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Fairy Tales and Feminism:

Gender Equality, Patriarchal Oppression, and Objectification

in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*

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Introduction

Fairy tales are often associated with stories for children and most often end with a happily ever after. They are often stories about princes and princesses, about kingdoms, or about mythical creatures. Fairy tales have been used to teach children how to behave and in this way have perpetuated stereotypes like boys should be brave while girls should be nurturing (Best 281). Needless to say, such stories have not usually focused on gender equality and other feminist ideals. At first glance, these two subjects, fairy tales and feminism, may not appear to be compatible.

If one were to combine fairy tales and feminism, what would the outcome be? An example of this can be seen in Angela Carter's collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), which alters 10 stories that originate from oral folk tales and fairy tales, such as "Little Red Riding Hood," "Beauty and the Beast," and "Bluebeard." Especially during the 1970s and the second wave of feminism, gender stereotyping was criticized as well as the patriarchal traditions which were fundamental in conventional fairy tales (Duggan, Haase, Callow 301). By altering the themes and gender roles of the original stories, Carter changes the stereotypes of the stories, e.g. that not only men can be lustful or dominant, and not only women can be dependent and weak (Snodgrass 198). Carter has confronted, examined, as well as disrupted the conventional fairy tales and their stereotypes, particularly concerning the conventional fairy tale heroines, in that her texts show that it is possible for females not to submit to patriarchal beliefs (Duggan, Haase, Callow 1112).

The fairy tale genre has changed over time, and several versions of the oldest fairy tales have been published. It is not always known which version of the fairy tales is the original one, i.e. who originally told it, who wrote it, when, and how (Bottigheimer 2). As a result of there being several retellings of the different fairy tales, I use the term "conventional fairy tale" as a concept for all versions of, e.g., "Little Red Riding Hood." This means that the stories from Carter's collection will be referred to as "Carter's version," and the others as conventional fairy tales, to be able to separate the two.

The stories I have chosen to analyze, "The Bloody Chamber," "The Company of Wolves," and "The Courtship of Mr Lyon", all three include either a role reversal, or show up the patriarchal oppression, in which a man is the more powerful gender. "The Bloody Chamber" starts the collection with typical stereotypes according to conventional fairy tales, until we get to meet the hero of the story, a powerful woman who is a secondary character

who illustrates the possibility of a woman's empowerment. "The Company of Wolves" is about sexual liberation and changing social norms and the view of women. This story contains dual gender roles, as both the female protagonist and male antagonist have traits that are male and female. The last story, "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" appears to be the typical happy ending fairy tale, where love is central. This story does not stray from the conventional fairy tale version, and so does not obviously reject stereotypes like "The Company of Wolves" does. This love story, however, is tainted by the patriarchal oppression which the story lays bare, as the girl is shown to be a commodity who wants to please the men in her life. This cycle of submission never ends, and Carter's way of showing this is a statement against oppression.

These three stories display three female protagonists in different situations, but in each case the woman encounters a man who treats her as the weaker gender. While the aim is to display that women can be equals to men, the problems of the stories are that not all the women are liberated. This means that not all the women get released from either patriarchal oppression or objectification, and not all get to express their sexuality freely. This essay argues that even though some of the stories portray stereotypical relationships and women who are never empowered or liberated, they still ultimately do disrupt these stereotypes and therefore promote equality.

The aim of this essay is to illustrate gender stereotypes, and patriarchal oppression on the one hand, and gender equality on the other hand with examples from Carter's versions of the conventional fairy tales. There are three different waves of feminism, and the essay's focus will be on the second wave of feminism, as the book was written during this period (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 470). There are four different theories within this wave, liberal, radical, social, and cultural feminism (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 470). While the majority of the analysis draws on ideas from radical feminism, the other three have similar ideas, and are used at times to incorporate what diverges from the conventional fairy tales.

Terminology

Stereotypes are established due to generalization, and many of the gender stereotypes are seen clearly in conventional fairy tales, which were often written to teach the traditional manners of the genders and how to behave accordingly for boys and girls (Roberts-Brackett 116). The general stereotypes in the conventional fairy tales have been strong male characters depicted as powerful patriarchs in charge, whereas women have been displayed as the weaker sex,

being either good girls or good housewives who take care of their children. Radical feminists oppose these stereotypical gender roles and aim to achieve gender equality, both at home and at workplaces (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). Carter's collection appears to challenge these stereotypes and to prove that there is an alternative to the typical stereotypes to both genders. She does this at times by using gender role reversal, either full- or partial reversals, where the men can be the weaker gender, and women can have the more powerful roles and can take care of themselves.

