International Scholars Journals

African Journal of Gender and Women Studies ISSN 2516-9831 Vol. 4 (9), pp. 001-008, September, 2019. Available online at www.internationalscholarsjournals.org © International Scholars Journals



*Full Length Research Paper*

# Rebellion against patriarchy: A Study of Gothic in Carter's short stories

**Sara Tavassoli[1] and Parvin Ghasemi[2*]**

[1]Ph.D. Student, Shiraz University, and Instructor of Semana University

[2]Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, College of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

Accepted 12 February, 2019

**Angela Carter is considered by critics as one of the most original writers of the twentieth century. She gives scholars plenty of material to work with as she draws on many disciplines and sub-genres in her narratives: romance, fairytale, porn, science fiction, folklore and the Gothic. The purpose of this paper is to examine a few Gothic elements in three of her short stories: "The Loves of Lady Purple", "The Lady of the House of Love" and "Fall River Axe Murders". The re-emergence of the Gothic mode in the last decades of the twentieth century can be seen as part of the revival of the marginalized sub-genres of the past during the post-modern era. Carter uses Gothic characters and themes in these works to explore one of the main issues of the century: the role of women in society and the relationship between the sexes. In fact, from the beginning of the development of the genre in the eighteenth-century, writers have used the potential of Gothic to address feminist issues. The heroines of Carter's stories take different roles: marionettes, damsels in distress, monsters, and vampires. No matter what they do, they have no control over the role the patriarchal society determines for them.**

**Keywords:** The Gothic, feminism, marginalized, sub-genres, patriarchal society

## INTRODUCTION

The writing of Angela Carter (1940-92) , one of the most original and controversial writers of the twentieth century, has been characterized by different terms: fantasy fiction, magic realism, postmodernist literature, science fiction, feminist writing and fairy tale are just a few of descriptions attributed to her fiction. However, her novels and short stories defy categorization as not a single term is enough to classify them. She can be called Foucauldian when she examines discourses of power in a male-dominated society. She is Bakhtinian when she integrates the carnivalesque and the grotesque to disrupt those discourses of power. When she explores class privilege and British Imperialism and capitalism in her work, her Marxist tendencies are revealed. Last but not the least, she is a feminist when she challenges social structures of a patriarchal society which represses and marginalizes women.

One of the interesting aspects of Carter's fiction, which has not been explored as extensively as the other features of her work, is the Gothic. The use of Gothic elements in Carter's works can be seen as part of revival of the marginalized subgenres of the past during the so-called post-modern era. Carter's own comments in this regard are very illuminating. In the Afterword to *Fireworks* (1974), she says: "We live in Gothic times" (p. 122). In this new age, the nearly forgotten forms of the past substitute their canonized counterparts. Carter goes on to say:

> Though it took me a long time to realize why I like them, I'd always been fond of Poe and Hoffman…. The Gothic tradition in which Poe writes grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane. Its great themes are incest and cannibalism….Its characters and events are exaggerated beyond reality to become symbols, ideas, passions….style will tend to be ornate, unnatural-and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact….[The Gothic] retains a singular moral function-that of provoking unease(ibid.).

In fact, the re-emergence of the Gothic in the last decades of the twentieth century can be attributed to the destruction of the grand narratives in the post-modern era and the removal of the boundaries between "high" and "low" literature. As many critics have pointed out, the Gothic and the postmodern share many characteristics: parody, irony, self-reflexivity, pastiche, intertextuality,

