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Recycling the Femme Fatale in Tales of Vampirism: Garry Kilworth's "The Silver Collar" and Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love"

Introduction: *Femme Fatale* Vampires in Literary History

According to Jack Holland's claim, "misogyny can push a woman upwards as well as downwards. In either direction, the destination is the same: woman dehumanized" (6). This binary tendency can also be seen in the gender roles manifest in early vampire fiction, where female characters correspond either to the role of the angelic victim or to that of the devilish predatory animal. Vampire fiction, especially up to the 1970s, provides a graphic embodiment of these dichotomic images, which are embedded in a specific view of intersubjectivity that presupposes the inevitability of hierarchy as well as dominant and subordinate positions.

The victim in traditional vampire tales is mostly a sweet, virtuous, passive woman dependent on men, and needing them to intervene against the vampire attacking her. In the case of Miss Aubrey, the victimized female character in the first full prosaic English vampire story, John Polidori's *The Vampyre* of 1819, the intervening efforts prove to be fruitless: "The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!" (Polidori, 24). Possibly due to the sensational character of the work, the portrayal of Flora Bannerworth's helplessness in James Malcolm Rymer's (or, since there has been a debate on authorship, Thomas Preskett Prest's) penny dreadful called *Varney the Vampyre* (running between 1845 and 1847) is even more vivid, as it is represented from her point of view: "Intense fear paralyses the limbs of that beautiful girl. [...] She tries to scream again but a choking sensation comes over her, and she cannot. It is too dreadful–she tries to move–each limb seems weighed down by tons of lead–she can but in a hoarse faint whisper cry,–'Help–help–help–help! [...] The power of articulation is gone,..." (Rymer, 28–9) and the scene is concluded in a way similar to its predecessor: "The girl has swooned, and the vampire is at his hideous repast!" (Rymer, 30).

The other typical role assigned to women in vampire fiction besides that of the *victim* is the *femme fatale,* which reflects male anxieties concerning the threat of non-subordinate, sexual women. In my view, as this figure proceeds in the history of vampire fiction, it gets more and more monstrous, while, at the same time, in a seemingly paradox way, it is also more and more conquerable. In the Romantic imagination she is all attraction and power. This can be the reason why a narrative poem like John Keats' "Lamia" (1820) is often classified among vampiric works, although there is no immediate reference to (blood-)vampirism in it. Goethe's "The Bride of Corinth" (1792) is an exception: the female sucks the young man's blood and, representing the power of paganism over prevailing Christianity, pulls him down into the grave. As Maria Janion points out, the earlier Medieval adaptations of the ancient narrative by Phlegon aim at frightening the reader off physical passion by the repulsiveness of the corpse-bride, but in Goethe's poem the girl embodies youth, love and passion, which could be preserved by a sensual figure like the vampire (Janion, 13–4).

Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" enchants the narrator into endless melancholy; while his Lamia seduces the narrator into self-deception, disclosed by a wise old man immune to the woman's attractive power. This figure will appear as a stock character in several further Gothic works, as a contrastive figure of the victimized, weak male. So, as the nineteenth century proceeds, the *femme fatale*, although she becomes increasingly monstrous, is at the same time executed more and more brutally.

In Theophile Gautier's work of 1832 *La Morte Amoureuse* (or *Clarimonde*) Romuald is tormented to lead a kind of double life as the vampire's lover and a village priest. However, his desire for safety outweighs his desire for Clarimonde, especially when it is revealed she is sucking his blood in order to survive. Although there is no evidence that she wants to kill Romuald – she argues that she takes the smallest amount necessary for her survival and her tears are the manifestations of the first emotional vampire long preceding Anne Rice's Louis (*Interview with the Vampire*, 1975). However, she is killed – with holy water – at the end by the stock character of the wise old man, who, also a clerical man, is again cold and rational enough to be able to withstand the attractive power of the female vampire. The life of Sheridan LeFanu's Carmilla (1872) is terminated more brutally, she is staked, although there is some ambiguity in the ending: after her death, Laura still fancies hearing "the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door" (LeFanu, 137).

