

Univerzita Karlova

Pedagogická fakulta

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Female Desire in the Works of Angela Carter

Téma ženské touhy v díle Angely Carter

Klára Polášková

Vedoucí práce:
Studijní program:
Studijní obor:

Bernadette Higgins, M.A.
Specializace v pedagogice
B AJ-NJ

2017

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma Female Desire in the Works of Angela Carter vypracovala pod vedením vedoucí práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále prohlašuji, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

Praha, 21. 4. 2017

.....

podpis

Acknowledgment

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Bernadette Higgins, M.A., for her guidance and understanding. Secondly, I hereby express my gratitude to my family and friends for their endless and much needed support.

Anotace

Cílem této bakalářské práce je seznámit čtenáře s problematikou projevů ženské touhy obsažených ve sbírce povídek *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (do češtiny přeloženo jako *Krvavá Komnata*) od spisovatelky Angely Carter. V první části je přiblížen život autorky, situace ve feministickém hnutí ve druhé polovině 20. Století a vysvětleno jak do něj spadá sama Angela Carter. Dále je popsán způsob kombinování literárních žánrů i užití jazyka, které jsou pro autorku typické. Druhá část práce se skládá z představení a analýzy ženských postav v každé dílčí povídce obsažené v tomto díle.

Klíčová slova

Angela Carter, *Krvavá Komnata* a jiné povídky, pohádky, feminismus, postmodernismus

Annotation

The aim of this Bachelors thesis is to introduce the topic of female desire and feminism contained in *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories*, a collection of short stories written by Angela Carter. First part of this thesis is dedicated to introducing Angela Carters life, the situation within the feminist movement in the second half of the twentieth century and Carter's place in it. The thesis continues with describing the author's style of writing, genres that she combines and her use of language. The second part contains an analysis of female characters in individual stories in the collection.

Key Words

Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, fairy tales, feminism, postmodernism

Content

1. Introduction	6
2. Angela Carter- her life and work.....	7
3. Feminism in times of Angela Carter	9
4. Carter’s Style of Writing	10
4.1. Postmodernism.....	11
4.2. Gothic.....	12
4.3. Pornography.....	13
4.4. Angela Carter’s language.....	14
5. Fairy tales	15
5.1. Fairy tales according to Angela Carter	17
6. The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories	19
6.1. General introduction	19
6.2. Interpretation of the title “The Bloody Chamber”	19
6.3. The Bloody Chamber.....	21
6.4. The Courtship of Mr Lyon.....	23
6.5. Tiger’s Bride	25
6.6. Puss in Boots.....	26
6.7. Erl-King	28
6.8. Snow Child	29
6.9. The Lady of the House of Love	29
6.10. The Werewolf.....	30
6.11. The Company of Wolves.....	32
6.12. Wolf Alice.....	32
7. Conclusion.....	35
8. Works Cited.....	38

1. Introduction

This thesis aims to analyse the topic of female desire which appears in most of Angela Carters works, but will specifically use the examples that can be found in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* which was published in 1979. This collection contains ten short stories that are inspired or built on the base of classical fairy tales that have been written according to Carter's specific artistic and ideological convictions.

The first chapter of the purely theoretical part of this thesis introduces Angela Carter's life and work. It will describe her background and give an idea of her development as an author and her life accomplishments. The thesis will continue by describing the state of the feminist movement in the second half of the twentieth century, the so called second-wave feminism and explain where the significance of Angela Carter as a feminist author lies and what controversies she has sparked throughout her life with her works. It will also give a brief overview of her opinions on myths and pornography, which will be acquired not only from *The Bloody Chamber*, but from *The Sadeian Woman* (1979) as well.

In the next chapter of the thesis the author also attempts to describe literary genres that are to be found in *The Bloody Chamber*. Postmodernism is a genre which has to be mentioned in the relation to Carter for she was a master at applying individual elements of it, such as combining low and high literary genres in her works. Gothic and pornography will also be introduced for they are very important elements in the mixture of genres in *The Bloody Chamber* collection.

Analysis of the language Angela Carter employs in *The Bloody Chamber* will be provided in the next part chapter. It will also be compared with the language of traditional fairy tales and other genres.

The genre of fairy tale will be introduced in following chapter as well as its origin. There will be space given to the explanation of the significance of the fairy tale in a child's upbringing and education that will be based on research of Jane Yolen and the fairy tale structure based on research of Vladimir Propp will be presented and compared with the structure of Carter's stories.

Following chapter will provide the reader with an overview of Angela Carter's own opinions on fairy tales and explain the way she treats them from her feminist standpoint. It will be explained which aspects of the classical fairy tales she uses as well and which she deconstructs and transforms into something new. The importance of mentioning female sexuality and liberation in relations to fairy tales will be highlighted as well as gender roles and dynamics that are also given an important function in her versions of fairy tales. Violence against women in Carter's stories will be mentioned and explained as a device that emphasizes the pointlessness of female oppression within traditional fairy tales.

The next chapter of the thesis will concentrate on the analysis of the name of the whole collection for it gives an opportunity for several explanations, which should be mentioned. Analyses of individual stories in *The Bloody Chamber*, their relations with classical fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers or Charles Perrault and other authors and most importantly analyses of their female characters will follow and relations to the world views of Carter herself will be explained. There will be a short introduction to the story of every one of them followed by the analysis of the leading female characters in them.

2. Angela Carter- her life and work

The aim of this chapter is to summarize the life and work of one of England's most influential female authors of the 20th century. Some of the most important moment of her life and literary career will be introduced here. Even though her life ended prematurely due to serious illness, she has not died as an unknown author. During the twenty-six years of her literary productivity she has written nine novels, four collections of short stories, non-fiction, translations, poems, film scripts, radio plays and more. Her body of work has gained recognition and sparked controversies since late 1960s and Carter has been considered one of the most successful feminist authors. In 2008 she has been ranked tenth in The Time magazine's "The 50 greatest British writers since 1945" list.

Angela Carter was born in 1940 in Eastbourne, Sussex as Angela Stalker. After having spent World War II at her grandmothers in South Yorkshire, she moved back with her mother to continue her carefree childhood.

Angela married Paul Carter in 1960 and relocated to Bristol where she started working as a journalist for the *Croydon Advertiser* where she wrote features and reviews. After graduating from Bristol University she launched her literary career.

Carter's first novel was *Shadow Dance* (1966) followed by the critically acclaimed *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) for which she not only won the Jon Llwylyn Rhys Prize but also was the first work in which she started pointing out the topic of sexuality which would keep influencing her work for the rest of her life. For her third novel *Several Perceptions* (1968) she received the Somerset Maugham Award. Being successful in her writing career didn't prevent her marriage from crumbling, so after having separated from her husband Carter moved to live in Japan for two years, which she spent working at bars, writing *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and *The Passions of New Eve* (published 1977) and many more. "It was during her time in Japan that Carter's fiction became more speculative, intellectually more demanding and increasingly absorbed with sexual perversity" (Bristow and Broughton 3). While in Japan, Carter's career slowed down and it took years before she reclaimed her position in English literary circles.

In 1979 she sparked immense controversies among her fellow feminists with *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, an essay in which she shares her view on Marquis de Sade's legacy that is kept in the way sexuality and relationships between men and women are portrayed in contemporary fiction, pornography and overall society as well. What was surprising to many of Carter's contemporaries was that not only doesn't she criticize de Sade, she bluntly and unapologetically defends him.

