

# Liminality in Angela Carter's Collection of Stories *The Bloody Chamber*

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**Abstract.** The article explores the theme of liminality – liminal experience and liminal human beings in Angela Carter's collection of stories *The Bloody Chamber* in an attempt to reveal the complexity of human – female and male – identity, its transformations and outcomes. In literary and cultural theory, liminality is defined as a “space or state which is situated in between other, usually more clearly defined, spaces, periods or identities.” Thus, liminal human beings do not have one form of existence, they are naturally ambiguous. In the stories, Carter investigates liminality through half-beings who represent two sides of personality which are at odds with each other and do not make a harmonious whole, as well as the image of the bloody chamber. Moreover, neither of the character's states is fully accepted. Carter considers the ways how to deal with each of them in order to regain integrity of mind and claim their full humanity.

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**Keywords:** *liminality, liminal experience, liminal human beings, half-beings, beasts, werewolves, vampires.*

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## Introduction

English postmodern writer Angela Carter's (1940–1992) rich literary oeuvre – novels, short stories, essays – cannot be interpreted in the light of one single critical theory or category. In her works, Carter employs elements of science fiction, magic realism, fantasy, the gothic as well as rewrites certain myths, classical folk and fairy-tales, in which she provides a (feminist) critique of Western hierarchical and patriarchal ideologies and the binary thinking inherent in them, examines and disrupts discourses of

power of the symbolic Western order, and celebrates its imminent collapse. Carter's work encompasses diverse aspects of sociocultural life as well as those of human nature.

One of the interesting aspects of Carter's fiction is liminality and liminal experience of the characters which is most overtly expressed in her collection of stories *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Liminality in the collection can be interpreted as a (post) modern individual's split consciousness, ambiguity, as his deep spiritual and ethical disorientation in the present – day world, which occurs in the 'middle stage of rites' – a passage that changes an individual's identity status. Carter's main characters' subjectivity is often shown to be in process, their condition is always somewhere in-between.

Thus, the aim of the article is to investigate the liminal points in the characters' lives, trace their passage route from the pre-liminal stage to the so-called consummation. Although all the ten stories in the collection in one or another way deal with the theme of liminality, that is, the protagonist's (usually female) 'enlightenment' and her / his subsequent transformation, the present study focuses on tales about half-beings – werewolves in *The Werewolf*, *The Company of Wolves*, and *Wolf-Alice*; and beasts in *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon* and *The Tiger's Bride*, as they most overtly explore the issue of human liminality.

The methods applied combine definitional and contextual analyses. In elaborating the theme of liminality in the stories, we will draw on the theories of liminality by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1967, 1969, 1974), as well as the protagonists' experiences as illustrations.

## The Theoretical Considerations

Although the term and notion of liminality first appeared in socio-anthropology, it has been given a literary application and has recently appeared as one interpretive strategy in the readings of various literary texts of a variety of literary genres.

The term and concept of liminality<sup>1</sup> first appeared and was expounded in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the work of anthropologists van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967, 1969, 1974), and it described the middle phase in a rite of passage, in which a person passes from one identity state to another. According to van Gennep, this passage has three stages: isolation or separation when an individual ('initiant') is isolated from some fixed social or cultural structure; marginality or liminality – a transition period – in which the liminar is ambiguous; and the consummation of the passage, when the liminar reaches a new identity state and he is expected to adopt certain norms (van Gennep, 1960, 43). Turner extends this conception, claiming that

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<sup>1</sup> The word derives from the Latin *limen* and means "threshold," "boundary," "passage" between two different places.

the liminal person is 'interstructural' and ambiguous as he is 'betwixt and between' the positions he occupies at the points of separation and consummation, he is neither here nor there (Turner, 1967, 95). For Turner, the liminal position has a few characteristics: the ambiguous liminal is socially and / or physically invisible, that is, they are outside society's secular definition; there is a link to (metaphorical – D.M.) death; the liminal's relationship with elders is that of obedience (Turner, 1974, 47). In Turner's description of the liminal individuals, "liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness... Liminal entities... may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked" (Turner, 1969, 110). However, in further elaborating on the state of liminality, Turner makes the point that liminality is not only a simple transitional point, not only isolation from stable social structures, is not only 'death', but also a potential possibility to create a 'positive alternative' to the objective reality. And this positive alternative is triggered by the creative will or imagination and acting potential (Turner, 1969, 53).

