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## Erotic Infidelities: Angela Carter's Wolf Trilogy

The erotic always carries with it a certain discontent. Circumscribed by the hegemonic, it can only ever be a profound disappointment so long as it remains mired in heteronormative gender conventions, limited by, or to, phallogocentric fantasy. Audre Lorde calls this patriarchal erotic "the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation" (53) and, even in her perhaps overly romantic redefinition in terms of women's "lifeforce," reminds us of the social, political, and sexual confines of the dominant erotic. Such is the erotic implicit in one sense of an erotic infidelity, an infidelity *to* the erotic. But I also mean to invoke a second erotic infidelity, an *erotic* infidelity, an alternative erotics located in the very infidelities to the usual, enchained erotic. In this second sense, then, the very acts of betrayal are themselves sites for an emergent other erotics. Of course, the two are not entirely distinct but rather double up on each other, one erotic derived of a betrayal to the other.

In this context, infidelity is powerful, subversive, transgressive, and—most significantly—gendered. Jane Gallup's incisive rendering of Lacan's twining of the biological (the paternal) and the linguistic (the patronym) in the *authorized*, the Name-of-the-Father, makes clear the feminist underpinnings of any such infidelity: "Infidelity then is a feminist practice of undermining the Name-of-the-Father. The unfaithful reading strays from the author, the authorized, produces that which does not hold as a reproduction, as a representation. Infidelity is *not* outside the system of marriage, the symbolic, patriarchy, but hollows it out, ruins it, from within" (48).

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Unfaithful readings, a ruination from within: here, then, is the connection to what I'm calling Angela Carter's wolf trilogy—"The Werewolf," "The Company of Wolves," and "Wolf-Alice." While these final three stories in Carter's fairy-tale collection *The Bloody Chamber* are not explicitly framed as a trilogy, I refer to them as such in order to hold them together as necessarily conjoined, intertextually inseparable, a slightly more insistent naming than what Cristina Bacchilega terms the "women-in-the-company-of-wolves' stories" (59) in her own intertextual reading of the three tales. I want to argue that the wolf trilogy is a set of Little Red Riding Hood (ATU 333) stories borne of unfaithful readings, marked by multiple rewritings, full of intricate and intimate betrayals, not only of Charles Perrault's patriarchal "Little Red Riding Hood" but also of the feminist desire to "eroticize" the classic tales, of Carter's own restagings even—infidelities upon infidelities, a luxurious promiscuity.

Angela Carter knew her fairy tales. In 1977, two years before publishing *The Bloody Chamber*, she translated the collected tales of Charles Perrault, whose fairy tales have for centuries insinuated themselves into both vernacular and popular contexts and often come to represent the most familiar, and thus most authoritative, versions we know. Perrault's fairy tales surface in the tales of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–1815), for instance, while also providing the basis for many of Walt Disney's animated film versions—a patriarchal legacy of sorts, even when passed on by women. In order to translate Perrault's collection, Carter had to make him a familiar, had to inhabit his language, wrap herself in his elocutions, feel the very texture of his tales. Translation is the ultimate fantasy of fidelity, a fantasy that seeks to obscure the arbitrary nature of signification, an arbitrariness made explicit when the inevitable excesses and failures of language reveal the necessary slippage between two systems. Ironically, however, the act of translation (that ultimate fantasy of fidelity) may itself be the prelude to infidelity. First there is a translation, then a reimagining. Surely this was not lost on Carter, and her intimate knowledge of Perrault's collection and her translation of *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* only accentuate the erotic infidelities of her wolf trilogy and *The Bloody Chamber* as a whole.

Not only does Carter write away from Perrault—restoring Little Red Riding Hood's sexual agency in the tale's seduction, overturning the bourgeois morality of his coda in verse—but she also writes and rewrites her own versions throughout the trilogy in an attempt to author differently. As layered and intertextual versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," the tales in Carter's wolf trilogy resist foreclosure, beckoning instead to their companion tales and, in the process, gesturing toward an important instability that works to "hollow out" (to use Gallup's phrase) Perrault's voice and the authority of the traditional tales. In part, the wolf trilogy is important *as trilogy* precisely because of its recursive power; rather than replace Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" with a feminist

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version, a different authority, Carter implies an infinite chain of infidelities beginning with infidelities to her own tales.

Carter's desire to voice instability, to tell tales with a multivocal tongue, distinguishes the wolf trilogy, and *The Bloody Chamber* generally, from the more recent trend of women rewriting fairy tales in an explicitly "erotic" register. Carter's fairy tales covet and create tensions with the hegemonic erotic, challenge readers to find an other erotic in a dramatically different, often disturbing, sexual imagination. They are, as Bacchilega contends, "doubling and double: both affirmative and questioning, without necessarily being recuperative or politically subversive" (22), more invested in the hollowing out, the ruining from within than in any simple reversals—infidelity over recuperation. Women's "erotic" fairy tales, on the other hand, are premised on the very idea of such a recuperation and seek to recast the dominant erotic in a feminine voice. I situate Carter's wolf trilogy as counterpoint to these feminine and feminist erotic rewritings because their very preponderance attests to a certain feminist desire in and for the fairy tale as a potentially transformative genre,<sup>1</sup> a desire I want to ascribe to Carter but in a radically different way. Below, I read Carter's tales against this feminist yearning for an alternative erotics, suggesting instead that her stories undermine, complicate, and defy this feminist longing even as they approach the pleasures of an other erotic.

