

**READING WOMEN'S LITERATURE THROUGH
BAKHTINIAN LENSES: CARNIVAL IN *THE PASSION*
(1987) BY JEANETTE WINTERSON AND *THE BLOODY
CHAMBER* (1979) BY ANGELA CARTER**

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Gender Studies.*

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Budapest, Hungary

2011

ABSTRACT

Primary goal of the following dissertation will be to attempt to demonstrate how Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of carnival and dialogism, as powerful ways of subverting existing hierarchies and questioning the prevailing oppressive order, can be applied as a useful analytical framework for women's literature. The discussion will be focused on the investigation of works of two prominent British novelists, i.e., Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) as well as Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987). The subject may be worth examining as concepts of carnival and dialogism put emphasis on enabling dialogue and plurality of voices, thus being often considered a tool of liberation and subversion for the variety of subordinate figures. Thus they have been often appropriated and critically discussed by feminist critics. I believe, it may be useful to explore how those two concepts can be found relevant for the study of women's fiction, taking as an example two feminist magical realist texts.

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INTRODUCTION

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of *carnival* and *dialogism*, articulated by Russian scholar during the period of Stalin's rule and further repressed by the authorities, are primarily concerned with the exposure of neglected, suppressed voices and challenging the prevailing order. Thus they became to be perceived as powerful antihegemonic and emancipatory tools for those oppressed by the Soviet regime. Later on, along with their international recognition, Bakhtinian notions have come to be examined as powerful instruments of subversion for those placed at the bottom of social hierarchies. Feminist critics have often made use of them to mock prevailing gender-based divisions as well as to put into question the dominant patriarchal order. I think it may be worth scrutinizing how Bakhtin's groundbreaking theories can be applied to the discussion of women's fiction, a great deal of which is preoccupied with offering alternative visions of world, where woman's voice is no longer neglected and marginalized.

In the following dissertation I am going to present the results of my library-based research and attempt to demonstrate that Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of carnival and dialogism, as powerful instruments of challenging the existing boundaries, can constitute an analytical framework for women's literature, taking as an example works of two prominent British novelists, i.e., Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) as well as Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987).

Jeanette Winterson (1959) was born and raised in the English town Accrington. She obtained a degree in English at Oxford University. As far as her professional career is concerned, her most prominent works, apart from *The Passion*, include *Oranges Are*

Not the Only Fruit (1985), often considered as the semi-autobiographical text which presents the story of a girl who is raised in a small town and becomes subject to exorcisms by members of her religious community after they discover she is a lesbian, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) or *Written on the Body* (1992)¹.

Angela Carter (1940-1992) was born in Eastbourne and, in her teenage years, moved with her mother to Yorkshire. She got a degree in English literature at the University of Bristol. Apart from writing fiction, she also worked as a journalist and wrote articles for many newspapers, including *The Independent* and *The Guardian*. She is an author of many recognized novels, such as *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984), which was awarded James Tait Black Memorial Prize in a year of its publication².

I resolved to investigate *The Passion* and *The Bloody Chamber* in this dissertation as they both belong to the genre of magical realism, which, as Lois Zamora asserts, can be viewed as highly subversive in its encouragement of “resistance to monologic political and cultural structures” (1995:6). Thus, as I am going to illustrate in my analysis of the books, it shares many features emblematic of Bakhtinian theories of carnival and dialogism. The genre of magical realism also aims at transgressing normative oppositions between “real and imaginary, self and other, male and female” and seeks to replace them with “alternative structures to destabilize and/or displace them (ibid.).

The following dissertation consists of three chapters.

¹ <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com>> Retrieved on 22.05.2011.

² <<http://www.angelacartersite.co.uk/>> Retrieved on 02.06.2011.

The first chapter is going to provide a brief theoretical background concerning Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism. Its another goal will be to discuss literature which illustrates how his ideas have been reexamined by feminist scholars.

The second chapter is going to scrutinize how Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism can be found relevant to an analysis of Winterson's *The Passion*. Thus, its primary focus will be placed on investigating several components of the book, i.e., its narrative structure and representation of history enabling plurality of voices of marginalized figures, as well as construction of its pivotal characters revealing fluidity of identities and instability of social hierarchies.

The third chapter is going to attempt at applying Bakhtinian framework to the study of four selected retellings of fairy tales from Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, i.e., the opening story "The Bloody Chamber", "The Tiger's Bride", "The Erl-King", and "The Company of Wolves". The first goal of this chapter will be to offer an insight into the history of fairy tale, as the genre with a subversive potential, and its appropriations by feminist writers. Next, its emphasis will be on demonstrating how construction of narration seeks to expose female voice in the chosen stories. Finally, it is going to illustrate how subversion of the characters' gender roles in the rewritten tales puts into question binary oppositions between men and women, thus successfully challenging the dominant social order.

CHAPTER 1: BAKHTINIAN CARNIVAL AND DIALOGISM. CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS

As already mentioned in an introductory part of the discussion, major aim of this dissertation will be to examine how Winterson's *The Passion* and Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* can be explored using the concepts of carnival and dialogism, as developed by Russian literary theorist, critic, philosopher and linguist, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), and further critically examined by feminist theorists.³ The primary goal of the following chapter, preceding an analysis of the books in focus, will be to provide a concise outline of theoretical foundations of Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism. Its further emphasis will be placed on demonstrating the ways in which Bakhtin's theories have been appropriated by feminist scholarship.

In regards with Bakhtinian concept of carnival, the scholar has raised this issue in the two of his salient works, i.e., *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1929) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Bakhtin traces the idea of *carnival* back to the period of the Middle Ages, and more precisely he links his concept with The Feast of Fools, organized in medieval times by members of the clergy, which can be interpreted as a revolution in which the power was temporarily taken by those of a subordinate rank, and during which life was "subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom" (1965: 195). John Fiske suggests that carnival culture is created by "various formations of subordinated and disempowered people, (. . .) in relationship to structures of dominance" (1989: 2). In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin comments upon the carnivals of the Middle Ages and contrasts them with official ceremonies:

³ <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/49580/Mikhail-Bakhtin>>. Retrieved on 20.05.2011.

All these forms of rituals were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, non-official, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom (1965: 197).

Carnival, Bakhtin suggests, seeks to challenge and transgress existing power relations.

The scholar explains that this temporary reversal of existing hierarchies which took place during carnival:

(...) created a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times (1965: 200).

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin discusses “the life of the carnival square” which is “free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything” and contrasts it with so called “official life” which he depicts as “monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence and piety” (1984: 129-30). During carnival, the world is deprived of its hierarchy, it is put upside down. Official rules and universal truths are no longer valid and are contested and overthrown by usually suppressed, unheard, alternative voices. Bakhtin argues that:

Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed (1965: 199).

Carnival is connected with freedom and can be considered a very powerful strategy helping to subvert the existing hegemonic structures, dominant power relations and

hierarchies. Carnival world is not complete and finished, it is dynamic, thus creating space for freedom and change. Stam elaborates on the transgressive and subversive role of carnival:

The carnivalesque suggests a demystifying instrument for everything in the social order which renders such collectivity difficult of access: class hierarchy, political manipulation, sexual repression, dogmatism and paranoia. Carnival in this sense implies an attitude of creative disrespect, a radical opposition to the illegitimately powerful, to the morose and the monological (1982: 19).

Stallybrass and White observe that carnival may be perceived as a site of resistance and political struggle:

For long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable, politically transformative effects, but given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as a catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle (1986: 14).

Stuart Hall argues that Bakhtin's category of carnival, through its subversion of the dominant order, enables an access to the sphere of the popular, "the below, the underworld, and the march of the uncrowned gods" (1996: 291). Carnival is "a theatre where we play with identifications of ourselves (. . .) and is not constructed with single binaries" (Hall 1996: 477). Frank Farmer supports Hall's argument stating that:

Carnival places an enormous faith in popular forms of resistance, in the ability of the 'lowly' to travesty the high monologism of all things official, authoritative and sacrosanct (. . .) without patronizing or dismissing 'the low' and its potential for insurgent laughter (1998: 194).

Hall maintains that carnival cannot be read just in terms of the reversal of the binary marking the boundary between "the low" and "the high" because it aims at questioning those fixed binaries and seeks to produce new links and relationships which might have a

deep transformative potential (Hall 1996:291). He observes that a huge success of Bakhtin's theory is that in his concept of carnival:

The low invades the high, blurring the hierarchical imposition of order; creating impure and hybrid forms of the 'grotesque'; revealing the inextricably mixed and ambivalent nature of all cultural life (1996: 292).

