

## **Feminism and Postmodern Aesthetics in Angela Carter's "Wolf-Alice", "The Company of Wolves", and "The Werewolf"**

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**Abstract:** *This paper analyzes the connections between feminist politics and postmodern aesthetics as demonstrated in recent women's fiction. It intends to investigate the much debated problematic of postmodernist and feminist ideologies by examining certain key texts written by Angela Carter, who is a British novelist. Angela Carter's "Wolf-Alice," "The Company of Wolves," and "The Werewolf" are examples which transform revolutionary aesthetics strategies usually associated with post-modern fiction to strengthen its feminist political edge. The first section highlights the theoretical frameworks of postmodernism and feminism accordingly showing the different perspectives from which Carter's work would be analyzed. The second section is devoted to Angela Carter's three short stories.*

### **1. Postmodernism and feminism**

For the last three decades and more, postmodernism has been an essential term of literary theory as well as one used to characterize an entire period in literature, politics, the arts, media and architecture. There is a huge debate between critics and cultural historians about the meanings and characteristics of postmodernism, but one traditional reason for its emergence is the socioeconomic development of late capitalism into consumerism. Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* is regarded as a key text of postmodernism. It was first published in 1979 as a report on the state of scientific knowledge and information in the late twentieth century. Lyotard's central concern is how forms of knowledge come into being, who controls and has access to them, and how they become accepted as valid. This work offers economic and cultural explanations for the new disappearance of borders between high and low culture for the way in which culture apparently can endlessly create and reconstitute arts forms. Lyotard's basic argument is that because of broad changes in culture and society scientific disciplines no longer assume that their theories and discoveries have universal value. He also claims that grand narratives, or theories, of Marxism, capitalism and humanism have come to an end since these 'metanarratives' do not support us to understand such continuous cultural revisions. Indeed, Lyotard chooses skepticism to metanarratives, or single explanations of culture, as a key feature of postmodernism. Lyotard replaces metanarratives with an evaluation of cultural contexts: he argues that the meaning of culture derives from the social contexts in which these processes take place.

The close relationship between feminism and postmodernism came to light ever since Lyotard's definition, because the metanarrative that has been the

most problematic for feminists is patriarchy. Feminism's contribution to postmodernism is enormous; and feminist critical texts about postmodernism are thriving. Craig Owen sees feminism as a characteristically postmodern trend in its affirmation on difference, its rejection of totalizing grand narratives and, above all its revaluation of the structures of power and representation. In this context, woman comes into sight as the very stimulating power of the marginal and the sublime:

It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged – not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorize certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. Excluded from representation by its very structure, they return within it as a figure for – a presentation of – the unrepresentable. (Owen 1985: 59)

Jane Flax has agreed that "feminist theorists enter into and echo postmodernist discourse as we have begun to deconstruct notions of reason, knowledge, or the self and to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lay beneath their "neutral" and universalizing facades" (1987: 626), and acknowledged feminism as a discourse of the marginalized Other, whose future lies "with those who seek to further decenter the world" (1987: 642). Julia Kristeva similarly supports the significant importance of the marginality of feminist criticism. Kristeva's work has been mainly concerned about the "place" from which women may represent themselves, struggling, similar to many feminist critics, to articulate the revolutionary potentials of a marginal discourse, while avoiding a repetition of the gesture of patriarchy in holding woman immovably in position as the marginal (Moi 1985: 150). Kristeva's fundamental aim is to destabilize the model of essential gender identity, and consequently of intrinsic position, the attempt "to locate the negativity and refusal pertaining to the marginal in "woman", in order to undermine the phallogocentric order that defines woman as marginal in the first place" (Moi 1985: 163).

Alice Jardine's book *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* links feminism with postmodernism, but also recognizes the tensions between the two. Jardine coined the term "gynesis". Gynesis applies a poststructuralist analysis of the category 'woman'. The book carries out a dual method. First, it reveals the obvious absence (yet compulsory stereotypical presence) of femininity in those conceptual and intellectual approaches and features which have endorsed contemporary history, philosophy, and culture. Jardine reveals that femininity has been always identified with the inferior or negative side of every binary opposition, as body to mind, nature to culture and madness to reason. Therefore this is a key aspect of the postmodernist questioning of western master narratives, and it is a challenge to create a new space for women. Concerned with the 'non-knowledge' or feminine 'space' which the master narratives always contain, gynesis is the process of putting into discourse that 'other': 'woman', and to articulate these marginal spaces. Jardine argues:

To give a new language to these other spaces is a project filled with both promise and fear ... for these spaces have hitherto remained unknown, terrifying, monstrous: they are mad, unconscious, improper, unclean, nonsensical, oriental, profane. If philosophy is truly to question these spaces, it must move away from all that has defined them, held them in place: Man, the Subject, History, Meaning. (1985: 73)

It is important to clarify at this point that feminism is a combination of conflicting languages – the language of liberal humanism with its keystone belief of personal freedom for women, as well as pre-symbolic language of mothering (the semiotic). It could be argued that the female experience in general has a strong affinity with postmodernism. Women have always occupied a marginal position in the cultural system and often had to recognize dual languages – the language of home and the language of cultural foundations such as schools. Secondly, Jardine demonstrates that femininity also offers the symbol or the approach for the deconstruction of those binaries in the work of male theorists of postmodernism. Gynesis sees such an absence a way that destabilizes the master narratives. Gynesis also sees the feminine as intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, and speaking.

