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Angela Carter, the Complex Fairy Tale and “The Tiger’s Bride”

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Para cada mulher que conseguiu ter sua intelectualidade reconhecida, há milhares e milhões ao longo da História que trabalharam sem o privilégio de ter sua sensibilidade e sua capacidade de pensar respeitadas, mas que também construíram o mundo. Portanto, este trabalho é dedicado:

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*“Monster, take me somewhere
Where I can see my breath in the air,
We walk in shadow,
Monster, lead me home.
Where there is no place to hide,
Stranger on the other side,
We walk in shadow,
Monster, lead me home,
Monster, lead me home.”*
(Sarah Hartman)

RESUMO

Embora o livro de contos de fada da autora Britânica Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, frequentemente seja elogiado por sua originalidade e pioneirismo, ele também ocupa um espaço em uma longa linhagem de contos de fada complexos e política e textualmente conscientes de si, escritos por e para mulheres adultas; tradição esta que data do século XVII. No conto “The Tiger’s Bride”, Carter estabelece um diálogo intertextual com tal tradição ao reescrever “A Bela e a Fera”, um conto com um histórico de autoria feminina. O presente artigo contextualiza Carter na tradição complexa dos contos de fadas, analisando “The Tiger’s ride” em vista de sua exploração dos conceitos de identidade, sexualidade feminina, artifício e natureza, e em vista de seu diálogo único com outras autoras de contos de fadas.

ABSTRACT

While British author Angela Carter’s fairy tale book, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, is often praised for its pioneering originality, it also has a place in a long lineage of complex, politically and textually savvy fairytales written by and for adult women which dates back to the 17th Century. In the tale “The Tiger’s Bride”, Carter establishes intertextual dialogue with such a tradition by rewriting “Beauty and the Beast”, a tale with a history of female authorship. This paper contextualizes Carter’s writing within the complex tradition of fairy tale, analyzing “The Tiger’s Bride” in view of its exploration of identity, female sexuality, artifice and nature, and its unique dialogue with other women authors of fairytale.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Though the idea of rewriting fairytale, especially in a way that questions tradition and gender roles, has become commonplace in the 21st century, it carried an aura of revolution when British author Angela Carter published her most famous work, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, in 1979, in the context of the Feminist Sex Wars of the 1960s and 1970s. Carter's book of fairytales has since become a critical piece in English-language feminist literature and literary critique, becoming, in Lorna Sage's words, "the most fashionable twentieth century topic" (SAGE, 2007, p. 7) at Cambridge University after her death in 1992.

The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories reinterprets fairytale and brings out what the author termed its "latent content" (HAFFENDEN, 1985, p. 80) in view of the role of women within the narrative. In one such revisited fairytale, "The Tiger's Bride", the author establishes an intertextual dialogue with "Beauty and the Beast", and in doing so, reclaims a legacy that dates back to the *conteuses*, female fairytale authors in 17th Century France. The heirloom of these women's work is apparent in Carter's in the way gender identity and gender roles are problematized by the latter's narrative.

"Beauty and the Beast" is a fairytale known to the Western world primarily from the versions written by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve and later – most famously – by Mme. Leprince de Beaumont. Harries (2001) identifies a "complex" tradition of fairytales, mainly authored by women, which begins with the *précieuses*, the foremothers of Villeneuve and Beaumont, and extends to these two authors as well as to contemporary writers. This legacy is often interpreted as odd and derivative in relation to the "compact" tradition, represented by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, among other authors who construct, using the artifices of narrative, the illusion of a natural, rustic, plain folk tale.

This same logic of contrasting *natural* vs. *non-natural* which permeates popular culture (and academic repertoire) with regards to fairytale also corresponds to one of Carter's main concerns as an author: destroying myth, deconstructing its appearance of neutrality and spontaneity so as to reveal artifice. She famously describes myth as "consolatory nonsense" (CARTER, 2011, p. 5), often a tool women use for "flattering themselves into submission" (Idem, *ibidem*) by painting them fictionally as wise women, goddesses, fairies, witches and other such figures while ignoring the powerlessness they were subjected to in their daily life. And it is with the complicated and sometimes ambiguous relations between natural and artificial, between myth and harsh reality, that she operates in "The Tiger's Bride".

In the tale, a young woman experiences the awakening of her sexuality and of her identity in the ruined castle of a decadent monster, dressed up as a human with the aid of the aesthetic trappings of a humanity which, paradoxically, eludes them both, woman and beast, in their exile. It is only when confronted with the call of desire that both are able to leave behind, deconstruct, an ideal of humanity which oppresses them, and to take the form of a tiger and a tigress in an inverted happy ending.

Angela Carter was a controversial personality in the heart of the feminist movement. Benson (in BACCHILEGA et ROEMER, 2001) states that criticism towards *The Bloody Chamber* from within feminism is due to the fact that Carter's aesthetic has more interest in playing with, disentangling and cannibalizing the misogynistic aspects of fairytale than "fixing" such tales by "fixing roles of active sexuality for their female protagonists" (2001, p. 43). Second-wave feminism, which Carter was a part of, was concerned with the possibility – or impossibility – of female sexual freedom in heterosexual relationships inevitably dominated by the power struggle which defines the patriarchy. While the so-called "anti-porn feminists" claimed that activities such as prostitution, pornography, sadomasochism and even, in some cases, heterosexual sex as a whole were inherently demeaning to women, "sex-positive feminists" believed that sexual freedom and women's ability to act upon their desires were crucial to women's liberation.

It's interesting to note that women's fight for freedom and their claim to authorship – of fairytale as well as any other genre of writing – go hand in hand in Western tradition: the authors of the "complex tradition" of fairytale have questioned the limitations imposed on women since the earliest days of the *précieuses*. The concerns these 17th Century proto-feminists had with regards to women's place in marriage and in the society of their time are interestingly paralleled in 2nd wave feminist thought (especially sex-positive feminist thought) regarding women's place in sex and in the society of *their* time. Both groups were comprised of educated women writing towards an audience of intellectual women; both the conteuses and Angela Carter were concerned with equal romantic and sexual relationships between women and men; both saw fairytale as a useful tool to explore and question issues of power, gender and identity.

This paper aims to problematize the typical understanding of "traditional" fairytale as simple and natural folk writing by contextualizing Angela Carter not only as a pioneer, but also as the heir of a tradition of complex fairy tale writers, investigating both the Complex

Tradition and its history and Carter's own writing. I chose Carter's tale "The Tiger's Bride" as a starting point of this analysis due to its exploration of identity, female sexuality, artifice and nature, and due to its unique dialogue with other women authors of fairytale.

2. THE FAIRY TALES

2.1. “The Tiger’s Bride”

In Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride”, the story of Beauty and the Beast becomes a tale of desire, sexual freedom and the place of women in the world. Gambled along with her father’s belongings in a game of cards – as an object, a bartering chip rather than a person –, the protagonist and narrator of “The Tiger’s Bride” is given to the mysterious Milord. An ambiguous figure, Milord is clearly non-human, presumably monstrous, and yet the exact nature of his condition is hidden by all the artifice bourgeois Europe can muster – gloves, boots, masks, wigs, perfume. As he feigns humanity, he is a sort of hesitant extension of the symbolic violence suffered by the protagonist in the hands of her father. *Hesitant* precisely because his claim to the status of man and human is, at best, tenuous.