Fiske elaborates on the capacity of the category of carnival to produce long-lasting transformative effects. He observes that carnival change:

(. . .) is an ongoing process, aimed at maintaining or increasing the bottom-up power of the people within the system. It results in the softening of the harsh extremities of power, it produces small gains for the weak, it maintains their esteem and identity. It is progressive, but not radical (1998: 198).

What is more, carnival's pronounced feature is the frequent use of grotesque. Carnival is vigorous as well as parodic and ironic in tone. It can be contrasted with the gloomy, serious, official side of the world (1929: 129). It places emphasis on deviations from proportions and celebrates the body. Shepherd observes that elements, such as grotesque, material aspect of the world, the carnal desires and pleasures are strongly pronounced during the carnival (1993: 72-75). According to Russo, the element of grotesque "turns inward and makes the familiar become the alien and the uncanny" (1994: 33). Bakhtin explains that the category of grotesque is an indispensable feature of carnival as thanks to it:

All that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life, and recognized by all suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile. Our own world becomes an alien world. Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure (1965: 38- 39).

The role of laughter in carnival needs to be emphasized. Bakhtin suggests that carnival can be perceived as "the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter"

and defines it as “a festive life; second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (1965: 198-199). Carnival is pervaded by pure laughter which possesses reviving force. According to Bakhtin, laughter of the carnival “is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding; it asserts and denies, it buries and revives” (1965: 200), as well as it “may be directed toward a higher order – toward change of authorities and truths, toward change of world orders” (1965: 104). It has to be underlined that Bakhtinian concept of the carnival laughter has been often referred to in feminist scholarship. Toril Moi, in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (2002), comments upon the importance of transgressive qualities of the carnival laughter for feminist movement:

Anger is not the only revolutionary attitude available to us. The power of laughter can be just as subversive, as when carnival turns the old hierarchies upside-down, erasing old differences, producing new and unstable ones (2002:40).

Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex which is Not One* (1985) is also worth mentioning here as, although it does not make direct references to Bakhtinian carnival, it certainly conveys similar ideas concerning the subversive power of laughter for marginalized figures, with its primary emphasis put on women. Irigaray suggests that laughter should be considered a powerful tool for women as it has the capacity to express desire and pleasure and, thus, challenge the prevailing “socio-symbolic order” (1977:163). The scholar elaborates on its transgressive qualities:

Isn’t the phallic tantamount to the seriousness of meaning? Perhaps woman (. . .) transcends it “first” in laughter? To escape from a pure and simple reversal of the masculine position means in any case not to forget to laugh. Not to forget that the dimension of desire, of pleasure, is untranslatable, irrecoverable, in the “seriousness” – the adequacy, the univocity, the truth (. . .) of a discourse that claims to state its meaning (1985:163).

Moreover, what has been often appropriated to the feminist theory is concerned with Bakhtin's claim that the category of carnival is linked to *the lower culture*. It has to be made clear here that the division into *the higher* and *the lower culture* has been undermined with the coming of postmodern theory. One of the prominent scholars who challenged the binary opposition between low and high culture is Raymond Williams who perceives culture as ordinary (1961:11). He argues that the division into "the high" and "the low" functions as an instrument for maintaining the hierarchies between the higher position classes, as distinguished from the low and mass population. According to Williams, "everyone, in the course of making sense of the world and becoming a person, is an active producer of meanings, a creative interpreter" (1961:11). However, as the boundary drawn between *the higher* and *the lower culture* is still clearly pronounced and maintained in stereotypes underpinning the dominant, patriarchal discourses, Bakhtinian connection of carnival to *the lower culture* has been often discussed in feminist scholarship.

According to Strinati, *the higher culture* evokes strong associations with "masculinity production, work, intellect, activity, writing", whereas *the lower culture* is most often linked to "femininity, consumption, leisure, emotion, passivity, reading" (1991: 191). As Bakhtin perceives carnival as a highly subversive, anti-hegemonic tool for the marginalized figures, feminist scholarship has often considered this category as advantageous and empowering for women. According to Bauer and McKinstry, carnival becomes "a period of transposed reality, in which official rules concerning the definition of womanhood are forced into suspension and interrogation" and speaks of "transgressions that are liberatory and joyous" (1991:149). This is the time when women

“learn to transgress the strict rules society sets for their behavior and to survive by using difference to their advantage” (ibid.). They gain the opportunity to demonstrate an arbitrary nature of power relations and successfully challenge validity of the clearly delineated boundaries established by society. The scholars note that:

Bakhtin’s notions about the freeing and empowering forces within a united community of the underclass during a period when official rules are unstable do allow for models which oppose bourgeois individualism (ibid.).

On the other hand, it has to be observed briefly that feminist scholars have been also apprehensive about transgressive and empowering qualities of carnival, stating that carnival may function merely as an “outlet” for the marginalized, subordinate figures which “prevents any real insurrection”, and which might be a space created by “institutional authority, as an event staged to allow feminists to drown out their own voices and thereby return to silence” (Bauer and McKinstry 1991:20). Judith Mayne warns against “enthusiastic celebration of carnival, which obscures the extent to which it may exist as a safety valve, as a controlled eruption that guarantees the maintenance of the existing order” (1989: 40).

What is more, Bakhtin’s emphasis on the body and grotesque, and especially his focus on the grotesque body as a prominent feature of the carnival world, has been applied by feminist scholars, too. Mary Russo views the category of the grotesque body as a site of resistance and struggle against the patriarchal, oppressive order and claims that it “might be used affirmatively to destabilize the idealization of female beauty or to realign the mechanism of desire” (1994: 65). She defines the grotesque body as “the body of becoming, process, and change”, and opposes it to the classical body, which can be marked as “monumental, static, closed, and sleek” (ibid.). It has to be added briefly that,

as will be further demonstrated in analytical chapters of this dissertation, the emphasis on the body pronounced in carnival can be also linked to *écriture féminine*, i.e., the concept of women's writing. It has been developed by Helene Cixous and calls for the creation of a type of writing which will be aimed at empowering women through exposing their female difference⁴. Cixous asserts that, unlike masculine body "gravitating around the penis", woman's body is (1993: 311):

body without end, without appendage, without principal "parts." (...) It's a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized around any one sun that's any more of a star than the others (ibid).

Cixous claims that as woman's body is the body without end, it may create space for renewal. Female sexuality may "serve the cultural project of disrupting the political economy of the sign as it is produced in dominant discourse" (Russo 1994: 67). Cixous suggests, women "should write through their bodies and invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes" (Cixous 1993: 315). Cixous's notion of woman's body bears resemblance to Bakhtinian concept of grotesque body, which is in the constant process of becoming and brings change.

As regards Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of *dialogism*, I think it can be argued that it is possible to link it to the concept of carnival as it is also concerned with "the exploration and activating of the unvoiced exiled world" (Bauer, McKinstry 1991: 215). According to Bakhtin, dialogism aims at expressing the plurality of voices as "discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary of its own context and another, alien, context" (1965:284). It depends on the context and recognizes that "people's responses are conditional, human

⁴ <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/219228/French-literature/247811/Feminist-writers?anchor=ref848707>> Retrieved on 05.05.2011.

circumstances are irreducible and contingent” (Bauer and McKinstry 1991:2). Hall and du Gay draw on Bakhtinian concept of dialogism as a theoretical foundation when discussing the ways in which ‘difference’ is represented in culture nowadays. He explains that, according to Bakhtin, dialogism is about meaning which “arises through ‘the difference’ between the participants in any dialogue” and “the Other is essential to this meaning” (1997: 235-236). Thus, dialogic language proposed by Bakhtin may be used to challenge the authoritative and monological language prevalent in the discourses of the dominant order and to expose differences “through which identities are constructed” (Hall 1997:4).

Concept of dialogism has been found relevant for feminist scholarship as it aims at recognizing multiplicity of voices and places emphasis on exposing perspectives of marginalized, oppressed and unheard figures, thus challenging the monological language of the hegemonic order. Therefore, it might create space for activism and become a tool for change (Bauer and McKinstry 1991:2) Pearce observes that dialogism aims at enabling communication, which, in the long run, may have a deep transformative potential for women. She explains that:

For Bakhtin, all thought became a matter of ‘dialogue’ and ‘difference’: dialogue requires the pre-existence of differences, which are then connected by an act of communication to generate new ideas and positions (2006: 226).

