

THE SCENT OF AIR: SPACE IN ANGELA CARTER'S *THE BLOODY CHAMBER AND OTHER STORIES*¹

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Abstract:

Space plays a crucial role in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber (1979) and she skilfully utilizes it to create a sense of atmosphere and tension throughout her narratives. By carefully describing the physical surroundings, she immerses the reader in a vivid and evocative world, that resembles and, more importantly, draws from well-known fairy tales. The focus of this paper is to explore the symbolic significance of the chronotope and its ability to evoke characters' memories or define their personalities through the use of scent within a given space.

The experience of immersion allows the readers to grasp more fully the themes and motifs explored by the author in her writing (gender representation, patriarchy, power, identity), as well as to interpret the symbols she employs to express her perspective. The analysis of the three stories, The Bloody Chamber, The Courtship of Mr. Lyon, and The Tiger's Bride, demonstrates that the spaces Cater portrays are often symbolic, representing the inner psychological states of her characters and through her meticulous attention to detail, the author

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REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

transforms the environment into a dynamic element that enhances the overall impact of her storytelling.

The portrayal of the dilapidated castle or mansion, along with the ailing inhabitants (in The Beauty and The Beast reinterpreted stories) serve as a metaphor for the conclusion of an era, signalling the decline of patriarchy and the revitalization of conventional gender roles, since the house flourishes after Beauty's return or the girl transforms into her true shape. The ending of The Bloody Chamber reveals that a corrupt space can be purified and turned into a beneficial one after the wicked presence is removed.

Keywords: fairy tale; magical realism; environment; bloody chamber; liminality.

The term *magical realism* was coined by the art critic Franz Roh in an attempt to describe and define a movement that involved a return to a more realistic style after the expressionism wave. Combined with the political influences at the time, Franz Roh argued for a “sparser, clearer form of representation than expressionism” (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 134), emphasizing the inner oddity of the objects by employing realism; at the same time, the spectator/lecturer should perceive the unreal through real world and vice versa.

In his essay, *Of the magical realism of the Haitians* (1956, 2002), Jacques Stephen Alexis considers how magical realism seeks to reconcile both the arguments of the intellectuals that advocated for social realism, while many post-colonial societies are described by a pre-industrial, mostly rural state, with a significant part of their identity stemming from myth and magical tradition. In this type of post-colonial context, Peter Childs and Roger Fowler argue that the definition Alejo Carpentiere (1973) gives to what he names *real maravilloso*:

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

Reflects the shifting, transformative, ever-changing native world and even in its tropical landscape, which becomes for him the symbol of the power of the colonized and oppressed to act as a revolutionary force and to resist and dismantle the static, fixed and conservative force of European aesthetic and political force (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 135).

For the European and American writers, magical realism served as a vehicle to delve into the intricacies of modern societies, blending realism with the supernatural, beyond the post-colonial subject, as we can see in Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Nail Gaiman, Ruth Ozeki's works. J. A. Cuddon argues that several of the magical realism characteristics include:

The mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skilful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable (Cuddon, 1999, p. 488).

Carter's volume, *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories*, is an investigation of the gender representation, with themes such as marriage, sexuality, power or metamorphosis. Several magical realism traits listed by Cuddon (1999) appear in Carter's fiction, as she tries to forge a female-empowerment movement through her characters, reverting the classical fairy tales. These stories of female emancipation develop in a setting which is

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

rather magical, the castle or the mansion's description seem to be taken almost directly out of the original tale, mirroring a blend of reality and fantasy. The horrific, the shock, the inexplicable are all part of the narratives, as Carter invites her readers to perilous yet enticing places, as one can see in short stories such as *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Tiger's Bride* or *The Lady of the House of Love*.

