

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract A

1. Read your critical extract.
2. Talk about whether it:
  - a. Gives you any fresh knowledge/information that's useful in reading the story.
  - b. Confirms your interpretation.
  - c. Adds to or develops your interpretation.
  - d. Challenges your interpretation.
3. Highlight one or two short phrases which you might use in an essay to use to develop your argument or viewpoint.
4. Write a paragraph in which you incorporate the quotation into an exploration of an aspect of the story.

In her late twentieth-century fiction, Carter powerfully, and often critically, demonstrates the reversal of values and identifications that occurs via the Gothic genre. Otherness takes centre stage: sexual transgression, dark desire, and fantastic deviance wonderfully subvert the restrictive orders of reason, utility, and paternal morality... In Gothic times margins may become the norm and occupy a more central cultural place.

**Fred Botting, 'Aftergothic: consumption, machines and black holes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge UP, 2002).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract B

Read your critical extract.

1. Talk about whether it:
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Carter has [...] been seen critically as part of the new wave of contemporary women writers of the Gothic for her use of paradox, irony, myth, fairy tale and horror tropes to critique the contemporary world. One of her favourite subjects for Gothic and horror writing is the gendered construction and representations of power which render woman as automata, puppets and femmes fatale. Carter's rewriting of certain fairy tales and horror scenarios, including the female vampire and the werewolf, celebrate sexuality [...] or critique family tyrannies and patriarchal power.

**Gina Wisker, *Angela Carter A Beginner's Guide* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2003).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract C

Read your critical extract.

1. Talk about whether it:
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Sometimes the legends are uncanny just because they are so enigmatic. [...]

**Angela Carter, 'The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm', in *Expletives Deleted*  
(Vintage Books, 2006).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract D

Read your critical extract.

1. Talk about whether it:
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...her characters are forever escaping, socially, mentally, or physically, the traps laid by men. If she deals with established stereotypes in *The Bloody Chamber* rather than fully-fleshed out characters, then this is because fairy tales clothe themselves in stereotypes and archetypes.

**Jeff Vandermeer, The Scriptorium [www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/carter.html](http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/carter.html)).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract E

Read your critical extract.

1. Talk about whether it:
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In gothic fiction, Angela Carter wrote in 1974, 'characters and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions... style will tend to become ornate and unnatural – and thus operate against the perennial human desire [especially in Britain] to believe the word as fact...(the Gothic) retains a singular moral function – that of provoking unease.'

**Christopher Frayling, 'Introduction', in *The Gothic Reader – A Critical Anthology* (Tate, 2006).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract F

Read your critical extract.

1. Talk about whether it:
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[Carter believed that] the Gothic should be placed and was beginning to be placed, she concluded, in relation to realism in literature and the visual arts and at the same time associated with fantasy and the fantastic, with the realms of imagination and desire: novels needn't deal with domestic life and everyday experience after all' their truth could lie elsewhere. The genre may have started life with Horace Walpole and neo-medievalism – a haunted castle, giant pieces of armour, an avenging ghost, a disputed inheritance – but the Gothic had since turned into something more pervasive: an aesthetic. This aesthetic had strong links with the realist-sentimental novels of the Abbe Prevost, Samuel Richardson and Jean-Jacques Rousseau which preceded it [...] but it was beginning to be seen as standing in stark opposition to 'safe' literary realism. Angela Carter was delighted to see, as she put it, that 'the *fin* in this particular *siecle* was beginning rather earlier than usual. For, as she added, 'we live in Gothic times...'

**Christopher Frayling, 'Introduction', in *The Gothic Reader – A Critical Anthology* (Tate, 2006).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract G

1. Talk about whether it:
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Perhaps we either need to accept that these stories are not fairy-tales at all, or radically re-think what a fairy-tale is. After all, while Carter's two *Virago Book(s) of Fairy Tales* (1991 and 1993) are self-evidently collections of revisionary fairy-stories, can the same so easily be said of a collection called *The Bloody Chamber*? Quite clearly, rather than being fairy-tales which contain a few Gothic elements, these are actually Gothic tales that prey upon the restrictive enclosures of fairy-tale formulae in a manner that threatens to become 'masochistically' self-destructive.