According to Bauer and McKinstry, “like Bakhtin’s theories, theories of feminine language describe a multivoiced or polyphonic resistance to hierarchies and laughter at authority” (1991:8). They observe that Bakhtinian theories:

(. . .) provide a critical language that allows us to pinpoint and foreground the moments when the patriarchal work and the persuasive resistance to it come into conflict. By highlighting these contradictions, a feminist

dialogics produces occasions for the disruption and critique of dominant and oppressive ideologies (1991:3).

This chapter has aimed at providing theoretical background concerning Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism, which will be used to set the framework for an analysis of Winterson's and Carter's works in my thesis. Its goal has been also to discuss literature in which those two concepts are critically used and reexamined through feminist lenses.

CHAPTER 2: REVISITING IDENTITY AND HISTORY IN A LESBIAN NARRATIVE: CARNIVAL IN *THE PASSION* (1987) BY JEANETTE WINTERSON

The primary objective of this discussion will be to examine Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987) with its major focus on an attempt to answer the question how Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of carnival and dialogism, theoretical foundations of which have been presented in the previous chapter, can constitute a useful framework for the analysis of Winterson's work. In the following chapter I am going to illustrate that *The Passion* can be looked at through Bakhtinian lenses and, in order to demonstrate it, my primary goal will be to explore its several facets, i.e., delineation of central characters, construction of narration as well as an approach to history adopted in the text. However, before applying Bakhtin's theories to the discussion of *The Passion*, it is necessary to offer a brief summary of Winterson's book.

The Passion, Winterson's one of the most recognized and highly acclaimed books, labeled by critics as 'a lesbian narrative', was published in 1987 (Palmer 1998: 113). It consists of four sections. First one, i.e., *The Emperor*, is set in the French port of the city of Boulogne, at the beginning of Napoleonic Wars. The story here is narrated by one of the pivotal characters, Henri, who becomes a cook in Napoleon's army, and it is devoted to the depiction of his immense passion about Bonaparte. Second section, i.e., *The Queen of Spades*, is set in Venice and narrated by second of the central characters, Villanelle, who is a gambler working in casino. The events here revolve around Villanelle's infatuation and erotic affair with a married, older woman, to whom she refers to as 'The Queen of Spades'. Penultimate section, i.e., *The Zero Winter*, is set in Russia

near the end of Napoleonic Wars. Encounter between Villanelle, and Henri takes place in this part of the book. Both characters create a very intense relationship and resolve to escape from Napoleon's army and go from Russia to Venice on foot. Henri falls in passionate love with Villanelle, while she considers him a brother with whom she shares an incestuous relationship. Finally, last section, i.e., *The Rock*, is set in Venice after the war comes to an end. Villanelle's husband is killed there and it is Henri who takes responsibility for this action. He is kept in a lunatic asylum from now on. He ends up being well aware of but also totally unable to handle his passion for Napoleon and Villanelle.

I claim it is possible to argue that that the world of *The Passion* can be analyzed in terms of Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism as it is the world in which the central characters' conventional roles become bent, reversed and put upside down, thus pushing and subverting the existing gender-associated boundaries and hierarchies. The ways in which identity and history are approached in the novel, along with the construction of its narration substantially contribute to the subversion of these roles, enabling the voices of usually marginalized, subordinate figures to come under the spotlight and question the hegemonic social order. The following chapter is going to look at several facets of the book, i.e., its specific narration, construction of its key characters, with the primary focus put on exploring the issues of identity and gender representations in the text, as well its approach to history.

Having examined *The Passion*'s narration, I think it can be asserted that a way it is constructed can be looked at through Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism as its structure enables presentation of the multitude of perspectives and points of view in

the novel. Construction of narration in Winterson's work, just like carnival world, serves the purpose of subverting existing hierarchies as well as exposing neglected and marginalized voices of female figures, thus becoming a powerful transgressive and liberatory tool for them.

The first section of the novel is first-person narrative of Henry, whereas the second one is narrated by Villanelle. From the third section their voices mix as well as switch with each other. It is crucial that although both narratives take place within the same time framework, they often refer to and focus on different events, thus, as it is going to be illustrated below, offering the horizon of additional interpretative meanings to the book. Villanelle's narrative dealing mostly with her lesbian affair with a married woman, accompanied by numerous passages devoted to detailed descriptions of the physical aspect of their relationship, engages her character in the dialogue with Henri's narrative. *The Passion* can be looked at through the framework of carnival and dialogism as it draws attention to the exposure woman's voice, marginalized in hegemonic patriarchal discourses, thus successfully challenging the oppressive social order. Paulina Palmer observes that Villanelle's appearance in *The Passion* substantially contributes to the decrease in Henri's agency in the story and explains that although Henri, through falling in love with Villanelle, makes an attempt to place her in the conventional role of "object of desire", she successfully resists this objectification (1998:105) Even though she shares a sexual relationship with Henri, she portrays herself as "the lover of 'The Queen of Spades', thereby successfully repositioning herself in the narrative in the role of active agent" (ibid.).

Additional point which, in my opinion, is relevant to the subject under discussion and is going to be further developed in the next part of this chapter is that that Villanelle's narrative concerned with her passion for another woman and her body exposes her female difference, which has strengthening impact on Villanelle's position in the novel and helps her to call into question prevailing social hierarchies, as it is done in the world of carnival (ibid.). It may be useful to mention briefly that the emphasis on female body and bodily pleasure as a tool of empowerment for women is also a crucial feature emblematic of *écriture féminine*, coined by French feminist writer, Hélène Cixous, and referring to "a kind of writing that emblemizes feminine difference"⁵. In her salient work *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), Cixous calls for a new type of writing which may "give woman back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories that have been kept under seal" (1993: 338). According to Lucy Burke and Tony Crowley, *écriture féminine* "involves a return to the pleasures of the female body and the realization of a female centered sexuality" (2000:180).

What Villanelle's lesbian narrative in the story does is revisiting erotic love and "defying the culture of shame and subordination that surrounds female sexuality", through the emphasis it places on the celebration of women's pleasure (Richardson 2007:18). In my view, through exposing her female difference, the figure of Villanelle becomes empowered and highlighted in the story, which again contributes to the carnival-like subversion of prevailing hierarchies as well as functions as the instrument for female liberation and rebellion against gender inequalities and oppression. In addition, presence of the fantastic elements in the book, such as Villanelle's webbed feet,

⁵ <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/219228/French-literature/247811/Feminist-writers?anchor=ref848707>> Retrieved on 22.12.2010.

her heart literally being torn out of her body and beating on its own as a consequence of the character's fatal infatuation with another woman or Venice, inhabited by Villanelle and presented in *The Passion* as "the city of disguises" or "the city of mazes" are also meant to emphasize female difference here (Winterson 1987: 150).

Furthermore, the world of *The Passion*, like the Bakhtinian "life of the carnival square" already discussed in the previous chapter, is the world of performance which questions the idea of stable, static roles and identities (1984:129). What *The Passion* focuses on is exposing how identities are fluid with its emphasis placed on demonstrating how gender is a construct rather than a stable and fixed category. When pondering about identity, it might be relevant to go back to Stuart Hall who makes a claim that "identities are never unified (...), are increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular" and opposes his idea to traditional approaches which view identities as "seamless" and characterized by "an all-inclusive sameness, without internal differentiation" (1997: 4). *The Passion* destabilizes the traditional, essentializing accounts of identity through the way in which its two central characters, i.e., Villanelle and Henri are delineated. What Winterson's text does is the subversion of its two major figures' gender roles. As it is going to be demonstrated below, Henri possesses numerous traits usually perceived as those characterizing women, whereas Villanelle, while, to a certain degree, shaped in a way which exposes her female difference, is attributed with certain features typically associated with men. It may be useful here to refer briefly to Cixous who, when discussing the multiplicity of gender identities, asserts that:

(. . .) there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. (. . .)
But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual
constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform,

homogeneous, classifiable into codes -- any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another (1993: 334).

It can be observed that two pivotal characters of *The Passion* are drawn in a way which displays flexibility and fluidity of gender, challenges the binary opposition masculine/feminine and works against the rigid boundary placed between males and females, which, in my opinion, successfully helps to bring both figures to an equal level in the story.

