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## Trabajo Fin de Grado

"In Her Own Right": Narrative Voice and Ideology in  
Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The birth and evolution of folk tales

It is difficult to find an agreement about the meaning of the different terms employed to describe folk narratives as there are many, such as "folk tale", "fairy tale", "wonder tale", "*Märchen*", "legend" and "archetypal" or "mythical narratives", and they have all a similar origin. "Folk tale" and "fairy tale" are the most deeply studied terms, and they are often used interchangeably by scholars because of their close meaning. Thus, for example, JoAnn Conrad argues that the main difference between both terms is that the folk tale is oral while the fairy tale is a written literary form (363). Nevertheless, it is not easy to find a clear distinction between the origin of oral and written narrative forms because of the changes they suffered throughout history. Two of the most important folklorists who helped in the establishment of tales as a genre were the German scholars Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859). They collected popular oral narratives and wrote them down. In the French salons from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the term *contes de fées* was first coined and subsequently translated as "fairy tale" (Conrad, 365). As Jack Zipes explains, in German usage, *Märchen* refers both to the literary fairy tale and the traditional folk tale (167). This is one of the reasons why the terms are interchangeable. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, Zipes differentiates them not only according to form but also theme: a folk tale is any tale existing in an oral tradition while a fairy tale, though having the same characteristics and origin as the folk tale, deals specifically with magical and wonder events (167). In this essay, the preferred term will be "folk tale" because of the lack of magical elements of the story to be analysed.

Given their common origin in oral tradition, folk tales and fairy tales usually share the same function in Western culture. As Zipes suggests, the main role of tales has

always been the socialization of listeners (xix). Nevertheless, their function depends on the characteristics of the society it represents since the narrator gives voice to its ideology (xix). Indeed, the function of tales has changed throughout history, depending on the period in which they belonged. The oldest examples of orally transmitted tales served as the expression of common beliefs and values for a specific group. After folk and fairy tales became a literary genre, the audience widened to include different social classes, so the ideologies involved in the stories changed. Since women were not allowed to work as writers, the tales were shaped by literate men, although many tales were originally told by women. At the end of the seventeenth century in France, the scope of tales changed to the more educated classes thanks to the literary salons. These tales reflected the manners and power of society during Louis XIV's reign. During this period, the tales started to be used in educational fields for children too. Thus, the tales focused on discussions about morals, manners, gender, and sex roles (xx–xxiii).

These changes in ideology and function along history can be exemplified by "Blue Beard". The best known version of this tale is Charles Perrault's because he transformed the oral folk tale into a literary text. However, there are numerous versions of the same tale, and each portrays a different ideology. "Blue Beard" is the story of a young woman who marries a wealthy man who turns out to have murdered several earlier wives. The new wife is exposed to an obedience test by forbidding her to enter a locked room. Driven by curiosity, she unlocks the chamber and finds the corpses of the previous wives. She is condemned to death by her husband but her brothers arrive just in time to kill Blue Beard. Following other folklorists, Jack Zipes claims that the function of this tale is to portray children's fears about marriage (54). Nevertheless, the role of the tale changes from one version to another. Thus, Perrault added some verse morals at the end of the tale whose aim, according to Zipes, was to advise female

readers about the evils of disobedience and curiosity. But this critic also explains the development of "Blue Beard" by other folklorists. For instance, there are folk versions that do not blame the curiosity of the protagonist but praise her courage to fight against the murderer (55–56). In other words, the ideology of each version of the tale reflects that of the narrator, who in traditional fairy tales is a supposedly reliable and omniscient, external narrator. The aim of this essay is to demonstrate that the choice of narrative voice in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" utterly transforms the patriarchal ideology of Perrault's tale.