The sheer number of erotic fairy-tale collections written and edited by women is a statement in itself. Among these collections are Mitzi Szereto's *Erotic Fairy Tales: A Romp through the Classics*, Alison Tyler's *Naughty Fairy Tales from A to Z*, Hillary Rollins's *The Empress's New Lingerie and Other Erotic Fairy Tales*, Cecilia Tan's *Of Princes and Beauties: Adult Erotic Fairy Tales*, Isabelle Rose's *Naughty Fairy Tales* (e-book, 2 volumes), Nancy Madore's *Enchanted: Erotic Bedtime Stories for Women*, Joan Elizabeth Lloyd's *Naughty Bedtime Stories*, and, of course, Anne Rice's erotic *Sleeping Beauty* trilogy published under the name A. N. Roquelaure. The only erotic tale collections I could find that were written or edited by and/or for men happened to be by the same person, Michael Ford, who has two relevant collections, *Once Upon a Time: Erotic Fairy Tales for Women* and *Happily Ever After: Erotic Fairy Tales for Queer Men*. Importantly, neither of these collections is intended for heterosexual men, a point that underscores all of these collections' interest in rewriting the dominant, patriarchal erotic at the heart of the traditional tales.

Along these lines, women writers seem to have found in fairy tales a means of rearticulating women's sexual agency by calling attention to their/our positioning within a culture that fetishizes young girls as objects of sexual desire. The cultural fascination with Lolita-like girls and the related sexualization of adult women through tropes and markers of this fantasy have been well documented by psychologists like Valerie Walkerdine and, more recently, by the American

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Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls as well as by media scholars like Debra Merskin and Jean Kilbourne. Heterosexual male fantasies as expressed in pornography, strip clubs, and even mainstream media often revolve around Lolita's appeal whether she is in pajamas, schoolgirl uniform, or cheerleader getup.

Within this context, women writing erotic fairy tales might be understood as shifting the terms of titillation by choosing a genre that is frequently associated with children—and, in the American context, with girls in particular. The transformation of the fairy-tale genre into erotica suggests a transgression that might at first seem to accord with the heterosexual male pedophilic fantasies about sexually precocious young girls. Titles like *Naughty Fairy Tales*, *Naughty Bedtime Stories*, and *Enchanted: Erotic Bedtime Stories for Women* all recognize and play on such transgressions, bringing together the “naughtiness” of such a transformation with the childlike innocence of “bedtime” stories. Catherine Orenstein makes a similar point about fairy-tale pornography: “The titillation factor of these videos is in part through transgression—fairy tales are meant, we believe, for children; and meant, we believe, to express morality” (211). However, rather than further reinscribe dominant male fantasies, as fairy-tale pornography might be seen to do, women writing erotic tales call attention to the dominant cultural fetishization of young girls and the sexualization of women according to such tropes in order to rewrite desire such that it prioritizes women's sexual agency as they see it. The genre itself thus becomes essential to the feminist project of dismantling patriarchal understandings of women's sexuality. Through these acts of rewriting both the tales and themselves as sexual agents, these women writers also redefine the erotic such that it appeals to their own sexual desires and fantasies, not patriarchal fantasies of women's sexual desires and fantasies.

The question, of course, is whether such erotic reimaginings of classic fairy tales exceed patriarchal definitions of the erotic or whether these women are producing a sexual agency that exists alongside, and perhaps operates with and through, a dominant erotic. Based on my readings of these erotic fairy tales, I would suggest that, for the most part, even as these women contest the cultural fetishization of sexually precocious young girls and their own status as adult women within such a hegemonic sexual system, they also reproduce fairly traditional patriarchal definitions of the erotic as related to sexual arousal and desire. To rewrite their sexual selves through the “naughtiness” created by the cultural resonances of the genre itself might be analogous to the relatively current fashion of adult women wearing short pleated skirts with knee-high socks and Mary Janes. Both are ways in which women engage the set of male fantasies that converge in the figure of the nymphet. Regardless of the degree to which we might read agency and play into such acts, however, this repositioning of women's sexual agency is not in itself enough to escape the patriarchal sexual order.

Defying these ostensible subversions—as well as Perrault’s authorship, Perrault’s authority, the patriarchal authoring of our entextualized fairy-tale inheritance—Carter’s wolf trilogy flirts with another erotic, an erotic that simultaneously acknowledges and contests the complex, ambivalent potentialities inherent in the power of the phallus.

### Little Red Riding Hood: “The Werewolf”

The opening story in Carter’s wolf trilogy, “The Werewolf,” is not an obvious variant of “Little Red Riding Hood.” The title itself suggests another set of narrative relations, a different storytelling genealogy, and the first third of the tale elaborates on this implicit association with legend, superstition, and folk belief. For the people of this “northern country,” who “have cold weather . . . [and] have cold hearts” (*Bloody Chamber* 108), werewolves are no more extraordinary than the devil who might be glimpsed feasting at midnight in the local graveyard, “a blue-eyed child born feet first on the night of St. John’s Eve [who] will have second sight” (108), vampires, witches. About women and witches Carter writes: “When they discover a witch—some old woman whose cheeses ripen when her neighbors’ do not, another old woman whose black cat, oh, sinister! *follows her about all the time*, they strip the crone, search for her marks, for the supernumerary nipple her familiar sucks. They soon find it. Then they stone her to death” (108; emphasis in original).