Masks, mechanism and artifice are recurring themes throughout the tale and, in fact, a reoccurring theme in Carter’s work. They reflect another of her topics of choice, the theme of the libertine’s sentimental liberation. Ritual, and distance allow the libertine (and by extension the patriarch, to whom nothing is forbidden) to mechanize and objectify the Other’s body, which becomes a mere tool from which pleasure can be extracted. When she arrives at the castle, Carter’s Beauty anticipates a life of prostitution: bereft of capital and of the feeble protection that being her father’s property might have allowed her, she will certainly need to use the only belonging she now has; that is, herself. Instead, she faces a libertine’s request: Milord would like only to see her naked, remaining, meanwhile, entirely dressed – the substitution of the physically intimate act of sex with the intellectually distant experience of objectification and spectacle.

Beauty is appalled not by the sexual connotations in this proposition, but by the disparity of power it implies – the humiliation which would set them as predator and prey rather than merely two creatures (if not “two people”) completing a business transaction. A business transaction is, in fact, exactly what her counterproposal is:

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 [...] There you can visit me once, sir, and only the once. After that I must [...] be deposited in the public square, in front of the church. 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. (CARTER, 2006, p. 161)

This refusal and re-establishment of terms allows for a first herald of the transformation that is to come: a single tear, doubtless both a “tear” of emotion and a “tear” as in a rip, emerges from Milord’s eye and “[tumbles] down the painted cheek to fall, with an abrupt twinkle, on the tiled floor” (CARTER, 2006, p. 161). A tear of shame, Beauty believes, and also the chink in his armor which allows him, perhaps, to start recognizing her as his equal in exile. The first, but not the only: the next time she sees the Beast, she witnesses a “dropped tear” (CARTER, 2006, p. 162) which “[catches] on his fur and [shines]” (Idem, *ibidem*). Another moment, this time one of mutual recognition – the Beast cries after reaching a mute understanding with the heroine about her motivations, and when he does, she in turn can start to recognize his body as it really is for the first time.

As she won’t accept his proposal, she remains in Milord’s decrepit castle. In it, all servants are automatons – another play with the concept of artifice and masks. Beauty is accompanied night and day by a robotic imitation of herself – or rather, an imitation of her appearance, devoid of any other aspect of her. As Sellers (2001) points out:

The clockwork maid ‘The Beast’ sends to her is initially described as her ‘twin’ since it so exactly mimics the mechanical obedience she has been required to display, though the figure acquires a different, rebellious connotation when it is sent to the girl’s father to act as his daughter in her place (SELLERS, 2001, p. 118)

This mechanical “reflection” allows her the first shock in contrasting her experience of the outside world, which has always been one of objectification and degradation, with the blossoming of her individuality and sexuality which she will get to experience in the beast’s castle. As she grows, the automaton no longer seems to bear any but the most caricaturized resemblance to her – and at the end of the tale, as she takes on her new shape, it won’t even have that. It also begins to represent the perfect, souless figure she was expected to be – so much, in fact, that she ironically sends it back to her father to stay with him as her replacement. Harries (2001, p. 155) sums the situation up: being a member of “humanity” is being machinelike, recognizing an animalistic nature one shares with the Other is transformative.

A few days of precarious balance go by in which the heroine’s fate is uncertain, but also in which she sees herself alone with only her thoughts, feelings and the strange non-humans which surround her. Even as she goes for a horseback ride, accompanied by the Beast – still cloaked in a human guise – and the monkey butler who runs the castle, each of them riding one horse, she muses over her own “monstrous” status as a woman:

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 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. (CARTER, 2006, p. 165)

It is the beast itself who, moved by Beauty's refusal to undress before him, triggers the final transformation by asking her, instead, to see him naked. This request is not posed as a role reversal in a game of cat and mouse (or, rather, in a game of tiger and lamb) but as a gesture of vulnerability which implies a new level of equality between Beauty and Beast. When the heroine accepts, "Milord" reveals himself to be a tiger, endowed with an otherworldly beauty that awes her: "Nothing about him reminded me of humanity" (CARTER, 2006, p. 166).

This revelation allows her to take the initiative of undressing before him and feeling, in her own words, "at liberty for the first time in my life" (Idem, *ibidem*). When the Tiger embraces her and begins to lick her shoulders, Beauty finds herself having her own skin also gently peeled back by his tongue, revealing underneath a tigress also hidden by the artifice of human life. At the sound of the tigers' purring, the walls of the decrepit castle fall away and the protagonist's "tear-shaped" diamond earrings (no doubt a callback to the "tear" that cuts through the tiger's mask) turn into drops of water which she "[shakes] off [her] beautiful fur" (CARTER, 2006, p. 166).

BENSON (in BACCILEGA et ROEMER, 2001) points out an apparent contradiction in such an apparently idyllic return to primal nature coming from an author who was so eager to dismantle ideals of what is natural, what is universal, what is acceptable. This contradiction can perhaps be resolved (shakily, maybe, as the tale doesn't lend itself to simple answers) with a reminder that, again, this "nature" is also constructed – and it was constructed in discourse, via the dehumanization and marginalization of women, long before the heroine had had the chance of undergoing any physical transformation.

Or, as Sage (2007, p. 32) puts it, "It is central to Carter's argument that this lack of a 'place in the world' is not women's genuine condition but a piece of mystification, a myth, a nonsense". House and castle are culture – when the house burns down, when the castle falls away, the vital energy of their foundation is dissipated and protagonists such as Beauty in "The Tiger's Bride" conclude not a mystical initiation into some secret, deeper world of natural truths but rather a gleeful process of dismantling the tools of their own oppression.

“Gleeful” is an important word here, seeing as along with dehumanization comes always the possibility of alienation or annihilation. If a world of men and women as separate entities often at odds is also a world of hunter and prey – respectively – as the patriarchal framework would interpret it, then it would be logical to extract from that the conclusion that the encounter of hunter and prey, Beauty and Beast, would also be adversarial, and a break from it a painful, confrontational separation.

It’s a risk Beauty is aware of, recalling the stories she’d been told as a child of terrible monsters who eat little girls. Even as she approaches the Beast, she describes herself as “[...] white, shaking, raw, approaching him as if offering, in myself, the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction.” (CARTER, 2006, p. 168). This wasn’t simply the peaceable kingdom of the fairy tale ending, but also a reality that sex-positive feminism strived for when defending the possibility of women finding fulfillment and joy in taking ownership of their sexuality and acting out on their fantasies and desires:

You see – she appears to be saying [...] – you did not have to confine yourself to those mechanical stage sets, those mechanical rituals. It wasn’t just eat or be eaten. You could have been human! ‘Human’, however, does not necessarily mean ‘wonderful’. In Carter’s world it is always, even at best, a little ambiguous. She does have a yen for tigerhood. (ATWOOD in SAGE, 2006, p.147-148)

Tigerhood, thus, isn’t mythical nature, but rather a real possibility of equality and strength. As Beauty herself puts it, recalling an early part of the text in which she mentions “the blessed plot where the lion lies down with the lamb” (CARTER, 2006, p. 154): “The tiger will never lie down with the lamb. The lamb must learn to run with the tiger.” (CARTER, 2006, p. 166)

2.2. Roses and Thorns, Beauties and Beasts

Among the tales found in *The Bloody Chamber*, “The Tiger’s Bride” is particularly interesting because, unlike other tales in the book which come from a recognized tradition of male authorship – such as “Little Red Riding Hood”, popularized by the Brothers Grimm, or “Bluebeard”, popularized by Perrault – its most notable version, Andrew Lang’s 1889 retelling, found in his *Blue Fairy Book*, comes from an amalgamation of two tellings by female authors: Mme. Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve, in 1740, and Mme. LePrince de Beaumont in 1756. Lang attributes his tale solely to Beaumont, since her compact, chaste, virtuous and moralistic telling aligns more closely with dominant values of Lang’s (and her) time with regards to the purpose and the ideal form of fairy tale.

