

CHAPTER ONE: THROUGH THE MIRROR – RITUALS AND REFLECTIONS IN CARTER'S NARRATION

In *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, Campbell mentions how in different cultures since the beginning of time certain motifs are repeated both in ritual and in ritual-invoking folk narrative. He calls this “Ritual Love-Death”(170). He explains that this ritual, which revolves around ceremonial copulation and then (often, rather brutal) annihilation seems to fulfill a need in the primitive to render an “act of a mythology inspired by death and life in the plant world” (*Primitive Mythology* 171).

Other writers, such as Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* have talked about the rites of initiation. Van Gennep, in particular, has singled out the

rites of passage as a special category, which under further analysis may be subdivided into *rites of separation*, *transition rites*, and *rites of incorporation* (10-11)

Van Gennep also refers to transition rites as “liminal rites” (11) or “threshold rites”(21) where the crossing of a physical threshold (20) is linked with moving on from one aspect of life to another. Van Gennep comments:

Precisely: the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in

the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination and funeral ceremonies (20).

In a sense, the journey between the states of procreation and annihilation can be said to be a protracted transition rite. This element can be seen in selected stories in Angela Carter's *oeuvre*. In her stories, the characters undergo instances of change, which seem to connect both the states of creation and annihilation. Therefore, this journey will be explored in this dissertation with an eye towards the hybridizing of the traditional messages of fairy tales through the act of transformation within Carter's texts.

While Angela Carter may take the validity of mythic archetypes with a generous pinch of salt (*Sadeian Woman* 6), archetypes do play an important function within her narrative. This would include the instances of transformation within literary appropriations of fairytales such as "Beauty and the Beast", "Red Riding Hood", "Cinderella" and "Snow White".

Cristina Bacchilega in *Postmodern Fairy Tales* reflects upon this transformation in "Beauty and the Beast" by asking:

Where, indeed, is Beast? Is transformation "real" or does it result from Beauty's new perception of him? Does the change answer or betray Beauty's desire? And what kind of transformation has she undergone herself? Who has

tamed whom, and how have social dynamics shaped this apparently magic moment? (79)

It is at the heart of this “magic moment”(79) where protagonists hover between love and death with which my dissertation is concerned. It is my submission that this transformation is in harmony with the theme of the mythic ritual love-death (*Primitive Mythology* 170-225), with several caveats, since Carter’s application and resolution of this ritual is hardly traditional. Rather, it is subversive, containing a plurality of meaning despite the fact that the ritual can be found in the bones of the original fairytales from which Carter drew inspiration.

John Mepham notes in “Narratives of Postmodernism”:

There are many ways in which fiction can exploit the possibilities for producing undecidable elements, or elements which hover unstably between two or more interpretations, as a result of being inserted within different frames or contexts. Textual strategies of foregrounding and reframing and so on are calculated to engage the reader in a play of plural interpretations, so that the reader’s sense of a stable, reliable (fictional) world is disturbed. (150)

This instability is characteristic of postmodern fiction and challenges the way the reader approaches the text. This dissertation will explore the idea that the textual rituals in Carter’s stories transform gender-based polarities which are a general mainstay of fairytales. These polarities within Carter’s stories will be studied in order to show how they disrupt the original

mytales, bringing forth a multitude of meanings in the process through the agency of the mythic ritual I have outlined earlier.

The Sadeian Woman, Carter has shown that she does not pay much credence to certain mythic patterns or archetypes because they are primarily historically, or socio-economically based. She notes that:

archetypes serve only to confuse the main issue, that relationships between the sexes are determined by history and by the historical fact of the economic dependence of women upon men. (6)

Nevertheless, she does utilize the metaphors representing the archetypes in order to shake up preconceived understandings of male-female relations. Her narration helps outline how these gender relations are connected to wildness and civilization as opposite influences. She achieves this through two main methods. The first method involves repeating certain metaphors which are defined by and subject to binary relations. The second method is the creation of contrast between these metaphors in order to disrupt and subvert gender stereotypes through the use of intertextuality and narration techniques.

Barry Kaiser talks about the use of this subversion in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, noting that "Carter introduces the notorious analogy that in Western culture male is to female as culture is to nature" (par. 14). Carter employs this subversion to demonstrate to the reader that previous

held sexual stereotypes exist mostly because of socio-economical (6) and cultural contexts which can therefore be challenged.

Since Carter is basically rewriting fairytales which have originated as folk tales, I would aver that certain motifs are pre-existing ones. These motifs include the animal bridegroom and the act of transformation or redemption through love/acceptance. However, there are other elements introduced by Carter which add to a more immediate sense of induction or ritual. An example can be found in "The Company of Wolves" where the climax of the story includes elements of primitive rituals such as Red Riding Hood eating the lice of the wolf-man in a "savage marriage ceremony" (*The Bloody Chamber* 118) and the Beauty in "The Tiger's Bride" making an offering of herself like a voluntary sacrifice at the climax of that plot (67).

The pantomime-like quality of the stories seems to be on some level symbolic of change or transformation. This is achieved through the repetition of certain metaphors. This repetition identifies and then hybridizes tropes which are binary opposites of each other such as wildness and civilization, human and beast, man and woman. This repetition is a powerful tool in Carter's hands used to subvert pre-existing stereotypes with regard to both culture and gender. It is particularly effective because the different tales with fairytale motifs within Carter's oeuvre can be read off one another.

