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**METAMORPHOSIS AND TRANSITIONAL FEMALE IDENTITIES
IN ANGELA CARTER'S FAIRY TALES**

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I desire, therefore I exist.

(A. Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* 1972)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER 1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CRITICAL BACKGROUND	10
1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS	10
2. GENERIC AND TEXTUAL METAMORPHOSIS	18
2.1. THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF FAIRY TALES BETWEEN FOLKLORE AND LITERARY TRADITION	19
2.2 CIRCUMSCRIBING “POSTMODERN” NARRATIVE STRATEGIES	23
2.3 DEFINING “FANTASTIC” ELEMENTS	28
2.4 ABOUT – UNRELIABLE – NARRATIVE VOICES AND FOCALISATION	32
2.5 SOME GENERAL REMARKS ABOUT CARTER’S STYLE	35
3. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF FEMALE IDENTITY: ISSUES OF GENDER PERFORMANCES, ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS	38
3.1. GENDER POLITICS IN <i>THE BLOODY CHAMBER</i> : WHAT KIND OF FEMINIST AGENDA?	40
3.2. A CONTROVERSIAL “MORAL PORNOGRAPHER”	43
3.3 THE LIBERATING POTENTIAL OF TRANSFORMATIVE FEMALE DESIRE	49
3.4. MAJOR CRITICAL REFERENCES ON ISSUES OF GENDERED POWER RELATIONSHIPS, DESIRE, IDENTITY AND FEMALE AGENCY	52
3.5 CIRCUMSCRIBED REFERENCES TO PSYCHOANALYSIS	57
3.6. CRITICAL HINTS AT MOTHERHOOD	59
3.7. SIGHT AND SENSORY ACCOUNTS: A RED THREAD THROUGHOUT THE COLLECTION	60
4. AVAILABLE CRITICISM AND NEW INSIGHTS INTO AND PERSPECTIVES ON METAMORPHOSING BODIES	63
4.1. THE BODY: A NEW THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CARTER’S FAIRY TALES	64
4.2. MONSTROUS FEMININITIES: THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION – AND REPRESENTATION – OF THE FEMALE BODY AS MONSTROUS	71
4.3. FEMALE GROTESQUE BODIES	76
4.4. ANIMALS AND SUPERNATURAL BEINGS: UPSTREAM BODILY TRANSFORMATIONS	78
4.5. APPETITES AND (NON-) CANNIBALISTIC CONSUMPTION: DISCLOSING AND REDISTRIBUTING POWER THROUGH THE INCORPORATION AND DIGESTION OF THE OTHER	86
CHAPTER 2. METAMORPHOSING THE FAIRY TALE: RE-STYLING A GENRE	89
1. THE RE-BIRTH OF THE AUTHOR IN <i>THE BLOODY CHAMBER</i>	89
2. IN-BETWEEN COMPLICITY AND REBELLION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF CARTER’S FAIRY TALES	97
3. POSTMODERN NARRATIVE STRATEGIES: INTERTEXTUAL REFLECTIONS	108
3.1. POSTMODERN DEMYTHOLOGISING BUSINESS: THE “CONTRADICTION DOUBLENES” OF HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION	125
4. FANTASTIC HESITATIONS: METAMORPHIC LIMINAL EXPERIENCES	131
5. WHO’S SPEAKING/LOOKING? UNRELIABLE NARRATORS AND DISRUPTIVE FOCALIZATION	140

CHAPTER 3. TRANSFORMATIVE IDENTITY JOURNEYS – GENDER(ED) SUBJECTS AND RELATIONSHIPS	156
1. INTRODUCTION. GETTING READY TO EXPLORE IDENTITY JOURNEYS	156
2. WOMEN IN PROCESS: CARTER’S SEXUAL POLITICS FROM <i>THE SADEIAN WOMAN</i> TO <i>THE BLOODY CHAMBER</i>	160
2.1. A SADOMASOCHISTIC MARRIAGE-BARGAIN	166
2.2. THE COMMODIFICATION OF WOMEN AS BARGAINING OBJECTS FROM FATHERS TO HUSBANDS	170
2.3. THE LIBERATING POWER OF FEMALE UNBRIDLED DESIRE	177
3. IDENTITY JOURNEYS: TRANSITORY ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS TOWARDS RECIPROCITY	182
3.1. DECONSTRUCTING AND RE-SIGNIFYING FEMALE ARCHETYPES TROUGH SADEIAN WOMEN	183
3.2. IDENTIFYING VISIONS: CONSTRUCTING AND MASTERING IDENTITIES THROUGH GAZES AND REFLECTIONS	189
3.3. THE TRAPS OF ONE-WAY DESIRE: WHEN THE INABILITY TO CHANGE PRECLUDES RECIPROCITY	201
3.4. RE-ENCODING NEW PROCESSES OF IDENTIFICATION AND SUBJECT FORMATION: “WOLF-ALICE”	209
CHAPTER 4. REPRESENTING METAMORPHIC BODIES TO RE-SIGNIFY THE BODY	219
1. THE BODY IN – THIS – CONTEXT: A DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK	219
2. STAGING THE FEMALE BODY: THEATRICAL PERFORMATIVITY	228
2.1 BODILY PERFORMANCES: PARADOXICAL MASQUERADES	236
3. EXCEEDING BODILY BOUNDARIES: BECOMING ANIMAL	249
4. GROTESQUE INTERLUDE	257
5. MONSTROUS FEMININITY	264
5.1. “THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE”: THE PARADOXICAL DOUBLE ABJECTION OF THE BODY OF THE VAMPIRE	265
5.2 DUPLICITOUS APPETITES: A NEW HETERONORMATIVE MODEL OF INCORPORATING CONSUMPTION	275
CHAPTER 5. CHANGING PERSPECTIVE: A CORPUS STYLISTIC INVESTIGATION	287
1. INTRODUCTION	289
1.1. DEFINITIONS AND FEATURES OF CORPUS-BASED RESEARCH METHODS	290
1.2. THE DEBATE ABOUT THE OBJECTIVITY OF CORPUS LINGUISTICS	294
1.3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES	295
1.4. THE DATA	298
2. A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF “THE BLOODY CHAMBER”	300
3. A CORPUS LINGUISTIC COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF “THE COURTSHIP OF MR LYON” AND “THE TIGER’S BRIDE”	319
BIBLIOGRAPHY	331

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims at re-signifying and developing new readings of the poetics and the politics of Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories* (1979) through the key image of the metamorphosis.

Metamorphic processes can be said to inform the fairy tales of the collection both in a thematic and a stylistic perspective, to the extent that transformation itself becomes a particularly suitable interpretative kernel within the analysis of their – content as well as their style. The transformations devised by Carter address first and foremost the need to rethink human experience altogether, especially as regards – heterosexual – relationships and power distribution between the sexes. They call attention to the fact that from the second half of the Twentieth century ongoing transformation has become an essential dimension of human life, a process which characterises people's everyday lives, their identities, but above all their bodies. The body, indeed, inevitably undergoes a series of transformations through time, which are the result of biological evolution, but also of psychological and relational changes, unavoidably leaving some – readable and mappable – traces on its inscriptive surface. Transformation, however, is also the basic dimension of all the other aspects of – collective – life, whose keywords have become change, speed and technological progress, with all the consequences that this engenders in the way people device and handle their relationships, perceived needs and tastes, and therefore personal and social aspirations.

When Carter writes *The Bloody Chamber*, it is the end of the Seventies, a time when the slow but progressive empowerment of women's conditions and positions within society seems to have emphasised the old urge to keep their bodies – and the free expression of sexual desire – under control with new, subtle devices. Among the most powerful, one can count patriarchal discourses which subtly prompt women's complicity with their submission, and slow down their growing independence. The strategies of similarly devised power-knowledge arrangements consist in refashioning myths and ideals, which virtually grant identification and recognition to women, but actually are cunningly subservient to a subordinating logic, often disguised behind the impression of being a

free and/or empowering choice. Carter exploits the powerful potential of metamorphosis – as a concept, a topic, a structuring and guiding principle, and as a proposed model – in order to expose, challenge and design strategies of resistance to, and to overthrow, such patriarchal myths and discourses.

That being the case, in this work a close examination of the fairy tales collected in *The Bloody Chamber* is carried out by analysing the texts through ideas, images and narrative strategies conveying change and transformation, and is structured into three main parts. First of all, the way in which Carter plays with the generic conventions of fairy tales, and with their narrative structures and strategies is shown to be transformative, in that her re-writings perform a reconfiguration of, and disrupt readers' expectations towards, the traditional genre in terms of pedagogic content, symbolical meanings, and political consequences. Secondly, the metamorphosing female identities described in the tales are shown to elicit a critical, on occasion even controversial, reflection on sexual politics, above all on its inscription in the development of subjectivity, social relationships, empowerment and freedom. Last but not least, and strictly linked to/connected with the previous points, the metamorphoses portrayed in Carter's tales are investigated in their complex conceptualisation of the role of the body both in terms of textual and of sexual politics. Under this perspective, representations of the body are questioned in order to show how they comply with or disrupt established generic norms and conventions of fairy tales, and how this has an impact on the feminine ideal that those conventions traditionally purported to fashion and hand down.

Throughout, metamorphosis becomes the key concept through which reflections on desire, sexuality, identity, role positions, power-knowledge relations, storytelling and the materialization of the body are developed, in the same way as they are triggered by the fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber*.

Metamorphosis is considered the guiding principle for the analysis of the collection because it pervades the content and meanings of the tales, is a metaphor for alternative developments of female identity, and informs their structure and representation. As the heroines' bodies and identities experience physical, social or psychological change, metamorphic supernatural creatures come on the scene, the borders between the genres are blurred and generic narrative conventions are bent and rearranged, change itself

becomes the cornerstone of the texts. This research illustrates how Carter's tales – which display different kinds of change and embody change in their very structures and language – suggest that ongoing transformation is at once the means and the outcome for the possibility of saying something new and conveying new meanings, of standing up against oppression, of figuring new patterns for the development of female identities.

From a generic point of view, the traditional structures and purposes of fairy tales, that is representing the resolution of a conflict, teaching how to move away from that which disturbs harmony and (re-) establishing a final equilibrium which mirrors stable, desirable and normalized social norms, are replaced by Carter with the very idea of embracing and performing change. Restyling generic conventions in turn influences the experiences of the characters, that is the identity journeys they are allowed to set out on and their aftermaths, because narrativisation is what enables them to be signified, made sense of and accounted for through language. In this respect, the tales seem to suggest that only through a continuous effort of analysing, understanding, and then questioning and changing their social definitions and locations, and most importantly by devising creative narratives to account for them, can women be active masters of their destinies. The body is the site where change becomes visible, so it can be considered both the surface of inscription of the transformations portrayed on a textual level and conceptualised in terms of identity politics, and the means through which change can actually be performed. Carter's literary work turns the body into "writing", that is marks it with the signs which narrativise identity by inscribing it onto and making it readable from the body surface itself (see Brooks 1993).

Ultimately, the purpose of this work is an analysis of the different kinds of metamorphoses represented in *The Bloody Chamber*, which endeavours to expose without attempting to resolve the tensions and contradictions characterising either the individual tales or the collection as a whole. Contradictions, flux, and polysemy are praised as keywords to understand the subversive potential of Carter's fairy tales, in which change, malleability and instability of meanings and identity make their reinterpretations and re-appropriations after thirty years possible and still productive.

Given the importance and the subversive potential of Carter's peculiar and challenging use of language, the last part of this thesis is devoted to a thorough analysis of

her words. The last chapter attempts a corpus stylistic investigation of some tales of *The Bloody Chamber*, that is, it investigates the texts by applying corpus linguistic methods to literary analysis. This choice is driven and sustained by several beliefs: first of all, that it is worth venturing into such an innovative domain in order to disclose new insight into Carter's work, and to find textual evidence for some intuitive claims which are still object of contention. Secondly, Carter's queer, conspicuous style particularly suits computer assisted research, as it easily isolates oddities and atypical occurrences in the use of language, thus also possibly enabling one to make generalisations on the idiolect of the author. Third, a similar choice would also be consistent with Carter's insistence on change, on the need to constantly find new meanings to literary texts, so that they are re-signified and re-appropriated over time. Interestingly, this would also be in line with the concept of metamorphosis, which permeates, structures and gives coherence to the collection, and at the same time allows it to exceed its boundaries and to merge genres, to symbolise disruptive identity developments and to bend and reshape bodies so that they fit the inscription of subversive performances. Finally, and most remarkably, it would be a pioneering endeavour to enrich corpus stylistic methods themselves, as it would entail the combination not only of literary, but also of cultural studies and corpus linguistics. My analysis, indeed, tries to assess intuitively produced considerations and to generate new insight into political issues as well so that, consistently with the whole research project, and with the application of corpus linguistics to discourse analysis, the underlying poetics and politics of *The Bloody Chamber* are once again proved to be inextricably interrelated.

CHAPTER 1.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CRITICAL BACKGROUND

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Before presenting the details of the main articulations of the concept of metamorphosis in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, as they have been outlined above, some premises need be advanced in order to establish the framework of the analysis, as well as to give grounds for the choice of the methodological apparatus and critical references, and not least to disclose some new insights informing my critical approach to the collection.

More than thirty years have passed after the publication of *The Bloody Chamber* and a number of works have been devoted to celebrating, criticizing, analysing, contextualising and re-contextualising this astonishing and controversial collection of short stories. This thesis proposes a different approach to Carter's fairy tales, drawing as it does on the topic of metamorphosis as the polysemous paradigm for a thematic, generic and political analysis of the tales.

Carter's writings have been either praised or despised in the light of her alleged feminist agenda, of her appropriation and subversion of different generic conventions in order to expose and overthrow patriarchal control over social structures, power relations and the circulation of knowledge – or, most notably, her failure to do so, for which she has been accused of being complicit in their enforcement – of her provocative claims and her bewildering style. Even if her subversive, parodic, sometimes mocking intentions are undeniable, on no account must Carter's work be reduced to a coherent political agenda, to a supposed message she wants to communicate or to a set of meanings she wants to convey, which might be seen to inform her literary production and could therefore be used to interpret it. Rather, as this research seeks to emphasise, Carter's fairy tales are first and foremost literary texts, and as such require an analysis which accounts for their

dialogue with other literary texts belonging to the same as well as to different genres, whose goal is also that of finding out the reasons why traditionally established generic models are transformed. As to Carter's political agenda, there certainly is one, or rather there are more, which have evolved over the years, and which she discusses in her non-fictional writings. *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), for instance, is a controversial essay that was published in the same year as *The Bloody Chamber*, and that as different critics point out (Wisker 1997; Day 1998; Sage 2007; Atwood 2007) undeniably sets forth what is represented in fictional terms in the fairy tales. Other examples of non-fictional writings casting light on Carter's political stance are the article "Notes from the front Line", first published on the Journal *Gender and Writing* in 1983, and the introductions and afterwards of other fictional as well as non-fictional works (for instance, the afterwards to *Fireworks*, 1974; the introduction to the translation of Perrault's fairy tales, 1977, or the introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, 1990). "Do I situate myself politically as a writer?" (Carter, 1997: 37) is the question Carter asks to herself in "Notes from the Front Line", whose answer is unsurprisingly "Well, yes; of course" (ibid.). Interestingly she also admits to be a feminist writer, "because I'm a feminist in everything else and one cannot compartmentalise these things in one's life" (ibid.). However, trying to retrace the articulation of a coherent feminist program in her work would be useless if not forcing the point. What one can find throughout Carter's writings is a deep commitment to materialism and historicism, which for her means being aware of one's sexual and socio-cultural position and overtly exposing it as the standpoint from which one speaks. Therefore, far from being attached to a set of feminist worldviews in particular, what Carter is interested in is questioning her "reality as a woman", trying to investigate and disclose the processes through which the "social fictions that regulate our lives", first of all that of femininity are created, "by means outside [our] control". This goes hand in hand with *historicism*, which is a fundamental dimension of Carter's politics both under an individual and a collective perspective. According to Carter, indeed, individual political consciousness and attitudes are forged by one's own experiences, first and foremost by the "practice" of sexuality (ibid.:39). These attitudes, nevertheless, are produced as well as represented by and enacted in social, collective practices, which fashion "what constitutes material reality" (ibid.:38). When discussing the process though which patriarchal social

arrangements ended up stabilising and naturalising female role positions in the Western world, Carter asserts “Our flesh arrives to us out of history” (Carter, 1979a: 9), implying that women’s subject positions in specific epochs depend on the power relations which characterize those historical moments, on the tension between the normative and creative aspects of power, on the space which is left for rebellion/subversion, and thus on the agency which is accorded to the unprivileged. Her statement reveals that it is necessary to be aware of the ways in which power imbalances and their underlying sexual politics constrain and control people by normalizing and naturalizing appropriate behaviours – or conversely blame, punish and isolate disturbing ones – and at the same time suggests that change is possible, as history is made and written by people (ibid.: 3).¹

I argue that from Carter’s point of view, as it surfaces from a close reading of the fairy tales collected in *The Bloody Chamber*, the very possibility of change – which I analyse in identifying different layers of metamorphosis – lays precisely in the emphasis on the situatedness of the characters as well as of the writer: “you write from your own history [...] you have to bear it in mind when you are writing, you have to keep on defining the ground on which you’re standing, because you are in fact setting yourself up in opposition to the generality” (Haffenden 1985: 93). In other words, being aware of one’s own position within the network of relationships founded on a patriarchal, oppressive model, of the historical and material position which shaped and continues to shape one’s own existence is a precondition to be able to describe it, and subsequently to change it. Rather than imparting truths, or conveying stabilised meanings, Carter’s purpose in writing fiction is helping explain experience and “making the world comprehensible” (ibid.: 79), in order to present and represent ways to improve or radically reshape it. It follows that the fairy tales do not predicate how ideal role positions for women and performances of femininity should be, but show possible alternatives to those which are already provided by representing fictional examples of transformations and by creatively transforming already existent fictional models, i. e. genres, modes, figurations. In this sense, sexual and textual politics overlap in Carter’s tales, where the turmoil represented

¹ As is perhaps already clear, Carter’s non-fictional writings are influenced by the early works of Michel Foucault, whom she quotes at the very beginning of *The Sadeian Woman* (Carter 1979a: 3) and mentions among the critical references. For more about the influence of Foucault’s work on Carter’s, see Day 1998 and Sage 2007.

through often disturbing, rebel, or unconventional behaviours of the heroines mirrors the way themes, motives and narrative strategies belonging to different textual genres are mingled and intertwined.

My analysis regards *The Bloody Chamber* primarily as a work of art, a text whose literary qualities must on no accounts be considered subservient to a – feminist – political agenda, strong and evident as Carter’s political commitment could appear to be. That being the case, rather than identifying the flaws and contradictions emerging from the tales, incoherence and instability can be praised as resources for challenging and changing established discourses and role positions designed for women within society. As will be shortly shown, for example, the intersection between Carter’s political agenda and her literary creativity is achieved through unconventional narrative strategies, such as the use of the narrative voice in the tales.

More to the point, it is my pivotal contention that, suspended between political commitment and literary talent as it is, *The Bloody Chamber* exhibits a clear and claimed authorial voice. Carter is a controversial writer, who always refuses any labels for her work, and any association of her writings with –isms in general, whether it is feminism, post-structuralism, surrealism or psychoanalysis in favour of the assertion, first and foremost, of her literary creativity. As a matter of fact, she borrows some of these movements’ metaphors and symbols – if only to play with them and to subvert their original meanings.

Of course, Carter is aware that literary works cannot avoid referring to previous works, which are chained together in an intertextual web of references, thus her well-known statement about her writing being a matter of “putting new wine in old bottles” (Carter 1997: 37). However, this claim also paradoxically means that Carter wants to communicate something new and considers herself capable of doing so. That is to say, she is aware of the resources offered by intertextuality, but also of the fact that texts are not merely “about texts” – i.e. there must be a “first book” about which the other books are (Carter, Katsavos 1994: 14). In *The Bloody Chamber* Carter plays with fairy tale’s generic conventions, plots and narrative strategies by complying with them enough to make fairy tales recognizable as such, but at the same time she also disrupts them for political – *demythologising* – purposes. Yet, the narrative strategies she politically and

intertextually resorts to and her peculiar style, besides being the vehicle for change, are also to be interpreted as unmistakable signals of an explicit authorial voice surfacing throughout the stories, a voice which speaks from a precise historical, social and gendered perspective, just like the female protagonists-narrators of the fairy tales do.

The insistence on Carter's authorial voice is inscribed in the representation of metamorphosis on a political level: it promotes the possibility of actual changes in women's agency. These changes, Carter seems to suggest, must be grounded in the material reality of women, of which they must be aware. The deconstructionist claims of the death of the author, or of that of the subject do not seem to make sense in the case of a female writer who proclaims the need to demythologize and expose the structures of oppression and their narratives, who plays with the literary canon to expose, parody and mock its most prestigious texts. "One cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted control over" (Braidotti 2002: 82); one must first be aware and take control of her subject position in order to be able to change it. The same holds true for the writer: Carter aims at questioning the patriarchal order and at offering alternatives to it, first and foremost through her commitment to historicity and materialism. Her experience in Japan (1971), the encounter with otherness and her being other in a foreign, non-Western country, led her to a deeper understanding of "what it means to be a woman" (Carter 1982: 28), and to radicalization, which, in turn, resulted in the beginning of her speculative fiction (Dimovitz 2005: 17). In Carter's material perspective, therefore, who speaks, where and when does matter (Alterves 1994: 18), even if, of course, the literary texts will be able to speak for themselves, to be interpreted in different ways and to signify something different to readers over time and in disparate cultural contexts. In this regard, I try to establish a productive dialogue between two major critical essays about the death of the author, that is Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" (1967) and Michel Foucault's "What is an author?" (1969), Carter's fairy tales and Rosi Braidotti's (2002) recent articulations of metamorphosis in relation to - nomadic - female bodies and identities. My arguments about Carter's complex relation to authorship are aimed at contesting or developing the sporadic comments dropped and soon dismissed in some critical texts. Sage, for instance, contends that Carter chooses folk tales because they are anonymous, thus the narrator's authority "rests precisely in

disclaiming individual authority” (Sage 2007: 21). The scholar goes on to clarify that the death of the author must correspond to its “dissolution”, that is to the dismissal of the author’s individual voice and its replacement with multiple, dialogic and hybrid voices (ibid.: 21). The two options – multiple voices and individual voice of the author – are not mutually exclusive, and *The Bloody Chamber* succeeds in conveying the impression of plural, dialogic, polyphonic voices without Carter’s authorial voice being completely silenced.

Closely interrelated with this topic is the inevitable and necessary discussion of Carter’s relationship to myths. Her pronouncement “I’m in the demythologising business”, is grounded in the firm belief that “all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human experience”. Carter interprets myths as “consolatory nonsense[s]” (Carter, 1979a: 6), that is false universals where women are encouraged to find the reasons for their underprivileged position within society by identifying with mythical models, which would embody the most desirable features of femininity. According to Carter, failing to acknowledge that these supposedly universal models are in actual fact false and misleading makes women complicit in their submission, as they prefer to “dull the pain” of their condition by looking for ideal images which legitimise and to a certain extent universalise submission and voicelessness as the natural destiny for all women. Finding “emotional satisfaction” in “the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin”, in that of “the healing, reconciling mother”, or even in worshipping a “mother goddess” (ibid.) means indeed choosing the shortcut of identifying with taken for granted patriarchal discourses instead of engaging in investigating one’s own material reality in order to be able to question and to change it.

Carter’s stance on myths has been extensively dealt with from different angles. Day, and Atwood highlight Carter’s commitment to demythologization on account of the nonsensical consolatory quality of myths (Day 1998: 3-4; Atwood 2007: 134). In Moss’ view, Carter’s investment in the demythologising business is due to her antipathy towards theories, which try to explain reality and experience outside practice (Moss 2011: 197). Gamble refers to the distinction Carter makes in “Notes from the Front Line” between mythology and folklore, and interprets Carter’s rewritings of fairy tales as powerful weapons to “dismantle” and “argue with” myths “through the act of writing” (Gamble

1997: 131). Renfroe inquires Carter's attempts at demythologising the biblical figure of Eve while reframing the structure and development of the quest narrative in her fairy tales. Reference is made to the anthropological studies of Lincoln, according to which successful women's initiation rituals – and by extension, one may add, narratives – necessarily feature the identification with a heroine or goddess (Renfroe 2001: 98-99). Britzolakis interestingly links Carter's demythologising efforts with theories about gender performance, claiming that her project entails "investigating femininity' as one of 'the social fictions that regulate our life'" (Britzolakis 1997: 43).

Despite the significant amount of criticism on this topic, the investigation of Carter's engagement with the demythologising business could be enriched by adding that her attack of myths, instead of bringing about their denial altogether, paves the way for the encoding of new ones in her fairy tales: "In *The Bloody Chamber* she proceeds to provide us with consolations of another kind, and she does so through the folk tale form, which is about as close to myth as you can get. [...] to combat traditional myths about the nature of woman, she constructs other, more subversive ones" (Atwood 2007: 138). Precisely because myths are not universal, a-historical archetypes, but rather models built as reflections of historically contextualized human experience, one could claim that Carter's stories provide new myths, that is frames of reference for those women who have already committed themselves to a deeper understanding of their role positions, and are willing to turn them into something more suitable and desirable. Myths are indeed first and foremost narratives, role models and experiences translated in fictional terms. Rather than completely rejecting myths, then, Carter exploits mythical strategies of storytelling to propose new ideals, which instead of fixing desirable standards praise change and flux as empowering and freeing alternatives. Carter's sharp criticism against myths depends on the qualities of intrinsically a-historical and theoretical accounts of reality and experience they have taken on over time, which aim at providing, fixing and handing down apparently neutral role models. If the process of re-writing fairy tales in which she engages is closely investigated, however, it becomes evident that Carter does draw on mythical motives, even though the stories she tells, unlike myths, are grounded in experience and history. The strategies deployed to achieve this goal will be tackled while analysing the

disruption of generic conventions in *The Bloody Chamber*, like setting the stories in recognisable socio-historical contexts.

Besides their historical locatable origin, all the new myths offered by *The Bloody Chamber* play intertextually with the literary as well as folkloric tradition and intratextually relate with each other thanks to the omnipresent, underlying idea of metamorphosis. Walker Bynum's interesting remarks on the representation of metamorphosis and its relationships with identity in medieval times fit the analysis of fairy tales – and Carter's re-writings in particular. In her study (2001), metamorphosis is seen first of all as the narrative representation of a process which “expresses a labile world of flux and transformation encountered through story” (ibid.: 30). Furthermore, this kind of transformation “goes from one being to another”, thus the two entities that can be found before and after the transformation can be understood as “where we are in the story” (ibid.). In other words, before and after the metamorphic process no otherness is visible, because the change itself becomes manifest only while the metamorphosis is taking place. Likewise, instead of emphasising the starting point or the product of the transformation, or pointing out the achievements of the protagonists who have been able to solve a problematic situation, Carter's tales seem to associate the ongoing process of turning into something else, in whatsoever shape with the most important outcome of their adventures. In this way the new myths offered to women become examples of a – more often than not disturbing – metamorphosis of some kind. It is worth noting that metamorphosis as it is represented by Carter does not devise role models to be embraced as sources of consolation, but on the contrary it sets up problematic examples to be put into question, since exposing the mechanisms of transformation means crossing boundaries, destabilising borderlines, unveiling the fluidity and instability of the categories and frameworks through which the world is made sense of (Walker Bynum 2001: 31).

This chapter devoted to the review of literature and to outline the critical framework of the thesis is an attempt to systematise the available theoretical and critical material about *The Bloody Chamber* in relation to the three main areas of articulation of the concept of metamorphosis and the topics discussed above, even though they are often

entangled and intertwined, so that it is difficult to establish a clear-cut schematic arrangement of such references. Thereafter, new approaches are also proposed by either problematizing and/or developing already existing ones, or by suggesting new perspectives on Carter's fairy tales – such as that of using metamorphosis as a category of analysis. The transformations taking place in *The Bloody Chamber* are thus analysed by turning to a body of theoretical work which has not been deployed to analyse Carter's writings so far, and which hopefully will result in suggesting some new insights on this worthwhile collection.

2. GENERIC AND TEXTUAL METAMORPHOSIS

The multifarious concept of metamorphosis accounts for the ways in which generic conventions are played with in *The Bloody Chamber*, highlighting the twofold nature of the highly codified genre of the fairy tale as both product and tool of patriarchal discourses. As such, fairy tales encode, circulate and legitimate assumptions about disciplined identities, for they are so embedded in popular culture that they unconsciously shape people's frames of mind and behaviours. Of course, this affects both male and female individuals, and while the female protagonists of fairy tales are mostly confined in a passive and subordinate position, their male counterparts are expected to play the active part of the hero. Furthermore, the presence of fantastic elements sets the stories in the realm of magic and fantasy, so that the supposed distance of their content from what is commonly conceived of as "real" turns them into apparently innocent narratives, even if they actually are powerful means of knowledge transmission and discursive construction.

Carter's rewriting of popular fairy tales is grounded in the awareness of the historical dimension of all narratives. In other words, Carter's stories disclose the nature of all narratives, which far from being neutral accounts of – likely or fictional – events, are by contrast an outcome of the value system that created them, which, in turn, they contribute to enforce. This holds even truer for fairy tales, since they have circulated by means of oral storytelling throughout the centuries before being written down and

subsequently re-written in an endless effort of adapting their contents to the transmission of – desirable – standards of behaviour.

Carter exploits the conventional structure of fairy tales in order to make her stories recognisable as such and to establish a clear intertextual reference to this tradition, but then she revises some fundamental features of the genre, which have mainly to do with its female protagonists – such as using female first person narrators. The result is a discourse accounting for new articulations of female identity by drawing back to and at the same time deconstructing one of the oldest genres both in terms of literary tradition and in terms of educational function. The metamorphic process is made manifest precisely in the interplay between compliance with the rules and their subversion, in the combination of different versions of the same fairy tale, one more conventional and the other subversive, in the presence of unexpected characters and the use of an even more unexpected language, and in setting some tales in precise historical and geographical contexts. Being confronted with re-elaborations, contradictions, unfathomed elements, readers indeed are forced to relate Carter's versions to the traditional, known ones, and the comparison inevitably leads at least to question what was previously taken for granted.

2.1. The social function of fairy tales between folklore and literary tradition

The analytical framework for the contextualization of Carter's fairy tales in the literary and folkloric tradition of the genre draws mainly on the work of Jack Zipes (1989; 1993; 1994; 2001; 2002) and Christina Bacchilega (1997; 2001). Their research accounts indeed for the popular origin of fairy tales and their dialogue with the literary transpositions, the traditions of their re-writings up to contemporary times, the role of magic and fantastic figurations in depicting power struggles, describing the personal development of the characters and their possibility of changing their material conditions. Moreover, Bacchilega and Zipe's research is always rooted in the socio-historical conditions where fairy tales were produced, transmitted and reworked over time, and

particular attention is given to the capital importance of change in the shaping of power relations as they are represented in the stories. As Zipes points out, research on fairy tales cannot fail to acknowledge that their symbols and patterns reveal “specific forms of social behaviour and activity”. Moreover, their creative purpose and key themes concern “the depiction of changing social structures and alternative forms of behaviour” so that people can make sense of them (Zipes 2002: 169). Of course, the concept of power is central here, as the plots reveal struggles against a repressive situation guided by “emancipatory impulses” (Bacchilega 1997: 6).

It must be noted that the very importance of contextualising fairy tales in relation to both the circumstances of their production and those of their reception lies in the fact that the representation of struggles against the existing order towards independence, or the institution of a new order, do not necessarily lead to subversion. In many cases fairy tales rely on and sustain oppressive social norms, so they uphold the current structure of power relations (ibid.). Rather than subversion in itself, the “tale of magic produces wonder precisely through its seductive, concealed exploitation of the conflict between its normative function, which capitalizes on the comforts of consensus, and its subversive wander, which magnifies the powers of transformation” (ibid.: 7).

Both Zipes and Bacchilega stress those characteristics of fairy tales which are most valued by Carter – to the point that they may be defined the very reason why Carter decided to rewrite fairy tales in the first place – that is their representation of conflict and of changes in power relations. As a matter of fact, such tensions can be exploited in subversive ways to challenge dominant ideas of gender identity according to which role positions within society are assigned to the two sexes.

The standpoints of these researchers in folklore studies are suitable for embarking on an investigation of Carter’s fairy tale at least for another main reason. They belong to the group of scholars who claim that fairy tales originate in folklore. Although both of them admit that the literary versions of the tales also rely on previous literary versions, all the same they strongly believe (and their research shows) that the literary tradition is the culmination of the oral ones, with which it continues to intersect. New versions of the stories are therefore produced thanks to mutual influences of the two traditions in terms of themes and motives as well in terms of politics (Zipes 1993: 7). Angela Carter seems to

share this position, since she stresses on more than one occasion that she finds her material in folklore and popular traditions. In the afterward to her translation of Perrault's collection of fairy tales, for example, she contends that the source texts of Perrault's tales are to be found in folklore as well. According to Carter, Perrault transposed popular plots and motives into literary form, adapting them to the expectations of the readership and to their function as moral teachings at the court of the Sun-King: "though he retained the narrative form, the simplicity and directness of the folk tale, he extensively rewrote and even, on occasion, censored his sources" (Carter 2008: 76). As Zipes points out in the introduction to her translations of Perrault's fairy tales, Carter makes a similar but contrary endeavour, that is she tries to bring the stories "down to earth" by turning Perrault's morals into popular proverbs, which more often than not change the meaning the French writer wanted to convey. Furthermore, she simplifies and modernises the style and the language of the tales, so that they seem closer to the oral tradition (Carter 2008: xx). Heidman and Dutheil de la Rochère's analysis of Carter's translations (2009) shows that the linguistic and stylistic changes made by the translator establish a complex dialogue both with Perrault and with the folk tradition. In addition, they agree with Zipes in claiming that the fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber* are most likely the result of a subversive reworking of the translations, where Carter was able to introduce only minor changes due to the necessity to be close to the source text.

Besides the emphasis put on the historical dimension and popular origins of fairy tales, both Zipes and Bacchilega's critical work provides a useful guide through the study of feminist rewritings of fairy tales.² In this regard, Zipes (1989) raises some interesting questions about the role that feminist fairy tales could play in setting forth different processes in the education and socialisation of children because of the new ways in which they represent change in gender relationships. Moreover, these rewritings invariably deal with issues of "power, violence, alienation, social conditions, child-rearing and sex roles", to such an extent that they expose the relation between the aesthetic components of the genre and its historical function (ibid.: 2). A similar social function of fairy tales is acknowledged by Bacchilega: "Fairy tales [...] are produced and consumed to accomplish a

² Both authors extensively studied the works of Angela Carter, in particular *The Bloody Chamber*, and considered it as part of broader analyses of feminist fairy tales (Bacchilega 1997; Zipes 1989, 1993, 2001).

variety of social functions in multiple contexts and in more or less explicit ideological ways” (Bacchilega 1997: 3), and by several other critics. Cronan Rose, for example, refers to Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis of the fairy tale as a genre which has the privilege of standing symbolically for culture by synthesizing its main processes of socialization and describing its “essential paradigm” (Cronan Rose 1983: 209). The function of feminist rewritings is equally located in changing the existing order, in particular in accounting for a different path for female development. Even if some of her insights are undeniably interesting, such as pointing out that accepting female sexuality is a crucial step towards rearticulating female development, the conclusions Cronan Rose draws in her essay about how such a change is represented by Carter are nonetheless limited. Since she focuses her analysis mainly on “The Bloody Chamber”, and on the two versions of “Beauty and the Beast”, she asserts that female development, besides on the acceptance of sexuality, should “be grounded in the mother-daughter matrix” (ibid.: 227). Mother-daughter relationships, however, are a very problematic issue in Carter’s fairy tales, to the extent that the writer has often been criticized precisely for having denied them pre-eminence, or at least the potential for freeing female sexuality and subjectivity.³

Carter’s – like other feminist – rewritings of fairy tales, play with generic conventions of popular literary forms as a political practice, in order to reveal how they impinge on the ideology they promote. As Cranny-Francis remarks, “genres encode ideological information [...they] work by convention and those conventions are social constructs” (Cranny-Francis 1990: 17). Moreover, feminist writers playing with popular genres must be wary of the ways in which they subvert readers’ expectations, as conventions “operate by social assent”, change as society does but always risk being re-appropriated by the very discourses they seek to criticize (ibid.). Even more important, what feminist writers often do is play with generic conventions in order to make dominant discourses visible (ibid.: 18). This is one of the accomplishments of Carter’s fairy tales, which do not simply alter prevailing generic features of the fairy tale, but introduce elements of other genres, such as those of the gothic, mystery and even horror novels and short stories. One of the grounding issues of this research is thus scrutinising

³ The inscription of *The Bloody Chamber* in a broader tradition of feminist re-writings of fairy tales is developed in the section devoted to metamorphosis and gender. In this section only the aspects pertaining to style and generic conventions are dealt with.

how the metamorphoses of the generic conventions in *The Bloody Chamber* question the very process through which genres come to narrativise dynamics of socialization and to embody and sustain ideologies and normalized role positions and expectations.

2.2 Circumscribing “Postmodern” narrative strategies

Carter’s fairy tales are commonly referred to as “postmodern”, often without specifying what exactly the term means in relation to the analysis. All the most prominent theories of postmodernism agree that the definition of the notion is slippery, difficult to grasp, multi-layered, entangled. As a paradoxical result of its complexity, “postmodernism” has often been used as a generic, all-inclusive label, designating unspecified contemporary narrative strategies which do not fit into traditional generic and stylistic designations.

Due to the underlying potential of the notion of postmodernism in analysing Carter’s narrative strategies, this section sets out to clarify the meanings and scope of the concept, which are endorsed because of their relevance to this research. As the interesting debate put forward by Wilson indicates (1990), “postmodernism” has commonly been related either to a period, or to an “aesthetic genre or style” (ibid.: 113). The theoretical works of Lyotard and Baudrillard belong to the first instance, describing as they do “the state of culture” in the light of the technological, scientific, artistic, literary changes taking place since the end of the nineteenth century (ibid.: 112). They predicate the end of master narratives, replaced by “many small” ones, where language is played with in order to produce simulations and displacements of reality and to emphasise that reality itself is nothing more than a simulacrum. Zipes’ analysis of postmodern fairy tales seems to fall into this category, as his sharp and stimulating considerations appear to give the designation for granted, without problematizing or attempting to define it. My contention is that they simply locate *The Bloody Chamber* in a supposed “postmodern epoch”, thus failing to recognize that one of the most troubling features of postmodernism is its boundary-crossing, where reigns a fundamental contradiction. Past and present are indeed always present at once, engaged in a productive dialogue with

each other, the past is challenged, but continuities with it are stressed, while at the same time the *here and now* is paradoxically stressed as the location of the subject, which situates it historically and culturally, thus making its politics visible. As Hutcheon puts it: “The postmodern partakes a logic of ‘both/and’, not one of ‘either/or’” (Hutcheon 1988: 47). The views considering postmodernism as a period are therefore limited in that they lack the necessary flexibility, which would allow to account for it as “the nexus of boundaries that traverse each other” (ibid.: 110). In other words, postmodernism should rather be understood as the locus of instability itself, as predicating the “decay of boundaries”. As a consequence, according to Wilson, the second and better way of attempting a definition of postmodernism would rather be by considering it as an “aesthetic genre or style”, characterized by playful deconstructionism of language and generic conventions and self-reflexivity, a cultural phenomenon which nonetheless is not consistent with “any precise model of culture in mind” (Wilson 1990:114).

Hassan and Hutcheon are perhaps the best examples of this second understanding of postmodernism, and their work is thus taken as the most suitable to a critical approach to Carter’s fairy tales. Hassan’s work is drawn on for a definition of postmodernism, which comprises but is not limited to the notion of “aesthetic genre or style”.⁴ Postmodernism is rather to be understood more broadly as “an artistic, philosophical, and social phenomenon [which] veers towards open, playful, optative, provisional, disjunctive, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of ironies and fragments, a “white ideology” of absences and fractures, a desire of diffractions, an invocation of complex, articulate silences” (Hassan 1993: 283). Interestingly, this definition accounts for postmodernism as “a theory of change itself”, and as a social phenomenon besides an artistic one (ibid.: 280) – even though, as Hassan remarks, the very need to name the complex “indeterminance”⁵ of postmodernism resides in the academic anxiety to circumscribe “the irrational genius of language” (ibid.: 274).

⁴ As will be shortly discussed, indeed, defining postmodernism merely in aesthetic terms could lead to misunderstandings in analysing feminist texts, as the label of “postmodern” is at times attached to writers when pointing out that aesthetics overcomes politics in their texts (See Clarke in Altevers 1994: 18).

⁵ Hassan’s neologism seeks to account for “two central, constitutive tendencies in postmodernism: one of indeterminacy, the other of immanence”, which are neither linked by a dialectical relation nor leading to a synthesis (Hassan 1993: 281).

Hutcheon's insights into postmodernism (1988; 1989) are also extensively referred to while carrying out the analysis of *The Bloody Chamber*. Accordingly, the tales are addressed as postmodern texts because of the importance given to historicity and materialism, their focus on difference, on the multiplicity and the instability of change, their parodic quality and displacement of margins and edges, and not least their political engagement. Despite Carter's stories rarely presenting actual historical events – they rather hint at recognisable historical periods – some of them are investigated as “historiographic metafiction” (Hutcheon 1988), since in order to be considered “historical”, events do not need to be written in history books (Suleiman 2007: 119). This standpoint enables one to add one more postmodern trait to Carter's tales, such as their formal hyperselfconscious mode of writing and their thematic reflection on history as the relation between social past, present and envisaged future, which give them a “double orientation – towards other texts and towards the world” (ibid.: 120).⁶

⁶ Addressing Carter's work as “postmodern” does not entail, as should be clear from the meaning(s) of the term endorsed in this thesis and outlined above, that her writings are set in contrast with “modernism”. On the contrary, Carter herself would be against a sharp and oppositional separation between the two movements, both in terms of chronological and ideological development. In other words, Carter does not

desire, like [...] the Angry Young Men before her, modernism's annihilation; rather, she seeks to tear down the artificial ‘great divide’ between modernism and popular culture. By freely mixing random elements of high and low cultures with an ostensibly promiscuous but deliberate abandon, Carter challenges Huysen's supposition that ‘strategic moves tending to destabilize the high/low opposition from within...have never had any lasting effects’ (7). [...] The challenge for Carter was to set modernism on its ear by collapsing the dichotomies on which it was theoretically constructed without necessarily destroying it. One of her great if unheralded accomplishments was to help bring modernism to its logical conclusion. (Smith 1996: 359-360)

Despite Carter's (and her contemporary's) reluctance to acknowledge it, their work bears the traces of the modernists' influence. Of course, the relations between the production of the artists belonging to Carter's generation and that of their modernist predecessors are problematic and tangled to say the least, and their overt rejection of any links with the past may be the result of the “anxiety of influence” described by Harold Bloom (see Smith 2006: 336). Smith well summarises the reasons for such a tension between anxiety of influence and inspiration on the part of Carter and her contemporaries when it comes to acknowledging their debts towards modernist writers:

For Carter and her contemporaries, the moderns stood as monuments to a world long since dead, existing in a lost and mostly irrelevant world on the other side of the historical dichotomy forged by the Second World War. At the same time, the moderns' rejection of Victorian mores and conventions influenced, no matter how anxiously or unconsciously, the cultural movements that sounded the death knell of Victorianism in the 1960s. (ibid.)

In particular, the most evident reference to modernism in Carter (which is detectable also in her fairy tales) is the visual element, that is the fascination with cinema, specifically the French and European avant-gardes (the most telling example being Godard – ibid.: 334-335. For a thorough collection of Carter's writings about cinema see Carter 1997: 350-400). In a review devoted to Godard's work (1983) she praised the artist

Redefining postmodernism in aesthetic and generic terms⁷ and highlighting among its distinctive features its orientation towards other texts together with its relations to social phenomena, then, enables one to introduce another complex and controversial feature of Carter's excessive and playful style; intertextuality. The body of criticism regarding intertextual games and references in *The Bloody Chamber* is heterogeneous and almost all-embracing. It ranges from the efforts made by those dealing with folklore studies, such as Zipes and Bacchilega, to trace the versions which inspired Carter's rewritings both in the folk and in the literary tradition, to references to other generic traditions, such as the gothic and horror novels and tales (Armitt 1997; Wisker 1997; Moss 2001), and even to pornography (Wisker 1997), to those who analyse the intratextual play of the variations of the same story in the collection itself (Armitt 1997; Atwood 2007; Bacchilega 1997). Interestingly, Armitt combines the last two strands in pointing out that "the stories comprising *The Bloody Chamber* are [...] (inter)textual metamorphoses of both the fairy-tale and each other" (Armitt 1997: 89) while also claiming that some of them⁸ should be considered gothic tales rather than tales of magic. Britzolakis sees Carter's "Voracious and often dizzying" use of intertextuality as a reaction and a product of the institutionalization of Modernism in the academic domain in the 1960s (Britzolakis 1997: 50). The limits of this contention, grounded as it is in Carter's

for having grasped the core features of her generation and the divide which separated it from the previous one: "[we were] Not, as we'd been told, the children of F. R. Leavis and the Welfare State, but, in Godard's famous definition, children 'of Marx and Coca-Cola'. And more. Children of Hitchcock, Dostoevsky, Brecht - and of pulp fiction, phenomenology and the class struggle. Heady stuff, that changes you" (Carter 1997: 380). More specifically, Carter was subject to the same - albeit contradictory and multifaceted - fascination for cinema which characterised the work of Woolf, Stein, Eliot, Pound and the other "high modernists" (see McCabe 2005). Interestingly, this feature of her narrative and stylistic choices is strictly interconnected with the omnipresence of metamorphosis; as Mulvey remarks: "Transformation and metamorphoses recur so frequently in Angela Carter's writing that her books seem to be pervaded by this magic cinematic attribute even when the cinema itself is not present on the page" (Mulvey 2007: 241). Besides, if one agrees with Marina Warner's claim that "film is essentially an oral medium and shares many characteristics of traditional storytelling" (Warner in Mulvey 2007: 251), Carter's fascination with the cinema and the cinematic elements she scattered in her writings would be consistent with her revolutionary project of re-signifying storytelling as the privileged site of - and means for - identification, challenge, deconstruction and re-construction of discursive formations and ideologies, and not least reflection on, play with and innovation of language.

⁷ A similar standpoint is a conscious methodological choice. It could be easily argued against, like Altevors does, claiming that it makes no sense to identify Carter's "primary allegiance [...] to a postmodern aesthetics", as poststructuralist ideas of intertextuality have shown that there is no distinction between literary and ordinary discourses, thus the categories of "aesthetics" itself is void. In this perspective postmodern aesthetics would be in fact a "contradiction in terms" (Altevors 1994: 18).

⁸ She refers specifically to "The Bloody Chamber", "The Lady of the House of Love" and "The Company of Wolves" (Armitt 1997: 97).

celebration of progress and technologies as potential sources of liberation from the slavery of reproduction, are the implicit consequence of considering intertextuality among the narrative strategies of an alleged postmodern period, or worse, as the development of certain modern, “Decadent or proto-Decadent style[s]”, such as those of Poe, Baudelaire or Huysmans (ibid.). Crunelle-Vanrigh links the intertextual character of Carter’s tales to the *hypertextual* quality of all narrations, which inevitably originate in plagiarism, by referring to the insights of Genette, Giraudoux and Kristeva (Crunelle-Vanrigh 2001: 129). These considerations are particularly remarkable as they draw attention to a supposed celebration of a “never-ending metamorphosis” in Carter’s tales without reducing their disrupting and creative potential to a constant, thus pointless, process of deferral of meanings. On the contrary, in spite of their inevitable reference to previous texts, Carter’s intertextual games would rupture “the endless and preferably exact repetition of the same story” on which the models fixed in the literary *märchen* depend (ibid.:134).

This thesis dwells on intertextuality to investigate two main areas of interest, both of which highlight its subservience to representing and conveying ideas of transformation. First of all, it is considered as a constitutive feature of the fairy tale itself, as a genre whose inherent “multiple versions and inversions” (Sage 2001: 69) represent social change as well as contribute to social transformation. If different versions produced in different socio-historical contexts are compared, indeed, the provisional character of the discourses they enforce or contest is stressed. In addition, as Roemer remarks by referring to the literary *märchen*, intertextual references point to the inherent liminal dimension of the tales, which in turn brings the reading experience to a similar liminal position. As a matter of fact, literary fairy tales expose the reader to new information added by the authors – which voices their social and personal mores – and at the same time they recall the information carried by well-known traditional versions. As a result, different sets of values are juxtaposed in the mind of the reader, and transitions and transformations become evident (Renfroe 2001: 95).

The second aspect of intertextuality that is investigated here makes the former more specific, in that it scrutinises the effects of intertextual references on the representation of historicity and cultural contexts in some of Carter’s tales. Kaiser’s enlightening insight shows how the use of intertextuality in *The Bloody Chamber* “moves the tales from the

mythic timelessness of the fairy tale to specific cultural moments” (Kaiser 1994: 30). As a consequence, they show different arrangements of social and sexual relations and conventions in context, so that the intertextual web of references thickens – and signifies – ever more. Meaningfully enough, intertextuality also resurfaces as a pivotal structure and narrative device in the corpus-based analysis of some of the stories, which is carried out in the last chapter of the thesis.

2.3 Defining “fantastic” elements

The above discussion referred more than once to Carter’s tales displaying fantastic elements or figurations. It is now necessary to give reasons for the use of such a term, since the main critical studies on the topic tend to set the fantastic in opposition to fairy tale, implying that the latter belongs to another mode – i.e. the *marvellous*. That is to say, the fantastic and fairy tale are deemed to share some features, but to basically rely on different narrative strategies and pursue different purposes (both in political and in aesthetic/literary terms).

Turning mainly to the definitions given by two of the most well-known critical texts about the fantastic (Todorov 1975; Jackson 1981), Carter’s tales are shown to engage in a problematic dialogue with it, which once more locates the stories in a liminal position – i.e. the place of instability and controversy – and results in stressing once more the importance of change as a structural as well as thematic principle throughout *The Bloody Chamber*.

Todorov analyses the fantastic in structural terms as a genre based on the hesitation of the reader/protagonist who confronts an uncanny⁹ event. The reaction may lead to two opposite conclusions: the uncanny event is real (that is, the supernatural is acknowledged as part of reality) or it is dismissed either as the fruit of the

⁹ It could be useful to make a distinction between the way the word “uncanny” is used by Todorov and the meanings it takes on in Jackson’s work. The latter, indeed, draws on – and amends – the complex, Freudian notion of *Unheimlich*, thus projecting the word into the realm of psychoanalysis. Todorov’s “uncanny”, instead, is the translation of the French word *étrange*, and simply means: “strange or mysterious; difficult or impossible to explain” (Cambridge English Dictionary Online 2013).

readers/protagonists' imagination or of their psychological instability. Moreover, the fantastic event must not be interpreted either in poetic or in allegorical terms, but the feeling of suspension on the part of the reader/protagonist must remain unresolved. Finally, in his attempt to build up an approach to the fantastic which accounts for the analysis of the genre from "within", Todorov identifies verbal, syntactical and semantic properties of the fantastic (Todorov 1975: 157). According to his classification, fairy tales (in particular those of Charles Perrault, which he quotes as examples) do not belong to the fantastic, but fall under the category of the "pure marvellous", where supernatural facts and elements do not provoke any reactions in the implicit readers/characters, who occupy a passive position in that they do not question but simply assimilate and take for granted the narrated events (ibid.: 52). As Todorov remarks, the fairy tale is "the first, and also the stablest, form of narrative" (ibid.: 163). An interesting distinction pointed out in the conclusion of *The Fantastic* is that between supernatural elements and the fantastic. The differences between the two concepts are exemplified by resorting to "elementary narratives", which simply describe a situation of equilibrium or disequilibrium or the process of transition from the former to the latter. Here the supernatural intervenes only to disrupt or transgress the balance, or conversely to help the protagonist re-establish a more desirable one. In both cases supernatural events have a "social function": they break the law and/or show the process through which a new one is established, through transgression (ibid.: 164). The fantastic, instead, is the reaction of the implicit reader/character to those supernatural events. In representing the hesitation of the reader/character who confronts the supernatural event (careless of its resolution), fantastic hesitation questions what is conceived of as real or natural as opposed to what is considered unreal or unnatural (ibid.: 166).

Jackson slightly modifies Todorov's insights by defining the fantastic a "mode" rather than a "genre" (Jackson 1981: 32), and by emphasising its historical dimension overlooked by Todorov, whose structural analysis of the texts "from within" develops a "theoretical rather than historical definition of the genre" (ibid.: 26-27). According to Jackson, Todorov fails to account for the "social and political implications of literary forms", as his analysis focuses entirely on the "poetics" of the texts instead of considering also their "politics" (ibid.: 6). In trying to explain the political function of the fantastic,

Jackson expands Todorov's considerations by referring to psychoanalysis and claiming that the unconscious and desire play a fundamental role. The unconscious, indeed, is the place where social structures and norms are "reproduced and sustained" (ibid.). Whereas Todorov dismisses psychoanalysis by claiming that it has replaced the fantastic and its functions (Todorov 1975: 160), Jackson relates the fantastic to the uncanny (or, rather, to the Freudian notion of *Das Unheimlich*), thus opening up new core dimensions of the hesitation which characterises it. Fantastic literature thus stands for the impossibility of giving expression to the unconscious struggles between desire and lack, it displays the flaws and limits of a language which is unable to spell out the uncanny, understood as the "objectification of the subject's anxieties, read into shapes external to himself" (Jackson 1981: 67). The feelings of estrangement and hesitation experienced by the reader/character correspond to the void left by a language which needs to turn to supernatural elements and situations in order to try to explain what is otherwise impossible to represent, because it does not belong to the realm of "reality" in its politically naturalized versions.

Day (1998) reads Carter's literary production in general (but his discussion could be as well refereed to the particular instance of *The Bloody Chamber*) against both Todorov's and Jackson's interpretations of the fantastic. He concludes that Carter's writings "do not satisfy Todorov's criteria" because on no account can the supernatural explain anything in her texts (ibid.: 6), whereas Jackson's do only in part. According to Day, Jackson's account of fantastic literature, which deal with social and political issues, suits Carter's use of fantastic figurations to explore "aspects of sexuality that are not allowed for in dominant patriarchal ideology". Jackson's theory, however, does not detail the connections between political disruption and political agency, therefore is unfit for the analysis of Carter's work, which displays a "positive and highly directed feminism" (ibid.: 7). Day's arguments are limited and flawed with reference to both versions of the fantastic, since they disregard (as Jackson herself does to some extent) the social and political subversion implicit in Todorov's analysis of supernatural elements (which are different from, but at the same time are a constitutive part of the fantastic). Furthermore, Day's contention that Jackson's idea of the fantastic is politically negative rests on the assumption that her text does not establish a clear connection "between the formal

textual features of fantastic literature and actual political practice” (ibid.), that is Jackson’s claims describe the subversive nature of the fantastic without giving examples of its performance. This does not mean, however, that such performance cannot be inferred through the critical analysis of fantastic literature’s instances, which is exactly what emerges from a close reading of the fairy tales collected in *The Bloody Chamber* either in terms of content and plots and in terms of style and narrative strategies, as will be shortly shown.

Another mention of the fantastic in relation to Carter’s fairy tales can be found in Wisker, who devotes her essay to the analysis of horror elements in Carter’s body of work (Wisker 1997). Here only Jackson’s notion is taken into account, and fantastic elements (in particular the horrific ones, and the way in which Carter uses them) are praised in that they undermine the “presumed stability of the real world”, expressing a kind of desire “that is elsewhere disavowed in culture” (ibid.: 130).

It is my contention that Todorov and Jackson’s texts lay the basis for a productive investigation about the possibility of establishing an approach to the fantastic which would be able to account both for its literary qualities and its political significance. For this very reason they are suitable to undertake a study of fantastic figurations in Carter’s fairy tales, playing as they do in-between literary creativity and political purposes by means of the representation of metamorphosis and the metamorphosis of literary generic conventions. In *The Bloody Chamber*, indeed, supernatural elements perform what Todorov calls a “social function”, but in some cases the way they are dealt with is fantastic because they provoke an unresolved hesitation either in the implicit reader or in the characters, thus also putting the status of reality into question. Two main reasons support this hypothesis: firstly, some tales of *The Bloody Chamber* borrow gothic and horror elements, such as plots and characters (for instance, “The Lady of the House of Love” and “Wolf-Alice”) so that, as has already been pointed out, they are closer to this kind of narratives than to fairy tales. Most notably, this very difficulty in telling where the gothic/horror tale ends and the fairy tale begins triggers the type of hesitation typical of the fantastic. Secondly, Carter’s fairy tales never make use of the marvellous in its traditional fashion, as there are no magic helpers, fairy godmothers or evil queen/witches. Magic has significantly to do only with transformation, as some of the protagonists are

supernatural creatures belonging to the gothic and horror tradition – thus people turned into monstrous beings dwelling in the borders between life and death, human and inhuman – or magic transformations take place without the intervention of a supernatural helper – such as Red Riding Hood turning into a wolf or the Beast licking away Beauty’s skin in order to transform her in a Tiger. In addition, Carter’s tales meet the conditions laid out by Jackson, such as making “explicit the problem of establishing ‘reality’ and ‘meaning’ through a literary text” (Jackson 1981: 36). Even more importantly, the metamorphoses which take place in *The Bloody Chamber*, like the fantastic, take metaphorical constructions literally and metonymically transform characters, roles and situations in “a permanent flux of instability” (ibid.: 42). As should be evident from these last considerations, discourses about the fantastic intermingle with issues of genre and narrative strategies as well as with questions related to the representation of gender identity and, even more, with that of the female excessive, grotesque and monstrous body.

2.4 About – unreliable – narrative voices and focalisation

The last two sets of issues belonging to the analysis of the metamorphosis in generic terms, likewise, create a bridge with considerations about the other two main areas of interest – namely metamorphosis of genre and of the body.

Narrative voice is one of the most interesting, creative and problematic aspects of Carter’s tales. This topic can be tackled from a number of perspectives: the variations on the generic conventions of the fairy tale and the mode of the fantastic, the political consequences of a storytelling which translates the identity journeys and experiences of the female protagonists into fictional account, a reflection on postmodern self- and hyper-reflexivity on the part of the narrator, of the characters and/or of the implicit readers. All these issues are strictly connected with the process of metamorphosing traditional textual conventions and expected narrative strategies. Questioning the means and voices through which the stories are told leads indeed to scrutinising their – explicit and latent – content

as well, in particular it unveils the mechanisms through which their meanings have been stabilised and naturalised over time. Together with the introduction of ambiguous fantastic elements, which are located on the borderline between the expected marvellous of the fairy tale and the fantastic of the gothic and horror genres, the unconventional use of narrative voices belongs to the already mentioned tension between literary creativity and politics in Carter's tales. The way in which Carter plays with narrators and focalisation in order to give back to female protagonists the possibility of accounting for an alternative and autonomous representation of identity is dealt with in the following section devoted to questions of metamorphosis and gender identity. Carter's political agenda is thus examined in order to find out if unconventional re-arrangements of generic conventions succeed in portraying examples of female agency, and to assess the extent to which particular strategies of storytelling can introduce new possibilities of voicing silenced subversive and/or marginal experiences.

The analysis of Carter's narrative strategies reveals parallelisms as well as contrasts with the fairy tale tradition. The most obvious disruption is the frequent use of the first person narrator as opposed to the traditional omniscient third person of the fairy tale, which reaches a higher degree of complexity when Carter rewrites two different versions of the same story, one told in the traditional fashion and the other in the first person (see, for instance, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" versus "The Tiger's Bride").¹⁰ Another troubling move away from fairy tales' basic features is the psychological complexity of some characters, which clashes with the usual lack of any specific connotation defining the traits and roles of types within the story.

Renfroe, whose study is devoted to the analysis of rites of passage and liminal experiences in the plot of "The Bloody Chamber", refers to the retrospective accounts the heroine gives of her experience (Renfroe 2001: 96). Implicit in her claims are two significant facets of Carter's narrative strategies, namely the use of a first person narrator and, even more important, the fact that this narrator gives an account of her experience after the events have taken place. This dimension opens up interesting reflections about focalization, as the woman who tells the story talks about the girl she was from a new

¹⁰ Of course, the implications of rewriting different versions of the same stories by deploying different narrative strategies are manifold, and will be therefore dealt with in depth throughout the thesis.

perspective. Bacchilega comments on this kind of retrospective first-person account, and discloses the implications of revisiting and scrutinizing the past, together with analysing a past “victimizing experience from varying distance” (Bacchilega 1997: 121).

One last pivotal hallmark of Carter’s play with narrative voices is mentioned by Armitt in the critical study of “The Company of Wolves”, where the shift in narrative voice is pointed out and linked to the protagonist’s ability to face what was previously described in the third person as dangerous in a cautionary tone (i.e. entering the enclosure of the forest) (Armitt 1997: 94-95).

My examination of the implications of destabilizing conventional narrative strategies turns primarily to the critical work of Mieke Bal (2006; 2009), already extensively deployed by Bacchilega in her study on postmodern fairy tales (1997). Bal’s insights draw on Genette’s, and criticise, develop and reframe his analytical categories and approaches (Bal 2006) first and foremost by making an internal distinction in Genette’s notion of “point of view” as composed by both an “object of the gaze” (corresponding to external focalization) and a “subject of the gaze” (corresponding to internal focalization). More specifically, Bal’s redefinition of “focalization” is deployed here in order to account for the gaze, i.e. the vision, in Carter’s fairy tales. Determining the subject of the gaze and the focalizer in the stories, and even more importantly, the change in perspective taking place there – regardless of the narrator – helps assess to what extent the female protagonists are actually freed from patriarchal established frameworks and naturalised role positions. In other words, a close observation of how Carter plays with switches in focalization allows to one to ascertain to what extent the transformation of traditional generic dictates succeeds in questioning the authority of such laws and the process through which they were naturalised. As Bal points out, generic narratives are characterized by a system of basic rules “immanent in each individual narrative”. Therefore, “if a given narrative is different from those similar to it, the difference will necessarily lie in its compliance with the rules of the genre. Otherwise, it is not a narrative” (ibid.: 34). Of course, this goes hand in hand with the educational function that fairy tales have come to perform, hence Carter’s narrative strategies are to be related to the folkloric tradition as well as to the literary one, bearing in mind that every oral and

written version produced after the first instances of literary adaptation of popular motives encapsulates and opens a dialogue with both traditions.

2.5 Some general remarks about Carter's style

The last issue to be taken into account with relation to the metamorphosis of generic conventions in Carter's fairy tales is deeply interconnected with intertextuality and postmodern narrative strategies, the shifts in and troublesome uses of narrative voices and focalization, and last but not least with representations of the female body. Although a number of critics comment on Carter's style, defining it ironic, grotesque, baroque, or in terms of parodic pastiche, their considerations are more often than not vague to say the least. In general, a link is established between Carter's style and her feminist commitment in positive as well as negative ways, so that her excessive stylistic choices are invariably interpreted either as vehicles of subversion, or deemed to sustain patriarchal discourses. Carter's style has only rarely been described as the product of mere literary creativity, or as Carter's intention of creating her own, personal voice. Crunelle-Vanrigh, for instance, asserts that Carter's words are "very much her own" despite the innumerable intertextual references and imitations. In addition, she identifies "textual intrusion", meaning the texts' comments "on their own narrative procedures", as what makes readers aware of their fictional status (Crunelle-Vanrigh 2001: 130-131) but does not discuss the topic further. As the contention about Carter's words being recognisable as her own suggests, however, her stylistic choices could as well be regarded as a sort of signature, leaving an imprint of Carter's authorial creativity, that she is aware must at the same time be dismissed and undermined in favour of the appropriation of the texts by the readers. Here is where Carter's mockery and playfulness lie: in the tension between her undeniable authorial presence - whose discernibility resides in a specific use of language - and her eagerness to give it up so that her texts can be appropriated and re-signified by different readerships.

The best example of an explicit connection between style and subversive purposes other than mocking or provocative playfulness is drawn by the revealing study on Carter's novels carried out by Anna Kerchy. Interestingly, here the subversion of generic forms and narratives is tied to the representation of the body, to the extent that Carter is deemed to write from a "corporeographic point of view", which produces "body texts" (Kerchy 2008). Even though Kerchy's analysis is mainly focused on *The Passion of New Eve*, *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, similar conclusions can be reached by applying the same analytical framework to the stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, as the collection undeniably marks a key step in and influences her subsequent production. The label "corporeographic metafiction", indeed, merges Hutcheon's notion of "historiographic metafiction" with the grotesque body and aims at analysing Carter's narratives in terms of instability, change and interrelatedness of "generic properties", narrative strategies, sexed identities and representations of "ideologically prescribed" bodies, and therefore fits the analysis of metamorphosis of and through Carter's disruption of fairy tales' generic forms and of the fantastic mode.

A pervasive irony is the feature of Carter's style on which almost all the critics agree, even if in some instances it is considered in negative terms as a device which is successfully deployed to blur the boundaries without nevertheless being able to "significantly attack deep-rooted ways of thinking and feeling" (Lewallen 1988: 157). Gamble acknowledges as well the risks of such an omnipresent ironic atmosphere, which has been accused of luring allegations of "callousness and collusion by those [...] who either miss the irony, or see it as an inappropriate response to the subject matter" (Gamble 1997: 100).¹¹ As a matter of fact, some critics point out that Carter's sharp irony and, in general, her extravagant style could divert attention from, or lessen the subversive potential of, the content. Clark, Lewallen and Duncker complain that her "excessive", "lavish", "glossy" style can be tricky, or worse result in sustaining instead of undermining what is purported to be criticised (Bacchilega 1997: 51). As Bacchilega aptly remarks, however, Carter's "transformative strategies" are to be thought of in terms of "magic re-clothing" of fairy tales, whose purpose is to show how the mechanisms of oppression

¹¹ Here Gamble is explicitly referring to Dworkin and Kappeler, two of the most notorious detractors of Carter's work.

gradually put down roots by narrativising and naturalising uneven and repressive role positions, which served to perpetuate official social discourses. In order to overthrow deeply rooted discourses such as those upheld by traditional fairy tales, it is necessary to acknowledge and confront the patriarchal, stylized configurations of womanhood they promote, before being able to reject and replace them (ibid.: 52). Thus Carter's glossy style, an unusual and unique blend of baroque language, gothic, grotesque, decadent elements put together by sharp irony or even ruthless sarcasm, polemically confronts the conventions of fairy tales, and in betraying the reader's expectations convey a feeling, or even provide evidence of, change.

Another interesting approach linking Carter's style to her feminist commitment is Wisker's, which interestingly refers to the oxymoron as a subversive rhetorical trope throughout *The Bloody Chamber*. According to her, coupling opposites is Carter's way to refuse to privilege exclusive values or expressions of identity as well as speculate about storytelling itself by merging "documentary and historical realism with speculative, magical and fantastic narrative" (Wisker 1997: 125).

To my knowledge, Britzolakis is the first who engages in trying to negotiate the tensions between Carter's literary style and her political agenda. When one tries to frame Carter's work within both postmodern aesthetics and feminism, indeed, a problematic tension between the two surfaces, as the former "privileges style over substance", whereas the latter is in fact very concerned with substance. Britzolakis locates the possibility to solve the conflict - thus to turn to postmodern stylistic devices without renouncing to political commitment - by setting aside poststructuralist approaches in favour of reading Carter's texts in terms of theatricality and the way they stage femininity as spectacle (Britzolakis 1997: 44).

In sum, as these arguments suggest, the outcome of Carter's extravagant and hyperbolic stylistic choices is at least twofold. Although they are undoubtedly expression of her literary creativity and of an attempt to distinguish her authorial voice, far from setting forth Carter's narcissistic allegiance to postmodern aesthetics, they deliberately expose the fictional character of her fairy tales, and in doing so, disclose the likewise fictional nature of previous authoritative versions and of the value systems they handed down.

3. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF FEMALE IDENTITY: ISSUES OF GENDER PERFORMANCES, ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

On a second level, the idea of transformation is linked to the metamorphosis of female identity, as Carter's tales unveil traditional power and gender relations in order to subvert them by endowing female protagonists with disruptive strategies of storytelling. The new language thus encoded is able to give voice to a potentially active female subject, who can speak, look and act, instead of being the object of the male gaze or of male desire.

The centrality of sexuality in shaping and conditioning the development of female identity, the way women perceive reality and their role positions and relationships within society is a constant preoccupation throughout Carter's non-fictional writings. In her essays, reviews and interviews, indeed, she usually tackles discourses of sexuality, always drawing on personal experience and on the observation of what she considers material reality. Significantly, these reflections invariably also become precious sources for her fiction, where they are manipulated and given narrative contours. So, for example, the publication of the collection of self-reflexive short stories *Fireworks* (1974) is the culmination of Carter's Japanese experience, and is preceded by several non-fictional pieces written during her stay in Japan (1969-1971), later collected in *Nothing Sacred. Selected Writings* (1982), where she declares "In Japan, I learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalised" (Carter 1992: 28). In similar fashion, *The Sadeian Woman*, published in the same year and probably written immediately before *The Bloody Chamber*, is the critical premise to the collection of fairy tales, where reflections on the cultural signification of the category of sex throughout history and as the primary site of the different understanding and development of male and female identities are transposed in fictional terms.

The Sadeian Woman is considered here as the site where Carter conceives the idea that sexuality could become an empowering dimension for women's lives, even if it has traditionally been the very reason for their subordination. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the book Carter declares her purpose of deconstructing "the whole metaphysic of sexual difference" (Carter 1979a: 4) by showing how anatomy has actually been configured as destiny through the creation and imposition of a mythical

iconography of male and female naturalised models. Carter's critical stance on Sade's work indeed lays bare and deconstructs some basic concepts informing the patriarchal tradition, and thus accordingly encoded female roles. In particular, the constructed character of cultural representations of sexuality (Sceats 2001: 115), desire (Moss 2001: 187) and femininity (Makinen 1992: 6) is unmasked and dismantled. In addition, Sade's rationalism, which is historically contextualised and metonymically stands for the whole of Western - oppressive - philosophical tradition is addressed. Interestingly Carter's critique of such rationalism provides at least two fundamental stances, which inform her standpoint on female identity in *The Bloody Chamber* and lay the foundations for her approaches to the topic in her following works. I am referring to Carter's - perhaps paradoxical - contentions about the way in which the Marquis freed women and constrained them at the same time. According to Carter, his original contribution was setting free female sexuality and allowing women to be subjects of desire while at the same time denying them an autonomous subjectivity. Carter tries to plug this gap by endowing her female protagonists with the means to shape their own identity, while also representing relationships based on passion and reciprocity instead of passivity. This idea of reciprocity is all the more important as it triggers a reflection on otherness, that is on how alterity is represented as a fundamental, constitutive part of one's self.

Throughout this thesis, the representation of metamorphosis stands for the non-linear and non-unitary understanding of the subject, as something always in process, as a site where political practice can be reconfigured and political subjectivity can be redefined (Braidotti 2002: 3). As is claimed in the chapter devoted to the metamorphosis of female identity by turning to Braidotti's insights on the topic, Carter's fairy tales do not dwell on the attempt of finding out - and representing - what subjects are, but rather what they can and do become through "mutations, changes and transformations" (ibid.: 2). More to the point, the development of thus defined subjects always takes place in a relational way, that is through their interactions with other characters and with new situations, where they learn that their positions, the identities they can take on from time to time and the agency and degree of freedom they can claim are always also dependent on social norms and power arrangements among people within different contexts. Carter's discourse about gender identity is therefore inextricably linked with discourses of power and social

relationships, and the fairy tales become privileged means through which a number of examples of female agency are displayed.

3.1. Gender politics in The Bloody Chamber: what kind of feminist agenda?

The first objective of the chapter dealing with the analysis of metamorphosis in female sexualities and identities is trying to account for Carter's feminist agenda, which can be inferred by looking at her critical production, starting from *The Sadeian Woman* and culminating perhaps in "Notes from the Front Line" (1983). This approach allows one to trace the development of Carter's thought with relation to - and assessing the reach of - its fictional materialisation. Furthermore, its intersection with a range of consistent feminist theories also provides a basic frame of reference to circumscribe the analysis of Carter's fictional production (in particular *The Bloody Chamber*). This does not mean that the fairy tales are not accorded the possibility of being re-signified and interpreted over time in the light of a number of other - not necessarily feminist - stances. As a matter of fact, the selection of critical references merely aims at framing and circumscribing the focus of this work, which investigates the significance of metamorphosis and ongoing change in shaping alternative models of female development and liberation. This approach, far from constraining or limiting the polysemy of Carter's texts, could on the contrary broaden their scope, in that it requires a major gap in Carter's criticism to be filled, namely the endeavour to try to explicate Carter's stance on female agency. As a matter of fact, criticism about Carter's fairy tales has primarily been carried out under a feminist perspective, so that the stories have been read as more or less subversive accounts of female sexual development and experience. Nevertheless, none of the critical texts about *The Bloody Chamber* embarks on the problematic and demanding effort of establishing the different meanings of "female agency" for Carter, and thus how it is given shape in the stories.

My contention is that opting for an approach which draws on metamorphosis as an interpretative strategy could help identify the core issues in Carter's understanding and representation of female agency, as both her theoretical and her fictional accounts are often contradictory, playfully hermetic and purposefully cryptic. Significantly, the only persistent element is the insistence on change: whether with relation to her ideas over the years, to the necessity of changing one's perspective in observing and understanding reality, history and identity, to her fictional representation of women growing older, turning into monsters or animals, changing sex or being hybrid creatures - that is embodiments of a metamorphic process in progress.

Throughout this research Carter's fairy tales are considered feminist and accordingly analysed following Grosz (1995). Her guidelines, which attempt to pinpoint the features of feminist texts, do not aim to label literary works once and for all, but rather to establish a relation between a particular text and its context of production and reception in the light of its political commitment. To begin with, Grosz's basic assumption linking "textual production to conceptions of the sexually specific signature and the sexually specific body" is taken into consideration in order to ground a definition of "feminist text" (ibid.: 11). More to the point, Grosz's scrutinising of the notion of authorship is also endorsed. Partly sustaining Barthes and Foucault's ideas about the death of the author, Grosz also concedes that in analysing the production of the text - including the productive role of readers - the sexual specificity of the author "is relevant to the question of sexuality". Her remarks particularly suit Carter's insistence on the author as the material subject of her writing. Drawing on Nietzschean perspectivism, that is taking into account "the specificities and positionality of the speaking/writing/reading subject, not only in the position she occupies in textual production, but also the way in which the authorial position is occupied" (ibid.: 22), Grosz proposes to assess the feminist status of the text by judging its politics in context. Thus, a feminist text can be defined as one that renders "the patriarchal or phallogocentric presumptions governing its contexts and commitments visible", questioning the power of these assumptions in the "production, reception and assessment of texts" in order to challenge them (ibid.: 21-22). In addition, feminist texts must carry the signs of their production while at the same time questioning and challenging the traditional patriarchal ways "in which the author

occupies the position of enunciation” (ibid.: 23). Last, but not least, as it is of particular significance to Carter’s literary creativity, a feminist text must help to produce “new, and perhaps unknown, unthought discursive spaces – new styles, modes of analysis and argument, new genres and forms – that contest the limits currently at work in the regulation of textual production and reception” (ibid.).

