Feminist Writings
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Angela Carter: Fairytale Sexuality and the Deconstruction of myth

Avishek Parui: So hello and welcome to this NPTEL session where we are doing this course on Feminist Writings and I am delighted to have a speaker today in this very special session - Dr. Michael Yates, from Rikkyo University, Japan. So Dr. Yates is a Narratalogist, that is his specialty of research and he worked in Narratology, post-classical Narratology coming from post-modern tradition. And today, we are in for a treat because we have got Dr. Angela Carter and the topic of the talk today is 'Fairytale Sexuality and the Deconstruction of Myth' which is very very germane to the content of this particular course, I am sure you can imagine that.

So we'll make it very interactive. He will deliver a talk at the beginning and we will have a Q&A session at the end where you are very encouraged to speak, ask questions, comment, and if you have any more perspectives that you can lend into this talk, you are very welcome to do it. So without any further ado, I request Dr. Yates to kindly begin his talk.

Michael Yates: Thank you Professor Parui. It is such a pleasure being here. I do not think I expressed it enough in my session last week, how honored I am to be here. And how thankful for your invitation to come here to IIT Madras and meet these excellent students and the faculty here have been very kind to me. First off, a message of thanks to everyone for inviting me here. Today's talk is, as Professor Parui brought up, about Angela Carter. Angela Carter is somebody who I have been working on for several years and who I am really excited to talk about because I think she allows us to look at narrative in some really interesting ways and discuss the deconstruction and the structure of myth in interesting ways because she often times lays here cards on the table and shows us exactly what she's doing. And that is where I want to start out with today's session.

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Okay, there we go. So today in today's session, we will be looking at three stories and also a little bit of theory. So one little point as you can see here from the PowerPoint, I have changed it from 'Little Red Riding Hood' to 'Cinderella', I think to be more in keeping with the topic that we are going to discuss. So we will first look at Ashputtle or The Mother's Ghost which is a posthumously published work. Then we will look at Angela Carter's translation of Perrault's Cinderella. And then finally, we will look at Wolf-Alice, which is from Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber.

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So, hopefully you had a chance to read or to look at Ashputtle. Ashputtle, the Carter version, is one of my favorite of her short stories because it it has a very interesting, sort of three part structure where she she seems to be mulling over the concept on this story and thinking about the plot, thinking about the characters and also showing her hand, again, as the narrative, as the kind of kind of a fairy godmother sense of authorship here. And so it comes to us, the readers, in three parts. So we first get section is called 'The Mutilated Girls' and we get a second section, slightly shorter, 'The Burt Child' and then the third section even shorter, 'The travelling ghost'.

So it is a kind of distillation of the Cinderella origin. But it is also showing Cinderella as a myth going into her hands, into this contemporary story telling context, it is an interesting structure.

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Of course, this structure of Ashputtle goes back to the German tradition of Cinderella and she is taking, I think, her version from the Grimms, who first published their Ashputtle in 1812, I believe. And so, these are some of the illustrations that I have gone together with the Grimm Brothers' tales.

So the first one we have here is Gustave Doré and his Cinderella. And the reason why I brought these slides today is to show the kind of different arrangements that we get with Cinderella. There are some very social arrangements such as the French versions, and kind of a much more oral style of storytelling that we get in the Grimms which is far more kind of in the back woods forests sort of traditional sense of the telling.

So, those both have a contribution to the Cinderella myth and that is why I wanted to show you these slides. As you can see, what Doré slide, we have Cinderella as the center here, but she is surrounded by these adoring men who obviously have some power to wield. So there is a power dynamic between the center protagonist, this this young lady, and the court that is suddenly, sort of, devouring her at the end.

Whereas, in Edmund Dulac's painting of Cinerella some maybe some (15 years) 50 years later, there is a kind of quiet desperation to her circumstance, a very different approach to her as a character that she is she is depicted very alone here in the hearth among the cinders, among the ashes, right, lending itself to the title Ashputtle, right? So, 'little ash girl' would be one reading of that.

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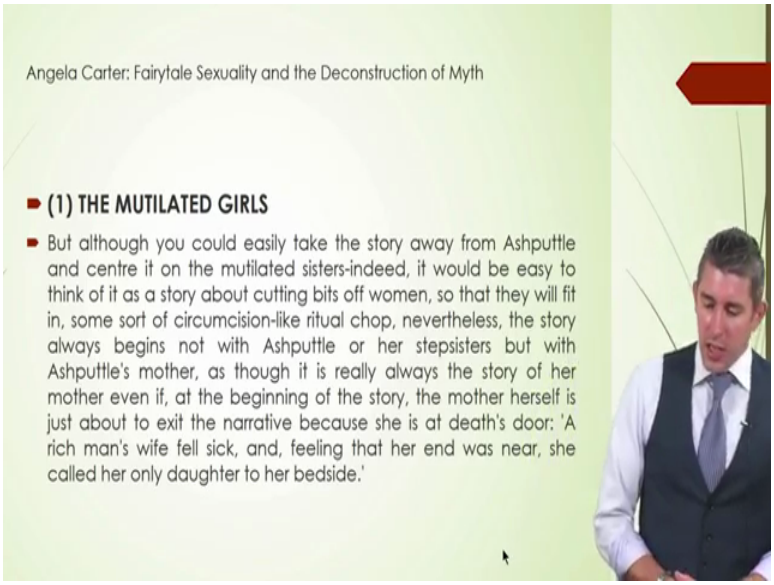

So let us have a look at the first part of Carter's Ashputtle. We begin with “The Mutilated Girls” and this is how she starts her analysis. In the first part of this three part story is very much an analytical approach to the bits and pieces that construct this story, right? So we we can hear Carter's voice, her authorial voice coming through here as she mulls over the parts that have been put together by authors such as Perrault's, such as the Grimms.

So we get this first section here and it read 'But although you could easily take the story away from Ashputtle, and center it on the mutilated sisters-indeed, it would be easy to think of it as a story about cutting bits off women, so that they would fit in, some sort of circumcision-like ritual

chop, nevertheless, the story always begins, not with Ashputtle or her step sisters, but with Ashputtle's mother, as though it is really always the story of her mother even if at the beginning of the story, the mother herself is just about to exit the narrative because she is at death store.

A rich man's wife fell sick and feeling that her end was near, she called her only daughter to her bedside.' Dot dot dot, right? So here we get Carter exploring how this story gets rolling, right? It is a story of mutilation, of course, as you know from the original Grimm's story, the mother, the step-mother, in order to get the shoe to fit, first she chops off the toes of the elder daughter, but a little bird comes and tells the prince look in the shoe, look in the shoe, there is blood in the shoe. So he takes it off and ahhh that is disgusting. So he takes her back, right?

And of course, the second daughter gives it a try. So the mother cannot get the shoe to fit so she chops off the heel of the foot and shoves it back into the bloody shoe, I do not think there was any cleaning being done. And, shoves it into the bloody shoe and again the bird comes and says look in the shoe, look in the shoe, there is blood in the shoe. He looks and indeed there is blood. And he goes back as for the third time and it is Cinderella's chance to try out the shoe. And again, it is this nasty, bloody orifice that Cinderella is being asked to put her foot into, her lovely dainty foot into.

