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Tiger Bride



Oil on canvas, 2012, 121.5 x 150cm, collection of Ali Maginness

“A Different Logic”

Animals, Transformation, and Rationality in Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride”

Since at least the time of Aristotle, Western culture has been recognized as structured through key binaries, commonly identified as including animal and human, body and mind, nature and culture, female and male. The hierarchies involved in these dualities have often depended on an appeal to reason as defining the valued pole, with unreason, emotion, and instinct denigrated at the other pole.¹ Arguably, the central organizing principle of reason—described by Val Plumwood as the “protagonist-superhero of the western psyche” (*Feminism*, 3)—not only sustains these binaries but is also gendered and anthropocentric and thus has consequences not only for women but also for animals and the natural world; in fact, Plumwood has suggested that rationality is “inimical to both women and nature” and “is the key to the connected oppressions of women and nature in the West” (“Nature,” 3). According to Carol Adams, a dualistic worldview that pivots on qualities such as reason or rationality and that constructs ideas about human identity by means of an emphasis on difference “not only reinforces fierce boundaries about what constitutes humanness, but particularly what constitutes manhood” (11). Similarly, Donna Haraway writes eloquently that the “discursive tie among the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal—all reduced to type, all others to rational man, and essential to his bright constitution—is at the heart of racism and, lethally, flourishes in the entrails of humanism” (100).

In this essay we discuss Angela Carter’s treatment of the “Beauty and the Beast” story in “The Tiger’s Bride” (1979) in relation to central ideas of animal studies, “an intellectual location seeking to destabilize conventional notions of

the human and its discursive centrality" (Greenhill and Allen). We specifically examine the significance of the protagonist-narrator's initial identification of herself as economically but not intellectually "other to rational man," charting the dependence on reason reflected in her responses to The Beast's² household and to the possibility of transformation from animal to human or vice versa. What folktale characters, and even modern-day fairy-tale readers, generally take for granted—the transformation between animal and human—becomes for Carter's protagonist a focus for anguished self-examination and examination of her society and its mores, a focus that results not in a magical simplicity but in a slow and often painful choice of animal body over human convention. In the course of this complex narrative the protagonist's own internalization of patriarchal norms, including the privileging of reason, is gradually dismantled in the face of a more powerful logic.

As we show, the narrator's claim to rationality in "The Tiger's Bride" is central to Carter's critique in this story of patriarchal exclusions of the Other. Interestingly, in the context of the literary production of the *conteuses* and French literary salons that ground Carter's imaginative retelling, Jack Zipes notes "a certain resistance towards male rational precepts" (*Beauty and the Beast*, xiii). In "The Tiger's Bride" the narrator demonstrates a gradual abandonment of conventional rationality; her move toward acceptance of the animal Other as "natural" inverts the implicit movement of Madame Leprince de Beaumont's version of the *Beauty and the Beast* story, its ostensible referent.

More generally, by challenging the factors that sustain this "line of fracture between reason and nature" (Plumwood, *Feminism*, 44), Carter reinstates a wider understanding of the place of the human in the biological world. This challenge highlights how ideas of "human" and "nonhuman" identity have traditionally been constituted through folktales and fairy tales, which frequently draw on the trope of animal transformation. Such transformations, representing the characteristic fairy-tale "suspension of natural physical laws" (Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, xxii), allow human characters to slip in or out of animal form, a metamorphosis that itself at once represents a concretized and literal expression of traditional Western human/animal dualism and implicitly undercuts it. Lewis C. Seifert, in examining hybrid animal-humans in fairy tale, has argued not only that such animal characters as Red Riding Hood's wolf can be seen as literary shadows of real animals but also that "animals—no matter how metaphoric—always pose an existential problem for humans" (244). That existential problem is at the heart of Carter's story. By foregrounding the role that rationality plays in such binaries, Carter produces a profound critique of the postagrarian culture following the Enlightenment in which men perceived women, as well as animals, as not merely objects of dominance and consumption but as objects of exchange, and she implicitly proposes an alternative

response not only to animals but also to ideas of the human as other than animal. "The Tiger's Bride" thus undermines the conception of rationality that, as Haraway indicates, underlies human (male) conceptions of the hierarchical distinctions between male and female, human and animal.

Animals as a Vehicle for Change in Traditional Tales

At the heart of most fairy tales and folktales lies the desire for transformation. This is the narrative form of the disempowered: in the Western European tradition, many tales show the powerless moving toward a position of power, the poor finding wealth, the beautiful but impecunious marrying well. Ruth B. Bottigheimer describes the early writing of Giovan Francesco Straparola as "rise tales," stories of social ascendancy and growing power, representing the dreams of the newly ambitious Italian urban classes (20). Similarly, Jack Zipes points out how the French fairy-tale writers of the 1690s followed Straparola and Giambattista Basile in "[writing] subversively to question the mores, customs, habits, and use of power during their own time" (*Fairy Tales*, 22). Although these examples show stories from a range of social classes and contexts, a common thread binding these narratives together is that all describe *change*. They represent an imagining of different lives, the location or discovery of power from either internal or external sources, often through a transformative process. People without the power to change use stories to imagine and even impel such change; as Marina Warner writes, "The story itself becomes the weapon of the weaponless" (*Beast to the Blonde*, 412). Indeed, this resolute desire for a better life has become a defining characteristic of these stories. As Warner pithily puts it, "Fairy tales express hopes" (*Once Upon a Time*, xxiii), which are manifested in what Angela Carter has described as fairy tales' "heroic optimism" (*Angela Carter's Book*, xx).