As has already been clarified, the roots of Carter’s feminism, like those of her inspiration and literary creativity must be looked for in historicity and in the materiality of experience. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the questions raised by feminists in the Sixties and Seventies which interest Carter most are those linked to the fight against social injustice and the claim for women’s equal rights. As Carter remarks: “the economic dependence of women upon men” is a historical fact, just as the relationships between the sexes are a cultural construct produced throughout history. Nonetheless, it is also a “believed fiction” in that it is “assumed to imply an emotional dependence [of women upon men] that is taken for granted as a condition inherent in the natural order of things and so used to console working women for their low wages”. This lack of economic freedom, Carter adds, is worsened as it brings about their lack of reproductive freedom (Carter in Altevers 1994: 18). In analysing the subversive potential of Carter’s representation of vampirism, Sceats points out that the association of women’s sexuality with emotional dependence is “economically and culturally endorsed” (Sceats 2001: 115). Marriage is the institution through which they are kept under control, so that the social established order is not threatened. Even though the arguments in favour of the “moral pornographer” have earned Carter the harshest hostilities, an emancipatory feature of Sade’s narrative she points out is the unusual representation of female sexuality freed from its reproductive function (ibid.). Thus, the first step toward an empowering transformation of women’s material conditions seems to be envisaging the possibility for them to choose a different pattern whose outcome is not necessarily marriage and maternity.

Taking into account how difficult it is to try to make sense of Carter’s controversial relation with feminism, an effort is made here to investigate her allegiance to some feminist issues, rather than to a particular coherent trend or “party line” (Gamble 1997: 98). More specifically, Carter’s commitment to change women’s material conditions is

investigated by analysing the new role models proposed by the heroines of her fairy tales, who actually embrace and enact change. What must be borne in mind when dealing with the feminist commitment of Carter's stories, is that denunciation is always paired with the envisaged feasibility of change and above all with women's power to improve their material conditions. So, if Carter's work "has consistently dealt with representations of the physical abuse of women in phallogentric cultures, of women alienated from themselves within the male gaze", it also has paired oppression with rebellion, representing "women who grab their sexuality and fight back, of women troubled by and even powered by their own violence" (Makinen 1992: 3).

3.2. A controversial "moral pornographer"

Among the variety of issues delved into by critics in trying to account for *The Bloody Chamber's* feminist agenda, the most debated and controversial is undoubtedly Carter's celebration of pornography. Carter's interest in and apology for pornography are to be traced back to her critical study of Sade's works. As the collection of fairy tales is published shortly after *The Sadeian Woman* and almost unanimously considered its attempted fictional transposition, it is accordingly praised or despised depending on commentators' opinions about the extent to which pornography could set women free from patriarchal constraints. The positive or negative evaluations hinge on whether and to what degree Carter's critical stance on Sade's representation of pornography is understood. It follows that the detractors usually despise the tales because they fail to recognize the ambivalence of Carter's standpoint. On the one hand, indeed, the representation of female desire, active sexuality, and the fact that sex is freed from reproduction, are applauded while at the same time the limits of denying reciprocity in Sade's depictions of sexual relationships are acknowledged.

In this respect, for example, Duncker criticises the way the sexual act is spectacularised in the fairy tales as "the ritual disrobing of the willing victim of pornography" (Lewallen 1988: 149), pointing out that all the tales of the collection but

“The Bloody Chamber” enforce patriarchal discourses (Kaiser 1994: 30). It is curious, however, that Dunker considers this story as the only example of “an uncompromisingly feminist message” even if, as Lewallen maintains, she later contradictorily comments that the victimising spectacle of pornographic disrobing “is particularly applicable to the tale ‘The Bloody Chamber’” (Lewallen 1988: 149).

Clarke’s arguments against Carter’s appreciation of pornography refer to another kind of misinterpretation. He criticises Carter’s fairy collection for it would uphold “an inverted form of sexism”,¹² which uncritically accepts the binary thinking of patriarchal discourse. In his view, Carter’s writings are nothing but “feminism in male chauvinist drag”, because her first allegiance would be to a postmodern aesthetics that “emphasises the non-referential emptiness of definitions”. In the light of these considerations it would be impossible to conceive of, let alone represent, an “affirmative feminism” (Altevers 1994: 18). What Clarke forgets, however, is that in *The Sadeian Woman* Carter explicitly rejects the inversion of roles embodied by the sadistic Juliette. She claims that for women to be empowered a negotiation is necessary between the mythical victim (Justine) and victimiser (Juliette), thus suggesting that a simple role reversal – that is a woman taking up the masculine dominant position – is not enough for her to be freed from patriarchal constraints.

Lewallen contends that Carter’s tales do not succeed in enacting the arguments set forth in *The Sadeian Woman* on two main accounts. First of all, the tales would fail to unveil and motivate the constructedness of desire and the mechanisms through which it shapes subjectivity, being at the same time subject to historical processes. As a consequence, “the actual constructedness and ideological premises of [traditional] fairy tales remain intact”, and do not fulfil Carter’s deconstruction of historical processes (Lewallen 1988: 157). These considerations, nonetheless, neglect textual evidence in *The Bloody Chamber*, where the stories set in different historical epochs disclose and trigger a reflection on the construction of patriarchal discourses over time. Secondly, Lewallen problematizes the (lack of) choice offered to the female protagonists, arguing that Carter’s heroines are presented with “already prescribed” options (ibid.: 149). Reasons supporting

¹² As Altevers interestingly points out, the same allegations were levelled against Gilbert and Gubar (Altevers 1994: 18), who also dealt with the deconstruction of female sexuality by analysing fairy tales.

this claim are given through the ironic remark that Carter's protagonists are offered the choice to "fuck or be fucked", where "fucking" seems to be picked simply because it is the lesser evil. Furthermore, the lack of choice is linked to "the acceptance of animal sexuality", which instead of being interpreted as an empowering alternative, is regarded as "a choice between rape and death", thus it follows that the decision to survive is the more logical one, whatever alternatives to death are offered. Once more, therefore, choosing active sexuality would merely be a false choice where only one option is provided.

Lewallen's contention about Carter's supposed "lack of historical awareness" (Lewallen 1988: 145) is aptly countered by Sheet, who reads *The Sadeian Woman* in conjunction with *The Bloody Chamber*, and contextualises her insights in the feminist debate on pornography taking place during the Seventies. Sheets lists the main arguments in favour and against potentially liberating and empowering aspects of pornography for women in general and feminists in particular, and gives reasons for Carter's ideological standpoint. After conceding that Carter's position defies "easy categorization" (Sheets 1991: 642), she locates the subversive potential of Carter's use of pornography in her interdisciplinary approach, which links it to folk and fairy tale tradition, psychoanalysis and other forms of fiction (ibid.: 656). The result is not a celebration of pornography as liberating or empowering in itself, but rather the process through which its deconstruction and demystification are performed reveals its underlying patriarchal discourse and thus envisages ways to subvert it, or at least to put it in the service of a female-oriented economy of desire.

Besides Sheets' enlightening overviews, the examination of Carter's fascination with pornography under a positive perspective – which is shared by a number of critics, among which Altevers 1994; Kaiser 1994; Keenan 1007; Sage 2001 and Sceats 2001 – is perhaps best summarized by the ideas set forth by Gamble. Dworkin and Kappeler's misinterpretations, seeing Carter's critical study of Sade's work as respectively a pseudo-feminist "unequivocal defence" and a misreading "dazzled by the offer of equal opportunities" (Gamble 1997: 99), are dismissed not only because they "miss the irony", but above all because they fail to recognize the controversies of pornography pointed out by Carter. And it is exactly from these controversies that analyses seeking to map the profile of Carter's feminist agenda must start. Carter's intentions, indeed, are "hardly a

ringing endorsement for pornography” (ibid.: 101), but more precisely exploit pornographic representations of womanhood in a twofold manner. On the one hand, Carter provocatively draws on the most extreme stereotypical expressions of women’s victimisation through violence (when they assume a passive, masochistic, dominated role) or of their fake status of dominators (when they are allowed to be the sadistic perpetrators), always produced for the male gaze and for male pleasure. On the other hand, she underlines that women’s subordination has always to do with controlling their sexuality. Gamble interestingly frames Carter’s discussion of pornography in her wider interest, developed from the Seventies all through her career, in power relationships, more specifically in “the alliance between the powerful and the powerless – how it is constructed, how maintained, by whom and to what ends” (ibid.: 103), which is testified by her interest in Foucault’s works, as is evident from the quotation opening *The Sadeian Woman* (Carter 1979a: 3).¹³

In sum, Carter’s positions on pornography, as well as her approach to fairy tales have often been considered contradictory or at least problematic because in her fictional work subversion and questioning of patriarchal discourses is frequently paired with representations which seem to sustain them (the most suitable examples are perhaps the two versions of the “Beauty and the Beast” motif, where “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” seems to conform to the classical versions, thus enforcing a bourgeois social structure). Nevertheless, “a purity from patriarchal contamination entails feminist incommensurability with patriarchy – thus the inability to criticise it” (Grosz 1995: 56). A successful criticism and displacement of patriarchal discourses entails instead “immersing in patriarchal practices” before being able to use them against themselves (ibid.: 57), as “politics is always already bound up with what it contests” (ibid.: 56).

Carter’s stories succeed in representing change and promoting the liberating potential of female sexuality through establishing a productive relation between fairy tales and pornography, as both these genres are vehicles of historically specific power

¹³ The main implications of this idea are explored both in the chapter devoted to the analysis of the construction of female identity and in the following one, where the metamorphosis of bodies is investigated. In the former, some sections of *The Sadeian Woman* are read against Foucault and filtered through Grosz and Braidotti’s critical remarks. In the latter, the link between power and predators and lack of power and preys is dealt with, expanding Atwood’s perceptive considerations on the topic (Atwood 2007).

arrangements and promote or reject role models primarily according to sexuality. The similarities between pornography and fairy tales reside in their “dichotomized treatment of female characters” (Sheets 1991: 649), in their dependence on “repeated motifs, multiple versions and inversions, the hole in the text where readers insert themselves” (Sage 2001: 69), in their openness to interpretation, which conveys the profanity and provisionality of “cruelty, desire and suffering” (ibid.). Moreover, both genres underline “the connections between sexual and economic relations in a patriarchal society”, to the extent that the revision of fairy tales can reveal “the pornographic nature of the stereotypes of women that they have recirculated” (Keenan 1997: 137). Like pornography, fairy tales promote binary patterns of signification for men and women, so that what is praised in the former is rejected or disapproved in the latter (Zipes 1989: 187) and above all “function to maintain present [male-female] arrangements” (ibid.:4). Interestingly enough, despite undeniably sharing the centrality of sexuality, the most evident difference between the two is its representation: sex is the core explicit content of pornography, while in fairy tales it is often symbolically represented or indirectly referred to, but never explicitly described. Even a superficial approach to Carter’s tales would reveal that in fact the disruption of this convention is one of their utmost and most troublesome traits, as not only is sexuality overtly represented, but it also constitutes a fundamental dimension of the protagonists’ experiences. In actual fact, Carter’s fairy tales utterly turn the conventions of the genre upside down because they praise active female sexuality as a liberating and empowering dimension, whereas fairy tales traditionally predicate encoded tamed, disciplined, restrained female sexuality as the virtue which guarantees the eternal happiness of the passive, perfect princess/wife.

When it comes to female heroines, fairy tales usually narrate women’s journeys towards the resolution of a conflict or problematic situation, which normally imply sexual maturation (i.e. the transition from girlhood to womanhood), taming childish behaviours and learning those virtues which will lead to everlasting happiness – usually synonymous with marriage. Nevertheless, they also implicitly describe what happens to those women who decide to deviate from the path imposed by the patriarchal discourse, who fail to embrace violence and suffering as their doomed destiny and are thus denied a place in the realm of good (for example, wicked witches) or will be destroyed at the end of the

story, as they embody the enemy to be defeated: “the counterpart of the energetic, aspiring boy is the scheming, ambitious woman [...] women who are powerful and good are never human” (ibid.: 187). As Dworkin harshly comments, fairy tales offer only “two definitions of woman”: the good woman, who invariably is a victim, and must be possessed, and the bad woman, who must be killed or punished. In either case, the woman must be “nullified” (Sheets 1991: 649). This nullification almost invariably takes place once women are married, that is when their sexuality is successfully tamed because they are committed to a man and to reproduction. Traditional fairy tales which sustain the patriarchal existing order are very much concerned with marriage and sexual economy, as “sex outside marriage threatens the social order constructed through patriarchal fears over property and possession”, thus female role models – or rather types – must either endorse this ideal, or be blamed and rejected (ibid.).

Carter’s heroines, on the contrary, are complex characters, whose personalities instead of being clear-cut or typified are multiple and problematic, often displaying features of the “good” as well as the “bad” woman at once. The psychological complexity of these characters is conveyed by the representation of the inner struggles they face to come to terms with the contradictions of their selves, even if the end of the story does not always coincide with a resolution of the conflict. Rather than embracing the typical traits of the desirable woman or of the wicked witch, the protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber* usually deconstruct mythical versions of femininity and substitute them with women who are struggling, who must negotiate with their conflicting selves, who decide what is best for them despite social expectations or the threat of marginalization and exclusion. The best examples of this inner struggle are the stories narrated in the first person (in particular “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Tiger’s Bride”), where the protagonists spell out the conflicts they experienced when faced with the sudden inevitability of “becoming women”, as well as with being turned into bargaining objects in the patriarchal exchange presided over by their fathers and/or husbands. Most notably, in these accounts of female maturation, the girls are confronted with a double dimension of change. First of all, they experience the inevitable changes occurring while growing up (both physically and psychologically), which necessarily alter the way in which they understand and interact with themselves and the others. Besides this obvious step, Carter’s heroines are then

presented with the alternative of conforming to the ideal of the “passive, good woman”, which usually has negative consequences and leads to experiencing fear, violence and helplessness (like in the case of “The Bloody Chamber”), or the possibility of embracing change as an empowering dimension (as in the case of “The Tiger’s Bride”). Of course, even if it is not their main concern, as they deal primarily with the development and transformation of female characters, Carter’s tales also represent unusual masculine role models. As Sheets contends, for instance, the stories “challenge ideas of masculinity based on domination” (Sheets 1991: 654) and, one could add, they likewise call into question masculine ideals of heroism.

3.3 The liberating potential of transformative female desire

One of the most interesting articulations of change encompassing fairy tales’ generic conventions as well as sexual economy in *The Bloody Chamber* is the process of women’s transformation from objects to subjects of desire. The invisibility of sex, which covertly informs the content of classical fairy tales but is never overtly represented, goes hand in hand with the lack of representation of – female – desire. In the traditional fairy tales reworked by Carter, what the girls desire is never directly dealt with: either they are punished because they disobey their parents or husbands (“Little Red Riding Hood” and “Blue Beard”), or are rewarded because they comply with social/patriarchal expectations and show humility, devotion or self-annihilation (“Beauty and the Beast”). The third option is the quintessence of passivity, that is women who are won as prizes for reasons outside of their control (“The Sleeping Beauty”, “Snow White”). The spectre of women’s complicity in the enforcement of patriarchal discourses is always lurking, so Carter emphasises that women do have an active “part in the construction of their world”, even when they refuse to act and passively accept whatever is offered them (Sage 2001: 71).

Significantly enough, Carter’s versions of these tales borrow elements from other generic traditions also to incorporate desire as a prominent topic, and problematize it by providing different “economies of desire”. In the same familiar way in which female

domesticated behaviours are polemically presented together with disrupting ones, both disciplined submissive female subjects, and unruly, desiring ones are accounted for. As a consequence, the tales show examples of the dangers and potentials of untamed desire and invariably suggest that in order to be free and to wield power upon their destinies, women must negotiate a way to give expression to and satisfy sexual desire. More to the point, “Puss in Boots”, the only tale which defies such a categorization in *The Bloody Chamber*, reinforces the idea of the centrality of desire, in that it adds to the critical and committed goals of the other stories its playful, comic, futile, but equally powerful and necessary aspects. As Lau points out, feminist writers find in fairy tales a means of “rearticulating women’s sexual agency” by unveiling their passive position in a culture where they are fetishized as objects of desire (Lau 2008: 79). Carter goes further, as she also offers fictional and provocative, but nonetheless powerful examples of how active articulations of desire can be in the service of women’s liberation and allow them to be subjects *of* instead of subject *to*.

The transformative and liberating power of Carter’s fairy tales in relation to desire and pleasure has been discussed from different points of view, with reference to her appropriation of traditional versions, her narrative strategies or the development of a subversive sexual economy. Lewallen suggests that like sexuality, desire is also “ideologically and socially constructed”, and in some tales Carter abandons “the economics of sexuality” to focus on “the nature of desire and sexual subjectivity” instead (Lewallen 1988: 156). Her conclusion that the tales “leave the constructedness out of the picture” (ibid.), however, is due to the compartmentalisation of sexual economy and desire she endorses. Desire, especially when it comes to women as desiring subjects, is in fact very much part of the “economics of sexuality”, in that its being denied or granted determines whether women are allowed active participation in the construction of their identities, and the extent to which they are free to make decisions and change.

The relationships between pleasure and female subjectivity in *The Bloody Chamber* are investigated by Crunelle-Vanrigh as well, who claims that female desire “moves towards polymorphousness” (Crunelle-Vanrigh 2001: 139) – which, in Carter’s tales, always depends on change and transformation – and in the same way, “pleasure lies in the unfixing” and in the recognition of the fluidity of identity (ibid.). Once again,

metamorphosis is understood as the propelling force of female identity journeys towards autonomy and freedom, since only by ongoing change and by giving up a stable notion of identity can women subvert patriarchal social arrangements and create more desirable, alternative ones.

According to Moss, Carter's fairy tales succeed in portraying empowering accounts of female development thanks to the representation of "particularized voices of desire", which counter the universalising drive of patriarchal myths (Moss 2001: 197). Even though Carter has been criticised for the Euro-centric assumptions underlying the kind of woman her writings describe and address, which could be accused of universalism, she is aware of the troubles such a universalizing drive could cause: "The notion of a universality of human experience is a confidence trick and the notion of a universality of a female experience is a clever confidence trick" (Carter 1979a: 13).

Although no critical text about *The Bloody Chamber* is entirely devoted to the analysis of metamorphosis as a subject of topical interest, a number of critics draw on notions of change and transformation as a means to describe the representation of female identity in the tales.

As Lau contends, Carter's creation of "a series of constantly shifting women" together with offering an alternative to "the dominant myth of singularity", produces a slippage between binary categories, thus confusing patriarchal discourses of sex and the "conventions of power, authority, and symbolic representation" (Lau 2008: 92). Manley describes the protagonist of "The Bloody Chamber" - but this could be held true for other characters of the collection as well - as a "woman in process", that is "someone who is exploring her subject position and beginning to tell her own story" (Manley 2001: 83). This implies that the girl must undertake a journey in order to "establish herself as subject", that is finding out and then giving up all previous assumptions about herself - which mainly correspond to how her mother and her husband see her. In so doing, she can finally develop a new sense of herself as subject based on reciprocity instead of passivity, for in place of relying on how the others see her, she can see herself in the uninterrupted flux of her relationships with them, and thus acknowledge the dynamism of her identity as well. Last but not least, Moss considers Carter's "continual exploration and regeneration" as an "imperative responsibility", in that the celebration of

transformation in her tales projects readers into alternative worlds where different ideals and arrangements of sexuality, and therefore social transformation are possible (Moss 2001: 199). As Moss' argument suggests, the representation of metamorphosis in terms of sexual politics and female identity, besides being a means for questioning and disrupting the established order, could also propel social change. Furthermore, as will be shortly discussed, if it is combined to the analysis of the transformations of the female body described by Carter, from the representation of rebellion and the acquirement of self-consciousness, metamorphosis will turn into the expression of female agency. In other words, Carter's fairy tales supply women with "a recipe for transformation" (Sage 2001: 79), where the embodiment of change becomes the way through which improvement and empowerment can be actualised.

3.4. Major critical references on issues of gendered power relationships, desire, identity and female agency

The complex and controversial issue of female agency linked to the representation of sexual economy and female identities in *The Bloody Chamber* is investigated throughout this thesis by referring primarily to Braidotti's *Metamorphosis* (Braidotti 2002). In addition to circumscribing and establishing a clear-cut perspective on the analysis of the collection, this approach could put forward innovative insights into Carter's work, since – to my knowledge – it has not been used to tackle issues of sexuality and subjectivity in her writings so far. The reasons underlying a similar choice are multiple, and range from the emphasis put by Braidotti on change and metamorphosis as capital dimensions of experience, to her non-unitary and non-linear vision of the subject, which nonetheless refuses its denial; the materialism and historicity of all accounts of sexuality and subjectivity; the reconfiguration of patriarchal reasoning through desire and imagination, and the importance of embodiment and of the representation and re-signification of female bodies. Drawing on and amending Foucault and Deleuze's theoretical work, Braidotti suggests a new approach to the analysis of subjectivity, which she calls

“cartographic”, and which is able to explain the political empowerment of the nomadic subject accounting for one’s location in terms of space and time as determined by power relations. Power is interpreted here as expression of both “*potestas*” – that is, restrictive power – and in terms of “*potentia*” – i. e. affirmative power (Braidotti 2002: 2). The subject is conceived of as a de-centred, dynamic and changing entity, and the definition of identity can only take place in between, in the interstices where the oscillations of power can be grasped and modified. Most notably, sexuality is considered of capital importance to understand contemporary subjectivity (ibid.: 20) and the deconstruction of the subject is performed by freeing it from the patriarchal rationalist *cogito*, and by replacing rationality and consciousness with desire (ibid.). The materiality of bodies is re-encoded by moving away from biology and psychoanalysis and defined as an “interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces [...] a surface of intensities, pure simulacra without originals” while at the same time its inner contradictions are acknowledged but purposefully left unresolved (ibid.: 21). One of the most significant intersections between Braidotti’s theoretical work and Carter’s rewriting of fairy tales is the refusal to give up ideas of self and the category of woman in a deconstructionist fashion. On the contrary, their centrality is brought to the fore by suggesting that the first step towards the achievement of women’s agency is their ability to unmask patriarchal strategies of oppression and to re-signify definitions of subjectivity, identity and womanhood through language. Carter’s refusal to abandon the notion of the ‘self’ – “My anatomy is only part of an indefinitely complex organization, my self” (Carter 1979a: 4) – neither endorses understandings of the self as a supposedly unitary, organic, entity nor is indebted with those who interpret it as an immutable essence to be discovered once and for all. Rather, the self should be understood as the site where disparate, unfixed, contradictory forces converge, which on no account can be reduced to anatomical traits, as bodily attributes are to be considered part of the self and not the other way round.

Since cultural significations of sexuality play a decisive role in the hierarchical distribution of power and as a consequence in the way people negotiate self-definitions and relationships, devising strategies of resistance and envisaging possible configurations of agency requires first and foremost the possibility of understanding and defining one’s self and one’s location. As Braidotti remarks, “the positioning that comes from our

embodied and historically located subjectivities also determines the sort of political maps and conceptual diagrams we are likely to draw” (Braidotti 2002: 167). As a consequence, women cannot relinquish “the signifier ‘woman’” yet, as they need to possess and to be able to define the identities such signifier allows to represent with language first (ibid.: 41). The same holds true for the notion of subjectivity, which cannot be deconstructed and left behind unless it has been first granted control over. This does not mean that “woman” should be considered a universal category, but rather that the universality of women’s experience resides in the necessity of winning control over the definitions historically imposed on womanhood by drawing on biology, psychoanalysis, or simply out of fear and the need to control reproduction and the unknown “dark continent” of female desire. This is not to say that the commonality of women’s experience, which still allows the category “woman” to be of significance, lies in a lack or in a negative experience they share, as positions like those of Mckinnon and Dworkin seem to suggest. They argue, indeed, that women are negatively defined as opposed to men based on a binary distinction grounded in the biological difference of sexual attributes, which are socially constructed so that women as a group become objects of sexual consumption (MacKinnon 1987). Carter’s tales seem to suggest that the commonality of women’s experience is rather to be found in the positive effort of re-appropriating and re-signifying the language of patriarchal discourses who made such objectification possible, in order to create new, multiple and unstable definitions of “womanhood” starting from and grounded in female historical and material experiences. Accordingly, Carter does not accept the absolute deconstruction of the subject, but contrariwise she “believes in the ‘self’ as autonomous being”, because this allows women to make history, instead of being considered its slaves (Altevers 1994: 18). Therefore, agency is once more linked to the active construction of identity and grounded in historicity and material social conditions.

The commitment to materialism seems to be the cornerstone of Braidotti’s philosophy as well as Carter’s “positive and highly directed feminism” (Day 1998: 7), wherein – as has already been emphasised with regard to the feminist causes Carter is more interested in – she is concerned with the articulation of issues of sexuality “that occur in the actual, day-to-day world” (ibid.). In discussing Waug’s claims about the possibility of reconciling postmodern aesthetics and feminist commitment, Day seems to

agree with Braidotti's scepticism towards postmodern praise of relativism and deconstruction, because they succeed in emptying patriarchal essential discourses, but at the same time risk doing the same with feminist ones (ibid.: 106). Perhaps Carter's texts manage to avoid such a relativism or excessive deconstructive drive exactly because they can be brought back to reality, to the materiality of women's experience in that they address issues to which feminist movements were actually committed to in the Seventies.

When seeking to overcome negative characterizations of womanhood and to frame a positive, empowering agency, reference to Butler's work seems inevitable. The idea of the cultural construction of gender developed in *Gender Trouble*, indeed, allows one to challenge dualistic assumptions about the biological differences between men and women, since "sex" is showed to be as much a cultural construction as "gender". More precisely, according to Butler, "the binaries of sex, gender and the body" that is, the "foundational categories of identity" are the effects of a specific formation of power" (Butler 1999: XIX), that must be critically analysed, following Foucault, in a genealogical fashion. Representation of identities thus defined must take into account the historically particular inscription of subjects in power relations, and above all the complicity of language in providing a limited range of alternatives to describe and signify these subject positions and the relationships between individuals and groups within society (ibid.: 8, 15). Furthermore, together with gender, the body itself is seen as a construction and no longer as an "instrument" or a "medium" (ibid.:13) which plays a central role in the development of identities, for "persons become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognisable standards of gender intelligibility" (ibid.: 22).

The indissoluble interconnection between sexuality and the body lies in Butler's notion of the "performativity of gender", where "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (ibid.: 43-44). If gender is a "ritually repeated performance", the "re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (ibid.: 178), then representing performances which disrupt expected and normalized behaviours has a double consequence. On the one hand, it unveils the limits of established discourses, and on the other it can even subvert them by suggesting alternatives to replace oppressive "historically specific

organizations of language” (ibid.: 184). This is precisely what happens in Carter’s fairy tales, where the metamorphoses of female identities manifest the need to renegotiate the power relations underlying the – inadequate – language at their disposal. In order to devise new, liberating ways of representing their rebellion and their choice to part with an overpowering social arrangement, Carter’s heroines embrace change, which most of the times takes the form of a physical transformation.¹⁴

Sage describes Butler’s work as a “theoretical frame that fits Carter so much better that it seems set to canonise her” (Sage 2001: 71), and quotes Butler’s notion of the body as “a field of interpretive possibilities” where history has been imprinted on the flesh (ibid.), the symbolic importance of cross-dressing and “carnival practices” in her writings and last but not least, her description of performativity as a “relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, thus turning power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power” (ibid. 71-72).

Kerchy’s analysis of Carter’s body-texts refers to the parallelism established by Butler between the grotesque bodies and the abject and emphasises how her conceptualization of performativity carries “a deconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition able to put the consolatory norms of sex into potentially productive crisis” (Kerchy 2008: 40-41). Performativity is therefore linked also to Carter’s commitment to the demythologising business.

Finally, Jordan stresses Butler’s arguments about the deconstruction of the notions of “reality” and “naturalization” as particular concepts embedded in language, and interprets Carter’s awareness of the inevitability of copying when dealing with language, and her intertextual narratives as creative strategies, which oscillate between transgression and conservativeness (Jordan 2007: 202).

¹⁴ The implications of this kind of metamorphosis will be extensively dealt with in the section devoted to the body, where Butler’s theoretical considerations about performativity, the materiality of bodies and how change can be actively enacted on and through them are compared to Carter’s fictional representations.

3.5 *Circumscribed references to psychoanalysis*

Another highly controversial domain, which cannot be avoided in dealing with a feminist analysis of Carter's fairy tales, is without doubt psychoanalysis. This thesis does not investigate the topic in depth, and prefers to approach Carter's work from different perspectives. Therefore, even though on some occasions feminist re-interpretations and appropriations of psychoanalytical theories are addressed because they help analyse some features of the fairy tales or explain Carter's aversion to some of Freud and Lacan's stances on female sexuality, psychoanalysis is not among the chief references. Broadly speaking, the main perspective privileges the critical sources, which analyse sociocultural constructions and their impact on sustaining or questioning power arrangements and relationships within society, always grounded in material experience and history. Within a similar framework, this research tries to account for the importance of change and transformation as they are displayed in *The Bloody Chamber* under the different points of view which have been articulated so far and will be expanded throughout.

As to psychoanalytical readings of fairy tales such as Bettelheim's, they are dismissed on different accounts. First of all, Carter herself is sceptical about his psychoanalytical readings of traditional fairy tales, and in an interview with John Haffenden she observes that "Some of the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* are the result of quarrelling furiously with Bettelheim" (Day 1998: 133-136). Carter criticises Bettelheim by turning to – and agreeing with – Darnton's contention that folk tales do not have a latent content, because they explicitly describe "cannibalism, incest, bestiality and infanticide" (Haffenden 1985: 82-83). Once more, Carter prefers that the content of her tales be attached to material conditions and actual experience than to psychic unconscious meanings, because their purpose is to "help kill the giants in the everyday, patriarchal world" (Day 1998: 133), rather than to provide consoling ways of coping with unconscious processes (Haffenden 1985: 83). Although Carter admits that she is interested in the latent, "psychoanalytic content of fairy tales" (*ibid.*), such content is considered the, perhaps uncanny or repressed, but nonetheless concrete product of experience. In order to explain her relation to psychoanalysis, Carter plays with the definition of dreams, and claims that they are real; what is unreal is just their content.

That being the case, “if dreams are real as dreams, then there is a materiality to symbols; there’s a materiality to imaginative life and imaginative experience which should be taken quite seriously” (ibid.: 85). This redefinition of the Freudian notion of imagination is part of the social function of folk tales which Carter wants to restore in her literary fairy tales, so that in *The Bloody Chamber* “imagination is not only the necessary product of an individual’s unfulfilled needs which are bound by static infantile sexual wishes for gratification, but is socially and historically conditioned and embraces more than sexual desires” (Zipes 2002: 27). Moreover, the significance of this socio-historical dimension of imagination lies in its critical as well as subversive potential, as “it can be used to compensate for what is lacking in reality, but can be used in reality to supply practical criticism of oppressive conditions in the hope for surmounting them” (ibid.).

The urge for social change described by or advocated for in fairy tales through imaginary projections of how transformations of an oppressive existing social arrangement can actually take place is what, according to Zipes, Bettelheim fails to acknowledge. His psychoanalytical readings of fairy tales are flawed and inconsistent with both the literary qualities of folk and fairy tales and Freudian theories. First of all, Bettelheim assumes that classical literary fairy tales are addressed to children, which they most certainly are not, and that their inner harmony, order, optimistic representations of how conflicts can be solved help to come to terms with reality (ibid.: 160-163). Besides other contradictions in Bettelheim’s analysis of the relation between literary fairy tales and the psyche (ibid.: 162-164), Zipes shows how in his *The Uses of Enchantment* Freud’s theories themselves are trivialised, because they are turned into absolute laws and their moralizing aim is overemphasised (ibid.: 165). Interestingly, Zipes does not reject Freudian interpretations of fairy tales, but praises the fact that Freud “located the cause of psychosis and all mental sicknesses in the historical and materialistic development of social conditions” (ibid.: 166), stressing that psychoanalytical theories must be rethought and reworked “in the light of social and scientific changes” (ibid.: 165), and that “the psychological components and meanings [of fairy tales] can be best understood when first related to the contradictory developments of the historical period in which they originated” (ibid.: 170).

One last key relation between psychoanalysis and Carter's tales is the critique of Lacan's mirror stage, which could be inferred from the tale "Wolf-Alice", where Carter proposes an alternative way of coming into language and acknowledging one's own subjectivity that does not exclude the body (Lau 2008: 91, Bacchilega 1997, 163 n.34). The analysis of the tale in the light of Carter's polemical stance on the mirror stage and the law of the father is carried out by turning to Grosz' interpretation of Lacan (1990).

3.6. Critical hints at motherhood

The last issue concerning feminist analyses of *The Bloody Chamber*, which is on occasion tackled by resorting to psychoanalysis, and is not extensively dealt with in this research, is the representation of motherhood. Simplistic considerations like Lewallen's, according to which in Carter's tales - with the only exception of "The Bloody Chamber" - as in classical fairy tales "mothers are either absent, insignificant or bad" (Lewallen 1988: 152), carry an implicit criticism in echoing social constructivist feminists, who encouraged women to give up maternity and to embrace masculine traits in order to be freed of reproduction and thus empowered.

Similarly, Ward Jouve praises Carter's recreation of the sole expression of motherhood which "could be salvaged", that is "Mother is what mother does" (Ward Jouve 2007: 171). Cryptic as it may sound, this contention is grounded in the biological difference of the sexes, as her argument that "if De Beauvoir [...] is right and it is woman's biology, her being 'the sex that gives life', which 'destines' her for second place, than Carter's systematic and endlessly inventive attacks on images of motherhood, [...] are also many blows for women's freedom" (ibid.: 170-171) clearly sustains Freud's view that anatomy is history. Similar considerations are obviously untenable, as the roots of Carter's commitment to feminism lie in the deconstruction of biological determinism, countered with the cultural construction of sex and the body in their being immersed in power struggles and relationships, which can and must be renegotiated.

Even though “The Bloody Chamber” is the tale where the figure of the mother is more conspicuous and plays a crucial role in the story, overt and covert references to motherhood pervade all the collection. Cronan Rose, for instance, points out that Carter’s versions of “Little Red Riding Hood” offer a heterosexual alternative to Freud’s account of female development through the identification between the girl who achieves sexual maturity – that is, who affirms her own sexuality – and the (grand)mother (Cronan Rose 1983: 225).

Sheets refers to psychoanalysis as well, and, in commenting on the function of the mother in “The Bloody Chamber”, contends that Carter’s tales challenge “Oedipal models of development which privilege separation over dependence” (Sheets 1991: 654). Interestingly, Sheets concludes her reflections on pornography by emphasising that moving beyond binary oppositions such as “male/female, dominant/submissive, sadist/masochist” requires “a reconceptualisation of the mother’s role” as a starting point (ibid.: 657).

Bacchilega links the representation of motherhood in Carter’s version of the Blue Beard story with female agency and voice, for they are all are “vehicles for change”, even if, she points out, Carter warns readers of “the shifting, even contradicting values they assume in different contexts” (Bacchilega 1997: 129). Both Bacchilega and Sage address Carter’s postmodern narrative strategies to discuss the idea of doubling of mothers and daughters, who are reflections of each other and at the same time are complementary, like the Sadeian sisters Justine and Juliette (Sage 2001: 74; Bacchilega 1997: 120, 155n27). The motif of multiple reflections conveys an idea of transformation associated to the metamorphosis of identity through the relation with the mother, which accounts for the sexual maturation of the girl unburdened from the weight of the Oedipal complex.

3.7. Sight and sensory accounts: a red thread throughout the collection

The way in which the female subject experiences the world is first and foremost through the body and its relation to what surrounds it. Most notably, then, subject formation and

the construction of identity are indissolubly linked with and mediated by the body. This contention grounds the reflections around the gaze and focalisation, which draw a strong link among the main topics tackled in this thesis. Sight, in terms of perspective is analysed in the second chapter with regard to focalization, which is certainly connected with the analysis of sight as underlying power relations, in determining who is looking, i.e. who is the subject of the gaze and who, conversely is its object. Last, but not least, sight also enables one to turn to the body in investigating the implications of Carter's emphasis on other sensory experiences, as provocative and/or empowering alternatives to - masculine - vision.

Among the range of sensory experiences described in *The Bloody Chamber*, sight is probably the most complex and articulated. First of all, the action of looking or the condition of being looked at links the body to narrative, for who looks and who is looked at determines who are the focalizer and the focalized of the text, thus opening up questions of narrative perspective. This, in turn, allows one to establish the degree of activity and passivity of the female protagonists of the fairy tales, and to assess the extent to which their metamorphosis - be it physical or psychological - changes the power arrangements and enables them to speak for themselves and give free accounts of their identity journeys. Furthermore, the gaze is connected to questions of objectification and otherness, since the subject of the gaze wields the power to define the object of its gaze. The alternatives offered to the subject gazed upon are limited to passively conforming to the meaning attached to it, or resisting and challenging them, thus being labelled as "other" and marginalised. In fantastic literature, like in all narrative accounts, the body is "generated in language - in narrative strategy and descriptive technique - and is simultaneously the expression of the vision of a particular narrator, whose act of looking translates the objects seen in particular ways" (Harter 1996: 51). Moreover, the gaze determines the point of view, establishes and tries to fix the difference between the self and the other in order to keep its threatening, unknown nature under control (ibid.). Harter's insights into the objectifying gaze of the narrator in fantastic texts emphasise the construction of the female body as a body in pieces, as the dismemberment of the female form allows the male gazing subject to own it, to safely being able to represent it without experiencing the feeling of hesitation generated by the unknown.

The analysis of the images linked to sight in *The Bloody Chamber* problematize the issue of the gaze and its implication in power distribution even further if they are read against Kaplan's contention that the male gaze "carries with it the power of action and possession that is lacking in the female gaze" (Sheets 1991: 646). In other words, women are looked at and can look back, but allegedly cannot act on their gaze. The reasons why the male gaze aims at dominating women is the need to contain the threat and exorcise the same fear for women's sexuality that also leads to the representation of femininity as monstrosity. Carter, however, challenges the traditional power arrangements and manages to set free enslaved and codified representations of femininity by conveying alternatives to that of the look. This means that she does not try to reverse the roles and to give the female gaze the same oppressive, enclosing power of the male counterpart, but rather exploits the other senses to suggest strategies of resistance and empower female agency. Some of Carter's heroines, for example, speak (they account for their experiences in the first person), that is they have a voice, therefore "can be heard without being seen" (ibid.: 648).

The last, important articulation of the motif of sight in Carter's fairy tales is the examination of the omnipresent image of the mirror, which takes on a number of meanings with relation to the articulation of female identity, otherness and the idea that the subject achieves self-awareness through the incorporation of the other in the reflection of its body into the other's eyes. The complexity conveyed by reflections in *The Bloody Chamber* is due to the manifold meanings attached to mirrors. It is by glancing at their reflections in the looking glass that the heroines "see themselves being seen" as subjects and, at the same time, it is through the same process that they see their reflection into the other's - usually male - eyes (Pi-tai Peng 2004: 117). Significantly enough, the extent to which women are able to act and their sexual position to be empowered depends on "the way the female subject participates" in the complex visual exchange she engages in with the master gaze (ibid.).

4. AVAILABLE CRITICISM AND NEW INSIGHTS INTO AND PERSPECTIVES ON METAMORPHOSING BODIES

The third and last characterization of the idea of metamorphosis explored by this research is tightly linked to the previous ones, and explores the transformation of the female body.

Carter's fairy tales always represent a physical metamorphosis of some sort, the most obvious being that of the young woman who is growing up and experiencing the physical and psychological changes which are part of the transition from childhood to adulthood. In addition, a number of other symbolic and meaningful changes are illustrated, which embody the revolutionary and disruptive potential of Carter's narratives in that they overthrow rather than sustain traditional gender roles and relationships by means of fantastic figurations. On the one hand, the tales describe human protagonists turning into animals and vice versa, in most cases the choice of giving up the human shape being a way for women to free themselves from binding and limiting role positions. On the other hand, the protagonists of the stories are often metamorphic creatures such as zombies, vampires and werewolves, that is hybrid and liminal beings who have already experienced a metamorphosis, who have challenged death and given up humanity, who threaten life, but who do not belong completely to either life or death, therefore having to negotiate their position within and between the two. In any case, the body becomes the surface on which change is made visible, at times conceived of as a limit (usually the human body) but more often as the primary site in which desires can be fulfilled and constrained identities can be freed (usually the animal one). Most notably, Carter's bodies are always sexed, in such a way that the traditional Western association "woman-body" is unmasked and subtly criticized as a core part of the binary and oppositional system grounding Western philosophy and thought, which not only have naturalized female inferiority and consequent submission, but have also set up reproduction and motherhood as the sole suitable outcomes of female identity journeys.

The fact that the female protagonists of some tales are or decide to turn into wild, cruel and threatening animals or supernatural beings is of particular significance, in that such bodies defy the already referred to codified associations or, at least, question their basic inferences and consequences in terms of disciplined behaviours. This aspect

suggests that embracing the instinctual drives of desire from which they have always been restrained – if they wanted to suit the norm and avoid being marginalised – is a way for women to describe an autonomous, active, and free subjectivity instead. The process at work here matches the way in which Carter intertextually plays with fantastic elements in manipulating fairy tale conventions: she is aware of their codification and is able to re-write them in order to make them recognizable but disruptive at the same time. In a similar fashion, her female protagonists seem to comply – or at least to try to – with social expectations, that is, they embrace the associations woman-body/instinct-desire but then disrupt their conventional meanings and give them empowering new ones.

The weight of female metamorphosing bodies and the potential of change they embody is of paramount importance in Carter's fairy tales, for it symbolically draws on the disrupting representation of female sexualities and identities and materialises the creative use and blend of generic conventions.

4.1. The body: a new theoretical and critical framework for Carter's fairy tales

Although the representation of subversive bodies has been extensively investigated in Carter's novels, surprisingly enough the topic has not been examined in depth with regard to the fairy tales, where attention is usually mainly drawn to issues such as the development of female identities and sexualities or unconventional economies of desire without focusing on how they are actualised and given shape on the bodies. In trying to fill this gap, this research turns to the theoretical work of feminist philosophers such as Grosz (1995), Butler (1993, 1999) and Braidotti (2002) who, like Carter, understood the body as a site of power struggles and a cultural construct always historically and contextually signified, and at the same time as the locus where change is enacted and the transformation of the existing – oppressive – order is made possible.

Grosz's approach to the critical analysis of the female body is perhaps the most suitable starting point to tackle Carter's fairy tales for a number of reasons. To begin

with, her insights are grounded in materialism, historicity, and the overthrowing of patriarchal binary thought, which led to the subordination of the concrete, physical dimensions of experience (that is, the body, associated with the feminine) in favour of the abstract, intellectual ones (that is reason, associated with the masculine).¹⁵ After dismissing oppressive discourses based on such oppositions by identifying their contextual nature of power-knowledge arrangements, Grosz explains why the “purely conceptual” has come to be privileged over the corporeal (Grosz 1995: 26) and the role of the body, or rather of “sexed corporeality” (ibid.) is given new empowering meanings in the light of its transformative potential. Carter’s firm belief that patriarchal discourses must be acknowledged and understood before they can be questioned and unsettled is echoed by the double characterization of the body put forward by Grosz. Before demonstrating how the body can actually become an empowering means for the assertion and enactment of female agency, Grosz maintains that it plays “a major role in women’s oppression” (ibid.: 31) because it has been both conceptualised – by the patriarchal tradition – and condemned – by feminist critics – in biologist, essentialist, ahistorical and naturalised terms. However, Grosz suggests, charging and condemning such reductionist perspectives on the body is not enough, since they obscure “the possibility of sociocultural conceptions of the body” and ignore “the transformations and upheavals that may transform biological accounts” (ibid.). Therefore, the body must be re-defined in non-reductionist and non-biologistic fashion first and foremost by reconceiving bodies as preeminent objects of culture with a social and cultural “nature”, so that sexual difference can be approached in terms of bodily differences without reducing the variety of performances to biologism. In other words, “difference” must be thought of in terms of “variations”, that is the “specific [culturally constructed] modes of corporeality of bodies in their variety” (ibid.: 32). In order to do so – Grosz argues following Foucault – women’s experiences and social positions must be located according to the place occupied by female bodies in social discursive interactions, as power “operate[s] directly on bodies”,

¹⁵ Grosz’s analysis and questioning of power-knowledge interactions informing society and shaping context-specific dominant discourses – in this particular case, her attempt to undermine Western prevalence of reason over all the other dimensions of experience – explicitly draws on Foucault (Grosz 1995: 30).

“knowledges require the interaction of power and bodies” and power, in turn, “requires knowledge of bodies and behaviors in order to remain effective and ‘in play’” (ibid.).

Grosz’s definition of the body as a “surface for inscription” (ibid.: 33) is the outcome of a synthesis between the two major approaches to the theorization of the body in the twentieth century: the “inscriptive” conceptualization which derives from Nietzsche, Kafka, Foucault and Deleuze and the “lived body” of psychoanalysis and phenomenology (ibid.). Questioning both lines of thought triggers reflections on the binary categories which define the body (such as “inside/outside, subject/object, active/passive”), and leads to marking the body as the site of instability and change, as “a hinge or threshold” placed on the borderline “between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the *inscription* of the body’s outer surface” (ibid.). A similar understanding of the body is able to unravel patriarchal injustice and power imbalance while at the same time accounting for strategies of resistance. The universalization of the masculine, indeed, can be made explicit only through the development of alternative ways of representing the female body. This, in turn, is viable only if “phallogentric texts and paradigms” are carefully read and appropriated, because in so doing their “flaws and cracks” can be deployed to “reveal spaces where these texts exceed themselves, where they say more than they mean, opening themselves up to a feminine (re) appropriation” (ibid.: 38). Paradoxically, the dominance of the masculine as the neutral term of reference goes hand in hand with the neutrality of female bodies for men. That is to say, female bodies are devoid of their sexual specificity in order to function as the “bodily counterpart to men’s conceptual supremacy”, and thus reduced to lacking variants “of men’s bodies and desires”, as a “function of men’s self-representations” (ibid.).

Grosz’s call for a re-conceptualisation of female sexed bodies and the need to emphasise their unstable and ever-changing cultural constructedness and historical specificity is given shape in Carter’s fairy tales through the representation of the materiality of a variety of metamorphic experiences. More to the point, in the stories of *The Bloody Chamber* disruptive behaviours are always paired with compliant ones, and transformation becomes part of the – culturally constructed, material and liminal – nature of the body itself, whose limits entail transgression.

Since Carter's tales are fictional examples of how female agency is rooted in the redefinition of bodies as "pliable flesh" (Grosz 1995: 32), as changing and unstable entities on whose surfaces transformation can be enacted and made visible, reference to Butler's theoretical work seems, also in this case, unavoidable. From the very beginning, indeed, Butler has been committed to investigate the way in which gendered bodies are signified through power relations, and to envisage the possibility of performing bodily acts which theatrically parody the normalised ones and at the same time stage disruptive, alternative performances. Like Grosz, Butler draws on Foucault to argue that the body is a "discursive construction" (Butler 1999: 164), produced in a "performative fashion" by the normative "regulatory ideal" (likewise culturally established) of sex (Butler 1993: 1-2). The naturalness of the sexed body is therefore an idea produced within discourse, where meanings are conveyed and fixed through historically-specific power relations (Butler 1999: 117), and where history – despite being itself a "creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice" (ibid.: 165) – negotiates and imposes suitable meanings on bodies because its signification "requires the subjection of the body" (ibid.). According to Butler, practices of signification are regulated by processes of repetition, that is the rules governing intelligible (i.e. disciplined) bodies and identities become norms and are consequently perceived as natural because they are constantly acted out through time in compliance with the dictates of the established discourses.¹⁶ *Enfleshed* subjects are thus constituted as either tamed, obedient, desirable bodies (if they stage prescribed performances), or as outsiders, necessarily pushed away because they enact abject, disruptive performances (Butler, 1993: 3). Even if Butler points out that together with reiteration, "the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection" (ibid.), prohibition and exclusion – which, in this case, are meaningfully synonymous with "marginalisation", i.e. pushing to the borders – do not prevent change from taking place. In the same fashion, although performativity conceals the conventionality of the norms it reiterates and dissimulates its historicity (ibid.: 12), it is a "constitutive constraint" which enables the existence and even the production of the subject (ibid.: 15), without denying the possibility of agency. Agency itself is in fact a "reiterative or realitulatory practice immanent to power", rather than an external action of opposition

¹⁶In this case "discourse" generally refers to the established, dominant power-knowledge arrangement.

to power (ibid.: 15). This also means that the performative constitution of bodies in the dialectic between reiteration and exclusion already incorporates the possibility of rebellion and change. Compliance and disruption share indeed the same theatricality, since the norms need to be staged. The norm “compels a certain citation in order for a viable subject to be produced” (ibid.: 232), so that the resistance to discursive conventions is an act of mimicry and parodic repetition. Butler calls the site of collective rebellion, the kind of performance it enacts and the bodies it produces “queer” (ibid.: 226-232). Queerness is a worthwhile notion because it raises questions about power relations, compliance and disruption of discursive norms, individual and collective performances always grounded in historicity and experience, but above all is invariably rooted in the body, which is the means through which the repetition of norms is enacted and made visible. Most notably, this holds even truer when such repetition is subversively parodic, for in this case the citation “mimes [and] renders hyperbolic the discursive conventions that it also reverses” (ibid.: 232).

The notion of theatricality inherent in Butler’s ideas of parody, mimicry, repetition and staging of performances has at least a double characterisation: it can refer to the reiterative practice of (parodic) repetition which brings the subject into being and signification, or to the staging of female identity as masquerade. In both cases nevertheless, the theatrical staging of bodily performances could bring about either submission – when the compulsory repetition of norms is compliant with official discourses and the female body is signified as spectacle and object of the male gaze – or agency and subversion – when reiteration becomes parodic mimicry and female identity is intentionally staged as masquerade. In the latter instance, women play a role, consciously acting like the social order expects them to in order not to be marginalised, to try to change society from within, or at least to survive in it. As a matter of fact, masquerade can be a valuable strategy that “works simultaneously as an analytical and a critical tool [since it] can be used both for identity construction and for critical deconstruction” (Tseëlon 1995: 108).

The interactions between Butler’s reflections on queerness and theatricality and the notion of masquerade as it is conceptualized by Tseëlon open up interesting reflections about the role of the female body and its representation in the construction of female

identity, all the more if they are contextualised in a genre like the fairy tale and in its disruptive reworking performed by Carter. This topic will be explored with relation to textual examples taken from *The Bloody Chamber* in order to emphasise the centrality of the body in the process of identification, which seems to have been disregarded by critics so far. Although the issue of theatricality has been dealt with (see Britzolakis 1997; Pi-tai Peng 2004), the role of the female – transforming – body in displaying and embodying power struggles, and the agency of the female subjects striving for encoding autonomous definitions and performances of their-selves has not been emphasised enough. Britzolakis, for example, focuses on the staging of femininity as spectacle in Carter’s work and wonders if it could be linked with a “liberatory feminist project” (Britzolakis 1997: 44). The answer is probably affirmative, since Carter’s representation of femininity as spectacle usually challenges the defining power of the male gaze.¹⁷ Gender performance seems to be a “double edged sword” for Carter, in that it is used as a tactics to “expose the fictional and inessential character of femininity”, and at the same time it engages with “the male scenario of fetishism that lies behind, and is required by, the female scenario of the masquerade”,¹⁸ so that it helps expose “the male scenario of fetishism” as well (ibid.: 53). Theatricalism, therefore, could be identified with Carter’s commitment to the demythologising business (ibid.: 43).

Pi-tai Peng’s analysis of theatricality in *The Bloody Chamber* is mainly focused on the tale “The Lady of the House of Love”, where the protagonist is described as putting on her identity, playing the only script she knows because she has no other choice (Pi-tai Peng 2004: 110). Being the daughter of the King of the Undead, she can only act like her ancestors condemned her to, and the impossibility of defying her destiny is validated by the fact that the will to change means for her true death.

Despite the limits of this argument, which fails to acknowledge that the choice to fall in love and die is nonetheless an empowering decision rather than the result of what is already “scripted in her identity” (ibid.: 110), it allows one to introduce another omnipresent topic in Carter’s writings – hinted at also in the fairy tales – namely the

¹⁷ The analysis presented in the following chapters makes this point by referring particularly to “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Lady of the House of Love”.

¹⁸ These considerations are conclusions drawn by referring to Fletcher’s definition of masquerade, according to which it doubles female subjectivities and generates stories that can be told from the position of the masculine subject as well (Britzolakis 1997: 53).

puppet or clockwork doll.¹⁹ Throughout this research, considerations on the empty, lifeless body will be articulated with reference to some specific tales: as corpse and doll-like vampire in “The Lady of the House of Love” (see Pi-tai Peng 2004), as statue or artefact, therefore metaphor of submission to the male gaze; as object of masculine desire and as specular images of a possible destiny in “The Bloody Chamber” (see Roemer, 2001); and as a clockwork mirror-image, which confronts the protagonist with her lack of self-knowledge in “The Tiger’s Bride”. In general, the impression of inhabiting an empty body encourages the young protagonists to embark on an identity journey, which will teach them to build their future with their own hands.

Female bodies are often represented as reflections in a mirror, which strike the heroines with the consciousness of their bodies still being blank pages, empty surfaces to be filled-in with meanings – like the patriarchal discursive arrangements picturing their lack predisposes them to be filled in by meanings devised by masculine desires. With the representation of female bodies as empty, passive vessels Carter provocatively wants to encourage female subjects to acknowledge their helplessness and submission, and to emphasise that they must start building up their selves from the material object because of which they have traditionally been stigmatised, and with which they have been reductively identified. Once more, then, the transformative nature of the body is considered the most powerful expression of the possibility of change and improvement in women’s experiences. This holds even truer when it is pushed to the extreme, that is when it is represented as an impossible, unrealistic metamorphosis, because it becomes an eloquent example of the liberating but above all creative change which can actually take place when women lay claim to their right to control their bodies according to their desires.

¹⁹ Complex fictional speculations on the puppet and the living doll can be found, for example, in the short stories “The Loves of Lady Purple” and “Flesh and the Mirror” (collected in *Burning Your Boats* 1995) and in the novel *The Magic Toyshop* (1967).

4.2. Monstrous femininities: the cultural construction – and representation – of the female body as monstrous

The way in which Carter encourages and describes transformations involving first and foremost the female body and gives it a fundamental function in shaping autonomous and empowered female identities is even braver, more provocative and subversive if it is related with the representation of monstrosity. This research problematizes the complex articulation of the motif of monstrosity in *The Bloody Chamber* by turning to the work of Creed (1993) and Braidotti (2002), and develops it into two main strands. First of all, it addressed the idea of woman as monstrous, and then scrutinises the reasons why female sexuality and the female body have been associated with monstrosity. After that, Carter's fairy tales are analysed in order to explore the consequences of literalizing the metaphor, that is of representing female monsters or women turning into monsters.

The monster is a scaring being, its threatening nature varying in different socio-historical contexts, as “every age embraces the [monster] it needs” (Gordon & Hollinger 1997: 1). A close analysis of the literary history of any monstrous figure shows how monsters change according to the cultural needs of the society which represents them. Gordon and Hollinger effectively sustain this argument and explain how narrative forms are ideological acts whose function is to invent suitable imaginary solutions to social contradictions by turning to Jackson's work on the fantastic. Moreover, as they acknowledge by turning to Foucault, monsters are social constructions that change through time just like people's self-representations do (ibid.: 2). In a nutshell, monsters mirror and embody in their aspects and behaviours the fears of the societies which produced them, so that postmodern monsters incarnate contemporary fears of boundary crossing and dissolution, but at the same time their function is to “help us construct our own humanity, to provide guidelines against which we can define ourselves” (ibid.: 5).

My contention is that the monsters devised by Carter fulfil both these functions: on the one hand they epitomize the fear for female sexuality, which resides in the female body as it is subject to change – therefore the monsters are metamorphic, liminal creatures such as zombies and werewolves. On the other hand, transforming into a monster or crossing the boundaries between the human and the animal/monstrous is

sometimes welcomed as an empowering strategy for women – therefore literalizing the metaphor means suggesting guidelines to help women define themselves and improve their conditions. Creed introduces her study on the cultural significance of the representation of female monsters in the horror film with interesting considerations about the distinction between “female monsters” and “monstrous feminine” (Creed 1993: 3). While the idea of the female monster merely indicates the counterpart of the male monster, the notion of monstrous femininity allows an important feature of the peculiarity of the feminine characterisation of monstrosity to surface: its being invariably linked to sexuality. Sexuality, in other words, is the source of the construction of woman as monster, exactly as it is the aspect of female experience which generates all the other stereotypes of femininity “from virgin to whore” (ibid.). Associating monstrosity with sexuality means grounding it in desire, but above all in the female body, which becomes the site where monstrosity is made visible, but at the same time is also the place where the fear of woman as monster originates. Creed gives reasons for patriarchal fears of female sexuality by reversing Freud’s arguments about female alleged castration anxieties (ibid.: 6). Lurie’s contentions against Freudian description of the castrating complex are put forward and supported, and instead of being found in their supposed castration, the reason why men fear women is located in their wholeness: “the male fears woman because woman is not mutilated like a man might be if he were castrated’ [...] The notion of the castrated woman is a phantasy intended to annihilate man’s real fear of what woman might do to him” (ibid.). These claims have a double implication: the female body is scary, and men are afraid of women because they suffer from castration anxieties. But why is the female body so scary? And how does it have the power to threaten men? Creed answers the first question by turning to Kristeva’s notion of the abject in order to explain why the female body is perceived as scary and dangerous (ibid.: 8-14). The core of her argument is that the female body is abject because it “does not ‘respect borders, position, rules [...and] disturbs identity, system, order”; it is “the place where meaning collapses” and where life is threatened (ibid.: 8-9), therefore it must be kept under control. The abject body is indeed one which “has lost its form and integrity” (ibid.: 10) and which menaces stability by showing boundaries or crossing borders, thus making the fragility of the confines between inside-outside, human-inhuman, normal-abnormal, and

the separateness of different bodies manifest. The main sources of abjection are those practices or bodily parts which expose boundaries, such as food loathing, corpses, orifices and bodily wastes, which consequently are considered polluting, immoral and ritually turned into taboo objects (ibid.: 8-10). It should be clear by now that abjection is connected to instability, pollution and above all change, all of which are features of the female body, and thus sources of danger and fear, as it is subject to constant change (first and foremost because of childbearing) and to the loss of bodily fluids (menstrual blood, synonymous with life but at the same time with lack of it when it is shed): “when woman is represented as monster it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive function”, and “menstruation and childbirth are seen as the two events in woman’s life which have placed her on the side of the abject” (ibid.: 7, 49).

In addition to the monstrosity of the female sexed body, the power it has of threatening men (which leads to answer the second question) resides in its being the place where unbridled manifestations of female desire can take place, all the more when they are freed from reproduction and maternity. In this respect, one of the most recurring images is the toothed vagina, “the vagina that castrates”, powerfully and simply explained by the myth reported by Creed: “women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas and [...they] must be tamed or the teeth somehow removed or softened – usually by a hero figure – before intercourse can safely take place” (ibid.: 2).

Following Creed’s contentions – which are consistent with Carter’s claim (already referred to more than once) that patriarchal power arrangements must be first understood and disclosed in order to be contested – this research analyses the representation of female monstrosity in *The Bloody Chamber* as twofold. Female monsters are at first interpreted as embodiments of male fears and anxieties of female sexuality grounded in the – abject – metamorphic female body, but a similar reading is then paired with the examination of how Carter also succeeds in empowering the transformative potential of the female body. The positive characterization of change is inherent both in the necessary creation of the fictional monsters to which Jackson and Foucault referred and in Kristeva’s notion of abjection, as the abject must also be “tolerated” because “that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life” (ibid.: 11). Furthermore, “the abject is placed on the side of the feminine” (ibid.: 37) so that the literary construction of

female monstrosity fashioned by Carter could be considered an expression of the rebellion of the female flesh.

Braidotti (2002) also discusses the representation of female monstrosity in contemporary times as source for disruption as well as a constructive force through boundary crossing and ongoing change. After having contextualised postmodern discourses about the body in the expression of anxieties regarding the “bodily roots of subjectivity” – which lead to the designation of the “material/maternal feminine” as monstrous – Braidotti interprets the “techniques aimed at perfecting the bodies” enforced by mainstream socio-cultural discourses as technologies whose purpose is helping supersede the natural – mortal, decaying, imperfect – state of the body (Braidotti 2002: 199-200). In addition, monstrous others are deemed to fulfil a “kaleidoscopic mirror-function” inasmuch as they make people aware of the mutations taking place in society and, above all, wield the metamorphic power of “illuminating the threshold of otherness while displacing their boundaries” (ibid.: 201-202). Braidotti’s “enfleshed materialism” (ibid.: 99) – whose purposes seem to be shared by Carter’s speculative fiction – is not limited to acknowledging and criticising patriarchal strategies of oppression, but it also analyses and devises strategies of resistance. Therefore, popular (counter)cultural ways of transgressing imposed forms of bodily domestication which appropriate what they contest like Carter’s are scrutinised and praised, and monstrosity is welcomed as disruptive performance.

Monstrous representations, however, “do not express only the negative or reactive anxieties of the majority. They also, often simultaneously, express the emerging subjectivities of the former minorities, thus tracing possible patterns of becoming” (ibid.: 200). These considerations echo once more what Carter does in fictional terms: by resorting to the popular genre of the folk tale she voices, or rather *enfleshes* female experiences (that is, the experiences of a marginalised category), in order to show how women have been constructed by oppressive discourses as monstrous, scary others because of their bodies – and, by extension, of their sexuality. Moreover, metamorphoses of women willingly turning into monsters are displayed as strategies of resistance as well as ways of appropriating new languages, which allow them to build new patterns of signification through the body and its changes.

The same process which has already been discussed with relation to the metamorphosis of the fairy tale's generic conventions and the patterns of development of female identity they represent as models is thus at work here, where once again Carter turns patriarchal discourses against themselves. The transformation of women into monsters/animals or their symbolical identification with monstrosity and with the abject is emphasised in *The Bloody Chamber* in order to re-signify the means through which the patriarchal tradition has engaged and limited definitions of femininity through its identification with otherness. The othering strategies deployed by patriarchy are thereby disclosed and then emphatically overturned as they are appropriated to provide examples of female empowerment and agency. Embracing the stereotypical binary association of woman with animal/monster – traditionally meant to be degrading and restraining – is disruptively turned by Carter's narrative into a getaway, which can in fact lead to freedom.

The issue of the female body as abject in Carter's fairy tales is addressed by Wisker (1997), who claims that the stories encourage to acknowledge and embrace the abject other as part of the self in order that "the need to find victims, scapegoats and enemies" can be overcome (ibid.: 126). Pi-tai Peng (2004) links instead monstrous representations of femininity in *The Bloody Chamber* to the problematic relation between woman and her body, which is perceived as "the body of the other" (ibid.: 116). When they feel estranged from their bodies, women undergo an uncanny experience for the body is perceived as an empty vessel – for instance in the case of the doll or the corpse of the Gothic tradition – on which prescribed sexual performances must be worn (ibid.).

Since in Carter's fairy tales the transgressive and creative potential of excessive, boundless, uncontrollable bodies as sites of resistance, provocation, negotiation is linked to performativity and its – parodic – repetition, which enables the subject to exceed the norm and to strive for self-assertion and liberation, the bodily performances of their characters can also be interpreted as grotesque. Significantly enough, *The Bloody Chamber* is not commonly analysed in terms of the grotesque, the best expressions of the development of this motif being rather located in Carter's novels (in particular in *Nights at the Circus* [1984] and in *The Passion of New Eve* [1977]) and in other short stories. Nonetheless, my contention is that in the fairy tales a number of important grotesque

elements can be detected, in particular with regard to some characters, such as Wolf-Alice, the Duke (in the tale “Wolf-Alice”) and the Vampire Queen (in “The Lady of the House of Love”).

4.3. Female grotesque bodies

The main references for the study of the grotesque body in this research is the synthesis between Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World* (1968) and Russo’s *The Female Grotesque* (1994) made by Kerchy to analyse the female protagonists of Carter’s novels (2008), and Creed’s essay “Horror and the Carnavalesque. The Body-monstrous” (1995). Although in Carter’s works male characters are also shown to enact disciplined or subversive performances, the specificities of gender must not be disregarded, as the peculiarity of male and female experience is grounded first and foremost on the sexed body and on its physical attributes, but above all on the different patterns of signification assigned to it according to the power arrangements of socio-historical discursive practices. As Kerchy remarks: “in contrast with the *disembodied*, masculinized, universal thinking-subject position, woman is over-embodied and dis-identified as the essential *other* marked by her unthinkable bodiliness” (Kerchy 2008: 39). One can therefore infer that if bodily performances are unruly, the over-identification of the feminine with her body leads to excess, deviance and consequent marginalization. Moreover – as the notion of monstrous femininity showed – in any case the female changing body with its mobile borders is culturally constructed as the target of male anxieties, as a dangerous, scary place, to be kept under control. Russo’s grotesque body is gendered, a cultural construct designed to oppose and amend the classical, disciplined female ideal, which “might be used affirmatively to destabilize the idealizations of the female beauty or to realign the mechanisms of desire” (Russo 1994: 221), that is to display displaced, flexible, changing bodies which exceed the norm in order to unveil and overcome its limits. Moreover, “the grotesque [is] a process through which differently gendered bodies are displayed in provocative, new and possibly transformative ways” (ibid.: i).

According to Kerchy, Carter promotes a “freak-ethics” by substituting the Bakhtinian celebration of the grotesque with the marginality, difference and threatening otherness of the freak (Kerchy 2008: 13). Her heroines embrace otherness, “the internal freak” as an inherent part of their selves (ibid.: 14) and, most importantly, they do so by embracing bodily transformations which constantly blur the categorical boundaries between self and other, natural and supernatural, human and animal, life and death. Kerchy’s insights into the “semioticization of the body/ somatization of the text” (ibid.: 25-38) are particularly useful to examine Carter’s work focussing on the body also because of the relation they establish between the female body and the text, combining as they do narrative considerations with their consequences on the representation of the body and vice versa. Drawing on Kristeva’s notion of the *subject-in process*, Kerchy embarks on enquiring how it is entangled with the “*meaning-in-process*” and the “*body-in-process*”. Her “narratological study of Carter’s dynamic text” is aimed at exploring how disciplined, culturally constructed and gendered bodies can be constructed and deconstructed within a discourse whose purpose is to “trace the interconnections of *the text of the body* and *the body of the text*” (ibid.: 25-26). Bodies used as metaphors for texts are then identified with identities, as both of them are never fixed, ever changing, multidimensional (ibid.) and, it could be added, in Carter’s texts bodies and identities are at the same time the medium and the outcome of narrative accounts of experience grounded in language. Furthermore, the body is seen as a “locus of identity (Smith-Watson 2001)”, an already signified surface “upon which the heroines’ lives are ideologically inscribed and subversively re-inscribed” and the “textual engine” through which “embodied memory turns the narrative into a space of embodied knowledge” (ibid.: 86). Accordingly, Carter’s “corporeographic metafiction” (Kerchy 2008: 61) queers the body while queering the text, that is represents grotesque metamorphic bodies through textual strategies, which interweave different narrative genres and linguistic styles and registers.

Another interesting examination of the female grotesque in Carter’s tales is carried out by Moss. Also in this case the analysis is not focused on a story of *The Bloody Chamber*, but on a later tale: “Peter and the Wolf”. Nonetheless, this discussion of Carter’s use of grotesque imagery, which evokes fairy tale motives, is worth being mentioned since it could be considered the product of the textual experiments performed while re-writing

folk tales and offers a suitable transition from the representation of grotesque monstrosity to that of metamorphosis. According to Moss, Carter's wolf stories "develop a fictional idiom adequate to the expression of [a] desire" which is positive and productive rather than driven by Lack (Moss, 2001: 187). The female body is considered the "crucial site of transformation", a body, in Cixous' terms, which "begins to write" (ibid.: 194). The grotesque is given a feminine connotation by integrating Bakhtin's theories with Cixous' and is linked to the fantastic in that the ambivalence provoked by the grotesque is shown to bring about the feelings of unease triggered by the fantastic both in the characters and in the reader (ibid.: 191). Interestingly enough, considerations about Carter's sexual politics are once more linked to textual practices, so that the subversion of patriarchal discourses on disciplined bodies and sexualities is deemed to be brought about by means of disruptive narrative strategies.

4.4. Animals and supernatural beings: upstream bodily transformations

Although the metamorphoses of the often hyperbolic bodies represented in *The Bloody Chamber* do not challenge the heterosexual matrix (as the queer and drag performances advocated by Butler are meant to do), nonetheless they do challenge patriarchal discourses by being implicated in what they oppose (more often than not the protagonists are introduced as docile bodies, subject to discourse and not yet subjects of power), so that they are able to turn power against itself. Moreover, their agency is made explicit through their disruptive bodily performances, which exceed the norm and/or overthrow it. The bodies of supernatural beings such as vampires or werewolves as they are represented in Carter's fairy tales belong to the first category, since they are liminal creatures which used to be – but no longer are – subject to human power-knowledge arrangements. They know what it means to be human but now exceed the human, therefore do not need to abide to compulsory discursive repetitions. Furthermore, they do not belong to human society, and would be marginalised in the light of their difference in any case, because it is synonymous with death.

The willing transformations of female characters into animals belong instead to the second category, for they symbolise the decision to refuse humanity and its constraining discursive arrangements in order to embrace another nature, which is free from – and does not care about – power hierarchies, and is subject to another law (meaningfully enough, a law which is linked to instinct and thus to desire, and where there is no room for rationality).

In traditional representations wild animals and supernatural creatures share some features as well as symbolic attributes such as danger, death, violence or monstrosity. Furthermore, they are usually identified with otherness or with the abject, thus rejected and pushed to the margins, or tamed and kept under control. Following a similar line of reasoning, the categorical association of women with these creatures in a discursive binary logic, which also goes hand in hand with feminine identification with monstrosity, is made explicit. That being the case, investigating representations of women wilfully turning into wild beasts or horrific monsters can help unveil the double otherness embodied by the feminine and also scrutinize potentially empowering dimensions of the metamorphosis. Like the grotesque body, the bodies of such creatures signify a collapse of the boundaries between human and non-human, and are thus places of transgression, instability, confusion and change. Moreover, they are abject in that they are places of meaninglessness, which highlight the failure of language in making sense of and defining them (see Creed 1993: 9-10). Yet, for these very reasons they are also the places where new meanings and performances can infiltrate and alternative, re-shaped paths identity can be developed.

Braidotti draws on Deleuze's notion of "becoming-animal" to discuss how the excessive desire associated with bestiality and animal instincts has been constructed by psychoanalytical theories as something that must be tamed, regulated and normalized (Braidotti 2002: 139-140). Psychoanalysis is deemed inadequate to account for the "interaction between embodied practices", as it arranges the "affective and sexual structure of human subjectivity" in dualistic terms in order to make it suitable to the culture of its times (ibid.: 139). The new approach proposed by Braidotti seems to imply the celebration of "polymorphous perversity" and the need to release traditionally processed, domesticated and/or suppressed animal drives (ibid.: 140-141). "The notion of

the 'becoming animal' [...] throws open the doors of perception toward impersonal, uncaring, dangerous, violent forces", and "the outside/r need not be always reassuring", because the scaring quality of difference and of otherness should rather be considered a chance to change through "walking on the wild side" (ibid.: 141), a threatening risk that perhaps is worth taking. According to Braidotti, the wolf is a particularly emblematic example of the transformative power of the body in the service of feminism, all the more when it comes to the werewolf, its horrific, mutant version (ibid. 128-129).

Felines are another category of animals which, together with wolves, play a privileged role as metaphors of empowering transformation in *The Bloody Chamber*. Makinen (1992) analyses the signification of such figures and of women's choice to turn into them as an exploration of "dangerous, exhilarating change" for "the felines signify otherness, a savage and magnificent power, outside of humanity". Beasts are metaphors of the sensuality that women have been thought to give up because it is too dangerous but that, conversely, could give them "power, strength and a new awareness of both self and other" (Makinen 1992: 10). If turning into a feline is seen as a transgressive, emancipatory action which signifies embracing sensuality, turning into a wolf is even more subversive, as werewolves signify "a stranger, more alienated otherness than the cats" (ibid.: 11).

Even though some symbolic interpretations of the wolf as representation of masculine violence and sexual aggression proved insightful (see Braidotti 2002: 128), other readings such as Duncker's, which reduce the beasts to "men in furry clothing" (ibid.: 12) are here dismissed. If the beasts are also interpreted as projections of the female libido, indeed, they "become exactly that autonomous desire which the female characters need to recognize and appropriate as part of themselves" (ibid.).

As to the other supernatural beings that women come to impersonate in Carter's fairy tales, according to Makinen they signify "the problematics of desire itself [... and its] polymorphous potential" (ibid.: 11, 14). Wisker adds a connotation to this understanding of horrific figures by reading them in Freudian terms as "the return of the repressed". Horrific figures would therefore be "rejected Other[s] the monstrous, unsafe sel[ves] that dwell within", which confront people with their worst fears, but in so doing also allow them to envisage possibilities of change (Wisker 1997: 117).

At this stage a distinction needs to be made among the different kinds of supernatural protagonists of Carter's fairy tales. Some of them are clearly recognizable creatures belonging to the Gothic tradition, such as vampires or werewolves. Some others have a less clear-cut status, as they blend some features of different horror and folklore traditions, such as the Earl-King or the Duke. Even though these characters will be discussed in detail with reference to each story, it is worth introducing some general considerations to help contextualise them in the framework of the tales of *The Bloody Chamber* as well as in the dialogue Carter engages them in with previous literary and popular traditions.

The vampire is particularly suitable for identification with the human being by virtue of its resemblance to the human form (Grosz 1995: 192). In general it reflects contemporary anxieties of border instabilities and dissolution, and the fear of contamination and invasion of an unknown and unknowable other, for it incorporates the body of the victim through sucking its blood and makes death the source of its life. Furthermore, like the human body is to be caught in the social relationships which emphasise its cultural construction, so is its fictional representation in the body of the vampire. Accordingly, supernatural bodies like the vampire's must first and foremost be defined as sexed bodies, and the performances and representations of the male vampire need to be distinguished from those of the female vampire, since different meanings are attached to the circulation of blood, death and contamination depending on the gender of the monster.

Special attention is given in this research to the figure of the female vampire, for Carter's fairy tale "The Lady of the House of Love" features a female Queen of the Dead, and focuses on fear, sexuality and desire from the point of view of monstrous femininity. The female vampire is the actualization of the metaphor of woman as a living dead which stems from the association of female sexual pleasure and unbridled desire with fear and death, so that the female vampire becomes a metaphor for woman as a "living threat to death" (ibid.: 194). In addition, what makes the female vampire even more monstrous and scary is perhaps the paradoxical meaning taken on by her blood, which becomes a doubly abject object. When it is related to femininity, indeed, together with its abject connotation of bodily fluid exposing and trespassing the borders between inside and

outside, blood usually also signifies life, fertility, the power to give birth. Within patriarchal discourses these features render it “more abject than men’s” at least for three reasons (Kristeva in Creed 1993: 62). First of all, woman’s menstrual blood threatens “the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference”; secondly, her blood is linked to ideas of fertility and thus “bears witness to woman’s alliance with the natural world”. Finally, her blood with its capacity to give life reminds man of his – more or less willing – capability to shed blood and kill (ibid.).²⁰

Creed analyses the different symbolic meanings attributed to female vampires in different narratives across history (ibid.: 62-65), which range from the representation of a rite of passage used to explain the menarche, to young girls’ sexual initiation (i.e. defloration) – interestingly enough the beginning of menstruations is traditionally associated with the beginning of sexual desire as well – to the identification with fanged animals such as the snake, and to the link between the female body and the lunar phases. Furthermore, the female vampire can evoke the *vagina dentata* (toothed vagina), which embodies masculine fears of woman as castrating rather than castrated subject (ibid.: 106): “the fantasy of the *vagina dentata*, of the non-human status of woman as a [...] vampire, or animal, [is] the identification of female sexuality as voracious, insatiable, enigmatic, invisible and unknowable [...] castrator/decapitator of the male” (Grosz 1995: 203). According to Creed, the image of the toothed vagina is to be found in some folktales, such as “Sleeping Beauty”, “Briar Rose” and “Little Red Riding Hood” (Creed: 1993: 107-108). The textual analysis of the fairy tales in the chapter devoted to the metamorphosis of the body takes these insights into account, and tries to show how Carter promotes metamorphosis, abjected bodies and mobile boundaries as empowering means for women, who are allowed to choose to embrace transformation and change even when it entails death.

