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**Subversion of Gender Roles in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*
and *Other Stories***

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Letter of Recommendation

Ms. Rekha Baral has completed her thesis entitled "Subversion of Gender Roles in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*" under my supervision. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva-voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Subversion of Gender Roles in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Rekha Baral has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Angela Carter redefines prevailing conventional notions of femininity in her selected stories from The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories (1990). In male dominated society female are presented as weak, emotional, submissive, follower of male where as male are presented as strong, bold, rational and warrior. But Angela Carter in these stories challenges those traditional notions and presents female character as strong and bold who possess the so-called masculine traits to take up challenges. This study borrows theoretical concepts of Judith Butler who proposes that gender is a socially/culturally constructed category and it can therefore be changed.

Key Words: Redefine, Femininity, Gender roles, Identity, Sexuality

This thesis explores how Angela Carter redefines the idea of femininity in the selected stories from *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1990) which was first published in 1979. The collection contains ten stories. And for the purpose of the study, I have selected only three stories: "The Bloody Chamber," "The Tiger Bride" and "The Erl-King." All these selected stories are told from the perspective of a female. And that is one important way the author uses to give voice to the female characters. The belief that female characters remain is challenged by this technique. Some of the selected stories use supernatural characters and plot lines. This study will also try to link why the author tries to do that in her stories. My argument is that the traditional gender roles were the constructions of the patriarchy and they were constructed through fears of external forces including insecurity from supernatural forces. But Carter's stories create characters that not only fight the male members but also show courage to encounter deadly beasts.

Carter, in *The Bloody Chamber*, unfolds the issue of gender role, sexuality, marriage, identity, love, sex and violence with mythical references. "The Bloody Chamber" starts with the description of a seventeen-years-old girl newly married with a wealthy businessman of France, The Marquis. The same young girl is the major character in the story who is starting her new life with a strange man older than her. But from the early days of marriage, she is quite unsatisfied with her husband. The husband tries to kill her by shooting at her. But the girl's mother intervenes and is able to save her daughter. The mother also kills her own son-in-law in revenge. She is presented as a very bold and courageous woman. The husband of the girl wanted to kill her because she knew about the bloody chamber of her husband where he had murdered three of his earlier wives. The girl finally marries with a blind piano tuner

with whom she shares all the property for charity and lives a relatively free and happy life.

Similarly, in the "The Tiger Bride" too, the female protagonist is herself the narrator. She is a very beautiful girl but her father loses her to the Beast during the card game. She accepts the marriage proposal because she does not want to disappoint her father and starts to live with the Beast. The Beast always hides his appearance in front of the society because of his animal-like appearance. The Beast always desired to see the nude body of his wife. To persuade her, the Beast brings an expensive ornament and diamond earring. But the wife does not accept his proposal and throws his gift into the corner. She, finally, leaves the Beast and starts a new life on her own.

Lastly, in "The Erl-King", the narrator is a young girl. In the story, she describes her walking experience through the jungle alone. She also describes the Erl-King who is a strange creature that eats plants, milk from goats and other animals. She was curious about this unusual character. Actually, she was seduced by the Erl-King. So, she visits him to learn about his behavior and characters. During the visits, the Erl-King touches her with his harsh hands. But she is disturbed by his behaviors. So, she kills her by strangling him with her hair and gets herself free.

Angela Carter, in these three stories, presents the female character as a in the major roles where they act against abusive and authoritarian male counterparts. And they make their way for a free and independent life through the ways of becoming fearless, courageous, valiant and brave. In the conventional stories, female characters are presented as weak, submissive, emotional, bread server and follower of their male counterparts. However, male characters are supposed to be brave, winner, bold, strong, rational and thoughtful. Men are often seen in the roles of hunters, the providers, the warriors. But the selected stories studied in this paper subvert such

tendencies. The stories have shown that female characters are lovers, obedient and passionate but when required they can also be violent, disobedient and cruel. The female characters presented in the stories are not only in the submissive roles but they become triumphant against the male domination with their changed masculine roles.

Traditional cultural conventions are reconsidered in *The Bloody Chamber* with reference to gender roles. In the past, females were not only manipulated by men, they were restricted by cultural values itself. Females are considered as an angel in the house. It is associated with beauty bodily softness and observance of quietness. They are expected to wear expensive ornaments and cosmetic. But such positions of female characters are altered in the stories. For example, in "The Tiger Bride", the female character throws away the precious ornaments to lure her for sexual relationship. Dress codes and other etiquettes were invented by men to control women. And such things have been exposed and challenged by the female characters in the stories.

