



FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

Facultade de Filoloxía

Traballo de Fin de Grao

“Sexuality is power”, or how the Marquis became
Marchioness.

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Título: "Sexuality is power", or how the Marquis became Marchioness.
Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]: Introduction: The fairy tale genre is a discourse with a strong presence of male chauvinistic and almost misogynist ideas. In the context of the Second Wave Feminism, Angela Carter reviews these conventions from a feminist perspective, reinventing the grounds of a monolithic and apparently unalterable structure. <i>The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories</i> challenges the presumed patriarchal mechanisms and gender politics. Thesis: Carter's use of the fairy tale offers a feminist revision of the genre without altering its main features. Purpose: The purpose of this TFG is to show Carter's success in achieving a feminist interpretation of traditional fairy tales, a genre until recently regarded by the critics exclusively at the service of patriarchal ideology. Structure: The sections of this TFG include: an explanatory introduction illustrating the main features of the fairy tale genre. Chapter 1 will analyze Carter's feminist ideology in relation to her use of the fairy tale. Chapter 2 will compare the tales from <i>The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories</i> and their counterparts in Perrault and the Grimm Brothers from a feminist perspective. Chapter 3 will explore the impact of this new interpretation in relation to the fairy tale genre as for women's writing and its impact on the feminist movement in Britain. Finally, the last chapter brings together the main conclusions extracted from the central points covered in this TFG. Method: First, I will contrast Perrault and the Grimm Brothers narratives with Carter's to show the main similarities and differences in the way they portray ideals regarding the fairy tale genre. The I will explore the importance that Carter's versions have for the fairy tale genre. Sources: The main source will be <i>The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories</i> and Perrault's <i>Histoires ou Contes</i>

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du Temps Passé avec des Moralités and *Grimm's Fairy Tales* by the Grimm Brothers. I will use *The Sadeian Women: An Exercise in Cultural History* to explore Carter's creative process. And I will also use feminist literary criticism articles on the fairy tale genre, such as those from Andrea Dworkin, Alison Lurie, Marcia Lieberman, among others.

Santiago de Compostela, 8 de NOVIEMBRE de 2017.

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Introduction:

The fairy tale genre is a discourse with a strong presence of male chauvinistic and almost misogynist ideas. In the context of the Second Wave Feminism, Angela Carter reviews these conventions from a feminist perspective, reinventing the grounds of a monolithic and apparently unalterable structure. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, perhaps Carter's most famous work, challenges the presumed patriarchal mechanisms and gender politics. In my opinion, and therefore my thesis of this TFG, Carter's use of the fairy tale offers a feminist revision of the genre without altering its main features.

The purpose of this TFG is to show Carter's success in achieving a feminist interpretation of traditional fairy tales, a genre until recently regarded by the critics exclusively at the service of patriarchal ideology. Such a reading will be explored in relation to the Feminist movement and to the literary genre that this collection is part of.

This TFG is divided into several chapters that will provide an explanation to understand the effectiveness of Carter's enterprise. Chapter 1 will deal with the differences between short story and fairy tale and it will conclude with an explanation for the choice of categorisation of the collection. Chapter 2 will analyse Carter's feminist ideology in relation to her use of the fairy tale and present the figure of the Marquis de Sade and *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. Chapter 3 will compare some of the tales from *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* and their counterparts in Perrault and the Grimm Brothers from a feminist perspective and explore the similarities and differences that I find within the different versions. Chapter 4 will explore the impact of this new interpretation in relation to the fairy tale genre as for women's writing and its impact on the Feminist movement in Britain. Finally, the last chapter draws on the main conclusions extracted from each of the central points covered in this TFG.

To achieve this, first, I will contrast Perrault and the Grimm Brothers narratives with Carter's, in order to show the main similarities and differences in the way they portray ideals regarding the fairy tale genre. Once the main points have been extracted from each narrative, I will give an explanation as for why all the differences and similarities are important in Carter's conception of the fairy tale genre. Finally, I will explore the importance that Carter's versions have for the fairy tale genre.

The main sources will be *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé avec des Moralités* and *Grimm's Fairy Tales* by the Grimm Brothers. For the study of Perrault's collection, I will work with Carter's own translation *Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and other classic fairy tales of Charles Perrault* (2008). I will use *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* to explore Carter's creative process and other of her works, not only to offer a broader understanding of her work, but also because I will explore them as ideological treatises that extend her feminist ideas as for example *The Passion of the New Eve*. I will also use feminist literary criticism articles on the fairy tale genre and on the relationship between fairy tale and feminism, such as those from Andrea Dworkin, Alison Lurie, Marcia Lieberman, Lorna Sage, among others.

It is my intention to offer a general overview of the historical background of Carter and the Feminist movement, to be able to comprehend the importance and the relevance of her publications during this period. Also, the figure of the Marquis de Sade is somewhat important to discuss in order to understand how Carter engaged with his critical approach to sex and pornography. In relation to this, I will introduce *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, to clarify the misunderstandings that surround its publication and debate whether critics were right or not of accusing Carter of engaging with the anti-feminist response to the movement. This work will also

provide a better insight into the changes that were made in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* in comparison with the original tales.

1. Chapter 1

The first chapter of this TFG explores the characterisation of the nature of Angela Carter's revision of traditional fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979). Trying to adscribe Carter's collection to a determined genre or subgenre is a difficult task to carry out, due to the different labels that the corpus uses to delineate its features. In the study of Carter's work, scholars and critics exchangeably refer to it as belonging in the realms of the fairy tale genre and the short story. The differences between both literary forms are not clear and some of its main features appear to constitute formal features of both phenomenons. The aim of this first chapter is not to provide a unequivocal definition of the type of text that Carter uses to narrate the stories, since it will defeat the objective of the postmodern idea of skepticism and cancel the metafictional reading of such texts, which at the same time, goes against Carter's aim to present new readings of traditional tales and myths, or as Carter (Wandor, 1983, p.73) puts it:

I feel free to loot and rummage in an official past, specifically a literary past.... This past, for me, has important decorative, ornamental functions; further, it is a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which new lies have been based.

In this section I will provide the reader with a general and approximate idea of the meaning of these terms in relation to Carter's texts. However, I will not restrict the different interpretations of the text. I will devote the first part of this chapter to the exploration of the fairy tale tradition and the two types of fairy tale: oral and literary fairy tale. I base my study on the definitions that different authors provide of the term, and take those parts that I find in Carter's texts as defining features. I will then move on to the study of the postmodern idea of fairy tale and short story, as literary form that presents elements from other genres and subgenres as it can be seen in Carter's revision. Before I

delve in the study of these concepts, I would like to point out the fact that, in the corpus of fairy tale studies, the concept of fairy tale is generally used as a synonym of literary fairy tale — from now on I will use the term written to refer to the notion of literary fairy tale, since I consider both oral and written fairy tales as literary forms.

1. 1. The Fairy Tale Tradition:

Stith Thompson (1977, p.8) describes the fairy tale as

a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures and is filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land, humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses.

The first time the term fairy tale was used dates back to 1697 by the French author, Marie Christine d'Aulnoy. She coined the tales that had magical or supernatural features as 'conte des fées'. The term was later translated into English as 'fairy tale' and used with the same connotations in 1750. As debates surrounding this new coinage arose in Europe, so did the appearance of similar texts that fitted into the description of those fairy tales. This was due to the presence of different fantastic elements in other narratives and cultures from ancient times, passing through the Ancient Times to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Examples of such texts can be as different as texts by Calvino in Italy or Ancient Greece legends. The previous examples show that even though the coinage of the term dates back to the late 17th century, this does not imply that before that time there was no production of literary pieces with elements that characterise the fairy tale.

Even though, as Zipes (2012) explains, there were not such things as fairy tales until d'Aulnoy started using the term, and all the works that came before her were regarded as the presence in different genres of fantastic or magical elements. These magical or fantastic elements were not regarded as exclusive or defining elements of the genre. Instead, they were considered borrowed elements from the cultural background. Also in his work, Zipes explores the reason for the survival of the fairy tale. He found the explanation for this phenomenon in the science of memetics, this is, the use of certain patterns, characters or symbols that are recognised and accepted by a community and that by repetition they become part of the popular traditions, therefore, continuing its spreading and general acceptance. The term memetics, and meme — the minimal unit of structure in memetics —, were coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976, p.192), in which the author explains the way memes work as replicators in the fields of culture, as he puts it:

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catchphrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.

These ‘memes’, according to Zipes, are the ones in charge of the fixation of the repetitive patterns that are present in the vast majority of Western tales and that also facilitate the creation of new tales with recognisable patterns for the reader. By equating genes to memes, in terms of their function as replicators, genes by copying genetic information and memes by imitating already existent cultural patterns in society, the idea of a shared cultural tale tradition seems more plausible. The notion of meme helps to understand the way in which fairy tales became part of the shared Western literary legacy by imitation, which explains the presence of similar or parallel fairy tales in different parts in Europe. Carter understood that the content of the tales depended, to a certain extent, on the

memes reduplicated in the narratives and the way in which every period understood and made use of them.

The characteristics of the fairy tale genre can be summarised according to Marina Warner (2013) as:

a short narrative, sometimes less than a single page, sometimes running to many more, but the term no longer applies, as it once did, to a novel-length work. Secondly, fairy tales are familiar stories, either verifiably old because they have been passed down the generations or because the listener or reader is struck by their family resemblance to another story. The genre belongs in the realms of folklore, and many fairy tales are called 'folk tales', and are attributed to oral tradition, and considered anonymous and popular in the sense of originating not among an elite, but among the unlettered, the *Volk*.

