

Using your further reading, explore the roles of male characters in both works. How far can we argue that men are powerful, but unhappy in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*?

Angela Carter and F. Scott Fitzgerald use male characters to comment on the roles of men in society. Both writers explore men who abuse power as well as men who are broken. However, by the end of Carter's collection, she presents the idea that men can escape fixed roles, whereas Fitzgerald suggests societal roles are not flexible to change.

We could argue that both writers suggest through male characters that society accepts the ways some men objectify and mistreat their female counterparts, as with Carter's Marquis and Fitzgerald's Tom Buchanan. In Carter's first story and retelling of Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard*, she presents the Marquis as physically abusive, as "a dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides." Through this unpleasant imagery we could certainly agree with Simpson on the notion that "[Carter] was using the forms of fantasy and fairy tales with conscious radical intent,"¹ by exposing the "latent content [in fairy tales which] is violently sexual."² The sex between the Marquis and the girl is presented as violent, being depicted as a "one-sided struggle" and "as if he had been fighting with me." Carter's descriptive and factual simile of the 'one-sided' sex creates an image of unchallenged maltreatment that the Marquis inflicts on the girl – ironic as rather than a connection from sex, readers are forced to visualise damage as the narrator recalls that "I had heard him shriek and blaspheme at the orgasm; I had bled." Like the Marquis, Tom is violent and resorts to using his "cruel body" to control Myrtle and "breaks her nose with his open hand."

¹ Simpson, Helen (2006) An Introduction to Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories' London: Vintage, p9.

² Simpson, Helen (2006) An Introduction to Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories' London: Vintage, p9.

Fitzgerald's blunt language suggests an accepted brutality in Tom's actions towards women and shows a belief that, like the Marquis, he views women as objects to be used. Moreover, Stocks argues that "Fitzgerald seems to suggest, society is strictly ordered... and those below must also remain in their proper place."³ We could agree with this notion by suggesting that this abuse of Myrtle reflects a strictly ordered social hierarchy where Tom, a symbol of 'Old Money' treats his mistress, a working-class woman, as lesser. In a similar sense, Carter's allusion to the 18th century aristocratic Marquis de Sade in her antagonist of the first fable also depicts a man who abuses his wealth and class by mistreating women from lower classes. In the case of de Sade, luring them in with his wealth to fulfil his sexual desires, but also using bribes to evade criminal charges, as was the case with one of his victims, Rose Keller. Hence, both writers suggest that men with status and wealth can abuse this power to mistreat their female counterparts without consequence. Moreover, both writers also suggest that marriage allows for the mistreatment of women by their husbands to go unchallenged. Warner argues that *The Bloody Chamber* is "a spirited exposé of marriage as sadistic ritual."⁴ Validating this view, the Marquis' sadistic methods force the girl to feel "infinitely dishevelled by the loss of my virginity," as he uses the girl's "spent body" so that one day she "might bear an heir." Carter objectification of the girl by giving her the purpose of supplying a child for the Marquis subtly suggests the idea that marriage is a façade that in some instances allows men to freely use women's bodies. Similarly, as Morton argues, Tom uses his marriage with Daisy for "her beauty which he takes pleasure from displaying as a mark of his own social status."⁵ Crucially, we could argue that marriage has allowed Tom to mistreat Daisy without challenge because their marriage was done for reasons "of money,

³ Stocks, Claire (2007) 'All men are [not] created equal' Hodder Education, English Review, p12.

⁴ Warner, Marina (2012) 'Why Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* still bites' The Scotsman.

⁵ Morton, Darren (2007) 'Whiteness in the *Great Gatsby*' Yorkshire: Emagazine.