The tales contained in *The Bloody Chamber* volume draw inspiration from fairy tales, particularly those published by Charles Perrault, which are variations of ancient European oral narratives that have been circulating for centuries. Therefore, Carter's stories are not entirely "new", but rather reimagined and rewritten, *reforged*, with a focus on female characters², set within a vague chronotope³. In addition to the intricate temporal shifts and unusual environments characteristic of magical realism, it is important to note that time and space are interwoven in Carter's narratives, operating in a manner that doesn't allow for their independent functioning. Thus, the representation of space and time constitute a

² However, these texts that *The Bloody Chamber* presents should not be read as a simple rewriting in a feminist key, but, in Angela Carter's own words, "to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories" (Carter 2006: vii-viii). (Vintage edition).

³ Bakhtin claims that the chronotope reflects the link between space and time and their underlying connection, time, as the Theory of Relativity states, being the fourth dimension. Although Bakhtin uses the term only in relation with literature and as a formally constitutive category, he states that the chronotope has an intrinsic *generic* significance, thus defining the genre of a text: "in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1982, pp. 84-85).

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

significant aspect of the genre, as Ato Quayson (2020) points out in his essay⁴.

My paper explores the reinterpretation of fairy tale landscapes in Angela Carter's collection, particularly emphasizing the representation of the castle in *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* and *The Tiger's Bride*. Throughout these short stories, the setting is consistently centred around a castle or a mansion, depicted in either its full splendour or in a state of decay. As the narratives examined in this paper are rooted in fables, the chronotope associated with the castle and the temporal setting of the narratives bear a striking resemblance to those found in classic fairy tales, where notions of space and time are ambiguously portrayed. Consequently, the portrayed landscape, while modified to some degree, continues to reflect the essence of the 'original' environment.

It is noteworthy that Carter retains the fairy tale setting in her revised narratives, often featuring a castle or a decaying mansion, which are quintessential elements of the Gothic genre. Although her stories do not strictly conform to the conventions of Gothic fiction, she adeptly employs tropes associated with this aesthetic to advance her plot and convey significant insights about her characters and their circumstances. Fred Botting (1996) argues that the 'major locus of Gothic plots, the castle, was gloomy predominant in early Gothic fiction' and its state

⁴According to Quayson (2020), the genre of magical realism establishes a correspondence between the codes of the fantastical and the real. This correspondence, however, is not exclusively reliant on the characters depicted in the narrative, but it is equally reinforced by the intrinsic characteristics of space and time as they are portrayed. Conflation or juxtaposition of different ontologies, transposition or leakage from a timeline to another are, as the author points out, not uncanny at all in magical realism. More on this subject can be read in Warnes, C., & Sasser, K. A. (Eds.). (2020). *Magical Realism and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

of decay and maze-like shape reminds of the feudal past, which was filled with superstition, fear and barbaric practices. We concur with Carol Senf (2017) in recognizing the transformation of Gothic space in later literary works (especially in Carter's narratives). These stories, which take place in cities and residences utilizing modern technological advancements, still retain their Gothic essence through several core components⁵.

In *The Bloody Chamber* short story, the Marquis, the wealthiest individual in France as the narrator states, lives in his family's ancestral estate located in Brittany, along the coast. The castle bears a striking resemblance to the grandiose fairy tale châteaux on the shoreline, seamlessly blending with the ocean's materiality:

And, ah! *His* castle. The faery solitude of the place; with its turrets of misty blue, its courtyard, its spiked gate, his castle that lay on the very bosom of the sea with seabirds mewing about its attics, the casements opening on to the green and purple, evanescent departures of the ocean, cut off by the tide from land for half a day ... *that* castle, at home neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious, amphibious place, contravening the materiality of both earth and the waves, with the melancholy of a mermaid who perches on her rock and waits, endlessly, for a lover who had drowned far away, long ago. That lovely, sad, sea-siren of a place! (Carter, 1993, p. 13).

⁵ Senf claims that while the early Gothic novels were set in the past and featured spaces such as castles, remote country estates or even monasteries, 'contemporary Gothic no longer depends on the conventions of castles, villains, and persecuted maidens but instead reveals people's fears of what is taking place around them. As a result, today's Gothic writers, while aware of the choices—locations, characters, and other trope—their predecessors had made, are nonetheless focusing on their own historical period' (Senf, 2017, p. 260).

