



**Masculine behavior in *The Bloody Chamber*
[Angela Carter, 1979] and *The Orphan* [Amelia
Opie, 1806], instructional writing for male readers
and its morally didactic purpose**

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Introduction

Gothic fairytales and moral tales may not be strikingly similar when it comes to narration, purpose, or writing style, in the same way as Angela Carters *The Bloody Chamber* may not be the most obvious piece of literature to compare with Amelia Opie's *The Orphan* as they belong to different genres and are written in different centuries. However, these stories have interesting similarities and displays a variety of different attitudes towards both the characters behavior and morality. In addition, *The Orphan* as a piece of moral fiction, has an instructional purpose for its female readers, primarily to implement "good morals", with an aim to educate (Killick, 2008, p.84). A common critical approach to *The Orphan* has therefore often been to label it as an instructional tale for female readers. In *The Bloody Chamber*, the main character is a female. Both of the stories are in this sense highly relevant in terms of the female characters morality and behavior. However, I will give my own take on the didactic purpose of masculine moral and behavior throughout this paper by conducting new reading on the chosen texts and see why it can be relevant to search the stories for a "moral message", which potentially adds an instructional purpose for male readers as well as for female ones. This is not a highly researched subject and is therefore not written too much about, resulting in a limited number of sources to draw upon. However, I will apply the sources and research that I have available as an extension to this papers subject. Both stories have a register of different male characters who also play significant roles throughout the tales acting as a counterpart to the heroine of the stories. Through examples of the male characters in *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Orphan*, I will emphasize the male characters characteristics, attitude, and appearance. This again, will reflect my argument of how different behaviors and morals are connected to the male participants in the stories as well, making them perhaps indirectly just as important for the narrative as the female characters in terms of exploring the didactic purpose for male readers. Throughout this paper, I will also explore if the chosen texts display aspects of gender as something contrary in the societies they were written in, which different traits that can be found in the portrayal of masculine morals throughout *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Orphan* compared to what is displayed in female characters, and how this is exemplified through their behavior.

Didactic Literature

“Didactic”, or “Moral tale-fiction” as a genre has always had a presence in literature as “[...] Stories with moralistic or didactic intentions constitute a genre that is as old as any in the history of literature.” (Killick, 2008, p. 73). Literature with a didactic purpose can be found “[...] From the earliest parables, fables, and exemplars” (Killick, 2008, p. 73). These kinds of stories have “[...] narratives designed to convey instruction at the same time as they entertain and amuse”, and “[...] have remained a staple educational tool right up to the present day” with as purpose of educating or implement a set of moral code to help shape the readers behavior and values (Killick, 2008, p. 73-74). In the early 19th century “[...] [t]he popularity of both the didactic tale and the regional tale grew out of wider literary trends”, in which the didactic and moral tales concerned themes such as manners, family lives, and domestic manoeuvres trough authors such as Amelia Opie who increased in popularity through her writing of moral tales during the early 19th century (Killick, 2008, pp.73, 82). Most of the authors who wrote about moral tales and didactic literature were women, and it represented a literary landscape in which they were able to “[...] construct a new identity for themselves, a space distinct from, though not necessarily acting in opposition to, the male-dominated public sphere” (Killick, 2008, p.74). However, as discussed in the paragraph above, throughout this paper I will research to which extent the chosen literary works *The Orphan* and *The Bloody Chamber* can serve a purpose as this fiction can prove to have a didactic purpose for male readers as well.

Storytelling, may it be fairytales or instructional tales, is as described in *Studying the Novel* by Jeremy Hawthorn “[...] so central to our culture that we pay it little analytical attention”, as everyone reads or absorbs it one way or another throughout childhood, school, or everyday life (2017, p.1). Telling or reading written stories can give those who listen to and read them insight in historical events, traditions, and important reflections (Hawthorn, 2017, pp.2-3). Literature in form of fiction, is something all humans have encountered, and as “[...] fiction seems to be universally present in the lives of all human beings, it nevertheless assumes different forms in different ages and different societies” (Hawthorn, 2017, p.2). Literature has changed throughout history, as Hawthorn states, in the same way as the society in which it is written does.