Her tales gain currency through an intertextual reading. Intertextuality, notes Graham Allen, "concerns a text's emergence from the 'social text' but also its continued existence within

society and history” (36). He explains and simplifies Julia Kristeva’s opinion of the text as being viewed as an *idéologème* by noting that:

The text’s appearance of unity and independent existence is, in fact, part of its momentary arrangement of words and utterances which have complex social significance ‘outside’ the text in question. (37)

The significance mentioned above is relevant within Carter’s textual universe. Her tales cross-refer, thereby creating a complex discourse. The stories also change shape according to the cultural context of each tale. The shifting of shapes creates in the reader an effect of returning again, and yet again to the site of transformation¹.

Roland Barthes mentions in “From Work to Text” that:

The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an irreducible (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a coexistence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. (288)

I find this applicable in relation to Carter because the plurality of Carter’s text leads the reader to a location within the text where an oddly anti-climactic explosion occurs. The explosion then inducts the reader to the site of transformation through the agency of certain metaphors.

Therefore, this dissertation will study how Carter's textual handling of fairytale motives is imbued with the use of both theriomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs/metaphors within a ritual-invoking narrative. I will also look at how Carter brings about the transformation of certain polarities induced by both gender-based and cultural stereotypes in her text. This transformation shows that human experience is ultimately beyond the wasteland of imposed polarities and is, rather, a result of hybridity.

The works analyzed will be selected fairytales from Angela Carter's anthologies, *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories* (1979), *Black Venus* (1985) and *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993)². My emphasis will be on the stories of *The Bloody Chamber* which I consider central to the thrust of this dissertation. References and analogies will additionally be drawn from her views in *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* and other essays and interviews by and of Carter.

One of the earliest instances of transformation within the plot of a fairytale occurs in *The Golden Ass* by Lucius Apuleius. In that multi-layered account Apuleius goes about introducing the fable of Cupid and Psyche, which is the fore-runner of the "Beauty and the Beast" motif. In *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, Jack Zipes notes that

The plot of 'Cupid and Psyche' was also well-known in 17th-century France and was transformed by La Fontaine into a long story, *Amours de Psyche et de Cupidon* (1669) and made into a tragédie-ballet, *Psyché* (1671) by

Corneille and Molière. It served as the basis for numerous fairy tales by Mme d'Aulnoy and inspired the two classical versions of 'Beauty and the Beast' by Mme de Villeneuve and Mme Leprince de Beaumont. (22)

At the heart of this fable which has been invoked again and again within the fairytale genre is the act of redemption through love and/or guilt, as well as the transfiguration caused by that act. Psyche in the fable had no clue as to her husband's identity. She had initially assumed that he was either a sorcerer or a monster – a by-product of her sisters' counsel (Apuleius 77). Only later did she realize that her mysterious husband was the God of Love, Cupid. The essence of this tale was then transposed into the French fairytales that Carter later made full use of.

In the "Beauty and the Beast" story framework, a more literal transformation is required since the Bridegroom has been literally transfigured. Aidan Day, citing Haffenden's interview with Angela Carter, notes that for her the tale is:

an advertisement for moral blackmail: when the Beast says that he is dying because of Beauty, the only morally correct thing for her to have said at that point would be, "Die, then"³

(qtd. in Day 139)

Day asserts that this instance of 'pure emotional blackmail' (138) is set out very clearly in this pivotal scene within "The Courtship of Mr Lyon":

‘I’m dying, Beauty,’ he said in a cracked whisper of his former purr. ‘Since you left me, I have been sick. I could not go hunting, I found I had not the stomach to kill the gentle beasts, I could not eat. I am sick and I must die; but I shall die happy because you have come to say goodbye to me.’ (*Bloody Chamber* 50)

While the pathos-laden declaration above could be blackmail as asserted by Day, it could also be interpreted as a transformation of Beauty’s perception, even if through manipulation.

Volney P. Gay, in *Ritual and Psychotherapy: Similarities and Differences* defines ritual as “activity that is patterned, meaningful, symbolic and normative”(217). An intertextual reading of Carter’s stories will reveal that the action/inaction of Carter’s protagonists fit this definition. There is a recurrence of patterns from which meanings can be derived and these patterns are rife with symbolism. The location of the ritual or the part of the story where this transformation occurs is where binary tropes must face off and confront each other. This tension will eventually result in change and transformation. This may take on literal and dramatic proportions, as has occurred in “The Tiger’s Bride”. It may also be of a subtler, more ambiguous nature as seen in “Wolf-Alice”.

Gay muses on the connection between ritual and transformation, noting that:

Many authorities on ritual testify to the value that ritual actors place on the transformation of the self. In detailed and voluminous studies scholars

describe the nuances of ritual actions, modes, symbols, and the like, directed toward the transformation of the ritual actor. The most obvious examples might be puberty rituals that have as their central task the conveyance of the child into adulthood. Rituals of the forbidden, including Dionysiac rituals and other hypersexual modes, clearly promise similar transformations (224)

It is important to note at this point that the tales contain theriomorphic-anthropomorphic binaries, which interchange with male-female binary structures in order to disrupt. These help to foreshadow as well as propel the stories towards a destination, which is the product of the earlier mentioned textual disruption. This is a place that exists beyond the binaries of gender stereotypes, achieved only via transformation. The “rituals of the forbidden”(224) that Gay mentions can be seen in the evocative “The Company of Wolves” where Red Riding Hood actually consorts with the Wolf and eats his lice “as he will bid her” in a “savage marriage ceremony”(118). It may also be found at the heart of tales like “The Tiger’s Bride” since a literal look at the culminating scene might reveal what begins as inter-species intercourse (67). Thus, Carter brings to the reader’s attention what is implicit behind the scenes of fairytales with animal bridegrooms, the sexual act itself and she highlights it as an act of transformation, in order to disrupt (as previously mentioned).