The structure of the fairy tale follows a typical storytelling line, dividing the plot into three parts: introduction, part in which we get to know the characters and the main pieces of information such as setting, time and the issue are given to the reader; body, part in which the problem develops and all the actions take place around it; and resolution or ending, that involves a closure of the narrative in terms of defeat of the evil or cause of the problem. This type of narrative has always a complete closure, since the moral or didactic purpose of the tale would not be fulfilled with an open ending.

Regarding the characters that appear in the different tales, the distribution of male and female participants answers to the functions they display during the narrative. These functions tend to be directly related to each of the different attributes and flaws that make it easier for the reader to engage with the story. What I find interesting to point out is the fact that there is a constant pattern that affects

the female characters in particular. This pattern involves the inevitable fate of women presented as a “happy ending”, meaning marriage, upward social mobility — usually involving marriage or submission to a wealthy man, not by their own means — and childbearing. This tendency was another of the key features that Carter saw as damaging, thus she changed this in her own fairytales for other more ideal from a feminist perspective. This situation was perpetuated by the scholars and critics who, as Jan Ziolkowski (2007, p.62) states: “drew a distinction between masculine and feminine wonder tales or magic tale.¹ Whereas, the latter deal with key crisis and transitions in the lives of young women, the former present the achievements of male heroes”. This distinction between the differences in the plot that both varieties of tales present, already points out to the patriarchal essence of the distribution of topics that influenced fairy tales since its origins.

Following this idea of how patriarchal politics surround the fairy tale tradition, I find interesting to show how language covered these ideas. The fairy tale genre displays a binary set of oppositions that form the antagonist and clearly divided good and evil values and attitudes. This is a useful feature in order to convey the moral or didactic idea that this genre pursues, since the association is clearer. This binary set of oppositions can be seen in three different tales. Starting with the titles, as it can be seen in *Beauty and the Beast*, *Ferdinand the True* and *Ferdinand the False or Truth and Falsehood*. In terms of character construction, the characteristics ascribed to each set of participants provide a range of values that move in the paradigm of good and evil — good men and evil women —, creating false stereotypes for example: the brave hero, the defenceless princess, the nosy maid, the unfair queen or the honourable king, among others. The reader should also note the tendency used to present characters, as pejorative adjectives are generally attributed to the female characters, whereas male characters are praised and exalted by the use of adjectives with a positive connotation and even using superlative adjectives to emphasize their extraordinary qualities. These formulations help to convey the male chauvinistic thoughts of the different periods and depict a very

¹ The terms fairy tale, wonder tale, fantastic tale, among others, are considered as synonyms by critics and authors.

unrealistic idea of roles and duties for both sexes. Finally, the depiction of the action also fits in this stereotyped characterisation, since the male characters are the ones that carry the strength of the action and on them depends the resolution of the conflict, whereas female characters are the ones that receive or perform a passive role in the narrative. For example in *Sleeping Beauty*, Rosamund is asleep most of the narrative until the Prince comes and saves her; again in *Cinderella*, the Princess lives a miserable life until the Prince comes and saves her from her shameful existence. These are just a few examples that we can find in seemingly harmless fairy tales from the Western popular tradition.

Another important feature to take into consideration in order to understand the relevance of the texts, in connection to the historical and social background, is the targeted audience. As previously mentioned, the starting point of this tale tradition comes from the realms of folklore, and from the illiterate groups of society, where the production of tales responded to their desire for entertainment and to raise their children. According to Zipes (2012), fairytales during the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century moved from the lower spheres of society to the aristocracy, who enjoyed reading the compilations of tales, that little had to do with their original functions. The new tales² were mainly addressed to the lower classes of society, those containing a moralising function with a pejorative or condemning tone. Those that involved rich men and arranged marriages as part of the plot, to the higher classes of society. In Cristina Bacchilega's (1997, p.7) words: "in modern times, the fairy tale has more often than not been "instrumentalized" to support bourgeois and/or conservative interests". It is interesting to point out how the shift in the targeted audience conditioned, to a certain extent, the way in which the plot of the story was presented. Bruno Bettelheim reflects on this shift in *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1991), where he specifies that the high classes of society demanded that fairy tales should not only instruct them, but also please and amuse them. He identifies these demands as the main reason for the tales to display an extremely violent and sexist discourse, especially in the Grimm Brothers' case. This traditionally targeted

² By "new tales" I do not mean that they were original creations from the authors of the period, but adaptations that matched the fashion of the time and the taste of the new audience.

audience was another of the characteristics that Carter was against of. Her belief on the values of empathy, compassion and closeness to those in a situation of vulnerability led her to broaden the targeted audience and break with the labels of male and female wonder tales.

Several authors and critics have tried to provide the general public with a clear definition of fairy tale, but all the attempts to do so seem to have failed since their explanation is rather a personal interpretation than an objective analysis of its nature. To mention some examples, Steven Swann Jones finds the presence of magic or magic elements as the main feature that distinguishes the fairy tale from other types of tale; Davidson and Chaudri claim that transformation — metamorphosis, as explored in Carter's production — is the key element of the genre. Critics such as Jean Chiriac, study the fairy tale from a psychological perspective, and he ascribes to the fairy tale the characteristics of the fantastic. Going back to the Renaissance, Italo Calvino — in the same way Poe will do during the Romantic period, when describing the notion of 'single effect' in relation to the short story — suggested that brevity in fairy tales is the main characteristic that separates it from other genres (Tatar, 2014). As it can be seen, each of the critics and authors provides a different approach to the fairy tale from a different perspective. These sectional characteristics do not provide enough information as to consider any of them as a fully informed definition of the term. As Cristina Bacchilega (1997, p.5) admits:

... since nobody, from psychologists and historians to parents and artists, feels any qualms about defining and discussing fairy tales, I will follow tradition here and tell my own version of the "fairy tale" story.

These different features that define and constitute what we understand by fairy tales nowadays are the result of the combination of different 'memes' that have been reduplicated throughout the history of the genre, until they became fixed elements that they cannot survive on their own, since the

defining characteristics are given when grouped and combined. These characteristics are common features in different tales in the West and East cultures. Carter was aware of that, as we can see in the notes that Angela Carter wrote down while she was translating the works of Charles Perrault. Carter started to detect this ‘memes’ in the fairy tales from Perrault (1977), that she was translating into English, and others from all over the world, that she recollected in her book *Angela Carter’s Book of Fairy Tales*, as we can see in the notes that she took while she was working on this collection.

I will explore now the distinction between the oral and the literary fairy tale. Once again, this is not a clear cut distinction due to the influence that such divisions have on each other. Even though, as Hilda Ellis Davidson and Anna Chaudhri (2003, pp.1-13) argue, the distinction between the oral fairy tale and the literary fairy tale should be clear before moving to the discussion of its main characteristics. As for the oral fairy tale, it is difficult to precise its original form and structure, since its fluctuant nature is given in its oral essence. Therefore, it can be regarded as a capricious form of literature, since it is subject to change from storyteller to storyteller, and also between countries and even regions. In the case of the literary fairy tale, the creative process is placed in the writer’s hands and it could be a written record of the previous oral tale, or an innovative version created by each author. Therefore, I find it extremely difficult to establish the limits between both notions since as Zipes himself claims in *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (2012, p.3) that both “oral and literary tales form one immense and complex genre because they re inextricably dependent on one another”. Despite Davidson and Chaudhri’s concern about achieving a full understanding of the notions before moving to its study, none of them are able to provide the reader with a clear distinction between these concepts. Hence, why it seems reasonable to admit that the influence of the oral and the written tradition is bidirectional or reciprocal, as Marina Warner puts it (1994, p.24):

Fairy tales act as an airy suspension bridge, swinging slightly under different breezes of opinion and economy, between the learned, literary and print culture in which famous fairy tales have come down to us, and the oral, illiterate, people's culture... and on this bridge the traffic moves in both directions.

The reader can assume that the oral fairy tale is the departure point for the writer to create a new version or reproduce the oral fairy tale and provide it with a written record. Historically, critics and scholars tended to privilege written records of literary productions, since the material format of the text seems to provide it with a superior status. With this open debate on how to define and characterise the oral and written tradition of the fairy tale, another characterising element emerges when we try to analyze the nature of Carter's work.

1.2. Between the short story and the postmodern fairy tale

The reason for this section to be part of this first chapter responds to the fact that the terms fairy tale and short story have been used conversely in the literacy that deals with the study of Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. It seems important to me to give a brief account of the characteristics of the latter in order to achieve a better understanding of why does this happen. The notion of short story has been defined by Ian Reid in *The Short Story* (1997, p.4) as:

A fictional prose tale of no specified length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own, as novellas sometimes and novels usually are. A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel's sustained exploration of social background. There are similar fictional forms of greater antiquity — fables, *lais*, folktales, parables, and the French *conte* — but the short story as we know it flourished in the magazines of the

19th and early 20th centuries, especially in the USA, which has a particularly strong tradition.

