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The Inner Wild Woman Freed: Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*
And The Overcoming Of Sexist Traits In Classic Fairy Tales

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SUMMARY

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RESUMO: Esta obra pretende analisar como a escritora britânica feminista Angela Carter utilizou os personagens e tramas presentes no conto "*The Story of Blue Beard*" (1895) do autor francês Charles Perrault para criar a narrativa de suspense "*The Bloody Chamber*" (1979), através do estabelecimento de um arcabouço teórico para a origem e desenvolvimento do gênero literário conto de fadas e seu uso da ideologia patriarcal para o processo civilizatório ocidental. Ao explorar obras de autores como Jack Zipes (2006), Pauline Greenhill e Sidney Matrix (2010), Weston Sue (1992), Elisabeth Ostry (1998), Tzvetan Todorov (2014) e Marina Warner (2018), foi possível analisar o texto de Carter a partir de um ponto de vista embasado em um determinado aporte teórico. Especificamente, esta análise enfoca o uso da perspectiva feminina por Carter e a atribuição de qualidades como coragem, inteligência e curiosidade - qualidades tipicamente masculinas em um conto de fadas tradicional - às personagens femininas, a fim de subverter a ideologia patriarcal enraizada nesse gênero literário. Além disso, o personagem Barba Azul é explorado como uma representação do machismo presente nas sociedades ocidentais. A protagonista não nomeada de 17 anos é uma personagem complexa que representa a luta interna da mulher moderna: seguir cegamente papéis patriarcais sem considerar seus próprios desejos e necessidades, ou se libertar desse padrão e confiar em seus próprios instintos. A partir dessa perspectiva, esta análise - baseada no método de pesquisa bibliográfica - foi realizada a fim de proporcionar uma melhor compreensão da escrita de Carter e sua intenção de problematizar a desigualdade de gênero a um gênero literário tradicionalmente sexista.

Palavras-chave: Contos de fadas; Angela Carter; A Câmara Sangrenta; O Barba Azul; Escrita feminista.

ABSTRACT: This work intends to analyze how feminist British author Angela Carter used the characters and plot present in French author Charles Perrault's tale "The Story of Blue Beard" (1895) to create the suspenseful narrative "The Bloody Chamber" (1979), through the establishment of a theoretical framework for the origin and development of the literary genre fairy tale and its use of patriarchal ideology for the western civilization process. By exploring works from authors such as Jack Zipes (2006), Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Matrix (2010), Weston Sue (1992), Elisabeth Ostry (1998), Tzvetan Todorov (2014) and Marina Warner (2018), it was possible to analyze Carter's text from an informed point of view based on a particular theoretical framework. Specifically, this analysis focuses on Carter's use of the female perspective and the attribution of qualities such as courage, intelligence and curiosity - typically male qualities in a traditional fairy tale - to female characters in order to subvert the patriarchal ideology embedded in this literary genre. Additionally, the character Blue Beard is explored as a representation of the sexism present in western societies. The unnamed seventeen-year-old protagonist is a well rounded character that represents the internal struggle of the modern woman: to blindly follow patriarchal roles without considering their own desires and necessities, or to free themselves from the mold and trust their own instincts. From that perspective, this analysis - based on the bibliographic research method - was carried out in order to provide a better understanding of Carter's writing and her intention of criticizing gender inequality to a traditionally sexist literary genre.

Key-words: Fairy Tales; Angela Carter; The Bloody Chamber; Blue Beard; Feminist writing.

1. Introduction

During the last two years, a challenge arose for researchers around the world to continue working and writing in the midst of an unimaginable scenario: the COVID-19 pandemic. The new coronavirus caused the abrupt interruption of work within universities, and in Brazil it was no different: students and teachers alike had to learn how to keep studying and teaching while going through situations like economic insecurity, loss of friends and family, mental illnesses and, for many of them, the disease itself.

While the adjustment to the new - and mostly virtual - reality was a difficult process, life still went on and it was time to consider what subject was most significant throughout the entire course, from the many that could have been. In this context, one begins to reminisce about the experiences lived and enjoyed while a Letras student, and the one that came to mind most often was the time spent working in an extension project focused in literature and representation.

"*Literatura Aplicada à Sala de Aula*" was one of the most fulfilling projects of the entire course, and during the event "*Semana de Letras*" in 2018, we planned and executed a three-night workshop about female representation in fairy tales. And from that, an interest in the subject arose.

Coming across the book "The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories" (1979) by Angela Carter, the tale namesake to the book stood out as it seemed to capture various qualities from classic fairy tales yet uncover and expose stereotypes within the story. The British author raised interest, especially because her writing was inspired by gothic fantasy, classic fairy tales and even Shakespeare, all fascinating subjects from my experiences during the course. At the start of her career, her style contained that "libertarian energy of the 1960s" (BRITISH LIBRARY, 2021), which definitely stirred towards science fiction as she kept on writing. However, what truly captivated my experience as a reader was the feminism in her works: her stories portray "women as central to, and in control of, their own narratives" (BRITISH LIBRARY, 2021). She was incredibly innovative for her time, writing about themes such as female identity, sexuality and self-discovery. Also, she never held her tongue and always spoke her mind. So, as a fan of her feminist writing and also as a recent fairy tales aficionado, the concept of adapting fairy tales into adult female points of view seemed all too interesting.

Once I picked up "The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories" (1979), it was simply impossible to put it down. Even though I had not read Charles Perrault's "The Story of Blue

Beard" (1895), "The Bloody Chamber" seemed like a work of art in itself, and I easily recognized aspects of classic fairy tales being adapted into a new context. After reading Perrault's version, it dawned on me how her writing had truly transformed the concept and structure of the genre. Then, a final project for my university experience began to take shape and a research question was formed: how does Angela Carter's tale subvert the sexist traits of classic fairy tales and resignify female representation in them?

Consequently, the main objective when formulating the text was to understand how the female representation in "The Bloody Chamber" confronts patriarchal gender roles and overcomes the sexist structures of fairy tales to present a subversive story with in-depth female characters. Then, five specific objectives were formed: to contextualize the possible origins of fairy tales, to identify the subversion of modern fairy tales, to recognize the sexist traits present in classic fairy tales, to analyze Angela Carter's tale's subversion of the sexist traits and to understand how the tale resignifies female representation in fairy tales.

With those guidelines, the following analysis was carried out using the bibliographical research approach, from which was formed a theoretical basis regarding the study of fairy tales, followed by a critical analysis of Angela Carter's tale focusing on the subversion of classic fairy tale structures. It was written in the hopes that it might, at least slightly, enrich the field of literature analysis and feminist writing.

2. Fairy Tales

2.1 Origins and Ideologies

Not many people are aware that the same fairy tales we have been hearing since we were children have been told for centuries, in different countries, as distinct versions, with various purposes. They have not always had children as their intended audience, and they have not always had entertainment as their main goal. More often than not, they were used as instruments to enforce the ideology of the western civilizing process, i.e., "[...] a transition in European history from a social order based on external constraint to one increasingly dependent on the internalisation of constraint." (VAN KRIEKEN, 2007, p. 29).

