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# Trabajo Fin de Grado

**DEFEATING PATRIARCHY: FEMINIST TRAITS IN ANGELA CARTER'S "THE BLOODY CHAMBER"**

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# INTRODUCTION

Children have always been told stories about heroes and villains, damsels in distress and wicked witches. Tales form part of folk culture and have been transmitted orally from generation to generation until they were collected by several authors such as the Grimm Brothers or Charles Perrault. In these tales characters have a fixed role and a pre-established fate: the hero is always a man who comes into the rescue of a poor lady who gets into troubles because she is too curious (as in the case of the protagonist of "The Bloody Chamber"). Feminist writers started rereading and rewriting on that tales because they aimed to change the image of women they portrayed, which is far from what women are. One of these writers was Angela Carter. In order to show the changes Carter introduced and how she transformed the old fairy tales into feminist ones, I will take "The Bloody Chamber", the first story in the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, as the source of analysis and explain through it Carter's work within the revisionist business.

The idea of women as subordinated was already existent in eighteenth-century Western literature with the rise of the novel; a great part of the published works was male-authored and therefore the image of women in them was one-sided. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest, this situation changed when, during the last years of the nineteenth century, the number of professional women writers increased. That created a climate of uncertainty for men who sought to maintain their status in the writing business and worked on the creation of a "modern male literary discourse, exemplified by theoretical and canon-forming works [… in] an attempt to construct *his* story of a literary history in which women play no part" (quoted in Morris, 47; emphasis in the original). The canon-forming works were considered as the classics of literature

standing out of the rest because of its aesthetics qualities, intellectual pleasure, meticulous form, influence on society and relevance. Women writers were considered special cases and therefore their works were left out of the canon.

During the nineteenth century and great part of the twentieth women's access to higher education was limited, their working conditions were deplorable and their legal situation weak. In a heteronormative world dominated by men women have few chances to leave the domestic sphere and stand out. Nevertheless, feminism[1] has been fighting and still fights nowadays to change the untruthful representation of women as inferior to men that prevails in literature at the same time as it attempts to improve women's situation within society, demanding the same rights their male companions have.

But, why were women considered inferior to men? It is true that women and men are different, that is undeniable, but do these differences make women inferior to men? Pam Morris argues that women have been suffering from "biological essentialism" (1-2), that is, the idea that "woman's 'nature' is an inevitable consequence of her reproductive role" (2). During the twentieth century biology was seen as the origin of the differences between men and women and, if biology made women submissive and inferior to men, that condition was hard to change, as Morris states (2). Biological essentialism would be responsible for shaping women's personality and nature in a smoother way than men's, providing them with so-called "feminine" attributes such as an extreme sensibility or excessive delicacy; it would also provide them with skills "typical" of their genre and make them devoted wives and caring mothers, giving shape to the idea that "what is inborn must be borne since it cannot be changed" (Morris, 94). In spite of this, whether you are born male or female does not

[1] Pam Morris defines feminism as "a political perception based on two fundamental premises: (1) that gender differences are the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences" (1).

necessarily determine your personality, as femininity and masculinity are, according to Morris and feminism in general, acquired cultural gender identities. In the same line of thought, Morris argues that being a female does not make you a feminist or feminine because these terms (female, feminine and feminist) are related but not necessarily linked. Each one of them has a different meaning; "feminist" has political connotations and "feminine" is related to cultural conceptions whereas "female" is about biological sex (2).