## The Bloody Chamber(s)

Carter's stories of the collection are a postmodern transformation – a new retelling of some classical folk and fairy-tales with elements of the neo-gothic.<sup>2</sup> The writer employs the old forms of fairy-tales of *The Bluebeard*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Puss in Boots*, and *Little Red Riding Hood* to challenge the myths and stereotypes of love, marriage, gender roles, sexuality, and violence. Like in all her works, the writer in the stories applies Gothic elements with its roots in the fantastic – setting, plot, character and theme. However, she reverses the classical patterns of Gothic genre in an attempt to convey her particular vision of life, a manner of coping with the contemporary realities which Freud called the 'uncanny'.<sup>3</sup> The (post)modern Gothic explores the anxieties of the contemporary psyche, terrors of the mind, reflects the epistemological confusion, an age of insecurity and unease about the threats of destruction and terrors of uncertainty. In a similar vein, Carter's protagonists in the liminal stage experience fears of formlessness, chaos, and uncertainty which are suppressed in the unconscious. Acquirre contends that the liminal is a defining feature of the Gothic novel as the effects of terror in the Gothic novel are due to the diegetic (textual) constitution of a threshold between a "domain of rationality [...] and the world of the Other, the Numinous" (Acquirre, 2007, 15). In general, fairy-tales and the

<sup>2</sup> The writer is regarded as the most subversive and radical proponent of a modern neo-gothic movement.

<sup>3</sup> Under Freud's influence the Gothic turned from the supernatural to psychological versions of the demoniacal. Ghosts, demons and vampires are perceived as man's 'other'. The vampire is a reflection of the self (Freud, 76–86).

Gothic are closely entwined since a “fairy-tale’s basis in folklore provides a traditional framework upon which modern fears can be explored” (Aquirre, 2007, 22).

Although the title story *The Bloody Chamber* has received the biggest attention among the literary critics, a ‘bloody chamber’ as an actual location and a metaphor is present in different forms in all the ten pieces of the collection. It is that liminal space and the middle phase in the protagonist’s life in which she or he experiences both violence and enlightenment, or transformation, and passes from one identity state to another. For example, in the title story *The Bloody Chamber* based on Charles Perrault’s fairy-tale about the Bluebeard, the heroine’s entering the forbidden chamber where she sees her husband the Bluebeard’s murdered wives and which literally means a chamber of torture and death, also marks her transformation, it is the key to her selfhood when seeing her imminent fate, she realizes that she has been objectified as a woman and subjugated by her supposedly loving husband. She is therefore saved from her illusory life and finds the potential to change her fate, or, in Turner’s words, a ‘positive alternative’ to the objective reality. In *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon* and *The Tiger’s Bride*, the bloody chambers are the beasts’ rooms – places of the protagonists’ transformation, in *The Werewolf* and *The Company of Wolves* based on Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood*, that bloody chamber is grandmother’s house, in *Wolf-Alice* – the Duke’s castle, whereas in *The Lady of the House of Love*, whose female protagonist is a vampire suffering from her unasked for and inescapable fate to kill and suck young men’s blood – it is her, the Countess’s, room. In *The Erl-King*, which borrows its title and title character from German and Scandinavian folk tales, the bloody chamber is the Erl’s – the king of elves – hut. The Erl himself is a liminal creature – he is half-human, half-woods, both good and evil, civilized and savage, he stands between nature and culture. Going through the woods, the young heroine is “trapped in her own illusion because everything in the woods is exactly as it seems” (Carter, 1993, 57). She is fascinated with the Erl’s in-betweenness and is both awed and attracted by him, which makes her feel disoriented. He initiates the heroine into sexuality, into the beauty of the plant and animal kingdoms. The heroine describes the feeling of liminality as ‘vertigo’, and she is worried about this sensation: “I am not afraid of him; only afraid of vertigo, of the vertigo with which he seizes me. Afraid of falling down” (Carter, 1993, 59). “His touch both consoles and devastates me; I feel my heart pulse, then wither, naked as a stone (...) while the lovely, moony night slides through the window to dapple the flank of this innocent who keeps cages to keep the sweet birds in” (Carter, 1993, 62). Her illumination occurs when she realizes that the beautiful tormented caged birds in his hut are but young girls whom he ‘killed’, which sheds light on her own imminent fate. And still, she is torn between that saving force of illusion (of love) and the reality: “When I realized what the Erl-King meant to do to me, I was shaken with a terrible fear and I did not know what to do for I loved him with all my heart and yet I had no wish to join the whistling congregation he kept in his cages although he looked after them very affectionately, gave them fresh water