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

The suggestion of a 'sea-siren location' conjures up the notion of deception, captivating individuals and drawing them into a realm from which there is no escape (legend has it that one of the wives perished in a boating mishap), quite similarly to sailors unable to break free from the sirens' trap once they are ensnared by their enchanting melody. "[The Marquis'] castle" quickly becomes "that castle", being surrounded by magic, or being in itself a magical place, a place which is neither on the sea, nor on the land, suspended in time, always the same in spite of how many women, chatelaines, reach its doorsteps. Regardless of the circumstances, the melody reminiscent of a 'sea-siren' provides solace to the narrator amidst the bleak and unfamiliar surroundings. The space that comprises the narrator's new residence has blurred the lines between reality and fantasy, with the castle taking the shape of the ocean and serving as the birthplace of all the Marquis' ancestors:

his great ancestral bed in the sea-girt, pinnacled domain that lay, still, beyond the grasp of my imagination ... that magic place, the fairy castle whose walls were made of foam, that legendary habitation in which he had been born. To which, one day, I might bear an heir (Carter, 1993, p. 6).

In, perhaps, that castle to which the train now took us, that marvellous castle in which he had been born (Carter, 1993, p. 8).

The ocean relates to the idea of motherhood because the narrator, bereft of her real mother, indulges in the "amniotic salinity of the ocean" (Carter, 1993, p. 12), the first smell and sensation she gets from her new home. The water, the drops, the 'melting landscape' (formed no

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

doubt by her tears) all are reminiscent of the womb's protective space; the young woman's saviour, her mother, also emerges from the rising tides at the end of the narrative. The narrator vividly remembers how the ocean's presence appears to permeate the interior of the castle, as the vibrations of the tides echo in all chambers. Rather than being perceived as an intrusive, unseen energy, the sound of the ocean is experienced as a nostalgic reminder of bygone days. The murmur of the restless ocean, driving back and forth its waves, creates a melody which reminds the young wife about her formal life, a penniless orphan girl with the gift of music:

No room, no corridor that did not rustle with the sound of the sea and all the ceilings, the walls on which his ancestors in the stern regalia of rank lined up with their dark eyes and white faces, were stippled with refracted light from the waves which were always in motion; that luminous, murmurous castle of which I was the chatelaine, I, the little music student whose mother had sold all her jewellery, even her wedding ring, to pay the fees at the Conservatoire (Carter, 1993, p. 14).

The castle is a powerful symbol of the patriarchal world to which the Marquis stubbornly clings to and portrays more of a prison than a home for the multiple wives he had, due to the existence of a torture room. A place of decadence and horror, the chateau is a multilayered labyrinth in which the young wife loses herself, her identity, her virginity, she becomes a wife, part of his "gallery of beautiful women", not quite the chatelaine she imagines to be, thus she feels and is corrupted by the strange world she willingly exiles herself to. If the exterior of the Marquis' domain seems to be part

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

of the ocean, the entrails of it, bearing all his sins, seem to be, for sure, part of the underworld.

The bedroom in which the marriage is consumed is filled with white funeral lilies, a symbol of the death to come, associated, just like her hair twined into a rope and lifted off her shoulders, with a specific part of the body: *the throat*. The smell of lilies asphyxiate the narrator, for they are heavy fleshed and full of pollen, as she remarks: “Those undertaker’s lilies with the heavy pollen that powders your fingers as if you had dipped them in turmeric. The lilies I always associate with him; that are white. And *stain* you” (Carter, 1993, p. 16).

The *stain* she recalls can be read as the *blood stain* on the forehead she will acquire after the Marquis discovers where she had been, in his *man-cave*, in that place of death and horror, from which she can no longer come back innocent; the *stain* can also be interpreted as *being tainted*, touched by corruption, as the narrator often portrays herself. After the Marquis preys on her virginity and takes it as a prize, the bedroom resembles, in the narrator’s eyes, like an embalming parlour, loaded with *extinction lilies*, suggesting the death of her earlier persona [maiden status], as the marriage is also metaphorically seen as the termination of a woman’s independence in a patriarchal society.