In a sense, *The Bloody Chamber* is a commentary on social conditions which tries expose the intentions behind the culturally constructed roles of femininity and masculinity. Even in the modern world, females are still in a subjugated position and will be so until and unless they unveil the hidden agenda of the cultural and social values constructed by men.

Angela Carter's stories have been studied by critics and readers from different perspectives. Merja Makinen in "Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality" argues that "The Bloody Chamber" rightly constitutes that the heroine, initially is abused by her own aged husband but she gradually collect courageous within herself though she does not expose it explicitly, her mother appears to murder son-in-law who symbolically represents the phallogocentric worldview. At the same time, the death of Marquis symbolizes the death

of phallogentric/male-centric viewpoint- the conventional patriarchy. She states:

I need to examine the feminist strategies of her representations of sexuality, particularly the debate surrounding the constructions of sexuality within the *Bloody Chamber* stories. I believe Carter is going some way towards constructing a complex vision of female psychosexuality, through her invoking of violence as well as the erotic. Carter's strength is precisely in exploding the stereotypes of women as passive, demure ciphers. That she, therefore, evokes the gamut of violence and perversity is certainly troubling, but to deny their existence is surely to incarcerate women back within a partial, sanitized image only slightly less constricted than the Victorian angel in the house. (8)

Carter gives more agencies to the female characters in her stories. In "The Bloody Chamber", the mother provides safety to her daughter instead of the father.

Traditional stories show that males are the protector of the female from any kind of danger but this notion is subverted in the story. The female character is the protagonist and she is not like a Victorian angel in the house who likes to wear ornaments and beautiful clothes.

Seda Arikan in his review of *The Bloody Chamber* discusses out how Carter has used the fairy tales features in the stories to give a greater agency to women in which they are transformed from passive characters to active agents. They are presented in a position where they are able to take decisions for themselves. Arikan rightly points out:

"The Bloody Chamber", "The Tiger's Bride" and "The Erl-King" makes the ideological message of traditional fairy tales, where the stereotypical females are pictured as passive victims and males as strong agents, explicit. However,

Carter challenges the general tendency of traditional fairy tales in which 'passivity is constructed as pleasurable'. By converting passive recipients that are female into active agents after a while, she presents a deliberate transitivity choice related to her feminist concerns. She becomes the agent to make decisions and to take action. (125)

Carter explicitly gives the position of power to the mother, as Marquis is murdered by the heroine's mother. Similarly, "The Erl-King" ends with the female protagonist taking action to kill the Erl-King. The female protagonists become actor at end of the stories. In conventional fairy tales, male characters become the hero but in Carter's stories it turns out to be otherwise.

Similarly, Carter not only deals about the sexual life of the human being she is trying to deal with the marginalized group too. She is giving the voice to the voiceless people.

Kelly Weaver in "Review: The Bloody Chamber" argues that the heroine in the story does not disappoint like ancient fairytales story. She carefully and secretly finds out the reality of her husband. Finally the protagonist herself makes a strong decision of her life. She shares all the property for charity and lives a happy life. She opines:

The Bloody Chamber", she does not disappoint. Though the reworking of traditional characters and tale, Carter generates a revelation about gender roles; how male desire and powers have overshadowed, twisted and suffocated the significance of female desire. These stories defy traditional gender roles that were extolled within their predecessors. (158)

She mentions that Carter is trying to produce new women who challenge the traditional gender role. She is reworking the traditional belief and system. Kelly

further mentions that "The Erl-King's qualities contradict the historical archetypes when he is described as an excellent housewife, with having eyes of an incomparable luminosity. This tender butcher subverts the very idea of a mother nature through Carter's juxtaposing descriptions" (Weaver). The Erl-King has also feminine quality. He lives along in the jungle. He is very conscious about health and sanity because he always keeps his house clean. In "Erl-King" heroine directly tells to the audience that Erl-king is a strange creature he lives alone in the jungle. He creates different obstacle to the heroine but she is not afraid but is disturbed by him and makes a plan to kill him.

In "Pornography, Fairy Tales and Feminism: Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chambers'", Robin Ann Sheets argues that "Carter defends Sade because he treats all sexual reality as a political reality and he declares himself unequivocally for the right of women to fuck as aggressively tyrannously and cruelly as men" (633). Likewise, in these short stories, the female characters are more powerful than male characters. People do not believe that how a mother kill a man but in the story a mother present as a heroic figure. She kills a man with a gun.