every day and fed them well. His embraces were his enticements and (...) they were the branches of which the trap was woven” (Carter, 1993, 57).

## The Werewolves

The stories *The Werewolf* and *The Company of Wolves* are based on Perrault’s fairy-tale of Little Red Riding Hood.

In *The Werewolf* told by a third-person narrator, however, the young daughter sent by her peasant mother into the forest to bring some food to her sick grandmother is a rather static character. She is unafraid to travel through the dark and bleak woods full of bears, wild boar, and starving wolves as she knows them, but her mother arms her with a knife. In the forest the girl is unabashed when she is attacked by a huge wolf and defends herself by cutting its paw which she wraps up in a cloth and puts in her basket. When the girl arrives at her granny’s house, she finds her in a terrible fit of fever. The girl then unwraps the cloth intending to use it as a compress, but finds there her granny’s warped hand instead of the wolf’s paw. When the heroine uncovers her granny’s blanket, she sees that her right hand has been severed. The prejudiced neighbors, whom the girl calls, stone her to death as they take the warp on the old woman’s hand for a witch’s nipple. Here the liminal human being is the grandmother. Carter combines the characters of wolf and granny to create a werewolf – a liminal individual who represents two sides of human personality which she cannot combine successfully and does not find a ‘positive alternative’. Both the wolf, a beast, and the granny – a human being die as neither of their states is fully accepted. The ignorant, superstitious townspeople identify a wolf, whose obscure nature they cannot explain, with the Devil who “holds picnics in the graveyards and invites the witches, (...) dig up fresh corpses, and eat them” (Carter, 1993, 108). Likewise, they shun and persecute women who are said to possess features of the unknown – the devilish, and they punish them by stoning. Thus, in terms of Turner’s explanation, the liminal granny in the story is socially invisible. Her ambiguity means that she is outside definition and is, therefore, a threat to stable social structures. Langdon observes that “this liminality, where no passage is possible is the condition of exile and extinction which has become a dominant subject in many literatures during the last hundred years” (Langdon, 2010).

*The Company of Wolves*, told by a third-person narrator, follows the conventional pattern of a passage rite. At the beginning of the story, a young pure virginal girl leaves her ‘preliminal’ condition when she sets out into the forest to bring food to her ill grandmother. In her preliminal state the heroine is described as ‘strong-minded’, as a unified entity, an ‘unbroken egg’, a ‘sealed vessel’, and a ‘closed system’ (Carter, 1993, 114), who is afraid of nothing and is sure the wild beasts cannot harm her. It is said that the young girl with the red shawl “stands and moves within the invisible pentacle

of her virginity” (Carter, 1993, 113–14). This may imply that it is her virginity and purity symbolized by the color red that gives her value and will protect her from the carnivorous wolf. The young girl’s preliminal stage and her isolation from fixed social structures, or, her initial stage of development, is preceded by a long vivid description of the ferocity of carnivore wolves, who live to kill and eat other creatures and should be feared and avoided. However, the townspeople fear werewolves even more than wolves because they are in cahoots with the Devil. The narrator relates two tales of townspeople who killed wolves only to discover that they were werewolves – liminal creatures – when their corpses turned to human form.

