

Violence Surpassing Innocence in *Lord of The Flies* by William Golding and *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter

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Abstract

Of all the instinctive feelings shared by every living being all around the world, there is a collective drive in nature called violence. From the most primitive tribes to the post-modern era of present day, violence is the most basic feeling lying under everyone's psychology. Sigmund Freud claims that the human psychology is divided into three basic parts; namely, id, ego and superego. Id is the part in which all the instinctual feelings including violence is sheltered and Freud suggests that it is one of the basic human instincts in shaping the human life. No matter what a person's age, statue, gender or culture is, from the four-year-old baby to the serial killer, sometimes an angry neighbor and sometimes a looter; the same instinctual desire to harm and the feeling of violence exist in human nature. In other words, violence is explicit in every handle of the live. It would certainly be impossible not to see the reflections of such a shared feeling in literature. Throughout ages, many literary works have focused on this intinction either as the social violence on individuals, or physical violence of characters on the other people, or psychological violence the characters are exposed to. As the writers of post-1950 period, Angela Carter and William Golding display the violence of the characters in a different way in their works *Lord of the Flies* and *The Bloody Chamber*. The aim of this study is to analyze how the feeling of innocence is surpassed by the violence through deconstructing the basics of life together with detailed references to these works.

Keywords

Violence; deconstruct;
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Angela Carter; William
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Although there have always been chaos and problems in the world, the post-1950 period was more infamous due to the Cold War, hydrogen bombs, the effects of

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WWII and the fall of USSR. There appeared a kind of paranoia due to the violence people are exposed to during WWII and the ongoing atomic bomb threats. It is in the background of the widely remembered Jews, who were killed at the hand of Nazis, the disasters after Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Cultural Revolution in 1960s, people started to question and rebel against established institutions and grand theories. The more they questioned the more helpless and hopeless they felt. Therefore, in this depressive and gloomy mood, the theme of violence fits into the literary works more cruelly than ever.

Written under the atmosphere of depression and fear, Golding and Carter's works address the violence as the universal theme of all ages. They show this violence and cruelty in their works on both thematic and symbolic level. The reason why the contents of their works can be thought as *cruelly* violent is that both reveal the latent content of violence in children's world. In the typical world of children, when children gather, they are supposed to play, spend enjoyable time or at least have some simple adventures but this is expected to happen without having any ferocity. Likewise, throughout ages the child motif has been perceived as the symbol of fun and innocence in many stories. However, Golding and Carter set their novels on such a ground that children are depicted as behaving more merciless and barbarous than savages. As Gordon claims, 'by choosing children to be the protagonists of his story, Golding emphasizes the theme that evil is inherent in man's nature and that childhood innocence serves only to veil it.' (1965, p. 164) The established thought that refers to children as innocent and pure turns out to be reversed in these works. In other words, contrary to the common idea that violence is something that belongs to the adult world, Golding and Carter draw their characters as performing the most violent deeds from murder to torture and they point to the realities of human nature.

At the very beginning of *Lord of the Flies*, the reader is informed that in the midst of a war, a plane which carries a group of young boys is shot down and falls into the Pacific Ocean. No adult survives except for the boys who are left on an uninhabited island. Just after the plane crash, a clash between violence and reason starts among children. While some of the children under the leadership of Ralph want to go hunting, the rest of them, including Jack, think that in order to live together they

should set up some rules. The first thing to do is to set a fire; that is the most basic need and the only signal of civilization which can save them. However, the hunger and desire to catch and murder the pig take over the hunters and they forget about the fire and go off running into the forest. Upon returning from the jungle, they chant ‘Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood.’ (Golding, 1954, p. 69) When the hunters return from a successful hunt, Ralph and Piggy - as the voice of reason – strive for signaling the fact that keeping the signal fire burning is much more crucial than having meat for their meals. What is peculiar about these boys is that they are the children who were left deprived of modernity in the wilderness; in other words, they are in between the wilderness and the life they belong to. At the end of the novel, the officer who is used to such scenes says that ‘the thing which in the embryonic society of the boys we find shocking has been quietly incorporated into our modern society as convention and custom. Any attempt to rid society of evil is clearly impossible.’ (White, 1965, p. 170) As it is also suggested by Sigmund Freud, when the society and social norms that represent the superego is taken apart, the anarchic, amoral, driving force that Freudians call the Id takes the ground in its most violent form. To illustrate, during the ritual like dancing of the group on the beach, the children attack Simon without paying attention to whom or what they are attacking because they lose their control under the effect of the group’s violent chanting and the only thing they focus on is the violent deed of attacking. Just like a hungry lion delivered from its cage, the instinctual violence that lies deep inside their psychology burst out when they have a chance.

