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GENDER STEREOTYPES IN QUESTION: ANGELA CARTER'S
EXPLORATION OF THE VICTIM, THE VILLAIN AND THE
SAVIOUR IN *THE BLOODY CHAMBER*

Marion Marchetti

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UNIL | Université de Lausanne

Faculty of Arts

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EXPLORATION OF THE VICTIM, THE VILLAIN AND THE
SAVIOUR IN *THE BLOODY CHAMBER***

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Introduction

Fairy tales leave an indelible mark on children's minds and some argue that they deeply shape their representations of the world during their entire lives. While the earliest written versions of fairy tales 'solicited an adult audience' (Warner 1994: xvii), they mainly address children since the XVIIIth century. As a result of the infantilization and moralization of the genre, especially during the Victorian period, the moral world of the fairy tale has tended to become manichean, relying on stereotypes of evil queens, passive princesses and heroic saviours. Now that 'the Disney Corporation has literally commercialized the classical fairy tale as its own trademark' (Zipes 2015: xxxii), the usual repartition of the functions of victim, saviour and villain amongst male and female characters in mainstream versions of tales tends to offer children a narrow conception of gender, based on either one stereotype or the other. This process was further reinforced by critical approaches in the XXth century that tended to reify the genre still further (fairy tale types in folkloristics, formalism, and feminism). In the second half of the XXth century, however, many women writers rewrote the most popular stories from a feminist standpoint, including Angela Carter (1940-1992). After her translation of Perrault's *Contes* for children in *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977), Carter's rewritings of fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) make his ironic and challenging reflexions about gender roles and representations explicit, which opens new perspectives with regards to these representations. Indeed, 'Perrault belonged to a circle of mostly female writers who used the *conte de fées* as a subtly ironic and erudite game in the ancient regime salons to address social and gender issues (in a veiled and subtly humorous fashion) and to debate the role of art and literature' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 30). As Marc Escola argues about Charles Perrault's *Contes*, 'les moralités n'induisent [...] en rien une lecture moralisante, mais un jeu distancé – un jeu de la lecture lettrée avec elle-même et non pas directement de la morale avec la fiction' (Escola 124). Angela Carter's rewritings underline his tales' false simplicity and draw attention on their deeper meaning and challenges (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 30). In 'The Bloody Chamber', 'The Lady of the House of Love', 'The Werewolf', 'The Company of Wolves' and 'Wolf-Alice', male and female characters share, reverse, evolve into and, above all, question the different roles that are usually gendered in a binary fashion: in our perception of traditional fairy tales, the prey is conventionally female, while the predator is usually male, as in the Little Red Riding Hood, to give one paradigmatic example. Challenging these critical commonplaces about the genre (based on cultural stereotypes and simplified versions of fairy tales for children), Carter's rewritings therefore deconstruct the dichotomies between subject and object, passive and active, vicious and virtuous that some critics have projected onto the

fairy-tale tradition, which is in fact much more diverse and complex than we may think. Carter's view and treatment of the fairy tale therefore puts into question Patricia Duncker's theory according to which the essence of fairy-tales consists of reproducing a 'deeply sexist psychology of the erotic' (73), which betrays an arbitrary selection in the corpus she is referring to when defining the fairy tale. In the same way, Carter's tales challenge Jones's definition according to which 'fairy tales promote marriage and the patriarchal family structure as dominant cultural institutions [and] depict roles and behaviour patterns considered socially appropriate for each gender and for each age group' (Jones 20). In addition, Carter's characters' behaviour, personality and motives complicate Vladimir Propp's structuralist definitions of the different functions that fairy-tale characters perform in his *Morphology of the Folktale*, first published in 1928 in Russia. Finally, Carter's variations on the familiar stories confront Stith Thompson's tales model (ATU) based on the different characters and motifs that he uses to define the genre, which was very popular back in the 1970s and still used today among folklorists. In this way, Carter's rewritings call into question these reductive assumptions about the fairy tale, as they experiment with the structures and stereotypes that the cultural reception as well as the critical discourses produced, thus underlining the fact that literary texts—notably Perrault's *Contes*—contradict these theories and offer a more open and complex definition of the genre anchored in a specific historical context. Thus, Angela Carter does not only respond to Perrault's original tales and their variants collected by the Grimms in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, but she also writes back to different scholarly studies by engaging with their ideas, approaches and theories in her rewritings. Thus, she puts into question the rigid categories established by theory and criticism as well as their assumptions about fairy tales giving predetermined roles to male and female characters and enforcing patriarchy. In this way, her rewritings challenge formalist theories which reduce characters to functions as well as radical feminist theories that assume that literary texts perpetuate fixed gender roles, which betrays a lack of knowledge about the history of the fairy tale and the textuality of the classical versions. Carter's tales set the record straight about the genre as they are grounded in an in-depth knowledge of the genre, and offer new definitions and alternative, dynamic and exploratory performances of gender to their readers, and even shed light on their sources against the grain of their mainstream critical reception.

Angela Carter's Life and Literary Project¹

The work of Angela Carter, born in 1940, was not limited to translation and rewriting: she was also a fairy tale scholar, wrote novels, short stories, newspaper articles and poetry, adapted some of her literary pieces for the radio and took part in television documentaries. Her early novels *Shadow Dance* (1966), *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Several Perceptions* (1968), *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and *Love* (1971) explore Gothic, fantasy and fairy tale motifs, call into question the binary oppositions associated with femininity and masculinity—including the dichotomy between victim and persecutor (Sage 18-19). Indeed, 'all "mythic versions of women" [were] suspect for Carter, even those of blameless and morally superior victim' (Horner 108). These themes and questions recur in her work. *Heroes and Villains* even explores 'the whole mystique of Otherness' and offers an ironic conclusion suggesting 'matriarchy instead of patriarchy' (Sage 18-20) with the new queen eventually claiming: 'I'll be the tiger lady and rule them with a rod of iron' (Carter 1993: 150). Indeed, Carter was wary of all self-serving myth-making, radical feminist (essentialist) ones included. This parody allowed her to 'examine how these [matriarchal myths] do not necessarily guarantee a different symbolic order but often end up reiterating phallogocentric representations of women's bodies' (Jennings 64). These questions deeply mattered to Angela Carter, who challenged the meaning of gender in both her private life and her literary career as a feminist:

I can date to that time and to some of those debates and to that sense of heightened awareness of the society around me in the summer of 1968, my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*. How that social fiction of my "femininity" was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing.

(Carter 1997c: 37-38)

This putting into question of prescribed gender roles (notably through religious myth) led her to consider that 'bodies have lost the innocence and materiality we used to attribute to them, and flesh has revealed itself as culturally conditioned, a kind of costume or disguise' (Sage 21). It also motivated her to criticise religion: 'No feminist, like me, who is proud of her sex & actively enjoys womanhood, can have anything to do with the filthy, sickly tenets of Christianity' (Dimovitz 2016: 132). Her feminist commitment appears in her literary writings, in which she challenged stereotypes and archetypal representations of women and portrayed hermaphrodite protagonists to challenge gender boundaries.

¹ This section is based on information found in Lorna, Sage. *Angela Carter*. Tavistock: Northcote House Publication, 2007.

She lived in Japan from 1969 to 1972, where she discovered the experience of appearing as the exotic Other: 'It was, for example, to be defined as a Caucasian before I was identified as a woman' (Carter 1997b: 39). She was also confronted to a deeply sexist culture that strengthened her feminist commitment: 'In Japan, I learned what it was to be a woman and became radicalised' (Carter 1982: 23). She used this topic as an inspiration for the short stories collected in *Fireworks* (1974). During her time in Tokyo, she also wrote articles for the newspaper *New Society*. After her return in England, she published the novels *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann* (1974) and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), which did not please the mainstream critics (Sage 32). Unable to live from her pen, she kept working as a journalist for *New Society* and *The Guardian*. In 1977, she published her translations of *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*; this exercise allowed her to acknowledge Perrault's progressive gender politics (as a promoter of female education and authorship on the side of the Moderns) and made her realise that his being labelled as a sexist by most contemporary anglophone scholars was a misinterpretation of his work (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 30-31):

What an unexpected treat to find that in this great Ur-collection – whence sprang the Sleeping Beauty, Puss in Boots, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Tom Thumb, all the heroes of pantomime – all these nursery tales are purposely dressed up as fables of the politics of experience. (Carter 1997b: 452)

This motivated her to rewrite his tales (and the fairy-tale tradition generally) and reproduce this calling into question of gender stereotypes in her own way: in 1979, she published them in *The Bloody Chamber*, which became her most well-known literary work. Her interest in the fairy tale as an authorless, fluid, flexible and metamorphic genre that is endlessly reinvented gave her a great sense of liberty in her rewritings:

Fairy tales [...] are [...] anonymous and genderless. [...] Ours is a highly individualised culture, with a great faith in the work of art as unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are they makers. Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. 'This is how *I* make potato soup.'

(Carter 1990: x)

Indeed, her 'potato soup' recipe did and still does challenge misconceptions about the gender politics of fairy tales, which caused 'shock waves' (Simpson viii) when it came out. Angela Carter demystified formalist, patriarchal and radical feminist representations of the fairy tale

in *The Bloody Chamber*. Indeed, the complex, evolving and fluid characters' roles challenge Vladimir Propp's and Stith Thompson's model of fairy tales since the rewritings combine, invert or exchange functions, so that the classic fairy tale figures act in unexpected ways, or suggest contradictory readings of their actions. In addition, Carter built complex female characters who ironize incarnations of both female evil and pure innocent femininity, thus challenging the patriarchal representation of women given by mainstream tales such as Disney's. In this way, she follows Gilbert's and Gubar's feminist recommendation in their 1979 study *The Madwoman in the Attic* that 'a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" [...] generated for her' (Gilbert and Gubar 812). Finally, she used irony to call into question the radical feminist myths and draws attention to the fact that they are illusory and self-flattering by showing, for instance, that 'the heroic, avenging mother is a fantasy, too, only to be expressed in the overblown language of heroic rescue' in her short story 'The Bloody Chamber' (Wanning Harries 157). While being recognised as a thought-provoking exploration of gender stereotypes today, Carter's fictional experiments did not please many feminists. For instance, Patricia Duncker reproached her with 'rewriting the tales within the straitjacket of their original structures', thus not challenging women's representations convincingly enough because of 'the infernal trap inherent in the fairy tale' (Duncker 73). This betrays Duncker's reductive understanding of the genre, her knowledge of the tradition probably relying on the 'Disneyfied' fairy tale. She was joined in her criticisms by Suzanne Kappeler and Andrea Dworkin, which amused Angela Carter very much: 'If I can get up Susanne Kappeler's nose, to say nothing of the Dworkin proboscis, then my living has not been in vain' (Gordon para. 5). Her style was similarly condemned by various critics, such as Nicci Gerrard, who considered that her rewritings were 'undecorous, overripe and mocking tales in which nothing is sacred and nothing is natural' (Gerrard 1995: 20, as cited in Cavallaro 10). Angela Carter reacted to such comments in an interview: 'I write overblown, purple, self-indulgent prose—so fucking what?' (Cavallaro 10). Later on, the critics she received regarding gender turned into very positive reviews. Sage mentions that 'in retelling these tales [Angela Carter] was deliberately drawing them out of their set shapes, out of the separate space of "children's stories" or "folk art", and into the time done caressingly and seductively' (Sage 39). After receiving the Cheltenham Prize for *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter saw her career taking a new turn. She started teaching in the United States, her earlier novels got republished and translated in most European languages. 'The experience had a transformational effect on her literary persona – she had emerged (it turned out) from the self-consciousness of the Camp sensibility

into a robust political and performative role' (Sage 40). She published the novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and the short stories collection *Black Venus* (1985), in which she continued playing with 'ready-made traditions' by adding 'voices we didn't get to hear' (Sage 44). Her last published novel, *Wise Children* (1991), explores fatherhood through a comedic deconstruction of the 'figure of the patriarch', including, as usual, magical elements in the narrative (Sage 57).

Angela Carter died of lung cancer in 1992. She remains one of the most important feminist writers of the 20th century and keeps shocking, putting into question and challenging received ideas through her work and opinions, including about the fairy tale. Her critique of gender stereotypes constitutes the key issue of her life and work, as she wrote:

It is so enormously important for women to write fiction *as* women – it is part of the slow process of decolonialising our language and our basic habits of thought. [...] it is to do with the creation of a means of expression for an infinitely greater variety of experience than has been possible therefore, to say things for which no language previously existed.

(Carter 1997c: 42)

She believed that 'all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice' and considered herself as being part of the 'demythologising business' (Carter 1997c: 38) regarding gender, narratives and theory. Not only did she call patriarchal values and formalist theories of fairy tales into question, but also radical feminist myth-making, most openly in her novel *The Passion of New Eve*. Her work as an editor celebrates women writers who refused to see themselves as victims and took their life into their own hands.

Carter's Critical and Creative Dialogue with Fairy-Tale Criticism

Angela Carter's challenging of gender roles both in these fairy tales and in her other works is almost a critical commonplace amongst the scholars cited in the bibliography. Despite Patricia Duncker's and other feminist critics' reproaches to her work being 'offensive to some sections of the women's movement,' the majority now considers that her tales usefully deconstruct binary oppositions associated with gender and reject traditional representations of femininity (Gordon 2017: para. 4). The same applies to the fact that she both revisits and redefines fairy tales in context, thus drawing attention to their historical nature and significance: she commits to 'putting new wine into old bottles, especially if the pressure of the wine makes the bottle explode' (Carter 1997c: 37). However, her literary response to and engagement with Vladimir

Propp's, Steven Swann Jones's and Stith Thompson's theories does not appear in the different analyses of her fictional work. My contribution to existing criticism therefore seeks to add this neglected aspect to the discussion regarding her treatment of fairy tales, which allows for a deeper understanding of her method of deconstructing traditional gender roles and relations, and thus of the demythologising of femininity. In addition to the conventional binary oppositions associated with male and female representations, the very notion of gender carries predefined roles. Misconceptions about the fairy tales led radical feminists to reject the genre while her approach, which redefines, complicates and transforms (putting them in motion as it were) these functions also deserves to be brought to light: it adds a further layer to her challenging of gender in literature and to her understanding of the fairy-tale genre. Finally, it is consistent with her view of literature as the working out of ideas and arguments.

From ATU Fairy-Tale Types to Carter's Challenging of Gender Stereotypes

Amongst the influential scholars who intended to define or classify the genre of fairy tale, this work mainly refers to Stith Thompson and Vladimir Propp as founders of twentieth century fairy tale formalist scholarship in the aftermath of XIXth century folkloristics. The idea is to confront their definition of the genre and system of types with Angela Carter's rewritings. Because they also rely on a fixed conception of the genre, albeit from a different standpoint, I will confront radical feminist analyses such as Patricia Duncker's and Steven Swann Jones's to Carter's literary practice in my comparisons. In contrast to these approaches, I will rely on more historicizing and text-based approaches of the fairy tale, which Carter herself can be said to have anticipated: Marina Warner's, Elizabeth Wanning Harries's and, up to a point, Jack Zipes's works. These scholars indeed combine 'feminist concerns with the interrelation between gender and genre and other conceptual approaches and methodologies' (Zipes 22), which allows for a more complete, complex and relevant understanding of the fairy tale.

Vladimir Propp's 1928 *Morphology of the Folktale* conflates the folktale and the fairy tale. Propp's approach describes the genre based on a model that distinguishes between the different steps of the action and identifies the character's 'functions' as 'those components which could replace Veselóvksij's "motifs", or Bédier's "éléments"' (20). Propp gives each function a noun that expresses the action carried out by the character, and its place in the course of the narration (21). His structuralist approach is 'preoccupied with the stable underlying form of tales', and in his point of view, functions are 'constant [...] elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled, so they constitute the fundamental

component of a tale' (Zipes 2015: 18-19). In addition to the 'villain' function, he distinguishes two types of heroes: the seeker and the victimised hero.

- Seeker: after a character has been kidnapped and disappears from the thread of the narrative, the main hero is the seeker who departs on a search for the kidnapped character (36).
- Victimised hero: the character who has been kidnapped, whose fate the narration follows. According to Propp, there are no seekers in this type of tales (36).
- Villain: this character is in conflict with the hero. 'His role is to disturb the peace of a family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm. The villain(s) may be a dragon, a devil, bandits, a witch, or a stepmother, etc' (27). They appear twice in the fairy tale: first through a sudden appearance from outside, and then disappear. According to Propp, they reappear as a person who has been looked for through the narration (84).

Vladimir Propp mentions other functions (he defines 31 different ones in total in his *Morphology of the Folktale*). Lorna Sage calls attention to the fact that Vladimir Propp's theory raised criticism regarding the roles he gives to feminine characters in his classification:

Most of Propp's examples, as Jack Zipes points out in *Don't Bet on the Prince* (1986), contain a very different pattern of signification for girls and women: 'What is praiseworthy in males [...] is rejected in females; the counterpart of the energetic, aspiring boy is the scheming, ambitious woman. [...] Women who are powerful and good are never human [...]' (Zipes 1986: 187, as cited in Sage 1998: 67)

This partly explains Carter's implicit critique of Propp's theoretical model in her rewritings. This MA thesis uses Propp's term 'function' when mentioning and analysing the three different roles (victim, saviour and villain) that constitute the basis of this comparison, even though the point of the analysis is to show how Carter uses, but also challenges and 'deconstructs' Propp's functions in her fiction.

After Propp, Stith Thompson offers another model of what he calls the 'complex tale' (21) in *The Folktale* (1951): he enumerates different characters and motifs which can be found in their narratives – amongst which he mentions the presence of 'magic and marvel' (67). In order to justify his classification, he gives examples of each element in various types of tales. According to him, 'a type is a traditional tale that has an independent existence' (415). His theory is not as strict, schematic and exclusive as Propp's model, since Thompson

specifies that these different elements appear in ‘*nearly* all complicated fairy tales’ (23, my emphasis).

