The Intermedial Trajectories of Angela Carter’s Wolf Tales

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1 Susannah Clapp has quoted Angela Carter as liking “anything that flickers,” (American ix) and Carter’s attraction to the cinema is apparent in both the structure and themes of her work. She admits to a fascination for experiences of collective viewing that reach back to the Granada Tooting, a cinema from her childhood described as a “dream cathedral” which incarnated the “apotheosis of the fake” in its very architecture (Carter, “Granada” 400). In a Radio 4 (1989) interview, she comments on how the cinema had influenced her fiction: “I’m perfectly conscious of using all kinds of narrative technique that I’ve taken from the cinema. Our experience of watching narrative in the cinema has completely altered the way that we approach narrative on the page, that we even read nineteenth-century novels differently” (qtd. in Crofts 92). Intermedial concerns are indeed interlaced with Carter’s writing, as she wrote for the radio, the cinema, and television. In her introduction to Carter’s collected dramatic works, Clapp explains that “These pieces [...] By their form and extent [...] enlarge the scope and alter the contours of a rich body of work” (Curious ix), and Charlotte Crofts has emphasized the importance of approaching Carter’s work through the lens of media.

Carter’s work in media has been sidelined by the academy because it does not fit neatly into generic or canonic categories. But in editing out her mediated texts, contemporary critical responses offer an incomplete picture of her work. As the texts discussed here reveal, Carter’s writing for radio, film and television is not an aberration from her real vocation as a writer of fiction, but ‘an extension and an amplification of writing for the printed page’ (Carter 1985: 12-13). (Crofts 194)

2 A self-consciousness of the “screen,” whether internal or external, pervades much of Carter’s fiction, reflecting what Robert Olen Butler refers to as the “dream in your consciousness” that is set into place by a “work of literature” with its “characters and the setting” (64). In her work with the fairy tale Carter foregrounds the performance of storytelling and the power of image-making. She also demonstrates a consciousness of how such dreams might be perpetuated and amplified by machines that “do our dreaming for
us,” as “within that ‘video gadgetry’ might lie the source of a continuation, even a transformation, of storytelling and story-performance” (Carter, Virago Book, xxii).

3 It is commonly known that Carter’s 1977 translation of tales by Charles Perrault led to the writing of The Bloody Chamber (1979), a collection of revisionist tales that was published concomitantly with her feminist appropriation of the Marquis de Sade’s ideas in The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History (1979). As Jack Zipes observes in The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy Tales (2011), discursive elements from Carter’s critical survey of Sade’s pornography are woven into her fairy tales, particularly in the way she endows “the characters with flesh and blood and the plots with more intricacy” (135), thus taking them beyond the realm of archetypal forms. I would like to argue, however, that Carter’s tales also delve into the troubling potential of “terrorism of the imagination” she attributes to the pornography of Sade:

Nothing exercises such power over the imagination as the nature of sexual relationships, the pornographer has in his power to become a terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerilla whose purpose is to overturn our most basic notions of these relations, to reinstitute sexuality as a primary mode of being rather than a specialised area of vacation from being. (Carter, Sadeian 21-22)

4 She indeed makes of the reading “dream” an arena for reflection which is colored by affect, drawing upon the reader’s expectations to tease him/her on multiple levels. Robert Olen Butler speaks of the “rub,” that is a combination of aesthetic elements that gives rise to the unexpected (Butler 84). Carter’s aesthetics hinge upon such an effect, that is on the friction caused by her collage of intellectual, literary and cultural artifacts. I will argue that it is the spirit of the “rub” more than content and theme that informs the intermedial transformations of Carter’s wolf tales, that is three tales from The Bloody Chamber: “The Werewolf,” “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf Alice.” The tale “Red Riding Hood” (AT333) serves as a nexus for these three stories that were adapted for the radio in 1980 (The Company of Wolves, directed by Glyn Dearman) and into a film of the same title directed by Neil Jordan in 1984. Such adaptations attest to the intermedial metamorphoses of Carter’s politically saturated aesthetics.

