A CONSIDERATION OF EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "BERENICE" AND "LIGEIA" AND ANGELA CARTER'S "THE BLOODY CHAMBER" AND "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE" THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GROTESQUE

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ABSTRACT

A CONSIDERATION OF EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "BERENICE" AND "LIGEIA" AND ANGELA CARTER'S "THE BLOODY CHAMBER" AND "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE" THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GROTESQUE

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This study explores in what ways the female characters in the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter embody the grotesque tradition and to what end the grotesque is employed by the authors. As an aesthetic and literary tradition, the grotesque commonly employs imagery which ranges from excessiveness, exaggeration, hybridization of features, and estrangement to transgression, degradation, or distortion of conventional limits, foregrounding a critical dimension. In its unease with what is deemed normativity within the dominant ideology of its time, the grotesque is widely employed by Poe and Carter, especially in their short stories centering on female characters. This study specifically focuses on Edgar Allan Poe's short stories "Berenice" and "Ligeia", and Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" to explore how and why the grotesque is employed in relation to the settings and female characters in these works. The analysis of these short stories is conducted using a conceptual framework established through

the work of scholars like Mikhail Bakhtin, Wolfgang Kayser, and Mary Russo, who have all written on the grotesque. This study claims that through the use of fundamental attributes of the grotesque style, the selected stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter challenge traditional gender roles and confront patriarchal power structures around love and marriage, which govern female bodily and social norms. It further suggests that, with their exploration of the complexities of female identity and desire, these short stories display a quintessentially feminist strategy in their envisioning of grotesque female characters capable of agency, desire, and resistance.

Keywords: Angela Carter, Edgar Allan Poe, the grotesque, short story, female characters.

ÖZ

EDGAR ALLAN POE'NUN "BERENICE" VE "LIGEIA" VE ANGELA CARTER'IN "THE BLOODY CHAMBER" VE "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE" HİKAYELERİNİN GROTESK ODAĞINDA DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

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Bu tez Edgar Allan Poe ve Angela Carter'ın kısa hikayelerindeki kadın karakterlerin grotesk geleneği nasıl temsil ettiğini ve grotesk stilin hangi amaçla yazarlar tarafından kullanıldığını analiz etmektedir. Estetik ve edebi bir gelenek olarak grotesk; aşırılık, abartı, hibridizasyon ve yabancılaştırmadan, norm ihlali, yozlaşma ya da geleneksel sınırların çarpıtılmasına kadar uzanan bir imgelem yelpazesini eleştirel bir boyutu ön plana çıkararak işler. Kullanıldığı dönemin egemen ideolojisi içinde normatif ve doğal olarak kabul edilen öğelere duyduğu rahatsızlıkla ilişkilendirilen grotesk, özellikle kadın karakterler üzerine odaklanan kısa hikayelerinde, Poe ve Carter tarafından yaygın biçimde kullanılmaktadır. Bu çalışma Edgar Allan Poe'nun "Berenice" ve "Ligeia" ve Angela Carter'ın "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" hikayelerine odaklanarak grotesk imgelerin mekanlar ve kadın karakterlerle nasıl ve neden ilişkili olduğunu inceler. Bu hikayelerin incelemesi, grotesk kavramını kuramsallaştıran Mikhail Bakhtin, Wolfgang Kayser ve Mary Russo gibi yazarların düşüncelerini sentezleyen bir kavramsal çerçeve kullanılarak yürütülmektedir. Bu tez,

grotesk üslubun temel unsurlarının stratejik kullanımı aracılığıyla Edgar Allan Poe ve Angela Carter'ın seçili hikayelerindeki imgelerin geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini sorguladığını ve kadın bedeni ile toplumsal normları düzenleyen aşk ile evlilik eksenindeki ataerkil iktidar yapılarıyla yüzleştiğini ileri sürmektedir. Çalışma ayrıca, bu hikayelerin kadın kimliği ve arzusunun katmanlarını irdelemek yoluyla özne olma, arzu ve direniş kapasitesine sahip grotesk kadın karakterler tasavvur ettiğini, bunun da özünde feminist bir strateji olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Angela Carter, Edgar Allan Poe, grotesk, kısa hikaye, kadın karakterler.

Dedicated to my parents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The grotesque tradition in art and literature can reveal cultural anxieties and social tensions. While the commonplace interpretation of the term may call to mind negative connotations, this elusive concept is often found as a subsidiary feature of the Gothic—or at least dwelling with it. It consists of abrupt contrasts, utilizing caricature, inversion, and hybridization to present the viewer with distorted imagery in human features or in bizarre situational deformations, whether taboo, ugly, or out of the norm. The grotesque is frequently employed as a subversive tool, criticizing the conventional and normative structures around body politics, it presents a challenge to the ideological assumptions of the reader. The aim of this study is to explore the use of the grotesque tradition in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, "Berenice" and "Ligeia", and Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love". It examines the grotesque as a structurally embedded device to elucidate how and why these writers have utilized it in their short fiction and to consider the implications this has for their representation of female characters.

It has become a tradition in studies of the grotesque to initially begin by pointing out the caveats of using or studying the term. A wide range of writers, from critics and thinkers like John Ruskin and Mikhail Bakhtin to scholars such as Wolfgang Kayser, Mary Russo, Geoffrey G. Harpham, and Frances K. Barasch, have dealt with the term to discuss and understand the grotesque tradition throughout history, art, and literature. A brief introductory understanding of it should suffice for this section, since the grotesque will be later detailed and used as the lantern in our descent into the gothic fictions of Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter.

As many critics of the grotesque agree[1], the origin of the word leads to Rome, with the accidental discovery of Nero's *Domus Aurea* (Golden House), estimated to have been built around 64-68 B.C., unearthed in the late quattrocento. Hence, *la grottesca* and *grottesco* refer to the Italian *grotta,* which simply means "cave". Renaissance artists were struck by the elaborate and ornamental paintings on the ceilings and frescoes of *Domus Aurea* and did not wait long to imitate these designs. The frescoes depicted a variety of imaginative and decorative creations:

> This style consisted of graceful fantasies, symmetrical anatomical impossibilities, small beasts, human heads, and delicate, indeterminate vegetables, all presented as ornaments with a faintly mythological character imparted by representations of fauns, nymphs, satyrs, and centaurs. (Harpham 26)

The strange decorations that went against the orthodox ideas and/or artistic manners at the time also depict a key feature of the grotesque: transience. The grotesque and its subversive and disturbing effect depends on the conventions and norms of its context, each age possibly has novel grotesque imagery once the previous ones become domesticated and admired and no longer incite reactions of confusion or disturbance.

Over time, both the concept and the term were established in both arts and literature, resulting in works that deal with the grotesque consciously. The common understanding stands amidst the oscillation between the medieval and modern, terrific and comic, mundane and abnormal—mostly an admixture of abnormalities, defamiliarizations and disturbances. Among the first literary examples is François Rabelais' *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (1535), in which both the characters themselves and their actions can be defined as grotesque. Rabelais extensively influenced the work of the Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, whose *Rabelais and His World*, first published in 1965 in Russian, prominently affected the later discourse around the term. Bakhtin names "exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness" as the fundamental attributes of the grotesque style (303) and argues that the Rabelaisian world is full of satirical grotesque imagery, similar to looking at "improper" things with a magnifying glass (307). Robert Duggan, in *The Grotesque in Contemporary British Fiction* (2013),

[1] See Kayser 19-20, Harpham 28-29; Clayborough 1-2.

illustrates the multiplicity of the grotesque with a chain of signifiers: "the ugly, the fantastic, the gothic, the sublime, the abject, the uncanny, the monstrous, the ignoble, the generically mixed, the insane, the immoral, the exaggerated and the macabre" (13). The strange and the ambivalent, alongside the excessive and the exaggerated features of the grotesque pervade both Poe's and Carter's short fiction selected for analysis in this study. The current study will look into the atmospheric elements and the characters in the selected stories through the lens of the grotesque. The authors of the stories probe the readers' knowledge or expectations on the body, beauty ideals, proper or decorous manners of behaving, and gendered or normative behaviors, and thus engage in the conflict foregrounded by the grotesque tradition. Their inspection results in a subversive approach, offering an alternative interpretation of our world and preconceived constructions.

Edgar Allan Poe's contributions to the gothic and his fiction of the gruesome and the macabre have been a source of inspiration for many writers, including Angela Carter herself. Grotesque elements such as the destabilization of sanity, the failing/aging body, provoking nature, and claustrophobic atmospheres also pervade Carter's fictional worlds. Although Carter read and was heavily influenced by Poe's fiction and poetry, naturally, she sustains a contemporary sensibility in her approach to culture and society. This study argues that the grotesque is used as a significant aesthetic strategy in both authors' works in multiform layers and meanings. Both Poe and Carter, albeit having differences regarding the time and place they were writing in, have a shared goal to demythologize patriarchal norms prevalent in their time and age. In both authors' depiction of characters and atmosphere, the grotesque remains as a device to challenge established or dominant ideologies. Carter was noticeably influenced by Poe's gothic writing, thus similar gothic environments and themes, such as the *femme fatale* or the exploitation of violent imagery, are present in the selected short stories. Finally, in addition to their writing style, their mutual preference for the short story form provides a common ground to examine them both in this study. Poe's "Berenice" and "Ligeia" and Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" are selected because they highlight the malleability of certain boundaries and concepts, in their exploration and transgressions of bodily or sexual norms, where the grotesque appears as a key critical tool to expose the constructedness

of gender and social institutions. Through the problematization of complete or perfect art forms or bodies, subverting the classical or normative expectations, their critical perspectives are conveyed through the device of the grotesque in the selected works.

The first writer that will be the focus of this study is Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49), the eccentric, mournful, and complex writer from Baltimore, USA. Stirring the imaginative faculties and passions, and vividly depicting the anguish of the soul, Poe is an author that scholars do not quite know where to place[2]. His most popular works are a result of a period of intense creativity: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (his only novel) published in 1838; with 25 stories including similar disturbing subjects mentioned above, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, in 1840; and *The Raven and Other Poems and Tales* in 1845. Poe also expresses his views on artistic productivity in a critical piece, "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), in which he reflects upon and revels in his manner of writing poetry. Its analysis of poetics and how meticulously he fabricated the poem backward in a sense, and his use of words and musical quality to the utmost poetic effect, later became a great inspiration for writers such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé. His plots in prose and his rhythmic language in verse, filled with excrescent Gothic modes, have stood the test of time. With stories of revenant lovers, premature entombments, absurd decapitations, Melvillean journeys on the open seas, and vindictive jesters reminiscent of a Rabelaisian carnival, Poe indeed loved telling a wide range of stories that occupied not only the deeply terrifying but also the absurdly comic spectrum of human experience, of love and hate and of life and death. These explorations proved most fruitful in his careful use of the grotesque as a strategy in his work to underscore excessive and extreme emotions. In the selected texts of Poe, this study will look into the atmospheric elements and the characters within the rupture created by the grotesque. Poe's works probe the readers' knowledge or expectations on the bodily ideals, proper or decorous manners of behaving, and gendered or normative behaviors. They, therefore, engage in the conflict foregrounded by the grotesque tradition and result in a subversive approach, offering an alternative

[2] In an anthology, he is described as the writer most critics "love to hate—or hate to love" (Leitch et. al. 641).

interpretation of our world and preconceived constructions. They convey Poe's critique around patriarchal constructions of femininity, beauty, and desire.

Nonetheless, Poe's distinguished career is not without criticism. He has especially been criticized by modern feminist scholars regarding his approach to his female protagonists. The main debate is between scholars who disapprove of Poe's treatment of women—arguing that he is deifying and fetishizing them—and those that do not view the treatment in a negative light. The reproach of certain critics tends to initiate from Poe's famous and much debated claim over the closest ally of beauty in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846): "The death…of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover" (qtd. in Leitch et al. 647). The critics who condemn Poe's poetry and short stories find them misogynistic and argue that these texts appropriate violence against women. In this regard, countless books and articles have undertaken the challenge of answering the hotly debated question: Was Poe a protofeminist, a misogynist, or simply a tortured madman?

To briefly review the most relevant discussions on this fragile topic may assist in framing the rest of the study. Floyd Stovall believes that in most of Poe's prose and poetry women have no real personality and that "they appear as mere mechanisms of the plot, without character or individuality" (197). Stovall is quick to divinize Poe's heroines:

> Poe's women are either extremely innocent and unsophisticated, like Eleonora and Annabel Lee, or else abnormally intellectual, like Ligeia and Morella. They are all noble and good, and naturally very beautiful, though sometimes made ugly by disease, as in the case of Berenice. Most remarkable of all is their passionate and enduring love for [Poe's] hero. (197)

Beth A. Bassein condemns Poe for using his poetic license maliciously and "[placing] women on pedestals and … [leaving] them there" (45). She argues that this false depiction of women as fragile and passive characters in his stories could influence his readers badly, thus creating an untruthful account of women. Karen Weekes similarly reproves Poe's approach to his heroines, arguing that they are used as a means to an

end, that is, they die to enrich the story of the male in the story or poem. She believes that the dying woman "passes silently from this life, rarely expressing her feelings on the matter" (150).

Such censure is not without a response. Cynthia S. Jordan argues that Poe was not simply subtracting and dehumanizing his heroines, but through constructing his narratives carefully, he was contributing to what was so acutely felt by women in the nineteenth century: "…Poe's ability to tell both stories, or both halves of the human story, is, therefore, the sign of what we would today call feminist re-vision" (151). Joan Dayan holds the opinion that Poe merely dramatizes an appropriated image in his own context, in order to "expose and overturn all gestures of idealization" ("Feminist" 9). She highlights the endurance of Poe's female characters. Similarly, Jacqueline Doyle underlines how a heroine such as Berenice refuses to remain dead, and she "embodies a radical critique of the patriarchal poetic tradition that proves so nearly fatal for her" (13). She claims that Poe does not have a fetishistic gaze but merely demonstrates the fetishization and violent abstraction of Berenice by Egæus, directing the criticism toward the male character.

The criticism against Poe evidently lacks the nuances and careful analysis these short stories require. Claiming that the female characters in all of Poe's stories merely act as "placeholders" arguably denies these heroines' agency and strength. Stating that women are simply subsumed under another's ego, or that his readers were not competent enough to discern the exaggerations and the level of self-awareness in his gothic is an underestimation of both Poe and his readership. In accord with the views of Jordan, Dayan, and Doyle, this study aims to explore how Poe employs the grotesque as a strategic device to criticize and subvert the norms and idealizations around the feminine body and identity, aiming to foreground an approach in which Poe is observed to have a critical agenda. His short stories endorse the liberation and non-conformity of women in a patriarchal society, upholding modern day feminist views. The stories "Berenice" and "Ligeia" are selected deliberately for their focus on marital and romantic relationships in combination with an excess of violence centering the feminine body, which aid in illustrating Poe's critical approach to the sensitive topics of his day and foregrounding his discomfort with the patriarchal idealization

and abstraction of women. This study suggests that Poe's frequent use of violence, gore, and heightened suspense in his short fiction, is not a fetishization or glamorization of death and brutal aggression directed at female bodies but it is actually a shocking and subversive strategy aiming to convey a subtle but sharp criticism on the widespread social perspectives and norms of his time. Poe's heroines do not die to enrich the story of the male character. What Poe attempted to do in his stories is not strictly a feminist undertaking in our present-day sense, but in his own highly patriarchal and phallocentric environment, he attempted to rewrite and foreground female characters that were generally forgotten or silenced through the prevalent sociopolitical and cultural atmosphere. Later, in the chapter on Poe, this study will examine how the author used imagery in line with the grotesque tradition to exceed social boundaries, transgress certain frames of thought, and in the end, suggest that idealizations of the object of desire result in atrocious scenes of violence and brutal deaths. The female characters in the selected short stories, whether living, dying, or *returning*, will be the main focus in the selected works. The defamiliarizing, exaggerated, and disruptive elements present in the grotesque tradition allow Poe to challenge the patriarchal discourse and the normative or fixed conceptualizations of women.

Similar to Poe, the English writer Angela Carter's (1940-92) exuberant prose has garnered much praise and criticism. Carter was a prolific writer of nine novels and four collections of short stories, alongside non-fiction works, giving her critics much to write about concerning her twenty-six years of writing. Some of her works have stood out more than the others in academic circles and mainstream culture, such as *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Nights at the Circus* (1984), and *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979). Her non-fictional works like *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1979) or *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1987) and her editing of two collections for Virago press[3] and her translation of Charles Perrault's fairy tales have all contributed to her witty writing, where one might regard all her

[3] A feminist publishing company established in Britain in 1973 and run by women as chief staff. In addition to Carter, some authors whose works that were published by Virago are Maya Angelou, Margaret Atwood, Daphne du Maurier, Zora Neale Hurston, and Elaine Showalter.

works as interconnected, even including her four radio plays. Elaine Jordan encapsulates the alluring aspect of Carter's writing:

> Carter's fictions are serial and episodic, not hierarchical and organic…Her typical narrative procedure is the refusal of nostalgia, *not* keeping the home fires burning for an escape route. She burns the boats or the brothel, crashes the train, or buries the last provisional family acquired under a landslide. There's no going back, her narratives insist; you have to go somewhere else, even become someone else… (123)

Carter's interest in transgressive female characters that refuse to be put in certain boxes alongside her literary occupation with macabre and disturbing prose work are qualities that make her an author that is highly relevant both in her own time and at the present. Similar to Edgar Allan Poe, and even more explicitly than him, Carter was interested in the tyrannies and oppressions that women experienced: women who were trying to exist comfortably in their skin and failing, women trying to write, speak, and laugh from the margins. Carter once wrote: "I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I'm in the demythologising business" (*Shaking A Leg* 47). Female desire, and the social constructions around being a good wife or a pure woman, for instance, are the cultural myths that she keeps coming back to in her fictional and non-fictional works. Defining myths as "consolatory nonsense" (Carter *Sadeian* 5), she also believes that myths "deal in false universals" (ibid.), hence stepping up to deconstruct and demystify false consolatory narratives, whether they be on sexual license or archetypal figures of the sacrificing mother or innocent virgins, which are all sustained by patriarchal cultures.

In her non-fiction book, *Fireworks* (1974), which presaged *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter refers to Poe's influence on her: "I'd always been fond of Poe...Gothic tales, cruel tales, tales of wonder, tales of terror, fabulous narratives that deal directly with the imagery of the unconscious" and continues to list thematic similarities that appeal to her in line with Poe: "mirrors; the externalized self; forsaken castles; haunted forests; forbidden sexual objects" ("Afterword" 132). The conventions of the Gothic, qualities which are present in Poe's writing according to Carter, are defined briefly as follows:

> Character and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions. Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural, and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. Its only humour is black humour. It retains a singular moral function – that of provoking unease. ("Afterword" 132)

Moreover, Carter's interest in Poe can also be seen in her writing on Poe's poetics in "Through a Text Backwards: The Resurrection of the House of Usher[4]", originally published in 1988, where she discusses how artistic composition takes the female body as its locus.

Carter's relentless preoccupation with "provoking unease" spills over into to her powerful dialectic, even when she undertakes the task of contributing a witty retelling of well-known and often-told fairy tales. Fairy tales and storytellers, as underlined by Marina Warner "pass on vital information, about the values and beliefs of the community in which they are growing up" and they can teach them about "who is trusted and who is not, about what is considered praiseworthy and what is condemned, about alliances and enmities, hopes and dangers" (49). Carter's translation of Charles Perrault's fairy tales in 1977 for Virago Press can be regarded as the inspiration and catalyst for *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), in which she re-visions the classical fairy tales, such as "Little Red Riding Hood", "The Sleeping Beauty", "Bluebeard", and "The Beauty and the Beast". Carter self-admittedly sees herself as writing within the fairy tale tradition: "My intention was not to do 'versions' or, as the American edition of the book said, horribly, 'adult' fairy tales, but to extract the latent content of the traditional stories and to use it as the beginning of new stories" (qtd. in Haffenden 36).

Carter is commonly praised for her subversion of gender roles and for expanding upon preconceptions about feminine sexuality, yet – similar to Edgar Allan Poe – she has also been critiqued for being provocative, morally dubious, and fetishistic by some critics, or chastised for remaining bound to the misogynistic tones prevalent in "old wives' tales". In his article on *The Bloody Chamber* Robert Clark refers to Carter's

[4] This witty piece by Angela Carter can be found in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* (1998).

work as "old chauvinism, new clothing" (149). Similarly, Patricia Duncker argues that Carter's rewriting of the fairytales in *The Bloody Chamber* is "within the strait-jacket of their original structures" (227) since these stories are carriers of ideology. After receiving widespread attention in literary circles and academia after the 1970s, her *Sadeian Woman* was indicted as a "pseudo-feminist" essay by Andrea Dworkin, who criticized her approach to Marquis de Sade's politics of pornography as sycophantic (84). Dworkin's condemnation of Carter is based on de Sade, explaining how Carter's approach to him as a critic and not as a feminist does not fare well. Another critique comes from Susanne Kappeler, who argues that Carter's self-proclaimed demythologizing project of women in culture ends up perpetuating the very discourses she is supposed to deconstruct (135). For these writers and feminist critics, Carter seems to be fighting for the opposing team. This study aims to demonstrate otherwise—how she deliberately approaches the archetypal representations of women and constructions around femininity in culture by adapting the tool of the grotesque to expose the vulgarity and the permeability of these concepts and limitations.

Carter's cultural critique and explorations of gender expression in the world of predators and preys are evident in the way she demythologises the archetypal figures of a good mother or a *femme fatale* frequently, and how the deconstructed manifestation of the female body and feminine sexuality in her works aims to "disrupt the social construction of women as Woman" (Peach 4). Her reworking of the fairy tale narrative, which is as close as one can get to myths, is actually Carter's strategy to take initiative and demystify the myths of femininity, to expose the thrills of sexual and textual aggression. Moreover, as wittily put by Merja Makinen as she comments on *The Bloody Chamber*, "…Carter's tales do not simply 'rewrite' the old tales by fixing roles of active sexuality for their female protagonists — they 're-write' them by playing with and upon (if not preying upon) the earlier misogynistic version" (5). It is important to keep in mind that Carter herself approaches these stories with irony and self-awareness, and her dialectic carefully approaches the embedded values and ideologies of these fairy tales as she writes from both *within* and *against* them. Carter herself maintains this view in her essay "Notes from the Front Line": "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (*Shaking a Leg* 46). Hence, the readers are greeted with the

familiarity of the fairy tale tradition, places and names from their childhood, albeit magical, still sustained in their collective unconscious mind. Using the vivacity of fairy tales to draw attention to issues informed by the reality principle, Carter further illustrates the significance of the fairy tales underneath their luminous exterior. The familiar fairy tale features of exaggeration or inflation as well as overstating are inherent features in the grotesque. Similarly, both the grotesque and the fairy tale can be duty-bound when used properly: while entertaining and alluring the readers, they can convey the author's criticism in a sense. Thus, Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" are chosen for this study for their deliberate approach to the myths around femininity and their use of the grotesque to subvert the readers' expectations on subjects of romantic love, marriage, sexuality and beauty ideals imposed upon women.

The intent behind bringing together these four texts in a joint study is their deliberate interaction with the female body as an ideological site. The foregrounding of the feminine experience is arguably the most overt seam running through all four stories. The questions of desire, power, death, and subjectivity are inscribed upon the female characterizations of Poe and Carter. In their selected stories, the female body is simultaneously desired and annihilated; it is aestheticized and stripped of the subjectivity that inhabits it. While in Carter's revision of the Bluebeard myth or the vampire trope, her response is more theoretically informed, in Poe's selected stories, the focus is on creating a disturbing effect on the readers regarding the fetishization and abstraction of the female body as an object by the narrators, albeit without the conscious engagement with feminist theory. The selected stories, whether consciously or unconsciously, generate their aesthetic and emotional effects through their strategic use of the grotesque tradition.

Having expressed that Carter has been influenced by Poe and holds an admiration for him, in addition to the invisible string of the grotesque tying these two authors, another vital feature that brings them together in this study is their preference for the short story format. There is one overarching common point as to why both writers preferred this form. The brevity of the short story form has the advantage of leaving a profound

impact on the reader. Poe's comments on his premeditated approach to poetry writing in "The Philosophy of Composition" provides insight into this:

> If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression—for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and every thing like totality is at once destroyed…It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting… (Leitch et al. 645)

Poe's short stories of terror, tales of ratiocination, and tales of satire are all meticulously arranged to leave the most intense –or the most gruesome– effect on the readers while still keeping him employed in the literary publishing scene[5]. In a somewhat similar vein, Angela Carter's approach to this mode also emphasizes the concentrated effect of the brief form. She explains her experience in the Afterword to *Fireworks:*

> I started to write short pieces when I was living in a room too small to write a novel in. So the size of my room modified what I did inside it and it was the same with the pieces themselves. The limited trajectory of the short narrative concentrates its meaning. Sign and sense can fuse to an extent impossible to achieve among the multiplying ambiguities of an extended narrative. *(Fireworks* 132)

In addition to the intense effect left upon the readers, Carter's use of short story was a better fit for the topics she was writing on, as explained by Gina Wisker:

> Carter's best horror writing is more suited to the art of the short story than to longer fiction. Like Poe she goes for "unity of effect", telling individual, perfectly controlled tales which retell and often revalue a myth or legend, which develop and embody a particular lurking perversity or nightmare, and which explore the horrific sources of real events. As in traditional gothic tales, we are terrified because the atmosphere threatens us, the familiar is our familiar nightmare. ("On Angela Carter" 241)

Carter's use of the grotesque carries her stories to where the world of fantasy blurs the lines between the mundane, or the daily. Carter uses a playful analogy between

[5] Poe scholars J. R. Hammond and Benjamin F. Fisher reflect upon the reasons behind his preference for the short form fiction. Hammond argues that shorter form of fiction requires more literary merit than the longer novel form (62); and Fisher points out that it was a strategic maneuver in Poe's career, since he had tried and failed to make a name and earn a living by writing poetry between 1827 and 1831, resulting in a genre shift from poetry to short stories (78).

cooking and writing, as she writes about her approach to the genre in the Introduction to the collection she edited for Virago Press (1990):

> …Fairy tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created our world. . . Ours is a highly individualised culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one-off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are their makers. Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. "This is how I make potato soup". (*Book of Fairy Tales* x)

This study, then, brings together Poe and Carter not only because of the ambivalence of feminist criticism surrounding them and their shared interest in the gothic and the grotesque, but also because of their common sympathy for the short story form, which both find valuable in order to convey their artistry and critical approach. It argues that in the selected short stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter the grotesque is used as a functional aesthetic strategy in examining social and cultural concerns around the female body, sexuality, and desire. By leveraging the grotesque's characteristic focus on bodily distortion, exaggeration, and the process of defamiliarization, both writers emphasize the inherent violence in idealized feminine forms and expose the fragility of the patriarchal myths that underpin them. While Poe employs grotesque excess to illustrate the destructive effects of aesthetic idealization and fetishism, Carter's narratives expand upon this critique by utilizing irony, sensuality, and subversive repetition to demythologize traditional conceptions of womanhood, present in the fairy tale genre. The way bodies are described, fragmented, gazed at, consumed, and either silenced or given voice is inseparable from the narrative structures Poe and Carter construct with their use of grotesque imagery. Therefore, this study contends that rather than perpetuating fetishistic or misogynistic tropes, Poe and Carter harness the grotesque to confront dominant ideologies and highlight female figures who defy silence or containment and to dismantle patriarchal notions of femininity, desire, and beauty. Their work thus affirms the grotesque's enduring efficacy as a tool for cultural critique, one that challenges normative structures and expands the horizons of gendered representation.

In this study, Chapter 2 is comprised of an exploration of the grotesque tradition. Initially, the grotesque will be explored as a term, and its various uses throughout history will be briefly recounted within their contexts. Then, a variety of the prominent theorists, philosophers, and scholars of the grotesque will be discussed in relation to their own understanding of the tradition in art and literature. In the light of this survey, this thesis will arrive at a working definition of the grotesque, which will in turn guide the analyses that will be made in the chapters that follow. In Chapter 3, the focus will be on Edgar Allan Poe's understanding and application of the grotesque tradition. With a variety of examples from his oeuvre, as well as social and contextual factors that may have somewhat altered his approach to the term, this chapter seeks to ground Poe's critical use of the grotesque as a device. After that, Poe's short stories, "Berenice" and "Ligeia" from *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) are discussed in relation to how the grotesque interacts with the setting, atmosphere, certain objects, and finally, the representation of the characters, with special attention given to female characters. The analysis of the selected stories will eventually demonstrate that with the use of the grotesque tradition, Poe's depiction of female characters defies idealization and fetishism and thus, Poe's critical attitude aids in a condemnation of the social and literary enforcement of misogynistic gendered roles, dismantling patriarchal myths of femininity, desire, and bodily ideals. Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of Angela Carter's understanding and application of the grotesque. Two of her works are foregrounded in depicting her understanding and underlying agenda behind her employment of the grotesque as a tool in her writing, and later "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" from the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) will be scrutinized through the lens of the grotesque. These selected short stories from the collection are of vital importance in depicting Carter's conscious feminist agenda and her use of the grotesque as a critical device within her oeuvre. The stories are analyzed respectively in their relation to the use of the grotesque in their settings and characterization. The selected stories' analyses will ultimately reveal that Angela Carter deliberately utilizes the grotesque in order to interrogate certain patriarchal myths surrounding the female body and sexuality, especially prevalent in the fairy tale genre which she undertakes to subvert; therefore, the selected texts and their female protagonists foreground excessive and transgressive representations of femininity, advocating for the

ambivalence and hybridity present in grotesque. Chapter 5 conveys concluding remarks on the present study, with a brief overview of the arguments made throughout and their implications, especially in such a comparative study where significant similarities are found between two writers of different nationalities, periods and genders. The concluding chapter closes with a discussion of possibilities for further research.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEFINITION AND FUNCTION OF THE GROTESQUE

The grotesque has traveled long and far since its emergence in the sixteenth century. Seeing the context-bound and unstable nature of the term, this chapter focuses on approaches to the grotesque that are most relevant to bodily representation and narrative subversion. For the purposes of the present study, the grotesque as a term should be understood as a mode of representation characterized by distortion, hybridity, excess, and ambivalence, which disrupts normative categories of body and identity. Grotesque representations collapse familiar boundaries—for instance, between the beautiful and the repulsive, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the human and the inhuman. Thus, with the sense of estrangement created by the rupture of grotesque imagery, it will be seen that it is not only an aesthetic category, but also a critical device capable of exposing and interrogating cultural norms, particularly those governing the female body and gendered ideals.

In order to present a working definition of the term, this chapter aims to outline key theoretical formulations of the grotesque, beginning with Wolfgang Kayser's influential emphasis on estrangement and the disruption of reality, before turning to Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization of grotesque realism and the unfinished, excessive body. Although both Kayser and Bakhtin's insights are essential in the framing of the grotesque as a critical device, their approaches remain largely gender blind. Hence, this limitation requires engagement with feminist critiques of the grotesque, particularly those conceptualized by Mary Russo and Margaret Miles. Their approach to the grotesque, which foregrounds the ways in which the female body has been constructed as grotesque within patriarchal cultures, supplements the necessary gendered approach that is absent in the discussions of Kayser and Bakhtin. In the light of these perspectives, eventually, emphasizing the fluidity, flexibility, and ambiguity of the term, this chapter will arrive at its own hybrid theoretical model of the grotesque,

which will act as the guide for the analyses of Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter's selected short stories in the following chapters.