The castle exudes a masculine essence, permeating the entire environment with an aura of male dominance, attributed to the distinct smell of the Marquis characterized by notes of leather, tobacco and aftershave. The scents of the husband trigger recollections of the narrator’s father, particularly when he indulges in cigars, portraying him as the predatory patriarch rather than the

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

absent figure of her now dead father⁶: “the cigar glowed and filled the compartment with a remembered fragrance that made me think of my father, a warm fug of Havana, when I was a little girl, before he kissed me and left me and died” (Carter, 1993, p.12).

Of all the fragrances linked to the Marquis, the scent of leather is the most striking, indicative of his considerable wealth and power. Russian leather, known for its exceptional quality, is traditionally viewed as the finest, distinguished by its robust aroma and unparalleled resilience:

If I rose up on my elbow, I could see the dark, leonine shape of his head and my nostrils caught a whiff of the opulent male scent of leather and spices that always accompanied him and sometimes, during his courtship, had been the only hint he gave me that he had come into my mother’s sitting room (Carter, 1993, p. 6)

His library seemed the source of his habitual odour of Russian leather. Row upon row of calf-bound volumes, brown and olive, with gilt lettering on their spines, the octavo in brilliant scarlet morocco. A deep-buttoned leather sofa to recline on (Carter, 1993, p. 17).

There was a pungent intensification of the odour of leather that suffused his library (Carter, 1993, p. 18).

At the halfway point of the story, the young woman is left to wander in the maze library brimming with

⁶ The concept of ‘the absent father’ is evident in both adaptation of *The Beauty and The Beast*, despite the fathers being physically present. Nevertheless, they relinquish their paternal rights and responsibilities when they surrender their daughter to The Beast.

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

explicit artwork depicting sexual themes, violence and death. Initially, the contents of the Marquis' library fail to raise her interest, but she becomes enthralled by the pornographic images she encounters in *Reproof of curiosity* or *Immolation of the wives of the Sultan*. The role of these items is significant in shaping the character development as they provide the newly wife with insights into her husband's perception of her and what are his expectations from her.

In Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, the narrative is rich with references that suggest the position of the young wife within the household. The narrator reflects on her husband's fascination with symbolist art, noting that his study is adorned with the renowned painting "Sacrificial Victim." She contemplates the possibility that he may have imagined this artwork during their initial sexual encounter. The chronotope seems to exhibit influences from French Symbolism/Decadence, evident in the paintings displayed by the Marquis in his private quarters, the music performed by the girl, and the literary works found in the husband's collection. It is clear the Marquis is a dedicated collector, amassing paintings, books, and wives⁷. The gendering of space is evident as women, akin to the paintings adorning ancient walls, find themselves in a position of ownership, powerlessness, and voicelessness, ultimately being objectified.

After being entrusted with a handful of keys to the Marquis's castle, she realizes that he deliberately concealed the key to his *den*, his place of hiding when the "yoke of the marriage seems to weigh too heavily on his shoulders", playing with her curiosity, enticing his *little*

⁷ His inventory comprising works of art that belong to painters such as Moreau, Gauguin, Watteau, Poussin, Fragonard, Redon, de Chavannes, or music sheets by Debussy, Gounod, Czerny, Bach, Wagner.

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

child/baby. It is the key to *enfer* [hell] and this pivotal information regarding the location of the room, akin to the *Bluebeard* fairy tale, is disclosed to her without concealment. Despite providing extremely detailed instructions on how to access the chamber, he emphasizes the importance of her avoiding it at all costs:

All is yours, everywhere is open to you – except the lock that this single key fits. Yet all it is is the key to a little room at the foot of the west tower, behind the still-room, at the end of a dark little corridor full of horrid cobwebs that would get into your hair and frighten you if you venture there. Oh, and you'd find it such a dull little room! But you must promise me, if you love me, to leave it well alone. It is only a private study, a hideaway, a 'den' (...). There I can go, you understand, to savour the rare pleasure of imagining myself wifeless (Carter, 1993, p. 24).