## **1.2. Charles Perrault and patriarchal ideology**

Charles Perrault (1628–1703) was one of the writers who established the fairy tale as a literary genre, together with the Brothers Grimm. He belonged to the French seventeenth century and so to a period characterised by the absolutist monarchy of Louis XIV and a patriarchal society that considered women to be inferior to men. Perrault became interested in folk tales at literary salons frequented by women and, led by the desire to modernise literature, he transformed the popular wonder tales that cultivated women were fond of into moralistic tales. In 1697 he published *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, a collection of fairy tales based on popular oral and literary motifs. His intention was to address the manners and social issues of the upper classes (Zipes, 379–81). Perrault's position regarding female issues has always been controversial, since the verse morals he usually added at the end of the tales suggest ambivalent or even clearly male-chauvinistic meanings. While Zipes claims that Perrault wrote in defence of women at the salons and that even some of his writings dealt with omnipotent women (xxii), Anne E. Duggan retorts that Perrault's intention was not to raise women's status in the public or private spheres (739). In the case of his

tale "Blue Beard", both during the narration and in the verse morals, Perrault blames the curiosity of women and warns readers about its consequences, thus suggesting that curiosity is a specific female fault. As Shawn C. Jarvis argues, one of the most controversial points about this tale is the blaming of women's curiosity instead of Blue Beard's crimes (130). This fact has been a source of debate in many feminist writings. Probably, the most influential feminist rewriting of "Blue Beard" is Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979).

## **2. Angela Carter**

### **2.1. Context: Feminism**

Angela Carter (1940–1992) was a British writer stemming out of the radical period of the 1960s. Although she is considered to be a postmodernist writer, there are critics such as Lorna Sage who do not think she fits into this label (58). Carter was influenced by different trends and genres such as magical realism, the Gothic, surrealism, folklore, the fairy tale tradition, and Japanese pornography. Critics agree that the 1960s was a period of change characterised by a general discontent that gave birth to different political and social movements, such as the Sexual Revolution on both sides of the Atlantic, the Anti-war and Civil Rights Movements, the birth of the New Left in the United States, or the May 1968 Students' Revolt in Paris. Carter was very much influenced by these new ideological currents, particularly the feminist movement (Tiffin, 162). She tried to capture in her works concepts of femininity and themes related to female oppression in patriarchal societies, so she is commonly considered a feminist writer. Nevertheless, Carter's treatment of controversial themes such as pornography and female sexual desire provoked a strong adverse reception of her works by feminists with contrary views on these questions (Sage, 40–41).

In order to have a better understanding of Angela Carter's work, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the feminist movement and its development throughout history. Critics like Bryson (1999), Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006), Nash (2004), and Varela (2008) agree that the feminist movement started by questioning the reasons for the lack of women's rights in both the private and public spheres, and for their subordination in patriarchal societies. The first instances of feminist vindications are traditionally situated in the seventeenth century in the French salons. Nevertheless, what was later named "the feminist movement", did not start until the late eighteenth century. Many scholars divide this movement into different "waves", which took part successively overall in the United States, France and Britain.

The beginning of the First Wave of feminism is set in the French Revolution (1789–1799). These early feminists fought against male supremacy and asserted that women's subordination was produced not because of natural inheritance or biological constraints, as was believed, but because of social and cultural constructions. Male power reacted against these convictions with harshness. In Britain, Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), standing for, among other rights, egalitarianism between genders, economic independence for women and parliamentary representation. This is considered even nowadays, one of the most important feminist texts throughout history. For all this, it was not in France or Britain, but in the United States that the first political movement of women was created at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1948. It was at this convention that the first manifest in favour of women suffrage in North America was created. Briefly stated, the First Wave of feminism was centred on the right of education, the right of job, the right of vote and the rejection of home confinement (Varela, 23–41; Kroløkke, 3–7).



Despite the rejection and repression they suffered, feminists continued to fight for women's rights during the nineteenth century. Their main goal was the right to vote, since they considered that this achievement would lead them towards success in the rest of fields. During World War I, women started to work substituting men fighting in the war. Thanks to this, women achieved the suffrage in some countries such as Britain (1917) and The United States (1920) (Varela, 50–53).

During World War II, women lived again the same situation: they got the jobs while men were at war; but once they returned, the women were fired. Women's indifference to feminist issues was increasing until Simone de Beauvoir appeared. Scholars do not agree whether she belongs to the final part of the Second Wave of feminism or the beginning of the Third, but nevertheless, she overturned the disappearance of feminism by writing *The Second Sex* (1949), one of the standard texts of feminist history. In this book, Simone de Beauvoir contended that the marginalization of woman was the result of a social construction, not of biology; and she argued for the necessity of women's struggle for independence from androcentric society.