In the folktale and fairy-tale tradition the process of change is represented by means of external rather than internal markers. Instead of change being depicted through developments in character psychology, as in realist fiction, human-animal transformations emerge as a common trope, with these transformations often compelled by magical intervention. Robert Irwin describes human-to-animal transformation as a "basic fantasy" and observes that "this motif is pervasive in the world's folklore," with shape shifting woven through canonical Western texts such as Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (70). Various folktales and fairy tales tell of enchanted suitors, including the Animal Groom and Animal Bride cycles of tales, such as Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" or the Grimms' "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich." Transformation stories have attracted various readings, often focusing, following Bruno Bettelheim, on the animal as representing a link to

subconscious erotic desires. Robert Darnton, however, in his examination of French folk versions of tales, observes that Bettelheim's and Erich Fromm's psychoanalytic readings of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story reflect a "blindness to the historical dimension of folktales" (11). Discussing the French versions of "Tom Thumb" and "Hansel and Gretel," Darnton writes that "when [the protagonists] knock at the doors of mysterious houses deep in the forest, the wolves baying at their backs add a touch of realism, not fantasy" (37). Warner, similarly, observes that Animal Grooms often appear in the form of animals—such as wolves, bears, pigs, and warthogs—that "used to pose a very real threat" (*Once Upon a Time*, 28). Both Warner's and Darnton's analyses point to the historical relationships between human and animal that have shaped human stories featuring animals.

At least superficially, folktales and fairy tales commonly reflect an instrumental view of animals. Darnton observes how French peasants of the eighteenth century, locked in an impoverished cycle of labor, tended to imagine happy endings that involved food and economic windfalls, such as ownership of cows, chickens, or a horse (33–40). Human and animal lives were closely intertwined in a primarily agricultural economy. Keith Thomas notes that it was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that animals began moving out of the "long house," a combined house and barn where cattle and people slept under the same roof, and into separate buildings (95). The relationship between human and animal, in both peasant and aristocratic culture, was primarily one of use: humans used animals for food, clothing, plowing, and transport—the essentials of living.³ The animals' images, therefore, performed similar functions. Within the context of folktales and fairy tales, with their drive to project or describe transcendence of individual or cultural constraint, it is perhaps not surprising that animals are depicted as useful in being facilitators of that transcendence.

However, this usefulness is not always manifested simply through the use of the animal as objectified. Despite their insistence on the primacy of the human subject, fairy tales depict animal transformations that cross the species barrier in a multitude of ways: humans become animals, animals become humans, humans adopt animal disguises, and some entities possess hybrid qualities. Often, human characters are changed into animals as the sudden result of a magical spell, as in the English tale "The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh" (Jacobs). At other times the transformative apparatus is less visible—Warner speaks of a "stark absence of explanation" (*Once Upon a Time*, 36)—such as when a peasant woman gives birth to a hybrid human-animal in the Grimms' story "Hans My Hedgehog." Scholars, including Cristina Bacchilega, have argued that the facility of transition from human to animal or vice versa and the importance of animals as agents in many folktales suggest an attitude

already anticipating ideas found in animal studies (see Bacchilega); in other cases, the condition of being or becoming animal serves as a stage in the protagonist's self-realization.

In many folktales animal transformations are represented as temporary states, stepping-stones on the way to an authentic human identity; this is particularly observable in tales of the "Beauty and the Beast" type (425C). As Steve Baker remarks, "It is clear that Western Society continues to draw heavily on symbolic ideas involving animals and that the immediate subject of those ideas is frequently not the animal itself, but rather a human subject drawing on animal imagery to make a statement about human identity" (xxxv). The line between human and animal, negotiated symbolically through the trope of animal transformations, therefore represents a continual enactment and reinforcement of human identity, as Seifert notes (244). Helen Tiffin observes that "what constitutes the 'human' is its very distance from the animal and the animalistic" (36). In many fairy tales, when a human character is changed into an animal, this change not only reflects oppositional conventions surrounding human identity but also specifically locates how that character's identity is being defined and valued in the tale.

Sometimes animal transformations mark a point where, in hierarchical terms, a human needs to "go down" in order to "go up": as enchanted "beasts," humans trapped in an animal's skin, they suffer a transitional period in the wilderness. Several versions of "Beauty and the Beast"—though not, interestingly, Beaumont's or her predecessor Villeneuve's, both of which leave the focus firmly on Beauty—indicate that this has been necessary for the Beast; see, for example, the German "Little Broomstick" and the Danish "Beauty and the Horse." In the Animal Groom tradition, "protagonists mutate into a strange, often loathsome and sometimes terrifying outward shape, a boar, a bear, a snake, or a raven, often the outer proof of their inner viciousness" (Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 28–29). At other times, particularly if it occurs toward the end of a narrative, animal transformation can function as a final punishment for a malevolent character, marking him or her as less than human. Transformation in these tales thus appears as an alignment between human flaws and the animal body, a point where essence and appearance converge.

On the other hand, for female characters especially, transformations in fairy tales often mark a point where human existence has become untenable. For example, in the Grimms' version of "All Fur," a variant of tale type 510B in which a beautiful girl flees her father's incestuous passion, the female protagonist seeks shelter in a cloak made from the skin of many animals and is mistaken for an animal (Grimm and Grimm, "All Fur," 261). As Warner observes, "Animal form marks a threshold she passes over, before she can take control of her own identity" (*Beast to the Blonde*, 354). In such tales the animal shape acts

for the disempowered as an imaginative nexus between present reality and desirable future. As we will see, Carter's story "The Tiger's Bride" highlights the potential implications of such transformations.

Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" and Its Context

Angela Carter's engagement with the folktale and fairy tale tradition in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), not merely through late-twentieth-century versions but in a variety of older renderings, has been much discussed. In particular, Stephen Benson warns against the danger of reading Carter's work in isolation from that folkloric context (36). Our reading of "The Tiger's Bride" highlights Carter's transformation of earlier versions of the tale in her emphasis on the ratiocination of its protagonist. By inserting Beauty's viewpoint as narrator, Carter reshapes the reader's experience of the tale: the protagonist's reflections and responses become central to that experience. In the process, Carter invites a focus on the nature of the narrator's viewpoint and its movement away from dependence on the very Western construction of rationality that has trapped her.

