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Is Prince Charming Still Alive?  
A Comparison of Traditional and Postmodernist Fairy  
Tales

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## ABSTRACT

Postmodernism in literature seeks to create new forms since it considers that everything has already been invented. For this reason, retellings arose, which are reinterpretations of previous works. This project will explain what masculinities consist of and what their objective is, in addition to showing what gender roles and stereotypes are attributed to men in fairy tales. Therefore, after an comparison between the male characters of four fairy tales in their original version and their respective postmodern versions, we will proceed to conclude if the theories that seek to blur rigid gender roles have achieved their goal in postmodern retellings or, on the contrary, the princes continue to maintain them in their physical appearance and behavior.

Key words: Postmodernism, retellings, masculinities, fairytales, princes and gender roles.

## RESUMEN

El Postmodernismo en la literatura pretende crear nuevas formas ya que considera que ya está todo inventado. Por ello, surgieron los “retellings”, los cuales son reinterpretaciones de obras previas. En este proyecto se explicarán en qué consisten las masculinidades y cuál es su objetivo, además de mostrar cuales son los roles de género y los estereotipos que se atribuyen a los hombres en los cuentos de hadas. Por lo tanto, tras una comparación entre los personajes masculinos de cuatro cuentos de hadas en su versión original y sus respectivas versiones postmodernas, se procederá a concluir si las teorías que pretenden difuminar los rígidos roles de género han logrado su objetivo en los “retellings” postmodernistas o, por el contrario, los príncipes siguen manteniéndolos en su apariencia física y su comportamiento.

Palabras clave: Postmodernismo, “retellings”, masculinidades, cuentos de hadas, príncipes y roles de género.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES AND JUSTIFICATION

Literature is a field that has been widely explored over the years. One of the branches that have emerged from this evolution are retellings and adaptations; the former consisting of a reinterpretation of a story, while the latter takes a story and transforms it into a different medium or format (Corrigan 23; Stephens & McCallum 1).

Adaptations are not a new invention. Authors, playwrights, directors, composers and choreographers have been adapting material for centuries; however, these adaptations offer new information in a unique way (Hutcheon 48-49). The stories were formerly told orally until they were captured on paper, so literature has been destined to be “retold, reheard and reread” (Kroeber 1). Consequently, the adaptations went from different formats: from oral to written, from written to written and from written to visual.

On the other hand, retellings originate new stories from the literature of a culture, in our case, children's literature and folk tales. These are stories about fictional individuals memorialized for their heroism or holiness, adventurousness or mischief (Stephens 1). Stories express the aspirations of a society and introduce children to a cultural heritage and values; however, when traditional stories are retold in another time and cultural context and for a different audience, the meaning given to that story can change. Therefore, some stories, such as folk tales, are particularly malleable to, for example, feminist reinterpretation (Stephens & McCallum 1). This is probably because they are stories told throughout different generations and need to be adapted to modern times and their demands.

This study focalizes on retellings that have emerged in recent years to focus on a more feminist point of view in traditional tales. Specifically, it will analyze the representation of the princes or male protagonists in four short stories belonging to the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) by Angela Carter in comparison to their traditional equivalents.

Angela Carter was an English novelist known for her feminism among other features; *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* is her best-known work, which consists of an anthology of short stories, published in 1979 (Jasmine). Angela Carter's books are usually considered within the fantastic literature, using innovative narrative procedures and frequent intertextual references (Okuhata).

The objective of this project is to compare the stereotypes of the male characters in traditional tales as opposed to the postmodern ones, in order to check if Prince Charming is still alive or modern times have managed to change the role that men are thought to have. Therefore, the central interest lies in identifying the similarities or differences in terms of the representation of Prince Charming.

The analysis in this project will include the comparison between the original stories of “Bluebeard” (1697) by Charles Perrault, “Beauty and the Beast” (1740) by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, “Snow White” (1812) by Jacob y Wilhelm Grimm and “Sleeping Beauty” (1697) by Charles Perrault, and its modern versions respectively: “The Bloody Chamber”, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, “The Snow Child” and “The Lady of the House of Love”.

To carry out the analysis of the characters and the stereotypes that each one possesses, I chose the main male characters of each story. The type of methodology used in this research is qualitative and comparative. The quantitative methodology has been carried out through content analysis, based on an impartial classification of data in order to obtain some resulting conclusions. Finally, relationships between the stories have been established through the comparative methodology.

This project is structured in three broad sections: theoretical framework, the comparison of the male characters and conclusion.

In the first section, masculinity is treated as the social expectation about what it implies to be a man and the characteristic qualities and attributes of this gender. Besides, I will explore the connection between masculinity studies with feminist theories, how they

arise, what they try to deal with and what they consist of. Masculinities will show the stereotypes and the gender roles that are assigned to male characters within tales, and from these protagonists it will be possible to extract key features of Prince Charming for their later analysis. Likewise, I will contextualize Postmodernism and what are the reasons that explain why retellings emerged in this period. Therefore, I will explain what retellings are and what new reinterpretations bring to fairy tales.

The second section is the body of the project and where the analysis of the short stories will be carried out, which will consist of the comparison of the tales of both periods with the purpose of looking for the stereotypes of male roles and see how they have evolved, if they have, at present.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the analysis and the data obtained for a total and joint understanding of the project. The reader will be able to check if the male protagonist has evolved throughout the years.

As a justification for the elaboration of this project, a very recurrent theme is the stereotypes of princesses and how they affect girls; nonetheless, stereotypes in princes are not a much examined topic. In this way, we can verify if history and literary movements have created a different standard for boys, one that is not harmful and that serves as a reference for them; or on the contrary, the role of the prince remains the same. Furthermore, these retellings are aimed at an adult audience that will know if the ideals included in the traditional tales have changed, or they will continue to reference the traditional Prince Charming.