Patriarchy can be described as a system in which men decides the rules, and women are trophies to be displayed to other men and to show power, wealth, and authority (Tyson 97; ed. 3). Patriarchal oppression is when men abuse their authority to suppress women to be submissive and obedient according to the oppressor's demands. Within a patriarchal system women have two options, either to stay silent or to be submissive of men (Tyson 97; ed. 3). This is due to the belief that women's voices are not rational according to the standards of the patriarchy (Tyson 97; ed. 3). An essential element of patriarchal oppression is "the male gaze," i.e. how men view women (Tyson 97; ed. 3). As men hold the power, they are the ones looking at women who are seen as objects (Tyson 97; ed. 3). One can link women to commodity under patriarchal oppression where they were used to demonstrate a man's wealth (Tyson 97; ed. 3). The patriarchal oppression marks women as objects who should be submissive to men and never liberated from or question their fate. This means that empowerment is the opposite of oppression, as it gives women liberation to do as they please, and not do as they are told to act.

Gender roles are often (but not always) blended or reversed in Carter's stories, a result of changing the existing stereotypes about women. For example, the heroes of the stories can be women instead of men in order to show that women can be independent and take care of themselves in Carter's versions of the fairy tales. By reversing the female gender role from being a weak character into a strong, independent female protagonist, Carter thus changes the way conventional fairy tales have been portraying women. Moreover, some women in Carter's fairy tales are also liberated in their own sexuality, while conventional fairy tales are often silent about the subject of women's sexuality or imply that women should be good girls who wait for sex until after marriage.

Characteristics of the Second Wave of Feminism

Feminism has changed over time, as ideas about how to fight for gender equality have changed and this has resulted in three waves of feminism (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 469). The first wave of feminism which was active at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century focused on gaining equal legal rights so that women could participate more in society, such as by being able to vote (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 469). Due to the women's suffrage movement this became possible in the 1920s (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 469). The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 70s focused especially on women's experiences, social oppression, and gender equality (Cockin, Morrison 172), while the third and most recent wave of feminism which is still active focuses on the spectrum of diversity to include all varieties and different shades of sex, race, and class (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471).

Different theories of thought within the second wave of feminism, whether liberal, radical, social, or cultural feminism, all have the same ultimate goal, to achieve gender equality, though they approach this differently. Out of these four different theories, liberal feminism and radical feminism are the two most strongly represented in Carter's collection, although there are aspects from cultural feminism and socialist feminism as well.

The main focus of liberal feminism is to use rational thoughts to argue for equality, because oppression is argued to be the negative result of being irrational (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471). Liberal feminists desire to live as gender equals, in a society where everyone has equal legal rights to their own property, liberty, and dignity in life (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471). Liberal feminists believe that restrictive gender roles, i.e. to be raised to be submissive, and with low self-esteem, are degrading to women, so they aim for men and women to be seen as individuals in society, to have the freedom to do what they want to and to not be confined by the gender roles (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471).

Radical feminism believes that oppression towards women is the ultimate oppression, as it is men who decide over women (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). Radical feminism believes that society can change through social activism, and that patriarchal oppression, e.g. heterosexual male conceptualization of sexual desire as default has impacted every area of life (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 469). Radical feminists do not want the genders to be distinguished by masculinity and femininity, rather they want equality and to remove all oppression (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). They believe that the best way to remove oppression is for oppressed women to step forward and to share their stories; by doing so, they would manage to get rid of

the oppression connected with the traditional view of the binary genders (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). Personal experience is important, and radical feminists believe that “the personal is political”, this emphasizing how patriarchal social structures and systems affect individuals (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). Radical feminism opposes stereotypical gender roles, both in the home and the workplace and dislikes male authorities, which often perpetuate structural stereotypes, such as the notion that men should be the bosses, while women should be the workers (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). Feminists in this tradition question the traditional female gender role of the housewife and want to have equal rights to the jobs that men have, as well as to be sexually liberated (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472).

