CHAPTER THREE

FAIRY TALES REWORKED

Rewriting of texts or reworking of earlier texts has gained immense popularity and significance in recent times owing to the post-structuralist theory of deconstruction where Derrida re-interprets Saussure to establish that language is a free play without a centre and that the “center is not the center” (Lodge, 109) and as such incapable of conveying the truth. Owing to the arbitrary nature of the sign, it is clear that a sign has no fixed meaning for its meaning is contextual. All that a sign can do is to urge upon us to search for what is lacking and remind us what it is not, and as such according to Derrida:

The sign is a ‘trace’ which is not more natural (it is a mark, the natural sign or the index in the Husserlian sense) than cultural, not more physical than psychic, biological than spiritual. It is that starting from which a becoming
unmotivated of the sign, and with it all ulterior opposition between physics and its other is possible. (Of Grammatology 48).

Literature being a form of writing, a poem or a story or a novel is a structure of traces, where each trace is different. Hitherto, a critic of a work of art used to emerge with a concept that could be related to several other concepts. Every work of art thus became a “book” a sacred thing as its meaning could be related to the concept of origin, truth, ultimate reality and so on. But with the formulation of the theory of deconstruction where all works of art are not books but only texts offer the reader the scope to indulge in a free play of words and arrive at one of the several meanings. According to this theory there is no “a meaning” or final meaning for a text but the possibility of infinite meaning. This possibility of infinite meanings for any text offers writers the scope to rewrite or rework earlier texts and present re-visionary perspectives. Referring to this re-visionary strategy based on the theory of deconstruction Bijaykumar Das in Twentieth Century Literary Criticism is of the view that “no work of literature whatsoever has been able to express exactly what it wanted to say and that the critic’s business is to deconstruct and re-create them taking their words as not the outward form of their meaning but only the ‘trace of a quest’” (31). Derrida’s notion of opening up the weave of writing to enable other meanings to come to the fore is a potentially empowering one for feminists. Women writers have found this re-visionary process very effective as it affords scope to re-write earlier male-
written texts from a female viewpoint, although serious doubts have been raised by feminist critics regarding the possibility of feminist re-writing. Luce Irigary suggests that "women can have no voice at all within the present scheme, or can speak only as the mimics of men" (Sellers 24). Julia Kristeva maintains that as "we can only operate from inside the system of representations within which we are immersed, does it follow that women's writing will repeat the way we have been taught to see" (24)? In this context can women's writing inscribe alternative modes of being? It can, as seen in Helene Cixous who shares Derrida's view that "writing has the revolutionary potential to counter the phallogocentric system" (26.) Cixous argues:

Writing presents an unbounded space in which the self that strives to constitute itself through mastery of the other is relinquished and in which the other can finally be received. Consequently, she suggests that the feminist writer's task is to actively inscribe the heterogenous promptings that are thrown up by the process of writing, an endeavour that will bring into being an alternative mode of perception, relation and expression to that decreed by the prevailing schema. (qtd Sellers 26)

Like Derrida and Cixous, Kristeva feels that the processes of writing makes it necessary "to inscribe plural meanings into their work, and to draw on the unconscious for inspiration since this is where outlawed alternatives to the
prescribing order are lodged” (26). And in the re-writing of myth, “disruption can occur both through the inclusion of unanticipated meanings generated by a word or a phrase in the course of writing and through references to other texts” (26). Moreover, Diana Purkiss identifies three modes of re-writing in poetry that may be applied to women’s fiction as well- the shifting of focus from male to female as in Barbara Walker’s “Gorga and the Dragon” and “Jill and the Beanroot”, transposing the terms from negative to positive as in Angela Carter’s re-interpretation of the wolf from ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ and allowing a minor character to tell the tale as in Alison Fell’s “The Mistress of Lilliput”. Though they are problematic “they tamper with internal patterns, leaving the mythical discourse in which they are embedded intact.” (Sellers 27) and these three modes frequently re-occur in reworkings which has also been attempted by Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi in their re-written tales.

Though the difficulties that confront the women rewriter are so immense that Camilla Paglia calls the feminist project of rewriting myth both pointless and absurd, innumerable women writers have taken up the challenge and have rewritten previous texts, altering internal patterns and attempting to express silenced or marginal voices. Several women writers have focussed their attention on the rewriting of previous texts, including Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee, Anne Rice, Emma Tennant, Sheri Tepper, Jenny Diski, Barbara Walker, Marina Warner, Alison Fell, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi. Their writings
are not “pleasurable reversals or ingenious tinkerings but new embroideries, adding fresh images and colours to radically alter the picture” (29). Feminist rewriting can be looked at from two perspectives - “as an act of demolition, exposing and detonating the stories that have hampered women, and as a task of construction – of bringing into being enabling alternatives” (30). Further, as Sellers comments feminist rewriting could thus include: “ironic mimicry and clever twists, as well as a whole gamut of tactics, that would open the myth from the inside as well as out, leaving in place enough of the known format to provide evocative points of reflection for its readers, but also encompassing different possibilities and other points of view.” (29)

Several women writers including Tanith Lee, Jane Yolen, Anne Sexton, Olga Browmas, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi have focused their attention on such rewritings of fairy tales, because of its role in the acculturation of gender ideology. Marcia Lieberman in “Some Day My Prince Will Come: “Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale” analyses the gender roles generally portrayed in Fairy tale:

Among other things, these tales present a picture of sexual roles, behaviour and psychology, and a way of predicting outcome or fate according to sex, which is important because of the intense interest that children take in
‘endings’; they always want to know how things will ‘turn out’. (Breaking The Magic Spell 187).

A close survey of the treatment of girls and women in fairy tales, reveal certain patterns, that play a major role in forming the sexual role concept of children, and in suggesting to them the limitations imposed by sex upon a person’s chances of success in various endeavours. The good women, usually the heroines are invariably beautiful, passive and powerless, while the bad ones usually witches or stepmothers are very often ugly, bad-tempered and powerful. Consequently, the message conveyed is “being powerful is mainly associated with being unwomanly” and “the moral value of activity “is “sex-linked” (197). What is generally appreciated in males is disapproved of in females. The failure of moral assertiveness in women has had, manifest effects on feminine behaviour, which has resulted in masked forms of aggression or “covert devices of verbal and emotional manipulation – guilt-producing mechanisms, habits of deception or evasion, ploys of helplessness, and even invalidism” (Kolbenschlag 21). Women writers in their rewriting present a counter system emphasizing the importance of females.

The central issue of the majority of folk and fairy tales is power and the ideology of power, which is particularly feudal. Here women are naturally excluded from holding power, which is only a reflection of that of husband or
father. Therefore as Anne Cranny-Francis in *Feminist Fiction* aptly points out “female characters, encoded with the ideological positioning of women, are accordingly passive, objectified, positioned as prize or reward for consumption by an active, aggressive male subject” (87). This “formula female”, who has been conditioned to live for another is mainly obsessed with winning the acceptance and approval of the significant other, and “her self-concern is focussed on her impact on others than on her self” (Kolbenschlag 21).

Moreover, the traditional fairy tales position their readers passively to receive the discourses as natural or inevitable. But feminist re-visions of these tales on the contrary position the readers actively “to re-evaluate the nature of fantasies represented ideologically as harmless—by implication, value neutral—childhood amusements” (89). In their rewritings, these writers necessarily present two narratives—“the revised version of the traditional narrative and its discursive referent, the traditional narrative.” (Cranny-Francis 89). But primarily, these re-visions operate as meta-ffictions:

While significant in themselves of particular gender relations, rely on the constant comparison with traditional narrative to construct a feminist reading position from which the anti-woman ideology coded traditional fairy tale becomes visible. (94)
Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi in their collections of short stories have attempted feminist re-visions of traditional fairy tales to present a counter system of the prevailing dominant ideology embedded in the traditional tales. Their female characters are strong and active, unlike the passive and docile females that people the traditional tales. Moreover, they position their readers as active recipients rather than the customary passive readers of their discourses.

Angela Carter has attempted the re-workings of traditional fairy tales in her collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. Except “The Erl-King” (BC 84-90), which is an adaptation of Goethe’s Ballad, Carter selects a sequence of classic tales mostly from Perrault - the story of Blue beard and his wives in “The Bloody Chamber” (BC 7-41), two versions of Beauty and the Beast in “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-50) and “The Tiger’s Bride” (BC 51-67), an operatic “Puss-in-Boots”, (BC 68-83) suggestive of the Baroque ornamentation of Rossini’s music and also the traditional tale “Puss in Boots.” “Snow-White” in “The Snow – Child” (BC 91-93) Sleeping Beauty as a Gothic Vampire in “The Lady in the House of Love” (BC 93-107), two versions of Red Riding Hood in “Werewolf” (BC 108-110) and “The Company of Wolves” (BC 110-118), and a strange combination of several tales in ‘Wolf-Alice’. In her rewritten tales Carter portrays active and assertive little girls or women, who instead of being intimidated into passivity by the sexual potency of the aggressive male, assert their
female sexuality, by re-shaping “the archetypes of imagination recasting the bricks of our inner world” (Dunker 223) with extraordinary resourcefulness. The animal aspects of human sexuality are her particular concern, which she explores through these re-written tales, that provide her with a form in which she can achieve powerful effects by concentrating on pure experiences with a short narrative trajectory. The sexual symbolism inherent in traditional fairy tales, is exploited by Angela Carter and her “re-writing of the tales is an exercise in making the mystery sexually explicit” (Dunker 227). Carter in her re-telling is not in any sense blind to the psychoanalytic content of fairy tales, but it was not her primary concern. Aiden Day in The Rational Glass notes:

Carter’s fairy tales are, then informed but not contained by psychoanalytic insight. They are better described as materialist, rationalist ‘fables of the politics of experience’ that they are preoccupied with. Carter’s tales go deeper than Perrault’s kind of moralizing about experience; they look at the way in which experience is fundamentally structured in gendered terms.