5 Each of the three aesthetic productions is characterized by a reflection on re-writing and the act of storytelling. Playing with the palimpsestic relations inherent to the fairy tale, Carter’s stories foreground the ghosts of previous tellers and tales, as if to release, as Cristina Bacchilega has observed, forgotten layers of sedimented storytelling: “Postmodern revision is often two-fold, seeking to expose, make visible, the fairy tale’s complicity with ‘exhausted’ narrative and gender ideologies, and, by working with the fairy tales’ multiple versions, seeking to expose, bring out, what the institutionalization of such tales for children has forgotten or left unexploited” (Bacchilega 50). The wealth of criticism about The Bloody Chamber attests to the success of Carter’s enterprise in the realm of academia. However few critics have focused on the intermedial shifts that occur in Carter’s different versions of the wolf tales. According to Bacchilega, writers such as Carter focus not only on the content of the tale, but on its telling, on its performative aspects: “This kind of rereading does more than interpret anew or shake the genre’s ground rules. It listens for the many ‘voices’ of fairy tales as well, as part of a historicizing and performance-oriented project” (50). She speaks of how Carter “explodes the stereotype of the fairy tale as a static and ‘closed system’ by mobilizing the multiple and contradictory refractions of sexualized imagery” (50).
This is particularly evident in Carter's self-conscious narrative performance. The three tales are juxtaposed in *The Bloody Chamber*, as if to play one against the other. "The Werewolf" is a rendition of "Red Riding Hood" in which the grandmother is actually a werewolf. She is killed and replaced by Red who "lived in her grandmother's house" and "prospered." "The Company of Wolves" is a collage of "wolf" stories: a hunter kills a wolf only to see it transformed into the body of a man, a witch transforms a wedding party into wolves because "the groom had settled on another girl," and a version of Red Riding Hood ultimately strips and lies down with the wolf. The final story, "Wolf Alice" revisits the motif of the feral child, a girl who lives with wolves.

There is a predominate third person narration throughout the three stories with shifts in the temporal position of the narrator, and a frequent use of "you" and "we" to foster a didactic complicity with the reader, as if to accentuate the voice of a storyteller persona. In "The Werewolf" the narrator states clearly: "To these upland woodsmen, the Devil is as real as you or I," ("Werewolf" 108), in "The Company of Wolves," the narrator says: "You are always in danger in the forest, where no people are. Step between the portals of the great pines where the shaggy branches tangle about you [...] if you stray from the path for one instant, the wolves will eat you" ("Company" 111), and in "Wolf Alice" the reader is invoked as part of "we" in the first sentence: "Could this ragged girl with brindled lugs have spoken like we do she would have called herself a wolf" ("Alice" 119).

The reader is even invited to “see” the images. The use of the word “will” underlines how the reader’s images, projected onto an imagined cinematic screen, emerge from a stereotypical “ur” text that reads like a screenplay: "There will be a crude icon of the virgin behind a guttering candle, the leg of a pig hung up to cure, a string of drying mushrooms. A bed, a stool, a table. Harsh, brief, poor lives" (108). Similar attention to detail is present in "The Company of Wolves" in the description of the grandmother’s house: "Two china spaniels with liver-coloured blotches on their coats and black noses sit on either side of the fireplace. There is a bright rug of woven rags on the pantiles. The grandfather clock ticks away her eroding time" (115). The senses of the reader are explicitly invoked and self-consciously underlined through a focus on eyes:

> At night, the eyes of wolves shine like candle flames, yellowish, reddish, but that is because the pupils of their eyes fatten on darkness and catch the light from your lantern to flash it back to you – red for danger; if a wolf’s eyes reflect only moonlight, then they gleam a cold and unnatural green, a mineral, a piercing colour. If the benighted traveller spies those luminous, terrible sequins stitched suddenly on the black thickets, then he knows he must run, if fear has not struck him stock-still.