To begin with one of the most significant contributions to the exploration of the grotesque as a term, Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature,* written in the 1950s[6] when the academic interest in the grotesque was on the rise, should be discussed. His work inaugurated one of the most mainstream discussions in grotesque studies, still relevant today. In his study, Kayser follows a methodological starting point with a rigorous etymological and historical inquiry into the word's origins, as he traces the initial appearance of the word in relation to artistic style. The words *grottesca* and *grottesco*, were coined in the latter fifteenth century to designate an ancient Roman ornamental style of sculpture and painting unearthed with the excavations in Rome and other parts of Italy (Kayser 19). The paintings found on the walls of the ruins in Rome were termed at the time as *grottesche*, which refers to the word *grotta* (meaning cave in Italian) since these caves were in fact rooms and corridors of the Domus Aurea, simply collapsed and buried overtime. Kayser documents how the initial decorative usage—pertaining to fantastical ornamental motifs blending human, animal, and plant forms in hybrid configurations — gradually expanded its semantic field. The Renaissance employed the term *grotesque* first to designate the specific scroll-type ornament and gradually came to associate the word with both the "carelessly fantastic" (Kayser 21) but also as "something ominous and sinister" (ibid.). The grotesque as a term continued to evolve beyond its purely ornamental usage and began to illustrate entire artistic worlds. The grotesque comes to inhabit "…A world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid" (21). Kayser further exemplifies the artworks of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel, where the grotesque manifests itself as "a frightful mixture of mechanical, vegetable, animal" and the human elements are "represented as the image of our world, which is breaking apart" (33). As observable in Kayser's genealogy, the grotesque as a term turned, over time, into a

[6] Originally published in German in 1957; a few years later translated into English and republished in 1963.

self-sustaining aesthetic category encompassing more than just the ornaments and engravings in the Domus Aurea.

After an inclusive study of the term's historical origins, Kayser arrives at his own understanding and structuring of the grotesque as a term. His fundamental definition of the grotesque is as follows: "…An aesthetic category referring to certain creative attitudes (dreamlike, for example), contents, and structures, as well as to effects upon the beholder (...'laughter, disgust, and astonishment')" (179). He foregrounds certain key elements of the grotesque style:

> …The fusion of realms which we know to be separated, the abolition of the law of statics, the loss of identity, the distortion of "natural" size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order. (185)

One of Kayser's pivotal arguments about the grotesque is that it is a manifold concept, applying to three different areas: the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception. He further underlines the reception realm of the term, arguing that grotesque is only experienced in the act of reception (Kayser 180-181). This is also in keeping with the previously mentioned aspect of the grotesque, its transience. The grotesque can be heavily dependent on the time and place; as Kayser argues, dependent on the act of reception in the end. He stresses the affective category the grotesque inhabits: "The author intends to shake the reader's confidence in his world view by depriving him of the safeguards provided by tradition and society" (61).

Kayser provides organic examples through which he exhibits his own understanding of the grotesque. One example is the jungle, which possesses an "ominous vitality" (183) in which the world of the animals is entangled with that of plants. Kayser deems some animals readily suitable to the grotesque, for instance the ones that are nocturnal and creeping, such as snakes, owls, toads, spiders. He elaborates on the animal which he argues to be made up of the most grotesque qualities:

> The grotesque animal incarnate, however, is the bat (*Fledermaus*), the very name of which points to an unnatural fusion of organic realms concretized in this ghostly creature. And strange habits complement its strange appearance. An animal of the dusk, the bat flies noiselessly, has exceedingly subtle senses, and moves so rapidly that one could easily suspect it of sucking the blood of

> sleeping animals. It is strange even in the state of repose when its wings cover it like a coat and it hangs, head down, from a rafter, more like a piece of dead matter than a living thing. (183)

Kayser presents another critical approach to the grotesque in its enmeshment of the separate realms: "Among the most persistent motifs of the grotesque we find human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks" (183). In addition to animals and nature, Kayser thus proves that certain human features can result in an encounter with the grotesque. These transgressive moments that invoke discomfort in the audience will be crucial in this study as well. He also provides an explanation for the unfamiliar-familiar feeling we tend to feel towards grotesque imagery with an ominous axiom: "The grotesque is the estranged world" (184). In this alienating world, the grotesque emerges as "primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (185), and he argues this is because of the absurdity of this world. As a reaction to what he describes as the estranged world, "the mocking, cynical, and ultimately satanic laughter" (187) aids in relieving the tension created by the absurdity. Hence Kayser's description and understanding of the grotesque in arts and literature both appear to include organic and inorganic realms, familiar concepts fused into absurd substances which result in unfamiliar worlds, forcing a laughter to attempt to shake off the fear of the unknown and the ambivalent—a "play with the absurd", as he calls it (187).

Ultimately, Kayser concludes his arguments around the grotesque tradition having defined it as an attempt to invoke and subdue demonic aspects of the world:

> In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. (188)

Thus, he finds value in the intermingling of the grotesque with arts, literature, and the mundane daily life, potentially viewing such expressions as a way of relieving the tension, albeit momentarily, between our world and the abysmal and ominous aspects of the "estranged world".

Wolfgang Kayser's definition and exploration of the grotesque as a term and an aesthetic category present a foundational reference point; however, since the present study will deal primarily with the representation of female characters and their bodily descriptions, it is also worthwhile to look at another fundamental study of the grotesque by Mikhail Bakhtin — most notably in his alternative, celebratory account of the grotesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1965), which explicitly contests Kayser's emphasis on dread, estrangement, and the demonic. In *Rabelais*, Bakhtin directly engages with the term grotesque, as he reassesses François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* written in the 16th century, through a term he coins as the "carnivalesque". For this study, Bakhtin's approach to the grotesque body will be of special importance. Rabelais' book, as Bakhtin shows, is aimed at reacting against the cultural attitude which was official and humorless at times, hence the carnival and a festive and gay acceptance of the body is profound. Mikhail Bakhtin interprets the carnival imagery in Rabelais in relation to degradation, albeit not a negative one; for him, it is rejuvenating. He believes that it is "the essential principle" of what he calls grotesque realism and that "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" to "the material level" is what makes carnival so earthy and coarse (19). A similar sentiment is found in Robert Duggan's review of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*:

> A central idea is the "uncrowning" of "official" hierarchies and dogma through degradation and parody during the period of the medieval festival or carnival. The celestial, intellectual and spiritual aspects of people, all associated with the head or sky, are replaced by the terrestrial, anatomical and biological aspects of life, associated with defecation and dirt. The body as presented in carnival inaugurates what Bakhtin calls "grotesque realism"–that is, a way of looking at the world which cuts through the dominant ideology and prevailing truth. (Duggan 20)

With grotesque realism, as Duggan points out, the aim is to transgress the limits drawn by the dominant ideology of the time. Bakhtin stresses the difference between a "classical" body and a "grotesque" one, the former associated with a certain closedness, a static or perfect product of bourgeois individualism, whereas the latter one corresponds to an unfinished and protruding body, with an acceptance of the "lower stratum" (Bakhtin 23). Thus, Bakhtinian grotesque realism would aid in, for instance, cutting through a patriarchal dominance in culture, especially with its defiance against ideal and/or classical conceptions of a perfect body. Bakhtin's study does not attempt to hold one end of the spectrum over the other—but aims to highlight

the importance of the phase, and the fluidity of the continuum, and the malleability of the grotesque style:

> The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. The relation to time is one determining trait of the grotesque image. The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis. (Bakhtin 24)

The metamorphosis motif will be observed in the selected stories of Poe and Carter in the following sections of this study, particularly relevant to Ligeia's return through Rowena's body and to the Countess' perpetual undead state. The female body will be explored as a potential site of subversion and transformation in these texts.

If Kayser defines the grotesque through estrangement and dread, Bakhtin defines it through ambivalence, in which the simultaneous presence of opposing forces may not be resolved into either the purely positive or purely negative. Moreover, Bakhtin comments on his different approach: "For Kayser the essential trait of grotesque is 'something hostile, alien, and inhuman'" (47). He posits that the way that Kayser described the grotesque is no longer applicable to the Romantic world and criticizes him for the lack of "material bodily principle with its inexhaustible wealth and perpetual renewal" or any notion of time (48). On that note, Bakhtin claims in *Rabelais* that this grotesque body transgresses its own limits and outgrows itself:

> This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. (Bakhtin 26)

Manifested in the bodies of Pantagruel and Gargantua, Bakhtin contends that their excessiveness and Rabelais's satiric and unrestrained festive marketplace descriptions work to turn the world upside down. This transgression is primarily achieved through the fundamental attributes of the grotesque style, which he names: "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness" (303).

Certain aspects of the Bakhtinian grotesque will be immensely beneficial in the framing of the current study: the seeming opposites that are observed to include each other, the "deep ambivalence" of the grotesque (304), the previously mentioned "topsy-turvy" approach which brings the high to low, and especially the notion of using the grotesque as a tool to react against the official norms of culture. However, while it may appear democratic and even optimistic at first, some hierarchies still remain persistent in Bakhtin's approach to grotesque representations, which will be detailed in the next section, where the bodily aspect—the unfinished, excessive, and regenerative aspects of the body—as well as certain related criticism towards the Bakhtinian grotesque will be discussed in order for this study to finally present its own hybrid definition of the term, which will establish the backdrop of the selected texts' analyses.

2.1. The Grotesque Tradition and the Female Body

Having introduced the preliminary features of the grotesque, traced a basic genealogy of the term's history, and relayed the relevant criticism, it will be fitting to explore another chief undertaking of this study: the grotesque and the body. This section will underline the importance of the protruding, ever-changing, and fluid body conception within the framework of the grotesque, informed by the aforementioned critics like Bakhtin, yet filling in certain gaps in his conceptualization through the insights of Mary Russo, a critic focusing on the female grotesque. Bodies which are capable of transgressing their own boundaries, of mixing up inner and outer realms (blurring the body-world distinction) will be at the center of the discussions of Poe and Carter's protagonists; therefore, this section aims to illuminate this aspect of the grotesque.

The grotesque conception of the body would fundamentally include a deviation from the norm which threatens the generic modes of representation in art or literature. Within a classical conception of the body, there are no allowances for impurities, orifices that ooze with bodily fluids or peaceful existence of binaries, such as life and death. The grotesque conception of the body reconciles the parts and features which are rejected or ignored by the perfect body. Under the patriarchal lens the framing of the body is almost always political. The use of the grotesque often aids subverting the

ideological enforcement of acceptable or normal conceptions of seemingly self-contained bodies.

Mikhail Bakhtin's starting point in *Rabelais and His World* is Rabelais's representation of the body as unfinished, excessive, and in perpetual transformation. For Bakhtin, grotesque images "remain ambivalent and contradictory" and resist the fixity of classical aesthetics, retaining their focus on material processes such as "copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, [and] dismemberment" (Bakhtin 25). It can be observed that, initially at least, Bakhtin's approach does not appear to be gendered but informed by class, in its regard for classical aesthetics in quotation marks. He foregrounds the traditional images of metamorphosis and regeneration: "…The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (26). This conception of the body will be critical for this study and its analysis of the ever-changing and non-static bodies in the following sections.

What is of central importance to the present study is Bakhtin's framing of the body as a socially subversive agent, which is hybrid and regenerative. Yet, the relative indifference to gender in *Rabelais* becomes a critical limitation when the grotesque is applied to representations of female bodies. One exception is Bakhtin's argument that the grotesque body, open and incomplete, is embodied in the pregnant terracotta figurines:

> In the famous Kerch terracotta collection we find figurines of senile pregnant hags. Moreover, the old hags are laughing. This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its twofold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. And such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body. (Bakhtin 25-26)

Bakhtin's discussion of the pregnant Kerch figurines presents a partial point of view of his conceptualization of the grotesque. The figurines' transgressive and ambivalent bodies are depicted as "ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of 'classic' aesthetics" (Bakhtin 25), and Bakhtin does not elaborate on the implications of this view. His oblique remark on the female body as a grotesque one, embodying both the

regenerative and the ugly aspects, is difficult to pin down as either a positive or a condemning one. Yet, it can be argued that there is a blind spot, which necessitates further elaboration to comprehend his postulation of the human body. Perhaps, his treatment of the female body and the grotesque feminine operates as a trope within a male-authored, or dominant-ideology centered approach. The grotesque female body is indeed grotesque and "ambivalent" and "incomplete" (Bakhtin 25) because it is positioned against the classical and normative male body. His statements regarding the lower stratum of the body, which he deems to be grotesque, seeing its "unifying, degrading, uncrowning, and simultaneously regenerating" functions (Bakhtin 24), is related essentially to the feminine body as well. He argues, "Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving" (Bakhtin 21). Bakhtin's framework around the grotesque body reiterates the ancient symbolic alignment of the feminine with the material or the natural, as opposed to the masculine association with reason or transcendence. The reproductive lower stratum carries certain connotations for the grotesque feminine body. Evidently, within Bakhtin's framing of it in the grotesque tradition, the female body appears to be more on the symbolic and essentialist side, rather than a locus of feminine subjectivity, reinscribing patriarchal structures instead of suspending them. As problematized by Mary Russo and Margaret Miles, this model had certain shortcomings and negative connotations surrounding the female body, which will be detailed in the next section.

One of the major aims of this study is to present the possibilities within a grotesque understanding of the female body, which can be liberating and pave the way for achieving an authentic sense of self. Moreover, scrutinizing the social structures around the body, especially on feminine bodies, the leering grotesque imageries can unearth deep-rooted identity and body politics which attempt to oppress and marginalize them. The female body, pregnant with chaos and order, embodying the potential to give birth or to devour, has been discussed by a variety of critics and scholars. This section will foreground two critics who have expanded upon Bakhtin's theorization of the grotesque body in order to scrutinize the relevant approaches to what is called the female grotesque. These two discussions are valuable in framing the rest of the study in relation to the grotesque body: Mary Russo's *The Female Grotesque* and Margaret Miles' *Carnal Knowing*.

Mary Russo illuminates the grotesque as a process through which differently gendered bodies are presented in unique, vigorous, and possibly transformative ways. She restructures the Bakhtinian carnival and the body and integrates it into the context of culture[7]. Russo's feminist engagement with the female grotesque emphasizes female subjectivity, which was arguably restricted and allegorical in Bakhtin's interpretation. In her 1988 paper on the same subject, a discussion which she extended in *The Female Grotesque* in 1994, Russo elaborates on Bakhtin and emphasizes the need for further study of the subject:

> For Bakhtin, this body is, as well, a model for carnival language; a culturally productive linguistic body in constant semiosis. But for the feminist reader, this image of the pregnant hag is more than ambivalent. It is loaded with all of the connotations of fear and loathing associated with the biological processes of reproduction and of aging. Bakhtin, like many other social theorists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, fails to acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic, and thus his notion of the Female Grotesque remains, in all directions, repressed and undeveloped. ("Carnival" 219)

She attempts to fill in the gaps created or intentionally left open by Bakhtin's framework around the female body and the connotations around the material features/functions of that body. Russo's approach to the female body includes semantic depths:

> [The grotesque], as almost every writer on the topic feels obliged to mention sooner or later, evokes the cave—*the grotto-esque*. Low, hidden, earthly, dark, material, immanent, visceral. As bodily metaphor, the grotesque cave tends to look like (and in the most gross metaphorical sense be identified with) the cavernous anatomical female body. These associations of the female with the earthly, material, and the archaic grotesque have suggested a positive and powerful figuration of culture and womanhood to many male and female writers and artists… Blood, tears, vomit, excrement—all the detritus of the body that is separated out and placed with terror and revulsion (predominantly,

[7] Mary Russo is obliged to Bakhtin for his work on the discourse of carnival and the carnivalesque, which has "translocated the issues of bodily exposure and containment, disguise and gender masquerade, abjection and marginality, parody and excess, to the field of the social constituted as a symbolic system" ("Carnival" 214); however, as she observes, he is not without criticism: "There are especial dangers for women and other excluded or marginalized groups within carnival, though even the double jeopardy that I will describe may suggest an ambivalent redeployment of taboos around the female body as grotesque (the pregnant body, the aging body, the irregular body) and as unruly when set loose in the public sphere" (ibid.).

> though not exclusively) on the side of the feminine—are down there in that cave of abjection. (*Female Grotesque* 1-2)

It could be said that a cavernous anatomy, under the patriarchal lens, could also be related to archaic horrors of the "devouring mother" or monstrous womb[8]. The division Russo suggests is similar to Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body:

> The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the "high" or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official "low" culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation. (*Female Grotesque* 8)

Throughout her analysis Russo maintains a positive attitude towards the grotesque body for its political and social capacity for change, although she foregrounds the stakes of establishing the female body as grotesque. Peter Stallybrass argues that bodily definitions are crucial in the mapping out of both class and gender and that ideological configurations are present in the construction of these concepts, mostly at the stake of women. Consequently, as he brings to our attention, an open body that is transgressive and ever-growing is also open to surveillance, interpretation, and interrogation ("Patriarchal" 126). To exist within a female body, inherently a grotesque one, readily possesses signs in culture. This is argued by Russo as well, as she writes: "…In the everyday indicative world, women and their bodies, certain bodies, in certain public framings, in certain public spaces, are always already transgressive—dangerous, and in danger" (*Female Grotesque* 60). The danger is in line with the idea of risk in Russo's study—the grotesque is "only recognizable in relation to a norm" and that exceeding or transgressing the norm involves "serious risk" (*Female Grotesque* 10). To recall Bakhtin's conceptualization of the body, his arguments referred to a utopian or a festive alternative brought on by the grotesque; meanwhile, Russo underlines the potential risk and critical positioning the body may possess. The female grotesque may be genuinely risky. A woman might expose herself to real social, psychic, and sometimes physical danger by "making a spectacle of oneself"

[8] See *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) by Barbara Creed, for her psychoanalytic approach to the ideological construction of women as archetypal or mythic monsters. Her Freudian and Lacanian reading of movies with a contemporary feminist approach is invaluable.

(*Female Grotesque* 12). Constructing femininity takes place in culture and discursive practices; monitoring and policing what ideas and actions are associated with the concept of "femininity" is directly related to the power dynamics within that society. The ideologies that women or other marginalized groups are exposed to can even make themselves their own oppressors in the sense that, to fit in, the oppressed may partake in self-surveillance and self-policing[9]. Grotesque heterogeneity presents a liberating ground in order to react against the project of standardization. Inclusive of the marginalized and the nonnormative, the grotesque space allows for all bodies and voices to be heard from the periphery. The female grotesque reveals the constructed and contingent nature of feminine embodiment norms through their hyperbolic performance or distortion. The body is a site of political meaning, a culturally constructed and ideologically charged area, where subjectivity and meaning making are dependent on context. Bakhtin's emphasis on the pregnant body arguably reduces femininity to the biological and reproductive function, stripping the female body of historical, social, and subjective complexity. Throughout her book, Russo finds the female grotesque to be always already a cultural figure appropriated by a male discourse. This historicized approach to the female body—as opposed to Bakhtin's distant past, where the collective and anonymous folk body is scrutinized—further highlights Russo's critical and historical situating of the discussion. In the end, by shifting the focus of the grotesque away from a nostalgic honoring of communal vitality, as it was in Bakhtin's carnival, Mary Russo creates a vital analytical framework for examining how female bodies are at once displayed as spectacles, subjected to discipline, and positioned as sites of resistance. In contrasting these perspectives, she underscores that determining who is categorized as grotesque and under what circumstances is a deeply political matter rather than a simple academic nuance.

On the other hand, in *Carnal Knowing* (1989), Margaret Miles discusses the relationship between the female body and the Western theological perspectives. For the present study, her chapter "Carnal Abominations" will be especially vital in conceptualizing her claims around the female body and the grotesque. Her analysis

[9] Russo elaborates on how women are afraid of "making a spectacle" of themselves, and at times, even colluding with their oppressors when criticizing other women (*Female Grotesque* 53).

includes the grotesque tradition, as she begins by foregrounding the grotesque as a historically produced mode and situates it as the effect of specific cultural, theological, and visual practices that denote certain bodies as excessive, threatening, or monstrous in relation to dominant norms. In her chapter, she first defines the grotesque to identify its components, then argues that woman's affiliation with birth, intercourse, and death makes her the primary figure of the grotesque within the male public sphere. After exploring how women's bodies and behaviors relate to devices that render the familiar grotesque, Miles uses sixteenth-century literature to demonstrate the social function of portraying woman as a grotesque figure.

Miles' book highlights the importance of the female body left undiscussed by Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism, and she finds transferring the material, corporeal, and sexual to the woman's body as the catalyst for a grotesque conversation: "The association of the female body with materiality, sex, and reproduction makes it an essential —not an accidental—aspect of the grotesque" (*Carnal* 150). She formulates a possible reason why critics of the grotesque readily associated the female body with the grotesque tradition:

> The special affiliation of the female body with the grotesque is founded on the assumption that the male body is the perfectly formed, complete, and therefore normative body. By contrast, all women's bodies incorporate parts (like breasts, uterus, and vagina) and processes (like menstruation and pregnancy) that appeared grotesque to the authors and artists who represented women. The female body is inherently volatile, the "source of change, disruption, and complication." Twentieth-century analysts of the grotesque—Kayser, Bakhtin, Harpham—fail to notice the gender assumptions embedded in grotesque art and literature, with the effect that they ignore a structural feature of the genre. (*Carnal* 155)

In her analysis of the female grotesque, Miles argues that against the normative body of the male, the figure of woman, from the male perspective, provides the most concentrated sense of the grotesque and has certain social and literary functions (ibid.). The difference between female and male bodies, materially and socially, can be seen in the hierarchical treatment of them. The ever-growing and changing aspect of the female body is used in an argument by Miles in order to show that male bodies are also subjected to grotesque figurations; however, there is a difference:

> …As grotesque, male bodies take on precisely the characteristics regularly attributed to female bodies; they lose form and integrity, become penetrable, suffer the addition of alien body parts, and become alternately huge and tiny. Like women's bodies, the grotesque male body is no longer "clearly differentiated from the world, but transferred, merged, and fused with it." (Miles 151; Bakhtin 339)

Miles pays attention to certain representational traditions of the female body in theological and visual cultures of the West, contained safely within its historical and ideological framework:

> The female, from the perspective of the collective male public, is constantly and frustratingly mobile between poles of similarity and alienness…Women's difference from the normative male was, however, far more frequently noted in medieval Christianity. Male authors wondered whether women have souls; women often seemed, to the men who represented them, to lack the subjectivity they associated with having a soul. Figured as Eve, the perversely bent rib, every woman was seen as essentially grotesque, though the revelation of her hidden monstrosity could be prevented by her careful adherence to socially approved appearance and behavior. The function of this figuration was to identify, define, and thus to stabilize a feared and fantasized object. (*Carnal* 152)

Miles' stress on the grotesque figuration of women externally, that is, as shaped by the dominant visual or literary culture, points to the danger that may cause internal or spiritual revision. In perceiving one's body as excessive or abnormal in relation to the classic or normative male body may result in the questioning of one's behaviors, sexuality, or bodily experiences. Miles approaches the female grotesque as not innate or given but actually a culturally and visually produced aesthetic. This production is carried out by three rhetorical and pictorial devices of the grotesque: "caricature, inversion, and hybridization" (*Carnal* 155). Especially for the present study, the devices of inversion and hybridization will be of utmost importance: Miles claims that inversion includes the reversal of an expected and pleasing appearance to produce a "disturbing image" (159) and that the female body, "even without the usual device of hybridization, appears to be innately and simultaneously fascinating and terrifying" (161).

All in all, both Russo and Miles' approaches to the socially inscribed and subversive grotesque bodies are vital for the following chapters and their utilization as a critical tool. Russo's theoretically vivacious and politically charged framework foregrounds

the possibilities of female agency and transgressive performance. Miles proposes a historically and genealogically rigorous account of the structural or cultural conditions that may have produced and shaped the female body as grotesque across the Western imagination. Miles' approach to the grotesque is valuable in its tracing of the historical and cultural reasons why the female body is associated with the grotesque but arguably, it is limited. However, when combined with Russo's consideration of the notions of agency and resistance—to avoid the determinism of reducing the female grotesque to an unbroken history of patriarchal imposition—it can serve the critical and theoretical needs of the present study.

In the light of the relevant criticism, the following chapters will explore the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter's selected short stories in order to show how these texts employ the grotesque as a critical device to expose, question, and subvert existing notions about women and the female body. As discussed before, a single definition of the grotesque is neither applicable nor ideal in a study like this, which aims to depict the range and uses of different variations of the term in the selected short stories of the authors. From Kayser's discussion, the emphasis on the grotesque's strength in creating an estrangement from the present is included in the definition adopted for this study. His formulation of "the distortion of all ingredients, the fusion of different realms, the coexistence of beautiful, bizarre, ghastly, and repulsive elements, the merger of the parts into a turbulent whole" (79) will be applied to the grotesque bodies described in Poe's and Carter's stories. The dehumanized human aspects which aim to alienate and shock the readers' sensibility are one of the key strengths of grotesque imagery. Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque as "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness" (303) will also be a part of the framework scaffolding this study. How Bakhtin points out the way opposites are observed to include each other—for instance, decay and regeneration, life and death, familiar and unfamiliar, chaos and order—or the "deep ambivalence" (304) and the in-betweenness of the grotesque, alongside the conception of an unfinished, excessive, and regenerative body are essential to this study's hybrid understanding of the grotesque. As argued by Margaret Miles, gender construction plays a critical role in constructing an exhaustive understanding of the grotesque; therefore, this must also be a part of any analysis of what constitutes the grotesque (*Carnal* 168). Moreover, Mary Russo's approach to women as a

construction of patriarchal society and their bodies as possible sites of revolution and resistance against the norms, present the categorical study of the female grotesque as a strategic tool to "destabilize the idealizations of the female beauty or to realign the mechanisms of desire" ("Carnival" 221). With such a critical framework, the grotesque will be explored as a strategy which reacts against the official "norms" of the culture and depicts the authors' critical approach to the valorization of certain institutions or manners to subvert the social and cultural expectations from bodies that are inscribed with ideological configurations.

CHAPTER 3

THE GROTESQUE AS OBSERVED IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "LIGEIA" AND "BERENICE"

Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* was published initially in 1839 in two volumes during his lifetime. This collection of Gothic stories includes a wide variety of narratives, some of which are the most popular of his oeuvre. The collection also includes a brief preface, which sets the stage for Poe's approach to and treatment of the short gothic fiction which would meet the readers and critics with mixed reviews. This chapter of the study will examine Edgar Allan Poe's understanding, approach, and use of the grotesque in his selected Gothic stories, "Berenice" and "Ligeia" respectively. However, before their discussion, Poe's specific understanding of the grotesque needs to be elaborated on, to better grasp his unique application of it as a critical tool in the characterization and settings of his stories.

3.1. Edgar Allan Poe and the Grotesque Tradition

Poe wrote in the Preface to the first edition of the short stories a vague explanation of his use of the term grotesque: "...Epithets 'Grotesque' and 'Arabesque' will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of these tales here published" (qtd. in Thompson 117). For him, the prevalent tenor he speaks of appears as an emulation of different Gothic writers of his time, as well as certain Germanic influences. Poe's use of the terms grotesque and arabesque[10] in his title likely stems from Walter Scott, who, in his 1827 essay "The Novels of E. T. A. Hoffmann," had

[10] Kenneth Silverman points out that Poe's understanding and use of these terms remain uncertain: "Historically the terms refer to different sorts of decoration, the first combining plant, animal, and human motifs, the other using only flowers and calligraphy. But in Poe's time grotesque and arabesque were often confounded and used synonymously" (153).

described Hoffmann as the first great artist of the supernatural grotesque. Scott compared the grotesque in literature to the arabesque in painting, treating both as intricate structures of imaginative distortion. Kayser traces a line of influence starting from Germany, then moving to Britain, and finally to America (77). He relates the term to the Gothic genre in literature:

> The famous critic William Hazlitt was the first to extend the meaning when in 1820 he spoke of English literature as being Gothic and grotesque. By so doing, he detached the word from its tangible context (whether ornament, figure, or landscape) and made it a general category. As the conjunction with Gothic implies, emphasis is laid on the ominous and somber aspects of the phenomenon. The word serves as a rather vague designation of the atmosphere or mood of a work, or the impression which it makes upon the reader. (Kayser 77)

Kayser argues that Poe's use of the word in his title for his stories seems to be "more closely related to Hazlitt's impressionistic [use] than to Scott's structural use of it" (78). He explains that Poe indeed was influenced by the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, namely, *Nachtgeschichten* (1816-17) and *Der Sandmann* (1816), and with their influence Poe forged "something new and unique that was to acquire its own historical sphere of influence" (81).[11] Wolfgang Kayser praises "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842) as he finds Poe's approach to the grotesque "the most complete and authoritative" of definitions: "…There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust" (78-79). The grotesque for Poe thus encompasses distortion, fusion, and contradiction; the mingling of beauty and horror, reason and madness, reality and dream. His turbulent stories create a whole in which the bizarre and the sublime coexist within a nocturnal, phantasmagoric world he once called his "daydreams" (Kayser 79). According to Kayser, Poe employs the grotesque on two levels: "to describe a concrete situation in which chaos prevails" and to indicate "the tenor of entire stories concerned with terrible, incomprehensible, inexplicable, bizarre, fantastic, and nocturnal happenings" (ibid.). Additionally, Daniel Hoffman claims that for Edgar Allan Poe,

[11] Another Poe scholar, G. R. Thompson also suggests that Poe not only "carefully perused" Scott's article on Hoffmann, but also he appropriated Gothic materials from it, putting forth "Metzengerstein" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" as parallels for evidence (111).

"…*Grotesque* signifies the depiction of monsters in an elaborate, foliated setting" (203). Hoffman posits that what Poe emulated in his texts were "making monstrosities of realities" and his grotesque imagery in his collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* were "the exposure of the idiocy of the monstrous world" (205-206). In Poe's penmanship, the atmosphere and the dark vision created in these texts could be argued to leave a "shock-effect" on the readers, as Philip Thomson terms it: "The shock-effect of the grotesque may also be used to bewilder and disorient, to bring the reader up short, jolt him out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective" (58).

It seems that the grotesque excess serves a critical purpose in Poe's short stories, through which he can convey a certain critique, a feeling, or a contribution to the overall grisly effect left on the reader. To illustrate this, an example from his oeuvre which tackles mesmerism[12] "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845) can be practical. In this story, a character on his deathbed consents to undergo hypnosis—a mesmeric trance—to see the effects of it on a dying person. This curious experiment proves traumatizing for the narrator, who, in the end, witnesses a marionette-like scene in which the dead man's tongue speaks the words "I am dead!" (Poe *Complete Tales* 726). This is one example of the tongue-in-cheek manner that Poe can hardly do without even in his most serious stories. Adding a final grotesque touch to the ending, the last lines describe how the patient disintegrates before the narrator's eyes: "…His whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute, or even less, shrunk—crumbled, absolutely rotted away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putridity" (*Complete Tales* 728). In this context, it could be argued that Poe takes the dissolution of masculinity literally. This uncanny and horrific scene could also provide a clue as to how and to what effect Poe used bodies and the grotesque in his stories.[13] The final scene of Valdemar both dead, yet at the same time still animated, while his body

[12] Mesmerism, a pseudoscience that was practiced and written on with scepticism around Poe's time.

[13] David Greven's interpretation of this story is from a point of view that applies the Kristevan concept of abjection. He argues that Poe thematizes "a fear of *wet masculinity*" (192) and that Valdemar embodies "a grotesque version of the indomitable American spirit" (195) which provides an acute example of "of living an abject life" (201).

transgresses its original human "limits" and turns into a putrescent liquid mass of materials disturbs the readers to the point of reconsideration of their preconceived beliefs and expectations of death and the boundaries of their own bodies.[14]

Additionally, Poe's famous short story, a tale of "ratiocination," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) can present another example of grotesque imagery. The relatedness of the flesh-creeping violence and Poe's use of the grotesque can be seen in Detective Dupin's description of the manner of the crime: "…A strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a grotesquerie in horror absolutely alien from humanity" (*Complete Tales* 389). Reminiscent of Wolfgang Kayser's remark on the grotesque being "the estranged world" (Kayser 184), Poe seems to wield the term in his story to denote a sense of alienation and un-naturality in a world that was assumed to be familiar and "knowable".

