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THRICE UPON A TIME: FEMINIST, POSTFEMINIST AND LESBIAN REVISIONS OF FAIRY TALES: ANNE SEXTON, ANGELA CARTER AND EMMA DONOGHUE

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Introduction

Within the literary tradition, fairy tales have established themselves worldwide as a literary subgenre of folk tales. However, my main focus will fall on the development and proliferation of fairy tales in the Western tradition. In spite of the multiple changes that the subgenre has undergone - the initial origin of fairy tales, named *das Volksmarchen* and belonging to the oral storytelling tradition, their subsequent adaptation to a written tradition, their process of domestication in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the inclusion of a wide range of elements from folklore, myths and legends belonging to different communities - these external elements have not affected the essence of the fairy tale.

Yet, what are the essential features that define fairy tales? In general, the definition of 'fairy tale' coined by *The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (1990) seems to refer to fairy stories for a specific audience, with specific characters and imagery: "a story for children about fairies, or about magic and enchantment" (www.surlalunefairytales.com). Derek Brewer expands the previous definition:

> These stories have stereotyped characters and a certainty of predictability of event. They embody the social wisdom of their communities and an implicit morality or didacticism [...]. In many tales the protagonist commits some kind of transgression, but recovers through a central 'magic event' on which the plot turns, often a form of wish-fulfilment (qtd in Ellis Davidson and Chaudhri, 2006: 15).

Taking into account both explanations, it could be said that fairy tales present a double function: a source of entertainment but with a moral at its core. The dictionary definition rather focuses on the modern concept of what a fairy tale is: entertainment for children

whose ending may be moralizing or not, whereas Brewer's explanation embraces the timeless, basic aspects of fairy tales, paying special attention to their moralizing nature.

In fact, during the process of popularization of fairy tales, also known as *conte de fées* in the seventeenth century, their most prominent function was that articulating of the moral authority which was promoted by aristocratic female circles in French salons. Thus, the written tradition of the fairy tale started to be ascribed to the figure of the female writer. As Jack David Zipes states (1994), "[t]he institution of the fairy tale was created by women" (31). Many aristocratic women used fairy tales to improve their knowledge and pursue a higher level of education. Owing to the success of fairy tales as a vehicle for women to acquire knowledge, it was determined that these fairy stories should be also deployed as moral tales addressed to an essentially female audience. They were considered a manual that defined the norms of female behaviour within society, all the while warning of the danger of disobedience and social ostracism. According to Sheldon Cashdan, "[s]ome folklorists believe that fairy tales offer 'lessons' on correct behaviour, advising young readers on how to succeed in life" (2000: 8). These first examples of stories written by women were crucial in promoting the rise of an incipient female point of view which would subsequently become feminist literary criticism. Several of these female writers, such as Madeleine de Scudéry and Madame de Lafayette, encouraged other women from aristocratic circles to write fiction, poetry or plays whose themes centred around their own female condition.

As mentioned before, fairy tales included myths and motifs from different national folklores. Writers and folklorists such as Bruno Bettelheim or Bengt Holbek have stated the existence of a general use of a language of symbols in order to represent an unconscious content. In fact, Holbek stressed the importance of the use of familiar symbols of everyday life in fairy tales (qtd. in Ellis Davidson and Chaudhri, 2006: 10).

Nonetheless, the meaning of these symbols had been coined from a male perspective, and this patriarchal point of view excluded or manipulated the female figure in fairy tales. Thus, female characters were consigned to traditional stereotypes and symbols that were used to reassert female submission. As Donald Haase (2004) remarks, the history of the male appropriation of folk tales is the history of the male's attempt to control female power (16).

As a reaction, once feminist literary criticism developed, one of its main aims was the revision of the symbols and imagery established by the patriarchal system. This process of revisitation is called 'revisionist mythmaking' by her ideologist, Alicia Ostriker, and consists in the selection of classical fairy stories' patterns in order to create innovative ones. As Zipes suggests, "[t]he purpose of producing a revised fairy tale is to create something new that incorporates the critical and creative thinking of the producer and corresponds to changed demands and tastes of audiences" (1994: 9). Ostriker (1985: 317) explains that this revisionist strategy in fairy tales is related to the creation of a new female identity outside the mythical canons proposed by an eminently patriarchal society, as will be shown later on. Therefore this process was strongly linked to the subversion of traditional motifs in order to offer new interpretations of fairy tales.

The technique of subversion was also closely related to the postmodernist paradigm emerging in the literary world. One of the key points of postmodernist literature was the questioning of texts and the values they conveyed. From a postmodernist point of view, reality is linguistically and socially constructed and there is no such thing as an original or purely individual point of view. According to Hal Foster (1985: vii- xiv), the author can only deploy symbols and imagery in accordance with the interpretation and usage established by the society to which the author pertains. That is, although the author can create his own vision of the world, this latter will always be based on his society's

symbols and imagery. Postmodernist authors supported this perspective, which had been already anticipated by Modernism, and based themselves on it to claim for the inclusion and visibility of minority interpretations of reality that had been marginalized because of the influence of the mainstream view imposed by society.

As regards the question of the representation of women, the lack of legitimacy or visibility given to females beyond traditional stereotypes was denounced by feminist writers as a form of repression and manipulation. In this respect, the few examples of female representation were manipulated by the traditional canons, and as a consequence of this process of manipulation a misrepresentation of femininity finally developed. This idea could be extrapolated to some classical fairy tales that maintain a system of stereotyped gender roles; the meaning attributed to the image of the heroine in classic fairy tales is connected with the emphasis on traditional female qualities such as innocence, inexperience and passivity.

As Linda T. Parsons states, these stories portray women as "weak, submissive, dependent, and self-sacrificing while men are powerful, active, and dominant." (2004: 135-154). Passivity is related to the tradition of female objectification fostered by patriarchal conventions. In classical fairy tales, female characters are beautiful and defenceless objects that accept the conventions and interests of the patriarchal system. Hence, the subversion of symbols and imagery in general could be considered a rebellion against patriarchal control. When analyzing the process of revision and subversion of patriarchal motifs in fairy tales, parody appears as the most relevant postmodern strategy so as to denounce the implicit sexism that they contain. Linda Hutcheon defined 'parody' as "a form of repetition with an ironical critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity" (2000: xii). In this sense, one might

understand that parody may represent a critique of the prevailing view of other texts based on the effects of repetition and irony.

Anyhow, the combination of postmodernism and feminist activism gave as a result in the literary arena the rise of feminist writing and criticism. According to Patricia Waugh, "postmodernism is usually presented as an art of the marginal and the oppositional and as such would seem at last to offer women the possibility of identity and inclusion" (1989: 3). Diverse feminist writers such as Anne Sexton, Angela Carter, Emma Donoghue, Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood or Tanith Hill, all of them belonging to the second half of the twentieth century, were classified as postmodern authors, since these female writers created a kind of literature focused on innovation from the perspective of writing as a woman. They started to re-write classical fairy tales subverting and re-evaluating their classical motifs by means of parody and irony, thus questioning the classical literary tradition. In spite of the relevance of all these authors in the development of postmodernist fairy tales, I would contend that there is a certain level of difference among them, related to their different historical and critical backgrounds.

In the mid-twentieth century, Anne Sexton started to write poetry and her more prolific period coincided with the second wave of feminism. The emergence of the feminist movement fostered the development of a feminist writing which turned into one of the weapons for change in women's status in society. Generally speaking, feminism in literature attempted to give legitimacy and visibility to a new female construction of reality and identity beyond the image imposed by the dominant culture. In relation to Sexton, some authors, like Shiho Fukuda, have stated that this poet could not be considered a feminist author in a strict sense:

> "A close examination of *Transformations,* [...], indicates that Sexton was as yet unable to present a strictly feminist point of view at the time she penned its lines. On the verge of making the transition from a traditional to a feminist manner of writing, she appears to have hesitated before making the final commitment to what for her would be a new style. It was as if she viewed her surroundings and her times through a spy glass fitted with a set of lenses that were colored by the tenets of the patriarchal society at one end and by the feminist movement at the other. Until she could bring into focus what she viewed, it can be said that she would continue to be hesitant to adopt a purely feminist point of view" (2008: 31-32).

In this respect, Sexton's poetry focused on satirical representation of old-fashioned female roles which highlighted the impossibility of her female figures to transcend their reality. Thus, some of her heroines describe Sexton's own internal conflicts as victim of the so-called 'American dream'. Although the poetry in her revolutionary work *Transformations* (1971) is not lyric and confessional, in contrast with other of her poetic works, but focused on the rewriting of Grimm's fairy tales, it could be suggested that this work is also influenced by her way of thinking about traditional female aspects associated with her own experience of being a woman such as beauty, the family, and morality. As Fukuda explains, "*Transformations* may have been based on model stories that were selected at random and based solely on the impressions they had made on her psyche" (2008: 32). In this collection of poetry, one of her most well-known books, Sexton questioned the patriarchal association of the female with certain performative qualities in traditional heroines of fairy tales such as innocence, submission, passivity, obedience and sacrifice, considering them simple projections of male fantasies or what was called 'the Other' by writer Simone de Beauvoir [1].

[1]For a definition of the 'Other' see Simone de Beauvoir (1989).

Feminist writers belonging to the second wave feminist current challenged the demands of the patriarchal culture that imposed female behaviour from a male perspective. Consequently, Sexton rejected the idea of female objectification by means of the manipulation and distortion of classical female stereotypes in her poetry, more specifically by portraying classical heroines negatively. Thus, she was considered one of the first writers who highlighted the conservative point of view of fairy tales and was able to subvert it to encourage female readers in their acquisition of a new female identity. Diane Wood Middlebrooke and Diane Hume George restated this idea in the introduction to Anne Sexton's book of selected poems: "Sexton was the modern woman poet who first gave extended voice to issues of female identity" (2000: xviii).

Nonetheless, it can be argued that feminist doctrine, which influenced Sexton's poetry, evolved with the passing of time and finally interconnected with different currents of poststructuralist criticism giving way to academic postfeminism or "third wave feminism" in the late nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties[2]. Meanwhile, during the period of the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies, feminist writers deployed literature as a weapon; writing became itself a way of reflecting and denouncing social, political and cultural gender inequalities. Thus, women were portrayed as victims of the submission to male power and society in general. Waugh asserts (1989):

> [f]eminism seeks a subjective identity, a sense of effective agency and history for women which has hitherto been denied them by the dominant culture [...]

[2] Stephanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon (2009:76) consider that postfeminism has intermingled with different cultural waves leading to the development of other postfeminist currents. In the context of popular culture, it is possible to talk about the postfeminist current that conceived the idea of "girl power" promoted by the Spice Girls and Madonna during the nineteen nineties. "Girl power" was defined as the re-appraisal of femininity – including the stereotypical symbols of feminine enculturation such as Barbie dolls, make-up and fashion magazines – as a means of female empowerment and agency. Similarly, Genz (2010: 109) proposes other kind of postfeminist current based on female representation in the HBO sitcom *Sex and the City*: "postfeminist portrayals of the singleton still feature backlash myths that record the perceived neuroses of the single, childless, thirty-something career woman. In *Sex and the City*, a fashionable urbanite laments that the 'the issue of unmarried, older women is conceivably the biggest problem in New York City".

> Certainly, for women in the 1960s and early 1970s, 'unity' rather than dispersal seemed to offer more hope for political change (9,13).

As mentioned above, a new feminist criticism emerged as a movement which underlined an alleged second wave feminists' failure. Female writers belonging to the late nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties whose works were written under the influence of postfeminism realized that the inequalities already mentioned were based on the notion of gender identity, which had been constructed in accordance with the postulates of an eminently patriarchal society. According to Maite Escudero- Alías (2009) "[...] postfeminism does not envision a female subject who is endowed with a stable and essential identity, instead, it attends to how the category of "woman" is produced through discursive strategies of power [...] (30).

These female writers rejected the use of literature as denunciation because they wanted their literature to be interpreted as stories about a plurality of human subjects regardless of their gender, developing concepts such as their unstability and fluidity in accordance with the poststructuralist notion of the subject. The very fact that literature saught to emphasise socially constructed gender differences weakened its authority over the matter. Thus, it was difficult for women's literature to be seen in such light. As Genz and Brabon point out:

> [a] critical as well as temporal distance is established between the 'newfeminists' – who discard what they see as uptight, establishment feminism (or, in some cases, 'victim feminism') in favour of ambiguity and difference- and the 'old' second wavers who hold on to a dated, old-guard and rigid feminism (2009: 14-15).

Authors such as Angela Carter were highly influenced by second-wave feminism as well. In fact, similarly to Anne Sexton, she was primarily concerned with investigating her own internal experience of being and becoming a woman. However, this British author was also considered controversial due to her support of pornography and the

excessive violence represented in her texts, two reasons for Carter to be associated with the marginal side of the feminist movement. As the specialist in contemporary women's writing and gender theory, Sarah Gamble, affirms:

> "Her relationship with feminist critics and women's studies departments, for example, was an extremely ambivalent one. One of the most controversial areas of her work as far as feminists are concerned is both her apparent support for pornography, and her graphic depictions of violence against women in her writing, [...]" (1997: 4).

Furthermore, the author always rejected the dichotomy male/female based on the pre-established roles of man as an aggressor and woman as a victim. In addition, Carter's work characterized itself for her feminist criticism of the patriarchal system and her challenge against the literary female representation as the 'Other'. Subsequently, the concept of the 'other' would be developed and also subverted into a positive category by the postfeminist current. The academic Rosemary Tong states that "[p]ostmodern feminists take de Beauvoir's understanding of Otherness and turn it on its head. Woman is still the Other, but rather than interpreting this condition as something to be transcended, postmodern feminists transcend its advantages" (2008: 219).

Taking into account Tong's statement, it could be suggested that Angela Carter's revision of fairy tales, concretely her collection of short stories *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), advances the postfeminist idea of subverting the role of the female 'Other' and thus, challenges the sexist constructions of gender imposed by patriarchy. This author wrote parodies of classical heroines who finally revealed themselves as subversive female representations involved in polemical and sordid plots that do not fit the passive, innocent and defenceless role of the traditional heroine proposed by the original fairy tales. Carter emphasized the refusal of her female characters to be classified as victims of the patriarchal system, in contrast with the

emphasis of second wave of feminism, embracing sexuality, still mostly within a heterosexual scenario, as something pleasurable and exciting, even if it implies violence. Thus, she advanced the idea of "consent", so important in Donoghue, and repeatedly deconstructed the binaries masculine/feminine and human/animal. Therefore, one might understand that Carter belonged to second wave feminism but advanced postfeminist ideas. According to Lorna Sage (1994):

> [i]n order to escape victimisation, women have to divest themselves of the trappings of conventional womanhood; Mercy, pity, peace and love, and especially chastity and motherhood, go out the window: in come ruthlessness, lasciviousness, the separation of sexual pleasure from procreation, and delight in the pain of others (119).

On her part, Emma Donoghue could be clearly considered a post-feminist author in the collection *Kissing the Witch* (1997), as will be argued further. This Irish author belongs to a generation of feminist and lesbian writers who were influenced by the backlash against feminism denounced by authors like Susan Faludi during the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties[3]. As in Carter, Donoghue's retellings of fairy tales can be interpreted as transgressing generic and sexual boundaries; a social critique to the binary terms imposed by the patriarchal system such as human/animal male/female, masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality Apart from this social denunciation, the increasing visibility of gay and lesbian studies within the academic and literary fields helped to revitalize feminism in general. As Julie Abraham (1996) asserted:

> The gay and women's liberation movements produced new publications and new publishers committed to lesbian and gay material, offering new means of access to a new audience committed to challenging dominant social hostility and claiming authority and even power (xiv).

[3] On this, see Susan Faludi (1991).

Thus, lesbian writers, like Emma Donoghue, understood postmodern literature as an artistic framework to make lesbian identity visible. According to this premise, it might be affirmed that the common motive in Donoghue's work is to make usage of fairy tales to give legitimacy to lesbian literary representation, which had frequently been invisible or considered something alien. As theorist Diana Fuss remarks: "the society attempts to suppress homosexuality by relegating the lesbian and gay man to the invisible domain of 'phantom other'" (qtd in Palmer, 1999: 2).

Consequently, Donoghue's female characters are not represented as victims of heteronormativity or aggressive authorities. Besides, her treatment of female characters is not only addressed to the articulation of lesbian identity, given that the author's tales deal with different kind of relationships among women, and also men, such as lesbian, filial and heterosexual. In this sense, it is possible to see the influence of the author's lesbian condition in her work but this one is not interpreted as political rebellion against the dominant ideology. According to Emma Donoghue (2010), "[a]ll writing has a political impact, and I am aware that doing interviews, etc., is my form of lesbian activism, but the motive for writing is not propaganda: I just want to tell stories in a language as powerful as I can make it" (qtd in Aktari, 262).

Overall, one might suggest that Anne Sexton, Angela Carter and Emma Donoghue share a common ground, all of them denouncing by means of their fairy stories the oppression suffered by women in terms of gender. As writers, they try to fight against the traditional myths of gender constructed socially through the creation of new models of femininity based on subversion and parody. All these authors propose different kinds of female representation in each story or poem written; even so, each piece of work encloses an overall vision about femininity and has to be interpreted as a unity. In this respect, the reader might understand that the subversion of female stereotypes is meant

to underline the idea that these old-fashioned female roles do not have much to do with contemporary reality. Nevertheless, as will be seen later, it is still possible to notice a certain mythical base and a social and ideological function that remain in them.

Furthermore, they emphasized the controversial topic of sexuality as a relevant female issue, dealing with the idea of sex as a struggle of power among men and women and giving legitimacy and visibility to taboo subjects such as incest, female sexual desire or lesbian identity. Each one of these feminist writers focused on the exploration of gender and sexuality employing postmodern literary strategies such as subversion and parody to change not only female roles but fairy tales' conservative atmosphere. Although all of them, implicitly or explicitly, parody female roles, stereotypical backgrounds and symbols so as to transmit a feminist or postfeminist message, it could be suggested that Anne Sexton's and Angela Carter's use of subversion also criticizes in a veiled way some of their own experiences as women. On the other hand, although Emma Donoghue also employs the literary strategy of subversion in order to reflect her female experiences in her writings, she does it by stressing her condition of lesbian rather than of woman.

