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Metamorphosing Subjectivities and Fairytale Conventions:

How Angela Carter Reinvents Womanhood

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Abstract

The following thesis explores how Angela Carter's re-writings and adaptations of fairytales transgress the confinements of womanhood told in original folktales. Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* is a collection of fairytales that challenges traditional fairytale narratives and rewrites characters' identities that break down constraining boundaries women must uphold. The transformative nature of Carter's literary works transcends more than the elements of fiction, rather the entire identity of women by challenging the status quo and incorporating ambiguous identities throughout her stories. This thesis is broken down into three interrelated sections; the first section discusses how Carter deconstructs the traditional narrative form of fairytales in an innovative fashion. The second section investigates the ambiguous identities of Carter's characters as means to liberate women from the constraints of womanhood, with a specific focus on Donna Haraway's theoretical work in "A Cyborg Manifesto." The third and final section captures how the grotesque and catastrophes function in Carter's fairytales. Overall, this thesis is defined by its exploration of Carter's reworking of fairytales, as well as womanhood at large.

Keywords: English Literature, Angela Carter, feminism, feminist theory, fairytale(s), folktale(s), narrative, point of view, ambiguity, identity, Donna Haraway, grotesquerie, catastrophe.

Introduction

Britain-born author Angela Carter (1940-1992) offers a feminist critique of fairytales by reinventing the definable and traditional features of fairytales. Her adaptation of several traditional fairytales in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* bewitches its readers with tales of moral monsters, lionhearted women, calculated creatures, and boundless layers of generic defiance. As the stories progress, Carter pulls her readers through the looking glass, where the sensical approaches to fairytales collapse. All of her characters, from the toughened heroine in “The Bloody Chamber,” over to the contrapuntal Countess of “The Lady of the House of Love,” ending with the perplexing wolf-like girl in “Wolf-Alice,” reflect a distorting, yet harmonious image of womanhood. The elements and motifs that define antiquated fairytales often involve images of violence, abuse, and overall injustice towards women; but Carter refuses to accept these objectionable and ageless tales that control and define women. By defying the fairytale genre, Carter brings into question the authenticity and universality of womanhood in Western culture. By approaching different unconventional thematic and structural aspects of Carter’s fairytales, beginning with the boldly resistant narrative, moving to the transformative, liminal, and partial characters, and ending with the grotesque imagery, one can see how the act of Carter’s adaptation provokes the imperative need to reclaim and reinvent womanhood.

1. Transforming the Narrative and Point of View.

At first glance, Angela Carter’s title story, “The Bloody Chamber,” is not obviously an adaptation of “Bluebeard,” however, once the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the motifs align with the story’s unique categorization in the Aarne-Thomson-Uther (ATU) Types of Folktales Database: Type 312: The Bluebeard (*Motif-Index Database*). The title change is vital to Carter’s adaptation, as well as the caricature of Bluebeard, whose name is simply The Marquis.

Charles Perrault's original story emphasizes the male figure, Bluebeard, despite his violent disposition towards women, while Carter's title emphasizes the room in which women have experienced violence. Naturally, this is a shift in narrative mode. By taking the focus off of Bluebeard, the man who kills several of his wives, to the room where Bluebeard disposes of their bodies, a particular genre norm in fairytales is subverted. "The Bloody Chamber" is then a story about the violent murder of Bluebeard's wives, the heroine's discovery of their bodies, and the eventual demise of Bluebeard's violence. These dead wives, who remain unnamed in Perrault's version, become the opera singer, the diva, and the Romanian Countess, return to their bodies, because of Carter's adaptation. Despite their imminent fate, these women re-establish themselves as vital entities, where their suffering and eventual death are not forgotten behind the tale of "Bluebeard." The attention in Carter's story is then not about Bluebeard, but about our heroine, that room, and those once-forgotten women.

The fate of women, in fairytales and reality, is too often determined by the elements of narration created and maintained by men, leading women, in both fairytales and real life, to face violence, exploitation, and utter disparagement. Most of Carter's fairytale adaptations grapple with the misogynistic fairytale narrative that continues to dominate the genre. In the aforementioned example of the "Bluebeard" classification in the Type-Index, Type 312 is described as "The brother rescues his sisters" (*Folktale Story-Type Index*). While Stith Thompson rightfully claims that the goal of the Motif-Index and Type-Index is to "promote accuracy of terminology and [. . .] act as keys to unlock large inaccessible stores of traditional fiction," the overall collection of stories that have been perpetuated throughout history are those of patriarchal standards (427). Carter's adaptations of these fairytales fairly attempt to challenge the misogynistic narratives that control and classify the fairytales that cycle through society.

Although all of Carter's stories transgress these classifications through adaptive methods, the most innovative transgressions are seen in "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love." Each protagonist from their respective stories grapples with the pre-determination of their fate and identity and shines a light on the immolation of women throughout their respective fairytales. The contention against fate is a reclamation of narration imposed on them by the historical classification of fairytales.

Alongside Carter's transformation of the title is her gruesome, explicit discourse to shift away from the typical narrative style associated with "Bluebeard," and towards a story about women's position in a heteronormative, patriarchal society. In both Perrault's version of "Bluebeard" and Carter's adaptation, after the protagonist drops the key in the blood of Bluebeard's victims and stains the key, the blood cannot be cleaned off of the key due to its magical properties. Perrault writes, "she saw the key of this forbidden room was stained with blood and washed it. But the blood would not go away" (7). In "The Bloody Chamber," the description is similar: "the key was still caked with wet blood and I ran to my bathroom and held it under the hot tap. Crimson water swirled down the basin but, as if the key itself were hurt, the bloody token stuck" (Carter 35). To a contrasting effect, in Perrault's fairytale, the room "was covered with clotted blood," while in Carter's fairytale, the dead Countess' body "seemed so newly dead, so full of blood," and the key "dropped into the forming pool of [the dead countess'] blood," (Carter 30). Perrault's word choice when describing the blood as "clotted," makes it appear as if the violence has ceased; there will be no more bloodshed. Perrault's narrative of the heroine inside of the forbidden chamber is a mere two paragraphs, while the heroine's exploration of the chamber in Carter's story is a lengthy three pages. Carter's imagery, on the other hand, is reflexive to her title: "The Bloody Chamber," as in, there is more bloodshed to

befall. Despite the similar endings of both fairytales, where Bluebeard is killed, the haunting effect of Carter's extensive discourse to describe the ever-forming blood echoes how eternal and ever-present the violence against women is.