Furthermore, G. R. Thompson locates Poe's grotesque imagery in physical settings and decorations, arguing that Poe frequently links the terms with "irregular, niched, multifor architecture, Gothic armorial trophies, flickering fiery light, the weird transformation of natural light through Gothic windows and the like" (Thompson 130). The eccentric setting and elaborately structured frames of Poe may provide symbolic clues to the deceptive quality of Poe's narrators', and this trick will be reviewed with special attention to female figures in his short stories "Berenice" and "Ligeia" in the following sections. In these macabre stories, the depictions of chimerical figures of women, both living and dead, existing in a fantasy or dreamlike state, in settings that are both homely and estranged at the same time, will be seen to transgress the boundaries and combine what seems incongruous into a harmonious narrative as these figures unapologetically exist in the state of either/or. The grotesque tradition is used as a strategic device to depict the dangers and shortcomings of mythologizing or stereotyping female figures, whether as *femme fatale* or a divinized love object, thus

[14] See Xavier Aldana Reyes' *Body Gothic* (2014) for a more extended discussion of the gothic body and the body gothic. As he distinguishes between the two to highlight the inescapability of corporeality, he argues that: "...Corporeality, its transgression, limits and the horror of embodiment, as well as concomitant notions of materialism and transcendence, lie at the heart of subgenres such as body horror…" (17).

showing Poe's attempt at transcending the binaries and subverting the social norms for bodily and behavioral ideals.

3.2. Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice" and the Grotesque

In this section, a close reading of "Berenice" from Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* will be carried out to explore his approach to and use of the grotesque as a critical tool in his short fiction, mainly from the perspective of the setting and the corporeality of the heroine. This section will demonstrate that Poe's grotesque operates as a critical literary strategy and that his short stories, by collapsing bodily, epistemological, and moral boundaries, aid Poe to destabilize dominant ideological assumptions related to gender and further convey his cultural criticism. "Berenice" was first published in the March 1835 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, which met instant criticism from its readers. In a letter dated April 30, 1835, Poe wrote to his editor Thomas W. White, in defense of the subject matter of "Berenice", admitting that the "subject is by far too terrible" (*Letters* 1: 57) but arguing that the magazine is not foreign to such dark Gothic tales. In describing the peculiar nature of the story, he writes: "In the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical. You may say all this is bad taste" (*Letters* 1: 57-8). When the story was published, the gruesome mutilation of a corpse with necrophiliac connotations was the reason for the public outrage; however, Poe had the idea for it from a real-life event[15]. The Poesque subject matter of the prematurely buried woman by a recently bereaved lover—although it was possibly based on a real-life case— was still disturbing enough for the common *Southern Literary Messenger* readers to provide harsh criticism. As Dayan remarks, by the end of the story the readers must "wonder what Poe intends by the cruel and seemingly gratuitous violence to human identity" (*Fables* 141).

[15] "Poe claimed that the story originated in a bet with an unnamed editor after both read an article in the February 23, 1833, issue of the *Baltimore Sunday Visiter* on the subject of graves being robbed to obtain teeth for dentists" (Sova 26).

The following discussion will be centered around the grotesque representations of the setting and atmosphere of the story and the ways in which the female characters are disembodied and abstracted. Utilizing Bakhtin's and Russo's theorization of the grotesque body, the analysis argues that Poe employs the grotesque and the excess of violence within "Berenice" as a critical tool. In other words, his aim is not to sensationalize brutality or fetishize death but to deliberately expose and critique the aesthetic idealization of women and the systematic denial of female subjectivity within nineteenth-century patriarchal gender norms, thereby unsettling dominant assumptions about bodily integrity and feminine identity.

The storyline follows the unfortunate fate that befalls the narrator Egæus, and his betrothed cousin Berenice, whom he "grew up together with in [his] paternal halls" (*Complete Tales* 228)[16]. While they are young, it is Egæus who is sickly and gloomy, whereas Berenice is his opposite, energetic and agile. The narrator claims to be suffering from a not-yet-understood condition which he terms *monomania*. He describes it as "a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the attentive" (*Complete Tales* 228) and a "nervous intensity of interest" (229). From a modern psychological perspective, the disease he seems to suffer from is more likely an obsessional tendency. This immense fixation upon whatever object results in a state similar to delirious patients— that is, ignoring to eat, sleep, or indulge in the mundanities of life; all seem of little importance to a person like Egaeus who prefers to divert all his attention to the then-object-of-fixation, his books. Egaeus engages in meditations that are not pleasurable when he is overcome with his self-diagnosed illness, monomania. Over time, Berenice becomes ill and starts to waste away. Egæus' disorder intensifies upon the "startling changes wrought in the physical frame of Berenice and "in an evil moment" (230) as he calls it, he proposes marriage to her, and she replies with an enigmatic smile. As her mouth parts for this smile "of peculiar meaning" (231), the full fury of his monomania comes, for her teeth. The emaciated Berenice early one morning suffers from an epileptic seizure and is

[16] The references to Poe's "Berenice" henceforth will be made from the Barnes & Noble compilation, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (2006).

described to be dead; later she is buried "at the closing in of the night" (232). At midnight, the narrator awakens from a confusing and an exciting dream with no recollection of the events since Berenice's burial, yet a disturbing and eerie sensation interrupts the grieving Egæus as his eyes fixate upon a little box on the table and an open book in which a line of poetry has been underscored, and tellingly, the line expresses the comfort in visiting the grave of a beloved. It is then revealed by a servant that Berenice's grave has been violated, and they have found the violated, yet still alive, body of Berenice. The story concludes with Egæus' slow yet horrific recollection of what he has done to his betrothed. He rushes to the box and drops it onto the ground with shaking hands, revealing "some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor" (233).

To begin with the atmospheric elements that contribute to creating a setting of grotesque nature; Poe's preference for archaism in including a centuries-old line for an epigraph provides a foreshadowing in the text: "*Dicebant mihi sodales, si sepulchrum amicæ visitarem, curas meas aliquantulum fore levatas*"[17]. This is the line that is later shown to be the one that Egæus' eyes fixate upon in the open book on his desk, which makes the "blood of [his] body become congealed within [his] veins" (*Complete Tales* 233) and soon enough comes the revelation of the story. Like Raphael did with his *grottesco*, Poe repurposes this line from a bygone era according to his own nineteenth-century Gothic sensibilities. His admixture of archaic and modern elements in his unique approach to the grotesque is of key importance to the overall grotesque atmosphere present in the backdrop of the story.

Previously, the grotesque has been defined as the play with the absurd world (Kayser), where hierarchies and limits are blurred or inverted (Bakhtin 81), and "the unresolved clash of incompatibles" (Thomson 27) paradoxically both build and relieve the tension. This narrator's world presents a similar experience for its unlucky inhabitants.

[17] Beard (1987) provides some insight into what is available of this ancient writer. The line from Ebn Zaiat (d. 847 A.D.) could be translated as: "My companions told me I might find some little alleviation of my misery, in visiting the grave of my beloved," as provided by Poe's own from a footnote to the printings of the stories (Blythe and Sweet 24).

This is observable in Egæus's interpretation of the world around him as not only Gothic but also grotesque:

> Misery is manifold. The wretchedness of earth is multiform. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow, its hues are as various as the hues of that arch—as distinct too, yet as intimately blended. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow! How is it that from beauty I have derived a type of unloveliness?—from the covenant of peace a simile of sorrow? But as, in ethics, evil is a consequence of good, so, in fact, out of joy is sorrow born. Either the memory of past bliss is the anguish of today, or the agonies which *are* have their origin in the ecstasies which *might have been.* (*Complete Tales* 227, Poe's emphasis)

In this extended description, Egæus' own introduction to his perspective employs inversions which traditionally have been seen to be a part of the grotesque. From the hues of the rainbow, Egæus derives a type of "unloveliness," and sorrow is born from his joyful moments. Going against normalcy, in a world where evil is a consequence of good, Egæus sets the grotesque atmosphere of the short story.

To look into the more concrete aspects of the story and how the grotesque applies to them, the library is pivotal to the discussion of the grotesque setting of the story. Egæus' initial introduction of himself is centered around the library chamber: "Here died my mother. Herein was I born" (*Complete Tales* 227). He traces his genesis to this literary scene, like so many of Poe's narrators. He "lives among, through, and from books, even hinting that he himself may have derived from the fictions contained in their pages" (Doyle 15). The setting is described with certain grotesque architectural details: "the frescos of the chief saloon…the tapestries of the dormitorie…the chiseling of some buttresses in the armory…the gallery of antique paintings" (227). This decorative choice could be read as what Renaissance Italians referred to as *grotesques*; the frescoes and the buttresses could be related to the early works referred to as "*anticke worke*" (Barasch 58) in which imitative designs of an older era were manifest and they were observed to be "ambivalently meaning-bearing as well as decorative" (Harpham xxi). With Egæus' fragmented narration, a certain insolent attitude— "our line has been called a race of visionaries" (*Complete Tales* 227)—reinforces the dream-like state of his establishment and overpowering standing. Born in the library, his description presents a life lived in books and perhaps fantasy. A self-assured attitude in his heritage, an absorption in his fancies, all paired with his self-diagnosed

"monomania," signal the fatal extent of his imaginative faculties, through which he transforms his fiancée into an object of wish-fulfillment[18]. Egæus' characterization represents a pathological symptom of the very systems—Romantic aestheticism, domestic idealism, masculine intellectual authority—that the story ostensibly inhabits. His dissociative and paralyzing contemplation, namely his monomania, depicts how he has internalized relating to his surroundings through aesthetic meditation instead of human reciprocity. The very apparatus through which Egaeus perceives and describes Berenice is simultaneously the system that destroys her.

The highly fanciful description of Berenice in Egæus' eyes turns strangely terrible, as Poe incrementally depicts this grotesque situation:

> Ah! vividly is her image before me now, as in the early days of her light-heartedness and joy! Oh! gorgeous yet fantastic beauty! Oh! sylph amid the shrubberies of Arnheim!—Oh! Naiad among its fountains!—and then—then all is mystery and terror, and a tale which should not be told. Disease—a fatal disease—fell like the simoon upon her frame; and, even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! (*Complete Tales* 228)

This oscillating and unsure reaction towards Berenice is one of the key examples of the way Poe invokes the grotesque tradition. Between attraction and repulsion, Egæus' narration depicts the uncanny and ambivalent space Berenice occupies. Soon enough, her figure becomes the ground upon which Poe conveys a critique of the patriarchal literary tradition. With Berenice's illness worsening, Egæus' obsessive tendencies also get worse, which Doyle connects to this patriarchal tradition:

> As Berenice's lover transfigures her into his idealized image of herself, the dark lady becomes grotesquely fair, her vitality dissipated, her body increasingly attenuated—and finally violated, in a grisly graveside crime. Poe's tale dramatizes the disfiguring power of the rhetorical figures which from Petrarch to Dante to Shakespeare, from the early Church fathers to his own

[18] Poe intentionally uses an example from one of Egæus' literary forefathers to illustrate his monomania, Tertullian and his "De Carne Christi": "*Mortuus est Det filius; credible est guia ineptum est; et sepultus resurrexit; certum est quia imposstbile? est.*" The paradoxical statement which Egæus fixates upon on a page could be roughly translated as believing in the resurrection of the Son of God *because* it is absurd, or impossible. This contributes to the fact that Egæus follows a certain patriarchal line of learned men. Moreover, the life-in-death and death-in-life liminality of Christ will be repeated in the grotesque image of Berenice later on.

> Romantic age and beyond, have enslaved the female body and silenced the female voice. (13)

The objectification, and later violation, of Berenice possibly stand for a criticism of the similar treatment of women across history in social and literary scenes, as suggested by Doyle. Egæus' recurrent mentioning of his literary forefathers could be regarded as standing for a criticism of the traditional line of patriarchal literary figures[19], which have in one way or another effaced or silenced feminine subjectivity in their works.

Poe employs grotesque corporeal distortion to expose how patriarchal desire converts the female body into an abstract, fetishized object, revealing the violence inherent in aesthetic idealization rather than romantic attachment. Although Egæus describes Berenice as an ephemeral angel, he also admits that his love and proposal have not been of the sentimental kind: "During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings with me, had never been of the heart, and my passions always were of the mind" (231). Here, then, the readers may recall his inverted description of his world quoted earlier. Just as the joyful world is sorrowful, his affections for her are also, in a sense, bankrupt. The union he wishes to make with her is solely based on the material and surface level of sentiments. His fetishistic gaze does not recognize her as a real person of substance, but a subject for his analysis:

> ...She had flitted by my eyes, and I had seen her—not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream—not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being—not as a thing to admire, but to analyze—not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation. (*Complete Tales* 230)

Berenice both exists and does not exist for Egæus, who intermittently slips between reality and fantasy—in both realms fantasizing and idolizing her. Perhaps choosing to further his methodological analysis of her, or arguably in a moment of pity for her "fallen and desolate condition" (ibid.) and recalling that she had loved him for a long time, he proposes marriage to her "in an evil moment" (230). His timing as well as

[19] Moreover, Doyle shows a potentially different reading of the story's reference to Zaiat: "The fact that…Ben Zaiat authored a well known elegy on the loss of a beloved slave girl is suggestive. Egaeus' rhetorical figures have virtually enslaved Berenice, whom he has lost" (17).

wording are interesting. As her physical health and aforementioned beauty begin to decline, he asks her to marry him—and later recalls this in his narration regretfully. It could be argued that her previous state was a threat to Egæus and that she was perhaps *too* beautiful or strong to be submitted to his will. The heavily mythologized and already superficial image of Berenice shatters before their nuptials, "emaciation [of her person] was excessive" (231), in which the perception of her in his mind becomes distorted and vile—nonetheless, he wants to marry her for what she seems to signify in his mind.

Before the discussion of the events following Egæus' proposal to Berenice, it may be useful to take the nature of the relationship between them into account and depict how the grotesque elements here sustain a disturbing and critical approach in the backdrop of the story. Their incestuous engagement can be regarded as a boundary-blurring union, in line with Kayser's "fusion of different realms" (79)—thus evidencing a level of institutional grotesque, beyond that of aesthetics. This is important for a variety of reasons. To begin with, Egæus' marriage proposal is not related to their mutual desire, but it can be inferred as a patriarchal fantasy of preservation. When he proposes matrimony to the sickly Berenice, Egæus' ultimate wish is to control or contain her deteriorating body, to arrest the changes that happen in Berenice' decaying body. Moreover, Poe critiques the inverted domestic space and the perils of marriage as an institution for women. Although Berenice had known her cousin all her life and loved him, her hopes of a safe and loving home are annihilated in the unfolding narrative as a distorted, grotesque nightmare. Egæus denies her the possibility of domestic safety or emotional reciprocity. In one of her cataleptic fits, instead of resting from her illness in her bed she is deemed dead and entombed hastily—her soon-to-be husband, instead of mourning for her, turns her into a corporeal resource, and violates her body to extract her teeth.

The grotesque, then, further depicts the home as a death-bound and dangerous site for women. The marriage intuition itself becomes grotesque as it signifies decay, obsession, and violence for Berenice and Egæus, instead of safety, comfort, or the continuity of social cohesion. This unconventional and incestuous engagement, already bending the natural categories of coupling from the start, proceeds in a manner in which a woman is displaced from her standing as a beautiful, vigorous, and

matrimony-worthy companion. The spatial corruption in this story reveals what the idealized domestic interior conceals—namely, the violence, obsession, and exploitation that structure relations between men and women within it. In his constitution of a Gothic demystification of idyllic domestic ideology, Poe shifts the preconceived notions of the idealization of the institution of marriage through Berenice and uses the grotesque nature of their relationship as a critical strategy that lays bare the violence embedded within patriarchal fantasies of possession or intimacy.

In Bakhtinian terms, Berenice's grotesque body could be read as a body in the becoming, containing multitudes, sickness and imminent death, *as well as* tenacious vitality. Egæus begins loathing and even fearing Berenice' paradoxical existence in her sickness:

> The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets now of a vivid yellow, and jarring discordantly, in their fantastic character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. (*Complete Tales* 231)

The dehumanization and exaggerated decay of the body of Berenice is what Russo calls an attempt using the grotesque tradition to "destabilize the idealizations of the female beauty or to realign the mechanisms of desire" ("Carnival" 221). Through Egæus' fetishistic gaze and Berenice's progressive bodily deterioration, Poe uses the grotesque to uncover the patriarchal impulse to stabilize female otherness—or simply existing out of the norms of the dominant ideology—by abstracting, controlling, and ultimately violating the female body. No longer human, her dehumanized figure exacts the definite article[20] from Egæus—*the* hair instead of *her* hair—and as Kennedy puts it, there is little beauty in dying, "once a brunette, now a blonde, Berenice has become a grotesque version of herself" (*Life of Writing* 79). The description of Berenice takes a grotesque turn, as seen from the shift in Egæus' description and approach to her. The body and person of Berenice sustain an alternative, a grotesque depiction. The function

[20] Another heroine, from "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), upon whose body a linguistic dehumanization is conveyed, is exemplified by Joan Dayan: "Think about Lady Madeline Usher returning from the grave as a brute and bloodied thing, reduced from a woman of beauty to the frenziedly iterated 'it' of her brother Roderick" ("Amorous" 240).

of such grotesque figuration is "to identify, define, and thus stabilize a feared and fantasized object" (Miles 152). Gradually Poe depicts this in Egæus' turn from idolatry to a contempt for Berenice. In her illness and physical dissolution, Berenice embodies the grotesque opposition between vigour and decay and unwittingly attains Egæus' attention and desire as he abstracts her into an image, effacing her subjectivity. Further depicting how Egæus valued the ideal over the particular or the fantasy over the individual. After his proposal to her and her quiet acceptance of it with a smile, he describes Berenice as if she appeared before him and then faded into thin air:

> The eyes were lifeless, and lusterless, and seemingly pupil-less, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died! (*Complete Tales* 231, Poe's emphasis)

Egæus' already unstable condition is triggered by her uncanny smile and precisely what that smile enshrouds—her teeth. The grotesque objectification of Berenice climaxes once his fixation finds a latch, the teeth which he begins to long for "with a frenzied desire" (231). Within her sickly body, now similar to a living cadaver, the teeth remain intact as signifiers of her previous health and vibrancy, underscoring her condition's liminality. As Weissberg explains, "The symmetry and lifeless luster of her teeth—indicators of health and beauty—become noticeable only in their difference from the decaying body and its recollection, in their unchangeability" (69). His obsession reads as: "I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a frenzied desire. All other matters and all different interests became absorbed in their single contemplation" (231). Kennedy traces the importance of teeth across different short stories of Poe's and finds that they are signifiers of mortality. Should this view be applied to "Berenice," her teeth could signify Egæus' fear of lack of control and being weak[21], as Kennedy writes:

> Egæus can do nothing about the disease of Berenice, and her hideous transformation confronts him with a reminder of his own impotence and vulnerability. In particular, women's teeth signify the problem of death; the

[21] Samantha Stobert interprets the narrator's obsession with the teeth of Berenice as a macabre parody of the tradition of keepsakes. She elaborates: "…Keeping locks of hair and photographs 'in death' was integral to sentimental death rituals, despite a paradoxical denial of physical death. Poe drains the custom of its sentiment by having his narrator choose an especially morbid keepsake…" (290).

> narrator wants to possess them to control the reality which they represent. (*Life of Writing* 80)

Her body and existence are reduced to her pearly teeth, through which her lover retains his mental peace. The teeth, which Egæus desired precisely because they seemed ideal and separable from Berenice's physical being, come back to haunt him as evidence of irreducible, horrifying corporeality. The violence he commits cannot be aestheticized through nineteenth century sensibilities; Berenice's excavated teeth remain as the biological matter torn from a living person, and their presence in the narrative forces a confrontation with the material reality that aesthetic idealization works to repress. Abstracted and anatomized to her parts, she loses her unity and subjectivity; in a sense, she only lives to sustain Egæus and his mental stability. In Bakhtinian terms, the body reasserts its grotesque and excessive materiality against the narrator's attempt to fix it in aesthetic stasis. Berenice's violated body—suffering, bleeding, living—refuses the annihilation that Egæus' aesthetic idealization requires of it, granting the story its subversive attitude toward body politics.

Berenice no longer fits the mental image sustained in Egæus' memory. Her body is changing and growing older and sicker with each passing day; therefore, for Egæus her grotesque body appears as a threat[22]. According to Russo's understanding, an interpretation of Berenice as a heroine can be established with the idea of "the grotesque as a process through which differently gendered bodies are deployed in provocative, new, and possibly transformative ways" (Russo i). The nonnormative bodies, which resist the dominant epistemology of their time, aid in the subversion of concepts of normalcy and propriety through their mere existence.

[22] Marie Bonaparte, a pupil of Sigmund Freud, provides a psychosexual reading of Poe's "Berenice" in her *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation* (1949). For her, and in common psychoanalytic practices of her time, the teeth were related to male impotence with their connection to the concept of *vagina dentata,* a site of danger of castration embedded in men's unconscious. For some, this view can provide a psychological explanation of Berenice as a threat to Egæus.

The identity of Berenice, mostly avoided in Egæus' self-centered and superficial narration, is hard to put together. Egæus' fixation upon the teeth could be analysed within Poe's somewhat overt reasoning for his deranged hero:

> *Des idées!*—ah here was the idiotic thought that destroyed me! *Des idées!*—ah *therefore* it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason. (*Complete Tales* 232)

Poe most likely morphed the French words "*idées*" and "*dents*" to point the readers to *identité*. Egæus' immediate connection between "ideas" and the teeth is an obvious word play on Poe's part, showing Berenice's idealization, the worship of her person, and later her being fragmented into bits, in this case, into her teeth. Leland S. Person postulates what Poe seems to be criticizing: "Disembodied and transformed into ideas in men's minds, women are separated from themselves in the process of being separated from the world of men's work" (139). This could also be further viewed as an epistemic violence carried out by Egæus, or the patriarchal tradition—where the female body or intellect is subjugated to the male one.

Berenice's teeth reveal how feminine corporeality is constructed as fetishized and threatening by the patriarchal desire, seeing how it prompts Egæus' violation and fragmentation of her body in order to possess and neutralize it through violence; which results in an ideological critique presented by the grotesque. Some critics have interpreted the teeth of Berenice as "genitalized" in the unconscious, hence "the ideas" related to her teeth within that cavernous space end up related to sexuality—as a literalization of the grotesque as *grotto-esque*; or the "cave of abjection" as Russo puts it (2)—and the pulling out of the teeth as a way of relieving sexual anxiety[23]. To recall Kayser's conception of the grotesque, "the coexistence of beautiful, bizarre, ghastly, and repulsive elements, the merger of the parts into a turbulent whole" (79) are observable in both Egæus' narration of Berenice' story and body. In losing both her physical and spiritual unity, the Berenice that is presented to the readers is a composite and ever-changing figure, thus sustaining a grotesque space within the text. Poe deliberately criticizes the abstraction of her body and person, in his word play on the word *identité* and Egæus' fixed and normative bodily views. Hence, it could be argued

[23] See. Bonaparte 219; Creed 127.

that in Egæus' destructive reaction in the face of losing Berenice eternally, he disfigures her assumed-dead body in order to extract the teeth which he covets so dearly. He hopes to immortalize her, or himself, through this appropriation of her feminine energies. Anne Mellor views this annihilation as an "elimination of Otherness":

> Since the object of romantic or erotic love is not the recognition and appreciation of the beloved woman as an independent other but rather the assimilation of the female into the male (or the annihilation of any Other that threatens masculine selfhood), the woman must finally be enslaved or destroyed, must disappear or die. (26)

This approach to Egæus is convincing in that Berenice's existence, the symbolic body and "ideas" were a threat for him and his psychic unity, hence the violence and oppression. Poe uses grotesque excess and fragmentation to transform the female embodiment into a site of anxiety, fetishization, and epistemic control.

To conclude this section on Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice", Poe can be seen to engage in the pressing discourse of his time, whether on romantic love, the marriage institution, or the idolatry of women as objects and their effacement from the culture as subjects. Poe's use of grotesque excess in "Berenice" ultimately foregrounds the gendered violence embedded in nineteenth-century ideals of beauty, love, and domesticity. Moreover, the bodily grotesque, as underscored by Bakhtin and Russo, functions as a disturbing tool to depict women as signs of transgression and symbols of liminality while exposing the corruption of certain social and gendered norms. The excess of violence and exaggerated or ambivalent desire presented seem to convey that Poe was deliberate in his critical use of the grotesque. Through grotesque fragmentation, fetishization, and epistemic control, the text reveals how feminine otherness is abstracted and punished when it resists containment. Yet Berenice's survival unsettles Egæus' authority. Although harmed, her body resists narrative closure or epistemic effacement at the hands of Egæus', thus affirming the grotesque as a highly critical mode through which female subjectivity persists in defiance of ideological oppression. Furthermore, this study challenges earlier debates concerning Poe's alleged fetishization and objectification of female characters, demonstrating how he deliberately deploys the grotesque tradition to critique the lethal male gaze and dismantle patriarchal idealizations of the female body within his Gothic narratives.

Even though the story includes gruesome details and violence against women, Poe employs the grotesque to expose the corruption within the established societal norms—specifically those surrounding family ties, the institution of marriage, and aesthetic ideals. The story's horror does not arise despite these systems but *through* them, and its critical force lies in its capacity to render their violence visible by following their internal logic to its catastrophic conclusion. It could therefore be argued that the depiction of these grotesque and marginalized figures, especially women, are a way to hold a mirror up to the general public that is interacting with his stories and disturbing them to the point of reconsidering their views on the oppressive conventions. This marks "Berenice" as a critique of the very aesthetic and domestic systems it appears to inhabit.

3.3. Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" and the Grotesque

"Ligeia," one of the most critically acclaimed short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, was first published in the September 1838 issue of the *Baltimore American Museum*. "Ligeia" was conceived "after a dream in which [Poe] saw nothing but eyes—eyes that fascinated him by their strange expression" (Bonaparte 227), and this elusive and nuanced story is also one of the most academically studied stories of Poe's oeuvre. It combines three of Poe's most common themes: "the death of a mysterious and beautiful woman, a bereaved narrator of doubtful stability, and a gruesome resurrection" (Sova 134) and, admittedly, it was Poe's favorite among the stories he had written[24]. The following discussion of "Ligeia" with special attention to the grotesque elements and imagery throughout the story will initially take the atmospheric elements into consideration and then focus on the three characters of the story in order to problematize the objectification of women with excessive depictions of violence and death. Ultimately, the story will depict how Edgar Allan Poe uses the grotesque as an aesthetic strategy to subtly express his disdain for oppressive social and gender norms surrounding the female body or the marriage institution.

The story follows another husband narrator, similar to "Berenice", who is intensely infatuated with his wife, Lady Ligeia. The narrator describes her in hyperbolic, quasi-

[24] In an 1846 letter to Evert A. Duyckinck, talking about "Ligeia," he writes: "... [It] is undoubtedly the best story I have written" (*Letters* 2: 222).

mystical terms, her dark eyes, jetty black hair, and her vast erudition renders her more an ethereal ideal than a flesh-and-blood person. She is a woman of extraordinary beauty, profound intellectual capacity, and a supernatural willpower. Tragically, the beautiful Lady Ligeia succumbs to an illness, and the narrator watches her struggle and endure the illness with a "fierceness of resistance" (*Complete Tales* 260)[25]. Before her death, she reciprocates the loving words and admiring sentiments of her husband and asks him to recite a poem she wrote, "The Conqueror Worm"—which regards human existence as a tragic performance dominated by death allegorically—after which she passes away. The grief-stricken narrator, whose opium addiction worsens over time, relocates to a decaying English abbey and takes a second wife, the fair-haired Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine. She stands in stark contrast with her blue eyes and fair hair to her successor. As the newlyweds spend their first month with disquietude, not long after, he comes to loathe his new companion with unmatched hatred. Two months later, Lady Rowena falls ill mysteriously; from here onwards she oscillates between getting well momentarily but then relapsing, more violently towards the end of the story. Lady Rowena dies, and by the fourth subsequent night as he sits with her shrouded body, in the climax of the story, the husband-narrator who is heavily under the influence of opium believes that he sees some movement in the dead body of Lady Rowena. The figure that rises from Lady Rowena's deathbed, when the narrator enshrouds her, is revealed to be Lady Ligeia herself.

To begin with, where the story takes place and where it moves after Lady Ligeia's death are important in order to discuss the atmospheric elements that contribute to the grotesque imagery in the story. "Ligeia" is arguably one of the best decorated of Poe's stories. With the medieval background of the story, set in an unspecified European city, Poe is once again mixing ages, as he refers to Greek gods, the daughters of Delos, or "the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk" (*Complete Tales* 257) in referring to Ligeia; the narrator is generous with references to all geographies. As mentioned in the theoretical framing of the present study, the function and aim of the grotesque tradition is "to bewilder and disorient, to bring the reader up short, jolt him out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different,

[25] Henceforth references to Poe's "Ligeia" will be made from the Barnes & Noble compilation, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (2006).

disturbing perspective" (Thomson 58). The backdrop of the story creates a confusing state for the readers, with references seeming familiar enough, yet at the same time disorienting. Thus, Philip Thomson's "radically different" perspective which the grotesque introduces into the story will be evident in the following depictions of the setting and atmosphere.

Poe's grotesque imagery sustains a disturbing ambivalence and liminality through the décor and spatial logic infused into the following descriptions, causing the bridal chamber to operate as a grotesque inversion of the domestic ideal. After Ligeia's death, the obsessional husband moves away to a "remote and unsocial region of the country" (*Complete Tales* 262), and he purchases a Gothic abbey and works on its decoration to channel his grief. The room which is to be the future bridal chambers of Lady Rowena, lie in the high turret of this abbey, pentagonal of shape and capacious of size, with a single windowpane, reminiscent of a prisoner's cell. The sun or the moonlight can only fall "with a ghastly luster on the objects within" (263). The entire room, "this melancholy vaulting" (ibid.), is illuminated by the fireplace whose flames "writhed in and out of" the perforations of its exterior, "as if endued with a serpent vitality" (ibid.). The ceiling is of "gloomy-looking oak" and "elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device" (ibid.). The room is comically melancholic and oppressive for a bridal chamber. The curtains are "spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures," adding to the uneasy and claustrophobic atmosphere prevalent in the chamber:

> To one entering the room, they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities; but upon a farther advance, this appearance gradually departed; and, step by step, as the visiter [*sic*] moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk. The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies—giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole. (Poe *Complete Tales* 263)

Ideally, a room traditionally associated with intimacy, union, and social cohesion—here resembles a prison cell or sepulchral vault instead, collapsing the boundaries between marriage and entombment, desire and confinement. The furnishing of the room is enough to destabilize those who enter it, with a possible contribution to its blurring of the real and the imagined, or the animate and the inanimate, according to

the narrator's description of the lighting and wind-induced phantasmagoric effects[26]. The ambiguity sustained by the unreliable narrator creates a boundary-dissolving effect. The curtains' unsettling animation may simply be the breeze, or it may be the narrator's opium-distorted perception and Ligeia's supernatural will exerting itself upon matter. The bridal chamber is reminiscent of a shrine. The narrator's obsessive accumulation of funerary artifacts, "gigantic sarcophagus of black granite, from the tombs of the kings over against Luxor, with their aged lids full of immemorial sculpture" (*Complete Tales* 263), further point toward the absurd decorative choices for this room[27]. Reminiscent of Bakhtinian attributes of "exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness" (Bakhtin 303) of the grotesque style, Poe is heavy-handed with Gothic imagery and creepy ambiance for the newlyweds. Poe's excessive and inappropriate décor thus performs a critical function through grotesque distortion. The bridal chamber stages marriage as a claustrophobic and deathly institution, especially for the woman who must inhabit this space. The idealistic and ordered private sphere turns hostile, blurring every boundary that this ideology requires: between interior and exterior, animate and inanimate, the living and the dead, and between present and past. Far from providing refuge and comfort, this domestic space is the very site of ontological transgression. Should the immediate connection between bodies and the spaces they inhabit be made, then the bridal chamber also frames the female body as grotesque by enclosing it, animating it, and placing it under obsessive surveillance. To recall Russo's conception of the female grotesque, "femininity as spectacular production" (*Female Grotesque* 168), this room and its decoration serve to transform the female body into a confined spectacle and forces Lady Rowena to be displayed, her body to be made grotesque through "public framing" (Russo *Female* 60). Poe's spatial grotesque overall acts as a critical mechanism through which he attains both a skillful Gothic narrative and a perspective into the isolated and disciplined female body.

