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Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale: Myths of Sexuality

Angela Carterová a pohádka: Mýty sexuality

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I would like to thank my supervisor for her kind and valuable guidance.

I would also like to thank my amazing mother for always being there for me.

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and this work has not been submitted for any other degree or processional qualification except as specified.

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Author‘s signature

Abstract

This thesis attempts to analyze in what manner Angela Carter subverts the classical fairy tale`s discourse as regards its portrayal of sexuality, and affords the readers a new perspective on the genre that has never been thoroughly addressed. In the first chapter, I have commented on the objectives Carter pursues in the framework of her revisionist project while choosing the fairy tale as its primary basis, and the way the writer approaches the discussion of the genre as a repository of mythical constructions, as understood by a French literary scholar and philologist, Roland Barthes. In the following chapters, I have focused on different manifestations of human sexuality that Carter depicts in her work, namely the sexuality of subjection and domination, sexuality of reciprocity and otherness, as well as the problematics inherent in the phenomenon as such.

Key words

Angela Carter, fairy tale, myth, narrative myth, political myth, sexuality, demythologization

Abstrakt

Tato práce se pokouší zanalyzovat, jakým způsobem Angela Carterová přetváří diskurz klasické pohádky, vztahem k jeho vyobrazení sexuality, a poskytuje čtenářům nový pohled na žánr, který nikdy nebyl důkladně adresován. V první kapitole komentuji na cíle, které Carterová sleduje v rámci svého revizionistického projektu při zvolení pohádkového příběhu svymi primárním základem, a na způsob, kterým se autorka přibližuje k diskusi o žánru, který je zdrojem mýtických konstrukcí, jak je chápe francouzský literární kritik a filolog Roland Barthes. V následujících kapitolách jsem se soustředil na různé projevy lidské sexuality, které Carterová líčí ve své práci, a to sexualita podmanění a nadvlády, sexualita reciprocity a jinakosti, stejně jako na problematiku vlastního fenoménu jako takového.

Klíčová slova

Angela Carterová, pohádka, mýtus, narativní mýtus, politický mýtus, gender, sexualita, demytologizace

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Introduction

Once upon a time…

It would not be a mistake to assume that every human being heard these words at least once in their lives: perhaps, as a part of a bedtime story read by their mother, or a part of a cautionary tale from their caring grandmother. This stock phrase was a magical spell, a key, an invitation to the world of the fairy tale, the tale about the good and evil, brave knights and beautiful princesses, talking animals and enchanted Far-Far-Aways. After many years, having grown up, we continue to take the fairy tale with nostalgia and awe before the world of childhood. Not without reason, Merriam-Webster dictionary gives the following definition of the fairy tale: "a simple children's story about magical creatures."[1] However, is everything that innocent? It turns out that, if one probes a little bit deeper into the matter, one learns that the story is not that simple, children are not the only target audience, and, as Angela Carter puts it, the reader "will find very few actual fairies"[2] in it. Angela Carter was the very person who wanted to probe deeper into the genre to see what is hidden under the happy-ever-after surface of the fairy tale, thus the moniker Faerie Queene. Indeed, the writer is notorious for her revisions of well-known and long-established classic fairy tales. With all this being said, what is Carter`s overall approach to the genre? The answer might be not far to seek as it was laconically formulated by the writer herself. This is what she wrote in her essay "Notes from the Front Line:" "Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode."[3] Indeed, what Carter does is turn to the established format of the fairy story, create revisions of renowned classic fairy tales and imbue them with a completely new content which makes her readers look critically at what has always been "taken on trust."[4] The didactic function of the fairy tale in socialization has at all times been significant, making it easy to impose convenient values, stereotypical gender roles, and norms of *civilité* on growing generations of boys and girls. For this reason, Carter decides to challenge and sabotage the most favorite classic fairy tales in order to demythologize their essence and uncover their subtexts. A longer answer will entail an examination of the concept of myth as a

[1] "Fairy Tale." Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.
[2] Angela Carter, "Introduction", *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, ed. Angela Carter (London: Virago Press, 2001) ix.
[3] Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line", *Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings*, ed. by J.Uglow, intro. by Joan Smith (London: Penguin, 1998) 69. Electronic Edition.
[4] Carter, "Notes from the Front Line," 72.

second-order semiotic system and its relevance to Carter`s project of demythologization by means of the fairy tale. It will also involve a discussion as regards what reasons stand behind Carter`s choice of the fairy-tale genre and the positive/negative potential of the latter within the framework of gender politics.

Angela Carter`s Approach to the Fairy Tale

Charged with writing in fancily decorated style that creates seducing visual images but, nonetheless, allures the reader away so that they do not notice the lack of substance, criticized for re-inscription of misogynist ideas and indulging in escapist utopianism, Carter`s project nevertheless displays a liberatory stimulus. Her work might be best described as an exercise "in the deconstruction of a form that has become appropriated by those who have a vested interest in upholding the status quo."[5] This impetus has earlier been expressed in Carter`s comment that she is "in the demythologizing business."[6] Indeed, the writer was very much "interested in myths […] just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree."[7] However, what is myth in Carter`s project of demythologization apart from being an extraordinary lie? William Righter, in his *Myth and Literature*, affirms that "most definitions [of myth] exist at a very high level of generality, and an admission of the multiple nature of the subject is built into them."[8] For example, Angela Carter believes that myths are created when politics encroaches upon the literary realm which is supported by Jack Zipes`s comment that fairy tales "assume mythic status only when they resonate with the dominant ideology."[9] Some scholars, including Lorna Sage, suggest that each genre is a priori "a site where the literary and the extra-literary confront each other and converse."[10] Carter tends to share this view as well as that of Roland Barthes`s on the concept of myth, as, having been asked to define myth in one of her interviews, she replied: "In a sort of conventional sense; also in the sense that Roland Barthes uses it in *Mythologies* - ideas, images, stories that we tend to take on trust without thinking what they really mean, without trying to work out what, for example, the stories of the New Testament are really about."[11] She also labels myth as a "consolatory nonsense"[12] that eclipses "the real conditions of life"[13] and circulates "false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances. And in no other area this is more true than in that of relations between the sexes."[14] By her own

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[5] Sarah Gamble, "Penetrating to the Heart of the Bloody Chamber: Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale", *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale*, ed. by Stephen Benson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 27.
[6] Carter, "Notes from the Front Line,"74.
[7] Carter, "Notes from the Front Line," 71.
[8] William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) 5.
[9] Susan Sellers, *Myth and the Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women`s Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) 13.
[10] Lorna Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 71.
[11]Anna Katsavos, "A Conversation with Angela Carter", *Dalkey Archive Press* November 18, 2016 <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-angela-carter-by-anna-katsavos>.
[12] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 1990) 5-6.
[13] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 5-6.
[14] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 5-6.

admission, Carter works with "various configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture"[15] to get a sense of what they signify "underneath the kind of semireligious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them."[16] Indeed, this logic behind Angela Carter`s demythologizing project appears to echo that of Barthes`s. Therefore, let us take a closer look at the French scholar`s study of myth.

Mythology is the oldest form of human consciousness. The exact time of the origin of mythological images cannot be determined; their formation is inextricably linked to the origin of language and consciousness. The main task of myth at all times was to set samples, models for every important action committed by the man; myths served to ritualize everyday life, allowing the person to acquire the meaning of it. Initially, semantically the closest to 'mythos' was the concept of 'logos'. However, it gradually acquired the meaning of analytical approach, rationalized and conscious notion and even law, while 'mythos' referred to a vaguer semantic field, saturated with intuitive, irrational and mystical substance. It is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of mythological consciousness. On the one hand, it is specific irrational reflection of the world; on the other hand, myth represents an objectification of mythological consciousness in verbal and other sign forms (dance, gesture, image, music) in rites.[17] Thus, mythology is studied from different perspectives. Within the framework of this thesis, it would be appropriate to employ a socio-philosophical approach to myth. Socio-philosophical approach to the study of myth develops the concept of transformed forms of consciousness. This approach isolates the social specificity of myth. This specificity lies in the fact that myth substitutes the perception of social being for artificially created illusory constructs of consciousness. As before, mythological consciousness functions on the basis of the features of mass consciousness. In modern society, as in any other, mass consciousness is easily exposed to the influence of myths. Chiefly, this is due to underdevelopment of logical thinking, which can be exploited by ideologists.[18] Underdevelopment of logical thinking in modern society is primarily linked to the crisis of rationalism, in which myth, remaining inherently irrational, inevitably becomes a new ground for the construction of the concept of being. Mythological thinking sets ready-made value and norm constructs to the reflecting mind, a priori offering to accept them outside any concept and subsequently rationalize them as substantially inherent in this world.

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[15] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 6.
[16] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 6.
[17] Pivoev, V.M., *Mifologicheskoye Soznanie kak Sposob Osvoyenia Mira* (Petrozavodsk: Karelia, 1991) 111.
[18] Victoria Adamenko, *Neo-mythologism in Music: From Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press) 15.

In the twentieth century, interest in myth was largely driven by the accelerated pace of scientific and technological progress. In this context, it was a French literary scholar and philologist, Roland Barthes, who successfully studied the phenomenon of myth in the modern world. He finds affinities between the archaic and modern myth of ideological nature. Barthes states that myth is not only what is communicated (a certain subject), but also the manner in which this subject is communicated (mode of communication; figuration). According to Barthes, myth is a social phenomenon. The scholar sees myth as "a semiological system"[19] whose subject of study is formalized ideas. Barthes identifies in myth "a signified"[20] (a concept) and "a signifier" (a form) consisting of language signs. Meaning arises as a result of the synthesis of these two elements. Thus, Barthes attributes myth to a deformed, distorted reality. Thanks to its naturalness, emotionality, suggestivity, myth is perceived by the consumer as a system of facts. This way occurs a transformation of meaning into form. Absolutely anything can serve as an object of mythologization.

However, apart from describing the process of myth formation, Barthes also advances a way to demythologization which involves creating artificial or, if you will, secondary myths that helps to debunk the primary myth, its naturalness, that is to say, put new wine in old bottles. The concept of mythology, according to Barthes, is linked to the concept of ideology. Accordingly, mythology is especially developed in the bourgeois society; and the myths of bourgeoisie and its myth-creating abilities are much more sophisticated. As his main task, Barthes sets dethronement of the bourgeois myth. According to the scholar, in the bourgeois myth is metamorphosed into a means of deception, when "a whole new history […] is implanted in the myth."[21] Myth exists beyond time and history. For this reason, Carter herself thinks it crucial to "uncover a deeper, more subversive history of the fairy tale, bringing to the surface not only what Warner terms its 'harshly realistic core' but also 'the suspect whiff of femininity' from which it has never been completely disassociated."[22]

Bourgeois myth theories are based solely on logical and psychological data of the history of human consciousness. Thereby, mythology is interpreted as finest and highly intellectual phenomenon (literary myth), which it never was in the times of barbarism (archaic/folk myth). However, despite this chasm between the notions of a modern and archaic myth, there still

[19] Roland Barthes, "Myth as a Semiological System," *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press) 110.
[20] Barthes, "Myth as a Semiological System," 111.
[21] Barthes, "The Form and the Concept," *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press) 117.
[22] Gamble, "Penetrating to the Heart of the Bloody Chamber: Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale", 21.

remains the same impact on mass consciousness, that is the creation of a unified concept of the world among a large group of people. Just as many centuries ago, modern myth forms a simplified, holistic picture of the world, intelligible to the consumer. This universal nature of myth allows to consider culture not as something fragmented, but as something integral, since myth synthesizes and integrates various phenomena of philosophy, politics, religion, morality, art, history, literature, and science. Life is easier in such a world, isn't it? Certainly, because myth, functioning in this cognitive-theoretical manner to 'aid' an individual in grasping the world around him, creates a simple and intelligible enough worldview. In this regard, it is important to highlight that this mythological world picture must not lend itself to any kind of analysis: it cannot be broken down into any constituents. Perhaps, this is why the fairy-tale format is such a perfect 'bottle' for mythic content, as it usually never crosses our minds to take this genre critically.

Nonetheless, is this the sole reason why Angela Carter employs the form of the fairy tale while she is in her "demythologizing business"[23]? Partly yes, but also because the fairy tale is aesthetically appealing to Carter, as she remarks in her "Afterword" to *Fireworks*:

> [fairy tales] are fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious – mirrors; the externalized self; forsaken castles; haunted forests; forbidden sexual objects. […] [T]he tale differs from the short story in that it makes few pretenses at the imitation of life. […] The tale has relations with subliterary forms of pornography, ballad and dream, it has not been dealt with kindly by literati."[24]

Indeed, several critics, including Marina Warner, agree that Carter`s fascination with fairy tales is an affair of the heart, as Warner notes, "fairytales explore the mysteries of love […] Carter's quest for Eros, her attempt to ensnare its nature in her imagery."[25] In addition, some critics, including Lorna Sage, also argue that Carter`s relationship with the fairy tale is just as much "an affair of the head."[26] Language in general, and the language of the fairy tale in particular, is, as Carter sees it, "life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination;"[27] however, this very language can also transform, if applied appropriately, "actual fictional forms

[23] Carter, "Notes from the Front Line," 74.
[24] Angela Carter, *Fireworks: Nine Stories in Various Disguises* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) 132-133.
[25] Marina Warner, "Angela Carter: Bottle Blonde, Double Drag," *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago Press, 2007) 243.
[26] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 66.
[27] Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line", 76-77.

to both reflect and to precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves."[28] Being aware of the dual power of language and the way it has been misused by previous collectors/editors of fairy tales especially in the nineteenth century, Carter sets out to afford her readers an opportunity to unchain themselves from what Blake called the "mind forged manacles."[29] Her famous comment that there are "very few actual fairies"[30] in fairy tales begs the question of genre definition in the perspective of Carter`s revisionist project, "for the term 'fairy tale' is a figure of speech and we use it loosely, to describe the great mass of infinitely various narrative."[31]

In 1812 in Germany, two brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm become popular, having released Children's and Household Tales - a compilation of tales collected on the German lands and then literarily processed by the brothers themselves. The Grimms` German Dictionary defined these tales as "Märchen,"[32] which might be translated from German as a 'fictional tale.' This word had acquired a collective character, and began to be used generally with reference to various narratives. Under this term fell magical tales, tales that featured animals, and pious tales, inherited from the Middle Ages. Subsequently, different collectors and anthologizers referred to a wide variety of folk tales by one word 'Märchen,' and in this very fact the major difficulties of precise generic definition are rooted. When being translated into English, Märchen was introduced simply as a wonder tale, popular tale or fairy tale. Remarkably, the latter term owes its name not to the German tradition, but the seventeenth-century French tradition of *contes de fées*, or narratives where fairies and other magical creatures figure as the main characters. This inaccurate translation subsequently resulted in dissociation of the actual meaning, creating a sort of metonymy which later firmly established itself as convention. This fact led to generalization of various collections written in English under the term 'fairy tale,' which in turn constituted only a minor part of those narratives. For this reason, Carter identifies 'fairy tale' as "a figure of speech"[33] and uses the term exclusively for her convenience and the convenience of her readers. In her work, the writer acquaints the latter with strikingly different types of fairy-tale narratives. Her collections are best described as kaleidoscopic, including an intermixture of the gothic and the wondrous, the dark and the classic, animal tales and biblical allusions, etc.

[28] Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line", 76-77.
[29] Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line", 74.
[30] Angela Carter, "Introduction," ix.
[31] Angela Carter, "Introduction," ix.
[32] "Märchen," *Wörterbuchnetz - Deutsches Wörterbuch Von Jacob Grimm Und Wilhelm Grimm*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Nov. 2016.
[33] Angela Carter, "Introduction," ix.