Moreover, Carter's adaptation of "Bluebeard" adds an element of cultural context to the narrative that depicts the social difference and power imbalance between men and women when describing the heroine's lack of power and control over the situation. The heroine says, "I was seventeen and knew nothing of the world," emphasizing her own innocence and vulnerability (Carter 4). The Marquis, on the other hand, is as "rich as Croesus," a king known for his great wealth, ultimately exaggerating his position in society as a wealthy, older, and more experienced man in comparison to the innocent heroine. Likewise, Carter's theoretical work in *The Sadiean Woman* claims, "We may believe we fuck stripped of social artifice in bed. [. . .] But we are deceived. [. . .] We do not go to bed in simple pairs; even if we choose not to refer to them, we still drag there with us the cultural impedimenta of our social class, our parents' lives, our bank balances, our sexual and emotional expectations, our whole biographies" (*TSW* 9-10). As a result, the heroine and the Marquis have a relationship that is maintained by his power over her. The Marquis exemplifies his power over her when he buys her "a choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat" that is "clasped round [her] throat" (Carter 6). The bloody, gruesome imagery shows the Marquis' inherent power over the heroine and captures her as an image at his disposal. When he gazes at her, her body is reduced to meat: "I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of the connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab" (Carter 6). By reducing the heroine to meat, she becomes an object to him; something that he can consume, overpower, and control. "The Bloody Chamber" uses an element of setting that relocates the

narrative in “Bluebeard” towards one that is socially conscious of a woman’s condition and the heroine’s characterization.

To a similar effect, Carter’s “The Lady of the House of Love,” challenges the narrative style insinuated in the characterization of vampires by giving the protagonist, the Countess & queen of vampires, moral complexity and human characteristics. The Countess transgresses several story types, most recognizably Type 307: The Princess in the Shroud, as well as other vampire legends and motifs. Thompson describes vampires as “horrible creatures” who make “unprovoked attacks on travelers” and “molest those bold enough to stay overnight” (256-257). However, Carter revises these definitions assigned to her vampire Countess and reminds her readers of how the Countess’ position in society as a woman affects her sexual relationships. The Countess seemingly cannot escape her ordained cycle of consummation due to her social status as a woman. The narrator explicitly notes the Countess’ “horrible reluctance for the role” (Carter 120). Her authoritative role as the queen of vampires is enforced by her predecessors, who police her actions: “now she is a woman, she must have men” (Carter 121). The ancestral vampires impose the Countess’ position and identity, giving her a false sense of control and selfhood. The Countess is in a position of subservience regardless of her acts of violence towards men; “her ancestors leer and grimace on the walls; however hard she tries to think of any other, she only knows of one kind of consummation” (Carter 130). Nevertheless, the Countess is a reflection, as well as a reminder, of a woman’s uncomfortable position in society as a woman, despite her classification as a vampire, who is controlled and policed by her social position.

Considering Carter’s theoretical work on sexual relationships in *The Sadeian Woman* while analyzing her discourse throughout “The Lady of the House of Love” assists in understanding the Countess’ social position in the world as a woman given her undesirable,

ordained role as the queen of vampires, controlled by her ancestors. There is a clear distinction between the two major characters, as the Countess believes she must perform consummation on a kind bicyclist who visits her castle against her will, since he is a man of his innocence, and she is a woman of subservience to obligatory erotic violence. Although the Countess does not kill him in the end, she still cannot deny her hunger since she “does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes” (Carter 130). These ancestors, sometimes referring to the masculine figure Nosferatu, a vampiric caricature who performs consummation on women, control her movements and existence. Just like the world of fairytales is primarily dominated by men, so is the Countess’ body, as well as all women’s bodies at large. Carter exemplifies men’s control over women in *The Sadeian Woman* when describing how images of sexual relationships, such as pornography, reproduce society’s immolation of women even when they are dominant: “A male-dominated society produces pornography of universal female acquiescence. Or, most delicious titillation, of compensatory but spurious female dominance. [. . .] She is not cruel for her own sake, or for her gratification. She is most truly subservient when most apparently dominant” (*TSW* 23). Although the kind bicyclist does not take advantage of her and escapes her consummation, her subservience to men is most apparent through the puppeteering of her ancestors. The imposition of particular characteristics to different identities is larger than the typical vampire seen in fairytales; women suffer from the same type of reductive characterization in all aspects of life.

Despite her narrative discourse in “The Lady of the House of Love,” Carter offers a sense of liberation to women by refusing to perpetuate certain plotlines and endings in the narrative of fairytales. The Countess herself appears to be the resurrection of the Romanian Countess in “The Bloody Chamber.” Her reappearance as a vampire in a later story of Carter’s fairytale collection

is a chance for a new ending, one that does not involve her utter immolation by the hands of a man. Nevertheless, the Countess in her vampiric condition seemingly can never escape her fate in “The Lady of the House of Love,” even when she tries to interrupt her intended destiny through prophetic Tarot cards. They continuously reveal “La Papesse, La Mort, La Tour Abolie, wisdom, death, dissolution” (Carter 120). Her reappearance in “The Lady of the House of Love,” allows the Countess freedom from her cycle of dismay. The image of Tarot cards is reflexive; the reading gives the same fate, and her ancestors continue to preside over her duty to murder men, yet the Countess opposes their narration by finally drawing the card “Les Amoureux,” (The Lovers), noting how “never before has the Countess cast herself a fate involving love” (Carter 123). As a result, her existence ceases upon the failure of her murderous ritual, her ancestors “turn away their eyes and grind their fangs” (Carter 133). Those who dictate and control, as the dominant male society resent her grand shortcoming, but the Countess is freed from her undead narrative through death: “the end of exile is the end of being” (Carter 133). Although her liberation denies her any life at all, she is no longer subjugated to her subservient role. Her death ends her exile and condemnation as a woman in a male-dominated society and fairytale. Retrospectively, the Countess destroys herself as an act of transgression against the narratives which perpetuates unnecessary and cruel violence.

The acts of violence in Carter’s fairytale adaptations, while nuanced in “The Lady of the House of Love,” are directed towards women at large in “The Bloody Chamber.” The heroine’s narrative of Bluebeard also reflects women’s subservient role as well as the vicious and intentional acts of violence that are made towards women by men. When the heroine enters the chamber, she details the horrifying image of the mutilated opera singer: “On her throat I could see the blue imprint of his strangler’s fingers” (Carter 29). The truth of the male-dominated

society shows how many women suffer from violence through strangulation: an article within the Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention shows how “45 percent of the victims of attempted murder, had been strangled by their partner within the year before [. . .] there isn’t a more deadly form of domestic violence than strangulation” (*Strangulation Training Institute*). The heroine’s now-husband further instills a sense of fear in her through his demonstrative acts of superiority. The heroine says to herself, “My first thought, when I saw the ring for which I had sold myself to this fate, was how to escape it” (Carter 30). Carter is aware of the fate women are placed in by their social status in her theory as well, clarifying how “violence has always been the method by which institutions demonstrate their superiority [. . .] It suggests, furthermore, that male political dominance might be less a matter of moral superiority than of crude brute force” (Carter 25-26). Once the Marquis discovers that the heroine has explored his forbidden chamber, he also attempts to make her a subject of violence, in a way similar to how fairytales predetermine the death and immolation of women, as if it is a mystification of reality, rather than a sick reality women face. These fairytales act as a guise to hide a woman’s suffering; Carter explains how “the beatings, the rapes and the woundings take place in a privacy beyond the reach of official censorship” (*TSW* 26). However, these narratives are no longer put in a place of censorship when Carter reinvents these fairytales; she shines a light on the women who have yet to speak of the violence and predetermined fate women face by the narratives society perpetuates. Instead, she allows the women to speak for themselves.