The vampire is without doubt the supernatural character which has drawn the greatest attention of critics who studied *The Bloody Chamber*. The most articulate analysis is perhaps carried out by Sceats (2001), who investigates the cultural significance of

²⁰ The signification of female body through blood is very strong throughout *The Bloody Chamber*. As will be recurrently emphasised in the pertinent sections of this study, besides the obvious associations with female sexuality, menstruation, life, nourishment and death, it alternatively – and on occasion even at the same time – stands for pollution, disease, violence, and is a metaphor for desire and its consequences which are written on/encoded in the body (like in the case of the blood stain in “The Bloody Chamber”).

contemporary narrative representations of vampires as raising issues of otherness, desire and sexuality and then discusses vampiric transgressions in Carter's writings. Vampires are seen as "embodied ossymoron[s]" (Sceats 2001: 107-108) because of their inherent ambiguities and contradictions, as legitimising and/or giving expression to what is excluded by society and morality – which is bound to the socio-cultural and historical context (ibid.: 108). According to Sceats, vampirism in Carter's work can be interpreted both in psychoanalytical terms (ibid.: 108-109) and as a "metaphor of political oppression" (ibid.:109).

Although the psychoanalytical argument may be appealing, this research focuses on the second characterisation of vampirism as a reflection and disruption of power relationships. Carter portrays the problematic, contradictory aspects of the vampiric condition as characterised by "appetite and longings as well as they are [...by] power and abuse", thus expressing at the same time predatory, aggressive instincts and "the predicaments of desire" (ibid.:112). In her novels as well as in her short fiction, Carter explores the ambiguity of vampires, especially of the female variants, in that they are associated with "taboo, [...] degradation" and therefore feared and rejected, but also personify transgression: "vampirism represents a rebellion against excessive rationality and control" (ibid.) and attraction. As for *The Bloody Chamber*, readers are presented with different articulations of both male and female vampirism with relation to sexuality (ibid.: 115), but in the figure of the vampire there is always an inherent doubleness or contradiction: it can represent sexual domination as well as "undermine existing [...] power relations" (ibid.). The vampire's erosion of borders is subtler and more complex than that of other supernatural creatures, for together with dwelling in the threshold between life and death – being dead but still in need to feed and looking just as if it was alive – it transgresses the boundaries between human and animal, is "one and the other, both and neither" (ibid.: 119).

In her study of Carter's horror writing, Wisker (1997) understands traditional representations of vampires as narrativized fears of invasion (of the body and of the home) – which today is the most popular interpretation of the vampire in its multifarious television and cinematic versions. In particular, female vampires stand for "male anxieties of sexually voracious women" (Wisker 1997: 126) and Carter's representation of such

characters would aim at disclosing “the insurgent power of female sexuality that patriarchal culture does everything to repress” (ibid.).

Armitt defines Carter’s vampires as metamorphic expressions of the transgression of boundaries between the human and the animal and, like Wisker, identifies them with “anatomical representation” of “the transgressive and untamed excess of [...] sexual practices” (Armitt 1997: 96).

Pi-tai Peng emphasises instead the complexity of Carter’s approach to the female vampire and remarks that, contrary to other feminist texts “which use the woman vampire to subvert the rational-phallogentric sexuality”, Carter’s fairy tales provide a demythologization of these figures in terms of their connotation of aggressive female sexuality but also in their embodiment of men’s fear for women’s sexuality. In her opinion, Carter deconstructs “the myth of the fearful power that has been imputed to the female vampire to show that this fearful power is debilitating for women in its empowerment from the phallogentric discourse” (Pi-tai Peng 2004: 109-110).

In sum, all these considerations about the representation of (female) vampirism in *The Bloody Chamber* demonstrate that the way Carter handles the topic is highly problematic and does not allow to reach a definite conclusion about the extent to which it offers empowering and/or liberating examples for the construction and narrativisation of female identity and sexuality through liminality and metamorphosis.

In this respect, even though it is a controversial expression of hybridization, abject bodies and border crossing as well, the representation of werewolves seems to be less ambiguous. In Carter’s fairy tales, indeed, werewolves usually either stand for aggressive male sexuality, the dangers of desire, fear for masculine violence and rape and female rivalry within different generations, or for the emancipation of female sexuality and desire, which takes place when women decide to give up their – already – discursively signified and oppressed bodies to merge with or embrace the animal body of the wolf.²¹

²¹ The following analysis of the identification between woman and animal is introduced by turning also to the work of Erica Fudge (2002), which investigates the complex relations between the human and the animal as a contextual(ised) cultural construction – specifically, her essays focus on the Early Modern England. Fudge’s insights help to further investigate the reasons why Carter insists on fictionally blurring the boundaries between the human and the animal body to scrutinise the naturalisation of context-specific discourses on the body.

Sexed as bodies always are in Carter's writings, the meanings werewolves take on depend on their gender. The male lycanthrope has been canonised in folk and fairy tales as a metaphor for "male violence and especially for his sexual aggression", thus symbolising "the dangerous and irresistible seducer who haunts the helpless female victims" (Braidotti 2002: 128).²² Although the fairy tales display some examples of the were-male seducer, their most disruptive feature is the representation of female wolf-like creatures, which curiously does not have many precedents in literature, and is thus all the more significant. As Creed points out, indeed, the transformation of werewolves during the full moon – and, more generally, their life cycles being conditioned by the lunar calendar – fit women better than men due to the menstrual cycle, which makes female bodies linked to the phases of the moon (Creed 1993: 65).

The metamorphosis into wild beasts, werewolves and vampires is perhaps best understood, as Atwood aptly suggests (Atwood 2007), if the stories of *The Bloody Chamber* are analysed according to predator-versus-prey arrangements. A similar viewpoint indeed helps draw together actual and metaphorical representations of beastlike and supernatural dreadful creatures²³ and to investigate the power relations subsisting between the two categories so that, regardless of generic assignment, it is possible to find out who wields power and who, conversely is represented as powerless, and why. This approach also allows one to examine if and to what extent the physical metamorphoses of the characters lead to a change in power relations, thus to assess whether the transformations of female bodies do empower women's sexualities and performances. Atwood's contentions are grounded in the parallel reading of *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Bloody Chamber*, the latter being considered a sort of fictional representation of the insights put forward in the former: "In both books, the distinctions drawn are not so much between male and female, as between 'tigers' and 'lambs', carnivores and herbivores" in other words, predators versus preys (ibid.: 134). According to Atwood, Sade offers only one way for women to escape "sacrificial lambhood" (ibid.), that is "adopting tigerhood" (ibid.: 135), the former being exemplified by Justine, the perfect

²² As will be shortly shown, Carter does draw on traditional folkloric representations of werewolves, which pre-date the re-appropriation of the motif by Gothic literature.

²³ Here I am referring to those critics who attached vampiric or beastly attributes to human characters, in particular to the Marquis, the male antagonist of "The Bloody Chamber" (see, for example Sceats 2001 and Armitt 1997).

victim, and the latter by Juliette, the ruthless perpetrator. As Carter suggests, though, neither of them is a free, empowered woman since both of them are, in different ways, victims of patriarchal stereotypical definitions of womanhood as the naturalized ideal (Justine) and as the subversive, threatening whore (Juliette). The experiences lived by the heroines of Carter's fairy tales aim at achieving a tentative synthesis of Juliette and Justine, which Sade was never able (and perhaps not even willing) to find, so that "the tiger and the lamb parts of the psyche can reach some sort of accommodation" (ibid.: 136). Lambhood and tigerhood, indeed, can coexist in the same person and, most notably, they can be found in either genders (ibid.: 137; Sage, 1997: 24). This clever distinction befits the analysis of each story of *The Bloody Chamber* while also establishing a framework for the analysis of the collection as a whole, arranged as it is "according to categories of meat-eater" (ibid.).

4.5. Appetites and (non-) cannibalistic consumption: disclosing and redistributing power through the incorporation and digestion of the other

Atwood's perceptive suggestion widens the scope of the study of the body in the fairy tales because it gives way to the possibility of interpreting them in the light of appetites. The choice of the plural "appetites" endeavours to convey the symbolic polysemy the concept might take on with reference to different levels of reading. To begin with, appetite and eating are revealed as "loc[i] of vigorously exercised power relations" (Sceats 1997: 102).

Sceats makes an interesting distinction between hunger and appetite, according to which hunger is a physical drive coming exclusively from the inside whereas appetite, like sexuality, is a cultural construct that comes from inside as well as outside, being also subject to "external constraints and forces" (ibid.). Such a distinction is even more meaningful since, whether it is sexual or alimentary, appetite does not necessarily privilege "neither the provider nor the consumer" (ibid.). In other words, representing power distributions according to appetite promotes an alternative to institutionalised power, which "can be seen in the Foucauldian model of unstable power relations where

dominant and subordinate positions are not fixed” (ibid.: 110). Carter’s fairy tales add a subtle connotation to the representation of appetites, as they present patriarchal appetites as cannibalistic drives, which tend to devour and incorporate the other “to exclude and repress it, and define it negatively against itself” (Kerchy 2008: 47). Patriarchal appetites are interpreted as cannibalistic for cannibalism “suggests the absolute supremacy of the consumer, and is presumably experienced as pretty well absolute by the victim” (Sceats 1997: 109). The wilful transformations of female characters into wild beasts counter this disposition by depicting women’s choice of identifying with and embodying the other, incorporated as a new part of the – heterogeneous – self, which embraces difference through welcoming change, and thus challenges the patriarchal cannibalistic annihilating imposition of power.

The transposition of power relations in culinary terms seems to be a recurring feature of Carter’s writing (see Sceats 1997) where, as Roemer puts it, the logic is quite basic: “there are those who eat and there are those who are eaten” (Roemer 2001: 114). Although the arguments underlying the depiction of power relations between men and women in terms of predators and victims seem to be rather evident if one follows the line of reasoning laid out so far, the same cannot be held true with regard to the culinary understanding. Why, one may wonder, can female bodies be considered preys, literally objects of consumption to be devoured by masculine appetites? This third implication of Carter’s culinary metaphor derives from the famous distinction the writer draws in the *Sadeian Woman* between “flesh”, which is “alive and, typically, human”, and “meat”, which is instead “dead, animal and intended for consumption” (Carter 1979a: 161). Carter attaches skin to flesh so that “flesh plus skin equals sensuality” (ibid.: 162), and signifies pleasure, whereas “flesh minus skin equals meat” (ibid.), and signifies “economic objectification” (Makinen 1992: 10). In the fairy tales these parallels are actualized, thus the power relationships between men and women are represented in terms of predators – i.e. those who eat – and preys – i.e. those who are eaten. The same tension, however, is also highlighted within the same individual, so that “the relationship between women’s subjective sexuality and their objective role as property” is also stressed (ibid.).

The metamorphosis of woman into wild beast – that is, predator – or her being a supernatural predator like the vampire gives way to the empowerment of female sexuality.

Significantly enough nevertheless, it does so in a more complex way than a simple power reversal, which would sustain the patriarchal cannibalistic economy that brought about the victimisation of women in the first place. Carter gives up patriarchal established, oppressive discourses overturning “the conventional generic formulae that consistently cast women in negative roles of victims or predators” (Wisker 1997: 125) because her heroines are able to recognize the beast in themselves as well as the beastly attributes of men, and to choose to embrace the former and to disavow the latter. This process is described through the motif of women changing their skin (that is, what makes their body lively, human, flesh). Stripping off the skin corresponds to freeing the self from the meanings written on the surface of its body, but also to being able to write, on a new surface, new autonomous meanings. The animal body signifies empowerment because by wearing a furry skin women decide to embrace the positive aspects of bestiality and appetite. These claims are consistent with Gamble’s insights on how Carter deals with power relations and the “alliance between the powerful and the powerless” within them, according to which, when women are “stripped from their veneer of ‘naturalness’, they can be exposed as the constructions they are, and thus [are] capable of being dismantled and rebuilt in different forms” (Gamble 1997: 103).

The last implication of Carter’s culinary metaphors explored in this research is a reflection on the association between desire and appetite suggested by Braidotti’s contention that “the object of desire has to be made digestible” (Braidotti 2002: 141). The idea of digestion aptly endows the image of the body with open boundaries, incorporating something other, which comes from outside, is assimilated and then becomes a constituent part of the body itself. Appetites and eating as ways of transforming and assimilating otherness can be linked to a broader emphasis put by Carter on bodily sensory experiences, as her prose is rich in “a variety of reported sights and tastes as well as smells, textures, and sounds” (Roemer 2001: 115).

CHAPTER 2.

METAMORPHOSING THE FAIRY TALE: RE-STYLING A GENRE

Speculative fiction really means that [writing about ideas], the fiction of speculation, the fiction of asking “what if”. It’s a system of continuing inquiry. In a way all fiction starts off with “what if”, but some “what ifs” are more specific.

(Carter in Katsavos & Carter 1994 13-14)

You write from your own history [...] you have to bear it in mind when you are writing, you have to keep on defining the ground on which you’re standing, because you are in fact setting yourself in opposition to the generality

(Carter in Haffenden 1985: 79)

1. THE RE-BIRTH OF THE AUTHOR IN *THE BLOODY CHAMBER*

Before venturing into the study of the metamorphosis of generic conventions in *The Bloody Chamber*, it is worth dwelling upon the issue of authorship with relation to Carter’s writings for at least two main reasons. First of all, this allows one to identify the development of a – albeit at times incoherent and always changing – literary and political agenda throughout her work, which, as this research strives to prove, reaches a turning point with the rewriting of fairy tales in the light of the critical reflections set forth in *The Sadeian Woman*. Secondly, it provides a precious occasion to examine the notion of authorship, and to amend the major *authoritative* standpoints on the topic in order to account for Carter’s literary creativity without considering her work subservient to a coherent feminist agenda.

The new notion of authorship that is proposed here aims at freeing authorship from its dependence on the imposition of power and on the stabilisation of a supposed original meaning. Alternative ways of defining authorship by referring to Carter's case are instead grounded in the recurrence of subversive narrative strategies and stylistic choices, in the commitment to the demythologising business, in materialism and historicity. Furthermore, Carter's authorial stance can be traced back to a feminist political agenda which evolves over time so that its expressions are not always consistent with one another, but nonetheless remain among Carter's main obsessions throughout her career, earning her work the fitting label of "speculative fiction" or "fiction of ideas". An alternative way of articulating the concept of authorship with reference to Carter would be defining it an "authorial voice" rather than the more authoritative idea of "authorship", loaded as the latter is with patriarchal power imposition and post-structuralist attempts to deconstruction. Distinguishing Carter's authorial voice is all the more important as it means acknowledging that it is possible to single out messages she wants to convey within the collage of genres, the pastiche and the intricate intertextual web of references. It is worth noting that the complexity of Carter's style and narrative arrangements far from fixing a meaning which must be discovered, generate contradictions and ambiguities so that rather than imposing an authoritative explanation, they encourage readers to appropriate her fiction and negotiate its signification through time.

The idea of the "Death of the Author", which started to surface with the work of post-structuralist philosophers and critics such as Roland Barthes, has developed from the 1960s taking on two main implications. First of all, the writers' biography must not be prioritised when reading their works and trying to trace the original meaning the author allegedly wanted to convey. Secondly, as deconstructionists emphasise, the personality of the author must not be used as a means to interpret their writings, since there is no unitary empirical or transcendental, stable subject who writes (Burke 1989: 1-6).

Barthes' purpose is to reinstate the intrinsic value of literary texts by replacing the authority of the writer with that of language. In *Criticism and Truth* (1966), he claims that "a science of discourse could only be established if literary analysis took language rather than authors as the starting-point of its enquiry" (ibid.: 20). Barthes opposes the notion of a godly author, who is the "source and master to whom the chain of textual effects must

be traced, and in whom they find their genesis, meaning, goal and justification” (ibid.: 23). Accordingly, since the text “is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning [...] but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (ibid.: 25), killing the author would imply the refusal to assign a fixed, “secret” or “ultimate” meaning to the text (ibid.: 24). It follows that the author is, in Derridian terms, a “transcendental signified” which neutralises all differences and conflicts, and cancels polysemy (ibid. 23-24). This last remark makes even more explicit the lack of theoretical bases for Barthes’ statement of the death of the author pointed out by Burke (ibid.: 9) because the imposition of meaning allegedly fixed by the author, which neutralises the polysemy of literary texts should rather be ascribed to the critical analysis of the writings. In other words, it is not the author who stabilises meaning and imposes a univocal interpretation of the text but the critic, who does so either by analysing the literary work in the light of the writer’s biography or by trying to identify its supposed original signification. The author, and the correspondent figure of the critic Barthes refers to, is the “modern” one, whose prestige and sovereignty was granted by humanism, rationalism and positivism (see Barthes 1967: 2). He is the product of a specific discursive arrangement which, as such, can and must be questioned and overthrown once it has proved to be no longer able to account for late-Twentieth-Century changes in the understanding of literature. Instead of sentencing the author to death, then, Barthes should have conceptualised the need to change the established mechanisms of literary criticism and, in my position, the extent to which the author’s experience affects the politics of the text rather than constraining its meanings.

As Carter’s work – in particular the collection of fairy tales – shows, identifying an authorial voice does not mean killing the polysemy of the text, but on the contrary cherishing it on account of the author’s experience and beliefs. Carter’s commitment to materialism and historicity, indeed, is grounded in her strong belief that people are socially determined, so that who is speaking, from where, how and why – that is, the author’s positionality – is of paramount importance in order to grasp and to put into question her political agenda. This does not undermine either the literary creativity which produced the text, or the unique value of the literary work itself when it is detached from the author’s experience, but helps one to assess the significance of the work for its times

and its different interpretations for the time being. A similar claim is sustained by Carter's characters, since even the more fictitious imaginary beings that crowd her fairy tales are irremediably shaped by their culture, relationships and more generally by the circumstances of their lives, exactly like their author is: "[Carter] never accepted the madwoman-in-the-attic school of thought about the woman writer, particularly not about the Gothic or fantastical writer: freaks and fairies, she believed, were as much socially determined as anyone else; our symbols are of course ours" (Sage 2003: 74). Stating that both writer and text are culturally constructed or socially determined is not a way of dismissing the polysemy of the literary text, or its possibility of signifying something new when it is reinterpreted. Rather, it is merely a guiding principle informing an analysis of the literary work which goes beyond aesthetics – to which it also turns to – and looks at the circumstances of its production in order to uncover and frame the influences that shaped it and the consequences it generates within a broader social, historical and literary landscape.

The second main idea emerging from Barthes' essay devoted to the deconstruction of the author is that he shall be killed in order for the reader to be born: "suppressing the author for the sake of the writing [...] is [...] to restore the status of the reader" (Barthes 1967: 3). Barthes assumes that if the author is acknowledged, the ultimate meaning of the text is discovered and "explained", and therefore the reader is denied the possibility of giving life to the text by interpreting and signifying it:

The true locus of writing is reading. [...] the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination [...] the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the author. (ibid.: 6)

Once again, though, Barthes is addressing the kind of criticism which seeks to discover "the Author [...] beneath the work" (ibid.: 5), and to stabilise a meaning which the author ostensibly aimed to convey, but actually is only the outcome of the critics' stance (itself socially and culturally determined) on the text. As a matter of fact – and as Carter's work demonstrates – the presence of a strong, easily recognisable authorial voice does not preclude the creative role of the reader. In "Notes from the Front Line" Carter explains:

I try, when I write fiction, to think on my feet – to present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and to leave the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions. (Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts...). (Carter 1997: 37)

It should be clear that for Carter rewriting is a process in which the role of the reader is of paramount importance, and that it is the reader's interaction with the text to generate its meanings. Therefore, although Carter leaves her imprint on what she writes, this does not preclude but on the contrary utterly encourages an interactive and prolific relation between her fiction and its public: "reading a book is like re-writing it for yourself [...] You bring to a novel anything you read, all your experience of the world. You bring your story and you read it in your own terms. And therefore it's impossible to quantify what the reaction should be" (Carter 1985: 20).

The last implication of Barthes' contentions which is worth noting with reference to Carter's literary work is the assumption that writing is an imitative practice, and therefore it can never be original: "the writer can only imitate a gesture forever anterior, never original; his only power is to combine the different kinds of writing" (Barthes 1967: 4). Even though this point could be held true with reference to linguistics, that is generally speaking to the use of language as a culturally established mutually understandable code, it could also be questioned by referring to Carter's example on more than one account. To begin with, Carter's way of playing with language defies easy definitions and often pushes conventions to the extreme, so that the character of the cultural – thus human and totally contextual – nature of language is exposed. More to the point, Carter believes that writers are able to say something new despite the unavoidable references to previous works, or, at least they must believe they can in order for their work to be of value. Furthermore, unlike Barthes, she does not believe that words – and texts – are part of a "ready made dictionary" where they can be explained and defined "only by other words [...] ad infinitum" (ibid.: 5). In an interview with Anna Katsavos, Carter wonders: "Can a bird sing only the song it knows, or can it learn a new song?".²⁴

²⁴ Here Carter is quoting a line in the tale "The Lady of the House of Love", which is part of the collection *The Bloody Chamber*. As the writer explains in this interview, it is taken from a filmic adaptation

Have we got the capacity at all of singing new songs? It's very important that if we haven't, we might as well stop now" (Katsavos & Carter 1994: 16). Carter's speculative fiction is in fact all for "putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new ones makes the old bottles explode" (Carter 1997: 37). Acknowledging that her intertextual play with generic and narrative conventions is a way of making old bottles explode, corresponds to admitting that the dialogue Carter establishes with them is aimed at questioning and overthrowing them. As has already been pointed out, Carter exploits patriarchal narratives in order to turn them against themselves, to expose their naturalisation and to replace them with something subversive, which defies and challenges the discursive arrangements according to which they were built and are sustained. Moreover, as an answer to the post-structuralist conviction that "a text is a text is a text" and that "writer's lives merely distract us from the true slipperiness and anonymity of any text worth its salt" (Sage 2003: 65), while discussing Borges' corresponding idea that books are about books, Carter polemically asks: "What then was the first book about?" (Katsavos & Carter 1994: 15). Carter dismisses similar arguments because they come from purely theoretical speculations, and therefore are not grounded in any way in historicity and experience. Such theoretical stances, finally, are thus comparable to myths, in that they "present us with ideas about ourselves which don't come out of practice" (ibid.: 16).

Another set of issues related to the importance of underlining Carter's authorial voice has to do with feminist criticism. Those feminist critics who endorse the death of the author refer to the same definition of authorship turned down by Barthes. In particular, they despise the kind of authority which goes hand in hand with the idea of the - male - author-god, and the oppressive discursive arrangements which have allowed a male literary canon to be established by excluding women writers. They proclaim the death of the author, for both authorship and the aesthetics of representation "are seen to be the products of a patriarchal politics of representation" where "the ideology of authorship and representation mutually reinforce one another" (Burke 1989: 42). Yet, if their aim is reinstating the space for women writers in the canon or reshaping it through

(about which she does not specify any further detail) of a story by Dostoevsky, which is one of the sources of inspiration for the tale itself (Katsavos & Carter 1994: 16).

a more equal redistribution of power, they should engage in a more inclusive redefinition of authorship, and celebrate the birth of a new kind of author instead of decreeing its death altogether. As Burke remarks, indeed: “No subjectivity precedes a language that has evolved for millennia [...] but this in no way impedes the ability of an author to work [...] innovatively within and with the language” (ibid.: 174).

As Carter’s example shows, the language mastered and ruled by patriarchy can be used in creative and disruptive ways to challenge and overthrow oppressive discursive practices and to suggest new strategies to articulate female agency. More to the point, “there are greater and lesser degrees of authorial inscription”, which also depend on the different acts of reading gathering over time so that “the differences (in gender, history, class, [...]) that exist between authors – within authorship – defy reduction to any universalising aesthetics” (ibid.: 191).

The investigation of authorship should rather be inscribed in the broader reflection on the complexities of the female subject which, in turn, instead of being killed like the patriarchal tradition has tried to do, needs to be given back its materiality (ibid.: 202). This is precisely what Carter represents in her fairy tales: embodied female subjects who struggle to come to terms with themselves and with the world by experiencing it with their bodies, within the limited span of alternatives offered by their historical and material conditions. The same holds true for the writer herself, who acknowledges the need for authorship to be a “situated activity” (ibid.), as the author is “that one category which clearly overlaps [...] text and context” (ibid.). The role of the author as a situated subject should be reappraised because it involves an understanding of the cultural energies of which the literary text is a product, but which, in turn, are reshaped and given new life by it, also thanks to the creative contribution of the author (ibid.: 204). Last, but not least, political forms of literary criticism like feminism should also take into account the necessary responsibility of the author for the political implications of what she says both in terms of criticism and in terms of the strategies of resistance and agency she puts forward.

On the whole, as Foucault admits, “To this day, the ‘author’ remains an open question” (Foucault 1969: 299) and, in spite of all the efforts of those who endeavour to decree his death, his disappearance raises further questions, which need be

problematized. While reflecting and trying to deconstruct the notion of “work” with relation to its creator, Foucault wonders: “Yet, what of a context that questions the concept of a work? What [...] is the strange unity designated by the term, work? What is necessary to its composition, if a work is not something written by a person called an ‘author?’” (ibid.: 301).

Not only is a definitive solution to this debate still unavailable, but perhaps it does not even make sense, in that diverse responses should be found in the complex plurality of authorial inscriptions referred to above, which also depend on the function assigned to the critic – both of which, most notably, are bound to history and context. Nevertheless, as Foucault remarks, “we should re-examine the empty space left by the author’s disappearance, we should attentively observe [...] the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance” (ibid.: 303). From this gap left by the death of the subject-author emerges what Foucault calls “the ‘author’ as a function of discourse”, which, broadly speaking – since an in depth discussion of Foucault’s stance on authorship is beyond the scope of this work – is not universal and results from constant negotiations within a period or form of discourse (ibid.: 305-307). In any case, “a text always bears a number of signs that refer to the author” (ibid.: 308) and even if the link between authors and their work is problematic, and the “absolute nature and creative role of the subject” are suspicious to say the least, “the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its interventions in discourse, and its system of dependencies” (ibid.: 314).

Hence, the notion of authorship must not sustain or worse consolidate the idea of “a universal and unitary subject”, but “the retracing of the work to its author is a working-back to historical, cultural and political embeddedness” instead (Burke 1989: 202).

A possible reconfiguration of the role of an author who is very much alive like Carter could start from the premises laid out by Bakhtin and Kristeva, who welcome the evolution of a “sense of the author”, which is able to keep “pace with a changing literary situation”, as “author-text relationships are subject to variations both historical and structural” (ibid.: 50). In other words, the “idea and function of the author” should be reconceived, in order that the authorial voice becomes “the voice amongst the many

which holds together the polyphonic strands of the text's composition, an author who resides within the controlling centre constituted by the intersection of the surfaces" (ibid.: 48), where also the creative re-significations of the text performed by readers lie.

Besides being a critical tribute to Carter's fictional speculative reflections, these introductory considerations are set forth to ground and guide the analysis carried out in this chapter and to establish a red thread throughout the thesis. The study of Carter's narrative strategies, intertextual plays and defiance of generic conventions sets out to show how the transformation of the genre of fairy tale performed by the literary creativity of the writer could suggest new approaches to the analysis of generic fiction in broader terms. In addition, acknowledging the peculiarity and originality of Carter's authorial voice serves to exemplify and sustain the enquiry of her feminist and identity politics, which albeit at times inconsistent and often amended and adjusted, always remains a central preoccupation fuelling the fiction of ideas of which *The Bloody Chamber* represents a turning point. This, in turn, lets one move on to the issue of the body, whose articulation reveals an intricate, dynamic identity politics, which draws on the physical metamorphosis to symbolize and/or embody the necessary changes female subjects must embrace if they want to be empowered, stop playing and start taking action.

2. IN-BETWEEN COMPLICITY AND REBELLION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF CARTER'S FAIRY TALES

This section is focussed on the metamorphosis and redefinition of the fairy tale as a narrative genre through the analysis of Carter's stance on and reworking of its generic conventions and functions. First of all, specific reference is made to the folkloric tradition and to the significance of Carter's viewpoint about the interaction between popular, oral and literary, written versions of the fairy tales, which is rendered in the stories through the subtle intertextual arrangements of elements belonging to both traditions. Secondly, the social function of the fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber* is pointed out and grounded in

the representation of power structures and their changes, which is a feature shared by most of the stories in the collection. The final considerations examine the possibility of defining these tales as “re-written” fairy tales, and develop alternative metanarrative reflections about the outcomes of the transformations of the genre brought about by Carter.

It is important to bear in mind that the reason why this research dwells on the investigation of generic conventions and narrative structures lies in the productive interaction between poetics and politics, textual and sexual politics in *The Bloody Chamber*. The metamorphosis of female identity and of gendered role positions and social relationships represented in the tales, which has been discussed at length by several critics, is indeed strongly connected with its textual rendition. More to the point, storytelling and identity development are mutually productive, and Carter’s transformative texts embody the changes which are taking place in the psychosocial²⁵ development of the characters. Furthermore, the protagonists of some tales are given the opportunity of accounting for themselves by narrating their own stories, or by being the focalizers of the events in the context of a third person narration.

Stating that Carter’s fairy tales perform a social function implies endorsing the view that the literary fairy tale is the product of an intertextual interaction between folk tales and previous literary versions. In addition, establishing a dialogue between the oral and literary tradition of the fairy story is one of the hallmarks which allows one to label the short stories collected in *The Bloody Chamber* “fairy tales” despite the number of features which distance them from the genre.

Jack Zipes has devoted his scholarly work to researching and advocating for the need to trace the origins of the fairy tale as a genre in the oral tradition, which the literary one has not yet ceased to refer back to and mingle with:

²⁵ The term “psychosocial” is purposefully used here to highlight two intertwined fundamental features of Carter’s characters. On the one hand, it underscores that not only is their development shaped by the relationships and discourses which rule their experiences and interactions, but they are also given psychological depth. On the other hand, their psychological characterisation and its metamorphosis emphasise Carter’s significant amendment of the generic conventions of the fairy tales. In *The Bloody Chamber*, indeed, the traditional types are often replaced by individuals with a rounded and constantly problematised personality.

The literary origins of all our canonical fairy tales in the West mark the culmination of an oral tradition in history but certainly not its end. As historical culmination, the literary fairy tale regulates an oral folk tale thematically and stylistically, possesses it, passes it off and on as its own, and thus does violence to it. Therefore, it is at the intersection of the oral with the literary that we can begin to trace the cultural significance of a fairy tale. (Zipes 1993: 7)

Bacchilega²⁶ basically agrees with Zipes' stance when she asserts:

The "classic" fairy tale is a literary appropriation of the older folk tale, an appropriation which nevertheless continues to exhibit and reproduce some folkloric features. As a "borderline" or transitional genre, it bears the traces of orality, folkloric tradition, and sociocultural performance [...]. And conversely, even when it claims to be folklore, the fairy tale is shaped by literary traditions with different social uses and users (Bacchilega 1997: 3)

Carter is certainly aware – and most probably is even a supporter – of Zipes' theories. In any case, the stories of *The Bloody Chamber* are located exactly on the threshold where the oral and the literary tradition are hinged. In fact, deciding to write fairy tales which refer back to both the folk and the literary versions seems to be the culmination of the process started by Carter during the translation of Perrault's fairy tales, where she felt the need to bring the texts back to "the simplicity and directness of the folk tale" (Carter 2008: 76). The folkloric elements, indeed, had been censored by a writer whose intended audience was the French Court of Louis XIV. Far from despising Perrault for the changes he made in moralising and mitigating the original content of folkloric versions, Carter rather shows the sharp awareness that "Each century tends to create or re-create fairy tales after its own taste" (ibid.) and accordingly decides to show in hers what she deems to be the required changes in values and power structures – obviously after *her own* taste.

Carter expresses her appraisal of and debt to folklore on different occasions. In the introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1990) she acknowledges the folkloric origins of fairy tales while also giving a definition of the genre:

²⁶ Besides her work being a major reference throughout this research, this section in particular is indebted to Bacchilega's insights. In addition to carrying out an apt and interesting analysis of postmodern fairy tales, Bacchilega's critical investigation of Carter's stories is groundbreaking also with regard to the exploration of the political implications of the writer's narrative choices.

The term “fairy tale” is a figure of speech and we use it loosely, to describe the great mass of infinitely various narrative that was, sometimes, passed on and disseminated through the world by word of mouth – stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them, the perennially refreshed entertainment of the poor. (Carter 1990: ix)

Even though her versions owe a lot to the popular tradition, they can be unmistakably considered literary texts: “writing them down [...] both preserves, and also inexorably changes, these stories” (ibid.: ix-x). This aspect becomes all the more evident, as Carter herself points out, if the role of the storyteller is observed. Whereas in the case of the folktale: “We may know the name and gender of the particular individual who tells a particular story [...] but we can never know the name of the person who invented that story in the first place”, when it comes to literary fairy tales, “our highly individualized culture” considers them the outcome of the authorial creativity of “the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs” (ibid.: x). In other words, besides being tailored to suit a particular audience and lose their original democracy, the literary versions are to be framed in the literary creativity of a writer who reworks their ingredients in a personal way – “This is how *I* make potato soup”, as Carter writes of herself (ibid.). Moreover, as Makinen aptly remarks, Carter praises the folk tale for its straightforwardness, “whose structures could be easily rewritten” – and, it could be added, re-signified – easier than those of myths, which are more dangerous (Makinen 1992: 4) and against which Carter takes strong positions. Unlike myths, fairy tales project one onto “a world where our dreads and desires were personified in beings that were not-human without being divine” (Sage 2001: 70). Therefore, Carter does not hesitate and appropriates, plays with, disrupts and puts into question such structures which depict relationships between men and women in order to sustain “fertility and continuance” (Carter 1990: xviii). Turning conventions against themselves like she always does – both on a textual and on a political level – she exploits the normative functions of these tales but instead of enforcing “the ties that bind people together”(ibid.), represents ways of questioning them, and teases their sub-text “to isolate their elements for cruelly lucid contemplation” (Sage 2001: 68).

The strong, permeable links between folk tales as fictions of the poor and their literary remoulding can be easily detected through a close reading of the fairy tales

collected in *The Bloody Chamber*, particularly those who have a clearer and traceable folk origin, such as “Little Red Riding Hood”.²⁷ All the three stories explicitly referring to this folk tale contain descriptions of the rural settings and superstitions, which reproduce the atmosphere of the places where different versions of the cautionary tale were most probably told and which do not usually find place in the most famous literary adaptations.

In “The Werewolf” almost one third of the tale is devoted to giving an account of the “harsh, brief, poor lives” of the “upland woodsmen” (Carter 1979: 108) among which the narrative is set, and of the popular superstitions in which these people blindly believe:

There will be a crude icon of the virgin behind a guttering candle [...]
To these upland woodsmen, the Devil is as real as you or I. More so; they have not seen us nor even know that we exist, but the Devil they glimpse often in the graveyards. [...] At midnight, especially on Walpurgisnacht, the Devil holds picnics in the graveyards and invites the witches; then they dig up fresh corpses and, eat them. Anyone will tell you that.
Wreaths of garlic on the doors keep out the vampires. A blue-eyed child born feet first on the night of St John’s Eve will have second sight.
When they discover a witch [...] they strip the crone, search for her marks, for the supernumerary nipple her familiar sucks. (ibid.)

“The Company of Wolves”, which opens with the description of a similar unfriendly, winter setting – “this region of mountain and forest” (ibid.: 110) – is interspersed with popular superstitions and legends as well:

A witch from up the valley once turned an entire wedding party into wolves because the groom had settled on another girl. She used to order them to visit her, at night, from spite, and they would sit and howl around her cottage for her, serenading her with their misery (ibid.: 111-112)

After this first taste of popular legends, a longer digression follows, which accounts for the story of a man turned into a werewolf and on the destiny of his family. The section closes with the detailed illustration of folkloric beliefs about werewolves to which the inhabitants give credit:

²⁷ For an extensive analysis of the folk origins and multiple literary adaptations of the tale through time see Zipes 1993.

They say there's an ointment the devil gives you that turns you into a wolf the minute you rub it on. Or, that he was born feet first and had a wolf for his father and his torso is a man's but his legs and genitals are a wolf's. And he has a wolf's heart.

Seven years is a werewolf's natural span but if you burn his human clothing you condemn him to wolfishness for the rest of his life, so old wives hereabouts think it some protection to throw a hat or an apron at the werewolf, as if clothes made the man. (ibid.: 113)

“Wolf-Alice”, deemed by Bacchilega as part of the three “women-in-the-company-of-wolves’ stories” reworking the folkloric tradition of “Red Riding Hood” (Bacchilega 1997: 59) also displays hints at popular superstitions when ironically addressing the way people can fight werewolves and body-snatchers: “He filled the church with an arsenal of bells, books and candles; a battery of silver bullets; they brought a ten-gallon tub of holy water in a wagon from the city, where it had been blessed by the Archbishop himself” (Carter 1979: 125).

Likewise, other stories which do not refer to the “Red Riding Hood” tradition feature descriptions of popular legends and beliefs. In “The Lady of the House of Love” overt reference to popular ways of chasing away monsters and supernatural creatures stresses at once the folkloric origins of fairy tales as well as of the genre it is combined with in this particular instance; the gothic. The horrific tale whose main character is a female-vampire thus describes its protagonist:

She is the hereditary commandant of the army of shadows who camp in the village below her château, who penetrate the woods in the form of owls, bats and foxes, who make the milk curdle and the butter refuse to come, who ride the horses all night on a wild hunt so they are sacks of sin and bone in the morning, who milk the cows dry and, especially, torment pubescent girls with fainting fits, disorders of the blood, diseases of the imagination. (ibid.: 95)

Finally, in “The Tiger’s Bride” reference is made to the popular, oral tradition of storytelling, when the protagonist’s maid tells her the – conveniently amended – story of the tiger-man “to scare me into good behaviour” (ibid.: 56):

They'd brought him from Sumatra, in the Indies, she said; his hinder parts were all hairy and only from the head downwards did he resemble a man. [...] But the tiger-man, in spite of his hairiness, could take a glass of ale in his hand like a good Christian and drink it down. Had she not seen him do so, at the sign of The George, by the steps of Upper Moor Fields when she was just as high as me and

lisped and toddled, too. [...] But if this young lady was not a good little girl and did not eat her boiled beetroot, then the tiger-man would put on his big black travelling cloak lined with fur, just like your daddy's, and hire the Erl-King's galloper of wind and ride through the night straight to the nursery and – Yes, my beauty, GOBBLE YOU UP! (ibid.)

The examination of how continuities and disruptions between the oral tradition, its literary adaptations, and the dialogue between the two over time is reproduced in Carter's versions of the fairy tales gives way to the analysis of the social function these texts – like their folkloric predecessors – continue to perform. As has already been anticipated, analysing the social function of fairy tales unavoidably reveals the conflation of poetics and politics in the stories, whose plots are imbued with and arranged according to the representation of changing power relations. The capital role played by fairy tales in representing social structures and power-knowledge negotiations through time and the educational function they have come to perform are also the main reasons why feminist writers from the second half of the Twentieth Century onwards have been appropriating and reshaping the genre, bending its conventions to amend the politics of traditional texts and suggest the necessary changes. Furthermore, they have been calling on readers to actively engage in the signification of plots and characters' experiences, always keeping an eye on the discursive arrangements on which the tales comment or of which they are expression:

the aesthetics of the feminist fairy tale demands an open-ended discourse which calls for the readers to complete the liberating expectations of the narratives in terms of their own experience and their social context.
[...] It is no longer possible to ignore the connection between the aesthetic components of the fairy tales, whether they be old or new, and their historical function within a socialisation process which forms taste, mores, values and habits. (Zipes 1989: xi; 2)

As Gamble remarks, throughout the seventies “Carter's main preoccupation in her writing [...] is with the alliance between the powerful and the powerless – how it is constructed, how maintained, by whom and to what ends” (Gamble 1997: 103). This process can be said to meet a turning point with *The Bloody Chamber*, where Carter comments on her earlier work, creates fictional examples out of the polemical claims

outlined in *The Sadeian Woman* and develops “interconnected narratives ‘compulsively circling and reworking’ images and scenarios” (Benson 2001: 61).

Among the central concerns of the collection, power relations are described and scrutinised by unveiling and disrupting their naturalisation in traditional fairy tales. Most importantly, the protagonists’ struggles against oppressive power arrangements also emphasise that in traditional folk and fairy tales – like in actual life – striving for independence does not necessarily mean subverting established social discourses, but sometimes only leads to uphold current power structures (Bacchilega 1997: 6). As Zipes points out, indeed, even when change is realised in the tales, social relations are not necessarily altered (Zipes 2002: 28). The reason why Carter represents “the alliance” and not simply the conflict within power relations is then to be found in her intention to ground her fictional writing in the materiality of human experience, where the variety of alternatives to the solution of conflicts aimed at improving one’s social conditions is rich and unpredictable. Moreover, it is rooted in her polemical criticism of traditional fairy tales sustaining patriarchal gender politics and the naturalisation of women’s subservience and passivity, which is intertextually evoked in order to be criticised and possibly overthrown.

According to Zipes, fairy tales are privileged sites to represent power struggles, since they: “are reflections of the social order in a given historical epoch and, as such, they symbolize the aspirations, needs, dreams and wishes of the people, either affirming the dominant social values and norms or revealing the necessity to change them” (ibid.: 5). Furthermore, their focus on power depends on the historical epoch, of which they “portray either the possibilities for social participation or the reasons for social conflict” (ibid.: 170), as “the creative purpose and major themes of the folk tales did not concern harmony, but the depiction of changing social structures and alternative forms of behaviour so that new developments and connections between human and things could be better grasped by the people” (ibid.: 169-170). This is the first reason why Carter’s fairy tales can be deemed to perform a social function: they are a response to the urge to investigate and renegotiate power arrangements and established social discourses involving women in the second half of the Twentieth Century. The transformations Carter represents in *The Bloody Chamber* manage to give her stories emancipatory

developments and – albeit open – endings because of the changes she introduces in their generic conventions, for

Narrative genres clearly do inscribe ideologies (though that can never fix the readings), but later re-writings that take the genre and adapt it will not necessarily encode the same ideological assumptions [...] when the form is used to critique the inscribed ideology [...] then the form is subtly adapted to inscribe a new set of assumptions. (Makinen 1992: 4-5)

As a consequence, not only do Carter's fairy tales comply with the traditional conventions of the genre in performing a social function – i.e. portraying the status quo of a given community in history or how people want or need it to improve – but they also account for the changes of that social function itself on a double perspective. To begin with, they are a critical response to the repressive uses fairy tales have been put to over time in their different mainstream literary adaptations, which from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth centuries can be narrowed down to “literature for children” with a moralising impulse (Bacchilega 1997: 3-7). After having exposed and questioned this kind of social task, Carter puts the “ideologically variable desire machines” of her fairy tales in the service of the portrayal of “emancipatory impulses” (ibid.: 6-7), so that power in *The Bloody Chamber* becomes synonymous both with privilege and with empowerment.

So far, Carter's fairy tales have been examined in their dialogue and continuity with both the folk and the literary traditions. A pivotal aspect of the social function of her stories, however, is the polemical distance they take from the literary canon with regard to the naturalisation of disciplined behaviours it hands down and purports to stabilise, which sometimes renders the stories escapist and consolatory, therefore of no use besides questionable entertainment. This critical stance, in turn, allows one to draw further connections between narrative and politics, as Carter's narrative techniques and devices also endorse feminist criticism and promote strategies of resistance against the imposition of patriarchal ideologies – which explains why her fairy tales are so often called “feminist”. Even though the gender politics informing *The Bloody Chamber* will be discussed at length in the following chapter, it is worth hinting at it briefly in order to underline how the writer's feminist politics affects the texts, and conversely how the analysis of their narrative structures suggests the underlying political stance of the author,

the most evident manifestations of which are probably the use of female first person narrators and the psychological characterisation of the protagonists.

Notaro (1993) effectively explains the transition of the function of the genre from its literary systematisation which took place in the Eighteenth Century, when fairy tales lost their “original purpose of clarifying social and natural phenomena but became sources of refuge and escape in that they made up for what people could not realize in society” (Zipes in Notaro 1993: 72) to contemporary feminist re-writings. Like some fellow feminist writers (such as Tanith Lee), Carter’s fairy tales criticise those literary adaptations which “perpetuate the patriarchal *status quo* by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate” because “fairy tales are not just entertaining fantasies, but powerful transmitters of romantic myths which encourage women to internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate to our ‘real’ sexual function within patriarchy” (Rowe in Notaro 1993: 73, N92). Most importantly, not only do the tales explicitly question the patriarchal naturalization of a convenient *status quo*, but they also offer alternatives, criticising “current shifts in psychic and social structures and [...] point[ing] the way toward new possibilities for individual development and social interaction” (Zipes in Notaro 1993: 73).

Before starting to give proof of the textual implications of these theoretical remarks, attention should be directed to Carter’s appropriation of the fairy tale as a narrative genre, which often results in its denaturalisation and implosion rather than in the compliance with its conventions.

As Carter declares: “My intention was not to do ‘versions’ or, as the American edition of the book said, horribly, ‘adult’ fairy tales, but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories [...] and to use it as the beginning for new stories” (Haffenden 1985: 84). In metanarrative fashion, she also describes the collection as “a book of stories *about* fairy stories” (Makinen 1992: 5). Of course, this is an attempt to disavow any easy labelling of her work on the part of the writer, which, however, is not unfounded. What Carter does, indeed, is twisting the original content of folk tales, remoulding their plots and structures, mocking the purposes they took on through their different literary adaptations and manipulations in history, blending them with other narrative genres and adding her personal touch to let the mix amalgamate and get a new flavour altogether.

Bacchilega calls Carter's rewritings "magic re-clothing" (Bacchilega 1997: 51), which "involves substantive though diverse questioning of both narrative construction and assumptions about gender" (ibid.) not only on the part of the writer, but also on that of the reader, who is "actively" engaged in "a feminist deconstruction" (Makinen 1992: 3).

As a matter of fact, re-writing seems to suit the fairy tale particularly well, as it is "the genre par excellence of iteration (re-telling)" (Crunelle-Vanrigh 2001: 128), which accordingly welcomes the metamorphosis and distortion of its structures. The principle underlying the changes introduced by Carter in her versions does turn some of its conventions utterly upside down, as

Fairy tales are informed by closure, a movement from change to permanence. Their plots move from an initial, pernicious metamorphosis to a stable identity that must and will be reached or recaptured. Carter, however, stubbornly moves the other way round, from stability to instability, undermining the closed binary logic of fairy tale. [...] The fairy tale moves from the margins to the center, Carter from the center to the margins. (ibid.: 128-129, 139)

In the light of these considerations then, it seems inevitable to question the very possibility of defining Carter's appropriation of fairy tales as a rewriting process. As Armitt points out, Carter's "usage of the fairy tales form" is too problematic to be "simply viewed as a rereading, reworking or revision of the fairy-tale mode", because this risks confining the texts "within a generic stranglehold" that could be reductive (Armitt 1997: 90). As has already been clarified, Carter's manipulation of the genre can bring to its revision and redefinition rather than limit the range of the significance of its disruption, but these arguments nonetheless stress the difficulty of classifying and the need to constantly renegotiate the cultural impact of Carter's work.

For these reasons, far from aiming to solve the dilemma of finding a coherent definition of the process Carter engages in with *The Bloody Chamber* – which would mean distorting her narrative and political project in the first place – this research rather endeavours to problematize the disruption of the typical generic traits of the fairy tale. More precisely, it critically investigates the interplay between different genres, questions the significance of the introduction of unexpected elements and examines the consequences of their failure to meet conventional expectations, which result in the redefinition of the genre itself.

3. POSTMODERN NARRATIVE STRATEGIES: INTERTEXTUAL REFLECTIONS

In the old bottle of the generic conventions of the fairy tale, which perform social functions by being primarily concerned with power structures and struggles, Carter puts new wine, that is she explores topics and strategies of storytelling which do not normally find place in the genre. These strategies have frequently been labelled, too many times unproblematically, “postmodern”, a contention which is here agreed upon, with the necessary specifications about the definition of postmodernism that the review of literature set out to clarify (see chapter 1 section 2.2). If postmodernism is to be considered, following Hassan (1993) as a “theory of change” (ibid.: 280), a social as well as artistic phenomenon which encompasses provisional, disjunctive, even contradictory discourses, then Carter’s fairy tales fit the paradigm well enough. The analysis of her supposed allegiance to a postmodern aesthetics could then help organize – as systematizing would be too hard, and perhaps useless, a goal – the study of demythologising strategies, intertextual references and play with generic conventions in *The Bloody Chamber*, which this section purports to tackle.

The most convincing point against the possibility of describing Carter’s fiction in postmodern terms comes from Day, according to whom Carter “stands at odds” both with postmodernist “textual features” and with its philosophical articulations (Day 1998: 129). As to poetics, his objections are rather punctilious, in that he underlines that some of postmodern narrative and textual features such as “pastiche, intertextuality or reflexivity”, which Carter most certainly deploys, appeared “in modernist and earlier texts as well” (ibid.) – therefore using them would not necessarily signal an allegiance to postmodernism. When it comes to postmodern philosophical perspectives, he dismisses Carter’s alliance to them on account of their “relativizing impulse”, which contradicts and “undermine[s] the grounds of [Carter’s] liberal-rationalist, specifically feminist politics” (ibid.). Easy as it could be to superficially agree with these remarks, after a deeper analysis the lack of solid theoretical reference of Day’s claims raises questions about their grounds. Indeed, a definition – attempted and necessarily provisional as it inevitably is – of postmodernism is not clearly referred to, not even to try to set the boundaries or the scope of the term, except that it refers to formal textual features and that it draws on

some sort of philosophical thought. Moreover, and most importantly, a specific characterisation of “relativism”, complex and slippery as also this notion is, is neither hinted to nor attempted.

As this research has endeavoured to show, a possibility of reconciling postmodernism with the constant changeability it entails and historicity, materialism and commitment to feminist politics is conceivable, and lies in the notion of change itself (which the various levels of metamorphoses represented in *The Bloody Chamber* testify to). In this respect, Braidotti is agreed with when, while referring to what could be called a postmodern vision of the subject, she declares: “Non-linearity and a non-unitary vision [...] do not necessarily result in either cognitive or moral relativism [...]. I rather see them as significant sites for reconfiguring political practice and redefining political subjectivity” (Braidotti 2002: 3), which seems to be a very materialist position, showing political awareness as well as commitment.

According to Bacchilega, “postmodern’ retellings” can be distinguished from other contemporary fairy tales “on the grounds of narrative strategies (doubling as both deconstructive and reconstructive mimicry) and subject representations (self-contradictory versions of the self in performance)” (Bacchilega 1997: 140-141).

“It is Carter’s focus on subjectivity as constructed in social and narrative contexts that makes hers a postmodern approach” (ibid. 1997: 21), together with the enquire of borderlines performed by her fiction and her practicing “writing-as-experience-of-limits” (Hutcheon in Bacchilega 1997: 20). Furthermore, Carter’s postmodern rewriting is

twofold, seeking to expose, make visible, the fairy tale’s complicity with “exhausted” narrative and gender ideologies, and, by working from the fairy tales’ multiple versions, seeking to expose, bring out, what the institutionalization of such tales for children has forgotten or left unexplored. (Bacchilega 1997: 50)

These powerful arguments enable one to define Carter’s postmodern revisions as “acts of fairy tale archaeology” which release the many soothed voices of the stories (ibid.: 59).

The choice of the fairy tale model itself signals Carter’s incredulity towards “metanarratives” (or “master narratives”) which according to Lyotard characterises the postmodern condition and is expressed by the refusal to “posit any structures [...] – such

as art or myth – which [...] would have been consolatory” (Hutcheon 1988: 6). These “attractive” and “illusory” “systems” are countered by Lyotard with smaller, “petit récits”, or particular, localised narratives (Lyotard 1993), precisely what Carter’s fairy tales do as opposed to the myths they set out to demythologise.

“Metanarrative” is a term which deserves particular attention within the investigation of Carter’s postmodern narrative strategies, for it could be also understood as “narrative about narrative”, as Makinen probably does when she points out that Carter’s fairy tales are in fact “stories about fairy tales”. An expansion of this connotation of metanarrative can be found in the metacommentaries, which surface form a close reading of some stories within *The Bloody Chamber*. The most evident instance of these self-reflexive comments within the stories is perhaps to be found in one of the first paragraphs of “The Erl-King” (Kramer Linkin 1994: 312): “The woods enclose. You step between the first trees and then you are no longer in the open air; the wood swallows you up [...]”, which continues, after a few lines:

the woods enclose and then enclose again, like a System of Chinese boxes opening one into another; the intimate perspectives of the wood changed endlessly around the interloper, the imaginary traveller walking towards an invented distance that perpetually receded before me. It is easy to loose yourself in these woods. (Carter 1979: 85)

Intertextuality, seen after Barthes as a common, inevitable feature of every text, can also be consciously used by writers – in what could be considered a postmodern fashion – as a powerful narrative device. It is the guiding principle which informs the following analysis of Carter’s fairy tales, since in *The Bloody Chamber* intertextuality takes on a number of embedded meanings and functions. To begin with, the fairy tale as a genre is intrinsically intertextual, as it is characterised by the accumulation and intertwining of multiple “versions and inversions” (Sage 2001: 69) produced, written and handed down in different socio-historical contexts, thus taking on different meanings and implications. Like intertexts, fairy tales are “permutation[s] of texts’ in which several utterances, taken from other texts [in this particular instance, above all from previous versions of other fairy tales] intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva in Allen 2000: 35). In addition, not only do these texts include, appropriate and re-signify traces of other texts, they also

“contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse”, that is the stratification of the “cultural textuality” (ibid.: 36) which is the result of intertextual accumulations. Most notably, intertextuality must not be reduced to simple reference to “sources’ or ‘influences’ stemming from what traditionally has been styled ‘background’ or ‘context’”, as it implies practice and productivity as well, that is the engagement in “on-going ideological struggles” over the different meanings texts never cease to take on (ibid.).

Conscious of the implications of a similar stratification of overlapping but distinguishable meanings over time, which is the product of ceaseless struggles and negotiations, Carter chooses to revise fairy tales further, fully exploiting their intertextual potential and making it even more intricate. The complexity of this postmodern hyper-reflexive operation consists in adding to the fairy tales other generic conventions in order to broaden the scope of their significations, writing fairy tales which comment on previous – oral and literary – versions of the story, and/or linking different tales within the collection in a complex intertextual web of references, whereby the tales are in dialogue with each other. The most subversive intertextual act, however, is perhaps Carter’s choice to set the stories in precise historical moments and in geographically locatable places. In this way the writer is able to comment on and criticise the sets of values and the power structures and relations of different periods, by pointing out with her fictional examples that the imposition of naturalised and disciplined behaviours and norms is merely the result of contextual – therefore provisional – discursive arrangements. Furthermore, the same impression of the temporary and circumstantial character of discursive positions/ing is conveyed, even magnified, by the comparison of different versions of the same tale within the collection.

Even though an all-encompassing and exhaustive analysis of the entangled web of sources to which Carter’s fairy tales refer would be necessarily partial and beyond the scope of this research, some examples are provided in order to account for the refined intertextual work cunningly woven by Carter in her metamorphosing and critical intents.

“The Bloody Chamber”, the opening story of the collection, turns at least to two main sources: the fairy tale “Blue Beard” by Perrault – and possibly to other revisions of this motif and of that of the “forbidden chamber” (Bacchilega 1997: 121) – and the figure

of Sade. The first reference is easily drawn through the plot of the tale, which basically follows Perrault's structure but for the end, where instead of being saved by her brothers, the protagonist is rescued by her mother. Other important variations are to be found in the change of some details, where the feminist politics of the text can be pinpointed – and which will be accordingly discussed in the following chapter – such as the female first person narrator, her speculations about her complicity in her dreadful destiny and on the nature of sexual desire, the link between curiosity and the heart-shaped bloodstain the key leaves on her forehead, the description of the heroine's journey towards self-consciousness and the shaping of her female identity.

The most outstanding disruption of readers' expectations is to be located in the overt association between the male antagonist of Carter's tale, whose name is eloquently enough "the Marquis", to the literary master of pornography, Sade. Consistent with this reading is the possibility of associating the young bride with Justine, the innocent masochistic victim of countless libertines, who, like the protagonist of "The Bloody Chamber" is to some extent implicated in her submission (Notaro 1993: 20).

Among the multiple allusions to pornography which can be detected in the story (see Sheets 1991) the most significant to this stage of the analysis is the description of the shock the protagonist experiences when she enters her husband's library and finds books interspersed with pornographic illustrations. After setting eyes on a copy of "Huysman's *Là-bas*" and on some books by Eliphas Levy, the young lady is suddenly confronted with a dreadful truth. Even though at first she does not understand the implications of titles such as "*The Initiation, The Key of Mysteries, The Secret of Pandora's Box*", the young bride cannot avoid to quiver when she looks at the pornographic pictures and reads their unmistakable captions

I had not bargained for this, the girl with tears hanging on her cheeks like stuck pearls, her cunt a slit fig below the great globes of her buttocks on which the knotted tails of the cat were about to descend, while a man in a black mask fingered with his free hand his prick, that curved upwards like the scimitar he held. The picture had a caption: 'Reproof of curiosity'. [...]

I turned the pages [of *The Adventures of Eulalie at the Harem of the Grand Turk*] in the anticipation of fear; the print was rusty. Here was another steel engraving: 'Immolation of the Wives of the Sultan'. I knew enough for what I saw in that book to make me gasp (Carter 1979: 16-17).

Besides their significance as omens of what is about to happen to the girl, these images are particularly telling because they hint at the nature of the Marquis' sexual appetite and of the sadomasochism underlying the pleasure of his sexual encounters. Most notably, however, they also signal Carter's extreme – intentional – intertextual provocation, as similar images of violence and explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse certainly never appear in fairy tales – at least, not after they have started to be addressed to children.

“Puss in Boots” is an interesting, playful example of intertextual references to less known, but more overtly linked with the popular tradition, literary versions of the fairy tale with the same title. Most likely, the main reference made by Carter is to the Italian Gianbattista Basile's tale “Cagliuso” collected in *Lo cunto de li cunti* (*The Tale of Tales* [1634-36] – Roemer & Bacchilega 2001: 13). This is unquestionably a political choice, as Basile's book incorporates, too “an eclectic range of styles and themes drawn from various traditions”, and above all it is aimed at rearranging “linguistic and cultural hierarchies” through the intersection of high and low culture and by means of subversive strategies – such as having a noble man speak the Neapolitan dialect at a time when it meant being associated with “peasants, vagabonds, fools” (ibid.). Mockery of social conventions and their subversion seem to be Carter's purposes as well, as her tale happily ends with “the low subordinat[ing] the high in fun and challenge” (ibid.: 15), when the poor master succeeds in tricking the rich Signor Pantaloon and in conquering both his wife's heart and his money. Even if Carter changes the Neapolitan setting of Basile's story, the backdrop of “Puss in Boots” remains all the same an Italian city, Bergamo (Carter 1979: 68). Hints at the fact that the original story resorted extensively to the Neapolitan dialect can be traced in Carter's use of Italian words within the English text (ibid.: 68, 72, 77). Furthermore, another proof of Carter's allusion to the Italian writer – and, by extension, reference to the popular character of the genre – could be found in the numerous citations of the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*.²⁸ The terrible, greedy husband of the main female character – i.e. the object of desire of the cat's master – is called Signor

²⁸ It is interesting to note that Bergamo is definitely, even if indirectly, linked with *Commedia dell'arte*, as the city has a long, outstanding tradition of puppet theatre, which among other references draws on *Commedia dell'arte* for its stories. This remark seems significant in the light of Carter's interest in the symbolism of the puppet theatre as well, which she represented and variably signified throughout her career (see, for example, the novel *The Magic Toyshop* and the short story “The Loves of Lady Purple”).

Pantaleone/Pantaloon (ibid.: 74, 76), which reminds one of the Italian mask “Pantalone” who, in the Venetian tradition as well as in the story represents an old, rich, greedy and lustful merchant. In addition, the cat associates itself to Harlequin remarking about his acrobatic abilities: “I might never have braved that flying, upward leap that brought me, as if Harlequin himself on wires [...]” (ibid.: 75), which corresponds to Harlequin’s – and the cat’s – profile of colourful, playful *saltimbanco* (acrobat).

The more one proceeds through the stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, the more intertextual references become entangled, as it is evident from the complexity of the intertextual web characterising “The Erl-King”. The sources of this tale, indeed, rather than in previous versions of fairy tales are to be recovered in the folkloric tradition as well as in the literary one, but first and foremost in Carter’s attempt to deconstruct Romantic ideology and aesthetics and to reshape them from a female perspective (Kramer Linkin 1994: 307). As the title-character suggests, the story is based on the figure of the Erl-King, a malevolent spirit of the forest who lures and kills unaware human beings who cross its path. Although this is a character of Northern European folkloric legends, and reference to similar old wives’ tales would be consistent with Carter’s re-writing project which also seeks to bring fairy tales back to the folk, the main reference here is most probably to Goethe’s ballad *Erlkönig*. As Kramer Linkin suggests, nevertheless, Carter’s purpose is not to refer directly to Goethe’s “ballad of fathers and sons”, but rather to use it to address more broadly the Romantic aesthetics of which it undeniably is a product (ibid.). As a matter of fact, its narrative is “conspicuously overlaid with echoes of canonical nineteenth-century lyric poetry” (ibid.), of which Kramer Linkin provides extensive proof. What Carter sets out to criticise by means of intertextual references is thus the gender politics underlying an aesthetics which represents women as invariably “encapsulated within the male, as if they can only be Blakean emanations whose separate existence in a public sphere so threatens the integrity of the male” (ibid.: 308). Thus, the recurrent images of cages and entrapment which permeate the story, suggested since the beginning in a halo of foreboding from the descriptions of the forest, where threats seem to be hidden in every corner: “the woods enclose [...] the wood swallows you up” (Carter 1979: 84). The forest is a “subtle labyrinth”, where women who got lost – and have lost themselves – are condemned to “hunt around hopelessly for the way out” (ibid.: 84-85).

The same claustrophobic motif of entrapment is soon after repeated like a refrain – “the woods enclose and then enclose again” (ibid.: 85) – in the piece which has already been described as a meta-commentary. In this way the reader, too, is encouraged to speculate about Romantic representations of nature and desire, sticking to which, the narrator warns, “It easy to lose yourself in these woods” (ibid.). Read as such, the story becomes a sort of cautionary tale, which urges readers to put into question Romantic-like male chauvinist perspectives on reality and relationships if they want to avoid being done “grievous arm” (ibid.) by the ominous Erl-King.

Another shade of *The Bloody Chamber’s* intertextuality which needs to be investigated is the re-writing of different versions of the same fairy-tale type within the same collection, i.e. “Beauty and the Beast”, of which Carter provides two versions, and “Red Riding Hood” of which the collection includes three variations (if one considers “Wolf-Alice” among them following Bacchilega’s classification – Bacchilega 1997: 65). Although each of these tales has an internal intertextual consistency of its own, the scope of their intertextual complexity is best understood when they are read against each other. In other words, they can be “considered narrational units; however they are also sites of opening, thresholds on to other tales which themselves provide entries into others” (Roemer 2001:107). Intertextuality as a narrative choice in Carter’s work is therefore once more to be paired with transition and change, because through it different sets of values are simultaneously juxtaposed in the minds of the readers, enabling them to cross different ideological territories and to transit “to new modes of thinking” (Renfroe 2001: 95).

The first couple of openly intertextually connected tales reworks the theme of “Beauty and the Beast”. The main common sources of these stories are to be located in the Latin tale “Cupid and Psyche”, in Perrault’s “Riquet à la Houppe” (Bacchilega 1997: 89-90) and in what is perhaps the most famous version of “Beauty and the Beast” written by Mme Leprince de Beaumont (ibid.: 91). Bacchilega (ibid.) and Day (1998: 135) agree that the first of Carter’s rewritings, “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, is “more a version or imitation” (Bacchilega 1997: 91) of Le Prince de Beaumont’s story, because it more or less upholds its plot and does not introduce revolutionary changes. Yet, as Bacchilega specifies, “Carter’s language and focalization [...] complicate matters, shifting her tale

towards Perrault's ironically ambiguous 'Ricky and the Tuft' (ibid.). Less direct flashes of intertextual links with other fairy tales can also be glimpsed, such as the description of Beauty recalling the traditional portrait of Snow White: "This lovely girl, whose skin possesses that same, inner light so you would have thought she, too, was made all of snow" (Carter 1979: 41), or the reference to "Alice in Wonderland" when Beauty's father arrives at the Beast's house and finds "On the table, a silver tray; round the neck of the whisky decanter, a silver tag with the legend: Drink me, while the cover of the silver dish was engraved with the exhortation: Eat me, in a flowing hand" (ibid.: 43).

Even if this is an apparently innocent and harmless version of the story, its – intertextual – disruptive potential surfaces when it is compared to the tale which follows in the collection, that could be considered its specular rewriting: "The Tiger's Bride".²⁹ This tale in fact questions and distorts everything that was considered normal and domesticated in "The Courtship of Mr Lyon". First of all, the father-daughter relationship from an affectionate submission in impeccable patriarchal style – "Yet she stayed and smiled, because her father wanted her to do so" (ibid.: 45) – turns into the passionate account of a girl who is bitterly disappointed by her father because he "lost me to the Beast at cards" (ibid.: 51). To the silent, unquestioning submission of Mrs Lyon to be, the future Tiger's Bride opposes her rational, albeit emotional disappointment towards her father's behaviour, which is definitely not absolved:

Gambling is sickness. My father said he loved me yet he staked his daughter on a hand of cards [...]. Oh, I know he thought he could not lose me; besides, back with me would come all he had lost, the unravelled fortunes of our family at one blow restored [...]. You must not think my father valued me at less than a king's ransom; but, at no more than a king's ransom. (ibid.: 54)

Furthermore, the evident change in narrative voice and focalisation is particularly telling, as its difference is a vehicle of two divergent significations of the metamorphosis taking place in both stories. The "external, camera-like" (Bacchilega 1997: 94) distant focalisation of "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" depicts "Beauty's transformed vision of herself [which] also transforms Beast", and whose magic "leaves its work visible" (ibid.).

²⁹ An additional analysis of the powerful intertextual references between these stories is carried out in the last chapter through corpus linguistic methods, which gives further evidence of some of the claims laid out here.

Even though the bourgeois idyll of its happy ending describes the re-establishment of an “objective naturalisation” (ibid.: 95) of the patriarchal order: “Mr and Mrs Lyon walk in the garden; the old spaniel drowns on the grass, in a drift of fallen petals” (Carter 1979: 51), the “work of focalization” produces a subtle criticism of “the fairy tale’s collusion with bourgeois and leisurely carnivorousness” (Bacchilega 1997: 94-95). This criticism is then made explicit and turned into subversion in “The Tiger’s Bride”, where the female first-person narrator is given the opportunity to describe her own self-development outside of any patriarchal prescribed framework.

As Bacchilega interestingly remarks, the change in perspective and the opposition between a compliant and a disruptive metamorphosis are symbolised by the weather. Although both tales are set in the winter, in the first one it suggests a “freezing process – the metamorphosis of flowing tears into snow, of life into picture” where “the traditional female initiation pattern leading to marriage” is naturalised as well as de-naturalised (ibid.: 94), whereas in the second it stands for an overt, polemical criticism against patriarchy, as “The extraordinary cold that envelops her [i.e. *Beauty*] is, of course, an external correlative of her father’s actions – a typical Carter strategy for showing how ‘myths’ turn human relations of power into something as natural ‘as the weather’” (ibid.: 98).

The other group of tales which can be read intertextually rework the motif of “Red Riding Hood” in three very different, but interconnected ways, which also “dialogue with the folkloric traditions and social history” of their sources (ibid.: 59) and with mainstream literary adaptations, such as that of Perrault and of the Grimm brothers. In addition to sharing the similar wintery mountain setting crowded with obscure popular legends and superstitions, these tales are linked together by a trail of blood. The overriding image of female spilled blood, and above all the representation of the positive meanings it conveys, is a powerful element in Carter’s narrative for its re-signification is indispensable to encode and exemplify new paradigms of female agency and empowerment. As Bacchilega remarks quoting Irigaray:

The economic and symbolic revaluing of women's menstrual and birth blood [is] essential to the transformation of the heroine's subjectivity. Formerly identified with life itself, blood's "natural" value has been "covered over by other forms of wealth: gold, penis, child". In patriarchal economies, women – who represent these "blood reserves" – are exploited because both profit and pleasure require the spilling of their blood (ibid.: 66).

In "The Werewolf" the blood of grandma-werewolf is spilled by the young girl, who cuts off her arm when she encounters her grandmother in her dreadful wolfish form. As specified by Bacchilega's interpretation, Carter's version refers to some folk-tales within the "Red Riding Hood" tradition, where the girl is tricked by the wolf into drinking her grandmother's blood as a ritual which signifies her transition into adulthood and emphasises her connection with the family and, more specifically with the legacy of its women. The original ritual pattern is however disturbed by Carter, as "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" (ibid.: 61). As the tale shows, then, this is the blood of the ancestors, which needs to be incorporated but also spilled, and could therefore signify the necessity of leaving the past behind if the girl wants to "prosper" in her grandmother's house (Carter 1979: 110). As Carter seems to whisper to her readers by breaking the unchanging chain of the ritual, old, monstrous patriarchal ideals of disciplined femininity (embodied by the grandmother, who stands for an example of femininity to be followed by her granddaughter but at the same time turns into a werewolf, thus symbolising patriarchal threats) must be left behind and replaced by a new, uncompromised paradigm of brave, self-aware and cunning womanhood.

After having spilled the blood of past, acquiescent articulations of femininity, Red Riding Hood embarks on a journey where she can discover desire and negotiate her female identity outside of patriarchal restrictions and reductive span of alternatives. In what could be considered a chronological sequence, this process is represented in the rewriting of the Riding Hood theme in the following story, "The Company of Wolves". Blood here turns into the menstrual blood of an adolescent girl, who armed with her empowering virginity looks out into womanhood: "Her breasts have just begun to swell;

her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white as she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month" (Carter 1979: 113). When she meets the werewolf-hunter, her naiveté prevents her from noticing the threat the predator poses: "There is a faint trace of blood on his chin" (ibid: 115). To this spilled blood of a prey which has been consumed, and therefore has become dead meat, the girl counters the blood spilled when she loses her virginity. When she chooses to offer herself to the wolf, indeed, she is not devoured like meat by his appetite, but instead participates with him in the pleasures of sex like lively, desiring flesh. Thus, the spilling of blood in this case symbolises for the girl "act[ing] out her desires", not an act of violence and death (as it was in "The Werewolf"), but one of transformation and life. In a way, her act of reciprocity also manages to tame the hunger of the wolf: "See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" (ibid.: 118), so that in the end a double metamorphosis (similar to that portrayed in the variations on "Beauty and the Beast") is performed: in the girl's subjectivity and sexual maturation as well as in the animal instincts of the wolf.

The last of the tales in the wolf trilogy, "Wolf-Alice", takes a step further in the representation of the construction of alternative patterns of identity development for women. The story features a girl who is brought up by wolves and, once found, proves resistant to any attempt at being taught how to behave in a proper human way, and therefore to be part of society. As a result, she is forced to live on the margins, outside of society's judgemental gaze, in the castle of a feared supernatural being half way between a werewolf and a body-snatcher, known as "the Duke". Bacchilega includes this story in the re-writings of "Red Riding Hood" on account of philological evidence, which links Carter's version to the almost forgotten medieval "De puella a lupellis seruata" ("About a Girl Saved from Wolf Cubs") (Bacchilega 1997: 65). Together with the complex dialogue it establishes with the Riding Hood folkloric tradition, "Wolf-Alice" also draws on the several cases of feral children studied by scientists at the beginning of the twentieth century and, interestingly, to heroic figures like Romulus and Remus or Beowulf (ibid.).

In this tale blood, albeit linked to the sexual maturation of the girl, finally completely coincides with the principle of life. It is through blood, indeed, that the wolf-

child begins to perceive a sense of her self, as well as her connection with the world because her first bleeding, tied with the cycles of the moon, also coincides with her first conscious confrontation with her mirror-image. When she does not know how to explain either the menstrual blood or the fact that what she sees in the mirror is her reflection, the girl theorises that another wolf “must have nibbled her cunt while she was sleeping” (Carter 1979: 122), so goes to the mirror to check if she can see it: “The moon and mirrors have this much in common: you cannot see behind them. Moonlit and white, Wolf-Alice looked at herself in the mirror and wondered whether there she saw the beast who came to bite her in the night” (ibid.: 123). Another strong symbolic meaning of this new self-awareness whose primary vehicle is blood, is the process whereby she learns the notion of time through the regular appearance of her menstrual blood.

Her first blood bewildered her. [...] The flow continued for a few days, which seemed to her an endless time. She had, as yet, no direct notion of past, or future, or of duration, only of a dimensionless, immediate moment.
[...] Soon the flow ceased. She forgot it. The moon vanished; but, little by little, reappeared. When it again visited her kitchen at full strength, Wolf-Alice was surprised into bleeding again and so it went on, with a punctuality that transformed her vague grip on time. [...] Sequence asserted itself with custom and then she understood the circumambulatory principle of the clock perfectly [...] *she discovered the very action of time by means of this returning circle* (my emphasis). (Carter 1979: 122-123)

It is worth noting that a subtle consequence of this coincidence is the different understanding of time Alice gains, which is at odds with the traditional linear development sustained by – and which sustains – patriarchal discourses. Linked to the lunar phases and to the idea of a regularly recurrent cycle, this perception of time is circular, and epitomises the necessity to change traditional cultural approaches to the notion. Although the idea of linear, chronological development apparently entails progress, therefore change, it has instead proved to be unable to account for the transformations of the female body in a positive way. Moreover, a similar, partial and therefore flawed understanding of time has prevented a deeper comprehension of the female changing body, thus contributing to enforce fear for it, and its consequent demonization. Wolf-Alice’s blood instead is, like that of the protagonist of “The Company of Wolves”, a positive token which symbolises life in contrast with the blood

spilled by “us” – i.e. the other socialised, allegedly fully human members of mankind – which points on the contrary to death and destruction: “We’ judge and spill blood, while her brave acceptance of difference revalues life” (Bacchilega 1997: 65).

Also in this case of intertextual reflections the weather mirrors human experience, as both “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice” are set in that period of the year which perhaps is most loaded with magical charge, and is associated with ritual transition; the winter solstice. When the protagonist of the first tale leaves the warmth of her house to visit granny “it is Christmas Eve. The malign door of the solstice still swings upon its hinges” (Carter 1979: 113), and when the Duke sets out to his unnatural hunt while Alice is sleeping “in the soft, warm ashes of the heart”, unaware that her body is about to change irremediably, it is “the red early hour of midwinter sunset” (ibid.).

“The Lady of the House of Love” is perhaps the story where intertextual references are more intricate and elaborately constructed. The only element which allows one to define it a fairy tale in the first place is perhaps its reference to “The Sleeping Beauty”. The beautiful Vampire Countess lives indeed in a castle surrounded by thorns. These thorns, however, contrary to the traditional ones, are not meant to prevent people from approaching the enchanted palace where the beautiful Lady sleeps waiting for a fearless knight to rescue her. They are instead the spines of grotesque roses, overgrown because they have been feeding on the corpses resting in the ground underneath them, most likely meant to lure people who are “ignorant or foolhardy” (Carter 1979: 96) enough to venture in the surroundings of the castle:

A great, intoxicated surge of the heavy scent of red roses blew into his face as soon as they felt the village, inducing a sensuous vertigo; a blast of rich, faintly corrupt sweetness strong enough, almost, to fell him. Too many roses bloomed on enormous thickets that lined the path, thickets bristling with thorns, and the flowers themselves were almost too luxuriant, their huge congregations of plush petals somehow obscene in their excess, their whorled, tightly budded cores outrageous in their implications. The mansion emerged grudgingly out of this jungle. (ibid.: 98)

In a further grotesque reversal of the Sleeping Beauty’s tale, the protagonist is condemned to sleep, but only during the day, doomed to wake up as soon as the sun goes down and darkness falls to hunt her preys to death (ibid.: 95). The last, disruptive reference to the traditional fairy tale is the motif of the life-restoring kiss, which Carter

repeats twice by way of a refrain ironically representing an impossible delusion, since the protagonist knows well that her kiss can only bring death. In both cases Carter plays with the impossible aliveness of the vampiric Countess, for in the first instance – “A single kiss woke up Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” (ibid.: 97) – she links the refrain to the young male protagonist of the story, whose primary feature is repeatedly stated to be rationality (therefore he cannot believe in such predicaments of fairy tales’ magic). The second mention of the magic kiss is silently spoken by the “inner voices” of the Countess as an impossible hope, in her excruciating longing for life: “One kiss, however, and only one, woke up the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” (ibid.: 103).

