

Between Two Waves: Reconciliation of BDSM and Radical Feminism in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"

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Abstract

Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979) is now a renowned 20th-century rendition of a fairy tale, "Bluebeard." Critics such as Kelly Link evaluate this work as a novella dealing with the unruliness and subversive potential of women. However, this novella provoked controversies among feminist scholars, who are Carter's contemporaries, regarding the way it displays subversive and transgressive feminist agency. Anti-pornography feminists criticize the work as a text that reinforces social oppression and sexual objectification of females as "The Bloody Chamber" is encoded with symbols alluding to BDSM and pornography. On the other hand, Robin Ann Sheets asserts that this novella also has an aspect that "moves closer to the anti-pornography feminists" (Sheets 655). This paper aims to read Carter's novella as a work transgressing the boundary of two different feminist waves, which are radical feminism opposing non-normative sexual practices as well as pornography and pro-sex third-wave feminism that advocates sexual deviations. Through this reading, the paper asserts that this work is Carter's navigation to seek a ground that does not belong to either radical or third-wave feminists. Instead, she suggests an alternative perspective that weaves women's adventurous sexual exploration with the issue of female liberation from the violent patriarchal system. Through this text, Carter evokes the need to realize the sexual and otherworldly desires of women, but at the same time, she contends that the glass ceiling of the patriarchal system is yet hindering many women from truly pursuing their desire. Hence, she spotlights the need to break the fetter of patriarchy in advance so as to save women from its violence and abuse through the denouement of the story. To demonstrate the story's relevance to different feminist ideas, it grounds its argument on Robin Ann Sheet's explanation of the feminist history and it also refers to the argument of Gayle Rubin when it comes to demonstrating the story's relevance to non-normative sexual practices.

Keywords: Feminism, BDSM, Sexuality, Normativity, Fairy Tale, Agency

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Introduction

Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979) is now a renowned contemporary rendition of a fairy tale, "Bluebeard." Many contemporary critics evaluate this work as a novella discussing women's sexuality. The narrator "I" of the novella starts out her journey to her older husband's estate with an excitement of sexual awakening. She is also delighted with the prospect of elevating her economic status with her husband's wealth. In these excitements, she presents herself as a submissive marriage material rather than a bold heroine for the first half of the story. Such an attitude make her appear as a meek girl who agrees to what her husband tells her to do and enjoys his gaze on her body. Her overt sexual obedience and sensual narration provide a ground to relate this novella to pornography and BDSM practice.

Feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Patricia Duncker, who are standing on the side of anti-pornography movements have criticized Carter's work as a text that reinforces social oppression and sexual objectification of female sex. On the other hand, some scholars like Robin Ann Sheets assert that this work also has an aspect that "moves closer to the anti-pornography feminists" (655), which means this story is more than a mere defense of pornography and eroticism. Sheets claims that the subject of the novella is rather more close to the political stance of anti-pornography feminists.

In this paper, "The Bloody Chamber" will be read as a work transgressing the boundary of two different feminist waves: radical feminism opposing to non-normative sexual practices and pro-sex third wave feminism that advocates sexual deviations. Through this reading, the paper asserts that this work is Carter's navigation to seek a ground that does not belong to either radical or third-wave feminism. In fact, she refuses to place this work within the dichotomous division but suggests an alternative perspective that weaves women's adventurous sexual exploration with the issue of female liberation from the patriarchal system. In other words, "The Bloody Chamber" is a literary reconciliation of two conflicting realms of feminism.

In order to prove this statement, the paper will first outline previous scholarships on Carter and her fairy tales. Then, it will examine how BDSM and pornography are viewed by radical feminists and third-wave feminists. For this job, the research conducted by Robin Ann Sheets and the perspective of Gayle Rubin will be introduced. Then, the paper associates this analysis with the submissiveness of Carter's narrator. Her sexual submissiveness and consent to marital bondage will be taken as tactics to realize her desire for sexual awakening and for her husband's wealth. In addition, a discussion on freeing women's curiosity will be followed. In this perspective, meekness in the story is not read as a sign of passivity, but it is a wild medium she employs to freely explore her sexual desire. Hence, acting submissively is not a behavior that repeats the traditional gender role of women but it is a strategy conducted with the sexual agency.