(134)

Carter’s re-visionist strategy of re-telling popular fairy tales was designed to effect the destruction of giants in the everyday patriarchal world.
Margaret Atwood has also reworked fairy tales in her works, which have been primarily influenced by the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen. Several works make explicit fairy tale references; some offer self-reflexive fairy tale commentary and echoes of fairy tales or literary folk tales constitute more than a simple influence or allusion: they function as inter texts. Like García Marquez, Salmon Rushdie, Angela Carter, Charlotte Bronte, Anne Sexton, Toni Morrison, Anne Herbert, Marie Claire Blais, Margaret Atwood makes extensive references to fairy tale elements in the details of everyday events and these echoes constitute more than a simple influence or allusion. Sharon Rose Wilson in Atwood's *Fairy Tale and Sexual Politics* remarks:

> Throughout her career Atwood has used numerous inter texts or texts within texts; frame narratives echo inner narrative’s images, motifs, themes, characterization, structure and even plots, self-consciously reflecting and reflecting upon inter texts. (4)

Atwood’s fairy tale inter texts, foreground sexual politics and other political issues, raising pertinent questions regarding the possibility of human survival and evolution. Her inter- texts serve at least five related purposes according to Rose:
1. To indicate the quality and nature of her character's cultural contexts, 2. to signify her characters and readers entrapment in pre-existing patterns, 3. to comment self-consciously on these patterns including the embedded fairy tales, myths and related popular traditional stories – often by deconstructing constricting literary folkloric and cultural plots with transgressive language and filling in the gaps of female narrative, 4. to comment self-consciously on the frame story and other inter texts 5. to structure the characters' imaginative or magical release from externally imposed patterns offering the possibility of transformation for the novel's characters, for the country they partly represent for all human beings. (34)

Atwood in her short story collections has made use of fairy tale inter texts and allusions - the 'ugly duckling' in "The Man From Mars" (DG 13-37), the 'blue beard story' in "Blue bead's Egg" (BE 131-164), 'snow-white's palace in "The Salt Garden"(BE 209-228), ‘Hansel and Gretel’ in “Unearthing Suite” (BE 263-281), ‘blue beard’ in “Weight” (WT 177-194), ‘the robber bridegroom’ in “Wilderness Tips” (WT 195-222) ‘princess on the pea’ in Princess Prunella and the purple peanut, ‘the wicked step-mother in “There was Once” (BAM 22-26). There are fairy tale echoes of ‘Cinderella’, ‘Hansel and Gretel’ and ‘Rapunzel’ in “Unpopular Girls” (BAM 7-12). Not only in her short stories, but also in the novels she has made abundant use of fairy tale inter-texts. For instance, Grimm’s

Unlike, Mary Daly’s negative view of fairy tales, when she refers to them “as poison apples” and mind-dismembering myth” inducing “masochism in female sadism in males; mother-hating and paralysis” (Wilson -xiv), Atwood’s reworking of fairy tales reveals her attitude to fairy tales as sources of inspiration and beauty, hereby acknowledging that fairy tales are not meant exclusively for children. Both oral and written tales dramatize basic human emotions and as such are timeless works of art in spite of the recent practices where variations of folk tales started deconstructing fairy tale sexism. Sharon Rose Wilson in her introduction to *Margaret Atwood’s Fairy Tale Sexual Politics* observes:

Fairy tales continue to inspire us, either directly or as a subtext in films, television programmes, musical operas, plays and books. Recognition for fairy tales connections to particular culture need not necessitate disregard of their appeal or of correspondences to mythic, religious and psychological texts (Arche- types). Fairy tale inter – texts in Atwood’s work reverberates
with mythic significance giving us courage to face themes of sexual politics in literature, society and our lives. (xiv)

Margaret Atwood challenges the traditional myths about women and explores the possibilities of new mythic alternatives in her “Blue beard’s Egg” (BE 131-164) and *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut*. Like the works of Doris Lessing and Marge Piercy, Atwood’s texts break through phallocentric plots to revision the stasis of happily ever after, a resolution not so common in folklore as popularly believed. Aware of the fact that traditional fairy tales, particularly those of Perrault and Andersen, reflect societal conditioning and patriarchal sexism; Atwood in her writings deconstructs phallocentric versions of fairy tales and other confining myths and patriarchal patterns and thereby compels readers to re-read and re-shape not only Canadian Literature but also history at large. Atwood deconstructs her fairy tale inter-text, so as to make the muted sub-text speak. Her narratives, which generally consist of more than two strands interwoven, build a scene on a powerful fairy tale image, frequently reversing the gender of the hero or other characters in order to shift females from object position to subject position while displacing the original plot so that the silent or marginalized sub-text of female experience becomes the focus, as in *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut.*
This kind of re-working of fairy tales, classical tales, popular fables, a significant concern of feminist writers, is also taken up by Suniti Namjoshi. This is amply illustrated in her fable collections—Feminist Fables, and “The Solidarity Fables” in the collection Saint Suniti and The Dragon and Other Fables. In her fables she presents the female characters as liberated women contrary to their traditional roles in a male-dominated society. Namjoshi in all her fable collections—The Blue Donkey Fables, Feminist Fables and “The Solidarity Fables” in Saint Suniti and The Dragon and Other Fables adopts the fable form as a suitable medium to put forward her ideas effectively, in a precise and vivid manner as it “is epigrammatic, extremely economical and absolutely concrete” and “has no room for a concluding abstraction to explain meaning” (Gardner 37).

Suniti Namjoshi’s re-workings of ancient myths, legends and fairy tales particularly in her Feminist Fables has made them a vehicle of new vision through the exploration of the female condition. In these fables, as Savita Goel in ‘Suniti Namjoshi’s Feminist Fables: A Minor Feminist Classic’ states:

She has invented a mythology that is simultaneously thought-provoking and entertaining and deals with the aspects of women’s lives that have been erased, ignored, demeaned and mystified. The stories explore with playful irony the concepts of decency, honour and status of women. The writer
tries to comprehend the social and psychic mechanisms that construct gender inequality and believes that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences. The fables interrogate the marginalization of women in a patriarchal society and inspire women to struggle for self-identity and autonomy. (Doditya 177)

Suniti Namjoshi’s re-visioning in Feminist Fables, focuses on challenging traditional patriarchal myths upholding women as objects, and offering new alternative paradigms, uplifting the status of women and acknowledging her inherent qualities. Jack Zipes in Children and Their Books states that “the (re)-telling of fairy tales [enable] women to picture themselves, social manners and relations, in a manner that [represents] their interests”(122). In the fables “Jack Three’s Luck” (FF 101), “In the Forest” (FF 95), “The Three Bears” (FF 39), “The Princess” (FF 5) and “And Then What Happened” (FF 118), Namjoshi through a re-visioning of familiar fairy tales offers alternative mythical paradigms for the female enabling women to live and dream as women. “Jack Three’s Luck” (FF 101) is a re-visioning of the fairy tale ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’. Here it is the Giantess who is all powerful and instead of devouring children wants to marry the boys. In this role reversal the boys are expected to perform the domestic chores generally done by women. The Giantess tells them that “she would keep them as
husbands. but they must cook and clean and make themselves useful and generally be pleasant” (FF 101). Docility is not a solely feminine quality. They are expected to take on the role of a slave to serve the master- in this case a giantess. Here the generally accepted roles of the male- the master and female- the slave, are challenged and altered. “In the Forest” (FF 95), is a re-visioning of the fairy tale ‘Hansel and Gretel’ which presents the girl Gretel taking on a dominant role. She is pictured as the ‘braver and wiser’ of the two. On the contrary, Hansel is portrayed as a coward who “runs back home to his wicked step-mother”. But Gretel doesn’t run “she stays on” (FF 95). It is distinctly possible that in this “wild witch’s world she stands a better chance” (95), conveying the message that women handle problems more effectively. Modelled on the Goldilocks story, Namjoshi in her fable “The Three Bears” (FF 39) pictures Goldilocks as “a little pretty boy” who in fact has all the qualities of a girl “he cries” and when the bears relent he “smiles and tries to charm” (39). Pappa Bear, Mama Bear and baby bear “kiss and cuddle him and wipe away his tears” (39). He can stay because “he makes such a sweet and good little girl” (39).

In Namjoshi’s feminist rendering of the Cinderella story in “And Then What Happened” (118), the usual happy ending is reversed. Here Cinderella is not the docile woman according to patriarchal standards. After the marriage they “started squabbling” (118) both accusing each other being equally powerful, “You
married me for my money” was the Prince’s charge, “You married me for my looks” retorted Cinderella. Unable to settle the issue Cinderella takes the first step and “simply walk(s) out” (118).

In the “Solidarity Fables” too Namjoshi re-visions a resourceful goose in “Mother-Goose, Sister Goose and the market-led Farmer” (SF 96-7), who lays not only the traditional golden eggs, but also “silver ones, plain ones or speckled”(96). But unlike the traditional version where the greedy farmer kills the goose, here the clever geese escape and even go to the extent of thinking about making “war on farmers” (97). In “Blue beard’s Way”(FF 98-101), Namjoshi depicts Blue beard as a miser who hoards women, unlike the traditional Blue beard who kills his brides. He preserves his women and tends them well and is even worried about their future: who would take care of them after his death. It was his practice to kill male off springs at birth; “but the females he kept, and each was locked in an individual cell as soon as it was worthwhile” (98). Namjoshi through her re-visions displaces the traditional patriarchal myth providing alternative myths that centre around female experience and importance.

Myths, stories which distil aspects of common experience in a concentrated and therefore highly potent form as is evident from the abundance of women’s adaptations and re-workings are a vital force in contemporary feminist fiction. For
Marina Warner “it is the openness of myth, allowing for the weaving of new meanings and patterns that creates its ongoing potency” (Warner xiv). A cursory survey of women’s re-writing, reveals that women writer’s re-vision of myth frequently alter the form of their source myths and set them to very different purposes acknowledging Barthes’ view in Mythologies:

"[T]here is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being alter, disintegrate, disappear completely, (and that around the meaning of myth) there is a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating."

(130)

Moreover, anything can be turned into a myth from the banal to the extraordinary offering scope to the woman writer as “feminist critique necessarily spans the broad spectrum of classical, religious, literary, psycho-analytic, media and other myths that have chronicled women’s existence” (Sellers 7). Myths afford ways of comprehending our experiences and provide crucial insights into the ideologies that underlie them. Myths also offer the writer the scope “to loosen its negative strangleholds, sew new variations into its weave, and jettison those myths that cannot be satisfactorily altered” (7), which women re-visionists focus on as, “re-working and fresh creation of myths [are] a valuable and communal enterprise” (7).
Hitherto, literature has depicted women as passive, docile, dependent and helpless victims at the mercy of men. The inner experiences of women were ignored on the grounds that they were trivial. Moreover, their roles were restricted by their womanhood and consequently, the muted female half of the society were not reflected in literature. With the advent of Feminism women became aware of the fact that gender, a patriarchal creation is neither natural nor immutable. Women began to realise that patriarchy was no longer relevant in a rapidly changing society where women were trying to liberate themselves from subordination. They were also trying to explore their possibilities and to define their potential. They grew intolerant of their exploitation and victimization by men and revolted against marginalization. They began questioning the injustice and challenged society’s gender arrangements and began struggling to dethrone the myth of femininity, the construct of patriarchy and to re-order the world. Literature today reflects the change in the relations of power, the changing perceptions of man-woman relationship. It depicts the New Woman, who refuses to be a toy in the hands of men, falsifying the old belief – of a man’s world and the woman’s hearth. A large number of texts written today depict women who are attempting to deconstruct the myth of male supremacy by coming out of the margin in order to occupy the subject positions. Change in the socio-economic conditions has resulted in the change in patriarchal attitudes to gender that is reflected in literature. Women characters in recent literature are no longer victims.
or commodities to be bought or sold, but are heroines; the subjects. The old traditional myths about male and female, no longer prevail, subjectivity has been re-defined. This is precisely what Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi have attempted in their short stories.