Socialist feminism is somewhat of a mix between radical feminism and liberal feminism with a focus on economic structures (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). As part of this, it emphasizes equality in the household and the workplace, that men and women should both take care of children and households together, as well as have jobs (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). They also agree that all oppression has to stop, not only because of gender, but also because of class, race, and sexual preferences (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). Economists such as Karl Marx, saw this as a utopia, which should be the main goal of equality between men and women (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). Social feminists agree with radical feminism that women’s bodies are their own, and they also agree with liberal feminism that gender roles should be equal in society (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472).

Both radical feminists and social feminists argue that the main reason for women’s oppression is either patriarchy or capitalism (Gamble 167). Although radical feminists claim that patriarchy is a system of oppression which is apart from capital structures, and that capitalism and patriarchal oppression do not affect each other, social feminists emphasize that women’s oppression occurs due to the class system in society, and gender equality therefore cannot be accomplished because of capitalism (Gamble 167). For radical feminism and its ideas to enable a change of women’s oppression over time, four structures were seen as necessary to change, “production, reproduction, sexuality, and the socialization of children” (Gamble 33). However, if only one of the structures were to be used for transforming women’s oppression, it could affect women negatively. For example, it has been argued that during the 1960s, the sexual liberation of women without other liberations caused women to become sexually objectified by men (Gamble 33).

Cultural feminism also wants men and women to be equal, but its proponents value what they see as biological differences between the genders (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471).

Instead of gender equality in the sense of women and men doing the same things, they want to reclaim and give more value to the female gender role as caregiving and nurturing (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471). These feminists advocate for the nurturing feminine as a method for overcoming problems in society as a result of an over-emphasis of the masculine (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471). As mothers it is the women's "maternal thinking" (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471) which helps them make ethical and moral decisions when it comes to their children. Cultural feminists do not agree with the idea that a woman should "think like a man", but they rather argue that a woman should stay true to herself and should not have to think like someone else to be accepted in society (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471).

As all the different theories provide various ideas in Carter's stories, examples from the collection as well as the theories will be displayed in the analysis to ultimately illustrate how the stories incorporate ideas from all these the theories, though some examples are used to show where Carter's versions diverge from, for example, cultural feminism.

Analysis of the Collection

Not every character in every story experiences a gender role reversal, and the first story of the collection (which is also the title of the whole collection), "The Bloody Chamber" (Carter 1), a version of Perrault's "Bluebeard," presents some typical stereotypes of conventional fairy tales. It has a female character, who, like females in the typical conventional fairy tales, is submissive and weaker than the powerful male character. However, this story also provides a secondary character, the protagonist's mother, whose empowerment is portrayed by her being a female hero. This deviates from "Bluebeard" (Perrault), where it is the protagonist's brothers who come to her rescue, and not her mother, so already here a role reversal has actually happened.

The main female character of "The Bloody Chamber" is a teenager portrayed as a typically good girl, who is innocent and submissive (Carter 6). The much older male antagonist, the girl's husband, represents the typical male patriarch who shows dominance with his status and money (Carter 8). This relationship exemplifies oppression and objectification, as the husband has given his wife a ruby choker (Carter 6), similar to a dog's collar, which seems to imply that he wants to keep her on a leash and to show dominance. The husband decides to test his wife's obedience to him by appealing to her curiosity (Carter 16). He tempts her by giving her all the keys and free reign in the castle but says that: "Every man must have one secret, even if only one, from his wife" (Carter 18). His secret, that he killed

his previous wives, is locked in a particular room, and even though she has the key, he forbids her from using it.

The girl cannot suppress her curiosity, and when the husband finds out that his wife did not obey his wishes, he wants to punish her. The husband was actually hoping that the end result would be the same as with his previous wives, and she proved him right by opening the chamber and not being the obedient wife he demanded her to be. Because of the husband's patriarchal oppression and objectification of his wife, he feels justified in claiming that she deserves a punishment, as she did not obey him, and he sees her as an object belonging to him, who should obey his orders. In his opinion she deserves to get punished for to her curiosity and disobedience, even though it was he himself who gave her the key. Another man in the story, the piano tuner, even points out that she disobeyed her husband's rule and therefore deserves to get punished (Carter 38).