And Carter does not shy away from that bloody detail. It very much, this first section, is about mutilation. And the kind of expectation that goes into that kind of mutilation. This is a mutilation that is being caused by her mother, or is also being causes by her society, her culture, all of these influences are coming in on these sisters and causing this mutilation. And of course, the third mutilation being Cinderella's, actually acceptance of this horrible nasty ritual and her being sent off to somebody who would ask a girl to put her foot into a bloody shoe. Right so, the third and final quiet and acceptable mutilation.

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Then we go into the second section “The Burned Child”. Not quite as graphic in its violence but mirroring the first section. Here, there is a focus on the burning aspect, the fact that this character has been sort of sent off to stay among the ashes in the oven. So, very much a kitchen made, a scullery made. So we have here, the first part of the second section. 'A burned child lived in the ashes. No not really burned - more charred, a little bit charred, like a stick half-burned and picked off the fire. She looked like charcoal and ashes because she lived in the ashes since her mother died and the hot ashes burned her so she was scabbed and scarred. The burning child lived on the hearth, covered in ashes, as if she was still mourning.' Right?

So, of course the sense of ashes and Christianity coming here, very symbolically at the end, but the sense that she is a left over bit of refuse fallen on the kitchen floor, is what Carter is emphasizing here the sense of being discarded, having been somehow fallen off of the table, the clean table where everyone can have a happy family meal, she has somehow fallen under the table and then left behind. And that is very much a major theme in this Cinderella round or cycle.

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Okay, let us get to the third section. So in the final section of the story "The Travelling Ghosts" we have a further distillation of the sort of central elements, right? And in the Ashputtle story, there is, of course, a Hazel tree, right? If you know the story, the father goes away travelling and he asks his daughters what would you like me to bring you? And the first daughter says I want a silk dress, the second daughter says, I want a string of pearls, but in her humbleness and her purity, Cinderella or Ashputtle asks for the first branch that brushes against your hat as you return. And of course, he is true to his word his father and he brings back a Hazel twig and Ashputtle plant it in the ground. And the Hazel twig is nurtured by her tears and grows into a Hazel tree.

And this is important because whenever we see the name of the tree, it is not there accidentally, right? In any kind of mythology, the nomenclature of the tree to these magical elements are essential, and Hazel in the Druidic tradition, is a very auspicious tree, right? Of course, the Hazel creates the Hazelnut and the Hazelnut in the Druidic tradition, in Celtic tradition, is a kind of magic token of wisdom and power, it is a kind of talisman. And if you feed these Hazelnuts to a Salmon and then eat the Salmon, then you become all powerful, it is kind of a Faustian myth. And if you know anything about the Irish mythology, Finn McCool got his heroic power by popping the blister on a Salmon as it was being cooked full of Hazelnuts and as he licked his thumb, all of the power from the Hazelnut went into him and he became a hero.

So the Hazel tree is what is being referenced here in this third section where she plants the Hazel, branch it turns into a Hazel tree and a bird, a little bird comes up and of course, it is the same bird, it is her dead mother's ghost. And the dead mother's ghost gives her various special special items. This is very much a helper kind of motif that is coming in here with the mother. But she is helping from beyond the grave. There is this strong chthonic force in this dead mother who is coming back from the dead, coming back from beyond and bringing gifts to her daughter.

So here is, kind of, the last section of that final part. 'The dead woman waited until night came. Then she climbed out of her grave, we assume, and went to the house. The stepmother slept on a featherbed but the burned child slept on the hearth among the ashes. When the dead woman kissed her, the scars vanished. The girl woke up. The dead woman gave her a red dress...' and so on. So as this, sort of, zombie mom comes from the dead, she first gives her a dress and then she plucks the worms from her eyes and they turn into jewels, and she puts on a diamond ring and then finally, this zombie mother asks her daughter to, 'step into my coffin', she says, 'step into my coffin, I did it when I was a girl.'

So even though Ashputtle does not want to do it, she very, kind of gingerly steps into the coffin and it turns into a carriage with horses ready to tremp, tremp away into the future. And the story ends 'Go and seek you fortune darling.' Right?

But it is interesting, the symbols that Carter uses here, right? 'The worms from her eyes are akin to diamonds rights, right? There is a metaphorical connection there. The transformation can easily return, right? These diamonds and germs can easily turn back into worms, like we have seen in some other mythology. Likewise, this carriage that is carrying her off into her royal future, we presume, is a coffin, right? It is also sealing her death, it is a death (())(16:28). And the red dress, of course, is laden with heavy symbolism, right? It is the red of blood, it is the blood of menstruation, it is the red of virginity and the loss of virginity, it is also the red of death, it is the red of being murdered, right? So, it is a heavy sexual and violent metaphor that she is stepping into. And this ironic ending 'Go and seek your fortune' is just laden with potential disaster.

And that is how Carter is exploring this myth, right? She is exploring it in all of its gruesome details, but also in its very earthy delight. Carter revels in her language, revels in these symbols of darkness and taboo. And, as she does that, she makes us think about the symbolism in this

story. Her story is not the Grimm's story. And if you know anything about the Grimm's fairytales, from the 1812 version to the 1857 version, there are several editions and they get cleaner and cleaner and cleaner and more Christian and more sort of disnified as they go along. All of these sort of dark symbols of this little moments of violence have been sort of brushed aside or have been sort of bowdlerized to be sort of digestible to all ages and all persuasions.

But Carter is doing the opposite. She is revering that trend of sort of cleansing and trying to make things dirty again, to get back to the core.

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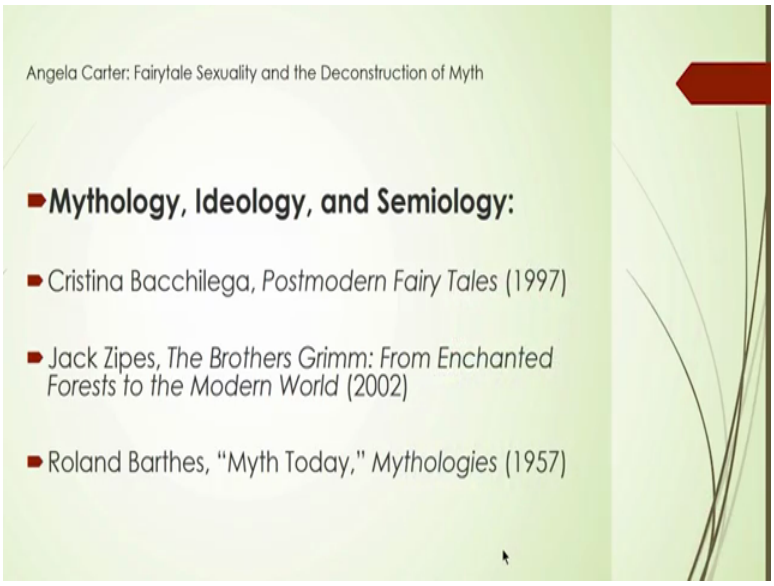

So, in the next section we will look at a little bit of theory. So we will look at a little mythological theory, ideological theory and some semiology as well. We start by having a glance at Cristina Bacchilega, who is a professor at University of Hawaii and one of my favorite of her works is this The Postmodern Fairy Tales. I think she does a really interesting job of deconstructing what authors such a Carter have done.