As a number of critics point out (Notaro 1993; McLaughlin 1995; Armitt 1997; Pi-tai Peng 2004; Farnell 2009) rather than a fairy tale, this should be considered a gothic or horror short story on account of its setting (an isolated, ghost-hunted castle), of its protagonist (a female Vampire) and of the plot (a young, rather naïve boy is lured into the castle and deemed to become a prey of the evil supernatural being). Nevertheless, the intertextual complexity of the story due to its reference to the gothic literary tradition intersected with the fairy tale’s is even more entangled and becomes subversive because it is also a metanarrative comment on the gothic genre, where Carter’s “gothic view underlies the speculative power of her speculative writing” (Pi-tai Peng 2004: 99).³⁰ Despite her evil nature, indeed, the vampire queen despises her destiny and strives to be human: “But the Countess herself is indifferent to her own weird authority, as if she were dreaming it. In her dream, she would like to be human; but she does not know if that is possible” (Carter 1979: 95). Moreover, the gloomy, eerie decadence of the castle, which seemed so scary and ominous in its initial description (ibid.: 93-94) proves in the end to be merely a farcical, second-rate fake: “now you could see how tawdry it all was, how thin and cheap the satin, the catafalque not ebony at all but black-painted paper stretched on struts of wood, as in the theatre” (ibid.: 106). And, finally, not only does the male character survive his encounter with the vampire unarmed, but he also fails to experience the fear, or at least uneasiness which usually characterises the experience of the protagonist of gothic novels (see Notaro 1993: 29-33). As a result of these overturning

³⁰ It is worth anticipating here that the unusual mingling of the very different typical manifestations of magic in the two genres also triggers a reflection on Carter’s appropriation and amendment the fantastic mode, which will be analysed in the following section.

restyling, gothic fiction seems to be mocked, most probably because of its so typical representation of the female protagonist as a passive, helpless victim (ibid.: 31) and of the female body as a broken item whose scattered pieces help the male hero overcome his fears of female sexuality and active desire through its objectification or its definition as monstrous (see Harter 1996).

In this respect, it could be useful to draw one more, this time internal, intertextual reference between “The Lady of the House of Love” and “The Bloody Chamber”. According to Notaro, indeed, the latter could be classified, albeit with some amendments, a gothic tale. Her interesting analysis, linking together the Gothic and Pornography gives a detailed account of the tale’s ascription to both genres, so that, as the critic acknowledges, if analysed within this parameters, in the end the role of the female protagonist complies with the Gothic model of female passivity (Notaro 1993: 31). In “The Lady of The House of Love”, on the contrary, even though the heroine dies, she is given the opportunity of accounting for her desire of love and life, as Carter devotes a section of the tale to the lament of her inner voice, which expresses the contradictory impulses of the identity she is trying to come to terms with (Carter 1979: 103).

The symbol which most powerfully conveys the chasm between the two representations of gothic motives is the mirror, itself one of the omnipresent tropes of the genre - as well as of *The Bloody Chamber*. In “The Bloody Chamber”, as Notaro has to admit, the reflection of the protagonist caught by the mirror corresponds to the way her husband sees her, which implies that, once more, the construction of the female subject is contingent on the male gaze and its characterisation of female sexuality (Notaro 1993: 32): “When I saw him look at me with lust, I dropped my eyes but, in glancing away from him, I caught sight of my self in the mirror. And I saw myself, suddenly, as he saw me” (Carter 1979: 11). More to the point, a similar identification of the female self with the male gaze carries with it a dangerous potential of the woman’s complicity in her subordination. Indeed, thus the narrator goes on “And, for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away” (ibid.), which means that if she sees sexuality in his terms, the fulfilment of desire is not source for pleasure and freedom but for perversion, therefore corruption. On the contrary, in “The Lady of the House of Love” the likewise unknown feelings of love and

desire are seen in a positive way, as what could help the protagonist free herself from a destiny to which her ancestors have condemned her. The vampire casts no reflection in the mirror, which in this frame of analysis means that her self-perception is not affected by a male gaze whatsoever. Moreover, the Lady protects herself from being gazed upon by wearing sunglasses, which prevent the cyclist from looking into her eyes and at the same time allow her to look at him while he only sees his own reflection: "Her blind spectacles gave him his handsome face back to himself twice over; if he presented himself to her naked face, he would dazzle her like the sun she is forbidden to look at because it would shrivel her up at once" (Carter 1979: 102). Perhaps the heroine would be destroyed, if she had the chance to be looked in the eyes because she would substitute her dreamlike, still unaffected romantic idea of reciprocal love with a patriarchal male-oriented engaging one, which in turn could extinguish her desire for life. When she guides the boy into her room to perform the only ritual of consumption she knows "she takes off the glasses" and they "smash to pieces" (ibid.: 106). Now the girl must face her own desire; while trying to recollect the pieces of glass she wounds her finger (in perfect Sleeping-Beauty fashion), and, as happens during the first menstruation, she becomes aware of her blood for the first time. Afterwards, when the cyclist sucks the blood to heal her wound, which mimics the first sexual intercourse, everything in the room begins to fall apart, and the Lady realizes that becoming human will be painful, and hesitates "How can she bear the pain of becoming human?" (ibid.). Even though in the end she has succumbed to male desire, she has not been tamed by it, for, unlike what would be expected of a fairy-tale happy epilogue, love and life for her imply death. After experiencing pleasure, indeed, the Vampire Queen is fully human, but dead (ibid.:107), and death is the destiny foreseen for the young cyclist as well, since "Next day his regiment embarked to France" (ibid.: 108).

3.1. Postmodern demythologising business: the “contradictory doubleness” of historiographic metafiction

So far the narrative intertextuality of *The Bloody Chamber* has been framed as part of postmodern textual strategies aimed at questioning, blurring and crossing the borders of generic conventions, which in turn are rooted in a political act of subversion of the patriarchal discourses and oppressive power arrangements upholding and naturalising them. The analysis of poetics and politics in the framework of the postmodern textual subversions performed in Carter’s fairy tales, however, can be further investigated with reference to the relation they engage in with history, which scrutinises historicity itself. Carter’s re-writings, to put it with Hutcheon’s words, can be interpreted as “a kind of seriously ironic parody that often enables this contradictory doubleness: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the ‘world’ and literature” (Hutcheon 1988: 124).

Carter’s stories show a “contradictory doubleness” because some indispensable features of the fairy tale are retained so that they can still be recognised as belonging to the genre. At the same time, nevertheless, these conventional elements are aptly and subtly subverted – sometimes in a parodic way – or mixed with typical traits of other genres. To begin with, some stories are located in a precise, or in any case easily locatable historical and geographical setting, which obviously enough is at odds with the timeless *neverwhere* of fairy tales, and which has at least two important political implications. First of all, moving “the tales from the mythic timelessness of the fairy tale to specific cultural moments” (Kaiser 1994: 30) discloses the context-bounded and therefore provisional character of the power structures sustained and transmitted by traditional – both folk and literary – fairy tales. In addition, and as a consequence, the social function performed by fairy tales is exploited by Carter to propose alternative discourses, which could guide the development of female identity, and free and empower female sexuality and desire through the metamorphosis of the foundations of power relations themselves. Traditional fairy tales are indeed shown to be primary vehicles for the enforcement of specific normative systems, and to represent harmless struggles for power, as they do not

endeavour to challenge social structures and/or power discourses, but only to change the social status of the protagonists.

In this way, Carter gives examples of her theoretical statements about her demythologising business grounded in and sustained by her commitment to historicity and materialism, which materialises through the postmodern narrative device of historiographic metafiction.

The critical work of historiographic metafiction suits Carter's appropriation of fairy tales on two main accounts. On the one hand, they share "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" which are made "the grounds for rethinking and reworking [...] the forms and contents of the past" (Hutcheon 1988: 5), that is generic conventions and the discourses they hand down. On the other hand, historiographic metafiction like Carter's parodic criticism of patriarchy is inherently contradictory, for it "always works within conventions in order to subvert them" and "paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (ibid.: 5, 9). Furthermore, this powerful postmodern notion discloses what Carter represents in fictional terms, that is the "meaning-making function of human constructs", among which history and narrative hold the same authority, as "both history and fiction are discourses, both constitutive systems of signification by which we make sense of the past [...]. History cannot be written without ideological and institutional analysis, including analysis of the act of writing itself" (ibid.: 88; 91). With her fairy tales Carter challenges a common trait of historical narration and the fairy tale, which "tend to suppress grammatical reference to the discursive situation of the utterance (producer, receiver, context, intent) in their attempt to narrate past events in such a way that the events seem to narrate themselves" (ibid.: 92-93), even if they do so in different ways. History, indeed, derives its authoritativeness from the assumption that those facts which account for themselves have most certainly happened in the real world whereas fairy tales reach the same goal in that the events they account for are outside of plausibility, and belong to the fictional - therefore altogether unreal - realm of magic. The consequences of the de-contextualisation of the production and reception of both narratives on these grounds, however, bypass the fact that they are situated discourses imbued with political purposes and implications, which are unmasked by Carter through the description of the settings of her fairy tales. Since the writer is well

aware that “both history and fiction are cultural sign systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained” (ibid.: 112), she decides to turn “‘Events’, which have no meaning in themselves” into “facts”, which are instead signified” (ibid.: 122). Far from leading to extreme relativism, which is the consequence of postmodernism most feared by engaged feminists, the outcome of Carter self-reflexive fiction is rather disturbance and challenge of taken-for-granted narratives, which does not mean that they are made obsolete, but rather rethought and confronted with alternative possibilities.

The backdrop of “The Bloody Chamber” is “the world of decadent turn-of the century French culture, amongst the operas of Wagner and the fashions of Paul Poiret” (Kaiser 1994: 30). The main settings of the story are Paris, where the narrator enjoys a cheerful, public life before getting married and the dreadful isolated castle of the Marquis – whose description reminds one of Mont Saint Michel – where the young wife is trapped in her new, unwelcomed private life:

And, ah! his castle. The faery solitude of the place; with its turrets of misty blue, its courtyard, its spiked gate, his castle that lay on the very bosom of the sea with seabirds mewing about its attics, the casements opening on to the green and purple, evanescent departures of the ocean, cut off by the tide from land for half a day. (Carter 1979: 13)

Moreover, and most importantly, through its portrayal of the socio-geographical landscape the tale explores issues of class and the protagonist’s “socio-economic motivations for entering the bloody chamber of collusion” (Bacchilega 1997: 126). The Marquis is described as a rich bourgeois man probably implicated in shady business, whose wealth lures the young, naïve girl into marriage with the self-complacent idea of improving her social status. When asked if she is marrying out of love, she must admit that in fact she is marrying the Marquis out of will: “‘Are you sure you love him?’ ‘I am sure I want to marry him’” (Carter 1979: 7). Her purpose is trying to “banish the spectre of poverty from its habitual place at our meagre table” (ibid.) despite her mother’s example “For my mother herself had gladly, scandalously, defiantly beggared herself for love” (ibid.: 7-8). Even disregarding the reasons why the girl makes a similar choice – greed, vanity, rebellion against the mother and consequent attempt not to follow in her

footsteps or, on the contrary, desperate attempt to improve her living conditions out of gratitude – Carter criticises the cultural alignments which lead a girl to think that marriage is the natural solution for women’s problems. In accordance with Carter’s commitment to ground her fiction in material conditions and experiences Carter sets the story back in time, as if to suggest that a practice which was so common some fifty years before she wrote the story, at present is not any more. At the same time, however, she covertly addresses women who are still entrapped in a similar frame of mind, who should be encouraged, if not to change their situation, at least to be aware of it.³¹

The historical setting of “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” is not made explicit, although readers are told that the story takes place in the surroundings of London (Carter 1979: 45, 48). The geographical environment of its intertextual partner, “The Tiger’s Bride”, is described in more detail, and the origins of the female protagonist are also accounted for. The tale opens with a description which contrasts the wintry landscape of the protagonist’s homeland – Russia – with the luxurious warmth which welcomes her while she travels to her destination, northern Italy:

There’s a special madness strikes travellers from the North when they reach the lovely land where the lemon trees grow. We come from countries of cold weather; at home, we are at war with nature, but here, ah! you think you’ve come to the blessed plot where the lion lies down with the lamb. (Carter 1979: 51)

The idealisation of the Italian climate, which seems to bring about less strict, even subversive customs – lions lying with lambs instead of eating them – nevertheless is soon substituted with the bitter acknowledgment that here, too “the snow comes, you cannot escape it, it followed us from Russia” (ibid.). This latter statement entails a further doubling of the implied meaning suggested by the sudden arrival of the winter: patriarchal power structures are not so different in the two distant countries, when you observe them closely – maybe lambs do not rest with lions after all – and people cannot

³¹ It is important to note that this is only one among the multiple meanings which the story can convey. This simple, rather superficial interpretation serves the purpose of showing the straightforwardness and pragmatism of the feminist message disclosed by Carter’s fairy tales through the simple addition of a historical and geographical setting. A more complex analysis of the implications of the tales in terms of identity construction and gender politics will be provided in the following chapter.

escape their cultural background, not even by running away from the place where they were born.

Geographical and historical settings in the instances of Carter's rewriting of "Beauty and the Beast" are aimed at representing patriarchal discursive arrangements which objectify women, who are transferred from father to husband like personal belongings or, even worse, used as items of exchange. The vehicle for the metamorphosis of a similar cultural construction is to be found, once again, in the intertextual reference between the two versions of the story. Whereas "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" (set in an idyllic bourgeois non-time) depicts the compliance of the daughter in her objectification when she submits to a fate decided for her by her father out of love, but above all duty ("Yet she stayed, and smiled, because her father wanted her to do so" - Carter 1979: 45), "The Tiger's Bride" shows that the girl's disappointment about her father's behaviour and her rebellion against her husband's wishes allow her to turn a prospective dreadful destiny into actual empowerment.

In this respect, another intertextual link could be established among the stories within the collection, as the two tales featuring "Beauty and the Beast" expand the critical purposes with which Carter has already engaged in "The Bloody Chamber". In all three stories, indeed, contemporary women are cautioned against their complicity in their objectification and dependence upon (fathers and) husbands through looking back at historical times when the process was more overt. In that distant past women's connivance with their subordination was more evident, therefore easier to detect, criticise and subvert by means of the powerful educational function of fairy tales. Nowadays, instead, Carter seems to warn, the mechanisms of subordination are more subtle and based on more complex systems of rewarding, so that submitting to a husband could also be misleadingly considered a willing accomplishment, since freedom and perhaps pleasure are sacrificed in exchange for wealth and protection (as was the case of the Marquis' wife).

Similar processes of deconstruction of the neutrality of narratives are accomplished through the disruptive introduction of not overtly specified but easily inferable historical and geographical coordinates in other tales, which establish a dialogue between past and current power relationships as well. More specifically, it is the case of "The Snow Child",

“The Werewolf” and “In The Company of Wolves”, whose atmospheres are reminiscent of the Early Modern period. Among the three, a less specifically characterised setting is to be found in “The Snow Child”, where the only recognisable landmark in the winter landscape is snow: “Fresh snow fell on snow already fallen; when it ceased, the whole world was white” (Carter 1979: 91). According to Bacchilega, nevertheless, the lack of detail is eloquent enough to stand for power relations and to account for the relationship between the (step)mother and Snow White:³² “in this snow-covered landscape, the only relationship possible between women is one that re-produces itself as rivalry, as struggle to survive at the other woman’s expense. Within this initiatory and narrative cycle no possibility for human growth and transformation exists” (Bacchilega 1997: 38).

In a similar fashion, the narrators of the two tales reworking “Red Riding Hood” do not clearly name the place and time where the stories are set. However, the description of their landscapes, wintery climate and popular legends and superstitions – which have already been pointed out with relation to their intertextual reference to each other – exhibit a sufficient abundance of information to echo a rather precise background. As Bacchilega explains while analysing “The Werewolf” – but her claims can be held true also for “The Company of Wolves”:

This cold and violent context, a quasi-ethnographic sketch of early modern upland peasant life and its “popular sentences” or naturalized beliefs, resembles the French Peasant world of the seventeenth century as historian Darnton would have it. A time-worn warning and initiatory tale emerges from a specific economic and social situation. We cannot help but hear the story anew. (Bacchilega 1997: 60)

In short, when the thick web of references linking the stories of *The Bloody Chamber* and engaging them in a dialogue with each other intersects with the historico-geographical coordinates given to usually timeless fairy tales, the result is that readers are called to hear – that is, to signify – the stories anew. Hence, the transformative powers of the fairy tale which the writer appropriates in order to re-write stories along the line of, but at the same time distant enough from the traditional ones, are meant to bring about a

³² “Stepmother” is the closest designation conventional language can provide for the figure of the Countess in this story. The woman, indeed, is not Snow White’s mother in that the daughter is conceived by her father’s desire. The term seemed in this case convenient thanks to its immediate reference to the traditional fairy tale.

new engagement on the part of the reader with the polysemous meanings of both old and new tales. Such engagement, in turn, is able to trigger actual (desire for) change, which mirrors the metamorphosis achieved by the genre and by its conventions through the writer's transformative speculative imagination.

4. FANTASTIC HESITATIONS: METAMORPHIC LIMINAL EXPERIENCES

The thick intertextual web which has been woven among the stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, and between the collection and traditional oral or written folk/fairy tales and other literary genres shows that instability of meaning, border crossing and change are the hallmarks of Carter's tales. Their liminality is all the more meaningful as it finds expression in the tension between violation and compliance with the generic conventions of the fairy tale, whose borders are destabilised and crossed to meet other genres and is also embodied by the physical, symbolical, social and/or psychological metamorphoses underwent by its protagonists. This section sets out to demonstrate that this kind of liminality is echoed and testified by the use of fantastic figurations, but above all through the creation of the feeling of estrangement and hesitation produced by fantastic narratives.

As has been anticipated in the review of literature, this research opens a dialogue between *The Bloody Chamber* and two among the most influential studies of the fantastic; Todorov's *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975) and Jackson's *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (1981). Despite the different approaches endorsed by the two critics and the disparate conclusions drawn by their texts, here their common grounds are emphasised, in particular where Jackson's contentions amend Todorov's by enriching the study of fantastic poetics with its political as well as psychological significance.

The definition of "fantastic" devised by Todorov accounts for the social function performed by Carter's stories, and it emphasises how its figurations provide the means to tackle topics otherwise deemed taboo:

[according to Peter Penzoldt] ‘for many authors, the supernatural was merely a pretext to describe things they would never have dared mention in realistic terms.’ We may doubt that supernatural events are merely pretexts; but there is certainly a degree of truth in his assertion: the fantastic permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so long as we have no recourse to it. [...] Take, for example, the ‘themes of the other’: incest, homosexuality, love for several persons at once, necrophilia, excessive sensuality [...]. It is as if we were reading a list of forbidden themes, established by some censor: each of these themes has often been banned as a matter of fact, and may still be so in our own day. (Todorov 1975: 158)

Likewise, Jackson accounts for the fantastic as a literary form with important “social and political implications” (Jackson 1981: 6):

The modern fantastic, the form of literary fantasy within the secularized culture produced by capitalism, is a subversive literature. It exists alongside the “real”, on either side of the dominant cultural axis, as a muted presence, a silenced imaginary other. Structurally and semantically, the fantastic aims at dissolution of an order experienced as oppressive and insufficient. (ibid.: 180)

These features of the fantastic effectively describe the feeling of hesitation which occasionally strikes the protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber*. Even though uncanny experiences do not always lead them to put reality into question and to choose whether to believe in the supernatural or to find a scientific explanation for it – like Todorov’s definition of the fantastic predicates (Day 1998: 6) – the feeling of hesitation itself is undeniably central to these narratives. Although in Carter’s tales the supernatural is never accepted as an explanation, it casts doubts on a precise – often, as has been demonstrated, historically and geographically contextualised – reality and thus calls for a deeper comprehension if not a re-arrangement of the social relations and power distributions which characterise it both on the part of the character and on that of the reader. Contrary to what is contended by Day (1998: 4-6) this process is consistent with Todorov’s view, even if it is emptied of the tension between the scientific and the supernatural interpretation of estrangement. What counts more is in fact the feeling of uncertainty, not so much the explanation endorsed by the character/reader:

In a world which is indeed our world [...] there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions [...]. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous [...]. The possibility of hesitation between the two creates the fantastic effect. (Todorov 1973: 25-26)

Finally, despite the fact that Todorov confines the fairy tale in the realm of the marvellous, where no hesitation is brought about because all the supernatural phenomena are taken for granted as part of the magic which characterises the backdrop of the stories and is thus left unquestioned, Carter's tales can in fact be read in fantastic terms for they defy exact correspondence with the generic conventions of the genre pertaining to magic. Remarkably, the absence of magic is one of the main disruptions of typical features of the fairy tale in *The Bloody Chamber*.

As a matter of fact, magic in *The Bloody Chamber* is referred to only in two sets of circumstances, linked to two different kinds of representation of the fantastic mode. To the first group belong the instances of wild animals turned into humans – or rather which are deemed to have undergone such a metamorphosis, as the reasons for or the process of their transformations is never overtly described – and of human beings, mainly women, more often than not willingly turning into animals. In neither case, however, is the metamorphosis explained in magical terms, that is, unlike the versions of the fairy tales on which Carter's stories draw (in these specific instances “Red Riding Hood” and “Beauty and the Beast”), there are no magic helpers or black magic at work whatsoever. The second manifestation of magic and the fantastic experience in Carter's collection is to be linked to the Gothic genre, therefore to the representation of supernatural creatures – such as vampires, werewolves or corpse-snatchers – whose magical nature is likewise left unexplained, as it usually is in gothic or mystery fiction.

The first accounts of the feelings conjured up by the fantastic mode in correspondence with a magical – respectively anthropomorphic and zoomorphic – transformation are to be found in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Tiger's Bride”. In these tales the metamorphosis is the outcome of striving for a desired and/or necessary change, but rather than being performed by an external, magical helper of some sort, it is accomplished through the protagonist's efforts. Their physical transformations embody

the work they do on themselves, while they are learning how to mould the shape of their identities. Rather than a punishment or a reward – as it is in the traditional versions of “Beauty and the Beast” – the transformation of Carter’s characters is the visual materialisation of what they have already achieved: “Carter’s magic may mark one order more desirable than another, may even privilege ‘wild beasts’ over ‘human carelessness’, but she also signals, through its visual education component and its verbal artifice, the magic’s own hard work” (Bacchilega 1997: 100).

Even if no tension is expressed between a scientific or paranormal explanation, the female protagonist of “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” experiences fantastic hesitation when she comes back to the Beast’s castle after a long absence: “There was an air of exhaustion, of despair in the house and, worse, a kind of physical disillusion, as if its glamour had been sustained by a cheap conjuring trick and now the conjurer, having failed to pull the crowds, had departed to try his luck elsewhere” (Carter 1979: 50). In line with the self-reflexivity of Carter’s speculative narratives, here the feeling of estrangement derives from the girl’s unawareness of her narcissistic selfishness. Since the girl has never bothered to look the Beast in the eyes but when trying to find a mirror-like reflection of herself, she cannot guess why the magnificence of the castle has now faded away: “How was it she had never noticed before that his agate eyes were equipped with lids, like those of a man? Was it because she had only looked at her own face, reflected there?” (ibid.). Once she has acknowledged that there is more in the Beast’s eyes than her reflection, Beauty realizes that everything around her is fading away because of her inability to understand love and reciprocity. As soon as she has painfully come to this realisation, the Beast finally turns into a man, as if to suggest that there had always been a man underneath the fur, but he could materialise only when Beauty was able to look past herself and see him. Magic, therefore, neither explained as supernatural nor denied on scientific grounds, is deemed to mirror the expression of the heroine’s inner qualities.

“The Tiger’s Bride” provides instead the example of an unresolved fantastic tension. The protagonist thus calls into question the magic which seems to haunt the Beast’s palace and its inhabitants:

He [the valet] clapped his hands and my maidservant clocked and jangled into the imitation of life. [...] The wind that sprinted through the place made the door tremble in its frame; had the north wind brought my garments across Europe to me? At home, the bear's son directed the winds at his pleasure; what democracy of magic held this palace and the fir forest in common? Or, should I be prepared to accept it as proof of the axiom my father had drummed into me: that, if you have enough money, anything is possible?
"Tantivy," suggested the now twinkling valet, evidently charmed at the pleasure mixed with my bewilderment. (Carter 1979: 61-62)

Whereas in "Beauty and the Beast" the riddle is in the end explained by an evil spell, which must be reversed for the Beast to become human again, in Carter's tale the magic remains unexplained, for the Tiger – which perhaps never was a man in the first place – stays as such, and it is Beauty who turns into an animal. The transformation itself, in compliance with Bacchilega's interpretation, is not a product of sorcery but of the work of the Beast, which literally licks the skin off the girl (Carter 1979: 67). This unresolved uncertainty prolongs the disruptive effects of the fantastic, and leaves open the speculation on a social order which is experienced as oppressive and insufficient.

Compared to Todorov, who excluded from the category a number of literary genres on account of their too close affinity with the "neighbouring genres" of the uncanny or the marvellous, Jackson provides a more inclusive definition of the fantastic, where the Gothic is identified as its privileged domain, but other narratives are also deemed able to convey its effects: "As a perennial literary mode, fantasy can be traced back to ancient myths, legends, folklore, carnival art. But its more immediate roots lie in that literature of unreason and terror which has been designated 'Gothic'" (Jackson 1981: 95). Undeniably Carter's recourse to the fantastic is strictly connected with her reference to the gothic tradition, which is engaged in a dialogue with the fairy tale precisely to substitute its uncritical and taken-for-granted magic with one which makes the protagonist – as well as the reader – doubt the certainty of reality and therefore look for alternative answers to those provided by contextually established socio-cultural discourses. Carter makes explicit her fascination with and reference to the Gothic tradition in the "Afterword" to *Fireworks* (1974):

Though it took me a long time to realise why I like them, I'd always been fond of Poe, and Hoffman [...]. The Gothic tradition in which Poe writes grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane. Its great themes are incest and Cannibalism [...] its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural – and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the world as fact [...]. It retains a singular moral function – that of provoking unease. (Carter in Pi-tai Peng 2004: 102)

As Pi-tai Peng comments, “The sense of the familiar becoming strange, the natural becoming uncanny, and the transgressive profaning of the holy are what marks Carter’s subversive writing, and they are also thematic concerns of the Gothic” (ibid.). In addition, the use of fantastic figurations in the unusual backdrop of a fairy tale problematizes even further the reflection on otherness linked to cultural “fears and values” usually performed by the fantastic (Jackson 1981: 52): “Any social structure tends to exclude as ‘evil’ anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction, and this conceptualisation, this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture” (ibid.). And Carter’s gesture is even more significantly ideological and political, since she exploits the radically other creatures on which fantastic narrative usually speculates in order to show that the same process of othering and exclusion due to fear for the change and instability they embody is attached to women – who, evidently enough, are instead very much part of the “same” humanity.

Notaro sketches a valuable profile of the subversive potential of the fantastic in general, and of the Gothic genre in particular, if put in the service of a feminist agenda (1993: 36-37). As Hélène Cixous remarks, the function of the fantastic with relation to the real is “a subtle invitation to transgression” (ibid.: 37), even though the extent to which a similar subversion can be or is actualised remains a matter of debate. A more cautious solution is provided by David Punter: “Gothic fiction demonstrates the potential of revolution by daring to speak the socially unspeakable; but the very act of speaking is an ambiguous gesture” (ibid.).

The social function of the fantastic, as well as its revolutionary reach – like that of the fairy tale – depends indeed on the political agenda with which it is paired, and to the extent to which disruption is brought about by specific combinations of textual poetics and politics. As happens in the fairy tale, at the heart of the fantastic lies a certain ambiguity, due to its risk of enforcing oppressive discourses and promoting patriarchal

ideologies: “When fantasy has been allowed to surface within culture, it has been in a manner close to Freud’s notion of art as compensation, as an activity which sustains cultural order by making up for a society’s lacks” (Jackson 1981: 174), without therefore changing the social order where the lack is perceived, nor undermining established discourses while trying to fill the gap. Conversely, however, the fantastic can also serve disruptive goals, as it did in some instances of feminist appropriation of the Gothic genre: “The Gothic mode eventually became an imaginative vehicle for feminism, since it provided a radical alternative to the daylight reality of conformity and acceptance, offering a dark world of the psyche in which women were the imprisoned victims of men” (Figues in Notaro 1993: 36-37).

Carter plays with the ambiguity of the fantastic exactly as she does with the fairy tale’s by developing narratives where the typical feeling of unease and hesitation is re-contextualised and mostly left unresolved (so that the doubts which elicit the interrogation of reality are open to multiple meanings and significations).

The most evident intersection between fairy tales and Gothic generic conventions where Carter speculates on the fantastic mode is certainly provided by “The Lady of the House of Love”. Here the writer rather overtly plays with the fantastic because she sets a mirroring interaction between the rational and scientific explanation given to the bewilderment experienced by the male character when he faces the supernatural creature and a reversed feeling on the part of the female vampire, who cannot explain her confusion in front of love and humanity. The young male protagonist of the story is described as a rational boy, whose rationality is embodied by the means of transport he uses - which comes to epitomise the features of its rider: “Although so young, he is also rational. He has chosen the most rational mode of transport in the world for his trip around the Carpathians. To ride a bicycle is in itself some protection against superstitious fears, since the bicycle is the product of pure reason applied to motion” (Carter 1979: 97). Accordingly, when he is confronted with the vampiric apparition of the Countess, he cannot avoid giving a scientific explanation to her odd condition because he is a virgin, so he is still unaware of what must be feared, and because he thinks to be a hero, his enterprise does not leave space for imagination.

He was stuck, once again, by the birdlike, predatory claws which tipped her marvellous hands; the sense of strangeness that had been growing on him since he buried his head under the streaming water in the village, since he entered the dark portals of the fatal castle, now fully overcame him.

[...] A fundamental disbelief in what he sees before him sustains him [...] he would have said, perhaps, that there are some things which, even if they *are* true, we should not believe possible. He might have said: it is folly to believe one's eyes [...] he himself is immune to shadow, due to his virginity – he does not yet know what there is to be afraid of – and due to his heroism [...] he sees before him, first and foremost, an inbred, highly strung girl child, fatherless, motherless, kept in the dark too long and pale as a plant that never sees the light, half-blinded by some hereditary condition of the eyes. (Carter 1979: 103-104)

And thus out of pity and tenderness, he plans to cure her:

Then he padded into the boudoir, his mind busy with plans. We shall take her to Zurich, to a clinic; she will be treated for nervous hysteria. Then to an eye specialist, for her photophobia, and to a dentist to put her teeth into a better shape. Any competent manicurist will deal with her claws. We shall turn her into the lovely girl she is; I shall cure her of all her nightmares. (ibid.: 107)

After upholding the young hero's point of view with a perfectly rational scientific explanation, the narrator mocks the naïve boy by suggesting that his braveness could as well be the outcome of ignorance: "And though he feels unease, he cannot feel terror; so he is like the boy of the fairy tale, who does not know how to shudder, and not spooks, ghouls, beasties, the Devil himself and all his retinue could do the trick" (ibid.: 104).

The reference to fairy tales here is not fortuitous: Carter assigns to the cyclist both types of escape from the fantastic experience; a scientific, natural interpretation of the phenomenon on the one hand and a marvellous, fairy tale-like explanation on the other – thus suggesting, in the light of what happens next in the story, the fallibility of both.

It is worth noting that heroism goes hand in hand with rationality as typical traits associated with masculinity. Since the Countess in the story actually is a vampire, Carter seems to suggest that lack of imagination in favour of a dumb endorsement of reason blinds the man who "is rooted in change and time", and does not allow him to escape the destiny his linear history has already prepared for him "in the trenches of France" (Carter 1979: 97).

In contrast, the Lady is characterised by the irrational, supernatural "timeless Gothic eternity of the vampires, for whom all is as it has always been and will be, whose

cards always fall in the same pattern” (ibid.). This means that normality for the girl corresponds to eternal immobility, therefore she experiences a fantastic feeling of hesitation when she faces the strength of her desire to love and to become human, which bewilders her in that it would imply experiencing change and time – which, in a game of reflections, is the normalcy of the rational cyclist. The vampire is taken by surprise when she first sees her own blood, as her bony body, looking so fragile to the soldier but being in fact so strong, never happened to be hurt before. The fear for change, for what it entails to be human strikes the Lady when her ritual of perpetual repetition is interrupted by something unexpected, which lets her realise that becoming human is going to cause her pain:

She gapes blindly down at the splinters and ineffectively smears the tears across her face with her fist. What is she to do now?

When she kneels to try to gather the fragments of glass together, a sharp sliver pierces deeply into the pad of her thumb; she cries out, sharp, real. She kneels among the broken glass and watches the bright bead of blood form a drop. She has never seen her own blood before, not her *own* blood. It exercises upon her an awed fascination.

Into this vile and murderous room, the handsome bicyclist brings the innocent remedies of the nursery. In himself, by his presence, he is an exorcism [...]

How can she bear the pain of becoming human? (ibid.: 106)

Carter’s play with opposite but mirroring representations of the fantastic experience counters the usual, human feeling of hesitation with the same bewilderment faced by a supernatural being, and results in the celebration of imagination and desire as substitutes for blind rationality. Even though in the end the vampire dies, she does so out of her choice to spare the cyclist, enjoy love and turn into a human being. Without trying to explain her confusion to overcome fear, she embraces her mixed-feelings and is able to freely choose her destiny. The cyclist, on the contrary, even though he does not let fear overcome him thanks to his rationality, proves unable to avoid the fate history has prepared for him, as his dumb heroism is about to lead him towards an irrational death which, however, he has not decided for himself.

5. WHO'S SPEAKING/LOOKING? UNRELIABLE NARRATORS AND DISRUPTIVE FOCALIZATION

The last set of issues at stake within this chapter, which tackles focalisation and narrative voice, encompasses the metamorphoses of fairy tales' generic conventions performed by Carter described so far, and introduces other significant ramifications of the intersection between poetics and politics in her literary enterprise.

In spite of what Carter claims in the introduction to the *Virago Book of Fairy Tales* – that folk tales are “anonymous and genderless” (Carter 1990: x) – implying a certain “nostalgia for anonymity, for the archaic powers of the narrator whose authority rests precisely on disclaiming individual authority” (Sage 2001: 21), textual evidence in *The Bloody Chamber* proves the contrary. The narrative strategies deployed in these literary fairy tales reveal in fact that Carter lets her authorial voice and the politics underlying the texts surface, first and foremost through the subversion of the typical third person account of the events, where the focalization is usually external. The use of first person narrators is all the more disruptive, as it also substitutes the types of the fairy tale with psychologically complex characters.

Keeping in mind the intersections of textual poetics and politics, Carter's unconventional characters and the shifts of narrators and focalizers in the stories are enquired under different angles, mainly turning to Bacchilega's appropriation of Mieke Bal's notion and analytical tools of “critical narratology” (1997) and to Linda Hutcheon's conceptualisation of the “unreliable narrator” as a result of the ex-centric and fragmented subject of postmodernity (1988).

Bacchilega applies Bal's narratology to a study of postmodern fairy tales which is not circumscribed to the analysis of the poetics, but aims also at uncovering the politics underlying the re-written versions of the stories. The purpose of Bal's “critical narratology”, indeed, is to “limn ‘ideology at work in narrative subjectivity’” (Bacchilega 1997: 17), thus approaching fairy tales – and, more broadly, any literary text – according to this paradigm allows one to unmask the political and socio-cultural meanings and messages handed down and sustained by specific narrative choices through the endorsement of a determinate ideology. Following Althusser, Bal understands the work

of ideology as producing a “seemingly coherent subject” and shaping “a society’s representation and a subject’s position” through its naturalising power (ibid.), so that “when ideology succeeds, a subject occupies one or more positions as if they were natural, in an it-goes-without-saying fashion” (ibid.).

The task of critical narratology as described by Bal and Bacchilega particularly suits this analysis of Carter’s collection, which is aimed at unveiling the not so much “latent” gender politics of the texts, and which is interested in “assign[ing] narrative and ideological responsibility” not only to the first person narrator, but also to “the so-called ‘third person’ narrator who, thanks to the naturalising ‘once upon a time’ fairy tale frame, is usually considered to be objective” (ibid.). This approach accounts for the performative value of the literary texts as well, in that it connects the “verbal signs” with “their users”, which here stand for both readers and the author. Finally, it gives reasons for the framing and re-framing of the performative force of the fairy tale, because, as has been demonstrated by a number of feminists and deconstructionist critics:

while the meaning of a (sign-)event still depends on its performative force, its context-bound performance, that context can be framed and reframed, resulting in different meanings which no one subject can master. And without discounting the significance of agency, the effect of this shift is to resituate responsibility not within individual intention, but in the network of ideologies articulated in a performance as interpreted within multiple frames. (ibid.: 19)

The scope of these contentions in examining Carter’s stories is considerably wide, for it examines the implications of a metamorphic and polymorphic narrative which gives way to and reflects on gender politics both with critical – deconstructionist – and with productive intents – that is, foregrounding different forms of agency. Furthermore, it addresses the possibility of re-interpreting and re-signifying the stories through time, but always provided that the readers actively engage with them and share with the author the responsibility which comes with the appropriation of a narration – which would have certainly been welcomed by Carter, given her belief that reading must be an active participation in the process of meaning-generation, a kind of re-writing operation:

Carter was insistent that her texts were open-ended, written with a space for the reader's activity in mind. [...] Carter's own fiction seems always aware of its playful interaction with the reader's assumptions and recognitions. [...] she] often explained that for her "a narrative is an argument stated in fictional terms". And the two things needed for any argument are, something to argue *against* (something to be overturned) and someone to make that argument *to* (a reader). (Makinen 1992: 6)

Drawing a tight connection among narrative conventions, subjective formation and representation, social function and politics of narrations, an approach which turns to critical narratology must "make visible a narrative imposition by unfolding its strategic proposition of meaning – its subjectivity. Achieving this task involves tracing the network of subject roles, positions and actions within a text, and then measuring this specific ideologically produced subjectivity against narrative and social norms" (Bacchilega 1997: 17). These tasks imply a close examination of what Bal calls "subjective network", that is of "narration (who speaks?), focalization (who sees?), and agency (who does?)" (ibid.).

Before applying Bal's theory to a discussion of the politics of Carter's texts through the disentanglement of the narrative arrangements of the stories, a close examination of the notion of "subjectivity", so central in Bal's approach, is due. With the firm belief that this will not distort or de-contextualise Bal's purposes, it is suggested here that Hutcheon's articulation of the postmodern subject would meet the requirements of critical narratology, tailored as they seem to be to account for the diverse portraits of female subjectivity sketched by the fairy tales.

Consistent with historiographic metafiction within the stories, the female subjectivities emerging from *The Bloody Chamber* are produced by the destabilisation of the notion of historicity as plural instead of "a-temporal eternal essence", where margins are rethought and borders crossed (Hutcheon 1988: 58). "When the centre starts to give way to the margins, when totalising universalization begins to self-deconstruct, the complexity of the contradictions within conventions – such as those of genre [...] – begin to be apparent" (ibid.: 59). The identities resulting from this deconstruction and re-construction of culturally established boundaries are "fluxed" and "contextualised", that is asserted through "difference, "specificity" and "discontinuity" rather than similarity and complicity. Moreover, according to Hutcheon, new formulations of subjectivity, like those of generic conventions and definitions, always draw on what they purport to

subvert (as disruption always does in Carter's fairy tales): "The decentering of our categories of thought always relies on the centres it contests for its very definition [...]. The power of these new expressions is always paradoxically derived from that which they challenge" (ibid.: 59). It is important to note that decentering in this sense does not simply entail the displacement of the centre so that it can be replaced by what is marginal, but rather a questioning of both the centre and the margins "from the inside as well as from the outside, against each other" (ibid.: 69). Inasmuch as "the centre used to function as the pivot between binary opposites which always privileged one half", it established a language of otherness that must be transformed and replaced with a language of difference and discontinuity which breaks with the norms sustained by the discursive impositions of the privileged half. After the centre has been put into question, "if [it] is seen as a construct, a fiction, not a fixed and unchangeable reality, the old either-or begins to break down [...] and the new and-also of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities" (ibid.: 62).

These assumptions about postmodern subjectivity seem to suit the profile of the subject whose network Bal's critical narratology sets out to explore, all the more because they function in the same way as Carter's questioning and overthrowing of patriarchy does: in the tension between complicity and disruption, parodying and turning discursively established meanings, practices and positions against themselves to underline their lacks and inconsistencies, and then encourage readers to actively engage in order to find alternative, freer and empowering arrangements.

For these reasons, for instance, not only do Carter's fairy tales display a shift of female character's perspective to the centre – that is they move from the place of the object of desire/of the hero's quest to subject of the gaze, i.e. focalizers, or to be the narrative voice of the stories – but they also feature more complicit and traditional female characters. The transformative movements towards the centre and towards alternative perspectives do not coincide with the central, dominant ones but provide empowering alternatives to them. More to the point, when two versions of the same source-story (such as "Beauty and the Beast") are presented with different narrators and under different points of view, changes and displacement become even easier to detect.

Besides being disruptive as they unsettle fairy tale's generic expectations, the stories which feature a first person narrator in *The Bloody Chamber* are all the more problematic either because the narrative voice is combined with peculiar or shifting focalizations – as in the cases of “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Tiger’s Bride” – or because the narrator herself is unreliable – as in “The Erl-King”.

As Culler points out in the introduction to an edition of Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1990), “In what is traditionally called a first-person narrative the point of view can vary, depending on whether events are focalized through the consciousness of the narrator at the moment of narration or through his consciousness at a time in the past when the events took place” (Genette 1990: 10). The narrator of “The Bloody Chamber” belongs to the first instance, since the story is told by a woman after the facts have taken place but the actual narrator is not always the main focalizer; different points of view are offered as the gaze is alternatively that of the young girl whose story is being told or that of the grownup woman who is telling the story.

The analysis of focalization carried out in this research mainly draws on Bal's understanding of the notion by amending and expanding Genette's insights on the topic, which can be summarised as follows:

“Focalization” must be intended as the “*center of interest*”, that is the result of selection [...] of the content of the narrative. Next, the concept includes the “gaze”, the *vision*, also in the abstract sense of “considering something from a certain angle”; and finally, the concept includes *presentation*. The subject and object of these three activities, which can be summarised as *orientation*, are the narrative agents we are dealing with. (Bal 2006: 18)

Bacchilega analyses the fragmented narrative voice – which, meaningfully enough, echoes the idea of the fragmented subject referred to above – of the “The Bloody Chamber” as part of a broader interplay of doubles in the text as well as in the Blue Beard tales in general (Bacchilega 1997: 119-129). Carter's fairy tale begins with “I remember” (Carter 1979: 7), followed by an account of the events which led the narrator to marry the Marquis. The long opening sequence is a flashback, as the narration of the main storyline only begins at page 11, where the protagonist is on her way to her husband's castle. The tones of this retrospective account are melancholic and condescending, as if the narrator

was blessing and regretting the ignorance and innocence which characterised her girlhood:

I remember how, that night, I lay awake in the wagon-lit in a tender, delicious ecstasy of excitement, my burning cheek pressed against the impeccable linen of the pillow and the pounding of my heart mimicking that of the great pistons ceaselessly thrusting the train that bore me through the night, away from Paris, away from my girlhood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of my mother's apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage. [...] And, in the midst of my bridal triumph, I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on my finger, I had, in some way, ceased to be her [my mother's] child in becoming his wife. (Carter 1979: 7)

This first textual evidence alone conveys the complexity of the psychological articulation and the reflexivity of the character who, unlike the typified bride of Perrault's and other traditional fairy tales, speculates about the past and the choices she made while also trying to measure the extent to which she was actively involved in directing her destiny by alternating proclamations of her innocence and acknowledgements of her compliance. As Roemer remarks, this "double-voice strategy" is a "first person retrospective style of narration 'whereby the past is not simply repeated, but subject to scrutiny and re-evaluation'" (Roemer in Bacchilega 1997: 121). Even if "I was seventeen and I knew nothing of the world" (Carter 1979: 9), "I was only a little girl, I did not understand" (ibid.:18), "I was only a baby" (ibid.: 21), "Child that I was, I giggled when she left me" (ibid.: 23), doubts are recurrently cast on the naiveté of the protagonist/narrator when it comes to seduction and desire, more precisely when the girl describes how she feels when she looks at herself in the mirror and sees what her husband might see: "And, for the first time, in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away" (ibid.: 11), and "I was not afraid of him, but of myself [...] And, in the red firelight, I blushed again, unnoticed, to think that he might have chosen me because, in my innocence, he sensed a rare talent for corruption" (ibid.: 20).

Readers are addressed as "you" in the inclusive way that reproduces the oral transmission of folk tales, although when the narrator begs them for understanding and tries to justify her actions, her pleads seem to be in actual fact addressed to herself, as if she was trying to make sense of what happened to her, of what she did, and to assess her

degree of responsibility in it. Tellingly, the instances where the readers are directly addressed also signal that the focalizer is the woman, trying to mediate the girl's behaviours: "I swear to you, I had never been vain before I met him" (ibid.: 12); "And yet, you see, I guessed it might be so - that we should have a formal disrobing of the bride" (ibid.: 15).

Further switches of focalization from the narrator to her younger self beat the rhythm of the text, covertly performing a similar function to that of metacommentaries. When the older woman (that is, the actual first-person narrator) interrupts the narration, which after the introductory section (ibid.: p. 1-11) is mainly informed by the point of view of the girl (who therefore becomes the focalizer while at the same time she is the character of the story the narrator is telling), she either tries to give reasons for her past actions or establishes a distance not only of time but also of identity and experience between her selves.

One more strategy Carter deploys to stress the distance between the narrator's selves is describing the girl's actions in the third person, as if she was talking about someone other than herself:

And there lay the grand, hereditary matrimonial bed [...] surrounded by so many mirrors [...] that reflected more white lilies than I'd ever seen in my life before. He'd filled the room with them, to greet the bride, the young bride. The young bride, who had become that multitude of young girls I saw in the mirrors.

My dear one, my little love, my child, did it hurt her? He's so sorry for it, such impetuosity, he could not help himself; you see, he loves her so..." (ibid.: 14, 18).

The narrator refers to her past self in the third person because she wants to emphasise that, in her ingenuity, that girl objectified herself by identifying with the mirror image which reflected her husband's objectifying gaze: "there is an odd kind of self-alienation in this objectification of herself as other, her self-objectification on the masculine terms of the mirror" (Day 1998: 154).

The self-reflexive tale "recounting her [the narrator's] awareness of and growing reflecting distance upon those things [she has experienced]" (ibid.: 162) culminates at the end of the story, where the time of the narration abruptly shifts to the present tense, and the narrator becomes again the main focalizer. In this sort of epilogue, the protagonist

describes the details of her “happily ever after”, which is not so perfect as the fairy tale formula in its being oblivious to what actually happens after the happy end usually suggests. Even though she is married with the blind piano tuner, the narrator seems to regret their poverty: “and now here I was, scarcely a penny the richer, widowed at seventeen in the most dubious circumstances and busily engaged in setting up house with a piano-tuner” (Carter 1979: 41). Notwithstanding her increased self-awareness, which allows her to see past events under a different light and to despise the levity which brought her to undergo such distressful events, the narrator does not seem to be satisfied with love without wealth, nor is she at peace with herself yet, as the conclusive remarks show: “No paint, no powder, no matter how thick or white, can mask that red mark on my forehead, I am glad he [the piano-tuner] cannot see it – not for fear of his revulsion, since I know he sees me clearly with his heart – but, because it spares my shame” (ibid.: 41). The woman has changed, but she has not learned from her past mistakes, since she still relies on the image the others have of herself to shape her identity, so that her shame is spared not because she feels she has nothing to be ashamed of, but because she knows that her blind husband cannot see it.

The multiple and fragmented subjectivity which brings about a similar split and shifting narrative account of its experience, caught while trying to understand past choices and to negotiate coherence within its contradictions, could be considered part of Carter’s postmodern “inquiry into the very nature of subjectivity” (Hutcheon 1988: 11), which refuses to reconcile difference by turning to the traditional – patriarchal – notion of coherent, essential, stable self. The literary representation of this kind of postmodern quest results, according to Hutcheon, in “the frequent challenge to traditional notions of perspective” where “the perceiving subject is no longer assumed to a coherent, meaning-generating entity” (ibid.). As a consequence, “Narrators in fiction become either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate [...] or resolutely provisional end limited – often undermining their own seeming omniscience” (ibid.).

If the latter is the case of the narrator of “The Bloody Chamber”, who is unreliable because she is far from being omniscient (she can only account for her past experience with her present, provisional and still in-process point of view), the former variant suits the narrative voice of “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”. In this story, indeed, the apparently

normal third person omniscient and powerful narrator of traditional literary fairy tales, actually hides a difficulty of pinpointing whose perspective is being adopted and the multiple focalization, which in fact is character-bound (Bacchilega 1997: 91). As Bacchilega clarifies: “we look here upon a rather familiar fairy-tale situation and landscape [...] and yet the shifting focalization puts us in familiar Carter territory by undermining the external narrator’s reliability even while serving it. Who is looking?” (ibid.). At first sight the answer to this question seems obvious: the external focalizer is. But if observed more closely, the focalization often proves to be character-bound, so that the narrator’s gaze is covertly replaced by that of one of the characters, and thereby its objectiveness, neutrality and omniscience are put into question. In the very first sequence, for example, the description clearly starts with an external perspective, yet the focalization suddenly changes and the readers are presented with Beauty’s point of view, her thoughts sliding into the words of the narrator:

Outside her kitchen window, the hedgerow glistened as if the snow possessed a light of its own; when the sky darkened towards evening, an unearthly, reflected pallor remained behind upon the winter’s landscape, while still the soft flakes floated down. This lovely girl, whose skin possesses that same, inner light so you would have thought she, too, was made of snow, pauses in her chores in the main kitchen to look out at the country road. Nothing has passed that way all day; the road is white and unmarked as a spilled bolt of bridal satin.
Father said he would be home after nightfall.
The snow brought down all the telephone wires; he couldn’t have called, even with the best of news.
The roads are bad. I hope he’ll be safe. (Carter 1979: 41)

Similarly, focalization passes to Beauty’s father in the subsequent scene (ibid.: 42-43. See also Bacchilega 1997: 92-93).

According to Bacchilega, Carter’s play with focalization, which undermines the status of the third person narrator of the fairy tale, invites readers “to share in the naturalizing gaze that sees Beauty as unmarked, ambiguously animate snow, but we are also exposed to Beauty’s own look, and therefore to the question of how we are to look” (Bacchilega 1997: 92).

It seems just predictable then, that the following story in the collection, which likewise reworks the narrative of “Beauty and the Beast”, is told by Beauty in the first person. In this tale the same shift in focalizers which characterized “The Courtship of Mr

Lyon” produces the corresponding effect of challenging the authoritativeness of the narrator (Bacchilega 1997: 95). It is interesting to note that the narrative voice of this story echoes to a certain extent the one of “The Bloody Chamber”, as here, too, albeit not exactly in the same way, a retrospective account is provided. As Bacchilega quite effectively puts it: ”From the very beginning, the “we” – at times represented by the indexical “you” – knows what happened through her [the narrator’s] words and eyes. But what the I-character saw in herself and others at the time is not what the altered I narrator sees” (ibid.: 97). In other words, the younger subject, i.e. the girl who was scared by the dreadful tale of the Tiger-man told by her nanny to make her behave, has given place to a young woman who is scared of and enraged at “how women being seen as objects had shaped her own seeing of humans” (ibid.). The girl’s way of looking at reality and of describing it is obviously neither omniscient nor reliable, as it is culturally shaped and mediated: “What is important here is the heroine’s confused perception. An external, but not impartial or ‘natural’ focalization, the humanistic, patriarchal gaze, conditions her responses, even though she realizes that this order victimizes her” (ibid.: 98).

It could be argued, however, that what Carter wants to emphasise is precisely the opposite, that is, we can count more on the version of the story of a narrator whose perspective is clearly and declaredly biased in that the circumstances which shaped it are earnestly disclosed to us, than on an external narrative voice which apparently is omniscient and neutral but in fact conceals naturalising and disciplining drives. And the “latent” subtext of a similar textual strategy could well be part of the implementation of female agency, as women are encouraged to produce their own narrative starting from the hard facts of their experiences and of their material condition in order to understand and then to be able to change them. Hence, in *The Bloody Chamber* unreliable narrators are celebrated as they fuel the metamorphosing power of storytelling by turning an apparent weakness – namely, their partial, confused, still in-process perception – into an empowering tool, for it becomes the starting point to account for themselves and create brand new stories in the never-ending process of development and invention of their identities.

Another intertextual reference to “The Bloody Chamber” testifies to this appraisal of instability and change as sources for empowerment and improvement as the narrator talks about herself in the third person: “The valet moved forward as if to cover up his master now the girl had acknowledged him but I said: ‘No’” (Carter 1979: 64). Here the effect is the same as that of the Blue Beard story, where the protagonist wanted to disavow the objectification she let herself endure. In this case, indeed, “the girl” in the third person stands for “the girl who was too much immersed in the cultural assumptions attributed to femininity by her father to notice that there actually existed alternatives to it”. The “I” who says ‘no’ is the I who is ready to embrace the Tiger’s bestiality in order to partake in its freedom and in its defiance of given assumptions and definitions. As a consequence, the shame which informed Beauty’s actions when she refused to show her naked body to the beast (because she conformed to her father’s standpoint according to which the female body is precious “meat to trade” – Bacchilega 1997: 98) turns now into “pride” as she unbuttons her shirt, ready to take off her clothes and share the Tiger’s nakedness: “Pride it was, not shame, that thwarted my fingers so” (Carter 1979: 64).

With regard to the narrator’s unreliability, the best instance is perhaps to be found in the “Erl-King”, where to the emotive, sometimes contradictory account of the facts, of which the I-narrator is the sole focalizer, is added an extreme fragmentation of the narrative voice itself. Kramer Linkin (1994) grounds her far-reaching examination of the narrative frames of the story in the fragmented personality of the narrator, whose different levels of consciousness are associated to different narrative persons (first, second and third). The random and non-chronological shifts of narrators, or rather, of different levels of consciousness of the same, split narrative persona convey the unreliability of the storyteller as they cast doubts on “the extent of the narrator’s self-knowledge [which] is impossible to gauge as is her relation to and distance from the protagonist” (ibid.: 311).

The story opens with a second-person narration which “both heightens readerly identification and dispenses with psychological disengagement (making us experience [...] the breakdown of ego boundaries that so frightens the protagonist)” (ibid.: 310-311). Moreover, this narrative choice creates a tension between the trustworthiness of the narration, which seems the account of a personal experience reminding one of a cautionary tale, and the contradictions which follow, since readers are directly addressed

as were the people gathering together to listen to the oral storytelling of a folk-tale. Soon after the narrator switches to the first person: “The two notes of the song of a bird rose in the still air, as if my girlish and delicious loneliness had been made into a sound” (Carter 1979: 85), and then addresses as “you” not the public but a specific person, the Erl-King “I felt I was in a house of nets and though the cold wind that always heralds your presence blew gentle around me, I thought that nobody was in the wood but me” (ibid.), to switch back to speaking directly to the reader in the subsequent line: “The Erl-King will do you grievous harm” (ibid.). This I narrator is a young girl, venturing in the woods and finding herself in front of the Erl-King. At the beginning, she is fascinated by the mysterious creature, who seems to have come “alive from the desire of the woods” (ibid.: 86), but soon charm turns into terror, as the Erl-King flashes a smile of fangs: “He [...] laughs and shows his white, pointed teeth with the spittle gleaming on them” (ibid.: 87). After having depicted the luring figure of the Erl-king as a dangerous predator, and thus justified the warning given in the first pages, the profile of the narrator subtly changes again, as we learn that the focalizer is, in fact, her grownup self, remembering the feelings which overwhelmed her when she got lost in the woods and met the Erl-King for the first time. Again, Carter has devised a retrospective account:

Now, when I go for walks, sometimes in the mornings when the frost has put its shiny thumbprint on the undergrowth or sometimes, though less frequently, yet more excitingly, in the evenings when the cold darkness settles down, I always go to the Erl-King and he lays me down on his bed of rustling straw where I lie at the mercy of his huge hands. (ibid.)

This first hint suggests what will be soon after made explicit: that the woman has changed her perspective and attitude towards the Erl-King; now she blames him for making her indulge in a desire that she fears because it seems to be out of her control, and thus she begins to reject it and to demonize its source:

And now – ach! I feel your sharp teeth in the subaqueous depths of your kisses. The equinoctial gales seize the bare elms and make them whizz and whirl like dervishes; you sink your teeth into my throat and make me scream.
[...] How sweet I roam, or, rather, used to roam, once I was the perfect child of the meadows of summer, but then the year turned, the light clarified and I saw the gaunt Erl-King, tall as a tree with birds in its branches, and he drew me towards him on his magic lasso of inhuman music. (ibid.: 88-89)

As Kramer Linkin comments, “Afraid of being consumed by the gazer upon the wood/woman, she [the narrator] supplants his role by using language to shield herself from the desire language creates, transforming the Erl-King into the big bad wolf before his ‘irrevocable hand’ can transform her” (Kramer Linkin 1994: 315). Like the protagonist-narrator of “The Bloody Chamber”, this woman fears her complicity in the Erl-King’s desire, and her refusal to take responsibility in it is translated into the way she plays with words to trick the reader in endorsing her standpoint and justifying her actions, for in the end she plans to murder the bad wolf.

When the protagonist envisions the murder of the Erl-King, perhaps trying to convince herself – and readers – of the righteousness and inevitability of her actions, the narrative shifts to the third person:

I shall take two huge handfuls of his rustling hair as he lies half dreaming, half waking and wind them into ropes [...] I shall strangle him with them.
Then she will open all the cages and let the birds free; they will change back into young girls, every one [...].
She will carve off his great mane with the knife he uses to skin the rabbits; she will string the old fiddle with five single strings of ash-brown hair.
Then it will play discordant music without a hand touching it. (Carter 1979: 91)

As both the third person and the future tense suggest, probably these are merely the protagonist’s intentions, actions yet to be performed, but whose resolutions lead to the belief that the woman would do what is in her power to destroy the threats of unbridled desire embodied by the Erl-King. “Reinventing her position [...] to become the empowered subject, even when she shifts narrative voice from first person to third person, the narrator-protagonist envisions herself as a great liberator who frees the Erl-King’s caged birds before she produces her own eolian music out of elements appropriated from his dead body” (Kramer Linkin 1994: 320).

Rather than signalling, as Kramer Linkin claims, a “diminishing sense of self”, the non-chronological unravelling of the narrative voice emphasises the fragmentation of the female subject when she experiences desire, since she is, like Erl-King’s birds, encaged in a culturally shaped framework where it is deemed inappropriate and condemned. As a result of the cultural assumptions in which she is entrapped, when she faces her own desire the woman’s consciousness and subjectivity shatter, and the only way she knows of

piecing them together in what she believes is her true, whole self, is killing what produced the fracture in the first place. In this sense her self-perception does not “diminish”, but is simply unable to escape the normative discourse which shaped her identity. Therefore, instead of embracing the plural, unstable, ever-changing qualities desire has forced her to confront with, she fights for freedom in the only way she knows, that is referring to the cultural ideology which engaged her. As Makinen points out, indeed, the shifts of narrative persons embody the ambivalent problematic nature of desire the narrator is experiencing. In particular, “The disquieting shifts between the two voices of the narrator, first and third person, represent the two competing desires for freedom and engulfment” (Makinen in Day 1998: 150).

Another example of character-bound focalisation which is worth mentioning, although – to my knowledge – it has not been analysed by any critical study of *The Bloody Chamber* so far, is “The Lady of the House of Love”.

Mixing intertextual references to both the fairy tale and the Gothic tradition, the narrative structure of this story ends up disrupting both. The first part of the tale, despite the clearly Gothic atmosphere, is told in fairy tale fashion in the third person with an external focalisation. In Gothic fiction, instead, similar events are usually narrated by a first person eyewitness, who is also the focalizer even if he has only a partial knowledge of the facts and can therefore experience the typical fantastic feeling of hesitation. From the moment when the young cyclist arrives in the hunted village where the castle of the Lady-vampire stands out against the hill, readers witness a constant shift in focalisation from the Vampire to the young man, where at times the third-person narrator meddles in. Moreover, to underline the fragmented and multiple points of view in the narration, different descriptions of the same people, objects and places overlap, so that for instance the portrait of the Lady is depicted both by the omniscient narrator and by the boy (Carter, 1979: 93-96, 100-101). The climax of this alternate focalization is reached when the focalised narration, whose point of view is variably that of the cyclist or of the vampire, abruptly turns into a first-person interior monologue. Most of these interludes spell out the Lady’s thoughts (Carter, 1979: 103, 105, 107) but on one occasion the young man is allowed to think in the first person as well (ibid.: 105).

The disruptive quality of these interruptions of the expected narrative framework is even more powerful if compared to the usual narrative arrangements of Gothic novels and short stories, where the point of view of the “other”, of the monster/supernatural being is most certainly never accounted for – with the conspicuous exception of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* – as this would entail unravelling the mystery which allows the tense atmosphere to generate fantastic bewilderment both in the protagonist and in the reader. Of course, as usual Carter’s purposes go beyond the turmoil of generic conventions, and in this particular case the confusion generated by the Vampire’s thoughts and desires aim at inserting the standpoint and psychological problematisation of the other usually left unexplained and simply exploited as receptacle for the protagonists’ fears, anxieties for what is unknown and possibly irrational in mystery and Gothic fiction.

Last but not least, here, too, the third person narrator’s nature is ambiguous and raises questions about its reliability. As was true of “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” – and the internal intertextual reference is probably not casual – in “The Lady of the House of Love” at times one is led to wonder: “Who is speaking?”. Towards the end of the tale, indeed, a reflexive commentary whose authorship is not clear: “This lack of imagination gives his heroism to the hero” (ibid.: 104) is followed by an omniscient-like looming forecast – again, of dubious origin: “He will learn to shudder in the trenches. But this girl cannot make him shudder” (ibid.). The passage then proceeds with a description in which the inclusive pronoun “us” surprisingly appears, as if the narrator, or even the reader, were partaking in the narrated events: “the impedimenta of her condition squeak and gibber all around us” (ibid.).

This particularly ambiguous example of Carter’s self-reflexive narratives unsettles the generic conventions of the genres to which the tales refer and foregrounds the writer’s commitment to a feminist gender politics, thus also epitomising the outcomes of the postmodern narrative strategies deployed throughout the collection. Admittedly, resort to fragmented and unreliable narrators in *The Bloody Chamber* goes hand in hand with the unstable, still in-process female subjectivities they represent, whose metamorphoses will be described in the following chapter by analysing the political consequences of Carter’s

transformative textual strategies on the subjects they portray and on the identity journeys they are accordingly allowed to set out to.

CHAPTER 3.

TRANSFORMATIVE IDENTITY JOURNEYS – GENDER(ED) SUBJECTS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Feminism is not simply about rejecting power, but about transforming the existing power structures, and in the process transforming the very concept of power itself.

(Moi, 1985: 141)

Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation.

(Carter 1997: 43)

1. INTRODUCTION. GETTING READY TO EXPLORE IDENTITY JOURNEYS

As a matter of fact, power is the key to understand how the transition of metamorphosis from textual strategy to its visible materialisation on the body through gender politics works in Carter's fairy tales. To begin with, the stories sketch a definition of metamorphic female identity at least in a twofold way. First of all, subjectivity is represented as unstable, fragmented and multiple, and is caught in the act of being made through language and storytelling. This means that it is a never ending process mediated by individual – and by necessity partial – desires and drives as well as by the social interactions and relationships in which the subject is engaged (Foucault, 1998; Braidotti 2002). Secondly, the identities described by Carter are rooted in material experience and historicity, thus they invariably change according to contextual and contingent situations, therefore transformation could be considered, if any, their only foundational and stable feature. Furthermore, in order for women's conditions in society to improve, as suggested by the portraits of Carter's heroines, change is to be considered the chief achievement which is worth fighting for

(Carter 1979a). Of course, change is not disruptive in itself, and does not necessarily entail improvement (Bacchilega 1997; Zipes 2002).

This chapter purports to discuss the different declinations of metamorphosis in Carter's representation of a number of patterns of development for female identity with the limits and the potential of her context-bound perspectives on the issue.

The centrality of power in *The Bloody Chamber* surfaces from the description of unequal relationships where violence, aggression, polarities and imbalances are depicted both in terms of gender and of class. A similar understanding and representation of power and its consequent impact on the development of self, social and gendered identity most probably derives from Carter's acquaintance with the work of Foucault, which interestingly enough she quotes at the beginning of *The Sadeian Woman*, her theoretical manifesto on sexual politics. In general, as Sage effectively points out, Carter shares Foucault's conviction that power is omnipresent in society and human relationships, that its nature is both constrictive and productive, that it is inscribed in knowledge and its transmission, and above all that sexual politics is contingent on historically determined discourses – that is power-knowledge arrangements. In particular, Foucault's insights into sexuality seem to have inspired Carter's contention that “Flesh comes to us out of history” (Carter 1979a: 11):

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse [...] are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power”. (Foucault in Sage 2001: 33)

These assumptions ground the enterprise of demythologising Western patriarchal discourses about sexual relationships which Carter sets out to theorize in *The Sadeian Woman* and then actualises with narrative examples in *The Bloody Chamber*:

Foucault's revisionist picture of (sexual) politics mirrors Carter's thinking during these years [i.e. late Seventies]. Whether or not she made direct use of *The History of Sexuality*, it does exemplify the kind of intellectual company she kept. And in practice, in the writing of fiction, she was playing out what she preached. (Sage 2007: 34)

Her *Exercise in Cultural History* deserves being taken into consideration, as the arguments set forth here allow one to assess the extent to which Carter's stances on the relationships between men and women, and the cultural construction and naturalisation of gender roles and performances are disruptive and depict empowering patterns of development for female identities. As a close analysis of the theoretical essay discloses, Carter engages in a criticism of patriarchy - which she calls "demythologising business" (Carter 1997: 38) - which turns its discourses against themselves. In other words, through the critical and polemical examination of Sade's work Carter reveals the centrality of the category of sex in defining identity and meanwhile dismantles the binary oppositions informing and sustaining patriarchal thought by exposing the cultural constructedness of their naturalising drives and outcomes. In so doing, the contingency of what have been traditionally considered appropriate roles, positions and behaviours for men and women, and therefore for the relationships between them, is exposed. Acknowledgement and disclosure of the discursive dynamics at work is then followed by their challenge and disruption, that is by the suggestion of alternative patterns (in theoretical terms in *The Sadeian Woman*) and by their representation (in fictional terms in *The Bloody Chamber*). In this way criticism leads to agency, and it is precisely the analysis of Carter's strategies of resistance and empowerment for women that allow one to examine her feminist agenda and the political powerfulness of her literary work.

In this respect, some general considerations can be put forward in order to frame the assets and limits of Carter's challenge of patriarchy. First and foremost, transformation and amendment of existing discursive arrangements and practices are always preceded by and grounded in a deep understanding of how they work. Carter always shows the complicity of women in their submission in order to emphasise that if they want to stop being victimised, they must be aware of the mechanisms which uphold their submission and act within their frameworks. As the example of traditional fairy tales with their social function shows, indeed, the improvement of one's own conditions does

not imply that the social structures have been changed. Women must therefore change the way they look at themselves and relate to the others to try to transform the way relationships function altogether. Significantly, this means that simple role reversal is not the solution, since – as Carter strongly proclaims in *The Sadeian Woman* – it does not undermine patriarchal discursive arrangements, because it may lead to the improvement of individual conditions, but without changing the system which generates oppression and inequality. If role reversal is useless and does not compromise oppressive discourses, it is accordingly fruitless to replace them with a reasoning informed by binary and mutually exclusive categories, no matter how empowering for women. Thus, within the examination of Carter's feminist politics, whether it is linked to the analysis of the arguments set forth in *The Sadeian Woman* or to the study of power dynamics and relationships in the fairy tales, reciprocity is often mentioned to emphasise the importance of mutual exchange and balance for the creation of new discursive orders which could be empowering for both sexes.

Among the limits of Carter's sexual politics, which could be pointed out with reference to the tales collected in *The Bloody Chamber*, the most evident is perhaps their confinement within the heterosexual matrix. The relationships between the sexes are indeed scrutinised and patriarchal assumptions about them are challenged without undercutting or providing alternatives to the heterosexual economy of desire. Far from underestimating or minimising the revolutionary and subversive range of her literary speculations, it could be argued that Carter is interested in questioning and remoulding power dynamics and relationships *between* the sexes, which however results in the endorsement of normative – albeit disruptive – heterosexuality.

The identity journeys represented in Carter's fairy tales are analysed in this chapter by exploring the interactions between feminist politics and the narrative devices of fairy tales, always bearing in mind the mutually productive exchange between poetics and politics. Moreover, as was true for the intertextual play with generic conventions, also in this case patriarchal narratives and discourses are questioned and overthrown starting from the constant oscillation between compliance and subversion. That is to say, the representation of metamorphosis both of individual characters and of the identity profile

they epitomise is always described as something in process, as a journey from an initial position which is framed in patriarchal structures and then variably moves toward self-awareness and the development of strategies of resistance aimed at building – or at least recognising the need for – new orders.

2. WOMEN IN PROCESS: CARTER'S SEXUAL POLITICS FROM *THE SADEIAN WOMAN* TO *THE BLOODY CHAMBER*

The process through which the female protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber* construct their identities could be described as a transformation taking place during the transition from submission (to and within a patriarchal discursive order) to the achievement of different degrees of empowerment. These journeys caught while still in progress, nevertheless, never come to an end, as the protagonists' struggles and negotiations with themselves and with the other – mainly male – people do not lead to everlasting happiness. Rather, their accomplishment seems to be the journey itself, the process through which they experience change, the always still-in-act itinerary of identification and subject-formation. As Manley points out with reference to the narrator of "The Bloody Chamber", who initiates the journey of the collection and to a certain extent typifies the experiences of the other female characters: "She is a woman in process, someone who is exploring her subject position and beginning to tell her own story" (Manley 2001: 83). These private, personal journeys, where the young women learn how to make an account of themselves are always grounded in their material conditions, which Carter discloses and questions as a primary influence in the development of their identities.

According to Day: "major aspects of Carter's metaphysical materialism are empiricism and her passion for reason. Carter's exploration, throughout her fantastic allegories [...] is primarily an exploration of the politics of Western heterosexual identity" (Day 1998: 12).

The choice of exploring Western heterosexual politics through the literary work of Sade is a particularly provocative but at the same time wise choice on Carter's part. His pornographic novels, indeed, represent the most basic and stylised social relationships – thus they deal with issues of power in both its constrictive and productive articulations – between men and women, where sex is overtly addressed, when it is not their central concern. This enables Carter to directly address the issue of power with relation to sex, to emphasise the importance of sex and gender in the historical construction of discursive practices and role positions, and to unmask the contextual and provisional character of their universalising and naturalising drive.

The first question Carter addresses in the book is, most notably, the necessity of enacting change, hindered by ideologies which do not contemplate transformations and amendments (like the fiction of biological reasons grounding power distribution):

Pornographers are the enemies of women only because our contemporary ideology of pornography does not encompass the possibility of change, as if we were the slaves of history and not its makers, as if sexual relations were not necessarily an expression of social relations, as if sex itself were an external fact, one as immutable as the weather, creating human practice but never a part of it. (Carter 1979a: 3)

In this specific case Carter addresses the ideology of pornography, but her claims could be held true also with reference to ideologies in general, which must be scrutinised in order to understand the reasons why their predicaments and the subject positions they create work in order to challenge and change what they attempt to stabilise:

The “object” of ideology does not quite exist; it is a creative empty place and what it creates is the illusion of a coherent decisional self. The point is that ideological representations work, whether their content is “true” or “false”. The success of ideology, therefore has nothing to do with the truth or falsity of its representation; what matters instead is the subjective position that ideology implicitly creates in the process of enunciation. (Braidotti 2002: 176)

Carter's provocative statements on pornography, in particular her “scandalous” contentions concerning the definition of the “moral pornographer”, cost her sharp criticism, above all from contemporary radical feminists (Sage 2007: 35). The issue has been discussed at length by several critics, therefore is not further tackled here (Benson 2001; Sheets 1991; Atwood 2007; Lau 2008; Gamble 1997; Notaro 1993, Sage 2007).

What needs to be underlined, however, is the fact that a number of Carter's detractors missed the point. If one looks past the provocation of suggesting that women should be sexually aggressive and openly enjoy sexual pleasure and focuses instead on the political meaning the idea of moral pornographer implies, it becomes clear that pornography is just a very powerful example which stands for all the other "fictions" sustained and naturalised by patriarchy to uphold women's subordination and let women be complacently compliant with it. In other words, pornography, like religion, science, history and all the other discourses constructed by patriarchal ideologies succeeded in endorsing and spreading double-edged myths of femininity, that is "false universals" conceived to "dull the pain of particular circumstances" among which the most dangerous deal with the "relations between the sexes" (Carter 1979a: 6).

The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual license for all the genders, and projects a model of a way such a world might work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind [...].

And that is because sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations, even if that is not and never has been the intention of the pornographer. (ibid.: 22-23)

Compared to other less controversial – and taboo – discourses, overt reference to sex and representations of sexual intercourse prove to be particularly powerful to uphold Carter's arguments for at least two main reasons. First, because sex actually grounds women's oppression, as patriarchal oppositional thought includes female sexuality within the subordinated halves of its mutually exclusive categories, i.e. with nature, instinct, irrationality, the body. It follows that explicitly addressing the context-bound character of sexual relations can help revalue the subordinated halves, or even better overthrow the oppositional logic altogether. Secondly, sexuality is shown to be a potential site where empowerment can take place and freedom be achieved even though it has traditionally been the very reason for women's subordination. In this way Carter manages once more to turn patriarchy against itself by showing that women can, or rather should, fight back starting from challenging it with its own means. Significantly enough, this is also in line

with a Foucauldian understanding of power dynamics, as discourses can and must be thwarted and twisted with the very tools which sustain them in order that change can take place:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it [...]. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. (Foucault 1998: 100-101)

According to Carter's definition of *moral pornographer*, not only must sex and sexual relations be understood and scrutinised as socio-cultural constructions, but they help make explicit the very nature of the social relations taking place within society in different historical moments. These arguments together with the demythologising enterprise – which is the declared goal of her fiction – ground Carter's materialism, which in turn is voiced by her declared interest in representing and demystifying the archetypes of femininity and the social conditions of women she actually experienced in Western societies:

There is the unarguable fact of sexual differentiation; but, separate from it and only partially derived from it, are the behavioural modes of masculine and feminine, which are culturally defined variables translated in the language of common usage to the status of universals. And these archetypes serve only to confuse the main issue, that relationships between the sexes are determined by history and by the historical fact of the economic dependence of women upon men. (Carter 1979a: 7)

The issue is developed even further in order to underline Carter's perceptive awareness of the new articulations of female subordination which are taking place in Western countries in the Seventies. Later on, indeed, she explains:

This fact is now very largely a fact of the past and, even in the past, it was only true for certain social groups and then only in certain periods. Today, most women work before, during and after marriage. Nevertheless, the economic dependence of women remains a believed fiction and is assumed to imply emotional dependence that is taken for granted as a condition inherent in natural order of things and so used to console working women for their low wages. They work; see little profit from it; and therefore conclude they cannot really have been working at all. (ibid.)

