Little Red Riding Hood Meets the Werewolf: Genre and Gender Tensions in Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves*

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The ancestral folk tale and the modern horror film converge in Neil Jordan's film *The Company of Wolves* (1984), forming a peculiar hybrid. *Company* is actually an adaptation of the eponymous short story from the collection by Angela Carter *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Carter's story is a post-modern, literary retelling of the folk tale "Little Red Riding Hood" popularised, among many others, by Charles Perrault (1697) and the Brothers Grimm (1812). Whereas in Perrault's version the naive heroine is devoured by the wolf - in the Brothers Grimm's tale a hunter rescues her from the wolf's belly - Carter's more ingenious heroine neutralises the threat that the wolf poses against her life by becoming his lover, taming him into submission as she sexually liberates herself. Jordan's film, though, abandons Carter's optimistic, erotically appealing plea for liberation, enhancing instead, possibly for commercial reasons, the horrific elements implied in her story, especially her characterisation of the wolf as a werewolf. As a horror film, though, *Company of Wolves* is, due to the average quality of its special effects and to Jordan's failure to build up suspense, less effective than other ground-breaking films of the werewolf sub-genre in the 1980s, such as *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London*.

The weight of the horrific elements in the film greatly distorts the relationship between Carter's story and the versions of the folk tale that she criticises, especially Perrault's. The nameless heroine of Carter's story - called Rosaleen in the film - appears to be a step forward towards the creation of an ideal liberated, feminist heroine who can overcome the negative image of Perrault's vain, heedless girl. Transferred to the context of the horror film, Rosaleen's resolute naiveté - Carter's typical trademark for most of her heroines - appears to be, in contrast, a step backwards. Rosaleen compares quite badly to the new heroine of horror film that first appeared in the mid 1970s: the final girl, in Carol Clover's denomination. The final girl, Clover explains, endures a relentless persecution that claims the lives of all those around her

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and that finally leads her to a horrific confrontation with death, embodied by the monster, which she survives whether she is rescued by others or rescues herself (35). Clover rejects this victorious heroine arguing that her victimisation, and not her triumph, is the core of the sadistic pleasures male spectators indulge in thanks to the misogynist genre of the horror film. She, however, quite misses the point that for many female spectators the image of a brave young woman facing the horror of a threatening male monster, whom she often ends up killing, can be positive and even empowering.

It is in this sense that Rosaleen appears to be a far less enticing heroine than, for instance, the final girl of a most popular horror film made the same year, Nancy in Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Unlike the terrified final girl, characterised as a born survivor, Rosaleen simply refuses to be scared, which ultimately leads in Carter's story to her building up a questionable sexual complicity with the wolf and in the film to her own transformation into a wolf. Whereas the temerity of Carter's heroine may be read as an ironic comment on Perrault's victimisation of his maid in a red cap, even despite the problematic liaison between woman and male monster, within the context of the horror film, in which the impact of violence is always foregrounded, Rosaleen's refusal to feel fear appears to be pure simple-mindedness.

The different endings of the short story and the film reveal, besides, not only an important disagreement between Carter and Jordan, but also *Company's* failure to contribute a truly alternative reading to "Little Red Riding Hood," one that would firmly side with the heroine against the monster. In Jordan's script, co-written with Carter herself, [1] the tale is dreamed by a late twentieth-century teenage girl, a narrative choice that made a double ending imperative. Jordan apparently wrote on his own this double ending and deeply altered Carter's message of liberation since he chose to *punish* the heroine, both transforming her into a monster (within the tale) and killing her (within the contemporary narrative framework). In the tale Rosaleen becomes a (were)wolf - that is to say, a non-human *monster* - in order to join her wolf lover; the couple ward off the attack of the hunters and are free to follow the call of the wilderness thanks to her mother's help. The young contemporary dreamer wakes up only to be attacked and presumably devoured by the wolves that pounce on her. The aggression goes on, apparently unnoticed by her family - that is, if she is not still dreaming - as the final moral of Perrault's conservative tale is recited off-screen by the dream Grandmother.[2]

Carter granted Jordan the right to modify her story, but was politely mystified about his final intention: "[The film's] purpose and meaning are not intended to be clear", she declared. "I'm not sure of its meaning; it is supposed to be an open-ended film, with a plentiful amount of material for interpretation" (Haffenden 84). In fact, the film's end is not so unclear if we take into account the codes of the horror film: Jordan's film follows them in his victimisation of the dreaming girl, but ignores them as regards the characterisa-

tion of the dream's Rosaleen as a brave final girl, preferring to turn Carter's cross-species affair into Rosaleen's *fall* into monstrosity. A brief examination of two far more challenging modern versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" which also include horrific elements, Tanith Lee's novel *Heart-beast* (1992) and Matthew Bright's independent film *Freeway* (1996), suggests that, in any case, Carter's story is nothing but a consolatory fantasy, as Margaret Atwood argues (130). Both Lee's novel and Bright's film clearly side with the heroine, turning Clover's derided final girl into a vindictive heroine who will not be victimised.