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[26] Thompson argues that "Poe provides symbolic 'clues' to the deceptive quality of the narrator's experience," (134) and he associates such grotesque pattern with "deceptiveness, confusion…and the subconscious" (137).

[27] Stobert argues that the decorations of the elaborate and excessive kind within this chamber "defy the link between mourning and Christianity" and that the "[The] narrator's obscene 'shrine'…seems to mock the Victorian traditions of shrines to the dead, 'sacred' places within the domestic space to weep for the departed" (Stobert 287-288).

The bridal chamber is not merely inhospitable but overtly oppressive, animated by flickering light, restless draperies, and monstrous ornamentation that blur the distinction between the inanimate and the sentient. Figuratively, the bridal chamber includes in itself a death chamber, and perhaps this is why the narrator makes a bitter remark on Lady Rowena's parents: "Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment so bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved?" (*Complete Tales* 262). Poe deploys grotesque imagery in this room to create stark contrast to the normative domestic ideology of antebellum America, a space of social and biological reproduction and feminine virtue. The unstable ornaments and excessive decorations violate the readers' expectations from a domestic space and foreground obsession and death instead of marital harmony. In Bakhtin's words, "the exaggeration of the improper" (307) is observed in this bridal chamber. As it sustains a disturbing ambivalence and liminality with the decorations and a certain level of absurdity—a bridal chamber resembling a prison cell—the depicted setting mixes the mundane with the abnormal. Poe strategically utilizes the grotesque in his setting, whether in inversions or transgressions, and adjusts the mood for the rest of story without siding with the bereaved husband and foregrounding a critical approach to domestic normativity.

Just as the ambiguous setting and the morbid decor assist in disorienting and disturbing the readers, the characters each contribute to the grotesque aspects of "Ligeia". To begin with the husband-narrator of the story, his opium-induced psychological and narratorial distortion aligns well with the grotesque tradition. Joel Porte describes the narrator as a "fantast, a man who willingly commits himself to the world of subjective vision", and that he is a man "who is determined to live a life of romance" (70). Poe sets about to demonstrate the fantastical elements admixed with the perceived reality; the sense of unease and uncertainty infiltrates through the little detail he adds: substance abuse. Similar to the narrator-husband in "Berenice", the narrator of this story is, self admittedly, "a bounden slave in the trammels of opium" (*Complete Tales* 262). Opium is a drug which relaxes the control of the moral censor, resulting in a euphoric feeling in the addict as well as hallucinations. In the grotesque, "all that was

for us familiar and friendly suddenly becomes hostile" (Bakhtin 48); therefore, the estrangement of the familiar, as well as the collapse of stable categories can be observed. The narrator's loss of a cohesive narrative of an "alienated world" (Kayser 185) around him depicts how the grotesque intercepts this psychological register.

In his heavy dependence on opium, the narrator's reality becomes blurred. To what extent the readers can trust his stability and sanity is brought under scrutiny. In a sense, the readers are estranged from the text they are reading. For instance, at the very start of the story, the narrator admits that he "cannot, for [his] soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where" he met the love of his life, Lady Ligeia (Poe *Complete Tales* 256). "I have never known the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed" (ibid.), he further admits. He tells the story in retrospection and claims that his memory is "feeble through much suffering" (ibid.), yet it is intriguing to see how much devotion he possesses for his first wife, whom he simply cannot recall much about. This initial incapacity for remembering immediately marks him as an epistemologically unreliable and psychologically incongruous narrator.

In an absurd and liminal space sustained by the grotesque (Kayser 185), the readers struggle to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural, what is actually seen and what is hallucinated. It can be argued that the narrator does not merely account for the grotesque; his very consciousness produces it. To elaborate, when Lady Rowena is ill and the narrator is tending to her in the bedchamber, he recounts two curious experiences, in the first of which he sees—or believes to see—a peculiar shadow:

> I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed lightly by my person; and I saw that there lay upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich luster thrown from the censer, a shadow—a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect—such as might be fancied for the shadow of a shade. But I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium, and heeded these things but little, nor spoke of them to Rowena. (*Complete Tales* 265)

Scenes like this one render his account as perpetually oscillating between hallucination and reality. In the following segment, he is to give the sick Lady Rowena a cup of wine to help her feel better, unaware that she is to pass away soon; he once again presents an unreliable account of events:

> …As Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid. If this I saw—not so Rowena. She swallowed the wine unhesitatingly, and I forbore to speak to her of a circumstance which must, after all, I considered, have been but the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour. (Poe *Complete Tales* 265)

The readers may question whether the ruby drops are spectral or administered by the husband in this uncertain recollection. Therefore, the narrator-husband's distorted lens through which he sees the world contributes to the grotesque spatial logic in this story. Poe could also be criticizing him based on the nineteenth century standards of respectability. His tenuous grasp on reality and his estrangement from his environment recall the narrator of "Berenice", whose mental instability constituted much of the psychological terror and epistemic dubiety of "Ligeia".

Furthermore, his elevated vision and divinization of Lady Ligeia or heightened repulsion of Lady Rowena are a result of his excessive substance abuse[28]. Perhaps, Ligeia's revival, if it occurs at all, may be a projection of his unstable mind. Nonetheless, he readily welcomes the so-called return of Lady Ligeia, remaining indifferent to Lady Rowena's suffering and thereby revealing his moral impropriety and psychological abnormality. The Bakhtinian regeneration of the grotesque body takes an immoral turn. The husband does not mourn the loss of Lady Rowena; his desire for Lady Ligeia overpowers moral boundaries and he merely watches, as her spirit superimposes upon Rowena's body. Poe refrains from depicting the narrator as a miserable and misfortunate lover, but as a person actively choosing to oscillate between inappropriate extremes as he abuses substances.

The grotesque personification of Lady Ligeia, and how her body and existence presented as grotesque contribute to the story is perhaps easier to elaborate compared to the narrator-husband's elusive grotesque elements. The following discussion will show that the exaggeration and the uncontainable excess through which Lady Ligeia

[28] Roy P. Basler believes that the husband poisons Rowena in an opium-induced mental state. See "The Interpretation of Ligeia", 369.

is described—alongside her transgressive existence and the narrator's fragmented divinization of her—position her firmly within the grotesque tradition.

The grotesque female figure, whose bodily excess—whether of appetite, size, sexuality, or vitality—is one that can disrupt the disciplined and the classical body that patriarchal culture valorizes. Poe draws the readers' attention to the objectification of a powerful subject with the strategic use of grotesque exaggeration and excess. Each crevice and part of Lady Ligeia's body is described, mapped, and revered by the narrator. However, he does not successfully assemble these fragments into a coherent whole, even though each part is described in superlatives:

> I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead—it was faultless—how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!—the skin rivaling the purest ivory…and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant, and naturally-curling tresses…I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose—and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection…I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly—the magnificent turn of the short upper lip—the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under—the dimples which sported, and the color which spoke—the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid, yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin—and here too, I found the gentleness of breadth, the softness and the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek… (*Complete Tales* 257)

Despite the narrator's endeavor in recounting an image of his beloved, the words are inadequate to capture what Lady Ligeia represents for him. Lopes argues that she "resists being defined by the means of words" (41). His fragmented admiration is almost endless; from head to toe, Lady Ligeia is anatomized down to her final fragments. Moreover, the devoted narrator admits that the beauty he sees in his wife is not of the "classical" sense:

> …Although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity—although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of "the strange." (*Complete Tales* 257)

The body of Ligeia is one that contains multitudes, of both perfection and eccentricity. Since her physical features are divinized in the eyes of the narrator, the strangeness he

mentions is hard to point out. Her "pale and lofty forehead" (ibid.) or his description of her eyes, to some other person than him might sound scary: "They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race" (ibid.). The bulging eyes of Lady Ligeia happen to be, contradictorily perhaps, the point of fixation of her husband. He elaborates on them extensively:

> The "strangeness," however, which I found in the eyes was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the expression. Ah, word of no meaning! behind [*sic*] whose vast latitude of mere sound we entrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it—that something more profound than the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What was it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! (*Complete Tales* 258)

Her eyes and their expression allude to something non-human residing *within* Ligeia's human flesh. Lopes argues that "word of no meaning" in Ligeia's eyes points to the fact that she escapes language and lacks a concrete definition that the narrator cannot pin down (43). This is reminiscent of the Kayserian grotesque body, the familiar human surface concealing an alien interior (Kayser 183). Ligeia's eyes are almost like the aperture through which that alien interior becomes visible to the narrator, which puzzles him. What this fragmented bodily description of Lady Ligeia conveys in Poe's use of the exaggeration and excessive qualities, as well as estrangement, is his deliberate scrutiny of natural and normative boundaries of the body and the objectification of the lover. She is simultaneously the idealized Romantic feminine—with her extraordinary beauty—and its grotesque underside—in her embodiment of the excessive, the strange, and the inhuman.

Despite the narrator's attempts to draw a mental portrait of his beloved wife, she hardly gains a unity of form. Ligeia's body, therefore, could be said to refuse this male-dominated and classical coherence. Her body, as in Bakhtin's conceptualization of the grotesque body, asserts itself against the classical and normative body. The body of Ligeia is not "completed", it "is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (Bakhtin 26). Moreover, Lopes believes that "…Ligeia's body plays a dual role: it's the place where death and birth/maternity conflate" (42) and that Ligeia

embodies both the classical aesthetics alongside the monstrous ones: she is a cultivated angel-in-the-house but also she possesses preternatural traits "her unusual bodily elasticity, her magical voice, unearthly eyes, luxuriant black hair, will to vanquish death" (Lopes 44). The readers are left without a stable image of Ligeia, despite the narrator's intense obsession and devotion to her mind and physical attributes, the person of Ligeia as transgressive excess does not fit into the nineteenth century norms of femininity.

In addition to Lady Ligeia's physical descriptions by the narrator, in the climactic scene at the end of the story, her transformation becomes an overt elaboration of the body as a grotesque site of liminality and regeneration. How Lady Rowena's sickly and dying body can also inhabit the strong-willed and vital one of Lady Ligeia's is the final and, arguably, the most disturbing question that the readers are left with. In the shocking and narratively climactic scene of revival, the narrator is standing by the body of Lady Rowena, who appears to get better, only to later get worse. The narrator describes the eerie and in-between state of her body:

> The corpse, I repeat, stirred, and now more vigorously than before. The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the countenance—the limbs relaxed—and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily together, and that the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of Death. But if this idea was not, even then, altogether adopted, I could at least doubt no longer, when, arising from the bed, tottering, with feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream, the thing that was enshrouded advanced boldly and palpably into the middle of the apartment. (*Complete Tales* 267)

Lady Rowena, the corpse, and eventually the "enshrouded thing", completes its narrative purpose before turning into the previous object of desire and obsession, Lady Ligeia:

> One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head, unloosened, the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber huge masses of long and disheveled hair; *it was blacker than the raven wings of the midnight!* And now slowly opened *the eyes* of the figure which stood before me. "Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the LADY LIGEIA." (*Complete Tales* 268, Poe's italics and capitalization)

The strange and seemingly impossible supernatural climax, merges two discrete, bounded bodies—one only recently married and one long dead—into a single, indeterminate form. The boundaries that normally separate one person's body from another are dissolved. "The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, *is a body in the act of becoming*. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin 317). Perhaps most disturbingly, the emergence of this new entity in the dead body of Lady Rowena, with the stark features of Lady Ligeia, transcends the boundaries of metaphysics and results in a new and unknown composition. Arguably, Rowena is expelled from her material body. Bakhtin's framework explains their incongruous existence: "…Grotesque imagery constructs what we might call a double body. In the endless chain of bodily life it retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one" (318). Their grotesque combination, a compound Rowena and Ligeia, violates every boundary that normally structures human embodiment.

Regardless of the scene being a hallucination of the narrator or the reality, this unifying of the two disparate bodies is symptomatic of the liminality and the "deep ambivalence" (Bakhtin 304) found in the grotesque. In accordance with the Kayserian grotesque in its "distortion of all ingredients, the fusion of different realms, the coexistence of beautiful, bizarre, ghastly, and repulsive elements, the merger of the parts into a turbulent whole" (79), the merging of Ligeia and Rowena could be read as Poe's way of exposing the deadly limits of objectification and subjugation of women to male fantasy. The narrator and, in a sense, his extended mourning of Lady Ligeia's death, turns her into an object of melancholy contemplation, a source of the sublime torture for the narrator[29]. Yet, unnaturally, her grotesque resurrection in the body of Lady Rowena ruptures this aestheticization violently and the new creation rejects remaining merely as an object to be admired. The aesthetic structure built after her loss

[29] In the present study's previous sections, Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) and his controversial maxim was discussed briefly. On the topic of death of a beautiful woman, Poe had written this: "The death…of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover" (qtd. in Leitch et al. 647). This aestheticization of death was perhaps a means of coping for the loss of the lover or for his personal artistic creativity.

is destroyed by Lady Ligeia's exertion of her agency and will in the end of the story—albeit at the cost of another woman.

In her brief existence throughout the story, Lady Rowena is not seen as a subject, a person in her own right. She is not granted a separate existence outside the narrator's obsessional projection from his past. This is his recollection of their first month of marriage:

> I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I reveled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty—her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug), I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned—ah, could it be forever? —upon the earth. (*Complete Tales* 264)

Another element of the grotesque tradition observed in Lady Ligeia is her characterization as an erudite woman of great intellectual capacity, with "rare learning" (*Complete Tales* 256). In the cultural imagination, she is unnatural and grotesque, her existence is a disruption of the proper order of sexual difference and the gendered roles of heterosexual relationships. The narrator idolizes her and his dependence on her is exaggerated[30], as he recounts:

> I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense—such as I have never known in woman. In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my Own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault … I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation at which I was most busily occupied during the earlier years of our marriage. (*Complete Tales* 259)

[30] Kennedy points out the narrator's lack of confidence in their marriage: "His conviction that Ligeia's love for him is "all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed" reveals the narrator's own lack of ego strength and self-esteem. He is nothing; Ligeia is all" ("Dying Women" 121).

The narrator divinizes her intellectual prowess excessively and surrenders the intellectual or rational faculties in their matrimony to her hands. He openly confesses that he is her inferior in all these domains he lists and that she is, effectively, his teacher. With a view to the grotesque tradition, this arrangement is already culturally transgressive within the context of early nineteenth-century America, where the learned woman occupied a deeply ambivalent position in public discourse (Welter 151-152). In this vein, Lady Ligeia's characterization is already a form of the grotesque in the ideological register. She is a transgressive woman whose intellectual capacities exceeded what the cultural order assigned to her sex. Miles argued that the essentially grotesque woman's "careful adherence to socially approved appearance and behavior" (152) was one way of hiding the hybridity and the nonconformity she possessed—yet Lady Ligeia is comfortable in her grotesque nature and seems to transgress the social boundaries and norms drawn to her kind in nineteenth century.

To depict how this transgressive and nonnormative female character aids Poe to present his subtle critical agenda behind "Ligeia", a discussion of contextual details may be useful. Poe seems to scorn the typical gendered habits of his time, and Lady Ligeia is one great example of how Poe attempted to subvert these premeditated roles. Poe dissolves conventional images of womanliness and the "appropriate" feminine conduct at the time. In connection with her scholarly attributes, Lady Ligeia is presented as more masculine and mentally stable than her husband. For instance, in addition to speaking multiple languages, she is presented as more scholarly than her husband:

> I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman—but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive, that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding… (*Complete Tales* 259)

Bending the gendered conceptions of the demeanor of the women of his time, Ligeia appears to be a transgressive figure in her intellectual prowess and subverts the readers' expectations of an idealized woman. Similar expectations were put on American women of the gentry and working class, as previously mentioned, to fit into a certain mold of mother or wife and to have perfection and propriety as their defining identity markers in all circles of life. As mentioned in the story, to possess the beauty

"of beings either above or apart from the earth" (*Complete Tales* 257) appears to be the key concept criticized by Poe in his work. Thus, the personification of Ligeia appears as a subtle model of defiance against the typical nineteenth-century envisioning of women, deliberately molded by Poe.

Additionally, the grotesque allows Poe's female protagonist to exceed and subvert the boundaries assigned to her. To recall the poem she composes before dying, "The Conqueror Worm" also evidences that the masculine prerogative of sovereign will, alongside philosophical authority, is seized by a female figure who exceeds her male narrator in every measurable dimension of intellect[31]. Rather than wasting away with her illness, she has "wild desire for life", and the "fierceness of resistance" she possesses against death poses the male narrator as the emotional one in the relationship (*Complete Tales* 260). Kennedy comments on how her denial of death appears as "an inherently masculine response to the problem of dying" ("Dying Women" 121). Bronfen regards the poem and Ligeia's death as the narrator's fatal appropriation of her body embodying the absolute truth: "…He reduces her to a meaning from which she is alienated, for she is merely the body at which his truth, but not necessarily hers, is reflected and secured" (332). Rather than being presented as a docile and meek woman, whose body is idealized and foregrounded, Poe's Ligeia seems to be in possession of "a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden" (259). That this wisdom is accessible to a woman results, within the cultural logic of the period, in a grotesque inversion.

Within the grotesque framework, this inversion of gendered behavior and attitude results in a further transgression of the "natural" order. Lady Ligeia's erudition is the intellectual aspect of the same transgressive excess that manifests bodily in her later resurrection in the body of Lady Rowena. Ligeia, with her intense will and desire for life, violates the limits assigned to her sex by the cultural order and the limits of mortality. The grotesque, in this approach, becomes the register in which Poe's female

[31] Joel Porte interprets the poem as an outlet for a secret desire, with sexually charged imagery and suggest that the poem is "a ghastly symbolic rendering of the dark lady's internal being—the eternal midnight quest for erotic gratification", and he elaborates: "From Ligeia's point of view, the play is the tragedy "Woman" and its hero the conquering male organ. The dark lady has been provisionally annihilated in the culmination of the narrator's erotic fantasy." (73)

protagonist exceeds every boundary assigned to her—Lady Ligeia, as a learned woman and a liminal and supernatural entity who suspends the laws of science in her revival, is thus a grotesque figure.

Poe's skillful prose makes multiple readings possible, yet he manages to expose the shortcomings of the patriarchal aesthetics in an overspill in narration and bodily limits. Lady Rowena acts as a surrogate for the desire for another woman. The feminine ideal, that is, the eternal feminine, manages to transcend individual boundaries to sustain the narrator's dreams and obsessions. Her personality is harder to gather than Lady Ligeia, since she is reduced to a silent object to be overwritten—the grotesque bodily transfusion at the story's climax is, in this sense, could be seen as the exteriorization of the narrator's desires. The narrator's gaze regards Rowena's body with "a bosom full of bitter thoughts of the one only and supremely beloved" (Poe *Complete Tales* 265-66). To use her body as a blank canvas to sketch his desires for the lost love is the narrator's end goal—or an unconscious reflection of his controlling and oppressive tendencies towards women. The uncertain ending of the story, either signifying Ligeia's supernatural triumph over death, or the narrator's final stage of psychological disintegration caused by opium use, is still a demonstration of how the husband-narrator saw the women around him. Poe deliberately makes use of the ambivalent ending and the husband-narrator's unreliability to expose ideologically what he is critiquing: the violence latent in the male fantasy of the eternal feminine. In his unquestioning devotion to Lady Ligeia with the brutal effacement of his second wife, the narrator refuses to grant women independent existence outside the normative categories of his own ideals of beauty and bodily norms, the ones his male imagination constructs and confines women to. The grotesque abstraction of women into objects and ideas is a persistent theme in both "Berenice" and "Ligeia", and it is one of the main targets of Poe's critical use of the grotesque as a tool. In both, their bodies refuse the finitude that the classical aesthetic tradition and the patriarchal social order demand of the female form based on an imaginary and constructed ideal.

Ultimately, Lady Rowena's grotesque bodily abstraction and effacement from the narrative—both figuratively, and literally at the end of the story—depict what Poe could be warning his female readers about. From her initial introduction in the middle of the story as the opposite of Lady Ligeia's darker features and indomitable vitality,

Lady Rowena appears passive and silent throughout the story. Either her husband actively effaces her from his narration, or she is denied narrative agency by failing to resist his corporeal fantasies, through which her living body becomes a substitute for that of his dead wife. Similarly, Bronfen argues that,

> She is denied her own body, and is only a figure for a meaning alterior to herself, prematurely turned into a ghost, into a body without the soul or personality unique to her, into a living cipher for her lover's desired lost object. (328)

Although reading Ligeia's grotesque body as a site of power and Rowena's body as a site of weakness may lead to a troubling interpretation that Poe may not have intended, this reading nonetheless reveals the dangers of patriarchal idealization. Therefore, in line with the fierce nature of Lady Ligeia as a female character of resistance, it can be maintained that Lady Rowena's personification stands to depict the dangers of *not* resisting patriarchal idealizations. The dissolution of her bodily limits, and her subjective annihilation stands as a warning to Poe's readers in nineteenth-century America. Upon her body, which is still objectified in the overarching narrative, Poe depicts the caveats of conforming to cultural expectations by being passive and contained within others' norms. The domesticated feminine ideal does not protect her from violation and being overwritten. In the end, her grotesque dissolution and bodily displacement can be reasoned as a cautionary tale alongside Lady Ligeia's excessive and transgressive body.

In the end, "Ligeia" presents Lady Ligeia and Lady Rowena as grotesque abstractions, the doubles of one distant ideal, as Elisabeth Bronfen puts it, "neither the model nor the copy" (335), a womanliness fantasy which both women are held up to and are sacrificed to the name of absurd excellence. Lady Ligeia's challenge to gendered norms, the liminal quality of Lady Rowena's body, and the narrator-husband's narratorial instability collectively expose and transgress the cultural limits of romantic love and the marriage institution. Poe's "Ligeia" allows him to subvert gender and societal norms and challenge the readers' preconceived notions around femininity. As Poe aspires to present an alternative text in his criticism of the misogynistic nineteenth-century view of women, "Ligeia" invites the readers to challenge traditional ways of meaning-making, amidst the interpretive multiplicities created by grotesque depictions of setting and characters.

CHAPTER 4

THE GROTESQUE AS OBSERVED IN ANGELA CARTER'S "THE BLOODY CHAMBER" AND "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE"

This chapter seeks to examine Angela Carter's use of the grotesque in her works. Her exploratory fictions are concerned with sexual, political, economic relations rather than escapist fantasy worlds. In her work the grotesque emerges as a strategy she uses to produce a new consciousness and perhaps explore a new order of things. In her relatively short career, Angela Carter produced a medley of works ranging from the bizarre to outright disturbing. Being a writer of contradictions, her style yokes disparate effects, the banal and the extraordinary or the moralistic and the offensive (Jordan 123). She achieves this with what Christina Britzolakis has called "the voracious and often dizzying intertextuality of her writing" ("Fetishism" 50) and a conflation of disparate things in her use of grotesque imagery.

4.1. Angela Carter and the Grotesque Tradition

A brief overview of her oeuvre will be valuable in charting the ever-elusive grotesque imagery prevalent in her work and perhaps drawing a clearer mental picture in the readers' minds about why and how Carter utilizes it in her writing. Her approach to fiction could be regarded as deliberate, decorated with vital strategies for dismantling patriarchal structures and critical of essentializing notions; she engages with oppressive systems to expose their inner workings. Carter's exploration of the brutal realities of flesh, power, and cultural myths alongside the complexities of female desire, exposes how the grotesque tradition can be used strategically without reducing women to pure, innocent victims of patriarchy.

In order to grasp Carter's approach to the grotesque and the bodily grotesque, two of her texts can be referred to: *The Sadeian Woman* and *Nights at the Circus.* Not only are these works indispensable in providing an insight to her oeuvre, but also their significance stands steadily upon the strategizing of the grotesque as a tool for criticism. As Duggan states, "The perilous borderline that is the domain of the grotesque…may be seen as part of the hinge around which Carter's work moves and that gives her work its cutting edge" (54). To begin with, Carter's interest in pornography, alongside eroticism and sexual representation in phallocentrism, can be deduced from her non-fiction book *The Sadeian Woman* (1979). Published in the same year as *The Bloody Chamber,* she critically approaches the work of the infamous eighteenth-century French pornographer, the Marquis de Sade[32]. Sarah Gamble states that *The Bloody Chamber* project was "an offshoot of her research on de Sade, not a completely separate endeavor" ("Penetrating" 23). After publication, this attempt to polemicize de Sade was censured quickly. The prominent feminist writers at the time interpreted Carter's challenging of social constructions of gender and taboos around feminine sexuality to be complicit in the fetishization and sadistic treatment of women. Andrea Dworkin in *Pornography* (1979) reprimanded Carter for being a "pseudofeminist" (84) and a "Sadean sycophant" (86). Suzanne Kappeler in *The Pornography of Representation* (1986) condemned Carter's depiction of Juliette in *The Sadeian Woman* for ignoring her complicity in a system that oppresses women. Kappeler argued that Carter causes suffering "just as men do" (134) or suffer at the hands of the libertine or the patriarch (144). The present study will situate its approach on the premises that Angela Carter's body politics are in favor of feminist struggle and that her use of the grotesque as a tool in her fiction illuminates and criticizes areas of complicity in the discourse on feminine sexuality and gender.

To begin with *The Sadeian Woman* and how it could be a source in clarifying Carter's approach to the grotesque tradition, the book-length essay poses certain arguments

[32] Gamble traces this fascination with the notorious pornographer back to Carter's Japan trip, where she came across his work in a second-hand bookshop (*Fiction* 112). Moreover, after Carter's period in Japan, her writing displays "a heightened concern with ways in which the boundaries between reality and illusion are blurred" (Peach 22).

regarding sexual politics, as she argues "[de Sade] is not a religious man but a political man, he treats the facts of female sexuality not as a moral dilemma but as a political reality" (Carter *Sadeian* 27). Carter scrutinizes pornography and heterosexual relationships in her analyses of the female protagonists of Marquis de Sade; Juliette (the sexual aggressor) and Justine (the submissive victim) in *Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue* (1791) and *Juliette, or Vice Amply Rewarded* (1797). As Merja Makinen suggests, "…[Carter] is using de Sade to argue for a wider incorporation of female sexuality, to argue that it too contains a whole gamut of 'perversions' alongside 'normal' sex" (12).

In her meticulous analysis, Carter points out the similarities of Charles Perrault with de Sade, and how pornography and fairy tales—in their approach to sex, love, marriage—act in a similar way of "false universalising" (*Sadeian* 12):

> [Justine] is a beautiful and penniless orphan, the living image of a fairy-tale princess in disguise but a Cinderella for whom the ashes with which she is covered have become part of the skin…She is the heroine of a black, inverted fairy-tale and its subject is the misfortunes of unfreedom; Justine embarks on a dolorous pilgrimage in which each proferred sanctuary turns out to be a new prison and all the human relations offered her are a form of servitude. (Carter *Sadeian* 39)

In Carter's literary exercise upon pornography, these two archetypal female figures allow her to critically approach philosophical topics such as morality, fatalism, and desire, as well as religion and devotion. How the virtuous and passive image of Justine is up against the murderous libertine Juliette, presents the readers a compelling, approach to carnal desire and the notion of agency. The link between sexual and economic relations upholding a patriarchal and unequal society can be observed in both Perrault's fairy tales and de Sade's two books.

Interestingly, and perhaps calling to mind Bakhtin's bodily conception of the grotesque, Carter resorts to exemplifying from aged bodies when further discussing de Sade's sexual politics:

> The libertines in *The One Hundred and Twenty Days at Sodom* take four hideous and aged crones with them on their holiday at the castle. The sexual

> enthusiasm they exhibit for the wrinkled and ulcerated old monsters is an ironic reversal of the veneration of physical beauty; human ugliness at its most extreme is as extraordinary a phenomenon as beauty and a phenomenon of the same kind, one of excess. So why may it not, too, be appetising? (*Sadeian* 76)

Here the grotesque ambivalence is the most acute. Desiring the "monstrous" or the coexistence of the seeming opposites is elaborated on in her evaluation of de Sade's *Sodom* (1904). To elaborate on where the grotesque comes into play within her sexual politics, Carter's elaboration on the flesh is critical:

> …[T]he pleasures of the flesh are vulgar and unrefined, even with an element of beastliness about them, although flesh tints have the sumptuous succulence of peaches because flesh plus skin equals sensuality. But, if flesh plus skin equals sensuality, then flesh minus skin equals meat. (*Sadeian* 137-138)

With this conceptualization, she inspects when and how dehumanization comes about, taking power dynamics into account:

> …[The] shocking tragedy of mortality itself, that all flesh may be transformed, at any moment, to meat…Necrophagy is the exposition of the meatiness of human flesh. Necrophagy parodies the sacramental meal by making its assumptions real…The strong abuse, exploit and meatify the weak, says Sade. They must and will devour their natural prey. The primal condition of man cannot be modified in any way; it is, eat or be eaten. Eat, assimilate; but the process doesn't stop there. Defaecate, assimilate again. How greedily the coprophile consumes the physical surplus of the act of eating. (*Sadeian* 140)

This idea of transgression in the bodily limits and borders, where flesh turns into meat and vice versa, is one of the main instances of grotesque imagery Angela Carter takes up in her collection, *The Bloody Chamber*. Having defined the grotesque as a tool which can aid in demystifying the norms or as a site of moral ambiguity, in the eponymous story "The Bloody Chamber" Carter critically approaches how the Marquis dehumanizes the bride, whether through his voyeuristic gaze or his sinister gifts. Most strikingly, his treatment of his previous victims as objects of macabre "art" further depicts how Carter has been inimical to decadent art's pictorial or literary depiction of female bodies which sustain patriarchal myths around femininity. Within the characterization of the young bride in "The Bloody Chamber" Carter allows her to embody both Juliette and Justine, thus criticizing the singularizing approach to

sexuality. She articulates her approach to the myth of a perfect and submissive woman as follows: "To be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is, to be killed. This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman" (*Sadeian* 76-77).

Her approach to the fairy tale genre is entangled with her interpretation of pornography, and binary prescriptions of "eat or be eaten" are indivisibly taken up in her collection *The Bloody Chamber*. Carter also tackles the idea of complicity that women might have with certain mythic or archetypal figures like Justine/Juliette: "In the looking-glass of Sade's misanthropy, women may see themselves as they have been and it is an uncomfortable sight" (Carter *Sadeian* 36). With certain relationship dynamics or cultural positioning such as submissive or aggressor, she is also criticizing that some women may find themselves enthralled with these categorizations, hence in her collection of writing Carter makes sure to install a level of unease in her audience. The grotesque tradition aids her in the exploration of ambivalent desires and shifting dualities.