> But those eyes are all you will be able to glimpse of the forest assassins as they cluster invisibly round your smell of meat as you go through the wood unwisely late. They will be like shadows, they will be like wraiths, grey members of a congregation of nightmare; hark! his long, wavering howl… an aria of fear made audible. ("Company" 110)

Such visual interpellation along with the use of “you” is repeated throughout the story. At the end of the story, the reader is asked to observe the girl sleeping in the arms of the wolf: “See! sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" ("Company" 118). In addition to weaving connections between stories, the reader is invited into a literary “dream” with broad ranges of affect from fear to marvel, playful symbolism and moments of reflection. Carter reiterates the didactic thrust of Perrault’s tale, for example, in a way that resonates with the previous message and opens up for...
further interpretation, particularly the placement of female sexuality at the center of the tale:

She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing. (“Company” 113-114)

Carter thus lays bare the didactic symbolism of Perrault’s version that so irritated Bruno Bettelheim (Bettelheim 169), but her narrative opens up this symbolism, or rather “explodes” it, in Bacchilega’s words, for further investigation by the reader.

It is the creation of such open spaces that drew Carter to the radio as a medium. Charlotte Crofts, in reference to Clare Hanson, observes the parallel between the openness of the short story form and the medium of radio:

Radio’s ‘open-endedness’ mirrors the elliptical structure of many short stories which, as Clare Hanson has argued, stirs the imagination of the reader in a particular way [...] Both forms paradoxically contain more imaginative space precisely because of their ‘lack’. The ‘blindness’ of radio, the absence of visual stimuli, necessitates the stimulation of the listener’s imagination (in Hanson’s terms, activating the ‘image-making faculty’), creating space for their active involvement in the process of meaning production (inviting the listener’s ‘desire’ into the text). The lack of narrative space in short fiction contributes to its open-endedness as a medium, demanding a similarly active readership. (23)

Carter explained this open-endedness through the “three-dimensional story-telling” of radio that goes beyond the linearity of both written and oral narrative because of its characteristic devices:

Radio may not offer visual images but its resources blur this linearity, so that a great number of things can happen at the same time. Yet, as with all forms of story-telling that are composed in words, not in visual images, radio always leaves that magical and enigmatic margin, that space of the invisible, which must be filled in by the imagination of the listener. (Carter, Preface 497).

Crofts has focused on the complex interplay between the oral tradition of the fairy tale and Carter’s recuperation of its voices for the radio. I would suggest that it is not simply the recuperation of the voices, but also the types of imaginative spaces it fosters, that links the radio to the political aesthetics of Carter’s written tales. In her performative reprisal of familiar narratives she carves out a space that reveals the underlying forces behind the waking “dream.” Liliane Louvel has used the term “pictorial third” to indicate the in-between space that emerges between image and text:

In these “dark machines” that we are, the dynamic of the pictorial third plays itself out: movement and energy that lead to a disruption, a surplus of meaning and affect, a waking dream that dances between the two. Neither one nor the other, it is one and the other in the back and forth sway with the image. It is really a modality that belongs to the order of the living, of movement, of desire, of lived experience, of the event in the sense of what happens: an operation as well, a performance. [my translation]

Carter’s radio plays create a similar performative space, where the linearity of text is pushed to the background to allow for the emergence of the personal image, an image with a dynamism and fluidity that lends itself to inquiry.

Part of this dynamism is achieved, much like in the stories, in the experimentation with narrative voices. Carter’s radio play reproduces the three stories to varying degrees but...
shifts the narrative emphasis to create a Chinese box structure. A framing story is presented, that of a grandmother talking with her granddaughter (referred to explicitly in the radio play as Red Riding Hood). The grandmother adopts the storyteller role, accompanied by the interventions of a didactic, anonymous narrator, and weaves together different tales in a fading in and out of narratives that touch upon the werewolf motif, Red Riding Hood, and the feral child. The characters in the narrative occasionally take over the narration, be it the werewolf, the bride of the werewolf, the wolf who attacks Red Riding Hood, or even Red Riding Hood herself. The listener is faced with a medley of voices and noises that ask him/her to draw connections. This is strikingly apparent in the following excerpt where the narratives of granny, werewolf hunter, and main narrator blend and overlap. A hunter had just baited a pit with a duck to trap the wolf.