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which is the culmination of the genre of the vampire novel, we can see both tendencies at the same time, since women begin to show, instead of paralysing fear, responsiveness to the vampire's call, thus threatening to become monsters themselves. The intervention of male characters proves to be effective in Mina's case but futile in Lucy's, whose victimization coincides with the deviance attributed by anxious men to New Women in *Fin-de-Siécle*. As Salli J. Kline states in her book *The Degeneration of Women: Bram Stoker's 'Dracula' as Allegorical Criticism of the 'Fin de Siécle*, these *femme fatale* vampires must be differentiated from the vampire figures who are symbolic manifestations of the New Women in terms of repulsion and the number of potential victims. Firstly, the *femme fatale* is a deadly beauty whilst the New Woman is portrayed as "a disgustingly ugly androgynous being" (Kline, 87). Secondly, the *femme fatale* enchants men slowly through sexual attraction whilst the New Woman is portrayed to be aggressive and immediately threatening. Thirdly, the *femme fatale* seduces "certain weak and whimpering men", whilst the New Woman is a threat to the Empire as a whole (ibid.). For example, New Women seemed to be threatening for conservative men due to the refusal of motherhood as a central (or the only) meaning in their lives. This anxiety is presented graphically in the scene where the three vampire women are about to kill the baby the Count has brought them in a bag (Stoker, 53). No wonder that in the case of these demonized women along with their potential recruit Lucy – as Bram Dijkstra argues in his book *Evil Sisters. The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* – "the ritual execution of female vampires always takes the form of a sadistic rape scene blended into a ritual of symbolic female castration" (118). Dijkstra's analogies of clitoredectomy, 'female castration' and removing the *vagina dentata* for removing the head with sharp teeth cannot be left without consideration if we note that the Count is killed merely with knives! (Dijsktra, 118–123). This shows how femaleness is identified with threatening monstrosity in a certain historical, cultural atmosphere. This tendency went on in the early twentieth century as well, ascribing the essence of vampirism to every woman:

> The early twentieth century's ever expanding cultural documentation of the confrontation between the sexual woman and the would-be continent male, her habitual victim, was linked to a growing conviction among physicians, biologists, and other such theologicians of the scientific age, that *all*

> women were, in fact, "real" vampires, driven by nature to depredate the male, and hence creatures who were, even if only in medical terms, dangerous to a man's health ... (Dijkstra, 46–7)

However, the classification still takes place along binarisms: the difference is that these deadly instincts of 'good women' are supposed to have been bridled by civilisation. We can see several examples of this binary view of women along with a growing optimism about patriarchal power: the deadly instincts of these women are always suppressed either by murdering them, or by conditioning and domesticating them. For example, when Mina turns into a bright-eyed, lascivious sexual woman in Tod Browning's film *Dracula*, her fiancé is startled and does not show any sign of responsiveness or titillation; however, he is relieved when the transformation proves to be reversible.

The tendencies to nullify or restrict the *femme fatale* have not disappeared from contemporary vampire fiction either. For example, the sequel to Whitley Strieber's *Hunger* entitled *The Last Vampire* is quite disappointing from a feminist perspective: the once immensely powerful and independent Miriam is demonized, subordinated, and imprisoned by stereotypes (e.g. falling in love with the vampire killer representing hegemonic masculinity). In the end she is killed.

Nevertheless, we can see that the invincible *femme fatale* along with her willing victim still stirs the contemporary imagination. The theme is manifest in its traditional form in Garry Kilworth's short story entitled "The Silver Collar". This story, narrated by the victimized male, was published in 1989, in one of the collections of psychic vampire stories edited by Ellen Datlow, entitled *Blood Is Not Enough: 17 Stories of Vampirism*. The collar mentioned in the title is intended to be a means of protection; however, its function fails when the will or consent to become a victim is stronger. As we shall see, Kilworth treats the *femme fatale* theme in the traditional way.

