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Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* through the Female Gaze

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Abstract

The discourse on Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* has primarily been focused on the feminist undertones of her neogothic fairy tale retellings. In this essay, I apply the male and female gaze to Carter's collection, which are perspectives I believe previous research on Carter's works has overlooked. The incorporation of the male gaze allows for a further nuancing of Soloway's female gaze, and my analysis will thus utilize both perspectives as complementary frameworks. Analysing "The Erl-King", "The Tiger's Bride", "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice" against Soloway's and Mulvey's theoretical backgrounds, I will investigate how Carter dismantles the patriarchal hierarchy, and subverts the image of the objectified woman established through the male gaze which has previously dominated the European fairy tale tradition. I argue that Carter, through this subversion, utilizes the female gaze to prescribe agency and subjecthood to the heroines of her novellas "The Erl-King", "The Company of Wolves", "The Tiger's Bride", and "Wolf-Alice". To explore this topic, I observe how each female protagonist is focalized to evoke empathy, how they negotiate looked-at-ness on their own terms, and how they ultimately escape falling victim to the male gaze. The female gaze consequently becomes a politically reformative deconstruction of objectification and looked-at-ness, and allows Carter's heroines to claim subjecthood and agency.

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Introduction

Fairy tales have long captivated audiences. Primarily marketed towards children, modern adaptations of familiar narratives serve a multitude of purposes: "stereotyped and institutionalized fragments" (Bacchilega 2) of European folk tales are continuously reproduced within popular culture, functioning as both entertainment and education. Although Bacchilega argues that these commercialized tales are "literary appropriations" (3) of their predecessors, she notes how the reiterated tropes remain similar. In connection to this, Bacchilega highlights the fairy tale as a transformative medium: through endless subversion and adaptation, the fairy tale can carry ideological significance and become "instrumentalized" (7) to support, or subvert, societal norms. Furthermore, Bacchilega discusses stereotypical female characters within fairy tales: classical fairy tale narratives serve to reinstate the role of the female as inferior and submissive since women, specifically in fairy tales, are closer connected to nature than culture. Drawing upon the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Bacchilega explains that "natural" women pose a threat to men, who in turn construct the stereotypical image of the female fairy tale archetype as both a "neutralizing make-up" (9) and a recreation of "womanly essence" (9). As argued by Bacchilega, this leads to "showcasing 'women' and making them disappear at the same time" (9), and transforming them "into man-made constructions of 'Woman'" (9).

This process would, in turn, benefit a patriarchal hegemony: Jorgensen further suggests that popularized fairy tales often represent a "patriarchal bias" (33) which, as previously noted by Bacchilega, materializes through the objectification and passivation of female characters. Jorgensen explains that this stripping of agency forces readers to identify with either the passive female victim or the active male perpetrator. The possession of agency and activeness is thus, argues Jorgensen, vital to subjecthood: though scholarly discourse has been "slow to adapt" (32) the term *agency* in connection to fairy tale heroines, Jorgensen believes that the feminist undertones of Angela Carter's works could be used as a productive background for such a topic, stating that her fiction "has invited enough feminist analysis [to] provide a model for this discussion" (32). I agree, but would like to suggest an additional dimension to the analysis of female agency and empowerment in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* by using Mulvey's theory of the *male gaze* and Soloway's definition of the *female gaze*, which are perspectives I believe previous research on specifically Carter's works has overlooked. In this essay, I will investigate how Angela Carter dismantles the patriarchal hierarchy, and deconstructs the image of the objectified woman established through the male gaze which has previously dominated the European fairy tale tradition through narratives promoting the

passivation of female characters. I argue that Carter, through this subversion of the male gaze, utilizes the female gaze to ascribe agency and subjecthood to the heroines of her novellas "The Erl-King", "The Company of Wolves", "The Tiger's Bride", and "Wolf-Alice".[1]

The feminist prose of English author Angela Carter (1940-1992) has long been subject for discourse. Much of Carter's earlier work is laced with social realism and critical commentary on working class conditions and gender inequality (Sage 6): her first novel, *Shadow Dance* (1966), provoked audiences since, according to Sage, "its treatment of sexual politics [was] quite ruthless for its era" (10). Sage characterizes Carter as a "tale-spinner" (1), referring to the ever subversive powers of Carter's literary repertoire, as classical tales and myths are twisted into ideological retellings which explore the core issues of womanhood. In 1977, Carter published *The Sadeian Woman,* which, as Sage notes, is an "ironic exploration of women's plight in a world authorized by patriarchy" (38): it is a "mockery of authority" (38), and a deconstruction of classical, stereotypical femininity. Two years later, Carter published her novella collection *The Bloody Chamber.*

Subverting both the popularized European fairy tale and the stereotypical image of women within it, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) twists popular narratives into dark, and often erotic, neogothic retellings. The collection could be read as an ideological statement, and as a desire to reform subjecthood and agency within classical fairy tale narratives: Sage describes *The Bloody Chamber* as a deliberate "assault on myth" (39), where "the monsters and the princesses lose their places in the old script, and cross the forbidden binary lines" (39). The four chosen novellas are similar in their portrayal of the female protagonist as a superior, independent subject, and the ending of each novella serves to empower the heroine, in one way or another: "King" ends with the female narrator strangling the Erl-King to death and thus both freeing the women he has captured, and freeing herself from the same inevitable fate; "Company" features a blossoming romance between Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, and concludes with the narrator sleeping peacefully in her late grandmother's bed "between the paws of the tender wolf" (200); "Tiger" portrays the metamorphosis of the female narrator into a beast, as she simultaneously becomes superior to the Tiger who originally captured her (stating that "[h]e was far more frightened of me than I was of him" [108]); finally, "Alice" is a representation of the main character's maturing into womanhood, and a depiction of a transformation which prescribes her with agency and bodily autonomy through constructing her personal rendition of the Freudian ego.