*Corresponding author E-mail: pghasemi2000@yahoo.com

identity crisis, and fragmentation of the self, the breakdown of boundaries between reality and fiction and the ontological uncertainty. Carter applies these features in her work to highlight the lack of a single, central truth and the substitution of ordinary, everyday material with the uncanny in this brave new world. Beate Neumeier believes: "Gothicism in this sense is placed in opposition to mimetic art, to realism and situated within the realm of non-mimetic art, of fantasy and the fantastic, areas which have always been associated with imagination and desire" (1996:141).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the Gothic elements in three of Carter's short stories and how the author has revived this genre in order to address one of the main issues of the century: the role of women in the society and the relationship between the sexes. The selected short stories are: "The Loves of Lady Purple" from *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces",* "The Lady of the House of Love" from *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* and "The Fall River Axe Murders" from *Black Venus.* These short stories display how the so-called feminine roles, whether negative or positive, are social and cultural constructs defined by the patriarchy. The above-mentioned works begin as the female protagonists are playing the roles patriarchy has defined for them. At some point in the plot, the heroines stage what may seem as a reaction against those pre-determined versions of femininty imposed on them. Lady Purple of the first story kills her puppet-master and goes to the town; the heroine of "The Lady of the House of Love" seems to give up her vampiric tendencies inherited from her father and fall truly in love with a man. Lizzie Borden of the last story, murders his father, the symbol of patriarchy and repression of women. All these attempts, however, prove not so much fruitful; what these women face after their so-called rebellion is not much more favorable than what they had before. They either lose their lives or are forced to choose some other form of life in which everything is controlled by the phallocentric society.

Before analyzing the stories, it would be helpful to review the characteristics of the Gothic mode since its development in the second half of the eighteenth century and the transformation it has underwent during the past 250 years. Of particular relevance to this discussion is the re-emergence of the genre in the last decades of the twentieth century and its interface with the postmodern literature.

**The Gothic**

The Gothic novel as we know it today is widely believed to have been born with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story (*1764). Coming across a single definition of the genre has proved very difficult as there are disagreements among the critics about what differentiates it from some other similar genres like horror fiction. In this paper, we will mainly focus on the definitions offered by Fred Botting and Jerold E. Hogle.

In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002), Hogle refers to the gloomy and mysterious setting as one of the main features of the genre (p.2). A Gothic story usually happens in an antiquated place such as "a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large old house or theater, an aging city, or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building, or some new recreation of an older venue, such as an office with old filing cabinets, an overworked spaceship, or a computer memory" (ibid., p.2). According to Botting in *Gothic (*1996), "Gothic landscapes are desolate, alienating and full of menace" (p.2). The second feature Hogle mentions is the concept of physical or psychological haunting. The haunting can take different shapes, which are known as stock Gothic figures and characters: ghosts, specters, monsters (combining elements from different modes of being, often human and inhuman), corpses, evil aristocrats, vampires, skeletons, doubles and Byronic heroes (ibid., p.2).

Whatever form these figures take, Hogle observes, they "manifest unresolved crimes or conflicts that can no longer be successfully buried from view" (p.2). Botting has a similar view. He believes the Gothic mode developed in response to various anxieties and uncertainties of the age: "political revolution, industrialization, urbanization, shifts in sexual and domestic organizations and scientific discovery" (ibid, p.3). In fact, many scholars consider the emergence of the Gothic in the eighteenth century as a countermovement against the parallel philosophies that ran throughout Europe. According to Maria Beville, "…it might be said that the Gothic was, in a broad sense, a reaction to Enlightenment and Neo-classical ideals, those that valued reason and aimed at reducing all life to one definitive over-arching reality" (p.55).

In Gothic works, the reason, social norms and morality are replaced by excessive emotions, sensational experiences and immoral deeds. Using themes and motifs from other modes like the medieval romance and folklore, the Gothic delineated worlds of monstrosity which aroused excessive horror among the audience. Breaking the Neo-classic rules of clarity, simplicity and lucidity, Gothic productions moved towards a literature based on desires, imagination, multiplicity of meaning and ambiguity. In sharp contrast to the Neo-classical emphasis on didactic purpose of literature, the Gothic aroused uncontrollable feelings and could even encourage immorality. "Gothic excesses transgressed the proper limits of the aesthetic as well as the social order in the overflow of emotions that undermined boundaries of life and fiction, fantasy and reality" (Botting, p.3).

As mentioned earlier, the Gothic demonstrates the hidden fears, anxieties, uncertainties and desires of the society. In order to interpret such anxieties and their embodiment in Gothic works, it would be helpful to use Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva's psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework. Psychoanalytical readings of the Gothic deal with the ways in which social traumas are supernaturalized and rendered in displaced forms. The Gothic figures embody what Freud described as the examples of "the Uncanny" (or *Unheimlich)* in his 1919 essay of the same name. By analyzing "The Sandman" by the German writer E.T.A. Hoffman, Freud explains what is "uncanny" are our repressed and most familiar desires which reappear to us in seemingly external, disgusting and unfamiliar objects. He explains the uncanny effect in this way: the sensation of "dread and creeping horror'' aroused when a well-known thing or person becomes strange, or when something unfamiliar is invested with a haunting familiarity. The uncanny "is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" ("Uncanny", pp.368, 394). In other words, Gothic characters like monsters are the embodiment of our hidden desires which have been repressed by the society. They are disgustingly strange and unfamiliar and at the same time, hauntingly familiar.