With only the transition “Winter and cold weather” (109), however, Carter transforms the tale from one of superstition and stoning witches to one that clearly recalls “Little Red Riding Hood”:

Go and visit grandmother, who has been sick. Take the oatcakes I’ve baked for her on the hearthstone and a little pot of butter.

The good child does as her mother bids—five miles’ trudge through the forest; do not leave the path because of the bears, the wild boar, the starving wolves. Here, take your father’s hunting knife; you know how to use it. (109)

In keeping with the “Little Red Riding Hood” tradition, the “good child” does indeed encounter a wolf as she makes her way to her grandmother’s house. Unlike the clever, fast-talking wolves of Perrault and the Grimms, however, this wolf goes straight for her throat. She responds quickly, severing its paw with her father’s hunting knife, at which point the wolf limps off. The young girl wraps the paw, puts it in her basket, and carries on to her grandmother’s house. When she arrives, Grandmother is feverish, sick; being the good child that she is, she removes the cloth encasing the wolf’s paw, intending to make a cold compress for her sick grandmother, but when the paw falls from the cloth, it is not a paw

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but a hand: “It was a hand, chopped off at the wrist, a hand toughened with work and freckled with old age. There was a wedding ring on the third finger and a wart on the index finger. By the wart, she knew it for her grandmother’s hand” (109). Pulling back the sheet to verify her discovery, Little Red Riding Hood awakens her grandmother—now “squawking and shrieking like a thing possessed” (109)—and is forced to restrain her with her father’s hunting knife until the neighbors come rushing in, alerted by the girl’s cries of horror at her grandmother’s bloody stump. Grandmother is chased from her home and stoned to death, and Carter ends this first tale with a happily-ever-after of sorts: “Now the child lived in her grandmother’s house; she prospered” (110).

As the first story in the wolf trilogy, “The Werewolf” structures how we read the two stories that follow. Thus, Carter’s positioning of the grandmother as werewolf, her drawing on a lesser-known werewolf tradition against a vast popular history of werewolves as specifically male—the name itself betrays the sexing of this tradition; the Old English “wer” or “were” means “man” as biological category—serves an important function both within the context of the story itself as well as within the context of the trilogy as a whole.<sup>2</sup> If the Little Red Riding Hood tales consistently warn young girls to stay clear of predatory men, “wolves” in the long-standing vernacular tradition, what might Carter be saying in casting the grandmother in the traditional role of male sexual predator? Here, the grandmother is literally wolf, not just the traditional wolf in grandmother’s clothing.

Keeping in mind the primacy of “The Werewolf” in the wolf trilogy, its status as originary tale, I want to suggest that in writing the grandmother into werewolf, in transgending her by aligning her with the predatory male of the Little Red Riding Hood tradition, Carter creates a phallic mother—herself something of a myth of origination, the supposed omnipotent master of the child’s desire and the child’s eventual initiation into language and the symbolic order. In describing Julia Kristeva’s project of demythologizing the omnipotent Mother, Gallup foregrounds the importance of her insistence on the phallic mother in denaturalizing the “ideological solidarity between phallus, father, power and man” even as she “expose[s] the phallus of the phallic mother . . . theatricalize[s] her, give[s] her as spectacle, open[s] the curtain” (117–18). The very existence of Carter’s grandmother-as-werewolf similarly calls into question the ideological solidarity of phallus and masculine authority. But, like Kristeva, Carter also resists substituting one (less obvious) phallic authority for another (more obvious). Rather, she too theatricalizes the phallic mother in the character of the grandmother—as wolf, she is “a huge one, with red eyes and running, grizzled chops . . . [who] let out a gulp, almost a sob, when it saw what had happened to it”; the grandmother awakens and struggles, “squawking and shrieking like a thing possessed” (*Bloody Chamber* 109)—and thus reveals her phallus for a sham. When the neighbors arrive to help Little Red Riding Hood, “they [know]

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the wart on her [grandmother's] hand at once for a witch's nipple" (109–10). In her moment of exposure, Granny no longer embodies the transsexuality of her werewolf persona but becomes simply witch, categorically "some old woman," like those described at the outset of the story.

If the phallic mother is "more dangerous because less obviously phallic . . . more phallic precisely by being less obvious" (Gallup 118), it can be little surprise that Carter first conjures her to subvert the naturalization of the phallus-penis equation before killing her off, laying her bare. Granny as simultaneously werewolf, witch, and woman embodies the failures of language: she cannot be contained by the singularity of any given category. Instead, her constant slipping between werewolf, witch, woman, from male to female, offers a glimpse into the cracks that belie the myth of an omnipotent language, the myth of total signification. In slashing the werewolf, cutting off her paw in a trauma that leads to her eventual death, Little Red Riding Hood opens up a range of possibilities in which girls, women, might exist in the symbolic order, might even "prosper" there. No longer subject to the aggressions of the phallic mother—the predatory moves that a phallogocentric language in wolf's clothing make on a young girl—Little Red Riding Hood can inhabit her grandmother's house, can thrive in an alternative fairy-tale ending, a heroine who separates from her family only to live alone, able to protect herself, prosperous.