After the Marquis appears to be called for business to New York, the young wife feels increasingly bored and isolated and, unknowingly she will be tested for obedience. The castle, now both prison and place to explore, is lighted up by the chatelaine who feels the exhilarating freedom of the explorer. Illuminating every corner of the castle, she endeavours to dispel the enigmatic aura enveloping it, while also seeking to discover her husband's true identity. The realisation that he had deceived her about the entrance to the forbidden room heightened her curiosity even further. The young wife travels to the *bowels* of the castle, where the fresh ocean air doesn't permeate; it is the perfect Gothic interior, lined up with underworld imagery. The corridor aesthetics, which feels like a maze, warn the narrator of what she might encounter insider his *den*: venetian

tapestries, the Rape of the Sabines, mythological scenes, as the hallway *wounds* downwards.

The *den* serves by excellence as the place where the predator rests, well-fed; most of narrator's depiction of him shows the embodied signs of animal behaviour and carnivorous tendency, as he is a *connoisseur* and a *gourmand*, feasting on her virginity. Upon her arrival into the *den*, she comprehends its sinister purpose as a site of torture and murder. The embalmed body of the opera singer (reevoking the embalming parlour she imagined when she set up her eyes on the lilies in her bedroom), the skull of the second wife and the still trapped and bleeding body of the Transylvanian countess⁸ serve as chilling evidence of the horror that had taken place there. In that moment, she realized with dread that she is going to be the next item on his *showcase*.

The unexpected return of the Marquis prompts the narrator to frantically seek refuge from her impending fate. In that moment, her eyes are drawn once more to the painting of Saint Cecilia, the revered figure known as the patron saint of musicians, who met a tragic end by beheading. The chronotope shifts and it seems like both the narrator and the reader are transported back in time to a medieval era where she had sworn allegiance to her husband, only to fall short in upholding her vow. The key, now permanently stained with blood, serves as a haunting reminder of her failure.

⁸ Carmilla, a Romanian aristocrat and one of the wives of the Marquis, serves as a notable Gothic element within the narrative. Her name alludes to the Gothic novella *Carmilla*, authored by the Irish writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu in 1872, which predates Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. This novella features a female vampire as its central predator. The Gothic aspect represented by her name has been revisited in contemporary media, notably by the developers of the video game series *Castlevania* (1986-2010) and its adult animated adaptation, *Castlevania* (2017-2021). In these adaptations, the character retains two key attributes: her country of origin (Styria) and her sexual orientation.

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

The castle of the Marquis is reminiscent of the one where Bluebeard resides, with the turret's bedroom serving as the wife's accommodation, mimicking the tower where the fairy tale damsel waits for her brothers' rescue. After discovering his wife's disobedience, the husband compels her to kneel and presses the bloody key onto her forehead, before instructing her to prepare for martyrdom, staging the entire act as a replica of the fairy tale scene; the key's impression left on her forehead after the blood was partially absorbed by the skin can also suggest the idea of branding, as a proof of ownership and male dominance over the female character. The impending beheading with a sword raises the question of whether his great-grandfather could possibly be the infamous Bluebeard:

Decapitation. Go and bathe yourself; put on that white dress you wore to hear *Tristan* and the necklace that prefigures your end. And I shall take myself off to the armoury, my dear, to sharpen my great-grandfather's ceremonial sword (Carter, 1993, p. 46).

The landscape now is not the magical, serene scenery from before, but rather features a "pale light of morning; the weather was grey, indeterminate, the sea had an oily, sinister look, a gloomy day on which to die" (Carter, 1993, p. 46). The imminent murder is set to take place outdoors, reminiscent of the respective Perrault's fairy tale, as the Marquis beckons the female narrator to join him in the courtyard. The unexpected sound of hoofbeats catches her attention, and peering out the window, she sees a rider galloping towards the castle – none other than her own mother. Following the narrator's widowhood (the Marquis is shot dead by his mother-in-

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

law who comes to her daughter's rescue), the castle undergoes a metamorphosis into a school for the visually impaired (blind), a haven for people who cannot see its dark and sinister past.

