

"The Women in the Castle" in Angela Carter's  
"The Bloody Chamber" and Tennyson's "The  
Lady of Shalott": A Postmodern Feminist  
Comparative Study

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The story of Tennyson's woman locked in the castle, depicted in "The Lady of Shalott" (1883), inspired many writers in the twenty-first century. One of these writers is Angela Carter, author of "The Bloody Chamber"(1979), who evokes and recreates feminist awareness of her adaptation of the fairy tale. This story represents a woman taken by marriage to "the fairy castle whose walls were made of foam"(3), similar to the isolation of the woman in Tennyson's "four gray towers"(14). Thus, this study will unfold the feminist synthesis that Carter reinterprets in her story to fit the stance of women in the context's time. By applying Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, I will argue how Carter adapts the Victorian story of Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" to analyze the stance of women in both texts and periods. In the light of postmodern feminist theorists like Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and others, this study strives to reflect the transformation of identities for the women in the castle in both Tennyson's poem and

Carter's story, revealing in the analysis of the character's transformation the feminist claim of curiosity.

Angela Carter (1940-1992) is a British writer who adapts fairy tales and rewrites them from a feminist perspective. Carter's time witnessed a change in women's role in society, which affected her rewriting of fairy tales. Kristeva writes in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that "intertextuality demands a new articulation of thethetic--of enunciative and denotative positionality" (60). In Carter's rewriting of the fairy tale, the historical change of women's rights and roles in her time and country is reflected in her adaptations. However, many critics condemn Carter's adaptation of the fairy tale, especially "The Bloody Chamber", because they see her as highlighting the pornographic realm of the story, representing the female character as seductive and very sexual. One of these critics is Avis Lewallen, who censures Carter's rewriting of the fairy tale, especially "Bluebeard" in "The Bloody Chamber". He explains his argument in "Wayward Girls but Wicked Women?: Female Sexuality in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber":

The heroine's corruption is three-fold material, as she is seduced by wealth; sexual, as she discovers her own sexual appetite; and moral, in the sense 'like Eve'. She disobeys her master husband's command"(150).

However, I do not see Carter's adaptation of "Bluebeard" in "The Bloody Chamber" as representing pornography. Instead, she wants to make the generation aware of the dangerous part of the fairy tale on the young generation. This parallels my argument that Carter does not conflate and rewrite these stories to lull the readers; instead, her narrative is a mirror of

the cultural changes toward gender and the role of women. This idea will be the kernel point of my argument in adapting not only "Bluebeard", but also the famous Victorian poem by Alfred Tennyson: "The Lady of Shalott".

In the 1960s, women in Britain had many job opportunities, and the law asked employers not to discriminate against women with lower wages. Most women had the opportunity to pursue a higher education. Some women took high political positions, such as Barbara Castle in 1968 became First Secretary of State. Women became eligible for free abortion and contraception. In 1970, women started a campaign under the name of "Miss World Protest" to rebel against judging women solely by their appearance (George Stevenson 50,66,70). All these historical changes for the sake of women's rights had a great influence on Angela Carter's mode of writing. In her adaptation of the fairy tale, Carter captures the cultural differences and the rights of women of her time in the recreation of the fairytales. Mary Kaiser argues for analyzing the concept of intertextuality in the adaptation of fairy tales. She claims:

In her 1979 collection of retold fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter shows an acute awareness of the changes that result from an oral to written transposition and calls attention to them by heightening the intertextuality of her narratives, making them into allegories that explore how [sexual behavior and gender roles are not universal, but are, like other forms of social interaction, culturally determined].(1)

Notably, Carter conflates the story she creates with old fairy tales but changes the role and voice of the female characters in these stories. In this study, I will focus on the story of

"The Bloody Chamber", which is considered to be an adaptation of the known fairy tale of "La Barbe Blue", an older version of "Bluebeard" by Charles Perrault in 1697. The story is about a 17-year-old woman who is married to a rich old man and is taken to a dilapidated castle. It is the same story as depicted in "Bluebeard", the story of a young woman who is married to a hideous, yet wealthy man. She discovers during a party that Bluebeard is not as bad as everyone tries to describe him. Thus, she marries him and soon discovers that he had many wives who have vanished under unknown circumstances. She is asked by her husband not to enter a certain room, but her curiosity drives her to disobey his commands and discover the mutilated bodies of his former wives scattered in a room filled with blood. The key was spotted with the blood, unable to be cleaned, leaving her unable to hide her discovery from her murderous husband. She seeks help from her two brothers to avoid meeting the same fate as her predecessors.

