

**The Dreaming and The Dreamt
A Lexicon of Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves***

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Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* (1984) is a film immersed in the symbolism of fairy tale narratives and imagery. Based upon three short stories from Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, the film functions as a revisionist text which blends Gothic motifs with Carter's own interpretations of classic fairy tales. For Carter, the original version(s) of *Little Red Riding Hood* operated as a structured agenda to warn young girls of the dangers of sexual maturity and implicates for them a passive family and societal role. By rewriting this and other traditional tales from a feminist perspective, both subtle and blatant inversions took place within Carter's stories: her versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* positively attack the wolf with a combination of hunting knife and sexual awareness, slaking his desire to eat her with sex. Jordan wrote the script for *The Company of Wolves* in collaboration with Carter, and as such, the film creates a symbolic world where the transition from child to adult - from girl to woman - is both a beautiful and dangerous moment, one to be both celebrated and feared. So layered and intertwined are these symbols that the most productive way to critically analyse them is to format them into a lexicon, giving definition to the representations and allowing for meaning to build up and repeat, as they do in the film, in between the layers of narrative and the viewer's mind.

Because there are two representations of the same character within the film, the text defines each persona through the terms the Dreaming Rosaleen and the Dreamt Rosaleen: the Dreaming Rosaleen is the protagonist who exists in the film's representation of the real world, whilst the Dreamt Rosaleen is her fictional, dreamt alter ego.

For those readers who are unfamiliar with the film, a full synopsis has been provided in an Appendix at the end of this text.

Dreams and Dreaming

The film functions upon the narrative device of the dream: having argued with her older sister and locked herself in her bedroom, Rosaleen falls asleep and dreams the narrative, one in which she positions herself as a seemingly innocent *Little Red Riding Hood* figure. For Carole Zucker the context of placing the narrative within a dream allows for Rosaleen to see

herself as strong, fearless, powerful, and special; dreaming a dream that enables her to have control over the story and the fictive world in which it takes place. It is manifestly an anxiety dream of a young woman searching, in psychoanalytic terms, for the integrity of her psyche, questing for identity, independence and sexual fulfilment (1).

Duality

The dream state of the narrative allows for the Gothic trait of duality to be made manifest. Aspects of the Dreaming Rosaleen's life – her mother, father, sister, family car and dog as well as the wealth of toys scattered about her bedroom – are symbolically or emotionally incorporated into the life of the Dreamt Rosaleen. In the establishing shots of the Dreaming Rosaleen's room, the camera steadily moves over her toys and then lingers on her dressing table before moving onto the sleeping girl. By the door is a doll of the dreamt Granny, her stuffed arms folded around a copy of Potter's *The Tale of Miss Tiggy Winkle*. Shelves are littered with books, and a doll dressed as a sailor sits on the window sill. A teddy bear rests against the wall. A doll with her hair tied back plays the mouth pipes. On the dressing table, amongst the tissues and hairbrushes are a pocket watch and a porcelain replica of a white Rolls Royce. All of these objects will, at some point, be incorporated into the dream. Some, such as the sailor and the teddy bear, will take on symbolic value whilst the others function as details within the narrative: the Rolls Royce appears in one of Granny's stories whilst the dolls mouth pipes erupt out of the earth of the forest to form part of its aberrant landscape.

See also Toys

Perhaps the most significant of the bedroom's content are those objects that rest upon the Dreaming Rosaleen's bed. By her hand lies a copy of *My Weekly*, the cover story being *The Shattered Dream*. Next to this is a hand mirror, its surface reflecting the darkening sky. This mirror will reappear throughout the narrative, its metaphoric value varying upon the context within which it is seen. Although the magazine doesn't manifest itself in the dream, its significance is obvious; it is the dream narrative itself, for the Dreaming Rosaleen will dream a shattered dream and, like the girl depicted on the gaudy cover of the magazine, she will, by the end, raise her bare arms to her face and scream.

See also Mirror

Like the duality that runs through most Gothic narratives, some of the doubles that operate within *The Company of Wolves* function as an inversion or opposite. The most obvious example of this element is the oppositional duality that exists between the Dreaming Rosaleen and the Dreamt Rosaleen. The sleeper is rich and spoilt, locking herself in her bedroom in a tantrum because, once again, she can not have things her own way. Conversely, the Dreamt Rosaleen is her creator's opposite – poor but strong, willing to explore the world and, at times, submit to its needs. Given this, the Dreamt Rosaleen is aware and steadily gaining confidence in her world, whereas the other simply hides herself from it.

Perhaps the most obvious opposite are the werewolves: regardless as to whether they are taken literally as animals hiding within the skins of men or as symbolic manifestations of masculine desire, dominance and power, the werewolves are visual opposites that, for *The Company of Wolves* at least, represent patriarchal order.

