

## **Posudek vedoucí na bakalářskou práci**

**Název: “Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale: Myths of Sexuality”**

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Throughout her career, prematurely cut short by her death at the age of 51 in 1992, Carter’s writing was preoccupied with sexuality, desire and identity (particularly gender identity). Carter raids literary history, both popular and canonical, for intertextual allusions, she uses an eclectic mixture of styles, genres and forms, her fiction is non-realist and highly self-conscious, and embraces marginality, perversity and the fantastic. These are all features that align her with a postmodernist critique of modern distinctions such as those between good and bad literature, canonical and popular genres and mainstream and marginal themes and styles. These are some of the roots of Carter’s interest in the peculiar genre of the fairy tale, which becomes the focus of Dmitry Pyshkin’s BA thesis. He also does not forget Carter’s commitment to feminism. Her writing is indeed unapologetically feminist. However, yoking together feminism and postmodernism may cause problems as is testified by the history of her works’ reception. Some critics have, for example, expressed concerns about her depiction of violence against women and the way she constructs female desire as passive and responsive to men. These issues are most apparent in *The Sadeian Woman* in which she argued in favour of the liberating potential for women of the non-reproductive erotics contained in the Marquis de Sade’s work. This pro-pornography stance was and perhaps still is controversial. Therefore the only thing I really miss in Pyshkin’s thesis is a larger critical awareness of the debates around the issues of representation of sexual domination. The chapter on this (chapters are unfortunately not numbered) is acute in its readings, interpretation of motifs and various details. However, if we shift the focus, can the author see any problems with such depictions of sexuality as we find in “The Bloody Chamber”? By pointing out “the way of the world”, so to speak, is she satirizing it or entrapping the heroine into an eternal fatality? And, also, if “The Lady of the House of Love” can be liberated only in death, is that not also annihilation (and fatality as the La Mort card from the tarot cards indicates)?

The decision to focus his thesis on Carter’s fairy tales is, I think, sound and logical and gives a unity to the piece. Starting with the assumption that fairy tales’ main function is to socialize, Pyshkin proceeds to look at how Carter probes the essence of the classical tale in order to accomplish her project of cultural de-mythologization. He traces the concept of the myth, the history of the fairy tale from the salons of the précieuses to the brothers Grimm and Disney, notes Carter’s use of de Sade etc. This is fine, the only problem is that by then the reader is already on page 20 and the analysis has not genuinely taken off yet.

The language is colourful and poetic (e.g. note how on page 20 “Carter picks the lock, enters the bloody chamber...”) but sometimes overburdened with repetition and empty phrase.

How actually does the fairy tale “offer recoverable, class and gender specific histories of storytelling” (page 19)? With all respect to Zipes, does not the fairy tale attempt to hide these under the guise of a universal timeless message? And, also, sometimes the “ornate, abundant” (page 21) Carter’s style probably influenced the author of the thesis.

The long account of Tamburlaine (mostly influenced by a secondary source) seems rather unnecessary and could have been abbreviated. Moreover (page 30) Tamburlaine indeed presented an image of the oriental male Other. But how exactly did this help constitute Western male hegemony? If one represents a romanticized oriental Other, can that simply be analogous to how hegemonic patriarchy works in the west (as represented by the Marquis)? Or, is Carter exploiting simply the idea of allure, luxury, desire?

The allegorical readings mostly work out persuasively. Sometimes only some loose ends remain, such as, for example, explaining away the fate of both protagonists in “The Lady of the House of Love” and the irony of it. The Countess may have pulled out The Lovers, but La mort will come to the innocent soldier anyway.

For the sake of better orientation, perhaps numbering the individual subchapters could have been a good idea. Otherwise the structure is clear and logical, the topics dealt with well-chosen. Language-wise, the Czech abstract could have been better.

In conclusion, the submitted thesis is certainly a relevant piece of research and literary analysis. It fulfills all requirements for work on the BA level and I most certainly recommend it for defence with the provisional grade of excellent (**v ý b o r n ě**).

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