To move on from her polemic on pornography, yet not too far, Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) is a principal text in her oeuvre which further illustrates her understanding and application of the grotesque tradition to subvert the feminine idealization of beauty. In this novel, Carter depicts her sympathy for the magic realism convention (Peach 7), in her fusion of fantasy and reality, or breaking of the conventional boundaries. Magic realism is similar to the grotesque in that they are both subversive techniques and can be used to challenge the present ideological assumptions in the readers' notions around what is deemed normal or natural. In the protagonist Fevvers we can observe a clear link between Mary Russo's concept of the female grotesque as well as the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. As a showgirl and an enjoyer of the spotlight, Fevvers is an unabashed display of excess and ambivalence, which are fundamentally grotesque elements. Her home is a traveling circus, which could call to mind the carnivalesque. She is to be supposedly hatched from an egg with her sublime size and functional wings. In her conjoining of human and animal aspects she appears as a traditionally grotesque art piece (Bakhtin 316). A spectacle, a mystery—is this aerialiste fact or fiction? Walser, the journalist visiting her circus,

aims to find out. She outruns the preconceived patriarchal conception of woman in her use of her agency, corporeality, and performativity. Sally Keenan argues that de Sade's Juliette infiltrates many of the female protagonists of Carter's fiction, most explicitly in Fevvers from *Nights*, in her embodiment of a woman active and indulgent in her sexual behavior: "In Fevvers, Carter creates a mediated version of this New Woman/sexual terrorist, who uses her sexuality as a device for survival, but who grows to understand that the price to be paid for playing the game according to the master's rules is ultimately annihilation" ("Treason" 142). A similar connection is drawn up by Mary Russo as well:

> It is with great irony that Carter reproduces aspects of Juliette and the libertarian tradition in *Nights at the Circus*. In a series of critical counterproductions of the affirmative woman "who will have wings and who will renew the world," Fevvers is born and born again, as an act (in the theatrical sense) of serial transgression. (*Female Grotesque* 166)

In Fevvers both the struggle to survive and skillful escapes from annihilation are evident throughout the novel, in instances where she chooses to commodify or objectify herself before the others do, although later on she comes to recognize the shortcomings of this approach. As mentioned before, the goal of the grotesque is to force the reader "out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective" (Thomson 58) and this is the jolting effect Fevvers' performance—and existence—is to have upon the readers. Carter's depiction of Fevvers and her sexuality without demonizing her liberties or attempting to constrict her innate hybridity is in favor of feminist sentiments and functions as an interrogation of unequal patriarchal demands and body politics.

Mary Russo dedicates a good portion of her book *The Female Grotesque* to her analyses of Fevvers, the myth of femininity, and Carter's approach to questions of identity, authenticity, and masquerade. She elaborates: "Female narcissism itself as a canonical representation of the feminine is parodied and revised in the frames, mirrors, and circus rings which accompany the hyperbole of self-consciousness that is female masquerade" (*Female Grotesque* 162). Her face is "thickly coated with rouge and powder so that you can see how beautiful she is from the back row of the gallery" (Carter *Nights* 18) with ostentatious stage outfits and "six inches of false lash" (*Nights*

7). Fevvers' performance (or the mask she figuratively puts on) is glamorous and exaggerated. Popping a champagne bottle with her mouth and gulping it with vigor, she embodies the excessiveness of her body proudly and loudly:

> She gorged, she stuffed herself, she spilled gravy on herself, she sucked up peas from the knife; she had a gullet to match her size and table manners of the Elizabethan variety. Impressed, Walser waited with the stubborn docility of his profession until at last her enormous appetite was satisfied; she wiped her lips on her sleeve and belched. (Carter *Nights* 22)

Similar to Fevvers' seemingly impossible trapeze act and flight, her body appears to transgress its limits. In Bakhtinian terms, her body is "unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (Bakhtin 26) and Carter directly presents a grotesque body at the center of attention, in spite of the ambivalence—and arguably the discomfort—she represents in the spectators' eyes. The physicality of Fevvers also strikes the journalist with its dual form, oscillating between enchantment and revulsion; Walser tackles to capture her in discourse, arguably attempts to totalize or "fix" her place in the society or biology—but she evades his attempts. In her corporeal existence, she fills the room with her "highly personal aroma, 'essence of Fevvers'" (*Nights* 9), a mixture of perfume, sweat, and greasepaint. Fevvers' dressing room is "the tabooed cave of the female grotesque" as Anna Hunt points out: "…She makes the margins her own: visceral, moist and pungent…The suggestion of bodily secretion and detritus is everywhere…" (154). Her excessive body and unnatural origins are politically coded, and her body is the site where the grotesque and magic realism converge.

Without a belly button, and her colorful wings unfolding six feet across (*Nights* 15), Fevvers' ambivalent and defiant characterization stands within the tradition of the grotesque. Her excessive and exaggerated demeanor which explodes the myth of femininity, involves the readers, or the male onlookers, in an alternative process of materiality, a potential for transformation and nonconformity made possible by the grotesque. Moreover, Gina Wisker claims that throughout her adventures in *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers manages to rise above the figures that wish to imprison or harm her because she embraces the "performative". Her defiance against societal and familial normality –or against reductive formulations as *femme fatale* and/or victim–

in her grotesque and carnivalesque existence in the end help her to "[fly] free of both mythic and social constraints" (Wisker "Behind" 196). As can be observed in Carter's well-known and successful novel *Nights at the Circus*, the grotesque tradition for her was a means of transgression and defiance of what society deemed normal or natural in regard to sexuality and femininity. Her interrogation of patriarchal bodily or beauty ideals is achieved with her extensive utilization of the grotesque as a strategic tool. The next section will briefly introduce *The Bloody Chamber* as a collection and later will focus on Carter's two selected tales and their use of the grotesque tradition in order to explore Carter's critical approach to female characters.

4.2. Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and the Grotesque

Having discussed certain literary depictions of the grotesque tradition within Carter's oeuvre, this section will shortly introduce Angela Carter's *Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) as a whole and later continue with the analysis of the selected stories from the collection. A stylistic change is observed in Carter when she adapts the fairy tale form to criticize the ideological assumptions inherent in myths. This collection of revised fairy tales finally brought Carter to wider public attention. From the 1980s onwards, the collection has achieved a canonical status among academics and students. This collection of short stories, set in Gothic and claustrophobic settings, not only draws attention to the form, or the frame of the story, but also to their fictionality. Carter's mixture of pragmatism, ironic humor and elusive happy endings apply to her own reworking of the fairy tale frame. In her Introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, she writes on this pragmatic view: "[F]airy tales, folk tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created our world" (ix)[33].

Linden Peach grounds the expectations of the readers or critics when it comes to *The Bloody Chamber*:

[33] Although this is not a naïve approach, Carter is self-conscious in her expectations from this connection. In the *Virago Book*, she lists what the fairy tale tradition *can* demonstrate: "…the extraordinary richness and diversity of responses to the same common predicament—being alive—and the richness and diversity with which femininity, in practice, is represented in 'unofficial' culture: its strategies, its plots, its hard work" (xiv).

> Although these stories are based on fairy tales…they are not "versions" or, as the American edition of the book said, "adult" fairy stories. Carter herself explained that she sought "to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories"…In them, Carter develops the connection…between the perception of women as property and the objectification of women as "flesh" in ways which elide the connotations of "flesh" and "meat". (33)

In *The Bloody Chamber,* Carter attempts to provide an alternative to phallocentrism, and she scrutinizes power dynamics, the deadly extensions of desire, the boundaries of freedom and enslavement, and cultural reappropriation of gendered behavior under patriarchy without presenting her readers with a false consolation or a simplistic happy ending. Carter's project in this collection to deconstruct and subvert cultural mythologies is in line with Bakhtin's theorization of grotesque realism as a mode which "discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life" (Bakhtin 48). The fairy tales appear familiar enough on the surface to draw in the readers, yet with her "undeferential borrowing and illegitimate co-mingling" from fairytales (Duggan 62), she creates an entirely new world through her bizarre and grotesque approach to unearth unconscious desires and horrors. She probes and digs to expose the uncomfortable relationship between sex and power, the erotic and the perverse, all illicit collisions framed by the evocative fairytale form.

Although "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" from this collection will be examined in the coming sections of this study, perhaps a few words on the rest of the collection[34] and their interaction with the grotesque will be fitting to contextualize the selected tales within Carter's oeuvre. The first three tales can be categorized under "cat family," the last three under the "wolf family" tales (Makinen 10, Peach 33). Makinen argues that, in the first three tales, wild felines signify "the sensual desires that women need to acknowledge within themselves" (11) and in between the cat/wolf narratives three tales of magical beings intervene with their own

[34] The collection includes ten short stories: "The Bloody Chamber", "The Courtship of Mr Lyon", "The Tiger's Bride", "Puss-in-Boots", "The Erl-King", "The Snow Child", "The Lady of the House of Love", "The Werewolf", "The Company of Wolves," and "Wolf-Alice".

fantastical worlds; the erl-king, the snow child, and the vampire explore dehumanization and entrapment, but overall keeping the focus on female desire and sexuality variations that could be deemed unorthodox. Sexuality, especially feminine sexuality, seems to hold a key place in Carter's scrutiny of social limits and their transgression. She uses these stories to explore women's autonomous desire and their ability to fight back against the male gaze, or phallocentric cultures that commodify them; whether for the heroine to accept the validity of her sexual desire or in other cases the transformative potential of the masculine (Palmer 196). Punter and Byron evidence the relationship between *The Bloody Chamber* and the magic realism convention:

> This background of myth and legend also figures largely in the novels, which are populated by vampire counts, morbid clowns, glass women. A prevailing image is the circus – the circus of night, the circus of desire, a place where conventional boundaries between man and beast, between face and mask, between appearance and reality, bend and warp – which is taken as the archetypal image for a version of 'magic realism' that refuses to recognize limitations or restrictions. (*Gothic* 102)

Similarly, the grotesque elements in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* include abstraction, dehumanization, excessive and exaggerated bodies/situations, the meatification of bodies, the tension between the binaries of predator/prey and desire/repulsion, as well as an admixture of high culture/sacred with the low/profane. Carter skillfully mediates the grotesque tension in her collection which is structured like a menagerie.

Having briefly touched upon the grotesque and its interaction with *The Bloody Chamber* collection, the following discussion will be focused on the eponymous tale "The Bloody Chamber" and how Angela Carter has utilized the grotesque tradition in her narrative. This tale is Carter's unique rendition of the folk tale Bluebeard[35]. The popular fairy tale of the Bluebeard is centered around a wealthy nobleman distinguished by the color of his strange beard, and whose previous wives have disappeared under suspicious circumstances. When he is remarried to a young girl,

[35] The earliest known text to specifically use the name Bluebeard was Charles Perrault's "*Barbe Bleue*" (Kim 406). It was one of seven prose fairy tales in his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités* (1697) which were addressed to young female readers at the time, depicting exemplary qualities and demanding moral values, such as self-control and humility (Zipes 40).

soon after their wedding, Bluebeard announces he must travel on business and entrusts the housekeys to his new bride. She is free to enter every room in the castle, except for a single locked chamber which he strictly forbids her. When Bluebeard is away, the young bride is soon overcome with curiosity about this chamber and gives into the temptation, eventually unlocking the forbidden door to discover a gruesome scene. The floor is pooled with blood, and the bodies of Bluebeard's previous wives hang from the walls. In a state of panic, she drops the key into the blood before managing to escape the horrific scene. She later realizes the bloodstain cannot be washed away, because the key is enchanted. When Bluebeard returns unexpectedly, he sees the stained key, an indelible mark of her disobedience, and resolves to kill her. She begs for a moment to say her prayers, using the time to signal to her brothers. Just as he is about to strike, her brothers burst into the castle and kill Bluebeard. The wife inherits his vast fortune, eventually remarries, and moves on with her life.

When compared to other re-writings in the same collection, Angela Carter is observed to remain quite loyal to the generic Bluebeard myth in her retelling in "The Bloody Chamber". As Christina Bacchilega points out, the name Bluebeard nowadays evokes "the image of a man with a dark secret, a number of murdered wives, and a bloodstained key" (104); however, it is omitted from the title in Carter's adaptation. The carefully picked title foregrounds the violence and the gruesome side of the man's secret, underlining the crime and what is at stake: the imminent death of a young girl in the bloody chamber. The myth of Bluebeard was not chosen haphazardly by Carter. Her intended aim could be interpreted as the subversion of messages aimed at young girls on being docile, meek, and restrained. The story, filled with haunting grotesque imagery, disturbs the readers and moves them to question the daily institutions—courtship, romantic love, eroticism, marriage—and think critically of certain roles imposed upon genders.

The first aspect that will be scrutinized in "The Bloody Chamber" in order to discuss Carter's deliberate subversions of the Bluebeard myth is the setting and atmosphere. The home of the Marquis is one of the initial changes where she employs grotesque imagery. After their hasty marriage, the train takes the young bride away from Paris

to "the unguessable country of marriage" (Carter *BC* 7)[36]. Just as she is left in anticipation and wondering, the readers do not get to read about the castle for the first quarter of the story. The readers are seduced by Carter's prose the way the young girl was seduced by the Marquis, as we slowly peer into the mist of the gruesome details. Once she arrives at the castle, the initial experience she has is a visceral one: "the amniotic salinity of the ocean" (*BC* 12) hits her face as she disembarks the train. Her recounting of the first impression of her new home is mixed with excitement with a tinge of unease:

> And, ah! his castle. The faery solitude of the place; with its turrets of misty blue, its courtyard, its spiked gate, his castle that lay on the very bosom of the sea with seabirds mewing about its attics, the casements opening on to the green and purple, evanescent departures of the ocean, cut off by the tide from land for half a day. . .that castle, at home neither on the land nor on the water, a mysterious, amphibious place, contravening the materiality of both earth and the waves, with the melancholy of a mermaiden who perches on her rock and waits, endlessly, for a lover who had drowned far away, long ago. That lovely, sad, sea-siren of a place! (*BC* 13)

Setting the scene in this waterlocked and amphibious place on land upon which the castle sits gloomily could be regarded as grotesque: neither an island nor located inland, this location is the epitome of *in-betweenness*. The castle, in its ambivalent and contradictory features, or in Bakhtin's terms "peculiar nature" (25), can be regarded as belonging to the grotesque tradition. Not in decrepit or overtly spine-tingling condition, as commonly found in gothic stories, it is strange enough to evoke melancholic and lonely feelings in the young bride's first impression. "Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure" (Bakhtin 39) and this is exactly what will be encountered in the grotesque setting of this story.

As the girl eases into her new position as the chatelaine of the "luminous, murmurous castle" (*BC* 13), two particular places outside the bloody chamber could be said to convey the story's employment of the grotesque tradition: the music room and the bridal chamber. In the music room, on the wall hangs a wedding present from the

[36] The references to "The Bloody Chamber" story can be found in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* publication from Penguin Books (1987). The abbreviation *BC* will be used to reference this publication of Carter's collection.

Marquis, a painting of Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians. The young girl's initial reaction—perhaps the readers' reaction, too—is sympathetic: "I warmed to a loving sensitivity I had not hitherto suspected in him" (*BC* 14); however, the gift arguably possesses a grotesque position because it reflects the perverse and sinister plan the Marquis has for his bride: martyrdom. Gifting her generously a piano forte could perhaps be read as being welcoming, yet decorating the room with Saint Cecilia's painting is a foreshadowing of his bloody plans for her, considering how Saint Cecilia had met her demise by beheading. As it hangs in her music room, this seemingly thoughtful gift mocks the young girl's musical background, and anticipate her imminent execution.

The bridal chamber is a feast for the readers' minds' eye. One of the best realized instances of allegorical imagery not only in this story but throughout the collection is sustained in this room with mirrors. The Marquis, a voyeur and a "connoisseur" of art has the room decorated with mirrors:

> Mirrors on all the walls, in stately frames of contorted gold, that reflected more white lilies than I'd ever seen in my life before. He'd filled the room with them, to greet the bride, the young bride. The young bride, who had become that multitude of girls I saw in the mirrors, identical in their chic navy blue tailor-mades, for travelling, madame, or walking. A maid had dealt with the furs. Henceforth, a maid would deal with everything. "See," he said, gesturing towards those elegant girls. "I have acquired a whole harem for myself!" (*BC* 14)

His lightweight approach to this perverse decorative choice juxtaposes with the oppressive atmosphere in this scene. Carter uses fragmentation quite literally, as the girl's image multiplies on mirrors, her lack of sense of self and stripping her uniqueness away are conveyed through this imagery. Each prism of light reflected upon the surface depicts her in a grotesque fashion from his subverted point of view. Just as the Marquis collects art, in cruel humor, he collects wives in his harem. Maria Tatar calls him "supremely visual in his desires" (117) and the mirrors stand to testify his grotesque treatment of his wives—his objectification, fragmentation and dehumanization of them before he butchers them.

The mirrors could be read as contributing to setting a grotesque atmosphere because of their excessive number. The narrator recounts: "…[I] watched a dozen husbands approach me in a dozen mirrors" (*BC* 15). It would only be natural to expect more than one mirror in the elaborate and lavishly decorated home of the Marquis, yet a dozen mirrors in a single room, surrounding the marital bed, point to an exaggeration and of excessive quality found in grotesque imagery[37]. Her sense of wholeness or uniqueness dissolves the longer and harder she puts up with the Marquis' oppression within the walls of the home, resulting in the grotesque depiction of a character. The motif of perversion in the sacred bridal chamber calls to mind Poe's imagery; where the home becomes a hostile and predatory location for the woman, which inversely brings a threat and sense of danger to them rather than provide security or comfort. To recall the gruesome bed chambers of Lady Rowena who unwittingly stepped into it, the bridal chamber turns into the place where she is effaced and Lady Ligeia "returns" from the dead at her expense. Additionally, Kathleen Manley argues that the mirrors convey the protagonist's lack of a sense of herself as subject:

> Mirrors also help her to see herself as others see her and provide the beginnings of that sense. At the same time, the mirror scenes establish the protagonist as oscillating between girlhood and womanhood, between a patriarchal view and her own definition of herself. (87)

Carter's criticism of patriarchal depictions of women and the dehumanizing approach to female characters are evident. Within the castle's rooms, she is fragmented into many pieces, some of which do not even belong to her but are projected onto her. In her new home she struggles between being the object to be surveyed or adorned, or the subject that resists this treatment and follows her own agency. Although these will be later detailed in the character analyses, it is important to note that the castle and the rooms themselves depict her as a grotesque figure in process, in a liminal space between adolescence and adulthood, her body flesh and meat, and her fate alive or dead.

[37] Toward the end of the story, her fragmentation is reflected upon these mirrors when the young bride describes how "twelve young women combed out twelve listless sheaves of brown hair in the mirrors" (*BC* 37).

Perhaps the most pivotal location depicting Carter's grotesque imagery in the setting of the story is the room which the smallest key opens: the bloody chamber. The protagonist, while her husband is on a work trip, is overcome with ennui and curiously looks for traces of who her husband may be. She begins exploring different rooms of the castle and eventually, she decides to venture into the only place that was strictly forbidden to her. For several reasons, this place is a valuable locus for Carter's application of the grotesque. Until the young bride steps into the bloody chamber, she is under threat—but as soon as she does, she becomes a threat for the Marquis. The visit to the bloody chamber acts as a catalyst in the text aiding in her personal change and/or development. After burdening herself with the knowledge of what the chamber holds, she now possesses the ultimate piece of truth about her husband which could eventually lead to his incarceration for his crimes. Hence, her position here is reminiscent of Mary Russo's grotesque categorization of women and their bodies, which are always "dangerous, and in danger" (60). Her liminal position, as encapsulated by Russo, is related to the grotesque tradition, for she is caught in the process, in the act of becoming. As a threat she can dismantle the patriarchal and brutal rule of the Marquis and destroy him, but also, she is threatened by him. The bloody chamber and the horrors it harbors force the young girl to an ambivalent and liminal position.

Lucie Armitt contributes a semantic approach to the word *chamber*, exploring which demarcations are transgressed, and how, in the end, this collection of short stories is an example of narrative overspill and containment:

> "Chamber" carries two differing connotations. On related behaviour patterns: the activities of the erotic and the inactivities of sleep…The violence inherent in the world? "bloody" leads us to expect the chamber to be the location for hideous and violent sexual excess. But what if we read the word "chamber" not as a room, but as a vase or a vessel for carrying liquid? In this case the blood is the liquid with which the vessel is filled…The associated excesses are those of overspill, not those which threaten containment. In this case it is not the chamber that contains and thus constrains the woman (who then becomes a terrified victim), but the woman herself who takes control as the body of excess. ("Fragile" 91-92)

With Carter's use of enclosure imagery, the readers are faced with mundane limits and are presented with ways to exceed them. The concept of the bloody chamber standing as a metaphor for female excessiveness will be elaborated later in this section. Thus, the Marquis was expecting, *hoping*, the young girl to give in to the biting curiosity of what the room held within its locked door. When she asks romantically if the smallest key from the bunch opens his heart, the Marquis tantalizingly calls it "the key to my *enfer*" (*BC* 21)[38]. He clumsily describes why that room is of no interest to her; however, his ambiguous language is exactly the point of the hook; he wishes to invoke a curious reaction in her. *Coup de grâce* comes from his remark on the chamber, as a place "to savour the rare pleasure of imagining myself wifeless" (ibid.)—which seems like a sardonic *inside* joke he seems to have between himself and his dead wives—amplifies the allure of this secret room for the curious and insecure bride[39]. Therefore, the intricate plan sketched out for the young bride is further illustrated. The Marquis has no use for a wife that is submissive and alive. To clarify, his objectifying gaze and violent tendencies could not be acted out if he picked a submissive and docile wife—their disobedience further reifies the disobedient wife trope and his later punishment of them is justified. The threat she later becomes is when she transgresses the boundaries drawn for her; therefore, she needs to be killed and mythified like her predecessors. Thus, the driving plot of the narration depends solely on the young bride's discovery of the bloody chamber.

The horrors that lie waiting inside the chamber make up an effective Gothic read. In the dark room, the young girl finds some monstrous items, but she naively hopes that they are merely for perverse contemplation and she does not immediately associate them with actual murderous acts. Her sight is sustained with the little glow from the flimsy matches, through which Carter seems to be paying homage to classic gothic heroines. Her description of the first horror she encounters is reminiscent of a generic Poe narrative, building anticipation and terror steadily:

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[38] *Enfer* is French for hell, underworld.

[39] Sarah Gamble points out the underlying tone of fatalism prevalent in the story and argues that the young girl is fooled by the Marquis and that "she is only following a path already laid down for her" rather than embarking on "an independent quest toward self-actualization" ("Penetrating" 29).

> …At the centre of the room lay a catafalque, a doomed, ominous bier of Renaissance workmanship, surrounded by long white candles…The opera singer lay, quite naked, under a thin sheet of very rare and precious linen…I touched her, very gently, on the white breast; she was cool, he had embalmed her. On her throat I could see the blue imprint of his strangler's fingers. The cool, sad flame of the candles flickered on her white, closed eyelids. The worst thing was, the dead lips smiled. (*BC* 28)

The body of the Marquis' first wife, embalmed and preserved in a lifelike situation, carries distinct grotesque qualities. The in-betweenness of its status and the disturbing appearance of the lips that seem to smile nearly animate the dead body. The claustrophobic atmosphere closes in on her as she looks around in the candlelight, only to find herself descending further into the Gothic *mise-en-scène*:

> Beyond the catafalque, in the middle of the shadows, a white, nacreous glimmer; as my eyes accustomed themselves to the gathering darkness, I at last – oh, horrors! – made out a skull; yes, a skull, so utterly denuded, now, of flesh, that it scarcely seemed possible the stark bone had once been richly upholstered with life. And this skull was strung up by a system of unseen cords, so that it appeared to hang, disembodied, in the still, heavy air, and it had been crowned with a wreath of white roses, and a veil of lace, the final image of his bride. (*BC* 28-29)

In addition to embalming, another technique of preserving and aestheticizing death is presented to the readers. His project for this wife resembles a puppet hanging from the ropes. Being an art connoisseur, the Marquis does not stop at merely deceiving them into marriage and brutally murdering them under his warped conceptions of justice for disobedience—he also turns them into "art". The flower crown made up of roses are a clear attempt by the Marquis to turn the dead body into a piece of art for his voyeuristic gaze. A similar theme is also explored in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842) and "The Oblong Box" (1844). In both stories the protagonists find a way to glamorize death in turning the object of beauty or desire into art. The execution of it is grotesque in both, although arguably for Poe, this theme was more about the exploration of immortal devotion to the object of love, while Carter clearly shows for the Marquis that he is no more than a serial killer with scopophilia. Poe's doomed narrator-husbands divinize and objectify their wives' and their early death, not for possession, but perhaps for an everlasting remembrance of the love they once had. Meanwhile, the Marquis serializes the marriage institution only for its ample resource for bodies. He

does not have eternal devotion to any of his previous wives, they are objects to be repurposed as art for him; his only devotion is perhaps to the process and the drama of punishing and mutilating the "deserving" disobedient wives. This balanced tension—which lies at the core of the grotesque—between the opposites of alive/dead, aesthetic/repellent, familiar/unfamiliar or natural/supernatural helps Carter to sustain a level of unease just enough to draw attention to her criticism upon the narrative that patriarchy imposes upon young readers. With her use of the grotesque tradition, evidently, what Carter seems to be criticizing is the deadly outcomes of certain snares around marriage or love.

Lastly, the third wife kept as a memento in the bloody chamber is the Marquis' most recent lover. In showing the young bride's horror and curiosity Carter's grotesque imagery is evocative of Poe's: "…The metal shell of the Iron Maiden emitted a ghostly twang; my feverish imagination might have guessed its occupant was trying to clamber out, though, even in the midst of my rising hysteria, I knew she must be dead to find a home there" (*BC* 29). A blood chilling image of an undead person clawing their way out of their enclosures may remind some readers of Madeline Usher's reanimation and revenge at the end of "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), or how reality blurs and fantasy intercepts our experiences, parallel to the delirious narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842).

The dead resident of the Iron Maiden possesses a certain corporeality, in her bloody and captive nature as opposed to the other victims in the bloody chamber. She appears less like an art installment but as a sinister appropriation of another myth:

> With trembling fingers, I prised open the front of the upright coffin, with its sculpted face caught in a rictus of pain. Then, overcome, I dropped the key I still held in my other hand. It dropped into the forming pool of her blood. She was pierced, not by one but by a hundred spikes, this child of the land of the vampires who seemed so newly dead, so full of blood…oh God! how recently had he become a widower? How long had he kept her in this obscene cell? Had it been all the time he had courted me, in the clear light of Paris? I closed the lid of her coffin very gently and burst into a tumult of sobbing that contained both pity for his other victims and also a dreadful anguish to know I, too, was one of them. (*BC* 29)

Not only does she realize the extent of the Marquis' deceitful courtship of her but also witnessing a body with its blood so fresh that it is yet to dry up or congeal—she and the readers are naturally nauseated as a result. The eternal resident of the Iron Maiden is an interesting allusion of Carter. The young bride had previously found a self-contented postcard from this Romanian countess as she was sifting through the Marquis' desk: "On the occasion of this marriage to the descendant of Dracula –always remember, '*the supreme and unique pleasure of love is the certainty that one is doing evil'. Toutes amities, C.*" (*BC* 26). Carter is intertextually alluding to the fact that the Marquis' most recent wife of Eastern European descent was in fact Carmilla. This is the only first name reference given by the narrator throughout the story, while the other female characters remain anonymous[40], as pointed out by Sarah Gamble ("Penetrating" 31); evidently, this reference is important because it is not to another fairy tale source but to Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872) which was the precursor of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Gamble argues that Carter's direct textual reference to the female vampire Carmilla foregrounds a certain quality or a tendency present in the wives of the Marquis:

> The fragmentary traces left behind by Carter's version of Carmilla— in particular the quotation from Baudelaire on her postcard ("the supreme and unique pleasure of love is the certainty that one is doing evil")—suggest that she may have been a female version of the libertine and that for her, just as much as for the Marquis, sex and death were inextricably entwined. Such a conclusion carries with it a faint but disturbing suggestion that Carmilla may even have colluded in her own murder. ("Penetrating" 33)

The reference to Carmilla disrupts the predator/victim dichotomy so far presented in story alongside engaging in demythologizing the feminine myth imposed by patriarchy. Rather than a constrained and an inert image of the female protagonist, Carter skillfully depicts the deadly desires and complicity of Carmilla and the Marquis. While alive, the female vampire, transgressive and liminal on her own right in corporeal form and its adherence to social structures—her marriage to the Marquis—shows her accomplice as well as their common erotic sensibility. Hence, Gamble

[40] The other female vampire in the text, which will be analyzed in the next section of this study, is from "The Lady of the House of Love." Given the family name of Nosferatu, she is merely mentioned by her aristocratic title, as "the Countess" throughout the narrative of the story. She is, thus, also generically rather than specifically named.

points out the difficulty of discussing Carmilla, and the young bride for that matter, in clear-cut terms. Both female characters in the "The Bloody Chamber" may be regarded as "the prototype of a female identity that is deeply and problematically split; itself predator and prey, erotic object and sexual aggressor" ("Penetrating" 33).

The aesthetic of the grotesque aids in this project of demystifying the feminine as passive, submissive and fragile. Similarly, Kari Lokke posits that this story is "grotesque in essence" seeing how it brings together "…violence and love, perversion and innocence, death, and marriage in an unsettling combination. The intermingling of seemingly incongruous elements and the juxtaposition of opposites challenge audience expectation and habits of thinking in a manner typical of the grotesque…" (7). This is most acutely observed in the intertextual reference to Carmilla and her sardonic death. The Marquis and Carmilla in their unbecoming bloodthirst and libertine pleasures arguably make a perfect union. With the grotesque depiction of her in the Iron Maiden pierced by hundred spikes, Carter is scrutinizing the female characters with allusions of corruption, encompassing complicities, and breaking down the boundaries of familial roles and subverting "inappropriate" hierarchies proposed by androcentric perspectives.

Carter's grotesque *mise-en-scène* in the "The Bloody Chamber" is resonant with Bakhtin's conception of grotesque imagery, life as an unfinished metamorphosis as life and death taking place simultaneously sustaining the vital level of ambivalence—the old and the new mix and according to him the dying and the procreating are inseparable in this formula of metamorphosis (Bakhtin 24, 163). The dead wives in the locked room are dangling on phases of life in a similar sense; one is a skeleton, no more flesh and blood, completely disintegrated to bones, another one is still in decomposition as the fresh blood pools on the ground when the bride opens the Iron Maiden. Lastly, the embalmed lady is frozen in time, in its raw ambivalence she is preserved with a smile; it looks like she is either sleeping or dead. Carter is flawlessly executing the passage of time through this imagery. It could be further argued that the young bride entering the room signifies the regenerative, birth-giving aspect of this

Bakhtinian theory of the grotesque[41]. Unless the Marquis is thwarted, in this given sense, the bloody chamber will keep giving birth to new victims.

To move on to the characterization of the grotesque in the main characters of the story, a portrait of the Marquis should be accounted for before anyone. Carter's Marquis is "a coldhearted, manipulative, blasé, and cynical aesthete" as described by Dutheil de la Rochére (144). Carter fiercely depicts him as the embodiment of sexual perversion. The Marquis' threatening sexual charisma is mixed with voyeurism. He manifests himself as more animalistic than human. The young girl describes his head of a "leonine shape" (*BC* 8) with "streaks of pure silver in his dark mane" (ibid.); he possesses a "waxworks stillness" (*BC* 18). Early on she spots the unnatural feature he retains:

> And sometimes that face, in stillness when he listened to me playing, with the heavy eyelids folded over eyes that always disturbed me by their absolute absence of light, seemed to me like a mask, as if his real face, the face that truly reflected all the life he had led in the world before he met me, before, even, I was born, as though that face lay underneath this mask. (*BC* 9)

Being young and perhaps inexperienced, she wonders what lies underneath this mask—this disguise to his friends and business partners. His appearance is hence grotesque in its ambivalence, the lion-like physical attributes—he almost feels like an alien pretending to be human. Wolfgang Kayser argues that "human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks" are among the most persistent motifs of the grotesque (183). Through the Marquis' "deathly composure" (*BC* 18) in breaking down conventional boundaries between appearance and reality—such as between man and beast, or between face and mask—Carter presents a commanding image of the grotesque in her repertoire (Punter 143). This in turn foregrounds the ambivalence the young girl feels toward him. The grotesque characterization of the Marquis acts as the catalyst for the young girl's metamorphosis, and her process of recognizing her boundaries and desires.