Reid points out in his definition that there are other similar fictional forms that have shared features, and explicitly mentions those of the folktales. Relying on his account of the short story, the main features that characterise this form of fictional prose do not seem to differ that much from those that define the fairy tale. The fact that these terms are used exchangeably could be based on the assumption that they are equivalent. In my opinion, the term short story refers to the physical medium that the author uses to narrate the events and that set the boundaries for its length and characters, without restricting the themes or the general atmosphere of the narration. This atmosphere would therefore be specified by each author according to the type of narration developed in the plot. Therefore, why it is not extrange to find a fairy tale that fits in the characteristics of the short story, regarding the features already mentioned. In my opinion, all the stories collected in Carter's collection are fairy tales — revisions of fairy tales — and at the same time they follow the principles of length and characterisation of the short story. Having said this, I do not consider the first story from *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* as belonging to the fairy tale tradition, since nor the themes, nor the characters, nor the setting fit into that category.

Another aspect that I find of particular interest when labelling this collection is the fact that Carter engages with the readers and demands from them to create their own idea of the text, to take an active role in the creative process. Carter expressed in *On Gender and Writing* (Wandor, 1983, p. 69) her ideas of how this interaction should occur:

I try, when I write fiction, to think on my feet - to present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and to leave the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions. 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.

I find this important because, to a certain extent, Carter combines the written essence of the text — written fairy tale — with the dialogue — oral fairy tale — between author (storyteller) and reader (audience or younger generations), maintaining the core idea behind this tradition. The merging of old and new, and the respect for the original purpose of the fairy tale, engages with the postmodern features that are present in her collection.

The relationship between Carter's work and the postmodern literary legacy is unquestionable, her metafictional creations mingle pornography, fairy tale and the Gothic literary tradition in a provocative and defiant manner. The already blurry boundaries between the different genres and subgenres are completely broken in Carter's work and she presents them from a new subversive perspective in order to convey her feminist ideas. Her aim was to extract from the original tales their inner harmful ideology and latent content rooted in a tradition that perpetuates patriarchal gender politics. This implied a modification of the features from the fairy tale tradition that she regarded as detrimental for her enterprise. Carter's duty towards the vindication of women's rightful place in the fairy tale tradition matches Adrienne Rich's (1979, p. 35) idea of the duty that female writers have regarding the revision of traditional forms of discourse:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for woman more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is

more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.

Craig Owen (1985, p. 59) explores the connection between postmodernism and feminism, and praises the power of women's writing in rejecting "totalizing grand narratives" and subverting power structures and their representation of women:

Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for - presentation of - the unrepresentable.

As it can be seen from what has been defended in this chapter, the difficulties to characterise Carter's work, and even offer definitions of new literary forms, faces several complications since the nature of the notions discussed is not exclusive or limited to a particular genre or literary form. The purpose of this first chapter was to offer an overview of the fairy tale tradition, and familiarise the readers with the opened debate on how to characterise Carter's literary legacy. In this TFG, I will use the terms fairy tale and short story in the same way the corpus in which I base my study has done before, as synonyms and equivalent terms.

Chapter 2. Carter, feminism and the fairy tale.

2.1 Angela Carter:

Angela Carter born Angela Olive Stalker, May 7th 1940, Eastbourne (Sussex), is probably one of the most influential and greatest British authors of the 20th century English literature and also one of the most controversial, not only in terms of her literary production but also regarding her feminist ideas and her pornographical beliefs, that provoked harsh criticism against her and her work. She spent the war in Yorkshire with her maternal mother. Her interest in writing and English literature started around 1959, year in which she was junior reporter for *Croydon Advertiser* and started reading English at the University of Bristol, where she became a specialist in the Medieval period, between 1962 and 1965. After her first novel *Shadow Dance* (1966), she started to write her first political works. With the publication of her second novel, *The Magic Toyshop*, she won the John Llewellyn Rhys prize and the Somerset Maugham Award for her third novel, *Several Perceptions*. Between 1976 and 1978, she was appointed as Arts Council of Great Britain Fellow in Sheffield and two years later, she travelled to the United States of America and started working on the Writing Programme at Brown University, Rhode Island, as Visiting Professor. Her literary production is very extensive and prolific specially from the 1970's onwards, until the publication, in 1991, of her last novel *Wise Children*. Her most famous work, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, dates from 1979 and it consists of a revision of the classic European fairy tales, mainly from Perrault and the Grimm Brothers, from a feminist point of view. That same year, Carter published *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, as a feminist non-fiction book in which she expresses her admiration for the work of the Marquis de Sade. This publication was very controversial at the time, as it is still today, from a feminist perspective since it showed an open acceptance of pornography as means of liberating women from her role as mothers and breeding beings, as exemplified through the character

of Juliette, a strong and powerful woman that defies social conventions, openly exploring her sexuality in the 18th century France (de Sade, 1954).

Early on in her career, she gradually acquired an interest in the way gender politics worked in her culture and how feminism offered the possibility to change that situation. It was not until she travelled and lived in Japan, that her ideas started to emerge in her literature and became an important part of both her fiction and nonfiction production and of her active political action during the 70's and 80's. As she herself confesses, "the two years she spent in Japan were what radicalised her as a feminist".³ In Japan, she found herself surrounded by a complete different culture with their own traditions and customs, and as she confessed in an interview for *Independent on Sunday*, it was this new approach to a different culture, that made her analyse her own and therefore detect the shortcomings that needed to be addressed.⁴ During this period she wrote many of her essays, that sharply criticised Western societies, and also mini-biographical short stories, *Fireworks* in 1974.

From the very beginning of her career as a writer, Carter faced the criticism of the most conservative spheres of the British society, both in political and literary spheres, because of her sharp criticism of the gender roles present in society, her unusual form of writing and the content of her production. By the time Angela Carter wrote and published her novels, the Second-Wave Feminist movement was taking place and as some critics claim, she took an active part in it, not just with some publications promoting and defending the cause, but also in her literature, in which she reproduced through her characters the new values and ideals of the movement.

³ Acocella, J. (2017). *Angela Carter's Feminist Mythology*. [online] The New Yorker. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/13/angela-carters-feminist-mythology> [Accessed 17 Feb. 2018].

⁴ Oxforddnb.com. (2017). *Carter [née Stalker], Angela Olive (1940–1992), writer*. [online] Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50941?rskey=K0RXiN&result=3> [Accessed 18 Feb. 2018].

The inspiration for the revision of the great classic European tales came from the translation of Perrault's collection, an accepted commission to translate his tales into English, in 1976. During the translation of the famous tales, she started to detect ideas in different tales that explicitly depended on sexuality. As she confessed in an interview with Kerry Goldsworthy, what she did was extract the latent content of the traditional fairy tales, namely sexuality, and place it at the centre of the tales: "My intention was not to do 'versions' or, as the American edition of the book said, horribly, 'adult' fairy tales, but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories."⁵ When the collection was published in 1977, Carter added in the foreword a warning for the readers, where she claims that "each century tends to create or re-create fairy tales after its own taste",⁶ anticipating *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979).

Carter was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1991, that same year she published her last novel, *Wise Children*. She spent her last days in London, where she died on 16 February 1992. After her death, her books started escalating the ranks in best-seller categories, and many sold out. Years later, several anthologies of her short stories and essays were published and translated to various languages: *Burning your Boats* (1995), containing all her short stories; *The Curious Room* (1996), containing her forays into drama; and *Shaking a Leg*. The same editorial (Virago Editorial) that commissioned the translation of the tales from Charles Perrault into English, which would later on during her lifetime and after her death, include her in one of the most famous feminist topic based book collection. The recognition she did not achieve during her lifetime came all of sudden: she began to be studied in Universities and was regarded as one of the most influential feminist of the century, as Marina Warner (2004) wrote, the process emerged as "a popular necrophilia".

⁵ Goldsworthy, Kerry [May 1984]. 1985. "Angela Carter". *Meanjin*, 44, 1, pp. 4-13.

⁶ Carter, A. and Ware, M. (1977). *The fairy tales of Charles Perrault*. 1st ed. London: Victor Gollancz, p.5.

2.2. Influences

2.2.1. Carter and the Second-Wave Feminism (and even Third)

Second-Wave Feminism is the term used by critics and scholars to refer to the second stage in the evolution of the feminist movement. It appeared as a result of the restoration of women's domesticity in the United States of America after the Second World War. Due to America's late participation in the conflict and to the fact that the war was not fought in American territories, its economy experienced a period of economic growth, if we compare it to the other European countries that intervened in the conflict. This economic expansion resulted in what it is known as 'baby-boom' and also in the movement of working-class families from the central areas of the cities to the suburbs. All these factors provoked the reappearance of the female domesticity, since they were no longer needed outside of the house by the end of the War. The main concerns of the movement, added to those already present in the First Wave Feminist Movement (e.g. suffrage, property rights), were mainly sexual harassment in the workplace, women's equal access to education, equal job opportunities, sexuality and reproductive rights, among others. Carter included these topics in her work since the fairy tale tradition, with its latent sexual essence, played an important role in the reproduction of patriarchal patterns of behaviour. Readers can also see Carter's concern with this 'imprisonment' in her early works and also in letters published or collected in anthologies and biographies of the author, a good example of this is Aidan Gray's *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (1998).

Her book *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1979) covers a new topic that was already emerging in the feminism spheres at the time, but that had not been approached from that perspective yet: pornography. This concern, according to the critics, marks the beginning of the Third-Wave Feminism. This third stage of the Feminist movement started around the early 1990s and

dealt with issues such as pornography and the consideration of race among the feminist debates.

