



## Tracing the Feminist Standpoint in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*

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### **Abstract**

The paper examines the significant themes of power and objectification reflected in Angela Carter's debut novel, *The Bloody Chamber*. Carter gave these well-liked and conventional stories a radical new twist by incorporating a feminist by debunking the image of female characters as, weak, demure or old, haggard, and witch-like. The objective of the paper is to acknowledge that men often portray women as unreliable in literature, and this practice is carried down through the years. Which now took a turn. The paper also examines the lasting effect of storytelling from a patriarchal point of view is demystified and traces the decisive role of women characters in the retold fairytale.

**Keywords:** Demystification, Retelling, Patriarchy, Feminist and Magical realism.

*“Good-humoured, unaffected girls, will not do for a man who has been used to sensible women. They are two distinct orders of being.”*

- *Jane Austen*

*Retellings frequently retain the essential elements of the original story while giving it a new spin. “Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten,” states Neil; Gaiman in Coraline. A fairytale is a type of fantastic tale that typically has its roots in folklore. Commonly, a strong, resourceful, and bravely underprivileged protagonist experiences hardship before finding ultimate success in fairy tales. In Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll claims, “Actually the best gift you could have given her was a lifetime of adventures”*

Angela Carter, a feminist author of the 20th century, retells folklore from a feminist standpoint. The Conventional stories of Blue Beard and Sleeping Beauty are reconstructed in



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a new form with relevance to contemporary society. She rewrites the stories with an unexpected ending while altering the narrative of the original story. A strong woman in literature is what today's feminists want to see, and that desire is presented in 1979's *The Bloody Chamber*. To demonstrate a realistic image of the contemporary world alongside mystical components, she has used magical realism in the retold stories. The representation of men and women in conventional stories is debunked through the mode of retelling. The paper focuses on the character named Blue Beard who kills his wives in the Charles Perrault folktale *The Blue Beard* and depicts women as weak and fragile. Angela Carter breaks down the stereotypical image of women and rewrites the story from a new perception offering powerful, and independent female characters.

*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* adopts a gothic style of narrative that reflects Western European traditional fairy tales. Angela Carter encapsulates the subversive feminist touch in the original folktales. According to Carter, "A work of fiction that is utterly aware that it is a separate manifestation of human experience from reality might influence reality. Consequently; Angela Carter wanted the tales to promote society". (NGM, 3)

A timeless fairy tale is Charles Perrault's *The History of Blue Beard or Female Curiosity*. It tells the story of Blue Beard, a violent husband, and his prior wives' bodies, which were stored in a locked chamber. On the other hand, the narration in *The Bloody Chamber* is in first person from the perspective of a girl, which is contrary to Blue Beard's third-person narration. Thereby, the retold fairytale fore grounded from a feminist perspective. An unnamed seventeen-year-old girl plays the role of the main character in *The Bloody Chamber*. Aristocrat Marquis, a Frenchman, with a monocle covering his left eye, and a narrow face. He had promised the young woman wealth in exchange for her hand in marriage. Since he had already been married three times, he was much older than the girl. The bodies of all three of his wives were never discovered, and their deaths were all mysterious. The mother of the protagonist advises her to contemplate her life before getting married, and the girl gave her consent to the union.

Angela Carter talks about how women experience anxiety when choosing to enter married life outside of their favorite and most comfortable mother's home. The girl



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experiences grief when she stops being her mother's daughter and starts dating another man. She laments the ephemeral nature of her identity. On the day of her daughter's wedding, the mother was torn between joy and sorrow. Even though there is little information about the wedding, the reader concludes that the mother was self-centered enough to marry her daughter to an elderly man. However, in *The Bloody Chamber*, the mother of the girl is praised for being courageous, outspoken, and sympathetic. She successfully raised the child on her own after becoming a widow at a very young age. Being a single mother, she is bold enough to raise her daughter, and has also learned to use the handgun which her spouse has left behind to save herself and her daughter from difficult times. She always had a revolver in her reticule because she knew that society would take advantage of the fact that they were alone and bother them. Carter accounts the mother in *Bloody Chamber*:

*My eagle-featured, indomitable mother, what other student at the conservatoire could boast that her mother had outfaced a junk of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, killed a man-eating tiger with her own hands, and all of this before she was my age? (BC, 2).*

The portrayal of female characters in conventional folklore shows that women are always dependent and are never independent; Angela Carter breaks this notion and portrays her characters as successful, talented, and independent women. For instance, in *The Bloody Chamber* Marquis's first wife is a skilled opera singer with a flourishing career who is able to support herself. The second wife of a well-known symbolist artist was a devoted model. The high fashion Romanian Countess was the third spouse. The young woman whom he recently married is an accomplished pianist. The strength and tenacity that education offers women are distinctly portrayed by Angela Carter in the retold version.

