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Claustrophobia and Imprisonment
in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*:
Surviving Male Domination

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Resumen:

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado tiene como propósito analizar las tres primeras historias de la colección de cuentos escrita por Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber*, es decir, “The Bloody Chamber”, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” y “The Tiger’s Bride”, centrándose en las experiencias de claustrofobia y encarcelamiento en el proceso de emancipación de las protagonistas. Influenciada por los valores destacados de la Segunda Ola Feminista y el movimiento postmodernista, Angela Carter rechaza las convenciones de género y ofrece una introspección femenina sobre las vivencias machistas en los cuentos de hadas. La autora se deshace de la idealización de la sumisión femenina y desarrolla diferentes estrategias para enfatizar la asfixiante situación que sufren los personajes sometidos a la dominación masculina. Por ende, el objetivo de este trabajo es demostrar cómo los personajes femeninos reaccionan ante su encarcelamiento, desvelando similitudes y diferencias, además de observar los efectos que causa la experiencia claustrofóbica en el desarrollo de las heroínas.

Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the first three stories from Angela Carter’s collection *The Bloody Chamber*, these being “The Bloody Chamber”, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride”, focusing on the experiences of claustrophobia and imprisonment within the emancipation process of the female protagonists. Influenced by the ideas spread by Second Wave Feminism and the postmodernist movement, Angela Carter rejects gender roles while she offers a female introspection into the sexist world of fairy tales. The author gets rid of the idealisation of female submission and develops different strategies to reinforce the suffocating situation suffered by the characters exposed to male domination. Therefore, this dissertation aims to demonstrate how female characters react to their imprisonment, noticing similarities and differences, as well as observing the effects provoked by claustrophobic experiences in the heroines.

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I. Introduction

I.1 Angela Carter in the Context of Second Wave Feminism

The 20th century constitutes a promising period for the recognition of women's authorship and talent. From the second half onwards, a series of gifted female authors positively invaded the male-dominated literary industry, opening the field for future generations. It is during these decades when the English author Angela Carter was making her way to becoming one of Britain's literary geniuses, her production being considered unique and extremely transgressive. Carter's wit was expressed in different forms. Short stories, children's stories, plays and novels are some of the genres that this gifted writer mastered. This phenomenal storyteller did not conform to conventional narratives. Bristow and Broughton describe her as a "contentious writer who took a great many risks" (1). Indeed, she became a polemical figure due to her explicit treatment of female sexuality and pain expressed through a sophisticated style. The impressive knowledge of language and literature that the English author possessed has been a key ingredient to her beautiful prose. Angela Carter has often been defined as a fearless writer who was able to portray a powerful vision of women during times of male literary domination. As Bristow and Broughton defined her, "Carter certainly could not bear to see women rendered powerless in fiction" (12).

In order to fully comprehend the intentions and motifs behind Carter's work, it is necessary to analyse the socio-political context of the 60s and 70s. These decades were extremely significant to the development and improvement of women's rights. Angela Carter belongs to what critics have named Second Wave Feminism, a movement that was established in the 60s through the early 80s. Those who participated expanded the demands of First Wave Feminism, whose focus was mainly on achieving women's suffrage. Second Wave Feminists advocated new divorce laws, body autonomy and

denounced marital rape. The feminist movement reflected the urge of women to reclaim what had been taken from them during previous centuries. A significant number of women started to liberate themselves from the cages of patriarchy. In a way, these movements allowed women to be able to breathe and taste the beginning of a promising era. Consequently, such striking evolution was reflected on the literary production of authors of that time, such as Angela Carter:

By this time, the Women's Movement was transforming how people thought about the relations between the sexes. In this turbulent era, Carter's fiction had already begun to represent how women have a conflicted relationship with their production as 'feminine' subjects. (Bristow and Broughton 10)

Moreover, the cultural influence of Carter's literary work can be understood through the emergence of feminist literary criticism. During the last three decades of the 20th century, literary reviewing and criticism became tools for women's emancipation. Essential names within this context are Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar with their work *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). In their book, they explore the anxiety provoked by a male-designed canon in which women are excluded, as well as the traditional dichotomies that have damaged the image of women in literature (Federico 2). The role of writers such as Angela Carter was to subvert these conventions and construct a fairer depiction of women. Another essential critic is Helene Cixous, whose influential essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" denounced the impact of male supremacy in the literary field. As she explains in her work: "writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; [...] this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated" (879). Additionally, Cixous formulated a new form of writing, with the concept of *écriture féminine* developed in her essay. As Chakraborty

defines it “Cixous *écriture féminine* is a reaction against female repression by phallogocentric structures of the Western societies” (2895). Cixous’ method connects with the different forms of writing as feminist strategy. Relevant forms are intertextuality and parody, since they enable the writer to subvert the unfair depictions of women throughout history. Intertextuality offers a vision of literature as a net system of interconnected texts, whereas parody, following Linda Hutcheon’s definition, is: “repetition with critical distance” (6). Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is a great representative of the use of these forms as a feminist strategy.