[41] It should be noted that the home is described early on as a "marvellous castle in which he had been born" (*BC* 9). Both his birth and eventual death taking place in this castle, perhaps not in the forbidden room itself, is still in line with a Bakhtinian grotesque approach to the location.

The Marquis' scopophilic tendency is initially attributed to a keen taste for the finer things in life. He is presented initially as an art connoisseur, in addition to his other areas of authority, a collector of invaluable items, a habitué of the opera, an influential and powerful businessperson. This story, intertextually connected with the others in this collection, aims to protest against what Dutheil de la Rochére calls "the predominance of visual modes that reify the feminine" (138). The motif of the eye allows Carter to convey criticism on how power is exerted and control is imposed upon women:

> I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab. I'd never seen, or else had never acknowledged, that regard of his before, the sheer carnal avarice of it; and it was strangely magnified by the monocle lodged in his left eye. (*BC* 11)

The Marquis is approaching her as a tradesman who is assessing his bargain, the meat that he has purchased, and the girl feels this oppressive and dehumanizing gaze. Having argued that the flesh-as-meat is a favored trope that Carter integrates into her fiction, here the "inspecting cuts on the slab" metaphor blatantly demonstrates his approach to her; she is abstracted into a commodity. His ultimate desire in pursuing the naïve and inexperienced protagonist is to turn her into a piece of art or a memento akin to his previous wives—hence, he is not only a connoisseur of artwork, but also of flesh. A functionalistic and abstracting approach to the human body is a grossly grotesque trait.

What Carter seems to be criticizing with the use of the grotesque tradition in the personification of the Marquis is his predatorial gaze, which dehumanizes and objectifies the young bride. He slowly turns her into an object to be consumed, "His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat" (*BC* 11). Carter is being heavy-handed with the foreshadowing here but also depicts a pivotal aspect of this lifestyle promised to her through the marriage: *You will be objectified and you will enjoy it.* She does enjoy it, initially at least, having elevated her social status from a poor household into a

grandiose castle filled with riches: she is indeed complicit[42] in this liaison to a degree: "When I saw him look at me with lust, I dropped my eyes but, in glancing away from him, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. And I saw myself, suddenly, as he saw me, my pale face, the way the muscles in my neck stuck out like thin wire. I saw how much that cruel necklace became me" (*BC* 11). The Marquis can only fulfill his desire when his wives are turned into tableaux vivants, disempowered objects of desire. One may have a variety of reasons for pursuing marriage, but his are of a carnal avarice, resulting in this grotesque narrative about her looks and treatment. Their marriage is a financial transaction, and he has made sure to pay handsomely[43] before enacting his erotic fantasies. Keeping with the commercial language, she is treated as a vegetable, bought first and prepped before cooking:

> He stripped me, gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke – but do not imagine much finesse about it; this artichoke was no particular treat for the diner nor was he yet in any greedy haste. He approached his familiar treat with a weary appetite…And so my purchaser unwrapped his bargain. (*BC* 15)

A similar treatment of fragmented—and then worshipped—body parts is also observed in Poe's narrators and their abstraction of their wives, whether it is their eyes, hair, or teeth, they are described in an abnormally deconstructed language, taken apart limb by limb, then put back together in a way that fulfills the narrators' desire. A similar deconstructing approach has been discussed in the narrators of "Berenice" and "Ligeia" previously. The husband-narrators were seen to divinize and obsess over the minute details related to their wives' appearance rather than their character. Carter, here, through many dehumanizing similes—as a vegetable, as meat cuts on the slab, as an item to be purchased—foregrounds the danger and the sinister plans the Marquis has for the girl via grotesque imagery. As wittily put by Dutheil de la Rochére:

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[42] A similar sentiment is conveyed by Maria Tatar, who argues that the young bride "yields to the sensual appeal of the Marquis's moral corruption and becomes complicit in her own seduction by giving in to her masochistic desires" (117). This complicity will be discussed in relation to the grotesque aspect of the bride.

[43] At some point she is self-aware of this transaction, although at the start of the story the narration tends to possess a girlish romanticism: "This ring, the bloody bandage of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth, his scent of Russian leather – all had conspired to seduce me so utterly" (*BC* 12). Later, she shakes off the "seduction" narrative to refer to herself as "bought" (34), which is closer to the narrative's truth.

> When she sees herself in the mirror, the bride realizes that her undressing is staged as a *tableau vivant*, although she is still ignorant of the fact that her husband's real intentions are to turn her into a *nature morte* (144).

The smaller details that are infused with grotesque imagery in relation to the Marquis, such as the lilies, are noteworthy. Early in the story and their relationship, the protagonist makes a curious analogy between the Marquis and a flower: "…Sometimes he seemed to me like a lily. Yes. A lily. Possessed of that strange, ominous calm of a sentient vegetable, like one of those cobra-headed, funereal lilies whose white sheaths are curled out of a flesh as thick and tensely yielding to the touch as vellum" (*BC* 9). She comes to find the grotesque allure of them:

> …I felt both a strange, impersonal arousal at the thought of love and at the same time a repugnance I could not stifle for his white, heavy flesh that had too much in common with the armfuls of arum lilies that filled my bedroom in great glass jars, those undertakers' lilies with the heavy pollen that powders your fingers as if you had dipped them in turmeric. (*BC* 15)

In a way related to the grotesque tradition, the young bride finds the flower—and the Marquis—stimulating and abominable at the same time. Here, Carter is scrutinizing the layers of desire without trying to fit the young girl into a single category. The somnolent flowers, signifying here a beautiful seduction that turns eventually insufferable, clearly suggest a foreshadowing: "My husband, who, with so much love, filled my bedroom with lilies until it looked like an embalming parlour" (*BC* 18). As she lies in this oppressive bedroom at one point the bride acknowledges the incongruous feelings she harbors: "I longed for him. And he disgusted me" (*BC* 22). Furthermore, in the tall jar beside her bed, the lilies hazily put her to sleep with their excessive scent—with a distortion on the glass jar, the stems "looked like arms, dismembered arms, drifting drowned in greenish water" (*BC* 22). As argued by Lokke, "there is an edge of violence, sadism, and corruption to all this luxury and taste" (10). Hence, the abnormal mixture of the beautiful with the ugly, the tender with the suffocating, the animate with the inanimate and strikingly, the object with the subject is enmeshed in "The Bloody Chamber". Carter ensures to include such grotesque details to highlight the complex nature and the perhaps disturbing aspects of one's desires, where ambivalence is underscored.

Another detail related to the Marquis is the key of the bloody chamber with which he entrusts his young wife. Intruding into the story like a paraphernalia from Poe's Gothic mind, as soon as the key is given to the girl she is tempted dreadfully by this object. The quality that tenably presents it as a grotesque element in this story is its supernatural aspect. Evidently, there are no magical beasts, spells or witches that might accompany the usual fairy tale. Terror is driven mainly from the criminal plot of Bluebeard. The key is the only exception in Carter's rather realistic fin de siècle atmosphere. As Dutheil de la Rochére points out, Carter uses fantasy mixed with reality to critique the underlying misogynist bias within that fin de siécle culture: "Far from being safely located in an imaginary past, Bluebeard's sordid murders serve to illuminate the darkest and more disturbing aspects of symbolist and decadent art" (140). This magical key, when dropped into a pool of blood in the bloody chamber, becomes sentient—or awakened with bloodlust—and no matter how much she cleans it, the key betrays the young girl. When the Marquis returns from his work trip, he recognizes the bloody stain on the key and deduces the fact that she had disobeyed him and visited a certain part of the castle. Thus, this grotesque object between natural and supernatural, or alive and inanimate seals the young bride's fate. The malevolent key's presence in the story blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, foregrounded by the grotesque theme of ambivalence and liminality. Hence, it serves Carter's blend of fantasy and realism to challenge the inherent misogyny of fin de siécle culture.

Finally, the young bride remains as the *object* of grotesque imagery for most of the story. Only for brief instances could she be argued to act as a subject within this macabre world, and when she does, she acts as a conduit for Carter's aim in challenging the sexist constructions foregrounding a complex illustration of feminine desire. The adolescent protagonist of "The Bloody Chamber" is to a degree complicit in the transactional marriage that takes place—Carter makes sure to depict how she was seduced by the Marquis and showed a level of complicity that might be disturbing to some readers[44]. Once she puts on the ruby choker gifted by the Marquis, she recounts: "…[F]or the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself

[44] Lewallen is not impressed by Carter's implementation of such sexual agency in the story: "The heroine's own subsequent recognition of total manipulation does not allay my unease at being manipulated by the narrative to sympathise with masochism" (151).

a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away" (*BC* 11). Especially when the Marquis is examining her body after their arrival at the castle, in the quiet languor of the moment her eyes dart to an etching on the wall depicting a similar scene[45] in which flesh is meatified, and she is visibly excited for her first sexual encounter: "I began to shudder, like a racehorse before a race, yet also with a kind of fear, for I felt both a strange, impersonal arousal at the thought of love and at the same time a repugnance…" (*BC* 15). However, she is left to anticipate his touch. Later at the library, she recounts: "Nothing, here, to detain a seventeen-year-old girl waiting for her first embrace" (16). After losing her virginity, she seems more determined to follow her desire, and a certain confidence is instilled in her narrative from then onwards:

> I was not afraid of him; but of myself. I seemed reborn in his unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes. I hardly recognized myself from his descriptions of me and yet, and yet - might there not be a grain of beastly truth in them? And, in the red firelight, I blushed again, unnoticed, to think he might have chosen me because, in my innocence, he sensed a rare talent for corruption. (*BC* 20)

The "beastly truth" being that she may be just as perverse as the Marquis and in fact enjoy their oddly sadistic relationship. Although the Marquis believes that there is a "promise of debauchery only a connoisseur could detect" written on her face (ibid.), Kathleen Manley rightfully questions whether she is acting on her own agency or if she is being written-over by the Marquis' successive narrative that had swallowed his other wives whole:

> She is not always passive, however, but rather oscillates between being insecure and feeling sure of herself. She is a woman in process, someone who is exploring her subject position and beginning to tell her own story…Carter's protagonist appears to be the blank page upon which her husband will inscribe his story of her. (83-84)

[45] The symbolist artist Félicien Rops (1833-1898), whose oeuvre is abundant in transgressive and sexually explicit engravings of women, is a clue Carter inserts to better depict the Marquis' decadent tastes in art.

Carter is meticulous with her narrative choices, almost preemptively answering such propositions from critics like[46] Manley. When the Marquis leaves her with the keys and drives off, she evidently wishes to have him back for their honeymoon:

> …Now my female wound had healed, there had awoken a certain queasy craving like the cravings of pregnant women for the taste of coal or chalk or tainted food, for the renewal of his caresses…I lay in our wide bed accompanied by, a sleepless companion, my dark newborn curiosity. (*BC* 22)

Making sure that she is not a passive or naïve victim, Carter depicts the awakening and ripening of feminine desire. At the beginning of the story her conversation with her caring mother makes it clear that she is not marrying for love, but for financial security. As the Marquis' courtship continues, in a grotesque way she comes to desire this older and sadistic man[47], despite all the repulsive attributes she can think of, reasons why she shouldn't like him—namely, his leathery perfume, or his strange face that seems to mask how he feels. Going through his desk, finding a love letter from a previous lover makes her jealous. Thus, it can be argued that Carter is using the grotesque tradition to sketch a complex and non-normative picture of feminine desire—attempting "to decolonize our habits of thought" (Makinen 14), especially around female sexuality in phallocentrism. As opposed to the fairy tale genre, where she would be depicted as the young and naïve victim of an older and wiser villain, here she has agency, one that grows gradually. Defying the authority or male-dominated power structures with grotesque imagery, Carter demystifies the feminine "norms" or myths around sexuality through the young bride'

s transgression of them. Perhaps disturbingly for some critics, she bridges the gap between repulsion and desire, or imprisonment and liberation in her provocative

[46]Paulina Palmer also highlights the ambivalence—namely, whether the girl finds this objectification and violent treatment as arousing or not ("Coded" 190). To what degree she has autonomy in this myth and Carter's own retelling, Palmer finds, much is left to the reader's interpretation.

[47] Makinen notes a crucial aspect of their sadomasochist transaction, consent. She points out how the young bride retracts her consent halfway through "when she realizes her husband…is planning to involve her in real torture and a 'snuff denouement'" (13), but until that point of discovery in the bloody chamber, the protagonist admits her complicity.

narrative conjunctions, where the female protagonist has space to explore and express her own sexuality without being chastised or being *consumed* for it.

To call back on Manley's woman in process, we witness the protagonist's journey from adolescence to adulthood. From a feminist position, this could be read as an articulation of the Bakhtinian grotesque within the narrative. Having visited the bloody chamber, regardless of the macabre and terrifying reality of her world, she exists in a continuum—in a grotesque life that is "always conceiving" (Bakhtin 21). The young bride goes through a change, a metamorphosis by the end of the story. After her visit to the grotesque mausoleum of the Marquis, she dreads his return—yet when he does, she finds herself not shaking: "Sly, cunning, he had returned; he was waiting for me outside the door! I rose to my feet; fear gave me strength. I flung back my head defiantly. 'Come in!' My voice astonished me by its firmness, its clarity" (*BC* 31). Showing how composed and careful she is, with a newly acquired "edge of steel in [her] voice" (*BC* 34), the naïve girl at the beginning of the story is nowhere to be found. With grotesque imagery, foregrounding a sense of regeneration and transformation, Carter is rejecting reductive and one-dimensional approaches to her female protagonist. Amidst the unease and ambivalence, the young bride is depicted to be in process, and multiform in her desires and character formation overall. At times she is complicit in perpetuating the repetition of patriarchal values, yet by the end of the story she learns to negotiate her own path in the barbaric and violent world of the Marquis. Thus, this portrayal of a fluid sense of self aids in Carter's debunking of stereotypes of the sacred feminine attempting to liberate her protagonist from the straitjacket of binaries (pure virginal or aggressive libertine) and welcomes her into the world of grotesqueries.

Carter's protagonist refuses to be the perfect woman, "to exist in the passive case" and "to die in the passive case" (Carter *Sadeian* 77). In the end, she is freed from her Saint Cecilia-like fate—Carter's final subversion of the classical fairy tale ending—when her mother and the piano tuner comes to her rescue: "Now, without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head" (*BC* 40). Dutheil de la Rochére points out the importance of these two characters at the end of the story: "Even though the unexpected

intervention of the mother gives a feminist twist to the Bluebeard plot, the blind piano tuner symbolizes to an almost parodic degree the need to move away from the tyranny of the male gaze" (141).

Her description of his shock and frozen expression, or "as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs" (ibid.), alludes to the decadent paintings that he was so fond of collecting. His bloody career in uxoricide is forever halted, and the hopes of turning the young bride into an art piece are reversed, as she had described in the previous page: "The puppet master, openmouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their strings, abandon the rituals he had ordained for them since time began and start to live for themselves; the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns" (*BC* 39).

"The Bloody Chamber" by Angela Carter revisits the Bluebeard myth in order to deconstruct the misogynistic undertones and convey to the readers how subtly patriarchal powers can be imposed upon the readers. Using the malleable tool of the grotesque in her disturbing and evocative imagery, Carter's gothic imagination translates well into the classic myth of violence, domination, and death. Metaphorical extensions of the grotesque tradition to certain items like the key, mirrors, or jewelry, all catapult the readers into the story's macabre and distant world, in order to explore the character's carnal desires which are not-so-distant to that of the readers. Carter's reworking of the myth is visionary in its combination of grotesque elements of human/beast, seductive/repugnant, familiar/alien, safe/dangerous, and fantasy/real. Through her depiction of her female protagonist without the limitations of phallocentric stereotypes on love, sexuality, and freedom, Carter presents a woman in process, ambivalent in her desires and in charge of her own fate and sexuality. With hopes to contribute to a liberating re-telling of an "old wives' tale", her stinging prose aims at emancipation from socially prescribed behavior and patriarchal values and a destabilization of the mechanisms of desire. Skillfully, she depicts that the fairy tale form has more to offer than to simply scare bad children into good behavior.

To conclude, in the setting of "The Bloody Chamber" the grotesque functions as a critical mechanism for examining and restructuring the ideological frameworks of

gender, sexuality, and power. The young bride acts as a conduit for actualizing Carter's aim in challenging the sexist constructions foregrounding a complex illustration of feminine desire. The inherent liminality of the grotesque allows Carter to position her characters and sets the mood and the atmosphere within conceptual binaries, thereby facilitating a rigorous critique of established norms. Through the Marquis' systematic exercise of control, or his macabre theater of domination, Carter depicts identities and bodies as an evolving process rather than a static state. The violent inscriptions of the Marquis' gaze, imposed on women's bodies and desires, are heavily foregrounded in the bloody chamber itself. Ultimately, this feminist reinterpretation of Gothic and fairy tale motifs demonstrates the capacity of the grotesque to foster resistance and provide a foundation for alternative narratives of femininity.

4.3. Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love" and the Grotesque

"The Lady of the House of Love" from the same collection, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), is Carter's reimagining of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale in combination with the vampire myth. In her vivid reimagining, Carter plays with clashing concepts related to the setting and the characters, as she does with the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber", who is a beast in disguise as opposed to his genteel and aristocratic appearance. In "The Lady of the House of Love"[48], the protagonist is the Countess, who appears as a young girl trapped in her castle like the helpless Sleeping Beauty in the original tale, yet she is in fact an ancient master hunter who resides in the shadows of the château in her own beastliness. Carter's story depicts an anomaly of a woman, abnormally and ominously beautiful, a cordial predator, trapped like her pet bird in the cage built for her by her ancestors. The readers are seduced and invited into her grotesque world, only to find out that she is actually not dangerous but *in danger*. A brief overview of the short story is necessary to explore these ideas.

"The Lady of the House of Love" is set on the eve of the First World War, centering on the female vampire in her decaying castle in Romania, drenched in apathy. She is

[48] The references to "The Lady of the House of Love" can be found in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* from Penguin Books (1987) edition. An abbreviation of *BC* will be used to reference this compilation of short stories.

"the last bud of the poison tree that sprang from the loins of Vlad the Impaler who picnicked on corpses in the forests of Transylvania," as the narrator describes her (*BC* 94). She is condemned to a repetitive routine; reading her tarot cards and satiating her hunger are her only reasons for leaving the bed. Her lethargic routine is altered when a young British officer wanders into the chateau with his bicycle, seeking a place to rest and dine. The young man is not at all mesmerized by the mythic appearance of the place, a turreted and dilapidated castle, with a garden blooming with red roses. Neither is he alarmed by the young Countess who is wearing her mother's wedding dress which does not even fit her frail body. His approach to the young girl and her odd surroundings is quite rational. His lack of belief in superstitions or *old wives' tales* about the chateau –in mixture perhaps with his naiveté– result in his bold venture into the Countess' bed chambers, led by the housekeeper. He is underlined to belong to a new generation defined by rationality and technology in this new modern world. Meeting the Lady of the house, he merely finds her an unstable, lonely girl in need of a cure, and not a bloodthirsty creature of the night. She finds him to be charming and naïve. As she prepares herself to murder the young man and have her dinner, the Countess drops and shatters her eyeglasses in a moment of excitement for this handsome man's fresh blood. This unexpected and vulnerable moment interrupts her cyclical theatre of feeding and thus her static languorousness is altered. She then becomes erratic and in a vain attempt to clean up, she pricks her finger and bleeds after clumsily touching the broken glass shards. Her routine is further irrupted once the soldier kisses the blood away to soothe her. The next morning, the young man wakes up to find her dead and discover the pet bird set free from its cage. He leaves the housekeeper to attend to the dead girl and retrieves his bicycle to ride back to town. Finding a telegram summoning him to rejoin his regiment at once, he leaves the country and the strange girl behind. Later in his locker room in Bucharest, while changing his uniform, he discovers a plucked rose in his jacket pocket all the way from Romania. He attempts to revive the flower "because the girl had been so lovely and her death so unexpected and pathetic" (*BC* 107). The withered rose regains all its color and vibrancy overnight, and the next day the young soldier embarks for France.

To begin with the fact that the protagonist of the story is a female vampire, Angela Carter turns the Gothic tropes upside down and inside out at her will as she exploits

the vampire myth and the bleak imagery related to it to the fullest. Elsewhere, in her collection of essays, Carter expresses her grasp of the melodramatic nature of the trope:

> The vampire. Especially, the female vampire, the *femme fatale*, epitomising the fear of and longing for sexuality, symbolising sex and femininity as compulsion and disease. She is the woman who takes by force the blood and life and potency of a man. A metaphor. A part of the decor, in fact — no lonely castle in these abandoned parts is complete without one. The vampire is a tacky theatrical device, too, just like the collapsing house itself. (*Shaking a Leg* 598-599)

Carter's adoption of this figure, well known in Romantic and Victorian literature with many popular renditions, vampiric *femme fatales*, characters that go against the grain in society or culture, seducing readers aesthetically and psychologically, could be regarded as her homage to the long line of literary heritage that she writes within and against. James B. Twitchell, in his study of vampires in Romantic literature, *The Living Dead* (1981) succinctly explains this *femme fatale* figure that has been haunting cultures:

> She is dangerous but not cruel, passionate but not loving, delicate but not feeling. She is eternal, having been given perpetual life by all who have seen her, by all who have dreamed of her. She is the destroyer and preserver, the femme fatale…While the male vampire story was a tale of domination, the female version was one of seduction. (39)

Therefore, it is noteworthy that Carter's employment of the vampire figure is not haphazard but is directly in line with her critical agenda around social propriety and gender "norms". The defiant and transgressive figure of the vampire, when joined with the female figure, constitutes the crux of criticism that Carter seeks to unearth. Regarding the body, beauty ideals, proper or decorous manners of behaving, and gendered or normative behaviors, she holds up a magic mirror—seeing how the story deals with an eternal vampire—to the readers and invite them to interrogate preconceived notions around romantic love and liberation.

The descriptions of environment and the setting of story are valuable to discover how they are in line with the grotesque tradition, through which Carter aims to relay her critical perspective in the fissures of readers' knowledge or expectations and offer an

alternative interpretation of our world and preconceived constructions. The story includes certain grotesque elements and imagery present in its setting and atmosphere, through which fixity becomes destabilized. The readers face the tension between the fantastic and the real early on in the story. In setting up the *mise-en-scène*, the narrator describes a lonely and eerie château:

> At last the revenants became so troublesome the peasants abandoned the village and it fell solely into the possession of subtle and vindictive inhabitants who manifest their presences by shadows that fall almost imperceptibly awry, too many shadows, even at midday, shadows that have no source in anything visible; by the sound, sometimes, of sobbing in a derelict bedroom where a cracked mirror suspended from a wall does not reflect a presence…(*BC* 93)

Carter creates a claustrophobically gorgeous atmosphere for her Countess. Although set in early twentieth century, the initial description of the place is evocative of a medieval castle—here the grotesque results from the mixture of different tones and atmospheric elements belonging to different eras, since Carter's descriptions of this place in the most unnerving and dreadful manner are soon upturned by the introduction of the young British man on his bicycle, the two-wheeled reason machine. The shadows without a source and a mirror without a reflection point to a certain disembodied presence residing in the castle. The familiar world becomes unfamiliar, and the characters feel estranged to the grotesque setting. Within that rupture, or alienation to the atmosphere, the readers are met with what Carter is attempting to subvert in her stories. That is, they witness her critical perspective on the ordinary issues surrounding romantic love, power dynamics, and survival.

The castle[49] of the Countess is dreamlike and contributes to the strange and eerie spatial logic of the story.. Carter introduces the readers to a classic haunted house narrative with the twist of the protagonist acting as the victim *and* the perpetuator of all the haunting; she is "both death and the maiden" (*BC* 93). Her lineage and the house are also explained to be connected: "…The beautiful queen of the vampires sits all

[49] Elsewhere, the narrator briefly mentions how the young girl came to inhabit the castle all alone, without her family: "A chignoned priest of the Orthodox faith staked out her wicked father at a Carpathian crossroad before her milk teeth grew. Just as they staked him out, the fatal Count cried: 'Nosferatu is dead; long live Nosferatu!'" (*BC* 94-95). Hence, it is interpreted that she was quite young when her parents were killed, and evidently, she was raised by the groundskeeper.

alone in her dark, high house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, through her, projects a baleful posthumous existence" (ibid.). The reluctant countess, as she "helplessly perpetuates her ancestral crimes" (ibid.), is haunted by her past—with the ancestors' phantasmic portraits following her eerily. The narrator comments on how the girl is influenced by her roots, "her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes" and how they condemn her to "a perpetual repetition of their passions" (*BC* 103). Lucie Armitt connects the framed portraits to how, figuratively, the Lady has been "framed" by her own genealogy. She argues that Carter's careful choice of the word "peer" instead of "stare" or "gaze" reinforces this awareness:

> Behind that glassy face, just as the eyes of the apparently inert portrait move, so her eyes encapsulate the conflict which exists on the precarious site of abjection between overspill and containment. The reader must positively engage with this conflict. ("Fragile" 95)

As Armitt points out, the portrait motif is a common trope in Gothic tradition—a physical manifestation of the inexplicable; the visceral feeling of the eyes following you—and the compulsive inherited repetitions are neatly placed within the frame. Moreover, the interior descriptions of her bedroom and drawing room also depict an homage to the classic story of Gothic fiction:

> Closely barred shutters and heavy velvet curtains keep out every leak of natural light…This room is never more than faintly illuminated by a heavily shaded lamp on the mantelpiece and the dark red figured wallpaper is obscurely, distressingly patterned by the rain that drives in through the neglected roof and leaves behind it random areas of staining, ominous marks like those left on the sheets by dead lovers. Depredations of rot and fungus everywhere. (*BC* 94)

Although the chambers were once richly decorated, now they are in rot, and "the mistress of all this disintegration" does not seem to care as she sits in "a chair covered in moth-ravaged burgundy velvet" (*BC* 94). She can only exert her energy to read her tarot cards, which lie on a carpet "part rotted away, partly encroached upon by all kinds of virulent-looking fungi" (*BC* 101). The room she rests in could also serve as the place she was buried in:

> At the room's four corners are funerary urns and bowls which emit slumbrous, pungent fumes of incense. In the centre is an elaborate catafalque, in ebony,

> surrounded by long candles in enormous silver candlesticks. In a white lace neglige stained a little with blood, the Countess climbs up on her catafalque at dawn each morning and lies down in an open coffin. (*BC* 94)

Transgressing the boundaries between life and death, the normal and abnormal, the funereal bedroom is also quite reminiscent of the bridal chamber that the bereaved husband in Poe's "Ligeia" had prepares for his second wife, Lady Rowena. The oppressive and mismatched atmosphere turns absurd once the young traveler is invited in. He mockingly calls it "Juliet's tomb" (*BC* 100), and he merely finds it an odd and unhealthy living arrangement for such a young and beautiful girl, as he deems her obsession with the tarot cards as "strange playthings for a young girl" (*BC* 101). The ruinous house is in synchrony with its chatelaine[50]. The imperfectly perfect creation—both she and the house—stands in seemingly opposing elements in line with grotesque principles. However, the grotesque atmosphere falls on deaf ears, since the young soldier is not alarmed or disturbed, as will be detailed later.

Finally, in relation with the grotesque atmosphere created in the story, the garden is noteworthy, especially seeing the reaction it evokes in the young man as he enters the castle's premises. As the mansion emerges "grudgingly out of this jungle" (*BC* 98), the first thing any unlucky traveler encounters is a lush rose thicket, which was previously noted to have been planted by the Countess' dead mother:

> A great, intoxicated surge of the heavy scent of red roses blew into his face as soon as they left the village, inducing a sensuous vertigo; a blast of rich, faintly corrupt sweetness strong enough almost, to fell him. Too many roses. Too many roses bloomed on enormous thickets that lined the path, thickets bristling with thorns, and the flowers themselves were almost too luxuriant, their huge congregations of plush petals somehow obscene in their excess, their whorled, tightly budded cores outrageous in their implications. (*BC* 98)

Directly in contrast to the decrepit situation of the castle, the roses are in full bloom. Their grotesque nature comes from their shameless excess; their sinister and extravagant odor nauseates the young soldier. The roses have a multifarious symbolic

[50] A similar personification of a house motif is observed in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe. The physical structure of the house alongside the family lineage of Ushers forms a symbiotic relationship. This doubling motif, used in both "Usher" and "The Lady of the House of Love" create a pathetic fallacy, in which the houses develop a consciousness with their owners and materialize the swallowing of the legacy they carry.

quality; they represent how the mother's garden and the family tradition live through the young Countess and also their lush condition hints at the insatiable hunger of the young girl. When the narrator describes a probable fate for the young soldier, it is made clear how they have come to fill enormous thickets: "Tomorrow, her keeper will bury his bones under her roses. The food her roses feed on gives them their rich colour, their swooning odour, that breathes lasciviously of forbidden pleasures" (*BC* 105). Thus, the excessive and intoxicating scent emanating from the roses is directly related to the number of corpses buried under the bushes—their beauty and source of life is a macabre and repugnant reality. In their mixture with life and death and decay and vigor, the rose thicket is another element that contributes to the overall grotesque atmosphere of the short story. The flowers' grotesque nature is also in accordance with the grotesque nature of the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber", in which the young bride draws an analogy between him and the lily flower—which she finds attractive and repulsive simultaneously. The roses of the Countess and the lilies that adorn the bride's chamber could be regarded as grotesque imagery in their unnatural and entrancing odor and textual connections with death.

The atmospheric elements and the setting, which are in line with the grotesque tradition, are also evidently one of Carter's main tools in relaying her critical perspective. In foregrounding the purpose of the grotesque, Philip Thomson's approach may be remembered:

> The shock-effect of the grotesque may also be used to bewilder and disorient, to bring the reader up short, jolt him out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective. (58)

Thus, the setting and the atmosphere, so far discussed, sustain an alternative interpretation of our world, informed by the transgressive imagery and liminal states of existence. Seeing the family portraits in the castle and the fierce roses that adorn her castle, the Countess is directly related to her house—in a sense, the castle is her damnation and salvation simultaneously. The vampire figure at its core is one of the overt images of the grotesque; it is the embodiment of disturbing fusion of attraction and repulsion, and the collapse of boundaries between human and beast, natural and unnatural, and most disturbingly, dead and undead (Dutheil de la Rochére 213-214). As a predator, the vampire figure transgresses the bodily boundaries and in feeding

with human blood, the interior is externalized in the most vicious of modes. The vampire overtly violates natural laws and order. In its excessive appetite, for instance, gorging upon a human until they are drained—the vampire is the grotesque personified. The portraits that eerily follow the Countess within the castle depict the ancestorial burden on her. The predation of the violence, as if her bloody fate was pre-inscribed on her, establishes the basis of one of the key critical dimensions of the story. Carter's depiction of the Countess, is one of a tired and condemned person—trapped by her ancestry to this form of existential imprisonment. She is "a victim as much as a predator" as Dutheil de la Rochére puts it (215). Additionally, Gina Wisker points out that the story and the vampire herself thrive on contraries, "inhabits a half way existence" ("Revenge" 128). The Countess is morally conflicted about killing living animals and humans for her survival, and yet at the end of the day, she has only one place on earth to be who she is and find familiarity: her castle. The same place, contradictorily, which keeps her enslaved to a (un)life of perpetual murder, also acts as the place where she can find refuge. In the next section, this scrutinizing approach will be explored in relation to the characters, especially the female protagonist of the story.

The characters in "The Lady of the House of Love" are also grotesque in certain aspects. Carter's gothic somnambulist is at war with her nature and heritage: "Everything about this beautiful and ghastly lady is as it should be, queen of night, queen of terror – except her horrible reluctance for the role" (*BC* 95) and although she lives like a ghost, possessing all the haunted forests and mysterious habitations of her ancestors' domain, she is "indifferent to her own weird authority" and wishes to be human (ibid.). She is not content with her bloody routines and wishes she could live, and love, like humans: "…She is herself a cave full of echoes, she is a system of repetitions, she is a closed circuit. 'Can a bird sing only the song it knows or can it learn a new song?'" (*BC* 93). After all, she is "both death and the maiden" (*BC* 93). Lamenting her endless repetition of her old routines, she yearns to learn a new song and perhaps experience an alternative way of living in which she is not condemned with vicious hunger or an eternal loneliness that comes with being a vampire.