[1] The novellas will henceforth be abbreviated as "King", "Company", "Tiger" and "Alice".

The vivid visual imagery of Carter's writing allows for the application of Mulvey's and Soloway's theories; though not all parts of both theories are directly convertible to prose (such as camera angles and directorial intentions), I will project the female gaze onto narrative, visual imagery and symbolism, and narration and focalization. I will introduce this research by discussing Mulvey's and Soloway's theories, then analyse my chosen novellas under three thematically organized sections: "Narration, Focalization and Empathy", in which I discuss how Carter focalizes female voices to evoke empathy; "'I See You Seeing Me'", where I explore how each female protagonist escapes the male gaze and refuses objectification through acknowledging the true intentions of her spectator; and, finally, discussing how the heroines possibly reverse the gaze, or at least challenge the patriarchal order which the male gaze promotes through questioning the hierarchy itself under "Reversing the Gaze?". Finally, I will conclude my essay and suggest further expansion to this research.

The Male and Female Gaze

The male gaze, first introduced by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), is a psychoanalytical theory seeking to investigate the influence of patriarchal structures within film and visual media. The male gaze, argues Mulvey, is representative of the phallocentric hegemony which manifests itself through gendered power imbalances: Mulvey distinguishes between the "active/male" and the "passive/female" (11) and observes how the dominating male gaze "projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly" (11). Thus, the man inhabits the active role of a multifaceted spectator, and the passive, objectified woman possesses a two-dimensional "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 11). The male is narrative-driving, and the female is a narrative-interrupting, because, as Mulvey suggests, an "active/passive heterosexual division of labour has a similarly controlled narrative structure" (12). The active male protagonist is thereby not only representative of phallocentric power, but becomes the character with which the audience identifies, and his gazing upon the passive woman consequently transcends into the *audience's* gazing (Mulvey). Thus, the male gaze is constructed through three key "looks" (Mulvey 17): that of the camera, the audience, and the male protagonist. All three looks function to objectify female characters on screen (Mulvey).

Mulvey explains that this objectification results in an oppression of women which, in turn, is provoked by the Freudian concept of castration anxiety: women represent a threat to male superiority (due to their lack of a penis, which in turn, as argued by Freud, evokes a feeling

of discomfort for men through the implied castration) and thereby provoke the need for "voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms" (17) which would allow men to escape this threat. Sadistic voyeurism, for example, builds upon castration anxiety: here, the male character asserts dominance and avoids the discomfort which the implied castration provokes by "subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (14), which, as Mulvey argues, often leads to the suffering of the woman. Through fetishistic scopophilia, however, the beauty of a female character allows her to transcend outside of the narrative: she no longer personifies the feelings associated with castration anxiety but becomes a "perfect product", and is thereby reduced to a nonthreatening object since she is no longer "real" (Mulvey 14). This could be likened to Bacchilega's previously mentioned work, in which she discusses how the stereotypical fairy tale woman is often turned into a "neutralizing make-up" (9) for the purpose of "showcasing" (9). Thus, one could argue that the male gaze, or at the very least the associated Freudian castration anxiety, has influenced the portrayal of women in traditional European fairy tales.

Notably, Mulvey states that the male, in contrast to his female counterpart, "cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification" (12). The male gaze would thereby be irreversible: the woman is bound to her presupposed role as a passive object for the sake of visual pleasure (as opposed to the active, narrative-driving male), and since the man is unable to inhabit the same role, the gendered hierarchy remains intact. The reason for this, Mulvey explains, is due to the "principles of the ruling ideology" (12), implying, as I suggest, that the man avoids sexual objectification so long as society upholds the presupposed patriarchal ideals. However, the male gaze, according to Mulvey, is not the solution to gender inequality, but rather a deconstructive tool allowing for hypothetical improvement and inclusion. Mulvey acknowledges that "there is no way [to] produce an alternative out of the blue" (7), and claims that the gap between the binary genders is too large to allow for any form of reformation. She does, however, weaponize the concept of the male gaze as a method for feminist analysis, and as a way of "examining patriarchy with the tools it provides" (7).

Oliver notices how Mulvey loosens her strict limitations on the gendered passive/active-female/male relations in her essay "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'" (1990). Previously, Mulvey has, as observed by Oliver, rejected all possibility for a female spectatorship. Although Mulvey clarifies that a female audience *could* be able to identify with an on-screen male protagonist, Oliver argues that the male gaze still "limits the possibilities for the female spectator imagining herself as a woman with agency" and further hinders the woman in escaping from "identifying herself as a passive object" (451). There is, thus, still no possibility for the change which Mulvey suggests in her original article,

according to Oliver. However, in another recent essay on the contemporary male gaze, Martin suggests that the male gaze is evolving, much due to developed forms of visual art such as advertising and social media. Instead of the gendered power relations proposed by Mulvey, Martin suggests that the spectator, as constructor of the gaze, "may not be biologically male, but instead occupies a position of power or control" (67). Due to the now increased rights of women and other previously marginalized groups, Martin argues that the "once looked upon, can now control their own looked-at-ness and gaze" (67) Essentially queering Mulvey's previous theory, Martin further suggests that "[t]rans is the new gaze" (60), implying that there is possibility for new alternatives of deconstructive gazes to emerge, or, alternatively, for the male gaze to be redefined.