Fairy tales, which aim to instruct and those, which seek to propel their readers to criticise social control, distinguish between two kinds of re-visioning - the transfiguration of a well-known tale in which the author depicts its familiar ingredients in an unfamiliar manner, so that the reader is forced to consider their negative aspects and perhaps reject them. This may entail breaking, shifting, debunking or re-arranging of traditional components in order to liberate the reader from their programmed response, and secondly a re-working in the fusion of classic configurations with contemporary settings and alternative plot-lines. Such re-visions do not re-assemble the tales into new wholes, but expose instead the artifice of the stories and present the reader with different options and points of view. As Zipes feels “stories are continually being re-written to respond to the prevailing ideology [which are the] starting points for a feminist reading of the genre” (Sellers 14). The re-visionist strategy, employed by women writers in their work, tends to break the established patriarchal myths and indulge in woman-identified myth-making not only by “weaving in new images and situations, but also by sifting through the layerings of adverse patriarchal renderings from which
women were excluded, marginalised or depicted negatively to salvage and re-
interpret as well as discard” (Sellers 22). Many women writers have experimented
with this revisionist myth-making including A.S.Byatt, Marina Warner, Fay
Weldon, Christine Crowe, Anne Rice, Emma Tennant, Sheri Tepper, Cixious,
Emma Donoghue, Jeannette Winterson, Atwood, Carter and Suniti Namjoshi. Jane
Caputi’s classification of feminist rewriting of myth as either ‘patriarchal myth-
smashing’ or ‘woman-identified myth-making’ though inadequate in itself,
nevertheless foregrounds or illuminates female experience. Angela Carter,
Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi in several of their short stories have effectively
attempted revisionist myth-making to highlight women’s experience which has
been omitted from patriarchy’s account and the fresh deployment of women’s
images acknowledging. Critic Jean-Francois’ argument that “the role of the writer
today is not to compose new myths but to offer inspiration and models for our own
imperative rewritings” (Sellers135). Atwood, Carter and Namjoshi question
patriarchal myths by demonstrating how they obliterate or falsely present female
experience. This is particularly noticeable in their re-telling where they invariably
depict female characters who overcome victimization and establish self-identity in
an attempt to offer new paradigms and myths.

Feminist fairy tale writing focuses on revising traditional fairy tales to
highlight the ideological content they encode, especially their construction of a
patriarchal reading position, which is popular with women writers like, Marina Warner, Tanith Lee, Jane Yolen, Atwood, Cater and Namjoshi. ‘Red Riding Hood’ or ‘Cinderella’ are no longer innocent fairy tales but ‘patriarchal morality plays’ (Cranny-Francis 197.) teaching female readers “the proper role, for women under patriarchy: women are passive, powerless, subordinate to men.”(197). Warner’s insistence that “the tales can change and change again offers a rallying cry to feminist writers” (Sellers 16). Re-writing from a feminist perspective women writers challenge the patriarchal assumptions of the female and suggest alternative modes of perception and expression to the prevailing patriarchal ideology. Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi in their re-visionings of fairy tales, particularly the ‘Blue beard’ story, the ‘Beauty and the Beast’ and ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ or wolf stories have focussed their attention on highlighting female experience questioning the marginalization of women and presenting strong, active and resourceful female characters.

Blue beard themes are very popular not only in literature, but the other arts poetry, music, film and drama as well. Women writers have also been captivated by them. In Charlotte Brontes’ novel Jane Eyre is a classic novel with obvious blue beard themes. Mr. Rochester is pictured as a version of Blue beard although he may only be accused of trying to murder Jane Eyre’s virtue not her physical person when he tries to enter into a bigamous marriage with her. The Blue castle by L.M. Montgomery is another novel that openly deals with the blue beard theme.
in a light-hearted way. There is a forbidden room but it does not contain dead bodies. *Blue beard*, a novel by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. is the story of a man who destroys all he loves. This Blue beard theme has been treated in many short stories too. Neil Gaiman’s “The White Road” and Karawynn Long’s “The Shell Box”. Poems have also been composed on this theme. Sara Henderson Hay’s “Syndicated column”, Anne Sexton’s “The Gold Key”, Rose Terry Cooke’s “Blue beard’s closet”. Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Blue beard”. The play “Ariane et Barbw-bleu” by Maurice Maeterlinck is based on Blue beard. Moreover, there are musical operas and films based on this theme. Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi have equally been fascinated by the blue beard theme and they have in diverse ways explored this theme in their short stories. Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” (BC 7-41), Atwood’s “Blue beard’s Egg” (BE 131-164), “Weight” (WT 177-94) and “Alien Territory”(BAM 103-116) and Namjoshi’s “Blue beard’s Way” (SF 98-101) and “A Room of His Own”(FF 64) are feminist revisions of this favourite tale of Blue Beard who symbolizes the “authoritarian, tyrannical husband” of the patriarchal set up.

“The Bloody Chamber” is Carter’s re-telling of Perrault’s tale of a wealthy man, Blue beard, who has married several wives, all of whom have disappeared. Blue beard, then marries the daughter of a neighbouring family. When Blue beard is away on business he leaves his new wife the keys to his home, with
instruction that she should not use the key to open one particular room. Her curiosity gets the better of her and she enters this forbidden room only to discover the remains of Blue beard’s previous wives. Blue beard returns to discover what his new wife has done, and decides that she too must die. She pleads for a little time, fortunately, her brothers come and rescue her, killing Blue beard in the process. Carter’s version on the contrary is the first person narration by the girl who had married “(t)he richest man in France” (BC 12) – a Marquis, the equivalent of Blue beard and then escaped from him by the timely rescue by not her brothers but by her mother who telepathically learns that her daughter is in danger. She kills the Marquis with a single shot. Here Carter stresses the possibility of female power. Issues relating to power and sexuality come up in a more problematic way in Carter’s version. The traditional interaction between the powerful, sadistic husband and his innocent wife is preserved, although there is the emphasis on “female consciousness and the possibility of female power” (Alexander 70) in Carter’s version, sexual violence which is a pre-requisite of the Blue beard theme, is present in vivid detail that is highly disturbing to critics like Patricia Dunker and Paulina Palmer who view pornography as an acceptable manifestation of the humiliation of women and the assertion of male power” (71). But Carter’s writing is an artistic expression of the erotic influenced by her desire for female autonomy.
The tale is that of experience-the girl recalling her initiation into the adult world. Carter’s story is about women’s masochistic complicity in male sexual aggression and about husbands where Bluebeard is pictured as a connoisseur of juvenile and sadistic pornography. Carter’s writing offers the excitement of erotic anticipation, at the same time parodying it. Carter’s rewritten tale outlines the classical pornographic model of sexuality, that of male sexual tyranny within a marriage that is grossly unequal; the model that acknowledges the normal and natural sadism of the female complemented by the normal and natural masochism of the male. Again the poignancy of the separation of mother and daughter, a pathos which constitutes part of the erotic excitement is evoked when she remembers how she “lay awake in the wagon-lit in a tender delicious ecstasy of excitement” (BC 7) as the train bore her “away from Paris, away from girl-hood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of [her] mother’s apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage” (BC 7). The mother’s regrets are also depicted: “folding up and putting away all [her] little relics” probably “with the half joyous, half sorrowful emotions of a woman on her daughter’s wedding day” (BC 7). Unlike the traditional ‘bride’, the bride in Carter’s tale is so thrilled by the part she plays that she does not in reality regret ‘the world of tartines and maman that now [recede] from [her] as if drawn away on a string, like a child’s toy’ (BC 12) As Elaine Jordon in The Story teller: Illuminations puts it:
In context, this wonderfully evokes the sensation of pulling out of a railway station, but also in a wider context grandfather Freud’s game of forte/Da, here and gone - the child’s overcoming of separation from the mother by calling performance and language, signification into play. (Jordan 124)

Unlike the original versions where the brother comes to the girl’s rescue here it is the mother who comes to her rescue. Here the role of the mother is not passive. Her sudden appearance to her daughter’s rescue is vindicated to the reader in a prosaic manner that she had come because her daughter’s phone call had alarmed her. But it implies “a solid connection between mother and daughter that can survive even the most macabre of patriarchy’s fairy tales” (Sellers 119). Nicole Ward Jouve, argues that the mother’s appearance “contradicts all motherly representations” (Ward Jouve 153) Lorna Sage, in her introduction to a volume of essays on Carter, agrees that the stories in The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories, develop Carter’s attack on the fraudulent ahistoricity of myth and symbol, but believes that what Carter does is to “re-write them into mutability, pull them into a world of change” (Sage 16). By inserting what is apparently incontrovertible into new “speculative histories”, Sage maintains that Carter “is able to expose the bankruptcy of past forms and gainfully re-invest those which still have resonance for us” (16).
Carter in her rewriting of the tale has created two other figures – the blind piano-tuner, Jean Yves and the girl’s mother- whose actions and presence alter the terms of the unequal conflict between husband and wife. Instead of the bride’s sister Anne in the Perrault’s original version who announces the arrival of the bride’s two brothers, in Carter’s version we have the blind piano-tuner, Jean Yves, who loves the child-bride not for her beauty but for her single gift of music. The brothers who arrive armed with muskets and rapiers to save Blue beard’s bride in the original tale. But here appears the mother as travelling heroine. The wonder struck girl exclaims:

You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, 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 thighs, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father’s revolver. (BC 39-40)

And the hand of vengeance against the husband is the woman’s hand, the mother’s hand. Only the women have suffered, only the women can be avenged. Without a moment’s hesitation the mother puts “a single irreplaceable bullet” (BC 40) through the Marquis’ head. Here Carter alters the sexual politics of fairy tales. The girl’s mother never deserts her child. Though she has the wisdom to
give her child the freedom demanded by sexual maturity, the mother arrives with melodramatic timeliness to her daughter’s rescue. Patricia Dunker in ‘Re-imagining the fairy tales: Angela Carter’s Bloody Chambers’ aptly comments “Carter’s tale perhaps unwittingly, carries an uncompromisingly feminist message; for the women’s revolution would seal up the door of the bloody chamber for ever” (Humm 235).