It may be useful to indicate briefly that because the world of *The Passion* is the world of constant performance, I think it can be argued that it can be looked at through the lenses of queer theory, as it also, like carnival world, constantly aims at pushing the existing boundaries and subverting the dominant social order. Taylor states that queer theory:

critiques metanarratives, undermines sexual categorization based upon a heterosexual-homosexual divide, and points towards the increasingly multiple, shifting and fragmented sexual identifications currently in existence. It brings into play politics able to respond to such changes in lifestyles and identities, and champions an 'outness' or clarity about sexual identity in academic, personal and political terrains (2009:199).

As it is going to be demonstrated below, what Winterson proposes in her text is in line with Judith Butler's theory of performativity of gender and her original/copy argument, rejecting the existence of original, fixed sexual identities. Butler's theory of performativity implies that there is no original gender as "gender is always an imitation for which no original exists" and "there are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality" (Butler 1993:313-315). Gender can be viewed as a repeated and constant imitation which is done in order to produce the notion of the original, to establish one's sexual identity as the

original one. Butler's original/copy argument implies that the sexual identity can be viewed as the matter of performance. The scholar claims that:

if a regime of sexuality mandates a compulsory performance of sex, then it may be only through that performance that the binary system of gender and the binary system of sex come to have intelligibility at all. It may be that the very categories of sex, of sexual identity, of gender are produced or maintained in the effects of this compulsory performance (2002:134-135).

As far as the pivotal characters of Winterson's novel are concerned, it has to be noticed that Henri, throughout the book, is portrayed as endowed with conventionally female-attributed traits. He is confined to the private, conventionally female-associated, sphere of the kitchen. He works as Napoleon's cook, although he joins Bonaparte's army with an aim of becoming a drummer. However, his wishes remain unfulfilled as he lacks physical strength which is required from those who intend to play the drums. (Winterson 1987:5). Thus, Henri often becomes the subject of ironic jokes for others serving in Bonaparte's army referring to him as "a young man brought up by a priest and a pious mother. A young man who can't pick up a musket to shoot the rabbit" (1987: 28). Moreover, Henri is portrayed in the book as very sensitive and willing to openly talk about his emotions. It is him who, in the end, falls victim to his passion for Villanelle and Bonaparte, which brings him to a lunatic asylum. He is overcome with the feeling of nostalgia straight after he joins the army and misses his mother. He confesses:

I was homesick from the start. I missed my mother. I missed the hill where the sun slants across the valley. I missed all the everyday things I hated (Winterson 1987: 6).

Henri is also endowed with a well-developed sense of sensitivity and empathy. He often, especially near the end of the book when he fully realizes the senselessness and atrocity of Napoleonic Wars, states he cannot consider himself a good soldier confessing that:

I was a bad soldier because I cared too much about what happened next. (. . .) My mind ran before me with pictures of dead fields and all that had taken years to make, lost in a day or so (Winterson 1987: 123).

As Paulina Palmer claims, Henri's attachment to his mother develops in him a sense of sympathy with women's oppression during the times of war when they tend to be "dehumanized" and "the suffering endured by them becomes neglected and ignored by other men" (1998: 104). He states:

We never think of them here. We think of their bodies and now and then we talk about home but we don't think of them as they are; the most solid, the best loved, the well known. (Winterson 1987: 27)

Henri is also the only one who expresses deep concern with a way in which women in the brothel are being humiliated, objectified and harassed by other soldiers as well as is truly sympathetic towards them. When a woman in the brothel gets slapped by one of his fellow soldiers, Henri "wants to go to him and ram his face in the blanket until he has no breath left" (1987: 14-15).

Unlike Henry who spends most of his time working in the kitchen, Villanelle is mostly presented in the public space throughout the book. She works in the casino as well as enjoys passing her free time wandering through the alleys of the city of Venice. She "walks the streets, rows circles around Venice, wakes up in the middle of the night with her covers in impossible knots and her muscles rigid" (1987: 62). Villanelle's figure clearly reveals how identity is a fluid, arbitrary, unstable category, just like it takes place

in carnival. She possesses very unique bodily features, namely she is born with webbed feet which are considered an attribute associated exclusively with male inhabitants of Venice and, thus, she queers fixed male/female boundaries. She says: “My feet were webbed. There never was a girl whose feet were webbed in the entire history of the boatmen” (1985: 51). Similarly to an enormous body of Dog-Woman in Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), the subject of Elizabeth Langland’s “Sexing the Text: Narrative Drag as Feminist Poetics and Politics in Jeanette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry*” (1997), Villanelle’s webbed feet serve to underline the fluidity of gender and destabilize heteronormative assumptions about masculinity/femininity. In *The Passion*, like in *Sexing the Cherry*, “self and other, masculine and feminine (. . .) are envisioned not as alternatives but as simultaneous and coexisting” (Langland 1997:106). Villanelle’s bizarre body equipped with webbed feet, which are attributed to males, never females inhabiting the city of Venice, crosses certain boundaries valid in the higher world. (Palmer 1998: 110) By displaying her unusual body which destabilizes the binary opposition masculine/feminine, Villanelle, in my view, successfully rebels against the patriarchal order which placed her in the lower position, as compared to men. Her figure is delineated in a way which “subverts the conventional depiction of woman as wife, mistress and mother, and rejects normalizing images of womanhood” (Palmer 1998:81). Villanelle’s grotesque body, another feature characterizing Bakhtinian carnival, with its “aquatic associations relates her to the motif of the mermaid, an ambiguous image of woman as beautiful seductress/ unnatural monster” which in art often comes to represent “the threat posed by female independence and lesbian sexuality associated with ‘the new

woman” (Palmer 1998: 110). Her bizarre bodily features “carry the connotations of social transgression and carnivalesque misrule” (Palmer 1998:81).

Moreover, Villanelle wears male clothes for most of the time, especially at the times when she works at the casino. However, she sometimes chooses to dress in a very feminine way. She reveals: “I took to working double shifts at the Casino, dressing as a woman in the afternoon and a young man in the evenings” (1987: 62). Her cross-dressing is also meant to expose the fluidity of identities to the extent carnival does. It is also in line with Butler’s argument put forward in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2002), where she claims that the acts performed by a drag or a cross-dresser “bring into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original” and aim at parodying the idea of existence of original gender (2002:41).

What is also crucial, Villanelle is very explicit when talking about her sexual life with both men and women. She says: “I am pragmatic about love and have taken my pleasure with both men and women” (Winterson 1987: 59-60). Through her intense, physical relationship with a married woman, whom Villanelle calls ‘Queen of Spades’ and, it has to be emphasized, which takes place during the period of Carnival in Venice, she again succeeds in putting into question heteronormative ways of looking at what is supposed to be masculine and feminine, thus gaining carnival-like liberation from the oppression of rigid social hierarchies. The female protagonist in the story brings the subversion of gender-based assumptions as she is portrayed as well aware of her sexual desires and willing to openly depict erotic pleasures she derives from affair with another woman, as it is illustrated below:

She lay on the rug and I lay at right angles to her so that only our lips might meet. Kissing in this way is the strangest of distractions. The greedy

body that clamours for satisfaction is forced to content itself with a single sensation and, just as the blind hear more acutely and the deaf can feel the grass grow, so the mouth becomes the focus of love and all things pass through it and are re-defined. It is a sweet and precise torture (Winterson 1987: 67).

According to Palmer, emphasis on the bodily pleasures, carnal desires and “the transgressive sexual pleasures associated with carnivalesque festivity”, conveyed through lengthy descriptions of erotic acts between Villanelle and her female lover are other prominent features emblematic for Bakhtinian carnival (1998:83). *The Passion* can be investigated using the concepts of carnival and dialogism as it, through the depiction of Villanelle’s erotic affair, exposes marginalized and unheard lesbian voice as well as “signifies her sexual difference” instead of (1998:110):

normalizing the image of the lesbian and highlighting the features which she shares with women in general, Winterson foregrounds lesbian difference and invents strategies of representation to express it (1998:110).

Finally, a way in which history is approached in Winterson’s novel can be also explored through the lenses of carnival and dialogism as it rejects monological language of the dominant historical discourses and seeks to enable the multiplicity of voices, especially of those raised by normally marginalized, subordinate figures.

Before proceeding to examining the approach to history presented in *The Passion*, it is worth noting briefly that *The Passion* can be considered a piece of historiographic metafiction, term coined by Linda Hutcheon who defines it as a type of fiction which:

is overtly and resolutely historical though, admittedly, in an ironic and problematic way which acknowledges that history is not the transparent record of any sure “truth” (1989:10).