Accordingly, both feminism and postmodernism have worked to enable us to see that cultural production and the politics of representation are carried on within a social context. Similarly, Maggie Humm states that both feminism and postmodernism "have undermined modernism's and capitalism's celebration of great artists and the universalization of white, middle-class masculine values. For both gender is a historical and shifting construct" (1995: 128). In other words, both challenge canonic genres and the separation between dominant/master discourses, codes, institutions, and authorities and marginal ones. Then, to be a woman writer is persistently to confront a canon which only lately admitted women in any numbers. The major theme of contemporary women's fiction is the reconstruction of a new history and a marginal space as a way to tackle patriarchy. Susan Watkins points out that a major feature of postmodernism in culture is "the breakdown of the distinction between high and popular art forms and the mixing of elements of both in the same text [...] then the only appropriate response is to treat everything equally as a discourse or text" (2001: 124). Although all arts produce models of postmodern practice, literature has been an important resource of ideas and themes for postmodernism. This is because modern fiction includes several postmodern features: an adaptation of everyday contemporary culture with certain alterations and modifications, it is normally an eclectic mixture of literary constructs and it also shows self-awareness about gender and historical constructs.

Angela Carter deals with the debates about postmodernism and feminism that we are discussing here. Carter's writing is concerned with sexuality, desire and identity (particularly gender identity). This concern reveals itself in ways that some critics have acknowledged as noticeably postmodernist (Watkins 2001:130; Joannou 2000: 90). Carter has described herself as a feminist. She claims that feminism is at the very core of her literary enterprise: "I'm a feminist

in everything and one can't compartmentalize these things in one's life" (1983: 69). Carter's feminist thoughts about social and psychological aggression against women oblige her into a new notion of narrative. She uses different materials (fragments of modern culture, fairytales, Freud and Jung, mythology, gothic romance and direct narrative) to deconstruct traditional gender constructs, and to dismantle any division of literature from culture. Her fiction is non-realist and extremely self-conscious, and embraces marginality. These are all features which align her with a postmodernist critique of modern distinctions such as those between good and bad literature, canonical and popular genres and typical and marginal premises and styles.

I want to argue that Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is a good example of the way in which feminist postmodernist re-writing of Western fairytales can de-centre gender constructions.<sup>1</sup> Carter explains her literary project in *The Bloody Chamber*:

I'm in the demythologizing business... I'm interested in myths – though I'm much more interested in folklore – just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree. ... [In *The Bloody Chamber*] it turned out to be easier to deal with the shifting structures of reality and sexuality by using sets of shifting structures from orally transmitted traditional tales. (1983: 71)

In this collection Carter is intent on exposing the fictions designed to persuade women of their powerlessness: "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (1983:69). Carter illustrates her view that "myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice." Further she describes it as "a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity" (1983:71). Carter uses fiction for subtly didactic ends, "transforming actual fictional forms to both reflect and precipitate changes in the way people feel about themselves" (1983:76). *The Bloody Chamber* employs intertextuality and parody. It parodies the notion of an essential 'feminine', and uses intertextuality to question any separation of literature from culture.<sup>2</sup> If the significance of literature occurs in its connection to other literary works and cultural products, since postmodernist art tends to make intertextual use of other texts in a humorous way and not merely determined by a writer's intentions, then literature cannot be appreciated outside the cultural context which creates it.

Carter is also interested in how and why desire is central to the literary tradition. This concern about desire directs her to place her work within the myths of sexual desire carried on in the fairy-tale manner. The book's title refers to the "Bluebeard" story which was set down by Perrault in 1697. His collection, *Histoires et contes du temps passe'*, was translated into English by Carter as *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* in 1977.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that Perrault's collection is thought of as "original fairy tales," "there is no genuine or authentic version of the fairy tale" (Parsons 2004: 135). Re-vision, an idiom whose basis is initiated in feminist postmodern thought, signifies a writer's choice about which original elements to maintain and which to contest when fashioning his/her new account of text (Parsons 2004: 138). Carter is attracted to such

textual freedom since she shares a postmodern view that any challenge of 'ownership' disputes political absolutes. "Feminist rewriters of fairy tales have reworked the conventions of the genre so as to encode discourses that contradict or challenge patriarchal ideologies that are increasingly viewed as anachronistic in today's society" (Crew 2002: 77). Thus we can see feminist postmodernism not so much as a total rejection of the grand narratives of the West, but as a constructive recreation of fictional and critical forms and expressions.