Initially, it is important to establish the origins of western fairy tales. They come from the oral tradition existent in all cultures, which is why it is so difficult to pinpoint which version of a tale is the original. As these stories were told, they were modified and adapted into each context. From the western cultures' oral tradition to what we now consider "classics", there were many versions of the same tales, such as "Cinderella", "Little Red Riding Hood", "Snow White", and many others. Although they remain somewhat similar throughout time, these tales have been transformed in a manner of ways, and even though they were popularized around the eighteenth century, they already existed before then. It is theorized that their earlier versions come from the oral tradition of western matriarchal societies[1]. Their folklore portrayed situations where women were the civilized creatures while men were the uncontrollable animals. As Göttner-Abendroth (1980 apud ZIPES, 2006) described:

> [...] in the eyes of the matriarchal woman, who created a cultivated environment for herself, he [the man] has never developed beyond the condition of a predatory animal that roams the woods. He is still covered by fur or feathers, while she wears human clothes which she herself has made. (GÖTTNER, 1980 apud ZIPES, 2006, p. 49)

As for the existence of these alleged western matriarchal societies, there are few studies on the subject, so it is not possible to confirm this direct connection with fairy tales. However, Bamberger (1974) mentions Bachofen's investigation of earlier societies:

> The earliest and most erudite study of matriarchy was published in Stuttgart in 1861 by the Swiss jurist and classical scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen. [...] Arguing from mainly poetic and frequently dubious historical sources (Hesiod, Pindar, Ovid, Virgil, Horace, the Iliad and the Odyssey, Herodotus, and Strabo), Bachofen tried to establish as moral and historical fact the primacy of "mother right," which he thought sprang from the natural and biological association of mother and child. Matriarchy, or the dominion of the mother "over family and state," according to Bachofen, was a later development generated by woman's profound dissatisfaction with the "unregulated sexuality" that man had forced upon her. (BAMBERGER, 1974, p. 263-264)

Regardless of the existence of these societies, women were still a dominant presence in children's lives. As western patriarchal societies progressed, women were almost exclusively labeled as "mothers" and "housewives" only, and their role was to keep house and family in order for the men who would actively participate in society. As such, the mother figure was a constant element in a child's life. As King (2007) describes:

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[1]There is much controversy as to the existence of matriarchal societies. For the purposes of this study, they will be considered "alleged" societies, in accordance with the quote by Bamberger (1974).

> In premodern times, children spent their first seven years with their mothers, or with a wider circle of women including maternal kin, friends, neighbors, and servants: roughly speaking, the same kind of groups that supported the process of childbirth. [...] we know only a little about this process of acculturation aside from hints about the circulation of folk tales [...] and the nature of lullabies. (KING, 2007, p. 393)

Thus, even if the narratives did not stem from matriarchal societies, they were still passed down by communities of women encircling children's lives. Since, for a long time, mothers were more involved with the care and well being of their young ones, the latter would spend their formative years surrounded by a strong female presence.

However, as capitalist notions began to arise in Europe around the end of the Middle Ages and beginning of Modern age, economic status represented significant differences in the raising of offspring between poor and rich families. While poor women had to raise their children along with a community of other women - including nursemaids - since most of them had to work to complement the family's income, the ladies of the upper classes had the choice to bestow on others the care for their offspring. Despite their different contexts, most of them would share the practice of bequeathing the education and care of their children to other women, and sometimes the poor women in need of these jobs would spend more time with other women's children than with their own - the so-called nursemaids. Badinter (1980) confirms this "widespread phenomenon":

> But it is in the 18th century that the sending of children to the homes of nursemaids spreads through all layers of urban society. From the poorest to the richest, in small or large cities, the handing over of children to the exclusive care of a nursemaid is a widespread phenomenon. (BADINTER, 1980, p, 67, tradução nossa)

These nursemaids had a great influence in the imagination and behavior of children, with the example of Charles Dickens' nursemaid, Mary Weller, who influenced his writing and discourse with her storytelling (OSTRY, 1998). As time went by, the stories passed down by said women reached the beginning of the civilizing process in Europe, and as such, they were reshaped into cautionary tales about basic civil behavior. For example, the Italian writers Giovan Francesco Straparola and Giambattiste Basile had access to the folklore that spread across Europe and wrote down their versions of the tales. They transformed the folklore into Fairy Tales in order to generalize courtly manners and cater to the nobility of their time, as those were the people that dictated what should be considered "civilized" or not. Their tales

were then popularized and the genre was further developed to, later, accommodate capitalist ideals as well as a norm for behavior. Zipes (2006) further explains:

> [...] there were numerous books about courtly manners and the proper education of the aristocracy, some with references to specific principalities in Italy, others that concerned European society. The French were the progenitors of a more general and effective civilizing process in the sixteenth century. But literacy in Italy, that is, the significance of becoming literate, was part of the process, and the publication, distribution, and reading of Straparola's fairy tales were part of the nascent civilizing process in Italy. In particular, he demonstrated how both oral and literary fairy tales could be shaped in metaphorical form to address delicate issues pertaining to the power of tyrannical princes, justice, and proper comportment. (ZIPES, 2006, p. 16)

In light of the values reinforced during the civilizing process, writers adapted the folktales spread by oral tradition into tales that imposed "decent" behavior and morality through instruments like fear, shame and the overall patriarchalization of the stories. As Zipes (2006) puts it:

> [...] by the time the oral folktales, originally stamped somewhat by matriarchal mythology, circulated in the Middle Ages, they had been transformed in different ways: the goddess became a witch, an evil fairy, or a stepmother; the active, young princess was changed into an active hero; matrilineal marriage and family ties became patrilineal; the essence of the symbols, based on matriarchal rites, was depleted and made benign; and the pattern of action that concerned maturation and integration was gradually recast to stress domination and wealth. (ZIPES, 2006, p. 7)

Those changes were also a sign of capitalist ideals - which can be traced back to as early as the sixteenth century (BRITANNICA, 2021) - and Christian domination, and even though the progress of capitalism could seem as a step back from christian beliefs in society, the latter were still present in societal values. As societies were more and more centered around money, power and status, these values influenced the way stories were told. While European societies went from the end of the Middle Ages to the Modern age, the most basic physical human necessities - such as urination, defecation or sexual intercourse - became something to be ashamed of and forbidden in public spaces, as people's basic behaviors started to be controlled. Women were to stay at home, care for the small children and perform house chores, all of that without pay, while men participated in societal activities such as labor and socialization (FEDERICI, 2004). Any traces of female empowerment and sexuality were erased from fairy tales, because capitalist principles needed women to be complacent with the roles they were allowed to have: mother, wife, lady of the house (FEDERICI, 2019).

As to any women who did not conform to those ideals, they were persecuted by the Inquisition in their witch hunts. Women were "undressed, had their bodies completely shaved, and then perforated all over by long needles in search of the 'Devil's mark', usually in the presence of men" (FEDERICI, 2019, p. 70, tradução nossa) if they strayed from the strict roles society imposed on them.

These patriarchal ideals were beginning to take hold of society as the Age of Enlightenment spread them and the Industrial Revolution perpetuated them, despite Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist ideas. She was an English author and a "passionate advocate of educational and social equality for women. She outlined her beliefs in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), considered a classic of feminism." (BRITANNICA, 2021). Wollstonecraft demanded and believed in equal education for men and women alike, and in her book she explained that society would be better off with an equalitarian educational system. Her writing was clearly progressive for her time, as one can attest from the quote below:

> Published in 1792, Wollstonecraft's work argued that the educational system of her time deliberately trained women to be frivolous and incapable. She posited that an educational system that allowed girls the same advantages as boys would result in women who would be not only exceptional wives and mothers but also capable workers in many professions. Other early feminists had made similar pleas for improved education for women, but Wollstonecraft's work was unique in suggesting that the betterment of women's status be effected through such political change as the radical reform of national educational systems. Such change, she concluded, would benefit all society. (BRITANNICA, 2021)

From her ideas, it is possible to recognize that there was a fight for social change at the time, but the Age of Enlightenment was a force to be reckoned with and resisted it; the traditional sexist thinking was the hegemonic model for society's behavior. That context - patriarchal hierarchy, exploration of working classes, class inequality - was not age-restricted, considering "childhood" was not a widespread concept until some time later, so boys and girls were also bound by these rules. When Perrault wrote his versions of the Fairy Tales, the concept of infancy as a separate part of life was in the process of being conceived. According to King (2007):

> [...] the modern concept of the child, the sentimental concept of childhood, of which there were glimpses in Renaissance Italy and Reformation Germany, first crystallized in seventeenth-century England, more or less, and then, in the eighteenth century, in France and more highly urbanized regions of Europe and the Americas. (KING, 2007, p. 371)

In that sense, if there were norms and a collective common sense to follow, the youngest people in society were the most likely to be shaped by enforced behavior, so that as working members of capitalism, they could become decent people - according to the dominant ideology of that time. Consequently, Fairy Tales were now aimed at this specific audience - children - who were very much influenced by such stories.