Taking into account their use of parody and subversion of female stereotypes and of mythical backgrounds and symbols in general so as to spread a feminist or postfeminist interpretation of fairy tales, the aim of this essay is to analyze how Anne Sexton, Angela Carter and Emma Donoghue satirize and subvert traditional characters and imagery contained within fairy tales in order to attack patriarchal conventions of the feminine within a feminist, post-feminist and lesbian interpretative framework. In doing so, I seek to illustrate how the authors of *Transformations* (1971), *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) and *Kissing the Witch* (1997) develop a feminist, postfeminist and lesbian interpretation of three well-known classical fairy tales: "Beauty and the Beast",

"Snow White", and "Sleeping Beauty". Before starting the analysis and comparison of the tales, I would like to refer to some general narrative strategies used by these authors.

First of all, both Anne Sexton's *Transformations* and Angela Carter's and Emma Donoghue's collections reinterpret classical fairy tales following a mythic structure similar to that of classical fairy stores. According to this structure, one might conclude that these subverted fairy tales follow the literary pattern of Joseph Campbell's hero's quest[4]. At the beginning the heroine is not happy due to her lack of self-identity. Indeed, in some cases she is not conscious of her lack of self-identity. Subsequently there is a change in her life, which can be positive or negative, but it helps to start a process of self-reflection which ultimately leads to the development of her own identity and her liberation. It could be affirmed that the intention of this structure is to highlight the female character's figure in a global sense, assuming that some of these female characters are immersed in a process of transformation or acquisition of knowledge of themselves. This literary pattern is found in Carter's and Donoghue's works; however, it changes substantially in Sexton's rewritten fairy tales. In spite of the fact that Sexton's heroines are involved in circumstances that could be considered a turning point in their lives and immerse themselves in a self-discovery journey, at the end of Sexton's poems it is possible to observe that the female protagonists have not acquired any knowledge from these experiences.

Each one of these writers makes a different usage of narrative strategies in accordance with the approach they adopt. For example, Donoghue refuses the use of the external narrator and prefers to employ narrative strategies like personal or internal narration. This strategy, known as auto-diegetic narration, fosters the figure of the female protagonist as 'teller of her own story'. This could also be interpreted as a way

[4] On this, see Joseph Campbell (1972).

of emphasizing the idea of subversion against patriarchal discourses written in the first person that attempt to reproduce a female perspective. As Marie Von Franz points out:

> [q]ue una figura femenina sea la protagonista de un cuento no significa necesariamente que el cuento hable de los problemas de las mujeres, porque muchas historias que describen las aventuras o los sufrimientos de una mujer han sido contados por los hombres y son proyecciones de su imaginación, expresan sus aspiraciones y dificultades para vivir su lado femenino y para entrar en relación con las mujeres (qtd in D'Agostino, 1998: 8).

On their part, Sexton and Carter employ the external narrator so as to focus attention on the process of transformation or acquisition of knowledge instead of on the female protagonist herself. Thus, they create an ironic atmosphere in which women in the stories kept being 'the other' but they may take advantage of their unfair marginal status. In this respect, the fact of not having an active role allows them to reflect on themselves. Both narrative strategies are a way of rebelling against the imposition of a male perspective in the original literary sources. As Susan Sniader Lanser (1992) argues: "if women are encouraged to write only of themselves it is because they are not supposed to claim knowledge of men or 'the world' [...]' (19).

Another remarkable issue is the way of naming the heroines. Both Sexton and Carter deploy the names of the classical tales in order to emphasize the relevance of their meanings. Names such as 'Beauty', 'Snow White' or 'Briar Rose' are clearly meant to remark the most valued qualities described in classical female protagonists and promoted by the patriarchal discourse. Donoghue, however, dissociates herself from this literary strategy and prefers to envision her heroines as anonymous characters; this is a way of reinforcing the female character's feeling of lack of identity. Moreover, there is a tendency in fairy tales to be set in an ahistorical and timeless scenario in which references to past, present and future are not completely accurate. However, Sexton's

and Carter's tales show references to contemporary elements and culture that are alien to fairy tales. Their intention may be to approach fairy tales to a twentieth century setting in order to highlight that fairy tales can be developed from a contemporary perspective and that they are actually related to society due to their performative and ideological value. In Carter's specific case, the contemporary references to technology are not so explicit as Sexton's ones due to the proliferation of gothic elements in, for example, "The Courthip of Mr Lyon". Due to this mixture of both aspects, a certain confusion arises when one attempts to identify them separately. In her collection, Donoghue attempts to represent fluid identities. The structure of the collection, more tightly woven than the other two, enforces this idea of fluidity. In *Kissing the Witch*, the female protagonists become in turn both listeners to another's story and then tellers of their own, while the previous narrator now becomes the listener. Thus, discursive power is democratically shared, everyone is given her voice and all of them keep changing status and position. This embedded structure intertwines all the female protagonists in a nicely woven pattern: 'Who were you before...? And .... said, Will I tell you my own story? It is a tale of a/an... (Donoghue, 1997)[5].

Sexton's collection of poetry follows the structure of the traditional fairy tales by beginning the stories with the introduction of the female protagonist through allusions to earlier periods of her life such as birth, childhood and adolescence: "[o]nce there was a lovely virgin called Snow White. Say she was thirteen" (Sexton, 1971: 3)[6]. Hence, the abundance of verbs in the past tense. However, throughout the texts one might observe a relevant repetition of expressions such as 'once there was', 'once more' or simply 'once' which do not appear to evoke a previous period of time. In fact, they can be considered linguistic parodies of the classical 'once upon a time'. The aim of the parody

[5] Further references to *Kissing the Witch* will be to the 1997 Harper Collins edition.
[6] Further references to *Transformations* will be to the 1971 O U P edition.

regarding the past is to criticize the patriarchal elements that compose fairy tales. In this respect, the most radical point of view is Carter's one. The author portrays the past intermingled with references to the present that provide a feeling of being inside the female protagonists' memories and thoughts through a stream of consciousness technique: "[f]ather said he would be home before nightfall. The snow brought down all the telephone wires; he couldn't have called, even with the best news. The roads are bad. I hope he'll be safe" (Carter, 1981: 41)[7]. In spite of the references to a past time in their fairy stories, there are no complete descriptions of specific moments from the heroines' childhoods, only a few scattered memories. On the contrary, the tales' plots usually begin at the key point in which the female character is discovering her female identity in accordance with the patriarchal canon. According to A.M. García Dominguez (2004), "[...] todos los cuentos toman como punto de partida el momento crítico en este adoctrinamiento, el despertar sexual, el descubrimiento del propio deseo, el inicio de la dinámica sujeto/objeto" (4).

In general, the introduction and treatment of the female characters in all the works could be described as unconventional. At the beginning, the heroines are portrayed as having the same characteristics as in classical fairy tales: obedient, passive and beautiful. So, heroines in these contemporary fairy tales are initially portrayed in accordance with the traditional scheme of the 'Innocent Persecuted Heroine', a phrase coined by Aleksandr Isaakovich Nikiforov (1927). As Steven Swann Jones (1993) explained:

> Nikiforov divides the female fairy tale into "two predominant types of schemes: Tales about winning (mainly of a groom, but with a completely different morphological composition of episodes than in the [male] fairy tale about winning);

[7] Further references to *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* will be to the 1981 Penguin edition.

[and] Tales about the sufferings of the innocently persecuted (maiden or woman)" (13).

Although Sexton's, Carter's and Donoghue's heroines do not know exactly who they are, they appear not to feel comfortable in their roles, except for Sexton's heroines who do not have the ability to understand their female condition. In contrast with Sexton's female protagonists, Carter's and Donoghue's ones promptly abandon the traditional scheme to develop progressively a subversive behaviour that will take them away from the stereotypical role of the female. The female protagonists described in Carter's and Donoghue's adaptations of the fairy tale *"La Belle et la Bête"* (1756) are a clear example of subversion of a stereotype.

To conclude this introduction I will now describe the structure of this work, which is divided into three chapters: the first chapter will analyze Angela Carter's "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" and Emma Donoghue's "The Tale of the Rose". The second chapter will examine Anne Sexton's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", Carter's "The Snow Child" and Emma Donoghue's "The Tale of the Apple". Finally, the third chapter consists in an analysis of Sexton's "Briar Rose" and Donoghue's "The Tale of the Needle". My main focus of analysis is going to be based on the examination of the heroines, secondary male and female characters and symbols and imagery.

First Chapter: Carter's "The Courtship of Mr Lyon"/ Donoghue's "The Tale of the Rose"

In this first chapter, I will analyze and compare Angela Carter's and Emma Donoghue's revision of the literary source, "Beauty and the Beast", written by Madame Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont. The structure of this analysis will focus on the comparison between Carter's feminist retelling, "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" and Donoghue's postfeminist and lesbian retelling, "The Tale of The Rose"[8]. In the original fairy tale, the heroine can be interpreted as an archetype of female submission to male dominance, symbolized in the figure of his father and subsequently in the beast. Carter's and Donoghue's heroines seem also to recreate submission to male dominance but it will actually lead them to discovering their own selves; in the case of Carter's heroine the discovery of her sexual desire and in Donoghue's one the disclosure of her lesbian condition, as will be explained in the following analysis. As mentioned above, the female protagonist of Angela Carter's tale "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" does not seem initially to dissociate herself from the heroine created by Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont: the story starts by describing a snowy landscape and a young girl who is waiting for her father's return. The way in which the protagonist is physically represented is similar to that of the classical heroine 'Snow White': "[t]his lovely girl whose skin possesses that same, inner light so you would have thought she, too, was made all of snow, pauses in her chores in the mean kitchen to look out at the country road" (41).

[8] In spite of the fact that Angela Carter's collection, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* includes another story, called "The Tiger's Bride", which can be considered another reworking of the original "Beauty and the Beast", the influence of Gothic fiction in this story has drastically changed its structure. Owing to these changes, the tale can be considered a very loose adaptation of the classical fairy tale and for this reason it will not be analyzed.

At first glance, this framework could be not considered too relevant; it is quite evident that Carter exaggerates the beginning of a well-known fairy story such as 'Snow White' to create an ironic atmosphere. In this sense, Carter's female protagonist is a parody of the traditional girl introduced in fairy tales, given that she is portrayed as fragile, ethereal and completely devoted to her home and family. Subsequently, the young protagonist will lose all these, in theory, virtues for a woman and during her stay in London she will acquire some less proper qualities for a heroine in a classical fairy tale. Nonetheless, Carter is being forceful in her message; the female protagonist abandons those qualities that transform her into a stereotype to turn into a real woman with faults in her personality:

> [s]he was learning, at the end of her adolescence, how to be a spoiled child and that pearly skin of hers was plumping out, with high living and compliments. A certain inwardness was beginning to transform the lines around her mouth, those signatures of the personality, and her sweetness and her gravity could sometimes turn a mite petulant when things went not quite as she wanted them to go (49).

According to Beth Ellen Reith, "[i]n Carter's 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' Beauty's fallibility and, therefore, her humanity is shown through her becoming spoiled when her father becomes rich again and they move to the city" (2006: 23). Personal features like petulance seem not to last too much in the heroine when she returns to the Beast's castle, once the search for her identity has been concluded.

Likewise, Emma Donoghue's female protagonist of 'The Tale of the Rose' is introduced as a rich young girl who has to do housework and work in the fields once her father has lost all his riches and servants. Paradoxically, one might suggest that she feels proud of her new condition. These new circumstances do not turn her into a fragile heroine but they allow her to explore aspects of herself that she did not know until then: "It gave me a strange pleasure to see what my back could bend to, my arms could bear.

[...] My hands grew numb and my dark hair tangled in the sunshine. I was washing my old self away" (28). It seems that Donoghue subverts the classical stereotype of the heroine in fairy stories to her female protagonist's benefit.

Similarly to the traditional fairy tales, in Carter's 'Beauty and The Beast' the heroine's family is one of her essential mainstays. Bettelheim (1989) affirms that the classical fairy story written by Madame Le Prince de Beaumont offers a positive perception of the paternal figure given that, "the father (willingly or unwillingly) causes his daughter to marry; relinquishing his oedipal attachment to his daughter and inducing her to give up hers to him lead to a happy solution for both" (129). Nevertheless, the figure of the father in Carter's tale, which is given a lot of prominence, is quite negative. Much more so than in Donoghue. He is described as a selfish man who has ruined himself and his family: "[a]nd not even enough money left over to buy his Beauty, his girl-child, his pet, the one white rose she said she wanted; the only gift she wanted, no matter how the case went, how rich he might once again be. Beauty had asked for so little and he had not been able to give it to her" (41-42). However, his most negative aspect is his refusal to break the oedipal relationship with her daughter, giving as an excuse the love that he feels for her. When the father is taken prisoner by the Beast, he does not raise any objections with regards to her beloved daughter's replacing him in the castle with the Beast. This fact could be understood as the father's attempt to relinquish the oedipal relationship with her daughter. But, taking into account the father's behaviour, the most plausible interpretation is that he wants to take advantage of his unhealthy attachment to his daughter by leaving her as hostage with the beast:

> [b]ut when, as they sipped their brandy, the Beast, [...] suggested, with a hint of shyness, or fear of refusal, that she should stay here, with him, in comfort, while her father returned to London to take up the legal cudgels again, she forced a smile. For she knew with a pang of dread, as soon as he spoke, that it would be so and her visit

> to the Beast must be, on some magically reciprocal scale, the price of her father's good fortune" (45).

Therefore, it is difficult to understand the blind obedience that Carter's heroine feels for her father, whom she admits to love with fervour. The fact that she submits to him voluntarily can be interpreted as an exaggeration or mockery of the overvalued role of the paternal figure highlighted by the patriarchal discourse in fairy tales. Indeed, Beauty is being manipulated by a 'sense of obligation' imposed by the patriarchal conventions represented in the figure of her father.

> [y]et she stayed, and smiled, because her father wanted her to do so; [...] Do no think she had no will of her own; only she was possessed by a sense of obligation to an unusual degree and, besides, she would gladly have gone to the ends of the earth for her father, whom she loved dearly" (45).

At the end, the heroine is the one who relinquishes that relationship of dependence on his father when she prefers to leave London and return to live with the Beast in the castle. This can be considered a cathartic moment because for the first time she is not acting on her father's wishes: "[b]eauty scribbled a note for her father, threw a coat round her shoulders. Quickly, quickly, urged the spaniel soundlessly; and Beauty knew the Beast was dying" (49). Thus, the anonymous female protagonist changes a relationship based on submission for another one focused on the idea of equality.

The reason why Carter criticizes fiercely the figure of the father in "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" is that he symbolizes a patriarchal archetype which Carter wants to attack openly. According to Sage, "[f]ather and male figures and patriarchal power are attacked, deconstructed, shown to be hollow or vulnerable in Angela Carter […]" (1994: 155). As mentioned earlier, Angela Carter is a writer who was doubly influenced by the second wave of feminism and anticipates some of the facets of postfeminism. For example, second wave feminism is there when she illustrates male figures as dominant

subjects who attempt to control women's wills. However female ones are not portrayed as victims of male dominance at all. Most of the stories collected in *The Bloody Chamber* show how Carter advances certain postfeminist ideas since she rejects the acceptance of the female role of victim. In fact, the author struggles with this archetype transforming her heroines into independent and dominant beings in the sense that these females become ruling subjects of their own lives.

This last perception is similar to what Donoghue reflects in her collection *Kissing the Witch*. This author also describes her female characters as subjects who are in the middle of a process of transformation. Nevertheless, Donoghue offers a different representation of the father in "The Tale of the Rose", where the heroine's father could even be considered a kind of 'involuntary male helper'. In spite of the fact that the father is involved in similar circumstances, whose consequences cause her daughter to stay with the beast in a castle, in this case the father shows a deep feeling of remorse: "Daughter, he said in a voice like old wood breaking, can you ever forgive me?" (31). At the same time, the heroine's reaction is very similar to that of Carter's heroine; both sacrifice themselves for their fathers' lives. However, in 'The Tale of the Rose', blind obedience to her father is not the only reason why the female protagonist decides to live with the Beast in the castle. She gives her consent because he is eager to find 'something improbable' (27) that may allow her to escape her fate as a woman: "Now you may tell me that I should have felt betrayed, but I was shaking with excitement. I should have felt like a possession but for the first time in my life I seemed to own myself" (31).

It is necessary to remember here that the intention of Donoghue in this tale is to narrate the process of discovery of the heroine's lesbian identity in an allegorical way. So, at the beginning of the story the female protagonist is conscious that there is a

different ‘aspect’ within her that separates her from her sisters: “It was not that I was better than my sisters, only that I could see further” (28). She is unable to identify that aspect or feeling because of her lack of self-knowledge. For this reason, when the heroine asks her father for a red rose just opening, she is unconsciously asking for help from her father in order to discover her true identity: “I knew that nothing could keep the wind out, so I asked for a red rose just opening” (29). Thus the figure of the father can be interpreted as a male helper given that he is the one who gets the rose, in contrast with Carter’s male protagonist in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, and introduces his daughter to the beast’s world, the idyllic place where she will finally fully live out her lesbian identity. In this sense, one might consider that the heroine’s settlement in the beast’s world thanks to her father’s help and her return to the castle without his permission is the symbolic way that they select to break off their oedipal attachment. This positive portrayal of a male character has to do with Donoghue’s refusal to victimize her female characters in order to denounce patriarchal hegemony in terms of gender and sexual orientation. The rejection of victim status seeks to illustrate a new female status related to the acquisition of power and control in accordance with postfeminist postulates. As Sarah Gamble (2001) affirms: “[v]ery generally speaking, however, postfeminist debate tends to crystallise around issues of victimisation, autonomy and responsibility. Because it is critical of any definition of women as victims who are unable to control their own lives” (43- 44).