To conclude, the connection of this project with the subjects of the English Studies degree is mainly with Literature and Theory of Literature, in which the history of literature is encompassed over the years and, especially, Postmodernist literature, which determines the style and content of the versions of the stories selected for the analysis.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. GENDER ROLES AND MASCULINITIES**

Since the beginning of history, society has been imposing attitudes and behaviors associated with people depending on their gender. Although the norms are different in each culture, traits that influence gender identity have been delimited in all of them. Consequently, society inculcates behaviors that are considered specific to each sex and, therefore, delimiting and biasing the sexes.

Cultural representations of gender are expressed and manifested through stereotypes. These are defined as preconceived generalizations about the attributes (assigned to men and women according to their sex) or characteristics of people in different social groups (Laird and Thompson 113-122).

These stereotypes favor gender roles that are socially rooted. To understand the difference between stereotype and gender role, we must first define the differences between sex, gender and gender identity. Sex is the distinction that is given to a person when is born based on their physique. Gender refers to the way of being of each sex, assigned and transmitted by culture. And gender identity is how each person feels inside (Pérez Hinojal 19).

Gender stereotypes are social and cultural beliefs that assign us a series of characteristics for being a man or a woman. They give us behaviors, ways of carrying emotions, ideas about our physical appearance and even interests. Nevertheless, gender roles are the implementation of stereotypes in society. They are a set of behaviors, thoughts and emotions that we are expected to do, based on our gender. The roles can also mark features of our personality; in them we find, for instance, the explanation of why men do not cry (Pradas Gallardo).

This internalization has great consequences and, on occasions, they have been instilled unconsciously through fairy tales. In this way, the most common female stereotypes are emotional instability, tenderness, submission, dependence, little intellectual

development, affectivity, irrationality and frivolity; while the masculine stereotypes are on the contrary, emotional stability and self-control, dynamism, aggressiveness, domination, intellectual aptitudes, poorly defined affective aspect, rationality and frankness (Gutiérrez Fraile 20).

In the case of women, it is around puberty when beauty and sympathy develop – without mentioning their sports, intellectual or creative abilities, but their artistic ones– so it is likely that due to this, the protagonists in tales are usually girls or adolescents. On the other hand, the model of men is marked by the patriarchal mandate of gender, and they are the ones who succeed when they are strong, athletic and intelligent (Gutiérrez Fraile 21).

That is the reason why feminist theories emerged, fighting against the subordination of women to men and the established system –patriarchy– which is unequal in terms of power relations. Thanks to these feminist theories and masculinities, traditional gender roles were gradually blurred, although there is still much work ahead (Del Barco Cuesta 8, 9; Lerner 238-239).

Traditionally, gender studies have generally focused on women. Politically, this is logical enough. It is women who have undergone the worst effects of gender discrimination. Nevertheless, gender studies started to pay attention to men's lives as well, recognizing that the lives of women are inextricably linked to men's (Armengol et al. 1).

Studies on masculinity appear between the 1970s and 1980s as a similar reaction as feminist ones. These studies analyze and question what was considered "feminine" or "masculine" until then. Masculinity does not have a specific classification but can be studied from the variables of history, culture, race, ethnicity, class, sex, or age (Del Barco Cuesta 8; Kimmel 16).

Male liberation calls for men to free themselves of the sex-role stereotypes that limit their ability to be human. Sex-role stereotypes say that men should be dominant; achieving and enacting a dominant role in relations with others is often taken as an indicator of success (Murphy 25).



Masculinity involves the social expectations of being a man; this term refers to the roles, behaviors and attributes considered appropriate for boys and men. Masculinity is socially, historically, and politically constructed and defined, rather than biologically driven. There is a great variety of masculinities due to its social character in manhood; this means that there is no single definition of masculinity. One of them is, for example, patriarchal masculinity, which emphasizes the superiority of masculinity over femininity and the authority of men over women. These constructions can change over time, as we can see in the difference between family generations (National Democratic Institute).

Gender stereotypes make men groom themselves to be strong, knowledgeable, powerful, and insightful without showing their feelings. They are attributed a personality contrary to that of women, known as "hegemonic masculinity", and is based on power and potency culminating in success, competitiveness or status (Espinoza Yépez 21). Hegemonic masculinity deals with groups of men who take positions of power and wealth in a certain historical context. They legitimize the social relations that generate their domination; in addition, they offer provisions and protection. This hegemonic masculinity is found both in the individual and in the institutions –the State, companies, unions and families– (Del Barco Cuesta 15; Carrigan, Connell and Lee 153).

### **2.1.1. MEN IN FAIRY TALES**

Traditional fairy tales are fictional stories that may contain fantastic characters and enchantments, usually with a happy romantic ending and archetypal characters. This genre is mainly directed towards children, and, as I said before, it could influence them since childhood by establishing ideals. These archetypal characters tend to be princesses, young sons, evil stepmothers, and brave princes, as well as other creatures such as ogres, giants, dragons, and fairy godmothers (Thompson 8).

Most of fairy tales were popularized by the Grimm brothers and Charles Perrault. The nature of the tale does not depend on the presence of fairies in it. Thompson has concluded that in many of the stories we know extraordinary beings do not appear, however, magic is notorious (Thompson 55).

Regarding the princes and kings, both have predetermined features. The former must be handsome, strong, and ready for adventure, brave to defeat their enemies and fight against all adversity. Moreover, he has to show his worth and, as a reward, he will have a beautiful princess waiting to be rescued, who, in return, will be servile to him and will love him forever. They are predestined to love. On the other hand, the kings will seek the best for their kingdom in a wise way, being rational and not very emotional. That lack of sensitivity sometimes means going over their sons and daughters (Tamia).

