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Postmodern feminism in Angela Carter's Fiction

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Podpis

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes Angela Carter's fiction in a context of postmodern feminism, her representation of women in narratives and approach to an issue of postmodern discourse. A theoretical part work discusses a place of feminism in a postmodern literature and provide a historical and social context of Angela Carter's works. A practical part of the work consists of analysis of a role of heroines in the short story collection *The Bloody Chamber*, with a focus on Carter's postmodern approach to criticism of stereotypes established in western culture through classical folk narratives.

Introduction

A main aim of this work is to discuss Angela Carter's work in a context of postmodern feminist literature with a focus on a representation of female characters. Angela Carter was a one of the most influential writers of a second part of 20th century and her approach to a feminist discourse was essential for defining a postmodern feminist movement, which set bases for a modern understanding of gender and sexuality.

Angela Carter did not consider herself to be a postmodern feminist, while postmodern women writers were not recognized by public until 1970s and a feminist message was excluded from a postmodern discourse until in 1983. However, by this time Carter was already established as influential and controversial writer who included the feminist message in her works. She focused primarily on a problem of a women's social equality and their representation in the media and its influence on a society. An exploration of Carter's works in the end of the 1970s, should provide a brief overview of the contemporary feminist discussion which prominently influenced the development of postmodern feminism.

In the short stories collection *The Bloody Chamber* from 1979, Carter explores an impact of traditional tales, including folklore, mythology and religion ones, on gender stereotypes and a historical oppression of women in a western society. She approaches folklore as form of popular media and through postmodern techniques of a deconstruction of the narrative, explores themes and interpretations of narratives, and by using alternative view on the narrative, she highlights oppressive elements of the traditional female representation in historical texts. A critical analysis of a short story *The Bloody Chamber* provides a detailed view of the Carter's innovative approach to the female representation and discusses its value in a contemporary feminist discourse.

Carter highly influenced the postmodern discourse, and due its feminist and literally values, *The Bloody Chamber*, is considered to be one of the core works of the postmodern feminist literature. Alex Garland's inspiration by Carter's version of a Bluebeard tale was recognized in his movie *Ex Machina* (2015) by various feminist critics. Carter's approach to classical narratives as feminist texts is still relevant in a present feminist discourse, especially in mainstream media.

1. Theoretical part

1.1 Postmodernism

The origin of postmodernism is dated to the aftermath of the Second World War. Its definition policy is, however, complicated and the term “postmodernism” itself considered to be only vaguely representative of the concept of the movement, as it explicitly refers to modernism, which is not the main aim of the movement.¹ There is no officially recognized definition of postmodernism, therefore a work can be only recognized as postmodern, if it features some of postmodern aspects.

Postmodern work intends to be experimental and innovative in order to create space for the reader’s interpretation. It uses intertextuality, various references and narrative layers, which tend to lack a meaning, until they are interpreted by the reader. However, this approach inevitably leads to a collision with other literary movements, because if by a postmodern work we mean any intertextual work, every work can be considered postmodern. Susan Hogan defines intertextuality as “the inevitability of textual interrelatedness and interconnectedness.”² According to her it is impossible to write a work not referring to any other works, or prevent the reader from connecting the text to other narratives.

Another unresolved issue is that the interpretation primarily depends on the reader and the context in which the work is read.³ Every interpretation will therefore be influenced by the reader’s intention and can unintentionally mirror the political and social conditions of their contemporary society.⁴ Nicola Pitchford speaks of “inevitable ambiguity of postmodernist” and she claims that the interpretation of the work and its influence is often more important than the work itself.⁵ This dependency on a point of view opens up various possibilities in interpretations of a postmodern narrative, including an exploration of possible social aspects of works, such as feminism.

¹ MCHALE, Brian. *Postmodernist fiction*. Reprinted. London: Routledge, 2001. ISBN 978-041-5045-131.

² HOGAN, Susan. *Revisiting feminist approaches to art therapy*. New and rev. ed. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012, xxi, 333 p. ISBN 978-085-7453-495.

³ PACHMANOVÁ, Martina. *Věrnost v pohybu: hovory o feminismu, dějinách a vizualitě*. 1. vyd. Praha: One Woman Press, 2001. 237 s. ISBN 80-86356-10-8.

⁴ PACHMANOVÁ, Martina. *Věrnost v pohybu: hovory o feminismu, dějinách a vizualitě*. 1. vyd. Praha: One Woman Press, 2001. 237 s. ISBN 80-86356-10-8.

⁵ PITCHFORD, Nicola. *Tactical readings: feminist postmodernism in the novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter*. 1. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002, 223 s. ISBN 08-387-5487-2.

Postmodernist writers tend to encourage these interpretations by working with surreal and uncanny images, making it almost impossible to distinguish the postmodern narrative from the fantastic or science fiction genre. Brian McHale calls science fiction a ‘sister-genre’ of postmodernism, referring to their indubitable proximity in aspects of speculative themes and the tendency of postmodernists to ‘borrow’ themes and motifs from science fiction in order to create allegorical or speculative situations.⁶

Angela Carter in her interview with Katsavos mentions various science fiction writers, who used the science fiction genre to manipulate reader’s view of contemporary issues through various unreal parallels.⁷ Postmodern feminist writers adopted this idea and often experimented with stripping their characters of gender stereotypes through surreal context, or the inner monologues of the characters.

1.2 Postmodern feminism

Postmodernism had to deal with various problems with the female representation in its ranks from its start. Despite the postmodern movement having been developed in the 1940s, notable postmodernist women writers were absent until the 70s. Susan Rubin Suleiman mentions that postmodern art, starting with the Beat Generation, has almost no contributing female artists, except Diana Di Prima, Marisol. Although feminist literary criticism had at that point already developed in France, in English speaking countries the topics of the female question were not explored until the 1970s and even then many female writers, including Angela Carter, were ignored.⁸

The situation changed with Craig Owens’ essay from 1983, where he criticized the “blocking” of women works, denying them their voice and feminist discourse.⁹ In his essay ‘*The discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism*,’ he pointed out feminist aspect of works of contemporary female writers and criticized a negligence of the female writers

⁶ MCHALE, Brian. *Postmodernist fiction*. Reprinted. London: Routledge, 2001. ISBN 978-041-5045-131.

⁷ O'BRIEN, John (ed.) a Anna KATSAVOS. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction (Fall 1994): Angela Carter / Tadeusz Konwicki*. 14.3. Dalkey: Dalkey Archive Pr, 1994. ISBN 1564781267. Dostupné také z: <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-angela-carter-by-anna-katsavos/>

⁸ PACHMANOVÁ, Martina. *Věrnost v pohybu: hovory o feminismu, dějinách a vizualitě*. 1. vyd. Praha: One Woman Press, 2001. 237 s. ISBN 80-86356-10-8.

⁹ OWENS, Craig. *The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism* [online]. 1983 [cit. 2015-12-20]. Dostupné z: <http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/OwensOthers.pdf>

works and “the voice of feminism,” which, according to him, was denying the basic point of postmodernism.

Craig Owens saw postmodernism as a literary movement based on the criticism of society, inequality and privileges and though it was necessary to include a female representation in the postmodern works rather than create another movement consisting only of “women’s works.”⁴ From his point of view it was necessary to include feminism into postmodern works, because the female question is one of the factors defining the postmodern discourse. However, he didn’t mean to create “an opposition” to the “patriarchal” texts, distancing himself from the idea of a women’s writing literary category, but rather for the modern narrative to be shaped in such way that it would involve the female question and sexual differences by default.¹⁰

According to Susan Hekman, many postmodernist and feminist writers were skeptical about the term “postmodern feminism.” According to some writers, the contemporary feminist writing challenges modernist ideals, which meets the ideas of postmodernism, but due to its bases in liberal humanism and Marxism, feminism itself can be considered to be a modernist movement. However, by meeting postmodernist ideas and providing a discussion about the issue of gender, previously omitted by postmodernism, feminism became a crucial part of the postmodern movement.¹¹

There hadn’t been any notable theoretical works on the topic of postmodern feminism until the 1990s, when Judith Butler published her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), where she summarized the aims of postmodern and poststructural feminism. Postmodern feminism denies innate differences between genders and sees the problematic of gender inequality as a result of gender-dichotomy and cultural, historical and social standards and stereotypes.