To show the array of the tales included in *The Bloody Chamber*, I will consider the three wolf tales included in the collection. The first story is "Wolf-Alice." The other two stories are of the same plot: "The Company of Wolves," and "The Werewolf." They are based on the children's folk tale "little Red Riding Hood,"<sup>4</sup> in which a young girl goes through the woods to visit her grandmother and meets a wolf, who rushes ahead and eats the grandmother, then, tries to pass himself off as the old woman so as to eat little Red Riding Hood. A passing woodsman rescues the girl. Although Carter rewrites the plot of the same fairy tale twice – Carter alters the cultural background of each tale, and as a result, each retelling creates a different narrative on the possession of women, gender identities, and physical desire. In the three narratives, the gloomy feature of the fairy tale is fully explored to show the opposition between women's growing awareness of their sexuality and the cruel constructs which society creates to control women. Carter's suggestion as to how women's bodies may be viewed as objects of power and particularly objects of resistance is a crucial element in her work, her new accounts of the female body, and her feminist re-writing of its cultural presentations. The affinity between Carter's work and postmodernism is very strong, since postmodernism focuses for the most part on the interplay between discourses of power and physical representations.<sup>5</sup> Carter's three wolf stories reject conventional conceptions of representations. The three narratives, like Jardine's *Gynesis*, make apparent the fact that femininity is always the inferior term in those binaries which are essential to the conceptions of truth, subjectivity and representations.

## **2. Narrative and gender (re) writing in Carter's three wolf stories**

In "Wolf Alice," Carter reworks the sexual politics of the fairy tale and the Gothic to parody the notion of an essential 'feminine'. Carter's strong affinity with the gothic is used in the story to represent women's anxieties about the monstrosities of their bodies and about their gender. The female gothic has a long tradition in women's writing demonstrated in the work of eighteenth and nineteenth-century women writers including Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Mary Braddon, and others.<sup>6</sup> The conventional heroine in this literary tradition is a helpless victim of unexplained threats to her life and ghostly visitations over which she has no control. However, Carter's approach towards this type of women differs completely from the original gothic. While in original Gothic narratives, this model of femininity is honored as the perfect model of femininity, Carter considers this representation of femininity as terrible and wants to free women of it. Carter plays with the Gothic to displace the

conventional logic of realism by introducing narrative contradictions. Another representation of femininity which can be found in Gothic literature that Carter restores is that of the "madwoman in the attic."<sup>7</sup> This model represents the sexual woman who is considered as monstrous and mad by the public and who is imprisoned away and silenced in order not to mingle with outside society and not to spread her infectious "sickness." But as Carter herself notes in *The Sadian Woman: an Exercise of Power in Cultural History* "a free woman in an unfree society will be a monster and her sexuality, even if based on personal privilege, will be like that of men" (1979: 31).

The story is about a girl raised by wolves. Even though she is actually a human, "Nothing about her is human except that she is not a wolf"; ("Wolf-Alice": 119) she runs on all fours, yowls rather than speaks, and does not put on clothes. Villagers see Wolf-Alice sleeping next to her wolf mother, whom they shot to death. When they recognize she is human, they take her to live in a convent. But nuns cannot change her animal routine, and then send her to serve a werewolf called the Duke. The Duke is an invincible creature who "ceased to cast an image in the mirror [...] nowhere, a reflection of himself; he passed through the mirror" (120). He is in-between the physical and metaphysical worlds; "an aborted transformation, an incomplete mystery" (128). He does not fit in humans or wolves communities. He is nocturnal, when the moon comes out; he becomes voracious and eats humans and wolves. Apparently because she is in-between the two worlds, the Duke does not eat Wolf-Alice. Both Wolf-Alice and the Duke present an imagery of dismemberment.

Carter tactically positions Wolf-Alice as a 'freak' against the 'freak' duke whose abnormality also has no place in the social order. Freaks are fixed in the genus of the Other. She belongs to the category of the grotesque in the arranged order of the female body. Her body does not, or cannot, find any function as normal sexual spectacles in the popular culture. The figures of popular culture are often emblems of ethical and social anxieties. Freaks do have a narrative which is the interpretable, knowable narrative of abnormality. The communal narrator admits that "we secluded her in animal privacy out of fear of her imperfection because it showed us what we might have been" (122). The freak herself is the text of the body. Caught up in the image of abnormality, Carter is saying, how can women express the body?

Among the narratives of femininity constructed by society, a link to nature is usually given to women. One of the problems then for the feminist reader might be Carter's identification of women with nature. The nature/culture binary suggests that the animal nature associated with women is sexual. Contemporary women writers treat the identification of women with nature and the body in a variety of different ways. Carter, for example, exploits the potential the motif possesses for fantasy and the grotesque. Illustrations of this include her description of the mutant prostitutes, part-vegetable, in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* (1972) and her exquisitely affective representation of the metamorphosis of woman into beast in the conclusion of her short story 'The Tiger's Bride' (*The Bloody Chamber*). Wolf-Alice is immediately identified or