The Countess is referred to as "a nocturnal creature" (*BC* 95) and described to have animalistic traits, which further depict Carter's agenda in subverting the idealizations of female beauty: "She has no mouth with which to kiss, no hands with which to caress, only the fangs and talons of a beast of prey" (*BC* 104). At night, she does not fight her beastly nature and when the housekeeper lets her out into the garden, she surrenders to her animalistic side:

> When the back door opens, the Countess will sniff the air and howl. She drops, now, on all fours. Crouching, quivering, she catches the scent of her prey. Delicious crunch of the fragile bones of rabbits and small, furry things she pursues with fleet, four-footed speed; she will creep home, whimpering, with blood smeared on her cheeks. She pours water from the ewer in her bedroom into the bowl, she washes her face with the wincing, fastidious gestures of a cat. (*BC* 95)

The transfusion of animalistic qualities with a human appearance is one of the most ancient grotesque forms, as Bakhtin also remarks (316), and Carter skillfully merges the Beauty with the Beast to suggest an alternative reading of the popular fairy tale. Should the townsfolk see her going on all fours and eating without "decent" manners, aside from the obvious fact that she is the predator of humans, they would surely make her an outcast. Through this grotesque personification, Carter is perhaps criticizing the detrimental aspects of repressing one's natural instincts. This could be read as the repercussions of living a life in which the instinctive does not align with the "proper" or "decorous", inviting the readers to interrogate the boundaries present in society; and perhaps drawing attention to the price paid for the sake of fitting in.

Another aspect of the vampiric protagonist, a death-in-life contradiction, that makes her the perfect predator, is her grotesque appearance: "She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness" (*BC* 94). This description is one of the most overt handshakes Carter has with the grotesque tradition in her collection of stories. In a Bakhtinian sense, "the violation of natural boundaries" (*Rabelais* 40) shows her composite and grotesque nature. Similar to her lush rose thicket, the overabundant beauty of the Countess is intense and borderline. In the earliest descriptions of grotesque art, straying further from the classical and perfect

depictions of things and humans were enough to deem an artwork grotesque. In Carter's fiction, the Countess' frozen and unnatural allure is grotesque, liminal, and her beauty is incongruous with the modern sense of the word. Yet she exists, like an anomaly, a living-dead contradiction—she is excessively and disturbingly beautiful, serving Carter's critical approach to the fixity of boundaries, or the binaries of beautiful and repugnant.

Through these physical descriptions Carter also blends the animalistic body with the conception of the female body as a site of decomposition, dirt and detritus. For instance, the housekeeper, and seemingly her only help or companion, helps the Countess clean up after another savage meal with a silver toothpick "to get rid of the fragments of skin and bone that have lodged there" (*BC* 96). Carter's depiction of a beautiful character in the most outrageous and repulsive way surely aids in destabilizing the idealizations of female beauty (Russo 65). As evidenced above, the representation of the Countess as an anomaly and a grotesque beauty, as well as her depiction as an (un)civil human—serving her guests a cup of tea before devouring them—all point to the rationale behind utilizing the grotesque tradition in her collection of stories.

Straying far from the ideal representations of women as bearers of good health and morals through purity and stability, this and many other female vampire figures challenge such conventional notions and docile conceptions of women altogether[51]. Exceeding the given boundaries of the beautiful, she transgresses into uncharted territory, befuddling her victims with this advantage—she is a *femme fatale*, albeit unwilling and "unnatural" and "deformed". The monstrous rose she gifts to the young soldier carries the same adjectives that could be used in describing her appearance: "corrupt, brilliant, baleful splendour" (*BC* 108). She is grotesque in her bipartite embodiment of delights and disgust. Moreover, Wisker comments on the Countess' contradictory status in the story: "She both occupies the traditional vampiric role of

[51]Gina Wisker points out how the figure of the vampire—as an agent of metamorphosis and chaos—exposes the social terror against the marginalized groups/the demonized other and everything existing in unfixed and liminal conditions: "We read them now as markers of a lack of ease, as gaps, fissures in social certainties, projected nightmares emanating from imperial, patriarchal comfort zones" ("Vampirism" 152).

uniting opposites (life/death; human/animal) and exposes the destructive antitheses between logic/superstition and male/female which produce wars and romantic lies" ("Revenge" 128).

Additionally, the voice of the Countess is another grotesque element, a feature that blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy or human and machine. Although the narrator urges the readers to make a more naturalistic connection with the Countess, the young traveler's initial response to hearing her is like hearing "a faint, metallic twang as of, perhaps, a chord struck on a harpsichord" (*BC* 100) and follows it with its alluring aspect, "…the most seductively caressing voice he had ever heard in his life" (ibid.). The narrator refers to the Countess in more than one instance with bird references; "the song of a lark" (*BC* 100), "poor night bird, poor butcher bird" (*BC* 103), and repeating the question in parentheses: "Can a bird sing only the song it knows, or can it learn a new song?" (*BC* 93, 103). This further aids in Carter's critical approach to the ideas of imprisonment and liberation—the invisible cage of customs and heritage that holds the Countess captive. The young soldier further describes the inhuman and grotesque voice, and his odd attraction to it is as follows:

> Her voice, issuing from those red lips like the obese roses in her garden, lips that do not move – her voice is curiously disembodied; she is like a doll, he thought, a ventriloquist's doll, or, more, like a great, ingenious piece of clockwork. For she seemed inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born, and now the mechanism was inexorably running down and would leave her lifeless. This idea that she might be an automaton, made of white velvet and black fur, that could not move of its own accord, never quite deserted him; indeed, it deeply moved his heart. (*BC* 102)

The voluptuous voice and the synthetic body from which it emanates add to her grotesque and transgressive façade. Recurring references to "a ventriloquist's doll" or an "automaton" displace her from the world of the young traveler—where reason and logic apply—and locate her in an ethereal realm of her own. The readers may recall the murderous Marquis' mask-like face, and how disturbing it was for the young bride to read his emotions. Similarly, the vampiric Beauty also appears human enough to attract her victims, yet her behavior is doll-like. She sits in her room like an eternal animatronic that is lit up and activated once a human passes nearby and she carries out her given script. This creates an atmosphere of unease at an extra-linguistic level. The

young man, in his reasoning, likens her movement to a machine, yet it does not suffice—for he does not believe in "old wives' tales" or have superstitions that sustain the vampiric creatures' impossible existence. His rationality falls flat and only disturbs him on a visceral level. The traveler's perspective of the macabre setting and the ghastly inhabitant of the castle underscores that her existence is of a discordant (con)fusion:

> With her stark white face, her lovely death's head surrounded by long dark hair that fell down as straight as if it were soaking wet, she looked like a shipwrecked bride. Her huge dark eyes almost broke his heart with their waiflike, lost look; yet he was disturbed, almost repelled, by her extraordinarily fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson, a morbid mouth. Even — but he put the thought away from him immediately — a whore's mouth…He thought she must be only sixteen or seventeen years old, no more, with the hectic, unhealthy beauty of a consumptive. She was the chatelaine of all this decay. (*BC* 101)

The repellent or distorted details about the castle or the hybrid appearance of the Lady do not deter him. Wisker argues how he is trapped in patriarchal constructions of women: "He can only compare her to flowers and whores"[52] ("Revenge" 127). In one way or another, he is disturbingly seduced by the strange woman haunting the ruinous castle. Oscillating between being repulsed and aroused by the object of desire, we might recall how the young bride felt similarly towards the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber". In the end, his rational approach to the fantastic world of the Countess and his superficial excitement for her proves stronger than any illegitimate theatre she sets up. In the end, the Countess' grotesque body as a fluid, dangerous site of "untamed excess" (Armitt "Fragile" 96) and indecorous or animalistic behavior force the young man, and the readers, to question certain limits drawn between reality and fantasy, human and machine, life and death, and natural and unnatural. The Countess' ontologically unstable position, in a vampiric liminal body, acts in order to estrange the readers. Her grotesque embodiment allows Carter to expose the misogynistic, or normative, logic behind female sexuality and bodily norms. The vampire's radical

[52] Margaret Miles contributes a critical view on the connection between the grotesque and the socially inscribed body: "Some women were seen as personifications of the grotesque; prostitutes, for example, epitomized the penetrable body, the body shaped by lust, the permeable body that produces juices and smells. The prostitute's body is opposite to the closed, self-contained, controlled male body, and the opposite of that of some virtuous women, especially of virgins, who were 'gardens enclosed'" (92). Hence, Carter's "a whore's mouth" irrupts into the text as a grotesque transgression.

instability—simultaneously desirable and repulsive, predator and prey—aids in Carter's critical agenda for dismantling the readers' preconceived norms or expectations, especially around contradictory and marginalized bodies which are forced to operate within an oppressive or excluding logic.

When the story is read against the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty, whose female protagonist also pricks her finger and falls into an eternal sleep with a curse until the true love's kiss wakes her up, it becomes clear that Carter seems to be borrowing from the traditional story. With the introduction of the *femme fatale* archetype and the vampire myth, the story engages with ideas of agency, love, and imprisonment in its own unique way. Carter's "sleeping beauty" has all the power, agency and strength on her side, in addition to being undead—yet she is not satisfied, for she wishes to love and be loved. Her reluctance in carrying out what is "natural" for a bloodsucking creature—that is, hunting like a predator and/or seducing the preys so that they become willing victims—is one the main subversions Carter employs in her retelling. In "The Lady of the House of Love" the predator accidentally becomes the prey at the hands of a lover, in a sense. Not a stake through the heart, but the gentle kiss of a stranger turns her into a mortal human. One must imagine the Countess happy in death, although finally receiving a true love's kiss and becoming human destroys her. In death, she is also liberated from the eternal occupation of being the chatelaine, from the burden of her lineage, and from the unbecoming and bloody routine between her and humans.

The young man's characterization also contains certain elusive elements belonging to the grotesque tradition which aid in his further displacement in society and mostly in the fantastical world of the Countess. The young soldier is depicted as a young but rational man. He similarly exists in an in-between place as the Countess:

> He has the special quality of virginity, most and least ambiguous of states: ignorance, yet at the same time, power in potentia, and, furthermore, unknowingness, which is not the same as ignorance. He is more than he knows — and has about him, besides, the special glamour of that generation for whom history has already prepared a special, exemplary fate in the trenches of France. (*BC* 97)

In his youthful representation of "the most and the least ambiguous of states" Carter chooses to foreground his virginity. This brings into discussion a transgression and reversal of gender norms, which are sustained by the grotesque. His presence in the story could also be a nod to the fairy tale tradition where the convention loves to reprimand youthful curiosity; or the Gothic tradition, in which a young and inexperienced girl is taught a lesson of life and death. Carter inverts these gender norms—arguably does not surpass them—and leaves the young virgin man at the mercy of the ancient and *monstrous* lady. As seen with the Countess' comment, "[the] bridegroom bleeds on my inverted marriage bed" (*BC* 105), she is apparently self-aware of the ironic situation. Hence, the grotesque tradition in this narrative, at instances like this, emancipates the readers' preconceived ways of thinking or attempts to pose a critical approach to socially accepted or normative forms of gendered behavior.

Repetitively infantilizing and underestimating her, the young soldier is not afraid of the Countess at all: "…He thought of a child dressing up in her mother's clothes, perhaps a child putting on the clothes of a dead mother in order to bring her, however briefly, to life again" (*BC* 100). The narration overtly keeps up a cynical tone, compared to the fairy tale genre, with reminders of how "he is a hero" (*BC* 103) and sustaining his ever-abundant sensibility, "in himself…he is an exorcism" (*BC* 106). With the strength of patriarchy—and perhaps a savior complex—supporting him, he is *surely* in no danger in the presence of the ghoulish lady and her murderous bedroom, with a catafalque surrounded by candles like a sacrificial alter. His internal monologue depicts why he is not afraid of her in his rational point of view, and he plans how to save her from this decrepit house and improve her appearance:

> 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 better shape. Any competent manicurist will deal with her claws. We shall turn her into the lovely girl she is; I shall cure her of all these nightmares (*BC* 107).

In the previous chapter, similar approaches to regulate and "improve" the grotesque and feminine body are also argued to be present in Poe's "Ligeia" and "Berenice". The husband narrators take on the challenge of loving their companions into a better—a

different—shape with their excessive and absurd idealizations. Egeaus' morbid attention to Berenice remains merely skin-deep, or the husband of Lady Ligeia confines her within a "proper" mold of beauty and ultimately destroys Lady Rowena by forcing her to be in the form of Ligeia. Such deadly figurations of feminine beauty and ideals are evident in the analyses of the stories in the previous chapter.

All in all, rather than the young man's physical attributes, his behavior can be located within the grotesque tradition. Hollinger elaborates on why perhaps the young man is so disillusioned by the fantastic atmosphere "…Carter's creation is completely overshadowed, first by the solidity of empirical reality, and then by the events that will soon destroy that reality. Perhaps there is no room for an inhuman other, nor any need of one, in a human world that can provide its own apocalypse" (Hollinger 209). For the soldier, the elusive other is no danger in the face of man-made horrors. The fantastic atmosphere is bankrupt, or it no longer serves to frighten in the post-industrial era. The narrator says: "He will learn to shudder in the trenches" (*BC* 104). Thus, Hollinger is valid in pointing out why the Countess' world seems mere cheap theatrics and her tarot cards are simple toys: "His will be no transcendent battle against Evil, but a war of strictly human proportions, harrowingly real…Allowing herself to die for love of him rather than destroy him, thus preserving him, of course, for the greater horror of the trenches" (*BC* 208). His blatant ignorance of the creeping supernatural and adamant trust in the male-dominated organizing principles is a grotesque response to the fantastical world he steps into momentarily. His approach to the unexpected stay at the chateau and the strange girl's death after their brief meeting is psychologically strange in its depiction of a deliberate incongruity that is found in the grotesque. The grotesque tradition allows Carter to carefully position the chimerical bodies and ambiguous settings as sites of attraction, simultaneously opulent and ruinous; challenging how the readers feel, think, and question the given norms about romantic love or carnal desire as she intervenes with the canonized fairy tales and their highly coded genre and delivers her twentieth century approach to the more abstract concepts of terror, curiosity, violence, and danger.

In the story, whether it be love or war, neither character can escape a fate bigger than them. Since violence, oppression, and freedom are universal concepts, regardless of

the vampire or the fantastic beasts and fairies, Carter is scrutinizing moral ambiguities presented by the bloody chamber without immediately subscribing into a system of belief. Criticizing the normative behaviors and idealizations of feminine beauty, Carter's project of demystification takes a dizzying form with this story. As Gamble points out:

> It does not just exist in fairy tales, folk tales, and stories of vampires and werewolves. Instead, it is a real condition of our very existence, for Carter intends her audience to realize that these stories apply to the contemporary world and the way we live now. It is inescapable, since it exists both inside and outside the self and in both the public and the private sphere. Quite simply, there's nowhere else to run. (Gamble "Penetrating" 38)

Ultimately, in Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love," behind the conceit of the vampire or the allusions to the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty, Carter confronts the binaries of alive and dead, the beauty and the beast, or the victim and the murderer, opening up the space of a discourse in which the readers may contemplate upon how big or small the gap between these seeming opposites is. Carter's ability to use the Gothic and the fairy tale genre to dismantle itself, in juncture with the grotesque—with its foundational ambivalence and liminality—enables her to hold her characters suspended between such boundaries, so that each becomes a site of critique as well as possibility. By rendering the Countess as both a predator and a puppet, a site where necrophilic decay meets ethereal beauty, Carter deconstructs the traditional Gothic vampire, stripping away its romantic allure to reveal the suffocating weight of patriarchal lineage. She demonstrates how the grotesque operates as one of her most potent strategies for interrogating, unsettling, and ultimately reimagining the ideological structures surrounding gender, sexuality, and power. Through her deliberate manipulation of Gothic atmospheres, her hybridization of bodies, and her destabilizing use of myth and fairy tale motifs, Carter exposes the artificiality of patriarchal constructions and the violent inscriptions they impose on women's bodies and desires. This further displays how the grotesque can carve out imaginative room for resistance, metamorphosis, and alternative forms of desire, challenging readers to confront the seductive myths that shape cultural understandings of femininity and to envision new narratives beyond them.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study originated with the aim to analyze Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice" and "Ligeia" and Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" in association with the grotesque tradition to scrutinize the authors' approaches to their female characters and their use of the grotesque as a deliberate and productive critical tool to unveil social anxieties around the feminine body and gender norms. Having evolved from an aesthetic tradition in visual arts to an aesthetic sensibility in literature, the grotesque tradition is employed by authors to effectively convey their critiques on what is deemed as normal, temporal, natural, acceptable in relation to the given or classical boundaries, and it momentarily penetrates the social or aesthetic commonalities in its inherent transgressive nature. The excess and distortion provided by the grotesque, exposes the violence inherent in idealized and mythologized femininity, aesthetic fetishism, patriarchal structures, and bodily norms. Both Poe and Carter's use of the grotesque as a strategical device display their undertaking to demystify and destabilize feminine beauty and bodily ideals while displaying how grotesque imagery—marked by bodily excess, distortion, hybridity, and ambivalence—operates to challenge patriarchal idealizations rather than merely reproduce them and emphasize that the body as a site of re-vision and resistance in the face of ideological oppression.

Following the introductory chapter which aimed at presenting the main argument and focus of the present study, the second chapter sought to give the necessary theoretical background to analyze the novels with a view to the grotesque tradition. Tracing the evolution of the grotesque tradition in history, focusing only on the most relevant critical approaches for the current research, this thesis established its reasons for utilizing the theoretical approaches of the four writers and following a hybrid definition of the term grotesque. Initially, one of the pioneering works in the study of

the grotesque, Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957) was used in theoretical scaffolding. Kayser's emphasis with the argument "The grotesque is the estranged world" (184) underlines estrangement and alienation as one pivotal element of the grotesque. The world for him is not only estranged but also demonic; hence the grotesque tradition brings the dreadful into sight for the readers' critical apprehension. Furthermore, his claim regarding the grotesque as "the fusion of realms which we know to be separated, the abolition of the law of statics, the loss of identity, the distortion of 'natural' size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order" (185), formed another part of the basis for the grotesque conception to be followed in this study.

Another key writer, Mikhail Bakhtin, with his *Rabelais and His World* (1965) formed the other footing for the present study's hybrid grotesque definition. His analytical study of the sixteenth century writer François Rabelais' carnivalesque and the notions around what Bakhtin named "grotesque realism" (18), yielded the notions of excess and ambivalence in relation to the term. Moreover, he foregrounded degradation as of key principles of grotesque realism, that is, the discrowning of the authority and defying the power of the orthodox. Bakhtin names "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness" (303) as the fundamental attributes of the grotesque style, with which the critical perspective is achieved and hence grotesque imagery is utilized to react against the official norms of the culture, whether bodily or behavioral.

The third critical approach to the grotesque for the completion of this study's hybrid definition was taken from Mary Russo's feminist revision of previous studies of the grotesque in visual and literary arts in *The Female Grotesque* (1994). Her conceptions around the female body, transgression and the grotesque female body's capacity for resistance and possibility of change were crucial in supplying the feminist approach to this study's theoretical framing. The immediacy of the grotesque body and femininity were not previously analyzed by Kayser or Bakhtin, at least, not in the similar constructive light as observed in Russo's work. Therefore, Russo's feminist reworking of the grotesque and her meticulous analysis revealed how such associations are culturally produced and ideologically enforced. She explores a variety of topics, "making a spectacle of oneself" (*Female Grotesque* 12) or how femininity is produced

within male-dominated cultures; she argues that the female grotesque reveals the constructed and contingent nature of the norms concerning feminine embodiment through their hyperbolic performance or distortion. Her analytical framework finds that the body is an ideological and socially inscribed site—and simultaneously, with grotesque embodiment, it can be a site of resistance. In displaying bodily excess, and hybridity, in its defiance against the norms, the multiform female body may resist false idealization or passive subjugation to a patriarchal logic of bodily existence. Her approach to the female grotesque as a strategic tool to "destabilize the idealizations of the female beauty or to realign the mechanisms of desire" ("Carnival" 221) have been one of the vital pointers of the present study.

Finally, Margaret Miles' framework around the female grotesque depicts how culture and society interact with bodies, constructing and upholding certain conceptualizations. Her *Carnal Knowing* argued that taking the male body as the norm, was one of the reasons why the female body was perceived as innately grotesque. She mainly focuses on the theological reflections of these ideas in the Western imagination. Therefore, in this study's compound and multiform definition of the grotesque, Miles' emphasis on certain features of the grotesque—inversion and hybridization—and how these can be utilized in grotesque imagery have been particularly significant. The inversions and hybridizations in the imagery surrounding the female body and subject, reveal the disturbing effects of the grotesque aesthetic and underscore the female body's capacity to appear simultaneously fascinating and terrifying even without an inherent deformity. Taken together, the approaches of Miles and Russo provide complementary frameworks for understanding the grotesque female body as both historically inscribed and potentially subversive.

Just as contradictions and ambivalence pervade the grotesque style, so were the critical acclaim of Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter. Both authors were scrutinized and criticized heavily for their violent or degrading treatment of their female characters and were charged with misogyny. This has been another goal of the present study, to disprove these claims, and suggest that the censure they received was a misjudgment of some of their critics. Though set apart by nearly a century, Poe's distinguished Gothic and horror writing immensely influenced the English writer, Angela Carter.

They may differ in cultural and social contexts; however, their works share a common interest in using the grotesque as a critical tool to expose the darker side of the ideological and epistemological oppressions they observe. This further shows that certain tendencies, including bodily or social policing, and confinement of non-normative or marginalized subjects, were prevalent in nineteenth century America and in twentieth century England.

In Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice" (1835), the grotesque excess and exaggeration of violence lays bare the lethal results of fetishization and aesthetic idealization, particularly through the unreliable male narrator Egæus, whose obsessional gaze reduces his fiancé Berenice to a fragmented object, an abstraction. His desire to possess and contain Berenice's grotesque and non-static body, especially while she is suffering from an illness, demonstrates the male drive to control and to exert power upon the non-normative body. With the story's shocking finale which reveals how Egæus has excavated her teeth out of the unconscious but still alive body of Berenice, Poe employs grotesque corporeal brutality to criticize how patriarchal desire converts the female body into a fetishized object and thus to reveal the violence inherent in aesthetic idealization rather than romantic attachment.

In "Ligeia" (1838), one of Edgar Allan Poe's most loved and well-known short stories, the author extensively exploits grotesque elements of hybridity and the in-betweenness. Similar to "Berenice", the narrator of the story, the husband of Lady Ligeia divinizes her endlessly, particularly her physical attributes which are described in superlatives and his one-sided dependence on her worsens once she mysteriously gets sick and passes away. These are examples of Poe's doomed characters who cannot find peace either in life or in death. The narrator remarries another unlucky woman named Lady Rowena, who also gets sick not long after their marriage. Poe skillfully depicts the surface level attachment the narrator has for his new wife, in addition to reiterating the narrator's opium-abuse multiple times throughout the story. This study has found that the world and its inhabitants Poe envisions here involve grotesque elements. These elements aid in the estrangement of the readers—and arguably the narrator himself—to the narrative, underscoring the unreliability of the husband-narrator. Considering Lady Ligeia's non-normative existence as an erudite woman

who dominates her husband in any given intellectual and philosophical arena, she is hardly the nineteenth century ideal of a good wife. Moreover, before dying she is emphasized to have excessive survival energies and that the strength of her will is unmatched. Poe subverts the gender norms and his readers' expectations through such a masculine depiction of Lady Ligeia. When Ligeia superimposes herself on the dying Rowena, the grotesque female body is observed in its ultimate regenerative and excessive state. The story, thus, reinforces the importance of resistance, defiance against what is deemed natural by the patriarchal logic, with the strategic use of the grotesque allowing Poe's female protagonist to exceed and subvert the boundaries assigned to her. She disrupts the expectations around life and death, challenging the normative boundaries between the classical body and the grotesque body in her final resurrection.

In both of Poe's short stories, it is observed that he may not be readily called a feminist with modern-day sensibilities, but he could be said to be working towards a non-patriarchal expression of gender. To achieve this, the grotesque acts as a critical tool, where extremities and hybridizations are inherent to the style, and aims to offer a potent means of cultural critique. Arguably, his use of the grotesque is more on the unconscious side, and his texts are not overtly informed of theory. The grotesque and liminal bodies of Berenice and Ligeia, in their resistance against fixity or death, prevail over the male-authored desire to overwrite their stories. The covert violence in the male fantasy of the eternal feminine, which is an idealized and transcendent notion of womanhood, is questioned by Poe, and his female characters, in their rejection of the male-dominated ideals surrounding their lives and bodies, reconfigure the norms and limits around the feminine subject.

Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) was a theoretical undertaking of revising well-known fairy tales in her self-claimed "demythologizing business" (*Shaking A Leg* 47). "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" from the collection have been selected for analysis in the present study for their centering of female bodies within the grotesque aesthetic. Although myths and legends, fairy tale settings and stereotyped characters may appear unrealistic at first, they are the ultimate encapsulation of expressions and characterization of the everyday

world. In her collection of short stories, Carter digs underneath the comfortable and safe surface of fairy tales to reveal the horrors that lurk behind them. She was "all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (*Shaking a Leg* 46) and her collection of stories can be likened to a thought experiment, consciously arranging certain kinds of imagery to provoke her readers. As it is argued, Carter uses the grotesque as a critical strategy to deconstruct patriarchal myths embedded in fairy tales, notably their constructions of femininity, desire, marriage, and power.

The first Carter story that was discussed in the study is the eponymous "The Bloody Chamber". In this story, through Carter's direct engagement with theory, magical realism and feminism, she reveals the power dynamics that are concealed beneath romantic or aesthetic mystification. It is argued that Carter remained quite loyal to the original Bluebeard myth, with the gradual entrapment of the young bride by the cruel Marquis—and the readers' steady seduction by the narration—Carter captured the dark and Gothic elements of the old folktale. The young and virginal bride, married for wealth, discovers the Marquis' brutal murders and objectification of his previous wives. The Marquis does overtly what the patriarchal culture does covertly, he purchases, possesses, aestheticises, and eventually destroys female bodies. Carter's genius is to make this continuity visible and unavoidable rather than safely containable as Gothic excess. She also demonstrates to her readers that this is at the same time a self-discovery story of a young woman. One of the primary uses of the grotesque style in this story is through subtle details. The castle of the Marquis, as an amphibious setting, has been discussed to represent the liminality and the in-between status of the young bride. The mirror-filled bridal chamber has been argued to present the readers with a literalization of the bride's identity and its fragmentation, turning her into a multiplied object for the Marquis' gaze. Perhaps the most important place, where the logic of patriarchal punishment is exposed, is the bloody chamber itself, where the Marquis turns his previous wives into artistic objects after death. This thesis argues that within the chamber, the embalmed wife, the skeletal hanging remains of another one, and finally the Iron Maiden which holds captive the Romanian countess, Marquis' latest victim whose blood has not been dried up yet, each objectification of women in different temporal stages of decomposition, align with Bakhtin's notion of unfinished

metamorphosis (Bakhtin 24). The grotesque depictions of women signaling a darker transformation within them, display the violence embedded in the voyeuristic and dehumanizing gaze from patriarchy. The Marquis, an agent of hedonism and violence in the story, and his gaze depict how his desires reduce the bride to a piece of meat, commodity, or an art object to be put on display, rather than a person. Finally, through Carter's foregrounding the complex nature of feminine desire, as seen in the oscillating feelings the young bride has towards her husband, as she is simultaneously aroused and repulsed by the Marquis, exemplifies grotesque ambivalence. In the end, Carter's interrogation of how myths discipline female desire and how they seek to contain the excessive grotesque female body show that Carter's fairy tale rewriting is a critique of male-dominated narratives.

Angela Carter's second story reviewed in this study is "The Lady of the House of Love," in which she deliberately utilizes grotesque imagery to question and dismantle patriarchal myths of femininity and beauty. The protagonist of the story, the Countess, is a contradiction in her death-in-life state. In the hybridization of genres, her mixture of the fairy tale with the Gothic story, this thesis has argued that Carter presents a Sleeping-Beauty type vampire to scrutinize the fixed binaries and beauty norms through the grotesque style. Her body is the site of grotesque ambivalence, and Carter refuses to resolve this ambivalence into any single ideological position. Despite her inherent predator nature, the female vampire is paradoxically a prey to the male human that wanders into her castle, disrupting her melancholic and repetitive routines of hunting for survival. Carter's reconfiguration of the *femme fatale* figure, in the depiction of her excessive or improper body or behavior, to critique the restrictions underneath female sexuality and romantic desire, is aimed at the readers' preconceived notions around gender binaries and norms. Her body is argued to be of a Bakhtinian grotesque; animalistic and liminal, meanwhile, she is both refined and savage in her customs. In line with Russo's argument that the female grotesque can destabilize the ideals around female beauty ("Carnival" 221), in her bloodstained clothes and the fleshly remains under her nails, the Countess is still in possession of an excessive and ethereal beauty, in the eyes of the young man in the story. In her clockwork-like routines, she is presented as a mechanical representation of femininity; performed and repeated continually until the cycle breaks. This analysis underlines that, here, Carter

is seen to critique the artifice or the spectacle surrounding the notions of conforming to society or patriarchal expectations. The Countess is dangerous, predatory, and insatiable not because this is her authentic self but because this is the role Gothic and patriarchal tradition has written for her body—Carter presents an inherited compulsion around the female subjectivity and sexuality. The power she appears to wield is entirely structured by the system that has made her. The Countess is powerful only in the mode her patriarchal Gothic inheritance has prescribed, which is the mode of monstrous, destructive, punishable female sexuality. All in all, Carter uses the grotesque to dismantle romantic fantasies that conflate love with salvation; the young man's touch is subverted in Carter's retelling of the fairy tale, leading to her death. The modern rationality that the young man carries into the supernatural world of the Countess creates a rupture which unsettles and disorients both the vampire and the readers—resulting in a critique of patriarchal certainty or blind rational excess, especially seeing that the narrator makes it clear that although the young man is to survive the Countess, he is to die in the upcoming war. Carter's reconsidering of the vampire figure—as reiterated by the portraits in the castle and the references to her ancestry—within the grotesque atmosphere of "The Lady of the House of Love" undertakes to expose certain bodily myths around the female body and creates a unique fictional space where binaries can be challenged with regard to gender and romantic desire, and ultimately reimagine the ideological foundations of sexuality and the female grotesque's interaction with power structures and the performative nature of certain marginalized bodies.

In the end, this thesis argued that both Edgar Allan Poe and Angela Carter use the grotesque as a critical device in their interrogation of norms around femininity. Poe's short stories "Berenice" and "Ligeia", and Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" depict hybrid, transgressive and liminal representations in their female characters. The grotesque style creates a rupture, a gap, in these texts with which it allows the authors or the readers to fill it in, creating a compelling urge to produce meaning and approach the presented subject or bodies critically. The grotesque tradition creates a symbolic force that is posed against its audience. This results in a dual, if not multiform, level of representation, in which the viewers are met with contradictions, inversions, extremities, ambivalences, and excessive aspects, and

therefore this representation of style calls into question what George Harpham called, "the adequacy of our ways of organising the world" (5). Through its deliberate repudiation of fixity, and challenging traditional gender roles and patriarchal power structures around romantic love and marriage, the grotesque tradition presented the readers with a critical insight into how certain dominant ideologies exert violence and control upon the feminine or disruptive bodies. In its bold encounter with the marginal, the strange, the epistemologically dubious, and the transgressive, the grotesque precipitates a symbolic rupture—a gap that compels a confrontation with the inherent and multiform possibilities of radical transformation.