The handling of the *femme fatale* theme by a woman writer puts the theme in a completely different perspective, showing, first and foremost, the female point of view in the narration. Angela Carter's short story, "The Lady of the House of Love" combines the rethinking of the classical *femme fatale* vampire plot with the rewriting of the well-known fairy tale entitled "Sleeping Beauty" (or "Little Briar Rose"). It was originally published in a volume entitled "The Bloody Chamber", which is a collection of fairy tales rewritten from a feminist perspective. Feminist criticism has also shown from the 1970s that the patterns of feminine representation are basically the same in fairy tales as the ones I have shown in vampire fiction: women are either passive and dependent characters with the only virtue of beauty, or, if they are still assertive and powerful, their (relative) independence is equated with being wicked. The function is the same as in early vampire tales: to maintain the status quo of male dominance. For example, as Karen E. Rowe puts it, "tales which glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a heroine's cardinal virtues suggest that culture's very survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of the roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity" (239). However, "The Lady of the House of Love" subverts the traditional distribution of roles characteristic of vampire fiction and fairy tales. As Gina Whisker claims,

> Carter discloses that, by figuring women as either malevolent *femmes fatales* or idealized, doll-like icons, conventional horror disempowers femininity. But rather than simply reveal the limiting ways in which horror writing makes women into either bloodthirsty vampires or quaking violets, Carter's fiction sets out to redefine the genre altogether. (116)

In this essay I am going to carry out a comparative analysis of "The Silver Collar" and "The Lady of The House of Love" focusing on how the depredatory view of heterosexual relationships is portrayed in them and what these representations imply concerning love, desire and

possibilities of liberation. My theoretical framework is derived from Bram Dijkstra's above mentioned book where he argues that even contemporary thinking about gender is formed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century semi-scientific ideas that intended to legitimate women's subordination. These early works – based mostly upon social Darwinism, merging with psychoanalysis – basically equated all women with vampires. They started out from the presumption that there is a basic instinct of destruction in every woman, and the ideal, passive, feminine woman was only a precarious achievement of civilization. However, if men do not keep their dominant status (by force if necessary), they risk sliding down the evolutionary ladder. These views are long outdated in the scientific sense, but the problem is, as Dijkstra argues and shows through many examples, that they flowed into popular culture and even political practices, resulting in racial hatred and misogyny (4–5). These views have their origin in a depredatory view of relationships, i.e. regarding them as an inevitable struggle, a fight that will result in clear-cut hierarchical positions. The stereotypical women, driven by their "hungry wombs", are out to deprive males of their vital essence, so men must bridle their instincts by rendering women passive and subordinate. Active, confident, feminist women were regarded as degenerate, atavistic creatures, who must be either domesticated or killed. What I am interested in is how the views discussed by Dijsktra merged into the contemporary fantastic, more specifically the contemporary Gothic, and in what way they are maintained, or – a possibility Dijkstra seems to ignore – subverted.

Recycling the *Femme Fatale* Figure: Garry Kilworth's "The Silver Collar" (1989)

According to the editor's introduction, this story "shows the folly of those who believe love can conquer all" (Datlow, 69), but in my understanding it also shows the never-ceasing lure of the *femme fatale.*

The plot follows the tradition in the sense that it is presented from the victim's point of view, and, just as in *Clarimonde* by Theophile Gautier, the narration has a double layer: an older man's (Sam's) story is embedded into a frame story told by a younger man, John. The frame can be described as a Gothic setting – despite the modern vehicle, the outboard motor – the two men are drinking whisky by the fire on a remote Scottish island, in an isolated setting, under the moonlight. In both Gautier's and Kilworth's work, the older man's story has a moral function of warning against the threat of women, although in Kilworth's story it is less explicit. However, the story refers back to the powerful *femmes fatales* who are not destroyed: Sam is a willing victim. Even at the beginning John is suspicious about him, because he is talking about horsedrawn vehicles and old times in the following way:

> A different set of values. A different set of beliefs. We were more pagan then. Still had our roots buried in dark thoughts. Machines have changed all that. Those sort of pagan, mystical ideas cannot share a world with machines. Unnatural beings can only exist close to the natural world and nature's been displaced. (71)

The attempt to embed the clash of value systems in a vampire story dates back as long as Goethe's *The Bride of Corinth*, where pagan religion collides with Christianity. Just as in Goethe's poem, a kind of disappointment is suggested in Kilworth's story too: vampires do not seem to have a place in the new world, but they attempt to reclaim it. These rejected but constantly

recurring vampires are symbolic representations of unwanted human desires, either of ones that collide with the value system of the dominant culture, or of ones that, due to their uncontrollable character, have a threatening power on the character's personal integrity, or sometimes both.

The exclusion of vampires from the new world is based not on a new religion but on constantly developing technology. This kind of anxiety of modernity is presented not only in nineteenth-century Gothic literature by the new stock character of the mad scientist (as in Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter*, or Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or an earlier example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) but also in contemporary literature. For example, in Whitley Strieber's *The Last Vampire* most vampires, however powerful they may otherwise be, cannot adapt to the technical development of humankind, and they lose the fight against a human hunter, who blows them apart with a special weapon.

In Kilworth's tale, women are the objects of anxiety from the very beginning: "I was afraid of getting into something I couldn't get out of. Woman trouble, for instance..." (71) says Sam. Women's attractive power is portrayed in terms of masculine paranoia in a misogynist manner just as in *Clarimonde*, where the old priest advises the younger one not even to look at women, because they are the source of all trouble. The story, written in the late twentieth century, still reflects the binary view that equates pure reason with men and imposes corporeality/sexuality exclusively on women. It is suggested that women are the ones who put men's minds off rationality, or, in Gautier's story, religion. The point is always the exclusion of women from the achievements of culture or those of the intellect by confining them to sexual drives. In these texts women are the ones who are blamed for all complications of relationships and not, for example, the generally complicated and risky character of human beings and relationships. That is why the fantastic figure of the *femme fatale* vampire is suitable again to reflect male anxieties.

However anxious Sam was, he still meets his fate embodied by a woman with a "bewitching, spellbinding smile" (73) who appears one day in his silversmith's shop and orders a tight-fitting silver collar sealed on her neck. Seeing Sam's reluctance she reveals the truth: she needs the collar as a protective device against a diseased husband-to-be, who is "not like other men" (73). Sam visualizes an ugly folklore vampire, but actually he is beautiful and refined. "He isn't an animal. He's a gentleman," the woman insists, and Sam wonders if she fancies marrying some deity (75). He finally fashions the collar for the lady, with whom he soon gets obsessed. Three weeks later the woman comes back, and wants the collar to be removed, in order that she can give herself fully to the man she loved. The transformation takes place, and she comes back to Sam, claiming him. "Come. I need you" (77). She has the immense physical strength that could be perceived both in Polidori's Lord Ruthven and in Stoker's Dracula.

From this point on the story takes a different path from its nineteenth-century predecessor *Clarimonde* and becomes characteristic of the (late) twentieth century. Namely, Sam is much colder and more practical than Romuald: "I had no illusions about her being in love with me – or even fond of me. She wanted to use me for her own purposes, which were as far away from love as earth is from the stars" (77–8). His aim is a mere sexual relationship: "for once I had allowed my emotions to overrule my intellect" (Kilworth, 78). This is a misogynist assertion again: he equates himself with cold reason and the woman with passion, i.e. unwanted but irresistible temptation. What he wants is to possess her and outwit her: to get away with the *liaison* without being transformed into something insubstantial (i.e. driven by sexual desires instead of reason). To be more precise, he hopes to maintain the 'core' of his masculine subjectivity, which presupposes absolute independence and autonomy.

