BEAUTY AND BEASTLINESS:
A COMPARISON OF THE REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN SELECTED WORKS BY
WALT DISNEY PICTURES, ANGELA CARTER AND DIANE VICTOR

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, which I submit for the degree Magister Technologiae (Fine Art) in the Department of Visual Art, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg, is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution of higher education.

Roxanne Do Rego

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Date

25 January 2016

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how selected works by Walt Disney Pictures, Angela Carter and Diane Victor make use of the theme of ‘beauty and beastliness’ in such a way that they either reinforce or challenge traditionalist notions of femininity. The research question will be investigated by means of a comparison of the representations of women in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” and selected works by Diane Victor, with specific focus on *XXX* (2002) and *Untitled (“City of Pricks”) *(1985). I critically analyse the modes or devices the director/author/artist has used to either sustain or unsettle the dichotomy of ‘beauty and beastliness’.

The tale *Beauty and the Beast* was originally written in 1756 by French governess Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont and was conceived to serve a distinct pedagogical purpose. As a result the representation of the female protagonist in this tale is informed by eighteenth-century ideals concerning the nature and behaviour of women. In 1991 Walt Disney Pictures released its cinematic interpretation of *Beauty and the Beast*, a film which reworks the 1756 story in such a way that it is ostensibly relevant to the frameworks and perspectives of late 20th-century audiences. However, I argue that the Disney production in fact maintains traditionalist understandings about femininity through its emphasis on the dichotomy of ‘beauty and beastliness’. The short story “The Company of Wolves” (1979a) by Angela Carter is a feminist or revisionist tale which parodies the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697) by Charles Perrault. I contend that this story challenges inherited notions of femininity (particularly those perpetuated through patriarchal fairy tale discourse) by unsettling the dichotomy of ‘beauty and beastliness’. Through her work, contemporary South African artist Diane Victor often deals with the interplay between fragility and the bestial as well as the misleading and sinister nature of appearances. I am interested in exploring the way in which Victor represents femininity as that which is subversive and, above all, un-idealised.
This research works within materialist feminist and postmodernist feminist paradigms and makes use of Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection as well as Mary Douglas’ concepts of ‘purity’ and ‘the marginal’ as critical frameworks for interpretation.
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I dedicate this study to the memory of my father, Paulo Do Rego, who gave me the strength to begin and complete it.
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INTRODUCTION

Beauty can be understood as a term which describes that which is aesthetically attractive or possesses qualities which provide sensory pleasure and/or satisfaction. Conventionally one who is ‘beautiful’ possesses a set of corporeal qualities which are considered ideal by a specific culture or society; hence the notion of beauty is revered based on its capacity to manifest ‘perfection’. In contrast, beastliness or the bestial can be understood as that which is nonhuman, animalistic and repulsive in appearance and which often incites danger and fear. For the purpose of this dissertation concepts of beauty and beastliness will be explored not
only in terms of their physical manifestations but also largely in relation to the characteristics or
behaviours associated with these two states of being. For instance, beastliness is conventionally
associated with uninhibited, untamed and instinctual behaviour as well as carnal sexual desire.
It is important to note that physical beauty (as well as its various non-physical characteristics) is
conventionally ascribed to femininity while characteristics associated with beastliness tend to be constructed as masculine in nature.

In *Baa Baa Black Sheep* (1989: Figure 0.1), Paulo Rego visually represents this dynamic in a
parody of the children’s nursery rhyme of the same name. In this scene the black sheep of “Baa
Baa Black Sheep” has been re-imagined as a giant boisterous ram. The young girl, a reference to
“the dame” in the original rhyme, is seemingly infatuated with the ram as she stands encompassed by his outstretched limbs. Their arms are locked as though in a dance while the creature sits with his leg suggestively propped around the pubescent girl as she admires his fleece. The tiny figure in the composition, the “little boy who lives down the lane”, watches the pair as though witnessing a dangerous and forbidden act—his voyeuristic presence heightening the erotic tension of the scene.

This work is significant when considering Rego’s play on fairy-tale discourse¹ in order to critique
gender roles and issues of morality. Having had a strict upbringing, where etiquette and ‘good
behaviour’ were reinforced, the artist’s own struggle between adherence to these norms and a
propensity for inward revolt is, unsurprisingly, a theme which features strongly in her work
(McEwen 1997:17). This is evident in *Baa Baa Black Sheep* where Rego implies a sexual and
taboo relationship between girl and beast, which challenges acceptable social conventions
while subverting the innocence of a children’s nursery rhyme. Although still dichotomous in
nature, the interplay between beauty and beastliness in this work begins to suggest a more

¹ Fairy tale discourse appears to communicate important moral values by consistently rewarding ‘good’ and
‘ethical’ protagonists as well as ensuring that these characters triumph over their evil counterparts. However,
while children may well learn through these stories the consequences of various ‘immoral’ acts, they are also in
the process assimilating various behavioural patterns, particularly those associated with gender.
ambiguous representation of the theme, a notion I endeavour to expand upon through this study.

This study is not, however, focused on Rego but rather on selected works by Walt Disney Pictures, Angela Carter and Diane Victor, and on how they make use of the theme of ‘beauty and beastliness’ in such a way that they either reinforce or challenge traditionalist notions of femininity. The research question will be investigated by means of a comparison of the representations of women in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, Angela Carter’s “*The Company of Wolves*” and selected works by Diane Victor, with specific focus on *XXX* (2002) and *Untitled* (“*City of Pricks*”) (1985). I will be critically analysing the modes or devices the director/author/artist has used to either sustain or unsettle the dichotomy of ‘beauty and beastliness’.

The tale *Beauty and the Beast* was written in 1756 by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, and it is this version of the story which remains canonical in contemporary society. The iconicity of Beaumont’s storyline may, however, be partly attributed to the animated feature film of the same name produced by Walt Disney Pictures. In 1991 Disney released its cinematic interpretation of the classic *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, which appears to revise traditional conceptions of the female protagonist. While the character of Belle is most definitely a progression from her 18th-century predecessor, I will argue that Disney in fact maintains a traditionalist approach towards the representation of the female protagonist, evident through the dichotomy of beauty and beastliness sustained throughout the film.

The short-story “*The Company of Wolves*” (1979) by Angela Carter can be argued to be a feminist or revisionist tale which parodies the classic fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697) by Charles Perrault through its transforming of the female protagonist from one who is powerless to another who is unafraid and has agency. Carter does so by manipulating the plot so the character of Little Red Riding Hood is not victimised by the wolf but rather develops an infatuation with the animal. The story concludes with an erotic scene between girl and wolf,
and this is significant because Carter represents femininity as that which is as sexually autonomous as conventional masculinity. In the film *The Company of Wolves* (1984), directed by Neil Jordan and based on the original story by Carter, this transformation of the female character is more radically represented when the protagonist literally assumes the form of a wolf at the conclusion of the film. Jordan’s film is therefore a significant adaption of Carter’s tale and so will also be referred to whenever relevant within this dissertation.

Through her practice, South African artist Diane Victor critiques current socio-political issues pertaining to racism, sexism, corruption and violence by referencing various mythological and/or religious narratives. By means of parody, Victor often deals with the interplay between fragility and the bestial, as well as the misleading and sinister nature of appearances. In this dissertation I focus on a selection of Victor’s artworks, particularly *XXX* (2002) and *Untitled (“City of Pricks”)* (1985). While these artworks are not based on any one fairy tale in particular, I will argue that they present transgressive understandings of femininity by making use of ‘beastliness’ as an important visual and conceptual theme.

Through this study I aim to compare and interpret the representations of women in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” and selected works by Diane Victor. Secondly, by examining these works in light of dichotomies between beauty and beastliness, I intend to suggest how they either perpetuate or challenge traditionalist understandings of femininity. By dealing with the representation of women in relation to the theme ‘beauty and beastliness’ in a variety of visual platforms (namely literature, film and visual art) I am able to take cognizance of how different discourses may have an impact on one another in regard to the construction or redefinition of cultural and societal values. The research is also socially important because, as I intend to illustrate, the representations under discussion are informed implicitly by issues pertaining to the construction of gender roles—which remain relevant and in need of critical analysis.
Theoretical Positioning

My analysis throughout this dissertation will work within more than one feminist paradigm. In some respects my arguments will work within a materialist feminist paradigm. According to Jill Dolan (1988:41) “one of the basic assumptions of feminist criticism is that all representation is inherently ideological”. Materialist feminism argues that all cultural products are determined by patriarchal ideology and thus focuses on the ways in which gender and gender roles have been constructed through these ideologies. It is also interested in the denaturalisation of these dominant ideals which serve to categorise and control definitions of femininity (Dolan 1988:11). This text will be key in supporting my argument when exploring the examples of visual culture selected for this dissertation and whether these representations of women can be considered transgressive, as opposed to patriarchal or traditionalist, based on the ideologies they embody. However the research will also be largely informed by postmodernist or French feminism. According to Rosemarie Putnam Tong (1998:194), as with postmodernism, postmodern feminists reject phallogocentrism and interrogate notions of “the symbolic order”, women’s “otherness” and her conventional “authorship, identity and selfhood”. Postmodern feminism therefore finds its roots in ideas developed by existentialist feminism and deconstructionism (Tong 1998:195). In her writings, existentialist feminist Simone de Beauvoir deals extensively with the notion of woman as the “second sex” or “other”; postmodern feminism expands on this concept by positing the advantages of woman’s “otherness”, arguing that existing in the periphery and outside the dominant order allows for women to effectively criticise and potentially transcend the limitations of patriarchy (Tong 1998:195).

Typical to deconstructionist theory is its antiessentialism, which questions Western “dualistic thought” and the notion of ‘identity’ or the integrated self (Tong 1998:195-196). Deconstructionist theorist Jacques Derrida critiques the symbolic order by focusing on its

2 As theorised by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Tong 1998:196), the symbolic order can be understood as a system “which regulates society through the regulation of individuals; so long as individuals speak the language of the symbolic order—internalizing its gender roles and class roles—society will reproduce itself in fairly constant form”. It is an order which ensures, predominantly through language, that signs or the symbolic (rather than the imaginary) determines the subject.
logocentrism, phallocentrism and dualism (or construction of binary oppositions)—aspects which he argues reproduce “the assumption of singularity” or the view that there exists one single truth in the Western search for meaning (Tong 1998:198). Postmodern feminism aligns with Derrida’s philosophy in that it similarly seeks to break down the symbolic order, and identifies with the distance between reality and ‘reality’ constructed and controlled by phallocentric language (Tong 1998:198)—a gap between signifier and signified. Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection is important in this regard.

For Kristeva, who draws on Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytical writings in relation to the symbolic order, there is a distinct contrast between the “symbolic” (post-Oedipal) stage and the “semiotic” (pre-Oedipal) stage, where the maternal “semiotic” is also the “abject” or element of rejection that exists both inside and outside the symbolic order (Tong 1998:205). In this way, the “abject” can be defined as “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1982:4). More specifically, it is the bodily waste which was once integral to the body but has since been removed and rejected (Von Veh 2008:92): it then possesses the power to transgress the phallocentric symbolic order. Postmodern feminism can then, in part, be characterised by “an appreciation for the possibilities latent in nothingness, absence, the marginal, the peripheral” (Tong 1998:210).

Similarly, in her anthropological study Purity and Danger (1966), Mary Douglas explores the notion of ritual cleanliness (or purity) as well as concepts of the marginal as devices for maintaining order and control within society. According to Douglas (1966:150) any idea that threatens or disrupts that which is socially ‘acceptable’ is associated with the realms of the marginal, as “ideas about power are based on an idea of society as a series of forms contrasted with surrounding non-form” (Douglas 1966:122). Within her research Douglas (1966:4) explores the role of the body within ritualised societies, where she suggests that bodily waste or ‘impure’ dangers might be “better interpreted as symbols of the relation between parts of society, as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the larger social system” (Douglas 1966:4). I apply this theory as an interpretative framework within my dissertation,
along with Kristeva’s concept of abjection which builds on ideas developed by Douglas within a feminist framework. This is important as I investigate abjection in Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” and selected works by Diane Victor as a means of destabilising the coherent female subject constructed by patriarchal society.

Throughout my discussion, particularly in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I refer to Judith Butler’s theories on gender identity as argued in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) in order to support my analysis. In her text, Butler (1999:viii) argues against regimes which dictate “true” and “false” expressions of gender, and towards the breakdown of gender binaries. As opposed to feminist discourse, which she maintains restricts the meaning of gender by creating new idealised models of femininity, Butler (1999:viii) seeks to explore or simply pre-empt new possibilities for gender identity without dictating or determining these in any way—as these possibilities have, in the past, been limited and foreclosed owing to habitual presumptions. The author rejects the ‘subject’ of feminism and seeks to problematise the very categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’. Through her text, Butler (1999:xxi) aims to “uproot ideal morphologies of sex” by exploring the essence of gender, which she identifies as “performative” by nature.

The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures (Butler 1999:xv).

This theory will prove strategic to my argument as I explore the binary construction of masculinity and femininity in relation to the theme of ‘beauty and beastliness’, and the ways in which these states of being have been culturally constructed, visually represented and naturalised through socialisation. Furthermore, I identify a theoretical alignment between Butler’s proposal for new figurations of gender identity and those presented in *The Company of Wolves* by Angela Carter and in the works of Diane Victor.
When considering the examples of literature, film and visual art selected for this discussion, it is important to note that each makes strategic use of parody in one way or another. Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* is an animated appropriation of the classic story “Beauty and the Beast” (1757) written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” parodies the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697) by Charles Perrault, and through her works Diane Victor often references and reworks various Western narratives and mythologies. In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon (1985: 10) defines parody as a “modern form of self-reflexivity” and “the incorporation of another work as a deliberate and acknowledged construct”. Parody as a genre can thus be understood as self-reflexive in that it involves the integration of a pre-existing source into a new context, and in-so-doing alters the meaning of the original source while simultaneously prompting the receiver to question the identity of the ‘new’ product in relation the old (Hutcheon 1985:8). What this means is that the purpose of parody lies not only in characteristic imitation, but rather in the way it “establishes difference at the heart of similarity”—in other words parody produces meaning through difference (Hutcheon 1985:8). This text will serve as a key reference when analysing the way in which the examples selected make use of pre-existing narratives by re-appropriating these in order to construct new meanings and hypertextual or “trans-contextual” insights (Hutcheon 1985:11).

**Originality of the Study**

While much has been written about the representations of women in Disney films, my analysis of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* investigates the representation of the film’s protagonist in relation to the theme of ‘beauty and beastliness’. Writings I refer to throughout my analysis, in order to support and nuance my argument, include Allison Craven’s “Beauty and Belles: Discourses of Feminism and Femininity in Disneyland” (2002), Lara Sumera’s “The Mask of Beauty: Masquerade Theory in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast” (2008) and Libe Garcia Zarranz’s “Diswomen Strike Back? The Evolution of the Disney Femmes in the 1990s” (2007).
In “The Mask of Beauty: Masquerade Theory in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast”, Sumera discusses the evidence of patriarchal codes and opposing feminist characteristics in various hit Disney animations including Beauty and the Beast. Sumera (2008: 40) argues that “feminist qualities fronted by the heroines are foregrounded to mask Disney’s engrained conservatism, evidenced in its films by its stringent adherence to the patriarchal order”. Similarly, in her article “Beauty and Belles: Discourses of Feminism and Femininity in Disneyland” Craven critically analyses Disney’s Beauty and the Beast (as well as the stage production of the same name) and its representation of the heroine, Belle. Craven does so in order to argue that Disney displaces the heroic focus from Belle to the Beast and “compresses female ideology into conventions of popular romance” (Craven 2002:123). Interestingly, Craven also mentions Carter’s short-stories as examples of narratives which subvert patriarchal fairy tale narratives. However this is discussed in passing and is in no way an in-depth comparison.

In “Diswomen Strike Back? The Evolution of the Disney Femmes in the 1990s” Libe Garcia Zarranz investigates Disney’s fairy tale adaptations (or the “Disneyfication” of folklore) with particular focus on selected female characters from Disney films during the 1990s. As opposed to my study, Zarranz (2007:56) argues the heroines represented by Disney during this time-period are far more liberated and transgress “Disney’s traditional Manichean definition of femininity” therefore successfully representing contemporary notions of gender and sexuality.

The abovementioned literature is evidence that I would not be the first to write a dissertation concerning the representation of women and notions of ideal femininity, particularly in relation to patriarchal conventions, in Disney films. However, my research would be the first to examine the way in which ideal femininity is constructed in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast (1991) by means of the dichotomy between beauty and beastliness.

Literature which informs my analysis of Carter’s short story includes “Seeing is believing but touching is the truth” (1996), where Catherine Lappas (1996:115) argues that in the short story “The Company of Wolves” Carter “transforms themes of victimization and voyeurism into opportunities for female empowerment”. Lappas argues that, through Carter’s rewriting of Little Red Riding Hood, the author transforms a male initiated and possessed gaze into an
important moment where a woman begins to behave as a distinct subject exhibiting agency and identity (Lappas 1996:116). Here Lappas mentions the envisioning of a feminist gaze as one which subverts the masculine/dominance feminine/submission pattern inherent in cinema culture—furthermore the author identifies this important subversion in Carter’s “The Company of Wolves”.

Also important is “Erotic Infidelities: Angela Carter’s Wolf Trilogy” (2008), where Kimberly J. Lau explores Carter’s Wolf Trilogy (“The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice”) and discusses Carter’s parody of Charles’ Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood* within these stories. Here Lau argues that the repositioning of women’s sexual agency is not radical enough to escape the patriarchal sexual order, and that Carter’s Wolf Trilogy succeeds in doing so by making use of an ‘animal erotic’ that offers new possibilities for women’s sexuality. Another noteworthy text is “Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality” (1992), where Merja Makinen focuses her discussion on Carter’s feminist re-writing of fairy tales and her deconstruction of binary oppositions. Here Makinen (1992:3) argues Carter mocks “constrictive cultural stereotypes” through the use of violence and active eroticism as an aggressive subversive strategy within *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) including “The Company of Wolves”.


This summary demonstrates that while much has been written about the representation of women in Angela Carter’s writing, and her interrogation of the binary construction of gender, my research is unique because it compares this representation to those of Disney and Diane Victor. Furthermore, although Elaine Jordan’s text makes mention of Butler’s theories in relation to Carter’s subversive strategy, I have not encountered a text which specifically analyses “The Company of Wolves” supported by Butler’s ideas concerning gender.

Studies which inform my analyses of Victor’s works in this dissertation include those which show how Kristeva’s and Douglas’ texts may be used as an interpretative framework. This body of writing includes *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (1996), where Rosemary Betterton discusses the way in which various women artists have dealt with the complex territory of the female body within their art. In the chapter “Body Horror? Food (and sex and death) in women’s art”, Betterton begins by discussing the representation of the female body in popular culture as well as concepts of ‘the monstrous feminine’ in relation to the theory of abjection. Betterton (1996:137-138) goes on to explore abjection in visual art and states that, although considered dangerous territory by feminist critics, many women artists of the twentieth century were particularly interested in dealing with the concept of transgressive
bodily transformation within their works. This may be attributed to what Betterton (1996:138) describes as “the power of the body to subvert rationality and to evoke disorder”.

In the chapter “Bodily Issues as Subject Matter: Abjection in the Works of Penny Siopis and Berni Searle” in Expressions of the Body: Representations in African Text and Image (2009) Brenda Schmahmann analyses the work of South African artists Penny Siopis and Berni Searle in relation to Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection. These artists have been selected because they deal specifically with margins of the body in their works. Schmahmann goes on to suggest that the idea of abjection has had “validity for artists working within feminist frameworks as well as in a South African context” (Schmahmann 2009:98): not only does a representation of the abject body involve a challenge to patriarchal aesthetic conventions that inform representations of women in the West, but it also implicitly unsettled apartheid regulations where there was a “belief that people could be positioned geographically and socially according to their supposed ethnicities” and thus where “policing ‘borders, positions, rules’ was the necessary mechanism for holding such a system in place” (Schmahmann 2009:100-2). This text is relevant to my study of Victor’s works in relation to Kristeva’s theory of abjection, and will be referenced to support my analysis and argument.

Along with a survey of Victor’s works by Elizabeth Rankin in Taxi 013 Diane Victor (2008), there is a significant body of literature on Victor by Karen von Veh (2008, 2011-12, 2012). In her writing Von Veh focuses on the ways in which Victor makes reference to, and subverts the meaning of, religious iconography. Von Veh’s research has a feminist underpinning. For example, in her chapter, “Saints and Sinners: Re-Evaluating gendered power bases entrenched by religious iconography” in Taking a Hard Look: Gender and Visual Culture (2009), she discusses religious imagery as that which normalises and idealises femininity. She indicates that this can be understood as control through aspiration rather than control through fear (Von Veh in Du Preez 2009:47) which has exerted itself through the use of religious iconography. Von Veh states that, while religious iconography appears to uplift the status of women, it actually disempowers womankind by providing a set of ideals that are in fact unattainable. Thus such
imagery serves to control and regulate the behaviour of women and encourages female subservience to patriarchal hegemony (Von Veh in Du Preez 2009:48). Von Veh’s insightful research makes evident how Victor’s work can be understood in light of feminist ideas. She does not, however, focus on notions of ‘beauty and beastliness’ and my own research will thus be contributing to discourse on the artist.