And so Perrault and many other French authors wrote stories that portrayed "proper manners" and the drastic consequences of behaving inappropriately. Fairy tales were a way to civilize the masses and, according to Zipes (2006), inspire men to be intelligent and courageous and women to be beautiful and submissive. That is why Cinderella was so kind to her cruel sisters and mother-in-law and her happy ending was marriage, while the "Puss in Boots" had to use his intelligence and loyalty to prove himself and become a lord. There were clearly different standards for men and women, and the latter were considered dangerous or untrustworthy when endowed with cleverness, as in "Ricky of the Tuft".

As fairy tales changed and adapted into becoming stories for children, there were also changes in structure and language. The genre known as Fairy Tale, which began in oral form, then evolved into long written narratives, and later to short stories. As a result, a structure started to take place, and a literary genre was formed.

2.2 Aspects of the modern fairy tale

According to Warner (2018), there are five main aspects of a modern fairy tale. Firstly, it is a short narrative that results in some kind of moral lesson. The length of these tales is clear in Perrault's versions, which were incredibly short. As for the moral of the story, it is ever changing. Since it has been established that each version of a fairy tale caters to the ideology of their time, the moral values in the story are bound to do the same.

Secondly, the story is familiar to the reader; since fairy tales come from oral tradition, they are very popular, even if in different versions. "Little Red Riding Hood", for instance, dates back to the seventeenth century, in a gruesome version that involves cannibalism. Nowadays it is represented by books like "Scarlet" by Marissa Meyer or "Princess of the Silver Woods" by Jessica Day George, by movies like the animated comedy "Hoodwinked!" (2006), directed by Cory Edwards, or the sensual and suspenseful "Red Riding Hood" (2011), directed by Catherine Hardwicke, or even by an episode of the television shows "Disenchantment" (2018 - present day), "Grimm" (2011 - 2017) or "Once Upon a Time"

(2011 - 2018). As capitalist societies now turn to movies and television shows for entertainment, fairy tales have been adapted so they can continue to be a familiar part of people's childhoods. Greenhill e Matrix (2010) elaborate:

> Indeed, the movement of traditional fairy tales to cinematic form may have enabled their commodification in capitalist socioeconomic structures, but filmed fairy tales are as much the genuine article as their telling in a bedtime story or an anthology. (GREENHILL; MATRIX, 2010, p. 3)

That way, that familiarity is not lost on more recent generations. The third aspect is the fact that the narrative takes place in an unspecified fictional past, which is made explicit by the usual initial expression "Once Upon a Time" and other expressions concerning time, the representation of pre-capitalist societies, antiquated language etc. These details distance the reader from the actual tale, and they imply that the mythology in it is far from reality. Since fairy tales are supposed to be about moral and civil behavior, it must be clear that the magic is only for kids' imagination.

The fourth characteristic of a fairy tale is the specific language used to create it. The mention of castles, kingdoms, magic, fairies, talking animals, monsters, knights in shining armor, princesses and princes, as well as expressions like "And they lived happily ever after", are all part of a typical fairy tale. Symbolism is also a resource applied to these stories as a way to represent society and its ideology in a different light, e.g., Cinderella's fairy godmother's gifts as a symbol of what a nice, hard-working girl deserves in life: comfort and happiness.

The fifth and last aspect of a fairy tale is the correlation between the supernatural and the wonder within the story, which is why they were also referred to as "wonder tales". Fairies, for example, were something to be feared in mythology, until fairy tales began to portray them as kind and beautiful creatures who help those who behave properly. Talking animals and pumpkins turned to carriages are resources used to amaze children into obeying society's rules so they can pursue that wonderful happy ending.

These five characteristics are the basis for writing a traditional fairy tale, according to Warner (2018). The narrative structure and language are fundamental in creating the atmosphere necessary to amaze the reader. As much as authors throughout the centuries have reinvented these tales, they are still based on that structure.

Thus, a fairy tale is composed of specific aspects in structure and language and the dominant ideology in a certain time period. As time goes by, societies evolve and fairy tales

along with them; new versions are concocted to fit into a particular context. Now, fairy tales are adapted into books, movies, television shows, songs, games or comic books as the entertainment industry expands and takes over childhoods. Children are now, more than ever, being constantly exposed to these new formats, and the stories and values they learn from the media they consume stay with them. In that way, fairy tales stay relevant to this day and age.

2.3 Contemporary Reinvention and Subversion

As it has been discussed hitherto, Fairy Tales went through a long process in which they gradually became stories for children. They also went from enforcing ideology to subversing it. The great writers were now using the fairy tale structure to reimagine and, sometimes, contradict societal norms. Thus, the genre became a path to exposing one's true ideals, especially if they were contrary to current dominant ideologies. Authors such as Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde, who are now considered classics, were already using the structure of the genre in order to portray issues within the society of their time. Oscar Wilde, a known socialist, believed that society should not be focused on productivity and conformity with the status quo. According to Sue (1992):

> In his fairy tales, Wilde uses imagery - verbal abstractions - to again turn people's thoughts in another, higher direction. Those protagonists in the fairy tales who would seem to achieve Wilde's idea of self-fulfillment usually reach a point when they cease doing what is expected and begin to listen to the promptings of their own selves. Action becomes useful as a means to an end, not in any way the end itself. Wilde challenged a society dependent upon conformity and rule-following. (SUE, 1992, p. 12)

As a result of Wilde's ideals, his fairy tales reflect on the pointlessness of capitalist ideals compared to one's ability to imagine and break free from social constraints. Stories like the tales present in the books "The Happy Prince and Other Tales" and "A House of Pomegranates" subvert the ideology imposed on society and entice readers to perceive the exploration they have been enduring. For instance, in "The Happy Prince", the values upheld in the story are compassion and love rather than duty and imposed behavior, as Sue (1992) puts it:

> The Prince literally gives himself up to relieve suffering, not out of a sense of duty but from compassion. His heart breaks from real love of the Sparrow, not from desire. His imagination has been freed of the narrow expectations and petty desires of the court, allowing him to see, hear, and feel the world around him for the

first time. The disintegration of the physical self is prompted by the interior self's struggle to free the imagination, to reach beyond the physical limitations of the body, of the baggage of learned behaviors and opinions, of the tyranny even of words. (SUE, 1992, p. 26)

Consequently, the story - just as his other fairy tales - conveys values that stray from the norm of his time, and in doing so, he uses the genre for subversion. In a similar way, Charles Dickens also conveyed his wish for social change through his words. His tales were written as an imagination of a different society, with less moral constraint and more space for imagination and freedom. Ostry (1998) evokes that:

Dickens used fairy tale images of monsters and fairies, of wildernesses and homes, to promote his views on the need to foster humanity in the home and in society. [...] the Christmas books are the best examples of Dickens's ideology of fancy and the home, especially the poor home. Dickens tried to model the poor home on the ideal middle-class home, revealing his ambivalence about class. (OSTRY, 1998, p. 5)