The question of women being inferior to men has repeatedly appeared in history but it was Simone de Beauvoir who first explored the issue and tried to give an answer to it in her book *The Second Sex* (1949). According to de Beauvoir, if women are seen as inferior it is because we are presented in opposition to men and not as independent creatures. "Man" is the term we use to refer to all humankind, both women and men, a fact that empowers men, placing them on a privileged position, and depreciates women, leaving them is a secondary one; this makes of men "the ones" and women "the others" (16). Nonetheless, Simone de Beauvoir insisted on the fact that the concept of "otherness" is also needed for humans to have a concept of themselves, of what they are, in opposition to what they are not (17-18). "Otherness" is a shallow term that the dominant group can fill with any characteristics they find appropriate (18); according to this, and with women representing "the other" men define themselves and at the same time put into the category of "women" whichever characteristics are needed to create a positive image of masculinity (they depict women as weak so they seem stronger). According to de Beauvoir, when represented by men, woman "has a double and deceptive image […]. She incarnates all moral virtues from good to evil and their opposites […]. He projects upon her what he desires and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates" (229). De Beauvoir went along with the existentialist idea that when

you are born, you are not born one thing or the other but you have to become it; in her own words: “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (295), meaning that whatever you are is based on your experience and your personal growth and is not determined by your birth. Hence, women are not born inferior; it is society that makes them so.

Another critic who discussed the revision and rereading of the canon was Adrienne Rich. She stated:

> Re-vision —the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction— is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves (90)

By this, Rich meant that what was needed to change the image of women reflected in the canon was a break with the past, a fresh start, reversing the unfounded conception of women from within patriarchal culture. With that purpose in mind, feminist writers who had reread the texts belonging to the canon agreed that, in order to have the new start they wanted, they should use a feminist way of writing as a weapon, and that they could do so in several ways. One of them is the use of what is known as *écriture feminine*, a term coined by Hélène Cixous and explained in her work “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975), where she defines it as a feminine mode of writing that remains in contact with feminine libidinal energy and also opposes phallocentrism. In “The Laugh of Medusa”, Cixous argued that language is a tool used to create, that men have been using it to create an image of women that, consciously or not, contributes to the oppression women are still suffering, and that women must write about women

using the same tools as men but presenting a different image and a different perspective from which to be observed. In her own words: woman "must write herself, because this is the invention of a new *insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformation in her history" (880; emphasis in the original). This new feminist writing should be, according to Cixous, well differentiated from that used by men and should invite the reader to reflect on what she or he is reading, to look twice with different eyes, to see beyond what is written and reach her or his own conclusions.

But *écriture feminine* was not the only tool feminist had to fight the constrictions of the canon. A number of feminist writers based part of their literary work on the rewriting of previous texts in which women were portrayed as passive, submissive or oppressed. Some focused on the rewriting of fairy tales and folk tales that had been gathered by authors such as the Grimm Brothers, Hans Christian Andersen or Charles Perrault. In the new versions of those stories female roles were subverted, their characters were empowered and no longer appeared as secondary but having relevant parts and playing crucial roles for the development of the events. Also, the circumstances in which the heroine was involved along the story are similar to those typical of the *Bildungsroman*,[2] so the reader witnessed the process of maturation of the protagonist. Hence, as fables do, these stories used to have a moral at the end exemplified by the personal growth of the protagonist and all the process that leads her to that growth. Among the authors who have written new versions of the so-called classics, we can mention the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy (1955- ), who is recognized for her lesbian-themed poems inspired by fairy tales; the writer of fiction Emma Donoghue (1969- ), famous for her collections of short stories driven by myths

[2] *Bildungsroman* is a term applied to novels of "education" (in the widest sense), of which many of the best examples are German. (Dabble 100).

and old tales as, for example, *Kissing the Witch* (1997); or Angela Carter (1940-1992), who, together with her short story, "The Bloody Chamber" (1979), is the subject of analysis of this Dissertation.

## ANGELA CARTER: THE AUTHOR IN CONTEXT

Angela Carter was born in Eastbourne (Sussex), but spent part of her childhood in the care of her grandmother in South Yorkshire. As a writer she was prolific and versatile, and dedicated part of her work to the rewriting of the classics but was also the author of short stories, novels, poetry, non-fictional works, children's books and dramatic works. She worked as editor and translator as well, and spent part of her life in several universities around the world (The United States, Australia, Japan...) before finally returning to Britain. Her first book, *Shadow Dance*, was published in 1966 and from that moment on she never stopped publishing; one year later she was awarded with the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize for her novel, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). Although she was a very prolific writer during all her career, the 1960s is the time when she wrote and published four out of her nine complete novels, *Several Perceptions* (1968) *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and the other two mentioned above.