Julia Kristeva's theory of the abjection as she explains in *Powers of Horror* (1980) is also helpful in interpreting the Gothic works. She argues for ghosts, monsters or grotesque bodies, so explicitly created to embody contradictions, as instances of what she calls the 'abject' and products of "the abjection", which she derives from the literal meaning of the ab-ject: "throwing off" and "being thrown under". She suggests what we throw off is all that is "in between… ambiguous… composite" in our beings, the fundamental inconsistencies that prevent us from declaring a coherent and independent identity to ourselves and others (p.4). We throw off or abject whatever has these qualities of being in-between and even dead- and –alive, into unfamiliar embodiments. Such objects create feelings of fear and desire in us: on the one hand, they threaten to dominate us and on the other hand, they promise to return us to our primal modes of being. Hogle sites famous Gothic figures like Frankenstein's creature, the vampire in *Dracula* and the character in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as examples of the abject (p. 7).

A closely associated, highly significant sub-genre of the Gothic is the "female-Gothic". In the next section, we will focus on this sub-genre and the link between the Gothic and feminism.

**The Female Gothic**

Since fear and desire are the major features of the Gothic novel, the expression and liberation of such emotions has produced a rich legacy of female writers trying their hands at this genre. In fact, just from the beginning, the Gothic has always been conceived in gender terms and some of its earliest and most well-known practitioners have been women. As Rebecca Munford (2007) observes, "Female sexuality and its expression have been central preoccupations of the 'female Gothic' and its criticism since the eighteenth century" (p.58). In such kind of works, the heroine is a woman in conflict with the values of the male-dominated society and the role that the society prescribes for her. This kind of Gothic writing usually presents the central female character as both a victim and a brave heroine. The Gothic mode has always been used to deal with problems of gender distinction, structures of power play between the sexes and women's rebellion against patriarchy.

The re-emergence of the Gothic writing by women writers in 1960's and 1970s is related to the feminist movement. Feminist literary criticism offers specific ways of interpreting the representation of the women in works of art and addresses the issues of women's suppression in male-centered communities. Munford (2007) quotes Elaine Showalter as saying "One of the earliest critical manifestations of the change in consciousness that came out of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960's was the theorization of the Female Gothic as a genre that expressed women's dark protests, fantasies and fears" (p.59). The development of such writings in the above-mentioned era can also be seen as Post-modernism's endeavor to break down grand-narratives of the past including patriarchy. Several postmodern writers such as Linda Hutcheon have postulated that feminist literary theory and postmodernism overlap in some points and influence each other ("Feminism and Postmodernism"). She also believes women writers can question and subvert the way women are represented in literary works. The aim of the next section is to examine the Gothic elements in the above-mentioned short stories of Carter with an emphasis on their link to feminism and how the writer underscores the performarive nature of the so called feminine roles.

**Angela Carter and the Gothic**

As mentioned in the introduction, Carter's work is a hybrid, highly sophisticated one, which cannot be described and defined by a single term. Fred Botting's comment is illuminating: "Angela Carter's fiction, self-consciously mixing different forms, including fairytale, legend, science fiction and Gothic, shows the interplay of narratives shaping reality and identity, particularly in relation to the production of meaning for sexuality" (p. 110). He goes on to say the stories in the collection *Bloody Chamber* "play with the ways fairytales, legends and Gothic fictions construct identities, fantasies, fears and desires, particularly in terms of female sexuality and

desire" (ibid, p 110). Peng (2004) has recognized her as a "dedicated feminist writer" who has been celebrated and questioned for her writing on gender performance and sexual politics (p.101). She also believes that Carter's use of Gothic tradition plays an important part in her fictional play of sexual identity (p.101). Sara Gamble (2001) also refers to her feminism, saying: "Carter's work has consistently dealt with representation of the physical abuse of women in phallocentric cultures, of women alienated from themselves within the male gaze, and conversely of women who grab their own sexuality and fight back, of women troubled by and even powered by their own violence" (p. 111). In this part, we will explore how Angela Carter applies the Gothic elements in the selected short stories to address issues of women suppression in male-centered societies.