Despite the discussion that Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" is an adaptation of "Bluebeard", this paper will also argue how Carter's story is like Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott". Since Carter represents the cultural aspect of the context's time in her fairy tale adaptations, I find this story intersects with Tennyson's imprisoned women in the castle but with an acute difference in empowering the role of the female character. Liu Fenglin claims that Carter, in her adaptation of the classical fairy tale, not only renders the same story but also recreates the feminist tone in her writing. She claims: "To some extent, both [Carter] and Sexton's transformations of fairy tales are a process of deconstruction and rebuilding rather than simply retelling"(3). This kind of feminist transformation resonates in

capturing the Tennysonian figure of the woman in the castle, which resonates in Carter's story.

It is worth noting that Carter mapping the Tennysonian narration of the woman who is locked in the castle until she is rescued by her mother to strengthen the gendered aspect of her creation. The female protagonists in both texts search for truth, and both of them are sick of "shadow"; which is what leads to their fall. Carter adapts this story, but she highlights the nature and right of women to be curious individuals. A woman has the right to quench this desire by exploring the shadowed side of her life. This idea brings Kristeva into the discussion, as she believes that intertextuality differs from allusion because it requires, through rewriting of the old stories, a thematic change to the narrative. She writes in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that intertextuality "demands a new articulation of thethetic--of enunciative and denotative positionality" (60). Departing from Tennyson's famous line "I am half sick of shadows" and Carter's "I was determined, now, to search for through them...for evidence of my husband's true nature"(23), this paper will encompass the aim of Carter in adapting the fairy tale because she wants to meet the truth of the alluring misogynist texts of the old fairy tales. Both texts, as I see it, dismantle many gender aspects, such as men's power and voice versus women's passivity and gaze. Both texts reflect one aspect of male abuse of their wives and differently reflect women's passivity with feminist archetypes and symbols that reveal the role of women in the time of the texts.

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) is a British Victorian poet. "The Lady of Shalott" is one of his masterpieces. It was published in 1832 and received many harsh responses from

critics because it deals with an imaginary world instead of a realistic one. This collides with the norms of the Victorian era that reject the romantic isolation of the artist. Unlike Romantic poets who surrendered and transcended through nature, Victorian poet returned back to society and dealt with social matters. The poem describes a young maiden who is imprisoned in an isolated castle and can only see the world through reflections in her mirror. She is not allowed to look out the window, or she will suffer a horrible curse. Instead, she focuses on her weaving and sees only the reflection of the world behind her. Joseph Chadwick acknowledges that Tennyson adapts the story of Elaine, the "lily maid of Astolat," taken from the legends of King Arthur. Nevertheless, the source of the poem is not my focal interest here. Instead, my focus is the significance of the complexity of the female persona's seclusion. Many critics argue that this poem shows the importance of seclusion for artists because this serene isolation sharpens his craft, and thus if she tries to mingle with society, her creative production will be negatively influenced. In Harold Bloom's introduction to the poem, he claims that it "is concerned with the problem of artistic isolation, an issue which can lead to some contradictory interpretation" (15).

Contrary to what most critics interpret as the meaning of "The Lady of Shalott", this poem has another gender aspect that posits many male and female archetypes and symbols. I agree with Carl Plasa's argument that this poem is not a depiction of the situation of the artist, but it is more a debate about gender relationships. He writes:

One of the concerns at the heart of the political (as well as intellectual, social and cultural) life of Tennyson's nineteenth-century context is, as criticism generally acknowledges, the "Woman Question". (248)