We can see that the transformation by her vampire lover enhanced woman's appearance: "she was more beautiful than ever, with a paler color to her cheeks and a fuller red to her lips" (79). In other words, she became a sexual woman, and, as opposed to above mentioned earlier representations of this kind of transformation, this is unambiguously plausible to the narrator. A further difference from the earlier *femme fatale* tales is that making love to her is more graphically portrayed in Kilworth than in *Clarimonde,* where emotional affection gains more emphasis than sex in its physical corporeality. The sexual act is an unearthly ecstasy for Sam, but the moment comes when the woman wants to take his blood. The needleprick substituting the fangs is a recurring motif in both Gautier's and Kilworth's story. Like in Strieber's *Last Vampire* the man in Kilworth is driven by curiosity and sexual desire, which he tries to separate from *himself.* He regards the woman as a mere piece of flesh, the object and, at the same time, embodiment of his unwanted desire, which is further intensified by the fact that she is an upper class woman (opposed to the working class man) – thus we can see how misogyny is inextricably linked with class prejudice. Disregarding the potential consequences for her, Sam has injected holy water in his veins, in order to get away with the act without any consequences. However, the trick does not work in the long run: John, the younger man to whom Sam tells his story, has to realize that Sam has not been able to stay away from her and he has been transformed as well.

This story is indebted to the depredatory view of relationships, and it cannot detach itself from the idea of an inevitable hierarchy. The text does not even question its necessity, but it is centered on the fight for the dominant role. Thus the most the potential victim can do is to bring about a role reversal. Sam's strategy is trying to victimize the victimizer, but the woman is able to rearrange the roles and conquer him.

The publication of such a story in 1989 may prove Dijkstra's statement that the depredatory view of relationships has found its way into contemporary popular culture. The solution, according to Dijkstra, is to do away with vampires since

> to fantasize about warlocks and witches, about vampires and werewolves, about Mars, Venus, and the caveman within, is to perpetuate the fantasies of a world eager for war and to remain complicit in the fetishization of others as 'evil,' as 'alien,' as 'inferior.' To do so is to see difference as disease (443).

This might be true for vampire stories following the classical patterns, but the way women writers deal with the *femme fatale* topic reveals the possibility of new perspectives and opens up new directions subverting the traditional gender hierarchy.

Being murdered or becoming a murderer? Can the bird sing a new song? – Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love" (1979)

The story is based on the fairy tale entitled "Sleeping Beauty" (or, "Little Briar Rose"), which shows that it is no good for a young girl to be curious, active and inventive. Once she is left without charge, she sets out to explore the hidden parts of the castle and meets her fate: she takes the spindle, hurts herself and falls into a deep sleep of one hundred years. The curse of the offended wise woman is broken by a man who is, in fact, not a real hero, he is just in the right place at the right time. What is more, in the person of the sleeping princess we have the opportunity to meet the ideal woman, who is, unlike the repulsive, vengeful and powerful wise woman, beautiful, passive, and without a voice. "They lived happily ever after" is, of course, an

important conclusion of all fairy tales, teaching little girls the cardinal female virtues (beauty, passivity) and what they can dream of (getting under Prince Charming's control).

As Andrea Dworkin writes, fairy tales offer only two definitions of woman: "There is the good woman. She is a victim. There is the bad woman. She must be destroyed. The good woman must be possessed. The bad woman must be killed, or punished. Both must be nullified" (649). In the dichotomic way I have shown above, this scheme is applicable to female characters in vampire fiction. This may be the reason why Angela Carter vampirized the protagonist of the tale she reinterpreted, exploiting the Gothic elements it already involved, like the castle or the curse. However, Carter's text does not only point out the flaws of fairy tales, it also puts vampire fiction into a new perspective, emphasizing, at the same time, the problematic character of a depredatory view of relationships.