To exemplify this, his Christmas-themed stories were full of references to social issues, the most famous tale being "A Christmas Carol" (1843), and Ostry (1998) confirms this:

In A Christmas Carol, Scrooge sees the spirits of what are, perhaps, "guilty governments" (23) floating about, condemned to bewail their previous neglect of the poor. The Christmas books feature cruel, greedy employers such as Scrooge, and Tackelton in The Cricket of the Hearth, who stand for the cruelty of the businessman who cares only for profits and not for his workers. Even the dolls in The Cricket of the Hearth are divided into classes by the materials with which they are made (OSTRY, 1998, p. 159)

Thus, Dickens' Christmas tales are a representation of societal problems and people's indignations, therefore making them subversive texts. Both him and Wilde used the genre's structures to build realistic stories with controversial moral lessons. That change in purpose made way for authors in the twentieth century who reimagined the stories and reinvented the genre. Especially after World War II, fairy tales started to take stands against the "abusive treatment of children and the repressive methods of sexual pedagogy" (ZIPES, 2006, p. 170). The "fantastic" had become a way to protect children's imagination from the ever growing "rationalization of culture, work and family life in Western society" (ZIPES, 2006, p. 170).

The "fantastic" is a concept also addressed by Todorov (2014), when he mentions a text's ability to amaze; it is an umbrella term in which fairy tales are included. According to him, the fantastic is "the uncertainty between what's real and what's imaginary" (TODOROV,

2014, p. 21, tradução nossa). That is exactly how we perceive fairy tales as children: we wonder if magic and supernatural creatures are real because the moral dilemmas faced by the characters are.

The author also specifies three functions of the fantastic; first of all, it evokes a particular effect on the reader, such as terror or suspense. Secondly, it allows for an interesting organization of the text structure. Thirdly, it shows a universe that does not exist outside of the text (TODOROV, 2014). In other words, the fantastic is a story told within a strange universe, in a particularly suspenseful tone, which makes for an intriguing textual structure.

When comparing Todorov's arguments to movies and television shows with scripts based on fairy tales, it becomes clear that the fantastic is an essential element to the telling of fairy tales in this different format. Having become more compelling when developed on a screen, a challenge arose for authors who wished to write any kind of literature towards the end of the twentieth century: how could one transform stories into something interesting enough to catch the attention of an audience while also promoting awareness regarding societal issues? One way, it seemed, would be to reimagine old concepts with new perspectives; that is, to draw from content written during previous literary contexts and subvert the stories to accommodate contemporary values.

When considering the adjective "subversive" as "trying or likely to destroy or damage a government or political system by attacking it secretly or indirectly" (OXFORD LEARNER'S DICTIONARY, 2021), it seems that subversive literature indeed possesses the tools to attract attention. Going against the tide to write a text that defies the norm put authors in an innovative position, in which they could transform narratives created to reinforce societal values into gripping stories about current issues and the human condition. Which is exactly what English author Angela Carter did at the end of the twentieth century.

3. The importance of Feminism in Angela Carter's literary production

During the 1970's, authors began to write about gender and diversity in a way that exposed the social problems of their time. In order to denounce sexism, female authors used their platforms to write about gender inequality and female sexuality. And while it did not exactly begin then, feminist writing started to go deeper into societal issues than it had before, and it continues to grow and expand until now. After the 1970s, feminism expanded and

began to include groups other than cisgender heterosexual white women and their issues (HEMMINGS, 2009).

During that time, it became clear that women should be represented more often and more significantly in literature, and that representation should be analyzed and criticized as to generate discussion regarding the woman as both reader and author. The language and the characters in a story should include feminine and feminist aspects, in order to properly portray the gender, in a way that had been rarely done before - even less in the texts considered classic (BELLIN, 2011).

Following this line of thinking, Elaine Showalter introduced the concept of "gynocritics", a branch of literary criticism that focuses on the work of female authors and their representation of women. As she explains in the essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics", the idea is that the obsession with male literature is set aside in order to analyze literature written by women, to women, representing women:

> In contrast to this angry or loving fixation on male literature, the programme of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture. (SHOWALTER, 1979, p. 217)

Showalter (1979) was concerned that even though feminist critique already existed, it could get lost in its Marxist and structuralist tendencies and neglect women's experiences. She states: "The experience of woman can easily disappear, become mute, invalid and invisible, lost in the diagrams of the structuralist or the class conflict of the Marxists." (SHOWALTER, 1979), poiting out that feminist criticism needs to be focused on actual female representation. She strode for the protagonism of female authors, characters and readers, and in the same way, for the focus on these questions above all others. What Showalter defended was the originality and independence of feminist criticism: "The task of feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our scepticism and our vision.", i. e., to find ways in which to break from the manners with which to analyze male perspectives and dive into female and feminist points of view.

Consequently, it is possible to perceive how female written literature was at a period of self-discovery, and women were encouraged to write about their own experiences and

imaginations. To write and read about the female inner workings became easier in terms of quantity and quality of works as well as access to them. Female authors around the world were fueled by the movements occurring in society and within literature itself, making it possible for them to enter the overwhelmingly masculine world of literature.

Following this wave of female empowerment and representation, stemmed the writing of female authors in search of creating and reinventing characters and narratives in order to present actual concerns regarding real women, and not just patriarchal notions of women's experiences. At the time, there was a surge of publishers willing to accept and publish these texts, including the British publisher Virago Press, publishing feminist authors and paving the way for female authors who wished to write about their disquietudes regarding the female condition. At the center of all of that was the founder of Virago Press, Carmen Callil, who was also a writer and created the publisher "To break a silence, to make women's voices heard, to tell women's stories, my story and theirs." (CALLIL, 2021 apud WHEATLEY, 2021).

That was the environment from which English author Angela Carter's books were published. Carter became known for several of her works, including her book of reimagined fairy tales, "The Bloody Chamber and other stories" (1979), in which she explores traits of the female psyche as well as empowerment and sexuality.

The book was released at a time when feminists took to the streets to demand equality of the genders and sexual liberation. In England, the British Women's Liberation Movement (BWLM), inspired by the rise of feminism in western cultures in the 1970's, stemmed from socialist and marxist groups who believed that despite the achievement of women's right to vote, equality was still a distant concept and progress was coming at a glacial pace.

It is in that context that Carter writes and publishes "The Bloody Chamber and other stories". And just as feminism influenced her life experiences, it inspired her writing. She transformed classic fairy tales like "Beauty and the Beast", "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Story of Blue Beard" to subvert patriarchal ideology and to offer an insight into the female perspective and sexuality. As gruesome as some of the stories in the book may be, they showcase an understanding of women's fears and strengths in a way that the classic fairy tales did not, which is why she considers them to be new stories beginning in the content from the original tales and turning into something else entirely (HAFFENDEN, 1985 apud ARIKAN, 2016). When reading the first tale in her book, it is already possible to see how her feminist writing empowers women:

> Angela Carter produces professionally successful women who are talented and independent. The first wife of Marquis is a talented Opera singer who is successful in career and she is capable of living on her own. The second wife was a passionate model for a famous symbolist artist. The third wife was the Romanian Countess of high fashion. The newly married young girl is efficient in playing piano. Angela Carter displays the importance of education to women as it makes them strong and high spirited. (PRIYANKA, 2019, p. 1066)

From that small description of only a piece of the plot, it is possible to ascertain that the story is quite different from the original and, furthermore, it fits perfectly into the feminist writing that gynocritics set out to analyze - as it was mentioned before: literature written by women, to women, representing women. Clearly, Carter is diving deep into traditional fairy tale structures in order to identify and expose the sexism in them, and then she uses the genre to completely stray from that in order to not only empower women, but also break with gender stereotypes:

> By challenging the archetypal characters and stereotypical female and male figures, Carter re-examines the themes of marriage, sexuality, power relations between females and males, gender roles, and female liberty. Standing against the oppression by males, she announces the liberation of females in fairy tales. (ARIKAN, 2016, p. 118)

According to Arikan (2016) and Priyanka (2019), Angela Carter breaks from the fairy tale mold to introduce gender equality and female empowerment into this familiar setting. Furthermore, while the classic tales exemplified behaviors to be embodied by the average citizen, Carter's narrative confronted the assumptions and impositions embedded in the role of western woman by presenting female characters who broke free of stereotypes and released their "inner wild woman".

