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**“ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A GIRL...”: AN  
ANALYSIS OF BAD GIRLS IN FEMINIST REVISIONARY  
FAIRYTALES**

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Esta Dissertação foi julgada adequada para obtenção do Título de “Mestre” e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês

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To all the girls that grew up inspired by the Riot Grrrl movement, by the Spice Girls, and most of all by Madonna, and now are part of the contemporary feminism.



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*“Good girls go to heaven. Bad girls go everywhere”*

Motto from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,  
popularized by Helen Gurley Brown

*“When I'm good I'm very, very good,  
but when I'm bad, I'm better.”*

Mae West

## ABSTRACT

Women have for a long time been regarded as secondary characters in human history. They had to sacrifice their potential to fit in the patriarchal norms of good behavior in order to be socially accepted. The aim of this study is to analyze feminist revisionary fairytales in search of portrayals of women who rebel against those norms, disobeying Patriarchal ideology, and offering alternative femininities. Because popular narratives such as myths and fairytales take part in shaping one's identity, it is important to look at them from a critical perspective; and revisionism highlights the importance of women's re-telling of stories in order to re-think themselves and their positions, and re-define their identities. The works analyzed are: the short stories "The Bloody Chamber," "The Snow Child," "The Werewolf," "The Company of Wolves," and "Wolf-Alice," by Angela Carter; "Snow White," by the Merseyside Fairy Story Collective; "Bluebeard's Egg," by Margaret Atwood; and the poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," by Anne Sexton.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Revisionism, Fairy tales

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## RESUMO

Por muito tempo mulheres foram relegadas a personagens secundárias na história humana. Elas tiveram que sacrificar seus potenciais e se encaixar nas normas patriarcais de bom comportamento para serem socialmente aceitas. O objetivo desse estudo é analisar contos de fadas revisionistas feministas em busca de representações de mulheres que se rebelam contra essas normas, desobedecendo a ideologia patriarcal e oferecendo femininidades alternativas. Por narrativas populares como mitos e contos de fadas tomarem parte na formação da identidade, é importante examina-los através de uma perspectiva crítica. O revisionismo em questão enfatiza a importância da recontagem de histórias sob uma perspectiva feminina para que as mulheres repensem suas posições e redefinam suas identidades. Os trabalhos analisados são: os contos “The Bloody Chamber”, “The Snow Child”, “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves”, e “Wolf-Alice”, de Angela Carter; “Snow White”, do coletivo Merseyside Fairy Story Collective; “Bluebeard’s Egg”, de Margaret Atwood; e o poema “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, de Anne Sexton.

**Palavras-chave:** Feminismo, Revisionismo, Contos de fadas.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: WHO'S BAD?

What is a bad girl? Traditionally, what is understood as a “good girl” in the patriarchal context can be many things: a woman secluded to the domestic space, passive, submissive, innocent, well behaved, pure, virginal, and sometimes even childish. If a woman presents any characteristic contrasting with these, in my understanding, she will normally be regarded as a bad girl. This classification of women into good or bad, depending on how they acquiesce to patriarchal norms of acceptable behavior for women, has been generally accepted in literature as well as in life. Most of the really active female characters in literature are considered villains, and by the end of the story their fate is predictable: they are mostly punished for their outrageous boldness with death or madness. Meanwhile, in real life, women are blamed for prioritizing their dreams and careers over their families, or even blamed for showing their sexual desires openly. Fitting into the pattern of what constitutes a good girl is a limitation for women, and the restrictions it imposes turns women into secondary beings, their subjectivity constructed to serve the male, or the male protagonist in the case of literature.

As Joanna Russ theorizes in her essay “What can a heroine do? or Why women can’t write,” women’s existence in literature has been limited to two polarized archetypes: the Bitch Goddess, and the Maiden/Victim (6-8). This is very similar to Virginia Woolf’s “angel in the house,” from her essay “Professions for Women”:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed daily. [...] Above all, she was pure. (285)

Woolf’s metaphor is further discussed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in The Attic*, where the angel is counterpoised by “the monster,” which is everything that the angel is not, including the female eager to create, to become an author.

However, whereas Gilbert and Gubar see the Monster-woman as the symbol of feminine creativity, Russ’s Bitch Goddess is a patriarchal creation, the Femme Fatale, the fetishization of a bad woman. Russ

advocates for a more active and strong portrayal of women, from the perspective of a woman-made culture in contrast with the hegemonic patriarchal culture. This is very similar to what Teresa de Lauretis proposes in her essay “The Technology of Gender,” as she points out most of the theories are male-centered, based on male narratives, written by men and about men, and thus in order to construct gender with the feminine subject in mind, it is necessary to “create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms from another perspective – a view from ‘elsewhere’” (25), an idea much similar to revisionism.

In order to retell stories from the perspective of women, with the publication of “When We Dead Awaken” (1972), by Adrienne Rich, there was the rise of revisionism, a strategy taken up by black, feminist, and postcolonial scholars from the final decades of the twentieth century to the present. Part of this critical project consists in the need of retelling well-known stories with alternative concepts and different ideologies embedded in the narrative. Revisionism highlights the importance of women’s re-telling of stories in order to re-think themselves and their positions, and re-define their identities.

These rewritings of stories can be seen as what Lauretis would call “technologies of gender,” with the social subject constructed “across languages and cultural representations; a subject en-gendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual, relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted” (2). Through the essay, she explains that gender is a representation, and that this representation is its own construction, a construction that continues even as it is deconstructed by feminism. Gender, according to de Lauretis, “represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation; (...) it represents an individual for a class” (5). This class which Lauretis refers to is inside the sex-gender system, which is a system of

representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the *conceptual* and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes [...] which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society.  
(5)

When explaining how gender has been constructed inside the sex-gender system, de Lauretis addresses the issue of how “female sexuality has been invariably defined both in contrast and in relation to the male” (14) and how penetration has been considered the center of the sexual act. She advocates for a different construction of gender, outside the heterosexual social contract, which can only be possible in the margins of hegemonic discourse. Moreover, she addresses how the deconstruction of gender affects its reconstruction, which brings us back to revisionism as a transgressive practice of rethinking the gender roles in the portrayals of gender of its feminist rewritings from the female perspective; characterizing revisionism and its subversive potential as what she calls “micropolitical practices” of resistance.

Bearing all this in mind, I want to propose the term Bad Girl as an umbrella for femininities portrayed in these feminist revisionist works that diverge from those two axes of patriarchal feminine portrayal that Russ talks about. I want to appropriate this derogatory term, and resignify it, ascribing the meaning of active girls in their pluralities who want to act upon their own life. Thus, the “bad” in Bad Girl represents not only the non-conformity with what is considered a “good behavior” for women, but also an attitude of resistance towards patriarchy, much like the “slut” in the SlutWalk<sup>1</sup> movement. The relevance of this relies on the importance of elucidating this subversion of gender as a micropolitical practice of feminist resistance, and on an understanding not of the subject of feminism as many authors theorize about, but of a feminist subjectivity, which is multiple and inclusive, in the portrayals of femininities in feminist fiction.

## 1.1 FAIRYTALES

Myths are certainly amongst the sites where revisionism is most needed. Rachel DuPlessis has a whole chapter dealing with the rewriting of myths in her book *Writing beyond the Ending* (1985), in which she analyzes the possible plots for women characters in the literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to DuPlessis, myths are considered the narratives which most express the embedded ideology from the depths of mankind:

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<sup>1</sup> SlutWalk is a transnational movement of resistance against rape, slut shaming, and many other sexist issues that still afflict society.

The special status of Judeo-Christian myths hardly needs elaborating. These literally canonical, sacred texts on which are built man's highest and perhaps most redeeming ideals have constituted ideologies surrounding and defining women as evil, duplicitous, closer to nature, disallowed from speech, thought, or debate. (105)

This female "natural inferiority" is discussed by Pierre Bourdieu, in his book *Male Domination*, as a series of symbolic associations with each sex, such as female darkness/male light, female under/male above, female inside/male outside. He argues that these symbolic associations are present since the genesis of an androcentric society, and what happens is an unconscious incorporation of these cultural elements of a male-centered historical structure. Thus, patriarchy is nothing less than a reproduction of these socially constructed values, because there is a general understanding that such values are natural to women and men. Therefore, when a female writer opts for inventing a revisionary version of such hostile or indifferent texts, she is attacking the cultural patriarchal hegemony.

In the same way as myths, fairytales are narratives that shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and gender relations as well, as Jack Zipes explains extensively throughout his works since the publication of *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, in 1979. In that book, Zipes describes how fairytales evolved from folk tales, which belong to the oral tradition of storytelling, and how they were tamed or "instrumentalized" by aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and the capitalist mass media when they assumed their written forms, therefore becoming what we know now as fairy tales. Those folk tales reflect not only the socio-historical conditions of a people in a determined epoch, but their utopian wishes to subvert their situations in order to live a better life. Thus, the upper classes who worked to edit those tales as they saw fit not only silenced the subversive potential for revolution of the peasants whose traditions created such tales, but also turned those tales into ideological tools to serve their own purposes.

Zipes also addresses the issue of revisionism as a feminist form of resistance, in the same way as the aforementioned authors do, in the preface and introduction of the book organized by him, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (1986). He elucidates the importance of fairytales in the way

children conceive the world, much like the way DuPlessis does about myths and literature. Thus, as Zipes points out, revisionary fairytales with their counter-hegemonic discourse could be used as important tools to change the patriarchal institution for future generations:

How we have arranged ourselves, our bodies and psyches, in society has been recorded and passed down through fairy tales for many centuries, and the contemporary feminist tales indicate that something radical is occurring in Western society to change our social and political relations. (26)

Cristina Bacchilega, in *Postmodern Fairytales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (1997), also addresses the subversive potential of revisionary fairytales, especially concerning gender. She states that fairy tales are “ideology machines”, and in the same way that traditional fairy tales have been “instrumentalized” to support aristocratic, bourgeois, and commercial interests, as Zipes further explains, they can be rewritten in order to question the rules that contribute to the naturalizing of subjectivity and gender. These de-naturalizing strategies, according to her, can be articulated to produce a subversive effect: “These stories might seem old and worthless, but performing their magic’s many tricks once more unleashes new powers which, in turn, can expose the magic as trickery and thus unmake its spells” (24).

Because popular narratives such as myths and fairytales take part in shaping one’s identity, it is important to look at them from a critical perspective, taking a position of resistance against undesirable social representations. Among feminist authors, Angela Carter is known for her effort of demythologization, as well as for her keen interest in breaking the representation of femininity as good, passive, subtle, and submissive. The many contributors in the books *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, organized by Lorna Sage, and *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, organized by Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega, describe Carter as having her own brand of feminism: an iconoclastic pro-sex kind of feminism with a matter-of-factly empowerment that understands gender inequality as a cue for women to go and fight for what they want. When in 1978 she published her extended essay *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, she entered the debate on pornography and feminism in a position not so favorable with the other feminist critics of the time, as Sage recalls in the introduction of the book she organized. Right

afterwards, in 1979, Carter published the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, presenting what could be considered erotic revisions of fairytales. Most of the works I analyze in this study are from this collection, as my take on feminism is very similar to hers, my aim being to verify how femininity is portrayed in order to create the image of the Bad Girl, re/de/constructing traditional portrayals of femininity, and thus producing a subversive effect in those revisionary works. My hypothesis is, of course, that those portrayals are in fact subversive, and that they present not only a criticism of the standards of patriarchal society, but also alternative femininities in opposition to the traditional forms that imprison individual women into limited patterns of behavior.

As I wanted to have different perspectives of the notion of Bad Girl, I decided to create a progression in the way I divided my chapters based on the stages of the life the young women who are protagonists of the original tales were in, therefore: the first chapter would deal with revisions of Little Red Riding Hood, because the protagonist is still a child; the second would have revisions of Snow White, which narrates what happens right before the protagonist's wedding; and for the last chapter I chose Bluebeard's revisions, for their portrayal of newlywed bride. Of course the revisions do not always present the protagonists in the same situations of the original tale; nevertheless, this way of organizing the chapters made it easier to showcase different sides of the notion I had in my mind of who these Bad Girls are. My objective was to attribute my analysis with an organic progression in the flow of ideas I presented regarding the different sides of what I considered as Bad Girls.

Although I have a preference for Carter, as I stated before, I could not just work with her revisions as I had the idea of working with three revisions in each chapter and Carter only wrote one revision of Snow White, and one revision of Bluebeard. Thus, I chose two other Snow White revisions to work with, based on how differently they present their protagonists; and only one other revision of Bluebeard, which I chose to be Margareth Atwood's because I also have a preference for her stories. Due to the length of both Bluebeard's revision, I decided not to choose a third one, leaving the last chapter with only two revisions for analysis.

My first chapter is entitled "Naughty children: Little Red Riding Hood versus Big Bad Wolf." In this chapter the three revisions I

analyze, all written by Carter, are *bildungsmärchen*<sup>2</sup>, that is, coming-of-age fairytales: “The Werewolf,” “The Company of Wolves,” and “Wolf-Alice.”

The second chapter, “Snow bitches: the (wo)men in the mirror,” presents an analysis of three revisionary versions of Snow White. The revisions analyzed in this chapter are very different from one another: “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” a poem by Anne Sexton published in her book *Transformations* from 1971, the only work I analyze that is not a short story; “Snow White” (1976), by the Merseyside Fairy Story Collective that focuses on the class issue; and “The Snow Child” (1979) by Angela Carter, a revision based on an obscure variation of Snow White.

The third and last chapter is called “Sado-masochist wives: a peek at the infamous chamber.” It is the only chapter in which I analyze only two works: “Bluebeard’s Egg,” by Atwood, and “The Bloody Chamber,” by Carter. Both of them are revisions of Bluebeard, and both deal with the dynamics of heterosexual relationships.

While reading my bibliography and writing the chapters I noticed that coincidentally all but one of the works I chose to work with were also analyzed by Bacchilega in her previously mentioned book. Therefore her presence is heavy in all the chapters, as I came to consider her study as a guiding light to my research while trying to maintain a dialogue between my analysis and hers, adding my contribution mostly to the scholarship about Carter and fairytales. However, my aim is different from hers, since my focus is to delineate the notion of Bad Girl using the portrayals of femininities in the feminist revisions of fairytales to illustrate my idea.

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<sup>2</sup> From German: *Bildungs* means formation, education; and *Märchen* means tale. This is not a term that Bacchilega uses, but it fits perfectly; as *Bildungsroman* is a term used to describe novels of formation, and *Märchen* to refer to fairytales.



## 2. NAUGHTY CHILDREN: LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD VERSUS BIG BAD WOLF

If you are a woman walking alone in the dark of the night, there is a feeling that follows you wherever you go, because when you are a girl you learn to be afraid of the dark or of being alone. When you are a child, it is easy to ignore advice such as “don’t talk to strangers” and toss them in the same bag of fictitious stories to scare children, but as you grow up you realize that anybody could be a wolf. Personally, I have always related this fear of being raped to the Little Red Riding Hood story.