"The Tiger's Bride" is a Beauty and the Beast story (tale type 425C) that reconfigures the fairy-tale deployment of animal transformation, rendering the distinction between human and animal a focal subject of attention and inverting the assumptions behind it. In earlier versions of the Beauty and the Beast tale, the Beast enters the narrative as a sometimes vaguely defined yet resolutely animal entity (Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, 299). In Beaumont's story and many similar versions, the Beast regains human form following Beauty's recognition of his inner beauty; humanity here is affirmed as distinct from and superior to the animal, because the Beast's behavior marks him as worthy of human status. Beauty's act of recognition simultaneously represents and inverts the fairy-tale convention of using kindness to animals as a litmus test of human virtue, in which a human character's treatment of animals—by definition the powerless—shows that the character is worthy of fairy-tale largesse. In Beaumont's story, Beauty's altruism has already been established through her self-sacrificial willingness to take her father's place; her characteristic respect for and politeness to the Beast (himself earlier the powerful figure in the tale) enables the Beast also to demonstrate his *civilité* by ceding power to Beauty and thus prepares for his eventual (re)transformation to the human.

Beaumont, like her predecessor Madame de Villeneuve, thus represses the disturbing potential of the animal alluded to by Seifert, because the Beast's qualities are recuperated as human; as Carter herself observed, the emphasis in Beaumont's version of the story is on the "lesson in love" that instructs young girls to seek beneath appearances (Carter, "Review," 123). In Carter's version

neither girl nor tiger undergoes a temporary transformation. Instead, the girl's final acceptance of "Milord's" animality, which as we will see is strikingly depicted, marks a profound change in her worldview to recognition of what Jacques Derrida calls the "absolute alterity of the neighbor" (380).⁴ The "kindness" practiced by the protagonist of Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" is manifested in "The Tiger's Bride" as both a willingness to accept the animal as himself and the privileging of the girl's own desire, itself an aspect of human animality—all within a social context that inhibits such revelations or considers them anarchic.

Carter's movement toward this repositioning of human as animal in the story is characteristically slow, as the protagonist's relationship to The Beast, and to herself, passes through distinct stages. As Kimberly J. Lau has argued, both "The Tiger's Bride" and "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," its predecessor in *The Bloody Chamber*, "first draw out and condense the gendered ideologies at the heart of the ["Beauty and the Beast"] tale and then critically reimagine the phallogocentric systems of power and privilege that determine and define their beastly subjects" (*Erotic Infidelities*, 42). Carter's version of Beauty is a post-Enlightenment narrator-protagonist whose view of the animal—including the animal in herself—has been not just as utility but as commodity. Her confrontation with The Beast involves not merely politeness, such as that exhibited by Beaumont's Beauty, but rather what seems a willfully slow recognition that he is indeed an animal and that the animal is other than human—a distinction that will be problematized. Her apparent reluctance to perceive her host as animal indicates that she initially shares what Tiffin describes as "the human determination to keep the so-called 'species boundary' firmly in place" (37). The protagonist's narration represents the extent to which people in Western societies such as her own had internalized a set of culturally constructed expectations that key elements of social practice, particularly the relations between the sexes, will operate in terms of commodity exchange rather than as a full engagement between individual subjects—or even to fulfill direct needs, as was and is the case with the consumption of animals and their by-products.

In many of Carter's rewritten fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, the image of the animal "Beast" signifies not just Otherness but specifically the Otherness of the instinctual human body, repressed and feared by its Enlightenment opposite, the rational mind. The volume interrogates, among other things, a cultural vision in which animals and the body are not merely useful but commodified and consumed: the narrator of the title story is sexually used by her husband, but more important to them both is his fetishized concept of her, conveyed through pornographic images and mirrors. Adams reminds us of the binary relationship between viewer and the

viewed: "Representation enables conceptualizations in which the subject-object dichotomy recurs: looking at representations provides the gazer with pleasure while simultaneously reinforcing the distance between subject and object as unbridgeable" (41).

In "The Bloody Chamber," which, significantly, opens in the urban setting of fin de siècle Paris, we are a long way from a world vision in which the animal is accepted as a natural and necessary part of human existence; it appears only in symbolically charged traces such as the "perfume of spiced leather" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 8) associated with the Marquis. These traces of animal lives and bodies evoke Adams's absent referent: "the process by which the animal used for corpse eating disappears both literally and figuratively. Animals in name and body are made absent as animals in order that flesh can exist" (16). The narrator's body, however, is made visible to herself as meat when the Marquis shows it to her in a mirror, "the living image of an etching by Rops. . . . He, in his London tailoring; she, bare as a lamb chop" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 15). The identification of her body as a butcher's cut, mediated by means of representation, foregrounds the tension between pleasure and consumption. As Adams observes, "The association between attractive human female bodies and delectable, attractive flesh appeals to the appetitive desires as they have been constructed in the dominant culture in which we interpret images from a stance of male identification and human-centeredness" (30). Thus the physical bodies of both the Marquis and the narrating bride are overlaid for them with both his androcentric and indeed patriarchal concepts. As Caroline Webb argues, Carter's highly sensuous language in this story simultaneously evokes erotic response and critiques the ways this response is patriarchally constructed: "Carter deploys the reader's awareness of linguistic sensation to enforce her assertion of the inextricable relationship between physical experience and cultural shaping, and requires us to come to terms with our implication in cultural shame" (202). The comment highlights Carter's own sophisticated consciousness of the implications of her representation, which we will see extend even further in "The Tiger's Bride."

Following from her piercing representation of the mediated body in "The Bloody Chamber," Carter's volume traces a movement back to acceptance of the animal as natural and away from the highly rationalized and codified. Most strikingly, the protagonist of "The Company of Wolves" discovers that the gentlemanly huntsman who has raced her to her grandmother's is a werewolf—and she chooses the wolf by destroying the clothes earlier identified in the story as a possible way to keep such beings human (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 118). Carter here draws on an old version of the "Red Riding Hood" tale type ("Conte de la mère-grande"), in which the wolf instructs the girl to burn her own clothes, while recasting the girl from victim to agent: after she burns her

own clothes, she burns his as well and joins him in bed. The animal becomes associated with sexuality in Carter's stories, whether that be male sexuality unconstrained by civilization or, as Merja Makinen suggests, "the projections of a feminine libido" (12). Makinen's reading points to the traditional fairy-tale use of the animal as means to an end: Carter's Red Riding Hood figure escapes the patriarchal burden of female chastity and achieves her own desires, previously expressed in her flirtation with the huntsman, when the huntsman/wolf devours her grandmother—the representative of acceptable womanly behavior under patriarchy. The reversal of twentieth-century patterns of consumption that occurs when the animal eats the human echoes the fears of the narrator in "The Tiger's Bride." However, as we will see, those fears underlie that narrator's sophisticated perception of herself as commodity—a view not shared by the self-willed protagonist of "The Company of Wolves," who "knew she was nobody's meat" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 118).