Carter was an exceptional writer of short stories, mostly rewriting of male-authored ancient fairy tales such as those included in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), and others dealing with her experiences around the world, such as *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974). She also dedicated part of her work to writing non-fictional essays, such as *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1978), the title of which was later changed to *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, which is a book dealing with pornography, a feminist appraisal of the Marquis de Sade and his vision of women. In spite of being regarded nowadays as a

great feminist, Carter's style, tone, themes, and works were put into question by other feminists during her time because of the images she portrayed of women. During the 1960s and 1970s feminists wanted to highlight the issue of violence against women as having an exclusively male origin but Carter presented both, male and female, as violent, brutal and sadistic. For some feminists her works were "against the grain of the widespread contemporary feminist belief that violence emanated from an exclusively male source" (Makinen, 150) and they harshly criticized Carter for her view of feminism and her female characters with masculine traits. According to Lorna Sage, Carter "adopted the supposedly male point of view also because, under the mask of the 'general', it was more aggressive, more licensed, more geared to *waiting*, more authorial" (25; emphasis in the original), and that was what, according to Carter, feminists needed to understand, a more aggressive and effective discourse standing out of male writings; in other words, they needed to find a way to make their works prominent.

According to her date of birth Angela Carter would belong to second-wave feminism, but, far from getting on well with the ideals of the Women's Movement that flourished from the 1960s to the 1970s in America she was rather skeptical about some of their attitudes. She never accepted the fact that all women were the victims of male oppression and claimed that none of the sexes is superior to the other while at the same time she maintained that we cannot be equal because "masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another" (Carter 1977, 149), meaning that both are needed for the other to exist, and that there is not a fixed differentiation between men and women far beyond what biology establishes. She was skeptical of feminists who, in trying to defeat patriarchy, used biological essentialism on their behalf by acclaiming motherhood and the superiority of the female body. Ward Jouve states that, in Carter's

works, “the fiercest rebellion is against the mother, what she stands for” (166). These are mothers who dedicated their life to their families performing household duties, mothers who spent their life taking care of their children, mothers who assumed that their role was none other than staying at home, remain quiet and comply with their husbands’ wishes. Carter’s mothers, as we will see in detail later, are fierce women who despite the troubles and misfortunes of life, keep fighting (even literally) to overcome their situation and even come to the rescue of those who need them, as is the case of the mother in ‘The Bloody Chamber’.

Carter could also be classified as a radical-libertarian feminist. This branch of feminism agrees with other branches that “the oppression of women stands as the oldest, most widespread, most entrenched, and most brutal form of oppression” (Tong, 46-7), but differs from them in the way they see reproduction, gender definition, pornography, sexuality and the biological versus the environmental origins of masculine and feminine traits. Regarding pornography, radical-libertarian feminists see it “as a liberating fantasy tool, and want women’s sexuality liberated from all societal taboo and dictate” (Tong, 56-64). In contrast to them, feminists belonging in the 1960-70s American Women’s Movement saw pornographers as the enemies of women and pornography as a way of exerting sadistic violence on them.

Pornography divided feminist during the last decades of the twentieth century: some wanted to put an end to it and others (although they censored it too) wanted to redefine it and give to it a feminist perspective. Thus, the first group organized themselves in anti-pornography movements and labelled as pornographic every representation that eroticizes male dominance over women or any form of sexual violence against them. The other, the group Angela Carter belonged to, wanted to explore pornography in the light of feminism. As Carter argues in *The Sadeian Woman*:

> our contemporary ideology of pornography does not encompass the possibility of change, as if we were the slaves of history and not its makers, as if sexual relations were not necessarily an expression of social relations, as if sex itself was an external fact, one as immutable as the weather, creating human practice but never a part of it (1979, 3).