ranked with the daily behaviors of animals and she is intimate with the survival routines of wilderness living. Carter's story then leads us straight to the key question of feminist criticism: How can women's writing bring nature and the body together without risking the old binary division of nature/culture? Yet by choosing wild women as literary symbols, Carter both dramatizes, and heightens, the contradiction between conventional notions of womanhood and the freer possibilities of particular literary representations. In "Wolf-Alice," Carter evokes the stereotype only to disturb subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) aspects of it. This subversive rewriting is perhaps what Jardine characterizes as part of the "strangely and irresistibly subversive" quality in gynesis "when taken by female voice" (1985: 258). For Carter, the representation of women's sexuality is not seen as revolting anymore, but is considered as essential for a contented life. Monstrosity in 'Wolf-Alice' is an affirmative distinction from conventional representations of women and a revolution against male prospects of femininity. So, again, Carter's approach towards this type of femininity has altered considerably from the original Gothic: The repulsive being of the "madwoman" has changed into the notable figure in Carter's story. Wolf-Alice centers on the transformation of humankind into an animal state and vice-versa, the she-wolf learns to accept the internal wilderness of the body made strong with the metaphoric power of animals.

Identifying this synthesis – woman/animal/cognition, Carter combines the animal and civilized worlds. This helps Carter to visualize a representation liberated from cultural inscription, resting on an affinity between women's bodies and nature (animals) and spirituality. Carter avoids the static limits of the mythical archetypes. Ronald Barthes notes that "there is no fixity in the mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely," and that around the meaning of every myth "there is a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating" (quoted in Sellers 2001: 7). It is this anticipation of changing archetypes that encouraged Carter to start the reexamination of fairy tales. "Wolf-Alice" removes any meaningful difference between nature and rationality. In other words the story, through its identification of women with natural cognition and in its tendency to challenge the basic difference between cognition and feelings, supports an organic and feminine power.

On the other hand, Wolf-Alice is an outsider of the social preparation of the symbolic order; the girl's monstrous nature makes her ill-suited for life in the symbolic order. Even the nuns' rejection of her conveys obvious cautions to defiant females: confrontation with the cultural imperatives symbolizes a rigorous danger to the social foundation that they will be obliged to surrender. If a daughter revolts, then she risks social condemnation of her femininity, distressing uncertainties about gender identity. The nuns in "Wolf-Alice" are replacing the traditional role of the mother as a transmitter for female attitudes, and whose responsibility is to enforce their daughter's conformity within a patriarchal culture. The young girl grows up outside the cultural scheme and discovers a new awareness of self from coming across with the mirror and from

the routine of her body. She discovers a sense of time when she starts to menstruate. Looking through her work we see how Carter returns again and again to rituals of bodily transformations from childhood into maturity. Wolf-Alice is bewildered by this strange bleeding and ashamed for the very first time. In a phallographic culture woman is defined by reference to the body and sexual reproduction, along with their pollution ailments, desires and pains. Alice's feeling of shame can be explained by the fact that she has internalized the dominant culture. Her body, accordingly, she feels is the polluted space which she seeks to cleanse. While wondering in the Duke's house, Wolf-Alice sees her reflection in a mirror for the first time. She tries to play with her reflection because, like an animal or very young child, she does not recognize it as her own:

First, she tried to nuzzle her reflection; then, nosing it industriously, she soon realized it gave no smell. She bruised her muzzle on the cold glass and broke her claws trying to tussle with this stranger. She saw, with irritation, then amusement, how it mimicked every gesture of hers when she raised her forepaw to scratch herself [...] She rubbed her head against her reflected face, to show that she felt friendly towards it, and felt a cool, solid, immovable surface between herself and she – some kind, possibly, of invisible cage? [...] She was lonely enough to ask this creature to try to play with her... (126)

Mirror is an organizing motif in this story. Responses to the mirror constitute the plot of the story. Alice experiences a disjunction between her observations, and what is, or what might be, actually occurring around her. The boundary between the human existence and the animal realm is blurred. The girl's conscious conception of her personal body power is of a hybrid form – one where "animal/human" boundaries are blurred. She felt at one with nature at that stage, as though it was "the emanation of her questing nose and erect ears," now she sees it as "a backdrop for her that [waits] for her arrivals to give it meaning" (126). Wolf-Alice, previously as engaged in the moment as a baby or animal, starts to become more withdrawn. The she-wolf while inside patriarchy best begins her process of self-definition by exercising skills of disassociation and psychic withdrawal. This is not to say that Carter characterizes Alice as impotent feminine sensitivity. Rather Carter makes plain that women must gain internal, psychic autonomy as a preliminary and essential event before body boundaries can be crossed. When she realizes that the reflection is hers, that she is capable of casting a reflection, she begins to understand that she is separate and has power over her surrounding; "She goes out more often now; the landscape assembles itself about her, she informs it with her presence. She is its significance" (127).