This tale’s relation to rape is not solely mine, for a number of authors also interpret Little Red Riding Hood as a cautionary tale of rape even in its folk variations, before Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers came along with the written versions that we are familiar with, entitled “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge” (1697) and “Rotkäppchen” (1812) respectively. The first author to propose this interpretation was Susan Brownmiller (1975), followed by Jack Zipes, who discusses its implication more broadly in *The Trial and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Version of the Tale in Sociocultural Context* (1983), and in the article “A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood’s Trials and Tribulations” (1985). Jennifer Orme, in her essay “A Wolf’s Queer Invitation: David Kaplan’s Little Red Riding Hood and Queer Possibility” (2015) labels the tale “as the quintessential instantiation of stranger danger, which typically opposes an active male predator to a passive female victim” (87).

Of course this is not the only current interpretation of the tale: Maria Tatar lists several authors with very different interpretations in her book *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (39-42). But even Perrault himself seems to suggest a relation to rape in the verses that come right after the tale as “the moral” of the story in a 2009 translation:

Young children, as this tale will show,  
And mainly pretty girls with charm,  
Do wrong and often come to harm  
In letting those they do not know  
Stay talking to them when they meet.  
And if they don’t do as they ought,

It's no surprise that some are caught  
 By wolves who take them off to eat.  
 I call them wolves, but you will find  
 That some are not the savage kind,  
 Not howling, ravening or raging;  
 Their manners seem, instead, engaging,  
 They're softly-spoken and discreet.  
 Young ladies whom they talk to on the street  
 They follow to their homes and through the hall,  
 And upstairs to their rooms; when they're there  
 They're not as friendly as they might appear:  
 These are the most dangerous wolves of all. (103)

When one reads the first half of these lines, "...pretty girls with charm/ *Do wrong* and often come to harm/ *In letting* those they do not know/ Stay talking to them when they meet./ And if they don't *do as they ought*,/ *It's no surprise* that some are caught" (emphasis mine) it becomes very clear that Perrault hints that, instead of being the victim, the girl is the one to blame in case of rape, a message that, according to Jack Zipes, is conveyed by both Perrault's and the Grimms' versions.

In his previously mentioned works, Zipes describes how the plot of Little Red Riding Hood changed throughout history and discusses the ideological and social implications of those changes. As mentioned, in *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* Zipes explains how fairytales in their written versions carry different ideologies from their original oral manifestations – the folktales. While folktales were usually more subversive, often carrying an urge for class revolution, as they were kept alive by peasants' oral tradition, the written versions were instrumentalized by aristocracy and then by the bourgeoisie, being used not only to contain the animosity of the masses but also to carry important values for the agendas of these classes: either to keep them in power, as was the case with aristocracy, or to incite a revolution against the aristocracy, which was a bourgeois interest. Obviously, patriarchal and Christian values were in play as well, and since the oral versions were of pagan origins and most of the time more emancipatory for women, the written versions tried to tame the contents of the stories as they reached the people; and that is how these stories have reached us, as Zipes states in most of his works.

The ones responsible for this sanitization and instrumentalization of folktales, and thus their transformation into

fairytales, were the pioneering folklorists and anthologists who collected the oral folktales and edited their content, Perrault and the Grimms being the two most famous examples. Although both Perrault and the Grimm Brothers were from bourgeois families, Perrault was working for the aristocracy during the reign of Louis XIV and was “a most loyal servant of the crown” (xi), according to Christopher Betts in the introduction of the 2009 edition of his translation of *Complete Fairytales*. There are two major differences from the version published in 1697 by Perrault and the 1812 version by the Grimm Brothers. In Perrault’s, Little Red Riding Hood undresses herself before going to bed with the wolf, still thinking that he was her grandmother; and there is no huntsman to save her, so in the end both she and her grandmother die. In the Grimms’ version, the huntsman not only saves the two women while the wolf is still asleep, but he and Little Red Riding Hood fill the wolf’s belly with stones that kill him when he wakes up. And also, the story ends with Little Red Riding Hood encountering another wolf that subsequently gets killed by her and the grandmother.

Even though the Grimm brothers’ version seems more optimistic for women, with the protagonist and her grandmother killing another wolf without any male help, Zipes’s analysis shows that both versions condemn sex outside marriage and both written versions present the girl as responsible for an implicit rape instead of being the victim (227). In addition, Zipes brings to his analysis a third version of the story, titled “The Story of Grandmother”, as representative of the original oral tradition. This version was collected by folklorists in Nièvre around 1885, and published by Paul Delarue in the 1950s, and it is much cruder and explicit than the written ones. Undoubtedly, the most striking differences of this version are the following: Little Red Riding Hood drinks the blood and eats the flesh of her own grandmother without knowing it; her undressing that also appears on Perrault’s version is slower and more detailed, and her clothes are thrown in the fire; and the last and foremost difference is that she manages to escape from the wolf by lying that she has to pee. Thus, as Zipes implies, the oral tradition was much more about how a girl could defend herself from these kinds of dangers than blaming her for her own rape (229-230).

Unfortunately, the most famous versions are still the written ones that were sanitized by male authors in order to be accepted as literature at the time of their publications, as Zipes briefly mentions. This is why the feminist revisionism of fairytales is so relevant, for its authors

recreate those famous stories in order to retrieve this insurgent essence of nonconformity regarding patriarchal values which an original version of a tale in the oral tradition may hold.

This retrieval of lost voices and a women's genealogy of stories is what Christina Bacchilega talks about in her book *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (1997). In the third chapter, titled "Not Re(a) Once and for All: 'Little Red Riding Hood's' Voices in Performance," as she does a thorough revision of literature around the Little Red Riding Hood scholarship, she disagrees with some feminist critics that accuse the fairytale genre of being absolutely imprisoning for women, even in its rewritings; and Angela Carter of reproducing patriarchal values and secluding her female characters to such a genre. Bacchilega defends Carter by arguing that:

Neither the struggle for freedom or a belief in change should be abandoned; but to actually transform desire [...] may require acknowledging and confronting, rather than simply rejecting, the fairy tale's "several existences" as a genre in history, as well as its stylized configurations of "woman". (52)

While she analyzes the very same short stories that I will analyze in this chapter; "The Werewolf", "The Company of Wolves", and "Wolf-Alice," revisions of Little Red Riding Hood by Carter, Bacchilega argues that "Carter's postmodern rewritings are acts of fairy tale archeology that release this story's many other voices" (59). With this in mind, I will take a step further into the Little Red Riding Hood scholarship and try to listen to those voices that Bacchilega talks about in search of Bad Girls.

First of all, it is important to remark that in these revisions the wolf is not an independent character, but it is merged with another character that differs in each of the three short stories: the grandmother in "The Werewolf," the huntsman in "The Company of Wolves," and the heroine herself in "Wolf-Alice." The importance of giving the wolf a little bit of the spotlight relies in the fact that as the main antagonist force, the identity of the wolf is paramount to define how the heroine of each revision positions herself in the story in order to insure her survival.

## 2.1 THE WEREWOLF

Starting with “The Werewolf,” the story is set in a peasant community in a northern country in the winter where people live very hard lives. As Carter briefly depicts the beliefs and practices of those people, she creates a dark atmosphere, in which not only the weather is cold but also the people who live in it; it is a time when witch hunting is at its highest and pretty much everything that is super natural is hunted down (172).

As usual, the heroine is going to take some food to her sick grandmother and her mother warns her about the dangers that might cross her path; but instead of wearing the famous red riding hood, she wears “a scabby coat of sheepskin”, bringing to mind the image of “a wolf in sheep’s clothing.” However, differently from the classic versions, the heroine is not a “normal” girl, for her mother gives her the father’s knife, because she “know[s] how to use it” (172). Or rather, the norm for that community is that girls know how to defend themselves in order to survive. This can be seen when she meets the wolf: “It was a huge one, with red eyes and running, grizzled chops; any but a mountaineer’s child would have died of fright at the sight of it” (172). Therefore, it is no surprise that when engaging in combat with the wolf she manages to cut off its right forepaw before it runs away howling.

The surprise comes when, while she is taking care of her sick grandmother, she discovers that the wolf’s paw she had cut and was keeping wrapped in a cloth is now a human hand, and the old woman now has “a bloody stump where her right hand should have been, festering already” (173). As she screams in panic, the neighbors come to the house to see what is going on and recognize the wart in the slashed hand as a “witch’s nipple” (173). How the grandmother meets her ends is already expected, her fate is to be dragged into the snowy forest to be beaten and stoned to death. Meanwhile, after this bloodbath, the heroine moves in to the grandmother’s house, and “she prospered” (173).

In her analysis, Bacchilega questions the meaning behind the heroine’s actions by referring to her “scabby coat of sheepskin”, arguing that:

Is she too in disguise? Economics after all can turn sheep into wolves – the grandmother into a witch, the young girl into a killer. And economics, which the narrator juxtaposes from the beginning against the moral dichotomies of popular sentencing, are also at issue when the girl “prosper” after taking over her grandmother’s house. [...] Instead of drinking her ancestor’s blood to reinforce family/female ties, the girl spills that blood in a scapegoating ritual that ensures her own livelihood. She replaces the old woman, not by assimilation but through a violent severance that reproduces the wolf’s ferocity. [...] Has she defeated the witch? Turned into one herself? Both or neither? (61)

I agree with Bacchilega in some points. In my opinion one of the themes of this story is the uncovering of identity and façade, so that is why the heroine has a scabby coat of sheepskin instead of having a red riding hood, for she is one of the sheep of the flock, a member of that community. However, if she takes this coat off, she might not be a sheep anymore, she might transform into a wolf like her grandmother in both figurative and literal senses. For me, she seems to be her grandmother’s successor, so she could be able to transform into a wolf in the same way her grandmother did.

Stefan Dziemianowicz in his piece about the werewolves in the second volume of S. T. Joshi’s *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural: An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares* remarks that it was “in the Victorian era that female werewolves begin to gain currency” (658); they were mostly monstrous and predatory, as it was common to associate monstrosity with the non-traditional femininity. Dziemianowicz explains that several authors used the werewolf to deal with women experience, which seems to be connected to its singularity of being human and inhuman at the same time, making the werewolf a symbol of the social outsider and many other political issues (669-681). The non-conformative femininity that the image of the werewolf stands for is what the community in this short story really fears, and if the heroine is the successor of her grandmother she really needs to be a wolf in disguise among the sheep, for as a werewolf she would represent a danger to that community, which fears the supernatural so much.

Moreover, the heroine is not to be blamed for her grandmother's death because I see the confrontation between girl and wolf as a ritual of succession, just like those testosterone-fueled cliché stories of samurai in which the disciple must kill his master to take his place. Of course this would be traditionally related to manliness, and it would be an unnecessarily violent way of solving the issue of succession in the society we live in; but the heroine lives in a reality that is distant from ours. And who said a feminine ritual of succession cannot be as fierce and violent as that of a wolf? I think Carter breaks traditional configurations of femininity by ascribing "manly" features to such an important event, and, as witches are so emblematic of feminine power, a ritual of succession is analogous to the passing of women's tradition; and just like those samurai stories, this ritual is not a cold-blooded murder. The heroine does not know the battle with the wolf was a ritual, so when she sees the paw is now her grandmother's hand with the wart, and her grandmother's injury is already festering, she connects the dots. Her panicking is not because she is afraid of the supernatural as the neighbors are; she is in fact overwhelmed with fear and pain for having killed her beloved grandmother and discovering the burden of the tradition that she now has to carry. Thus, blaming her for the killing of the wolf/grandmother is almost as cruel as blaming the classic Little Red Riding hood for being raped/eaten by the wolf. In addition, Carter retakes the oral tradition by bringing the grandmother and the succession to the center of action. If we compare the titles of this short story with the retrieved variation that Zipes presents, "The Werewolf" and "The Story of Grandmother", both allude to the same characters, seeing that the grandmother is the werewolf in the revision. According to Bacchilega, the grandmother was in fact the central character in the oral tradition, and both she and Zipes mention Yvone Verdier's theory that Little Red Riding Hood, in its genesis, was about a rite of passage connected to sewing communities (Zipes 229), involving a metaphorical succession through cannibalism (Bacchilega 56).

Regarding the association of the feminine with the monstrous, Kelly Hurley, in her book *The Gothic Body*, talks about the female gothic, stating that "Gothic materiality is a condition which might overtake any human subject [...] but which is particularly compatible with the condition of femininity" (118). This association of what instigates fear to the feminine happens necessarily because of the traditional association of the feminine with nature, "one cultural tradition [...] identifies women as entities defined by and entrapped

within their bodies, in contrast to the man, who is governed by rationality and capable of transcending the fact of his embodiment” (119), as articulated by Sherry B. Ortner in “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?”.

Barbara Creed depicts the same scenario in her article “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: an Imaginary Abjection,” when she uses Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection, “that which does not ‘respect borders, positions, rules’... that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order’” (45) as a way of situating the monstrous-feminine:

Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies, as a means of separating the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject. Ritual becomes a means by which societies both renew their initial contact with the abject element and then exclude that element. (45)

Creed observes how the abject, although undesirable and excluded by the subject, must exist in order to define the subject’s position (47). Thus, as the abject is rejected, excluded, an error in the matrix, and is everything that people are not supposed to be, in order to be considered the other, the monstrous, one does not need to be necessarily grotesque, it just needs to be out of the axis of what is considered normality.

In order to understand the subversive potential of the image of werewolf, we must align the notion of abject with queering. Lewis C. Seifert defines “to queer” in the introduction of the volume of Marvels and Tales about *Queer(ing) Fairy Tales* as:

to make strange by accentuating what departs from normative social expectations about gender and sexuality, thus exposing the notions of “normal” gender and sexual identities as myths (albeit powerful ones). As a critical practice, queering necessarily involves reading against the grain so as to pick up signs and meanings neglected or obscured by heteronormative interpretations. (16-17)



Jennifer Orme, in her already cited paper, talks about queer reading as “straying from the path, particularly one built on binary oppositions between masculine and feminine, active and passive, and heterosexual and homosexual” (87). She states that what most happens with adaptations of Little Red Riding Hood is a reversal of binaries, a shift in positions; however “the binaries themselves are often left intact [...] but even when it is difficult to see who is ‘good’ and who is ‘bad,’ the seemingly natural order of the good/bad binary is always there, structuring the relationships” (91).

By turning the Grandmother into a werewolf, Carter is not just queering her femininity and the grandmother/granddaughter relationship; she is blurring the boundaries of what is right or wrong. And since, according to Creed, the werewolf’s body “signifies a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal” (48), Carter is also blurring the boundaries between human and nature. The werewolf is not a repositioning of the Grandmother on the other side of the axis; instead, it is an amalgamation of woman, monster, animal, human, natural, and supernatural. Therefore, the werewolf presents itself as a powerful ally to the representation of non-traditional femininities for its ambiguity and rejection a binary positioning.