- The first of his components that is relevant for this study is the ‘supernatural adversary’ that the hero must often confront in fairy tales (23). According to Thompson, this adversary can belong to the categories of ‘ogres and witches’ (35); ‘vampires and revenants’ (40); ‘Devils and Demons’ (42); or be ‘Death in person’ (45).
- He also mentions the recurrent apparition of a ‘supernatural helper’ which he divides in different groups (47): ‘supernatural spinners’ (47); ‘helpful dwarfs or fairies’ (49); ‘the grateful dead’ (50); ‘the extraordinary companions’ (53); ‘helpful animals’ (55); ‘helpful horses’ (59); and ‘helpful devil or demons’ (65).
- Thompson does not have a category for victims (or ‘victimised heroes’ according to Propp). However, he creates a group of characters named ‘lovers and married couples’ (87). According to him, in many fairy tales, ‘the winning of the wife or husband or the recovery of the mate after some disaster forms the central motivation of the whole’ (87). If magic objects or powerful helpers and adversaries appear, they are entirely subordinate to the love interest which lies at the heart of the narration’ (87, 88). This definition will be useful for the analysis of the function of victim in Angela Carter’s rewritings: three of her tales involve marriage or romantic interests, which is interdependent with the victimisation of some characters.

The other elements that Stith Thompson mentions are not relevant for my study. Jack Zipes mentions that scholars such as Torborg Lundell reproach Stith Thompson for having a sexist bias because of selecting tales about male characters at the expense of strong feminine heroines, and arbitrarily focusing on male protagonists in his study (190). The comparison between Carter’s tales and Thompson’s model will raise these gender issues and questions.

Several decades after these formalist and structuralist approaches, Steven Swann Jones gave another description of the genre. His 1995 book *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of the Imagination* defines a specific fairy tale as ‘the sum of its versions’ (4): ‘*From the coinciding events or episodes in texts that apparently tell the same basic story, a plot outline for that tale is deduced.* That plot outline is used to define that fairy tale, which is considered a discrete tale type’ (4). He mentions that the origin of the fairy tale cannot be dated nor situated: it finds its roots in oral tradition and evidence for its existence before any written records is acknowledged in almost every culture (Jones 1). This also means that fairy tales evolve and change through time: no version is admitted as the original one and different titles

can refer to the same tale (3). According to him, myths, legends and folktales all belong to folk narratives and differ in terms of the nature of their characters, namely immortal, extraordinary or ordinary protagonists; he considers that fairy tales are characterised by their magical nature, which distinguishes them from fables, novellas and jokes (8). Whereas the formalist approaches of the genre completely ignore questions regarding feminine representations, the relationship between fairy tales and gender issues remains tricky for Steven Swann Jones. He claims that fairy tales promote marriage culture as well as patriarchy and depict the appropriate behaviour each gender should adopt to fit in socially (20). He also mentions the fact that several scholars consider tales as having sexist biases (27), which is an idea that Patricia Duncker still supported in 2002 (Duncker 73) when she argued that women were encouraged to rely on others for finding motivation and solving their problems and to play passive roles, without taking initiative nor speaking their minds (Jones 65).

However, 'the literary fairy tale has taken a number of shapes in its history,' (13) as Elizabeth Wanning Harries underlines in *Twice Upon a Time* (2001), which gives a historical overview of the genre with a focus on female authors. Indeed, the earlier versions of fairy tales were written 'by women' and 'opened an opportunity for them to exercise their wit and communicate their ideas' (Warner 1994: xvi, xxiii). They even 'played with earlier romance patterns and sometimes called them into question' (Wanning 17). Likewise, Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994) confirmed the gendering of the genre and its historical variability. These feminist approaches question Patricia Duncker's interpretation of the genre that neglects the historical development of the fairy tale and relies on a selective approach that focuses on 'those tales that evince "negative" female role models; that is, heroines who are passive, submissive, and helpless' (Zipes 2015: 22).

In turn, Angela Carter defined the fairy tales with the following explanation in her introduction of *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1992):

The term 'fairy tale' is a figure of speech and we use it loosely, to describe the great mass of infinitely various narrative that was, once upon a time and still is, sometimes, passed on and disseminated through the world by word of mouth – stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them. (Carter 1990: ix)

Similarly, Marina Warner names 'fairy tales' all the stories that 'have been called by that term' (Warner 1994: xix). According to her, scholars divide fairy tales into the categories of 'folk tales (*Märchen*) [...] that are anonymous and undatable' and 'literary or "art" fairy tales (*Kunstmärchen*) [...] that are signed and dated,' even if they are complicatedly entangled in

history and all find their roots in oral tradition (Warner 2014: xxiv-xxv). Warner also mentions the existence of the term “wonder tale” [...] (*Wundermärchen*)’ that captures the fantastic quality of fairy tales (Warner 2014: xxiv). Accordingly, this MA thesis uses the term ‘fairy tale’ to refer to Charles Perrault’s and Angela Carter’s tales as primarily literary tales that nevertheless reference an oral tradition, in the awareness of their complex entanglements. Likewise, definitions of the key aspects of the genre differ from one scholar to another, and even though Marina Warner has insisted on historicizing the genre in *From the Beast to the Blonde*, she makes a tentative list of recognizable features in her 2014 book *Fairy Tale: A Very Short Introduction*, based on six characteristics (Warner 2014: xxiii-xxviii):

1. a fairy tale is a short narrative, sometimes less than a single page, sometimes running to many more (xxiii)
2. fairy tales are familiar stories, either verifiably old because they have been passed on down the generations or because the listener or reader is struck by their family resemblance to another story (xxiii)
3. the necessary presence of the past makes itself felt through combinations and presence of familiar plots and characters, devices and images; [...] fairy tales are generically recognizable even when the exact identity of the particular story is not clear’ (xxv)
4. fairy tale consists above all of acts of imagination, conveyed in a symbolic Esperanto; its building blocks include certain kinds of characters (stepmothers and princesses, elves and giants) and certain recurrent motifs (keys, apples, mirrors, rings, and toads); the symbolism comes alive and communicates meaning through imagery of strong contrasts and sensations, evoking simple, sensuous phenomena that glint and sparkle, pierce and flow, by these means striking recognition in the reader’s or listener’s body at a visceral depth (glass and forests; gold and silver; diamonds and rubies; thorns and knives; wells and tunnels) (xxvi).
5. Supernatural agency and the pleasure of wonder are interwoven in the character of fairy tales (xxvii).
6. ‘The happy ending’: Fairy tales express hope (xviii).

This definition contrasts with the formalist approaches that intend to divide fairy tales into elements of plot, characters or motifs, although it reflects the need to try and formalise the genre based on structural, thematic and generic features.

Vladimir Propp’s and Stith Thompson’s approaches, as well as Steven Swann Jones’s and Patricia Duncker’s radical feminist view of the genre constitute the main basis for

analysing and contrasting Angela Carter's rewritings, and assess the nature and implications of her variations on the familiar stories, especially in relation to the gender politics of the tales. The first chapter of this MA thesis analyses Carter's challenging deconstruction of Propp's functions in 'The Lady of the House of Love' by foregrounding the ambivalence of the characters of the Countess and the officer and their shifting roles as prey/predator. It also returns to Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant' and its paradoxical representation of the Prince and the Princess. The second chapter focuses on the three rewritings of 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge,' namely 'The Werewolf', 'The Company of Wolves' and 'Wolf-Alice' to analyse the complication of Red Riding Hood's victim status, and achievement of autonomy and independence. It also explores the new roles of protectors or victims (of human beings) that Carter assigns to the wolves. Finally, it links her rewritings with Perrault's ambivalent description of the female protagonist, who wishes to help her grandmother but unintentionally triggers her devouring, along with her own death. The third chapter explores the calling into question of villainy and victimhood in 'The Bloody Chamber' as well as in 'La Barbe bleue', and the complex dynamics between victim and victimizer in the sado-masochistic scenario. It shows how the tale echoes religious myths that condemn women to offer a different interpretation of responsibility and agency. As a whole, this study intends to emphasise the self-defining quality of Angela Carter's tale by drawing attention to their gender and theoretical deconstructions.

1. The Evil Victim: Shifting Roles in 'The Lady of the House of Love'

Angela Carter took the challenge of rewriting the story of the character whom radical feminists called 'the most passive and repellent fairy-tale heroine of all' (Tatar 142). Indeed, 'Sleeping Beauty', as she is represented in the best-known version released in 1959 by Disney, undermines gender equality in many ways. The protagonist's awaiting sleep for a Prince to save her with a kiss assigns her to the 'passive' side as opposed to the 'active' one that her male saviour plays, thus reinforcing the connection between this binarism and the opposition between men and women in patriarchal regimes. In addition, the different 'functions' that male and female characters play tend to fall into gender stereotypes. Women play either the victim, as Aurora does, or the villain that Maleficent incarnates, bringing back the 'femme fatale' who threatens the patriarchal order, and eventually gets killed by the Prince (Massei 5). The latter takes on the role of saviour, thus reinforcing the Disney archetype of the helpless woman needing a man to rescue her. However, Angela Carter's 'The Lady of the House of Love' reminds us that this distribution of the 'functions' in 'Sleeping Beauty' does not apply to every version of the tale, including Disney's alleged source (Perrault).

In her rewriting, the ambiguous representation of the protagonist opens a space of deconstruction by merging the 'villain' and the 'victim' in one single character, the Countess. Besides, the tale suggests similarities between the predator and her preys, which complicates the notion of villain. Indeed, 'The Lady of the House of Love' sometimes depicts her as a cruel predator, reducing her to a more bestial status than the animals that she devours alive. However, the fact that her preys are herbivores makes them appear less feral than her, thus drawing the attention to her cruelty again. Furthermore, surprising swaps in the subject-object dynamic between the Countess and the officer bring up their similarities as well as their differences. In addition to the deconstruction of these functions and of their usual opposition, Angela Carter's rewriting brings both the 'victim' and the 'saviour' in the character of the officer, and paradoxically represents his vulnerability as a strength. This challenges the stereotype of the male protagonist usually representing the only hope for the princess to survive. Finally, the officer's ambivalent help that he offers to the princess and its unexpected murderous consequences problematizes the function of 'saviour', thus definitely destroying the possibility of assigning a single function to each character. In this way, Angela Carter's rewriting calls into question the misconceptions that lead to depict 'Sleeping Beauty' as a sexist story and redefines the purpose of fairy tales: a deeper analysis of the different versions

of this tale shows that 'The Lady of the House of Love' belongs to a long tradition of tales that call into question cultural stereotypes.

Charles Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant', for instance, also consisted in rewriting a well-known story in order to challenge its representations of gender roles and relations. Indeed, the beautiful sleeping woman is a recurrent poetic theme that existed since Antiquity (Rigolot 92). The challenging of the different functions that appear in Angela Carter's rewriting also occurs in Charles Perrault's version of the tale, as Carter found out when she 'immersed herself in the study of Perrault's *Contes*, including the life of their author [and] the larger social and discursive context in which they were embedded' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 14). His ironic moral and his ambivalent descriptions of the princess prevent us from reducing her to a status of victim, shifting the attention from the misfortunes to her similarities with her ogress stepmother. Thus, 'La Belle au bois dormant' deconstructs the function of 'victim'. In addition, while the prince protects his family from his ogress mother by keeping his marriage secret, the text also thematically and textually emphasises his own potential nature of ogre, thus questioning the security that his wife and children supposedly have after his mother's death: the tale 'seems to signal (and enact) the connection between the ogre of hearsay and the young prince' (Hennard Dutheil 221). In this way, the prince blurs the opposition between the 'saviour' and the 'villain'. These complications in Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant' and Carter's rewritings thus contradict Vladimir Propp's and Stith Thompson's theories regarding the fixed role that characters play in fairy tales in various ways. They also offer a different representation of this genre from the one radical feminists defined: 'The lack of a kiss in the source text [written by Perrault] and the fact that the eventual marriage of Sleeping Beauty to the prince is not without its trial' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 191) along with the 'the childlike kiss [that] kills the lady who has fallen in love with her potential victim' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 192) in Carter's version confirm the challenging quality of these fairy tales in terms of gender representations. In contrast, Disney's version confirms most of feminist and formalist models; the appropriation of the fairy tales by this company explains the reductive theories that formalists and some feminists elaborated concerning the genre. Not only did Angela Carter create a new version of 'La Belle au bois dormant', she also followed the same tradition Perrault had adopted while writing the fairy tale, that is to say, playing with cultural conventions in order to call them into question. In this way, she set the record straight regarding the purpose of fairy tale and reopened a literary space to question stereotypes.

1.1 Vulnerably Villainy: from Predator to Victim

The Countess incarnates an ambivalence that blurs the limits between the functions of 'villain' and 'victim'. The very first sentence of 'The Lady of the House of Love' describes 'the revenants' as 'troublesome' and the reason for the peasants' leaving the region, thus depicting the vampire family as a scourge and the perpetrators of an unbearable situation for the inhabitants (107). However, their presence becomes manifest partly 'by the sound, sometimes, of sobbing in a derelict bedroom', thus shifting their representation from spite to pathos. This vacillation between villainy and victimhood (eliciting compassion) materialises in a more precise paradox when the text mentions that 'the beautiful somnambulist helplessly perpetuates her ancestral crimes' (107). The Countess keeps moving between both functions throughout the tale, appearing as the victim of her 'atrocious ancestors' who take control of her, but remaining a monster who traps the passers-by to devour them. This ambivalence contrasts with the representation of the princess in Disney's movie, who passively suffers the different decisions of the evil fairy and never does any harm, thus incarnating the typical victimised character. However, the differences between Aurora and the Countess in terms of function could be interpreted as falling into a trap regarding feminine representations: Martine Hennard Dutheil mentioned that 'this "feminist" twist in the plot does not represent a significant improvement in her condition, but merely the move from one stereotype (the passive princess) to another (the blood-thirsty predator)' (2011: 3). Indeed, both conditions by themselves would imprison the protagonist in a different feminine cliché. However, the continual shifting between the two opens a space in which the reduction of the female character to a mere stereotype becomes impossible. Besides, the Countess's sadness about her own condition allows a calling into question of 'her status as a character caught in old, exhausted and convention-ridden genres' (Hennard Dutheil 2011: 4). This triggers a more complex representation of femininity and deconstructs the mechanism that Disney adopts as the film confines female characters to one or the other function, eliciting a complex intellectual and emotional response in the (feminist) reader.

Similarly to this tension between spite and melancholy, her eventual death maintains a contrast in terms of functions: her demise is both the consequence of the officer's kiss, which depicts her as victim of his unwillingly mortal help and disinterested act of kindness, and of her own decision, since the narrator claims to 'believe she scarcely knows what she is doing' during the crucial moment she spends with him (122). In addition, the representation of her flower before his departure to France suggests a connection between its revival and the beginning of his war experience:

When he returned from the mess that evening, the heavy fragrance of Count Nosferatu's roses drifted down the stone corridor of the barracks to greet him, and his spartan quarters brimmed lasciviously with the reeling odour of a glowing, velvet, monstrous flower whose petals had regained all their former bloom and elasticity, their corrupt and brilliant splendour.

Next day, his regiment embarked for France. (124-125)

The supernatural growth and depiction of the flower as 'monstrous' portray the plant as scary and dangerous, which also suggests a symbolic inversion of the flower as having a life and a will of its own, baleful and harmful. In addition, the transition between the description and the start of his war experience suggests a cause-effect relationship between the two. The fact that the tale's ending matches his departure for the trenches, along with the ironic description of the 'special, exemplary fate in the trenches of France' that he will suffer, suggests a very probable death and hence elicits empathy for the young officer as a victim of a murderous war (112). In this way, the flower appears as a trigger of his passing away, thus bringing us back to the former representation of the Countess as an unwilling murderer as a result of her vampirical nature. Along those lines, Michelle Buchel argues that 'the fangs represent active resistance against oppressive and invasive representations which seek to colonise the female identity' (33). However, this finale description designates the flowers as 'Count Nosferatu's roses', thus defining them according to their belonging to a male member of the family (124). In this way, the finale description of the Countess's rose maintains the tension between her representation as a villain who brings death and a victim who passively obeys her ancestors' will. This continual ambivalence between two feminine stereotypes questions them both and challenges the usual reduction of female characters to either of them.

In addition to this paradox between the functions of villain and victim in the character of the Countess, the fairy tale reduces her to a bloodthirsty beast—below the animals that she eats (as she eats helpless herbivores), which deconstructs the dichotomy between the animal predator and the human prey (in 'Little Red Riding Hood', for example). Her hunting at night begins when 'her keeper lets her out into the garden,' which assimilates her to the status of a dangerous pet whose activities depend on its mistress (109). Her bestiality increases when the tale describes that 'she will sniff the air' and catch 'the scent of her prey', thus emphasising her sensibility for smell that most mammals develop more than human beings (110). When 'she drops [...] on all fours' to start hunting, her body posture is reminiscent of an animal's (110). These descriptions assign her a more bestial status than the 'rabbits and small, furry

things she pursues', whose tiny size she symbolically reaches when 'she washes her face with the wincing, fastidious gestures of a *cat*,' that is also a small animal and, more importantly, a feline (110, my emphasis). The following sentence even uses a comparison that makes her a ferocious, bloodthirsty carnivore: 'When she was a girl, she was like a fox and contented herself entirely with baby rabbits' (110). In addition, the similar early stage of growth of the 'girl' predator and the 'baby' prey emphasises their resemblance, thus increasing the inversion of the human/beast dichotomy. Besides, the oxymoronic description of her 'nauseated voluptuousness' while eating the animal emphasises her perversion as well as her vulnerability during this moment. This also adds a layer to the similarities between the Countess and the rabbit that 'squeaked piteously', thus also portrayed as helpless (110). The female human predator makes her the villain, though a victim of her ancestry and instincts, thus putting into question the legitimacy given to these functions by reductive theories about fairy tales, such as Propp's and Thompson's.