In addition to Von Veh’s writings, there is an essay on gender politics in works by Victor (and Paul Emmanuel) by Pamela Allara (2012), where focus is placed on the defiance of bodily margins. Allara reveals how Victor and Emmanuel “use portraiture to personify the individual in a state of extreme vulnerability, as the categories gender and racial identity, and their established hierarchies, are in flux” (Allara 2012: 34). While related to my study in terms of this orientation, Allara’s discussion focuses on Victor’s Transcend and Lost Words series, which are comprised of drawings constituted from ash and charcoal, and where the defiance of borders and categories might be discerned in the very technique the artist uses. My exploration is not of any of the so-called ‘smoke drawings’ by Victor, and does not therefore simply repeat important work Allara has already done. And, as with Von Veh’s work on gender politics in Victor’s art, Allara’s exploration is not directed at engaging with ‘beauty and beastliness’ as a theme.

Of the literature I have investigated, the publication which remains the most akin to my dissertation is a study by Marina Warner in From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers (1994). Here Warner explores the history and context of various fairy tale types including ‘Rapunzel’, ‘Bluebeard’ and ‘Beauty and the Beast’. This publication is significant in that, according to my knowledge, it is the only text which discusses film, literature and visual art in relation to the story ‘Beauty and the Beast’. In the chapter “Go! Be a Beast: Beauty and the Beast II”, Warner discusses Disney’s cinematic retelling of ‘Beauty and the Beast’, as well as The Company of Wolves directed by Neil Jordan and written by Angela Carter. Warner also includes a discussion of a selection of artworks by Paula Rego and discusses the artist’s exploration of themes such as female sexuality and ‘beastliness’. However, while Warner does touch on
feminist issues, she does not focus her entire book specifically on the representation of women. Warner also references many examples of visual art within her book but does not include any examples of South African art.

To conclude, there is evidence of many writers who identify the importance of the representation of women in the writing of Carter and the films of Disney. There are also many who have identified a meaningful relationship between the interpretations of fairy tales in Disney films in comparison to a parody of these tales in the stories written by Carter. However, I have found no evidence of a source that discusses this relationship between the two in an in-depth manner. There is also no evidence of research that draws a relationship between the representation of women by Disney, Angela Carter and Diane Victor.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Disney’s Beauty and the Beast (1991)

To begin this chapter and my dissertation, I provide a brief history of fairy tale discourse and attempt to define the genre in order to place in context the chapters to follow—as these involve an analysis of selected films, literature and visual art which reference fairy tale narratives through parody. I then discuss the cultural significance of these narratives in relation to the representation of women and the construction of gender roles, as this contributes to an understanding of the genre as implicitly informed by patriarchal ideology.

Thereafter I briefly analyse the story “Beauty and the Beast” (1757) written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, as the story is adapted for Disney’s cinematic version but (as I will argue) also informs the film’s traditionalist ideology. Following this, I introduce my critical analysis of Beauty and the Beast (1991) by detailing an understanding of Walt Disney Pictures as a corporation and discussing its “production for profit” ethos (Zipes 1997:91). This discussion serves to establish the reasons behind Disney’s engrained conservatism, particularly in relation to its representation of women. My argument when investigating the Disney film is structured
by a materialist feminist paradigm and therefore makes strategic use of Jill Dolan’s text *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988). Furthermore Laura Mulvey’s chapter “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in her book *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989) is pertinent to my analysis, as the author theorises that all narrative cinema is constructed by the unconscious of patriarchal society.

Chapter 2: Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” (1979)

In order to contextualise Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” (1979) I begin this chapter by discussing Charles Perrault’s *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge (Little Red Riding Hood)* (1697), its history and various interpretations. I do so in order to trace the patriarchal ideology incorporated in the tale, as I argue it eventually came to embody specific sex and class biases when rewritten by Perrault. I establish my post-modernist feminist framework by then critically analysing Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood*, structured by Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) and similar ideas developed by Mary Douglas in her anthropological study *Purity and Danger* (1966). My analysis focuses specifically on patriarchal anxieties surrounding the fecund female body, a theory I utilise as an interpretative framework, as posited by Jane Ussher in her book *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body* (2006). This serves to inform my extensive analysis of Carter’s short-story which I will argue subverts Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood*, partly through the use of these themes: female fecundity and the abject.

I begin my study of Carter’s short-story by discussing her ideas concerning pornography, the erotic and female sexuality as a means of interrogating conventional gender constructs, in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979). I do so in order to trace this strategy in “The Company of Wolves” which forms part of her collection of short-stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979).

When critically analysing Carter’s short-story I refer to Neil Jordan’s cinematic retelling wherever I find the visual discourse supports my argument. However my discussion is for the most part a textual analysis aimed at investigating Carter’s literary use of the theme of ‘beauty
and beastliness’ in relation to her representation of the female protagonist, in order to investigate whether within this short-story she perpetuates or challenges traditionalist understandings of femininity. This is informed in places by Judith Butler’s ideas concerning gender as performative and mimetic as posited in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999).

I move on to discuss Jordan’s *The Company of Wolves* (1984) independently, where, although the film introduces content which deviates from Carter’s short-story, I focus on the male director’s representation of the protagonist (Rosaleen) at the conclusion of the film as one example which furthers Carter’s feminist agenda. Here again my argument is supported by Laura Mulvey’s ideas regarding the representation of women in film. My discussion of Jordan’s film further supports a reading of the ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ tale in relation using Kristeva’s concept of abjection as well as Ussher’s notions of fecundity as well as the monstrous feminine as interpretive frameworks.

**Chapter 3: Beauty and Beastliness in selected works by Diane Victor**

The first part of this chapter focuses on gender as masquerade, as theorised by Butler. I will argue this notion is evident in the artworks *XXX* (2002) and *Untitled (“City of Pricks”)* (1985), and I will also explore how Victor’s use of abjection in these works facilitates an alternative understanding of female identity.

I move on to investigate how Victor’s use of ‘beauty and beastliness’ extends to her technical strategy and aligns with her conceptual intentions. I look specifically at *In Sheep’s Clothing* (2001) as one such example which incorporates ‘beauty and beastliness’ as both content and method. Lastly I discuss Victor’s extensive use of parody as a means of socio-political commentary. Here I look at *Diana and Actaeon* (2004) and *Goldilocks* (2004) from Victor’s *Of Man and Beast* series as two examples of this method, furthermore explicating why parody proves an appropriate and effective strategy for Victor when critiquing traditionalist notions of femininity. Linda Hutcheon’s ideas in *A Theory of Parody* (1985) underpin and frame my discussion here.
The chapter as a whole is informed by interviews I conducted with Victor in Johannesburg and Pretoria respectively, in order to improve my understanding of those works selected for this dissertation (particularly where my questions were not addressed in the available literature).

Conclusion:

In the conclusion I detail the findings of the research and point to their importance, with focus on the role of cultural products in the formation of gender identity, and the significance of ‘beauty and beastliness’ as a conceptual theme in relation to this.

Far more may be discernable in [...] stories than is brought out by the analyses of them, for stories must be as complex as the minds which produce them, but while there may be disagreement as to what stories mean, there must be agreement as to the fact that they do mean. There is deliberate intention in every minor aspect of a story and much of this intention is to create disguises [...] the disguises are essential for the survival of stories; without disguises they could not be enjoyed, and if they were not enjoyed, they would cease to exist (Wilson 1976:52).

Introduction

Fairy tales have predominantly been considered the territory of children based on their seemingly meaningless, naïve and imaginative content. But in fact these stories are not merely products of fantastical and wishful thinking: they are a major platform through which writers record and respond to the socio-political landscapes of their times (Albers 2008:192). Stories, like artworks and film, have the power to “remake the world in the image of desire” (Warner 1994b:XII) and are important cultural products which provide rich content in which to investigate social values and attitudes.

In 1991 Walt Disney Pictures released Beauty and the Beast, its thirtieth animated motion picture in the Walt Disney Classics Series. The film was directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise and is based on the classic fairy tale “La Belle et la bête” (“Beauty and the Beast”) (1757) written by Madame Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. Following its release the animation was a significant success and quickly achieved worldwide acclaim. According to the film’s directors Trousdale and Wise (1991) “it was a landmark film [...] [it] validated animation as an art form”.

As mentioned in the Introduction, a number of writers have identified the importance of investigating representations of women in Disney films. While some, like Libe Garcia Zarranz in her article “Diswomen Strike Back? The Evolution of the Disney Femmes in the 1990s” (2007),
may argue that Disney’s contemporary portrayal of its heroines renegotiates its traditionalist ideals of the past, the vast majority of writers working within a feminist framework find these representations explicitly communicate conservative patriarchal codes. I share the orientation of the latter commentators but, as indicated in the Introduction to this study, focus more specifically on the dichotomy between ‘beauty and beastliness’ than has hitherto been offered.

To begin, a brief history of fairy tales is discussed in order to place in context the various examples of film, literature and visual art to be explored throughout this dissertation—examples which either lie comfortably within the fairy tale genre or find themselves embodying this tradition in one way or another. I move on to define the fairy tale and what constitutes a fairy tale narrative, and attempt to unearth the significance of these tales in order to account for their evident longevity. In the process I discuss the construction of gender roles and stereotypes within these narratives, with particular focus on the traditional role of female characters. Thereafter I undertake an analysis of the story “Beauty and the Beast” (1757) written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, a significant predecessor to Disney’s cinematic version. This analysis is imperative as it serves to contextualise Disney’s Beauty and the Beast (1991) and trace the history of certain traditionalist notions of femininity which are, as I will argue, incorporated into the film. I introduce my analysis of Beauty and the Beast (1991) by providing an understanding of Walt Disney Pictures as the massive multi-billion-dollar corporation that it is today based on its production of traditionalist storylines, and then begin my investigation of the film directed by Trousdale and Wise (Zipes 1997:91).

A History of Fairy Tales

Jack Zipes, in When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition (1999:2-17) provides a useful overview of the history of fairy tales, and one which is immediately relevant to my discussion here. He observes that it is very difficult to ascertain from when and where fairy tales originate, as the history of these narratives is complex. However it is certain that fairy tales date back hundreds and even thousands of years, and are rooted in folklore and oral

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3 Unless otherwise indicated, commentary in this section of the chapter is indebted to Zipes’ study.
tradition. Oral tradition, or the act of storytelling, predates written culture and therefore eludes recorded history (Jones 1995:1). Fairy tales, then, are arguably as old as storytelling itself and an accurate chronology of these tales is virtually impossible to establish. According to Zipes (1999:2), the function of early oral tales was closely linked to “the rituals, customs, and beliefs of tribes, communities, and trades”. These stories were shared as a means of cultural learning, and served not only to amuse but also instruct, warn and initiate. Interestingly, these early tales and even the first literary fairy tales were not created for the amusement of children but rather for an adult audience.

The first well-known major literary fairy tale was Apuleius’s “Psyche and Cupid”, which was written in Latin in the second century. This story and various other Latin tales which appeared after it were largely aimed at the male sex and, Zipes (1999:8) suggests, served to encourage the morals and ethics necessary to maintain patriarchal power at the time. Later, in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the development of printing technology, more and more oral tales were recorded and distributed in written form. Although these written stories were largely based on those from oral tradition, they were also altered by various writers in order to appeal to the reading public at the time, predominantly comprising upper-class males. These written stories with their numerous adaptations of characters, motifs and plots formed the beginnings of the literary fairy-tale genre that we encounter today. For example, in Italy between 1550 and 1553 Giovan Francesco Straparola published Le Piacevoli Notti (The Pleasant Nights). This collection of tales was the first to appeal to a mixed audience of both men and women, which included the tale “Constantino” a forerunner of the popular “Puss in Boots”. So it is in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the literary fairy tale thrived, in an era of great cultural development.

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4 While majority of the research available on the history of the fairy tale argue its origins lie in folklore, it is important to note that certain texts reject this theory. For example, Ruth Bottigheimer (2009) in her book Fairy Tales: A New History argues against the existence of fairy tales in oral form. She (Bottigheimer 2009:3-8) opposes the notion that fairy tales emerged from an oral fairy tale tradition, arguing that the folk tale and the fairy tale are in fact significantly different from one another. Bottigheimer (2009:75-115) bases her theory on publishing history and credits sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century Italian writers Giovan Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile with the invention of fairy tale tradition.
From Italy these stories were disseminated throughout Europe both orally and via print, later flourishing in France between 1690 and 1714. During this period emerged two of the most significant and well-known authors of the classic fairy tale, Charles Perrault and Mme. Marie Catherine D’Aulnoy. Perrault was the first to publish the now famous and canonical “Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Sleeping Beauty” and “Blue Beard” in his collection *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697). Thereafter the fairy tale became increasingly popular and acceptable as a means of amusement; in fact the very term *conte de feé* (fairy tale) was coined by French writers during this time. However only after around 1730 did it become common to write and publish tales specifically for children, and consequently various French fairy tales written after this time had a distinctly didactic quality. This is most notable in the writings of Le Prince de Beaumont, specifically in her collection *Magasins des Enfants* (1757) which includes “Beauty and the Beast”. From here storytelling became an integral part of the civilizing process for children in upper-class and aristocratic homes, first through governesses and then later through mothers reading bedtime stories. A peak in the popularity of the genre came about with the publication of Charles Mayer’s *Le cabinet des Feés* (1785-1789), which contained forty-one volumes of French fairy tales most of which were written in the previous one hundred years. As a result, a fairy tale discourse became firmly established in the Western tradition. The French fairy tale would significantly influence the German classicists and Romantics (as well as the famous Brothers Grimm) and this growth of the genre in Germany was strategic in the overall development of the genre in the West.

**Defining the Fairy Tale**

In order to better understand folk tradition and attempt to define the fairy tale, it is necessary to expand on the various types of folk narrative. Folklorists have recognized three major forms of folk narrative, namely myth, legend and folktale (Jones 1995:8). According to Jones (1995:8) fairy tales can be classified as one kind of folktale, along with fables, jokes and novellas. These various types of narratives have been classified under one category (the folktale) based on their
purpose to entertain by making use of common or ordinary\(^5\) people as protagonists, in order to appeal to an audience who will then naturally relate to the range of human emotions presented (Jones 1995:8). What sets the fairy tale apart from other kinds of folktales is its definition as a magical tale, as opposed to a strictly didactic, humorous or romantic narrative (Jones 1995:8). This means that while fairy tales may make use of ordinary people within their narratives, their inclusion of magical or marvelous events is key (Jones 1995:9). Not surprisingly then fairy tales are also referred to as wonder tales, as the inclusion of fairies is not essential to the definition of this genre but rather its use of fantasy in order to captivate the reader and/or audience. The realm of fairy tale provides the promise of endless possibility; an opportunity to live vicariously through the adventures of the hero/heroine, suspend disbelief and enter a landscape of possibility where one is capable of escaping the boundaries and predictability of everyday life.

But fairy tales can also be defined as a genre based on their adherence to some generic characteristics. The first of these, as identified by various scholars including Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), is the confrontation of a problem by the undertaking of a quest or journey by the protagonist (Jones 1995:14). Undoubtedly this characteristic appears rather vague and general on its own, so it is also critical to the fairy tale genre that the quest undertaken by the protagonist is of a magical nature or involves the realm of magic in some way. Thirdly, fairy tale narratives consistently conclude with the successful resolution of a problem or, in other words, a happy ending (Jones 1995:17). This is one of the more significant characteristics of fairy tales as it is linked to their utopian and idealistic nature as a genre. While these characteristics prove helpful in attempting to define what constitutes a typical fairy tale narrative, it is also important to consider the transformation of the fairy tale genre in a contemporary context, particularly evident in the 20\(^{th}\) century. For example Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) draws on traditional fairy-tale narratives but reworks these into feminist or revisionist tales which subvert inherited notions of femininity.

This example demonstrates that although the fairy tale can be loosely defined, their classification is not static but can be challenged and redefined within any given epoch (Zipes

\(^5\) The term “ordinary” in this context refers to a common or realistic human character as opposed to a divine, immortal or godlike protagonist.
Ultimately the fairy tale can be best understood as a genre which embodies the realm of imagination and which has the capacity to construct wondrous alternatives to various social, political and cultural realities.

The Cultural Significance of Fairy Tales and the Representation of Women

Fairy tales are informed by culture and are essentially cultural by nature. Although over time various tale types\(^6\) have spread throughout the world, specific tales do not commonly cross major cultural boundaries (Jones 1995:29). This is because while the issues these tales address may be universal, the form they take and their respective symbols are culturally determined—for example traditional African stories are markedly different to those originating from Europe (Jones 1995:29). However, between like cultures fairy tales are seen to remain relatively stable and consistent over time which may point to their meaning and apparent longevity.\(^7\)

In *Traditional Romance and Tale*, Anne Wilson (1976:5) indicates that the significance we attach to stories can be attributed to their personal and emotional relevance. This relevance emerges from various universal human emotions such as love, hate, fear and desire which are embodied within all narratives. Similarly it was psychotherapist Carl Jung who hypothesised that fairy tales in particular have universal appeal because they address “fundamental questions of human existence” (Jones 1995:29). Jones (1995:19) regards fairy tales as functional texts and he identifies three major issues they address: the psychology of the individual, the sociology of the community and the cosmology of the universe. As already mentioned, fairy tales engage with the psychology of the individual by addressing basic human emotions and experiences. They reflect the sociology of the community by incorporating and exemplifying various social values which include culturally appropriate roles and behaviours (Jones 1995:20). They comprise

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\(^6\) According to Jones (1995:3) a fairy tale can be traced back to its oral or literary predecessors by means of identifying its general structure or ‘tale type’. Scholars define a specific story as belonging to (for example) the “Snow White” group by isolating its basic plot outline, as this is seen to remain constant over time and in various versions. A tale cannot be defined by its individual motifs (characters, settings and objects) because these may alter and even reappear in numerous different tales over time.

\(^7\) As previously mentioned, Bottigheimer supports a book-based history of fairy tales as opposed to an oral history. Her theory challenges prevailing theories around the meaning of fairy tales, for if fairy tales were in fact disseminated strictly by print, rather than orally, then their psychological significance is debatable (Bottigheimer 2009:107).
spiritual properties by indicating the existence of supernatural forces or divine law\(^8\) and, in-so-doing, address the cosmology of the universe (Jones 1995:20).

Readers are also reassured by the predictability and consistency of fairy tale narratives. They appreciate and identify with stories on a much deeper subconscious level and find satisfaction in the formulae of the narrative, the repetition of themes and the recurring archetypal characters and imagery with which they are presented (Wilson 1976:4). These factors culminate to create an experience that is dynamic, interactive and undeniably meaningful for both storyteller/writer and listener/reader.

Fairy tales are created to serve more than just a recreational purpose; whether consciously or subconsciously, they are structured texts which communicate significant messages. As research by Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz (2003:714) shows, children’s literature “contains explicit and implicit messages about the dominant power structures in society, especially those concerning gender”. These messages are communicated in a number of ways which include the author’s careful selection of symbols, settings, characters, emphases and omissions (Albers 2008:192). All these factors culminate to create a cultural product that is inseparable from the context in which it is produced.

It is through such stories that children develop a specific set of assumptions about society (Albers 2008:165). Fantasy is a particularly potent vessel for the transmission of such formative messages as it plays a dominant role in the way children experience the world around them. Fantasy plays a much larger role in the world of a child than mere entertainment, it is largely psychological. Hence children’s literature has the capacity to play a major part in the way children learn concepts of culture and gender, and it appears to contribute to the understanding of these concepts by providing a set of codes (Albers 2008:189). This means that through the imagery and narratives presented by fairy tales, children may begin to classify their world and the people around them according to a specific set of concepts, behaviours and physical characteristics (Albers 2008:189). The way in which children classify the world around

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\(^8\) This divine law is characteristically Christian especially in fairy tales originating from Europe (Jones 1995:20).
them therefore depends on the type of codes to which they are exposed during their formative years.

The influence of fairy tales on young children is important when considering the part they may play in the construction of gender and gender roles. According to Marina Warner (1994b:XIX) the fairy tale reflects lived experience “with a slant towards the tribulations of women”. This is not only because women have long been associated with the territory of fairy tale based on its affiliation with children and the domestic realm, it is also due to the way in which the trials of women are explored and portrayed through fairy tale narratives.

Fairy tale narratives embody a definite tradition with regards to the representation of women, and this tradition can be traced back to the origins of the literary fairy tale when oral fairy tales were transcribed, appropriated and disseminated by upper-class males (Zipes 1999:7). What is clear is that these literary tales were initially adaptations made by men, and so began to illustrate and exemplify patriarchal ideology. This is evident in the representation of female characters in most early fairy tales, which remain popular in a contemporary context. Good female characters are consistently portrayed as passive, disempowered and dependant on external forces as opposed to self-initiative. Powerful and rebellious female characters are typically evil, unattractive, old or non-human (for example evil queens, fairy godmothers and witches). By presenting a heroine that embodies a selection of ‘favourable’ female traits, fairy tales encourage identification with these characteristics and vilify other, less favourable, female attributes. Rebellious and disobedient female characters are often portrayed as physically repulsive and are punished in a variety of different ways; invariably they are prevented from attaining a ‘happy ending’. Fairy tale narratives are also overtly romantic and can be perceived as transmitters of romantic myths (Rowe 1979:239) which encourage women to aspire to a set of seemingly predestined roles. These roles are tied to institutions such as motherhood and marriage and are presented as rewards for ‘well-behaved’ women. What results is a process of female acculturation wherein idealised notions of femininity and unrealistic romantic expectations are exalted and presented as naturalised.
De Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” (1757)

In 1757 the tale “La Belle et la bête” (“Beauty and the Beast”) was written by French governess Madame Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont and published in her book *Le Magasin des Enfans*. Although the tale existed in various other forms long before this, it is De Beaumont’s version that has become canonical and remains the most well-known to date (Warner 1994b:292). When considering the context in which it was written, De Beaumont’s tale was conceived to serve a distinct pedagogical purpose: to prepare and condition young girls for wifely duties. As a result the representation of the female protagonist in this tale is loaded with eighteenth-century ideals concerning the nature and behaviour of women, which I discuss in detail in the analysis to follow.