Next, we will have a brief look at Jack Zipes and think a little bit about the utopian impulse that is at the core of all kinds of fairy tale and mythology. And then we will have a brief look at Barthes's "Myth Today," which, I think, I see a few of you have from his mythologies which gives us an interesting kind of template for structuring and considering the way that myths are put together.

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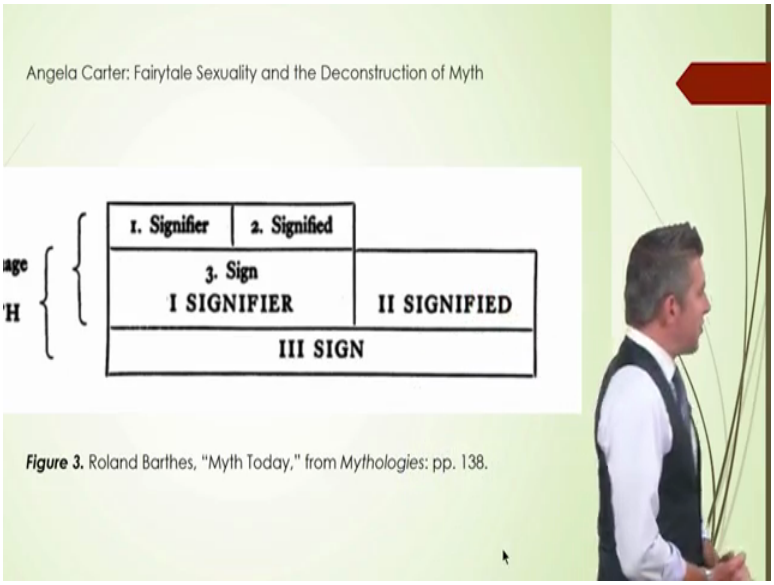

So let us begin with this famous diagram, I am sure you have probably all seen this. But I think this is interesting diagram for what we are looking at today because it not only shows how language is built on or myth is built upon language. But it also signals to us that it is not in any way a directed process and any one of these categories can be emphasized in any given myth. Ideally, in a sort of typical fairy tale situation, we have the myth sort of developing out of the language, sort of sourcing the language and enriching the language, taking something like the apple from Snow White and turning that into a symbol, giving it poison, giving it potent, connecting it to the culture from which it evolves, taking it from the Bible, taking it from other sort of cultural and social mythical contexts and building a myth out of that material.

But what we get here with Carter, as I mentioned before is a kind of a return from this mythical meta language, this meta discourse, back towards the root of the language. There is always a gesture in Carter I believe of going back towards the signifier, going back to what is actually being used as language here. She is very careful with her word choice, right? And as you know in English, we often have two choices with any given noun because we have had so many influences. For example pig and swine, they both describe the same thing but one is Anglo-Saxon and one comes from a more romantic tradition, it comes from maybe old French.

But they have a different sense, they have a different flavor in the mouth, right? The way that they are said, right? 'The pork' is a very sort of Anglo-Saxon, heavy, sort of dal ta dal ta Viking

word, right? But swine has this very French fluidity, kind of velvety roll to it. And Carter plays with that back and forth, right? Certain of her tales are very velvety, she uses a lot of sort of Francophile terms, lot of illusions to French art, French history, French design, French food and cuisine and smells, uses a very Frankish language. Whereas, other tales such as, especially, Wolf-Alice's, we will see are very much a Northern European kind of Germanic language that she is using very hard cold words. So she is very aware of the language, right? So her meta discourse is constantly looking back, looking over shoulder, at the language that is being employed in these.

And so when she came to Perrault's translations, she was very aware, I think she became very aware of the language that he was using because of the stylists of the fairy tale during Perrault's time. He was perhaps the most comfortable with the language, he was very much a poet of the fairy tale at a time when there were some excellent writers. So as Carter got into the fairy tale process through Perrault, I think he really tuned her ear to the language that was being used.

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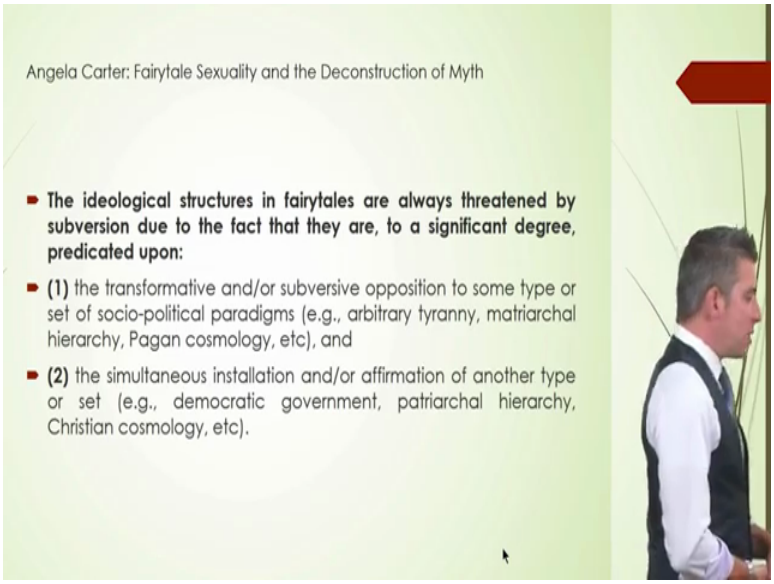

So, at the root though, and this is something is important to remember, that we are not just talking about language, but we are talking about ideology, right? Hidden within this language, hidden within this meta discourse and its discourse, is always some sort of ideological program, right? And theorists such as Mircea Eliade have described it as the kind of camouflaged ideological content that is always at the core of any fairy tale, right? And it is the critic's job to

kind of peel back the beautiful language and find the core that is camouflaged by the meta discourse, the myth itself.

So, let us have a look at this. 'The ideological structures in fairy tales are always threatened by subversion due to the fact that they are, to a significant degree predicated upon: (1) the transformative and/or subversive opposition to some type of, or set of socio-political paradigms, for example, arbitrary tyranny, matriarchal hierarchy, Pagan cosmology, and (2) the simultaneous installation and/or affirmation of another types or set, a sort of replacement by of arbitrary tyranny with democratic government, or replacement of matriarchal hierarchy with patriarchal hierarchy' and likewise the replacement of Pagan cosmology with Christian cosmology etc.

So these structures are always at risk, you can always take a fairy tale and restructure it, change the symbols, tinker with them, turn black to white, white to black, right? Add a strong mother instead of a strong father, right? So these ideological structures are weaker than they look and Carter is very delicate with her approach to this, though she does not need to be.