In short, the male characters in traditional fairy tales are represented under the stereotypes included for centuries in accordance with the biology of their sex; however, with the arrival of new currents of thought and literature, the concept of virility has changed and is embodied in postmodernist retellings, as we will see in the analysis.

## 2.2. POSTMODERNISM AND RETELLINGS

Literature has undergone a lot of evolution over time due to historical events and necessities that authors and society needed to express themselves. In this way, Postmodernism emerged in the 1960s after World War II and was influenced by the rise of new technology and science. This new movement is difficult to define and, although it claims to be independent of the ideas of modernist literature, it maintains its experimentalism. Thus, Postmodernism was created as a response to Modernism, to the new world that would emerge after the war, the universalization of information, capitalism and fragmentation.

Postmodernism analyzes and reconstructs all types of texts, including myths and folk, due to the idea that everything is already written and structured and it is not possible to do anything new; therefore, they reinvent what was previously written. As a result, the retellings and adaptations emerge as a reproduction of the originals, pretending not to be copies (Martín García 11; Connor 64-65).

Considering the aforementioned information, Postmodernism has some features that must be defined to understand how retellings arise. In the first place, the intertextuality within this trend is essential; this relationship between texts within the same story is evident in references to fairy tales. Similarly, this concept is linked to the "pastiche", which means to combine several elements, and, hence, consists of a mixture of genres or aspects in the same narrative. Thus, in retellings it will be a widely used practice and, equally, in fairy tales due to its mixture of fantasy, romanticism, magical elements and tragedy (Sim 209).

On another front, Postmodernism was a philosophical and cultural movement. Some of the main figures of this movement researched history and exposed the pervasive phallocentrism of thought by empowering themselves, including Angela Carter. This idealism would be reflected in the collection of short stories that we will analyze and we will see if not only the female character changes but also the male (Travers).

Finally, this movement is also characterized by the use of magical realism, where surrealism and imaginary, extravagant, fantastic and oneiric themes play a paramount role. This concept mixes the realistic with the fantastic or bizarre in narratives such as fairy tales (Travers).

Delving into retellings, they designate the acts of reflecting, repeating and recreating a classic tale to give rise to our new version (Ridler & Dyer 1). These reinventions are usually the product of a need to change mentality over time, add freshness and broaden the range of the public to which it is directed. Following this trend, Angela Carter rewrites fairy tales focused on adults that contain violence and more elaborate language, as we will see in the examples of this anthology, to raise awareness in society thanks to her feminist vision (Sanders 9, 10).

Retellings have great controversy when it comes to setting the fine line between rewriting or copying, therefore, Desmond and Hawkes (3) set a classification according to the fidelity of the original. There are three levels, the first one is called “close”, which includes the exact copies; the second is “intermediate”, a reinterpretation with the same structure as the original; and third is “loose”, this being totally different from the original. Hence, the retellings should not fall into the temptation of belonging to the first category.

To conclude, Cristina Bacchilega confirms what I have said above in her book *Postmodern Fairy Tales* (2010): fairy tales are predominantly for children; however, they are easy to be retold and dramatized. Children's stories are one-dimensional; nevertheless, this proliferation cannot occur in this type of reading, so retellings give them a new use and meaning. Thus, this genre is legitimized in other areas such as psychotherapeutical approaches and contexts.

### **3. TRADITIONAL AND POSTMODERN PRINCES: A COMPARISON OF MALE CHARACTERS**

In the analysis included in this project, I will make a comparison between the characteristics that gather, on the one hand, the princes of the selected traditional tales – “Bluebeard”, “Beauty and the Beast”, “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty”– and, on the other, those of the postmodernists –“The Bloody Chamber”, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, “The Snow Child” and “The Lady of the House of Love”–. After putting each prince in context, an analysis of their physical appearance and the behavior of each one will be carried out.

#### **3.1. PHYSICAL ASPECT**

##### **3.1.1. THE EVIL ARISTOCRAT**

Beginning with the first two stories, Bluebeard's original version is much shorter than Carter's, so even though he is a sadist in both stories, the postmodernist version gives us much more detail about what he is like. Perrault uses very few adjectives and his description is vague and repetitive. Bluebeard is a wealthy man who owns “beautiful houses, a large number of silver and gold plates, embroidered furniture, and carriages gilded entirely with gold” (Perrault). Angela Carter focuses more on his physique and only tells us that he is rich and has a castle (Carter, “The Bloody Chamber” 10, 13).

According to the first version, he is “unlucky and frightfully ugly” due to his blue beard (Perrault). Because of this appearance, women and neighbors feared him and ran away from him. This description is the only one that occurs throughout the story and is repeated over and over again.

Unlike the previous version, the narrator of “The Bloody Chamber” is the main female character, who describes her husband as she perceives him. Because of this description, we get a more detailed mental picture of what Bluebeard looks like. He has a

“dark, leonine shape of his head” and, although he was a big man, he moved softly and soundlessly (Carter 7). He was much older than her, so his dark mane had traces of pure silver. Nonetheless, his “strange, heavy, almost waxen face was not lined by experience” (8).

Moreover, his eyes are always “disturbed with absence of light”, as if it was a mask (8). As for its smell, he has an “opulent male scent of Russian leather and spices” (12). The woman makes an analogy comparing him to a lily, possessing an “ominous calm”. He was wearing a monocle over his left eye and “London-tailored trousers and the shirt from Turnbull and Asser” (11, 46). His “voice resonated” and “his lips always looked so strangely red and naked between the black fringes of his beard”, besides, he did not usually smile (14). This beard was like “a wet, silken brush” and his fingers were “well-manicured” (16, 41).