Later in the film, the Dreamt Rosaleen is given a red shawl which serves two symbolic purposes. It is primarily to keep Rosaleen warm but it also functions to conceal her developing body from the gaze of the village boys. Rosaleen makes her understanding of this duality clear in her dialogue. Upon receiving the shawl from Granny she says “soft as snow... red as blood”. With this function made apparent by Rosaleen it is possible that the shawl itself is symbolic of the adolescent girl. She is on the cusp of puberty, a girl who is pure; a virgin who is experiencing, for the first time, sexual attraction, desires and fantasies. The shawl’s colour is emotive of desire and of passion and, as will be identified later, menstrual blood.

Given the Dreamt Rosaleen’s narrative end, it is possible that the shawl’s symbolic value, like other symbols within the film, is in flux: in one context it may represent those concepts previously described whilst in others it may imply different, oppositional ideas. In her final confrontation with the werewolf Huntsman, she is encouraged to take off her shawl. Having taken off his own shirt and allowed her to see his muscular body, The Huntsman suggests that she too undress and throw the shawl into the fire as she “won’t need it again”. With only a moment’s hesitation, Rosaleen removes her shawl and throws it onto the fire. The removal of the shawl, the protective layer that it offers, makes Rosaleen’s clothed body available to The Huntsman’s gaze but also functions as a means of removing the patina of childhood from her. If the shawl in this scene represents childhood, then its destruction becomes for both Rosaleen and The Huntsman a symbolic act, marking the transition from girl to woman.

See also Red Cloak

Eggs

Wrapped in her red shawl, Rosaleen climbs to the top of a tree in an effort to hide from one of the village boys. Once there she finds a bird’s nest. Resting within the woven structure are a circular hand mirror, lipstick and four eggs. She smiles and picks up the mirror and lipstick. As she applies the make up to her lips the eggs crack open, one by one. Inside each egg lies a small statuette of a baby.

The symbolic value of these eggs obviously lies within the notion of birth and so makes the nest in which the eggs rest a surrogate womb. As Rosaleen watches the eggs hatch an analogy is made between what she is witnessing and the bodily changes she is undergoing. The eggs can be seen to represent Rosaleen’s awareness for her capacity to give birth to not only to children but also to her adult self. Combined, these symbolic values imply the onset of her sexual awakening. These values are consolidated by the presence of the mirror and lipstick, both connotations of the adult that Rosaleen will eventually grow into.

See also Lipstick and Mirror

Forest

Zucker comments upon the function of the forest in relation to Rosaleen’s Granny:

Before been devoured by the wolf she says, ‘Get back to Hell, where you came from’ to which the wolf/man replies ‘I don’t come from Hell, I come from the forest.’ But for Granny they are

one and the same: the primeval, the unknown, the fearful. Granny constantly cautions Rosaleen that when walking in the woods she must never ‘stray from the path’, a common interdiction in folk tales. The path signals the safety in obedience and virtue, whereas the forest signifies the dangers of defiance, and most especially of wantonness and sexual desire. (2)

See also Nature and Religion

Full Moon

An obvious symbol of transformation given the film’s antagonists are predominantly werewolves. For those creatures, the Full Moon signifies the period of transition from man to beast and, for the Dreamt Rosaleen it too signifies transformation: when trapped in Granny’s cottage with The Huntsman, she looks out of the small window and sees the full moon. As she stares at it, the moon’s bright white surface changes into a deep shade of red. Realising this moment’s symbolic value – that it is time to transform from a girl into a young woman – Rosaleen accepts her situation and, matching The Huntsman’s aggression and innuendo with her own, transforms into a wolf.

In addition to this, the full moon is part of the lunar cycle and so, given Rosaleen’s narrative trajectory, a parallel can be made between this cycle and the menstrual cycle which the film implies Rosaleen is beginning.

Granny

By the narrative’s end it becomes apparent that Granny never dared to stray from the path. Submitting to masculine authority and control has left her alone, with her only comforts being the log fire, her constant knitting and the stories she tells to Rosaleen. This persistent belief in the ‘correct’ path will be her final undoing.

See also Forest, Religion and Stories

Independence

It is clear from the start that the Dreamt Rosaleen is a strong and independent girl. This status inverts the audience’s expectations of a character which they come to associate with Little Red Riding Hood; the girl of that narrative is, for a majority of its interpretations, passive and reliant upon a masculine presence to save her from the wolf. Carter and Jordan’s interpretation is clearly the opposite: at Alice’s funeral Granny says “Your only sister. All alone in the woods and nobody there to save her. Poor little lamb” to which Rosaleen replies “Why couldn’t she save herself?” This is a Little Red Riding Hood who, by the end of the film will have brandished a knife, knowingly flirted with a werewolf and used a shot gun to defend herself. As Zucker describes her, she is “tough, independent, and unsentimental” (3).

