

RE-READING ANGELA CARTER'S *THE SNOW CHILD* FROM A POST-COLONIAL POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract: Angela Carter's short story *The Snow Child* has been analyzed from several critical approaches, mainly through feminist and deconstructionist points of view. It is our intention to provide a new focus on the selected short story by re-reading from the point of view of post-colonial studies, showing how the main characters in this story can be interpreted to represent Western attitudes towards the East / Other, finding a similitude with colonial encounters denounced by post-colonial theories, showing both approaches of the West to the East: attraction and rejection. In Carter's story, attraction to the Other ends in physical possession and rejection of the Other ends in the subject's death. We will see how this short story can be interpreted as paralleling power relations between the Count-Countess / the child with power relations present in post-colonial theory. We will see that the construction of the identity of the Other (the child) is similar to the construction of the identity of the post-colonial other, proving that neither of them have a voice.

Keywords: Angela Carter, Snow Child, post-colonial, Other.

The Snow Child is a short story by Angela Carter, a British writer, and it is part of her collection of short stories entitled *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. This collection includes rewritings of traditional fairy tales which have been analyzed from several critical approaches, mainly through feminist and deconstructionist points of view. It is our intention to provide a new focus on the selected short story by making a re-reading from the point of view of post-colonial studies.

The first thing that strikes the reader in this short story is the familiar atmosphere of the text, immediately associating the content with the classic fairy tale *Little Snow-White*. This fact makes clear the type of reader that will make this association, i.e. to whom the text is addressed. This reader is Western, as this fairy tale lays in the folklore of Western cultures. When looking at the main source for this thematic association we find the first part of the fairy tale by the Grimm brothers, which reads as follows:

Once upon a time in midwinter, when the snowflakes were falling like feathers from heaven, a queen sat sewing at her window, which had a frame of black ebony wood. As she sewed she looked up at the snow and pricked her finger with her needle. Three drops of blood fell into the snow. The red on the white looked so beautiful that she thought to herself, "If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood in this frame." Soon afterward she had a little daughter who was as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as ebony wood, and therefore they called her Little Snow-White. And as soon as the child was born, the queen died. (Grimm 2005)

The striking short story that Carter re-creates offers a new and modern vision of the traditional fairy tale compiled in the terms above by the Grimm Brothers. Through the use of parallel images that bring back familiar images from the childhood of the potential Western reader, Carter offers a short story that twists the fairy tale into a whole different story.

As we analyse this story we can appreciate that the main parallelism that is established from the beginning is based on the physical characteristics of the child: black hair, white skin, red lips. These attributes are the same in both stories, although the first main difference is the person who *desires* the child. In the classic fairy tale it is a woman, the queen, who desires to have a daughter. In Carter's short story it is the Count who desires a girl, as it appears explicitly in the text "she was the child of his desire" (Carter 1993: 91). She has all the attributes he wishes her to have, as he clearly states through the first part of the short story when he says, "I wish I had a girl as white as snow", "I wish I had a girl as red as blood", "I wish I had a girl as black as that bird's feather" (Carter 1993: 91). Thus, the child appears as a creation of the Count, she is his invention, the product of his sexual desire.

The desire of the Count can be re-read based on post-colonial theories that started with the re-reading of *The Tempest*, stated in *The Empire Writes Back*. Thus, in this post-colonial reading of the short story we find it can be considered as a metaphor for the relations established between the empire and the margins, being the figure of the Count a reminder of the figure of Prospero who "places himself over nature and seeks to subdue it by a massive exercise of his will" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1991: 88). Carter portrays in the Count a figure that can create a child as a direct consequence of his desires, altering nature at his will to prove his power.

All this closely reminds us of post-colonial relations, and if we consider a Western reader it is undoubtedly related to Said's *Orientalism*. Taking Said's work as fundamental in our post-colonial re-reading of this short story, we shall recall his ideas about the Orient as a European invention, an ideology, considering the West as "masculine" and the Orient as "feminine". In a clear representation of this theory the Count appears as the West, masculine, creating his Other, the child of his desire, the Orient. As Said establishes, "[t]he relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 1995: 5). This is the relationship we find in this story between the Count and the child. She has no name, it is not important for him to provide her one, he only desires her and exercises his power over her by stating what she can and cannot do (like picking the glove or jumping in the pond), he dominates her and thus exercises a complete hegemony not only over the child but also over his wife, as the Countess' opinions are disregarded in all the cases except in the last and fatal one: the picking of the rose and subsequent death of the child.

Another reflection of these post-colonial theories in the text is represented by the progressive clothing of the child. The Countess, who rides with the Count, is portrayed as riding a black mare, wearing black furs, black boots and scarlet heels. The child, in a direct contrast, is bare naked and white as the snow. As the story progresses the girl gets furred in the black clothes of the Countess, right before her death. From the post-colonial point of view this could be seen as a Westernization of the East, the girl gets the clothes of the Countess and she is progressively Westernized before the act of physical possession takes place. The West/Count projects his desire in the child until she is Westernized and ready to be possessed as the final act of colonization, the one of the body.

