Feminist Fairy Tales

Blurred Boundaries in Angela Carter’s Rewritings of Classical Fairy Tales

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Abstract

This essay examines Angela Carter’s feminist rewritings of classical fairy tales. By examining the original fairy tales and comparing them to what Angela Carter published I aim to highlight a feminism that is subtle and non-binary. In the analysis I draw on ideas presented by Hélène Cixous as well as Simone de Beauvoir.

Furthermore, a pedagogical reflection is included to show ways in which these stories could be incorporated in the upper-secondary school.

Sammanfattning

Denna uppsats undersöker Angela Carters feministiska omarbetningar av klassiska sagor. Genom att undersöka originalversionerna av sagorna och jämföra dem med det Angela Carter publicerat ämnar jag visa på en feminism som är subtil och icke-binär. I analysen använder jag idéer presenterade av Hélène Cixous samt Simone de Beauvoir.

Vidare finns även en pedagogisk reflektion för att visa på hur dessa sagor skulle kunna inkluderas i undervisning på gymnasiet.

Nyckelord

Angela Carter, feminism, fairy tales, Little Red Riding Hood, Beauty and the Beast
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Introduction and Background

Folk and fairy tales are some of the oldest forms of narrative that exist in this world. These literary forms have developed over centuries and have been transformed and adapted from spoken tales to written stories, theatre and even film. The fairy tale genre is simple and unequivocal, often orbiting around a damsel in distress and a resilient man who sets out to save her. Fairy tales are inspiring for many modern writers who have rewritten, adapted and transformed the classic tales into new narratives. The reason fairy tales lend themselves to revision could be the fact that the characters are often static and stereotypical.

This essay will look at the feminist retellings of two fairy tales by Angela Carter (1940–1992), a British writer of the post-modern era. Her collection of short stories The Bloody Chamber, published in 1979, is a critique of patriarchal injustice and imbalance between the sexes. This essay aims to examine the changes that Carter has made to the original stories, paying particular attention to the way in which she has rewritten traditional gender stereotypes. In the analysis I will argue that Carter’s rewritten fairy tales challenge traditional gender stereotypes, not by simply reversing gender roles, but by blurring the distinction between masculine and feminine altogether. The analysis in this essay draws on feminist theories, most notably Hélène Cixous’ critique of phallocentrism in “Sorties” (1975).

In the first chapter of this essay, a brief sketch of the relationship between the fairy tale genre and stereotypical gender roles is provided. Following this, Chapter two discusses Carter’s story “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, which is one of two versions of Marie Le Prince de Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” contained in The Bloody Chamber. Here, I will demonstrate how Carter’s feminist rewriting of the two main protagonists is not straightforward; indeed, this version of “Beauty and the Beast” at first sight might seem to follow the original very closely. However, the very subtle changes Carter has made suggest an initial stage of the blurring of boundaries that characterises The Bloody Chamber. In the third chapter of this essay, “The Company of Wolves”, which retells Charles Perrault’s story of “Little Red Riding Hood”, is examined. This story, as will show, subverts the traditional gender boundary system altogether, by not only letting its characters challenge stereotypical norms, but also by providing a whole
new fate for them at the end of the story. In the last section of this essay, a discussion on how teachers could use *The Bloody Chamber* in the classroom, and how discussions of gender roles can be included in this is provided. Making students in the upper-secondary school critically reflect on gender norms is crucial to my own pedagogical practice. By learning how to question gendered patterns and structures in literature, the students will hopefully be more confident in seeing the socially constructed patterns that determine their own everyday lives. Connecting what the students learn to the real world outside the school context is important for developing their critical thinking. Moreover, using literature in doing so doubtlessly improves the students’ language skills as well.

The feminist movement was at its peak in the 1970s and female writers and critics were demanding their rights to be heard in a patriarchal literary field (Moi 22). Indeed, Carter was one of these writers, and one should regard her work as a product of, and contribution to, the feminist movement of the late 20th century. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, most published criticism on *The Bloody Chamber* has a feminist perspective, and my essay, as indicated above, is no exception. In my analyses, I have found Cristina Bacchilega and Patricia Brooke’s respective discussions of Carter’s changes to the “Beauty and the Beast” story particularly helpful. In addition, Wendy Swyt’s insightful discussion of the old wives’ tales that inspired Carter to write “The Company of Wolves” and Kimberly Lau’s reading of *The Sadeian Woman* in relation to Carter’s fairy tales have also provided important support for my argument.

In the field of feminist theory there are many important scholars who have earned their right to be acknowledged. One of the pioneers of feminist theory in modern times was Simone de Beauvoir, whose idea in *The Second Sex* (1949) that “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” was revolutionary (295). Furthermore, Beauvoir states that “since the earliest days of the patriarchy they [men] have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the Other” (171). Moreover, Beauvoir discusses the imbalance between the sexes as seen in ancient stories under the heading “Myths”. Her analysis of symbolism and gender dichotomies in ancient narratives is still relevant in modern-day stories. She states that woman in ancient texts “is healing presence and sorceress; she is man’s prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not” (175). Toril Moi notes that Beauvoir fiercely attacks the notion that woman is solely created as a possession for man, and shows how social behaviour has “constructed” woman (90). The idea that women (and men) are socially – not biologically –
constructed was ground-breaking at the time, and many feminists thereafter have been influenced as well as inspired by Beauvoir’s ideas.

Beauvoir’s critique of gender binaries constitutes the basis of my analysis of gender in Angela Carter’s stories. Moreover, this analysis will turn to Hélène Cixous, a feminist theorist whose critique of binary thinking in “Sorties” will shed light on the narrative changes that Carter has made in her modern fairy tale adaptations. In “Sorties”, an essay which is largely contemporaneous with *The Bloody Chamber*, Cixous lists words of opposition, under the headline “Where is she.” Among these opposing pairs are words such as: “Sun/Moon,” “Culture/Nature” and “Activity/Passivity” (63). According to Cixous, this list represents words that have traditionally been associated with male and female qualities. Examining these words, Cixous argues that words closely linked to power are reserved for men, while women are prescribed the less powerful descriptions. Culture/Nature is an interesting opposition. If culture is linked to male behaviour, then nature (which is often connected to barbaric and uncivilised behaviour, as well as nurturing and caring) is a female tendency. The last pair, Activity/Passivity, is one of the most important ones. Cixous states that while men are a part of the active side of this pair, women therefore by default have to be passive or else “she does not exist” (64). It is noteworthy that Cixous actually turns to classical fairy-tale structures to prove the hypothesis of activity and passivity.