In France, the origins of the literary fairy tale can be traced to the conversations and oral games developed in the salons of the 1630s by aristocratic Parisian women (Zipes 1999:31). These women, who were denied access to educational institutions, arranged such gatherings in their homes as a means of discussing intellectual topics such as art and literature in order to distinguish themselves from the lower classes of French society (Zipes 1999:31). Towards the middle of the seventeenth century these groups of women began inventing games which involved the challenge of creating unique and compelling narratives based on folk tales they had been exposed to since childhood (Zipes 1999:32). Gradually the subject matter of such games and conversations began making its way into literary form and by the 1690s established the beginnings of the literary fairy tale or *conte de fée* (Zipes 1999:32-33). According to Zipes (1999:38) the French fairy tale can be distinguished by three waves or periods, namely the Salon Fairy Tale (1690–1703), the Oriental Fairy Tale (1704–1720) and the Comic and Conventional Fairy Tale (1721–1789). Although these waves often overlap it is useful to identify the origins and influences within each wave in order to better contextualise the tales and symbols emerging from each period respectively (Zipes 1999:38).
It is during the Comic and Conventional Fairy Tale period that De Beaumont published her “Beauty and the Beast” based on earlier versions of the tale,9 most notably one written and published by Mme. de Villeneuve seventeen years earlier in 1740 (Warner 1994b:290). It was during this era that many of the fairy tale narratives from the salon tradition were being revisited but also parodied and conventionalised in a process of socialisation—in order to convey morality, manners and social norms (Zipes 1999:45). Hence De Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” reworks much of the grotesque, macabre and sadomasochistic elements evident in earlier forms of the tale. Le Magasin des Enfants served the function of an educational textbook for French girls under the tuition of governesses (Swahn 1989:16) and it was De Beaumont, being a governess herself, who pioneered the use of the fairy tale as didactic children’s literature (Warner 1994b:297). Accordingly “Beauty and the Beast” conveys an overtly moralistic message concerning marriage, domesticity and ‘proper behaviour’ for young French women.

At the start of the tale we read that a merchant has three daughters. The youngest, being the most beautiful, is given the name Beauty and it is significant that De Beaumont (1989:137) writes “[t]he youngest, as she was handsomer, was also better than her sisters” as this cements the notion of beauty as superior and naturally associated with goodness. While Beauty’s sisters spend their time socialising and pursuing rich men, Beauty enjoys reading books and shows no interest in marrying. Rather than implying Beauty’s autonomy and intelligence, these characteristics communicate the importance of being well-read and chaste in the context of eighteenth-century France. Women’s capacity to manage and maintain the domestic sphere was also considered favourably during this era, and similarly Beauty practices this trait as every morning she “made haste to have the house clean and dinner ready for the family” (De Beaumont 1989:138). In all ways Beauty represents the ideal French woman within an eighteenth-century context, apparent throughout the story where she is consistently described as industrious, patient and humble.

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9 All ‘Beauty and the Beast’ tales find their origins in Apuleius’s “Psyche and Cupid” written in the second century.
Following the loss of her father’s wealth, Beauty resolves to follow him and live in his small country house to work for their living. Despite the many marriage proposals she receives, Beauty refuses as she “could not think of leaving her poor father in his misfortunes, but was determined to go along with him into the country to comfort and attend him” (De Beaumont 1989:138). Later in the tale, her father returns home from his trip and explains that he should give his life to the Beast as punishment for picking roses from his garden. On hearing this Beauty decides she will give her own life to save her father’s and says “since the monster will accept one of his daughters, I will deliver myself up to all his fury, and I am very happy in thinking that my death will save my father’s life and be a proof of my tender love for him” (De Beaumont 1989:140-141). Beauty’s decisions, firstly to stay with her father, secondly to serve him and finally to sacrifice her life for his, collectively communicate a female subservience to patriarchal needs of a paternal kind (Rowe 1979:244) almost in preparation for the subservience she will be required to practice in marriage. Throughout the tale, Beauty’s choices remained centred on these two patriarchal forces, that of her father and that of her suitor.

Once Beauty is taken captive by the Beast she begins to discover he is in fact good-natured and kind, although she is repulsed and often frightened by his appearance. But it is only later on in the tale that she realises her love for him and, with this realisation, she returns to his castle and finds him dying of a broken heart.10 Once Beauty agrees to marry Beast he is transformed into a charming prince and the protagonist is rewarded for her passivity, patience and compassion. De Beaumont’s story also tells of Beauty fetching water from the canal, and pouring this over the Beast’s head before professing her love for him. This has strong connotations of the Christian baptism, as the water is a type of cleansing from which the Beast emerges transformed and reformed, and it is just one example of the overtly Christian values embodied within the tale. The tale in its entirety expresses pious morality which centres on virtue and the sanctimony of marriage.

10 “No, dear Beast, said Beauty, you must not die; live to be my husband; from this moment I give you my hand, and swear to be none but yours” (De Beaumont 1989:146).
Tales such as “Beauty and the Beast”, which centre on the theme of animal grooms or monstrous spouses, arguably served to prepare young women for the challenging and often frightening territory of marriage at a time when women had little control over their own lives. Within these narratives an involuntary marriage or abhorrent husband is represented as a literal monster whose form and nature can only be altered by means of female virtue. As Karen Rowe (1979:245) argues, “Beast’s transformation rewards Beauty for embracing traditional female virtues. She has obligingly reformed sexual reluctance into self-sacrifice to redeem Beast from death. She trades her independent selfhood for subordination”. The story conditions young women to resolve marital challenges by means of obedience to the patriarchal status quo, for within the story a monstrous form becomes a test and metamorphoses can only come about once the female protagonist overcomes her initial aversions. Beauty ultimately displays little to no autonomy as the fate of the monster rests on her willingness to surrender to his needs. While this may seem contradictory (how can Beauty hold all the power and yet remain powerless?) the choices of the female protagonist are in fact predetermined and governed by fairy-tale tradition. In order to achieve an inevitable happy ending she must accept and love the Beast in his monstrous form.

[The tales in the Beauty and the Beast group [...] number among the most eloquent testaments to women’s struggles, against marriage, and towards a definition of the place of sexuality in love. The enchantments and disenchantments of the Beast have been a rich resource in stories women have made up, among themselves, to help, to teach, to warn (Warner 1994b:318).

Similarly, based on Marina Warner’s statement above, I would argue that sexuality in De Beaumont’s tale is symbolised by a monstrous and animalistic beast intended to provoke fear in young female readers. Sexuality in this instance is represented as a concept which is external and ‘other’ to young women or femininity as a whole. If viewed this way then the tale encourages women in eighteenth-century France to reject carnal desires until such time as these desires can be tamed and civilised through the sanctimony of marriage. As a result, sex and sexual desire is also gendered within “Beauty and the Beast” as distinctly masculine in nature.
In conclusion, De Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” communicates a number of traditionalist notions of femininity which effectively embody the historical and cultural context in which the tale was written. Within a contemporary context these notions are arguably outdated and irrelevant yet they remain prevalent particularly where classic fairy tales are referenced in mass media.

**Disney’s Beauty and the Beast (1991): A Critical Analysis**

During the early 1920s the Walt Disney Company was founded by brothers Walt Disney and Roy Disney as the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio. What began as a small entrepreneurial establishment soon grew into one of the most well-known and popular production companies in the United States of America and later other countries (Wasko 2001:15). The instantaneous success of the company began with the production of its Mickey Mouse cartoons in the 1920s, and by the 1930s the image of Mickey Mouse had become a global icon (Wasko 2001:15). During the 1930s filmmakers began realising the rich material of fairy tales at a time of great economic and social depression for most of the world (Zipes 1997:ii). Walt Disney’s priority was always that of attracting audiences and it was his intention, through his films, to ‘civilise’ children during uncivilised times and offer a sense of hope and an escape from the harsh social landscape of America at the time (due to the Great Depression) (Zipes 1997:82). Hence fairy tales were the ideal material for Disney animations, being canonical, utopian and well-known narratives accepted by all audiences. It was in 1937 that Walt Disney Productions released its first full-length animated feature film in colour, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* based on the story “Schneewittchen” (“Snow White”) (1854) by the Brothers Grimm. The film was revolutionary in terms of artistic and technical innovation as Walt Disney had succeeded in bringing together some of the most exceptional animators, musicians, technicians, artists and writers in order to produce the animation (Zipes 1997:82). Since the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* Disney has continued to produce feature-length fairy-tale films that have set the standard for all filmmakers working within the genre (Zipes 1997:89).

Today the Walt Disney Company is a massive multi-billion dollar corporation and the second largest broadcasting company in the world, unequivocally dominating children’s entertainment
worldwide. The mass-media corporation is perhaps one of the most well-known and recognised brands globally and has expanded over eighty-five years to the extent that its business includes the production of films, home entertainment, television production, music products, theatrical productions, consumer products, theme parks and resorts as well as television, radio and cable broadcasting (Wasko 2001:19-24).

When critically analysing Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* it is crucial to acknowledge that the representations of women evident in this film are potentially informed by various underlying factors, some of which are more strategic and intentional than others. In his book *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* Jack Zipes (1997:91) states that:

[T]he filmmakers’ creative intentions are governed by a structural network of production for profit to which they appeal and against which they rebel, and this network is built into the very plots and narratives of the fairy-tale films.

This statement proves relevant when analysing the motivation behind the representation of, in particular, Disney’s female protagonists. As previously discussed, The Walt Disney Company must essentially be considered both as a corporation and as a brand. Its success lies in its ability to significantly influence children (and adults) to the extent that it controls the values, attitudes and tastes of the consumer. This is evident in the vast and omnipresent collection of branded or signature merchandise such as toys, clothes, books, accessories and décor which are distributed throughout the world and then purchased by consumers following the release of any given Disney film. When considering the massive impact a Disney film has on a worldwide audience and their consumerist desires it would be naïve to disregard this aspect as one which implicitly informs a Disney filmmaker’s decisions. In order for any film to achieve popular success it must appeal to the masses not only through its ability to entertain, which is often fleeting and impermanent, but also in its ability to influence the psyche of the viewer. By impacting the viewer personally the movie exerts a more powerful hold on its audiences that remains long after the actual duration of the film has run its course. The success of Disney is then not only a
result of its technical and artistic brilliance but equally what the company as a brand has come
to represent or its trademark values.\textsuperscript{11}

In this way Disney not only plays a large role in constructing various ideals (particularly
surrounding femininity) but it also perpetuates these ideals in the name of capitalism.\textsuperscript{12}
Because a specific set of ideals has been established as acceptable and desirable by children
and adults alike, by consistently creating and presenting the kind of imagery that embodies
these ideals, Disney succeeds in eternally satisfying the tastes of its viewers and in the process
gains brand loyalty. This is relevant in relation to my analysis of \textit{Beauty and the Beast} as the film
was Walt Disney Pictures’ thirtieth release in the Walt Disney Classics Series and was inevitably
preceded by an established Disney tradition. According to Zipes (1997:93) all Disney films are
alike in that they each embody characteristics that maintain the Disney tradition or standard.
Firstly, each Disney film is a musical and is structured in order to incorporate catchy lyrics and
tunes that engage the viewer (Zipes 1997:93). The basic plot of each film is prescribed and
predictable, beginning with a heroine in need of rescue and concluding with happiness in the
form of heterosexual marriage (Zipes 1997:93). Characters remain one-dimensional and
develop minimally throughout the plot in order to be recognisable as archetypes or stereotypes
(Zipes 1997:93). Because most Disney films are based on classic fairy tales, incidental characters
(which usually take the form of animals) and their comical activities play a role in refreshing
what is otherwise a very basic and recognisable plot (Zipes 1997:93). Disney films also reinforce
nostalgia for childhood by embodying a naïve and Manichean approach to the world, where
good consistently overcomes evil and both forces manifest in recognisable physical forms (Zipes
1997:93). More importantly this tradition involves a specific approach to the representation of
female protagonists, or princesses, which will be discussed in detail in my analysis of \textit{Beauty and
the Beast}.

\textsuperscript{11} These values or associations include ‘hope’, ‘freedom’, ‘love’, ‘family’, ‘imagination’, ‘childhood’, ‘magic’, ‘justice’
and ‘the power of good over evil’—values which constitute a greater American ideology.
\textsuperscript{12} In his chapter “Walt Disney’s Civilizing Mission: From Revolution to Restoration” Jack Zipes (2006:210–211)
states that “Disney came to represent the essence of American ideology—its populism, Puritanism, elitism, and
consumerism—and he [Walt Disney] felt that these values should be spread throughout the world by all his
products”.
With this in mind, Disney’s traditionalist approach to the representation of women in its animated films can be understood as a strategic decision which is predominantly concerned with both the social and financial success of the motion picture. This success relies on the production team of any Disney film ensuring that the film remains relevant and responsive to the societal context in which it is created yet still maintains its Disney iconicity. In this way much of the content evident in Disney films reflects established social norms and can be considered conservative, predictable and idealistic in nature. For as Zipes (1997:92) states, “all of Disney Studios fairy-tale films focus on synchronization, one-dimensionality, and uniformity for the purpose of maintaining the Disney brand name as champion of entertainment”. When analysing the representation of the female protagonist in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast the abovementioned factors, and the extent to which these factors may inform this representation, must be considered.

In her book The Feminist Spectator as Critic, Jill Dolan (1988:41) argues that “all representation is inherently ideological”. Dolan (1988:1) maintains that all representation, particularly in the form of cultural products, is created in order to appeal to the ideal spectator who is representative of the dominant culture and the ideology it embodies. This implies that cultural products implicitly reflect and perpetuate the dominant culture’s ideology which results in specific cultural conditioning (Dolan 1988:1-2). In line with this theory, Dolan identifies the ideal spectator as white, upper-class and male, and one who embodies the patriarchal status quo. Consequently the representation of women is consistently rooted in patriarchal ideology which prioritises male desire and in-so-doing rejects female subjectivity (Dolan 1988:57). Similarly, in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, her well-known essay first published in 1975, Laura Mulvey (1989:14) argues that all film form is structured by the unconscious of patriarchal society. Mulvey (1989:14) describes film as simultaneously revealing and playing on the notion of sexual difference, which she argues governs images and the very act of (and

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13 This includes, but is not limited to, theatre, film, dance and visual art.
14 Ideology can best be understood as a set of ideas or ideals, either of an individual or shared by a cultural or political group. Materialist feminists Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (Dolan 1988:16) define ideology as “a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourse, images, myths) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live”.

pleasure in) looking. This theory informs her description of woman as bearer, rather than maker, of meaning (Mulvey 1989:15).

Dolan’s and Mulvey’s theories are relevant to my analysis of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* as I explore the ways in which patriarchal ideology informs the representation of the female protagonist Belle in relation to her male counterpart, the Beast. As Libe García Zarranz (2007:55) states:

By developing an appealing cinematic language of fantasy, Disney’s fairy tales often manage to conceal a suspicious ideology concerning sexual, race and class politics. In this respect the construction of Disney’s heroines has become a controversial site for discussion in terms of stereotyped femininity and sexuality following the demands of a pervasive patriarchal system.

![Figure 1.1](image.png)

*Beauty and the Beast* begins with a narration of the tale aided by illustrations rendered in the style of stained-glass windows. This, directors Trousdale and Wise (1991) explain, is a reworking of the traditional Disney storybook opening and serves to provide the viewer with an understanding of how the Beast came to take this form. What this also achieves is a shift in ‘voice’ from what was originally a tale which embodied a feminine perspective (Beauty’s) to one that encourages identification with the Beast. According to the film, the Beast was once a spoiled and selfish Prince who was tricked by an enchantress and transformed into a monstrous beast as punishment for his unkindness. Here, already, the film embodies and

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15 By destabilising her physicality the enchantress appears to the Prince in the form of an old beggar woman in order to teach him of the misleading nature of appearances.

16 “Once Upon A Time, in a Faraway Land, a young Prince lived in a shining castle. Although he had everything his heart desired the Prince was spoiled, selfish and unkind. But then, one winter’s night, an old beggar woman came to the castle and offered him a single rose in return for shelter from the bitter cold. Repulsed by her haggard appearance, the Prince sneered at the gift and turned the old woman away. But she warned him not to be deceived by appearances, for beauty is found within. And when he dismissed her again, the old woman’s ugliness melted away to reveal a beautiful enchantress. The Prince tried to apologise but it was too late, for she had seen that there was no love in his heart, and as punishment she transformed him into a hideous beast and placed a powerful spell on the castle and all who lived there. Ashamed of his monstrous form, the Beast concealed himself inside his castle, with a magic mirror as his only window to the outside world. The rose she had offered was truly
expresses various patriarchal values concerning gender,¹⁷ power and beauty. It is significant that in the form of an old beggar woman the enchantress is sneered at and rejected by the Prince (Figures 1.1−1.2) and it is only once the haggard woman transforms back into a beautiful enchantress that she possesses power over him, and he is portrayed kneeling at her feet begging for forgiveness (Figures 1.3−1.4). This is largely representative of power structures within society concerning women, where young beautiful women are considered desirable and subsequently far more powerful than those that are older and deemed unattractive. Although the Prince is punished for rejecting the beggar woman and behaving unkindly, he is punished by a beautiful enchantress and not an old or ordinary one. This conveys that patriarchal ideology associates beauty with power and female ugliness with shame or rejection, further emphasised by the closing question of the scene “for who could ever learn to love a beast?”

¹⁷ “Sex is biological, based in genital differences between males and females. Gender, on the other hand, is a fashioning of maleness and femaleness into the cultural categories of masculinity and femininity. These adjectives describe cultural attributes that determine social roles. Sex is empirical, but gender is an interpretation that can only take place within a cultural space” (Dolan 1988:6).
As previously mentioned, Belle’s character in *Beauty and the Beast* is preceded by a distinct Disney tradition regarding the representation of women (or princesses). Elizabeth Bell
(1995:111) says "the Disney apparatus buys into and then sells the twofold fantasy of little girls who want to grow up to be princesses". Disney’s princesses have been separated into “waves” by numerous scholars, with first-wave princesses being those from the earlier films created under Walt Disney (Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty) and second-wave princesses being those from later films such as The Little Mermaid (1989), Beauty and the Beast (1991), Aladdin (1992), Pocahontas (1995) and Mulan (1998) (Sumera 2008:42). What divides these two waves of Disney princesses is not only the respective eras in which they were created but more so the approach of the Disney team in constructing their characters. Second-wave princesses such as Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas and Mulan display far more rebellious characteristics than those of the first-wave princesses such as Snow White, Cinderella and Aurora. This progression could likely be attributed to the rise of Third Wave Feminism in the early 1990s. For example, Ariel is shown to consistently defy her father (patriarchal control) in order to explore and enrich her knowledge of the human world. Similarly, Pocahontas does not wish to marry a man who will build her a stable home and offer her a predictable life but rather craves freedom and adventure; Mulan runs away from home so she can save her father by taking his place and fighting in the war. However, despite the progressive aspirations of these female protagonists, each of these films concludes with the heroine attaining happiness in the form of romance and marriage. Ultimately each princess falls into the same Disney princess prototype in order to appeal to the masses and maintain the values that Walt Disney sought to advocate throughout his career (Sumera 2008:41). This demonstrates how “the power of the Disney Princesses looms large over the princess narrative—even to the point that Disney's own efforts to conform to a seemingly more progressive and feminist-friendly audience somehow fail” (Whelan 2012:32).

Disney’s attempt to integrate feminist discourse in order to appeal to a society increasingly concerned with contemporary issues is evident throughout Beauty and the Beast. For as Marina

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18 Third-wave princesses may include those from more recent Disney films such as The Princess and the Frog (2009), Tangled (2010), Brave (2012) and Frozen (2013). This is my own assessment and not supported by any specific scholar or text.
Warner (1994b:313) notes, “this fairytale film is more vividly aware of contemporary sexual politics than any made before”.


For example, at the start of the film, Belle walks through town and sings of the restlessness she feels living in a predictable small village. From lyrics such as “every morning just the same” and “there must be more than this provincial life” we find Belle is not like the other villagers because she reads and craves adventure. As she makes her way through town the townsfolk too begin to sing and they describe Belle as “strange”, “most peculiar” and “a funny girl” with “her head up in the clouds” (Figure 1.5). The animators have included some visual clues which also hint at the various ways Belle is different from the other women in town. Firstly, she passes by the butcher who is flirting with a young woman and eyeing her cleavage while his large and angry wife looks on (Figure 1.6). The man holds the meat seductively below the woman’s breasts suggesting that she too is considered “a piece of meat”. Belle then looks on amusedly as one woman attempts to buy eggs whilst carrying three babies and caring for her two smaller children (Figure 1.7) (the eggs in the scene can be interpreted as a witty play on the reproductive function of women). In Figure 1.8 a bald woman beautifies herself by trying on various hats and wigs inside a corner shop, while Belle walks by indifferently reading a book. Belle is presented as vastly different to these three women because she shows no interest in flaunting her sexuality, having children or becoming preoccupied with her appearance.

By providing a seemingly progressive role model for young girls the Disney team succeeds in sending what appears to be a positive message. However, Belle is actually ostracised for her love of reading and lack of interest in leading a provincial town lifestyle. It is her beauty that is admired by men and envied by other women, rather than her intelligence and aspirations.