Company, a British film, was released at a time when the American werewolf film was passing through the most innovative and productive period in its whole history.[3] It faced, therefore, the daunting prospect of having to compete commercially with the quite accomplished products of the American market. Until the 1970s, the evolution of the werewolf film sub-genre ran parallel to that of the other two most popular monsters: Universal Studios's Dracula and Frankenstein's creature. In the 1980s, however, the new special effects developed to represent metamorphosis made the werewolf film a more distinct sub-genre. Bram Stoker had represented Count Dracula as both vampire and werewolf in his popular classic (1897), yet, as David Skal explains, "the werewolf theme was largely eliminated from *Dracula* stage adaptations, due to the difficulties of convincingly presenting such a total physical transformation in the theatre" (212).[4] Since the werewolf has not inspired any major literary work,[5] Hollywood chose to link lycanthropy to the model of transformation proposed by R.L. Stevenson in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1886). Unlike Henry Jekyll, though, the werewolf is usually represented as an innocent man unfairly placed under a terrible curse, a motif apparently introduced also in the 1930s by Guy Endore's novel *Werewolf of Paris* (1933) and rescued by the British Hammer Studios with Terence Fisher's adaptation *Curse of the Werewolf* (1961).

The development of special effects and make-up techniques in the early 1980s helped the werewolf reconquer the film screen after the decadence of the classic monsters of horror in the 1970s. This, incidentally, was partly due to the rise of independent horror films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), from which the final girl derives. Joe Dante's *The Howling* (1981, a free adaptation of a novel by Gary Brandner), John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), Michael Wadleigh's *Wolfen* (1981, based on Whitley Strieber's novel) came in quick succession. They inspired *Company of Wolves* but also comedies like *Teen Wolf* (1986, also based on *I was a Teenage Werewolf*) and even Michael Jackson's popular music video "Thriller" (1983), directed by Landis.

The main gimmick of any werewolf film is, of course, the metamorphosis from man to wolf. The essential turning point in the history of the werewolf film came in this regard with the seminal work of American special effects

artist Rick Baker for *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London*. Jack Pierce, the make-up artist famous for his work in *Frankenstein*, had produced innovative make-up designs for *Werewolf of London* and the classic *The Wolfman* (1941) with Lon Chaney, Jr., but lacked the technology necessary to represent a credible step-by-step transformation. Directors Joe Dante and John Landis commissioned Baker to design a complete metamorphosis practically at the same time, in the early 1980s.[6] Baker not only made the transformations for their respective films believable but also altered the figure of the werewolf, transforming him into the ten feet tall monstrosity of *The Howling* and the bestial monster of *American Werewolf*. His designs for this film were so revolutionary that a new Oscar category for Best Make-Up was introduced to acknowledge his achievement. Barker, thus, raised the threshold of tolerance marking the limits of the representation of monstrosity on the screen and stressed the importance of the transformation as spectacle, aspects that *Company* could not ignore.

Barker's work produced, beside, an interesting side effect in the representation of metamorphosis in films. As Salisbury and Hedgecock report (43), Baker's designs were effective but not perfect, especially those for *The Howling*, which were actually completed by his disciple Rob Bottin. The latex foam appliances used on the actors, supposed to swell and bubble on their skins to produce the illusion of a smooth change, would often burst. Special sound effects were added to cover up this mistake, which produced the illusion of an agonising, bone-cracking metamorphosis, an illusion imitated by all subsequent werewolf films. In *Company* the physical ordeal that the werewolf undergoes is a central aspect, not only because of its undeniable value as spectacle but also because this pain sparks the compassion that leads Rosaleen to choose to become a werewolf herself. Her own transformation, however, happens off-screen, which somehow undermines the value of both her sympathy for the suffering of her chosen companion and the impact of her own physical change.