While the bestial aspects of the female protagonist assimilate her a more feral quality than to the animals that she eats, the text blurs the subject-object dynamic between the Countess and the officer, thus emphasising their similarities:

Her blind spectacles gave him his handsome face back to himself twice over; if he presented himself to her naked face, he would dazzle her like the sun she is forbidden to look at because it would shrivel her up at once, poor night bird, poor butcher bird.

Vous serez ma proie. (119)

The reflection of his own image that he perceives while looking at her suggests the impossibility for him to objectify her through his gaze: instead of observing her, he is brought back to his own self. In addition, the mention of her death if she looked at him without her glasses creates an unwilling perpetrator-victim relationship between the two, depicting him as a danger for her. The sentence in French that follows immediately reverses the dynamic, representing her as a threat for him. This brings both characters to a similar level of vulnerability. Similarly, the explanation for his refusal to take advantage of the Countess concludes with a sentence that assimilates his decision to weakness: 'So delicate and damned, poor thing. Quite damned' (122). This underlines the danger he's facing because of the Countess's murderous ritual and of his naivety. However, the next line challenges expectations regarding the identity of the 'poor thing': 'Yet I do believe *she* scarcely knows what *she* is doing' (122, my emphasis). This shift of focus from a description of the officer to

a comment regarding her behaviour generates an ambivalence that puts her vulnerability at the same level as his. Her character is more endangered by his than the opposite since his kiss eventually kills her due to her feelings for him, which definitely reverses the perpetrator-victim dynamics that she experienced until then. Karen Seago rigorously comments on this function exchange in this analysis:

The motif of the prince's life-giving kiss is first transposed into the death-dealing bite of the vampire delivered by the voraciously predatory Countess, the Sleeping Beauty figure of this tale. It then becomes an 'innocent nursery remedy' [123] when the young soldier sucks her thumb after the Countess has injured her hand, nevertheless this leads to her destruction rather than rescue. (87)

Her analysis sheds light on the succession of shifts that characterise the relationship between the two characters. This ambivalent distribution of their functions, and its constant shifts as the narrative unfolds, puts into question the very notions of victimhood and villainy and offers an alternative to the narrow representations triggered by Disney's version of the tale and commonplaces about the genre, critical ones included.

Similarly to Carter's deconstruction of *The Countess*, the female protagonist's status as a victim is put into question in *'La Belle au bois dormant'* and even more so their 'passivity'. Indeed, Perrault's ironic moral first uses the diminishing noun 'femelle' to designate women, and so implicitly as 'bestial' beings driven by lust (though in a playful, ironic, 'enjoué' fashion—his first audience were women and fellow fairy-tale writers), secondly by drawing attention to the Princess's awaiting for a husband without mentioning the dreadful misfortunes she goes through during the tale: *'On ne trouve plus de femelle / Qui dormît si tranquillement'* (140). As François Rigolot argues, 'il y a là le ton condescendant d'un locuteur masculin qui s'amuse de l'impatience des femmes de son temps' (98). This creates a feeling of injustice in the readers and increases the empathy for Sleeping Beauty whose terrible experience is not acknowledged. *'On ne perd rien pour attendre'* appears as a possible interpretation of the fairy tale, but the narrator diminishes the probability of the accurateness of this moral by preceding it with *'La fable semble encore vouloir nous faire entendre'* (140). As François Rigolot claims, this insistent use of 'marques d'atténuations' sets a distance between this interpretation of the tale and its potential meaning, thus multiplying possibilities for interpretation (100). By extrapolation, this deconstruction also puts into question the moral's initial refusal to recognise the Princess's misfortunes, thus diminishing the persecution by her mother-in-law. In addition, the moralist literally refuses to

'prêcher cette morale' and justifies his decision by claiming that they do not have 'la force ni le coeur' to do so (140). This 'aveu d'impuissance' raises sympathy for the storyteller, thus creating a tension with the initial empathy raised for the Princess (Rigolot 99). In this way, the moral challenges the Princess's victimhood, which contradicts Vladimir Propp's and Stith Thompson's fixed character model. In addition, this challenges the representation of women as purely passive that Disney's 1959 movie eventually emphasised.

Along with this deconstruction of victimhood, its blurring of the function of villain that Carter's female protagonist incarnates also appears in Perrault's Princess. Indeed, her status of victim erodes when the ogress hears 'le petit Jour qui pleurait, parce que la Reine sa mère voulait le faire fouetter, à cause qu'il avait été méchant, et elle entendit aussi la petite Aurore qui demandait pardon pour son frère' (139). This single representation of the protagonist's interaction with her children alters her image of innocence and passivity, depicting her as authoritarian, brutal and almost vindictive—which, in this sentence, assimilates her to the function of villain (although the boy, too, is depicted as villainous). In addition, when the Prince asks about the inhabitants of the castle where the Princess sleeps, he learns that 'la plus commune opinion était qu'un Ogre y demeurait,' which, though proven to be false, raises the possibility of an idea of monstrosity regarding the Princess (134). Finally, when entering the castle, the Prince confronts a frightening scene: 'c'était un silence affreux, l'image de la mort s'y présentait partout, et ce n'était que des corps étendus d'hommes et d'animaux, qui paraissaient morts' (135). About those lines, Maria Tatar emphasises the implication that this dreadful moment has on the representation of the Princess:

Much as there is a seductive appeal to sleeping princesses, their beauty immune to decay and corruption, the attraction mingles with dread and repulsion, for the 100-year sleep is surely also a proxy for death, which lurks at the borders of the castle in the corpses of the suitors entangled in the briars. (146)

Indeed, this negative representation attributes to her a frightening, dangerous even lethal aspect and maintains a tension regarding her status of victim. In this way, Perrault's Princess embodies a similar ambivalence to the paradox incarnated by Carter's Countess, which prevents the reader from reducing her to either the passive woman or the 'femme fatale' and blurs the distinction between victim and villain, although this becomes visible only through a comparative analysis with the rewriting that activates its potential for complexity and unexpected reversals.

In addition to putting into question formalist models and functions, the Countess's ambivalent role conflates two female characters in 'La Belle au bois dormant', namely the ogress and the princess, as Martine Hennard Dutheil claims in the following analysis:

Like the young Queen, Carter's vampirical heroine is both young and ageless, uncannily beautiful and morbidly pale as befits her condition. Like the old Queen, however, she hungers for young flesh and her nostrils quiver at the smell of the young man's blood. (Hennard Dutheil 2011: 7)

Indeed, 'The Lady of the House of Love' does not only fuse the separate functions, but also the characters that mainly play the roles of villain and victim in Perrault's version. This being said, a similar ambiguity appears in 'La Belle au bois dormant'. Indeed, the use of the word 'la Reine' to designate both the Princess and the ogress in the same paragraph blurs the distinction between the two (Hennard Dutheil 2011: 7):

Il alla accommoder une biche, que la Reine mangea à son soupé, avec le même appétit que si c'eût été la jeune Reine. Elle était bien contente de sa cruauté, et elle se préparait à dire au Roi, à son retour, que les loups enragés avaient mangé la Reine sa femme et ses deux enfants. (139)

This confuses the separation between both characters and merges them into the similar entity of queen (Hennard Dutheil 2011: 7). By telling the story of a single character that incarnates the Princess and the ogress, Angela Carter makes this aspect of Perrault's version more explicit. In this way, 'The Lady of the House of Love' invites its readers to call into question their misconceptions about fairy tales, to explore their challenging textual quality, especially in the original language, and to look beyond cultural stereotypes informed by the Disney versions.

This putting into question of the functions in both Carter's and Perrault's versions contradicts Propp's and Thompson's theories about fairy tale characters. The blurring of the distinctions between the villain and the victim complicates the very notion of 'function'. In addition, the definitions they give for each function do not only describe the characters, but also the plot that both 'The Lady of the House of Love' and 'La Belle au bois dormant' challenge in different ways. Indeed, Propp depicts the 'victimised hero' as being kidnapped, which does not happen in Carter's version. In addition, Propp argues that the villain appears and disappears to come back a second time, which is not the case in these fairy tales. Similarly, Thompson mentions that the 'supernatural adversary' always confronts the hero,

whereas the Countess does not try to eat the officer. His theory includes a category of lover, arguing that 'the winning of the wife or husband or the recovery of the mate after some disaster forms the central motivation of the whole' fairy tale (87). Nevertheless, the Countess and the officer both die in Angela Carter's rewriting, thus annihilating any hope of marriage. Perrault's version continues his telling after the lovers' marriage, which does not reduce the plot to this purpose. Both fairy tales thus put into question theories based on functions and define the genre as an artistic space that challenges cultural and critical stereotypes.

1.2 Empowered Victim: the Officer's Strengths

Besides the deconstruction of the victim and villain dichotomy, 'The Lady of the House of Love' represents the officer as bearer of both the victim and the saviour functions. The fairy tale creates an ambivalence between vulnerability and strength in his character, thus challenging the idea of the male protagonist who saves the female character's life. Indeed, his first apparition in the Countess's thoughts represents him as her designated prey: 'Fee fie fo fum / I smell the blood of an Englishman' (111). This reference to Joseph Jacobs's 1890 verse from 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' that the ogre recites while Jack is hiding in his house, reminds us of its final lines: 'Be he alive, or be he dead / I'll have his bones to grind my bread' (Jacobs 55). In this way, this first mention of the officer assigns him the status of future victim of a bloodthirsty monster. The narrator's comment about his fate reinforces this idea while predicting that 'tomorrow, her keeper will bury his bones under her roses' (121). These implicit and explicit mentions of bones as a synonym for death contrast with the description of his awakening on the following morning: 'his *bones* were stiff and aching, he'd slept on the floor with his bundled-up jacket for a pillow, after he'd put her to bed' (123, my emphasis). Not only does it contradict the prediction by showing that he is still alive, it also inverts the mortality symbol that the word 'bones' above. In addition, the officer appears to feel pain because of sacrificing his own wellbeing out of consideration for the Countess's health. This removes his earlier status of victim and assigns him the function of hero and saviour, thus creating an ambivalence that the character embodies in the fairy tale. Whereas 'The Lady of the House of Love' explicitly represents the Countess as a mortal threat for the officer, he only perceives her vulnerability: 'the handsome bicyclist, fearful for his hostess's health, her sanity, gingerly follows her hysterical imperiousness into the other room' (122). The adjective 'fearful' stresses the mortal danger the officer faces in this castle, emphasising his status of prey, but the rest of the sentence inverts the dynamic: the male protagonist does not feel terror for his own life, he worries for her sake. As María del Mar Pérez-Gil argues, 'rather than a

helpless victim (the natural role he would fill in Gothic tales), the officer takes action to try to rescue the imprisoned maiden, ironically the dark anima, the one in need of help' (2016: 517). His representation shifts from potential victim to the status of saviour of the Countess, but also of the young men who could have been preyed upon by her after his visit. The exposure of his ignorance and vulnerability combined with his incarnation of rescuer puts into question the stereotype of strong male protagonists saving weak female characters and offers a more complex representation of gender roles and relations. This also challenges the concept of assigning a single function per character in fairy tales.

In addition to this ambivalent description of the officer, 'The Lady of the House of Love' suggests that his vulnerability is even a form of power. For instance, the narrator insistently mentions that 'he has the special quality of virginity, most and least ambiguous of states' (112). This sexual innocence appears to protect him from the threat incarnated by the Countess since his composure despite the castle's frightful atmosphere happens to depend on this quality: 'in the invisible, even unacknowledged pentacle of his virginity, the young man stepped over the threshold of Nosferatu's castle and did not shiver in the blast of cold air' (114). The fairy tale justifies this paradox by explaining that 'due to his virginity—he does not yet know what there is to be afraid of,' showing ignorance as a shield (120). Indeed, the gap between his perception and the danger represented in the fairy tale depicts his character as exaggeratedly naive. When the memory of 'childhood tales' arouses fear while he observes the manor, his lack of imagination reminds him that he is 'no child, now to be frightened of his own fancies' (114). By showing this discrepancy between the Countess's supernatural status (that the readers acknowledge) and the officer's obstinate refusal to perceive it, the fairy tale accentuate his dullness. However, the fact that his innocence eventually saves him from the Countess's murderous hunger emphasizes the positive side of his standpoint, thus valorising his symbolical blindness. This paradox remains after his survival and her death, when he notices her absence and supposes that she 'must have got up early to enjoy the sunshine, slipped outside to gather him a rose' (123). This idea contrasts with the mention of the 'brilliant fusillades of early morning light' that reminds of the mortal threat that sunlight represents for her because of her vampirical nature (124). In addition, this emphasises his dullness since even he thought that she was 'half-blinded by some hereditary condition of the eyes' on the previous day (120). Finally, the gap between his representation of her going outside and the fact that she actually died underlines his lack of understanding of the entire episode. The officer leaves Nosferatu's castle without realising that he narrowly escaped death thanks to his naivety and sheer luck. This tension between his inaccurate perception and

the actual danger happens to save his life, thus depicting vulnerability as a paradoxical strength. In this way, his bearing of the victim function empowers him, which blurs the binary opposition and challenges the stereotypical representation of victimhood.

This ambivalent representation of the male protagonist also appears in the tale's descriptions of animals. Indeed, his encounter with the old mute happens when he raises 'his dripping, gratified head from the lion's mouth,' the fountain's tap he drinks from (113). This evokes the image of a predator about to eat their prey, portraying the officer as mortally endangered. This representation evolves during the time he spends with the Countess:

He was struck, once again, by the birdlike, predatory claws which tipped her marvellous hands; the sense of strangeness that had been growing on him since he buried his head under the streaming water in the village [...] now fully overcame him. *Had he been a cat*, he would have bounced backwards from her hands on four fear-stiffened legs, but *he is not a cat*: he is a hero. (120, my emphasis)

Designating the Countess's nails as 'claws' to describe them as 'birdlike, predatory' makes her a dangerous animal, emphasising the role of the officer as her prey. In addition, the text evokes an image of death by claiming that he 'buried his head', once again portraying him as a helpless victim. Besides, if the conditional and negative phrases in italics deny the potentiality of him being a cat, they also raise this idea twice by repeating the noun 'cat'. This reminds us of the fairy tale's very first paragraph, where the mention of 'the lion's mouth' is followed by the presence of a cat who 'grins and spits, arches his back, bounces away from an intangible on four fear-stiffened legs' (107). By raising the possibility of likening him to a cat, the fairy tale represents him as the scared animal that the incipit describes, thus making him submissive before the 'intangible' Countess as a cruel feline or bird of prey. However, the tale eventually denies this comparison by concluding that 'he is a hero' (120). This shift of representation creates an ambivalence that the narrator maintains while claiming that his 'lack of imagination gives his heroism to the hero,' thus placing the source of his strength in a weakness (120). Finally, the Countess's thoughts underline the paradox when she admires his 'golden head, of a lion' (121). This raises the officer at the same level as the predatory fountain that symbolically threatened him, but she then balances this idea by mentioning that she has 'never seen a lion, only imagined one' (121). This constant shift of representation between vulnerability and heroism deconstructs the unequivocal designation of victim.

This calling into question of victimhood contradicts Stith Thompson's and Vladimir Propp's theories that the plot also challenges in many ways. The blurring between victim and

saviour does not appear in Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant', which is why this paragraph focuses on the contradictions between Angela Carter's version and formalist theories. Propp defines the 'seeker' as the character that goes on a search for the kidnapped victim. This theory does not apply to 'The Lady of the House of Love', in which the male protagonist meets the female vampire without having looked for her. In addition, his *Morphology of the Folktale* argues that 'seekers' do not appear in the tales that follow the fate of the 'victimised hero'. However, Carter's version portrays two victims—the Countess and the officer—and assigns the latter the function of saviour because of his continual worrying for the Countess's health. The fact that he embodies both the functions of victim and saviour contradicts Propp's assumption about the genre. Thompson's *The Folktale* similarly offers a theory that does not fit 'The Lady of the House of Love'. He mentions the category of a 'supernatural helper,' that the Countess, despite her magical aspect, cannot embody since she does not offer any help to the officer—quite the contrary. The character of the officer, who tries to help the Countess, also contradicts this category, not only because of his non-supernatural nature, but also because his rationality prevents him from perceiving the magic elements during the entire episode. In this way, Angela Carter's characters contradict formalist theories, and redefine the fairy tale away from the supposedly fixed models in order to revisit the genre and open it up to new literary possibilities.

1.3 Vicious Saviours: Protagonists' Ambivalence

Beside the ambivalent functions of villain and victim incarnated by the Countess, as well as the officer's blurring of saviour and victim, 'The Lady of the House of Love' further deconstructs the opposition by ironically turning the officer's efforts to help the female vampire into the cause of her death. Not only does his constant care for his hostess's health unwittingly saves his life, but it also kills her. The fairy tale precedes the crucial moment of the kiss with a description that creates a contrast between assassination and rescue: 'into this vile and murderous room, the handsome bicyclist brings the innocent remedies of the nursery' (123). The officer represents care and kindness, thus standing in opposition to the castle's maleficent, Gothic, evil and macabre atmosphere. However, the next sentence creates an ambiguity regarding this dichotomy by claiming that 'in himself, by his presence, he is an exorcism' (123). In view of the Countess's vampirical nature, the mention of an 'exorcism' represents a potential danger. The officer's help thus becomes a threat for her, which creates an ambiguity regarding his status of saviour. In addition, the fact that he eventually kisses her hand 'turns upside down the active/passive roles typical of the vampire's blood-drinking

ceremony' (Pérez-Gil 2016: 519). Whereas this assigns him the role of the villain, his kiss intends to heal her, which brings him back to his function of saviour. 'Nevertheless this leads to her destruction rather than rescue' (Seago 83-90), because she is not meant to fall in love with her prey, which inverts the dynamic between rescue and murder again. This continual shift between opposite functions prevents the reader from reducing the officer to either of them. Along those lines, Michelle Buchel interprets the Countess's death as 'an escape from the good intentions of the army officer who reverts to the heroic archetype' (31). However, the Countess's 'horrible reluctance' for her role represents her death as a liberation (110). The ending appears to suit the expectations she expresses in her thoughts when admiring the officer: 'your golden head of the lover whom I dreamed would free me' (121). In this way, the murderous consequences of his good intentions appear to emphasise the ambivalence between the roles of saviour and villain that he embodies, thus calling into question the stereotype of the male saviour—although ironically that's what he ends up being for her and for her future victims. This paradox challenges formalist models of fairy tales by assigning two opposite functions to the same character.