Oppositional Gender-Roles, Contextual Background, and a Historical Overview of How Characters Reflect Societal and Political Contexts in Terms of Male Hero as a Counterpart to the Female Heroine

Based on the notion that literature changes together with the society the author originates from, it can be assumed that *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Orphan* also to some extent mirror societal views on gender. *The Bloody chamber* may at first glance look like a traditional, conservative portrayal of gender-roles. However, even with a lot of similarities with the original fairytale *Bluebeard*, which it is based on, there has been made some significant changes. Even though it starts of as a portrayal of a marriage with a strong male dominating part, this changes drastically towards the end of the story. To begin with, there is a strong imbalance within the marriage as the husband is an oppressive middle-aged businessman who is married to a young girl from a poor family. The young girl is early on isolated and stationed in a gigantic French castle while the husband works. As the story culminates into its climax as the husband is about to kill his newlywed wife, the mother of the girl comes riding in on a noble steed and kills the evil husband. This rewriting of the traditional fairytale *Bluebeard* empowers the women of the story as “[...] Angela Carter reappropriates the consolatory mechanisms of the traditional fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* stories and reconstructs the conventions governing a certain social behavior for women” (Özüm, 2011, p.109). This rewriting of the fairytale may suggest that Carter, in likes with the society she wrote in, was more aware, and critical of traditional and outdated gender roles as the 1970’s was a decade which saw women fighting for equality (Dow, 2014, pp.4-5). This in not unlikely to have shaped Carters gothic fairytale by creating “[...] new cultural and literary realities in which sexuality and free will in women replace the patriarchal traits” previously associated with traditional fairytales (Özüm, 2011, p.109). Angela Carter’s approach in *The Bloody Chamber* depicts the husband as a male antagonist. This leaves an impression which can be seen to represent the masculine as something to be defeated in order for women to gain liberty, creating a starch contrast between the feminine and masculine characters. In the case of *The Bloody Chamber*, the toxic masculinity of the husband is emphasized through an oppressing marriage. The most prominent male character, the reckless husband Marquis is predatory, cold blooded and “[...] evil [,] which is closely linked with masculinity and patriarchal values and norms” (Özüm, 2011, p.109). The evil masculinity can only be “defeated” by its own cunningness, violence, and force, something the heroine’s mother ruthlessly uses when killing

off the Marquis and saving the heroine.

Even though there is a clear contrast between Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and Amelia Opie's *The Orphan*, I think both texts are presenting oppositional gender roles, each in their own way, as they both can be interpreted as a means to direct criticism towards the consequences a rigid set of gender roles leads to. Carter draws the critique of gender roles to the "extreme", in an explicit way by parodying the original fairytale and certain traits of the romance fiction genre, as she in the end of the tale switches the traditional "distribution of power" between male and female. Whether Amelia Opie's goal is to criticize the conventional gender roles through her moral fiction tales, is something I find hard to determine. Nevertheless, despite the contrasts between the two stories, I will argue that it is possible to find a critique of the masculine oppression of the female, which creates a didactic purpose for the male reader by displaying how conservative and old-fashioned gender roles leads to unequal opportunities for self-realization, creates dependency and as the case is in *The Orphan*, hurts Jane and causes her to be emotionally neglected.

In Amelia Opie's *The Orphan*, the male characterization is depicted quite differently, as it also is a product of an author writing in a society with different associations to gender, given that it was published in 1806. In *The Orphan*, a young girl named Jane is adopted by a married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hanbury. She is described as truly feminine, and she has a several talents and skills. On pages 213-214, Jane proclaims she can draw, paint, sing, talk French, and embroider (Opie, 1806). However, these skills are not given much attention throughout the tale after the young male student "Mr. Douglas" is introduced. Mr. Douglas is an extremely devoted student and is described as a man "[...] whose feelings were completely absorbed in an ardent passion for study, and whose warmest ambition was to excel both as a mathematician and a metaphysician" (Opie, 1806, p.224). While Jane over time develops a romantic devotion towards Douglas, he continues to care for nothing other than his academical ambitions. Douglas is portrayed as a rather unromantic character, but nonetheless rational in the sense that he is pragmatic and does not get tempted to pursue any "unvirtuous feelings". Jane on the other hand is portrayed as "weak" in the sense that she lets her feelings get the better of her as she "[...] embrace[s] hopeless passions, no matter how worthy the object" (King, 2014, p.74).