As the story progresses, the adjectives start to become more negative. He is “a grave satyr and a gourmand”; he also has skin like a toad (15, 21, 24). Furthermore, he was a “mysterious being” who hid his true nature. Finally, when what she suspected is discovered, the description changes to torturer, strangler, betrayal, ghastly, puppet-master and monster (31, 32, 40, 42, 47). There is a contradiction in some names since on the one hand he is seen as the “Eye of God” and solitary but on the other he is brooding (33, 42), he feels “shame and guilty joy”, as well as “genuine tenderness” while he is trying to kill her (42, 47).

In conclusion, the description of both characters is very similar, although in the postmodernist version it is broader and, therefore, we can see his physical appearance more clearly. In the original version he is only a rich and ugly sadist with a blue beard; however, in Carter's version we can see attributes considered masculine such as strength, success, long mane. But he is also no longer the typical young husband and is described as older, lustful and preoccupied with his clothes and his manicure; some of these attributes are considered feminine.

### 3.1.2. THE ENCHANTED BEAST

Continuing with the second tale, the male protagonist is a prince turned into a beast. However, in Villeneuve's version, for practically the entire story he remains in the form of the creature. It is the only story in which the character has two shapes and is physically described in both. In Carter's version a longer description is given but only of the beast.

On the one hand, in Villeneuve's "Beauty and the Beast", the appearance of the beast as a prince is described as a handsome young prince on several occasions. He "seemed to smile kindly"; however, when Beauty saw him in dreams, he is "unhappy, sad, weary and sorrowful" (Villeneuve 19, 23). The girl refers to him with adjectives like "Unknown prince", "Charming prince", "Mysterious prince", "Beloved prince" and "Dear Prince" (19, 20, 23, 24). Finally, the fairy who places us in the story of the prince's enchantment assures that this last form is his natural form. Carter's character, once changed, possesses "an unkempt mane of hair, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, and a distant but heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all the beasts" (Carter, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" 61).

On the other hand, there is the aspect of the beast. Villeneuve describes him as a "frightful beast that strikes fear with a "terrible", "dreadful" and "gruff" voice (Villeneuve 19, 21). It is described with adjectives like "angry", "furious", "grimly" and "roughly" (8, 10). Carter makes a similar description of his "furious roaring" and "a voice that seemed an instrument created to inspire the terror", however, quickly switching to adjectives like "mysterious being" (Carter 56, 53).

Shortly after meeting him in "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon", she sees that he is "kind" and "assertive" but also shy (Carter 53, 55). Likewise, as the story progresses in "Beauty and the Beast", Beauty becomes aware of his vulnerability. Little by little the beast acquires the qualities of kindness, generosity and gentleness (Villeneuve 24, 15). Finally, Beauty starts calling him "Poor Beast", "Dear Beast", or "Kind Beast" (21, 22, 23).

In the postmodern version we have much more imagery, the beast is “ponderous” but “swift”, he has a “great, mazy head of hair, green eyes as agate, golden hairs in his paws and head of a lion” (Carter 53). Beauty says that the lions are “more beautiful by far than we are, yet they belong to a different order of beauty, to the wild things” (54). “He reared on his hind legs” and “wore a smoking jacket of dull red brocade”. He remains “impassive as a figurehead at the top of the table”, denoting his supremacy. He was strange but when he was with her he purred through the stiff bristles of his muzzle, from which a rough tongue came out (57).

At last, when the young girl finds him dying in Villeneuve’s tale, producing groans, she saw how this “ugly creature” transformed her voice into a gentle one and disappeared, becoming her “long-loved prince” (Villeneuve 27). Likewise, the transformation of Carter’s beast began with “the bones showed through the pelt and the flesh through the wide, tawny brow” (Carter 61).

Despite this appearance, according to the original version, he is a “noble sir” who owns a castle due to his wealthy status, while the postmodernist version only said that he owns a “Palladian house”, a “lovely house” (Villeneuve 6, 8; Carter 50).

Therefore, in these two stories there is a contrast between the appearance of the beast and the prince it transforms into. While in both cases the beast is terrifying and leonine in appearance, in Carter's story it is more sensitive and assertive as well as being mentioned as dressed. Both descriptions are quite extensive; however, Carter uses more metaphors and similes. Finally, regarding the prince's appearance, in Villeneuve's version he is the typical young and handsome man, while in Carter's version he is rough looking similar to a boxer with a broken nose, breaking the beauty standards imposed over men.

### **3.1.3. THE RESCUER PRINCE**

In the tale of “Snow White” and “The Snow Child”, the prince is the least physically represented character. In the former, he just appears at the end of the story to



take the beautiful girl. The narrator describes him with only one word: “joyfully prince” (Grimm). This does not help us to make a mental image of him and know the prototype of man. In the other story, it is not very different; despite the fact that in this story he is a protagonist, we only know that he is a Count (Carter, “The Snow Child” 115).

As a result, we conclude that we cannot obtain an accurate image of what these two male protagonists look like, however, according to the established standards, both have a noble title.

### **3.1.4. THE VALIANT PRINCE**

Lastly, the prince from “Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” also has little physical description. He is the son of a king who ruled in those days, they were from different family from that of the sleeping princess. When the prince heard the legend of the woman, he was delighted. At one point in the story, he is married and becomes king.

On the contrary, in “The Lady of the House of Love”, the male character is a “young officer” who belongs to the British army. He is “blond”, “blue-eyed” and “heavy-muscled” (Carter, “The Lady of the House of Love” 121). He came to Romania after a visit to some friends in Vienna, so he is an explorer and an adventurer. His virginity makes him ignorant but powerful, as well as unimaginative, but it protected him against the vampire (121, 130). Despite being young, he is very rational, unlike Perrault's prince, who goes into the forest without thinking. At one point in the story, he is “hot, hungry, thirsty, weary, dusty”, and later he is grateful to the girl for satisfying his desires (122). He is a strong and handsome biker, who is compared to a brave hero and not a scary cat, although his mane is like a lion and the sun (Carter 130, 131).