This habitual, at last boring, fidelity to her every movement finally woke her up to the regretful possibility that her companion was, in fact, no more than a particularly ingenious variety of the shadow she cast on sunlit grass. Had not she and the rest of the litter tussled and romped with their shadows long ago? She poked her agile nose around the back of the mirror; she found only dust [...] A little moisture leaked from the corners of her eyes, yet her relation with the mirror was now far more intimate since she knew she saw herself within it. (127)



Carter has a frequent attention to the semiotic – a time before the framing of the social identity, which is a moment commonly characterized as the 'mirror phase'. In *Ecrits*, Jacques Lacan postulates that the baby gains an individual and unified image when it looks in a mirror and sees its mother as another. A transition from the semiotic to the symbolic order before depends on separation from the mother. The world of early childhood constitutes, in other words, a fragmented imagistic powerful space whose language can never be entirely recovered by social history and by the symbolic order. In the case of this story, Wolf-Alice discovers the truth about her reflection. She begins to identify her body. As she plays with her reflection, she finds a wedding dress behind the mirror. She finds the dress so beautiful that she decides to wash herself before wearing it, "in the mirror she saw how this white dress made her shine [...] she trotted out in her new dress to investigate the odorous October hedgerows, like a debutante from the castle, delighted with herself but still, now and then, singing to the wolves with a kind of wistful triumph, because now she knew how to wear clothes and so had put on a visible sign of difference from them" (128). Then Wolf-Alice leaves the castle wearing the dress. Generally, in Carter's narratives women's sexual and psychological alienation is described and inscribed through the agency of clothing. The discarding of clothing is a general metaphor for the defiance of sex roles in many women's books, since clothing are explicitly associated with the social script of femininity.

However, the very act of putting on a wedding dress in "Wolf-Alice" represents a parody of the socialization of the heroine; she is assimilating the cultural stereotype of what costume is appropriate for her gender. The dress marks her as a woman and separates her from men. Through traditional fairy tales, such as "Cinderella," the role offered by putting on a glamorous dress is shown to be reasonably effective; it can get the heroine what she wants, as long as what she wants corresponds to what society wants her to want. But "Wolf-Alice" parodies the conventional concept that suggests that heroine must learn how to use the dresses, the social artifacts and superior material goods, to succeed socially. When at the end of "Wolf-Alice," as Wolf-Alice wonders into the village, a young bridegroom is scheming retribution against the Duke for his bride's death. She and the Duke run away as the village people throw holy water and bullets. They hit the Duke. When the peasants see Wolf-Alice running after the Duke in her wedding dress, they suppose that she is the Duke's victim, a bride's ghost attempting revenge from the Duck. Then, they ran screaming. Finally, as the wounded Duke lies bleeding in his castle, Wolf-Alice starts leaking the blood off his body. This is unmistakably alluding to "Beauty and the Beast," where the heroine's compassion leads into a magical transformation of the beast into a handsome prince. Alice's pity for the Duke once shot by the villagers transforms the werewolf Duke into the world of the rational, where he too can be symbolized. Whereas the mirror enables Alice to cross the border of animal into a new cosmology, the Duke's face begins to appear in the mirror's glass until it is reflected there fully, "as vivid as real life itself." Finally, a mirror of their identification is reflected in the last scene:

The rational glass, the master of the visible, impartially recorded the crooning girl. As she continued her ministrations, this glass, with infinite slowness, yielded to the reflexive strength of its own material construction. Little by little, there appeared within it, like the image of photographic paper that emerges, first, a formless web of tracery, the prey caught in its fishing net, then in firmer yet still shadowed outline until at last vivid as real life itself, as if brought into being by her soft, moist, gentle tongue, the face of the Duke. (128)

Wolf-Alice identifies with the Duke's imperfection and liminal position. The immediate recognition of the Duke's misery intensifies the association between the woman and the beast as well as their shared status as outsiders in patriarchal culture. Similarly, the Duke's border position can be read as a "projection [...] of a feminine libido" (Makinen 2000: 33), or in other words, as a prohibited sensuality which is, in this case recognized by the heroine. Both being rejected by people, and marginalized; Wolf-Alice must revisit her world through allegorically an image of her libidinal drive and the refusal of the mirror metaphor proposed by Lacan; a woman cannot find herself in the patriarchal symbolic. In essence, "Wolf-Alice" represents a moral caricature of the untruthful world in traditional fairy tales, which pretends that the integrating of personal and cultural values into a scheme that is shown to be in harmony with the universe is somewhat optimistic and reductive. In contrast to conventional fairy tales which offer an appealing model that they suggest all can follow to some extent; "Wolf-Alice" recognizes or treats the experiences of those who do not conform.