In this non-fictional work, Carter explores the issue of pornography taking as a basis the Marquis de Sade's work. De Sade was a French nobleman who wrote about female sexuality, their sexual freedom and the current relations between the sexes during the last decades of the eighteenth century. What Carter does in her book is a twentieth-century re-interpretation of de Sade's ideas aimed to show that most of what de Sade discussed about women's sexual freedom is still a problem nowadays. In the preface to *The Sadeian Woman*, entitled "Polemical Preface: Pornography at the Service of Women", Carter discusses the reduction of men and women to their "formal elements" (4): the penis and the vagina, and how individuals are portrayed in society. Carter explains how men and women are constructed around these formal elements and how "the probe" and "the fringed hole", as she called them, work as metaphors for men and women themselves. She opens this Preface with the following words:

> Pornography involves an abstraction of human intercourse in which the self is reduced to its formal elements. In its most basic form, these elements are represented by the probe and the fringed hole, the twin signs of male and female in graffiti, the biological symbols scrawled on the subway poster and the urinal wall, the simplest expression of stark and ineradicable sexual differentiation, a

> universal pictorial language of lust —or, rather, a language we accept as universal because, since it has always been so, we conclude that it must always remain so (1979, 4).

According to Carter these metaphors works because they are rooted in society, the characteristics of the formal elements attributed to male and female fit the characteristics that women and men are said to have. Men are represented as being alert, always ready to act, while women are represented as being patient, always waiting and longing.

The main theme of the Preface is pornographic literature. This type of male-authored stories addressed to male adults, portrays women as the source of pleasure for men. It usually presents women as first-person narrators —a fact that, according to Carter, "reinforces the male orientation of the fiction" (1979, 17)— and has clear and defined roles for masculine and feminine characters. Pornography supports the preconceived values of male superiority in society, and when literary pornographic productions do so, they are not banned but accepted, and when it innovates and tries to provide a new vision of pornography, it is banned. De Sade presented sexuality in a more relaxed way, free from constrictions and not necessarily bound to a reproductive role. As stated above, Carter wanted to explore pornography in the light of feminism, to look at it from another perspective in which women were the ones who take the control, and are not just the givers, but also the receivers of pleasure. More importantly, Carter saw the need to redefine the relations between both sexes. With that purpose, she introduced the figure of the "moral pornographer", an artist who "uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual licence for all genders, and projects a model of the way such a world might work" thus

transforming pornography into a critique of the relation between sexes (1979, 22). As Carter argued, the fact that this moral pornographer makes a critique of pornography from within, allows him or her to create "a world of absolute licence for all genders" (1979, 22) aimed at changing society and human nature.

The Marquis de Sade creates "women-monsters", libertine heroines who freely enjoy their sexuality but who must live in exile, apart from society (Carter, 1979, 29). Angela Carter condemns this misogynist attitude but at the same time she commends him for "claiming rights of free sexuality for women, and in installing women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds" (1979, 41). What de Sade does is to depict the suffering of those women-monsters he creates and reopen old wounds by making women suffer again. He envisioned a change in the world that would start by transforming society and making it egalitarian but for that, society should undergo a violent transformation that de Sade sees as essential for a "fresh start" (Carter 1979, 29). In summary, according to Carter, de Sade's works present sexual violence against women as well as women's sexual violence, as the only way in which women could "heal themselves of their socially inflicted scars" (Carter, 1979, 29).

The very same year that Carter published *The Sadeian Woman* she published *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* as well. Both works have been related because the two of them present female sexuality openly and without censorship and because they both carry out a feminist reading of previous works, those belonging to the Marquis de Sade and some of the best-known canonical folk tales in Western culture.