In 1979 she also published the collection of short stories *The Bloody Chamber* which she wrote strongly influenced by traditional French fairy tales contained in a collection by Charles Perrault which she translated into English two years prior.

Carter's eighth novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984) was already published by a popular author who was not only recognised among the literary elite but commercially as well. *Wise Children* (1991), her last novel was written under the influence of cancer yet it is one of her accessible pieces of work and therefore also one of the most read ones among general public.

3. Feminism in times of Angela Carter

This chapter aims to show the development of the feminist movement in the western world in the second half of the twentieth century. The chapter will also give an illustration of the overall social background from which Carter's ideas originated.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the first-wave of feminism, which was fully launched in 1848 after the Seneca Falls Convention (of course, later the feminist ideas spread to Europe as well), focused mainly on legal rights such as the right to female suffrage, right to education or to own property, the Second wave feminism movement concentrated their attention on more private aspects of women's lives such as divorce, custody or reproductive rights. Their primary goal was the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution which would guarantee social equality irrespective of sex.

During the era of second-wave feminism women started appearing in areas of life which were formerly dominated by men only, such as media, military, in higher positions in companies and politics. This was mostly provoked by the post-World War II development of western societies, in which women had to take up formerly male jobs in order to maintain their countries while men were fighting at war. After having tasted the independence and having the power, it was impossible for women to agree to step back into public invisibility and insignificance. For that reason, among the great economic growth and baby boom, that followed immediately after the war, there was a huge raise in unsatisfying relationships of men and women, that were caused by men's expectations of women who were supposed to remain passive just as they did before they knew they had better prospects in life than being overeducated baby-sitters and a housemaids. Thanks to the public visibility that women gained they were able to shine light on previously seemingly non-existing issues such as reproductive rights, marital violence or marital rape.

As Bristow and Broughton mention, it was not an English nor was it a particularly feminine thing to do to write about sexuality as explicitly as she did, which put her into a difficult position among the literary elite of that era. As it showed in the 1980s and 1990, Carter was well ahead of her time in that she anticipated two main issues that would concern feminists of that time, the issue of pornography (whether it is oppressive or not)

and “the construction of gender as a scripted performance” (11). The first one mentioned has been discussed by Carter in the *Sadeian Woman* and caused a scandal, when she did not dismiss pornography completely, moreover did she see it as something that could be beneficial to women and presents a possibility of there being a “moral pornographer”, who would use pornography “a critique of current relations between the sexes” and “penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture”(The *Sadeian Woman* 22). What she also debunks is the myth about the female powerlessness compared to men by explaining the dichotomy of two Sadeian characters Justine and Juliette, two sisters one of which is the victim in her life, one the aggressor. This shows that a person’s power or morality is not at all connected to their gender.

Angela Carters was a very influential figure of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. Even though she gained a controversial reputation thanks to *The Sadeian Woman*, she expressed more popular opinions such as the need to deconstruct myths that patriarchy has created about women and emphasised that it is not only of women’s best interest, because men live in myths about women as well and they are influenced by them even more for women know that these myths are based on pure nonsense. In her works she tries to do so for example by assigning her heroines to traditionally male qualities, such as strength, reason and healthy sexuality.

4. Carter’s Style of Writing

This chapter will introduce the specifics of Angela Carter’s style of writing that she engages in most of her works. She does not only aim to entertain the reader, her main aim is to provoke thoughts and doubts about concepts, system and rules that apply to the majority of patriarchal society. Her works function on many different levels and it depends on the reader only, how many he or she will discover and how many thoughts it will provoke in them. She is very elaborate in choosing what genres and language to employ, even the choice of narrator in her works is very well thought through.

With her writing, Carter manages to draw attention to topics that were and to some extent still are considered inconvenient, such as sexuality, portrayal of gender, pornography and disruption of myths, and furthermore, combines multiple genres in order to achieve biggest impact on the reader.

4.1. Postmodernism

Angela Carter is usually ranked among postmodernist authors, due to her use of typically postmodern devices such as pastiche, mixture of genres and other means of experimenting with language and narratives.

Postmodernism is a post-war genre emerged in the legacy of modernism and its experimental tendencies and had its peak in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of postmodern authors have been directly impacted by World War II having caused them to develop a certain level of paranoia towards the world and the conception of truth, which is mirrored in their works. Postmodernism was also born as a reaction to modernism, which can be seen as very elitist and strictly intellectual style of writing which was unapproachable and unintelligible for the most of readers. On the other hand there are some aspects that these two genres have in common. Fragmentation of the text is desired, to show internal struggle which has to be overcome and eliminated in modernism, postmodernism, on the other hand, shows the reader how to cope with the struggle and chaos for it is everlasting and inevitable.

Postmodernism is known for crossing borders of individual genres and combining them together, high genres, such as novels and low genres, such as porn of science fiction. The authors borrow from them and merge them together to create pastiche, something new, unusual and exciting. This also goes well with one of the main motifs of postmodernism which is the inner contradiction and experimentation.

In postmodernism combining narrative techniques is also very common, for example using metafiction (writing about writing) or intertextuality, acknowledging other text or even adding excerpts of other texts into the new writings. A very popular device is also the temporal distortion or the use of flashbacks or flash-forwards.

Postmodern fiction attempts to deny the existence of a universal truth and reality, which is often achieved by using multiple endings, among which a reader can choose which one to believe, or by engaging an unreliable narrator such as children or someone who has a hindered view of reality. This leads to mistrust between the reader and the writer. On the other hand, postmodernist writers explicitly engage the reader in the creation

of the story, so that the experiences and the roles of the writer and the reader are not isolated from each other but rather shared.

Magical realism is a very typical postmodern combination of genres which aims to disrupt the position of rational thinking in Western culture. It attempts to blend the everyday with the supernatural and thus create a surreal fairy tale-like atmosphere. It was often used by Angela Carter in her other works, but not so typically in *The Bloody Chamber* so it will not be introduced any further.

4.2. Gothic

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, a gothic novel is a European Romantic, pseudo medieval fiction having a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror. Its heyday was the 1790s, but it underwent frequent revivals in subsequent centuries. It is “called Gothic because its imaginative impulse was drawn from medieval buildings and ruins, such novels commonly used such settings as castles or monasteries equipped with subterranean passages, dark battlements, hidden panels, and trapdoors. The vogue was initiated in England by Horace Walpole’s immensely successful *Castle of Otranto* (1765).“ They were also “easy targets for satire” due to ”extravagances of plot”. Carter herself describes gothic tales as “cruel tales, tales of wonder, tales of terror, fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious – mirrors; the externalized self, forsaken castles, haunted forests; forbidden sexual objects . . . Characters and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions. Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural – and thus operate against perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. Its only humour is black humour. It retains a singular moral function – that of provoking unease. (qtd in Peach)

The atmosphere that builds up in a Gothic novel is usually created by a luring fear of that is caused by a psychological evil rather than a threat against the character’s physical self. Characters in gothic stories are in anticipation of revealing an ancient secret which causes them psychological distress or have to fight the demons haunting their own minds while the danger outside can be present as well is deemed of lesser importance to the plot of the story.

In *The Bloody Chamber* story the reader uncovers both, the external threat in the form of the husband and the inner demons in the form of the main character's own corruptibility. One of the topics that Gothic literature deals with is not only fears but also dark desires and those are also prevalent topics of Carter's works. She uses the gothic genre not only to emphasize the horror and lust, that her characters go through, she also highlights them, presents them as a means to one's liberation, as opposed to former gothic tales, which were inclined to a more black and white perspective, that is the reason why the fear and lust were presented as a means to one's demise in them.