The Courtship of Mr. Lyon presents itself as a contemporary reinterpretation of the classical tale of *Beauty and the Beast*. In Carter's version, an inept businessman finds himself marooned near the Beast's enchanted estate during the depths of winter due to a malfunctioning vehicle, leading him to barter his daughter in exchange for assistance and good luck. Although this story may not possess the same level of excitement and novelty as other tales within the collection, its significance should not be overlooked, particularly when juxtaposed with *The Tiger's Bride*, an upside-down reinterpretation of the same original fairy tale.

The Beast's leonine figure resembles the fairy tale depiction, while Beauty embodies perfection. The *castle*, designed in a Palladian style, more like a mansion, where the Beast resides breathes an air of enchantment, seemingly under the character's control, as it welcomes Beauty's father for a meal and drinks. Despite its outward appearance of decay, the interior of the estate is teeming with life. Therefore, the house is a metaphor for the Beast's character, reflecting its own life and demeanour, under the terrible curse that afflicted him:

The door was equipped with a knocker in the shape of a lion's head, with a ring through the nose; as he raised his hand towards it, it came to him this lion's head was not, as he had thought first, made of brass, but, instead, of solid gold (Carter, 1993, p. 55).

Within the confines of the dwelling lies a luxurious enchanted garden, with an array of flowers displayed in

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

“free-standing jars of crystal”. The interior landscape leads the father to speculate that the household is inhabited by a wealthy and eccentric family, considering the fact that their spaniel dog’s neck is adorned with a diamond necklace. Every sight that meets the father’s eyes surpasses his imagination, yet he accepts it without question: a silver tray bearing a bottle labelled *drink me*, and a lavish meal labelled *eat me*, the scene resembling the whimsical events of *Alice in Wonderland*. The host’s hospitality extends to providing car service to the father (without pay), who is then escorted out by the dog. Upon leaving the mansion, the father encounters a white rose, the only wish Beauty had from him to gift her. The entire house embodies the Beast’s turmoil when confronted with the sight of theft: “at that, every window of the house blazed with furious light and a fugal baying, as of a pride of lions, introduced his host” (Carter, 1993, p. 57). The resolve to compensate for this unthinkable offence to the host is to bring his daughter to have dinner with the Beast. The rose appears to serve as a representation of the enduring beauty of Beauty, while the lilies symbolize death in *The Bloody Chamber*.

As a result of the Beast aiding his father’s appeal in London⁹, Beauty is compelled to reside in his mansion until the trial reaches its conclusion. Despite being surrounded by opulence that far surpasses her modest home, “she longed for the shabby home of their poverty” (Carter, 1993, p. 60). The house she will eventually discover is devoid of any caretakers aside from the spaniel; however, the young girl is provided with freshly prepared meals each day, and her chamber is completely furnished to meet the standards of a lady:

⁹ Beauty’s father had serious legal problems and no financial aid to deal with them.

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

Her bedroom contained a marvellous glass bed; she had a bathroom, with towels thick as fleece and vials of suave unguents; and a little parlour of her own, the walls of which were covered with an antique paper of birds of paradise and Chinamen, where there were precious books and pictures and the flowers grown by invisible gardeners in the Beast's hothouses (Carter, 1993, p. 60).

The widespread existence of magic no longer astonishes her, and against all expectations, Beauty finds joy in that “bright, sad, pretty place”, where the reader is warned that

All the natural laws of the world were held in suspension, here, where an army of invisibles tenderly waited on her, and she would talk with the lion, under the patient chaperonage of the brown-eyed dog (...). Yet still his strangeness made her shiver (Carter, 1993, p. 62).

The spatial and temporal dimensions depicted in this narrative are intriguing, as Beast's estate seems to be ensnared in a temporal enchantment, yet it remains intertwined with the advancements of the external realm. For example, Mr. Lyon, known as The Beast, possesses a functional telephone that Beauty's father conveniently discovers, accompanied by a card from a garage providing a 24-hour rescue service, which guarantees the repair of his vehicle, at the estate's mater expenses. Although the furnishings are dated and there are no attendants, the house is well-maintained, and a dumb waiter facilitates the delivery of food to Beauty in her room.