Feminism in general, but especially radical feminism emphasizes that patriarchal oppression impacts women in a negative way, and that some women do not want or have the strength to fight against the oppression the women are exposed to (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 469). A liberal feminist might interpret the oppression in this story through the lens of irrational thinking (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 469), as it was the husband himself who gave his wife the key, and yet he is angry with her. They could use this story to argue that if the man had thought rationally he would not give his wife the key if he did not want her to see the chamber. However, he in fact intended for her to open the chamber; he did not actually fear her seeing the chamber, but aimed to create a reason to punish her for breaking his rule. According to radical feminists, all sorts of oppression originate from male authority and function to sustain men's egos and self-esteems (Tandon 44). The man in this story seems to manipulate his wife for the sake of his ego; he likes to keep his wife obedient by giving her the option to be a good girl, but actually wants her to do the opposite of what he is telling her to do to be able to show his control over her. The husband does not see his wife as a person, but rather an object he can decide what to do with (Tyson 97; ed. 3).

The dynamic between these characters exemplifies typical stereotypes, and the role reversal in "The Bloody Chamber" is then presented in the protagonist's mother. This means that it is not a main female character who is empowered, but a secondary character who illustrates empowerment. The protagonist's mother is described as a strong character from the beginning of the story. In a typical conventional fairy tale, a hero is generally an upper class male or even a prince (Roberts-Brackett 116). In this story, the mother is instead a strong

heroine, who can fight against the male authority to save her daughter (Carter 40). This shows that when a woman gets empowered she can eliminate the oppression that the patriarch of the story has. This is an image of gender equality which manages to remove oppression as radical feminists would advocate (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 469). This key reversal is also what differentiates “The Bloody Chamber” from “Bluebeard,” where the protagonist’s brothers come to her rescue. Instead, the mother knows that her daughter is in danger because of her “maternal telepathy” (Carter 41). This phrase is quite similar to “maternal thinking,” which is what cultural feminists claim helps mothers make ethical and moral decisions about their children (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471), and this is why the protagonist’s mother comes to her rescue. The daughter admires her mother’s atypical heroic strength; she reflects:

My eagle-featured, indomitable mother; what other student at the Conservatoire could boast that her mother had outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand and all before she was as old as I? (Carter 2)

The role reversal with a woman as the hero of the story is clearly feministic, and particularly in line with radical feminists who oppose the idea of men as authorities (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472). The heroine instead acts upon her motherly instincts, which might be praised by cultural feminists as they advocate that women’s role as nurturing is especially important for the world (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471). However, this woman is not only nurturing but clearly also capable of violence and in fact uses her dead husband’s gun to shoot and kill her daughter’s husband to protect her, a clear symbol of gender equality. The motherly character is displayed not only as a loving and protecting mother, but also as a strong and fearless mother who would even kill to protect her child. In this way, she is not the stereotypical mother nor the stereotypical hero, as violence is associated with men. Instead she has taken the form of both a loving mother and a protecting father, as the main female character’s father is dead.

The conventional fairy tale roles are present in “The Bloody Chamber”, as the protagonist is portrayed as the weaker female character, and her husband as the stronger and more powerful male character. The story illustrates oppression as the husband wants his wife to fail his test. This oppression is clearly based on irrational thinking, in that the husband must punish his wife for opening the chamber, even though it was he himself who gave her the key. However, the protagonist’s mother has the role of both female and male, as she is both nurturing and loving, as well as a violent and protective, due to her love for her daughter. In fact, she is not only her daughter’s hero but also the whole village’s hero. Through the gender

role reversal, the story has a happy ending, as the mother manages to kill the husband, and her daughter survives.

The second story of this analysis, Carter's "The Company of Wolves," (Carter 129) contains another type of role reversal and also explores a sexual experience. This story is an alternative to the conventional fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" about female appropriateness and protection. In Carter's version, Little Red Riding Hood explores her own sexuality and desires for another person (Mitchell, Reid-Walsh 281). The protagonist is portrayed as the opposite of the traditional conventional fairy tale version, who is young and innocent and therefore a potential prey for the huntsman (the wolf). Instead she is curious and forgetful of her mission due to her desires (Carter 133). It was not appropriate in the traditional fairy tales to highlight sexuality, but "The Company of Wolves" goes against that convention to show that a female also can act on her sexual instincts and, perhaps needs to be a sexual predator on occasion (Mitchell, Reid-Walsh 281). In the same way, radical feminists advocate for women to be sexually liberated and to decide themselves what to do with their bodies (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 472).