As for the maternal figure, in classical fairy tales it is classified into different types. All classical fairy stories follow the same pattern according to which the maternal figure is dead, evil, or irrelevant for the development of the plot. Furthermore, all these stories share a common ground regarding the presentation of the relationship among female characters, which in most cases is negative. Concretely, in the original literary “Beauty

and The Beast" written by Mme de Beaumont, the figure of the mother or any maternal figure is not even mentioned throughout the tale. Carter's and Donoghue's adaptations are similar to the original tale in this respect. As Bettelheim (1989) pointed out, "it is the father who causes the heroine to join the Beast; she does it because of her love for or obedience to her father; overtly the mother plays no significant role. In animal-groom stories, by contrast, mothers are outwardly absent" (283-284). However, Carter includes a reference to the heroine's mother which hints at a negative link between mother and daughter: "[a] resplendent hotel; the opera, theatres; a whole new wardrobe for his Darling, so she could step out on his arm to parties, to receptions, to restaurants, and life was as she had never known it, for her father had ruined himself before her birth killed her mother" (48). The fact that the author uses the verb 'kill' to talk about the female protagonist's birth does not seem to be accidental; indeed it makes it clear that the heroine is, voluntary or involuntary, her mother's murderer. It could be suggested that the choice of the verb 'kill' to refer to a death caused by giving birth is another strategy of Carter so as to parody the male tendency to manipulate language and to portray the relationships between females in traditional fairy tales as *liaisons* focused on the feeling of envy.

On her part, Donoghue's 'The Tale of the Rose', and other stories of the same author, subvert this concept of female envy by means of the transformation of evil female characters into female helpers. The Irish author's use of the figure of the female helper, which contrasts with either the submissive or wicked female character favoured in classical fairy tales, is quite relevant. In 'The Tale of the Rose', the heroine finally creates a new identity based on everything that she has learned individually and through the help of a fellow female character. By possessing a double identity as the beast and as a woman, this fellow female character can be considered a representation of a

maternal figure, a love partner from a lesbian perspective, or the maternal *abject* in contrast with the female protagonist in accordance with the postulates of the theorist Julia Kristeva.

According to Kristeva (1982), the abject could be defined as something that we expel from ourselves but at the same time we feel attracted towards (4-6). Therefore, the concept has to do with a process by means of which an element belonging to ourselves is excluded and identified as 'Other'. In the original literary source, 'Beauty and the Beast', the beast represents the 'Other' and, thus, a relationship of binary opposition is established between the female protagonist and the beast in different aspects but, above all, regarding gender. As Meyre Ivone Santana da Silva (2004) explains: "French feminists as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray have examined the role played by the set of dichotomies produced by the phallocratic culture in perpetuating women's subordinating position" (1). When Angela Carter wrote 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon', one of her intentions was to parody these gender polarities throughout the story so that the reader realizes the uselessness of their existence, as finally happens at the end of the tale when both protagonists become subjects in an egalitarian relationship: "Mr and Mrs Lyon" (51). In Carter's tale, the beast can be considered the abject, but more concretely the abject is what 'it' represents. The beast symbolizes the female protagonist's sexual desire and this feeling is precisely what the heroine rejects but at the same time she feels attracted towards it.

From the moment in which the heroine meets the beast in Carter's tale, she appears to have ambiguous feelings towards it: it seems that the female protagonist feels attracted to 'it' and for this reason she suggests that 'it' is beautiful but at the same time the heroine feels fear; this is due to the fact that 'it' represents something that scares her, her own sexual desire, owing to her lack of knowledge about female sexual instincts.

Thus, it is clear that Beauty confuses her sexual attraction with fear for the beast's condition or her own condition. Indeed, the female protagonist is scared of having a sexual relationship with it because she associates sexual intercourse and its animal condition with something strange, dirty and violent in accordance with patriarchal discourse: "[i]t was in her heart to drop a kiss upon his shaggy mane but, though she stretched out her hand towards him, she could not bring herself to touch him of her own free will, he was so different from herself" (48). According to Marina Warner (1991), "[t]he daughter fears the sex relation and sees the defloration as something dirty, she sees the sexual relation with abjection" (4). In this respect, Carter emphasizes another of her intentions when she wrote the tale: to criticize those patriarchal conventions that describe women as sexual objects and victims of male sexual desire. In Carter's and Donoghue's tales it is possible to observe that at the beginning the female protagonists are sexually objectified by means of the beasts' gazes, although both reach the status of subjects once they have finished the search for their identities. This process of objectification will be subsequently developed in detail in the analysis of "Snow White"'s and "Sleeping Beauty" rewritings.

Turning to Donoghue's 'The Tale of the Rose', the anonymous heroine also feels attracted and repulsed by the beast in this tale. However, again, this fear is based on something different from the beast's identity, though she is not aware of that at the beginning. By considering the beast as the 'other', the female protagonist is also recognizing 'it' as her opposite: "I sat in my satin-walled room, before the gold mirror. I looked deep into the pool of my face, and tried to imagine what the beast looked like" (35). The female protagonist feels attracted to the beast although, indeed, 'it' represents everything that she refuses to accept about herself, such as her lesbian orientation. The acceptance and reaffirmation of her homosexuality is tremendously important so that

she can finally see her own reflection. Therefore, in "The Tale of the Rose" a new kind of binary relationship is found which is not observed in Carter's tale; the opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality, in accordance with Michel Foucault's depiction of homosexuality as the "other' of heterosexuality (Escudero-Alias, 2009: 38).

So far, it has been possible to observe that both Carter and Donoghue make use of traditional characters associated with fairy tales to subvert them according to the message that they want to transmit. Now, the main focus of this analysis is going to concentrate on the subversion of classical symbols associated with the popular imagery of fairy tales. As was already mentioned in the introduction, Bettelheim supports that there is a general agreement that myths and fairy tales speak to us in the language of symbols that represent unconscious content (1989:36). Subsequently, in the postmodern adaptations this imagery belonging to the traditional tales has lost its original meanings. Both writers, Angela Carter and Emma Donoghue, deploy a highly symbolic language in order to call the reader's attention. More specifically, Carter's use of language goes beyond the literary canon imposed by patriarchal hegemony in fairy tales. The English author introduces symbols and fantasy elements in her collection to refer explicitly to those issues that repress the heroine's sexual development. Rosemary Jackson (1981) stated that Carter's consideration of fantastic elements in literature was enclosed within a very particular perception: "she sees in fantastic literature a kind of return of the repressed. Whatever cannot be fitted into the norms and codes of established culture, whatever is taboo according to those norms and codes, finds expression in the fantastic" (qtd in Day, 7). Donoghue's tales, on the other hand, are deceptively simple in their use of language: short sentences and not an excessively literary diction. Nevertheless, the difficulty lies in her constant metaphors, hidden meanings and sexual innuendos, which lead the reader to seek a different interpretation beyond the explicit or classical ones.

In the classical fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast" the rose symbolizes love, perfection, the virginity and femininity of the Beauty. According to Christina Bacchilega (1997), "[t]his association of woman with nature paradoxically produces the artifice of 'femininity' both as naturalizing make-up and as representations of womanly 'essence'" (9). In "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" the meaning of the rose is the same as in the original story, but it can also be suggested that it represents the female protagonist's discovery of her sexual desire. The fact that the father attempts to steal the rose may symbolize the father's intention to maintain the oedipal relationship with her daughter. However, as the rose is offered by the beast on its own accord, this point implies that the beast is going to be the guide by means of which the heroine will acknowledge her sexual instincts, a similar role to that of Donoghue's beast in 'The Tale of the Rose'.

Nevertheless, in the 'Tale of the Rose', the symbol of the rose utterly changes its classical meaning so as to fit the new postmodern tale. Throughout the tale, the female protagonist seeks tirelessly for a rose. The symbol of the 'rose just opening' in Donoghue's tale can be interpreted as the representation of the female protagonist's search for identity and her subsequent discovery of her lesbian sexual orientation. The heroine compares her wishes with a red rose just opening which is, according to her, improbable. The female protagonist does not know exactly what she wants but she does not feel completely fulfilled with her life. Even so the heroine tries to resign herself to her fate because she is conscious of the impossibility of changing her life. The simple fact of meeting the beast changes the whole course of her life. However, although the alleged beast guides the heroine in her search for identity and self-knowledge, she has to discover the truth on her own. The narrator-protagonist reveals her lesbian identity to the reader by means of an explicit reference to the motif of the rose: "I saw lips red as a rose just opening. I saw that the beast was a woman" (39). In this manner, the heroine

finds ‘something improbable and perfect’ in an ‘unconventional happy ending’. As Garcia Zarranz (2005) explains, “[b]oth women become an alternative family unit, breaking away from the heterosexual norm”(28).

Finally, the rose could also be identified with the achievement of happiness in both fairy stories. In Carter’s tale the female protagonist describes herself as ‘happy’ while living in the castle with the beast:

> Or, well wrapped up, she wandered in the walled garden, among the leafless roses, with the spaniel at her heels, and did a little raking and rearranging. 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 (47).

However, Beauty abandons this idyllic place to go back to her father. The reason for this desertion may be related to the permanence of that unhealthy bond that still links her to her father. The female protagonist will not feel completely fulfilled until she relinquishes her oedipal attachment and thus she can freely accept her sexuality. Once this fact happens and Beauty abandons London and her father, she urgently returns to the castle in order to live with the beast as Mr and Mrs Lyon: “Mr and Mrs Lyon walk in the garden; the old spaniel drowses on the grass, in a drift of fallen petals” (52). These events are in some aspects similar to what happens in Donoghue’s tale. When the female protagonist arrives at the cottage with her family, she feels happier but not totally fulfilled: “[t]here were weeds and grasses but no roses. Down by the river, where I pounded my father’s shirts white on the black rocks, I found a kind of peace” (28-29). The heroine feels comfortable amongst nature but she cannot feel fulfilled without discovering her identity. At the end of the story, her return to the cottage, which represents the intermediate state of her process of self-discovery, allows her to reflect on everything that she has discovered about herself in the beast’s castle and finally accept her sexual identity; now she can live with her beloved freely. Thus, the

female protagonist achieves her long-awaited fulfilment: "I struggled to guess these riddles and make sense of our story, and before I knew it summer was coming again, and the red roses just opening" (40).

Another classical motif such as the book is also found in both stories. As in classical fairy tales, the book keeps being a symbol of power by means of which it is possible to obtain knowledge. In "The Courtship of Mr Lyon", the author subverts this meaning with the purpose of parody. Carter introduces references to *conte de fées*, a kind of literature from the seventeenth century whose main focus was the education of the female readers in those aspects related to morality. In the tale, Beauty talks about these stories without any interest, highlighting the sense of uselessness of these tales whose plots do not reflect real women or life at all:

> She ate it as she browsed in a book she had found in the rosewood revolving bookcase, a collection of courtly and elegant French fairy tales about white cats who were transformed princesses and fairies who were birds. Then she pulled a sprig of muscat grapes from a fat bunch for her dessert and found herself yawning; she discovered she was bored (46).

Through the introduction of references to this kind of books, Carter mocks these stories written to indoctrinate young women about appropriate gender values and attitudes related to the morality imposed by patriarchal assumptions. By contrast, Donoghue introduces the symbol of the book in her tale in accordance with its classical meaning: the acquisition of knowledge and consequently the achievement of power. Female achievement of knowledge means loss of power for the patriarchal system. Bearing in mind Donoghue's postfeminist ideology, one might conclude that the Irish author reflects the female protagonist's process of empowerment in this plot parallely to what happened in Western society during the eighties and nineties. Subsequently, Donoghue also parodies how the tradition of portraying powerless heroines has caused insecurity

in those new heroines who achieve power: “The first book I opened said in gold letters: You are the mistress: ask for whatever you wish. I didn’t know what to ask for” (34).

Finally, it is possible to observe that the symbol of the mirror is employed in the two postmodern tales differently. Regarding this symbol, there are multiple interpretations about its meaning but in classical fairy tales, the most relevant meanings focus on the entrance into a fantastic world, which Carter and Donoghue do not develop in their stories, and the question of identity. In this respect, the first time that the mirror is mentioned, Carter just refers to this element giving it a positive connotation. Beauty is glad to observe the transformation that has been produced in her facial traits. She is happy to see herself become a sexual woman. This change is a symbol for her development from stereotype to real woman: “[s]he smiled at herself with satisfaction. [...] You could not have said that her freshness was fading but she smiled at herself in mirrors a little too often, these days, and the face that smiled back was not quite the one she had seen contained in the Beast's agate eyes” (49). As happens in the castle, the heroine feels happy to be in London where she has achieved knowledge of herself. In this manner, it could be suggested that the female protagonist is almost finishing her process of discovery and acceptance of her sexuality. Even so, Beauty is not totally fulfilled because she has not broken the oedipal attachment with her father and this prevents her from living her own life with the beast. In this sense, the mirror turns into a key symbol because, in front of it, the heroine realizes she has to be the one to abandon her father and return with the beast, who has been her guide in her symbolic journey of self-discovery.

In the case of Donoghue’s tale, one might suggest that the author deploys the mirror’s symbol so as to denounce the lack of visibility of lesbian identity. As mentioned before, the female protagonist has not found her self-identity yet and

therefore she cannot identify herself in the mirror: "I looked in my mirror, and saw, not myself, but every place I'd never been" (28). This fact could be caused by the absence of a maternal figure in the story, as was mentioned before. As D. W. Winnicot states in his revision of Lacan's 'mirror stage' theory:

> the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face. That is, when the mother and the infant are in a symbiotic relationship before the mirror stage and the child has not drawn its boundaries between self and (m)other yet, the mother's face functions as a mirror of the self. If the infants do not have mother to look at, then '[t]hey look and they do not see themselves' (qtd in Aktari, 2010: 287).

However the heroine sees herself in the beast's image and initially identifies 'it' as the 'other': "Because I thought the beast must be everything I was not: dark to my light, rough to my smooth, hoarse to my sweet" (35). Nevertheless, by the end of the tale, the protagonist discovers that "the other" is nothing but "the same". Similarly to Carter's tale, the mirror becomes again an element full of symbolism because in front of the mirror, the female protagonist does not see her own reflection but her future. The mirror allows her to choose her future: she can stay in the cottage and not see herself reflected in the mirror anymore. In terms of symbolism, this would mean that the female protagonist will never be able to obtain a clear image of herself because her decision will fragment her personality or, on the contrary, she can go back to the castle and see her image at last by means of the beast's eyes. Finally, the heroine decides to go back to the castle with the beast, which means that she decides to accept her lesbian condition.

Therefore, one might conclude that the analysis and comparison of both authors' tales present a series of similarities and differences. This fact may have to do with the different stages of feminism that influence both authors' context. At first glance, Angela Carter and Emma Donoghue introduce female protagonists who are initially

playing archaic female roles and this is the reason why they feel uncomfortable, misunderstood and unfulfilled at the beginning of the stories. This lack of resignation with regards to the female role imposed by the patriarchal system has different aims for the two authors. Carter wants to highlight the fact that women feel sexual desire similarly to men and Donoghue wants to give visibility to a lesbian identity which had never been portrayed in fairy tales before. Seemingly, the two authors' purposes appear unlike but, indeed, they are denouncing how women are being obliged by the double standard of morality and heteronormativity to renounce unacknowledged parts of their personalities. This fact hinders their development and the acquisition of self-knowledge. In spite of the fact that the heroines' process of self-discovery is being interfered by patriarchal assumptions, they are never depicted as victims of male oppression, given that Carter and Donoghue have always rejected female victimization, which was one of the most prominent features of the second wave of feminism. In this sense, their female protagonists know how to subvert the roles imposed by patriarchy to their own benefit.

Turning to male representation, both postmodern tales depict clear representations of men in accordance with the perception of masculinity of each one of the authors. Carter describes the patriarchal character from a negative perspective, in the sense that he possesses negative qualities regarding his treatment of the female protagonist, whom he does not respect and attempts to submit. However, in other tales, the English author also describes male characters that are the antithesis of a male patriarchal figure, so that she is anticipating the postfeminist idea that not all men are patriarchal monsters against women. This idea is also going to be developed in Donoghue's tale, where she rejects male misrepresentation and does not depict Beauty's father as a male oppressor. The Irish author seems to be very influenced by the idea that gender is only a social

construction and, for this reason, she is prone to describe all her male and female characters equally as subjects.

Regarding female portrayal, there is a substantial difference between both authors. Similarly to classical fairy tales, Carter employs the role of the absent mother to parody female envy whereas Donoghue attempts to take to pieces this false myth in a different way. She introduces the figure of the female helper that, in "The Tale of the Rose", encloses a maternal figure and a love partner. One might suggest that this positive female representation is a parody of the popular secondary female roles in traditional fairy tales: the wicked stepmother or the evil witch. Likewise, the symbols and imagery deployed have been used with a parodic or subversive intention. Their purpose is to give new meanings to classical symbols. In this sense, this strategy is used to emphasize female issues that have been taboo until a recent period: the fact that a woman can feel sexual desire, the fact that a woman might love another one or that she may need to acquire knowledge out of the domestic realm.

Second Chapter: Sexton's "Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs"/ Carter's "The Snow Child/ Donoghue's "The Tale of the Apple"

In this second chapter I will analyze and compare these writers' revision of the classical fairy tale entitled "Snow White" and written by the brothers Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm (1812). The original literary source deals with a young female protagonist whose name highlights the enormous importance given in this story to her physical beauty. However, this beauty is not a godsend for her, since it triggers her stepmother's envy and the subsequent flight of the heroine from the castle towards an unknown fate. This journey can be symbolically interpreted as her journey from childhood to maturity. According to Midor Snyder, female journeys develop in a different way than the male ones:

> Unlike sons who set off to win their fortune, who are journeying toward adventure, the daughters are outcasts, running away. The princes usually return at the end of the story, bringing treasure and magical brides. Princesses do not return; they must forge new lives, new alliances (qtd in Windling, 1997: 10).

Analyzing the concept of subversion in the postmodern adaption of this fairy tale, it could be suggested that Sexton's and Carter's retellings do not portray a heroine in the middle of a process of self-discovery who finally subverts patriarchal conventions. These postmodern female protagonists are characterized similarly to classical ones but described from an ironic, critical perspective.