In short, these two characters have different social status; in addition, the original character's courage that goes against the human instinct is opposed to the rationality of the postmodern character. Nonetheless, the typical physical appearance of a handsome and muscular man is maintained.

After this comparison, I can conclude that the books written by women have, in general, much more physical description. In most cases the prince is strong, except for the protagonist of “Snow White” and “The Snow Child”, who we do not know what they are like. They are all rich. They are often described as handsome and young, although neither Bluebeard nor the beast meets this requirement. At the beginning of all the stories, except in the case of the Beast in its two versions, all the male protagonists are kind; however, some evolve into a terrible being, others remain the same and the beast becomes kind. In many cases the prince is blond, although in others it is not mentioned. Finally, those who are brave are the two characters from “Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” and “The Lady of the House of Love”, in the others I would not dare to say that there is courage.

## **3.2. MALE GENDER ROLES**

### **3.2.1. THE EVIL ARISTOCRAT**

Another way to know more about the princes and their personalities is through their behavior; through the actions and words of people we can learn many of their qualities. Through the behavior of these male characters I will analyze whether they follow the Traditional Gender Roles or move away from them. This aforementioned behavior also varies depending on how the princesses were, if they were calmer or more authoritarian.

In the story "Bluebeard", the neighbor and her daughters were suspicious of the man due to his multiple marriages and the disappearance of his wives. For this reason, he tries to win their affection by taking them to a country house (Perrault). From what we may seem, the gesture can be interpreted as trying to buy their love or as a kind gesture. He behaved like a gentleman and embraced them.

As "Bluebeard" progresses, the male character, already married, began to give orders to his new wife but was also attentive. However, at the moment of the imminent murder, the real personality of Bluebeard appeared. The girl was under him as he held a large saber in his hand as "he cried out as loud as he could bawl making the house tremble". This attitude denotes that he had a need to be superior and terrifying. In this part of the story we can perceive the hegemonic masculinity that shows the dominance over the woman. With the other hand he held her hair, so it can be a last act of delicacy with her before decapitating her (Perrault).

In "Bluebeard", when he heard that his wife's brothers were coming to her aid, Bluebeard made a sudden stop and immediately run away for his life, to no avail (Perrault). This can be understood as an act of cowardice since he fled from his brothers but subdued the woman, or as an instinctive act of natural survival.

Continuing with "The Bloody Chamber", there is no previous relationship between the girl's mother and Bluebeard; she just asked her daughter if she was sure about the marriage. However, he was also very attentive to her at first, presenting her with a bouquet

of flowers and jewelry –an act that could also be to buy her love and trust (Carter, “The Bloody Chamber” 8). He loved surprising her when she was alone, something that could also be to control her.

The girl describes what he did all the time so we can also know how she perceives him. The protagonist tells us how he was in her marriage proposal, since, even in a moment of happiness; he did not lose that “heavy, fleshy composition” (8). He was ruled by desire and lust and looked at her with “carnal avarice” (11). In this story he had also been married several times but she did not want to think about it (9).

In Carter's version, he shows a “mixture of mockery and relish” (18). When the girl inspects the house, she sees that he has two or three Gauguin's, so he is an art lover, making him sensitive. Nonetheless, his favorite painting has a girl in a deserted house, which could be a simile (21). He trusted her by leaving her the keys; nevertheless, he told her "if you love me, leave it well alone", which implies manipulation and blackmail (23). She considered that he had mastery over her, so we see the hegemonic masculinity again. Following her inspection of the room, she noted that the desk had its back to the sea, as though he wanted to turn his back on the siren sea, indicating introspection or introversion and being reserved (28).

Throughout Carter's entire story we can see the contrast between sensitivity, as when she defines him as an amateur botanist, but also wonders if he is not rich enough not to commit a crime (28). His zeal for secrecy makes her suspicious, even more so when the girl finds the love letters he hides to feel bachelor again. The woman had found her husband's secret: the murdered wives, which makes him a murderer (31).

Carter gives a more detailed description of the "museum of perversity". He had embalmed one of the wives in his “private slaughterhouse” (32, 35). She wondered if she would survive his depredations and vices because “her music could no longer ensnare him” (34, 35). The history of this bloody chamber is complemented by the legend of a Marquis who used to hunt young girls with dogs in this castle of murder (38), so this mastery has been present for generations.

When the girl finds out everything, she asks herself a very revealing question in the use of the word "bought": "had he not bought me so that I should do so?" (40) At this point, the husband is defined as atrocious, executor and owner of the "Kingdom of the unimaginable" (42). He was in despair and had lost his impassivity in exchange for a "somber delirium" (42).

In "The Bloody Chamber", before beginning with the "sacrifice", he did a previous ritual (Carter 44). He ordered her to her knees, lovingly removed her jewelry, twisted her hair into a rope, kissed her nape, and had a moment of indecision before killing her. This shows his internal dilemma or his last glimmer of love. However, he soon returned to his task (47).

Moreover, in Carter's version, the woman's mother is who saved her, and Bluebeard did not run away but stayed petrified in front of her (Carter 48), this act opposes the instinct to flee that the protagonist had in the original version, this change in front of an attacking woman means that he is also afraid of her and did not expect a woman to confront him, since he dominates his wife but against the mother remains static.

A noticeable difference between the two stories is that when the husband leaves on his business trip, in the original he wants her to have fun with her friends in his absence, while in the second he leaves her totally alone with the servants (Perrault; Carter 16). Moreover, in the original version he had already spent his honeymoon while in the second the journey was during it (16), being the woman's holder and a successful business man. The postmodernist story, being longer, gives more details of what the man does. When they arrived, he gave her his hand to get off the train, noticing that she was wearing the ring on the outside of her glove, and later, he kissed her hand (13).