I.2. The Postmodernist Influence

Furthermore, *The Bloody Chamber* was published in times of postmodernism, the artistic movement that originated in the 1970s and developed until the 1990s approximately. Postmodernism questioned conventions and the status quo. Within this context, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard contributed to the foundation of the theoretical base of postmodernism with his seminal work *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). He conveyed the idea of skepticism towards grand narratives, that is, a sense of disbelief in universal truths (Lyotard, XXIV). In literature, this theory has been widely applied to the feminist cause. In connection to feminist literary criticism, the representation of women in the canonical works written by male authors is thus reviewed and transformed products arise. Indeed, Giroux defines postmodernism as “a historical moment in which culture is no longer seen as a reserve of white men whose contributions to the arts, literature, and science constitute the domain of high culture” (2). For instance, postmodernism questions the construction of reality in terms of binaries, a recurrent issue in gender representation. As advanced before, Gilbert and Gubar’s study denounces that women have traditionally been depicted by means of

dichotomies, either as angelic or sinful. The authors also unveil the strategies female authors have developed to escape the binary opposition (Federico 3). Hence, the aim of feminist authors influenced by postmodernism will be, then, to liberate gender roles from the restrictive male gaze.

Moreover, the exploration of identity constitutes an essential feature of postmodernist literature. Identity is no longer a fixed characteristic of individuals but rather, an evolving element that defines the characters' progress. These intentions within the context of postmodernism will be perfectly illustrated in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. As Gamble asserted, Angela Carter "was primarily concerned with maintaining a sceptical, interrogatory position on the periphery of dominant cultural attitudes and conventions" (3). Additionally, her proximity to postmodernist principles allowed her to explore female emancipation, a process that is symbolically reflected in her collection of short stories *The Bloody Chamber*. In the collection, Carter offers a subversive take on traditional fairy tales in which the heroines are finally given the right to describe the atrocities they experience as a result of a male-dominated society. There is no longer an idealised version of female and male relationships in which women's suffering and degradation is justified for the cause of love. Moreover, Punter and Byron notice how "Carter retells old legends and fairy stories, but always from an unusual point of view and usually with a twist on the accepted interpretations" (102). The term 'accepted' is fundamental in this definition. Previous to the end of the 20th century, legends and fairy tales were narratives so rooted in popular culture that their underlying morals were not questioned. It is precisely the innocent and naïve atmosphere of fairy tales that Angela Carter examines and revises.

The choice of traditional European fairy tales opens a wide range of possibilities to the author. The message of denunciation and reversal of gender conventions is

precisely achieved thanks to the popular knowledge of the original stories by the reader. Her retellings rely on these roots and convert them into a sombre narrative that reflects on gender roles still relevant at the end of the 20th century. As a result, the collection suggests a revindication of female authorship and independence:

Carter was not only exploiting the potential inherent in fairy tales for demonstrating how experiences are “embedded in material and social conditions”, but also doing so through a specifically feminist sensibility which consciously recovered a male tradition of storytelling obscured by the popularity of such male adapters as Charles Perrault. (Gamble 131)

Therefore, Carter’s rewritings of these traditional tales favour the female perspective and experience. It is the silenced voice that prevails. Since Carter takes the raw material from already existing folk tales, it is necessary to mention their role in the depiction of women. These sweet and didactic stories hide macabre messages that Carter carefully exploits in her work.

I.3. Imprisonment in the Fairy Tale Tradition

Throughout the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* Carter’s depiction of the female journey towards freedom is often expressed through the issue of imprisonment, a concept that will be the central theme of the analysis, together with the notion of claustrophobia. This dissertation will consider the term ‘imprisonment’ as the situation in which someone is kept unwillingly in a place or certain condition. Imprisonment often involves a being who restricts somebody of their liberty. Liberty, however, is not a monolithic term. Its implications vary according to the individual imprisoned. As unveiled by the analysis, each of the heroines presents a different conception of liberty. *The Bloody Chamber* explores imprisonment against the backdrop of fairy tales,

offering different perspectives based on the heroines' psychological evolution and relationship with their captors. Precisely, imprisonment is an essential element in traditional fairy tales. There seems to be a pattern in which our beloved princesses and protagonists are trapped in a closed space and imprisoned by a superior force, embodied by male characters. Such is the case with Rapunzel, trapped in a small tower isolated from the exterior world, and Sleeping Beauty, who is not only confined to a solitary castle, but also imprisoned in her own body, since she cannot wake up until she receives the kiss of a chivalric prince.