According to this ideology a gender is a social construct, which is not based on biological sex, but on the historical, cultural and social context.¹² The reason these

¹⁰ NATOLI, Joseph P a Linda HUTCHEON. *A Postmodern reader*. Albany: State University of New York Press, c1993. ISBN 07-914-1637-2.

¹¹ HEKMAN, Susan J. *Gender and knowledge: elements of a postmodern feminism*. Reprint. Cambridge [u.a.]: Polity Press, 1995. ISBN 07-456-1048-X.

¹² BUTLER, Judith. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. 1. New York: Routledge, 1999, xxxiii, 221 s. ISBN 04-159-2499-5.

stereotypes are present in society is the practice of gender performativity. In his *The postmodern turn: new perspectives on social theory* Seidman wrote:

“Postmodern feminists have criticized the essentialist discourse of gender - both androcentric and gynocentric - that posits a bipolar gender order composed of a fixed, universal "man" and "woman." According to these postmodernists, such agentic concepts are understood as social constructions, is itself a part of the will to shape a generic a gendered human order. The discourse of the gender is tied to ongoing struggles to assign human order. The discourse of gender is tied to ongoing struggle to assign gender identities and social roles to human bodies.”¹³

This approach meets postmodern ideals in the open criticism of the point of view provided by Western society, which is presumably based on the oppression of one social category in order of the to grant privilege to the other. Postmodern feminists believe that gender differences will always lead to oppression of one gender and social superiority of the other.¹⁴ However, by resisting these stereotypes and showing individuality of the person, gender categories can be deconstructed. Postmodern feminism was the only feminist movement which approached the problematic of gender inequality by striving to dissolve the social hierarchy rather than encouraging female empowerment.¹⁵

In its way of understanding gender, postmodern feminism is similar to post-structuralist feminism¹⁶ and in the 1990s inspired the invention of queer theory. However, its main aim is more radical. By subverting gender roles, postmodern feminism intends to achieve an absolute annulment of gender categories, which is expected to solve gender based discrimination. Postmodern feminists do not consider men and women to be psychologically different in any way, and assume that the gender experience is gained through life in a society enforcing gender stereotypes.

¹³ SEIDMAN, Steven. *The postmodern turn: new perspectives on social theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. ISBN 05-214-5879-X. (str. 132)

¹⁴ VALDROVÁ, Jana. *Abc feminizmu*. 2004. Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004, 232 s. ISBN 80-903-2283-2. (str.209)

¹⁵ JOY, Annamma a Alladi VENKATESH. *Postmodernism, feminism, and the body: The visible and the invisible in consumer research* [online]. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 1994 [cit. 2016-03-18]. Dostupné z: <http://merage.uci.edu/Resources/Documents/1994PostmodFemIJRM.pdf>

¹⁶ PACHMANOVÁ, Martina. *Věrnost v pohybu: hovory o feminizmu, dějinách a vizualitě*. 1. vyd. Praha: One Woman Press, 2001. 237 s. ISBN 80-86356-10-8. (str.206)

Critics of the postmodern approach, such as Jeffreys, say that this practice may lead to neglecting major feminist questions, such as violence towards women¹⁷ or even denying female identity and individuality.¹⁸ This statement collides with Butler's concept of female identity, which is, according to her, not only defined by gender, but consists of person's sexuality, ethnicity, class and other features.¹⁹ Although it includes female experience, it does not necessarily refute Jeffreys statement, because it presupposes that a whole female identity is based on a set of social factors, omitting the possibility of innate gender differences.

Steven Seidman empathizes the importance of postmodern feminism in the context of individual experience in narrative. He suggest that postmodern feminism was the first feminist movement to consider not just gender, but every category with a possible social outcome which shapes one's identity, mentioning sexuality, race, nationality, social background, age, and even geographical location.

There is no reason to believe that a middle-class southern heterosexual Methodist woman will share a common experience or even common gender interest with a northern working-class Jewish lesbian.²⁰

His statement is supported by Nicola Pitchford who says "Postmodernist feminism recognizes the existence of many images of woman with quite divergent social meanings."²¹ He, however, speaks primarily in the context of the postmodern social narrative and its agenda in the postmodern prose, rather than about the theoretical bases of postmodern feminism.

Postmodern feminism combines liberal feminism and radical feminism and, while following the French feminist pattern, is also based on principles of psychoanalysis. Due to this, postmodern feminism is often criticized as a movement, which may describes itself as feminist, but is led and shaped by men. Sheila Jeffreys says the postmodern and French

¹⁷ JEFFREYS, Sheila. Queer theory and violence against women. *Écrits d'Élaine Audet* [online]. Vancouver: Copyright Sisyphe 2002-2015, 2004, 2004 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: <http://sisyphe.org/spip.php?article1053>

¹⁸ PITCHFORD, Nicola. *Tactical readings: feminist postmodernism in the novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter*. 1. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002, 223 s. ISBN 08-387-5487-2.

¹⁹ BUTLER, Judith. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. 1. New York: Routledge, 1999, xxxiii, 221 s. ISBN 04-159-2499-5.

²⁰ SEIDMAN, Steven. *The postmodern turn: new perspectives on social theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. ISBN 05-214-5879-X. (str. 133)

²¹ PITCHFORD, Nicola. *Tactical readings: feminist postmodernism in the novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter*. 1. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002, 223 s. ISBN 08-387-5487-2.

feminism do not contribute to the feminist discourse, because their agenda is based on men's ideologies²².

1.3 Postmodern feminism in prose

The basis of postmodern feminist theory was the contemporary French feminist wave “*Écriture féminine*” (feminine writing) lasting from the 1970s to the 1990s. The earlier works of Anglo-American theorists, such as Kate Millett, were based primarily on a Marxian critique and although they discussed sexual politics and criticized sexism of male writers, they neglected female analysis of women's works. The French sociolinguistic wave consisting of such essential feminist theorists as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar analyzed works of notable British women writers in order to define and distinguish problematic terms connected with female works.²³ In narrative, they characteristically approached feminist questions through metaphorical prose and explored the topic of sexuality and language.

Postmodernism and the feminist ideology of the second wave both criticized the lack of representation and remaining stereotypes in the media. Their main aim was to change the fact the only represented and therefore the only possible view of narratives was through the obligatory male gaze.²⁴ Feminist writers saw intertextuality as a tool for possible manipulation of patriarchal texts in order to reclaim an individual point of view which would reflect other than the average male experience.

Susan Hogan emphasizes the importance of reader's interpretation of the narrative. According to her the individual point of view is “a key to alternative reading” of the patriarchal work. By re-reading patriarchal text and interpreting it from other point of view, the text can reveal meaning overlooked by majority of readers.²⁵ Through this practice, the

²² JEFFREYS, Sheila. Queer theory and violence against women. *Écrits d'Élaine Audet* [online]. Vancouver: Copyright Sisyphe 2002-2015, 2004, 2004 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: <http://sisyphe.org/spip.php?article1053>

²³ FRANKOVÁ, Milada. *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999, 206 s. ISBN 80-210-2148-9. (str. 13)

²⁴ NATOLI, Joseph P a Linda HUTCHEON. *A Postmodern reader*. Albany: State University of New York Press, c1993. ISBN 07-914-1637-2.

²⁵ HOGAN, Susan. *Revisiting feminist approaches to art therapy*. New and rev. ed. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012, xxi, 333 p. ISBN 978-085-7453-495. (str. 67)

reader is allowed to relate fictional text to their own reality. This individual approach to the narrative is described by Judith Butler and later inspired queer theory in queer reading.²⁶

Reversing the method of intertextuality and creating a meta-message allowed the postmodern feminist prose to move beyond the genre of the women's writing and allowed feminist agenda to become a part of the more complex narrative.²⁷ These texts cannot be easily recognized as feminist, but still deliver the message to the reader. A crucial intertextual factor of this analysis is understanding its symbolism. For an example, Pamela B. June empathizes the importance of "corporeal trauma narratives," where a racial and historical experience of the female heroine often materializes in the form of physical trauma or a disability.²⁸

However, some feminist writers, most notable of them being Angela Carter, intentionally used an explicit deconstruction of symbols, especially mythological motifs and tropes. They reworked old narratives to make implicit feminist content explicit to the reader. This form of the feminist analysis allows postmodern feminist writers to deliver the feminist message to the reader. Angela Carter explained this method in her interview with Katsavos.