## *THE BLOODY CHAMBER AND OTHER STORIES*

*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* is a collection of ten short stories written by Angela Carter and published in 1979. She provides new versions of some of the canonical folk tales that our parents have been telling us for decades and that became well known in their sweetened Disney versions for children from the 1930s onwards but that appeared in literature during the seventeenth century and before, as is the case of "Bluebeard", attributed to Charles Perrault and published for the first time in 1697. Carter's intention was not to do versions of adult fairy tales, but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and use it as the beginnings of new stories (Haffenden, 80), to write new versions of the classical tales that would embody feminist ideals. But can these new versions in Carter's collection be labelled as "fairy tales"? Are they really meant to be read by children or should they be addressed to another type of audience? According to Bruno Bettelheim, fairy tales are the most enriching tales for children's inner life; they are so good because, within children's comprehension and unconsciously, fairy tales make them aware of the problems and dilemmas they should face in their lives and provides them with tools to cope with them (5).

Bettelheim and psychoanalysis convey the same kind of message: the aim of psychoanalysis is to show how to overcome the difficulties of life without being defeated by them. In Freud's words: "only by struggling courageously against what seem like overwhelming odds can man succeed in wringing meaning out of existence" (quoted in Bettelheim, 1977, 8); that is, only by facing our deepest fears can we get to know ourselves and be able to defeat them. Fairy tales adapt the message to children but keeping the essence of the message that one should face the struggles of life because that fight is intrinsic to human nature and by doing so, one would finally master all the inconveniences of life and end up victorious (Bettelheim, 8).

Despite the instructive and illustrative aspects of these tales Patricia Duncker finds Carter's tales "so entrenched in patriarchally restrictive kinship systems that no amount of revision can free them up for positive feminist aims" (quoted in Armitt, 89). Carter writes these new stories from a feminist point of view abolishing patriarchal roles and any kind of women's misrepresentation. The result is a set of stories echoing fairy tales but having some hints of Gothic fiction too. In Armitt's words: "rather than being fairy-tales which contain a few Gothic elements, these are actually Gothic tales that prey upon the restrictive enclosures of fairy-story formulae in a manner that threatens to become 'masochistically' self-destructive" (89).

It may be true that these new stories Carter writes have little of fairy tales but at the same time they still keep similarities with the original versions. The reader can see how, both in the original tale by Perrault and in Carter's version of "The Bloody Chamber" a parent is missing or dead and how characters represent polarized roles (good or bad, pretty or ugly…). She transforms the traditional male heroes into heroines for her feminist versions, heroines who are strong characters that contradict the classical roles of women in fairy tales and Gothic fictions, in which they are presented as weak and helpless characters. In keeping with her preoccupation with "the enclosing effects of domesticity and the negative impact these have upon her characters" (Armitt, 88), Carter frees the female characters in her stories from the domestic sphere in which they were trapped in the former version of the stories she re-writes. Moreover, Carter was fascinated by female sexuality and she explored it in many ways, giving her protagonists both active and passive roles and making them sexually violent and even sadomasochistic (Armitt, 88), just as de Sade did in his works on female sexuality.

Carter responded to criticism on the way in which she depicted sexual violence in her tales by saying that: "[she] was using the latent content of those traditional stories

and the latent content is violently sexual" (quoted in Simpson). For her, traditional tales were closely related to the "subliterary forms of pornography, ballad and dream" (Carter 1974, 122). While it could be argued that the way in which she depicted sexual violence was not politically correct at the moment of publication, Carter had nevertheless both supporters and detractors. Merja Makinen, Elaine Jordan, and Lucie Armitt, for example, agree that the tales perfectly accomplish their function as "textual exploration of the genuine complexities that confront even the most assertive of heterosexual women under patriarchy" (Armitt, 88). By making women the protagonists in these unorthodox sexual encounters, Carter reclaims their independence of thought and advances towards a depiction of women as subjects instead of objects of sexual activity. According to Makinen, Carter's representation of female sexuality "play[s] with and upon (if not prey[s] upon) earlier misogynistic version" (quoted in Armitt 89). Hence, the changes Carter made, the way she reversed roles and plots, and the narrative form and structure she used complete the ideological reorientation she gave to her new stories. To exemplify that reorientation I will analyse the narrator, the importance of mirrors and the male gaze, the character of the Marquis and Jean-Yves and finally, the mother.