Then the paper moves on to the discussion regarding the climax and the conclusion of the plot, where the narrator discovers the presence of the secret chamber and her dominant mother shows up to kill the violent Marquis. This scene is where Carter tries to construct the reality outside of the sexual fantasy of the narrator. On the surface, the scene where the taboo set by the narrator's husband gets violated can be perceived as disobedience if read in terms of BDSM. However, instead of having the narrator encounter with another sexual pleasure, this disobedience leads her to face violence and all the misogynistic practices of her husband which are not part of her sexual fantasy. The paper claims this scene is where the narrator gets disenchanted and realizes the real power relationship between a male patriarch and a female member within a society, which is a primary issue dealt over the period of the second wave feminist movement. The rescue provided by the mother and the new love relationship with the blind piano tuner become a new opportunity for the narrator to build a stable society free from the patriarchal violence.

Through this text, Carter evokes the need of realizing sexual and other worldly desire of women, which should not be treated differently from that of men. At the same time, she suggests that the glass ceiling of the patriarchal system is yet hindering many women from truly pursuing their desires, which brings the need to break the fetter of patriarchy first so as to save women from its violence. To put this idea differently, "The Bloody Chamber" functions as a literary construction that holds and integrate polarized feminist stances by showing how non-normative sexual practices and female liberation from the patriarchal system can go hand in hand.

This section reviews the established scholarships regarding Angela Carter and “The Bloody Chamber.” Most of the criticisms on Carter and her fictions are about Carter’s rendering of fairytale into a genre that reveals feminist agency. Many well-known fairytales such as “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Blue Beard”, or “Sleeping Beauty” are bounded by patriarchal tradition—a heroine is often times objectified and rescued by a male savior, whether that figure is a woodman, brothers, or prince. Put it differently, “[fairytale] is considered to be oppressive tool informing female readers, especially children, of their subordinate role in relation to men” (Boonpromkul 52). However, critics agree that Carter’s newly rendered tales “present the modern feminist want for a strong women in literature” (Priyanka 1). Therefore, the heroines in Carter’s re-written tales “conquers individual fears and mov[e] from dependence to independence” (Priyanka 4), which adds feminist aspect to Carter’s stories.

Furthermore, previous scholarships also note that Carter’s rewritten fairytales are not just ‘fairytales,’ but mixed with other genres—“a fairy tale, a pornographic fiction, a gothic horror, and a bildungsroman novel” (Boonpromkul 51), which enriches the story and makes it more multidimensional. Lorna Sage explains that this abstraction of genre was intentional. She says, “[Carter] valued and sought abstraction as an antidote to the climate of foggy realism in which she’d grown up” (54). Other than Carter’s refusal of “foggy realism,” there is a different reason for employing many different genres. For instance, Kari E. Lokke explains the functions of the Gothic elements in Carter’s story. She says that “the grotesque in both *Blue Beard* and *The Bloody Chamber* functions as an unsettling vehicle for exposing, through exaggeration, dark humor, and irony, the brutality of traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women” (12). In other words, the Gothic tradition is employed to explicitly reveal the ugliness of patriarchal violence toward women.

Another significant generic characteristic found from “The Bloody Chamber” is its use of bildungsroman style to trace the development of the female protagonist. Melinda G. Fowl mentions that “the most interesting association exposed in *The Bloody Chamber* concerns the *development* of character in situations where a relationship to someone ‘strange’ or ‘foreign’ dominates the situation” (71, emphasis mine). Like other protagonists in bildungsroman novels are, the protagonist in “The Bloody Chamber” also goes through self-realization and growth in the “foreign” environment, which is her “strange” husband’s giant castle-like mansion in France.

