

“New Wine in Old Bottles”: Ethical Literary Criticism, Adaptations and Angela Carter’s Little Red Riding Hood

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Received: November 3, 2023

Accepted: December 22, 2023

Online Published: January 20, 2024

doi:10.5539/ells.v14n1p9

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v14n1p9>

Abstract

This paper reexamines the classic fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood” and, in conjunction with Angela Carter's adaptations, “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves”, and “Wolf-Alice”, reimagining and analyzing the story from the perspective of literary ethics. Both the original version of “Little Red Riding Hood” and Carter’s adaptations exhibit strong ethical consciousness. Carter’s artistic creation is deeply influenced by European traditional fairy tales in many aspects. The tragic endings of “Little Red Riding Hood” and Carter’s adapted version, “The Company of Wolves”, symbolize the disruption of ethical order. In both versions, the breakdown of ethical order is a result of violating ethical taboos, usurping ethical identities, and allowing free will to dominate, disregarding rational will. The conclusions of these two ethical tragedies serve as a warning to people: any violation of ethical taboos, trespassing on identity, and disruption of ethical order will bring punishment. Meanwhile, Carter’s adapted versions also illustrate the artistic charm and value of tragedy, as well as the practical significance of upholding ethical order. The paper analyzes key themes such as gender, power, morality, and self-awareness in the adaptation and explores how these themes can be reinterpreted through literature, placing the story in a contemporary context to enhance its relevance.

Keywords: “Little Red Riding Hood”, ethical literary criticism, Angela Carter, literary adaptation, feminism.

1. Introduction

Fairy tales have always been an “ethical model” in literature because of their rich symbolism and profound moral lessons (Bremond, 1977, p. 50). “Little Red Riding Hood”, as one of the classics, has been adapted many times since its inception. Notably, in 1979, the distinguished British writer Angela Carter presented a collection of reimagined fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), within which she transformed the iconic Grimm fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood” through narratives like “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice”. However, few scholars have examined this story from the perspective of ethical literary criticism. This paper seeks to reinterpret “Little Red Riding Hood” through the adaptations of Angela Carter. Ethical literary criticism is a theoretical framework and method for interpreting, understanding, analyzing, and evaluating literature from an ethical standpoint. As a branch of literature, fairy tales also serve the function of “moral education”; thus, through the lens of ethical literary criticism, the interpretation can “uncover the ethical values” of literature and help people make correct ethical choices through the interpretation and analysis of literary works (Nie, 2015, p. 4). In this light, this paper endeavors to delve into the ethical underpinnings of Carter’s reimaginings, employing ethical literary criticism as a guiding framework. By scrutinizing the transformative narratives in “The Werewolf,” “The Company of Wolves,” and “Wolf-Alice,” this critical analysis seeks to unravel the ethical implications woven into the fabric of these adaptations. Through this exploration, the paper aims to offer insights into the ethical dimensions of literature and the potential influence of these adaptations in shaping ethical discourse. In positioning Angela Carter’s adaptations as a focal point, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the intersection between literature, ethics, and the enduring power of storytelling.

2. Literature Review

The enduring tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” has captivated audiences for centuries, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries. Angela Carter, a prominent figure in contemporary literature, has undertaken the task of reimagining this classic narrative through a lens of ethical literary criticism. In exploring Carter’s adaptations, this literature review delves into the rich tapestry of scholarship surrounding her work, contextualizing it within broader discussions on ethics, feminism, and the transformative power of storytelling.

Carter's reworkings of "Little Red Riding Hood" have become seminal texts in feminist literature. Scholars such as Susan Sellers (2017) and Jennifer Gustar, Caleb Sivyer, Sarah Gamble (2021) emphasize Carter's radical departure from traditional gender roles, with particular focus on her subversion of the submissive female archetype. Carter's protagonists, often imbued with agency and resilience, challenge prevailing societal norms, thereby offering readers a redefined understanding of femininity. The application of ethical frameworks to literary analysis has gained prominence in recent years. Scholars like Martha Nussbaum (2011) claimed the necessity of literature to moral philosophy; and Mario Gotterbarm (2019) has advocated for a conscientious engagement with literature that takes into account moral dimensions. In the context of Carter's adaptations, this literature review explores how ethical considerations, ranging from gender equity to socio-cultural implications, shape and inform the critical discourse surrounding her works. Examining Carter's adaptations requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural and historical contexts that influenced her storytelling. By situating her works within the broader socio-political landscape, scholars such as Ankita Sen (2023) and Alison Lurie (2017) have shed light on the socio-cultural commentaries embedded in Carter's reimagined narratives. This literature review critically assesses how Carter's ethical choices intersect with the socio-historical dynamics of the time, thus enriching our comprehension of her literary contributions. The reception of Carter's adaptations plays a crucial role in evaluating the ethical dimensions of her literary interventions. Through an exploration of critical reviews, reader responses, and academic discourse, this literature review investigates how Carter's reimagined "Little Red Riding Hood" narratives have influenced literary criticism, feminist discourse, and public perceptions of the classic fairy tale.