All literary fairy tales have their origin in folktale tradition. Today, it is commonly believed that all the fairy tales by the Grimm brothers were the products of their own imagination. On the contrary, the Grimms did not, so to speak, come up with any fundamentally new stories, rather, they masterfully processed folk material, with which they were supplied by people of sometimes strikingly different occupations and backgrounds. The Grimms` approach was quite noble: believing that the collected tales eloquently represented the spirit of the German people (*Volkgeist*), they scrupulously accumulated, edited the tales according to their artistic design and eventually released them in multiple-volume collections. However, the problem of the brothers was that they, guided by romantic ideas of the time, focused their attention exclusively on the material itself, and completely neglected the socioeconomic condition of the people who provided them with this very material. Still guided by the same romantic ideas, they became the most prominent advocates of the values and norms of bourgeois audience, thus depriving the original material of its distinct substance. In the borrowed tales, the brothers preserved only the carcass of narratives and their basic plots, editing out the rest as being unfit. Thus, the Grimms, now working in the capacity of editors and co-authors of the collected material, rather selectively sieved the content of the tales, amplifying, for example, Christian aspect and completely eliminating any sexual innuendos. In so doing, the brothers shift the focus from peasant values, the carrier of which was folk material, away on the values of the German middle class. Indeed, fairy tales no more reflected folk reality, but were rewritten into "the refined pastime of the middle classes, and especially of the middle-class nursery."[34]

If the German fairytale tradition was interesting for Carter in the context of generic definition, then the French fairy tale was also a subject of her sociopolitical investigation. The fairy tale of the French model was born in Paris of the thirties of the seventeenth century in salons, where educated women of aristocratic background discussed literature, art and the themes that preoccupied them primarily as women, such as love and marriage. These remarkable women as Jack Zipes puts it, were "constantly seeking innovative ways to express their needs and to embellish the forms and styles of speech […] that they shared."[35] It was the fairy tale that became one of the means that provided them with an opportunity to speak their mind. Inspired by the stories they heard as children, salon participants experimented with tales in an intellectual way, thereby creating tales that met their needs. Later, fairy tales were put down on paper and gave birth to the French literary fairy tale, or *conte de fées*. These *contes* were written in a highly

[34] *The Old Wives` Fairy Tale Book*, ed. Angela Carter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990) xvii.
[35] Jack Zipes, Beauties, Beasts and Enchantment: Classic French Fiary Tales (Nww York: Meridian Books, 1989) 2.

sophisticated manner to "contest the emerging associations of fairytales with the primitive."[36] Just like the oral tales, they continued to be told at salons and had a significant sociopolitical potential. As has been previously noted, the *contes* were elaborated to address the women`s needs of the day such as the critique of forced marriage and a position of women within the patriarchal world. This measure was rather forced, since it was only by means of fantasy that these women, being dominated by the patriarchal code, could get their social commentary across. The aforesaid thus led to the critique of the *contes* themselves as being "deeply disturbing and suspect."[37] This originally female genre needed to be adulterated and, of course, spearheaded by a "learned male author,"[38] none other than a "well-known member of the Academy,"[39] Charles Perrault, who was "most sincere in his intentions to improve the minds and manners of young people."[40] It is interesting that Carter, a feminist, decides not to turn to some less sophisticated refined tradition, but to the patriarchally-biased tales by Perrault with the intent to intensify and modify "previously instituted and sophisticated narrative modes."[41]

In his *Fairytales and the Art of Subversion*, Jack Zipes notes that "there is a direct line from the Perrault fairy tale of court society to the Walt Disney cinematic fairy tale of the culture industry."[42] The fact is the writers of the French vogue created favorable conditions for the subsequent institutionalization of the fairy tale and "stamped the very unreflective and uncritical manner in which we read and receive fairy tales to the present."[43] In Zipes`s view, Disney never sought to "enhance the communal aspects of narrative and bring about major changes in viewing stories to stir and animate viewers,"[44] he, more as a businessman rather than an artist, was anxious to address as large an audience as possible determined to "sell a commodity and endorse ideological images that would enhance his corporate powers."[45] By choosing a familiar story whose simplicity would advantageously underline the technical mastery and unprecedentedness of the film and ingraining a patriarchal code with its inherent

[36] Elizabeth W. Harries, "Fairy Tales about Fairy Tales: Notes on Canon Formation," *Twice upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 19.
[37] Harries, "Fairy Tales about Fairy Tales: Notes on Canon Formation," 35.
[38] Harries, "Fairy Tales about Fairy Tales: Notes on Canon Formation," 20.
[39] Harries, "Fairy Tales about Fairy Tales: Notes on Canon Formation," 20.
[40] Jack Zipes, "Setting Standards for Civilization through Fairy Tales," *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York, London: Routledge, 2006) 32.
[41] Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega, "Introduction," *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 11.
[42] Zipes, "Setting Standards for Civilization through Fairy Tales," 34.
[43] Zipes, "Setting Standards for Civilization through Fairy Tales," 34.
[44] Jack Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," *The Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999) 352.
[45] Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 87.

gendered characterization, Disney encourages, what Zipes defines, the "domestication of the imagination."[46] The former sells in a prescriptive manner same old didactic messages which were earlier formulated by the classical guardians of culture, thus promoting one-dimensional thinking and "nonreflective viewing,"[47] something which Carter interrogates while setting Disney in dialogue with other fairytale-inspired artists like, for example, Giambattista Basile, in her "Puss-in-Boots." As has been demonstrated, fairy tales have been drastically modified throughout the seventeenth, nineteenth and even twentieth century and their oral variants came to mirror the ideological bias of their editors and collectors.

While defining the fairy tale merely as a figure of speech, as a convenience of familiarity, Carter also emphasizes the oral origin of these stories that were "once upon a time and still [are], sometimes passed on and disseminated through the world by word of mouth – stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them, the permanently refreshed entertainment of the poor."[48] Thus, she makes it clear that one of the principle constituents of her approach to the fairy tale is, in fact, folktale tradition.

In the 1970`s, Carter turned out to be "more explicitly and systematically interested in models that pre-date the novel: fairy tales, folk tales, and other forms that develop by accretion and retelling;"[49] and the specific impact of folktale tradition was, of course, significant in the context of Carter's fairytale project. Perhaps, this is why she rather resentfully notices that when "you mention folk culture, […] people immediately assume you`re going to talk about porridge and clog-dancing,"[50] since there is, of course, much more to it than that. So what is all the same the main charm of folklore in Carter`s opinion? Answering this question, let us address Lorna Sage who believes that this tradition first of all offered Carter a tempting concept of the role of the author that does not conform with historically determined modern Western notions. As Sage writes: Carter "could experimanet with her own writer`s role, ally herself in imagination with the countless, anynonmpus narrators who stood behind literary redactors like Perault or […] the brothers Grimm."[51] Sage goes even further and positions carter within the framework of "the old 1960s utopian dream of 'The Death of the Author,'"[52] admonishing, however, against identifying Carter`s work with avant-grade movement. What carter was, in fact, guided by was

[46] Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*, 92.
[47] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1994) 94-95.
[48] Angela Carter, "Introduction," ix.
[49] Lorna Sage, "Angela Carter," Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992) 173.
[50] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 65.
[51] Lorna Sage, *Angela Carter*, Writers and their Work (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994) 40.
[52] Sage, Angela Carter, 43.

her innate "nostalgia for anonymity, for the archaic powers of the narrator whose authority rests precisely on disclaiming individual authority."[53] Thus, folktale tradition affords Carter an opportunity to assume the role of the oral narrator, which was at all times, as Stephen Benson believes, "a deliberate performance, staged in part to deflate the myth of paternal authority, hence her own repeated reference to mainstream European literature as 'a kind of folklore […] a folklore of intelligentsia.'"[54]

In this regard, marina warner notes that Carter`s assuming Mother Goose persona was a premediated act that would affiliate her with a performative, even pantomime, concept of authorship, which was clearly demonstrated in the two Virago books of fairy tales edited by the writer. These two volumes chart "the richness and diversity with which femininity, in practice, is represented in 'unofficial' culture: its strategies, its plots, its hard work."[55] Here, Warner draws the reader`s attention to what she defines as a shift in Carter`s sensibility, a shift "bound up with her change of attitude to fairytales."[56] Thereby, in the introduction to the first volume, it is explicitly stated that for Carter "fairytales came to represent the literature of the illiterate: the divine Marquis yielded pride of place to the illiterate peasant."[57] However, in the second volume Carte carries out a careful selection of material "from a variety of folklorists and ethnographers", and "her choice bears throughout the stamp of her mind."[58] In fact, Carter, unlike her previous experiments with the genre, does relatively minimal editing work, anthologizing the stories from different collections 'raw,' as they are, without any alteration or revision. Christina Bacchiega writes in this regard that Carter invites the reader to take a look at these fairytales as a repository of "unofficial, cross-culturally varied, and entertaining knowledge."[59] By doing so, she as an editor "overtly participates in the chain of transmission by explicitly making her selection on the basis of specific class and gender considerations."[60] Ironically, Carter, drawing her inspiration from folktale tradition, nevertheless, follows the tradition of didacticism, thus putting herself in a sense a par with the famous collectors, editors

[53] *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago Press, 2007) 2.
[54] Stephen Benson, "Angela Cater and the Literary Marchen," *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 47.
[55] Angela Carter, "Introduction," xiv.
[56] Marina Warner, "Speaking with Double Tongue: Mother Goose and the Old Wives` Tale," *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 1992) 39.
[57] Sage, "Angela Carter," 245.
[58] Marina Warner, "That Which is Spoken," rev. of The Virago Book of Fairy Tales, ed. Angela Carter, *London Review of Books* 8 Nov. 1990, 21.
[59] Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997) 20-21.
[60] Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, 21.

and tellers of the literary fairytale like Perrault, and the brothers Grimm, albeit pursing diametrically opposite goals.

Another Carter-inspired scholar, Lorna Sage, believes that the writer`s fascination with the genre has to do with the fairytale`s innate potential of abstraction and simplification. In her essay, Sage defines abstraction as a way to escape realism. She sets Carte in dialogue with another famous fairytale-influenced writer Italo Calvino. Who was "in rebellion against the postwar socialist-realist orthodoxy, which preached that the artist could only connect himself with 'the people' if he wrote naturalistically."[61] However, storytelling offered a different viewing angle to it. Storytelling was actively practiced by people themselves, and once fantasy and recurring constructions were part of the folk culture and provided people with an opportunity to escape the difficulties the unknown world placed before them. Fantasy was part of the folk imagination. In this regard, tales were in turn a way of knowing the world and the self. The fairytale represented a sort of pragmatic fantasy with the capacity to free one from various constraints of tribal life, something what Sage calls "narrative levitation – abstraction, patterning, getting above yourself."[62] In the fairytale, there is always a departure from reality (transference of the hero, for example), which lured such writers as Carter and Calvino, albeit Carter does not employ the transference method very often in her works.

Carter re-reads folk tales and literary fairytales while studying Sade, and interprets the material in a reductionist manner. For example, this is how she breaks down the myth of a perfect woman:

> To be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case.
>
> To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is, to be killed.
>
> This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman.[63]

It follows, that in Carter`s view, the fairytale is not just "an extraordinary lie,"[64] or a cultural construct, since this type of the heroine is inherent to various types of fairytale characters; thus, it is not that easy to isolate myth form the fairytale, and the fairytale from cultural construction. For support, Carter turns to Sade, who once created Justine, a heroine in whom Carter sees the prototype of women blameless but constantly suffering, since they were born to learn that the world was not made for them. And the fairytale, according to Sage, became a faithful servant

[61] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 66.
[62] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 67.
[63] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 77.
[64] Carter, "Notes from the Front Line," 71.

of this "post-romantic agony culture."[65] Yes, this type of heroine was also quite persistent in other genres such as Gothic fiction, and Carter had always been open to generic experimentations and amalgams, but no other genre affords "the formal distance of the fairytale, which has a longer and larger history."[66]

In this regard, Sage believes that the fairytale cannot have a single author, fairytales at all times were the property of each and every one, thus it is in vain trying to understand them outside their historical context. Fairytales were created by different people over and over again by means of recurring motifs, patterns and models; it follows then that by isolating these repetitive constructions, it is possibly to analyze sociopolitical realities in a certain historical period. That is why Carter is interested in Sade`s manner, as his work is in many ways built around "repetitive and obscene narratives."[67] No wonder Carter turns to this very genre as she genuinely believes that it possesses the means "by which a writing woman may take flight,"[68] and gender politics interwoven in fairytales, however, does not belittle their charm, it simply means that, as Sage puts it, "you have to take a longer detour through cultural history to arrive at lightness."[69]

In addition, the author highlights a very unique power of the fairytale, equating it with the power of pornography, as she notes: "like pornography, fairy tale relies on repeated motifs, multiple versions and inversions, the hole in the text where the readers insert themselves."[70] The fairytale genre very easily lends itself to interpretation, fairytales are perceived as potentially empty, light genre, which makes it possible to play back "obsessive matter of cruelty, desire, suffering […] profane and provisional."[71] As Zipes affirms, "the best of folk and fairy tales chart ways for us to become masters of history […] they transform time into relative elements."[72] The fairy tale offers recoverable, class and gender specific histories of storytelling. Thus, tales exist in the context of time, which stands in opposition to the religious concept of eternity. Carter associates the cult of passivity with the immutable obedience to Christianity and Father God. In response, it would be possible to enthrone someone like Mother God, but Carter, inspired by Sade`s atheistic ideas, resents the idea, since for her 'mother goddesses are just as silly a notion

[65] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 68.
[66] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 68.
[67] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 68.
[68] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 68.
[69] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 68.
[70] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 69.
[71] Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," 69.
[72] Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (London: Heinemann, 1979)18-19.

as father gods."[73] Exactly for this reason, Carter is allured by the fairy tale, since the fairy tale`s world is a world of human fears and desires, resuscitated in nonhuman creatures, which are at same time devoid of divinity.

To sum up, Angela Carter appears to be a gifted archeologist: seeing through the mythic past, she aptly interrogates and reworks patriarchal code in her revisions of 'canonical' fairy tales which not only shaped the world a couple of centuries ago, but, as it seems, continue to be well-suited containers for modern social myths which still give form (hopefully, to a lesser extent) to today`s society and the minds of its members in a very subtle and aesthetically pleasant manner. In the following chapters, it will be demonstrated more graphically how Carter picks the lock, enters the bloody chamber and makes all the subtexts and agendas visible to the reader whom she offers to take a new look at the good-old stories.

[73] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 75.

Sexuality of Subjection and Domination

"I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab…"[74]

Angela Carter`s style of writing has always been one of her assets as an author – ornate, abundant, and… seductive; this, of course, has made it a subject of numerous debates among critics, and it is clear why. Through this language, Carter is able to discuss in entertaining manner serious issues such as, for example, human sexuality, or, to be precise, the cultural construction of it. The question is *how* Carter handles such serious issues so that her message reaches the reader in the most efficient way. The answer would be Carter`s self-positioning as a satirist and social critic within the persona of a moral pornographer. Analyzing the classical fairy tale`s "latent content"[75] which is "violently sexual,"[76] Carter works on the premise that the state of affairs in society is reflected in the way sexual relations are treated in this very society, and the more sharply the writer draws these sexual relations, the more apparent embedded social constructions become. In this regard, Carter decides to start undermining the foundations of the status quo of gender relations by addressing the works of de Sade, whose depiction of sexuality is that of a power game, where "the whip hand is always the hand with the real political power and the victim is a person who has little or no power at all, or has it stripped from him."[77] In such an alignment of forces, "male means tyrannous and female means martyrised, no matter what the official genders of the male and female beings are."[78] Drawing inspiration from Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont`s, Charles Perrault`s, and the Brothers Grimm`s works, Carter writes her own stories *about* fairy stories, in which she unabashedly criticizes sexuality of subjection and domination. Her method requires discussion of the objectified desire within the paradigm of victim-and-victimizer dichotomy. She starts with the premise that the patriarchal sexuality is distinguished by its fundamentally contractual character, where female sexuality acquires a proprietary status, and evolves her argumentation in the background of the metaphor, in which the female (herbivore/meat) exist to appease the sexual appetite of the male (carnivore/predator). To contest this adamant dualism, Carter advances an alternative, that is, sexuality of reciprocity. Sexuality of reciprocity figures in Carter`s animal stories, which a lot of critics have described as utopian due to the impossibility

[74] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1993) 5. Electronic Edition.
[75] Kerryn Goldsworthy, "Angela Carter," *Meanjin 44* (March 1985) 6.
[76] Goldsworthy, 6.
[77] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 1990) 24.
[78] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 24.

of appreciating them in human terms. They, however, afford the reader an opportunity to take a new look at the old tales that have long entered cultural carcass of Western societies, and reconceptualize the patriarchal code they carry. Yet another facet of sexuality present in Carter`s revisions, sexuality of otherness, will be discussed within the framework, advanced by Betty Moss in her analysis of 'Peter and the Wolf' as the tale that features the female grotesque body, a sign of continual regeneration and renovation. It must be noted here, however, that the reader, participating in the discussion of the grotesque body, would be well-advised to refrain from excessive mythologizing of the maternal body as Carter herself was at odds with this tendency. To draw the line at the discussion of sexuality, it is rather imperative to consider the problematics of sexual desire as encountered by several Carterian characters, who long and abhor, come and flee, obtain and lose.