And yet, for Carter, such an act depends upon Little Red Riding Hood's own phallic power, her mastery of her "father's hunting knife" (*Bloody Chamber* 109), the phallic object with which she both protects herself and renders her grandmother impotent. Given Little Red Riding Hood's obvious phallic power in this specific tale as well as the widespread understanding of the sexual innuendo implicit in the wider Little Red Riding Hood tradition, "The Werewolf" might thus also be read as an oedipal conflict. In this case, Granny—as both phallic mother and traditionally masculine werewolf—is simultaneously object of desire and symbolic authority, and Little Red Riding Hood's encounter with her, with the wolf-witch-woman, is a complicated one run through with the competing desires to both possess her and to kill her off so as to replace her.<sup>3</sup> As Carter's rendering of both Granny as phallic mother and Little Red Riding Hood as phallic power suggest, the phallus occupies a certain primacy in her vision of a different relationship among power, desire, and sexuality, one that unhinges the phallus from its "ideological solidarity" with the father, with man.

Through this oedipalization of Little Red Riding Hood's drives, Carter again uses "The Werewolf"'s initial place in her wolf trilogy to establish the theoretical and thematic foundations of the three stories in their intertextual entirety. Thus, while "The Werewolf" does not foreground an explicitly alternative erotics as the following two stories do, it does succeed in establishing the erotic infidelities at play in Carter's intricate metamorphoses, metamorphoses of women, wolves, and

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witches as well as theories, tales, and language. In this context, Carter's writing both grandmother and werewolf differently, together with her killing off of that otherly inscription and all that it represents, helps her move toward the more sensual and sensory paradigms at work in the following two stories.

### Little Red Riding Hood: "The Company of Wolves"

In the spirit of erotic infidelities, Carter does not just build on the implicit theoretical assumptions of "The Werewolf" as introduction to her second story, "The Company of Wolves." Rather, she returns to familiar questions of woman's signification within a phallogocentric symbolic order, questions she herself has theorized directly with respect to sexual categories in her book *The Sadeian Woman*, where she explores what it might mean to be a "moral pornographer":

The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual license for all the genders, and projects a model of the way such a world might work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind. Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it. (19–20)

I quote at length here because Carter's *Sadeian Woman* provides a rich intertext for the wolf trilogy—"The Company of Wolves" in particular—and the *Bloody Chamber* as a whole. Carter's project is not so much to demarcate the moral boundaries of pornography but rather to suggest that pornography might offer a mode of interrogating any and all sexual acts in their specific historical and material contexts. In this sense, Carter's "moral pornography" refers more to a pornography that accounts for the power relations and material realities implicit in every sexual act than to a pornography whose content might meet ambiguous determinations of arbitrary moral standards. Context over content: an important distinction in reading Carter's wolf trilogy as a moral pornography committed to an alternative erotics motivated by amoral sexual drives.

Written at the same time as *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Sadeian Woman* helps contextualize Carter's move into a more visual and sensory mode of writing. Given the feminist critique of both Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and the phallogocentric symbolic order as overly focused on the visual—on the phallus as that which can be *seen*—Carter's centering of "The Company of Wolves" in a

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visual paradigm reproduces anew her desire to write and think between and beyond the authorities of both feminist theory and patriarchal culture. In this context, I read “The Company of Wolves” as an other pornography, as Carter’s moral pornography, an alternative pornography that must first engage a more traditional hegemonic gazing.

Once again, Carter opens her version of “Little Red Riding Hood” with a lengthy devotion to the lore of wolves—thick physical descriptions, tales of transformation, stories in which the wolf is always sexed male. Against this backdrop and—again—amid the “winter and cold weather,” Carter introduces the Little Red Riding Hood of this story in the conventional pornographic tropes surrounding the sexually desirable young girl discussed above:

[T]his one, so pretty and the youngest of her family, a little late-comer, had been indulged by her mother and the grandmother who’d knitted her a red shawl that, today, has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow. Her breasts have just begun to swell; her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman’s bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month.

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. (*Bloody Chamber* 113–14)

Carter’s description plays up Little Red Riding Hood’s childlike desirability, and her virginity is fundamental to that desirability.

As Little Red Riding Hood makes her way through the forest, she meets up with a handsome stranger—only shortly after hearing the “freezing howl of a lone wolf” (114)—and they have a flirtatious exchange in which he, characteristically, encourages her to leave the path and follow him through the woods on a shortcut to her grandmother’s house. She is demure, hesitant; instead, they wager on who will get there first. Again, Carter casts Little Red Riding Hood in the role of sexual nymphet, typical object of male fantasy, in their flirtatious exchange:

Is it a bet? He asked her. Shall we make a game of it? What will you give me if I get to your grandmother’s house before you?

What would you like? She asked disingenuously.

A kiss.

Commonplaces of a rustic seduction; she lowered her eyes and blushed. (115)

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She is, of course, both innocent and knowing, and that is exactly what makes her so highly desirable in the typical male fantasy.

But Carter is just toying with that fantasy, writing her own moral pornography as a way of further dismantling a world of sexual absolutes. As Carter writes her, Little Red Riding Hood is, ultimately, a sexual agent, more akin to Tex Avery's stripteasing Red than to Perrault's innocent. Early on, Carter hints at her emergent phallic power: "Her father might forbid her, if he were home, but he is away in the forest, gathering wood, and her mother cannot deny her" (114). Despite (or perhaps because of?) her alluring innocence, Little Red Riding Hood shares her father's power, participates in his authority over her mother. Having insisted on traveling alone to her grandmother's house, she dawdles along the way to ensure the handsome stranger will win the wager. Meanwhile, the stranger arrives at Grandmother's house, a ravenous young man with beastly eyes. He begins to remove his disguise, and it is at this moment that Carter fully shifts her moral pornographer's gaze. He—ambiguously described as wolf, as man—is now the object of the gaze: "He strips off his shirt. His skin is the colour and texture of vellum. A crisp stripe of hair runs down his belly, his nipples are ripe and dark as poison fruit but he's so thin you could count the ribs under his skin if only he gave you the time. He strips off his trousers and she can see how hairy his legs are. His genitals, huge. Ah! huge" (116).