Over the years after World War II women became more aware of their discrimination. Thus, Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), analysed the oppression suffered by women who remained at home cleaning and taking care of the family. This increasing awareness climaxed in the creation, in 1966, of the National Organization for Woman (NOW). This organization fought for the equality of opportunities, the end of discrimination at work, and the end of superficiality in the treatment of women's image by the media, among other issues (Varela, 100–2). The NOW was the highest representative of liberal feminism. Their main tenet was that women's situation was not the result of exploitation but of inequality.

Depending on the sources consulted (Varela, 43, 89; Kroløkke, 7, 15) the separation between Second and Third Wave feminism changes. Nonetheless, the important facts about the period covering from the end of World War II until nowadays are the numerous feminist movements that were created. Although all of them were motivated by the same ideas of gender equality, their main goals and strategies differed. Women started to form groups depending on their own necessities, realities and characteristics. These groups spread from the movement called Radical Feminism, which went to the roots of women's oppression: men's control over woman's sexuality (Bryson, 26). These new feminist groups included: black women, who fought for black power and against racism; lesbian feminism, in favour of homosexual rights; difference feminism, centred on sexual difference as the path for women's freedom; or feminists concerned with issues of sexuality and pornography (Kroløkke, 8). Radical Feminism and particularly the groups focused on sexuality will be analysed in more detail because they are essential for the explanation of Angela Carter's life and works.

As mentioned above, Radical Feminism was centred on the study of the roots of women's oppression. They had a particular interest in achieving not only public but also private space for women. Moreover, they developed an analysis of sexual education for women, and encouraged them to know their own body. They considered marriage a form of daily oppression and advocated women's sexual freedom. Thus, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1971) included sexuality as a political aspect of the battle against patriarchal prejudices. This period also saw the publication of works about the sexual revolution, sexual relationships, female sexuality, abortion, heterosexuality and homosexuality, etc., which had been taboo topics so far (Nash, 101–2; Kroløkke, 9–15).

One of the most controversial topics during the 1960s and 70s was pornography. Most feminists shared the belief that pornography should be banned because it

emphasized women's subordination under men's power. But there were other groups which did not agree. These debates on pornography created two antagonistic factions: anti-porn and the anti-censorship feminists. The former group argued that pornography showed abusive sexual relationships which could give way to violence and so, to rape. The anti-censorship movement retorted that this was a wrong understanding of pornography, imposed by the dominant patriarchal ideology, and that pornography needed to be liberated as an educational issue (Onega, 5). Angela Carter was in favour of pornography and this brought her writings much adverse criticism. She included in her fiction the topics of women's pleasure, pornography and violent sex. And she gave evidence of her feminist ideology in most of her works, although she never recognised herself as a feminist. Thus, in *The Sadeian Woman*, one of her most controversial works, which will be explained later, Carter defended the work of the pornographers, and defined them as victims of patriarchal ideology:

Pornographers are the enemies of women only because our contemporary ideology of pornography does not encompass the possibility of change, as if we were the slaves of history and not its makers [...]. (3)

## **2.2. Angela Carter's work**

Lorna Sage claims that, during the 1960s, Angela Carter questioned the nature of woman and the beliefs that society had created towards femininity (9). As Carter herself explained to Sage, when she was working as a journalist, she generally adopted a male point of view in order to meet the expectations of the patriarchal tradition she was writing in (25). In 1979, Carter published two controversial books addressing the question of pornography: *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* and *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. The first was a collection of short stories

rewriting classical folk tales from a feminist perspective. The second was a critical essay on the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), the French philosopher and writer known for his theorisation of sadomasochism. *The Sadeian Woman* was met by a heated critical response by many feminists who did not share her ideas on sexuality: while anti-pornography groups argued that pornography only served to enhance male domination and female victimisation, Carter overturned this belief by describing how sexual relations are shaped by socio-cultural archetypes (Rubinson, 155–56). Thus, she carried out a detailed critical analysis of the cultural problems concerning sexuality in Western society aimed at "put[ing] pornography in the service of woman" (Carter 1992, 37). She thought that the social submission of women to men was historically determined (6–7), and she contended that pornography could be used for educational purposes as, by describing sexual relationships explicitly, sexuality would stop being a taboo and would overturn received notions on the relations between the sexes (14). By using pornography in her literary texts, Carter wanted to depict the real problems of women in a male-dominated world (Rubinson, 174).