"A book of stories about fairy stories"[79] – this is how Angela Carter described arguably one of her most ambitious and daring projects in the fairytale genre, the collection of the fairy tales titled *The Bloody Chamber*. Carter explains her choice of the fairy tale format by admitting that it was easier for her to "deal with the shifting structures of reality and sexuality by using sets of shifting structures derived from orally transmitted traditional tales."[80] Although, it can hardly be argued that the familiarity with folk and traditional tales would aid the reader in uncovering restrictive subtexts of the literary fairy tale and seeing through the images Carter draws in her revisions, several critics contested the writer`s preference of the fairy tale`s structural settings for the purpose of criticizing the status quo. One of these critics is Patricia Duncker, who believes that the employment of folk material, having initially little structural space for the possibility of a successful critique of gender relations, forces Carter to depict the latter as, in fact, an imitation of the pornographic encounter, or, in other words, "the realities of male desire, aggression, force,"[81] and women reduced to being submissive and compliant recipients of these realities. Duncker questions Carter`s self-styled persona of a moral pornographer who "might use pornography as a critique of current relations between sexes"[82] by reading her program as a sheer resurrection of the same old pornographic archetypes. According to the academic, in Carter`s logic, women`s sexuality does not exist as autonomous desire rather as "a response to male arousal."[83] Duncker's position towards the fairy tale evidences how *The Bloody Chamber*

[79] Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line", *Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings*, ed. by J.Uglow, intro. by Joan Smith (London: Penguin, 1998) 27. Electronic Edition.
[80] Angela Carter, "Notes from the Front Line," 28.
[81] Patricia Duncker, "Re-Imagining the Fairy Tale: Angela Carter`s Bloody Chambers," *Literature and History 10* (1984) 8.
[82] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 19.
[83] Duncker, "Re-Imagining," 7.

has been put by many critics in the context of the controversy as regards the appropriateness of pornography as a literary technique.

Indeed, the late 1970s and 1980s witnessed a rather heated debate among conflicting camps of feminist thinkers, which was centered around the role of pornography in the feminist project. It was generally accepted that pornography mirrored patriarchal gender relations established in society. However, it remained unclear whether the use of pornographic representations is justified in an attempt to describe the status quo and provide the writer with means of destabilizing it.

In her essay *Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter`s 'The Bloody Chamber,'* Robin Ann Sheets presents an exhaustive chronology and dynamics of the further development of the dispute over the appropriateness of pornography. Her analysis evolves from the discussion of anti-pornography movement equating pornography to the eroticization of male power, and placement of "the male viewer/reader in the sadist`s active position while assigning the masochist`s passive role to the female viewer/reader."[84] Some critics, nonetheless, deemed this form of representational sadomasochism an unavoidable part of a successful study of the eroticism that exists outside of any ideology, since it is counterproductive trying to remove the power aspect from sexual relations.

In the midst of these intellectual battles, Carter made her word by publishing in the same year two of her principle works, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* and *The Bloody Chamber*, in which she advanced her vision of the interrelationships of the fairy-tale genre and pornography, placing them both in historical and sociocultural context. As Lorna Sage puts it, both pornography and fairy tale depend on recurring motifs, diversified 'translations' and inversions, "the hole in the text where the readers insert themselves."[85] In *The Sadeian Woman,* Carter works in tandem with a notorious eighteenth-century master of erotic fiction, Marquis de Sade, whom the former praised for the sexually liberating impetus of his writings. Speculating on why Carter would need the fairy tale while addressing 'the ideology of pornography,' Stephen Benson isolates several instances of her referring to the fairy-tale

[84] Robin Ann Sheets, "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter`s 'The Bloody Chamber,'" *Forbidden History: The Sate, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe: Essays from the "The Journal of the History of Sexualit*y, ed. By John C. Fout (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) 339.
[85] Lorna Sage, "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale," *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 69.

genre in *The Sadeian Woman*: first, Carter defines *Justine* as "a black, inverted fairy-tale,"[86] then identifies "the black and white ethical world of fairy tale and fable"[87] with the literature of de Sade; in addition, the entire book is usually viewed by the critics as a "polemical preface"[88] to *The Bloody Chamber*. It is Sade`s characterization of Justine and Juliette that in Carter`s hands becomes the tool of investigation of how gendered identity is constructed in a carnivorous hierarchy. In de Sade`s *Justine*, the narration of the novel revolves around the protagonist, Justine, a young girl born into a noble family, now an orphan, who struggles to earn her living honestly and at the same time remain adherent to the moral standards of Catholicism. The girl`s efforts prove vain: kidnapping, rape, and false accusations mark the beginning of the unfortunate events yet to come. In the final scenes of the novel, the protagonist is contrasted with her sister, "rationality personified,"[89] Juliette, who, as opposed to Justine, indulged in vices and perversions, and to whom befell a luckier lot. If we were to apply Blake`s terminology, then blameless Justine would be a passive lamb unable to function in a predatory society and destined to be devoured by a tiger. Both heroines are the polar opposites of each other, and neither is the answer: "Justine is the thesis, Juliette is the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling."[90]

Juliette can be classified among de Sade`s archetypal libertines – unlike her sister, whose "organ of perception is her heart,"[91] Juliette is hard-headed, she is perfectly fitted for the world of predators and their victims, thus she evades being objectified. However, like other Sade`s libertines, she is distinguished by the "diabolic solitude"[92] of a tyrannous subject. In such characters, Carter identifies one key quality of theirs, their "absolute egotism."[93] Absolute egotism implies absence of the reciprocity element, which, in relation to sexuality, entails failure of "a shared pleasure."[94] Shared pleasure is rejected as it poses direct threat to the integrity of the libertine`s ego. For this reason, both of the heroines appear as the embodiments of what Aidan Day defines as "rigid dualisms - reason and unreason, aggressor and victim,

[86] Stephen Benson, "Angela Carter and the Literary Marchen: A Review Essay," *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 37.
[87] Benson, 37.
[88] Benson, 37.
[89] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 51.
[90] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 79.
[91] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 51.
[92] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 150.
[93] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 25.
[94] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 142.

annihilator and annihilated."[95] In Justine`s case, her position of an object in de Sade`s universe denies her access to enjoyment, while the wayward Juliette, violating the laws of the same universe, is condemned to subject`s perpetual solitude without the right of reciprocity. Both sisters are stuck within the abiding dualism, where "the freedom of one […] sex, or individual necessitates the unfreedom of others.'[96]

In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter speculates a lot on the binary eat-or-be-eaten logic, which is, as she believes, "the primal condition of man."[97] In this respect, particularly useful is Darwinian rhetoric with its principle mechanism of natural selection - it is the fittest who survives. The fittest "abuse, exploit and meatify the weak,"[98] and it is only 'natural' that the prey will and must be devoured. The dichotomy of this sort engenders the vacuum of sensation, in which the possibility of love is brought down to quench the predator's appetites. In this regard, it is important for Carter to distinguish between the two notions, flesh and meat: the former is "usually alive and, typically, human,"[99] while the latter is "dead, inert, animal and intended for consumption."[100] Carter prefers to see both sexes as "creatures of the flesh,"[101] guided by its impulses, which is not what "the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman"[102] prescribes, though. This mythic perfect woman is at all times the object of another`s desires: she has been robbed of her libido and "exists in passive case,"[103] which consequently leads her to being eaten by the male sexual appetite. While male libido is all-powerful and "threatening to devour sexually unmotivated females,"[104] female libido is denied as a source of autonomous desire, otherwise it becomes a dangerous rival to the male one, which in turn will seek to "protect itself against sexually motivated"[105] women by branding them whores. In Carter`s project, female libido is personified through the animalistic aspect: her wolves, tigers and lions signify a libido that "has been culturally repressed in some women and which needs recognising and articulating in order that they may define autonomous subject positions for themselves."[106] Carter`s animal stories attempt to dismantle the internal structures of one pole of the opposition, thus getting rid of the opposition itself. In the meantime, Carter`s heroines must begin their

[95] Aidan Day, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) 98.
[96] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 24.
[97] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 140.
[98] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 140.
[99] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 137.
[100] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 137.
[101] Aidan Day, 147.
[102] Sage, 77.
[103] Sage, 77.
[104] Aidan Day, 147.
[105] Aidan Day, 147.
[106] Aidan Day, 147.

journey doomed to be ‘meatified’ like Bluebeard`s wives or exchanged for a white rose like Beauty, and their relevance as characters in this case is that these ‘wise girls’ grow to realize and reject their object position within the phallocentric society, and afford the readers an alternative model of experience.

In order to illustrate the above said, let us turn to the title story of Carter`s collection of short fiction, *The Bloody Chamber*, its overture, and analyze the key scenes, following the development of the narrative. The tale resembles memoirs narrated by the heroine in the first person, and begins with a scene aboard a night train, which is taking her “away from girlhood, away from the white enclosed quietude of my mother’s apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage.”[107] The young heroine`s mother is an outstanding personality: she fought the Chinese pirates and defeated a man-eating tiger, she gave her heart to a poor soldier, who was soon killed on the battlefield. After her father`s death, the heroine is left alone with her mother, both poor and devastated. When the mother asks her daughter: “Are you sure you love him?”[108]; she replies: “I'm sure I want to marry him.”[109] Hence, it is clear that in the decision to marry a mature man, the heroine does not proceed from her feelings towards him, rather from how much this marriage will benefit the women`s financial condition. However, the reader should not ignore the fact that the heroine is guided not only by purely altruistic reasons; she is to a greater extent tempted by the Marquis`s wealth and power. Therefore, the girl does not feel any regret at the fact that she has to leave her native penates. The only difference is, as it will further become clear, that the heroine`s home lives according to the laws of independent femininity personified in the figure of her mother, while the life in the Marquis's castle is arranged according to other laws, the laws of patriarchate, which the heroine will have to obey, or not?

Preparing herself for the long-awaited visit to the opera, the young pianist notes:

> For the opera, I wore a sinuous shift of white muslin tied with a silk string under the breasts. And everyone stared at me. And at his wedding gift.
>
> His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat.[110]

This passage is remarkable in that it contains two of the central material symbols of this tale: a white muslin dress and a ruby choker. These are the symbols of objectification. To begin with,

[107] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 2.
[108] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 2.
[109] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 2.
[110] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 4.

the white muslin dress may be considered one of the tale`s dramatis personae, since it quite often appears throughout the narration: the heroine wears "Poiret extravaganza"[111] in almost every significant scene of the story. By referring to her gown as "Poiret extravaganza,"[112] she alludes to the most fashionable Parisian couturier of his day, Paul Poiret. In her essay "The Conceptualization of the Marquis in Angela Carter`s 'The Bloody Chamber,'" Danielle M. Roemer investigates his phenomenon and why his figure is relevant in the context of Carter`s work. Analyzing the myth of the man of action, Roemer writes that in his career Poiret was led by the ideal of a man whose hands hold her majesty fate; a man, recognized in the highest strata of society; a patron of arts and an artful strategist. Having worked in the fashion house and having been ultimately fired from his position, Poiret devoted himself to creating gowns, which would stand out in their elegance, exquisite luxury and abundance of materials and accessories. The couturier made a name for himself on the bodies of others, and the main object of his creative genius became his wife, in whom he felt certain "hidden graces,"[113] just like Marquis once sensed "promise of debauchery"[114] in his young spouse. Drawing parallels between Poiret and the Marquis, it is possible to assert that both men were seeking to create in those they controlled a vacuum, a feeling of absence. Paradoxically, the couturier, gravitating towards ornate compositions, admits that "in dressing Madame Poiret, [he] strive[s] for omission, not addition."[115] Therefore, Poiret had accumulated a client base of women, ready to be transformed through deletion. His artistic design produced mannequins devoid of individuality as it was of no use; all that mattered was "a woman`s textile skin"[116] manufactured by the couturier. Ultimately, his artistic idea came down to that the image of a woman and a woman within this image could be reconstructed according to the masculine taste, just like sculptures, sculpted by a male artist according to his own creative conception. Just like sculptures, women could be locked up in the statis. The dress that appears in "The Bloody Chamber" is a good example of Poiret`s creation – "simply-lined, high-wasted,"[117] and executed in his Hellenic style, which was inspired by the couturier's study of ancient Greek sculpture.

In Carter's tale, the Marquis makes his young wife wear her evening dress every time, when he needs to objectify her. Same as Poiret, the Marquis prefers to identify his wives with pieces of

[111] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 14.
[112] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 14.
[113] Danielle M. Roemer, ""The Conceptualization of the Marquis in Angela Carter`s 'The Bloody Chamber,'" *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. by Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 120.
[114] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 11.
[115] Roemer, 120.
[116] Roemer, 120.
[117] Roemer, 120.

sculpture, whom he sculpts at his discretion. The scene at the opera demonstrates how skillfully the Marquis employs spectacle to achieve recognition in society. "All eyes were on me,"[118] notices the heroine. Indeed, in the Marquis's play, she is assigned a role of an expensive accessory, a luxury good; her principle value is her appearance, which, we must say, is not her merit; as a personality, the heroine is muted.

Next time, when the young spouse must dress in her white gown, the Marquis gives his wife the keys to the castle and instructs her as regards which chambers are at her disposal and which ones are closed for her. As Roemer rightly notes, the possession of the keys to the castle would normally make the chatelaine a figure, endowed with power and autonomy: she would freely move around the castle, open any door, for there are no forbidden territories for her. However, how coldly the servants meet a new mistress of the property informs the reader regarding what place previous chatelaines took in the hierarchy of this household. Being in charge of the keys does not open all doors before the heroine, she is not even in charge of them, to be precise. She is best described as a trinket in this bunch of keys, and the key herself until she unlocks the door to see what fate she is destined for.

Finally, the Marquis makes his young wife wear a white muslin dress as part of the ritual that would prepare her for the execution. As a trophy, after the execution, the Marquis expects to receive his spouse`s body as a new showpiece in his museum of death. The execution scene is the final touch in the bloodthirsty husband`s work of deletion, which will transfer the heroine from the rank of a "sculpted body"[119] into that of a "body preserved as sculpture,"[120] and delete life itself. Ironically, it is the Marquis himself who is ultimately described as a statue, petrified under the gaze of the heroine`s Medusa-like mother.

The ruby choker in this tale functions in a similar manner. Along with the white muslin dress, it constitutes the heroine`s overall outfit for going to the opera. Again, the Marquis uses spectacle as an instrument of power, hinting simultaneously at what role is prepared for his spouse in this play, that is, to be beheaded. This role is not a consequence of the girl`s excessive curiosity. What then was his first wife guilty of? What was the chamber that *she* entered? In any scenario, the finale of her role is always an exhibit in Marquis`s private museum of death.