Most fairy-tale princesses are indeed passive to the point of coma, until being awakened by the prince at the very end of the story (66). Carter deliberately plays with these binaries in *The Bloody Chamber* in order to expose gender norms as well as to rewrite them. What happens to our perception of the main characters when female and male oppositions in this binary system do not follow the usual pattern? That is the driving question of this essay.
Fairy Tales and Gender Roles

Folk and fairy tales have been told and retold for centuries. In *Breaking the Magic Spell*, Jack Zipes gives a comprehensive background of the evolution of the fairy and folk tale genre. Originally, these tales generally served a didactic purpose, but were also a way to “unite the people of a community and help bridge a gap in their understanding of social problems” (6). In other words, fairy tales were used to educate both children and adults and warn them of the consequences that would wait should they chose to cross social boundaries.

Everyday folk and fairy tales have been collected and altered for hundreds of years. Perhaps the best-known fairy tales are the ones collected by the Brothers Grimm. Gathered in the early nineteenth century, these stories have become known all over the Western world. Their versions of these tales are often referred to as “authentic” (Zipes 18) but are indubitably not the only versions. In my analysis of Carter’s modern fairy tales in relation to their original source there is the issue of deciding which version is the original one. There is always a difficulty when working with classical fairy tales as a primary source for analysis solely because they are not owned, nor were they created, by one single author.

This analysis is built on Charles Perrault’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood” as an intertextual base for Carter’s adaptation. The reason why I chose Perrault’s over the Brothers Grimm’s version lies in Carter’s previous work. In 1977 Angela Carter published a book of English translations of Charles Perrault’s classical French fairy tales. Thus, Carter was working on these translations at the same time that *The Bloody Chamber* was being created and this was probably where she found most of her inspiration. Since there are certain elements, such as the ending, that differ in the Perrault and Grimm versions, I will turn to the previous one.

According to Zipes, the fairy tales collected during the nineteenth century were often addressed to the lower classes of society as moralising instructions for living (8). However, the stories did not always address or orbit around moral statements for the working class. There were also stories more related to the higher classes of society: Marie Le Prince de Beaumont’s version of *Beauty and the Beast* serves as a perfect example of this. The story revolves around a rich merchant who has lost his fortune, and
the struggles that come as a consequence. The story does indeed moralise standards of living, the vast difference being that the characters are aristocratic (10).

Characters in traditional fairy and folk tales are often highly stereotypical. As indicated above, the female characters are often weak, naïve and helpless. Furthermore, the stories tend to rely on a male character redeeming the female character, making her into an object that needs to be saved (Zipes 181). Additionally, Karen E. Rowe describes the “female virtues” in fairy tales as “patience, sacrifice and dependency” (217). Stereotypes are indeed very common in the fairy tale genre, but authors can use these stereotypes to highlight the imbalance in patriarchal structure. These structures are often deeply rooted in culture and society to the point where they seem almost natural. Angela Carter discusses patriarchal structures in conjunction with myths in The Sadeian Woman and states that “myth deals in false universals” (5). Here, she not only discusses myths in a literary sense, but also highlights the fact that gender roles are created as a kind of myth. Furthermore, she states in “Notes From the Front Line” that: “I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I’m in the demythologising business” (38).

Carter discusses the fact that she has used the structures of fairy and folk tales in order to expose structures that are unfortunate for women. She states that she is interested in working with myths and fairy tales because “they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree” (38). Thus she is using known structures to highlight what she feels is wrong with them; she is “demythologising” them in order to emphasize gender imbalance. This quotation can also be linked to Simone de Beauvoir’s theories about gender roles as a social construction. Because these stereotypical tendencies are so evident in the fairy tale, they lend themselves to feminist alterations.

Furthermore, Carter claims that she is “all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (37). This metaphor clarifies what she is aiming to accomplish with The Bloody Chamber: to use old structures (fairy tales) as a means to create a literature, and a world, where patriarchy is exploding from the pressure within. I believe that adding Cixous’ critique of patriarchal binary thought to literature that is so clearly playing with gender stereotypes gives a forceful feminist result. Changing structures that have not been questioned for centuries transforms the fairy tales into a narrative critically highlighting patriarchal imbalances.
“Beauty and the Beast”

This chapter will examine “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, which is one of two versions of “Beauty and the Beast” contained in The Bloody Chamber. I will look at the changes Carter has made regarding the main characters and what this does to the reader’s perception of the story. Readers of The Bloody Chamber, who are familiar with Carter’s overt feminist agenda, might expect the gender roles in the stories to be completely inverted. Yet, this is not true for “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”. Apart from the fact that Carter has set this story in a modern context, involving cars and telephones, it might at first glance seem very similar to the original. Indeed, by changing the setting the reader might expect a more drastic rewriting than what Carter actually presents. One might, after first reading the story, even begin to question if the adaptation is at all a feminist one. There are, however, subtle alterations made which expose traditional binaries between masculine and feminine (or if you will: Beast and Beauty). Moreover, as I will show, reading more closely and examining the alterations Carter has made reveal that the boundaries between stereotypical gender roles, rather than having been inverted, have been blurred. This deconstruction of boundaries is a much more radical feminist intervention compared to a mere inversion of opposites.

Marie Le Prince de Beaumont’s short version of “Beauty and the Beast”, published in 1756, circles around a rich merchant who has lost his fortune. Beauty, his youngest daughter, is the female protagonist who, despite her older sisters’ jealousy, is “such a charming, sweet-tempered creature” (Beaumont 1). One of the greatest differences between the two stories is the absence of the sisters (as well as the three brothers) in Carter’s version. The sisters might have been omitted because of the female rivalry that emerges in the original intrigue. In de Beaumont’s story the sisters highlight the goodness of Beauty; the cost of this, however, is that the sisters come to represent female rivalry and hatred. They often ridicule Beauty and are delighted at the thought of her being imprisoned by the Beast, mainly because “her virtue and amiable qualities made them envious and jealous” (2). The effect of omitting the sisters is that Beauty in Carter’s version is not as perfect as in the original; she thus becomes more neutral. Furthermore, in de Beaumont’s’ version, Beauty’s three older brothers serve as protectors of their fragile younger sister as she attempts to leave for the Beast’s castle, and state that they will “either kill him, or perish in the attempt” (5). This is a clear
example of the gender stereotypes described by Zipes. Beauty willingly sacrifices herself in her father’s place, serving as a perfect daughter although the brothers try to protect her. As a contrast, Carter has reduced the number of characters in her version, which puts more focus on the main characters (Beauty, the Beast and to some extent the father) instead.