Day opines that Carter

uses the image of animals to signify a libido that has been culturally repressed in some women and which needs recognizing and articulating in

order that they may define autonomous subject positions for themselves.

(147)

He also earlier asserts that the message of Carter's tales is to "strip away existing cultural definitions of sexuality in order to reach a base level from which to begin building representation anew" (147). My assertion is that these tales are dialectics, moving from point to point in a ritualistic fashion, inducting the reader into the world of the text, slowly, through the tropes as guides. This would mean that the animal figures in Carter's tales do not necessarily represent patriarchy. For instance, in "Master"⁴ the spirit of the Jaguar leads the native girl towards liberating herself from the man who has enslaved her. As this transpires, the girl is slowly transformed into the mystical totem of her tribe:

She could no longer tolerate cooked meat but must tear it raw between her fingers off the bone before Master saw. She could no longer twist her scarlet tongue around the two syllables of his name, 'mas-tuh'; when she tried to speak, only a diffuse and rumbling purr shivered the muscles of her throat and she dug neat holes in the earth to bury her excrement, she had become so fastidious since she grew whiskers.

(*Burning Your Boats* 80)

It is interesting that the feline traits found in the native girl may also be found in the pale vampiric protagonist of "The Lady of the House of Love" from the anthology *The Bloody Chamber*⁵. These traits are also found in the ingénue of Carter's fictive version of "Beauty and

the Beast”: “The Tiger’s Bride”. In this scenario, Beauty learns to shed the trappings of her patriarchal upbringing in order to reclaim her animal self (67).

The blurring of the lines between humanity and bestiality in Carter’s text brings home to the reader the hybridity of human experience, where values and other polarities often overlap.

Marina Warner explains some of the dialectic found with *The Bloody Chamber*:

The attraction of the wild, and of the wild brother in twentieth-century culture, cannot be overestimated; as the century advances, in the cascade of deliberate revisions of the tale, Beauty stands in need of the Beast, rather than vice versa, and the Beast’s beastliness is good, even adorable

[. . .]She has not mistaken a human lover for a monster, like Psyche, or failed to see a good man beneath the surface, like Belle; on the contrary, the Beast’s beastliness will teach her something. Her need of him may be reprehensible, a moral flaw, a part of her carnal and materialist nature; or, it can represent her understanding of love, her redemption. He no longer stands outside her, the threat of male sexuality in bodily form, or of male authority with all its fearful amorality and social legitimacy, as in D’Aulnoy’s stories, but he holds up a mirror to the force of nature within her, which she is invited to accept and allow to grow. (307)

The mirror may be warped, as in the title tale of *The Bloody Chamber*, where the ingénue sensed in her self “a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away” (11) or it may have

a gentler effect. Like ritual, everything leading up to this pivotal moment is in the apprehending of some kind of change, be it transformation, regeneration, transmogrification, or reincarnation. This can be affected through the agency of identification. One example of this is the identification of female to male, or male to female which occurs in "Peter and the Wolf"⁶. In that tale, the boy, tamed and subdued by time, and the civilizing process reaches a state of epiphany thanks to his sighting of his feral cousin (290):

Peter could not help it, he burst out crying. He had not cried since his grandmother's funeral. Tears rolled down his face and splashed on the grass. He blundered forward a few steps into the river with his arms held open, intending to cross over to the other side to join her in her marvelous and private grace, impelled by the access of an almost visionary ecstasy. (290)

Unfortunately, his cousin takes fright at his advance, and lopes off, wolf-style, with her cubs running after her (290). But in that fleeting moment, there had been identification.

It is an identification which also occurs in "The Tiger's Bride" and "The Company of Wolves," an appropriation of "Red Riding Hood" where the girl, who seems so fair and innocent knows that "she was nobody's meat" (118) but rather, something wild herself. Looking out into the cold where the wolves are howling, she muses, "It is very cold, poor things, she said; no wonder they howl so" (117) even as she realizes that "the worst wolves are hairy on the inside" (117). This leads up to the ritual itself, in which Red Riding Hood disrobes and throws her

shawl, which is the color of blood, into the fire like a libation (117) as she prepares to face the wolf/male as equal. Carter concludes this little tableau with that of the “marriage” itself:

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. (118)

With this identification comes transformation. Although the stories I have referred to come from different fairytale sources, the *modus operandi* is consistent. This is mostly because Carter repeats certain motifs to drive home her point concerning hybridity and the many-layered social mores behind each action. Cristina Bacchilega says:

some postmodern revisions may question and remake the classic fairy tale’s production of gender only to re-inscribe it within some unquestioned model of subjectivity or narrativity. Other postmodern tales expose the fairy tale’s complicity with the “exhausted” forms and ideologies of traditional Western narrative, rewriting the tale of magic in order to question and re-create the rules of narrative production, especially as such rules contribute to naturalizing subjectivity and gender. Still other tales re-place or re-locate the fairy tale to multiply its performance potential and denaturalize its institutionalized power. (Bacchilega 23)

The questioning nature in Carter's works is evident in the way she turns certain tropes on their head, inverting the motifs of traditional tales. One such instance occurs in "The Lady of the House of Love". In that tale, I read the Lady as both a vampiric Sleeping Beauty and a feminized Beast, waiting in her castle of roses for a wayfarer to cannibalize. This is caused by the multiplicity of Carter's narratives in which a narrative seemingly focused on one fairytale contains motifs from more than one. Merja Makinen reads this same fairytale as an inversion of "the woman constructed as an aggressor with the man as the virgin victim." (11).