Perrault's portrayal in *The Blue Beard* is replaced by Carter who genders her protagonist as a powerful, intelligent girl. For instance, in the retold tale, when the young girl is dressed in her school uniform, she feels secure and at ease. Her identification helps her feel like she is herself, whereas, in the conventional tale, she has the impression that she is her husband's property because of her husband's extravagant and lovely outfit. Once she realized, she had been taken in by the man's wealth, and feels discomfort. He has a



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sophisticated look, which she also notices, and she began to see herself in that light. She believes his assessment of her even if she never feels the way he says she does. Later, she comes to terms with being defiled. She declares, "I seemed reborn in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes in my innocence, he sensed a rare talent for corruption" (25).

However, in contrast to *Blue Beard* in *The History of Blue Beard*, Marquise didn't consider the loneliness of his wife in *Bloody Chamber*. The key to the secret chamber at the base of the tower was among the set of keys he handed her, but he failed to include the set of keys for all of the castle's doors. He claims that the room is his personal space where he goes to daydream about life. For her assistance, he also sends the piano tuner. The young woman repeatedly says, "I have to be content." She must comply with everything he gives her; but in reality, she is not happy. However, the girl is aware of her desires and does not wish to be submissive, but is struck with loneliness and unable to talk to anyone. She sobs and phones her mother, but the connection was terrible and disconnected. Being literate, the mother could sense that something is wrong with her daughter. She does not seek assistance from anyone and is not afraid to deal with the matter. Carter depicts the mother as a merciful angel who rescues her daughter from her predicament.

Even though she has access to everything, and is immensely anxious to find out what is in the closet. She does not like her company or the compliments and is always urged to learn more. Her curiosity drags her to find out what is forbidden. Although she is aware of the risks, she is unable to resist her temptation, "To be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case that is to be killed. This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman". (SW, 15)

The protagonist in *The Bloody Chamber* investigates every space before going to the library, where she is frightened by the graphic titles of the books that contained guides for torturing people. Marquis possessed statues, paintings, and writings depicting debauched, feeble, and demented women. Women work hard to achieve awareness, but once they do, they return to their nightmare with youthful follies. Then, she immediately makes the decision to enter the restricted area because she wants to see the man for who he really is. Nevertheless, she discovers the bodies of his previous wives who were cruelly murdered by her husband.



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*Seeing the dead bodies causes her to become fearful, but she finds strength in remembering her mother. Immediately she thinks to escape from the true personality of the wicked man. She began to get angry at the idea of becoming his next victim. She was savvy enough to exit the room.*

*In contrast to *The Bloody Chamber*, when the girl in *The Blue Beard* opens the closet door and discovers the secret of her husband, she is interrupted by him and is accused of the crime. She then implores him to pardon her but to no avail. She cried out to her brothers to hurry over because she needed their help. This implies that a man is in the position to exact revenge and not a woman, according to a cultural stereotype. Her brothers dramatically and unexpectedly save the girl. The men are portrayed as strong, courageous protectors and warriors. Therefore, Perrault's message was that female curiosities result in vengeance and bloodshed.*

*Whereas, in the retold version the girl accidentally drops the chamber key into the blood. Even after washing and wiping it away, the blood mark remains and takes the form of a heart. When Marquis came back and asked her to give him the key, she refused. When he realized this, he was not startled to learn that she was aware of his secret. So, he plans to kill her, but the girl seeks an attempt to reach her mother but failed. She is now in a helpless situation but fortunately, the mother rode her horse and shot Marquis in the forehead when he prepares to cut off the girl's head. Carter describes a woman in action who killed the wicked.*

*The puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their strings, abandon the rituals he had ordained for them since time began and start to live for themselves, the king, aghast, witnessed the revolt of his pawns. (BC,59)*

*Ever since the dawn of time, men have ruled over women like puppet masters. But today's women explore life on their own and release themselves from the constraint. Women broke the cycle of passivity and rose up in a revolution for their independence and rights. The girl in *Blue Beard* receives the entire estate. She spends some of the money on the marriages of her sister Anne to young men, her brothers' purchases of captain's commissions, and*



*herself to a highly deserving man.*

*Contrary to the original story, In Bloody Chamber, the girl who inherits the great riches donates most of it to charitable organizations. She has a demanding life. A piano tuner is her second husband. On her forehead, there was still a scar. The girl was still responsible for transmitting the remaining humiliation she felt for having compromised wealth. In the re-writing, the classic fairy tale, in which poverty and unhappiness are changed into wealth and happiness through marriage, is modified.*

*To sum up, Carter incorporates folktales to challenge the conventional from feminist retellings of fairy tales that persistently expose and refute the patriarchal gender norms and moralistic her provocative and inventive work exposes taboos and acknowledges the active female presence and the consistent repetition of breaking the conventional ideologies of folktale in the contemporary world. Representing reality, the paper foregrounds that modern women confront the stereotypical norms and thereby become strong as an act of survival.*

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