Christopher Tucker's make-up effects[7] and Rodger Shaw's animatronics (models animated electronically) for Jordan's film are competent enough - especially in the scene of actor Stephen Rea's metamorphosis - but they are certainly inferior imitations of Baker's work. "I remember when I saw *The Company of Wolves*," Landis reminisced in the early 1990s. "I went 'all right. We've seen it already.'" (Salisbury and Hedgecock 46). Curiously enough, Guido Almansi maintains that the metamorphosis from man to wolf in the radio play *The Company of Wolves* (Carter's own adaptation) is superior to any possible film version (229), whereas Laura Mulvey has also noted and praised Carter's deft use of film images "even when the cinema itself is not present on the page" (230). Naturally, the imagery used by the novelist is not conditioned by available special effects technology: telling has here a clear advantage over showing. Carter herself, however, noted in an interview that Jordan's adapta-

tion was in part conditioned by the cinematic possibilities available in the early 1980s. These limitations affected not so much the werewolf transformation, which seems not to have interested Carter at all, as the ending. According to her, Jordan wanted to end the film with "an extraordinary image - an image of repression being liberated by libido" in which the twentieth-century sleeping beauty "would wake up and do the most beautiful dive into the floorboards" (Haffenden 84). Carter's comment suggests that Jordan's interest in the visual aspects of his film was more limited as regards the make-up special effects of the werewolf sub-genre than as regards his own personal imagery. This, and possibly the producers' limited investment, would explain why *Company* fails as a horror film in comparison to its direct competitors.

The precarious mixture of the codes of the popular, commercial werewolf film - possibly imposed by the producers - with Jordan's personal vision of Carter's literary fairy-tale story is, precisely, what makes the film so singular, but also so indeterminate. As film reviewer John Hartl noted, "it's hard to find the centre" of *Company*, a film that is "certainly stylish, perhaps too much so" (1984). *Company* failed to become either a cult horror film or a commercial success basically because it could not please either of its two possible audiences: the art-house film connoisseurs familiar with Jordan's work and the horror film fans familiar with Landis'. On the one hand, the grisly make-up special effects possibly alienated art-house film-goers but were too conventional to please horror film fans. On the other, the sophisticated narrative technique aimed at the art-house film-goer, which combines the dream framework with the inclusion of diverse brief werewolf stories within the basic plot,[8] prevents the film from building up any kind of tension, something essential in any horror film.

Even though the British leading film magazine *Empire* has recently included *Company* in its list of "The Greatest Horror Movies Ever" (2000), the fact is that the film's most distinctive feature, its true trademark, is its fairy-tale atmosphere. This relies on two essential elements: first, the enchanting score by George Fenton, which carries a great deal of the weight of the narration, given the scarce dialogue, never sounding like the penetrating music of horror films; second, Anton Furst's oddly artificial, uncanny production design representing the forests found in illustrations for children's books. The risky, unstable combination of these elements with the horror special effects makes *Company* an eccentric adult fairy-tale film, practically alone in a category of its own,[9] which is why it is so difficult to find its centre. Possibly, this also shows that Jordan was in full control of neither the artistic nor the ideological discourse of his film.

Company is, in short, certainly unique, though much of its uniqueness depends paradoxically on the incoherence of its artistic and ideological (i.e. gender) discourse. This is not visible in the flawed characterisation of the heroine Rosaleen, the film's main weakness, as has been noted. "What appears to de-

marcate the horror story from mere stories with monsters, such as myths," Noël Carroll explains, "is the attitude of characters in the story to the monsters they encounter. In works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order. In fairy tales, on the other hand, monsters are part of the everyday furniture of the universe" (16). In Jordan's hybrid film, Rosaleen is incongruously allowed to behave as a fairy-tale heroine despite the fact that the monsters she comes across belong to the domain of the horror film. The doubt, though, is whether her final twin punishment is justified on *genre* grounds or on *gender* grounds. It is not clear whether Jordan could not make sense finally of the clash between the two codes that he was using (fairy-tale and horror film) - which is why he left both Carter and the spectators mystified as to what the film meant - or whether he was using the clash between these genres to let his own misogyny surface with the punishment of the dreaming and the dreamt Rosaleen. It is important to remember, though, that, unlike literature, which is produced by a sole creator, films are the product of collaborations and, thus, much more likely to show discrepancies between diverse elements. Whereas Carter fully controlled her work - or, at least, needn't submit it to the criterion of another artist - Jordan did not, beginning with the fact that Carter herself contributed her own ideas to the script.