However, Soloway presents an alternative perspective: in their 2016 lecture at the Toronto International Film Festival, they establish the three key components to constructing the *female* gaze. Although Soloway acknowledges that the female gaze may be interpreted as simply the male gaze in reverse, their theory is more nuanced. Firstly, the female gaze is "a way of feeling seen" (Soloway 17:38): through the use of a subjective point-of-view, the aim is to encourage audiences to emphasize with the female protagonist who, in turn, symbolizes more than objectifying "looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 11). Secondly, Soloway introduces the concept of the "gazed gaze" (21:26) which illustrates the feeling of falling victim to said looked-at-ness: the camera becomes representative of receiving the gaze, illustrating how it, in turn, affects the viewer. Thirdly, the female gaze is a politically reformative way of "returning the gaze" (Soloway 22:58), and an opportunity for female characters to expose and thereby challenge male spectators. The act of declaring that "I see you seeing me" (Soloway 23:07) becomes a way of breaking the spell, of refusing objectification, and of claiming active, narrative-driving subjecthood.

Although Soloway, as mentioned, clarifies that the female gaze is not a complete reversal of gender roles, it still allows for the objectification of men through the subjectification of women, since the power hierarchies become subverted. Most importantly, however, Soloway highlights the female gaze as a "socio-political, justice-demanding way of art-making" (24:30) and as an intersectional, inclusive way for minorities to reclaim agency by subverting the dominating male gaze, further building upon Mulvey's reformative ambitions. However, Benson-Allott criticizes Soloway's model in stating that it is "race blind" (69) and fails to account for the lived experience of non-white women. Although this is valid criticism, Soloway themself acknowledges that they, as a white person, cannot speak for ethnically marginalized groups. I have chosen to use Soloway's description since Carter primarily speaks for the lived

experiences of white, heterosexual, cisgender women, without an intersectional perspective to be applied to any greater extent. Although the scope of this essay is restricted to Carter's representation of women, and Benson-Allott's criticism is relevant, I will remain faithful to the limited nature of my primary sources and apply Soloway's definition of the female gaze to the heroines, nonetheless. Furthermore, my language will be limited to man/male and woman/female, used as synonyms: a more inclusive language would be appropriate, but I have chosen to adapt the language of my restrictive primary and secondary sources, which do not strive beyond the queering of the gazes, nor of Carter's original novellas. Thus, the question of the female gaze applies only to the binary gender relations depicted in the chosen novellas, and the subversion of the male gaze is thus limited to a subversion of binaries, and not a subversion *beyond* binaries.

Narration, Focalization and Empathy

Angela Carter focalizes female voices and nuanced heroines to evoke empathy with her audience, and Soloway's female gaze is thereby applicable when encouraging readers to identify with these prominent female characters, rather than with male protagonists, as with Mulvey's theory. When translating Mulvey's and Soloway's visual media theories to prose, narration and focalization become vital elements to discuss as conveyors of power and independence (as opposed to camera angles and directorial decisions). Bacchilega, in reference to Bal, describes the three key points of storytelling as narration, focalization and agency; traditional fairy tale narratives often utilize objective, third-person narration, for example. Focalization, however, is rather constructed through "selection and gaze" (Bacchilega 18), and functions to center character experiences, as opposed to narration, which concerns a speaker who is not necessarily the focalized experiencer. Bal utilizes who "sees" and who "speaks" (273) to separate between focalizer and narrator, respectively: the focalizer "selects the actions and chooses the angle from which to present them" (273) and thus "produces the narrative" (273), while the narrator "puts the narrative into words" (273). Simultaneously, the focalizer speaks to a "'spectator'" (Bal 273), and the narrator to a "hypothetical reader" (273), evident of the multiple layers of narration. External focalization furthermore correlates to omniscient third-person narration, and internal focalization to limited first-person narration (276). Bal explains how the only concrete "narrative 'person'" is the first-person narrator, who exists within the narrative itself (274), while the third-person narrator "does not exist" (274) as a

palpable person within the story: in reference to Genette's terminology, the first could be classified as a homodiegetic narrator, and the latter as a heterodiegetic narrator (Bal 271).

All four of Carter's novellas feature a female heroine as the main focalizer, instead of a male protagonist. Utilizing first-person narration in "Tiger" and "King", and third-person narration in "Company" and "Alice", Carter introduces female characters with whom the reader is encouraged to identify, unlike the narrative-driving male protagonists portrayed through the male gaze. As previously discussed, Soloway emphasizes the power of evoking empathy through narration and point-of-view. As a key factor to constructing the female gaze, Soloway values heroines as conveyers of emotion: rather than exclusively being looked at, women are through the female gaze portrayed as multi-faceted characters which become representative of "feeling seen" (Soloway 17:38). This stands in contrast to Mulvey's theory, which focalizes a male protagonist, and consequently introduces the image of the woman as an object of visual pleasure and the male as the main conveyor of empathy and relatability (Mulvey 12).

Carter challenges the patterns of narration, focalization and empathy produced through the male gaze and, as I would argue, focalizes her heroines through the female gaze, instead. For example, the homodiegetic narrator of "The Tiger's Bride" encourages readers to empathise with her situation, and she, as Bhatt and Pareek observe, "narrates her own story" (76). Bhatt and Pareek further note how the narrator is aware of the destructive impacts which the patriarchal society has on her life, and is conscious of her place within it: she states that "I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason" ("Tiger" 101), and later likens herself to the mechanical doll-copy which has been made of her, alluding to the objectifying, performative nature of patriarchy and the male gaze. By focalizing "Tiger" through the first-person perspective of a young female protagonist, Carter criticizes the classical male-centred narrative by showcasing its destructive effects upon female voices, and thereby highlights the experiences of previously oppressed women which, once again, becomes a "way of feeling seen" (Soloway 17:38); the male gaze is consequently subverted, and the female gaze emerges. As Beauty herself acknowledges, she has "been bought and sold, passed from hand to hand" ("Tiger" 101), and is constantly defined through her relationship to superior male figures. Bacchilega further notes how the "splitting of the subject/object of focalization is a necessary step" (95) for the narrator to "ac[t] upon her desire" (95)" and thereby become empowered; Carter's deliberate choice of narration style is thus, as I would argue, vital to Beauty's journey towards independence and authority. From belonging to her father to being imprisoned by the Beast, Beauty's story could, in conclusion, be argued to showcase fragments of the female

experience under male hegemony which, in turn, functions as a way of evoking empathy and is thereby an example of the female gaze functioning to highlight women's voices.