It is important to note that even with the different ways in which varied accounts within Carter's texts deviate from this pattern, the journey bears similar echoes. These parallels, which refer back to the core ritual, create a discourse structure within the narrative. This is because in each succeeding narrative there is a deviation from the preceding ritual. This creates a sense of change and each change reinforces irony.

In Leech and Short, irony is defined within a discourse situation as "the 'secret communion' between author and reader" (277). They go on to explain that

For fictional purposes irony may be defined as a double significance which arises from the contrast in values associated with two different points of view. So defined, irony is a wide-ranging phenomenon which can be manifested in a single sentence, or may extend over a whole novel. The most usual kind is that which involves a contrast between a point of view stated or

implied in some part of the fiction, and the assumed point of view of the author, and hence of the reader.

(Leech and Short 278)

One may find an example of this by comparing two tales with certain similarities in narration and thematic structure but with different effects, or by looking at how the different narrations of Carter's fairytales differ from other, more traditional versions. This idea of juxtaposition between the old and new is also found in postmodern texts. Linda Hutcheon talks about and qualifies the role of irony in postmodernism in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. While citing Umberto Eco, she states:

Many of the foes of postmodernism see irony as fundamentally anti-serious, but this is to mistake and misconstrue the critical power of double-voicing. As Umberto Eco has said, about both his own historiographic metafiction and his semiotic theorizing, the "game of irony" is intricately involved in seriousness of purpose and theme. In fact irony may be the only way we *can* be serious today. There is no innocence in our world, he suggests. We cannot ignore the discourses that precede and contextualize everything we say and do, and it is through ironic parody that we signal our awareness of this inescapable fact [. . .] the postmodernist ironic rethinking of history is definitely not nostalgic. It critically confronts the past with the present and vice versa. In a direct reaction against the tendency of our times to value only the new and novel, it returns us to a re-thought past to see what, if anything,

is of value in that past experience. But the critique of its irony is double-edged: the past and the present are judged in each other's light. (39)

By juxtaposing traditional fairytales with her intertextual accounts, Carter falls within the ambit of irony defined in the above quotation. She achieves this with references to not only tales by other authors or storytellers, but also within her own output. This is often marked by the usage of several devices or metaphors.

I will look at the manner in which the narration of "Wolf-Alice" coincides with the narration of "Reflections" to further illustrate this point. Here, the metaphor that I am concerned with is the mirror. In "Wolf-Alice", the main crux of this anti-climactic tale is shown through what the wolf-girl sees in the mirror. The interaction with the mirror illustrates a recurring motif in Carter's tales: opposite poles transforming into one another through a medium of reflection.

The most cogent transformation in "Wolf-Alice" is the slow civilizing of Alice from a wild wolf-pup to the role of nurturing female. It is interesting that her decision to take on this role is the catalyst allowing the image of the werewolf-duke to appear within the mirror, suggesting that they are the opposites of the same coin (126).

Here, the 'secret communion' of irony is aided primarily by the repetition of motifs as well as the language used. The same visual cues presented in different contexts can be a powerful tool for purposes of irony. For example, mirrors exist in both tales. In "Wolf-Alice" it is a "rational glass" which seems passive, or passive-aggressive, in that its observation is such an integral

part of the tale's process, while in "Reflections" it is a nexus between two worlds and an active force, since it tangibly affects the events within this tale.

As a matter of fact, there are three important elements within "Wolf-Alice". This includes the title character (Wolf-Alice), the Duke, who could be seen to be either insane or in the process of a very painful transformation and finally, the mirror, that shows Alice her reflection, but denies the same of the Duke. The Duke is characterized thus:

Poor wounded thing ... locked half and half between such strange states, an aborted transformation, an incomplete mystery, now he lies writhing on his black bed in the room like a Mycenaean tomb, howls like a wolf with his foot in a trap or a woman in labor, and bleeds.

(The Bloody Chamber 126)

The phrase "locked half and half between such states" creates an interesting contrast, particularly because of the use of "and". This heralds the interstices between the polarities of male/female and civilized/wild. The phrase can also be read as delineating a trapped situation, for instance in the use of "locked" which in a sense stymies the suggestion of open-endedness invoked by "half and half between". I read "and" as a nexus, in between two states. In equating the bed with a tomb, a trap and a birthing bed Carter is moving into the subterranean province of myth where death heralds birth, but she changes the dynamics by adding "a wolf with his foot in a trap".

The word “trap” may seem to imply that the “half-and-half” condition is something undesirable but is also situated between the tomb and the womb. This suggests at the intimate relationship between love/procreation and death which is an integral part of Campbell’s “Ritual Love-Death”⁷. This link between two states represents another binary while the condition of unfinished transformation is the nexus of hybridity between states.

The Duke-Wolf is not the only creature requiring transformation in Carter’s fictive pantheon as these half-done creatures in stasis may be found in various half-human and half-animal guises in Carter’s fairytale revisions. This condition requires the “rescue” of the transformative process. It would not be quite accurate to say that these characters have solely anthropomorphic qualities, because it is plainly not just an issue of attributing human characteristics to animals, but also of the reverse: the tropes of theriomorphism.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary [Ninth Edition] defines the adjective “theriomorphic” as “having an animal form”. This can be seen in Carter’s tales where the rites of transformation contain an inverse of the original fairytale motif by turning humans into animal forms. Theriomorphism is the act of attributing animal characteristics to humans, or illuminating the process whereby a human transforms into bestial form. This transformation is ritualistic and metaphoric in Carter’s fairytale universe. This is a key towards discerning the ideology of the implied narrators within her tales.