Lucie Armitt argues that stories in *The Bloody Chamber* are not fairy tales with gothic elements, but rather Gothic tales inspired by fairy tales (89) but that probably depends on every reader's consideration.

4.3. Pornography

Once Angela Carter published *The Sadeian woman*, which was her essay on Marquis de Sade, the earl of pornography and female characters in his works, she sparked an immense controversy among her fellow feminists. Carter fully recognizes de Sade as a misogynist, who fantasized about torturing woman and was full of "hatred of mothering functions"(28) On the other hand, she appreciates him because "[h]e was unusual in his period for claiming rights of free sexuality for women, and in installing women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds" (*The Sadeian Woman* 41). In *The Sadeian Woman* she also predicts the arrival of the "moral pornographer [who] might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes"(*The Sadeian Woman* 22). Even though *The Sadeian Woman* contains inarguably feminist ideas, Carters position towards pornography was enough for her to be labelled a defender of pornography, which was a highly reprehensible opinion among a large group of feminists at that time

In *The Bloody Chamber* Carter very provocatively combines pornography with fairy tales, two almost opposing genres as one for them is intended for children and one for an adult demographic, in a way that highlights the sexual undertones that are contained in most fairy tales. In some of the fairy tales it is more obvious than in others, for example *The Bloody Chamber*, or *Snow Child Puss in Boots* even contain rather explicit depictions of sexual intercourse. In the last one mentioned it is most explicit, which is caused by the

choice of narrator. An animal does not have to conform to human norms and is not bound by morals, therefore is free to express his instinctive needs in all bluntness. Otherwise the depiction of sexual intercourse is something that is never associated with the genre of fairy tale, and in *The Bloody Chamber* it is possible only thanks to the postmodern combination of genres. Thanks to the language Angela Carter engages, it does not appear vulgar nevertheless.

4.4. Angela Carter's language

The language Angela Carter uses in her works is one of the most important features, that determine their strength and the influence she has on the reader. Without her capability of using the language in such an artistic, elaborate manner, the stories she wrote would lose half of their depth and eloquence.

In Carter's works, the language creates a highly significant layer of meaning in the story by applying specific registers in specific situations, which helps create the atmosphere, further describes the characters and creates a connection between fairy tales myths and today's reality. Carter provides the reader with metaphors and allusions in a very ornate literary language and on the other hand even vulgarisms when she feels it is necessary. She also uses the language to create gradation within the stories to keep the reader excited. Carter's works are highly experimental, which is enabled by her being a part of the postmodernist movement.

Carter's style of writing can sometimes be considered too elaborate by some readers and difficult to follow. The multiple layers of meaning that she creates with her use of pastiche and language can cause misunderstanding among readers and not being able to uncover what is hidden under the poetic but slightly artificial language. Carter's style can be labelled as mannerism which according to *Encyclopedia Britannica* is an "artistic style that predominated in Italy from the end of the High Renaissance in the 1520s to the beginnings of the Baroque style around 1590....Mannerist artists evolved a style that is characterized by artificiality and artiness, by a thoroughly self-conscious cultivation of elegance and technical facility, and by a sophisticated indulgence in the bizarre."

In *The Bloody Chamber* the reader is presented with rich imagery and descriptions of characters, places and inanimate objects which is not very common in traditional fairy tales, which are intended for children with limited vocabulary. Carter overfills the reader's imagination with metaphors, allusions, similes, and other literary figures in order to create a masterpiece in which the language is of almost the same importance as the plot of the fairy tale. It is not unusual for the reader of Carter's works to be overwhelmed by the imagery which may result in not fully understanding the plot and getting lost in the art of the language yet she always achieves the most important goal, which is to enchant the reader and exaggerate the fantastic features of the fairy tale genre.

Carter also tries to appeal to all the senses in order to create a fuller experience while reading. A perfect example of this is the *Erl-King* in which the description of Erl-Kings home, "[t]he room is musical and aromatic and there is always a wood fire crackling in the grate, a sweet, acrid smoke, a bright, glancing flame" (*The Bloody Chamber* 87), provides enough imagery to cause overwhelming impressions in one's imagination.

Aytül Özüm points out that Carter uses language not common for fairy tales in order to emphasize the relations she builds between male and female characters in her stories. Traditionally, males in fairy tales are associated with active properties, being strong, brave and smart, whereas females are portrayed as being passive, humble, patient, beautiful and pure. Carter chooses not to meet these requirements of the genre, for example in *The Bloody Chamber* "she paves the way with appropriate wording of sensuality and violence for the maiden's psychological involvement in the pornographic and pervert world of the Marquis" (Özüm 111). In other words, Carter considers language another means of drawing attention to problems of patriarchal society and afterwards liberating women from social and sexual oppression

5. Fairy tales

A fairy tale according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary is a simple children's story about magical creatures. Not only do the human appearing characters possess supernatural qualities, such as witches or fairies, fairy tales can also feature, dragons, beasts or personified animals. It is assumed that their primary purpose was to

share wisdom, experience and morals with children in a way that would be entertaining and easily comprehensible. The understanding is accomplished mostly by the use of conventional symbols, characters, principles and other motifs. Thanks to these there is also a very clear line between the good and the evil.

Most folk fairy tales have taken centuries to develop into the forms that we know today and there are close to no information about their first occurrence, even though fragments of them can be traced across many countries in several forms. These stories have been subject of many folklorists attention, since they tried to spread and preserve their respective nations traditions and orally submitted stories in order to satisfy strong nationalistic tendencies which were very prominent in Europe of the 18th and 19th century. Some of the most famous ones must be the ones collected and published in 1697 by Charles Perrault in France or *The Children's and Household Tales*, a collection of folk tales created by Brothers Grimm in 1782 and 1787 in Germany. In these two collections Perrault and the Grimm brothers established the forms of fairy tales which are most widely spread throughout western civilization.

Fairy Tales have a very important role in lives of children during their early years of life. According to Jane Yolen, there are four basic functions of fairy tales, the first one being "to provide a landscape of allusions... a new environment, one that is filled with quests and questers, fated heroes and fetid monsters, intrepid heroines and trepidant helpers, even incompetent oafs who achieve competence and wholeness by going out and trying." (15), the second one "is to provide a way of looking at another culture from the inside out"(16), a person that is subjected to magical stories in their childhood may become a more open-minded individual in their adulthood. The third basic role of fairy tales is to process experience through symbols (17). Yolen explains that fairy tales comprise of smaller and larger motifs that can be combined into endless variations. The fourth function is "to provide a framework or model for an individual's belief system ... the tales and stories handed down to us from the cultures that preceded us were the most serious succinct expressions of the accumulated wisdom of those cultures... Even very young children can absorb the meaning and wisdom of these symbolically expressed ancient tales and use them as tools for interpreting their own day-to-day experience." (18)

Morphology of the Fairy Tale written by Vladimir Propp is a highly significant body of work which introduces a theory about the inner structure of fairy tales. Propp divides traditional Russian tales and analyses the order of succession in which they follow and explains the importance of the sequence of the plot. According to him fairy tales begin with the initial situation, followed chronologically (some of them may be inverted but it is mostly set) by 31 functions last of which is the wedding. Propp did not only analyse the morphology of fairy tales, he was also concerned with their characters, which he found seven that can be variously distributed among more characters, or one character can occupy more roles in one story as well (Everard) .

In *The Bloody Chamber* is the chronology of the fairy tales slightly altered but one must remember that these are not traditional fairy tales and that Angela Carter even strived not to follow the traditional way of writing fairy tales in order to achieve her goals of deconstructing them.