"The Erl-King" is the second novella using partial first-person narration, although at times shifting to third-person, with the initial few pages told through second-person narration. As noted by Makinen, the fluid change in voice "represent[s] the two competing desires for freedom and engulfment" (11) within the narrator herself, and Linkin further describes how Carter's use of second-person narration particularly "heightens readerly identification" (311). The extent to which the narrator's thoughts are represented, along with the internal quarrel between wishing to stay and succumb to the Erl-King versus freeing herself from his possession are, as I would argue, examples of how Carter utilizes an introspective point-of-view to convey emotion. As opposed to through the male gaze, the homodiegetic female narrator of "King" is given a voice, and a literary three-dimensional space in which to act (Mulvey), as is the case in all four novellas. Ultimately, and as will later be discussed, she claims subjectivity by refusing objectification. This, in turn, enables the application of the female gaze to the novella. This notion, as I would argue, is further heightened by Carter's use of focalization which, in turn, functions as a way of evoking empathy.

As previously mentioned, Mulvey argues that the male gaze allows for the male protagonist to act within a three-dimensional space, which they in turn dominate (12-13). In "Alice", however, this three-dimensional space becomes a house in which Wolf-Alice's self-discovery takes place. The novella uses third-person narration, featuring only Wolf-Alice and the Duke as prominent characters. Mainly focalized through Wolf-Alice, the novella portrays her internal journey towards humanity and subjecthood. As Lau observes, "Alice" is a dissection of "phallocentric language" (89). Wolf-Alice "does not speak [nor] 'look'" (89) due to her disconnection to the mirror image, but she instead navigates through smell, which further emphasizes her initial bestiality: her "long nose is always a-quiver, sifting every scent it meets [and] her poor eyesight does not trouble her. Her nose is sharper by night than our eyes are by day" ("Alice" 202). Although primarily focalized through Wolf-Alice, Carter's stylistic choices are reminiscent of "other narrative traditions" (Lau 89), much like in "Company". Since Wolf-Alice does not speak herself, Carter introduces an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator who closely represents Wolf-Alice's inner monologue: when pondering about the cause behind her first menstruation, Wolf-Alice's culprit becomes "a wolf who, perhaps, was fond of her, as wolves were, and who lived, perhaps, in the moon?" ("Alice" 207), and the narrator represents Wolf-Alice's naïve, speculative uncertainty with "perhaps", and stammering commas. Although this representation could be interpreted as a tactic of erasure, I argue that Wolf-Alice's

voice thereby becomes highlighted, despite her not narrating her own story as opposed to the protagonists in "Tiger" and "King". And if language, as Lau argues, is a phallocentric construct, Carter's choosing to focalize "Alice" through a female character who does not speak becomes an additional act of subversion. Thus, Wolf-Alice, as the empathy-evoking focalizer, is portrayed through the female gaze.

Finally, "Company", similarly to "King", features multiple forms of narration, with the main focalizer (Red Riding Hood) not entering the story until after a third of the novella has passed. The style of narration in "Company" alludes to classical nursery tales of dangerous wolves, and adheres to this typical narration by primarily being told through third-person. The juxtaposition between the cautionary warnings and the very last line of the novella, however, as the girl ignores her fears ("since fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid" ["Company" 198]), subverts the typical narrative: the last "[s]ee! sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" (200) encourages association with classical, orally told nursery tales. One could thereby even argue that the anonymous, heterodiegetic third-person narrator is the focalized Red Riding Hood herself, telling her own version of the tale after she saves herself from the same fate as her grandmother. The initial exclamation, specifically, could be interpreted as a way of comforting the listener, and as a way of subverting expectations: supposing that the listener is familiar with the intertextual references which the narrator has just distorted, this word choice reassures the listener that the situation has been resolved. As Carter focalizes the Red Riding Hood character primarily towards the end, Red is prescribed with agency and sexual authority, which, in turn, becomes a way of highlighting her experience and thus allowing for the portrayal of Red through the female gaze.

"I See You Seeing Me"

Each female protagonist, as I would argue, acknowledges her intended male spectator[2], breaks the "spell" of the male gaze and, through the female gaze, rejects objectification. For example, I argue that the narrator of "Tiger" negotiates her *own* looked-at-ness: when told that the Beast wishes to see her undressed, Beauty abruptly tells a servant that she will only pull her dress halfway up, wants her face covered, and demands to be placed in a "windowless room [with]

[2] The Beast in "Tiger", the Erl-King in "King", and the Wolf in "Company", with the Duke in "Alice" not claiming a similar position of spectatorship as the previously mentioned characters, but nonetheless functioning as a male opposition to the female heroine.

no lights" (93). I thereby suggest that she is distancing herself from the inevitable role as a visual spectacle for male pleasure: Bacchilega even notes how the protagonist "refuses to be seen" (96), which further illustrates how she resists objectification, and thus avoids falling victim to the male gaze. The protagonist laughs upon hearing the Beast's demands. Just as in "Company", this becomes a revolutionary act of bravery and of acknowledging the absurdity behind the demands of the spectator, and thus a way of exposing the intentions of the male gaze. Upon acknowledging that "I see you seeing me" (Soloway 23:07), both protagonists are prescribed with agency which allows them to uncover the true intentions behind looked-at-ness: they could each be argued to break the spell of the male gaze by laughing at and refusing to succumb to their intended spectators, which instead allows for the female gaze to emerge.