The first thing the reader notices as an innovation in Angela Carter's tale is the fact that the third-person narrator presents the lady's perspective, and only partially dwells on the young man's. In the preceding literary works we gained no or very little insight into the vampires' thoughts, thus they did not seem to problematize or dislike their existence. However, the second innovative trait is that this lady, surprising as it may seem, does not take pleasure in being a *femme fatale*: "Everything about this beautiful and ghastly lady is as it should be, queen of the night, queen of terror – except *her horrible reluctance for the role*" (Carter, 493, *emphasis mine*). That she refuses to take pleasure in the powerful position of the *femme fatale* may be surprising at first. We may think that the lure of this role must be similar to that of the *vamp* film stars Bram Dijkstra describes by "emotional independence from men, sexual confidence, pleasure in the seductive authority of her body, and 'masculine' economic depredations [which] gave her a centrality in that period's cultural imagination of which today's manufactured 'sex symbols' can only dream" (246). She may seem a demon of "empowerment," but Dijkstra dissolves the lure of the vamp(ire) arguing that "to accept the vampire image of feminine sexuality as a positive model also requires acceptance of the aggressive-reactive principles of the turn of the century's gender wars" (247), i.e. the acceptance of a depredatory view of relationships characterized by an inevitable struggle for dominance. I wish to argue that this is precisely what the Lady aims to steer clear of.

However, she encounters the first problem through her embodying an archetype from which it is impossible to break out:

> Her voice is filled with distant sonorities, like reverberations in a cave: now you are at the place of annihilation, now you are at the place of annihilation. And she is herself a cave full of echoes, she is a system of repetitions, she is a closed circuit. (Carter, 483)

The 'cave' is a symbol for femaleness/femininity, and the 'system of repetitions' can refer to the female biological cycle. Biology is destiny, according to Freudian and social Darwinist views. The Lady also seems to be incarcerated in the 'repetitions' of her female body. However, as we shall see later, she tries to break out of such impediments, pointing out the fact that the limitations of being a female are cultural rather than biological. The idea that she is 'a system of repetitions' may project Judith Butler's performative theory of gender. Associating her with 'the place of annihilation' evokes the above mentioned idea that the basic instinct of destruction was attributed to every woman. This lady is far away from a civilized setting, and far from the authority of men: still we can see that her isolation does *not* result in murdering men with self-abandoned pleasure: "A certain desolate stillness of her eyes indicates she is inconsolable. She would like to caress their [her victims'] lean brown cheeks and stroke their ragged hair" (Carter, 486). However, hunger always overcomes her. So there is a conflict between her will and the in-

stincts determining her behaviour. Is she the embodiment of male desires/anxieties projected upon her?; "She herself is a haunted house. *She does not possess herself*; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes..." (493, *emphasis mine*) She seems to be imprisoned in the traditions of a weird ancestry, a lineage of bloodlust and hunger, which always overcomes *her*. What we can see in the whole story is a desperate struggle for selfhood, a struggle for breaking out of this lineage of murder and the depredatory role.

However, the cards always show the same pattern, and the pet lark in the cage is also a projection of her own, possibly inalterable situation. "Can a bird sing only the song it knows or can it learn a new song?" the story asks. The old song is nothing but her isolation and imprisonment: the (questionable) ability to 'learn a new song' refers to the doubt whether she can break out of her predestined role. She is the monstrous feminine, whether she wants it or not, and because she murders any potential companion, she is condemned to loneliness (disregarding the old crone in her service). Yet, although she is tormented by it, she also wants to fall in love: this is shown by the bridal gown she constantly wears. She becomes a grotesquely tragic character because of this ridiculous garment expressing her seemingly absurd refusal to face the consequences of her power over men and her otherness as a non-subordinated woman.

Her relationship with the British army officer is a subversion of the fairy tale and romance plot as well. As distinct from classical fairy tales, she is not a princess who can be saved by a man. As a parodic motif, she wears a wedding dress, but she kills all applicants for the role of Prince Charming: "The bridegroom bleeds on my inverted marriage bed" (495). It is a kind of ironic role reversal in a situation that is stereotypically seen only in terms of inevitable hierarchy: the virgin who ought to tolerate the pain of the first penetration 'passively' assumes the active role of the penetrator herself, taking the man's blood.

