



Variations in the representation
of masculinity in “The Bloody
Chamber” (1979) by Angela
Carter and “The Orphan”
(1806) by Amelia Opie

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Introduction

“Telling stories” is an activity that is so central to our culture [...] we learn not just between true and untrue but also between different sorts of untrue reports – “lies” and “stories,” for example” (Hawthorn, 2017, pp. 1-2). The art of storytelling creates endless possibilities, as stories often seeks to express a certain meaning, or create entertainment for those interested. In this case, I will examine two tales, published in different decades. To be more specific, this text will examine the “masculine representations” in both “The Bloody Chamber”, written by Angela Carter in 1979, as well as *The Orphan*, written by Amelia Opie in 1806. Furthermore, overall topic in which I will examine is the masculine representation in both of the texts, which will be defined by the way in which masculinity is represented, especially through the characteristics and behavior of the masculine characters in the different stories. This paper will focus on each of the most prominent masculine representations throughout each text, which is the Marquis in “The Bloody Chamber” and Douglas in *The Orphan*. However, to fully examine the role and extent of the masculine representations, it will also be highlighted through other characters as well.

As there is a limited amount of literature on this topic from before, I found it extremely interesting to take an innovative approach and examine already well-known literature in a different manner to those published previously. Both Opie and Carter’s tales have been analyzed in the same manner before, but these critics have predominantly focused on the feminine aspect in both texts. Instead, I want to build on their critics, and examine how the masculine representations creates other interesting aspects to consider when working with these literary works. This paper will firstly examine the overall characteristics and the relevance of the masculine representation(s) of Angela Carters “The Bloody Chamber”, before subsequently doing the same with Amelia Opie’s *The Oprhan*.

The masculine representation in “The Bloody Chamber” (1979)

The Marquis, which is one of very few masculine characters in this story, is introduced by the heroine as a mystical character. The first concrete description the reader gets of the Marquis, is of his face: “there were streaks of pure silver in his dark mane. But his strange, heavy, almost waxen face was not lined by experience” (Carter, 2006, p. 7). Furthermore, the same passage describes the way in which his face almost seems like a mask, as his face continues to disturb her without even blinking. The heroine is in this case feeling monitored by the Marquis, as she is constantly being watched and observed: “I felt a certain tension in the pit of my stomach, to be so watched, in such silence” (Carter, 2006, p. 12). Even though the Heroine may seem discomforted at first, her naivety towards the marriage of the Marquis is further emphasized later in the passage, as his behavior is of consequence of loving desire: “Oh! how he must want me!” (Carter, 2006, p. 9). Thus, the relationship between the Marquis and the Heroine could initially be described by: “[...] evocations of predatory masculinity and of woman as passive, as an object of sexual consumption” (MacSiniuc, 2015, p. 80). MacSiniuc does not point towards “The Bloody Chamber” in this case, as she explicitly points towards the “The Lamb and the Tiger” to highlight her views (2015, p. 80). However, to expand on her thoughts, one could also apply her views towards “The Bloody Chamber” as well, which could be justified by the arguments made previously.

Moreover, these relations are often being represented by using or referring to “nakedness or symbolic or ritual objects of clothing” (MacSiniuc, 2015, p. 80). This is extremely clear in “The Bloody Chamber”, as the wedding gift the Marquis has bought to the heroine, is a symbol of predatory masculinity and woman passivity: “His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat” (Carter, 2006, p. 11). This has a special significance in this story, as its “ominous beauty [...] is a kind of warning for the young wife, a symbolic anticipation of the planned immolation of an unfortunate [...] who has innocently consented to self-destructive submission” (MacSiniuc, 2015, p. 82). As MacSiniuc emphasize the feminine aspect, it is necessary to highlight how the gift not only is a warning for the heroine, but also a sense of strong masculine dominance. Although MacSiniuc is pointing towards the predatory masculinity, the dominance in which the Marquis establish creates a terror in the heroine, as the night at the opera terrifies her even long after the night itself. Furthermore, most prominent in her memory is the way she was dressed, especially the wedding gift around her throat (Carter, 2006, p. 11). Thus, Angela Carter succeeds to represent masculinity through