The narrator of "Tiger" is faced with two scenes of disrobing: the first one occurs in the woods, by a river, as both Beauty and Beast undress. This, just as the second scene, is a mutual interaction, and although Beauty initially expresses her dislike towards the act, she voluntarily complies, nonetheless. In the woods, the Beast undresses first: "Nothing about him reminded me of humanity" ("Tiger" 103) explains Beauty, and so she undresses, too. As she removes her clothes, she blushes from pride, and not from shame. When she is fully exposed, she is watched by the others, but the depiction of her naked body is never made explicitly sexual. In this first scene, I argue that bestiality plays a significant role in how Beauty is gazed upon. While not necessarily exposing her male spectator as the other heroines do, Beauty acknowledges how the Beast is not completely a human male. Thus, I would argue that she distinguishes his gazing from the male gaze, and he, too, is "othered". He does not, therefore, claim complete spectatorship, and she voluntarily undresses while keeping her ascribed agency. The second disrobing scene concludes the novella, and will later be discussed in reference to subversion and gaze reversal.

In fact, the protagonist of "Company" is, similarly to the narrator of "Tiger", also encountered with an act of undressing. The scene toys with the original tale, with much dialogue adhering to the classic narrative but the reactions and counteractions of the Red Riding Hood figure subverts expectations. The undressing scene could also, as in "Tiger", be interpreted as a display of the female figure, and thus alluding to looked-at-ness: like the protagonist of "Alice", Red's body has recently undergone typical feminine transformations – her "breasts have just begun to swell" and "she has just started her woman's bleeding" ("Company" 191). However, as Bhatt and Pareek observe, the protagonist of "Company" is thereby a "sexually attractive girl" (75), who "undresses herself at her own will" (75), and therefore, as I would argue, negotiates looked-at-ness on her own terms. The classic exchange of lines in "[w]hat big

eyes you have"/"[a]ll the better to see you with" ("Company" 197) connects to "[y]ou can tell by their eyes, eyes of a beast of prey, nocturnal, devastating eyes red as a wound" (195) a few pages earlier, and both descriptions are reminiscent of looking, and could allude to the destructive nature of the male gaze. The Wolf is a consumer: not only as a "carnivore incarnate" ("Company" 196), but he looks upon the protagonist, and his gaze is associated with danger. However, as stated, the heroine laughs at the idea of his (both literal and metaphorical) consuming of her, and she is thereby awarded with a subjectivity which distances her from the role as a spectacle: "[t]he girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt and flung it into the fire" ("Company" 199). Thus, the female gaze is instead enabled and the protagonist escapes objectification when acknowledging her spectator.

One could argue that the seemingly naïve, inexperienced Red is unaware of the Wolf's intentions, and of his gazing upon her, as she undresses and is consequently prescribed with objectifying looked-at-ness. However, I suggest that Red is fully aware of the Wolf's scheme, and the intentions of his spectatorship: she rejects fear, just as the heroines in "King" and "Tiger", when faced with the demands of her spectator ("Company" 198). The fear is furthermore proof of Red's sharp intellect: Red is not a fool, but instead aware of her current situation, just as Beauty in "Tiger", and the narrator of "King". Thus, her presupposed naivete does not cloud her judgement, nor does it shape her into the virgin female archetype which the male gaze would typically produce. Instead, Red refuses this stereotypical role: she is a "wise child" ("Company" 199) who rejects objectification through the prescription of looked-at-ness, and acts towards her own satisfaction instead of succumbing to the male gaze.

The narrator of "The Erl-King" negotiates looked-at-ness in a different way. She explains that she loves the Erl-King, although admitting that their relationship is highly destructive. On multiple occasions, she acknowledges how the Erl-King will harm her, and capture her in one of his cages. When read against the notion of challenging looked-at-ness, the birdcages could be interpreted as a method of performative showcasing: the protagonist will inevitably fall for the "trap" ("King" 150) which the Erl-King unknowingly has prepared for her. As briefly mentioned by Makinen, the cages thereby represent the male gaze, and the objectifying "entrapment within" (11), which the narrator "both fears and desires" (11). To further reinforce this allegory, the novella is scattered with parallels to the Erl-King's spectatorship: not only do the captured women-turned-birds "sit and sing for him" ("King" 146), which in turn alludes to women as performers and spectacles under the male gaze, but the narrator also notably describes the Erl-King's eyes in detail. They "fixate [her] reflective face"

("King" 149), but she is afraid of being trapped: the Erl-King is looking at her, but she is only looking at herself through him, and through her reflection which projects in his gazing eyes. This is reminiscent of the depiction of women through the male gaze: when portrayed through the perspective of the focalized male spectator, women are forced to see themselves through the male gaze, and thus as objects representing looked-at-ness (Mulvey 11). However, the narrator is aware of the dangers in being looked at, thereby acknowledging her spectator's intentions and, again, could be said to break the spell of the male gaze.

In further addition to this notion, the narrator calls the Erl-King's eyes a "reducing chamber", and explains that "[i]f I look into it long enough, I will become as small as my own reflection, I will diminish to a point and vanish […] I shall become so small you can keep me in one of your osier cages and mock my loss of liberty" ("King" 149), which could be interpreted as a further analogy to looked-at-ness. Moreover, it could be read as the effects of the male gaze upon female objectification, and is thereby a similar exposure of spectatorship as in the previously mentioned novellas. Although this protagonist does not laugh at her spectator, she still refuses to be captured (despite the Erl-King treating his bird-women well), and thereby refuses the inevitable objectification and oppression which comes with the prescription of looked-at-ness (Mulvey 11). The female gaze could thus be applied as a way for Carter's above mentioned protagonists to acknowledge their spectators, and escape them.