In both stories, when he returned earlier from his journey; he easily guessed what had happened with the keys so he was insightful. When Bluebeard demands the key from his wife, Perrault writes: "Bring it to me", while Carter uses coarser language showing the arrogance and mistreatment of the husband: "Give it me back, whore." (Perrault; Carter 46)

Furthermore, when time comes for the confrontation, we see a lot more of the imbalance that he has compared to the original "Bluebeard" story. In both stories, when he was going to kill her, she begged for his pardon, thus giving him the power of redemption, making him more powerful. In addition, in Carter's story, he is the one with the power to grant or not mercy for the sin committed by her, a few carefully selected religious words (41). Continuing with this religious vocabulary, the husband orders her to come to his sacrifice with these words: "Shall I come up to heaven to fetch you down, Saint Cecilia?" (46).

Therefore, in both cases, he begins by being kind and attentive, to finally show his true murderous nature when his secret is discovered and he is exposed and threatened. At that moment, he intends to regain control over the woman showing the gender role of dominance. Despite their similarities, there are notable differences in how he treats his wife, such as the freedom that the woman has in the original version to bring friends to the house, while in the postmodern version she is isolated with the servants. On the other hand, as for himself, in the version of Carter, the change in personality is more appreciated and, at times, he is much more sensitive. Moreover, it is quite noticeable that, even though he uses a lot of religious terms, he is making a mortal sin.

### **3.2.2. THE ENCHANTED BEAST**

Switching to "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon", in the first story, at the beginning, Beauty thought she was his prey and must be hungry, so she tried to please the beast (Villeneuve 13). The Beast gave orders and kept Beauty's father a prisoner. However, when he and Beauty lived together and got to know each other better, he was not as ferocious and terrible as she had assumed (19). By contrast, at the beginning of Carter's version, he felt much more insecure and shy. He disliked the presence of servants because "the human presence reminded him of his otherness" (Carter, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" 54). The difference he had with her is clear and she frightened him due to the fear of refusal (55).

In Villeneuve's version, every evening after supper, the Beast came to see her and always before saying good night asked her in his terrible voice: "Beauty, will you marry me?" After Beauty's refusal, he went away quite sad (Villeneuve 21). On the contrary, Carter's Beast had a resonant voice as if "coming out of a cave of echoes, dark and soft rumbling growls" (Carter 56). His shyness, typical of a wild animal, is reflected when every night he licked Beauty's hands with the "bristles of his muzzle", showing affection towards her by kissing her fingers in this way (57).

In "The Beauty and the Beast", the Beast took an interest in her asking her if she thought she could be happy in that palace, but when it comes time to really take into account her feelings, there are details to consider. He was "sighing dolefully" and, on the day that Beauty wanted to go back to her family, he asked what the matter was, so he was interested in her feelings (Villeneuve 22). However, at that time, he Beast seemed "sadly distressed" and "cried miserably" like an "unhappy beast" (22). He asked: "What more do you want to make you happy? Is it because you hate me that you want to escape?" which shows an unsympathetic and possessive behavior (22). There is a contrast between this attitude and loving the young girl. He says that he cannot deny her anything, nonetheless, he adds: "even though it should cost me my life", something that probably makes her feel guilty and is emotional blackmail (22).

Upon advice from Beauty's father, he told her that the Beast deserves her love for his gentleness and kindness. On the other hand, the prince who appears in her dreams is so that she understands that she must reward her wishes, despite being ugly (24). This advice is sexist because correct treatment should not be a reason for submission. On the other hand, in "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon", the beast was a source of new prosperity for Beauty's family; although they considered it monstrous and benign, it was also a spirit of good fortune (Carter 58). This denotes generosity on the part of the creature towards Beauty.

Finally, in Villeneuve's tale, when Beauty returned, the beast was about to die. He "stretched out upon his side" and, despite being at a critical moment he reproached her

faintly with being the cause of his distress (Villeneuve 25). At last, he revived and they lived happily ever after. At the time of the Beast's death in Carter's story, he was lying "sadly diminished on the quilt" (Carter 61). This story gives much more description of his soft transformation. His mane was no longer majestic but a "gray rat's nest" (61). The claws, which until then had been hooks, changed to pads; leaving his fingers painfully stretched for the first time (61). In this case, the Beast did not try to blame her directly, but simply told her that he had been sick since she left his side, however, in his last breath, he says: "I am sick and I must die; but I shall die happy because you have come to say good-bye to me." (61)

The conclusion we get from these two stories is that the Beast in this new version, despite looking just as fierce as in the previous one, is a shell to hide his vulnerability and that little by little he shows his sensitivity and trusts Beauty. In this retelling the objective is to show a more empathic and less possessive protagonist, however, he maintains some gender roles such as being the one in charge of supporting the woman financially.

### **3.2.3. THE RESCUER PRINCE**

"Little Snow White" and "The Snow Child" are in third place. In this first tale, the prince is almost a secondary character, he appears at the end and we have almost no description of him or his actions. The first appearance in the story is when Snow White has already died and he was looking for a shelter for the night when he met the dwarfs (Grimm). We do not know what he was doing in the middle of the woods but it could be because he was a hunter.

When he saw Snow White he fell madly in love and wanted to take her to his palace. He himself said: "I cannot live without being able to see Snow-White." (Grimm) This attitude denotes infatuation and, in addition, wanting to take a dead woman is, in my opinion, sinister; however, this impression is softened when he swears that he will honor and respect her as if she were his most cherished one. In "The Snow Child", the Count



wanted a child with specific characteristics, so he was also capricious (Carter 115). In this case, the relationship is more like a father and daughter than a couple.