The poem addresses the common gender norms in Victorian times, even for talented creative Victorian poets, artists, and novelists. Victorian novelists were asked to articulate the importance of domesticity for women and highlight the relation of women to their house and marriage. In 1846, James Lorimer's complements the writing of Emilia Wyndham in North British Review. He writes: "...all end happily: with the lesson that husbands and wives have much to correct in each other, that duty is better thing than pleasure..." (qtd in Helsinger and others 50). So, the best thing for the Victorian writer to do is to highlight the domestic duty of women. If she intends to discuss other social problems, she should hide her name under a male name, such as George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë<sup>1</sup>. Only women novelists who published under their real names discuss the "tradition of domestic realism" (Helsinger 48), like Anne Marsh. Therefore, most women's writing in the Victorian era from the 1820s to the 1860s was encouraged to reveal "truth of the affections, the sanctity of the home..." (Helsinger 51). This reading of the historical exposition of female artists in Victorian times leads me to frame my argument about the gendered aspect of Tennyson's imprisoned female artist who is not allowed to let the world discover her. She is the emblem category of the "angel of the house" that I, as a modern reader, can read as the dominance of patriarchy. This domesticity of the persona is like the female characters in fairy tales who face the curse of the world if she disobeys the patriarchal norms of the story's time. I will argue how Angela Carter renders Tennyson's imprisoned Lady of Shalott, but with a new construction of an active, erotic woman who also becomes "sick of shadow."

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<sup>1</sup> Brontë went by multiple male pen names, the most famous of which was Currer Bell, credited for *Jane Eyre* at the time of its release. However, her association with the Brontë literary family means that, unlike Eliot, scholars primarily refer to her by her real name.

Arguably, the spectrum tendency of Victorian women is clearly constructed in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott". In Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," the Lady of Shalott is imprisoned away from people; no one ever meets or talks with her. Her domestic domain is parodically rendered in the depiction of the walls and fences that separate her from the external world, such as in the second stanza of the poem: "Four gray walls, and four gray towers/Overlook a space of flowers, And the silent isle embowers" (Tennyson, lines 14-16). The only thing the reapers around her castle can reach is her voice. Her song, which is described as "her ever chanting cheerly" (Tennyson, line 19), prompts me to address the boundaries of the Victorian female artist. Intertwining the song of the Lady of Shalott with other critical letters I found sent to the Victorian poetess helped me to dismantle the gendered limitations that Tennyson posits in the first part of this poem. Women at that time were encouraged to write lyrics that is depicted in Tennyson's persona who sings and weaves which indicate two things. First, the education women received in Victorian times was less than their male partners, making them less qualified in writing sophisticated prose. This is evident in the Irish novelist and journalist, Julia Kavanagh's, collection of English women's Letters. In the chapter for Maria Edgeworth, she discussed how education creates a difference between the female and male writers of the time. She wrote:

Nature has set a difference, and a great one, between man and woman, but education has set one still greater.... It is that they are trained to act a part in life, and a part worth acting, whilst girls are either taught to look on life, or, worse still, told how to practice its light and unworthy acts . (87)

Beside the difference in education is that the fact that women in the Victorian era were expected to depict the domestic aspect of their lives. They were not allowed to participate in the outer world and its sophistication as men did. In 1842, Mary Ann Stodart argued that lyrics are the most suitable genre for women because they capture the experience of daily domestic life. She claimed, "...and her heart will ponder on what a true-hearted woman ever loves to portray, the kindly charities of home...(qtd in Helsingr and others, 31). For the Victorian female artist, her voice (the lyric) was the only possible way for her to communicate with the world and practice some semblance of dominance on the reapers and fields around her castle.

The other feminine aspect that Tennyson attaches to the imprisoned creative lady is that she is "Like an angel, singing clearly"(20). I propose the traditional gender stereotypes that Tennyson posits in the description of the Lady of Shalott. She is the angel who produces song, lyrical poetry, that is used only to cheer the listeners but has no effect on social or sophisticated matters. The passivity of this imprisoned artist continues as she views everything through reflection in the mirror in front of her. This is an oblique example of how women at that time, especially artists, were marginalized from the social scene. They view things as they are told or rendered to them. This scene of the exclusion of the artist from society reveals how the patriarchy did not accept their involvement in the social reformation and believed that their place was in their house. One thing that advocates this exclusion of the Victorian female writer from the social reforms is a letter written by Christina Rossetti in 1866, "The Iniquity of the Father Upon the Children". Her brother,

Gabriel, hinders the publication of this letter because he believes that women should stay ignorant of "sexual intrigue and social evil" (Helsing and others 40) .