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Let us hear from Cristina Bacchilega. Cristina Bacchilega says, 'As folk and fairy tale, the tale of magic produces wonder precisely through its seductively concealed exploitation of the conflict between its normative function, which capitalizes on the comforts of consensus and its subversive wonder, which magnifies the powers of transformation', right? So as we read our story, as we read Cinderella, there is a there is a normative process going on, right?

Certain things are being shown as normal, 'it is normal for a girl to want to better herself', 'it is normal for stepmothers to be nasty to their non-biological daughters', 'it is normal for a girl to marry a boy', 'it is normal for etc etc', right? There is a normative process going on, it is very digestible for young children, because it is a kind of situation that maybe they can relate to, maybe this is like them, they feel little, they feel alone, they feel neglected, they feel like there is something more, they are poor, they feel like they are wearing rags but they want to have that dress in the window, right? And once you are teenager, maybe you start to have romance and you think, 'maybe marriage is the only option?' And this story tells, 'yes, heterosexual marriage is your only choice', right? It makes that very normal and regular and modern common sense.

But, you can always change the polarities of any kind of story. So there is always this subversive wonder that is there at the corner, right? And you are always subverting something. It is always at risk of being subverted, as we have seen in some recent Disney films, it is still a hot topic and it is still something that can be augmented and changed.

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Okay, now we move on to Zipes, Jack Zipes. In his critical analysis of the stories of the Grimm Brothers, Jakc Zipes writes the following: 'Each innovative telling or retelling and rewriting of a well-known tale in the cultural heritage is an independent human act seeking to align itself with the original utopian impulse of the first told tale.' So ideally, any fairy tale is trying to give you

something to better you, to make you stronger, to make you smarter, to prepare you for the world, right?

This has gone back for generations and generations. The stories that we have now, have roots, you know, back millennia. But there is always a progressive, utopian core, according to Zipes. The core of the story was always 'betterment'. The story teller was telling you a story to make you laugh or to make you afraid to help you, to show you what is poisonous, the dangerous animals in the forest, the things to beware of, the things to look for, where you can get help, Hazelnuts will make you strong and smart, for example.

So there is no mistake to the kind of symbolism that comes into this, that goes back to the earliest sort of stories that were told around the fire to improve that social unit, to improve that social round, by telling them of the risks and the dangers of the world and also to strengthen that sort of social bonds of that community by creating norms, right? Through the normative language of this tale, right?

So, Zipes goes on, 'the contemporary myth is not only an ideological message but also a fairy tale that cannot totally abandon its ancient utopian origins.' It never gets away from that utopian content, according to Zipes, always trying to better ourselves.

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Okay, however, Roland Barthes is a little bit more reticent about what the myth is doing. He says, 'During the myth making process, society, culture, ideology and history are stolen and replaced by a simulacrum or 'reflection' of the natural world.' That is where we get that second order discourse, the meta discourse, right? Myth coming out of language, sort of stepping above language and saying 'I know better than you,' right? Because it is being replaced, we are now in the mythic realm. It is a simulated artificial realm which pretends to reflect language, thereof reflect nature, but it is really only reflecting the language that it comes out of.

And Jack Zipes, in reference to this package, states 'Myth is a collective representation that is socially determined and then inverted so as not to appear as a cultural artifact.' So we get this sort of distancing at the beginning of almost every tale, right? Which is the 'once upon a time', which is a kind of discursive distancing that asks us to suspend our disbelief please if you will suspend your disbelief and believe this story to be true even though there are talking dogs and monkey kings, still suspend you disbelief, go along with it; 'Once upon a time', right?

So even in that act of 'once upon a timing' we get this, sort of, new world order, this fictional world that we are bring brought into which allows for those ideological messages to get in without you being aware of them, right? It is a perfect way of disarming your audience, taking away their weapons of defense, getting in your message.

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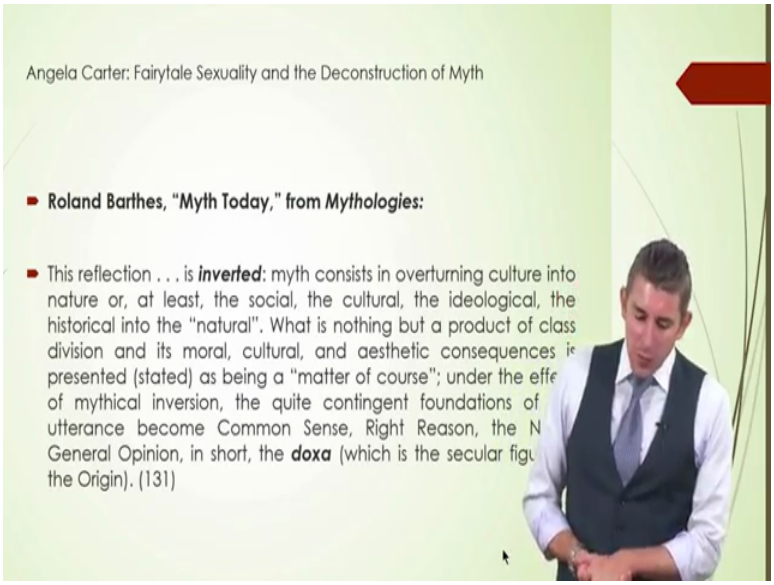

So Barthes is a little bit wary of this process. He says, 'This reflection... is inverted. Myth consists in overturning cultural into nature or at least the social, the cultural, ideological, the historical into the 'natural.' What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a 'matter of course', under the effect of mythical inversion, the quite contingent foundations of the utterance become common sense, right reason, the norm, general opinion, in short the doxa, which is the secular figure of the origin.'

So as we have discussed just a moment ago these sort of power struggles that we see in fairy tales are shown as common sensical situations where the hero because the hero is blank, because the hero is powerful, strong, smart, something, because the hero has this trait, he must succeed or she must succeed. And because they have succeeded, we have this hierarchy of that quality. Our kings, our queens, out leaders, our authority figures must be smart, strong, powerful, intelligent, beautiful, right? So there is a kind of classist hierarchy being supported here according to Barthes.

And he is very clever in his his insertion of this class division aspect because this is very much about more than just human traits. There is a classist, there is a kind of social process going on here in dividing the intelligent form the not intelligent, the beautiful from the not beautiful, right? The clever from the stupid, for example. And that is something that we need to as critics be careful of.

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So, back to the Cinderella round, I will not lead you through the story, you have seen it even in robot movies where we have robots fighting each other, we can have robot Cinderella. Cinderella is perhaps the most common sort of plot copula there is in the world. It is transnational, trans pretty much everything its very ancient pattern. But I think what is worth noticing here today is Carter's moral versus Perrault's moral, because we can see a vast difference in the kind of approach to the morality of details, so I want to focus in on that.

And have a look briefly at Arthur Rackham's illustration here from the 1919 version of Cinderella and its reintroduction to the tale with this, kind of, darkness and dread that surrounds her. I think this would have been an illustration that Carter would have enjoyed immensely. It has all these little creepy, crawly, sort of dark creatures surrounding her.