A remarkable instance of the employment of the Gothic in Angela Carter's fiction is "Loves of Lady Purple". In this story, Carter uses different elements of the Gothic genre to explore female sexual subjectivity in a patriarchal community. It tells the story of a doll, Lady Purple, who performs different stories of horror in the hands of the Asiatic professor. She plays the role of a young girl who murders her step-father and his wife and then begins a life of unthinkable crimes and sexual promiscuity. Using her irresistible beauty, she charms men, makes them fall in love with her and finally kills her lovers in a bestial manner. As a result of her monstrous acts, she turns into a marionette that the professor uses in his dramas. This drama is performed every night until the story reaches its climax: the puppet turns into a real woman when the master kisses her. This real woman does the same to the master as she used to do with her lovers in the enacted stories: she sucks his blood, kills him and then escapes to engage in a life of promiscuity and prostitution.

The relationship between the puppet and master is symbolic of the relationship between men and women in the society. No other image could fully show the control and domination exerted over women in phallocentric communities. The puppeteer here represents patriarchy that writes roles for women and makes them behave according to pre-determined codes. The puppet, a highly significant symbol of women's situation, has no self and no role in determining her life and conduct. She has no control whatsoever over what happens to her. Her strings are always pushed by the dominant male who will decide for every aspect of her life.

So it can be said that Lady Purple in this drama, directed by the Asiatic professor, plays the role of the damsel in distress in a Gothic story. She is entrapped and imprisoned within the confinement of the stories the master writes and she must perform. As mentioned earlier, the suppression of women by men has always been a preoccupation of the Gothic mode. Lady Purple plays the role of a femme fatal or a sinister woman who seduces and kills woman, but she herself is a captive in the hands of her master. She does not have the least control over what she does. She is just a puppet who cannot choose what to do and what not to do.

On the other hand, the puppet, with her charm and her unrestrained sexuality, is a good example of what Freud called "the uncanny". She is the embodiment of the master's repressed desire for feminine sexuality: "he revealed his passion through a medium other than himself and this was his heroine, the puppet, Lady Purple" (p.26). The same familiar object of desire becomes estranged, unfamiliar and frightening at the end of the story when the puppet comes to life after being kissed by the master. In fact, the transformation of the doll into a monstrous woman at the end of the story represents the return of the professor's repressed and hidden desires. The body of the puppet reflects the male attraction to the female body and at the same time his fear of it. According to Peng (2004), "The uncanny experience is presented as the supernatural event of a doll being transformed into a woman" (p.107).

On the other hand, the way the author introduces and describes the doll is very close to Kristeva's concept of abjection. The puppet is the symbol of the ventriloquist's desire for and fears of female body, which he has thrown away in the form of Lady Purple. The turning of the puppet into the real woman at the end of the story can be considered the return of the abject. Moreover, Lady Purple has more abject potentials. According to Kristeva, the abject has a quality of being in-between or even contradictory mode of being dead and alive. Lady Purple disrupts many boundaries between animate and inanimate, doll and human being, natural and supernatural, dead and undead.

Based on our discussion, it can be said that Lady Purple is an instance of the monster in a Gothic novel. Like many monsters in Gothic stories, she incorporates and mixes many contradictions, which symbolize the tensions and anxieties within human psyche. Similar to Frankenstein's creature, she is an unnaturally made creature. Monsters are in fact metaphors for repulsive realities that human beings seek to deny and remove. Lady Purple is the incarnation of what the male-dominated society, symbolized by the puppeteer, cannot accept (in this case, excessive female sexuality) and therefore casts off in the figure of the monstrous woman.

In many conventional Gothic works, the heroine is held captive and suffers all kinds of hardship in the hands of a villainous monster in a dungeon or a castle. Carter herself has used this motif in her rendition of *Bluebeard* in "The Bloody Chamber". In a postmodernist parody, she reverses this mode in "Loves of Lady Purple": here we have a cruel, cold-blooded monstrous woman who imprisons and tortures the men who fall victim to her and her enchantment. In narrating the story of her life, the puppeteer says: "Booted, in leather, she became a mistress of the whip before her fifteenth birthday. Subsequently, she graduated in the mysteries of the torture chamber, where she thoroughly researched all

manner of ingenious mechanical devices. She utilized a baroque apparatus of funnel, humiliation, syringe, thumbscrew, contempt and spiritual anguish" (pp.30-31).

