Chapter 4

Locked Rooms and Open Bodies: Gothic Entrapment and Female Transgression in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"

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Abstract

This chapter examines Angela Carter's story "The Bloody Chamber" as a modern Female Gothic based on the traditional Bluebeard tales. The analysis employs the Female Gothic as its main framework and uses the key concepts such as "transgression", Kristeva's "abject", and Freudian concepts of the "superego" and "repression". The study aims to reveal the systematic subjugation of women in a patriarchal domestic sphere. Carter intentionally uses a familiar fairy tale structure wherein the figure of Bluebeard, husband, patriarchy, the Marquis victimises and imprisons women by forming the source of fear and violence. Gothic tension and suspense are sustained through several key elements: the fearsome character of the Marquis, the terror of the forbidden chamber, a space containing the corpses of previous female victims, and the labyrinthine, eerie castle, deserted from the land by the sea. Carter subverts the typical motif by offering the transgression as both an inevitable patriarchal tool and an empowering journey for women that ultimately leads to self-discovery and freedom. Reintroduction of the mother figure in Carter's version as the protector and saviour turns the traditional narrative trajectory into a story of female empowerment. The unnamed narrator is rescued from her impending death at the last moment when her mother arrives to kill the monstrous Marquis, turning the conventional fairy-tale ending into a powerful form of female agency.

Introduction

Angela Carter (1940–1992) is a central figure recognised within Second-Wave Feminism and is mostly associated with the *Female Gothic*. Through her writing, she questions and subverts the restrictive gender roles created

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by grand narratives. Carter writes retellings of classic folk and fairy tales, including "Bluebeard", "Puss-in-Boots", and "Little Red Riding Hood", to reveal and subvert the patriarchal motives under the surface. In *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), she explores the Gothic's thematic and structural possibilities, the principles of feminist theory, and the universal expectations surrounding women's roles. Her stories frequently delineate the movement of female protagonists from a victimised position, often represented in patriarchal "locked rooms", towards a new autonomy wherein they confront and destroy the established systems of male power.

Carter's method is to discover the latent implications embedded in fairy tales that have historically been spread through a male-centred ideology and then to rewrite them from a distinctly feminist perspective. In her own words, she aims to put "new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (Carter, 2013, p. 27). She further explains that her intention is not to produce "adult" fairy tales or "versions" but rather "to extract the latent content from the traditional stories" (Haffenden, 1985, p. 80). This process of forcing the "old bottles" to split enables Carter to transform the heroine of "The Bloody Chamber" from a locked-up victim of a "homme fatale" (Turki & Saeed, 2021, p. 324) into a figure of sexual, emotional, and physical agency whose transgression of patriarchal constraints ultimately leads to her salvation.

The term "Female Gothic", first coined by Ellen Moers, originally referred to the novels of Ann Radcliffe, whose heroines are characterised by virtue, sensibility, vulnerability, and eventual triumph over patriarchal oppression. In *Literary Women*, Moers defines this subgenre as "the work women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (1976, p. 90). She describes it further as "a long and complex tradition… where woman is examined with a woman's eye, woman as girl, as sister, as mother, as self" (p. 109), locating this tradition within the literary productions of British and American women from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. Whereas the male Gothic typically charts the tragic experiences of a male protagonist who confronts external and frequently supernatural threats, the Female Gothic focuses on the psychological and emotional turmoil of its female protagonists as they negotiate social constraints and endeavour to escape male tyrants or captors (Williams, 1995, p. 101). Within this tradition, the central source of fear is no longer a supernatural presence or familial villainy, as is common in early Gothic texts, but rather the lived realities of gendered oppression, the domestic sphere, and the patriarchal structures governing marriage and family life (Ağır, 2023, p. 240). Judith Butler, in her conceptualising "gendered

agency", similarly argues that agency, the capacity to make decisions about one's own life, is located in the repetition of norms, just like Bluebeard tales motivate the continuity of these patriarchal forms (Kovacs, 2013, p. 39). In other words, the Female Gothic has come to identify the traditional Gothic dynamics of terror that confine, silence, or destroy women and to reverse them. This motive enables a questioning of concerns surrounding sexuality, motherhood, and "gendered agency", associated with the main concerns of Second-Wave Feminism.

Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, in *The Female Gothic: New Directions,* trace the origins of the Female Gothic tradition back to Radcliffe and identify the symbolic significance of women imprisoned in the patriarch's house, where they face fears as both domestic and psychological entrapment (2009, p. 2). These victim-heroines ultimately achieve liberation, thus breaking the social and familial regulations designed to control female behaviour. Carter provokes this tradition by using the Female Gothic not only to criticise patriarchal domination but also to underline the role of female transgression as a transformative and radical act. According to Gilbert and Gubar, women's incarceration is not merely the result of physical restrictions; emotional and psychological constraints also serve to marginalise them and push them to the fringes of society. To name an example, Bertha Mason, Jane Eyre's double alter ego, embodies the patriarchal construction of women who exist at society's margins as threatening or insane just because the patriarchy labels her so (2020, p. 360). Patriarchal ideology has long associated femininity with monstrosity and demonisation. Since antiquity, cultural narratives have portrayed figures such as snaky-haired Medusa, rebellious Eve, witches, female vampires, and other unsubmissive femme fatales as inherently perilous to male authority. Medieval theological misogyny similarly announced that "woman [is] the unhappy source, evil root, and corrupt offshoot, who brings to birth every sort of outrage throughout the world" (Gilmore, 2001, p. 86). In the Renaissance, the pregnant female body was insulted as a "two-legged she-beast" (p. 88). The Victorian era further entrenched restrictive ideals through its construction of the woman as the "angel in the house", while classical representations of ideal femininity emphasised containment: "the closed mouth, enclosed body, and locked household door" (Mulvey-Roberts, 2016, p. 107). It means that patriarchy has historically devised multiple strategies to dominate and control women, employing myths, folklore, and explicit implications designed to instil fear and prevent potential acts of female resistance.

The Bluebeard narrative is among the most frequently revisited fairy tales, particularly since Charles Perrault's canonical transcription. Perrault's

"Bluebeard" (La Barbe bleue), included in *The Tales of Mother Goose* (Histoires ou contes du temps passé), was first published in 1697 and later translated by Angela Carter in 1976. Bluebeard's figure is based on the historical figure of Gilles de Rais, Joan of Arc's lieutenant, who was notorious for his terrible secrets (Williams, 1995, p. 40). In the traditional versions of Bluebeard tales, a young woman marries a wealthy widower with a distinctive blue beard, and the man forbids her from entering a locked chamber, announcing that her disobedience will cost her life. When the wife inevitably breaks his rule, she discovers the murdered bodies of his former wives. Horrified, she drops the key into a pool of blood; its permanent stain reveals her transgression. As Bluebeard prepares to execute her, she is dramatically rescued by her soldier brothers (Pyrhönen, 2010, p. 3). This pattern of patriarchal dominance and female transgression is even called "Bluebeard syndrome", which carries four stereotypical characters: "a persecuted young woman and a mysterious, possibly dangerous man"; there may also appear, in the Bluebeard pattern, two optional characters: "a helper or rescuer figure, and a mad, bad, or very unlucky wife" (Barzilai, 2005, p. 250). As a whole, the Bluebeard motif has a consistent place in the imagination of patriarchal culture.