Although Carter’s description of Beauty as a woman “of absolute sweetness and absolute gravity” echoes de Beaumont’s (“a charming, sweet-tempered creature as a woman”) there are vast differences between these two protagonists, the main one being where the power of choice is placed (“The Courtship of Mr Lyon” 51). In the original tale, the Beast demands that the merchant either dies or makes one of his daughters live with him in the castle. Beauty, being the unselfish, perfect daughter subsequently sacrifices herself. The scenario reoccurs in Carter’s version, albeit modified. There is no strict demand from the Beast that the merchant bring his daughter as a prisoner. Rather, he asks to have her dine with him and Beauty does not refuse. Because the Beast does not request the daughter’s imprisonment in a life or death fashion, Carter’s Beauty’s decision to stay at the castle belongs to her. She is not forced, but asked, and thus the power is hers from the very beginning of the story. Although the original Beauty may be perceived as a heroine, one could argue that she is merely a product of patriarchal constructions of gendered behaviour. The original heroine falls into the basic “patience, sacrifice and dependency” pattern described by Rowe as most other fairy-tale heroines (217). Though Carter’s construction of the heroine may at first glance seem equally stereotypical, I instead claim that it is in fact the Beast in this story who displays characteristics such as “patience, sacrifice and dependency”. The Beast acts with a “hint of shyness, of fear of refusal” in the face of asking Beauty to stay with him, which is remarkable for a character we expect to act with stereotypically “male” characteristics (“The Courtship of Mr Lyon” 53). Qualities such as shyness or fear of rejection are often linked with female characters, but Carter gives these characteristics to the Beast, who is thereby portrayed as an insecure character who depends emotionally on the female protagonist.

Carter’s Beauty chooses to stay in the Beast’s castle, and is thus portrayed as more free and in control of her own destiny than the Beauty of de Beaumont’s story. Yet, in Carter’s version, Beauty states that she feels “a sense of obligation” to stay with the Beast, mainly because it is “the price of her father’s good fortune” (53). Thus, even though the narrator makes it perfectly clear to the reader that Beauty is in control of her
own will, her “sense of obligation” seems to play an important part in her decision. There is a possibility that Beauty only thinks that this decision is her own, when she is in fact acting according to the gendered structures created by patriarchal society. In this way, Carter’s story is ambiguous; we cannot tell if Beauty is really as strong-willed as she is perceived, or only performing according to the fixed rules of society. As Judith Butler aptly argues, gender identity and sexual desire are culturally constructed through “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance” (Butler 45). Gender, thus, is performed – a set of repeated acts – and “not natural.” This idea is similar to Beauvoir’s, but takes it a step further, as Butler believes that even sex (male/female) as well as sexual desire (heterosexual) is performed, but has come to be seen as “natural” through repetition. Thus, it is difficult to tell if Beauty in Carter's story is acting on her perceived strong will, or if the “set of repeated acts” discussed by Butler comes into play here, and is something which Carter wishes to expose.

De Beaumont’s Beauty is likewise in thrall to her father. Rowe argues that this Beauty suffers from a severe Oedipal complex, for she persistently changes herself in order to please her father’s wishes and needs (215). She constantly emphasises her love for her father and reassures him that she is “happy in thinking that [her] death will save [her] father’s life, and be a proof of [her] tender love for him” (de Beaumont 5). Even though Carter’s Beauty does indeed have a choice, that choice seems to be conditioned by paternal – even patriarchal – obligation; but in contrast to de Beaumont’s portrayal of a young woman who gladly embraces death for her father, Carter manages to make the patriarchal structures of this desire visible. By stating that Beauty feels obliged rather than delighted to face death for the sake of her father, the reader is explicitly told that she only chooses to stay “because her father wanted her to do so” (“The Courtship of Mr Lyon” 52).

Brooke notes another interesting aspect of Beauty’s relation to her father in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”; that is, the way he refers to his daughter as his “girl-child, his pet” (Carter, “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” 48; Brooke 6). By calling her a pet, Brooke argues that the structures of subordination become evident. Ironically, the actual pet of the Beast’s castle (a dog) acts as hostess for the father, upon his arrival (Brooke 6). Moreover, Carter refers to Beauty as “Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial” (52). This description invokes domesticated and sacrificial animals: she is described as a victim. Carter indicates irony in portraying her characters in this stereotypical fashion. Since she
aims to make the “old bottles” explode with the “pressure of the new wine”, she is ironically using the old structures before changing them ("Notes from the Front Line 37"). Carter has also used the metaphor “sacrificial lamb” for women in The Sadeian Woman where she states that “the lamb does not understand why it is led to the slaughter and so it goes willingly, because it is in ignorance” (138).

Another interesting alteration is the portrayal of the Beast. In de Beaumont’s version, the Beast is often referred to as “frightful” (4) and “ugly” (6), although Beauty does become more attached to him and reflects that “tis a thousand pities any thing so good-natured should be so ugly” (7). Although he is a monster, he still carries himself like a gentleman and Beauty treats him with respect. The respect Beauty shows the Beast earns her a fair amount of freedom during her captivity in the castle. The Beast makes it clear that “you alone are the mistress here; you need only bid me gone, if my presence is troublesome” (6). In Carter’s story, however, the Beast does not explicitly tell her that she is free to roam the castle; she does this anyway without waiting for permission. As previously mentioned, Carter’s portrayal of the Beast is of a different nature in the sense that he is the one portrayed with descriptions linked to “feminine behaviour”. When first interacting with her father Carter’s Beast is described “like an angry lion” (51). However, he is changed in the presence of Beauty, and transforms from “angry lion” to experiencing “fear of refusal” when asking Beauty to stay with him (53). Thus, Carter delicately shifts the source of power by connecting typically feminine gendered behaviour to the Beast.

Marriage is a theme that reoccurs repeatedly in de Beaumont’s original story. The Beast asks Beauty every night to be his wife, which makes her quite uncomfortable. She tries to explain that “I shall always esteem you as a friend” but does not wish to marry him (7). In Carter’s version, however, the Beast asks no such question – he seems all too shy and timid to do so. However, although Carter’s Beast does not request Beauty to join him in matrimony, the outcome is identical in both stories. The same structures of power come into play in this sequence as in the one where Beauty is asked to stay at the castle. In de Beaumont’s version the Beast pleads with Beauty to marry him, whereas in Carter’s version there is no such occurrence.