Although Angela Carter is best known for her fiction, she also wrote poetry and journalism (Schlueter, 83). Her early novels *Shadow Dance* (1966), *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *Heroes and Villains* (1969) were very influenced by the Gothic (Sage, 13). She made a blend of reality and fiction focused on sexual and violent topics (Schlueter, 83) and always depicted women lost in a man's world (Sage, 10). While in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and *Wise Children* (1991), the questions of femininity and masculinity were addressed explicitly (Sage, 58), in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* her intention was to draw the readers' attention to the reality of women in society.

*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* consolidated Carter's career as a writer (Sage, 40). It is a collection of short stories based on such traditional tales as "Little Red Riding Hood", "Sleeping Beauty" or "Beauty and the Beast". Carter transformed traditional tales for children into short stories belonging in different genres, and displaying various writing strategies and intertextual echoes, aimed at rejecting the image of women as naive and innocent victims (Zipes, 89). She wanted to show that twentieth-century society was misogynistic. But also that it is possible for this society to change (Sage 39). As Tiffin points out, the strategies Carter used in these tales drew the emphasis on female stereotypes which clashed with traditional ones (163). Consequently, together with controversial topics such as sadomasochistic relations and pornography, Carter presented women as active partners in sexual and social relations.

The first story in the collection is "The Bloody Chamber". Most critics agree that this story is based on the traditional folk tale "Blue Beard", although Salman Rushdie has argued that it is a version of "Beauty and the Beast" (xi–xii). Nevertheless, the most striking feminist twist is the same in both folk tales: the courageous mother saving her daughter in Carter's story, instead of the weak father in "Beauty and the Beast" or the brothers in "Blue Beard". The purpose of this essay is to analyse "The Bloody Chamber" as a feminist rewriting of Perrault's version of "Blue Beard". Like Perrault's tale, Carter's is the story of a young woman who marries a mysterious wealthy man who has murdered his previous wives. But, while in its patriarchal version, the tale is narrated by an external author-narrator, in Carter's the narrative voice and perspective are those of the protagonist herself. My contention is that this formal change is ideologically significant.

Although there are many characteristics and issues relating to this short story that can be commented on, this essay will centre on the characterization of the women in Carter's short story in comparison to those that appear in Perrault's "Blue Beard".

### **3. Analysis of "The Bloody Chamber"**

As in other traditional folk tales, "Blue Beard" is narrated by an omniscient external narrator who shares the male perspective of the author, while the voice of the female protagonist is silenced. In "The Bloody Chamber" the roles are reversed: the story is narrated from the female protagonist's perspective and the Marquis is silenced. This reversal reflects the opposed ideologies that lie behind both stories. Perrault wrote the tale according to patriarchal ideology, which enhanced the dominant role of men over women. By contrast, Carter's version brings to the fore woman's agency and autonomy by allowing the protagonist to tell her life story in her own voice.

The fact that "The Bloody Chamber" is narrated retrospectively by the adult protagonist minimizes the suspense since the reader knows from the very beginning that the protagonist survived. This type of retrospective first-person narrator is extradiegetic (Genette, 180) as the events narrated were lived by the young bride she was when the action took place. Nevertheless, the fact that the narrator is a character in the story means that she is also a homodiegetic narrator (184). This creates a distinction between narration and focalization, that is, between the adult woman narrating the story and her younger self living it. Mieke Bal defines focalization as "the point from which the elements are viewed" (118). The narration could be interpreted differently depending on who perceives the events. In this case, although both narrator and focalizer are the same character, the narrator omits her own knowledge and interpretation of the lived events, which are focalised by her younger, purblind self. This creates an ironic gap that

compensates for the lack of suspense about the survival of the protagonist. In other words, the narrator has more knowledge than the focalizer but she hides that information from the readers, who are made to share the purblind bride's fears, incomprehension and forebodings as she is living the events.

Another way of creating suspense is through the use of *prolepses* or anticipatory comments that prefigure intriguing further developments. The younger girl seems blinded and cannot see any danger either in the Marquis' weird reaction for example when she accepts his marriage proposal (Carter 2006, 4); or when her nanny sees a bad omen in the opal ring he presents her with (4). Despite the adult narrator's better knowledge, she refrains from commenting overtly on the events, but she drops significant hints. For instance, she compares the Marquis' family choker with "an extraordinarily precious slit throat" (6), alluding to the times of the Terror of the French Revolution. The Marquis' grandmother wore that choker as a symbol of her escape from the guillotine. The fact that now the protagonist wears the same ruby ribbon is an anticipatory hint about her ending. But the protagonist does not seem to catch the implications of this fact, and the narrator does not make any clear comment of warning. It is here that the irony lies: the readers are astonished by the incapacity of the purblind protagonist to understand the awful risks involved in accepting the Marquis' marriage proposal and fear for her.