## ANALYSIS OF "THE BLOODY CHAMBER"

"The Bloody Chamber" is Angela Carter's version of the famous folk tale by Charles Perrault–"La Barbe Bleue" (1697). In contrast to the original "Bluebeard" —which is told from the perspective of a third-person, omniscient narrator— Carter's tale is narrated retrospectively in the first person, from the perspective of the wife. Whereas the two stories–follow the same plot (a young maiden is married to a member of the nobility who is secretly a sadistic murdered and, after disobeying his order not to enter a

certain room, is condemned to die but is later saved by a family member), various elements are changed in Carter's version, which respond to the transition from patriarchal ideology to the empowerment of women. Fairy tales are traditionally told by a third-person omniscient narrator, which is normally assumed to be a male figure. In "Bluebeard", the narrator has universal knowledge about the characters, their feelings, and the events in which they take part. Carter challenges this traditional narrative voice by choosing the protagonist of "The Bloody Chamber" as the narrator of the story and by giving her the chance to tell her version of the events. As she begins to narrate the story, the reader is given insight into her feelings. She is no longer portrayed as a mere victim with no control or opinion; instead, we are given the opportunity to see how she truly feels about the events. From a feminist perspective, the fact that Carter wrote the story from the point of view of the "victim" is quite important.

In the story, we are able to bear witness to the inner thoughts of the protagonist; we can see that she is a sentient being. She willingly marries the Marquis even if she is given the choice by her mother not to follow through with the marriage at the beginning of the story but she refuses her mother's advice. Instead of presenting an already strong and independent woman, Carter presents us with a character in transition, who is "struggling to establish her subjectivity" and "exploring her subject position and beginning to tell her own story" (Manley, 1998: 83). Maybe it is a question of age, as even the protagonist recognizes that: "I was seventeen and knew nothing of the wold" (Carter, 1979: 4). Indeed, at the time of the story, she is half way between adolescence and adulthood; she is old enough to marry: "I had […] ceased to be her child in becoming his wife" (Carter, 1979: 1), but some of her decisions seem hasty for an adult and might need rethinking or maybe a better understanding on her part. The heroine's attitude also seems childish and obstinate, as she did not really think about the

implications of being married to a man much older that her, who had already been married several times, as if she just wanted to be with him because of his wealth so she would have her life solved, a way to avoid the problems her mother had when she became a widow.

As I have said above, the heroine is a character in transition, in the process of establishing herself as an independent subject. In the climactic scene in the marital bedroom she is not presented through her own eyes, but through her multiple reflection on the mirrors surrounding the bed. The Marquis uses these mirrors to objectify the heroine because, as the voyeur he is, the pleasure he gets is from looking; besides, they give him power and control over the heroine. The reader knows how the heroine looks like at this moment thanks to these mirrors in which she is reflected, but they do not provide a truthful image of how she really is and feels. However, as Kathleen Manley argues, "the mirrors, by providing opportunities to see herself as others see her, allow the protagonist to begin to have a more complete sense of herself" (85). Mirrors help her to know that the Marquis looks at her with "sheer carnival avarice [and] with lust" (Carter, 1979, 2, 6) but also how he sees her: "I caught sight of myself in the mirror. And I saw myself, suddenly, as he saw me" (Carter, 1979, 7). When the heroine describes herself in this scene she does so from the perspective of the Marquis so we never have a self-impression of her; she depends on him to describe herself. As long as the heroine describes herself in relation to what the Marquis sees of her, she would not be able to establish herself as an independent subject. Manley also states that looking at the mirror "provides not only the beginning of subjectivity but also some honesty" to the protagonist (85); looking at the mirror through which the Marquis is looking at her, she sees in herself "a potentially for corruption that took [her] breath away" (Carter, 1979: 7) for the first time. It is at that very moment that she begins to break the chains

of the stereotype of being a "good girl" and she gives the first step in establishing herself as an independent character, evolving towards what she wants to be.