The Bluebeard motif has a prominent place in European folklore, appearing in numerous adapted forms. In Norwegian tradition, the husband takes the shape of a troll, while Italian versions portray him as a devil, and an ancient Greek variant personifies him as death itself (Lokke, 1988, p. 8). In other interpretations, Bluebeard is depicted either as a stereotypical Turkish tyrant who is about to behead Fatima for her disobedience, or as a wealthy merchant, a king, or the folkloric Mr. Fox in the English tradition (Hermansson, 2009, pp. ix, xi). Despite its diverse forms, the Bluebeard tale cycle consistently revolves around the uncanny ambiguity of the Bluebeard figure and the heroine's coercion to uncover his secret (Pyrhönen, 2010, p. 4). As Carter observes in her foreword to her translation of Perrault, "Each century tends to create or re-create fairy tales after its own taste" (Perrault, 1979, p. 41). Consequently, the Bluebeard archetype has taken a remarkable interest among feminist fiction writers, and in numerous Gothic works, including *Jane Eyre*, Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca,* as well as Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg". The Bluebeard motif has also become recurrent in Gothic literature as it provides a range of Gothic conventions: the vulnerable but "curious heroine; a wealthy, arbitrary, and enigmatic hero-villain", and a grand, mysterious castle-house whose labyrinthine spaces conceal violent and often implicitly sexual secrets belonging to the homme fatal (Williams, 1995, p. 38). Although Perrault reassures his readers by noting that the events in the

Bluebeard tale occurred "many years ago" and that "no modern husbands would dare be half so terrible" (1979, p. 41), the tale nonetheless endures as a potent symbol of violence, exploitation, and physical-emotional isolation of the female.

The Bluebeard legend and fairy tales in general, in terms of Female Gothic, particularly, and more broadly from a feminist perspective, refer to the patriarchal impulse to restrain the transgressive curiosity of the female protagonist. The male in power, endowed with property and social authority, easily acquires successive wives who might otherwise have rejected him. Female curiosity, depicted as irresistible, is strategically set in opposition to the unyielding prohibition imposed by the husband/patriarchy. In this sense, Bluebeard's wife becomes the archetypal descendant of Eve and Pandora: figures whose male-defined identities assume their inevitable disobedience (Williams, 1995, p. 42). Atwood, despite claiming that Grimm's Fairy Tales contain many stories that posit women as the central characters who win by using their intelligence, accepts that some "tarted-up French versions of 'Cinderella' and 'Bluebeard'" portray women as weak who "get rescued by her brother" or another male emancipator (1979, p. 28). As a result of this pre-formed cycle of domination, the Female Gothic offers the woman's transgression as both predictable and necessary to achieve liberation from patriarchal dominion.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb "transgress" as "to go beyond the bounds or limits" (OED, n.d.); a paradoxical expression that underscores the relationship between a rule and the desire to exceed it. Yet, as cultural theorists such as Jenks have emphasised, transgression does not mean the pure negation of limits; rather, it exceeds them and thus completes them, as every boundary contains the latent possibility of its own violation (Jenks, 2003, p. 7). Accordingly, transgression means not the elimination of the rules but a structural part of them. This notion aligns with Georges Bataille's claim that prohibition and transgression are reciprocal, for "two diametrically opposed views" follow each other in a continuous dialectical movement; more interestingly, "often transgression is permitted, often it is even prescribed" (Bataille, 1986, p. 63). Foucault, similarly, notes that transgression "does not seek to oppose one thing to another… [but] no limit can possibly restrict it" (1977, p. 35). In other words, the paradoxical nature of transgression shows its inevitable encounter with the moral and social boundaries.

Within a Freudian psychoanalytic analysis, transgression can be thought of as a moment in which the id, governed by the pleasure principle, presses