Commenting on Carter's stories, Patricia Doncker argues that there is crucial shift in power relation between man and women. The women characters are in victorious position and male are in defecation. The performance of woman has been given an award. They are always required to walk along the path of injustice and discrimination:

[. . .] the critical relation between women and men in this short stories whether the women were wives or whores, is always economy. The act of sex is always a question of performance. Most women are able to perform award-winning orgasms to order, faking it so successfully that the limits of authenticity are

placed in doubt most men neither know nor care whether they are getting a command performance or the real things. (62)

Women are more strong and powerful in these three short stories. They themselves open the Pandora's box their minds are always in a curious mood. In "The Bloody Chamber" the heroine does not lose her hope. She enters into the forbidden chamber and found out the reality of her husband. When her husband tries to kill her, her mother come and shoots him. Here, we can see the female bound against the male. Carter follows the humanitarian path that she focuses on rational human nature/behavior to each member in the society irrespective of gender, sex, caste, creed, race, and geographical location.

Margaret Atwood praises Angela Carter's audacious impertinent wit and magnificent imagination, her sharp rationalism, and her highly forwarded intellectualism as she explores herself to change the old conventions and cultures in a right path. Atwood comments, "She was a born subversive, in the sense of original root: to overturn" (61). Carter, through her literary endeavor, explores the roots of social-cultural and historical discourses which give a real foundation for analyzing the source of social, cultural and more significantly gender and sexual misery caused due to patriarchal hierarchy.

One's literary endeavor as a byproduct of society and social affinities inculcates the social-cultural realities. A literary text is not an isolated phenomenon but is constituted many beliefs, thoughts, practices and cultural codifications that have already gone before it intertextually. For Julia Kristeva, a literary text is transmitted, "from one signifying system to another" intertextually (60). Kristeva links a text with one's locality and or cultural belief. Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* intertextualizes the traditional femininity and fairy tales into a modern tale. She also

opines that "Femininity is the product of the human mind and reflects only aspects of material human practice"(70). According to her fairy tales and myths are simply constructed in order to define feminine roles in the earlier societies. Carter, with the help of redefining and intertextuality revises women's imprisonment within gender cultural traditions of femininity.

The Bloody Chamber is in a way a rewriting of traditionally known western mythology of the Bible, the story of Eve and Adam, and fairy tales narratives of 'Pandora's Box' and 'Bluebeard' incorporates the social realities and social discourses simply constructed by the elite male-dominated society. It also delineates how discourses constitute cultural values and norms. Marquis, Beast and the Erl-King those characters in the story, treat female figure as a commodity to devour his sensual thirst- throughout his life. This vitalizes the phallogocentric notion of prevailing even in the modern world. His third marriage with a seventeen years' young girl also shows his only sexual affinities with the female. Similarly in "The Tiger Bride" Beast wants to see her naked body that gives his pleasure and satisfaction. His main purpose of marrying her is for sexual pleasure. Mirja Mäkinen, in her review of *Erotic Infidelities: Love and Enchantment in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber* by Kimberly J. Lau argues that this story specially focuses on the present situation. The patriarchal belief and values are in crisis situation. Carter is also trying to challenge the heterosexual relation. In the present context not only male and female can marriage and have physical relation and she state:

The Bloody Chamber as an acknowledged major literary text repays such a lengthy focus on its content and context. As Lau argues, despite the collection's patriarchal baggage, Carter never gives up on her exploratory and challenging renditions of heterosexual love... which enable Carter to escape

not only phallogentric but also, a more controversially feminist expectation in a textual recuperation of heterosexual desire, love, and companionship. (296)

Carter utilizes her literary creations in order to dismantle the prevailing patriarchal belief, thoughts, and cultural practices. She not only demystifies the societal gender discourses and cultural ideologies but also looks at the positive sites of them. As she regards masculinity and femininity both as constructed phenomena, she precisely emphasizes the cultural social discourse about gender role to be revived in the right manner that is the human manner.

Angela Carter gives a new perspective to understand the notion of femininity and feminine in order to postulate the root cause of bias and inhuman gender practices. For her redefining the conventional tales and narratives constitutes a path to follow a modern gender discourse where there are no biases between male and female or between masculinity and femininity.

As stated earlier, this study draws theoretical concepts from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity*. Femininity generally means the quality of being female or womanliness. This definition is simply in the sense that being feminine means being a woman, no matter how you choose to express or embrace this quality. Feminine means also being pretty, sensitive and gentle as well as many other stereotypical traits, both physical and emotional. But now there are understandings that femininity should no longer be understood as those traits that are deviated from masculinity; on the contrary, femininity should be understood as a way of being that needs no point of reference except itself.