This deconstruction of the saviour role similarly appears in Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant' that represents the Prince in an ambivalent way. Indeed, his refusal to introduce his family to his ogress mother first depicts him as protective:

Il n'osa jamais se fier à elle de son secret ; il la craignait quoiqu'il l'aimât, car elle était de race Ogresse [...] on disait même tout bas à la Cour qu'elle avait les inclinaisons des Ogres, et qu'en voyant passer de petits enfants, elle avait toutes les peines du monde à se retenir de se jeter sur eux. Ainsi le Prince ne voulut jamais rien dire. (137)

This attempt to rescue his wife and children contrasts with the decision that he takes after his father's death, namely to bring his family to his castle. Indeed, the connection between the king's vanishing and a supposed change in the ogress's nature remains unmentioned and unlikely. In this way, the Prince endangers his family, which diminishes his function of saviour. Similarly, his presence during the Princess's awakening and his arrival just before the ogress devours her seems to represent him as a rescuer. However, his passivity during these two crucial moments contradicts this idea. For instance, the end of the spell that put the Princess to sleep happens without any kiss, contrary to Disney's version (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 190): 'Il s'approcha en tremblant et en admirant, et se mit à genoux auprès d'elle. Alors comme la fin de l'enchantement était venue, la Princesse s'éveilla' (136). This inaction

contradicts the idea of the male protagonist who brings the princess back to life. A similar phenomenon happens when the Princess and her children are about to be devoured:

Ils étaient là, et les bourreaux se préparaient à les jeter dans la cuve, lorsque le Roi, qu'on n'attendait pas si tôt, entra dans la cour à cheval ; il était venu en poste, et demanda tout étonné ce que voulait dire cet horrible spectacle ; [...] l'Ogresse, enragée de voir ce qu'elle voyait, se jeta elle-même la tête la première dans la cuve, et fut dévorée en un instant par les vilaines bêtes qu'elle y avait fait mettre. (139, 140)

In other words, the Prince saves his family by asking his mother a question. The fact that she commits suicide prevents him from having to defeat her, thus diminishing his representation of chivalric saviour and challenging the stereotypical male rescuer that Disney later portrays.

Beside deconstructing the function of saviour by representing the Prince's passivity, Perrault's version blurs it with the role of villain. As François Rigolot mentions in *Les songes du savoir*, 'Perrault [...] présente un personnage double: l'Ogre et le Prince, au pouvoir curieusement semblable' (95). Indeed, when asking about the inhabitants of the castle, the Prince learns the following information: 'la plus commune opinion était qu'un Ogre y demeurait, et que là il emportait tous les enfants qu'il pouvait attraper, pour les pouvoir manger à son aise, et sans qu'on le pût suivre, ayant seul le pouvoir de se faire un passage au travers du bois' (134-135). The narrator gives a very similar description when the Prince tries to enter the woods:

A peine s'avança-t-il vers le bois, que tous ces grands arbres, ces ronces et ces épines s'écartèrent d'elles-mêmes pour le laisser passer [...] et ce qui le surprit un peu, il vit que personne de ses gens ne l'avait pu suivre, parce que les arbres s'étaient rapprochés dès qu'il avait été passé. (1)

The Ogre of the rumours and the Prince manage to go through the forest, the trees preventing other people from following them in both cases. This similarity between them suggests a connection between the two, which happens to come true when the text reveals that the Prince's mother is an Ogress, thus making him an Ogre as well. Considering his mother's attempts to devour his family, his own nature also endangers his wife and children. The fairy tale raises this issue at the end, when mentioning the Prince's disappointment after his mother's death: 'le Roi ne laissa pas d'en être fâché : elle était sa mère ; mais il s'en consola bientôt avec sa belle femme et ses enfants' (140). As François Rigolot rigorously asks, 'comment un fils d'Ogresse peut-il « se consoler » avec ses enfants ?' (95). Indeed, whereas he can comfort himself by spending

time with them, the mention of his ogre's nature suggests that he might try to devour them. The ending emphasises the ambiguity regarding the representation of the Prince, shifting his role from saviour to potential villain. In this way, 'La Belle au bois dormant' puts into question the assigning of one single function to a character, namely the stereotypical role of saviour to the male protagonist.

Carter's and Perrault's versions thus problematise the function of hero and rescuer, thus contradicting formalist theories. Propp defines the villain as a character that struggles with the hero, which hardly applies to 'the Lady of the House of Love'. Indeed, whereas the narrator calls the officer 'a hero', the fact that he eventually kills the Countess also assigns him the function of villain, even though from her perspective it represents a liberation, which makes his action quite ambivalent. In addition, the female protagonist plays the main role in the tale, which allows us to consider her, in a way, as the heroine. Her refusal to kill the officer also prevents us from calling her the mere villain of the tale—even if she is a murderess. This ambiguity between the two characters and functions draws attention to the limitations of Propp's theory. Besides, Thompson mentions the existence of a 'supernatural adversary' confronting the hero; neither the Countess nor the officer incarnates this function. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the female protagonist does not try to kill the officer, which annihilates the assignment of this role to her. In addition, the fairy tale depicts the officer as self-consciously non-magical, thus preventing us from calling him 'supernatural'. Finally, he murders her while trying to help her, which forbids his categorisation as an 'adversary'. In the case of 'La Belle au bois dormant', the 'supernatural adversary' mainly corresponds to the stepmother, but the representation of the Prince as an ogre tends to assign him this role as well—which creates an ambivalence with the fact that he prevents his mother from eating the Princess. By contradicting Propp's and Thompson's theories, Carter's and Perrault's versions define fairy tales as a literary space for challenging cultural norms and critical models. Disney's version created misconceptions about the genre by reducing the complexity that Perrault's text had opened to stereotypes, but more surprisingly the critics themselves tended to overlook them in order to fit their model or ideology. In 'The Lady of the House of Love', Angela Carter invites her readers to go beyond formalist and feminist representations of fairy tales and find the real nature of this genre by reading *Contes du temps passé* by themselves.

'The Lady of the House of Love' merges several functions in each character and redistributes the roles between the protagonists to the point that we cannot reduce them to simple and single binary oppositions. Indeed, the Countess plays both the victim and the villain,

constantly shifting from the stereotype of the passive princess to the 'femme fatale' and the other way round. This prevents the tale from reducing her to any of these harmful clichés. In addition, this draws attention to the similar phenomenon that happens to the Princess of Perrault's version, making his calling into question of feminine stereotypes explicit. Besides, Carter's officer plays the roles of victim, villain and saviour, in strong contrast to Disney's Prince, whose function merely consists in rescuing the princess. 'La Belle au bois dormant' assigns its Prince the characterisation of saviour and villain, thus creating an ambivalence in the influence that male protagonists may have towards female characters. Carter's and Perrault's version do not only contradict Stith Thompson's and Vladimir Propp's theories in many ways. Likewise, they also call gender stereotypes into question: their characters offer a complex, multidimensional representation of men and women, creating a space of reflection regarding the expectations that society projects on each of them. 'La Belle au bois dormant' and 'The Lady of the House of Love' negate radical feminist's misconceptions about the genre by illustrating fairy tale's challenging quality and refusing to idealise and sentimentalise women.

2. From Villain to Prey: 'The Company of Wolves,' 'The Werewolf' and 'Wolf-Alice'

Angela Carter questions Red Riding Hood's presumed innocence through her rewritings of Perrault's 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' in an attempt to dismantle simplistic binary oppositions between the scheming male predator against his naïve and ignorant female prey. Even before publishing *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter had proposed a radical critique of this so-called quality: 'Why do they talk so much crap about innocence? As if lack of knowledge could ever be a good thing? I hate innocence' (Hennard Dutheil 2018: para. 4). In 'The Werewolf', 'The Company of Wolves' and 'Wolf-Alice' the fixed roles of saviour, victim and villain are blurred and give way to much more ambivalent characters and interpretations. This problematises Thompson's and Propp's theories regarding fixed functions in fairy tales as well as radical feminist's misconceptions of the genre, according to which fairy tales 'acculturate girls to believe that passivity, placidity, and morbidity, along with physical beauty, will make them the "best" kind of girl to be' (Zipes 190). Indeed, 'some feminist fairy-tale analyses remain stuck in a mode of interpretation able to do no more than reconfirm stereotypical generalizations about the fairy tale's sexist stereotypes' (Haase ix). In addition, Carter's paradoxical, ambivalent or ambiguous characters significantly differ from those in Disney's short cartoons 'Little Red Riding Hood' (1922) and 'The Big Bad Wolf' (1934), whose plot focuses on 'overcoming the voracious evil wolf at the door of the helpless pigs' (Zipes 2011: 28). Indeed, these films represent fixed functions and characters: Red Riding Hood plays the victim, the man or wolf who tricks her is the villain, and either the intelligent pig or the well-intentioned hunter helps Red Riding Hood and gets rid of the villain. In contrast to fairy-tale stereotypes, Carter's three rewritings call into question religious projections of evil, complicate the representation of the villain versus victim, and hence their associated gender roles and relations, either by emphasizing the vulnerability of the wolf, by suggesting parallels with the heroine (through imagery, structural echoes, flirting and sexual play) or by reversing and merging their roles. Similarly, the figures of the werewolf and Wolf-Alice's ambiguous status deconstruct the binary opposition between humanity and bestiality, which blurs the prey-predator dichotomy. In addition, 'The Company of Wolves' deconstructs the function of victim by representing vulnerability and virginity as a strength. 'Wolf-Alice' depicts the wolves—and eventually Alice—as both victims and protectors, which reduces the distinction between victims and saviours: the wolves raise Wolf-Alice, who eventually tries to heal the Duke; both the protagonist and her foster family are victims of humans' cruelty. Finally, these three tales problematise the function of saviour by representing a Red Riding Hood who defends and rescues herself. Carter's rewritings also merge the functions of villain

and saviour when showing the negative consequences of the characters' offered help. As Kimberly Lau claims, 'Carter's women and wolves slip between categories—male, female, human, child, animal, witch' (92), thus complicating the categories of functions, gender, as well as the opposition between humanity and animality.

Not only does this deconstruction call into question the dominant model of fairy-tale functions, it also engages a dialogue with classic versions of the tale. Carter's three stories explore questions that Charles Perrault raised in 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' and play with 'the possibilities opened up by role switching, substitutions, and shifting identities' (Hennard Dutheil 85). Indeed, his version suggests the merging of the grandmother and the wolf by disguising him into her, thus blurring the distinction between victim and villain. Besides, 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' shows a degree of ambivalence in the function of saviour that Red Riding Hood plays while carrying a basket full of goodies to her grandmother in order to take care of her. Indeed, her good intentions ironically result in the devouring of both her grandmother and herself, depicting her as a victim of her own actions and as somehow responsible for her grandmother's death. In addition to responding to Charles Perrault's dramatic irony and to the allegorical dimension of the tale in the moral, Angela Carter uses elements of medieval tales, such as 'De puella a lupellis seruata', in which 'we discover the female protagonist not in her granny's home, but unexpectedly safe in the lair of the wolf,' (Bacchilega 65) a motif explored in 'Wolf-Alice'. Another oral version from the late middle-ages features how Red Riding Hood 'burns her clothes in the fire and joins the wolf in bed,' (Bacchilega 54), a scene that also appears in 'The Company of Wolves'. Angela Carter's rewritings open a conversation with several adaptations, including Grimm's *Rotkäppchen* (1853) from which she borrowed the hunter, appearing in the form of woodsmen in 'The Werewolf'. Her three stories thus raise awareness on the changing significance of motifs that appear in well-known and lesser-known versions of 'Red Riding Hood' and call into question the cultural stereotypes that are attached to them. Carter's use of the fairy tale offers a more complex definition of the genre as grounded in history and of ever-changing significance (based on the treatment of the action, motifs, genre and style), thus drawing attention to the limitations of theoretical models and misconceptions based on cultural stereotypes.

2.1 Sympathy for the Devil: the Wolves' Pain

Angela Carter's tales deconstruct the projection of evil onto the religious representations of the Devil. Indeed, 'The Werewolf' starts casting doubt on some Christian beliefs when the narrator claims that '[t]o these upland woodsmen, the Devil is as real as you or I' (126). By

specifying that this idea only concerns the inhabitants of this 'northern country,' (126) the tale reduces it to an unreasonable belief. This contradiction between the woodsmen's beliefs and the narrator's point of view evolves throughout the story: 'At midnight, especially on Walpurgisnacht, the Devil holds picnics in the graveyards and invites the witches; then they dig up fresh corpses, and eat them. *Anyone will tell you that*' (126, my emphasis). The events that the inhabitants accept as true become increasingly supernatural. Besides, the last sentence transforms these picnics into an old story that the woodsmen 'tell' (126) to each other, shifting this image from reality to fiction. This tension between the narrator's objective description and their beliefs grows into tragic irony in the following paragraph:

When they discover a witch – some old woman whose cheeses ripen when her neighbours' do not, another old woman whose black cat, oh, sinister! *follows her about all the time*, they strip the crone, search for her marks, for the supernumerary nipple her familiar sucks. They soon find it. Then they stone her to death. (126, emphasis not mine)

The so-called witches' first characteristics regarding cheese and cats are non-supernatural, which calls into question their designation as such. In addition, this description of ordinary day-to-day events contrasts with the magic powers that they are arbitrarily assigned and with the treatment they are inflicted. Besides, the fact that the beliefs lead to stoning and killing appears at the end of the paragraph emphasises this effect and underlines this absurdity and raises empathy for them, thus portraying the woodsmen as dumb and cruel. Finally, the commentary that the narrator makes, 'oh, sinister!' and the italicized description of the cats highlight the irony of this situation: whereas these women are perceived as witches for arbitrary reasons (such as the company of an animal), they are victims of barbarous treatments. Indeed, the inhabitants' persecution of the so-called witches suggests a more convincing manifestation of evil than the women's scapegoating as consorting with the Devil. In this way, 'The Werewolf' deconstructs the blaming of witches for evil being a reality, 'implying that the devil is only the institutionalized projection of our fears and desires' (Bacchilega 61-62), thus calling into question the arbitrary assignation of the function of villain to these women.

Not only does the witches' designation suggest arbitrariness, it also raises empathy for them as victims of persecution driven by human vices (envy, greed, malice, ignorance,...). Indeed, the tales draw attention to the scapegoated females' vulnerability, which questions their supposed evil nature. Later on in the same tale, the female protagonist is threatened by a wolf in the woods. After the 'good child' (127) of 'The Werewolf' slashed off his forepaw,

the narrator mentions that '[t]he wolf let out a gulp, almost a sob' (127). This 'subtly shifts the reader's sympathy from the girl to the wolf' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 98). In addition, the text emphasises the beast's vulnerability when specifying that 'wolves are less brave than they seem' (127). As he flees, 'the wolf even briefly becomes the focalizer' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 98): '[i]t went lolloping off *disconsolately* between the trees *as well as it could* on three legs, leaving a trail of blood behind it (127, my emphasis). This draws attention to the wolf's pain and its difficulty to walk, which brings Barbara Klonowska to claim that 'it is the wolf which seems to be the victim here' (150). The tale accentuates this helplessness when the sick grandmother appears to lack a hand, thus suggesting that she is the same wolf that the protagonist wounded, and hence a werewolf. The fact that her grandchild calls out for the neighbours who kill her suggests two contradictory readings: either the old woman is a cruel werewolf, or the granddaughter manipulates religious beliefs to appropriate her grandmother's belongings. This opens the possibility of assigning the grandmother the state of victim, that the description of her death eventually emphasises. Indeed, the narrator again ironizes the woodsmen's beliefs when telling that '[t]hey knew the wart on the hand at once for a witch's nipple', thus mentioning an arbitrary reason to blame her (128). In contrast with the arbitrary motif they use to accuse her of witchcraft, their cruel punishment raises a feeling of injustice: 'they drove the old woman, in her shift as she was, out into the snow with sticks, beating her old carcass as far as the edge of the forest, and pelted her with stones until she fell down dead' (128). By raising the readers' empathy for the wolf and old woman accused of being a witch, 'The Werewolf' deconstructs the assignation of villainy to a character for arbitrary reasons and describes a paradoxical character, thus problematising one of the functions that Stith Thompson and Vladimir Propp defined.

Similarly to the ambivalent representation of evil within systems of belief in 'The Werewolf', 'The Company of Wolves' draws attention to the projection of evil onto animals by underlining the wolves' vulnerability. As Cristina Bacchilega claims, 'Carter reminds us that werewolves are not simply devilish creatures devoted to witchcraft and cannibalism, but also sad creatures' (62). Whereas the narrator mentions that wolves are 'as cunning as ferocious' (129), this behaviour is explained by the fact that in 'this region of mountain and forest, there is nothing for the wolves to eat' (129). After raising empathy for them, the tale emphasises it by mentioning that 'wolves grow lean and famished' (129). However, 'The Company of Wolves' does not reduce wolves to their famine; it maintains an ambivalence between their vulnerability and the fear they inspire by setting conditions to the possibility of seeing their helplessness: 'There is so little flesh on them that you could count the starveling

ribs through their pelts *if they gave you time before they pounced*' (129, my emphasis). The paradox between their cruelty and their vulnerability similarly appears in the description of their howl that 'has, for all its fearful resonance, some inherent sadness in it, as if the beasts would love to be less beastly if only they knew how' (131). This shifts the focus from their need for food to their feelings of regret, thus diminishing their perceived cruelty and monstrosity as creatures that threaten the life of human beings. In this way, Carter questions the anthropocentric world-view that projects evil onto these animals. When the protagonist hears the wolves from her grandmother's house, she verbalises her empathy: 'It is very cold, poor things, she said; no wonder they howl so' (137). She does not consider them 'with fear, as traditional readings would hold, but with compassion and identification' (Lappas 125-126). The tale rewards her compassion by making her refusal to fear the wolf her salvation, which values empathy and deconstructs the age-old human representation of wolves as villains. The end of the story represents the protagonist as she 'sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the *tender* wolf' (139, my emphasis), which ultimately destroys the stereotype of the evil wolf. As Martine Hennard Dutheil mentions, the 'semantic possibilities of the word *tender* invite further complications of the prey-predator divide' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 102). Indeed, this adjective refers to kindness and vulnerability, both of which contrast with the stereotypical representation of villainy, although the carnivorous nature of the beast craving flesh remains. By emphasising the wolves' vulnerability and suffering, 'The Company of Wolves' refuses to reduce them to evil, but treats them ambivalently instead, opening up a reflection on human projections of their own dark sides onto animals. In this way, Carter's manifold rewritings of the 'Little Red Riding Hood' tale contradicts Thompson's and Propp's theories of functions.