The quality of being well read strikes the townspeople as odd, adding strength to the subtext that feminist notions are unnatural and deviant when opposed to the “normalcy” of patriarchal society. Even Belle’s beauty keeps her distanced from everyone [...] since, though she is beautiful, she does not use her attractiveness to get herself a husband and settle down (Sumera 2008:44).

Additionally, Belle’s love of reading may seem progressive when considering the Disney princess prototype but this character trait is also evident in De Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” where Beauty is described as spending “the greatest part of her time in reading good books” (De Beaumont 1989:137). Evidently, based on its origin, even this liberating trait has undertones of eighteenth-century ideals concerning women.

Later on in the film, Belle is also seen to reject Gaston’s marriage proposal and in response she sings: “Madam Gaston, can you just see it? Madam Gaston, his little wife. No Sir, not me, I
guarantee it, I want much more than this provincial life” (Trousdale & Wise 1991). This scene is one of the more liberating for Belle’s character as she appears to rebel against the roles and expectations placed on women, specifically those of marriage and motherhood. Marina Warner (1994b:313) notes that the film was “deliberately developed [...] for an audience of mothers who grew up with Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem”. This implies the film addresses second-wave feminist concerns which included (amongst others) the notion of female identity and the way this identity is formed by various prescribed and seemingly pre-determined roles or functions, such as mother, homemaker and wife. As she sings “I want adventure in the great wide somewhere” and “I want so much more than they’ve got planned” she runs through the field and takes on an empowering stance with clenched fists (Figure 1.9) which has strong feminist connotations.

But, however progressive Belle may appear, “the commodification of feminist ideas in popular culture produce strange contradictions” (Craven 2002:123) and these contradictions are particularly evident in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast. While Belle defies various social norms concerning her role as a woman, she ultimately submits to patriarchal order by the end of the film. Her only means of achieving a ‘happy ending’ is by embodying ideal and favourable
feminine qualities (I discuss this again and more comprehensively later on). Fundamentally the film displays, as noted by Warner (1994b:313), “Hollywood’s cunning domestication of feminism itself”.

Belle’s physical appearance reveals various stereotypes concerning feminine beauty, evident in the design of all Disney princesses. Her facial features are soft, with doe eyes that bring to mind those of Japanese anime characters (Figure 1.10). Her body is slender and dainty with a small waist. Her walk is poised and graceful and, according to directors Trousdale and Wise (1991), was designed to mimic the movements of a ballerina. Belle wears a pale-blue dress and white apron (Figure 1.11), colours which can be associated with those of Mother Mary which hints at her purity (virginity) and goodness and is also indicative of the underlying Christian values that inform Disney’s conservative discourse. If Belle’s character is intended by the directors to manifest the notion of beauty, then these physical characteristics send a clear message regarding the definition of feminine beauty, which above all else must be visually appealing for the male viewer. For as Mulvey (1989:19) argues: “[...] in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly”. Perhaps the only physical trait which sets Belle apart from previous Disney princesses is her dark hair which, before Beauty and the Beast, is only evident once, in the character of Snow White in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.
In one scene (Figure 1.11) at the start of the film, Belle leaves her cottage early in the morning and is seen reaching out her hand to touch and engage with two birds. It is not uncommon for Disney princesses to be portrayed having close connections with birds or animals and even an ability to communicate with them. Often these animals are the princess’s only confidants to whom she expresses her deepest hopes and desires, usually by means of singing. This is evident again in the film when Belle sits at a fountain in town and shares her book with a flock of sheep (Figure 1.12). Because she is a social outcast and marginalised by the townsfolk for her love of reading the sheep become Belle’s associates. This affinity between princess and animal is yet another example of the outdated gender constructs evident in Disney films. For in the past “because they can give birth, women [were] viewed as instinctually more natural, more closely related to life cycles mirrored in nature” (Dolan 1988:7).

In contrast to Belle’s affinity with animals the viewer is introduced to Gaston when he shoots a bird down from the sky. Gaston is a hunter and this is significant in a tale about a Beast as it immediately places his character in a villainous role. Within the film Gaston’s character serves as the direct masculine antithesis of the Beast—who is an animal with the heart and mind of a man as opposed to Gaston who is a man with the heart and mind of a beast. Directors Trousdale and Wise (1991) have effectively reversed traditional fairy tale roles by transforming a character who looks like a hero (a strong handsome man) into a villain. This serves to reinforce Disney’s moral-of-the-story which appears to be centred on the misleading nature of appearances. Gaston is essentially a brute and his inherent ‘beastliness’ is expressed throughout the film by his primal love of killing (Figure 1.13), his hairiness (Figure 1.14) his desire to breed with Belle and his complete disregard for intellectualism (Figures 1.15). His primeval characteristics also include some offensive (yet humorous) ideas regarding women, particularly evident in a scene where he says to Belle “it’s not right for a woman to read, soon she starts getting ideas and thinking”.

Gaston’s character arguably represents what Jill Dolan (1988) identifies as the ideal spectator, or patriarchy itself, in the sense that he embodies and expresses the active male gaze throughout the film. His pursuit of Belle is based solely on her beauty and his desire for her is essentially an expression of his own vanity. This is evident in one scene where he sings “here in town there’s only she, who is beautiful as me”. Although his character is purposefully and overtly misogynistic, through statements such as “she’s the most beautiful girl in town—that makes her the best” Gaston effectively communicates outdated yet ironically relevant notions concerning femininity. These include in particular the notion that beautiful women are superior to unattractive women and a woman’s intellect has no value and is, indeed, a potential source of female corruption.
As opposed to Bell and Gaston, the Beast is a more complex and nuanced character that shows evidence of progression throughout the film. The viewer is first introduced to the Beast at the start of the film when the narrator tells the tale of his curse; however we are reintroduced to his character later on when Belle’s father is lost in the woods and takes refuge in his enchanted castle. Here the viewer is confronted with the Beast in his most primal form, as a territorial, ferocious and prowling alpha-male (Figures 1.16). Although he wears a cape and short pants, in this scene he alternates between walking on all fours and balancing precariously on hind legs. By emphasizing these animalistic qualities the directors effectively reiterate his beastliness at this stage in the film. According to Trousdale and Wise (1991) the Beast was a particularly challenging character to design and is the combination of an American buffalo, a bull and a gorilla with the hind legs of a wolf. His menacing horns (Figure 1.17) also bring to mind another mythological beast, the Minotaur, who is described as “a fierce creature [...] half-man and half-bull” and a “horrible monster” in the tale “Theseus and the Minotaur” (Black 2000:4). Marina Warner (1994b:315) describes the Beast’s character as “male desire incarnate” and suggests he embodies the Eros figure, the Greek God of sexual desire and love, also known as Cupid. This
association re-establishes the tale’s origins in Apuleius’s “Psyche and Cupid” and hints at the Beast’s inherent eroticism, although the directors refrain from developing this further within the context of a children’s animation.


Further on in the film when Belle is taken captive, the Beast explains she is free to roam the castle but is forbidden from entering the West Wing. But Belle cannot resist her curiosity and that evening she investigates the West Wing (Figures 1.18) where she finds the Beast’s lair and the enchanted rose—a symbol of hope throughout the film. Belle is discovered by the Beast just as she leans in to touch the rose, potentially leading to its destruction and the Beast remaining a monster for all time (Figure 1.19).

This detail is exclusive to the Disney film and is evident in no other version or interpretation of “Beauty and the Beast”. Disney’s inclusion of this scene in the film alludes to other tales which condemn female curiosity such as “Bluebeard” (1659) written by Charles Perrault, “Pandora’s Box” of Greek mythology and the most well-known narrative of Adam and Eve or ‘original sin’ from Christian scriptures. What these tales have in common is their portrayal of femininity as inherently flawed and weak, prone to self-indulgent curiosity, disobedience and corruption. This disobedience often results in some form of punishment depending on the tale, and in Christian scripture Eve’s transgressions result in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and ultimately humanity’s suffering for the rest of time. Identically, Pandora’s curiosity leads
her to release all the evils of the world leaving behind only the Spirit of Hope. Such narratives effectively convey femininity as the source of all evil and a site of shame, and in-so-doing reinforce patriarchal supremacy and female inferiority.

Similarly, when Belle is discovered in the West Wing, she flees the Beast’s castle and breaks her promise to remain a prisoner for all time when she runs away into the woods. Caught in the margins between two patriarchal spheres (the Beast’s and her father’s) she is attacked by wolves and punished for her transgression and rebelliousness (Figures 1.20). Belle’s escape not only provides the Beast with an opportunity for redemption through the act of saving her life, but also the circumstances to regain his masculine power and dominance (Figures 1.21). This ultimately communicates that Belle cannot, and may not, operate autonomously but instead must remain under patriarchal control if she is to be safe and protected. Mary Douglas (1966:150) states: “all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins.” If patriarchy can be understood as a structure of ideas, a system or order, then wolves in the
forest may also been interpreted as symbolic of the dangers that attack those females who explore the margins and in-so-doing challenge the system (I discuss this more comprehensively in Chapter 2 in relation to Charles Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood*).

![Figure 1.20](image)


According to Steven Jones (1995:15-16):

[T]he occurrence of the fantasy in the fairy tales represents in part the protagonist’s exploration of his or her own unconscious mind. The threshold crossing is, in this light, a crossing from the conscious, rational realm to a fictional representation of the unconscious, nonrational domain of the individual’s psyche.

With this in mind, I would argue that the Beast may represent Belle’s own sexuality, or a process of sexual awakening in Belle’s transition from girlhood to womanhood, and from living with her father to taking on the role of a wife. The tale arguably serves a heuristic function (Jones 1995:20) as Belle’s conflict with the Beast and his beastly qualities can be interpreted as her personal anxieties concerning newfound carnal desire. Disney’s film resolves this conflict in
precisely the same way as De Beaumont’s version, with Belle breaking the curse and the Beast transforming into an ‘acceptable’ and ‘civilised’ human form. If the Beast is perceived as symbolic of Belle’s own sexuality, then the film and story essentially communicate a repression or complete rejection of feminine sexual power by means of embracing traditional female virtues such as obedience, self-control and self-sacrifice.


Perhaps the clearest example of Disney’s traditionalist approach to the representation of women is evident at the conclusion of the film. Typical to fairy-tale tradition, following the breaking of the curse, the film concludes with the marriage of Belle and the Beast/the Prince. Although the character of Belle is portrayed throughout the film as an independent, ambitious and progressive young woman who yearns for knowledge and adventure, these aspirations are ultimately left unresolved once she marries the Beast who is now a rich and handsome prince. In this way Belle only appears to have been liberated from the Disney princess prototype by the end of the film. She no longer lives in the small village or wears modest clothing but instead is portrayed wearing an opulent ball gown, embracing her wealthy husband and possessing new
found status (Figure 1.22). This change in costume points to a significant shift in Belle’s identity, from commoner to royalty. Rowe (1979:246) points out how such rewards have a traditionalist gendered underpinning:

A strict moral reading would attribute these rewards solely to the heroine’s virtue; but, the fictional linkage of sexual awakening with the receipt of great wealth implies a more subtle causality. Because the heroine adopts conventional female virtues, that is patience, sacrifice, and dependency, and because she submits to patriarchal needs, she consequently receives both the prince and a guarantee of social and financial security through marriage. Status and fortune never result from the female’s self-exertion but from passive assimilation in her husband’s sphere.

Such an ending is typical, in fact formulaic, to any given Disney film particularly within the Walt Disney Classics Series. In fact, according to directors Trousdale and Wise (1991), the final frames of Beauty and the Beast (Figure 1.22) were modelled entirely on those of the early Disney film Sleeping Beauty (1959) (Figure 1.23).
While the directors attribute this decision to the time constraints experienced during the making of the film, I would argue, rather, that this clearly illustrates the idealistic and traditionalist nature of Disney films. The fact that the ending of two Disney animations made over thirty years apart remain both visually and conceptually interchangeable reveals that the vast collection of Disney films based on classic fairy tales may each appear unique but only truly differ in the details that constitute their narratives. The patriarchal ideology embodied within these films remains constant and governs their structure and meaning, an ideology which reflects society’s approval while making “the female’s choice of marriage and maternity seem commendable, indeed predestined” (Rowe 1979:239).

Throughout the film, the characters of Belle and the Beast have been juxtaposed in order to maintain a rather definite and visually apparent dichotomy. While Belle is small, beautiful, kind, gentle and often vulnerable, the Beast in contrast is large, frightening, erratic, powerful and prone to fits of rage. These differences have been accentuated, and are easy to identify, in the physicality of the characters. Although we see towards the end of the film that the Beast begins
to walk upright and dress like a gentleman, his character in relation to Belle’s character perpetuates gender constructs and the notion of sexual difference by representing masculinity and femininity as polarized (where male is defined by female and vice versa).


Within the film, femininity is presented as that which is not wild, untamed, sexual and instinctive. Rather, it is portrayed as a civilising force which tames, domesticates or remedies these ‘masculine’ states of being. This is evident throughout the film as the Beast increasingly begins to dress and eat like a gentleman (Figure 1.24) and in the scenes where Belle teaches him to read and then dance (Figures 1.25–1.26). In this way the character of Belle can be perceived as the symbolic Other whose only purpose is to define and then redefine her masculine counterpart, the Beast. This redefinition is manifest at the conclusion of the film when Belle proclaims her love for the Beast and he is transformed into human form again (Figures 1.27–1.29). Mulvey’s theory proves relevant to this argument, for evidently “what counts is what the heroine provokes or rather what she represents” (Mulvey 1989:19) rather than an identity independent from a masculine counterpart or the male gaze.


**Conclusion**

Based on this analysis I argue that Disney maintains a traditionalist approach towards the representation of women evident in the sustained and emphasised dichotomy of beauty and beastliness throughout the film _Beauty and the Beast_. Additionally, the film remains faithful to the original tale (De Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast”) by communicating notions of ‘beauty’ as the most superior of all feminine qualities and naturally indicative of inner goodness. In precisely the same way as De Beaumont’s tale ‘beastliness’ is represented in the form of a monstrous groom and a test: should the protagonist practice obedience and subservience to patriarchal hegemony, she is then rewarded with a handsome prince. This conceptual adherence is evidence of idealistic and outdated notions of femininity carried through from the eighteenth century into twentieth-century mass media.

Disney’s traditionalist approach towards the representation of women is supported by a “production for profit” ideology (Zipes 1997:91) that governs the corporation’s films and products. Consequently the Disney discourse is a conservative one which portrays various social dynamics and social norms in a manner which perpetuates their existence rather than
challenges the status quo. Disney’s commodification of feminist ideas within the film *Beauty and the Beast* is a relevant example of this. The character design of Belle, her physical appearance and characteristics, is also an indication of Disney’s idealistic approach to the representation of femininity. Furthermore the film references a discourse of texts and narratives which condemn female disobedience and in this way discourage female autonomy and support patriarchal authority.

Most notably the ending of the film, which adheres faithfully to De Beaumont’s version, encourages female virtue and conformity in the form of marriage despite the progressive characteristics of the heroine. If unpacked psychoanalytically, the Beast in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* may also represent a sexual awakening in Belle and his transformation a complete rejection of female sexual power—an idea I expand on in Chapter 2. Lastly, Disney’s polarised representation of masculinity/beastliness and femininity/beauty perpetuates outdated gender constructs by portraying a definitive dichotomous relationship between the two sexes. Edgar-Hunt, Marland and Rawle (2010:70) point out:

> Film is a cultural product. It does not grow, it is built. The camera may reproduce the appearance of real objects, but a movie is an artificial construct, a ‘text’, a body of discourse (words and images) based on principles born of history and convention.

Within cultural products there exists an ideology determined by the dominant culture. This ideology “appears in representation as naturalized and seemingly nonideological” (Dolan 1988:41) but is nonetheless pervasive and powerful. In line with Dolan’s theory, the ideology embodied within Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* is of a patriarchal kind; consequently it represents and reinforces traditionalist notions of femininity. However, in as much as fairy tale discourse can be adapted to perpetuate repressive social norms it also possesses a liberating potential, particularly in a contemporary context, to challenge and subvert prevailing social constructs—as will be discussed in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER 2: ANGELA CARTER’S “THE COMPANY OF WOLVES” (1979)

Woman, as a sign of difference, is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-a-vis the norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of fascination and horror (Rosi Braidotti in Ussher 2006:1).

Introduction

The short-story “The Company of Wolves” (1979) by Angela Carter can be argued as a feminist or revisionist tale which challenges inherited notions of femininity, particularly those perpetuated in traditional fairy tale narratives. In this story, Carter parodies the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood (1697) by Charles Perrault by rewriting the narrative in order to encode different, more transgressive meanings. In this chapter I propose a critical reading of “The Company of Wolves” within a materialist and postmodernist feminist framework, with particular focus on Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection and similar ideas concerning body politics developed by Mary Douglas in Purity and Danger (1966).

As outlined in the Introduction, Carter’s stories have previously been examined with focus on her destabilisation of traditionalist and binary notions of gender inherent to fairy-tale discourse. Furthermore, eroticism and female sexual agency commonly emerge as significant themes within Carter’s narratives, as evident in Merja Makinen’s “Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality” (1992) where the author discusses Carter’s feminist strategy as one centered on the use of violence and sexuality within her fiction. In a similar way Kimberly J. Lau in “Erotic Infidelities: Angela Carter’s Wolf Trilogy” (2008) identifies the importance of eroticism within Carter’s Wolf Trilogy in The Bloody Chamber, taking this further to include the ‘animal erotic’ in her discussion. While my chapter

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19 Two years before publishing The Bloody Chamber Carter began translating the collected tales of Charles Perrault (Lau 2008:78) and, while the author does not explicitly state that “The Company of Wolves” is a parody of Perrault’s Little Red Riding Hood, it can be assumed that her short story (and others within The Bloody Chamber) responds to these texts with which she was working closely at the time.

20 This refers to Carter’s short stories “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice”. 
deals with related issues, I explore Carter’s representation of the female protagonist more specifically in relation to concepts of ‘beauty and beastliness’, revealing how her representation challenges traditionalist understandings of femininity by unsettling this dichotomy. My argument is largely informed by ideas surrounding the binary nature of gender as theorised by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999).

In 1984 “The Company of Wolves” was made into a film of the same name directed by Neil Jordan and co-scripted by Angela Carter. I take cognisance of the fact that this film is a product of both Jordan and Carter’s vision, and warrants its own in-depth analysis. When analysing Carter’s short-story I refer to it in part wherever I find the visual discourse enhances an understanding of specific ideas in the short-story. However I am also aware that in some instances the film may introduce content which differs to that of Carter’s story. With this in mind, I move on to discuss Jordan’s film independently, briefly outlining where it may differ but also align with Carter’s feminist ideology. This is evident in my lengthy discussion of the ending of the film, which deviates from Carter’s narrative, yet reinforces my reading of the short-story in relation to abjection. I am primarily interested in how Carter’s subversive ideas translate on screen, in identifying these subversive moments in the film and exploring the ways in which these moments challenge the conventions of cinematic representation, in precisely the same way the short-story poses a challenge to the patriarchal conventions which govern fairy tale narrative. Ideas by Laura Mulvey (1989:14) in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, where she argues that cinematic imagery is structured by the unconscious of patriarchal society, are important in this regard. Furthermore, the inclusion of Jordan’s film potentially enriches and nuances a comparison between Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” and Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), which I undertake at the conclusion of this chapter.
Perrault’s *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge (Little Red Riding Hood)* (1697)

The ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ tale is arguably one of the most familiar and recognisable fairytales\(^\text{21}\) which remains circulated in contemporary society. *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* (referred to in this chapter as *Little Red Riding Hood*) was published in a volume of stories titled *Histoires ou contes du temps passé avec des moralités* (1697) written by Charles Perrault. This collection includes other prominent fairy tales such as “Sleeping Beauty”, “Puss in Boots”, “Cinderella” and “Bluebeard”, fairy tales which “have for centuries insinuated themselves into both vernacular and popular contexts and often come to represent the most familiar, and thus most authoritative, versions we know” (Lau 2008:78). Perrault’s version of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ marks the beginning of the tale in its literary form; consequently his plot structure and motifs remain canonical and have influenced all written and oral versions since. Prior to this, the story was an oral tale told mostly by peasant women in seventeenth-century France (Zipes 1993:7). At this time it had the name *Conte de la Mere grand* (*The Story of Grandmother*) and went more or less as follows:

It was a woman who had baked bread. She said to her daughter: “Go carry this hot loaf and a bottle of milk to your granny.”

So the little girl departed. At a crossroads she met *bzou* [the werewolf], who said to her:

“Where are you going?”

“I’m taking a hot loaf and a bottle of milk to my granny.”

“What path are you taking,” said the *bzou*, “the Needles path, or the Pins path?”

“The Needles path,” said the little girl.

“Well, I shall take the Pins path.”

The little girl enjoyed herself picking up needles. Meanwhile the *bzou* arrived at the grandmother’s house, killed her, put some of her meat in the cupboard and a bottle of her blood on the shelf. The little girl arrived and knocked at the door.

“Push the door,” said the *bzou*, “it’s barred with a wet straw.”

“Good day, grandmother, I’m bringing you a hot loaf and a bottle of milk.”