Mme. de Villeneuve’s telling falls under an entirely different category. It’s filled with mystical apparitions by fairies, long dream sequences and issues of class displacement – in it, Belle the merchant’s daughter turns out to be a lost princess rather than a member of the bourgeoisie. Its rich, layered structure, complex plot, intricate language and sheer length – 362 pages when it was first printed – have all contributed to the original version of tale having an unfortunately secondary place in the minds of contemporary readers. This is an issue we will explore in depth further along this paper. In this chapter, our focus is on comparing and contrasting the Villeneuve and Beaumont versions of the tale with Carter’s own telling. For the most part, Beaumont’s version, being the more widely known and more historically influential, and being an example of a compact fairy tale, will be the basis of comparison.

Beaumont’s story begins when the main character’s father, a merchant, loses his fortune and subsequently has the chance to regain it in a business venture. As his daughters pester him to buy them dresses and jewels, the youngest, Belle, states that she simply wishes for her father’s safe return. Since the merchant insists she at least ask for something, she requests a rose, the first simple thing that comes to mind, out of a good-girl desire to both satisfy her father’s will and not appear to be “putting on virtuous airs” by not asking for anything. Ironically, however, it’s not the sisters’ requests for jewels and furs that turn out to be costly: as the merchant goes to pluck a rose from a palace garden, he awakens the wrath of the Beast, a terrible monster who demands his life as payment for his offense.

The story proper begins when Belle/Beauty is given to the Beast. And it is, in all versions, a matter of *given*, since ultimately, Belle’s father and the Beast find themselves negotiating – bartering over – the transferring of Belle to the Beast’s estate, as currency which

can serve as a replacement for her father. She is so objectified and passive, in fact, that the Beast doesn't even demand her specifically: any of the merchant's daughters can be used to settle the debt between the two. In Beaumont and Villeneuve, that exchange is glossed over as a matter of love: Belle, a good daughter, is properly appalled that her simple wish might take such high a price, and volunteers as a sacrifice in order to save her father: "Seeing as the monster finds it fitting to accept one of his [the merchant's] daughters, I will surrender to all his fury, and I am very happy, because in dying I will have the joy of saving my father and proving my tenderness for him¹." (BEAUMONT, 2015).

Villeneuve, at least, repeatedly has her Beast display concern over Belle's willing, knowing consent: the Beast checks several times whether Belle knows what awaits her, whether she knows the terms of the agreement and whether she's not being pressured by her father – an echo, in a way, of Villeneuve's and the *précieuses*' concern with arranged marriage and women's freedom to marry at will. Even so, Belle's is still painted as a sacrifice of love, an idea which is still current and which lends romantic, idealistic overtones to the situation, and makes this exchange a sort of test to Belle's ability to be loving and steadfast:

There is a clear relationship between the love the young woman has for her father and that which she gives the Beast: in both cases, it circumvents social conventions. In the former, she doesn't care for the fortune her father lost; in the latter, the beauty that the Beast lacks ceases to matter to her. She showcases the ability to transfer the same kind of bond, as if love for one of them taught her to love the other. (CORSO & CORSO, p. 135)¹

In Carter, too, Belle is quite literally a bartering chip. However, she doesn't sacrifice herself out of love and there are no romantic overtones to how she comes to be in the Tiger's castle: she is grouped together with land, livestock, gold and furniture, as one more in a series of objects belonging to her father and which he can give away at leisure.

Carter also subverts the plucking and giving of roses: her Beauty has a white rose in her hands as she watches the card game, and tears it apart as her father gambles her away. The destruction of the rose is the deconstruction of this "loving sacrifice", and also of the layers of feminine decorum which hide the protagonist's feelings: nervously picking the petals as she watches is a small opportunity she has to express her own hate, and as such, it's the perfect inversion of the process by which the rose is requested by Mme. Leprince's Belle: not a decla-

¹ This quote, like any other not originally in English, has been translated by me.

ration of love but a contained explosion of anger and fear.

Later Beauty still adds:

The valet stood [...] 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**. He sprang down with preternatural agility to place them ceremoniously in my reluctant hand. My tear-blobbered father wants a rose to show that I forgive him. When I break off a stem, I prick my finger and so he gets his rose all smeared with blood.

(CARTER, 2006, p. 158, bolding mine)

The father receiving one such rose further undermines Beauty's idealized, exemplary love: he is a gambling-addicted alcoholic, his financial troubles and constant need of care and affection on Beauty's part are a burden which she carries with stoic resignation, not with love. Her problems, of course, aren't social conventions – she is not ashamed of her father, but rather resentful of him. She bears, in her own words, “[...] the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly” (CARTER, 2006, p. 154). Her feelings remove her from the ideal of being a perfect little lady bereft of desire and gifted with the ability to love against all odds. Her ability to love and desire freely will, instead, be the fruit of her own “disenchantment” and breaking away from the dehumanization she was subjected to during the gambling and throughout her relationship with her father.

Beaumont's Belle has a palace entirely at her disposal and a promise which is revealed to her in a dream: "this good deed you've done in giving your life to save your father's will not go unrewardedla."² (BEAUMONT, 2015). She is, in fact, protected and rewarded for fitting neatly into the roles assigned to her by men, roles of caretaker, of bartering chip or of beautiful décor. She is praised and respected – both by the narrative and by all its male characters, from her father and brothers to the Beast – in spite of every adversity she is subjected to.

This is the “consolatory” story of a young bourgeois woman who gets to keep her values in the face of poverty: she's destitute, but her nobility of character will make her earn the right to being treated like royalty. Neither Villeneuve nor Carter quite maintain this stasis of class. In Villeneuve's tale, Belle discovers she is actually a noblewoman, misplaced at birth. A conservative solution which mirrors Belle's presence in a castle and the entire idea of

²This quote, like any other not originally in English, has been translated by me.

being rewarded for emotional nobility, but it still involves changes to the heroine's idea of herself, her identity and the places she belongs to in the world.

Carter, of course, manages to go much beyond that, and have a Beauty who extricates herself from the entire value system that assigns her a place in the world according to her class and status. The "Tiger's Bride" is aware of what Beaumont's Belle in particular never admits: that any status she might have as the queen of the palace is false, because it necessarily depends on the goodwill of the one who actually owns the land and riches.

That said, it's important to point out that in every one of the three versions, the Beast's lair and palace is the place in which she begins to articulate her wants and dislikes: even in Beaumont's telling, which isn't as preoccupied as Villeneuve's with the issue of Belle's freely given consent, Belle gets to express her desires in a way she couldn't when she reluctantly asked her father for a rose: she asks to see her family through the mirror and to eventually visit them, she refuses the Beast's proposals of marriage and that refusal is accepted without question until she is ready. Even Angela Carter's less idealistic fairytale has Beauty state her own mocking counterproposal to the Tiger's request to see her naked, and has her getting to make decisions about her future rather than simply witnessing it as it's gambled away at the hands of men.

The story of Beauty and the Beast is, among many other things, a story about negotiating boundaries and about the negotiation processes inherent to romantic love. Compared to other tales of young heroines falling in love (such as Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, for instance), it's notable in how much it takes the heroine's consent into consideration, but it's still a story of a woman eventually accepting a man's insistence – in it, Belle still takes on the passive role of one who cannot make her own proposals in regards to her lover, only deny or accept the proposals she gets.