## 2.2 THE COMPANY OF WOLVES

In the second revision that I will analyze, “The Company of Wolves,” the central issue is not feminine succession, but female lust. The wolf here is the huntsman, a handsome werewolf; and the protagonist both seduces and is seduced by the wolf. Since the savior from the classic tale has become a danger here, the heroine depends solely on herself to survive. Fortunately, just as in the previous short story, the heroine here is very skilled with knives, just as all the children in her village are trained to defend themselves from wolves.

Although the place where the story is set is not as dark and cold as the setting of the previous story, this community is certainly haunted by its own ghosts, as the first pages present accounts of wolves that turn into men and vice-versa. Undoubtedly the fear is present, but in contrast with the heavy indiscriminating fear of the supernatural that “The

Werewolf” presents in an almost lovecraftian<sup>3</sup> way, the atmosphere in the second story is a little bit lighter.

As I perceive it, since the start of the story, the outside and the inside are presented as separate dimensions: her mother, instead of warning her not to stray out of her path like in most versions, does not want her to go, she is the one who insists; the forest is almost a supernatural being by itself, “You are always in danger in the forest, where no people are. Step between the portals of the great pines where the shaggy branches tangle about you” (174), “The forest closed upon her like a pair of jaws” (176). The outside seems to be the realm of wolves, the outsiders in that community: in one of the stories that make up the beginning of the narrative, about accounts of the existence of wolves in that community, there is a groom who turns into a wolf when he goes outside to pee; the wolves are right at their door, almost as if the people of that community were prisoners of their own houses, “But the wolves have ways of arriving at your own hearthside. We try and try but sometimes we cannot keep them out. There is no winter’s night the cottager does not fear to see a lean, grey, famished snout questing under the door” (174), “We keep the wolves outside by living well” (178). The contrast between outside and inside is also used figuratively: referring to the heroine’s virginity, “she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane” (176); and to the wolf’s nature, “she knew the worst wolves are hairy on the inside” (179).

In her analysis of Argentine feminist revisions of fairytales, Fiona Mackintosh argues that, when girls walk into the woods, this is a metaphor for self-exploration, mostly but not only in a sexual way:

[...]one of the recurrent motivation behind women’s versions and adaptations of fairy tales – that is, the inscription of female desire and the attraction toward potentially dangerous and frightening places such as the wood. Whereas in the classical moralizing versions of fairy tales fear was supposed to elicit obedience and moral

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<sup>3</sup> Lovecraftian horror is a subgenre of horror fiction that emphasizes the cosmic horror of the unknown (and in some cases, unknowable) more than gore or other elements of shock, though these may still be present. It is named after American author H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937).

behavior, these women writers resolutely channel fear into eroticism and boldness [...] a resistance to domestication, and a search for a darker identity [...] making it a place of encounters at once sinister and erotic. (159)

This revision's main theme is sexual awakening, so if we consider Mackintosh's idea the heroine's sexual development starts not by encountering the wolf, but by leaving the interior of her home. By abandoning the domestic space and entering the woods, she is beginning her sexual quest by herself, independently of a man to teach or guide her; she will go hunting in the forest for something that can satisfy her sexual appetite. When she meets the wolf in his human form in the forest, their interaction is like a flirtatious encounter of teenagers: they make a bet that if he reaches grandma's house first she would give him a kiss, and she is quite anxious to lose this bet as she lingers on her way to the house on purpose. She is clearly playing a hunting game in which he is her prey.

As in the classic versions, he reaches the grandmother's house first, but instead of simply killing her, he performs a slow and very sensual striptease, as if he were having sexual intercourse with her instead of literally feeding on the old woman:

He strips off his shirt. His skin is the colour and texture of vellum. A crisp stripe of hair runs down his belly, his nipples are ripe and dark as poison fruit but he's so thin you could count the ribs under his skin if only he gave you the time. He strips off his trousers and she can see how hairy his legs are. His genitals, huge. Ah! huge.

The last thing the old lady saw in all this world was a young man, eyes like cinders, naked as a stone, approaching her bed. (178).

The wolf here is clearly objectified, in a scene that seems to be from the point of view of the grandmother, a character usually deprived of any sexual innuendo.

This inversion of roles that objectifies the wolf instead of the protagonist is also at issue in Jennifer Orme's previously mentioned essay. Orme articulates Laura Mulvey's theorization of the cinematic

gaze that puts woman in the position of “the desired erotic object of the male character, the masculine camera, and (presumed) male spectator” (95-96), with Donna Haraway’s explanation of the male gaze as “the unmarked and disembodied gaze of dominant heterosexual white masculinity that “claim[s] the power to see and not be seen, [and] represent[s] while escaping representation” absents itself from specificity by playing the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (93). Orme also mentions E. Ann Kaplan’s discussion of Mulvey’s arguments in which she talks about the inversion of roles when the male becomes the sexual object and the female “takes on the masculine role as bearer of the gaze and initiator of the action” (129). However, in my opinion, by placing the wolf in a position which is traditionally occupied by women as objects of sexual desire, that of “*homme fatale*,” Carter is not inverting the roles and imbuing the grandmother with a masculine gaze. The notion of the sexual gaze being masculine is problematic for me in the way it relates sexual desire to masculinity, negating the possibility, and the power, to sexually objectify to femininity. Of course the power to objectify has been historically almost exclusive to the male gaze, but in the way I perceive, Carter is arguing for the articulation of a female gaze, not only with this scene but with most of her works, providing the feminine with an optics of sexual desire, which offers a much more valid perspective of escaping oppression than a simple inversion. Furthermore, the subject to whom Carter is attributing this female gaze and voyeuristic desire is an old woman, a subject who is traditionally very far from being related to anything sexual. This constitutes not only a breakdown of taboos, but an empowerment for a brand of femininity often neglected in the sexual area.

Finally arriving at Grandmother’s house, the heroine finds the wolf there instead of the old lady, and realizes she is in danger when she sees a little bit of hair burning in the fireplace. She cannot reach for her knife but is still fearless, for “since fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (179); and when the wolf says he is going to eat her, she “bursts out laughing”, because “she knew she was nobody’s meat” (179). This is the definitive scene where we see how the heroine is really in control of the situation.

In the same way the wolf did with Grandmother, she starts to strip off her clothes and burns them in the fireplace, turning the wolf into her prey. By the end of the story she is sleeping “between the paws of the tender wolf” (180), and now there is no danger anymore, at least from

his part. Bacchilega counters the arguments of critics that see this ending “as an enjoyment or passive acceptance of rape” (162), by stating that the girl acts out of her sexual desire and not just in order to survive; the shifting point being when she sympathizes with the wolves that are howling in sadness outside the house. I think this is a valid argument, but for me there is no shifting point, for this is a case of fatal and inevitable attraction. Her newly discovered sexuality is wild, and in the same way the wolf is hungry for meat, she is hungry for his body since the beginning when she enters the forest, sees him, and takes measures to lose their bet. Moreover, she does not hesitate for a moment while she is striping, not even after perceiving he had just killed her grandmother. She wants the wolf, and she will want the wolf even if he has just killed her grandmother; even if this means bestiality, or having sex without letting her guard down; and even if she has to turn into a wolf herself, as she seems to be so sympathetic towards the howling wolves outside.

In my opinion, one of the keys to interpreting this story, or almost any Little Red Riding Hood variation or revision, is to perceive the symbolism behind the color red: menstrual blood, “her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman’s bleeding” (176); danger, “You can tell them by their eyes, eyes of a beast of prey, nocturnal, devastating eyes as red as a wound” (178), “There is a faint trace of blood on his chin; he has been snacking on his catch” (177), “red as the blood she must spill” (179). But the utmost emblematic use of this color is certainly in her red shawl that “has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow” (176), since it was made by her grandmother, it could very possibly mean familial protection. Although, when the heroine burns it in the fire, a possible explanation would be that she disowns her blood ties, in the same way that she seems to do by almost ignoring the death of her grandmother, symbolically rejecting feminine tradition as well. My theory is different from that, I do not think the meaning of the red shawl is limited to familial protection, and therefore, the implications of her disowning her own blood ties is not a valid conclusion for me.

As Bacchilega mentions, there is an eleventh-century Latin poem, “De Puella a Lupellis Seruata” (About a Girl Saved from Wolf Cubs) that Jan M. Ziolkowski considers a forgotten version of Little Red Riding Hood, in which the girl is protected by her red hood (65). According to Bacchilega, its editor Egbert of Liège relates the red hood to Christianity, “baptism will protect you from the old sinner” (163-

164). In the same manner, I also ascribe religion to one of the meanings behind the shawl, for the grandmother in this story is presented as a very religious lady, always glued to her Bible. After throwing her Bible on the werewolf once he enters her house, Grandmother has no religion to hide herself behind anymore; her fate is to succumb to sin. However, this is no ordinary shawl: it may symbolize religion or religious protection, but red here is the color of sin, menstrual blood. Thus, when she throws her shawl in the fire, the girl is burning the religious stigma of sin that taints every woman; she is burning traditional femininity, embracing her own wildness and sexuality; she is burning her virginity, transforming from girl to woman, turning into a she-wolf. The transformative power of fire turns her into a phoenix, or a werewolf in this case, since in the beginning of the story there is a passage that says “if you burn his human clothes you condemn him [the werewolf] to wolfishness for the rest of his life” (176).

This rejection of what is human, in order to rethink traditional notions of femininity or sexually can be related to the ideas of critical posthumanism that Rosi Braidotti discusses in her book *The Posthuman*. The critical branch of the posthuman, as she conceives it, claims for an erasure of the ultimate binary, the human/nature, as the only way to erase the other binaries, as man/women for instance. Braidotti explains how the humanistic premise of “Man,” being white, male, and middle class, excludes and subordinates to this “Man” everything that is considered “other,” as women and animals, for instance. In order to counter this idea, Braidotti argues for a “zoe-centric” view of the world, which she draws from Spinoza’s monism: “[c]ontemporary monism implies a notion of vital and self-organizing matter ... as well as a non-human definition of Life as *zoe*, or a dynamic and generative force” (86). This zoe-centric views the universe, and all within it, as a whole instead of many individualistic existences, thus opening the possibility to conceive alternative ways of constructing subjectivities.

I believe the werewolf (not the character of this story, but the creature present in so many stories) is very much a posthuman icon *per se*; not only for its in-betweenness, being human and animal at the same time it is neither, but for its unity with nature, as its transformation traditionally occurs at a full moon. These three images that Carter creates in each revision analyzed here present three different hues of a wolf-human continuum that could be all analyzed in light of the critical

posthuman. However, as my focus is on the alternative femininities, I will not delve deeper into this subject.

Back to the protagonist, as she throws her clothes in the fire, she is symbolically rejecting her humanity in favor of her blooming animalesque sexuality in order to redefine her subjectivity, because human values and human femininity are not enough for her anymore. However, this process is not sudden, it had already begun by the moment she steps outside her house, and metaphorically explores her sexuality. She becomes an outsider, a wild creature, out of the realm of domesticity and traditional femininity; a prey that becomes the predator, and can play on equal terms in the company of wolves.

### 2.3 WOLF-ALICE

Moving forward to the analysis of the last short story, although “Wolf-Alice” apparently bears no connection to the classic versions of Little Red Riding Hood, Bacchilega proposes that this revision is analogous to the aforementioned 11<sup>th</sup> century poem, “De Puella a Lupellis Seruata” (65). Bacchilega goes further in her defense of the importance of analyzing this short story, stating that:

Together, then, these three radically different “women-in the-company-of-wolves” scripts bring into being contradictory yet genealogically related images of “Red Riding Hood.” [...] But this transformation works only if we are willing to read these stories intertextually, within the volume *The Bloody Chamber [and Other Stories]*; and in the broader wonder tale tradition. (65-66)

This is part of what Bacchilega terms Carter’s metafolkloric archeological historicizing project, an idea Bacchilega revisits throughout her whole book, which is the effort Carter puts into rescuing obscure folk versions that empower women and retelling them in a way that highlights such proto-feminist values.

In the story, the protagonist was raised by wolves, and after she is found “in the wolf’s den beside the bullet-riddled corpse of her foster mother” (181), “rescued” from nature, she is put in a convent where the nuns try to bring her into humanity by teaching her how to behave

properly, like a normal girl. As she barely learns how to emulate human manners, she is not able to go unnoticed, for her subjectivity is not that of a human, but of a wolf. Even though “Nothing about her is human except that she is not a wolf; it is as if the fur she thought she wore had melted into her skin and become part of it, although it does not exist” (181), the wolves accepted her as she was different from the humans; they “had tended her because they knew she was an imperfect wolf; [they] secluded her in animal privacy out of fear of her imperfection because it showed [us] what [they] might have been” (183). Her wolfish subjectivity is an abjection in the eyes of the community that received her; and as they are not having any success in their attempt of changing her and make her fit the norm, in order not to disrupt the community in the convent she is sent to the Duke’s castle to be a sort of maid.

The Duke is not simply a seemingly eccentric aristocrat; he also is an abject in the eyes of society, as kind of lycanthrope whose transformation “parodies” a wolf. During the day he sleeps, and at sunset he leaves his castle to hunt and eat people. He does not cast a reflection in the mirror anymore, and this seems to alienate himself from reality as he lives in a trance composed only of sleeping and eating: “His eyes see only appetite. These eyes open to devour the world in which he sees, nowhere, a reflection of himself; he passed through the mirror and now, henceforward, lives as if upon the other side of things” (182). The Duke’s gaze that absorbs the world in search of himself and never find his reflection is very different from Orme’s discussion regarding the gaze that I mentioned above. While the Duke cannot see himself in the mirror, he is deprived of subjectivity as he cannot conceptualize his own existence. His gaze cannot objectify anything either, because as he is deprived of subjectivity he is not able to “otherize” other subjectivities; therefore, as he cannot determine what is the object/other and what is the subject/himself in the gaze, he cannot build a subjectivity for the subject who is gazing based on the other. He is left without a subjectivity or an identity for his own self, or even without a “self”. He represents, thus, an abject to humanity and an alternative masculinity, as he does not fit in the parameters of the oppressive subject of the gaze. Both his and the protagonist’s subjectivities, in the way they are constructed, offer a posthumanistic perspective as they blur humanness and wolfishness.