Moreover, the choker as a symbol foreshadows the heroine`s position conditioned by the Marquis`s sadistic desires. The young wife will appear in a pornographic role of a sex toy,

[118] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 4.
[119] Roemer, 122.
[120] Roemer, 122.

which will be choking individuality in her and will ultimately turn her human flesh into game meat. Her new life is a life in a passive case, but for Carter to "exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is to be killed,"[121] whether metaphorically or literally. Several critics have also remarked that the choker of rubies red as blood presents itself as a projection of the social myth of the female wound, the bleeding scar left after her castration. This cultural fiction, as Carter believes, "transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed."[122] Inasmuch as his spouse was born to bleed, the Marquis deems himself the one who must spill the blood.

Reading "The Bloody Chamber" leaves an impression as if the whole tale was bleeding – from bloody red ruby stones to the "rugs on the floor, […] red of the heart`s dearest blood."[123] The latter, in turn, expands the material imagery of this work, thus contributing to the disclosure of the Marquis's image and creating a certain multidimensionality of his figure. Speculating in her essay on the phenomenon of the man of action in Western literature, Danielle Roemer notes that the region of the Middle East, or the Orient, as is commonly referred to, has always been a source of inspiration for the Western world: viewed as "grotesquely uncivilized" and savagely erotic, violent and infinitely different, the world of the East enriched European society not only with various "systems of order,"[124] but also entered its cultural carcass in the form of rather controversial constructs. The images of Eastern profusion allured Europeans, but, as Roemer claims, were always shaded by the figure of Oriental tyrants, in whose hands these numerous treasures were concentrated. History is a witness to the unquenchable military ambitions of various Eastern empires and their leaders, which always instilled fear and, perhaps, awe in the representatives of the Western world. Therefore, the publication of *Arabic Nights* at the turn of the eighteenth century created a demand for the Oriental Other, which became a readily salable product of fiction among European elitist consumers. The abstraction of the East became the residence, in which the European imagination had lodged the mythic man of action, who, acting in the interests of Western imperialism, was supposed to conquer the uncivilized Oriental world and glorify his country. Central to the hero`s quest for glory was initiative, "the direct translation of will into effective enterprise."[125] Roemer discovers quite a lot of points of contact between the Oriental context and Carter`s prose, and, drawing allusions, sometimes apparent, sometimes a little less so, between the Marquis and notoriously famous Eastern tyrants,

[121] Sage, 68.
[122] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 23.
[123] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 8.
[124] Danielle M. Roemer, 109.
[125] Danielle M. Roemer, 110.

demonstrates consuming appetites of patriarchy, embodied in these men`s concern with spectacularity and disregard for others` individuality.

Scrutinizing the husband`s library, the heroine of "The Bloody Chamber" pays attention to the carpets on the floor, red as blood, that "came from Isfahan and Bokhara."[126] As Roemer notes, Bokhara was a favorite city of such an odious person as a Tartar warlord, Timur, and was a center of textile (including carpet weaving) as well as culture of his empire. The figure of historical Timur as a man of action became a prototype for Marlowe`s character of Tamburlaine of the eponymous play. Therefore, European depiction of this character type found its expression in the image of the male Other, which later consolidated the definition of male hegemony in Western society. Historical facts characterize Timur as a man with the will to win, unstoppable in his enterprises, a conqueror, woven from contradictions; it is no surprise that such a historical personage attracted young Marlowe`s attention. Greedy for new victories, Timur acquires the city of Bokhara as a pearl in the crown of his empire. The biography of this very city is embroidered on the rugs in the Marquis`s library, which, as once Bokhara did, represents a center of literature and arts in the Marquis's miniature empire, his castle. However, just like richly decorated Bokhara used to hide from sight its master`s cruelty, the library hides under the mask of a patron of arts Marquis`s bloodthirsty interior. Thirsty and hungry, the Marquis shares analogous appetites with Marlowe`s Tamburlaine, the fact Roemer supports by providing several direct citations from the play that indicate the tyrant`s consuming ambition: guided by "'thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown,'"[127] he aspires to the "'ripest fruit of all,'"[128] the "'secret fruition of an earthly crown.'"[129] Therefore, although different from each other in many respects, ranging from their descents to the scopes of their empires, both men have one thing in common – both are ready to expand the limits of the possible at any cost. Actually, it does not cost them anything; their victims are the ones who pay the price of their appetites. In this regard, Roemer remarks that, although Marlowe romanticizes the patriarchal world with its aesthetics, while Carter writes against it, both authors employ appetite metaphor to convey the voracity of the tyrants they seek to portray. However, sharing a common starting point with Marlowe, Carter digresses towards the portrayal of the Marquis not so much as a gourmand, but as an outright predator, who plays with his food before eating it. The scene, in which the "purchaser unwrap[es] his bargain,"[130] presents the way Carter puts this image on

[126] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 8.
[127] Roemer, 112.
[128] Roemer, 112.
[129] Roemer, 112.
[130] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 7.

paper: having stripped his wife, "as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke,"[131] the Marquis takes delight in beholding her bare body and shuts her legs "like a book,"[132] leaving the heroine bewildered and, paradoxically enough, stirred. Roemer describes this scene as a "cat-and-mouse game,"[133] correctly observing that Carter herself describes her characters in similar epithets: "leonine shape of [the Marquis`s] head"[134] define his cat-like appearance, while the heroine in turn is a possessor of "mouse-colored hair."[135] The epigraph to this chapter and the above-mentioned Marquis's comparison of the heroine with an artichoke serve as examples of how Carter chooses to realize the appetite metaphor, that is in terms of the cuisine dualism with its simple logic: "there are those who eat, and there are those who are eaten."[136] Accordingly, the Marquis, inspecting his wife`s body like "a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab,"[137] or stripping her like an artichoke, demonstrates his predatory hunger for individuality, integrity and talents; this hunger originates in him, operating in Cixous`s terminology, a void of Lack, which will be discussed later in the chapter. Like Tamburlaine collects territories, the Marquis collects wives, whom he empties, transforming them into unfilled vessels, into which he will pour whatever substance that will appease his appetite.

On the eve of the wedding, the Marquis takes his bride to the opera, and she, having accidentally thrown a glance in the mirror, sees herself through his eyes:

> I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab. […] When I saw him look at me with lust, I dropped my eyes but, in glancing away from him, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. And I saw myself, suddenly, as he saw me, my pale face, the way the muscles in my neck stuck out like thin wire. I saw how much that cruel necklace became me. And for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away.[138]

The above-cited passage communicates the heroine`s entrapment within the male gaze. Many critics point out that the male gaze is a mechanism by which patriarchy exercises control over

[131] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 7.
[132] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 7.
[133] Roemer, 114.
[134] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 28.
[135] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 4.
[136] Roemer, 114.
[137] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 5.
[138] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 5.

the woman and subordinates her as a sexually inferior. In his full scale study of Carter`s fiction, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*, Aidan Day speculates on how patriarchal gaze is realized in "The Bloody Chamber." Analyzing the scene in the opera, Day insists that the events, preceding this scene and culminating in the heroine`s marriage, demonstrate her "assimilation to the world of the masculine"[139], which entails the imprisonment of her individuality within the myth of the ideal woman. What is most interesting, the heroine at least initially lends herself to it. For example, having caught in the Marquis`s eyes a promise of sexual domination, she senses in herself "a potentiality for corruption."[140] Her female sexuality awakens, but it awakens in conditions dictated by the patriarchal dualism – the heroine cannot exercise her sexuality, it does not belong to her. Sexuality and sexual desire have been confiscated by the one who dominates in this oppressive dichotomy. Watching herself in the mirror, the heroine comes to realize that she is first and foremost a spectacle, and soon she begins to adjust herself to this image, constructed for her by the bloodthirsty husband, justifying herself before the readers: "I swear to you, I have never been vain until I met him."[141] The role of the mirror, in Day`s opinion, is defined by its function in classic canvasses, which was oriented towards prompting the woman to perceive herself as "'first and foremost, a sight.'"[142] Next time the heroine sees herself in the mirror, or, to be precise, in the myriad of mirrors, adorning the walls of the matrimonial bedroom, she sees in them not so much herself, but a "multitude of girls […], identical in their chic navy blue tailor-mades."[143] The heroine loses herself in those mirrors – she is no longer an individuality, she is merely "a specimen of female sex in the Marquis' harem."[144]

The next scene narrates the girl`s first sexual experience:

> He […] lifted [my hair] off my shoulders so that he could the better kiss the downy furrows below my ears […]. And he kissed those blazing rubies, too. He kissed them before he kissed my mouth. […]
>
> He lay beside me, felled like an oak, breathing stertorously, as if he had been fighting with me. In the course of that one-sided struggle, I had seen his deathly composure

[139] Day, 152.
[140] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 5.
[141] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 5.
[142] Day, 154.
[143] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 7.
[144] Day, 154.

> shatter like a porcelain vase flung against a wall; I had heard him shriek and blaspheme at the orgasm. […]
>
> When he'd finished […], he turned to me and stroked the ruby necklace that bit into my neck, but with such tenderness now […]. My dear one, my little love, my child, did it hurt her? He's so sorry for it, such impetuousness, he could not help himself; you see, he loves her so… and this lover's recitative of his brought my tears in a flood. I clung to him as though only the one who had inflicted the pain could comfort me for suffering it.[145]

This scene brings the reader back to the symbolism of "The Bloody Chamber." On the wedding night, the Marquis again forces his now wife to wear the choker, which, strangely enough, stimulates his sexual desire. The man first thing kisses the ruby stones with their color of arterial blood. His desire is focused in the first place on the inanimate object, and not on the living flesh of the partner, which gives the impression of the heroine`s very inanimation in the eyes of her husband. The protagonist describes her first sexual encounter as a battle, and not as an act of love. The matrimonial bed becomes a battlefield, whereas sexual activity turns into "torture,"[146] as evidenced by the Marquis` fierce non-human orgasm. The character of the Marquis is a prototype of de Sade`s notorious libertines, whom Carter characterizes as "men possessed by demons"[147] whose "orgasms are like the visitation of the gods of voodoo, annihilating, appalling."[148] Further narration advances according to the formula of a romance novel: unexperienced youth finds solace in the hands of sophisticated masculinity. Having subordinated his victim economically, the Marquis tames the heroine`s emotions, compelling her to believe, that he alone is both her pain and remedy for it. Being a patron of arts, the hero himself creates a piece of his own art, and the heroine fuzzily perceives it, mentioning to herself that she now seems "reborn in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes,"[149] that she "hardly recognized"[150] herself. The reborn heroine is, in fact, a product of the male gaze, because only in this semblance she organically fits in the dichotomic framework.

Once reborn, the young pianist will no longer be able to escape the self-induced shame of her complicity in her own sexual objectification. "No paint nor powder"[151] can mask the red mark

[145] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 8-9.
[146] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 149.
[147] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 149.
[148] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 149.
[149] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 11.
[150] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 11.
[151] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 26.

the Marquis transfers from the key to the heroine`s forehead after the act of her disobedience has been revealed. During the Middle Ages, especially in Europe, cattle branding was employed to identify the owner of livestock. In a similar manner, the heroine, branded by the master, will forever remain his property, haunted by the derogatory tag 'return to the owner.' The equity of the girl`s retribution calls for further discussion, though. Although Carter asserts that "there is no defence at all against absolute tyranny,"[152] the heroine throughout the entire story makes it clear that she, having neglected the ideals of autonomous femininity, previously established by her mother, marries a man, in whose eyes she distinctly reads the "carnal avarice."[153] On the other hand, it is not entirely fair to blame an unexperienced girl, whose critical thinking is not mature enough to resist cultural conditioning, which largely explains her initial decision to become a young wife of such an odious figure.

The issue of oppressive sexuality is further deliberated in the next fairy tale, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon." The tale`s central plot line does not contradict that of the original version of Beauty and the Beast story, once written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. In many respects, it is the most disappointing tale of the collection, since critics find in it all the same mythic props of bourgeois culture of the late seventeenth century, told in a new way, but not rewritten from scratch. Let us take a closer look at what this tale has got to tell of.

The tale`s action revolves around a young rose-like, white-as-snow girl, Beauty. One winter evening, a beautiful girl, having put aside her household chores for a while, is looking out of the window of her poor kitchenette at a country road, waiting for her belated father, who promised to return home before the dark. The father, meanwhile, due to the incessant snowfall, is trapped in a jam: his car got stuck in the snows, and there is not a soul around; the snowfall cut off telephone wires and it is impossible to contact home. By a lucky coincidence, the man finds shelter in the house of the Beast, but inadvertently offends its master by plucking in his garden a rose, which he promised Beauty. As a punishment for his insolence, the Beast obliges the man to send his daughter to the master`s house, where she will be living with him for a season. In return, the Beast assured the man of aiding the latter in the ailing financial affairs he had been struggling with lately. Having spent some time with the Beast and promised to come back before the end of winter, Beauty leaves him to reunite with her father, who by that time had restored his fortune. However, the girl does not keep her promise; as a result, the Beast begins to fade and almost dies. Beauty returns to the place of her former imprisonment, and

[152] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 139.
[153] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 5.

heals the Beast with a kiss, freeing him from his affliction as well as his animalness, or so it seems… The final scene presents a matrimonial harmony in the Garden of Eden, as the couple "walk[s] in the garden; [while] the old spaniel drowses on the grass, in a drift of fallen petals."[154]

Commenting on *The Bloody Chamber*, Salman Rushdie notes that in Carterian rewrites "the fable of Beauty and the Beast [serves as] a metaphor for all the myriad yearnings and dangers of sexual relations." Indeed, Beauty and the Beast`s story is, in the first place, a story about a monopolized libido, in which a young girl is represented as an object of a predator`s lust. Therefore, the prey-predator dichotomy ceases to be solely an abstract metaphor: Mr. Lyon is literally a half man, half animal, and Beauty notes to herself that in his company she feels like a "tender herbivore."[155] Traditionally, in such fairy tales, the Beast personified masculine sexual desire, which had to be tamed and domesticated. Certainly, in Carter`s version, the act of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation from Beauty`s part transforms the big cat into a bourgeois Mr. Lyon. Frankly speaking, Beauty`s place in the patriarchal hierarchy of this fairy tale is defined at the very beginning of the narrative by the words of her father, who had recently become a victim of the snowfall:

> But the old car stuck fast in a rut […]; the engine whirred, coughed and died and he was far from home. [...] he had turned out his pockets to find the cash for petrol to take him home. And not even enough money left over to buy his Beauty, his girlchild, 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.[156]

In his analysis of Carter`s fiction, Aiden Day wonders, what is it that is bought in this passage: Beauty or the white rose? The ambiguity of the formulation and the fact that the father thinks of his daughter as if she was his pet allow the reader to assume that Beauty's status in this tale is the status of commodity, which is sold, passed form hands to hands, given as a gift. Another point of concern is the heroine`s name: the girl is essentially nameless; her name is the quality that defines her as a person, her main virtue and value. Thus, throughout the narrative, the heroine is either Beauty, Miss Lamb or Mrs. Lyon, and never a specific person.

The symbol of the choker reappears before the readers, when Beauty`s father in search of help wanders into the Beast`s Palladian house, where he is welcomed by a white spaniel wearing a

[154] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 33.
[155] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 29.
[156] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 26.

diamond necklace, which is later replaced by "a neat choker of turquoises."[157] In this case, the symbol bears the same semantic load: it is an instrument of subordination, suppression and dehumanization. The latter is especially relevant in "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," since the spaniel`s presence, whom her master rewarded with a precious collar, expands the semantic field of this symbol, drawing parallels between women and pets. Both Beauty and the spaniel are incarnations of domesticity: they are home keepers; their main task is to provide their masters with comfort and pleasant pastime.