Carter's Beauty, however, is not as passive in her relationship to the Tiger. For all that there is a power imbalance between them which she quickly recognizes, she doesn't shy away from giving her own counterproposals to how they will carry on, and is active in the final transformation scene – after she sees the Tiger naked and decides, unprompted, to take her clothes off as well, she is the one who actively goes after him and kneels by him in the embrace that breaks the spell.

It logically follows that the happy ending Carter's heroine gets, therefore, is not the comfortable one in which the Beast is restored to humanity. In that traditional ending, everyone is elevated in status according to their inner goodness and the ambiguity of beasts and spells is resolved with every character returning to their proper place – nobles are nobles, men are men, women are women, beautiful is beautiful, ugly is ugly and all tensions presented by these categories are now ended, literally by magic.

In Carter's however, no such ease is found. The heroine's transformation into another Tiger seems to further muddle our ideas of privilege and oppression. Furthermore, given how it obviously doesn't change the systemic conditions that led to Beauty being bartered away in the first place, it echoes the author's own words in *The Sadeian Woman*: "A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster. Her freedom will be a condition of personal privilege." (CARTER, 2011, p. 152)

2.3. Breaking Binaries and Bringing Transformation

CRUNELLE-VANRIGH (in BACCHILEGA et ROEMER, 2001) states that the “traditional” narration of “Beauty and the Beast” is based on binary oppositions: father and daughter, rich and poor, good and evil, intelligent and stupid, beautiful and ugly, active and passive, human and monster. These binary oppositions, in turn, are subject to the hierarchy implicit in the separation between “male” and “female” within a patriarchal system. It is this implication towards gender politics which Carter “explodes [...] with infectious glee” (CRUNELLE-VANRIGH in BACCHILEGA ET ROEMER, 2001, p. 132)

Not that the possibility of such an implosion wasn’t already present in even the most traditional tellings of the tale: the possibility of transformation (a transition from monster to human) can itself open up avenues for other transformations. Beaumont’s Beast, for instance, goes also from unintelligent and coarse to savvy and refined; in his domain, Belle goes from a poor girl doing drudging work to a “maitr esse” clad in exquisite clothing and showered with lavish gifts.

Even transition from feminine to masculine makes a subtle appearance in the text: in French, as in most romance languages, the word for Beast, “La B te”, is feminine – and curiously, the word endures constantly from version to version, never changed into “Le Monstre” or any other grammatically masculine word which might signify the same beastliness. Also consistently, as “La B te” turns human, he also turns into a man who is no longer referred to with grammatically feminine words – he is a prince, or a king, or a Lord, or simply a man. That isn’t enough, however, to signify actual structural change in the underlying assumptions beneath the binary system. Throughout the Beaumont and Villeneuve versions of the tale, progress is clearly on the side of wealth, beauty and humanity – and of masculinity.

Beauty in “The Tiger’s Bride” sharply picks up on where exactly the distinction between human and non-human leaves her. Woman as animal – or as animal-like, “wild”, “untamed”, “fertile” or any other of those words which “flatter women into submission” – is an image of degradation helpfully provided by the patriarchy in order to turn the condition of “human” into a status that is only actually available to select humans.

The protagonist’s epiphany is that the world had been treating her “like an animal”, i.e. badly, long before she assumed the role. However, when language and behavior destroy

the polarization of opposites, clear associations of “human” with “masculine” and “good”, and of “animal” with “feminine” and “bad”, get scrambled:

The bodily transformations of fairytale heroines take them across thresholds which could not otherwise be crossed [...] This phenomenon of metamorphosis as liberty saturates the imagery of the tales and the language in which they are conveyed; the animal disguise of the heroine **equips her to enter a new territory of choice and speech**; the apparent degradation works for her, not against her. (WARNER, 1995, p. 354, bolding mine)

Breaking binaries down to reveal their complexity invokes the potential for female liberation. In order to free herself, Carter’s Beauty doesn’t need to “destroy” femininity or inhumanity so much as destroy the mentality that sees these concepts as inherently negative: “Just as female protagonists in [The Bloody Chamber] typically find themselves within actual or perceived parameters, they just as typically discover alternatives to them” (BACCHILEGA et ROEMER, 2001, p. 12). She needs to take hold of the advantages this “apparent degradation” will bring her. In becoming “The Tiger’s Bride”, she gets to exist as a woman, as an animal, as a beast equal to her male counterpart and as a fully realized person, destroying boundaries that close those categories off from each other just as easily as she participates in the crumbling down of the castle.

Warner (1995, p. 307) cites a change that occurred in the 20th Century with regards to the popular representation of the wild animal in Western culture: from a dangerous beast, synonymous with cruelty, stupidity and loss of control, it shifts into becoming an important symbolic part of a process of maturation and healing for people of all genders. To Warner, part of Angela Carter’s boldness lies in the fact that the latter is willing to admit that her Beauties willingly choose to play with the masculine and monstrous aspect of the Beast, attracted precisely by their animalistic and wild traits.

Carter was criticized in her time for her exclusive portrayal of heterosexual relationships in fairytale. However, she can also be said to challenge heteronormativity as a wider cultural narrative which not only assigns people binary genders, fixed gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality, but also dictates a set narrative for romantic and sexual encounters which reinforces these roles. She does so by proposing a narrative of love tinted by female desire, which doesn’t demand that one partner devour, or fix, or “look beyond” the other. Instead, it requires them to recognize one another as equal – and, if masculine and feminine are scrambled by the transformation, then even the textual assurance that one is a

Man and the other a Woman may become questionable (how does one tell, if both are now tigers and no longer have clothes and powdered wigs, diamonds and makeup to differentiate them?)

On Beauty, the character, in the 20th Century, Warner states: “She has not mistaken a human lover for a monster, like Psyche, or failed to see a good man beneath the surface, like Belle; on the contrary, **the Beast’s beastliness will teach her something.**” (WARNER, 1995, p. 307, bolding mine). That’s part of what’s revolutionary about Carter’s work: the simultaneous admission of animality as a narrative constructed to degrade women and as a liberating path they can take. The ascension of woman to “a new territory of choice and speech” won’t happen via elevation to tiers of dignity constructed by the patriarchy (money, status, nobility, etc). as happened in Beaumont, but rather through choices the protagonist makes, through a transformative vision she is able to apply to herself and to the world around her, and which reorganizes good and bad, degradation and ascension.

3. COMPLEX TRADITIONS

3.1. The Complex Fairy Tale

The term “complex fairy tale” is defined by Elizabeth Wanning Harries in her 2001 book *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale*. According to her, the cultural production of fairy tale as it’s presented to contemporary readings (via Perrault, the Grimms, Andersen, Wilde, Lang, Calvino etc.) falls into the category of “compact” tales. Their simple narrative structure, attempted imitation of oral transmission patterns, association with remote, ancestral tradition, simple characters and association with the world of childhood are now a part of our very definition of fairy tale:

“The tales are said to be “timeless” or “ageless” or “dateless”; they seem removed from history and change. They “offer insights into the oral traditions of different cultures” or have “the unadorned direct rhythm of the oral form in which they were first recorded” or “retain the feeling of oral literature”; they seem to give us access to a more primitive and more authentic oral culture. “Universal” and “classless”, they “offer insight into universal human dilemmas that span differences of age, culture and geography,” and are told by “titled ladies in the salons of the aristocrats, by governesses in the nursery, and by peasant farmers around the hearth. [...] **these conventional notions are completely mistaken, part of the nostalgia and traditionalizing that have accompanied our construction of our own modernity.** We need to begin by acknowledging that all fairy tales *have* a history, that they are anything but ageless or timeless”

(HARRIES, 2001, p. 3, bolding mine)

However, there is another, and older, complex structure of fairy tale writing which has been nearly erased by history, “a long tradition of tales written by women, beginning in France in the 1690s and continuing for over three hundred years” (HARRIES, 2001, p. 5). Its representatives range from Mme. d'Aulinoy, Mme. de Villeneuve and Mme. l'Hertier in the 17th Century to Tatar, Atwood and Carter in the 20th Century, and beyond.