Concretely, Anne Sexton's rewriting of "Snow White", entitled "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", depicts the female protagonist following the literary pattern of Nikiforov's 'innocent persecuted heroine' and, furthermore, other features such as passivity, tendency towards superficiality, lack of self-knowledge and awareness will

finally transform her, we guess, into an evil queen like her stepmother. As Shandi Wagner (2011) points out, "Snow White is no longer the heroine who, after many trials, achieves her dream, but rather an empty-headed virgin who is beautiful and vain and little more" (111). With this protagonist Sexton's intention is to criticize the values of patriarchal society by highlighting an obsolete female stereotype. It is necessary to remember that Sexton is influenced by the second wave feminist current. In this sense, authors such as Robin Morgan have affirmed that feminist postulates are firmly against the female role promoted by Western society: "the role all women are forced to play in this society, one way or another: apolitical, unoffending, passive, delicate (but delight by drudgery) *things"* (qtd in Gamble, 2001: 31). This female stereotype is interpreted by Sexton as a misrepresentation of the female image and, for this reason, Sexton satirizes this prototypical heroine by means of the exaggeration and parody of her qualities. The author emphasizes common aspects related to feminine beauty comparing them with contemporary elements of every-day life from a sardonic perspective, reinforcing their excessive importance, fragility and lack of usefulness: "cheeks as fragile as cigarette paper,/ arms and legs made of Limoges,/ lips like Vin Du Rhône,/ rolling her china-blue doll eyes/ open and shut" (3). According to these similes, the female protagonist is considered fragile as cigarette paper and Limoges enamel, and very similar to a 'doll' because of her appearance and passivity.

Carter's tale "Snow Child" also describes the female protagonist as an innocent heroine: beautiful, fragile and submissive to male wishes: "As soon as he completed her description, there she stood, beside the road, white skin, red mouth, black hair and stark naked" (91). In this respect, Carter does not subvert the female character but her fate. In opposition to the Grimm Brothers' ending, Carter's young protagonist is not rewarded for following the female model of behaviour imposed by the patriarchal authority. In

fact she is punished for it by means of her death and subsequent rape. The fact that the Count rapes her dead body can be understood as a parody of women's passivity and objectification in sexual intercourse, as promoted by the patriarchal authority: a voiceless and inert female body that is violently penetrated and is unable to feel any kind of sexual pleasure. In this manner, Carter criticizes those patriarchal assumptions that prevent women from behaving actively during the sexual act. In fact, Carter supports Sade's conceptions of sex, sadism and pornography.

At first, Carter's controversial way of thinking about sex caused a certain commotion in feminist circles who consider that sexual practices such as sadism and pornography humiliate and objectify women. As the sociologist Amitai Etzioni asserts, "[...] we regard pornography primarily as a medium for expressing norms about male power and domination which functions as a social control mechanism for keeping women in a subordinate status, [...]" (qtd in Diamond, 1980: 686). Similarly to second wave feminism's view, Carter interprets pornography as a definited framework in which women become objects of male sadism but instead of qualifying men as aggressors and appeal to the discourse of female victimization, she prefers to highlight the figure of the woman as a female sexual subject. For this reason, Carter supports authors like Sade because he defends the female sexual right: "He treats all sexual reality as a political reality and [...] declares himself unequivocally for the right of women to fuck as aggressively, tyrannously, and cruelly as men" (qtd in Sheets, 1991: 633). According to this perspective, the fact that the child melts at the end of the tale can also be interpreted from a parodic point of view; thus, Carter ironizes about the possible future of female stereotypes in fairy tales: if these female archetypes do not develop, they will be obsolete and will disappear in the same way as the innocent persecuted heroine's body disappears in the snow in Carter's postmodern tale.

Despite having, apparently, the same physical qualities of the classical Snow White and of her mother, whose fragility is the origin of her death at the beginning of the story, Emma Donoghue's female protagonist promptly dissociates herself from this female role by showing qualities than make her different from the other fragile characters: "Though I was so much smaller than she was, I was stronger" (44). In fact, Donoghue's heroine is the only one of the three Snow Whites who begins a physical and psychological journey by means of which she finally acquires self-knowledge and personal fulfilment. In contrast to Sexton's heroine, Donoghue's anonymous protagonist is not forced to escape from the castle because of the danger of being killed by the queen's hunter; indeed this heroine is not afraid of the queen thanks to her strong personality and bravery: "That night I heard many feet hammer a track to my father's room. I flattened my face into my pillow. I waited. No sound, cutting through the dark castle; no final word for me. The linen lay against my eyelids, still dry" (51). It could be suggested that one of the reasons for her flight from the castle to the forest has to do with a feeling of loyalty to his father: "I decided not to stay to see what the day of the funeral would bring, which courtiers' eyes would shine with flattery, and which glitter with violence. I decided to leave it all to her, and leave her to it" (20). Paying attention to this last sentence, one might observe how this flight is also related to her lack of self-knowledge, which does not let her accept the attraction that she feels for her stepmother, as will be analyzed later on. During her stay in the woodsmen's cottage, she takes a new role as housewife, which allows her to show her physical fortitude, in opposition to Sexton's heroine, and to avoid reflecting on herself and her relationship with the new queen

> "I guessed how to cook the food they threw on the table, gathering together from the shattered jigsaw of memory everything I must have seen the castle servants do ten thousand times. Gradually I learned how to keep hunger at bay and disease from the

door: all the sorcery of fire and iron and water. Hard work no hardship to me; it kept the pictures at bay. Whenever I slackened or stopped to rest by the fire, I was haunted by the image of my stepmother" (53).

In general, the female protagonist seems to feel comfortable in this new role but not completely fulfilled. This lack of fulfilment could be the reason why her stepmother's images assail her at moments of rest. The possible interpretation of the heroine's behaviour will be developed subsequently when analyzing the queen's character.

Overall, it could be affirmed that the three Snow White's figures described by Sexton, Carter and Donoghue present a similar behaviour to that of the traditional heroines' one, although in Donoghue's tale, these old-fashioned qualities are only shown at the very beginning of the story. Passivity, virginity, submission, fragility and, above all, beauty are qualities that guarantee their status as objects. Beauty has always been a dominant theme in fairy tales; in fact it is a quality that has been rewarded with a traditional happy ending but at the same time this feature has also been related to negative aspects such as danger, victimization and a process of female objectification by the patriarchal discourse. According to Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz (2003: 711), "the feminine beauty ideal is viewed largely as an oppressive, patriarchal practice that objectifies, devalues, and subordinates women".

Although in Sexton's, Carter's and Donoghue's postmodern tales, the beauty motif has lost its conventional positive consideration to acquire a negative meaning, beauty continues being a remarkable aspect in these stories due to the influence of different discourses that indoctrinate women to value themselves only in terms of the way they are perceived[9]. Therefore, one might conclude that in these Snow White's adaptations, heroines are still the products of a process of female objectification. In accordance to

[9] On the relevance of beauty, see Naomi Wolf (1991).

Laura Mulvey's theory (1975), the process of objectification is based on the representation of women as static images, attractive objects to be gazed at, whereas male characters seem to be the active subjects and possessors of the gaze. In spite of the fact that Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze was developed to be applied to the narrative forms of mainstream cinema, one might suggest that several aspects of Mulvey's arguments about female representation can be extrapolated to literature. Bearing in mind these statements, it could be said that in fairy tales, heroines are portrayed as mere signifiers for the male other, catering to his fantasies and pleasures.

Thus, it could be said that Sexton's and Carter's intention is to satirize this patriarchal model of femininity in accordance with the second wave feminist's assumptions that foster the rejection of female objectification. In Donoghue's case, her heroine can only be seen as a female stereotype at the very beginning of the tale. Owing to the female protagonist's quick dissociation from this stereotype, there are few examples of objectification in "The Tale of the Apple". Anyhow, the treatment of their female protagonists as passive beings or even objects that project male desires fosters the exploration of new gender polarities such as passive/active and object/subject. Keeping with Mulvey's theory, "[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/ female" (19).

In Sexton's narrative poem, the first example of objectification of the female protagonist is observed through the hunter's figure. In this story, the hunter decides finally to let Snow White go and take a boar's heart to the Queen instead of the heroine's one. One might suggest that the reason why the hunter allows the female protagonist to run away to the forest has to do with objectification. Owing to her beauty, Snow White is seen by the hunter as an object of desire, something too beautiful to be destroyed. Against all forecasts, Sexton's heroine is able to keep herself

alive in the forest for weeks until she finally finds the seven dwarfs' house. In spite of the fact that some critics like Bettelheim have affirmed that the dwarfs' attitude to the female protagonist in Grimm's is based on a relationship of brotherhood: "Were not men in any sensual sense — [...] loved the girl as they would a sister," (1989: 11), it is quite clear in Sexton that during the first meeting among Snow White and the seven dwarfs they watch her sleep astonished by her beauty: "The dwarfs, those little hot dogs,/ walked three times around Snow White,/ the sleeping virgin. They were wise/ and wattled like small czars./ [...] They stood on tiptoes to watch/ Snow White wake up" (5). Contrary to the Brothers Grimm's tale, Sexton offers an explicit view of the dwarfs as masculine sexual beings by referring to them as 'hot dogs'. As mentioned above, Anne Sexton's Snow White has been portrayed similarly to the beautiful heroines in classical fairy tales and, consequently, the dwarfs cannot avoid feeling attracted towards her given that her image corresponds with a male fantasy. As Mulvey explains (1975), "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (19). Thus, these little men look at the female protagonist as an object of desire and this scopophilia produces in them an intense pleasure. The reference to their appearance like 'czars'[10] symbolizes the fact that they automatically become the owners of the heroine, making her their housekeeper, thus reinforcing her condition of object.

The control that the dwarfs exert over the female protagonist is explicitly evident in their warnings against opening the door while they are away: "Beware of your stepmother,/ they said./ Soon she will know you are here./ While we are away in the mines/ during the day, you must not/ open the door" (5-6). Taking into account the

[10] According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2009), *Czar* is the most common form in American usage and the one nearly always employed in the extended senses "any tyrant" or informally, "one in authority."

issue of objectification, one might suggest that their orders signify the control they exert over their prized object. Beyond this interpretation, from a feminist point of view, these warnings are also a representation of the patriarchal voice that is trying to submit the female will. Yet, Snow White does not pay attention to their orders and allows the disguised queen into the house, not only once but three times: "and once more the queen dressed in rags and once more Snow White opened the door" (6). Indeed, from a feminist perspective, this fact could be interpreted as an act of rebellion against patriarchal authority but knowing the heroine's personality, the most plausible interpretation has to do with Snow White's lack of awareness. Sexton underlines this lack of awareness through the use of references to American popular culture such as 'she was as full of life as soda pop' (6), 'Orphan Annie' or 'the dumb bunny' (7). Thus, the poet criticizes the lack of knowledge of the female protagonist, who is absolutely anodyne and unable to acknowledge the danger that lies ahead of her.

Once the queen, apparently, manages to kill Snow White, the protagonist, who is compared to 'a gold piece' (7), is set in a glass coffin, which reinforces the heroine's identification with an object of ornamentation: "The seven dwarfs could not bring themselves/ to bury her in the black ground/ so they made a glass coffin/ and set it upon the seventh mountain/ so that all who passed by/ could peek in upon her beauty" (7). This idea is consolidated with the prince's apparition who, completely astonished at Snow White's beauty, convinces the dwarfs to take her to his kingdom: "He stayed so long his hair turned green/ and still he would not leave./ The dwarfs took pity upon him/ and gave him the glass Snow White —/ its doll's eyes shut forever — /to keep in his far-off castle" (8). Thus, the prince turns into the new owner of the female protagonist.

The fall of the coffin while the heroine's body is carried in it causes the chunk of apple to fly out of the female protagonist's throat; Snow White revives in order to become the prince's possession and to highlight the fact that she has not acquired any knowledge or suffered any transformation due to her experiences. According to Wagner (2011):

> "no character, least of all Snow White, matures by the end of the poem. As far as intelligence and common sense goes, she is still that thoughtless doll she was at the beginning of the tale. In fact, a man has rescued her from every trial: the hunter from the original death sentence, the dwarves from the disguised stepmother's trickery, and the prince (or rather the clumsiness of his men) from the final trickery of the apple" (116).

At the end of the tale the heroine lives, in theory, the classical happy ending, which is simply an extension of her stepmother's flimsy life, an existence based on being valued for her beauty in accordance with patriarchal assumptions and against other valuable features: "Meanwhile Snow White held court,/ rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut and/ sometimes referring to her mirror/ as women do" (8). Despite not having acquired any knowledge, the female protagonist achieves her own fulfilment yet she is the same vacuous girl that she was at the beginning of the poem.

In Angela Carter's tale 'Snow Child', female objectification is a central theme. As Stella Bolaki (2010:187) argues, one of Carter's aims is to expose the objectification of women under patriarchy. In this tale, the heroine is not initially portrayed as a subject and subsequently objectified by means of the male gaze but is represented as an object from the beginning. Firstly, the young female protagonist appears suddenly after the Count has enumerated all those features that embody his perfect model of beauty: "I wish I had a girl as white as snow", says the Count. [...] I wish I had a girl as red as blood". [...] I wish I had a girl as black as that bird's feather" (91). The fact that the

heroine is the product of a male character's fantasy instead of that of a female character, induced by her desire to be a mother, as happens in the original literary source and in Sexton's and Donoghue's adaptations, highlights the idea that this girl is clearly a male projection that reflects the Count's desire: "she was the child of his desire and the Countess hated her" (92). This interpretation is supported by Nelcis Alves Coelho Silvestre (2011), *"[d]iferentemente dos Irmãos Grimm, a versão de Branca de Neve, produzida por Angela Carter The Snow Child, nos apresenta uma jovem criada pela fantasia libidinosa de um homem e não do desejo feminino de ser mãe"*[11] *(6).*

However, Angela Carter goes beyond this idea by representing the child not only as an object of erotic spectacle. The author shows that the male protagonist is enjoying a fantasy created by him; it could be affirmed that the Count considers the heroine as his creation and this fact provokes his narcissism and his sexual arousal. As Mulvey (1975) affirms, "[t]he man controls the [...] fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle" (20). In this sense, the way in which the young female protagonist is named and portrayed in the story is remarkable. On the one hand, she has no name to indentify her and she is referred to with generic terms such as 'the girl' or 'she' (91-92) and, on the other hand, the way in which she is dealt with by the Count as if she were an inert item - "the Count lifted her up and sat her in front of him on his saddle [...]" (92) – are devices that underline the young female protagonist's condition of object.

As for Donoghue's "The Tale of an Apple", it does not present so many examples of female objectification as in Sexton's and Carter's adaptations. This may be due to

[11] "Contrary to the Brothers Grimm, the adaptation written by Angela Carter 'The Snow Child' introduces a young female created by means of the libidinous fantasy of a man and not because of the female wish of being mother" *(my translation)*.

the female protagonist's refusal to be portrayed as an object to a large extent. Therefore, one might suggest that the difference among Donoghue's heroine and Sexton's and Carter's ones is that these latter accept their submission to male control. One of the examples of female objectification in the Irish author's tale is overtly observed when the king enters the room where the queen and the female protagonist are trying jewels on each other:

> "Once when he came to her room at night he found us both there, cross-legged on her bed under a sea of velvets and laces, trying how each earring looked against the other's ear. Two such fair ladies, he remarked, have never been seen on one bed. But which of you is the fairest of them all?" (47).

Taking into account the classical tale, it could be suggested that the king is looking at his wife and daughter from a paternal perspective. He looks at the two most important beings of his life and feels tenderness to see that they get on well. Nonetheless, by adding the question of which of the two is the most beautiful at the end of the paragraph, he reveals his condition of patriarchal authority symbolized by the mirror's voice in Grimm's original fairy tale. Again the issue of objectification of these two female characters and their conversion into objects of erotic pleasure arises. Selen Aktari (2010) goes beyond this idea with this explanation:

> "[...] it is implied that the King takes pleasure from the sight of the queen's and his daughter's sitting on the same bed. Obviously, this is a remark which hints at the sexual desire that can arise between women and which can also become a pornographic spectacle for the male gaze" (300).

Thus, not only female beauty but also same-sex female relationships are objectified, given that here they target male fantasies.

The same process of objectification is carried out by one of the woodsmen when the heroine finds their cottage in the forest and meets them: "One of them asked what was

in my skirts to make them so heavy, and I said, Knives, and he took his hand off my thigh and never touched me again"(52). The woodsman's action of touching the female protagonist's thigh while he asks her about such as intimate issue implies that he initially looks at her as an object of desire. However, the heroine's quick answer suggests a possible defence in case the woodsman attempted to assault her sexually. Thus, the warning of an active defence by the female protagonist makes the woodsman stop looking at her as an object and start respecting her as a subject.

Returning to Aktari's statements about the king's male gaze, one might deduce that through the fantasy of the male protagonist he can feel the sexual desire that is going to develop between the two female characters. The concept of fantasy as an imagined scene in which something imperceptible may make itself visible was developed by Elizabeth Cowie in her article 'Fantasia' (1984)[12]. Thus, the heroine's comparison of her appearance with that of her stepmother has a double interpretation: "We looked at each other, she and I, and chimed in the chorus of his laughter. [...] You see, her hair was black as coal, mine as ebony. My lips were red as hers were, and our cheeks as pale as two pages of a book closed together (47-48). On the one hand, this description can be analyzed as a process in which the female protagonist is objectifying the queen from a sexual perspective. In spite of the belief that objectification is only a practice carried out through the male gaze, the rise of the lesbian movement has socially shown that sexual objectification is also part of female desire. According to Sheila Jeffreys (1993): "Another fundamental concept of male supremacist as well as lesbian therapy is that of objectification. [...] The new lesbian sex industry and the new lesbian therapies have undertaken the task of constructing objectifying sex for lesbians" (54). In this sense,

[12] "The word derives through Latin from the Greek term meaning to 'make visible'. However, rather than a notion of revelation, making visible what we would not otherwise be able to see- as with a microscope allowing us to see bacteria etc invisible to the 'naked eye'- fantasy as a term has come to mean the making visible, present, [...] of what can never directly be seen" (Cowie, 1984: 75).

one might suggest that Donoghue reappropriates a technique considered traditionally masculine to give visibility to lesbian representation. However, taking into account the depiction of Donoghue's heroine and the emphasis on the description of little physical details, another possible interpretation can be that this depiction is more focused on the heroine's need to recognize eroticism in another female when they mirror each other. In general, there is a difference with the king's gaze, which holds both together as the "other' as will analyzed later on.