The ritualistic element can be seen in the transformation of Wolf-Alice, who is the other salient character in the tale bearing the same name. She is a girl raised by wolves and is wild in nature.

It is she who comes to succor the Duke, with the tender ministrations of either the mother, or the midwife, helping him give birth to himself and conversely, her own self too. The mirror that seems to be looking at the process of transformation taking place is an important part of this ritual:

The lucidity of the moonlight lit the mirror propped against the red wall; 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 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)

The “pathetic fallacy” or personification used is rather striking in this passage. The moonlight is “lucid” and the mirror, or glass is “rational” and “impartial”. The thrust of the narrator’s intention in this sentence seems to be that this act of transformation will bring disparate parts into the light of lucidity and reason. It also suggests that the interstices between sexes are impartial and will eventually engender change.

Parallels to the mirror in this tale can be found in the appropriately titled “Reflections” in which the male protagonist enters the woods of the tale only to be captured by a female huntress, Anna. He is then presented to her androgyne aunt/uncle, who is identified as Tiresias. Anna is introduced as someone who can “go both ways” by Tiresias – which suggests both androgyny and bisexuality. The protagonist, who has been captured by the niece, is told that he cannot be set free because he has seen them and knows their secret (*Burning Your Boats* 87). The punishment is for him to be sent through the mirror – by kissing his own reflection.

‘Kiss yourself, commanded the androgyne in a swooning voice. ‘Kiss yourself in the mirror, the symbolic matrix of this and that, hither and thither, outside and inside.’

[. . .]Out of rage and desperation, I advanced my own lips to meet the familiar yet unknown lips that advanced towards mine in the silent world of the glass. I thought these lips would be cold and lifeless; that I would touch them but they could not touch me. Yet, when the twinned lips met, they cleaved, for these mirrored lips of mine were warm and throbbed. (88-89)

When this erotic process has taken place, the protagonist finds that he has become his own reflection (89) and that the androgyne and her niece are waiting for him on that other side of the mirror. Anna bids him welcome:

'So,' she said. 'Welcome. This room is the half-way house between here and there, between this and that, because, you understand, I am so ambiguous.

(89)

The androgyne is then identified in the two rooms in between the reflections as thesis and antithesis. The difference between "Wolf-Alice" and "Reflections" is that of the voice of the narrator. In "Wolf-Alice", the narrator's tone appears to be compassionate and calm but in "Reflections" the tone seems more strident and bitter. The choice of words, the metaphors used and the archetypal imagery bear correlation to one another in the patterning of the tale and the ritualized process.

For instance, the "formless web of tracery" slowly emerging in the rational glass of "Wolf-Alice" seems to evoke a "prey caught in its own fishing net" (126). The ambiguity here is that one is not entirely sure if the narrator is implicating the Duke, Alice, or the mirror itself. It is salient to note that both the mirror and the metaphoric cobweb are seen as connected to one another. This connection may also be found in "Reflections", where the mirror seems to be an extension of the cobwebs of Tiresias's weaving and therefore Tiresias himself/herself. The identification with Tiresias can be seen in the following excerpt:

At first I thought the spiders had cast their nets on both sides of the stair but then I saw the workmanship that wound down the inner side of the staircase was not that of the spiders for, though it was the same colour, this web had a determinate pattern that resembled nothing so much as open-work knitting,

the kind of featherlike, floating stuff from which they make courtesans' bedjackets.

(Burning Your Boats 85)

The web is woven by Tiresias who can be identified with the mirror, and who wears

A loose negligee of spider-coloured lace, unless she, like the spiders, spun and wove her own thread and so had become clothed, for her shadowy hair was also the colour of the stuff she knitted and so evanescent in texture it seemed to move of its own accord on the air around her. (85)

An alternate universe can be seen through the mirror in which Anna's gun is identified as a phallus (88). This can be linked to the general indicators of power relations in which the patriarch is seen to be the one with the power and potential for violence. The protagonist as the solely intact/pure male within this scenario creates the final act of destruction/disruption in a state of protest, by shooting Anna who has raped him. By killing Anna, the protagonist disrupts this strange, reflective, dualistic textual universe although the mirror rejects him while keeping its secrets (94).

The androgyne (which has been identified as Tiresias) decomposes after Anna's murder, but not before leaving the cautious reader another clue into the voice behind the tale. It is not the voice of the I-narrator who is the arrogant male, but the same voice which is transfigured again and again throughout the different tales in *The Bloody Chamber*:

‘The umbilical cord is cut,’ she said. ‘The thread is broken. Did you not realize who I was? That I was the synthesis in person? For I could go any way the world goes and so I was knitting the thesis and the antithesis together, this world and that world. Over the leaves and under the leaves. Cohesion gone. Ah!’” (*Burning Your Boats* 95)

This is a clue that both the androgyne and the mirror are identifiable with each other, but more importantly, also with the two Sadeian characters Carter writes about.