3. Methods

Ethical literary criticism, a theoretical framework and methodology, offers a distinctive approach to interpreting, understanding, and evaluating literature from an ethical standpoint. The basic approach of the paper can be summarized as "one main theme, dual perspectives, three types of relationships": "one main theme" refers to the ethical appeal as the main theme of the paper. The ethical issues revealed in fairy tales revolve around the lack, misplacement, and uncertainty of characters' ethical identities, exploring the ethical propositions resulting from these issues, such as moral imbalance and the destruction of order, reflecting the moral exploration and value reevaluation in the adaptation. "Dual perspectives" refer to both ethical and narrative perspectives from the adapted works. On the one hand, it vertically studies the different presentations of ethical thoughts in fairy tale adaptations, revealing the ethical themes they intend to convey. On the other hand, it horizontally captures the narrative focuses and storytelling methods of the two works, attempting to summarize the ethical narratives and basic characteristics in Carter's new versions. "Three types of relationships" in the paper takes the specific ethical situations of characters in fairy tale texts as the research object, exploring how Carter integrates societal moral and ethical issues into relationships, such as man and woman, human and animal, and individual and society, reflecting Carter's philosophical reflections on family, nature, society, and other dimensions.

4. Discussion

4.1 Original "Little Red Riding Hood": *The Confusion of Ethical Identity and Tragedy by Free Will*

In Charles Perrault's original version of "Little Red Riding Hood" from 17th century France, the ending for the story is entirely tragic. Little Red Riding Hood is deceived by the wolf, who tricks her into revealing her grandmother's address. After the wolf eats her grandmother, he sets a trap for her and consumes her as well. Charles Perrault explicitly conveys his creative intent through "Little Red Riding Hood": readers should understand from the fairy tale that beautiful and well-mannered girls should not trust strangers. Otherwise, their fate will be tragic. Nie Zhenzhao, in "Introduction to Literary Ethical Criticism", also suggests, telling fairy tales to children is to awaken them from "ethical chaos" through animal stories, instill ethical awareness in them, and guide them into the stage of ethical choices (Nie, 2015, p. 257). This version carries a strong moral and ethical awareness, making its intention to provide ethical education for children very evident. In the context of that time, this tale served as a cautionary fable for children to be wary of attacks by strangers. The fact that Little Red Riding Hood is eaten by the wolf illustrates this point. The success of malicious villains in capturing children is also attributed to the children themselves. In structuralist theory, a "mytheme" refers to the smallest unit in mythology, similar to a "morpheme" in language (Leavitt, 2010, p. 98). From this perspective, the characters and elements in the story can be metaphorically interpreted. These metaphors also reflect the essential idea that literature is "an art about ethics" (Nie, 2015, p. 32):

Little Red Riding Hood———children with chaotic ethics
 Mothers———social experience
 Grandmother———elder

Wolves	—————	bad guys
Hunters	—————	good guys
Forests	—————	complex ethical environment
The main road	—————	established ethical order
Flowers	—————	temptations

These metaphorical meanings serve to admonish children to obey their parents and to discipline their behavior. Whether in fairy tales or other literary works, there are two ethical contexts: one is the ethical environment of the author's era, namely the historical and social environment at that time, which influences the author's ethics and creative ideas; the other is the artistic ethical context of the character relationships within the story, manifested as the ethical structure formed by story characters, plot, emotional relationships, etc., reflecting the ethical appeal the author seeks to convey. These two ethical contexts can be referred to as the "macro-context" and "micro-context" (De Fina, 2008, p. 434). In the case of Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood", with its unique narrative style and ethical perspectives, it holds a significant position in fairy tale literature, reflecting the ethical confusion and disruption of ethical order between men and women, and humans and animals. For instance, at the very beginning of the story,

Once upon a time there lived in a certain village a little country girl, the prettiest creature who was ever seen. Her mother was excessively fond of her; and her grandmother doted on her still more. This good woman had a little red riding hood made for her. It suited the girl so extremely well that everybody called her Little Red Riding Hood (Perrault, 2008, p. 1).

The opening of the story, while portraying the profound and spoiled love of the grandmother for the little girl and the charming episode of the girl being named after the red hood she wears, also subtly hints at the disruption of the ethical order at that time and the confusion of Little Red Riding Hood's ethical identity. In this story, the grandmother's excessive indulgence towards the little girl may have disrupted the family's ethical order at the time. Not only does the grandmother give the girl a special red hood, but she also fulfills all her needs, potentially leading the girl to disrespect authority and rules. In the society of that time, family education was the foundation of ethical order, and the grandmother's excessive coddling might be seen as inappropriate behavior, undermining traditional ethical values.

Moreover, the fact that the girl is named "Little Red Riding Hood" because of the red hood may further blur her ethical identity. This name associates her identity and characteristics with an external symbol (the red hood). Her identity and characteristics begin to be defined by external symbols rather than her character or morality. The construction of ethical identity should follow the ethical relationships individuals have with others and society, rather than external attributes. Therefore, this confusion of ethical identity may lead to her confusion about her role and responsibilities, and the change in ethical identity also brings about "insoluble contradictions and conflicts for the characters" (Nie, 2014, pp. 257–258).