Carter expands the tale`s symbolism by introducing yet another symbol, the photo of Beauty. Although it is a new symbol, its meaning is not that novel:

> The Beast rudely snatched the photograph […] and inspected it, first brusquely, then with a strange kind of wonder, almost the dawning of surmise. The camera had captured a certain look she had, sometimes, of absolute sweetness and absolute gravity, as if her eyes might pierce appearances and see your soul.[158]

Apparently, this is the fate of most Carterian heroines to be a spectacle for someone else`s eyes. In the above cited scene, Beauty`s father exposes his daughter, or rather her image, for the Beast`s scrutiny. Not even knowing what happened, Beauty nolens volens becomes an object of masculine desire – she is primarily an image of herself, and then a personality. What is telling is that, being desired for her appearance, Beauty is expected to like the Beast`s soul, disregarding his somewhat repulsive look of a beastly creature. It is disturbing, however, that the heroine, like previously the wife of Marquis, in a short time starts to assimilate to being a recipient of the male gaze: "You could not have said that her freshness was fading but she smiled at herself in mirrors a little too often, these days […] Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterizes certain pampered, exquisite, expensive cats."[159]

Thereby, the heroine begins her assimilation to the world of the masculine. Like a young disobedient pianist, who loses her individuality in the reflections of numerous mirrors, Beauty watches in the mirror a semblance of a pet. Ironically, Beauty partially loses beauty, the only defining trait of her muted personality. Now she is expensive, she is lacquer like a plastic toy, and she is pampered, which is at best a strange way to describe a person, isn't it?

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[157] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 29.
[158] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 28-29.
[159] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 31.

The dichotomy of the predator and its prey realizes itself in Beauty`s oppressive feelings, when she faces the Beast for the first time:

> How strange he was. She found his bewildering difference from her almost intolerable; its presence choked her. There seemed a heavy soundless pressure upon her in his house, as if it lay under water, and when she saw the great paws lying on the arm of his chair, she thought: they are the death of any tender herbivore. And such a one she felt herself to be, Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial.[160]

This passage informs the reader that Beauty thinks of herself in patriarchal terminology, positioning herself as a potential prey. The sexual subtext here is expressed in that the Beast`s desire, of which she is the object, chokes her, as she is not able to respond adequately to it, since in the meat-carnivore dualism both polarities are a priori not equal, in addition, sexuality is still an unmapped territory for this snow-like child.

The tale`s culmination, like the scene of Marquis and his wife`s postlude, resembles a clichéd episode taken from a romance novel: "'I'm dying, Beauty,' he said in a cracked whisper of his former purr. 'Since you left me, I have been sick. I could not go hunting, I found I had not the stomach to kill the gentle beasts, I could not eat. I am sick and I must die; but I shall die happy because you have come to say good-bye to me.'"[161] Like Marquis that subordinated his wife`s emotions, now the Beast manipulates Beauty and the girl's morality. Carter herself referred to the hero`s speech as a "moral blackmail."[162] As she puts it, Beauty did not have a choice, since her high morality would not have let her to do the only right thing in this situation, that is "hav[ing] said at that point […] 'Die, then.'"[163] On the contrary, Beauty responds: "Don't die, Beast! If you'll have me, I'll never leave you."'[164] In the final scene, the Beast indeed does have her, and she is attached to him by her everlasting sense of duty. Beast`s male libido is tamed, and Beauty is tamed by this libido, a beastly creature turns into Mr. Lyon, a respected man. All is well that ends well, or does it only seem so?

In her next fairy tale, "The Lady of the House of Love," Carter probes into the phenomenon of aggression as part of female sexuality: she retains the same dichotomy, but this time with a different arrangement of dramatis personae. In this work, the author rethinks the Sleeping Beauty story, coupling it with Bram Stoker`s Gothic heritage. Far away in the Carpathian

[160] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 29.
[161] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 32.
[162] John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985) 83.
[163] Haffenden, 83.
[164] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 33.

Mountains in Eastern Europe, at the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, just before the outbreak of the First World War, a beautiful vampiress, sentenced to eternal imprisonment, mourns her lot, laying out tarot cards and occasionally dining on travelers that have accidentally wandered into the ghost village. Each time the tarot cards bode death for her guests; everything changes, however, when she once pulls out Les Amoureux, and a young soldier, an officer, arrives in her village.

The Countess is a tragic figure: though being a predator, she does not escape objectification. She is trapped within her role, prescribed to her by "the beastly forebears on the walls."[165] Paradoxically, being at first sight a victimizer, the Countess is, in fact, more a victim of tradition, established by the patriarchs of her vampire family, which is why "the blood on [her] cheeks [is always] mixed with tears."[166] The bloodthirsty tradition compels the heroine to consume men, entrapped into the castle, thus depriving her of an autonomous desire: the Countess "does not possess herself […]. The beastly forebears on the walls condemn her to a perpetual repetition of their passions."[167]

In a lot of ways, "The Lady of the House of Love" is a tale about archetypes and patriarchal myths. Male imagination classifies such heroines among femmes fatale, sexually appealing yet dangerous. Nonetheless, the reality of the femme fatal of the House of Love is not enviable. In general, the heroine is not much different from the exhibits of Marquis`s misogynist museum: she is a dead, "waxen"[168] body, confined in a mortuary with its "funerary urns, of great antiquity,"[169] "bowls which emit slumbrous, pungent fumes of incense,"[170] and "an elaborate catafalque, in ebony, surrounded by long candles in enormous silver candlesticks."[171] She is an embodiment of the myths of femininity, heated by the male fear of the other: she is seductive (she has got "a whore`s mouth"[172]) but fatal, if not subordinated. Such a fear feels a necessity to rationalize the irrational feminine and urges to accommodate it into various roles. It must be said here that in none of these roles the heroine finds rest.

[165] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 69.
[166] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 65.
[167] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 69.
[168] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 66.
[169] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 64.
[170] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 64.
[171] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 64.
[172] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 68.

The Countess is more animalistic than she is human. "The combination of human and animal traits […] as the most ancient grotesque forms"[173] makes her belong to the other world, the world of the fantastic, the world of the grotesque, which will be discussed further in the chapter. A child of the world of shadows, the heroine with her whole being represents an epitome of the eternal feminine. However, this universal experience suffocates her; she finds it uncomfortable and seeks to escape it by acquiring humanity: "In her dream, she would like to be human; but she does not know if that is possible."[174] This, however, becomes possible when the Countess pulls out of her tarot deck a card under the name Les Amoureux, and in the village appears a handsome soldier.

The officer`s virginity and rationality are the main reasons why the Countess has no power over him. His innocence changes the layout of cards, and Les Amourex (the Lovers) replaces La Mort (the Death). The soldier is Carter`s the Wanderer, who surpasses mysterious territories of the feminine. He is the symbol of reason, en*light*enment, which would free the heroine from the shackles of shadows. His masculine reason is rather flawed, though. Masculine reason does not know the true meaning of fear, as evidenced by the narrator`s comment that the officer "has about him, besides, the special glamour of that generation for whom history has already prepared a special, exemplary fate in the trenches of France."[175] His reason blinds him with fictitious ideals of heroism, whereas Carte believes that in war there is nothing noble, only the "monstrous and obscene."[176] Masculine reason fails here for yet another cause – the faculty of rational thinking has always been granted to men, while women`s has been the realm of the non-rational. Such an allotment of traits a priori contributes to creating the image of the feminine on the principle of exclusion. It must be understood that although the hero has not been initiated into masculinity yet, he is the same product of socium as she is; still, they exist on the opposite poles of the dichotomy. Both are expected to perform their prescribed roles, but this time things take a turn for the unusual. The Countess must consume him, but for the first time her ritual does not follow the accustomed scenario, and the heroine feels that she acquires humanity, so long desired. The officer in turn, innocent as he is, sees before himself not an inanimate object, a recipient of his desire, but "first and foremost, an inbred, highly strung girl child, fatherless, motherless, kept in the dark too long."[177] Through her erotic exterior, he

[173] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 316.
[174] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 64.
[175] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 65.
[176] Angela Carter, "Anger in a Black Landscape", *Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings*, ed. by J.Uglow (London: Penguin, 1998) 47. Electronic Edition.
[177] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 70.

recognizes in the femme fatale feelings and emotions and, “due to his heroism, which makes him like the sun,”[178] he is not afraid of her alleged fatality. The hero puts the girl to bed like a parent would put his child. When he awakens the next morning, inspired by the hopes for a brighter future with the love he met in this castle, he finds the heroine dead, looking “far older, less beautiful and so, for the first time, fully human.”[179] Ultimately, the Countess acquires humanity in death, which liberates her from the chains of the male imagination, as well as the hazard of becoming yet another archetype of the damsel in distress to be rescued by a romantic hero. Deeply grieved, the officer returns to his regiment, this time to go to war in France, where he “will learn to shudder in the trenches.”[180]

[178] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 70.
[179] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 72.
[180] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 70.

Sexuality of Reciprocity

While de Sade`s thought bears a simple logic "fuck or be fucked,"[181] Carter offers an antidote to the established dualisms of a martyr and tyrant, object and subject. Her answer lies in the sexuality of reciprocity, which allows "both partners [to be] changed by the exchange and, if submission is mutual, then aggression is mutual."[182] Therefore, as Day writes, each of the partners combines in themselves "thesis and antithesis,"[183] which by definition denies the possibility of an either/or scenario. In Carter`s repertoire, there are indeed characters that exist outside the patriarchal code, such as, for example, Beauty and the Beast of "The Tiger`s Bride," and "a good girl" from "The Company of Wolves."

In "The Tiger`s Bride", unlike in "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon", animalism of desire is not a prerogative of one of the partners, but is appropriated equally by both of them. Now, there is no need in taming or domesticating animal desire, as far as both characters exit outside of the framework of dichotomous culture prone to dictatorship and containment.

"*My father lost me to The Beast at cards."*[184]

Italy, not far from Milan. Playing a card game, a desperate and greedy representative of Russian nobility puts at stake his own daughter, whom he values not "at less than a king's ransom; but at *no more* than a king's ransom."[185] Having enjoyed benevolent weather of the autumnal north, the father and daughter are now headed towards the south, hurried by the approaching winter. All his life, Beauty's father has lived a passion for gambling and extramarital affairs. His first victim became the heroine`s mother, beautiful as a rose flower, who "did not blossom long,"[186] though. Now, watching her negligent father gambling away their family fortune, Beauty expects to repeat her mother`s fate. When there is nothing left to stake on, the father offers his daughter`s life as an 'adequate' substitution. Beauty notes to herself: "now my own skin was my sole capital in the world and today I'd make my first investment."[187]

Beauty in this fairy tale is one of Carter`s 'wise girls;' it is no surprise that Carter grants her heroine a voice, trusting the latter to narrate her own story from the first person. What is remarkable is that the young girl looks soberly at the game unfolding before her eyes. She is

[181] Day, 149.
[182] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 146.
[183] Day, 101.
[184] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 37.
[185] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 35.
[186] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 34.
[187] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 37.

well acquainted with its rules, that once ruined her mother, and now are threating her herself; the rules that against her will make Beauty property, an object of exchange and bargain.

The next morning, Beauty departs for the remote castle of her mysterious purchaser, accompanied by his valet. Traveling in a carriage, the heroine reflects on the Beast`s persona and the secret he hides behind the mask. She recalls frightening stories about human-like animals, told her in childhood. Being "a wild wee thing"[188] as a child, the heroine could not be tamed "into submission with a frown or the bribe of a spoonful of jam."[189] To somehow make the girl obey, her English nanny were telling her stories about a tiger-man: "If you don't stop plaguing the nursemaids, [she said], the tiger-man will come and take you away. They'd brought him from Sumatra, in the Indies, […]; his hinder parts were all hairy and only from the head downwards did he resemble a man."[190]

Again, traditional tales about wolves, werewolves and big cats position animal-like characters as an embodiment of pure desire, pure sexuality, unadulterated by cultural and societal nurture. As is already known, that what the dominant ideology cannot control it declares dangerous. Autonomous female sexuality is among such phenomena. Noteworthy is also a story about a wagoner`s daughter: cross-eyed, hare-lipped, "ugly as sin,"[191] she, as rumor has it, was impregnated by a bear and gave birth to a boy, all in fur and with a full set of teeth. This tale about a wagoner`s poor child demonstrates in what forms social constructs are realized among people: the punishment for the girl`s active desire is her ugliness. Here, it should be noted that Beauty is well aware of what is going on in these fables, because she is theoretically familiar with the potential pleasures the flesh has got to offer, as "the giggling nursemaids initiated [her] into the mysteries of what the bull did to the cows."[192] Nonetheless, the heroine`s perception of sexuality remains tinted by the childhood fear of being eaten by an exotic predatory beast and prejudices about punishability for sexual curiosity.

However, when Beauty actually meets a character similar to those from the "old wives` tales,"[193] she observes it to herself that he does not correspond to the image of an uncivilized wild beast, infinitely remote from humanity, whom her imagination drew:

[188] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 36.
[189] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 36.
[190] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 36.
[191] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 36.
[192] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 36.
[193] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 37.

> My senses were increasingly troubled by the fuddling perfume of Milord, far too potent a reek of purple civet at such close quarters in so small a room. […] what can he smell of, that needs so much camouflage? […] There is a crude clumsiness about his outlines, that are on the ungainly, giant side; and he has an odd air of self-imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself to remain upright when he would far rather drop down on all fours. […] only from a distance would you think The Beast not much different from any other man, although he wears a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it. Oh, yes, a beautiful face; but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human […] He wears a wig, too […] [and] A chaste silk stock stuck with a pearl hides his throat. And gloves of blond kid that are yet so huge and clumsy they do not seem to cover hands.[194]

Each detail of Milord`s figure attests to his aspiration to participate in humanity, or, to be precise, in the cultural construction of human masculinity. Needless to say, he is not very good at it. The Beast represents by himself a pure primeval desire, undiluted by socialization, which by its natural power surpasses any cultural restrictions. He has a poor command of the symbolic language of the society he wants to belong to. The Beast lives "according to a different logic,"[195] which is reflected not only in his absurd exterior, but also in the place of his residence. If your home is what you are, then the Beast`s palace is a place of not purely physical but also cultural solitude, "dismantled, as if its owner were about to move house or had never properly moved in."[196] The hero exists outside the society not only territorially, but also psychologically.

In an uninhibited palazzo, Beauty is accommodated in a secluded room that is located just a little bit higher than the rest of the house. Milord`s one-sided communication with his purchase takes place through the Beast`s valet. One day, the latter announces that the sole desire of his master is to look at the young lady`s naked body, and then only once, after which she will be returned to her father intact and safe with numerous gifts of furs and jewelry. The father will be reimbursed the same amount of money he lost to the master at cards. Such a desire fits well into the patriarchal behavioral scenario towards a woman; this, as the Beast believes, will make him more masculine, more human. However, as it soon becomes obvious, the role of a patriarch is not organic to the hero`s nature, and Beauty`s response to his demand provokes tears in his eyes:

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[194] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 34.
[195] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 41.
[196] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 37.

> I felt that I owed it to him to make my reply in as exquisite a Tuscan as I could master. 'You may put me in a windowless room, sir, and I promise you I will pull my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it […]. So I shall be covered completely from the waist upwards, and no lights. There you can visit me once, sir, and only the once […]
>
> How pleased I was to see I struck The Beast to the heart […] one single tear swelled, glittering, at the corner of the masked eye. A tear! […] A tear came from his other eye. And then he moved; he buried his cardboard carnival head with its ribboned weight of false hair in, I would say, his arms.[197]

Quite similarly, in "The courtship of Mr Lyon," the Beast asks Beauty to keep him company, while in "The Tiger`s Bride", Milord demands that the girl undress for him. Both demands, whichever form they take, have a common underlying motive - to objectify the women for the male pleasure. The only difference between them is that Mr. Lyon has mastered the 'art' of being human, while the tiger does not really know how to communicate his desires in a proper manipulative manner. However, Beauty from "The Tiger`s Bride" has not lost her childhood willfulness, and her reaction to the humiliating behavior from the Beast`s part is very different from the submissive acceptance of the "tender herbivore"[198] from "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon." By this, Beauty resists being reduced to the object of anyone`s desire, and if the Beast wants to be with her, then he will need to be rid of all the pretenses at patriarchal subjectivity which he had imposed on himself. But now…

Beauty is taken to her room, where she is already awaited by a clockwork servant "with glossy, nut-brown curls, rosy cheeks, blue, rolling eyes,"[199] "in her little cap, her white stockings, her frilled petticoats,"[200] with "a musical box where her heart should be."[201] This is interesting that some of the epithets, Beauty chooses to describe the servant with, are precisely those with which she earlier described her mother`s appearance. The encounter with the maid automaton leads Beauty to question her own lot, and whether she herself had "been allotted the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given her."[202] The clockwork maid represents a caricature of a woman, beautiful on the outside, empty on the inside, created by

[197] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 38-40.
[198] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 29.
[199] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 39.
[200] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 39.
[201] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 39.
[202] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 41.

men`s hands to serve. Just about in such a way Beauty is perceived by the male imagination in the person of her father and (for now) masculine persona of the Beast.