The complex tradition is characterized by elaborate narrative structures, an awareness of intertextuality and, perhaps the most interesting from this work’s perspective, by the open characterization of their authors as educated upper-class women, in a direct contrast to the “folkloric”, “oral” and “authentic” pretensions of the authors in the compact tradition. We will start our presentation of such tales by discussing their characteristics, and, from there, move on to a more historical perspective of their tellers.

The complex fairy tale is narratively multilayered, sometimes even convoluted. The stories are filled with narrative reframing, tales within tales, shifts in perspective. Stories

which already circulated from other mythological, religious or secular sources are reimagined from different points of view. Stories are embedded into one another.

In Mme. De Villeneuve's version of "Beauty and the Beast", Belle's many elaborate dreams and visions open up new windows in the middle of the story. In Belle's dreams, she can see the Prince hidden beneath the visage of the Beast and fall in love with him long before she is able to even suspect that her onirical lover and her beastly guardian in the castle are the same person – thus, at least two parallel stories develop, separate at first and then progressively intertwined, and this not to mention the other plot tangents relating to Belle's parentage and the presence of fairies.

In "The Tiger's Bride", there is the parallel story of Beauty's father as seen through the mirror, and of how he exchanged a live daughter for an automated reproduction of one. There's a story embedded in Milord-Tiger's presence in the tiny villa where Beauty is lost at cards, and perhaps a story in all the trappings of his humanity, from his mask to his boots.

More notably than that, Beauty, as she narrates, recalls the Mother Goose-esque figure of her old nurse and her tales of beasts who gobble young ladies up, as well as a whole menagerie of bestial and grotesque creatures such as the young disabled boy in her village of origin who was hairy all over and said to be descended from a bear. In doing so, she calls upon us readers to remember our own background repertoire of such tales.

The complex fairy tale is thus, also, very aware of the intertextual relations it establishes with other materials. In "The Tiger's Bride", Carter plays up our expectations and comments on them constantly. She depends on our previous knowledge for the revelations and twists in her tale to work. She is aware that we, as readers, are aware of tropes such as the plucking of the rose, the negotiation of Belle's stay in the castle, the liberation of the Beast through love, his very nature of not being as he appears to be. She is aware that we expect Beauty to be showered with gifts of fine clothes and jewelry, that we expect her to reject the Beast and then fall in love with him, thus freeing him from his curse and herself from subjugation and poverty. If one doesn't know that the Beast turns human, one won't understand the significance of the human turning into a Beast instead.

More than that, she plays with our expectations of the fairy tale as a moral, edifying piece of writing. Nursery fears and childhood lessons about what behaviors are proper – such as Beauty recalling her nurse's admonition that she shouldn't laugh as she does, in a "raucous

guffaw” (CARTER, 2006, p. 160) – are called forth and then deconstructed. Part of the criticism of her work, in fact, even from other feminists, concerned her tales’ lack of simple and morally satisfying solutions to the problems they brought into the spotlight.

Revisiting and modifying previously established narrative patters established by male writers is, in fact, a common characteristic of women’s writings as they try to carve a place for themselves from an already existing background:

All writers write in dialogue with the traditions they have inherited, either openly or covertly; women writers, however, often understand and frame their revision of traditional models in sharply different ways. Our task as readers is to create for ourselves a more inclusive sense of those traditions and of the possible responses to them.

(HARRIES, 2001, p. 14)

Complex fairy tales are also extremely aware of their place as fairy tales, existing in the context of other fairy tales and of their material means of production and distribution. The tales of the 17th Century French *conteuses* often addressed their public of adult, intellectual woman with phrases such as “Madam, do you see this?”, “You should understand, mademoiselle...” etc. Their authors never portrayed themselves as kindly grandmothers spinning tales by the hearth, but rather, sometimes, as fairies themselves. *Conteuse* Mme. Murat, in her 1699 book *Histoires sublimes et alegoriques*, even describes herself and her readers as “Les Fées Modernes” (in: Harries, 2001, p. 56), the “modern fairies”, not crude and outdated like Perault’s Mother Goose but rather young, sophisticated and lively.

This sophistication also comes across in language. Many times, the language of the complex fairy tale is complex itself – articulate, loquacious and even baroque at times, to the point where critiques of such tales often focused with mockery on their verbose style. In the time of the *conteuses*, even when the language of a tale is simple, that simplicity is not an attempt to simulate some imagined oral monologue, but are rather an attempt at imitating the graceful ease of communication which was expected of a courtier in the *salons*.

Carter, of course, is a notable adept of baroque language which can serve both to obfuscate meaning and to create new associations (like the tear-tear that breaks through Milord’s façade in “The Tiger’s Bride”). As is to be expected of an author who is so interested in de-mythologizing, she also plays around with words themselves, the basis of all constructed meaning and all of mythology. Even her Beauty, when confronted with the Tiger’s request to see her naked, tells us “I felt that I owed it to him to make my reply in as

exquisite a Tuscan as I could master” (CARTER, 2006, p. 161) – such exquisite language being the natural response to the absurdity of the request, and, by extension, to the many absurdities that are a part not only of fairy tale but of the lives of women in a patriarchal society.

The tales of the complex tradition are also heavy on the theme of metamorphosis. Characters shift between human and animal or even plant forms, they adopt elaborate disguises to either hide or elevate themselves, they pass through thresholds of different realms by taking on new forms. Metamorphosis is an obvious part of any reimagining of Beauty and the Beast stories, but bodily transformations reoccur throughout Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* even in tales such as “The Snow Child” or “The Company of Wolves”, which derive from stories that do not contain such elements.

There is a logical relation between the subject of transformation and the exploration of gender expression. Characters in the complex fairy tale would often take on another disguise, that of cross-dressing, especially for female characters cross-dressing as men to seek their place in a male-dominated world. These tales wound up often questioning gender characteristics and expectations, and their supposed natural immutability.

Cross-dressing is in itself a form of metamorphosis, which, much like any other, doesn’t merely hide a given true form, but also tells fundamental truths about one’s nature which physical reality might not be enough to indicate. Carter picks right up on that: in her tale, the Beast is now the “real” form found at the character’s core whereas the human male form is the shallow disguise. The shift between these widely – and artificially – differing male and female figures conducts both to a tiger form which has almost no sexual dimorphism.

Other social expectations are also questioned in the wake of that of gender differences. If, after all, this most elementary of power differences can be thwarted through the cleverness and subterfuge of disfranchised women, the same can certainly be said of other disfranchised categories such as the poor and the illiterate. And here, again, we come to the matter of language, both the final disguise which creates mythology and the most powerful tool that the weak can wield against the strong:

[L’Hertier’s] fairy tales tend to validate the inferior category against the superior, the vernacular folk literature against the classics, oral tradition against book learning, the female against the male, by skillfully imitating the style of the dominant category, its learning and its refinement, by performing a successful masquerade

(WARNER, 1995, p. 177)

In talking about the characteristics of the complex fairy tale, we are describing them in such a way as to make them sound simply like another, different way of telling a similar type of story. However, there isn't just a matter of style differences at stake in the distinction, but also one of power imbalance, which permeates and surrounds tales and authors. After all, "The chaste compactness of [the compact tale] and its predictable structure help make its gender inequalities and family structure also seem inevitable." (HARRIES, 2001, p.13).