Carter's work was in the spotlight in such discussions, due to the controversy that her thoughts arose in these circles, especially those dealing with pornographic depictions of female empowerment. This non-fictional book will be analysed later on this same chapter, as it will help to achieve a better understanding of Carter's art and *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*.

The influence of the feminist movement and the situation of women in Britain, and in Western societies in general, was a major concern for Carter and she conveyed her ideas in works and interviews that were highly controversial. Criticism on Carter and how she perceived gender roles and women's role in society did not take long to arrive. As soon as her works of 1970's and 1980's came out, she saw herself immersed in a world of constant examination and criticism. Feminist activists such as Andrea Dworkin or Lorna Sage saw her ideas as extreme and even sometimes antagonist to the movement and attacked her approach to pornography, as detrimental and damaging for women and the feminist movement.⁷

The influence of the movement in Carter's work is present mainly in her choice of themes and topics that she tackles in the collection. Violence and sexuality were main topics for discussion in the debates among feminists between the 1960s and 1990s. At the same time Carter was rewriting these tales, the feminist movement was fighting against domestic violence and gender inequality situations, especially regarding indoors scenes of everyday life. During this period such topics were extremely controversial and divided feminists. It should be beared in mind that until 1982 according to the social and legal system in the United States of America, women belonged to their husbands, and battery and rape were commonly accepted — in fact marital rape was not outlawed in all states until 1993 (Eagleton, 2006, pp. 17-19).

⁷ Ward Jouve, N. (2018). 'Mother is a Figure of Speech'. In: L. Sage and A. Smith, ed., *Essays on the art of Angela Carter*. London: Virago Press, pp.151-183.

Where the First Wave Feminism fought to achieve the right to vote for women, and the Second Wave Feminism campaigned along with the political and social events that affected the world during the 20th century: Second World War, Vietnam War, equal opportunities for women to access the workplace and new policies regarding sexual harassment, among others. The Third Wave Feminism movement lacked a common target due to the diversity of issues that needed to be addressed: pornography, gender violence, rape and sexual harassment. This lack of unity is also the result of the differences that emerged from the split between radical — form of feminist theory or activism which emphasizes more holistic, system-level of oppression of women, i.e. patriarchy — and liberal feminists — form of feminist theory or a strand within the feminist movement that emphasizes working for women's liberation and gender equality through removing explicit legal constraints — during the Second Wave Feminist movement (Eagleton, 2006, pp.6-9). The differences continued to separate both spheres of the movement, and during the Third Wave Feminist movement, this split became more evident with the apparition of many different tendencies — punk feminism, glam-rock feminism and girly feminism are just a few examples — . Despite the difficulties of Carter's task of openly exposing the harsh situation of women during that time, she succeeded in her ambition to unmask the patriarchal roots of gender violence and inequality, as I will explore in Chapter 3.

Carter expressed in “Notes from the Front Line” in *On Gender and Writing* (1983) the difficulty to explain why and how did feminism influence her literary production:

It's been amazingly difficult, trying to sort out how I feel that feminism has affected my work, because that is really saying how it has affected my life and I don't really know that because I live my life, I don't examine it... Oh, hell. What I really like doing is writing fiction and trying to work things out that way.⁸

⁸ Carter, Angela (1983). “Notes from the Front Line.” in *On Gender and Writing*. London: Pandora, pp. 1-77.

Critics usually tend to classify Carter as a glam-rock feminist due to her exuberant and Baroque style, her colourful imagery and sensuous prose. Adding to these features a profound moral lesson, for both women and men. Her fairy tales have sometimes been considered as non-effective due to her abundant use of the magical or fantastic elements, as Patricia Duncker and Avis Lewallen claim.⁹ In my opinion, readers, regardless of their knowledge of notions about feminism or Carter and her work, can easily understand what and why she criticises the situations that are being narrated.

2.2.2. Charles Perrault and the fairy tale tradition

The starting point of Carter's enterprise goes back to the period in which she undertook the translation of Charles Perrault's (1628-1703) well-known tales compiled in his book "*Histoires ou contes du temps passé*" (1697). Perrault's most famous work little has to do with the rest of his literary legacy, of which, the vast majority deals with the worshipping of the King of France, Louis XIV. His reputation increased as well as his several awards and acknowledgements, which gave him the opportunity to recollect the oral tales that circulated in France and Western Europe during that period. "The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault" was published in 1977. At the time she was translating these tales, she started working on "The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories" (1977), influenced not only by the Feminist Movement as I have already mentioned, but also by Perrault's critique essence, that we can find in this collection and the rest of her literary production.

Carter found interesting the way in which Perrault used fairy tales from the Western Europe tradition to add his personal moralising ending, expressing his thoughts about the actions or characteristics of the characters from each tale. Adapting the moral of the tale to his audience and

⁹ Duncker, Patricia. (2002) "Re-imagining the fairy tales: Angela Carter's bloody chambers" in *Writing on the wall: selected essays*. London: Pandora, pp. 67-83.

period, he managed to instruct the aristocracy with examples of good and bad actions. As Bruno Bettelheim expresses in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1991, pp.10-13), not only did the bourgeoisie demand entertainment adapted to their own fashion, but also to be instructed in that fashion, even if it implied the use of violence and brutal scenes. Carter found sexuality and violence at the roots of the fairy tale and she decided that openly showing this side of the tradition was her duty. At the same time she uncovered the roots of the fairy tale folklore, she adapted the moral lessons of the tales to her own ideas and time, feminism of the 20th century.

2.2.3. *Juliette* (1797-1801) and *The Sadeian Woman* (1978)

Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade was born in Paris in 1740. He was the epitome of the Enlightenment, as nobleman, essay and novel writer, ‘radical’ politician and also as philosopher. Despite all the doctrines in which he was an ‘avant-garde’ thinker, he is famously known for his libertine sexual thoughts both for his time and our present time. His ideas regarding sexual relationships denoted his libertine and free-thinker essence, defined by the exaltation of sexual freedom. His revolutionary prose that mingled sexuality and brutality was written in prison, where he spent 32 years of his life. He also fought in the Seven Years’ War as Colonel of a Dragoon regiment, fact that some critics argue to have had a direct influence on perception of human relationships as based on violence. Despite the understandable criticism de Sade received, and still receives nowadays, regarding his carnal beliefs, his political ideas were highly regarded in France and so it was the case that he was named delegate to the National Convention, after he was freed from jail, during the French Revolution (Berman, 1971, pp. 20-21).

What critics were not able to understand was the fact that Carter did not praise his libertine ideas regarding male brutality, but the fact that, as it can be seen through the character of Juliette, women could achieve an equal - if not superior - position through sexual intercourse, something that

today would be regarded as BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism and Masochism), due to the rough depiction of the sexual encounters in de Sade's works. Carter summarises de Sade's exploration of sexual behaviour as a result of a political system of oppression in the following excerpt from *The Sadeian Woman* (2013, p.27):

He creates, not an artificial paradise of gratified sexuality, but a model of hell, in which the gratification of sexuality involves the infliction and the tolerance of extreme pain. He describes sexual relations in the context of an unfree society as the expression of pure tyranny [...]; 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 had it stripped from him.

Carter also points out the importance of the fact that Sade equates the power of the libertines with that of the libtines, since this means that women no longer play a secondary role in history and they are able now to control their own destiny (Carter, 2013, pp. 28-32). As noted in the same book, male protagonists in the history of literature use sexual relationships as a display of power, whereas female characters — note the different terminology, 'male protagonists' versus 'female characters' — use revenge and their sexuality to free themselves from patriarchal domination.

The Sadeian Woman is the first non-fiction book that Carter published during her lifetime and also the most criticised. In this book, Carter praises the way in which de Sade explored "some of the problems he raises about the culturally determined nature of women and of the relations between men and women that result from it" (Carter, 2013, p.14). At the same time as she offers a brief overview of de Sade's historical background and beliefs, her main interest focuses on his two main novels: *Juliette* and *Justine*.

The initial task of embracing and exploring these texts from a feminist perspective seems challenging and hopeless, especially *Justine*, which is full of abuse and rape scenes. What Carter found interesting was the way in which de Sade regarded the role of the female characters. On the one hand, Juliette is represented as a powerful woman who used sex to free herself from male domination. On the other hand, Justine is praised for her integrity and her opposition to sexual encounters during the narrative. According to Carter, de Sade's approach to female sexuality and role within society was that of the problematic dichotomy between freedom and repression. He understood that women were repressed and that they wanted freedom. He claims that using sexuality as a tool to obtain freedom, at a time when sexuality was another element of repression in the hands of men, was the way in which women would "then be able to fuck their way into history and, in doing so, change it." (Carter, 2013, p.31). Sexuality belonged, and belongs nowadays, exclusively to men spheres in the active case — talking about it, expressing sexual desires, in Carter words "the right to fuck" belongs to men (2013, p.31) —, and women were banned from exploring or discovering their own sexuality in an open way. As I will study in Chapter 3.1, in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, Carter explores and reverses this situation.

Chapter 3. Deconstructing the classic fairy tale.

In this chapter I will analyse the way in which Carter dealt with the latent sexist content of traditional fairy tales from a feminist perspective and subverted the patriarchal gender politics that they promoted. To do so, I will classify Carter's tales according to its thematic similarities and point out the differences that appear in relation to their original counterparts. My aim is to show the way in which Carter participates in the process of revision explained in Chapter 1.