The genre of historiographic metafiction approaches history as a discourse which “like fiction, constructs its object” (Hutcheon 1989:78). It rejects conventional accounts which claim the existence of objective history and historical facts as well as aims at exposing the multitude of subjective voices and perspectives. According to Hutcheon, what historiographic metafiction does is presenting “fictionalized history with a parodic twist” (1989:53). She explains that its major achievement is that:

we now get the histories of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, (. . .) of women as well as men (1989:66).

It also has to be added that the approach to history offered in *The Passion* is in line with many of the ideas of New Historicism, whose proponents support the view of history as dialogic and seeking to enable the expression of multiple perspectives and points of view. Newton claims that “history is a tale of many voices and forms of power, of power exercised by the weak and the marginal as well as by the dominant and strong” (1988: 88-89). The scholar suggests that history is “best told as the story of power relations and struggle, a story that is contradictory, heterogeneous, fragmented” (ibid.). As Newton shows, arguing for the creation of so called feminist new historicism, it is necessary to take into account women’s voices, thus “regrounding gender issues and women’s agency” (ibid.).

I think it can be argued that the key ideas prevalent in the school of New Historicism as well as emblematic of historiographic metafiction are closely related to Bakhtinian theories as their attempt is to present the multiple voices and perspectives held by various figures, with special emphasis placed on those marginalized in the

dominant social order, which brings carnival-like suspension from prevailing hierarchies, constantly reproduced in official historical discourses.

Indeed, what seems to transpire from *The Passion* is the vision of history as a construct, a fiction, which is repeatedly emphasized by two major characters of the book through a frequent use of the phrase: “I’m telling you stories. Trust me”, which, in my view, can be regarded as one of the key sentences of *The Passion* (Winterson 1987). According to Palmer, it “problematizes historical objectivity and ‘truth’, and by an emphasis on the partisan and provisional nature of all accounts of the past” (1998: 108). Winterson herself does not encourage a reader to approach *The Passion* as a historical novel per se. In one of the interviews she states that the text:

manipulates history. The past is not sacred. The past is not static. There are a few facts we can rely on – dates, places, people, but the rest is interpretation and imagination. I like that freedom. I liked the idea of setting an intensely personal story against a brutal impersonal background⁶.

When discussing the notion of history as a construct presented in the book, it might be relevant to shortly refer to Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, a prominent queer thinker and scholar, and her concept of *reparative reading*. Briefly speaking, Sedgwick’s idea is that one’s ability to establish a new way of life through the acceptance of both positive and negative surprises, “to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*”, may have a relieving, one may argue, ‘cathartic’ force and can be considered a fundamental step on one’s way to achieving self-reparation (2003:146). Sedgwick’s article also makes reference to S. Freud’s understanding of paranoia as related to “the repression of same-

⁶ <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/content/index.asp?PageID=18>>Retrieved on 22.12.2010

sex desire” and compellingly suggests that it may help to deconstruct the mechanisms behind homophobia and heterosexism and “if one understands these oppressions to be systemic, how the world works” (Sedgwick 2003:126). I think it is possible to claim that carnival world portrayed in *The Passion* can be viewed as the reparative one, not paranoid one, as its treatment of history as a discourse, not a source of ultimate truth, brings its focus to the present, to the moment, not to the paranoid thinking about oppressive past, which may have a relieving, liberating, strengthening impact on its central female character, Villanelle.

Furthermore, history in *The Passion* is rewritten, with the period of Napoleonic Wars being told from the subjective perspectives of those who are among the victims of the Napoleonic Wars, i.e., Villanelle and Henri. It can be argued that *The Passion* can be studied through Bakhtinian framework as it offers the multiple stories of neglected, ignored figures who, unlike Napoleon Bonaparte, are usually perceived as of no value from the historical point of view. As far as depiction of Napoleon himself is concerned, his figure in Winterson’s book is rendered in a very ironic and sarcastic tone, characteristic of carnival culture, with an aim to undermine Bonaparte’s great authority, attributed to him in prevalent historical discourses. To give one example, Napoleon in *The Passion* is portrayed here not as the great indefatigable hero but, instead as a “short, pale, moody” man driven by a mad passion for chicken (Winterson 1987: 13).

What is more, the importance of Henri’s diary, as an alternative, personalized insight into historical events, has to be emphasized here. So as not to let his war memories vanish into thin air, he resolves to write everything down “so that in later life when he was prone to sit by the fire and look back, he’d have something clear and sure to

set against his memory tricks” (Winterson 1987: 28). It can be deduced that Henri’s diary does not place its focus on relating prominent events or battles which took place during Napoleonic Wars but it is far more concerned with depicting everyday lives and stories of people in his surroundings, including ordinary, low-rank soldiers or army prostitutes, whose voices, just like his or Villanelle’s, would be marginalized and excluded the conventional accounts of history (Winterson 1987: 13).

The foregoing discussion has attempted at demonstrating that *The Passion* by J. Winterson can be examined through the framework of Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism. I argue that vision of the world offered in Winterson’s book carries many features indicative of carnival world, as depicted by Bakhtin, such as grotesque, emphasis on the body and erotic pleasure as well as the focus on highlighting the voices of subordinate figures, especially females. Carnival character of *The Passion*’s world enables its central female character, Villanelle, to transgress and subvert the existing hierarchies maintained in the hegemonic patriarchal order, thus bringing her liberation.

CHAPTER 3: QUEERING A FAIRY TALE: CARNIVAL IN *THE BLOODY CHAMBER* (1979) BY ANGELA CARTER

The main focus of this discussion will be to explore how Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and dialogism can offer an analytical framework for the investigation of feminist retellings of fairy tales, included in a collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) by Angela Carter. It has to be noted that the volume consists of ten stories and, as the author indicates herself, its creation had been to a great extent influenced by the fairy tales of French bourgeoisie writer Charles Perrault (1628-1703) (1983:69). Carter's interest in Perrault's work first prompted the author to translate his fairy tales, and later on, inspired her to reread and creatively rewrite them using women's lenses. When discussing the idea behind her *Bloody Chamber*, Carter reveals that:

(. . .) Most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode. (1983:69)

The following chapter is going to argue that Bakhtinian theories can be applied to the analysis of Carter's collection, which will be illustrated with four selected rewritings of fairy tales, i.e., "The Bloody Chamber", "The Tiger's Bride", "The Erl-King", as well as "The Company of Wolves". Like in the case of Winterson's *The Passion*, I am going to look here at several components of the stories in focus, such as specific narrative structure and the construction of main characters. However, before conducting an analysis, I am going to briefly trace the history of fairy tale and its appeal to feminist writers, as well as to provide brief summaries of the stories under discussion. As it is going to be proven below, this genre can be viewed to carry a highly subversive and liberatory potential for people from various, what is remarkable, also lower strata of

social hierarchies. I think it is possible to argue that this might have been the crucial reasons behind Carter's urge to make use of fairy tale to challenge the prevailing order and expose the voices of multiple marginalized figures, with primary emphasis put on women.

As regards the genre of fairy tale, Peter O. Arnds notes that it is connected to the carnival culture in that it "implies the traditions of lower social sphere", and argues that certain components of its structure correspond to its emblematic features, such as "the grotesque body" or "the principle of mockery" (2003: 4). According to him, "the fairy tale world and Bakhtin's carnival are inseparable, since they both reflect the world of the subordinate classes, their desires and fears" (ibid.). Susan R. Bobby emphasizes that a fairy tale also makes use of dialogic principle, as discussed by Bakhtin, not only because it enables the exposure of marginalized, unheard voices but also engages in "intertextual dialogue established with various fairy tales" it draws on (2009:15). Jack D. Zipes offers a definition of a fairy tale, based on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. He states that:

The literary fairy tale can be considered an utterance that relies on known existing themes and compositional techniques in oral and literary communication, and the individual form a tale takes is a response to those preexisting tales and perhaps even to anticipated tales. (Zipes 2002: 141)