Still, this story complicates this role reversal in that the girl is not fully transformed from prey to predator, but is in fact both predator and prey, and the antagonist takes on both roles as well (Carter 138). They both have dual gender role characteristics, and they oppress each other in order to survive. The girl finds the huntsman attractive and has a sexual desire for him, as well as he has for her. Both of the characters sexually objectify each other, as they do as they please without considering the consequences (Tyson 97; ed. 3). When the protagonist realizes that she needs to act upon their sexual desire for one another to be able to survive, she shifts from being prey to also being a predator. Instead of trying to kill the huntsman for survival, she seduces him and gives him her body sexually instead of being killed, as she claims she is "nobody's meat" (Carter 138). With this statement, the girl proclaims that the huntsman will no longer see her as meat to be eaten, but instead as flesh to have in a sexual manner to keep him distracted from killing her (Bacchilega, Roemer 12). That she willingly desires him also means that she is nobody's meat, that is, she avoids the male gaze and its objectification because the sexual act it is her choice. The girl's scarlet shawl (Carter 138) has the same color as blood, and is an illustration of her blood (Sanders 113). She knows that by distracting the huntsman she will not spill her blood by dying, but instead spill it when she gives her virginity to him. The protagonist does as she pleases with

her body, and she does not wait until marriage to lose her virginity as she is not afraid of acting upon her sexual desires.

Nevertheless, the girl is unfocused due to her sexual desire, as she forgets that her grandmother might be in danger, and in a way she sacrifices her grandmother due to her own passion for the antagonist (Mitchell, Reid-Walsh 281). The fact that the girl is careless about her grandmother goes against all ideas of women as nurturing and caring, but the idea of women not being afraid of their own sexual desire is displayed as a liberation in this story. Her grandmother's death is the starting point of the girl's sexual liberation as she has nobody who cares if she is sexual before marriage or not. In this way the grandmother represents old stereotypical points of view of women as well as traditional social norms which have to die for women to be free and the girl breaks free from them as she acts out of free will and desires. The fact that the girl also lets her grandmother die (Carter 137) is not only a result of her sexual liberation, it is also a necessity for her independence, as she makes a decision which is beneficial only to herself as she seeks authority over the antagonist. The authority she feels is a sort of aggression towards the antagonist as well as her grandmother, as she does not see them as important as herself (Tandon 44). She is boosting her own ego and self-esteem, as men would do to oppress women to behave in a certain way or to obey them (Tandon 44).

According to radical feminism, women's social liberation should be differentiated from their sexual liberation, as they are two separate acts (Tandon 45). In fact, some radical feminists view sexual liberation as a male strategy to keep women dominated, and to trick them into believing that sex as well as love are the optimal achievements for women, while they are distracted from the true problem of not having equal status to men (Tandon 45). This is illustrated in this story, as both the characters are distracted by each other due to their sexual desires. Yet, they are distracted for different reasons. The girl distracts the huntsman from killing her, and the huntsman distracts the girl from caring about her grandmother (Carter 138). The distraction happens by having sex with each other to avoid the problems (Carter 138). However, in this case even the distraction displays a kind of gender equality, as not only can men distract women from seeing their true problems, but women can also use sex to distract men from their original intentions.

In this version, Little Red Riding Hood accepts that she is not only the prey, but also the predator herself, which makes her aware of her strength, that she is the huntsman's equal. This is a symbol for feminism and gender equality, as it is not only men who can be egoistic

and act upon their sexual desire, but women as well (Maunder 83). Not all fairy tales have to have a love story and a happy ending, but this one has an ending where both of the characters end up happy as neither the protagonist or the antagonist dies, and they both act upon their sexual desire towards each other, without the necessity of first getting married. The girl's sexual liberation happens partly through her grandmother's death, as a symbol for the death of old social norms and views of women.

In this story, love is not a prerequisite for sex, and in fact in other stories in Carter's collection, love is often portrayed as an illusion as many of the couples are more or less forced to be with each other. These relationships seem to function in a capitalist view of relationships, where the men objectify the women and the women marry for the benefits of wealth that their husbands provide. "The Courtship of Mr Lyon," however, differs from the other two stories in this analysis, as the title hints that a courtship takes place. Although this is in fact a love story, the courtship is tainted by oppression and objectification as Beauty is treated as a commodity by the Beast as well as her father. Still, as the story unfolds, Beauty's and the Beast's love for one another grows, even though they are an odd couple to say the least as she is a beautiful girl and he is indeed a beast - a lion, who later on becomes a man because true love breaks the curse upon him (Carter 54).