The difference between these stories can be highlighted by Cixous’ theories. The clear-cut boundary between activity and passivity is blurred in Carter’s story. She utilises these structures and gives Beauty the power to decide the outcome of her existence. She is no longer a passive spectator that is oppressed, or “obliged” by patriarchal norms.
Although she does not rebel against patriarchy by denying the Beast her presence or refusing to help her father, she does revolt in being an active character. Rowe’s description that “the female receives her reward for tailoring personal behaviour to communal norms”, does not apply to Carter’s Beauty because she does not follow traditional fairy tale characteristics (221). In the original 1756 version of the story, this Beauty eventually agrees to marry the Beast and is thus rewarded with a handsome prince and all his riches, following the typical patterns for a fairy-tale princess. Is not this true for Carter’s version then? Beauty does indeed marry the Beast, but the question of power and initiative is relevant in this scenario as well. Since the Beast never requests Beauty to marry him, the decision lies with her alone. When returning to the castle and seeing the Beast at the end of his life, she exclaims: “if you’ll have me, I’ll never leave you” (59). She does not give in to something he has asked her to do; she takes the initiative and is thereby released from an altogether passive role.

Carter thus manages to make patriarchal structures of power visible without reversing the roles completely, but rather blurring them. As previously mentioned, she designates features such as shyness to the Beast, something that is usually not expected from a male character in a fairy tale. Whereas Carter’s version of Beauty might appear to be a “regular” fairy tale character on the surface, as I have shown, her characteristics are multi-faceted, and in the end she seems to be given the power to decide over her own destiny. Moreover, in further contrast to de Beaumont’s Beauty, Carter lets her protagonist be more interested in her own feelings and wishes, not only acting according to patriarchal demands. For example, towards the end of the story, after having left the Beast’s castle, she goes with her father to “buy her furs” (56), symbolically wearing and possessing the Beast. This is a significant symbol for the shift Carter is preparing. As Brooke too points out, Beauty is “purchasing the skin of the Beast” – he has become her prey rather than the other way around (7). When she leaves the castle, she is slowly becoming a predator, which the wearing of the fur implies. Furthermore, she is “learning … how to be a spoiled child”, who “smiled at herself in mirrors a little too often, these days, and the face that smiled back was not quite the one she had seen contained in the Beast’s agate eyes” (“The Courtship of Mr Lyon 57). Thus, turning into a predator is not seen as positive in this story. Beauty realises that becoming a beast herself is not the ultimate solution. Neither of them has to be the predator.

De Beaumont’s female protagonist also saves the Beast in the end. The main difference is that she has already been presented with the patriarchal demand – marriage.
Although the reader might perceive the choice of de Beaumont’s Beauty as her own, I argue that this is not the case. Conforming to Rowe’s definition of a female fairy-tale character, Beauty is rewarded at the end of the story because of her patience. The reward is that Beauty gets to marry the prince. She has been a passive spectator, following male expectations – except for her initial refusal of marriage. At the end of the story, however, she has realised that marriage is the only possible solution to the Beast’s suffering. Beauty thus sacrifices herself - another "typically feminine" virtue. She also recognises her own feelings of nurture for him and consequently agrees to marry him. Beauty acts on pity more than love since she avoids marriage until the very end. The agreement to marry the Beast can be seen as a sacrifice, which relates strongly to the ironical portrait Carter presents with her Beauty being “spotless, sacrificial”.

In Carter’s version, however, the Beast is the one realising that he needs to change. In the original story, the Beast’s transformation into a prince is caused by a fairy appearing and magically reversing the spell that has been cast upon him. In Carter's version the change comes from the Beast himself. Being a predator he needs to hunt, but he tells Beauty that he could not “find the stomach to kill the gentle beasts” and has therefore starved (59). When Beauty offers her hand in marriage, the Beast subsequently transforms metaphorically, understanding that he has to change and replies that he now can “manage a little breakfast” (60). This shift from hunting predator to domesticated husband is the transformation of the Beast. Metaphorically this can be seen as a symbol for equality in the relationship between Beauty and the Beast.

Brooke emphasises the fact that the Beast has been a symbol for male sexuality – “active, male culprit” – and that Beauty symbolises the prey – “passive, female victim” (2). Carter herself discusses the relation between prey and predator in *The Sadeian Woman* and states that “[t]he murderous attacks on the victims demonstrate the abyss between the parties to the crime” (138). This means that as the Beast abstains from hunting, he is not the predator feeding on victims anymore. This brings Beauty and Beast closer to an equal relationship where the tension, and power hierarchy, between prey and predator is eliminated. The transformation of the Beast is thus a symbol for equality in their relationship; the Beast is no longer a predator and Beauty no longer a “sacrificial lamb”. 

There is ambiguity in the transformations in Carter’s revisionary story. Christina Bacchilega notes that Carter’s description of the Beast throughout the story, as well as in his actual transformation into a man, leaves some room for interpretation (93). Has the
Beast really been transformed from carnivore to gentleman, or is it a more subtle transformation? Bacchilega argues that the Beast merely becomes Mr Lyon in Beauty’s mind, and that the transformation from wild beast to civilised prince is only a reflection of her domesticating him (94). The Beast is described as having characteristics such as a “head of a lion” at the beginning of the story (Carter 51). Still, the reader cannot be sure whether the Beast has an actual lion’s head, or if his appearance merely resembles a lion’s with a mane and carnivorous features. If this is only a metaphor for the Beast’s appearance, Bacchilega presents a strong argument. Surely, one of these theories need not exclude the other. The actual monstrosity of the Beast might not take its full form of a lion and the transformation might not be a physical one, but rather a redisposition of personality. The explicit moral of Carter’s version is still the same as the original – not to judge a person because of their appearance. The implicit moral of Carter’s work is a critique of gender norms and is displayed through the irony and exaggerated portrayals of the characters, as well as their challenging of the roles they have been cast in.

The changes that have been made in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” thus mostly concern the characteristics and portrayals of the main characters, who at times self-consciously perform and at times reject the stereotypical patterns of the traditional fairy tale. Carter allows the Beast to be frightened of rejection and also provides Beauty with a strong will of her own. The alterations are ingeniously masqueraded behind a storyline very intertextually similar to the original tale. Carter manages to write a feminist version of de Beaumont’s classic telling in an ambiguous manner.