Subsequently, in the Grimm's version, the prince ordered his servants to carry the coffin, which shows high status and power to command. When Snow White woke up he was kind and informed her of what had happened, to later profess his love for her: "I love you more than anything else in the world. Come with me to my father's castle. You shall become my wife." (Grimm) This is a hasty attitude since they do not know each other, it has only been physical and on his part towards her, since she has just woken up.

Carter's version is very different in this story. The Count picked up the child and placed her in front of him on his horse. The Countess was jealous and bossy, which affects the Count's actions on some occasions. When the Countess threw away the gloves and her brooch for the girl to go get the objects, nonetheless, the Count replied that he will buy her new ones and that the child is not a fish to go looking for them in the water, which shows that he defends the young girl and money is the solution (Carter, "The Snow Child" 115).

Nevertheless, when she asks for a rose, he replied: 'I can't deny you that', being accommodating (115). He felt sorry for his wife when he saw her naked. Contrary to what he felt for his wife, he felt desire for the child when she died. The Count got off the horse and raped the young girl's corpse by introducing his virile member. Therefore, he is a rapist, pederast and necrophiliac, in addition to being a horrible act towards whom he was supposed to treat like a daughter. Finally, he picks up the flower as if nothing had happened and gives it to his wife, showing no regret or emotion.

In conclusion, these two stories are the ones that differ the most from each other, being a retelling of the "loose" category where the story has been substantially modified. In the original version, despite being a passionate and intense man, he treated his future wife with devotion and respect. Nevertheless, in Carter's version the relationship is not between couples but between a child and an adult man. In this story there are behaviors of protection as well as violence and sexual aggression. In addition, the Countess is also treated with disdain until she gives her a gift at the end of the story, showing detachment, callousness,

and manipulation. Hence, the objective of this retelling is to show that these acts also exist and not every man who rescues a woman is to treat her better.

### **3.2.4. THE VALIANT PRINCE**

Lastly, there are the stories "The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods" and "The Lady of the House of Love". In Perrault's tale, the prince, when he knew about the story of the princess, asked intrigued, so he is curious, but he also doubted whether to believe it, so he is also incredulous. However, when he decided to believe in it, he was sure that he could end the enchantment, showing that he is self-confident and adventurous. He was "pushed by love and honor" in this adventure, nonetheless, it is rash to speak of love towards a woman he has only heard of and does not even know if it exists (Perrault).

He advanced toward the wood, showing that an amorous young prince is always valiant. He saw what could have frozen the most fearless person, crossed the court and approached trembling and admiring the princess, kneeling before her. He was filled with joy and gratitude at the sight of her, swearing that he loved her more than himself, and unable to deliver a coherent speech (Perrault). In this case, we can see again a platonic and idealized love since they do not yet know each other personally. The prince was kind and considerate as he helped the princess up and stayed with her until the next morning.

When he arrived in the city, the prince lied so as not to have to tell where he had been and kept this lie for two years, however, it was not for pleasure, but because he did not trust his ogress mother. He felt a duty to satisfy her, but he never dared to trust her mother with his secret because he feared and loved her at the same time (Perrault). This attitude contrasts with the courage and fearlessness he felt as he entered the castle.

He said that he was lost in the wood and every time he was absent he said that he was going to hunt, so this was a common practice in some princes. He was going to see the princess for four or five days and, although they asked him in court what he was going to

do, nobody seemed to give much importance to him disappearing alone for so long. During these two years, the couple had two children; he is the only prince that has children.

When the king died, that is, his father, he saw himself as lord and master, openly declaring his marriage; so it was not until he obtained the power that he was able to uncover his secrets by losing his fear. He made a great ceremony to bring his queen to the palace. Subsequently, the new king had to go to fight in the war, for which he was obliged to be absent from home and the kingdom during the whole summer, so there was someone who ruled more than him (Perrault).

When the battle was over and his family was about to be eaten, the king made a grand entrance into court on his horse and asked with astonishment what was going on. Finally, when his mother died, he felt sorry for her even though he had wanted to kill his wife and children, which denotes abundance of feelings in him; however, he was soon comforted by his family.

In "The Lady of the House of Love", the story changes completely. In this case, the protagonist is an officer who quixotically traveled the country on a bicycle. The narrator comments that it is the most rational vehicle in the world, so this quality is also attributed to the character (Carter, "The Lady of the House of Love" 121). He is a sensitive man as the beauty of the sunset made him forget his worries, including the unease of being in that place. Moreover, he was hesitant to enter the castle, so he is a cautious man (123). A strong scent of roses almost knocked him over and, wandering through the castle, he remembered "the tales of his childhood on winter afternoons", when he and his brothers and sisters scared each other with scary stories set in places like the one where he was at that time (123). He is the first character that told anecdotes about his previous life.

Once there, he almost regretted entering but he knew it was already too late, so we see again that he is cautious and rational (123). Again, he reminded himself that he was no longer a child who was scared of his own fantasies, which shows that he is a mature man but he does not admit that being scared is not bad and it does not make him weak but rather protects us from the dangers. Nonetheless, as much as he tried to make himself aware of not

being afraid, his body felt something else; his heart sank involuntarily (124). When he stayed in the room that the vampire had assigned him, he berated himself for the childish discouragement that the silence caused him, for which he has a dilemma between letting out his inner child and appearing to be mature.

The feeling of strangeness that he had in the castle would have made him run away if he were a cat, instead, he considered himself a hero (129). He was governed by a fundamental disbelief. In addition, he was immune to the shadows of the vampire who wanted to possess him in a sexual way and then kill him; this immunity was given by his virginity and lack of imagination (130). He did not yet know what to fear due to his heroism, and he did not feel terror but unease, however, he would soon learn what fear is in the trenches (130).