[extract 1]

GRANNY: And into the trap went the silly wolf. ([and stuck himself directly on that pointed stake])
(Animal shriek)
HUNTER: (Centre.) So I jumps down and slits –
(Throat slitting from pit and grunts from hunter.)
his throat quick as a wink. And commenced to lop off his paws, for I had a fancy to mount this brute’s great pads, d’you see, to decorate my mantel, along with the boar’s head and the moose head and the great carp my uncle caught ten winters ago that he had stuffed (Thwack; dull thud.) … but only the one paw did I chop off because, so help me, as I stand here –
(From pit.) Mother Mary and all the saints in heaven protect me!
GRANNY: (Far left.) Upon the ground the hunter saw there fall no paw at all but –
HUNTER: (From pit.) A hand! A man’s hand!
(Wind faded out:)
NARRATOR: (Centre. Close). The desperate claws retract, refine themselves as if attacked by an invisible emery board, until suddenly they become fingernails and could never have been anything but fingernails, or so it would seem. The leather pads soften and shrink until you could take fingerprints from them, until they have turned into fingertips. The clubbed tendons stretch, the foreshortened phalanges extend and flesh out, the bristling hair sinks backwards into the skin without leaving a trace of stubble behind it.
(Clock and fire back.)
WEREWOLF: (Approaching from mid right to RED RIDING HOOD.)
RED RIDING HOOD: Ooh . . .
WEREWOLF: Now my skin is the same kind of skin as your skin, little sister. There! my hand . . . won’t you take hold of my hand?
RED RIDING HOOD: (Gasps)
WEREWOLF: See . . . it’s just the same as any other hand, only perhaps a little larger . . . didn’t you see the enormous prints I left in the snow? (Carter Curious 66-67)

The narratives move in and out of each other with a fluidity that would be difficult to attain in a textual narrative. Radio, according to Carter, thus transcends the limits of the cinema: “radio can move from location to location with effortless speed, using aural hallucinations to invoke sea-coast, a pub, a blasted heath, and can make extraordinary collage and montage effects beyond the means of any film-maker” (Carter, Preface 497). Carter explains how the elasticity of this medium allows her to “explore ideas” which for her “is the same thing as telling stories since, for me, a narrative is an argument stated in fictional terms” (Carter Preface, 497). Such speculative play is further accentuated by the inherent self-consciousness of the radio play in a contemporary context (even that of the 1980s in which the play was first broadcast). Because of a marked contrast with the types
of suspension of disbelief solicited by visual media, the devices of the radio play stand out, bringing the listener to not only experience the story, but also to reflect upon its performance. The sound of the paw/hand falling to the ground, the growling sounds of the wolf, and even the sound of the clock acquire an artificial quality and invite the listener into the mechanics of the performance, giving it a semi-serious quality that adds to the range of images and effects. The listener is led to vacillate between plunging into the tale’s illusion and perceiving the various tricks used to “stage” the story for the radio. This ambivalence is accentuated by the moments of wry commentary on the part of the narrator, such as when the claws retract as if faced with “an emery board” (66) or Granny’s qualification of the wolf as “silly” (66).

Carter’s reiteration of fairy tale elements is indeed infused with irony. The “Granny” refers indirectly to what Marina Warner identifies as the “grandmotherly or nanny type” of narrator, often involving “bedside or laplike mannerisms that create an illusion of collusive intimacies, of home, of the bedtime story, the winter’s tale.” (Warner 25). She comments on Carter’s irreverent exploitation of this “mannerism” in her literary performances: “Angela Carter knew the storyteller’s time-honoured ruses, and played with the masks, the spells and the voices in her brilliant variations on fairy tales” (Warner 195). Carter’s stereotypical scenario in the radio play focuses the listener’s attention on this device, and exaggerates it ten-fold to set it forth for reflection. This irony in the performance is doubled by cautionary statements to Red Riding Hood, such as “But the worst thing of all, my dearie, is – some wolves are hairy on the inside” (64) and warnings that “If you spy a naked man among the pines, my dearie, you must run as if the devil were after you” (72). Such irony is mirrored in the sounds and story events, when the wolf confronts and eats Granny:

NARRATOR: And now, as the old lady quivered with dread before him, she witnessed the unimaginable metamorphosis, the course, grey, the tawny, bristling pelt springing out from the bare skin of her visitor...great jaws slaveri ng...his red eyes, now burning with far greater intensity than the coals in her hearth...

GRANNY: ...and his privates, of a wolf, huge...he naked as a stone, but...hairy he...

aaaaaaggh! (Echo.)

(Fade GRANNY. Hold wind for a moment. Then fade in logs crackle, clock ticks, mastication and lose wind.)

WEREWOLF: (Right centre.) Here’s a tough old bird, indeed...veritable jaw-cracker ....

Not much meat on her, all sinew...still, waste not, want not; down the red lane with Granny...and isn’t dessert trotting through the wood towards me this minute, and she tender as a peach...juicy as a wood strawberry...

(Swallow, Lip-smacking. Belch.) (Carter, Curious 77-78)

The variations in tone, along with a self-conscious narrative structure, lead the reader to engage with the speculative dimension of an “in-between” space where sensation and irony mingle, creating a “rub” with a titillating effect. The juxtaposition of the transformation of the wolf with the granny’s comments about the wolf’s “privates” and the munching sounds and belch of the wolf results in a discordance between humor, irony and speculation, creating a semi-serious game with the “once upon a time” world of story-telling.

This universe, much like Carter’s fiction, engages the reader in reflection, not only in the call to seek out the ideological messages behind Carter’s play with the Red Riding Hood palimpsests, but also with symbolism and allegory. In the radio-play Red Riding Hood echoes the statement about puberty evoked in Carter’s story: “An egg not yet cracked against the cup. I am the very magic space that I contain. I stand and move within an
invisible pentacle, untouched, invincible, immaculate. Like snow. Waiting. The clock inside me, that will strike once a month, not yet...wound...up... I don't bleed. I can't bleed” (64-65). Such statements, along with the interventions of the narrator, highlight deciphering as a dominant effect.

This effect is translated to the medium of film in Neil Jordan’s adaptation of the stories for the cinema in The Company of Wolves. Carter’s collaboration with Neil Jordan began in Dublin in 1982 when she approached him about the idea of making a film version of her wolf stories. They collaborated throughout 1983 on the writing of the screenplay, and Jordan suggested a Chinese box structure based on The Sargasso Manuscript [Wojciech Jerzy Has, 1964] which they had both seen. (Jordan Production Notes, 507). “Once we had agreed on the structure, the writing seemed to grow quite naturally from it, since it gave free rein to Angela’s own taste for narrative subversions” (qtd. in Crofts 507). The film also proposes a frame narrative, that of a middle-class girl and her family who live in a Georgian house. Much like the figure of Red Riding Hood, the girl, Rosaleen, is on the edge of becoming a woman. She is shown to be tossing and turning in her sleep, and her dream becomes a realm in which a multiplicity of tales are unleashed (Carter’s interest in Freud is evident here).

In her dream, Rosaleen’s sister is killed by wolves, and much of the narrative centers on the grandmother’s attempts to console young Rosaleen. Characterized as a young peasant girl, she lives in a village in a forest, and various aspects of her pubescence are outlined and reflected in this embedded story: she is courted by a local boy, she wanders in the forest and encounters symbolical spaces, she sees her parents having sex in their small, one-room house. Most importantly, her interaction with her grandmother as a didactic figure is foregrounded. Her presence multiplies the storylines in the embedded narrative, in a disjointed mise en abyme. The granny figure of the grandmother (played by Angela Lansbury), gives advice in the form of stories to Rosaleen. This grandmotherly influence is echoed by Rosaleen in the movie, as she later repeats some of her grandmother’s stories. She also repeatedly quotes her grandmother throughout the film, as if to point to the female genealogy of folk and fairy tales.