As a result of the disruption of ethical order and the confusion of ethical identity, Little Red Riding Hood leaves the main road, enters the woods to pick flowers. "As she was going through the wood, she met with a wolf" (Perrault, 2008, p. 98). Because the spoiled Little Red Riding Hood did not show the due respect for the ethical order of human society, she did not heed her mother's warnings and allowed her free will to govern her actions. In literary works, "free will" is prone to break free from the constraints of rational will, manifesting irrational tendencies, often resulting in either good or evil (Nie, 2014, p. 282). As Little Red Riding Hood disrupts the ethical order, she is inevitably subject to the consequences.

The moral themes extrapolated through the metaphorical meanings in "Little Red Riding Hood" may seem to be cautionary for children but, in reality, also serve as a warning for women to be vigilant of strangers, placing responsibility on women themselves. The perspective of Western feminist literary criticism suggests that the ethical values reflected in fairy tales cater to the moral views of the patriarchal society at the time. Therefore, the original version of "Little Red Riding Hood" and the French author Charles Perrault inevitably carried the influence of traditional ethical values in paternalism (Gilbert, 2021, p. 3). Charles Perrault created "Little Red Riding Hood" in the late 17th century, a period when French society was influenced by contemporary ethical and moral concepts. This was the backdrop of the Enlightenment era, where societal values were evolving towards reason and morality. Fairy tales were considered a means of moral education, used to impart ethical principles and values. In 17th-century French society, women were often confined by traditional gender roles, expected to play specific roles in the family and society. Women were seen as needing protection, and fairy tales often reflected this conservative societal notion. Consequently, female characters in fairy tales often assumed roles of

victims or those in need of rescue.

In “Little Red Riding Hood”, the protagonist’s encounter emphasizes caution towards strangers. This can be seen as a form of moral education, encouraging women to remain vigilant in social interactions to prevent potential dangers. This reflects the societal perception of women’s roles at the time, emphasizing their vulnerability in social situations. Another moral theme is the attribution of responsibility to women themselves. In the story, Little Red Riding Hood does not heed her mother’s advice, straying from the main road and ultimately putting herself and her grandmother in danger. This can be interpreted as an implication that women may need to take responsibility for their actions when facing problems. It also reflects the societal regulation of women’s behavior and the emphasis on personal responsibility. In summary, “Little Red Riding Hood” involves gender and ethical concepts in 17th-century French society, illustrating how this fairy tale conveys messages about morality and responsibility. It mirrors societal expectations of women’s roles and social interactions at the time, while also highlighting the emphasis on moral and ethical values.

4.2 Angela Carter’s Adaptations: Ethical Appeals in the Modern Era

Angela Carter boldly and innovatively adapted “Little Red Riding Hood” into three short stories: “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves”, and “Wolf-Alice”, all included in her collection of fairy tales *The Bloody Chamber*. However, Carter’s adaptation differs significantly from the original both in terms of narrative and ethics. This adapted story provides readers with a fresh perspective on traditional fairy tales, brimming with gender dynamics, power struggles, desires, and moral complexities.

In Carter’s adaptation, the first story, “The Werewolf,” unfolds in a cold and merciless country where people lead harsh and brutal lives. They persecute witches—often based on flimsy evidence—and believe in the real existence of the devil. They place garlic on their doors to ward off vampires. The brief narrative following the prologue is a variation of the “Little Red Riding Hood” story: a young girl ventures into the forest to visit her grandmother and falls victim to a wolf’s attack. The quick-witted girl draws her father’s knife and cuts off the wolf’s paw. The wolf flees into the woods, leaving a trail of blood behind. The girl picks up the wolf’s paw, wraps it in cloth, and continues her journey. Upon reaching her grandmother’s cottage, she discovers the old woman is feverish. She places the wolf’s paw down, watching it transform into a human hand. Pulling back the sheets, she finds her grandmother is feverish because her hand has been severed, and the recent wound is festering. She notices a wart on the old woman’s hand, realizing it is a witch’s nipple, and her grandmother is, in fact, a witch. The girl screams loudly, and the neighbors rush over, realizing the grandmother is a werewolf. They drive her out of the forest until she collapses and dies. The young girl inherits the cottage and lives there, growing up strong and independent.

Different literary works from various historical periods possess fixed ethical environments and contexts specific to those historical periods. Understanding literature requires bringing it back to its ethical environment and context; this is a prerequisite for understanding literature (Nie, 2014, p. 14). The ethical setting of the story is in a cold country where people live harsh and merciless lives. They persecute witches, even believing in the existence of the devil. This ethical environment reflects societal persecution of the different and diverse beliefs, as well as a warning against skepticism and religious extremism. Through this setting, Carter explores religious and moral concepts within ethics and how these notions may become harsh and intolerant over time. In Carter’s adaptation, the wolf is transformed into a werewolf. A werewolf is a being that is part human, part beast, transforming into a wolf during a full moon while maintaining a human appearance otherwise. Werewolves cannot rationally control the human factor within them, overpowering the animalistic tendencies, rendering them unable to restrain the wild nature of the beast. Literary ethical criticism sees humans as existing with a Sphinx factor. The Sphinx factor includes the human and animal factors: the human factor being ethical consciousness manifested as rational will. The “animal factor” is driven by human primal desires, externally manifested as “natural will” or “free will”. The “human factor” attempts to control the animal factor, making a person one with ethical consciousness (Nie, 2014, p. 38). Hence, the emergence of the animalistic factor is crucial for the werewolf’s transformation.