[and] of unquestionable practicality.” This binds her economically and socially to him as she depends upon him for financial security as well as social stability with regards to avoiding stigma as a divorcee in the 1920s. Additionally, Tom’s objectification within marriage is shown as Parkinson’s suggestion that “Fitzgerald’s view is [that the very rich have a] sense of inalienable right to what they possess.”⁶ We can confirm this view by arguing that Tom believes that by marrying Daisy he has the unconditional right to own and use her, just as the Marquis uses his wife in marriage. Furthermore, Tom’s multiple affairs indicates he is dissatisfied in committing to a relationship with just one woman, having a liaison with “one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel” and an affair with “some woman in New York.” Both of which are unchallenged by Daisy. Similarly, Carter’s narrator recalls that the Marquis “Married three times... [and] now, as if to demonstrate the eclecticism of his taste, he had invited me to join this gallery of beautiful women.” This suggests that, like Tom, the Marquis is not satisfied with committing to one woman, strengthening the notion that both characters treat women as expendable commodities which they view as lesser and use for their own benefit. However, even by the end of the novel Tom seems completely content in his role, possessing his natural “aggressive way,” unchanged by the events in the narrative. By contrast, the Marquis seems deeply unsatisfied in his position, “emitting that same, heavy sigh” and approaching “his familiar treat with a weary appetite.” Carter’s oxymoronic language and imagery of exhaustion perhaps gives us a sense of pathos, as she reveals a new sense of emotion in the Marquis “as though that face lay underneath this mask,” suggesting that even the antagonist suffers from the mistreatment he must inflict. Additionally, the notion that there is sense of fatigue which ‘lay underneath’ the Marquis’ outwards expression explores “the extent to which the surface represents reality.”⁷ This detail is not

⁶ Parkinson, Kathleen (1988) ‘Critical Studies: The Great Gatsby’ Penguin Adult, p132.

⁷ Dr. Green, Andrew (2014) ‘The Bloody Chamber- Barriers and Boundaries in Gothic Literature’ Yorkshire: Emagazine.

found in the source text and perhaps foreshadows the subsequent discussion of male roles in the rest of Carter's collection as she explores that idea that men too, are limited by inequality. Nonetheless, both these writers suggest through male characters that society accepts the way in which some men mistreat and objectify their female counterparts.

However, both writers also suggest through male characters that societal expectations force men to perform and appear self-assured in their wealth and power even if they are broken, as with Jay Gatsby and Carter's beasts in her twin *Beauty and the Beast* stories. For instance, to meet Daisy's expectations, Gatsby must appear socially and financially equal to her by performing and utilising "typically masculine show-and-tell tactics."⁸ This is evident when he confidently displays his wealth through "gleaming, dazzling parties," with orchestras that were "no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums." Fitzgerald's use of hendiadys suggests excess and depicts 'conspicuous consumption,' a term coined by social scientist Thorstein Veblen to describe the rise of businessmen who used "goods of a higher quality or in greater quantity than might be considered necessary in practical terms."⁹ This public display of luxury encourages readers to believe that Gatsby is a man who seems proudly self-assured in his wealth and social status. However, the inverse is true; he is broken by loneliness as "sudden emptiness seemed to flow" out of his house, leaving him in "complete isolation." Like Gatsby, the Beast from *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* also performs to seem confident in his fabled role. As Brooke argues, "Carter's parodic exaggeration of gender stereotypes, [draws] attention to the precarious distinction between

⁸ Saunders, J. P. (2018). 'The Great Gatsby: An Unusual Case of Mate Poaching. In *American Classics: Evolutionary Perspectives*' Academic Studies Press, p153.

⁹ Phillips, Ronnie J. (2014) 'conspicuous consumption'. Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/conspicuous-consumption>. Accessed 11 February 2023.

appearing and being.”¹⁰ Indeed, by parodying masculine folklore roles, Carter's beast appears to be self-assured in his position, emitting a “mighty, furious roaring” and having a “mane and mighty paws.” However, these badges of strength and power are revealed to be only superficial. As like Gatsby, the Beast is broken by isolation, evidenced by the notion that there was a “loneliness of the Beast” and that there was “sadness in his agate eyes.” Again, the Beast from *The Tiger's Bride* is labelled with the heraldic title of “La Bestia” suggesting regional power and yet “imposed seclusion on himself,” and was fighting an “odd air of self-imposed restraint.” While the suggestion of being broken by loneliness can be seen in the source text *La Belle et La Bête*, Carter's more radical version *The Tiger's Bride*, puts particular emphasis on the self-inflicting damage the role of beast has, as his suffering is ‘imposed... on himself’ and ‘self-imposed.’ Hence, both writers show through these male characters that men can seem strong in their positions in society and yet be entirely broken and isolated. Furthermore, we could argue these male characters use their homes as an extension of their performance in their roles. Indeed, as Godden puts it, for Gatsby to “be loved by Daisy he would have to bid for her in the open market. The house was his shop-window.”¹¹ Validating this perspective, Gatsby's house is described as a “factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy” intending to mimic the “the white palaces of fashionable East Egg.” Despite being a completely new mansion, Gatsby intends to imitate the style of the ‘Old Money’ so that he can appear as having climbed the social ladder to attract the attention of Daisy, evidenced by the notion that he'd “like to show her around [his house]” as a way of signaling to her that he can meet her financial expectations. However, Gatsby's personality can be seen even more as a performance, as “His bedroom

¹⁰ Brooke, Patricia (2004) ‘Lyons and Tigers and Wolves - Oh My! Revisionary Fairy Tales in the Work of Angela Carter’ Critical Survey, Berghahn Books, p74.