According to the previous analysis of female objectification, it can be stated that the relationship established between the male characters and the female protagonist in these fairy tales corresponds with a kind of *liaison* in which the male figures, in representation of patriarchal authority, attempt to submit the heroines, with or without success. Anyway, all the female protagonists suffer the consequences of this attempt since they are forced at one time or another to take a secondary role regarding the male figure. Owing to the tendency of these male characters to dominate female ones, the logical thing would be to think that their portrayals in these tales are going to be completely negative. Nevertheless, male figures appear to be ambiguous in this sense. These three works show the male characters' condition of superior beings to the female protagonists but, at the same time, it is possible to observe different attitudes in their treatment of the female protagonists on some occasions. As Fukuda argues (2008), in Sexton's collection of poetry, there is a certain level of ambiguity as regards the portrayal of the male role: "[...] in *Transformations*, Sexton is inconsistent in her portrayal of the male role. In some of the poems she interprets it according to the feminist ideals of the time while in others she upholds it according to the existing ideology of the patriarchal society" (45). More specifically, in Sexton's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", there are three different references to male characters: the

hunter, the dwarfs and, finally, the prince. Seemingly, these three male references only share a common ground: Snow White's objectification. However, all of them have saved the heroine's life at some point, intentionally or accidentally, as in the prince's case. Anyway, these male actions are influenced by the patriarchal vision of the Brothers Grimm original literary source, in which the heroine is not able to survive on her own. This idea is closely linked to the patriarchal belief "man is busy, the woman idle" just as was denounced by Simone de Beauvoir (1989: 258).

In spite of their condition of Snow White's 'saviors', it is not possible to assure that they are the helpers of the female protagonist. The identification of the male characters as helpers is not completely accurate according to the definition of 'helper' coined by Joseph Campbell and taking into consideration that Sexton's postmodern revision is still based on Campbell's theory of the 'monomyth' (1949). This author defined the 'helper' as a protective figure that can take a wide variety of forms, such as wizard, an old man, a dwarf, a crone or a fairy godmother, and whose main aim is to help the hero in his journey. In Sexton's tale, the heroine begins a physical journey from the castle to the forest in which she is indeed helped by the hunter and the dwarfs subsequently. These latter ones offer their house and protection to the female protagonist but regarding her symbolical journey of self-knowledge, none of the male figures help Snow White to maturate psychologically. Rather the contrary, they foster her view as an object: "It's a good omen, they said, and will bring us luck" (5). From a humanist point of view, one might understand that this tendency to objectify and submit the heroine to their control corresponds to an excessive overprotection. In this sense, Snow White's submission could be understood as a strategy of protection by the male characters. In accordance with patriarchal authority, females are beings who are not

able to protect themselves. By means of the objectification and dominance of the female character, they are protecting her in the only way that they know.

On the other hand, from a patriarchal perspective one might suggest that this promotion of the females as objects corresponds to the male characters' personal interest. If the heroine achieves knowledge of herself, she will be aware of her state as an object and will abandon her secondary role. This fact would be harmful for the male figures in the fairy tale, who would lose their powerful position. This belief of men as dominators of females is developed by the second wave feminist postulates and is based on the idea of woman as a secondary being at the service of the others, as Waugh explains:

> "Women's experience, historically, has been defined almost entirely through interpersonal, usually domestic and filial, relationships: serving the needs of others. In existential terms her identity exists largely as being-for-others (needing to please; narcissistic vanity; mothering as institutionalized in western social practices; deriving security from intimate relations with others) rather than being-for-herself (1989: 43).

In this respect, the tendency of Sexton's male characters to oppression and exertion of power over women seems to be the reason why the American poet portrays them negatively. As was mentioned previously, the fact that Sexton refers to the dwarfs as 'hot dogs' or 'czars' highlights the idea that they are beings controlled by their sexual desires and are prone to deal with Snow White as their possession. On his part, the prince's character appears to follow a similar tendency. Although the happy ending suggests that the female protagonist and the prince are going to have a relationship of complementary partners, given that the heroine becomes 'the prince's bride' (8), the truth is that the classical happy ending transforms Snow White into the prince's "trophy wife" and matches perfectly her status of object of ornamentation.

Contrary to Sexton, Donoghue's "The Tale of the Apple" apparently introduces a positive overall portrayal of the male characters: the king and the woodsmen gang. Paying attention to the king's figure, who is the female protagonist's father, it is possible to observe an explicit oedipal attachment which even suggests an initial sexual contact between them: "As I grew and grew, he bounced me on his lap till our cheeks scalded" (45). Indeed, the relationship between father and daughter has not always been like that, since at the beginning of the tale, the father is an absent figure because the heroine is brought up by the maid until the death of this latter one: "After the maid, too, died in her turn, he found me wandering the drafty corridors of the castle and took me up in his stiff ermine arms" (44-45). Anyway, the inappropriate behaviour previously mentioned ends up when the heroine becomes a woman and the king's new wife arrives at the castle: "But the day there was a patch of red on my crumpled sheet, my father brought home a new wife" (45). From a certain perspective, one might understand that the king's new marriage is the way for the father to break this attachment with her daughter. Yet, from a different perspective, the arrival of her daughter's first period leads the king to stop the ambiguous relationship that he maintains. One might suggest that the idea is to avoid a possible offspring from an incestuous relationship with the arrival of a new woman with whom the king can satisfy his sexual desire.

In the classical fairy tale, "Snow White", the wicked stepmother begins to feel threatened by the stepdaughter once she becomes a female rival for her: in other words, when Snow White turns into a woman, with her first menstruation, an event which Donoghue explicitly refers to. Contrary to the original literary source, Donoghue's protagonist is the one who initially feels jealousy at her stepmother, to such a point that she considers her father's new wife as her enemy. One might suggest that the heroine's feelings against her stepmother have been developed because of the accepted

knowledge, prejudices and patriarchal promotion of female rivalry and jealousy fostered by fairy tales. In this sense, it can be interpreted that Donoghue criticizes the negative influence of classical female rivalry in fairy tales by representing it as a prejudice that affects the relationship between the queen and her stepdaughter. It is evident that the female protagonist has not overcome the oedipal attachment with her father yet and consequently, the female protagonist attempts to take back her previous status over and over: "He curled up on his side like a bear troubled by flies. I stood by his bed, on and off, but he was past caring" (49). As Karen E. Rowe (1993) maintains: "In throes of oedipal ambiguities, a young girl who still desires dependency seizes upon her father‟ s indulgent affection, because it guarantees respite from maternal persecutions and offers a compensating masculine adoration" (qtd in Aktari, 214). Subsequently the heroine will forget her father's figure by falling in love with the queen: "My father was only a tiny picture in my mind, shut away like a miniature in lock" (53).

Indeed, both the king and the woodsmen are not represented as perfect men who help the female protagonist in her journey of self-discovery, since they are portrayed rather as imperfect beings who make some mistakes in their behaviour towards the heroine. This treatment of the male characters has to do with Donoghue's postfeminist approach. The development of postfeminism is directly related to the acquisition of a new status by women during the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties. The new female role turns patriarchal male behaviour into an obsolete attitude. The loss of their patriarchal attitudes transform men into troubled beings who have lost their male identity and hegemonic social role. This is also the origin of a 'New Man' who personifies a revision of patriarchal masculinity, as Catherine Mackinnon explains: "He embodies the sort of anti-sexism which is characterized by his attempts to form non-

oppressive relationships (2003: 13). It could be suggested that Donoghue describes these 'new men' in her fairy tales and this fact has a positive purpose: to emphasize glimpses of men's imperfection in order to humanize them and to leave aside their possible condition of dominant and oppressive males. In spite of some misunderstandings with the woodsmen, she refers to them in this way: "Though squat and surly, with earth in every line of their faces, these were not bad men, and considering how little my condition entitled me to, they treated me royally" (52). This statement shows that they try to avoid objectifying and submitting her. Nevertheless, in this tale it would not be accurate to refer to the submission of the female character given that the story deals with an exchange of interests: she keeps house for the woodsmen, whereas they allow her to stay in the cottage.

At the end of the tale, the woodsmen try to oblige her to abandon the kingdom, pleading that it is a strategy of protection against the queen: the heroine will be more protected in another place where her condition as princess will be taken into account: "But lie down, one said, you are not well yet. Until you were poisoned we had been forgetting who you are, said a second; now we're taking you to another kingdom, where they'll know how to treat a princess" (58). This fact can be interpreted as an indirect way of protecting the female character from her own erotic feelings for her stepmother: in other words a patriarchal authority attempting to submit the heroine to heteronormativity, as will be analyzed further. In a general sense, one might conclude that this measure has to do with a patriarchal and paternalistic feeling that asserts the alleged inability of women to take care of themselves. In 'The Tale of the Apple', the female protagonist defies their decision: "I made them set me down, and I got out of the box, deaf to their clamor" (58).

Regarding Angela Carter's portrayal of the male role in her work, one might affirm that what actually differentiates her work from the two others is the stress on the critique of the patriarchal male stereotype. The patriarchal figures portrayed in her tales can be perfectly qualified as inhuman. In this sense, one might suggest that Carter initially accepts the second wave feminist's concept of man as an aggressor coined by feminist activists such as Susan Brownmiller: "Like other second-wave feminists, Brownmiller viewed [...] all women as potentially passive victims and [...] all men as potential aggressors" (qtd in Gerhard, 2001: 76). Nonetheless, Carter usually subverts this male figure in her fairy tales so that he is finally defeated by the postmodern female character. Furthermore, Carter admits the possibility of other forms of masculinity that are not patriarchal and do not submit and oppress the female characters. These non-patriarchal male figures fit a previous version of the 'new man' conceived in the early nineteen seventies which will be the origin of the 1980s 'new man'[13]. In her tale "The Bloody Chamber", for example, the author introduces the French Marquis' character, who is described as a monster, so as to compare him with the piano tuner's character, who is portrayed as a male helper. In Carter, the monsters, the beast, the wolf, are eventually humanized. However, the introduction of different patterns of masculinity personified in more than one male character is not a technique developed in 'Snow Child'. In this adaptation, nevertheless, there is a certain level of ambiguity in the portrayal of the male role, similar to the one found in Sexton's and Donoghue's tales.

At first glance, in this tale the male role can be defined as negative because among some of the qualities attributed to the male protagonist, the Count, are the tendency towards superiority, power, dominance and even a certain degree of violence. According to Kevin A. Boon, the association of masculinity with these series of

[13] According to Genz and Brabon, "[o]riginating in the 1970s, the 'new man' was conceived as a 'nurturing' figure seemingly in tune with the demands of feminism and women in general' (2009: 137).

features is one of the key points denounced by the second wave feminism: "[...] there is still a perception of violence as a genetic component of masculinity. In this sense, masculinity is seen as the receptacle that encompasses 'violent, aggressive, domineering, controlling, and fearless qualities generally associated to manhood'" (qtd in Escudero-Alías, 2009: 74). Owing to Carter's association with the marginal side of the second wave feminism, her intention by introducing this character in the story is not only to criticize these qualities but also to denounce that they were considered only as masculine. For this reason, she portrays the Count and the Countess with the same qualities, subverting the feminine role that associates the female with the stereotype of the 'innocent persecuted heroine'. In this respect, these features do not draw attention in the case of the Count's, for they are expected as part of masculine behaviour. On the other hand, such a representation of the Countess diminishes her femininity and even her humanity, as will be seen subsequently. In this manner, Carter is trying to show that negative qualities are considered normative in men but exceptional when they are attributed to women. As Jack Zipes points out (1986), there is a very different pattern of signification for girls and women: "What is praiseworthy in males... is rejected in females"; (qtd in Roemer and Bacchilega, 67). The fact of ascribing the same qualities to characters belonging to different genders may be understood as a strategy; thus, she deconstructs the idea that evil and wickedness can only be attributed to masculinity or to those female characters described as desexualized or masculinised such as evil stepmothers, bad fairies or witches.

Taking into consideration that Carter's feminism provides a reflection on male and female roles in Western society, which anticipates the subsequent idea of gender as a social construction, and redefines classical myths, one might suggest that the ambiguity in the male protagonist can be a strategy to deconstruct the gender polarity of the

traditional fairy tales. This polarity consists in the identification of evil with male and desexualized female characters and good with feminine characters. According to Aytül Özüm, "[s]he (Carter) employs literary devices to impose the idea that evil and wickedness cannot be attributed to the male solely, and she deconstructs the solid link between evil and masculinity in most of the fairy-tales" (2010:114). Carter's introduction and description of certain male actions initially seem to be positive. In spite of the fact that the Count's behaviour is correct in certain aspects, he cannot be considered a male helper because his tendencies do not aim at protecting the female characters, as happens in Sexton's and Donoghue's works. Some actions such as his defence of the girl, twice preventing his wife from killing her: "Is she a fish, to swim in such cold weather?" (92); and his intention to please her by ordering the child to pick a rose for the Countess: "I can't deny you that" (92), seem to indicate the Count's attempt to conciliate these two different female characters in his life. These actions and his subsequent sadness when he loses 'the child of his desire' suggest that beyond his dominant and oppressive image there is something human within him.

Nonetheless, actions such as the rape indicate quite the opposite. Bearing in mind Carter's ironic style it is possible to think that everything that has been previously analyzed as positive could be considered just as parody and the Count's actions and intentions had never been true. First of all, the male protagonist is to blame for the girl's death, since his desire for a girl younger than his wife is the origin of the Countess's jealousy. In this sense, the male protagonist takes the role of the mirror in the classical Snow White's tales; the Count turns into the patriarchal gaze that judges the two main female characters for their beauty and creates the conflict between them, similarly to what happens in Donoghue's "The Tale of the Apple". The fact that Carter's male protagonist takes the child's side on some occasions does not imply a

paternal feeling of protection but rather a feeling of possession; the girl does not have to follow the Countess's orders because she belongs to him and not to her wife. Bolaki maintains this idea alleging that "the count has not wished for a child but for a sexualized object to replace his older, and for that reason easily dispensable, wife" (qtd in Fruss, 2010: 188). Following this idea, although the child belongs to the Count, he allows the girl to pick a rose for the Countess, maybe because he knows that the child will bleed at picking the rose and her blood excites him sexually, which might be interpreted as an anticipation of her violent defloration once she is dead. As will be seen when analyzing the symbolism of fairy tales, blood functions as a sexual motif.

As said before, negative representation of some characters in traditional fairy tales is related to masculine or desexualized/masculinized female characters. In this analysis, the term 'desexualized character' refers to those female characters that because of their evil condition are considered less feminine or even masculine. The Brothers Grimm describe many evil female characters who play the antagonist to the heroine. In classical fairy tales, the evil female antagonist is finally defeated by the heroine because of this latter's goodness. In the classical fairy story, 'Snow White', wickedness is personified in the figure of the queen, who is in turn her stepmother: the queen feels threatened by her stepdaughter and becomes jealous. When her first attempt to kill the heroine by means of the hunter fails, the stepmother uses her knowledge of witchcraft to disguise herself and kills Snow White on her own. Sexton's, Carter's and Donoghue's rewritings of Snow White follow a similar pattern in reference to the female antagonist: she is a maternal figure, an enemy, and a witch or a peddler in Sexton's case.

However, there is a certain ambivalence regarding the female antagonists' conditions in postmodern fairy tales. In the Brothers Grimm's original literary source,

the negative portrayal of Snow White's stepmother has to do with the idea that she is the antithesis of the female protagonist, who possesses the female qualities fostered by patriarchal assumptions. In this respect, the female roles who do not match this behavioural pattern are immediately associated with wickedness. Therefore, the stepmother's function is to present a foil for the heroine's good qualities. This contrast is still valid in Sexton's, Carter's and Donoghue's rewritings of Snow White, although in some cases in this comparison between the two main female characters the heroine does not seem to fare too well. More specifically, in Carter's tale the comparison underlines the obsolescence of the patriarchal female archetype proposed by male discourse, whereas in Sexton's and Donoghue's tales that comparison shows that both female characters are not so different. More specifically, in Sexton's tale, the heroine seems to be damned to become a woman similar to her stepmother whereas in Donoghue, the comparison is more positive since the female protagonist and the queen identify each other as "the same".

In Anne Sexton's poem 'Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs', the two main female characters are quite similar: both are beautiful, vacuous and, seemingly, innocent women with the difference that the stepmother loses her innocence in favour of keeping other qualities such as beauty and power. Sexton describes the same process of change in Snow White at the end of the poem: "Meanwhile Snow White held court, rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut and sometimes referring to her mirror as women do" (8). Snow White's future is described by Steven E. Colburn in the following terms: "In the last lines of the poem Snow White begins to look in her mirror and you know that twenty years later, she too, will face a middle-age crisis" (1988: 48). Thus the poet shows that in future, if Snow White faces a younger female, the female protagonist will behave in the same way as her stepmother. However, aspects like the queen's active

behaviour, still differentiate them: the queen tries to murder the female protagonist on three occasions and in the three attempts, she figures out a fancy dress and uses different tricks to deceive Snow White: "The mirror told and so the queen dressed herself in rags and went out like a peddler to trap Snow White. She went across seven mountains"(6). On the contrary, the heroine is prone to passivity; she never attempts to save her life by herself and is always rescued by the male characters.

In this poem, the author keeps to the plot developed by the Brothers Grimm. Similarly to the original tale, the biological mother has died and the new queen does not behave as a maternal figure at all. According to Bettelheim (1989: 69) it is usual in fairy tales to split the mother figure into a good (usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother. There is an atmosphere of rivalry between the stepmother and the heroine in the original tale and in Sexton's adaptation. In Sexton, such female rivalry is a parody of the female competition promoted by patriarchy. As a second-wave feminist, Sexton is conscious that women are not enemies but fighters against patriarchal dominance and for this reason they must be united. In fact, Sue Thornham defines second wave feminism as, "a conscious political movement which sought to unite women through a sense of a shared oppression [...]" (qtd in Gamble, 2001, 33).

Taking into account this idea of rivalry, the queen cannot be considered a female helper for the heroine's process of maturation. On the contrary, the stepmother obviates the existence of Snow White until she grows into a beautiful young girl and for her status as the beauty of the kingdom: "Until that moment Snow White/ had been no more important/ than a dust mouse under the bed./ But now the queen saw brown spots on her hand/ and four whiskers over her lip/ so she condemned to Snow White to be hacked to death (4). The only thing that Snow White learns from the queen is that the most important thing for a woman is her beauty and, consequently, she will finally

adopt the same behaviour. In this sense, one might suggest that the queen is an evil model for her stepdaughter. Although the stepmother could be considered a female character who is going through a 'middle age crisis' and is afraid of losing the only virtue that she considers valuable, the fact of planning her stepdaughter's murder to continue being the first beauty of the kingdom automatically makes her evil: "Her stepmother,/ a beauty in her own right,/ though eaten, of course, by age,/ would hear of no beauty surpassing her own" (3).