However, Carter's writing was not well received in the feminist circles of her time. Patricia Duncker, for instance, talked about Carter's book as a perpetuation of patriarchal structures - since the fairy tale genre itself carries that legacy. According to Wardle (2019), the feminist author did not think Carter's work was of a feminist nature:

> Although Carter's stories overtly depict female sexuality and pleasure, Duncker disputes that this alone does not justify feminist interpretations of Carter's fiction. For Duncker, the very fact that these 'celebrations of erotic desire' are written within the 'straight-jacket' of the fairy tale form means that the messages they deliver are inherently patriarchal. Carter may be attempting to tell stories of female sexual liberation, but ultimately her female characters are still victims of male sexuality concerned with the 'possession, the capture, breaking and ownership of women'. (WARDLE, 2019)

Said comments were common among the femininist community, specially criticism regarding Carter's portrayal of pornography. Since it had been a prominent male concept, her depiction of female sexuality and pornography did not seem to fit into feminist ideals of the time. But what her critics might have failed to recognize is pointed out by Wardle (2019):

> Taking a well-known story and retelling it from a female perspective, as Carter does, allows us to critically view the destructive masculine sexuality which is prevalent within many traditional tales, and draw comparisons between the new interpretation and the 'original' to highlight the problematic areas of familiar fairy tales which we may not have recognised. (WARDLE, 2019)

Therefore, it becomes clear that Angela Carter's stories are not the perpetuation of patriarchal structures; they criticize the sexism inherent within the genre and inspire comparisons that point out the issues in the classic versions of the tales. That seems to be the case throughout her entire book, and it is definitely the case in the first story of the collection, "The Bloody Chamber".

4. Blue beard and his Bloody Chamber: same tale, different story

Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber and other stories" (1979) brought the classic tales from western cultures into contemporary times and turned them into more adult narratives. The feminist approach to the stories explored women's sexuality and self discoveries in a way that might encourage one to reconsider the original tales and how female characters were portrayed. Within the book, the stories are all based on one or another familiar tale, but all of them showcase stories of female protagonism and empowerment. The first tale, "The Bloody Chamber", is an interesting take on the classic, if obscure, "The Story of Blue Beard" (1895). Although, at the example of various tales, it's origin is unknown, the most famous version is Charles Perrault's "*La Barbe-Bleue*" (1697).

Both stories portray a cautionary tale involving a mysterious husband, an innocent wife and a great deal of blood, yet Carter's telling is a dive into the psyche of women, their deepest fears and desires turned into mature fairy tales. As such, it makes for an interesting analysis to compare both versions and, furthermore, explore the representation of women's deepest fears, which keep them from identifying Blue Beard as a real threat.

4.1 A cautionary tale reimagined

As Charles Perrault wrote, there once was a man with a blue beard trying to persuade one of two sisters to marry him, but none would have him. Until, one day, he took them, their mother, and a few other people from the neighborhood to one of his properties. It went so well, that the youngest sister was finally persuaded into marriage, and soon enough they were living together in his home. Suddenly, he was needed somewhere else and left a set of the house keys in the possession of his wife, telling her she could open any room she wanted but one - a closet - or she would have to face his anger. Curiosity got the best of her and she went into the room only to find the corpses of her husband's ex-wives and a pool of blood, into which the key fell; unfortunately, the wife could not remove the blood from the key, for it was magical - and her husband came home to discover his wife's transgression. However, before he could strike and add her remains to the decoration of the infamous closet, her brothers rescued her and killed Blue Beard.

In a different direction, Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" portrays the innocent bride leaving her mother's side to marry a rich strange man and live with him in a distant and isolated castle. Once there, she perceives the strange environment in his house and his behavior, but still sexually desires him and succumbs to his charms. When he leaves for a work trip to the United States of America, he entrusts her with the keys to every room in the house but she is not allowed in all of them. The room in which she later discovers the remains of his dead wives is forbidden to her, but she ignores his request and enters it anyway. Once in there, she cannot unlearn the truth in front of her: the man she married has killed his previous wives and kept their remains in that secret closet. She leaves the room, but not without dropping its key in a pool of blood, staining it. She tried to clean it, but it was a magic key and the blood just kept on bleeding. Her husband comes back unexpectedly, and even though her lover Jean-Yves - the castle's piano tuner - tries to help her, she is to face the killer husband's wrath alone. Or so she thought, because her fierce mother saves her from death by decapitation by killing Blue Beard, but not before he marked his last wife with the blood from the key. In the end, the protagonist spends the rest of her life in the company of her mother and Jean-Yves, forever marked by the horrendous experience.

In a comparison, the tales are quite similar, yet entirely different. That stems from the fact that Carter's version is told from the perspective of the main character. All of her thoughts and feelings are exposed for the reader to interpret. In doing so, she creates a sensual

and suspenseful narrative that ultimately differs from Perrault cautionary tale. In the end, she transformed what was considered a fairy tale for the control of young girls' behavior into a story for the introspection of adult women.

4.2 The escape from the Bloody Chamber: Carter's female characters and the break from sexist fairy tale roles

Throughout the entirety of "The Bloody Chamber and other stories" there is a certain wildness within the characters and plots, as if the tales in the book portray human nature without its social constraints. If the fairy tales from centuries ago were written in order to put in place a set of rules for behavior, it would seem that Angela Carter brought to the pages of her book a context in which the rules and restraints put on human nature - and especially on women - were set aside to make way for bolder and wilder characters.

These restraints and rules embedded into our brains may very well stem from the aforementioned western civilizing process and Christian values, and curiously, they can be represented in a variety of ways, especially when it comes to fiction. If, so far in history, female representation has been mostly sidelined, shallow, or problematic, Angela Carter and her contemporaries had the chance to dive further into women's experiences. As a result, more complex female characters were written into existence, and in Carter's case, they were capable of defeating the set of restraints somehow.

Considering these to be the restraints installed by the western patriarchal society, then it is relatively easy to put a name to it: sexism. It is the instrument through which a patriarchal society assures its continuity: women are considered lesser beings than men, and that means they are objectified and abused, they receive lower salaries because they are deemed less competent and the representation of them in the media is designed based on prejudice and stereotypes. That is the aspect that constructs fairy tales as narratives of courageous and intelligent men, and beautiful and innocent women, building concepts and superficial instincts inside humans throughout history since birth by way of environment, education and example.