¹¹ Godden, R. (1982). “The Great Gatsby”: Glamor on the Turn’ Journal of American Studies, p357.

was the simplest room of all." Fitzgerald's contrast from the lavish and luxurious external view of the house to Gatsby's plain bedroom suggests that his desire for wealth is only to impress Daisy and not a personal desire of his own. Similarly, the Beast in *The Courtship of Mr Lyon* has "a modest bedroom! [and lives in] An attic, with a sloping roof, they might have given the chambermaid if the Beast had employed staff," despite the notion that he lives in luxury in a "perfect, Palladian house." Both writers juxtapose the grand exteriors of these men's homes with their simple bedrooms to suggest that these men do not desire wealth for their own materialistic cravings, but rather they attain wealth to perform in roles that are expected of them by society. This idea is also the same for the Beast in *The Tiger's Bride* who "bought solitude, not luxury with his money" and "had chosen to live in an uninhabited place." Moreover, not only do these men have to perform to meet expectations but both writers also suggest these men are broken because they are ashamed of themselves. For instance, Gatsby attempts to detach himself from his past identity as "he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent." Fitzgerald's repetition of 'invent' emphasizes that this personality has been fabricated to distance himself from his past identity which he is ashamed of being associated with. Instead, Gatsby lies by telling Nick that "[he is] the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West." Stocks argues that "social transition comes at a price,"¹² and in the case of Gatsby, it is his identity and his past that must be erased for him to meet the expectations which allow him to marry Daisy. Similarly, in *The Tiger's Bride* the Beast was "ashamed of his own request" and cried as "one single tear swelled... A tear! A tear, I hoped, of shame." Again, Carter comments on male expectations by putting emphasis on the damaging nature of the role of beast and of capturer as he feels compelled to use the girl. Hence, both writers suggest that societal

¹² Stocks, Claire (2007) 'All men are [not] created equal' Hodder Education, English Review, p12.

expectations force men to perform and seem self-assured in their wealth and power, when in fact they are broken and ashamed.

However, while Carter suggests that it is possible for men to be free from fixed roles if their natural selves are accepted, as we see in *The Tiger's Bride* and *Wolf-Alice*, Fitzgerald's tragedy suggests more simply that societal positions are not flexible to change. Carter explores the idea that roles are not fixed by "attacking the... deathly conformity [of fairy tales]"¹³ in which "inverting them was one strategy."¹⁴ Indeed, in Carter's deliberately placed centre story *The Tiger's Bride*, there is inversion from the source text as it is not the Beast who undergoes transmutation. Instead, positive transgression is symbolised where the Beast, who once hid his animal appearance by wearing "a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it," and wearing "perfume... far too potent a reek of purplish civet... [as] camouflage" now chose to abandon his costume and live with the "reek of fur and piss." Therefore, while Simpson suggest that in Carter's collection "some of [the] most brilliant passages are accounts of metamorphoses,"¹⁵ the Beast's lack of physical transformation is actually more brilliant in nature; however, we could certainly agree with Simpson if we consider the metaphorical metamorphosis of the Beast's role. Moreover, this change in role only materialises because Beauty not only accepts the Beast's natural self, clear through the first-person voice positively depicting his animal form as "A great, feline" and "a heraldic beast," but also by challenging his antagonist role. This female defiance "allows for a questioning of traditional political and social orders,"¹⁶ in which one could argue that Carter, writing in the 1970s when Second Wave Feminism was looking at the regressive

¹³ Warner, Marina (2012) 'Why Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* still bites' *The Scotsman*.

¹⁴ Warner, Marina (2012) 'Why Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* still bites' *The Scotsman*.

¹⁵ Simpson, Helen (2006) *An Introduction to Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories'* London: Vintage, p12.