In literature, liminal spaces traditionally give the person both power and torment. They are tormented by living liminally: “That long-drawn, wavering howl has, for all its fearful resonance, some inherent sadness in it, as if the beasts would love to be less beastly if only they knew how and never cease to mourn their own condition” (Carter, 1993, 112). Existing in two states or being two things simultaneously, the person has qualities of both. However, like all of Carter’s werewolves (the grandmother in *The Werewolf*, the hunter in the story under discussion, and the Duke in *Wolf-Alice*), they do not fit in with either humans or wolves. They are shunned by human beings and wolves alike, as they do not fit into any form of existence. People hate them because they try to eat them; and as the narrator in *Wolf-Alice* explains, eating humans makes werewolves cannibals; therefore, wolves do not accept them because they go against nature’s code by eating their own kind. In order to find a place with humans, the werewolves must transform somehow.

In the woods, the heroine of the story meets a handsome young hunter whom she earlier mistook for a wolf when she heard it growl. When she trustingly lets him hold her basket with a knife in it, the hunter swears he can come first to the granny’s house by taking another path and using his compass. For this he bets her a kiss. However, the hunter reveals himself as a werewolf and eats the granny turning into a man again. When the heroine arrives, he blocks the door so that she cannot escape. Then the traditional ‘what big eyes you have’ follows. The moment the girl realizes what happened to her grandmother she “put her scarlet shawl more closely round herself as if it could protect her although it was as red as the blood she must spill” (Carter, 1993, 117). The scarlet shawl is a symbol of her purity and virginity, which is supposed to protect her from the wolf’s attack. The heroine finds herself in a liminal situation when she hears the wolves’ sad threnody outside and takes pity on them. The girl’s taking off her scarlet shawl, “the color of poppies, the color of sacrifices, the color of her menses” (Carter, 1993, 117) may imply her passage to maturity. She realizes that her fear did her no good and ceases to be afraid. And when faced with the wolf’s threat of eating her, “the girl bursts out laughing; she knew she was nobody’s meat” (Carter, 1993, 118). Her willing embrace of the wolf, and of her own fleshly desire, transforms them both. As Kristeva notes, this scene hinges on the “crossing over of the dichotomous

categories of Pure and Impure” to dissolve the boundaries between bodies (Kristeva, 1980, 16). “See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf” (Carter, 1993, 118). Thus, the young woman must become more wolfish, impulsive and driven by a free exchange of desire, and be more human in order for them to be together.

The story *Wolf-Alice* based on *Little Red Riding Hood*, Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* and *What Alice Found There*, and on actual stories of feral children, further explores the theme of liminality revealed in the two main characters of Wolf-Alice and the Duke. Introduced as ‘this ragged girl with brindled lugs’ (Carter, 1993, 119), Wolf-Alice immediately embodies aspects of both the human and the animal. She is also defined by what she is *not*: “Nothing about her is human except that she is *not* a wolf” (Carter, 1993, 119). The heroine cannot be placed into a single category of existence, she is ‘betwixt and between’. Abandoned by her mother at birth, Wolf-Alice was fostered by wolves as an ‘imperfect wolf’. Her liminality is especially amorphous and chaotic as she can neither speak nor understand the wolves’ language. Wolf-Alice lives outside of language with its system of rules and codes, and outside of time, without the past and the future, inhabiting only “the present tense, a fugue of the continuous, a world of sensual immediacy as without hope as it is without despair” (Carter, 1993, 119). When Wolf-Alice is found in the wolf’s den beside the bullet-riddled corpse of her foster mother, she is brought back to the human world where she is taken to a convent. Although the heroine is described as feeling lonely, she does not seem to be tormented by her condition as most half-beings in Carter’s stories, for she does not reason and has no awareness of her plight. Her existence is based on sensual immediacy which is emphasized in the story: “Her panting tongue hangs out; her red lips are thick and fresh. Her legs are long, lean and muscular. Her elbows, and knees are thickly callused because she runs on all fours. She never walks; she trots or gallops... Her long nose is always a-quiver, sifting every scent it meets” (Carter, 1993, 119). Thus, she has no wish to ‘create a positive alternative’ as an opposition to the objective (or rather – her) reality.