5.1. Fairy tales according to Angela Carter

Carter believed that “appropriation and adaptation is really what the fairy tale is all about”(Gamble 67), which appears more than likely, considering the oral tradition of folk tales and the multiple versions of them, which can be found even in historical scripts all over the world. In *The Bloody Chamber* Angela Carter uses well known fairy tales and stories and enhances or adds some features in them, such as features of postmodernism, gothic, humour and a significant amount of eroticism in order to convey a new message with the story. The topic of gender and stereotypes surrounding it are often highlighted, deconstructed and reconstructed in order to point out and evaluate social problems in the society. Similarly, Jack Zipes claims that “especially since the 1970s and up through the present, the fairy tale has become more aggressive, aesthetically more complex and sophisticated, and more insistent on *not* distracting readers but help them focus on key social problems and issues in their respective societies“ (25).

In *The Bloody Chamber* Carter emphasises the role of a woman in relations to herself and to others, male partners or parents and also shows them to be sexual beings with physical needs that ought to be satisfied. She acknowledges the sexual undertones that are contained in classical fairy tales and emphasizes them in order to show women as

beings who are capable of initiating and even enjoying sexual encounters. Her female characters are even able to use their sexuality in a way that manipulates the ones they need into the desired position, which is something that is not witnessed in traditional fairy tales. For example in *The Company of Wolves* a young woman saves her own life by seducing a wolf who would otherwise be a cause of her demise.

Even though Carter's fairy tales are full of erotica and even descriptions of sexual activities, they are far from being pornographic. She uses the sex in her writing not with the intention to cause sexual excitement, which is the main role of pornography according to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, but to criticize prejudice that surrounds female sexuality which has disabled women from freely expressing it.

Violence against women is a very prominent topic throughout *The Bloody Chamber*. Carter shows her female characters as being oppressed by men and society in general and later gives them a chance to liberate themselves from those chains. She tries to show that women are not obliged to blindly obey men and abide the rules society has forced upon them. Moreover, she expresses the notion that by disobeying these rules and acting in accordance to their own will, women can gain so much more than if they were to follow somebody else's ideals.

Angela Carter disagreed with the traditional roles of men and women in fairy tales therefore she creates new stories from the remains of the old ones and comes up with different gender dynamics among the characters in fairy tales. She claimed that fairy tales are "the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created our world" (Lucie Armitt 89) but since then, society has changed drastically and so should gender dynamics in fairy tales.

Fairy tales not only provide an insight into our ancestors views, their enormous role is to explain children rules that are to be followed in a society, so if Carter's belief about appropriation and adaptation are based on truth, it can lead to enormous problems if fairy tales are passing on potentially damaging concepts that are not in accordance with values of respective societies and eras

6. The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories

6.1. General introduction

The Bloody Chamber, published in 1979 consists of ten short stories which are all based on traditional fairy tales, most of which could be found in the Charles Perrault collection which was translated by Carter in 1977.

The stories can be divided into groups that share similar topics or are even based on the same original fairy tale. The initial story, The Bloody Chamber is the only one that stands out of this division. The three groups, according to Merja Makinen, are “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, “The Tiger’s Bride” and “Puss-in-Boots, which all contain symbols of feline creatures, “The Erl-King”, “The Snow Child” and “The Lady of the House of Love” which deal with fairies or supernatural spirits and “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and the final story, “Wolf-Alice” which are based on the tale of the Little Red Riding Hood, dealing with the wolf/werewolf characters (28).

Carter writes the stories not as fairy tales that are intended for adult readers, but rather as a research of hidden meanings of traditional fairy tales. She acknowledges the sexual undertones of traditional fairy tales, accentuates it and immediately criticizes and reforms certain aspects of them.

Even though Carter changes the dynamic within the fairy tales by portraying females as being more active, she still puts the women through a lot of misconduct that they have to face and overcome in the stories in the form of male characters or the whole society. The women consequently overcome most problems by themselves or with a little help of someone else, as for example in the first story.

6.2. Interpretation of the title “The Bloody Chamber”

The title of the collection, The Bloody Chamber, opens many opportunities for interpretation, the first, most obvious one relates to the initial story of the collection. In the story the Marquis hides a room in his mansion, in which he keeps corpses of his former wives that he had tortured killed. It is a place of immense horror from which his young wife is banished. It is a place, which once visited leaves an imprint on the young woman,

physically as well as mentally. The colour of blood is closely connected with violence and crimes and anticipates a gloomy atmosphere throughout the whole collection.

Another specific place that could be called the Bloody Chamber is the Marquis' bedroom, a place where Marquis' aggressive sexuality is unveiled. Once the young wife finds pornography in Marquis' library, she is fully subjected to his carnal lust and as a typical symbol of the loss of virginity and innocence; her blood is shed during the intercourse. Blood in this case symbolizes becoming sexually mature and experienced. In *The Company of Wolves* it is further described as "the colour of sacrifices, the colour of menses"(117).

Christina Bacchilega also suggests that the Bloody Chamber could also symbolize the prison into which most of the female characters in the collection are thrown into. (qtd in Gamble 133) The females are not only locked up in a house or mansion and kept from encountering other males, but are also prisoners of patriarchy which prohibits them from fully expressing themselves.

The colour red is very prominent in the title story, as it is the colour of blood and creates a tense atmosphere. First the young bride is presented with an engagement ring "in a leather box lined with crimson velvet" (*The Bloody Chamber* 9) that has been passed down in the Marquis' family, here Carter draws attention to the blood bond associated with the object. As a wedding present she is given "[a] choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat" (*The Bloody Chamber* 11). The gifts that the young woman is given represents the character of the Marquis' financial wealth. He is vastly superior to his wife in economically and socially which gives him a power over her. Blood red is the colour of dominance over somebody, which is obvious from the beginning, but becomes more highlighted by the presents, Marquis gives his wife throughout the course of the story.

Blood and colour red is often associated with becoming sexually mature, first by menstruating and later on by bleeding during first intercourse or during childbirth. Blood is an inherent part of women's lives and in the *Bloody Chamber* this is accentuated in a way which is completely rid of prejudice that is held by the patriarchal society about

menstruation and female sexuality. Carter uses the symbol of blood to reclaim it as something that does not deserve mythologizing nor disgust, but as a symbol of womanhood and life.

6.3. The Bloody Chamber

The tale of Bluebeard, on which the story of The Bloody Chamber is based, was first published in 1697 by Charles Perrault. It is very unusual among fairy tales not only in the way that it starts with a wedding which is what fairy tales mostly end with, but with the fact that it's characters mostly do not possess any supernatural traits. It is a story of a young beautiful girl who marries an older man, who is a multiple widower already and she end up being terribly abused by him. The only comfort she has in the marriage is a piano and a blind piano tuner, who is hired by the Marquis to be of service to his lady. Once when her husband is leaving for a work related trip, he gives her a mysterious key from the only room in his mansion that she is forbidden to enter, she becomes curious and decides to explore the room anyway. What she finds there, she could not foresee in her worst nightmares, the Marquis has kept his previous wives, whom he has apparently murdered, stored in iron maidens and other torture devices. After she gets exposed she is supposed to be beheaded by her husband but at the last minute is saved by her mother. The young woman inherits all of her husband's wealth and builds a life with the blind piano tuner, with whom she had started a platonic relationship while she was still married to the Marquis. Not only is the beginning of the fairy tale unusual, but the ending is even more so. There are stories, in which a female character saves the situation, but it is very rare in fairy tales for a woman to gain wealth and live a happy life with someone after her husband has passed.