The physical transformation of the werewolf deepens their existential crisis. The image of being half-human and half-beast signifies the degradation of the body and the enhancement of the animalistic factor. The suppression of the animalistic factor by the human factor enables one to make correct ethical choices. However, in the ethical environment of the time, the werewolf’s human factor is continuously diminished. The weakening of the human factor leads to the gradual exposure of the werewolf’s animalistic nature, ultimately forcing them to live as a wolf, a mere animal. The werewolf undergoes an ethical choice from beast to human.

Similarly, the women in Carter’s rewriting experience a process of ethical choices: choosing to adhere to the

ethical identity of the “obedient granddaughter” or questioning the new woman advocating “punishing evil and promoting good” (Atashi, 2018, p. 304). This ethical choice also reflects the new era’s women breaking the ethical taboo of treating the grandmother as a blood relative, attempting to create a new ethical order. Ethical taboos mainly include two major prohibitions: intra-family marriage and prohibition of siblings harming each other. After these two taboos arise, acts of violence and sexuality within the family are labeled as “incest and patricide” and strictly prohibited by all societies. At the same time, societal ethical order, with the help of incest taboos, is maintained, forming societal taboos such as regicide based on blood-related incest (Nie, 2014, p. 261). From a modern perspective, this woman appears as a modern advocate for gender equality. However, she compares women’s pursuit of freedom with the beastly nature of the werewolf, falling into the circle of animalistic thinking. Humans evolved from animals, and in this evolutionary process, individuals must attempt to overcome the control of the animalistic factor, thus manifesting rational will. Beasts can choose to slaughter blood relatives arbitrarily because their decision-making process is driven by primal desires (libido), without the involvement of ethical consciousness. After undergoing the evolution from savagery to civilization, humans should have rational will control free will, transforming into individuals with ethical consciousness.

Examining the appeal of the woman in the story from an ethical perspective, Little Red Riding Hood’s pursuit of freedom is untenable. Her ethical appeal is built upon the disruption of blood relations. We do not know whether Carter intentionally or unintentionally compared women to wolf-like beasts when creating this short story, but Little Red Riding Hood’s pursuit of freedom in the adaptation breaks ethical taboos associated with beasts. The noncompliant Little Red Riding Hood’s pursuit of the animalistic factor reflects a residue of natural will in capriciousness, and her ethical views are far from mature. However, Carter cannot be seen as supportive of the arguments of Little Red Riding Hood in the poem; in fact, it is her ethical criticism of this conflicting situation. Carter’s analysis of the reasons for the transformation from wolf to werewolf reveals the author’s contemplation of the dual nature of human goodness and evil. When personal interests are at stake, individuals tend to make choices based on animalistic selfishness. Simultaneously, there is criticism of the ethical order of the country and society at the time, emphasizing the importance of establishing correct ethical views for the nation and society.

In Carter’s adaptation of the second story, “The Company of Wolves”, the plot differs significantly from the original. This story can be divided into two parts. In the first part, Carter describes the eerie and terrifying forest environment and the ferocity of the wolves, laying the foundation for the next three short stories about wolves and humans. Carter provides a specific description of the eyes of the wolves: “At night, the eyes of wolves shine like candle flames, yellowish, reddish, but that is because the pupils of their eyes fatten on darkness and catch the light from your lantern to flash it back to you—red for danger” (Carter, 1990, p. 129). The author extends from the terrifying appearance of the wolves to the greedy vision of humans, creating a terrifying and dark atmosphere. She emphasizes that girls should be more careful with wolves and stay away from them.

In the second part, Carter rewrites the narrative. The beginning of the story is similar to the original, starting with Little Red Riding Hood visiting her sick grandmother. Grandma is sick, and Little Red Riding Hood wants to visit her, but her mother forbids it. However, she insists on going. Little Red Riding Hood puts a knife in the basket of food, thinking it will deal with any potential wolves. She believes that as long as she does not leave the main path in the woods, there will be no danger. Unexpectedly, the wolf transforms into a young hunter walking in the forest. Little Red Riding Hood is deceived by the handsome appearance of the hunter and, in the conversation, hands him the basket. The hunter invites the girl to take a shortcut through the forest, but she refuses; so the hunter proposes a bet: to see who can reach Grandma’s house first, with the stakes being “a kiss”. Little Red Riding Hood agrees. After the hunter enters the forest, the girl deliberately walks slowly because she likes the hunter and would “rather lose to him and exchange for a kiss” (Carter, 1990, p. 134). The hunter, carrying the basket, arrives at Grandma’s house first, revealing his true wolf form and eating Grandma. When Little Red Riding Hood arrives at Grandma’s house, she immediately realizes that something is wrong. Instead of the hunter, it is the wolf inside the house. Faced with the dreadful werewolf and hearing the howling of the wolf pack outside the window, she feels scared, but she realizes that fear cannot save her; only wisdom can. So, she confronts the wolf-man, gives him a kiss, and burns his clothes (legend has it that once a werewolf clothes are burned, they cannot transform again). Finally, Little Red Riding Hood companions with wolves and sweetly enters the dream and beside him.