\(^{21}\) ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ is largely considered a fairy tale however it’s violent ending in Perrault’s version does not conform to the fairy tale tradition of happy ends. Whether the story can be considered a fairy tale or not depends entirely on which version of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ the reader examines. I would argue Perrault’s version reads as a cautionary or warning tale.
“Put them in the cupboard, my child. Take some meat that’s in it and a bottle of wine that is on the shelf.”
As she ate there was a little cat that said: “Phooey!...The slut!...eating the flesh, drinking the blood of her granny.”
“Undress, my child,” said the bzou, “and come lie down beside me.”
“Where should I put my apron?”
“Throw it into the fire, my child, you don’t need it anymore.”
And each time she asked where to put all her garments, the bodice, the dress, the skirt, and the hose, the wolf replied:
“Throw them into the fire, my child, you don’t need them anymore.”
When she laid herself down in the bed, the little girl said:
“Oh, grandmother, how hairy you are!”
“The better to keep warm, my child!”
“Oh, grandmother, those big nails you have!”
“The better to scratch, my child!”
“Oh, grandmother, those big shoulders you have!”
“The better to carry firewood, my child!”
“Oh, grandmother, those big ears you have!”
“The better to hear, my child!”
“Oh, grandmother, those big nostrils you have!”
“The better to snuff tobacco, my child!”
“Oh, grandmother, that big mouth you have!”
“The better to eat you with, my child!”
“Oh, grandmother, I’m hungry to go outside!”
“Do it in bed, my child!”
“Oh, no, grandmother, I want to go outside.”
“All right, but only for a short time.”
The bzou tied a woollen thread to her foot and let her go. When the little girl was outside she attached the end of the thread to a plum tree in the courtyard. The bzou was getting impatient and saying: “Are you making ropes? Are you making ropes?”
When he realized that nobody answered him, he jumped out of bed and saw that the little girl had escaped. He chased her, but arrived at her house just at the moment she entered (Da Silva 2002:132-133).

According to Jack Zipes (1993:2) “almost all the oral versions of Little Red Riding Hood show a remarkable unity in plot and structure that represent a socio-ethnic initiation ritual practiced by women in the southeastern region of France and northern Italy”. However, once appropriated
by Perrault, a male writer, the meaning of the oral tale was altered significantly and came to embody specific sex and class biases which I explain in detail further on.

‘Little Red Riding Hood’, as it was originally conceived (and entitled *The Story of Grandmother*), includes a number of details which are likely unfamiliar to contemporary readers who remain accustomed to the tale as told by Perrault. For example, in *The Story of Grandmother*, the creature who approaches Little Red Riding Hood is actually a *bzou* or a werewolf, as opposed to a simple wolf. This is indicative of the tale’s socio-religious context, specifically the superstitious belief in witches and werewolves maintained by European peasants at the time (Zipes 1993:23). The emergence of the oral tale coincides with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century trials against men and women accused of being werewolves and witches, who were associated with the devil and executed in the name of the Church22 (Zipes 1993: 19-69). *The Story of Grandmother* clearly reflects these anxieties and, what was then, the very ‘real’ threat of an evil wolf-man. By nature the werewolf was believed to be bloodthirsty and cunning, consequently many people at the time became afraid to walk alone through fields or in the woods (Zipes 1993:20). However by the late seventeenth century these fears had subsided and were no longer relevant or necessary for Perrault to include in his version (Zipes 1993:75).

In order to contextualise Perrault’s rewriting of *The Story of Grandmother* a brief outline of the socio-political landscape in France at the time is necessary. In his book *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (1993:25-31) Zipes provides a comprehensive account of this context which is relevant to my discussion here.

What emerges most prominently from a reading of Zipes’ text is the class and status of Charles Perrault and how this in turn influenced his writing of *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. Perrault was a “high royal servant, one of the first members of the Académie Française, a respected polemicist, and a significant figure in literary salons” (Zipes 1993:28). Furthermore he actively

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22 “It is apparent today that the firm Christian belief in werewolves in the 16th and 17th centuries derived from a strident campaign by the Church to exploit folk superstition in order to keep all social groups under its control” (Zipes 1993:70). These trials were a form of legalised terror where any man or woman who deviated from the dominant Christian order (as dictated by the Pope) could be accused and sentenced to burn at the stake.
supported the French regime which sought to ‘civilise’ all of Europe. As an author Perrault wrote for children, as well as the educated upper class, at a time when views on childhood began to alter drastically. For the first time children began to be viewed separately from adults and childhood began to be understood as a developmental phase which had the potential to significantly alter one’s character in adulthood. Consequently children came to require their own culture and literature which served the purpose of civilising their natural uninhibited nature according to specific class-determined behavioural codes. In the same way as Madame De Beaumont, Perrault sought to improve the behaviour and manners of children by encouraging Christian virtue. Above all, he intended for his tales to convey and instruct on morality. This is precisely why his tales in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé avec des moralités* are centred on a moral-of-the-story outlined at the end of each narrative. This civilising process in France was achieved in part through “literary socialization” (Zipes 1993:29). Perrault believed the development of children should be governed strictly by the ideology of the aristocratic-elite, an ideology which placed emphasis on regulating one’s behaviour, specifically in relation to “table manners, natural functions, bedroom etiquette, sexual relations, and correct speech” (Zipes 1993:29). At the time these ideals were often circulated by way of manuals, which defined ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ behaviour and promoted self-control as social distinction. This strategy succeeded in establishing a particular set of social norms as the dominant order. Undoubtedly this civilising process in Europe was patriarchal by nature and supported masculine dominance, and this is explicitly evident in Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood* and his other tales.

In Perrault’s other tales which involve female protagonists, such as *Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty* and *Bluebeard*, his heroines are passive, modest and not particularly intelligent. This is not surprising since, Zipes (1993:25) notes, it was well-known that Perrault had a low opinion of women. In contrast to the resourceful peasant girl in *The Story of Grandmother*, Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood* is spoiled, foolish and helpless. Moreover, although *Little Red Riding Hood* was written for children, the tale is far more erotic than it initially appears and embodies a number of sexual connotations which were intentionally included by Perrault in order for the narrative to simultaneously entertain adult readers. The most overt example is the girl’s death at the
close of the story: when she is devoured in bed, this is a certain allusion to her sexual violation. Evidently many versions of the tale since Perrault’s attempt to “cleanse the tale of its erotic components” (Zipes 1993:9), beginning with a retelling by the Brothers Grimm who were the first to introduce a happy ending to the tale as well as the character of the huntsman, who embodies German values of patriarchal law and order. Fundamentally the character of Little Red Riding Hood can be understood as a projection of masculine fantasies and anxieties concerning female sexuality. After Perrault’s rewriting the tale took on a distinct violence and a victimisation of Little Red Riding Hood, for which the protagonist is ultimately blamed. Zipes (1993:11) argues the tale in all its conventional versions since Perrault’s perpetuates the notion that “women want to be raped” and promotes a “rape culture”.

According to the socio-political context discussed above, Perrault omitted or altered other aspects of the oral tale he deemed irrelevant or inappropriate for the upper classes:

The common elements that are lacking from the literary story are precisely those which would have shocked the society of its period by their cruelty (the flesh and blood of the grandmother tasted by the child), their puerility (Path of Pins, Path of Needles) or their impropriety (question of the girl on the hairy body of the grandmother) (Da Silva 2002:119).

These particular elements were all vital in terms of the tale’s original cultural significance. As Zipes (1993:24) notes, “the references to the pins and needles were related to needlework apprenticeship undergone by young peasant girls, and designated the arrival of puberty and initiation into society in specific regions of France where the oral tale was common”. Similarly, when the young girl eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her grandmother, this is symbolic of her ‘replacing’ the older woman in a continuous cycle of life and death; it signifies the girl’s entry into womanhood and the continuity of these customs from one generation to the next (Zipes 1993:24). Perrault’s omission of these motifs then constitutes a disruption to an oral tale that initially embodied a female perspective (Zipes 1993:8).

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23 “And upon saying these words, the wicked wolf threw himself upon Little Red Riding Hood and ate her up” (Perrault in Zipes 1993:93).
However Francisco Vaz Da Silva (2002:119) argues these aspects have not been omitted in Perrault’s version but are subtly alluded to by means of symbolic guise, the implication being that “superficially different themes may be variant expressions of an encompassing semantic field” (Da Silva 2002:56). For example, the motif most notably absent in The Story of Grandmother is the red hood worn by the girl. This iconic element, without which the story might seem unfamiliar, was first conceived and incorporated by Perrault. And while various scholars maintain the addition of this detail is incidental and has little to no significant meaning, Da Silva (2002:118-119) argues it is a thematic transformation which symbolises the young girl’s coming of age, as identified in The Story of Grandmother. Perrault’s addition of the red hood in relation the girl’s interest in picking flowers points to a “maiden in flowers” or a girl who has begun menstruating for the first time (Da Silva 2002:122). In this way the redness of her hood along with the flowers can be understood as a metaphor for puberty and newfound sexuality. While Zipes (1993:26) concedes the story does in fact deal with a young girl’s coming of age, he maintains the red chaperon is not representative of menstruation but rather that Perrault chose the colour because it was associated with “sin, sensuality and the devil” at the time. Irrespective of whether or not the red hood represents her fecundity, it was Perrault’s conscious intention to construct the character of Little Red Riding Hood as disobedient and deviant, with her violent fate serving as a warning to all young women about the consequences of straying from the path designated to them. This allegory was indeed effective as Little Red has since come to signify, in all her visual and conceptual interpretations, a rebel and a non-conformist—attributes which have for the most part been negatively positioned.

In her book Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body, Jane Ussher (2006:i) discusses and explores the “construction, regulation, and experience of the fecund female body” and how the performance of gender is directly related to this body. Throughout her discussion Ussher highlights how idealised notions of femininity serve to construct and maintain fears about the monstrous feminine, which can be understood as “the [female] reproductive body [which] is positioned as the depository of all that is transgressive and dangerous, all that is outside the boundaries of what a good woman should be—an enemy to
be contained and controlled” (Ussher 2006:iii). The idealised image of woman presented in art and film can therefore be understood as representative of masculine anxieties rather than the glorification of femininity (Ussher 2006:2). Ussher (2006:1) describes the relationship with women’s reproductive body as ambivalent in nature, where throughout history woman is either “positioned as powerful, impure or corrupt, [a] source of moral and physical contamination; or as sacred, asexual and nourishing”. This ambivalence emerges from both fear and fascination with the power of woman’s fecundity (Ussher 2006:1).

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva (1982:4) defines abjection as that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”. Furthermore, Kristeva argues that “bodily fluids and emissions—sweat, pus, excreta, breast milk, semen, blood—stand as signifiers of the abject” (Ussher 2006:6). In line with this notion, Ussher (2006:ii) identifies female fecundity as a sign of abjection in that the female “seeping, leaking, bleeding body” is perceived as threatening and dangerous as it cannot be controlled. Feminine fecundity, particularly in the form of menstruation or pregnancy, transgresses bodily margins and therefore poses a threat to the symbolic ‘system’ or ‘order’ in society. Kristeva’s concept of abjection as threatening social structures gives a psychoanalytic and feminist dimension to ideas which Mary Douglas developed in her anthropological study *Purity and Danger* (1966). For Douglas (1966:4), “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience”. These ideas collectively contribute to understanding why and how the abject female body is often presented as dangerous and even monstrous. The fecund body has been positioned as that which must be purified, contained and regulated, as it poses the threat of polluting the world around it (Ussher 2006:7).

When examining Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood*, patriarchal anxieties surrounding the female reproductive body become apparent. I would argue that the redness of Little Red Riding Hood’s hood does in fact represent her fecundity, and this is precisely why she has been positioned as inherently deviant and a source of corruption. Little Red Riding Hood, like her changing body,
does not obey or conform to the dominant order. The male author responds by punishing the young girl, and having her eaten/raped by the wolf. In this way he violently conquers and supplants the threat of female sexual power with domineering masculine sexuality. For:

[t]he physical changes of puberty—breasts, pubic hair, curving hips and thighs, sweat, oily skin, and most significantly, menstrual blood—stand as signifiers of feminine excess, of the body as out of control. The spectre of sexuality hovers in the shadows, warning of worse to come; woman as ‘deadly man-eater’, inciting desire in men, a disturbing presence who must be carefully contained (Ussher 2006: 19).

However—to expand on ideas briefly introduced in Chapter 1—if one assumes that the wolf symbolises primal sexuality and lust, and the character of Little Red Riding Hood is one of a pubescent girl, then I would argue that Little Red Riding Hood’s encounter with the beast in the woods may also represent a symbolic encounter with her own newfound sexuality. The story would thus demonstrate the potential for fairy tales to “express sensitive, even painful problems” (Da Silva 2002:21). How the protagonist responds to the wolf is then representative of how she engages with these aspects within herself, which in Perrault’s story is indisputably negative. The wolf (her libido) not only scares her: he (it) also ultimately devours and destroys her. Perrault’s Little Red Riding Hood is discouraged from engaging with the wolf or confronting him and is punished for doing so. Ussher (2006:7) observes:

The apparently uncontained fecund body, with its creases and curves, secretions and seepages, as well as its changing boundaries [...] signifies association with the animal world [...] and stands as the antithesis of the clean, contained, proper body, which ‘must bear no trace of its debt to nature’—epitomised by the body of man, or the pre-pubescent girl not yet despoiled by fecundity.

In line with these ideas, Little Red Riding Hood is encouraged to reject and repress that part of her corporeality which is associated with the animal world, to remain obedient and stick to the proverbial path in order to remain safe and ‘good’. Similarly, her journey through the woods could be understood, psychoanalytically, as a transition from girlhood to womanhood. Douglas
suggests that “danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others”. In this way the wolf that lurks in the woods is largely representational of the abject female body in the form of a menstruating pubescent girl; her sexual power is a danger which she encounters ‘off the path’ and ‘in the woods’, on the borderline or outside the margins of patriarchal order. Thus Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf can be perceived as one and the same character, perhaps more literally expressed when the beast eats the girl and their bodies are merged into one—a concept I explore further in my next analysis.

**Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” (1979)**

Throughout her career, Angela Carter, a self-proclaimed feminist, received attention from various feminist scholars regarding her novels and short stories—through which she sought to deconstruct the myths around gender identity, particularly those perpetuated in folklore. In her collection of short stories titled *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) Carter parodies a selection of classic fairy tales which were ideal for this purpose. With their straightforward and recognisable structures, and inscribed patriarchal ideologies, these tales are rich territory which, when parodied, have the potential to embody new transgressive meanings. Thus expressing how “as a form of criticism, parody has the advantage of being both a re-creation and a creation, making criticism into a kind of exploration of form” (Hutcheon 1985:51). In Carter’s rewriting of these stories one can identify a distinct feminist strategy which makes use of “aggressive subversiveness” and “active eroticism” in order to challenge traditionalist notions of femininity (Makinen 1992:3). But this approach has not necessarily been well received by all feminists. Concerned about her use of the erotic in subverting cultural constructions of gender, some have felt that her rewriting of fairy tales is limited for as long as these stories work “within the straitjacket of their original structures”, therefore ostensibly reproducing patriarchal and conservative notions of female sexuality (Makinen 1992:4). However, as I will show through my analysis, it is precisely because Carter works within this framework that her fairy tales are
effectively transgressive. For “when the form is used to critique the inscribed ideology [...] then the form is subtly adapted to inscribe a new set of assumptions” (Makinen 1992:5).

Before analysing “The Company of Wolves” it may prove beneficial to contextualise the story by exploring Carter’s ideas surrounding pornography and the erotic as a means of interrogating gender constructs. In *The Sadeian Woman*, written at the same time as *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter explores the pornographic writings and ideologies of Marquis de Sade, from whose name the words *sadist* and *sadism* are derived. For Carter, it is not Sade’s sexual perversions or his overt misogyny which are directly relevant to her argument, but rather his radical ideas surrounding female sexual freedom. Through his writings Sade presents female sexuality as separate to that of its reproductive function (Carter 1979b:i). In his texts, Margaret Atwood (1994: 119) suggests, “mercy, pity, peace and love, and especially chastity and motherhood, go out the window; in come ruthlessness, lasciviousness, the separation of sexual pleasure from procreation, and delight in the pain of others”. While frowned upon in contemporary society, Sade’s ideas were in fact radical for the social and political context of his time (eighteenth-century France) as they were radically antithetical to bourgeois morality (Carter 1979b:i). Although Carter does not necessarily align with Sade’s binary approach to female sexuality (victim versus predator) she finds significance in his philosophy of “fucking” as a subversive and liberating strategy for women. As she explains, contemporary pornography is repressive of women only because it is created in service of the patriarchal status quo (Carter 1979b:17). In pornography both men and women are reduced to their basic anatomical elements (“the probe and the fringed hole”) and become signifiers of their biological differentiation (Carter 1979b:4). In this way pornography serves to reduce women into the symbolic “negative”—a receptive or passive void awaiting penetration and activation by a masculine force (Carter 1979b:4).

However, Carter (1979b: 19-20) argues, pornography need not be the enemy of women should it be transformed by what she terms a “moral pornographer”:

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24 I make use of this term as employed by the author throughout her text. Carter (1979b:27) places importance on differentiating between the act of sexual intercourse from the term “fucking”, which implies a more active or aggressive sexual act void of reproductive and romantic purposes.
The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual licence for all genders, and projects a model of the way such a world might work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes [...] Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture.

Carter’s ideas regarding the sexual agency of women clearly inform her short stories in *The Bloody Chamber*, where I would argue she utilises the erotic to critique tales which conventionally encourage the repression of female sexuality.

In Perrault’s *Little Red Riding Hood* the theme of appearances or rather, the misleading nature of appearances, plays a significant role in the shaping of the narrative. The wolf first deceives the girl by tricking her into a contest of sorts through the directive: “I’ll take this path here, and you take that path there, and we’ll see who’ll get there first” (Perrault in Zipes 1993:91). However the wolf knows that his path is shorter than the other and he will certainly arrive at grandmother’s house first. Once he has killed and eaten grandmother the wolf then puts on her clothes and gets into bed, awaiting Little Red Riding Hood. When the girl arrives she cannot recognise that the wolf is in fact masquerading as her grandmother, and so she gets into bed with him. Only then does she begin to suspect all is not what it seems, and she starts to identify the changes in her grandmother’s appearance—“What big ears you have, grandmother!” (Perrault in Zipes 1993:93). This series of questions eventually lead to Little Red Riding Hood’s demise when she says “What big teeth you have, grandmother!” and the wolf responds “The better you eat you” before pouncing on the girl and devouring her (Perrault in Zipes 1993:93).

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the devouring of Little Red Riding Hood is the metaphorical equivalent of her rape which supports Perrault’s moral-of-the-story outlined at the end:

> One sees here that young children,  
> Especially young girls,  
> Pretty, well brought-up, and gentle,  
> Should never listen to anyone who happens by,  
> And if this occurs, it is not so strange,
When the wolf should eat them.
I say the wolf, for all wolves
Are not of the same kind.
There are some with winning ways,
Not loud, nor bitter, or angry,
Who are tame, good-natured, and pleasant
And follow young ladies
Right into their homes, right into their alcoves.
But alas for those who do not know that of all the wolves
the docile ones are those who are most dangerous (Perrault in Zipes 1993:93).

In this extract Perrault implies the wolf in his story represents more than just a cunning animal. He effectively employs ‘the misleading nature of appearances’ in order to demonstrate to young women the dangers of strange predatory men who will deceive and ‘devour’ them should they behave indecently.

In “The Company of Wolves” Carter begins by describing the ferocious and merciless wolves that live in the forest and prey on those who stray from the path. The wolf is similarly described by Carter as cunning and she warns that one should “fear and flee the wolf; for, worst of all, the wolf may be more than he seems” (Carter 1979a:130). However I would argue Carter’s use of ‘the misleading nature of appearances’ is markedly different to that of Perrault’s, a conscious play on the reader’s assumptions and appropriated for another purpose altogether.

At surface level, when Carter says the wolf may be more than he seems, she is introducing (or reintroducing, if one considers The Story of Grandmother) the character of the werewolf. A wolf may be more than just a vicious animal but rather a supernatural creature who may change his form. However, in a much broader sense she may also be implying the character of the wolf, already familiar to readers through countless children’s stories, is subject to reinterpretation. She continues by presenting the wolf/werewolf as a tortured creature whose “long-drawn, wavering howl has, for all its fearful resonance, some inherent sadness in it, as if the beasts would love to be less beastly if only they knew how and never cease to mourn their own condition” (Carter 1979a:131). By presenting the wolf as a victim of his own condition, an illness
of sorts, and encouraging the reader to empathise with the creature, Carter begins to challenge the reader’s assumptions regarding his character as a villain.

Carter further emphasises the wolf’s unstable appearance by incorporating a few examples of this within her narrative. The first is an account of a hunter who, after killing a wolf, cuts off all his paws and discovers he has in fact killed a werewolf: “then no wolf at all lay in front of the hunter but the bloody trunk of a man, headless, footless, dying, dead” (Carter 1979a:131). And another where “a witch from up the valley once turned an entire wedding party into wolves because the groom had settled on another girl” (Carter 1979a:131).

In *The Company of Wolves* (1984) Jordan visually translates this second tale in a scene that effectively communicates notions of beastliness in relation to mankind, as well as the nature of appearances. In this scene (*Figure 2.1*) the witch, who in Jordan’s film is pregnant with the
groom’s child, enters the aristocratic wedding party where guests are indulging in fine food and music. The grandeur of the setting and the attire of the guests is emphasised and indicates the proper and refined tastes of the upper class nobility. However here and there the director hints at the true nature of the crowd, as some drink and eat greedily, ripping meat off the bone. As the witch enters the party grows quiet and she begins to implicate the groom when she says “So I wasn’t good enough for you? I was once [...] don’t you remember? The wolves in the forest are more decent” (Jordan 1984). Suddenly the guests begin to moan and scream in pain as they take on animalistic qualities, their bodies growing hairy and ripping through their clothes. The witch laughs at the discomfort experienced by those losing control over their appearance and behaviour, that which previously stood as indicators of their refinement and, by implication, their morality. Implied in this scene is the true beastly nature of humankind, characterised by primal desires to eat, kill and procreate, despite efforts to repress and conceal these inclinations. This is significant if one considers that, as Zipes (1993: 71) observes, “in both Catholic and Protestant thinking of the 16th and 17th centuries the greatest fear was chaos, which was associated with sensuality and uncontrollable inner and outer nature”. This separation between inner nature and intellectual reason, due to technological advancements in Europe at the time, began to govern the ideology of the upper classes and further support witch and werewolf hunts which “were aimed at regulating sexual practices and sex roles for the benefit of male-dominated social orders” (Zipes 1993:71).