Kathleen E.B. Manley also notes that “[Carter’s protagonist] is a woman in process, someone who is exploring her subject position and beginning to tell her own story” (72). Manley asserts that at first, “Carter’s protagonist *appears* to be the blank page upon which her husband will inscribe his story of her” (73). This suggests that the protagonist is seemed to be placed in a passive position in which she does not get to develop her subjectivity herself, but her story is written by a different figure with patriarchal authority. However, Manley insists that this is not true. The protagonist “is not an entirely blank page” (74) but “she has material to draw upon both from her mother’s life story and from the opportunity her mother has offered her to have a career and thus be financially independent” (74). She reads the first part of the story where the protagonist presents herself as a sexual object for the Marquis and realizes her sexual desire as a “journey” that “involves consciously seeing herself as others see her” (74). Manley says mirrors that appear frequently throughout the novella “help [the protagonist] see herself as others see her and provide the beginnings of that sense” (74). This point establishes an important argument that the protagonist is not merely being objectified or seen by the patriarch, but she is enable to view herself from many different angles and build the self-understanding.

The protagonist’s self-portrayal and self-realization have also been analyzed in terms of sadomasochism—the concept relevant to pornographic fiction. Lokke suggests that the narrative structure of this novella makes readers identify themselves with the “*masochistic* heroine” (11, emphasis mine) at first. Then, readers get to acknowledge “the glamour of sado-masochistic self-annihilation as well as its ultimate brutality, ugliness, and misogyny” (11) when the protagonist faces the bloody chamber and the brutal future that is about to come.

This paper’s claim is aligned with Lokke’s as it agrees that sadomasochism in the story is used for the protagonist’s subjectivity-building and self-realization. However, articulating the roles of

BDSM in the novella is not the ultimate aim of the paper. The paper will explore how Carter's story can be the ground that reconciles the debates between pro-pornography feminists and anti-pornography feminists. Before that, different political stances between feminists regarding BDSM and pornography will be examined in the next section.

Different Feminist Perspectives on BDSM and Pornography

Since the 1970s, ardent feminist debates have continued regarding the modes of practicing sexuality, the representation of women in various media, and the realization of female sexual desire. BDSM belongs to the category of non-normative sexual practice as it includes various types of seemingly aggressive or violent plays and gestures such as bondage and flagellation. Hence, this practice is often perceived as a persuasion of pleasure that deviates from the value of "the sexual value system" which generally deems "heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial" (Rubin 156) sex valuable while any sex that involves "pornography, fetish objects, sex toys of any sort, or roles other than male and female" (Rubin 156) is regarded as a bad sex. Since pornography includes the representation of sadomasochism and various role plays, it can be an umbrella term for BDSM practice. Therefore, in this section, the discussion on pornography also touches upon matters of BDSM.

Robin Ann Sheets provides a brief history of the conflicts between feminists regarding the issue of pornography. In the 1970s, there were groups of feminists who "sought to redefine pornography as a form of violence against women and to classify as pornographic those representations which eroticize male domination" (635). This perspective on pornography has been and still is largely shared by radical feminists whose activism is rooted on the second wave feminism. Women who supported this branch of feminism raised the issue of rape crimes and violence in domestic environment and claimed the need of their prevention. Furthermore, the main purpose of their movement was counterattacking patriarchy, which they deemed as the seed of all sorts of oppression on the female sex. They believed the society operates on the oppression on female members drawn by male members, which is the basic premise of the patriarchy. This oppression takes various forms such as sexual objectification of women, assigning certain roles to the female sex, and all sorts of physical and sexual violence on women. Hence, in order to breakdown the solid web of patriarchy, radical feminists believe it is necessary to go against every practice that subordinates women under men. In this vein, radical feminists define pornography heinous to the female sex as they considered it as a medium which displays male domination over female. They claim pornography shows "the physical power over and against others, the power of terror, the power of naming, the power of owning, the power of money, and the power of sex" (Sheets 637). In other words, they think pornography is a representation of how the dominant sex abuses and oppresses the other.

However, from the 1980s, new wave of feminism, so called the third wave, has arisen, represented by feminists like Gayle Rubin, Pat Califia, and Ellen Willis. These scholars support pornography and call themselves "bad girls" (qtd. in Sheets 636) which is an opposite concept of "good girls" that indicates anti-pornography feminists. Radical feminist like Robin Morgan and Andrea Dworkin contend these people do not deserve to call themselves feminists as they are advocating "sexual practice on domination" (qtd. in Sheets 636). But the perspective of Morgan and Dworkin is limited since they view women only as the oppressed and transfixes them in the position of the submissive and masochist.