Another liminal character in the story is the Duke whose ‘bereft and unsanctified household’ (Carter, 1993, 120) Wolf-Alice is sent to after the nuns lose their hope of ever civilizing her. The Duke is literally both man and wolf. He is completely alienated from himself and others. Unlike his counterpart Wolf-Alice, the Duke is well aware of the two sides of his personality which he fails to reconcile and is therefore tormented by his plight. His existence and double identity seem to be circumscribed by isolation and fear which result from the fear he causes in others as well as his understanding of his ferocity and inability to transform himself: “He carries on his frail shoulders a weird burden of fear; he is cast in the role of the corpse-eater, the body-snatcher who invades the last privacies of the dead. (...) and nothing deters him” (Carter, 1993, 121). He even ceased to look in the mirror as he cannot stand to see his image, therefore “nothing can hurt him” (Carter, 1993, 120). The Duke’s fear and self-hatred are also

strengthened by the fact that he understands that he transgresses boundaries of human cultural codes. For example, he feasts on the dead bodies in the village graveyard at night, ignoring the sanctity of the place and “will use the holy cross as a scratching post and crouch above the font thirstily to lap up holy water” (Carter, 1993, 121). Jennings aptly remarks that the Duke’s “apparent disregard for signs and their attempts at ritual purification belies the fact that he has not escaped being constituted by the hierarchical logic of the symbolic realm” (Jennings, 2014, 96), although like Wolf-Alice, he also rejects language with its system of prohibition.

The ‘otherness’, the heterogeneous in-between states represented by Wolf-Alice and the Duke, prove disastrous to the villagers who seek to expel them. The narrator explains: “The wolves had tended her because they knew she was an imperfect wolf; we secluded her in animal privacy out of fear of her imperfection because it showed us what we might have been” (Carter, 1993, 122). The imperfect humanity of Wolf-Alice and the Duke, their closeness to the animalistic presents a threat to fixed social and cultural structures. Their otherness is feared, they are shunned. Turner explains this as one characteristics of the liminar who are regarded as “unclean with contact being prohibited or curtailed during liminality lest they should ‘pollute’ those who have not been ‘inoculated’ against them” (Turner, 1967).

A turning point in Wolf-Alice’s progression from feral existence outside of language and time to take up a subject position in relation to her body and the world is marked by her first menses and recognition of her own image in the mirror (at first she thought it was a stranger or a friend who wanted to play with her. The heroine’s punctual bleeding transformed her grip on time, she “discovered the very action of time by means of this returning cycle” (Carter, 1993, 123). “She would spend hours examining the new skin that had been born, it seemed to her, of her bleeding. (...). She examined her new breasts with curiosity” (Carter, 1993, 123–124). In this way, the heroine gains a sense of self through the material relationship to her body and establishes a subject – object relation to the world, for “now the world around her was assuming form. She perceived an essential difference between herself and her surroundings (...) the trees and grass of the meadows outside no longer seemed the emanation of her questing nose and erect ears, (...), but a kind of backdrop for her, that waited for her arrivals to give it meaning” (Carter, 1993, 124). Thus, as her consciousness changes, she gains a new awareness of the world around her and her relation to it as well as understands that she gives meaning to the world around her: “The landscape assembles itself about her, she informs it with her presence. She is its significance” (Carter, 1993, 125).

At the story’s end, the Duke is wounded by the townspeople and goes back to his castle, where he lies in bed slowly pining away. Her gradual development from a wolf to a human being makes Wolf-Alice take pity on him who is “locked half and half between such strange states, an aborted transformation, an incomplete mystery, (...), howls like a wolf with his foot in a trap or a woman in labour, and bleeds” (Carter,



1993, 126). She snuffs at his wound and realizes that it does not smell like *her* wound. However, she begins to lick his dirty and bloody face clean. Wolf-Alice learns how to sympathize with a different wound and different pain. Jennings suggests that by this act she delivers him from a world of abjection and alienation to a world of compassion, and it is her tongue that engenders this re-birth, she ‘speaks’ him into existence (Jennings, 2014, 103). And when she shows him kindness and compassion, his reflection appears in the mirror. Having become more human, Wolf-Alice humanizes the Duke. However, the story has no closure, and the two characters’ identities defy any categorization.