As the narrative develops Rosaleen gradually becomes aware of her impending maturity and steadily gains confidence in the world around her. Her needs (which consequentially become her desires) are simple enough and her maturing temperament encourages her to obtain those things on her own terms with little help. This independent strength seemingly comes from the constraints of control. The path

Granny tells her to follow, the one that is safe and righteous, becomes for Rosaleen a constriction of ever tightening bonds. Her desires, like the forest which represents them, are clearly not going to be obtained by following the path and so, independently, she strays.

Kissing

The Dreamt Rosaleen kisses six times throughout the duration of her narrative. Of the six, only one – upon her mother’s cheek - is given through choice and with real love. The rest are given because they are requested by their recipient and, as a consequence, lack any sense of affection. These kisses are quick and rarely upon the lips and so lose any of their potential sexual quality. Her first kiss is upon the cheek of her dead sister (“Kiss your sister goodbye”), the second upon Granny’s cheek. The third kiss is given with love to her mother and as such represents the growing and strengthening bond between them. Her fourth kiss is given to the Village Boy when out walking with him in the forest. Although this kiss has some sexual charge (and so demonstrates the first real instance of Rosaleen signifying a willingness to stray from Granny’s path) it loses this quality because it is given in response to a childish dare. By kissing the boy she proves to both the boy and herself that she is capable of sexual contact. The boy asks her for another kiss but Rosaleen runs away from him saying “you’ll have to catch me first”. Rosaleen of course eludes him and so avoids having to kiss the boy again.

The fifth and sixth kisses are given to The Huntsman, again under some duress. The fifth kiss has some sexual charge but this is more so because she is kissing a man as opposed to a boy. This quality is enhanced by the flirtatious nature and innuendo laden conversation prior to the kiss (with The Huntsman offering to show Rosaleen “the most remarkable object in [his] pocket”) and so enhances the sexual nature of the contact. The sixth kiss is given in Granny’s cottage but it lacks any emotive overtones for it is merely what The Huntsman has ‘won’ from the bet he made with Rosaleen.

Lipstick

When aroused, blood rushes to the lips so making them a deeper shade of red. In visually symbolic terms, red lipstick is meant to imitate that bodily reaction and so signifies passion, sexual attraction and arousal. Within the context of *The Company of Wolves*, the red lipstick Rosaleen applies serves a dual purpose: on a surface level the application of the make up is a means of pretending to be adult, of mimicking her mother and elder sister. When looking in the mirror Rosaleen is allowed the opportunity to see that fictional representation of one self engaged in adult activity. Given the colour value of the lipstick, the make-up can also be interpreted as blood and the awakening of sexuality. This is made apparent in the scenes involving the Dreamt Rosaleen climbing the tree to find a mirror, red lipstick and four eggs. Having allowed the viewer to witness Rosaleen applying the make up to her lips, Jordan cuts from a close up of her face to a close up of a panting wolf, its snout smeared in the blood of a fresh kill. The symbolic connections are evident, once again reinforcing the dangers of attraction and adulthood and, consequently, the death of childhood.

See also *Mirror and Red*

Marriage

In the realities of the Dreaming Rosaleen and the Dreamt Rosaleen, marriage is both happy and harmonious with the respective parents seemingly functioning in a relationship of equality. The Dreamt Rosaleen's parents fulfil stereotyped roles: the mother as housewife and the father as protector/hunter. Although these roles may at times agitate the overall feminist quality of the narrative, the existing family structure is positive and supportive of Rosaleen, particularly the father who encourages her to involve herself with the village boys and, perhaps covertly, encouraging her to stray just a little off Granny's path.

The two other marriages depicted within the film are unsettled and corrupted. In Granny's story the wife is punished not just by the return of her first husband but also by her second husband, who having decapitated the werewolf within her first husband, turns and beats her. In Rosaleen's story the marriage is between an older man and younger woman. In the brief scene she affords the young bride, she looks terrified of all that is happening around her. As the newly weds cut the cake, the husband whispers a sexual promise which appears to frighten the young bride even more. As disturbing as this wedding appears to be, its façade of happiness is disrupted by the arrival of a pregnant woman who accuses the groom of being the father of her unborn child. Although in the world of the Dreamt Rosaleen marriage is a safe and ordered construct, fictional marriages are rife with anxieties, secrets and latent sexual threat. So, like Granny's other narratives, these stories function as moralistic tales, further warnings to the young Rosaleen of the terrors of men.

Men

Initially the Dreamt Rosaleen seems to demonstrate a subordinate nature to the males in her village but as the narrative progresses and her sense of self strengthens her desire to be treated as an equal manifests itself. When Granny recounts the story of the marriage of the Travelling Man, Rosaleen's response is not one of horror but "I'd never let a man strike me". It is the inability of the story's female protagonist to defend herself that shocks her, not the werewolf who attacks her. This comment echoes Rosaleen's earlier comment about the death of her sister. Granny says that there was no one there to protect her in the forest (a comment that in itself reinforces the fairy tale subordination of females) to which Rosaleen responds "Why couldn't she save herself?" This answer works itself into Rosaleen's self confidence to the point where she herself must stand by that dictum. And, in the end, she does. When confronted with the transformed Huntsman she doesn't scream or allow herself to be eaten. Instead she becomes his equal by transforming herself into a she wolf.