Said, in *Orientalism*, offers the following example that can be applied perfectly to the post-colonial re-reading of this story:

Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke for herself, she never represented her emo-

tions, presence or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess [...] physically but to speak for her (Said 1995: 6).

In "The Snow Child" the girl can be equalled to the Egyptian courtesan, she never speaks for herself, she does not show her feelings (even at the moment of her death she does not show any feelings, only follows the orders the Count gives her), and she is finally possessed physically. Clearly, the girl represents the Count's image of the Orient; and she is subjugated to his power, appearing thus as the post-colonial Other of this short story.

As we have seen so far, the child can be interpreted as the post-colonial Other and she is clearly deprived of her voice, which also allows the reader to associate her position to the one Spivak refers to in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The child, then, cannot perform any action with freedom of will, she only does as commanded and never obtains a *voice* until the end, when she screams right before dying. But does this final scream mean that the girl really has a voice? From the subaltern studies point of view the subaltern cannot speak, as at the precise moment s/he obtains a voice then s/he stops being a subaltern. In the specific case of this modern fairy tale, the girl screams because she is in danger, right before dying. Still, this is no *voice* as such, as immediately after dying the Count exercises his colonial power over her and rapes her dead body in a final act of power. Not only does he create her, but he does whatever he wants with her body. Again, this fact is closely related with the representation of the East as feminine and the West as masculine, involving the sexual desire for the post-colonial exotic Said analyses in his book *Orientalism*, previously mentioned.

In this short story, then, we can appreciate that not only is there an explicit physical desire for the Other, but there is also a projection of the fears of the West regarding the Other, fears represented in the Countess' intentions of getting rid of the child/Other, as the child is seen as potentially dangerous for the establishment of the Western traditions represented in her relationship with her husband. In this way we can also re-read "The Snow Child" from the post-colonial point of view, if we regard the Countess as the West feeling threatened by the East. In this way we have both approaches to the colonial encounter represented in the short story: the desire for the Other and the fear of the different, the threat that the Other constitutes to the established Western order. The direct response of the Countess/West is to try to get rid of the child/Other, an objective finally accomplished with the death/melting of the child.

As we have stated, Carter's story can be re-read interpreting it as the colonial encounter showing both approaches of the West to the East: attraction and rejection.

Both approaches are taken showing their direct consequences and both are fulfilled to the end. Attraction to the Other ends up in physical possession and rejection of the Other ends up with the subject's death, both ways showing the result of colonial encounters denounced by post-colonial theories.

Re-reading this story from a post-colonial point of view does not mean we exclude other elements present in former analyses, for example we still perceive the uncanniness present in the text. There is an *uncanny* effect precisely because Carter's short story does portray the familiar from another point of view, physical relations are no longer what they should be and it offers a twist and a new reading of the classic story that lets the reader get an uncanny feeling that lasts even after finishing the reading of the short story. This uncanny effect can be closely related to this post-colonial reading of the text, as the child/East does not represent the familiar comfortable other, but a menace for the Countess/West. Thus, in *The Snow Child* we find a representation of Kristeva's reading of Freud regarding the uncanny effect:

Freud [...] particularly stressed those works in which the uncanny effect is abolished because of the very fact that the entire world of the narrative is fictitious. Such are fairy tales, in which the generalized artifice spares us any possible comparison between sign, imagination, and material reality. As a consequence, artifice neutralizes uncanniness and makes all returns of the repressed plausible, acceptable and pleasurable. (Kristeva 1991: 187)

In our particular case, this rewriting of the traditional fairy tale does bring all the uncanniness that is abolished in the traditional version, as the story is no longer something familiar or *acceptable*. The post-colonial reading of the text unmasks the power relations and the repressed sexual desire for the Other, turning the classical comfortable fairy tale into a narration with deeper meaning.

As a conclusion, the power relations that can be seen in the process of colonization are also present in the text, represented in the relationship between the Count/Countess and the child, as both exercise their power over the child. As we have seen, the Count creates the child, does not allow her to have a voice or perform any act without his direct consent, until he finally takes physical possession of her dead body as his final act of power. The child, then, portrays all the characteristics of the subaltern that Spivak describes, as she never obtains a voice throughout the story.

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LIFE IN THE UK: A USER'S MANUAL?

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Abstract: This article provides an insight into British immigration policies during Tony Blair's tenure through the analysis of a representative document of the period. For many, integration is an unresolved matter, a result of the failure of Blair's multicultural Britain that he greatly glorified since the beginning of his premiership in an attempt to modernise and rebrand the country. A shift in the concept of integration led the government to reinforce the acculturation process through the publication of the book *Life in the UK: A Journey to Citizenship* (2004). The book was destined as a guide to foreigners who wanted to pass the citizenship test. Its aim was to provide migrants with a deeper knowledge of British society. Integration was then understood in Britain as an assimilation of certain values, values that define a British identity that seems to always be questioned. The aim of this article is to analyse the veracity of the image supplied in the book and the effectiveness of the whole citizenship process through the images conveyed by this official document.

Keywords: Britain, race, national identity, integration, immigration.