However, Angela Carter entitles her collection drawing inspiration from the story of the bloody Bluebeard, a murderer and collector of wives who tests his next victim by forbidding her to enter the room where he keeps his former wives' corpses. The most popular version attributed to Charles Perrault is the origin of Carter's rewriting of the story in "The Bloody Chamber", the first tale of the volume. Carter declared herself to be an admirer of Perrault, and she even translated into English *Histoires ou contes du temps Passé* (1697), the collection that popularised Bluebeard's tale. Hence, her familiarity with the 'original' version and the French writer are factors that make "The Bloody Chamber" a powerful opening that involves the reader in a process of deconstruction of the canonical classic. Unlike Perrault, Carter's version does not put the blame on the female protagonist. Instead, this opening tale explores the suffocating experience of living under the grip of the Marquis, the equivalent of Bluebeard, until the heroine is able to escape. Her tale narrates the story of a young lady married to a wealthy widower who hides a sadist character and a mysterious past. In the setting of a luxurious mansion, the heroine finds the corpses of the Marquis' former wives. The protagonist will be his next victim. The collection features two other rewrites of traditional fairy tales in which the presence of imprisonment is central. This is the case

with Carter's versions of "Beauty and the Beast": "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride", two stories that study the forced relationship between the protagonist and her captor.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse how the heroines of "The Bloody Chamber", "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" are placed in male dominated spaces that test their sanity and survival instincts, resulting in different choices that represent the fight for women's freedom. Through these three stories, Carter explores the feelings and emotions of her captive heroines and conveys the claustrophobia that male domination provokes. Indeed, claustrophobia will be a central element for the analysis. Radomsky et al. define claustrophobia as "a fear of enclosed spaces" (288). They also note the morphological origin, *claustr* meaning closed. Additionally, Rachman notes how "A person who is claustrophobic is not frightened of an enclosed space per se, but is frightened of what might happen in the enclosed space" (qtd. in Radomsky et al. 288). In the stories, the anxious feelings provoked by claustrophobia are mostly associated with men rather than the spaces themselves, since the male protagonists' physical space perturbs the heroines' mental stability. The predominance of claustrophobia in the tales in its relationship with imprisonment is further conveyed by the sensorial style of Carter. Hence, alongside the main thematic analysis, this dissertation explores, through close reading of representative fragments, how Carter creates a dense, sensory text that contributes to the overwhelming experience of female agencies deprived of freedom. In the main body of the dissertation, each story will be examined separately while common elements will be considered in the process.

II. The Claustrophobic Journey of Imprisoned Heroines

The analysis of “The Bloody Chamber”, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride” intends to show how Angela Carter shapes her heroines around the experiences of confinement and claustrophobia at the same time that she questions the stereotypically passive roles of female characters in fairy tales, allowing them some freedom of choice. As Stephen Benson notes:

The stories in *The Bloody Chamber*, and elsewhere, remain distinctive: a virtuoso collection of narratives that play in the exceedingly narrow gap between imprisonment and liberation, leaving the protagonists poised on the fulcrum of a decision that will commit them to either one fate or another. (Benson 42)

The stories will be analysed focusing on the imprisonment of Carter’s heroines and the different outcomes their choices represent. In addition, the analysis will provide an overview of the male characters since they are also relevant for the development of the heroines in the tales.

II.1. “The Bloody Chamber”: The Fugitive Bride

The opening tale sets a macabre tone for the collection. Carter makes use of an autodiegetic female narrator that reinforces the idea of personal experience and confessional tone. Thus, the reader’s direct access to her feelings and perceptions contributes to a sense of veracity. Moreover, the heroine has no name. It is not her persona that matters, but the experience itself. In “The Bloody Chamber” claustrophobia and female imprisonment are conveyed by the following elements: the castle, the scents, the choker and the forbidden room. In addition, Carter’s prose and style will be considered throughout the analysis.

The most prominent element is the castle, the protagonist's physical prison. She leaves her own home with the hope of entering a bridal phase, but, instead, she is to be confined in this disguised lethal area. Whereas the male protagonist controls and is a connoisseur of his land, the heroine finds herself in a closed space unknown to her. The hierarchy is thus established. The Marquis owns the castle and with it, all the luxurious items inside, including his current wife, and the corpses of the previous three: the opera singer, the model, and the Romanian countess. As a piece of furniture used to decorate the rooms, the heroine is kept under the Marquis' control. Besides, she has nowhere else to go: "there was nowhere to go but the music room" (Carter 18). This quotation also suggests that out of all the rooms in the castle, the heroine finds leisure just in one. The Marquis believes that he satisfies the heroine based on his superficial vision of women. He tries to win her over with excess and luxury, distractions that are, in fact, reminders of the heroine's loss of freedom. When the Marquis heads for New York, the anguish of her imprisonment is stressed: "the tide that would take him away to the New World would let me out of the imprisonment of the castle" (Carter 41). The castle, clearly, stands for the male figure in the story: "I could not take refuge in my bedroom, for that retained the memory of his presence trapped in the fathomless silvering of his mirrors" (Carter 40). Here, the mirrors, part of the physical space of the castle, expand into a reminder of the Marquis presence. He is visually multiplied in the scene, symbolising the inevitable doom of the heroine being watched by the Marquis. The heroine herself acknowledges the impossibility of escaping from the male oppressor: "Time was his servant, too; it would trap me, here, in a night that would last until he came back to me" (Carter 41). Time is personified when she realises that nobody and nothing would help her; she concludes that everything is under the Marquis' control.

