

FOLKLORIC WORLD: MYTHICAL CONCERNS IN ANGELA CARTER'S FICTION

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Angela Carter's place in literary history is of notable significance and as a woman writer, she seriously challenges the stereotypes through her stories and characters. Her female characters possess a strong identity in the stories in which they are placed and challenge their defined roles in emerging narratives. When it comes to women's writings, Angela Carter's contribution is of great significance. Women characters are very different and uniquely positioned in her narratives within the truth of daily life that is counterbalanced by a sense of fictional freedom that the novelist bring into question.

The marked boldness of her writings and writing as a woman made her stand in the line of distinguished women writers and thus her fiction identified her as a feminist. She is a writer of great promise and the way she uses her stories and plots also establish her as a dexterous writer who has the ability to shape social consciousness through her works. The feminist consciousness that comes to occupy a large part of the works is also to tell that she was well informed about her social surroundings. Bringing together fact and fiction in a seamless manner of her writings have a powerful connection that makes her availability as a novelist in a very personal way.

The novels of Carter seems to offer very explicitly, the feminist perspective of any story that interested her. She wrote whatever she considered worth talking about, putting at the forefront the identity of women in the society, including herself as a woman and more precisely as a woman writer. Carter came to be recognised as a

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writer who stood for her feminist ideals and for her to establish her point of view, she has to come across as a writer who resisted patriarchal tradition. Her life that dealt with noticing the pre conceived assumptions of what makes life worth living, however had to battle with the painful experience of undergoing the sufferings of cancer that took its toll on her. A writer with immense possibilities, Angela Carter's life came to an end on 16th February 1992 in the city of London.

In the history of twentieth century fiction, Angela Carter's name will always be recognised as one of the most formidable writer of her times. She had an immense possibility with her style of narration and the execution of fantastic plot brought together in her novels. She also made sure that women's representation is aptly done and made conscious efforts to shift the defined meaning of the self reasonably in favour of women folk in her established works.

Self-assertion and creation of female characters that have a strong presence in the novels of Angela Carter will always be remembered for her talent towards her creativity. We can always deduce that her works will be remembered in the history of English literature and also in the history of English novel that she took her talent to greater heights.

Shadow Dance (1966), *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) *Several Perceptions* (1968), *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and *Love* (1971) belongs to the category of her early novels. As mentioned that her overseas journey to Japan helped her explore the aspects of life that made valuable contributions to her novels, especially *The Infernal Desire machines of Dr Hoffman* (1972) and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). Thus her last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991), have very bold and assertive women as heroines and main protagonist of the novels. Besides her novels she has contributed to a collection of short stories like *The Bloody Chamber* and other stories (1980) and *Black Venus* (1986). Her collection entitled *Fireworks* (1987) also contains remarkable stories. She also wrote essay like *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in*

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Cultural History (1979) where she describes explicitly about the women's role in their own subjection and has dealt with it in a very candid manner.

She also published a wonderful series of articles for new society in her collection Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings (1982). The only work in verse among these was Unicorn (1966). She also edited a work called Wayward Girls and Wicked Women (1986) which talks about short stories about women who are generally termed as unwanted and useless. One of the last published of her works was Expletives Deleted: Selected Writing (1992) which proved her as an adept writer. Burning your Boats (1995) is the most recently published collection of her short stories.

Her every attempt is to seek an alternative newer version of writing literature in terms of experimentation that is solely targeted towards the idea of liberation and freedom and also to envision a new kind of women's liberation that should be seen as part of the postmodern understanding of human identity. She strongly resists the patriarchal ideas of life that need to be curbed and questioned.

Angela Carter, as such created her own myths to demystify the older myths meant to subjugate women. In this, she is undoubtedly, a bold, innovative, experimental and feminist writer of repute. The biographical details that form a vital part of understanding Angela Carter, is also to look at her life against the social backdrop of the times in which she was living. The fifties provided much experimentation in the field of art and literature. This was a welcome trend that had the assimilation of a new world that was opening up before her.

She started her writing career as early as in 1960's with her novels, short stories screenplays and wrote a lot of rewarding stuff till 1992. Unfortunately, she was inflicted with cancer and died in 1992. Her close friend Salman Rushdie was shocked at the sad demise of such an exuberant writer who had changed the landscape for women folk through her writings. Her characters does not move in the real world

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but indeed in a magical, unreal world made by her. This catchy world has swirling women characters behaving on equal terms with men.