As part of Carter’s narration, the point of view each story delivers shifts the focus onto women and women’s stories. “The Bloody Chamber,” dramatically shifts the nature of telling fairytales from the third-person point of view to the first-person point of view. Instead of opening with the cliché “Once upon a time,” Carter opens with the haunting words “I remember” (1). The

unnamed heroine asserts herself at the start of the story as both the protagonist and the narrator. Moreover, because the narrative tense is past tense, the heroine of “The Bloody Chamber” is narrating her story retrospectively, aligning with the nature of storytelling and fairytales in general. However, the first-person point of view transgresses the oral nature of fairytales and folktales through the heroine’s subjective narration of the fictive story. The effect of her opening statement is a direct reclamation of “Bluebeard” as the heroine’s own story, rather than the typical fairytale narrative where the woman is secondary to the dominant male figure. Because fairytales such as the original “Bluebeard” tend to be told through an authorial narrative, the agency of the protagonist is never asserted. Carter’s adaptation allows for the heroine to reveal her conscious narration and personal experience.

Unlike “The Bloody Chamber,” which directly grants the protagonist agency over her story, “The Lady of the House of Love,” grapples with pinning down a concise point of view. The story is introduced in the third-person point of view when the narrator introduces the readers to the Countess. Occasionally at the start of a new paragraph, sporadic appearances of the Countess’ first-person point of view dominate the narrative. In one sense, the Countess has dialogue where she is referred to in the third-person perspective: “‘Coffee,’ she said,” but then strikingly, the Countess’ narrates her own consciousness from the first-person perspective, saying phrases that express emotion and intention, such as “I do not mean to hurt you” (Carter 128). The shifting point of view in “The Lady of the House of Love” resembles the “The Bloody Chamber,” except the Countess’ cannot hold a firm grasp on her own narration because “her voice is curiously disembodied” (Carter 129). The term disembodied can refer to several different bodies: the Countess’ physical body, the body of fairytales, the body of a vampire, the body of a human, the body of work, the body of the story, or most likely, all of them. The

Countess' voice is disembodied from the story because she is condemned to her condition; as a result, the shifting narration in point-of-view reflects her own inability to define her identity. The Countess is condemned to be watched "under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, through her, projects a baleful posthumous existence" (Carter 117). By emphasizing the watchful eyes of her ancestors, Carter stresses the power beneath a story's point of view, and how it controls and maintains a particular entity. The ancestors are a reiteration of the Countess' subordination under her predetermined fate, echoing the Countess' subordination under narration.

A shifting point of view functions to a similar degree in the final three stories of Carter's collection of fairytales, which are all retellings of Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood." The first two of the last three stories, "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves," shift between different points of view in order to emphasize how fairytales are spread across countries and borders and emphasize the horrific implications within the story. "The Werewolf" opens as if it is a cautionary tale, warning the readers/listeners of the horrors that live in the night: "To these upland woodsmen, the Devil is as real as you or I" (Carter 137). The narrator refers to himself and includes the audience in order to warn them of these horrors. The tale goes on to tell of witches, wolves, and vampires, and the horrors they perform such as the night of "Walpurgisnacht," where "the Devil holds picnics in the graveyard and invites the witches; then they dig up fresh corpses, and eat them" (Carter 137). However, the narrative shifts into the third person to describe the violence the woodsmen and other townsfolk enact upon these creatures when they find them: "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" (Carter 138). The third person narration characterizes the people from an objective perspective, ultimately directing their

actions rather than their emotional context. A similar narrative is presented in “The Company of Wolves,” where the narrator says “you are always in danger in the forest, where no people are,” before shifting to the third person to tell the story of Little Red Riding Hood: “she heard the freezing howl of a distant wolf, her practiced hand sprang to the handle of her knife” (Carter 142, 146). By incorporating multiple points of view, these two stories replicate how fairytales create monsters out of creatures unlike humans and resort to violence. As a result, distinction from humanity, or what is determined as humanity, leads humans to result in violence. The tales that are perpetuated then lead to more violence against women as well as entities that divert from the male-dominated society.

2. Ambiguity, Liminality, and Transformation.

The transformative nature of Carter’s fairytales transcends beyond the elements of narration. The same three adaptations of “Little Red Riding Hood” not only transgress the boundaries of fairytales but add ambiguity to the various character’s identities. The ambiguity Carter applies to these stories directly transgresses both the classification of fairytales, as well as the archetypes associated with particular characters. Kathleen Dubs claims that “Writers have always depended on equivocation, the multiplicity of meaning, the uncertainty of meaning - deliberate mystification” (1). Dubs’ analysis of literature is applicable to Carter’s stories, however, the post-modern approach Carter takes when she writes her fairytale collection goes beyond equivocation; ambiguity attaches to the characters themselves and how they are represented and characterized through various modes of equivocated language, liminality, and transformation. Particular instances of ambiguity appear in “The Lady of the House of Love,” “The Courtship of Mr Lyon,” “The Tiger’s Bride,” “The Werewolf,” “The Company of Wolves,”

and “Wolf-Alice,” but in a variety of stylistic techniques and approaches, ultimately to challenge the binary understanding of womanhood in reality and fairytales.

The relevancy of ‘who’ is telling the story shifts ambiguously as well: Carter challenges what it means to be a woman through her ambiguous characters, language, stylistic choices, and transgressions of fairytales. Most notably, Carter’s characters are often a combination of several entities or are creatures who shift between two different identities, sometimes wolf or girl, or human and robot, in order to mystify and multiply the meaning of womanhood. These partial-women, cyborgs, and animal-human-monster hybrids, all subvert the binary understanding of being a subject with agency, which beings and entities have agency, and how women do not have to be constrained by humanity’s cruel imposition of violence, oppression, and exploitation. Carter reveals how binary, separation, and distinction allow for power structures to control women.