Looking and looked-at-ness plays a significant role in "Alice", as well. The novella features Wolf-Alice, who walks the line between human and beast, depicts her maturing into womanhood, and, consequently, into overall personhood. She is startled by her first menstruation, not comprehending the cause behind it; shortly thereafter, she finds a mirror, and calls her mirror image a "stranger" ("Alice" 208). A depiction of two connected transformations then follow: Wolf-Alice's body changing and displaying typically feminine traits (for example, she examines her growing breasts "with curiosity" [Alice 210]), and her increasing familiarity with her mirror image. The Lacanian mirror stage is discussed by Mulvey as a vital part of the male gaze: referencing Lacan, Mulvey explains that children recognizing their reflections as *themselves* is vital to the construction of the ego. The child interprets the reflection as the perfect image, superior to the child themself (Mulvey 9). This process, notes Mulvey, is thus the "first articulation of the 'I', of subjectivity" (10), and, in connection to the male gaze, functions in film as way of portraying male characters on screen as the perfect representation of the viewer's own mirror image. Since the male protagonist is superior to the audience looking at him, he is the ultimate active subject: productive, and demanding of a space in which to act (Mulvey 12). The woman, on the other hand, remains a passive icon (Mulvey 13).

However, Lau notes that this act of recognition in "Alice" does not align with the Lacanian model: rather than the ideal self, Wolf-Alice recognizes her reflection as a mere shadow, which furthermore "keeps her form entering into the symbolic, maintain[ing] her subjectivity outside of language" (91). Nonetheless, Lau still proposes this act of recognition as a pivotal point after which Wolf-Alice is sent "out into the world beyond the Duke's castle" (91). I would argue that Wolf-Alice, as a way of negotiating looked-at-ness, is projecting looked-at-ness onto *herself,* which consequently results in a subversion of the male gaze*:* the mirror stage, in turn, is closely connected to her transcending into womanhood, which could be interpreted as a way of projecting the female gaze onto the now active and empowered Wolf-Alice, instead. Furthermore, I argue that Carter's subversion of Lacanian psychoanalysis (which Lau, too, observes) becomes a further subversion of the male gaze. Due to the significance of the ideal ego to the construction of the male gaze, Carter's distorting of the experience becomes, as I would argue, a way of distorting the male gaze itself. As will later be discussed, Wolf-Alice becomes "far more sentient than [the Duke]" ("Alice" 213), which further reinstates her subjectivity despite the modified mirror stage.

Reversing the Gaze?

If not completely reversing the gaze, Carter's heroines still challenge the patriarchal order which has previously been established, and the female gaze, in each of the chosen novellas, can thereby be read as a method of questioning, challenging and empowering. Both Mulvey and Soloway portray a possible alternative to the male gaze as a politically reformative, revolutionary feminist statement: while not necessarily a complete reversal of the male gaze, Soloway highlights the female gaze as an inclusive way of reclaiming subjectivity and refusing objectivity. Soloway further encourages the challenging of the "dominant narratives" (36:25) and argues that the female gaze can function as a way to promote other narratives, and other perspectives, by highlighting the voices of minorities which have previously fallen victim to the male gaze, and by creating stories which evoke empathy for these voices through collaboration and cooperation. In line with Soloway's ambitions, Mulvey argues that the male gaze, when used as a feminist method of analysis, is able to detect and trace oppression under a phallocentric, patriarchal hegemony: although Mulvey, as mentioned, is sceptical of functioning alternatives, she, like Soloway, connects her gaze to feminist reformation and

deconstruction. I argue that Carter utilizes this reformative power when applying the female gaze to her novellas.

"King" is the only of the chosen novellas in which the narrator herself commits homicide. It therefore stands in contrast to the others, but, as I would argue, portrays the narrator breaking free from the male gaze, nonetheless. She is torn between the destructive yet addicting love which the Erl-King gives her and breaking free from her fate as one of the bird-women in cages. As previously discussed, she is aware of the consequences of being trapped, or, rather, of being objectified through the destructive male gaze which the Erl-King in turn represents, and thereby frees herself along with the previously entrapped women. This, in turn, becomes a revolutionary act of female liberation, hinting at an alternative escape from male spectatorship (although remaining a fictional solution). The heroine, through rejecting the position as a passive object, becomes the active, narrative-driving subject and thus allows for a reversal of the gaze (Soloway). In her essay on "King", Linkin notes that the narrator "violently reject[s] the standard feminine position of reflexive image" (309), which not only alludes to the previously discussed refusal of looked-at-ness, but paves way for claiming subjectivity and agency. Linkin further explains how the narrator "imagines the fiercest of defences against the devouring consummation the male canon inscribes" (310) by killing the Erl-King, and how she, through this act, finds "her own voice" (310). Although Linkin notes how this subject-object "role reversal" (310) ascribes the protagonist with power and independence, she suggests that the murder of the Erl-King nonetheless condemns the narrator to the loneliness which she initially dreads. However, I would argue that this consequential "solitude" (Linkin 310) is rather an act of rejecting influential patriarchal ideals, and a passivation of the male through the female gaze. Furthermore, if reading the novella as a refusal of female domesticity, the loneliness becomes an empowering act of freedom from male superiority.