Some critics, for example Sarah Gamble, have argued that the story does not end in this single adaptation, but that it continues to grow in Carter’s second adaptation of “Beauty and the Beast”, “The Tiger’s Bride” (125). In this story, Carter makes more drastic revisions to the female character and makes her transform to Beast herself: “And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs” (“The Tiger’s Bride” 81). Furthermore, Patricia Brooke notes that these two versions of the same story aim to highlight different ways of writing a female heroine without falling into stereotypes. Even though the first story (“The Courtship of Mr Lyon”) ends with marriage, “within the second tale, the union between Beauty and Beast exceeds the projected desire prohibited by cultural forces that restrict women to the status of property without their own libido” (Brooke 16). Both versions break stereotypical characteristics, but in different ways. The first version makes a more subtle impression while “The Tiger’s
Bride” aims towards a more violent and sexual release of the female protagonist. Because the latter is more obvious in the reversal of characters, it is more interesting for this essay to look at “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” to see how elusively this can be done. In contrast to this elusive rendition, the next chapter will show another way that Carter rewrites fairy tales. The rewriting of “Little Red Riding Hood” aims towards a more violent release of the female protagonist.
“Little Red Riding Hood”

This chapter will examine the portrayals of gender roles in Charles Perrault’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood” in relation to one of Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves.” In contrast to “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, this story is provided with a completely new ending, in which the female protagonist embraces sexual desire. In the final analysis, this act, as will show, does not result in inverted patterns of dominance, but in a reciprocal sexual relationship with the wolf.

As with the revisions of “Beauty and the Beast” there are more than one interpretations of “Little Red Riding Hood” in Carter’s fairy tale collection. Besides “The Company of Wolves”, there is also “The Werewolf” and “Wolf-Alice”. Although it is important to emphasise that Carter offers multiple interpretations of the same original story, this essay cannot take up this aspect due to limitations of space.

Perrault’s version of this classic fairy tale was published in 1697, and was most probably intended to warn youngsters to not wander alone in the woods. Zipes describes this tale as a “narrative about rape” (Don’t Bet on the Prince 227). As Bacchilega further argues, this fact makes the story aimed towards an audience that is broader than just young children (70). This becomes evident in the moral that is presented by Perrault at the end of the story where he warns “mainly pretty girls with charm” from engaging in conversation with handsome strangers that are called wolves, but indubitably refer to men that are “not as friendly as they might appear” (103). Interestingly, Carter herself translated many of Perrault’s versions of fairy tales, and her translation of this moral is somewhat different. She puts more emphasis on the “smooth-tongued, smooth-pelted wolves” who are “the most dangerous beasts of all” (Carter, “Afterword” 3) instead of placing the blame of rape on the victim. Perrault’s moral is a clear example of a situation where the female victim is warned that her actions might cause her great grief, since the male perpetrator’s nature is just to rape – it is inevitable – while Carter tries to redeem the female protagonist. The fact that these patterns of young girls taking the blame for rape can be traced back to the Brothers Grimm’s time is extremely interesting, not only from a feminist literary viewpoint, but from a historical perspective as well. Clearly these structures of gendered behavior, that are still conditioning women’s and men’s lives today, have been present in society for a very long time.
As in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon,” Carter uses the same structure as the original tale, but changes certain elements. One vast difference between Perrault’s original and Carter’s adaptation is the additional introduction to the origin of the wolf, or werewolf, in the latter. Contextualizing the story and providing a brief background to the wolves that wander the woods, Carter mystifies these villains and captures her reader. The opening lines of her story read: “One beast and only one howls in the woods by night. The wolf is carnivore incarnate and he’s as cunning as he is ferocious; once he’s had a taste of flesh then nothing else will do” (141). This introduction is of significance on many different levels. The epithet of “carnivore incarnate” reoccurs time and again as a description often linked to the antagonist wolf. One could argue that Carter is playing on essentialist ideas that men and women are born different; thus the wolf is “carnivore incarnate”. Also, Carter clearly states that there is but one danger in the woods – the wolf, which inevitably is a symbol for an archetypal man. However, there is clear irony in her description of her fairy-tale character in this stereotypical manner. Carter deliberately plays with old-fashioned norms, which are often apparent in fairy tales.

Carter’s introduction places the reader in a cold and harsh landscape in which “[i]t is winter and cold weather” and ”the shaggy branches tangle about you, trapping the unwary traveller in nets” (142). She introduces the origin of the wolf and warns the reader that should the wolf appear, one must “run as if the Devil were after you” (145). A reason for this setting might be to connect with the origins of the fairy tale. Bacchilega states that the story was originally meant to warn young peasants not to walk alone at night (55). Furthermore, Bacchilega also observes that stories about werewolves were very common in mountain areas across Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, and argues that they might have inspired Carter’s revision of “Little Red Riding Hood” (55). A similar observation is made by Wendy Swyt, who argues that the “old wives’ tales” that were the origins of Perrault’s stories, also inspired Carter (3).

In Perrault's version, Little Red Riding Hood is simply portrayed as “a little girl, the prettiest you could ever see” (99). In contrast, Carter introduces her female protagonist as “an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and is afraid of nothing” (146). The differences here are immense. Perrault simply states that she is the prettiest girl in the village, while Carter draws on the undiscovered sexual powers that this girl possesses. One can clearly see that Perrault is prescribing characteristics mainly linked to
appearances for his main character, conforming to the binary logic that we expect. Little Red Riding Hood is simply “pretty”, nothing else. In contrast, Carter alludes to the sexual undertone (ending in rape) of the original story; Little Red Riding Hood “stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity” (146). She does not know how to be afraid since she seems safe in her own sexual ignorance. Furthermore, Carter provides her main character with courage and a knife, stating explicitly that “she is afraid of nothing”, a description that traditionally might be more common for a male fairy-tale character (146). Moreover, as previously mentioned, her being unafraid could also be seen as a link to her virginity. At the very beginning of the story Carter hints to the reader that her heroine might be placed on what is often perceived as the male side of the binary system – in the position of power. She is courageous and not at all in distress, but strong and powerful, resembling how male characters of classical fairy tales might be described.