Golding arranges the setting as ‘a dark forest’ (Golding, 1954, p. 10); a place that is far remote to the civilization; ‘...no houses, no smoke, no footprints, no boats, no people. [They]’re on an uninhabited island with no other people on it.’ (Golding, 1954, p. 32) In such an isolated place, in order to emphasize to which degree children’s violence can rise; he excludes school or any type of instructions and all the other social factors that regulate the everyday life. The lack of adults and the rational structure in the group of boys that are left on a deserted place let the children spend their time without any limitation. When they are still under the influence of the modern world they came from, they attempt to call assembly to make the decisions, they ‘vote for chief.’ (Golding, 1954, p. 22) Whereas, the quest for survival easily

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lead them to the violence in the most extreme form. Their first attempt is to fulfill their hunger and hunt for the pigs, but they soon find out that they have the potential power and the ability to hunt and kill other creatures. Especially the hunter group lead by Jack is more eager to slaughter than eating a pig. They think that they have the physical capacity to overcome anything, so they do not need any rules. '[they're] strong-[they] hunt! If there's a beast [they'll] hunt it down. [They'll] close in and beat and beat-!' (Golding, 1954, p. 83) Having formed a tribe of savages, Jack's group loots the others' goods; they even steal Piggy's glasses leaving him virtually blind. Jack, 'trotting steadily, exulting in his achievement,' (Golding, 1954, p.168) practically abandons all the ties to civilized life. Just as the children, who experience the extreme violence in the computer games without their parent's intervention, the boys on the island take up the violence by hunting pigs and end up murdering two children- Simon and Piggy and firing out the forest.

Although the island they landed might be a place in which everything goes on well and every child works in cooperation with one another and lives happily, this remains as a utopia. The children on the island are in search for only providing their basic needs, so they behave as if they were like wild animals only in search of survival. As it is stated in the novel, 'There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws.' (Golding, 1954, p. 153) Perhaps, Golding's aim is to disprove the fact that people can live in peace without any trouble if there is not injustice of statute and if there is common wealth. Although all the children make a new start simultaneously, those who are physically strong turns out to be the dominant group and they took the control of the others. Just as it is in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in which the stronger animals rule the weaker ones, the basic desire for power and the dominance of the strong overwhelms the novel. The well-known motto of 'all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others' (Orwell, 1954, p. 112) reveals the reality lying on the ground of the novel. The irony is that in the *Animal Farm* there are animals that are depicted as humans, in *Lord of the Flies* there are human beings that behave like animals. The main point is that, every creature has a potential violence and unless it is tamed through social rules, a person can easily become a monster. Just like Orwell, Golding draws a picture that is

not restricted to any time; either in prehistoric times or in the age of technology, the struggle between violence and reason goes hand in hand, that is:

“the struggle between Ralph, the representative of civilization with his parliaments and his brain trust and Jack, in whom the spark of wildness burns hotter and closer to the surface than in Ralph and who is the leader of the forces of anarchy on the island,...the struggle in modern society between those same forces translated onto a worldwide scale.” (Golding, 1954, p. 205)

While Golding depicts how violence is an instinctual feeling that waits to be revealed through the children in a deserted island, Angela Carter takes the same theme from a different perspective. The characters in her stories are not basically children, but she chooses fairy tales, ‘the stories that are mainly written for children to take some instructional or moral values.’ (Bacchilega, 1997, p. 36) Originally, the fairy tales are accepted as innocent stories that deal with some certain harmless topics. The lost people are sheltered, the people in need find remedy, the good wins and the bad is punished. Besides, one of the most well-known things about fairy tales is that they begin with ‘once upon a time’ and end with ‘happily ever after’. However, in the introduction by Helen Simpson to *The Bloody Chamber*, it is quoted from Carter’s view that:

“...fairy tales contain topics that many people choose to ignore in them, such as incest, rape, and cannibalism. As the essence of human experience, fairy tales inevitably involve aspects of that experience to which people do not want to admit...I was taking ... the latent content of those traditional stories and using that; and the latent content is violent...” (1993, p. ix)