Yet another example of the same is the narrator's comment on the figure she cast when she went to the opera wearing the ruby choker: "the white dress; the frail child within it; and the flashing crimson jewels round her throat, bright as arterial blood" (6). This statement calls for the purity and naïveté of the child-like girl she was at that moment, how she was seduced by jewels and wealth, without seeing the consequences: an impending bloody death. Again, the irony lies in the fact that, despite the weird

situations the young protagonist has placed herself in, the narrator does not tell readers openly how wrong she was when living those events, limiting herself to make apparently merely descriptive but in fact connotatively charged, proleptic comments. Even at the end of the story, the narrator does not admit her mistake in paying no heed to the warnings of her mother and nanny. After the Marquis was killed, she blesses the "maternal telepathy" that led her mother to the castle after her call (41), instead of confessing that her mother had always suspected the Marquis.

The narrator shows how the young protagonist is purblind and naïve but also strong-headed and greedy, caring nothing for her mother's warnings. At the beginning of the story, when she remembers unwrapping the wedding dress, the mother stresses the question of love:

'Are you sure you love him?'

'I'm sure I want to marry him,' I said.

And would say no more. She sighed, as if it was with reluctance that she might at last banish the spectre of poverty from its habitual place at our meagre table. (2)

Her mother is not at all sure about the engagement. In Perrault's patriarchal society, marriages were determined by wealth and by the desire to go up in the social ladder. By contrast, in Carter's tale, the protagonist's mother married for true love: "my mother herself had gladly, scandalously, defiantly beggared herself for love" (2). She is represented as a woman outside the status quo and contrary to the usual representation of women in patriarchy. The figure of the mother is essential in Carter's tale since she acts as model and saviour for her daughter, and her characteristics challenge women stereotypes, as Carter wanted to emphasize.



At the beginning of the story, the narrator characterized her mother as strong and independent: "My eagle-featured, indomitable mother" (1). And she mentions her temperament again at the crucial moment when the protagonist is entering the forbidden chamber:

Until that moment, this spoiled child did not know she had inherited nerves and a will from the mother who had defied the yellow outlaws of Indo-China. My mother's spirit drove me on, into that dreadful place, in a cold ecstasy to know the very worst. (26)

The protagonist is influenced by her mother's values, which differ from the patriarchal concept of woman as dependent and weak. She not only challenges the traditional concept of marriage, which reduces the status of woman to an object of exchange by men (Lévi-Strauss 1969), she also gives her daughter an education at the Conservatoire, which would secure her economic independence and the development of her musical talent. Indeed, she wanted her daughter to be an independent woman at all costs: "I, the little music student whose mother has sold all her jewellery, even her wedding ring, to pay the fees at the Conservatoire" (9). The opportunity to have a career reverses the stereotype of woman in patriarchy, meant to be the submissive "Angel in the House" derided by Virginia Woolf (285).

The values and temperament of the mother emphasise the feminist ideas endorsed by Carter. The second role of the mother in this reversal of patriarchal stereotypes is that of saviour of her daughter. This moment marks the clearest difference between both tales since Carter gives the mother the role of valiant hero traditionally reserved to men. While in Perrault's tale it is the protagonist's brothers who save her from death, in this case, it is the mother who appears in the castle on horseback, shooting the Marquis, in an episode described in heroic terms:

You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's service revolver [...]. (40)