The grandmother tells the story of the man who disappears on his wedding night and who is ultimately revealed to be a werewolf. In another story, a young man is given lotion by a “prince of Darkness.” The lotion grows hair on the young man’s body, revealing his animalistic nature. Rosaleen later reiterates her grandmother’s story of a wedding party in which a woman returns to take revenge on the lover who rejected her by transforming them all into wolves. In the end, in an overt re-telling of Little Red Riding Hood, Rosaleen comforts the wolf she has injured with the hunter’s gun, and tells the story of a feral child, who lived with the wolves, and then Rosaleen, herself, metamorphoses into a she-wolf. The viewer is therefore faced with a series of cuts in a montage that borders on fantasy, horror, and the fairy tale, thus faithfully adapting the generic tight-wire walked by Carter in much of her fiction.
It is telling that Michael Dare, in his introduction to an interview with Neil Jordan, emphasizes the literary structure of the film: “In order to understand what was going on stylistically, I found myself pretending I was reading a short story rather than watching a movie” (Dare para. 5). The narrative structure draws the spectator into the active role of piecing the puzzle together. The openness and emphasis on the reader’s participation is therefore equally present in the film version of the tales, although in different ways. On numerous occasions the scenes are filmed through the trees, as if to place the spectator in the role of observer, almost voyeur, as if to replace the absent voice of the didactic narrator present in the stories as well as in the radio play. The levels of reality are also played with in the film as the initial landscape of the frame tale is presented in a realistic manner, whereas the forest is littered with objects emblematic of childhood (dollhouses, toys), and is characterized by exaggerated, unnatural monster mushrooms that place it on the edge of fantasy, described by Carter in the screenplay as “a brooding, Disney forest” (Carter Curious 187). David Wheatley expresses doubts as to the efficacy of The Company of Wolves, describing the movie as “flat” and speaking of the dangers of adapting a short story to film: “I think there is a danger in Angela’s work that when you dramatize it, you stretch the drama. It’s like a row of pearls. You stretch it so thin, if you’re not careful, it is just beads, and it no longer—you lose the narrative drive, with incidents colliding into one another” (237). However, in addition to the puzzle of the narrative structure, the film openly displays a multi-layered allegorical dimension, setting forth elements that call for interpretation, like much of Carter’s fiction. The scene in which Rosaleen witnesses eggs hatching and revealing tiny cherubs invites critical reflection. Similarly, the detailed listing of objects in Rosaleen’s bedroom at the beginning of the screenplay, many of which are reproduced on screen, engages the spectator in an act of interpretation.

An open cupboard reveals a mix of school uniform garments and teenage high style. There is a bookshelf above it with Enid Blyton books and school stories. Among them a sex-instruction manual – Jane Cousin’s Make it Happy, and dog-eared copies of fairy-tale books.

The GIRL shifts on her pillow. There is a sense of oppressive heat, oppressive and unfocused sensuality, adolescent turbulence.

A breeze comes through the curtains and stirs her hair.

Outside, the dog whines louder.

The breeze stirs the pages of Iona and Peter Opie’s The Classic Fairy Tales which lies on the window-sill, beneath the flapping curtains. The room has darkened subtly.

We glimpse fairy-tale illustrations through the shifting pages, until the illustrations by Doré for ‘The Little Red Riding Hood’ are reached. (Carter Curious 187)
blend of the irreverent and the gothic, its dazzling linguistic intricacy and relish for imagery. But it is this humour, its dark and even snaky stabs, that above all produced the shock and unease people felt at her work” (Warner 196-197). According to Hopper, the film produced similar levels of unease in censors and critics, and the film was labeled as an over-18 film by the British Board of Film Censors because of its lack of a moral lesson in regards to female sexuality. In addition, it could be neither marketed as a horror film nor as a pure fantasy film. It was caught somewhere in-between (Hopper 19).