Although the introduction is very different in Carter’s adaptation, the rest of the characteristic key features in the plot are not omitted. However, there are some differences that are important. The first real variance that is important from a feminist perspective is the initiative to visit the grandmother. In Perrault’s original narrative, Little Red Riding Hood’s mother orders her to go and visit her grandmother. In contrast, Carter’s heroine does not wait for orders but (similarly to Beauty in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”) takes control of the situation herself. Even though Carter uses descriptions very much linked to traditional female virtues such as “unbroken” (as a symbol for virginity), she still manages to make Little Red Riding Hood an interestingly powerful character by providing her with great courage and weaponry.

As in the traditional version of the tale, Carter’s heroine meets the wolf as she enters the woods. Introduced by a distant howl, a handsome stranger in green clothes makes his appearance. Just as in Perrault’s version they talk for a while before making a bet on who can reach grandmother’s house first. The classic wolf does not wait for Little Red Riding Hood to agree to this wager, he instead states: “We’ll see who gets there first” (Perrault 99). Carter’s handsome wolf, on the other hand, flirtingly asks Little Red Riding Hood: “Shall we make a game of it?” before requesting a kiss as a reward should he win (147). As the stranger asks for this kiss, Little Red Riding Hood deliberately uses her characteristic female features and performs the socially constructed reaction that is required of her: “[c]ommonplaces of a rustic seduction; she lowered her eyes and blushed” (147). She agrees to the bet and makes sure that this handsome stranger wins
by walking slowly to Grandmother’s house, which echoes Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood” who picks flowers on the way.

Carter’s adaptation and Perrault’s version of the story are very much alike from the part of the story where the wolf arrives at Grandmother’s house. Just like in the original story the stranger enters the house and engulfs Grandmother at once, although Carter’s description is more vivid and spiced with a sexual undertone as the stranger undresses and reveals his true nature as wolf – “carnivore incarnate” (149). After devouring Grandmother, the wolf dresses himself again and hides in bed. In Perrault’s version the wolf does not make an effort to dress up, but simply “went to lie down in grandmother’s bed, and waited for Little Red Riding Hood” (99). When Little Red Riding Hood of the original story reaches Grandmother’s house, she does not suspect that the wolf has eaten her grandmother. She finds explanations for all the evidence: “Little Red Riding Hood, hearing the Wolf’s gruff voice, was frightened at first, but, believing that her grandmother had a cold” (100). Perrault portrays her as gullible; she does not question the fact that the grandmother (the wolf) asks her to get into bed with her. Because she does not question the wolf, and because she has talked to a strange wolf in the woods, she is punished when the wolf at the very end, after having had the familiar conversation about large ears and teeth, eats her up.

Little Red Riding Hood’s virginal, yet sexual, features that were presented at the very beginning of Carter’s version are brought back into focus at the end of the story. Carter’s heroine soon understands that her grandmother has met the end of her days, but instead of being afraid she uses her sexuality to shift the power structures of this game of life and death. According to Bacchilega, the original oral version of this tale involves a scene where the girl asks the wolf for instructions while burning her clothes in the fire (54). In correspondence to this earlier tradition, Carter flirts with intertextuality on many levels as she incorporates this scene into her revision. Little Red Riding Hood realises that “fear did her no good” and instead starts stripping in front of the wolf, playing with him as “[h]er small breasts gleamed as if the snow had invaded the room” (Carter151). “What shall I do with my blouse?” she asks, and when the wolf responds “[i]nto the fire with it too, my pet,” she obeys his orders (151). She is not afraid anymore and uses her sexual powers while presented as being as pure as snow, commenting on her virginity. When all her clothes are gone, she is “only in her untouched integument of flesh,” and walks over to the wolf without apprehension (151). She continues the intertextual and characteristic dialogue of “what big teeth you have!” which in Perrault’s version is the
cue for the wolf to jump on his prey, devouring her (151). Nevertheless, Carter lets her female protagonist laugh at the wolf’s answer, “[a]ll the better to eat you with”, because “she knew she was nobody’s meat” (151). This effectively determines her as an active participant, choosing in what way this story will end instead of being a passive victim whose faith is set by the perpetrator. Hence, Carter’s “Little Red Riding Hood” opposes Perrault’s moralizing tale ending in death for the female protagonist.

As Swyt points out, “The Company of Wolves” contains numerous metaphors for eating. Much as in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon,” Carter mentions both flesh and meat at several points of this story (Swyt 7). Carter’s discussion on meat and flesh in The Sadeian Woman reads: “we make a fine distinction between flesh, which is usually alive and, typically, human; and meat, which is dead, inert, animal and intended for consumption” (137). Thus, flesh is seen as alive, while meat symbolises passivity. The burst of laughter makes Little Red Riding Hood the master of this situation, and she refuses to be eaten – that is, being a passive object. Carter has thus placed power with her and not the wolf. This laughter marks a rejection of the game all together; she will not be a part of the wolf’s sadomasochistic seduction plan. Lau further discusses the distinction Carter makes between flesh and meat. She states that Carter successfully detaches Little Red Riding Hood from what she calls “patriarchal pornography” (pornography on men’s terms) by letting her reject the part of passive object or victim (meat) (87). As Lau points out, Carter wants to create a “world of absolute sexual license for all the genders” instead (Lau 87, Sadeian Woman 19). Thus, as in “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, Carter can be seen to resist the prey/predator dichotomy.

A difference between “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Company of Wolves” is the how the power shift between the characters is portrayed. In “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” this is done elusively, whereas the latter portrays a more violent and drastic shift in which Little Red Riding Hood uses her feminine characteristics to her advantage. Moreover, the fact that Little Red Riding Hood bats her eyes and pretends to blush provides an ironic frame to Carter’s re-writing. She is retelling the story with a highly ironic undertone, playing with socially constructed norms in order to make them visible. Little Red Riding Hood ironically performs the “commonplace of a rustic seduction”. Carter thus lets her female protagonist knowingly play on constructed gender norms.

Perhaps the most notable difference between Carter’s and Perrault’s stories is that Perrault’s version does not have a happy ending. Indeed, both Grandmother and Red
Riding Hood end their days in the belly of the wolf at the end of the story. The rendition presented by the Brothers Grimm was changed to have both grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood saved by a passing huntsman (Zipes 230). According to Bacchilega, the unhappy ending presented by Perrault could be seen as an emphasis on the importance of the story’s moral. That is, that the punishment for engaging in conversations with wolves is ultimately death. Furthermore, one needs to consider the context in which Perrault put this story into writing (Bacchilega 57).