But what do these organisms, or partial organisms look like? Donna Haraway, the author of “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (1985), paints a clear picture of what a cyborg is. The cyborg is “our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (Haraway 7). In other words, the cyborg is a theoretical way of looking at our existence as both physical and metaphysical; the cyborg is an image of metamorphosis. Haraway’s definition of a cyborg is a sufficient definition for many characters in Carter’s work such as the heroine and the secondary characters from “The Tiger’s Bride,” the grandmother in “The Werewolf,” the girl in “The Company of Wolves,” the Countess and the crone of “The Lady of the House of Love,” but especially “Wolf-Alice.” What makes Haraway’s socialist-feminist theory so applicable is her

correlation between cyborgism, the destruction of universal womanhood, and the future of feminism.

Both Carter and Haraway grapple with the unification and singularity behind womanhood as society continues to enforce strict gender roles. Womanhood as an identity, given its disposition in society, too often associates itself with sexual violence, which becomes a key aspect that Carter challenges throughout the final three adaptations of “Little Red Riding Hood.” Womanhood is a contested concept; what does it mean to be a woman? Carter claims, “The notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick;” Haraway agrees with Carter, saying,

“The international women’s movements have constructed ‘women’s experience,’ [. . .]

This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of consciousness, imaginative apprehension, oppression, and so on possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century.” (TSW 13) (Haraway 6)

In any case, both writers understand how women’s bodies and experiences become politicized and defined by these male-dominated societies. The characters in Carter’s fairytales relegate themselves to ambiguous identities and free themselves from these constraints, echoing the woman reader to find liberation through ambiguity and contradiction. Wolf-Alice, The Countess and the heroine of “The Company of Wolves,” with all of their ambiguity and contradictions, achieve an individualized sense of freedom over their own woman’s experience.

Carter certainly employs the various motifs and story types from the Motif-Index of Folk-Literature and ATU Index, but in an ambiguous way: the motifs and story types are inclined to tell a particular story with a particular set of ideas, meanings, and morals, yet Carter does not

permit these fairytale concepts to taint the women in her stories. “The Company of Wolves,” opens with a tale as a predecessor to the actual story that contradicts many of these motifs. The Werewolf is classified by the Motif-Index as D113.1.1; Thompson describes the Werewolf in his wolf form as one who “combines human mind and memory with wolflike cruelty and voracity. It is not always easy to recognize whether a man is a werewolf, and thus almost anyone may be suspected” (*The Folktale* 259). The first portion of Carter’s story welcomes this concept with ambiguity when describing the werewolf. She claims that “there is a vast melancholy in the canticles of the wolves,” followed by Carter’s reinforcement of the werewolf’s resentment towards his beastly condition: “the beast will look as if he half welcomes the knife that despatches him” (Carter 143-144). While the werewolf is historically and typically defined by his violent nature, Carter adds ambiguous characterization to the werewolf. The werewolves in “The Company of Wolves” are both “as unkind as plague” and riddled with “despair” (Carter 142, 144). More importantly, because “The Company of Wolves” precedes the “Wolf-Alice,” Carter’s ambiguous approach to the werewolf carries over into her characterization of Wolf-Alice, who is both girl and wolf, as well. Ambiguity, in this case, transgresses the specification and characterization that Thompson assigns to the Werewolf.

The illustrious protagonist of “Wolf-Alice,” carries similar characteristics of identity found in “The Company of Wolves,” but in a way that contradicts and equivocates the idea of the werewolf, and animalistic characteristics in tandem with womanhood. Her body becomes the subject of the story; she is born a “ragged girl” who “would have called herself a wolf, but she cannot speak, although she howls” (Carter 153). Carter intentionally muddles up her appearance, giving her human-born body characteristics of a wolf, relating her to the werewolves the readers have already encountered. At the start of the story, “her panting tongue hangs out, [. . .] Her legs

are long, lean and muscular. Her elbows, hands, and knees are thickly callused because she always runs on all fours. She never walks” (Carter 153). Wolf-Alice’s ambiguous identity suggests Haraway’s cyborg. Haraway claims that “the cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed,” ultimately making Wolf-Alice herself a cyborg by Haraway’s definition (11). Once Wolf-Alice begins her menstrual cycle, she “perceived an essential difference between herself and her surroundings that you might say she could not put her finger on” (Carter 159). Instead of emphasizing her wolfish traits, now Carter makes an important distinction of her finger, rather than paws. Wolf-Alice complicates the idea of womanhood in so much as she complicates the wolf and the werewolf.

As Wolf-Alice explores her new environment after the nuns capture her and kill her mother, she experiences new changes in her body and her self-perception in her ambiguous state. When Wolf-Alice begins her menstruation, an ambiguous stylistic choice is made by Carter to describe why Wolf-Alice believes a wolf might have bitten her vagina, “The shape of this theory was blurred yet, out of it, there took root a kind of wild reasoning, as it might have from a seed dropped in her brain off the foot of a flying foot” (157). Carter’s ambiguous metaphor here is reflective of William Empson’s definition No.1 of ambiguity in his well-known book *The 7 Types of Ambiguity*, which claims “The first type of ambiguity is the metaphor, that is, when two things are said to be alike which have different properties. This concept is similar to that of metaphysical conceit” (1). Carter’s stylistic choice employs Empson’s ambiguity through metaphorical intervention; the audience grapples with Wolf-Alice’s understanding of her menstruation, as well as her newly found irrational reasoning through an unrecognizable metaphor. Structurally, the sentence muddles the reader’s understanding of Wolf-Alice; there is

no explanation for her unprecedented “wild reasoning” (Carter 157). However, as the story goes on, the motif of mirrors further distorts these inane reasonings.

Ambiguity in conjunction with Donna Haraway’s theory on cyborgs allows for the analysis of Carter’s motif of mirrors in “Wolf-Alice” to further the contradictory nature of multiplicity in identity, as well as the ambiguous nature of Carter’s writing at large. When Wolf-Alice passes a mirror for the first time, she believes it is a separate entity, and when she grows pubic hair and “show[s] it to her mirror littermate, who reassure[s] her by showing her she shared it too” (Carter 160). At first, Wolf-Alice has an impenetrable ambiguity to her identity that shields her from grasping her multiple identifiers. Before she comes to understand herself, she is restricted to her introspective notions, Wolf-Alice never conceptualizes a perception of herself purely as a woman, an identity that is plagued by generations of misogynistic discourse and control. Later in the story, when she sees herself in the mirror wearing a white dress, she sees how it “made her shine,” and now that “she knew how to wear clothes and so had put on the visible sign of her difference from [wolves]” (Carter 161). The knowledge of her identity does not exist beyond her animalistic upbringing, incarceration, silenced thoughts, and imposed duties up until this point, hence her unfamiliarity with her physical manifestation at first. Now that she wears a dress, despite her appearance, womanhood becomes malleable, and therefore freeing for Wolf-Alice.