Comparing “The Company of Wolves” with “Little Red Riding Hood”, it can be seen that Carter’s intention is to “put new wine in old bottles” in terms of character development and plot (Carter, 1997, p. 38). She attempts to create a new story on the basis of the long-standing ancient tale to express her ethical appeal. This rewriting is premised on feminist literary criticism’s elucidation of the metaphorical meaning and ethical themes of “Little Red Riding Hood”. The relationship between Little Red Riding Hood and the hunter in the story reflects a

profound reflection on gender and power dynamics. At the beginning, Little Red Riding Hood is initially deceived by the hunter's appearance, showing attraction to him, highlighting the complexity of gender roles and attractiveness. However, Little Red Riding Hood's intelligence and determination indicate that women should not be passive or victimized in the face of power and gender dynamics. She successfully contends with the hunter, demonstrating female autonomy and wisdom. Present interpretations of "The Company of Wolves" in the country mostly focus on themes such as power politics and feminism, discussing the independent identity of women in a patriarchal society. This reflects Carter's creative thinking, opposing the passive view of women and emphasizing female agency and social identity. Little Red Riding Hood's ethical choices play a crucial role in the story. She rejects the hunter's invitation, preferring to take a longer route to avoid losing her autonomy. This indicates that Little Red Riding Hood's moral views are not only related to power but also to her self-awareness and societal values. She chooses to stay alert in the face of danger, rather than being influenced by appearance or power. This reflects Carter's deep reflection on ethical concepts, namely, that morality is not only influenced by external pressures but also related to an individual's intrinsic moral choices and self-awareness. Literary ethics criticism combines literature with ethics, "interpreting, analyzing, and explaining literary works, studying authors, and issues related to literature from an ethical perspective" (Nie, 2010, p. 12). It emphasizes interpreting conflict events in literary works from a historically ethical standpoint, focusing on key ethical factors influencing character destinies in the work, analyzing characters' ethical choices in ethical chaos, and ultimately finding ways to reconstruct ethical order, providing appropriate ethical and moral evaluations.

One of Carter's intentions in her creation is to challenge social norms and traditional views. Little Red Riding Hood's actions reflect the importance of independent thinking and action; she is not a passive victim but an individual capable of autonomous decision-making. The latter half of the 20th century witnessed the rise of the feminist movement, where women began to fight for equal rights and gender justice. Against this backdrop, Angela Carter's works, reflecting the cultural revolution and anti-traditional movements in British society, emerged in a context of counter-traditional and popular culture (Santiago, 2020, p. 82). Carter's works typically carry rebellious elements, challenging traditional culture and ethical concepts. The tragic love story of Little Red Riding Hood is an inevitable result of the conflict between societal ethical order and her own ethical values. The novel reveals the dilemma of awakened women in the evolution of the modern feminist movement. Faced with powerful institutions and patriarchal forces, the protagonist readjusts her already awakened self and chooses to intelligently confront the difficulties of reality—this is also the author's own ethical choice. The novel conveys the ethical and moral thought of "correcting feminine qualities" and Little Red Riding Hood's active resistance, defending love, is based on her choice to align with the feminist movement in reality (Lau, 2020, p. 299). This is where the ethical values and practical significance of "The Company of Wolves" lie.

In Angela Carter's third adaptation story, "Wolf-Alice", the protagonist, Wolf-Alice, is a girl raised by wolves. She runs on all fours, cannot speak, and makes wolf-like howling sounds. Her behavior resembles that of a wolf, always sniffing out the potential smell of food or prey with her nose. She is taken away from her wolf mother (shot and killed by a farmer) and raised by nuns in a convent. However, the nuns, frustrated by their inability to civilize her, send her to the Duke, a werewolf living in his castle. At night, the Duke leaves the castle to indulge in cannibalism, occasionally killing people for meat, and sometimes scavenging from the local graveyard. However, he does not eat Wolf-Alice, perhaps because her nature is more wolf-like than human. She becomes his servant. One day, as she reaches adulthood, Wolf-Alice begins menstruating and developing breasts. Unlike the Duke, Wolf-Alice can see her reflection in the mirror. When she sees herself for the first time, she becomes curious about her appearance. The Duke hides a white wedding dress behind the mirror, and when Wolf-Alice discovers it, she puts it on and leaves the castle. A prospective bridegroom's betrothed is killed and eaten by the Duke, who waits in the church with a set of charms and weapons, ready to avenge his beloved, including bells, books, candles, holy water, and silver bullets. When the Duke appears, the villagers attack him, and he runs back to the castle with a bullet in his shoulder. The villagers believe that Wolf-Alice, who emerges from behind a tombstone to chase him, is the ghost of the murdered bride and scream in terror, fleeing. Wolf-Alice returns to the castle, licking the Duke's wound. His reflection gradually appears in the mirror, indicating that she has cured him of lycanthropy.