Consequently, if sexism is so embedded into western culture, it is also embedded into people's thoughts and actions. Even the most feminist of women can feel the effects of sexism within their thoughts, regarding their role in society and their behavior. It seems like sexism is a predator living inside and around women, keeping them from being whoever they want to be.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, an American poet and psychoanalyst, proposed a theory in 1992 which might represent that struggle. In her theory, there is a natural predator inside each person's mind that keeps them from pursuing their goals:

> While the cause of much human suffering can be traced to negligent fostering, there is also within the psyche naturally an innate contra naturam aspect, an "against nature" force. The contra naturam aspect opposes the positive: it is against development, against harmony, and against the wild. It is a derisive and murderous antagonist that is born into us, and even with the best parental nurture the intruder's sole assignment is to attempt to turn all crossroads into closed roads. (ESTÉS, 1992, p. 32)

Then, if there is an aspect of our minds that prevents us from truly becoming free and comfortable within ourselves, causing doubt and insecurities regarding our actions, it is only logical that we, as humans - and especially, as women -, reject that aspect and work to overcome it. That is what Estés evokes in "Women that Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype" - the representation of women identifying and escaping a natural predator in tales and myths. She points out that women's natural predator can often be perceived as a male figure; since men's oppression of women dates back centuries, the male figure can certainly be perceived as restraining, and therefore, used by a woman's subconscious to represent this intangible concept of the "natural predator". Consequently this figure could represent the sexism that has been embedded into women's thoughts and actions. More specifically, this predator can be represented by the villain in the tale "The Story of Blue Beard".

This man that imprisons and murders his wives is a symbol that may very well be compared to a psychological trait that keeps women from being completely themselves: sexist standards. Perrault's version of the killer husband is similar to Carter's, but the bride and her experiences differ. On one side, Perrault's bride is the classic "damsel in distress", who is lured into a dangerous marriage only to be saved by her brothers. She has no deeper personality traits than her innocence and the loss of it as she learns a lesson on caution. On the other hand, Carter's character is the protagonist; the story is told from her perspective, which shows a deeper understanding of her actions and portrays her as a round[2] character, with real motives and concerns. Unlike the stereotypical female characters featured in classic fairy tales, Carter's main female characters are curious instead of innocent and brave instead of helpless.

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[2]Round characters are complex and able to carry out emotion, contradiction and change (FORSTER, 2002)

While the French, German and French-Slavic versions of Blue Beard all similarly portray the killer husband as the oppressive figure and his wife as the helpless young woman to be saved by her brothers, Estés considers they can still represent a woman's struggle against her *contra naturam* aspect. She claims the brothers can signify something else:

> The young woman summons her psychic brothers. What do these represent in a woman's psyche? They are the more muscled, more naturally aggressive propellants of the psyche. They represent the force within a woman which can act when it is time to kill off malignant impulses. Although this attribute is here portrayed by the male gender, it can be portrayed by either gender—and by other things which are genderless, such as the mountain which snaps shut on the intruder, the sun which descends for an instant to bum the marauder to a crisp. (ESTÉS, 1992, p. 46)

So it seems "The Story of Blue Beard" (1895) can be a tale which represents a woman's journey into becoming aware and self-sufficient, by learning from her mistakes and getting in touch with her inner strength. So how is that represented in "The Bloody Chamber"? It would appear that a woman's force can be represented by female characters indeed, and in this feminist version, the above-mentioned journey is much more explored and detailed within the story.

In the beginning of the story, the unnamed bride feels a loss in her relationship with her mother when she gets married, thinking "[...] I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on my finger, I had, in some way, ceased to be her child in becoming his wife." (p. 5), indicating that she had to abandon her previous life in order to assume the singular role of wife. "Into marriage, into exile; I sensed it, I knew it--that, henceforth, I would always be lonely." (p. 12); already, it seems the character is powerless in the face of her husband, the predator, keeping her from being herself. The distancing from her mother can represent that by surrendering to Blue Beard - the predator and the very representation of sexism - she is deprived from her origins and her sense of self. Throughout the text she seems to have been close with her mother, and she always made clear that her mother is a symbol of strength and helped her build who she is and her own sense of courage - which is why this separation can mean a parting of ways with her sense of self.

As with any fairy tale, the man is surrounded by attractive qualities: in this case, wealth and even a castle, which the main character describes as: " [...] that magic place, the fairy castle whose walls were made of foam, that legendary habitation in which he had been born.". Seemingly, his good qualities would amount to a classic "happily ever after", and the place in which they would live should only bring happiness and comfort. Ironically, his wife

never once feels comfortable inside the mansion, as if her own instincts kept her in check against the predator. If his childhood home can depict a picture of his own personality, then her expectations are of a magical "happily ever after" indeed; if she followed society's rules into becoming nothing more than a shallow lady of the house, she would be happy.

While on the journey to the castle, the protagonist ponders on her husband's previous companions. Women who seemed passionate and free until they married the bearded man and were erased from existence by this powerful force that he is. Estés (1992) mentions: "The problem posed in the Blue Beard tale is that rather than empowering the light of the young feminine forces of the psyche, he is instead filled with hatred and desires to kill the lights of the psyche." (ESTÉS, 1992, p. 36), which can explain why these previous women were extinguished; and perhaps they are a warning of what can happen when one succumbs to the predator, i.e., what happens when a woman's natural instincts and personality are suppressed. Sometimes it can be a literal death from a violent sexist male figure, other times it can mean the death of a woman's creativity and freedom.

Another sign of danger could be the presence of the color red throughout the beginning of the story, as if a prelude to the blood that the woman would never free herself from. The inside of the box containing the engagement ring was "lined with crimson velvet" (p. 8), she mentions the crowd at a theater "parted like the Red Sea to let us through" (p. 10), they sat in "red velvet armchairs" (p. 10), but the most explicit warning might have been one of his gifts to her: "His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat" (p. 11). The blood represented as a chokehold, the mention of a slit throat, and even her comparison of the jewels with her own blood are ironic, considering that she would later discover his thirst for it. It seems that her repeated mention and emphasis on the color could mean she already senses that this is not a promising situation: following her life's course without actually steering the wheel by succumbing to the persuasive yet dangerous man.

When she arrives at the property, she is immediately met with uncomfortable situations, as if the house itself rejects her nature. She meets the housekeeper, who seems to be the home's true authority and a threat to her own; she has her sexual desire initially denied by her husband, who must attend to other responsibilities; and her one true passion besides her husband - music - is unreachable, since the piano is out of tune. It is as if the house, a representation of his personality - since it was his childhood home, besides being isolated and

surrounded in mystery -, is trying to suppress her passions and self-esteem, just as he apparently did to the previous women in his life.

Then, she finds his library, where some of the books portrayed pornographic images. Not only pornographic, but pictures of women in positions of submission and violence, the latter being too graphic for her, as she describes only the title but not the image - "Immolation of the wives of the Sultan" (p. 20). This, of course could be another warning about his nature; her "insight", as Estés (1992) mentions: an instinct to interpret and act accordingly to situations, should make her able to interpret it as a sign of the husband's intentions. However, the patriarchal notions inside her keep the main character from being aware of the surrounding danger; if only she were as clever or brave as the male figures in most classic fairy tales.

The reason for her ignorance in the face of clear signs of danger can be a combination of his own mechanisms to prevent her knowing better, - wealth, charm, power, which can be considered male privileges - and western values regarding women: they should be naive, innocent and ready to dedicate their lives to the service of men, regardless of their own feelings or opinions about them. And, as a consequence, it is more difficult to develop better instincts and insight to perceive the dangerous threat before it is too late.