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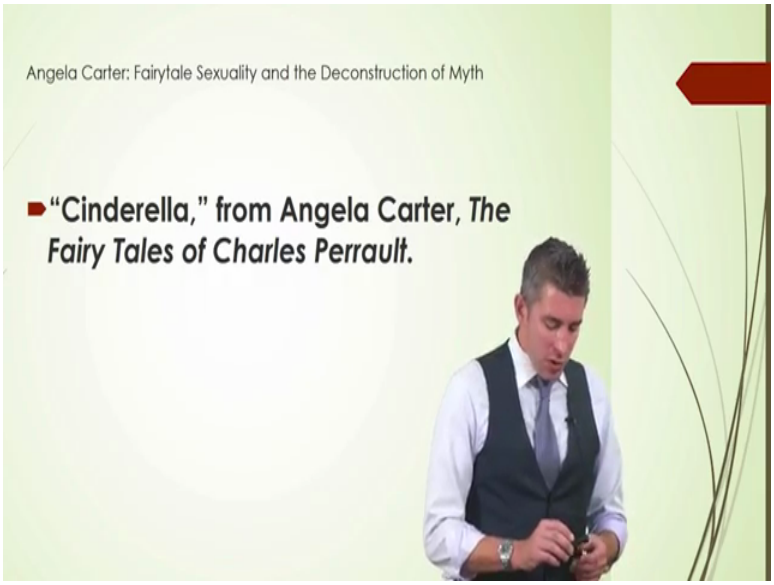

So let us have a look at the 'morals'. So a little history about Angela Carter's translation. Before she had translated Perrault, she had done some novels, she had done a collection of stories, she had won the Somerset Maugham prize. But it was not until the mid-70s when she was offered the contract to do this translation that she really began her passion for the fairy tale and for mythology. And after her translation of this and I think in 1975 she continued to work within the genre writing stories, collecting stories from around the world, and after she died, in her earlier 90s, she had this immense posthumous volume of work that has been collected in several collections of fairy tales.

So it really her relationship to the fairy tale really began with this translation. But all though she was very kind to Perrault, I would say that would be the word, she was very close in her translation of his prose. She was a little more, let us say artistic in her translation of his morals. So I want to look at the way that she has played with his morals, a little bit.

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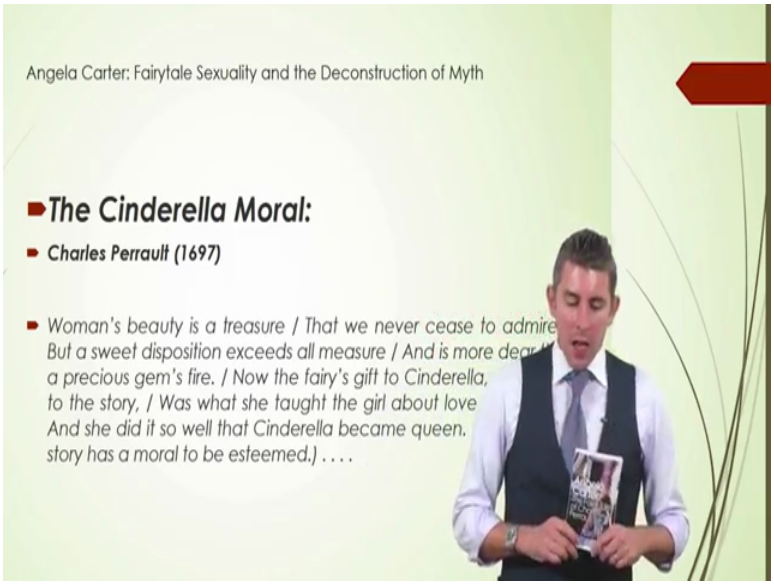

So here is the original moral translated into English from the 1697 version Perrault's Cinderella. It reads in verse 'Woman's beauty is a treasure that we never cease to admire. But a sweet disposition exceeds all measure and is more dear than a precious gem's fire. Now the fairy's gift to Cinderella, according to the story, was what she taught the girl about love and glory. And she did it so well that Cinderella became queen. Indeed, this story has a moral to be esteemed.' So beauty being focused on here, right? Disposition, even though he is sort of contradicting himself, he's listing off what a girl needs to have to be a success. You need beauty, you need a sweet disposition, perhaps some gems would come in handy, let us see, love and glory come in. If you get that love, that romance, maybe it leads to glory, you can become a mother, a wife, maybe queen.

So there's a suggestion and a sort of imposition of the doxa, as Bathes brought up, his common sense, hierarchical knowledge that is being suggested here by Perrault.

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And he goes on in the last part 'Beautiful ladies, it's kindness than dress, that can win the man's heart with greater success. In short, if you want to be blessed, the real fairy gift is graciousness.' So again, kindness and maybe fashion and a man's heart these are all the important things you need to get the man's heart, if you do not get the man's heart, you are a failure, right? And if you want to be blessed, then you have to be gracious. And 'gracious' is a very tricky term, right? Because what is 'gracious'? Is it being polite? Is it having good manners? Or is it always taking a step back? Letting the man go first, letting the man eat first, letting somebody go before you, somehow lowering yourself, it is a kind of inherent obsequiousness in the word 'gracious', right?

And it is placed at the end for a very powerful reason. It gives us the real gift, this second hand quality is really what men are looking for, that is an interesting little final punctuation there.

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Next, with Carter, we get a bit more of a kind of a old wife slap in the face with her moral. She is very down to earth, she is not messing around here. She is straight from her gut and she is not trying to sell us any nonsense. It is very brusque and she says and it is not inverse, you will notice, she write 'It is certainly a great advantage to be intelligent, brave, well born, sensible and have other similar talents given only by heaven, but however, however great maybe your god given store, they will never help you get on in the world unless you have either a godfather or a godmother to put them to work for you.

So this is a veiled language of 'get an education', right? 'Go to school', 'get smart', 'find somebody smart and be aware of their intelligence', 'and hopefully, if you are lucky enough, you will have somebody watching over your spiritual growth.' That is what a godmother or godmother is charged with to maintain at least in a Christian tradition your reverence, your sense of spirituality 'make sure you go to church'. But in a secular sense, your godmother or godfather is meant to look after you, right? Make sure you are on the right path. And that is I think what all educators are charged with as well as to make sure our students are on the right path. So for Carter, being a very well-educated and sort of an educator herself, I think what we have here is a veiled signal to the reader, to the young girl or boy - 'make sure you go to school'.

So very different, as we can see, in this comparison between Perrault and Carter. This is of course, Carter's translation of Perrault, right? She is taking this, we assume, from Perrault's work. But she is definitely putting her hand into there and making some changes.