Carter's Beauty figure in "The Tiger's Bride" is not, like Beaumont's, a modest and self-sacrificial daughter who willingly subordinates even her own survival to her father's; rather, she is an inwardly rebellious young woman who deploys the techniques of Western rationality to analyze her own status as a commodity in a patriarchal economy with a fierce intelligence. Carter substitutes for the neutral narrator of many folk tales—and for the sententious omniscient voice of Beaumont's fairy tale—a protagonist who narrates in the first person. This shift in itself transfigures the fairy-tale context, because it inserts the girl's emotional and intellectual responses into what is typically an unreflective account of events. The language of Carter's protagonist locates her as a complex character quite unlike the flat figures of folktales and even unlike Beaumont's comparatively thoughtful and self-sacrificial Beauty. Her richly adjectival evocation of the homeland her father has doubly abandoned, through travel and through gambling, indicates emotional depth and, perhaps even more visibly, sensory awareness, even as her incisive account of her father's actions manifests her capacity for rational analysis.

It should be noted that Carter's protagonist shares an intelligence and emotional responsiveness with Beaumont's Beauty, who is for Beaumont a role model for her adolescent female readers. But where Beaumont consistently depicts Beauty as exercising choice within the constraints of her changing circumstances—whether to marry or to stay with and serve her impoverished father, to let him return to the Beast or to take his place—Carter's narrator, as a sentient commodity, initially appears deprived of any capacity to act except through narration itself. Seeing herself as compulsorily passive, Carter's heroine has no recourse but observation, reason, and the language through which she articulates her situation—much as Beaumont's Beauty engages the Beast with her own reasonable, which is to say in their terms, courteous, responses

to his comments. Carter's protagonist can perhaps be aligned with the seventeenth-century French *conteuses* who used fairy tales to critique the limitations placed on their lives; they spoke out "against arranged marriages and the double standards, which allowed men to enjoy love affairs and punished women for adultery, which gave men an education and denied women the freedom that follows from knowledge" (Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 47). As Tatiana Korneeva comments in her comparison of Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" with Villeneuve's, "By describing [gender] relationships the *conteuses* provide preliminary diagrams of social mechanisms that need to be reconstructed" (245).

Carter's story initially opposes the girl's capacity for rational thought to the irrationality that surrounds her, whether it is the "sickness" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 54) of her father's compulsive gambling—in which he stakes his entire property, which includes his daughter, on a turn of the cards—or the superstitions among which she has been brought up. "The Tiger's Bride" opens with a single arresting sentence: "My father lost me to The Beast at cards" (51). The explicit instrumentalism of the narrator's bald statement at once evokes and recasts Beaumont's tale of a girl passed from one male to another, clarifying the girl's status as commodity in a financial transaction. Carter's foregrounding of this status through the girl's own perception, through its emphasis on her clarity of understanding, highlights the absurdity of that status, foreshadowing the progressive dismantling in the story of dominant Western binaries—mind/body, human/animal, culture/nature—that arguably perpetuate such subordination.

Beaumont's touching tale of a father transgressing for the sake of a beloved daughter—he steals a rose from the Beast to take back to Beauty—is here displaced by a vivid manifestation of the underlying economic situation of a marriageable upper-class woman across the eighteenth century, when Villeneuve and Beaumont wrote their narratives. "You must not think my father valued me at less than a king's ransom; but, at *no more* than a king's ransom" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 54; emphasis in original). This statement invites us to interrogate the cheerful announcement in many "rise" tales that the man who achieves the tasks set by a king will receive his daughter's hand in marriage. In such tales the princess, like the animals of transformation stories, becomes a device for the hero's achievement of his goals. From his point of view the princess is a means to change rather than an individual with her own desires and motivations. Carter's relocation of the reader's sympathies to her female protagonist invites a critique of the economy that reduces women to economic—and narrative—devices. At the same time, her representation of that protagonist as an individual aware of her plight challenges the basis of that economy, in which women, like children and animals, were traditionally located as unreasoning creatures valuable only as property.

Through this rewriting we are reminded, too, that in older versions of the story, when required by the Beast to hand over either his daughter or himself as payment for the rose, the father sends his daughter—even if, in some versions, including Beaumont's, she puts herself forward as sacrifice. In Carter's story the girl is no noble volunteer, nor, as Lau points out, does she carry "the emotional blackmail and guilt" adhering to the protagonist of Beaumont's and other versions because of that protagonist's request of a rose (*Erotic Infidelities*, 55). Instead, when Carter's Beast offers a wager for the girl, her father agrees willingly, in hope of regaining the estates he has already lost—and the girl can only watch "with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 52) while her father first begs them both and then bets his daughter on the turn of the cards. Carter's critique of Beaumont's tale thus emerges in the story's opening paragraphs; its feminist energy is only increased by the fact that this critique is spoken by the highly articulate girl-victim herself.

Transformation and Reason

To a reader accustomed to the different conventions of realist narrative, an intriguing aspect of human-animal transformations in folktales is both their spontaneity and how naturalized this event becomes within the context of these tales. Despite the sudden change of a human character into an animal, or vice versa, this is usually not treated in the narrative, or by other characters, as an abnormal event; disbelief is suspended by the characters as readily as by its contemporary audience, or by a modern readership trained to the appearance of the magical in fiction. Thus the affected character and those who observe the transformation rarely question the new reality or their own perception of it. For example, in the English fairy tale "The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh," when the king, Margaret's father, is told that the dragon is in fact the enchanted Margaret, he is grieved but apparently unsurprised. Similarly, in the Grimms' "Frog King," the princess exhibits no surprise when she encounters a talking frog, merely commenting, "Oh, it's you, you old water-splasher" (2). When she hurls the frog against her bedroom wall and he changes into a young man, she takes this transformation in stride. In this world reasonable behavior is identified not as intellectual rejection of what we would now see as physically impossible but rather in pragmatic responses such as bringing milk to the dragon Margaret. Thus the Grimms' princess is seen simply as discourteous in her violent rejection of the frog.