Carter's version of the Bluebeard story follows the original to a large extent, but one of the bigger differences is in the language that is applied and thanks to that the story has a different impact on the reader. The most apparent is the use of first person narration from the position of the main female character of the young wife, which subconsciously changes the dynamic of the story from a male-oriented one to female-oriented.

In the beginning of the story, the young wife may resemble the character of de Sade's Justine, especially by the way she is treated as a commodity by her new husband. This is true to a certain extent because even in the beginning she manifests her own will to marry the Marquis (who may resemble Marquis de Sade), for example when her mother asks her "are you sure you love him?" she replies "I'm sure I want to marry him" (7), which means that she obviously is not marrying for love, but is not forced to it either, which would happen the case if the analogy with Justine was correct. Even later on in the story the young woman states that she was "was innocent but not naïve" (17).

Once young bride moves to her new home, the reader starts witnessing a slight decay of her "morals" in a way that it is obvious that she has the potential to be corrupted and to put her former innocent self aside and to rebel against what was the norm for young wives and, furthermore, to rebel against her husband as well. Once the young wife tastes the newly acquired luxury she herself acknowledges a change in herself. The first moment when she herself realises it is during her wedding night and then even more noticeably while going through her the Marquis' library, after having found his pornography. She is also surprised that on the wedding night, even though she was repulsed by her husband she was able to feel aroused, but Aytül Özüm explains that "the problematized issue in the story is not focused on the young woman's sexual arousal, but it is on the fact that women can be as inclined as men for evil. (111)"

After she is presented with the opportunity to openly disobey her husband by entering the chamber, he explicitly banished her from, she is so far gone down the spiral of her own corruption, that there seems to be no other than a tragic ending for her. This also interferes with the theory of Justine, because she, even if it was the moral thing to do and would free her from her abusers, did not change her viewpoint about anything and stayed ignorant and passive for the rest of her short lived life. The wife in *The Bloody Chamber* chooses to rebel against the rules her husband has set and once she does so, she is sentenced to death. Not only because of her disobedience, but mostly because it was her innocence that "captivated him—the silent music, he said, of [her] unknowingness" (19), and at the moment of disobedience, she lost all appeal to the Marquis and therefore was of no use to him anymore.

In this place the role of the mother in this story becomes even more crucial. Unlike in other versions of the Bluebeard tale, she is the one who saves the young woman from death by the hand of her husband. Her female power is exaggerated to a large extent, as she, while riding a horse, strikes the Marquis with a single shot to the head and kills him and thus grants her daughter life yet again.

Last but not least, the relationship of the young wife and the blind piano tuner demonstrates that even though he is poor and visually impaired, he is capable of satisfying her emotional needs more fully than a wealthy man in full health. The inability to see her beauty denies the possibility of objectifying her as her husband did and opens possibility of building a relationship on a foundation of purer feelings than just sexual appetite.

6.4. The Courtship of Mr Lyon

Courtship of Mr Lyon is the first of two stories in The Bloody Chamber collection that are based on the classic fairy tale, Beauty and the Beast. The difference between the classical version and the Courtship of Mr Lyon is in fact not in the plot itself more so in the development of the relationships between the characters and the journey of their own self-discovery. The story also gains strongly sexual undertones. The plot otherwise stays more or less similar to the Beauty and the Beast story written in 1740 by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve.

What is interesting in this story is the fact that up to the point when the Beauty is supposed to be given to the Beast to live with him, there are no reasons for the reader to assume the Beauty to be treated as property or inferior to a man in any way. She is raised to be a humble young woman, innocent and pure, when asked about what present her father should bring her, she only wishes for a single white rose. The father, even on the verge of bankruptcy, is so filled with love for his daughter that his main regret is that he cannot provide for her, not even such a small token of his care.

The first time The Beauty feels any pressure upon herself is while having dinner with her father and the Beast, “(s)he found his bewildering difference from herself almost

intolerable; its presence choked her...And such a one she felt herself to be, Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial “ (45).

She is presented with a choice to stay and in return the Beast would take care of all of her father's financial matters, but the way they both treat her, leaves no space for doubt that the choice has already been made for her, and the men just want to make it look like she has made it herself. She agrees to stay nevertheless, because she feels like her father would appreciate it and “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). The pressure she feels is not one of having to obey a tyrant or a master, more so a pressure of wanting to please her parent so much, she would be willing to sacrifice herself for their good, and consequently for the good of the whole family, including herself as well. She ends up doing that at a much greater scale by agreeing to stay at the Beasts mansion until her father sorts out his financial matters in London. She becomes a victim of financial deals of men and conforms to them silently, as women are traditionally supposed to.

The reader of this story has to admit that the paternal figure in *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* is not only a loving father, but he has selfish intentions as well. Even though the Beauty's father grieves his daughter's fate as the Beasts companion, he trades her for the possibility of his own wealth anyway.

One of the highlights of this story is the way the Beast starts opening himself up to the Beauty. Even she notices that her host is probably more afraid of her, than she is of him, most probably due to his likeness to a wild animal. “He forced himself to master his shyness, which was that of a wild creature, and so she contrived to master her own“(47), so once they both make an effort to get to know each other, she discovers a part of his human side.

The affection that the Beauty shares with Mr Lyon is not yet very strong when she is called by her father to come back to accompany him in London, once his wealth is retrieved. Even though she promises the Beast that she would come back before the season ends, she finds herself in the midst of London's most exquisite distractions and for the first time in her life becomes spoiled and highly materialistic. She does send the Beast white

roses as a thank you for the care he has provided her with but otherwise does not think of him at all.

It is slightly paradoxical that even though the readers knows that the Beauty's relations with Mr Lyon have been established artificially, as one side of a deal and pity her for being a victim, once she starts living indulgently in London and seems to forget about her captor, she becomes depicted as a spoiled and ungrateful. Both sides have met the conditions of the deal, yet ironically, she gets blamed for not caring about her oppressor, however nice he has been to her.

After Beauty returns to Mr Lyon's mansion and thus almost miraculously saves his life, his body transforms into a body of a man. Beauty's civilizing presence has tamed the beast and thus made him conform to requirements of society. On the other hand, Beauty this time gets to decide about her destiny and start her life on the foundation of mutual liking.

6.5. Tiger's Bride

The story of the Tiger's Bride is the second story in the collection that is based on the original Beauty and the Beast story. The main differences between the original version and Tiger's Bride are those that in this one of Carter's versions the Beauty is actually lost to the Tiger by her father in a game of cards, which shows the dynamic of her relationship with men from the beginning of the story. The second most prominent difference is that in the end it is not the Tiger, who goes through a change and ultimately becomes human, but it is the Beauty, who becomes a free creature, equal to the Tiger, and thus becomes a beast as well.