Atwood’s title story “Blue beard’s Egg” (BE 134-164) from the collection Blue beard’s Egg and Other Stories makes use of Fitcher’s Bird inter-text. It is not an exact re-telling of the Blue Beard’s story. The story from the point of view of the male writer focuses on the helplessness of the woman who is to be saved by the patriarchal order. However the original story relates how the third sister by her resourcefulness outwits the wizard. A disguised wizard carries away each of the sisters in turn to a large house in the forest, where they have everything that they could desire, except entrance to a forbidden room. This is a false promise of a patriarchal order for it retains a forbidden space. In the wizard’s absence, the sister who is entrusted with the “egg” and “keys” and prohibited to open the door to “the forbidden room” disobedys and out of curiosity opens it. Inside it was a large basin full of blood, within which were “the bodies of many women, which had been cut to pieces; nearby were a chopping block and an axe.” (Wilson 155) The egg falls into the basin and gets stained. The angry wizard chops her into pieces.
and throws...into the basin. The second sister too meets a similar fate. Although
the third sister opens the door, she is wise enough to leave the egg outside and thus
the wizard loses his control over her and restores her sisters back to life. But in
Atwood’s story it is the Blue beard story that Sally has to rewrite as an assignment
for her ‘Forms of Narrative Fiction’ course. The story is narrated from Sally’s
viewpoint. She draws certain similarities between her married life and the story.
Sally is Ed’s third wife. She has “never even met the first one, who moved to the
west coast fourteen years ago and sends Christmas cards, and the second one was
middle-aged and already in the act of severing herself from Ed before Sally came
along” (BE 134). Sally loves Ed for his “monumental and almost energetic
stupidity” (132). She is filled with wonder “that the world can contain such
marvels as Ed’s colossal and endearing thickness. He is just so stupid” (132). On
good days she sees his stupidity “as innocence, lamb – like” (133) and on bad days
as “wilfulness, a stubborn determination ‘to shut things out” (135). Sally prefers
not to identify Ed with Blue Beard. Ed is the egg, blank and pristine and lovely.
Stupid too. Boiled probably” (157) In her story the forbidden room will not contain
“chopped-up women” but “nothing”. (156). Sally builds a mirage so that she
cannot see to what extent her husband, a heart specialist, is the modern Blue
Beard, someone who operates coldly on the hearts of others. As Sally prefers to
create the image of her sexual partner rather than see him directly, she pictures Ed
as the “egg” rather than Blue Beard offering a new mythic revision of the egg, the
egg of possibility, "alive", "pulsing" and likely to hatch". (164) But what will come out of it is vague. Aware of the egg's mythological and folkloric significance as a fertility symbol, Sally is hopeful about a positive transformation, a new vision.

Throughout the major part of the story Sally watches Ed, framed in the kitchen window "puttering around the rock garden" (132), while she cooks food that fails to nourish her marital or emotional life. Ed's over enthusiasm about a new heart machine that is "a thousand times better than an electrocardiogram", creates suspicions in her. She feels that the transaction, the whole room is "sexual in a way she didn't quite understand; it was clearly a dangerous place. It was like a massage parlour, only for women" (145). Despite all this, Sally puts on a brave front and constantly deludes herself by imagining how superior she is to her husband; and how much she is in control of him. But seeing Ed with her best friend Marylynn and watching their intimacy she realizes that Ed is no longer the passive egg "small and cold and white and inert but larger than a real egg glowing softly as though there's something red and hot inside. It's almost pulsing". Sally observes another dimension in Ed that frightens her "the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch. But what will come out of it?" (164) is vague. Sharon Rose Wilson in Fairy Tale Sexual Politics remarks:
Sally has already reminded us of the egg’s mythological and folkloric significance, as a fertility symbol, object in spells; and a source of the universe. Described as golden pink, resting in a nest of brambles, glowing softly as though there’s something red and hot inside it, and then darkening to rose-red, crimson, the egg carries specific associations with golden, red, and nest eggs, including the golden egg of the world laid by the primeval goose, the red eggs of salvation or abundance and the nest egg that may induce future birth. A number of fairy tale connections also exist most directly to the Grimm’s ‘The Crystal Ball’ This type, called the Ogre’s (Devil’s Heart in the egg, can suggest the external soul in the egg, which helps explain Sally’s association of the egg with the heart in Atwood’s story. Since Ed has been identified with the egg, if his heart or soul is in the egg, he no longer has power over Sally (the third sister). In the Grimm’s version of this type the crystal ball yolk of a ‘red hot egg’ releases a beautiful King’s daughter from the shape of ugliness given her by an enchanter, again implying positive transformation. In Andersen’s ‘The Phoenix Bird’ a phoenix symbolizing poetry arises from a red egg under the tree of knowledge. (269)

Although Sally ultimately seems to fear a sense of emptiness inside, however her search for a point of view in the Blue beard story and her encounter
with her real self is a promising sign of a positive transformation and possibly a re-born self from a female viewpoint. This re-visioning of the fairy tale from the Sally’s point of view focuses on the presentation of the woman’s experience in different situations and at different points in her life. Though, Sally initially makes herself believe that she is in control of things and that Ed is utterly stupid, at a later stage, she is haunted by a vague sense of emptiness within; she can only watch helplessly the delicate balance on which their marital relationship hangs precariously and may at any moment be shattered. Sally like the ingenious third sister has apparently been able to get what she wants, but is caught in a sense of emptiness that pervades her life by her inability to achieve absolute security. She attempts new ways of telling her story, though she is certain that her story cannot have a happy fairy tale ending, for she cannot completely understand Ed and is “fed up with her inner world; she doesn’t need to explore it. In her inner world is Ed, like a doll within a Russian wooden doll, and in Ed is Ed’s inner world, which she can’t get at” (BE 150).

Atwood in her story “Weight” (WT 177-94) has also alluded to the Blue beard theme when she identifies Molly’s husband Curtis as Blue beard. Molly, the feminist attorney, who spends her life advocating women’s rights is “murdered by her husband Curtis with a claw hammer” (180) on the charges of infidelity. “He killed her in her sleep” (192) Curtis was “the kind of man who was good with
tools. He had a workbench, in the cellar. The lathe, the vise, the buzz saw, the works.” (180) Curtis’ “secret chamber”. In “Alien Territory” (BAM 103-16) in section 6, she attempts a re-telling of the Blue beard story. Here Blue beard’s latest wife “the third sister” (111) is very much in love with him “even though she knew he was a serial killer” (111) Initially she abides by his command not to “open the small door” and contents herself in exploring his “medicine cabinet”, “Kitchen drawers” (111) and “linen closet” (112). She finds ‘his previous women’ (112) in the linen closet; “neatly cut up and ironed flat and folded, stored in mothballs and lavender” (112) She becomes more curious and decided to disobey his command. She opens the door and finds “a small dead child, with its eyes wide open” (113) Blue beard claims it to be his child whom he “gave birth to” (113). She pays the penalty for disobedience, “it becomes dark and the floor disappears and there was suddenly no floor” (113) and they go “deeper” into the earth. Here there is no rescue for the bride, being completely in the control of Blue beard. Despite, superficial difference in the three versions of the Blue beard story by the same author Atwood, the focal point that she attempts to highlight is the positive transformation in these women which make it possible for them to realize their full potential as women. Sally in “Blue beard’s Egg” (BE 131 – 164) shows signs of a positive transformation when she realizes her real self. In “Weight” (WT 177 – 222) Molly gains immortality when a shelter for battered women is to be named
after her "Molly's Place" (180). In "Alien Territory" (BAM 103 –116) the third sister disobeys Blue beard as she desires to "cure him" (111).

Suniti Namjoshi has also in her fables taken up the Blue beard theme in her re-workings in "Blue beard's Way" (SF 98-101) and "A Room of His Own" (FF 64). Namjoshi's Blue beard in 'Blue beard's Way' does not murder his wives as the traditional Blue beard but preserves them. Here Blue beard is a miser who hoards "gold", "furniture" and "women". It is in fact a satire on the status of women as objects in a phallocratic society. Women in a patriarchal set up are considered as possessions like other objects. This is highlighted in 'Blue beard's Way' where Blue beard the miser hoards women as he does other objects:

After all as economists say that from the male point of view cows and women are a form of property. He did not hoard cows. Cleaning up shit, the problem of space, the awkwardness of size, in short, the logistics, just weren't worth it. And in any case, he considered women the superior species. His house was honey combed with hundreds of cells, and in each of these cells his women were fed and fattened and tranquilized according to need. (SF 98)
The women were fertile. The male offspring "were disposed of at birth; but the females he kept and each was locked in an individual cell as soon as it was worthwhile" (SF 98). As blue beard grew old he became anxious about the future of his women "What of his property? Who would tend it?" (99) So the "next male was allowed to live" (99). After the death of old Blue beard, the young Blue beard effects a change in the system, "More males were permitted to live, not just as a matter of kindness but out of necessity." (99). Ultimately, old Blue beard's method prevails a few faithful sons of Blue beard remain, "their genes undiluted, their minds unclouded, their message clear: BACK TO FUNDAMENTALS. Authority and Territory are the Rights of Man" (101). Females are to be kept "barefoot and pregnant" (101). Patriarchy adopts Blue beard's way insisting on the victimization of women, where women are not given freedom but are confined within the restrictions prescribed by patriarchy. They are kept "pregnant" which is "the" role assigned to women. In "A Room of His Own" (FF 64) too Namjoshi takes up the theme of Blue beard. Here Blue beard kills his fifth wife not for disobedience but rather for obedience. "The house was dusted, the floors were polished and the door to the little room hadn't been opened" (64). Blue beard's wife is pictured as the docile woman who is prepared to accept her subordinate role as a slave to man. She is so meek that even Blue beard, her husband has only contempt for her. He was "so incensed that he killed her on the spot. At the trial he pleaded provocation." In these re-workings Suniti Namjoshi presents a very
different picture of the traditional Blue beard. It is her futuristic design for the women folk to be assertive.

Variants of the popular ‘Beauty and the Beast’ tale have also been handled by Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi in their re-worked tales. Angela Carter depicts the familiar ingredients in an unfamiliar manner. She does not stop with pointing out what is wrong with conventional representations or models, but also suggests alternate paradigms. Some times these twin concerns may find expression in a single tale or emerge in the counter-pointing between different versions of the same tale as in “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-50) and “The Tiger’s Bride” (50-67), two different versions of ‘The Beauty and the Beast’ tale. “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (41-50) repeats the basic outline of the traditional story of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ where Beauty saves her father by agreeing to live with the Beast, who is transformed by her love and care into a Prince who ultimately marries her. In Carter’s story, Beauty’s father who has been financially ruined, accidentally meets the Beast who sees Beauty’s photograph and invites them to dinner. The Beast offers to help him regain his fortune. Beauty’s father leaves for London “to take up the legal cudgels again” (45) while she remains with the Beast. When her father regains his fortune she leaves to join him promising to return to the Beast later. When she learns that the Beast is dying, she rushes to him “Don’t die, Beast! If you’ll have me, I’ll never leave you” (51). The Beast is
transformed with her kiss into a man and the story ends with a note of their marriage. In Bettelheim’s view ‘Beauty and the Beast’ is a tale imaging a healthy and positive transfer of a girl’s affection for her father to a man who is to be her sexual partner; the successful maturation of the girl into a woman:

No other well-known fairy tale makes it as obvious as, ‘Beauty and the Beast’ that a child’s oedipal attachment to a parent is naturally desirable, and has the most positive consequences for all, if during the process of maturation it is transferred and transformed as it becomes detached from the parent and concentrated on the lover. Our oedipal attachments, far from being only the source of our greatest emotional difficulties are the soil out of which permanent happiness grows if we experience the right evolution and resolution of these feelings. (Bettelheim 303.)