The lack of obvious consternation when a character changes between human and animal in traditional folktales and fairy tales may reflect the narrative function of transformation as a vehicle to bring about human change.

Seen from this perspective, a human character responding with surprise to an animal transformation would considerably slow the pace and effect of the narrative. It might also derive from the combination of familiarity and necessity in cultures where human and animal lives were more closely aligned than they are now.⁵ However, as we will see, a striking aspect of Angela Carter's reinvention of animal transformation is her female protagonist's initial reluctance to accept the animality of her masked host, despite a cumulative series of events and evidence that indicates he is not human. The story thus becomes a critique of broader constructions, such as rationality, traditionally used to justify and enforce the species barrier and other distinctions. More generally, it represents a poignant disruption of what Val Plumwood terms the "western hyperseparation from nature" (*Feminism*, 73). Carter in this story extends her critique of the post-Enlightenment rationality that locates the animal as Other to a critique of patriarchy and of the mind-set in which even female humans are reduced to objects, as in the pornographic worldview Carter described in *The Sadeian Woman*: "In its schema . . . man proposes and woman is disposed of" (6).

The masculine economy in which the narrator of "The Tiger's Bride" finds herself implicitly denies her any claim to reason. As she notes, "I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality just as they denied it to all who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 63). This astute observation in itself provides both a claim to the power of reason and a critique of patriarchal forms of reason, which "in all their unreason" delimit "rationality" as exclusively human and masculine. Carter here anticipates Plumwood's argument that "much of the problem (both for women and nature) lies in rationalist or rationalist-derived conceptions of the self and of what is essential and valuable in the human make-up" ("Nature," 5–6). The narrator's emphasis on reason as a distinguishing category of human identity implicitly illuminates the process by which a view of animals as utilities, producing meat to be eaten and wool to be worn, may have evolved into a view not only of animals but of everything beyond the self—in this case, beyond the patriarchal order—as objects to be deployed, and hence as commodities to be exchanged, and therefore as lacking any right or means to critique that deployment. Again, this reminds us of Plumwood's observation that "Nature in the west is *instrumentalised* as a mere end to human needs via the application of a moral dualism that treats humans as the only proper objects of moral consideration and defines 'the rest' as part of the sphere of expediency" (*Feminism*, 69; emphasis in original).

The girl's thoughts thus provide a clear feminist challenge to patriarchy but also extend this challenge to question the relative value of human and animal. The narrator had previously commented, on being fetched in *The Beast's*

carriage, that “I had always held a little towards Gulliver’s opinion, that horses are better than we are, and, that day, I would have been glad to depart with him to the kingdom of horses” (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 55). Indeed the Houyhnhnms of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) are represented as almost ideally rational, unlike the savage and brutal though humanoid Yahoos. In her comment, which prefigures the ending of her story, Carter’s heroine is thus consciously not yet rejecting the human world because she prefers the world of nonhuman animals but because the patriarchal economy represented by her father has failed the standards of logic and reason she has learned from it to value. She has not yet recognized that these standards themselves derive from the human civilization that has trapped her; she envisions the animals as a potentially superior, more truly rational version of the human—as Gulliver perceives the Houyhnhnms to be—through utilization of which, like other fairy-tale protagonists, she can somehow escape her current condition. In so doing, she is still participating in the binary vision of self and Other that has, as she sees it, placed her on the wrong side.

The narrator’s privileging of rationality in such moments paradoxically disables and delays her recognition that the world she has entered is indeed a nonhuman one. Although the landlady utters “La Bestia!” when she learns that the father has been invited to play cards with “Milord” (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 52), the girl’s narration initially maintains that Milord is human even as her description of him undercuts this. Here, what is suspended is not disbelief but the possibility that reality, and power, could inhere in anything other than the patriarchal structures to which she is accustomed. Noting “the fuddling perfume of Milord, far too potent a reek of purplish civet at such close quarters in a little room” (53), she speculates, “He must bathe himself in scent, soak his shirts and underlinen in it; what can he smell of, that needs so much camouflage?” (53). This is misdirection: civet scent is after all taken from the gland of a catlike animal. Accustomed to a society of artifice, the girl does not yet consider the possibility that the scent is not camouflaging some further unacceptable smell but is the smell of The Beast himself; her observations in the patriarchal world have trained her to identify traces of the animal merely as devices adopted by the man. Carter highlights the extent to which the girl’s perception is constrained by her binary understanding of the world, in which humans are separate from and opposite to animals: a being capable of playing cards and wagering must be a perfumed man. In this case, however, Milord has adopted a perceptible camouflage, a disguise that makes manifest that there is something to be disguised, and, in so doing, turns his own animal reality—the stench of the cat—into the appearance of just another disguise: “He has an odd air of self-restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself to remain upright when he would rather drop down on all fours. . . . Only

from a distance would you think The Beast not much different from any other man" (53).

That reference to "any other man" assures the reader that The Beast is indeed a man, even as the narrator details all the ways in which his characteristics diverge from the human, with gloves "so huge and clumsy they do not seem to cover hands" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 53). She perceives him as a monstrous man rather than as Beaumont's monster, a deformed human rather than an animal—rather as Perrault's Red Riding Hood, in a series of numbly declarative statements, persists in calling "grandmother" the creature in the bed despite her observation of its surprisingly big ears and teeth (Jones and Schacker 33). For all her analytic ability, Carter's narrator—in this conforming to fairy-tale norms—does not offer any deductions about the actual nature of her host. Accustomed to men scenting themselves with animal perfumes and behaving like brutes, the girl confines her speculations to essentially human concerns. The "carnival figure" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 53) identified by the narrator seems to belong in the world inhabited by the girl's father, where landscapes and horses and clothes can be transformed, in effect, into gaming counters, manifesting a post-Enlightenment version of the utilitarian view of the animal—and where deformity can be masked as beauty. Thus the narrator locates Milord's surface appearance, which she describes in extensive detail, in relation to the world of deception and commodification to which she is accustomed.