Upon devouring Granny, he is barely disguised, somewhere between wolf and man, awaiting Little Red Riding Hood's arrival. She arrives and realizes the wolf has eaten her grandmother, temporarily the scared child once again; recognizing, however, that fear will do her no good, she ceases to be afraid, returns to her knowing. And then, piece by piece, she begins to strip, coyly asking the stranger-wolf for direction:

What shall I do with my shawl?

Throw it on the fire, dear one. You won't need it again.

She bundled up her shawl and threw it on the blaze, which instantly consumed it. Then she drew her blouse over her head; her small breasts gleamed as if the snow had invaded the room.

What shall I do with my blouse?

Into the fire with it, too, my pet.

The thin muslin went flaring up the chimney like a magic bird and now off came her skirt, her woolen stockings, her shoes, and on to the fire they went, too, and were gone for good. The firelight shone through the edges of her skin; now she was clothed only in her untouched integument of flesh. This dazzling, naked, she combed out her hair with her fingers; her hair looked white as the snow outside. (117-18)

It is as if Carter is once again describing Little Red Riding Hood for the script of a traditional pornographic film, the desirable young nymphet caught in the male gaze, and yet even as she zooms in on Little Red Riding Hood, she continues to grant her sexual agency, an agency that resonates with the Little Red Riding Hood tales that predate Perrault's essentially authoritative version. Bacchilega locates Little Red Riding Hood's act of stripping and burning her clothes, piece by piece, in a European variant from the oral tradition of the Middle Ages (54), wherein the heroine escapes just as often as she is eaten by the wolf, but by the time Perrault writes her story, Little Red Riding Hood's stripping becomes a much more banal act: "Little Red Riding-Hood undressed herself and went into bed" (from the translation in Lang 53). As Carter stages it, Little Red Riding Hood's striptease is much more playful, a slow and sweet seduction, as thrilling in its act as in its defiance of both Perrault's moralizing tale and the cautionary old wives' tales.

"Clothed only in her untouched integument of flesh," Little Red Riding Hood begins to undress the wolf; she gives him the kiss she owes him as "[e]very wolf in the world now howl[s] a prothalamion outside the window" (*Bloody Chamber* 118). Despite the consummation implicit in the wolves' prothalamion, Little Red Riding Hood and the stranger-wolf go through some of the tale's ritual questions—my what big arms you have, my what big teeth you have. But when the stranger-wolf replies, "All the better to eat you with," "the girl burst out laughing. She knew she was nobody's meat" (118). This assertion is critical for Carter. In reading the Marquis de Sade's exploration of the limits of sexual behavior (and perhaps adding her own commentary on marriage), she makes an important distinction between flesh and meat: "Flesh has specific orifices to contain the prick that penetrates it but meat's relation to the knife is more random and a thrust anywhere will do" (138). Unlike the meatiness of Sade's characters—"he writes about sexual relations in terms of butchery and meat" (138)—Carter's Little Red Riding Hood laughs in the face of anyone misinterpreting her thus. The fact that Little Red Riding Hood is "nobody's meat" removes her from the realm of patriarchal pornography—the dominant tropes with which Carter first describes her—and resituates her in what Carter calls "the world of absolute sexual license for all the genders" (20).

After proclaiming herself nobody's meat, Little Red Riding Hood continues to undress the stranger-wolf, throwing his clothes into the fire in a move that ensures he will remain forever wolf—"if you burn his human clothing you condemn him to wolfishness for the rest of his life" (113). And then she seduces him—outside, the blizzard rages and calms as nature mimes their sexual appetites, their long-awaited consummation—and, for Carter, another happily-ever-after: "See! sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" (118). In choosing to burn the stranger-wolf's human

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clothing, Little Red Riding Hood opts for the bestial, and Carter seems to suggest that such a choice also reveals Little Red Riding Hood's own animal drives. Bacchilega similarly reads this scene as a testament to Little Red Riding Hood's desires: "by acting out her desires—sexual, not just for life—the girl offers herself as flesh, not meat . . . Both carnivores incarnate, these two young heterosexual beings satiate their hunger not for dead meat, but flesh, while at the same time embodying it" (64).