After her father's fortune is reestablished, they partake in social gatherings, lodging, cultural events,

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

dining establishments, and a contemporary lifestyle, all made possible by their recent wealth. Beauty's character is a prime example of submissiveness, as she dutifully adheres to the authority of both her father and the Beast. Paradoxically, her grace diminishes as she begins to live for herself, compelling her to return to the Beast's domain to save him, weighted down by guilt. However, she is etched in a number of descriptions as being vain:

A certain inwardness was beginning to transform the lines around her mouth (...) she smiled at herself in the 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. Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterizes certain pampered expensive cats (Carter, 1993, p. 64).

Once again, the dying, agonizing Beast's reflection permeates the entire domain. The garden, still under winter's spell, shows no signs of greenery, while the fading light from the window adds to the sombre ambiance. The eerie noises echoing from the house resemble the growls of a lion, and the once luxurious indoor garden now lies in decay, the air heavy with the scent of death:

There was an air of exhaustion, of despair in the house and, worse, a kind of physical disillusion, as if its glamour had been sustained by a cheap conjuring trick and now the conjurer, having failed to pull the crowds, had departed to try his luck elsewhere (Carter, 1993, p. 66).

Realizing that the reflection she saw in the Beast's eyes was merely her own, Beauty feels a deep sense of

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

contentment in the idea of wholly submitting to him, if he wishes for her. The story reaches its conclusion with his restoration to his former self as a man, and the two walk together in a spring Edenic garden, now resplendent with blooming flora. It is worth noting that Angela Carter's rendition of *The Beauty and The Beast* maintains the original mythical properties without subversion, as we have previously indicated.

Angela Carter's *The Tiger's Bride* draws inspiration from the same fairy tale as *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, yet she does not merely update the narrative. Angela Carter remains faithful to the original setting in terms of space and time, situating her story in a remote Italian countryside, thereby adding an element of mystery and allure for the audience.

This tale initiates with the odyssey of a father and his daughter, who are compelled to leave their native land, resembling an exile prompted by the father's issues with gambling. Unfortunately, the consequences of his reckless behaviour are dire, leading to the daughter's surrender to The Beast in a card game. The narrative serves as a stark reminder of the prevailing patriarchal ideology, wherein women are frequently regarded as mere possessions that can be bartered or traded. The young woman, Beauty, is brought to the Beast's dwelling, a remote and dilapidated mansion, where she refuses his intrusive demands – to see her naked. Upon his revelation of his naked, animalistic self to her, she chooses to be with him, undergoing a transformation into her true form, as a tiger.

The events of *The Tiger's Bride* unfold during the winter season, similar to those in *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*; however, unlike the latter, spring does not arrive as a conclusion. The depicted environment is so expansive that one may easily become disoriented (see the hunting scene), presenting a blunt contrast to the setting of the

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

other narrative, where only The Beast's domain was under the winter's spell. The narrator, Beauty, reflects with sorrow on the appearance of the landscape from their homeland in Russia: "we owned black earth, blue forest with bear and wild boar, serfs, cornfields, farmyards, my beloved horses, white nights of cool summer, the fireworks of the northern lights" (Carter, 1993, p. 67). Despite this, she and her father are travellers originating from the Northern regions and upon their arrival in Italy, they find themselves succumbing to a sun-soaked lethargy, only to be jolted back to reality when winter catches back, reclaiming them:

But then the snow comes, you cannot escape it, it followed us from Russia as if it ran behind our carriage, and in this dark, bitter city has caught up with us at last, flocking against the windowpanes to mock my father's expectations of perpetual pleasure as the veins in his forehead stand out and throb, his hands shake as he deals the Devil's picture books (Carter, 1993, p. 67).