As I have previously mentioned, the fairy tale genre is the result of different oral and written narratives that have been passed down from generation to generation and that perform a moral or didactic function within a determined social group. Angela Carter's enterprise was, as she herself once said in an interview, "to inject new energy into traditional tales and motifs deconstructing and transforming some of the core elements that support such stories" (Carter, 2006, xii). Even though Carter played with their defining features, these transformations do not involve the change of their original structure, but rather, in most of the cases, a change in their metaphorical or hidden message. I will refer to this change as 'a metaphorical notion of change', what in terms of literary devices we understand as metaphorical extension. This refers to an expansion of the original meaning - already metaphorical - in a completely new direction. In Carter's work, this 'metaphorical notion of change' depends on the interpretation of symbols that already have a known connotation to the reader, but that are reshaped in a feminist light. Examples of this device will be provided in the different sections, as it is the case with the white dress, that in each story shifts from representing marriage (as it does traditionally), to express ideas such as female empowerment.

The abundant imagery that one can find in Carter's collection has been highly influenced by the Second-Wave Feminist movement. This wave focused on rights for women's sexuality, gender violence and reproductive issues that are present in Carter's work. In this section the main topics that I

analyse are sexuality, gender roles and violence and virginity. These issues are influenced by Carter's position with regards to the feminist movement. Another topic that arose around the 1970s is pornography. As discussed in Chapter 2.2.3, Carter's views of pornography as "the right of women to fuck" (Carter, 2013, p. 31) were collected in *The Sadeian Woman*. Carter's imagery transforms female character's description as a subordinated individual and reshapes the way in which they interact with the rest of the characters. Imagery and motifs add a challenging atmosphere to Carter's narratives transforming the fairy tale tradition into a narrative style suitable for Feminist writers to explore. Carter's distinctive wording and wit manage to question and challenge patriarchal gender politics of the classic fairy tales from Western tradition.

In the following section, I will summarise the main ideas of each of Perrault's and the Grimm Brothers' stories and compare them with those present in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979). I have divided this chapter in three parts, each one of them dealing with a different topic that is explored in the collection.

3.1. Sexuality in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*

The first topic that I am going to deal with is sexuality, which is the most prominent in Carter's collection, the one that leads to the other themes in my selection of main topics, as well as in Perrault and the Grimm Brothers. This theme appears and is indeed central, in all the stories of the collection. According to Carter, women should claim and celebrate their own sexuality and explore it wisely. Sexuality is explored by Carter in the different stories following its different aspects, from the discovery of sexuality to its exploitation in order to achieve freedom. She also uses different mechanisms to explore it: symbols, animal metaphors, metamorphoses.

Despite the variety of aspects present in the collection, I find that there is a general tendency that unifies all of them. All sexual awakenings and encounters involve the transformation from human to animal, from virgin to sexually experienced character. In the collection, all the sexual encounters are described in this light, as a sudden change for the protagonist, represented in some tales through metamorphosis (“The Tiger’s Bride”, “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice”). Carter uses this metaphor to express the idea of equality in sexual relationships in her collection. For example, in “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, this metamorphosis occurs with a kiss:

She flung herself upon him, so that the iron bedstead groaned, and covered his poor paws with her kisses.

“Don’t die, Beast! If you’ll have me, I’ll never leave you.”

When her lips touched the meat-hook claws, they drew back into their pads and she saw how he had always kept his fists clenched but now, painfully, tentatively, at last began to stretch his fingers. Her tears fell on his face like snow and, under their soft transformation, the bones showed through the pelt, the flesh through the wide, tawny brow. And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man...

Carter, 2006, p.54.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Carter uses symbols to play with the two levels of interpretation. The first, the meaning determined by the patriarchal structures that govern human thought, and the second, her own interpretation, that cancels the patriarchal interpretation. Since the original connotation of these symbols is known to the reader, their transformation reinforce Carter's message. For example, the symbol of the white dress, that appears in the next passage, relates to the protagonist’s innocence and purity, in contrast with the Marquis’ sexual experience, “the white dress; the frail child within it” (Carter, 2006, p.6). At this stage in the narrative, the protagonist is still a naïve young girl that has not experienced with her own sexuality. In contrast with the traditional

patriarchal idea of women as innocent and naïve, as the narrative moves on, Carter lets the heroine explore her own desires and moves from a flat character to a self-made woman, who learns the skills to survive in an oppressive marriage.

In “Wolf-Alice”, the symbol of the dress appears again. This time the protagonist chooses to wear the dress, instead of it being a response to the Duke’s desires. Due to the protagonist's animal nature, she is not subject to patriarchal domination and the connotations of the dress are used in this passage of the story to convey the idea of marriage as a social construct. The protagonist stares at herself in the mirror and admires the beauty of the dress, not the meaning behind it, since it is unknown to her (Carter, 2006, pp. 144-145).

In “The Bloody Chamber”, the heroine’s awareness of her situation provokes her sexual awakening. She discovers her husband’s past, he has been married before and this makes her aware of the position she is in. Hers is not only an arranged marriage, she must also make up for the previous wives of the Marquis and live up to his expectations as submissive wife. The heroine quickly learns the tricks to survive and face her fears, gaining experience that will mean her salvation in the end. This awareness of her situation results in her discovery of her own sexual potential. She discovers how she can control her husband-to-be, hence they marry after this discovery of the previous wives’ death, so she secures her position as wife, “the next day, we were married.” (Carter, 2006, p.6).

This awareness is linked to the consciousness of the economic inequality within the marriage, which shows the extent to which patriarchal power relations control human relationships. In “Puss in Boots”, the master, even though he embodies the traditional idea of male abuse of power, he is not rich nor has the economic power of the Marquis. In this story the idea of women’s objectification is Carter’s main concern. The master falls in love with the young woman, but she is married to Signor Panteleone. Carter plays with two forms of patriarchal domination: the master’s assumption that

because he is in love with her, she will gladly correspond him; and the representation of an extreme form of objectification and entrapment that has strong links with the debates on female domesticity that were taking part during that period, the young woman being captive. In my opinion, Carter presents in these stories the different tools that patriarchy has to subjugate women's position and sexuality.

Going back to "The Bloody Chamber", the Marquis is unaware of the protagonist's loss of innocence, as he expresses when he says: "Have the nasty pictures scared Baby? Baby mustn't play with grownups' toys until she's learned how to handle them, must she?" (Carter, 2006, p.13). The heroine uses the Marquis' unawareness for her own benefit so that she can plot against him. At the same time, Carter leaves open the possibility of interpreting this as a covered critique to the patriarchal assumption that gender gives intellectual superiority to men.

In another key passage in this short story, Carter reflects on the fear about her new self, as it appears in the next passage, where she can not even recognise herself. The protagonist is scared when she realises that she is also a powerful being, able to metamorphose into a sexually independent woman. She is no longer a naïve character, but a self made woman. Carter subtly hints to the silencing of female sexuality, the protagonist voices female liberation and surprise when she finds out that she can also be sexual.

No. I was not afraid of him; but of myself. I seemed reborn in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes. I hardly recognized myself from his descriptions of me and yet, and yet – might there not be a grain of beastly truth in them? And, in the red firelight, I blushed again, unnoticed, to think he might have chosen me because, in my innocence, he sensed a rare talent for corruption.

Another element that has a strong link with the topic of sexuality is the revolver, that the heroine's mother uses to end the Marquis' life at the end of the story (Carter, 2006, p.40). Critics such as Robin Ann Sheets (1991, p.653) understand the story's end as an allegory of female empowerment through the appropriation of the phallus, represented by the Marquis' revolver. The heroine's mother comes to rescue her and ends the villain's life with his weapon of annihilation. In my opinion, this passage constitutes Carter's greatest feminist twist in the narrative. Critics, from a Freudian and psychoanalytic approach, praise this mother-daughter bond, which could not be broken by the distance between them.

The following story that I am going to analyse is "The Tiger's Bride", a new version of "The Beauty and the Beast" by the Grimm Brothers. In Carter's version, even though the narrative shows how the protagonist is lost to the Beast by her father in a card game, showing the protagonist's vulnerability and subordination to patriarchal power; she is aware of her own potential and sexuality. This story, as many others in the collection, did not receive the direct approval of the public or the critics, especially from Dunker and Lewallen, scholars more concerned with the depiction of wrong feminist values. The vast majority of the reviews pointed out the difficulty to combine the critique of patriarchal oppression and the objectification of the female character. As Carter pointed out in *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979), her enterprise as a feminist was not to recreate an utopia, but rather to show how, by exposing patriarchal structures a feminist revision of the tale could be possible.

In the Grimm Brothers' version, the core idea behind the narrative is that women's sacrifices will be eventually rewarded at the end by marriage. This conception of women's desire to marry and happily ever after, contrasts with Carter's presentation of the protagonist's sexuality. Carter refuses

the idea of marriage as every woman's dream in her revision, and cancels the possibility of such a reading. In the following passage, the reader witnesses how the protagonist gives in to the sexual encounter with the Beast but at the time acknowledging how both are in an equal position in the sexual encounter.

The beast and his carnivorous bed of bone and I, white, shaking, raw, approaching him as if offering, in myself, the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction.

He went still as stone. He was far more frightened of me than I was of him.

Carter, 2006, pp.74-75.