In contrast to those critics who understand Little Red Riding Hood's choices in this scene as constrained by patriarchal ideologies of sex and violence and thus passively accepting of rape (e.g., Duncker; Clark; Lewallen; Anwell), I read it, much as Bacchilega (162n29) and Merja Makinen do, as one in which Little Red Riding Hood chooses to act upon her own animal drives to enjoy a certain sexual agency. Moreover, as Makinen points out, the more conservative readings of Little Red Riding Hood's sexuality depend largely on a reading of the wolf as symbolic of the male libido; interpreting the wolf symbolism from a female perspective, on the other hand, opens up completely different possibilities for women's sexuality: "Read the beasts as the projections of a female libido, and they become exactly that autonomous desire which the female characters need to recognize and reappropriate as a part of themselves (denied by the phallogocentric culture)" (12). For Carter, then, the virginal, sexually precocious nymphet is not so much desired object of patriarchal projection but, rather, autonomous desiring subject, as bestial as the stranger-wolf: "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" (*Bloody Chamber* 118). While Little Red Riding Hood's initial seductions of the stranger-wolf—her "freely" given kiss, her stripping him—might still be perceived according to the logic of a pedophilic fantasy (nymphet as seemingly innocent in her knowing and her seductions), her picking and eating the lice of his pelt cannot be so understood. Through this other erotic, this animal erotic, Carter unveils the hegemonic order of heterosexual relations, offering in its stead "the infinite modulations of the sexual act, the real relations of man and his kind," a sexual moment no longer chained to a dominant erotic that limits the sexual possibilities of men and women but one that emerges from our deepest drives.

### Little Red Riding Hood: "Wolf-Alice"

If Little Red Riding Hood acts on her animal desires in "The Company of Wolves," she is all animal desire in "Wolf-Alice." Feral child, raised in the company of wolves until found in a den beside "the bullet-riddled corpse of her foster mother" (*Bloody Chamber* 119–20), Wolf-Alice is not quite child, not quite

wolf: “Nothing about her is human except that she is *not* a wolf; it is as if the fur she thought she wore had melted into her skin and become part of it, although it does not exist” (119; emphasis in original). Like “The Werewolf,” “Wolf-Alice” gestures toward other narrative traditions—to legends of feral children, to myths of famous children raised by wolves, Romulus and Remus, for instance—and yet Bacchilega helps place “Wolf-Alice” in the “Little Red Riding Hood” tradition, citing the medieval poem “De puella a lupellis seruata” [“About a girl saved from wolf cubs”], in which the heroine “tames the wolves thanks to her red tunic” (Bacchilega 65), a version that Jan M. Ziolkowski argues “should be registered somewhere on the [“Little Red Riding Hood”] family tree” (quoted in Bacchilega).<sup>4</sup> Carter further inscribes Wolf-Alice in this tradition, drawing parallels between her own earlier images of Little Red Riding Hood and Wolf-Alice: “Her panting tongue hangs out; her red lips are thick and fresh. Her legs are long, lean and muscular” (119). Once again, Carter plays with the pornographic, with the male fantasy of the nymphet, and reminds us that Little Red Riding Hood’s animal desires link her directly to Wolf-Alice.<sup>5</sup>

But Wolf-Alice is of a necessarily different order than the Little Red Riding Hoods of “The Company of Wolves” and “The Werewolf,” and Carter uses this story to draw together the considerations of phallogocentric language, dominant erotics, and the visual that center the first two stories in her wolf trilogy. With “Wolf-Alice” Carter more explicitly engages and critiques psychoanalytic theories of language, the senses, and desire in a complex and final erotic infidelity. Unlike the first two Little Red Riding Hoods, Wolf-Alice does not speak, a point Carter makes in the story’s opening sentence: “Could this ragged girl with brindled lugs have spoken like we do she would have called herself a wolf, but she cannot speak” (119). Perhaps even more significantly, neither does she “look”: “Two-legs looks, four-legs sniffs. Her long nose is always a-quiver, sifting every scent it meets. With this useful tool, she lengthily investigates everything she glimpses. She can net so much more of the world than we can through the fine, hairy, sensitive filters of her nostrils that her poor eyesight does not trouble her” (119).

Outside the dominant paradigms of speech and sight, Wolf-Alice smells her way through the world, thus recalling the Freudian association between feminine sexuality and the olfactory, an association whose logic Gallup makes clear: “The penis may be more visible, but female genitalia have a stronger smell” (27). Deeply connected to women, to women’s smells, to the smell of menstruation, the olfactory is marginalized by the privileging of the visual, is made “odious, nauseous, because it threatens to undo the achievements of repression and sublimation, threatens to return the subject to the powerlessness, intensity and anxiety of an immediate connection with the body of the mother” (27). Carter writes against the dominant discourses in which the smell of women, women’s smelling, threatens

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the stability of the symbolic order, positing instead an entirely different world for Wolf-Alice to inhabit, a world of sensual embodied pleasure.

Removed from the den where she is found beside the corpse of her wolf-mother, Wolf-Alice is taken to a convent, where she is “taught a few, simple tricks” (*Bloody Chamber* 120); however, when the Mother Superior tries to teach her “to give thanks for her recovery from the wolves”—that is, tries to push her into language, tries to make her a speaking subject—“she arched her back, pawed the floor, retreated to a far corner of the chapel, crouched, trembled, urinated, defecated—reverted entirely, it would seem, to her natural state” (120). This resistance to language is her bridge to the story’s other main character, the Duke, a night-prowling, corpse-eating werewolf who has “ceased to cast an image in the mirror” (120). Pawned off on the equally incomprehensible Duke, living in his castle, Wolf-Alice and the werewolf-Duke lead entirely separate lives, and Carter alternates their stories as if to underscore the parallel but largely untouched nature of their coexistence. In her part of the tale, Wolf-Alice is safely ensconced in the extralinguistic world of her imaginary: “In the lapse of time, the trance of being of that exiled place, this girl grew amongst things she could neither name nor perceive. How did she think, how did she feel, this perennial stranger with her furred thoughts and her primal sentience that existed in a flux of shifting impressions; there are no words to describe the way she negotiated the abyss between her dreams, those wakings strange as her sleepings” (122).