During the nuptial consummation, the room is decorated with mirrors and white lilies as if reflecting her innocence and virginity back to her. She earlier describes the lilies in a unusual way:

> [...] his white, heavy flesh that had too much in common with the armfuls of arum lilies that filled my bedroom in great glass jars, those undertakers' lilies with the heavy pollen that powders your fingers as if you had dipped them in turmeric. The lilies I always associate with him; that are white. And stain you. (p. 7)

The association of him and the lilies and the mention that lilies can stain you can lead a reader to believe the protagonist, in some level of her conscience or subconscious, knows she is in danger of being metaphorically stained by this man, which indeed happens - quite literally, as well - in the end. Furthermore, mentioning the flowers as "undertaker's lilies" is far too suggestive of the imminent threat of demise apparently unbeknownst to her. Similarly, she compares the room full of lilies with an "embalming parlour" (p. 21), and later on, just before she falls asleep, she sees the lilies and how "the thick glass distorted their fat stems so they looked like arms, dismembered arms, drifting drowned in greenish water" (p. 28). Then, if she is aware of the danger, to a certain point, she can prevent her path leading down a destructive ending, or at the very least, follow the path yet change the ending.

While they are having sex, he makes her wear the choker full of rubies, dominating her, as his taste in literature would indicate he enjoys. He even kisses the rubies before kissing her mouth, showing how the dominance he has over his wife might be more attractive to him than the actual woman. And, at the end of the scene, she describes the act of penetration while surrounded by mirrors: "A dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides while the mewing gulls swung on invisible trapezes in the empty air outside." (p. 21). The choice of the word "impaled" is dubious, considering the husband's ultimate desire is her death. Again, her instincts are there, even if dormant, to warn her against the dangers of being led into a life of patriarchal domination, as if the predator and her true self are clashing in her mind.

Later, he must leave the country for work and entrusts her with the set of keys corresponding to all of the rooms in the castle. She is allowed to use all of them and enter any room she'd like, except for one. One of the keys belongs to a room that is, according to him, his "one secret" from her, and she is not to use it, making it clear that the house is not partly hers, as one would imagine. She can roam the house because he allows it, which means she is not his equal, and could even be considered just another of the many riches within the walls of the castle, all belonging to him. This could be a comparison to living her life as a so-called "trophy wife": she is there to look beautiful and satisfy her husband, and nothing more; however, that is not the case in Carter's tale.

Soon after the bearded man leaves, she contemplates her situation while laying in bed, making this reflection:

> I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him. And he disgusted me. Were there jewels enough in all his safes to recompense me for this predicament? Did all that castle hold enough riches to recompense me for the company of the libertine with whom I must share it? And what, precisely, was the nature of my desirous dread for this mysterious being who, to show his mastery over me, had abandoned me on my wedding night? (p. 12)

It becomes clear that, in this quote, the protagonist is aware of her spouse's sinister quality, and seems to ponder on the mystery that is the master of the house. Seemingly, there is something in her instincts that keeps her questioning his intentions and actions, even though she is still attracted to him. As it has been evidenced so far, she is a curious creature who longs to explore and discover all the experiences she can, which is why it seems inevitable that she will, eventually, use the key and unveil Blue Beard's secret.

That can become a perfect metaphor for adventurous non-conforming women who seek to discover projects and opportunities and are crushed by sexist structures within

institutions. These opportunities provided by western society can, sometimes, set women up for failure, if not adapted to include women in adequate ways.

Once the bearded man is away, the woman is drawn to the piano, and after she discovers it has been tuned, it is with great joy that she goes to it and spends hours enthralled in music. Afterwards, she thanks the piano-tuner and he asks if he could be allowed to hear her play sometimes, to which she agreed. She seems more at ease with this man she's known for a few moments than with the man she married, as if this man could be the representation of her true self and her passions - in this case, music. Consequently, she builds more chemistry with someone who symbolizes her personality than with the husband who believes he owns her and can shape her according to his own liking.

Then, the lonely newlywed calls her mother, and finds herself surprisingly in tears when hearing her voice. She assured her that everything was perfect, trying to soothe a mother's worries. Here, it seems like she demonstrates more clearly her fears of not belonging in this current situation, calling the one nurturing presence in her life and instantly pouring out emotions without being able to admit to them.

Perhaps that could be the first cry for help as it dawns on her that she is being suffocated by this predator that exiled her from her previous life and demands that she adapt to his own. The nurturing female figure is a classic trait of fairy tales, yet here she is portrayed not only as the loving mother but also possibly as the knight in shining armor, a last resort to save the woman from the predator who would deprive her of her freedom and from herself.

After talking to her mother, the desire to uncover the mysteries behind Blue Beard overwhelms the central character and she decides to explore the house using the keys he provided for her. Even though she finds a drawer containing love letters from his previous significant others, it is not what lies beneath the husband's surface. A moment after finding the file labeled "Personal" containing the letters, she drops the set of keys and picks up the one which was forbidden: the key to his secret little closet.

As she approaches the room, there is no fear, only determination, which can indicate that she already expected something bad, even if subconsciously, through instincts she might have been taught to ignore or suppress by a patriarchal society. However, they seem to be surfacing as she enters the room to find objects of torture and still ventures inside: "Until that moment, this spoiled child did not know she had inherited nerves and a will from the mother who had defied the yellow outlaws of Indo-China; My mother's spirit drove me on, into that dreadful place, in a cold ecstasy to know the very worst" (p. 37).

The quote demonstrates that, first of all, the protagonist is not as innocent and fragile as your typical fairy tale leading lady would be, and secondly, the nurturing figure of the mother is also not portrayed as it usually appears in the classic stories. The subversion of these characters becomes more than clear: the protagonist is not the innocent fragile child bride at all; she is the clever hero in search of an adventure that leads to the discovery of the villain's evil doings. Furthermore, the nurturing figure of the mother, caring and loving as ever, is also courageous and protective, as the aforementioned figure of the knight in shining armor. And as it happens, those are exactly the roles played out at the end of the story.

In the climax of the narrative, the woman finds the remains of the killer husband's previous wives, set up as trophies or works of art, and one of them was hidden inside a coffin along with her blood still fresh, which spilled through the room and set off the girl's dread for her own life. The dread of becoming one of the dead wives, or alternatively, the women who succumbed to the impositions made by a society built to "tame" women, and become a lifeless shell herself.

She made to escape, but not before she picked up the key she had dropped in shock. It was now covered in blood, so she used a handkerchief to get a hold of it. And then she ran to the safest room she could think of: her music room. There she was free to be herself and express her thoughts and feelings through song, and there she would call her saviour - the mother. Running to the familiar symbols of her womanhood, her personality represented in the piano and her strength represented in her mother. These symbols are an escape from the masculine toxicity she encountered inside the house formerly known as Castle of Murder. In fact, when she hears this name out of the piano-tuner's mouth, she finally recognizes that she instinctively knew what awaited her in the marriage: "[...] in my heart, I'd always known its lord would be the death of me" (p. 45).

Once in the piano room, she could not reach her mother, for the lines were dead, and so she decided to play the piano, in order to calm herself. That is when the piano-tuner - Jean-Yves - arrives. However, when her husband arrives at the door of the castle, she sends Jean-Yves away. She tried to clean the blood off the key but the stain would not disappear, and that is how she delivers it to her husband, when he vehemently asked for it, and he passed the stain on the key onto his wife's forehead. And there it was, the stain she predicted when admiring the white lilies, to remain on her face for the rest of her life, as if a reminder of how a lifetime spent enduring the sexism inherent in woman's life and mind can stain a woman.

Before Blue Beard can kill her, however, he tells her to bathe and get dressed for the occasion, and then to wait for him in the music room. There she finds Jean-Yves, who did not abandon her and stayed to, at least, comfort her before her time came. In that moment, he is not only a piano-tuner to her; he is now her lover: "My lover kissed me, he took my hand. He would come with me if I would lead him." (p. 53). If Carter had already established that she subverted the ideal of the innocent bride into the representation of a real woman, this is the emphasis of it: the fact that she has taken a lover proves she stands to represent a real person. with desires and feelings. He is there for her in her hour of need, not to mention his love for music, and so she develops feelings for this man. A man who is not there to control or subjugate her but only to admire and comfort her, proving she actually desires to live freely and not surrounded by a controlling setting.