for immediate fulfilment of urges which are internalised as forbidden by the superego. In this regard, the prohibition of Bluebeard's forbidden room functions as a manifestation of the superego, or ego ideal, which enforces the culturally approved codes of obedience. The desire to know more serves as the motive of the id; when the heroine wants to discover what lies behind the forbidden chamber, the ego, struggling to make a balance between the conflicting forces, temporarily fails. Freud's statement that "the repressed is merely a part of the id and merges into it" (Freud, 1989, p. 17) is reclaimed as the form of latent forces hidden beneath the surface and inevitably reemerge, like the desire to transgress the boundaries. Accordingly, the guilt and punishment that traditionally follow the act of transgression in both the Bluebeard archetype and Gothic literature can be understood as expressions of both social discipline and internal moral judgement. As Kristeva suggests in her theory of the abject, the boundary-crossing act, here the heroine's desire to know the forbidden, produces a hesitation, a mixture of guilt and desire; thus it signifies the instability of the structures that seek to control female curiosity, sexuality, and self: as claimed by Kristeva, "The abject shatters the walls of repression and its judgement" (1982, p. 15). Thus, transgression of the female in the Bluebeard tradition becomes not merely a narrative device but a theoretical dilemma where psychoanalytic, cultural, and Gothic elements coincide.

Gothic Chamber and Transgression

In Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", the unnamed young narrator is newly married to the enigmatic and recently widowed Marquis, and as the legend necessitates, breaks the rule of entering the forbidden zone of the Marquis. She faces the dead bodies of his former wives and thus forecasts her similar fate. However, Carter subverts the traditional Gothic tale, which turns into a reclamation of the heroine's autonomy by disrupting the familiar script of the vulnerable and obedient heroine and by introducing a protective mother figure. Carter's retelling revisits the conventional tale of female curiosity and male perversity and locates it within the established framework of the female Gothic, where patriarchal spaces and their tools of control become central to the heroine's struggle.

Carter draws her story upon the foundational Gothic motifs: the figure of a husband who murders or imprisons his former wives, the motif of the haunted castle, and locked rooms to interrogate women's physical and mental incarceration within the domestic sphere. As Horner and Zlosnik explain, the recurring narratives of "heroines in flight", originally identified by Moers as the depiction of heroines terrorised and confined by a tyrannical

patriarch within the domestic sphere, have long been appropriated by women writers to symbolise the gendered anxieties embedded within seemingly protective household spaces (2016, p. 3). In Carter's version, the archetypal narrator is situated in a remote, almost isolated castle that foreshadows entrapment through its uncanny atmosphere inside and outside. Initially described as "the faery solitude" by the narrator, the setting is "cut off by the tide from the land for half a day… that castle, at home neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious, amphibious place… that lovely, sad, sea-siren of a place!" (Carter, 2015, p. 9). This antagonistic depiction of the castle highlights its menacing effect: its ambiguity evokes an apprehension between safety and danger, enchantment and threat; it also aligns with the Gothic's preoccupation with liminality and anticipates the narrator's physical and psychological imprisonment within a patriarchal structure. It is clear that Carter uses a Gothic atmosphere so as to declare a critique of patriarchal dominance over women's bodies and identities.

A further indication of Gothic entrapment in Carter's tale is the seemingly safe marital bedroom; a space traditionally associated with intimacy and protection. Carter subverts this expectation by transforming the bedroom into a site of scrutiny, destabilization, and patriarchal domination. The room's most striking feature is the abundance of mirrors, a motif that, as Horner and Zlosnik (2016) observe, is frequently used in Gothic fiction to create uncanny distortions of identity. In a similar vein, Gilbert and Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic,* claim that patriarchal culture imposes upon women the anxiety of being both 'angel' and 'monster' as a divided self, reflected in a male-authored mirror (1979, p. 17). Therefore, the mirror becomes an instrument through which women confront a reflection that is not her own but the patriarchal ghost of herself, a doubling effect that destabilizes female selfhood. This effect is dramatized when the narrator's own reflection is multiplied into uncanny identical versions: "The young bride, who had become that multitude of girls I saw in the mirrors, identical in their chic navy blue tailor-mades…" (Carter, 2015, p. 11). The multiplication of her image enacts precisely the fragmentation Gilbert and Gubar associate with patriarchal control, an imposed self-division that turns the heroine into an object dispersed across reflective surfaces. Thus, "what she sees in the mirror is usually a male construct" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 17). This fracturing is intensified by the chamber's function as a site of feminine imprisonment. Gilbert and Gubar argue that patriarchal structures often confine women to architectures of containment in which female characters are locked away, both literally and figuratively, within male-constructed spaces: either "in men's houses" or "into male texts" (1979, p. 83). The