The end of the poem is controversial in determining whether Tennyson is a feminist or misogynist in rendering the two images of the happy married couples and the handsome knight who intrigues the solicitude of the imprisoned woman. Despite this, it seems that the story escapes the traditional "happily-ever-after" ending. I argue that the last part of the poem is about self-searching for reality, departing from lady's resentment and grumbling of being alienated from the external world when she says, "I am half sick of shadow" (34). However, it is this self-discovery that leads to her fall. She died in a boat on which she wrote her name. This, for me, has many interpretations because letting her name to be known and facing the world required many sacrifices. Notably, it is the image of "marriage" that triggers her to search for other, real worlds. This leads me to question the ending of the poem that ends with a romantic scene of happy marriage, which shows that this is a typical Victorian woman who is torn between the isolation of creativity and being committed to her home and to the love of her husband. Is Tennyson trying to show that women in her self-discovery will find herself needing to be married? Is this the emblem representation of a good woman or the maker of the house? If so, being out of the norms will require many sacrifices from her. Therefore, Tennyson is conventional in representing the struggle of domesticity and art for the Lady of Shalott. Laurence W. Mazzeno claims that "Tennyson remains committed to at least modified version of separation of genders" (170). However, the woman died in her exploration of the world of reality, the world of men. The handsome knight comments on her beauty but does not show any attempt

to rescue her from death. Death is an indication that women cannot survive in the external world.

The struggle of the Lady in this poem is to find her true identity, and she accepts the danger of being outside, though she knows that she is going to be cursed. This leads me to read Tennyson's poem as more than as a mirror held on the situation of Victorian women and the sacrifices they made if they were going to participate with men outside the domesticity. Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Hołydyssays: "Despite common claims which assert Tennyson's anti-feminist perspective, his poems can be seen as a critique of conservative gender ideology"(7). For me, Tennyson shows and discerns the struggle that a woman, especially if she becomes an artist, suffers from this kind of social segregation, and all the production of her art would be very imaginative and away from the reality of everyday experience. This struggle that Tennyson renders in this fairy-like story reflects the Victorian time when women started to campaign for changing and enhancing labor conditions of the working class women who spend time in factories. This campaign ignores the rights of middle class women and tries to restrict them to homemaking because working outside of the home is only for spinsters and poor women. By this, they ignore the psychological and social needs of women to be intellectually independent and aware of the changes that happen in the world. This struggle of gender roles in Tennyson's female characters is parallel with the study of Roger Platizky's in "Tennyson's Angel in the House": Candy-Coated or Opiate-Laced?". He suggests Tennyson's poem is a depiction of the cultural and social status of women in his time more than he is feminist or anti-feminist. He writes:

The women in Tennyson's poems do not reside comfortably in their gender-prescribed roles. Instead, Tennyson's female characters are frequently given central functions and psychological complexity, corresponding to the way women were beginning to widen their spheres of participation and influence in Victorian society, especially by the end of the century. (50)

The female persona in the "Lady of Shalott" represents the general and expected role for women, even if she is an artist who believes she should be a homemaker whose art revolves around domesticity. Thus, as a twenty-first century reader, analyzing Carter's works from a postmodernist feminist perspective brings out hidden dimensions of these works and helps me to situate them alongside our twenty-first century understanding, which has been influenced by a new articulation of gender roles. I argue that Carter, as Tennyson, presents a woman imprisoned in a castle to explore contextual forms of theorizing that take account of gender and power asymmetries in the context of time. Applying the theory of intertextuality to Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", I am reinterpreting images of marriage, sexuality and patriarchy, drawing out any relevant insights about an emerging feminist consciousness in British in the postmodern time.

Julia Kristeva defines and coins the concept "of intertextuality". She writes: "Any text is constructed as a mosaic quotation; any text is the of absorption and transformation of another"(qtd in Clayton and Rothstein<sup>27</sup>).The story of "The Bloody Chamber" posits a story of an imprisoned woman in the castle like Tennyson's Lady of Shalott. The story is about a woman who is married at a young age to a rich man who keeps her away from the external world. He isolates her in an alienated place in which she examines the world only

through windows of the castle. By relating marriage to this kind of isolation, the protagonist refers to it as immigration, which indicates a huge transformation of her identity. Nevertheless, the protagonist of the story conceptualizes the reality of marriage and never romanticizes it. She says: "Into marriage, into exile; I sensed it, I knew it-that, henceforth, I would always be lonely"(7).