**Lucie Armitt, 'The Fragile Frames of The Bloody Chamber', quoted in Sarah Gamble, *The Fiction of Angela Carter – A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2001).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract H

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*The Bloody Chamber* may be read as a 'writing against' de Sade, a talking-back to him; and, above all, as an exploration of the possibilities for the kind of synthesis de Sade himself could never find because he wasn't even looking for it. Predator and prey, master and slave, are the only two categories – or roles, because in his world one person may play both, although alternately, - that he can acknowledge; above all, for him sex between unequals cannot be mutually pleasurable because pleasure belongs to the eater, not the eaten. What Carter seems to be doing in *The Bloody Chamber* – among other things – is looking for ways in which the tiger and the lamb, or the tiger and lamb parts of the psyche, can reach some accommodation.

*The Bloody Chamber* can be understood much better as an exploration of the narrative possibilities of de Sade's lamb-and-tiger dichotomy than as a 'standard' work of early seventies to-the-barricades feminism.

[...]

It is Carter's contention that a certain amount of tigerishness may be necessary if women are to achieve an independent as opposed to a dependent existence; if they are to avoid – at the extreme end of passivity – becoming meat. They need, in their own self-interest, to assimilate at least some of Juliette's [de Sade character] will-to-power. But their change from lamb to tiger need not be a divesting of all 'feminine' qualities, as it is for de Sade; also, although society may slant things so that women appear to be better candidates for meat-eating, the nature of men is not fixed by Carter as inevitably predatory, with females as their 'natural' prey. Lambhood and tigerishness may be found in either gender, and in the same individual at different times. In this respect, Carter's arrangements are much more subject to mutability than are de Sade's. He postulates the permanence and 'decreed' nature of virtue and vice: Juliette is born evil, Justine good, and so they remain. Carter, however, celebrates relativity and metamorphosis and 'the complexity of human relations.'

**Margaret Atwood, 'Running with the Tigers,' in Lorna Sage, ed., *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter* (Virago, 1994).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract I

Read your critical extract.

1. Talk about whether it:
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Because of the Gothic's conservative leanings and its capacity for disguising its abjections in highly displaced locations and spectres, on the one hand, authors and audiences can choose approaches that emphasise surface shock value, luridness of setting, exoticism of character, and a posture of convenient middle distance from these that both admits their attractions and condemns their excesses in the end, claiming 'that's entertainment!' On the other hand, since the Gothic also serves to symbolize our struggles and ambivalences over how dominant categorizations of people, things, and events can be blurred together and so threaten our convenient, but repressive thought patterns, its creators and onlookers have the opportunity to make Gothic show us our cultural and psychological selves and conditions, in their actual multiplicity, in ways that other aesthetic forms cannot manage as forcefully or with such wide public appeal. Such self-exposures can create occasions for us to reassess our standard oppositions and distinctions – and thus our prejudices – at which point Gothic can activate its revolutionary and boundary-changing impulses and lead us to dissolve some of the rigidities and their otherings of people by which we live and from which much of the Gothic takes its shape. We are always poised on the fulcrum of this choice when we read or consider Gothic fictions: do we let them mainly protect and justify us as we are (which most of them can, if we seek that through them) or do we let them arouse us to reconsider and critique the conventional norms of western middle-class culture, which confront disguised challenges to them in the Gothic (if we let it) more vividly than anywhere else?

**Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Introduction: the Gothic in Western Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge UP, 2002).**

## Reading around Angela Carter's *'The Lady of the House of Love'* — critical extract J

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The heroines of these stories are struggling out of the straitjackets of history and ideology and biological essentialism. 'There's a story in *The Bloody Chamber* called 'The Lady of the House of Love', said Carter, 'part of which derives from a movie version that I saw of a story by Dostoevsky. And in the movie... the woman, who is a very passive person and is very much in distress, asks herself the question, 'Can a bird sing only the song it knows, or can it learn a new song?' Have we got the capacity at all of singing new songs? It's very important that if we haven't, we might as well stop now.

**Helen Simpson, review of *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Guardian*, Jun 24, 2006**