"(The aim is) to find out what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semireligious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them."²⁹

1.4 Postmodern feminism and female sexuality and identity

The main aim of postmodern feminist writers was to explore the sexuality and identity of a modern woman. Women's emancipation created new opportunities for women,

²⁶ BUTLER, Judith. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. 1. New York: Routledge, 1999, xxxiii, 221 s. ISBN 04-159-2499-5.

²⁷ FRANKOVÁ, Milada. *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999, 206 s. ISBN 80-210-2148-9.

²⁸ JUNE, Pamela B. *The fragmented female body and identity: the postmodern, feminist, and multiethnic writings of Toni Morrison, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Phyllis Alesia Perry, Gayl Jones, Emma Pérez, Paula Gunn Allen, and Kathy Acker*. New York: Peter Lang, c2010. Modern American literature (New York, N.Y.), v. 56. ISBN 1433110504.

²⁹ O'BRIEN, John (ed.) a Anna KATSAVOS. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction (Fall 1994): Angela Carter / Tadeusz Konwicki*. 14.3. Dalkey: Dalkey Archive Pr, 1994. ISBN 1564781267. Dostupné také z: <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-angela-carter-by-anna-katsavos/>

which were historically limited by social obligations. This liberation provided new approaches to a woman's identity and how it's defined by her social role.³⁰

Although postmodernism criticized consumerism and a representation in the media, it omitted questions of sexualization, objectification and idealization of the female body. Joy and Venkatesh criticized this exclusion of establishing the female body into a marketing object, claiming that in this manner, feminism exceeds the postmodern discourse. They find it necessary to strip female body of prejudices and standards set by male oriented media.³¹

Postmodern feminists approached female body using the psychoanalytic theory and French poststructuralism. As a result they claimed that the female body is shaped by its interpretation, which is provided by society, and the image has to be transformed in order to disengage from the medial gender oppression. This idea of a body as a social construct is described by Joy and Annamma:

The body is not merely a physical entity in which our subjectivities and identities are trapped only to be recovered and restored into more sublime level. It is the body itself that needs to be restored to a higher level of discourse and viewed as part of the human self which corporeal as well as social and cultural presence.³²

Postmodern feminists refused to describe the female body metaphorically as it was presented in masculine writing. Following *écriture féminine* authors, postmodern feminist writers used naturalist images and focused on women as sexual subjects, independent on male desire.³³

Cixous reversed Freud's psychoanalytic approach to body, coming up with a conclusion that the female body, on the contrary of the male body, does not necessarily separates sexual pleasure and the physical "outer" body. She claimed that the female experience is bound to the female body and to liberate the body of the oppression of

³⁰ FRANKOVÁ, Milada. *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999, 206 s. ISBN 80-210-2148-9.

³¹ JOY, Annamma a Alladi VENKATESH. *Postmodernism, feminism, and the body: The visible and the invisible in consumer research* [online]. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 1994 [cit. 2016-03-18]. Dostupné z: <http://merage.uci.edu/Resources/Documents/1994PostmodFemIJRM.pdf>

³² JOY, Annamma a Alladi VENKATESH. *Postmodernism, feminism, and the body: The visible and the invisible in consumer research* [online]. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 1994 [cit. 2016-03-18]. (str. 354) Dostupné z: <http://merage.uci.edu/Resources/Documents/1994PostmodFemIJRM.pdf>

³³ JOY, Annamma a Alladi VENKATESH. *Postmodernism, feminism, and the body: The visible and the invisible in consumer research* [online]. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 1994 [cit. 2016-03-18]. Dostupné z: <http://merage.uci.edu/Resources/Documents/1994PostmodFemIJRM.pdf>

objectification, it is necessary to write about it from a woman's point of view. This approach allowed postmodern feminist writers to focus on woman's body as a sexual subject without exposing it to the male gaze.

Contemporary feminist works often follow postmodern ideas and are characterized by naturalist images of the female body, which includes various biological and physiological functions and imperfections.³⁴ Pamela B. June mentions authors who explored the theme of an incomplete female body, sometimes referred as the "bodily fragmentation." She connects it to the crisis of an incomplete female identity. June claims that in postmodern novels this crisis of the female identity is often materialized by physical wounds and scars.³⁵

Until postmodern feminism, images of dis-idealized female body were a taboo and did not appear in the media. Deconstruction of the idealized image of the female body became one of the main aims of postmodern feminism. Hélène Cixous encouraged female writers in her *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976):

"By censoring the body, breath and speech are censored at the same time. To write - the act that will 'realize' the un-censored relationship of woman to her sexuality, to her woman-being giving her back access to her own forces; that will return her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her vast bodily territories kept under seal; that will lead her out of the superegoed, over-Mosesed structure where the same position of guilt is always reserved for her (guilty of everything, every time; of having desires, of not having any; of being frigid, of being 'too' hot; of not being both at once; of being too much of a mother and not enough; of nurturing and of not nurturing ...). Write yourself: your body must make itself heard."³⁶

³⁴ FRANKOVÁ, Milada. *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999, 206 s. ISBN 80-210-2148-9.

³⁵ JUNE, Pamela B. *The fragmented female body and identity: the postmodern, feminist, and multiethnic writings of Toni Morrison, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Phyllis Alesia Perry, Gayl Jones, Emma Pérez, Paula Gunn Allen, and Kathy Acker*. New York: Peter Lang, c2010. Modern American literature (New York, N.Y.), v. 56. ISBN 1433110504.

³⁶ BELSEY, Catherine a Jane MOORE (eds.). *The feminist reader: essays in gender and the politics of literary criticism*. 1. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989. ISBN 03-334-4603-8. (str. 124)

A notable feminist discussion in the 70s and 80s was about the role of pornography in the matter of portrayal of female sexuality. In America, the conflict became so widely spread and radically bipolar that it is referred to as the feminist sex wars.³⁷

According to Langton, pornography treats women like objects and objects like people.³⁸ Many contemporary feminist theorists viewed pornography as oppressive and harmful. Postmodern feminism was conflicted on the topic of pornography. While the image of female sexuality media was oppressive because of its commercialization of the traditional portrayal of the passive female sexuality, which could be abolished by portrayal of sexually active women, pornography was unrealistic, because female libido was often reduced to an accepting position and the dependency on the male subject.³⁹

Writers saw the representation of passive female sexuality as unpleasant, therefore they explored other ways to portray it, and, in order to change the perception of the female body from a passive sexual object into an active sexual subject, they were often inclined to promoting unconventional female sexuality. Postmodernism as a theory adopted some of the radical-libertarian feminism's principles. In the matter of sexuality, the female position was seen as oppressed and unequal, therefore postmodern feminists sought some form of the sexual equality.⁴⁰ Sheila Jeffreys mentions postmodern theorists who promoted unconventional female sexuality images, such as promiscuity and BDSM practices.⁴¹

Some writers approached sexuality as an imaginary concept⁴², which they used to liberate their female heroines, creating a parallel between sexual and a social freedom. They often use transformation of the woman from a passive sexual object to an independent

³⁷ Sheets, Robin Ann. "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber"" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657.

³⁸ Langton, R. (2009). *Sexual Solipsism*. Philosophical essays on pornography and objectification. New York, Oxford University Press.