In addition to this portrayal of the vulnerability of animal 'villains' in the two first rewritings of Perrault's 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge', 'Wolf-Alice' emphasises the wolves' and the Duke's helplessness as beast-like or beastly beings. Indeed, the protagonist's foster family appears as victims of humans' cruelty, as the tale suggests when explaining that Wolf-Alice will no longer find them in the woodlands since 'the wolves keep well away from the peasants' shotguns, now' (140-141). This implies that they have suffered enough to feel scared of coming back, which the narrator clarifies by locating the encounter of Wolf-Alice 'beside the bullet-riddled corpse of her foster mother' (141). The fact of mentioning the wolves' suffering and death, let alone the ungratefulness of human beings for the animals that fostered a human child, victimises the animals. In addition, whereas the tale depicts the Duke as a werewolf, thus drawing attention to his monstrosity, it also focuses on his helplessness

regarding the part he plays in the villagers' myth-making: *'he is cast in the role of the corpse-eater, the body snatcher who invades the last privacies of the dead'* (142, my emphasis). The passive form suggests his helplessness concerning the atrocities he commits, thus questioning his evil nature since he seems to be driven by his animal instinct. However, the tale immediately returns to his cruelty and transgressions while explaining that *'nothing deters him. If you stuff a corpse with garlic, why, he only slavers at the treat: cadavre Provençale'* (142). This touch of humour maintains an ambivalence between his unresponsiveness and his horrible acts. The tale concludes this paradox while describing his death, naming him a *'poor, wounded thing'* (148) after the husband of his last supper shot him. This constant shift between vulnerability and monstrosity problematises human representations of animals as incarnating human vices.

Not only do the three tales emphasise the wolves' vulnerability, they also invert the relationship between the victims and the villains. In *'The Werewolf'*, the protagonist *'behaves somewhat like a professional murderer, masking all the traces of the "murder"'* (Klonowska 150) after slashing off the wolf's paw:

The child wiped the blade of her knife clean on her apron, wrapped up the wolf's paw in the cloth in which her mother had packed the oatcakes and went on towards her grandmother's house. Soon it came on to snow so thickly that the path and any footsteps, track or spoor that might have been upon it were obscured. (127)

This representation of Red Riding Hood as an assassin reverses the dynamics of predator and prey of Perrault's version. A similar paradox appears during the revelation of the grandmother's identity, when she wakes up and begins *'to struggle, squawking and shrieking like a thing possessed'* (128). The tale maintains an ambiguity concerning the child's intention, first claiming that she is *'strong, and armed with her father's hunting knife'* (128), thus emphasising qualities that are required for a fight and suggesting a probable physical encounter between the characters. However, *'The Werewolf'* eventually describes the protagonist managing *'to hold her grandmother long enough to see the cause of her fever'* (128), which implies an intention of helping her, unless she has set up a trap for her. Finally, after discovering the grandmother's wound, the child *'crossed herself and cried out so loud the neighbours heard her and come rushing in'* (128). Once again, this suggests that she aims to harm her, as Martine Hennard Dutheil underlines: *'the granddaughter can be seen as plotting against her elder, accusing her of being a witch to get rid of her and take the house'* (2013: 98). The very last sentence of the tale seems to confirm this hypothesis: *'Now the child*

lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered' (128). Patricia Klonowska points out that 'whatever sympathy we might have left for the character up to this moment will probably evaporate since the child seems to be obviously thriving on her grandmother's disaster' (151). Indeed, the possibility that Red Riding Hood might be wolf-like in setting a trap for her grandmother and being instrumental in her murder inverts the classical 'pattern of [...] the bad and the good characters' (Klonowska 150). In this way, the tale redistributes villainy between different characters, thus calling into question the attribution of a single function to one of them only—namely, the wolf.

In addition to the inversion of the victim-villain relationship in 'The Werewolf,' 'The Company of Wolves' blurs the distinction between the girl and the wolf, which problematises the binary opposition that they would incarnate in a stereotypical representation. This tale informs the readers that, according to legend, '[s]even years is a werewolf's natural span but if you burn his human clothing you condemn him to wolfishness for the rest of his life' (132). When she is with the werewolf, Red Riding Hood 'rips off his shirt and flings it into the fire [...] making clear that it's not the human half of the werewolf that she wants' (Shepard 71). Not only is her gesture reminiscent of the male character's wolfish nature, it also takes the readers back to the fact that she threw her shawl, blouse, skirt, woollen stockings and shoes in the fire, eventually appearing 'in her untouched integument of flesh' (138)—so stark naked. By representing such a striking resemblance between the characters' nakedness, the tale suggests that the girl, too, might become a wolf for life. This makes the protagonist similar to him and annihilates the opposition between prey and predator. Whereas the classical version of the tale raises expectations of the wolf devouring the child, 'The Werewolf' describes how 'she will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put the lice into her mouth and eat them' (138-139), thus inverting the eating ceremony and mentioning his fear in addition to hers by playing with the ambiguity of the word—'fearful' (139) meaning both 'scared' and 'scary'. Besides, the tale ends on the description of the female protagonist sleeping 'in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf' (139) and so according to Ritu Pareek 'here the conflict between the wolf and Red Riding Hood of the traditional tale is missing' (125). However, this conflict does not disappear, it turns into a different confrontation. Whereas the main character's red hood eventually represents death in Perrault's version, here it 'symbolises both sexuality and the possibility of procreation' and 'transforms the potentially deadly encounter with the attractive werewolf into a potentially regenerative union' (Hennard Dutheil 102). In this way, 'the opposition of subject versus object, active versus passive, is transcended so that each

individual in the encounter may be at once both ' (Day 149). These modifications of the relationship between the girl and the wolf offer a different configuration and convert the initial binary opposition between girl and wolf into a much more complex and mutually enriching interaction.

Beside inverting the dichotomy between predator and prey, the rewritten tales blur the opposition between humanity and animality constructed through religious myths. As Patricia Klonowska mentions, the title of the first tale already deconstructs this distinction: 'the word *werewolf* refers us immediately to the myth, to the duality of human nature, to the animal element in us, the dark side we are not aware of, unknown and potentially dangerous ' (149). The tale explores this paradox by merging the grandmother and the wolf, which conflates Perrault's victim and villain in one character. Similarly, "The Company of Wolves" explores the utopian possibility of reconciling (wo)man and beast ' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 82). As mentioned in the last paragraph, this tale also suggests Red Riding Hood's metamorphosis into a wolf when she throws her clothes in the fire. The same tale even explicitly tells the story of a wolf that became human before starting Red Riding Hood's narrative. Curiously enough, this wolf 'weighed as much as a grown man ' (130) and its corpse eventually became 'the bloody trunk of a man ' (131). 'The Company of Wolves ' also mentions the transformation of wedding guests into wolves by a witch, as well as a young husband's metamorphosis into a werewolf. Besides, 'Wolf-Alice ' features two characters who stand at the edge of humanity:

Wolf-Alice [...] lives in an intermediary state between humanity and animality (as distinct from beastliness, represented by the Count) [...] She flees the cruel world of the humans and the brutal educational methods of the nuns. This gives Carter an occasion to explore the paradoxical 'humanity' of the wolves and their maternal instinct, solidarity, and unselfconscious beauty (Hennard-Dutheil 2013: 104).

Indeed, the different treatments that humans and wolves offer to Wolf-Alice illustrate each species' characteristics, Carter suggesting that beasts are paradoxically more humane than human beings: 'The wolves had tended her because they knew she was an imperfect wolf; we secluded her in animal privacy out of fear of her imperfection because it showed us what we might have been ' (144). The narrator plays with Wolf-Alice's perception of her body to emphasise this tension: 'She perceived an essential difference between herself and her surroundings that you might say she could not put her *finger* on ' (146). This pun draws attention on both her humanity and her animality in an ironic way. These inversions of

stereotypes reflect Angela Carter's opinion that 'the arbitrary division between man and beast obliterates the fact that man himself is only another animal with particularly complex social behaviour' (Carter 1976: 301). In this way, these three tales explore and expose humanity's paradoxes, thus bringing to light the limits of the association of animality with beastliness.

This blurring of the distinctions between victim and villain, humanity and animality (constructed as beastliness in anthropocentric myths) also appears in the way the narrator addresses the reader. Indeed, the first sentence of 'The Werewolf' indicates that '[t]o these upland woodsmen, the Devil is as real as you or I,' which puts the narrator, the reader and the devil at the same level, thus assigning them negative characteristics (126). However, the sentence that follows calls this initial attribution into question by separating the narrator and the reader (designated by the first person plural) from the Devil: 'they have not seen *us* nor even know that *we* exist, but the Devil they glimpse often in the graveyards' (126, my emphasis). In this way, the reader's role takes on another part in 'The Company of Wolves', namely the victim's:

At night, the eyes of wolves shine like candle flames, yellowish, reddish, but that is because the pupils of their eyes fatten on darkness and catch the light from your lantern to flash it back to you – red for danger; if a wolf's eyes reflect only moonlight, then they gleam a cold and unnatural green, a mineral, a piercing colour. If the benighted traveller spies those luminous, terrible sequins stitched suddenly on the black thickets, then he knows he must run, if fear has not struck him stock-still. (129)

Martine Hennard Dutheil points out the paradox that this passage raises:

The narrator interpellates the implied reader as 'you' and thus casts 'him' in the role of Little Red Riding Hood, as prey and future victim [...]. But the central trope of the reflective eyes governing the passage suggests that there is something wolflike about the reader, too (2013: 100).

Indeed, the reflections of the lantern insinuates that the wolves' eyes reveal a quality that the reader is projecting on them, thus bringing them from victim to predators again. This blurred opposition similarly appears in the incipit of 'Wolf-Alice': 'Could this ragged girl with brindled lugs have spoken like *we* do she would have called herself a wolf, but she cannot speak' (140, my emphasis). The narrator and the reader unite again in the personal pronoun 'we' that characterises human beings in opposition with Wolf-Alice's wolfishness. In light of the calling into question of the dichotomy between humanity and animality, this distinction eventually dissolves. This constant deconstruction of the narrator's identity, shifting from

villainy to victimhood and the other way round, emphasises the arbitrariness of Propp's and Thompson's functions.

The deconstruction of villainhood through the calling into question of dichotomies already occurs in Perrault's 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge'. Indeed, this tale suggests the fusion of victim and evil by disguising the wolf into the grandmother. In addition, the binary opposition between animality and humanity merges in the character of the wolf:

Perrault's human type turns into a mere wolf. Perrault indeed capitalizes *Loup*, which suggests personification and allegorical meaning; 'compère le Loup' (*Contes*, 143) clearly references La Fontaine's fable, where *compère* (companion or accomplice) is used in connection with animals such as the fox or the wolf to underline their lack of scruples and guileful character. (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 85)

This reference to La Fontaine metaphorizes the character of the wolf, thus reducing his bestiality to a figurative attribution and blurring its distinction with animality. In addition, 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' explores the inversion of the prey-predator relationship by giving the victims responsibility for their tragic fate. For instance, the red cap, 'which [Red Riding Hood's] grandmother has made for her (a gift turning into a curse, as it were), masks her origins and flags her beauty, and this will bring about her downfall' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 87). By making this mistake, the grandmother plays an unwilling part in the tragic ending. This tale thus 'teaches a cruel but useful lesson, as it wryly comments on the failure of mothers and grandmothers to caution their daughters against the threat represented by seducers, embodied in the story by a deceitful wolf' (Hennard Dutheil 76-77). By suggesting that the girls' relatives might be indirectly and unwillingly accountable for her death, 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' ironically complicates the notion of responsibility in the tragic course of events. Far from blaming the victims for their misfortunes, Perrault intends to underline the importance of knowledge and the danger of being kept in ignorance of actual threats, since during his time, 'les filles de bonnes familles, élevées au couvent, étaient gardées délibérément dans l'ignorance. Le conte prend d'ailleurs le parti des femmes dans la querelle sur le bien-fondé de leur donner accès à l'éducation' (Hennard Dutheil 2014: 4). In this way, Perrault problematizes the binary opposition that Disney's films eventually solidify. 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' attempts to raise awareness regarding women's access to knowledge, thus challenging contemporary cultural stereotypes regarding gender.

In this sense, Angela Carter's and Charles Perrault's exploration of alternative and much more complex retellings of the tales (formally, stylistically, philosophically, morally

etc.) contradict formalist theories and radical feminists' misconceptions about them in that they oversimplify a rich tradition that resists univocal readings and schematic models. Indeed, Propp claims that the villain's role is 'to disturb the peace of a family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm' (27), which 'The Werewolf' contradicts by uniting the wolf and the grandmother in one character. Similarly, 'The Company of Wolves' defies this definition by bringing the wolf and the girl together in sexual intercourse. The story 'Wolf-Alice' prevents the reader from attributing the function of villain to the wolves: the tale mostly draws attention to their vulnerabilities and depicts humans as their most cruel enemies. Besides, Stith Thompson mentions that the hero must confront a 'supernatural adversary' (23), which the figures of the werewolves would embody. However, the heroine does not 'confront' them in the tales: 'The Werewolf' is murdered by woodsmen, the creature of 'The Company of Wolves' eventually makes love to Red Riding Hood, and 'Wolf-Alice' is never threatened by the Duke. Perrault's and Carter's stories also refute radical feminists' assumption according to which fairy tales are inherently sexist. Indeed, 'an examination of seventeenth-century texts shows that Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon rouge" is centrally concerned with gender issues [...] Perrault explicitly defines his own project against the fables of the Ancients' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 76). Through the motif of the cap and the grandmother's failure to protect the child she loves, the author intends to warn young girls against ignorance about sex and seducers, as well as emphasize the importance of education. Angela Carter's tales develop this aspect in different ways since they deconstruct Red Riding Hood's passivity, even suggesting in 'The Werewolf' that 'females can be as cruelly rapacious as males' (Oates 107) and sometimes instrumental in their oppression. The ambivalent representations of female characters and the confusion between the different functions direct the readers towards an informed, contextualized and referenced discussion of fairy tales, aiming to challenge cultural stereotypes.

2.2 Independent Victim: Red Riding Hood's Power

In her rewritings, Angela Carter features ambiguous characters who call into question a narrow and fixed notion of victim vs victimizer, also as a result of her use of shifting point of view and invitation to re-read the source texts against the grain of commonplaces about them. In this way, she 'responds to feminist critics who accused Perrault of disempowering the female heroine by making her a naïve and passive victim of the wolf' (Hennard Dutheil 73). For instance, 'The Werewolf' depicts the young female protagonist as able to defend herself against her powerful opponent, the wolf, whose appearance emphasises the threat he

represents: 'It was a huge one, with red eyes and running, grizzled chops' (127). The tale underlines this effect by claiming that 'any but a mountaineers' child would have died at the sight of it' (127), which makes Red Riding Hood stand out as brave and strong, since when 'it went for her throat, as wolves do [...] she made a great swipe at it with her father's knife and slashed off its right forepaw' (127). This empowering description depicts her 'as a self-reliant little girl, quite capable of dealing with the dangers of the wolf herself' (Seago 92), thus preventing the reader from reducing her to the status of victim. The rest of the story, however, suggests that she may be a predator as well. This challenges structuralist theories that reduce characters to either one or the other, and deconstructs the stereotype of the helpless woman who needs a male hero to rescue her, but also complicates the moral dichotomy whereby women are inevitably cast as the victims of male predators.

Beside this representation of Red Riding Hood as strong and independent in 'The Werewolf', 'The Company of Wolves' shifts between descriptions of the main protagonist as either vulnerable or strong, thus deconstructing fixed, binary oppositions. Indeed, the tale raises a paradox while mentioning the 'invisible pentacle of her virginity' (133). This oxymoron paradoxically construes her vulnerability and lack of experience as a protection against dangers, even though the tale then draws attention to her fragility: 'She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel' (133). Whereas the prefix 'un-' inverts the semantic meaning of 'broken,' it nevertheless maintains its presence, thus reminding us of its signification and proleptically suggesting that she might be 'broken' at some point. This along with the anaphora emphasises her brittleness, but 'The Company of Wolves' presents another paradox: 'she has inside her a *magic* space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane' (133, my emphasis). The magic aspect of her sexuality contrasts with the thinness of the skin that protects it, which underlines the fragility of her virginity and the protection that it provides. Along those lines, Wendy Swyt claims that 'the girl's innocence defines her as a sacrifice, yet it also affords her a strange detachment from this system' (Swyt 320). Indeed, this anaphoric succession of descriptions ends by mentioning that 'she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is scared of nothing' (133). This last sentence refers to Grimm's tale 'Märchen von einem, der auszog das Fürchten zu lernen' (1853) ('The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was'). The girl's ignorance of fear leads her to forget 'to be afraid of the beasts' (135) when the werewolf takes the basket containing her knife, thus endangering her. However, she eventually experiences this feeling once hearing the howling of the wolves from her grandmother's house: 'she *shivered*, in spite of the scarlet shawl' (137, my emphasis). This change regarding her

ignorance of fear allows her to decide how to deal with this newly discovered feeling, thus empowering her: 'since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid' (138). Her refusal to feel scared dedramatizes the situation and prevents the mythical 'All the better to eat you with' (138) from concluding on the wolf devouring her: 'The girl burst out laughing, she knew she was nobody's meat' (138). Since the wolf is a 'carnivore incarnate, only immaculate flesh appeases him' (138), the girl's departure from the classic scenario, that is to say her laughter, brings her salvation. In 'The Company of Wolves', 'Carter deconstructs the traditional myth of female virginity' (Wu 60-61) by offering Red Riding Hood her first concrete experiences with fear and desire. The protagonist's vulnerability and laughter eventually saves her, which challenges the notion of victim.