The scent of lilies impregnates the protagonist's room, contributing to her feeling of claustrophobia and causing dizziness. The choice of these flowers is ambivalent. Lilies carry strong symbolisms throughout the history of art, being commonly associated with purity but also with death. As Holly Dugan explains, "for medieval and early modern artists, white lilies signal purity. But lilies also decay rapidly, releasing a strong scent as they die" (201). In Carter's story, they could be associated with the female protagonist, a pure flower to be disgustingly corrupted by the Marquis. However, the scent of lilies that invades the heroine's senses is predominantly associated with death and suffocation: "My husband, who, with so much love, filled my bedroom with lilies until it looked like an embalming parlour. Those somnolent lilies, that wave their heavy heads, distributing their lush, insolent incense reminiscent of pampered flesh" (Carter 21). This quotation reveals the heroine's emergent awareness of her claustrophobic condition. She pities ironically the 'good intentions' of her husband, as well as expressing with negative lexis how the lilies 'fill' the bedroom, 'embalming' it. Additionally, the lilies cause a feeling of somnolence, creating a saturated and infested space. As the story progresses, lilies reinforce the growing claustrophobia of the female protagonist: "I did not like to linger in my overcrowded dressing room, nor in my lugubriously lily-scented bedroom" (Carter 30). The adjective 'overcrowded' clearly conveys the idea of lack of space. The dressing room, designed according to the extravagant preferences of the Marquis, distresses the heroine. On the other hand, 'lugubriously lily-scented' emphasises the inability to breathe properly in the room. Throughout the story, this scent is directly related to the Marquis and his intentions of terminating with the heroine's life: "The mass of lilies that surrounded me exhaled, now, the odour of their withering. They looked like the trumpets of the angels

of death” (Carter 52). In this quotation, the lilies echo the heroine’s impending murder. This foreshadowing is further stressed by the pejorative word for smell, “odour”.

Another threat to the heroine that overwhelms her senses is the body of the Marquis, especially his smell. In Carter’s version of Bluebeard, the presence of the Marquis expands to every corner of the story, reinforcing the heroine’s claustrophobic circumstance. Right from the beginning, the narrator senses a subtle detail about his husband that invades her space: “Above the syncopated roar of the train, I could hear his even, steady breathing” (Carter 7). His breathing is so potent that the heroine can hear it over the mechanical, piercing sound of the train. Carter gradually presents the Marquis as a source of suffocation for the heroine: “The chthonic gravity of his presence exerted a tremendous pressure on the room, so that the blood pounded in my ears as if we had been precipitated to the bottom of the sea, beneath the waves that pounded against the shore” (Carter 49). The Marquis’ presence is described as a hellish source of pressure. Moreover, Carter’s sensorial style conveys a feeling of drowning.

Additionally, there is a specific scent associated with the Marquis: the aroma of Russian leather, a rough material that reminds the reader of masochist practices. This smell accompanies the male protagonist wherever he goes, often invading the heroine’s personal space: “But that perfume of spiced leather always betrayed him” (Carter 7). His villainous presence is anticipated by his smell. Hence, the Marquis’ penetration of the protagonist is not only sexual but also sensorial. When the protagonist explores the Marquis’ library, she encounters the most intense concentration of the smell, which signals that she has entered his space: “There was a pungent intensification of the odour of leather that suffused his library” (Carter 20). This room suffocates her because it is the chamber of his masochistic male pleasures.

The ruby choker necklace, a wedding present from the Marquis, is a symbol of his ownership and domination of women in this especially macabre version of “Bluebeard”. From the first time that the narrator describes it, it conveys a sense of suffocation and death rather than glamour: “His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat” (Carter 11). The choker is a metonymy for the Marquis’ hands, which reinforce his possession of the heroine, as well as his capacity to suffocate her. It is the death of the first wife, the Opera singer, that directly evokes suffocation in the tale, as she was strangled by the Marquis: “On her throat I could see the blue imprint of his strangler's fingers” (Carter 38). This quotation reinforces the symbolism of the choker as a metonymy of the Marquis hands, who is confirmed to have strangled a woman with his bare hands. Furthermore, the author provides a visual description of the wife’s corpse because she represents the ultimate effect of the Marquis’ gradual asphyxiation to the heroine. The choker also foreshadows the planned decapitation of the female character at the end of the story. This glamorous accessory was inherited by the Marquis’ grandmother, a woman who lived during the French Revolution and escaped from the guillotine: “He made me put on my choker, the family heirloom of one woman who had escaped the blade” (Carter 21). As the narrator explains, she had the luxurious choker made as a reminder of her defiance. This conveys a sense of hope, a hint at all the women who manage to escape an oppressing system, such as the heroine herself.