Nonetheless, the queen does not realize that her beauty decreases as her bad actions increase too, as happens when she supposedly eats Snow White's heart: "The queen chewed [the boar's heart] up like a cube steak./ Now I am fairest, she said,/ lapping her slim white fingers". Licking her fingers after eating does not fit a queen's table manners; it is quite a rude action and turns the stepmother into the antithesis of attractiveness. This animalized description is a parody of the classical fairy tales' tendency to associate beauty with goodness. Likewise, those female characters that do not follow the behavioural patterns established for women are punished by patriarchy:

> The wicked queen was invited to the wedding feast/ and when she arrived there were/ red-hot iron shoes,/ in the manner of red-hot roller skates,/clamped upon her feet. [...] And so she danced until she was dead,/ a subterranean figure, her tongue flicking in and out/ like a gas jet (8).

Although the punishment selected for the evil queen is the same as in the original source it is highly meaningful regarding the relevance of the beauty topic in Sexton's poem. As stated above, the stepmother's need for her beauty to be acknowledged by the mirror, which symbolizes the patriarchal gaze, is the trigger for her murderous actions. So, the fact of being punished to dance perpetually can be interpreted as a patriarchal punishment but also as Sexton's one. In this postmodern version, the author may have subverted this patriarchal meaning: dancing is an action that might be considered a

form of female objectification: in this sense, Sexton also punishes the queen by forcing her to die as she has lived, as an object of spectacle. In this manner, Sexton criticizes the excessive importance given to beauty in the original fairy tale because of the influence of patriarchal discourses.

Emma Donoghue's tale 'The Tale of the Apple' also presents a comparison between the stepmother and the king's daughter which reveals that both females are more similar than they indeed think. Like Sexton's tale, the plot follows a parallel structure to the Brothers Grimm's one, though more loosely than in Sexton's case. For a start, the focus of the story has been subverted so as to develop a lesbian relationship between the female characters. The story begins with the internal narrator remembering what the maid told her about her mother: "The maid who brought me up told me that my mother was restless" (43). Again, it is possible to observe the tendency to idealize the dead mother in fairy tales and, as a consequence, the stepmother's misrepresentation in favour of the biological one[14].

Contrary to Sexton's tale, Donoghue promptly subverts the stepmother's image; the author even mocks this stereotype so usual in classical fairy tales: "Her lips were soft against my forehead when she kissed me in front of the whole court. But I knew from the songs that a stepmother's smile is like a snake's, so I shut my mind to her from that very first day when I was rigid with the letting of first blood" (46). It is possible to observe that the king's new wife dissociates herself from this negative stereotype to become a maternal figure and a female helper for the heroine. From the moment when the king's new wife meets the anonymous female character, she attempts to assume her role of mother. Nevertheless this gesture is misunderstood, given that the protagonist is

[14] According to John Hanson Saunders: "When a child lost a mother and was then introduced to a stepmother, the child would associate the qualities of both mothers with the birth mother and all of the bad or negative qualities with the stepmother. Splitting sets up the idea of the 'wicked stepmother' that has come to be a staple in many fairy tales" (2008: 26).

relying on prejudices and preconceived ideas. For she can only see her stepmother as the origin of the breaking-off of her idyllic relationship with her father: "it was me who was mirrored in my father's fond eyes" (46). This sentence seems to have a double interpretation: one the one hand, her father's new wife is usurping what belongs to the female protagonist, her father's love, and, on the other hand, it is difficult for the heroine to create a new bond with the maternal figure because he has been brought up by her father. As Aktari explains, "[s]he hears the voice of the semiotic represented by the stepmother-queen which tells her that she can reconstruct her bond with the maternal space again. On the other hand, she is raised by her father and she has learned to live up to the patriarchal ideology" (2010: 300). This would mean that the anonymous female character considers that she is only able to recognize herself in her father's figure. But she will change her mind when the female protagonist mirrors herself in the queen for the first time: "I looked at my stepmother, and she stared back at me, and our eyes were like mirrors set opposite each other, making a corridor of reflections, infinitely hollow" (48). The action of looking at the queen's eyes while seeing her own reflection in them signifies that she identifies with her and that she also feels attraction towards her. She no longer considers her "the other". According to Aktari, "Snow White senses that there is something more than the mother-daughter relationship between herself and the queen" (2010: 47).

Taking into account these circumstances, one might suggest that the female protagonist feels conflicting emotions for her stepmother and for this reason she escapes from the castle in order to discover who she is and what she feels. As object of both rejection and desire, the stepmother can be defined in accordance with Kristeva's notion of the 'abject'. Donoghue introduces the idea of the abject associated with lesbian identity again. It has to do with the idea of homosexuality, as something alien

even within the postfeminist movement, as Escudero Alías points out: "Until the late 1980s, the development of feminist thinking contributed to the creation of lesbian theory, [...]. Within feminism, lesbian perspectives were seen as *the* dissident voices which claimed for a separatist framework" (2009: 34-35).

Some figures related to fantasy imagery such as evil stepmothers, wicked queens, beasts and witches have also been traditionally related to the concept of the abject: something that is attractive but at the same time is rejected. More specifically, classical fairy tales usually portray the figure of the witch as a powerful personification of evil and monstrosity according to the patriarchal order. This could probably be the reason why the woodsmen suggest that the queen has to be a witch, although the stepmother has never employed witchcraft or sorcery to get her aims. Yet it is the only explanation that they find to understand that the heroine approaches the person whom, in theory, she is escaping from, and allows her to get into the cottage: "They said my stepmother had to be a sorceress to find me so deep in the forest. [...] They lift me up and told me that my stepmother must be a witch to put such poison of idleness in my head" (55-56). The woodsmen's lack of understanding of the heroine's behaviour is logical to a certain point; it has to do with their male condition since their patriarchal point of view prevents them form comprehending a love and sexual relationship between women. As Aktari explains: "The woodsmen are the voices of patriarchy which exclude sexually active women by defining her [*sic*] as a witch" (310). By means of this tale, Donoghue denounces that the patriarchal system has labelled powerful female characters or, as in this story, those that have transgressed heterosexual boundaries, as 'witches'. As Daly's "Gyn/Ecology" illustrates: "the witch played an important role in the iconography of the movement (radical feminist movement) [...] which patriarchy seeks to repress by

recruiting women into heterosexual relations and encouraging them to conform to a docile model of femininity" (qtd in Palmer, 1999: 30).

Angela Carter's 'Snow Child' draws attention to another powerful female character who is described as evil and perverse for not developing the same qualities as the heroine but others traditionally related to the male gender. In this sense, Carter's intention by introducing the Countess's character is to establish a dichotomy between both main female characters through their appearance and personalities. Thus, Carter dismantles the classical binary archetype encoded in the traditional fairy tale: the ideal of femininity/ the patriarchal construction of female evil. With this purpose, Carter's postmodern revision adopts a new structure in which many elements from the original literary source have been omitted and subverted in accordance to the author's interests. In general, one might observe that the female antagonist is not actually evil but rather her actions are addressed to preserve her status as her husband's female object. According to Bolaki, "The Countess is also the product of the Count's desire, but she is aware that she can be replaced by a younger woman any time she stops being her husband's object of desire" (qtd in Fruss, 2010: 187). The apparition of a new girl in the story, who is called 'child' so as to suggest her youth, endangers the Countess' status, so that she has to take drastic steps: "[...] the countess had only one thought: how shall I be rid of her?" (92).

Furthermore, it is necessary to remember that the Countess is not the murderer of the child and that her death has been caused by patriarchy, symbolized in the rose that pricks the female protagonist's finger, thus shedding her virginal blood as in sexual intercourse. Instead of changing her personality in order to be similar to the heroine, the Countess firmly keeps her personality in opposition to the girl who tries to please her and her husband by means of submission, which remarks the girl's fragile personality.

In this respect, the fact that the female protagonist dies at being pricked by the rose, whereas the Countess only feels a light sting, highlights that the Count's wife's female power and strength is what saves her life, while some qualities promoted by patriarchy like fragility are the cause of the child's death. Carter seems to express a preference for the Countess over the heroine. Hence, the Countess' wicked actions are rewarded with the maintenance of her status at the end of the tale, contrary to what happens in the traditional source. By means of this character, Carter defends the evil female figure in the reappropiation of fairy tales and saves women subjects from being victimized.

Once some remarkable aspects of Snow White's postmodern tales have been analysed, mainly female objectification, the description of the heroine as a stereotype and the portrayal of male and female roles, the focus of the analysis will concentrate on the process of subversion carried out through symbols. Taking into consideration the previous analysis of Angela Carter's and Emma Donoghue's use of language and specific symbols, now it is necessary to concentrate on Anne Sexton's deployment of language and her portrayal of popular imagery in her poetry. Sexton's poetry characterizes itself for the introduction of American popular imagery from the twentieth century. This literary strategy has two possible interpretations: on the one hand, the use of cultural references that come from popular culture creates a sardonic vision of certain aspects that the author wants to criticize, such as the beauty canon. On the other hand, Sexton's employment of contemporary references approaches the mythical tale to the reality of the moment. In this manner, Sexton highlights the influence of fairy tales on women's lives.

In spite of the fact that Sexton's poetry contains multiple references to her contemporary culture, the analysis will rather concentrate on the deployment of classical fairy tale's imagery by the three authors, their creations of new meanings and

subversion of the story's significance in accordance with each author's perception. First of all, in these three postmodern versions, there is a kind of dichotomy in the use of the red and white colours. According to the traditional Western artistic canon, the white and red colours might be interpreted as symbol of the binary archetype virgin/whore, which in these postmodern fairy tales is used to differentiate the heroine from the evil queen or wicked stepmother. In Sexton's poem, the white colour and a series of elements, in theory related to whiteness, recur throughout the poem in reference to Snow White's description: 'cigarette paper', 'china', 'unicorn', 'bonefish' (3). Through the female protagonist's comparison with this imagery, Sexton mocks the relevance of virginity in classical fairy tales, given that none of these objects is totally white. In fact, cigarette paper and bonefish may be described as beige; china is a material traditionally white but there exist other kinds of china of different colours, and, finally, although the unicorn is the only element that is really white, it is a fantastic creature, something strange to reality. The use of the unicorn can be read as a way of underlining that Snow White's virginity and innocence are also unreal.

Following the classical interpretation, the red colour is related to the evil queen and symbolizes her wickedness. The colour red is associated with the symbol of the 'red-hot iron shoes' (8) and the author's reference to fire when she writes: "First your toes will smoke" (8). In this sense, the author seems to connect the idea of evil developed by the patriarchal discourse with redness and for this reason the queen will dance with her red shoes until '[...] your heels turn black' (8). One might suggest that the stepmother will dance until her own wickedness burns with her. In this sense, it is possible to deduce that the black colour is also connected with the idea of evil.

In spite of the fact that Carter's Snow White combines the three colours in her appearance: - her hair is black, her lips are red and her skin is white - the notion of

whiteness seems to be the predominant one, given that it is embodied in the snow when the naked child appears, whereas the notion of blackness and redness are mainly attributed to the Countess' appearance through her 'pelts of black foxes', 'high, black, shining boots' and 'scarlet heels' (91). Thus, the dichotomy of these two female roles is accurate and fixed not only for their personalities but also for their physical appearance. This dichotomy is evident by means of the patriarchal gaze which is personified in the Count's figure, as happens with the king in Donoghue's "The Tale of the Apple". On her part, Sexton keeps to the classical imagery of the mirror as the patriarchal voice.

Returning to the symbology of colours, in Carter's tale the notion of redness is not associated with the evil queen but with sexual maturation. Blood is a highly sexual motif that indicates the heroine's sexual development. Moreover, it can also be interpreted as a symbolic prolepsis of her violent defloration. According to this point, this can be the reason why the girl screams and faints when she sees blood on her finger; elements such as blood and redness are strange elements for a pure girl in the same way as sexual intercourse is. As Bettelheim maintains, "[f]airy tales prepare the child to accept what is otherwise a most upsetting event: sexual bleeding, [...] and later on intercourse when the hymen is broken" (1989: 202). Donoghue also introduces references to redness by means of symbols. The image of blood appears when the female protagonist's biological mother pricks her finger with a needle while she imagines what her daughter will look like. The three drops of blood that stain the snow may signify the heroine's process of conception. Furthermore, blood has another meaning when it appears in the female protagonist's bed; it has to do with the heroine's subsequent process of transformation from child to woman.

As for the apple, it is a highly meaningful symbol in Donoghue's tale whereas Sexton's poem keeps its classical meaning. The Irish author preserves the association of

the apple motif with the acquisition of sexual knowledge, as happens in mythical stories and legends. The apple symbolizes the heroine's sexual desire for her stepmother and, just when the heroine bites the apple, she experiences pleasurable feelings that echo sexual pleasure or what Luce Irigaray defined as *jouissance*, "a sense of pleasure, abandonment, orgasmic overflowing" (qtd in Garcia Zarranz, 21); "I took the apple from her without a word, bit into the red side, and began to choke. Fear and excitement locked in struggle in my throat, and blackness seeped across my eyes. I fell to the ground (57). Thus, one might affirm that the motif of the apple loses its traditional meaning as a dangerous element as was promoted by patriarchal discourses[15].

While in Sexton the heroine's fainting and subsequent awakening are not really meaningful, these same actions become relevant in Carter and Donoghue. In Carter's tale, the child's faint and death symbolize the extinction of the old-fashioned female role of the 'innocent persecuted heroine'. On her part, the loss of consciousness of Donoghue's heroine has more positive connotations given that it does not imply death but an actual awakening. The female protagonist not only awakes physically but also awakes from a state of ignorance which prevented her from understanding and, therefore, accepting her lesbian condition. In this sense, one might suggest that the experience of loving a woman is very similar to an awakening; once the heroine knows the truth, this one cannot be obviated:

> "My head was still swimming; I thought I might faint again. But my mouth was full of apple, slippery, still hard, vinegary at the edges. I could feel the marks of my own teeth on the skin. I bit down, and juice ran to the corners of my lips. It was not poisoned. It was the first apple of the year from my father's orchard. I chewed till it was eaten up and I knew what to do" (58).

[15] According to Bettelheim: "In many myths as well as fairy tales, the apple stands for love and sex, in both its benevolent and its dangerous aspect. An apple given to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, showing she was preferred to chaste goddesses, led to the Trojan War. It was the Biblical apple with which man was seduced to forswear his innocence in order to gain knowledge and sexuality" (1989: 212).

Consequently, when the heroine awakes in the glass coffin, she is prepared to accept her lesbian identity and return to the castle together with her beloved.

In general terms, one might conclude that all these postmodern adaptations reflect a physical journey of the protagonist from her home to an unknown place. Despite being described as an enriching experience, in some cases the heroine does not acquire any knowledge of herself. When this fact happens this is because the authors are trying to criticize a specific female stereotype. On the other hand, it is possible to observe how the process of female objectification is only slightly parodied and criticized and subsequently discussed by Sexton whereas it is totally rejected and subverted by Carter and Donoghue. This has to do with the authors' historical background. As mentioned above, Sexton was a poet related to second wave feminism during the sixties and seventies, and from her writings can be deduced an incipient awareness of female objectification in the sense that was criticized by Simone de Beauvoir: the adolescent girl 'becomes an object and she sees herself as an object; she discovers this new aspect of her being with surprise: it seems to her that she has been doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now begins to exist outside' (Beauvoir 1989, 316). Sexton's strategy to fight objectification is the description of those females that represent male fantasies as useless and ignorant women. With the passing of time and the subsequent publication of Laura Mulvey's pioonering essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", many feminists and post-feminists took consciousness of this problem and have attempted to express their rejection of female objectification in different ways. In Carter's case, the strategy selected is the graphical representation of male violence against the female object, and Donoghue's one is the sexual objectification by means of the female gaze.

Similarly, the evolution in male and female representation is clear. Although, there is a certain ambiguity as regards male characters, they continue being shrouded in evil due to the feeling of dominance and submission that their presence instills. However, this feeling decreases progressively as the feminist movement advances. The same development is experienced by female characters. These ones end up by rejecting victimization due to the arrival of new female roles and the acknowledgement of the obsolescence of other female ones. As for symbolism, some relevant imagery from the classical fairy tale has been omitted or subverted to create a transgressive and parodic perspective. Sexton keeps a very similar structure to the original fairy tale and therefore most of its symbols have been introduced in the reworking with their initial meaning. Yet Carter and Donoghue's rewritings present certain levels of subversion. Accordingly, one might affirm that Carter's revision has simplified Snow White's tale to concentrate on the relationship of the main female characters, the origin of their rivalry and the Count's gaze, which symbolizes the motif of the mirror as symbol of the patriarchal voice and of objectification. In this sense, Donoghue's king also embodies the mirror's function, although with a more unexpected ending. Another subverted motif is the rose, which abandons its initial meaning to symbolize patriarchy: the rose kills the child but only bites the Countess. One possible explanation is that under the dominance of patriarchy fragile women such as Carter's girl, are condemned whereas those women who are strong enough can be free of oppression and submission.

Third Chapter: Sexton's "Briar Rose"/Donoghue's "The Tale of the Needle"

In this third chapter, I will concentrate on two postmodern fairy tales based on Charles Perrault's original literary source, *Belle au Bois Dormant* (1697). Subsequently, the German authors Jakob and Wilhem Grimm also wrote a similar fairy tale entitled *Dornröschen* (1812). The classical fairy tale's story describes a young heroine who is the victim of a powerful spell because of a fairy's curse: when the female protagonist becomes a teenager, she will prick her finger with a spinning wheel and will fall into an unconscious state between life and death. The heroine remains in this state until she is finally awaken by means of a prince's kiss. From a psychological point of view, it might be deduced that this state of unconsciousness represents a symbolic process of maturation from her childhood into adulthood: in other words, she will "sleep" until the moment when she is prepared to become a wife and a mother, as is represented with the arrival of the prince to rescue her. Feminist and postfeminist authors such as Anne Sexton and Emma Donoghue rewrite this story and introduce plenty of changes. In spite of the abundance of changes, the concept of a period of physical stagnation in the female protagonist has been maintained by both authors. However, this idea has been subverted and developed, changing its initial meaning in Sexton's and Donoghue's versions[16].