Mirror

Rosaleen is seen with two hand mirrors during the film. The first rests on the Dreaming Rosaleen's pillow and the other is found in a bird's nest by the Dreamt Rosaleen. Both function in relation to make-up, in particular lipstick. The Dreaming Rosaleen has, prior to the start of the film, applied her sister's lipstick to herself and has, one assumes, looked in the mirror whilst doing this. This act is repeated again when Rosaleen finds the mirror and lipstick in the birds nest. She applies the make-up and looks at herself, smiling as she turns her head back and forth to admire the lipstick's transformative qualities. By applying the make up Rosaleen temporarily 'becomes' adult and the mirror's reflective qualities allow her to see herself as an adult. As such, the mirror provides another instance of duality or doubling, a fictional representation of the future Rosaleen: mature, attractive, seductive, calm and powerful.

See also Eggs

Mothers

Of the three dreamt mothers in the film, two are assertive and transgress their patriarchally defined roles. The Dreamt Rosaleen's mother is presented as a strong female, a woman who has gained equal authority and respect within her marriage. She is also a woman who has rejected the mythical warnings of her own mother and so represents a product of what can happen when one does stray from the path. Given this, the Dreamt Rosaleen's mother represents the modern condition for she has taken life on her terms and as a consequence is in a partnership of equality and responsibility. If this is accepted, then Granny – as a mother - clearly becomes a representation of the past, as a symbol that is bound up in the old orders and hierarchy of relationships. By implication this then implies that the Dreamt Rosaleen will, upon her final transformation into a wolf / woman come to represent the modern and, possibly, the future.

See also Religion

The second assertive mother is the protagonist of a story the Dreamt Rosaleen recounts to her own mother. Here the mother is poor and pregnant, with the rich father having left her to marry an equally rich (and much younger) woman. During the wedding reception, the mother arrives and curses the wedding party, transforming them into a pack of salivating wolves. If this were not punishment enough, she commands the wolves to serenade her child to sleep each night. Rosaleen's mother questions what pleasure can be gained from making the wolves howl, to which Rosaleen replies "from the power she had". As will be seen later, this story functions as an expression of Rosaleen's developing desire for independence and individual power; both desires which will separate her from the patriarchal control of the village and an implied society.

See also Stories

Nature

Throughout the narrative, Nature is invested with both symbolic potential and power. The cycles of the moon, the mushrooms and trees, the presence of the wolves in the forest and their concealment within men, all suggest Nature as a metaphor, a cyclical concordance for the inevitable transformation of the Dreaming Rosaleen.

The werewolves themselves may form a further part of this interpretation as their hybrid status is the combination of man and Nature, with their interchangeability structured around the natural lunar cycle. It is ironic for them to be considered natural for they are, for the most part, considered to be unnatural - the cursed creations of superstition. Yet the wolf itself is the epitome of the wilderness; that untouched space of nature.

Path

The clearly defined path that winds through the forest is mirrored in Granny's stories. Staying on that path will ensure safety through the woods and, symbolically, through life. The stories Granny tells are all really warnings to Rosaleen, veiled threats bound up in simple superstitious narratives, all which rest upon departing from that route of safety. Stepping off the path will lead to being seduced by the wolf's golden eyes, to be mesmerised whilst been attacked and eaten. And to be eaten in this narrative is to have sex. So it is, in Granny's dulling eyes at least; better to stay on that well trodden route.

Predictably Rosaleen, with her increasingly inquisitive thoughts and questions, sees the path not as a route of security but one of restriction. The forest on either side seems to her to be a far more fascinating and seductive place to be.

Phallus

The forest Rosaleen dreams and in which her dream identity lives, is a construction of phallic symbols. Enlarged and bloated mushrooms grow out of patches of dense ferns and damp moss; thick cobwebs stretch across the branches of the giant, thick trunked redwoods or hang from branches like veils of mist. These symbols are obvious enough and simultaneously provide the film with an appropriate fairy tale locale as well as reinforcing the clear sexual overtones the forest implies.

Red

As a single colour within the film, red continually appears against a backdrop of purity in an effort to visually amplify both its visceral qualities and its symbolic value. The colour is given consistent form in the spilling of blood, first in the decapitation of the Travelling Man and then later when The Huntsman drinks the blood of a pheasant. On both of these occasions, the blood soils a background of pure white – the severed head falls into a pail of milk while the pheasant's blood drips down from The Huntsman's fingers onto the unspoiled snow. The vivid red blood against the symbolic purity of the milk and snow implies the onset of the Dreamt Rosaleen's menstrual cycle, with the two colours reaching further union when the Dreamt Rosaleen recounts her second story to the transformed Huntsman. As she tells her story an image of a white rose appears, coming into bloom. As the petals slowly open, the rose 'bleeds' and steadily changes from a white bud into a red rose in full bloom. The symbolic nature of this image is obvious, particularly as the Dreamt Rosaleen's dialogue forms a voice-over to the image: "and the wound did heal for she was just a girl after all who had strayed from the path".