If we credit Jack Zipes' argument, the heroine of the original late medieval versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" appears to have been closer to today's final girl than to Carter or Jordan's Rosaleen. Zipes explains that this late medieval folk tale was originally intended to "show how dangerous it could be for children to talk to strangers in the woods or to let strangers enter the house" (2) for reasons clear enough. In one of the earliest versions, Zipes reports, a girl of unspecified age outwits and kills the (were)wolf that has eaten her grandmother and that even keeps her dangerous company in bed before she realises who he is and what he's done. The tale, therefore, "celebrates the reliance of a young peasant girl" (Zipes 8) in the face of impending rape, symbolised by the danger of being 'devoured.' Zipes is quite critical of Perrault's version, in which Little Red Riding Hood is "pretty, spoiled, gullible and helpless" (9). He argues that Perrault turned the heroine into a doomed victim, punished by her gullibility because of his misogyny and his patronising dislike of the "superstitious customs of the peasantry" (8), which nourished the original folk tale.

In contrast, Zipes writes, Carter's story "deftly illustrates how a 'strong-minded' child can fend for herself in the woods and tame the wolf. The savagery of sex reveals its tender side, and the girl becomes at one with the wolf to soothe his tormented soul" (44). Olga Kenyon partly disagrees with Zipes, as she thinks that in Carter's story "the male ego is mocked" (13). Margaret Atwood, however, finds Carter's efforts at producing an alternative to patriarchal folk tales less uplifting than Zipes. As I have noted, she defines

Carter's taming of the wolf as a "consolatory nonsense, but at least a different consolatory nonsense, one that tries for the kind of synthesis Carter suggested in *The Sadeian Woman*: 'neither submissive nor aggressive'" (130). This synthesis, nonetheless, contradicts the original self-sufficiency of the medieval heroine, who, ironically seems better equipped to deal with the 'wolf' than Carter's post-modern young woman.

Carter's girl may be less naive than Perrault's, refusing, as Margaret Atwood notes, "to be defined as somebody's meat" (130). Yet, as Atwood adds, she does so "by 'freely' learning to - if not running with the tigers - at least lie down with them" (130). By preaching that the patriarchal wolf can be charmed by well-meaning heroines, Carter actually stays in the same path as Madame Le Prince de Beaumont in her version of "Beauty and the Beast" (1765). As is well known, in her tale the faults of the patriarchal Beast are redeemed by Beauty's love, which leads to everlasting love between her and the transformed Prince. Being a prisoner, Beauty has no other option than to offer 'freely' the love that will transform her captor, or else face eventual rape by the Beast. Carter's girl faces, likewise, a desperate choice and, being in mortal danger, she resorts to seduction. The final girl knows, in contrast, that outside pretty fairy-tales beasts will not be tamed. She is not interested in soothing the tormented souls of the patriarchal monster or in learning to love him, but in surviving.

The question, however, is that the final girl has not made yet the full transition from the popular fantasies written by men to the literary fantasies written by women; she might well never pass from one domain to another and perhaps needn't. As has been noted, the final girl described by Carol Clover as the lonely survivor of a killer's attack first appeared in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), in which she indeed survives but is driven apparently insane by her ordeal. Next came Laurie, the heroine of John Carpenter's successful hit *Halloween* (1978), and the most popular final girl, Ellen Ripley of the *Alien* series (four films: 1979, 1986, 1993, 1998). According to Clover, the fact that whenever "female monsters and female heroes" appear in men's fantasies - mainly films - they are

> masculine in dress and behaviour (and often even name), and that male victims are shown in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity, would seem to suggest that gender inheres in the function itself - that there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero functions that wants expression in a male. Sex, in this universe, proceeds from gender, not the other way round. (12)

Thus Clover's main objection to the final girl is that she is "boyish" (40); that is to say, her positive traits - courage, resourcefulness, physical resilience

- correspond to the ideal image of the hero. She is a female not because men are interested in representing the positive qualities of women in their fantasies, but because they want to mix the masochistic pleasure they feel in identifying with the suffering hero with the sadistic pleasure they feel in enjoying the victimisation of the defenceless heroine. "To applaud the final girl," Clover writes, "as a feminist development, as some reviews of *Aliens* have done with Ripley, is, in light of her figurative meaning, a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking. She is simply an agreed-upon fiction and the male viewer's use of her as a vehicle for his own sadomasochistic fantasies an act of perhaps timeless dishonesty" (53).

This is correct - she *is* part of a sadomasochistic male fantasy - but Clover's position is self-defeating for it rejects female characters gifted with quite positive traits only because these traits are typical of the hero. Certainly, Ripley was not created to please women - much less *feminist* women - and she is indeed victimised in the films in quite a suspect way, but for many female spectators she is a *heroine* - not a male hero in disguise - with many admirable qualities: common sense, determination in the face of danger, physical resistance. It is hard to see why these qualities should be denied or rejected as part of the make up of any heroine and what would replace them; in short, it is hard to see what the ideal feminist heroine of fantasy would be like.