In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler shows the distinction between sex and gender where sex as a natural given category and gender as an acquired cultural- social category. Butler argues that sex also is a socially constructed category which stems

out of social and cultural practices and in the context of a discourse that has a history and its own social and political dynamics. She argues that gender, sex and self is the effects of publicly regulated performance. Gender is not expressed but constituted through action. She explores the relationship between power, and categories of sex and gender. She calls for people to disturb the categories of gender through performance. Carter, just like Butler, contests the common modern view of women. Writing as a homogeneous landscape that simply serves specific consciousness-raising goals that is the new sets of gender and social values groundings on humanity and humanism.

As Butler sees, sexuality and gender roles are simply discursively constructed. She argued, “‘gender’ is constructive, rather than a core authentic, innate subjectively” (218). According to her the gender and sexual orientations are just socially, culturally constituted by the patriarchal power. She further argues that subjectivity and performativity begins here because the gender body utilizes semiotic and material signs (“words, acts gestures and desire”) to similarly create what appears to be an interiority, which she calls “the effect of an internal core or substance”. This in turn becomes a new prison within which human subjects are trapped (581).

For Butler, all human become subjects if the society prohibits to a ‘false stabilization of gender’. Gender is not absolute stabilization rather it is the matter of performance. False stabilization of gender needs to be re- performed by its “acts”, not by some essentiality. Those acts need to be performed within the public domain, and take on social and political significance. Moreover, Butler argues that “all of the norms produced by gender performances on the material surface of the body/ society are ultimately arbitrary, constructed, and ‘Phantasmatic’, thus subject to deformation, breakdown, and change” (582). According to her, gender is not absolute construction;

it is just the matter of performance. It means that gender issue, masculinity and femininity are not the inborn quality rather it is the construction by the society.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* offers the point of view of gender role as enacted and it questions over the fixity of gender identity. She analyzes, "Gender can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically incredible" (180). Gender can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of primary and stable identity. Butler denaturalizes law of normative heterosexual coherence by means of performance which affirms their distinctness. In patriarchy, historians were defined male as rational, bold and strong. They treated woman to fit to carry a child. But Carter shows adventurous and revolutionary woman in "The Bloody Chamber". They not only physically strong rather are mentally increasing their power to challenge the male. The heroine starts to think why her husband did not allow her to unlock that chamber. She cannot stop herself to explore that room. And she finally finds out the reality of her husband.

Carter, in *The Bloody Chamber*, examines traditional patriarchal notions of love and marriage, desire and sexuality and resituates them in the modern society. She contemplates on rewriting and reconstructing the patriarchal philosophy and, at the same time, the consideration of the patriarchy by feminism as universalizing 'repressive' and 'regulatory' structure. Traditional gender and cultural conventions are revisited in a feminist way in *The Bloody Chamber*. The author redefines the earlier gender notions and resituates in the existing ground realities.

In "The Bloody Chamber", the unnamed bride, an orphan child with no father, who belongs to the middle-class family in France, happens to marry Marquis, a wealthy businessman. She lost her father at war so she and her mother are struggling

for financial security. When she is offered to marry with a wealthy man, she accepts the proposal readily. However, she does not know about the family background of Marquis. Even when he proposed her, he did not show emotional feeling towards her. These characteristics make the heroine fear about the Marquis. The next day after the marriage, when the girl reaches the castle, she finds that it is decorated with full of lilies and everything is perfect like heavenly palace.

The husband gives instructions to her before he leaves the house for his business trip. He hands her a ring of keys to every lock in the house, all of which she is free to open, explore and enjoy except one that leads to a private chamber. When she enters the room, she sees instruments of torture: a rack, a wheel, and an iron maiden. In the middle of the room she finds a bier with candles around it and lights them to the embalmed corpse of the marquis's first wife. It is clear from the marks on her neck that she was strangled. Behind the bier hangs the skull of the Marquis's second wife, dressed in a bridal veil and she finds the corpse of the last wife inside the Iron Maide run through with "a hundred spikes". After knowing the reality, the narrator decides to escape the Marquis. She covers up all evidence of her snooping and flees the chamber.

The narrator tries to call her mother, but the phone is dead. When Marquis returned from his business he orders her to bathe and put on the dress whereas the Marquis had sent the entire servant away to the mainland. Then he commands her to approach the chopping block and swears to kill Jean-Yves after he kills her. The heroine tries to stall, but the Marquis lays her head on the chopping block and cuts her dress off of her. He raises his sword, but is distracted by her mother's loud arrival. Then she charges the Marquies and kills him with a single bullet through the head.