In Carter’s story, this tale is followed by a legend of a young woman who unknowingly marries a werewolf. On the night of their wedding (a full moon) the man deserts her and goes missing. Years later, he knocks at the door, and, as though time has not passed, is furious to discover the woman has remarried. In his anger he morphs from man to wolf but is killed by the woman’s second husband, and “when the wolf lay bleeding and gasping its last, the pelt peeled off again and he was just as he had been, years ago” (Carter 1979a:132). This metamorphosis is compellingly portrayed in Jordan’s film (Figure 2.2) where the decapitated head of the wolf transforms back into the head of a handsome man; floating in the water it appears mask-like and strangely beautiful, so that what was once frightening now captivates the viewer.
Later in the story, Carter again interrogates the nature of appearances when, after hearing “the freezing howl of a distant wolf” (Carter 1979a:134), Little Red Riding Hood meets a handsome stranger, who is also a hunter, on the path. At this point the reader draws on their knowledge of the tale and, knowing the girl meets the wolf on her way to grandmother’s house, can deduce the man is also the wolf. This is of course ironic as in many versions of the tale, as written by the Brothers Grimm, Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother are rescued from the wolf by a huntsman. Carter subverts this notion of the patriarchal hero and in-so-doing the danger the girl faces is magnified; because if there is no hero Little Red Riding Hood must save herself. In Jordan’s film this sense of foreboding is conveyed when Rosaline meets the handsome huntsman and ignores her grandmother’s warning: “Never stray from the path, never eat a windfall apple and never trust a man whose eyebrows meet” (Jordan 1984). The viewer becomes aware the man is a threat based on this comical visual indication (Figure 2.3). However in both the story and the film, the girl is attracted to the man and for that reason fails to recognise her danger.
At the close of Jordan’s film a female voice recites the following extract:

Little girls this seems to say,
Never stop upon your way,
Never trust a stranger-friend,
No one knows where it may end,
As you’re pretty so be wise
Wolves may lurk in every guise,
Now as then ’tis simple truth
Sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth

This verse references Perrault’s own moral-of-the-story and while it may appear conceptually similar, the line “sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth” can be perceived as an allusion to Carter’s subversive strategy as employed throughout “The Company of Wolves”. I would argue Carter makes use of the theme of appearances—which in her writings she constructs as transient in nature, oscillating between deceiving and revealing—in order to convey the ambivalence of her characters and challenge “a world of sexual absolutes” (Lau 2008:86).
Carter effectively invalidates the assumption that physicality is directly indicative of inner nature. This in turn speaks to feminist concerns surrounding biological sex versus gender, two separate aspects which have been constructed through culture as intrinsically interconnected; a relationship where one’s biological sex supposedly determines a particular set of physical and behavioural characteristics. However through analysing Carter’s writings it would appear the author actively aligns with the concept of gender as performance, as theorised by Butler. In “The Company of Wolves” specifically, this theory is explored in relation to beauty and beastliness. Carter blurs the lines between these two distinctions not only when her beastly characters masquerade as beautiful men (and women), but more so when both beauty and beast begin to demonstrate those characteristics denied to them by patriarchal conventions. This reinforces Butler’s notion that binary constructions of gender and their associated gestures, naturalised by society, are in fact staged. For “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1999:34).

Carter’s feminist strategy can be explored further when analysing her literary interpretation of the protagonist, represented as follows:

So pretty and the youngest of her family [...] indulged by her mother and the grandmother who’d knitted her the red shawl [...] Her breasts have just begun to swell; her hair is like lint [...] and she has just started her woman’s bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforth, once a month [...] She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing (Carter 1979a:133).

At first it would appear Carter’s Little Red Riding Hood25 conforms comfortably to “the cultural fascination with Lolita-like girls and the related sexualization of adult women” (Lau 2008:79). She is described in such a way as to titillate the reader, as one might find in pornographic texts

25 Although she is never given this name in Carter’s story I continue to refer to her character in this way throughout my chapter.
and even erotic romance novels targeted at female readers. Her portrayal as sex toy may seem
contradictory in light of feminist ideology; however this too can be argued as a conscious play
on a history of Little Red Riding Hood interpretations which, since Perrault, have treated the girl
as a “sadomasochistic object” who invites her own violation (Zipes 1993:8). Her virginity and
childlike innocence are then fundamental to her desirability (Lau 2008:85). Carter’s strategy
reveals a kind of feminist irony which plays on misogynistic assumptions in order to critique
them (Lappas 1996:119). But Carter also implies the girl’s resourcefulness when she writes “she
has her knife and she is afraid of nothing”. This is the reader’s first indication that the
protagonist may be more than she appears Furthermore the mention of the girl’s knife in
relation to her “woman’s bleeding” and virginity hints at the sexual power she now embodies
and the danger this presents; as pubescent girl she is both predator and the prey.

Later when she encounters the huntsman on the way to grandmother’s house, the girl soon lets
down her guard and allows him to carry her basket with the knife inside, as she is sure he will
protect her with his rifle. They begin “laughing and joking like old friends” (Carter 1979a:124)
but this soon turns into a flirtatious engagement where, as in Perrault’s story, the wolf and the
girl make a wager:

Is it a bet? he asked her. Shall we make a game of it? What will you give me if I
get to grandmother’s house before you?
What would you like? she asked disingenuously.
A kiss.
Commonplace of a rustic seduction; she lowered her eyes and blushed (Carter

Here again the narrative models pornographic conventions. The girl behaves coyly but still takes
pleasure in his advances; her innocence activates his masculine dominance. As expected, the
man arrives at grandmother’s house first and there he reveals himself as the bloodthirsty wolf.
“He strips off his shirt. His skin is the colour and texture of vellum. A crisp stripe of hair runs
down his belly, his nipples are ripe and dark as poison fruit […] He strips off his trousers and she
can see how hairy his legs are. His genitals, huge. Ah! Huge” (Carter 1979a:136). This emphasis
on the size of the man’s genitals serves to eroticise the tale but also reiterates the idea of the beast as a signifier of primal sexuality and libido. On screen this transition from gentleman to predator is conveyed through the man’s dishevelled hair, his hairy body and most prominently through his eyes which change colour and glow with a “diabolic phosphorescence” (Carter 1979a:137) (Figure 2.4). At this point in the story and film his character is revealed as monster and villain, with large genitals suggesting his primitive power.

![Figure 2.4](image.png)

*Figure 2.4, The huntsman/wolf eats grandmother. Neil Jordan (director). The Company of Wolves. 1984. Palace Productions (screen shot by author) (Jordon 1984).*

When the girl arrives at grandmother’s house she enters and finds the man sitting beside the fire. She realises her danger when she sees a tuft of the old woman’s hair caught on a log in the fire and she asks “Where is my grandmother?” the man responds “There’s nobody here but we two, my darling” (Carter 1979a:137). Then

a great howling rose up all around them, near, very near, as close as the kitchen garden, the howling of a multitude of wolves; she knew the worst wolves are hairy on the inside and she shivered, in spite of the scarlet shawl she pulled more closely round herself as if it could protect her although it was as red as the blood she must spill.
Who has come to sing us carols, she said.
Those are the voices of my brothers, darling; I love the company of wolves.
Look out the window and you’ll see them (Carter 1979a:137).

The protagonist is now fully aware the man is more than he appears, that he is a wolf and intends to devour her. She realises he has deceived her and she knows “the worst wolves are hairy on the inside” (Carter 1979a:137). Unlike in Perrault’s tale, the girl recognises the masquerade and anticipates her death. However she is not fearful but responds to the howling of wolves with pity and says: “It is very cold, poor things [...] no wonder they howl so” (Carter 1979a:138). She expresses sympathy for the creatures even in the face of her own vulnerability, and in-so-doing rejects her own victimisation: “She closed the window on the wolves threnody and took off her scarlet shawl, the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses, and, since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (Carter 1979a:138). Although the reader assumes the girl will respond to her situation with terror, instead she maintains control and thinks practically. She knows fear will not change her fate and so she decides she won’t feel afraid. In Jordan’s film this anticipation is heightened by the sexual tension between Rosaleen and the man, because although she knows he intends to kill her, she is still intrigued by him. He asks “Are you very much afraid?” and Rosaleen responds “Wouldn’t do me much good to be afraid, would it?” (Jordan 1984).

Also significant at this point in the text is Carter’s direct association between the girl’s red shawl and her menstrual blood. This relationship is only implied in Perrault’s Little Red Riding Hood but is more explicitly conveyed in Carter’s version, thus supporting the notion of Little Red Riding Hood as representative of patriarchal anxieties surrounding her fecund body. The removal of this shawl may also signify a transition of sorts, as if shedding a layer of skin, leaving the girl behind and emerging as a woman. Once taken off, the girl asks “What shall I do with my shawl?” to which the man responds “Throw it on the fire, dear one. You won’t need it again” (Carter 1979a:138). She then repeats this with her blouse, skirt, stockings and shoes. This is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, the removal of her clothes piece by piece before her death serves as a kind of perverse striptease; it eroticises the tale in a distinctly pornographic
manner. Secondly, this act of the girl throwing her clothes in the fire is not present in written versions by Perrault or the Brothers Grimm, only in *The Story of Grandmother*. By incorporating this motif back into her story, Carter re-establishes the tale’s origins in (female) oral folklore and re-appropriates the brave and resourceful qualities exhibited by the peasant girl into her own protagonist.

At the climax in Carter’s story, after the girl burns her clothes, she initiates what the reader presumes will be her death:

> Then [she] went directly to the man with red eyes in whose unkempt mane the lice moved; she stood up on tiptoe and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt [...] What big teeth you have! [...] All the better to eat you with. The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody’s meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing (Carter 1979a:138).

This playful subversion is meaningful when considering the tale was originally one with connotations of rape (Zipes 1993:1). If the devouring of the girl is representative of her violation, then Carter intentionally shifts this power dynamic by giving the female protagonist sexual agency. The extract epitomises Carter’s strategic use of eroticism in her writings in order to critique patriarchal conventions. At the very moment the wolf threatens to consume her, she laughs in his face and negates his desires with her own. The extract explicitly references Perrault’s narrative and presents a hypertextuality which consciously utilises the climax of his story in order to subvert its meaning. This demonstrates, as Anny Crunelle-vanrigh (1998: 117) explains,

> the idea that the "pleasure of the text" is to be derived as much from the text itself as from the reader’s identification of it as an instance of bricolage or palimpsest. The co-presence—and possible clash—of hypo- and hypertext, is what gives the experience of "palimpsestuous" reading its particular spice [...] with two texts superimposed, the original showing through.
The line “she knew she was nobody’s meat” (Carter 1979a:138) similarly embodies a double meaning. Literally the protagonist knows in this narrative she is nobody’s prey and will not be eaten by the wolf, but figuratively the word “meat” can be understood as a sexist allusion to women. The girl not only rejects her victimisation but also simultaneously reclaims her subjectivity. Furthermore the act of throwing the man’s shirt in the fire is meaningful as Carter (1979a:132) mentions earlier in the tale: “Seven years is a werewolf’s natural span but if you burn his human clothing you condemn him to wolfishness for the rest of his life”. This act implies that the protagonist desires the wolf in his beastly state—that she does not seek to civilise him or change him into another more acceptable form—as his beastliness is the very thing that arouses her.

Thus the author does not limit the erotic possibilities within her narrative to simple heterosexual relations (Lau 2008:8): “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” (Carter 1979a:139). She additionally presents an alternative erotic, an “animal erotic” (Lau 2008:8) intended to repulse conventional male fantasies by incorporating deep-seated primal desires. “The Company of Wolves” concludes with the line: “See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf” (Carter 1979a:139). The girl has domesticated the beast, not through civilising him but by embracing her own untamed sexuality. She lies between his paws and he is no longer described as “carnivore incarnate” or “ferocious” but as a “tender” creature, who has met his match in the protagonist (Carter 1979a:129,139).

Through this short-story, I would argue, Carter effectively subverts traditionalist notions of femininity not only by repositioning sexual agency but by moving towards a more ambiguous, rather than absolute, understanding of gender itself, as “images of the hybrid recur throughout Angela Carter’s writing, bearing witness to her preoccupation with dualism” (Mulvey 1994:233). Through her stories Carter seeks synthesis of binary oppositions such as male versus female, passive versus aggressive, predator versus prey and beauty versus beastliness (Atwood 1994:132). In other words, Carter suggests that women need not be one thing or the other, as
dictated by patriarchal and even past feminist discourses, but can simply be whoever or whatever they desire—a composite identity in line with postmodern feminist theory.26

**Jordan’s Company of Wolves (1984)**

When analysing *The Company of Wolves* (1984) directed by Jordan and co-scripted by Carter, one could argue the structure and meaning of this cinematic retelling differs considerably from Carter’s short-story. After being approached by Carter, Jordan immediately took an interest in her subversive message and strategy of revealing and playing on the violence and sexuality behind saccharine children’s stories through “The Company of Wolves” and other shorts stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (Barter 2013). Based on this interest Jordan then translated Carter’s revisionist tale into a horror/gothic film “influenced by filmmakers like Jean Cocteau (*Beauty and the Beast*) and 1970’s Parisian pornographic art movies that embedded fairy tales with a salacious twist” (Barter 2013). However, according to Sharon McCann (2010:68), following its release, *The Company of Wolves* received much criticism for what many perceived as Jordan’s failure to align with Carter’s feminist agenda. While the two writers collaborated on the screenplay, it is important to note that the film is a product of Jordan’s directorship and is therefore primarily informed by his creative vision. As Carter states: “[I]t’s not my movie, after all, it’s filtered through another sensibility which has a good deal in common with mine but is quite different in many respects” (McCann 2010:69).

Although McCann (2010:69) argues the film is underpinned by Jordan’s “Irish Catholic sensibility” and deals implicitly with issues pertaining to “modern Irish history”, and while I concede the film’s narrative does indeed differ from Carter’s, here I focus primarily on the representation and transformation of Jordan’s protagonist (Rosaleen) as one example where, in deviating from Carter’s short-story, the film in fact furthers her subversive feminist agenda. I would argue that Carter’s interest in destabilising traditionalist notions of ‘male’ and ‘female’ is ideally suited to Jordan’s modus operandi, for as the director states: “I come from a country

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26 In my introduction I define postmodern feminism and discuss the relevance of this theoretical framework in structuring my argument.
and a race that is obsessed with identities of various kinds and that’s been involved in conflicts that all come out of the urge to express identity” (Chua 1993:28). Thus in *The Company of Wolves*, as in many of his films, Jordan demonstrates an interest in challenging preconceptions around race, nationality and sex, and “stripping away those appearances that we think constitute our identities” (Chua 1993:28).


In the film Jordan introduces Carter’s fantasy landscape by means of an extended dream sequence, where Rosaleen (*Figure 2.5*) falls asleep on her bed and is both the dreamer and the protagonist (or Little Red Riding Hood). In structuring the film as a dream and making use of a conceptual “Chinese box structure” Jordan facilitates the regular transition between different story-lines throughout its duration (McCann 2010:70). Furthermore, within the context of

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27 In her article “‘With redundance of blood’: Reading Ireland in Neil Jordan’s *The Company of Wolves*” McCann (2010:70) argues this dream sequence is informed by Jordan’s Irish heritage and therefore serves to support his political agenda. Here she states this concept references the Irish literary genre of *aisling* poetry (*aisling* meaning “dream” or “vision”) which traditionally served as “a vehicle for the safe expression of politically sensitive views” (McCann 2010:71).
Rosaleen’s imagination the inclusion of seemingly arbitrary events and objects which reference Freudian symbolism—which serve as signifiers of major themes in Carter’s short-story—encourages viewers to interpret the film within a psychoanalytical framework (McCann 2010:72). This can be related to Jordan’s understanding of film as “the most interior medium of them all” which tends “to express things subconsciously” even when the viewer is unaware of this (Chua 1993:31).

However I would argue the film’s most prominent deviation from Carter’s short-story, which further supports my argument here, can be identified in the sequence of events following Rosaleen’s confrontation with the wolf/huntsman in grandmother’s house. In this scene, Rosaleen expresses her characteristic resourcefulness when, after looking out the window and seeing the pack of wolves,28 she grabs the man’s rifle in order to defend herself:

Rosaleen: “Poor creatures, it’s freezing cold out there. No wonder they howl so”
Wolf: “What, are you sorry for them?”
Rosaleen: “Yes and for you too”
(She pulls out the rifle and aims it at the wolf)
Wolf: “You’re a bold fearless girl aren’t you?”

As the huntsman tries to grab the gun from her, Rosaleen shoots at him and he falls to the ground whimpering in the manner of a scared animal. The loud noise of the gun has frightened him and, as he exposes his vulnerability, Rosaleen looks at him with surprise and confusion. Although he is a man he is also subject to the instinctual fears of an animal. At this point the power dynamics of the scene shift and the girl attempts to understand his condition:

Rosaleen: "Are you our kind or their kind?
Wolf: "Not one nor the other—both."
Rosaleen: "Then where do you live, in our world or theirs?"
Wolf: "I come and go between them. My home is nowhere."

28 “Those are the voices of my brothers, darling; I love the company of wolves. Look out the window and you’ll see them” (Carter 1979a:137).
Here the wolf describes himself as a liminal creature, as one who exists between worlds, between categories, the significance of which will be discussed later. After Rosaleen asks “Are you only a man when you dress like one?” (Jordan 1984) the man removes his shirt to reveal his hairy body. He throws his shirt in the fire and Rosaleen says “What big arms you have”, to which he responds “All the better to hug you with” (Jordan 1984). He walks towards her with open arms and the girl lets down her guard, and concedes to the kiss she now owes him (Figure 2.6).


After Rosaleen and the huntsman kiss, she pulls back suddenly and says: “Jesus what big teeth you have!” (Jordan 1984). This is a comic play on Perrault’s climax and, as expected, the man/wolf responds by saying “All the better to eat you with” (Jordan 1984). Here Jordan’s film deviates from Carter’s narrative and Rosaleen retaliates by shooting him in the arm. The wound triggers an involuntary transmogrification in the man, and what follows is a painful transition. The man groans, grunts, grits his teeth and shakes his head uncontrollably as his body writhes on the floor. His skin begins sprouting hair and the viewer hears his bones break as the snout of
a wolf emerges from his mouth (Figure 2.7). Here “we witness Rosaleen’s reaction to the transformation as a commingling of desire and disgust; she cannot avert her attention from the abject spectacle” (Lappas 1996:121) (Figure 2.8). While The Company of Wolves is a parody of a fairy tale narrative, the film can also be interpreted as a “parody of horror” (Lappas 1996:122). As in most horror films, the scene is profoundly disturbing precisely because of its abject nature. The image of the monster transgresses bodily margins as his skin bulges and tears open to reveal his inherent ‘hairiness’ in the form of a growling wolf coated in mucus.

Rosaleen’s gaze in this instance is highly significant. She stares at the beast in horror but “at the same time, however, there is a subversive affinity between monster and woman, the sense in which her look at the monster recognises their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing” (Lappas 1996:122). The girl identifies with the wolf and expresses sympathy for him when, after witnessing his transition, she says “I’m sorry. I never knew a wolf could cry” (Jordan 1984). In this scene Rosaleen realises the wolf is tortured by his condition, that he is a
misunderstood creature and therefore ostracised. His existence between worlds and between the categories of society is what constitutes his status as monster. The protagonist recognises this otherness in herself and can identify with the wolf’s abject nature. “Indeed, throughout the film Carter makes obvious that the wolf’s very otherness is what intrigues Rosaleen. Her sympathy and inclination towards other than what society has dictated, signals her own difference and surfaces explicitly in her natural affection for the wolf” (Lappas 1996:121). This is further implied when she attempts to comfort the wolf by telling him a story.

![Figure 2.8](image)

Figure 2.8, Rosaleen watches as the huntsman turns into a wolf. Neil Jordan (director). *The Company of Wolves*. 1984. Palace Productions (screen shot by author) (Jordan 1984).

The story Rosaleen narrates is about a she-wolf, or a female werewolf, who comes “from the world below to the world above” (Jordan 1984). The she-wolf is first represented in the film as a wolf, but after she is shot by one of the villagers she takes the form of a woman. However the woman cannot speak and is animalistic in appearance and behaviour. This scene in the film is an incorporation of Carter’s short-story “Wolf-Alice”, also included in *The Bloody Chamber* immediately after “The Company of Wolves”. In “Wolf-Alice” Carter similarly parodies the *Little
*Red Riding Hood* tale, but in this instance the wolf is also the girl, or rather “nothing about her is human except that she is *not* a wolf” (Carter 1979a:141). When this story is told on screen, “Carter visualizes Rosaleen's subconscious” (Lappas 1996:121) as both Rosaleen and the she-wolf embody a certain liminality. Both characters do not conform to conventional gender roles and both are monstrous in their ambiguity. Rosaleen chooses this story to convey to the wolf her own isolation and feelings of displacement in society.