In addition to the ambivalent representation of virginity, 'The Company of Wolves' explores and describes women's desire, which shifts from passive to active, thus questioning the representation of women as the mere victims of male sexual instinct. Red Riding Hood stays alert when she realises that the noise she had interpreted as a wolf's howling comes from 'a fully clothed [man], a very handsome young one' (134). Her defences melt when she sees him and finds him attractive: 'She had her hand on her knife at the first rustle of twigs but he laughed with a flash of white teeth when he saw her and made her a comic yet flattering little bow; she'd never seen such a fine fellow before' (134). The descriptions of his smile, his bow and his beauty reflect the pleasure she finds in gazing at him, thus drawing attention to feminine desire. This makes her 'dawdle on her way to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager' (135), thus actively choosing to fix the game in order to get the kiss that she wants. This exposure of female desire and pleasure climaxes when her grandmother's gaze confronts the naked wolf, leading Wendy Swyt to claim that 'desire is everywhere' (321): 'His genital, huge. Ah! huge' (136). The tale brings the grandmother and her granddaughter's sexual aspirations to light, especially when it heavily suggests sexual intercourse between the wolf and the girl, who eventually sleeps 'between the paws of the tender wolf' (139). Along those lines, Cristina Bacchilega comments that 'by acting out her desires—sexual, not just for life—the girl offers herself as flesh, not meat' (Bacchilega 63). However, Red Riding Hood does not 'offer' herself to the wolf, she takes what she wants from him. Indeed, the tale depicts her as the subject of most of the action taking place after she undresses the wolf: 'She will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put the lice into her mouth and eat them, as he will bid her, as she would do in a savage marriage ceremony' (138-139). The wolf appears as 'fearful' (138) and passive, whereas the anaphoric construction of the sentences emphasises the

decisions that 'she' (138) takes. This empowerment prevents us from reducing the girl to the role of victim, which calls into question formalist definitions of fairy tales as being either one or the other.

Likewise, Angela Carter's 'Wolf Alice' explores the ambivalence of several victims. Indeed, the tale's incipit represents the main protagonist as helpless: 'Could this ragged girl with brindled lugs have spoken like we do she would have called herself a wolf, but she cannot speak, although she howls because she is lonely' (140). This draws attention to her inabilities, her solitude and the incomprehension of her own nature, which fosters empathy for her. This effect is reinforced when it appears that she was 'found in the wolf's den beside the bullet-riddled corpse of her foster mother' (141), which makes her an orphan. The end of the tale is reminiscent of the emotion created by this event when the Duke gets shot:

First, she was fearful when she heard the sound of pain, in case it hurt her, as it had done before. She prowled round the bed, growling, snuffing at his wound that does not smell like her wound. Then, she was pitiful as her gaunt grey mother; she leapt upon his bed to lick, without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead. (148)

The transition from fear that depicts her as helpless, to her initiative of caretaking modifies the representation of Wolf-Alice who gains self-knowledge and agency over her surroundings. In addition, her licking proves to have an effect since it eventually makes 'the face of the Duke' (149) become visible on the 'rational glass' (148). Along those lines, Cristina Bacchilega comments on the paradoxical representation of the protagonist:

This girl is both a feral child, much like the inarticulate, intractable 'wolf children' studied by twentieth-century scientists, and a hero, marked like Romulus and Remus or Beowulf by association with the ancestral wolf. Though humans believe they have rescued Wolf-Alice, she proves to be the savior. 'We' have language, but her 'gentle tongue' has other powers. 'We' judge and spill blood, while her brave acceptance of difference revalues life. (Bacchilega 65)

Her analysis once again questions the binary opposition between humanity and animality. Indeed, the wolves appear as victims of men's arbitrary cruelty, but these animals also saved Wolf-Alice by taking care of her. Thanks to these ambivalences between the victim and saviour functions, 'Angela Carter boldly transforms themes of victimization and voyeurism into opportunities for female empowerment' (Lappas 115). This allows a reassessment of reductive theories regarding fairy tales.

Angela Carter's challenges to the formalist model also apply in a different way to Perrault's version. Indeed, the tale first depicts the grandmother as vulnerable when the mother asks her daughter to visit her: 'Va voir comme se porte ta mère-grand, car on m'a dit qu'elle était malade, porte-lui une galette et ce petit pot de beurre' (143). This assigns the girl the status of saviour who helps the sick victim. Whereas the grandmother becomes a victim of the wolf who 'la dévora en moins de rien' (144), Red Riding Hood's saviour type changes into a helpless prey. In addition, the fact that the old woman gets devoured straightaway contrasts with the elaborate trick that the wolf sets up for the girl. The succession of her questions about his arms, legs, ears and eyes, along with his mock answers, such as 'c'est pour mieux t'embrasser, mon enfant' (144) emphasise the girl's incomprehension and helplessness. In addition, the description of the devouring of the grandmother lasts for two lines, whereas Red Riding Hood's moment of danger covers more than half a page before the tale concludes on her death. This increases her vulnerability and tragic ignorance of the killer instinct of wolves and merges it with her initial intentions of helping her grandmother. Moreover, the division between wolves and human beings is questioned in the moral, which suggests an allegorical reading of the story. In this way, 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' already destabilizes the role of victim by assigning it to two characters and raising the issue of the manifold meaning of the tale.

'The Werewolf,' 'The Company of Wolves,' 'Wolf-Alice' and even Perrault's classic tale of 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' disprove formalists' and radical feminists' theories about the victim function. Carter's and Perrault's textual representation of ambivalent characters blurs the distinctions between vulnerable, strong, and evil characters, and they also contradict the definitions Propp and Thompson give in their models. Indeed, Vladimir Propp defines the 'victimised hero' (36) as a character who has been kidnapped, which does not apply to any of the tales' protagonists. Whereas Stith Thompson refuses to create a category of victims in his theory, he does mention the 'loved and married couples' (87). His model claims that 'the winning of the wife or husband or the recovery of the mate after some disaster forms the central motivation of the whole' (87) tale. However, romantic love does not appear in any of the tales in my corpus, except in 'The Company of Wolves'. This being said, the heavily suggested sexual intercourse between Red Riding Hood and the wolf does not necessarily imply a loving relationship. In addition, the tale precludes the possibility of a wedding across species. Finally, their relationship does not constitute the main interest of the whole tale, as it rather appears as a surprise. By implying the girl's lack of knowledge in the tragic ending of the tale, Perrault also contradicts radical feminists' claiming that fairy tales inherently

reproduce sexist patterns: Perrault's 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' underlines the importance of offering ladies an education (including in sexual matters, against religious prohibitions), which was hotly debated in the 17th century. Finally, Angela Carter's tales offer their protagonists a more explicit ambiguity:

The girl has greater agency; she is either armed, fearless and prepared to confront the wolf, or playful and knowing in the game of seduction with her male counterpart, or even a hybrid wolf-girl who instinctively ministers to a beastly Count wounded by gunshot.

(Hennard Dutheil 73, 74)

This exploration of cultural stereotypes that Perrault's tale had already challenged to some extent allows Carter to use the fairy tale as a self-defining medium that goes beyond reductive theories of the genre.

2.3 Harming Care and Irresponsible Help

Angela Carter's rewritings of 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' question the function of saviour by drawing attention to its potentially disastrous effects. Indeed, 'The Werewolf' depicts a child who can defend herself on her own and does not need anyone's help. This contrasts with the Brothers Grimm's 'Rotkäppchen', in which a hunter saves Red Riding Hood and the grandmother from the wolf. In addition, Carter's tale maintains an ambiguity regarding the child's true intentions towards her grandmother. As mentioned above, her attitude when she manages 'to hold her grandmother long enough to see the cause of her fever' (128) suggests both harming and caring aims, thus shifting her role from saviour to villain, and the other way round. Along those lines, Karen Seago comments on this tension with the following analysis:

The girl does not show the pity and redeeming love one would expect and which would be rewarded in a 'classical' tale, but calls the neighbours who help her to drive out the old woman and stone her to death. Although the tale has a 'happy ending', this upsets generic conventions and conditioned expectations as it sets up the girl in independent prosperity as a householder, living on her own and rewarded for behaviour which earns countless lazy sisters and scheming maid servants atrocious punishment. (Seago 88)

Similarly, the neighbours who come in after the child's cry for help play a paradoxical role. Indeed, when 'the child crossed herself and cried out so loud the neighbours heard her and come rushing in' (128), their intentions remains uncertain. Do they come to help and console Red Riding Hood for her loss? Are they here to help the grandmother to heal from her

wound? Or are their intentions evil and murderous? The tale suggests as much: 'They knew the wart on the hand at once for a witch's nipple; they drove the old woman [...] and pelted her with stones until she fell down dead' (128). This cruelty contrasts with the figure of the hunter in Grimms' 'Rotkäppchen,' which emphasises the tension between their roles of saviours and villains, thus challenging the moral world presented in the tale and the role attributed to the characters.

In addition to the way that 'The Werewolf' deconstructs formalist theories, 'The Company of Wolves' blurs the distinctions between evil and aid. As the narrator tells stories of a wedding that failed because of witches and werewolves, the tale mentions the return of a disappeared ex-husband. Furious to realise that his wife married again, he turned into a wolf again and attacked her children, until 'he was chopped up with the hatched they used for chopping logs' (132). This keeps the identity of the saviour unknown, but the following sentence confirms that her husband was present: 'when the wolf lay bleeding and gasping its last, the pelt peeled off again and he was just as he had been, years ago, when he ran away from his marriage bed, so that she wept and her second husband beat her' (132). The violence of her husband questions classical gender expectations, denying the husband the status of saviour and representing him as brutal. The man Red Riding Hood meets in the woods embodies a similar paradox: 'The dark and handsome gentleman is both wolf and man (he is, after all, a werewolf), but he is also a mix of predator and helper, because he is dressed like the huntsman in "Rotkäppchen"' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 99). Finally, the tale ends on 'Midnight; and the clock strikes. It is Christmas Day, the werewolves' birthday' (139). As Wendy Swyt perceptively notices, 'the becoming-wolf replaces the Christ child as the savior' (Swyt 322), which brings together this holy figure with the demonised wolves. These paradoxical references to religious and pagan emblems as well as well-known versions of 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' demystify the function of saviour by merging it with figures who personify evil.

Whereas 'The Company of Wolves' and 'The Werewolf' feature paradoxical representations of saviour figures, 'Wolf-Alice' sheds light on humans' contradictions. As mentioned above, the protagonist is found 'beside the bullet-riddled of her foster mother,' which depicts hunters as murderers. In addition, the religious sisters responsible for her education inflict her a cruel and dehumanizing treatment: 'she might snatch bread from their hands and race with it into a corner to mumble it with her back towards them; it was a great day among the novices when she learned to sit up on her hind legs and beg for a crust' (141). This description of her behaving like a dog along with the feeling of achievement amongst the

sisters creates an irony that depicts them as cruel. This effect is emphasised as the tale shows the Mother Superior's impression of having helped Wolf-Alice out when she 'tried to teach her to give thanks for her recovery from the wolves' (141), which contrasts with the acts of maltreatment that she suffers. The narrator's sarcasm regarding the nun's attitude comes to its peak when 'this nine days' wonder and continuing embarrassment of a child was delivered over to the bereft and unsanctified household of the Duke' (141). The use of free indirect speech reflects their impatience and severe judgement, which also accentuates the readers' feeling of injustice regarding their cruelty towards Wolf-Alice, and indifference when they acknowledge that she cannot (and will not) 'be saved'. Whereas the sisters think of themselves as charitable and generous, the protagonist refuses to learn from them, as her licking of the Duke's injury shows:

She tenderly cleans the fiend's gun-produced wound since wolves—unlike humans—took care of her because of her imperfection, and so Wolf-Alice turns to her 'gaunt grey' as a role-model, tending to that wounded parody of both wolves and humans, the Duke. (Bacchilega 65)

The wolves' kindness contrasts with the nuns' rejection of Wolf-Alice's otherness, in contradiction to what religion claims to promote. In addition, the sisters' pride of their so-called gesture of generosity emphasises this irony. Angela Carter deconstructs the role of saviour that they attribute themselves and draws attention to the villainy of their behaviour. In this way, she sheds light on the limits of the helper's role in fairy tales by questioning their motives and the implications of their attitude.

Just as the three rewritings of 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' complicate the function of saviour, Charles Perrault's version itself raises paradoxes regarding Red Riding Hood's role. Whereas the mother assigns her the function of saviour by asking her to bring her sick grandmother some food, the child's irresponsible behaviour endangers her relative and herself, thus making her partly accountable for the tragic ending. Indeed, as she meets the wolf and gets asked about where she is going, not only does she tell him who she is visiting, she also naively indicates how to reach her place: 'Demeure-t-elle bien loin ? lui dit le Loup. – Oh ! oui, dit le petit chaperon rouge, c'est par-delà le moulin que vous voyez là-bas, là-bas, à la première maison du Village' (143). In addition, her lack of understanding regarding the alarming situation that she has created builds a tension: 'Le loup se mit à courir de toute sa force par le chemin qui était le plus court, et la petite fille s'en alla par le chemin le plus long, s'amusant à cueillir des noisettes, à courir après des papillons, et à faire des bouquets des

petites fleurs qu'elle rencontrait' (144). Her carelessness contrasts with the task she has been assigned, shifting her status from helper to unwilling 'villain', even if it would be hard to blame her for being naïve. In this way, Charles Perrault deconstructs the function of saviour by merging it with irresponsibility and its dramatic consequences.

The fairy tales of Angela Carter and Charles Perrault thus feature ambivalent characters who refute formalists' reductive misconceptions of functions, or at least problematize the oversimplification of tales to fit a theoretical model. Vladimir Propp claims that the 'seeker' (36) aims to look for a kidnapped character, which does not happen in any of the versions. In addition, Stith Thompson defines the category of a 'supernatural helper' (47) who does not appear in any of the tales. Whereas 'The Werewolf' does not offer its female protagonist any help to defeat the wolf, it provides the girl an entire group of men to kill her grandmother, thus refusing to assign the role of saviour to any character at all. Similarly, 'The Company of Wolves' negates the category of helper by letting Red Riding Hood save herself thanks to her composure and the consciousness of her sexuality, though a virgin. Finally, 'Wolf-Alice' depicts wolves as the only generous rescuers, which merges the classical category of the wolf as the traditional villain with the function of saviour. These questionings mirror the reflections that take place in 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge,' where the protagonist underestimates her responsibilities and naively offers the villain the opportunity of destroying her family. Whereas Propp and Thompson created models in an attempt to map out fairy tales based on a theoretical model, their theories fail to capture the complexity of the genre as well as its challenging of cultural stereotypes.

In her rewritings, Angela Carter explores the different functions identified by formalist theorists in order to deconstruct them. Since she was familiar with criticism, we can hypothesise that she was doing so deliberately. Indeed, the three Red Riding Hoods interact with the figure of the wolves in a complicating process that prevents from reducing any characters to one role. She delves into the contradictions of her characters' intentions and behaviour, thus emphasising paradoxes, ironies and contradictions that not only put the source texts into critical perspective, but mostly invite the reader to go back to them and account for their overlooked complexities and ambiguities. Her deconstruction of the roles they play thus sheds light on Charles Perrault's challenging representations in 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge'. His protagonist indeed plays three roles according to different points of view, which denies reductionist models regarding characters and types. Both writers offer self-reflexive fairy tales that maintain a challenging conversation regarding the genre, cultural stereotypes and

misconceptions about their textuality and purpose. Whereas Disneyfied versions oversimplify the representation of fairy tales and cut these reflexions short, Charles Perrault and Angela Carter define them as an experimental space that questions literary types, and so challenge the influential theoretical models of her times.

3. From Guilty Eve to Female Saviour: 'The Bloody Chamber'

A key aspect of Angela Carter's 'demythologizing' project is her inversion of the condemnation of female curiosity in the ancient legend of Pandora's Box and the biblical Fall in Genesis through her rewriting of Perrault's 'La Barbe bleue'. Indeed, 'The Bloody Chamber' dismantles the guilt-tripping of feminine characters by playing with 'the leading idea, of curiosity punished, of the box or door which may not be opened, and of the prohibition infringed with evil results, [that] is of world-wide distribution' (Lang lxi). In addition, her blurred attributions of the different functions problematises Stith Thompson and Vladimir Propp's schematic models. 'The Bloody Chamber' indeed explores the villain function by drawing attention not only to the female protagonist's helplessness, but also to the vulnerability that she perceives in Bluebeard—which, as we will see, reinforces his monstrosity. In addition, whereas she becomes the object of her husband's murderous perversions, he eventually gets objectified throughout the narration. Finally, the explicit reference to Eve and Pandora allows the protagonist to dismantle the villain role that religious myths assigned to these figures. 'The Bloody Chamber' also calls into question the female protagonist's victim status by giving her the narrative voice, allowing her to reflect, as a subject, on the wrong reasons that lead her to marry him. The tale explores her sexual desire, which creates a space for female subjectivity usually absent from representations of sexuality, and even contradicts feminine stereotypical helplessness by assigning her mother the status of saviour. Moreover, the role her mother plays is called into question in the ambivalent representation of her arrival in the castle. The helplessness of the piano-tuner similarly deconstructs the stereotype of the male saviour. In this way, Angela Carter 'challenges us to acknowledge that the virtuous victim does not, cannot exist; that the heroic, avenging mother is a fantasy, too' (Wanning Harries 157). 'The Bloody Chamber' explores the different functions defined by formalists and draws attention to their contradictions.