The next morning, Beauty receives from the Beast a gift in the form of an earring, shaped like a teardrop, but the heroine rejects it. Similarly, she does not accept the second earring, brought to her in the morning of the next day. Every time the Beast cries as if each of the decorations was made of his own tears. Begging Beauty to accept his gifts, the hero begs her to listen to his emotional conflict. The teardrop earrings will reappear later in the tale, and will mark Beauty`s readiness to accept the Beast and his personal story.

But for now, Beauty is preparing herself for the horseback hunt with the master of the house and his valet. Galloping through the woods, the heroine continues to ruminate on her current situation: she is no longer that frightened by the beastliness of the beasts, and begins to recognize, as Aidan Day puts it, "the insubstantiality of her humanity as culturally defined."[203] Riding together with the Beast, Beauty rides beyond the boundaries of humanity, conditioned by cultural constructs and social myths, into the realm of the animalistic. She is neither an herbivore nor carnivore, as such dichotomist divisions exist only as part of the patriarchal code, and now Beauty is outside of it. When the Beast, tired of playing humanity, insists that she see him without his human attire, the heroine finds herself deeply touched by his animal form and bares her body as a sign of reciprocity: "The tiger will never lie down with the lamb […]. The lamb must learn to run with the tigers."[204] Not only Beauty rids herself of the clothes (which beasts do not wear), she goes back to her animal nature that does not know cultural definitions, and she felt "at liberty for the first time in [her] life."[205]

Having returned to the palace, already dressed, Beauty through the magic mirror sees her father who, not without the Beast`s help, has regained his bygone fortune. Convinced of Milord`s decency, the heroine decides to remain in the castle, sending her clockwork maid to take her place in the parent`s life. It is unlikely that he will spot the difference, isn't it?

Preparing herself for another encounter with the Beast, Beauty chooses to wear teardrop earrings, given to her earlier, and finds them "very heavy."[206] Yet, the earrings are the only thing the heroine has on herself when she voluntarily enters the Beast`s parlor and sees him in his natural state. The "earliest and most archaic of fears – fear of devourment"[207] awakens in

[203] Day, 142.
[204] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 42.
[205] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 43.
[206] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 43.
[207] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 44.

Beauty, but internally she is no longer a lamb, if she has ever been one, the heroine has learnt to run with the tigers and now is meeting the Beast on equal terms. The sentiment of reciprocity is further enhanced by the fact that the Beast "was far more frightened of me than I was of him."[208] In a mutual awe and fear, Beauty stretches out her hand, and the Beast, with the tongue "abrasive, as sandpaper,"[209] licks off her human skin that was her only currency in the world, to which she does not belong any more. And the tongue will be ripping off "skin after successive skin,"[210] until the only thing that remains is the fine fur of an animal, and the jewels turn into water.

"Fear and flee the wolf..."[211]

"The Company of Wolves," following the previous fairy tale in the collection, develops and supplements its thought, thus affording the reader an opportunity to look at sexuality of reciprocity under different conditions and expressions. As the name implies, this is a fairy tale about wolves. Perhaps, for this reason, before telling the story of a Red-Riding-Hood-like heroine, the narrator in a rather lengthy preamble acquaints the reader with wolves, dangerous creatures of the woods, endowed with special bloodthirstiness and unquenchable appetite for the flesh. As an epigraph to the story about Red Riding Hood, the narrator will tell you two cautionary tales: one about a wolf caught in a trap by a hunter, the animal eventually turns out to be a man; another one about a newly married man who disappears on a wedding night, having gone out into the backyard to relieve himself. Having been in the respectful period of mourning for her husband, the window marries a second time and bears children. "One freezing night, the night of the solstice, the hinge of the year when things do not fit together as well as they should,"[212] the husband, whom she has mourned for so long, returns home. Having beheld in her new marriage a sign of adultery, the man in a fit of rage turns into a wolf and attacks the woman`s son. Being killed, the horrendous wolf again turns back into a human, into a man she once married. All that the readers should learn from these tales, in the narrator`s opinion, is that "the wolf may be more than he seems."[213] The established truth of "this region of mountain and forest"[214] is what the girl is yet to learn. For now, however, the heroine is getting ready for the road to her grandmother`s house, planning to bring a pious old woman "a bottle of harsh liquor

[208] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 44.
[209] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 44.
[210] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 45.
[211] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 75.
[212] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 76.
[213] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 75.
[214] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 74.

distilled from brambles; a batch of flat oatcakes baked on the hearthstone; [and] a pot or two of jam."[215]

Who is this girl? With what does she start her journey, both literal and allegorical? To begin with, "The Company of Wolves" is a tale about transformation, a kind of bildungsroman on several pages. However, the transformative potential is realized only towards the end of the narrative, while the heroine begins her journey with a patriarchally constructed idea about herself. Initially, the girl does not represent any individuality, rather a mythic type: like many Carterian heroines, the child does not even have a decent name, she is simply a "flaxen-haired girl,"[216] one of many. She does not exist in the material world; her habitat is the world of idea, world of abstraction. Yet, as Elaine Jordan believes, "Where else can you start from, if not from where you actually are?"[217] The girl`s value in conditions dictated by patriarchy, depends, of course, on her physical features; and this what the tale begins with. The characterization of the heroine is primarily focused on her individuality as a sexual object:

> Her breasts have just begun to swell; her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month.
>
> She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver.[218]

The girl has got an identity of an eye-candy for the male gaze. Like Sadeian Justine, the heroine is valued for the skin as her only 'currency', and for how successfully she fits in the concept of feminine virtue, which would put her on the altar of masculinity. Within her family (it can be assumed that it is also within the society), the girl is revered: they worship her beauty, her youth, for "[c]hildren do not stay young for long in this savage country."[219] As a sign of reverence, the girl`s mother and grandmother have knitted for their favorite a shawl of color red that "has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow."[220] In her heroine, Carter finds what she tracks in

[215] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 76.
[216] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 76.
[217] Elaine Jordan, "The Dangers of Angela Carter," *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Discourses on Theories and Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992) 125.
[218] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 76-77.
[219] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 76.
[220] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 76.

the figure of Justine, that is, what she terms an "artificial ascendancy."[221] 'Artificial ascendancy' creates in the heroines an illusion of self-significance on the basis of their physical attractiveness. Such a logic is questionable, since the existence on the altar spoils the girl, as symbolized by the red shawl. The author of the original tale (if it can at all be called original), Charles Perrault, as Jack Zipes argues, "obviously intended to warn little girls that a spoiled child could be 'spoiled' in another way by a wolf/man who sought to ravish her."[222] 'Spoiled in another way' alludes here to sexual 'purity,' as the supreme definition of female virtue, but, as Carter sees it: "Purity is always in danger"[223] for it implies passivity, obedience and weakness; and this is exactly what ultimately makes Perrault`s Red Riding Hood a predator`s feast.

Again, female virtue is defined through her anatomy: her womb becomes a 'magical space,' a sanctuary. As a woman, the heroine`s entire being will be reduced to her genitalia: her reproductive function will eventually exclude her from the public sphere, and the preservation of virginity will make her a decent girl. Therefore, as Judo-Christian morality prescribes, while the heroine remains a virgin, she is virtuous and save, as if protected by God himself. Like the officer from "The Lady of the House of Love", whose virginity saves him from the charms of the vampire chatelaine, the girl`s virginity is supposed to protect her against the beasts, lurking in the woods; again, only on condition that she remains a closed system she is now. 'A closed system' is an interesting descriptive term, which entails that the girl, as an individual, is closed within her body, through which she is both defined and perceived. If Carter`s "strong-minded child"[224] is protected by the pentacle of virginity, then why does she take a carving knife with her?

Having packed the basket with the goodies for granny, the heroine takes the road, and "[t]he forest closed upon her like a pair of jaws."[225] And this time Carter, apparently drawing inspiration from the folk tradition, grants the forest the same semantic load it has in "The Erl-King" – a territory of male desire. The narrator notes the girl`s father would most likely forbid her to go into the woods, but, since he himself is there all the time, the girl led by her innate curiosity is headed through the trees. From the father`s perspective, his fears are justified: being a patriarch, the man tries to contain and pacify the sexuality of his daughter, warning the latter

[221] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 72.
[222] Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context* (London: Heinemann, 1983) 9.
[223] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 73.
[224] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 76.
[225] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 77.

that there, in the forest, she can be eaten not only by wolves, but the forest itself, in other words by carnivorous male libido. So far, the narration follows the version written by Perrault: a small girl goes through the forest in the direction to her granny`s house, for whom she carries a basket with cakes. It is expected that further events will progress in the following scenario: on her way, the girl encounters a wolf, in whom, due to her innocence, she does not recognize any danger, and with whom she makes a bet; in this bet, however, neither the granddaughter nor her grandmother wins, but both become the wolf`s feast. At the end of the fairy tale, Perrault, assuming the persona of a caring father, admonishes:

> Children, especially attractive, well-bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say "wolf," but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all.[226]

Attractive, well-bred young ladies, among whom belongs Perrault`s Red Riding Hood, are the products of the male imagination, to which belongs Perrault`s own genius, and the fairy tale in itself is a deeply-rooted pattern in Western culture, which reflects, as Jack Zipes puts it, “men’s fear of women’s sexuality – and of their own as well.”[227] The readers already met one such attractive and well-bred lady, Justine: “a good woman, [indeed], according to the rules for women laid down by men,”[228] she is ultimately rewarded for her decency, and “her reward is rape.”[229]

The folk tradition endowed the heroine of this tale with such traits as courage and wit, so originally Red Riding Hood was a peasant girl, ready to “use her wits to escape preying beasts.”[230] However, Perrault prefers to see the girl from a different angle: his heroine is a pretty, spoiled little girl, who is completely ignorant of the world`s dangers, and is always at the mercy of others (in Grimm Brothers` version, for example, she is saved by a huntsman, an awe-inspiring paragon of masculinity). Still, even if Red Riding Hood had obeyed the author`s wise piece of advice and never stopped to talk with the wolf, it seems, she would have been eaten, regardless, as she is destined for this lot by her own anatomy. In the prey-predator

[226] Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (London, ca. 1889) pp. 51-53. Lang's source: Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (Paris, 1697).
[227] Zipes, 57.
[228] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 38.
[229] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 38.
[230] Zipes, 9.

dichotomy, no matter how sweet and delicate the lamb is, it is to end up being eaten by the tiger. Thus, Carter`s task in the context of sexuality is to portray the prototype of Perrault`s Red Riding Hood as a carrier of autonomous desire, comparable to that of the wolf.

The encounter with the latter in the guise of a gentleman resembles something like a flirtatious game rather than an encounter of vulnerable innocence with a dangerous predatory beast: "[s]o on they went together, through the thickening light of the afternoon, […] laughing and joking like old friends."[231] In Perrault`s version, the girl, due to her being a "well bred young lad[y],"[232] fails to perceive any sexual impulse coming from the wolf, while in Carter`s, not all is that innocent. Carterian heroine is not new to the "[c]ommonplaces of a rustic seduction."[233] Having been shown the compass that navigates her new charming acquaintance through the woods, the girl finds it fascinating, refusing, however, to believe that it might lead the young man to her grandmother`s house unharmed and faster than she would do it her way. The heroine`s distrust of the outlandish device owes to her unfamiliarity with the landscape of desire, unmapped territories under masculine rule; for this reason, she chooses to "never leave the path [she knows] on the way through the wood or else she would be lost instantly."[234] Thus, both characters wager – who will get to the granny`s house first? – if it is a young man, then, as a reward, he asks for a kiss. It must be said, the heroine herself is not averse to provide such a reward, this is why she wants to linger in the woods, "to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager."[235]

The handsome gentleman indeed wins the wager, and arrives at the grandmother`s house long before the girl. Granny in this fairy tale is Perrault`s ideal heroine in her (probably) seventies - a once attractive, well-bred, but no longer young lady. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter writes that "our flesh arrives to us out of history;"[236] in this case, the old lady`s flesh arrived to her out of the history of female identities manufactured by masculine centralism, which continues to dominate her, as evidenced by the grandfather`s clock that "ticks away her eroding time."[237] This elderly woman is deeply religious, she has never left the path on her way through the woods and never got 'lost' in the scenery of masculine libido; her own libido, if she has ever allowed herself to have one, has remained rather rudimentary. It looks as though Granny had

[231] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 77.
[232] Andrew Lang, 53.
[233] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 77.
[234] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 77.
[235] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 78.
[236] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 9.
[237] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 78.

been trying to match the parameters of the purity myth, the Christian Holy Virgin. As has been previously mentioned, Carter`s relations with Judo-Christian morality are quite strained, as she deems its mythical content "heritage of shame, disgust […] that stand between the initial urge and the first attainment of this most elementary assertion of the self."[238] The alleged protection that religion might offer proves impotent in this tale: when the old lady faces pure animal sexuality, incarnated by the lycanthrope, with its "eyes of a best of prey, nocturnal devastating eyes as red as a wound,"[239] her first supposed thought is to throw the Bible at the beast, and start calling angels for the help; in other words, seek protection in religion, as she has been taught to do. Alas…

Do you remember what reward, according to Carter, awaits a 'perfect' woman? Here she is, lying horrified in her bed, and "[t]he last thing the old lady saw in all this world was a young man, eyes like cinders, naked as a stone, approaching her bed."[240]

Finally, the heroine arrives. She is frankly disappointed when, having entered the house, she discovers only her granny sitting by the fireplace. However, something has alerted her: for the first time, Granny`s Bible laid unopened. It does not take long for the girl to understand that in front of her there is a predatory wolf, her grandmother has been eaten and it is very likely that the same fate awaits her.

> Now a great howling rose up all around them, near, very near, as close as the kitchen garden, the howling of a multitude of wolves; she knew the worst wolves are hairy on the inside and she shivered, in spite of the scarlet shawl she pulled more closely round herself as if it could protect her although it was as red as the blood she must spill.[241]

She has been taught that the wolves hungriest for the flesh are the ones that are hairy on the inside, and now she meets one of them. Her reaction is rather disappointing, since it is clear that the girl still lives by the constructed image of herself as she seeks rescue in the scarlet shawl, symbol of her "artificial ascendancy,"[242] by pulling it closely around herself. Like her grandmother who lacks libido, the granddaughter, who has not yet realized the libidinal impulses, is defenseless before the desire incarnate. Like her grandmother, the girl seeks solace in things that contain her more than they might liberate. What is interesting in this scene is that the heroine actually shivers, while at the beginning of her journey, as the narrator assured us,

[238] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 11.
[239] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 78.
[240] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 78.
[241] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 79.
[242] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 72.

she did not know how to do it. The girl was described as a closed system, while now she must spill the blood. The question is what kind of blood it will be?

In the howling of a multitude of wolves, the girl recognizes a cry of despair, because they howl, "as if their hearts would break."[243] She grasps the condition of the wolves destined for the existence, as Carter puts it, in "diabolic solitude"[244] of a predator in the meat-carnivore dichotomy. Now, the fear does the girl no good, and "she cease[s] to be afraid."[245] The heroine steps beyond patriarchal myths of herself, and even laughs in their face, since "she knew she was nobody`s meat."[246] At this moment, the girl is transformed from being one of the polarities of dualism into an executor of an autonomous desire, based on the principle of reciprocity. As in "The Tiger's Bride," the heroes get rid of clothing of cultural constructs: the heroine, completely naked, burns the werewolf's clothes so that, according to the belief of these lands, he can no longer take the form of a man. Masculinity is arguably the most dangerous carnivore in this tale, and as long as the wolf remains a wolf, the girl is "sweet and sound […] sleep[ing] in granny`s bed, between the paws of the tender"[247] lover.