Like many other fictions produced by men for men's consumption which hide a universalising drive and require women's complicity to be sustained and take roots, pornography according to Carter "reinforces the false universals of sexual archetypes because it denies, or doesn't have time for, or can't find room for, or, because of its underlying ideology, ignores, the social context in which sexual activity takes place, that modifies the very nature of that activity" (ibid.: 18). Moral pornographers like Sade, or, it could be argued, Carter herself, on the contrary emphasise – perhaps in Sade's case notwithstanding his intentions – the social constructedness of sexuality, which "is as much a social fact as it is a human one" and "will therefore change its nature according to changes in social conditions" (ibid.: 19).

Contrary to what some critics have argued despising Carter's polemical intentions (see Dworkin and Kappeler in Gamble 1997: 99-100), her purpose is not to appraise or celebrate Sade, who "remains a monstrous and daunting cultural edifice", but to exploit those aspects of his fictions which could help women perform a needed social renovation: "de Sade's claim to the status of moral pornographer remains a matter of dispute through the text, and the apparent defence of him and his work with which the book opens is speedily abandoned in the rest of Carter's analysis" (Gamble 1997: 102). As Carter remarks: "I would like to think that he put pornography in the service of women, or perhaps, allowed it to be invaded by an ideology not inimical to women" (Carter 1979a: 42). More specifically, what Carter praises in Sade's work is that he "urged women to fuck as actively as they are able, so that powered by their enormous and hitherto untapped sexual energy they will then be able to fuck their way into history, and, in doing so, change it" as he "offers an absolutely sexualised view of the world, a sexualisation that permeates everything [...] he treats the facts of female sexuality not as a moral dilemma but as a political reality" (ibid.: 31). Last, but not least, he freed the sexual act, and therefore women from reproduction, that is the feature of women's sexuality which patriarchal discourses have traditionally tried – and still try – to control by taming and disciplining female sexuality and by depicting motherhood as the most desirable outcome of sexual intercourse as well as the natural destiny for women.

Although the value of Sade's work in terms of its complicity with women's liberation and agency is debatable, and may be considered the result of Carter's critical

appropriation of it – in a perfectly legitimate fashion – the outcome of her “exercise of the lateral imagination” (ibid.: 42), his narratives undeniably offer women new means to build alternative patterns of identity development to those supplied by patriarchy. As Gamble contends: “The purpose of *The Sadeian Woman* is not to defend de Sade so much as to fit his pornographic intent to Carter’s own radical practice” (Gamble 1997: 102), that is “a work of cultural evisceration which systematically strips Sadeian pornography of its superficial glamour in order to uncover and contest the issues of power and control which it disguises” (ibid.: 103). Most importantly, Carter’s critical stance on pornography and myths as it is fictionalised in the fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber* provides examples not only of how women’s conditions can be improved, but also of how the social structures and discourses which uphold their oppression can be turned inside out and changed.

As Benson points out in a very effective summary of criticism about the intertextual references between *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Bloody Chamber*, “It was Angela Carter’s [...] publication of *The Sadeian Woman* in the same year as *The Bloody Chamber*, that sealed the link between her conception of fairy tales and pornography, a link which constituted the prime historical and critical context within which the tale collection has subsequently been read” (Benson 2001: 37). Remarkably, in her theoretical discussion of pornography Carter explicitly mentions fairy tales, thus encouraging critics to perform parallel readings of the two texts (ibid.).

The gender politics set forth in *The Sadeian Woman* and enacted through fictional examples in some of the tales of *The Bloody Chamber* is examined in this research with reference to some core patriarchal practices and institutions which are openly addressed and contested by Carter in both texts: marriage, commodification of women through bargains between fathers and husbands, rape and sexual violence. These issues, besides being of paramount importance within the feminist debate of the Sixties and Seventies are tackled by Carter in the usual fashion of presenting the reader with both alternatives: acknowledgement and understanding of patriarchal practices and elaboration of strategies of resistance, never represented as definite solutions or successful outcomes but on the contrary as processes through which the heroines struggle, make mistakes, and/or assess the extent of their success. It is important to note that women’s complicity with their

subversion is often emphasised – as it is in *The Sadeian Woman* – to underline that they must first of all be aware of the part they play in sustaining their subordination.

2.1. A sadomasochistic marriage-bargain

The most evident references to pornography and to a pornographic approach to sex – which entails a sadomasochistic relation – is to be found in “The Bloody Chamber”. This retrospective account told by the female protagonist in the first person narrativises the process through which the woman begins to realise the role she played in her subordination and her troublesome and contradictory relation to desire, of which she was, and is, scared because she is unable to understand it. Encaged like she is in a patriarchal framework where marriage is a matter of status and female sexual desire is to be blamed, something to be ashamed of, she faces sexual intercourse, and more in general, the relationship with her husband as a masochistic victim of a sadist. The young girl is indeed emotively dependent on her husband, and she relies on him to define herself and be given a place in the world, which she is not capable of finding and struggling for by herself yet. In this sense, the description of her gradual access to self-awareness underlies her recognition of playing a part in the scary relationship with the Marquis, which troubles the protagonist with mixed feelings:

I lay in our bed accompanied by a sleepless companion, my dark new-born curiosity.
I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him. And he disgusted me.
[...] And what, precisely, was the nature of my desirous dread for this mysterious being who, to show his mastery over me, had abandoned me on my wedding night?
(Carter 1979: 22)

As Notaro comments, sexual intercourse loads the young girl’s emotive dependency on her husband with the typical traits of the sadomasochistic relationship: “I clung to him as though only the one who had inflicted the pain could comfort me for suffering it” (ibid.: 18) (Notaro 1993: 25).

These passages also introduce the theme of curiosity foregrounding Perrault's literary version of "Blue Beard", whose moral warning implies that women should be obedient and prevent being curious if they want to avoid a dreadful destiny. Carter, however, plays with Perrault's message and writes "against the interpretive tradition that emphasises the wife's illicit sexual curiosity" (Sheets 1991: 644). In this way the focus is shifted from the punishment of those women who disrupt the patriarchal order to a reflection on the nature of desire. The protagonist's longing, indeed, is not "dreadful" in itself, but because it is not a liberating, autonomous desire. Since she is complicit in playing the sadist's game, the girl is punished with bewilderment, confusion and shame. These feelings, nevertheless, are a necessary step she has to take to realize that she must seek for a new model of sexual relations where her desire is not to be despised but rather can help her find a way towards an autonomous definition and articulation of her-self. In other words, sex and sexual desire should be no longer contaminating, something which "corrupts", but rather empowering.

After losing her virginity, the new bride acknowledges her complicity in her victimisation, but in the wrong way. As a matter of fact, the narrator – that is the grownup woman who tells the story of her girlhood – calls her desiring drive and the pleasure she feels during the sexual act "corruption". This suggests that she has not succeeded yet in overlooking patriarchal structures, not to mention being empowered, as she feels ashamed for finding masochistic gratification in her submission. Moreover, she considers herself as an object which can be bargained in exchange for wealth and protection – obviously enough at the beginning she is too naïve to really understand what she is bargaining for. "I had not bargained for this", she cries when she looks at the pornographic pictures in her husband's books, where she foresees her future (Carter 1979: 16), and later on she complains: "Nothing in my life of family love and music had prepared me for these grown-up games" (ibid.: 26). What had she bargained for, then?

Through the fictional figure of this young bride Carter – as has already been shown – warns readers about the dangers of making such a bargain, of objectifying their bodies in the delusional belief that the comforts resulting from a similar marriage-contract are worth the dependence and self-annihilation they must give in exchange for them.

Eventually, when she is about to face death, the girl realizes that the only thing she can blame herself for is her complicity with her husband's behaviour; neither her disobedience nor her curiosity, but the willing victimisation which fuels the sadist's cruelty. When the piano tuner tries to console her: "You do not deserve this", she replies: "Who can say what I deserve or no?" [...] 'I've done nothing; but that may be sufficient reason for condemning me". When the boy then tries to make sense of the actions of the Marquis by conjecturing that perhaps the reason why he felt the right to punish her was her disobedience, she contends: "I only did what he knew I would" (ibid.: 37). According to this reading, the protagonist is caught within the irony of objectifying herself in exchange for marital protection and wealth, while her split self strives for a better understanding of her own awakening sexual desire without being able to escape the trap of patriarchal discursive structures in and by which her mind frames are circumscribed.

The bloodstain, the indelible mark left by the key on her forehead could be understood in - at least - two different but interrelated ways. As Notaro points out, it could be the unforgettable sign of guilt: the protagonist, indeed, contrary to what her mother did, chose a loveless marriage out of greed and ambition; she sold her soul to the devil for "a handful of coloured stones and the pelts of dead beasts (p. 16)" (Notaro 1993: 31). Bacchilega seems to agree with this interpretation when she observes: "Her collusion leaves its mark on her body in the 'heart-shaped stain' [...]; symbolically, this collusion causes her narration to oscillate between naïve expectations of sex and knowing descriptions of economics" (Bacchilega 1997: 123). On the other hand, however, as Lokke contends,

By acknowledging the glamour of sadomasochistic self-annihilation as well as its ultimate brutality, ugliness, and misogyny, Carter reveals both the difficulty and the absolute necessity of a feminist redefinition of sexual pleasure and desire. Thus the heart on the heroine's forehead is not only a mark of shame, a sign of complicity; it is also a badge of courage. She is rewarded for breaking the patriarchal taboo with a knowledge of the human heart. (Lokke in Notaro 1993: 31)

The accomplishment of the first heroine in the collection is then the recognition of the consequences of sadomasochistic desire when women accept to be victimised in exchange for something which will end up enslaving them even more. In addition, the blurred nature of this complicity is revealed, as women often justify their actions as the product of rational decisions, and do not realize that they are in fact working within patriarchal frameworks, which do not hinder but sustain the mechanisms of their oppression: “Carter reminds us how victimhood for women often carries with it the dangerously seductive companions of ‘willingness’ and ‘virtue’” (Bacchilega 1997: 122-123).

The protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” has changed, but is not able to change the discursive arrangements which tricked her, or perhaps she is not ready yet, just as she was unable to resist the strength of the Marquis’ desire, not even when it was about to kill her: “And it was as though the imponderable weight of his desire was a force I might not withstand, not by virtue of its violence but because of its very gravity” (Carter 1979: 9).

The protagonist’s mother could be considered the actual heroine of this tale. She is described as a wild, autonomous woman who challenged societal conventions to marry the man she loved, who adventurously “outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand” (ibid.: 7). And in the end came to her daughter’s rescue shooting the Marquis without blinking an eye:

You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father’s service revolver and, behind her, the breakers of the savage, indifferent sea, like the witness of a furious justice. (ibid.: 40)

Yet, she does not seem to be completely free from patriarchal structures and conditioning either, which she was strong enough to counter but not to subvert. Despite her happy life of love and braveness, indeed, she does not stop her daughter, not even when she realises that she is marrying to improve their social status. Since her own choices led her to experience poverty and hard times, she cannot blame her daughter for wanting to live in a different way:

She sighed, as if it was with reluctance that she might at last banish the spectre of poverty from its habitual place at our meagre table. For my mother herself had gladly, scandalously, defiantly beggared herself for love; and, one fine day, her gallant soldier never returned from the wars, leaving his wife and child a legacy of tears that never quite dried. (ibid.: 8)

2.2. The commodification of women as bargaining objects from fathers to husbands

The process of transformation of the destinies that phallogentric discourses devise for women becomes more explicit as one moves on in the collection. In the tales which follow “The Bloody Chamber” and rework the tradition of “Beauty and the Beast”, indeed, the commodification of women as objects of exchange in a patriarchal economy is unmistakable and out of their control, as it is performed by their fathers. On the other hand, however, the intertextual dialogue between the two stories shows the possibility for the protagonists of changing their fate and suggests examples of female agency, which could help other women do the same.

Both “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride” expand the reflection on “the potential distinction between love and marriage and the way in which marriage can have an economic dimension that lodges power with the male” (Day 1998: 152). “The Bloody Chamber” “recounts how her [the narrator’s] marriage defined a leaving behind of the feminine and an assimilation to the world of the masculine” (ibid.), since the girl leaves her mother’s house for the Marquis’ castle. Her identity, which was previously solely defined by her being “her mother’s child”, is now marked by her new role as wife, thus by the actualisation of “the whole structure of myth and legends about the fulfilments to be derived from partnership with the male”, which not only are “masculinely defined”, but also “patriarchally assumed” (ibid.: 153). Although the topic of marriage is tackled also in the following stories about Beauty and the Beast, it is dealt with in a slightly different way. The underlying assumptions about “the bargain involved in marriage” (Sage 2001: 72) is always in line with Carter’s contention that “[T]he free

expression of desire is alien to pornography as it is to marriage” (ibid.), but in these cases it is not the heroines who calculate and bargain; rather, they are turned into commodities to be exchanged by their fathers and future husbands. They are, therefore, enclosed in a patriarchal logic, which Carter exposes as a “masculine conspiracy to deny women the chance of ever reaching autonomous, self-responsible adulthood” (Day 1998: 136). The theme is dealt with in different ways in the two tales, which could be considered – as has already been pointed out with reference to intertextuality and generic conventions – specular reflections of possible developments.

In “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” Carter “makes the point not by altering the plot of the original, but through her emphases and observations in the telling of the plot” (ibid.), that is through the displacement of readers’ expectation by playing with character-bound focalization in a third-person narrative where the narrator is assumed to be omniscient. More to the point, this tale also complies with patriarchal definitions of womanhood and of the physical as well as moral stereotypical traits associated with a disciplined femininity. Beauty is indeed described as the traditional obedient, passive girl whose duty is to please her father (and afterwards her husband) and most praised virtue is self-denial, and above all, her frame of mind is uncritically shaped by patriarchal binaries. Accordingly, her first reaction when she faces the Beast is of terror not simply because of his scary figure, but due to his animality, that is to his difference from human beings with all the consequences such a mutually exclusive binary categorisation carries with it:

She could not control an instinctual shudder of fear when she saw him, for a lion is a lion and a man is a man and, though lions are more beautiful by far than we are, yet they belong to a different order of beauty and, besides, they have no respect for us: why should they? [...]
She found his bewildering difference from herself almost intolerable; its presence choked her. (Carter 1979: 45)

Yet, her overwhelming terror is not as strong as the duty she owes her father, and later the one she will owe her new owner, the Beast itself:

Yet she stayed, and smiled, because her father wanted her to do so; and when the Beast told her how he would aid her father's appeal against the judgement, she smiled with both her mouth and her eyes. [...]

Do not think she had no will of her own; only, she was possessed by a sense of obligation to an unusual degree and, besides, she would gladly have gone to the ends of the earth for her father, whom she loved dearly. (ibid.: 45-46)

The interesting analysis offered by Day accounts for Beauty's role in the story as "the position of the female in patriarchy as an object in an economic system of exchange" (Day 1998: 136). The commodification of the girl is emphasised by the symbolical meaning of two objects in the tale: the white rose and the spaniel. The rose is the only thing Beauty asks her father out of modesty as a present from his business trip, and paradoxically is also the very reason for her troubles, since her father steals it from the Beast's garden thereby releasing its rage. As Day remarks, however, the flower is symbolically exploited by Carter, who suggests its association with Beauty (its white colour which stands for purity is perhaps the most obvious hint at Beauty's virginity) by creating a "momentary ambiguity about whether it is Beauty who is bought or the rose that she wanted to be bought for her" (ibid.: 136). Later on, the parallel is made explicit and the rose comes to signify "Beauty's status as a commodity" (ibid.): "Ruined once; than ruined again, as he had learnt from his lawyers that very morning [...] and not even enough money left over to buy his Beauty, his girl-child, his pet, the one white rose she said she wanted" (Carter 1979: 41). The image of the pet used by the father suggests another symbolical relation between Beauty and the Beast's spaniel, which is the only living thing in its castle and is referred to as a female: "the dog is female and actualises, in its relation to the Beast, the manner in which Beauty's father images Beauty as less than human, as his 'pet'" (Day 1998: 136).

Once assessed that both male characters in the story are doubtless patriarchs, it becomes clear that the relationship between them is a business one, where Beauty is first objectified as "her father's property" and then treated as one, when she is used as an object of exchange between him and the Beast (ibid.: 137).

It is important to highlight that Beauty's commodification, powerlessness and submission, however, are not praised or despised by Carter, who does not devise strategies of subversion for the girl nor describes some sort of change or increased self-

awareness in her experience. Rather, on more than one occasion she points out Beauty's complicity in her subordination, which emphasises that women's destinies in a patriarchal system are inescapable and inexorable only as far as they are not challenged and women are unaware of and/or compliant with their predicaments. Beauty's experience, therefore, far from suggesting a role model, warns women against their willing acceptance of being objects of exchange in the marriage bargain, which more often than not condemns them to never ending "economic dependency and conditioned emotional susceptibility" (ibid.: 138) and is epitomised by Beauty's gallery of smiles:

when [...] the Beast suggested [...] that she should stay here, with him [...] while her father returned to London [...] she forced a smile. For she knew with a pang of dread [...] that [...] her visit to the Beast must be, on some magically reciprocal scale, the price of her father's good fortune. (Carter 1979: 45)

The transition from this first portrait of Beauty to its evolution in the corresponding character in "The Tiger's Bride" is set forth by Carter's ironic comments about "The Beauty and the Beast" narratives, which are "An advertisement for moral blackmail: when the Beast says that he is dying because of Beauty, the only morally correct thing for her to have said at that point would be, 'Die, then'" (Haffenden 1985: 83). After exposing the mechanism of this blackmailing bargain, Carter thus devises a new story which begins with the same premises, that is the commodification of a girl as an object of exchange between her father and husband, but develops and ends in a very different way. First of all, the girl tells the tale in the first person, which suggests her willingness and capacity to account for her own experience under her own perspective. Secondly, when she is lost to the Beast at cards, she does not smile, not even forcedly, but bitterly releases her disappointment towards her father, whom she surely loves, but all the same is not submissive enough to justify his behaviours: "I watched him with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly, while my father, fired in his desperation by more and yet more draughts of the firewater they call

‘grappa’, rids himself of the last scraps of my inheritance [...] My spite was sharp as broken glass” (Carter 1979: 52, 55).³³

Besides, as opposed to her counterpart in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, Beauty is here more self-aware and she “already knew that her status as object, as a commodity, was her only status in the world; that her flesh was the only purchase she had upon the world” (Day 1998: 140): “For now my skin was my sole capital in the world and today [the day her father loses her to the Beast] I’d make my first investment” (Carter 1979: 56).

The development of Beauty’s still-in-process self-awareness culminates in a speculative passage where the girl meditates on the difference between man and animal, on play-acting and theatricality, and also on her subordination and objectification. With reference to the last topic, which is of interest in this part of the research, she remarks:

I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason. [...] Understand, then, that though I would not say I privately engaged in metaphysical speculation as we rode through the reedy approaches to the river, I certainly meditated on the nature of my own state, how I had been bought and sold, passed from hand to hand. (ibid.: 63)

Interestingly enough, although the girl has been sold like a commodity by her father, she considers the investment “her own”, thus suggesting that she allows her father to objectify her only to a certain extent, because after the contract has been signed she is resolved to impose her own conditions. And actually she does, as once she has been taken to the Beast’s palace she refuses to obey his commands – i.e. that he wants to see her naked – and negotiates the terms of a possible settlement. To the clumsy offer which the valet puts forward on behalf of his master, Beauty responds indeed with a “raucous guffaw” (Carter 1979: 58) and counteroffers another agreement, settled on her own terms.

‘My master’s sole desire is to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude without her dress and that only for the one time after which she will be returned to her father undamaged with bankers’ orders for the sum which he lost to my master at cards and also a number of fine presents such as furs, jewels and horses – ‘ [...]

³³ The different attitudes of the two Beauty-characters towards their fathers as hints at their different degrees of self-awareness and empowerment will be validated and further investigated with textual evidence collected with computer-based methods in the last chapters.

'You may put me in a windowless room, sir, and I promise you I will pull my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it [...]. So I shall be covered from the waist upwards, and no lights. There you can visit me once, sir, and only once. [...] If you wish to give me money, then I should be pleased to receive it. But I must stress that you should give me only the same amount of money that you would give to any other woman in such circumstances. However, if you choose not to give me a present, than that is your right'. (ibid.: 58-59)

Tellingly, the deal proposed by Beauty reminds one of the bargain involved in prostitution, and besides the aim she resolves to achieve is that of being like "any other woman in such circumstances", which means that she wants the Beast to realize that what he is proposing is nothing more than a contract between client and prostitute. Being like "any other woman" precisely implies that every peculiarity which shapes a woman's identity is to be erased so that her body is completely emptied of the meanings she gives to it in order to be filled with any fantasies of the men who are buying it for a while. This reading is also supported by the fact that the girl wants her face to be covered, to further emphasise the anonymity of her body. What Carter does here, therefore, is once again literalising the metaphor, and, most importantly, having a woman consciously do so and showing that she is aware of patriarchal mechanisms of submission. However, she refuses to be complicit in her subordination or, rather, she proves to be complicit in it only to the extent that it enables her to obtain something from the bargain or have a say in its terms.

In a specular intertextual reversal of "The Courtship of Mr Lyon", Beauty's commodification is also symbolised by a white rose, a gift of the Beast, which is a token of his agreement with Beauty's father as well. Nevertheless, the flower now is angrily ripped apart by the girl, which suggests that she refuses to be compliant with her objectification and does not accept such a meagre return: "And the Beast gave me the rose from his own impeccable if outmoded buttonhole [...] This white rose, unnatural, out of season, that now my nervous fingers ripped, petal by petal, apart as my father magnificently concluded the career he had made of catastrophe" (ibid.: 53). Moreover, the unnaturalness of the rose and its being out of season imply its association with the patriarchal values embodied by the gift, which are similarly as unnatural and outmoded as the Beast's attire. Later on, the practice of giving flowers to women as a cheap payback is also addressed: "The valet

sat up on the box [...] clasping, of all things, a bunch of his master's damned white roses, as if a gift of flowers would reconcile a woman to any humiliation" (ibid.: 55).

Being aware of "the codes of masculine objectification of the female", Beauty can challenge them, as "her very assertion of her knowledge is something that defines her autonomy and incipient resistance" (Day 1998: 141). Beauty "decides that she will not, in fact, play her part in the discharging of her father's debt. She refuses to be an object in a patriarchal contract". The development of her self-awareness leads to a change in the attitude of the Beast, too, which signals a fundamental step outside of patriarchal discursive structures and relationships (ibid. 142-143), on the way to a transformation of both characters' individual identity and their attitude towards understanding and experiencing the world. Only once both of them have given up patriarchal limiting role positions and relationships can they experience love and freedom, which are described by Carter through the representation of a physical metamorphosis standing for the less evident but equally powerful internal one. More to the point, in this sense, unclothing could be understood as the literalized liberation from patriarchal power structures and limited binary definition of reality to embrace the "animal equality between the sexes" (Day 1998: 144).

As Makinen points out, amongst the meanings which could be assigned to Beauty's transformation into a Tiger with the help of the Beast is the necessary re-appropriation of autonomous desire on the part of women: "read the beasts as the projections of a feminine libido, and they become exactly that autonomous desire which the female characters need to recognise and appropriate as a part of themselves (denied by the phallogentric culture). [...] this is not [...] woman re-enacting pornography for the male gaze, but [...] woman appropriating libido" (Makinen in Day 1988: 146).

2.3. The liberating power of female unbridled desire

The last issue concerning Carter's attack on patriarchal institutions is to be found in the second tale about Red Riding Hood, "The Company of Wolves". Here the necessity to free female libido to escape patriarchal constraints is stressed even more, as the relationship between the hunter-werewolf and the girl is described as an evolution from binary distinctions to incorporation (see Day 1998: 148-149). As Day claims by referring to Zipes's insights, the traditional literary adaptations of the story display an implicit subtext of rape and violence. Moreover, as the illustrations of the tales analysed by Zipes show, there is a tendency towards representing Riding Hood as a willing victim, making a bargain with the wolf, or "in male terms, 'she asks to be raped'" (ibid.: 148). As Zipes remarks: "In such an inscribed and prescribed male discourse, the feminine other has no choice. Her identity will be violated and fully absorbed by male desire either as wolf or gamekeeper" (Zipes 1986: 258).

It is of no surprise, then, that Carter with a first mocking move devises the antagonist/potential rapist as both a werewolf and a huntsman (or "gamekeeper"), which suggests that patriarchal masculinity embodies different levels of threat. Together with the dangers of overt sexual desire represented by the bad wolf, that is the potential male seducer, women are threatened by those apparently reassuring men who do not expose their appetite, but work in covert, subtle ways. This latter case could be even more dangerous, for they succeed in luring and tricking into submission those women who ignore the warnings of peril, just like Carter's Red Riding Hood did not notice the menacing features of the handsome huntsman flashing his predator smile at her: "there is a faint trace of blood on his chin" (Carter 1979: 115).

This story brings about different dimensions of change, for both the male and the female characters experience a transformation which challenges disciplined roles and naturalised expectations. As a result, also the traditional meanings of this fairy tale motif are radically changed, and instead of conveying a cautionary message the story ends up encouraging women to embrace and appropriate sexual desire as an empowering dimension of their experiences.

The changes Carter introduces in the traditional versions of the fairy tale can be interpreted as part of a feminist politics in a twofold sense. First of all it is a way of challenging a patriarchal literary tradition which has reworked the motives of the original folktales to bend them to moral messages which sustained disciplined and appropriate behaviours following the established discourses of their times (here reference is made mainly to Perrault and the Grimm Brothers). To achieve this goal, writers have stripped the tale from its original explicit sexual content of warning girls against venturing into the woods alone (which was an actual danger, due to brigandage and wild beasts): “Clearly, what had formerly been a frank oral tale about sexuality and actual dangers in the woods became, by the time the Grimms finished civilizing and refining Little Red Cap, a coded message about rationalizing bodies and sex” (Zipes 1993: 34). As Zipes remarks, from the Nineteenth Century onwards, and mainly among the middle classes, “the process Red Riding Hood’ undergoes” is what Foucault calls a “pedagogization of children’s sex”:

It was “a double assertion that practically all children indulge or are prone to indulge in sexual activity; and that, being unwarranted, at the same time ‘natural’ and ‘contrary to nature’, this sexual activity posed physical and moral, individual and collective dangers; children were defined as ‘preliminary’ sexual beings, on this side of sex, yet within it, astride a dangerous dividing line. Parents, families, educators, doctors and eventually psychologists would have to take charge, in a continuous way, of this precious and perilous, dangerous and endangered sexual potential: this pedagogization was especially evident in the war against onanism which in the West lasted nearly two centuries”. (Foucault in Zipes 1993: 34)

Carter’s subversion of patriarchal discourses exploits once more their own weapons and strategies: she appropriates a fairy tale which has acquired a moralising and educational function through time and brings it back to its original themes (i.e. sex and danger in the woods). At the same time, however, she exploits its pedagogical tone to endow it with new meanings, that is the tale is addressed to contemporary women to encourage them to take hold of their sexuality and release their desire. This is the second outcome of Carter’s feminist politics: putting the text loaded as it is with the social function it has performed throughout history at the service of a new gender politics aimed at developing female agency and new strategies for autonomous identity development. As Zipes remarks:

Carter's Gothic version of *Red Riding Hood* recalls the superstitious past to transcend it. Relying on the folk tradition of the peasant girl and the werewolf, Carter blends the past with stark notions of sexuality and social behavior from the present. She deftly illustrates how a "strong-minded child" can fend for herself in the woods and tame the wolf. The savagery of sex reveals its tender side, and the girl becomes at one with the wolf to soothe his tormented soul. (ibid.: 64)

In addition, a powerful transformation of the patriarchal economies of 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'" (Bacchilega 1997: 52).

After a long opening passage in which Carter describes the setting and popular superstitions of the tale, and therefore brings it "back to the folk", Red Riding Hood is introduced. The girl is portrayed as a "strong-minded child" who carries with her in her basket "a carving knife" – which she knows very well how to use (Carter 1979: 113) – and open reference is made to the fact that "she has just started her woman's bleeding" (ibid.). After that, a speculative paragraph is devoted to analysing her privileged position as a virgin:

She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and is afraid of nothing. (ibid.: 114)

Virginity here is not praised – in patriarchal fashion – as synonymous with virtue, or as something which stands for fragility, danger and need for protection, to be kept safe and hidden, but as an empowering quality. It makes the girl fearless and brave, and although she is also naïve as the following part of the story shows, it is not due to her innocence, but to the fact that she does not know yet the ways of the world – which, in any case, she is about to discover and to learn quickly.

After the disruptive introduction, the plot proceeds in a rather traditional way, as Riding Hood comes across a werewolf/huntsman (who embodies all the features of the predator plus the seductive traits of a handsome young boy: "she'd never seen such a fine fellow before, not among the rustic clowns of her village" – Carter 1979: 114), accepts his dare disobeying the dictates of her mother and of common sense. This choice is

consistent with the need to frame the events in a disciplined, predictable narrative, for subversion must start from within the discursive framework one wants to overthrow. Even though “the ritual of the original story is broadly observed” (Day 1998: 148) until the girl meets the werewolf at her grandmother’s, some disruptive elements signal the incoming metamorphosis about to take place at the end of the story. For starters, the prize proposed by the werewolf for the competition is a kiss that the girl is eager to give:

What will you give me if I get to your grandmother’s house before you?
What would you like? She asked disingenuously.
A kiss. (Carter 1979: 115)

Rather than a childish game, as it is usually described in different literary versions of the story, Carter’s tale displays “Commonplaces of a rustic seduction: she lowered her eyes and blushed” (ibid.). In addition, the girl intentionally slows down her pace to make sure that she will lose, i.e. that she will kiss the wolf, even if this means endangering herself by wandering in the woods: “He went to the undergrowth and took her basket with him but she forgot to be afraid of the beasts, although now the moon was rising, for she wanted to dawdle on her way to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager” (ibid.).

The girl is therefore literally left unarmed, as she lost all her common sense in the seductive smile of the handsome predator and left her knife in the basket he is carrying now. The predatory nature of the werewolf, hinted at in the trace of blood on his chin and in his fanged smile, becomes explicit and takes on an overt sexual meaning when the wolf is about to eat granny. The scene is indeed described more as a sexual assault – i.e. rape – than as the feasting of a wild carnivore beast:

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 [the grandmother] 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. (ibid.: 116)

When Riding Hood reaches grandmother's house, her intuition tells her that she is in danger: "she knew the worst wolves are hairy on the inside and shivered, in spite of the scarlet shawl she pulled more closely round herself as if it could protect her although it was as red as the blood she must spill" (ibid.: 117). In spite of her fear, she stops to shiver, and in a sudden, unforeseen act of bravery, she takes off her shawl and goes on taking off her clothes.

Unlike what usually happens in the oral version of the folktale, where the girl is told to take off her clothes and throw them into the fire by the wolf, in Carter's fairy tale she decides to do so on her own initiative: "She [...] took off her scarlet shawl, the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses, and since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid" (ibid.: 117). And then she does the same to the werewolf in a passionate impetus: "She ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing" (ibid.: 118). In this way she turns the blood of death into the one spilled for the loss of virginity, and instead of being devoured by the wolf, she ends up peacefully sleeping in his arms.

With this tale Carter succeeds in putting into question and deconstructing patriarchal assumptions about the necessity to control female sexuality and to deplore female desire, as she explores the sanitised "stereotypes of women as passive, demure cyphers" (Makinen in Day 1998: 150) and then contrasts them with or represents their evolution into active desiring subjects. Most notably, in "The Company of Wolves" (as well as in other tales, such as "The Tiger's Bride"), passion, eroticism and desire are in fact represented as positive forces, which help women overcome difficult situations - where they literary risk being devoured - and turn them in their favour provided that they willingly stop being victims.

As Makinen remarks while discussing the reasons why some feminist critics fail to understand the revolutionary reach of Carter's feminist agenda:

I believe Carter is going some way towards constructing a complex vision of the female psycho-sexuality, through her invoking of violence as well as the erotic. But that women can be violent as well as active sexually, that women can choose to be perverse, is clearly not something allowed for in the calculations of such readers as Duncker, Palmer and Lewallen. [...] I would argue that just as it is the debates around the marginalized and pathologized 'perversities' that are breaking up the

phallographic construction of sexuality, so Carter's texts are beginning to sketch the polymorphous potentialities of female desire. (Makinen in Day 1998: 150-151)

On the whole, "The Company of Wolves" is among the best examples in the collection where the metamorphosis of patriarchal structures is not only suggested but also enacted, since the girl is able to escape from the "closed system" of her virginity by exploiting its magic, and to give up fear by embracing and enacting her own desire, being rewarded for it.

The next section is devoted to this topic, that is to show how Carter's fairy tales - after having exposed, challenged and sometimes subverted patriarchal institutions and normalising drives - actually succeed in representing alternative discursive negotiations where new, empowering arrangements are brought forward. Once again, the theoretical grounds for the arguments are to be found in the intertextual dialogue between the speculative ideas discussed in *The Sadeian Woman* and their fictional enactment in *The Bloody Chamber*.

3. IDENTITY JOURNEYS: TRANSITORY ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS TOWARDS RECIPROCITY

The transformation of patriarchal economies of desire grounded in the metamorphosis of the ways in which women can develop autonomous and empowered identities is introduced by the representation of reciprocity in the fairy tales. The identity journeys constructed in the stories, indeed, can be considered attempts to amend the experiences of Sade's Justine and Juliette's so that what they failed to accomplish because of the limits that will be soon pointed out can be overcome and altered. The achievements of the fairy tales' heroines and the extent to which they are empowered throughout the construction of their identity journeys are then discussed by analysing the motives of gaze - that is the extent to which women are subjects of the gaze as opposed to its objects - and metaphorical as well as actual mirroring/reflections within the stories.

3.1. Deconstructing and re-signifying female archetypes through Sadeian women

The actual possibility for the female protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber* of escaping established social roles and negotiating new arrangements is best understood if read against the theoretical speculations set forth by Carter in *The Sadeian Woman*. As a matter of fact, Justine and Juliette are described as the binary alternatives of female role models in the categorical opposition set by patriarchal discourse. The performances and behaviours of the Sadeian women are then analysed as either/or, as the only alternatives offered by a phallogocentric economy, and their limits are unveiled, criticized and deconstructed. As Carter points out, Justine is the “heroine of a Black, inverted fairy tale” (Carter 1979a: 44):

Always the object of punishment, she has committed only one crime, and that was an involuntary one; she was born a woman. [...] She is a gratuitous victim. And if there is no virtue in her suffering, then there is none, it turns out, in her virtue itself; it does nobody any good, least of all herself. [...] The passive virtue of a good woman, ensures she can never escape them [misfortunes] because the essence of her virtue is doing what she is told. (Carter 1979a: 44, 45, 53)

With Justine’s example, Carter unmask the dangers of abnegation and submissiveness in those women who identify with the socially imposed ideal of the subservient, modest, silent angel of the house. Furthermore, she deconstructs the definition of the virtue – or rather, its emptiness and lack of foundations – behind which those women hide in order to justify their otherwise pointless suffering: “The question of her virtue is itself an interesting one [...] why does such an intelligent girl so persistently locate virtue in the region of her genitals?” (ibid.: 54). After Justine has been raped, she persists with her stubbornness and amends her concept of virtue, without however unbinding it from – the denial of active – sexuality: “she concludes her virtue depends on her own reluctance” (ibid.: 55), because

her denial of her own sexuality, is what makes her important to herself. Her passionately held conviction that her morality is intimately connected with her genitalia makes it become so. Her honour does indeed reside in her vagina because she honestly believes it does so. (ibid.)

In other words, Justine – most likely unconsciously – has come to endorse the patriarchal discursive reduction of women to sexuality, from which they are allowed to redeem only through virtue. Such a notion of virtue, in turn, is itself devised by established discursive arrangements aimed at disciplining the development of female identity and at keeping the female body under control in order to master reproduction.

Interestingly, Justine is totally sterile despite doing nothing to prevent conception, which for Carter stands for her “inability to be changed by experience” (ibid.: 58). The obstinate conviction that she can preserve her virtue no matter what, which always guides and justifies her actions, to a certain extent does not make her feel responsible for her conduct. Therefore, “she is always the dupe of an experience that she never experiences *as* experience; her innocence invalidates experience and turns it into events, things that happen to her but do not change her” (ibid.: 57-58). In sum, Justine represents “the prototype of two centuries of women who find the world was not, as they have been promised, made for them and who do not have, because they have not been given, the existential tools to remake the world for themselves” (ibid.: 65).

What is most relevant in the framework of this research, is Carter’s insistence on Justine’s inability to change, which may be the only feature she shares with her reversed mirror image: her sister Juliette. According to Carter, indeed, their lives are “in a dialectical relationship” (ibid.: 89).

Contrary to Justine, Juliette epitomises the aggressive, self-made woman, who appropriates masculine traits and is thus constrained into the opposite role of the martyr Justine, namely that of the whore. In a patriarchal economy where the binary distinctions set a clear-cut opposition between the public and the private sphere, respectively – and exclusively – assigned to men and women, a woman who decides to occupy the public domain and to engage in its business-like transaction has one only asset to sell; her body: “in a world organised by contractual obligations, the whore represents the only possible type of honest woman” (ibid.: 65). The only way in which Juliette can be rich and free and wield power is to “enter the class” of men: “the life of Juliette proposes a method of profane mastery of the instruments of power. She is a woman who acts according to the precepts and also the practice of a man’s world” (ibid.: 90). As a consequence, nevertheless, not only does she obtain men’s benefits (that is wealth, power,

independence), but she is also by necessity infected by the consequences of being – and needing to remain – the dominant half of the binary. Thus, she has to give up also the positive aspects of femininity in order to embrace masculinity and “cause[...] suffering” (ibid.). Even if she has succeeded in overcoming the limits of her condition, her example does not undermine patriarchal definitions of femininity, as the role reversal merely leads her “by the force of her will, [... to] become a Nietzschean superwoman, which is to say a woman who has transcended her gender but not the contradictions inherent in it” (ibid.: 98). What Carter suggests in order to empower women, then, is that they can construct an identity freed from patriarchal constraints only through the redefinition of the category of woman itself, and certainly not by trying to appropriate masculine attributes. Both sisters are negative *ideals*, or more precisely *types* of woman exactly because their performances, subversive as they can be considered – above all in Juliette’s case – do not undermine the binary categories which define and constrain women in traditional Western thought and practice. As Carter comments, both Justine and Juliette should be considered “type[s] of female behaviour” rather than models, and the former’s failure and misery is to be matched to the latter’s apparent triumph (ibid.: 90):

Justine is the thesis, Juliette the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling. (ibid.: 90-91)

At this first stage, hence, Carter calls on women to be able to make a synthesis between the attributes with which they have been traditionally associated and those which would allow them to fight back and re-appropriate their voices and bodies in order to narrate their own stories in their own terms. The same synthesis, in other words, which the Sadeian heroines failed to achieve:

The Sadeian woman, then, subverts only her own socially conditioned role in the world of god, the king and the law. She does not subvert her society, except incidentally, as a storm trooper of the individual consciousness. She remains in the area of privilege created by her class, just as Sade remains in the philosophic framework of his time. (ibid.: 133)

The truly revolutionary and subversive move is made towards the end of the book, where Carter proclaims the necessity for reciprocity, which was denied to the Sadeian protagonists – both men and women, perpetrators and victims – and which would be the principal requisite to experience sexuality and pleasure as something which can lead to change and improvement. On the contrary, the Sadeian characters are, like Justine and Juliette, incapable of change; they could be considered “inhuman”, as they live in a cultural universe where sexuality is “stripped of the idea of free exchange [...] it is nothing but pure cruelty” (ibid.: 165); “sexuality, in this estranged form, becomes a denial of a basis of mutuality, of the acknowledgement of equal rights to exist in the world, from which any durable form of human intercourse can spring” (ibid.). Instead of a mutually enriching and pleasurable activity, sexual intercourse – and one could broaden the scope to other aspects of the relationships between the sexes – thus becomes something one can steal from the other, a mutually exclusive activity where one loses what the other gains. In the Sadeian economy of desire, “when a woman pilfers her sexual pleasure from a man, she patently reduces his own and to witness her pleasure can do nothing more for him than to flatter his vanity” (ibid.: 167). The same logic governs the binary thought arranged according to mutually exclusive categories: what is praised in one term is despised in its counterpart, so that if one embodies the positive side of the binary, by necessity its *other* can only be assigned the residual negative meaning. As a consequence, the sexual experience in Sade, as Carter contends, is “entirely inward” and besides “is not experienced as experience”, that is “it does not modify the subject. An externally induced phenomenon, its sensation is absolutely personal, just as it does not hurt the knife if you cut yourself with it” (ibid.: 169).

Once more, then, change becomes the mandatory experience for those who want to overthrow oppressive discursive arrangement and gain the right and actual chance of devising and accounting for their identity construction. As Carter acknowledges by referring to Foucault’s work on sexuality, “sadism” – like any other behaviour which has to do with sex – “is not a sexual perversion but a cultural fact; the consciousness of the ‘limitless presumption of the appetite’” (ibid. 36). It follows that the types of Justine and Juliette, and the role models they embody are themselves cultural constructions, that is consolatory nonsenses which, as such, can and must be deconstructed and re-signified.

The basic assumption informing the subsequent analysis is that with the fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber* Carter tries to design alternatives to the inescapable stillness and incapability to actively experience and narrativise women's processes of identity development. Furthermore, the idea of reciprocity discussed with relation both to the motif of mirroring and of that of the gaze allows one to investigate the - new - conceptualisation of identity emerging from the stories as well as the way in which women can literally and materially engage in the redefinition of their selves and of their roles within society.

The female identities which materialise in the fairy tales have been defined *transitional* for they are best understood, or rather grasped, as processes in transition rather than accomplishments. What Carter suggests with fictional examples, in other words, is not a definite alternative to existing models of development and outcomes of female subjectivities. Rather, it is the painful, at times misleading, often ambiguous and even contradictory efforts of women who try to divert from the ready made path and to build new ones. The difficulty of these endeavours stems from the fact that - as Carter never ceases to remind the readers - before relying on a brand new set of tools, they must start from what is already at their disposal, that is patriarchal categories and discourses. Before actively starting to construct, therefore, they need first to be aware of what has already been built, find a way to deconstruct it, and after having resourcefully devised strategies of resistance, overthrow it and replace it with something more desirable - but nonetheless equally transitory and partial.

As Braidotti would put it, "the point is not to know who [they] are" in an essential way, "but rather what, at last [they] want to become, how to represent mutations, changes, and transformations, rather than Being in its classical fashion" (Braidotti 2002: 2). Within this research, the cartographic approach advocated for by Braidotti could be considered both a methodological guideline and the expression of Carter's way of dealing with identity *ante litteram*. A similar standpoint, indeed, "fulfils the function of providing both exegetical tools and creative theoretical alternatives" (ibid.), for Carter's fairy tales interpret and criticize their times as well as try to put forward possible practical, experiential options. Moreover, both texts strive to provide "alternative figurations or

schemas for these locations [spatially and temporally individual positionalities]³⁴, in terms of power as restrictive (*potestas*) but also as empowering or affirmative (*potentia*)” (ibid.). Last, but not least, the notion of subjectivity conveyed by Braidotti’s theoretical claims seems to be the outcome Carter’s protagonists struggle to achieve, that is “a decentred and multi-layered vision of the subject as a dynamic and changing entity” whose definition takes place “in between [...] in the spaces that flow and connect in between” (ibid.).

As has already been pointed out, the experiences of the female subjects accounted for by Carter remain enclosed within a heterosexual matrix. This could be interpreted as the author’s endorsement of patriarchal discourses, which cannot escape the oppositional, enclosing categories of man and woman. Yet, as will be soon discussed, though Carter does not challenge sexual difference altogether, she most certainly tries to question the grounds on which difference is constructed in order to problematize them. In other words, even though the normativity of sexual difference is not turned down by the fairy tales, it does not mean that its normalisation is not disputed and amended.³⁵ Thereby, the sustainability of the claim that Carter succeeds in turning patriarchal categories against themselves and in re-arranging their signification in a non-binary, non-oppositional manner.

³⁴ Thus Braidotti defines what she means with “politics of location”, which is fundamental in order to correctly frame and understand the similarities between her theorisation and Carter’s fictional accounts grounded in the materiality of experience: “The politics of location refers to a way of making sense of diversity among women within the category of ‘sexual difference’ understood as the binary opposite of the phallogocentric subject. In feminism, these ideas are coupled with that of epistemological and political accountability seen as the practice that consists in unveiling the power locations which one inevitably inhabits as the site of one’s identity. The practice of accountability [...] as a relational, collective activity of undoing power differentials is linked to two crucial notions: memory and narratives. They activate the process of putting into words, that is to say of bringing into symbolic representation, that which by definition escapes consciousness” (Braidotti 2002: 12).

³⁵ These ideas stem from a lecture held by Judith Butler at the University of Cambridge: “Understanding society” (22/05/2013).

3.2. Identifying visions: constructing and mastering identities through gazes and reflections

The transition of female identity journeys towards change through reciprocity in *The Bloody Chamber* is variably represented by and through the motif of the gaze and/or a complex play with mirror images – which are always linked to sight and looking. As was shown with reference to different issues, also in this case the stories are intertextually arranged in a climatic fashion.

The journey starts with “The Bloody Chamber”, where the protagonist basically remains subject to the male gaze and tries to negotiate her self – and social – identity by struggling with the image her husband imposes on her. After that, with the “Beauty and the Beast” stories the compliance and subjection to the male gaze exposed in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” is amended and broadened in “The Tiger’s Bride”, and its supremacy in the light of its categorical association with rationality is questioned in “The Lady of The House of Love”. “The Snow Child” and “The Erl-King”, focused on the representation of (sexual) desire, picture what happens when reciprocity cannot be achieved and the gaze/reflection is a one-way look, like the desire of Sade’s libertines and victims, who are enclosed systems where pleasure implies being taken from. The “Red Riding Hood” story which concludes the collection, then, epitomizes the culmination of the process of identification through mirroring as reciprocity. “Wolf-Alice”, indeed, directly addresses issues of subject formation and socialisation by explicitly reflecting on the Lacanian mirror stage, and shows how an unmediated socialisation can lead to a mutually healing relationship.

Interestingly, in those tales where the transition is emphasised from being subject *to*, to being subject *of* the gaze – that is, in the instances where alternatives for an autonomous configuration of female subject formation are provided – different sensory dimensions are given pre-eminence and eventually substitute sight.³⁶

³⁶ The symbolic reach of such a replacement of sight with smell and taste also stresses the necessity to re-appropriate identity through the body, and is therefore linked to the reflections that will be articulated in the following chapter.

Sight as a sensory as well as political experience is analysed here by turning to Grosz's feminist introduction to Lacan's work. This choice is grounded in Grosz's lucid analysis of the mirror stage, which accounts for the consequences of this psychoanalytical theory –most certainly directly referred to by Carter – on female processes of identification. In particular, it emphasises the centrality of the body in the process, and the cultural construction of femininity as lacking and subordinate due to its binary association with the physical, sexualised dimension. Moreover, Grosz's reflections highlight and criticise the ways in which a rift must be necessarily created between the self and the other in order for the other to be made sense of and kept under control. Such a split, however, generates estrangement and denies reciprocity and a mutual understanding, which could only be achieved if both individuals engage in a balanced relationship where the other is granted the same prerogatives.

It is my contention that Carter's fictional examples of alternative patterns for the development of female identity originate precisely from the awareness of the power imbalance underlying the centrality of vision – specifically of the male gaze – in the process of subject formation. Imbalance that is then challenged by introducing other sensory experiences together with or as opposed to sight, even if, as the omnipresent play with mirroring reflections shows, sight itself is not completely done away with. Rather, Carter seems to try to negotiate a redefinition of the way the gaze works through different significations of the looking glass – whether it is an actual mirror or a reflective surface which casts back a reflection, such as the other's eyes – in order for women to master it, and by extension become masters and narrators of their self-development. As Grosz contends:

Of all the senses, vision remains the one which most readily confirms the separation of subject from object. Vision performs a distancing function, leaving the looker unimplicated in or uncontaminated by its object. With all of the other senses, there is a contiguity between subject and object, if not an internalization and incorporation of the object by the subject. (Grosz 1990: 38)

Furthermore, the relation between sight and the other senses is a hierarchical one, given that vision is not dependent – as the other senses are – on space, being rather the “point of view” around which other sensory experiences are organised: “the look is the

domain of domination and mastery [...] The tactile, auditory, and olfactory sense organs depend on some spatial representation, which, in our culture if not in all civilizations, is hierarchically subordinate to the primacy of sight” (ibid.).

The ways in which the male gaze establishes its primacy over the female one are the product of socio-historically contingent discursive arrangements, whereby the masculine subject of the gaze puts its object at a distance and by so doing prevents the possibility for it of taking part – that is of being actively involved – in the action of looking itself. Frozen in their being looked at, female subjects are left in an apparently inescapable passive position and their participation in their definition of themselves is hindered. As a result of this process, woman is constructed as the negative – i.e. lacking, maimed, incomplete or imperfect – mirror image of man, who besides needs the power of man’s word and gaze to be defined and completed. As Carter seems to suggest with her fairy tales nevertheless, the first step towards the destabilisation of such an engaging male gaze is recognising its provisional character and its dependence on contextual power-knowledge arrangements, and on female complicity. Likewise, mirroring itself is not “value free [...] but a ‘special effect’ of ideological expectations and unspoken norms – a naturalising technology that works hard at [...] re-producing ‘Woman’ as the mirror image of masculine desire” (Bacchilega 1997: 29).

The identity development of the protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” is established from the very beginning as a journey “away from girlhood [...] into the unguessable country of marriage” (Carter 1979: 7). Her “destination”, identified by the girl with her “destiny” (ibid.: 8), that is with marriage, is the castle of the Marquis, set in opposition to the house of the mother, the “enclosed quietude” (ibid.: 7) of childhood. The unpredictability of this destiny is highlighted by the opposition between the “quietude” of what is known and reassuring and the inability even to guess what is waiting for her after the wedding. Since the beginning, therefore, the fact that the protagonist is experiencing a process of transition, which she does not know how to handle, is stressed. This apparently minor element is of particular significance in that it gives reasons for the girl’s utter powerlessness against her husband, who can thus impose convenient definitions and role positions on her without being questioned. Her objectification and condition of being looked at is conveyed by the description of the

Marquis' wives, compared to a gallery of portraits he has eclectically chosen according to his taste: "he had invited me to join this gallery of beautiful women" (ibid.: 10). The power imbalance is also expressed through the action of looking itself, which for the Marquis is direct, inspective, even threatening in its confidence and compelling in its authoritativeness, whereas for the girl is always indirect, mediated by a mirror or denied altogether. For example, when the Marquis gazes upon her during courting, he has "the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts in the slab" (ibid.: 11). The reaction of the girl to this look is to lower her eyes, to look away: "when I saw him look at me with lust, I dropped my eyes" (ibid.). This response could be interpreted in two, tellingly - and perhaps purposefully - contrasting ways. On the one hand, it seems that the Marquis' gaze, like a snake's venom, has the power to paralyse the girl, as if her lively body was turned into the frozen image of the libertines' victims portrayed on one of his ghastly paintings:

The contrast between the husband's action and the wife's immobility seems to support the theory of the male gaze articulated by [...] E. Ann Kaplan: "[...] men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and possession that is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return a gaze, but cannot act on it. [...] the sexualization and objectification of women is not simply for the purposes of eroticism; from a psychoanalytical point of view, it is designed to annihilate the threat that woman [...] poses. (Sheets 1991: 646)

On the other hand, though, it may well be a polemical reference aimed at exposing and criticising a codified behaviour so frequently - and uncritically - assigned to women. The young wife, thus, is ironically represented in the act of submissively lowering her eyes to emphasise the contrast between her apparent compliance with patriarchal expectations and the realisation that in fact she welcomes passion and desire.

The mirror, which at first was complicit with the protagonist in casting the reflection of the Marquis so that she did not need to look at him directly to see him: "I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors" (ibid.), now betrays her: "but, in glancing away from him, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. And I saw myself, suddenly, as he saw me" (ibid.). Significantly enough, this is the passage where the girl senses her "potential for corruption" for the first time. What she sees in the mirror, indeed, is only her own image as it is perceived by her husband-to-be, but is also the only definition

available to her, which she immediately subscribes to. Ignorance leads to terror, so she is scared by his inscrutable, mesmerising eyes: “and his eyes, dark and motionless as those eyes the ancient Egyptians painted upon their sarcophagi, fixed upon me. I felt a certain tension in the pit of my stomach, to be so watched, in such silence” (ibid.: 12). The clash she experiences between her self-identity, so far the product of the safe, unproblematic relationship to the mother, and its potential development glimpsed in the Marquis’ gaze destabilize the young woman, who from that moment on will not be able to meet her husband’s eyes: “I could not meet his eye and turned my head away, out of pride, out of shyness” (ibid.: 14). In a perhaps paradoxical and grotesquely ironical twist, however, Carter insists in surrounding her with mirrors and reflecting surfaces, so that she is compelled, every once in a while, randomly, to confront her reflection and to be driven towards the painful achievement of some form of self-awareness. Although she has turned her eyes away, indeed, the bedroom is full of mirrors: “Our bed. And surrounded by so many mirrors! Mirrors on all the walls, in stately frames or contorted gold”, so that she is forced to watch “a dozen husbands approach me in a dozen mirrors” (ibid.: 14-15).

Another instance of how the protagonist’s identity is shaped by her husband is to be found in her indirect mirroring with the painting of St. Cecilia, which the Marquis gives her as a wedding present together with the piano. Yet, once more her lack of awareness proves to be startling, as she praises the features of the artwork without understanding its underlying meaning and the dreadful destiny which it stands for and foresees: “on the wall [there was...] another wedding present – an early Flemish primitive of Saint Cecilia at her celestial organ. In the prim charm of this saint, with her plump, sallow cheeks and crinkled brown hair, I saw myself as I could have wished to be” (ibid.: 14).³⁷

The process through which the girl tackles the bewilderment of growing up and the transition from adolescence to womanhood is always a mediated one. Moreover, it is

³⁷ St. Cecilia is the Catholic patron saint of music and musicians. Raised a Christian in a noble Roman household, she does not want to marry the man her family has chosen for her. On her wedding night she explains her faith to her bridegroom Valerian, and implores him to respect her virginity and become a Christian. The man accepts and is baptised by the Pope. Cecilia’s martyrdom is ordered by the judge Almachius, who rules that the woman be scalded to death in her bath. This first attempt, however, fails, so the judge orders her beheaded. Again, this is only partly successful, and she lives three more days. (Saint Cecilia, Virgin and Martyr).

invariably conditioned by the way her husband sees – and signifies – her, to the extent that she can no longer tell the difference between her and his idea of herself, for in the end they completely overlap:

I was afraid, not so much of him, of his monstrous presence [...] No. I was not afraid of him; but of myself. I seemed reborn in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes. I hardly recognised myself from his descriptions of me, and yet, and yet – might there not be a grain of beastly truth in them? (ibid.: 20)

Further evidence of the split sense of self she experiences in the “lovely prison” (ibid.: 24) where her husband has confined her is to be found in her comment: “I was alone, but for my reflection in the uncurtained window” (ibid.: 25), which suggests that she does not identify with her own reflection but when it is mediated or directed by her husband’s defining look.

The incapability to deal with the changes her identity is coming across due to the lack of instruments with which to make sense of herself and of the world also affects the girl’s experience of sexuality and desire as a “one-sided struggle” (ibid.: 18) where pleasure is stolen from one person to be given to the other, and where, as a consequence, there is no place for reciprocity and mutual interchange. Socialised according to a patriarchal order where female desire must be tamed and the destiny of the complicit good wife is silence and subservience, the girl is denied pleasure because she is the object meant to give pleasure. The violence required by a similar relationship where she is not allowed the possibility of “experiencing experience as experience” and of changing the image forced upon her by her husband reminds the protagonist of torture. “There is a striking resemblance between the act of love and the ministration of a torturer” read the lines of one of the Marquis’ favourite poems (ibid.: 29), whose resemblance with a Sadeian notion of sexual relationship is in all likelihood not accidental. It is not surprising, then, that when awareness eventually comes, and the girl must face the atrocities of her husband, it is as painful as it is sudden, and its price is most certainly not cheap: “I must pay the price of my new knowledge. The secret of Pandora’s box” (ibid.: 34). Although the price she has to pay is not linked, unlike in the traditional version of the story, to her disobedient curiosity, the young woman must atone for her blindness and her incapability to come to terms with her reflections on her own account. As has already

been pointed out, her fault is not so much having behaved as her husband expected her to, but her complicity in it even if she had sensed since the beginning it was not right: "I've done nothing; but that may be sufficient reason for condemning me" (ibid.: 37).

Nonetheless, reference to the traditional theme of blameworthy feminine curiosity is made through the words of the Marquis, who thus justifies his intention of killing his wife: "Let the blind lead the blind, eh? But does even a youth as besotted as you are think she was truly blind to her own desires when she took my ring? Give it me back, whore." (ibid.: 38). Yet this statement remains ambiguous, as the story seems to taunt it with its contrary. The girl, indeed, would not have gone through all the pain she had to suffer had she acknowledged from the start the power of her desire, if autonomously exploited and directed to decide for herself instead of letting it be guided and shaped according to the – apparently safer and easier – normative alternatives at her disposal.

Interestingly, the man who takes the Marquis' place after he has been killed by the protagonist's mother, the sweet piano tuner, is blind. His blindness, as opposed to the Marquis' piercing gaze, does not force any meanings or expectations into the girl. As a result, the proximity of their bodies carries a promise of reciprocity and mutual exchange: "He took my hand; he pressed his arms about me. Although he was scarcely more than a boy, I felt a great strength flow into me from his touch" (ibid.: 32).

The multiple refractions of this woman in process presented by Carter first and foremost aim at unveiling the dangers of women's collusion in their subordination without undermining the patriarchal system through which it is perpetrated, nor the identification of woman with sexuality and the dangers of female desire. However, far from endorsing the masochistic economy exposed by the tale, Carter rather underlines that the "destructive relations" which are not based on reciprocity and entail a mutually exclusive notion of pleasure are "symptoms of specific repressive socio-cultural dynamics" (Bacchilega 1997: 123-124), and as such can be overturned.

"The Courtship of Mr Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" can once again be read as complementary reflections also with reference to the process of female identity construction and to account for its transformation to and through the achievement of reciprocity. For starters, as Bacchilega remarks, the "Beauty and the Beast" stories are

privileged vehicles for “women’s transformative powers”, since regardless of Beauty’s active or submissive role, she is able to “transform another being, and more specifically, a sexually and/or socially threatening male” (Bacchilega 1997: 78). Even though this kind of female power most probably related to women’s “ability to produce new life” has been systematically reduced “within patriarchal ideology to the popular ‘kiss a frog motif’” (ibid.), Carter’s stories succeed in bringing back female transformative agency under a double perspective. The first, most obvious kind of transformation performed by Beauty is a physical one, whether it is the more traditional metamorphosis from beast to man represented in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” or the subversive metamorphosis of woman into wild animal, as in “The Tiger’s Bride” – which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Secondly, the physical transformation implies a covert transformation as well. That is to say, what is made explicit through the bodily remodelling is the metamorphic process experienced by the woman while trying to come to terms with and to map her identity journey. In Carter’s tales both developments require or lead to reciprocity, as the physical transformation is enacted only after both male and female characters have faced the need to renegotiate their individual and/or social identity and acknowledged the need to change with each other’s help. Significantly, in both instances self-awareness and action stem from a mirroring process where a transformation in the way of looking underpins the reconfiguration of gender relationships. Thus the other – either the woman as object of the gaze or the beast as animal – is no longer perceived as “object”, and both characters are allowed to become subjects of the gaze.

In “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” the transformation of Beast happens in Beauty’s eyes, regardless of the actual change in the bodily shape of the lion. As Bacchilega contends, indeed, it is “Beauty’s transformed vision of herself” that transforms Beast (Bacchilega 1997: 94).

Furthermore, like in “The Bloody Chamber”, vision here is the prevalent sensory experience. Nonetheless, it is no longer the one-way threatening gaze of the patriarch, which forces its ideal definition of woman’s role and place in society on her. Rather, Beauty’s fear gradually turns into braveness and confidence, so that when she sees her reflection in the Beast’s eyes she is not shocked because of the unfamiliar, alien and scary

nature of what she sees. On the contrary, she starts to see herself for the first time precisely from the moment in which she glances at her reflection into his eyes.

On their first night together, “Beauty and Beast exchange a crucial look” (Bacchilega: 1997: 93), which already suggests the mutuality of their relationships and the fact that the Beast’s gaze is not the empowered, one-dimensional and othering one. “He drew back his head and gazed at her with his green, inscrutable eyes, in which she saw her face repeated twice” (Carter 1979: 47). Up to now, the Beast’s eyes are “inscrutable” precisely because Beauty is only able to see herself in them. However:

Still ‘inscrutable,’ his eyes are no longer ‘sick of sight,’ for in their green meadow Beauty’s reflection begins to blossom. The naturalizing gaze works ‘on some magically reciprocal scale’: as she turns into the promise of life, he offers her a new vision of herself. (Bacchilega 1997: 93)

Likewise, as if he could foresee Beauty’s ability to free him from his miserable animal condition, the Beast was bewitched by her picture not simply because of her looks, but because he glimpsed in it the potentially transformative perceptiveness of her eyes:

The Beast rudely snatched the photograph her father drew from his wallet and inspected it, first brusquely, then with a strange kind of wonder, almost the dawning of surmise. The camera had captured a certain look she had, sometimes, of absolute sweetness and absolute gravity, as if her eyes might pierce appearances and see your soul. (Carter 1979: 44)

Of course, in this instance, like in that of “The Tiger’s Bride”, the power imbalance between masculine and feminine is reduced for the male protagonist of the story is a Beast, thus himself embodying a form of otherness – which narrows the distance from the woman and lessens the authoritativeness of his gaze: “He disliked the presence of servants because [...] a constant human presence would remind him too bitterly of his otherness. [...] She found his bewildering difference from herself almost intolerable” (ibid.: 45).

The image of Beauty cast back from the Beast’s eyes far from reducing her self-awareness to what he wants to see, paves the way for Beauty’s second significant encounter with her self, when she is sitting alone in her room in front of the mirror, far away from the Beast’s palace.

Returning late from the supper after the theatre, she took off her earrings in front of the mirror; Beauty. She smiled at herself with satisfaction. She was learning, at the end of her adolescence, how to be a spoiled child and that pearly skin of hers was plumping out, a little, with high living and compliments. [...] She smiled at herself in mirrors a little too often, these days, and the face that smiled back was not quite the one she had seen contained in the Beast's agate eyes. (ibid.: 49)

The physical distance from the place where the girl caught sight of her self for the first time could suggest that, unlike the protagonist of "The Bloody Chamber", she is not objectified, nor is her self perception influenced by the master's gaze.

The crucial transformation of Beauty's identity, which triggers the Beast's physical metamorphosis, takes place when the girl goes back to the castle to find him agonising. There she has the chance to look once more into the lion's eyes and to realise that she had never looked at them, but only at her reflection within them: "His eyelids flickered. How was it that she had never noticed before that his agate eyes were equipped with lids, like those of a man? Was it because she had only looked at her own face, reflected there?" (ibid.: 50).

That is to say, for the very first time Beauty acknowledges the presence of the other beneath the reflective surface of his eyes, and recognises humanity in them. In an entangled play with specular reflections, Carter thus shows how in order to avoid objectification one must first of all recognise herself in order to be able to recognise the other, and that this mutual knowledge is achieved provided that one is capable of seeing in the other's eyes what lays beyond one's own reflection. The mutual process of recognition will then lead to a transformation which will make ongoing mutual exchange and sharing possible.

In "The Tiger's Bride" the motif of vision is equally central and is conveyed through the transition accounted for by the I narrator from object to subject, which finds expression in "the splitting of the subject/object of focalization" as a "necessary step in the difficult process of turning the younger 'eye' into the exuberant 'I'-narrator who acts upon her desire" (Bacchilega 1997: 95). As Bacchilega suggests, the tale is focused on "the familiar tabu against looking", which affects equally Beauty, as she "refuses to be seen", and Beast, who "wears a mask" (ibid.: 96). Here, too, the mirror is an intermediary between the girl and her perception of herself and of the world: "I saw...I saw... I saw' she

says, fulfilling our expectations of a careful 'I-witness' with a detailed perception of places, people, and feelings. But much of this in-sight soon proves to be mediated, indirect, already materially and culturally framed" (ibid.: 97).

As a consequence, the more the protagonist understands about herself and about the Beast, the less her experience – symbolised by her gaze – is mediated by the mirror. As the privileged space of otherness, where the undesirable is trapped in order for the desirable to be able to take place, but always winks and threatens to surface; as the place where different – imagined, projected, physical as well as psychological – spaces are superimposed to one another, the mirror seems to take on a heterotopic function (Foucault 1967). The reflection of one's gaze in the mirror or upon a reflecting surface thus stands for the process through which the individual tries to appropriate its own identity by mapping the contours of its body and trying to reach, by looking into one's own/the other's eyes, what lies beyond. In other words, a similar spatial understanding of subjectivity through mirroring is what could enact Braidotti's recommended "cartographic" approach to describing and narrativising subjectivity.

In this particular tale, the culmination of the process of identification coincides with the physical metamorphosis that will set forth Beauty's liberation and empowerment: the disrobing. At the beginning, for example, the protagonist looks at the room where her father is losing her at cards – and by extension approaches an attempted understanding of the situation where she is definitely turned into a bargaining object – through a mirror: "The mirror above the table gave me back his frenzy, my impassivity, the withering candles, the emptying bottles" (Carter 1979: 52). The same mirror casts back the reflection of the Beast, himself concealed by his disguise which performs the same mediating function that the mirror does for Beauty: "The mirror above the table gave me back [...] the still mask that concealed all the features of The Beast but for the yellow eyes that strayed, now and then, from his unfurled hands towards myself" (ibid.). Everything in the Beast is camouflaged: his face is covered by "a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it", which however is blatantly fake, as this beautiful face is "one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human, [...] too perfect" (ibid.: 53). He also wears a wig, a silk stock and gloves to cover his hair, neck and hands, and even his smell is covered by a "fuddling perfume" (ibid.). Even though his eyes are

the only true and seemingly lively thing, Beauty cannot see her image reflected in them, neither can she look at his face for recognition not so much because he is an animal, but because of his deliberate disguise – that is, his intentional refusal to be recognised for what he is: “And yet The Beast goes always masked; it cannot be his face that looks like mine” (ibid.: 56). This also means that, at this stage, Beauty is still looking for resemblance, for sameness in the other to make sense of and accept both. The first disruptive experience of the girl occurs when she meets her clockwork maid, “a soubrette from an operetta, with glossy, nut-brown curls, rosy cheeks, blue, rolling eyes. [...] she is a marvellous machine, the most delicately balanced system of chords and pulleys in the world” (ibid.: 59-60). Later on, indeed, when she is riding with the Beast and his valet, she realises that the maid is “a clockwork twin of mine”, for “had I not been allotted only the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given her?” (ibid.: 60, 62). This means that she acknowledges that so far she has just been the puppet of her father or of the other men in her life, having allowed them to pull her strings as she refused to drop the veil which covered her eyes, to leave behind the mirror which mediated her experience of herself and of the world – either out of fear or out of convenience. Only then is she ready to “bear the sight of him”(ibid.: 64), so she finally looks at the Beast’s naked body, and willingly decides to take off her clothes in a true instance of “reciprocal pact” (Bacchilega 1997: 96). As soon as the Beast has eventually, bravely, given up his disguise, indeed, Beauty, too, feels empowered enough to take off her clothes and even to accept being deprived of her skin itself.

Hence, for the first time in the collection, reciprocity leads to the representation of an instance of female identity development which is linked to the male other as it needs the other’s gaze in order to awaken self-awareness, but at the same time is not entirely defined, nor conditioned by the other. Rather, mutual exchange and a balanced distribution of power within the masculine and the feminine are required in order for both of them to develop an independent but not lonely identity journey where reciprocity is not only possible but is necessary to achieve independence. Most notably, this accomplishment brings about and is subsequently re-enacted and amended through the change of the established social – discursive – order.

The issue at stake with regard to the alternative and empowering development of female identity in these two stories reveals once again the tensions between complicity in and transgression of the patriarchal order and naturalised ideals of female subjectivities and role positions:

In both stories, Carter intertwines gender and narrative concerns to comment on how the classic fairy tale plots women's 'developmental' tasks and desires within patriarchy in more ways than thematically and psychologically. The questions at work here do not simply concern Beauty's self-fulfilment or desire as she gains control over the path of her initiation process, but also investigate how narrow that narrative path is, and how it shapes the heroine's conforming or contesting journey. (Bacchilega 1997: 102)

3.3. The traps of one-way desire: when the inability to change precludes reciprocity

Besides being symbols of identity development, struggle and negotiation, issues of mirroring and reciprocity are explored by Carter with overt reference to female desire in "The Snow Child" and "The Erl-King".

The first tale represents a woman who is helplessly subject to male desire and is incapable of collaboration and reciprocity. Barely one page long, the story can be considered a version of "Snow White" for the initial remarks about a desired child white as snow, red as blood and black as a crow of whom her stepmother is jealous. Interestingly, though, the desiring subject in this instance is not the mother, but the father-to-be:

'I wish I had a girl as white as snow,' says the Count. They ride on. They come to a hole in the snow; this hole is filled with blood. He says: 'I wish I had a girl as red as blood.' So they ride on again; here is a raven, perched on a bare bough. 'I wish I had a girl as black as that bird's feather.' (Carter 1979: 91)

Moreover, the mother could actually be considered a sort of stepmother because she had nothing to do with the girl's conception: "As soon as he completed her description, there she stood, beside the road, white skin, black hair and stark naked; she was the child of his desire and the Countess hated her" (ibid.: 91-92).

The Countess is jealous of the girl because she is literally the fruit of her husband's (sexual) desire, which, as she envisages, will be soon consumed: "The count lifted her [the girl] up and sat her in front of him on his saddle but the Countess had only one thought: how shall I be rid of her?" (ibid.: 92). The girl is still naked, but as the Countess tests her with deceptive trials, she realises that her husband is always on the girl's side. Moreover, the more the Countess tries to bring the Snow Child down, the more she fails, as every trial ends with an item of clothing magically transferring from the woman to the girl, so that in the end: "the Countess was bare as bone and the girl furred and booted" (ibid.).

It is clear throughout the story that "magic" derives from the Count's will, as the girl was a product of his desire. As a matter of fact, the clothes move from the wife to the daughter when the Count blames the Countess for her wickedness, and in the same way the destiny of the two women is decided. Only when he sees his wife naked, "the Count felt sorry for her" (ibid.), therefore he allows the girl to endure the last trial proposed by the Countess: picking a red rose, which leads her to death: "So the girl picks a rose: pricks her finger on the thorn, bleeds; screams; falls" (ibid.). And notwithstanding the fact that she is dead, the man "got off his horse, unfastened his breeches and thrust his virile member into the dead girl" (ibid.).

Obviously enough, in this tale pleasure and desire are altogether denied to women, since the girl is raped after her death, so sexual pleasure is stolen from her body after it has been reduced to an empty vessel deprived of life. Interestingly, the Snow Child bleeds before being raped, which suggests that after all she is no longer a child, but a woman who could experience sexual desire and pleasure, had it not been denied to her by her killer and rapist. The Countess' feelings, in turn, are only rage and envy, and when she observes her husband's necrophilic act she stands still and silent on her horse, her emotions unaccounted for: "The Countess reined in her stamping mare and watched him narrowly; he was soon finished" (ibid.). When the Count is finished and the Countess fully clothed again, the girl melts into the elements from which she had originated. In a

patriarchal inconsiderate and self-centred act, the Count picks up the rose and gives it to his wife (is this a sarcastic reminiscence of men's habit of giving flowers to women to make amends, already criticised by Carter in the "Beauty and the Beast" stories?). The rose, however, "bites" (ibid.) and the woman must drop it.

According to Kaiser, this story is a "harsh reduction of sexual desire to a function of power" (Kaiser 1994: 30), historically contextualised in a feudal discursive arrangement where "the power is masculine", which Carter emphasises and sets out to criticise. The source tale Carter is referring to is probably the version of "Snow White" also quoted by Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment*, in which a Count wishes for a daughter (instead of a Queen, as happens in the Grimm's version - ibid.). Carter's play with and criticism of the motif is embedded in her choice of empowering the Count. In the original story, indeed, at some point he must choose between his daughter and his wife, whereas in "The Snow Child" "he can have both" (ibid.). The distribution of power, therefore, in a Sadeian-like economy of desire,³⁸ is a matter of mutually exclusive alternatives: man's empowerment equals woman's powerlessness. Both the Countess and the girl are in fact equally powerless "since both are held in the tyranny of the Count's desire" (ibid.). Their powerlessness as opposed to the Count's dominance is also conveyed by the clothes, as the women are alternatively clothed or naked according to the Count's wishes, whereas he is dressed up throughout (ibid.).

The lack of reciprocity represented in this tale is disclosed by the relationship between the two women as well: "in this snow-covered landscape, the only relationship possible between women is one that re-produces itself as rivalry, as a struggle to survive at the other woman's expense. Within this initiatory and narrative cycle no possibility of human growth and transformation exists" (Bacchilega 1997: 38). Their rivalry, indeed, is the outcome of the naturalisation of the patriarchal role models imposed on them by the Count's all-encompassing desire. Equally "silent and passive" (ibid.), the two women and their experiences are the mirror reversals of each other: "as the one gains, the other loses

³⁸ Kaiser also refers to Lewallen's insights into this tale and emphasises its overt reference to Sade's work by comparing the female characters respectively with Juliette - the Countess - and Justine - the girl: "Like Sade's Justine, the Snow Child will die, a victim of the Count's tyrannous desire and of the Countess' realization that they are rivals in a life-and-death struggle" (Kaiser 1994: 30).

- and depend entirely on the Count's words" (ibid.: 37). Even though Carter's version does not empower them but only discloses the patriarchal encaging and freezing dynamics underlying female subordination, the story manages to hint at the necessity to subvert such an established order through giving voice to women's pain.

The vehicle chosen for the disruption of this wintery frozen landscape - both literally and metaphorically - is once again a misplaced, unnatural, out of season rose. As opposed to Beauty's white rose, symbolising her purity and virginity, the Snow Child's rose is red and stands for as well as causes the spill of blood. Besides the usual association of the rose with "femininity in both its sexual and its mystically sacrificial connotations" that is coming of age, bleeding, and fulfilling woman's function as passive object of desire (ibid.: 37-38), here the flower embodies and exposes the pain of thus objectified women. The girl's suffering bursts out when she pricks her finger with a thorn and before falling and melting she "screams" (Carter 1979: 92), and the Countess' pain is likewise loudly expressed when the same rose bites her after the girl's death.

On the whole, then, rather than being devised to offer alternatives for the development of a self-conscious, empowered female identity which is able to freely enjoy desire through reciprocity, this tale is meant to expose the dangers of unquestioned patriarchal discursive traps which hand down female submission and prevent women from experiencing and being subject of desire and pleasure.

The "Erl-King" similarly tackles issues related to female identity journeys linked to the difficult negotiations required for women to be empowered through, and become subject of, desire. The already discussed complex narrative frames of the tale give voice to the interior struggle of a woman who faces and does not know how to deal with her own libido and with sexual pleasure, and who is misled into failure of appropriating it by the patriarchal discursive assumptions in which her notion of womanhood is too deeply rooted. The motif of entrapment is obsessively conveyed by images of confinement in the text, which project the difficulty for the protagonist of escaping them but also her efforts to break free: "the wood swallows you up", it is a "subtle labyrinth", "women who have lost themselves in the woods and hunt round hopelessly for a way out", "the woods enclose and then enclose again", "it is easy to lose yourself in these woods" (Carter 1979: 84-85).