Carnival is, of course, the time of reversal, and the narrator gradually discovers that The Beast's disguise is more than a matter of a too-perfect mask. His performance of the human is a caricature; he cannot even speak, but growls, his comments translated by his valet, "as if his master were the clumsy doll and he the ventriloquist," the narrator observes (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 54). The image again domesticates the potential for monstrosity and turns it into the instrumentally rational manipulation of puppets to which the girl has become accustomed. She remembers peasant superstitions from her childhood about beast/man hybrids but derides them: "Old wives' tales, nursery fears! I knew well enough the reason for the trepidation I cosily titillated with superstitious marvels of my childhood on the day my childhood ended. For now my own skin was my sole capital in the world and today I'd make my first investment" (56). The "old wives' tales" the girl remembers are, significantly, stories told by and about servants and farm workers. Her memory of their rumors about "the waggoner's daughter [whose] son was born of a bear, they whispered" (56) evokes the world of folktale in which a woman may bear an animal child, as in "Hans My Hedgehog," but the narrator dissociates that world from her own experience, relegating it simultaneously to childhood and to the peasant class.

We are reminded that Beaumont first published her tale in one of the earliest magazines for children; across the next century fairy tale lost its 1690s associations with adult salons and grew gradually more closely identified as a genre for children, not just generally for peasants.⁶ This is another example of the post-Enlightenment binarism—"the Cartesian dream of power," as Plumwood puts it (*Feminism*, 117)—that locates the nonrational as Other. The rational, educated (and therefore upper-class male) adult who no longer accepts as natural the events of folktales and fairy tales situates the uneducated, whether child or peasant, as irrational and relegates such tales to that audience. Despite her contempt for her father and for the exclusive claims to rationality of the masculine, Carter's protagonist nevertheless at this stage privileges the enlightened skepticism associated with her position in the class hierarchy. Her vision here emerges as bound by the Cartesian limits of her version of rationality, which denies the possibility of what it has not seen, just as much as her father's is by his gambling addiction.

This limitation also affects her ability to interpret what is said to her. When The Beast sends word through his valet that he wishes only to look at her naked body, she begins by translating his request into one from the world she knows in which women, like animals, are objects with particular uses, whose function is to fulfill human (male) needs. Thus, although The Beast's request is specifically "to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude without her dress" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 58)—a phrase that intriguingly incorporates the fairy-tale pattern of threefold repetition—she offers him the sexual use of her body. She replies, "You may put me in a windowless room, sir, and I promise you I will put my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it. . . . So I shall be covered completely from the waist upwards, and no lights. Then you can visit me once, sir, and only the once" (59). The narrator's reply, which explicitly denies The Beast the actual sight of her body, locates her situation firmly as prostitution in the usual sense, and she outlines the economic consequences of the transaction in these terms.

The Beast's actual request is at first unthinkable and subsequently unacceptable: "'Take off my clothes for you, like a ballet girl? Is that all you want of me?' 'The sight of a young lady's skin that no one has seen before—' stammered the valet" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 61). The narrator feels herself to be devalued; her reference to ballet girls recalls how women whose trade involved exhibition of the body (such as ballet dancers, artists' models, and even actresses) were seen by "proper" women well into the twentieth century as socially and sexually degraded. The elegant prostitution of marriage, even concubinage, is something Carter's narrator has been brought up to expect, but reduction merely to image, as she sees it, without even the dubious honor of having her body used sexually and potentially participating in the continuation

of property lines that sex represents in patriarchy, removes her from her own system of valuation and therefore debases her. "I wished I'd rolled in the hay with every lad on my father's farm to disqualify myself from this humiliating bargain. That he should want so little was the reason I could not give it" (61). The narrator identifies The Beast's desire to view her body without using it sexually as pornographic: it reduces her body to an image, and ignores its, and her, capacity as a sexual being, just as her father ignored her subjectivity by reducing her to a gaming counter.

If the narrator finds The Beast's request in effect monstrous, the last part of the story reconfigures monstrosity both for her and for the reader. The valet, not the narrator, tells us that "nothing human lives here" when he brings her a clockwork image of herself to serve as her maid (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 59). But the narrator clings implicitly to the fiction that The Beast is a deformed man, moving from indirectness to directness only slowly. "He buried his cardboard carnival head with its ribboned weight of false hair in, I would say, his arms; he withdrew his, I might say, hands from his sleeves and I saw his furred pads, his excoriating claws" (61). The phrases "I would say," "I might say" demonstrate that she is still struggling to relate what her senses tell her to what she believes she knows—until he begins to reveal his body. She is forced to acknowledge that "my two companions were not, in any way, as other men, the simian retainer and the master for whom he spoke, the one with clawed forepaws who was in a plot with the witches. . . . I knew they lived according to a different logic than I had done until my father abandoned me to the wild beasts by his human carelessness" (63). The phrasing here still refers The Beast and his servant to the human world, "not . . . as other men," and, as the reference to witches makes clear, the narrator still conceives of the "wild beasts" simply as opposed to the civilized and rational, indistinguishable from human barbarity. Their "different logic" is what makes The Beast and the valet technically monstrous to the narrator, as at this point she can locate them only in terms of the binary she knows.