Beauty's father is a wealthy man who loses his fortune, and on one occasion gets lost and ends up at the Beast's mansion where he steals a rose for his daughter (Carter 46). The Beast himself is wealthy, and he offers to help Beauty's father to get rich once again on one condition, that he bring his daughter to him as a punishment for the stolen rose (Carter 46). The Beast is portrayed as a strong character with a beastlike appearance, who proclaims and increases his ego with his power and wealth to do as he pleases (Tandon 44). He appeals to the father's capitalist desires to regain his wealth, but at the cost of his daughter's freedom (Carter 48). The father has a choice to be poor and keep his daughter, or to be rich and lose his daughter, and he makes the latter one. The story's narrator explains Beauty's situation:

Do not think she had no will of her own; only, she was possessed by a sense of obligation to an unusual degree, and, besides, she would gladly have gone to the ends of the earth for her father whom she loved dearly. (Carter 48)

According to the narrator, Beauty will do anything to make her father pleased without thinking of her own well-being. By this "sense of obligation" (Carter 48), she is being oppressed by her father, as she feels responsible for making him happy by staying with the

Beast so that he can regain his fortune. As liberal feminists argue that rational thinking should be used to achieve equality (Zerbe Enns, Sinacore 471), it could be argued that Beauty's obligation towards her father demonstrates that she is in fact thinking irrationally about how she is being treated, and not seeing herself as an equal to the men of the story. The men of the story are not thinking rationally either as the punishment does not fit the crime, that Beauty should pay for her father's mistake. One can compare Beauty to a commodity, as she is the object being discussed to be able to reach an agreement to restore her father's wealth (Maunder 90). That she submits to the agreement shows that Beauty has been raised to be submissive, evidence that she as a girl was likely raised differently than a boy would have been.

The oppression towards Beauty is displayed as patriarchal ideology, as men oppress a woman, and she accepts her fate. The Beast is described as a lion (Carter 46), and Beauty calls herself "Miss Lamb" (Carter 48), as she is scared of the Beast and feels vulnerable in his presence. Beauty has to stay at the Beast's house, but, perhaps surprisingly for this collection, she has a positive experience of her oppressor. As the story's title "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" hints, this is a fairy tale about a possible marriage. Even though at first Beauty fears the Beast, their feelings towards each other grow into mutual love (Maunder 90). Beauty's love for her father shifts into love for the Beast, a man whom she will marry and eventually have sexual experience with. This displays a woman growing from being a girl who loves her father into a woman who loves her husband (Day 135). This is not a liberation for Beauty as she does not become independent, but rather her being reliant on a different man than before. Her love shifts from her father to the Beast, both men who are portrayed as patriarchs with power over Beauty, and she feels obligated to please them.

The Beast's oppression and objectification of Beauty seems to decrease, and out of love for Beauty, he eventually offers her the choice to leave him if she wants (Carter 51), as her father's wealth has improved (Carter 51). In other words, she can choose to be free from the Beast, though "being free" means going back to her father, the other man in her life who oppresses and objectifies her. Nevertheless, Beauty decides to go back to her father, but she promises the Beast that she will come back to him (Carter 51). By giving her this choice, the Beast is no longer an oppressor. Beauty enjoys her old life, and to show the Beast gratitude for her freedom, she sends him white roses in return for the ones he allowed her father to give her (Carter 51). She expresses the sensation of "perfect freedom" as she sends them (Carter

51), yet, she is still paying for her father's mistake due to her obligation to make him happy (Carter 48).

As time passes, she fears for her life when spring comes and she has forgotten her promise to the Beast to visit him; and when she hears a "scrabbling noise" (Carter 52), she thinks it is the Beast who has come for her. However, it is his dog who has come to bring Beauty back to the Beast as he is dying (Carter 53). She decides to go back to the Beast, and by proclaiming that she will never leave him again, she saves him not only from his heartbreak, but also from his curse, and he turns back into a man once again (Carter 55). Beauty describes his appearance as "heroic," (Carter 55) which is ironic as it is Beauty who is displayed as the hero of this story, and not the typical conventional fairy tale stereotype of a hero, an upper class man like the Beast (Roberts-Brackett 116). The Beast can in this case be seen as a "princess" held captive in a castle which is protected by a beast, even though it is himself. In one way, it is the Beast who keeps himself from being saved from his curse of being a lion, as he prefers to be alone and out of the way of other humans.