Clover herself points out that one of the "main donations to horror" of the woman's movement is "the image of an angry woman - a woman so angry that she can be imagined as a credible perpetrator (I stress "credible") of the kind of violence on which, in the low-mythic universe, the status of full protagonist rests" (17). This angry woman empowered by violence tends, however, to be far less balanced than the final girl and is often represented as a monster by both women and men. Thus, despite their immense differences, both Jeanette Winterson's Dog Woman in the feminist novel *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) and James Dearden's Alex Forrest in the misogynist film *Fatal Attraction* (1986) are representations of the same angry woman as a monster. Winterson's novel demands sympathy from women for the Dog Woman on the grounds that she is empowered by her fantastic body and her violence, whereas Dearden's Alex elicits a profound aversion, especially from the male spectator, on similar grounds, as she is also violent. Both characters send out a message that is quite irresponsible, namely, that only violence can empower women; Winterson, furthermore, suggests that the only acceptable heroine for women is the monstrous woman.[10] The final girl also uses violence, in which she imitates the hero, but she is not uncontrollably aggressive like the angry woman: she is not a monster but a victim who is provoked into using violence to defend herself, which is quite close to how women behave in real life whenever they do use violence, which is seldom. She is, in short, potentially a fantasy more empowering for contemporary women than the angry woman of feminism.

In any case, Rosaleen is neither a final girl, nor an angry woman, which is, basically, why she fails as a heroine both in Carter's story and in Jordan's film. A brief comparison with the popular final girl Nancy - the heroine of three of the seven films in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series[11] - shows how inadequate Rosaleen already was as a heroine by the time *Company* was released. *Company of Wolves* and *Nightmare* share a similar narrative frame: a 1980s teenage girl dreams herself, her family and friends into an alternative domain, where a monster threatens them. For Nancy, this domain is a nightmarish version of her daylight suburban, American life; for Rosaleen, this is an 18th century fairy-tale forest, hardly connected to her English middle-class country life.

The monster Nancy faces in her dreams is the worst kind of patriarchal beast: razor-fingered Freddy Krueger is the spirit of a child abuser and killer, burnt to death by an enraged mob. Nancy and other teenagers in the neighbourhood where Freddy committed his heinous crimes become the target of his bloody supernatural revenge, for, as happens, the mob was formed by their own middle-class, suburban parents. They took justice in their hands when institutional justice allowed Freddy to walk out of prison, considering him mentally ill and, therefore, not responsible for his crimes. Nancy is jolted out of her comfortable childhood by the realisation that the adults around her are not quite innocent and by the nature of Freddy's crimes. His viciousness teaches her, nonetheless, that his redemption is not an option and so, she devotes the rest of her life to try to defeat Freddy and the evil he represents. The *Nightmare* series, in short, addresses the question of the gap between the moral attitudes of middle-class adults and teenagers, while also addressing the defencelessness of children and, in general of young people, in the face of abuse and violence. Nancy *is* a victim but she also *is* a heroine, which stresses the idea that what characterises the heroine is the realisation that she is or might become a victim, a reason good enough for her to face up to the monster.

Nancy's resistance against the monster is not the issue either for Carter or Jordan. Carter's nameless girl forgives the werewolf that has just killed her grandmother simply because her pity for him overcomes her pity for his victim; in the film, as I have noted, she is also moved by the physical agony of his metamorphosis. This compassion is quite in tune with Carter's belief that in women's fiction no woman faces a "final revelation of moral horror. We forgive, we don't judge" ("Introduction" ix). Her quite sweeping statement certainly does not apply to other women writers such as, for instance, Tanith Lee, but reveals much about Carter's own position. Whereas Wes Craven's Nancy does face the ultimate moral horror and reacts to her discovery of life's darkest side with fear and disgust, Carter's girl is too insensible to be afraid for herself or to judge the wolf's crimes.

When she takes the path to her grandmother's,[12] the girl claims she fears nothing because she carries a knife in her basket ; in the film she proudly rejects the protection offered by her young suitor. Yet, when a handsome hunter awakens her sexual curiosity, as she had "never seen such a fine fellow before, not among the rustic clowns of her native village" (114), her original caution is thrown to the winds and she accepts his challenge: she'll allow him to kiss her if he gets to her grandma's before her. She even foolishly dawdles "on her way to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager" (115) but when she reaches her Grandma's cottage, the girl realises she is "in danger of death" (116) and must defend herself. In Carter's story she faces the wolf and decides to save herself *and him* by stripping off her clothes in preparation for their "savage marriage ceremony" (118). The tale ends with an idyllic post-coital image, which does not imply her physical transformation: "See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf." His taming is complete because he can't use his most potent tool against her - her own fear - but she herself is also tamed into the arms of the wolf.