Another major classic motif Carter skillfully uses in this story is "vampiricism". There is no direct reference to the vampire in the story, but the transformation of the doll into a woman at the end is described in terms highly reminiscent of vampiric behavior: "She gained entry into the world by a mysterious loophole in its metaphysics and, during her kiss, she sucked his breath from his lungs so that her own bosom heaved with it. So, unaided, she began her next performance with an apparent improvisation which was, in reality, only a variation upon a theme. She sank her teeth into his throat and drained him" (p.36).

Vampires, these highly attractive images of domination and dependence, are still popular in contemporary art. They symbolize excessive sexuality, disregard for morality and insatiable passion and desire. They lasting appeal shows that they represent some hidden but always present aspect of the human psyche. Vampires, like many other Gothic figures, symbolize what we fear and desire at the same time. They give expression to what the rational and the moral exclude. They stand for an alien world of darkness, secrecy, excessive lust and horror. In other words, they symbolize "other" in contrast to self. While the origin of these enigmatic creatures can be found in ancient myth, this image owes its revival to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in the nineteenth century. Since then, this so-called vampire-standard proliferated in a large number of novels and films. And then it found its way to academic circles and came under scholarly study and criticism.

In "Loves of Lady Purple", the image of the vampire is exploited to show the horror of a sexually empowered woman. The metaphorical resonance of the vampire as domineer, parasite and especially predator is quite clear in this story. The coming to life of the doll, as mentioned earlier, was narrated using highly vampiric imagery. Lady Purple springs to life in response to her master's kiss and sucks his blood. What she does to the professor is exactly the same as the scenario which he wrote for her and she performed. Even after becoming a human being, she has no self and no control over her actions. She cannot do anything beyond what the patriarch has decided for her. With a deadly inevitability, she plays out the script written for her. In other words, her sexuality as a woman, just like her sexuality as a puppet, is programmed and pre-determined. Her sexuality has been constructed for her by the society and she behaves according to what is expected of her.

Angela Carter's treatment of vampiricism is closely related to her feminism. She uses this image to explore gendered behavior and heterosexual power relations. According to Gina Wisker as quoted by Peng (2004), the woman vampire has been a heavily invested site of cultural fears about female sexuality; women vampires in conventional vampire fictions connote aggressive female sexuality and excess (109). Carter's treatment of the motif is somehow different. She explores the female excessive sexuality through this image and at the same time demythologizes the horrible power that has been attributed to female sexuality. Such women may be powerful and fatal, but the source of this power is the same phallocentric society which determines what roles women should play. Whether a "damsel in distress" or a "vampire woman", the female is a puppet in the hands of male masters.

The protagonist of "The Loves of Lady Purple" takes on different roles a woman can play in the society: damsel in distress or puppet, femme fatal or monstous woman, or a so-called free woman who finally reacts to the control exerted on her, kills the master and escapes. This move on her part may seem a revolt against the tyranical system which creates and legitimizes such roles. Nontheless, the iroinical ending of the story shows the limitations this newly freed woman faces: she goes to a town's brothel and starts a life much the same she had when she was a doll. The male-dominated society cannot offer any desirable part to her.

"The Lady of the House of Love" can also be read as a Gothic story exploring women's condition in a patriarchal society. Gothic motifs here are more explicit than in "The Loves of Lady Purple". The writer combines several themes and motifs to tell a horror story: A castle in which the story takes place, a vampire woman and men who fall victim to her fatal enchantment. As a parody of *Dracula,* here we have a young woman who feeds on the blood of men. As the only heiress of a very old family, she lives in haunted, decaying castle. The life of living on human beings goes on until she meets a young British officer. For the first time, she falls in love, as a consequence of which she dies. Like the Lady of Shallot in Tennyson's famous poem, she dies as soon as she gives up her routine life and experiences falling in love with a man. She cannot have a life other than what she has inherited from her ghastly ancestors: "the beautiful queen of vampires sits all alone in her dark house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, through her, projects a baleful posthumous existence" (p.93). Even the body of Lady Nosferatu is described as a Gothic setting:

> She herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening. She has the mysterious solitude of ambiguous states; she hovers in a no-man's land between life and death, sleeping and waking, behind the hedge of spiked flowers, Nosferatu's sanguinary rosebud. The beastly forbears on the walls condemn her to perpetual repetition of their passions" (p.103).