The most blatant of all the film's symbols, the Dreamt Rosaleen's red cloak clearly marks her out as an interpretation of Little Red Riding Hood. The assigning nature of the cloak brings with it the connotations of that narrative, lending to the Dreamt Rosaleen traits such as vanity and sin. For the Dreamt Rosaleen the cloak carries a more physically symbolic weight, its colour clearly aligning the garment with blood. As Rosaleen says when Granny gives it to her, it is as "soft as snow... red as blood" again making the parallel of colour between the purity of snow and the spoiling nature of blood. Here the blood is menstrual and it is of no coincidence that the cloak is given to Rosaleen over her dead sister's grave: the onset of the menstrual cycle marks the transition from girl to woman and so, given the fairy tale context of the narrative, is another signifier of the death of the child and of innocence.

By the narrative's conclusion, the symbolic value of the red shawl makes explicit Rosaleen's final transformation. Just as the wolves have shed their human skin to reveal their true selves, Rosaleen is encouraged to reveal herself by shedding her shawl. Trapped inside Granny's cottage with The Huntsman, he tells her to take off her shawl and throw it into the fire. By doing so Rosaleen destroys the physical protection the shawl offered and as a result reveals her physical self - her clothed pubescent body - to the gaze of the Hunts

Religion

You can hurl your Bible at him and your apron after, granny, you thought that was a sure prophylactic against these infernal vermin... now call on Christ and his mother and all the angels in heaven to protect you but it won't do you any good. (4)

Although the villagers are seen to regularly attend church and hold a firm belief in God, it would seem that their daily lives are governed more by superstition than the instructions provided by the Bible. This is most apparently embodied in Granny who carries her Bible with her yet spins tales of immense superstition. On occasion these stories indicate a distrust of the clergy, particularly when she says "They say the priest's bastards often turn into wolves as they grow older". As a consequence of this duality of belief, Granny's dialogue and scenes successfully integrate folklore with religious belief, making both interchangeable and as powerful as each other.

But for all her belief in the power of superstition, it is her faith in God that Granny relies upon when she finally encounters a werewolf: as The Huntsman enters her cottage she recognises the signs of the werewolf and, holding up her Bible, says "God save us. Get ye back to Hell from which ye came". The Huntsman smiles and softly replies "I come not from Hell. I come from the forest". He snatches away Granny's Bible and, with ease, decapitates her. Within the context of this scene, Hell can be interpreted from The Huntsman's perspective as a fictional space, for the forest is, as Granny knows, a very real and tangible space. Perhaps, if this is true and for Granny at least, Hell is definitely on earth and it is right outside her front door.

Of all the religious symbols present within the film, the most prominent and most powerful is the Dreamt Rosaleen's silver crucifix. Taken from her sister's corpse and placed around her neck by her mother, the cross remains with her throughout the film. At times it is a source of comfort, with Rosaleen holding it tight when she is afraid or in the presence of what she perceives to be a supernatural event. The power of the cross will protect her, not Granny's superstitious charms and so aligns the Dreamt Rosaleen with the traditional structures and beliefs of religion as opposed to Folklore. Although this and the described instances have some value within the overall contextualisation of the film, it is the narrative's final scenes that place most emphasis upon Rosaleen's cross: Rosaleen's mother cautiously enters Granny's cottage to find a wolf sitting by the fire. Her husband enters and goes to shoot the animal. As he pulls the trigger, Rosaleen's mother knocks the gun out of the way. She looks down at the animal and gestures to the silver cross that hangs around the wolf's neck. It is a moment of dual recognition: the cross becomes a signifier for Rosaleen, functioning as her identifying object. Although her virtue may no longer be intact, her

morals - her personal code for living - is and so marks her implied intercourse with The Huntsman as one of accepting her maturity and an act of mutual agreement.

This moment of recognition is also one of personal reflection for her mother. By recognising Rosaleen in the wolf she is also recognising the wolf in herself: "If there is a beast in man it has met its match in woman".

An additional crucifix appears in the film when the Dreamt Rosaleen's father goes out with the other villagers to hunt down a wolf. As he takes up his gun, his wife offers him her own silver crucifix. Instead of taking the symbol, he pushes it away with the barrel of his gun saying "This is all those beasts understand. Kill them before they kill you". In the tangible world, for her farther at least, there is no value in religious symbols or superstitious ritual, yet this is typically inverted by Carter for he returns from the hunt in shock, unable to perceive the mythical event that has taken place before him: he stumbles back into the cottage and throws a bloodied bundle of rags onto the kitchen table. With caution, he peels back the layers exclaiming that it was a forepaw when he cut it from the wolf's corpse. Predictably, once the rags are fully removed, the paw is now a human hand, a wedding ring upon its finger. Once the hand has been seen by his family, to reassure himself that he is actually seeing what he thinks he is seeing, he relies upon superstition to 'undo' its symbolic power and throws it onto the fire.