In her rewriting of the tale, Angela Carter raises new questions about the 'complex dialogue with the long history of pictorial and literary representations of women in Western art and culture' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 136-137). Not only does 'The Bloody Chamber' echo 'La Barbe bleue', it also refers to earlier tales, which allows Angela Carter to draw attention to a long history of women who are the victims of violent, brutal, perverse husbands: for instance, the medieval story of Saint Margaret of Antioch, who survived after her perpetrator 'appear[ed] as a dragon, and swallow[ed] her alive' (Warner 261). After she got out of his belly, he made 'another attempt on her virtue' (Warner 261), this time sexual, which failed since she defeated him physically. The victim's triumph over its murderer similarly appears in

the Breton medieval story of Triphine whose husband ‘killed her, cutting off her head’ (Warner 261), as he always did to each of his wives ‘as soon as they became pregnant’ (Warner 261). She was brought back to life by a Saint who ‘was miraculously able to join her head again to her body’ (Warner 261). The Brothers Grimm also used this motif of resurrection in ‘Fitchers Vogel’ (1812), where the heroine ‘snatched away by a wizard discovers the mutilated bodies of her sisters in a *Blutkammer*, pieces their limbs together and brings the young women back to life’ (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 110). ‘The Bloody Chamber’ differs by scheduling its protagonist’s rescue before the murder takes place, but it still follows in the footsteps of former tales. For instance, it ‘is literally set in another version of the story collected by the Grimms, “The Castle of Murder” (“Das Mordschloss”)’ (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 110). In addition, every tale eventually punishes the husband by death, and recompenses the heroine, either by sanctifying her (which is considered positive in a Christian perspective, but wouldn’t have been approved by Angela Carter, who hated rewarded victimisation) or by offering her wealth and the opportunity to marry someone she loves. In the case of Perrault and Grimm, this reward celebrates the heroine’s curiosity, which offers an alternative interpretation of Pandora’s box and the Fall. Angela Carter delves into harmful religious representations of femininity and challenges them in ‘The Bloody Chamber’.

3.1 Rewarded Villains: the Power of Curiosity

In her rewriting, Angela Carter complicates Bluebeard’s villain status by shifting the protagonist’s attention between his cruelty and his loneliness—which does not exonerate him. At first, he infantilizes his victim in order to bring her vulnerability to the surface and assert his power over her.

‘My little nun has found the prayerbooks, has she?’ he demanded, with a curious mixture of mockery and relish; then, seeing my painful, furious bewilderment, he laughed at me aloud, snatched the book from my hands and put it down on the sofa.

‘Have the nasty pictures scared Baby? Baby mustn’t play with grownups’ toys until she’s learned how to handle them, must she?’ (Carter 13)

Bluebeard’s use of the third person to address his wife, the question tags and the use of the names ‘little nun’ and ‘baby’ infantilizes the main protagonist, as well as raise her husband to a superior rank of master: he belongs to the ‘grownups’, she does not. In addition, the satisfaction he gains from her confusion reinforces the binary opposition between victim and oppressor that structures their relationship. Bluebeard plays with the sexual and moral

innocence of the protagonist to devalue and manipulate her, even after having violently abused her trust: ‘My dear one, my little love, my child, did it hurt her? He’s so sorry for it, such impetuosity, he could not help himself; you see, he loves her so’ (15). These hypocritical apologies display an acknowledgement of her vulnerability and bring her ‘tears in a flood’; they open a space of confidence that he immediately takes pleasure in destroying by telling her he ‘must leave [...] and would be away for at least six weeks’ (15). His awareness of her loneliness serves him as a manipulating tool to increase her helplessness, which facilitates the elaboration of his chess-board tactics and the placement of her pawn on it. In his manipulative game, ‘Bluebeard the ogre husband plays two parts at least in his own story: the patriarch whose orders must be obeyed on the one hand, and on the other the serpent who seduces by exciting curiosity and desire and so brings death’ (Warner 1994: 246). By representing his calculated cruelty, the tale assigns him the villain role.

Whereas his behaviour depicts him as monstrous, the female protagonist sometimes perceives him as vulnerable. In her point of view, his ‘predatory hunger—his compulsion to devour the dignity, integrity, individuality, and ultimately the life of others in the exercise of his “omnivorous egocentricity”—suggests the sterile void within him’ (Roemer 115). Indeed, after his plans proceed according to his desires and the protagonist brings him the bloody key, she feels ‘there emanate from him, at that moment, a stench of absolute despair, rank and ghastly’ (35). The recent discovery of his dead wives and the desperate situation of the female protagonist reveal Bluebeard as a cruel murderer, which contrasts with her representation of him as weak. In addition, each step of the protagonist brings her closer to her execution and enhances her status of victim; the way she perceives her husband at that point of the story violently clashes with his status of persecutor. The victim even feels that he shares her despair in the following passage:

The chthonic gravity of his presence exerted a tremendous pressure on the room, so that the blood pounded in my ears as if *we* had been precipitated to the bottom of the sea, beneath the waves that pounded against the shore. (35, my emphasis)

This image that brings herself and her husband down leads Ann Robin on to claim that ‘Carter [...] challenges definitions of masculinity based on domination’ (Robin 654) by bringing to light not only his cruelty, but also his weaknesses. However, the protagonist eventually feels mercy for her husband because of the persecutor-victim dynamic that structures their relationship and endangers her life:

when he raised his head and stared at me with his blind, shuttered eyes as though he did not recognize me, I felt a terrified pity for him, for this man who lived in such a strange, secret place that, if I loved him enough to follow him, I should have to die. (35)

The narrator suddenly represents the murderer as disabled and unable to recognize her, thus depicting him in a position of paradoxical weakness. In addition, the protagonist ends her description with an hypallage by mentioning 'The atrocious loneliness of that monster!', thus shifting the attention from the monstrosity and the atrocity of the Marquis to his loneliness (35). However, she ends this description by recalling that her attachment for him will bring her death, thus shedding light on her victim status—which brings back to the monstrosity of her husband. Bluebeard carefully puts his plan in place in order to reach the status of total domination, feels extreme satisfaction in its elaboration and appears as weak to the female protagonist once he has achieved it. The vulnerability that the narrator perceives in him reveals the extent to which she subjugates herself to his manipulation. Far from exonerating his cruelty, this emphasises her victimisation to his plans.

Whereas the female protagonist's empathy highlights his psychopathy, the plot reverses the objectification he tries to apply on the female protagonist by eventually orienting it on him. At first, their sexual intimacy reduces the heroine to a mere food product: 'He stripped me, gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke' (11). She is consumed brutally: 'but do not imagine much finesse about it; this artichoke was no particular treat for the diner nor was he yet in any greedy haste. He approached his familiar treat with a weary appetite' (11). Danielle M. Roemer mentions that '[t]he underlying dynamic of the cuisine metaphor is quite basic: there are those who eat, and there are those who are eaten' (Roemer 114). Whereas the tale does not explore this comparison with vegetables any further, it maintains the sexual objectification as the Marquis denies the protagonist's desire and abruptly puts an end to their arousal: 'At once he closed my legs like a book and I saw again the rare movement of his lips that meant he smiled' (11). The comparison between the protagonist and a book reinforces the denigration of her humanity, their eventual and only intercourse is reduced to a rape: 'A dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides while the mewing gulls swung on invisible trapezes in the empty air outside' (14). Whereas the mirrors installed by the Marquis turn the bride into a mere sexual image, the metaphorical use of the verb 'impale' equalises their relationship to a murder: 'As the use of dehumanizing similes suggests, the erotic encounter between the experienced and predatory Marquis, for whom flesh is only meat, and his virgin wife foreshadows the death that is

planned for her' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 144). Bluebeard's violence towards women extends to the pictures that the protagonist finds in his books:

Yet I had not bargained for this, the girl with tears hanging on her cheeks like stuck pearls, her cunt a split fig below the great globes of her buttocks on which the knotted tails of the cat were about to descend, while a man in a black mask fingered with his free hand his prick, that curved upwards like the scimitar he held. (13)

Martine Hennard Dutheil comments that 'Carter's refined, perverse, and world-weary Marquis highlights the link between the aesthetic sensibility characteristic of the decadent movement and the violence done to women' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 138). The male protagonist's project includes a cruel objectification of the heroine that works up to a certain extent.

If the narrator is reduced to playing the object of the psychopath's fantasies during most of the tale, her mother's arrival puts an end to the murderous scenario. As she enters the castle on her horse, the description of the Marquis announces the breaking point: 'The puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their strings, abandon the rituals he had ordained for them since time began and started to live for themselves; the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns' (40). The puppet master's and the king's metaphors emphasise the loss of the former power that he had over his victim. In addition, the enumeration of adjectives depicting his passivity—open-mouth, wide-eyed, impotent—reduce him to the role of a powerless object. The tale emphasises this effect by immortalizing his surprise: 'And my husband stood stock-still, as if he had seen Medusa, the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs' (40). Martine Hennard Dutheil mentions that '[t]he Marquis becomes a work of visual art in his turn, and it is this that kills him' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 153). Indeed, the tale eventually gives him the function of a passive painting, which he intended to oblige his wife to play. In addition, his identity eventually matches the figure of Bluebeard in an explicit way, thus reducing him to an old fairy-tale character. In this way, the Marquis eventually embodies the passivity and the objectification that he had planned for the heroine. This time, by creating a plot in which this atrocious character is defeated, Angela Carter fleshes out the stereotypical figure of villain.

Besides overpowering the male protagonist as a patriarchal figure, 'The Bloody Chamber' converses with former tales and myths and 'enacts the dangers of literal reading' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 128). Indeed, Angela Carter offers an alternative interpretation to the

patriarchal values promoted by religious myths in which the woman appears either as the trigger of a disaster or as a villain by essence. In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Zeus compares Pandora to an 'evil thing, in which [men] may all delight in spirit as they embrace their evil' (Tandy and Neale 61) and justifies his creation as a revenge for the theft of fire. The woman serves as an object of punishment towards men, and she eventually opens the box that will increase their distress. In the Bible, God punishes Eve first and more severely than Adam. 'La Barbe bleue' ironically echoes this punishment trope by accusing the protagonist of being too curious in the moral, whereas it does not mention the vices of the psychopathic husband. Suniti Namjoshi exploits this idea in 'A Room of His Own', in which Bluebeard kills his wife for having obeyed him, which is, in his words, a 'provocation' (64). This reflects the double bind trope in the patriarchal value system that finds a reason to punish women independently of their behaviour. Amongst the texts cited above, 'La Barbe bleue' and 'The Bloody Chamber' offer an alternative that spares women from being punished or reduced to the object of punishment. Angela Carter's tale even explicitly shows that Bluebeard planned it all in order to perversely enjoy putting her to death. This shifts the focus from the female protagonist's so-called mistake to the Marquis' wickedness, thus reorienting the assignment of the villain function.

'The Bloody Chamber' explores and challenges this religious representation of guilty femininity. Indeed, the heroine 'is seduced by the Marquis's immense wealth, aristocratic rank and social status' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 142). She even acknowledges her own greed during their travel towards the castle, after feeling his glance upon her and looking at herself in the mirror: 'I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption' (6). Angela Carter herself criticises the extent to which the protagonist of 'La Barbe bleue' worships and uses money in 'The Better to Eat You With': 'Bluebeard's widow uses her inheritance to buy good husbands for herself and for her sister Anne. Marital content may only be acquired in the marketplace, after a good deal of consumer research. She's learned that much' (453). 'The Bloody Chamber' does not erase the corruptibility of the protagonist, who even appears as arrogant towards her employees, to whom she forgets she asked to prepare dinner: 'I knew by her bereft intonation I had let them down again but I did not care; I was armed against them by the brilliance of his board' (23). This parallel between the heroine's fate and religious myths reveals itself in the heroine's perception: 'The light caught the fire opal on my hand so that it flashed, once, with a baleful light, as if to tell me the eye of God – his eye – was upon me' (28). This brings the male and female protagonists in the biblical roles of Eve and the Great father, thus echoing religious interpretations regarding gender.

Nevertheless, Angela Carter proposes an alternative evolution and portrays a protagonist that eventually learns from her mistakes: 'I inherited, of course, enormous wealth but we have given most of it away to various charities. The castle is now a school for the blind' (41). In addition, her rewriting of the tale distributes the responsibility of the stereotypically female curiosity between both main characters. Angela Carter explicitly echoes Pandora's box and the Fall in order to criticise the attribution of guilt to women: 'I must pay the price of my knowledge. The secret of Pandora's box; but he had given me the box, himself, knowing I must learn the secret' (34). The opening of the box does not only imply Pandora anymore: the man shares this responsibility because he planned it. In addition, Jean-Yves, the piano-tuner, makes the parallel between the protagonist and Eve:

'You disobeyed him,' he said. 'That is sufficient reason for him to punish you.'

'I only did what he knew I would.'

'Like Eve,' he said. (38)

Not only does it portray Bluebeard as a perverse being that takes pleasure in punishing women for doing what he expects them to do, it also represents Eve as the victim of God's plans. As Angela Carter recalls the stories of the Fall and Pandora's box, she criticises them by putting the godly figures at the same level as a perverse murderer, thus representing their punishment through women as immoral. In addition, the tale rewards the heroine's curiosity in many ways:

The bride gains useful knowledge from opening the door of the bloody chamber, and this knowledge becomes the means through which Bluebeard's awful secret is revealed, triggering a chain of events that ends his career as a serial killer and enables his wealth to be redistributed more equitably. (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 128)

By extension, this also gives a new interpretation of the Fall regarding the motivations and consequences of Eve's acts:

'The Bloody Chamber' [...] invites readers to critique long-held assumptions about the character of women assigned by conventional interpretations of the biblical Eve, thus encouraging an awareness that Eve's disobedience was perhaps not motivated by lust, greed, or frivolous curiosity, and that it did not, in fact, bring disaster upon the world. Instead, Eve's action in the garden can be interpreted as an ordeal of initiation resulting in the very first instance of the exercise of free will intended to fulfil human beings.

(Renfroe 98)

In this way, 'The Bloody Chamber' calls into question the patriarchal model and the religious myths' interpretations that legitimize them, suggesting 'that traditional tales cease to be carriers of a patriarchal ideology when they are reinterpreted against the grain of dominant readings' (Hennard Dutheil 153-154). Angela Carter offers an alternative to male and female stereotypes and questions formalist definitions of functions, except for the villain figure.

Just as 'The Bloody Chamber' challenges cultural and religious stereotypes, Charles Perrault's 'La Barbe bleue' calls gender assumptions into question, albeit in a less explicit fashion. Indeed, 'Carter's tale also suggests that Perrault's text cuts both ways and is more ambiguous than it seems' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 110). The first moral seems to confirm the interpretation promoted by the Bible and Pandora's box:

La curiosité malgré tous ses attraits,
Coûte souvent bien des regrets ;
On en voit tous les jours mille exemples paraître.
C'est, n'en déplaise au sexe, un plaisir bien léger :
Dès qu'on le prend il cesse d'être,
Et toujours il coûte trop cher. (154)

This focuses on the protagonist's behaviour without acknowledging the monstrosity of her husband who is depicted as a psychopath. In addition, this moral depicts curiosity as a vice that leads to regrettable consequences, whereas the tale ends on a very positive note for the protagonist. This creates a tension between the objectification of this woman, who cannot express her own perception of the events, and the positive consequences of her behaviour:

Il se trouva que la Barbe bleue n'avait point d'héritiers, et qu'ainsi sa femme demeura maîtresse de tous ses biens. Elle en employa une partie à marier sa soeur Anne avec un jeune Gentilhomme, dont elle était aimée depuis longtemps ; une autre partie à acheter des Charges de Capitaine à ses deux frères ; et le reste à se marier elle-meme à un fort honnête homme, qui lui fit oublier le mauvais temps qu'elle avait passé avec la Barbe bleue.
(153-154)

Thanks to this contradiction, 'Perrault's first moral can be understood as an ironic quotation of his adversary's fierce attack on educated women who want to know more about the world and its secrets. This [...] does not condemn but on the contrary encourages women eager for knowledge' (Hennard Dutheil 125-126). The heritage enables the heroine to marry the man she wants, which reflects Perrault's claim of 'the rights for young aristocratic women to be considered as individuals who should be allowed to choose their own partners' (Hennard

Dutheil 125-126). In this way, 'La Barbe bleue' challenges the assignment of the villain role to female characters in religious myths and offers its heroine a freedom that questions gender assumptions. This contradicts both formalist theories and radical feminists' misconceptions about fairy tales regarding gender representations.

Angela Carter and Charles Perrault explore and sometimes confirm the function of villain in their versions of Bluebeard, but they also partly contradict Vladimir Propp and Stith Thompson in their definitions of this role in fairy tales. By referring to medieval legends and actual stories of persecuted and murdered wives, the two versions of the tale draw attention to the violence perpetrated against women, thus depicting Bluebeard as cruel and monstrous, which confirms formal theories. Stith Thompson mentions the category including ogres that he calls the 'supernatural adversary' (23), and accordingly to their theory, Bluebeard and the Marquis have a few special powers: the blue beard and the key that the female protagonists do not manage to wash. However, Vladimir Propp indicates that villains appear twice in the fairy tale, first through a sudden appearance from the outside, only to disappear afterwards. According to him, the second time, the villains appear as a person who has been looked for. The characters of the Marquis and Bluebeard are not looked for in 'La Barbe bleue' nor in 'The Bloody Chamber'. On the contrary, they come back from their trip earlier than expected, which frightens the brides. These nuances between Perrault's and Carter's tales and the definitions of Propp and Thompson illustrates the narrowness of formalist categories, drawing attention to the diversity of actual fairy tales.