In her story "The Company of Wolves" Carter again reveals pronounced affinities with the Gothic. The Gothic genre, traditionally noted for its representation of women as victims, becomes in Carter's hands the perfect medium for depicting contemporary woman caught unaware in the 'rape culture' which pervades society.<sup>8</sup> However Carter is evenly concerned by lingering within the borders of any one genre, because narrative determinism has its latent dangers. Carter's resolution is to take up an ironic tone for the sake of blurring and attacking the cultural and the literary determinations to which women are subject. Motifs associated with the genre which Carter attempts to rewrite and transform include: the ingenuous heroine as the victim of male manipulation and attack; an intrigue plot in which the male protagonists compete for power; the collapsing of conventional boundaries between the external/internal and the animate/inanimate; and the reference to certain socially taboo topics – in this case, rape and male violence against women.<sup>9</sup>

In "The Company of Wolves" Carter changes the sexual rules of the fairy tale and the Gothic to deconstruct male violence by parody and exaggeration. Carter's narrative urges the necessity for a woman to step outside the cultural traditions of femininity presented in the duplicitous fairytale which flatters her self-image and keeps her imprisoned in the inherited stereotype of helpless female innocence, and always punished for her curiosity. She changes themes of oppression and victimization into occasions for female empowerment. In Susan Brownmiller's interpretation of the traditional version of "Little Red Riding

Hood", she argues that it denies the female agency. "Red Riding Hood" is a parable of rape," "1) [it makes] women willing participants in their own defeat; 2) [it obscures] the true nature of rape by implying that women want to be raped; 3) [it asserts] the supreme rightness of male power either as offender or protector" (quoted in Zip 1986: 232). Carter regards such arguments as essentialist because they trap women into definitions which are used against them. In philosophical terms, woman is described as the ground upon which man constructs his violent fantasies. This agrees, of course, with the perceptions of the French theorist Irigaray who points out that in a phallogocentric culture:

Woman is the reserve of 'sensuality' for the elevation of intelligence, she is the matter used for the imprint of forms, the representative representing negativity (death), Dark Continent of dreams and fantasies.... (1985: 141)

To deconstruct the dangerous fantasy of conventional depictions, Carter describes the little girl's virginity as a powerful indicator of her sexuality. The relation of sexuality and power is a central question in this story:

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 closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing. ("The Company of Wolves": 114)

Typically in fairy tales, the heroine is depicted as innocent, passive, or at least naïve. They are also explicit about their protagonist's moral purity; it is their inherent goodness which is the product of how society wants them to see themselves that enables them to succeed in the end. In 'The Company of Wolves', the heroine is both described as innocent virgin and aggressive, she is armed with a knife. While the innocent naïve figure complies obediently with patriarchal expectations of feminine behavior, being aggressive and phallic resists and challenges them. This narrative device has the effect of exposing the reader to the divisions between which phallogocentric culture promotes. However such a view seems to be established on the argument that:

Only phallic masculinity is violent and that femininity is never violent – not even in imagination. This argument is essentialist. ... This is the very argument that patriarchal ideology has used for the past 2,000 year to control women – it is precisely because women by definition are "pure" creatures that they need to "guide" them through life's stormy passage. (Creed 1993: 155-56)

The story is placed in midwinter at Christmas Eve when it is "the worst time in all years for wolves" for there is nothing for the wolves to eat" in this savage country. (115) Despite such harsh surrounding, the "strong-minded child insists she will go off through the wood" to visit her grandmother's cottage with a basket of food. The heroine acts out of rebelliousness and impishness, qualities that fairy tale heroines do not traditionally manifest. Carter dramatizes the theme of adolescence as a dangerous period between childhood and maturity; the heroine started her journey on the risky course of her own sexual maturation, "she has just started her women's bleeding, the clock inside her will strike, henceforward, once a month" (115). As she reaches sexual maturation, she crosses the forest which closes "upon her like a pair of jaws" (115). The

heroine's journey through the forest could also be regarded as an exploration of her unconscious mind whereby she is able to confront and overcome her latent fears. Symbolically, it represents her own feelings about herself and her world to some extent. She meets a werewolf in the forest, "a fully clothed one, a handsome young one, in the green coat and wideawake hat of a hunter" (115-116). He claims that he has no fear of wolves, his compass will lead him through the dark forest safely, he will arrive at grandmother's house first and for such heroic act he deserves to be kissed. When the heroine reaches the cottage, she discovers that she has lost her bet, and she knows instantly that she is in danger of death. Though this "wise child" is in an immense jeopardy, she "[ceases] to be afraid, since her fear [does] her no good" (119). Actually, radical feminism, foregrounding the dialectic of sex, focuses attention on the tension between male dominance and female acts of resistance and rebellion. In contrast to Perrault's version of the innocent female victim, the girl in "The Company of Wolves" uses her sexuality as a weapon to control the wolf:

What big teeth you have! She saw how his jaw began to slaver and the room was full of glamour of the forest's Liebestod but the wise child never flinched, even when he answered: All the better to eat you with. The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face; she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. (119)