Compared to most conventional stereotypes, the roles seem to have been reversed in this story, but actually in the conventional fairy tale of *La Belle et la Bête* (Barbot de Villeneuve), it has always been Beauty's love for the Beast that saves him from death. Therefore, it is not a role reversal made by Carter, but one that is kept from the conventional fairy tale. This suggests that even the conventional fairy tales sometimes had atypical roles, but the heroic act that Beauty commits to save the Beast is non-violent and in fact not consciously heroic and shows that love is stronger than the curse. This story does not have a role reversal different from the conventional fairy tale, as it already to some extent had atypical roles, in that it is Beauty who saves the Beast, not the other way round. The story still shows stereotypical behaviors, such as patriarchal oppression due to the Beast's behavior towards Beauty and her father. Still, the Beast's character changes from being an oppressor into someone who can show love towards another person, as he sets Beauty free and is left heartbroken and alone.

This is the only story which ends with a hint of marriage, as the characters are referred to as "Mr and Mrs Lyon" in the title (Carter 56). This implies that Beauty was a typical conventional fairy tale "good girl," as she obeyed her father and did not engage in premarital sexual experiences (Tyson 85; ed. 2). While no other story in Carter's collection has a true conventional fairy tale structure, this one displays many similarities to one. The story does not deviate from the norms of society, and does not explicitly open up new ideas as some of the

other stories in the collection, such as “The Company of Wolves,” where the girl explores her sexuality. “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” displays a “respectable” but tainted love story which involves a courtship, in which the couple spend time with each other and feel love for one another before engagement or marriage. As the title hints about marriage as well, this story has a typical conventional fairy tale happy ending. However, the story also shows how Beauty goes back and forth between the two men in her life, and experiences a false sense of freedom, which is actually a sensation of obligation to please others - specifically men - in her life. She does not have any release of oppression, only the illusion of freedom. In this way, this story holds up this conventional fairy tale to be inspected for such inequalities and still counters stereotypes, although much more subtly than the other stories.

Conclusion

As seen in this essay, “grown-up” fairy tales do not need to contain happy endings like stories for children, but can also incorporate feminism. This has been proved to us through Angela Carter’s collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, and primarily from the stories that have been the focus of this essay, “The Bloody Chamber,” “The Company of Wolves,” and “The Courtship of Mr Lyon.” These three stories contain several ideas from the second wave of feminism, but mostly from radical feminism as the stories cover patriarchal oppression, and they oppose stereotypes. The stories contain ideas from liberal, social, and cultural feminism as well, but mostly through ideas that radical feminism also agrees with. The stories change the conventional fairy tales they are based on, by mainly changing the typical conventional fairy tale stereotypes, as well as going against patriarchal oppression and objectification to be able to achieve gender equality.

The stories focus on the three female protagonists, who all have similarities with as well as differences from each other. They are all portrayed as the weaker gender according to the conventional fairy tale stereotypes, and the men as the stronger gender. Two of the females are similar to each other, the girl in “The Bloody Chamber” and the girl in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon,” as they both experience patriarchal oppression. However, they differ from each other as the first girl does not accept her fate, while the second one accepts her situation. All three of the female protagonists are seen as objects, the first one through her ruby choker, which illustrates how the husband considers her to be his property, the one in “The Company of Wolves” as a sexual object through her willingness to give herself to the huntsman, and the last one as a commodity exchanged between two men.

On several occasions gender roles are blended or reversed in these stories, and it is not only the female protagonists who experience this, but antagonists as well as secondary characters. An example of this is the protagonist's mother in "The Bloody Chamber," who is portrayed as an empowered woman, while the girl of "The Company of Wolves" experiences gender equality to the huntsman. The only girl who does not experience an empowerment is the one in "The Courtship of Mr Lyon," as she is oppressed by two men, and never has the choice to get free, only the illusion.

Gender equality appears to be the goal of these texts, and is in fact supported even though not every relationship is gender equal. Needless to say, the stories all change the views of the conventional fairy tales, either in a positive or a negative manner, as they bring to light many of the darker aspects which normally are not thought of when we read fairy tales. All of these stories deal with tainted love, as it is experienced through either patriarchal oppression, or by trying to change the gender stereotypes. Sex is used as a defense in one of the stories, to prove that women can distract men the same way that men can distract women from their true feelings. This also shows that women can be free from not only patriarchal oppression, but also be sexually liberated as they can do what they please with their bodies. Love then becomes the illusion of happiness, and it is tainted in these stories as they try to achieve gender equality.

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