From the very beginning Carter establishes the relationship between the Beauty and her father and it is probably even more important to the Beauty's development than in the Courtship of Mr Lyon. The Beauty finds herself in a similar situation as the female character in previous story, only in this case her father treats her as merely his property, which he can lose in a game of cards just as he could do with money. The Father in the previous story shows regret and grief about having to surrender his daughter to the Beast because of his fatherly love and worries about her, whereas in the Tiger's Bride, the father

grieves only the loss of all his material possessions, which in his mind include his daughter and does not care about her well-being what so ever. As Aidan Day puts it, “[t]he role of women as items of exchange in a patriarchal system is accented even more sharply in “The Tiger’s Bride” than in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” (139)

Due to her upbringing, which to a certain extent lacked respectable loving father figure, the Beauty in the Tiger’s Bride is more likely to be able to lose patriarchal values and influences and most importantly “refuses the role of victim” (Day 145). Because of this she is able to accept the Tiger for who he really is, someone outside of the society, who is considered inferior to men, but once she is ready for it she is also capable of accepting and discovering the more animal and sexual side of herself and embracing it. She thus becomes equal to the Beast and therefore can become his mate. Carter explains that “[t]he Tiger will never lie down with the lamb; he acknowledges no pact that is not reciprocal. The lamb must learn to run with the tigers” (64)

The Beauty in the Tiger’s bride refuses jewellery and everything else the Beast presents her with and even only being willing to lift up her skirt and not showing her face, she shows her disobedience towards him, but also manifests that she is aware of the power of her sexuality and that she is willing to use it against him. She refuses to submit to another man who would treat her like property as her father would do and that it what consequently brings her together with the Tiger. What she is yet to discover is that the Beast is not interested in her as an object of his sexual desires but in her potential to become his peer and partner. According to Aidan Day the Beast in the Tiger’s Bride represents the hurtful effects that patriarchy has on men, which are for example not being able to fully express emotions and having the need to act more masculine(143). Carter dismisses this idea and creates a female character, who is sexually aware, strong willed, and inert towards social expectations towards women.

6.6. Puss in Boots

Puss in Boots is the third of the stories in The Bloody Chamber collection which contain a feline character. Compared to the other two it has a less gloomy atmosphere and it is one of the stories in the collection which involve a significant amount of irony and even puns and word play in general.

The character that the story is narrated by and concentrated on is not a female, but a male cat, who tends to objectify women and together with his master they both pursue a very chauvinistic lifestyle. From his point of view the story is about enabling his master to have sex with the married woman he has chosen, but what is portrayed as well is the woman's position in the patriarchal world and her liberation after becoming sexually awakened and being able to express her own will once she is free from her tyrannical husband, who used to isolate her from the outside world, treat her as though she was merely his possession and furthermore did not even have sex with her not only because of his impotence, but lack of interest as well.

In *Puss in Boots* Angela Carter uses the a very common motif used in fairy tales, namely the princess or a young woman imprisoned in a tower or in another remote building, in need of rescuing but in order to draw more attention to this issue, she places the prison in the middle of the city. Carter points out the fact that other town citizens ignore the lady's situation because of their belief that the husband has universal power over his wife and therefore there is nothing wrong about her not being allowed outside alone or even without a veil.

As in other stories in the collection, in *Puss in boots*, one can only wonder whether the young wife was sexually awakened by the Puss's master or longer before their first sexual encounter already. She may be mistreated by her husband, technically be a virgin and kept on a leash, but once the opportunity presents itself, she is willing to have sex with the first person to cross her path, without thinking twice about it. Even in their correspondence she seems like a woman, who is aware of her possibilities and is only looking for an accomplice to help her free herself of her wealthy and influential tyrant.

Once she has disposed of her husband she fires the old hag who, accompanies her at almost all times, and becomes a person with a bold personality, which she was not able to fully express under the influence of those two. Only in a few cases it shone through, for example when she ordered the hag to pay the rat catcher from her own money that she stole from her master.

6.7. Erl-King

Erl-King is the one of the stories in the collection that have not been renamed by Angela Carter and remained, as the original versions, named after the character of the king of elves, who appears on Danish and German folklore, sometimes portrayed as a creature that haunts the forest and lures people, especially children, into their own demise.

In Carter's Erl-King the narrator is a woman who shares her adventures in a forest which is inhabited by the Erl-King. He seduces her and takes her to his house in the middle of the forest, where she sees a collection of entrapped birds in cages and after some time realises, that he has a cage prepared for her as well. Consequently, she infers that the birds don't sing with joy but cry after their lost freedom, she kills the Erl-King and all the imprisoned birds change back into the young women they once were.

The Forest in this story initially appears to be safe or to be the norm "A young girl would go into the wood as trustingly as Red Riding Hood to her granny's house"(85) but once it is described as a male dominant "house of nets"(85) and that "there is no way through the woods any more... Once you are inside it, you must stay there until it lets you out again for there is no clue to guide you through in perfect safety" (85) it becomes clear that it is supposed to be a reference to the state of the world under patriarchy. A young innocent girl might enter it and face unexpected obstacles that might ruin her. The Erl-King then appears to be the personification of the forest and consequently also the patriarchy.

What is also depicted in this story is the slight masochism of the female character; she herself admits her desire to be caught by the Erl-king and to "lie at the mercy of his strong hands" (87) and willingly takes the risk of being captured as one of the bird in the cages in Erl-kings house. It may seem that the woman surrenders herself to the patriarchy but with the murder at the end she refuses to become a victim and be caged among the other birds and shows what a woman is capable of in order to win her freedom. She also proves that a woman is able to choose with whom to spend nights but not to be defined or entrapped by that person or the idea that they are entitled to anything in relations to her.

6.8. Snow Child

The shortest story of the collection is far from being the least interesting, imaginative or overflowing with symbols. Snow child is a rewritten version of the Brother Grimm's Snow White.

It tells a story of a Count riding a horse with his Countess in the middle of winter. While riding the Count vocalizes a wish for a girl who would be "as white as snow", "as red as blood" and "as black as a [raven's] feather"(91). After he has finalized the wish, suddenly a young woman, who meets the requirements exactly, appears in front of them. The Count takes her with him and the Countess loathes her and tries to eliminate her and the instability the girl might cause in her marriage. It seems as if the Count prefers the new younger woman but in the end she dies, after picking up a rose for the Countess which is the only favour from the Snow-child that has been granted to her by the Count (she had even lost her clothes to the new woman). She melts away after having pricked her finger. The Count then quickly gets off the horse, rapes the dead woman, the Countess watches him calmly. Afterwards there is nothing left of the Snow-child except a feather, a bloodstain and a rose and the Count and the Countess continue on their way as if nothing ever interrupted their ride

In the Snow Child it is the man, who is portrayed as the more important, he is introduced first and is granted every one of his wishes about the girl of his dreams. The Count is made to feel as if he was in the position of advantage in comparison with the Countess. The Countess on the other hand, right in the beginning is referred to as "his wife"(91) and is reduced into man's possession.

The Snow Child in this story seems to represent the instability of objects of male desire. The Count has a woman created precisely according to his every wish, however once she touches her (rapes her), he realizes, how unembedded in reality she really was and his materialised desire in a form of a Snow Child literally melts in his hands. When she was absent, he desired her, but once she became present, the desire wore off almost immediately.

From the point of view of the secondary character in this story, the Countess, the encounter with the Snow Child becomes very uncomfortable. She herself is someone who does not obey the rules of objectification of women and is not defined by a male view of the world. She is the one character in this story that is mostly real even though she is overcome with jealousy for a while and eventually succeeds in eliminating her.

6.9. The Lady of the House of Love

The seventh story in *The Bloody Chamber* may at first be mistaken for a simple story about a vampire princess, but it contains elements of the *Sleeping Beauty* as well. It is a story of a female vampire kept in isolation in a lonely castle in the company of her mute governess only. She feeds off of animals and if a man is unfortunate enough to enter her home, she devours them as well. She cannot contain her unnatural desires for blood and therefore bears the burden of her immortality all alone, until one day when a young officer comes to the castle, she desires his body and blood as well as the intimacy that she could have with him if she were not a vampire. He eventually becomes the one to end her miserable life when he kisses her bleeding after having pricked it with glass.