The forbidden room where the Marquis hides his collection of dead wives as a macabre hobby signifies a further level of imprisonment in the castle. Both the castle and the forbidden room act as a museum containing the Marquis’ most valued belongings. Following the Marquis’ orders, this chamber is the only one that the heroine must not access. Nevertheless, the heroine disobeys and enters the locked room, where

she will find her predecessors. The corpses of the Marquis' wives can be interpreted as the echoes of women who did not survive the forces of patriarchy, the victims of gender violence, confined to a small and obscure room in death. In the case of the Romanian countess, the heroine reflects on the Marquis' actions and real persona, that of a deadly jailer: "How long had he kept her in this obscene cell?" (Carter 39).

Paradoxically, it is the heroine's choice to be active and disobey, at the risk of her life, that allows her to know the truth of her companion and be a step closer to freedom. The ending of "The Bloody Chamber" is essential for the exploration of women's freedom in the tale. The female protagonist fights against her fate with the help of her mother. Once the Marquis discovers the heroine's disobedience, he decides to behead her. However, the figure of the mother interrupts the ritual. Carter rewrites Perrault's version, in which the heroine is saved by her brothers. The author rejects the traditional role of the mother in fairy tales, typically defined as evil and selfish, an opponent to the protagonist or just an absent figure in the heroine's development. In her reworking of the original story, the mother is a central figure who helps the heroine achieve freedom.

"The Bloody Chamber" offers an analysis of female imprisonment that is resolved by female agents; the heroine rises into action by disobeying her husband and the mother succeeds in rescuing her daughter. In this opening short story, freedom means literally escaping the deadly space dominated by the male protagonist and is only achieved when women are united to fight against the figure of the violent powerful man. In the end, the heroine succeeds in leading a rewarding life of her own choice. She opens a music school in her hometown while she lives with her mother and a new and honest husband. Thus, claustrophobia and confinement are substituted by a feeling of protection and safety.

II.2. “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”: The Liberating Force of Mutual Understanding

“The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” is a rewrite of “Beauty and the Beast”. This tale begins with Beauty’s father stranded in the midst of a snowstorm. He asks for help at the first house he finds, a magical place, a shelter owned by a mysterious host. Hoping to give a present to her daughter, the father steals one of the roses in the garden of the enigmatic house. It is then discovered that Mr. Lyon, an anthropomorphic beast, is the owner of the house and he demands the father to have his daughter as compensation for his burglary. Beauty’s family suffers from financial problems, and she can only return home when her father has regained their fortune. Until then, she is forced to leave her home and live with the unknown beast in this foreign space.

Carter defines the female protagonist as a kind-hearted girl who would do anything for her father. Thereby, she maintains the personality of the Beauty in the original tale. She is also depicted as a submissive young lady who obeys male orders: “Yet she stayed, and smiled, because her father wanted her to do so” (Carter 65). Claustrophobia in the story can be related to the heroine being trapped in her submissive role as well as in the physical space of Mr. Lyon. Nonetheless, the character also presents a reflective nature and a sensible, mature personality, capable of making independent decisions. Her thoughts and experiences are portrayed through a heterodiegetic narrator, bringing the story closer to the traditional narration, a method that might better suit the tale’s ending, which preserves the fairy tale atmosphere of the original version, having the Beast transformed into a man. Yet, Carter focalises on Beauty, so that the female experience remains the focus. In contrast to “The Bloody Chamber”, at the end of the story and already a free woman, Beauty decides to return to the Beast. “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” presents an outcome closer to the “they lived happily after”.

Similarly to “The Bloody Chamber”, the suffocating forces related to the male protagonists are partly represented by the residence they own. Mr. Lyon lives in a Palladian house, isolated from the crowded city: “Behind wrought iron gates, a short, snowy drive performed a reticent flourish before a miniature, perfect, Palladian house that seemed to hide itself shyly behind snow-laden skirts of an antique cypress” (Carter 60). The description of the place already establishes a connection between the captor and the space, as Mr. Lyon is a timid isolated figure who will take the heroine with him in his hideout. In addition, the mysterious space that surrounds the lord also hints at the future experience of the heroine: “the garden seemed to hold its breath in apprehension. But still, because he loved his daughter, Beauty’s father stole the rose” (Carter 63). Even though the quotation hints at the disastrous consequences of the father’s action, the personification of the garden with a reference to an inability to breathe anticipates the claustrophobia of the heroine once she enters the lord’s space.