Throughout *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter turns the conventions of fairy tales upside down by ripping them from this basic feature. Author Steven Swann Jones explains that: ‘fairy tales endure as they do because they simplify the human experience into a form that anyone can recognize and *enjoy*’ (2002, p. 18) However, Carter’s point is different from that of the joyous, happy form of fairy tales. She focuses on rather undesired and sober topics like rape, murder and violence as the other side of the coin. As Alison Lee writes about Carter, she is ‘the child, who sees that emperor has no clothes,’ (1997, p. 12) because she takes the attention of the

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reader to the ignored parts of the fairy tales. She puts emphasis on fairy tales as “a means of transferring the traditional social, moral, sexual and gender based latent messages which make them highly ideological rather than innocent children’s stories” (Erten, 2011, p. 247) and she recreates her own modern fairy tales through emphasizing the forbidden topics that no one dare to mention like pornography, sexuality, rape and violence.

The theme of violence can obviously be exemplified from almost all the stories in *The Bloody Chamber*. As Carter claims ‘I was using the latent content of those traditional stories, and that latent content is violently sexual’ (Carter quoted in Sheets, 1998, p. 103). The reader comes across with the rooms filled with blood and the characters that are raped in a remote place or murdered cruelly. In some of the stories, the violent acts are mingled with sexuality. The innocent little girls can be the victims of beasts or they might be turned into animals entrapped in the cages in the other ones. There are vampires sleeping in the coffins and human beings having sexual intercourse with the beasts next to the corpses.

Having introduced the claim that Carter deconstructs the traditional form of fairy tales, the following lines will be focused on the most striking details of violence in Carter’s book, *The Bloody Chamber*. Entitling the book, in *The Bloody Chamber* story, there is a wealthy, old Marquis who takes the virginity of the nameless heroine narrating the story in a room filled with mirrors. It is the retelling of ‘Blue Beard’ story that narrates the male figures that save the girl from being murdered. The main difference is that, Carter:

“uses the language of the story not to lull the reader into ignoring the dangers posed by Bluebeard but instead to heighten the reader’s awareness of the threat posed by the sadomasochistic underpinnings of much of decadent culture, which created a dangerously passive and readily victimized feminine ideal” (Kaiser, 1994, p. 32).

The nameless heroine refers to her husband’s movements as ‘deliberately coarse, vulgar,’ (10) and the sexual intercourse is narrated just like a scene of torture. Moreover, from the quotation of her husband’s favorite poet- ‘There is a striking resemblance between the act of love and the ministrations of torturer,’ (26) - the

violence she is exposed to can clearly be perceived. The bloody chamber, in which Marquis' ex-wives are laid and the key whose blood stain cannot be removed are the most distinctive symbols of violence in the story. *The Courtship of Mr Lyon*, is the second story in which Carter makes use of a symbolic violence through the description of the wild creature called Beast. Beauty, who is exchanged for her father's lost fortune describes the Beast in such a way that she is the victim of a hungry animal:

“She found his bewildering difference from herself almost intolerable; his presence choked her... when she saw the great paws lying on the arms of his chair, she thought they are the death of any tender herbivore... she felt herself to be Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial”. (Carter, 1993, p. 48)

Based on the *Beauty and the Beast* story, the next story called *The Tiger's Bride* starts with a girl running to the Beast's room, she takes off all her clothes just like a wild animal. As she rushes to the Beast, she encounters with the valet in the shape of an ape. Strikingly, the furs of the heroine become rats and escape. The story can be seen as fabulous up to this point; however, the real violent deed is revealed through the end. The human skin of the heroine is pulled by Beast's licking with his rough tongue. At the end, she is revealed as a tigress. Although the Beast does not seem to have a distinctive plot against Beauty, she is portrayed as a victim who is condemned to be harmed by this wild creature. The next story, *Puss-in-Boots* is perhaps an ironically comic one among the collection of Carter's short stories. However, just like the other ones, this story also includes violence. Puss befriends Tabby and they plan to trip Signor Panteleone so that he falls and breaks his neck. Their plot is as brutal as an assassin. Furthermore, when Puss' master disguises as a doctor to announce the man dead, ‘as soon as they are left alone... they are down on the carpet since the bed is occupé.’ (Carter, 1993, p. 93) While the corpse occupies the bed, the young woman and Puss's master have sex on the floor. It is striking that the sexual intercourse and the violence are just foot away from one another. The violence occurs on different levels in *The Erl-King* story. The first one is the liminal creature's imprisoning the women into cages. Upon seeing the cages, unaware of the fact that they are human beings turned into birds, the heroine utters ‘how cruel it is to