Mirrors and reflections are central to this story, for they are also the mediators for the heroine to develop herself a human subjectivity to



mingle with her wolfish being. Right after she has her first period, the heroine does not recognize herself when she sees her reflection for the first time with the help of the moonlight; which is very emblematic in werewolf mythology since in most werewolf stories they transform at full moon. Besides, the moon itself is kind of a mirror, as it reflects the sun. As she knows nothing about menstruation, she thinks the one that is responsible for her bleeding is “a wolf who, perhaps, was fond of her, as wolves were, and who lived, perhaps, in the moon? must have nibbled her cunt while she was sleeping, had subjected her to a series of affectionate nips too gentle to wake her yet sharp enough to break the skin” (183); then, when looking at her reflection what she sees is that wolf. When she grows used to having her period every month, she slowly starts to perceive how time works, and also starts to have thoughts about the things she sees around her. Now she recognizes herself in the mirror, and although she is a little bit sad that she is in fact alone and does not have that friend she thought she had, “her relation with the mirror was now far more intimate since she knew she saw herself within it” (185).

In addition, she starts to dress herself, first with the ball dress that previously belonged to the Duke’s grandmother, then with the wedding dress of a bride eaten by the Duke. The white color of the bride’s dress is as emblematic as red is for the other Little Red Riding Hood revisions, since it represents her purity, and therefore her wolfishness that is still with her even though she started to develop humanity. She is not tainted with sin, and thus, not related to the red color, as sin is a human creation.

Nevertheless, the act of dressing represents the blossoming humanity in her if we consider what clothes represented to wolves in “The Company of Wolves”. When she starts to dress there are two inherently human feelings that develop inside her: vanity – “she dragged out his grandmother’s ball dress and rolled on suave velvet and, abrasive lace because to do so delighted her adolescent skin [...] wrinkling its nose in delight at the ancient yet still potent scents of musk and civet that woke up in the sleeves and bodices” (185) – and shame, that the narrator cites as the reason behind her starting to do her personal hygiene.

This process of building her subjectivity is very masturbatory since she seems to develop a conscious of pleasure by discovering her

human body, and at the same time it feels like bestiality in the sense she viewed herself solely as a wolf before. Now she is not yet fully human, she is in-between human and wolf, so it is still a wolf's mind that is taking pleasure from a human body.

Moreover, when the narrator cites shame as the reason behind the heroine starting to do her personal hygiene it feels as if is the fall of Eve from paradise all over again. This time, however, what represents paradise is the absence of the human, the animality of being a wolf; and the more she acquires humanity the more she falls from paradise, trapping herself more and more in a human box and losing her freedom.

In the climax scene of the story, she saves the Duke while she is wandering by the church's graveyard and the husband of a woman the Duke killed makes an ambush to avenge his wife's death. Before she saves him, the Duke is shot in his shoulder, and because of this he has now to rise up to his feet. This might be a sign of the end of his trance and the beginning of his reacquiring of humanity; in the same manner that the heroine's menstruation changes her, his bleeding changes him. At the end of the story, when the heroine goes to the Duke's bed, where he is convulsing in pain, as she begins to lick his wounds, he slowly regains his reflection in the mirror.

In my view, this story is not about becoming human or civilizing the wild; it is rather about plurality, the union of opposites and erasure of binaries. It is not just because the heroine's humanity is increasingly emerging that she will leave her wolfishness behind; she can be both woman and savage creature; the same goes for the Duke. Also, the final scene seems to be a metaphorical wedding that represents this union of wild humanity with human savagery – the two reflections uniting in one single image is a perfect balance, in order to create something beyond human and beyond wild.

In contrast with the classic versions, these three revisions present strong girls that act to survive by their own hands instead of being victims of circumstances, fitting into the image of the Bad Girl. They surely add a new color and dimension to Little Red Riding Hood, as Bacchilega has argued; but they go further, they advocate for a broader notion of femininity and subjectivity allowing a posthuman view of the world. There are no labels of right or wrong anymore, just infinite possibilities. Each one of the three short stories analyzed tells a tale of

discovering the inner self and transformation, in which the protagonists choose their own destinies. The first one learns about her roots and the power of women's tradition; the second embraces the wild to explore her innermost desires; and the third sets a new dimension for her own existence that blurs the borders of humanity and femininity. Thus, in each one of Carter's rewritings, instead of conforming to what it is considered to be a proper feminine behavior by our society, the protagonists choose to go against the grain and outgrow themselves, embracing their unique femininities to explore new future possibilities. They choose to be Bad Girls.

### 3. SNOW BITCHES: THE (WO)MEN IN THE MIRROR

Mirror mirror on the wall... who is the fairest of them all? Who has never heard a reference to the famous (and infamous) mirror that triggers the events in one of the best-known fairytales? Innumerable song lyrics, film or series lines, and literary passages configure the mirror as one of the most remarkable characters that came from fairytales and now permeate popular culture. This character, the poisonous apple in a reference to Eve, the glass coffin, among other motifs, make Snow White a highly iconic fairytale, and perhaps the most relevant for gender studies in fairytale scholarship.

Since Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in The Attic* (1979) was published, the metaphor the authors created of Snow White as the angel-woman and the evil queen as the monster-woman, representing the duality within every woman, has been brought to mind every time the portrayal of female characters in fairytales is the topic in question. Although the book is criticized nowadays for failing to include a broader notion of femininity, the vision of the evil queen as the creative force inside women in contrast with the angelic protagonist as the desirable object for men, echoing Woolf's criticism of Patmore's "angel in the house", is one of the stepping stones of feminist fairytale analysis (Zipes, 9-10; Haase, 12-13).

Likewise, the aforementioned mirror also lends its power to a recurrent metaphor in feminist criticism, as it is often interpreted as the voice of patriarchy itself, as Donald Haase points out in his essay "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" (23). Many talk about the shattering of the mirror as an end to the control of patriarchy over the lives and behavior of women (Bacchilega, Gilbert and Gubar, for instance). As both images became so emblematic – the mirror as the voice of discord, and the queen and Snow White as reflections of each other – it is no longer possible to disregard them when analyzing any version of the story of Snow White, revisionist or not.

The classic fairytale of Snow White has many variations and origins, not only in European countries but around the world, including Africa and Asia Minor, as Bacchilega explains in the chapter dedicated to Snow White. According to her, even though there are many differences among those many versions, some features are present in

almost every variation: the protagonist's magical origin, her innocence, her persecution by an older woman, her pseudo death, and her accidental resurrection (31). It is not a surprise then, that most of the interpretations of those tales agree they are *Bildungsmärchen* with female jealousy as their basic theme (31).

However, as there is no space to discuss all the variations, I will refer mostly to the Grimm Brothers' version "Sneewittchen," a much modified tale in the many editions of the Grimms' anthology. It was only in the 1819 edition that the Evil Queen becomes Snow White's stepmother; in the first two editions she was the actual mother, according to Marina Warner (211). Similarly in some editions the cannibalistic intention of the Queen to eat Snow White's lungs and liver is not present, and neither is her deathly dance with red-hot iron shoes at the ending. Most Grimms' scholars, like Maria Tatar and Jack Zipes, consider these changes as part of the Grimm Brothers' effort to "civilize" the folktales they collected. By turning the murderous mother into a stepmother, the Grimms would suppress a taint to the image of the mother, which is holy and pure according to their protestant morals.

Two of the revisions which I analyze seem to be based on the Grimms' fairytale: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," a poem by Anne Sexton published in her book *Transformations* from 1971, a moment which was very important to feminism as it was the beginning of the Women's liberation movement; and "Snow White" (1976), a short story by the Merseyside Fairy Story Collective, which focuses on the class issue. The third revision I analyze, "The Snow Child" (1979) by Angela Carter, is a short story that, according to Bacchilega (33), is based on an obscure folktale variation mentioned in *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, a compendium of 5 volumes published by folklorists Johannes Bolte and Georg Polívka from 1913 to 1932; this variation bears very different characteristics with what is commonly associated with Snow White.

### 3.1 SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

I decided to start with Anne Sexton's revision not only because it was published earlier than the other two revisions, but also because Sexton was one of the pioneers of feminist revisionist fairytales, even

though she did not consider herself a feminist (Zipes 21). Her book came before feminist criticism started to discuss revisionism and women in fairytales more broadly, as the 1970s saw the explosion of feminism in academia, and according to Donald Haase in his aforementioned essay, feminist fairy tale scholarship started only in 1970-1972 as well, with the Lurie-Lieberman debate<sup>4</sup> (1-2).

In my opinion “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” is not only a revision of Snow White, but a poetic version of Gilbert and Gubar’s argument of the duality of the angel/monster woman. Although *The Madwoman in the Attic* was written nine years after the poem was published, the critical view of Snow White killed in art, forever beautiful and passive in her glass coffin, is present in both works; and other authors, among them Ana Cecilia Acioli Lima and Vanessa Joosen, also see the shared similarity between these two works.

Besides this strong parallel with the views propounded by feminist criticism, among the three revisions that I chose to analyze, Sexton’s poem is the closest to the Grimms’ version, not in terms of form and ideology, but in terms of plot. Thus, by looking firstly at Sexton’s revision, we may be able grasp how the Snow White revisions establish a dialogue with theory and amongst themselves throughout those first years of feminist criticism.

In the first stanza, as Jack Zipes stresses in the introduction of *Don’t Bet on The Prince* (1986), Sexton “elaborates her ‘transformed’ position regarding the original Grimm tale”, as she does with all the poems in *Transformations* (19), as an introduction to set the mood and theme of the poem or a background color on which she will paint her diffracted images of the elements present in the Grimms’ originals:

- 1 No matter what life you lead  
the virgin is a lovely number:  
cheeks as fragile as cigarette paper,  
arms and legs made of Limoges,
- 5 lips like Vin Du Rhône,

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<sup>4</sup> To summarize, Alison Lurie published “Fairy Tale Liberation” in 1971, arguing that classical fairytales carried feminist values; in 1972 Marcia R. Lieberman published “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale”, disagreeing with her. For a more detailed account see Haase 1-36.

rolling her china-blue doll eyes  
 open and shut.  
 Open to say,  
 Good Day Mama,  
 10 and shut for the thrust  
 of the unicorn.  
 She is unsoiled.  
 13 She is as white as a bonefish. (224)

When the persona calls the virgin a “lovely number”, she mocks the traditional role that women are expected to play when they are young, that of fragile and innocent girls. This farce is elucidated in the following lines, when the frailty of the virgin is depicted not only with references to porcelain (Limoges, china-blue doll eyes) but also to habits not suitable to innocence, like cigarettes and wine (Vin Du Rhône). Also, the capital letters in the line “Good Day Mama” are to show the artificiality of the sentence, like something taken from a margarine advertisement, the image of the good daughter that does not exist in real life.

The virgin’s eyes are “shut for the thrust/of the unicorn,” because she cannot see the unicorn thrusting her, possibly with his phallic horn, she cannot conceive this image; so she is closed to her sexuality, as the unicorn here in my opinion represents the possibility of sexual fantasies for virgins. Society dictates that girls should shut themselves off from their sexuality, even in their private individual lives; but contrastingly, at the same time, perform their roles as male sexual objects and passive receptors of male sexual action. The possibility of any sexuality independent of male participation is what the unicorn stands for, as it is a fantastic animal that exists only within imagination; the thrust of the unicorn is the pleasure that a virgin girl can give to herself, based on the sexual fantasies that she creates for herself. This sexual autonomy is denied to girls, since most of us learn as children that it is wrong to masturbate or to have sexual desires; even thinking or talking about sex in a way that differs from the heterosexual norm is considered perverted. Thus, as female sexuality is only allowed when defined by male sexuality, the virgin’s eyes are shut for the possibility of rupture of this rule.

The last line of the second stanza, “Pride pumped in her like poison,” refers to the Queen as a snake. In the same way the snake in the Genesis tempts Eve with the forbidden fruit, the Queen also gives Snow

White an apple, and without it Snow White would never have gone to sleep in a glass coffin or end up marrying the prince. Although Snow White's life prior to eating the apple could not be considered a paradise, she falls just like Eve. And her symbolic fall seems to be the institution of marriage, which later on will make her turn into an Evil Queen, as the ending lines of the poem point out.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> line of the third stanza, the Queen asks for Snow White's heart instead of her lungs and liver. It seems what the Queen want is really Snow White's youth, as Lima claims (92); but in my opinion the Queen's desire is something much more primal. For me this image recalls a scene from one of the *Friday the 13th* franchise movies, more specifically *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday* (1993), in which a policeman eats Jason's heart and becomes him. Although it presents a change in the organs to be eaten, this image maintains the ritualistic cannibal feeling that the classical variation has; and additionally, just like the policeman turned into Jason, the Queen's intention since the beginning is to turn into Snow White in the same mystical way. The highlight here is in the pleasure that the Queen has while eating what she imagines to be Snow White's heart. In the classical tale there is no comment or insight about how the Queen feels towards this cannibalistic act, while in this revision she "chewed it up like a cube steak" saying she is now the fairest while "lapping her slim white fingers," in the same way the policeman eagerly eats Jason's heart.

When Snow White runs away walking into the wildwood she realizes her sexual growth, for every animal there seems to desire her:

At each turn there were twenty doorways  
and at each stood a hungry wolf,  
his tongue lolling out like a worm.  
The birds called out lewdly,  
talking like pink parrots,  
and the snakes hung down in loops,  
each a noose for her sweet white neck (226)

As in a reminiscence of Little Red Riding Hood, there are several wolves hungry for her, their tongues "lolling out like worm[s]" recalling a phallic image, just like the snakes that hung down in loops, which are also, of course, a symbol of the fall and sin. The birds remind me of men cat calling women in the streets as they pass by.



Fiona Mackintosh's idea of exploring the woods as a metaphor for sexual development, mentioned previously, fits perfectly here. However, Snow White does not choose to follow any of the "doorways" in which the wolves are, which means she did not have sexual experiences in her way through the woods. Thus, here the purpose of the woods is not for her to explore her sexuality actively, but only to open her eyes to her sexual potential and attractiveness, therefore remaining passive, as a sexual object. This is so because, in order for the criticism towards society present in this poem to work, Snow White must remain passive and objectifiable, until the irony of the cyclical ending; for this revision does not show an optimistic alternative of reality, but it paints a parody of the bitter and painful reality of being a woman who follows the rules of traditional behavior dictated by patriarchy, as we shall see.

When in the seventh week of her pilgrimage, she arrives at the seventh mountain, where the seven dwarfs' house is, Snow White eats seven chicken livers as in a tribal ritual. In a sense, this whole pilgrimage has been a rite of passage, and the eating of seven chicken livers only marks the shift to the second part of the ritual, when Snow White will begin to be a trainee in domestic affairs at the dwarfs' house, in the same way as it was in the Grimms' version.

The dwarfs finally appear and, differently from the wolves from the woods, they seem harmless to Snow White. They are desexualized when they are referred to as "those little hot dogs;" even though hot dog may be a reference to the phallus, in the way it is put does not sound sexual at all, only quirky and funny. From the beginning they treat Snow White as an object: "Yes. It's a good omen, / they said, and will bring us luck." Thus, the chicken liver eating ritual not only marks the beginning of Snow White's slavery as a maid for the dwarfs, but also of her life as an object of the male gaze.