"Wolf-Alice" concludes Angela Carter's trilogy of werewolf-themed stories at the end of her novel collection. In the previous story, "The Company of Wolves", the female protagonist tames a male werewolf by engaging in a sexual relationship to preserve her own life. In this story, the girl herself is not entirely a werewolf, but she possesses many wolf-like characteristics. She forms an incredible alliance with the male werewolf and ultimately restores him to complete animality, undermining "the basis of oppositional logic" (Jennings, 2014, p. 90). The character of Wolf-Alice represents wildness and instinct. Although Alice grows up in a convent representing

human civilization, her behavior is wolf-like and incompatible with human society. Through this character, Carter attempts to explore the relationship between humanity and animality, as well as the impact of ethical chaos and ethical enlightenment on human ethical concepts.

This adaptation novel involves ethical considerations, specifically how people perceive and treat individuals who deviate from societal norms. As a child who has not undergone ethical enlightenment, young Alice is still in a state of ethical chaos, lacking a clear ethical consciousness and the ability to morally judge the werewolf's atrocities. Carter views the young Wolf-Alice as a representation of the id: desires and satisfaction, hunger and basic needs, without overall supervision or control. Her description of crawling on all fours not only mimics the actions of a wolf but also imitates the movements of a baby crawling on hands and knees before learning to walk on two feet. Her bestial factors are not constrained by rational will but are awakened and strengthened by the ethical views of the jungle law. On the one hand, Alice grows up in a human civilization represented by the convent; on the other hand, she retains the bestial factors within her. Nie Zhenzhao pointed out that "in some literary works, human and bestial factors often exhibit features of the separation of spirit and flesh", and "these two factors must be combined to constitute a complete personality" (Nie, 2014, p. 10). Clearly, the spiritually separated Alice has lost the essence of being human. The confrontation between the human factor and the bestial factor in the Sphinx factor creates an ethical dilemma for Alice, who constantly oscillates between reason and desire. In the novel, to overcome this ethical dilemma, Alice attempts to reconcile them in a traditional ethical environment, leading to the ethical enlightenment to the Duke's residence.

In fact, the moment when Wolf-Alice first sees and recognizes herself in the mirror can be linked to Jacques Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage" (Roudinesco, 2003, p. 28), where the subject (usually a one-year-old infant) falls in love with their own image, serving as a precursor to learning to love others. Alice's subsequent care for the Duke represents this shift of self-love onto another self, resulting in him regaining self-awareness. As identity is linked to ethical norms, changes in identity can easily lead to "ethical chaos and conflict" (Nie, 2014, p. 257). Alice's monotonous life, growing up without parents in the convent, lacks emotional communication. This is also the reason for her loneliness. Consequently, she has not found a way to alleviate the loneliness and inner frustration in her life. However, Alice's cognitive error in ethical identity leads to ethical chaos in her consciousness, directly changing her value orientation: she follows the werewolf Duke and becomes a werewolf herself, no longer accepting the guidance of rational will on her personal will. Therefore, starting from ethical enlightenment, Alice no longer considers the kindness required by societal ethics. The value orientation of irrationalism frees her from moral constraints, prioritizing free will in life. She chooses to help the werewolf Duke rather than the villagers. The Duke's actions expose his evil nature and the corruption of human society. However, when the villagers attempt revenge, their actions also reveal their own violence and malice. This triggers reflections on morality and social norms, questioning whether society, in opposing evil, may also become equally wicked. This story takes place in the 20th century, a period of significant social upheaval, including a reexamination of gender, morality, and social norms. Carter's creation reflects the spirit of that era, emphasizing individual autonomy and a rebellious spirit. The era also witnessed the rise of feminism and the sexual liberation movement, influencing Carter's thoughts on gender and social roles.

4.3 From the Original Version to Adaptations: Reconstruction of Ethical Order

Angela Carter's adapted versions of the three short stories and the original "Little Red Riding Hood" face an issue of ethical differences across time periods. The adapted versions evidently cannot faithfully adhere to the original work and require significant adjustments in both the contemporary context and artistic conception. Firstly, the original work's historical background must be transposed to the present, and the class labels of the main characters must be removed. Secondly, a reclassification of the fairy tale is necessary, with a fresh portrayal of the relationship between Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf to reflect different ethical values and the ethical appeals of the author at present. Therefore, the transition from the original "Little Red Riding Hood" to Carter's adaptation essentially represents a process from ethical chaos and enlightenment to the reconstruction of ethical order.