In this case, in contrast with “The Snow Child”, there is a sense of solidarity between women, as the narrator’s actions in the end are led by her intention to free the women turned into birds, whom the Erl-King keeps prisoner “in little cages he has woven out of osier twigs and there they sit and sing for him” (ibid.: 88). However, the protagonist’s awareness of the other women’s encaged condition to a certain extent blinds her, as she considers the pleasure she experiences during her sexual encounters with the Erl-King only as harmful and devouring. In other words, she fails to realize that there is a potential for liberation in their embraces because she is too deeply steeped in understanding sexual desire as one-way, as something which once taken from or given is lost and cannot be taken back or experienced as an exchange. The fact that she could envisage reciprocity in her relation with the Erl-King is implied by Carter’s description of their sexual encounters, always suspended between threats of consumption but also appeals, which the narrator’s resistance is too strong to acknowledge.

The reasons for the impossibility of experiencing pleasure as potentially liberating is most likely due to the woman’s fear of her own libido: “The protagonist fears her all-too-willing complicity in succumbing to an intensely erotic desire whose successive waves seem to break down the walls of her selfhood and make her dependent on the Erl-King’s pleasure for her existence” (Kramer Linkin 1994: 309). As the analysis of her split narrative voice has shown, the protagonist is undertaking an identity journey where she needs to re-negotiate the terms of her female subjectivity after experiencing desire and sexual attraction. Nevertheless, apparently she can “never stand outside her own cultural encoding to point to the way she is encoded; each attempt to stand outside merely places her within another of the Chinese boxes that contain human consciousness” (ibid.: 312).

The narrator recurrently states that the Erl-King can harm her (see, for example, Carter 1979: 90), even if there seem to be no clear grounds for her fear; perhaps she has been taught that women are endangered by lingering in and being complicit in desire. Her anxiety and the difficulty of coming to terms with her own libido frequently emerge in the text through oxymoronic images and contradictions, such as the idea that the creature is a “tender butcher” who has shown her that “the price of flesh is love” (Carter 1979: 87). This hypothesis is also sustained by the narrator’s later claim that “I am not afraid of him; only, afraid of vertigo, of the vertigo with which he seizes me. Afraid of

falling down” (ibid.: 87). Hence the association of the sexual act with motives of seizure, entrapment, devouring, swallowing up, suffocating, which, most notably, could instead be read with altogether different outcomes.

I fall down for him, and I know that it is only because he is kind to me that I do not fall still further. [...]

He could thrust me into the seed-bed and I would have to wait until he whistled me up from darkness before I could come back again.

Yet, when he shakes out those two clear notes from his bird call, I come, like any other trusting thing that perches on the crook of his wrist.

He strips me to my last nakedness, that underskin of mauve, pearlized satin, like a skinned rabbit; then dresses me again in an embrace so lucid and encompassing it might be made of water. And shakes over me dead leaves as if into the stream I have become. [...] His skin covers me entirely; we are like two halves of a seed, enclosed in the same integument. I should like to grow enormously small, so that you could swallow me, like those queens in fairy tales who conceive when they swallow a grain of corn or a sesame seed. Then I could lodge inside your body and you would bear me. [...] His touch both consoles and devastates me; I feel my heart pulse, then wither, naked as stone on the roaring mattress [...] Eat me, drink me; thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden, I go back and back to him to have his fingers strip the tattered skin away and clothe me in his dress of water, this garment that drenches me, its slithering odour, its capacity for drowning. (Carter 1979: 89)

If these descriptions are taken into account, it should be immediately clear that there would be a liberating potential in the narrator’s relation with the Erl-King. Yet she is incapable of discerning it because she has already been infected too deeply with patriarchal disciplining and normalising assumptions. After all she acknowledges that the Erl-King is “kind” to her, and does not let her fall helplessly in a desire which would suffocate her. Moreover she could have taken advantage of her being stripped to her “last nakedness” to find new meanings for her identity there, and come back newly clothed with the awareness of the need to change her own perspective in order to transform her life altogether. Instead, she lets his skin cover hers “entirely” and prefers being “swallowed” by and “lodged” in his body rather than exploit the union of the “two halves of the seed” that together may give birth to something new.

The narrator’s split self is caught within the tension of a necessary, scary change which is about to happen, but she does not know how to handle. On the one hand she fears she could turn into a “caged bird” herself, that is become the ideal, submissive object of desire her cultural frameworks threaten and urge her to identify with. On the

other, however, she is also scared by the alternative of transforming into a “sexually gratified woman”, for before being subject of desire this would entail being subject to it. In this sense, the lack of reciprocity, or rather of the instruments to make reciprocity possible surfaces, as the protagonist-narrator is “afraid of being confused by the gazer upon the wood/woman” (Kramer Linkin 1994: 315).

In this tale, too, vision and specular reflections are key themes around which the protagonist’s processes of identification and identity development revolve. Once again, the threat posed by the male gaze lies in the woman’s anxiety not only of being objectified, but rather of being complicit in her subordination as well as willing to submit to a desire she cannot master. Hence textual evidence reveals numerous instances where attention is directed to the Erl-King’s eyes, always hinting at the danger which lies beneath them: “His eyes are quite green, as if from too much looking at the wood. There are some eyes can eat you”; “Eyes green as apples. Green as dead sea fruit” (Carter 1979: 86, 89).

When these eyes actually perform the action of looking, nevertheless, one realises that what scares the protagonist most is not so much the male look itself, as is the fear of finding what her reflection in them looks like. In other words, what she mistakes for possible entrapment is actually acknowledging how the Erl-King sees her as a desiring subject who is willing to surrender. Therefore she turns her eyes away and refuses to look into her reflection in those eyes, assuming that her image will be “reduced” there instead of magnified by the new features of her-self that she does not want to deal with and take responsibility for.

What big eyes you have. Eyes of an incomparable luminosity, the numinous phosphorescence of the eyes of lycanthropes. The gelid green of your eyes fixes my reflective face. It is a preservative, like a green liquid amber; it catches me. I am afraid I will be trapped in it forever like the poor little ants and flies that stuck their feet in resin before the sea covered the Baltic. He winds me into the circle of his eye on a reel of birdsong. There is a black hole in the middle of both your eyes; it is their still centre, looking there makes me giddy, as if I might fall into it. Your green eye is a reducing chamber. If I look into it long enough, I will become as small as my own reflection, I will diminish to a point and vanish. I will be drawn down into that black whirlpool and be consumed by you. (ibid.: 90)

This last passage discloses that in fact it is the girl who looks into the Erl-King's eyes, and decides to run away from what she sees, as she senses that identifying with that reflected image could lead her to self-effacement. Nonetheless, this is her decision, as she could have chosen, instead, to dive into those scary whirlpools, exploit the newly born self-awareness and step away from it without giving up the pleasure she has learned to experience. Yet, she lacks the means to reach such awareness and piece together the fragmented, troubling aspects of her identity she dug up from the Erl-King's eyes. As a consequence, she decides to deny her own desire and to kill its target and creator, thereby also killing the possibility of mastering it and being, indeed, set free.

Eventually, the woman's victory – as she manages to kill the Erl-King and to free the other birds – proves to be more of a failure. When she foresees her destiny of entrapment together with the other birds, she does so only because – as perhaps they did – she can only envisage a similar outcome for women who surrendered to libido. And the only way to prevent it she can contemplate is role reversal, that is rejecting the “potential plenitude of commensal relations [which she does not know how to deal with] to reinscribe the same old pattern” (Kramer Linkin 1994: 310), this time, however, choosing to play the role of the empowered subject. As Kramer Linkin remarks, her defeat is stressed by the “troubling return to the ‘delicious loneliness’ of solitude that she experiences as the story begins” (ibid.: 310).

As the Snow Child is doomed to literally melt down and disappear, this broken woman is left in pieces. Neither of them, indeed, is able to structure their identity journey through change and reciprocity, whence their destiny is stillness and denial. In “The Snow Child”, the girl is and remains merely a fantasy temporarily brought to life by her father's desire and in “The Erl-King” the woman as a matter of fact is unable to change and continues to be the slave of her own incapability to escape existing patriarchal definitions of appropriate womanhood.

3.4. Re-encoding new processes of identification and subject formation: “Wolf-Alice”

Aidan Day defines “Wolf-Alice”, the last tale in *The Bloody Chamber*, as “a kind of summary of the collection’s preoccupations and perspectives as a whole” (Day 1998: 162). This claim is all the more true with reference to the topic of female identity journey as an ongoing process which must be rethought, re-signified and above all freed from patriarchal disciplining discursive constructions. In this tale Carter draws together the theme of the child brought up by wolves, who is “rescued” and re-socialised in a human environment – or rather, the failure of the attempted socialisation – and that of Red Riding Hood. Perhaps more covert than the other instances in the collection, the second motif is developed by making explicit what is implied in the traditional version of the fairy tale, that is the process of growing up and the discovery of sexuality through menstrual blood.

Among the most relevant aspects of the creative revision of this story is the dialogue it establishes with the Lacanian tradition of psychoanalysis, more precisely with the mirror stage as the moment in and mechanism through which subjects come to knowledge, enter the symbolic order and are socialised. Vision and reflections are therefore once more primary vehicles for identification and subject formation. In this case, however, it is the very process through which mirroring and vision are given pre-eminence to be scrutinised and problematized, as Carter’s explicit reference to Lacan is also meant to question some of the basic assumptions entailed in his understanding of the subjects’ access to the symbolic order and, more generally, to social life.

As this conclusive section sets out to demonstrate, “Wolf-Alice” could be considered an alternative model of female identity development, which tries to negotiate and compensate for the lacks and losses of the other female protagonists of the collection. The tale, indeed, displays the provisional consequences of an identity journey which starts from unusual premises – that is a girl who comes into contact with human civilization only after living with wild wolves for years – and is articulated outside of a normalised – phallogocentric – discursive framework, as the people who try to tame her soon realise that there is not enough humanity in her and thus she cannot be socialised. Wolf-Alice’s

experience shows that the wild girl in fact does go through a similar processes of identification and subject formation to that of the other human beings. However, her marginalisation and independence from established social conventions and recommended role positions at the same time transforms these processes, so that eventually the development of her identity will reach different outcomes. More explicitly, she will be able to experience reciprocity and to bring the werewolfish Duke back to life thanks to her pristine alienation.

Wolf-Alice, like many other female characters in *The Bloody Chamber*, is described as an innocent girl. Yet, in her case, for the first time, innocence is not set in opposition with naiveté, or clouded by a forecast potential for corruption in order to suggest its transience and volatility. Wolf-Alice's innocence is instead pure and uncompromised, because "she does not suffer from human constructions of what the human female is" (Day 1998: 163). The girl is literally untouched by humanity both in her physical appearance and in her inability to speak:

Could this ragged girl with brindled lugs have spoken like we do she would have called herself a wolf, but she cannot speak, although she howls because she is lonely. [...] Her panting tongue hangs out; her red lips are thick and fresh. Her legs are long, lean and muscular. Her elbows, hands and knees are thickly callused because she always runs on all fours. (Carter 1979: 119)

Nonetheless, she is not a wolf either:

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. Like the wild beasts, she lives without a future. She inhabits only the present tense, a fugue of the continuous, a world of sensual immediacy as without hope as it is without despair. (ibid.)

This liminal position, set at the beginning of the story as a hindrance which causes her incomprehension, suffering and loneliness, soon proves to be an invaluable asset. Being located in-between, on the edge where the borderline between the human and the animal is drawn, she is rejected by either category but at the same time can exceed the borders of both. Therefore, the wolf-girl can begin to discover, or rather "invent" (Bacchilega 1997: 64) her subjectivity by attaching unexplored and unbiased meanings

first to what she sees around her, and then to her own reflection in the mirror, and to how it fits in the whole picture.

The child's animality and its contrasts with humanity are expressed through sensorial descriptions. The fact that the girl prefers smell, touch and hearing as opposed to sight stresses her animal nature and at the same time questions the human pre-eminence of vision as the pivotal way to access knowledge and the world. This opposition is aptly represented by Carter with this concise matter-of-fact statement: "Two-legs looks, four legs sniffs" (Carter 1979: 119). Later on, the alleged supremacy of the two-legged sight is further scrutinised: "she can net so much more of the world than we can through the fine, hairy, sensitive filters of her nostrils that her poor eyesight does not trouble her" (ibid.). In this way the first anomaly of Wolf-Alice's approach to experience and the external world is put forward as an alternative to the most widespread, human one, but neither categorically dependent on nor hierarchically subaltern to it. Only when he girl comes across her reflection in the mirror, and thereby becomes aware of and begins to construct her identity does sight start to gain a focal role among her sensorial perceptions. After that, the eyes become her principal allies in the achievement of *human* knowledge and self-awareness, which, as will soon be shown, does not however entail that all aspects of animality are given up. Rather, Wolf-Alice's ability to keep inhabiting the undefined territory where the boundaries between the human and the animal lie allows her to develop an identity journey where she accomplishes what the other protagonists of Carter's fairy tales for different reasons have not or could not achieve.

Significantly enough, the child steps into self-awareness for the first time when she starts to bleed, and to experience time as a cycle linked to the lunar phases and to menstruations. The place where she is doomed to live, the castle of a monster half way between a werewolf and a corpse-snatcher called "The Duke" does not help her develop a strong grasp on reality, but on the contrary intensifies her blurred, liminal position:

In the lapse of time, the trance of being in that exiled place, this girl grew amongst things she could neither name nor perceive. How did she feel, this perennial stranger with her furred thoughts and her primal sentience that existed in a flux of shifting impressions; there are no words to describe the way she negotiated the abyss between her dreams, those wakings strange as her sleepings. [...] then she began to bleed. Her first blood bewildered her. (Carter 1979: 122)

When she is practically trying to cope with the mysterious, unexpected bleeding, the wolf-child “bumped against that mirror over whose surface the Duke passed like a wind on ice” (ibid.: 123). The experience is even more bewildering as the only person with whom she interacts casts no reflection upon it. Like an animal:

First, she tried to nuzzle her reflection; then, nosing it industriously, she soon realized it gave out no smell. She bruised her muzzle on the cold glass and broke her claws trying to tussle with this stranger. She saw with irritation, then amusement, how it mimicked every gesture of hers when she raised her forepaw to scratch herself or dragged her bum along the dusty carpet to rid herself of a slight discomfort in her hindquarters. (ibid.)

Her sharp senses of smell, touch and hearing no longer help her, and in order to develop a sense of the self she must turn to sight, that is embrace *also* the two-legged vision, which opens up an altogether new dimension of experience.

Day effectively summarises the links between Wolf-Alice’s necessary turn to sight when facing her reflection and the Lacanian mirror stage as follows:

Carter’s picturing of the emergence of individual identity through the recognition of the self in a mirror reflection, recalls Lacan’s idea that individual, self-conscious identity is born of reflection and representation in signs (Lacan 1977). When Lacan writes on the mirror stage in the human infant’s growth he does not assume that selfhood precedes representation but that it is born out of re-presentation. The self is founded on a reflexive image that in itself is not the self, but only a representation. (Day 1998: 164)

Besides displaying a mirror-stage-like development of self-awareness, however, Carter’s tale questions Lacan’s theory on more than one account. First of all, the necessary presence of an other whom the child identifies with or desires:

The child’s ego is paradoxically naturally social. Lacan argues that the mirror stage is grounded in a ‘biological prematurity’: it is based on ‘anatomical incompleteness’ or ‘organic insufficiency’ (1977A. 4), which the child attempts to fill by means of an identification with the image of an other. (Grosz 1990: 33)

What happens, though, when the only person around the child is a supernatural creature whose image casts no reflection in a mirror?

Secondly, Carter also questions the socialisation of the child, which according to Lacan takes place by default within a structured social organization (whether it is the

small unity of the family or the larger society itself – *ibid.*). In Wolf-Alice’s case, nevertheless, this social organization is too far from the enclosed, isolated castle of the Duke, which is purposefully kept outside and marginalised. Therefore, the girl does not have the chance to experience any “social and linguistic orders” (*ibid.*), let alone to be conditioned or constructed by the Law, i.e. the product but also the regulating principle of the social order which every individual must incorporate so that the system can function and they can be considered part of it. More to the point, also the necessary fracture and duplication experienced by the self in the encounter with its reflected image as well as the lack felt as a consequence of this displacement, which the wolf-child has to endure, are problematized by Carter in subtle ways.

As to the lack experienced by the child when it is about to leave the Real and beginning to perceive the ego:

The child’s recognition of absence is the pivotal moment around which the mirror stage revolves. The child is propelled into its identificatory relations by the first acknowledgement of lack or loss. Only at this moment does it become capable of distinguishing itself from the ‘outside’ world, and thus of locating itself in the world. [...] From this time on, lack, gap, splitting will be its mode of being. It will attempt to fill its (impossible, unfillable) lack. [...] This gap will propel it into seeking an identificatory image of its own stability and permanence. (*ibid.*: 34-35)

Wolf-Alice, as has already been remarked, lacks an other with whom to identify or onto whom to project lack while attempting to feel the void it causes and to piece together her fragmented self-perception. As a consequence, after turning to the inanimate objects which surround her, she starts looking inside herself: “She perceived an essential difference between herself and her surroundings that you might say she could not put her *finger* on [...] She saw herself upon it and her eyes, with their sombre clarity, took on a veiled, introspective look” (Carter 1979: 124). The other she is identifying with is thus her double, that is, her reflected image, which she still thinks is other to herself, but at the same time is also the same. The result of this realisation is noteworthy: she identifies with her self as she acknowledges the changes going on both in her body and in her consciousness:

This habitual, at last boring, fidelity to her every movement finally woke her up to the regretful possibility that her companion was, in fact, no more than a particularly ingenious variety of the shadow she cast on sunlit grass. [...] A little moisture leaked from the corner of her eyes, yet her relation with the mirror was now far more intimate since she knew she saw herself within it. (ibid.)

When the girl finally finds out that the reflection is actually her-self, she is ready to take a step further, and starts dressing up, that is acting upon the new discovery she has made in order to make her newly accomplished self-recognition visible. Only then can she fully comprehend where precisely her difference from the wolves (and from the humans) lies, and decide when and how to wander from one domain into the other:

She pawed and tumbled the dress the Duke had tucked away behind the mirror for a while. [...] she experimentally inserted her front legs in the sleeves. [...] In the mirror, she saw how this white dress made her shine.

Although she could not run so fast on two legs in petticoats, she trotted out in her new dress to investigate the odorous October hedgerows, like a *débutante* from the castle, delighted with herself but still, now and then, singing to the wolves with a kind of wistful triumph, because now she knew how to wear clothes and so had put on the visible sign of her difference from them. (ibid.: 124-125)

It could be claimed that in this tale Carter's appropriation of Lacan's psychoanalytical theory is aimed at emphasising its potentially empowering dimensions for women's identity development. More specifically, what seems to be praised by Carter is the fluid notion of identity emerging from the description of the child's acculturation through the mirror stage. The Lacanian subject, indeed, is always in process as it requires constant negotiation between autonomous agency and compliance with social norms which, in turn, are also, to a certain extent, essential parts of the processes of self-recognition and identification themselves:

Lacan posits a divided, vacillating attitude that is incapable of a final resolution. This 'divided' notion of self and the problem of self-recognition are crucial in so far as they may explain processes of social inculcation and positioning. Neither ignorant nor aware of its own socialization, the child must be both induced to accept social norms and values as natural, and yet to function as an agent within a social world, an agent who has the capacity for rebellion against and rejection of its predestinated social place. (Grosz 1990: 40)

This insight is epitomised by the emphasis Carter puts on the fact that “there is nothing behind the mirror” (Day 1998: 164):

The moon and mirrors have this much in common: you cannot see behind them.
[...]
She poked her agile nose around the back of the mirror; she found only dust, a spider tuck in his web, a heap of rags. (Carter 1979: 123,124)

The tension between the different meanings such a contention could take on is made explicit by Day’s analysis of the tale against Lacan: “the paradox about Lacan’s idea of the construction or acquisition of selfhood through representation and signs [...] is that it is at once a condition of loss” (Day 1998: 164). What Day refers to here is the loss of the sense of unity and plenitude which characterises the child when it is still in the realm of the Real, before its subjectivity is fragmented by the encounter with the mirror – and with the other. In Alice’s case, “What is lost is unselfconscious unity with the world, such as [...she] possessed when she lived with wolves” (ibid.). What is gained, on the other hand, “is a self or ego that amounts to a self-contradictory existence in that it exists by virtue of things [...] that stand in for something which they themselves are not”, such as the mirror itself. The fact that there is nothing behind the mirror’s reflections, however, also has a positive implication which balances the loss, for it also means that “there is no essential, patriarchal authority to dictate what form the self so constituted must take” (ibid.: 165).

It is from this blank surface, which only reflects her image, that Wolf-Alice starts to develop her sense of self – and her identity – in relation to the other, that is, to the Duke. Contrary to the Lacanian subject, however, Alice does not need a mediator within her relationship, a “law of the father” which is the authority in charge of symbolically regulating the interaction with the other so that the relationship does not become “a dyad trapping both participants within a mutually defining structure” (Grosz 1990: 46).³⁹ What grants the possibility for an “actual exchange” between self and other is therefore Alice’s

³⁹ Of course, Lacan speaks of “law of the father” as a mediator between the mother-daughter relationship, which is – perhaps intentionally – omitted in Carter’s story. The goal of this analysis, nevertheless, is exactly to try to find out how Carter’s amendment of the mirror-stage scenario can picture different developments of female identity and socialisation.

compassion and a sense of reciprocity developed towards the Duke when she realizes the extent to which both of them are, albeit for different reasons, outcasts.

It can be assumed that the result of this last identity journey is a provisional success. Alice, indeed, takes care of the Duke and heals his wounds. Her “tender” “ministrations” (Carter 1979: 125) in addition to curing the Duke, also succeed in humanising him, and his image, little by little, appears in the mirror together with hers. Reciprocity is here implied in the act of “taking care” (Day 1998: 165) of the Duke that Alice performs even though throughout their cohabitation he has only minded about his business; satisfying his hunger without paying much attention to the girl. While healing his wounds after having decided to develop her human subjectivity spotted in the mirror and glimpsed in the depth of her self after introspection, the girl willingly “enters into a relationship with and not against” the Duke (ibid.). This means that, despite undergoing the changes brought about by crossing the threshold of the mirror stage and experiencing difference and lack, “the subjectivity she has generated is not based on obliteration of but on communication with the other” (ibid.).

For these reasons the tale can be considered a solution to the difficulties and impossibility of developing an autonomous and empowered identity that the other female protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber* had to face. The “alternative” to a subject formation and identity development imbued in patriarchal assumptions, expectations, normalising and disciplined strategies is articulated through the example of an individual who grew up without being subject to them, thus being able to articulate an autonomous socialising process, which led to reciprocity, recognition of the other, and life. Eventually the “rational glass, the master of the visible, impartially recorded” (Carter 1979: 125) the still-in-process enactment of an independent subjectivity, a metamorphosis of identity “realised through self-representation” (Day 1998: 166). Moreover, the mirror which fragments and sets an opposition between the self and the other is here also the vehicle through which an image of reciprocity and mutual exchange by means of change is made visible and reflected, that is multiplied, for it “enables the girl to realise autonomous subjectivity but frees the man from definition as mere consumer and enables him to enter the representational realm of the genuinely human, which here is seen in terms not of exclusion but of mutual and reciprocal relationship” (ibid.).

Despite the liberating possibilities set out in this last tale, the identity development of the female protagonists of the collection – as has already been pointed out – remains enclosed in a heterosexual matrix, albeit amended and problematized in its articulation if compared to traditional representations of women in Western literature. Alice, indeed, chooses to wear a white dress and finally identifies with her womanhood when she fiercely stands and walks towards the Duke to take care of him. On the one hand, therefore, the girl gives up the victim role but on the other she still embraces a typical trait identified with female performance, that is taking care.

The Bloody Chamber is sprinkled with examples of performances of femininity, accurately staged by Carter to expose their fictional character, their theatrical playfulness and the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the enactment of a gendered identity which is partly subject to external – more or less conscious – discursive constraints and the need to devise strategies of resistance to and negotiation with them. The development and ongoing transformations of female identity are both shaped by and negotiated with reference to an entangled play of gazes and reflections, where autonomy and empowerment are struggled over through learning how to master vision and to signify specular reflections. In other words, the process through which female subjects gain – different degrees of – awareness of their selves and construct their identities is based on how woman sees herself and the extent to which she can(not) avoid identifying with the image conveyed by those who master the gaze and have the power of defining the meanings of the reflections cast by the rational glass – in whatever form.

The disparate experiences of Carter's protagonists show that the development of identity is a painful, complex effort, a journey with many diversions and deviations, a never-ending work in progress of mediation with oneself and with the world, always provisional and never conclusive. The gallery of examples described by Carter portrays different patterns of development for female subjectivity; some that comply with established discursive arrangements, some that fail to stray from the path they know, for it is already too deeply rooted in their (un)consciousness, some, finally, that manage to amend or re-signify the normative role positions society expects them to take on.

In general, it could be claimed that the solution devised by Carter for an alternative articulation of subjectivity is reciprocity, which implies mutual exchange with the other, incorporation instead of appropriation, and is based on the refusal of a binary and oppositional organisation of experience in mutually exclusive categories – which, needless to say, have always ended up disempowering and subordinating women and what is associated with them in the binary.

After pointing out the different paths that these identities can take, and the impact of this – more or less constrained – choice on the provisional stages in and outcomes of the journeys, the last step of the analysis needs to focus on the “how”, that is on the ways in which change and metamorphosis take place and/or are made visible throughout.

The last chapter, therefore, is focused on the body, i.e. on the surface where transformations are enacted and detectable during the endless, uneven, erratic process of identity development, and of its deconstruction, reconstruction and signification.

As has been anticipated, a bridge between the articulation of identity and its enactment on the body and through the body can be built starting from notions of theatricality, mimicry, masquerade and performance. Similar concepts suggest that embodied subjects are structured through the discursively established identification with ideal bodies and behaviours, but also that they can struggle over imposed role position by staging their own performances through the body, its expressions and disguises. Most notably, when one turns to the body, the category of gender is even more crucial in patriarchal attempts of devising and controlling the circumscribed meanings that can be attached to female subjectivities. Thus it is from and by means of the body that the metamorphoses performed or experienced by the female protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber* succeed in creating actual alternatives to the available – phallogoncentric – discourses on womanhood. Starting from acknowledgement, questioning and deconstruction of the patriarchal systems, the tales end up turning their assumptions against themselves, and then propose alternative, subversive patterns of development through disruptive metamorphoses of the female body.

CHAPTER 4.

REPRESENTING METAMORPHIC BODIES TO RE-SIGNIFY THE BODY

All the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using the subject's corporeality as a framework as it would be using consciousness or the unconscious. All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface.

(Grosz 1994: vii)

1. THE BODY IN – THIS – CONTEXT: A DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

This last chapter purports to show the centrality of the body in *The Bloody Chamber* as a transformative surface as well as the site where the metamorphoses covertly transmitted through textual strategies and representations of identity development are actually performed. The transformations experienced by some of the characters of the fairy tales, which expose the centrality of the body in the collection, are most notably aimed at giving pre-eminence to the body for different reasons.

First of all, this process is part of Carter's feminist politics, in that it aims at reconfiguring the available definitions of female identity development and subjectivity through the re-appropriation of the female body. Such re-appropriation requires new ways of approaching and understanding the idea of the body, which must be freed from the constraints of a binary and mutually exclusive – patriarchal – arrangement of knowledge.

Secondly, and as a consequence, discourses about the body must be reshaped so as to being able to account for the specificities of sexual difference, that is to supersede the neutralising and universalising drives of the phallogocentric tradition. In other words, female bodies must be tackled in their peculiarities and differences, after giving up the

patriarchal presumptions – derived from the mutually exclusive categories upon which similar knowledges are structured – that they represent as a somehow lacking or inferior variant of the male body, to which they are set at the same time in dialogue with and in opposition to.

Thirdly, this research tries to demonstrate that Carter’s commitment, so frequently stressed and repeated by the writer herself, to materialism and to historically and socially grounded experience, finds expression in her almost obsessive focus on the female body and on the representation of embodied performances in the collection as well as throughout her career. It is of paramount importance, then, that the bodies represented in the fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber* are caught and depicted in the act of changing, so that metamorphosis becomes the distinctive trait of most of the protagonists.

Fourth, the link between sexuality, identity development and the visible results of the transformation on the body become vehicles of Carter’s project of devising alternative paths to patriarchal discursive constructions, aimed at encoding, disciplining, normalising and fixing possible itineraries of female performances and role positions. The difficulty of straying from the path, so deeply rooted in cultural practices and affecting subjects from the very beginning of the process of their socialisation, is highlighted by the need to resort to fantasy, fictional, monstrous and magic bodily figurations to render the metamorphic liberation and empowerment of the female characters.

Last but not least, this issue exposes the conflation – that in Carter becomes a weapon that women can exploit in order to achieve freedom to choose – of imagination and material experience in the development and enactment of narratives of the self. No longer engulfed in the limiting binary thought of oppressive discourses, indeed, those of Carter’s heroines who succeed in embracing change and leave behind the comforting and safe bonds of patriarchal submission are able to give an account of themselves and to find strength both in imagination and in the “reality” of their positionalities.

As Grosz⁴⁰ contends, one of the primary goals of contemporary feminists in trying to establish a philosophical and cultural tradition parallel to, not completely disjointed,

⁴⁰Grosz’s work is extensively referred to here, and throughout this thesis because her approach to questions of feminist politics, identity and above all the body are particularly balanced, informed and effectively argued but nonetheless open to further signification, expansion, questioning. Emblematic of the equilibrium of her positions is the following contention, which synthesises her contribution to the debate

but at the same time autonomous from its patriarchal predecessors is “refocusing on bodies in accounts of subjectivities” (Grosz 1994: vii). The first step towards a similar accomplishment is questioning, displacing and leaving behind the binary, mutually exclusive categories which have set the opposition between male and female and the supremacy of the former through its association with thought, reason and “culture”, while confining the latter into a – biased and diminished notion of – body and nature. Interestingly, concepts like materiality, body, and nature are disparaged only insofar as they are compared to their counterparts in a structure whose organising framework excludes incorporation and reciprocity on principle. The structural “inversion” attempted by Grosz sets out to

Displace the centrality of mind, the psyche, interior or consciousness (and even the unconscious) in conceptions of the subject through a reconfiguration of the body. If subjectivity is no longer conceived in binarized or dualist terms, either as the combination of mental or conceptual with material or physical elements or as the harmonious, unified cohesion of mind and body, then perhaps other ways of understanding corporeality, sexuality, and the differences between the sexes may be developed and explored which enable us to conceive of subjectivity in different terms than those provided by traditional philosophical and feminist understandings. (ibid.)

It is my contention, not so much that Carter consciously undertakes such enterprise while writing *The Bloody Chamber*, but rather – less pretentiously – that her fairy tales can be re-read nowadays in the light of these purposes, and offer a starting point and/or strategies of resistance to, disruption and renegotiation of alternative patterns to those based on a “binarized or dual” understanding of the individual and of social relations – in particular those between men and women.

Sexuality itself, and by extension sexual relationships, may be redefined and acquire new meanings if the body is made the focus of attention in their re-conceptualisation. It can be understood “in terms of an act, a series of practices and behaviors involving bodies, organs and pleasures, [...] in terms of an identity [that is, broadly speaking, *gender*]

about the biological nature versus the cultural construction of the body (and, by extension, of sex): “As an essential internal condition of human bodies, a consequence of perhaps their organic openness to cultural completion, bodies must take the social order as their productive nucleus. Part of their own ‘nature’ is an organic or ontological ‘incompleteness’ or lack of finality, an amenability to social completion, social ordering and organization” (Grosz, 1994: xi).

[... and as] a set of orientations, positions, and desires, which implies that there are particular ways in which the desires, differences, and bodies of subjects can seek their pleasure” (ibid.: viii). The importance of redefining sexuality is due to its centrality in shaping people’s relationships with themselves as well as with the external world, as

Our conceptions of reality, knowledge, truth, politics, ethics and aesthetics are all effects of sexually specific – and thus far in our history, usually male – bodies, and are all thus implicated in the power structures which feminists have described as patriarchal, the structures which govern relations between the sexes. (ibid.: ix)

The function of the body, then, is dislodged here as the seed from which change can blossom, since it is impossible to universalise and neutralise the differences written on bodies, which can no longer be circumscribed to the “neutral” – but strategically empowered – masculine.

The subject, recognized as corporeal being, can no longer readily succumb to the neutralisation and neutering of its specificity which has occurred to women as a consequence of women’s submersion under male definition. The body is the ally of sexual difference, a key term in questioning the centrality of a number of apparently benign but nonetheless phallogocentric presumptions which have hidden the cultural and intellectual effacement of women. (ibid.: ix)

It is important to note that on no account does this mean that bodies are the vehicles of incontrovertible biological difference. On the contrary, they are “colonised” by different discourses, such as that of biology and medicine, which try to conceal that in fact “in all cases, how bodies are conceived seems to be based largely on prevailing social conceptions of the relations between the sexes” (ibid.: x). In other words, as Butler would also eagerly sustain, bodies are no less cultural constructions than sexual relations and performances.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the first characterisations of bodily performance – namely, theatricality and masquerade as issues that show the bodily enactments of the identity developments explored in the previous chapter – the notion of the body as it is understood and signified throughout this work deserved being elucidated.

Carter's bodies, to begin with, are both male and female, and despite the former being the main focus of attention, the latter is also investigated (the best examples in this respect would be the bodies of the Beasts in "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride"). They are caught in the act of changing as a consequence of the process of growing up, of transforming into a different, animal-like or fantastic being and/or in the choice of taking off a masque, of giving up a strategic or reassuring disguise. In any case, they are "lived bodies" which change as a result of their experience, of which, in turn, they bear the signs. The bodies represented by Carter are not blank pages upon which meanings can be written and fixed, but rather surfaces of inscription, whose permeable skin can be etched, from time to time, with a range of unstable, unfixed and changeable meanings. Bodies themselves, then, become the maps where the development of identities can be tracked, whose pliable flesh bears the marks of experience and of transformation in the form of more or less visible scars: "every body is marked by the history and specificity of its experience. It is possible to construct a biography, a history of the body, for each individual and social body" (Grosz 1994: 142).

More specifically, in Carter's fairy tales some of the signs left by this carving of experience on the body can be spotted, enabling one to consider the bodies of the protagonists both as surfaces of inscription and as maps. The most evident example is perhaps that of the protagonist of "The Bloody Chamber", whose body is forever marked by the heart-shaped, blood-red scar left by the bloody key her husband has pressed on her forehead as a symbol of her disobedience, as well as a sign of her complicity with a newly-awakened desire that she does not know how to define and how to control yet. In this case, the scar left on the body signifies a change that has taken place in the identity of the girl, which otherwise could risk being left undetected, as it apparently has not changed her physical appearance - or, at least, not in an immediately evident way, as she lost her virginity, but such a transformation is not apparent on the outside. Other instances of the mappability of bodies could be found in the cases where something recognisable is left in the body of the character who underwent a radical transformation. This is the case of the Beast in "The Courtship of Mr Lyon", who, after turning into a man, still bears some traces of his previous beastly state, such as his eyes or "an unkempt mane of hair and,

how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all beasts” (Carter 1979: 51).

These apparently random and undetectable signs emphasise that within social discourses, both the male and the female body is “involuntarily marked, but is also incised through ‘voluntary’ procedures, life-styles, habits and behaviors” (Grosz 1994: 142). In Foucauldian terms, in the bodies of Carter’s characters the technologies of production and self-production of subjects are uncovered and challenged, so that the body itself becomes the medium through which power relations and social discourses are made visible, questioned and amended. It is through the metamorphosis of the body, indeed, that some of Carter’s tales achieve the transformative potential required to change the way social power relations are organized and structured, and thereby allow the female protagonists to renegotiate their role positions and performances through the construction of a different social order, whose power arrangements are based on new foundations.

The transformative power of the bodies described and inscribed by Carter may be best accounted for if one turns to Foucault’s definition of the body as “the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. [... it is] totally imprinted by history and the processes of history’s destruction of the body” (Foucault in Grosz 1994: 146). Foucault’s insights into the body, the tensions between its appropriation and signification by and through power, and the power it wields to resist power and disrupt social discourses when they are perceived as unbearable and no longer able to grant agency and a certain degree of autonomy to the subject are effectively summarised by Grosz as follows:

In Foucault, the body is the object, target and instrument of power, the field of greatest investment of power’s operations, a stake in the struggle for power’s control over a materiality that is dangerous to it, precisely because it is unpredictable and able to be used in potentially infinite ways, according to infinitely variable cultural dictates. [...] power, according to Foucault, utilizes, indeed produces the subject’s desire and pleasures to create knowledges, truths, which may provide more refined, improved, and efficient techniques for the surveillance and control of bodies, in a spiral of power-knowledge-pleasure. The body is that materiality, almost a medium, on which power operates and through which it functions. (Grosz 1994: 146)

The cogency of Foucault's notion of the body, however, does not merely rely on its account of the body as *subject to* power, but rather, and most importantly, on its idea of the body as *subject of* power, as it is

acted upon, inscribed, peered into; information is extracted from it, and disciplinary regimes are imposed on it; yet its materiality also entails a resilience and thus also (potential) modes of resistance to power's capillary alignments. It is a kind of passivity, capable of being mobilized according to the interests of power or in the forms of subversion, depending on its strategic position. (ibid.)

In Foucault's terms, the "political investment of the body" in power relations thus constructed becomes a "useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (ibid.: 149). This idea, of course, derives from his understanding of power as a network that ceaselessly brings things into reciprocal interrelations, negotiations, investments, which engenders control but at the same time bears within it the possibilities and strategies of resistance to its functioning (see Grosz 1994: 147-148).

The most significant facet of Foucault's thought stemming from these considerations about the body, which may best account for the bodies represented in Carter's fairy tales, is the notion of sex, and the centrality of sexuality to power relations and struggles:

Sexuality is a particularly privileged locus of the operations of power because of its strategically advantageous position at the core of individualizing processes of disciplines and training [...]. Sexuality is not a pure or spontaneous force that is tamed by power; rather, sexuality is deployed by power to enable it to gain a grip on life itself. (ibid.: 152)

That is to say, sexuality is among the favourite loci where regulatory power operates, to the extent that it can be defined a "discursive-technological complex", and as such it cannot be identified with a biological, "material reality" (ibid.: 154). Rather, like the body, it is a historically contextual cultural construction, a product of determinate power-knowledge negotiations:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: [...] a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (Foucault in Grosz 1994: 154)

Carter's appropriation of Foucault's work – already hinted at while discussing the theoretical premises of *The Sadeian Woman* – is considered in this research as groundbreaking, for it succeeds in overcoming one of the main objections feminist scholars make to Foucault's conceptualisation of sexuality and the body. As Grosz remarks, indeed, Foucault's bodies are defined as surfaces of inscription without specifying the nature of the surface itself: in fact it makes a great deal of difference if the body which is being written upon is male or female.⁴¹

Carter's project of demythologising femininity precisely entails acknowledging that women are history's makers, that they play an active role in the relationships they are involved in – whether they result in subversion or empowerment – and, above all that “sexual differentiation” is a matter of cultural construction which cannot be disregarded (Carter 1979a: 3-4, 7) and which affects the body as well: “Our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else” (ibid.: 9). The pronoun “our” in this case, includes but also limits, as it does not designate a universal commonality of the human experience, but on the contrary refers to women, and thus stresses the specificity of female flesh. Shortly after, indeed, Carter adds: “Flesh is not an irreducible human universal” (ibid.). As a matter of fact, in the fairy tales which are about to be analysed, examples of both male and female bodies are put forward while caught in the process of self-creation, definition, modification, embodiment, which are invariably historically and culturally specific and depend on the identification with or amendment of roles, positions, behaviours and models of embodied sexuality – as has already been stressed, always within the confines of a heterosexual economy.

In the light of these considerations it is also possible to fully grasp the reasons why – as has many times been stressed – the disruption of patriarchal discourses performed by

⁴¹ For the main feminist objections to Foucault's arguments, see Grosz 1994: 156-158.

some characters of *The Bloody Chamber* needs to pass through compliance. In order to be twisted and turned against themselves, indeed, power structures need to be understood and incorporated. From this awareness and enactment, then, rebellion can surface and try to change what is perceived as oppressing or limiting, for power generates power and the negotiation of new power-knowledge arrangements springs from a restyling of the existing ones:

Power must be understood [...] as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another. (Foucault in Grosz 1994: 148)

Carter's female characters are represented in the process of "self-production and self-observation", while they wander along or across the "fine line" which separates compliance and subversion. What is emphasised through the transformation of their bodies is their "enmeshment in disciplinary regimes" as the subjects' condition of "social effectivity, as either conformist or subversive" (Grosz 1994: 144).

Last, but not least, if the body and sex are not natural givens, but the product of ongoing discursive negotiations and of contextual power-knowledge arrangements, and if power's instability incorporates the potential of resistance, then it also involves the possibility of agency. This is of paramount importance, as it allows one to introduce the notion of "performativity", which draws together identity development and bodily acts, and is linked to action in that it entails the idea of - more or less - purposefully making visible on the body what has been happening beneath its surface. In addition, such concept also points to theatricality and masquerade as strategies deployed in order to take action and to shape the inscriptive surface of the body in polemical compliance with or subversive contrast to discursively established ideals, to which the following paragraph is devoted.

2. STAGING THE FEMALE BODY: THEATRICAL PERFORMATIVITY

The notion of “performativity” introduced by Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) allows one to draw interesting connections between the development of (gender-ed) identity, sexuality and the body, which prove to be particularly insightful for an account of the metamorphosis of the female bodies represented in *The Bloody Chamber*. In this research, the concept of performativity is illustrated and then contextualised with relation to the motives of mirroring and the gaze discussed in the previous chapter. The process of subject formation reflected and/or mediated by mirrors or influenced by one’s own or someone else’s gaze (especially when the other who looks is a man who stands for the patriarchal tradition) is indeed crucial for the analysis of the protagonists’ identity development as a process of inscription of meanings on the body. In particular, this section is devoted to investigating the practices of theatricality, role-playing and masquerade as fundamental stages through which Carter’s characters display awareness of the idea that their identity is a cultural construction. As the performances of different characters throughout the collection show, identity journeys entail negotiations and struggles between self and social perceptions about oneself, the proper/appropriate role positions one is allowed to occupy, acceptable or discouraged behaviours, normal and deviant ways of giving an account of or defining one’s experience. In general, these couples of alternatives emphasise that identity construction is an ongoing effort, which requires endless mediation if one refuses to uncritically take on whatever position is attached to them according to the limited span of options offered by current social discursive arrangements. As will be shortly illustrated, representing a change in the way meanings and performances are attached to the body by starting from the re-appropriation or by different approaches to the signification and understanding of the body itself is a particularly valuable strategy when it comes to women. Their identities, indeed, have traditionally been shaped by phallogocentric discourses first and foremost to keep their bodies under control – mainly in order to control reproduction – while at the same time the body itself, and its association with the category of “woman” has been devalued within the binary logic of mutually exclusive alternatives. More to the point, reading the bodies represented by Carter against Butler’s conceptualisation of

performativity discloses the reciprocity implied by the productive interaction body-identity, where the body displays the marks left by the stages of identity development and at the same time is the medium through which the latter can escape the discursive constraints to which it is subject.

Butler's definition of performativity draws on Foucault's insights into the centrality of sexuality, conceived of as a "regulatory ideal" which compels the materialisation of the body through power-knowledge arrangements. The normativity of the discursive settlements about sexuality, however, is then displaced – again in Foucauldian fashion – by the idea that the imposition of power as constrictive is always paired with an inherent possibility of resisting and overthrowing it. In this way, the body is proved to be able to exceed the norms which compel its materialisation, enabling the subject to turn the law against itself "to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law" (Butler 1993: 2), that is the body is configured as the primary locus of agency. In Butler's words:

The category of sex is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a 'regulatory ideal'. In this sense, then, 'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. Thus, 'sex' is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. (Butler 1993: 1-2)

Nonetheless, within this never-ending process, "bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled" (ibid.: 2).

Not only is the subject whose body and identity are thus constituted subject to the regulatory ideal which compels its identity formation and the materialisation of its body, but it also, and most importantly, has the power to actively disrupt the reiteration of the law and to bend and amend it. Interestingly, according to Butler one of the most effective ways in which the subject can question the repetition of the norm and disrupt its naturalisation is through repetition itself, that is by mimicking the behaviours prescribed by the regulatory ideal and thereby disclosing its artificial, constructed nature. The norms

which “both produce and destabilize sex through reiteration” naturalise sex and the prescribed behaviours attached to it, but at the same time the ritual “opens up gaps and fissures that allow disruption to be performed” (ibid.: 10) because the “reiteration of a norm or set of norms [...] acquires the status of act-like [...] and conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (ibid.: 12). Butler calls the ritual, citational repetition involved in performativity “theatricality”, which clearly suggests that it is the result of acting, of playing a role, regardless of the intentionality or awareness on the part of the subject.

In sum, performativity and theatricality acquire in Butler – as well as in the way Carter plays with the motif – a double character. On the one hand they unveil and question the practices underlying identification and subject formation, and emphasise the need to be aware of them in order to be able to locate their flaws and turn them against themselves. On the other hand, and as a result, they disclose the agency hiding underneath the surface of the apparently inescapable circuit of reiteration which does not trap the subject in compulsive repetition, but rather allows it to mimic such theatricality in parodic fashion, and to exploit its covert normative character to perform change and promote and entrench destabilising alternatives: “The subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, *it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice*” (ibid.: 15, my emphasis).⁴²

Different textual examples in *The Bloody Chamber* convey the impression that Carter is well aware of the mechanisms of performative staging of identity – which will be conceptualised by Butler some twenty years later – and above all that she exploits all their playful and subversive potential. To begin with, as has already been highlighted, some of the stories are set in historically recognisable periods in order to stress that particular patriarchal discursive arrangements are being scrutinised. As a consequence, their historicity and the naturalised performances they engender are no longer “dissimulated”

⁴² Interestingly, among the consequences of the materialisation of the bodies conceived of according to Butler’s idea of theatrical performativity, there is the production of accepted and abject bodies, which do not “qualify as fully human” because of their deviance. Even though Butler mainly refers to those bodies which exceed the heterosexual norm, and are thus considered abnormal, this notion will be exploited to discuss some aspects of Carter’s monstrous bodies in the following sections.

(ibid.), and the theatricality implied in the related staging of identity is overtly addressed. Furthermore, the more or less conscious idea of staging one's identity through performances which imitate, and to a certain extent also parody, expected, disciplined behaviours is presented on more than one occasion in the fairy tales.

The first instances of Carter's approach to the idea of theatrically and of staging one's identity can be found in "The Bloody Chamber". Interestingly, throughout the story a sort of progress can be detected, whereby the protagonist, at first playing what she deems to be the appropriate role for a young woman who is about to get – and then has just got – married, later on deliberately acts the normalised role of the wife in order to trick her husband. That is to say, at the beginning of the story, when the girl is still unaware of the changes in her body and of her sexual desire – which has just awakened – she stages her identity because she strives to conform to the behaviours which she considers to be her husband's ideal. As she gains awareness of her situation, of the brutality of the bargain she has sold herself in, the nature of her performance slightly, but unmistakably changes. The young woman experiences estrangement when she looks at her reflection in the mirror, and is unable to recognise what she sees because of the new consciousness of her body and of sexual desire. However, she refuses to accept to be defined by and to identify completely with the way her husband sees her, since his lustful gaze blames the desire which she begins to appropriate. When she has just arrived at the castle of the Marquis, the girl thus tries to encourage herself, at a time when she has not fully understood yet what she has bargained for: "Courage! I shall act the fine lady to the manner born one day, if only by virtue of default" (Carter 1979: 19). Although she consciously decides to play a role that does not belong to her, here the girl proves to be still unaware of all the implications of acting "the fine lady". Therefore, during her first sexual encounters with the Marquis, it seems that she is experiencing his assaults from outside of her body, as if she was just the viewer, witnessing through specular reflections what is happening to someone else. The loss of her virginity, in fact, is staged like a private theatrical performance set within closed "purple velvet curtains" that the husband has arranged for himself, where the main actress is nothing but an uninformed, casual victim:

I had Cointreau, he had cognac in the library, with the purple velvet curtains drawn against the night, where he took me to perch on his knee in a leather armchair beside the flickering log fire. He had made me change into that chaste little Poiret shift of white muslin; he seemed especially fond of it, my breasts showed through the flimsy stuff, he said, like little soft white doves that sleep, each one, with a pink eye open. But he would not let me take off my ruby choker, although it was growing very uncomfortable, nor fasten up my descending hair, the sign of a virginity so recently ruptured that still remained a wounded presence between us. (Carter 1979: 19)

And when the libertine suggests that only an expert could have detected a “promise of debauchery” on her “thin, white face” (ibid.: 20), at first the girl is impressed and scared. She admits she is afraid of herself (ibid.) because she identifies completely with the image reflected by her husband’s eyes, where she feels she is “reborn”, and as a consequence sees in her newly born desire only a “talent for corruption” (ibid.):

I felt a vague desolation that within me, now my female wound had healed, there had awoken a certain queasy craving like the cravings of pregnant women for the taste of coal or chalk or tainted food, for the renewal of his caresses. Had he not hinted to me, in his flesh as in his speech and looks, of the thousand, thousand baroque intersections of flesh upon flesh? I lay in our wide bed accompanied by, a sleepless companion, my dark newborn curiosity.
I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him. And he disgusted me. (ibid.: 22)

This passage is interesting under multiple points of view. First of all, the loss of virginity is described as a wound in the female body, as something that requires healing, and at the same time as something which leaves an invisible, but very substantial scar. Secondly, desire and the longing for the husband accordingly take on the negative meaning of something as inevitable as it is disgusting, as the scar left by a wound which has healed but whose barely visible imprint on the skin is destined to remain as a reminder. The reason why such a longing is abhorred by the girl is that she has not realized yet what pleasure means, since it has been violently taken, stolen from her. Moreover, her remarks could stem from the association, already made explicit by the Marquis, between female desire and perversion, corruption, something deviant which should be kept under control. In this context, sex is a performance which leaves no room for reciprocity and exchange, because it is staged by a patriarchal director whose sole purpose is to tame the puppet-woman into his disciplined ideal of the perfect wife – which, in this particular case, implies being subject *to*, but most certainly not *of*, his

perversions. Even though the girl has never been explicitly compared to a marionette or a doll, significantly enough, towards the end of the story the Marquis is addressed as a – failing – puppet-master when he realises that his perfect deadly plot has been spoiled: “The puppet-master, open mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their strings, abandon the rituals he had ordained for them since time began and start to live for themselves; the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns” (ibid.: 39).

In the end, the girl manages to break free, and although her liberation is pragmatically effected by her mother, her emancipation symbolically begins when she stops lowering her eyes and bowing her head to look away – and turn away – from her self. The beginning of the process which enables the young woman to set herself – or rather, be set – free can be traced back to the moment when she witnesses the true character of her husband’s homicidal perversion – that is when she enters the bloody chamber. The second step is the encounter with the piano tuner, which lets her experience the implications of selfless affection and reciprocity with a man for the first time, and after which she can finally fully grasp the scope of the role imposed on her by her husband. Carter emphasises this change in perspective the second time the young bride is described while playing a part, which becomes – although desperate and hardly successful – a willing act, a deliberate performance. The young woman stops trying to imitate the constitutive constraints of the identity imposed on her by her husband, or to escape them by turning her eyes away from his and from mirrors, and purposely stages, imitates that performance with deceptive intentions: “With the most treacherous, lascivious tenderness, he kissed my eyes, and, mimicking the new bride newly awakened, I flung my arms around him, for on my seeming acquiescence depended my salvation” (ibid.: 34).

The young protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” could be considered a disembodied subject in that she has yet to take hold of her body, to learn how to mark it, how to write her own cartography on its surface. That is why she cannot help but learn how to live with the mark of shame impressed on her forehead by the bloody key, which symbolises the power of signifying her body that her husband still wields: “I scrubbed my forehead with the nail brush as I had scrubbed the key but this red mark would not go away, either, no matter what I did, and I knew I should wear it until I died” (ibid.: 37).

A similar instance of female body devoid of meaning and therefore compared to that of a puppet because its owner is not able to account for it on her own terms, and to inscribe it with her own meanings, can be found in “The Lady of the House of Love”. Although this tale will be extensively analysed with reference to other motives – namely monstrosity and the female grotesque – it is worth stressing here also its significance as to the issue of a dis-owned body, a body which has been forever marked by immortality, which in her case also means impossibility of changing. The destiny of immobility to which her ancestors have condemned her is perceived by the Lady-Vampire as helpless, unwelcomed, disgusting, a “role” that she is most reluctant to play: “Everything about this beautiful and ghastly lady is as it should be, queen of night, queen of terror – except her horrible reluctance for the role” (ibid.: 95). The body, here, is even more central than in “The Bloody Chamber”, not so much because the woman does not understand it – after all, it cannot change – but rather because it imposes its urges, its hunger on her:

The white hands of the tenebrous belle deal the hand of destiny. Her fingernails are longer than those of the mandarins of ancient China and each is pared to a fine point. These and teeth as fine and white as spikes of spun sugar are the visible signs of the destiny she wistfully attempts to evade. (ibid.: 94)

This passage discloses a pivotal strand within patriarchal discourses that Carter sets out to unmask, criticise and overthrow, namely the contention that “anatomy is destiny”, that women’s fate is written on their bodies. Interestingly, Carter tackles the topic by resorting once more to theatrical figurations, and she conveys the impossibility for this woman of changing and appropriating her body by comparing her to a “ventriloquist’s doll”, to an “automaton”, and later on to a “haunted house”:

Her voice, issuing from those red lips like the obese roses in her garden, lips that do not move – her voice is curiously disembodied; she is like a doll, he thought, a ventriloquist’s doll, or, more, like a great, ingenious piece of clockwork. For she seemed inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born, and now the mechanism was inexorably running down and would leave her lifeless. This idea that she must be an automaton, made of white velvet and black fur, that could not move of its own accord, never quite deserted him; indeed, it deeply moved his heart.
[...]

She herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself. (ibid.: 102-103)

Significantly, the automaton here does not stand for the potentially empowering hybridisation between human – and more specifically woman – and machine most aptly advocated by Donna Haraway (1985), but rather for her disembodiment, which man is eager to fill with his own meanings.⁴³ That is why, perhaps, the young cyclist is “moved” by the Lady’s ostensible forgery and later on does not hesitate to fantasize about possible ways of fixing what seems wrong in her body.

In both tales – “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Lady of the House of Love” – theatricality and mimicry do not represent the achievement of an empowered subjectivity freed from patriarchal constraints. Rather, they disclose different, almost opposite, hardships endured by women in the process of forging their own identity while facing disembodiment but at the same time perceiving that bodily inscription is the core of both their submission and their latent liberation and empowerment. More precisely, the first tale tells the story of a girl who is growing up – therefore her body as well as her social position are changing, and, more or less willingly – has to face the displacement caused by the realisation that she is forced to act a limited span of parts that have already been prepared for her. The second story represents instead a woman who is prevented from changing, whose body incarnates her eternal predatory stillness, and whose – bodily – performances are therefore ironically doomed to be an ongoing repetition of sameness. This woman literally embodies the constitutive constraints of disciplined performative repetitions and re-enactments of the same, from which she does not seem capable of escaping, thus her identification with a ventriloquist’s doll, which is voiceless and whose very movements depend on the master’s will.

So far, then, the issue of theatricality has been exposed as something exploited by Carter to trigger awareness, to disclose hidden, too often undetected and too deeply internalised patriarchal strategies of spreading and rooting discourses about disciplined – female – bodies. Nonetheless, these first connotations pave the way for a significant set of implications related to the concept of theatricality and the staging of identity on and

⁴³ Needless to say, this description is produced by the male character, who is the focalizer of this section.

through the body, which are also related to and may engender resistance and agency; the notion of “masquerade”.

2.1 Bodily performances: paradoxical masquerades

The concept of masquerade referred to by this research is mainly the one articulated by Tseëlon (1995) for several reasons. First of all, because her work sets out to explore some of the same “paradoxes which frame the feminine experience in contemporary West”, which Carter tries to disclose and question through her fairy tales. In particular, among the most significant traits of both texts are the attention for the intersection between cultural, discursive constructions and bodily inscriptions; the mutually productive nature of the relationship between self and social identity; and the close analysis of the role of representation in shaping embodied subjects:

The departure point of my work is the notion that a cultural designation is instrumental in shaping a personal one. There is a dialectical dialogue between cultural categories and the people who embody them: the act of representation modifies the nature of the represented object. (Tseëlon 1995: 3)

Secondly, Tseëlon proposes a definition of the category of woman which suits the lived experience of Carter’s characters, and besides could be a response to the urge of redefining instead of rejecting the category of woman advocated for by Braidotti. According to Tseëlon, “woman” defies “any categorical designation”, therefore she constitutes herself “as a paradox, a perpetual deference, an image of reality with the unavailability of desire, an absent presence” (ibid.: 2). Despite her apparent impossibility of being grasped, however, woman has always been imposed on roles that she is supposed to wear, or to perform, which puts her in an even more liminal and paradoxical position:

The roles that are available to her (social, psychological, visual) place her in another impossible position. If she embraces them she is supporting the ideology which defines her in the first place. If she rejects them outright she denies herself a certain amount of options, now marked, that would have otherwise been available to her. (ibid.: 2-3)

This is exactly the problematic situation in which Carter's heroines find themselves and from which they try to escape. As the analysis carried out in the previous chapter should have shown, indeed, the protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber* are often caught in the need of acknowledging the ways in which oppressive discourses work in order to be able to question and defy them, and the in necessity of finding alternative articulations to those available to them. The performances of the protagonists of "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" also fit into one of the paradoxes articulated by Tseëlon's analysis of female identity as masquerade, namely "female identity as non-identity" (Tseëlon 1995: 33).

As claimed by Tseëlon, this paradox "ranges from mythological and theological descriptions which define the essence of the woman as dissimulation, [...] as an inessential social construction" (ibid.: 33-34). Broadly speaking, the outcomes of such contentions, which according to Tseëlon are – albeit with fundamental differences (see Tseëlon 1995: 34) – the definition of femininity as fake, duplicitous, masquerade in the light of the importance of "the appearance of femininity" raise questions about the authenticity of the category of woman. In other words, Tseëlon asks, is the appearance of femininity "indicative of inauthenticity of character", or is it "external to the self"? Regardless of the arguments laid out in order to answer this question, what is of relevance here is that in this debate one voice is significantly always absent: that of woman herself (ibid.: 34). The real question to ask, then, which underlies the former, would be: "Given that women are placed in these feminine roles, do they experience them as alien or as part of the self?" (ibid.).

With the instances of "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" Carter seems to engage precisely in this controversy, which is not resolved, but nonetheless is invariably problematized. As the experience of both female protagonists highlight, indeed, the roles designed for women are most certainly socially and discursively devised and more often than not foisted on them – therefore they are alien to their selves. Nevertheless, if Butler's arguments pertaining to theatricality, performativity and repetition, Tseëlon's remarks and the way in which they are represented in Carter's stories are drawn together, the interplay between and mutual productivity of acting and

the embodiment of imposed role positions – experienced as alien as well as part of the self – becomes apparent. Carter’s characters show that the complexity of female identity construction resides in the necessity for women to gradually step out of naturalised role positions through acknowledging their cultural construction and then learning how to play with them and finally how to deconstruct and possibly dismiss them. Patriarchal established ideals of femininity are at first pivotal to female subject-formation and identification, that is they are the first stage in which the idea of “what it means to be a woman” is approached and internalised. After that, however, acknowledgement of the fiction of femininity thus encoded is necessary, and is followed by – as the protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” reveals – the parodic, acquiescent embodiment of those roles aimed at turning patriarchy against itself, that is at mimicking patriarchal conventions in order to trick and bend them. Only then can it be conceivable for woman to finally perceive the roles she wears as “part of the self”, as something which belongs to the subject, that can consciously be displayed at will. And, most importantly, this is the assumption which enables one to take a step further, that is to begin to build autonomous sets of roles and performances, which can defy the discursively predisposed and acceptable ones outright.

The function of the body and of its changes in this process is crucial. It is primarily through the body that woman displays her masquerade, whether it is complicit in what is expected from her or subversively plays with the different identities she is required to wear. Moreover, it is chiefly through the body that the change in attitudes, which is more often than not a sign of will and choice, is made visible. Far from signalling a lack of identity as it is possibly designed to do in the economy of patriarchal mutually exclusive categories, then, the paradoxical condition of femininity, its masquerade, is a weapon in women’s hands. This is to say, the duplicity with which they are associated and which is source of fear and eludes clear understanding is evidence of women’s ability to change and thwart the constrictions of the binary thought.

Besides staging and questioning female identity performances through the motives of theatricality and masquerade, the mask and the idea of playing a role are exploited by Carter to call into question masculine strategies of identity construction through the body and embodiment as well, and to expose their fictive and performative nature.

Significantly enough, if one turns to the “Beauty and the Beast” stories, some paradoxes also emerge from Carter’s characterisation of masculine identity and its transformations.

It is important to point out that Carter’s approach to masculine identity construction in these stories is peculiar, as it develops from the need for the male characters to transcend their physical appearance as animals, which they reject. Interestingly – and paradoxically – both Beasts in the tales about “Beauty and the Beast” literally endeavour to overcome an actual animal shape, whereas the female protagonists try to overcome woman’s symbolic associations with and reduction to the animal, which goes hand in hand with her identification with the body.⁴⁴

In both “Beauty and the Beast” stories the Beasts are dressed, and/or exert themselves to behave like men, in spite of the grotesque results of their efforts. In “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” the Beast’s attitude and appearances are aimed at highlighting the paradoxes of a self split between the resolution to look like a human being and the inevitable surfacing of beastly attributes. On his first appearance before Beauty’s father the Beast stands on his hinder legs and is elegantly dressed like a wealthy man. Yet, his body betrays his nature and his rage exposes him for what he is; a wild animal: “Head of a lion; mane and mighty paws of a lion; he reared on his hind legs like an angry lion yet wore a smoking jacket of dull red brocade and was the owner of that lovely house and the low hills that cupped it” (Carter 1979: 44). Significantly, in front of Beauty’s father, the Beast does not hesitate to stress his animal nature when it feels outraged. When the scared man addresses him as it is convenient because of the aristocratic surroundings as “My good fellow”, the Beast thus reacts: “Good fellow? I am no good fellow! I am the Beast, and you must call me Beast” (ibid.). When it comes to Beauty, however, the lion tries to behave like a gentleman, although, once again, the result is grotesque. When he kisses her hand, indeed, it takes her a while to realise what he is doing:

As she was about to rise, he flung himself at her feet and buried his head in her lap. She stayed stock-still, transfixed; she felt his hot breath on her fingers, the stiff bristle of his muzzle grazing her skin, the rough lapping of his tongue and then, with a flood of compassion, understood: all he is doing is kissing my hands. (ibid.)

⁴⁴As will be discussed in the subsequent sections, animals in Carter’s fairy tales take on very different meanings depending on their sex.

Despite the caricatural character of the scene, Beauty still feels a pang of surprise when she fully realises that she is in fact facing an animal, which walks on all fours: “Then, without another word, he sprang from the room and she saw, with an indescribable shock, he went on all fours” (ibid.).

The male protagonist of this story, thus, is a liminal creature, unmistakably embodying animal features, but at the same time displaying enough human attributes to prompt his final transformation into a human being. Unlike the Beast of the following story, “The Tiger’s Bride”, this one can speak, even if his voice “seemed to issue from a cave full of echoes”, it is a “dark, soft, rumbling growl” (ibid.: 46).

The beastly character of “The Tiger’s Bride” literally wears a mask “that concealed all [its] features”, even though he doesn’t succeed in disguising his actual looks, thus conveying a strident, utterly fake ensemble. The Beast’s body is completely hidden: his face is covered with a mask, his clothes do not leave an inch of his furry body visible.

I never saw a man so big look so two-dimensional, in spite of the quaint elegance of The Beast, in the old-fashioned tailcoat that might, from its looks, have been bought in those distant years before he imposed seclusion on himself; he does not feel he need keep up with the times. There is a crude clumsiness about his outlines, that are on the ungainly, giant side; and he has an odd air of self-imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself to remain upright when he would far rather drop down on all fours. He throws our human aspirations to the godlike sadly awry, poor fellow; only from a distance would you think The Beast not much different from any other man, although he wears a mask with a man’s face painted most beautifully on it. Oh, yes, a beautiful face; but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human: one profile of his mask is the mirror image of the other, too perfect, uncanny. He wears a wig, too, false hair tied at the nape with a bow, a wig of the kind you see in old-fashioned portraits. A chaste silk stock stuck with a pearl hides his throat. And gloves of blond kid that are yet so huge and clumsy they do not seem to cover hands. He is a carnival figure made of papier mâché and crêpe hair. (ibid.: 53)

Furthermore, his smell, too, is clumsily dissimulated so that it actually reveals instead of concealing what it tries to hide: “My senses were increasingly troubled by the fuddling perfume of Milord, far too potent a reek [...]. He must bathe himself in scent, soak his shirts and underlinen in it; what can he smell of, that needs so much camouflage?” (ibid.).

Despite his pitiful, desperate attempts to disguise its animal nature, this Beast is even less human than the lion of the previous story, as he cannot speak: “His masked voice echoes as from a great distance as he stoops over his hand and he has such a growling impediment in his speech that only his valet, who understands him, can interpret for him, as if his master were the clumsy doll and he the ventriloquist” (ibid.: 53-54).

Besides accounting for the masquerade of male identity, this description provides interesting insights into the parallels between woman and animal drawn by the patriarchal tradition, which usually go undetected because of the internalisation and naturalisation of its mutually exclusive binaries. Like other female protagonists throughout the collection, indeed, this - male - Beast does not have a voice of his own, therefore his experience must be mediated, that is translated by another person - the valet - as, for instance, the protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” needs her husband’s gaze to articulate a definition of her self and the mediation of the mirror to be able to account for it and then to part from it. More to the point, the Beast is directly compared with a ventriloquist’s doll, as is the female vampire in “The Lady of the House of Love”, which suggests that their bodies are empty vessels for they are soulless. As a matter of fact, the vampire is source of fear and threatens humanity because it is a body without soul, as the soul has left the body when the latter died, and the fear it engenders in the human being causes its isolation and marginalisation: the threat must be kept under control, confined and expelled from society. Likewise, the animal is traditionally granted a lesser status than the human in the light of its lack of - what could be defined by borrowing widespread catholic terms - soul or conscience.

As Fudge’s study on the perception of animals in Early Modern England (2002) shows, at the origins of the distinction between the human and the animal, and above all of the binary subordination of the latter to the former, lies the uncritical definition of “humanity” regardless of the attributes of “human-ness”. “Human-ness” according to Fudge would designate “the qualities which [...] each area of thought proposes as specific to the human” (Fudge 2002: 9). This is not to say that there exist some features or behaviours that qualify humanness, but rather that different historical epochs - and thus different discursive formations - define what standards are to be met for human beings to

qualify as such. Conversely, the term “humanity” works through exclusion, that is it designates as human – in essential terms – that which possesses the features of humanness within a specific socio-cultural discourse, which is then extended to embrace a supposedly universal human condition. As a consequence, humanity becomes “the unproblematic and unthought category of human: those who are human whether or not they possess the qualities of humanness” (ibid.: 9-10). This is how, for example, having or not having a soul/conscience (the latter being the case of animals and monsters) has become a way of distinguishing the human and the animal and, most importantly, of subordinating what is associated with the animal – as Carter polemically emphasises in these stories, the common features of women and animals.

This seems to be a sufficient reason why the Beasts try to disguise their animal nature and to imitate humanity, even though, as the fairy tales highlight, humanity has to be redefined altogether in order that both men and women be able to freely construct and express their selves.

The association between woman and animal, and the fact that the Beasts’ masquerades are performed through clothes must not be disregarded. It could be helpful here to recall another of the paradoxes of femininity pointed out by Tseëlon; the definition “of the essence of the woman on the side of the matter (body and appearance) as opposed to spirit” and the simultaneous proscription of woman on account of “her inferior essence” (Tseëlon 1995: 7). According to Tseëlon, the importance played by fashion and dress codes in defining and expressing female identity dates back to early Christianity, when female bodies were considered vehicles of sexuality, deemed source of temptation and consequently threats of men’s damnation: “since the Fall is blamed on the woman, the links between sin, body, woman and clothes are easily forged” (ibid.: 14).⁴⁵ Clothes play an ambivalent role in the revelation and concealment of sexuality “because clothes, through their proximity to the body encode the game of modesty and sexual explicitness, denial and celebration of pleasure. Clothes veil the body. Do they provide a kind of disguise of the body’s nakedness, or enhance the body’s nudity that is

⁴⁵ Although the topic is beyond the scope of this research, Biblical references in Carter’s fairy tales are numerous and telling. See, for example Renfroe (2001) who draws a parallel between the protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” and Eve.

fantasised behind?” (ibid.). Furthermore, fashion can be included among the technologies of gender and the mechanisms through which the body is kept under control: “Fashion has functioned as a technology of social control” (ibid.).

Interestingly, in Carter’s fairy tales clothes take on at least two distinct but related sets of meanings. To begin with, they disguise the body; they are masks to be worn by the male Beasts to hide their animal nature and to enact a masculine performance, but they also conceal, enclose and confine the female body, that is, female sexuality. In the first sense, then, they are a metaphor of lack of power over the body, of the difficulty of escaping social control, either because the need to identify with something familiar and accepted is too strong (in the case of the Beasts) or because they are the vehicles of a set of imposed behaviours which the subjects are not yet able to question and to elude (in the case of the Beauty in “The Tiger’s Bride”). Nonetheless, clothes also play a second, important role in Carter’s stories, for they are instruments through which subjects express agency as well. This second instance accounts for the performances of different characters in the collection and, paradoxically enough, is represented through two opposite actions: wearing or taking off clothes.

Wearing clothes generally conveys the idea of putting on an identity, and expresses performances through the body. In “The Bloody Chamber”, as has already been shown, the young bride uncritically wears the clothes her husband gives her in order to identify with his desired image of her, until she finally realises that she can exploit this imposed identification to willingly perform the part of the subservient wife for her own advantage. Obviously enough, this cannot be considered downright subversion, as it does not trouble patriarchal discursive arrangements, but rather a preliminary strategy of resistance.

In “The Lady of the House of Love” clothes are played with to provide a grotesque contrast between the predatory and deadly nature of the female vampire and the virginal, alluring innocence her white bridal gown is supposed to convey. The Lady utterly – and most likely purposefully – mocks the mythical “seductive threat” (Tseëlon 1995: 25) ascribed to woman. Her attire, indeed, does not carry the seductive dangers of a young untouched body nor the promises of the fulfilment of sexual desire, but rather conjures up pathetic childish games:

[...] this shape resolved itself into that of, of all things, a hoop-skirted dress of white satin draped here and there with lace, a dress fifty or sixty years out of fashion but once, obviously intended for a wedding. And then he saw the girl who wore the dress [...] so that it was little by little, as his eyes grew accustomed to the half-dark, that he saw how beautiful and how very young the bedizened scarecrow was, and he thought of a child dressing up in her mother's clothes, perhaps a child putting on the clothes of a dead mother in order to bring her, however briefly, to life again. (Carter 1979: 100)

Far from being a seductive threat, then, the “shipwrecked bride” (ibid.: 101) gives the impression of a young girl – “he thought she must be only sixteen or seventeen years old” (ibid.) – clumsily playing the grownup woman, even though she is in fact the ancient, dreadful “beautiful queen of the vampires [...] queen of night, queen of terror” (ibid: 93, 95).

In this instance, then, clothes represent the attempt to wear an identity which does not suit the subject, a masquerade which dissimulates an inherent monstrosity that the woman is not able to escape. It is important to note that this does not mean that the Lady possesses an essential nature, which she is not able to run away from, as if identity was an easily pliable inner core. Rather, as Carter suggests by means of this story, what is inescapable for the vampire is the immobility of her condition, the impossibility of changing, which is the reason why she strives for becoming human and persists in staging her identity, even if she is doomed to fail. The bridal gown, then, is also evidence of the empowering potential of the staging of identity, a choice the woman makes of eternally being on the threshold in a double sense; she cannot help being halfway between life and death and she paradoxically chooses to be in one of – human – women's most displaced position: the wedding day, which traditionally formalizes the transition from girlhood to womanhood.

“Wolf-Alice” is perhaps the best example of how wearing clothes could be an empowering act. After the girl has started to recognise her image in the mirror and gone through the subsequent stages of identification, she maladroitly manages to wear a white dress – which, once again, could remind one of a bridal gown:

She pawed and tumbled the dress the Duke had tucked away behind the mirror for a while. The dust was soon shaken out of it; she experimentally inserted her front legs in the sleeves. Although the dress was torn and crumpled, it was so white and of such sinuous texture that she thought, before she put it on, she must thoroughly wash off her coat of ashes in the water from the pump in the yard, which she knew how to manipulate with her cunning forepaw. In the mirror, she saw how this white dress made her shine. (ibid.: 124-125)

The dress has a double symbolic implication for the wolf-girl. On the one hand, it is evidence of Alice's humanity, which did not have a clear status before, as she behaved and perceived herself more like an animal than like a human being: "now she knew how to wear clothes and so had put on the visible sign of her difference from them" (Carter 1979: 125). On the other hand, it suggests that the girl is starting to enact her femininity, to take hold of her identity and performatively stage it.

Both these contentions could be argued against, as they could in fact put forward a regression on Alice's part, that is by wearing a female dress she has decided to give up the animality which was a vehicle of her positive difference from the other human beings, i.e. the fact that she was not subject to normalising cultural discourses and that she could escape and freely act outside of limiting social constrictions. Moreover, the wedding dress could signify that after all she has decided to identify with disciplined heterosexual performances of femininity. However, evidence in the text demonstrates that Alice's entrance into discourse maintains enough peculiarities to be still deemed subversive. As a matter of fact, she has not entirely abandoned the animal features that empowered her. Most notably, like a wolf she still relies more on smell than on sight, which means that she will not be subject to the defining powers of the male gaze, unlike other protagonists of *The Bloody Chamber*.

Although she could not run so fast on two legs in petticoats, she trotted out in her new dress to investigate the odorous October hedgerows [...] delighted with herself but still, now and then, singing to the wolves [...].
[...] then her nostrils twitched to catch the rank stench of the dead that told her her co-habitor was at hand [...]. And if her nostrils flare suspiciously at the choking reek of incense and his do not, that is because she is far more sentient than he. (ibid.: 125)

In addition, her humanity remains at odds with that of the other villagers, who are superstitious and hostile, who reject difference and refuse to understand it, therefore are unable to conceive of reciprocity and exchange. Not only have they confined Alice and the Duke at the margins of society because of their difference, but now they hunt the Duke and try to kill him because they believe he is a threat to their survival, as they did with Alice's wolf mother – despite neither was harming them: the Duke feeds on corpses, not on lively bodies: he “hunts the graveyards” (ibid.: 124). It is, finally, by means of one of the senses discarded by human beings – i.e. taste – that Alice is able to save the Duke, that is to bring him back to human life, licking “without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead” (ibid.: 126), as an animal would do. The ongoing metamorphoses of her self and her choice to perform her womanhood resulting from it hide a transformative potential which, in its reciprocal reach, is capable of remodelling the other, too.

As for the female dress the girl picks from the Duke's wardrobe, it is certainly a sign that Carter decides to stay within the territory of a normalised heterosexual economy. Nevertheless, at the same time it questions traditional associations between woman and animal, since the act of putting on a dress signals a distinction between the realm of the human and that of the animal, although their boundaries are porous, so that the woman always has the chance to embody those animal attributes which can help her contest and resist the external imposition of a tailored and buttoned-up female identity.