Therefore, my main focus of analysis is going to be Sexton's 'Briar Rose' and Donoghue's "The Tale of the Needle". Both Sexton's and Donoghue's female protagonists follow the same features of Nikiforov's 'innocent persecuted heroine':

[16] On her part, Angela Carter also wrote a story called "The Lady of the House of Love" which could be loosely based on 'Sleeping Beauty'. Although this tale can be interpreted as an adaptation of Perrault's fairy tale, the huge influence of Gothic fiction in the plot has blurred its indebtedness to "Sleeping Beauty".

passivity, fragility, innocence and lack of knowledge. At the beginning, Sexton's heroine is depicted in this sense, as a fragile and ethereal being: "Consider/ a girl who keeps slipping off,/ arms limp as old carrots,/ into the hypnotist's trance,/ into a spirit world/ speaking with the gift of tongues" (90). However, paying attention to this description, one might deduce that the female protagonist's fragility is excessive and her alleged ethereality is, indeed, a tendency to silence in order to escape from reality. The heroine's portrayal promotes the idea that there is something that goes beyond the typical female submission in fairy tales. It could be suggested that Briar Rose's behaviour highlights the idea that there is something within her, in her personality, which does not work properly. According to the psychiatrist Judith Herman, "[t]he psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflect attention from it" (1997:1). Subsequently, the poem reveals that this 'something' that does not work properly has to do with a traumatic experience of sexual abuse by her father. This fact is maintained in secrecy by Briar Rose. In fact, Sexton describes that experience using a veiled language, as if it were necessary to create a new language to discuss what is traditionally considered taboo. The author's employment of language is full of contemporary references that highlight an approach from the atemporal fairy tale to a twentieth-century setting. Moreover, Sexton's poem is full of symbolism and hidden meanings that create an ambiguous atmosphere in which something terrible like incest is suggested but not explicitly mentioned until the ending: "It's not the prince at all,/ but my father/ drunkenly bent over my bed,/ circling the abyss like a shark,/ my father thick upon me/ like some sleeping jellyfish" (95).

The female protagonist's impossibility to talk about this terrible event is the cause of stagnation in her behaviour, which is portrayed by means of allusions to a previous

period of time in the heroine's life: "She is stuck in the time machine, suddenly two years old sucking her thumb, as inward as a snail, learning to talk again" (90). Although the American author states that Briar Rose is 'on a voyage' (90), her references to a voyage can be interpreted in a sardonic way. Briar Rose is immersed in a voyage but contrary to physical journeys, this one is leading her to the past: "She's on a voyage./ She is swimming further and further back" (90). The female protagonist's impossibility to recognize this terrible event causes her stagnation in the past, reviving it by means of her memories time and time again: "Daddy! Daddy!/ Presto! She's out of prison! (93, 95).

The author connects the heroine's mental psychological stagnation with the hundred-year sleep in Perrault's fairy tale. Despite her inability to overcome this traumatic experience, the fact of remembering it repeatedly provides her with a certain amount of information. As Herman remarks, "[...] traumatized people, [...] need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future. [...] (2). However, since these regressions happen in an unconscious way, the heroine's conscious refusal to remember is what prevents her from acquiring enough knowledge to understand her past and, consequently, to talk about it. This denial of her memories is related to fear; she is not able to acknowledge what has happened to her and for this reason the female protagonist hides it to herself and even to her husband, of whom she seemingly feels afraid in the same way as of her father: "Briar Rose/ was an insomniac.../She could not nap/ or lie in sleep/ without the court chemist/ mixing her some knock-out drops/ and never in the prince's presence" (93). In fact, the text seems to suggest that the prince and the heroine have regular moments of sexual intercourse when her husband does not seem to suspect that Briar Rose is evoking her father's image while abusing her sexually. Indeed, the female protagonist seems to be unable to establish a relationship

of intimacy with the prince. The fear that she feels of him makes the classical happy ending impossible: "She married the prince/ and all went well/ except for the fear- / the fear of sleep" (93). This inability to trust her husband also has to do with the fact that she identifies the prince as another figure of patriarchal control, similar to her father as will be developed further. In general, the heroine's incapability to trust people is extrapolated to everyone, in accordance with Angelina Venezia's remarks: "Briar Rose cannot begin new relationships with people because of the presence of these experiences and feelings in her conscious mind" (2005: 86).

As mentioned previously, Sexton's female protagonists have not acquired any knowledge of their experiences by the end of her poems. However, from the beginning, Briar Rose differs from other Sexton's heroines in her need for self-knowledge, which is quite atypical in her female portrayals: "Each night I am nailed into place/ and I forget who I am" (95). In fact, contrary to the rest of them, the reason why the heroine does not finish this journey of self-discovery is the trauma that she is suffering. Such process of self-knowledge entails a great scale of psychological suffering for her, which could be the origin of an incipient madness instead of the beginning of a healing process. Hence, the high level of importance of the three final questions of the poem, given that they offer a revealing vision on the female protagonist's confusion: "What voyage this, little girl?/ This coming out of prison/ God help-/ this life after death?" (95). As Phyllip McGowan states, "Briar Rose is suspended in the traumatic realm of a regression that cannot be spoken, the three questions with which the poem closes attempt to find the words to comprehend her condition". Although Briar Rose discovers the reason for this state of stagnation, her inability to struggle against this trauma prevents her from acquiring any possible knowledge to solve it. Therefore her process of acquisition of identity becomes incomplete given that she has not been able to move

onto the next stage of her life, to the achievement of a longed-for fulfilment. In an overall review, one might suggest that Sexton's intention when she wrote the poem, leaving aside the incest issue, was to denounce the lack of external knowledge accessible to real women, in accordance with the second wave feminist current. This lack of information fosters the disillusionment of women; once they grow up, they realize that the world is different from what was portrayed in classical fairy tales. This female disillusionment was defined as the 'problem with no name' by the American writer Betty Friedan: "the physic distress experienced by women who had no public careers and were immured in domestic concerns" (qtd in Humm, 1992: preface).

Similarly, Emma Donoghue attempts to criticize the same idea following the same pattern of behaviour than in the rest of her female representations; at the beginning all her heroines possess the same qualities as traditional heroines in fairy tales. However it is possible to glimpse their desire for knowledge of the world, which encourages them to act against patriarchal conventions. This wish is decisive to achieve the much-desired feeling of happiness and fulfilment. Concretely, in "The Tale of the Needle", Donoghue's female protagonist abandons her traditional stereotype of heroine trapped in an idyllic world to introduce herself progressively in the external world. In this sense, Sexton's ending contrasts strongly with Donoghue's one, since the latter describes a female rebirth in which the anonymous female character becomes an active girl eager to learn and develop herself in the world. As mentioned above, at the beginning the female protagonist is a prototypical heroine from classical fairy tales and this fact is observed by means of the innocence and blind obedience that she professes to her parents. For this reason, the heroine never questions her parents' orders, even when she starts to grow up and feels the need of learning:

> "The only lesson I had to learn was the list of my virtues: how my face was the fairest, my wit the sharpest, my heart the most angelic, my singing the most comparable to a lark's in all the land. Everyone who set eyes on me fell in love with me, I was told. And I believed every word of it. Why would they have said it unless it was true?" (169).

Owing to her innocence and absolute submission to her parents' will, the heroine firmly believes that her function in the world is to be a passive and aesthetically attractive being. Female submission to patriarchal control seems to be a remarkable feature in the traditional female behaviour in fairy tales; however, Donoghue's female protagonist starts to question why any kind of knowledge of practical activities or any kind of knowledge about the external world is forbidden to her: "Whenever I asked a question that began with why, I would be told that things were done just as they had always been done for a hundred years before" (170). In this sense, one might suggest that the female protagonist is enveloped in a cocoon whose aim is to protect her from the external world. Nevertheless, this overprotection is not only guarding her from dangers but also from the reality of life. Thus, the heroine seems to be damned to live in an atmosphere of ignorance and inactivity that might symbolize Sleeping Beauty's sleep for hundred years in the original literary source.

With the passing of time, the anonymous female character's wish for knowledge increases in the same way as her disagreement with the control imposed by her family. Her obligation to be submissive to parental control is oppressing her to such a degree that the heroine becomes a different person. Feelings of love and affection for her parents seem to be disappearing and be replaced by rage and anger: "Poisonous feelings rushed through me with no warning. Greed, when there was nothing to resent. Despair, when I was the luckiest girl in the world" (171). In this sense, the female protagonist seems to suffer the same psychic distress denounced by Friedan in her book *The*

Feminine Mystique (1963): "Betty Friedan [...] reveals the private angst which many middle-class white American women were experiencing in the 1950s as unwaged housewives and consumers" (qtd in Humm, 1992: n. pag). The heroine's feelings of rage and anger can be similar to those of the women who did not have a public career and were confined to the domestic realm during the fifties, with the difference that this postmodern female protagonist finally achieves power. As Sarah Projanski illustrates, "postfeminism discourse deploys a variety of positions with respect to feminism, at times celebratory and at times laying blame for contemporary anxieties at the door of a past politics now felt to be misconceived" (qtd in Tasker and Negra, 2007: 8). According to this interpretation, one might suggest that Donoghue criticizes the tendency towards female confinement in a previous period of time to highlight the process of female empowerment in Western society during the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties. In accordance with her parents' assumptions, who could be considered personifications of patriarchal authorities, the anonymous female protagonist is aware that there is no reason in her life for feeling angry or unhappy. In fact, this is the reason why the heroine's parents keep her in the domestic sphere; they consider that it is a perfect world for females, where she is protected from negative experiences. Nonetheless, it is precisely this idyllic place created by them that is being harmful for her. The apparent perfection of the domestic realm is limiting her experiences, her need of learning things about the external world, and therefore of being herself.

As analyzed before, everything indicates that the heroine is trapped in this idyllic world similarly to Sleeping Beauty's sleep of one hundred years and her future seems to be damned to be the same as that of the rest of female members of her family:

> "[...] my great-grandmother had long fair hair and married a prince and had five children and lived happily ever after in this very manor house. How my great-great-aunt embroidered cloth of gold and married a duke and had four children and lived

> happily ever after across the mountains. How my grandmother had deep blue eyes and married an earl and had three children and lived happily ever after in this very manor house. How my great-aunt danced like a sparrow and married a baron and had two children and lived happily ever after across the seas. How my mother married my father and had me. I liked to consider this long story and how it led all the way to me, as a path winds to a mountaintop" (173).

But suddenly a trivial factor changes her life; one day she is playing in the garden, she notices the presence of a window in the castle's tower which was unknown to her. The heroine asks her mother about this mysterious tower, but the parental figure does not give any explanation because she considers that this information is not relevant for the development of her daughter into a patriarchal female stereotype. The mother attempts to end up with her daughter's wish of knowledge since, from a classical point of view, female curiosity or need of knowledge have been traditionally portrayed as something negative for they offer the possibility for female characters to abandon their old-fashioned roles and to acquire power. As Garcia Zarranz remarks: "Well known narratives such as Carter's short story 'The Bloody Chamber' (1979) or Sexton's poem "The Gold key" (1971) subvert traditional warnings against female curiosity sustained by mythical figures like Eve or Pandora and, instead, provide alternative possibilities for women" (2005: 53).

Since she does not receive any help from her parents, the heroine makes a last try to make them help her to discover the external world: "Then one evening after dinner I demanded that my father take me beyond the bramble hedge, and my parents stared at each other. There's nothing out there you need to see, said my mother; it's a cruel world full of evil men" (173). In this sense, it might be suggested that the anonymous female protagonist is eager to acquire knowledge through her parents but their new refusal causes her first rebellion against their wills and she decides to disobey their

rules by visiting the tower on her own: "I took my mother's keys from where they hung, slipped away to the west wing and waited in the shadows for what felt like an hour" (175). This act of rebellion goes beyond the typical disobedience between a teenager and her parents. It symbolizes that she is rebelling against the patriarchal authority that obliges her to be submissive and to accept her fate of wife and mother as the rest of female members of her family. It will be precisely in the tower that she will know another female character that rebelled against her fate and who will become her helper, as will be analyzed later on. It might be concluded that this female helper is responsible for the female protagonist's transformation but, indeed, the only one responsible for her change is the heroine herself, who decides to take the control of her own life and does not obey patriarchal rules any longer. Therefore, the struggle against patriarchal authorities personified in her parents' will is the only way for the female protagonist to abandon her passive role and become a useful and active character.

So far, it might be concluded that parental control is a relevant factor in the personal development of the female protagonists. Although it is possible to observe different reactions in Sexton's and Donoghue's female protagonists regarding the influence of parental figures in her lives, in both postmodern tales the process of self-discovery is closely linked with the heroine's state of mind. In these two stories, the heroines' state of mind has been caused by the paternal figure, and also maternal one in Donoghue's text. As a consequence of their improper actions, the heroines do not make any progress in their attempts to acquire knowledge. In Sexton's tale, from a psychological point of view, Briar Rose is an absolutely destroyed girl because of her father's sexual abuses. At the beginning of the poem, Sexton describes Briar Rose's father, the king, as an ambiguous character whose expressions of affection appear to be innocent but at the same time can also be considered disturbing given that they would be similar to sexual

expressions in an initial stage of a carnal relationship: "Sit on my knee. I have kisses for the back of your neck. A penny for your thoughts, Princess. I will hunt them like an emerald" (90). It seems here that, opposite to other male portrayals in Sexton's poetry whose ambiguity seems to be aimed at the female protagonist's protection in some cases and at patriarchal dominance of females in other ones, the actions of the king have a different significance. The father is not focused on the protection of her daughter in accordance with his status of paternal figure but in the physical objectification and dominance of her body.

As was observed before, Anne Sexton's male characters tend to objectify female characters by means of the process called 'scopophilia'. This process objectifies female bodies through the male gaze, and in this manner men turn into the possessors of the females, already objectified, and feel free to submit them to their wills. Nonetheless, the author goes beyond this process in this poem, depicting a male figure objectifying her daughter's body not only by means of the gaze but also by abusing her body sexually when she is in an unconscious state. According to Anette Karjalainen, "[t]he sexualisation of the female body is a central theme in Sexton's poem. In "Briar Rose", Sexton critiques the patriarchal sexualisation and possession of the female body" (2010: 19). In this sense, one might suggest that Sexton's intention in talking about a taboo issue like incest is to criticize the male objectification of women, widely rejected by second wave feminism, by means of one of the most serious sexual abuses within Western society: the father's sexual abuse of her daughter. As Professor of Clinical Psychiatry Clarice J. Kestenbaum affirms, "fathers as well as mothers contribute to the development of the female self-concept. [...] fathering provides nurturing affection, guidance, approval, and availability to love and be loved, admired, emulated, and obeyed" (1983: 119). Taking into account these statements, one might understand why

the female protagonist is so psychologically damaged: the person who should show Briar Rose her worth as a human being and not only as a body, is precisely the first male figure that objectifies her; the person who should protect her from external danger is the one that most harms her. In fact, the American author suggests in this poem that physical suffering does not compare to the negative effects of this traumatic experience: "You can stick a needle/ through my kneecap and I won't flinch./ I'm all shot up with Novocain./ This trance girl is yours to do with. [...] But if you kissed her on the mouth/ her eyes would spring open [...]" (94).

As mentioned above, the consequences of this traumatic experience are so deep than she is unable to feel comfortable among men and, subsequently, to be happy in her marriage with the prince. For the female protagonist, every man is similar to her father. This thought has to do with the second wave feminist tendency to associate the patriarchal attitude with masculinity and, thus, consider male figures as inhuman. In 'Briar Rose', this fact may be observed in the way in which she identifies every man in the court with her father because of their smell: "He forced every male in the court/ to scour his tongue with Bab-o/ lest they poison the air she dwelt in./ Thus she dwelt in his odor" (92). This is the king's strategy to keep her daughter away from the men in the court, which could be seen as a protective measure over Briar Rose, as happens in other Sexton's tales. However, taking into account the sordid relationship between father and daughter, the most plausible interpretation has to do with jealousy and the female protagonist's status as a possession.

Anyway, the father's strategy achieves its purpose but not in the expected way. The heroine is the one who rejects the presence of male figures and is not able to have any relationship with them except with her husband. Although the prince is never described as a tyrannical character, the female protagonist cannot avoid acknowledging him as the

figure of patriarchal control who now possesses her body. Briar Rose's inability to socialize does not only concern male figures but people in general, and it causes a tendency towards reclusion and solitude in her. According to A. Venezia, "[h]er relationship with her father was also incestuous, further secluding her, and making it even more difficult for her and society to accept each other. Her relationships are dysfunctional because of the incest that occurred earlier in her life" (2005: 86). Bearing in mind the heroine's tendency towards solitude, one might suggest that Briar Rose is a prisoner of her memories. In fact, the king's presence is remarkable throughout the poem due to the incapability of the female protagonist to stop thinking of him. Therefore, it seems that the heroine will never be free of her father's influence because his presence and actions are kept in her memories.

Similarly to Sexton's story, the parents' influence is a very remarkable point in Donoghue's tale, given that the female protagonist's first years of life are imprinted in her mind. Her subsequent rebellion is what prevents this influence from ruining her whole life. The Irish author keeps to her usual portrayal of male characters; In this sense, male characters are represented from a humanist perspective since Donoghue's intention is to describe them as imperfect beings who make mistakes in their behaviour towards the female protagonist. More specifically, in the tale the king is described as a loving father whose excessive overprotection and overvaluation of her daughter have as their objective to protect her from external dangers and help her to know how valueless she is: "The day I was born they lifted me into my father's hands, and he roared out so all could hear: This is my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased" (169). Bearing into mind these ideas, it is possible to interpret the father's behaviour as something positive and even, in this sense, the king can be considered a male helper. On the other hand, this male attitude can be interpreted as negative from a feminist perspective

because the ideas put forward are that woman needs to be protected from the external world and only valued in accordance with the premises imposed by patriarchy: beauty, passivity, innocence, lack of knowledge of the external world and disposition to become a wife and a mother. As Carolina Fernández Rodriguez points out, the princess of "The tale of the Needle" is shrouded in an atmosphere of inactivity and lack of knowledge: "Solo el conocimiento de las gracias femeninas estaba a su alcance sin cortapisas. El sistema en el que la princesa de Donoghue ha nacido desea hacer de ella una mujer en el sentido patriarcal, es decir, bella y durmiente" (1999: 133).