It is only Wolf-Alice’s coming-of-age, her first menses, that shifts her world, that brings her in contact with a mirror, though—importantly—not one that heralds an identity in the symbolic. In her search for “rags to sop the blood up” (122), Wolf-Alice discovers linens and old ball gowns in the closets of the Duke’s castle, finds the burial clothes of his recently disinterred victims scattered about his “bloody chamber,” and in the process, also “bump[s] against that mirror over whose surface the Duke passed like wind on ice.” Here, in the mirror whose reflection she cannot fathom, the mirror that cannot perceive him, the two cross narrative paths for the first time, but Wolf-Alice finds a different companion in the mirror: “First, she tried to nuzzle her reflection; then, nosing it industriously, she soon realized it gave out 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 . . . She rubbed her head against her reflected face, to show that she felt friendly towards it” (123).

Over time, marked by her budding sexuality, the adolescent development of her body—“She examined her new breasts with curiosity . . . she found a little diadem of fresh hairs tufting between her thighs” (124)—she comes to recognize her reflection in the mirror for what it is, an intimate disappointment: “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 par-

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ticularly ingenious variety of the shadow she cast on sunlit grass . . . 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” (124).

Wolf-Alice recognizes herself in the mirror not as the ideal coherent self of Lacan’s mirror stage (for Lacan, a misrecognition) but rather as shadow, as reflection, and it is this different recognition that keeps her from entering into the symbolic, maintains her subjectivity outside of language. As Bacchilega writes about this scene, Carter’s critique of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage and its implications for women implies an alternative “subjectivity that does not rely on visualization and language to the exclusion of the body” (163n34).

Narratively, it is also this moment of recognition—her abandonment of an other, a playmate, the one who “gave out no smell”—that sends her out into the world beyond the Duke’s castle, out into the world where olfaction structures meaning for her and ultimately reveals the danger that the local villagers pose to the Duke. With both Wolf-Alice and the Duke in the graveyard, Carter contrasts their sensory awarenesses in an explicitly gendered way so as to overturn the hierarchy that insists on the ocular over the olfactory; Wolf-Alice’s orientation to the world through smell clues her in to the villagers’ proximity, the scent of sulfur alerting her to the danger they bring with their guns, whereas the werewolf-Duke remains oblivious until hit by a bullet that “drags off half his fictive pelt” (*Bloody Chamber* 125).

Back at the castle, Wolf-Alice’s response to the injured Duke—“locked half and half between such strange states, an aborted transformation, an incomplete mystery, now he lies writhing on his black bed” (126)—is both tender and erotic. She circles his bed, sniffs at his wound, then “she leapt upon his bed to lick, without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead” (126). Wolf-Alice’s erotic care brings to mind Little Red Riding Hood’s earlier picking and eating of the lice from the stranger-wolf’s pelt: feminine animal desires exercised on the bodies of wolf-men. But Wolf-Alice’s licking has yet another effect: “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 on photographic paper that emerges, first, a formless web of tracery, the prey caught in its own fishing net, then in firmer yet still shadowed outline until at last as vivid as real life itself, as if brought into being by her soft, moist, gentle tongue, finally, the face of the Duke” (126).

Here, Carter’s final description of Wolf-Alice’s licking is slow and sensual, an erotically charged literary tumescence, building, ultimately, to the Duke’s presence in the mirror. Wolf-Alice has ushered him into existence, escorted him into the symbolic, but it is her symbolic, a world outside of language though still shaped by the tongue.<sup>6</sup>

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Carter's women and wolves slip between categories—male, female, human, child, animal, witch—in a way that confuses the sexed ideologies of the phallic and the oedipal, confuses the sexed conventions of power, authority, and symbolic representation. Such a confusion—the infinite metamorphoses of Little Red Riding Hood, her grandmother, the men they encounter, and their lupine counterparts—helps contribute to what Makinen calls Carter's "complex vision of female psychosexuality" (9), one that (re)imagines animal drives, sexual drives, free from the sex/gender system, and in so doing begins to dismantle the phallogocentric underpinnings of both sex and language. In creating a series of constantly shifting women, constantly shifting wolves, Carter offers an alternative to the dominant myth of singularity. Her endless transformations—from sex to sex, state to state, story to story—indulge a certain arbitrariness in denial of a hierarchical ordering, in defiance of any linear progression. As such, her infinite becomings uphold her erotic infidelities, ensure that her infidelities remain infidelities, never to become the fidelities of another set of definitive interpretations.

If Carter's women and wolves prove slippery, so too do their tongues. Good for "squawking and shrieking," flirting with the bestial, howling a collective prothalamion, howling a wolf-girl's loneliness, good for licking with "a quick, tender gravity," the tongues of Carter's women and wolves move us away from language, speech, articulation and into a more sensory realm. Their tongues bring into being an other erotic, much as Wolf-Alice's tongue brings the werewolf-Duke into another symbolic, an erotic outside of language as we know it, language as it knows us. Through these tongues, Carter writes erotic possibility—not simply a prescription for a new erotic, a new definition, but rather a space where both women and men can express their animal drives, can live their bestial natures, can embrace their erotic selves in a "world of absolute sexual license for all the genders."