Carter in "The Bloody Chamber" present two distinct characters Marquis a

wealthy business man and another Jean-Yves who is a poor blacksmith's son from the village. He is a blind piano-tuner who is characterized almost as a female because of his being as powerless as a woman. Carter describes him, "He was blind, of course; but young, with a gentle mouth and gray eyes that fixed upon me although they could not see me" (25). Carter's purpose seems to show that it is not only females who are weak, but if the economic and other environments are not supportive, males can also be socially weak. So, social weakness is not a given condition of an individual but something determined by other social and economic conditions. In order to challenge the conventional definition of female and femininity, the author presents the female character as inquisitive, rational and strong. The female protagonist does not stay passive when her husband leaves his house for business. She opens the forbidden chamber and find out the reality of her husband. The mother figure is characterized as a reformist who keeps on continuing cultural gender roles as loving and affectionate mother. But she also takes an intervening role to save her daughter by taking up arms. This event killing of Marquis denies the traditional representation of females and weak and tender-hearted.

Carter in "The Bloody Chamber" characterizes the mother and other female characters like heroines as revolutionary figures who fight against discrimination and inhumane behaviors of patriarchal society. The narrator describes her mother in the following way:

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 man, her black lisle legs exposed to the thing, her skirts tucked around 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. (47-48)

She further mentions that "On her eighteenth birthday, my mother had disposed of a man-eating tiger that had ravaged the villages in the hills north of Hanoi. Now, without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head" (48). The narrator sees her mother as a savior. In traditional stories and novels it is shown that a man or father is the savior. But this belief is challenged by the writer she present female as a heroic figure. The mother is the savior of her daughter. While transforming the traditional tale to a radical modern tale. Carter was efficacious in employing "The Bloody Chamber" with sinister wit and elements which subvert the traditional gender and the Gothic tradition. An attempt to transgress the social and moral codes is visible at every passage of the story. The male fear, fascination and abhorrence at the power of women's sexuality and their subjectivity are presented in "The Bloody Chamber" with utmost skill and vitality. *The Bloody Chamber* thus proves itself as a powerful Female.

In the story, Carter depicts the problematic notion of conventionalized sexual exploitation allowed by the social apparatus that defines and restricts sexuality and gender as construction. The heroine does not follow the path of her husband. After knowing the reality of her husband she does not believe him. She mentions:

I did not believe one word of it. I knew I had behaved exactly according to his desire; had he not brought me so that I should do so? I had been tricked into my own betrayal to that illimitable darkness whose source I had been compelled to seek in his absence and, now that I had met that shadowed reality of his that came to life only in the presence of its own atrocities, I must pay the price of my new knowledge. (40)

Carter describes the problems associated with conventional gender roles which resulted in subjugation of the weaker ones. The morality constructed by the society only reinforces the needs of the powerful ones.

The death of Marquis is a symbol of the death of inhuman patriarchy and the mother's attempt to shoot Marquis dead is justice to her daughter against his dominations and discrimination imposed on her. He decorates his room with beautiful flowers. He fills his house with expensive things. The bedroom is filled with lilies, which are reflected in twelve mirrors that surround the bed so that the room appears to be an embalming parlor. Such a vivid description of the room and the bed clarifies how Marquis considers the woman and more specifically the wives he had married before and now.

Marquis takes pleasure of the physical relationship with his new wife on the first night of their marriage. Then he tells his plan to leave for a business venture. He is least bothered to know the expectations of the newly married wife. Responding to such a situation, the new bride comments, "A dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides." We then see the Marquis giving instructions to his wife, also the narrator of the story. They are the dos and don'ts for her. She is instructed not to take off the choker. He hands her a ring of keys to every lock in the house, all of which she is free to open, explore and enjoy. But she is denied to get access to the private chamber. He even threaten her, "Don't loiter! Do you think I shall lose appetite for the meal if you are so long about serving it? No; I shall grow hungrier, more ravenous with each moment, crueler... Run to me, run! I have a place prepared for your exquisite corpse in my display of flesh!" (32). He also raises the 'sword' and cuts bright segments from the air in order to show his power her. This shows his repressive and regulatory attitude towards his wife.

As the title of Carter's story indicates, attention is displaced from the male villain to the bride-narrator's discovery of his monstrous secret in the forbidden chamber. "The Bloody Chamber" focuses instead on the conditioning of the bride to submit to her husband's visual power. This power consists of the absolute control he exerts over her image and identity as he shapes and reshapes it according to his desire. As the bride is made to enact his increasingly cruel erotic fantasies, all of which are derived from visual images, she becomes complicit in her own victimization to the point of almost accepting her death as the price of her disobedience.