## The Beasts

Like werewolves, the Beasts in Carter’s stories *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon* and *The Tiger’s Bride*, which are structured on the fairy-tale of Beauty and the Beast, are tormented by living liminally. They too are trapped between being human and animal – the state that makes them vulnerable. These half-beings know that neither of their existences would be fully accepted, however, they are unable to reconcile the two states of being, or, sides of personality. Therefore, their ‘otherness’ and vulnerability make them live in isolation, though they secretly desire love and compassion.

In the story *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, the beast – half man and half lion – and Beauty take on different forms of liminality. At the beginning of the story, Beauty’s father who gets trapped in a snowstorm and happens to wander into Mr. Lyon’s house, is struck by his warm welcome and ferocity when the father wants to pluck a white rose from his garden for his beloved daughter Beauty. His leonine appearance – “head of a lion; mane and mighty paws of a lion” (Carter, 1993, 28) appalls him. When Beauty arrives at Mr. Lyon’s house in exchange for her father’s regained wealth that Mr. Lyon promised to him, she has ambiguous feelings towards him. The heroine is first afraid of the creature’s ‘otherness’ and finds his “bewildering difference from herself almost intolerable” (Carter, 29). This can be explained by the fact that at the story’s opening she has a limited comprehension of herself and of the human race in general. In her preliminal stage, the heroine’s self-image and identity are defined by the gaze of the other. Beauty is cast in the role of her father’s ‘girl-child, his pet’. And it becomes clear that her understanding of herself is restricted to this image when the narrator tells us that “such a one she felt herself to be, Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial. Yet she stayed and smiled, because her father wanted her to do so” (Carter, 1993, 29). Beauty is not only the object of her father’s affection, but an object in general, which becomes clear when she is given to the Beast in exchange for the father’s regained wealth. The heroine cannot step beyond the fixed social and cultural boundaries separating humans and animals (she states that “a lion is a lion and a man is a man”). Pollock calls it a ‘psychic borderland’ between human consciousness and the consciousness of other species, the

realm of the almost / not quite human (Pollock, 2000, 48). Thus, she fears the unknown, the animalistic, something which is 'unclean'.

Mr. Lyon is tormented by his 'otherness' – he admits that he does not even like the presence of servants because, as Beauty surmised, a constant human presence would remind him too bitterly of his otherness. At one point in the story, the heroine is strangely moved by Mr. Lyon's apparent loneliness, shyness (we learn that he fears to be refused), and vulnerability. When he buried his head in her lap and began to kiss her hands, she was overwhelmed with a 'flood of compassion'. Like Wolf-Alice of the previous story, the heroine becomes able to sympathize with 'the other's' torment and feel compassion for him. However, no matter how moved she is by his care for her, she cannot bring herself to touch him of her own free will, though in her heart she wanted to, because of his difference from herself, – her well-ordered life and strictly circumscribed human identity prevent her from that. And when Beauty has to join her father in London, she is torn between staying with Mr. Lyon out of sympathy and compassion for him and a sense of obligation to her father – between her own free will and expectations of her.

The heroine's liminality lies in her mental and moral confusion brought by Mr. Lyon. After joining her father in London, Beauty lives a lavish life, "learning, at her adolescence, how to be a spoiled child" (Carter, 1993, 31). However, the protagonist is tormented by her ambiguous states of mind. On the one hand, as the narrator tells us, she experiences perfect freedom, "as if she had escaped from an unknown danger, had been grazed by the possibility of some change but, finally, left intact" (Carter, 1993, 31). On the other hand, she feels a desolating emptiness. It may imply the heroine's fear of amorphous freedom, unknowingness, change which present a threat to her well-ordered life and mindset. And it was Mr. Lyon who stirred in her the new feelings of sympathy and compassion for the 'other' and whose absence now left a void in her heart. Beauty's 'enlightenment' – her passage into a new subject position occurs when she explores her transformed image in the mirror: "Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterizes certain pampered, exquisite, expensive cats" (Carter, 1993, 31). Thus, she gets an insight into her illusory identity and simulated life and learns that her previous distinction – "a lion is a lion and a man is a man" is also a skewed perception. Love and compassion that Beauty shows for the dying Mr. Lyon when she makes up her mind to return to him, restores him to humanity, as "when her lips touched the meat-hook claws, they drew back into their pads (...) and she saw how (...) he at last began to stretch his fingers. Her tears fell on his face like snow and, under their soft transformation, the bones showed through the pelt, the flesh through the wide, tawny brow. And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man, a man with an unkempt mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all the beasts" (Carter, 1993, 33). One can agree with Crunelle-Van-