Monster, Animal, and the Animal Self

With etymological appropriateness, the actual nature of The Beast's monstrosity can be fully accepted only through demonstration, an act of showing. In place of revealing her own body, the narrator is told, she must view that of The Beast. But whereas she expected the viewing of her own body to reduce her, making her merely the image of the feminine projected by the patriarchal male, her viewing of The Beast forces her to recognize his difference from the world of utility and commodity in which she had been raised: "A great, feline, tawny shape whose pelt was barred with a savage geometry of bars the colour

of burned wood. His domed, heavy head so terrible he must hide it. How subtle the muscles, how profound the tread. The annihilating vehemence of his eyes, like twin suns" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 64). As often happens elsewhere in Carter's writing but rarely in this particular story, the prose is reduced to truncated sentences—here with an echo of William Blake's "The Tyger" ("In what distant deeps or skies / Burnt the fire of thine eyes? . . . And what shoulder, & what art, / Could twist the sinews of thy heart?" [214])—as the girl responds less than coherently to something that does not fit into her own rational and economic logic.

The pace of the writing also echoes the pounding of a frightened heart and accompanying shallow breathing, a device that foregrounds the corporeal nature of her coming transformation; it reminds us that the body is so often positioned—with women, animals, and nature—on the lower side of Western dualities. The shock appears to transform the girl's entire reading of and response to her situation: "I felt my breast ripped apart as if I suffered a marvellous wound" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 64). Again, the intensity of the emotional response highlights the challenge to the corresponding binary of reason. The fact that the animal is not named, and so placed as an object, but apprehended as a creature, "a great, feline, tawny shape" (64), underscores how the narrator begins here fully to accept that "different logic" (63) that lies outside patriarchal reasoning and almost beyond the human construct of language. "Nothing about him reminded me of humanity" (64). She exposes her breasts to the revealed tiger, implicitly accepting his earlier request not to have sex but to view her body and silently expressing the understanding that his view of her will be, as hers is of him, a confrontation with the Other that must accept Otherness. Monstrosity here is what is shown to exist but that cannot be understood within the terms of "rational man": in exposing her body to the tiger, the narrator herself moves outside those terms, accepting not his original demand—which Lau describes as "scopophilic fantasy" (*Erotic Infidelities*, 56)—but a contract posed in a different, nonhuman logic. Lau argues that, unlike the Beauty of "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," this girl "finds nothing reflected in The Beast's eyes" and therefore sees this encounter as evoking Irigaray's "nothing-to-see" (Lau, *Erotic Infidelities*, 58). However, what the girl sees in fact is not nothing but something other than herself, however mediated. The image in the phrase "the annihilating vehemence of his eyes, like twin suns" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 64) powerfully locates The Beast—as animal, not man—as a separate source of life and energy.

Further, when Milord's valet comes to send her home to her paid-off father, the narrator comes up with a surprising alternative, deciding to "dress [the clockwork maid] in my own clothes, wind her up, send her back to perform the part of my father's daughter" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 65). The valet's

expectations belong in the simplified world of fairy tale, in which the protagonist is presumed to be happy with his or her economic gains. The automaton responses depicted in fairy tales and required of a woman in a patriarchal society are rejected here, but so is the rationality represented in the clockwork. The girl is now acting intuitively, proposing a kind of sympathetic magic that is in itself appropriate to folktale, even as she underlines the nature of her prior status: emotion and instinct are again foregrounded in their traditional opposition to reason. Her planned substitution provides another version of transformation, in which the father will receive a clockwork girl to enable his real daughter to gain the change she needs. Moreover, it is significant that the girl herself is the agent here: she uses the clockwork maid as a device to escape her father and her father's view of her as an object. In staying with The Beast, she is choosing an alternative life and an alternative self, achieving the change toward which so many fairy-tale protagonists aspire—but not according to the socioeconomic norms implied in those tales. Transformation here is a mechanism not for success in the patriarchal and hierarchical world but for escape from it.

The final paragraphs also lead the reader as well out of conventional rationality and back into fairy tale. The narrator goes to The Beast still aware of herself as victim before carnivore, "as if offering him in myself the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 67). But although Carter's contemporary reader may be puzzled about how the sables that The Beast has given her can turn into live rats, the girl is not: she has surrendered her rational interrogation of what she sees and returned to the fairy-tale world of which magical transformation is an expected part. The fact that the sables turn into live rats reverses the process by which animals perform a useful function—usually after their deaths—as what the girl has accepted as clothing returns to its live and autonomous nature, and the rats run squeaking away. Patricia Duncker remarks that "she loses the egocentric sense of herself as a morally superior being that almost prevented her union with the Beast" (83). But the girl has gained a different, though arguably no less egocentric, sense of herself as beautiful animal through her relinquishing of the rational. Her comment "He will lick the skin off me!" (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 67) seems a last vestige of the bedtime-story threats of her childhood but becomes a literal prediction of subsequent events. "And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back into water. . . . I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur" (67). Only in the last phrase does the narrator make clear her own transformation. This may be read literally, or psychologically, as an acceptance of the human as animal; but any uncertainty about the process is left with Carter's modern

rational reader. In this passage, as Hopcroft puts it, “Carter writes across the species barrier” (217). The narrator herself has ceased to engage in rational analysis, and the final sentence states the fact of transformation without comment, as simply as in a fairy tale.

The narrator’s description of the “nascent patina of shining hairs” beneath the skins of “a life in the world” (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 67) identifies the human body as fundamentally animal, with animal desires. She has transcended the binaries whereby rational men deploy other entities—women, children, animals—as objects, commodities, and has located herself and The Beast as subjects whose bodily desires are important in themselves. In moving beyond rationality, she denies the binaries established by that rationality; in abandoning what readers identify as her humanity, she escapes the commodification that has placed her, in the patriarchal view, beneath humanity. Carter thus anticipates Plumwood’s claim that identity work is grounded in a rational tradition that not only stresses dualism but is inherently gendered: “Humanity is defined oppositionally to both nature and the feminine” (“Nature,” 11). Where Carter’s protagonist begins the story, like an early feminist, fiercely presenting her claim to share the rationality of men, she ends it by rejecting the categories into which male rationality has divided up the world and separated man not only from woman but also from animal.