This shift in the attitudes towards the sexual relationships in the story gives the narrative the new feminist perspective according to the principles explored in *The Sadeian Woman*. The fact that both characters realise that their mutual desire is what leads them to have sex, cancels the original reading of rape and female passivity of the Grimm Brothers and Perrault's tale. In my opinion, the fact that Carter presents her character as passive in the beginning and as sexually experienced and aware of her own self at the end, provides the feminist reinterpretation of the tale. The protagonist was raised as a submissive figure to the patriarchal rule, but she frees herself from that fatherly oppression and openly explores her sexuality. At the same time, this excerpt contributes to the effectiveness of Carter's enterprise as a form of critique of the patriarchal domination of women; and at the same time, of the subordination to money that motivates her father to give her away. As Duncker claims, this passage indicates that the girl takes the lead in the sexual encounter. Both of them are scared of their sexual power and Carter describes this moment as a sign of equality between them, a "peaceful kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction" (Carter, 2006, p.74), instead of portraying the protagonist as a "willing victim of pornography" (Duncker, 1986, p.12).

Angela Carter in *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* summarised this active role of women towards their own sexuality and sexual intercourse. She explains how “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.” (Carter, 2013, pp. 76-77). Carter broke with the idea of women as represented in the fairy tale tradition, giving power to those who truly needed it, without portraying an unrealistic view of the reality surrounding her characters.

In “The Company of Wolves” (Carter, 2006, pp.129-139), Carter explores the two sides of the human condition through a metamorphosis of the human being into werewolves. She plays with the rational and the beastly side to represent sexuality. The role of sexuality in this story of stories is introduced through the exploration of such metamorphosis on two different levels: the Beast-Human dichotomy and the Virgin-Woman dichotomy. Zipes in *Don't Bet On The Prince* (1986, p.227) described this fairy tale as a “narrative about rape”. The protagonist of the first story has no sexual experience and there are several cases of abuse from both of her husbands’ side. Carter uses the term ‘wolf’ to give the animal side of man a new dimension of brutality and irrationality. Criticising violence of any kind in a period in which the debate on gender violence was one of the main concerns for the Second-Wave Feminists seemed challenging at first, but Carter’s witty language and intricate plot twists provide this critical approach for the topic. In this story, violence motivated by the woman’s own desire to get married again after she considers her husband dead connects two of the issues tackled in both the Movement and her collection: violence and marriage. The violent act is motivated by the belief that women are a possession of men, and that is why he does not understand her desire to remarry. I will come back to this story in the next section dealing with gender inequality and violence.

The second story of this collection, which is a revision of “Little Red Riding Hood”, differs from the original tale in the moral of the story. In the original tale, the protagonist’s apparent innocent decision is used as a moralising element in order to show girls and women the frightening side of what is outside, of the unknown and the consequences of disobeying the rules. The reader can see a parody of this at the end of the story:

MORAL

Children, especially pretty, nicely brought-up young ladies, ought never to talk to strangers; if they are foolish enough to do so, they should not be surprised if some greedy wolf consumes them, elegant red riding hoods and all.

Now, there are real wolves, with hairy pelts and enormous teeth; but also wolves who seem perfectly charming, sweet-natured and obliging, who pursue young girls in the street and pay them the most flattering attentions.

Unfortunately, these smooth-tongued, smooth-pelted wolves are the most dangerous beasts of all.

Carter, 2008, p.3.

Perrault’s version blames the young girl, for being “foolish” and trusting strangers, instead of stressing the devilish side of the wolf - man - and his intentions. Perrault emphasises the fact that “pretty girls, especially” should pay more attention to the possible threats of the outside, rather than blaming the murderer and adopting a critical perspective on the atrocity. In the Grimm Brothers’ version, the salvation for this problematic situation comes from “a huntsman [that] was just passing by. He thought, "The old woman is snoring so loudly. You had better see if something is wrong with her." (Pitt.edu, 2018). In their account of the tale the patriarchal display of power lies in the role of the saviour. The saviour that comes to rescue both ladies is a man, that not only saves them, but also tells them what to do once they have been saved. The fact that advice comes from the huntsman in

Grimm's tale created an unequal situation of power. This is just another form of submission through the tale's perpetuation of patriarchal ideas of the tale and the expansion of gender politics that surround the original fairy tales.

In Carter's revision, the moral function is kept, but changed. In order to convey the feminist idea of the story, Carter blames the husband and allows the protagonist to own her own body and inner sexual power. Carter erases the man's role as saviour. In this story it is the girl who saves herself, seducing the wolf and presenting herself as a strong character. Carter places the wolf in an equal position to the girl of the story. They both are aware of their carnal desire, and are not afraid to explore their sexual appetite, as Carter describes in the following passage:

What big arms you have.

All the better to hug you with.

[...]

What big teeth you have!

All the better to eat you with.

The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat.

She laughed at him full in the face,

she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire.

Carter, 2006, p.138.

The protagonist is no longer a passive victim nor a naïve character, she is fully aware of her sex appeal and knows what is going to happen to her if she does not act quickly and wisely. She realises that the animal nature of the wolf could be seduced by her uncorrupted body, therefore she gives in her sexual desire and ends up having sex with the wolf. Carter shifts the power from the wolf to the heroine, providing a new perspective to the original tale of submission and fragility. Carter

subverts the original intended message of punishing or shaming the young girl and she celebrates sexual her desire and passion. By doing this, Carter broke with an old-fashioned and patriarchal storytelling tradition, resulting in a new form of fairy tale that emphasised the power of outcasts from the classic tales. Her ideas of equality and female empowerment originated a new form of rewriting traditional myths and shared cultural narratives. Sara Mills explains the link between male sexual desire and animal metaphors¹⁰ as follows: “Male sexuality is often described in terms of metaphors of animal behavior, as an animal’s, and as little under control. The describing of sexuality in these terms means that extreme male behavior such as rape may be understood to be only ‘natural’.” (Mills, 1995, p. 137). Carter represented both characters in an equal position, celebrating female and male sexual desire and the sexual act as an expression of a mutual agreement. Carter uses these metaphors to convey the idea of the unconscious desire that leads the protagonists to have sex, she does not equate human and animal sexuality.

Carter’s use of different devices — animal-human metamorphoses, language, symbols, metaphors, among others — helped to reverse the depiction of female sexuality as taboo and broke with an old tradition of female annihilation. Critics have praised and criticised Carter for her controversial use of women’s sexuality, since sometimes it could be interpreted as another form of women’s subjugation to male dominance. The main problem Carter faced was the way in which she dealt with the patriarchal taboos of female sexuality and empowerment. According to Patricia Duncker and Avis Lewallen, Carter fails to represent her heroines as beings with autonomous desires, they are portrayed as dependent on men’s sexual appetite and on their pornographical fantasy. Carter did not deny the existence of sexual desire and animal nature in human beings and celebrated the combination of both in her stories. In my opinion, the main problem when dealing with Carter’s short stories is the way in which she approaches sexuality and the related taboos that she found in the tale tradition. I find Duncker’s analysis of Carter’s texts very simplistic and as a more controversy seeking

¹⁰ Carter uses animal metaphors to destroy the patriarchal gender roles, as I will point out in the next section (3.2, pp. 42-43)

reading, than an informed and critical approach to Carter's work. Carter campaigns for the redefinition of sexuality, which is a hard task for feminists and certainly the most difficult point to embrace in Carter's revision. As her exuberant and flamboyant descriptions sometimes may mislead her intended message. But, I agree with Makinen's (1992, p.7) idea that they serve to embellish the narrative while still gaining possession over women's libido.

3.2. Patriarchal gender roles and violence in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*

Violence and patriarchal gender roles constitute another of the main topics that Carter explores in the collection. In this section, I will explore the reversal of gender inequalities and the representation of violence of the original tales in Carter's collection and how this results in a redefinition of the concept of gender. To understand Carter's redefinition of gender, it is important to know its meaning. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), gender is

the state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex, or determined as a result of one's sex.

OED (online), 2018.

As I will explore in this section, Carter uses different devices to redefine the idea of gender, for example, using animal metaphors and characters, by reversing gender roles and through the use of symbols.

In "The Bloody Chamber", the themes of obscene violence and gender inequality constitute the core idea behind the reformulation of the classic tale "Bluebeard" by Charles Perrault. The

intertextual relationship is explicitly mentioned in Carter's story when the protagonist describes her experience in the following passage: "And my husband stood stock-still [...] the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs" (Carter, 2006, p.40). Carter's story represents the empowerment of the female character, who breaks free from male oppression by means of her sexuality.

The main difference between both texts lies in the narrator's perspective. In Perrault's tale the narrator describes the events from a third person's perspective, which distances the reader from the woman in the story. Carter's revision shifts the focus to her own personal experience. She underlines the negative effects of patriarchal behavioral politics on marriage and female subordination, and at the same time, she challenges the romantic folk tradition and its notion of fairy tale marriage.

The notion of fairy tale marriage is present in Perrault's account. He stresses the value of marriage as a form of self-validation - only for women - and social recognition, punishing the blameworthy woman for disobeying her husband's commandments. Carter reshaped the way in which marriage was depicted in the original tale, as a form of salvation of the hopeless narrator. In Carter, marriage represents oppression at different levels: she needs to be obedient so as not to be punished and die, she has to please her husband sexually to survive and she has no connection with the real world, caused by her lack of mobility.