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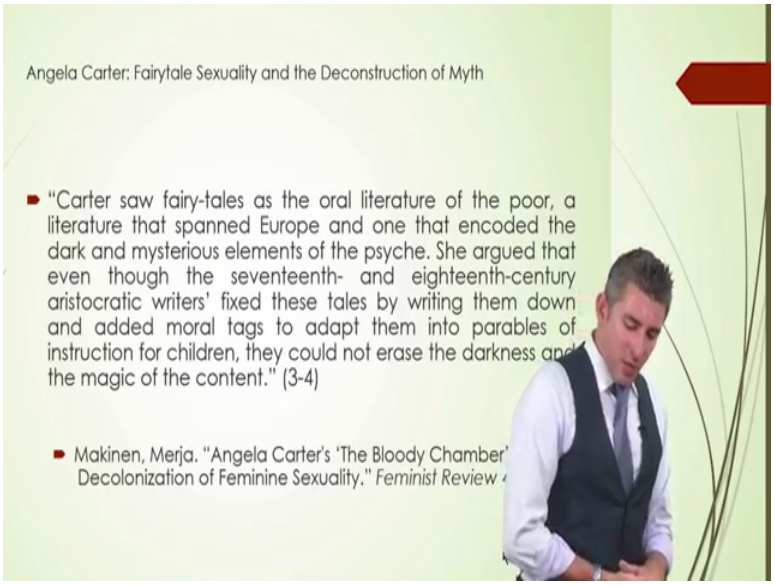

Let us hear from Makinen, and this is one of favorite critics of Carter, and she says, 'Carter saw fairy-tales as the oral literature of the poor. A literature that spanned Europe and one that encoded the dark and mysterious elements of the psyche. She argued that even now the 17th and 18th century aristocratic writers fixed these tales by writing them down and added moral tags to adapt them into parables of instruction for children, they could not erase the darkness and the magic of the content'.

And I think we see that a little bit even in just that comparison of the morals, right? It is very oral, the way that she approached the moral. It is not inverse, it is not a writerly, it is very much an orally written piece of text there at the end. She is coming to you as the fairy godmother, giving you that gift of knowledge at the end. It is not coming to you as a kind of parochial, sort of school master, smacking your wrists with his cane. (He is coming) She is coming to you as a friendly but kind of rough grandmother.

And she is like a friendly but kind of rough and very mealy-mouthed grandmother. She does not attempt to erase the darkness and the magic, right? It is all about the darkness, it is all about the

magic for Carter. And we see this especially in tales such as Wolf-Alice which is what I want to do next, is to discuss this tale.

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So briefly sketch out the outlines and then open it out to a general discussion of what we have talked about so far. But if you also want to reference this story and discuss this story, then we can use this time to do that. So to just generally summarize this story, we have two characters essentially. We have this wolf girl who seems to have been orphaned in the forest and raised by wolves who eventually makes it through to the mansion of the Duke. And the Duke also has a kind of a back story to him, he seems to have been birthed into the world with his teeth already sharp and intact and he bites off his mother's nipple. So get this sense of blood lust, or a vampiric, sort of zombie tendencies in the Duke.

So we have this werewolf girl, this girl of the woods, very natural and very visceral. And we also have this Duke who is sort of the supernatural figure as well. They are both born into these bizarre worlds and they somehow come together. And some critics have seen this story as a kind of Garden of Eden analogy. So we get this, this sense of this super natural Adam and this dark and animalistic Eve, coming together to join in some sort of union. There is a kind of mutual attraction, mutual sort of intrigue and it develops throughout the story. And the rest of society sees them as monsters, right? She does not shy away from the language of describing him, the Duke, as a vampire, he eats corpses, he sucks their blood.

Likewise, this Wolf girl, like any wolf girl, she does not know how to use a toilet, she does not know about language, she scratches herself and runs around and she sleeps on the floor and etc.

So there is a darkness and a kind of grittiness to Carters language here. But as they come together, there is an interesting romance that develops. And I think it is very unique for that very reason. So to avoid me speaking for the entire time, I want to open it up to discussion now. So if you have any comments about any of the topics that I have brought up today, please feel free to raise your hand and we will discuss the story or any of these topics thus far.

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Avishek Parui: You have set the ball rolling, and a very generic (())(47:46), I was thinking of it when you took us through the stories and the theory that comes into (())(47: 51), I was struck by the viscerality in that kind of writing. It had embodied qualities, something she does deliberately as a part of the deconstruction package.

Michael Yates: Right, I think so because as these stories were written down, as these stories were developed especially in Europe during the Victorian period, they were cleaned up. They were tidied up, all references to sexuality, all of their very sexual and violent aspects were turned into symbols, at best, or removed at worst. And she was aware of that, right? She had done her research. And realized that the really exciting tales are the ones that were before those removals and replacements occurred, right? So she is trying to get back to that errr material, right? The materials where these stories were really active in society, when they really had a purpose, not

just for he is very polite educational purposes with the moral and etc she wanted to get before that, back to their, kind of dark origins and you could only tell a tale if you could get your audience to be intrigued by its violence, by its very sexual content.

And things were different 200 years ago, right? We were at least in Europe we were much freer to speak on these subjects then especially during the 19th century. So she wants to predate the 19th at least and maybe even go back before the 17th, before Perrault's time to the roots of the oral tradition, when it was not so clean and taboos were hit hard.

Student 1 (Mohit): Can we say that there is a sort of bidirectional nature to Carter's retelling of the stories? Because in a story like Wolf-Alice, like she tries to reclaim viscerality and the darkness which is inherent probably in the first like Druidic versions of the stories. And at the same time, in other stories, she tries to undo and reconstruct the morality layer which has been added on to it so as to open up the process to furthermore retellings in a more modern context.

Michael Yates: Yes, definitely. There are both directions.

Student 1 (Mohit): It is like reclaiming the past which was hidden behind and as well as making it more modern.

Michael Yates: I think so. Yes, I think one way to read this collection is to read it as a novel which would give us both directions. Each of these stories helps us read the next story. So, for example the first story is The Bloody Chamber and it is very much a forward looking retelling of Bluebeard. So we get a replacement of certain aspects, instead of the brothers stabbing the monster at the end, we have the mother riding in solo with a pistol, right? So what a cool mom, right? And she comes and shoots Bluebeard through the head. And after, Bluebeard dies and they create a special music school for the blind. That has never been in the story before. So it is a very progressive, a very politically aware story that is trying to create again a new utopia these are the things that she wants to bring to the world, that she thinks might be possible.

And the romance at the end of her version is not a romance of getting married, they are just living together, it is a very equanimic of relationship that she has with her new boyfriend, they are shaking up, they are not getting married, there is no rings, there is no wedding, they are just living together in this music school for the blind and all of that money goes into this. So there is

this new ideology of economics, this new awareness of differently-abled, there is this new relationship to heterosexuality and to marriage and to the church. So she is replacing these things and it is progressive.

But like you said, Wolf-Alice is very much more backwards looking, like it is trying to get into the past. It is not trying to produce a new future but to see where our human relationships may have come from? Our sort of animal drives, she is trying to sort of scrabble back to the origins of sort of the animalistic in romance. So, both of those tendencies definitely. Thank you for your question.