the luxurious apparel of the characters. The Marquis represent masculinity through what Macsiniuc calls “the code of reputability”. The way he showers his wife with expensive and glamorous gifts “dictates what is acceptable and suitable to wear or to consume, so as to project a certain image of social status” (Macsiniuc, 2015, p. 81). Furthermore, the masculinity of the Marquis does redefine his wife’s life. She moves from being a young girl from the middle class, indicated by her limited clothing, to be thrown “into the ‘exile’ of the trophy wife condition”, in which again emphasized by luxurious gifts, such as clothes and jewelry that she receives from his Marquis (Macsiniuc, 2015, p. 81). The way in which her brand-new clothing and jewelry, provided by the Marquis, attracts everyone to her, highlight her portrayal as a prized possession. However, she does only realize this afterwards, as she describes the way in which the Marquis objectifies her as a trophy: “He stripped me, gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke [...] And so my purchaser unwrapped his bargain” (Carter, 2006, p. 15). Thus, the misogynistic relations are highlighted through the masculine dominance towards female characters (Özüim, 2011, p. 110).

A large contrast to the already established masculine roles in “The Bloody Chamber”, is shown through the feminine oppression as the heroine discovers the secret chamber. This chamber, used to torture and punish the Marquises’ “disobedient wives; as a scene of deadly bondage and ultimate subjection”, symbolizes both the oppression in the relation between men and woman, as well as gender inequality (Macsiniuc, 2015, p. 82). The secret chamber also highlights the masculine dominance of the story, as she is given direct orders not to enter the chamber. However, her curiosity is what triggers her insubordinate actions, challenging the already established masculine dominance in the relationship between the Marquis and the Heroine. Although the masculine representation may seem challenged in this case, we must not forget how the heroine’s destiny is ultimately being controlled by the Marquis, as his earlier wives have been killed in the room she just has discovered. Nevertheless, the story ends positively for the heroine, as her mother comes to the rescue to save her from the evil and powerful masculine figure. The mother, who kills her daughters “predatory, ‘meat-eating’ husband”, is in large contrast to her submissive and objectified daughter (Macsiniuc, 2015, p. 83). As Macsiniuc puts it: “the warrior-like mother appears almost masculine in her fierceness”, her appearance in which she is dressed, suggests how the mother has beaten the oppression of masculine powers, and tries to make her daughter do the same by killing the Marquis (p. 82). Her appearance does thus propose a certain freedom from masculine constraints, as her unconventional way of dressing suggests how she also oppress masculine

domination, by not being objectified as her daughter has previously been: “her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father’s service revolver” (Carter, 2006, pp. 39-40). To conclude, the masculine representation in “The Bloody Chamber” is strongly represented through the Marquis’s behavior towards the heroine of the story, however, he is strongly challenged by the mother of the, as she ultimately ends the objectifying, oppressive marriage between the heroine and the Marquis.

In order to fully understand the role of the masculine representation in “The Bloody Chamber”, one must also look at its relevance in the context of which the gothic fairytale was written. At first glance, the masculine dominance in “The Bloody Chamber”, predominantly shown through the Marquis, may act as a way for Carter to represent masculinity. As previously mentioned, there are several cases of an evident masculine dominance throughout the fairytale, especially when analyzing the Marquis behavior towards the heroine of the story. However, as we experience in the later stages of the story, Carter creates a shift, in which the masculine dominance fades away following the death of the Marquis. This shift is well emphasized as the mother comes to the rescue, and saves her daughter:

“On her eighteenth birthday, my mother had disposed of a man-eating tiger that ravaged the villages in the hills north of Hanoi. 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” (Carter, 2006, p. 40).

This shift importantly marks the end of the masculine dominance in which the heroine was a victim of. The previous wives of the Marquis did however not survive the marriages that they had with the Marquis, as the masculine evil became too much for his previous wives to manage. Furthermore, this change sparks a feminist inspiration, as Carter portrays the mother as a hero. This is in large contrast to the story in which “The Bloody Chamber” is based on, as it has taken inspiration from, and has the same basic elements as the story “Barbe Bleue”, more commonly known as Bluebeard (Sheets, 1991, p. 642). However, the major difference between the two stories is how the heroine is not saved by her mother, instead, her brothers come to the rescue and saves her from her suitor and his blue beard (Sheets, 1991, p. 642). These changes create a different purpose of both the male and the female characters of “The Bloody Chamber”, as Angela Carter criticizes the previously set standard of a more dominant, masculine dominance in the gender roles at the time. This feminist approach does thus

criticize the masculine urge to dominate the feminine and seeks to illustrate how the oppression towards the feminine must change, in order to create a more even playing field, as well as showing how masculinity must become less threatening and socially pervasive than previously shown in for example Bluebeard. As a result of these changes, one could argue that Angela Carter seeks to criticize the masculine dominance, which was apparent at the time to create equality between the feminine and masculine standards at the time.