While Bettelheim sees the story as an allegory of women’s growth into adulthood, Carter sees it as a male conspiracy to deny women the chance to attain autonomous adulthood, which she reveals not by altering the original plot but by her emphases and observations as the story unfolds. Beauty’s father is a patriarch; for him Beauty is “his girl-child, his pet” (BC 41). Here Carter highlights the position of the female in a patriarchal set up, where she is regarded as an object in an economic system of exchange. Instead of the white rose which Beauty’s father steals from the Beast’s garden for his daughter, he has to bring his daughter to the
Beast’s house for dinner. “Take her rose, then but bring her to dinner’ he
growled” (45). The dog, the Beast’s pet spaniel, is female and actualises in its
relation to the Beast, the manner in which Beauty’s father considers Beauty as less
than human, as his “pet”. The total powerlessness of Beauty in this male-
dominated system is evident in Carter’s description of why Beauty quietly goes
through the ordeal of her first meeting with the Beast and why she remains with
the Beast while her father goes to London:

[S]he stayed, and smiled, because her father wanted her to do
so....when....the Beast... suggested...that she should stay here, with
him....while her father returned to London. she forced a smile. For she
knew with a pang of dread, as soon as he spoke, that it would be so and her
visit to the Beast must be, on some magically reciprocal scale, the price of
her father’s good fortune. (45)

Bettelheim may have seen the relationship between Beauty on the one hand,
and her father and the Beast on the other characterized by “gentleness and loving
devotion” (Bettelheim 303). But to Carter it is a more mercenary one where
Beauty is passed around between males and denied the chance of self-
determination. The Beast is not a male ogre; he doesn’t imprison Beauty or rape
her but exploits her sentiment. When Beauty returns to the dying Beast at the end of the story he performs an act of pure emotional blackmail:

I'm dying Beauty, he said in a cracked whisper of his former purr. Since you left me, I have been sick. I could not go hunting, I found I had not the stomach to kill the gentle beasts, I could not eat. I am sick and I must die; but I shall die happy because you have come to say goodbye to me. (BC 50)

For Carter the story is an allegory of the stunting of women's growth to individual adult identity. Carter herself comments that the story is "an advertisement for moral blackmail": when the Beast says that he is dying because of Beauty, the only morally correct thing for her to have said at that point would be, "Die, then" (Haffenden 83). But Beauty doesn't say that she agrees to marry him. "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" (BC 41-50) highlights what is corrupt about gender relations in the Beauty and the Beast tale. On the other hand, "The Tiger's Bride" (51-67) seeks to alter the image. The role of women as objects of exchange in a patriarchal system is emphasized more sharply in "The Tiger's Bride" (51-67). Beauty's father ends up gambling and losing his daughter to the Beast. But here Beauty does not seem disillusioned by having been lost to the Beast. Aiden Day observes: "It is as if, under her father's tutelage, she already knew that her status..."
as an object, as a commodity, was her only status in the world, that her flesh was the only purchase she had upon the world” (139-40). She had already a childhood knowledge of sex, with its fear of animality and an awareness of her status as a commodity. On arrival at the Beast’s palace Beauty learns what he expects of her “to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude without her dress” (BC 58). Initially, she agrees to satisfy his demand on certain conditions:

You may put me in a windowless room sir, and I promise you I will pull my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it; though the sheet must be laid over me lightly that it will not choke me. So I shall be covered completely from the waist upwards and no lights. There you can visit me once, sir, and only the once. After that I must be driven directly to the city and deposited in the public square, in front of the church. If you wish to give me money, then I should be pleased to receive it. But I must stress that you should give me only the same amount of money that you would give to any other woman in such circumstances. (59)

Beauty is well aware of the codes of masculine objectification of the female as if she were saying “if I’m going to be an object, then I’m really going to be one.” (Day 141) Later, she refuses to be an object in a patriarchal contract “she
will not undress for the Beast” (BC 141). In “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (41-50) Beauty is not only defined but defines herself as the victim in the patriarchal contract; accepting it voluntarily. But on the contrary, in “The Tiger’s Bride” (51-67) Beauty defines the prescriptions of patriarchal culture and thereby refuses the role of victim, refuses ‘to be a lamb’ (143) The tiger ‘reveals his animality’ and Beauty asserting herself ‘does the same’ (143) Day observes:

Her stripping now does not place her as the object of the masculine gaze. It incorporates into her subject position an animality which cultural construction of what she is has sought to mask. Carter here exposes a key contradiction in the cultural construction of femininity. The exposure involves the issue of class. In masculine culture it is specifically bourgeois women who have been classed as non-animal, while working-class women have been more associated with the animal. Cultural construction of femininity has thus sought both to mask and paradoxically to insist upon women’s animality in a kind of divide and rule strategy. Both, bourgeois and working-class femininity are demeaned by the simultaneous masking of and insistence upon animality. By showing the bourgeois Beauty’s dismissal of her mask, Carter is breaking the patriarchal frame that has sought to oppress simultaneously bourgeois and working-class women through applying contradictory definitions of animality. Beauty
experiences freedom, for the first time in her life, as “she begins to run with— not from tigers” (143).

Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” (BC 51-67) attempts to abolish a cultural definition of the female as passive victim “a definition which attributes libidinal desire only to the male and associates the female with being merely the inert object of that desire” (144). Here Carter deconstructs the patriarchal idea of the female as passive victim. In the story “the male is represented as being as much trapped within the patriarchal scenario as the female. Here the female, equal to the male in fleshly nature and in appetite, dismisses nursery superstitions about the uniquely threatening animality of the male “and envisages a liberation from cultural misrepresentation of male and female through an exposure of an animal equality between the sexes” (BC 44). In “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-50), Beauty’s reappearance at the end of the story revives the dying Beast and with her power the Beast is transformed by her tears into a handsome man, Mr. Lyon and “then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man” (51). The conclusion of “The Tiger’s Bride” (BC 51-67) “contradicts the endorsement of patriarchal power in the original Beauty and the Beast fable as it envisages a liberation from cultural misrepresentations of male and female through an exposure of an animal equality between the sexes” (Day 144).
Here Beauty asserts herself and makes the choice when having seen the Beast’s nakedness, proceeds to reveal her own nakedness, refusing to let him be covered up again. To permit the Beast to cover himself would have been to endorse patriarchy by confirming that she has no animal self to expose for “she is not the mirror image of his sexuality but the distinct and equal complement to the sexuality he displays” (145-146). Beauty undergoes an erotic transformation. It is as though her whole body was being deflowered and consequently metamorphosing into a new instrument of desire, introducing her as it were into a new world. Beauty herself describes it in “The Tiger’s Bride”:

[\text{E}ach stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and tricked down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur. (BC 67)]

Atwood in her story “Weight” (WT 177-94) brings in a fairy tale allusion of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale, where she refers to Molly, the smart female advocate who is able to transform any ordinary man into a prince with her kiss. Namjoshi too presents another variant of the tale, in her fable “A Moral Tale” (FF 21), which presents a radical feminist picture. In Namjoshi’s tale, the Beast is pictured as a woman: “The Beast wasn’t a nobleman. The Beast was a woman.
That's why its love for Beauty was so monstrous” (21). Indirectly there is a hint that patriarchy did not approve of lesbianism “people disapprove” (21). Here Namjoshi alters a patriarchal notion that Beasts are generally fierce “the Beast isn’t fierce, Its extremely gentle” (21).

Werewolf stories recur throughout history, through Greek and Norse myths, Latin literature, medieval ballads and sixteenth-century trials where the belief in the actual transformation was taken very seriously indeed, so seriously that the accused could be executed to or crimes committed while he (or she) was in wolf form. (The term ‘Lycanthropy’ from the Greek words for wolf lykos, and men anthropos cover both the medical condition, a morbid delusion that the sufferer becomes an animal, and the belief that such a change actually takes place). Tina Rath in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* is of the view:

Even in England, where wolves were hunted to extinction early, the figure of the man-wolf lurks behind folk-tales like ‘Mr. Fox’ the story of a murderous bridegroom, and songs about ‘sly, bold Reynardine’, an outlaw, or perhaps something worse, who leads his innocent victims off into the forest to his ‘green castle or under the jolly trappings of the pantomime story of Little Red Riding Hood (was the wolf really Grandmother all the while?) Ireland is surprisingly rich in werewolf legends. Films gave the
werewolf a whole new lease of life, and a new image as a furry anthropoid, caught in med-transformation. (qtd. Mulbey-Roberts 277)

Helene Cixous in an essay translated into English as ‘Love of the Wolf’ explores several connotations of the mythic animal. The intermixture of love and fear in our attachment to what threatens as well, suggests a return to childhood:

For the child the ‘truth’ of love is ‘both-at-once’ imaged in the tale of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ in the beloved grandmother we take food to who is also the terrifying, devouring wolf. Unlike the child who can experience ‘both-at-once’ the adult is subject to ‘either/or’: we see either our ‘candy’ grandmother or the ferocious wolf. (Stigmata 93)

Angela Carter and Suniti Namjoshi in their re-working of fairy tales have written wolf and werewolf stories. Carter’s “The Werewolf” (BC 108-109) and “The Company of Wolves” (110-118) are werewolf stories whereas “Wolf-Alice” (119-126) and “Peter and the Wolf” (BV 79-87) are wolf stories. Suniti Namjoshi too in “Wolf” (SF 62-63) has emphasized the interaction between animals and humans.
The main attraction of the fairy tale centres on the far-fetched and the wonderful Carter employs the fairy tale to advance understanding of experience, which offers the most fruitful possibilities about interaction between animal and human world permitting new ways of exploring aspects of sexuality. She re-works stories of sexual encounter between animals and human beings in the “The Werewolf” (BC108-109) and “The Company of Wolves” (BC110-118) and the two variants of the ‘Beauty and the Beast’ story- “The Courtship of Mr.Lyon”(41-50) and “The Tiger’s Bride”(51-67) where she pictures women accepting a lion and a tiger as mates.

Carter’s “The Werewolf”(BC108-109) and “The company of Wolves” (BC 110-118) are revisionings of the fairy tale ‘Little Red Riding Hood’. Carter’s Red Riding Hood is a very bold girl, quite unlike the traditional Red Riding Hood. She is unafraid of the wolf and in “The Company of Wolves” she sleeps “between the paws of the tender wolf” (118). In “The Werewolf” (108-110), the girl at the conclusion of the story realizes that her grandmother is in reality the werewolf. When the wolf’s paw she had slashed up in the forest, and had carefully wrapped up in a cloth falls to the ground, “it was no longer a wolf’s paw. It was a hand chopped off at the wrist, a hand toughened with work and freckled with age. There was a wedding ring on the third finger and a wart on the index finger. By the wart, she knew it was her grandmother’s hand” (109).
The animal aspects of human sexuality are her particular concern; thus the wolf and the lion roar: through the tales seeking whom they may erotically devour. Here the mythic paradigm that Carter offers is the radical, shocking notion that the girl might easily be amoral, as savage as the wolf by the power of her own predatory sexuality and erotic wolfishness as also in “The company of Wolves” (110-118). In “The Company of Wolves” (110-118) Carter pictures a remarkably original version of the Red Riding Hood story in which the girl, instead of being devoured by the cunning and hungry wolf, is confronted by a werewolf figure and takes him as her lover. Jack Zipes, referring to Carter’s treatment of the story in The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood points out:

In the most popular forms of the story Red Riding Hood is a male creation, and reflects men’s fear of women’s sexuality by showing the girl to be to blame for her own death or symbolic rape. Carter by contrast shows a strong-minded young woman who can fend for herself and can tame the wolf by the positive use of her sexuality. (Breaking the Magic Spell 56-7)

In Carter’s story the girl reverses expectation when the werewolf says “All the better to eat you with” (118) She declares her own activity and her refusal to be victim or merely object. She bursts out laughing, “[S]he knew she was nobody’s meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung
it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing” (118). She discards her virginity at the appropriate moment and eventually sleeps between the paws of the wolf. In “The Company of wolves” (110-118) the girl asserts herself and refuses to be victim or merely object. Carter in this retelling takes the idea of the equality of libidinal impulse in human beings to ground a representation of interactions of human beings, Day notes:

The opposition of subject versus object, active versus passive, is transcended so that each individual in the encounter may be at once both. Just as the girl refuses to be ‘meat’, refuses to play the part simply of object of consumption or victim, so the wolf, traditionally solely the aggressor is described at the last as tender. (149)

Day agrees with Mackinen who is of the view that “in all the tales, not only is femininity constructed as active, sensual, desiring and unruly- but successful sexual transactions are founded on an equality and the transforming powers of recognizing the reciprocal claims of the other” (Day 151).