Angela Carter recreated the myth of the Fall of the Man in her second novel *The Magic Toyshop*, where a fourteen year old orphan girl Melanie and Finn leaves the magic toyshop to be free from the authority of the patriarchal figure Uncle Phillip and live life with freedom. The myth of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the paradise was constructed to demean women saying that Eve tempted Adam to commit the original sin of leaving the paradise and break through the patriarchal figure, God. So, this mythical story of the Fall of the Man from heaven has been turned upside down by Angela Carter. The blame of fall from heaven doesn't fall merely on the Eve this time but equally on both of them and moreover it was not a fall, they mutually left it for their good.

Angela Carter through her fourth novel *Heroes and Villains* again broke the myth that says that marriage in a way secularises women. Marianne, the heroine of the novel runs with barbarian boy Jewel to his community where she visualises a lot of myths associated with suppressing women folk. She herself was seen as an evil eye in the barbarian community till marriage with Jewel, the barbarian boy. After the much destined ritual of marriage, "the tribe no longer protected itself against Marriane with signs, for marriage had secularized her." (*Heroes and Villians*, 87). But Marianne strongly opposed the customs and traditions constructed by Dr Donally, the maker of myths in the barbarian community. Even when Marianne was unable to conceive after marriage, the blame was put on her solely and she was maltreated by her husband every night for not bearing him a baby. Here, Marianne avenges him and feel satiated after having an affair with a boy of the community and thus emerge victorious in her own way by cheating on her husband.

Moreover, all the myths that restricted the emancipation of women were kept alive by the patriarchal society and at the same time the myths that in any way helped

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women were suppressed. Once Donally had intentions of creating a myth of Tiger Lady, “He tattooed some little girl over with tiger stripes, once and said she’d be the Tiger Lady. But she died, it was a failure” (Heroes and Villians, 86). But at an intense moment, when Marrienne became helpless in the society, she took the help of the myth of the Tiger Lady and proclaimed that, “she would be the Tiger Lady and would rule over them all with a rod of iron” (150). Angela Carter through her heroines breaks the mythical pattern of women always being associated with the attributes of meekness, submissiveness and tenderness. She in turn presents before us outstandingly powerful women who become so by choice and not by circumstances.

Carter’s creation of the demonic women in the novel *The Passion of New Eve* challenges the existing gender relations and power politics. The demonic women are the projections of women’s imagination and at the same time existing as real characters in the novels, “The voice of reason, always subversive, must issue from a monster” says Angela Carter (*The Sadeian Woman*, 82). The mother Of Beulah in the *Passion* is a demonic women. But who made her? Carter answers the question:

“She had made herself !She was her own mythological artefact ,she had reconstructed her flesh painfully ,with knives and with needles ,into a transcendental form as an emblem ,as an example ,and flung a patchwork quilt stitched from her daughters breasts over the cathedral of her interior ,the cave within the cave”. (*The Passion*, 60)

Such women are emanations of a suffering woman’s desire for revenge against patriarchy. Such mothers in Carter’s fiction challenged the conventional notion of nurturing, self-effacing and suffering mothers.

So, myths have played a great role in the colonization of the minds of women. Sexist views about female beauty, the concept of women as passive, submissive and attractive are all creations of various mythologies down the ages. These myths have

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been promoted by the phallocratic culture. Carter frames her own myths in her stories. Commenting on myths Carter says :

“They deal in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances. In no area is this more true than in that of relations between the sexes ...all the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory non sense :and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth anyway” (The Sadeian Woman 5-6).

All the accepted notions about women have been mainly created by myths and are therefore cultural constructs. That a woman should submit herself to a man or should be economically dependent on men are all rules constructed by myths. After depriving women of their freedom, it is a nonsense to create myths of women as Mother Goddesses. So Carter creates phallic women and demonic women to challenge the myth of Mother Goddesses.

Angela Carter herself asserts that “myth is more instructive than history “(Passion 68). She says that “myth is a made thing, not a found thing” (Passion 56). All the myths about women have been purposefully framed with a political intention. So Carter proceeds to challenge these false notions with vigour ,in Lorna Sage’s phrase she attempts to “ turn myths inside out” (The Savage Sideshow 294).In order to prove to men that their concept of women is only a myth ,she frames her own myths in magical and unreal world .

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