Much of this unease also stems from an ironic citationality on the level of film which is similar to that found in much of Carter’s fiction; the images waver between dark fantasy and humoristic or ironic cuts. The scene of the werewolf’s transformation when he comes back to visit his former bride is emblematic of such combinations. Jordan’s horror image is so extreme that it pushes the limits of the genre to the point of exaggerated humor. The ironic reiteration of the abusive husband scenario in relation to both the werewolf and human is also loaded with ambivalence. As with much of Carter’s fiction, the range of tone, humor, irony, and citationality create an elusive ideological game. Hopper devotes an extended section to the intricacies of Carter and Jordan’s coded messages about the unconscious. I would maintain, however, that it is not only the reflection that is relevant, but also the manner in which the spectator is drawn into such reflection and the unease that results from methods that challenge categories, expectations, or even the perception of a satisfactory ideological message. The film, however imperfect, fosters many ranges of ambivalence. For example, the granny figure warning her granddaughter about men who are hairy on the inside and whose eyebrows meet in the middle, constitutes a humoristic reprisal of Perrault’s message about being careful of “wolves.” Similarly, when the grandmother’s head is knocked off by the wolf-man, the uncertain message conveyed by the scene is openly displayed, particularly when the wolf’s tongue protrudes in the fashion of horror films. Zipes’s interpretation of the scene reflects its potential for mixed reaction or interpretation: “To a certain extent, the film ‘justifies’ the werewolf’s devouring of the bigoted grandmother, whose aggressive storytelling is antiquated and needs to be replaced by her granddaughter’s” (150). An aura of irony is indeed evident when the grandmother asks for a kiss from Rosaleen in exchange for her “storytelling.” This accentuates the ambiguity surrounding the grandmother’s later murder, particularly in its parodic citation of horror film devices. The scene suggests multiple layers of irony and affect.

The ending of the film is where Carter’s role as an author is complicated, and it certainly provokes some of the strongest reactions in critics. Jordan’s film ends with a pack of dogs running through the house and crashing through a painting in Rosaleen’s bedroom into the realm of reality represented by the frame story. Rosaleen appears to wake up screaming in terror as the world of her dream invades what is to be interpreted as her conscious mind, while in a voiceover Rosaleen recites a morality similar to those at the end of Perrault’s tales:

Little girls this seems to say,
Never stop upon your way.
Never trust a stranger friend,
No one knows how it will end.
As you’re pretty so be wise,
Wolves may lurk in every guise.
Now, as then, ‘tis simple truth,
Sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth.
Angela Carter was out of the country, in Australia, when they filmed the ending, and she speaks of being “furious” about it, wishing that Jordan had ended with the more ambiguous image of the feral child and the reddening flower. “When I went to the screening I sat with Neil and I was enjoying the film very much and thinking that it had turned out so well—just as I had hoped. Until the ending which I couldn’t believe—I was so upset, I said, ‘You’ve ruined it.’ He was apologetic” (Carter Interview Carroll). The ending in the screenplay involves Rosaleen [Alice in the screenplay] diving into the floorboards:

ALICE stands up on the bed. She looks down at the floor below the bed. She bounces a little on the bed, as if testing its springs. A long howl can be heard – this time from somewhere beyond the open door.

ALICE suddenly springs off the bed, up into the air, as if off a diving-board. She curls, in a graceful jack-knife and plummets towards the floor. The floor parts. It is in fact water. She vanishes beneath it.

The floor ripples, with the aftermath of her dive. Gradually it settles back into plain floor again. (244)

However, Jordan couldn’t manage this ending because of the limits of special effects at the time, and claimed that the screaming Rosaleen fosters an equal amount of ambivalence. Jack Zipes condemns the ending, seeing it as a “revolting contradiction that belies the screenplay” (149). It is, perhaps, where the film departs most drastically from the space Carter describes as being “about the deep roots of our sexual beings” (Carter Interview Marxism 22), a realm her work seeks to explore, rather than condemn through the representation of pure terror.