Furthermore, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” repeats a pattern that appears in the three rewritings, that is, the extreme wealth of the male protagonists. Carter emphasises this feature so that the female characters are overwhelmed by masculine opulence and abundance. However, the description of Beauty’s assigned room does not carry the menacing connotations of death of the heroine’s bedroom in “The Bloody Chamber”: “Her bedroom contained a marvellous glass bed; she had a bathroom, with towels thick as fleece and vials of suave unguents; and a little parlour of her own, the walls of which were covered with an antique paper of birds of paradise and Chinamen” (Carter 66). In this narration, Carter creates a contrast between the beautiful description of the space provided to the heroine and her real situation. Opulence acts then as the façade of a forced stay at the Beast’s house. As happened to the heroine in “The Bloody Chamber”, the captors spoil their “guests”, giving them all kinds of services but their freedom. The

previous quotation is also interesting because of the allusion to birds. The wallpaper suggests a paradoxical picture of freedom. The image evokes an idyllic natural landscape with animals that have the ability to fly. In contrast, Beauty is caged in the room whose walls project such an image.

Moreover, abundance is cruelly contrasted to the absence of human life within the Palladian house: “Loneliness of the Beast; all the time she stayed there, she saw no evidence of another human” (Carter 66). In this case, the heroine suffers a double isolation in her imprisonment. She is taken away from civilization to a place with barely any human presence, where her captor suffers isolation himself. The first encounters with Mr. Lyon also hint at the claustrophobic effect: “its presence choked her. There seemed a heavy, soundless pressure upon her in his house, as if it lay under water, and when she saw the great paws lying on the arm of his chair, she thought: they are the death of any tender herbivore” (Carter 65). Focalising on the heroine, the narrator describes explicitly the effects of Mr. Lyon’s presence and his house. He “chokes” her. Therefore, Beauty senses the Beast as a suffocating force. Those stimuli trigger her feelings of claustrophobia. This quotation can also be related to a feeling described by the heroine in “The Bloody Chamber”, which relates sharing space with the male protagonist with drowning. This feeling is then associated with the heroine’s fear of the Beast and his effect on her.

However, in contrast to the “The Bloody Chamber,” Beauty’s imprisonment is not violent and sadistic. Indeed, she establishes an intellectual bond with the Beast by having conversations every night. Even though he has deprived her of her freedom, he does not expect her to fulfil his sexual desires, as the Marquis did. Therefore, it could be argued that Beauty does not feel as objectified. The female protagonist finds herself trapped because of her father’s wrongs and the wishes of a mysterious lord but she finds

herself at ease with the passing of time. Beauty adapts to her imprisonment: “An idle, restful time; a holiday. The enchantment of that bright, sad, pretty place enveloped her and she found that, against all her expectations, she was happy there” (Carter 68). Beauty starts to perceive her imprisonment as a holiday, a relaxing stay. She is no longer “choked” by the Beast but “enveloped” by the enchantment of the place. The latter word maintains the idea of being confined but on a more positive note, as if offering the heroine some protection. She also recognises that those feelings do not correspond to what she first experienced at her arrival. Whether Beauty suffers from Stockholm syndrome or finds true love in a tortured but honourable man who had not had the chance of being understood is not yet clear.

Beauty eventually comes back to her home in London, once his father has regained his fortune. During this period, the reader gets her reflections: “she experienced a sudden sense of perfect freedom, as if she had just escaped from an unknown danger, had been grazed by the possibility of some change but, finally, left intact. Yet, with this exhilaration, a desolating emptiness” (Carter 68). It is at this moment that the story studies the meaning of freedom for Beauty. Whereas “The Bloody Chamber” presents a clear decision from the heroine’s part to escape from the Marquis’ world, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” offers a complex perspective. The previous quotation presents Beauty’s awareness of her new freedom, but she does not feel happy. Her coming back to London should have brought a remarkable change but her shallow life does not satisfy her. She feels at the same time excited and miserable.

The figure of the Beast has been essential in her emotional metamorphosis. In “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, there is a positive change in the male protagonist. At first, he appears as the patriarchal force that deprives Beauty of her freedom to choose. However, as the story progresses, it becomes visible that he develops true feelings for

the heroine, who does not judge him once they get acquainted. Tellingly, Mr. Lyon experiences his own confinement for being a marginalised creature rather than an ordinary man. He confines himself to the attic in the tower of his house, as Beauty discovers when she comes back: “And not one light in any of the windows, only, in the topmost attic” (Carter 71). Nevertheless, the ending presents a metamorphosis, in which the Beast becomes a gentleman due to the heroine’s decision to stay with him: “And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man, a man with an unkempt mane of hair” (Carter 73). This ending follows the traditional love ending of the classic tale: “Turning to ask the Beast what it could all mean, Beauty found he had disappeared, and in his place stood her long-loved prince!” (De Villeneuve 25). Therefore, Carter maintains the sentimental aspect of the original story in order to humanise the male captor. Thus, the forced imprisonment and the claustrophobic experience of the heroine end when she gets to know the true nature of Mr. Lyon and his own distress. Hence, this story offers a more hopeful message: if understanding from both parties is established and the heroine returns of her own accord, positive change and happiness is a possibility.