³⁹ FORMISANO, Tara M. *Evolving Feminism: Angela Carter and "Glam Rock" Feminism* [online]. Stetson University, 2010, 2010 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: https://www2.stetson.edu/library/green/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/prize_2010Formisano.pdf

⁴⁰ FORMISANO, Tara M. *Evolving Feminism: Angela Carter and "Glam Rock" Feminism* [online]. Stetson University, 2010, 2010 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: https://www2.stetson.edu/library/green/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/prize_2010Formisano.pdf

⁴¹ JEFFREYS, Sheila. *Queer theory and violence against women. Écrits d'Élaine Audet* [online]. Vancouver: Copyright Sisyphe 2002-2015, 2004, 2004 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: <http://sisyphe.org/spip.php?article1053>

⁴² PACHMANOVÁ, Martina. *Věrnost v pohybu: hovory o feminizmu, dějinách a vizualitě*. 1. vyd. Praha: One Woman Press, 2001. 237 s. ISBN 80-86356-10-8.

subject. They promote sexual transaction in which the woman is allowed to take a fully dominant role. Schussler highlights that in BDSM pornography, gender roles are not defined by gender itself.⁴³ Postmodern writers used non-standard sexuality and female libido as another way to deconstruct gender and social norms.

Sheila Jeffreys criticizes this approach. She suggest that this concept is not suitable for feminist discourse, because it is idealistic and works mainly with fantasy. She says that postmodern feminism does not consider real situation of the pornography industry, human trafficking and violence against women. She accuses postmodernism of being “spectacularly unsuited to analyzing violence.”⁴⁴

⁴³ SCHUSSLER, A., (2013). Pornography and Postmodernism, Postmodern Openings, Volume 4, Issue 3, September, Year 2013, pp:7-23.

⁴⁴ JEFFREYS, Sheila. Queer theory and violence against women. *Écrits d'Élaine Audet* [online]. Vancouver: Copyright Sisyphe 2002-2015, 2004, 2004 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: <http://sisyphe.org/spip.php?article1053>

2. Practical Part

2.1 Angela Carter and postmodern feminism

Angela Carter's writing style is difficult to classify, since her works contain elements of horror, naturalism, the picaresque and the gothic. While her works are sometimes labeled as "magical realism," which is one of the postmodernist features, Carter herself disliked the term. She referred to her style as "Mannerism," fantastic, allegorical and imaginary writing, with obvious inspiration in modernist expressionism.⁴⁵ However, her various literary and cultural references and the range of intertextual links she uses in her works, make her narratives recognizable as postmodern.⁴⁶

At the time of her debut with the horror novel *Shadow Dance*, postmodern female writers still were not recognized by public. Her following works in the 1970s, where she already experiments with social feminism in a context of fairytale themes, correspond with second-wave feminism in the US.⁴⁷ Although, the term "postmodern feminism" wasn't defined until the 1980s, Angela Carter's approach to feminist narrative follows its basic principles.

Angela Carter was considered a very controversial writer and even now, she can be seen as very radical due to her obvious feminist agenda and very dark and sexually themed works. She explored the issue of female representation, often omitted by male postmodern writers, through twisting and reversing stereotypes and tropes used for portraying female characters, through which she deconstructed traditional view on folk tales. Her heroines refuse a passive role in the story and gain their own goals and identities, which generally leads to an utter deconstruction of traditional gender roles⁴⁸. In her interview from 1994 Carter said that she was no longer interested in reworking mythology themes, because they

⁴⁵ FRANKOVÁ, Milada. *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999, 206 s. ISBN 80-210-2148-9.

⁴⁶ EDITED BY REBECCA MUNFORD. *Re-visiting Angela Carter texts, contexts, intertexts*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. ISBN 9780230595873.

⁴⁷ FORMISANO, Tara M. *Evolving Feminism: Angela Carter and "Glam Rock" Feminism* [online]. Stetson University, 2010, 2010 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: https://www2.stetson.edu/library/green/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/prize_2010Formisano.pdf

⁴⁸ PEACH, Linden. *Angela Carter*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, x, 183 s. ISBN 0333676165.

“stopped being useful” for her purposes, however, other postmodern feminist authors still works with a deconstruction of these motifs even nowadays.⁴⁹

Although she did not view herself as a postmodern feminist writer, using rather her own terms, such as “glam rock feminism” for description of her works, in the way she understands and describes identity, gender and sexuality, she follows main thoughts of the postmodern feminism ideology. Tara M. Formisano describes Angela Carter’s stories as extravagant and imaginary, using intensive feminist agenda, which is “impossible to ignore”⁵⁰ for the reader. However, this approach was discussed by many theorists because of its postmodern aesthetic.

Tara M. Formisano mentions that some critics consider Carter's work to be too artificial. With the use of fictional situations and extravagant writing style, Carter’s stories become unreal and difficult to interpret. Although the feminist message is obvious, it is impossible for the reader to relate the fictional situation to their real life experience.²² Robert Clark claims that Angela Carter’s writing style provides such a stylized view of social history, that it becomes unreal and renders political critique of society impossible. *In Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* in 1987 he claimed that “(Angela Carter’s) writing is often feminism in a male chauvinist drag.”⁵¹ Angela Carter, however, insisted on her writing style, her statement is supported by many critics, who finds Carter’s extravagancy necessary and effective for delivering the feminist message to public.

While Carter’s main focus was the female identity, she approached the theme of social status in the same way many postmodern writers did. In *Notes from the Front Line* she writes, how her living in Japan shaped her understanding of identity and criticizes obligatory western view of the society.

“It was a painful and enlightening experience to be regarded as a colored person, for example; to be defined as a Caucasian before I was defined as a

⁴⁹ O'BRIEN, John (ed.) a Anna KATSAVOS. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction (Fall 1994): Angela Carter / Tadeusz Konwicki*. 14.3. Dalkey: Dalkey Archive Pr, 1994. ISBN 1564781267. Dostupné také z: <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-angela-carter-by-anna-katsavos/>

⁵⁰ FORMISANO, Tara M. *Evolving Feminism: Angela Carter and “Glam Rock” Feminism* [online]. Stetson University, 2010, 2010 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: https://www2.stetson.edu/library/green/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/prize_2010Formisano.pdf

⁵¹ EDITED BY REBECCA MUNFORD. *Re-visiting Angela Carter texts, contexts, intertexts*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. ISBN 9780230595873.

woman, and learning the hard way that most people on this planet are not Caucasian and have no reason to either love or respect Caucasians.”⁵²

She explored the female experience with focus on various cultural and ethnical backgrounds of the heroines in *Black Venus* in 1985.

Angela Carter believed gender stereotypes exist due to social standards, which have been dictated to people for centuries. Carter viewed the representation of women in texts, contemporary or historical, as oppressive and unnatural. She believed the picture of the woman should be realistic and less idealized. In her interview with Anna Katsavos she mentioned her intention to ‘demythologize’ the fairy tale motives, and show the reader their original purpose, which she expanded in her essay *Notes from the Front Line*⁵³. According to Angela Carter, myths and fairytales are an instrument of socio-political agenda based on generalizing gender and sexuality. As Rebecca Munford says, it is essential to consider a large amount of intentional references in Angela Carter’s narratives, in order to fully understand the message of works.

“Carter’s extensive and multifarious engagements with previous literary and cultural frameworks need to be reconsidered in light of a more complex understanding of her intertextuality as a feminist strategy.”⁵⁴

Carter reworked commonly known fairytale motifs to deconstruct original patriarchal or oppressive texts. The most obvious example is her collection of short stories “*The Bloody Chamber*,” where female heroines take leading roles of previously patriarchal stories and explore their identities.

Possibly the most controversial part of Angela Carter’s work is her portrayal of female sexuality, which is often described as very dark and violent. Tara Formisano believes the shocking style is what makes Angela Carter’s work so effective in spreading the feminist

⁵² CARTER, Angela, WANDOR, Micheline (ed.). *On gender and writing: Notes from the Front Line*. 1. Boston: Pandora Press, 1983. ISBN 08-635-8021-1.

⁵³ O'BRIEN, John (ed.) a Anna KATSAVOS. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction (Fall 1994): Angela Carter / Tadeusz Konwicki*. 14.3. Dalkey: Dalkey Archive Pr, 1994. ISBN 1564781267. Dostupné také z: <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-angela-carter-by-anna-katsavos/>

⁵⁴ MUNFORD, Rebeca (ed.). *Re-visiting Angela Carter texts, contexts, intertexts*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. ISBN 9780230595873. (str. 5)

message.⁵⁵ She uses sexuality as an instrument of power, which is usually used to oppress women, but when reversed, can empower them.