This climactic episode overturns the traditional male-authored sexist role of folk tales according to which one or several male characters are depicted as heroic saviours while the woman is a helpless damsel-in-distress in need of rescue. Furthermore, the mother achieves the disempowerment of the Marquis and, as a consequence, of male power in society. The Marquis is certain that his wife will disobey him and enter the forbidden chamber and that is why he gives her the key. In patriarchal societies men determine women's lives and the young protagonist prefers this kind of tradition to the alternative represented by her strong and independent mother, whose girlhood was full of adventures in Indo-China: she had fought against Chinese pirates, had shot a man-eating tiger, and had helped the sick during the plague (1–2). Moreover, instead of marrying a wealthy man to improve her family status, she chose a poor soldier, thus remaining poor for the rest of her life. The fact that the mother appears in the castle just on time to prevent her daughter's beheading is not by chance. Her intense love for her daughter warns her of the danger she is in without the need of talking with her. The weird telephone call she receives with her daughter crying tells her that there is something wrong in the castle. By the mother's brave deed the Marquis' power is defeated, and for the first time in the story, his weaknesses are emphasized:

The puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their strings, abandon the rituals he had ordained for them since time began and start to live for themselves; the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns. (40)

Thus, Carter reversed gender roles, revealing the Marquis as a weak man, condemned to death by women's power. By contrast, Perrault's moralities at the end of the tale blamed the curiosity of women instead of condemning Blue Beard's atrocities.

Another significant ideological trait of the mother is that, in spite of her suspicions about the Marquis, she believes that her daughter must choose her own path, exploring adulthood and, as a consequence, sexuality, by herself. As mentioned above, Angela Carter belonged to the anti-censorship movement and used to include sexual themes in her works. So, in "The Bloody Chamber" she overtly addresses the question of woman's sexuality, reversing the cultural concept of controlling male and innocent female. At the beginning of the tale, the young protagonist is presented as a passive, pure and innocent woman with bewildered feelings about sex:

And I began to shudder, like a racehorse before a race, yet also with a kind of fear, for I felt both a strange, impersonal arousal at the thought of love and at the same time a repugnance I could not stifle for his white, heavy flesh. (11)

In the opera, the teenage girl confesses that she sensed that her "skin crisped at his touch" (5), and she admits to being curious about sexuality: "And, for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away" (6). This confession shows that Carter wanted to fight against the patriarchal belief in women's natural sexual passivity and even frigidity by talking about women's sexual pleasure, which was a taboo topic.

As the tale develops, there is a progressive change in the perspective of the protagonist towards the events she is living and this is most notable in terms of sexuality. She describes her first sexual intercourse in terms of violence and man's

control over woman (14). After it, she describes her painful feelings and how she looks for refuge in her husband: "I clung to him as though only the one who had inflicted the pain could comfort me for suffering it" (14–15). This behaviour responds to the traditional power-bondage relationships in patriarchal culture according to which woman was subordinated by man and had no voice in any aspect of life. In this passage, the protagonist's life is limited by her husband's decisions. She does not realize the danger of living by his side, so she trusts him. Thus, the purblind protagonist accepts her husband's lame attempt to justify his sexual brutality as the result of love: "He's so sorry for it, such impetuosity, he could not help himself, you see, he loves her so . . ." (14); and she also describes herself in the same way her husband saw her: "I was only a little girl, I did not understand" (15). Nevertheless, after the discovery of the bloody chamber, the tables turn. Now she gets the courage inherited from her mother and tries to delay her husband's punishment using sex as a distraction when he asks her for the keys: "Now? This moment? Can't it wait until morning, my darling? I forced myself to be seductive" (34).

This is a sudden change of behaviour from innocence to cunning but she acts again according to patriarchal expectations, in this case, about women's seductiveness. After this, the protagonist changes her sexual behaviour a third and last time. Once everything had passed, she abandons both roles of innocent victim and seductress and initiates a new life of expiation, poverty and love with Jean-Yves, the blind piano-tuner: "and now here I was, scarcely a penny the richer, widowed at seventeen in the most dubious circumstances and busily engaged in setting up house with a piano-tuner" (41). This description contrasts with the life of luxury offered by the Marquis and echoes her mother's choice of love and poverty, at the beginning of the narration (8–9). At first, she liked riches and the prospect of becoming an aristocrat. Now she returns to her

previous situation of poverty but feeling proud of it. Her concluding words are crucial for the understanding of the change she suffered:

No paint nor powder, no matter how thick or white, can mask that red mark on my forehead; I am glad he cannot see it — not for the fear of his revulsion, since I now he sees me clearly with his heart — but, because it spares my shame. (42)