As we will see, the predominance of one mode of storytelling over the other isn't merely a matter of aesthetic preferences, but also of domination and subjugation through the fabrication of a history and ideology of fairy tale. The apparent greater naturalness or authenticity of the compact fairy tale is what Harries calls "a carefully laid narrative trap (HARRIES, 2001, p. 6) which has been maintained as part of a context interested in the silencing of women and the denial of their ability to successfully stand as the authors of their own stories.

3.2. A Legacy of Women

We have seen how the *conteuses* who began the complex tradition of fairy tale would openly present themselves as noble and well-versed ladies of the French court – the *précieuses*, as they often called themselves. It’s a characterization which, in fact, is a lot closer to the reality of the context in which all fairy tales as we currently understand them were produced.

Perrault, who has passed onto history as a benevolent and high-mindedly intellectual father of fairy tales, used the feminine voice of the uneducated, poor and wise old woman – Mother Goose – to lend legitimacy to his stories. In the introduction to his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé ou Contes de ma mere l’Oye*, he explains to his audience how in the book he is retelling the stories his children’s governess tells them to keep them entertained. Even visually, the book replicates this idea: in its frontispiece, kindly old Mother Goose sits by a fire with three richly dressed children sitting enthralled by her and listening to her spin both yarn – from a spindle she holds in her hands – and tales.

In truth, however, Perrault was a savvy and enterprising author who was able to play right into the expectations and demands of the nobility of his day: he established an “elaborate set of strategies [...] in the frontispiece, in the typography, in the dedication [to “Mademoiselle”, the niece of Louis XIV] – to frame his tales and direct his readers’ responses” (HARRIES, 2001, p. 30). The first print editions of his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* looked cheap and simple, and yet, simultaneously, key members of the court received exquisitely calligraphed manuscripts of the book with gilt covers. Thus, “Perrault disseminates his tales in two very different ways, for two very different audiences. He is poised between the manuscript culture of court patronage and the newer modes of printing for a mass reading public.” (HARRIES, 2001, p. 31)

And yet, it is Perrault that goes on to be praised by the Grimms for his “naïve and simple manner”, while predecessors such as his cousin Mme. Marie-Jeanne L’Hétiér are called “imitators” – despite having published their books before Perrault – and condemned for the length, stylistic affectation and lack of morality of their tales. Critiques from the *conteuses*’ time – notably from the abbé de Villiers, in his *Entretiens sur les contes des fees* – even go as far as to state that the presence of women as authors and consumers in the literary market is due to their laziness and ignorance. Villiers’s piece is even dedicated to Perrault,

who, says the abbé, possesses the cleverness to imitate the simplicity of the uneducated, ignorant folk teller (Harries, 2001).

Although the story of Beauty and the Beast (as in, the tale's history of versions and publications) is a bit more complex than that, seeing as it had two 17th Century French versions, one complex and one compact, both written by women with very different interests and agendas, even this tale suffered from this systematic erasure of women's voices. Its most widely known version is the amalgamation Andrew Lang created from Mme. Leprince de Beaumont and Mme. de Villeneuve's versions. From the time of Lang's version's publication in the *Blue Fairy Book*, it becomes almost impossible to find either previous version in print. Even Beaumont, who subscribed faithfully and vocally to the idea that fairytales should be simple, moralistic and aimed at children – assuming, therefore, the dominant model – wasn't spared from having a second class status among fairytale authors.

Interest in stifling the *conteuses'* expression, while certainly coming in part from a desire to gatekeep the rising literary industry and keep it away from female voices and audiences, also ran deeper in terms of political motivation. Their tales' insistence on questioning gender roles and arranged marriage represented yet another threat to male domination:

“Furthermore, the celibate ideal of the *précieuses* – to enjoy *tendresse* with men of equal intelligence and similar inclinations without the yoke of arranged marriages, their concomitant rejection of the economic basis of alliances, their argument for an end to the double standard which permitted male adultery but disgraced adulteresses – made them profoundly subversive, anomalous women within the social order of the *ancien régime* [...] If arranged marriages were abolished, women would be free to express their own desires – and this would spell the end of male authority in the household.” (WARNER, 1995, p. 169)

The *conteuses* were the protagonists of a flourishing time for protofeminist ideals, proposing the possibility of mutually satisfactory amorous relationships for men and women, based on artistic and intellectual appreciation, the pursuit of common interests and the extinction of convenience marriage. 17th Century Belle's happy ending isn't just marriage and love, it's also a graceful, witty and intelligent husband (good traits which were hidden under the beastliness of his curse) who can share in her appreciation of gentle arts such as poetry, music, rhetoric and the visual arts.

In turn, Angela Carter was a part of the 1960s and 1970s feminist sex wars, having published *The Bloody Chamber* in that context. The feminists of Carter's time also debated

the possibility of personal satisfaction in relations between men and women, this time with regards to sexual liberation and the intersections between people's sex lives and traditional gender roles. Carter, too, creates a story in which the romantic and sexual encounter between men and women can be beneficial, satisfactory and transformative so long as it occurs in conditions of social equality and mutual understanding. Once more, while she certainly *is* a pioneer in the boldness of her writing, in writing fairy tales the way she does, she is also the heir to a legacy:

Though the conteuses often refer to and simulate oral practices [...] they do not attempt to re-create a mythical or ur-storytelling situation. Theirs is not primarily a nostalgic art. Rather, they attempt to resist or undo the cultural notions that were coming into being as they wrote

(HARRIES, 2001, p. 71-72)

The stylistic and thematic similarities between these two historical moments in women's liberation and fairytale writing even led to similar critiques: Carter's tales, too, were criticized for being immoral and even perverse. They were not simply challenging the same moralistic mold that has been associated with fairytale since Perrault and the Grimms – which could already be objectionable enough for many – but also the morals of the society that surrounded them itself.

For Carter, this also meant questioning even some of the beliefs held by other feminists about what a feminist story should look like. The emphasis that her tales place on happy endings which include, or imply, a man and a woman falling in love, was sometimes questioned and found lacking by radical sex-negative feminism. However, this is a reflection of a matter dear to Carter and other sex-positive feminists: not the romantic happy ending in itself, but rather a possibility of equality in the free exercise of women's sexuality which was as crucial to Carter as the search for equality in marriage was to the *conteuses*.

When Angela Carter articulates the possibility of cruelty and harm that comes with sexual encounters between men and women in a patriarchal society, she recognizes power imbalance at the same time as she imagines possibilities of transgressing this same imbalance. While in the tale "The Bloody Chamber", "a dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides" (CARTER, 2006, p. 121), in "The Tiger's Bride", Beauty laughs in the face of the possibility of degradation, and in "The Company of Wolves", for example, the nameless female protagonist "burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat". (CARTER, 2006, p. 219). All over the stories, vulnerable little women about to be eaten up by wolves, tigers and

husbands suddenly disturb the scene and undo the bonds of power with their cleverness, their courage or even, yes, their bodies.

Radical anti-porn feminists of Carter's day often stated the conviction that social inequalities were enough to invalidate any possibility of a relationship – sexually, romantically and sometimes even in terms of other types of camaraderie – between men and women being fulfilling to the latter. Carter defies this view and aligns herself with sex-positive feminism, a branch of the feminist movement which maintains that even in the context of inequality between men and women, women are capable of taking ownership of their bodily autonomy, finding pleasure and escaping the role of victim without taking on its binary counterpart, the role of executioner.