In the same way as the Grimms' version, the Queen tries three times to poison her, finally managing to do it with the apple. But why does Snow White keep on opening the door for the disguised Queen? The persona calls Snow White a "dumb bunny," but it would be too simplistic to take for granted the persona's judgment since Sexton makes heavy use of irony in the whole poem. In my opinion, the reason behind her always opening the door is not her stupidity, but the fact that she is bored with a secluded life in which the only thing to do is cleaning and keeping the house for the dwarfs. Although the dwarfs'

intentions are implicitly to keep Snow White safe from the evil Queen who wants to kill her, on the other hand they have a slave to do the house chores for them, who is, in addition, beautiful.

Moreover, the things the Queen uses to draw Snow White's attention, which are the same in both the original tale and the revision, are symbols of traditional femininity: tight lacing, a poisonous comb, and the emblematic apple, one of the iconic images of Snow White, which is also a reference to Eve and sin, as already mentioned. As I see it, Snow White craves for the traditional feminine experience of vanity, or any experience at all since she has not had much of it and she is in a situation that deprives her of freedom because she must hide herself from the Queen. She may not see it yet, but she certainly feels that, with the limited possibilities in the fairytale she is trapped in, in her reality the only way out of this boring life of being a housemaid for seven men is to succumb to the Queen's seduction and eat the apple, in order to acquire the power to become the ultimate object of desire, eventually overthrowing and succeeding the Queen. The apple then becomes a symbol of power, the power of self objectification, one of the only powers that the traditional idea of woman has inside patriarchy, being the cause of both the fall of Snow White and of her "success" later on.

When she is finally "dead" after eating the apple, the dwarfs try to revive her in the same ways they did before: "they undid her bodice, / they looked for a comb," and when this does not work, they bizarrely wash her with wine and rub her with butter, as if she were the main dish of a fancy dinner, a wedding dinner perhaps. They finally make the glass coffin for her and put her on display "upon the seventh mountain / so that all who passed by / could peek upon her beauty", where she becomes, as Gilbert and Gubar remark, the ultimate work of art, "still as a gold piece" (228). When the prince sees her, the poem never says he fell in love with her, it only says he did not leave until, out of pity, the dwarfs donated her to him as if she was their possession, a piece of art in a negotiation, "its doll's eyes shut forever" (my emphasis).

She awakens accidentally, in the same manner as in the Grimms' version: when the men carrying the glass coffin stumble and drop it, the chunk of the apple she had previously swallowed flies out of her mouth. In my opinion, it does not matter for the symbolism of the apple previously discussed if the chunk she bit is not inside her anymore; the sin is not to have swallowed, but to have bitten in the first place.

In the end, Snow White marries the prince, as expected; and the Queen, who went to the wedding, dies in an infernal picturesque image reminiscent of the traditional scene of her death:

red-hot iron shoes,  
in the manner of red-hot roller skates,  
clamped upon her feet.  
First your toes will smoke  
and then your heels will turn black  
and you will fry upward like a frog,  
she was told.  
And so she danced until she was dead,  
a subterranean figure,  
her tongue flicking in and out  
like a gas jet. (229)

The key here is the line that may often go unnoticed: “she was told”. The Queen, thus, dies not because of something magical that takes her life, and I don’t think she deliberately took her life either. What kills her is society’s expectation of her death, the patriarchal rules establishing that an old woman is no good and she must be replaced by a new one; she is killed by the very system she is inscribed in, as in a vicious circle. Following the Queen’s death are the most striking lines, and the final lines, of the poem: “Meanwhile Snow White held court, / rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut / and sometimes referring to her mirror / as women do”.

With these gradual transformations from plain girl (as she is compared to a dust mouse in the beginning of the poem), to damsel in distress, to a maiden aware of her own attractiveness, to house chores slave, to woman-object, to finally the new Queen with the mirror, this poem’s theme complies with the title and the overall theme of Sexton’s book: the transformations that a woman may have in a life inscribed in patriarchal values. The last lines of the poem present not only the last transformation of Snow White and the beginning of a new loop in the vicious circle, but also generalizes her last transformation into something intrinsically feminine, “as women do,” highlighting the idea that there is no way out of patriarchal dictates towards the lives of women, there is no alternative, only to continue to play the game. This is the bitter remark I read in Sexton’s poem. If femininity is such a limited thing constricted by patriarchy, then the only possible view is tinted with helplessness. For me there are two opposite polarized positions in the

spectrum of feminist literature: one that empowers its feminine characters and another that crushes their soul. From all the revisions that I analyze throughout my chapters here, this is the darkest in mood, for the others lean more towards the empowerment aspect. And for this reason I cannot see any of the female characters here being Bad Girls, in the way I define it in the introduction of this study.

### 3.2 SNOW WHITE

The second revision of Snow White that I analyze is a ray of light and hope compared to the first one. “Snow White” (1976), by The Merseyside Fairy Story Collective, can be interpreted as an allegory of capitalism: the Queen lives with luxury high up in the mountains in a castle full of servants while her poor subjects “from all over the kingdom” have to climb “the steep pathway carrying heavy loads” (74). In order to keep her and her personal servants’ living standards, she subjugates her people, commanding them to pay tributes with what is produced in the kingdom while they live in misery, “allowed to keep only what was left over or spoiled” (74).

She also has a magical mirror that allows her to watch what her subjects are doing, and she keeps control of them by sending soldiers to punish them when they do whatever displeases her. However, the role of the mirror is a little bit different than in the classical versions: besides working as a security system, the Queen uses it to check whether she is the happiest of the land instead of the most beautiful. Although there was no Internet at the time the story was written, it works as a perfect allegory of the digital issues we face nowadays; not only regarding people who forge an image of perfect lives on Instagram and Facebook, but also regarding forms of control some overzealous governments exert over their people, such as the US, Japan, and China, for instance, that restrict and monitor their citizens’ Internet usage.

This difference in the interests of the Queen presents a major shift from the classical version because the Queen’s biggest concern is not beauty anymore, which was always associated with the feminine ideal, but happiness instead. Even though her concern about happiness at first sight can be understood as a positive change in comparison with the classical portrayal of the Queen who only cares about beauty, as the

Queen from this revision is the embodiment of capitalism this is not merely the happiness of an individual, but a questioning of what in fact is happiness and how this relates to the idea of happiness that capitalism has always sold. The fear of succession continues to be the theme of the story; however, while in the Grimms' version succession by beauty is what the Queen fears, in this revision, as the Queen represents the system, she fears the insurrection of ideas that can take down the system. When she asks the mirror "Who is the happiest in the land?" and the mirror answers "Queen, all bow to your command, / You are the happiest in the land", we can infer that what brings happiness is power, and what brings power to the Queen is her wealth, and these are ideals that prevail in our capitalist society.

Differently from most versions, including the Grimm Brothers', in this revision Snow White is not from the aristocracy; when she finally appears, it is revealed that she works in a diamond mine together with the seven dwarfs and many other men, women and children. She and the dwarfs are climbing the path to the castle carrying the yearly mandatory heavy chest full of diamonds to the Queen. If they do not take this chest every year, the community that works in the mine is cruelly punished. Not only is she presented as belonging to the working class, but she is also a skilled jeweler, and as the jewelry she creates pleases the Queen, Snow White is commanded to stay in the castle to dedicate her life to the craft. This is another shift from the classic tales; Snow White is not a passive idle damsel whose only occupation is being beautiful and eventually doing domestic chores for a bunch of men anymore. The author gives her an occupation and a talent; she is no longer an object of art immortalized in a glass coffin, but an artist who produces beautiful pieces of jewelry.

Moreover, she is also socially aware. She is not happy about her economic ascension; even though in the palace she will have servants, will be able to work only with what she likes, and will be richly rewarded for it, she is distraught with how unfair this situation is for the people who still live and work in the mines and do not have the same opportunity as she does, especially the seven dwarfs, who are close friends of hers. When Snow White goes to the Queen and asks permission to go back to her friends, the Queen is angry, for the grip that holds people under her power is based on the desire to be as rich as she is, because wealth means happiness to her. So of course the Queen is angry, for Snow White is already rebellious for not feeling that her

personal happiness depends on economic status. And as long as there is anyone in the land not accepting entirely the Queen's system of values her power will never be absolute.

However, Snow White is not punished for her rebelliousness because her skills are too rare and she is "young enough to change [her] thoughts" (76); instead, the Queen shows her the magical mirror, in which Snow White ironically sees herself as a princess. Every girl dreams of being a princess in our society, or so this is the idea that Disney and many toy/entertainment franchises sell us; but most parents, or even grown-up girls, do not realize that this is also a capitalist ideal that ties women to a passive and limiting position. For a princess is always beautiful, always dressing fancy, going to fancy places; but how could most girls ever afford that, as our wages are smaller than men's? We must meet a prince charming (a rich man) to save us, and in this way we will never again have to work tirelessly to receive such small wages; instead we will work for free, cooking and raising future labor force (children), besides spending the prince's money with expensive fashion apparel and electronics (fueling the market), the perfect cog in the machine. When Snow White sees herself reflected in the mirror, as a glimpse of her incarnations in other versions of the tale, she rejects this idea, silently wishing freedom from this system imposed by the Queen. By rejecting the ideal of traditional femininity, Snow White is opening the doors to alternative possibilities of femininity, endorsing an against-the-grain way of thinking not just about the system, but about the individual.

These are issues that have been explored by Sylvia Walby in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*. She defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (20); according to her, male dominance takes place in six different stances: household production, employment, state, violence, sexuality, and culture. Gender inequality takes different forms in different classes and ethnic groups in terms of these different sites of reality, and that imbalance of power can be found largely among different cultures, creating different forms of patriarchy (16). Walby argues that after the Women's Liberation Movement, there was no such thing as the eradication of patriarchy, as some might think. The improvements achieved "after the liberation" were just shifts in the forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression: from a private exclusionary form, to a public segregationist and subordinating form; and a decrease

in the degree of exploitation in the household production structure, which used to be the predominant structure, followed by a raise in the degree of exploitation of both employment and state (24). Within her six stances of exploitation, the most relevant for this discussion is certainly the cultural structure which “creates the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze in a variety of arenas, such as religions, education and media” (21); the idea of the princess is one of those representations.

This idea of princesshood is utterly rejected by Snow White in this revision, and because she has rejected the Queen’s reward, she is imprisoned in a tower guarded by soldiers, so that “unless she chooses to be a princess she will never leave the tower again” (77). This is an inversion of the usual motif present in fairytales, for Snow White is not imprisoned because she is a beautiful princess and is envied by the Queen; she is imprisoned precisely for rejecting the opportunity of becoming a princess, and so the Queen cannot give what Snow White desires without conceding power. In addition, Snow White’s way of thinking might be contagious to the Queen’s servants, for the girl now represents somehow an ideological menace to the Queen’s hegemony, and therefore must be locked away and have no contact to anyone.

The extension of the Queen’s power is another remarkable change in comparison with the Grimms’ version; while in the Grimms’ she is only an evil individual, here she is the force that controls everything, and this changes significantly the relationship between Snow White and the Queen, and the role they play in the dynamics that move the plot. For instance, in the Grimms’ version, while Snow White stays at the dwarfs’ home, the Queen in disguise is the one who goes to her and tries to poison her three times; in this revision it is Snow White who goes to the Queen, because the Queen commanded her to go. This change empowers the Queen, I would even say it overempowers her; and in order to antagonize her, Snow White has to rise as a social leader who dares to resist the seduction of individual success to protest for the sufferings of a larger group, uniting this group in revolt to take down the Queen.

In addition, it is Snow White who plots against the Queen by crafting wonderful accessories that caught the Queen’s attention; in this way she would be able to speak her mind to the Queen, who summoned her three times, in a reference to the three times the Queen tries to murder her in the Grimms’ version. Now it is Snow White who is the

agent that leads the action in the story; she is the one that wants to change the system and is working towards it, creating the conflict that makes the story interesting. Instead of being saved, she is the one who manages to escape from her imprisonment with a little help from the dwarfs and the soldiers, who have begun to admire her for resisting the Queen's commands.

After the Queen orders her army to seal Snow White and her friends inside the diamond mines, they also escape from being buried alive; but this time Snow White is not the one responsible for the escape, although she might be considered the reason behind their being sealed under the earth in the first place. In the climax scene, Snow White is the one in the group who gives voice to the general feeling of disgust of the mine workers and the people who hear about the Queen's act of cruelty that are right outside the diamond mine in vigil:

‘I will not go back to the castle and we will send no more diamonds to the Queen. Everyone will keep the things they make and send nothing to the Queen of the Mountains.’ [...] ‘Then we will kill you,’ said the soldier.

‘You may kill some of us,’ said Snow White, ‘but in the end you will lose for there are far more people than there are soldiers.’ (79)

With this appealing speech being delivered at the right moment, leading the revolution, this protagonist then transforms Snow White from a story about a girl's sexual development into a story about the awakening of social and political awareness in an individual, or even the birth of a revolutionary leader. She turned her internal revolt and personal struggle into words that inspire the people to an uprising against the Queen and the injustices they have been dealing with their whole lives. Just like in the first revision analyzed here, what causes the Queen's death is discourse; however, this time it is not the discourse of the ideology she is inscribed in, but a counter discourse.

In the end, after seeing the multitude of people who were rebelling against her, the Queen desperately asks the mirror to “Make them bow to my [her] command” (80); but the mirror's powers are merely to report what is happening to her, nothing can be done to restore her power over people. When she tries to get rid of the mirror, she ends up falling from the highest part of the castle and shattering into pieces,



for the mirror that “would not leave her hand” (80) is indissoluble from herself, an extension of her being, she and the mirror are the system that must fall and break in order to change the *status quo*. Differently from Sexton’s poem, the death of the Queen in this revision represents the extinction of the system that oppresses Snow White and the people, finally a happy ending to Snow White’s story.

### 3.3 THE SNOW CHILD

The last Snow White revision I analyze, “The Snow Child” by Angela Carter, is not as optimistic as the previous one; and although it might look darker than the first, behind its appearance there is a transformative meaning. In Carter’s revision there are no dwarves, no poisoned apple, no enchanted mirror at first sight, and not exactly a charming prince; the story is very different than the one we are used to. The Count and his wife are riding their horses in the snow; when the Count desires to have a girl “as white as snow, [...] as red as blood, [...] as black as that bird’s feathers” (159), suddenly the girl he desires appears. Of course the queen gets jealous and tries to get rid of her, but when she finally manages to kill the girl, the Count gets off of his horse and rapes the girl’s dead body.