She knows, like Tennyson's morbid description of the imposed isolation of the Lady of Shalott, that this marriage will control her freedom and social life. She describes this relationship with a tone of suspense and comfort, this journey of marriage as a cut-off from all the world around her. All that she does as a source of fun is play piano. Both Tennyson and Carter represent an isolated woman who enjoys a piece of art as a source of amusement. Instead of the Victorian persona's attachment to weaving, Carter's protagonist is playing piano.

In comparison to the "shadow" of reality that Tennyson unfolds in his ballad, the protagonist in the story is fully aware of her imprisonment from the beginning of the marriage, and this leads her to refer to it as "exile". However, the construction and meeting reality of marriage is very central to my argument. Carter, cynically by this suspicious description of marriage, suggests that she illuminates the generation by dismantling many unrealistic marriages and everyday life in her story. She illustrates in *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* how she reinterprets and reconstructs a postmodern stance toward the mythical alluring "happy ending" marriage that the old fairy tale renders. She writes: "Myth deals in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances. In no area is this more true than in that of relations between the sexes"(5). Carter's new

creation and construction of marriage from the eye of the twenty-first century leads me to analyze the protagonist's awareness of the ideology of marriage, unlike the Lady of Shalott, who is not aware of her situation until she sees a reflection of the external world in comparison to her. Later, the Lady of Shalott becomes conscious of her unhappy situation after she sees the reflection of happy couples and a knight. In "The Bloody Chamber," what proves Carter's protagonist's self-definition and self-awareness is her mother's question as to if she loves the marquis or not: "Are you sure you love him?" (9). She answers: "I am sure I want to marry him" (9), which indicates the protagonist deals with him solely as an economic power. This question elicits the idea that the protagonist is conscious and fully aware of the fancy of marriage, unlike the Lady of Shalott, who only becomes aware of her unhappy situation after she sees the reflection of happy couples and a knight, eventually leading to her death.

Fundamentally, unlike other fairy tales, when the bride depicts her fear in marring the "monstrous" gothic being and leaving her father's sight, the narrator in this contemporary story expresses sadness over the journey of marriage and how it is going to take her away from her mother, who she will ultimately long for. This very beginning line of story shows how Carter deconstructs the role of genders and substitutes the patriarchal presence with a maternal one. She mentions at the beginning of the story this kind of perplexed feeling toward marriage and her mother:

Ceaselessly thrusting the train the bore me through the night, away from Paris, away from girlhood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of my mother's apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage.(1)

Carter establishes a new role and appearance to the mother figure in "The Bloody Chamber". Instead of depicting this mother as weak and sad because of her daughter's marriage, she describes her as a wise strong woman who feels the fear of her daughter. This probes me to believe that gender is a cultural and historical entity, as Judith Butler claims. She defines gender "as a mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized"(2). More than taking the figure of the sad broken father, mother becomes the knight figure who will save the life of her daughter from this oppressive marriage. In the Lady of Shalott, it is the figure of a handsome knight who leads the persona of the poem to reexamine the isolation she is in. It triggers self-invention and self-definition for her.

On the other hand, Carter's figure of mother is the savior, and it is she who triggers this awareness inside her daughter's heart that "she does not love [her husband]"(3). She makes her daughter aware of men's sexual dominance. She says: "My mother, with all the precision of her eccentricity, had told me what it was that lovers did; I was innocent but not naïve" (18). This distance between her mother and herself gives her a sharp experience in enhancing her abilities and skills to know more about the reality of marriage, the true nature of her husband, the marquis, and the goals that drive her to marry him. When her husband attempts to kill her, her mother appears as the "knight" in the lady of Shalott. Unlike the knight who triggers curiosity in her, her mother comes to save her from the violence of patriarchy. She comes on a horse and fights with her husband's gun. For me, Carter represents the mother as a strong independent individual because she has given the absolute freedom to marry her husband out of love in which she suggests that there is no