Carter offers an entirely new ending as well as a new moral for the well-known story. Neither character has to die, but rather join each other in a sexual union based on equality and reciprocity, in which Little Red Riding Hood, “knowing she is nobody’s meat,” takes control and in a way tames the wolf. This can be seen in the last line of the story: “See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf” (152). However, Carter does not invert the binary structures completely even in the drastic revision of the ending. Little Red Riding Hood does not kill the wolf, she embraces her sexuality and meets the wolf as an equal. This echoes Carter's idea of creating a “world of absolute sexual licence for all the genders” (The Sadeian Woman 19). Little Red Riding Hood is not taming the wolf in the sense that she is denying the sexual tension, but she takes the initiative – she is an active participant, not a defenceless victim.

Carter utilises patriarchal structures and stereotypes in breaking down this system, and she rewrites the story without one character losing power to the other – they form a union. Carter’s Little Red Riding Hood is indeed closely linked to Perrault’s gullible peasant character on many levels. She wagers with the wolf, leaves the path and, as a consequence, faces the result of her initial ignorance. However, Carter equips her character with courage and will, which is vastly different from the girl presented by Perrault. The wolf also breaks the stereotypically gendered pattern of the original narrative. He succumbs to Little Red Riding Hood, accepting her as an equal.
Pedagogical Reflection

This essay has examined Angela Carter’s feminist revisions of known fairy tales and the contrast between them and the original stories. As a student teacher it is also important to discuss how these stories can be used in a classroom context. This chapter will present a possible way of teaching this collection in the upper-secondary school. Using Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater’s book *Literature in the Language Classroom* (1987) as inspiration, this chapter intends to consider if and why literature should be a part of English courses in Swedish upper-secondary schools, as well as give specific examples on how to use *The Bloody Chamber* as a basis for a set of lessons. This chapter will include a lesson plan, in which “The Company of Wolves” will serve as the primary material.

The reason for only choosing one of the stories from this essay is to give a more detailed and specific example of a lesson sequence. The decision to use “The Company of Wolves” instead of “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” is due to the way in which Carter has exposed patriarchal structures. Since “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” is more subtle than “The Company of Wolves” this means that the students need to be able to carry out a very sophisticated analysis. Since the latter offers a more prominent power shift, that is the reason for the decision. Furthermore, the essential value of discussing gender roles and norms with these students, in order to hone their skills in critical thinking and prepare them for a world outside the classroom will be discussed. One might argue that “The Company of Wolves” is a far too sexually violent story to use in school. However, issues regarding sexual assault and predators are important to discuss with students in order to prepare them for the real world. It is vital that students get a chance to discuss injustice and discrimination in a context where the teacher can act as a guide and make them aware of gendered norms that might appear as natural to them. These discussions will hopefully engage students and could therefore strengthen their language skills and communicative strategies.

Before examining the possibilities of using “The Company of Wolves” in the classroom one must turn to the syllabus for the English subject of the Swedish upper-secondary school. Should fiction be a part of education at all? On examination one can see that the syllabus states that students should “develop all-round communicative skills”. In order to do this *Skolverket* suggests that teaching incorporates “reception” as well as
“production”. In order to reach these goals, texts have to be involved. In addition, in the course syllabus for English 5, Skolverket specifies that “[l]iterature and other fiction” should be a part of the content. Students are also supposed to acquire “the ability to interpret the content” (Skolverket). Using fiction as a basis for understanding language as well as learning how to interpret content could be beneficial since it sparks interest.

Collie and Slater list four reasons for using literature when teaching English as a second language. According to them, the first key point of using literature is that it is “authentic material,” i.e. it is not created in the closed context of teaching language. Another reason is that literature provides a cultural aspect. Students get a chance to read about life in countries where English is a first language and get a richer understanding of their culture. Furthermore, Murat Hismanoglu adds to the points given by Collie and Slater that students can “become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language” (55). The last point discussed by Collie and Slater is that when reading literature students can get involved and inspired by the literary world, creating bonds to books and learning while enjoying themselves.

Hismanoglu stresses the fact that if literature is to be a constructive tool in second-language teaching, and fulfil the goal of involving and inspiring students, the text needs to be meaningful for the students. The teacher needs to account for the age group, language level and interests of the students (57). According to Collie and Slater, short stories are ideal to use in second-language teaching because of the variety of themes, the practical length and the fact that they are “less daunting” than tackling an entire novel (197). Since The Bloody Chamber is a collection of short stories, which Hismanoglu as well as Collie and Slater find to be a useful format, it will be a perfect basis for a lesson sequence. This set of lessons would be carried out over three or four sessions.

Working with Angela Carter’s revisionary fairy tales could be rewarding on many levels, the most obvious one being that the students have probably encountered the original stories before, and therefore have some basic knowledge about the structure of a fairy tale. The teacher starts this lesson by asking the students if they can list fairy tales that they know. As they mention stories they know, the teacher writes them on the board. After this the students are asked to consider what type of characteristics are typical for the main characters of the stories they have listed. They then discuss this in pairs before they are invited to a teacher-led class discussion where their suggestions are listed on the board. The class will clearly see what kinds of characteristics and descriptions are often connected to fairy tale characters. Also, discussing fairy tales and fairy-tale characters in
a general sense ensures that the students are prepared for the next stage of the lesson. Collie and Slater calls an approach like this “getting in the mood” and is a great way to introduce the students to the genre that is going to be read (18).

Next, the teacher asks the students to form pairs in order to tell the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” to their peer. This means that the students start to remember the key points of the story while using their language skills in a speaking and listening activity. If the students don’t know the story (which has to be considered as a possible barrier) the teacher might have to help students that are struggling by giving them the key points for them to use while telling the story to their peer.

After this is done, the teacher hands out copies and reads the original story by Perrault aloud when the students can check the similarities as well as the differences in their own versions. They are also asked to mark passages where the stereotypical tendencies of the characters are shown. This is a task that aims to help the students get involved with the story, use their own knowledge and share this with their classmates. Once the students have read the original story by Perrault and discussed the stereotypical characters, the teacher presents an alternative story that challenges these gender roles. At this point the first lesson has probably passed and the students take the original story home if they have not managed to finish reading it in class.