In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter studies the characters of Juliette and Justine in de Sade’s novels. One is virtuous and endlessly victimized, while the other is amoral and seen to be more powerful. Both are within the opposite ends of a grid which has been dictated by patriarchy. Juliette makes of herself a victimizer instead of a victim, by utilizing the same tools of patriarchy, whereas Justine is the much-maligned, much-resisting martyr/victim. Of them both Carter remarks:

[Juliette] is, just as her sister is, a description of a type of female behaviour rather than a model of female behaviour and her triumph is just as ambivalent as is Justine’s disaster. Justine is the thesis, Juliette the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling. (*Sadeian Woman* 79)

In this passage, Carter notes that instead of subscribing to the dualistic dialectic of being either the victim or the predator, a protagonist could move out of that trap and instead be a synthesis, which is not just ‘neither nor’, but also a sum of different polarities.

This is the manner in which Carter hybridizes the Sadeian dialectic in more than one of her appropriated fairytales, although the outcome may seem violent and destructive. Here, the magical place between polarities is represented by the mirror which is also depicted like a web. This is the place the hapless male protagonist ventures into and unknowingly destroys in his ignorance that there lies a way out of the Sadeian dialectic. The mirror is not only a nexus between worlds but also a bridge between texts, since it shares the web-like characteristics with the mirror in “Wolf-Alice”.

Anna in “Reflections” is seen as the predator whilst the male protagonist is victim-like, an obvious role reversal. As for the androgyne, she/he is identifiable with Helene Cixous’s laughing medusa. In *The Newborn Woman*, Cixous and Clément explore the story behind femininity and liken the wild woman or sorceress to this laughing medusa. “She laughs, and it’s frightening – like Medusa’s laugh – petrifying and shattering constraint” begins one part of Cixous and Clément’s tract – explaining how artificially created boundaries may be exposed and therefore deconstructed (32). It continues:

All laughter is allied with the monstrous. [. . .] Laughter breaks up, breaks out, splashes over[. . .] It is the moment at which the woman crosses a

dangerous line, the cultural demarcation beyond which she will find herself excluded. To break up, to touch the masculine integrity of the body image, is to return to a stage that is scarcely constituted in human development; it is to return to the disordered Imaginary of before the mirror stage, of before the rigid and defensive constitution of subjective armor. (33)

Cixous's statement echoes the disruptions found in Carter's text which shakes up the norms of not only the fairytale but also cultural boundaries. The reflection in the mirror can thus be equated with stereotypes based on a misapprehension of binaries as a static state of being, which laughter, like postmodern disruption, can distort and change.

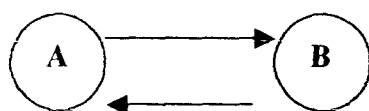
It is significant that the androgyne is identified with Tiresias, who was a blind prophet in Greek myth because both stepped into the state of synthesis, beyond gender-based polarities. According to Joseph Campbell, Tiresias was a man who turned into a woman after stumbling upon two snakes copulating in the forest and placing a staff between them (*The Power of Myth* 251-252). Years later, he/she is turned back into a man after he stumbles upon the same occurrence and reacts the same way, symbolizing a nexus between two opposites.

The events of "Reflections" seem to mirror this tale. The narrative opens in a "spring-enchanted wood"(81), which mirrors the woods in which Tiresias found himself. However, the postmodern Tiresias sees his/her self as a nexus between reflections and therefore more superior than either side of the equation because he/she straddles the polarities of gender. This is because Tiresias is the mirror which shows both sides of the gender equation, just as the

Tiresias of legend was the only one who could give the Gods an answer about both the sexes and was subsequently turned blind by Hera, in a fit of rage. Likewise, Tiresias in this tale is destroyed because of the protagonist's rage and fear of the disruption of binaries inherent in Tiresias's self.

The mirror is present in other fairytales by Carter, as seen in the title tale of *The Bloody Chamber* and more particularly in "Wolf-Alice" which I read as a twin narrative to "Reflections". Different results can be discerned in the two tales, though. Attrition and the death of cohesion can be found in "Reflections" while a change, albeit a rather cautious, ambiguous kind is heralded in "Wolf-Alice". The disruption of culturally contrived gender relations by the authorial voice is evident in both tales. Reading both tales together suggests that Carter deliberately re-introduces certain motifs in order to offset and outline the irony within her tales, that gender-constructs do not always accurately portray the nature of individuals, regardless of sex.

This aforementioned narrative ritual inducts the reader into the mysteries of transformation. The polarities explored are cogently those of civilization-wildness, male-female, beast-human. As such the main tropes are dualistic in nature and connected to each other in a binary dialectic, as may be represented below:



In this case, **A** may be represented as anthropomorphism while **B** stands for theriomorphism. This motif runs through the discourse of the various short stories/fairytales studied in this dissertation and suggests an important transformative process. This process outlines the fact that formerly binary-derived definitions of male-female are not necessarily correct or accurate and that the “human” experience is created out of multiplicity and hybridity rather than gender.

Hybrid beings who are neither human nor monsters are often the subjects of both myth and fairytale, as can be seen in figures such as sphinxes, chimeras, werewolves, amongst others. This is a device Carter makes full use of in her reworked fairytales. According to Curti⁸, this can be “a derisive counterpoint to the stereotypes of the feminine” (107). It is also apt and rather important to consider hybridity in relation to Carter’s tales because at the heart of her work lies a challenge towards prevailing stereotypes, particularly those imposed by culture upon gender. The animal nature of Carter’s subjects is foreshadowed throughout in metaphors and in events of transformation within the text. The fairytales of Carter are often monstrous organisms waiting, like the almost-alive woods of “The Erl King”, to swallow the reader up (*The Bloody Chamber* 84). Even the hut of this Erl King is depicted as something organic, as:

His house is made of sticks and stones and has grown a pelt of yellow lichen.