If Carter’s work fosters ambivalence, it is perhaps because Carter was doubtful about the potential of art to make clear-cut changes: “I don’t think art is as important as all that and I don’t think you can do all that much with fiction” (Carter Interview Marxism 22), demonstrating a consciousness of the diffuse nature of politics of and in art. Jacques Rancière in addressing the question of aesthetics and politics, speaks of the capacity of art to “frame” a “space of presentation” with its own “specific space-time”:

Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society’s structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space. (Rancière 23)

Carter’s ironic citationality, when played out via different media, speaks of such framing. The wolf tales, from their initial re-performance in Carter’s The Bloody Chamber, through their intermedial metamorphoses, occupy various times and spaces, thus allowing voices behind elusive palimpsests to emerge, even the voices of Freudian appropriations of the tale (Bettelheim), or of feminist revisionists that have come to light in contemporary perspectives about the tale.

Carter’s wolf tales in their intermedial trajectories thus set forth “space-times” that frame common experience. When questioned about the film in Marxism Today in 1985, Carter comments on how “The Thatcherite censorship certainly found it subtly offensive. They couldn’t put their finger on it but they knew something was wrong” (Carter Interview Marxism 22), reflecting a sense of what Rancière refers to as the “intolerable” in and of images. It is perhaps in the shifting nature of this “intolerable,” in the multiple
forms of aesthetic “rub” in Carter’s intermedial performances that the reader/listener/spectator ultimately engages with Carter’s politics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Cf. also the last paragraph of Robert Olen Butler’s “Cinema of the Mind” in the present volume.


3. “I am interested in the way people make sense, or try to make sense, of their experience and mythology is part of that, after all. I’m a Freudian, in that sense, and some others, too. But I see my business, the nature of my work, as taking apart mythologies, in order to find out what basic, human stuff they are made of in the first place” (Carter Interview Carroll).

4. MORALITÉ

On voit ici que de jeunes enfants,
Surtout de jeunes filles
Belles, bien faites, et gentilles,
Font très mal d’écouter toute sorte de gens,
Et que ce n’est pas chose étrange,
S’il en est tant que le Loup mange.
Je dis le Loup, car tous les Loups
Ne sont pas de la même sorte ;
Il en est d’une humeur accorte,
Sans bruit, sans fiel et sans courroux,
Qui privés, complaisants et doux,
Suivent les jeunes Demoiselles
Jusque dans les maisons, jusque dans les ruelles ;
Mais hélas ! qui ne sait que ces Loups doucereux,
De tous les Loups sont les plus dangereux.
Perrault (145)
English Translation:
From this story one learns that children,
 Especially young girls,
 Pretty, well-bred, and genteel,
 Are wrong to listen to just anyone,
 And it’s not at all strange,
 If a wolf ends up eating them.
 I say a wolf, but not all wolves
 Are exactly the same.
 Some are perfectly charming,
 Not loud, brutal, or angry,
 But tame, pleasant, and gentle,
 Following young ladies
 Right into their homes, into their chambers,
 But watch out if you haven’t learned that tame wolves
 Are the most dangerous of all.
 (Translated by Maria Tatar)

5. There is much ambiguity surrounding the main character’s name in the screenplay where Rosaleen appears as the alter ego of Alice. In the film, Alice is Rosaleen’s sister, and Rosaleen is the main character’s name throughout. This takes away a reflection on identity that would have amplified the puzzle of relations in the film.

6. “Fairy tales are part of the oral tradition of Europe. They were simply the fiction of the poor, the fiction of the illiterate. And they’re very precisely located. [...] the circumstances of the stories are simply transformed accounts of ordinary people’s lives. It’s something to do with Western Europe that these stories have gone into the bourgeois nursery and have been dissociated from the mainstream of culture.” (Carter Interview Marxism 22)
polo qui persiste à travers les métamorphoses intermédiales de l’esthétique idéologique de Carter.

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