The main task of this sequence comes into play after the students have read Angela Carter’s story individually, pen in hand, marking the passages that they find do not correspond to Perrault’s original version. This step could be done in class or as homework. Once this is done, the students form pairs and discuss what they have found in their reading. While they are discussing the teacher writes down what they can look for should they struggle with the analysis of gender role portrayals (for example, “How is Little Red Riding Hood described in the stories?”, “Why does Little Red Riding Hood speak to the wolf?”, “How does Little Red Riding Hood act towards the wolf?”). However, this does not have to be done if the students are very eager and interested, but it is good to have questions prepared in order to encourage the students’ learning if needed.

After the students have discussed the stories in pairs, they are asked to individually list some arguments for which story presents the most realistic gender portrayals. Some students might find the original story more appealing, while others might not, and here the students are to use their argumentative skills to defend their position. This is an activity that can be connected to situations outside the classroom.
context. Many of the students will have to argue and convince other people in their future careers and everyday life. The task also corresponds to the syllabus, which states that students should “develop all-round communicative skills” (Skolverket). The discussions is held in groups of four where the students try to argue and present the evidence they have found. This step might take place in the third lesson and the teacher needs to be alert during this stage to see that all the groups are engaged in the discussion. The discussion can then be brought to a class debate where everyone presents one of his or her arguments.

To further develop students’ awareness of stereotypical characters and the fairy-tale form, the teacher then gives them another known fairy tale to read before the next lesson. One alternative is using “Beauty and the Beast” by Marie le Prince de Beaumont, which they are then asked to re-write in the next lesson. In this way, the students will work with all four receptive skills during one lesson sequence: listening (to the teacher reading Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood”), speaking (when discussing in groups and pairs), reading (when tackling Angela Carter’s revisionary version) and writing (when re-writing a story themselves). This approach to literature in the language classroom eliminates the problem discussed by Collie & Slater who state that a teacher often turns to more “traditional” ways of teaching when “he or she sees him or herself as imparting information – about the author, the background to the work” (7). By letting students brainstorm, come up with suggestions on the characteristics of fairy tales and recreate stories on their own, they will learn more than if the teacher lectured on how Angela Carter uses irony to blur binary norms in patriarchy.

Angela Carter’s fairy tales are a great resource to use in English in upper-secondary school. The texts are short and the students are most likely familiar with the original framework of the story, making the content of the revisionary fairy tale easier to analyse. It is important that students develop a critical view on society and the norms that structure it. Using The Bloody Chamber could highlight gender imbalances in society more broadly, and open a discussion on this in an accessible way.

Additionally, the story invites the students to discuss morals in class. The wolf of the story serves as a symbol for sexual predators and discussing issues with violence and sexual assault might be difficult but important. The lesson serves as an opportunity for discussing problems with imbalance between genders and of sexuality. Teachers should not be scared to touch on these subjects, it is important for young adults to have a place to discuss these matters. This is a further argument for using “The Company of Wolves”
in class even though it might be perceived as too violent. Even so, teachers need to be able to analyse what stories to use and which not to use depending on the students – each class is unique. The lesson sequence that is presented here is only one possibility, but I am convinced that these stories can be developed into a great many of interesting lessons.
Conclusion

This essay has analysed Angela Carter rewritten fairy tales in her collection of short stories, *The Bloody Chamber*. By examining two stories in this collection – “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Company of Wolves” – it has argued that Carter challenges patriarchal norms by a rewriting of fairy-tale character stereotypes. Sometimes exposing the social construction of gender by making her characters self-consciously perform gendered stereotypes, and sometimes making them step out of their set roles altogether, Carter questions and parodies the notion of gender as “natural.” With the help of Hélène Cixous’ critique of patriarchal binaries in her essay “Sorties,” as well as the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir regarding gender as a social construction, this essay argued that Carter’s revisionary fairy tales do not reverse the generally perceived definition of masculine and feminine, but rather blur the lines between them. In this way, Carter’s “feminism” is often ambiguous rather than straightforward, which has been shown in chapters two and three.

Carter’s revisionary fairy-tale characters are first introduced just as stereotypically as their original equivalents. Beauty is a sacrificial lamb that in the end marries the Beast. Little Red Riding Hood initially disobeys her mother and has to face the punishment for her foolishness. However, these heroines have the power of choice and are not powerless spectators in the unfolding of their destiny – rather they perform and control it. Little Red Riding Hood’s claim for power is fiercer and more prominent than that of Beauty. Carter’s feminist stories are not cast in the same mold throughout *The Bloody Chamber*. Every story is different, but together they form a set of stories that aim to bring male and female, masculine and feminine, together in equality. Her feminist rewritings do not reverse the stories altogether but rather retell the same story while highlighting and simultaneously undermining the stereotypical features of the original ones. This makes the reader see and question the gender roles of the original fairy tale entirely.

In the two stories discussed in this essay, Carter plays with patriarchal binaries without inverting perceptions of typically male and female characteristics completely. Instead, she lets each character be the best of both sides and shows that any dichotomising logic is a patriarchal construction. She criticises female identification with victimization and shows her readers that female and male characters can stand as equal
even in narratives with such well-known frames (or bottles) as the fairy tales she has used. Moreover, it is important to note that the male characters are also given other characteristics than those of the original versions. The Beast is indeed somewhat timid in de Beaumont’s version, but even more so in Carter’s; the wolf in Perrault’s version is only portrayed as devious, but Carter makes him more three-dimensional by describing him as “tender” at the end of the story. She breaks the binary system by intertwining both sides in all the characters. In dialogue with her ideas in Sadeian Woman, the stories in The Bloody Chamber are both fiercely and playfully feminist. None of her characters represents only what are typically perceived as female or male qualities.

Furthermore, this essay has aimed to discuss possible ways of working with Carter’s revisionary fairy tales in Swedish upper-secondary school. By using known fairy tales as a basis for intertextual analysis of Carter’s work, the gender imbalances – both in the stories, as well as in society at large – will become evident to the students. It is important that teenagers get the chance to hone their skills in critical thinking and to be made aware of the role society has in constructing gender roles, which are still deeply rooted in the society of today. In addition, using literature as a method of teaching English as a second language is beneficial for improving the students’ language skills – both when it comes to their vocabulary and their idiomatic and stylistic abilities.

The experience of reading the fairy tales in The Bloody Chamber is confusing and highly enjoyable at the same time. The ever-changing nature of these stories that build on each other create at times violent or sardonic, and at times highly poetic fairy tales. Even though these stories were written over thirty years ago, they are still relevant. The exploration and criticism of gender as a social construction is important in contemporary society, not only for adults but for young readers as well.
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