II.3. “The Tiger’s Bride”: From Transaction to Tigress

The third story, “The Tiger’s Bride”, is the tale of a Russian girl, daughter of a gambling addict man who loses her to an influential lord in a card game. Such lord represents the Beast, in this case, a Tiger disguised as a gentleman. Whereas “The Bloody Chamber” presents an imprisonment that starts from a voluntary marriage and “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” introduces the theme of the heroine’s confinement as a way to compensate for her father’s mistake in stealing a rose, “The Tiger’s Bride” depicts a woman’s fate marked by an irresponsible and misogynistic patriarchal society.

The heroine in “The Tiger’s Bride” is more aware of her unfavourable condition in society. It is the title itself that signals the role of the female protagonist as defined by her relationship with the male character. She is *his* bride. In contrast, the original tale presents a romanticised version of the relationship between Beast and Beauty, in which the Beast seems to seek the woman’s consent to stay with him: “Have you come willingly?” asked the Beast. “Will you be content to stay here when your father goes away?” (De Villeneuve 11). This difference highlights Carter’s intention to emphasize the lack of consideration towards the heroine’s will.

The story denounces another kind of restriction of liberty for women. The heroine is sold to the Beast in a card game. Indeed, the opening line of the story is “My father lost me to the Beast at cards” (Carter 75). Additionally, the use of an autodiegetic narrator emphasises the angry tone of a woman who has been deprived of her freedom by an uncaring father and a male-dominated community in a transaction from man to man. Her frustration stems from her inability to be the owner of her life: “I watched with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly” (Carter 75). This establishes a contrast to the original tale, in which Beauty is more submissive and self-deprecating: “I have indeed caused this misfortune, [...] as I did the mischief, it is only just that I should suffer for it. I will therefore go back with my father to keep his promise” (De Villeneuve 11).

Moreover, Carter presents once again a wealthy man whose power and wealth are reflected on his home. In this case, he owns a mansion: “The Beast’s hereditary palazzo outside the city” (Carter 79). The residence of the male oppressor is once more a luxurious isolated place. The heroine is taken to a male space far away from civilization, as a first step to her imprisonment. Indeed, this second rewriting of “Beauty and the Beast” does not abandon the depiction of the Beast as a mysterious figure who

seeks confinement himself. The Beast's solitude will prove essential for the development of heroine.

The description of her room accompanies the mood of the heroine, who feels trapped in a claustrophobic situation: "A cell had been prepared for me, a veritable cell, windowless, airless, lightless, in the viscera of the palace" (Carter 87). The repetition of those adjectives with the suffix '-less' emphasises the feeling of restriction and reduction of light and fresh air, and ultimately, of freedom. Indeed, the heroine compares the palace with a prison: "There was so little natural light in the interior of the palace that I could not tell whether it was day or night" (90). In that same fragment she mentions the sense of stagnation that characterises the palazzo and makes breathing difficult: "the heavy air never moved" (90).

Furthermore, as happens in "The Bloody Chamber", the smell of the male protagonist plays an important role in "The Tiger's Bride". The lord's scent becomes the main source of claustrophobia for the heroine, right from the beginning. She starts her narrative describing how she witnesses her father losing her to the Beast, unable to do anything. To increase her anxiety, she becomes intoxicated by the scent of the Beast, which she describes even before alluding to his physical appearance: "My senses were increasingly troubled by the fuddling perfume of Milord, far too potent a reek of purplish civet at such close quarters in so small a room" (Carter 77). The choice of words is quite telling. His scent is an extension of his male presence. The lord's scent is so potent that the heroine's senses are perturbed. Despite the glamorous ingredient of the civet, the perfume is excessive for the reduced space of the room. Moreover, it is interesting how the heroine describes the scent of the Tiger as the story progresses: "The reed bowed down in a sudden snarl of wind that brought with it a gust of the heavy odour of his disguise" (Carter 94). It is no longer the Tiger himself that evokes an

odour, but his “disguise”. This detail connects to the role of the lord in the tale. During her imprisonment, the heroine studies the Tiger, learning of his insecurities. She discovers that the Tiger wears a mask with the painting of a human face, wears a wig and even gloves to cover his paws. Similarly to Mr. Lyon, he seems to hide himself, vulnerable because of his savage nature. Consequently, as the previous quotation illustrates, she ends up associating his odour with his masked identity, not with his true self, which implies that her mindset has undergone a change. Apparently, she prefers the isolated nature of the undisguised Beast rather than the fake culture of the metropolis. Hence, the Tiger’s obsession with disguising as a gentleman, his perfume included, become unpleasant.