Taking off the clothes, when it is the outcome of an autonomous decision is a less ambivalent act, which more often than not can be directly associated with agency and empowerment. In *The Bloody Chamber* nakedness is not to be read in negative terms as lack of modesty or intentional and tricky seductiveness, as the patriarchal tradition would interpret it (see Tseñlon 1995: 29), but rather as the willing act with which woman embraces sexual desire and acknowledges that her connection with the body is not a limit, but a potential – the possibility of experiencing pleasure and reciprocity which engenders and celebrates change.

In “The Company of Wolves” Carter plays with the transitional ritual described in the folkloric versions of the fairy tale “Red Riding Hood”, where the wolf orders the girl to throw her clothes into the fire, which traditionally symbolises renewal and rebirth. In

Carter's story, it is the protagonist herself who willingly takes off her clothes and throws them into the fire, after she has understood that being scared of the wolf – and of the sexual desire it stands for – does her “no good”:

She [...] took of her scarlet shawl, the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses, and, since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid.

What shall I do with my shawl?

Throw it on the fire, dear one. You won't need it again.

She bundled up her shawl and threw it on the blaze, which instantly consumed it.

Then she drew her blouse over her head; her small breasts gleamed as if the snow had invaded the room.

What shall I do with my blouse?

Into the fire with it, too, my pet.

The thin muslin went flaring up the chimney like a magic bird and now off came her skirt, her woollen stockings, her shoes, and on to fire they went, too, and were gone for good. The firelight shone through the edges of her skin; now she was clothed only in her untouched integument of flesh. (Carter 1979: 117-118)

After that, the girl takes off the wolf's clothes as well, and takes the initiative of kissing him:

Then went directly to the man with red eyes in whose unkempt mane the lice moved; she stood up on tiptoe and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt. [...]

She freely gave the kiss she owed him [...then] she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. (ibid.: 118)

With these acts, Red Riding Hood shows that she is eager to dismiss all the disciplined behaviours which society has taught her and to start acting on her desire on her own terms, even if it means breaching all the laws of disciplined and convenient femininity – her “integument of flesh” is “untouched” because she is a virgin, but also in that now she is free from any externally forced restraint. The agency and empowerment implied by this action is expressed through the domestication of the wolf: instead of eating her, he lies with her in bed, where the dangerous, threatening beast has now turned into a “tender wolf” (ibid.: 118). Once again, the transformation of the girl, who decides to free herself from social expectations, results in the transformation of the animal, and in a telling reversal, the supposedly dangerous untamed female desire succeeds in taming an actually dangerous creature. The wolf, indeed, tries to scare the girl: “What big teeth you have! [...] All the better to eat you with”, only to find out that

she bursts out laughing, as now she is wise and “she knew she was nobody’s meat” (ibid.). Then, in a lovely act of mutual exchange, she encourages the wolf to do what she did by helping him take off his clothes.

Likewise, in “The Tiger’s Bride” willing unclothing on the part of both characters signals the reciprocity required for a transformation that goes beyond and at the same time emphasises the metamorphosis taking place on the level of identity, and pre-empts the actual physical change. The Beast finally decides to take off his mask and to show himself for what he is:

The tiger sat still as a heraldic beast, in the pact he had made with its own ferocity to do me no harm. He was far larger than I could have imagined, from the poor, shabby things I’d seen once, in the Czar’s menagerie at Petersburg, the golden fruit of their eyes dimming, withering in the far North of captivity. Nothing about him reminded me of humanity. (ibid.: 64)

And the girl chooses to look at him, despite the fear and the panic arising in her at the very idea of such a sight:

‘If you will not let him see you without your clothes -’
I involuntarily shook my head -
‘- you must, then, prepare yourself for the sight of my master, naked.’
[...] My composure deserted me; all at once I was on the brink of panic. I did not think that I could bear the sight of him, whatever he was.
[...] When I saw how scared he was I might refuse, I nodded.
[...] I felt my breast ripped apart as if I suffered a marvellous wound. The valet moved forward as if to cover up his master now the girl had acknowledged him, but I said: ‘No.’ (ibid.: 64)

After confronting her fear, Beauty realises that the Beast, too, is afraid of its nakedness, of being helpless in the face of his body and desire, therefore she is ready to give up her disguise, too, that is the idea that nakedness is shameful and sexual desire something to be restrained: “I, therefore, shivering, now unfastened my jacket, to show him I would do him no harm” (ibid.). As a result of this wilful act, she acknowledges: “I felt I was at liberty for the first time in my life” (ibid.). And when she returns to her room she realizes that the clockwork maid, which earlier she had felt was her twin, now is not anymore: “[...] while my maid, whose face was no longer the spit of my own, continued bonnily to beam. I will dress her in my own clothes, wind her up, send her back to

perform the part of my father's daughter" (ibid.: 65). The woman is now freed from patriarchal discursive constraints because the choice to fully identify with her body and to embrace her desire made her realise that it is source of power, and she is ready to undergo the ultimate metamorphosis, to voluntarily turn into a beast.

3. EXCEEDING BODILY BOUNDARIES: BECOMING ANIMAL

Escaping the paradigms encoded by established discourses is not an easy task, but Carter sets out to explore ways of amending and changing them through the redefinition – or, in some instances, the rejection – of the confines between the human and the animal, which begins with blurring the boundaries between their bodies. In order to dismiss the negative definition of the animal, and its association with woman, animality must be redefined in positive terms, so that when woman chooses to turn into a beast, it becomes a willing act of empowerment and liberation. If the strategy succeeds, patriarchy is once more tricked, and its logic is turned upside-down and against itself, which means that its discourses are subverted as well.

Even though in Carter's fairy tales male and female animals and their transformations are tackled in different ways, their bodies share a fundamental feature: openness, which signals a collapse of the confines between the human and the animal. These permeable bodies are located on the edge of two different states, thus can oscillate between them, and embody the desired features of both. This is an inherently subversive standpoint, as animals have traditionally been defined "the metaphysical other[s] of man" (Braidotti 2002: 121), that is they have historically been set in opposition to the human being in order to point out the differences which emphasise and sustain human superiority. The fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber* succeed in questioning and overthrowing patriarchal assumptions which endorse and hand down clear-cut and hierarchized distinctions between animal and human – where woman is associated with the former, therefore placed in a subordinate position with respect to man, who by extension becomes the universal term for the human.

Most remarkably, in the stories the boundaries between the human and the animal are unsettled and made penetrable through the metamorphosis of the bodies of the protagonists, which goes both ways: from – male – animal to human (in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”) and vice versa (in “The Tiger’s Bride”, where a woman turns into a beast), and whose nature is investigated and negotiated in “Wolf-Alice” (where a girl struggles to build her human identity after being raised by, and mainly identify with, animals).

The first systematised attempts at stabilising the confines of the category of the “human” date back to Descartes’ thought, which has been accepted and enforced by subsequent patriarchal discourses: “The Cartesian subject is based in part on an accepted differentiation of the human from the animal, defined by the possession of a soul [...] the site of the soul [...] was only to be traced in the human and [...] signifies both rationality and immortality” (Fudge, Gilbert & Wiseman 2002: 3). Nevertheless, the scarce credibility of different endeavours to demonstrate scientifically that the human body hosts a soul disclose that this argument is hardly tenable, therefore new, different ways must (and have been) devised to prove that the differences between human beings and animals justify the superiority of the former. “Human” is in fact a “fragile category”, which “has never been stable or consensual. [...] it] has no sharp or evident frontier and is for its existence in constant need of contrasting border-figures, partly human – or, rather, intermittently human and inhuman according to their context ” (ibid.: 1-2). It is evident, then, that the notion of the “human” is context-dependent and is at the same time a medium and an outcome of discursive negotiations aimed at enforcing and reinforcing control over human bodies and behaviours in time. The definition of humanity proposed by Descartes and accepted, universalised and naturalised by patriarchal thoughts has engendered the parallel between woman and animal that Carter’s fairy tales seek to contest and to amend. Woman, indeed, shares animals’ otherness, she is the negative half of the binary needed by men to assert and uphold the superiority of the rationality they purport to embody.

Even if the definition of humanity offered by Descartes has taken roots over time, the materiality of human experience throughout history has demonstrated that “possession of a human shape [which entails possession of a soul, as it is located in the human body] did not ensure full access to the privileges of humanity, and deviation from

that category has figured in terms of monstrosity” (ibid.. 3). In other words, following a Foucauldian understanding of the functioning of discourse, what exceeds the norm, instead of being examined tends to be labelled as abnormal and marginalised. It follows, however, that since discursive formations are historically contextual constructions, they are subject to modification through resistance when they are no longer adequate to account for and regulate changing social practices: “The borders between self and other, human and animal [...] would seem to offer proof of difference. Yet the borders of the human turn out to change according to context and point of view” (ibid.: 5). Given that “women, too, are found at the border of the human and its others” (ibid.: 7), the category can and must be displaced and questioned in that women, like the animal “other” are of “structural importance [...] as props that confirm the ‘same’ in His dominant subject position”. In this way, the dominant half of the binary is challenged and displaced in “its very foundations” (Braidotti 2002: 118).

One strategy which moves towards this direction is eroding the boundaries between the human and the animal, all the more if the association between woman and animal is polemically literalised, and woman is encouraged to identify with or to become the animal as a means of empowerment. This act, indeed, would unsettle normalised power balances and point to the positive potential of the metamorphosis performed through the dissolution of the confines between human and animal bodies.

In Carter’s fairy tales, animals exceed all their traditional functions; like the Deleuzian becoming-animal, they “are neither functional to teleological systems of classification, nor are they about metaphors: they are rather about metamorphoses” (ibid.: 126). For starters, their strength “lies precisely in not being-one which is expressed in their attachment to and interdependence on a territory” (ibid.: 133). Therefore, re-signifying the identification of women with animals in these terms, which stress communion and mutual exchange, could bring forward the dissolution of patriarchal binary oppositions, so that the emerging subjectivity is “not split along the traditional axes of mind/body, consciousness/unconsciousness, or reason/imagination”. On the contrary, it becomes a “forever shifting entity, fundamentally driven by desire for expansion towards its many-faceted exterior borders/other” (ibid.: 131). The subject thus defined, then, exceeds the borders of its body, is able to incorporate the other without

consuming it, and celebrates the instability of its identity because it entails forthcoming, endless, change.

My contention is that the transformations undergone by the bodies of Carter's female characters tend to this outcome, that is they show how trespassing and transgressing fixed bodily borderlines challenges discursively imposed behaviours and helps them perform – attempted and provisional but autonomous – identities. In other words, they are examples which indicate how to exceed the norm and propose ways of re-encoding it.

The body from which Deleuze starts to construct his notion of the “becoming animal” is an “un-organic” body: “a body without organs, a body freed from the codes of phallogocentric functions of identity” (ibid.: 124). It is not a body literally deprived of its organs, but rather the functions of its organs are creatively rearranged so that the moral and prescriptive values associated with disciplined bodily performances can be re-signified, resulting in the empowerment of the subject who can thus inscribe new meanings on its body:

The un-organic ‘body without organs’ is supposed to create creative disjunction in this system [the phallogocentric one], freeing organs from their indexation to certain prerequisite functions: this is the process of becoming animal. In some ways, this calls for a generalised perversion of all bodily functions, not only the sexual ones; it is a way of scrambling the master-code of phallogocentrism and loosening its power over the body. (ibid)

“Wolf-Alice” can be considered an experiment aimed at testing the possibility of plying human bodily functions by integrating them with animal ones in order to detach the human body from the phallogocentric pre-eminence of sight, which keeps at a distance and others the observed object while imposing on it a limited set of meanings. That is why, even after having initiated a socialisation process towards womanhood, the wolf-girl still keeps on relying more on the other senses, even if they are traditionally subordinated to sight exactly because of their association with animality: “She can net so much more of the world than we can through the fine, hairy, sensitive filters of her nostrils that her poor eyesight does not trouble her” (Carter 1979: 119).

The becoming-animal undoes one of the metaphysics of the self, scrambling the distinction between human and non-human. [...] It not only engages in dialogue with the classical 'other' of Man [...which in this case is Woman/Animal] but it also frees the animal [and by extension, woman] from the anthropocentric gaze altogether". (Braidotti 2002: 145)

As a matter of fact, the invaluable asset at Alice's disposal in the construction of her identity is the liminal position of her body: neither animal nor human, but an ongoing process of negotiation between the two. The way in which Carter represents Wolf-Alice's purposefully incomplete transition from animal to human, which is paired with her transition from childhood to girlhood, does not meet the standards of normalised subject formation because her animal drives are not "processed and tamed in order to be made tolerable", their "raw intensity" is not "turned down", but rather incorporated in the substance of her womanhood, so that she never ceases to howl at the moon although it is not a "proper behaviour" (ibid.: 141; see Carter 1979: 126). Like her hyphenated name suggests throughout the text, Wolf-Alice will continue to inhabit the borderless, metamorphic space of interstices, always in-between.

The physical transformation of the woman into a tiger in "The Tiger's Bride" is part of Carter's re-signification and empowerment of the female body under another perspective. Whereas the internal and external metamorphosis of "Wolf-Alice" lead her to humanising the Duke through "instinctual, merciful, maternal" love (Atwood 2001: 147), the physical change of Beauty in "The Tiger's Bride" is the outcome of sexual drives, of a desiring subject whose passion urges her to exceed the confines of her human body to fulfil those instincts which are proscribed to her or blamed in the light of her femininity.

This tale reflects on the interactions between the body and desire and the strategies through which the latter can be freely disclosed and acted upon. The reflections on the topic fictionalised in the story could stem from challenging at least two assumptions. First, that the association between passion and woman has been traditionally pathologised and has served as a weapon for patriarchy to uphold the need to keep female bodies under control. Second, that drawing a clear-cut distinction between human and animal has assisted phallogocentric discourses in trying to tame desire - and the animal attributes in the human body - in order to build a model of the body as a "well-organised

and functioning organism”, whose sexual desires are by extension disciplined, controlled and regulated into “normal orgasms” (Braidotti 2002: 140) – that is, into heterosexual reproduction.

Braidotti provides a sharp analysis of how passion has become synonymous with dangerous disruption, its attachment to the female body leading to the need of taming and restraining its performances. Deconstruction is then coupled with re-construction, and the philosopher offers an alternative way of redefining passion and desire in positive terms, in order that they become – as Carter’s story exemplifies – the guiding forces which can trigger change through alternative bodily performances:

Historically, the dangerous tendencies or intense drives towards blurring of categorical distinctions or boundaries have been discursively packaged under the heading of ‘passions’. The term passion, of course, is of the same etymological root as the notion of pathology. Both of them, in western culture, bear connotations of a disease that shatters the balance of the subject. Since the eighteenth century especially, the pathologization of the passions has led to the modern regime of sexuality that Foucault analyses in terms of *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*. [...] This historical process has also invested primarily the female gender as a high-risk, ‘emotional’ category. The hysterical body of women in some ways marks the threshold of this process of pathologising human affectivity. (ibid.: 143)

Needless to say, in patriarchal regimes the female body is opposed to male rationality, and the two categories are mutually exclusive. As Braidotti contends, nevertheless, “the process of becoming is collectively driven, that is to say relational and external; it is also framed by affectivity or desire, and is thus ec-centric to rational control” (ibid.). Albeit dislodged from rationality, and mainly constituted by “unconscious affects, drives or desire”, “the processes of change and transformation, however difficult and at times painful, are also empowering and highly desirable events” (ibid.).

These contentions precisely mirror the experience of Beauty in “The Tiger’s Bride”, where the girl at first rationally speculates about the difference between herself – as a human being – and the Beast and its valet – as animals – only to realise that despite being physically human, she has been objectified like a bargaining item. Thereby she comes to the conclusion that the notion of humanity she was taught needs to be reconsidered altogether.

A profound sense of strangeness slowly began to possess me. I knew my two companions were not, in any way, as other men, the simian retainer and the master for whom he spoke [...]. I knew they lived according to a different logic than I had done until my father abandoned me to the wild beasts in his human carelessness. This knowledge gave me a certain fearfulness still; but, I would say, not much... I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason. If I could see not one single soul in that wilderness of desolation all around me, then the six of us – mounts and riders, both – could boast amongst us not one single soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things when the good Lord opened the gates of Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out. Understand, then, that though I would not say I privately engaged in metaphysical speculation as we rode through the reedy approaches to the river, I certainly meditated on the nature of my own state, how I had been bought and sold, passed from hand to hand. (Carter 1979: 63)

After realising that rationality does not help her solve the riddle of her identity and humanity, the girl decides to turn to instinct, to let her body be the guide and to embrace the instability of transformation. Most notably, her metamorphosis, like the one advocated for by Braidotti, is not an individual act: it requires the presence of the other – in this case of the Beast – to be fully enacted and achieved. In addition, it is a painful process, which is accounted for by the I-narrator of the story as a sort of “flaying”. When the girl takes off her clothes for the second time, in her room, the disrobing hurts because now she is aware of the symbolic reach of this act: she is ready to take off all the meanings imposed on her body, to strip off her flesh and go back to being meat so as to re-signify her body anew.

Then I took off my riding habit, left it where it lay on the floor. But, when I got down my shift, my arms dropped to my sides. I was unaccustomed to nakedness. I was so unused to my own skin that to take off all my clothes involved a kind of flaying. I thought The Beast had wanted a little thing compared with what I was prepared to give him; but it is not natural for humankind to go naked, not since first we hid our loins with fig leaves. [...] I felt as much atrocious pain as if I was stripping off my own underpelt. (Carter 1979: 66)

The second step after giving up the meanings and performances imposed on womanhood – i.e. what the girl did on the riverbanks, when she showed her nakedness to the Beast – is stripping off the assumptions that define humanity, whose cultural constructedness is conveyed by the biblical reference. The cultural codes are so deeply inscribed on the woman's body that she feels a physical, excruciating pain.

When Beauty approaches the Beast she is “raw”, that is her body has been freed from the weight of the many – metaphorical – constrictive layers of clothes, and she is eager to offer herself to him because she knows that “his appetite need not be my extinction” (Carter 1979: 67). The pact of reciprocity has been made, and she is ready to undergo the ultimate metamorphosis:

He dragged himself closer and closer to me, until I felt the harsh velvet of his head against my hand, then a tongue, abrasive as sand-paper. ‘He will lick the skin off me!’ And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive sin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur. (ibid.)

The powerful image of the skin being licked away resonates the depth of the bodily change that the subject needs to painfully endure if it wants to become animal, that is to learn how to dismiss the construction of difference as otherness and “pejoration”, and conversely how to incorporate the other – and being incorporated by it – so that desire and pleasure do not entail being taken from, but rather being experienced together and exchanged. The “changes of co-ordinates” required by the choice of embracing metamorphosis as a constructive – albeit unstable and never ending – force, call for

The political and conceptual necessity to change in depth and thus to extract from our enfolded memory the repertoire of available images for self-representation. [...] I would [...] describe it as a process of peeling off, stratum after stratum, the layers of signification that have been tattooed in the surface of our body and – more importantly – in its psychic recesses and the internalized folds of one's sacrosanct ‘experience’. Like a snake shedding an old skin, one must remember to forget it. (Braidotti 2002: 170)

4. GROTESQUE INTERLUDE

The metamorphosing bodies of Carter's heroines become permeable in exceeding the boundaries between the human and the animal, that is they open themselves to absorb and incorporate the substance of the body of the other coming from outside as well as to expose and expel what is inside. The openness and porosity which characterise the body "becoming animal" are to be found also in the bodies of supernatural creatures and monsters dealt with in the stories yet to be investigated, which undergo a transformation, too, or are inherently metamorphic. These similarities allow one to read all these excessive bodies against the notion of the "grotesque body" under multiple perspectives, which deepens the complexities of the polysemy taken on by the body in Carter's tales as well as guides and intermingles the analysis of the metamorphic body of the animal with that of the monster.

So far the body has been analysed in its interrelation with identity, its weight and metamorphoses linked to the construction and development of the subject's identity in order to show that the materiality of the body is shaped by but also, most importantly, shapes the transformations taking place at the level of subjectivity. The boundaries of these bodies are constructed and deconstructed with relation to psychic processes, that is they can and do change, they can become feeble and permeable, and thus be trespassed when established discourses around the development of subjectivity are contested and rearranged. As Butler would put it, the materiality of the body is not a causal effect of the psyche, the body is not inherently ontological and materialised by a psyche which "establishes its modes of appearance as an epistemological object" (Butler 1993: 66). On the contrary, the psyche is "an epistemic grid through which the body is known" but is also "formative of morphology": "psychic projection confers boundaries and, hence, unity on the body, so that the very contours of the body are sites that vacillate between the psychic and the material. Bodily contours and morphology *are* [...] tensions between the psychic and the material" (ibid.).

In the light of these considerations, calling into question and challenging patriarchal traditional ways of understanding the workings of the psyche and its disciplinary impact on the body entails opening the borders of the body, so that its

surface can expand and incorporate new meanings through alternative mechanisms of inscription. That is why the experiences of Carter's protagonists tend towards openness rather than the demarcation of the boundaries of the skin, which becomes synonymous with a layer of clothing to be stripped off, or more generally a thin film that can be easily wounded and broken to let out the bodily fluids it contains.

Among the different characterisations and implications of the notion of "grotesque body", the one that best suits the characters represented in *The Bloody Chamber* is perhaps its ability to blur "the boundary between self and other" (Creed 1995: 131) which leads to a reciprocal incorporation, and emphasises the necessarily relational features of the materialisation of an un-disciplined body in Carter's collection. As Russo explains, the notion of Grotesque/Carnavalesque body introduced by Bakhtin already stresses the social, collective nature of the body, whose materiality is not "contained in the biological individual [...] but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed'. [...] the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world; 'it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects'" (Russo 1994: 8). Moreover, its subversive character lies in its disruption of what is discursively constructed as the normal, naturalised body – which usually corresponds with a clearly circumscribed body whose boundaries are as tightly closed as possible: "The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and sleek; it is identified with the 'high' or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the Rationalism, individualism and normalising aspirations of the bourgeoisie" (ibid.). By contrast, due to the binary and mutually exclusive organisation of the categories predisposed by phallogocentric traditions, the opposite, negative, counterpart of this idealised body (often associated with the feminine, but, more broadly, with the body of the other, which is different and unaccountable for whatever reasons) is the grotesque body, which is "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official 'low' culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation" (ibid.).

The flaws of the grotesque body, then, turn into its assets, as its excesses lead to transformation, whereas the ideal, static, body, is condemned to immobility and to endlessly mirroring itself and its perfection. Carter, thus, chooses to represent open bodies without clear-cut boundaries because only those bodies are capable of becoming

vehicles of individual as well as social change. Once again, politics and poetics overlap, and the transgression of patriarchal politics is brought about through the fictionalised, narrative representation of – more or less – transgressive bodies and their metamorphoses.

This incorporative notion of the grotesque has become a bodily category which “emerges as a deviation from the norm” (ibid.: 11), that is it sets itself in opposition to the normalising drive of patriarchal disciplining bodily practices. As Russo remarks, however, it is necessary to draw a distinction between the general – assumed as universal but actually mainly referred to the male – conceptualisation of the grotesque body offered by Bakhtin, and its implications when it comes to the female body. The “positioning of the grotesque – as superficial and to the margins is suggestive of a certain construction of the feminine” (ibid.: 5-6). The genealogies of the female body and of the grotesque are “mutually constitutive” even if there is no “exclusive” or “essential” relationship between them, and most notably despite the correspondence between the two terms being a tautology, since the feminine “is always defined against the male norm” (ibid.: 12). That is to say, the female body is always identified as deviation from a standard in itself; if the “universal thinking-subject position” is assumed to be the “*disembodied*” masculinity set in opposition to its other, then woman is “over-embodied and dis-identified as the essential *other* marked by her unthinkable bodiliness” (Kerchy 2008: 39).

The transformations and transgressions of the bodies described in *The Bloody Chamber* have been analysed in terms of performative, iterative constructions caught in the tension between complicity in and subversion of the norm. As Butler contends, however,

the normative force of performativity – its power to establish what qualifies as ‘being’ – works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well. And in the case of bodies those exclusions haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed: the unviable, the unnarrativisable, the traumatic. (Butler 1993: 187-188)

This insight is of particular relevance to the investigation of the female grotesque body for at least two main reasons. As will soon be shown, first of all it introduces the site of the abject and its association with the female body as source of marginalisation and the

designation of woman as monster due to the threatening character of her bodily attributes. Secondly, it discloses the implications of a grotesque body that incorporates the other, thus making its abject experience viable and narrativisable, and helps the subject cope with and overcome traumatic events through reciprocity.

The grotesque, metamorphosing body devised by Carter is “a paradoxical space that fuses the ideologically prescribed writing *on* the body with the subversive materially induced writing *from* the body”, where “the body is regarded as a palimpsestic space of polymorphous, antagonistic texts” (Kerchy, 2008). The subjects-in-process accounted for in the tales, indeed, “are embodied in Carter’s fiction by the grotesque, freakishly (re)incarnated body generating its subversively somatised narratives” (ibid.).

The bodies of the female protagonists of the stories can be considered “in-process” – as can their identities (see Manley 2011) – in that they are subject to change because of the process of growing up (which usually coincides with menstruation), the loss of virginity, or a physical change (like that undergone by the Tiger’s Bride) which points to the choice of giving different meanings to the body, of completely identifying with it and with its desires by welcoming transformation.

Interestingly, a further dimension of woman’s bodily experience stems from the inherent openness of her body, whose changes are signalled by the spill of bodily fluids – more specifically, blood – which, in turn, lead to the coincidence between her body and abjection. In addition, it is thanks to this association that the female body, whose changes always entail the shedding of blood, is constructed as threatening and ultimately monstrous.

Among the specificities of the female grotesque body lies the abject quality of its blood, included by Kristeva in the category of “bodily waists” (Creed 1993: 9), which threatens the stability of the disciplined body by exposing its fissures and its contents.

The menstrual blood countlessly referred to in *The Bloody Chamber* locates woman in a liminal position: “at the threshold of womanhood” (Creed 1995: 150), which is grotesque – i.e. it disturbs normality and order – because it hints at “female power associated with bodily change” (ibid.). This is the case of Red Riding Hood in “The Company of Wolves”, whose shawl stands throughout the story for her first bleeding and locates her on the threshold between girlhood and womanhood: “Her mother and the

grandmother [...] knitted her the red shawl that, today, has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow. [...] she has just started her woman bleeding” (Carter 1979: 113). Later on, her decision to take off the shawl, once again explicitly linked to her menstruation, suggests that she is ready to leave behind her girlhood – i.e. her naiveté, related to fear for what is unknown – to embrace the sexual pleasure associated with womanhood – after she has chosen to overcome fear: “[she] took off her scarlet shawl, the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses, and, since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (ibid.: 117).

Likewise, in “Wolf-Alice” the menstrual blood’s abject quality is inherent in its symbolic association with growing up. In this case the displacement brought about by the abject fluid is even more significant as it also stands for the threshold between humanity and animality. As has already been remarked, indeed, it is through her first bleeding that the wolf-child begins to understand the meaning of time and change, significantly in a different, non linear way (ibid.: 122-123). The ideas of transformation and renewal implicit in Alice’s first experience of menstruation are even stronger than those of the previous example, as she believes her bleedings are adding new skin to her body: “She would spend hours examining the new skin that had been born, it seemed to her, of her bleeding” (ibid.: 124). This “new skin” could well stand for the new consciousness the girl is acquiring of her body, no longer a functional empty vessel which performs vital functions, but an inscriptive surface on which she can begin to write something new and from which she can look at the world through different senses.

Within the collection, the blood linked to female metamorphosing grotesque body as a site of abjection and threats to the established order is also that which is spilled through the loss of virginity. The stories also emphasise the ambivalence of this kind of bloodshed, as Carter shows different instances in which the equally abject voluntary or violently imposed loss of virginity signifies different – more or less empowering – processes of appropriation of the body on the part of woman. The eagerness with which Red Riding Hood strips off her shawl, and subsequently her clothes, suggesting that she is ready to lay in bed with the wolf, is at odds with the reluctance of the protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” to do the same. The latter, indeed, endures all the rituals related to the first sexual intercourse with intentional detachment, expressed by the action of looking

away from the mirror or from her husband's eyes when she glimpses the reflection of the woman, whom she is not ready to identify with yet. The loss of virginity constitutes for her a violation of her body, paralleled by the atrocities she witnesses in the bloody chamber where the Marquis keeps the bleeding corpses of his previous wives and victims. The motif of defloration is expressed by the blood stains on the sheets, when the Marquis ironically remarks:

'The maids will have changed our sheets already,' he said. 'We do not hang the bloody sheets out of the window to prove the whole of Brittany you are a virgin. Not in these civilized times. But I should tell you it would have been the first time in all my married lives I could have shown my interested tenants such a flag.' (Carter 1979: 19)

Although the words of the Marquis entail an ostensible idea of progress by implying that the wife's virginity is no longer deemed a vaunted trophy, their meaning suggests the contrary. The husband is in fact proud of being able to boast about the virginity of this young bride, like he would do about a new exotic item in his collection.

The objectification of this female body and its violation with relation to defloration stands out even more when set in comparison with the experience of the female protagonist of "Puss in Boots". The gravity with which the topic is tackled in the first story is indeed replaced by mockery and a jovial, comical atmosphere in the second. Here sex is a liberating, playful act, perhaps enjoyed even more profoundly by women since, as the clever cat remarks: "women, I think, are, of the two sexes, the more keenly tuned to the sweet music of their bodies" (ibid.: 78). Towards the end of the tale, the young lady unhappily married with an older, nasty man, finally has the opportunity to enjoy sex with a handsome young boy after being deprived of it by her greedy husband, who does not dare to enjoy any kind of consummation which could entail a loss of some kind – even of physical energy – or could spoil the perfection of his wife. The sexual encounter is accurately staged like a "grand charade" (ibid.) by the cat and its master, who pretend to be rat exterminators in order to access the impenetrable house of Signor Pantaleone – symbolically identifiable with the untouched body of his pretty wife. In this case, the blood-stained sheets are comically camouflaged to conceal the betrayal out of which the girl has taken as much pleasure as possible (ibid.: 79), and the bed is turned into the

battlefield of a war between cat and mice, whose implicit sexual undertones are easily inferable: “Puss had a mighty battle with the biggest beast you ever saw upon this very bed; can’t you see the bloodstains on the sheets?” (ibid.).

Regardless of its positive or negative associations, obviously enough the loss of virginity is dealt with in the collection as the infliction of a bleeding wound on the female body. It is interesting to note that in at least two other instances Carter resorts to the fairy tale motif of the virgin girl pricking her finger. Thus are insinuated the deflorations of Beauty in “The Tiger’s Bride” – the girl pricks her finger with a thorn of a rose that the Beast has given her, smearing it with blood (ibid.: 55) – and of Snow White in “The Snow Child” – the girl born solely out of her father’s desire “pricks her finger on the torn” of the rose the Countess commanded her to pick (ibid.: 92) before dying and being raped by her father.

A number of other examples in *The Bloody Chamber* refer to or explicitly mention blood and its flowing with relation both to the female and to the male body. Besides menstruation and defloration, blood usually marks a kind of violation of the body, as it is injured, devoured, drained, maimed, torn apart or devoured.

This second set of meanings associated with blood is to be placed in the realm of the abject and of the grotesque body, too, but with another connotation. The violent spill of blood, indeed, also stands for another kind of otherness associated with femininity because of the excessiveness of the female body: the erosion of the confines between human and supernatural, life and death. In this respect the body of woman is deemed to be grotesque for it becomes once again a place of transgression, instability and confusion due to change. In addition to the implications investigated so far, however, the grotesque features of the female monstrous body are enriched with the threat of undermining the other – male – bodies’ integrity through its physical attributes and, more specifically, their seductiveness which endangers the stability of established meanings with its potential of *engendering* change.

5. MONSTROUS FEMININITY

The topic of monstrosity is tackled by Carter in subtle, entangled ways. This section intends to unravel some of the political implications of monstrosity as it is represented in the fairy tales, first and foremost by referring to the monstrous female body.

Moving from the particular to the general, the issue of monstrosity related to the construction of the female body as an abject, threatening object is investigated with reference to the story which features a supernatural female monster as its protagonist: “The Lady of the House of Love”. The analysis exposes the paradoxes underlying the patriarchal discursive construction of the female body as monstrous through the paradoxical experience of the Lady-Vampire. It is claimed that the speculations about the nature of the woman-vampire’s condition developed all through the story question and challenge the over-identification of woman with her body – which led to its construction as monstrous. Moreover, the paradoxes inherent in the reduction of woman to her body are disclosed, as is the difficulty of struggling against similar assumptions and of devising effective strategies of resistance to counter them.

Subsequently, the topic of monstrosity – always indissolubly linked to the body – is dealt with in broader terms to embrace overt as well as covert examples throughout the collection, related to both male and female characters. In particular, Atwood’s insightful analysis (2001), which points to the possibility of classifying the tales of *The Bloody Chamber* in predators versus preys, that is of arranging the characters into “categories of meat eater” (ibid. 138) is expanded. Thereby, monstrosity is problematized further to contrast patriarchal models of cannibalistic sexuality, whose workings entail devouring the other, with an alternative economy of desire which starts from the body in order to propose a new form of consummation: the – mutual, reciprocal – incorporation of the other.

5.1. *“The Lady of the House of Love”: the paradoxical double abjection of the body of the vampire*

Monstrosity, like any other culturally constructed category, is to be investigated in its gendered specificities. As a matter of fact, the notion takes on different meanings according to the sex of the monster, which must be carefully scrutinised outside of simplistic mirroring reversals and binary oppositions. As Creed claims, there is a substantial difference between the concepts of “monstrous femininity” and “female monster”, where the latter is a simple reversal of the “male monster”, for the female scares for different reasons and in different ways than the male does: “as with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase ‘monstrous-feminine’ emphasises the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity” (Creed 1993: 3). More to the point, the inherent monstrosity of female sexuality is grounded in her body on account of its abject transformations. The “abject” is, according to Kristeva, “that which does not ‘respect borders, positions, rules’, that which disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva in Creed 1993: 8), and is therefore marginalised when it cannot be kept under control. “Abjection works within human societies, as a means of separating out the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject” (ibid.). In other words, the abject, grotesque body is perceived as dangerous because of its permeability, in that it is the site where borders collapse and transformation can be performed. The abject, however, is also inherently duplicitous. On the one hand it is “the place where meaning collapses” where life is threatened and thus “it must be ‘radically excluded’ (Kristeva 1982:2) from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self” (ibid.: 9). On the other hand, abject is also “that which [...] helps to define life” because its in-betweenness and its ability to expose and to cross borders entail that the place of abjection is also the place of rebellion and transformation.

The female vampire described by Carter embodies the monstrous feminine and is characterised by a double abjection: that associated with the female body and its

reproductive functions and that linked to the corpse and the body without soul. “When woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions” (ibid.: 7), since they imply a physical change of some sort, the loss of bodily fluids, and/or the exposure of the inside of the body, through which the body exceeds its borders and shape. In addition, the vampire is included among the sources of abjection in that it is a body without soul that feeds on other bodies’ source of life, thus wounding them and causing the loss and exposure of blood (ibid.: 10).

In sum, the female body is inherently abject thanks to its reproductive functions, which must be constructed as threatening if patriarchal discourses want to keep female sexuality under control for the sakes of ruling reproduction itself. This condition is already paradoxical in itself, even when it is not combined with the monstrosity engendered by vampirism. “Menstruation and childbirth are seen as the two events in woman’s life which have placed her on the side of the abject” (ibid.: 40) because they cause bloodshed and involve a metamorphosis of the body. Interestingly, however, menstruation and the maternal function of which it is a precondition are first and foremost to be seen as the primary vehicles of life. That is to say, the transformations related to sexuality taking place within the female body, which change its perimeter and expose its fluids should be considered under a positive perspective as that which allows renewal and grants continuity. The female blood, or rather its cultural construction, is intrinsically ambiguous, duplicitous, as it suggests both the vitality of generation and the threats of death (see McLaughlin 1995).

This ambiguity also grounds one of the paradoxes of femininity analysed by Tseëlon, that is, “woman signifies death as well as the defence against it” (Tseëlon 1995: 6). The paradox is explained by turning to Freudian psychoanalysis, according to which death is one of the major – repressed – sources of fear which cannot be explained in rational terms. Like the abject body of the woman, whose changes scare because they exceed bodily borders, death is uncanny, it “is the opposite of all that is familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, comfortable, arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security” (ibid.: 101). The reason why the female body is paradoxical with relation to death is that the sublimation of the fear of death increases the need to phantasise and idealise it.

Inasmuch as woman represents death, the uncanny female body is controlled through its aestheticisation, as a way of taming and making sense of death (ibid.: 102).

The body of the female vampire exposes this covert cultural identification devised by male anxieties towards death, since it is usually a beautiful soulless vessel inhabited by a deadly, threatening monster who kills and incorporates the victims by literally sucking life out of them. Blood itself, when it comes to female vampires, discloses its inherently contradictory nature: its loss causes death and is at the same time the source of a pseudo-life for the monster who spilled it.

Furthermore, in Carter's tale as well as in previous literary traditions, vampirism is linked to sexual desire and gender performances, and popular legends on the topic are often used to explain the abject losses of blood of the female body: menstruation and defloration (Creed 1993: 61-63). An additional, contradictory ambiguity of the (female) vampire is its representation as "a creature of evil because she/he lives on blood drawn from a wound that marks the surface of the skin", once again symbolising both an injury and the loss of virginity, so that "like all abject figures, the vampire is both terrifying and seductive" (ibid.: 66).

The gender attributes of the vampire, whether they are intentionally blurred or clearly described to emphasise the peculiarity of threat and seduction that male and female bloodsuckers embody, can also openly be a vehicle of mortal danger linked to sex. More specifically, in the case of female vampires they are associated with masculine fears of castration, since their bodies epitomise the *vagina dentata* (toothed vagina - ibid.: 72):

The fantasy of the *vagina dentata*, of the non-human state of woman as android, vampire, or animal, the identification of female sexuality as voracious, insatiable, enigmatic, invisible, and unknowable, cold, calculating, instrumental, castrator/decapitator of the male, dissimulatrix or fake, predatory, engulfing mother, are all consequences of the ways in which male orgasm has functioned as the measure and representative of all sexualities and all modes of erotic encounter. (Grosz 1995: 203)

Hence, the female body and its metamorphoses are perceived and constructed as threatening - vampiric - because sexual desire, pleasure and seduction have traditionally been discursively constructed within a patriarchal economy as one-way drives whose subjects are unequivocally men.

In short, the female vampire embodies those specific attributes which allow the parallel between woman and monster to be drawn and to be qualified as abject because her body:

Disrupts identity and order; driven by her lust for blood, she does not respect the dictates of the law which set down the rules of proper sexual conduct. [...] also crosses the boundary between the living and the dead, the human and animal. The vampire's animalism is made explicit in her bloodlust and the growth of her two pointed fangs. Because she is not completely animal or human, because she hovers on the boundary between these two states, she represents abjection. (Creed 1993: 61)

To which must be added the abject connotation culturally attributed to her blood because of reproduction and childbearing, so that menstruation and defloration also come to symbolise inflicted as well as endured bleeding wounds.

On account of these remarks, the bodily performance of "The Lady of the House of Love" is disturbing and subversive under different points of view, all the more as its paradoxes succeed in exposing and deconstructing the naturalisation of the female body as monstrous accomplished by phallogocentric discourses.

First of all, the female vampire discloses the patriarchal construction of woman as monstrous for, as Carter reveals from the very beginning of the story, her monstrosity is grounded in the impossibility of changing. That is to say, the Queen of the Dead incarnates death not because of the threatening attributes of her reproductive organs, but thanks to her immortal nature, which implies that her body needs to feed on death in order to survive, and that it is sterile, i.e. under no circumstances can it be source of life. Trapped in this world and instinctively forced to hunt in order to preserve her flesh, this apparently soulless body cannot change, let alone give birth, and despite causing bloodshed while feeding, does not know what it means to bleed – thus it is impossible to attach menacing meanings to its menstruation, defloration of childbearing: "she is herself a cave full of echoes, she is a system of repetitions, she is a closed circuit" (Carter 1979: 93).

Secondly, in the usual fashion through which Carter exposes patriarchal discursive constructions before challenging them, at first the description of the Lady apparently

meets all the standards of the paradoxical identification between female beauty and death pointed out by Tseëlon. Her beauty signals disorder, deadly threat, soullessness:

She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness. (ibid.: 94)

Moreover, she incarnates the abject features of a grotesque body which exceeds the borders between human and animal: despite her human appearance, her ravenous hunger and her hunting instincts are beastly:

On moonless nights, her keeper lets her out into the garden. [...] When the back door opens, the Countess will sniff the air and howl. She drops, now, on all fours. Crouching, quivering, she catches the scent of her prey. Delicious crunch of the fragile bones of rabbits and small, furry things she pursues with fleet, four-footed speed; she will creep home, whimpering, with blood smeared on her cheeks. She pours water from the ewer in her bedroom into the bowl, she washes her face with the wincing, fastidious gestures of a cat. (ibid.: 95)

The Countess wants fresh meat. When she was a little girl, she was like a fox and contented herself entirely with baby rabbits that squeaked piteously as she bit into their necks with a nauseated voluptuousness, with voles and fieldmice that palpitated for a bare moment between her embroidress's fingers. But now she is a woman, she must have men. (ibid.: 96)

Interestingly, though, all the descriptions of her hunger and of her hunts are paired with singular statements, asserting the reluctance with which she performs the animal rituals she is doomed to. It is clear that she refuses her animality, not so much because of its unruly associations and the aggressive potential it entails, but rather as it is symptom of her changeless immortality:

The voracious margin of huntress's nights in the gloomy garden, crouch and pounce, surrounds her habitual tormented somnambulism, her life or imitation of life. The eyes of this nocturnal creature enlarge and glow. All claws and teeth, she strikes, she gorges; *but nothing can console her for the ghastliness of her condition, nothing.* (ibid.)

The beautiful somnambulist *helplessly* perpetuates her ancestral crimes. (ibid.: 93)

Everything about this beautiful and ghastly lady is as it should be, queen of night, queen of terror – except *her horrible reluctance to the role.* (ibid.: 95)

She loathes the food she eats [...] but hunger always overcomes her. [...] A certain desolate stillness in her eyes indicates she is inconsolable. (ibid.: 96; my emphases)

The conflict experienced by the female vampire, who cannot put up with the requirements of her monstrous body, is expressed through the recurring motif of the tarots, which the Lady constantly, hopelessly and pointlessly interrogates, even if the cards always send the same message:

She counts out the Tarot cards, ceaselessly construing a constellation of possibilities as if the random fall of the cards on the red plush tablecloth before her could precipitate her from her chill, shuttered room into a country of perpetual summer and obliterate the perennial sadness of a girl who is both death and the maiden. (ibid.: 93)

These and teeth as fine and white as spikes of spun sugar are the visible signs of the destiny she wistfully attempts to evade via the arcana. (ibid.: 94)

In her dream, she would like to be human; but she does not know if that is possible. The Tarot always shows the same configuration: always she turns up La Papesse, La Mort, La Tour Abolie, wisdom, death, dissolution.

[...] She resorts to the magic comfort of the Tarot pack and shuffles the cards, lays them out, reads them, gathers them up with a sigh, shuffles them again, constantly constructing hypotheses about a future which is irreversible. (ibid.: 95)

My contention is that the Lady cannot come to terms with and accept her state because it is proof of her body being an empty vessel, a puppet through which her ghostly ancestors are free to peep and speak:

the beautiful queen of the vampires sits all alone in her dark, high house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, through her, projects a baleful posthumous existence.

[...] She herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening. [...] The beastly forebears on the walls condemn her to a perpetual repetition of their passions. (ibid.: 93, 103)

The destiny of eternal repetition of her ancestor's passions already suggests that she does not possess a voice of her own, but she is condemned to endlessly repeat the dreadful message of death to those who regrettably approach her: "Her voice is filled with distant sonorities, like riverberations in a cave: now you are at the place of annihilation, now you are at the place of annihilation" (ibid.: 93). This parallel culminates, as has already been

pointed out, with the young cyclist describing her voice as “disembodied”, like that of a “ventriloquist doll” (ibid.: 102).

Significantly, then, the kernel of her paradoxical state aptly devised by Carter is that the she-vampire is disembodied. Although the construction of monstrous femininity stems from the over-identification or reduction of woman to her body, the vampire being one of the most suitable incarnations of this process, this monstrous woman-corpse is anomalously discarnate. This does not mean, however, that the Countess wants to get rid of the physical constraints of her body in order to overcome the limits of a body whose attributes are demonised because of their association with threatening sexuality and desire. Her impossible dream of becoming human in fact entails the contrary, that is the possibility of experiencing love and change, even if they require pain and death. She is convinced that “love would free me” (ibid.: 105), and turn against itself the fatal ritual of seduction through which she lures her victims with the promise of pleasure, but which inevitably ends with their demise and her annihilation. Her tempting invitation, “My clothes have but to fall and you will see before you a succession of mystery” is aimed at masking that instead:

She has no mouth with which to kiss, no hands with which to caress, only the fangs and talons of a beast of prey. To touch the mineral sheen of the flesh revealed in the cool candle gleam is to invite her fatal embrace; in her low, sweet, voice, she will croon the lullaby of the House of Nosferatu. (ibid.: 94-95).

Yet, thanks to the encounter with the young cyclist – and, possibly, with love – she is able to breach the endless repetition of her murderous ritual and to turn into a human being, even if it means dying, breaking the spell, thereby exposing the fake tawdriness of her surroundings.

Pi-tai Peng contends that the tale ultimately does not succeed in conveying a message of female empowerment or liberation, because the vampire’s source of power is a “forever-annihilating” “passivity”: “she desires something she is structured lacking and she falls victim to romance, which is ironically her rescue” (Pi-tai Peng 2004: 110). “The countess’ doll-like vampiric desire” is seen as a sign of a “feminine sexuality – voracious passivity”, which

Parodies the male-centered rational discourse with its exorcising power, not just to subvert its rational-phallogentrism but to deconstruct the myth of the fearful power that has been imputed to the female vampire, to show that this fearful power is debilitating for women in its empowerment from the phallogentric discourse. (ibid.)

Under this perspective, female sexuality is still considered a dark continent, whereas masculine rationality is the necessary light which can exorcise the inherent monstrosity of female desire: “The Countess represents the dark space outside the rational discourse, haunting men with her dark excess, while the young man, representing the Enlightenment rationality, exorcises her vampiric power with his rational eye” (ibid.)

Despite the cyclist’s rational speculations, nevertheless, it is not the young man who breaks the spell and performs the vampire’s transformation. His attempts at explaining the oddity of the girl’s body and behaviour by resorting to medical science, indeed, prove to be pointless, and accordingly they never find validation in the story. Their only function is to reassure him and to prove the lack of fantasy which prevents him from dying of fear. Moreover, as the omens throughout the tale and its rather overt end suggest, his rationality will not spare him death at war.⁴⁶

It could rather be argued, therefore, that Carter’s “use of vampiric tropes indicates profound ambiguities at the heart of desire”, which are aimed at transgressing borderlines (Sceats 2001: 119). The only reason why in “The Lady of the House of Love” vampirism is not entirely embraced, but itself questioned, is that the Lady represents an over-embodied monstrosity discursively linked to woman’s desire but projected onto a disembodied subjectivity, which struggles to be able to fill her empty, haunted vessel.

The fantasy of turning into a human being, then, does not indicate the impossibility of fulfilling desire outside of patriarchal “enlightened” normalised performances. Instead, it could imply that in order to deconstruct the association female body-monster, woman must re-appropriate her body, that is abandon the established

⁴⁶It could be hypothesised that rationality in fact leads him to death, as his fate is waiting for him “in the trenches of France”, which suggests that he is going to fight in the First World War, sadly notorious for the use of newly devised deadly weapons. Moreover, the fact that he is going to be a casualty of war, which will most likely turn him into a war hero, is implied in the description Carter draws of his heroism. Associated with familiar ideal masculine attributes, this heroism is however deconstructed, it is ascribed to the boy’s virginity (Carter 1979: 104), which was earlier depicted as “source of power” but because of “ignorance” and “unknowingness” (ibid.: 97).

performances of disembodied monstrosity that she is compelled to repeat in order to resignify them or devise new ones. From a rationalist perspective, “The Countess herself embodies the culturally irresolvable, which is why any attempts to effect a ‘cure’ must culminate in extinction” (ibid.). From a corporeal perspective, nevertheless, she stands for woman’s willingness to exceed the over-identification with her – threatening – body to which she is subject, effected in Carter’s tale through the symbolical death of both the victim and the perpetrator.

In a cunning interplay of reflections, Carter’s characters once more embody and mirror the complexities of desire, as both can be considered either victim or perpetrator. If the cyclist as perpetrator is held to stand for patriarchal rationality, for example, then the story seems to insinuate that he – and the system he signifies – must die so as to be replaced by a new power-knowledge arrangement, as must the product of that system, namely the depiction of female sexuality, and by extension of the female body, as the voracious, dangerous abject other. That is why the vampire willingly embraces death: because it actually means welcoming change and possibly changing the ways in which the female body is signified.

Thus, even if the vampire knows that “there is no room in her drama for improvisation” (ibid.: 106), that is, her deadly, eternal ritual of compulsive repetition does not allow change whatsoever not even in the script, she manages to amend it. While she is taking off her clothes and is about to embrace the cyclist in her ghastly claws as she usually does with her male victims, she starts to cry, which triggers a series of unexpected events leading this monstrous Sleeping Beauty to wound her finger with a piece of glass and to bleed for the first time.

She raises her hands to unfasten the neck of her dress and her eyes well with tears, they trickle down beneath the rim of her dark glasses. [...] she has fumbled the ritual, it is no longer inexorable. The mechanism within her fails her, now, when she needs it most. When she takes off the dark glasses, they slip from her finger and smash to pieces on the tiled floor. There is no room in her drama for improvisation; and this unexpected, mundane noise of breaking glass breaks the wicked spell in the room, entirely. [...] When she kneels to try to gather the fragments of glass together, a sharp sliver pierces deeply into the pad of her thumb; she cries out, sharp, real. (ibid.: 105-106)

After the ritual has been disrupted, change cannot be stopped, and the Lady is at last able to turn into a human being and die. Her death is the final blow to patriarchal constructions of female monstrosity, since the vampire is threatening only as long as she cannot change. When she does, she dies and ceases to be dangerous. This suggests that monstrosity is inescapable unless metamorphosis is embraced as a positive force, even when it entails suffering and death. Last, but not least, as the story emphasises through the paradoxes embodied by its disembodied protagonist, the construction of the female body as monster because of its inherent changing potential is merely a strategy devised by patriarchal discourses to scare away what seems too difficult to be rationally explained, and perhaps should be simply embraced and cherished as it is the privileged vehicle of life.

The red, “bloodily reblooming” (Sceats 2001: 113) rose, the only living thing found by the boy in place of the vampire’s body after her death is the last, ominous presage which functions as a reminder. Among the different possible interpretations, it could be read as a token symbolising the deadly consequences of persisting in identifying female sexuality with a potentially devouring *vagina dentata* while preventing the necessary transformation of the available conceptualisations of the female body due to the scary, excessiveness and ongoing, cyclical change of its boundaries. In any case, as Kristeva would put it, the grim rose which stands for the excessive, monstrous body of its owner advocates against the purification of the abject historically carried out by art and literature in order to “bring about a confrontation with the abject” that is able to “finally eject and redeem the boundaries between the human and the non-human” (Creed 1993: 14). Even after the cyclist has left the enchanted castle to join the army, indeed, the rose he has brought with him still haunts him, as a magic reminder of the impossible experience he has lived, as the abject “rebellion of filthy, lustful, carnal, female flesh” (ibid.: 38). Through the piercing, charming smell of the rose and the luxurious opulence of its petals, indeed, the seductive, dangerous allure of the unconsummated encounter with the monstrous woman is kept alive:

When he returned from the mess that evening, the heavy fragrance of Count Nosferatu's roses drifted down the stone corridor of the barracks to greet him, and his Spartan quarters brimmed with the reeling odour of a glowing, velvet, monstrous flower whose petals had regained all their former bloom and elasticity, their corrupt, brilliant, baleful splendour. (Carter 1979: 107-108).

5.2 Duplicitous appetites: a new heteronormative model of incorporating consumption

The last reflections about the subversive metamorphoses of the female body, animality and the monstrous feminine in Carter's fairy tales stem from Atwood's perceptive observation: "The Bloody Chamber is arranged according to categories of meat-eater" (Atwood 2001: 138). This remark offers an interesting point of view on the collection, which draws together issues of genre – more precisely, an assessment of the female protagonists' ability to give an account of their transformative identity journeys – and above all of gender. Analysing the stories following the categories of meat eaters and the relationships between them, indeed, enables one to examine power distribution in the tales, since – as should be clear by now – both male and female characters can be carnivores and herbivores, wielding or struggling to obtain power. Moreover, predatory performances enacted by men and women, monsters and beasts within *The Bloody Chamber* question the ways in which heterosexual relationships are negotiated. That is to say, after having exposed the dangers hidden in different patriarchal traditions, Carter proposes alternative models of identification and of approaching sexual relations which are based on new foundations, and which, most importantly, are always the outcome of a transformation of some sort.

As to patriarchy, the predator-versus-prey-arrangement emphasises that patriarchal discourses work in a cannibalistic fashion, whereby the relationship with the other invariably entails devouring, violently incorporating it "to discipline, exclude, and repress it, and define it negatively, against himself" (Kerchy 2008: 47). As Braidotti remarks, "the object of desire has to be made digestible" (Braidotti 2002: 141), but digestion, that is

processing and incorporating the body of the other, can result in assimilation rather than a voracious consummation which leads to its effacement.

This is where the experiences of the female characters represented in *The Bloody Chamber* culminate: the strategies through which they struggle to be the narrators of their own stories, the negotiations through which they perform and rework their identity journeys and the metamorphic appropriation of their bodies are aimed at piecing together an alternative model of heteronormative – sexual – desire and relationships. Even though the examples set forth by Carter’s heroines are always specific, at times paradoxical, and never conclusive – for the kernel of their driving force is ongoing transformation – they tend towards the construction of an alternative model of heterosexual relationships based on reciprocity. The reciprocity already discussed in terms of subject formation and identity development in the previous chapter, indeed, finds even stronger grounds in the protagonists’ bodily performances analysed by means of the eating/predator metaphor.

Once again the fictional enactment of what was theoretically speculated about in *The Sadeian Woman*, the bodies described in *The Bloody Chamber* open themselves up “to reciprocal otherness”, that is they perform “negotiations between exciting, heterogeneous beings whose ‘alterities’ (Grosz 1994: 192; Bordo 1993: 41) enrich each other through an exchange that instead of aggressively remodelling them, leaves and loves them-(selves) deformed as they are” (Kerchy 2008: 47).

Conceiving of (and enacting) reciprocity and assimilating incorporation requires (self-) awareness on the part of the female subject about the political location of her body in discourse. This seems to be the pivotal starting point of the conclusive remarks of *The Sadeian Woman*, which scrutinise the construction of female flesh in phallogocentric power-knowledge arrangements.

In the fairy tales, Carter plays with the double meaning of the word “consummation”, which could stand for both eating and sexual encounters. This idea is enforced by Carter’s *Exercise in Cultural History*, where the definition of “meat” and that of “flesh” are contrasted in order to underline the difference between the two acts addressed by the concept of consummation. “Meat” becomes synonymous with the edibility of a body, which can be devoured in a cannibalistic fashion as it is dead, devoid of meaning,

merely considered an empty surface of inscription on which any meanings can be imposed. As a consequence, the term refers to sexual relationships where the object of desire is the victim, i.e. *subject to* othering, constrictive power, whose desire is not taken into account and from whom pleasure is stolen. “Flesh”, in turn, comes to signify the lively meat of the subject who has learned – or is learning – to act on her desire, who is *subject of* power and for whom sexual encounters entail exchange, and therefore reciprocity in giving and receiving pleasure. In Carter’s words: “In the English language, we make a fine distinction between flesh, which is usually alive and, typically, human; and meat, which is dead, inert, animal and intended for consumption” (Carter 1979a: 161).

Interestingly, this provocative definition already forecasts the complexities taken on by Carter’s representation of the animal motif in the fairy tales. As a matter of fact, in the stories female animality is not simply synonymous with victimhood and dead meat ready for consummation, but it is rather an alternative source for empowerment which escapes patriarchal – human, and masculine – established and limited ranges of behaviours and performances. Inert meat, Carter seems to suggest, is not a natural fact, but a cultural construction; that is to say, what qualifies as meat is made such, and likewise flesh needs to be appropriated and signified in order to be considered the lively, desiring version of its slaughtered counterpart: “flesh becomes meat by a magical transition about which there is nothing natural” (ibid.: 166).

When Carter contends: “But, if flesh plus skin equals sensuality, then flesh minus skin equals meat” (ibid.: 162), it could be claimed that the recurrent images of symbolic disrobing and the skin literally being peeled off of the body surface in the fairy tales clearly address the necessity for women of giving up established, oppressive meanings imposed on their bodies so as to be able to re-inscribe them with new, autonomously devised ones. In addition, sensuality is identified with a reciprocal notion of desire, where pleasure is exchanged through the flesh of both participants. This assumption is sustained by the following remarks, where Carter maintains that the reason why Sade’s novels describe sexual relations “in terms of butchery and meat” is that he “will disinfect of sensuality anything he can lay his hands on” (ibid.: 163).

Powerfully linked to this first topic is the complex relationship between prey and predator, carnivore and herbivore – which do not necessarily stand respectively for man and woman – conceptualised in *The Sadeian Woman* and forcefully fictionalised in the fairy tales. The grounding assumption of both is that a simplistic parallel must not be drawn between woman-herbivore-victim, as the relations between predator and prey are in fact far more complex:

The relations between men and women are often distorted by the reluctance of both parties to acknowledge that the function of flesh is meat to the carnivore but not grass to the herbivore.

The ignorance of one party as to the intentions of the other makes the victim so defenceless against predation that it can seem as if a treacherous complicity finally unites them; as though, in some sense, the victim wills a victim's fate. (ibid.)

Explicitly enough, the source of – more or less willing – victimhood is, not surprisingly, lack of awareness of one's own position and of the intentions of the other. In other words, women enforce their cultural construction as victims by uncritically accepting naturalised and naturalising positions offered by patriarchal discourses. This is exactly what the identification of woman with herbivore, therefore victim, therefore deemed to be devoured hides: her performances have been literally naturalised through their identification with the *natural* behaviour of animals. Human beings, however, no matter to what extent they are fictionally represented by resorting to monstrous or animal figurations, are ultimately different from animals, not because of their souls, but because of their ability to signify their meat as flesh: “Sexuality, stripped of the idea of free exchange, is not in any way humane; it is nothing but pure cruelty. Carnal knowledge is the infernal knowledge of the flesh as meat” (ibid.: 165).

Carter once again addresses a discursive economy of desire in which one of the two parties acts as the predator who subjugates and devours the flesh of its victim as lack of reciprocity. Her criticism is here against Sade's narratives as a contextualised example of phallogocentric discourse:

The act of predation [...] is the assertion of the abyss between master and victim. There is no question of reciprocal sensation; [...] to share is to be stolen from [...] when a woman pilfers her sexual pleasure from a man, she patently reduces his own and to witness her pleasure can do nothing more for him than to flatter his vanity. (ibid.: 166-167)

The Sadeian protagonists, and the patriarchal tradition they stand for, are incapable of experiencing reciprocity and of conceiving of sexual relations as mutually enriching, and are therefore prevented from changing, because for them “desire is a function of the act rather than the act a function of desire”, through which “desire loses its troubling otherness; it ceases to be a movement outwards from the self” (ibid.: 171).

These controversial acknowledgements are fictionally underscored in *The Bloody Chamber* through the Beauty and the Beast stories. The female protagonists of both tales, indeed, overtly speculate about their relations with the Beasts in terms of standard animal images of predators and victims. Interestingly, in both cases the issue at stake is otherness and the apparently natural impossibility of reconciliation and conceivable coexistence between carnivores and herbivores.

In the first story the topic is approached through the biblical image of the lion and the lamb, where Beauty unmistakably identifies with the prey, not only on account of the proverbial victimhood embodied by woman, but also for the compliance with which she is willingly sacrificing herself to obey her father and save his fortune:

How strange he was. She found his bewildering difference from herself almost intolerable; its presence choked her. There seemed to be a heavy, soundless pressure upon her in his house, as if it lay under water, and when she saw the great paws lying on the arm of his chair, she thought: they are the death of any tender herbivore. And such a one she felt herself to be, Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial. (Carter 1979: 45)

Apparently similar but radically different is the experience of her twin character in “The Tiger’s Bride”. As it happened with reference to many other motives, the intertextual references between the two stories mark a progression. In the second one, indeed, in spite of Beauty letting herself go to similar considerations about predators and preys and the difficulty of their coexistence, she acts on them and decides to change the naturalised arrangements. In this case, the girl suffers, too, when facing the outstanding difference of the Beast, which causes in her a physical, but paradoxically welcomed, pain:

The Tiger will never lie down with the lamb; he acknowledges no pact that is not reciprocal. The lamb must learn to run with the tigers. A great, feline, tawny shape whose pelt was barred with a savage geometry of bars the colour of burned wood. His domed, heavy head, so terrible he must hide it. How subtle the muscles, how profound the tread. The annihilating vehemence of his eyes, like twin suns. I felt my breast ripped apart as if I suffered a marvellous wound. (ibid.: 64)

As the first lines emphasise, it is the lamb, not the tiger, which can change the situation; that is, the herbivore can and must learn how to approach the predator not in order to fight or defeat it, but so as to “learn” how to play its game, how to be able to run free, to turn a body which has been signified as meat into flesh. This Beauty succeeds in the tasks: she gives up her old skin – i.e. what qualified her body as meat – and decides to wear the fur that the Tiger has exposed on the surface of her body as flesh. In this way, the woman is no longer a victim, she has overcome the “earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment” (ibid.: 67), that is to say, she is no longer afraid of being consumed in a cannibalistic fashion, for she has made a pact of reciprocity by incorporating the animal other in her body. Therefore, it is as flesh and not as meat, that she slowly approaches and offers herself to the Beast, shaking not out of fear but perhaps because of desire, as now she understands that she is offering with her body, with “myself, the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction” (ibid.). The Tiger’s bride has decided to change her skin and to embrace animality – i.e. the “troubling otherness” of the Beast – in order to change the meaning and reach of her sexual desire, so that the “act becomes a function of desire” and she is able to move outwards from her self, to reach for the other and thereby to experience an empowered and empowering reciprocity.

In sum, the reflections of these characters about the relationship between carnivore and herbivore, predator and prey, serve to emphasise that, metaphors aside, victimhood and predatoriness can and must be renegotiated within human – sexual – relationships, so that reciprocity and the circulation of pleasure can grant to both participants the enactment of desire through the body as flesh. In this way, the body of the other is digested and assimilated, and not utterly consumed and obliterated.

The stories about “Beauty and the Beast” explicitly challenge cannibalistic consumption offered as the most viable model of heterosexual relationships by

patriarchal traditions. Throughout the collection, nevertheless, other, more covert but equally powerful instances are aimed at overthrowing, and above all at providing alternatives to bodily consummation. Significantly enough, Carter's challenge functions as usual as a process of unmasking, disclosing what lies at the heart of discourses disguised as natural, matter-of-fact truths and counters what it criticises through transformation.

In this sense, the transformative power of metamorphosis progresses within the collection, increasing from story to story with different intensities, but always at work. The opening tale, "The Bloody Chamber", presents the reader with a human but no less beastly predator, the Marquis, whose appetite is described several times as devouring, annihilating for his prey, the young wife. The interplay between hunger and sexual consummation is omnipresent, so that in every instance where the Marquis' appetite is mentioned, it refers to the desire of the beastly predator, which devours and annihilates his victim.

He stripped me, gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke – but do not imagine much finesse about it; this artichoke was no particular treat for the diner nor was he yet in any greedy haste. He approached his familiar treat with a weary appetite. (ibid.: 15)

When he saw my reluctance, his eyes veiled over and yet his appetite did not diminish. His tongue ran over red lips already wet. (ibid.: 34)

'Don't loiter, girl! Do you think I shall lose appetite for the meal if you are so long about serving it? No; I shall grow hungrier, more ravenous with each moment, more cruel ... Run to me, run! I have a place prepared for your exquisite corpse in my display of flesh!' (ibid.: 39)

In "The Erl-King" the duplicitous meanings assigned to violent, cannibalistic consummation are even more complex. The male, predatory monster is an evil spirit of the woods always on the alert and ready to "gobble up" the female prey, to do her "grievous harm" (ibid.: 85). However, his dangerous nature is just the result of the projection of the female narrator's fears, due to what she has been taught about the dangers of acting on sexual desire. In the end the woman proves to be, in fact, the predator, and kills the Erl-King because she has enjoyed their sexual encounters but does not know how to set her desire free and to turn consummation into reciprocity. Therefore, the mutually exclusive association between man-predator and woman-victim is

blurred and exceeded, as both characters prove to embody either role. As the story seems to suggest, under these circumstances the sexual relationship is annihilating for both male and female characters.

Similarly, in “The Snow Child” the lack of reciprocity stemming from the conception of a woman entirely out of a man’s desire proves to be perverse (as the motives of incest and necrophilia insinuate) and to prevent the peaceful absorption of the other, who is destined to die, to utterly be consumed by the desire of the predator – the Snow Child, indeed, in the end melts back into the elements which originated her body. Moreover, like in “The Erl-King”, both male and female characters prove to be able to act the role of the predator, even if the addition of a third side of the triangle increases the complexity of the picture. The arrangements of the power relationships in the story could be read as follows: the part of the primary predator is played by the Count, who is able to impart his will both on his wife and on the child of his desire. The Countess, in turn, despite being victimised by the husband is allowed, with his consent, to act as a predator against the girl who, lastly, is totally speechless and powerless.

Other three tales seem to counterbalance this impossibility of amending the allocation of victimhood and of circulating power within the relationships between the sexes so as to enable the accomplishment a different kind of consummation. “The Werewolf” is all about feminine predatoriness; the werewolfish Grandmother, indeed, is violently killed by her niece, which grants the latter’s survival and prosperity. As has already been remarked, the tale underlines the necessity of a renewal of values and discourses in order for new models of femininity to take roots.

Utter displacement is brought about by the last two tales taken into consideration: “The Lady of the House of Love” and “The Company of Wolves”.

The first story features a female carnivore, monstrous femininity in the flesh, who is a predator – albeit reluctant – for her own vampiric nature. Consummation is hinted at twice in the text, always referring to cannibalistic, devouring consumption, which, as has been argued in the previous section, acquires different meanings from that of the predatory male animal-monster:

However hard she tries to think of any other, she only knows of one kind of consummation. (ibid.: 103)

[...] she knows no other consummation than the only one she can offer him. She has not eaten for three days. It is dinner-time. It is bedtime. (ibid.: 105).

Nevertheless, the vampire struggles to conceive of an alternative consummation, which ends up consuming her soulless life. In this way, even if no metamorphosis is actually enacted – as both characters end up dying – its feasibility is nonetheless implied. As a result of the protagonists' unforeseeable destinies, the roles of prey and predator are not only obviously reversed, but also questioned and redistributed. On the one hand the cyclist does not embody the predator, since he is supposed to be the powerless victim of a voracious female-vampire, but neither is he a victim, because in the end he is not bitten to death by the monster – and, ironically, he does not even realise the danger he has faced. On the other hand, the Lady is supposed to be the carnivore ready to devour its prey; instead, she sees his meat as flesh and endeavours to devise a different kind of consummation that allows her to fulfil her desire of his body in a non-cannibalistic way.

The paradoxical inversion and intermingling of the roles of the victim and the predator and of the polysemy of consummation is further emphasised by the silent monologue of the Countess. In her unheard plea, she reassures and exhorts the cyclist like a groom would do with his bride on their first night together: “the bridegroom bleeds in my inverted marriage bed” (ibid.: 105). Throughout the passage, the boundaries between consummation understood as sexual encounter and as vampiric feast are often blurred, as if to hint at the dreadful commonalities arising from the confusion between the two meanings:

Vous serez ma proie.

You have such a fine throat, m'sieu, like a column of marble. When you came through the door retaining about you all the golden light of the summer's day of which I know nothing, the card called 'Les Amoureux' had just emerged from the tumbling chaos of imagery before me; it seemed to me you had stepped off the card into my darkness and, for a moment, I thought, perhaps, you might irradiate it.

I do not mean to hurt you. I shall wait for you in my bride's dress in the dark.

The bridegroom is come, he will go into the chamber which has been prepared for him.

I am condemned to solitude and dark; I do not mean to hurt you.

I will be very gentle. [...]

See, how I'm ready for you. I've always been ready for you; I've been waiting for you in my wedding dress, why have you delayed for so long ... it will all be over very quickly.

You will feel no pain, my darling. (ibid.:103)

In general, rather than staged and enacted, the necessity of transformation is suggested by showing how immobility and inescapable eternal repetition – of the body of the vampire and of the stubborn rationality of the young man – prevent the actualisation of a reciprocal assimilation and lead to death. After turning into a human being, the vampire is doomed to die because her performance, eternally staged as a “predator-prey ritual” does not include an alternative script (see Atwood 2001: 144). Most notably, however, the fact that the boy dies as well could signify that this cannibalistic, oppositional script should be left behind altogether, as it led to the annihilation of both actors in the struggle to devour and to be spared.

“The Company of Wolves”, which perhaps best illustrates the actual transformation of patriarchal carnivorous appetites, begins in a rather traditional fashion, with a carnivore werewolf undoubtedly playing the role of the aggressive predator. Significantly, the very first lines state: “the wolf is carnivore incarnate and he’s as cunning as he is ferocious; once he’s had a taste of flesh than nothing else will do” (ibid.: 110), and the refrain “the wolf is carnivore incarnate” is then repeated as an ominous, but ultimately paradoxical reminder later in the story (ibid.: 116). The use of the term “flesh” with reference to eating instead of meat could be a deliberate strategy on Carter’s part, to signify both implied meanings of consummation (as the following part of the story discloses). The nocturnal howling of wolves in the god-forsaken land where the tale is set is described as a melancholic lament, as if the wolves were “mourning for their own, irremediable appetites” for which there is “no redemption” (ibid.: 112). Even though “grace could not come to the wolf from its own despair, only through some external mediator, so that, sometimes, the beast will look as if he half welcomes the knife that dispatches him”, the narrative proves the contrary. The apparently irremediable cannibalistic appetite of the male werewolf-hunter protagonist is in fact tamed by the “strong minded” (ibid.: 113) Red Riding Hood, and turned into assimilating, reciprocal consumption.

The most remarkable clues suggesting the oncoming metamorphosis if the wolf's appetite are preceded by textual evidence pointing to the duplicity of consumption. In the first place, the girl's shawl is "red as the blood she must spill", which could seem to refer to the bloodshed following the wolf's feasting on her body, but that actually designates her defloration. Secondly, when Riding Hood takes off her clothes, it is not meat that they reveal, but flesh: "now she was clothed only in her untouched integument of flesh" (ibid.: 118). Finally, and more explicitly, when the wolf answers the ritual exclamation "What big teeth you have" with "All the better to eat you with", "the girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat" (ibid.). And her subsequent actions, that is ripping off the wolf's shirt in a surge of desire, enact the metamorphosis of the wolf, which does not turn into a human being, but realises that there exist alternative forms of consummation. His carnivorous nature is now presented under a different light: no longer devouring, but being appeased by the girl's flesh. Although the wolf is still described as a "carnivore incarnate" whose appetite is only satisfied by "immaculate flesh" (ibid.) this does not prevent reciprocity. Once more, it is the girl who teaches him how to accept and incorporate the other through mutual exchange by performing an animal ritual which would be disgusting for a human being - thus proving that she is assimilating his wolfish nature, too: "she will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put lice in her mouth and eat them, as he will bid her, as she would do in a savage marriage ceremony" (ibid.).

In conclusion, it can be claimed that metamorphosis is the kernel of the heteronormative models of relationship offered by Carter and cast in opposition to those established by different patriarchal traditions. In contrast with phallogentric normative discursive constructions, metamorphosis is an unruly principle, whose reach is variable and depends on the extent of the transgression brought about by different kinds of transformation. As the analysis carried out in this chapter has tried to show, the transformations enacted and performed through the body are at the same time the source and the outcome of a process of bodily re-inscription and re-signification which, in turn, signals and engenders the changes taking place at the level of identity. Re-negotiating power arrangements through bodily performances is a subversive strategy deployed by

Carter to counter patriarchal traditions which project, confine, and expel what is deemed to be different, other, on account of the difficulty (and therefore also the importance) of rationally explaining and controlling it. Embodying the displacing and disturbing attributes of change, the female body has thus been restrained and contained on account of the excessive abjection of its mobile borders through its over-identification with the dangers of unbridled sexual desire.

Carter's fairy tales offer alternative, empowering and liberating examples for women exactly because they advocate for the necessity and illustrate the possibility of performing metamorphosis as a celebration of the displacement, the mutability and permeability of the female body's boundaries. Thus otherness, difference and excess take on positive connotations, so that the over-identification of woman with her body can be exploited to extract and wield the power generated by the driving force of ongoing change. In a powerful reflective inversion, what sustained subordination can disruptively be turned into a source of power: "The metamorphic power of monstrous others serves the function of illuminating the thresholds of 'otherness' while displacing their boundaries" (Braidotti 2002: 202).

CHAPTER 5.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVE: A CORPUS STYLISTIC INVESTIGATION

The possibility that the principles on which criticism operates might be derived via methods other than through the response of a gifted reader's intuition to a reading of literary work is rarely entertained.

(Louw 1997: 243)

In this concluding section a new methodological approach to the analysis of *The Bloody Chamber* is put forward in order to scrutinise some of the assumptions and insights discussed in the previous chapters. As was anticipated in the introduction to the thesis, this part is devoted to comparative investigations of the discursive construction of female identity in some of Carter's tales with the methodological tools offered by corpus stylistics. A thorough analysis of the collection would be beyond the scope of this work, which is rather aimed at showing how the purely qualitative analysis carried out with the traditional methods provided by cultural and literary studies can be supported and productively integrated with computational ones.

In particular, the purpose of this chapter is to give an example of the application of corpus linguistic methods to the analysis of a literary text. Besides the interesting achievements of corpus linguistics in the study of the poetics of texts, on authors' idiolects and, more generally, on style (see, for example, Louw 1997, Stubbs 2005, Toolan 2006, Mahlberg 2007, O'Halloran 2007, Goatly 2008, Fisher-Starcke 2006 and 2010), this methodological approach is particularly suitable to the investigation of Carter's fairy tales because it has already proved effective in unveiling the hidden ideology of texts, especially. Thus, it may be expected that it will prove useful when analysing the politics of Carter's texts

The following analysis addresses two main research questions with the general intention of exploring the discursive construction of female identity in Carter's fairy tales, that is the power relationships which condition and shape the development of the female protagonists' identity journeys, and the representation of their relation with authority. The first stems from the computational analysis of "The Bloody Chamber" by Carter and endeavours to assess if, how, and to what extent the text succeeds in disclosing, challenging and possibly amending the patriarchal, oppressive gender politics underlying Perrault's text through narrative strategies and stylistic choices. The results are then corroborated with a comparison between Carter's tale and an English translation of Perrault's "Blue Beard", which will be shortly introduced.

The second part of the analysis draws a comparison between the two versions of "Beauty and the Beast" within Carter's collection - "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" - in order to check what pointed out by means of purely qualitative analysis, namely if the intratextual references of the two tales reveal criticism towards women's compliance with patriarchy in their subordination; and whether the second story offers a more empowering alternative to the first in terms of female agency.