![Figure 2.9](image.png)

*Figure 2.9, Rosaleen turns into a wolf. Neil Jordan (director). *The Company of Wolves*. 1984. Palace Productions (screen shot by author) (Jordan 1984).*

This story leads into the climax of Jordan’s film, the ending, where Rosaleen literally takes the form of a wolf (*Figure 2.9*) and is recognised only by her mother. Rather than being eaten by the wolf, the form of the girl and the form of the beast now merge in a different way, as the protagonist embraces her inner self—the self as sexual and uninhibited. Here Jordan (and Carter) proposes it is only by escaping her physicality that Rosaleen is truly liberated from societal expectations regarding her gender, expectations for which she is ill-suited. In contrast to Perrault’s narrative, the girl’s sexuality as represented by the wolf does not frighten or
destroy her—it liberates her from patriarchal restrictions. She is no longer trapped in a society that seeks to control and define her, and, as a she-wolf, she now exists in the margins of the dominant order. For “the idea of society is a powerful image [...] this image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas” (Douglas 1966:141).


These observations of Jordan’s film further support a reading of both Perrault’s and Carter’s stories in light of Kristeva’s concept of abjection as well as Ussher’s ideas of the monstrous feminine. Furthermore this metamorphosis, and the masquerade performed by various characters throughout the film, subverts traditional modes of representation in cinema as well as the male gaze as theorised by Laura Mulvey: “By destabilizing the image of femininity, the masquerade confounds this masculine structure of the look. It effects a defamiliarization of female iconography” (Lappas 1996:129). If woman in film can be understood as a construction reflecting masculine desires and anxieties, then by destabilizing her image Carter succeeds in
breaking down the notion of sexual difference which governs cinematic imagery (Mulvey 1989:14). Where the image of Rosaleen at the start of the film is that of a fetish (Figure 2.5), she no longer retains that iconicity but rather takes on the form of monster, and so effectively disrupts the male gaze. This concept is poignantly portrayed at the end of the film when a pack of wolves runs through an abandoned house. One of these wolves jumps through a portrait of a woman, effectively tearing and destroying the image (Figure 2.10). The beast replaces and destroys her static iconicity and in-so-doing challenges the notion of woman as bearer, rather than maker, of meaning (Mulvey 1989:15) as evident throughout art history.

**Conclusion**

What this reading reveals is an explicit distinction between the intention and ideology within Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” and Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. While *Beauty and the Beast* maintains those binary oppositions essential to a definitive and idealised understanding of femininity, Carter seeks to destabilise these assumptions in her short-story in order to represent realistic and far more relevant notions of gender identity. To expose, reject, deconstruct and then reconstruct the myths surrounding femininity lies at the very core of Carter’s strategy. Parody as a methodological approach is then appropriate when considering these intentions, as it offers potential for a critical engagement with not only the specific source being parodied but also the very conventions which structure that source (Hutcheon 1985:12). In imitating while also adopting a critical distance, parody incorporates and then re-creates previous content. However, in-so-doing, it also has the potential to rework the discourse it references. While Disney simply reproduces and perpetuates the patriarchal ideology inherent in those fairy tales it adapts for cinema, Carter appropriates fairy-tale form in her short-stories in order to critique the traditionalist nature of this discourse.

In “The Company of Wolves” the author’s use of the themes of ‘beauty and beastliness’ as well as ‘the nature of appearances’ (which now appear to be conceptually interrelated) is also strategic. In *Beauty and the Beast*, beauty and beastliness are presented as two contrasting states of being where characters can easily be identified as either one or the other. In Disney’s
film a beast is simply a beast and a girl is simply a girl, and the physicality of both these characters is an outer expression of their inner nature. But in “The Company of Wolves” these distinctions are not so apparent, as Carter intentionally unsettles this dichotomy in a move towards a more ambiguous understanding of femininity, as conveyed in Jordan’s film when Rosaleen’s mother says: “If there’s a beast in men, it meets its match in women too” (Jordan 1984). Furthermore, I view Carter’s use of the erotic as a practical implementation of what she terms “moral pornography”, which serves the purpose of presenting alternative sexual models and behaviours for both genders as well as the “polymorphous potential of female desire” (Lappas 1996:116).

A reading of Perrault’s and Carter’s stories in line with Kristeva’s concept of abjection further reveals the traditional character of Little Red Riding Hood as representative of patriarchal anxieties surrounding her fecund body, and contributes to a psychoanalytical understanding of the relationship between the protagonist and the wolf. Although Jordan’s The Company of Wolves deviates from Carter’s short-story, in this film Little Red Riding Hood in the form of Rosaleen is portrayed as monstrous feminine thus effectively expressing the marginal nature of the protagonist (as read within Perrault’s tale) by means of her physical transformation. In this way her image rejects the male gaze and subverts the conventions of cinematic representation—demonstrating how concepts of the ‘abject’ and ‘transitional’ often manifest as monstrous in cultural products such as myths, and in art and films, since their transgressive potential lies in their capacity to disrupt the dominant order.
CHAPTER 3: BEAUTY AND BEASTLINESS IN SELECTED WORKS BY DIANE VICTOR

Introduction

Contemporary South African artist Diane Victor is renowned for interrogating contentious socio-political issues by making use of confrontational and satirical imagery within her work. In many of her drawings and prints, Victor deals with the interplay between fragility and the bestial, as well as the misleading and sinister nature of appearances.

In this chapter I will argue that the selected works, with particular focus on Untitled (“City of Pricks”) (1985) and XXX (2002), present unconventional and transgressive models of female identity in relationship to notions of the bestial. I am interested in exploring the way in which Victor represents femininity as that which is subversive and un-idealised. Ideas surrounding gender identity developed by Judith Butler in her book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1999) are directly relevant here, as Butler deals with the notion of gender as “performative” and culturally constructed. I also draw on Linda Hutcheon’s A Theory of Parody (1985) in order to explore Victor’s appropriation of various myths and children’s stories in her artworks, and why this genre proves visually and conceptually effective when considering the artist’s intentions. To conclude I discuss Victor’s representations of women in relation to those by Walt Disney Pictures and Angela Carter, in order to explore the ways these representations may differ or align, and the significance of this.

As observed in the Introduction, valuable feminist readings of Victor have been undertaken by Von Veh (2008, 2011-12, 2012) and Allara (2012). The works selected for primary focus in this chapter, Untitled (City of Pricks) and XXX, have not previously been discussed in-depth, however. Thus in including them in this chapter I aim to not only introduce a consideration of the idea of “beauty and beastliness” into feminist discourse on Victor but also provide readings of images which have hitherto been afforded limited attention.
Gender as Masquerade

In her writings Butler (1999:xxxi) poses the question “Does being female constitute a ‘natural fact’ or a cultural performance, or is ‘naturalness’ constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within categories of sex?” What this interrogation implies is that, while all human beings are born with a sex, one is not born with a gender—gender is a learned and acquired behaviour (Butler 1999:151). Here Butler posits that while notions of masculinity and femininity may appear absolute, they are merely exterior fabrications supported by a set of corporeal signs and gestures which are then assumed to be interior and naturalised. In other words, gender identity does not exist without “the mark(s) of gender”—the gendered body comes into being through the repetitive and ritualised performance of these acts (Butler 1999:xv).

This notion of gender as masquerade is one Victor began exploring early in her artistic career, as seen in Untitled (“City of Pricks”) (1985: Figure 3.1), drawn by the artist during her third year of studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. It was during this time that Victor won the Anya Millner Scholarship which provided her opportunity to travel to Europe.29

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29I ascertained this during an interview I conducted with Diane Victor in Pretoria on 9 September 2015.
The imagery in this artwork was drawn from Victor’s memory of the Scott Monument in Edinburgh, where she recalls the Neo-Gothic architecture and view over the city.\textsuperscript{30} In the drawing, a female figure dominates the composition, leaning towards a male figure who gazes suggestively at the viewer. While the female figure pulls at the clothes covering her breasts, a layer of fur runs down her back, ending in a wolfish tail which emerges from the base of her spine. Behind the figures the enlarged head of a hyena protrudes from between the buildings and over the city.

\textsuperscript{30} Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
According to Victor the drawing was a response to the “predatory nature” she perceived in those around her whilst travelling internationally as a young woman for the first time.\(^{31}\) Victor explains that during this time she became a voyeur in the city, an ‘other’ of sorts, and the response she received from men as a result prompted the artist to explore these bestial aspects within Untitled (“City of Pricks”).\(^{32}\) However, in the image it is the female figure that transitions from human to animal, rather than the male. This can be attributed to what Victor explains as “the feral nature of women, and the fact that one does transcend. You shift from being almost civilised and domesticated: to an extent it’s a self-survival shift. That feral quality which runs I think [...] through women more than it does through men”.\(^{33}\) The woman is portrayed in a transitional state; she reveals her tail yet keeps her shoes on her feet, which further suggests the role-play or performance involved with the gendered (female) body. The concept of appearing ‘female’ or presenting ‘femaleness’ through culturally determined costume is evident here, a notion I discuss again later in this chapter. The fur covering the figure appears to be that of a leopard or cheetah, and speaks to the artist’s position at the time as an African traveller in a foreign country; the shift from human to animal is perhaps a representation of her own ability to adapt and survive in unfamiliar territory.

As a child Victor grew up on a smallholding on the outskirts of Johannesburg and often spent her time drawing animals, which contributed to her relationship with, and understanding of, their nature and anatomy.\(^{34}\) In this piece the sexuality and sexual dynamic between the figures is visually portrayed through the woman’s zoomorphism. The drawing serves as an early example of Victor’s interest in using animal imagery to represent what she perceives as the bestial aspects of human nature:

> I’m very interested in animal nature and the complex relations animals have between themselves, and the way people say “oh they’re only animals” and very often they’re more civilised and function with more social structure than we do. [...] The fact that we are animals, that we all have a very bestial aspect

\(^{31}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.

\(^{32}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.

\(^{33}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.

\(^{34}\) Interview with Diane Victor by the author, Loreal Vos and Heidi Mielke on 4 March 2015 in Johannesburg.
which we attempt to civilise on a very superficial level, through our clothing and our habits and etiquette and civilise ourselves—or domesticate—but intrinsically we really are animals just dressed up.35

For Victor, her portrayal of individuals in relation to various animals is largely intuitive, and ranges from dogs, to vultures, to hyenas and even crocodiles. The artist naturally associates a specific set of characteristics with each of these creatures. For example the use of dog imagery seen in much of Victor’s early work can be linked to concepts of domestication and civilisation.36 This dog/wolf imagery is significant when drawn in conjunction with images of the female form, as I would argue it involves a challenge to the way femininity is constructed by contemporary society as well as “aesthetic conventions that have underpinned the ways in which the female body has been represented in the West” (Schmahmann 2009:99).

If one looks at traditional representations of women in visual art, particularly the female nude, the female form has largely been constructed by patriarchal society as constant and contained in an attempt to regulate women’s biology and appease masculine anxieties surrounding her fecundity (as discussed in Chapter 2). As Schmahmann (2009:100), quoting Lynda Nead (1992:18), explains: “[...] since woman is regarded as ‘both mater[mother] and materia[matter], biologically determined and potentially wayward’, a conversion of her body into unyielding form signifies the ultimate triumph of the (male) forces of art and culture over untempered (female) nature”. However, as hair sprouts from the figure’s back in Untitled (“City of Pricks”), Victor presents an abject spectacle which disrupts the ‘civilised’ female body and its physical boundaries. This disruption has the potential to evoke uncertainty and anxiety in the viewer, as the female body no longer behaves in a predictable manner. Where the image of woman has traditionally been constructed to fulfill masculine desires and appease the male gaze, in representing a physicality which deviates from these ideals woman rejects this gaze and

35 Interview with Victor, 4 March 2015.
36 Interview with Victor, 4 March 2015. This statement is centered on the common practice of keeping dogs as pets, in a process where the animals are trained to behave in a certain way and serve the purpose of protection, companionship and, in some cases, even the replacement of human children. Conversely, and for the purpose of this dissertation, a wolf can be considered the untamed and undomesticated version of a dog.
reclaims her subjectivity (Dolan 1988:54). Through *Untitled* ("City of Pricks") Victor then conveys a sense of disorder, which is transgressive in that

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[d]isorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power (Douglas 1966:117).
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Furthermore, by rendering a hybrid figure—dog/wolf and woman—questions surrounding the civilisation and domestication of women, as well as a socialised repression of their sexuality, emerge. As a result Victor demonstrates the potential of the abject to be deployed in representations of women in contemporary visual art in such a way that it overthrows oppressive patriarchal conventions.

This un-idealised approach to the representation of women as seen in *Untitled* ("City of Pricks") can be attributed to a number of technical and conceptual factors. Firstly, in the vast majority of Victor’s works her female figures, or parts thereof, are based on her own body (including facial features) and in this way can also be considered an extension of the self.\(^{37}\) This is significant because Victor draws her female figures as she sees them (and herself) in reality, in terms of their anatomy and physical appearance. The artworks are then void of traditional and formulaic models of beauty as the artist shows no interest in reproducing these but rather places importance on drawing figures more closely aligned to what she observes in her everyday life.\(^{38}\) The apparent disjuncture between Victor’s figures and those seen in the media and/or traditional nudes then serves as a visual indicator of the unrealistic and unattainable ideals the latter proposes, as these are so far removed from everyday life that when the female form is represented without regulation, the imagery is effectively jarring to the viewer and thus

\(^{37}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.

\(^{38}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
demonstrates how “the naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a preemptive and violent circumscription of reality” (Butler 1999:xxiv).

Secondly, through her works Victor intends conveying her personal observations of human beings and what she perceives as their inherent beastliness.\textsuperscript{39} Her figures are not rendered as physically ‘beautiful’ because the artist does not perceive them or their nature in this way.\textsuperscript{40}

Another example of this can be seen in XXX (2002: \textbf{Figure 3.2}), which is also the central panel of Victor’s triptych entitled \textit{Trinity Fetish} (\textbf{Figure 3.4}). In this print the figure arches backwards whilst sleeping, the back of her body being constituted as the pelt and head of a menacing wolf. In a similar way to the woman in \textit{Untitled (“City of Pricks”)}, the fur and tail of the wolf appear merged into her skin, below her breasts are a set of extra nipples, and although she is entirely nude her boots remain laced up and on her feet. Between the figure and the dark phallic shape which looms at the head of the composition, the letters XXX have been embossed, a reference to the custom of placing an “X” at the bottom of a message to convey kisses or loving sentiments.\textsuperscript{41}

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\textsuperscript{39} This beastliness refers specifically to themes of violence, corruption and sexuality.
\textsuperscript{40} Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
\textsuperscript{41} Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
According to Victor, the figure in this work was based on a student the artist was teaching at the time, whose behaviour she perceived to be animalistic in nature (“When she got into a situation that was to her advantage, she morphed and she became quite predatory. She had a focus and she went in there and she got what she wanted, or she got who she wanted, and then when necessary she pulled back”).\(^{42}\) Victor proceeds to describe this behaviour as the “feral tendency” of women, more specifically a sexual and survivalist mechanism portrayed in

\(^{42}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
XXX through the duality and hybridism of the figure. While she appears to be passive and in a state of repose, the girl depicted in the work conceals an aggressive beast beneath and behind her. She arches up in sexual playfulness, offering her genitals, pelvis and torso while keeping her other (more threatening) parts tucked away. This position directly references Louise Bourgeois’ sculpture *The Arch of Hysteria* (1993: *Figure 3.3*)

![Image of The Arch of Hysteria by Louise Bourgeois](image)

*Figure 3.3, Louise Bourgeois. The Arch of Hysteria. 1993. Bronze with silver nitrate patina. 83.8cm x 101.5cm x 58.4cm. National Gallery of Canada (National Gallery of Canada Collections 2016).*

but, the artist suggests, it also alludes to the arch of orgasm or the height of sexual pleasure.

The girl uses her sexuality to attract the flaccid shape hanging above. However, while making herself vulnerable, she is both predator and prey, fragile and bestial. This interplay is significant when considering traditionalist notions of femininity, and the importance of sexuality and

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43 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
44 This artwork was based on Bourgeois’ interest in the arch of hysteria as theorised by nineteenth-century French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, who observed and photographically recorded a number of mentally ill female patients supposedly suffering from ‘female hysteria’—a common medical diagnosis at the time. However, in this piece the artist represents a male figure suspended in this physical position, therefore subverting the concept of this condition as conventionally assigned to femininity (Meyer-Thoss 2006:144).
45 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
desire in the construction of gender, where “the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire” (Butler 1999:31). While Victor implies a binary relationship at play in XXX (between the female and male components) she simultaneously challenges this notion by presenting a model of femininity which is also binary and dualistic, in that the figure performs characteristics typically associated with the masculine domain.

Furthermore, the figure may be understood to flaunt her desirability in order to deceive her masculine counterpart, represented by the distorted phallus. If interpreted in this way, she is using her femininity in a strategic manner, as represented by the wolf.46 Here Victor deals with the misleading and sinister nature of appearances specifically in relation to gender constructs:

[Women], I think, have been brought up and socialized to be that presentation of being female and yet, they're not. And it's almost like a game for me, watching people to see when they slip out of the guise into who they are, and then you see them slip back. [...] that’s really what I watch people for.47

Albeit that Victor’s suggestion that there is a ‘true’ identity underpinning its disguise is out of kilter with Butler’s ideas, the artist’s play with masks and performances of the self may nevertheless be viewed in light of the theorist’s construction of gender identity as an ongoing performance. For Butler, “gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed [...] there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1999:34). Thus Butler argues there is no pre-existent identity behind the acts performed on the surface of the body: these performances construct and constitute the appearance of gender identity, which is then assumed to be biological or innate. If gender

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46 In fairy tale tradition the character of the wolf has typically been negatively positioned. Often the wolf is portrayed as a cunning trickster who deceives the protagonist in order to prey on him or her (as in the story of Little Red Riding Hood). As discussed in Chapter 2, this can be linked to the origins of these tales in fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century Europe, at a time where wolves remained a predatory threat to livestock and even small children.

47 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
identity can be understood as a masquerade or act, then the subject and very categories of gender—‘male’ and ‘female’—become problematic and open to redefinition or even non-definition.\(^{48}\) Such a notion is repeatedly expressed in Victor’s works, particularly in \textit{XXX} where the figure’s physicality becomes an ambiguous construct.

Key to this “presentation of being female”\(^{49}\) is a culturally determined and acquired dress-code, which demonstrates the notion that gender is constructed in part through the “repeated stylization of the body” (Butler 1999:45). In both \textit{Untitled (“City of Pricks”)} and \textit{XXX}, the women are predominantly nude but keep their shoes on their feet. This is also significant because, although their physicality begins to change form and take on feral qualities, they retain traces of ‘civilisation’ in the form of objects which connote conventional femininity. Mary Douglas (1966:124) argues that “there are no items of clothing [...] or of other practical use which we do not seize upon us as roles and the scene we are playing in. Everything we do is significant, nothing is without its conscious symbolic load”. This furthers the notion of gender as a performance but also establishes the link between fetishism and the female body—where everyday objects embody meaning and power (particularly in \textit{XXX} where large black boots suggest the figure’s sexual prowess) and perform a symbolic function within society, particularly in relation to gender roles.

\(^{48}\) Here Butler (1990:45) is not suggesting there exists an artificial gender versus a ‘real’ or ‘true’ gender, but rather that by way of repetition we perform our gender and this in turn constructs our being.

\(^{49}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
According to Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen (1994:15) the term ‘fetishism’ is complex and multi-faceted and can be classified according to three categories: “anthropological fetishism”, “commodity fetishism” and “psychiatric” or “pathological” fetishism (later referred to by the authors as “sexual fetishism”). In a broad sense, fetishism can be understood as the attribution of value and power to inanimate objects. When this fixation with a particular object causes sexual arousal it is then termed ‘sexual fetishism’ and the object is considered a ‘fetish’. Furthermore, as Anthony Shelton (1995:7) explains:

Part of the problem with ‘fetishism’ is the ambivalence which forms an essential quality of the term itself. Notions of ‘fetishism’ often imply ambiguity and disavowel (the simultaneous belief in the truth and falsity of something), and are used in discourse that are either about power or project power or authority on to supposedly subordinate groups such as foreign subjects, women, 'degenerates' and the insane.
In *Trinity Fetish* (2002: Figure 3.4), the artwork XXX is displayed alongside *Straight Dress II* and *Mercy Seat* within the context of a triptych. The title of this triptych implies a conceptual relationship between all three works and the notion of fetishism, which I will explore through the following analysis.

In *Straight Dress II* the dark form of a dress appears isolated in the centre of the composition, surrounded by embossed sperm. The dress itself is a hybrid garment, an awkward merging of wedding dress and strait-jacket. A strait-jacket is typically utilised as a means of controlling those considered mentally insane and a danger to themselves and others. By visually combining this element with a piece of women’s clothing, Victor evokes the restraints of patriarchal society as well as the physical manifestation of this control in the form of restrictive women’s clothing. Within this work, Rankin (2008:18) observes, Victor deals explicitly with the “contiguous ideas of the constraints of women’s clothing and the demands of social mores”. For, as the artist explains, the work was conceived during a time in the artist’s life when she was grappling with the concept of marriage as one of many societal pressures placed on women.\(^{50}\) Similarly, the embossed sperm surrounding the dress speaks of conventional constructions of women as wife and mother, where the straight-dress (feminine) becomes an object of attraction for the sperm (masculine) whose sole purpose is to seek out and impregnate the feminine. However the garment remains impenetrable and unyielding. Rankin (2008:18) suggests this implied discomfort connotes “the social ambivalence and unease of a subject who feels different from the norm”, thus further expressing the artist’s non-conformity to traditionalist roles assigned to women.