Avishek Parui: (())(53:01) Mohit said, a version which is excellent in terms of looking at it from a bidirectional perspective, the temporality of it, going past as we know it. It is a very interesting entanglement the animal, as you say, and the machine. The machine is forward moving, forward looking, at the same time, there is some sort of an (())(53:19) happen there. So kinship, which probably guides us to pure organic, human aura, so that hybrid between the animal and the machine is probably what signifies or is a metaphor for the bidirectionality that Mohit talked about.

Michael Yates: I think so. At least in this collection, there is an animatronic maid at one point and she, the protagonist is being sort of likened to her. There is a sense that female morays the expectations of the girl, are like the expectations of a robot. They can be, sort of socially programmed to do certain things, right? So much of our culture, so much of our education, so much of our symbology is very much a kind of social program, especially for women but also for boys, right? The whole, pink and blue, robots for boys and butterflies for girls sort of dichotomy is something that Carter was obviously not comfortable with. And she wanted to problematize that.

So her, the protagonist's interaction with that robot was very much kind of looking in the mirror and seeing herself as a robot and, 'wow', a sudden realization, kind of (())(54:43) moment of Zen where you see everything for its true face. And the realization that 'no, I do not want to be a mannequin' or ' I do not want to be a pretty little thing for a prince'. That is very much a part of her project.

Avishek Parui: So I was thinking of Haraway's blurring of distinctions between, first, man and animal and then, organism and machine. And this is actually happening in fiction and Carter's narratives, right?

Michael Yates: Sure.

Avishek Parui: And that is a cyborg quality.

Michael Yates: Sure, at its best. Yes, there is. But the cyborg for Carter, I think, is always super human rather than sub-human. I think in this sense, the robot would be sub-human. But in another, especially in Haraway's context it would be somehow superior to the human. You are both an algorithm, but you are also organic.

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Student 1 (Mohit): For instance, that he just described in this other story, it acts like a very perfect mirror to what happens in Wolf-Alice when she looks herself in the mirror and then she slowly realizes herself to be a reflection of her rather than another creatures.

Michael Yates: Right.

Student 1 (Mohit): From animality to human condition as well as from a cyborg, that also, like, approach the human nature.

Michael Yates: Right, I think that was a little just a little touch of Lacanian theory that Carter just sort of suggests there, that now she is human, this sort of border crossing.

Student 1 (Mohit): The mirror stage is achieved.

Michael Yates: Right, the mirror stage is achieved, now she can go on and progress as a human. And I think we get that similarly at the end of the tale with the Duke his sort of Dorian Gray in reverse sort of portrait is coming into shape. He suddenly has a shape as well. So it is that dual mirroring, right? She suddenly sees her image and he suddenly has an image. And both of those need to be in place for any kind of relationship to progress. Alright, so it is a good point.

Avishek Parui: We just slightly digress for a bit, what was Carter's relationship with (())(57:11) institution as feminists, was she in (())(57:12) with the French feminists for instance or did she make a very deliver departure as an artist rather than hitting off?

Michael Yates: No, she was very actively engaged with, at least with the fictional side, I mean fiction writing and artistic side of the feminist movement. Once she settled in London in, I think about the same time this was published, about 1979, or 77, maybe a little earlier, but she stayed in London for the remainder of her life and was engaged in magazines such as Bananas. And Bananas was a very feminist bent, sort of creative writing magazine.

She often published there and was very active in the community, trying to help other female writers and poets, publish their works, and very much an active critic of other female authors and very much a proponent of a new kind of female sexuality. Female sexuality that was not always the one on the bottom. It was not the victim role, she was very much a Sadean in her philosophy. She wanted to see women take a kind of vicious role in their sexuality. And that sort of masochism and sadism to her, was not necessarily a negative aspect of sexuality, that she wanted women to have an equal bent towards masochist and sadist tendencies, to sort of exercise that right as humans.

Avishek Parui: Very complex equation between violence and (())(59:00).

Michael Yates: Yes, exactly. She was not saying when men need to be less violent, she was saying that women need to be more violent, more sexual that would be empowering to her. That it was not about making everyone calm down, she did not believe in that. She did not believe that

was possible, we are animals but after all. So, to bring that animalistic sense back to femininity, I think, was her sort of her goal.

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Student 2: To pick up after that point of animalistic quality, you have consecutive stories, the coaching of Mr. (())(59:40) and The Tiger's Bride where in one there is a transformation from the animals to a human, the man transforms to the human, the lion transforms to a human, and then in the Tiger's Bride, the woman is transformed into an animal there Tiger. So it is very fluent, the categories, the boundaries can be crossed.

Avishek Parui: Right, that is a good point.

Student 2: And the consecutive stories in the collection.

Michael Yates: That is true that is true that is true. Yeah, when all of the hair melts away and we get this sort of Disney transformation at the end I was a little bit disappointed in that, I still kind of hold that against her. It is too safe. I do not know, maybe she just was not up to it at that time. But yes, I think there is some dynamics.

Avishek Parui: (())(60:32) yesterday, in terms of looking at the superficiality of Shakespeare's endings. Do you think there is a bit of a double joke there? I mean, she gives you a closure that is safe and sanitized, but there is an embedded superficial quality to it which is meant to convey 'do

not take this seriously; we have done it, it happened already.' So the closure is, the shallowness quite (())(60:54).

Michael Yates: Yeah, well I think she was very aware of her endings, especially in this but you know novels as well. Endings, I think for her were paramount. And she did not ever, which is why I hold that ending against her, that kind of easy Beauty and the Beast kind of expected ending, I hold that against her because I do not see it in any way, problematic. I do not see it, in any way, challenging the tradition. So I find it kind of a slip.

But her endings tend to be very carefully considered, sometimes a bit heavy handed, right? Like with The Bloody Chamber, we get this kind of final list of all the things that she wants in the world. And I find it a bit heavy. Really? That is how it ends? She is kind of piling it on and also this, and also this, and this would be good, right? So she can be a bit much but I do think that she is very careful about the suggestions at the end. And I think if we look at the endings, specifically, if we only look at the endings of this collection, we will find a kind of empowering and at least a femininely empowering end to most of them to the majority, where we have a kind of hungry sexuality at the end, especially among the female protagonists, some of them even saying, 'you are not going to eat me, I am going to eat you.' She puts that kind of perspective on things quite a lot in this collection.