As I mentioned earlier, according to Bacchilega, Carter based her revision on an alternate version which was collected by the Grimm Brothers but not published until Bolte and Polivka released it in their companion to *The Grimm Brothers Fairytales* (33) between 1913 and 1932. Although the story told in this tale might seem distant from the classic Snow White that we know, there are many features that are also present in other variations of Snow White, as Bacchilega shows in her thorough account of the differences and similarities among the many known versions of the tale. Here are some examples cited by Bacchilega as common motifs in variations of Snow White: the magical origin of the protagonist, and the relation of this origin with nature; her innocence, and persecution by an older woman; her pseudo death and accidental resurrection; female jealousy and female development as the main themes; the contrast of the color white with the color red, sometimes with the color black included, and almost always related to blood, or to a fruit, or to a petal (31-33, 152).

Although this revision also reinforces Gilbert and Gubar's metaphor of the angel-woman versus the monster-woman, it is very different from Sexton's poem. Here the girl and the Countess are also the same, but one does not become the other; the girl since the beginning is an alter ego of the Countess, her own mirrored reflection that appears to have materialized from the snow, and in the end melts, turning into snow again. By manifesting his will of having a girl with such and such qualities, the Count is projecting his desire on the Countess, who is unwillingly lost as she is slowly stripped of her belongings and thus her identity, while the child of his desire is now wearing the accessories the Countess was wearing before. The Countess tries until the end to maintain the integrity of her identity, but as she was probably raised inside a patriarchal context and was taught that the right thing to do is to please her husband, then, when she hears what her husband desires, she cannot help but create another self for her that mirrors what her husband craves for: a perfect girl, as pure as the snow, fragile and passive, the façade of "the angel in the house."

However, the Countess does not seem to be aware that she was the one who created it; therefore she has no control over it, which is why she tries unsuccessfully to get rid of it, for she is afraid that the self she created will take over her actual self. She only manages to do it when the girl pricks her finger on a rose thorn, falling dead on the ground where she can be raped by the Count, who finally fulfills his desire. It is important to notice that those infamous rose thorns and other sharp phallic objects that always make princesses' fingers bleed are usually interpreted as symbolizing the loss of virginity by most scholars in fairytale scholarship; so when Carter makes it even more explicit by writing "So the girl picks a rose; pricks her finger on the thorn; bleeds; screams; falls," in my opinion, the author is not only making a reference to this commonplace trope in fairytales and fairytale interpretation, she is also making her character have an orgasm.

Right after the Countess's other self experiences a *petit mort*, while the snow child's inert body being penetrated by the Count, the Countess is described as "rein[ing] in her stamping mare and watch[ing] him narrowly; he was soon finished." If we consider that both the snow girl and the Countess are reflections of each other, since the girl is in reality an image, an illusion, an invented persona, then the stamping mare in which the Countess is reining is not a mere horse anymore, but her husband's body while on coitus. Thus, she only manages to

extinguish her other self, passive and pure, by achieving her climax of pleasure and taking the power to herself by shifting to a top position, mounting and galloping on her husband's "virile member."

Body and performance are at issue here: where does the Countess end and the snow child begin? In order to clarify my line of thought from the last paragraph, and whether both the Snow Girl and the Countess are doing the same things at the same time, it is essential to observe how Carter creates the mirroring effect by interposing the scenes: the Countess tries to get rid of the girl throwing out her gloves, and then her diamond brooch; the girl is now wearing the Countess' furs, and then her Louboutin boots, the accessories that had not been thrown out. Those accessories are key to understanding that the Countess and the snow child are not separate individuals, but rather different performances of the same individual, as they represent the exaggerated sensuality and Hollywood glamour related to ideals of traditional femininity, in short, a 1950s movie star style of femininity. There was no Louboutin yet when Carter published this short story, however, her intention of turning the traditional red-hot iron shoes into a luxury fashion commodity by presenting them as red high heels matches what Louboutin stands for, with their signature red leather soles. Therefore, we can infer that in the same way the snow child is a performance of traditionally innocent and passive femininity, the Countess is also a performance of this, also traditional, femininity: the sex symbol, the fashion icon, the primadonna, the diva, the Bitch Goddess Joanna Russ talks about, the same image of femininity that composes part of the performance of so many superstars, supermodels, and drag queens nowadays.

Back to the sex scene, if this story is really about the game of power in a sexual relationship, then the riding is in fact metaphorical: they are engaged in the sexual act since the beginning. Moreover, since the Countess' alter ego did prick her finger on a thorn and bleed, maybe she was a virgin, which would be interesting for the contrasts it represents with the performance of femininity discussed above. Perhaps the midwinter in the story is referring to the Countess' virginity: "Midwinter – invincible, immaculate [...] Fresh snow fell on snow already fallen; when it ceased, the whole world was white" (159); which is not the same passive purity that fairytale heroines usually present, but a kind of empowered immaculation, cold and hard, like an invincible armor, making the body impenetrable. The snow, which awakens the

Count's desire and is the matter that forms the snow child, is only one element of midwinter, not as strong as the force of nature that midwinter represents. The midwinter seems penetrable only when the characters find a hole with blood in the layers of snow, which is a metaphor for the Countess' vagina.

Carter's revision does not offer the utopian alternative of changing the system that the Merseyside Collective's revision does with that optimistic ending. However, it shows an alternate view of the ways the impositions of society work in the manufacturing of gender, an internal perspective in the dynamics of the performance of femininity and the politics of sexual desire. This revision, in contrast with Sexton's poem, enables the protagonist to choose how she is going to perform her femininity. By customizing her own subjectivity, while battling with herself, and not letting survive the part of her subjectivity that was defined by what was expected from her by a man, the Countess as a character broadens our discussion to the psychological realm, highlighting the imposed limitations of living as a woman inside the society that we live in. I believe this is one of the hugest (and yet unconscious) struggles that most of us are going through in our lives in a daily basis, as we are constantly in process of building our subjectivities and some of us have yet to develop a feminist consciousness.

These last two revisions certainly present protagonists that comply with my understanding of what is a Bad Girl. Carter's Countess, due to the psychological nature of my analysis, is not active in the physical sense; but she certainly acts upon her dilemmas. The Merseyside Collective's Snow White is the most ideal one by taking the action to revolutionize the system she lives in, presenting a hope for a light in the future.

I do not believe there is a way out of patriarchy for now, but we can think and theorize over alternatives for change, and obviously act upon them in order to force ourselves out of the framing of the box we are imprisoned in. While we do not have power, as a group or as individuals, to take down the structures of the world around us, we can start by looking at the [wo]man in the mirror, as Michael Jackson would say in his famous song. If we take agency for ourselves in order to own our lives, our sexuality, our femininity, we can shatter the patriarchal mirror that society gives us and create our own mirror, with our own magic ascribed to it.

#### 4. SADOMASOCHIST WIVES: A PEEK AT THE INFAMOUS CHAMBER

The personal is indeed political. One of the sites where the oppression of women is most present and very often too subtle to identify is in the heterosexual relationship, not necessarily inside the family core. Society tells us how to behave properly towards our husbands, our boyfriends, or even our “crushes;” and sometimes those rules are so deeply rooted inside our minds that we fail to perceive how we hold ourselves back from being who we really are, or who we really want to be. Very often, while captivated by someone who oppresses us, we catch ourselves wanting to be oppressed, without even noticing. Of course this is not exclusive of heterosexual relationships; but by traditionally polarizing the two parts of a couple into uneven roles, heteronormativity is certainly the source of such evil.

Sylvia Walby, in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*, categorizes the oppression of women in six different instances where patriarchy exerts its power, as I have mentioned in the past chapter. However, Walby’s study focuses on the more obvious ways in which women are exploited, so I want to call attention to the more subtle ways, in which many times we are trapped in an illusion of a liberated life. It is precisely for this reason that I will conclude my analysis with revisions of Bluebeard, where the dynamics of heterosexual relationship are explored.

The story was published first in 1697 as “La Barbe-Bleue”, part of Charles Perrault’s *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé*. According to Cristina Bacchilegga, academic opinion is divided as to whether this story is original from Perrault or if it was previously a folktale (173-174); Paul Delarue claims that there is no distinction between AT312<sup>5</sup> (Bluebeard) and AT311 (Fitcher’s Bird), and that AT955 (The Robber Bridegroom) also holds similarities to these two (175-176). In this chapter I analyze two revisions of Bluebeard: “Bluebeard’s Egg,” by Margaret Atwood, which seems to be based on the Grimm Brothers’ tale “Fitcher’s Bird;” and “The Bloody Chamber,” by Angela Carter, which is based on Perrault’s version that she translated in 1977.

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<sup>5</sup> These are type numbers in the Aarne-Thompson’s classification system, which is used by folklorists to catalogue and organize folktales by motif.

As Maria Tatar and many other feminist critics acknowledge, including Carter, Bluebeard belongs to the tradition of Eve and Adam's story, which focuses on preaching women's disobedience as a sin. As I see women's disobedience to man, or patriarchy, as the most central definition of what a Bad Girl is and Eve as the original Bad Girl, since Lilith is somewhat the icon of the forgotten female tradition, I left my analysis of the revisions of Bluebeard to my last chapter.

Perrault's Bluebeard tells the story of a girl who marries a rich man against her will, unbeknownst to the fact he had murdered his previous wives. He gives her the keys to all the rooms of the house, but tells her there is a room she is prohibited to enter. She gets curious and disobeys him by entering this room, where she finds the bodies of the previous wives. Frightened, she drops the key, and stains it with blood. He discovers her disobedience because of the blood stain on the key, and her punishment is to be executed; but in the end she is saved by her brothers, and her husband is killed.

Fitcher's Bird differs in some details, but overall it is very similar to Bluebeard. Instead of being a rich man, the husband is a sorcerer who abducts young women to be his wives. He not only gives them the keys, but also an egg that they must carry with themselves all the time; and the egg is the object they drop and taint with blood. He abducts three sisters, one after the other; the first two end up being executed, but the third resurrects her sisters by reassembling the pieces of their bodies. Because she leaves the egg outside the prohibited room, the sorcerer does not know what happened and is going to marry the third sister. In the end, the third sister not only tricks the sorcerer into giving gold to her family, she and her two sisters run away before the wedding, and their family sets the sorcerer's house on fire with him and all the guests inside.

According to Bacchilega, in Perrault's version the heroine loses much of the agency she has in other (folk) versions as she is both the victim and the one to be blamed for; while in AT311 and AT955 the heroine is the hero of the story, being the one responsible for saving herself and the others (110). Both the revisions I analyze address the issue of feminine agency and question the fairytales' naturalizing of gender dynamics, as Bacchilega remarks (113); and I would add that

both of them also highlight the sadomasochist<sup>6</sup> dynamics traditionally embedded in heterosexual relationships, although differing from each other in terms of strategy.

#### 4.1 BLUEBEARD'S EGG

“Bluebeard’s Egg” differs from the other revisions analyzed here for being very realist in the sense it does not have any fantastic elements. It is set in 1970s Toronto and tells the story of Sally, a married woman who is emotionally dependent on her husband Ed. Differently from the protagonist from the classic tale, Sally is afraid she is a “nothing,” as Maylynn, her only friend, was before the divorce; but Sally has a job and earns enough to be economically independent. Sally is second in command for a bank’s magazine; her boss is related to the chairman so she thinks she cannot go for his job because it would be dumb to ignore such kind of power connections. Meanwhile she behaves as a secretary to this man: indulging him, covering up for him, letting him take the credit for what she does. He even tried to make a pass on her, but she “was kind about it” (166). She tries to justify herself, saying they have a secretary who brings coffee and therefore her job is different. In fact, her situation is very typical of working women in the 1970s, as she describes: few women “smiling brightly, with what they hope will come across as confidence rather than aggression” (165).

Despite being economically independent from her husband, her world still revolves around him and her submission can be seen in several moments: when she talks about her job she says “Luckily Ed has no objection” (165); when she takes courses to improve herself with the purpose of being a more interesting woman to Ed; when she talks to Ed about her night courses and belittles them “so Ed wouldn’t get the idea there was anything in her life that was even remotely as important as he was” (175); when Ed earnestly reprimands her for a joke she has made and she keeps quiet because she knows “how to keep her trap shut” (168); when she tries to keep up on new technologies “because she knows they interest Ed” and “she likes to check out anything that causes

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<sup>6</sup> When I use the terms sadist/ sadomasochist/ masochist I am not referring to the obsolete psychological concepts. I am referring to BDSM mostly in a metaphoric way, except when I talk about the Marquis’ sexual practices with his previous wives.

the line on Ed's excitement chart to move above level" (168); when, playing Monopoly, she sacrifices her winning for Ed's kids, while Ed would not even conceive the idea of letting somebody else win.

Even though she considers herself to have everything, she is afraid of something she does not know; she is afraid of solving the puzzle that is Ed, and lose everything after it. She thinks it is a bad habit to think about it, about Ed's inner world and how it affects her notion of happiness; but she does it anyway. It appears she is somehow seeking to escape these thoughts, and thus escaping her entanglement in Ed's world when she takes night courses, for they coincide with the nights that Ed is not home. She is trying to feel something more than shallow interest about a subject, "That's just it: everything is fascinating but nothing enters her" (174). She is always the star pupil who impresses the teachers, that is why she despises them. This reveals a masochistic strand in her, because her relationship is the center of her life for the challenge it represents; Ed does not seem that interested in her, and she is obsessed to conquer him, to be the center of his life as he is of hers, but she is not able to do it, and maybe that is why Ed is still central in her life. If she finds a subject that interests her and which she cannot master maybe the center of her life will shift; I speculatively think she unconsciously has that hope, and that is why she keeps on seeking this in the different night courses she takes.

Sally is very maternal towards Ed; "Edward Bear, of little brain" (160), she thinks he is profoundly stupid, and for this reason she objectifies him:

Sally knows for a fact that dumb blondes were loved, not because they were blondes, but because they were dumb. It was their helplessness and confusion that were so sexually attractive, once; not their hair. (161)

Although at first glance this turning of tables might look subversive, this inversion of object and objectifying agent does not benefit Sally. She may sound somehow empowered while objectifying Ed, but this blinds her to the fact she is leading a life dedicated by her husband's needs instead of living for herself. Sally is active only when it is about sparkling interest in the relationship.



The biggest issue here seems to be how Sally and Ed believe they are of completely different species, how they belong to different universes that do not mingle, even though they live in the same house. This is made clear since the very beginning of the story when contrasting images of Sally and Ed are presented: Sally is cooking in the kitchen, a space connected to women and traditional femininity, a domestic and civilized space, while Ed is outside in the lawn. Ed insisted on keeping a part of the lawn wild, where there is an old playhouse, instead of trimming it. Sally is positioned in complete opposition to him as she, bothered with the wilderness on the lawn, says her part of the back lawn is well kept, for instance; or when she describes him as an old man puttering and humming to himself, and Sally refers to his youth as “prehistoric.” As long as the two parts of a heterosexual relationship endorse this binary system, there is no possibility of talk in equal terms between those two parts, since the resistance to such binary classification is the very core of feminism, as theory and as a movement.