In the *Lady of the house of love* we again see the use of blood as a symbol, in this case as Lucie Armitt explains, blood “can equally signify menstrual flow, which continues to threaten to breach the limits of restrictively enclosing patriarchal representations (including its taboos, its silences and its secrets)” (93). What this signifies is that periods can be considered as threatening to men thanks to the fact that they cannot control them, understand or compare them to anything in their lives. Menstruation stands in the way of constant sexualisation and objectification of women, therefore is despicable and undesirable for men. Since men and the patriarchy cannot regulate women’s menstrual cycle, they have created a stigma around them in order to diminish their potential danger.

In *The Lady of the House of Love* we witness another version of Carter’s *Bloody Chamber*, specifically a one in which a mature woman has trapped herself in order to hide, not only her sexual desires and hunger, that could be considered unfit for a lady, but her wisdom strength and equality if not even superiority to some men as well.

The situation of the countess in the *Lady of the House of Love* suggests that she has spent her life in solitary and unable to cope with her appetite for food and therefore unable to fulfil some of her other physical and mental desires. She tries to suppress the natural predator in her but eventually succumbs to hunger every time. The Countess is the active and dominant character fighting her own instincts in this story therefore the traditional roles of male and female characters in fairy tales are reversed. She is the one, who brings men and consequently her victims to her bedroom before feasting on them, so not only is she stronger than the officer, but far more sexually active compared to his virginity.

The Countess's fairy tale-like presence is even more enhanced by the description Carter gives of her. She is characterized as unnaturally beautiful which is considered symptomatic of her being a soulless unnatural creature. There is nothing mentioned of her inner qualities or personality which gives the reader the impression of a two-dimensional character who is only defined by her appearance. Carter does this on purpose to emphasize the absurdity of female characters, rarely being characterised in depth in traditional fairy tales.

The male character in the *Lady of the House of Love*, the officer can be interpreted as a personification of the patriarchy itself. He is depicted as someone who brings light and youth to an otherwise dark gloomy decaying place, carrying a "special quality of virginity" (97), as if it was a superior character trait. He brings light to the Countess's world without realizing that her eyes are accustomed to darkness and in the glasses she uses as protection from the sun he sees only his own reflection.

The patriarchy speaks through the officer's mouth even in the way he patronizingly refers to the adult woman simply as "a lovely girl" (107). Even though he is portrayed as someone who brings enlightenment, he is also completely oblivious to the Countess's condition, and ignores the fact that she is superior to him in almost every way, physically, intellectually and. However, she is not a man therefore he feels as if there was no way in which she could threaten him. He even expresses a desire to help her "cure herself" at a clinic in Zurich (107), taking on a traditional role of a man as a saviour of a woman, even though this woman is in no need of that, on the contrary, his actions might even cause the Countess more harm.

In the *Lady of the House of Love* Carter provides the reader with a metaphor not only for the female sexual desire but also for the desire for equality as opposed to being patronised and misinterpreted by men in patriarchal society. Carter shows and challenges patriarchal society and its treatment of women. She provides her view on the situation in an ironic way which is very typical for her work overall.

6.10. The Werewolf

The werewolf is the first story in the series of three that are loosely based on the traditional fairy tale of the Little Red Riding Hood. In this story we follow a young girl who goes to visit her sick grandmother and on her way she is attacked by a werewolf. As opposed to the traditional tale, the young girl is able to defend herself by cutting off the wolf's paw and chases him away. Once she reaches her destination she notices that her grandmother has her hand chopped off, she realizes that "the wolf here is not disguised as the grandmother, it *is* the grandmother" (Atwood 129), and kills her. Once the grandmother is dead, the young girl stays in her grandmother's house and prospers.

This story stands out in the collection for reversing the roles and putting woman in the position of the werewolf, aggressor and the cause of danger to the main female character. It demonstrates that not only male can be of harm to women and that the grandmother character does not always have to be good and caring as in traditional fairy tales.

In *The Werewolf* there is a clear connection to the *Sadeian Woman* and Carter's criticism of the character of Justine, who believes that virtue can only be achieved by inactivity and passivity. In this story, on the other hand, Carter proves that in order to be virtuous one does not have to be weak. In the words of Margaret Atwood, "to be a 'good child' does not mean you have to be a victim. to be a good child is to be a competent child, to know how to recognize danger but to avoid being paralysed by fear, to know how to use your father's hunting knife to defend yourself against those who also hunt." (129)

6.11. The Company of Wolves

The Company of Wolves is a tale, which deals with the story of the Little Red Riding Hood as well. The tone of the short story is established right in the beginning:

“One beast and only one howls in the woods by night. The wolf is carnivore incarnate and he's as cunning as he is ferocious; once he's had a taste of flesh then nothing else will do. At night, the eyes of wolves shine like candle flames, yellowish, reddish, but that is because the pupils of their eyes fatten on darkness and catch the light from your lantern to flash it back to you--red for danger; if a wolf's eyes reflect only moonlight, then they gleam a cold and unnatural green, a mineral, a piercing colour. If the benighted traveller spies those luminous, terrible sequins stitched suddenly on the black thickets, then he knows he must run, if fear has not struck him stock-still.” (110)

This opening part creates a gothic atmosphere in which the evil which she presents seems supernatural yet perfectly real. Werewolves play an important role in *The Bloody Chamber* not only because of them being a metaphor for the threat that men (and in the case of the previous story, women) pose to women, but their half animal, half human existence triggers a fear of never knowing which of these will prevail in them, therefore never knowing what to expect of them. “The three first werewolf stories also deal with women’s relationship to the unruly libido, but the werewolf signifies a stranger, more alienated otherness than the cats, despite the half-human manifestations.” (Makinen) Carter also proposes the idea, that humans can become overcome by wild animal instinct, therefore sometimes it seems as if there were no difference between a man and a wolf and consequently between the woman and the man at all.

The female character in *The Company of Wolves* is very different from the traditional Little Red Riding Hood. The young girl is sent to the forest by her mother but does not seem as innocent, not only does Carter announce that „children do not stay young for long in this savage country“ (113), she also informs the reader about the state of the girl’s breast development and the fact that she has already started to menstruate, therefore has reached a certain level of sexual maturity. She is also portrayed as someone who knows how to deal with wolves, or men, if the metaphor is taken into consideration. “She is quite sure the wild beasts cannot harm her“ (113), but takes safety precautions and carries a carving knife with her in order to be able to defend herself with her “practised hand” (114). This makes her a female character which is not typical for a fairy tale, it makes her a woman, who is not helpless or in a need of a male saviour. She finds herself in an

endangered position and is able to make her way out of it, “she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing”.

The Company of Wolves is one of the stories that have more in common with the original fairy tale than some of the other stories in *The Bloody Chamber*. A young girl sets off on a quest to bring food to her Grandmother’s house, meets a wolf, disguised as a hunter and makes a bet with him about who will be the first one to reach the destination, which she loses. The wolf eats her grandmother (up to this point Carter follows even Propp’s theory of fairy tale structure) and tries to trick the girl into getting eaten by him, to which she only laughs and then seduces him in order to stay alive. This shows the girl’s resilience and survival instinct. Instead of being intimidated into passivity by sexual aggression of the male figure, and so being eaten like her grandmother, the girl chooses to use her sexuality as an advantage and therefore is liberated from the wolf’s domination and thus they are able to live side by side in peace and with mutual respect. Her attitude towards sex changes the role of the traditionally active male and passive female character, due to her cunning use of sexuality she establishes herself as, if not dominant, then at least as the wolf’s equal. “[S]he knew she was nobody’s meat“, and “[S]he laughed at him full in the face”(118) at the thought that she would surrender to him easily or at all.