Carter plays with the symbol of the mansion, that despite seeming a safe environment and providing the protagonist with several pastimes, is a form of oppression that the Marquis uses to control his wife. Carter links marriage to isolation, as the protagonist unconsciously expresses: "the everyday world from which I, with my stunning marriage, had exiled myself" (Carter, 2006, p.7). This idealisation of marriage is the result of patriarchal power structures that dominate the human mind and have a dangerous effect on the wife's perception of reality. Her liberation from the Marquis's

oppressive authority moves in a parallel direction to that of her spatial mobility — from being trapped in the mansion and subjected to male domination to finally leaving and destroying the mansion at the end of the story and freeing herself from patriarchal powers.

The unnamed narrator is subject to the patriarchal domination politics of society in general — understood as non explicit or indirect behaviour patterns or attitudes, memes in Richard Dawkins's terminology (1976) —, and her husband's in particular. My claim for both dominating forces having a detrimental effect on the protagonist, relies on the fact that she at first fulfills patriarchal expectations. She embodies the values of having the will to marry, her desire to become a marchioness, and the emphasis on her reproductive function. At the same time, she is an object of male desire, her survival depends on whether she is an obedient wife or not, and on her ability to fulfill her husband's sexual needs. By doing so, the heroine acquires sexual maturity losing her virginity to the Marquis, and she narrates her experience in the following excerpt: "I had heard him shriek and blaspheme at the orgasm; I had bled" (Carter, 2006, p.14). Women have been silenced in the previous tradition and Carter put an end to this situation by voicing their experience.

The symbol of the prohibited room is used in Carter's revision to exemplify the inevitable desire and curiosity for the unknown and forbidden. The first time the narrator breaks the boundaries of what is expected from a woman of her position — to be passive, accept orders from her husband and be obedient in any other regard — occurs after the Marquis's sudden departure, that awakens her desire to explore the forbidden room. From the moment she discovers what is inside the room, she realises that her fate will be the same as the Marquis' three previous wives. She becomes aware of her need for survival and it is then that she starts to explore her sexuality. Carter plays with violent scenes and grotesque Gothic characteristics to add a more gruesome atmosphere that keeps the reader's interest on the development of the facts and, at the same time, prepares the scene for fatal events to

happen. In Carter's revision the reader does not find the idea that breaking with the set rules ends up in severe punishment, as in the original tale..

In my opinion, Carter strengthens her point of view at the end of the story, when the mother comes to rescue the protagonist, instead of the traditional male hero that ends the passive and fragile princess' distress. Carter's goal in this story is to destroy patriarchal structures of power and women's domination by strengthening the women's bond. As Robin Ann Sheets (1991, p.664-665) states, Carter's revision: "restores to prominence a figure who is strikingly, ominously, absent from fairy tales, from pornographic fiction, and from the Freudian theory of female development: the strong, loving, and courageous mother".

In "The Tiger's Bride", a revision of "Beauty and the Beast", Carter's destruction of patriarchal gender roles regarding the original tale. It is important to note the great diversity of versions of this tale, although Carter revised the tale from Perrault, she had in mind the different representations of this tale and she not only addressed issues concerning that version, but the whole tradition. Carter's use of animal characters that embody human features has been regarded as a revolutionary approach to the destruction of gender identity and the creation of genderless identities that engage with her feminist ideas.

According to the OED's definition of gender, animals would not fit into the definition of gender, since they do not depend on social conventions, but rather on biological ones. Carter's thesis is emphasised by the creation of this new identity, that escapes patriarchal (re)definition of gender. By providing a genderless being with a gendered perspective, Carter proclaims the notion of gender as irrelevant, it can be dismantled by society in the same way it was constructed. Once the presentation of the genderless features of the protagonists are shown to the reader, Carter shifts her tone to provide a critical interpretation of the concept, which finds its climax at the end of the short story, "He [The

tiger] must have decided that if one should go naked, then all should go naked” (Carter, 2006, p.74). Both characters are in an equal position, and Carter compares this moment of equity to the destruction of gender roles. Once the earrings start to melt, the deconstruction of gender identities is complete. Carter uses the earrings to represent the creation of a patriarchal feminine identity, that does not respond to the real nature of female self. Hence why by destructing the earrings, the destruction of gender gives the narrative closure in a genderless light.

The destruction of gender roles that perpetuate the display of patriarchal ideology, continues to appear in the collection as it can be seen in “The Erl-King”. The traditional patriarchal discourse and its distribution of manly tasks and feminine tasks is subverted by Carter as she assigns the domestic duties to the King. The King embodies the male chauvinistic conception of woman, whereas the girl is the one that has sexual desires and becomes the murderer as she frees the captive birds at the end of the story. Carter subverts the basic patterns of patriarchal domination, engaging with the Feminist idea of female domesticity as a patriarchal construct.

Carter also uses language to strengthen her message, by adding to the voices of her female characters the ability to explore female sexual desire. Carter uses sensuous vocabulary to express the protagonist’s sexual desire. By doing this, Carter voices the female character’s appetite for the first time in the fairy tale tradition (Bacchilega, 1997, p.125), as shown in the following passage:

Eat me, drink me; thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden, I go back and back to him
to have his fingers strip the tattered skin away and clothe me in his dress of water, this
garment that drenches me, its slithering odour, its capacity for drowning.

Carter, 2006, p. 102.

This section has shown how Carter dismantles the idea of gender and the violence that results from social and cultural constructs.. Her study of the relationships between humans and animals to deconstruct the concept of gender, the use of symbols to reinterpret their original connotations, and the revolutionary aspects that surrounds the collection provide an effective reading of the new tales from a feminist perspective. Carter's engagement with de Sade's practices has been sharply criticised by feminists, such as Duncker. She claims that interpreting *The Sadeian Woman* as a feminist manifesto of female empowerment in masochist and sadistic sexual practices is impossible, since such practices go against women's freedom. The core idea behind Carter's study is the struggle for equality. In my opinion, despite the questionable practices explored in de Sade's works, Carter reclaims women's stance regarding sexual desire and gains control over determined sexual practices that pornography assigned to men, those involving violence or brutality. By doing so, not only did she emphasize equality in sexual practices, but also reinforced women's position in those practices that traditionally empowered men.

3.3. Virginity in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*

The theme of virginity has direct links with that of sexuality explored in the first section of this chapter. In this section, I will analyse the short stories of "The Snow Child" and "The Lady of the House of Love".

In "The Snow Child", the idea of virginity is represented through the symbol of the rose, as it has been represented in the previous tradition. In this story the image of the girl is created according to the natural elements described from the Count's perspective. By adopting this point of view, Carter invites her readers to question the Count's construction of the ideal woman and offers them tools for the inspection of their own stance on virginity and rape. In Carter's story, the Count exclaims: "I wished I had a girl as white as snow" (Carter, 2006, p.105), shaping his longed for child representing

her purity and innocence, fragile and weak like snow. Again, the Count confesses that he want his girl to be red as blood (Carter, 2006, p.105), referring to her menses. In his final claim, the Count longs for a girl as black as the crows feathers (Carter, 2006, p.105), black could here represent her sense for corruption, her inner sexual nature. It is important to note the contradictory aspects of his desire. The Count wants a weak and fragile girl, so he can manipulate her, but at the same time, he wants her to have sexual inclinations so he can satisfy his sexual fantasies.

Carter's strongest point in the following passage, in which the Count "thrust[s] his virile member into the dead girl" (Carter, 2006, p.106). As developed in *The Sadeian Woman: and the Ideology of Pornography*, understanding the Counts' sexual fantasies — men's sexual cravings — and display of authoritative power allows Carter to develop her feminist approach to this narrative. Carter extracts the latent content from the original tale, that passed unnoticed in front of the reader's eyes, and makes it the climax of her own narrative. The implicit sexual content that Carter found in the tradition surrounding Snow White's tale comes to the surface and becomes the topic of criticism in this story. In the Grimm Brothers' tale, there are passages reflecting on the girl's purity and innocence result in the confession that the protagonist "was so beautiful that the King could not contain himself" (Pitt.edu, 2018). Carter frames her narrative within the pornographic fantasy of necrophilic sexual intercourse. By doing this, Carter provokes a reaction in the reader, that of disgust and repulsion. The combination of these two factors: Carter's explicit mention to rape and the reader's reaction to it constitutes, in my opinion, Carter's feminist revision in this text, that is, the inner examination of patriarchal beliefs in the reader and by the reader. This reaction reinforces Carter's aim to question the grounds of patriarchal power structures — within the fairy tale tradition and in society — especially those related to the belief that women's pleasure depends on men's desire. In this short story, the responsibility of censoring the Counts' acts relies in the reader's perspective, rather than in Carter's explicit criticism on the facts.

Carter explores the men's desire for virgins and the concept of virginity from a patriarchal perspective. The young girl is the Count's creation, not the Countess', which confirms his desire for virgins, since it can be interpreted that he has had previous encounters with them. The symbol of the snow falling on top of other layers of snow represents women's subjugation throughout history and the hole in the snow full of blood symbolises women's menstruation. The combination of both symbols serve Carter to express the way in which men tend to overlook and consider virgins as naïve, asexual and passive beings. Carter subverts the traditional perspective on female virginity by creating sexually concerned and willing to experience women.

In the previous literary tradition, virginal characters have been presented with demeaning features, especially in the different versions of Little Red Riding Hood, linking virginity to the female character. In Carter's revision, virginity is indeed central and regarded as special for the protagonists, but the main difference between Carter's story and the previous tradition lies in the subject who values virginity. Traditionally, it is the wolf who values the virginity of the young girl and tries to eat her. In Carter's revision, it is the young girl who values her own virginity and gives in to her sexual desire without restraint. In my opinion, this difference marks Carter's greatest achievement in this story, her take on virginity tries to reshape the unreal idea of virginity and the virgin, presenting her as a character with sexual desires, as opposed to the definition of the virgin as a passive and submissive being subject to patriarchal control.