[243] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 79.
[244] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, 150.
[245] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 80.
[246] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 80.
[247] Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* 81.

Sexuality of Otherness

Yet another manifestation of sexuality, the sexuality of otherness, is discussed by Betty Moss in her essay *Desire and the Female Grotesque in Angela Carter`s "Peter and the Wolf"*. As Carter herself liked to say: 'there are no answers which are unequivocally correct."[248] The writer does not intend to convey the reality of sexuality and desire. What she does, however, is provide the reader with alternative possibilities of understanding the mechanisms of their functioning. Thus, the reader is positioned as an active participant in the work of fiction, which, in this case, is a fairy tale. In Carter`s hands, fairy tale becomes a chisel for cutting stone of cultural mythology. Fairy tale is also appealing to Carter since it belongs to the world of the fantastic. This fact is important in her project, as the fantastic stands in direct opposition to what Betty Moss calls "transparent realism,"[249] the "category of fiction which renders events 'as if' the reader is looking through a window at the familiar world."[250] Such a category is potentially dangerous in the context of cultural mythology, as it forces on a person a ready-made model of reality and beliefs that constitute it. This category easily lends itself to ideological editing, and freezes dominant political and social code into universal truth. While in her de-mythologizing business, Carter seeks to discover alternative realities, which exist beyond this code, that is, in the realm of the fairy tale, in the realm of the fantastic. The category of the fantastic relies heavily on the grotesque, a form that, as Mikhail Bakhtin defines it, "discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life,"[251] which is "always conceiving."[252] In this regard, the fairy tale as genre is especially relevant, since it does not make any pretenses at reality and stimulates unease. In the afterword to *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces*, Carter explains the appeal of short fiction, which has to do with the concentrated fusion of sign and sense peculiar to it. This fusion makes her narrative condensed to the extent that longer fiction cannot afford. It is also interesting that Carter avoids identifying her works of short fiction as *short stories*, and refers to them as *tales*. The key difference is that, while the short story describes reality, the tale only speculates on it, or "interprets everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday

[248] Haffenden, 79.
[249] Betty Moss, "Desire and the Female Grotesque in Angela Carter`s 'Peter and the Wolf,'" *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 188.
[250] Moss, 188.
[251] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 48.
[252] Moss, 189.

experience."[253] According to this logic, the reader is never betrayed into "a false knowledge"[254] of reality; on the contrary, they are taken to the provinces of the fantastic with their intrinsic predispositions for the grotesque. Thus, these "subterranean areas"[255] explored by Carter allow to re-conceptualize lived experience, and "toss the reader into a Cixousean void of potentiality."[256]

Here, let us address Hélène Cixous`s notion of the void of potentiality. Being a literary critic, Cixous strongly believes in the transformative capacities of literature, or, to be precise, a feminine text that, as she writes, "goes on and on."[257] This feature of feminine text is meant to challenge the reader, to throw them into the void. The challenge consists in the fact that when "the volume comes to an end,"[258] "the writing continues."[259] It is in this continuous movement towards potentially new future, where the void becomes that of potentiality, and in which the reader must participate. A masculine text in turn would represent the void of finality, since masculine desire is distinguished by the Lack, by the tendency to rationalize, categorize and be objective. It follows then that Cixousean void of potentiality complements Bakhtin`s theory of the grotesque: both are the sites of another experience of life.

Apart from Bakhtin`s grotesque and Cixous`s void of potentiality, Carter draws inspiration from the Gothic tradition, as evidenced by her commentary that she'd "always been fond of Poe and Hoffmann – Gothic tales, cruel tales, tales of wonder, tales of terror, fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious."[260] According to Carter, the principle value of the Gothic genre is that it holds on to "a singular moral function – that of provoking unease."[261] The unease is a feeling triggered as a reaction towards the betrayal of expectations as regards the functioning of the world. Moss illustrates that this initial reaction is further to develop into either a refuse to engage in exploring grotesque territories, or a consent to proceed with the discovering of yet unknown faces of the world. At this point, Moss draws parallels between Carter`s *unease* as an effect of the Gothic genre that depends on the grotesque for its effectiveness and Bakhtian *ambivalence* as generated by the grotesque. In Bakhtin`s rhetoric, ambivalence (unease) is an engine that sets the grotesque in motion. Ambivalence is a

[253] Angela Carter, *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces*, ed. by Carter (New York: Penguin, 1984) 133.
[254] Carter, *Fireworks*, 133.
[255] Carter, *Fireworks*, 133.
[256] Moss, 190.
[257] Helen Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Robert Von Davis and Ronald Schliefer (New York: Longman, 1989) 488.
[258] Cixous, 488.
[259] Cixous, 488.
[260] Carter, *Fireworks*, 132.
[261] Carter, *Fireworks*, 133.

depository of considerable regenerative, socially transforming potential, which is, however, not necessarily to be realized, but is made very probable by the emotional conflict evoked. To appreciate the grotesque as an aesthetic category, the reader should observe the ambivalence it embeds into the text and provokes in the readers themselves. As a result, Carter chooses to realize Bakhtin`s grotesque, Cixousean void of potentiality and Gothic ambivalence in her rewriting of one of the traditional wolf tales, "Peter and the Wolf."

Traditional wolf tales position the wolf as masculine threat. The only way to eliminate this threat in traditional tales is to resist it on the conditions it knows, that is through violence and tyranny. Betty Moss believes that in her revision of the folk tale, Carter not only addresses the tradition, but also works on Sergei Prokofiev`s musical score *Peter and the Wolf*. A Russian and Soviet composer, Prokofiev intended to create a 'symphonic fairy tale' of "masculine initiation,"[262] giving it the form of a guide to instrumental performance. The plot of Prokofiev`s tale unfolds as follows: early in the morning, Peter has a quarrel with his grandfather, who warns the boy of a big grey wolf lurking in the woods; Peter, a Young Pioneer, states that "boys like [me] are not afraid of wolves."[263] Later, however, the wolf indeed shows up, big and scary as it is, and Peter captures the animal by throwing a loop on its tale. The boy is later aided by hunters, who tie the wolf and take it to the zoo. The tale appears to be a celebration of masculine power: Peter, rather an archetypal folktale`s hero, distinguished by long-established virtues of courage and self-efficacy, saves his community of the threat from the woods, and thus is rightly honored. Borrowing the narrative of masculine initiation, Carter, on the contrary, situates her Peter`s heroism precisely in his ambivalence and subsequent daring act to go against the community`s traditions. The transition from the known into the unknown is itself marked by uncertainty and worry on Peter`s part, but it is through these encounters with "the grotesque wolf-human,"[264] which provoke such feelings, that Peter is able to defy dominant masculine myths of desire and sexuality. Thus, Moss reads Carter`s work as a tale about masculine encounter with Otherness as represented by the female grotesque, which arouses unease, and throws the boy intro "the potential of an other desire."[265] At this point, let us isolate the component parts of Carter`s tale and analyze them in series.

[262] Moss, 188.
[263] "Peter VS. the Wolf". *Justin Locke Productions*. Retrieved 8 March 2017. <http://www.justinlocke.com/pvtweng.htm>
[264] Moss, 188.
[265] Moss, 188.

In Carter`s "Peter and the Wolf," the boy encounters female sexuality represented by the wolf girl. Peter`s discovery of sexual difference is described in the following passage as an epiphanic merger with Otherness:

> He could not take his eyes off the sight of the crevice of her girl-child`s sex, that was perfectly visible to him as she sat there square on the base of her spine. […] it was neither dark nor light indoors yet the boy could see her intimacy clearly, as if by its own phosphorescence. It exercised an absolute fascination upon him.
>
> Her lips opened up as she howled so that she offered him, without her own intention or volition, a view of a set of Chinese boxes of whorled flesh that seemed to open one upon another into herself, rawing him into an inner, secret place in which destination perpetually receded before him, his first, devastating, vertigous intimation of infinity.
>
> She howled.
>
> And went on howling until, from the mountain, first singly, then in a complex polyphony, answered at last voices in the same language.[266]

The above-quoted passage is important at least for two reasons: first, the details of the wolf-girl`s body given in the passage trigger the discussion of the grotesque body and its relevance as the most formidable sign of potentiality; second, the wolf girl`s existence outside the Symbolic and the city allows to analyze the mysterious power Otherness has over Peter.

Despite certain advances in the study of human body and its connection with the mental manifestations of a single human being, the historically fixed rationalistic tradition of opposing 'man corporal' and 'man spiritual' continue to be reproduced. This happens not only in the context of theoretical research, but also in practice. In the most general sense, the peripheral position of the issue of human body in humanities is not unexpected. These disciplines have traditionally been focused on the study of non-natural phenomena, but on the comprehension of an artificially created human world - the world of culture. As a result, this 'disembodied' approach to the study of the man that reduces the man`s essence to his consciousness, established itself in humanities for a long period of time. Bakhtin, while solving the task of rejoining *res cogitans* (mental substance) and *res extensa* (corporeal substance), noticed how equal towards each other the corporeal and the mental were in the Renaissance. The grotesque

[266] Angela Carter, *Burning Your Boats: Collected Short Stories*, intro. by Salman Rushdie (London" Vintage, 1996) 287-288.

body, described by the scholar in his work about Rabelais, personifies an irreproachable unity of the physical and spiritual.

Being an analytical category, the grotesque is to a greater extent determined by the body, which in the context of grotesque realism is a positive element of unceasing growth and development. Metaphorically, the grotesque body can be divided into the social body and the textual body. The latter, imperfect and incomplete, resonates with Cixous`s concept of the feminine text that goes on and on. In his work on Rabelais and the Renaissance, Bakhtin contrasts the grotesque body and the modern complete and perfect body that belongs to the new post-Renaissance canon. Bakhtin elaborates on his argumentation by describing claustrophobic condition of the closed, isolated, static body, which no longer functions in its inherent philosophical aspect:

> In the modern image of the individual body, sexual life, eating, drinking, and defecation have radically changed their meaning: they have been transferred to the private and psychological level where their connotation becomes narrow and specific, torn away from the direct relation to the life of society and to the cosmic whole. […] All actions and events are interpreted on the level of a single, individual life. They are enclosed within the limits of the same body, limits that are the absolute beginning and end and can never meet.[267]

The grotesque body is able to merge with the metaphorical social body, with the cosmic body, in other words, it is able to exist in another world, and it is aware of the existence of another world, thus its importance for the grotesque. The wolf girl in this sense is an example of how the grotesque body functions: having adopted the habits of wolves, she crosses the boundaries of the world familiar to Peter into the world of the unknown and alien. Peter, in turn, reading the body of his cousin, also crosses the boundaries of the usual, and falls into a void in which the potential can be generated, provided the boy will accept the grotesque body with its dynamic nature. The wolf girl`s non-idealized mobile body also reorients the desire mechanisms, since, being an antithesis to the modern static body, it arouses in the boy a desire of a different order that does not fit into the canons of male idealization.

The transforming potential of the grotesque body also largely depends on the ability of the latter to degrade. Medieval Christian morality, which gravitated toward the values of asceticism, proclaimed a frankly hostile attitude toward the bodily nature of man. At the same time, various kinds of prohibitions had far-reaching goals; the major one was the expulsion of the corporal

[267] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 321-322.

from self-consciousness. Since such a task is hardly solvable - the man cannot permanently exist outside his bodily manifestations - the decision was to divide the man into the spiritual, noble 'high' and earthly, godless, corporeal 'low.' The antithesis to the popular interpretation of the high and low binary is the grotesque body that not only does *not* ignore the manifestations of the corporeal low, but also, on the contrary, makes them objects of aesthetic and ontological comprehension. It is crucial to note that the corporeal is understood not in egoistic and particularized, but in cosmic and universal sense. Therefore, the material aspect is always positive and creative: it is responsible for the eternal flow of life, for its eternal renewal.

The dichotomous principle of dividing the world into the spiritual 'high' and corporal 'low' has a long history of its existence. One of the proponents of such a sort of division is Plato's the Analogy of the Divided Line, which is based on the concept of the impossibility of bringing together the sublime world of ideas and the sensory world of things. To comprehend the processes of this 'complicated' world, it was necessary to categorize the world in binary oppositions: light vs. dark, beautiful vs. ugly, spiritual vs. material, etc. In this case, the high is the sky; the low is earth in which the birth and death processes occur. The man was organically inscribed into this picture of the world with the 'high' being his head and 'low' being his reproductive organs, digestive system, and arse.

In the context of grotesque realism, it is the lower regions that symbolize the ability of the dynamic body to degrade. It is important to remember that in Carterian universe, the female body is always the most potent site of transformation. Therefore, the wolf child`s body, "caked with mud and dirt,"[268] "scored and scabbed with dozens of scars of sharp abrasions of rock and thorn,"[269] is inextricably connected with the material world, and is closer to the earth, thus displaying infinite potential of regeneration.

Beside the discussion of the grotesque body, the above-quoted excerpt from Carter`s tale allows the reader to consider the wolf girl`s existence outside the Symbolic, and how this fact realigns the mechanisms of desire and sexuality featured in the male character, Peter. This passage contains a key scene in which Peter, for the first time in his life, encounters the female sex. The boy views the wolf girl`s reproductive organs as "his first devastating, vertiginous intimation of infinity."[270] This infinity of the female body echoes Cixous`s notion of the feminine textual

[268] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 286.
[269] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 286.
[270] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 287.

body, whose unconditioned dynamics are to transfer the reader into a void. In Peter`s case, the boy leaves the masculine void of Lack for the void of potentiality and Abundance.

This moment is crucial for the reason that Peter cognizes female genitals as a signifier of Abundance, as physical presence, which contradicts Sigmund Freud`s theory, which positions the female sex as negation or Lack. According to Freud, the first encounter with the female genitalia should have caused in the boy the fear of castration, the fear on which Freud bases man's sexual desire as well as desire to control, and restrain. However, Peter, as Jean Wyatt puts it, "doesn`t reduce female difference to a logic of the same (having/not having the penis),"[271] which enables him to enter a territory "unmapped by linguistic and doctrinal meanings, […] wide open to his discovery,"[272] a territory inhabited by his cousin.

The girl`s habitat outside the Symbolic is due to her inability to express her sex by means of restrictive grammar of the male language - the boundlessness of her sex "cannot be articulated, just *howled*,"[273] – and to the fact that the girl lives on the other side of the river, far from the city, since the city, as Cixious puts it, is "man, ruled by masculine law."[274] While Peter watches the girl "in her marvelous and private grace"[275] across the river, unable to articulate his feelings in a familiar language that "crumbled into dust under the weight of her speechlessness,"[276] he feels the urge to swim across the river, which would baptize him into the feminine, and join the mysterious Otherness. The moment he stretches his hands to the water, ready to set off, the wolf child takes "fright at the sudden movement,"[277] wrenches "her teats away from the cubs,"[278] and runs away. The feminine remains unattainable for Peter, thus he has nothing left to do but to return to the City.