As the above passage shows, she is a vampire woman, but she has no control whatsoever on her actions. The life she lives is just a continuation of what her male

ancestors did. Like Lady Purple, she seduces and murders men, but she does not do so according to her own free will. The portraits of her vampire ancestors on the walls of the castle, who see and control her, symbolize the control exerted on women's sexuality in a male-dominated society. Unlike the story of Lady Purple, here there is no physical control; the vampire woman is not a marionette. But she is entrapped within a strict set of prescribed rules of conduct. Her father has been staked out by a priest, but before his extermination he had cried: "Nosferatu is dead; long live Nosferatu!"(p.95) and he is living through his daughter.

"The Lady of the House of Love" explores predicament of women in a society through a vampire Countess, who cannot be happy and content with her situation. A reluctant predator, she considers herself as being victimized to a passion that results in isolation and loneliness. Trapped in a vicious circle of violation and dependence, her vampiric relationship with people makes her inhuman and incapable of building any full, satisfying connection with them. When the officer tries o rescue her from this situation, the result proves fatal for her. She cannot give up her parasitic dependence on human beings. His kiss renders her human and adult, but at the same time mortal. On the one hand, she lives on the blood of men and wants a true romantic relationship with a man. When her vampiric dependence turns into a "normal" relation, she ceases to exist: she has no self beyond what has been transmitted to her through inheritance form her ancestors.

When the officer meets the countess, the first thing that attracts her attention is her passivity. The prince charming of the story does not see a vampire, but a helpless creature and her situation deeply moves his heart: "she is like a doll, he thought, a ventriloquist's doll, or more, like a great, ingenious piece of clock work. For she seemed inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born, and now the mechanism was inexorably running down and would leave her lifeless" (p.102). The vampiricism of the countess is not a matter of choice; it is something like a hereditary disease she has been born with and can never be cured of. It is interesting that the officer considers her situation as some physical illness and believes they can turn her to the lovely lady she is if they visit doctors in the city.

The imagery used to describe Lady Nosferatu and her surroundings enhance her vampiric sexuality, especially the images of roses and her mouth. The roses, with their sexual connotation, stand for her excessive lust: "too many roses bloomed on enormous thickets that lined the path, thickets bristling with thorns, and flowers themselves were almost too luxuriant, their huge congregation of plush petals somehow obscene in their excess, their whorled, tightly budded cores outrageous in their implications" (p.98). Similarly, Countess Nosferatu's mouth is described with details that have strong sexual and vampiric implications, even from the perspective of the young officer. The narrator says: "he was disturbed, almost repelled, by her extraordinary fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson, a morbid mouth. Even-but he put the thought away from him immediately- a whore's mouth" (101).

In order to further delineate the hopeless situation of the countess, the writer juxtaposes the image of the vampire and femme fatal with the archetype of the damsel in distress or the Victorian angel in the house to make it more paradoxical and meaningful. Seen from the point of view of the British officer, her beauty is that of feminine passivity and fragility: "a girl with fragility of the skeleton of a moth, so thin, so frail, her dress seemed to him to hang suspended, as if untenanted in the dark air, a fabulous lending, a self-articulated garment in which she lived like a ghost in a machine" (100). The vampiric lady, who victimizes her poor lovers to her insatiable sexuality, is herself a victim of social marginalization. She haunts them because she herself is being haunted by what her ancestors want her to do. Before meeting the officer, her strings are pulled by what they have chosen for her and when she chooses to cut free from them, she has to face death. The monstrous countess in no one but a damsel in distress confined to the imprisonment of her inherited castle. And unlike many fairy tales, there is no happy ending for her: the arrival of a so-called knight does not free her; it just means the end of her existence.

The two short stories discussed delineate the situation of women and the limited options they have through the application of some Gothic elements. On the surface, the heroines are monstrous women who victimize men to their excessive sexuality. They seem to have rebelled against the codes of innocence and morality the society demand. But on the other hand, they are themselves passive puppets who enact the drama written for them. Their apparent freedom is nothing but another form of passivity and dependence on the phallocentric social system. According to Peng, Carter's vampire stories deconstruct the myth of the fearful power that has been attributed to the female vampire and show that the source of this so-called power is the same phallocentric discourse (p.110).