Not only that, this destruction of power structures that comes from women taking hold of their own sexuality and their own lives can, for Carter, be the trigger for the emancipation of women, much as Beauty's casting aside of her clothes and skin, in "The Tiger's Bride", spells ruin for the patriarchal castle. After all, Carter says, "[O]nly the possibility of love could awaken the libertine to perfect, immaculate terror. It is in this holy terror of love that we find, in both men and women, the source of all opposition to the emancipation of women" (CARTER, 2011, p. 176)

4. THE FAIRY TELLERS

4.1. Who Writes, Who Tells, Who Lives the Story?

WOOLF (2004) points out a discrepancy in how “woman” is represented throughout history in fact and in fiction:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.

(WOOLF, 2004, p. 51)

This discrepancy is also present in the narrative that has been constructed around what “traditional” fairy tales are like, how they are structured and, above all, what the role of women in them is.

The roles destined to women *within* the tales have already been extensively discussed in academia, although the results of such discussions have varied widely. Feminist critics have often damned traditional fairy tales over the passivity of their women, the dichotomy between innocent/good/beautiful young girls and experienced/evil/intelligent old hags, and the focus on romantic love and marriage.

And yet, many others have made remarks on the courage and power of fairy tale heroines who go on adventures, leave their birthplaces or kingdoms, discover new world and lands and modes of living; they’ve pointed out the occasions in which heroines’ thought and speech save them; and they’ve pointed out, as we have done as well, that simply condemning the tales for their focus on romantic love can be an overly simplistic way of interpreting these stories given the contexts from which they emerge.

Even Perrault, for all that his book of fairy tales served as a model which women’s writing got negatively compared to, was, as Warner (1995) points out, a protofeminist himself, defending in his writings the right of women to govern their own lives. And Beaumont, a female fairy tale author, assimilated the dominant models regarding fairy tale and didn’t hesitate to, at least apparently, dismiss authors such as Mme. De Villeneuve even as she borrowed from their legacy in writing her own stories. Fairytales have served and still serve a variety of voices and their interests throughout the centuries. There is no such thing as

intrinsic sympathy or antipathy of fairy tales towards women, such as many scholars have tried to find, simply because there is no such thing as an organic nature of fairytale itself.

In this multiplicity of voices that create and transmit fairy tale, it has suffered many appropriations, including conservative and moralistic ones. And yet, much as happens with the Beasts which inhabit it, fairy tale itself has an aspect of enchantment which can't be neutralized, like the monster's seduction overpowering that of the prince (as it often does, judging by how often children and adults alike are disappointed when the mysterious Beast turns into an easily comprehensible handsome prince). Even in Beaumont's educational and moralizing version of "Beauty and the Beast", it's possible to read a story which opens up possibilities of courage, change and transformation that allow for growth beyond prejudices and assumptions.

For all that the role of heroines is so often and hotly debated, however, an equally crucial discussion is a lot less popular: the one which concerns the cultural role of women as *authors* of such tales. Often, this subject in particular isn't even mentioned by authors who deal extensively with the matter of women as characters. However, while it's true that representation of minorities as characters of stories is culturally significant, it's also true that it's vitally important to understand the reality of women, as Woolf would put it, in history.

Historically, as we've already seen, women have always written fairy tales. And yet, they have been pervasively erased from their place of authorship so as to be instead identified as the tellers, only – those who repeat the story, rather than actively creating it. This erasure, Harries (2001) defends, is what has actually "made it difficult for women to take the active step of writing [fairytale] down and inventing them" (HARRIES, 2001, p. 56). Even if fictional women hold power, as some fairytale heroines and villainesses do, that does not mean much if such women are widely believed to be the product of men's authorship and imagination.

Walter Benjamin (in: HARRIES, 2001) defends two separate but interwoven notions when he discusses fairy tale: that it is "first literature", marking the primitive beginnings of the sharing of stories among people, and that it arises from "the storyteller". This storyteller is not an author, not an artist, but rather more of a transmitter of technique, a craftsperson or artisan. She – for, although Benjamin doesn't specify that the teller is a woman, this has been women's place in Western history with regards to participating in literature – is in fact almost a link between wherever it is the story comes from and the person who is receiving it: "A man

listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader” (BENJAMIN in HARRIES, 2001, p. 11)

Rancière (1995) mentions the “madmen of the written word”, a very influential political fantasy found in literature, related to what happens when people who “should not” access this art form – such as women like Madame Bovary or poor aristocrats like Don Quixote – come into contact with writing. Bovary and Quixote are “mad” because writing which was not supposed to be geared towards them gets to their heads and begins to influence their lives, and since their minds are in some way feeble or unprepared to deal with fiction, they fail to respect the separation between the stories they read and the reality they live in.

It’s almost amazing how closely such a concept mirrors the moral outrage and panic which surrounded the work of the 17th Century *conteuses*. They were either demonized as immoral or cruelly dismissed as incompetent imitators; they were shallow and ignorant female authors writing for shallow and ignorant female readers. Amazing, yet unsurprising: for the fantasy of the “madmen of the written word” to thrive, it is necessary, in viewing the marginalized populations it concerns, “first to declare them mute, [...] so the artist can make them speak³” (RANCIÈRE, 1995, p. 92).

This is what happened to fairy tale authors and characters. Women in fairy tales are made to (or at least said to) speak the words of men in fiction; in reality, they were silenced when attempting to speak their own words. The male artist can make women utter his brilliant words, as Woolf so cleverly points out, but in order to do that he must use his power to enforce the fantasy of mute women who aren’t able to be authors themselves. Thus, “[...] the work of [the *conteuses*] seems strange and unfamiliar because of the literary strategies they use and the way these strategies have been judged. These judgments, however, did not occur in a vacuum.” (HARRIES, p. 22)

For Rancière, literature as a cultural construct is an overlap between writing as a philosophical or theological entity and the material matter of social stratification that writing suffers – a logical framework which dictates who is allowed to write, how, about what. This is the framework that explains what fairytale should be like, and it has historically worked to si-

³This quote, like any other not originally in English, has been translated by me.

lence women. There is, however, no such thing as a socially mute body which does not participate in communication – that is a fantasy construct which masks, in our case, the complex reality of fairy tale both in its production and in its consumption.

It is very tempting, when discussing a history of female authorship, to fall into the trap of unwittingly reproducing such a fantasy right as one tries to dismantle it. As Pollock and Parker (2013) point out, women's history in art and literature is not just a history of exclusion from male-dominated systems, seeing as, again, they have always written, read and spoken out, and thus represented their own literary cycles.

This is evident in Angela Carter's case, since she was a 20th Century author whose work has been extensively critiqued, read and reviewed by other women; but it is also true of the *conteuses* in 17th Century France, who wrote primarily for an audience of other educated adult women. While female authors' exclusion from art history is certainly a problem to be discussed, to focus exclusively on it is to perpetuate the idea of the voicelessness of women and to fall into the trap of sacrificial lambhood which both Carter and her Beauty so adamantly rejected.

4.2. Carter In the Demythologizing Business

Angela Carter once remarked she enjoyed “putting new wine into old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (CARTER in SAGE, 2006, p. 12). This is her response to a biblical quote which says that old wine must be kept in old bottles and new wine in new bottles so that both get to maintain their flavor and neither bursts – in other words, so that tradition and youth can coexist peacefully and respectfully.