The third wave feminists proclaim sadomasochism and pornography can serve women's interest instead of fixating them in the position of the oppressed. Ellen Willis declares "women should be free to experience sex as 'an expression of violent and unpretty emotion'" (qtd. in Sheets 638). This contention explains that these practices may help women express and fulfill their wild sexual impulse. Put it differently, BDSM or other aggressive depiction of sex does not necessarily reflect the reality of the contemporary society where women have always been the victim of the patriarchy, but it can function as a way for them to pursue their desire that they were not able to freely express. Willis expresses the women who enjoy this kind of wild pleasure as "a rebel" as she actively explores her sexuality "that has been defined as a male preserve," and also pornography "reject[s] sexual repression and hypocrisy" (Sheets 638).

Regarding BDSM, Pat Califia, Gayle Rubin, and other pro-pornography feminists insist that they admit sadomasochism works within the dynamics of power. However, they don't agree to radical feminists' criticism that "[in this practice] one person keeps the other in a state of submission." Rather, it is a "negotiated exchange of power" (Sheets 639). In BDSM, a subject in the position of submissive is not always regarded as the powerless. At a glance, dominance and submissive relationship are made upon power inequality. But contrary to this assumption, the practitioners of the play state "subs have the power, dom(me)s have the control" (Meeker et al 1606). Some members of the BDSM community says "submissives hold more power than dominants because they set the boundaries, establish limits, and can leave at any time" (Meeker et al 1606). To elaborate, without the agreement of the submissive, the play itself cannot begin, hence there will be no pleasure for both parties. This argument that the submissive draws boundaries and limits prove their agency as a subject who leads the game instead of remaining in a passive position.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that women who practice BDSM do not always identify themselves with the submissive or masochist. Linda Williams mentions that a female spectator of a violent play "may also, simultaneously, identify with the beater or with the less involved spectator who simply looks on" (qtd. in Sheets 641). Even if that female spectator focuses on the subject that is being beaten or whipped, she may feel vicarious pleasure rather than pain. Moreover, this relationship may not always happen between a man and a woman but it can take place between any individuals with various gender identities and sexual orientations.

Gayle Rubin brings this discussion to a deeper level. To simply put, she claims through non-normative sexual practices, one can remove sexual restraints or decorum imposed by the society. Rubin gives the example of the Victorian era during which "it was commonly thought that 'premature' interest in sex, sexual excitement, and, above all, *sexual release*, would impair the health and maturation of a child" (Rubin 144, emphasis mine). This explanation demonstrates conservative decorum on sexuality of the 19th Century Britain might have excluded its denizens, including young kids, from sexual knowledge or seeking sexual pleasure. Rubin adds many articles of the sex law of her contemporary society has originated from so called this "nineteenth-century morality crusades" (Rubin 144). This shows even in the 20th century, the antiquated customs and decorum are used as a means to purge citizens. When it comes to releasing people from this repression, non-normative sexual practices can make a great contribution. Rubin contends "[t]his culture always treats sex with suspicion" (Rubin 150), which means the society have been treating sex as something to be concealed and tabooed. The only possible exceptions are "marriage, reproduction, and love" (Rubin 150) which shows having sex out of plain desire for pleasure have been considered unnecessary and evil. Non-normative sexual practices can create crevices to this decorum by violating the idea that sexual acts should be based on love and moral. Experiencing various forms of sexual pursuits can bring liberation to people who have been subjected to oppression. To sum up, these practices demonstrate their virtues by proving that sexuality does not always correspond to a single standard or a moral code.

"The Bloody Chamber" in-between Two Waves of Feminism

Considering the publication year of "The Bloody Chamber," which is 1979, this story can be a transitional piece of work that has witnessed the shift of feminist movements as it came out a year before the 1980s when the third wave feminism made its advent. Technically speaking, the work came out during the transition from the second wave to the third wave. Among feminists who were standing on the side of anti-pornography, Carter was severely criticized as if she had produced a piece of pornography. However, this paper disagrees to their viewpoint which suggests Carter is trying to eroticize female enslavement. In many different parts of the text, Carter indeed has inserted elements that can be read from the perspective of BDSM and utilizing them to talk about realizing female desire for sex and wealth.