As far as the rise of a fairy tale is concerned, Zipes remarks that its origin can be traced back to folk tales. The scholar argues that the history of this genre is extremely complex and hard to accurately define. However, he attempts at offering an insight into the circumstances of its emergence stating that fairy tales have been existing as "oral folk tales for thousands of years" and gained their literary form in the seventeenth century (Zipes 2002:2). The author observes that, originally, folk and fairy tales had primarily functioned as artistic means of articulating the voices of 'ordinary' people and as "the

projection of how they wanted to change and transform society” (2002:159). Their “imaginative power” and incorporation of fantastic elements have functioned to create hope for “a real fulfillment of the desires of those who were often underdogs or victims of social injustice” and call into question “authoritarian and patriarchal rule in the family” (Zipes 2002:15). Zipes claims that a huge success of this genre stems from its “ability to harbor unfulfilled wishes in figurative form and project the possibility for the fulfillment” and its emphasis on “subverting the arbitrary use of reason that destroys and confines the capacity of people to move on their own as autonomous makers of history” (2002:157). The scholar underlines that folk and fairy tales’ portrayal of the alternative vision of utopian worlds can be viewed in terms of “enstrangement or separation from a defeating situation which induces a feeling of possible liberation” (2002:157). However, he notes that, along with the rapidly-progressing process of commercialization and development of culture industry, followed by the rise of the flourishing publishing market in Europe during the 16th and the 17th century, folk and fairy tales were taken over by writers representing the higher strata of social ladder, i.e., bourgeoisie and aristocracy. As folk and fairy tales have come to function as the space for articulation of the plurality of voices of subordinate figures, thereby creating the opportunity for challenging the dominant order, higher-rank social groups have repeatedly attempted at undermining their value and “dismiss them as amusing but not to be taken seriously” as well as perceived them as “amoral because they did not subscribe to the virtues of order, discipline, modesty, cleanliness” (ibid.). Zipes observes that members of bourgeoisie and aristocracy felt particularly apprehensive about the space for emancipation and

subversion originally offered by the genre of folk and fairy tales, resulting from their focus on:

(. . .) spreading the word through the fantastic images about the feasibility of utopian alternatives, (. . .) created in rebellion against the manner in which reason had already become instrumentalized to serve the arbitrary interests of authoritarian powers. (2002:105)

As a consequence, Zipes notes, fairy tales became subject to control of the bourgeoisie classes and their liberatory potential was being gradually suppressed by the multitude of regulations imposed by the flourishing culture industry, with its “aesthetic norms, educational standards and market conditions contributing to controlling the imagination of all segments of society, (. . .) which is at the core of the instrumentalization process” (2002:12).

As already mentioned, the following discussion of the carnival and dialogue in *The Bloody Chamber* will be based on four stories, i.e., “The Bloody Chamber”, “The Tiger’s Bride”, “The Company of Wolves” and “The Erl-King” and will mostly deal with delineation of their major characters, seeking to call into question and mock gender-based hierarchies, as well as narration, construction of which aims at foregrounding and empowering heroines of the stories in focus.

“The Bloody Chamber”, the opening and the longest tale of the collection, is the rewriting of the story of Bluebeard by Charles Perrault. Its central protagonist, a young pianist, gets married to a wealthy old gentleman, a Marquis, and resolves to move to his castle. As it turns out, this is the third of the Marquis’s marriages and all of his previous wives abandoned him in secret circumstances. Shortly after their wedding, the Marquis suddenly has to go for a business trip and, before departure, gives the keys to all of the palace’s rooms to his young bride. He allows her to explore all of them except for

the. After the Marquis leaves, the heroine meets and creates friendship with a piano-tuner, Jean-Yves, who, unlike in the traditional story, is blind. Aidan Day explains that “through his blindness, Jean-Yves does not fix and objectify his partner through the masculine gaze” (Day 1998: 150). One day the girl cannot resist her temptation and, one day, decides to enter the forbidden room. This is where she finds the whole set of torture devices and discovers dead bodies of all of her husband’s former wives. Shortly after, the Marquis, who is back from his trip, finds out about the heroine’s journey to the room and intends to kill her. Near the end of the story, when he is about to behead her, the girl’s mother suddenly enters the courtyard of the castle on the horse and shoots the Marquis. From now on, the heroine and piano-tuner form a relationship and stay together ever after.

“The Company of Wolves”, one of the most controversial tales in the collection, is based on the story of the Little Red Riding Hood. A young girl, equipped with a knife, departs on a journey through the forest to her grandmother’s house. On her way she meets a young man. They soon resolve to split and organize the contest to the grandmother’s cottage. When the girl reaches her destination, she encounters the man there, who turns out to be a warewolf. She realizes that her grandmother was killed and devoured by him. Although initially petrified, the girl overcomes her fear of the warewolf and undresses herself in front of him, as well as takes off his disguise later on. They both embrace and the grandmother’s bones start moving, as if in rage, under the bed. The story ends with the girl and the warewolf sleeping peacefully in the grandmother’s bed.

“The Tiger’s Bride”, based on the tale of Beauty and the Beast, depicts the story of a young Russian girl who is lost by her father, a compulsive gambler, in the card game,

and sent to Italy to live in the mansion of enigmatic Milord, The Beast dressing up as a man. Milord promises to the heroine that once she undresses for him, he will give back her freedom as well as fortune, lost by her father in the game of card. She refuses and is waiting until the Beast strips for her. Ashamed Milord takes off his clothes and the girl realizes that he is a tiger in the man's disguise. She resolves to undress as well. Shortly after, although she is free to go home, she realizes she prefers to stay in the kingdom of the Beast. Naked, she goes to his chamber. At end of the story, Milord starts licking skin off her and she gradually transforms into tigress.

"The Erl-King" uses the figure of Erlking, a fairy-like forest creature often portrayed in the European, mostly German folktales, to depict the story of a young girl who ventures alone into the forest and suddenly hears the sound of The Erl-King's pipe there⁷. Awestruck, she follows the sound, which leads her to the chamber filled with bird cages, where the Erl-King, the beautiful forest creature, resides. From now on the girl regularly visits the chamber and develops a sexual relationship with the forest creature. One day she realizes that he started preparing the cage for her and all of the birds in his chamber are, in fact, women, whom he transformed into birds and enslaved. The story finishes with the girl resolving to annihilate the forest king and let all of the imprisoned birds leave their cages and change into women again.

When discussing Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, Danielle M. Roemer and Cristina Bacchilega explain that feminist writers have often engaged in the rereadings of fairy tales since "their availability to multiple interpretations, their potential poverty, bareness, lightness, represent the possibility of rendering the obsessive matter of cruelty, desire and suffering profane and provisional" (1998: 69). However, it has to be remembered that

⁷< <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/191680/The-Erl-King>>. Retrieved on 25.05.2011.

fairy tales are deeply rooted in stereotypes and gender-based assumptions and, thus, figures they portray and events they depict should not serve as “evidence of the universal cultural passivity of women in the past” (ibid.). Thus, as Sara Sellers suggest, feminist rewritings of fairy tales is:

(...) is not only a matter of weaving in new images and situations but also involves the task of excavation, sifting through the layerings of adverse patriarchal renderings from which women were excluded, marginalized or depicted negatively to salvage and reinterpret as well as discard. (2001:22)

Roemer and Bacchilega observe that Angela Carter’s success accomplished in *The Bloody Chamber* stems from the fact that, while “registering with grim humor and clarity the awful legacy of ‘the fairy tale about perfect woman’, she still sees in the genre of a fairy tale a means by which a writing woman may take flight” (ibid.). I argue that Carter’s text successfully applies Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism as it does not seek to:

produce a feminist monological voice, a dominant voice that is a reversal of the patriarchal voice, but to create a feminist dialogics that recognizes power and discourse as indivisible, monologism as a model of ideological dominance, and narrative as inherently multivocal, as a form of cultural resistance that celebrates the dialogic voice that speaks with many tongues. (Bauer and McKinstry 1991: 4)

Carter’s rewritings, in their focus on the exposure and empowerment of female figures, succeed at subverting as well as mocking the patriarchal framework of traditional fairy tales, positioning women at the bottom of hierarchy, as compared to men. This is emblematic of *écriture féminine*, as coined by Cixous, who argues that:

Writing presents an unbounded space in which the self that strives to constitute itself through mastery of the other is relinquished and in which the other can finally be received (Cixous: in Sellers 2001:26).

Carter's stories, through their emphasis on the usually marginalized female voice, challenge the patriarchal order governing traditional fairy tales, but, what is remarkable, they maintain their "the formal appeal" (Roemer and Bacchilega 1998:69). *The Bloody Chamber* calls into question the multitude of gender-based myths, lying at the root of fairy tales, which are viewed by Carter as "extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree" (Carter: in Roemer and Bacchilega 1998:79). Sellers notes that her retellings involve:

(...) ironic mimicry and clever twists as well as a whole gamut of tactics that open the myth from the inside as well as out, leaving in place enough of the known format to provide evocative points of reflection for its reader, but also encompassing different possibilities and other points of view. (2001:29)

I think it can be argued that Carter, just like Winterson in *The Passion*, managed to transform the world of the stories of *The Bloody Chamber* into the world of carnival and dialogism through the specific narrative structure and construction of protagonists.