The associations with nature and the wilderness are very similar to the metaphor of the forest I mention in previous chapters, with the difference that here the forest and the wilderness do not represent a journey of self-discovery, but the journey of discovering another person, a person who, to a certain extent, is embodied by the forest. Sally makes this comparison explicit by the middle of the story, relating Ed’s inner world with their ravine lot in the backyard, and herself with an angel who brings food to Ed, much like Woolf’s angel in the house. She asks herself: “why are its wings frayed and dingy grey around the edges, why is it looking so withered and frantic? This is where all Sally’s attempts to explore Ed’s inner world end up” (173). If there was ever a bond between the two of them their bond is severed, but perhaps there was never a bond in the first place; they are completely alienated from each other, there is no communication between them, Sally does not know what happened to “Bluebeard’s previous wives,” what went wrong with his previous marriages, or what his kids (whom she helped raise) are doing with their lives. Sally blindly believes that, whatever happened to his previous marriages, his ex-wives were the ones who were at fault, they lost him; and she is terribly afraid of losing him too, to wake up one day to find out that “precious” Ed might not love her anymore. And this idea of a relationship with no connection between the two individuals, while one of them is desperately trying to connect with the other in a

vicious cycle of masochism and Stockholm syndrome, is what constitutes the core of the traditional heterosexual relationship.

However, Sally slowly perceives that Ed hides his true self behind his apparent stupidity:

His obtuseness is a wall, within which he can go about his business, humming to himself, while Sally, locked outside must hack her way through the brambles with hardly so much as a transparent raincoat between them and her skin. (161)

She does not know who Ed is beyond the façade he is wearing, and that is where the Bluebeard's room takes shape. In fact, the idea of Ed she describes to the reader throughout the story seems very inconsistent with the few moments in which Ed acts. The way he behaves towards other women, towards his kids; the way he talks about his work as a heart surgeon; the way he patronizes Sally when she shows emotional distress; in all of these moments we are left with the impression he is playing with her: she is desperately trying to find a way for him to open up and let her into his world, but instead he shuts her out in a way that she is even unsure whether he shut her out or not.

Although Ed does not prohibit Sally of "entering in his world," the fact that he makes his true self so unattainable even for someone who shares intimacy with him turns into a necessity for Sally to uncover the real Ed, to enter Bluebeard's room. For Sally, this exploration of Ed's inner world is so vital because she sees it as the only way she can explore her own self. As Ed is the absolute center of her life, she thinks of him as her inner world to the point of rejecting emotional independence, self-exploration, and, of course, rejecting woman's culture and other women as well, as she is afraid of losing Ed because of them. This is very clear when Sally is talking about her night course 'Forms of Narrative Fiction,' and how the teacher tells the class to "explore your inner world," and Sally is "fed up with her inner world; she doesn't need to explore it. In her inner world is Ed, like a doll within a Russian wooden doll, and in Ed is Ed's inner world, which she can't get at" (173). But the opposite is also true, for when she thinks about Ed, she always ends up thinking about herself, but then she stops there.

Regarding her vision of herself and women in general, Sally's idea is very reductive. As Bacchilega points out, she "reduces female

cleverness to knowing how to catch a man and keep him” (182). This is made very clear when she talks about her “Forms of Narrative” teacher, as if that woman was a lesser human being for the singular way she performs her femininity. Interestingly, the teacher’s name is Bertha, the same as *Jane Eyre*’s madwoman who lived in the attic. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is generally acknowledged to make use of the Bluebeard’s motif as there are many passages in the story that refer direct or indirectly to the tale. The character Bertha is very emblematic for feminism for representing the image of repressed femininity, Gilbert and Gubar even named their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* in her homage. Also, she is emblematic for revisionism for being the protagonist of Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a milestone for feminist revisionism published in 1966. Thus, Atwood may have called the teacher Bertha to signal her association with feminism and women’s culture, and also to make clear how Sally rejects these values, acquiescing to patriarchal norms instead.

In fact, Sally sees other women as enemies, who may take Ed from her; he is “beset by sirens” (164) that want him to fix their hearts, as he is ironically a heart surgeon, but Sally is also one of those women who invent heart problems to get his attention, as she did once. Sally wants to remove those women’s hearts, in a reference to Aztec rituals; she sees herself as Ed’s savior, for she saved him from the “sink-holes” and “quagmires” that other women represent to her.

The only exception to Sally’s misogyny seems to be Marylynn, her only friend (and her most recent) and the only bond she has besides Ed. A successful fashionable divorcee who is apparently completely independent, Marylynn is the third most prominent character of the story; Sally admires her, and thinks of the two of them as being equally superior to other people when they are talking about others or appraising Ed’s stupidity. Although Sally does not like the way Marylynn sounds patronizing when they talk about Ed, she trusts Marylynn and does not see her as a menace, or a rival, in any way. Marylynn is the only one whom Sally respects and shares a mind connection with, as both do not need to explain many things because they are assumed between them.

In the climax scene, Sally is hosting a party in her house, and when she turns her attention back to Ed and Marylynn, after leaving them alone for a brief amount of time, she sees Ed pressing his hand on Marylynn’s buttocks. The three of them pretend nothing has happened

and act normal, and as the story is narrated through Sally's impressions, the last pages depict the direction of her line of thoughts while analyzing what happened. What really happened is left open, but there may be two possibilities: Ed was drunk and ends up harassing Marylynn, that "refrained from a shriek or a flinch out of good breeding or the desire not to offend him" (181); or Ed is clever in reality, and the idea Sally has of him is a persona he himself forged to make Sally (or people in general) believe.

If the last one is true then perhaps Ed and Marylynn were even having an affair, but this is left open for the reader's interpretation. In my interpretation, this is not unexpected as Sally already talked about Ed being cornered in bay-windows at parties by women who want him, "and Ed lets them do it." The way I see, Bluebeard's room is the unknown inside Ed's mind; and because they do not communicate, Sally does not know what Ed really thinks. This unknown is scarier for her than if she was actually sure that he betrayed her, for it strengthens his hold over her. It feels as if he is not human, he is somewhat superior, and the whole story conveys that feeling that Sally is being played by Ed. There is a small chance of Ed being a simple, conventional guy, who did nothing wrong as Sally sees him, and the scene with Marylynn may in fact be a misunderstanding. However, until she can talk with him in equal terms, she will never know for sure, and we will also never know.

Sally and Ed's relationship is an example of how subtle the oppression of women can be. Sally seems to be living a happy life, but in fact she is alienated from her husband due to the lack of communication between them; and, above all, she is alienated from herself, focusing all her expectations of happiness on another person.

The moment Sally sees for the first time how smooth Ed is with women is a turning point for her, her first glance at the Bluebeard's room. At first she loses herself, "She can't say anything: she can't afford to be wrong, or to be right either" (182); but along her trail of thoughts we can perceive some changes in the way she sees herself and the way she sees Ed. For instance, she is bothered for the first time by the fact that Ed refers to the cleaning lady as "the woman," the same way he referred to the previous cleaning lady, as if they were interchangeable. This not only represents how Sally is changing towards Ed, but towards women as a group.

Moreover, the fact that Marylynn is an interior designer is very symbolic, as Marylynn is the one who provided Sally with the iconic 19<sup>th</sup>-century key-hole desk that Sally wanted as an accessory to make her embody the traditional ideal of femininity:

she needs it to sit at, in something flowing, backlit by the morning sunlight, gracefully dashing off notes. She saw a 1940's advertisement for coffee like this one, and the husband was standing behind the chair, leaning over, with a worshipful expression on his face. (163)

Marylynn is actually leaning on this desk when Ed grabs her butt; so she is not only the one furnishing Bluebeard's room (Ed's mind), she also brought the door to open it (the desk), and more importantly, she is the key that opens the room for Sally to glimpse. And just like the key from the classical tale ends up tarnished in blood, revealing where the protagonist went, Marylynn and Sally's friendship now will also be tainted by what happened.

However, this is not the only issue left open by the end of the story. In her night course *Forms of Narrative Fiction*, Sally is studying a folk variation of Bluebeard, which is very similar to the Grimms' Fitcher's Bird; as an assignment, she must write a revision set in contemporary times and choose a point of view to narrate the story. She chooses the egg. She starts to see Ed as the egg: "Ed Egg, blank and pristine and lovely. Stupid, too. Boiled, probably," "how can there be a story from the egg's point of view, if the egg is so closed and unaware?" (178). Obviously Sally is the one who is closed and unaware, and this is made very clear in one of the most ironic scenes of the story where she hugs Ed thinking tenderly of him as the egg, while he is shaving. If we picture the image of a fifty-something man shaving, with a beard of shaving cream, we can visualize the alignment that Ed clearly has with Bluebeard; Sally is the only one who by this point had not figured it out yet. As for the egg, it really is a metaphor of Sally's inner world, which she only realizes with her epiphany at the end, when, while thinking about her heart beating on the screen when she had it examined in Ed's facility, she realizes the egg is alive.

As Bacchilega mentions, Barbara Godard talks about how Atwood's tale within a tale mirrors itself in order to highlight its metaphor (181), and I agree with her; the fiction that exists inside the

story enables a better understanding of the feminist message in the revision. Sally's assignment of rewriting Bluebeard through the perspective of the egg ends up being her story told from her own perspective, the reason for the title of Atwood's revision: "Bluebeard's Egg." Sally is so close-minded about her role as a woman, about her relationship with Ed, and even about regarding Ed as a person; her mind has yet to hatch the answers she seeks in order to be happy, and hopefully it hatches them in the last scene. There are two implications associated with what the egg symbolizes that can be applied to what Sally's inner world as the egg means: a new beginning for her, this time focusing on herself; and, of course, fertility, in the sense of woman's creativity. The later is, in my opinion, the whole theme of the circular metaphor, since this story is about a writing assignment that is the story itself; it is an ode to the feminist awakening of women through feminine creativity.

Bacchilega also implies that the egg represents a new life for Sally, since now she is "no longer under the spell of bluebeard" (115), an interpretation that is shared by Sharon Rose Wilson (182-183). However, Bacchilega also seems to imply an alternative interpretation of the egg ambiguously as an image of Sally's and/or Ed's inner world (115), which is quite similar to the matryoshka doll analogy Sally made of her own inner world, with Ed and Ed's inner world inside of it. In my opinion, although the image Sally has of Ed indeed lives in her mind, this Ed is not real; thus, Ed and his subjectivity in reality are not within the egg; therefore, the egg represents only Sally.

Furthermore, regarding the heart exam scene mentioned previously, in which Sally sees the image of her beating heart, I understand this vision as representing an alternative key, a second one (but not secondary), to that which the protagonist of the classic tale receives from Bluebeard. This scene can be mistakenly interpreted as an analogy to Bluebeard's room, as the heart surgeons got a new facility with new technological devices that Ed seems to be excited to use. However, even though exclusive, this room is not secret. Sally goes there to visit and asks Ed to examine her heart, just to check what the devices can do. Since Ed makes Sally go through the procedures as if she was just one of his patients, and they see her heart pulsing in the screen. Even though there was no sexual interaction between them at that moment, it feels like an erotic ritual or as if it was a sexual play game as Sally herself points out:

Ed unwired her and she put on her clothes again, neutrally, as if he were actually a doctor. Nevertheless this transaction, this whole room, was sexual in a way she didn't quite understand; it was clearly a dangerous place (175).

To Bacchilega, this is the Bluebeard's room in this story (114), whereas, to me, this fetishist role-playing scene of doctor and patient is more like a peek at Ed's inner world, which is the real Bluebeard's room in my opinion; and the vision she had of her own heart is the key to Sally's inner world. This key leads Sally not to uncover Bluebeard's room, of which she had a glimpse when she saw Ed with Marylynn, but to have access to the egg: to enter her own room of emotional independence, which is at the same time an escape from Bluebeard's room and a space for Sally to create her own world, a new world that is not a satellite of another person's world.

#### 4.2 THE BLOODY CHAMBER

Differently from Atwood's, Carter's revision is based on Perrault's version of Bluebeard, and it is very close to the original. In the introduction of *Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale*, from 2001, Roemer and Bacchilega ascribe this similarity to the fact that Carter was the translator of the anthology *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, published in 1977, and they mention Sarah Gamble's statement that "Bloody chamber is a 'gleeful, subversive commentary' on her own previous translation" (9). According to Stephen Benson, in an essay from the same book, the short story "The Bloody Chamber" is the most iconic of Carter's works, not only for setting the tone of the collection that shares the same title, but for seemingly representing everything "Carterian"(33).

What Carter did in her revision was to bring a story from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and embroider it with a number of references to movements that were en vogue by the fin de siècle: symbolism, occultism, decadent literature, among others.<sup>7</sup> This intertextuality not only provides a cultural

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<sup>7</sup> The authors and artists referred directly in the story are: Rops Felicien, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Eliphas Levy, Gustave Moreau, James Ensor, Paul Gauguin,

background that makes the historical setting much more believable, but they also change the hue of the story making it darker, deeper, and much more enjoyable.

The plot bears several similarities to Perrault's version. A lower-middle class girl marries a very rich man, a Marquis, not against her will as Perrault's protagonist, but for the sake of economic ascension and because she is somehow fascinated by the charms of this man. The Marquis has hints of megalomania and is an aficionado of the decadent movement, it seems; the parts where Carter describes his sophisticated tastes are the richest in references. He was married before, to very remarkable women, but now all his previous wives are mysteriously dead. Moved by the curiosity of knowing more about her husband, the girl goes into a chamber he had expressly prohibited her from entering, when he goes on a business trip and leaves her the keys. Inside this chamber she discovers the corpses of his previous wives, and when he suddenly comes back he uncovers her disobedience, for the key had been dropped and was stained with blood. He is going to punish her by cutting her head off, but before he does it her mother comes to her rescue, killing him with a headshot.

Although based on different sources of Bluebeard, both "The Bloody Chamber" and "Bluebeard's Egg" attempt to criticize the sadomasochist dynamics of heterosexual relationship; but they take different approaches. While in Atwood's revision the sadomasochism is psychological and subtle, Carter brings to the body what the mind is already suffering. The erotic paintings and drawings that are depicted, as their titles already hint "Reproof of Curiosity" and "Immolation of the Wives of Sultan;" the way the bodies of the Marquis' previous wives are exposed; everything surrounding the Marquis' plans towards the protagonist collaborates to building his sadistic game, from psychological manipulation to physical action, in which the protagonist must take a sacrificial role in order to satisfy the Marquis. It resembles a modern hunting game, as highlighted when the blind piano tuner Jean-Yves tells the stories of women-hunting associated with the Marquis' family. In such environment, almost completely controlled by the Marquis, it seems nothing escapes his power.

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Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Antoine Watteau, Charles Baudelaire, and Claude Debussy. There is also an indirect reference to the *Yellow Book*, a British periodical relevant to the decadent movement.