The main character feature of Angela Carter's heroines is their unconventional approach to their own sexuality. While in the traditional narrative, woman is treated as a passive sexual object, Carter works with the taboo of female self-exploration through sex. Her heroines use their sexuality independently to explore their own libido and personality and even to consciously establish their social position.⁵⁶ In Carter's prose, female sexuality is seen as a source of power rather than a weakness, which goes against the traditional concept of sexually passive women used in mythology and the classical narrative.⁵⁷ This representation of female sexuality meets the ideas of postmodern feminism, however, Angela Carter's promotion of sexual freedom was even more radical.

Carter's most notable work on the topic of female sexuality is her essay *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. Although Marquis de Sade's work is generally considered to be misogynistic, Carter refused this thesis and analyzed his work from a female character's point of view, exploring possible feminist subtext. She points out de Sade's approach to female sexuality, which was unique in the era. "(De Sade) treats the facts of female sexuality not as a moral dilemma but as a political reality."⁵⁸ De Sade thought that women, who are socially oppressed can free themselves only in the act of sexual violence.⁵⁹

Like many contemporary feminists, Angela Carter believed that the image of woman in pornography is a portrayal of her social position.

"...sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described

⁵⁵ FORMISANO, Tara M. *Evolving Feminism: Angela Carter and "Glam Rock" Feminism* [online]. Stetson University, 2010, 2010 [cit. 2015-12-19]. Dostupné z: https://www2.stetson.edu/library/green/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/prize_2010Formisano.pdf (str. 14)

⁵⁶ FRANKOVÁ, Milada. *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999, 206 s. ISBN 80-210-2148-9.

⁵⁷ FORMISANO, Tara M. *Evolving Feminism: Angela Carter and "Glam Rock" Feminism* [online]. Stetson University, 2010, 2010 [cit. 2015-12-19]. (str. 14)

⁵⁸ CARTER, Angela. *The Sadeian woman: an exercise in cultural history*. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 1979. ISBN 01-402-9861-4. (str. 24.)

⁵⁹ Sheets, Robin Ann. "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber"?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657.

explicitly, will form a critique of those relations, even if that is not and never has been the intention of the pornographer.”⁶⁰

She assigns de Sade the term “moral pornographer,” which she defines as a writer, who knows his portrayal of sexuality is not conventional and somehow apologizes for his work without justifying it.⁶¹ According to her, he writes about violent sexual acts without embellishing them, or idealizing their devastating and oppressive impact, and therefore, when read properly, his works subconsciously meet modern ideas.

Carter claims that the social positions of the characters in *120 Days of Sodom* are not predefined, since all participants involved are aristocrats, privileged and equal in society. Their roles change through the narrative, characters gain sexual dominance independently on their sex, and yet this practice is not idealized. In his pornography, de Sade describes absolute oppression of the submissive ‘feminine’ person and dominance of the ‘masculine’ element, regardless of the actual biological sex of the persons involved.⁶²

In her philosophy, Carter promoted pornography acting as symbolic critique of society and the stereotypical gender dynamic. In her work, she followed this idea, which makes her narratives controversial, since they have been published in the era of anti-pornographic movements. Carter’s narratives published in late 1970’s contain images of very dark sexuality with possible emphasis on sadomasochism and gendered power dynamic, which concurs with the start of the radical lesbian pro-sex movement, which took place in America in the 1980s. Carter, however, never openly supported this movement and, as Sheets suggests, her approach to sexuality in *The Bloody Chamber* differs from the pro-sex feminist approach, because it can be understood as a symbolistic critique of destructive masculine sexuality.⁶³ Some other critics discussed if Carter’s heroines actually reclaim their sexuality or just let themselves to be dominated by men, without resisting them.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ CARTER, Angela. *The Sadeian woman: an exercise in cultural history*. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 1979. ISBN 01-402-9861-4. (str. 20.)

⁶¹ O'BRIEN, John (ed.) a Anna KATSAVOS. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction (Fall 1994): Angela Carter / Tadeusz Konwicki*. 14.3. Dalkey: Dalkey Archive Pr, 1994. ISBN 1564781267.

⁶² CARTER, Angela. *The Sadeian woman: an exercise in cultural history*. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 1979. ISBN 01-402-9861-4. (str. 24.)

⁶³ Sheets, Robin Ann. “Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber””. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657.

⁶⁴ FORMISANO, Tara M. *Evolving Feminism: Angela Carter and “Glam Rock” Feminism* [online]. Stetson University, 2010, 2010

Carter's essential aim was to challenge the perception of pornography, as the most male oriented media, however, she distanced herself from any contemporary feminist theory, much in the same way she distanced herself from labeling her writing style. While she was primarily a feminist prose writer, rather than a theorist, and at the time of publication of *The Sadeian woman* was denounced by contemporary feminist theorists as "pseudofeminist" and remained discussed in following ten years.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Sheets, Robin Ann. "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber"". *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657.

2.2 Feminist motivations in *The Bloody Chamber*

Published in the 1979, *The Bloody Chamber* provides a discussion of the contemporary feminist issues, namely an approach to pornography and sexuality, a political position of women and a portrayal of gender in a media. The collection can be read either as one of core works of a British horror prose, or as an intertextual cultural criticism of a modern society, sub-textually summarizing various discourses of the postmodern feminism. Carter was aware, that to change public perceptions of gender and sexuality, it is essential to intervene in the mainstream mass culture. This idea she later successfully implemented by adapting *The Bloody Chamber* into a screenplay for a Neil Jordan's movie *The Company of Wolves*.⁶⁶

Harriet Kramer Linkin mentions that most of the critics of the *Bloody Chamber* collection focus on the deconstruction of traditional patriarchal texts and the consciousness of the main character, while criticizing Carter's unconventional approach to sexual themes. According to them the collection "lacks political correctness."⁶⁷ It is essential to consider that Angela Carter's short stories collection *The Bloody Chamber* was published in 1979, therefore in the same year as *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. It may be assumed that these works meet in various points and narratives and *The Bloody Chamber* may be analyzed comparatively with her feminist analysis of the Sade's work.

A main theme of these short stories is reclaiming the sexual identity of female characters, which allows them to become equal, or even superior to male characters. In her analysis Carter approached de Sade's heroines, especially Juliette, as possibly feminist characters, since she came from an oppressive background, but instead of becoming a victim, she managed to establish her social position as a dominant one. The second sister Justine, represents an archetype of the suffering female element, a sacrificial lamb, in the male dominated world.⁶⁸ In *The Bloody Chamber* collection, Carter finds a compromise between these two women and repeatedly uses the motive of a young woman gaining her identity and

⁶⁶ ANDERMAHR, Sonya a Lawrence PHILLIPS (eds.). *Angela Carter: new critical readings*. 1. New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2012. ISBN 14-411-6928-8.

⁶⁷ LINKIN, Harriet Kramer. Isn't It Romantic?: Angela Carter's Bloody Revision of the Romantic Aesthetic in "The Erl-King". *Contemporary Literature*. 1994, **35**(2), 305-. DOI: 10.2307/1208841. ISSN 00107484.

⁶⁸ Sheets, Robin Ann. "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber"". *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657.

dominant position through undoubtedly traumatic events.⁶⁹ She created female characters which are trying to reach their goals regardless of the situation, even if their only resistance to the oppressive society is a fulfilment of their own sexual desires. This practice of refusing male authority and the sexual oppression is most evident in *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Tiger's Bride* and *The Company of Wolves*.

When a whole collection is considered, it provides various different approaches to similar patterns. While the heroine of the short story *The Bloody Chamber* represents, in comparison to de Sade's work, the passive element of Justine, in various other stories Angela Carter introduces the archetype of a dominant woman. In *The Tiger's Bride* the heroine succeeds in initiating a fully equal sexual transaction and in *The Snow Child* the Countess establishes a fully dominant position over her husband, when she controls and destroys his desires. Carter transforms the theme of sexual violence imposed on women in order to humiliate and dominate them, into a threat of a sexually active and independent woman, which is unexpected and undesired in the society the heroine lives in.