Sisters

The initial part of the Dreaming Rosaleen's dream fulfils a simple revenge fantasy. In the waking world Rosaleen's sister, Alice, stands outside the locked bedroom door repeatedly whispering "Pest! Pest! Pest!" As Rosaleen slips into her dream the woodland outside of their country house becomes a dense forest shrouded in fog. Barefoot, her sister runs along its leaf strewn path. Although she attempts to stay on this path in an effort to reach some safe haven, she is forced off it by grotesquely enlarged versions of Rosaleen's toys. As she stumbles through the undergrowth she comes upon a pack of wolves that chase her and eventually corner her in the exposed roots of an equally enlarged tree. As they descend upon her she screams and screams, with Jordan cutting back to the Dreaming Rosaleen's grinning face just as the wolves consume her.

Within the symbolic index of the film, and given Granny's reason for Alice's death ("She strayed off the path"), this dream takes on a perverse edge; if the wolves represent sexual desire than a pack of wolves descending upon a single female possibly implies a violent gang rape. It is a brutal start to the Dreamt Rosaleen's narrative and in some ways acts as a 'bookend', for if the film begins with a physical death through sexual interaction then so the dream ends with the symbolic death of childhood and innocence through sexual interaction.

Stories

Just as Rosaleen dreams the narrative, so the dream punctuates itself with further fictions. Predominately recounted by Rosaleen's Granny, these tales are extensions of the central narrative, expanding upon, revising or reinterpreting the events of Little Red Riding Hood. As such, each story acts as a further cautionary tale for Rosaleen, prescribing to her an orthodox path to follow and one that will possibly

reduce her to passivity. The expectation is that Rosaleen will be effectively scared by such stories and that she will mature along a safe and predictable route into womanhood. Yet all of this is undermined by Rosaleen's imagination and curiosity. It is these personally inherent qualities that encourage her to take the less trodden path into maturity. And perhaps, by the end, it is the courage of her conviction that allows her to embrace her true self and transform into a wolf.

Approaching the film purely from the perspective of narrative and tangential narratives, the symbolic values of the film are again brought to the fore by the metaphor driven tales told by Rosaleen's Granny. The film becomes about storytelling, about the retelling of myths, of their elaboration and their deconstruction as well as their reconstruction for a more contemporary audience. Given this, *The Company of Wolves* can be interpreted as a visual text that quietly embraces the multiple versions of one story – Little Red Riding Hood – and celebrates its rich potential for positive metaphor.

As the film draws to a close, the Dreamt Rosaleen tells two stories; one to her mother and the other to the transformed Huntsman. On a surface level these stories allow Rosaleen to take on the role of storyteller, effectively taking Granny's place as the one who narrates the myths of folklore. By taking on this role, Rosaleen effectively replaces the old order and uses this position as a means of subverting those tired myths for her own ends. Granny's stories are full of repression in a covert attempt to maintain patriarchal order, whereas Rosaleen's stories are about expression and disruption of the established order. Perhaps more importantly, Granny's stories recount the punishments of sexual activity or transgression whereas Rosaleen's punishments are inflicted upon the aggressive males and the transgressive act is seen as a positive and healthy aspect of the maturing process.

Before discussing the symbolic value this clearly has for the Dreamt Rosaleen, it is worth noting that it is possible to make the equation between Rosaleen the Storyteller and Angela Carter the novelist. Within the context of *The Company of Wolves*, both women tell stories that are bound up in folklore, and those stories contain subtle narrative twists or inversions that allow for the presence of a strong, if not dominant, female character. As such, both Rosaleen and Carter's fairy tale narratives tell their listeners different stories, ones which construct positive feminine roles and identities.

In relation to the Dreamt Rosaleen's ongoing narrative, aspects of her desires (or by now what seems to be her developing capacity to become a woman/wolf or, to put it into the terms of Gothic critique, the Other) are also evident in the stories that she tells. Of the two stories she personally recounts in the film, the protagonists are women, one of whom exacts revenge upon men and betters them at their own seductive games – a role which Rosaleen herself will assume when she finally confronts The Huntsman. These stories give form to Rosaleen's growing awareness, not only of her sexual understanding and desires, but more so of her need to be an independent adult. She wants to actively engage in healthy sexual activity, but does not want to be oppressed by it nor by men. Interpreting her spoken narratives in this way implies that Rosaleen will, more than likely, mature into a woman that is not unlike her mother; by the film's end it indeed becomes apparent that Granny never strayed from the path (and as a consequence of this superstitious naivety, is killed by The Huntsman) yet her daughter has, hence Rosaleen's mother's comment "If there's a beast in men it meets its match in women too." It is this comment that gives the

Dreamt Rosaleen the confidence to take on those female roles she eloquently describes in her stories: if her mother has strayed from the path then why can't she?