*Carter’s “Peter and the Wolf” in Black Venus though not exactly a revisionary tale like her stories in The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories, is a re-working based on folk-tales about children being carried away by wolves and
brought up by them and traces the destructive effects that mythic paradigms can have on human interaction. The turning point in the story comes when Peter catches sight of the cousin who was carried away by wolves, suckling her cubs; it is this image that eventually leads him to abandon the seminary and go out into the world. As Sellers points out:

Peter’s witnessing of his cousin’s instinctual act enables him to eradicate the injunctions that have previously governed his existence, since through it he acknowledges both his kinship with the female and his own proximity to animal life. This insistence on beastiality as a positive step is a particularly prominent theme of “The Bloody Chamber”, generating a new ending to the ‘Beauty and the Beast’ tale in ‘The Tiger’s Bride’ for instance, where the protagonist’s spurning of the furs, clothes and jewels her culture values so highly results in a nudity that allows her to relate to ‘the Beast’ as an equal and without fear. (Sellers 119-20)

“Wolf-Alice” (BC 119-126) another of Carter’s wolf narratives is a re-working not based on any single fairy tale but incorporates features of several. It narrates the tale of a girl who has been raised by wolves and is therefore free of all the structuring identity that comes with human socialisation. She is, “not a wolf herself, although suckled by wolves” (119) and “nothing about her is human
except that she is not a wolf” (119). Some humans kill her “foster-mother” and deposit the wolf-girl in a convent where attempts to civilize her fail miserably and she is thrown out “delivered over to the bereft and unsanctified household of the Duke” (120), who in reality is a werewolf. Carter refers to his inhumanness by the fact that he casts no reflection in mirrors; “nothing can hurt him since he ceased to cast an image in the mirror” (120) as werewolf he is defined only by appetite: “At night those huge, inconsolable, rapacious eyes of his are eaten up by swollen, gleaming pupils. His eyes see only appetite” (120). The tale tells of the girl’s independent discovery of her humanity. She develops a sense of time and its regularities from her menstrual periods which begin while she is in the castle: “you might say she discovered the very action of time by means of this returning cycle” (123). She slowly discovers herself through her reflection in the mirror. Here Carter recalls Lacan’s idea that individual, self-conscious identity is born of reflection and representation in signs. The Duke is also restored to humanity when Wolf-Alice takes care of him after he is injured during one of his night time excursions.

Carter identifies an animal dimension to human beings generally suppressed beneath social representations of that animality. In all the stories in *The Bloody Chambers and Other stories* as Day opines “it is existing social constructions that repress and misrepresent an animal energy shared equally
between the sexes” (Day 145). Indulging in a true representation of nature and sexuality, Carter argues that the male and the female have equal “natural” impulses, libidinal drives. Day remarks:

Carter’s empirical materialism leads her to see both women and men as creatures of the flesh and as equally rooted in and driven by fleshly impulses. To deny women the same fleshly ontology as men would be to fall into the patriarchal ‘angel in the house’ syndrome of misrepresentation of women, which of course has its equally constraining counter-misrepresentation of women who act out fleshly impulses as whores. It is patriarchal culture- in a duplicitous attempt to contain the female- which has generated the idea of the male libido as threatening to devour sexually unmotivated females or as needing to protect itself against sexually motivated ones. By deconstructing one term of the opposition- in granting Beauty her own desire- Carter erases the opposition itself. She uses the image of animals to signify a libido that has been culturally repressed in some women and which needs recognizing and articulating in order that they may define autonomous subject positions for themselves. (147)

In these tales Carter employs animals to figure a libido common to both the female and the male.
Suniti Namjoshi too in her “Wolf” (SF 62-63) has presented a wolf narrative. The story is based on the folk tales relating to children being carried away by wolves and brought up in their midst. Here the story is about “a young woman who makes friends with a wolf” (62). Initially the townsfolk are indifferent to their friendship. The woman and the wolf became thick friends and “frequently went for walks” (SF,62). Time passes by, but “the virgin continued to remain a virgin and the wolf continued to remain a wolf” (62). Their attempts to hunt down the wolf proves futile. The mysterious disappearance of the virgin confirms the “presence of wolves” (62). Ultimately they put up a sign “in large red letters warning the unwary that there were wolves about”. (63) This story illustrates the fact that like Carter, Suniti Namjoshi too identifies an animal dimension in human beings as well. This may also account for the fact that Namjoshi employs animal characters in abundance in her fables.

Unlike Carter and Namjoshi, Atwood in her short stories has not written explicitly on ‘wolves’, but the animal dimensions in human beings particularly in the males in their extra-marital sexual relations has often been hinted at in a few short stories like “Hairball” (WT 39-56) where Kat recollects Gerald’s “furtive, boyish delight in his own wickedness” (49) for which he was so grateful and he used to say more frequently than was necessary and usually in bed “I can hardly believe this happening” (49). In “The Bogman” (85-106) Julie makes it clear that
she "has Connor's sexual attention, but the wife has Connor" (94) and in "Bluebeard's Egg" (BE 131-164) Sally who had been all along thinking that her husband Ed is stupid is shocked into realization that he is not when she sees Ed standing in a rather intimate posture with her best friend Marylynn.

The re-tellings of the traditional fairy tales from the female point of view, in the stories of Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi, also take the form of parody to give emphasis to the messages embodied in them. "Parody is a typical post-modern paradoxical form because it uses and abuses the texts and conventions of the tradition. It also contests both the authority of the tradition and the claims of art to originality" (Hutcheon 8). Parody, the form used to describe comic quotation, imitation or transformation, with its associations with the burlesque and its use of ridicule, has been criticized for negativity or destructiveness. But Christopher Stone, for a difference, uses the element of ridicule in a parody as a positive characteristic. According to Stone, "ridicule is society's most effective means of curing inelasticity. It explodes the pompous, corrects the well-meaning eccentric, cools the fanatical and prevents the incompetent from achieving success. Truth will prevail over it, falsehood will cower under it" (8). Stone’s approach follows Sir Owen Seaman’s view of the highest function of parody as being its ability to criticize that which is false. Seaman’s view in turn is a reflection of the French
critic and parodist Louis Fuzelier, defending parody as a useful device for attacking falsity.

Far from converting virtue into a paradox, and degrading truth by ridicule, parody will only strike at what is chimerical and false; it is not a piece of buffoonery so much as a critical exposition. What do we parody but the absurdities of the writers, who frequently make their heroes, act against nature, common sense and truth. (Rohrich 221)

Parody is a major form of formal and ideological critique for feminists. It is not only destructive but is also re-constructive, as Rohrich points out: "Parodist changes of pre-given traditions need not only be viewed negatively as a destruction of that which has been sung or spoken. They reveal at the same time a process of linguistic reformation and new formation" (221). Women writers have also made use of parody for re-constructive purposes as a weapon to fight marginalization, as it literally works to incorporate "that upon which it ironically comments. It can be both inside and outside the dominant discourse whose critique it embodies" (Hutcheon 266). Parody in this way is dexterously used by Marian Engel in Bear where she subverts the elitist high-brow concepts of what constitutes serious literature. The book came to be written as a novel because of the nature of the question of pornography as examined from a woman's point of view. The book
in effect parodies the male discourse of pornography first by usurping an
exclusively male tradition by the female; and secondly by transforming it into an
art form with the help of her feminist imagination” (Gender and Literature 109).
Women usurp male space to transform it into female space which is generally done
through subversive strategies of parody. Thus parody becomes another tool in the
hands of Carter Atwood and Namjoshi in their reworkings of fairy tales.

Parody is at times manifest at the level of language too, as it offers another
way in which women writers “can subvert the authority of language, language seen
as having a single and final meaning” (Hutcheon 7). This aspect of parody has
also been made use of by Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi. In “The Company of
Wolves” (BC 110-118), Carter parodies the very sentences uttered by Red Riding
Hood and the wolf in the original fairy tale ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, with minor
variations. “What big eyes you have “comments the girl. “All the better to see
you with” (117) retorts the wolf. “What big teeth you have – All the better to eat
you with” (118). But instead of “big ears” in the original, Carter’s version says
“What big arms you have – All the better to hug you with” (118). Unlike the
original, the wolf’s replies are ironic suggestive of sexual implications. In
Atwood’s Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut, the alliterative use of the letter
‘p’ is found throughout the entire tale, unlike the original fairy tale ‘Princess on the
Pea’. Here the parody takes the form of gentle mockery to present a pompous
Princess instead of a sensitive one normally appreciated in a patriarchal set up. Similarly, Namjoshi too in “The Princess” (FF 5) employs parody in a mocking manner to ridicule the princely quality of sensitivity, which “was such that it was absolutely amazing” (5), and her skin was so delicate “that she was allergic to everything” (5). To these writers parody provides “an alternative to silent rejection of male universals” and enable them to “address their culture directly without risking co-option by its values” (Hutcheon 121).