This is shown from the very beginning of the narrative. As Rubin suggests, the narrator shows a woman may choose her husband based not on pure love or out of a will to form a family, but on sexual fantasy and desire for wealth. On her way to her husband's castle, she mentions about the great wealth of her husband "to which, one day, [she] might be an heir" (3). Not only with her expectation on spending the first night of her marriage, the narrator seems to be excited with the thought of becoming the heir of her husband's fortune, who is "the richest man in France" (8). These passages

reveals that even a seventeen year old girl, who should not be tainted by any secular desire according to the Victorian decorum, may open her eye towards elevating her socio-economic status. “[A] potentiality for corruption” (7) she has discovered within herself refers not only to a sexual innuendo related to the loss of virginity, but it also refers to her secular hope of becoming the owner of wealth currently possessed by her husband. The fact that her mind was drawn to him when he took her and her mother to the *Tristan* performance also evidences her adoration of her ‘wealthy’ husband. When the narrator’s mother questions her whether she is convinced with her love on her husband, she responds as “‘I’m sure I want to marry him’” (2). Instead of giving a response on whether she truly loves her man or not, the narrator’s answer seems to slightly evade her mother’s question. She assures her mom about her strong will to marry him, but she doesn’t clarify if she was motivated by love or not, which shows love may not be her strongest motivation. These series of allusions are Carter’s device that proclaim love may not be the only thing that one should have for marriage. This assertion contradicts what is suggested by the moralists who claim marriage should happen for true love’s sake and for the sake of family building based on integrity.

Furthermore, another important motivation the narrator show is losing her virginity. She overtly expresses her sexual excitement originating from being sexually objectified by the Marquis as well as her desire for pleasure she can gain from sexual experience. This sexual objectification and the narrator’s consent to such a treatment may be read pornographically and negatively viewed by the second wave feminists. Because, objectifying the female sex as a trophy of men is the custom of the patriarchal society, and fetishizing female body is one of the ways of the objectification frequently employed in pornography. In the narrator’s description, it is hard to detect any discomfort about presenting herself as a sexual object, but she seems to be enjoying the whole process.

However, understanding this text as Carter’s support to pornography based solely on the submissive attitude of the narrator may lead the readers to reductionism. Considering that the narrator already knows that the Marquis is dependent on her submissiveness, meekness and submissiveness are not qualities that the narrator is enforced to have, but they are her tactics employed to satisfy her worldly and sexual desire. From the perspective of BDSM, the marriage with the Marquis is a contract through which the narrator’s sexual fantasy can get realized, and the narrator’s consent to all types of bondage drawn upon her by husband signals the play has been initiated. Given that the submissive is the one who has the actual power to set the rules and boundaries of the play, the narrator is not a woman who has internalized patriarchal violence or sexual expectation on women but her agency as a submissive can be linked to her feminist agency who is capable of navigating through her desire along with controlling the situation.

One may argue back, saying there is no scene of mutual consent between the narrator and her husband about what will be done on the bed or during their marriage life. But the absence of explicit consent can be explained with the term “deep consent” (Meeker et al 1595), which is also a term used in BDSM community. While “surface consent” and “scene consent” indicate different types of agreement where ‘yes or no questions’ about what will be and should be done take place, the deep consent makes agreement ambiguous. On this level, a cognitive consent may not take place and there may not be any rules regarding how to behave in certain situations. In this case, even an emotional distress that seems like a pain inflicted on the submissive/masochist, can actually be what is intended and desired by both parties (Meeker et al 1596). Becky McLaughlin points out that the scene where the narrator is secretly looking at a pornographic book at the Marquis’ reading room enables him to “perform the sexual act” (411). McLaughlin explains before this scene, the sexually inexperienced narrator was an “obstacle” to realize the Marquis’ sexual fantasy. But this revelation of the narrator’s sexual curiosity “project[s] [her] into [that] fantasy” (411). To put it differently, displaying her interest in sexual experience is read as a consent to be part of the sexual act the Marquis intends to perform. Through this agreement, though it is not a verbally made consent, the sexual interest of the narrator gets also served.