The contradiction of her identity is then contesting womanhood at large and is individually liberating since she can create her own identity as a woman or wolf, or both. At the end of the story, the physicality of the mirror is distorted: “the lucidity of the moonlight lit the mirror propped against the red wall; the rational glass, the master of the visible, impartially recorded the crooning girl” (Carter 162). Looking at the mirror as a physical object yields a level

of rationale through duplicating the physicality of the subject as well as her subjective consciousness. The image of the mirror endlessly transforms. Moreover, Carter interchangeably refers to the mirror as both 'glass' and 'mirror,' adding more ambiguity to its role in "Wolf-Alice." Although mirrors were once referred to as looking-glass, Carter is doing more than just reverting to antique terminology; she is divulging the duplicity of the mirror itself. The mirror can be both reflexive of the physical traits and totally transparent to the intellectual and mental traits of one's existence. In other words, the rational way of seeing can only distinguish one aspect of existence, our physical existence, while ambiguity allows for open interpretation.

Rational thinking, which is regarded as a human trait, is challenged most significantly in Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride," where the Beauty of the story challenges the way rationale is denied to women by accepting beastly nature over man's folly. After the Beauty's father loses her to his addictive gambling habit, the Beauty is sold to the Beast, and she cannot help but watch with "the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly" (Carter 61). The Beauty, already denied rationale by her imposed silence as a human woman, cannot help but see the human error in her father's human carelessness. Haraway comments on men's folly by looking at the Westernized idea of our society which is based on "racist, male-dominant capitalism" and notes how Westernized thinking is the "tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture," resulting in men, such as the Beauty's father, believing he can always outsmart or overpower nature, like the Beast (7). The Beast, who is someone that the Beauty is frightened of at first because of the old wives' tales, eventually causes her to think introspectively about the nature of man. As she lives in the castle with him,

“a profound sense of strangeness slowly began to possess me. I knew my two companions [the inhuman valet and the Beast] were not, in any way, as other men [. . .] they lived according to a different logic than I had done until my father abandoned me to the wild beasts by his human carelessness.” (Carter 76)

By reflecting on the nature of westernized humanity, the Beauty comes to realize that her father’s folly is a product of humanity that disparages women, and denies them autonomy over their lives. Retrospectively, the Beast and other non-human entities inhabit his castle “had chosen to live in an uninhabited place” because of humanity’s appropriation and exploitation of animals (Carter 69). The male-dominant society separates the Beast and all of these non-humans as means of escape, where man cannot control them, hence the Beauty’s ultimate embracement of her beastliness.

The Beauty herself comes to embrace a transformation, where she is ambiguously both beast and woman in order to escape from the imitation of life, driven by the misogynistic notions society confines her to. At first, The Beast only requests to see the Beauty naked, which she refuses at first: “pride it was, not shame” that prevents her from letting the Beast see her naked since she is praised for her virginity (Carter 78). She reflects on her inability to let go of pride at first, claiming “I was so unused to my own skin that to take off all my clothes involved a kind of flaying [. . .] it is not natural for humankind to go naked” (Carter 79). Haraway suggests that a cyborg world would be committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (9). Because the reality of the world as it is now is characterized by shame, modesty, and privacy, Carter challenges the way that women are defined and obligated to live as. After the Beauty recognizes what keeps her from embracing a liminal state, of both human and animal, she sees her previous life as something hollow, and dissociates

from her: “I will dress her in my own clothes, wind her up, send her back to perform the part of my father’s daughter” (Carter 79). The Beauty feels disdain towards her life and sees it clearly as an imitation of life that denies her agency in identity and characterizes her by the men who control her. As a result, she turns away from humanity, escaping the dualisms of man-woman and animal-human.

The Beauty, now disgusted by her life with her father as a full human-woman, fully accepts a cyborg identity, shifting from woman to beast. The Beast, who is part-animal, part-human, is thoroughly feared and exploited by humanity, hence why the Beauty was told terrifying tales of beasts as a child by her English nurse, who would say, “If you don’t stop plaguing the nursemaids, my beauty, the tiger-man will come and take you away” (Carter 67). Naturally, at first, the Beauty is afraid of the Beast because of these early memories and tales which depict beasts as monstrous. However, when she encounters him in her nakedness, she notes “He was far more frightened of me than I was of him” (Carter 81). Animals and beasts are still a place of fear, especially the more monstrous and large they are. However, it is humans who exploit them for food, land, and reproduction of cultural incorporation based on their natural resources. When the Beauty accepts the Beast and his various inhuman housemates, she reflects an idea that Haraway expresses: “a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (15). In the end, she comes close to him, unafraid and he begins to lick her, “and each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. [. . .] I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur” (Carter 81). Finally, the Beauty,

now unafraid of her new beastly disposition combined with her humane womanhood, accepts her identity in all of its ambiguousness and transformative aspects.

From another perspective, it is not all of humanity that Carter wishes to erase, but rather the totalization and essentialism embedded within identities and humanity at large. At large, many of the women caricatures in Carter's stories embrace a transformative, ambiguous state in order to escape the horrifying truths of the totalization of identities, and how a male-dominant society takes advantage of this totalizing viewpoint, especially in "The Lady of the House of Love," in which the protagonist, the Countess, is confined to her condition as a vampire. Carter describes her as "inadequately powered by some slow energy by which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born, and now the mechanism was inexorably running down" (Carter 129). Such totalization of identity seems to be oppositional to the cyborg, whose ontology attempts to achieve affinity with another, and includes an acceptance of contradictions, thus showing that "the feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one" (Haraway 52). Although the Countess is not human, she experiences the totalization of her identity, as she is forced to be a vampire, committing acts of violence that make her lifeless. The ancestors before her have predetermined her existence, which she narrowly tries to escape, but only continues to "emphasize her unreality" (Carter 129). The Countess' life is compared often to the terms 'imitation,' and 'unreality,' since her identity is rooted so deeply in the obligation to be a vampire, and she is forced to repeat acts not decided by her. As a result, it is not humanity at large that prevents women from social liberation, but humanity's totalizing of womanhood.

Because of the totalization of womanhood at large, women are often forced into positions where they have to be monstrous; Carter shows another ambiguous identity that appears in the identity of Little Red Riding Hood in “The Company of Wolves,” where the girl inherits beastly behaviors in the face of a monstrous wolf. The final three stories, which directly trespass the story type 333 “Little Red Riding Hood,” where “The wolf [. . .] devours human beings until all of them are rescued alive from his belly,” and has one or more of the following characteristics: Wolf’s Feast. (a) By masking as mother or grandmother the wolf deceives and devours (b) a little girl (Red Riding Hood)” (ATU-Index). Carter adds her own elements to the story to muddle up the nature of fairytales, particularly their defining characteristics. The most significant change appears in the ending of “The Company of Wolves,” when the werewolf is about to gobble up Little Red Riding Hood, but “the girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody’s meat” (Carter 151). In the end, the heroine makes the wolf “fearful,” and “sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf” (Carter 152). By inserting Little Red Riding Hood’s boldness and bravery, the elements of the story are transgressed, revoking the power and cruel nature of the wolf.