In his *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, Nie Zhenzhao proposes, Human natural selection begins with ethical chaos and thus requires enlightenment. The birth of a baby is a result of natural selection, yet ethically it is a beginning of chaos. As the child grows, it is like the division between heaven and earth, gradually gaining perception of the world. Telling children fairy tales is a way to awaken them from chaos through animal stories, instilling ethical consciousness, and "guiding them into the stage of ethical choices" (Nie, 2014, p. 257). Every individual must pass through the stage of ethical chaos, and everyone needs ethical enlightenment. Although the methods of enlightenment may vary, without going through enlightenment, individuals cannot develop ethical consciousness and cannot grow into moral beings. Accordingly, based on ethical literary criticism, if an

individual is in the stage of ethical chaos, they cannot develop ethical consciousness or make ethical choices that align with morality, indicating an incomplete process of ethical enlightenment. To awaken from ethical chaos, develop ethical consciousness, and enter the stage of ethical choices, ethical enlightenment is essential. The original “Little Red Riding Hood” depicts a character with an empty mind, lacking wisdom, kind-hearted yet willful, much like an obstinate child who ignores her mother’s advice. Little Red Riding Hood, on her way to visit her grandmother, allows her free will and irrational desires to govern her thoughts and actions, devoid of ethical consciousness. Her mind remains in chaos ethically. After succumbing to the wolf’s temptation, her rationality begins to waver, ultimately leading to the loss of her grandmother and her own life. Therefore, ethical chaos is the root cause of this tragic event.

In Carter’s adaptation, these experiences of hardship serve as a catalyst for Little Red Riding Hood’s enlightenment, ultimately illuminating the light of her rationality and wisdom, leading to the awakening of her ethical consciousness. For instance, in “The Company of Wolves”, Little Red Riding Hood visits her grandmother out of her own initiative rather than following her mother’s instructions. Although the girl is innocent and kind, she is not as ignorant and fearless as the original Little Red Riding Hood. She recognizes the wolf as an uncontrollable factor of her own animalistic nature and arms herself with a dagger, demonstrating both courage and the common sense of self-defense. After seeing through the wolf’s disguise, she is not deterred by fear but, instead, rescues herself with courage and wisdom. The transformation of the ethical identity of the naive “Little Red Riding Hood” is a continuous thread throughout Carter’s adapted works, where changes in the ethical environment leads to ethical dilemmas for the characters, resulting in a series of ethical choices and shifts in ethical consciousness due to “gynocritical” narration (Nouri, 2015, p. 102). Little Red Riding Hood in Carter’s portrayal is not willingly submitting to fate; she experiences struggles and conflicts. On the one hand, she is a victim of societal ethical conditions and the evil represented by the wolf. On the other hand, she possesses certain spiritual ideals and self-awareness, constantly seeking a spiritual identity in her resistance, thus achieving a new ethical identity. The fundamental purpose of literature is “to provide moral examples for humans to understand society and life from an ethical perspective, to offer moral warnings for material and spiritual life, and to provide moral experiences for human self-improvement” (Nie, 2014, p. 14). Hence, Little Red Riding Hood’s resistance and ultimate choices are driven by ethical consciousness. Carter’s version subverts the traditional image of passivity and obedience associated with the female character in the classic “Little Red Riding Hood” narrative. In her version, Little Red Riding Hood is no longer a passive victim but a clever, independent, and courageous girl. She does not passively adhere to her mother’s teachings but dares to question, reflect, and even discern the true nature of the wolf. This independent thinking attitude sparks a reconsideration of traditional gender roles among readers. Thus, Carter’s adaptations, both in narrative and character portrayal, instill a new ethical consciousness in Little Red Riding Hood, leading to ethical choices that align with the contemporary era, completing the process of ethical enlightenment.

Carter’s adapted versions also reflect a reconstruction of ethical order. Both the original “Little Red Riding Hood” and Carter’s adaptation are essentially tragedies within family ethics. The ethical tragedies in both works result from the confusion of ethical identities, the disorder of ethical relationships, and Little Red Riding Hood allowing free will to override rational will. The original sin of ethical order chaos and the subsequent tragedies in both works are thought-provoking. Regardless of how ethical taboos are transgressed or moral norms are violated, in Carter’s version, ethical order is reconstructed, ethical relationships are restored, and moral order is upheld. The main characters in the play, such as the indulgent grandmother and the willful Little Red Riding Hood, transform from slaves of free will at the beginning of the plot to individuals dominated by rational will. Nie states that in specific literary works, the core content of ethics is the accepted and recognized ethical relationships formed between people, between people and society, and between people and nature, as well as the moral order and various norms that maintain this order based on these relationships (Nie, 2014, p. 13). According to this view, the tragedy of Little Red Riding Hood is also due to problems in ethical relationships and moral order. Nie believes, “human ethical relationships are primarily formed based on blood relationships; therefore, relationships based on blood ties, if disrupted, will bring about misfortune” (Nie, 2014, p. 13). Since ethical order is crucial for human survival and reproduction, humans should be able to adhere to the most basic ethical rules, such as taboos, responsibilities, duties, etc. However, Little Red Riding Hood does not follow ethical rules; she reports and executes her grandmother. When Little Red Riding Hood discovers that her grandmother is a witch instead of the expected grandmother, it triggers ethical confusion and moral judgment. The neighbors in the community have an extreme reaction to the grandmother’s true identity, driving her out of the forest and causing her death. Ethical taboos mainly include two major taboos: intra-family marriage prohibition and prohibition of siblings harming each other. After the two major taboos are generated, actions related to sexual and violent acts within the family are classified as incest and parricide, strictly prohibited by all societies.