Bacchilega explains how Patricia Duncker, Robert Clark, and Avis Lewallen disapprove of the way Carter “brings [things] to the body”, depicting the physicality of sadomasochism and raw sexual desire in her work; they claim it is a regressive and violent kind of sexuality that serves the purpose of manipulating the reader to sympathize with masochism (123, 184-185). However, Bacchilega does not agree with them, thinking it is actually the opposite, and I agree with her. Carter rather recognizes the presence of masochism in sexual and economic exploitation, as “destructive relations are not presented as natural, but as symptoms of specific repressive socio-cultural dynamics” (185).

In most of Carter’s work, the body and the physicality of things are prominent and how they are portrayed in her stories is also very important to take into consideration. Roemer and Bacchilega quote Carter about that matter, from an interview published in the book *The Writer’s Imagination: Interviews with Major International Women Novelists*: “I do think that the body comes first, not consciousness.... I often shatter pure and evocative imagery with the crude. But remember there’s a materiality to symbols and a materiality to imaginative life which should be taken quite seriously” (7). Betty Moss, in her essay about the grotesque in Carter’s “Peter and the Wolf,” explains that Carter favors the body and sexual desire in her work in order to demythologize the ideas that we have of ourselves that were constructed by representation (mythological, literary, etc.) throughout time. According to Moss, Carter sees myths/ideas/representations as all theoretical, while the body and sexual desire derive from practice (197). The way I see, Carter meant that we live and feel our bodies and our sexual desire rather than constructing them, in opposition to what happens with gender and sexuality. I think Carter was aiming at an alternative theorization of gender and sexuality, one that disregards the constructions of gender and sexuality present in our society, deeming them as inappropriate, at the same time seeking to erase the dichotomy of body/mind, human/nature, much as we see now in post-human theorization.

On the subject of bodies, let us consider them literally, as corpses, to be more specific. In contrast with Bluebeard’s previous wives in Perrault’s tale, who have no background whatsoever, in Carter’s revision they have a life of their own. Each one of the Marquis’ wives has a particular story, characterization, and personality, enabling the

portrayal of multiple femininities and adding a complexity behind their relations with the Marquis, thus transforming them into much more than simply his previously murdered wives.

Although the wives are already dead, the differences between them are emphasized by their executions and the way their corpses are differently displayed, according to the lives they led: the first one, the singer, is a victim of strangling; the second, a former prostitute and model for famous painters, has only her skull left, being deprived of her body; and the third, a descendant of Dracula, ironically has all the blood drained from her body, for she was staked and entirely pierced in the Iron Maiden. This deadly art installation gives voice to the dead wives, in a way that enables their corpses to tell the story of their deaths and lives, providing them with a sort of autonomy regarding their husband, or even ways to counteract his plans by telling their story to his next victim-to-be, being monuments for the victims of patriarchy in the matrimonial context, even though paradoxically he was the one who sort of created these art installations.

Regarding the plurality of femininities that I mentioned earlier, the most contrasting example in this story is certainly the protagonist. She is completely different from Bluebeard's past wives, in the sense she is not even close to be as sophisticated as any one of them. She is a seventeen-year-old piano virtuosa who lives in relative poverty with her mother and nurse before being proposed marriage by Bluebeard. She wants to marry him not because she is in love or because her family sells her, but because she herself is interested in the material comfort, glamour and power that he offers, as she points out several times along the short story. For her material interest for him and tentative of economic ascension, the execution he plans for her is decapitation, wearing nothing but a sumptuous ruby necklace that previously belonged to the Marquis' grandmother, who escaped the guillotine in the French Revolution.

However, she does not find pleasure only in his wealth; before finding out his secret, she is very attracted to his mysterious and seductive air, and also to the idea of being the object of his desire, as she acknowledges: "for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away" (98). When he "takes her virginity," she feels a mix of pleasure and disgust, and is left craving for sex. And it is the sex that awakens her

interest towards him, and the dangerous curiosity that ultimately leads her to find the bloody chamber.

Bacchilega explains the protagonist's situation by quoting Avis Lewallen: "The heroine's corruption is three-fold: material, as she is seduced by wealth; sexual, as she discovers her own sexual appetite; and moral, in the sense that 'like Eve'... she disobeys her master-husband's command" (185). I see no problem in the protagonist being corrupted, and it seems neither Carter nor Bacchilega do. The real problem is not the sin, but the belief that to sin is wrong and you have to pay for what you have done, or even the notion of sin itself.

Most of Carter's critics connect her extended essay from 1978 *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* with the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, stating they are different approaches with the same line of argumentation regarding the topic of the representation of woman as a victim. According to Lorna Sage's introduction to *Flesh and the Mirror*, the reason Carter wrote *Sadeian Woman* was to criticize a sort of idealization of victimhood, suffering and self-pity of women that feminism was pointing towards by the late 1970s (32-33). Carter reminds us that putting women in the position of victimhood, as Bacchilega remarks, "often carries with it the dangerously seductive companions of 'willingness' and 'virtue'" (122-23). Bacchilega quotes Elaine Jordan when she states that to approve of the position of "virtuous victim" would be to imply a reward for all the suffering afterwards, and also to imply the existence of "a benign authority that can make it all better" (186). This position of virtuous martyr, seduced by the idea of paying for her sins in order to "save" herself, is precisely what the protagonist assumes, as Bacchilega points out in her analysis (124-27). This is not only the same ideology behind the story of the fall of Eve, but also is quite suicidal to think that you can only be saved if you pay for your sins; so you must pay the highest price to compensate for your lack of character, you must die.

The protagonist is saved from this suicidal line of thought only when her mother, the true hero of this story, comes to rescue her. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist describes how 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" (95); and now, riding a horse and holding a gun, she comes to the rescue of her daughter without even being warned about the dangers, merely

following an instinctive feeling, a sort of telepathy or female bonding, which further stresses the connections among women. Parallel to that, the protagonist, close to her execution, seems to find some sort of power and hope inside herself that reminds her of her mother, as if a small piece of courage and heroism similar to that of her mother had awoken inside her. Bacchilega argues, and I agree with her, that by making the protagonist's mother save her, Carter is not only emphasizing female blood ties and maternal relationship, she is advocating a feminine eccentric tradition (127-128). In her analysis, Bacchilega sees the protagonist as having two mothers, the nurse who helped to raise her and her real mother. While the nurse wants the protagonist to lead a traditional life for women of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even encouraging her to victimhood and martyrdom by calling her "my saint Cecilia,"<sup>8</sup> in the same way the Marquis did before he tried to execute her; her true mother is eccentric, empowered, a woman of action, and since the beginning suspicious of the Marquis' intentions. She is eccentric in the sense she represents an alternative tradition, out of the frame as Teresa de Lauretis theorizes, a marginal and feminine tradition of strong women, who do not abide to the rules, nor bow to patriarchal values, and most of all, a tradition that puts the measures to change in action with their own hands instead of lamenting for the unexplored potential of women. Much like what Joanna Russ argues for in her essay mentioned in the introduction, or what I see as *Bad Girl*. Bacchilega aligns the protagonist's mother with Carter's wish to "validate [her] claim to a fair share of the future by staking [her] claim to [her] share in the past" thus "revising the 'good' mother into the powerful and active keeper of an alternative economy of desire" (128), as part of what she calls Carter's metafolkloric archeological historicizing project, which is the effort Carter puts into rescuing obscure folk versions that empower women and retelling them in a way that highlights such proto-feminist values, as I mentioned previously.

Another major element that differentiates Carter's version is the existence of Jean-Yves, the piano tuner. He acts as a foil to Bluebeard, because while the Marquis is described as having a traditional masculinity, virile and imposing, Jean-Yves represents an alternative masculinity. He is not only delicate and gentle, but he has a major disability, blindness, and this disability provides him with an extra

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<sup>8</sup> Whose story relates to the protagonist's in many ways: her virginity, marriage to a pagan nobleman, relation to music, and the way she was executed.

sensibility. Instead of being the hero who saves the damsel in distress, he provides her with emotional support which inspires the strength in her, expressed in the moment she tried to protect him by sending him away instead of allowing herself to be protected by him. Bacchilega quotes Patricia Duncker by saying that Jean-Yves needs to be disabled in order for the final romantic pairing to have a balance in the dynamics of gender, because if he is blind the heroine is no longer an object trapped in the male gaze (183). I agree with Duncker, because everything related to the protagonist's "wrong deeds" is associated with vision and image, including her biggest "sin," which was to see the Marquis's secret. She saw her image in the mirror, and could see through the eyes of the Marquis the potential for corruption he sensed in her. Because Jean-Yves could never see her, his affection for her derives from the music she plays, and from the emotion he can sense through her piano playing. Jean-Yves could never see the red heart-shaped mark the Marquis left on the protagonist's forehead either. Bacchilega associates this mark with guilt and shame for selling herself for economic ascension (128), but I consider this mark as being more of a scar of all the misfortunes she went through and, of course, also a symbol of her being a social outcast now, much like Hawthorne's scarlet letter. The point of Jean-Yves not being able to see is analogous to the fact the protagonist is now damned in the eyes of society, and his inability to see the symbol of her damnation means that he does not see her as society does, or even that his whole vision of the world is not the same as society's.

Bacchilega concludes her analysis stating that "Carter shows how precarious any resolution built on binary oppositions will remain" (129), which, in my opinion, is not valid only for Carter, but for Atwood's story as well. Thus, Bacchilega's conclusion on Atwood's story can also be considered in light of Carter's story:

Simone de Beauvoir has best explained how the West has dichotomized gender dynamics through the body. Because man fears mortality, the condition of humanity, he believes himself to be in alien territory and chooses instead to conceive of himself metaphysically – like a god. Atwood's fiction fleshes out de Beauvoir's scholarly words. (118)

Bluebeard, as Bacchilegga implies in her book, represents the patriarchal rules that women must follow. He kills not only because he is a sociopath, but also for his aversion of the feminine in its connection to the female body; as he sees female as a representation of nature and body while male is connected to mind, and thus is superior. This is purely what misogyny is and always has been: an intention to purge the world from these inferior beings still so connected to the body. But as the human species needs women to go on, the superior godlike Male lets them exist as the subhuman species that he considers them to be.

By bringing focus to the body, to raw sexual desire, Carter is validating women's culture in its difference from that of men, advocating for an eccentric tradition far from the male-centered hegemony. A woman-made tradition is also what gives Sally, from Atwood's story, an alternative to her life that up until now had been ruled by patriarchy. Although only Carter's revision includes an act of disobedience itself, both revisions portray a feminist awakening, the raising of consciousness regarding the possibility to follow a path alternative to patriarchal norms. Turning to that path, in the way Carter conceives it, is rejecting conformism, victimization, and dependence; and therefore, to take your life in your own hands and make your own rules. Turning to that path is to become a Bad Girl.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The reason I left the Bluebeard revisions to the last chapter, as I have stated before, is that in my opinion what binds all the three classical fairytales, of which revisions I have analyzed, is the prohibition and the condemnable behavior of women: a girl who wanders out of her way, a girl who eats the poisonous forbidden apple, and a girl who is bested by her curiosity. Each one of the protagonists of the classic fairytales is condemned in a different way: one is eaten; the other is saved by objectifying herself, though as the cyclical nature of the story goes she will one day become an oppressive tool of patriarchy to the next Snow White; and the last one is barely saved, but she finds the corpses of her husband's other victims. If we see these protagonists of the original versions as the corpses of Bluebeard's past wives we can find metaphors of possibilities of feminine experience: the victims of patriarchy who are eaten by the world for deviating from their way; the Bitch Goddesses, who objectify themselves to achieve success, sometimes despising the young women that are trying to follow their steps; and the feminist critics, who find the ghosts of bodies from women victims of patriarchy. Instead of digging out bodies, my aim was to find the women who were still alive and kicking; instead of victims of patriarchy I was looking for girls who were fighting against it from inside fairytales, trying to find manifestations of what I called Bad Girls.

Throughout this work, my aim was to find very different portrayals of femininity that could fit into what I had in mind for Bad Girls as a category. Those different portrayals would contribute to shape the complexity of the notion of what is a Bad Girl. In my first chapter, I found protagonists who redefined the traditional opposition of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf, the first one embracing her roots and the power of women's tradition, the second exploring her wild sexuality, and the third blurring the borders of humanity and femininity. In the second chapter I found girls who fight inside and outside their minds against the system that bind us. However, I was not always successful; it is true that Sexton's poem criticizes the oppressive reality, but she does not offer an alternative, her images of women comply with what patriarchy expects from them, although with a subversive sarcastic tone. In the third and last chapter, while exploring the dynamics of heterosexual relationships, what I found were two women in the process of becoming Bad Girls, of leaving the victimization and dependence on

man behind. While doing my analysis, one idea was constantly present, that of the erasure of binaries in order to pave an alternative path in the theory of gender, which in order to work needs to erase the ultimate dichotomy: human and nature. Much has yet to be explored in posthuman theories, that work to erase this dichotomy in the ways we conceive the world, and there is place for deeper studies relating the posthuman with feminist revisionist fairytales.

Regarding other possibilities of future research, there are many options inside folklore studies and fairytale scholarship. The most obvious one is to explore regional folktales from non-European cultures in search of an approximate proto-feminist female-centered tradition. Carter was famous for collecting such forgotten tales with feminist messages. Close to her death she published her compilation in two volumes as *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, and *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales*. We need feminist folklorists to go through this path here in Brazil, and in other peripheral countries as well. At the same time, there are also many already collected and published folktales and fairytales that need feminist revisions; as well as many feminist revisions that need theoretical attention. There is also room for new research on mainstream revisions, as there is a recent trend on Disney to release adaptations that carry hints of a feminist agenda. Those new releases need to be analyzed, compared, and theorized about, for the sake of their intended audience; because as they are mass-consumed by children, those films and the ideology they carry will have a huge impact on the future of society.

This brings us to the importance of my research, which lies on the fact that every child, in one way or another, is exposed to some fairytale tropes that help to perpetuate patriarchal values in society; such as the imprisoned princess and her prince savior on his white horse. In order to resist against such patriarchal preaching, there is a need not only to bring awareness of these embedded values that can wither the potential of little girls and blind little boys to the fact that women are also full human beings, but also to offer possibilities of new stories to be told to those children, stories that present men and women as equal human beings. And the erasure of binaries, the embracing of feminine sexuality, the valorization of a woman-made culture, the micropolitical practices of resistance against patriarchy, the macropolitical resistance, the rejection of victimization, and the awakening of consciousness, are not only definitions of what I understand as Bad Girls but also present



alternative ways of conceiving the world that are important for a new generation to change the present reality.

Finally, we cannot forget that there is also a need for us to retell to ourselves those fairytales that we heard while we were still children, in order to try to repair the harm that having been raised in a patriarchal society did to us. That is the reason why revisionism exists: to recreate stories from the perspective of a woman in order to change women's perspectives about themselves.

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