In the film, this rosy image would make no sense because the (were)wolf that Rosaleen faces is no 'tender wolf' dressed in Granny's clothes but a creature undergoing a repulsive metamorphosis before her very eyes: this is the monster of horror fiction, not the monster of fairy or folk tales. Rosaleen is scared enough to shoot the hunter-(were)wolf in the shoulder, which triggers the final phase of his roaring, excruciating transformation, but, still, she fails to react as a horror film heroine. Instead she watches him, considers her options and chooses to be like him, though it is not clear what provokes her own metamorphosis. Rosaleen is never scared not only because she never abandons her fairy-tale frame of mind, but also because her sexual desire and her vanity - this handsome gentleman has chosen *her* - impair her common sense and her ability to feel empathy for other human beings. She is imprudent and narcissistic, which makes her not very different from Perrault's doomed heroine. In fact, both in the story and in the film, her survival depends not so much on her courage as on her luck: she is plain lucky that the wolf accepts her compassion and refrains from eating her. It is just impossible to imagine a similar resolution for Nancy's encounter with Freddy Krueger.

Laura and Vanessa, the heroines of, respectively, Tanith Lee's novel *Heart-beast* in Matthew Bright's film *Freeway* are very different from Rosaleen, since they feel fear for their lives and anger at what the wolf has done to people they love: they are empowered because their anger overcomes their fear. Laura is quite close to the final girl of horror film in courage and will to survive, but not even Clover could find anything suspect about her femininity. This does not mean that Lee is using her novel to condemn men's final girl; rather, her Laura is an example of the adaptation of this figure to popular fiction by women and also a quite valid alternative to the monstrous

heroine of feminist novels. Bright's Vanessa is a final girl who finds herself on the brink of becoming an uncontrollable angry woman, but who will not allow her well-justified anger to be used as an excuse for the social system to victimise and destroy her. As can be seen, Lee and Bright offer, thus, alternative readings of "Little Red Riding Hood" that, while still forcing female characters to face monsters in the tradition of men's sadistic horror fantasies, support the heroine and condemn the wolf.

Lee's werewolf novel *Heart-beast* is a more consistent anti-patriarchal revision of "Little Red Riding Hood" than Carter's story, as, unlike Carter, Lee is careful not to confuse enjoyable *human* sexuality with the empowering fear of monstrosity that finally frees her heroine from patriarchal control. Lee's plot borrows, in fact, elements from the folk tales "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Cinderella," but also, quite surprisingly for a horror novel, from works such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess*. In an imaginary 18th century, rich squire Hyperion Worth, the heir of Pamela's master and of Alex D'Urberville, harasses poor milkmaid Laura - a late descendant of Tess - with the consent of her greedy, impoverished family. Laura allows him to take her virginity, thinking this will rid her of his unwelcome presence; despite her sexual indifference to him, she eventually accepts his unexpected marriage proposal, simply because she fears her uncertain future. The plot stresses thus Laura's dependence in a patriarchal society which disregards her own sexual desires and in which her marriage is nothing but a commercial transaction between Hyperion and her father.

Laura submits to sexual intercourse out of duty towards her husband, until her passion for handsome Daniel, another local nobleman, dispels her frigidity. She takes him as her lover only when she realises that her husband is actively encouraging his attentions towards her. Worth actually uses Laura to bond with Daniel, having himself fallen in love with his rival out of his fascination for Daniel's double identity as man and werewolf, a secret only Worth knows and that finally causes his death. As long as her husband lives, Laura is never ashamed, since her adultery implies no deception, but when Daniel kills Worth and she realises who the werewolf is, her newly discovered shame and her anger surface and she gives Daniel a slow, most painful death.