In "The Lady of the House of Love", Carter shifts the traditional depiction of the fragile and passive woman and presents the Countess as a fierce and sexual woman, whereas the soldier incarnates the values of purity and virginity. This reversal impacts the reader who thinks that the virgin character will be the Countess. As it is the case in "The Snow Child", Carter's feminist twist does not only depend on the direct deconstruction of male chauvinistic ideas, but rather on the *quasi* cathartic effect that her writing provokes on the reader, and the subsequent analysis of Carter's

message. By this I mean that, in this short story, Carter wants the reader to question this role reversal with her and learn from it. In my opinion, other of the important features that emphasizes the feminist reading of this text, and explores women's sexual desire, can be found in the description of the soldier as "hot, hungry, thirsty, weary, dusty..." (Carter, 2006, p.113). Carter plays with the words 'hot' and 'thirsty', that have strong sexual connotations, and puts them in the Countess' mind. By objectifying the soldier, Carter inverts the traditional objectification of women by men. By doing this, Carter does not engage with the patriarchal structures of power, but rather offers a critical approach to such structures as stated by a woman.

This section explored Carter's idea of virginity and showed how works in a different way than the deconstruction of previous topics in this chapter. Instead of presenting the reader with a direct criticism on the issue, she leaves the reader to think and reconsider general assumptions of gender, sexuality and virginity.

4. Carter's influence: feminism and the new tradition

Carter's influence on literature and feminism has been overlooked by her radical approaches to the latter and her exuberant style. As I have explained in Chapter 2.1, Carter's literary and political appraisal appeared after her death and since then, her popularity increased to be considered one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. From the literary point of view, she engaged with the tradition of female writers that understood the importance of claiming women's place in literature and traditional narratives. From the socio-political perspective, her ideas on sexuality, women's sexual desire and her attitude towards pornography fueled the debates on these topics and provided the Feminist movement with new perspectives.

Despite the harsh criticism that Carter's work and ideology received during her lifetime, her impact is notable in many ways: her combination of radical feminism and political literature, contributed to women's empowerment in different artistic manifestations - cinema, literature, music. She engaged with her predecessors in the destruction of political and social conventions that forced women to conform to patriarchal ideals. In this chapter, I will summarise Carter's importance for the Feminist movement and women's place in literature.

Carter's take on feminism was controversial and it met harsh criticism early on in her career, due to the difficulty that her ideas presented to the Feminist movement. Critics and feminists opposed *The Sadeian Woman*, as I have studied in Chapter 2, but at the same time, it fueled new debates that questioned the role of women in sexual relationships that involved positions of power. Her interest in how pornography shaped human relationships was central in the debates during the Third-Wave Feminist movement. Feminists such as Patricia Duncker or Andrea Dworkin claim that Carter failed in her attempt to make of her literary production a weapon to fight against patriarchal structures of power. According to Dunker (1984, p.3), Carter saw "women's sensuality [as] simply... a response to

male arousal” and she criticises Carter for engaging with the previous fairy tale tradition, since the “disarming of the aggressive male sexuality by the virtuous bride is [already] at [its] root”. In my opinion, Dunker’s interpretation of Carter’s work reflects the difficulties that feminists found in Carter’s vindication of women’s sexuality and sexual desire. Dunker understands Carter’s vindication as another form of submission and patriarchal domination in sexual terms. Dunker’s reading of Carter’s work results in the rejection of her celebration of sexual relationships between men and women. Carter presents strong and resourceful women in her fairy tales, who, instead of accepting their reality, fight back and change it. In my opinion, the importance of Carter’s stance in relation to the Feminist movement is found in the presentation of women’s sexuality as an independent reality. It is their desire that motivates them to be active participants in the sexual act. As Margaret Atwood (2007, p.135) explains, in Carter’s production:

Mercy, pity, peace and love, and especially chastity and motherhood, go out of the window; in come ruthlessness, lasciviousness, the separation of sexual pleasure from procreation, and delight in the pain of others.

Despite the criticism received by other feminists — especially those belonging to the anti-pornography wing, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon — I note that in her works, Carter frees women from their own limitations, not real limitations, but those created as a result of centuries of patriarchal oppression of women. She gives them back the power to self-define themselves and explore their bodies, outside the control of patriarchy. As Carter claims in *The Sadeian Woman* (2013, p.19), she opened the path for future generations of feminists to create “a world of absolute sexual licence for all the genders”.

Regarding the exploration of Carter's influence in what I labelled 'new tradition'¹¹, I will highlight the importance of her writings towards the inclusion of women's voice in different artistic manifestations, mainly focusing on filmic adaptations.

Carter's influence in the literary scene joins the already present movement of women writers like Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys and Sylvia Plath, who raised their voices to claim the importance of the role of women in literature and in society. In their "Preface to the Special Issue on Fairy Tale after Angela Carter", Stephen Benson and Andrew Teverson (2008, pp.4-6), acknowledge the importance of Carter's production in the different retellings and revisions of fairy tales and refer to Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* as a "story collection that has had a profound and pervasive impact on our understanding of and engagement with fairy tales". Benson (2008, p.2) labels the generation that came after Carter and that was influenced by her as 'Carter Generation'. This generation includes writers such as Olga Broumas, Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood, Ane Sexton, Terri Windling and Jane Yolen.

Those writers in their works openly wrote about women's specific concerns. In *Transformations*, a collection of poems based on fairy tales "with a society-mocking overlay", she focuses on women cast in a variety of fictive roles – the dutiful princess daughter, the wicked witch, the stepmother" (Sexton, 2012, xxviii) – and writes "openly about menstruation, abortion, masturbation, incest, adultery, and drug addiction at a time when the proprieties embraced none of these as proper topics for poetry" (Maxine Kumin, 1988, p.438). Margaret Atwood's *Bluebeard's Egg* (1983) "explores themes present in earlier tales, like infidelity, abuse of trust, and concealment, by placing the fairy tale into an everyday, middle-class environment" (Rao, 2009). In *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983), Fay Weldon explores the topics of open marriage, infidelity, and women's subordination to their husband. In my opinion, the novel's most important topic is the creation of a

¹¹ By 'new tradition' I am referring to the new revisions and variations in traditional tales and myths that emerged in the last 40 decades of the 20th century and that are still relevant today.

new identity for the protagonist. After she hears about her husband's affair, she adopts a series of alias to take revenge on him, by adopting new personalities she discovers her true self at the end and is able to regain control of her life.

As I have analysed in this section, I find certain similarities in this generation's works that are also present in Carter's: marriage, women's subordination, the aim to offer new readings of traditional texts and the reversal of patriarchal gender roles. They wrote about women's reality in the 20th century and how they struggled to survive in an unequal and male-centered society. Their plots explore how these women came to understand the importance of their own lives and become strong and powerful women. These writers continued and still continue with the task of returning to the past to claim women's righteous place in history and literature, but also to write new futures for them. As Adrienne Rich (1979, p.35) claims: "revision... is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival".

5. Conclusion:

Having analysed Carter's revision of traditional fairy tales, I will now summarise my conclusions.

As explored in this paper, Carter's revision challenges the preconceptions of the fairy tale genre, as a monolithic literary form to the service of patriarchy. She destroys the strong patriarchal elements in traditional fairy tales using various devices such as symbols, metaphors and characterisation. As I have shown in this work, Carter's feminist ideology clashed with these elements, giving rise to her addressing this situation within her work. Her knowledge of the original stories allowed her to analyse them "and extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories", as she explained (Carter, 2006, vii-viii). In her work, she subverts the original message from the tales through the reinvention of symbols and characters that the reader recognises, producing an innovative and groundbreaking reading.

On the one hand, the reinvention of symbols from a feminist perspective allows Carter to convey her feminist ideas and provide a new interpretation of them without having to alter the basic structures of the fairy tale. The reader can still recognise the original tale in Carter's revision, even if the titles are not the same. This is due to the presence of several memes that connect the tales and that are known to the reader.

On the other hand, the characters are the same as in the original tales, so that the reader can still detect the relationship between them. Carter infuses her characterisation with her feminist ideas, presenting strong and resourceful women that contrast with the passive and fragile women from the original tales. At the same time, she voices their own experiences and lets them explore their sexuality.

As I claimed in the Introduction, Carter manages to offer a feminist retelling of classic fairy tales without changing the basic structures of each tale. In my opinion, the changes that Carter has made do not involve a change in the defining features of the fairy tale. Her revision updates and adapts the narrative elements to her own beliefs, but they are still fairy tales. The presence of magical elements, animals, fantastic settings and moralising endings can be detected in Carter's tales. Her combination of modern literary forms like the short story or the Gothic subgenre, with ancient forms like the fairy tale, makes Carter's revision stronger, since it opens the way for future retellings of traditional myths and narratives.

In conclusion, despite the harsh criticism received from feminists and critics due to her radical approaches to the fields of sexuality, gender roles, virginity and pornography, Carter's work influenced new generations of women writers. They found in Carter's revision the option to change traditional narratives and shift patriarchal power structures that conveyed ideas that relegated the role of women and silenced their voices.

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