heroine's feeling of entrapment, thus, she, far from feeling secure, trembles when "a dozen of husbands approach me [her] in a dozen of mirrors (p. 44). Carter's transforming of the bridal bedroom into a site of horror anticipates the narrator's later discovery of the Marquis's murderous chamber below. Near the story's end, when she is ordered to prepare for her execution, the mirrors again reproduce this crisis of identity as the mirrors reflect a hopeless woman, not a young girl and the same lilies look like angels of death: "Twelve young women combed out twelve listless sheaves of brown hair in the mirrors, soon there would be none" (Carter, 2015, p. 40). Here, the multiplied reflections foreshadow erasure, reinforcing her entrapment.

Kristeva's theory of abjection further illuminates the narrator's horror. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the abject as "what disturbs identity, system, and order" and "what does not respect borders, positions and rules" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). The mirrors' grotesque multiplication of the narrator's body disturbs precisely these boundaries, dissolving the coherence of the self and exposing the heroine to a form of psychic disintegration. Kristeva also notes that the abject is often linked to the "feminine" as a culturally coded site of danger and destabilization; "the feminine, becomes the synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppresses" (p. 70), a dynamic Carter exploits by making the bridal chamber, a supposedly sacred feminine space, into a place where identity collapses. Thus, the mirrors in "The Bloody Chamber" function not merely as decorative objects but as theoretical instruments: they enact the patriarchal doubling and self-division described by Gilbert and Gubar, while simultaneously producing the boundary-breaking horror theorised by Kristeva. In this way, Carter transforms a traditionally feminine domestic space into a Gothic landscape of entrapment and psychic dissolution.

In "The Bloody Chamber", the primary patriarchal threat and the embodiment of Gothic monstrosity is the figure of the Marquis, a quintessential "homme fatal" as previously noted. As the counterpart of the femme fatale, the homme fatal is a seductive and destructive male figure whose lineage includes archetypal predators such as Don Juan and Dracula, both defined by their relentless desire to dominate, possess, and consume women (Turki & Saeed, 2021, p. 324). Carter's Bluebeard wears a monocle, which demonstrates the wealth, refinement, status, and more importantly, superiority: according to Hentea, monocles were popular in the modernist period and worn by famous modernists such as G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Conrad, and W. H. Auden (2013, p. 214). The villainous Marquis in Carter's version is sure to depict a modernized Bluebeard. His aristocratic taste and refined outlook function as a mask of his predatory violence: the "streaks

of pure silver in his dark mane," his lavish gifts, and his scent of "Russian leather" give the impression of his rituals intended to attract vulnerable young women into his domain. The narrator verifies his seductive influence in these words:

> This ring, the bloody bandage of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth, this scent of Russian leather—all had conspired to seduce me so utterly that I could not say I felt one single twinge of regret for the world of tartines and maman that now receded from me as if drawn away on a string. (Carter, 2015, p. 7)

The monstrosity of the Marquis precisely aligns with the disguised villain of the Gothic tradition. In the narrator's description, he watches her "in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts of the slab." (Carter, 2015, p. 6). In other words, the watching eyes of the Marquis stand for the male gaze, reducing women into objects to be purchased.