Witches, who are historically women, are subject to violence because of their monstrosity, leading Carter to exemplify how women become monsters in the face of pre-determined violence. While both Carter and Haraway embrace identity in its transformative, liminal state, Carter recognizes how existing outside the expected woman’s experience can lead to further violence in her first Little Red Riding Hood story, “The Werewolf.” “The Werewolf” opens with an in-depth description of the town and the nature of the town, almost as a warning or a reminder of danger. The tale tells of Walpurgisnacht, a night of witch-hunting, where “the Devil holds picnics in the graveyards and invites witches; then they dig up fresh corpses, and eat

them. Anyone will tell you that” (Carter 137). As a result, the people of the town are extra cautious of the presence of witches, ready to annihilate them from existence. Carter uses “they,” to describe the whole town, explaining what one is to do in the appearance of a witch. According to the town’s tale, “When they discover a witch—some old woman [. . .] whose black cat, oh sinister! Follows her about all the time, they strip the crone, search her for marks, for the supernumerary nipple her familiar sucks. They soon find it. They stone her to death” (Carter 138). From this description, it is obvious that the people of the town attack the witches and creatures just for their difference. These witches and monsters are pejoratively identified as old women and ‘croncs,’ degrading their difference and ultimately leading the people to act on violence. As a result, “The Werewolf” demonstrates how one group holds power over another on the basis of difference.

It’s no wonder that when the Little Red figure of “The Werewolf” realizes her grandmother is a werewolf, she is inclined to kill her; but it is her grandmother who seemingly attacks her first. “A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster. Her freedom will be a condition of personal privilege that deprives those of which she exercises it of their own freedom. The most extreme kind of this deprivation is murder. These women murder” writes Angela Carter (*TSW* 30). The grandmother, who is a werewolf, is the subject of violence due to her difference. The violence the town has towards monsters, witches, and creatures is already predetermined: a woman must act in violence as a form of self-defense. When the town becomes aware of her transformative existence, “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” (Carter 139). Carter makes sure to point out that the grandmother of the story is in her transformative state to exaggerate her difference and

separation. Although there is a need for difference and multiplicity to overthrow the notion of universal womanhood, there is certainly the risk of violence, as there always is for women.

Overall, it is important to note that women find liberation in different ways, but as Carter shows in her fairytales, never in a completely totalizing, essentialist way. The ambiguous identities that the women embrace, whether through an encounter with an outside entity or through their own transformative or liminal experience of life, allow women to see how their lives have been shaped by the constraints of society's demeaning expectation and submission of women. Even the Beauty in "The Courtship of Mr Lyon," who does not undergo a physical transformation, encounters an ambiguous Beast, who is both man and human, and liberates herself by accepting another being's ambiguous identity. At first, "she could not bring herself to touch him of her own free will, he was so different from herself," but then eventually, "flung herself upon him, so that the iron bedstead groaned, and covered his poor paws with her kisses" (Carter 57, 59). Beauty's acceptance of difference in this story, while different from the other stories, shows the affinity among different identities that Haraway touches on. By accepting the other internally or externally, (even if it is monstrous, grotesque, or frightening) difference becomes an image that can be challenged, and dualisms that curse society's disposition can begin to fade away.

3. The Grotesque & Catastrophe.

Carter's adaptation of traditional fairytales is an act of transgressive grotesquerie, given the historical significance of fairytales and folktales throughout society. The previously mentioned subversion of narration and utter transformation of key characters is connected to the overall structure and enactment of the grotesque. The grotesque, with origins as disjointed as its

structure and aesthetic, encapsulates countless attributes, including “peculiar, odd, absurd, bizarre, macabre, depraved, degenerate, perverse;” these attributes reveal themselves in all different forms throughout literature (Edwards 1). Justin Edwards claims,

“the attributes of incompatibility and ambivalence do not simply lead to a conceptual dead-end or a place where meaning is absent and unattainable. Instead, the grotesque offers a creative force for conceptualizing the indeterminate that is produced by distortion, and reflecting on the significance of the uncertainty that is thereby produced.”

(3)

In other words, the grotesque in literature is the development of the unknown and the impossible; the application of language to describe and conceive disturbingly abstract ideas and images. The realness and normalcy of social reality are contested with ambiguity, incongruity, abnormality, and the uncanny to create grotesquerie. As such, Carter’s fairytales challenge the social realities within fairytales, as well as in reality, particularly for women through transgressions of form and plot and incongruity in style to express the unstable and the uncertainty; however, it is important to note that “any attempt to locate the grotesque by its definition is bound to fail. For if there is anyone thing that defines ‘the’ grotesque, it is precisely that it is hybrid, transgressive, and always in motion” (15). The fairytale and the folktale, with all of their hybridity, transgressions, and movement, is a mutable place to begin discussing the grotesque. At its core, a fairytale is a place of motion each tale travels across borders and generations with the same motifs and overall story types. Nevertheless, Carter’s transgressions of the fairytale narration as well as the social reality of binaries violate the boundaries of fairytales and normalcy.

And yet it is true to say that fairytales fundamentally create grotesque images. More specifically, Justin Edwards claims that “grotesque physical features arise out of the combination of the human and non-human” (Edwards 36). The witch, the werewolf, the vampire, and the beast are fundamentally grotesque by their hybrid nature. The exploration of these caricatures in Carter’s stories under Donna Haraway’s theoretical approach aligns with Edwards’ analysis of “the grotesque and otherness,” since the “combination of the human and non-human could just as easily force the readers to reconsider their own sense of self, their own distance from monstrosity” (Edwards 48). Indeed, the monstrous entities, hybrids, and transformative characters in Carter’s stories, such as “The Werewolf,” “Wolf-Alice,” “The Courtship of Mr Lyon,” “The Lady of the House of Love,” and “The Tiger’s Bride,” are images of the grotesque. However, Edwards’ treatment of the hybrid body does not account entirely for the aspects of womanhood that are already taboo, disharmonious, and transgressive to articulate or express.