Lee uses sexual codes that seem quite puritan in comparison to Carter's but that actually allow her heroine to learn to trust herself. Laura enjoys sex with a man, not with a werewolf, which somehow protects her self-esteem when she finds out the true nature of her lover. Unlike Rosaleen, who finds her own self in the wolf's arms, Laura finds herself when she rejects Daniel, both the man who pleases her sexually and the werewolf she hates and fears. Even though she is free to continue the affair with Daniel, Laura chooses to be her own woman and, so, kills Daniel to vindicate her (feminine) humanity against his (masculine) monstrosity. Daniel's monstrous personality is, in fact, a peculiar combination of patriarchal and anti-patriarchal feelings that

make him quite a singular wolf. The transformation, brought about by a magic jewel, allows his repressed hatred of his father, a man who abused Daniel's mother, to surface and to be projected against other men. The werewolf "slew women quickly, almost as an afterthought. But men it savaged. It was primarily a despoiler of men" (165). Daniel's mother kills herself believing she is guilty of having instilled in her son the feelings of hatred that dominate the werewolf, but Daniel himself feels no guilt. For him, monstrosity means a liberation from patriarchal rule, not only for himself but also for Laura, who, he thinks, was unfairly enslaved to Worth. However, Daniel behaves towards her in a selfish, intolerable way, pleasing her sexually but disregarding her feelings in all other respects, which is what in the last instance prompts her to kill him. In the end, Laura survives both husband and werewolf, freeing herself from their rule. There is, nonetheless, a note of bitterness in her newly found courage that is far away indeed from Carter's joyful final image: "She was not afraid. She did not fear a beast. She was past fear, and past all things" (373).

Lee, like Bright in *Freeway*, suggests that freeing oneself is not simply a choice but a painful, unavoidable obligation. Bright's tale focuses, above all, on the consequences that Little Red Riding Hood must face in a late twentieth-century American society more willing to protect 'wolves' than women. Vanessa, aged 15, runs away from a most dysfunctional family: her mother is a prostitute and her step-father a crack addict who's been sexually abusing her since she was 11. When they are sent to jail again, Vanessa determines to seek shelter in the trailer park home of her unknown paternal grandmother, rather than put up with yet another foster family. On the way to her grandma's, Vanessa's car breaks down on the freeway - hence the title - and she is picked up by child psychologist Bob Wolverton. The ride in his car becomes a matter of life and death when she realises that the man who is asking her to trust him with her most intimate secrets on a professional basis is the rapist who's been murdering young prostitutes. She repeals Bob's vicious attack by shooting him several times, but this is only the continuation of her nightmarish life, for he survives. Supported by his wife, who ignores his double life, Bob uses then the machinery of justice to send Vanessa to prison for attempting to murder him.

Apart from gender, class is an important factor in all versions of "Little Red Riding Hood." Carter's peasant girl falls for the hunter when she realises he's no country bumpkin. Lee's Laura is another peasant girl seduced by a capricious aristocrat. Possibly, "Little Red Riding Hood" echoes as a cautionary tale the feudal times when peasant girls were fair game for randy aristocrats. *Freeway* also highlights class issues by pitting small-town, white-trash Vanessa against Los Angeles, middle-class Bob, a man whose social status - and this is the main joke in this very black comedy - depends, precisely, on his work as a child therapist. Bob, who treats only middle-class boys while he secretly rapes working-class girls, justifies his killing spree to Vanessa on the

grounds that he can no longer stand the presence of white trash like her on the streets of America. As an unrepentant Vanessa confesses to the police, she decided to execute Bob because of this declaration, thinking that, in any case, nobody and nothing would protect her, or others like her, from him.

Bob himself teaches her that no judge would believe her claim that he, a respectable citizen, is the freeway killer. His social status gives him an obvious advantage over this practically illiterate girl who already has a long police record as shoplifter, arsonist and prostitute. But he makes the mistake of awakening her self-confidence by also teaching her during the placid first part of their car ride that she is not guilty of the abuse heaped on her: she is the victim. Vanessa believes him and, so, assuming later the role of victimised heroine, she chooses to kill Bob, a move he does not anticipate. Her idea of justice is not, however, that of the law and Vanessa is mercilessly persecuted, which makes her even angrier. When Vanessa finally meets the wolf Bob at her grandmother's, too late to save her life, their mutual hatred is so strong that they fight to death. This physical confrontation, a violent reversal of Carter's sexual encounter, ends with her victory, which earns her the sympathy of the police, already aware of who Bob really was. As a fantasy of empowerment, *Freeway* is, possibly, the most effective version of "Little Red Riding Hood," especially because by casting in the role of heroine a young woman of questionable behaviour it stresses the idea that all victims deserve protection.

The point I have tried to argue here is that it is not possible to produce a single, unified reading of Jordan's film - to find its centre - because it is a work whose meaning depends on the diachronic dialogue in which it participates with others versions of the same traditional fairy tale, and on the synchronic dialogue it established with the other werewolf films of the 1980s. This is, of course, true of all texts: much of their meaning derives from their context at the time when they were produced and from the context they come to occupy in the course of history. Jordan's film, however, is perhaps a specially remarkable example of how the twin varieties of the dialogue generate texts that are quite self-conscious about the company they keep.