right's suggestion that the Beast's humanity is restored and his final metamorphosis takes place in Beauty's eye much rather than in his body, "as if scales fell from her eyes and her initial judgement had been the result of some form of myopia, or hermeneutic confusion, a mere problem of interpretation" (Crunelle-Vanrigh, 2001, 139), which implies her mental transformation.

In the story *The Tiger's Bride*, the male protagonist's liminality is made manifest in an opposition between his natural animalistic instincts and a respectable outer façade of a civilized human being, and his inability to reconcile the two sides of his personality. He lives in a voluntary seclusion, and his suffering is strengthened by the 'unhealthy, toxic atmosphere' of the place he lives in. In his desperate effort to resemble a human being, the protagonist wears a human mask – a wig, a gown that falls from his shoulders to conceal his feet, he hides his hands in his ample sleeves. The young heroine whose father lost her to the Beast by wagering her in a game of cards, is first appalled by "the artificial masterpiece of his face" (Carter, 1993, 37). He tells the heroine that he will let her go if she undresses for him. When the woman refuses a couple of times as she is a respectable lady, it is he who gets undressed, revealing himself as a tiger underneath his human clothing. Like the heroine in *The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*, the female protagonist undergoes a mental transformation when looking in the mirror, she sees not her own face, but that of the soubrette who served her at the request of Tiger-man in his castle. The mirror image of the soubrette as if 'enlightens' her, gives her an insight into her own artificial, imitative life that she has led. By undressing for each other they accept each other as they really are. At the story's end, when hunting with Tiger-man and his valet, the heroine feels closer to Tiger-man's world than the one she has been living in. She regains her natural human instincts and stays with Tiger-man.

## Conclusions

Liminality in Angela Carter's collection of stories *The Bloody Chamber* (1993, first published in 1979) reveals the complexity of (post) modern individual's identity, his split consciousness, and ambiguity as his deep spiritual and ethical disorientation in the present-day world which occurs in the 'middle stage of rites' – a passage that changes an individual's identity status.

The present investigation based on the anthropologists van Gennep's and Turner's theories of liminality showed that Carter's protagonists – male and female – to some extent conform to stages in a 'rite of passage' described by the theorists.

Carter's protagonists in their liminal stage experience fears of formlessness, chaos, and uncertainty which are suppressed in the unconscious.

A 'bloody chamber' – a room, a house or a castle – as an actual location and a metaphor is present in different forms in all the ten pieces of the collection. It is that

liminal space in the character's life in which she / he experiences both some form of violence and "enlightenment," or, transformation.

Liminal spaces give the person both power and torment. They are tormented by living liminally. Existing in two states or being two things simultaneously, the person has qualities of both. Their suffering results from the fact that they do not fit into any form of existence. For example, Carter's werewolves do not fit in with either humans or wolves and are shunned by both. They are also tormented by fear they cause in others and fear of their own condition. The beasts in Carter's stories are also trapped between being human and animal, the state that makes them vulnerable, therefore they choose a voluntary isolation.

In Carter's stories, two liminal protagonists usually act on each other, or, complement each other in order to become fully integrated personalities. For instance, the woman must become more wolfish and the man more human in order for them to be together; it is also a free reciprocal exchange of desire in which there is no hierarchy, no subject – object relationship; sympathy and compassion offered by one protagonist to another. However, not all protagonists achieve consummation, or, find a 'positive alternative' to their condition and the objective reality (The heroine's grandmother in *The Werewolf*). Therefore, their liminality is the condition of exile and extinction.