Although the female gaze, as previously discussed, does not equivalate a complete reversal of the patriarchal hierarchy (Soloway), the narrator of "King" not only refuses to be objectified, but subjects her spectator to the act of performance, instead: after strangling the Erl-King to death, she "carve[s] off his great mane" (151) and strings the self-playing fiddle with strands of his hair, which begins to play and lament, crying out "you have murdered me!" (151). She thereby, as one could argue, condemns the Erl-King to a similar fate as the performing bird-women, whose song is replaced with the "discordant music" ("King" 151) which the fiddle now plays, instead. Further instances of subverted gender roles can be found throughout the novella, as well. For example, the narrator describes the Erl-King as "an excellent housewife" ("King" 144), ascribing him the stereotypical characteristics: he cooks, cleans, and keeps his home

organized. Further described as "tender" ("King" 145) and "kind" (146), the narrator justifies her love for the Erl-King through a characterization which alludes to further softness and femininity: though he metaphorically bites, drowns, and skins her, the violence is shrouded within romantic descriptions, and the narrator states that she is "not afraid of him; only, afraid of vertigo" ("King" 145). Through supressing fear, similarly to both protagonists in "Company" and "Tiger", the narrator of "King" is able to assert control, and allow for a reversal of gender roles as she returns the violence and strangles the Erl-King to death with his own hair. I would argue that the narrator, through both the previously discussed refusal of looked-at-ness and the murder of the Erl-King is claiming subjectivity and agency. Carter is thereby portraying the narrator through the female gaze, instead of allowing her to become objectified through the gaze of the male Erl-King.

"Company", as Bhatt and Pareek observe, depicts the transformation of the female protagonist from a "passive being who is seduced [to] an active being who seduces" (75), as a "protest against patriarchal domination" (75). Similarly to "King", this could be interpreted as a reversal of the gaze; instead of murdering the Wolf, the heroine seduces him. Duncker, quoted by Makinen, claims that the Red Riding Hood character does not become ascribed with sexual agency but, instead, accepts her fate of being raped as the only way to rescue herself from the same fate as her grandmother. However, Makinen disagrees with this notion. Although there are several alludes to the inevitable, violent fate of the protagonist, Carter nonetheless prescribes Red with agency (Makinen): not only is the heroine undressing *herself*, but she is also, to the Wolf's surprise, boldly undressing *him*. I therefore agree with Makinen's analysis of the scene as the protagonist's asserting dominance over the Wolf, and prioritizing her own interests as opposed to showcasing an erotic performance for male pleasure. Makinen suggests that Carter's protagonists, throughout *The Bloody Chamber,* are "rewarded (rather than punished)" (4) for their curiosities and sexual desires, and that thereby become "active" (4), as opposed to the stereotype of the passive woman reiterated through classical versions of the tale. Here, Carter instead allows for the portrayal of women through the female gaze: as the female gaze becomes a way of rewriting oppressive narratives and highlight marginalized voices (Soloway), Carter prescribes the heroine of "Company" with the sexual agency and fearlessness required to not only save herself, but to reject objectification and, in turn, to act toward her own satisfaction.

Wolf-Alice is also prescribed with agency, but the gendered dynamic is here presented differently. As observed by Schanoes, the Duke (who is the only prominent male character in the novella) does *not* have a mirror reflexion due to his vampirical nature. Instead,

Wolf-Alice brings him into "humanity" (Schanoes 10) after she has found her own, and the novella concludes with the mirror by the Duke's bed finally projecting him "vivid as real life itself" ("Alice" 214). Interestingly, Schanoes argues that "neither one truly has a reflection" (10) initially, and that none are thereby "fully human" (10), since Wolf-Alice does not recognize her own reflection, and the Duke simply has none. However, as Wolf-Alice relates herself to her mirror image and is rewarded with the subjectivity, agency and humanity that has previously been rejected through the disconnection with her reflection ("Alice" 211), she gains the power to bring the Duke into personhood, as well while caring for his wounds (Schanoes 10).

In an intriguing comparison to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There,* Schanoes notes how Carter traps the Duke behind the mirror, rather than Wolf-Alice, who now has a full grasp of personhood. In fact, Wolf-Alice is "far more sentient than he" ("Alice" 213), which alludes to superiority, and the consequent inferiority of the non-human and non-agent Duke. While Wolf-Alice does not actively objectify him, the narrative positions her in the role of a superior being: it is only because of her that the male Duke can claim personhood through some form of abstract mirror image, although still being trapped, while Wolf-Alice is free to roam within the space of the novella. Through the female gaze, it is Wolf-Alice, rather than the male Duke, who constructs her own ego and is thereby, as I would argue, able to replace the role of the active, agent male who drives narratives in Mulvey's model. There has not been a complete reversal of gazes but a reversal of a classical, male-dominated narrative structure; as Wolf-Alice becomes human, she becomes more of a subject than the Duke.

Beauty, in "Tiger", is faced with a transformation which brings her away from humanity, as opposed to Wolf-Alice; both heroines are ultimately awarded with subjectivity. Bacchilega argues that the metamorphosis in "Tiger" serves a role in subverting the "patriarchal order" (99): the transformation triggered by the Beast's licking off Beauty's skin and revealing fur instead is, according to Bacchilega, a mutual subversion of patriarchal structures. Despite the limiting heteronormative nature of Carter's collection, I agree with Bacchilega's interpretation of the bestiality as breaching of society's ideals. As previously mentioned, the notion of refusing patriarchal domesticity is also reoccurring in "King", where the narrator escapes confinement through murdering her captor. However, this gendered power dynamic is resolved differently in "Tiger", where both parts mutually transcend past personhood and thereby past the ideals which tie genders to their respective hierarchal positions. Bacchilega notes how the ending of the novella "neither betrays Beauty's desire nor belittles the Beast" (99), which I find interesting in comparison to "Company": the latter novella, as I would argue,

positions the heroine as superior to the male Wolf, while the narrator of "Tiger" finds a mutual connection with her Beast. Although both women are transformed into sexually empowered, agent subjects, I would argue that "Company" features a more drastic gaze reversal as opposed to "Tiger", in which both characters seem to ascend *beyond* the established, gendered gazes. One could thereby argue that "Tiger", specifically, utilizes the female gaze as an alternative which does not include a direct reversal, but more so a deconstruction of stereotypical gender dynamics, which is also promoted by Soloway. The second disrobing scene is thereby, as I would argue, a way of distancing both parts from the realm of humanity, and thus subverting of human binary gender hierarchies which uphold a phallocentric structure.