(86)

This foreshadows the theriomorphized female victims of the Erl-King, transformed into caged singing birds (90), representing the victims of patriarchy. They seem to be animals, but are

much more than this *prima facie* representation. They are, in fact, examples of how mythical iconography gets incorporated into fairy tales. In murdering the Erl King and releasing the birds from their cages, Carter physically wrenches these victims out of one dialectic into another. Carter also shows how the action of one woman could have an empowering effect on the rest. “The Erl King” foreshadows “The Snow Child”, which is Carter’s very disruptive reworking of “Snow White”, in which the two female protagonists are on opposite sides of the fence thanks to the patriarchal divide. This tale shows in greater depth the gap between civilization and wilderness that is so pervasive in Carter’s tales. The lure of the wild is never far away, and animal imagery can even be found from the start of “The Snow Child”.

In that tale the Countess is found “wrapped in the glittering pelts of black foxes” (91), a symbol of culture and civilization as opposed to the Snow-Child who is stark-naked, mute and unnaturally attuned to the cold of the elements (92). The person wholly in control of this scenario that ends with the annihilation of the Snow-Child is the Count, who indulges in necrophilia at the end of the tale. He is as much a patriarch in this scenario as the “Erl-King” is in his woodland setting. In my opinion, both are manifestations of the sadistic “Marquis” of “The Bloody Chamber”, the first tale in this anthology, based upon the fairytale “Bluebeard”.

Therefore, it would appear that in the tales Carter links civilization with the “Master” or “Marquis” of patriarchy who imposes roles on both his Countess, wrapped in the skins of dead animals and forced to be worried about her position in his household⁹ and the Snow Child who, while seeming to be a wild, elemental creature, is really just another construct. In this sense, the Snow Child is akin to the robotic simulacra of Beauty found in “The Tiger’s Bride”¹⁰.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir comments that while patriarchy would like to associate the “Other” sex with “nature”, inherent fear of what this entails requires that this manifestation of nature be adorned with artifice (158):

Man wishes her to be carnal, her beauty like that of fruit and flowers, but he would also have her smooth, hard, changeless as a pebble. The function of ornament is to make her share more intimately in nature and at the same time to remove her from the natural, it is to lend to palpitating life the gelid urgency of artifice [. . .] A woman is rendered more desirable to the extent that nature is more highly developed in her and more rigorously confined: it is the “sophisticated” woman who has always been the ideal erotic object. (158-159)

This situation of nature being artifice has been played out in both “The Snow Child”, a construct of patriarchal desires, as well as in “The Erl King” where the supposed man of nature is actually a construct, a civilizing force as well as a trapper of birds¹¹. This is one way in which Carter gets at the truth behind stereotypes, by showing how things that seem natural are actually constructs.

The association of human qualities with animals (anthropomorphic), and animal qualities with humans (theriomorphic) is often a mainstay of both fairytales and folk stories and is an

essential part of our shared cultural history (Campbell, *Primitive Mythology* 300). Marie Louise Von Franz expounds on this in *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*.

If you read *Fairy Tales of World Literature*, you will see that in certain ethnological setups what are called fairy tales are practically all animal tales, and even in the Grimm collection there are very many animal tales... The word *animal* is not very good in this connection because although the characters are animals, everyone knows that these animals are at the same time anthropomorphic beings [. . .] From our standpoint they are symbolic animals, for we make another distinction, we say the animal is the carrier of the projection of human psychic factors. As long as there is still an archaic identity, and as long as you have not taken the projection back, the animal and what you project onto it are identical; they are one and the same thing. You see it beautifully in those animal stories which represent archetypal human tendencies. They are human because they really do not represent animal instincts, and in that sense they are really anthropomorphic.”

(35-36)

I therefore assert that the animals within Carter's fairytales are not really animals, but projections of a sort, referring to the animal-like qualities that hide within the skin and clothing of humanity as well as the other way around. This play on projections is apparent throughout the tales studied for this dissertation and is an important ingredient in the narrative ritual beyond the binaries.

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One way in which the lines are blurred is through narration. For example, the ingénue of “The Tiger’s Bride” shares her apprehending of a beast creature and then, in an about face, turns into one of them (67). The interchanging of affiliation between the beast-world and the human-world has the tendency of shaking up previously entrenched ideals of what should happen in a fairy story and therefore causes the reader to involuntarily identify with the ‘beasts’ by proxy of the heroine.

Avis Lewallen in “Wayward Girls but Wicked Women?”¹² attributes this phenomenon to the condition of patriarchy which requires the female heroine/victim to be forced to identify with her oppressor by making a choice between “rape or death” (154). Earlier in her essay she comments on the Sadeian dialectic:

In *The Bloody Chamber* Carter is attempting to promote an active sexuality for women within a Sadeian framework, and, therefore within the logic of the world she creates, sexual choice for the heroines is circumscribed by Sadeian boundaries. One wonders why, given her recognition of what she sees as Sade’s failure, there is no attempt to address the question of these ideologically defined parameters. (146)

I will concede that the accusations leveled against Carter’s text by Lewallen do have some plausibility, particularly seen in the light of certain statements running through Carter’s accounts. However, I disagree that the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* deal solely with

sexuality¹³. As I have mentioned earlier, the tales contain elements of ritual and in countless instances in the text the heroines are seen to be considering their enclosures¹⁴ and finding their own ways out of the trap and into their destiny. One example of the way this dialectic can be misread is in statements such as the following by Carter:

The tiger will never lie down with the lamb; he acknowledges no pact that is not reciprocal. The lamb must learn to run with the tigers.