By knowing how Angela Carter took inspiration from the fairytale of Bluebeard, it creates different perspectives towards the masculine dominance in which has been characterized earlier. As previously mentioned, the destiny of the heroine is ultimately being controlled by the Marquis, as he seeks to kill the heroine at the later stages of the fairytale. As the reader is aware of the plot of the original story, one could argue that the heroine has less agency than what she thinks she does. However, one could argue that the curiosity of the heroine is sparked by her awareness and agency as a character, in which the Marquis does not suspect at all. The heroine is aware of the mystical and secret agenda in which the Marquis is planning, and she is therefore “not afraid of him; but of [herself]” (Carter, 2006, p. 20). The heroine’s awareness and agency are in consequence driven by a feministic urge to justice, as she discovers the true intentions of the Marquis. Therefore, considering these conclusions, it is the masculine representation – the Marquis, who is being criticized by Carter, as he does not suspect the heroine of being capable to discover his darkest secrets. Also, Carter does also emphasize the shift of power, as the correlation of power and dominance between the masculine and feminine seems to even out, because of the heroine’s actions throughout the tale.

The masculine representation in *The Orphan (1806)*

“*The Orphan. A Tale. Founded on a Well-known Fact*” written by Amelia Opie, is also an interesting subject when analyzing masculinity. The most prominent masculine representation in this text is Douglas, who was a “visiter, so wished for by the Handburys” (Opie, 1806, p. 222). In short, Douglas visits the Handburys occasionally, as he visits them when taking a break from his college education. He could be described as a pragmatic character, as he predominantly focuses on getting his collage-degree to become a mathematician and metaphysician. Furthermore, he could also be described as quite rational, as he disregards the notion of romance, as he only concentrates on the pragmatic aspects of his life, such as getting a college-degree. We are introduced to Douglas when Jane meets him for the first time. Of course, the Handburys does know Douglas quite well from before, however, their first

meeting could be described as quite mysterious, as Douglas' "fine dark eyes [was] fixed on her in a manner that distressed her exceedingly, and confirmed more than ever, her idea that he was proud, and presumed-on his superior fortune" (Opie, 1806, p. 223). In Jane's point of view, Douglas monitors her every move, like an animal watching their pray. This alludes similarly to the relationship between the Marquis and the heroine in "The Bloody Chamber", as it creates an anxious relationship between the two characters, suggesting predatory masculinity and of woman as passive, as an object of sexual consumption" (Macsiuic, 2015, p. 80).

However, in large contrast to the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber", Jane quickly realizes what Douglas' real intentions are. "The truth" as Jane puts it, was that Douglas' passion was to become a successful mathematician and metaphysician. Therefore, the way Douglas monitored Jane when they first met was a way for him to study beauty up close – like a researcher examining a relevant object for his studies. Thus, the way that Douglas behave towards Jane in the beginning of *The Orphan* could thus hint towards a different view of masculine representation, as Douglas does not have the driving sexual temptations in which the Marquis does have in "The Bloody Chamber", and instead focus on becoming a successful in his studies. However, the masculine dominance is also quite apparent in this case, as Jane does not dare to reprove the way that he makes her uncomfortable, not even "with a frown" (Opie, 1806, p. 224). Douglas is in other words distressing Jane to fulfill his passion for his studies, as he "continued his offence, and his ignorance" (Opie, 1806, p. 224), emphasizing his masculine dominance towards Jane, being unable to disapprove Douglas' cruel behavior towards her. Thus, the overall difference between the heroine and the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber", and Douglas and Jane in the beginning of *The Orphan*, is how Douglas and Jane's relationship does not have the same sexual tension between them, however, there is without a doubt an apparent masculine dominance in their first encounter, as emphasized above.