3.2 Empowered Victims: the Mother's Strengths

Whereas the dynamic between the protagonists explores and nuances the function of villain, the empowerment of the heroine calls into question the victim status stereotypically associated with women. The transition from self-objectification to the role of subject illustrates her evolution, thus denying the definition of vulnerability as a fixed characterisation in fairy tales. The rewriting first represents her denial of her subjectivity, which 'depicts the alienating effects of the male gaze on her sense of self' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 145). Indeed, a part of her feels flattered to become the Marquis's new piece of art: 'Married three times within my own brief lifetime to three different graces, now, as if to demonstrate the eclecticism of his taste, he had invited me to join this gallery of beautiful women' (5). Along those lines, Martine Hennard Dutheil notices that '[t]he bride's choice of vocabulary ("demonstrate," "eclecticism of his taste," "gallery of beautiful women") immediately draws attention to the Marquis's collector spirit by associating his previous wives with art objects

(Hennard Dutheil 2013: 151). Her approval of this instrumentalization betrays her lack of sense of subjectivity, which she enjoys because she is 'the subject, *as* a girl, to a whole structure of myth and legend about the fulfilment to be derived from partnership with the male' (Day 153). She maintains this paradoxical perception of herself while entering the bedroom: 'He'd filled the room with [lilies], to greet the bride, the young bride. The young bride, who had become that multitude of girls I saw in the mirrors, identical in their chic navy blue tailor-mades, for travelling, madame, or walking' (10). Aidan Day pertinently comments this description with the following analysis:

In this passage the heroine as young girl objectifies herself first of all in the way she refers to herself in the third person. This is an analogue of the image of herself in the mirror which she comments on as if it were outside or different from herself. She comments on the images in the mirrors noting the chicness and elegance of the girls. There is an odd kind of self-alienation in this objectification of herself as other, her self-objectification. (Day 154)

Indeed, the female protagonist paradoxically firstly consents and even participates in her own objectification. In this way, 'The Bloody Chamber' delves into 'the superficiality and naïveté of young "girls" who marry for the wrong reasons' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 121), thus exploring one of the aspects of female victimhood.

Whereas the beginning of the tale depicts a heroine who first enjoys being instrumentalized, it gradually emphasises the representation of her strengths. For instance, the rewriting allows her to appropriate the narrative as a subject 'by placing her in the traditional male-dominated role of a storyteller' (Pareek 124). This creates a tension with the objectification of the male protagonist who refuses to acknowledge her as a human being, as well as with her submission to his will. In addition, her perfect pitch 'allows her to assert herself in a field in which she is more knowledgeable than her husband' (Manley 88): she realises that the piano is 'out of tune' (12), which 'causes her to demand that her husband add a piano tuner to the staff' (Manley 88), thus bringing an ally in the castle that will support her emotionally and eventually become her lover. Another of her strengths reveals itself as she enters the Bloody Chamber and realises that 'she had inherited nerves and a will from the mother who had defied the yellow outlaws of Indo-China' (26). This presence of 'her mother's spirit' (Manley 87) does not only empower her, it also offers a strong representation of femininity that creates a tension with the heroine's naivety at the beginning of the tale. Her character is evolving, which the mirrors similarly reflect as the husband, now returned, asks her for the keys: 'I saw myself, pale, giant as a plant that begs to be trampled underfoot, a

dozen vulnerable, appealing girls reflected in as many mirrors, and I saw how he almost failed to resist me' (34). The heroine 'now thinks herself capable of changing his determination of her story [...] she is no longer naïve about her situation' (Manley 86-87). Indeed, she becomes increasingly conscious and enrolls the 'active, (self-)critical and creative subject of her own tale' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 141). For instance, as her mother arrives in the castle to save her, she 'reaffirms the power of naming' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 141) by comparing him to 'those clockwork of Bluebeard' (40). This succession of empowerments depict 'the girl's metamorphosis through daringly gained knowledge' (Renfroe 102), represents the female protagonist as increasingly strong, thus proving formalist and radical feminist theories wrong in the field of fairy tales.

In addition to the narrator's evolution towards a self-conscious (and self-critical) subjectivity, the representation of her sexuality transfigures the traditional tale. She acknowledges that one of her fears results from her husband obliging her to face her own desires: 'I was not afraid of him; but of myself. I seemed reborn in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar and yet, and yet – might there not be a grain a beastly truth in them?' (17). The fact that the protagonist sees her image in his 'unreflective eyes' (17) suggests that she identifies with him, which draws attention to both his and her desire:

As with mirrors [...] refraction and the shaping presence of a frame mediate the fairy tale's reflection. As it images our potential for transformation, the fairy tales refract what we wish or fear to become. Human – and thus changeable – ideas, desires and practices frame the tale's image. (Bacchilega 28)

Similarly to the image that the frame offers to the tale, 'The Bloody Chamber' opens a 'potential for transformation' to the female protagonist, exposing her to her first experiences with desire. This creates a space for female subjectivity usually lacking in representations of sexuality, which tend to be male-centred. However, the mention of her desire does not only empower her, it also reduces her sexuality to his perverse fantasies as they are reflected in the heroine: 'And, as at the opera, when I had first seen my flesh in his eyes, I was aghast to feel myself stirring' (11). Along those lines, Makinen claims that 'Carter stresses the relationship between women's subjective sexuality and their objective role as property' (10). Indeed, the protagonist enjoys the practice of her husband and expresses it as a subject, but this belongs to his plan of educating her to find pleasure in her subjectification. This tension between the fact that the Marquis had foreseen her sexual arousal and the freedom she thinks she finds in desiring submission prevents from reducing her status to a mere victim. Indeed, 'the bride

admits her involvement in the sadomasochistic script laid out for her' (Hennard Dutheil 2013: 153), thus acting consciously until she realizes that her husband 'is planning to involve her in real torture' (Makinen 13), the point at which she eventually 'retracts her consent' (Makinen 13). By exploring the heroine's enjoyment of her victimisation, 'The Bloody Chamber' sets the record straight regarding the challenging quality of fairy tale with regards to gender representations and characters' functions.

In parallel to the exploration of the female protagonist's empowerment and sexuality, the depiction of her mother provides the representation of a strong woman, which dismantles the initial victimisation of women in the tale. Indeed, the mother of Carter's rewriting has 'gladly, scandalously, defiantly beggared herself for love' (2) and explicitly questions the heroine's choice to marry the Marquis. In addition, 'The Bloody Chamber' substitutes the brothers of the protagonist in 'La Barbe bleue' for her mother, who appears at the last moment to 'put a single, irreproachable bullet through [the] husband's head' (40). In addition, the '*maternal telepathy*' (41) that motivates her to run for her daughter does not only add a magical note to her intervention, it also portrays her as active and attentive. It also puts into light the value of their relationship: 'I never heard you cry before, she said, by way of explanation. Not when you were happy. And who ever cried because of gold bath taps?' (41). Her awareness of the protagonist's helplessness valorises the connexion between mother and daughter. Besides, it reverses the conventional gender role that the Bible and the myth of Pandora's box display. Instead of a male god that punishes a woman or uses her as a punishment tool, a female figure offers protection to a woman and punishes a man for performing this conventional patriarchal punishment on her daughter. This empowerment of the heroine's mother deconstructs the feminine victimisation that seems to appear at the beginning of the rewriting. In this way, Angela Carter denies radical feminists' misconceptions and formalists' definitions about fairy tales.

As 'The Bloody Chamber' deconstructs the female protagonist's victimhood by emphasising her strengths and the villain's vulnerabilities, both Carter's and Perrault's tales challenge the definitions that Vladimir Propp and Stith Thompson created about the function of victim. Indeed, Vladimir Propp considers that the 'victimised hero' (36) must have been kidnapped. However, Carter's and Perrault's heroines follow the psychopath freely to his castle. In addition, Stith Thompson's theory does not mention a category of victims, but a category of 'lovers and married couples' (87) whose eventual union forms the whole motivation of the fairy tale. The fact that the marriages take place at the beginning of the two versions of the tale contradicts his definition. Contrarily to Thompson's description, the

resolutions of 'La Barbe bleue' and 'The Bloody Chamber' happen when the marriages finish due to the husbands' death. The second marriage of Perrault's protagonist does confirm that one of the motivations of the tale consist of her finding an appropriate husband, but this union only occurs at the end of the story. Similarly, the relationship with the blind piano-tuner suggests the importance of being with a loving partner. However, this love story does not eventually give way to a wedding. The oppositions between formalist theories and the actual roles played by fairy tale characters betrays Propp's and Thompson's incongruities in their theories.

3.3 Mythical Saviours: the Lover and the Mother

'The Bloody Chamber' calls into question the stereotype of the male saviour by representing a masculine character whose presence, though benevolent, only helps the heroine up to a certain point in escaping the Marquis's monstrous plans. Indeed, the blind piano-tuner Jean-Yves 'challenges definitions of masculinity based on domination' (Sheets 654). His blindness prevents him from protecting the narrator, as he tells her: 'I can be of some comfort to you [...] Though not much use' (37). His status even joins the female protagonist's victimhood as the Marquis notices his presence before his wife's execution: 'Let the blind lead the blind, eh? [...] leave the boy; I shall deal with him later, utilizing a less exalted instrument than the one with which I do my wife the honour of her immolation' (39). This being said, Jean Yves does play a role in the heroine's salvation: 'for an instant, the beast wavered in his stroke, a sufficient split second of astonished indecision to let me spring upright and dart to the assistance of my lover as he struggled sightlessly with the great bolts that kept her out' (40). In this way, the female protagonist's mother plays the main role of saviour and the piano-tuner allows her to enter the castle, but only with his lover's help. This caring character who does not manage to defend the heroine by himself challenges both masculine clichés and the function of saviour.

Whereas Jean-Yves deconstructs the stereotype of the masculine saviour, the ambivalent representation of the mother's arrival prevents from reducing her character to a heroic saviour. Indeed, by killing the Marquis, she 'overthrows the patriarch, but only with the weapon of her father' (Dimovitz 15), which diminishes the feminist empowerment of this scene. In addition, the representation of this character as 'rescuer out of some heroic epic, as aging martial maid or turn-of-the-century, petrifying Medusa' (Wanning Harries 156) exaggerates the melodramatic aspect of this passage, thus diminishing its seriousness:

You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's service revolver and, behind her, the breakers of the savage, indifferent sea, like the witnesses of a furious justice. (40-41)

The designation of her mother as a 'wild thing' portrays her as a nature entity accompanied by the sea. Her mane reminds of the horse she is riding and visually merges the rider to her mount, thus creating an image of centaur and putting her at the same level as a mythical character. In this way, Carter 'troubles this return by suggesting its theatrical excess and magical unreality' (Wanning Harries 155-156). Indeed, the '*maternal telepathy*' (41) that brings her to the castle 'questions the sentimental, essentialist notions [...] that there is a special kind of communication between mother and daughter' (Wanning Harries 157). Angela Carter represents a saviour character that deconstructs its own function, thus challenging Vladimir Propp's and Stith Thompson's theories regarding the different roles played in fairy tales and dismantling the feminist interpretation of the mother's intervention.

These contradictions in the function of saviour in 'The Bloody Chamber' draw attention to sexist bias in classical versions and formalist theories of fairy tales. For instance, the maternal saviour challenges the usual presence of the male saviour. In addition, incongruencies also emerge when comparing reductive theories with 'La Barbe bleue'. Indeed, Vladimir Propp considers that the seeker who departs on a search for the victim is the main hero and that the thread of the narrative follows their adventure. However, in Carter's and Perrault's tales, the saviours appear at the end of the story, that focuses on the victims. A similar conflict emerges with Stith Thompson's theory, that divides the category of the 'supernatural helper' (47) in different groups: 'supernatural spinners' (47); 'helpful dwarfs or fairies' (49); 'the grateful dead' (50); 'the extraordinary companions' (53); 'helpful animals' (55); 'helpful horses' (59); and 'helpful devil or demons' (65). Neither the mother of 'The Bloody Chamber' nor the brothers of 'La Barbe bleue' fit in this classification that emphasises supernatural characters. These conflicts between the theory and the actual characters reveal the limitations of formalist definitions and the dynamism of fairy tales' characterisation.

In 'The Bloody Chamber,' Angela Carter deconstructs both gender stereotypes and radical feminists' misconceptions about fairy tales. In addition, her rewriting goes beyond

formalists' definitions since the functions of villain, victim and saviour do not apply to any character. Her text reflects Charles Perrault's intentions of drawing attention to the importance of curiosity, as well as the necessity for young women to choose their own husband. These tales' representations conflict with mainstream interpretations of the Fall and Pandora's box, showing feminine inquisitiveness as the consequence and the trigger of an advance for humanity. This way of engaging with cultural clichés and inviting the readers to challenge their commonplaces echoes the questioning quality of fairy tales, which contradicts the purpose and values promoted by fairy-tale stereotypes and Disney movies. In this way, Angela Carter opens a representation of fairy tales that she bases on a very referenced vision of the genre, conversing with former versions and interpretations of the Bluebeard story.

Conclusion

In addition to the narrative quality of Angela Carter's rewritings, her approach merges a documented and historicised reflection on fairy tales with an analytical depth in her challenges of cultural stereotypes. 'The Lady of the House of Love,' 'The Company of Wolves,' 'The Werewolf,' 'Wolf-Alice' and 'The Bloody Chamber' question the gender representations that Disney promoted in 'Sleeping Beauty,' 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'The Big Bad Wolf'. Instead of merely inverting or annihilating these clichés, Carter's tales explore and problematize them by constantly shifting between different functions, which avoids reducing any protagonist to a fixed role of saviour, villain or victim—except for the Marquis of 'The Bloody Chamber,' who stands as a good reminder of the fact that heartless psychopaths exist in real life as well. Whereas female protagonists are empowered, they do not appear as perfect: Angela Carter warily avoided self-serving myth-making, including radical feminist ones. Far from creating new stereotypes, *The Bloody Chamber* calls into question the existent gender dichotomies and their connection with other binary oppositions, problematising, for instance, the distinction between human and animal. Her rewritings depict cruelty and beastliness as part of several heartless human characters and feelings of empathy amongst animals are displayed, which raises awareness regarding our construction of beastliness according to anthropocentric myths. In addition, Carter explores and challenges the link that Disney tales maintained between masculinity and the role of saviour, between femininity and helplessness, as well as the villain being represented either as a cruel man or a *femme fatale*. In this way, Carter goes beyond gender clichés, which does not only challenge them, but also offers a historicised definition of fairy tales as a long tradition that calls cultural stereotypes into question.

By problematising gender representations, these rewritings also contradict radical feminist misconceptions about fairy tales as well as the models that Stith Thompson and Vladimir Propp created. Their formalist approaches focus on the basic structure, form and plot of a tale while ignoring its textuality, context and historical background, which results in reductive theories. Angela Carter calls into question each of the functions mentioned by Thompson and Propp by displaying ambivalent characters and blurring the distinctions between their roles. Instead of appearing as fixed functions, most protagonists adopt dynamic relationships with one another, playing different roles at the same time or shifting between them. The opposition between victims and villains that takes shape between male and female characters in these tales is most notably blurred. When a protagonist of *The Bloody Chamber* represents a threat to other characters, this often indirectly endangers himself or herself as

well, regardless of gender identity. This, along with the deconstruction of the archetype of saviour and its connection with other functions, allows for challenging representations of characters and offers a more complex definition of fairy tales. Indeed, Angela Carter shows the historically-rooted, challenging quality of the genre through the calling into question of gender stereotypes in her rewritings.

Whereas the exploration of female sexuality allows a subjectification of the heroines, it also raises a paradox. On the one hand, feminine desire often takes place within a context generated by male characters. The female protagonist of 'The Lady of the House of Love' feels attracted to the man that Count Nosferatu wants her to devour; Red Riding Hood has sexual intercourse with the wolf that initially trapped her in her grandmother's house in 'The Company of Wolves'; and the masochistic arousal for the Marquis represented in 'The Bloody Chamber' takes place according to his psychopathic plans. Whereas this superficial reading does not account for the textuality and contextualisation of the tales, it certainly contributed to Patricia Duncker's reproaching Angela Carter with reproducing the 'deeply sexist psychology of the erotic' (Duncker 73). This critic forgets to acknowledge that these rewritings refer to a very long history of victimised women, thus denouncing the injustice and violence addressed to them. Duncker also dismissed the textual suggestions of empowerment and liberation from the objectification that female characters were initially imposed. The comment Charles Perrault made about his own tales also applies to Carter's rewritings: 'si on examine bien ces Contes, on verra [qu'ils] referment tous une Morale très sensée, et qui se découvre plus ou moins, selon le degré de penetration de ceux qui les lisent' (Perrault 127). Indeed, a mere description of the plot neglects the textuality of the tale, its context and its challenging references to cultural stereotypes, thus missing the initial aim of fairy tales.

The Bloody Chamber fits within the 'demythologising business' (Carter 1997c: 38) of its author, celebrates the long-held tradition of fairy tales as a reflection about cultural stereotypes, thus encouraging Carter's readers to reconsider this literary genre beyond Disney's appropriation of the different tales that turned into mainstream cartoons. Her choice to refer to Charles Perrault's tales mirrors this invitation to go back to former versions of well-known tales to analyse them from one's own perspective, as she did through reading, translating and rewriting. Far from limiting her investigation to *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, she used her rewritings as an opportunity to refer to medieval tales and was very aware of the different theories regarding the genre amongst scholars. Not only did she play with famous motifs and challenge cultural conventions, she also problematised academic conceptions of the genre. By questioning representations of femininity and definitions of the

genre, her rewritings reopen the conversation Perrault maintained through his fairy tales, that, when read in terms of textuality and context, denounced the abusive treatment of women and defended them against the lower education that Perrault's society reserved to them. By continuing this reflection, Angela Carter raises awareness about the dangers of ignorance, underlines the importance of looking beyond commonplaces and encourages her readers to nurture their curiosity as well as their critical thinking.

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