Simultaneously, societal ethical order relies on incest taboos to be maintained, forming societal incest taboos such as “regicide on the basis of blood kinship” (Nie, 2014, p. 261). Therefore, in Carter’s version, Little Red Riding Hood’s discovery of her grandmother’s true identity triggers ethical confusion and moral judgment. Little Red Riding Hood does not adhere to traditional ethical rules but reports her grandmother, leading to the grandmother being expelled from the community and dying. This behavior challenges traditional taboos of intra-family marriage and siblings harming each other. Carter expresses skepticism about ethical order in this way, emphasizing the complexity and instability of ethical order.

Therefore, Carter’s adaptation serves as a symbolic act to dismantle the inherent moral chaos world and establish a new ethical order. The adaptation of “Little Red Riding Hood” triggers a reexamination of ethical order. Her reporting and the death of the grandmother prompt people to rethink ethical rules, especially in terms of societal incest taboos. This process of reevaluating ethical order can be seen as a reconstruction and redefinition of ethical order. Carter’s adaptation, by challenging traditional ethical rules and causing ethical confusion, highlights the complexity and relativity of ethical order. This exploration and reexamination contribute to the reconstruction and redefinition of ethical order to adapt to the constant changes in society and culture. This provides rich material and discussion topics for the adaptation of literary ethics and children’s literature.

“In literary texts, ethical lines and ethical structures are closely connected; ethical lines can be seen as the vertical ethical structure of literary texts, and ethical structures can be seen as the horizontal ethical structure of literary texts” (Nie, 2010, p. 20). In Carter’s adaptation of “Little Red Riding Hood”, there are two ethical lines. One involves the struggle and entanglement between Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf-man, while the other concerns the continuous combination and variation of Little Red Riding Hood’s inner human and animalistic factors. Literary ethical criticism methodically depicts the formation process of the tragic fate of these characters and the process of their internal breakdown. Besides evoking sympathy and contemplation in readers, the core value of literary works lies in their instructive function, thereby elevating the moral consciousness of readers. Through the analysis of this novel, it can be observed that, in any situation, the restraining and guiding role of individual rational will remains crucial. The destructive impact of the ethical environment not only brings about devastating consequences to the spiritual morality among individuals, nature, and society but also underscores that the departure of rational will is the fundamental cause of tragic destinies. Therefore, the return to rationality is the necessary path for achieving the ethical redemption of the characters.

5. Conclusion

Fairy tales have consistently served as a genre for conveying ethical principles and promoting moral values, often seen as an “extension of feminism” in their various adaptations (Santiago, 2020, p. 21). Angela Carter’s adaptation of “Little Red Riding Hood” emerges as a transformative literary endeavor that goes beyond the mere retelling of a classic fairy tale. Through her reimagining, Carter not only navigates the temporal and societal shifts but also engages in a profound exploration of ethics and morality. The stark contrast between the original version and Carter’s adaptation underscores the evolving nature of ethical considerations across different epochs. Carter’s rendition acts as a symbolic force, dismantling the conventional moral order and reconstructing a narrative that challenges traditional norms. The journey of Little Red Riding Hood becomes a metaphorical quest for ethical enlightenment, symbolizing the transcendence from a state of moral chaos to the reconstruction of ethical order. By infusing her protagonist with intellect, agency, and resilience, Carter breaks away from the passive female archetype, prompting readers to reconsider established gender roles and societal expectations.

The ethical transformations within Carter’s adaptation, particularly in the face of societal taboos such as incest, serve as a catalyst for a broader societal introspection. The narrative prompts readers to question and redefine prevailing ethical standards, emphasizing the malleability and relativity of moral constructs. Carter’s work not only challenges the narrative conventions of the fairy tale genre but also serves as a thought-provoking commentary on the intricate interplay between literature, ethics, and societal norms. In essence, Carter’s adaptation of “Little Red Riding Hood” is more than a literary revision; it is a dynamic discourse on the evolution of ethics and morality. By redefining the ethical landscape of the traditional fairy tale, Carter invites readers to confront and reassess their own ethical frameworks, thereby contributing to a broader dialogue on the transformative power of literature in shaping our understanding of morality across time and cultures. Through the lens of Carter’s adaptation, the significance of ethical metamorphosis within literature becomes apparent, urging us to recognize and embrace the fluidity of ethical paradigms in our collective narrative consciousness.

Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the valuable contributions of committee members of International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism (IAELC).

Authors' contributions

Conceptualization, A.P.; writing—original draft preparation, A.P. and X.C.; writing—review & editing, A.P. and X.C.; supervision: X.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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