Then, just as she prepares to face her husband and thinks of her mother's courage to evoke her own, her lover hears hoofbeats and sees her knight in shining armor coming to her rescue. Her mother appears moments later, just as Blue Beard is about to decapitate her daughter, and saves her by killing him. When she spots her mother earlier, she thinks "When I thought of courage, I thought of my mother." (p. 53), and that is all the more proof that the representation of women in the tale is, unlike in the classic fairy tales, empowering of women. They too can be the saviors, the protectors, the adventurous or the courageous if they are so inclined.

The tale ends with the protagonist achieving her "happily ever after", by spending the rest of her life with her mother and Jean-Yves, the representations of her freedom from the stereotypes and the constraints that lived not only in the environment she inhabited but also in her own mind - the predator, looming over every decision, as to keep her from being truly happy, and truly herself.

When Angela Carter wrote her version of "The story of Blue Beard", she added more personality and depth to the characters - mainly, the innocent bride - to build a deeply sexual and suspenseful narrative. In her tale, there is a sexual tension between the protagonist and her husband, which leads to an interest, from her part, regarding him and his matters. Then, her curiosity takes her on a journey to discover violent pornography and, later on, a room full of blood and dead wives. However, she is not rescued and avenged by her brothers, but by her mother, who appears as a reinvention of the classic fairy tale symbol: the knight in shining armor.

Carter's storytelling dwells on the female psyche and represents the struggle of the western woman against the constraints of sexism. The impositions put in place in our society to keep women from achieving complete independence, intelligence and self awareness are repeatedly exposed in literature, and it is no different with fairy tales.

As it has been discussed so far, the role of the good man in a fairy tale is to be clever, brave and dominant, whilst the good woman is portrayed, more often than not, as nurturing, beautiful and innocent. These submissive traits are a way to impose on women a sexist structure within a patriarchal society, and that seems to be very well represented by Angela Carter's narrative.

The innocent bride, however, is not rescued by the brave strong men this time around. Furthermore, she is curious, tenacious and resourceful in this story; all qualities a female character should not incorporate in a fairy tale. In addition, the mother figure, which should be a nurturing but harmless one, turns into the hero and savior of the story, yielding the sword that slays the villain. Thus, it seems this could be a tale about the overcoming of the patriarchal control over female behavior, and it could represent a female protagonist who struggles with the fatal threat of sexism, represented by the killer husband, and achieves victory - not, however, without consequences.

5. Conclusion

When discussing fairy tales, it becomes difficult to stay away from the familiarity they evoke. With the familiar comes the feeling of nostalgia, and so it can become challenging to question these stories and their roles in twenty-first century literature. However, it is necessary to question and ponder on texts that influence behavior and moral values within society.

In questioning Charles Perrault's fairy tale "The Story of Blue Beard" (1895), Angela Carter brought to the table a variety of issues that exist within the fairy tale structure and culture. She defied the roles assigned to women in order to tame their nature by writing a story that represents the gender with qualities that would be considered to be both feminine and masculine. However, these qualities are really just part of human nature and, therefore, should not be considered a trait of just one or another gender. Gender studies have been working on that very issue: how to dissociate stereotypical roles from gender or biological sex. It has been common knowledge for some time that personality traits and values are not

inherent to one or another gender or biological sex, because it is clear that women are more than capable of being curious, intelligent and courageous just as a male counterpart can be. In the same way, men can be sensitive, nurturing and, unfortunately, even helpless.

As for the actual structure of the fairy tale, the English author mostly follows Warner's (2018) and Todorov's (2014) notions of a fairy tale, even if in a different manner than the traditional modern fairy tale. When considering Warner's (2018) structure, although Carter's story portrays a moral lesson, it would definitely not be a lesson taught by a traditional fairy tale - it is one of female empowerment, independence and self-discovery. Furthermore, the story breaks from the mold in the sense that it is not a short narrative, but it is still a short story - definitely much shorter than a novel. The familiarity is there, since it is based on a classic tale, and there is no indication of a specific year or century in which the story takes place. As mentioned before, the fairy tale language is present as well - the fairy castle, Blue Beard as the monster, and the magic key, for instance. However, the correlation between the supernatural and the wonder is not exactly what it should be; there are a few supernatural elements but the wonder seems hard to find, as it is a more suspenseful story than anything, which brings the text closer to Todorov's (2014) ideas for a wonder tale. Besides possessing that horror atmosphere, Blue Beard's castle is a fictional place - all in accordance with Todorov (2014). In the same way, Carter's writing makes for an interesting textual structure - definitely if one considers the foreshadowing, the use of symbols, and most importantly, the subversion.

Interestingly enough, Angela Carter tells a fairy tale containing all the most important aspects of a traditional version of the genre with the twist of subversing the story to accomodate feminist ideals. So, regardless of what the feminists of her time thought about her, she was indeed doing what "gynocritics" considered as feminist writing: texts written by a woman, about the female condition, for female readers to identify with. So even if society reinforces the stereotypes and structure in fairy tales as an instrument of control in order to keep sexist structures in place, Carter shows there is hope after all. Feminist writers are still at work trying to reverse these values and stress the importance of equality in the media. Movies like Frozen (2013), Moana (2016) and Captain Marvel (2019) can reassure young girls of their worth and the endless possibilities they are entitled to have. And Carter herself took a stand in the name of equality over 40 years ago with her writing.

If in Perrault's tale the damsel in distress relies on her brothers - the bold and protective figures in her life -, then it can signify to an entire demographic of young girls that

they must rely on someone - and, most likely, a man - to rescue them from situations they might not perceive as dangerous until it is too late. On the other hand, Carter's protagonist is no damsel in distress, as she perceives the threat she is facing, even if subconsciously. She possesses traits like no fairy tale princess should have, but real women do: sexual desire, curiosity, intelligence and resourcefulness. And even though the tale is not for children, it can function as an eye-opener to women who were once influenced by the original versions of the tales and are now in need of complex and empowering representation.

And that is how "The Bloody Chamber" confronts patriarchal gender roles and overcomes the sexist structures of fairy tales to present a subversive story with in-depth female characters: through the complex representation of women, the protagonist's perspective, the foreshadowing and symbolism throughout the story, she uses the very structure of the genre to subverse it. After one contextualizes the origins of fairy tales and what they transformed into - a tool for behavior inforcement -, it becomes easier to identify the ways in which that genre can be subverted - in Carter's case, the female perspective and the complexity of the character - and, along with that process, to identify the ways in which the structure can be used to reinforce gender roles and sexist notions into young women's behavior. Consequently, by analyzing the English author's tale and how she uses subversion to create such an empowering story, it was possible to understand how it resignifies female representation by having a female protagonist that actually possesses human qualities - and not just stereotypical qualities - and is able to escape gender roles and resist the patriarchal pressure to succumb to them.

As for the hero of Carter's narrative, she can represent that women can also be a savior or the proverbial "knight in shining armor". The mother in the story is a side character yet is always mentioned by the bride and seems to be a large part of her "previous" life. The fact that her mother saves her proves that, first of all, there can be strong and empowered female representation where they can be the brave hero and teach young girls about courage and taking a stand for yourself. Secondly, it proves that a woman must turn to her true self - the version of her where she can be a complex individual with multiple qualities - in order to break free from the torment and prejudice present in society. In summary, a woman can free herself from the "predator" in her brain telling her to embody the role society has built for her, and live according to her own personality and qualities. She can be, in a word, wild.

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