In case he had relations with her, he would die naked paying the price of spending the night with her. He followed her despite seeming hysterical, nevertheless, he looked at her wanting to cure all the ills and nightmares she might have and take her in his arms protecting her and not in a sexual way (131). When she cut her finger, he licked the wound with a mother's care, showing gentleness, sweetness and kindness (133).

The morning after putting her to bed, his bones ached from sleeping on the floor, showing his gentleness and consideration again (133). When he found the woman's lark, he softly picked it up and tossed it into the air currents (133). Finally, when he was about to leave, he discovered his bicycle and left his vacation to go to war and do his duty. However, making his way to France, he found the woman's rose, which he had kept in his pocket. This act shows the attachment he had towards the woman and how he wants to remember her, as well as the symbol of keeping a flower on his way to war (134, 135).

Therefore, in these two stories we can conclude that in both cases the two protagonists are strong and brave for going to war for their country and both want to protect their beloved women, a trait that comes from gender roles. Nevertheless, in the case of the officer, he tries to hide and convince himself that he is not afraid of fighting to fulfill

gender roles. In addition, we can appreciate many more feelings in this character such as nostalgia.

Analyzing the behavior of the eight male characters, I conclude that, except for the officer in "The Lady of the House of Love," all of them are possessive. Most of them are protective –sometimes in a possessive way–, although Bluebeard and the Count from "The Snow Child" finally show their true intent. Beast and the officer are insecure compared to the other characters. Furthermore, while some of them only seem frightening but are sensitive, at other times they are murderers and abusers. They are all portrayed as fearless or not allowing themselves to feel fear, yet they can feel love; sometimes even at first sight –such as in “Little Snow White” and “The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods”–, a feeling quite intense considering they do not know each other. In some stories, like “Bluebeard” and “The Beauty and the Beast” and their homologous tales, the characters remain almost the same personality, while in the other two, the male character is completely different.

Therefore, in the classic versions many gender roles are followed, being protective and dominant, making the hegemonic masculinity notorious on several occasions, however, in the postmodernist versions they try to show how the protagonists let sensitivity and their weaknesses surface, except for the Count from "The Snow Child" that shows more crudely the heinous behavior of a rapist. Therefore, the retellings aim to blur the behaviors that are considered feminine in the male characters or to show dominance and supremacy in an extreme way over women.

## 5. CONCLUSION

To finish this Final Degree Project, I will make a final conclusion of what I have obtained as a result of this comparison. Following the theoretical framework, stereotypes manifest gender representations to which specific behaviors and attitudes of each sex are assigned. These stereotypes are linked to gender roles, which are internalized and disseminated through, for example, fairy tales. Thanks to feminist theories and masculinities, traditional gender roles have been blurred; making less distinction between what is considered masculine and feminine.

Therefore, making the comparison between the early fairy tales from the 17th to the 19th centuries and the postmodernist tales from the 20th century, we can conclude the following results.

According to the physical appearance, the classic tales show short descriptions of the appearance of the princes and, therefore, showing only the main characteristics attributed to men, such as social status, age, hair color and musculature. However, the postmodernist versions give much more detail regarding the way they dress, the care they take to maintain a more refined appearance, despite the fact that sometimes the narrator is the princess and they are also described with contempt.

In the original stories there are, on the one hand, Bluebeard who is ugly but wealthy and strong and the Beast who is ugly and monstrous, and on the other hand, the beast transformed into a prince and the two princes from "Little Snow White" and "The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods" who are young, brave, respectful and handsome.

Likewise, three of the retellings belong to the "intermediate" category, being very similar since they are based on the original stories although changing, as I have already mentioned, physical characteristics. Bluebeard is a nobleman who takes care of his clothes and his hair despite being old and the Beast also improves in terms of his appearance and clothes, while in the prince transformation he is rougher than in the original. On the other hand, in "The Snow Child" we only know his social status and, in the last story, despite

maintaining his handsome, muscular and blue-eyed appearance, he loses his noble title and his status as a rich man as before.

Regarding the behavior, the original versions present, on the one hand, the supreme dominance typical of hegemonic masculinity like Bluebeard when he shows his true identity or when the princes support women economically. On the other hand, the princes allow themselves to feel and show love but from the point of view of possession, as the beast and the prince of Snow White do when they want to take their wives to their castle. Nonetheless, in general, in all cases they are brave, tough, self-confident and protective.

On the contrary, in the postmodernist versions we can see how Bluebeard is more affectionate with his wife and at the moment of the murder he hesitates for a moment, the Beast is not so possessive but is more assertive and generous with Beauty and the officer treats the vampire with gratitude and affection, without sexual intentions. In addition, he is cautious and for the first time we see rationality against forced bravery. Nevertheless, in the "loose" retelling the full version is changed and we see, instead of a prince in love with his princess with whom he devotedly shares his life, a Count who rapes a child after rescuing her.

To summarize, the versions written by the women –Carter and Villeneuve– are the richest in both physical and behavioral details. The princes of both periods have in common that they are all rich, capricious and possessive, with the exception of the officer. In the early versions, except for Bluebeard, they are all handsome; however, in the postmodern versions the standard changes as when the Beast transformation occurs. Nonetheless, there is another type of prince who is not the typical valiant and gentle rescuer, but who is a murderer and a rapist.

Thus, the princes have not changed much in the last centuries in terms of gender roles and stereotypes, probably because feminists made a great effort to end the weak role of the female protagonists of fairy tales, being more notorious the change in them. However, the stereotype of men in these new versions has focused on changing the inability they had to

show feelings and weaknesses and are more favorable to showing their insecurities such as fear and complexes, in addition to taking more care of their clothing and appearance.

Therefore, we can conclude that Prince Charming is still alive. Prince Charming is still adapting to modern times and while there is a lot to go on, the current Prince Charming is more assertive and receptive towards women, despite there being exceptions that show the horrors that can occur in terms of abuse.



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