This passage is characteristically postmodern like the rest of the story, because it blurs narrative distinctions very precisely in order to throw into question constructions of women's sexuality and supposed lack of moral authority. The representation of women as 'man's meat', the prevalence of which the heroine in "The Company of Wolves" comes to recognize and reject instantly, "she knew she was nobody's meat." When she laughingly approaches and undresses him, she knows that he, in his nudity, fears her because she behaves in an unexpected manner. The wolf's strong authority is parodied; his threats seem ludicrous. Though it might look as if Carter weakens feminist attitudes when she strips off the girl in front of her invader, she creates a self-confident woman who is competent to take control of any situation with the right approach. Carter takes up an ironic tone here; the girl imagines "she will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put the lice into her mouth and eat them, as he will bid her, as she would do in a savage marriage ceremony" (119). The wolf has a certain comic status which undercuts all the conventional assumptions about the story. At the end of the story, both the girl and the wolf end up as a loving couple: "sweet and sound sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" (119). While in "Wolf-Alice," it is the Duke, who is transformed from non-being into being through the girl's kindness, in "The Company of Wolves," Carter leaves us in uncertainty whether the heroine has really transformed into a wolf or whether the wolf has transformed into a gentle creature. Thus, Carter uses the gothic, as a foil to reflect upon a metamorphosis of shifting depictions of passive femininity and the shifting behaviors of the female protagonist rather than shape transformation.

Finally, in "The Werewolf", Carter continues to rework the ideological package which comes with the gothic and fairytales to construct a new language for women. "The Werewolf" is based on "little Red Riding Hood" story. The wolf is not in grandmother's masquerade but he is the grandmother herself. She is lycanthropic. The grandmother transforms into a wolf that is "a huge one, with red eyes and running grizzle chops" ("The Werewolf": 110). The essence of this characterization is to exaggerate and dramatize an underlying psychological conflict between an oppressive mother figure and a young heroine by having the good grandmother replaced by unrealistically grotesque of the maternal; a hostile wicked werewolf who wants to kill the granddaughter. Traditionally, in conventional fairy tales such as 'Snow White' and 'Cinderella' the step-mother is the hostile mother figure, and the heroines are powerless and pitiable. The heroine in "The Werewolf" lives in "a northern country [where] they have cold weather, they have cold hearts" (108). Carter here refers to her home land England. Despite knowing the hazards that the road poses such as "the bears, the wild boar, the starving wolves," the mother assertively sends her child out, armed with a knife, assured that her child "[knows] how to use it." Such hazardous surroundings provide the girl with a capability to deal with such circumstances; therefore, the heroine who is a "mountaineer's child [who does not die] of fright at the sight of it (109)," as soon she sees the wolf,

she [seizes] for her knife. It [goes] for her throat, as wolves do, but she [makes] a great swipe at it with her father's knife and [slashes] off its right forepaw. The wolf [lets] out a gulp, almost a sob, when she sees what happened to it; wolfs are less brave than they might seem. (109)

When the girl has arrived at the grandmother's home, the cut-off-paw, changes into a human hand. The girl identifies this hand with the wedding ring and wart on it as her grandmother's hand, which is "toughened with work and freckled with age" (110). When at the end of "The Werewolf" the heroine along with the angry crowds destroyed the grandmother/werewolf.

They knew the wart on the hand at once for a witch's nipple; they drove the old woman, in her shift as she was, out into the snow with sticks, beating her old carcass as far as the edge of the forest, and pelted her with stones until she fell down dead. (109-110)

Carter's choice of having her heroine actively eliminate her wicked grandmother is significant. Her heroine is allowed to get angry and act decisively on her feelings, a positive and nonsexist representation. She uses her knife much as the male protagonists of other fairy tales use their swords. This representation of the heroine contrasts traditional fairy tales in which female protagonists can only act in consonance with sexist and patriarchal notions that women are fundamentally not hostile and aggressive. Though Carter depicts the girl wearing "a scabby coat of sheepskin" (110), she is not the victim/sheep which is eaten by the wolf. Carter gives the girl a deceptive innocence as an easy prey in the face of her attacker. In "The Werewolf", the heroine acts out of anger and righteous indignation for her own plight, thus it presents the protagonist acting decisively and authoritatively to uphold and secure her place in the world. Thus, the wicked werewolf symbolizes the heroine's negative attitude toward a repressive

authoritarian mother figure dominating the granddaughter's subconscious mind, and the purpose of her journey is to resolve these hostile feelings and to bring some balance to her world by killing the wicked grandmother.

The story ends with "now the child lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered (109-110)." The heroine last task is to go back home, taking over her grandmother's place. She possesses the qualities necessary to fulfill the role. She already has the hand of the wolf, the symbol of her place in society that she is in the process of filling. She needs only recognize that she has achieved her goal. She prospers because she is a good child. A good child here does not mean an obedient child who conforms to the social rules, but it means that the protagonist must have the ability to overcome her subordinate and socially disenfranchised position in order to conquer the obstacles that interfere with maturation and a successful transition to adulthood. Carter gives her heroine a high level of agency. This is not seen in traditional fairy tales, where the little girl who is faced up to the pain of emerging sexuality is always said to be consigned to passive roles, depending on others to offer directions, stimulation and resolution to her problems. Karen E. Rowe argues that traditional fairy tales project the adolescent conflicts facing young girls in a way that:

Aggravate[s] the female's psychic helplessness. Led to believe in fairy godmothers, miraculous awakenings, and magical transformations of beasts into lovers, that is in external powers rather than internal self-initiative as which brings release, the reader may feel that maturational traumas will disappear with the wave of a wand or prince's fortuitous arrival [...] By portraying dream-drenched inactivity and magical redemptions, enchantment makes vulnerability, avoidance, sublimation, and dependency alluring virtuous. (1986: 219)

Though Carter's "The Werewolf" suggests strongly that the heroine should hang to her own self-agency, it also allows for the exploration of the darker violent implications that such perception might produce. Similar to "The Company of Wolves," where the heroine is forced by circumstances to act in a way shows that the traditional story "Little Red Riding Hood" offers no hope of diminishing the risk of violence and cruelty toward women; instead it is responsible for the sexual notions which add to people's disturbance and aggressiveness.