The main changes introduced by Carter as part of her adaptation, namely the choice of a heroine-narrator who documents the masculine bias of visual art, as well as the presence of two helper figures, the blind piano tuner Jean-Yves and the avenging mother, confirm the need to move attention away from the alienating effects of visual conventions, shaped as they are by the male gaze, as part of a strategy of female empowerment. On a first reading, the story even seems to set up an opposition between visual and literary representation, insofar as the Marquis's despotic rule of vision is exposed by the female narrator and overthrown by her heroic mother.

The Heroine, unlike the conventional woman character, later lives a happy and splendid life with her new lover, the piano tuner, after her husband Marquis's death. She narrates the situations in the following way:

We lead a quiet life, the three of us. 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, though I pray that the children who live there are not hunted by any sad ghosts looking for, crying for, the husband who will never return to the bloody chamber, the contents of which are buried or burned, the door sealed. (48)

It shows that the female protagonist does not only act to alter the traditional role of a weak and submissive woman but she also continues to remain loving and caring along with her humanitarian bent. We learn from her that she donates her former husband's wealth to the needy people and other charitable works. She changes the castle into a school for the blinds. Carter through this event also emphasizes on humanity and humanitarian world views.

Angela Carter reappropriates the consolatory mechanisms of the traditional fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* stories and reconstructs the conventions governing certain social behaviour for women. Carter's tales fabricate new cultural and literary realities in which sexuality and free will in women replace the patriarchal traits of innocence and morality in traditional fairy tales. In "The Bloody Chamber", Carter is concerned not only with the shortcomings of conventional representations of gender, but also with different models of deconstructed masculine evil which take various shapes in wicked female format. The image of the young female which is mostly associated with the good, decent, innocent and naive is rendered either to have inclinations towards perverted sexual practices or to be violently harmful for the opposite sex.

Likewise, the next story "The Tiger Bride" takes place in Italy. In this story the female protagonist is the narrator also. Though she is a very beautiful girl, her father lost her in the game of cards, and she is forced to marry to the Beast. Her husband, the Beast, has a face like a tiger. So he hides his face because his ugly appearance. He wears a mask with a perfect man's face painted on it so only his yellow eyes are visible. His actions are awkward because he forces himself to act human. The wife says, he "has an air of self-imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself to remain upright when he would far rather drop down on all fours" (62).

Furthermore, he speaks in such an incomprehensible growl that his assistance must translate for him. The wife of the Beast describes about her husband in this way:

I never saw a man so big look so two-dimensional, in spite of the quaint elegance of The Beast, in the old-fashioned tailcoat that might, from its looks, have been bought in those distant years before he imposed seclusion on himself; he does not feel he need keep up with the times; only from a distance would you think The Beast not much different from any other man, although he wears a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it. (65)

Carter in this story brings juxtaposition between human female and non-human male characters. It appears very deliberate on the part of the author to do this. He tries to show that females are kind while the males are wild. In the same token, the male character is named as the Beast to suggest the animalistic features in the males. But at the end, the story takes an interesting twist.

Next day when the wife arrives at the Beast's home, his assistant explains that his master wishes to see her naked virgin body. After that, she would be free to return to her father's home with a lot of property and gifts. Then the Beast tries to give her a diamond earring to persuade her but she throws it into a corner. She does not like his behavior and leaves the Beast to start her new life. It shows the failed attempt of the Beast to lure the girl to pose naked by offering the prize of precious gifts. The Beast considers woman to be a mere consumer of material goods without any dignity and self respect. But the wife acts in a rational way and denies such awkward proposal of the Beast. When the novelists describes the Beast in an unusual look, as he wears old-fashioned clothing, including a wig, gloves over his uncannily large hands and a scarf to cover his neck, it is suggestive of the possible conspiracy that could be hatched.

Similarly, Carter uses the earrings as a symbol to depict the bondage of

"womanhood" and the destruction which suggests the destruction of values of the gender-construction. She writes, "My earring turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders" (67). It seems that Carter is dispelling the notion of materialism as a feminine stereotype, actively working against the idea of gender. The idea of materialism as a female stereotype stems from the construct of beauty connected to women in a cultural sphere where clothing and beauty are marketable and profitable endeavors.