It is also worth mentioning that the figure of the mother in Donoghue's tale matches perfectly this patriarchal female behaviour and, so much so, that she seems to represent a secondary patriarchal authority, as will be explained later on. Consequently, one might consider that the two parents represent the same patriarchal authority and both of them assume dominant and oppressive roles justified by feelings such as love and affection to her much-desired daughter after so many years of infertility:

> "You see, before they had me they were both so old they thought for sure they were barren. They swore complicated vows, swallowed medicines made from boiled frogs, and went on pilgrimages for months at a time. At last, like a gift from above, my mother grew big, and my father put a chicken in the pot of every family on our estate" (168).

Again, this description highlights the idea that Sleeping Beauty is a much-loved daughter and for this reason they do not want her to be damaged in any way. However, it may also be argued that the couple's happiness at becoming parents is not so much a personal achievement as the pleasure in being "normal" and fulfilling social expectations. Developing this idea beyond, it is possible to understand that all these displays of love and affection are another way of objectifying the female protagonist. Until now, the processes of objectification analyzed consisted in the objectification of

the female body by means of a male gaze somehow invested with sexual desire. In "The Tale of the Needle", there is no male desire but we encounter the same procedure of objectification: once the heroine is born, she is objectified by means of her parents' look and thus she turns into her parents' possession. From this moment, the heroine is looked after and kept far from the external world as if she were a priceless object of ornamentation: "From the very first day of life I wore gold mesh gloves so that nothing would ever soil my fingers. [...] For many years I didn't learn to walk, because I was carried everywhere - not by my parents, who had grown frail, but by the most sure-footed of the servants" (169). In this light, one might conclude that the king and the queen do not love her daughter as a subject but as an object which they own.

In this sense, the fact that the queen looks at her daughter as an object instead of a subject highlights to what extent she has interiorized the precepts of patriarchy. The mother encourages in her daughter's behaviour all these classical female qualities valued in fairy tales; all of them transform her into an object of ornamentation. In this respect, the queen's conduct seems to imply that she also possessed the qualities previously mentioned and was objectified in the same way as previous female members in her family. Consequently, she considers this process of female objectification as a usual procedure that accords with patriarchal hegemony and turns her into an oppressor. Despite the mother's female condition, she is another patriarchal authority that exerts dominance over the female protagonist. By means of this character, Donoghue may have attempted to criticize those females whose old-fashioned ways of thinking support patriarchal premises and foster female submission. Yet the queen's patriarchal behaviour does not imply that she is not a good mother. In fact, the queen's feelings of love and affection for her daughter appear to be so deep that it is difficult to identify her with a patriarchal figure.

In Sexton's tale, the maternal figure also seems to be another classical female character of fairy tales. Although there are no accurate descriptions of this character, the explicit reference to the queen's figure refers to her as an appendage of her husband: "The king and queen went to sleep" (92). There are no references to this character as an independent being. The influence of patriarchal authority personified in her husband's figure could be the reason why the mother does not check the disturbing attachment between the king and her daughter. In this way, the mother could be considered an accessory of her husband's abuses on Briar Rose. On the other hand, the lack of references to the queen in the poem might have to do with the queen's portrayal as an absent mother, an absence which influences the heroine's subsequent behaviour. In the first lines of the poem, Briar Rose seems to invoke implicitly the help of her mother. When the female protagonist alludes to 'her mother's pocketbook' (90), she is, indeed, depicting the image of a uterus. By means of this reference to a metaphorical uterus, the heroine invokes the queen's present protection as she protected her when she was a fetus. Apart from the need for protection, Briar Rose needs a maternal figure with whom to identify. Again, Kestenbaum underlines the importance of the parental figure in the development of children's personality, more precisely the maternal figure in the case of young females: "Feminine behavior in girls, it was presumed, was derived chiefly from identification with the maternal figure. The daughter is implicitly female as is her mother; she imitates her mother's behavior, and her primary identification is with her mother" (1983: 119).

Nevertheless, Briar Rose's invocations are in vain and in addition to the constant sexual abuses by her father, the female protagonist also has to suffer the absence of her mother. As Venezia explains, "[...] one can conclude that [the mother's absence] has some relevance in it; she may be searching for a maternal substitute" (2005: 85). Owing

to her need for protection, the heroine appears to find a female helper in the twelfth fairy who softens the thirteenth fairy's mortal curse: "However the twelfth fairy/ had a certain kind of eraser/ and thus she mitigated the curse/ changing that death/ into a hundred-year sleep" (91).

Returning to Donoghue's female protagonist, once she realizes that she is never going to obtain any knowledge from her parents, she makes the decision to begin her learning on her own. The action of approaching the tower, a place which her parents do not want her to enter, is the first physical activity that she decides to carry out by herself: "I took the stairs one by one, oddly frightened of what they might lead to" (176). By getting into the room, she senses that the person who lives there is going to be relevant in her journey of self-discovery even before the heroine sees who it is. This new character is a female one and, like all the female characters who have kept their distance from the patriarchal female archetype of wife and mother, she is described as an old, dirty and ugly woman: "I forgot all my sorrow when I peeped into her room. There she sat, an old woman I had never seen before, [...]. Dirty white hair hung about her face like ivy" (176). Through this parodic description, Donoghue denounces that the patriarchal system stigmatizes powerful and active female characters or, as in other stories, those who have transgressed patriarchal sexual boundaries. Nevertheless, in 'The Tale of the Needle', the Irish author gives predominance to the transformation of females into active subjects, leaving aside the issue of their sexual preferences.

Likewise, Sexton's thirteenth fairy is also represented as an ugly hag. "The thirteenth fairy,/ her fingers as long and thing as straws,/ her eyes burnt by cigarettes,/ her uterus an empty teacup,/ arrived with an evil gift" (91). In this respect, Sexton's intention in portraying this female character so negatively seems to satirize the association between female empowerment, ugliness and evil imposed by the patriarchal

order. More specifically, the reference to 'her uterus an empty teacup' appears to reinforce the idea that those women who reject the wife and mother roles are embodiments of evil[17]. In this sense, Sexton's portrayal seems to anticipate the subsequent denunciation by Donoghue of female misrepresentation[18]. Anyhow, the old female character introduced by Donoghue is not a witch but an active woman who has preferred hard work to being a passive female and being submitted to her husband and children's wills. Her tendency towards activity and knowledge could be the reason why she is enclosed in a tower; her disobedience of the rules imposed by the patriarchal system has condemned her to social ostracism. The fact that she is enclosed in a tower highlights the idea that she knows the consequences of not following the norms established and this experience will be beneficial for the heroine: "Listen, girl, she said, they've tried to stop me teaching any of the things I know. Now they're trying to prevent you from learning all the things you don't" (178).

Taking into account her tendency towards activity and knowledge, it can be affirmed that the representation of this female character is quite positive. In folklore, she would be the old wise woman. Apart from the female helper's negative physical portrayal, there is positive evidence in her favour. First of all, before being seen by the female protagonist, the heroine hears her voice and this underlines the idea that only the women who are free from prejudices and established rules have the right of expressing themselves and being listened to. The voice is a powerful weapon of female expression and resistance. For this reason, the female ability to talk is not considered important, in comparison with such eminently feminine qualities as beauty, discretion and decency

[17] Paradoxically, by analyzing the thirteenth fairy's curse, her character could be considered a female helper, as will be developed further in the examination of symbols and imagery.

[18] Susan Faludi denounced the promotion of negative stereotypes against career-minded women and the return of women to the traditional forms of femininity such as the old-fashioned concepts of marriage and motherhood in the media during the eighties and nineties. See Susan Faludi's *Backlash. The Undeclared War against American women* (1991).

fostered by classical fairy tales. Furthermore, this old female character is the first person who dares to say the truth to the female protagonist. In this manner, the Irish author also seems to criticize the representation of women as misleading characters. In fact, the old woman is so honest that she seems rude: "Delicate, my arse! she said. What do you mean by that? [...] What's there to hurt you in a bit of work? the old woman asked" (178). The reason for her rudeness is to call the heroine's attention, who is completely astonished at the way in which this woman talks to her. One might understand that the old woman is trying to open her eyes to the relevance of being able to manage on her own: "Wake up, princess, snapped the old woman, clapping her hands in front of my nose" (180). According to Garcia Zarranz, "[a]nd indeed the princess wakes up, no thanks to the kiss of a Prince Charming but with the help of a wise old woman" (2005: 53). In this quotation, the expression 'wake up' is a sardonic self-conscious message addressed to the traditional fairy tale. Contrary to the traditional tale 'Sleeping Beauty', the heroine in 'The Tale of the Needle' is the only one who has to make the decision of becoming an active subject, or remaining in her condition of passive object. After a while, the heroine affirms having 'woken up', alluding to the original literary source again, and finally decides to take control of her life: "All of a sudden I felt quite awake. [...] I sat down on the stool and said, Please. Show me how" (182).

In the final part of this chapter, I will turn to the two stories' use of symbols and imagery coming from the traditional fairy tale, although it is true there are only a few remarkable examples. One of the most relevant ones is the spinning wheel. According to the classical fairy tale, the heroine is damned to death due to the thirteenth fairy's curse, which is that the female protagonist will prick her finger with a spinning wheel. The elements of the curse and the spinning wheel are kept in Sexton's tale, although in

this story they subvert their meaning from punishment to liberation. Thus, the thirteenth fairy's curse actually turns the bad fairy into a female helper, since in this tale death by means of the spinning wheel symbolizes the heroine's liberation from the sexual abuses of her father and patriarchal dominance in general. As the story develops, one might observe that the only way that the female protagonist has to freed herself from her father's memories is death: "God help – /this life after death?' (95). Nevertheless, the twelfth fairy's action, inspired by a feeling of maternal protection, of softening the spell so that Briar Rose's curse is sleep instead of death is not so beneficial for her as it may seen. Owing to this action, the heroine is damned to sleep and revive the sexual abuses of her father time and time again. Similarly, in Donoghue's tale the motif of the spinning wheel also subverts its meaning but contrary to Sexton's, it becomes beneficial. The spinning wheel symbolizes a new beginning for the heroine who is learning a useful activity for the very first time in her life.

In general, it might be said that both authors, Anne Sexton and Emma Donoghue deploy the female protagonists' period of stagnation fruitfully, subverting its meaning in their own interests. In her tale, Sexton has a clear intention: the introduction of a taboo issue like incest, described from an allegorical and mythical perspective. Bearing in mind that Sexton's ideas rather belong to the second wave feminism, it may be thought that the poet's purpose is to remember the multiple male aggressions suffered by women throughout history. By introducing the issue of incest in the story, Sexton remarks that classical fairy tales prevent women from acquiring knowledge about the real world. Paying attention to Sexton's way of thinking, one might deduce that the message that she wants to transmit is that traditional fairy tales should not be exempt from describing the reality of the world although that means to portray its dangers and cruelty. Donoghue's vision of the world seems to be less hard. The Irish author

attempts to call women's attention so that they keep being conscious that they are, first and foremost, active and individual human beings that transcend patriarchal roles. In this sense, Donoghue's tale is really revealing because the author leaves the issue of lesbian identity aside so as to focus on the denunciation and elimination of patriarchal stereotypes in literature and society.

Regarding male representation, it is possible to observe Sexton's tendency to represent male characters with a certain level of ambiguity at the beginning, as was the case in other stories, her male characters become evil progressively and, thus, the negative portrayal becomes complete by the end of the poems. Sexton's poem, "Briar Rose", follows these premises and suggests a sexual aggression by means of a language full of symbolism and metaphors until incest is described explicitly at the end. On Donoghue's part, in spite of the fact that her male characters show some patriarchal attitudes, they continue being described from a positive perspective. In postfeminist terms, men are not aggressors or monsters: they are human subjects that make mistakes in their behaviour with women.

On the other hand, female representation is completely structured and well-organized in the two tales. Female characters are classified into two different roles: the first one represents the female archetype that supports patriarchal power. The second one is the role of female helper that personifies a different kind of woman: powerful, active and disobedient to patriarchal rules. Owing to this disobedience, classical fairy tales have always described this stereotype as less feminine, a kind of representation which is subverted and parodied in Sexton's and Donoghue's texts. In general, it is possible to notice the sympathy that both authors feel for these female characters, given that their objective is to try to help the young heroines to become free from what is oppressing them in the same way as it oppressed them when they were young. In this

sense, Sexton and Donoghue subvert the negative meaning of aspects such as old age or lack of beauty. Sexton and Donoghue associate ‘old age’ with experience and ‘lack of beauty’ with the relevance of other qualities such as activity or independence; they take advantage of these different qualities to help the new generations of females to overcome male dominance.

Final Thoughts

After analyzing the different fairy tales from Anne Sexton's *Transformations,* Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* and Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch,* I cannot avoid wondering an idea: Can a fairy tale, which is initially a patriarchal text, be subverted to develop a feminist, postfeminist or lesbian perspective without ruining the original plot? Everything seems to affirm that this is so. The deployment of a fairy-tale framework, which has been traditionally associated with the functions of entertainment and female indoctrination, highlights that fairy stories' mythical base still has a huge influence in our contemporaneous society, above all on the female members of society. For this reason, fairy tales are the proper framework so that authors such as Sexton, Carter and Donoghue may discuss their different points of view regarding feminism. These collections of fairy tales provide reflections not only from their own experiences and perspectives about being and becoming a woman but at the same time represent the historical period in which they lived and the feminist theories that have influenced them. Sexton's Carter's and Donoghue's subversion of these texts is aimed at approaching them to the reality of the twentieth century but always under the influence of the feminist, postfeminist or lesbian discourse. By means of these conclusions, I am going to refer to each author, remarking her belonging to one of the several feminist currents previously mentioned and how their adherence to a determined current has been reflected on their work.

Following a chronological order, Anne Sexton is the author whose career developed during the mid-twentieth century. It is necessary to remember that Sexton began to write poetry as way of expression of her own emotions and experiences; her own vision of the world as a woman. The fact that feminist readers emphatized with her may have

to do with the fact that her thoughts and beliefs about the world were not so far from the feminist movement. As she continued her literary career, her work was more and more influenced by the second wave feminist postulates until her adherence was confirmed with the publication of *Transformations.* In general, this work can be considered as a pioneer collection of poetry since it describes the inability of the females to transcend stereotypes due to the boundaries imposed by the male discourse and, simultaneously, it highlights the need of a new female identity by means of the negative portrayal of the female stereotype. As other second wave feminist writers, such as Simone de Beauvoir or Betty Friedan, Sexton considered literature as a weapon of denunciation and criticized widely literary female misrepresentation and objectification of the submitted woman to patriarchal dominance. Hence, her collection of subverted fairy tales does not differ much from the original fairy stories. In accordance with the traditional fairy tales, Sexton's female characters are pushed into the background by the patriarchal discourse. In this manner, she stresses the victimization and objectification of these patriarchal female stereotypes and that they correspond to male projections and not to reality. Despite Sexton's literary commitment to make visible second wave feminist tenets such as victimization, other ones such as female sexual rights were not developed except when they had to do with male violence against women in the sexual arena, in other words those ones that were considered taboo for the patriarchal authorities. Owing to all these reasons, one might consider Anne Sexton as a member of the mainstream second wave feminism current.

On the other hand, authors such as Angela Carter, who was also associated with the second feminist wave, show a certain ambivalence in their relationship with this movement. Although Carter agreed with some aspects of the mainstream feminist current, such as the critique of patriarchy and the challenge against literary female

representation as 'the Other', her collection of postmodern fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* is focused on the reflection of her own ideas about the relationships among men and women, stressing the sexual distinction of female and male roles. Male fantasies of sexual intercourse were described as ways of humiliating into women by second wave feminism. On her part, Carter rejected this idea, which transforms all females into victims and all male into dominators. She preferred to give her female subjects a main role in the sexual relationship. In this sense, the author's heroines abandon their roles of victims of male desire to become sexual subjects. This idea may seem a contradiction given that Carter's texts have a lot of references to female objectification, but paying attention to the process of objectification, one might realize that only those characters who play obsolete female roles are objectified. Besides, Carter's work is characterized by her excess and abuse of male violence against women as a way of transgressing regarding the patriarchal establishment; in no sense the author supports this kind of violent behaviour but emphasizes that those women who resign themselves to being victims will keep being victims. Furthermore, by means of the representation of violence and female objectification in her tales, the author attempts to criticize the tendency to the identification of sexual roles in accordance with gender.

Carter's female characters who claim for their rights to be subjects and deny the established female roles are rewarded with the development of an incipient sexual desire. One of the most remarkable points of Carter's literature is her defence of the female right to have sex as violently as men. In fact, the author's controversial opinions on sex, pornography, violence and the questioning and deconstruction of gender polarities such as animal/human or masculine/feminine were the reason why she was deliberately linked with the marginal side of the second wave feminism. In this sense,

one might suggest that Carter advances the assumptions that will subsequently influence the development of the postfeminist current.

The second wave feminist current evolved progressively to another way of understanding feminism which was epitomized in some authors such as Emma Donoghue. The most prominent point of the postfeminist current encloses the idea of gender as a social construction and, therefore, that female and male categories have been created through discourses of power. Many postfeminist authors such as Donoghue support this idea and avoid reflecting gender differences that may provoke female victimization and male demonization. Their main aim is to preserve literature as a form of expression and not a tool to denounce gender differences. In Donoghue's specific case, it is necessary to take into account her condition of lesbian writer. Her collection of fairy tales entitled *Kissing the Witch* can be interpreted as a transgression not only of gender boundaries but also of sexual ones, adding a new polarity, heterosexuality/homosexuality. The author's intention is the visibility and legitimacy of the lesbian condition in those literary texts from which the patriarchal tradition had silenced them. However, Donoghue's tendency towards the idealization of lesbian relationships, goes so far as to describe idyllical endings based on what can be seen as social ostracism: in other words, promoting life in lesbian 'ghettos' as the only way to escape from heteronormativity.

In general, one might observe that Sexton, Carter and Donoghue attempt to awake consciousness and open the readers' minds to another reality beyond the traditional fairy tale canon by means of the discovering of new forms of understanding femininity, masculinity, love and sexuality. The most remarkable conclusion I reached when interpreting these postmodern fairy tales is that each one of these female writers, regardless of the feminist current to which they belong, has found her place in the

world and this is very different from what the fairy tales represented. In this sense the three authors have known how to subvert classical fairy tales to adapt them to their own realities and at the same time keep their mythical base. Definitely, all of them have been successful by putting new wine in old bottles and making these bottles explode[19].

[19] On this, see Angela Carter (1983).

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