As regards the narration of the stories in focus, it has to be noted that a way they are structured can be explored using Bakhtinian lenses of carnival and dialogism since they seek to enable the exposure of multiplicity of voices of female figures marginalized in the hegemonic social order and objectified in the patriarchal framework of traditional fairy tales. Thus, as carnival world brings the reversal of prevailing power relations, in the rewritten tales narration becomes a powerful instrument for subversion of existing gender-based hierarchies, thereby creating the emancipatory potential for their female characters. As Bacchilega observes, Carter's collection "seeks to expose, make visible, the fairy tale's complicity with 'exhausted' narrative and gender ideologies, (...) which interprets anew or shakes the genre's ground rules" (1997:50).

It has to be underlined that, in the case of *The Bloody Chamber*, the most remarkable shift from the traditional modes of fairy tales which are using third-person narratives, is that many of these stories are told by their female protagonists, which puts an emphasis on articulation of their perspectives and points of view. Thus both “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Tiger’s Bride” are narrated by their central female characters which enables their protagonists to express clearly their suffering in the authoritative and monological patriarchal world. It also helps them to subvert gender-based power relations and, thus, gradually break free from oppression, just like as it takes place in carnival world seeking liberation from existing social hierarchies.

What has to be observed in case of “The Bloody Chamber” is that its narration portrays an internal dialogue between various viewpoints taking place within its central female character, and which, apart from placing even more emphasis on the traditionally marginalized female perspective, can be viewed as “an intentional fragmentation”, aiming at “providing multiple possibilities and choices” for the protagonists as well as readers of the story (1998:152). “The Bloody Chamber” depicts two separate perspectives of two heroines, embodied in one, i.e., the old mature heroine looking back at the events which took place in her youth, as well as, the young heroine at the age of seventeen. According to Roemer and Bocchilega, this narrative strategy implemented in the story aims at the exposure of the female protagonist’s growing empowerment and sense of liberation from the oppressor, the Marquis, which stems from her disobedience of the husband, and which, in the end, helps her to resist victimization (1998:153). The same technique of “moving among multiple viewpoints within a single character”, with an aim to illustrate the female character’s gradual subversion of existing gender divisions and

emancipation from being objectified by the patriarchal order, is employed by Carter in “The Company of Wolves”. The story uses a third-person narrative usual for the genre, but it successfully draws attention to the point of view of its major female character through illustration of three internal shifts within the protagonist, describing her gradual victory over the fear of the werewolf, which, in the end, becomes the key to her liberation and functions as a tool for the reversal of gender-based hierarchies. Initially afraid of the man encountered in the forest, the girl “knew she was in danger of death” (Carter 1979: 67). Next, once she gets to know about her grandmother’s death, her dread grows even more. The narrator says: “She shivered, in spite of the scarlet shawl she pulled more closely round herself as if it could protect her although it was as red as the blood she must spill” (ibid.). Finally, the narrative moves to portrayal of the protagonist’s denial of being positioned in a subordinate role of the victim. The narrator reveals: since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (ibid).

As regards “The Erl-King”, it employs two different types of narration, which also aim at enabling and exposing female voice. First part of the story is narrated by a female protagonist who attempts at breaking free from the Erl-King, “ultimately seeking to entrap her through seduction” (Roemer and Bacchilega 1998:153). Final part of the tale, in which the girl transforms her internal intentions, portrayed using the first-person mode, into real action and resolves to kill the Erl-King, uses third-person narrative. It is devoted to the description of the protagonist’s liberation from the oppressor and her subversion, as it happens in carnival, of the established social order, placing women at the bottom of hierarchies. Roemer and Bacchilega remark that Carter in the story:

enacts the splitting of perspectives and their inevitable clash through a subtle shift from first- to third-person narration, which signals the narrator's movement from inertial status to action, from imagining the Erl-King's death to performing it. (1998:153)

Furthermore, it has to be emphasized that all of the stories under discussion, as in the case of *The Passion*, work against essentialization of identity as well as aim at deconstructing binary oppositions between males and females through presentation of gender as a fluid, flexible category. I think it can be asserted that, apart from their specific narrative structure, also the way in which their major protagonists are constructed calls into question rigid gender-based divisions imposed on men and women by the patriarchal order, functioning as an organizing principle of traditional fairy tales rewritten in the collection. The stories in focus can be scrutinized through the lenses of carnival and dialogism as all of them, through the subversion of their characters' gender roles, successfully challenge and mock existing hierarchies as well as seek to bring under the spotlight perspectives of women, marginalized and unheard in the prevailing social order. It may be argued that Carter's stories, just like *The Passion*, can be looked at in terms of Bakhtinian carnival as they offer vision of the world based on performance destabilizing as well as ridiculing established identity categories, which has a highly liberating and relieving impact on their female protagonists. Like in world of the carnival, their aim is to "resist, exaggerate, and destabilize the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain organized society" (Russo 1994:63). It has to be mentioned briefly that the stories in focus are concerned with exploration of "shifting structures of sexuality and desire" (Wandor 1983:71). Sexuality in the rewritten tales becomes a powerful emancipatory instrument for female protagonists who, through their multiple and very

varied bodily desires, transgress the boundaries imposed by heteronormative framework and gain liberation through subverting the hegemonic patriarchal order.

In case of “The Bloody Chamber”, the main subversion of gender-based roles here takes place in a culminating scene of the story, where its main protagonist, i.e., the Marquis’s wife, is rescued from the claws of male oppressor by her mother, instead of her brothers, as it happens in Perrault’s version of the Bluebeard. The figure of mother in the story brings about a carnival-like reversal and liberation from existing hierarchies as she is endowed with traditionally male-associated traits. She is portrayed here as physically strong, courageous, indefatigable warrior who: “on her eighteenth birthday, (...) had disposed of a man-eating tiger that had ravaged the villages” (Carter 1979: 22). In the final scene of “The Bloody Chamber”, she enters the Marquis’s courtyard on the horse, armed with loaded gun as well as a sword, and shoots her daughter’s oppressor. She is presented as “an avenging angel” who “puts a single, irreproachable bullet through his head” when he is about to behead her dearest daughter (ibid.). The narrator depicts her mother’s sudden appearance in the courtyard as a performance. She says:

(...) her hat seized by As in carnival world seeking to question and bring liberation from existing social hierarchies the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's service revolver and, behind her, the breakers of the savage, indifferent sea, like the witnesses of a furious justice. (1979:22)

World of “The Bloody Chamber” turns into carnival, which is achieved through the introduction of the mother’s figure who, by displaying man-attributed traits, destabilizes essentializing views of masculinity\femininity, thus bringing freedom from the

oppression of the hegemonic order. It also has to be noted that the final scene she appears in has a very mocking character, which is emblematic of carnival culture. Although the Marquis is initially depicted as a master of torture who annihilates his three former wives, in the end he becomes a grotesque figure, totally defenseless and frightened by figure of the mother. The narrator ironically portrays last moments of his life referring to him as: “the king”, who, “aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns” (1979:22).

Construction of the main female character in “The Erl-King” as daring, fearless and tough, which has traditionally come to be attributed to males, also, as in carnival, aims at the subversion of hegemonic order, which has an emancipatory and highly empowering effect on the heroine. Although her sexual desire for the oppressive man here makes the girl internally struggle with transforming her intention to kill him into the real action, she finally manages to do it, thus gaining liberation for herself and other women imprisoned by him. The narrator says that after she annihilates her oppressor, “she will open all the cages and let the birds free; they will change back into young girls, every one, each with the crimson imprint of his love-bite on their throats” (Carter 1979:53). What is also remarkable, in traditional accounts the figure of the Erl-King has come to be embodied by females, either in the form of a fairy or a siren, using their seduction to lead the males astray (Sellers 2001: 109). Here it is represented by a male, which also reverses essentializing views on identity, linking seduction to femininity. Thus, vision of the world emerging from Carter’s story can be viewed as performance of roles and identities, which is highly emblematic of carnival.