What may come as a surprise in the final part of the story is the young girl’s disinterest towards her grandmother’s disappearance. Carter not only chooses a tragically realistic ending in comparison to the traditional fairy tale, in which the grandmother is cut, without any harm, out of the wolf’s stomach, she also suggests the girl’s callousness. It is understandable, that at first the girl is too occupied playing tricks on the wolf in order to get him to bed so that he does not eat her alive as well, but even after the danger is over, she prefers to stay consciously unaware of her grandmother’s fate, lying in the wolf’s peaceful embrace. She simply assumes that her grandmother has died by the hand of the wolf. At this moment, Carter reverses the roles of the characters again and suggests that there might have been other motivations for the girl to act the way she did and thus the wolf suddenly becomes a more likable character. He may be an animal but at least he acts on instinct, therefore maintains a natural innocence of an animal. She on the other hand

and chooses to not only save herself by having sex with her grandmother's murderer in her grandmother's bed, but furthermore does not seek any kind of revenge at all.

6.12. Wolf Alice

Wolf-Alice is a story of a young girl, who had been raised by wolves and therefore “nothing about her is human except that she is not a wolf”(119). She is a wild creature in a way no human being brought up by humans could ever be, she even “lives without a future, She inhabits only the present tense”(119). After being found she is to be raised by nuns, who fail miserably. She is “taken to a convent where she learns some hygiene but rejects the ritual of grateful prayer, she eventually becomes the servant of an outcast werewolfish Duke.” (Bacchilega 64) The Duke and Alice, both being outcasts, share an understanding that no human could provide and in his half-human, half-wolf household Alice finally finds shelter where she can live without having to choose a fully human life or being judged for not meeting the standards of human behaviour. Eventually she ends up saving the Duke's life after he has been wounded and about to die.

Wolf-Alice is the last story of the collection and does not have a clear connection to any traditional fairy tale. It is a story of a wild indomitable woman maturing in a sense of becoming aware of herself most literally, because after being raised by a wolf, she doesn't even recognize herself in a mirror. Throughout the short story the reader also witnesses her becoming sexually mature once “she began to bleed. Her first blood bewildered her, she did not know what it meant” (122), she also shows a great ability to learn and deduce when she realizes that menstruation is a monthly cycle and learns to cope with it.

The other symbol that is to be found in the story of Wolf-Alice is the symbol of the absent mother. Alice has not abandoned by her human mother and taken care of by a wolf mother as one of her cubs. The animal, who is traditionally associated with being dangerous to humans (as portrayed in the traditional Little Red Riding Hood story), actually shows more compassion and human-like qualities than Alice's biological mother but the wolf mother eventually gets killed by humans and Alice is sent to be socialised in the convent. Having been raised by a wolf has left Alice damaged in the eye of conventional human society but after she has lived with the duke for some time, she

eventually shows human-like emotions as well when she saves his life. On the other hand these traits are compared to those of her wolf-mother, not the human one.

What is also obvious in this story is the gender dynamic between Alice and the Duke, which is distorted in comparison with traditional fairy tales. The Duke is a strong frightening creature, whose reflection does not appear in mirrors, and who feeds on corpses. He is the dominant one in the beginning of the story, when Alice is the one who is confused and scared of her own physiology, but as their time together passes, they get accustomed to each other, especially thanks to their mutual animalism. In the end it is Alice who ends up saving the Duke's life

7. Conclusion

The focus of this thesis was the topic of female desire and problematics of relationships between men and women in Angela Carter's short story collection *The Bloody Chamber* published in 1979. It provides a brief introduction to Carter's own background and life but more importantly it continues with an introduction to second-wave feminism into which Angela Carter was born and provides an overview of Carter's beliefs about gender roles, myths surrounding them or pornography.

Carter's views are also explained as they penetrate through *The Bloody Chamber* and form an important layer of all of the stories. Carter claimed that myths are an important means of female entrapment in the position of the weaker and more passive members of patriarchal society.

Angela Carter uses a very interesting mixture of styles and language in her works, therefore a part of this thesis is dedicated to describing and highlighting features of postmodernism, such as combining genres like fairy tales, gothic and pornography. Final part of this chapter describes Angela Carter's use of language which is highly ornate, full of metaphors, similes and allusions.

Further in the thesis the role of fairy tales in a child's upbringing is explained. Fairy tale is a literary genre that is supposed to help children understand the world and teach them crucial lessons about the unknown. Carter's notion of fairy tales is discussed as well. In *The Bloody Chamber* Carter attempts to change the unequal dynamics of the characters

as we know them from traditional fairy tales and reconstruct them in a way that fits her world view.

The next part of the thesis to describe notions of female desire and feminism contained in *The Bloody Chamber* collection. It begins with interpreting the title *The Bloody Chamber* and explains some of its possible meanings. It continues further with analysing all of the individual stories for in every story the traditional myth or fairy tale is deconstructed and rewritten in a different way, for example *The Tiger's Bride* and *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* are very similar in the sequence of plot they contain, the character's backgrounds, intentions and even the outcome of the story are different, and therefore every story has to be analysed to a certain extent. The last three stories are also based on the same original fairy tale, but are all rewritten in a highly original manner as well.

8. Works Cited

Armitt, Lucie. "The fragile frames of The Bloody Chamber." edited by Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge, 2014, pp. 88-99.

Atwood, Margaret. "Running with the Tigers." In *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, edited by Lorna SageVirago Press, 1994, pp 117-135.

Bacchilega, Cristina. *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

Bristow, Joseph, and Trev Lynn Broughton. "Introduction." *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, edited by Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge, 2014, pp. 1-23.

Carter, Angela. *Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. Vintage, 1995.

---. *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. Virago, 1979.

Day, Aidan. *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*. Manchester University Press, 1998.

"fairy tale." *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fairy%20tale>. Accessed 19 Apr 2017.

"Introduction to Vladimir Propp." *Jerry Everard*, <http://mural.uv.es/vifresal/Propp.htm>. Accessed 19 Apr 2017.

Gamble, Sarah. *Angela Carter: Writing from the Front Line*. Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

"Gothic novel." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Gothic-novel>. Accessed 20 Apr 2017.

Keenan, Sally." Angela Carter's The Sadeian Woman: feminism as treason." *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, edited by Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton. Routledge, 2014, pp. 132-148.

Makinen, Merja. "Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber and the Decolonization of Feminine sexuality." *Feminist review* 42, Autumn 1992, pp.2-15.

"Mannerism" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Mannerism>. Accessed 20 Apr 2017

Özüm, Aytül. "Deconstructed Masculine Evil in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber Stories." *Promoting and Producing Evil*, edited by Nancy Billias. Rodopi, 2010

Peach, Linden. *Angela Carter*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

“pornography“ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pornography>. Accessed 19Apr 2017.

“Seneca Falls Convention.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Seneca-Falls-Convention>. Accessed 19 Apr 2017.

“The 50 greatest British writers since 1945.“ *The Times*, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-50-greatest-british-writers-since-1945-ws3g69xrf90>. Accessed 19 Apr 2017.

Yolen, Jane. *Touch magic: fantasy, faerie and folklore in the literature of childhood* . Philomel Books, 1981.

Zipes, Jack. *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition*. Routledge, 2013.