A related issue, essential for the Carter's approach to a women's question, which Carter discussed in *The Bloody Chamber* and which is also mentioned in her *The Sadeian Woman*, is a historical position of a woman in the society. The heroines of short-stories are often treated as a property of a man until they gain a sensible view of their situation. In *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Tiger's Bride*, both narrators are bought by wealthy men, however, narratives provide different outcomes of the situation. While in *The Bloody Chamber* the heroine sells herself voluntarily and is purchased by an abusive man and she has to fight for her own identity, in *The Tiger's Bride* a self-confided heroine is lost by her father in cards, and later, it is the father, who receives a pay for her. The heroine comes to a realization that her father, and not her purchaser, is her oppressor and decides to leave him.⁷⁰ This simultaneous sexual and political empowerment reflects aims of the liberal feminist movements that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. However, her raw naturalistic form was so radical for any contemporary conservative movement that some critics, such as Robin

⁶⁹ CARTER, Angela. *The Sadeian woman: an exercise in cultural history*. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 1979. ISBN 01-402-9861-4.

⁷⁰MUNFORD, Rebeca (ed.). *Re-visiting Angela Carter texts, contexts, intertexts*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. ISBN 9780230595873.

Sheets, make connections between the themes in *The Bloody Chamber* and the sex wars in America in the late 1970s.⁷¹

However, Linkin claims that for a deep analysis of *The Bloody Chamber*, it is essential to focus on a symbolism, more than eroticism, and on how a previously subordinated female element of the traditional narrative suddenly is in the leading position of the story.⁷² Angela Carter herself repeatedly mentioned that she was not interested in reworking fairytales by adding new content, but rather finding out what elements these narratives already contained. The main motivation for writing *The Bloody Chamber*, was to explore symbolism in fairytales and their impact on society, in order to deconstruct patriarchal roles.⁷³ *The Bloody Chamber* collection follows anti-mythic ideas of her earlier novel *The Passion of New Eve*, which was published in 1977. In her *Notes from the Front Line* (1983) Angela Carter provided an explanation of her approach to folklore.

“I'm interested in myths -- though I'm much more interested in folklore -- just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree.”⁷⁴

According to Kari Jegerstedt by focusing primarily on Carter's sexual politics without analyzing its connected symbolism, the message of the narrative and reasons, why Carter so innovatively reworked the Western imagination, are lost.⁷⁵

By switching the focus of the narrative from a whole male-dominated concept to a female individual, she explicitly highlighted some of the oppressive elements of the classical mythology. She worked with a historical perception of the tales to create a complex message of a sublime manipulation and the oppression in the patriarchal society. Her alternative approach to classical texts is considered to be still relevant in the contemporary feminist narratives. A director Alex Garland in his interview about his movie *Ex Machina* (2015), which, according to various feminist critics, bears resemblances to Carter's works, discusses

⁷¹ Sheets, Robin Ann. “Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber””. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657.

⁷² LINKIN, Harriet Kramer. Isn't It Romantic?: Angela Carter's Bloody Revision of the Romantic Aesthetic in "The Erl-King". *Contemporary Literature*. 1994, **35**(2), 305-. DOI: 10.2307/1208841. ISSN 00107484.

⁷³ FRANKOVÁ, Milada. *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí*. 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1999, 206 s. ISBN 80-210-2148-9.

⁷⁴ CARTER, Angela, WANDOR, Michelene (ed.). *On gender and writing: Notes from the Front Line*. 1. Boston: Pandora Press, 1983. ISBN 08-635-8021-1. (str. 4)

⁷⁵ ANDERMAHR, Sonya a Lawrence PHILLIPS (eds.). *Angela Carter: new critical readings*. 1. New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2012. ISBN 14-411-6928-8.

a relevance of deconstructing of traditional roles in the narrative in the order to explore an identity, sexuality, a male-centrism and the female oppression internalized in the society:

“What we know is that the young man sees her (as a female). (...) That then allows Caleb to cast himself in the role of the rescuer, the proper hero of this little narrative. Now, whether Nathan is that Bluebeard figure or just presents himself as that is one of the questions that then is posed, but also is Caleb reasonable as casting himself as the savior / knight figure? In doing that, does he make himself the "hero" of the story, without stopping to think what's actually going on inside this machine's head? “⁷⁶

Carter was interested in a deconstruction of male-centric tropes, denying an existence of female virtue and victimhood, replacing them with a desire and critical consciousness of her female characters. She deconstructed all stereotypes which are connected with folk tales and reversed various fairytale and myth tropes, such as the innocence of virginity, the incorruptibility of the maiden, the self-confidence of the male hero, or the absolute monstrosity of the beast. Heroines of the short-story collection are mostly victimized by male dominated world, but they refuse the role of a mindless victim that it imposed on them. It cannot be said that the heroines of these narratives are innocent victims. In many cases, Carter lets them cause their own misery, but despite that, it is impossible to blame them. How she points out in the Speculative Finale of *The Sadeian Woman* “there is no defense at all against absolute tyranny,”⁷⁷ either tyranny of especially violent circumstances or living in an oppressive society. By reclaiming the female voice of heroines who have been originally silenced in *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter provides an alternative view of the whole literary history.

⁷⁶ KWAME, Opam. Machine anxiety: a chat with Ex Machina director Alex Garland. In: *The Verge* [online]. Vox Media, Inc., 2016, 13. 4. 2015 [cit. 2016-04-09].

⁷⁷ CARTER, Angela. *The Sadeian woman: an exercise in cultural history*. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 1979. ISBN 01-402-9861-4. (str. 139)

2.3 The Bloody Chamber

The Bloody Chamber is the most known short-story by Angela Carter, based on the folktale Bluebeard. Along with Carter's innovative revision of a classical patriarchal folktale, the narrative provides a response to the feminist debate of the 1970s about the role of a woman in pornography and aspects of female sexuality, with a focus on discussing the right of a woman to be submissive. Robin Ann Sheets, in the introduction of her essay, states two reasons, why The Bloody Chamber should be discussed even nowadays:

- (1) that fiction constitutes an important part of the contemporary discourse on sexuality; and
- (2) that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary for reading imaginative literature about sexuality.⁷⁸

The Bloody Chamber introduces a whole new point of view on the Bluebeard story, while in the original story the main focus was on Bluebeard,⁷⁹ Angela Carter switched the narrator from an observing one to the protagonist heroine, which itself can have various explanations. From the postmodern viewpoint, this technique allows reader to explore the classical narrative from a new perspective of the, previously silenced, woman. Additionally, by using a female first-person narrator Carter adopted a technique of erotica writers, which, as she mentioned in *The Sadeian Woman*, allows to the reader to take a dominant position over the narrator. In classical erotica this style of narration provides a pornographic experience, since it dismisses social politics of the sexual intercourse between the characters and focuses on the consumerism of the reader.⁸⁰ Carter reverses this trope with a stream of consciousness of the main character, which reflects the miserable position of the heroine.

Carter manipulates the original motives of the Bluebeard story to support her anti-mythic approach and demonstrate the problematic message of the classical narrative to the reader to subvert a traditional perception of the folk tale. Through the history, the fairy tale changed its moral message, from the original warning before an unwisely chosen marriage

⁷⁸ Sheets, Robin Ann. "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber"". *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): (str. 647)

⁷⁹ PERRAULT, Charles, LANG, Andrew (ed.). *The Blue Fairy Book: Blue Beard*. Online. London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1889. ISBN 978-0486214375. Dostupné také z: <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/perrault03.html>

⁸⁰ CARTER, Angela. *The Sadeian woman: an exercise in cultural history*. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 1979. ISBN 01-402-9861-4. (str. 13-15)

to the violent man, to a punishment of the female curiosity.⁸¹ While Angela Carter keeps these motives, she puts them into more realistic and relatable circumstances, as a result she uses them for a criticism of gender roles, performative masculinity and patriarchal society.