Carter transgresses the boundaries in which the fairytale caricatures who are women express their hybridity and transformative nature. The grotesque body is one of monstrosity and abnormality, such as the previously mentioned grotesquerie within the fusion of the human and the non-human. This application of grotesquerie is insufficient since so much of womanhood is mystified and relegated beyond the boundaries of humanity already. Carter recognizes the mystification of womanhood: “Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it” (*TSW* 4). In an act of rebellion against this mystification, the women in Carter’s fairytales express their body in a grotesque fashion beyond just animal-human hybridity. The grotesquerie appears in the woman’s body amid Carter’s story, “The Company of Wolves,” through Little Red Riding Hood’s explicitly sexual characterization. The Little Red Riding Hood of this story beckons the reader to

answer “two key questions: ‘what is normal?’ and by extension, ‘what is abnormal’” when expressing images of women’s bodies (Edwards 8). Little Red Riding Hood’s “breasts have just begun to swell [. . .] and she has just started her woman’s bleeding,” reminding the readers of her adolescence and directly characterizing her sexuality, which remains discreet and shrouded from men’s understanding of womanhood (Carter 145-146). Her innocence is emphasized through the reminder that she is still but a child, growing into a new form. By characterizing her body through taboo subjects, Carter creates an image of grotesquerie; “the status quo is transgressed, and the transgressive aspects of the work violate accepted, imposed or harmonious boundaries” (Edwards 66). The language of the world is the language of men, and this language does not include the normalization of women’s natural bodily functions.

The body of the woman is an image of grotesqueness in “The Tiger’s Bride,” as the Beauty of the story, the heroine, realizes her life is an imitation of life that mirrors men’s desire for women. Her introspective look upon herself results in the grotesquerie of woman’s bodies by means of comparison to non-humans. Edwards describes this as “the inhuman relation to the grotesque presents a space in which the notion of humanity itself, and the distinctions between the human and the inhuman, are fundamentally unsettled” (Edwards 86). Since all of the characters who live in the Beast’s house are cyborgs created by men, the Beauty sees herself in them as she believes her life is an imitation of life. When the Beauty encounters the soubrette, the Beauty calls her “this clockwork twin of mine,” recognizing that she herself is an imitation, and that the woman’s body is always suffering the objectification of the male gaze and that women are created into the image men want out of women (Carter 72). When she gazes into the soubrette’s mirror, she sees “within it not my own face, but that of my father, as if I had put on his face,” expressing how little of her image is of her own agency (Carter 72). Later on, Beauty

contemplates her existence, asking herself, “had I not been allotted only the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given her?” (Carter 76). The strength of the term ‘doll-maker’ to describe the creation of identity relegates the woman’s body to the grotesque: the Beauty’s humanity, as it is defined by patriarchal men, becomes grotesque amid its comparison to the inhuman.

Like the mystification of women’s bodies, the behaviors of women are mystified in classic fairytales to maintain a particular status quo amongst women. As a result, Little Red Riding Hood of “The Company of Wolves” continues to transgress the boundaries of normality. Moreover, Edwards draws the relationship between grotesquerie and monstrosity strictly based on appearances, yet this is another shortcoming of Edwards’ analysis of the grotesque in regards to womanhood. When discussing female monsters who act violently, but do not look beastly, Edwards claims that these women do not fulfill the grotesque criteria because “behavior holds the possibility for reform, whereas a monstrous body allows less possibility for modification” (47). The basis of Edwards’ argument haphazardly overlooks the cultural invocation of women’s passivity and submission: “Flesh comes to us out of history; so does the repression and taboo that governs our experience of flesh” (*TSW* 12). Historically, Little Red Riding Hood is one of submission, but she becomes grotesque to the readers when she fully embraces assertive sexuality. She reclaims the power from the werewolf and incites fear back into him until he succumbs to the frightening girl, who “will lay his fearful head on her lap and [. . .] pick out the lice from his pelt” (Carter 151). The concept of abnormal behaviors functions as an inversion of a woman’s displacement in society. She displaces herself from the male gaze through her monstrous behaviors. Furthermore, Red Riding Hood deflowers the wolf, and “the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering but she did not pay them any heed” (Carter 151). The

sexual, fearless nature of the girl calls into question what the norm is, as the grotesque intends to. Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" perpetuates the normalcy of fearing strange men, and ultimately reiterates the power imbalance between men and women, since men attacking young girls is normalized in his timeless telling of the story. Through Carter's subversion, women's bodies are grotesque to challenge the status quo that disposes women to patriarchal standards.

From another angle, women's bodies become subject to grotesquerie at a man's excessive desire for women as objects, such as in "The Bloody Chamber," where the excess of mirrors reflects a grotesque image. Sometimes the grotesque appears when "it injects harmony with disharmony, and it destabilizes what is 'acceptable' and 'normal' through an overdose, an excess of the abnormal, the deviant, the abject [. . .] because it exposes the boundary" (Edwards 75). The first time the heroine and the Marquis enters their now-shared bedroom, the heroine notes there are "mirrors on all the walls, in stately frames of contorted gold [. . .] the young bride, who had become that multitude of girls I saw in the mirrors, identical" (Carter 10-11). Mirrors appear all over Carter's stories, but in "The Bloody Chamber," it appears in a grotesque excessiveness to make the uncomfortable sexual exploitation that is yet to come even more unsettling. Finally, when he viciously attempts to take her virginity, the heroine "watched a dozen husbands approach me in a dozen mirrors" (Carter 11). Then when he actually defiles her sexually, there is no first-person, just a singular paragraph, broken away from the rest of the story: "A dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides" (Carter 15). The excess of mirrors alongside the repetition of mirrors is meant to make the readers uncomfortable, and see how unsettling and grotesque the Marquis' sick actions towards the heroine are. Moreover, the repetition of the Marquis' piercing of the heroine occurs when she enters the bloody chamber and sees the Romanian Countess who "was pierced, not by one but a hundred spikes" (Carter 30). Excess is expressed by the repetition

of mirrors, and how mirrors can reflect horrific images. Carter's use of mirrors can reveal grotesquerie in the self, and the other, in cruel, vile ways.

Even when peering through the looking-glass, Carter's characters find something objective of themselves within it, so where else do women look when all else objectifies them? Annihilation of the self appears terrifying; but perhaps the lack of 'I' offers solace, as it does for the Countess in "The Lady of the House of Love." While the grotesque functions in literature to point out disharmonious and transgressive entities, grotesquerie also offers reconciliation away from the object and the subject, otherwise known as abjection. Edwards' *Grotesque* draws some of its knowledge of the grotesque from Julia Kristeva's feminist essay *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, which implores a place where "meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). Not quite a contradiction nor transformation, the abject subject is "Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me" (Kristeva 2). Abjection is then the erasure of boundaries and of meanings: the ambiguous, undefinable locality after utter annihilation and rejection. The Countess beckons her reader to this grotesque place, "now you are at the place of annihilation, now you are the place of annihilation" (Carter 118). If the grotesque is the transgression of boundaries, then the abject is the most extreme form of grotesquerie, where boundaries are annihilated.