Likewise, Christine Delphy argues in her text "Materialist Feminism" She explains,

women are the subordinates within families. As such, women constitute a separate oppressed class, based on their oppression as women, regardless of the socioeconomic class to which they belong. For Delphy, marriage is a labor contract that ties women to unpaid domestic labor, commonly trivialized as "housework," not considered important enough to be seriously analyzed as a topic, or a problem, in its own right. (98)

By removing material goods, Carter eliminates this stereotype and re-enforces the gender neutrality. She describes how men denied acknowledging her rationally for being a girl: "I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied my rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason" (78). This is a moment when Beauty attempts to eliminate the gender hierarchy of humankind, her world, by placing herself and the Beast on the equal ground. If she is to be objectified by the Beast then she can distance herself through cover. Here Beauty can be seen taking the opposite approach to the Beast's neutralization of atmosphere.

On the other hand, the girl is presented as an obedient daughter. When her

father lost all his property with the Beast during the card game, she accepted the marriage proposal to save father's dignity. The question it raises is, why she should suffer for the fault her father committed. Looking at this incident from another perspective, it can be said that the author is trying to expose how the patriarchy treats their daughters (family members) as the object that can be exchanged or bartered. She mentions, "I snapped the box shut and tossed it into a corner. This sudden, sharp movement must have disturbed the mechanism of the doll; she jerked her arm almost as if to reprimand me" (75).

She describes what she felt about herself in the following lines:

Yet I was clumsy and blushed a little, for no man had seen me naked and I was a proud girl. Proud it was, not shame, that thwarted my fingers so; and a certain trepidation lest this frail little article of human upholstery before him might not be, in itself, grand enough to satisfy his expectations of us. (79).

The heroine feels proud to be a female. When she sees her body at the mirror she realizes who she is. She is satisfied with herself to be a female. Probably, Carter also wants to celebrate her womanliness.

If Carter wishes for gender to be a non-consequential element, then she can remove its importance entirely, creating a distinctly gender neutral piece of short fiction. As Patricia Brooke states, Carter writes to "undermine the lingering presence in contemporary cultural presumptions" (69). That presence being the underlying roles and assumptions given to gender identity and the ways that society and culture color those constructions.

If gender is a human invention then there is no need to apply it to the realm of animals. It would appear that in this statement on gender neutrality, Angela Carter is not fighting for the reading of her story as feminist or misogynist but as an

examination of why gender exists in the first place and the desire to destroy gender entirely, celebrating neither womanhood nor manhood; a transcendence of gender in the story. Maybe Angela Carter, through her pursuit of bestial tendencies, arrived at the conclusion that man should be as animals and remove the perceptions of binary gender from self-realization and instead function in the realm of gender neutral existence.

Finally in the third story “The Erl-King”, the female narrator describes walking through the woods alone. She is not like Elizabethan girls who like to wear an expensive ornament. The heroine speaks directly to the audience about the Erl-King. He lives along in a one-room hut in the middle of the forest. He eats plants, milk from goats and cows. It implicitly shows that the narrator girl is enticed by the Erl-King. He touches her with his large, huge hand. Sometimes she also visits his home and helps him keep his home neat and clean. Ever since the narrator met the Erl-King, she has visited him to learn his ways and makes love with him. She observes how her lover weaves little cages where he keeps the best singing birds and with which he decorates his cottage. When he wants to see her, he calls her to the woods with his birdcall. He likes to proclaim, “skin the rabbit” as he undresses her. When he makes love to her, he bites her neck. She does not like his behaviors. She feels as though she is trapped by the Erl-King. Meanwhile she discovers that he is weaving a cage for her.

In “The Erl-King”, the female narrator concludes that the birds in these cages are his former lovers and that he is weaving another cage for her. In this way through the story, the subject is in the process of acquiring her own voice and identity in her refusal to become the Erl-King's object of desire.

She mentions:

When I realized what the Erl-King meant to do to me, I was shaken with a terrible fear and I did not know what to do for I love him with all my heart and yet I had no wish to join the whistling congregation he kept in his cages although he looked after them very affectionately, gave them fresh water every day and fed them well. (123)

The narrator of this story is aware of the peril she faces and therefore prepared to resolve it. As a strategy to free herself from the trap that the Erl-King has made, she says, "I shall take two huge handfuls of his rustling hair as he lies half dreaming, half waking, and wind them into ropes, very softly, so he will not wake up, and, softly, with hands as gentle as rain I shall strangle him with them" (124). The narrator further says "I am not afraid of him; only, afraid of the vertigo, of vertigo with which he seizes me. Afraid of falling down" (120). She means to say that she is afraid only of the way he throws her senses off balance. She calls this feeling "the vertigo with which he seizes me". He makes her feel as though she is a bird falling out of the sky, out of the power of the earth's gravity and into his trap.