Catherine Lappas interprets these two narratives from a different perspective. In the context of her essay, the revenge narrative is seen as a means of releasing “the repressed anger of women who are denied their own desire, such as they are in Granny’s tales” (5) and can be covertly reflected into the Dreamt Rosaleen’s straying from the path. Her curiosity and her increasingly overwhelming desires are initially repressed by Granny’s stories, yet her physical and symbolic encounters (kissing the village boy, climbing the tree and finding the eggs) coupled with her mother’s comment imply a possible release, one that she finally finds in *The Huntsman*.

The second narrative the Dreamt Rosaleen recounts concerns a she-wolf who enters the world above from the world below. Once there she is shot and wounded. Played naked by Goth icon Danielle Dax, the story again highlights for Lappas the increasing Otherness of Rosaleen:

Both Rosaleen and the she-wolf are trapped in hostile and unfamiliar land, encased in unfamiliar skins, ill-fitted for traditional gender roles, and shunned because of their differences. (6)

Here Lappas implies the inevitable transformation of the Dreamt Rosaleen, one who will shed both her clothes and skin before *The Huntsman* and become what she really is. As a consequence, the second of Rosaleen’s narratives equates her with the monster, or at least a version of it. Lappas discusses this later within her text, stating that Carter does not read “the monster as the embodiment of male sexuality alone... she focuses instead on the similarity and solidarity between monster and woman and sees the source of the monster’s difference and power as sexual” (7) and so strengthens the notion that Rosaleen’s stories are not just alternate versions of Folklore but another clear and unrepressed expression of her (sexual) desires.

See also *Werewolves*

Toys

Although obvious symbols of the Dreaming Rosaleen’s childhood they also become objects that, by the end of the film, symbolise her past. Rosaleen sleeps as a child but wakes up to the ‘horrors’ of puberty, with the adult, masculine wolves breaking through the walls and windows of her bedroom, smashing her toys and dolls as they do so.

The most explicitly physical interpretation of transformation obviously lies within those men who are werewolves. Their painfully graphic mutation from man to animal is not typical of contemporary Horror cinema for within *The Company of Wolves* it is made apparent that those cursed are merely wolves in men’s clothing. It is appropriate that such symbolic imagery should take place for this is, after all, a retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* and so wolves are expected to disguise themselves in order to obtain the flesh they desire. So instead of flesh rippling and contorting as bones bend and crack as the body

realigns itself, those wolves of *The Company* rip their way through the flesh and tear away the clothing of human skin to show their true selves.

See also *Red Cloak*

The idea of a pure beast being within a man is consolidated by Rosaleen's mother. Late one evening Rosaleen hears her parents having sex. The following morning Rosaleen asks her mother if father hurts her, to which she replies that "if there is a beast in man, it's met its match in women". The dialogue implies the taming potential of sexual activity in that the beast may well be a beast but it is soon pacified by the opposite sex. This dialogue has resonance near the end of the film when Rosaleen submits to the Huntsman, pacifying his aggression with a kiss and implied sexual intercourse.

As an image, the symbolic value of transformation is obvious as it is the revelation of the animal inside. Yet because of the visual strategy of transformation *The Company of Wolves* elects to use, this could be equally inverted to be revealing of the man on the outside. Given Rosaleen's Granny's many warnings about the exterior appearances of men ("Don't trust men whose eyebrows join") this interpretation has its value when reading the film as a whole.

Like the many werewolves in the film, Rosaleen is undergoing both a mental and physical transformation, changing from a child to an adult, from a girl into a woman. Given its parallel with the painful, skin shedding transformation of man into wolf, the narrative positions the onset of puberty and sexual awareness as a painful, frightening and a potentially horrific transition. Just as the werewolves bled from the shedding of their skins, so too will Rosaleen.

See also *Blood, Full Moon and Red*

It is interesting to note that in texts which provide general overviews of Carter and Jordan's oeuvres, the theme of transformation becomes a prevailing trait. For Carter, narratives often feature instances "where conventional boundaries between man and beast, between face and mask, between appearance and reality, bend and warp" (8). Whereas for Jordan this transformation "is the crossing and blurring of boundaries" which has taken form in "animal and human [in films such as] *The Company of Wolves*, *Interview with a Vampire* and, to a lesser extent, *The Butcher Boy*." (9) Although this may seem to be a surface appraisal of defining traits, Jordan's use of transformation is as much symbolic as it is physical, with these transitional states addressing "the constructedness, performativity and fluidity of identity, particularly gender and sexual identities. Throughout the film, characters are not what they seem." (10)