Resolution of the Beauty and the Beast narrative need not involve the transformation of Beast into handsome (human) prince or even, as at the end of the film *Shrek*, of “beautiful” human into “beastly” ogre. “The Tiger’s Bride” neither simply “[turns] Beaumont’s story on its head,” as Jerry Griswold puts it (183), nor reverses established binaries; rather, it provides a reading outside the norms of the story in which the animal body is itself perceived as beautiful. Whereas in many Western European fairy tales transformation to the animal is either a temporary suffering or a final punishment, in “The Tiger’s Bride” such a transformation away from the human becomes the goal of the narrative. Monstrosity becomes beauty when the viewer moves outside the binary of human and Other. Carter’s representation of this recognition gains power through her study of the narrator’s corresponding movement away from the “rational” process that produces such binaries. The tiger is a powerful being whose motivations and behavior cannot be reduced to the human. The protagonist’s recognition of this allows her to see herself as more than merely a rational, civilized human; she renounces not only objecthood but aspiration to patriarchally constructed subjectivity, and, by choosing the animal in herself, she locates both transformation and animal as ends, not means.

Aidan Day, offering a generally perceptive reading of “The Tiger’s Bride,” suggests that Carter “uses the image of animals to signify a libido which has

been culturally repressed in some women" (147), but although liberation of that libido and definition of "autonomous subject positions" by women are certainly goals of the story, Day's phrasing posits a treatment of the animal that the story itself escapes. In the course of providing a powerful feminist critique of the historical status of women under patriarchy, as well as of Beaumont's pedagogy in her version of "Beauty and the Beast," Angela Carter anticipates the animal studies movement by representing animals no longer as literal or symbolic tools for the achievement of human ends but as beings in their own right.

Conclusion

Angela Carter's critique of rationality in "The Tiger's Bride" forms part of her feminist project: as Lau has observed, her vision "(re)imagines animal drives, sexual drives, free from the sex/gender system, and in so doing begins to dismantle the phallogocentric underpinnings of both sex and language" ("Erotic Infidelities," 92). It also enables reflection not only on the patriarchal view of women but on the historical treatment by humans of those around them, including nonhuman animals. More broadly, the relationship between the narrator and The Beast suggests an almost visionary perspective on the gulf between humans and nature, rooted in dominant Western binaries, which some commentators consider to be at the root of the current ecological crisis. Plumwood writes that "once nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and human identity is reconceived in less polarised and disembodied ways, the great gulf which Cartesian thought established between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears" (*Feminism*, 5). The traditional folktale depictions of animals locate them, first, as a natural part of life and, second, as necessary for sustaining that life—they serve the function of feeding and clothing human beings. Transformation tales demonstrate how the animal can be deployed to serve further functions. But the metaphoric nature of that process, in which the animal fulfills a need beyond that of ordinary subsistence, prepares for the post-Enlightenment view of the animal as Other and in turn for that Other to be seen as an object that can be deployed for any purpose, including as a commodity, an object of exchange. Carter's narrator, seeing the viewing of her body as reduction of herself in both class terms and sexual terms, demonstrates how this "rational" view of a being, whether nonhuman animal or human female, deprives it of inherent value. The dance of the main characters' relationship—as the narrator slowly moves beyond the binaries constituted by, and constituting, patriarchal rationality—foreshadows Plumwood's more recent observations on environmental ethics and on bridging the gulf between human and nature through an "ethics and politics of mutuality" (Plumwood, *Feminism*, 2).

The protagonist of “The Tiger’s Bride” begins by resenting her exclusion from the privileged circle of patriarchal dominance, angrily demonstrating her superior claim to the powers of reason on which that dominance has been founded. Through her encounter with The Beast she comes to accept her own nature as a being intrinsically more valuable than “a king’s ransom” (Carter, *Bloody Chamber*, 54) and more powerful than the men who gamble and trade such commodities. The girl begins by staking an implicit claim to the rationality notionally underpinning the power structures of her father’s world, even as she casts doubt on her father’s right to that power. Her slow recognition of The Beast’s nature compels a shift in her evaluation of the binaries constituting that rationality: the definitive importance of rationality itself, as so constituted, is eventually rejected in the girl’s emotive and physical response to the vehemence of the tiger’s eyes.

By defining animals as objects to be used for human purposes, just as much as by relegating women to the sphere of the irrational and hence treating them as commodities, Carter implies that we are naturalizing the dehumanization of the human body and of the human itself, turning men into carnival figures, women into clockwork maids, both artificially constructed. Her fairy tale proposes a worldview in which the binaries through which human “rationality” has been constituted are dismissed; in which the animal body—in the human or in the nonhuman “beast”—is accepted as part of the full human experience; and in which animals, like female humans, must be respected as subjects.

Notes

1. An early version of this can be seen in Plato’s allegory of the chariot, in *Phaedrus*, in which the charioteer controlling both spirit and flesh is reason.
2. We have retained Carter’s capitalization of both article and noun in referring to “The Beast” in her story. Other versions of the fairy tale, and other scholars, generally capitalize the noun, and we have done this whenever we refer to the figure of the antagonist in such versions. Elsewhere we have sought to eschew the term *beast*, with its negative associations, in our discussion of animals and animal bodies.
3. This relationship of dependence, often unacknowledged, continues into the present. Indeed, Helen Tiffin writes that “anthropologist Nick Feddes challenges us to get through a day—whether or not we are vegetarians or even vegans—without using an animal product, symbol or metaphor” (39). More broadly, Plumwood sees this “denial of dependence on biospheric processes” as part of a largely one-sided “view of humans as apart, outside of nature, which is treated as a limitless provider without needs of its own” (*Feminism*, 21).
4. Carter’s representation of the narrator as shocked within the gaze of the tiger aptly prefigures Derrida’s account, more than twenty years later, of “these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat” (Derrida 380).

5. In contrast, in his essay "Why Look at Animals?" John Berger considers the implications of the gradual disappearance of animals from everyday life, in Western Europe and North America from the nineteenth century onward, largely as a result of commercial or mechanization processes. "Cities, growing at an ever increasing rate, transformed the surrounding countryside into suburbs where field animals, wild or domesticated, became rare" (256).
6. It is worth noting here that the Grimms named the original edition of their folktale collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

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