¹⁶ Onyett, Lydia (2013) 'Gothic Terrorist' Hodder Education, *English Review*, p12.

expectations for women after the Second World War, suggests that that only if men are challenged can they be saved from living in fixed artificial roles. In a similar sense, *The Great Gatsby* initially seems to suggest the idea that roles are not fixed, as Gatsby manages to break class bounds having been a “penniless young man without a past,” being born to “parents [who] were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people.” This change in financial position comes from what modern readers would associate with the American Dream, a term created by James Truslow Adams in 1931 shortly after the publication of Fitzgerald’s novel, which encapsulates the idea that upwards social mobility should be possible for all, regardless of social status at birth. However, this idea is arguably considered not possible by Fitzgerald whose, as Pearson argues “unique expression of the American dream lacks the optimism [found in his predecessors]”¹⁷ as he denies Gatsby any satisfaction from achieving this wealth; he does not win Daisy over and he is never socially accepted as ‘Old Money.’ Instead, he is labelled by Tom as a “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” suggesting even after climbing a financial ladder he is still fixed socially from entering the same social class as Tom because of his past. Therefore, unlike Carter, Fitzgerald suggests roles are not open to change, as we see with Gatsby who is “being torn away from [his] chosen image”¹⁸ of ‘Old Money.’ By contrast, rather than a tragic recognition of the futility of his position, as we see with Fitzgerald’s titular character, Carter creates a moment of positive realisation, where the Duke actually gains his chosen image. As seen when he breaks free from being “cast in the role of the corpse-eater” and regains a soul as “the face of the Duke” appeared “Little by little... like the image on photographic paper that emerges.” This gothic and liminal imagery of Duke's true self developing once again indicates that men do not have to be confined into

¹⁷ Pearson, R. L. (1970). ‘Gatsby: False Prophet of the American Dream’ *The English Journal*, 59(5), p638.

¹⁸ Miller, Arthur (1949) ‘Tragedy and the Common Man’ *The New York Times*, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html> (Accessed: February 1, 2023).

fixed roles, but instead they can be free and choose to be genuine. Indeed, as Green argues, “by transgressing and pushing at the bounds of acceptability and credibility, the Gothic inevitably focuses us more and more on defining those very boundaries.”¹⁹ It is through these boundaries of male expectations which Carter pushes at and suggests are flexible through this transformation of the Duke. Ultimately, by transgressing these boundaries Carter not only empowers women in her collection but goes further than her contemporaries by encouraging men to seek genuine compassion and authenticity as the Duke is “brought into being by her soft, moist, gentle tongue,” and Wolf-Alice who “leapt upon his bed to lick, without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead.” Carter’s listing and repetition of ‘without’ implies that in this final and redemptive tale there is no judgement in this relationship. Instead, through this lasting image of acceptance and freedom from societal pressure, Carter finishes her “manifesto for alternative ways of loving, thinking and feeling”²⁰ and encourages readers not to be fixed in artificial roles but to be free and natural. By contrast, unlike Carter’s ending which uses a redemptive fairy tale to envision a future with the potential for optimistic change, Fitzgerald’s ends with tragedy and contains a tone of pessimism. This is explicit the final line of the novel, as Nick remarks: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” This emphatic positioning of hopeless imagery portrays a cynical view of societal progression by 1920s America and is, as Mackendrick suggests, part of a “detailed analysis of the ills of [Fitzgerald’s] society.”²¹ The ills of which are seen by the end of the novel as “the holocaust was complete,” and Gatsby,

¹⁹ Dr. Green, Andrew (2014) ‘The Bloody Chamber- Barriers and Boundaries in Gothic Literature’ Yorkshire: Emagazine.

²⁰ Warner, Marina (2012) ‘Why Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber still bites’ The Scotsman.

²¹ Mackendrick, P. L. (1950) ‘The Great Gatsby and Trimalchio’ The Classical Journal, 45(7), p312.

symbolic of the American dream and that anyone can achieve true upwards social mobility is destroyed.

Therefore, while both Carter and Fitzgerald use male characters to comment on society by exploring male roles of power and examining the ways in which men are broken by societal expectations. By the end of Carter's collection there is a sense of optimism that these roles can change for the better, while Fitzgerald's view on society and male roles seems to lack this sense of change and instead elicits the idea that alternative pathways for men are not possible.

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