In *Mercy Seat* the artist creates a visual relationship between African fetishes\(^{51}\) in relation to an electric chair—a device used in the electrocution of a prisoner sentenced to death by law, commonly referred to as a ‘mercy seat’. Here Victor renders a rich and elaborately carved wooden chair with nipped back and furry seat, textures which visually connote female sexuality

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\(^{50}\) Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.

\(^{51}\) African fetishes are traditional African charms or talismans created by different groups (usually by means of carving) and believed by members of the groups to embody magical powers or spirits (Shelton 1995:12). It is important to note that these objects were given the term ‘fetish’ by European colonialists who often misrepresented Africa’s religious beliefs (Shelton 1995:8).
in the form of breasts and pubic hair. The phallic wooden poles are decorative and emphasise the object’s sumptuousness which contribute to the chair’s aesthetic seductiveness. Victor explains that in all three Trinity Fetish works she was exploring the sexual practice of sadomasochism (S&M). In a way similar to the figure in XXX, the chair is a death machine disguised as an inviting seat—it incorporates both pleasure and pain. These ironies are significant when considering Victor’s intention to disrupt such dualisms.

Within all three works seen in Trinity Fetish, a sense of ambiguity is conveyed through the visual and conceptual hybridity of the objects or figures that they represent. By combining various dichotomous elements (male versus female, beauty versus beastliness, attraction versus repulsion, passive versus aggressive, and so on) Victor interrogates the stability of these respective categories and plays on ambiguity or the abject, particularly in Untitled (“City of Pricks”) and XXX, as a means of subverting social order. For as Butler (1999:182) argues, the stability and coherence of society “is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject. Hence, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject”. Fetishism as a conceptual thread running through this triptych thus expresses Victor’s interest in dealing with concepts of power within society, particularly constructs of power associated with gender roles, as seen in XXX where the artist plays on the notion of women as ‘objects’ of desire.

Furthermore, by visually combining the female subject with aspects of the bestial, female sexuality is portrayed as a source of danger based on its transgressive power. As opposed to traditionalist understandings of female sexuality as passive and repressed, here Victor exposes aggressive female desires typically concealed through socialisation.

‘Beauty and Beastliness’ as Method

‘Beauty and beastliness’ and ‘the misleading nature of appearances’ are not only recurring themes within Victor’s works, but they also facilitate a further layer of signification when

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52 Sadomasochism (S&M) is a practice or fetish which involves the giving and receiving of sexual pleasure through consensual acts of pain and/or humiliation. The term is derived from the words sadist and sadism and based on the ideologies of Marquis de Sade (see Chapter 2).
utilised as a technical strategy in relation to the artist’s conceptual intentions. When observing what Rankin (2008: 4) terms her trademark “compulsive linear detail” and “penchant for complex forms that reward the painstaking viewer with many intriguing minutiae”, it becomes apparent that ‘beauty’, in a technical sense, performs a very particular role in Victor’s oeuvre.

For Victor, her art-making has always been a means of purging herself of information and imagery which she finds personally disturbing. This can be understood as a cathartic process wherein the artist draws out her feelings of anger, disgust and trauma. In Sheep’s Clothing (2001: Figure 3.5) is one such example of this. In this etching, a young child with the head of a lamb sits on the edge of her bed, while a man kneels down with his face between her legs. Alongside the figures a fantastical scene plays out, as the caricature of a wolf runs and pounces across the bed. In the margins of the print seemingly innocent texts read ‘Daddy’s Girl’ and ‘One for the Master’ from the nursery rhyme Baa Baa Black Sheep, alluding to the sordid sexual abuse taking place (Rankin 2008:43).

The artwork forms part of Victor’s ongoing Disasters of Peace series which references Francisco Goya’s Disasters of War (1810-1820)—a collection of etchings which record and protest against the atrocities Goya witnessed during the Peninsular War of 1808-1814 between France and Spain. Similarly, in Disasters of Peace Victor responds to numerous brutal and violent acts of terror taking place in Post-Apartheid South Africa, incidents which ironically remain rampant during our democratic era, a time of political ‘peace’ and within the context of a progressive constitution. In Sheep’s Clothing and other works from the Disasters of Peace series sparked controversial debate when they were exhibited in the Faculty of Law at the University of Pretoria. In response to the graphic visuals and disturbing subject matter portrayed in these prints, many from the faculty found the works inappropriate and offensive. As a result the prints were relocated and eventually removed.

53 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
54 See Heyns (2005) and Van Marle (2005) whose papers presented at the Arts and Reconciliation Festival and Conference on 16 March 2005 at University of Pretoria offer opposing positions in regard to the controversy around the removal of these artworks. See Rankin (2008: 43) and Schmahmann (2013: 212-217) for overviews of this controversy.
While this response from the public may appear negative, Victor finds it far more successful when her work provokes viewers to such a degree, as her practice is informed by an intention “to shock people out of their complacency and encourage them to re-evaluate their preconceptions” (Von Veh 2008:50). This is important in the sense that disconcerting subject matter and confrontational imagery is not only a means for Victor to process her personal feelings, but is also intended to bypass the viewer’s own blocking mechanisms in order to create a sense of discomfort, and in turn result in increased awareness of social injustice.  

However, forcing viewers to view and process images they find uncomfortable is often a difficult task. This is especially true within the context of South Africa, where, Victor observes, the majority of the population are exposed to horrific crimes on a daily basis, either directly, or indirectly through the media.  

What remains is a desensitised nation, and one accustomed to increasingly high levels of violence and injustice particularly in the form of woman and child abuse.

The reluctance of many to confront these issues, at the expense of the victims involved, is what motivates Victor to create disarming imagery which she feels has the capacity challenge the viewer’s indifference. In order to do so, the artist employs what she describes as an attraction/repulsion technique where “aesthetically pleasing surfaces or technical skills act, to an extent, like a snare or a trap”.  

Victor’s intricate detail, rich tonal contrast and figurative mode of drawing then works to seduce the viewer’s eye, but once he/she begins processing this imagery, the viewer is then confronted with macabre and often frightening subject matter under the guise of technical beauty.  

Victor’s practice therefore embodies themes of ‘beauty and beastliness’ and ‘the misleading nature of appearances’ not only through the imagery she chooses to incorporate, but also through a technical strategy—where beauty operates as a camouflage or façade which initially conceals, and then reveals, horrific content.

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55 Interview with Victor, 4 March 2015; Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.  
56 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.  
57 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.  
58 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
Victor points out that the title *In Sheep’s Clothing* (*Figure 3.5*) is a reference to the Afrikaans word *skaapie*, or little lamb, a term of endearment often used by parents towards smaller children.⁵⁹ It is also a play on the idiom “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” of Biblical origin, a phrase which refers to a person who appears harmless but conceals a predatory disposition. Here Victor utilises the ‘misleading nature of appearances’ as a conceptual theme in order to convey the misconceptions surrounding abuse and the deceiving nature of its perpetrators. By representing the young child with the head of a lamb, Victor implies the victimisation of the child like that of “a lamb to the slaughter”, where the father is predator and the child is prey. Here the viewer is presented with an overt visual and conceptual contrast between the young girl’s fragility and the perpetrator’s beastliness. Concepts of the bestial are further emphasised through the inclusion of a wolf taken directly from Disney’s *Peter and the Wolf* (1946), illustrated in a manner which reads as moving images or a series of animated frames. According

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⁵⁹ Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
to Victor, the inclusion of this component is a reference to the darker themes within children’s stories, which are often sexual and violent but fundamentally deal with human nature under the guise of an ‘innocent’ genre.\textsuperscript{60} Victor therefore visually represents the psychology of a young girl processing trauma through her imagination, where fear manifests itself as the Big Bad Wolf. The work is then also an effective parody of a number of Western narratives such as “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Peter and the Wolf” as it references the archetypal character of the wolf in relation to current socio-political affairs. In a similar way Victor subverts Christian iconography in this piece by making use of the lamb as a symbol of sacrifice, and subverting notions of the Almighty Father (God) or ‘good shepherd’ by constructing the father as inherently perverse and corrupt. This points to another significant strategy Victor employs throughout her practice, that of parody, as a means of critique.

**Parody and Subversion**

Although in XXX Victor does not intentionally reference any one tale in particular, she concedes that the work may call to mind the ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ narrative wherein the protagonist is traditionally deceived and eventually devoured by a wolf (see Chapter 2). In this work the artist portrays the figure slipping out of her skin, as in “Little Red Riding Hood” where the wolf devours Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother, and the pair are then rescued by a huntsman and cut from the wolf’s stomach.\textsuperscript{61} This notion of slipping out of skins is not tied to one specific narrative but extends across many in fairy tale discourse as well as ancient Greek and Nordic mythology; furthermore it speaks of a physical metamorphosis which signals a change in identity.\textsuperscript{62} In relation to XXX, the subject slipping out of her skin again refers to the ‘misleading nature of appearances’ but also the multi-layered nature of (female) identity, where changing skins becomes a metaphor for shedding external selves.

\textsuperscript{60} Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
\textsuperscript{61} This is the ending of “Rotkäppchen” or “Little Red Cap” as told by the Brothers Grimm in their collection Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children’s and Household Tales) (1812).
\textsuperscript{62} Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
The abovementioned example demonstrates Victor’s intertextual approach to art-making which involves “interweaving signs and symbols that reach back into art history” in an interplay between past and present discourses (Von Veh 2008:50). As Victor explains, her appropriation of various myths, legends and children’s stories is tied to her intention of making work which is accessible to a broader audience, rather than limited to those with an art education.63 The majority of these narratives are firmly established in Western tradition, particularly in the form of religious imagery. Hutcheon (1985:5) argues that, if the viewer is to recognise the ironic inversion at play in a work, he/she must first have knowledge of the source being parodied, and, in keeping with this, the narratives Victor uses provide the ideal structure or vehicle for conveying meaning as most viewers can easily identify and recall their iconography.64 Furthermore, Victor plays on these narratives, she indicates, as she finds they deal with some generic aspects of human nature that tally with those being invoked in her works.65

![Figure 3.6](image)

**Figure 3.6**, Diane Victor. *Diana and Actaeon (Of Man and Beast Series)*. 2004. Drypoint on aluminium soft-drink cans. 5cm x 12cm. Private Collection (Rankin & Von Veh 2008:33).

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63 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
64 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
65 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
In “destablising such symbols and signs, drawn from, but also critiquing Christian narratives, pagan myths and African beliefs, social stereotypes and popular media, [Victor] creates open-ended iconographies that invite imaginative interpretations” (Rankin 2008:38). In Diana and Actaeon (2004: Figure 3.6) and Goldilocks (2004: Figure 3.7) we see two examples of this approach.

These drawings form part of a waste art project carried out in 2004 and are rendered on aluminium soft-drink cans, a material which facilitated small spontaneous responses to various mythological narratives (Rankin 2008:32). In Diana and Actaeon, Victor makes reference to a myth featuring Actaeon as a young hunter and Diana as the goddess of the hunt. In this tale Actaeon unwittingly stumbles upon the goddess bathing in a spring, and in response Diana, who is both embarrassed and angry, accidently splashes water on Actaeon and transforms the man into a deer (Guerber 1975: 64). After he flees in fear, Actaeon is eventually hunted down and killed by his own hounds who fail to recognise their master (Guerber 1975:64). In the artwork, Victor portrays Actaeon shouting out while surrounded by his dogs which appear mesmerised by his transformation. Ignoring his distress, Diane turns her back on Actaeon and covers her breasts in a petulant manner, clearly ashamed and annoyed at having been exposed (Rankin 2008:32).

Figure 3.7, Diane Victor. Goldilocks (Of Man and Beast series). 2004. Drypoint on aluminium soft-drink cans. 5cm x 12cm. Private Collection (Rankin & Von Veh 2008:33).
In *Goldilocks*, we see the familiar children’s story “Goldilocks and Three Bears” reworked to incorporate darker content. The original story is one which instructs children of the importance of obedience, and the dangers of wandering off or exploring unknown territory. In the tale the protagonist, Goldilocks, wanders into the home of a family of bears and proceeds to eat their food, sit on their chairs and sleep in their beds. In the end she is discovered by the bears and flees in terror, having ‘learnt her lesson’ never to intrude or indulge her curiosity again. However, in Victor’s artwork, Goldilocks is portrayed straddling one of the three bears (which appears to be Mommy Bear) in a sexual manner while lifting her arms in a childlike cry for affection, while the largest bear stands alongside the pair. Although it’s unclear as to the bears’ intentions with Goldilocks, Baby Bear looks on dejectedly from the corner of the composition while witnessing the curious scene taking place.

While these works may seem playful, they in fact expose the menacing and macabre themes within the narratives they parody. In *Diana and Actaeon* Victor explores Diana’s beauty as a source of danger which seduces and ultimately destroys Actaeon—for as Actaeon gives in to his sexual desires he is punished by means of his physical transformation into a beast. In this way Victor deals with the notion of beauty as power in society, further expressed by Diana’s spiteful reluctance (in *Diana and Actaeon*) to save Actaeon from his violent fate. By reinventing the relationship between the archetypal characters within these tales, Victor succeeds in appropriating these stories to critique current social dynamics. Her engagements therefore demonstrate how, through parody, “works of the past become aesthetic models whose recasting in a modern work is frequently aimed at a satirical ridicule of contemporary customs or practices” (Hutcheon 1988:11).

In deploying irony when engaging with pre-existing sources, Victor then utilises parody as an intentional transgressive device. In relation to her representations of women, this strategy is effective in that Victor not only reworks the content of the narratives she parodies, she simultaneously challenges the discourse and conventions which underpin their legitimacy. For example (as previously mentioned) the artwork XXX makes subtle reference to the ‘Little Red

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66 Interview with Victor, 9 September 2015.
Riding Hood’ tale, however in this work Victor presents an inversion of the traditional victim versus predator dynamic as she constructs a subject who simultaneously embodies both these roles. By presenting a figure that visually signifies both girl and wolf, Victor then also subverts fairy tale discourse which typically constructs female characters as passive victims and beasts as aggressive villains. This demonstrates how “parody can also be seen [...] to be a threatening, even anarchic force, one that puts into question the legitimacy of other texts” (Hutcheon 1985: 75).

**Conclusion**

Victor’s works discussed in this chapter represent notions of gender at odds with normative or traditionalist understandings of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. In contrast to Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, which perpetuates a binary understanding of gender identity and gender relations, Victor presents gender as non-dichotomous, and in this way calls into question the very subject of ‘woman’ as that which has been constructed as other to ‘man’. The seemingly contradictory dichotomies the artist merges in turn constitute ambiguous subjects (and objects) which offer new and far more liberal possibilities for gender identity. This is in line with postmodern feminist thought, informed in part by Kristeva who suggested that “the liberated person is able to move freely between the ‘feminine’ and the ‘masculine’, chaos and order, revolution and the status quo” (Tong 1998:205).

Victor’s disruption of gendered norms is in part due to the role that abjection plays in the artworks discussed in this chapter. In confounding the margins of the body and creating dislocations in categories, she poses a challenge to patriarchal conventions concerning the representation of women as well as absolute definitions of female identity. Also important, however, is Victor’s deployment of parody to critique those aspects of society she finds problematic, including constraining notions of gender such as those implicit within ‘beauty and beastliness’ discourses. Subverting inherited imagery and narratives in such a way that models of femininity inscribed within those discourses are effectively transgressed, Victor instead presents un-idealised and composite identities for women – ones which invite questions about inherited narratives and the gendered meanings which underpin them.
CONCLUSION

Butler (1999:189) observes that a distinction should be drawn between parody that is subversive and parody that reinforces existent norms:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony.

In exploring examples of visual and literary culture selected for this dissertation it becomes apparent that, while all make use of parody and draw on traditional fairytale narratives in one way or another, they are not all transgressive in their representations of women in relation to notions of ‘beauty and beastliness’.

In Walt Disney Production’s Beauty and the Beast, the presentation of its female protagonist conforms comfortably to traditionalist notions of femininity, both visually and conceptually. Belle’s relationship to the Beast is dichotomous in nature, and in an iconographic sense these two figures serve to define and oppose one another. Here Disney appropriates a classic fairy tale in such a way that it is appealing to contemporary audiences, but in the process perpetuates outdated ideas concerning ideal femininity implicit within the narrative(s) it draws on.

Here I propose that, in having their origins in ancient mythology, fairy tales embody traditionalist constructs of femininity which require reevaluation and reinterpretation when being represented in contemporary visual culture. However, as the Disney version of the Beauty and the Beast story suggests, these tales may continue to be circulated through the mass-media, both textually and visually, in a manner that remains true to their initial formulas and significations. Such reiterations may mean that dated understandings of appropriate femininity continue to have impact. Simone de Beauvoir (1973: 301) posited that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, and my analyses in this dissertation reveal the impact
and significance of cultural products in this process—how the recirculation of imagery and texts, in part through films and stories, constitutes part of this ongoing socialisation of the sexes as well as how constructed definitions of masculinity and femininity become naturalised.

‘Beauty and beastliness’ as a conceptual theme constructs a dichotomous dynamic between the sexes. But what emerges from my interrogation is that, while in conventional representations of ‘beauty and beastliness’ such as in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, ‘beauty’ is portrayed as the ideal form of femininity, the two are in fact constructed as interchangeable—woman *is* beauty, she is reduced to the aesthetic nature of her corporeality. In contrast, ‘beastliness’ and all its associations (as discussed in the Introduction) is assigned to masculinity and conveyed as Other and exterior to femininity. In this way, sexuality or primal lust associated with ‘beastliness’ becomes an aspect of woman’s physicality that she is encouraged to repress or reject in order to remain a coherent subject.

Angela Carter, I suggest, uses the erotic to interrogate binary constructions of gender and as a means of repositioning power between the sexes. If “in the tradition of fairy tales women are punished for their desires” (Betterton 1996:148), then Carter subverts this discourse by assigning woman the sexual agency denied her by patriarchal hegemony. In actively pursuing their sexual desires, Carter’s women begin to embody and perform aspects of the ‘bestial’ conventionally associated with masculinity, effectively destabilising the ‘beauty and beastliness’ dichotomy. This ‘beastliness’, however, is only fully integrated into Carter’s protagonist when she is represented as a literal beast in Jordan’s *The Company of Wolves*. Jordan’s portrayal of femininity as monstrous speaks to concepts of abjection and conveys a sense of how a “transgression of borders, particularly between the human and non-human, is central to the construction of the monstrous” (Betterton 1996:132). This example then is also in keeping with postmodern feminist theories which argue for woman’s “otherness” as advantageous and a site for potential transgression, rather than oppression (Tong 1998:195).

Furthermore the theme of ‘the misleading nature of appearances’ which continues to emerge as intrinsic to stories dealing with ‘beauty and beastliness’ (as I have identified in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” and Diane Victor’s artworks) speaks
to the significance of the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ in relation to identity. Butler observes that we are taught to think of the biological sex of a subject as consistent with his or her gender identity, pointing out that transgressions occur when such correlations are unsettled. If gender can be understood as exterior to (and independent from) one’s sex, an outer performance that conveys the illusion of an inner self, then

what performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? […] And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire? (Butler 1999:189).

I would argue that precisely such a performance (or proposal thereof) is represented in Victor’s works. In this study I have identified how, through the use of parody and Kristeva’s concept of abjection the artist conveys ambiguous notions of gender as well as composite female identities—ones which challenge dualism or the construction of binary oppositions. Here Victor uses what Butler (1999:189) terms “parodic repetitions” that may be “effectively disruptive” and “truly troubling” in that they convey femininity as indefinable. According to Kristeva (1982:2) the abject is “the place where meaning collapses”, in other words where it escapes the Symbolic order. If “so many ideas about power are based on an idea of society as a series of forms contrasted with surrounding non-form” (Douglas 1966:122), then the abject in visual art may facilitate a destabilisation of traditional constructs of power, particularly those expressed in acts of looking. By visually merging aspects of the bestial with representations of women, and presenting these subjects as neither fully one nor the other, Victor demonstrates how a focus on the margins of the body in visual art might facilitate a transgression of societal conventions and allow for the expression of female subjectivity. This has particular validity within a South African context where our socio-political landscape remains unstable, causing individual and collective racial and sexual identities to remain in constant flux and therefore ambiguous.
According to Douglas (1966:151): “[...] just as it is true that everything symbolises the body, so it is equally true (and all the more so for that reason) that the body symbolises everything else”. Through this study I am able to take cognisance of how representations of the female body in visual culture embody and communicate various societal values concerning femininity. Furthermore, these cultural products in turn inform and reference one another—not excluding those within the field of visual art. Parody as a tool is then appropriate as it serves to refunction pre-existing sources and, through ironic inversion and trans-contextualisation, communicate new meaning while critiquing the old. As “an intentional dialogized hybrid” (Hutcheon 1985:69), parody is in fact particularly well-suited to expressing composite notions of female identity.

Through a focus on ‘Beauty and the Beast’ as a tale type as well as an idea with broader impact, I have argued in this dissertation that the circulation of traditionalist myths through cultural forms may convey reductive and narrow definitions of womanhood and appropriate female roles and behaviours, but such ideas may also be reworked to subvert their efficacy and impact. To conclude, I would propose that there may be benefits for future research to be directed at the ways in which some other myths and fairy tales are represented or invoked within contemporary cultural practices, and to discern the significance these discourses might also have on the definition of female identities—whether in South Africa or beyond these borders.
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