The issue of metamorphosis is not directly tackled for lack of textual evidence, that is, the frequency of words conveying the idea of transformation, like "turn* into", "change" or "metamorphosis" is not particularly significant. However, this does not mean that change and transformation are not major issues in the collection. Rather, for starters, the limited amount of terms expressing change could be due to the limited length of the text. Furthermore, and more significantly, it is consistent with Carter's way of dealing with relevant topics. The metamorphosing processes represented and/or hinted at in the fairy tales are indeed conveyed in covert, often indirect ways, which are not directly pointed out semantically, thus often requiring tracking down and bringing to life.

The following analysis is structured in three sections. The first deals with the main methodological and critical references - in particular, the debt to the work of Fischer-Starcke is acknowledged. Moreover, the definition of "Corpus Stylistics", of its features, goals and methods and of the reasons why this innovative discipline could be relevant to

an analysis of the aesthetics as well as the politics of *The Bloody Chamber* (and of any other literary text showing a similar political commitment) are emphasised. Finally, the methods of corpus stylistics of which use is actually made are described.

The second and third sections are devoted to the analyses of the pairs of stories which have already been presented, i.e. respectively, to the comparison between Carter's and Perrault's versions of "Blue Beard" and between Carter's interpretations of "Beauty and the Beast", and are followed by some concluding remarks.

1. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of literary texts by means of corpus linguistic methods is a rather innovative endeavour, whose potential still needs to be fully appreciated. Although this research only purports to show a fairly small and circumscribed case study, it nonetheless adds some insights into the multifarious possibilities of this discipline-in-progress. So far, indeed, the scholars who embarked on a corpus stylistic analysis have tended to choose the works of well-known and extensively studied Anglophone writers to investigate their stylistic choices on different grounds. Among them,⁴⁷ for example, Culpeper (2000) and Scott and Tribble (2006) analysed Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Adolphs and Carter (2006) the work of Virginia Woolf, Stubbs (2005) focused on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Mahlberg (2007) on Dickens' *Bleak House*, O'Halloran (2007) on Joice's "Evelin" and Fischer-Starke (2006 and 2010) on Jane Austen's novels.

The main source of reference (and inspiration) for this chapter is the work of Bettina Fischer-Starcke, in particular her PhD thesis devoted to the analysis of Jane Austen's novels, since her research is the most complete and thorough under both a theoretical and an applied perspective. As a matter of fact, not only does it provide an effective and up-to-date overview of past and current definitions and uses of corpus stylistics (thus contributing to the systematisation of the discipline), but it also shows the

⁴⁷ For an extensive review of literature on corpus stylistics, see Mahlberg 2007: 219-220; Fischer-Starcke 2010: 40-53).

application of different kinds of corpus stylistic methods to the analysis of a single text as well as a corpus. Therefore, due to its reach, depth and – albeit by necessity provisional – completeness, *Corpus Linguistics in Literary Analysis* (2010) is the main reference when it comes to definitions and theoretical and critical considerations about corpus stylistics throughout.

To begin with, Starcke points out the reasons why her – as well as the above mentioned scholars’ – research focuses on the work of famous and extensively studied authors and literary texts. The chief goals of the use of corpus linguistic techniques to study literary texts is to achieve “new insight into already known and already thoroughly analysed texts”, that is, to reveal “new literary meanings” within the data (Fischer-Starcke 2010: preface). Another important advantage of this technique is that it enables one to test if intuitively gained insights find correspondence in the actual use of language *within the text* (ibid.: 10-11). Therefore, starting with the analysis of well-known and extensively studied texts is the best way of proving the actual capability of computer-based methods to add something new or to challenge long established and/or unquestioned assumptions.

Even if Carter’s fame perhaps is not comparable to that of Jane Austen or Virginia Woolf, the amount of criticism on her work – as the first chapter of this thesis suggests – and its acknowledged, at times even celebrated influence on contemporary writers definitely makes *The Bloody Chamber* a suitable candidate for a pioneering corpus stylistic analysis.

1.1. Definitions and features of corpus-based research methods

Corpus stylistics could be defined as “the linguistic analysis of electronically stored literary texts”. It results from the combination between stylistics and corpus linguistics, where the former is “the linguistic analysis of literary texts” and the latter the “electronic analysis of language data” (ibid.: 1).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Interestingly, the definition elaborated by Starcke answers the question that Mahlberg indirectly poses in the title of a paragraph where she discusses the definition of corpus stylistics: “Corpus linguistics + (literary) stylistics = corpus stylistics?” (Mahlberg 2007: 119).

Significantly, the basic assumption of stylistics could be summarised as follows: “meaning in language is a linguistic phenomenon which can be decoded by way of linguistic analysis” (ibid.: 6). This statement already conveys the reach of an approach to the study of literary meanings which makes use of electronic resources and methods: corpus linguistics allows “a systematic and detailed analysis of *large quantities* of language data” (ibid.: 1, my emphasis). The “large quantity” of data that can be thoroughly analysed deserves to be given particular attention, because corpus linguistic techniques add a quantitative element to the qualitative examination of the text usually carried out by literary studies.⁴⁹ Besides adding a quantitative analysis to the intuitive one, corpus stylistics can

help with the analysis of an individual text by providing various options for the comparison of one text with groups of other texts to identify tendencies, intertextual relationships, or reflections of social and cultural contexts [... and] help to develop descriptive tools to identify and characterize the features that make a text distinctive. (Mahlberg 2007: 221)

Corpus linguistics, in turn, can be – and has been – given a range of different definitions, depending on the feature that one decides to emphasise. The first stems from the centrality of the occurrence of words, clusters of words or linguistic structures, that is from their frequency. The basic principle underlying this approach is the identification of common and uncommon features within the corpus under examination – which, in the case of corpus stylistic analyses is an individual or a group of *literary* text(s). Following this principle, a comparison is made between usual tendencies in the use of language and unusual, uncommon choices of the author, which stand out and therefore call on the attention of the researcher. By so doing, two opposite approaches can be engendered. The first gives pre-eminence to the frequency of linguistic items: if words and clusters of words are frequent within a text, it means that the meaning of the text is encoded in and

⁴⁹ Far from considering “literary studies” as a fixed, homogenising label, I refer once again to the effective excursus of the way the discipline has evolved through time, thus creating different paradigms, methods and results sketched by Starcke (2010: 2-9). Nonetheless, my remarks are grounded in the assumption that a common trait of the different understandings of literary studies is the emphasis on their supposed lack of a quantitative element. Before corpus linguistics was introduced, indeed, literary critics could refer only to their interpretations of the texts and verify the “connection between language structures and their meanings” (ibid.; 7) only on very limited chunks of text.

through them and their collocates, and that they contribute to its structural organisation. Starcke endorses this approach in her analysis of the phraseology of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, where she remarks, "the more frequent a [textual] item is, the greater its significance for the structure or the content of the text" (Starcke 2006: 88). The definition of corpus linguistics originating from this understanding of the discipline is "empirical discipline which assumes a correlation between the frequency of a linguistic structure and its importance for the structure and the meaning of a text" (Starcke 2006: 88).⁵⁰

Conversely, however, researchers could also focus on an atypical, unexpected use of language as it would signal peculiar features of the style of an author or, more generally, remarkable choices within a literary work, which are meaningful in terms of content as well as form, and thus deserve the attention of the critic – this is the underlying principle which informs the following analysis of Carter's work. As Stubbs puts it:

Individual texts can be explained only against a background of what is normal and expected in general language use, and this is precisely the comparative information that quantitative corpus data can provide. An understanding of the background of the usual and everyday – what happens millions of times – is necessary in order to understand the unique. (Stubbs 2005: 5)

"Unique" here refers to the particular use of language made by the author of the literary text, which needs to be investigated as if it were unfamiliar to the analyst, and therefore a potential source of unforeseen meaning, and which sometimes can be detected only by means of computational tools. Thus, according to Stubbs corpus linguistic analysis is aimed at explaining the language of more or less prestigious texts – first and foremost literary texts – because "software can identify textual features that are of literary significance, including features which critics seem not to have noticed" (Stubbs 2005: 6).

A third definition of corpus linguistics, given by Biber (2011:15), stresses instead the "empiricism of its analytic techniques". Biber basically emphasises that although corpus linguistic research is based on the analysis of a collection of "texts stored on a computer" with the goal of "describing the pattern of language use in the computer-

⁵⁰ As Starcke acknowledges, this definition is taken from Teubert, 2005 (Starcke 2006: 88).

assisted study of a corpus [which] can also show the results that are already inherent in the text” (ibid.), it nonetheless extensively relies on the researcher’s intuitions, choices, opinions. In other words, even though this “research approach [...] facilitates empirical descriptions of language use”, and can be defined as “the most powerful empirical approach for analysing the patterns of language use in [...a given] domain” (ibid.), it cannot be considered entirely descriptive and objective simply by reason of its being following quantitative methods, as the qualitative component is equally important. These rather obvious considerations are put forward by Biber, and recalled here in order to preempt detractors of corpus stylistics, who challenge its pretence of empirically generating quantitative results as opposed to the qualitative approach of non-computational literary research.

Last but not least, analysis carried out by means of corpus linguistic techniques – also when it is performed on a literary corpus – can be classified according to “analytic techniques and criteria” in two main types: corpus-driven or corpus-based (Fischer-Starcke 2011: 52). In a corpus-driven – or, as Louw calls it, “Data-driven” (Louw 1997: 247) – analysis “hypotheses are developed by way of corpus linguistic data” (Fischer-Starcke 2011: 52). This means that the choice of what should be analysed is based on the frequency with which the features of the text under scrutiny occur within the data. As a consequence, the research questions are developed step by step in an inductive way (ibid.). In the specific instance of literary texts, the corpora can “provide insights into aspects of ‘literariness’ [...] which have hitherto not been thought by critics” (Louw 1997: 247).

Corpus-based – or “Data-assisted” (Louw 1997: 243) – analysis, instead, “is one that researches a particular hypothesis by way of corpus linguistic techniques” (Fischer-Starcke 2011: 52). In other words, when a corpus-driven approach is chosen, the corpus is used as a “reference tool” to answer questions or validate hypotheses about the text, which are intuitively posed or made by the researcher in a deductive way (ibid.). The corpus, therefore, is interrogated “for verification of an intuitive insight”, which can be corroborated, but more often than not modified or even displaced (Louw 1997: 243). The analysis of Carter’s fairy tales is carried out following a corpus-based approach, that is the research questions are devised and then deductively investigated by means of the data.

1.2. The debate about the objectivity of corpus linguistics

It is important to note, nevertheless, that the last three characterisations of corpus linguistics give rise to a number of objections related to the actual possibility for computational tools of giving an account of the literariness of a text and/or providing relevant information about the style of an author. A number of studies which analyse literary texts with computer-assisted techniques, indeed, also dwell on problematic issues raised by the detractors of corpus stylistics, as they feel the need to justify the objectivity and the innovative contribution that this research method can give to literary criticism by providing new – or amending established – insights into the literary work. It is worth quoting here the main points of this debate, in order to emphasise that quantitative procedures, especially when combined with qualitative ones, can actually be successful.⁵¹

Stubbs responds to Fish's attack (1996) on quantitative analysis, which Fish argues would be "circular" and "arbitrary" (Stubbs 2005: 6). After demonstrating that Fish's allegations could hold true for "any study of anything" (*ibid.*), Stubbs argues in favour of corpus stylistics as computer-based analysis ensures the identification of linguistic features that could not be detected intuitively or in extensive corpora, and that are undeniably helpful to understand the meaning of literary texts, as literary authors, too, "express their ideas through language" (*ibid.*). More to the point, Stubbs does not deny that the contribution of the researcher is also needed, as "a purely automatic stylistic" would not be possible (*ibid.*), and besides the role of linguists is rather important, as they select the features to be studied within the corpus and interpret the answers given by the software (*ibid.*).

Similarly, Fisher-Starcke questions the objectivity of corpus linguistic techniques and concludes that, although complete impartiality and objectivity could not be feasible – no more than in any other discipline – nonetheless the subjective decisions made by the linguist do not belittle computer-assisted findings. Among the subjective decisions which need to be made within the research project, one could list "the choice of data and

⁵¹ With the notion of a "successful" corpus stylistic analysis I imply the criteria set forth by Fischer-Starcke: "1. Growth of knowledge resulting from analyses, 2. Replicability of results, 3. Checkability of results, 4. Innovations derived from analyses" (Fischer-Starcke 2011: 19).

software for an analysis, the settings of the software, the choice which of the data generated by the software is analysed and the interpretation of the data” (Fischer-Starcke: 16). Fischer-Starcke thus concludes that also in a corpus linguistic analysis subjective and objective elements are unavoidably interrelated.

The corpus-based analysis of Carter’s fairy tales takes all these assumptions into account and, even if it is informed by the awareness of an inescapable subjective element, it will show that some intuitive claims are confirmed by the language of the texts, that new insight can also emerge and hint at new possible, otherwise unforeseeable developments in the criticism of *The Bloody Chamber*.

1.3. Methodological approaches

The last matter that needs to be tackled while introducing a corpus stylistic research is a brief discussion of the different methodological approaches hitherto available to researchers. Biber’s essay “Corpus linguistics and the study of literature” (2011) provides a concise and effective summary of the major methods used by researchers in corpus stylistics. The three main approaches identified here “focus on the distribution of words to identify textual features that are especially characteristic of an author, particular text, or even a single character within a play or novel” and could be summarised as follows: “keyword analysis, identifying typical extended lexical phrases, and collocational analysis” (Biber 2011: 16). All three approaches require the use of two corpora, that is a main corpus (called “target corpus”) – the text or collection of texts under investigation – and a “reference corpus” – a larger corpus with which the target one is compared. As has been already anticipated, the purpose of the comparison is to point out typical (or atypical) patterns of language use, which are then interpreted by the linguist in order to draw stylistic considerations on the main corpus or, more broadly, on the style of its author(s). To these methods Fischer-Starcke adds a fourth one, that is the “distribution analysis of keywords and of points in the data where new lexis is introduced” (Fischer-Starcke 2012: 26).

As regards the first technique, “Keywords” are “words which are unusually frequent (or infrequent) in a text as compared to the reference corpus” (Mahlberg 2007: 223). They can be identified by means of software like *WordSmithTools* (Scott 2004) – which is the one that has been used in this thesis. Keyword analysis, then, identifies words that occur more frequently – in a statistically significant way – in the target corpus than in the reference corpus, thus allowing the researcher to find out “the individual words that characterize a literary work” (Biber 2011: 16). Obviously enough, as Biber reminds us, in this case the choice of the reference corpus is crucial (ibid.: 17).

The second method discussed by Biber, “identifying typical extended lexical phrases”, entails an analysis of the most recurrent lexical clusters within a literary text or the work of an author. These lexical “clusters” could be defined as “sequences of words” which become “pointers to local textual functions and thus to stylistic features” of a text or corpus (Mahlberg 2007: 223). Clusters become of interest to the analysis because they form units of meaning which exceed the meaning of the single words they contain (ibid.: 224).⁵² Their impact on the study of style depends on their particular contextual use. In this respect, Mahlberg identifies several categories of local textual functions of clusters:

characterising people, places and things, expressing interaction between characters, describing looks and movements, creating textual world by comparison and contrast [...] and locating and relating actions in time and place. (Biber 2011: 18)

As for the third methodological approach, “collocation” is a descriptive category which “characterise[s] the association between meaning and form” and “describe[s] the tendency of words to co-occur” (Mahlberg 2007: 223). What corpus stylistics is most interested in when it comes to collocations is the frequency with which some of them co-occur in unusual, creative, metaphorical or even oxymoronic ways within a literary text or the corpus of a writer (ibid.: 222). Following Hori:

[the] study of unusual collocations with high frequencies in the corpus of writers’ whole texts may reveal their predilection for particular collocations; and repeated usual collocations in their works could be considered the characters’ idiolect. (Hori in Mahlberg 2007: 222)

⁵² For a thorough analysis of clusters, see Mahlberg 2007 and Fischer-Starcke 2011.

Biber highlights a fairly meaningful aspect of the analysis of collocations, that is the investigation of semantic prosody.⁵³ Some collocations, indeed, all the more if they transgress expectations, can be used by writers to play with semantic prosody, thus creating interesting stylistic effects, like humour or irony (see Biber 2011: 18).

Last but not least, the fourth approach proposed by Starcke deserves to be given some attention, even though it is not presented in depth, as it is not specifically relevant to this thesis. Basically, the “distribution analysis of keywords and of points in the data where new lexis is introduced” (Fischer-Starcke 2012: 26) is a technique which allows the linguist to study the distribution of lexis in the corpus, that is to identify “where specified word forms or lemmata are used within a text or corpus” (ibid.:145). Starting from the assumption that the dominant semantic fields of a text indicate its “semantic foci”, this approach enables the researcher to locate those sections in the text or corpus where new content is introduced, as it is signalled by a change in the most frequent semantic fields – i.e. by the introduction of new lexis (ibid.). This kind of analysis is articulated in two steps: first, the text needs to be segmented into its constituent parts (this is done computationally by dividing the text into sections which are lexically rather homogeneous); second, its keyword distribution (previously found by comparing it with a suitable reference corpus) is analysed. The keyword distribution is utilised to further segment the text and then this segmentation is compared to the points where new lexis is introduced within the text (ibid.: 144).

All the approaches sketched above focus on lexis, as the pioneering studies which analyse literary texts by means of corpus linguistic techniques focus on the analysis of words or clusters of words. This is mainly due to the difficulty of studying other features, for example grammar, with computer-assisted tools. Moreover, “it is easier to notice the stylistic importance of word choice, while grammatical characteristics are much less salient” (Biber 2011: 19). As Biber himself remarks, however, it is also true that “registers and individual styles are distinguished by the use of pervasive grammatical features”

⁵³ Biber turns to Louw, Partington and Sinclair, and defines “semantic prosody” as “an underlying evaluative meaning [of words and clusters of words], which is usually categorised simply as whether the object or events are considered to be good or bad” (Biber 2011: 18). Semantic prosody, in other words, is the way in which seemingly neutral words are perceived positively or negatively because of their tendency to co-occur with certain words, which carry a good or bad connotation.

(ibid.). It would be really interesting to investigate recurrent grammatical structures in Carter's work, since, as has been underlined more than once, a number of critics contend that her style is peculiar and the way she uses words is "very much her own" (Crunelle-Vanrigh 2001: 130). As the following sections will hopefully show, indeed, the aim of my analysis is that of putting into practice some of the theories and methods introduced above in order to assess and possibly expand on some of the intuitive insights into the discursive development of female identity put forward throughout the thesis by grounding them in the actual use of language. Moreover, it must be conceded that a more extensive research based on the comparison of *The Bloody Chamber* as target corpus with a bigger, *ad hoc* reference corpus, which makes use of different techniques would most likely add an interesting, new contribution to the field.

Nonetheless, even the circumscribed study of the small samples of text which are presented here can be of interest on different accounts. First and foremost – to my knowledge – it is the first instance where a study carried out by combining the methodological tools of cultural and gender studies and literary studies appears with a parallel analysis which makes use of corpus stylistics. Secondly, thus far Carter's works have not been taken into consideration for experiments with computer-assisted research despite their potential suitability to both a lexical and a grammatical analysis. Finally, this study could enrich the relatively new research field of corpus stylistics and be added to the still too few instances of this kind of analysis, which will hopefully keep on spreading, improving and finally, possibly consolidating.

1.4. *The Data*

The texts under examination in the following sections are Carter's tales "The Bloody Chamber", "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" collected in *The Bloody Chamber*, and an English translation of "Blue Beard" by Charles Perrault.⁵⁴ More

⁵⁴ This version of Perrault's tale was chosen among the number of collections of his fairy tales available on Project Gutenberg. It was published in 1900 by J. M. Dent & Company with twelve illustrations by Charles Robinson. Unfortunately the name of the translator is not made explicit. However, this version was

specifically, as has already been anticipated, two comparative analyses are carried out: the first between Carter's and Perrault's version of "Blue Beard", and the second between the two stories about "Beauty and the Beast" by Carter.

Of course, the extremely small size of the corpora taken into consideration has a significant impact on the results of the analysis: "The Bloody Chamber" counts 16370 orthographic words – or "tokens" – whereas its counterpart "Blue Beard" only 1951. As for the second set of texts, "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" amounts to 4643 tokens, and "The Tiger's Bride" to 7753. Contrary to what usually happens in these kinds of corpus stylistic analysis, whose reference corpus is usually very broad, frequently coinciding with the *British National Corpus* (consisting of about 100 million words)⁵⁵, it will not be possible to draw general conclusions about Carter's style or on the ways in which fairy tale as a genre changes thanks to her revolutionary manipulations. As a matter of fact, such an analysis would be beyond the scope of this research, which rather aims at giving a sample-example of the ways in which a computer-assisted analysis could support, validate and even enrich an intuitive one performed through the methodological and critical tools offered by cultural and literary studies. Nevertheless, as the discussion of the data will hopefully show, interesting insight can be attained even from this limited source texts, which suggests that a broader research would be worthwhile and should be encouraged. Besides, this is not the first instance where a really small text is analysed with computer-assisted techniques in order to gain literary insight into it. O'Halloran's "corpus-informed" research (2007: 228), indeed, focuses on the short story "Evelin" by James Joyce with a double purpose. First, the study wants to counter Fish's argument that stylistics is "arbitrary and circular". Secondly, and more significantly, it demonstrates that it is possible to foresee that the protagonist, title-character of the story, will not elope since the beginning by means of textual evidence gathered through computer-assisted techniques (ibid.)

chosen for other reasons, not least the fact that it is among the closest to the French one, and the moral at the end is translated and kept – which is not always the case in later translations and collections addressed to children.

⁵⁵ This is due to the fact that the BNC is taken to represent "standard" language, and is therefore suitable as a background against which to "measure" the peculiarities of a text.

The analysis of Carter's texts is carried out through three main techniques: the study and comparison of the wordlists of the tales through some purposely-generated concordance lines, the analysis of collocations and – to a lesser extent – that of keywords. This latter method, which is usually the most extensively deployed, is not widely referred to here because the limited length of the texts lowers the significance of their keywords. In both analyses, indeed, the keywords resulting from the comparison were entirely due to one of the stories being a third-person account told by an – almost – omniscient narrator, whereas the other featured a first-person narrator. As will be shortly shown, however, keywords were nonetheless a useful starting point to decide how and where to begin the analysis, i.e., which words were of relevance in Carter's tales as opposed to Perrault's and why.

The software used for the analyses is *WordSmith Tools 4.0* (Scott 2004), which generates statistical data on a text or corpus through three main functions: *wordlist*, *concord*, and *keywords*. The function *wordlist* – which is the most extensively used here – generates a list of the tokens of texts or corpora, which can then be ordered according to their alphabetical order or their frequency. *Concord* – which is also extensively employed in my analysis – creates concordance lines of chosen words and lemmata. Finally, *keyword* is the function which individuates the keywords of data by comparing the wordlist of a text to that of the reference corpus. In addition to “wordlists, concordance lines and lists of keywords, WST [*WordSmith Tools*] also provides statistical information of the data” (Fischer-Starcke 2011: 32), that is its word-number, type-token ratio and average length of sentences.

2. A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF “THE BLOODY CHAMBER”

The corpus-assisted analysis of Carter's “The Bloody Chamber” is carried out in three steps. First of all, Carter's tale is considered alone in order to show how some intuitive hypotheses related to power relationships and the discursive construction of female identity put forward in the previous analysis can be confirmed by corpus linguistic

methods. More specifically, the claim that the tale is a retrospective account told by a woman whose identity journey is still in-progress is scrutinised. Secondly, the tale is compared to Perrault’s “Blue Beard” and the intuitive interpretation of the texts is validated and expanded through a corpus stylistic examination. This stage purports to point to the linguistic elements which enable one to prove that Carter’s representation of the development of female identity exposes the underlying patriarchal ideology and is set in dialectic opposition with Perrault’s. Last but not least, new insight into Carter’s story as a result of the corpus-driven comparative analysis is introduced, which – to my knowledge – has not been pointed out by any literary critics so far.

In the second chapter of this thesis, Manley’s contention that the protagonist of “The Bloody Chamber” “is a woman in process, someone who is exploring her subject position and beginning to tell her own story” (2001: 83) was discussed in order to explain how the character’s attempt to account for her self is grounded in material experience, and is an expression of nascent agency. Furthermore, it suggests that every achievement within an identity journey is only a provisional step. This understanding is enforced by the fact that the tale is a retrospective narration made by an older woman who accounts for and speculates about her past under a new, but still contingent, perspective. The examination of the wordlist of the tale generated through *WordSmithTools* confirms these impressions.

In this respect, the first interesting considerations arise from the analysis of the modal “could”, more often than not followed by “not”, or in any case used in a negative sense. The verb expresses dynamic modality and conveys the impression that the young girl, whose experience is accounted for, was unable to act or react autonomously in the situations which she came to face:

found I could not say anything else hours at your piano. And away that afternoon and now already surrounded the castle, reverberation, like the door of hell. were stiff and shaking. At first, and at the same time a repugnance My breath came thickly. sprang out in beads on my brow.	I could only I could not I could not I could I could not I could I could not I could not I could no	repeat: ‘In tune...perfect... resist that. Besides, I sleep. I lay tossing and contain myself no longer. I take a refuge in my bedroom, manage nothing better than the stifle for his white, heavy flesh meet his eye and turned my longer hear the sound of the
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about. Mother, the line was bad,	I could	hardly make out her
now, for the rest of my life. And	I could not	sleep. I stealthily sat up,
like a gipsy's magic ball, so that	I could not	take my eyes off it when I
now that I had said it, I found	I could not	say anything else. I could
played, to be conversing with God.	I could not	restrain a sob. 'Oh, my love,

Moreover, the frequent use of “could” also testifies to the way in which the grownup woman reassesses her by-gones in the light of newly gained knowledge and narrates them with a regretful, and perhaps also apologetic tone:

time in all my married life. And	I could	have shown my interested
in this file. It was a very thin one.	I could	have wished, perhaps, I had not
crinkled brown hair, I saw myself as	I could	have wished to be. I warmed to a
But, now...what shall I do, now?	I could	have spent a happy hour

Together with “could”, “would” is the first modal in the wordlist after “had” and “was”. The relations between these two verbs in the past tense is significant, in that “would”, often used in a future-in-the-past construction, introduces predictions, that is, decisions that the girl takes about her future actions. Through this opposition, the impediments to act expressed by “I could not” are partly countered by her anticipations, often stated with determined resolution (even though they are never confirmed):

to Paris. Such jewels! Why,	I would	be able to change my earrings
so that, for as long as I could	I would	be able to smell the ancient
when I thought that, henceforth,	I would	always share these sheets with a
I knew that, henceforth,	I would	always be lonely. Yet that was
creatures, all. Once at the village,	I would	fling myself directly on the mercy
of avid collectors - ah! He foresaw	I would	spend hours there. He had amply
If he had come to me in bed	I would	have strangled him, then. But he
chamber, it seemed to me that	I would	never laugh again; now
of an officer's daughter. No,	I would	not dress for dinner. Furthermore,
tide receded from the causeway	I would	make for the mainland - on foot
before I spoke; a subtle discourtesy.	I would	Speak to my husband about it.

A similar function is played by the cluster “seemed to me” and by the verb “remember*”, which are rather frequent (respectively seven and six occurrences)⁵⁶. Besides conveying the idea of a retrospective narration and of a subject-in-process who narrativises her access to womanhood in order to make sense of it, and to justify her past actions (to herself as well as to the readers), these patterns also hint at the – questionable – reliability of the narrator. As “seem” and “remember” suggest, indeed, what is told is the product of – more or less randomly surfacing – memories and, in any case, of a partial, individual perspective:

“I remember*”:

<p>bad dreams away. But the last thing and had scarcely seen. When to a Romanian countess? And then country of marriage. And in my hair until I winced; I said, evening without you at the piano,</p>	<p>I remember I remembered I remembered I remembered I remember I remember I remember</p>	<p>how, that night, I lay awake , before I slept, was the tall that, I felt the exhilaration her pretty, witty face, and I tenderly imagined how, at , very little. ‘The maid will Of course! The music room!’</p>
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“seemed to me”:

<p>a sombre delirium that in the torture chamber, it sunk in his hands. And it monocle; his movements absolute absence of light, a flower, but sometimes he</p>	<p>seemed to me seemed to me seemed to me seemed to me seemed to me seemed to me</p>	<p>compounded of a ghastly, yes, that I would never laugh again; now he was in despair. Strange. In spite deliberately course, vulgar. The like a mask, as if his real face, the like a lily. Yes. A lily. Possessed of</p>
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With reference to the identity journey in progress, the frequency of the cluster “I found” is meaningful:

⁵⁶ Given that there are only 16370 tokens in the story, a similar frequency may be significant, and is therefore worthy of consideration.

When I recovered consciousness,	I found	I was lying in the piano-tuner's
to the music room but there	I found	I had not been abandoned. 'I can
acquired a whole harem for myself'	I found	that I was trembling. My breath
nervously to the solitary meal. Then	I found	I had to tell her what I would like
of his desk. All was in order, so	I found	nothing. Not a random doodle on
To my surprise, now I had said it,	I found	I could not say anything else. I
I searched among his scores until	I found	the Well-Tempered Clavier. I set

Only two instances (i.e. the fifth and the last line), indeed, refer to the action of locating something. In the other cases, it always indicates a realisation on the part of the narrator, something new and often unexpected that she has learnt about herself.

If one turns to the comparison between Carter's tale and what is commonly deemed to be its source of inspiration, or rather the main text that it sets out to question, the potential of a corpus linguistic analysis becomes even more interesting for the ways in which intuitive assumptions can be confirmed and even further developed through computational tools. It is easy to observe intuitively that Carter's tale is a first person narration, as opposed to a third person one, and that, consequently, the protagonist is also the main focalizer of the story. A simple analysis of the most recurrent clusters with the keyword "I" testifies to it, as the subject is preceded or followed by verbs like "know", "think", "feel", "see", which suggests that everything is seen through the eyes of the protagonist. From these considerations, then, it is easy to infer that in Carter's tale the female character is given pre-eminence together with voice, and that this counters Perrault's silencing of the passive type of his heroine, who is accounted for in the third person by an omniscient narrator. This, nevertheless, does not imply that Carter's protagonist is accorded much more agency than is to Perrault's. As has already been stressed, indeed, the fact that the narrator's identity journey is still in progress entails that she has not elaborated efficient empowering strategies yet. The pattern of recurrent clusters with the keyword "I" confirms this hypothesis, since, as is proved by textual evidence: more often than not the subject pronoun co-occurs with a negative verb (i.e. the negative adverb "not" is unusually frequent), or with modals at conditional tenses or verbs of feeling and perception, which express subjective impression rather than action, factual statements or truths, and an external imposition rather than autonomous initiative:

Cluster	Frequency	Length
I COULD NOT	13	4
I KNEW I	12	4
I DID NOT	9	4
I FOUND I	8	4
I HAD NOT	8	4
KNEW I MUST	7	4
I FELT A	7	4
THAT I SHOULD	6	4
I COULD SEE	6	4
WHEN I THOUGHT	5	4
I HAD BEEN	5	4
I COULD HAVE	5	4
AS I COULD	5	4

As for the negatives, the instances where the protagonist takes the decision of not doing something are definitely outnumbered by the ones where she is kept from doing something either by her husband or by her inability to understand the situation or her self:

the appearance of life, to mock me.	I did not	like to linger in my overcrowded
our interrupted pleasures, my love.'	I did not	believe one word of it. I knew I
- on foot, running, stumbling;	I did not	trust that leather-clad chauffeur,
of his; I was only a little girl,	I did not	understand. And, he said
newlyweds in her native Breton.	I did not	understand. That he, smiling,
turned my back pettishly on her.	I did not	want to remember how he had
I had let them down again but	I did not	care; I was armed against them
a late luncheon. When I told her	I did not	need it, she looked at me
to seduce me so utterly that	I could not	say I felt one single twinge of
reverberation, like the door of hell.	I could not	take a refuge in my bedroom,
and at the same time a repugnance	I could not	stifle for his white, heavy flesh
My breath came thickly.	I could not	meet his eye and turned my
now, for the rest of my life. And	I could not	sleep. I stealthily sat up,
like a gipsy's magic ball, so that	I could not	take my eyes off it when I
now that I had said it, I found	I could not	say anything else. I could
played, to be conversing with God.	I could not	restrain a sob. 'Oh, my love,
hours at your piano. And	I could not	resist that. Beside
away that afternoon and now	I could not	sleep. I lay tossing and
the music room but there I found	I had not	been abandoned. 'I can be of
face without its mask; and perhaps	I had not	. Yet I had been infinitely
Until that moment,	I had not	given a single thought to the
a connoisseur of such things? Yet	I had not	bargained for this, the girl with
I warmed to a loving sensitivity	I had not	hitherto suspected in him. Then
I could have wished, perhaps,	I had not	found that touching, ill-spelt
of an officer's daughter. No,	I would not	dress for dinner. Furthermore

by the brilliance of his hoard. But	I would not	find his heart amongst the
little relics, the tumbled garments	I would not	need any more, the scores
always subtly oppressed me...No,	I was not	afraid of him; but of myself
not dress for dinner. Furthermore,	I was not	hungry enough for dinner itself.
weight of his desire was a force	I might not	withstand, not by virtue of its
the well-behaved housekeeper, and	I dared not	take any of the pale, ghostly

A similar impression is reinforced by the occurrence of the modal “must”, which conveys an external imposition or a likely guess (as in “I must truly love him”), which still points to the protagonist’s scarce understanding of, not to mention ability to act in, the situations she is reporting:

be desecrating the marriage bed? So	I must	go to the courtyard where my
of the libertine with whom	I must	share it? And what, precisely,
occupant more closely; yet I knew	I must	. Each time, I struck a match to
Now I had ransacked his desk,	I must	spend a cool-headed quarter of an
edge of steel in my voice, for I knew	I must	meet my lord alone. ‘Leave me!’
Jean-Yves. ‘He is here. I know it.	I must	stay with you.’ ‘You shall not!’ I
a little drawer that had stuck fast,	I must	have touched a hidden spring, for
me the box, himself, knowing	I must	learn the secret. I played a
the presence of its own atrocities,	I must	pay the price for my new
during the Liebestod that I thought	I must	truly love him. Yes. I did. On his
up and set me on my feet; I knew	I must	answer it. The receiver felt heavy
as long as I was his. And with that,	I must	be content. But, here, it would be
And, once again, of my apparel	I must	retain only my gems; the sharp

These considerations would support the arguments put forward in the third chapter with reference to the female identity portrayed in Carter’s tale. Moreover, they also sustain the claim that rather than utterly opposing to Perrault’s passive heroine an empowered and active one, Cater aims at exposing and disclosing the patriarchal ideology informing traditional fairy tales. In other words, she gives voice to a female character who is no longer treated like a type, who is able to speak in the first person about her past painful experience. On the other hand, however, the protagonist/narrator is not yet completely freed from the subaltern role assigned to her – she is actually complicit in her subordination – nor is she fully empowered or ready to take responsibility for her narrative.

The tales can be observed under another perspective in order to draw conclusions about the different representation of female identity through language: the comparison between the use the authors make of some relevant words which express power relations within the couple and the family. The different occurrence and collocations of these words in the two tales is rather significant, as they signal the description of subtly different power arrangements in spite of both stories being apparently informed by a patriarchal background.

To begin with, it is worth examining the ways in which the terms “wife” and “husband” are used respectively in “The Bloody Chamber” and in “Blue Beard”. “Wife” is the most recurrent term referred to familial relationships in Perrault’s tale.

called out with all his might to his	wife	, ‘Come down quickly, or I shall
more, if you please,’ replied his	wife	; and then said quickly in a low
there.’ ‘I am coming,’ answered his	wife	; and then called ‘Anne, sister
of a month, Blue Beard told his	wife	that he was obliged to take a
been settled to his advantage. His	wife	did all she could to make him
having examined it, said to his	wife	, ‘Why is there blood on this key?’
is still pacific, indifference to his	wife	affecting. And of his beard,
them as the brothers of his	wife	, one a dragoon, the other a
‘One minute more,’ replied his	wife	; and then she cried, ‘Anne! Sister
him dead on the spot. The poor	wife	was almost as dead as her
‘I don’t know,’ answered the poor	wife	, paler than death. ‘You don’t
about to cut off her head. The poor	wife	, turning towards him her dying
whole house shook again. The poor	wife	went down and threw herself at his
tower, and the poor unhappy	wife	called to her from time to time

As should be clear from the above wordlist, conveniently arranged according to the first collocate on the left of the lexical item “wife”, the term always co-occurs with words with negative meaning (“poor” and “unhappy”), and in most cases it is emphasised that she belongs to someone (“his wife”). As a matter of fact, “his wife” either “replies” to or “answers” something her husband has said, is told something or shown indifference. Doubtless she is the utmost victim, passivity made flesh, her only active action being to desperately call on her sister for help.

And sister is in fact the second most recurrent word belonging to semantic field of domestic relationships within the tale. Contrary to the protagonist, her sister does have a name, Anne, which is almost always repeated after the general designation “sister”. This is

probably due to the narrative strategy of repetition characterising the final part of the story, whose purpose is to quicken the pace of the narration and to increase its tension. Here, the poor wife insistently asks her sister if she sees their brothers coming to her rescue (she is about to be killed by Blue Beard). In this case as well woman is associated with passivity and powerlessness, as the sister only observes the distance from the top of a tower, without being able to help the protagonist, and besides the only other thing readers are told is that she was “married to a man” by her sister (not even that she got *married with* a man, which would suggest at least a semblance of agency).

The third most frequent noun related to family ties is “brothers”.

<p>strength to rise and embrace her a moment afterwards. ‘They are my this way,’ said Sister Anne. ‘Is it my the top of the tower, and see if my Beard. He recognised them as the captains’ commissions for the two</p>	<p>brothers brothers brothers brothers brothers brothers</p>	<p>. It was found that Blue Beard ! I am making all the signs I can ?’ ‘Alas! No, sister, only a flock are not in sight. They promised of his wife, one a dragoon, the ; and with the remainder she</p>
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Although it is not apparent from the chunks of text reported above, the wife’s brothers save her life by “running their swords through” Blue beard’s body.

Overall, linguistic evidence shows that in Perrault’s fairy tale the only active role is played by men: by the female protagonist’s brothers and by Blue Beard himself, who, interestingly, is never addressed as “husband” that is according to his role, but always with his (nick)name.

Predictably enough, Carter’s story shows a mirroring pattern, for the most recurrent term expressing family bonds is “husband”:

<p>thoughtfully forewarned by my witness of a furious justice. And my my lover would not see me die. My door kept me from my was lighter for the lack of it. My go to the courtyard where my as childbirth, mortal. When my discourtesy. I would speak to my in these more democratic times, my pass the long, sea-lit hours until my through the shifting mist. My know that, in a few moments, my</p>	<p>husband husband husband husband husband husband husband husband husband husband husband</p>	<p>, had restrained herself from stood stock-still, as if she laid my branded forehead and it stood open. If I rose took it lovingly and lodged it waited in his saw my companion, he about it. She eyed my must travel as far as Paris beds me? I shivered to think had indeed returned; this would have left France</p>
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of distant bees. My husband. My	husband	, who, with so much love,
massive, irredeemable bulk of my	husband	but the slight, stooping
like a hive of distant bees. My	husband	. My husband, who, with so
from that northern city? Or had my	husband	bought it for himself, from
of Russian leather assured me my	husband	was once again beside me.
were a system of soft shields. My	husband	liked me to wear my opal
left me and died. As soon as my	husband	handed me down from the
at me derisively; they knew my	husband	had been too clever for me! I
empty; Jean-Yves was correct, my	husband	had already entered the
irreproachable bullet through my	husband's	head. We lead a quite life
and if he, too, were one of my	husband's	creatures, then at least he
them all for evidence of my	husband's	true nature. His office first,
of a torturer,' opined my	husband's	favourite poet; I had
of keys I'd dropped outside my	husband's	office door, the ring from
ghosts looking for, crying for, the	husband	who will never return to the
shyness, and watched a dozen	husbands	approach me in a dozen
her sonorous jewellery.' A dozen	husbands	impaled a dozen brides while

Out of twenty-nine occurrences, twenty-six collocate with “my”. It could be claimed that in this case the use of the possessive adjective plays a similar role to “his” in Perrault, not so much because it is vehicle of an idea of ownership or control, but rather in that it confines the man to his role of husband. As happened to the wife in Perrault’s story, in Carter’s the husband is never called with his first name, which subtly challenges the confinement of woman to a role in the patriarchal cultural framework to which traditional fairy tales like Perrault’s belong. In general, nevertheless, the husband is granted an active role in Carter’s tale, too, as the noun is often linked to verbs of action.

The role “husband” is followed in the wordlist of “The Bloody Chamber” by “mother”, which is significant for two reasons. First, because the word is absent in Perrault’s tale, and second, because it is not a mere substitution of Perrault’s “sister”. Carter’s mother, indeed, is an active woman, who kills the cruel husband without blinking an eye.

Among the numerous occurrences, it is worth noting the most unusual, which also convey the agency of this woman and enable one to consider her as an example of subversive female character, disrupting traditional fairy tale types (e.g. she is described while wildly riding her horse, carrying a revolver and “disposing” of a man-eating monster). However, and most importantly, she does not lose her feminine attributes, as the woman is depicted as “wild” and “indomitable”, but also as “loving”, and associated with a domestic environment (the word occurs with terms like “apartment”, whose

feature is “quietude”, “sitting-room” and “house”) and with her caretaking function (she sold her jewellery to grow her daughter, she is capable of “maternal telepathy” and is the first person whom her daughter thinks to when she needs “assistance”).

antique service revolver that my	mother	, grown magnificently
place at our meagre table. For my	mother	herself had gladly,
such a wild thing as my	mother	, her hat seized by the winds
of disillusion! But I do believe my	mother	loves him as much as I do
no further. Assistance. My	mother	. I ran to the telephone. And
On her eighteenth birthday, my	mother	had disposed of a man-eating
the maternal telepathy that sent my	mother	running headlong from the
all morning?’ Every moment, my	mother	drew nearer. ‘She will be too
I thought of courage, I thought of	mother	. then I saw a muscle in my
me that he had come into my	mother’s	sitting room
enclosed quietude of my	mother’s	apartment, into the
yellow outlaws of Indo-China; my	mother’s	spirit drove me on, into that
as firmly as I had done in my	mother’s	house. Not a narrow, dusty
Conservatoire could boast that her	mother	had outfaced a junkful of Chinese
My eagle-featured, indomitable	mother	, what other student at the
inherited nerves and a will from the	mother	who had defied the yellow
the little music student whose	mother	had sold all her jewellery, even

The following term related to kinship in the wordlist is “father”, to whom, nevertheless, no particular active role is assigned.⁵⁷ The man is dead and hinted at only four times: two are nostalgic fantasies of the protagonist, and in the other two he is mentioned just because the gun the mother carries with her (and uses) was his.

fragrance that made me think of my	father	, how he would hug me in a
yet she half-blinded me. And my	father	, still alive (oh, so long ago),
horse while the other clasped my	father’s	service revolver and, behind
moment’s hesitation, she raised my	father’s	gun, took aim and put a

The last contention which is corroborated by means of – computationally pinpointed – textual evidence through the comparison between the two tales is an example of the centrality of the body in Carter’s stories, as opposed to its merely

⁵⁷ Perhaps Carter tried to balance action and passivity among the characters according to their gender, so that even if the female protagonist is not empowered, her mother is and, conversely, her husband plays an active role, but her father does not.

functional role in traditional fairy tales. As the following instances testify to, the insistence on an omnipresence of bodily parts seem to promote a change in the traditional way of considering and representing perception. That is to say, different functions, purposes and abilities are ascribed to different parts of the body. More to the point, this choice plays a pivotal role in that it could point to Carter's intention of weakening the supremacy of the - masculine and patriarchal - sight. The female body, Carter's language seems to suggest, should be the place where a new way of approaching reality and knowledge of oneself and of the world should start.

In Perrault's "Blue Beard" the representation of both "his" and "her" body is negligible, with the obvious exception of "beard", which is the only term related to the body mentioned more than four times. As for the female body, there are only few instances where its parts are explicitly mentioned (more specifically, "her hand" appears twice and "her head" and "her neck" once). With regard to the male body the difference is inconsequential, but is eloquent to quote the case of "his feet", used twice, and always to describe the wife throwing herself at them

went down and threw herself at his	feet	with weeping eyes
flung herself at her husband's	feet	, weeping and begging his pardon

When it comes to Carter, instead, the occurrence of - especially female - bodily parts is surprisingly frequent: "my" co-occurs ten times with hand(s), eight times with head and fingers, five times with breasts, eyes, forehead, heart and hair, four times with neck, three times with ears and shoulders twice with face, feet (interestingly enough always referred to rising or being set on her feet, and not to throwing oneself at someone's feet), thighs and skin and once with flesh, palm, lap, legs, throat, nostrils, stomach and elbow.

"Hand(s)"

light caught the fire opal on my	hand	so that it flashed, once, with a
My lover kissed me, he took my	hand	. He would come with me if I
'I can smell the blood.' He took my	hand	; he pressed his arms about
taper and advanced with it in my	hand	, like a penitent, along the
of water, he reached out for my	hand	that had his sultry, witch ring

the key I still held in my other
rim of my glass and drenched my
the shore. I held my life in my
snatched the book from my
it in my handkerchief to keep my

hand
hands
hands
hands
hands

. It dropped into the
. I thought: My cup runneth
amongst those keys and, in a
and put it down on the sofa.
clean, and fled the room.

“Head”

a dawning surprise in his face. My
from the piano-stool under my
sable, with a collar from which my
jewelled turban and aigrette on my
the key tantalizingly above my
gave me strength. I flung back my
the necklace did not sever, my
meet his eye and turned my

head
head
head
head
head
head
head
head

throbbed. To see him, in his
. ‘You are in some great
rose like the calix of a
, roped with pearl to the navel,
, out of reach of my straining
defiantly. ‘Come in!’ My voice
did not roll. For, for an instant,
away, out of pride, out of

“Finger(s)”

he put the gold band on my
I gladly slipped it from my
of sparks; the opal on my
discords flowed from beneath my
I began to play but my
candles round the bier with my
witchy ring on it, pressed my

finger
finger
finger
fingers
fingers
fingers
fingers
fingers

, I had, in some way, ceased to
and, even in that dolorous
spurred green flame. I felt as
: out of tune...only a little out
were stiff and shaking. At
, to gather up my taper, to
, kissed my palm with

“Breast(s)”

piercingly, somewhere inside my
executioner. His hand brushed my
laid his hand imperatively upon my
he seemed especially fond of it, my
ceased flinching and he caressed my

breast
breast
breast
breasts
breasts

; his figure blurred, the room
, beneath the sheet. I strained
, beneath the sheath of ancient
showed through the flimsy
. My dear one, my little love,

“Eyes”

look at me with lust, I dropped my
keys and clasp his hands over my
ball, so that I could not take my
lascivious tenderness, he kissed my
a white, nacreous glimmer, as my

eyes
eyes
eyes
eyes
eyes

but, in glancing away from him,
as I was lost in a Debussy
off it when I played the piano.
and, mimicking the new bride
accustomed themselves to the

“Forehead”

had transferred itself to my
he pressed the key lightly to my
but, outside – never.’ I scrubbed my
to drop a beard-masked kiss on my
can mask that red mark on my

forehead
forehead
forehead
forehead
forehead

, to the space between the
, held it there for a moment.
with the nail brush as I had
. ‘Every man must have one
; I am glad he cannot see

“Heart”

Except that, in my
the pillow and the pounding of my
Tristan. And, do you know, my
he said. ‘Not the key to my
even in that dolorous place, my

heart
heart
heart
heart
heart

, I’d always known its lord would
mimicking that of the great
swelled and ached so during
. Rather, the key to my enfer.’
was lighter for the lack of it. My

“Hair”

satyr who now gently martyred my
ice and chilled me. He twined my
us. He twined his fingers in my
had done once before, twisted my
he unwound the tendrils of my

hair
hair
hair
hair
hair

. To know that my naivety gave
into a rope and lifted it off my
until I winced; I said, I
into a rope and drew it away
from the buttons of his smocking

“Neck”

I fastened the thing about my
a rope and drew it away from my
face, the way the muscles in my
the ruby necklace that bit into my

neck
neck
neck
neck

. It was cold as ice and chilled
. ‘Such a pretty neck,’ he said
stuck out like thin wire. I saw
, but with such tenderness now.

“Ear(s)”

madame, and put my
so that the blood pounded in my
kiss the downy furrows below my

ear
ears
ears

to the keyhole and listened, and
as if we had been precipitated
; that made me shudder. And he

“Shoulders”

seems to weigh too heavily on my
hair into a rope and lifted it off my
of my jacket and slip it from my

shoulders
shoulders
shoulders

. There I can go, you
so that he could the better
Enough! No; more! Off

“Face”

vulgar. The blood rushed to my
suddenly, as he saw me, my pale

face
face

again, and stayed there. And
, the way the muscles in

“Feet”

outside the door! I rose to my
lifted me up and set me on my

feet
feet

; fear gave me strength. I flung
; I knew I must answer it. The

“Thighs”

insinuating, nudging between my
feel the cold metal chilling my

thighs
thighs

as I shifted restlessly in my
through my thin muslin frock.

“Skin”

substance that could seep into my
Red Sea to let us through. My

skin
skin

. I looked at the precious little
crisped at his touch. How my

“Flesh”

opera, when I had first seen my

flesh

in his eyes, I was aghast to feel

“Palm”

pressed my fingers, kissed my

palm

with extraordinary tenderness.

“Lap”

the keys in a jingling heap in my lap . I could feel the cold metal

“Legs”

stirring. At once he closed my legs like a book and I saw again the

“Throat”

His wedding gift, clasped round my throat . A choker of rubies, two

“Nostrils”

leonine shape of his head and my nostrils caught a whiff of the opulent

“Stomach”

a certain tension in the pit of my stomach , to be so watched, in such

“Elbow”

stood open. If I rose up on my elbow , I could see the dark, leonine

Last but not least, the computational comparison of the two fairy tales also brought new knowledge to the critical interpretation of Carter’s story thanks to a corpus-driven intuition, which stemmed from the corpus-based analysis. While examining and comparing the wordlists of the two tales the frequency of the word “chamber” in Carter’s text stood out,⁵⁸ as opposed to its absence in Perrault’s. An attentive research in the wordlist of “Blue Beard” revealed then that the term used to address the room where

⁵⁸ The frequency of “chamber” is not outstanding, it amounts to the 0,365% with 6 occurrences, but nonetheless the term is important as it designates the main space in the story.

Blue Beard's homicides and the wife's attained knowledge, disobedience and mixed feeling of fear and guilt took place in "closet".⁵⁹

The comparison between the definitions of the two terms given by the *Cambridge English Dictionary* is already indicative of the significance of Carter's - very conscious - choice. A *closet*, indeed, is "a cupboard or a small room with a door, used for storing things, especially clothes", whereas a *chamber* is "a room used for a special or official purpose, or a group of people who form (part of) a parliament" or "a closed space in a machine, plant, or body" (*Cambridge English Dictionary Online* 2013). As is apparent from the definition, Perrault's closet is a service room, a place where things are stored, which conceals something dreadful, but which is not loaded with particular symbolic meanings or implications. The writer's word choice is only functional to the final *moralité*, that is to his reproach of female marital disobedience and curiosity, which seems to imply that the wives had it coming (for lack of "common sense")

Provided one has common sense,
And of the world but knows the ways,
This story bears the evidence
Of being one of bygone days.
No husband now is so terrific,
Impossibilities expecting:
Though jealous, he is still pacific,
Indifference to his wife affecting.
And of his beard, whate'er the hue,
His spouse need fear no such disaster;
Indeed, 'twould often puzzle you
To say which of the twain is master.
(Perrault 1900)⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Of course, the hypothesis that the word choice made by the translator was taken into consideration. The other translations available on Project Gutenberg call the room either "closet" (Perrault 1922, 2005) or "little room" (Perrault 1921). After making sure that the use of the word was consistent in the English translations, also the original version was checked, (as Carter wrote "The Bloody Chamber" shortly after completing the translation of Perrault's tales for the French) which revealed a congruent term, i.e. "cabinet" or "petit cabinet" (Perrault 1859).

⁶⁰ Even though this work does not tackle Carter's translations of Perrault's tales, it is interesting to compare this moral with the ones Carter - rather loosely - translated as:

MORAL

Curiosity is a charming passion but may only be satisfied at the price of thousand regrets; one sees around one thousand examples of this sad truth every day. Curiosity is the most fleeting of pleasures; the moment it is satisfied, it ceases to exist and it always proves very, very expensive.

ANOTHER MORAL

In contrast, Carter’s linguistic choice loads the room with an evocative symbolic reach on different accounts. For starters, the “chamber” is an official place, where important functions are carried out, meaningfully having to do with the law. The “law”, indeed, is here evoked as a masculine principle, perhaps one of the many forms of subtle criticisms of Lacan’s law of the father that can be spotted in Carter’s work. Moreover, the chamber represented in the story, as textual evidence shows, is always “bloody” or linked with violence through the co-occurrence with “torture”, whereas the semantic associations of “closet” are rather neutral in Perrault’s story:

“The Bloody Chamber”:

who will never return to the bloody	chamber	, the contents of which are
The evidence of that bloody	chamber	had showed me I could expect
dreadful revelation of that bloody	chamber	, it was his tender look that
of the Devil himself. In the torture	chamber	, it seemed to me that I would
the walls of this stark torture	chamber	were the naked rock; they

“Blue Beard”

You must need to go into the	closet	. Well, madam, you shall go
said he, ‘that the key of the	closet	is not with the others?’ ‘I must
now perceived that the key of the	closet	was stained with blood; she wiped
hand opened the door of the	closet	. At first she could distinguish
bottom. At the door of the	closet	she paused for a moment, calling
back staircase leading to the	closet	, and in such haste that she nearly
to go and open the door of the	closet	on the ground floor. Her curiosity
everywhere except into that little	closet	, which I forbid you to enter, and I
little key, it is that of the	closet	at the end of the long gallery on

It is easy to see that the events described in this story took place many years ago. No modern husband would dare to be half so terrible, nor to demand of his wife such an impossible thing as to stifle her curiosity. Be he never so quarrelsome or jealous, he’ll toe the line as soon as she tells him to. And whatever colour his beard might be, it’s easy to see which of the two is the master (Carter 2008:10).

In “Blue Beard”, as can be noticed from the table above, “closet” is accompanied by words like “key” and “door”, which emphasise the action of entering it, that is point to the husband’s legitimate prohibition and to the woman’s wrongful transgression. “Blood” appears only once, but significantly enough it is referred to the key, which is proof of the woman’s disobedience. The room itself, despite being the backdrop to Blue Beard’s dreadful crimes, is never negatively connoted.

More to the point, the term “chamber” is reminiscent of the room of a temple, that is of a sacred place, a shrine. This association is double-edged, since it could address both the ritualised domestic violence embodied by the bloody room in the story or the sacredness of the female body as a shrine, with reference to its ritual sacrifice as well as to the acknowledgement of the consequences of its physical changes, in this specific instance having to do with the loss of virginity and a traumatic sexual maturation. Therefore, in Carter’s tale a metamorphosis of the renowned room takes place, so that the typical, forgotten and dusty service room turns into the chamber where law is discussed and enforced or rituals take place. The negative associations brought about by the unusual collocates chosen by Carter, then, attack the naturalisation and ritualization of female submission brought about by discourses enforcing patriarchal laws, ideologies and practices. Womanhood, the subtext seems to be, was turned into a typified role and naturalised as such, all its powerful potential enclosed in a meaningless service room, like cleaning tools are hidden from the sight of the guests who enter the house. By sacralising the space where female sacrifice is hidden, Carter wants to stress instead that it is in fact a very much cultural practice, which entails the creation and enforcement of laws and needs a specific setting and conventional actions to be performed and repeated.⁶¹

Although these conclusions are undoubtedly the result of the researcher’s speculations, corpus linguistic tools played a capital role both in marking out the significant words from which to start and in granting the possibility of grounding the critical assumptions thus drawn in the language of the texts.

⁶¹ These interpretations raise interesting implications for the link between the development of female identity and the spaces where it takes place neglected by Perrault and underlined by Carter, which could be object of future research.

3. A CORPUS LINGUISTIC COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF “THE COURTSHIP OF MR LYON” AND “THE TIGER’S BRIDE”

Further, to a certain extent even more significant, proof of the reach of a corpus stylistic literary analysis is offered by the computer-assisted comparison between the two versions of “Beauty and the Beast” collected in *The Bloody Chamber*. Throughout the thesis, a productive dialogue between “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride” has been established with reference to different topics in order to argue that the two stories function as a sort of intratextual mirroring device. The following investigation draws on textual evidence gained through the examination of the wordlists and collocations produced by *WordSmithTools* to show that three among the most noteworthy intuitive contentions are in fact rooted in Carter’s language. The first stage is a comparison between the use of the word “father” in the two stories, followed by the analysis of the differences in the collocates of the nouns related to enclosed spaces, which allows one to draw interesting conclusions about their impact on the representation of female identity. Finally, considerations about focalization, agency and empowerment are put forward through the comparative study of the terms related to sight.

The comparison between the wordlists of “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride” shows that there is an evident disparity in the frequency of the word “father”, which registers an occurrence of 0,43% in the first tale and of 0,23% – that is, almost a half – in the second. Since the father is an important character in both stories, as he is the one who sets in motion the events and brings Beauty to the house of the Beast, Carter’s choice must be consequential. Moreover, in both tales he is the typical patriarchal figure, who can decide the destiny of his daughter and claim her obedience. What is, then, the difference, and above all the reason why there is such an evident disparity in the occurrence of the word? I claim that this disparity is coherent with the different attitudes of the two daughters toward the father, rather than due to the father himself.

“Father” in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” (20 occurrences out of 4643 tokens, that is 0,43%)

<p>that remained to make Beauty's loved his daughter, Beauty's being who now confronted Beauty's leonine apparition shook Beauty's was for my daughter,' said Beauty's rudely snatched the photograph her Although her cheese. He asked her and smiled, because her he would aid her in comfort, while her scale, the price of her ends of the earth for her Next morning, her to the study in which her single pearl, asked after her shrilled; for her. Her has time to settle; and her never known it, for her desolating emptiness. But her Beauty scribbled a note for her</p>	<p>Father father father father father father father father father's father father's father father father father's father father father father father father</p>	<p>said he would be home before entirely comfortable was to find stole the rose seemed to him until his teeth rattled and then 'All she wanted, in the whole world drew from his wallet and inspected had told her of the nature of the to serve them from a buffet and wanted her to do so; appeal against the judgement returned to London to take up good fortune. , whom she loved dearly. kissed her and drove away with had been entertained and there, law case; and her dead mother . Such news! was as good as rich again, had ruined himself before her was waiting for her at the , threw a coat round her shoulders.</p>
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“Father” in “The Tiger’s Bride” (18 occurrences out of 7753 tokens, that is 0,23%)

<p>My windowpanes to mock my witness folly, while my Not my profligate petal by petal, apart as my lost all its petals, my Gambling is a sickness. My You must not think my my flesh but, truly, my that was in peril. My brought his cloak. My shaped shoes. Where my My tear-beslobbered to conceal the sight of my peasants once brought my will be returned to her my own face but that of my</p>	<p>father father's father father father father father father's father father father father's father father father father father father</p>	<p>lost me to The Beast at cards. expectations of perpetual pleasure , fired in his desperation by more , certainly; the mirror above the magnificently concluded the career , too, was left with nothing. said he loved me yet he staked his valued me at less than a king's soul that was in peril. , of course, believed in miracles; sat amongst these preparations for had been red as fire, now he wants a rose to show that I forgive farewell; my spite was sharp as a skull with horns four inches long undamaged with bankers' orders , as if I had put on his face when</p>
---	--	--

hay with every lad on my	father's	farm, to disqualify myself from this
as proof of the axiom my	father	had drummed into me:
than I had done until my	father	abandoned me to the wild
own face in it but that of my	father	; at first I thought he smiled
pile of banknotes. My	father's	circumstances had changed already
showing. Then I saw my	father's	trunks were packed, ready for
looked at the mirror again, my	father	had disappeared and all I saw
to perform the part of my	father's	daughter. 'Leave me alone

As the wordlists above show, in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” the daughter loves her father and holds him in the highest regard. As has already been remarked with reference to her smiling no matter what (see chapter 2 pp. 259-260), Beauty is obedient and does not challenge paternal authority, thus is totally complicit in her destiny. If one turns to “The Tiger’s Bride”, instead, the girl – who accounts for herself in the first person – openly despises her father’s drinking and cowardice and obeys to his orders because she cannot do otherwise, but manages to rebel against the Beast and to negotiate and then assert her decisional power. Thus, the different occurrence of the word signals the different degrees of importance of the character for the protagonist in terms of his capacity of influencing and directing her behaviours and decisions.

As for the analysis of enclosed spaces within the two stories, it arises from the traditionally established link between woman and private spaces as if the latter were her natural domain, which Carter addresses and challenges with apt strategies throughout the collection. As textual evidence shows, however, intratextual references between the stories about “Beauty and the Beast” are a particularly successful instance of this kind of subtle criticism.

I claim that Carter addresses and criticises the cultural construction of female confinement in domestic spaces through establishing echoes between the two tales in such a way that the first story exposes woman’s complicity in her confinement and the second questions it. Within this framework, the first significant word is “door”. In “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” it is the first noun to occur after the names of the characters and, as can be seen from the examples below, it collocates with usual or neutral words (i.e. words which suggests opening and closing without any further connotation), and most of the times is simply described (e.g. it is a “mahogany” door, “equipped with a knocker”).

the girl pushed open the front close as that mahogany front conscience, how the golden scrabbling sound, of claws, at her he squared up to the mahogany spaniel, darting from the open no living person in the hall. The could announce his presence, the a pleasant chuckle, and the joyful, she ran to open the thickly muffled in black crêpe. The magical hospitality was over. As the up to the mahogany door. This

door
door
door
door
door
door
door
door
door
door
door
door
door

, she saw, with a thrust of , rose a mighty, furious roaring; the knocker was thickly muffled in . Her trance before the mirror . This door was equipped with a , danced round them, yapping behind him closed as silently as it swung silently inward on well-oiled of a cloakroom opened of its own . But it was his liver and white did not open silently, as before, but swung to behind him, he saw the was equipped with a knocker in the

A similar stance holds true also for the use of the words “house”, “home” and “room”, all rather frequent in the tale and all conveying the impression of domesticity being a safe, cosy, welcoming dimension – thus emphasising that traditional models are not challenged.

“House”:

and was the owner of that lovely in this confusion, vaster than the At that, every window of the as soon as he described the not even the statutory country-rich are often very eccentric and the It was almost night; that a miniature, perfect, Palladian

house
house
house
house
house
house
house
house

and the low hills that cupped it he owned, ponderous yet swift blazed with furious light and a from where he was calling. And he garden mackintosh to greet his was plainly that of an exceedingly , with its sweet, retiring that seemed to hide itself

“Room”:

at the top of the table; the dining themselves together, alone, in that another word, he sprang from the

room
room
room

was Queen Anne, tapestried, a in the depths of the winter’s night and she saw, with an indescribable

“Home”

said Beauty. ‘I have come	home	.’ His eyelids flickered. How was it
she longed for the shabby	home	of their poverty. The
find the cash for petrol to take him	home	. And not even enough money left
bridal satin. Father said he would	home	before nightfall. The snow
be		
and died and he was far from	home	. Ruined, once; then ruined again.

“Home” is the only word within the list to be treated in similar fashion in the two stories, as in both cases it is linked to ideas of distance, separation and a nostalgic melancholia:

“Home” in “The Tiger’s Bride”:

at my feet. I was far from	home	. ‘You,’ said the valet, ‘must.’ When
across Europe to me? At	home	, the bear’s son directed the winds
from countries of cold weather; at	home	, we are at war with nature

When it comes to the other terms, instead, their collocates immediately show differences between the feelings associated with domesticity, which in “The Tiger’s Bride” turns into an entrapping, at times scary domain, therefore pointing to the threats hidden beneath woman’s naturalised confinement in the entrapping walls of the private realm.

In this story, for example, “doors” are “heavy”, barriers outside or inside of which individuals are trapped and communication is obstructed if not unattainable (someone knocks, or tentatively “rap[s]”). In other cases they are frail borders protecting from something threatening, as in the case where the Beast makes “the door tremble” with a roar:

already faded. I opened the carriage	door	and tossed the defunct bouquet
I heard the key turn into the heavy	door	and the valet’s footsteps patter
to my tentative rap on his door	door	. Then the wind blew the valet
pad back and forth outside my	door	. When the valet arrived again with
moment, the valet knocked at my	door	to announce that I might leave the
knocking and clattering behind the	door	of the cupboard; the door swings
He did not need to lock the	door	, now. I fixed the earrings in my
through the palace made the	door	tremble in its frame; had the north
the door of the cupboard; the	door	swings open and out glides a

Similar, negative impressions of confinement are conveyed by the noun “room”, which most of the times co-occurs with words expressing littleness, (e.g. “small”, “little”) or claustrophobia (like “small, stifling, darkened” and “windowless”).

close quarters in so small a	room	. He must bathe himself in scent,
valet bowed me inside The Beast’s	room	. The purple dressing gown, the
house, a small, stifling, darkened	room	; he keeps his shutters locked at
his horses the use of the dining	room	. The walls were painted, aptly
the earth turn, filled the little	room	; he had begun to purr. The sweet
his fur and shone. And in my	room	for hours I hear those paws pad
hastily ushered me out of the	room	. A mauve cloud of his master’s
‘You may put me in a windowless	room	, sir, and I promise you will pull my

One last comparison confirms the impression that Carter sets a contrast between two opposite representations of female identity – one compliant with her subordination, perhaps even unaware of it, and the other subversive, or at least consciously challenging oppression – through the description of domestic spaces: that between the collocations of “wall*”. In “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” walls, like the house and its rooms, are harmless: the walls of Beauty’s room are covered with beautiful tapestries painted with “birds of paradise” and despite the garden being “walled”, Beauty can serenely “wander” around.

and a little parlour of her own, the	walls	of which were covered with an
birds of paradise nodding on the	walls	? This one's fringed ears
it from the world outside the	walled	, wintry garden
she wandered in the	walled	garden, among the leafless roses

In “The Tiger’s Bride”, on the contrary, “walls” are always coupled with negative images of entrapment (people hanged in cages within the city walls), power abuse (people put “face to the wall” because their masters do not want to see their faces), and threat (the “draughts came out of the old walls” to “bite” her). Paradoxically, however, they are also barriers about to be broken, or rather made fluid, which tremble and finally “dance”, their movements paralleling the dramatic metamorphosis of the human body, whose boundaries are about to be exceeded, its furry insides abjectly overflowing onto the outside.

men in cages from the city	walls	; unkindness comes
draughts came out of the old	walls	and bit me, I was colder
of the dining room. The	walls	were painted, aptly enough, with
propped with their faces to the	walls	as if their master could not bear to
thunder of this purr shook the old	walls	, made the shutters batter
the foundations of the house, the	walls	began to dance.
of the painted horses on the	wall	, into whose saddle the valet sprang

The third set of considerations that one can draw by the computational comparison between Carter's stories is indirectly related to the previous ones, as it addresses issues of freedom and autonomy of female identity as well as of focalization. More specifically, the focus of the last topic under consideration is the power of observing, understanding and defining people and the external world through sight and looking. In this case, the corpus-assisted analysis reveals that although the main focalizer of the events is the same (i.e. Beauty), other linguistic strategies enable Carter to portray two very different examples of female identity: once again one completely caught up with patriarchal discursive arrangements and the other who, on the contrary, tries to challenge established norms and to negotiate an independent subject position.

If a range of terms belonging to the semantic field of sight is taken into consideration, it can be noticed that in "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" not only is Beauty the main focalizer, but she is invariably the looking subject, as opposed to the Beast, who is mainly the object of the gaze. The verbs "see" and "saw" confirm this standpoint:

possessor and himself she did not	see	all day as if, curious reversal, she
jumping up from time to time to	see	that everything was in order. How
might pierce appearances and	see	your soul. When he handed the
host's wealth and eccentricity to	see	the dog wore, in place of a collar, a
pressed the latch of the gate and	saw	, with a pang, how, on the withered
the door swung to behind him, he	saw	the lion's eyes were made of agate.
inward on well-oiled hinges and he	saw	a white hall where the candles of a
lay under water, and when she	saw	the great paws lying on the arm of
shudder of fear when she	saw	him, for a lion is a lion and a man
pushed open the front door, she	saw	, with a thrust of conscience, how
drew back into their pads and she	saw	how he had always kept his fists
he sprang from the room and she	saw	, with an indescribable shock, he
all the time she stayed there, she	saw	no evidence of another human she
inscrutable eyes, in which	saw	her face repeated twice, as small as
pot, and, when the spaniel	saw	to it he had served himself, she

as does “look”.

down the snow-filled lane to	look	for help. Behind wrought iron
her chores in the mean kitchen to	look	out at the country road
Was it because she had only	looked	at her own face, reflected there?
sadness in his agate eyes, that	looked	almost blind, as if sick of sight

Interestingly, the only instance when “looked” is referred to the Beast means “to look like”, and besides it hints at an impairment of the sight, since his eyes seem “almost blind, as if sick of sight”.

More to the point, as the above listed examples show, in the few times when “he” is the subject of the verb to “see” (or “saw”), it is always Beauty’s father. The only verb linked to the semantic field of sight which does not follow this pattern is, curiously enough, to “gaze”, which could be an ironic move on Carter’s part for the symbolic load of the corresponding noun.

He drew back his head and	gazed	at her with his green, inscrutable
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As to the “eyes”, most of the times they are the Beasts’, and are looked at by Beauty. Conversely, in the only two instances where they are Beauty’s, either one of their features related to looking is emphasised: “as if her eyes might pierce appearances”, or they are performing an action: “smiling”:

seen contained in the Beast’s agate	eyes	. Her face was acquiring, instead of
some kind of sadness in his agate	eyes	, that looked almost blind, as if sick
noticed before that his agate	eyes	were equipped with lids, like those
and absolute gravity, as if her	eyes	might pierce appearances and see
with both her mouth and her	eyes	. But when, as they sipped their
mane a greyish rat’s nest and his	eyes	closed. On the stick-backed chair
at her with his green, inscrutable	eyes	, in which she saw her face
behind, him, he saw the lion’s	eyes	were made of agate. Great wreaths
great, mazy head of hair, on the	eyes	green as agate, on the golden hairs

The connotation of the looking person as female and the direction of the gaze being usually from Beauty to the Beast foreground the girl's position as subject, besides focalizer. The fact that Beauty does not challenge the patriarchal standards that she is *subjected to*, however, suggests that she is complicit in her subordination or, at least, that she is so engulfed in patriarchal normative and naturalising discourses that she is unable to literally look outside of the framework. As the use of language in the text testifies to, indeed, neither the Beast's gaze nor that of her father can be deemed to wield an actual defining power over the girl's identity: Beauty is unquestionably the looking subject. Furthermore, her visual perceptions are always clear and neat, and provide a rather straightforward picture of the "bourgeois idyll" (Bacchilega 1997: 95) which constitutes the epilogue of the story, but which is anticipated by the images offered throughout the narration.

Both the nature of sight and that of its subject change in "The Tiger's Bride", although the female protagonist remains the main focalizer and looking subject. As the analysis of the verbs "see*" and "look" proves, sight is sometimes blurred, its focus partial, its perspective unclear or questionable:

"See*":

in all their unreason. If I could	see	not one single soul in that
inches above us. As far as eye could	see	, not one thing living. How
against the cold so you can hardly	see	their faces. And they lie to you and
of reeds. 'If you will not let him	see	you without your clothes-' I
meat of contract and, if she did not	see	me, then so much more like the
magic fits again and I did not	see	my own face in it but that of my
river that was so wide we could not	see	across it, so still with winter that
He gibbered a little to	see	my fine furs and jewels as if I were
your right.' How pleased I was to	see	I struck The Beast to the heart! For,
'My master's sole desire is to	see	the pretty young lady unclothed
with a bow, a wig of the kind you	see	in old-fashioned portraits. A chaste
blushed a little, for no man had	seen	me naked and I was a proud girl.
lady's skin that no man has	seen	before-' stammered the valet. I
from the poor, shabby things I'd	seen	once, in the Czar's menagerie at
drink it down. Had she not	seen	him do so, at the sign of The

“Look*”:

I never saw a man so big	look	so two-dimensional, in spite of the
would have called an ‘old-fashioned	look	’, ironic, sly, a smidgen of disdain
as if their master could not bear to	look	at them. The palace was
douse the candles one by one. To	look	at them you would think that
raised her dripping muzzle and	looked	at me keenly, as if urging me.
me up and send me off. When I	looked	at the mirror again, my father had

The high frequency of instances where modals like “could” or conditionals like “had she”, negatives and adverbs like “hardly” co-occur with terms belonging to the semantic field of sight suggests that the point of view is limited, the perspective questionable and, above all, its subject – in this case also the narrator – unreliable. In addition, as the wordlists of “seen” and “looked” in particular reveal, the woman is both the subject and the object of the gaze. Most notably, in this story the only occurrence of the verb “to gaze” sees Beauty, or rather, her eyes, as its subjects:

had passed under the indifferent gaze of eyes like hers. Then I was

Hence, all these examples of corpus stylistic analysis give evidence for the potential of the application of its methods to the study of literature. The computer-assisted comparison between “The Bloody Chamber” and “Blue Beard”, whose intertextual references and relations were intuitively drawn, proved indeed that the application of some corpus stylistic methods – in particular lists of frequency, keyword and collocation analysis – could both confirm intuitive hypotheses and find new insight in an extensively studied text. The comparative investigation of two stories belonging to the collection, whose intratextual references were intuitively pointed out and discussed within the previous chapters of this thesis benefited, too, of the import of corpus stylistics. The analysis of the occurrence of the lexical items and of their collocations generated by *WordSmithTools*, indeed, enriched and corroborated the arguments set forth both with relation to the poetics and the politics of the text, that is, in a nutshell, the goal that this chapter set out to reach.

Of course, as was suggested in the introduction, research on *The Bloody Chamber* and, more broadly, on Carter's work, with corpus stylistic methodology could – and should – be improved and expanded, since this would surely enrich the scholarship on the collection and on its author. For example, *The Bloody Chamber* as a corpus could be compared with a reference corpus made by gathering all the traditional fairy tales from which the writer drew inspiration. Alternatively, the collection of fairy tales could be read against other works considered “feminist rewritings of fairy tales” like Sarah Maitland's, in order to appreciate how and to what extent language can be the vehicle of empowering gender politics through different discursive articulations of female identity.

Remarkably, the interaction between intuitive interpretations and their questioning, endorsing and expansion through computational methods would add to the stratification of meanings generated by the different interpretations of Carter's work which have been multiplying over the years, and which the writer would have welcomed. Those who still fear that quantity could replace quality and thus steal value and richness to literary research and criticism should remind, as this research hopefully contributed to prove, that the scholar's interpretative choice is fundamental for the software to produce meaningful results. And to exorcise this looming ghost, Weber's words should be born in mind, as they revive the too often forgotten importance of the contextual interactions of the readers with the text, which grant the ongoing renewal of its significance:

Style is not either inherent in the text (as the formalist claimed) or totally in the reader's mind (as Fish and other reader-response theorists claimed) but an effect produced in, by and through the interaction between text and reader. Thus meaning and stylistic effect are not fixed and stable, and cannot be dug out of the text as in an archaeological approach, but they have to be seen as a potential which is actualized in a (real) reader's mind, the product of a dialogic interaction between author's context of production, the text, the reader and the reader's context of reception – where context includes all sorts of sociohistorical, cultural and intertextual factors (Weber 1996:3 in O'Halloran 2007: 229).

All things considered, then, I believe that not only would a broader corpus stylistic research on Carter's work be fruitful due to the peculiarities of her linguistic choices, but it would also be coherent with her project of grounding fiction in material experience. In other words, after having been thoroughly contextualised in and intertextually analysed

against other literary, artistic and theoretical work, the study of “her fiction of ideas” would finally, really be founded upon her extraordinary playful and queer, but extremely mindful experiments with language.

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