Douglas is also continuously going back and forth from university and to Mr. and Mrs. Hanbury, exemplifying his independency. In addition to coming and going as he likes; he talks about how he wants "[...] to travel over Greece, and, indeed, over every part of Europe, and great part of Asia, as soon as he had taken his long-expected degree, and had possession

of his fortune” (Opie, 1806, p.266). I will argue that the behavior of Douglas has certain idealized traits, however, it is also at the same time neglectful on behalf of Jane and her emotional well-being. It is idealized in the sense that he is well educated and hard-working, however he is insensitive and distant, ego-centric, and lets his own ambitions affect Jane in a way which proves to be fatal in the end, as his neglectful behavior drains her will of life. Jane describes how Douglas’s lack of affection and masculine arrogance is hurting her in “[...] The first poem [as it] opens “Not one kind look—one friendly word!” and closes with Jane’s sense that her “timid, hopeless passion” bids her heart “silence keep, and break.”” (King, 2014, p.73). This again causes Douglas to react on his own behavior as he exclaims “[...] What a monster I was to be blind and insensible to so true and delicate an attachment!” (King, 2014, p.73).

In contrast to the heroine in *The Bloody Chamber*, Jane is mostly at home waiting for Douglas to return from school, as she longs for his attention, and dreams of him return her passion for him. Over time as this does not happen, she is destroyed by grief, portraying her as irrational. *The Orphan* is traditionally seen to portray the dynamics between the male and female characters in a conservative way, taking the examples above in to consideration as it does portray the masculine as a counterpart to the feminine with an emphasis on the rational vs the irrational, the domestic bound Jane and the free, independent, Douglas. *The Orphan* is also written in 19th century, a period of time when this traditional views on gender roles were not unusual, however also challenged by the rising feminist movement of the time. The early 19th century was an interesting time in gender politics, as it was a time with a backlash to feminism as the French Revolution’s outbreak in 1789 carried with it the “[...] eloquent claims that the “rights of man” included women as well” (Kent, 2001, p.115). The French revolution led to repercussions also in Britain the following years, as radicalism grew stronger. As a response to this, the moral tale fiction genre rose in popularity, as it was seen as a preventive measure against the threat of radicalism in a time where the “[...] revolutionary wars in Europe had left many in Britain concerned about the possibilities of civil disorder in their own country” (Killick, 2008, p.75).

Close Reading and Remarks

Amelia Opie is traditionally viewed as a conservative author, and as discussed through this paper, *The Orphan* can at first glance look like a text advocating for a traditional view on gender-based behavior and roles. However, throughout my critical reading of *The Orphan* I will highlight how the conservatism of Opie's fiction can be debated as a critique of the male behavior and moral can be found in the story as well as the moralist approach to female behavior, which is more explicitly portrayed. I think that both of the chosen texts, *The Orphan* and *The Bloody Chamber*, presents opposing gender roles, however in slightly different ways. Even though Opie's moral tales are being classified as "didactic fiction", I think one can argue that a didactic purpose for male readers is present in both *The Orphan* and *The Bloody Chamber* if reading between the lines of the narratives. I will also argue that Amelia Opie arguably has a more critical view of gendered behavior than she explicitly expresses through her literary work. By interpreting *The Orphan* through a modern point of view, it is possible to sense a more critical attitude to the masculine behavior through Jane's male counterpart Douglas. As I am going to discuss further down in this paper, Douglas, despite his positive qualities, displays a toxic masculine arrogance which leads to a neglectful and insensitive behavior in interpersonal interactions.

Throughout *The Orphan*, Amelia Opie presents opposed gender roles through her characterization of the heroine Jane and Douglas. As Jane under the circumstances and the expectations of her surroundings is unable to pursue her own talents such as speaking French and painting, I will argue that *The Orphan* displays a critique of the idealized gender roles. While Douglas is able to devote himself to academics, Jane is set inside the house to chase after hopeless romantic dreams, which only causes her misery. It can also be interpreted as a critique of the arrogant and neglectful mindset of Douglas towards Jane, as he only seems to care about himself, and is incapable to reciprocate any of the attention he is given. However, *The Orphan* also criticizes Jane's inability to act or do anything to break out of the role she is given. While Carter writes about rebellion against the idealized gender roles, the heroine in *The Orphan* is unable to actively go after Douglas in an attempt to spark a romance between them, in the same way she is unable to demand or fight for her own self-preservation as she "accepts" the role she is given, and thus let herself become a victim of her own feelings of unreciprocated love.