The scene by the river is preceded by other key events, namely the death of the grandmother, who did not recover from the consequences of her wolf granddaughter`s bite. "Consumed by an imperious passion for atonement,"[279] Peter turns to religion. Thus, the boy denies the flesh or the physical world in favor of abstraction. Moss claims here that transcendent religion is the most traditional way people choose to reconcile conflicting feelings provoked by their

[271] Moss, 195.
[272] Moss, 195.
[273] Anny Crunelle-Vanrigh, "The Logic of the Same and Difference," *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, ed. Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 140.
[274] Cixous, "Castration," 49.
[275] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 290.
[276] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 290.
[277] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 290.
[278] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 290.
[279] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 289.

experience with the grotesque. As has been previously stated, Christian morality gravitates toward the values of asceticism and holds an unfavorable attitude toward the man`s bodily nature. At the same time, it was necessary, through various kinds of taboos, to remove the physical from the human`s self-concept. Since the man cannot permanently exist outside his bodily manifestations - the decision was to divide him into the spiritual, noble 'high' and earthly, godless 'low.' For Carter, however, the realm of the material and physical is the beginning of eternity. Therefore, Carter`s is a rather antagonistic attitude towards religion, as she believes that the transcendent spiritual can be achieved only through the material: "How do we know what is authentic behavior […]? It`s about the complex interrelation of reality and its representations. […] I suppose it comes back to the idea of mythology and why I talk so much against religion. Its because its presenting us with ideas about ourselves which don't come out of practice; they come out of theory."[280]

Religious rhetoric deals directly with the world of abstraction – universal truths and received dogmas. Carter, however, writes against generalizations – she particularizes sexuality and desire as processes (not determined givens) that take various forms and guises according to complex social and bodily circumstances.

The encounter with the grotesque leaves Peter deeply troubled "for reasons he could not explained."[281] He suffers from nightmares and does not succeed in his studies for the priesthood to the extent desired. The priest later recommends the boy for further studies at the seminary, and Peter sets off to the institution hoping that being there will relieve him of his fear. The boy`s fear is, in fact, cosmic terror, which is, as Bakhtin explains the notion, the apprehension of that "which is materially huge and cannot be overcome by force,"[282] and which is usually abused by "all religious systems to oppress man and his consciousness."[283] The seminary here signifies a symbolic space that guarantees an alleged protection from this fear in exchange for the opportunity to subjugate the boy. These events are then followed by the river scene, which is the moment of major epiphany in the tale. This epiphany, however, is not due to the glory of the Bible`s God, rather to the earthly figure of his half-animal cousin. Even though Peter returns to the world of the Symbolic, he does so, having experienced "visionary ecstasy,"[284] "the

[280] Angela Carter, "An Interview with Angela Carter," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14.3 (1994) 16.
[281] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 290.
[282] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 12.
[283] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 12.
[284] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 291.

vertigo of freedom,"[285] spiritual transience realized by the physical body. "What would he do at the seminary, now?"[286]

[285] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 291.
[286] Carter, *Burning Your Boats*, 291.

Problematics of Sexuality

Having discussed various forms of sexuality present in Angela Carter`s fairy tales, let us now address the issue of problematicity of desire as experienced by some of the heroines. The interest in the problematics of desire in the feminist traditions has predominantly taken the form of a polemic with the psychoanalytic thought of Sigmund Freud. At the head of his theory, Freud places the idea of phallus supremacy, which automatically categorizes femininity as lack; the castrated female is thus inferior. Having subordinated the feminine to the masculine supremacy, Freud goes even further and advances an idea that would deprive women of autonomous desire. Pre-Oedipally, the boy and the girl, in the psychoanalyst`s opinion, occupy common emotional space – they are only starting to develop, and are not sexually differentiated yet; moreover, they are both strongly attached to the mother. Such a logic allows Freud to define the girl as an infant man. It follows, then, that there exists solely one libido, which is exclusively male, since the recipient of this libido is the mother, and the desire for the mother in turn is associated with masculinity. Subsequently, Freud's heritage had been retheorized and complemented by various psychoanalysts, among whom is Jacques Lacan. Lacan`s theory presumes that any attempt at theorizing and categorizing desire are doomed to failure, since the whole truth about desire cannot be articulated neither in discourse nor elsewhere. Such a formulation of desire organically fits in Carter`s project, as she really appears to share the idea that holds desire as infinitely complex; Carter, however, dares to articulate the complexity of desire in her literary discourse.

Lying in ancestral bed and not able to fall asleep, the heroine of "The Bloody Chamber" confesses: "I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him. And he disgusted me."[287] The Marquis`s young wife`s confession quite accurately formulates a twofold desire in Carterian heroines for freedom and entrapment simultaneously. Earlier in the narrative, when the pianist finds herself stirred by the Marquis`s pornographic attentions, her reaction witnesses how complex her female sexuality actually is. Is she responding to the sadistic desire of her husband? Or, is she simply seduced by the attention of a mature and powerful man? To provide a detailed answer to these questions, let us turn to Carter`s sensory imagery. Apart from the material imagery, Carterian fairy tales display an abundant repertoire of tastes, smells, textures, and sounds. In "The Bloody Chamber," this repertoire is realized primarily through the heroine`s innate sensitivity and her natural predisposition towards sensory experience. However, the young

[287] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 12.

pianist is not the only one in this tale, who is inclined towards a sensuous perception of the world. Paraphrasing Christina Bacchilega, Roemer points out that the heroine`s attraction towards the Marquis rests on a certain degree of affinity, without which the Marquis's strategic seduction would not achieve the desired effect. The scholar finds this affinity in both characters` in the form of an immediate sensuous response to experience. The heroine`s "queasy cravings […] for the renewal of [the Marquis`s rather degrading] caresses"[288] communicate to what extent the young woman`s sensitivity has been subdued by her husband, who provides her with a sensory experience of his own creation. The levers of influence on the feeling heroine vary from the luxury of the castle, an access to which the new chatelaine receives together with a bunch of keys, to the presentation of an opportunity for her to acquire "contexts of origin."[289] Besides the treasury of fine art the chambers of the Marquis`s castle abound with and the Bechstein piano the young wife receives as a wedding gift, the most potent way of establishing control over the heroine`s sensitivity is the provision of one lost context of origin for her, that is the oedipal attachment in the person of her deceased father. In the scent of the Marquis's cigar that filled the room "with a remembered fragrance that made [the heroine] think of [her] father, how he would hug [her] in a warm fug of Havana, when [she] was a little girl,"[290] in Wagner`s Isolde`s aria that burned from the stage with "white-hot passion,"[291] when her father "still alive (oh, so long ago), took hold of [her] sticky little hand, to comfort [the girl], in [this] last act,"[292] the young heroine finds the echoes of her father`s figure that she once lost and would like to resurrect in her life. However, she would not have been one of Carter`s wise girls, if she had not recognized in herself this strong emotional need for the parent, her somewhat vain class ambitions, as if she was selling herself for "a handful of colored stones,"[293] and, more importantly, how the Marquis manipulates her innate sensitivity for these sorts of things. Subsequently, the heroine comes to realize the tension between the Marquis`s sensuous wealth and his interest in degradation and death. At this point, the scent of the Marquis`s Russian leather starts reeking of "flayed hide and excrement of which it was composed,"[294] and white-hot passion of Wagner`s opera turns into "silent music […] of [the heroine`s] unknowingness."[295] In the place of her initial excitement, there is a feeling of entrapment and

[288] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 12.
[289] Roemer, 117.
[290] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 5.
[291] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 4.
[292] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 4.
[293] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 9.
[294] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 22.
[295] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 10.

apathy. By the end of the tale, the heroine herself, as Roemer interestingly points out, once the Marquis`s wife dressed in ermine and sable, is lowered to the level of a "little green moss, growing in the crevices of the mounting block."[296]

The forest imagery later features in the next tale by Carter, "The Earl King," in which simultaneous desire for freedom and domination manifests itself in yet another character. "The Erl-King" tells of a young girl`s story, who, having gone deep into the woods, meets the Erl-King that turns girls like her into birds and locks them in cages. "The Erl King" is Carter`s attempt at the revision of a European fairy tale that is less familiar to the reading public. The central figure of this tale, with the exception of the girl, becomes the Erl-King, a new reading of the folk Green Man, the embodiment of nature and its forces, who seduces little birds with his trill and deprives them of freedom. Although the Green Man used to be more often portrayed as a kind and hospitable keeper of the woods, the Erl King, as the heroine admonishes, "will do you grievous harm."[297] Indeed, if in the romantic tradition, forest embodies spirituality and eternity, then in this tale it bodes death and eternal confinement: "There is no way through the wood any more [...] [when] 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."[298] The wood represents an alluring realm of man-centered sexuality that devours and captivates stray "women who have lost themselves in the woods and hunt around hopelessly for the way out." The Erl-King is a patriarch; as far as the forest is his servant, he manufactures it like a cage to enclose the feminine.

The Erl-King is adept at seduction: with the melody of his pipe, his smile, with "his irrevocable hand[s],"[299] he attracts the birds that, as if deprived of will, fly together to face their lot. The birds` existence in the woods as a realm of masculine sensuality is always transferred to the margins, therefore the King, abusing the creatures` sadomasochistic desire for entrapment, defines them as Others, which makes their entrapment seem natural. In her "Patriarchy and Pleasure: The Pornographic Eye/I," Geraldine Finn puts it in the following way: "male subjectivity creates its Other precisely to designate itself as its superior, its creator-spectator-owner-judge."[300] The heroine identifies herself as one of these birds: she is guided by his music, and, even knowing in advance what kind of fate awaits her, she "come[s], like any other trusting

[296] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 24.
[297] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 58.
[298] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 57.
[299] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 58.
[300] Geraldine Finn "Patriarchy and Pleasure: The Pornographic Eye/I" *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 9/1-2(1985) 89-90.

thing that perches on the crook of his wrist."[301] The girl adopts the lexis in which the King describes her – a skinned rabbit, and a stream. The moment she is almost assimilated by the male gaze, she realizes that the Erl King is a fictitious creation of her seduced mind that does not exist in nature, that "the birds don't sing, they only cry because they can't find their way out of the wood."[302] This epiphany becomes possible due to the tension, existing between two polar desires, as she admits: "His touch both consoles and devastates me."[303] Her ultimate lot is foreshadowed by the symbol of an old fiddle that hangs on the wall next to the cages, detuned and worn-out. Without her freedom, the heroine is doomed to be detuned and worn-out while struggling to get out of her cage; she will never be able to produce "better music than the shrill prothalamions of the larks stacked in their pretty cages."[304] The tension is further heightened by the shifting narrative voice, which places the heroine into varying perspectives, none of which is the decision. Therefore, the girl makes a conscious choice in favor of personal freedom and decides to get rid of her captor. His dying cry - "Mother, mother, you have murdered me!"[305] – indicates that the heroine has acquired her subjectivity, like the figure of the folk Mother, a source of ultimate authority, and now is able to enjoy her autonomous female desire as she sees fit.

In the shortest tale of *The Bloody Chamber* collection, "The Snow Child", desire is problematic due to its elusiveness. In the middle of winter, the Count and his wife go horseback riding, and the former draws in his imagination an image of the girl, ardently desired, "white as snow,"[306] "red as blood,"[307] and "black as [the raven`s] feather."[308] The child of his imagination appears as if from nowhere. At the sight of the girl, the Countess feels pangs of jealousy and decides to get rid of the rival in any possible way. The two previous attempts proved in vain, the third one, however, bears its fruit: the child dies when she pricks her finger on a rose, requested by the Countess. Horrified, the Count rushes towards the girl and "thrust[s] his virile member"[309] into her dead body; the girl melts, though.

The child, made of snow, is a product of male imagination, at that exclusively physical, since the Count`s imagination excludes any other aspect of the girl`s individuality, except for her

[301] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 60.
[302] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 61.
[303] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 61.
[304] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 60.
[305] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 62.
[306] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 62.
[307] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 62.
[308] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 62.
[309] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 62.

appearance. She is valuable as long as she meets the parameters of a sexual object. Being a manufactured sexual object, she, as Bacchilega writes in her *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, remains a girl, a child. The blood on the girl`s finger, after she has pricked it on a rose, a symbol of femininity, stands for her menstrual blood, which informs the Count that the creation of his imagination has come of age and now can participate in sexual activity. The girl`s death is explained by the fact that she "fulfills her function as passive object of the Count`s desire,"[310] and is thus of no use anymore. The foregoing demonstrates that the product of male desire is not viable. The Count fails to realize his desire to the fullest extent, though; since the girl melts before he is able to possess her. Her absence, in turn, awakens a new desire in him that remains unattainable, for what is desired is always what is not present: "desire's *raison d'être* is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire."[311]

The problematic of desire is touched upon in the above-discussed fairy tale, "The Lady of the House of Love." As been demonstrated, the vampire heroines drags out a lonely existence "in the castle of her inheritance,"[312] deprived of freedom, personal desires, and, finally, herself. She is aware of her desires, but they are not autonomous just as she does not possess herself. Her entire true nature is suppressed by patriarchal laws, which prescribe the heroine to consume any traveler that has accidentally strayed into these deathtrap lands, while "she would like to caress their lean brown cheeks and stroke their ragged hair."[313] Therefore, the fulfillment of the Countess`s true desire is constantly deferred. Her awaking sexuality restrains itself under the surveillance of her ancestors "leer[ing] down from the walls."[314] When a sun-like officer impinges upon her habitual existence, the heroine allows herself to depart from the tradition. The triumph of independent desire results in death, though.

[310] Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) 38.
[311] Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997) 39.
[312] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 64.
[313] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 65.
[314] Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 71.

Conclusion

To this very day, although being less popular among children as bedtime reading, fairy stories have remained "part of the invisible luggage people take with them when they leave home."[315] Indeed, it would be misleading to claim that the fairy-tale discourse ceased to operate on the cultural level of the collective unconscious; on the contrary, all our favorite stories and characters have been accommodated to new modes of cultural transmission, dictated by time. Old bottles are replaced by new ones, flashy and polished; yet, the content is hardly that novel. It follows, then, that the fairy tale continues to be an astonishingly potent cultural and social instrument of children`s socialization. Product of narrative and political myth, the genre naturalizes social fictions, imposing cultural constraints on individual freedom.

In this regard, Angela Carter`s business of demythologization seems like a noble attempt to do her bit in a sophisticated reconceptualization of received truths and cultural givens. In so doing, Carter chooses to fight the 'enemy' with their own weapon, that is, the form of the literary fairy tale, which has proved to be an amazingly solid and convenient container for the storage of mythical substance. The latter is understood in the context of Carterian project both in the conventional sense and in that, introduced by Roland Barthes as a second-order set of signs or connotations, through which people assert their values. One of the motivation behind the creation of such myths is to maintain the status quo of how sexuality is constructed in the public consciousness, which is exactly what some of Carter`s revisionist tales deal with.

The study of sexuality takes one of the central positions in the work of Angela Carter. It comes to the forefront and acquires special sharpness and relevance in the analysis of gender relations in Carterian retellings of classical fairy tales, which in turn are the retellings of the oral culture`s heritage. While many heroines of oral tradition are portrayed as representatives of autonomous sexuality and sexual desire, fairy tales written by such famous authors as Charles Perrault, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont and the Brothers Grimm, position sexual relations in the manner of de Sade, that is, as relationships of dependence and submission, where authority is delegated to the one who has the real political power. In such a case, the one who has less power exists on the margins as an object, including that of sexual desire. Sexuality of subjugation and domination, being a product of patriarchal thinking, generates market relations in which a woman acquires proprietorial status, and her personality is reduced to anatomical constituents, existing in such a way to satisfy the predator's sexual appetite. Reciprocity, as a possible

[315] *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, ed. Angela Carter (London: Virago Press, 2001) xiv.

alternative to hierarchical relationships, is explored by Carter in animal terms. Animalism of desire is secured for both partners, which allows the characters to surpass oppressive dichotomies, their anatomies had destined them for. The image of liberating sexuality develops further in the form of otherness. In this respect, progressive is the grotesque female body, whose dynamic essence denies masculine vision of a void of finality. The discussion of sexuality culminates in the problematics of desire as such, amenable yet elusive. Therefore, Angela Carter proves herself a connoisseur of mythical wine: having managed to achieve a remarkable coherence between the form and content, the writer masterfully fills old bottles of cultural myths with new substances, affording her readers an interesting reconceptualization of the loved childhood stories. All this, however, "happened long ago, in another country, and nothing is the same now, of course."[316]

[316] Angela Carter, *The Donkey Prince*, ilus. Eros Keith (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970) 40.

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