The ending of “The Tiger’s Bride” shows another significant, and rather surprising, perspective on female imprisonment. The hierarchy between Beauty and the Tiger is destabilised, as the claustrophobic experience is gradually transformed into frustration and anger rather than fear. For instance, the heroine threatens to end her life out of desperation: “I shall twist a noose out of my bed linen and hang myself with it (Carter 87)”. In contrast to the more innocent nature of the heroine in “The Bloody Chamber” and the pacific character of Beauty, she cannot be tamed. She repudiates her confinement and is eager to confront it, as she even threatens the Beast with running away (Carter 91). However, against all expectations, she does not escape from the Tiger. In parallel, the Beast has shown signs of weakness, as if he was the prey and the heroine the predator: “He went still as stone. He was far more frightened of me than I was of him” (Carter 99). Thus, the firm character of the heroine ends up taming the apparent wildness of the male Beast: “He snuffed the air, as if to smell my fear; he could not” (Carter 99). Eventually, he becomes a suitable mate that grants her the respect she did not receive in human society. Instead of escaping captivity, the heroine

undergoes a metamorphosis and becomes a female beast. She converts her imprisonment into an opportunity to evolve. She offers herself to the Beast, and then the process of transformation begins, as the Tiger licks off the heroine's skin until it reveals a beautiful fur: "each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs" (Carter 100). The heroine experiences a rebirth, describing her new form on a positive note.

Her transformation can be interpreted as a reaction to the patriarchal society of human beings, embodied in her father. Her life was conducted by her father and her destiny was in his hands, metaphorically and literally. Hence, the tale denounces how women are trapped in a society in which they have no voice. They are pieces in a game played by men. On the other hand, the story offers Beauty's metamorphosis as a prove of her evolution. As Melinda G. Fowl explains, "Ridding herself of the garments of the imprisoning appearance as her father's daughter, as a doll, as property, was not the end result for Beauty" (75). This interpretation implies that Beauty's process of emancipation is gradual. Her detachment from the metropolis and her oppressing father is not the ultimate phase but her physical metamorphosis into a tigress. Furthermore, critics have highlighted the relevance of her relationship with the Beast in the process of emancipation, as Benson explains: "Carter suggests [...] that man and woman can come together as equals in a meeting that has potential to transform both" (42). Whereas the classic tale only considers the possibility of a happy outcome if the Beast is humanised into a gentleman, the world of the Beast in Carter's rewriting ends up being a world safe from patriarchy. In the company of the Beast, now sought after, the heroine finds her true (animal) self and even an equal relationship with a being who will no longer have to hide himself.

III. Conclusion

To conclude, Angela Carter's rewritings have become a literary gem that denounce the miseries suffered by women throughout history. This dissertation has analysed the first three tales of her prestigious collection, focusing on the role of claustrophobia and imprisonment in the female experience against patriarchy. The contact of the heroines with their captor and the effects of the male dominated spaces convey the suffocation provoked by a patriarchal system in which female individuals are granted no voice. Additionally, there is an introspection on the heroines, who illustrate distinct reactions to the claustrophobic effects of male domination. "The Bloody Chamber" hints at the deadly consequences of violent domination. Yet, its way to resolve the imprisonment implies the cooperation of women so as to fight the oppressive male force embodied by the Marquis. Then, the reworkings of "Beauty and the Beast" explore two different endings regarding the heroine's emancipation. "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" preserves the submissive female character that humanises the isolated Beast. Eventually, he frees her and it is her choice to return and evolve together. "The Tiger's Bride" establishes a contrast to the thematic development in the first version of the classic tale. The heroine illustrates the female frustration and anxiety provoked by the inability to be the owner of her own life. However, the story ends with a magical and hopeful event in which she rejects the oppressing patriarchy of human society and accepts the company of the Tiger. Thus, she is reborn as a new version of herself, now animal rather than human. These stories illustrate the changing atmosphere of the late 20th century, in which women's literary production and role in literature was critically revised. Angela Carter reversed Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard" and the classic tale of "Beauty and the Beast" in order to denounce the stereotypically submissive role of women and their lack of freedom, characteristics that were idealised rather than questioned in fairy tales. *The*

Bloody Chamber exemplifies the new modes of depicting women as complex beings rather than individuals trapped by simplistic binaries. As explained by Gamble, “These are texts in which the heroines, now fully-rounded distinctive characters, write their own autobiographies” (9). Thus, Carter’s heroines encourage the reader to share their own perspectives and reasoning, while they learn about themselves in their confinement, providing hope for a future of women liberated from the cages of patriarchy.

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