The presence of mirrors in the marital room confirms what we already know about the Marquis, his voyeuristic habits and his taste for control and possession. Watching at the multiple reflections of his bride in the mirrors, he remarks: "'I have acquired a whole harem for myself!'" (Carter, 1979: 11). Also the fact that during the deflowering scene the heroine is described as a "treat" (Carter, 1979: 11) that the Marquis looks at with "weary appetite" (11) emphasise the objectification of the heroine. The narrator adds to this impression when she describes herself as an 'it' and the Marquis as a carnivore approaching his prey. Nevertheless, even if the loss of her virginity is described as "one-sided struggle" (Carter, 1979: 15), it is also at this moment that she realizes that her naiveté and innocence are pleasurable to the Marquis (she will try to use her sex-appeal in the future in order to take advantage over her husband).

Linked to these mirrors is the male gaze. As E. Ann Kaplan suggests, "men do not only look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and possession" (331). This male gaze gives the Marquis the power to objectify the heroine and, therefore, to own her. When the Marquis looks at her it is like a hunter looking at his prey or as if she is something highly valuable to possess: "and so my purchaser unwrapped his bargain" (Carter, 1979: 12), says the heroine after the disrobing. Even if she knows that she is nothing but a precious object to him she seems to find a secret pleasure in it: "and, as at the opera, when I had first seen my flesh in his eyes, I was aghast to feel myself stirring" (Carter, 1979: 12). For the heroine, sexual pleasure is associated with her objectification because, as E. Ann Kaplan states:

> If she is to have sexual pleasure, it can only be constructed around her objectification; it cannot be a pleasure that comes from desire for the other (a subject position) […] Women […] have learned to associate their sexuality with domination by the male gaze, a position involving a degree of masochism in finding their objectification erotic (315-16)

Such is the attachment of the heroine to the Marquis that she doesn't even care about the pain he might inflict on her, as we see during her deflowering. She thinks that: "only the one who had inflicted the pain could comfort [her] for suffering it" (Carter, 1979: 15), and she enjoys her objectification during their sexual encounters. It is not until she finds the bloody chamber and discovers the bodies of her predecessors and all the depravation behind the Marquis' sexual perversity that she knows her life is in danger. The finding of that room shocks her into awful reality and makes her wish to escape from the castle and the fate her husband has already chosen for her.

But there is a male character in "The Bloody Chamber" that cannot objectify the heroine because he is not even able to see her at all, a blind man, Jean-Yves, the piano turner. Jean-Yves represents all that the Marquis is not; he might not have the wealth of the Marquis or his looks, but because of his blindness he will not be able to objectify the heroine. They become friends and eventually he becomes her helper when the mother of the heroine comes to her rescue: "'She will be too late,' Jean-Yves said and yet he could not restrain a note of hope that, though it must be so, yet it might not be so" (Carter, 1979: 41). Finally, he will become her husband. Still, he is not as perfect as he seems. Jean-Yves shows at a certain moment in the tale that he is also under the influence of the myth of evil women when he tells the protagonist that her disobedience deserves to be punished: "'you disobeyed him', he said. 'That is sufficient reason for him to punish

you'", and he compares her to Eve: "'Like Eve', he said" (Carter, 1979: 40-41). He does not seem to feel any kind of sexual attraction for the heroine and he does not have the need to possess and objectify her. Patricia Duncker describes this lack of sexual appeal as a consequence of being blind: "while blindness, as a symbolic castration, may signal the end of male sexual aggression, it is also a mutilation" (11). She argues being blind, Jean-Yves is unable to gaze in the same way as the Marquis, and so, to feel the need for possession the Marquis has, or to find pleasure in it. Jean-Yves is the alternative to all that the Marquis represents.