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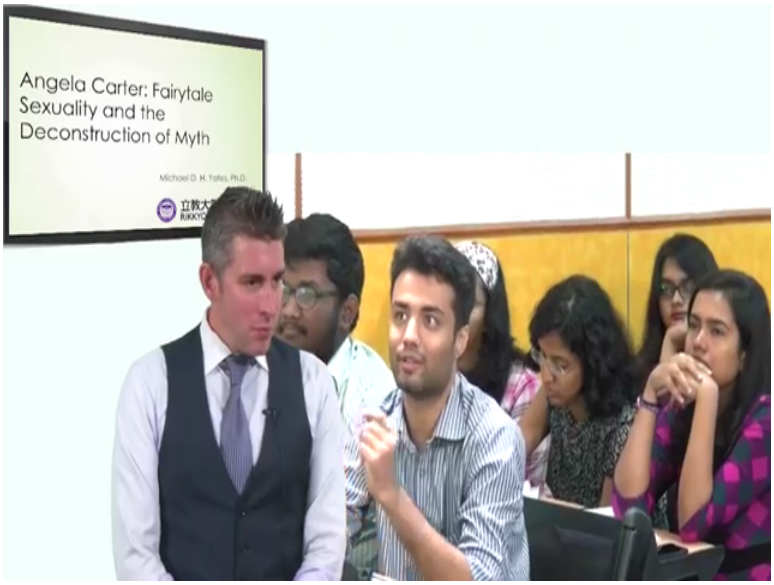

Student 1 (Mohit): I would like to ask another question. How would you compare the project of this deconstruction of fairy tales and reclamation of feminine nature which was explored, and it was explored in a much more visceral way in the earlier versions of fairy tales. So how would you compare Carter's project, which she explored in these works with the kind of with the kind of change that has come in let us say Disney movies, and their interpretation of their interpretation of these fairy tales in which more and more focus is now put on let us say the female protagonist and these gender roles and this normativity of heterosexual relationships is also being challenged. And like a very common example might be Shrek in which she decides she decides to say a monster at the end. So, it is like a new version of Beauty and the Beast.

Michael Yates: That is true.

Student 1 (Mohit): So how would you compare these two trends?

Michael Yates: I think, we have two very social roles being discussed here. The role of a film is to make money and to benefit Disney or the producers, whether it is Pixar or Illustrate or Illumination, etc. So it is a business, but it is a social business where you have to make the customer happy. But I do think there is a social awareness among Disney films recently that is surprising hopeful.

But I do think that the oral process of storytelling and this sort of public cinematic process of storytelling very different things. Although Disney is trying to source that material, they are very careful to make it kind of oralistic, they are using oral techniques to do their story telling. It is very much based on fairy tale method. But it is for a very different purpose, so Disney's approach to the fairy tale is to I believe make the customer happy, and to be very sensitive to the Zeitgeist and to what is happening in society, the Meetoo movement, feminism, political correctness, gay rights, same sex marriage, these issues are having a very major effect on the writers and illustrators and sort of administration of Disney for sure because that is I think in the corporate interest.

But when it comes down to the fire side, and telling your grandchildren a story, there is a very different relationship between the listener and the teller and that is really what Carter's concern was was to maintain that very oral direct link of communication and message, conferral of the message between the older wiser and the younger naive. And that relationship was essential,

especially for girls, right? There was not a voice out there today doing that there are all of these men talking to girls, these men putting on this sort of mask of the fairy godmother and putting on the fairy godmother's voice, 'Yes, I'm the fairy godmother and I will tell you what you should do, little girl' but it is still a man, it is still a male writer inscribing these prescriptions of female behavior right? So Carter wants to rip up that outfit, get him out of the way and place herself as very much a real fairy godmother figure. And do that for the betterment of her audience. So I think there is a very different process there.

But we need to aware of the improvements that Disney has taken and not fall victim to their own ideology because there are some questionable bits to even the best of the new Disney. Although, they have made huge steps forward in the kind of sexist doxa that they are selling in comparison to things such as Snow White, which was their first animated film and then later Sleeping Beauty very heavy handed with their sort of heterosexual messages and social messages of hierarchy. I think we have gotten beyond that a bit, but it has taken a century to do so. Let us hope we can go further.

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Student 3: Looking at the adaptations of fairy tales, we take the central thought, two the things which are innovative and fit the potential of storytelling, but after this fairy tale [inaudible (()) (68:21) where I was reading the first story, and the connection of the (())(68:25), this is a fairy tale. You get so immersed in it and all the things that you know like that in a medieval version of

it, she is done away with. She is gotten her own (())(68:37). It is not shied away from (())(68:41.) So I feel as compared with retelling, it is the fairy tale in essence but more suited, she does away with the pretenses (())(68:53). But it is the fairy tale. It has the essence, it has the beauty, it has the (())(69:01).

Michael Yates: Right. Very true.

Avishek Parui: And also, just to quickly add on to that, from (())(69:08) perspective, it has the (())(69:09) quality to it, right? The entire defamiliarization thing, you put a telephone in a medieval setting and everything changes dramatically.

Michael Yates: But it is never entirely medieval though, is it? It is kind of this other worldly story world, you cannot really place it. You are not sure if it is the 17th, 18th, maybe 19th century. Okay, if there is a telephone, then it must be what time in the 19th? It is constantly making you wonder when the time is. And I think she is using that to the benefit of the story because she really catches you in that mysterious, sort of, liminal space which is somewhat real but somewhat unreal. It is very dreamy. And she does not shy away from things like telephones and cars. They are part of our reality now. So why not have a car or a telephone?

But she brings, it is still a magic car, it is still a magical telephone. There is always magic in that. But I think that is one thing that Disney would never do. If Moana is out there on her boat, she would not just pull out a smart phone and check her emails, right? But I think Carter might. If Carter was doing Moana, she had have her own social media for sure. But different situations. Thank you for your comment.

Avishek Parui: So again that leads on to this could be last couple of questions because I was intrigued by Carter's against, the biological, Carter's relationship with the post-modern magical realists, writers, especially Rushdie, looked up to her as a mentor figure in some sense. So she was never deliberately a magic realist in that sense, I think she would prefer the fabulous tradition or the fantastic tradition, so do you think there is any ontological difference between what you just talked about as having a telephone in a medieval setting and the Rushdien narrative of magic realism?

Michael Yates: No, I do not think there should be any distinction. I think magic realism is a kind of fantasy or vice versa fantasy as a kind of magic realism. But I do, if I had a blackboard, I would sketch it out, but I do think there is a spectrum to myth it runs all the way to the Asaltarik religious, right? The holy text, the Quran, the Torah, the Bible, all the way back to the zero point of experience, right? And as it goes through that, we get fairy tales, we get the folk tales and it comes closer to human experience, that sort of realist moment, which would be the zero point.

But that magic realism, fairy tale, folk tale, myth such as the Greek myth, the Gods, and all, of course, these religious traditions as we get towards the end of that spectrum, they are all represented in on that mythical spectrum. So to make these distinctions between maybe science fiction and sort of oldy worldy ‘Tolkienesk’ sort of fantasy, I think, is a mistake. Because I think they share a lot. And if you read somebody like Joseph Campbell and start to think of the mythical cycle, you can really start to see that, I mean figure such as Budda and Christ were going through the same sort of things as Cinderella. They both have their following the monomyth, their following the monomythical pattern of the hero and that is what really defines that mythical spectrum as one of the aspects of narrative, narrative literature, at least.

But it is a very hot topic because if you go to a fantasy conference for example and you meet sci-fi people and you meet sort of Tolkien fans, they do not want to think of their genres as anyway related 'these are not fairy tales, these are, this is serious' and that always blows my mind. Because they are not so different I mean how is the Marvel universe that different structurally than Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, for example those have supernatural creatures, etc special powers, special weapons, it is just a different setting, different trees maybe. Thank you very much.