"The Fall River Axe Murders "is another relevant short story by Carter, based on a real case: a murder in New England in August 1892. Like many other short stories of Carter, it has many elements of the fairy tale, but Carter juxtaposes these entities with very realistic description of details. The illustration of the setting at the beginning of the work gives it historical accuracy: "Early in the morning of the fourth of August, 1892, in Fall River, Massachusetts. Hot, hot, hot….very early in the morning, before the factory whistle, but even at this hour, everything shimmers and quivers under the attack of white, furious sun already high in the still air (103). This is in sharp contrast o the setting of most of Carter's fairy tales and Gothic stories which take place at cold winter nights. But the writer skillfully uses other elements of the

genre to tell a story of female rebellion against patriarchy. The house in which Lizzie and her family live is described in Gothic terms, representing it as a trap and highlighting the theme of being buried alive: it is as narrow as a coffin. This narrowness is symbolic of the oppressive atmosphere of the house and 'coffin' foreshadows the deaths which will happen later as the story unfolds. Indeed, like a classic Gothic mansion, the house is mysterious and maze-like: "One peculiarity of this house is the number of doors the rooms contain and a further peculiarity, how all these rooms are always locked. A house full of locked doors that open only to other rooms with other locked doors, for upstairs and downstairs, all the rooms lead in and out of one another like a maze in a bad dream. It is a house "without passages"' (107). The house is very much like a trap or prison with no way out. But unlike the aristocratic mansion of "The lady of the House of Love", it is the humble house of a farmer.

The way the narrator introduces the so-called protagonist of the story, Lizzie Borden, to the audience is very interesting. Just like a damsel in distress, she cannot free herself from the stifling conditions of her life. She is seen as an old spinster, who very rarely has had the chance of leaving her house, and even then, it has been just a temporary occasion. She has gone on a European tour a few years ago, which is described as a sour trip. It has also ended where it has begun, highlighting Lizzie's situation. There is n escape from this situation. The narrator even likens the locked rooms of the house to Bluebeard's castle. Like a Gothic heroine, she is the victim of an oppressive patriarchal world. As Anja Muller-Wood (2004) states, "Lizzie Borden is a prisoner both in the private context and in the world at large" (p.282).

The helplessness of Lizzie's situation is further portrayed through the description of her clothes:

On this morning, when after breakfast and the performance of a few household duties, Lizzie Borden will murder her parents, she will, on rising, don a simple cotton frock-but under that, went a long, starched cotton petticoat; another short, starched cotton petticoat; long drawers; woolen stockings; a chemise and a whalebone corset that took her viscera in a stern hand and squeezed them very tightly. (103-4)

This very oppressed maiden has a 'double' who is capable of committing parricide. In fact, this maiden and the monster within her are like the two sides of the same self: different but inseparable. While the protagonist in "The Lady of the House of Love" was a vampire-woman who turned into a real woman; here we witness the transformation of a confined, very ordinary woman into a Gothic monster. She is even described as a werewolf at some point:

There is a mirror on the dresser in which she sometimes looks at those times when time snaps in two and then she sees herself with blind, clairvoyant eyes, as tough she was another person.

''Lizzie is not herself, today''

At those times, those irremediable times, she could have raised her muzzle to some aching moon and howled. (119-20)