When the narrator's father's gambles everything on a hand of cards, she counts what riches they could win: "The Beast's hereditary palazzo outside the city; his immense revenues; his lands around the river; his rents, his treasure chest, his Mantegnas, his Giulio Romanos, his Cellini saltcellars, his tides ... the very city itself" (Carter 72), and only for a brief moment she believes her father would win. The apparent opulence of The Beast in *The Tiger's Bride* contrasts sharply with the dilapidated condition of the palazzo he calls home. The recurring motif of the white rose, with its symbolic importance, is also present in this narrative as it was in the previous work. The narrator was born on Christmas, and her

English nurse would call her 'Christmas rose'. The image of *La Bestia* is taken from a Renaissance painting, he is dressed in an old-fashioned tailcoat and wears a beautiful painted mask, a wig as in old portraits, even the chronological time in the story passed.

The Beast, however, presents the girl a rose from his own out-fashioned buttonhole when he first meets her. The 'girl-rose' shape shifts into a truly white rose, mirroring the snow; the flower felt unnatural during winter, as Beauty rips nervously his petals off. By the time she takes leave to his mansion, after her father lost her to cards, The Beast's valet gives her a bouquet of white roses, on behalf of his master. The imprudent father seeks a rose from Beauty's bouquet to serve as a keepsake of her, and she willingly presents him with one. In doing so, she accidentally pierces her finger, resulting in the rose being marked by her blood. This evocative scene lingers in the minds of readers, intertwining with themes from *The Sleeping Beauty*, an intertext. It can be posited that Beauty, in certain aspects, mirrors the state of being 'asleep' akin to *The Sleeping Beauty*, as she ultimately experiences a revival from her dormant state and reclaims her authentic form by the end of the story. Consequently, the rose emerges as a significant and recurring symbol throughout Angela Carter's narratives.

The narrator remarks with anguish, as she catches sight of the village: "A funeral hush about the place, the inhabitants huddled up against cold so you can hardly see their faces (...). The treacherous South, where you think there is no winter but forget you take it with you" (Carter, 1993, p. 69). The space in the winter's grasp, the never-ending snowfall, the biting cold, all of it do not inflict somatic reflexes on Beauty, a 'child of the severe North', but point out to a symbolic loss, and, ultimately, death.

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

The land where the Beast lives is a place of extinction, symbolically implied by the massive fall of snow that covers everything, although it is the South of Italy. The man-creature lives in a remote location, indicating the considerable distance between it and any semblance of civilization (suggesting, at the same time, how far society is from being civilized), within a desolate environment often likened to a “burnt-out planet”, where the predominant colour palette consists solely of melancholic browns and sepia tones reminiscent of winter: “a bereft landscape in the sad browns and sepias of winter lay all about us” (Carter, 1993, p. 84).

The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories represents a remarkable anthology of feminist reinterpretations of classic tales, featuring female protagonists as seen in *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, and *The Tiger’s Bride*, who collectively embody a triad of women entering unions with monstrous beings. Carter skillfully utilizes a variety of convoluted narrative techniques through her work; however, a notable aspect of each story remains the distinctive setting in which these events unfold.

The depiction of the environment, intricately detailed with thoughtful attention to colour schemes, integrates visual perception in conjunction with other sensory experiences, while also allowing room for reader interpretation through the incorporation of allusions and various levels of intertextuality.

The ruined castle, mansion and domain, are places of power and wealth, iconic images of the Gothic genre, all present in these three short stories written by Carter. Moreover, vast spaces like forests or barren fields are metaphors associated with various stages of civilisation. The author delves into the perils of a patriarchal society,

REALISMUL MAGIC ÎN LITERATURĂ

steeped in tradition, and the journey of transformation that female characters undergo, from being victims to empowered individuals in her retelling of classic fairy tales. These narratives not only serve a clear didactic purpose but also highlight the potential for women to flourish and be resilient within a male-dominated social structure. Carter's depiction of old-fashioned, conservative gender roles and their subsequent shift, which impacts the traditional dynamics between male and female characters, illustrate how women can seize up the opportunity to break free from oppression and advocate for equality. These stories can also help women understand and identify the behaviour of a predator and that of a male that objectifies, making them more aware of a male's desire for dominance and ownership.

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