The problem, perhaps, if it can be called a problem, is that Jordan attempts to hold different conversations at the same time that do not quite deal with the same subject: his absorbing dialogue with Carter - a consequence of her own dialogue with Perrault - leaves little room for the innovating, daring mixture of the tale's wolf with the horror film's werewolf. In the end, the fairy tale dominates the horror film, a victory which undermines the role of the immature heroine, born from a few non sequiturs in the dialogue between Jordan and Carter and from their common disregard of the new trends in the horror film of the 1970s and 1980s. Jordan, to sum up, seems happily self-conscious about his use of codes borrowed from the fairy tale, but he seems, in contrast, unhappily self-conscious about his mismanagement of the horror film codes, which ultimately deprives *Company of Wolves* of the status of fantasy master-

piece. Other works inspired by the same fairy tale - the novel *Heart-Beast*, the film *Freeway* - may be far below Jordan's or Carter's artistic achievements, but they succeed where they fail, namely, in the characterisation of the heroine, because their creators manage to establish a better balance between the gender and the genre issues they deal with.

Notes

[1] According to Carter, she and Jordan wrote the screenplay for *The Company of Wolves* in a friendly, informal, collaborative atmosphere (Haffenden). They first met in 1982, though Carter was part of the jury that awarded the Guardian Prize to Jordan's short story collection *Night in Tunisia*, his first book, in 1979. Though Jordan is better known as a film director, he has published several books of fiction. The screenplay of *The Company of Wolves*, should be seen, therefore, as a collaboration between two writers, one of whom is also the film director.

[2] In S.R. Littlewood's 1912 translation: "Little girls, it seems to say/ never stop upon your wake,/ never trust a stranger friend/ no one knows how it will end./ As you're pretty, so be wise,/ wolves may lurk in every guise,/ now and then it is simple truth:/ sweet is the tongue as sharp is the teeth."

[3] Out of the 113 films listed in the website *The Werewolf Page*, which covers the years from 1913 to 1999, 34 correspond to the 1980s, the most productive decade.

[4] By the time the werewolf first appeared in Henry McRae's *The Werewolf* (1913), which dealt with a Navajo female werewolf, the connection had been completely severed. The making of the first major werewolf film - Universal's *Werewolf of London* (1935) - was, however, prompted by the successful adaptations of *Dracula* by Tod Browning and *Frankenstein* by James Whale (both 1931).

[5] The werewolf inspired, of course, a best-selling serial novel: the popular *Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf* (1847) by George W.M. Reynolds.

[6] Dante was satisfied enough with *The Howling* but Landis wanted from Baker a smooth werewolf metamorphosis that required the use of still unavailable infographics (computer special effects), which Disney would pioneer later in *Tron* (1982). Morphing, the infographic technique habitually used today to represent a transformation, would be first used in 1986 with *Willow*. Lacking the aid of computers, Baker had to use the classic stop-motion technique invented by French pioneer George Mèlies and perfected by Willis O'Brien for *King Kong* (1933). This involved shooting frame by frame the actor David McNaughton in different stages of werewolf make-up and in full light.

[7] The highlights in Tucker's short special effects career are *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *Company*. He coincided with Baker and Bottin on the set of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977), where the three collaborated in the famous cantina scene. Production designer Anton Furst was also part of Lucas's team.

[8] The tragic anecdotes of the first section of "The Company of Wolves" are kept in the film: a hunter who believes he has killed a wolf, realises he has killed a man; a

witch, the bridegroom's spurned lover, turns the guests at his wedding party into (were)wolves; a woman is terrified by the return of her long-lost husband, a lethal werewolf. Jordan and Carter wrote for the film the brief story of the boy who meets the Devil in the forest and that of the female werewolf befriended by a priest.

[9] Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), which also mixes the codes of the fairy tale, contemporary suburban life and the classic horror films - the *Frankenstein* motif - is, indeed, far more coherent as a fairy-tale for adults than *Company*.

[10] I've discussed this issue elsewhere. See my essay, Martin (1998).

[11] The first, in which she is 15 (1984); the third, *Dream Warriors*, (1987) in which she is supposedly a post-graduate student; and the seventh and last, *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1995) in which actress Heather Langenkampf plays herself, aged 25, since Nancy died in episode III.

[12] Jordan faithfully follows Carter in all except in the ending and, so, what I argue here is valid both for story and film.

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