### Notes

I would like to thank the Student Folklore Society at the University of Missouri, Columbia, for inviting me to share some of my early thoughts on this topic as well as for the lively discussion that followed. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers for their close reading and for their references to other psychoanalytic readings of Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. In addition, I want to thank David Marriott for his incisive comments and his generous and patient guidance through some of the more difficult psychoanalytic terrain.

1. Some feminist critics of Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, like Patricia Duncker and Avis Lewallen, have argued that the fairy tale is itself a misogynistic genre that necessarily reinscribes a conservative sexual ideology; as a result, they contend, Carter cannot escape the genre's patriarchal sexual oppression despite her reimaginings. See Merja Makinen's "Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality" for a more detailed analysis of such criticisms as well as for a cogent argument against the fixity of literary genres generally. The vast number of

feminine and feminist revisions of the classic fairy tales would suggest that quite a few women writers find the genre itself rich for alternative understandings of dominant sex and gender roles and ideologies.

2. See Christina Bacchilega's *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (1997), 160n22, for a brief discussion of women as werewolves in late medieval and early modern Western history.
3. See Robin Ann Sheets's "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber'" (111) for a similar example of Carter providing a female character with both male and female Freudian symbols. In particular, Sheets reads the gun-toting mother who saves the heroine in "The Bloody Chamber" as Carter's way of "challenging the Oedipal models of development which privilege separation over dependence."
4. For a more extensive discussion of "De puella a lupellis seruata," see Jan M. Ziolkowski's *Fairy Tales from before Fairy Tales*, in which he argues convincingly for a religious interpretation that seems to suggest the poem is an early cognate of Little Red Riding Hood (ATU 333).
5. Just as Little Red Riding Hood is linked to Wolf-Alice, so too is Wolf-Alice linked to another icon of children's literature—Alice in Wonderland—whose real-life inspiration, Alice Liddell, has been associated with the pedophilic fantasies of Lewis Carroll. The connection between Wolf-Alice and Alice in Wonderland is even more compelling in the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1965), *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), a text in which a mirror also proves central. In both cases, the Alices can be similarly read in relation to Lacan's theories of the mirror stage. Makinen also notes this connection (11).
6. For an alternative but complementary reading of this scene, see Bacchilega's *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, 164n37. Drawing on Helene Cixous's "Difficult Joys," Bacchilega emphasizes the relationship that ensues between writing and death through Wolf-Alice's licking of the Duke's wounds; insofar as she argues that this act as captured by the mirror "reflect[s] back and chang[es] existing social arrangements," I see our readings as complementary.

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## CONTENTS

**52 Guilty Pleasures: Reading Romance Novels as Reworked Fairy Tales***Linda J. Lee*

Popular romance novels have much in common with traditional fairy tales: both are highly formulaic; invoke a fantasy realm; focus on the creation or reconciliation of a romantic pair; exist in an infinite variation of texts that fall into distinct types; and are often dismissed as being “trivial,” suggesting romantic fiction as a natural excursus of folkloristic inquiry into popular culture. This article examines how *Beauty and the Beast* (ATU 425C) is reworked in the paranormal romance subgenre. These erotic romances offer elaborated descriptions of the central couple’s intimate relationship, inverting the traditional fairy-tale structure by making the resolution of the male/female opposition the central narrative element.

**67 Intellectualizing Smut: The Role of Tradition in Anne Rice’s *Sleeping Beauty****Sarah Lash*

Rewrites and analyses of “*Sleeping Beauty*” often focus on elucidating the tale’s sexual undertones. Anne Rice’s *Sleeping Beauty* trilogy (1983–1985) takes this further, using the tale as a vehicle for erotica. This article examines the novels in light of the traditional tale, scholarly literature on ATU 410, and the eroticization of the fairy tale. It looks at how Rice uses tradition, and posits that she does so consciously. The themes she explores are more than pornographic as they comment on the storytelling tradition in a complex and fascinating manner.

**77 Erotic Infidelities: Angela Carter’s Wolf Trilogy***Kimberly J. Lau*

Reading Angela Carter’s three consecutive versions of “*Little Red Riding Hood*” (the three wolf stories at the end of *The Bloody Chamber*) together with feminist interpretations of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory suggests the possibility of a radically different erotics based on a range of categorical slippages and unexpected characterizations of feminine sexuality. This other erotics simultaneously contests both the oppressive sexual ideologies at the heart of many of the classic Western fairy tales as well as the more recent attempts by women to rewrite fairy tales in an erotic vein.

**95 The Infernal Desire Machines in Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s *Bluebeard’s Keys* and Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber”***Shuli Barzilai*

Between 1866 and 1874 Anne Thackeray Ritchie published nine revisions of classic fairy tales, such as: “*Beauty and the Beast*,” “*Bluebeard*,” “*Cinderella*,” “*Jack and the Beanstalk*,” and “*Little Red Riding Hood*.” Ritchie’s novella *Bluebeard’s Keys* (1874) is not only one of the more subversive narratives among these revisions but also, demonstrably, the most personally inflected fairy tale she undertook to rewrite. This essay begins with an exploration of the extratextual reality that informs *Bluebeard’s Keys* and its revisionary relation to Charles Perrault’s “*Bluebeard*.” The focus then turns to the intertextual grid in which Angela Carter’s “*The Bloody Chamber*” (1979) converges with diverse particulars in Perrault’s and Ritchie’s versions. Among the main points considered in this analysis are the distinct ways that an illicit erotic dimension of experience leaves its mark on a range of situations in *Bluebeard’s Keys* and “*The Bloody Chamber*.”

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