(The Bloody Chamber 64)

This may be taken to mean that the woman has to run along with a patriarchal destiny if read literally. However, within the context of the tales Carter explores as well as her intertextual cues, the meaning becomes less clean-cut, particularly because Carter's narratives are multi-layered. For instance, the apprehending of the groom creates an emotional, almost epiphanic reaction in the ingénue,

A great, feline, tawny shape whose pelt was barred with a savage geometry of bars the colour of burned wood. His domed, heavy head, so terrible he must hide it. How subtle the muscles, how profound the tread. The annihilating vehemence of his eyes, like twin suns. *(The Bloody Chamber 64)*

This grandness is not so much a subduing of self in relation to an oppressive order as it is an apprehending of wildness. This is also a narrative disruption since the reader is made aware of the vital force of nature found within the artifice of the initial trappings of the story. This

complements the opposing quality found in “The Erl King”: the force of civilization hidden within a woodland setting. In musing about the nature of the Tiger, the heroine is essentially trying to draw herself within the world-view of the beast and what he represents. In this sense the Tiger is not necessarily a patriarchal entity in the eyes of the heroine. This is something that Day affirms in *The Rational Glass*, when he asserts that

Carter certainly identifies an animal dimension to human beings that lies beneath social representations of that animality. In all of the tales in *The Bloody Chamber* it is existing social constructions that repress and misrepresent an animal energy shared equally between the sexes. One of the morals of all these tales is that we have to strip away existing cultural definitions of sexuality in order to reach a base level from which to begin building representation anew. It might be said, of course, that Carter, in arguing that the male and the female have equal 'natural' impulses, libidinal drives, is herself indulging in no more than a representation of nature and of sexuality" (147)

Day notes that for Carter, male and female are both made of similar energies beneath the outer trappings of our skin. Interestingly, Carter delineates this similarity by exaggerating the lines of difference. For instance, Carter uses anthropomorphic/theriomorphic metaphors to delineate the different ways with which certain things are associated. The bars of the tiger's pelt are “the colour of burned wood”, mentioning again the woods which seem to follow the reader from the tales of *Fireworks* to those of *The Bloody Chamber*. The woods give birth to the strange

dramas of her fairytales, as in “The Erl King”, “Reflections”, “The Werewolf”, “In the Company of Wolves”, or in the narrations of the ingénues of “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”. The woods also represent Carter’s text as can be seen in her sly phrasing in “The Erl King”:

The woods enclose then enclose again, like a system of Chinese boxes opening one into another; the intimate perspectives of the wood changed endlessly around the interloper, the imaginary traveler walking towards an invented distance that perpetually receded before me. It is easy to lose yourself in these woods. (85)

In this passage above, Carter acknowledges the artificial quality of the woods. The woods are her words and the reference to “Chinese boxes” is telling since it is a metaphor often used to describe postmodern narration. This mode of literary elbow nudging is also found in “Reflections” where Carter has the androgyne mention that she/he is both “Thesis” and “Antithesis”.

The medium between this dialectic of difference (Thesis and Antithesis) may be a mirror, or a literal act of transformation, or a “stripping of skin”. In “The Erl King” which foreshadows both “In the Company of Wolves” and “The Tiger’s Bride”, the Erl King undresses the female protagonist. This act connotes enslavement especially since the other birds stuck in cages are also his victims.

In this particular setting the theriomorphic elements are entrapped by the Erl King who can be seen as a force of civilization. He has set up home in the woods and performs an array of domestic tasks, converting the raw materials of nature into different things. It is also the Erl King who takes away the strength of the narrator, by removing her pelt.

He strips me to my last nakedness, that underskin of mauve, pearlized satin,
like a skinned rabbit; then dresses me again in an embrace so lucid and
encompassing it might be made of water. And shakes over me dead leaves as
if into the stream I have become. (89)

The difference between this tale and the stripping that takes place within “The Tiger’s Bride” and “In the Company of Wolves” is that in the two latter tales, the heroines do not see themselves as victims by the end of the tale. In “The Tiger’s Bride” the heroine moves into a hybridized and theriomorphized state of being. In “The Company of Wolves” she mates with a wolf-man and identifies with the wolf pack. Neither of them are victims. However, in “The Erl King” the heroine moves hypnotically back to the Erl King, her attitude mirroring that of an abused female. This story, like “Reflections”, ends in an act of violence as a form of resolution. The difference is that the narrator in “Reflections” is male, and patriarchal, whereas the narrator of “The Erl King” is female and identifies with the other entrapped females within the tale, even though they have been theriomorphized as birds.

At this stage, I hope I have shown that there is a link between the thematic structures of the stories examined, the narrative ritual that encompasses the theriomorphized and anthropomorphized characters within Carter's tales. This connecting link can be discerned through the authorial choices in the sense of language and metaphors used in order to show how one story thread has different resolutions, which also points at the fact that the labyrinthine rituals within her tales are structures that can be deconstructed.

In Chapter Two I will explore Carter's narration in relation to the very strong intertextual elements contained within her tales as well as the cultural contexts in the different retellings of similar themes. In Chapter Three I shall look at the sites of these tales as enclosures and labyrinths where the rituals of transformation take place, and in Chapter Four I shall explore the very act of transformation as well as identification, which I have begun to flesh out in this chapter.