From the beginning of the story, the narrator has been excited with the thoughts of getting “away from girlhood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of [her] mother’s apartment” (1). This tacit consent serves as the initiation of the narrator’s sexual awakening. By practicing submissiveness to her husband, the narrator has finally obtained opportunities to explore sexual pleasure and other desires. Carter demonstrates that these nonnormative sexual practices may be various means to

aggressively pursue female desire and the employment of such transgressive measures should not be deemed as vulgar or something that a fallen woman does.

One may ask a more fundamental question which is why the narrator has to choose the role of the submissive when she could have chosen to be a dominatrix. Becoming a wife of a man who is much more senior to her may appear as making the narrator as a new Lolita, and having to be situated within the Marquis' gaze and sexual fantasy also seems like subordinating a female character under the patriarch. However, the subversive characteristic of Carter's text is discovered in the way the narrator uses the male gaze upon her. In the patriarchal society, not much medium is allowed for women to freely express their desire and pursue it. Metaphorically speaking, the social system itself is a bondage to most of the female members. In this situation, her husband's gaze becomes the means through which the narrator discovers her "potential of corruption." When she first sees herself "in [her husband's] eyes, [she] was aghast to feel [herself] *stirring*" (12, emphasis mine). The connotation of this stir may be ambivalent. It may hint the narrator's fear, but at the same time, she is stirring with excitement. The husband's gaze is not just a captivation, but it is a medium that allows the narrator to discover the possibility of her secular and sexual awakening. The pornographic settings in the text are Carter's props to disconnect the bond between love and sex, and to realize her political intention, which is expressing her endorsement of "bad girls."

This discourse on bad girl is also related to the matter of curiosity. Indeed, making her open the forbidden chamber is what was originally intended by her husband and this leads her to the disillusion of her fantasy. In this vein, female curiosity and having to be decapitated as "the reproof" (14) of it seem to be showing violence against women, which is a valid observation. However, before moving on to the discussion on the real violence brandished upon the female sex, curiosity and disobedience can also be associated with the narrator's feminist agency. Sheets mentions that "nearly every nineteenth-century printed version of 'Bluebeard' singles out the heroine's curiosity as an especially undesirable trait" and adds "the wife's disobedience had become a much more serious issue than the husband's violence" (644) back then. In "The Bloody Chamber," Carter gives her heroine an opportunity to quench sexual thirst, and this exploration reveals her disobedience to her mother's will and to the society that demonizes a woman's sexual corruption. In terms of curiosity, the narrator's temporal marriage can be read as an experiment to find a way to satisfy herself.

"The Bloody Chamber" and the Attack on the Patriarchy

However, a question may be raised regarding the secret chamber of the Marquis and the conclusion of the story where the "indomitable" (2) mother appears like the heroine of the text who saves her daughter from the dungeon of the evil patriarch.

Until the first half of the story, Carter seems to endorse non-normative sexual practices and show how the daring narrator is getting close to her desire. But from the scene where she gets shocked to see the chamber and the corpses of her husband's ex-wives, the story turns into the narrative of survival rather than that of sexual deviations. While there has been no condemnation for the narrator for exploring through sexual curiosity, her curiosity about the forbidden chamber gets to face a severe punishment, which is beheading. This direct threat to her life dismantles her fantasy on the marriage life she has projected in her fantasy. In other words, this is the moment when the BDSM play halts and the reality outside of the play comes in. This bloody chamber as a hidden space in the castle is what Carter uses to depict the reality allegorically in which women are used as a prop to satisfy perverted desire of men. At first, the narrator thinks violating the taboo set up by her husband is just a simple act of disobedience. But what is interesting is this disobedience is predicted and planned like one of the settings of a game. The narrator also admits to the blind man at the end that opening this chamber is "what [her husband] knew she would [do]" (40). In other words, disobeying the Marquis is actually a way of being submissive to him, given that the narrator has fallen for his trick. From this point of the plot, the submissiveness is no longer the narrator's tactic that shows her agency, but it starts backfiring her in a form of violence.