Carter's intentional ambiguity is in providing her fictional women with a voice of their own. She is trying to build an alternative type of feminism. The protagonist in this story compares the Erl-King's hair with dead leaves. She writes:

When he combs his hair that is the colour of dead leaves, dead leaves fall out of it; they rustle and draft to the ground as though he were a tree and he can stand as still as a tree, when he wants the doves to flutter softly, crooning as they come, down upon his shoulders, those silly, fat, trusting woodies with the pretty wedding rings round their necks. (120)

Carter probably wanted to show that the traditional patriarchal value has been dead. The very description of the Erl-King and his dead colorless body is symbolic of this.

She compare his body structure with dead leaves. Carter here tries to challenge those conventional gender concepts about male bodies.

The narrator feels that she is in idealized domesticity's golden cages. The hero traps women who wander in the woods and in caging them, transforms them from creatures of free will to servants. Explaining this situation she states:

The candle flutters and goes out. His touch both consoles and devastates me; I feel my heart pulse, then wither, naked as a stone on the roaring mattress while the lovely, moony night slides through the window to dapple the flanks of this innocent who makes cages to keep the sweet birds in. Eat me, drink me; thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden, I go back and back to him to have his fingers strip the tattered skin away and clothe me in his dress of water, this garment that drenches me, its slithering odour, its capacity for drowning. (122)

The Erl-King desires to control and even consume her. She encourages the Erl-King's domination because she is caught in the vertigo between his erotic desire for her and her desire to be independent.

The narrator ends her story by describing her plan to kill the Erl-King, She narrates her plan in this way: "I shall take two huge handfuls of his rustling hair as he lies half dreaming, half waking, and wind them into ropes, very softly, so he will not wake up, and, softly, with hands as gentle as rain, I shall strangle him with them" (124). She is not like other women who remain silence. When she is with the Erl-King, she feels as if she is in a trap. In the end, the narrator's extreme solution is to kill the Erl-King and supplant male domination with female domination. She must kill the male figure in order to supplant him as the authority.

Carter uses the fairy tale as a way of exploring female power, desire, and sexuality. The women in these stories have actual voices which are almost unheard of

in the original tales. She transports the stories to the confines of modern society and considers real issues such as the representation of women, and the limitations of gender. Carter is rewriting traditional tales and narratives in a newly constituted and modified form and structure. Through her literary text *The Bloody Chamber*, rightly delineates that the old traditional things, cultures and cultural orientations. Along with the gender roles at the present days are not something that is to be excluded and outdated but they need a new definitions and reformations. So, that the present society can easily adapt and assimilates as pre the time demands. Carter tries to argue that culture is always dynamic. It keeps on changing according to time. Therefore, Carter attempts in redefining the conventional femininity to establish a harmonized world where there is no discrimination and biases between male and female. Male and female are part of a coin. One cannot live in the absence of the other. She does not only argue for the resistance of the conventional world view but also argues for the equidistance between male and female that eventually establish a harmonious relationship between them.

In *The Bloody Chamber* stories Carter focuses on the processes of subject formation, and especially the formation of gender and sexual identities. Carter uses fairy tales and traditional mythological stories in her literary articulations in a quite different way unlike her contemplate. She draws traditional stories in order to reveal existing societal belief systems and its historical roots and to reveal out the contemporary popular cultural representations. Thus gender is nothing absolute it is a performance. Men also have a feminine quality and a female also have masculine quality it is our society that creates hierarchy between male and female.

In all the three stories studied, Carter provides active roles to the female characters. The first story “The Bloody Chambers” presents a fine balance between

the feminine and masculine traits in the female protagonist where the protagonist is both a rebellion to her abusive husband and a very caring wife to the second piano tuner husband. Similarly, in the second story “The Tiger Bride”, the obedient daughter and a submissive wife turns out to become a tiger-bride. She presents herself more violently and ferociously in order to tackle the violence of her husband, the Beast. It again reveals how females can harness their masculine traits when they require it in their own defense. In the third story “The Erl-King”, the narrator is first seduced by the lustful Erl-King. But she is presented as an intelligent character who can make sense of her surrounding and is able to properly judge the situation. She is tactful and clever enough to strangle the giant Erl-King who is otherwise powerful and violent. The study shows that the author has deployed the female characters in both modern and rebellious roles with all masculine traits who are but capable of living with all feminine and soothing roles as lovers and mothers. Gender roles therefore are subject to change as determined by personal need and through social and cultural assignments.

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