As this study draws to a close, it calls for more research into the potential of different uses of the grotesque tradition in American and British contexts. This study focuses on the female body and on Poe and Carter's selected short stories that foreground their grotesque uses as a strategic tool regarding the female body and subjectivity; yet, in different national and cultural contexts, grotesque imagery and its locus may differ. Additionally, Angela Carter's novels from her early career (*Shadow Dance*, *Love*, or *Heroes and Villains*) may be analyzed through the lens of the grotesque for a comparison of her adaptation and techniques in utilizing this tradition leading up to her works of wider reputation, such as *Nights at the Circus* or *The Bloody Chamber*. Such an undertaking may suggest further functions of the grotesque in longer fiction and provide further food for thought concerning the use of the grotesque as a critical and subversive tool.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Edgar Allan Poe'nun ve Angela Carter'ın seçili kısa hikayelerinde *grotesk* geleneğin temsilini ve kullanım amaçlarını incelemektir. Bu doğrultuda, Poe'nun "Berenice" ve "Ligeia" hikayeleri ve Carter'ın "Kanlı Oda" ve "Aşk Yuvasının Hanımı" hikayeleri seçilmiş ve fiziksel ve uzamsal imgeler üzerinden yazarların *grotesk* geleneğine yaklaşımları incelenmiştir. *Grotesk* terimi ve edebiyattaki teorik kullanımını tek bir çerçevede incelenecek hikayelere uygulamak, bu hikayelerin analizi ve terimin kökenine uygun olmayacağından, bu çalışma dört farklı yazarın *grotesk* estetiğe yaklaşımını ve kavramsallaştırmasını kullanır. Terimin kökeni İtalyanca *grotta* (mağara) sözcüğüne dayanmaktadır. Robert Duggan *The Grotesque in Contemporary British Fiction* (2013) adlı analizinde groteskin çok katmanlı boyutunu bir göstergeler zinciriyle ortaya koymaktadır: "çirkin, fantastik, …, iğrenç, tekinsiz, canavarca, alçaltıcı, türler arası karma, çılgın, ahlaki olmayan, abartılı ve ürpertici" (13).

Grotesk, marjinal olanla, tuhaf olanla, epistemolojik açıdan şüpheli olanla ve ihlalci olanla cesur karşılaşması aracılığıyla simgesel bir kırılmayı—radikal dönüşümün içkin ve çok katmanlı olanaklarıyla yüzleşmeyi zorunlu kılan bir boşluğu— tetiklemektedir. Terimin tarihi kökenleri, MS 64'teki büyük Roma yangınının ardından inşasına başlanan ve tamamlanamayan Nero'nun sarayı *Domus Aurea* (Altın Saray)'da keşfedilen süslü anlatı sahnelerine ve panoramalara uzanmaktadır. 15. yüzyılda gün yüzüne çıkarılan bu yapının duvar ve tavanlarında kabartmalar, freskler ve dekoratif işlemeler, Rönesans dönemi sanatçılarını ve estetik algılarını etkilemiştir. Freskler, çeşitli süslemeler tasvir etmekteydi: "simetrik anatomik olanaksızlıklardan, küçük hayvanlardan, insan başlarından ve narin, belirsiz bitki figürlerinden" oluşan (Harpham 26) bu figürler gündelik unsurlarla fantastik ve mitolojik figürleri kaynaştırmıştı. Raphael ve Hieronymus Bosch gibi sanatçıları etkileyen bu süslemeler,

dönemin gerçekçilik anlayışıyla zıt olan grotesk motifleri benimseyerek imgelem dolu ve oyunsu eserler ortaya koymuşlardır. Dönemin yaygın estetik anlayışına ve/veya sanatsal geleneklerine aykırı üşen tuhaf süslemeler, groteskin temel bir özelliğini de yansıtmaktadır: geçicilik. Grteskin yıkıcı ve rahatsız edici etkisi, içinde bulunduğu bağlamın uzlaşımlarına ve normlarına dayanmaktadır; önceki grotesk imgeler zamanla evcilleşip beğenilir hale geldiğinde ve artık şaşkınlık ya da rahatsızlık uyandırmadığında, her çağın özgün grotesk imgeler üretmesi olası görünmektedir. Zaman içinde hem kavram hem de terimin kendisi, sanat ve edebiyat alanlarında yerini sağlamlaştırmış; groteski bilinçli bir biçimde ele alan eserlerin ortaya çıkmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Genel kabul gören anlayış, antik ile modern, korkunç ile komik, sıradan ile anormal arasındaki salınımın ortasında konumlanmakta olup çoğunlukla anormalliklerin, yabancılaştırma tekniklerinin ve rahatsızlık unsurlarının bir bileşiminden oluşmaktadır.

Bu çalışma, groteskin tuhaf ve muğlak nitelikleri; aşırılık ve abartı unsurlarına ek olarak, bu çalışmada incelenmek üzere seçilen Poe ve Carter'ın kısa hikayelerine sinmiş durumdadır. Seçilen öykülerdeki uzamsal ve atmosferik unsurları ve karakterleri grotesk penceresiyle ele alacaktır. Öykülerin yazarları, okuyucuların beden, güzellik idealleri, uygun ya da nezaket kurallarına uygun davranış biçimleri ile toplumsal cinsiyet ve normatif davranışlara ilişkin bilgi ve beklentilerini sorgulamakta; böylece grotesk geleneğinin ön plana çıkardığı çatışmayla yüzleşmektedir. Poe ve Carter'ın ve bu dört hikayenin, bu çalışmada incelenme amacı eserlerin kısa hikaye formatında olması ve iki yazarın da bu türün istenilen etkiyi en çarpıcı şekilde yarattığını savunmasıdır. Ayrıca, her iki yazarın da kadın karakterlerine olan tutumlarının bazı çevrelerde kadın düşmanlığı/karşıtlığı olarak yorumlanması ve yazarların seçilmiş eserlerinde grotesk imgelemin yaygın kullanılması, onları bu çalışmada bir araya getirmenin başka sebepleridir. Bu sorgulamanın sonucunda, Poe ve Carter'ın kadın karakterlere yaklaşımının aslında grotesk geleneğin düzen bozucu ve rahatsız edici özelliğini kullanarak feminist bir yaklaşım benimsedikleri savunulmuş ve bu yazarların grotesk öğeleri eleştirel bir amaçla kullanarak kadınların ataerkil toplumlarda önceden belirlenmiş kurguların—cinsiyet, evlilik, aşk— nasıl bir parçası olduğunu okurlarına sunduğu incelenmiştir.

Edgar Allan Poe, 19.yüzyılın ortasında, dişilik, ölüm ve bedensel çözülmeye ilişkin kaygıların Romantik ve proto-Gotik estetik aracılığıyla müzakere edildiği Amerikan bağlamında kaleme almıştır. Angela Carter ise 1960lar sonrası İngiltere'sinde, ikinci dalga feminizmin ve Kıta Avrupası kuramının entelektüel ikliminde yazmıştır. Tehlikeli kadın (*femme fatale*), saplantılı erkek ve çökmekte olan aristokratik mekan gibi aynı yapısal kaygıların bu farklı bağlamlar arasında nasıl dönüştüğünü izlemek, Gotik ve ona sıklıkla eşlik eden grotesk geleneğin tarihsel açıdan duyarlı ve ideolojik açıdan değiştirilebilir bir form tartışma niteliği taşımaktadır.

Grotesk, görsel sanatlardaki mağara resimlerinden doğan mütevazı kökenlerinden edebiyat, felsefe ve kültür teorisine uzanan geniş bir kavramsal yolculuk geçirmiş; bu süreçte biçimsel bir süsleme anlayışından varoluşsal rahatsızlığı ifade eden güçlü bir estetik kategoriye dönüşmüştür. Bu hikayelerin analizi açısından en alakalı eleştirel yaklaşımlara odaklanan bu tez, dört yazarın kuramsal yaklaşımlarından yararlanma ve grotesk teriminin bütünleşik bir tanımını benimseme gerekçelerini ortaya koymuştur. Groteski inceleyen öncü çalışmalardan biri olan Wolfgang Kayser'in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957) adlı eseri, kuramsal iskeletin oluşturulmasında başvurulan ilk kaynak olmuştur. Kayser groteski "yabancılaşmış dünya" (184) olarak öne çıkarır ve yabancılaşmayı (*alienation*) groteskin temel unsurlarından biri olarak belirlemektedir. Grotesk gelenek, okuyucuların eleştirel kavrayışı için korkunç ve rahatsız edici olanı gün yüzüne çıkarmaktadır. Ek olarak, Kayser'in grotesk kuramındaki, "birbirinden ayrı olduğunu bildiğimiz alanların kaynaşması, statik yasanın ortadan kalkması, kimlik kaybı, 'doğal' büyüklük ve biçimin çarpıtılması, nesneler kategorisinin askıya alınması, kişiliğin yok edilmesi ve tarihsel düzenin parçalanması" (185) olarak nitelendiren ifadesi, bu çalışmada benimsenen grotesk anlayışının kuramsal temelini oluşturan önemli dayanak noktasını oluşturmuştur.

Grotesk kavramını kuramsal bir çerçeveye yerleştiren bir diğer teorisyen, Mikhail Bakhtin, 1965 yılında *Rabelais and His World* adlı kitabında 16. Yüzyıl sanatçısı François Rabelais'nın eserini ve karnavalesk dünyasını inceleyerek grotesk gerçekçilik adını koyduğu teorisini öne sürer. Bakhtin grotesk üslubunun temel nitelikleri "mübalağa ve aşırılık" olarak tanımlar (303) ve Rabelais'nın dünyasının, "uygunsuz" şeylere büyüteçle bakma deneyimine benzetir (307). Grotesk imgelemin

bedensel ya da davranışsal olsun, kültürün resmi ve alışagelmiş normlarına karşı tepki vermek için kullanıldığını ileri sürmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın çok katmanlı tanımının tamamlanmasında groteskin ele alındığı üçüncü kuramsal yaklaşım, Mary Russo'nun *The Female Grotesque* (1995) adlı eserinde groteskin görsel ve edebi sanatlara ilişkin önceki çalışmalarını feminist bir perspektiften yeniden ele almasından alınmıştır. Kitabındaki kuram, ataerkil normun dışında konumlanan kadın bedeni ile grotesk kavramını ilişkilendirir ve dişil bedenin direniş kapasitesi ile epistemolojik dönüşüm olasılığına dair görüşleri, bu çalışmanın kuramsal çerçevesine feminist bir bakış açısı kazandırmak açısından belirleyici bir öneme sahip olmuştur. Russo'nun analizi, daha önce Kayser ve Bakhtin'in teorilerinde ele alınmayan, kadınlığın erkek egemen kültürler içinde nasıl üretildiği ve dişil groteskin kadında bedenleşmesine ilişkin normların hiperbolik bir performans ya da çarpıtma yoluyla, inşa edilmiş ve koşullu niteliklerini nasıl açığa çıkardığını savunmaktadır. Russo'nun kuramsal yaklaşımı, kadın bedenin ideolojik ve toplumsal olarak şekillendirilmiş bir alan olduğunu—ayrıca eş zamanlı olarak grotesk bedenleşmeyle birlikte bir direniş alanına dönüşebileceğini—ortaya koymaktadır. Normlara meydan okuma biçiminde tezahür eden bedensel aşırılığı ve melezliği sergileyen çok katmanlı dişil beden; sahte idealizasyona ya da ataerkil bir bedensel varoluş mantığına boyun eğmeye karşı direnç gösterebilir. Russo'nun dişil groteski, "dişil güzellik ideallerini istikrarsızlaştırma ya da arzu mekanizmalarını yeniden düzenleme" ("Carnival" 221) amacıyla kullanılan stratejik bir araç olarak ele alışı, bu çalışmanın temel yönlendirici unsurlarından birini oluşturmuştur.

Bu tezin dördüncü ve son kuramsal dayanağını da Margaret Miles'ın *Carnal Knowing* (1989) adlı çalışması oluşmaktadır. Miles'ın dişil grotesk etrafında geliştirdiği çerçeve, kültür ve toplumun bedenlerle nasıl etkileşime girdiğini, belirli kavramsallaştırmaları nasıl inşa edip sürdürdüğünü ele almaktadır. Kitabında erkek bedeninin norm olarak benimsenmesinin, dişil bedenin özünde grotesk olarak algılanmasının ardındaki nedenlerden biri olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Miles, bu fikirlerin Batı imgelemine yansıyan teolojik yansımalarına odaklanmaktadır. Dişil beden ve özneye ilişkin imgelerdeki tersyüz etme ve melezleştirme, grotesk estetiğin rahatsız edici etkilerini açığa çıkarmakta ve dişil bedenin, özünde herhangi bir

biçimsel bozukluk bulunmaksızın, eş zamanlı olarak hem büyüleyici hem de ürkütücü görünebilme kapasitesinin altını çizmektedir. Miles ve Russo'nun yaklaşımları bir arada ele alındığında, grotesk dişil bedeni hem tarihsel olarak konumlandırmış hem de potansiyel olarak altüst edici bir olgu biçiminde kavramlaştırmaya yönelik birbirini tamamlayan çerçeveler sunduğu görülmektedir.

Değerlendirilen dört farklı grotesk kuramının ve yaklaşımının incelenecek hikayelere uygulanması, bu tezin üçüncü ve dördüncü bölümlerinde sürdürülmüştür. Poe'ya ayrılan kısımda bu tez, yazarın grotesk gelenekle örtüşen imgeleri kullanarak; toplumsal sınırları nasıl aştığını, cinsiyetlere atanan kalıplaşmış belirli düşünce çerçevelerini nasıl ihlal ettiğini ve nihayetinde arzu nesnesinin yüceltilmesinin nasıl şiddet sahnelerine ve vahşi ölümlere yol açtığını öne sürer. Edgar Allan Poe, "Berenice" (1835) hikayesinde, grotesk imgelem ile aşırılık ve abartılı şiddetin kadın bedeni üzerinden yansıtılması; fetiş haline getirilmesi ve estetik idealizasyonun ölümcül sonuçlarını gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu durum, özellikle güvenilmez anlatıcı Egæus aracılığıyla somutlaşmakta; Egæus'un obsesif bakışı, nişanlısı Berenice'i parçalanmış bir nesneye, bir soyut imgeye indirgemektedir. Berenice hastalanır ve Egæus ona evlenme teklif eder. Egæus karakterinin, Berenice'in grotesk ve statik olmayan bedenine sahip olma ve onu denetim ve kontrol altına alma arzusu, erkeğin normatif olmayan beden üzerinde denetim kurma ve güç uygulama dürtüsünü gözler önüne sermektedir. Egæus, Berenice'in katalepsiden dolayı bilinçsiz ancak hayatta olan bedeninden, onun öldüğünü sanıp dişlerini söküp çıkardığı sarsıcı finaliyle birlikte Poe, ataerkil arzunun dişil bedeni nasıl yüceltilmiş bir nesneye dönüştürdüğünü eleştirmek ve bu surette romantik bir bağlılıktan ziyade estetik idealizasyonun özünde barındırdığı şiddeti açığa çıkarmak amacıyla grotesk bedensel vahşeti bir araç olarak kullanmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada incelenen ikinci Poe hikayesi, "Ligeia"'da (1838) ise, yazar, melezlik ve arada-kalmışlık unsurlarını kapsamlı biçimde işlemektedir. "Berenice" hikayesine benzer şekilde, hikayenin anlatıcısı olan Ligeia'nın kocası, ona—özellikle de üstün nitelikler atfettiği fiziksel özelliklerini—sonsuz bir yüceltmeyle adanmıştır ve Ligeia'nın gizemli bir biçimde hastalanıp hayatını kaybetmesiyle birlikte anlatıcının ona duyduğu abartılı bağımlılık daha da derinleştiği gözlemlenir. Güvenilmez anlatıcı,

eşinin ölümünden kısa bir süre sonra, Rowena adında bir başka kadınla ikinci evliliğini yapar ancak evliliklerinin üzerinden çok geçmeden talihsiz Rowena hastalanır. Poe, anlatıcının yeni karısına beslediği yüzeysel bağlılığı ustalıkla aktarırken, hikaye boyunca anlatıcının güvenilmez tarafına—afyon bağımlılığına defalarca vurgu yapmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Poe'nun burada tasarladığı dünyanın ve bu dünyanın sakinlerinin grotesk unsurlar barındırdığını bulmuştur. Söz konusu unsurlar, okuyucuların—ve bizzat da anlatıcının—anlatıya yabancılaşmasına katkıda bulunmakta ve anlatıcının güvenilmezliğini pekiştirmektedir. Ligeia karakteri, kocasını her türlü entelektüel ve felsefi alanda gölgede bırakan bir kadın olarak taşıdığı normatif dışı varoluş göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, onun 19. yüzyılın ideal ev kadını imgesinden uzak kaldığı açıktır. Bunun yanı sıra, ölümünden önce Ligeia'nın aşırı bir yaşam enerjisine sahip olduğu ve irade gücünün eşsiz olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Poe, bu kadın karakterin bu denli eril özelliklerle betimlenmesiyle toplumsal cinsiyet normlarını ve okuyucu beklentilerini alt üst etmektedir. Ligeia'nın ruhu, ölmekte olan Rowena'nın bedenini ele geçirdiği ve onun fiziksel özelliklerini değiştirerek tekrar yaşama geri döndüğü hikaye finalinde, grotesk dişil beden rejeneratif ve en aşırı haliyle karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bakhtinsel groteskte dönüşüm (*metamorphosis*) imgesi ve ikircikli (*ambivalent*), içinde ölümü ve hayatı barındıran, beden ön plandadır (24). "Ligeia" hikayesinin analizi, direnişin ve ataerkil mantığın doğal saydığı olgulara meydan okumanın önemine vurgu yapmak olduğunu göstermiş; groteskin stratejik kullanımı, Poe'nun kadın kahramanının kendisine biçilen sınırları aşmasına ve bu sınırları altüst etmesine olanak tanımaktadır. Ligeia, yaşam ve ölüm etrafında şekillenen beklentileri allak bullak ederek, nihai yeniden dirilişiyle klasik beden ile grotesk beden arasındaki normatif sınırlara meydan okumaktadır.

Poe'nun incelenen iki öyküsünde de Poe'nun kendi bağlamında kabul gören ideal eş/dişil beden imgelerini yalnızca dramatize ettiği ve Joan Dayan'ın tartıştığı gibi, bunu "idealizasyonun tüm işaretlerini açığa çıkarmak ve altüst etmek" ("Feminist" 9) amacıyla yaptığı görüşündedir. Bu tez, Poe'nun kadın karakterlerinin dayanıklılığını vurguladığı ve bedenlerinin ataerkil mantığa karşı koyduğunu bulunmuştur. Poe'nun grotesk unsurları dişil beden ve kimliğe ilişkin normları ve idealizasyonları eleştirme amacıyla nasıl stratejik bir araç olarak kullandığını inceleyen bu çalışma, bu doğrultuda Poe'nun kadın karakterlerinin, içinde yazıldığı dönemin eğilimlerinin

aksine, eleştirel bir amaçla şiddet ve ölüm gibi temalara maruz bırakıldığını gözlemlemiştir. 19. yüzyılda yazılmasına rağmen, Poe'nun kısa hikayeleri, ataerkil bir toplumda kadınların özgürleşmesini ve kurallara uymama eğilimini onaylamakta ve günümüz feminist görüşlerini destekler nitelikte bir tutum sergilemektedir. "Berenice" ve "Ligeia" hikâyeleri, evlilik ve romantik ilişkilere odaklanmaları ile aşırı şiddet unsurunu kadın bedeni merkeze alarak işlemeleri nedeniyle bilinçli olarak seçilmiştir; bu özellikler, Poe'nun kendi döneminin hassas konularına yönelik eleştirel yaklaşımını ve kadınların ataerkil idealizasyonu ile soyutlanmasına duyduğu rahatsızlığı gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu çalışma, Poe'nun eserlerinde sıklıkla başvurduğu şiddet, kan ve yoğun gerilim unsurlarının, dişil bedenlere yönelen ölüm ve vahşi saldırganlığın bir fetişleştirmesi ya da yüceltilmesi olmadığını; aksine döneminin yaygın toplumsal perspektiflerine ve normlarına yönelik ince fakat keskin bir eleştiriyi aktarmayı amaçlayan sarsıcı ve altüst edici bir strateji olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Angela Carter'ın *Kanlı Oda (The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* 1979) adlı hikaye derlemesi, yazarın tanıdık peri masallarını yeniden ele alarak ideolojik etkilerini ortaya çıkarma ve yıkma girişimidir. Carter feminist ve postmodern kuramlar bilinci ve etkisiyle ünlü mit ve peri masallarını kendi yorumlamasıyla okuyuculara sunmuş, eleştirmenlerden karışık yorumlar toplamıştır. Koleksiyondan seçilen "Kanlı Oda" ve "Aşk Yuvasının Hanımı" (*The Lady of the House of Love*) hikâyeleri, dişil bedenleri grotesk estetik çerçevesinde merkeze almaları ve yoruma açık doğaları nedeniyle bu çalışmada inceleme kapsamına alınmıştır. Mitler ve efsaneler, peri masalı mekanları ve kalıplaşmış karakterler ilk bakışta gerçekdışı bir izlenim bırakıyor olsa da bunlar, gündelik dünyanın ifade biçimlerini ve karakterizasyonunu en yetkin biçimde kapsayan unsurlardır. İlk hikayenin odağında Mavisakal (*Bluebeard*) efsanesinden etkilenen Markiz (*the Marquis*) karakteri ve yeni evlendiği genç kız olmakta ve bu karakterlerin ilişkileri Carter'ın feminist projesine verimli bir zemin sağlamaktadır. Yazar, peri masallarına işlenmiş ataerkil mitleri—özellikle de kadınlık, arzu, evlilik ve iktidar etrafında inşa edilmiş yapıları—çözümleyerek analiz etme amacıyla groteski eleştirel bir strateji olarak kullanmaktadır. "Kanlı Oda" hikayesinde genç kızın yeni evliliğinde ve evinde farklı grotesk imgelerle karşılaşması onu bir öz keşif yolculuğuna iteler. Hikayenin başlarında, ilişkilerindeki yaş ve deneyim farkından ilk başta rahatsız olmayan genç kız, Markiz'e çelişkili duygular besler. Grotesk abartı, hibrit ve çetrefilli

elementler bu geleneğin ana temsil yollarından olduğu bu çalışmada önceden de belirtilmişti. Markiz'in kalesi, amfibik bir mekân olarak, genç gelinin belirsizlik ve arada-kalmışlık (*ambivalence*) durumunu simgelemesi bakımından ele alınmıştır. Aynalarla kaplı gelin/yatak odası ise okuyuculara genç kızın kimliğinin parçalanmasının somutlaştırılmış bir yansımasını sunmakta; onu Markiz'in bakışına sunulmak üzere çoğaltılmış bir nesneye dönüştürmektedir. Genç kızda hem uyarılma hem de iğrenme gibi zıt duyguları uyandıran Markiz karakteri, Carter'ın titizlikle seçilmiş grotesk imgeleri ile bir insandan çok hayvanı andırır.

Markiz'in onu bir süre yalnız bırakmasıyla, genç kız girmemesi tembihlenen odaya girer ve Markiz'in önceki eşlerini acımasızca öldürdüğünü ve onları sanatsal bir nesne gibi sergilediğini keşfeder. Duvardan sarkan parçalar, yerdeki kan gölleri ve mumyalanmış kadın bedenleri, okuyuculara korkutucu bir sahne sunar. Markiz, ataerkil kültürün örtük biçimde yaptığını açıkça hayata geçirmektedir: dişil bedenleri satın almakta, onlara sahip olmakta, estetize etmekte ve nihayetinde yok etmektedir. Kanlı odanın içinde, vahşice öldürülmüş eski eşlerin grotesk üslupla tasvirleri, ataerkinin karanlık tarafını, röntgenci (*voyeuristic*) ve insanlıktan çıkarıcı bakışına işlemiş olan şiddeti açığa çıkarmaktadır. Markiz karakterinde, hazcılığın (*hedonism*) ve şiddetin vücut bulmuş temsilini gözler önüne sunan Carter, Markiz'in asıl arzusunun gelinini bir birey olarak değil, sergilenmek üzere ortaya konan bir et parçasına, metaya ya da sanat nesnesine indirgemek olduğunu gösterir. Hikayenin sonunda annesi tarafında Markiz tarafından öldürülmekten kurtulan genç kız, karmaşık dişil arzunun ve grotesk belirsizliğin bir temsilcisi olarak hayatına devam eder. Nihayetinde, Carter'ın mitlerin dişil arzuyu nasıl disipline ettiğini ve aşırı ve grotesk kadın bedenini nasıl denetim altında tutmaya çalıştığını sorgulaması, Mavisakal efsanesini "Kanlı Oda" olarak yeniden yazımıyla ataerkil anlatılara yönelik bir eleştiri yönlendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın son bölümünde ise Angela Carter'ın kadın karakter ve bedeni üzerinden melez ve sınır-aşan grotesk temsiller açısından incelenen "Aşk Yuvasının Hanımı" ("The Lady of the House of Love" 1979) bulunmaktadır. Bu hikayede Carter cinsiyet ve kadınlığa ilişkin normları sorgulamasında, yaşam ve ölüm arasında kalmış olan vampir motifini Kontes karakterinde somutlaştırmıştır. Grotesk imgeler—bahçede

ölülerin kanından beslenip coşan güller, küflü odalar, kan izleri ve hayvan kalıntıları—yaşam ile ölüm ve doğal ile doğaüstü arasındaki sınırı muğlaklaştıran maddi göstergeler olarak işlev görür. "Aşk Yuvasının Hanımı" klasik vampir anlatısını feminist bir demontaj pratiğine tabi tutarak grotesk geleneği siyasi bir dile dönüştürür. Vampir Kontes, bir kan emici olarak avlanır, bir kedi gibi avını yakalayıp parçaladığı anlarda, insan ve hayvan arasındaki eşiği okuyuculara sorgulatır. Kontes, kendi doğasının aksine bir vampir olmaktan ve hayatta kalmak için insanları ve/ya hayvanları avlamaktan yakınmakta, farklı bir yaşam biçimine arzu duyar. Bu arzusu, bir gün kalesine yolu düşen genç bir adamla gerçeğe dönüşür. Bu genç adam, Aydınlanma fikirlerinin ayaklı temsilcisi gibi Kontes'in evine misafir/akşam yemeği olarak davet edilir ve olağanüstü ve mitolojik bu atmosferde hiç rahatsızlık çekmeden, gördüklerini rasyonalite ile meşrulaştırır. Geleneksel Gotik hikayelerde tehlikede olan deneyimsiz genç kız motifi, Carter'ın sınırları alt üst etmesiyle, bu genç adamda simgesel bir kırılma olarak temsil bulur. Kontes'in bedeni Bakhtinsel groteskin beden bulmuş hali gibidir; genç adam onun fiziksel özelliklerini hem iğrendirici hem de garip bir şekilde çekici bulur. Russo'nun, dişil groteskin kadın güzelliğine ilişkin idealleri istikrarsızlaştırabileceği yönündeki argümanıyla ("Carnival" 221) örtüşür biçimde; Kontes, kanla lekelenmiş elbiseleri ve tırnakları altındaki et kalıntılarıyla birlikte, hikayedeki genç adamın gözünde hala aşırı ve eterik bir güzelliğe sahip olmaya devam etmektedir. Kontes'in yıkım ve çürüme içindeki odasını, gün ışığına hassasiyeti önleyen gözlüğünü ve genç yaşına rağmen tenha ve yabani bir hayat sürdürmesini kendince nedenlerle açıklayıp mantık çerçevesine oturtan genç adam, Kontes'in akşam yemeğine dönüşmekten son anda kurtulur. Bir robot ya da tiyatro karakteri gibi yüzyıllık, mekanik kurban etme rutini, gözlüklerini düşürüp kırmasıyla bozulan Kontes, kanayan parmağını öpmesiyle bu genç adama aşık olur. Carter'ın bu iki karakterin tuhaf ve rahatsız edici çekimini işlerken, sınırları aşan (*transgression*) bir tutum izler ve grotesk imgeler karakterler ve atmosferle ilgili okuyucuları eleştirel bir noktaya getirmeye hazırlar. Hikayenin sonunda Kontes, aşktan ve/ya insana dönüşmesinden dolayı ölür. Genç adam ise zarar görmeden bu tuhaf kaleden ayrılıp yoluna devam eder. Ancak adamın asker olduğu ve birliğinin yakında Fransa'ya gideceği bilgisini veren anlatıcı, onun yakında cephede öleceğini de işaret eder. Carter, grotesk unsurları yalnızca estetik efekt için değil; toplumsal cinsiyet, iktidar ve bedenin normatif sınırlarının sorgulanması için bilinçli olarak araçsallaştırır.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma grotesk imgelerin, Edgar Allan Poe'nun ve Angela Carter'ın seçili hikayelerinde dişilik etrafında şekillenen normlara yönelik eleştirel bir araç olarak kullandığını savunmuştur. Kendi zamanlarında kadın düşmanlığı iddialarıyla yazdıkları kısa hikayelerin eleştiri gördüğü bu yazarların seçili hikayeleri incelendiğinde, Poe ve Carter'ın aslında kendi bağlamlarında yarattıkları dişil grotesk imgeler ile, var olan cinsiyetlendirilmiş bazı pozisyonları (ideal kadın, rasyonel erkek) alt üst ederek, aşırı ve sınır tanımız karakterleriyle ölüm ve yaşam, sevgi ve nefret, av ve avcı arasındaki ince çizgiyi ön plana çıkarmayı çabalamışlardır.

Grotesk geleneği, izleyicisine karşı konumlandırılan simgesel bir güç doğurmaktadır. Bu durum, çok katmanlı olmasa bile en az iki düzeyli bir temsil biçimiyle sonuçlanmakta; izleyici çelişkiler, tersine çevirmeler, aşırılıklar, çift değerlilikler ve taşkın unsurlarla yüzleşmek zorunda kalmaktadır. Poe'nun "Berenice" ve "Ligeia" hikayelerinde ve Carter'ın "Kanlı Oda" ve "Aşk Yuvasının Hanımı" hikayelerinde, kadın karakterlerinde melez (*hybrid*), ihlalci ve eşiksel (*liminal*) temsiller ortaya koymaktadır. Poe grotesk aşırılığı, estetik idealizasyonun ve fetişizmin yıkıcı etkilerini gözler önüne sermek amacıyla kullanırken; Carter'ın hikayeleri bu eleştiriyi ironi, şehvet ve yıkıcı yineleme aracılığıyla genişleterek peri masalı türünde var olan geleneksel kadınlık tasavvurlarını ifşa edip, yalın halleriyle gözler önüne sürer. Bedenlerin nasıl tasvir edildiği, parçalandığı, bakışa maruz bırakıldığı, tüketildiği ve susturulduğu ya da ses kazandırıldığı; Poe ve Carter'ın grotesk imgelem kullanımıyla inşa ettikleri anlatı yapılarından ayrı düşünülemez. Grotesk üslup, bu metinlerde bir kırılma, bir boşluk yaratmakta; bu boşluk, yazarlara ya da okuyuculara anlam üretme ve sunulan özneye ya da bedenlere eleştirel bir perspektiften yaklaşma yönünde güçlü bir dürtü sağlamaktadır. Grotesk gelenek, sabitliği ve klasik estetiği bilinçli olarak reddederek ve romantik aşk ile evlilik etrafında örülü geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini ve ataerkil iktidar yapılarını sorgulayarak okuyuculara, belirli egemen ideolojilerin dişil ya da ihlalci bedenler üzerinde nasıl şiddet ve denetim uyguladığına dair eleştirel bir kavrayış sunmuştur.

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A Consideration of Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice" And "Ligeia" and Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Lady of the House of Love" through the Lens of the Grotesque

TEZİN TÜRÜ / DEGREE: **Yüksek Lisans** / Master ☒ **Doktora** / PhD ☐

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