Through this scene, Carter shows that meekness and submissiveness have limits as means of fulfilling one's desire. She asserts as long as the solid patriarchal oppression exists, a female subject will face a limit and violence at some point while she pursues her desire. The narrator also gets

'punished' by the Marquis for pursuing her curiosity and obtains a mark of shame on her forehead. This shows how the patriarchal society *still* taboos women's curiosity and prevents women from knowing its unjust and violent customs. If a woman steps outside of the play, a game in which she might have been the subject with power, she has to face the real violence and inequality. However, Carter is not criticizing the BDSM practices as a flawed way to satisfy female desire, but she is saying that it is the patriarchal society that one has to debilitate first before she initiates a play.

Cheryl Renfroe focuses on the biblical narrative of Eve who also gets allured by the snake's seducement to eat the forbidden apple since Jean-Yves mentions Eve's name in his conversation with the narrator (Carter 41). Renfroe reads Eve's episode from a different angle. She says "Eve's disobedience was perhaps not motivated by lust, greed, or frivolous curiosity (...) Instead, [her] action in the garden can be interpreted as an ordeal of initiation resulting in the very first instance of the exercise of free will" (86). In the same vein, the narrator's curiosity about the chamber is different from sexual curiosity, but it is a sign of her free will and motivation that makes her move towards knowledge and truth. And her mother who appears at the very last scene is the character who can remove this 'ordeal' that the narrator has to overcome in order to have a rebirth as a more liberated subject. The narrator may have enough agency to choose her partner, experience sexuality, and design her marriage life, but she still needs a great aid from someone to escape from the oppression of the patriarchy. The strong mother figure in the text is vindicating and saving this yet-to-fully-grown narrator.

One noticeable thing about the mother is she always carries the revolver of her deceased husband in her reticule (Carter 2), which is also used when she kills the Marquis. Some may question why a woman who was physically capable of killing a tiger as an eighteen-year old girl and who has made numerous achievements, such as eradicating pirates, has to carry her *husband's* gun all the time. To reformulate this question, why the mother has to use the weapon once belonged to a patriarch to kill another patriarch instead of using the strong female power, which may have added more feminist aspect to this text. One cannot ascertain the intention of Carter for this setting, but the mother can be interpreted as a figure who has enough capacity to manage the power which used to be her husband's. In other words, the mother figure in this novella is very androgynous as she possesses an aspect as a caring mother, which has been deemed as a representative characteristic of the female sex, and simultaneously, she shows agility when it comes to handling masculine power. She knows how to wield a phallic object once managed by the patriarch of the household. This observation tells that the mother is not a character who 'relies' on the masculine power, but who has a command on the power that have been used to oppress her own kind.

With the aid of mother, the narrator finally gets rescued and lives happily ever after with Jean-Yves. His blindness may also be metaphorically interpreted as the non-existence of the male gaze that objectifies female body and the female sex as a whole. One cannot be sure of whether Jean-Yves is also able to satisfy the narrator's sexual curiosity or bring her great wealth. However, this emotionally comforting character of Jean-Yves symbolizes a new model of masculinity that is not oppressive to women at all. The conclusion of the story is the beginning of the new phase of the narrator's life in the community free from the patriarchal order.

Conclusion

Sheets asserts Carter "has escaped from absolutes" (656) of feminist perspectives. She is neither aiming to normalize pornography in her contemporary society nor merely telling women to avoid any practice that seems to reinforce violence against the female sex. It is possible to say her support of non-normative sex and her support for radical feminists' goal, which is breaking down the patriarchy, coexist in this story. She rejects the views that consider sadomasochism "on the ground of essentialism or psychological determinism" (656). She asserts we should move beyond the discourse on good girls and moral decorum to make sexual liberation for women happen. In a nutshell, she suggests a new direction when it comes to thinking about what is the right sexuality for women. However, as it is possible to see from the mid part of the narrative, she is saying this freed sexual pursuit is yet to happen since the restraint of the patriarchy upon women's curiosity and learning is still solid. Hence, before realizing sexual fantasy, Carter agrees to dismantle the ground on which the patriarchy is standing. Angela Carter, who has combined these two different feminist perspectives,

she is no longer standing on the boundary between the second wave and the third wave feminism, but she has discovered the most radical ground for everyone longing for the women's liberation to stand.

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