Carter is the heir to a tradition, and a savvy heir at that. Throughout her stories, she’s aware of the concepts and tropes she is invoking as well as of the historical background she is tapping into. But she never simply respectfully admires the past by keeping its wine in its bottles – she subverts it; she blows it up. She serves its memory by finding latent themes and contents in it and bringing those forth in ways that she is allowed to do due to her historical and social position in the world.

It’s no wonder that, just as she published the revisited fairytales of *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter also investigated the possibilities of pornography as an ally to women in *The Sadeian Woman*, which was published in the same year. The switch from fairytale to pornography might seem abrupt, but it makes a lot of sense when one considers that both pornography and fairy tale, as Carter herself points out, involve reducing the world to concise narratives with key elements of myth and fantasy. “Like pornography, the fairy tale was practical fantasy, in this view, and it worked by narrative levitation – abstraction, patterning, getting above yourself...” (SAGE in BACCHILEGA et ROEMER, 2001, p. 67).

And yet, Carter imagines a “moral pornographer” – not a moralist, but rather one who questions, explodes and explores morality – who does in the mythology of pornography what she has done in the mythology of fairy tale: to become a “terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerilla whose purpose is to overturn the most basic notions of [gender and power] relations” (CARTER, 2011 p. 24). This terrorist would explode old bottles by deconstructing our notions surrounding sex much as Carter deconstructs our notions surrounding love, fairy tales and happy endings.

It is in *The Sadeian Woman* that she discusses the dangers of myth and naturalization, the very tools of the narrative of compact fairy tales which, as Harries (2001) pointed out, also neutralize their gender roles and family structures and make those seem like inevitable aspects

of human nature. Unquestioned myth will always be a tool of the powerful to reinforce the structure of power as it currently is by making it seem entrenched and unchangeable, woven into the very fabric of human social structure.

If “social construct” is a monument to the status quo, it proceeds that deconstruction, to whatever ends, is a liberating experience in itself. If the castle, clothes, masks and diamond earrings represent the rituals of nobility so clearly associated with fairy tales in common sense, then logically a terrorist of the imagination will have the castle fall away, clothes and masks be discarded and the diamonds turned into water droplets.

We come thus to a more steady resolution of the tension of the ending which Benson (in: Bacchilega et Roemer, 2001) problematized earlier in this paper: what we could see as the protagonist’s return to nature is itself a deconstruction of the “nature” of fairy tale with its clear associations of happiness with nobility and inclusion in the patriarchal framework. Carter’s fairy tale is physical and present. It represents material possibilities towards the emancipation of women. It works with the language of imagination and dream, but does so in order to question the messages we’re used to such a language sending us.

Both *The Sadeian Woman* and “The Tiger’s Bride” can also be thought of as being investigations on the traditionally gendered role of victim and executioner (lamb and tiger). As Margaret Atwood puts it:

For [the Marquis] de Sade, women can escape sacrificial lambhood (the ‘natural’ condition of women, as exemplified by Justine and defined by men) only by adopting tigerhood (the role of the predatory aggressor, the ‘natural’ role of men, as exemplified by Juliette and also defined by men).

(ATWOOD in SAGE, 2007, p. 134-135)

Her interest in the question and its unresolved tensions is one of the key aspects that have made Angela Carter a polemical author. Like her characters, Carter goes beyond designated spaces and transcends even as she explores apparent degradation. In doing so, she rethinks ideas of who is allowed to say what. She can write fairy tales and appreciate sadism, and expose the latent sexual fantasies and sadomasochist undertones of what we ordinarily (and erroneously) think of as children’s stories.

While openly challenging conventional misogyny in the very act of speaking and making images, they [Angela Carter and surrealist artist Paula Rego] also refuse the wholesome or pretty picture of female gender (nurturing, caring) and deal plainly with erotic dominance as a source of pleasure for men – and for women.

(WARNER, 1995, p. 301)

The reminder Carter gives us that the lamb must learn to run with the tigers, in “The Tiger’s Bride”, mirrors the Emma Goldman quote she closes *The Sadeian Woman* with and which reminds us that, historically, the oppressed classes never had freedom handed to them, they have “gained true liberty from [their] masters through [their] own efforts” (GOLDMAN in CARTER, 2011, p. 177). Creating new fantasies that serve to further women’s liberation is a part of those efforts.

In her introduction to *Angela Carter’s Book of Fairy Tales* (2005), Carter writes that the very exercise, by women, of the pleasure of reading and writing tales (or telling them and listening to them) is a threat to patriarchal power, much like women’s exercise of any other source of pleasure including their sexuality. Precisely because of that, this ability to create, transmit and receive stories has been curtailed throughout history. After all, reading fairy tales can lead women to reclaim their past and thus claim their future: “That I and many other women should go looking through the books for fairy-tale heroines is a version of the same process – a wish to validate my claim to a fair share of the future by staking my claim to my share of the past.” (CARTER, 2005, p. 13)

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner discusses the matter of narrative voice: “Perhaps the very presence of the narrator guarantees the possibility of survival: this person, who speaks of these things, has not been silenced.” (WARNER, 1995, p. 352). This is the guarantee the history of the *conteuses* gives us, and the guarantee that Angela Carter furthers. Carter’s work has been influential now to two generations of feminism, having encouraged many feminist authors and scholars to find their own voices.

Given its pioneering qualities, feminism is often seen merely as uprooting, as breaking from tradition – an argument which traditionalists are quick to enforce, accusing feminism and other minorities’ rights movements of destroying traditional or “family” values. It is therefore crucial that we be able to look into our history and our past and find other traditions which show that women’s claim to equality and respect is, itself, the taking of a mantle passed onto them by the generations which preceded them. In telling the stories of complex fairy tale authors, I hope to have contributed, in some small way, to keep the flame of their memory burning a little longer and a little wider.

I have shown in this paper that questioning something as apparently innocuous and simple as fairytale can bring up a rich history that sheds light into how we think of myth, authorship, womanhood and the “proper”, “natural” place of things and people in this world. The story of the Complex Tradition of fairy tale can ground contemporary writers as they come to grips with their own demythologizing, and it can also ground our interpretations, as scholars, of their work.

Fairy tales, in the language of myth, offer us promises of restitution, of claiming our rights, of triumphing over adversity and of attaining new tiers of dignity, choice and voice. They allow us to reclaim our experiences both as individual readers and as a society; they allow us renewed faith in our ability to overcome the hurdles that would silence us.

In briefly telling the story of generations of female fairy tale authors, I have also involuntarily told my own. Long before my speaking voice was comfortable with telling anyone my history of psychological abuse and sexual violence, I could already pose difficult questions regarding a tale of degradation and animality turned into beauty and belonging. Long before I felt able to come before others as a person deserving of honor and respect, I was able to demand chances to tell the stories I’ve told in this paper. Long before I was able

to admit to the questions that surrounded my own gender identity (and which are now precariously resolved, like the latent tensions in the tale, with my ability to say “I am transgender”) I had already been enticed by this story of one who leaves behind the adornments of womanhood and comes into a new skin.

In producing this critical analysis, I was able to occupy that double-place the authors of fairy tale who preceded me laid out for me: transcending and healing in becoming tiger-like, demanding respect for my thoughts and my voice by claiming my place as a scholar. I give the reader a glimpse of my story because that, I believe, is the crucial demand that the complex fairy tale authors make of me and of other marginalized people who read them: that we proudly take our places as authors and come into our own voices. That is the transformative spark that tears away at old skins and allows for a possible future of happier endings.

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