Carter’s re-telling of fairy tales in the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* are parodies of the patriarchal assumptions of women as docile, timid and passive. In “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride” for example Beauty is pictured not as the traditional passive Beauty, but a daring, enterprising female, willing to accept a ‘lion’ and a ‘tiger’ as mates. At the conclusion of “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” we find Mr. and Mrs. Lyon walking in the garden “The Werewolf” and “The Company of Wolves too are parodies of Red Riding Hood, who is here pictured as unafraid of Wolves and willing to sleep between the paws of Wolves, something that the traditional Red Riding Hood would never have dreamt of. The re-telling of the Bluebeard story in “The Bloody Chamber” is a parody of the traditional Bluebeard who is an expert in murdering his brides is killed at a single shot by his latest brides mother, a woman.
In Anderson's fairy tale “The Princess on the Pea” where we get the patriarchal mythical archetype of the docile women, highlighting that sensitivity is an essential characteristic of princesses in a patriarchal set up. Atwood in Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut parodies this patriarchal myth where women with excessive pride and energy (considered unwomanly) are punished. In Atwood's parody a contrast of Prunella's character is painted - In the first half of the fairy tale before the wise woman casts a wicked spell on her, Prunella is pictured as a very pompous princess, “proud and prissy” (PP 3) the most bad tempered and most inconsiderate princess on the planet. She is so proud of her beauty that she, “parades around all day, in puffy petticoats sprinkled with sparkling pink sequins” (3) and “slurping peppermints and peering at her dimples in a pocket-mirror” (3). In a patriarchal set-up, the ultimate goal of a princess is to marry a charming Prince. Prunella too dreams of marrying “a pin-headed prince with piles of money who will praise and pamper and adore her” (3). She is not tidy and well behaved as girls ought to be. “she would never pick up her playthings, plump her pillows or put away her pens, pencils and puzzles” (3). Moreover, she has a problem of perceiving where she is going because of her pocket-mirror. She spills “parsley and potatoes on her pinafore, producing spots”, upsets “the pudgy palace lamps from the pedestals”, trips over “the powered porcelain Pekingese perched near the fireplace, and tips Princess Patty’s “powerful perfume all over the Persian carpet, making an unpleasant puddle” (5). When Penny, the parlour maid remonstrates
with her, she haughtily retaliates: “Pooh Penny who gives a piffle what you think? You are nothing but a paid servant. Plod off and get the scrub pail, and wipe up that puddle of poisonous perfume”(5). She steps on the tails of the pussy-cats. Patience, Prue and Pringle and not sorry about it calls them “parasitical pipsqueaks” saying that, “pussy-cats are perverse, piddling pointy pawed, pie-faced pudding brains. They are not worth spit” (7). Prunella is so proud that she sends away the wise woman saying “Porridge and Prunes and Peppermints are for princesses. Poor people don’t deserve any. So get away from this palace, you pathetic, peasant pauper” (9). The woman casts a spell on her – a purple peanut begins to grow from the tip of her nose, which ultimately gains the size of a pumpkin. ‘The purple peanut’ disappears only when she performs three good deeds and becomes transformed into a docile and passive woman who is admired and accepted in a patriarchal set up. In the latter half of the fairy tale, the repentant princess cries out in despair “I have been a proud, presumptuous and pre-occupied princess” and “a pearly tear-drop plopped sloppily onto her spotted pocket-hanky” (19). Immersed as she is in performing the three good deeds she hardly realizes the disappearance of the purple peanut.

Here Atwood presenting such a pompous and selfish Prunella displays a subverted picture of princesses who are essentially considerate and sensitive thus parodying the qualities expected from princesses. The pompous princess receives
due punishment when the wise woman casts a wicked spell over her; a purple peanut’ begins to grow from the tip of her nose. She weeps in despair. She may be redeemed only after she performs three good deeds. As Prunella’s purple peanut disappears and she becomes a transformed person and gains the approval of all the palace inmates. Atwood parodies the fact that females who not conform to patriarchal norms will be duly punished. Atwood’s portrayal of the repentant princess Prunella in the second half of the fairy tale is the picture of the docile female appreciated in a patriarchal set up.

Atwood in her story, “Rape Fantasies” (DG 93-104), parodies the undue importance given to rape reports particularly in the magazines. The narrator says, “The way they’re going about it in the magazines you’d think it was just invented, and not only that but its something terrific, like a vaccine for cancer” (93). Here the rape fantasies related by Chrissy, Darlene, Greta and Estella are parodies of real rape instances. Greta imagines a man who enters through the balcony all of a sudden while she watches T.V. “He’s all dressed in black with black gloves on” (96). He tells her “that he goes all over the outside of the apartment building like that, from one floor to another, with his rope and his hook” (96). Then he goes out to the balcony, tosses his rope, climbs down and disappears. Chrissy imagines that a man who suddenly enters when she’s in the bath-tub. She cannot get out of the bath-tub as he’s blocking the way so she just lies there while he also gets into the
bath tub. She feels it’s useless to scream and moreover, all the articles say “it’s better not to resist, that way you don’t get hurt” (97). Estella imagines a man pouncing on her as she walks down a dark street at night. In a business-like manner she calmly asks him “You’re intending to rape me right?” (97) He nods and willingly holds all the junk in her purse while she searches for the plastic lemon. He even opens the top of the plastic lemon for her and she squirts him in the eye. The narrator too thinks of her rape fantasies. She imagines being accosted by a short ugly fellow on a dark street, who pins her to the wall and is about to rape her but his zipper gets stuck. He bursts out crying that he has “never been able to get anything right in his entire life and this is the last straw, he’s going to jump off the bridge” (99). She also thinks of another instance where a fellow with a bad cold enters her room while she is lying in bed with a terrible cold. Although he intends to rape her, he finally takes “a neo-citran and scotch” (100) and ends up watching the late show together. The comic touch and the mocking tone used in the handling of the rape theme, here, make these stories a real parody of reports of rape cases.

Suniti Namjoshi’s re-tellings of fairy tales parody the active, bold males who in her tales are frequently presented as far inferior to stronger female characters. In “In The Forest” (FF 95), Gretel is unafraid of the wicked witch and takes the initiative to enter her house. In “A Moral Tale” (21) the Beast is
pictured as a ‘woman’ and a lesbian and in “The Three Bears” (39) Goldilocks is parodied as a boy with all the qualities of a girl. “He makes such a sweet and good little girl” (39) In “A Room of His Own “ (64) which is a parody of the traditional Bluebeard story. Bluebeard is amazed and incensed to find that his bride has not disobeyed him by entering the forbidden room, and kills her on the spot, when she calmly says “I think you’re entitled to a room of your own”(64). Here Suniti is parodying the verbal form of Virginia Woolf’s title “A Room of Her Own” where she is championing the cause of women. “The Princess” - Suniti’s version of Andersen’s fairy tale ‘The Princess on the Pea’, parodies the traditional sensitive woman. The Princess is unable to sleep because of a pea placed under a pile of mattresses, a sign of being sensitive, an essential feminine quality in a patriarchal set up. But Namjoshi’s princess being sensitive and allergic to everything finally catches a cold and dies of it, unable to survive in this harsh world of reality.

Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi in their re-visionings have employed gothic elements too. Gothic fairy tale, a sub-genre of gothic fiction has found acceptance in contemporary women’s writing. Lucie Armitt in The Handbook of Gothic Literature expresses her view:

It is predominantly through the discourses of feminism and psychoanalysis that our understanding of the Gothic Fairy tale emerges. It is also in the
field of contemporary women's writing that some of the most interesting recent literary explorations of this sub-genre are found. (269)

Women writers like Anne Sexton in Transformations, Angela Carter in The Bloody Chamber and Lucie Armitt in Theorising the fantastic have effectively employed the Gothic fairy tale. Richard Thompson in his introduction to Romantic Gothic Tales lists gothic ingredients:

Windswept castles, dim cathedrals, subterranean passages, creaking mansions, deserted churchyards. Dark forests, deep mountain gorges, sheer precipices, frozen wastes. Mysterious manuscripts telling stories of vengeful villains, pursued maidens murderous madmen; of rape incest, torture, insanity, damnation; of pursuit by demons, ghosts, ghouls, resurrected corpses, vampires, werewolves. (1)

Later critics have discerned deeper meanings in the Gothic. J.M.S. Tompkins in an introduction to a study of the Gothic says:

The insights of Freudian psychology bring to light in the Gothic Romance the suppressed erotic and neurotic impulses of society. The Gothic castle itself— with its twistings, recesses and spiral staircases, its vaulted ceilings
and labyrinthine dungeons, all shut off from outside light is seen as a symbol of anxiety, the dread of oppression and of the abyss, the response to the political and religious insecurity of disturbed times. (qtd. In Thompson 4)

The male figure in Gothic fiction is frequently demonic in his physical and mental torture of the female. In addition to the central figure of the cruel male oppressor, the literature abounds in diabolic females, hags, witches, fatal ladies sent to tempt him to destruction.

Carter’s re-working of the fairy tale, ‘Sleeping Beauty’ in “The Lady in the House of Love” (BC 93-108) contains elements of the gothic in it. This story portrays a powerful woman, a young vampire, Nosferatu’s daughter, who devours men:

When she was a little girl, she was like a fox and contented herself entirely with baby rabbits that squeaked piteously as she bit into their necks with a nauseated voluptuousness, with voles and field mice that palpitated for a bare moment between her embroideress’s fingers. But now she is a woman, she must have men. (BC 96)
Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* subordinates this complex erotic impulse to generalized physical fear as "in Gothic writing fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the common place, and the supernatural over the natural, all with one intent to scare at a basic level". (qtd. Thompson 6)

The queen of vampires sits all alone in her dark castle "mostly given over to ghostly occupants". (93) She dwells in her own suite with "closely barred shutters and heavy velvet curtains’ to keep out ‘every leak of natural light’ (94) adding an eerie and mysterious touch. The castle is a picture of decay and disintegration, "depredations of rot and fungus” everywhere, “unlit chandeliers” covered with “dust and canopies” in the corners” woven by industrious spiders” (94) The castle consists of “endless corridors”, “up-winding staircases”, “galleries full of family portraits” (100). In Carter’s rewritten tale the deamonic male figure is absent. Here instead we have the benign figure of the “handsome bicyclist” (105), a young officer of the British army who revives the vampire with his soothing kiss and liberates her forever, “The end of exile is the end of being” (106). As Patricia Dunker in “Re-imagining the fairy-tales: Angela Carter’s Bloody Chambers” points out:

Carter’s gothic version of the tale is a peculiar nemesis for radical feminism.

The Lady of the House of Love that titular story is both the Sleeping Beauty
and the vampire queen, the voracious witch of Hansel and Gretel..... In fact what the Countess longs for is the grand finale of all ‘snuff movies in which the woman is sexually used and ritually killed, the oldest cliché of them all: sex and death. She can abandon her predatory sexuality, the unnatural force, as her own blood flows, the symbolic breaking of the virginal hymen, the initiation into sexual maturity and then into death...... Only in death does she pass into womanhood, and the handsome British cyclist passes out of the innocent security of fairy tale into the terror of history and the trenches of the First World War. (Humm 232)