Carter increases this predatory masculine symbol through the frequent use of animal metaphors such as "tiger-beast" and "Erl-King" in her retellings. Such metaphors function, as Arıkan notes, to foreground male sexuality as a force of power and supremacy, casting the male body as instinctive, unrestrained, and fundamentally bestial (2016, p. 122). Mills similarly argues that representations of male sexuality in animalistic terms naturalise extreme behaviours, including sexual violence:

> Male sexuality is often described in terms of metaphors of animal behaviour, as an animal's, and as little under control. The describing of sexuality in these terms means that extreme male behaviour such as rape may be understood to be only 'natural'. (1995, p. 137)

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Carter's depiction of the Marquis resonates with Kristeva's concept of the abject, in which the monstrous male figure embodies that threat to the boundaries of the feminine self. The Marquis's bloodstained chamber, his voyeuristic surveillance, and his ritualised seduction all operate as abject encounters: thresholds where the heroine confronts the dissolution of identity and bodily autonomy. Additionally, in a Bataillean register, the Marquis's eroticised violence reflects the "transgressive excess" that aligns eros with death, pleasure with annihilation, a dynamic Carter both exposes and ultimately subverts.

The relationship between the young heroine and the Marquis becomes increasingly unsettling throughout the narrative, as the narrator repeatedly blurs the boundaries between husband and father figure when describing

him. From the beginning, the significant age gap, Marquis defined as "much older" than her (Carter, 2015, p. 3), signals an unbalanced power relation that resembles, rather than a marital partnership, a hierarchical parent–child structure. This paternalistic dominance becomes explicit when the Marquis discovers her reading one of his pornographic books, he says: "Have the nasty pictures scared Baby? Baby mustn't play with grownups' toys until she's learned how to handle them, must she?" (p. 14). His language reduces the heroine to a child incapable of sexual agency, casting himself as the authoritarian father who dominates access to forbidden knowledge. The manifestation of the father as the figure who both embodies desire and imposes prohibition resonates in the young heroine's non-existent real father and the deliberate ignorance of Carter for the heroic paternal figure. Freud's term "uncanny", as "a class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud, 2018, p. 85), explains the defamiliarized image of the father and husband for the young girl. In Carter's narrative, the Marquis functions precisely as this uncanny figure: familiar yet terrifying patriarch whose authority manipulates the heroine's transition from innocence to sexual awakening.

One of the most powerful Gothic elements in "The Bloody Chamber" emerges through the spectacle of the murdered wives whose mutilated bodies are arranged within the forbidden chamber. This chamber, described as the "private slaughterhouse of his" (Carter, 1979, p. 31), functions as the darkest locus of Gothic horror because it transforms the female body into an emblem of patriarchal violence, repetition, and possession. The Marquis anticipates his young wife's curiosity and disobedience, as it happened with his earlier wives, and deliberately entrusts his keys to her before leaving on his trip:

> All is yours, everywhere is open to you—except the lock that this single key fits. Yet all it is the key to a little room at the foot of the west tower, behind the still-room, at the end of a dark little corridor full of horrid cobwebs that would get into your hair and frighten you if you ventured there. Oh, and you'd find it such a dull little room! But you must promise me, if you love me, to leave it well alone. (Carter, 2015, pp. 19-20)

Tempted by her curiosity, the young bride rebels against the restrictions imposed on her and specifically takes the forbidden key and leaves the others lying there. Her uprising and showing no feelings of fear, "no raising of the hairs on the back of the neck, no prickling of the thumbs" (Carter, 2015,

p.27) are significant marks of her departure from the passive portrayal of the victimised heroines in traditional fairy tales. Carter, somehow, achieves this re-centring by employing a first-person narration to give voice to silenced female victims of the traditional tales. She discovers that the 'bloody chamber' is a gruesome torture room filled with instruments of suffering. Among the corpses, she recognises the previous wives of the Marquis, the embalmed body of a murdered opera singer, a skull adorned with a bridal veil, and the fresh corpse of the Marquis' most recent wife, impaled with an Iron Maiden. In this regard, the aestheticized dead bodies as the representative of the erasure of the feminine by the patriarchy are the symbols of the totalising patriarchal control the Marquis seeks to impose on the living heroine, and the bloody chamber represents the climax of Gothic entrapment.