As the story progresses however, we get the impression of a slightly changed dynamic between Douglas and Jane. Soon after their first meeting, Douglas has become more respectful and caring towards Jane, as he has "heard her story" and became aware of her being an orphan (Opie, 1806, p. 226). Furthermore, because of these new insights, she is no longer viewed by Douglas as an independent heiress, instead, he gives her sympathy and empathy to lift her spirits following her parents' demise. As displayed on page 226 in Opie's text, Douglas shows compassion by bowing "with an air of ample respect, and an expression of kindness and interest on his countenance" (1806). Moreover, he hands her a chair and moves her chair closer to the fire to keep her warm and comfortable. This may well be the first spark

between the two characters, as it initiates Jane's affections towards Douglas. Furthermore, as Douglas gets to know Jane's past in more detail, she becomes "an object of such sacred respect in his eyes", giving her more attention than what he has given any woman in his past. Jane emphasizes this change very well, as she clearly states on page 228 how she may never prejudice someone in that manner again, as his presence is now has become pleasant to her (Opie, 1806). The controlling, masculine domination which was more present in the beginning of the story, has now shifted towards a more uniform relationship, where they treat each other with ample respect and tolerance. However, as this sparks Jane's unrequited passion towards Douglas, we soon realize how this may be the beginning of Jane's horrible downfall.

Towards the end of the story, Jane falls into what King calls "a clinical depression, characterized by headache, lethargy, and physical decline" (2014, p. 73). Furthermore, her condition is a consequence of her passion for Douglas, in which he does not share. Although Douglas became increasingly respectful towards Jane earlier on in the book, he has not been able to share this confined love in which Jane has not shared with Douglas, creating this "mental uneasiness" (King, 2014, p. 73). As previously mentioned, this is due to Douglas' rational and pragmatic behavior, resulting in an ignorance towards the obvious, loving passion in which Jane has. Even though Douglas was not interested in romantic relations with Jane, he decides to marry her after he read the lyrics of her songs, which unveiled Jane's contentment with him. However, as argued by Shelley King, Douglas' marriage proposal is admittedly done "from compassion rather than love" (King, 2014, p. 74). To take this argument further, these observations lead to the assumption of a weakened masculine dominance in which Douglas initially showed in the beginning. The masculine dominance has progressively weakened, in proportion of Jane's declining health and well-being. However, the compassion in which Douglas shows, is also triggered by the authority he has over Jane, as he ultimately could save the life of someone in which he describes as "the most amiable of human beings" (Opie, 1806, p. 273). Furthermore, Douglas does not plan to tell Jane what his true intentions are, as he attempts to affirm his role as a saving grace, instead of marrying Jane in an act of true love, following a sort of hero complex. Thus, the moral "promotion" Douglas gain following the marriage proposal, preceded over the happiness that Jane and Douglas would have had, if the love between them would have been mutual. Again, the pragmatic and rationalized thinking of Douglas emphasizes the masculine domination and control in Amelia Opie's *The Orphan*, as his arrogance creates the opportunity of masculine dominance in the relationship between Douglas and Jane.

Tales such as *The Orphan* were extremely popular during the 1800s, especially amongst moral and didactic writers. *The Orphan*, being a didactical, moral tale, would thus be extremely relevant in a context of societal improvements and edification (Killick, 2008, p. 74). Of course, Opie was especially interested in highlighting the “emotional development and the delineation of good family practice”, which is extremely important when analyzing *The Orphan*. The educational purpose may well be more specifically inclined towards the female heroine of the story, Jane. However, one could also argue how the masculine representation also has a moral and didactical purpose for the reader. As previously mentioned, Jane’s obsession with Douglas, which ultimately lead to her demise, was largely due to her not following the moral standards at the time. This kind of socializing literature was predominantly created in order to educate and serve didactically towards the large masses of the British population, as there was a general fear of a revolutionary war, which happened in France a couple of decades before. In consequence, the short moral tale fictions popularity flourished at the time, as this kind of didactic literature sought to “improve their readers and create a socially-minded populace” (Killick, 2008, p. 75). Furthermore, this kind of literature, such as the moral tales of Opie, were appealing to both children and adults at the time, making it suitable for most people living in Britain during the 1800s.