The applicant is a comic figure from the first moment: he arrives riding his bicycle, the symbol for rationality, which is stereotypically a masculine trait (as opposed to 'feminine' emotionality and instinctiveness). As Anne Koenen writes, this story "quite explicitly associates the Gothic mode with a feminine mode of thinking that is juxtaposed to (and vanquished by) a rational scientific mode; that mode is in turn associated with masculinity" (143). Although excluding women from the domain of rationality is also problematic, in Carter's story rationality itself is mocked to the same extent as its gendered character: rationality has no use here, and the male hero is prevented by his cold intellect to judge the situation correctly and realize that he is facing a vampire. The most comic twist is that he mistakes the *femme fatale* for several other, much less powerful images: "bedizened scarecrow" and "a child dressing up in her mother's clothes" (Carter, 490).

> And then he saw the girl who wore the dress, a girl with the fragility of a skeleton of a moth, so thin, so frail that her dress seemed to him to hang suspended, as if untenanted in the dank air, a fabulous lending, a self-articulated garment in which she seemed to live like a ghost in a machine. (490)

In the following paragraphs, she is described in contradictory terms: her "morbid mouth" is that of a whore (491), she is like a doll (492), a "great, ingenious piece of clockwork", "an automaton, made of white velvet and black fur, that could not move of its own accord" (492). These images stand for the static and often contradictory images of 'femininity' that seem artificial and weird rather than attractive, for the very fact that there is really no substance behind their enacted forms. The Lady's case seems to project Judith Butler's views again: "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (25).

Several feminist critics point out that contemporary images of ideal femininity aim at rendering women egoless and, most important of all, childlike and weak. For example, Sandra Lee Bartky describes techniques of disciplining women so that they seem powerless, without any sign of wit or intelligence. The soldier also wants to see the woman having much less power than she actually does.

Thus, we can see that this woman is made up of stereotypical images of the mythical *Eternal Feminine* Simone de Beauvoir also criticized:

> as against the dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences of actual women, mythical thought opposes the Eternal Feminine, unique and changeless. If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are told not that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine. (237)

The eternal character of femininity is opposed by its internal contradictions (e.g. child-whore), and its essential character is denied by the fact that the Lady does not want to occupy either of these positions. She yearns to be human through achieving a non-depredatory human relationship. This is not a traditional romance where the heroine happily consents to her own domestication and subordination recognizing the beneficial effects of love, which has a potential of 'curing' independent (and thus, stereotypically unhappy) women. The intentionally benevolent paternal behaviour of the army officer turns out to be foolish. The Lady has been dead for long hours when he is still pondering in the morning light how to transform her, how to cure her:

> We shall take her to Zurich, to a clinic; she will be treated for nervous hysteria. Then to an eye specialist, for her photophobia, and to a dentist to put her teeth into a better shape. Any competent manicurist will deal with her claws. We shall turn her into the lovely girl she is; ... (Carter, 497)

He still does not recognize that he is facing a (dead) vampire, thus his overemphasized reason lacking any imagination is ridiculed again. Classical vampire tales are mocked as his seeing the vampire as a sick child and wanting to cure her is an unusual and comic attitude. Yet there is much more at stake than parodying the traditional vampire plot. No matter how benevolent the 'hero' may seem, he wants to gain power, planning to transform her mind and body. Besides supposing an inner essence to the woman, he also supposes that this essence coincides with the ideologically prescribed feminine woman ('the lovely girl'), and that after certain corrective procedures this supposed core of her 'true' self will evolve. So we can see how the story enacts the discrepancy between the conviction of the male character as a stereotypical repository of reason and the supposed 'feminine essence' as an absolutely irrational given.