The heroine of the reworked story is not an innocent victim of the system, she is surprisingly decadent, in her perception of sexuality she connects it with death and violence, and she willingly chooses the Marquis, possibly for wealth. By leaving her mother for a man, she voluntarily accepts her position as a passive element of the society. She is doing everything to please her husband under a presumption it is expected of her.

“He had loved to surprise me (...) but that perfume of spiced leather always betrayed him; after my first shock, I was forced always to mimic surprise, so that he would not be disappointed.”⁸²

As Sarah Gamble claims, Angela Carter was interested more in showing a process of victimization and oppression, than in martyrizing women.⁸³ Through the story, Marquis is trying to establish himself in a fully dominant position, he does not give her a chance to refuse him in any way and he infantilizes the heroine verbally and symbolically, while he is turning her into a doll by dressing her up into a clothes he chooses. This situation is supported by servants, which expect the narrator to act the way they demand.

Previously, she lived with her mother in absolutely different conditions and had education and freedom of the modern world. By moving to the castle she moves to a traditional, even historical environment and is instantly expected to behave the way the historical position of a woman demands. Carter is concurrently illustrating the historical oppression of women and an abusive relationship encouraged by the outer society. It is notable, that for the abuse, she blames not only the main male character, but also surrounding characters, especially the female ones. Carter does not see women as martyrs of the history, but puts a part of the guilt for their historical position on them, for either encouraging or passively accepting the oppression.

⁸¹ SHEETS, Robin Ann. “Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber"”. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657

⁸² CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110. (str. 7)

⁸³ MUNFORD, Rebeca (ed.). *Re-visiting Angela Carter texts, contexts, intertexts*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. ISBN 9780230595873.

The most discussed part of *The Bloody Chamber* is a dynamic between Marquis and the heroine. Marquis is a wealthy, excessively violent and dominant man, who established himself in almost feudal position in his surroundings. While he is presenting himself as superior in experience, power and intelligence, the heroine is repeatedly put into a position of a dependent infant. Carter intentionally exaggerates gender differences, letting Marquis to represent stereotypical violent and hyper masculine elements, while the narrator is, on the contrary, a vulnerable, pubescent woman. Carter often emphasizes the gender dynamic by switching to power-fueled relationships with even more defined roles, as dominant-submissive or even sadomasochist dynamics. The narrator feels obliged to submit herself to Marquis in every way, but instead of fully losing her own identity under a man's command, she gains sexual awareness and starts to explore her own identity. Moreover, she realizes she actually wants to submit sexually, but also starts to understand the importance of distinguishing her social position from her sexuality.

“I lay in bed alone. And I longed for him. And he disgusted me.”⁸⁴

Carter raises a question whether a modern oppressed, even abused woman has the right to desire sexual submission. Through the narrator, she discusses the complicated issue of morality and female desire. The heroine is conflicted on the matter of her sexual curiosity. She is fascinated by her traditionally dominant husband, although she fully understands how dangerously violent he is. The punishment for her own desires is so excessive and devastating, the narrator realizes, that although she could fulfill Marquis's sexual desires simultaneously with her own, she would not be treated differently in her social position. It is obvious, she gains a complex concept of morality and a sober sense of justice and self-preservation, as she claims ‘I don't deserve this.’⁸⁵ She later finds her solution in a blind piano-tuner Jean-Yves, who, due to his disability, is unable to establish full supremacy over the narrator and his blindness makes him a social outcast, as is a female gender a social disability for the heroine. When they go to the courtyard, where the narrator should be

⁸⁴ CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110. (str. 21)

⁸⁵ CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110.

decapitated, the Marquis mockingly addresses them as “Let the blind lead the blind, eh?” referring to the heroine’s blind disobedience and “blindness to her own desires.”⁸⁶

Angela Carter switched the Victorian interpretation of the Bluebeard story as a tale of punishment of the female curiosity, to highlighting its earlier message, which implied the punishment of a woman for adultery or sexual curiosity.⁸⁷ This interpretation is delivered to the reader through the story by various symbols and images, especially, when the narrator finds sexually themed paintings, one of which is called “*Reproof of curiosity*.” It is essential that the narrator is blamed by others for her actions. Even though the narrator claims she opened a forbidden chamber because she had to, Jean-Yves believes she will be punished rightfully, from the Marquis’s point of view; ‘Like Eve.’⁸⁸ Carter impasses that it is essential to recognize tradition or internalized female guilt not just in folk tales, but accuses even the Christian tradition of unjustly blaming women for the first sin. She implies that the forbidden fruit could be only a manifestation of Adam’s desire to sin and Eva, by taking the fruit, took the responsibility for the sin on herself.⁸⁹

In a way the narrator of *The Bloody Chamber* resembles De Sade’s Justine; she is also objectified and dehumanized by her surroundings, however, unlike Justine the narrator recognizes her own sexual needs, addressing them as “a corruption.”⁹⁰ It is obvious that Angela drew her inspiration for the concept of *The Bloody Chamber* from De Sade’s prose and the criticism of pornography. The heroine is treated purely as an object of her husband’s desire. During every sexual intercourse she is forced to accept an absolutely passive position, while Marquis assumes the active one.⁹¹ The contrast between them is increased by their age difference, physical strength and even clothing. While the Marquis is always dressed, his wife is repeatedly forced to strip and wear only jewels, which marks her as Marquis’s

⁸⁶ CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110. (str. 39)

⁸⁷ Sheets, Robin Ann. “Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter’s “the Bloody Chamber””. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657

⁸⁸ CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110. (str. 38)

⁸⁹ ANDERMAHR, Sonya a Lawrence PHILLIPS (eds.). *Angela Carter: new critical readings*. 1. New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2012. ISBN 14-411-6928-8.

⁹⁰ CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110.

⁹¹ Sheets, Robin Ann. “Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter’s “the Bloody Chamber””. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657

possession. Carter repeatedly uses a motif of devouring, cannibalism and vampirism, as a symbolic substitute for the problematic of the male gaze.⁹²

“I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab.”⁹³

The room where the narrator stays is filled by mirrors, so she is exposed to the Marquis’s gaze and sexual desires, without being able to present her own desires. She sees herself in the mirrors as the Marquis sees her and she finds out she is fully objectified, therefore she distances herself from her image. By this Carter illustrates how the female body is approached by society. By using a conscious narrator she could deliver the message of humiliation and dehumanization, which this treatment causes. The picture goes so far that the Marquis perversely exhibits dead bodies of his former wives. While the narrative of *The Bloody Chamber* mimics classical erotic novels, it distances itself from their aesthetics. Carter openly criticizes objectification of the female body. She connects this act directly with male to female violence and sexual oppression, which she immediately links to a social oppression.

Marquis’s approach to women is through sexualized pain, possessives and objectification, Jean-Yves offers a resolution of the male interest, providing another attitude to women. In his blindness he cannot sexually objectify a woman by a look, without considering their personality and emotions.⁹⁴ He was interested in listening a narrator’s music, and later was the only one who approached her for a conversation, in contrast to the Marquis, whose conversations with his wife seemed one-sided.

Jean-Yves’s blindness also prevented him from seeing a red mark, which remained on a heroine’s forehead. Carter adopted postmodern technique of manifesting a female experience as an imperfection of the physical appearance.⁹⁵ The heroine as a punishment for

⁹² Sheets, Robin Ann. “Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "the Bloody Chamber"”. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.4 (1991): 633–657

⁹³ CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110. (str. 14)

⁹⁴ DAY, Aidan, “The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories (1979),” in *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*, ed. Aidan Day (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), (str. 157)

⁹⁵ JUNE, Pamela B. *The fragmented female body and identity: the postmodern, feminist, and multiethnic writings of Toni Morrison, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Phyllis Alesia Perry, Gayl Jones, Emma Pérez, Paula Gunn Allen, and Kathy Acker*. New York: Peter Lang, c2010. Modern American literature (New York, N.Y.), v. 56. ISBN 1433110504

a disobedience, has a key, she used to open the forbidden chamber, imprinted into her forehead by the Marquis. Later the heroine is ashamed of the mark, because it represents her whole experience gained in her first marriage. It is discussable, if she is ashamed of her loss of virtue, or her initial obedience to the violent man, however, reading her self-reflection as a critique of intentional disregard of the danger provides a connection to the original meaning of the Bluebeard folktale, with an additional focus on the own will of a woman.