sexual dominance in marriage that is drifted from poverty like her daughter who marries the marquis because she was attracted by his wealth when he offers her the ticket of the opera. Ann Sheets discusses the role of the mother and, for me, represents the mother with androgynous features, being male and female at the same time: "Carter equips the mother with male and female Freudian symbols, making several references to the father's gun kept in the mother's reticule" (22). Thus, Carter, in her reassessment of gender and its role, represents the mother with a masculine characteristic to highlight the independence of women. As a postmodernist writer, Carter identifies Freud's hypothesis on mother's passivity because she lacks a penis and thus should be weak: "The turning away from the mother is accompanied by hostility; the attachment to mother ends in hate" (qtd in Sheets 22). In the story, the mother becomes the savior and is supported by the young bride. She is the one who leads her to understand the inner domestic shadow of her husband.

In addition to criticizing the role of the mother who stands in for Tennyson's knight, this paper will further discuss and sustain the role of mirror versus reflection and truth in both texts. From reading Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott", mirrors are the source of truth. The Lady views the world around her through the reflection she sees in the mirror, and thus she knows more about herself and her needs. Similarly, the narrator in Carter's poem views her identity and the surrounding people through mirrors. She knows the development of her physical changes as a married woman through the mirror. The mirror shows how she becomes dominated by the gaze of Marquise, but this does not lead the narrator to be passive and surrender to his desire. The mirror helps her to scheme and empower. She describes how the reflection of her body as he stares at her and how this leads her to be

mean: "And for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentially for corruption that took my breath away"(7). She uses her reflection and his as powerful weapons to benefit from him materialistically. She admits in the beginning that she married him because she strives to be rich and wishes to attend the opera. When she mentions the reason for marrying him: "This ring, the bloody bandage of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth,... all had conspired to seduce me" (8), she debunks any submission to him but shows that it is his "money" who seduces her, which indicates that this marriage will be wrong for her. The word "seduce" is embedded with danger and flaws, which shows how Carter aims to refute patriarchal dominance of women even with the power of money. This solely materialistic aim leads her to view his inner dangerous whims to her, as he views her as a commodity. Carter's utilization of mirrors aims to figure out the gender's role in the text that this reflection illuminates lots of oblique reality to the narrator about herself about marriage. Through mirrors, the narrator knows more about the gender binarism that occurs between men and women, and thus she reacts to eliminate this superiority.

To the contrary, the mirror in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" becomes a reflection of the word, which increases her curiosity. Through the mirror, Tennyson constructs the role of women in terms of art, gender and participation in the outside world in Victorian times. She tries to adapt to this isolation until she becomes seduced with the image of happy married couples and the appearance of the handsome knight. This reflection leads her to question her role as a woman of her time and how she needs to be married because it was a very essential role for her in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alternatively, maybe she wants to be an equal to

the knight who has the right to participate and explore the world. Thus, the reflection of the mirrors questions the role of gender and the place of women. For Carter, this is a source of reality and power for the narrator to delve into her curiosity and to know more about this playful and mysterious husband. However, for Tennyson, the mirror leads the Lady to another articulation of her femineity other than isolation, but this curiosity marks her fall victim to her curse.

In "The Bloody Chamber," the blind pianist Jean-Yves warns the narrator against being curious like Eve. Despite his warnings, she chooses not to listen to him and follows her curiosity, though she knows that it will lead to her end. She becomes determined to know the truth about her husband and thus to know more about her fate and place in marriage. By invoking Eve's image and curiosity, Carter suggests that searching for truth is the fastest answer about the narrator's identity, even if this will lead her to conflict and death. Similarly, the persona in Tennyson's poem knows that she is going to be cursed, but she moves on her curiosity and follows her inner soul to know more about herself. The destiny for her is death: "The first house by the water-side/singing in her song she died"(86–87). The death synthesizes the situation of women in the context's time, as they are restricted only to being homemakers and not allowed to quench their curiosity about their realistic position in society. Maria Tatra comments on the nineteenth century's right of women in questioning and compacting her position, and thus curiosity is as taboo for them as it was for the biblical Eve. She writes in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tale* that the nineteenth century story "singles out the heroine's curiosity as an especially undesirable trait"(171). In "The Bloody Chamber," however, despite curiosity's imbedded danger, it

will lead the narrator to a moment of realization. Holly Morse argues for Carter's use of Eve's as a figure of epistemophilia and how she contradicts the biblical illusion of Eve's fall due to her curiosity. She renders:

By removing the divine command and cutting the divine punishment, Carter's configuration of the story explores the folkloric aspects of the biblical tale, which focus on neither sin nor punishment, but on the necessary stages of initiation into adult life, and as such she frees Eve from any burden of guilt. (121)

When the narrator describes the key as: "I took the forbidden key from the heap" (26), and links it to her "obedience" to him, the narrator assimilates herself biblically to Eve but with a postmodern feminist articulation. However, this forbidden exploration that swings between fear of seeing "figure of himself" the desire to truth leads her to a moment of realization. This realization that comes after this curiosity leads the narrator to reassess her situation of marriage and how this man is controlling and violent. Symbolically, the "leather" perfume he wears is used to cover the black side of his character. Thus, this shadowy side of his character, which he tries to hide, is obliquely answered through the reflection of the heinous acts in the titular bloody chamber. Carter's protagonist admits that knowing the truth rests her: "I had met that shadowed reality" (36).

Analyzing the articulation of curiosity and the gender's relativity of it in both texts leads to dispute the result of this curiosity through the historical feminist lens. Why does "The Lady of Shalott" die, and the narrator in Carter's story survives? The curiosity in Carter's story leads her to rebel against the illusion of obedience. She transforms from naivety to maturity

and becomes an independent woman seeking her mother's help to save her from a dangerous marriage that is based on dominance and power, and thus she reaches an equal relationship between her, her mother and the kind blind pianist whom she becomes her friend. Thus, Carter, by representing the friendship between the two sexes, emancipates women from the hierarchy of patriarchal power. She shows the narrator in a well-determined transformation that she walks in her castle as "firmly as I had done in my mother's house"(27). To the contrary, Tennyson theorizes the sin of being a rebellious woman in the nineteenth century. The lady of Shalott is found dead and no positive development on her situation as a woman is rendered in the poem, except that she is a corpse on a boat. Tennyson, I theorize, depicts in the last stanza the dominating patriarchy over the thoughtful woman. She becomes dead and helpless to question her role in society. In addition to this passive end, the man stands indifferent before her paralyzed pale body to coldly describe her beauty: He said, "But Lancelot mused a little space; 'She has a lovely face,'" (96-97), which indicates Victorian men's awareness about only the beauty of women. Sadly, in her quest to be a visible artist who produces art that reflects the reality of the external world, she died. Many critics, such as Kathy Alexis Psomiades, theorize that the Lady of Shalott becomes the art object instead of being the producer of art. She becomes, as I argue previously, the subject of the male gaze: paralyzed and helpless. This strongly suggests the struggle of the Victorian woman in her quest for equality. In fact, Tennyson's poem is just a reflection of the Victorian gender ideology that is based on binarism and hierarchy, as illustrated in 1979 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic*: "male sexuality, in other words, is not just analogically but actually the essence of

literary power"(4). This suggests the reason behind the death of the Lady of Shalott's art, and thus she becomes a suppressed object to patriarchal dominance. Even Tennyson's 1832 version of the poem ends with that persona describing herself as the object that lost her charm. By associating her identity with this piece of art "Draw near and fear not,—this is I"(97), she turns herself into art within art, but not as a separate poet who speaks freely about the work to be acceptable in the patriarchal community.

All in all, this paper represents Carter's gender ideology and feminist perspective in the twenty-first century through the analysis of the postmodern feature of intertextuality in the story of "The Bloody Chamber". By applying intertextuality to the text, the story encompasses many allusions from different texts, but I argue that the isolated woman in the castle renders a similar narrative to Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott". Both texts are examined in the light of postmodernist feminist and gender theorists like Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, interrogated with historical reflection of women at the time. Consequently, Carter posits a cynical and parodic utilization of "The Lady of Shalott" in which I synthesize the equality between the sexes by compacting the hierarchy between the genders and the quest for curiosity. Carter admits that women need to be illuminated to reach a better identification with themselves, unlike Tennyson's Lady, who falls victim to her curiosity and becomes the suppressed invisible woman in shadow of the patriarchal hierarchal power.

## **Works Cited**

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