keep wild birds in cages!’ (Carter, 1993, p. 99) On one side, Erl-King bites her during the sexual intercourse just like a vampire. On the other side, when she notices the cage he builds for her, the heroine slays Erl-King. The shortest story in the book and based on the story of *Snow White*, *The Snow Child* is the most symbolic and among the most violent one: Snow White comes into existence through the Count’s wish. Having endured all the inconvenience caused by Count’s wife, with her red mouth, black hair and her white skin, she dies due to the rose’s prick on her finger. The girl, who is ‘...as red as blood,... as black as a bird’s feather... and as white as snow...,’ (Carter, 1993, p. 105) is raped by the Count when Count ‘thrust his virile member into the dead girl,’ (Carter, 1993, p. 106) and having sex with a dead boy is another striking example of Carter’s style to extract the latent content from the traditional stories. Another violent example to be seen explicitly is, as the heroine in *The Lady of the House* -the queen of vampires- sucks people’s blood in her castle. Her violence is revealed through the tarot card she has chosen: ‘be he alive or be he dead, I’ll grind his bones to make my bread.’ (Carter, 1993, p. 112) The setting of the story is also decent for such violent deeds; it is a place so lonely, the village is deserted,’ (Carter, 1993, p. 118) and ‘the stained and peeling walls’ (Carter, 1993, p. 118) of her room gives the reader a sense of horror. The next two stories are based on *Red Riding Hood* and there are drastic differences between the original story and Carter’s versions. Unlike the girl in *Red Riding Hood*, Carter draws the girl in her stories as courageous, frigid, chivalrous and lascivious. The first story, *The Werewolf*, is a bloody story in which the little girl ‘splash off its [wolf] forepaw,’ (Carter, 1993, p. 127) and the grand mother is stoned to death. While it would be a grievous thing for the girl in traditional stories, the story ends as ‘the little child lived in her grandmother’s house; she prospered.’ Through the word ‘prospered’ Carter criticizes the importance of wealth for the modern people and she wants to emphasize the cruelty of real life. In the next story based on *Red Riding Hood*, *The Company of Wolves*, the wolves are depicted as the ruthless creatures:

“The wolf is carnivore incarnate and he’s cunning as he is ferocious; once he’s had a taste of flesh then nothing else will do.... They will be like shadows;

they will be like wraiths, grey members of a contegration of nightmare...”
(Carter, 1993, p. 129)

The adjectives that are used for the wolves show how threatening and violent these creatures would be. Furthermore, there are the liminal creatures called werewolves in the story; the town’s people were afraid of them more than wolves because they believed that there is a relation between the werewolves and the devil. However, once more in contrast to the traditional stories, the young girl who is sent into the forest to go to grandmother’s house is not afraid of him. After the werewolf kills and eats the grandmother, regardless of his warnings to eat her, the girl undresses before him and the heroine sleeps with the werewolf ignoring her grandmother’s bones. Just like Puss’ master, who has sexual intercourse next to the dead body, Carter applies the same intermingle of violence and sex in this story. The last story, *Wolf-Alice* is the story of a human in form but wolf in her behaviors: ‘Two-legs looks, four-legs sniffs.’ (Carter, 1993, p. 140). The wolves are believed to raise her. She is sent to live with a werewolf who steals human corpses and eats them. The Duke kills a bride and he is shot by town’s people on the shoulder. Alice’s licking his wound, just as the Beast does in *The Tiger’s Bride*, shows the amount of their savagery and how violent they can behave.

Carter’s work, which points the violent drive under every human being’s psychology, is a deconstructed version of innocent childish stories. Having pointed out almost all the things which can be referred as violent, it wouldn’t be unfair to say that Carter, throughout the stories, does not refrain from explicitly using the violence as a theme that takes over innocence. She aims to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that the fairy tales are not as innocent as they seem. Thus, it is violence and the most basic feelings that are peculiar to human beings in her stories can easily be traced.

In conclusion, as a feeling that is proved to reside in every human being more or less, when they are obliged to or when the external factors are swiped away as it is in Golding’s work, children can also turn out to be fierce creatures. Also, the stories that are designed for children seem to be innocent; however, they can find their places among the most fearful ones with a few touches. In other words, although it is a

common idea that violence is a feeling that belongs to the adult world, in Carter and Golding's views, it does not seem to be so practicable, as proven through the examples, the threshold of violence is also applicable to the world of children and their stories.

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