It seems that there is a wild soul confined to her body, waiting to be released from this prison when the time is right: "she traces the outlines of her face with an uncertain hand as if she were thinking of unfastening the bandage on her soul but it is not time to do that yet: she is not ready to be seen yet" (120). Rikki Ducornet as quoted in Langlois (2001) says Lizzie is, in fact, a "werewolf ruled by the moon" whose "anger has made her supernatural'' and who literally "cuts loose'' from her "coffin house'' by hacking its occupants to death (212). The act of murder is seen as a revolt against the repression Lizzie experiences in living the life of a spinister at the end of the nineteenth century. However, this freedom from the control of her father does not change the situation of Lizzie Borden that much. Like Lady Purple, she has endeavored to break free from the patriarchal order (in this case her father), but this freedom is not very different from when she was living the life of a captive. Although the story does not tell us what happens after the murder and whether she is acquitted or convicted at the court, the reader can see that at any case, Lizzie will not be a free woman. If convicted, she would be executed or compelled to spend her life behind the bars. And if acquitted, she will be buried alive in her father's house. In fact, she will return to the life she had before the killing of her father. Death of her parents will not change the whole patriarchal system within which she is confined forever. Similar to the situation of the protagonists of the two other stories discussed earlier, the transformation and breaking away from the dominance of patriarchy, do not bring about an ideal situation for Lizzie. Three characters discussed in this paper, consiously or unconsciously, make attempts to free themselves from the predicament patriarchy has created for them. Such endevours, although brave, do not seem to be very successful; they just mean transience from one form of subjugation to another.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper is dedicated to a study of Gothic elements in three of Carter's short stories. It is noteworthy that she is not a conventional Gothic writer with the purpose of provoking terror in the audience. Carter uses the potential of the Gothic to explore the role of women in patriarchal societies: Gothic settings, Gothic characters and Gothic themes are her vehicle of the investigation into gender relationships in the modern society. As Beate Neumeier (1996) astutely observes: "….Carter's use of Gothicism is related to the idea of gender. Whereas earlier Gothic fiction shows the materialization of ideas( Frankenstein's monster, Dracula), Angela Carter uses Gothicism to reveal the process of transformation of human beings,

particularly women, into symbols and ideas by the process of gender construction"(p.149). The stories discussed here show how the women are turned into the symbols of the domination of men over women. Whether they are monstrous women, vampires, marionettes or damsels in distress, they are just puppets in the hands of the social institutions. Her short stories depict how women's role in the society is the product of what grand narrative of patriarchy determines for them. She especially emphasizes the situation of women and the dissatisfaction and isolation which is the result of the control exerted over them. Although the stories discussed in this essay take place in a non-realistic situation, they are highly characteristic of what takes place in the real world. These stories depict the predicament of the women who try to rebel against what is expected of them and what their family or society has determined for them. On the surface, these women seem to succeed in their endeavor, but in reality, they can achieve no relief and liberation from this system. All these stories depict women's rebellious behavior, especially in terms of sexuality. Nevertheless, Carter demonstrates that these so-called rebellious women cannot make significant change to their socially-constructed identities and characteristics. These transgressive roles are just another part of pre-determined, imposed identities others have created for them. Carter's women have no choice: they should either conform to the social standards or face death or isolation.

**REFERENCES**


Beville M. (2009). Gothic Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity. Amsterdam: Rodopi Editions.

Botting F. (1996). Gothic. London & New York: Routledge.

Carter A (1993). "The Lady of the House of Love." The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories. NY: Penguin Books. pp. 93-108.

Carter A 1986). "The Fall River Axe Murders." Black Venus. London: Picador. 103-21.

Carter A. (1988). "The Loves of Lady Purple." Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces. London: Virago. pp. 23-38.

Freud S (1919). "The Uncanny" In Collected Papers, ed. and trans. Joan Riviere etal. NY: Basic Books.

Gamble S (ed.) (2001). The Fiction of Angela Carter. UK: Palgrave.

Hogle JE (ed.). (2002). The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kristeva J (1980). Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. NewYork: Columbia University Press.

Langlois JL (2001). "Andrew Borden's Little Girl: Fairytale Fragments in Angela Carter's 'The Fall River Axe Murders.'"In Angela Carter and Fairytale, eds. Daniell M. Roemer & Cristina Bacchilega. Michigan: Wayne State University Press, pp. 204-24

Muller-Wood A (2004). "Disconcerting Mirrors: Angela Carter's Lizzie Borden Stories." Literature Interpretation Theor.y 15:277-97

Munford R. (2007). "The Desecration of Temple or Sexuality as Terrorism". Gothic Stud. 9:58-70

Neumeier B (1996). "Postmodern Gothic: Desire and Reality in Angela Carter's Writing." In Modern Gothic: A Reader, eds. Victor Sage & Allan Lloyd Smith. UK: Manchester University Press, pp. 141-51

Peng EP (2004). "Angela Carter's Postmodern Feminism and the Gothic Uncanny." NTU Studies in Language and Literature. 13: 99-134.