Male Behavior, Moral and its Instructional Effect on Male Readers Throughout *The Orphan* and *The Bloody Chamber*

In *The Orphan* it is, as exemplified through Douglas, a clear connection between the emotional aspect of the character and its behavior. Douglas's rational mindset seems to make him less susceptible for romantic affection. However, as he finds out that Jane's sickness is a result of her broken heart, he shows sympathy and is willing to sacrifice his own dreams of travelling in order to save her. Even though this is a heroic action done by Douglas, I will argue that it is not necessarily an act of kindness originated from his pure values and a superior set of morals. In a critical reading of his behaviour in this specific situation, I will argue that a less egoistic behaviour from Douglas from an earlier stage could have prevented the situation to take place. When he at the end realizes how his behaviour has caused Jane to fall sick, he decides to take on a role as a saviour. This can be seen as an action caused by a masculine hero-complex, which in the end only escalates the situation, culminating in the tragic death of Jane. To further build on this argument I will pull fourth some aspects Tim Killick points out in his book "*British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Rise of the Tale*" (2008). Killick points out how recurrent "[...] themes in Opie's tales, such as the dangers of the abuse of power, the necessity of self-control" are worth taking into consideration when discussing morality and behavior (2008, p.83). While the critique of Jane's behavior could be coined on her lack of self-control over her emotional attachment towards Douglas, I argue that Douglas's behavior represents the aspect concerning dangers connected to the abuse of power. In *The Orphan*, I will argue that there is an uneven distribution of power between the male and the female counterparts Jane and Douglas. Not only does Douglas have more freedom and is way more individual in comparison to Jane. He also has an emotional advantage as Jane's feelings towards him, as they amplify the already uneven balance of power. Also, Douglas's behavior throughout the tale appears ignorant, as he is unable to perceive how his own actions influences Jane's well-being as he treats this aspect of interpersonal relationship between the two with a lack of awareness.

I would say that a clear didactic element for male readers in Amelia Opie's *The Orphan*, is how it in all situations where power is involved, for example the power to influence other persons life's, there follows a moral responsibility. This responsibility is something Douglas fails to treat in a sensible way, as he lets his own arrogance, egoism, and masculine urge to be a hero leads to the abuse of an emotionally vulnerable person. It is also worth to mention that even though he is portrayed as a rational counterpart to Jane, he still

fails to tackle the interpersonal complexity of the situation in a rational way in which could have saved both of them from tragedy. Previously, I have also discussed the didactic value for the male reader by considering how the conservative and old-fashioned gender roles leads to inequality, creates dependency, halts opportunities of self-realization, and causes Jane to become emotionally neglected. Taking this into account, there is certainly an instructional effect to *The Orphan* on male readers as well as to the traditionally agreed didactic purpose to young females.

Angela Carters *The Bloody Chamber* is not classified as a moral fiction tale, but as a roman gothic fairytale. Roman gothic fairytales are not widely associated with its instructional or didactic purposes. However, through the displayed morals and behavior of the masculine counterpart of the heroine in the fairytale, the Marquise, I will argue that there are highlighted a critique of idealized masculine traits. By idealized masculine traits, I refer to the characteristics, both good and bad, traditionally associated to the masculine. The masculine traits are also put in contrast to the female representation in *The Bloody Chamber*, as this breaks with the stereotypical and conservative gender roles. In comparison to *The Orphan*, *The Bloody Chamber* has a different dynamic between the masculine and the feminine as the female heroine in *The Bloody Chamber* has a much bigger sense of individuality compared to Jane. The behavior of the male antagonist in *The Bloody Chamber* is throughout the whole story is objectifying and predatory. In comparison to Douglas, the Marquise appears cunning and calculating, while Douglas's behavior, as discussed above, arguably stems from a masculine arrogance and ignorance. The way the Marquise objectifies his substantially younger wife, and thereby expresses his desire for dominance over the female, is symbolized through the "wedding gift" which he gives his wife. The wedding gift is as described in the book "[...] clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat." (Carter, 1979, p.11). His predatory behavior and sense of ownership is described further on page 11 as the heroine describes how she "[...] saw him watching [her] 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" (Carter, 1979). Nevertheless, I will argue that the Marquise never attains the authority and ownership he tries to establish, as the heroine throughout the story displays a self-awareness of her own situation and choices. Even though she is married into a domestic and solitary life, going into marriage with uneven dynamics of power, she appears to have thought it through as she is not afraid of her new husband. As this chosen paragraph from *The Bloody Chamber* displays, the heroine has clear and reflected thoughts of the marriage she is about to enter; "[...] Into marriage, into