The tale ends with the protagonist feeling embarrassed by her past because she was seduced by wealth. She followed the patriarchal tradition of a poor woman marrying a wealthy man and now she regrets it. As the analysis shows, Angela Carter overturns this expected female behaviour by giving power and the most important role to the protagonist's mother, and changing her purblind and greedy daughter's future into that of a mature woman living humbly with her mother and a blind piano-tuner. Thus, while in "Blue Beard", the characters are the same at the beginning and at the end, in "The Bloody Chamber" the events lived by the protagonist make her change. Perrault's protagonist marries again an "honourable" man and tries to forget her past life but there is no sign of learning a lesson. On the other hand, Carter's protagonist matures from purblind girl to a knowing adult woman who regrets having been seduced by wealth, has learnt from her past errors, and is a living example of what little girls should not do.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Angela Carter brings out in her writings the ideological changes fostered by feminist activism in the 1960s and 70s. She believed that women in patriarchal societies suffer social discrimination because of their gender and that men control their entire lives. Moreover, she supported the anti-censorship feminist view that pornography could help

put an end to the sexual taboos that have contributed to the maintenance of women's submissive position in patriarchal societies.

As I have attempted to show, in "The Bloody Chamber" Carter reversed the gender roles represented in "Blue Beard" and dignified the figure of woman. While Perrault's tale, in agreement with patriarchal ideology, has an omniscient author-narrator and grants value only to the male characters, Carter's short story gives agency to the female protagonist by giving her the role of narrator of her own story. This narrator is tricky because, although the suspense about her impending death is lost because we know that she survived, she hides the consequences of her own past actions by focalising her life story from the perspective of her purblind younger self. This gap of information produces irony and a feeling of empathy in the readers: we suffer throughout the story because we get the hints from the narrator and know that there is something wrong with the Marquis, while the young protagonist seems unaware of the danger. With this strategy, Angela Carter transmitted to the readers the awful nature of the Marquis and of his conception of marriage first-hand. Accepting the role imposed on women by patriarchy, the naïve protagonist was submissive to her husband's power and this led her to terrible consequences. In everyday life, these roles that deprive women of liberty still exist.

The best example of the reversal of gender roles in Carter's rewriting of "Blue Beard" is the figure of the mother. She has two main functions with respect to her daughter: as teacher of moral values and as her saviour. Although she is not the protagonist, the mother plays a central role in the tale. She provides her daughter with the best of educations and offers herself as a tantalising example of female agency, independence and resourcefulness, in sharp opposition to the patriarchal stereotypes of woman. Thus, the maturation process of the heroine goes through her rejection of the

capitalist values fostered by patriarchy (female submission in exchange for money and social status) and her endorsement of the values of freedom and love.

The mother's values are inherited by the protagonist but she only endorses them consciously after realizing her husband's real nature. She suffers a process of change as she learns to focus her patriarchal values from her mother's feminist perspective. First she is attracted by the Marquis' wealth but at the end of the story she is embarrassed by her greed. This maturation process is facilitated by the way of life that her mother taught her. At the end of the story, she rejects her past life as a woman at the service of a man, and opts for a life and relationship based on humility and respect. Thus, she transforms herself from "an object of exchange by men" (see above) into an independent "new woman". Her maturation process echoes the feminist movement's fight for women's rights and its vindication of independence from men.

The concept of sexuality is important in the protagonist's process of maturation. Her initial image as a naïve and pure teenager changes to that of an astute woman who tries to use her sexuality to distract her husband when he asks her for his keys. Although Carter was in favour of teaching and practising sexuality, in this case, the protagonist made a bad use of her sexual power, as by attempting to seduce her husband in order to delay her punishment, she was moving from the role of virgin to that of whore, in the patriarchal virgin/whore archetype. Still, at the end of the tale, when her mother rescues her from sure death, she comprehends the extent of her mistake and the worth of her mother's defence of liberty and love over money and status, and this is what determines her to lead a humble and exemplary life with the blind piano-tuner.

The agency granted to the female protagonist by providing her with the narrative voice gives the readers the chance to empathise with her and to follow the evolution of her maturation process. Instead of Perrault's moralities in which the protagonist is

blamed because of her curiosity, Carter blames the society and its traditional beliefs and teaches women the way to overcome them. Thus, through her use of narrative voice, Carter manages to reverse the patriarchal ideology of Perrault's "Blue Beard" and to praise the power of women to achieve their purposes "in their own right".

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