Finally the most striking change Carter introduces is the figure of the mother. In Perrault's version the figure of the mother is slightly mentioned but Carter makes her the saviour of the heroine —she knew her daughter was in danger because of "maternal telepathy" (Carter, 1979: 44)— with her deceased father's revolver. As Robin Ann Sheets comments, Carter's narrative "restores to prominence a figure who is strikingly, ominously, absent from fairy tales, from pornographic fiction, and from the Freudian theory of female development: the strong, loving, and courageous mother" (644-45). This mother is described from the beginning as a fierce woman —"my eagle –featured indomitable mother" (Carter, 1979: 2), says the protagonist—, who had to raise the young heroine alone and who, among other things, had to deal with pirates and had even shot a man-eating tiger with her own hands in her youth (2); she was also a nurse, the only female attribute Carter gives her, but which is given equal value than the rest of her characterological features. With this description of the mother Carter shows that women can be both feminine and maternal but also fierce and strong: she has all the traits of the typical masculine hero in fairy tales but she is not less feminine for it. She decided to marry a soldier she loved and desired rather than a wealthy man who would

have make her life easier but did not love and, when her husband died, she had to perform her roles both as mother and as absent father or brother.

There are different moments in the story when the mother shows that she embodies those two roles. When the heroine decides to marry the Marquis, the mother asks her if she really loves him but the heroine simply says: “I’m sure I want to marry him” (2) and the mother seems to be disappointed by her daughter’s decision. Later, when the heroine is preparing to be killed by the Marquis, she thinks that she must be courageous, and this thought brings her mother to her mind: “When I thought of courage, I thought of my mother” (41). It is at this moment that the mother reappears, now displaying the male role:

> 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 and, behind her, the breakers of the savage, indifferent sea, like the witnesses of a furious justice. (43).

The mother is described here with masculine attributes and as bold as a hero might be. She can perfectly embody this role because during all her life she has been doing it, during her youth and also when she became a widowed mother. Carter depicts a courageous female, a paragon of womanhood from a feminist perspective, who faces the Marquis without hesitation using her husband’s revolver. By having a strong female character save the protagonist Carter breaks the story’s dependence upon the male figure (remember that in the original tale the heroine is saved by her brothers)

## CONCLUSION

Angela Carter's work is undeniably an advance towards women empowerment in literature. In the case of "The Bloody Chamber", this is more evident in the character of the protagonist's mother, who is depicted as brave and indomitable from the beginning of the story. In "The Bloody Chamber", the protagonist begins by being innocent and naïve; however, in the end we see that she has developed into a grown up woman. The shift from the third-person narration in "Bluebeard" to the first-person narrative in Carter's short story told from the point of view of the adult protagonists but from the perspective of her younger self constructs an image of women beyond the objectification they were subjected to in earlier male-dominated works. Carter also presents an alternative to the traditional male protagonist in fairy tales embodied by Jean-Yves. He is the counterpart of the Marquis and even if he is only a poor piano turner he seems to be the most suitable partner for the heroine. Due to his blindness he is unable to objectify the heroine as the Marquis does, so she escapes male dominance. Finally, Carter introduces the figure of the mother. She is a strong woman who has few motherly qualities and who had to be also a father for the heroine, saving her at the end of the tale. This, together with the fact that she is described with masculine attributes, breaks the boundaries between male and female, and challenges the traditional roles in fairy tales. Even if it is not a complete transition towards female independence in the sexual realm, Carter's work sets a precedent for the emancipation of women in modern literature.

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