"Tiger", as Bacchilega argues, is centered around tabus. Bacchilega interprets the final, mutual disrobing scene as a breaking of several: as previously mentioned, both Beauty and Beast refuse looked-at-ness, as "she refuses to be seen [and] he wears a mask" (Bacchilega 96), and the undressing of both parts results in a "willing exposure" (96) which consequently challenges "the familiar tabu against looking" (96), as Bacchilega suggests. I agree with Bacchilega's analysis of Beauty's metamorphosis as a way of subverting phallocentric, domestic ideals: Bacchilega even notes how the Beast's gaze requires "another subject's engagement" (98) and does not other nor objectify Beauty. Furthermore, his gaze "liberates her from her own otherness" (Bacchilega 99) as it stands in contrast to the patriarchal hegemony she has previously been existing under. Through her metamorphosis, therefore, Beauty claims her place as the Beast's equal, and both parts transcend beyond the gendered hierarchies. In reference to a possible subversion of Mulvey's theory, I argue that this bestiality, and the mutual ascension into otherness, disables the male gaze: it can no longer cling to the human binary gender hierarchy of active/passive, subject/object, male/female, which it builds upon. Despite connotations between bestiality and inferiority, I suggest that the glorifying nature of the transformation alludes to the superiority of the bestial nature in Carter's story: in the final line of the novella, Beauty shakes her "beautiful fur" ("Tiger" 109), and the Beast is throughout the novella described as luxurious and other-worldly. Furthermore, if utilizing the Soloway's theory as an overarching, intersectional, deconstructive perspective, I suggest that this metamorphosis becomes a representation of the female gaze: it is not a complete gaze reversal, but Beauty and Beast, as previously mentioned, both escape the gendered binaries and the consequential subject/object relations through becoming non-human.

Conclusion

This essay has incorporated the continuously debated female gaze, translated to and projected upon four novellas in Carter's collection *The Bloody Chamber,* and investigated its effects on women's portrayal within reimagined fairy tales. I have argued that Carter constructs her female heroines through the female gaze which, in turn, prescribes them with agency and subjectivity: through utilizing Soloway's definition of the female gaze, I have analysed narrative and focalization, the exposing of spectatorship through interactions between the heroines and their respective male characters, and, finally, concluded by exploring how Carter enables a gaze reversal, and a deconstructive feminist alternative, overall. Carter allows her heroines to transcend beyond Mulvey's static subject/object relations: through metamorphosis, literal or metaphorical, the nuanced protagonists escape their seemingly inevitable fates as pure objects for male pleasure. In fact, the heroines seize pleasure for themselves in claiming full subjecthood: Beauty in "Tiger" is set free from the phallocentric structures which has previously confined her by becoming bestial, and thus not submit to fetishistic scopophilia but instead claiming individuality through a mutual act of pleasure; Red in "Company" deliberately seduces the Wolf as he succumbs to her, which not only saves her life, but grants her pleasure, sexual agency and bodily autonomy; the narrator of "King" murders her intended spectator and frees the captured bird-women in a revolutionary act of defiance against objecthood and looked-at-ness; finally, Wolf-Alice, in "Alice", is entering personhood and subjectivity before the male Duke, and it is only because of her that the Duke is able to claim a sense of humanity, as well. I thereby argue that Carter subverts the male gaze and utilizes the female gaze to empower her heroines.

I argue that the female gaze can be applied to all four novellas in terms of several factors. Most importantly, however, I note how the female gaze is used by Carter as a deconstructive, reformative perspective, and the female gaze consequently becomes a political, intersectional standpoint which subverts the dominating hierarchies established through the male gaze. The women reject the predetermined role as spectacles, and the male characters either reject their role as spectators ("Tiger", "Alice"), or are forced to succumb to the now agent protagonists ("Company", "King"). The classical gendered dynamics are questioned, and the female gaze emerges as a way to highlight previously oppressed female voices. Carter subverts the expectations of the fairy tale genre, thus subverting the expectations of the reader; the prominence of the male gaze within traditional narratives is questioned. Despite Carter's

limited heteronormative perspective, I conclude that the female gaze allows for a breaching of established power relations, and for the empowerment of the heroines.

This research could be expanded upon through the incorporation of classical fairy tales: in using Perrault's and Grimm's versions, for example, the comparison between Carter's reimagined tales and their predecessors would become more nuanced. Alternatively, it would be interesting to bring Carter's retellings in contrast to, for example, contemporary author Carmen Maria Machado's novella collection *Her Body and Other Parties* (2018) which weaves classical fairy tale narratives into stories of womanhood, discusses issues related to bodily autonomy, societal beauty standards, mental health, and highlights the experiences of queer women of colour. In comparing both collections, the research could adapt a more relevant contemporary perspective. Queering Carter's collection would be an interesting expansion, as well, and a further expansion to the application of the intersectional female gaze. Furthermore, the inclusion of feminist narratology could deepen the analysis of gendered focalization which this essay has presented.

Lastly, the female gaze as a theoretical framework in progress needs to be acknowledged: can the perspective be applied to contemporary fiction, or do restricting obstacles remain? Is the prominence of the phallocentric hegemony eliminating any opportunities for further development of the female gaze? How, in that case, are these blockages best deconstructed, and by whom? I recognize the importance of work in fields of feminist narratology, literature and visuality which highlight the gaze within prose fiction. However, articles such as Benson-Allott's question the very existence of the female gaze: I suggest that the female gaze is the possible alterative which Mulvey mentions, but there is still progress to be made, since the credibility of the perspective, despite its prominence in multiple literary and visual fields, remains questioned: through queering, challenging and deconstructing traditional narratives, and portraying heroines as nuanced, independent, empowered subjects, I argue that there is a possibility for the female gaze to become an essential, even more widely recognized contribution to feminist discourse.

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