As many critics mentioned, it is essential that the Marquis is killed by the narrator's mother. In the story she replaces brothers of the heroine, who originally killed Bluebeard, which obviously changes the original woman's dependency on the male characters to an act of female empowerment. However, in this context, Angela Carter seems to be more interested in replacing a lacking father figure by a figure of the mother. While in classical narratives is a character of the mother, eventually a grandmother, either absent or reduced to a role of a victim, or has features which are contrary to maternal attributes.⁹⁶ Carter emphasizes the relationship between mother and daughter as much more important than the relationship between the heroine and her husband. The mother's intuition leads her to rescue the narrator, while her actions are described as shockingly violent and ruthless.

“You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, (...) On her eighteenth birthday, my mother had disposed of a man-eating tiger that had ravaged the villages in the hills north of Hanoi. Now, without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head.”⁹⁷

While Carter provides a criticism of a masculine form of violence, she recognizes an importance of the justified one. She shoots Marquis with a gun of her dead husband, claiming a dominant male power for herself in entirely unexpected way. While the Marquis's behavior is portrayed as purely perverse, animalistic and chaotic, the mother's violence is described as “wild” but legitimate and necessary for ending of the oppression.

As Lawrence Phillips mentions, the *Bloody Chamber* introduces in the character of the mother multiple political discourses. Along with a feminist discourse he recognizes the final encounter of the narrative as an allegory of the conflict of the modern postcolonial

⁹⁶ DAY, Aidan, “The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories (1979),” in Angela Carter: *The Rational Glass*, ed. Aidan Day (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), (str. 133)

⁹⁷ CARTER, Angela. *The bloody chamber and other stories*. [New ed.]. London [etc]: Vintage, 1995. ISBN 0099588110. (str. 40)

world and the traditional western imperialist society.⁹⁸ The widowed mother of an Indo-European origin lives in a city and provides her daughter with a modern education and freedom, while the Marquis lives isolated in a very traditional matter. His cyclic necessity to kill his wives, isolation, significantly medieval view of relationships and nearly theatrical violence and the antique equipment of the torture chamber, all illustrate his inability to move on and keep up with the modern world. Phillips also puts the narrative in the context of the 1970s and the end of the Vietnam War, pointing out the French setting of the story and the Indo-Chinese origin of the mother. The final encounter of *The Bloody Chamber* presents a victory of the anti-colonial resistance over the western oppressor.⁹⁹

Angela Carter does not reject the western society as a whole, but distances of it the same way, she refuses to follow any of the feminist approaches to the female sexuality and identity. While she allows her heroine to seek a submission, she openly criticizes patriarchal cultural roles and the devastating impact of an objectification of a female body in the media and pornography. *The Bloody Chamber* present her perception of the complexity of the female sexuality, which she does not isolate from social positions. By using the politically incorrect sexuality, she challenges a reader's morality and the perception of subjective woman's needs, forcing the reader to accept the possibility of the submissive sexuality existing independently on the person's treatment in the society. In a same manner she treats western values and a perceptions, admitting the progress of the modern world, but highlighting its hypocrisy in enforcing traditional values, based on the historically determined oppression.

⁹⁸ ANDERMAHR, Sonya a Lawrence PHILLIPS (eds.). *Angela Carter: new critical readings*. 1. New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2012. ISBN 14-411-6928-8.

⁹⁹ ANDERMAHR, Sonya a Lawrence PHILLIPS (eds.). *Angela Carter: new critical readings*. 1. New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2012. ISBN 14-411-6928-8.

Conclusion

This work discusses feminist aspects of the works of Angela Carter, focusing on her influence on the female representation in postmodern literature. Angela Carter is considered one of the first authors who introduced the female question in postmodern discourse, which makes her works essential for defining the postmodern approach to gender and sexuality. While she did not follow any established feminist movements and provided her own radically progressive response to the contemporary feminist discussion, her works shaped the basis of postmodern feminism, which was not defined until 1990's. Due to her widespread use of intertextuality, references and narrative layers, her works are profoundly complex and they offer various critical interpretations. This, along with her extravagant writing style and radical approach to female sexuality, makes Carter one of the most innovative postmodernists.

Carter was one of the first feminist authors who connected the perception of women in society with the sublime message delivered by commonly known media. She was interested in reworking classical folk tales, which was essential for both the feminist and the postmodern discourse. In *The Bloody Chamber* she introduced a completely new perception of folk tales and their impact on society. According to her, traditional narratives subliminally enforce social stereotypes and oppressive boundaries to society. In her work, she deconstructed this practice by switching the focus of the classical narrative to the oppressed subject, the heroine of the story, which provides a new approach to the story and changes reader's perception of the issue.

Heroines of *The Bloody Chamber* are portrayed as oppressed yet absolutely individual women, who are searching for their identities independently on the society they live in. Carter's narratives often deliver a complex moral message reflecting the contemporary discussion of female identity and a female's place in society.

It is essential to mention Carter's approach to sexual politics of writing erotica, which is considered to be shocking even nowadays. She believed pornography does not have to be necessary oppressive and she repeatedly portrayed explicit female sexuality as liberating. However, she criticized male gaze and its objectification of women, being one of the first literary authors discussing the issue.

Due to Carter's progressivity, her criticism can be applied even in a present feminist discourse. Her feminist perception of a Bluebeard tale inspired in various ways Alex

Garland's Oscar winning movie *Ex Machina* (2015) which recently reopened a discussion on a topic of objectification and its relation to female identity and consciousness.

The most progressive aspect of Carter's work was her awareness of the necessity to deliver the feminist message to public through popular media. This issue of the gender representation and the manipulation with a perception of the audience through mainstream narratives remains relevant even nowadays. In her work Carter provided a criticism of contemporary society and its approach to women through imaginative and picaresque prose, the popularity of which allowed her to deliver the message of remaining influence of a the historical position of women and the value of feminism in modern society to a wide range of readers.

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Resumé

Bakalářská práce je zaměřena na analýzu ženských postav v dílech Angely Carter a jejímu přístupu k práci s historickými patriarchálními texty a současnými médii. Komparativní analýzou jejího teoretického díla *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1978) a její povídkové sbírky *The Bloody Chamber* (1978) byly odhaleny postmoderní metody, které Carterová použila k dekonstrukci tradičního pohledu na genderové stereotypy. Při porovnání feministických motivů v dílech Angely Carter a základní filozofie postmoderního feminismu bylo demonstrováno, jak Carter ovlivnila vznik moderního feministického diskurzu.

Anotation

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Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Andrea Hoffmanová PhD
Rok obhajoby:	2016

Název práce:	Postmoderní feminismus v dílech Angely Carter
Název v angličtině:	Postmodern feminism in Angela Carter's Fiction
Anotace práce:	Cílem práce je analýza ženských postav Angely Carter a jejich zasazení do kontextu feminizmu sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let a postmodernismu. Obsahem je prozkoumání dobových feministických tendencí a jejich odrážení v tvorbě Angely Carter, obzvláště v její povídkové sbírce <i>Krvavá komnata a jiné pohádky</i> (1979). Práce analyzuje i její teoretické dílo <i>The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography</i> (1978) a kritické názory na její radikalismus.
Klíčová slova:	Feminismus, Postmoderna, Angela Carter
Anotace v angličtině:	An aim of this work is an analysis of female characters in the Angela Carter's fictions in a context of postmodern feminist discourse of 1970's and 1980's. The thesis discusses contemporary feminist discourse and its influence on Angela Carter's fictions, especially in her short story collection <i>The Bloody Chamber</i> (1979). The analysis discusses even her core theoretical work <i>The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography</i> (1978) and a critical response to her radical approach.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Feminism, Postmodernism, Angela Carter
Přílohy vázané v práci:	
Rozsah práce:	58 338 znaků
Jazyk práce:	Anglický