Following her moment of transgressive courage in entering the forbidden chamber, the young narrator immediately recognises that the same act that has granted her knowledge now places her in mortal danger as she faces a similar fate. Her fear, as she admits, paradoxically gives her strength yet this temporary hope to escape the castle dissolves the moment the Marquis returns unexpectedly, transforming her trespass into a predestined end and forcing her to confront the inevitability of patriarchal punishment. The heroine's confession, "I only did what he knew I would", highlights the deterministic structure of patriarchy, in which male authority anticipates and controls female disobedience in order to justify punishment (Carter, 2015, p. 40). The piano tuner, who has become a helper and lover for her now, frames her transgression in line with Judeo-Christian myth by saying, "Like Eve", situating female curiosity as the original sin (Carter, 2015, p. 41). As Warner observes, Eve's notorious legacy has frequently been adapted as the archetypal transgressor, whose desire for knowledge and tempting Adam with her words, function as the latent symbol for moral condemnation and subjugation of women (1995, p. 30). In a similar vein, Williams states that Bluebeard's women act as her "nature" demands when she breaks his rule; "Like Eve and Pandora, she then may be held responsible for any ill that ensues" (1995, p. 42). Carter's recontextualization of this myth connects the Bluebeard narrative to the myth: the woman who seeks forbidden knowledge is punished not only because she threatens her husband's power but also as she threatens the ideological foundations of patriarchal order.

The heroic mother figure in *"The Bloody Chamber"* is one of Carter's most noteworthy subversions of the fairy-tale tradition. As noted by critics, classical fairy tales offer only two mother models:

> Either they are the perfect birth mother who tragically dies at the very beginning of the heroine's story, thus becoming an unattainable ideal who provides no comfort or help and is not present for the heroine's journey, or they are the evil stepmother, 'greedy, ambitious, and ruthless'. (Wynn, 2019, p. 79)

Carter introduces the biological mother not as an idealistic but absent or a demonic figure; the mother is rather a living, heroic, and authoritative agent; thus, disruption of this traditional legacy posits Carter's version in the feminist writing. Introduced at the beginning of the story as an "eagle-featured, indomitable mother [who] outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand…" (Carter, 2015, p. 2), she embodies a blend of nurturing presence and martial capability rarely attributed to maternal figures in patriarchal narratives. Her dramatic return at the climax of the story further disrupts traditional fairy-tale gender roles. Where Perrault's tale grants the rescue to the heroine's brothers, a reinforcement of male protection, Carter replaces them with a singularly potent maternal force. Gamble points out that Carter's "introduction of the mother… changes everything", which adds a "third element into the fixed dualism of the couple" (1997, p. 155). At the moment when the Marquis prepares to behead the narrator, the mother arrives "on a horseback" and provokes in him a terror "as if he had seen Medusa," before firing the fatal shot: "Now, without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head" (Carter, 2015, p. 44).

This disruption of the traditional fairy-tale gender roles echoes the ancient Demeter-Persephone myth, one of the oldest motifs of maternal intervention against male abduction. Like Demeter, who descended into the underworld to reclaim her daughter from the abduction by Hades, Carter's mother figure invades the Marquis's slaughterhouse castle, a symbolic underworld, and rescues her daughter from patriarchal law. The parallelism is strengthened by the imagery: the Marquis's territory, with its forbidden chamber of corpses, functions as a Gothic counterpart to Hades' underworld. The mother's intervention, like Demeter's universal search for her daughter, reasserts the holy maternal bond over the possessive claims of a patriarchal predator. Simultaneously, by evoking the terrifying image of Medusa on the Marquis, Carter evokes an impression of the mother as what Cixous calls the "laugh of the Medusa", a symbol of female power that patriarchal culture has tried to demonise, but which feminist writers recover as a symbol of resistance and liberation; a feminine text for Cixous is like a volcano to "smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the

law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (Cixous, 1976, p.888). In this regard, the Marquis/ patriarchy is scared stiff "as if he had seen Medusa" (Carter, 2014, p. 44) and the new feminine order is established.