### **3. Conclusion**

This paper aims at exploring a single technique or a strategy; it tries to recognize both politics and aesthetics, working on the assumption that postmodern feminist politics is the politics of representation and broken images. Yet postmodernism does make clear that all accounts are cultural constructions. Similarly, Carter's three wolf stories are clearly informed by a sense of what has become known as postmodernism because the three narratives play with female identity, and social constructions of femininity as well as politics. The three short narratives I treat are crisscrossed by inter-textual allusions, indicating the traditions of European fairytales which form an important part of Carter's inheritance. The three stories recognize the cultural and literary determinations to which Carter is subject and they all attempt to rework them to accommodate

more effectively modern's women's experience and knowledge, and revise women's imprisonment within cultural traditions of femininity. They offer versions of women resisting such pressures. Carter's account of methods by which femininity can be constructed is humorous and entertaining. The fictional strategies of these stories focus attention on women's revisionism together with the contradictions brought about in writing new versions. They show not only how problematic a woman writer's relations to her literary and cultural inheritances are, but also how a woman's determination defies the forces of determinism. The strategy of intertextuality promotes the fictionality of the text. They detach the reader from the events, leading us to the fact that the narrative is chiefly a medium for ideas. Carter's treatment of gender in fairy tales raises certain interesting ideological issues. It foregrounds, as no doubt the reader will have perceived, the question, discussed by the French theorist Julia Kristeva, *What is woman?* (Moi 1985: 162-67) Does femininity reside in biology, gender attributes, or, as Kristeva suggests, in the marginal position assigned to the female subject in the dominant culture? Carter rejects the first possibility, and accepts the second.

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<sup>1</sup> There have been many contributions to the investigation of fairy tales since the initiation of folklore as an academic field at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A well-known work is Clarissa Pinkola Estes. (1992). *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. Estes offers wide-ranging investigations of fairy tales as demonstrations of the archetype of the wild woman and the troubles that women face. However, this study seems unaware of feminist criticism of fairy tales such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. (1979). *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*. They do not consider connecting women in fairy tales with instinctive and supernatural powers as a positive thing. See also Jack Zipes. (ed.). (1986) *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* in which Zipes points out the established sexist attitudes of many fairy tales. This collection includes an essay by Karen Rowe. 'Feminism and Fairy Tales' (209-26) that points out how traditional fairy tales are responsible for encouraging certain sexist norms through their representation of marriage. Furthermore, see Kay Stone. (1986). 'Feminist Approaches to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales.' In Ruth B. Bottigheimer (ed.), *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, 220-234. Finally, see Donald Hasse. (2004). 'Feminist

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Fairy-tale Scholarship'. in Donald Hasse (ed.), *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, 14-26.

<sup>2</sup>Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva to indicate the interdependence of literary texts, the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it. Her argument is that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon but is made up of a variety of quotations, and any text is transported "from one signifying system to another." See (Kristeva 1984: 60)

<sup>3</sup> During the late 1970s and 1980s, rewritten folktales and fairy tales claiming to be feminist often simply reversed the normal gender stereotypes for example Alison Lurie's *Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folktales* (1980), and Ethel Johnston Phelps' *The Maid of the North: Feminist Folk Tales from Around the World* (1981).

<sup>4</sup> Carter's tale is an adaptation of the Perrault and Grimm versions of "Little Red Riding Hood". See

Jack Zipes (ed.). (1984). *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context: 70-71 and 124-26*. See of other Perrault and Grimm fairy tales in Carter's collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979).

<sup>5</sup> The Postmodern criticism most interested in the persistent traces of the economy and of politics on the body is: Jean Baudrillard. (1975). *The Mirror of Production*; Guy Debord. (1985). *Society of the Spectacle*; S. Rubin Suleiman (ed.). (1986). *The Female Body in Western Culture*; Teresa de Lauretis. (1987). *Technologies of Gender*; and A. Kroker and D. Cooke. (1988). *The Postmodern Scene*.

<sup>6</sup>The tradition of the female gothic has been thoroughly explored in Kate Ferguson Ellis. (1989). *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*; and Eugenia Delamotte. (1990). *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth Century Gothic*.

<sup>7</sup> See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this topic see Hester Eisenstein. (1984). *Contemporary Feminist Thought*. p. 104

<sup>9</sup> See Rosemary Jackson's analysis of the Gothic motifs in *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion* (1981)



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