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# Liminalumas Angelos Carter apsakymų rinkinyje *Kruvinasis kambarys*

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## Santrauka

Straipsnyje yra nagrinėjama liminalumo, liminalios patirties ir liminalaus personažo tema anglų rašytojos Angelos Carter apsakymų rinkinyje *Kruvinasis kambarys* (1979), siekiama atskleisti šiuolaikinio (post)modernaus žmogaus tapatumo problemą, tapatumo transformaciją ir jo kūrimą. Rašytoja apsakymuose panaudoja gerai žinomus mitus ir klasikines pasakas apie Karalių Mėlynbarzdį, Gražuolę ir Pabaisą, Snieguolę, Batuotą Katiną ir Raudonkepuraiteį, taip kritikuoja Vakarų hierarchijos ir patriarchalinę ideologijas ir su jomis susijusį binarinį mąstymą; tiria ir dekonstruoja sustabarėjusius Vakarų pasaulio socialinius ir kultūros kodus.

Carter kūryba yra labai įvairi ir netelpa į vieno kurio nors žanro rėmus (rašytoja kūrė romanus, apsakymus, išleido nemažai literatūrinės esė rinkinių). Carter kūrybos taip pat negalima būtų priskirti vienai literatūrinei srovei: ji naudojo klasikinių pasakų motyvus, mokslinės fantastikos, (neo)gotikos ir postmodernizmo, magiškojo realizmo elementus.

Vienas iš įdomesnių Carter kūrybos aspektų – liminalumo tema. Personažų liminalumas Carter apsakymuose gali būti traktuojamas kaip šiuolaikinio – (post)modernaus – žmogaus pleišėjanti, skylanti sąmonė, ambivalentiškumas, jo dvasinių ir etinių vertybių sumaištis šiuolaikiniame prieštaravimų draskomame pasaulyje.

Carter apsakymų personažų liminalumas, jų liminali patirtis tam tikra prasme atliepia antropologų Arnold'o Van Gennep'o ir Victor'o Turner'io transformacijos ritualą (a "rite of passage"): personažo atsiskyrimą, liminalią, arba perėjimo, būseną ir „agregaciją“, arba naujo tapatumo sukūrimą. Liminalumas apsakymuose atskleidžiamas tiriant vilkolakius, žmones-žvėris, žvėrių užaugintus vaikus ir vampyrus.

Liminalios būsenos Carter personažai išgyvena sąmonėje slypintį amorfiškumo, chaoso, netikrumo jausmą. Kruvinasis kambarys, kaip konkreti vieta ir metafora, įvairiomis formomis egzistuoja visuose rinkinio apsakymuose – tai kambarys, namas arba pilis. Kruvinasis kambarys – tai ta liminali erdvė, kurioje personažas patiria ir smurtą, ir „nušvitimą“ – savotišką transformaciją.

Liminalumas apsakymų personažams teikia ne tik jėgą, bet ir kančią. Būdamas dviejų egzistavimo formų, personažas turi abiejų savybių, tačiau negali jų suderinti. Taip pat nėra viena egzistavimo forma nėra priimtina kitiems. Jų kančia kaip tik ir kyla iš nesugebėjimo pasiekti vidinę dermę. Kančią kelia ir baimė, kurią jie kelia kitiems, taip pat baimė, siaubas išgyvenami mąstant apie savo būseną. Tokia egzistencija daro personažus pažeidžiamus, todėl jie dažnai renkasi nuošalų gyvenimą.

Liminalūs personažai papildo vienas kitą, kad taptų integraliomis, visavertėmis asmenybėmis. Pavyzdžiui, liminali personažė turi tapti labiau animalistinių instinktų valdoma būtybe,

o žmogus-žvėris – žmogiškesnis. Abipusė aistra, kurioje nėra hierarchijos, subjekto ir objekto priešpriešos, vieno personažo nuoširdi užuojauta ir meilė kitam taip pat išvaduoja veikėjus iš liminalumo ir kančios būsenos.

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***Esminiai žodžiai:*** liminalumas, liminali patirtis, liminalus individas, žmonės-žvėrys, vampyrai, vilkolakiai.

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