In restoring agency, physical power, and moral authority to the female, Carter reconfigures the familial hierarchy: she extracts salvation from the paternal line and returns it to the mother, transforming the domestic sphere into a site of female solidarity rather than patriarchal domination. The mother thus becomes both rescuer and avenger, a figure who breaks the Gothic cycle of female victimisation and enables the heroine's final escape from the Marquis's deadly system of control. Female transgression against Bluebeard, the Marquis, and patriarchy, in this context, functions as an act of resistance against both the structures of patriarchal society and the mechanisms of terror and entrapment through which it asserts control. Carter's subverted version of the female victim, paternal Gothic, and avenging mother has inspired many works, including Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg" (1983), and Helen Oyeyemi's 2011 novel *Mr. Fox*.

A later feminist version of the Bluebeard pattern can be seen in Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg", which objects to the French version of the rescue tale of the heroine. She builds her characters mostly on Grimm's version, in which "women are not only the central characters but win by using their own intelligence", stating that "in many of them [fairy tales], women rather than men have the magic powers" (Atwood, 1979, p. 28). In Atwood's version, the protagonist, Sally, is seemingly in charge of the house while her husband, Ed, appears to be an ordinary husband, a surgeon. Yet, Ed turns out to be just the opposite, cheating on Sally with her best friend. Sally discovers his secret when she attends a writing course and reads a traditional version of the Bluebeard story; in this version, the husband gives an egg to the heroine to keep unbroken as a sign of her commitment to not entering the forbidden room. Sally, in Atwood's story, associates her husband not with Bluebeard but with the egg, which symbolises the secret of the husband. "Sally thinks, "the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch. But what will come out of it?" (Atwood, 1983, p.146). In other words, Atwood's story recognises the significance of continual investigation of the cliches, such as the nature of the husband and the persisting unequal balance of power.

A more recent reconsideration of the Bluebeard tale is by Helen Oyeyemi, a Nigerian-born British novelist. In *Mr. Fox*, Oyeyemi achieves a subversion of the masculine gaze, and claims female agency for Black women in literature typically dominated by patriarchal and colonial narratives. Here, Mr. Fox, as the representative of Bluebeard, is a wealthy author who frequently kills

his fictional heroines in the same way patriarchal society turns women into passive, helpless victims (Sumedha, 2025, p. 399). His muse, Mary Foxe, reverses male violence by defying his trend, prompting him to re-evaluate his perception of women. One of the female characters in Mr. Fox's stories, Daphne, not accepting to be a victim of a man's murderous scheme, and she "encouraged herself to see her very small presence in the world as a good thing, a power, something that a hero might possess" (Oyeyemi, 2012, p. 65). In this way, Oyeyemi distorts the relationships between male gaze and violence, and implies that women are more than passive victims of male aggression; they rather actively oppose and write their own stories.

Conclusion

The analysis of Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" demonstrates a feminist reclamation of the Bluebeard fairy tale pattern for the Female Gothic. By deploying theoretical concepts such as transgression, repression, and the abject, this chapter has revealed how Carter systematically exposes and dismantles the patriarchal mechanism of subjugation embodied by the Marquis and his ancestral castle. The story operates on multiple symbolic levels: the castle's liminal position functions as psychic and physical containment, the mirrors fragment the heroine's identity under the authoritarian look, and the forbidden chamber stands as the ultimate signifier of patriarchal violence and the reality of female erasure. Carter's feminist subversion reframes the heroine's curiosity as a vital act of resistance. Her transgression is not a moral breakdown but crucial for knowledge and female autonomy, which inevitably means a confrontation with patriarchy. Carter breaks the traditional Gothic cycle with her introduction of a female/mother agent, in compliance with Second Wave Feminism. "The Bloody Chamber," therefore, reclaims female power and agency, leaving future feminist writers a powerful legacy of reimagining alternative possibilities outside the confines of patriarchal order.

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