As Killick argue, Opie’s short, moral tales has several apparent themes in them, which highlighted the moral standard or ideals at the time. Firstly, he highlights “the dangers of the abuse of power”, which is especially apparent in the *Orphan*, through how Douglas serves to be the dominant and powerful figure throughout the tale. As previously mentioned, Douglas becomes aware of Jane’s passion towards him, and decides to marry her in an act of compassion. Secondly, Killick argues how “the necessity of self-control” is also an important theme of Amelia Opie’s tales (2008, p. 83). The moral superiority Douglas has over Jane, is due to Jane’s lack of self-control. Jane has throughout the tale been largely focused on her feelings and has thus lacked the rationality and pragmatism in which Douglas has. However, one could also argue how Douglas is quite the opposite of Jane, as Douglas pragmatic and rational behavior is one of the main reasons to why Jane becomes ill in the first place. Therefore, one could argue that Amelia Opie does not only create didactical tales which serves important towards the female readers, the masculine relevance and representation serves also as an educational purpose towards the male readers as well.

Furthermore, when analyzing the context of Jane's behavior, it is important to notice how Opie portrays her in a conservative manner, as Opie's tales often portrayed conservative values in her characters (Killick, 2008, p. 83). As Jane is introduced in the beginning of the story, she is already being characterized conservatively:

“Jane Vernon was what is understood by the truly feminine character - embarrassed by notice, and terrified at attracting attention. She had always taken as much pains to conceal her beauty and her talents as most women take to display theirs.” (Opie, 1806, p. 214)

This description of Jane is precise, as she predominantly is home-bound and works with ordinary house-chores to help the Hanbury's. Furthermore, as she is introduced to Douglas, she continuously waits for him to come back to see her and the Hanbury's, as she is obsessed with him being in near proximity. Jane's passivity and contentedness would align with the conservative values at the time, furthermore, she does not pursue her talents, such as singing and painting. Similarly, Douglas does also align with the conservative values at the time. However, he has gained the liberties to do follow his desires to become a successful mathematician and metaphysician, as well as being able to freely travel as he wants to. Despite these benefits, he lacks the awareness to recognize how his behavior and actions ultimately affects others. Based on this, one could argue how Amelia Opie seeks to portray the flaws of the moral ideals of masculinity at the time, as the ignorance and lack of awareness by masculine characters such as Douglas, leads to the deterioration of Jane. This does again emphasize the didactical importance of masculinity in the story, as its significance further strengthens its role as a didactical piece of literature. In addition, the portrayal of Douglas as a contrast to Jane, does also emphasize the masculine representations importance in Amelia Opie's morale tales.

Conclusion

The masculine representation is defined by the way in which masculinity is represented, especially through the characteristics and behavior of the masculine characters in the different stories. In both “The Bloody Chamber” and *The Orphan* we experience quite apparent representations of masculinity, as both the Marquis in “The Bloody Chamber” and Douglas in *The Orphan* are quite apparent in the tales’ in its entirety. However, as mentioned previously, there are a limited amount of scholarly literature on this topic from before. This makes it interesting to analyze, as one could further expand on the arguments made previously and develop new and interesting aspects to work with.

The masculine representation in both stories is quite apparent, as its relevance and characteristics both serves an importance when trying to understand their stories in its entirety. Firstly, Angela Carter depicts a shift in the oppressive relationship between the masculine and the feminine. The death of the masculine Marquis seeks to illustrate how a more equal and mutual relationship between both the feminine and the masculine is essential to highlight a needed change in society at the time. The tale, taking inspiration from the tale Bluebeard, could thus act as a critic towards the masculine dominance, to eliminate the oppressive and misogynistic elements in the relationship between the masculine and the feminine. Secondly, Amelia Opie uses the masculine representation in a didactical manner, as she tries to portray societal improvements and edification. Although the masculine representation may not seem as apparent as in “The Bloody Chamber”, Douglas’ actions and behavior is ultimately what leads to the death of Jane, who is in love with him. The tale could thus act as a moral pointer towards both male and female readers, as Opie depicts flaws in both the feminine and the masculine standards at the time, in which Douglas and Jane exemplifies throughout the tale. To conclude, the masculine representation in both tales serves as important and apparent factors throughout both tales. Although the masculine representation serves different purposes for its respective stories, it is important to highlight how they both contribute to the complexity and important purpose of the tales, which is important when creating and telling stories.

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