Carter’s ‘The Bloody Chamber’ is commended by Flora Alexander: “as a piece of Gothic style it is perfect” (70). It has all the elements of the Gothic – the remote castle of the Marquis, the bride at the mercy of the hero-villain, the enclosed spaces, hidden atrocities, the forbidden room where the mutilated bodies of his previous brides are kept, women “masochistically eager for the corruption of sexuality” (Humm 233). The rich Marquis’ castle has an air of fairy solitude, “with its turrets of misty blue, its courtyard, its spiked gate lay on the very bosom of the sea with sea birds mewing about its attics: a mysterious amphibious lovely sad siren of a place” (BC 13), provides a beautiful gothic setting for the tale accompanied by the gruesome murders and mutilations of the brides in the torture chamber or the bloody chamber.
Margaret Atwood in her re-workings in “The Bluebeard’s Egg” (BE 131-164) and Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut, uses certain gothic features—supernatural element, deamonic male figures, diabolical females, the suppression of erotic and neurotic impulses expressed in anxiety and fear. In “The Bluebeard’s Egg” (BE, 131-164), the story of Bluebeard is retold from Sally’s point of view, where the story of her life is superimposed on the Bluebeard’s tale which she is asked to rewrite by the teacher of the night course on ‘Forms of Narrative Fiction’. Sally like the ingenious third sister, is Ed’s third wife. Though she has apparently been able to get what she wants, she is caught in a sense of emptiness that pervades her life by her inability to achieve absolute security. She is filled with a sense of anxiety and dread, when she realizes that her story cannot have a happy fairy tale ending, for she cannot completely understand Ed, whose inner world, “she can’t get at” (150). The egg remains closed until Sally sees a different face of Ed in his relationship with her best friend Marilyn. Though in Atwood’s story the usual gothic castle, with its labyrinthine passages, is absent, a sense of mystery pervades Ed’s “Ultra-Sound” room, the dark small room, which creates suspicions in Sally. She feels that the “transaction, [the] whole room, was sexual in a way she didn’t quite understand; it was clearly a dangerous place” (145). The apparently stupid Ed is in reality the deamonic male figure, the modern Bluebeard, who coldly operates on women's hearts.
In *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut*, already analysed in p. 135-136, the traditional castle setting is absent, but it has fantasy and supernaturalism. Princess Prunella lives in a “pink palace with her pin-headed parents, Princess Patty and Prince Peter” (PP 1). She is served pineapple and passion fruit punch in “a copper cup painted with porpoises and spiders” (3). The palace lamps are placed on “pedestals patterned with puffins and pelicans” and the parlour-piano is draped with “pewter-coloured polyester periwinkles” (5). The diabolical female here is the wise woman who appears at the palace to punish the “proud-spoilt princess”. She casts a wicked spell that cannot be revoked until she performs three good deeds. “Nipity, Piptiy Zeenut, Let the Princess sprout a peanut” (11) and she disappears. Instead of a deamonic male, here Atwood presents a gentle male figure – the Prince ready to marry Prunella. It establishes her opinion that the inter-dependence of man and woman holding an equal status is essential for a harmonious existence.

Suniti Namjoshi’s re-telling of the Rapunzel story in her fable “Rescued” (FF 87) may be read as a Gothic Fairy tale. Here Rapunzel is at the mercy of a diabolic woman the wicked witch who has kept her captive, “tied to her chair by her golden hair” (87). Rapunzel dreams of a Prince who will free her and carry her away to “a castle with a very wide moat and four strong walls and a room of
her own where she’s perfectly safe” (87) free from the clutches of malevolent forces. Again, Namjoshi’s “In a Forest” (95) a re-telling of ‘Hansel and Gretel’ also has gothic elements. Here Hansel and Gretel thrown out by their wicked step-mother, find themselves alone in a lonely forest, where they find a “house made of candy”(95), owned by a wicked witch.

Erotic descriptions and sexual connotations are found in abundance in their re-tellings, particularly in Carter. For instance, sexual violence that Carter evokes in detail in “The Bloody Chamber” has disturbed critics who find in the descriptions something that comes uncomfortably close to pornography as pointed out in p. 102. Patricia Dunker finds in Carter’s exploration of the tension between female fear and acceptance of the male a “version of essentially pornographic material of “male domination and possession” (Humm 228). According to Paulina Palmer:

‘The Bloody Chamber’ coming close to pornography in the vividness with which it treats sadistic and masochistic material, but considers that it may be rendered acceptable by the location of the narrative voice in the victim and by the denouement in which the heroine’s mother asserts female power” (Palmer 189).
In Carter's view, pornography is not harmful to women and her writing about the erotic is moulded by desire for female autonomy. She clearly expresses her ideas on pornography in the "Polemical Preface" to her The Sadeian Woman where she sees pornography as potentially liberating for women. Carter here observes that "he [de Sade] was unusual in his period in claiming rights of free sexuality for the female" (36).

She in The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories makes overt references to eroticism, which clearly reveals that these tales are intended for adult readership. With his wedding gift, a choker of rubies, clasped around her throat the bride watches the Marquis' examining her "in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab" (BC 11). She had never seen that regard of his before, the "sheer carnal avarice of it" (11) which was strangely magnified by "the monocle lodged in his left eye"(11). Again in another passage after the bride is brought to his castle, in their bedroom with many mirrors on the walls where he disrobes his brides, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke" not "in any greedy haste" (15). The "old monocled lecher" examines her, "limb by limb. He in his London tailoring; she, bare as a lamb chop. Most pornographic of all confrontations". (15) In yet another two or three passages she describes the Marquis' complete possession of the bride and the consummation of the marriage.
act. “A dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides while the mewing gulls swung on invisible trapezes in the empty air outside” (17).

In “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, the Beast pines for Beauty and he is restored to health only when Beauty returns and promises to stay with him. Again in “The Tiger’s Bride” the beast’s sole desire is “to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude without her dress” after which she may return to her “undamaged with banker’s orders for the sum which he lost to my master at cards and also a number of fine presents such as furs, jewels and horses”. (53). At the conclusion of the story Carter gives an erotic description of Beauty’s transformation “And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs.” (67)

“The Snow-child” (91-92) is a reworking of the fairy tale “Snow-white”. Unlike the original version, here the snow-child dies and disappears and is not revived by the prince: “The girl began to melt. Soon there was nothing left of her but a feather a bird might have dropped, a blood stain, like the trace of a fox’s kill on the snow; and the rose she had pulled off the bush” (92). The daughter in “The Snow-child” is quite inhuman. Just as Snow-White was the creature of her mother’s desire; the snow-child is what the Count her father wants. “I wish I had a girl as white as snow...as red as blood.... as black as (the) bird’s feather” (91).
Here the girl is the object of the Count’s sexual desire. Elaine Jordan in *Illuminations* observes:

Like a customer in a brothel, sometimes he wants the virginal girl, sometimes he wants the corrupt queen, a role which the girl would take up in her turn, if she survived to age. The queen or rather the Countess in “The snow-child” exposes the truth of such masculine desires: “either the love child is ephemeral as snow, or her sexuality when matured would threaten the man—the final rose that bites, of male terror”. (Jordan 127)

The killing of the object of desire in this story is “not a killing of woman, but the killing of masculine representations in which women collude” (127). The threatening image of the genital rose with teeth at the end of “The Snow-child” is one tactic to invert their ferocity. When the countess touches the rose that the Count hands over to her, she drops it as “it bites” (BC 92). In the “Snow-child” Carter exposes the oedipal conflict between mother and daughter; the snow-maiden is the father’s child, “the child of his desire” (91), who threatens to usurp the mother’s place. In Carter’s version the mother offers up the child, as her sexuality blossoms in the rose, to the father’s lust, which destroys her. Carter does away “with the consoling denouement to the tale in which the mother is destroyed
and the child successfully overcomes the dangerous transition into sexual maturity” (Day 147)

“The Company of Wolves is another adult fairy tale where Carter offers the shocking idea that the girl (Red Riding Hood) might easily be as savage as the wolf whom she may conquer by her predatory sexuality or erotic wolfishness. She throws her clothing into the fire. She knows she is “nobody’s meat”. (BC 118) She laughs at him “full in the face” (118) rips off his shirt and flings it into the fire “in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing” (118) and finally she sleeps “sweet and sound in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf.” (118)

Margaret Atwood’s story “Bluebeard’s Egg” does not contain such erotic descriptive passages as found in Carter’s stories or explicit sexual connotations but only very indirect references. Sally in “Bluebeard’s Egg” believes that Ed is absolutely stupid and she is in control of things. Later Sally is rather uneasy about the attention he gives his women patients. “[T]he fact that he’s a heartman is a large part of his allure”. (BE 137) Sally dislikes them. Everywhere he goes he is “beset by sirens”. They want him to “fix their hearts” as each of them “seems to have a little something wrong - a murmer, a whisper” (137). Moreover, “women corner him on sofas, trap him in bay-windows at cocktail parties, mutter to him in confidential voices at dinner parties. They behave this way right in front of [her] under her very nose, as if she’s invisible, and Ed lets them do it” (137). Ed’s
enthusiasm over the new heart machine, which was much better than an electrocardiogram, annoys Sally. To her this transaction, the [dark] room, was sexual in a way she didn’t quite understand; it was clearly a dangerous place. It was like a massage parlor, only for women. “Put a batch of women in there with Ed and they would never want to come out. They’d want to stay in there while he ran his probe over their wet skins and pointed out to them the defects of their beating hearts.” (145)

Suniti Namjoshi like Atwood makes indirect hints or suggestions to eroticism or sexuality. Like Carter, there are no erotic descriptions in Namjoshi’s fables. In “A Moral tale” (FF 21) which is a reworking of the Beauty and the Beast story, the theme of lesbianism is taken up. Here “the Beast wasn’t a nobleman. The Beast was a woman. That’s why its love for Beauty was so monstrous” (21), because in a patriarchal set up homosexuals are disapproved of. Again, in “Jack Three’s luck” (101). Jack and his two brothers are seized by a giantess who does not want to eat them, but on the contrary wants to make them husbands who “must cook and clean and make themselves useful and be generally pleasant.” (101).

Susan Sellers disagrees with Bettelheim’s view that fairy tales speak primarily to children. She believes that they “can impact on adult life... with all the resonance and force childhood memories produce... whether the emotions stirred by the tales...”
are ones of terror grandiose dreams of achievements, or puerile satisfaction injustice being dispensed”. (Sellers 21)

The origin of the literary fairy tale in the tenth century by aristocratic women as a type of parlour game where both men and women participated, clearly reveals that fairy tales are not intended exclusively for children. Jack Zipes in his article “Origins of the fairy tale for children” in *Children and their Books* observes:

The institutionalizing of the literary fairy tale, begun in the salons during the eighteenth century was for adults and arose out of a need by aristocratic women to elaborate and conceive other alternatives in society than those prescribed for them by men. The Fairy tale was used in refined discourse as a means through which women imagined their lives might be improved.’ (Avery 184) Jack Zipes again comments in *Don’t Bet on The Prince*:

Created out of dissatisfaction with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales and with those social values and institutions which have provided the framework for sexist prescriptions, the feminist fairy tale conceives a different view of the world and speaks in a voice that has been customarily silenced. It draws attention to the illusions of the traditional fairy tales by demonstrating that they have been structured according to the
subordination of women, and in speaking out for women the feminist fairy tale also speaks out for other oppressed groups and for another world, which may have appeared utopian at one time but is now already within the grasp of those people seeking to bring about more equality in social and work relations. (Zipes xi)

This is quite applicable to the retold fairy tales of Atwood, Carter & Namjoshi, analysed in detail in the foregoing pages.

These contemporary women writers have challenged the patriarchal assumptions of the female and suggested alternative modes of perception and expression to the prevailing patriarchal ideology. In their short stories they have aimed to highlight women’s experience which has been omitted from patriarchy’s account and the fresh deployment of women’s images. These writers have questioned patriarchal myths by demonstrating how they obliterate or falsely present female experience and have attempted to offer an alternative paradigm of discourse as opposed to the traditional patriarchal one, where women are generally passive and weak, by portraying female characters who are bold, strong and enterprising.