exile; I sensed it, I knew it - that, henceforth, I would always be lonely. Yet that was part of the already familiar weight of the fire opal that glimmered like a gypsy's magic ball” (Carter, 1979, p.12).

Through my critical reading of *The Bloody Chamber*, I have emphasized how Angela Carter in comparison to Amelia Opie’s *The Orphan*, in a more explicit way, criticizes male behavior and oppositional gender roles by turning upside down on the traditional ending on a well-known fairytale. This creates in my opinion an instructional purpose in the *Bloody Chamber* for its male readers. The didactic function of *The Bloody Chamber* is present, as Angela Carter brings forth a moral message by representing “[...] not only femininity, but gender relations as” well by bringing forth the importance of gender equality (Macsiuniuc, 2015, p.90). The behavior of the Marquise symbolizes gender-based stereotypes which Carter arguably wants to oppose through her representation of female rebellion against the “tyranny” of an inequal and oppressive marriage. The didactic purpose for male readers is amplified by switching around the outcome of the fairytale, as Carter challenges the traditional roles of the masculine hero and the helpless female heroine. When the evil husband gets shot by the savior mother, this lets the heroine of the story take control over the big house and the huge fortune of money left behind, providing justice for herself and the former murdered brides. In addition, she gets to marry the blind piano boy, a decision on her own terms. By giving a female character the opportunity to act as the savior and take control of their own life and sexuality by breaking out of the oppression of toxic masculinity, Carter in my opinion advocates for male awareness of the female right for equality and ability to possess the same characteristics associated to the masculine in literary and cultural contexts. The extermination of the Marquise breaks the expected gender-based pattern and launches an “attack” onto patriarchal structures both in the domestic sphere and the modern society.

Conclusion

As discussed in this paper, there could be argued that both *The Orphan* and *The Bloody Chamber* can serve a didactic and instructional purpose in form of a message based on morality and behavior. Both stories depict different characterizations of gender and behavior, and in different ways exemplifies how traditional dynamics between genders in their own ways can be criticized. I have also pointed out how both authors in different ways criticizes traditional and conservative gender-roles through their display of the oppositional gender-roles, with the female heroine and the male “hero” characters as counterparts to each other according to my critical reading and interpretation. I have also analyzed how different traits of the characters, and how their behavior in the stories symbolizes different aspects and messages. To give my point a broader contextual background, I have looked into the how characters reflect societal and political contexts in the times the two stories were written, the value of storytelling, feminism of the 19th century, and a look into the background and purpose of the didactic literature. To round off the main part, I finished my argument by discussing the male of behavior, moral and the instructional effect on male readers throughout *The Orphan* and *The Bloody Chamber* in light of different examples picked from the respective literary works. Although didactic literature mostly was written for women during the 19th century, as shown by this paper it is possible to interpret an instructional purpose for male readers as well in Amelia Opie’s *The Orphan*. As shown in this paper, by highlighting positive and negative characteristics related to masculine behavior and morality, *The Orphan* raises a critique of how masculine behavior can be neglectful and oppressing towards women. Although *The Bloody chamber* is not written as a didactic tale, and is written in another period of time, and in an increasingly modern society, there is arguably a moral message based on behavior and gender roles. By comparing *The Orphan* and *The Bloody Chamber* I have tried to highlight how both these texts direct criticism towards a rigid set of gender roles, and by displaying its potential consequences as they challenge traditional gender roles in society and in literature.

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