Abjection appears in "The Lady of the House of Love" precisely when her vampiric mechanisms fail, and she can no longer sustain her existence as a vampire, forcing her into a grotesque and vile expulsion of the internal self to the external world. To elaborate, Edwards explains how abjection appears in the grotesque as a "state of flux" when "the body is open and irregular, sprouting or protruding internal and external forms" in images such as "deformed

bodies and oozing bodily fluids: blood, pus, bile, feces, sweat, and vomit break down the borders separating the inside from the outside, the contained from the released” (Edwards 33). At the end of the story, The Countess experiences a form of abjection unfamiliar to her, which thrusts her into an abject state, and the readers experience abjection in its grotesque state. When the Countess begins her ritual of consummation on the kind bicyclist and fails, she drops her glasses, shattering them, and then “a sharp sliver pierces deeply into the pad of her thumb, [. . .] and watches the bright bead of blood form a drop. She has never seen her own blood before, not her *own* blood. It exercises upon her an awed fascination” (Carter 133). The Countess, whose blood reaches the external world, forcing her into an abject state, where she cannot help but be thrust externally, despite her life always being one of internal mechanisms. The kind bicyclist contrasts her bleeding with “innocent remedies of the nursery,” forcing the readers to experience grotesquerie from two juxtaposing concepts (Carter 133). The blood is grotesque and unsettling, but her state of abjection comes to be upon her new state of existence, after a catastrophe.

As the Countess’ blood puts her in a state of fascination, she begins to experience a grotesque experience of catastrophe, similar to that of Kristeva’s theory on abjection. The kind bicyclist in the room “by his presence, he is an exorcism” (Carter 133). Afterward, a disembodied voice says, “the end of exile is the end of being,” which captures the grotesque catastrophe of the Countess’ being, as well as the abject that Kristeva speaks of (Carter 133). Because of the bicyclist’s external presence, and the Countess’ failure to complete her ritual of consummation, she is forced into the annihilation of her existence, where she is not the subject, the object, but also not nothing, leaving the readers to assume she is gone. Nevertheless, the Countess’ dead body remains, and her disembodied voice still speaks to the bicyclist: “I will vanish in the morning light; I was only an invention of darkness” (Carter 135). Here, abjection

appears in the grotesque again, since “the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject” (Kristeva 5). She is abject; dead, but alive in an ambiguous voice, leaving the bicyclist but a rose. All her life, she craved being a human, and she looks “for the first time, fully human,” but is still a corpse, and a grotesque reminder of her unfortunate condition, where the dead and the living have no boundaries (Carter 135). The Countess’ story ends in a catastrophe; she is dead but alive; not human, but not a vampire (perhaps a rose?), and the bicyclist leaves the next day, since his “regiment embarked for France,” implying that he is off to go fight a war (Carter 135). There is no consolation, just mystery after the dramatic disaster that ends Carter’s story.

Catastrophic endings are a motif in Carter’s stories. Many of her fairytales end in sudden disaster and catastrophic demise as if the world that has been upheld thus far can no longer sustain itself, and an entire upheaval of the old system must begin. The grotesque is at the heart of catastrophes; according to Kristeva, “For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic” (8). Similar to Haraway, the other, the grotesque non-human, partial-human, and inhumane entities who challenge the status quo is never a product of totalization, and therefore their existence in the world is utterly catastrophic, hence why so many of Carter’s stories end in a similar fashion. This is true in “The Lady of the House of Love,” but also in other stories, such as “The Tiger’s Bride” when The Beauty transforms into her beastly self.

When the Beast understands the Beauty will not harm him, utter catastrophe begins to tear the palace down. At the start of the story, “the palace was dismantled, as if its owner were about to move house or had never properly moved in; the Beast had chosen to live in an uninhabited place” (Carter 69). The Beast, separate and distinct from humans, but also not quite fully an animal, puts himself into a world of solitude. He is a deject, a grotesque image that is

rejected away from society, and so he lives in a palace fitting for his condition. However, when the Beauty and the Beast mutually trust each other, a place of solitude is no longer necessary. Finally, “a tremendous throbbing, as of the engine that makes the earth turn, filled the little room; he had begun to purr” (Carter 81). Carter makes an analogy to the Beast’s purring and the “engine” of the earth in order to show how the animal and the human reconnecting causes the world to turn, and the palace which dislocates the Beast and his creatures can collapse. The Beauty’s skin is ripped off, those skins of the human world, and “the reverberations of his purring rocked the foundations of the house, the walls began to dance. [the Beauty] thought: ‘It will all fall, everything will disintegrate’” (Carter 81). At last, the catastrophic ending begins with the affinity between beast and human, annihilating their grotesque differences, and causing an utter catastrophe.

Catastrophe appears again and again in Carter’s stories, destroying the people and places who totalize and control women, and allowing for a new system to take place of the old. The end of “The Bloody Chamber,” is also one of catastrophe; the mother of the heroine saves her from the Marquis: “without a moment’s hesitation, she raised my father’s gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband’s head” (Carter 44). First, the Marquis is dead, ending his cruel habit of murdering and defiling women in his forbidden chamber. Then, the castle becomes “a school for the blind,” and the once bloody chamber and its horrors no longer exist, the “contents of which are buried or burned, the door sealed” (Carter 44). Now the place that once caused great terror and horrific, gruesome images, is gone in a moment’s time; a complete catastrophic event to overturn what once was.

What once were, these dualisms and distinctions that control and maintain life, especially for women, are broken down in Carter’s fairytales. She incorporates grotesquerie to show how

horrifying life is for women when they are totalized, and forced into positions of servitude to men, while also showing how the grotesque can liberate women when they accept identities of multiplicity. These grotesque images, although they are a representation of the status quo, the grotesque also breaks down boundaries and reveals the power and control behind a totalizing, male-dominated society. Carter suggests that “only a violent transformation of this world and a fresh start in an absolutely egalitarian society” (*TSW* 29). A catastrophe, in any case, is a sufficiently volatile transformation that can free women, and reinvent womanhood into one of heteroglossia. On another note, at the end of Carter’s novel, *The Magic Toyshop*, the protagonist Melanie escapes from her abusive home by burning it down, and her mute aunt finally speaks for the first time, and the narrator says, “Catastrophe had freed her tongue” (*The Magic Toyshop* 197).

Conclusion

If Carter can grasp the age-old fairytale and dislocate its elements, and recreate a new image from the boldness of her words, one does not need to even imagine, but embrace the adaptive nature of womanhood. The Motif-Index and Type-Index of fairytales successfully catalog fairytales, placing each story inside their respective boxes; but these stories, as exemplified by Carter’s adaptations, are never unequivocal. Breaking convention, finding comfort in liminality, accepting contradiction, and reinventing oneself is no easy feat. Nevertheless, Carter’s stories serve as a reminder that no identity, narration, or boundary is immutable. Even the women of Carter’s fairytales must go through periods of disorientation, abjection, or catastrophe to redefine themselves, despite the fragmented dispositions and situations each character is placed in. Whether it be through point-of-view, narration, liminality,

hybridity, grotesquerie, or beyond, Angela Carter emphasizes the freedom that comes along with transcendence.

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