The transforming acts planned by the male are aimed at depriving the female vampire of her dangerous body parts with which she can hurt men: her claws and her pointed teeth. This might evoke Germaine Greer's views on what she calls castration, that is, depriving women of their energies and forcing self images on them which they do not feel relevant (3). This is a more subtle, psychic version of the butchery Van Helsing and his companions enact on Lucy in *Dracula.* Moreover, the treatment against nervous hysteria means (re)gaining male dominance over indocile female bodies which do not comply with patriarchal regulations of femininity. Thus, the body of the female vampire embodies the female body in patriarchy, which is, ideologically, insufficient and must be altered. On the whole, the army officer does not accept the Lady as she is, he regards her otherness as abnormality, her fatal femininity as a disease which can and must be cured.

The fact that the Lady is willing to give up her depredatory position to a certain extent – he is the first man whom she does not kill – does not mean that she herself is willing to get

victimized and objectified. She does not want to be moved from one static image, that of the *femme fatale*, to another one, that of the *victim*. She wants to throw off static attributes that symbolize roles culturally identified as 'feminine' (like the obedient 'automaton' or the beautiful 'doll') and wants to become a person – a position she has been denied. Consequently, she regards the other as a person, too, not as prey, as victim; but she also refuses to be regarded as one. She aims to do away with the depredatory view of relationships; and the binary of either oppression or demonization of women, i.e. the "good girl/bad girl" dichotomy, which can be traced back as far as the opposing figures of Virgin Mary and Eve. As Robin Ann Sheets proposes, Carter seeks "to escape from dichotomies altogether" (642), but this endeavour fails in this tale: the Lady's death suggests that there is no third way; there is no breakout from the stereotypes of femininity. For the Lady, there is no possibility of *selfhood* beside the originally refused victim-role, besides being regarded as a thing to be cured, altered, and thus to be deprived of power. With her power she can only live on if she turns it against men again – if she gives it up, she inevitably becomes a victim. Thus we can see how difficult it is to transcend the *status quo* which Sheets describes in the following way: "the association of sex, power and sadomasochism in pornography is part of society's common prescription for heterosexual relations" (Sheets, 645). Although Carter "urges women to challenge assumptions about female masochism and to define sexuality outside of dominant-submissive power relations" (ibid.), this seems to be impossible in this tale unless we accept Jody Regel's more optimistic interpretation:

> In this story it is the innocence and virginity of the male which is important because it is his unaffected and guileless treatment of the woman as a human being that breaks the spell and destroys the torment of her life. The ancient constraints and constructs of male hegemony have to be destroyed completely and the fairy tale princess image has to die in order for women to be perceived and accepted as fully human. (Regel 1996)

Alternative masculinity as opposed to the hegemonic one can mean a solution in Carter's other tales, for example "The Bloody Chamber". However, in this case we must notice that the alternative masculinity the army officer seems to embody is only a temporary one due to his lack of experience. As soon as he gains some confidence, he wants to gain authority and dominance over the body of the woman as well. As we could see, he does *not* regard her as human, what is more, the Countess can turn into a human being only after she dies. The scent of the rose reminds the army officer of her for a long time, however, being remembered does not create the desired humaneness and selfhood either. In my understanding "The Lady of the House of Love" expresses anxieties and doubts concerning woman's breakout from her gender-role. Carter's Lady seems to have no chance to stay alive, since she proved to be the product of patriarchal ideology, of a depredatory view of relationships, of which the story in itself offers no way out. However, if we read this story in the context of the other tales in "The Bloody Chamber", we can regard it as a possibility, an occasional doubt, even if it in itself fails to provide a final answer.

Thus we could see the *femme fatale* in two different positions: the dominant and the failing one. Both stories, despite their different perspectives, remain within the depredatory view of relationships, of which the *femme fatale* figure itself is an embodiment. Hence, as long as gender inequality continues, the *femme fatale* will keep her eternal charm, regardless of the reader's (or the spectator's) gender. However, the *femme fatale's* attractiveness is *not* the core of the problem since her figure is not a reason but a consequence, a reflection of already existing engendered power relations, either a manifestation of paranoia, the embodiment of an erotic, masochistic dream, or an insufficient attempt to break out of the ideologically prescribed identity positions.

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