As regards “Company of the Wolves”, delineation of its central female protagonist, as possessing traditionally-associated masculine attributes, also questions the existence of stable identities and reveals fluidity of gender, which contributes to, indicative of carnival world, suspension of prevailing hierarchies and becomes a powerful liberatory tool for the girl. The female character in the story, unlike Perrault’s Little Red Riding Hood, is presented as physically strong, brave, sexually-conscious and all the time aware of the threat posed to her life by the masculine warewolf, especially when she finds out he killed her grandmother. It also has to be noted briefly that presence of the warewolf in the story can be also looked at in Bakhtinian terms as “the combination of human and animal traits is...one of the most ancient grotesque forms”, and the grotesque is an inherent feature of the carnival world (Bakhtin 1965:316). An introduction of part-human, part-animal figure to Carter’s tale also destabilizes prevailing hierarchies as it happens during carnival. It “both deconstructs received assumptions of gender and desire, and offers alternative possibilities for understanding and constructing desire and sexuality” (Roemer and Bacchilega 1998: 187).

The girl keeps a knife in her basket and she is conscious she can use it whenever the warewolf approaches her. Although she is initially apprehensive about the warewolf and the howling of his fellow wolves surrounding the grandmother’s cottage, she soon abandons her dread because, as the narrator explains, “since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (Carter 1979:67). She is surely capable of killing the wolf with her knife but makes a conscious decision not to do so. The girl destabilizes existing gender hierarchies when she refuses to be the warewolf’s victim and bursts into ironic laughter when he shyly attempts at threatening her life. When, as in traditional story, she asks him

why he has such huge teeth and he replies that they are meant to be used to eat her, she reacts in a following way:

The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. (1979:68)

As emerges from this scene, "masculine predatory evil" embodied by the werewolf in the story becomes successfully suppressed by the female protagonist, which is described by the narrator in a very parodic, as in the carnival world, way (Roemer and Bacchilega 1998:151). The use of parodic language here aims at subverting and ridiculing existing gender hierarchies and bringing empowerment to the girl. It also has to underlined that the girl's laughter can be perceived in terms of the carnival laughter as it is mocking and possesses a liberating force for her. The female protagonist further reverses traditional gender-based stereotypes and deconstructs assumptions about desire, when, at the end of the story, she undresses the werewolf and takes him to the bed. The tale finishes with the words: "Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf." (1979:68). As Day explains:

The opposition of subject versus object, active versus passive, is transcended here so that each individual in the encounter may be at once both. Just as the girl refuses to be meat, refuses to play the part of object of consumption or victim, so the wolf, traditionally solely the aggressor is described at the last as tender. (1998:149)

Finally, "The Tiger's Bride" can be explored through the framework of carnival as it speaks for plurality and flexibility of identities, thus successfully subverting the dominant order. It "envisages a liberation from cultural misrepresentations of male and female through an exposure of an equality between the sexes", thus offering suspension

from prevailing gender-associated hierarchies (Day 1998: 144). This is achieved in the story through the depiction of its two major characters, i.e., the heroine and Milord, who destabilize gender-based assumptions. Both figures serve as examples of performativity of gender and “volatile and unstable identities, in which the new identity\signifier can in a sense be said to give meaning to the previous one” (Roemer and Bacchilega 1998: 139). Roemer and Bacchilega note that Carter, like Butler:

presents the body as a field of interpretive possibilities, and highlights the symbolic importance of disguise, as well as various carnival tactics, as images of the practice of making up gender as you go along. (1998:72)

Delineation of the figure of Milord here, a tiger dressing up as a man, serves to demonstrate that “identity is an artifact” (ibid.). The female protagonist, the narrator of the story, describes him in the following way:

(. . .) only from a distance would you think The Beast not much different from any other man, although he wears a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it. Oh, yes, a beautiful face; but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human. (. . .) He wears a wig, too, false hair tied at the nape with a bow, a wig of the kind you see in old-fashioned portraits. A chaste silk stock stuck with pearl hides his throat. And gloves of blond kid that are yet so huge and clumsy they do not seem to cover hands (Carter 1979:29)

Moreover, the central female character of the story is portrayed here as “the liminal figure” who derives pleasure from “polymorphousness, the unfixing of identity, and the recognition of its fluidity” (Roemer and Bacchilega 1998:139). Her transformation into the tigress at the end of the tale clearly displays flexibility and plurality of identities, as well as, through its subversion of male\female boundaries, moves her to the world of carnival, where she can gain freedom from oppressive patriarchy-imposed hierarchies. The female protagonist’s body here can be viewed as grotesque, because it “outgrows

itself and transgresses its on limits”, which is another feature of carnival (Bakhtin1965:26). It is the body of becoming, which brings renewal and liberation for the female character.

This chapter has aimed at examination of four chosen stories from Angela Carter’s collection *The Bloody Chamber* using the lenses of carnival and dialogism. It has done so by looking at their narrative structure, which is distinct from traditional fairy tales and seeks to place emphasis on female voices, as well as investigating the ways in construction of their characters reveals flexibility of identities and subverts existing gender hierarchies, rooted in the patriarchal order. The goal of this discussion has been also to offer brief information concerning the genre of a fairy tale, as it is linked to carnival in its attempt at exposing perspectives of the marginalized ones, and often dealt with by feminist writers, thanks to its subversive and liberating potential.

‘TRUST ME. I AM TELLING YOU STORIES.’ – CONCLUDING REMARKS

The primary objective of this discussion was to explore how concepts of carnival and dialogism, as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and further critically reexamined by feminist scholars, can be applied as useful theoretical tools to the reading of women's literature. Its intention was to concentrate on the study of works belonging to the realm of magical realism, as it has come to be recognized as the genre with a highly subversive potential, thanks to its focus on the portrayal of multiple, alternative visions of world which transgress existing boundaries and question the dominant, monological order. To make my analysis more precise, I resolved to limit my research to the investigation of two texts by prominent British women authors, i.e., Winterson's *The Passion* and Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. In case of the latter, I narrowed my analysis to four selected rewritings of fairy tales.

My attempt was to demonstrate that several facets of the books in focus, i.e., delineation of their pivotal characters and specific narrative structure, as well as an approach to history adopted in the case of *The Passion*, all substantially contribute to the emergence of the carnival vision of world in both of them. I chose to place the quote from *The Passion* in a title of the concluding part of this dissertation as I think it successfully embraces the wide range of problems covered by me in the preceding chapters. As it implies, worlds depicted in both *The Passion* and *The Bloody Chamber* can be looked at in terms of carnival-like performance of identities, thus successfully ridiculing existing social hierarchies and power relations. In the case of *The Passion*, the quote can be also read with reference to its account of history as a construct, a discourse.

One of the major goals of this dissertation was to apply Bakhtinian concepts to the study of characters in the books under discussion. Its intention was to demonstrate that major protagonists of both texts are drawn in a way which, just like carnival culture, seeks to expose a fluid, arbitrary and unstable character of identities as well as mock the prevailing oppressive order, thus carrying liberatory potential for their female characters. Construction of key figures of the books in focus aims at subverting harmful binary oppositions between males\ females and bringing empowerment to their female figures. As I attempted to show, in order to expose marginalized female voices, both texts employ various elements characteristic of carnival culture. They place emphasis on the portrayal of multiplicity of female sexual desires and carnal pleasures, they make extensive use of parody and sarcastic language in order to mock prevailing gender-based power relations as well as equip their characters with grotesque bodies, which have capacity to subvert and transgress rigid boundaries between what is considered masculine\ feminine in patriarchal discourses.

Another focus on this discussion was to look at how specific narrative structure of two texts can be scrutinized using Bakhtinian lenses because, as I attempted to show, construction of narration in the books in focus enables plurality of voices of subordinate figures, especially females. *The Passion* employs two shifting first-person narratives. Narrative of its major female protagonist, which is predominantly preoccupied with her description of erotic affair with another woman, has an empowering impact on her and helps her to question the oppressive heteronormative order. Narrative of its male protagonist, in turn, which depicts the events of Napoleonic Wars, seeks to articulate perspectives of various victims of the war, such as army prostitutes or low-rank soldiers.

In regards with *The Bloody Chamber*, specific narrative structure of its selected rewritten stories differs from traditional fairy tales. What is most remarkable here, its shift from third- to first-person successfully brings woman's voice under the spotlight and places emphasis on perspectives of their female protagonists.

All in all, I believe that the foregoing discussion managed to demonstrate that Bakhtinian notions of carnival and dialogism can be found relevant for the discussion of two books in focus. As size of this dissertation is limited, I regret I could not expand my research to an analysis of the remaining rewritings of fairy tales included in *The Bloody Chamber*.

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