Werewolves

Fred Botting states that the contemporary Gothic's manifestation of the monster is one with whom sympathy may lie in that they are

sites of identification, sympathy, and self-recognition. Excluded figures once represented as malevolent, disturbed, or deviant, monsters are [now] rendered more humane while the systems that exclude them assume terrifying, persecutory, and inhuman shapes. (11)

If the Dreamt Rosaleen represents the future and the modern, then Botting's reflections upon the Gothic Monster have resonance for the protagonist as she identifies with the narrative's monstrous element. For her increasing sexual awareness and desire, the werewolf becomes the site of identification; it is their very difference that attracts her. Their surface is human and when transformed they remain human for Rosaleen. Having shot The Huntsman, she witnesses his transformation. Instead of being repulsed she watches with fascination and curiosity. When the wolf stands before her she does not run like all the other women do. She crouches down beside the animal and says "I did not know that wolves could cry." Her dialogue humanises the monster and so, for this scene at least, collapses the werewolves duality into one unified whole. Whether man or animal, human or monster, Rosaleen perceives that simply to be their condition.

Given her narrative end, the Dreamt Rosaleen's sympathy is clearly based upon her identification with the Monster. Ultimately this sympathy is accepting herself for what she is becoming, a sexually aware and active young woman.

1. Carol Zucker, 'Sweetest Tongue has Sharpest Tooth: The Dangers of Dreaming in Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves*' (*Literature Film Quarterly* Vol.28, No.1, 2000) p.67
2. Ibid, p.68
3. Ibid, p.67
4. Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage, 1995)
5. Catherine Lappas, 'Seeing is Believing, but Touching is the Truth: Female Spectatorship and Sexuality' in *The Company of Wolves*' (*Women's Studies* Vol.25, No.2, January 1996)
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. David Punter & Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.102
9. Fidelma Farley, 'Neil Jordan' in *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers*, Yvonne Tasker (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2002) p.187
10. Ibid, p.188
11. Fred Botting, *Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black Holes* in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.286

Appendix

A young girl, Rosaleen, has locked herself in her bedroom. Having read a magazine and experimented with some of her older sister's make up, she now lies in bed dreaming of a fairy tale world in which her alter ego lives: a small rural community built deep within the depths of a forest. The dream begins with Rosaleen's sister being chased by a pack of wolves who eventually catch and attack her. In what seems to be the following day, Rosaleen attends her sister's funeral. Before she is buried, Rosaleen is told to kiss the corpse and is then given her sister's silver crucifix. Instead of returning home with her mother and father, Rosaleen leaves the funeral with her Granny, walking through the forest to her home. As they walk, Granny offers Rosaleen superstitious advice, warning her not to trust men whose eyebrows meet and not to stray from the forest path or else she will fall prey to the wolves that attacked her sister.

Sitting in front of the open fire, Rosaleen helps her Granny to roll a ball of bright red wool. As they work together, Granny spins a tale about the marriage of a woman in the village to a travelling man: before their

marriage can be consummated, the groom steps out into the forest to answer the 'call of nature'. He doesn't return and, upon hearing the howling of wolves, his wife assumes he has been attacked and killed. Years pass and she remarries only for her former husband to return. Filthy from the years spent in the wilderness, he sits at her dining table and demands food. As he eats he realises that she has remarried and, in a fit of rage, begins to rip the skin from his face. Once naked of skin, his face and body contort, stretching and distending until he has transformed into a wolf. Before he can attack his wife, the second husband appears and decapitates the wolf. The severed head returns back to its human state. The husband assumes his wife is involved in an affair and so beats her.

The following morning Rosaleen returns to her parent's home. As she hangs out the bed sheets, one of the village boys approaches her and asks if she will walk through the forest with him after the Sunday service. He assures that he will look after her and that they will not stray from the path. That evening, Rosaleen is woken up by the sound of her parents having sex. She watches them for a moment, holding tightly to her sister's crucifix as she does. In the morning, when she is alone with her mother, Rosaleen asks if it hurts when they make love. Later in the day, Rosaleen visits her sister's grave. As Rosaleen lays fresh red roses on the grave, Granny finishes knitting a red shawl for Rosaleen.

Rosaleen's parents allow her to go into the forest with the boy. Wearing her red shawl, Rosaleen manages to avoid the boy's advances but, eventually, he manages to kiss her. When he tries to kiss her again, Rosaleen dodges him and runs off into the forest. As she runs off the path, she shouts out that he can kiss her but he has to catch her first. In an attempt to hide from the boy, Rosaleen climbs a tree. At the top she finds a stork's nest. Inside are four eggs, a hand mirror and lipstick. As she applies the make-up to her lips, the eggs crack open to reveal a statuette of a baby inside. Rosaleen takes one the babies and, when she shows it to her mother, it weeps.

Whilst her father is out hunting the wolves that killed his eldest daughter, Rosaleen tells her mother the story of a cursed revenge: a woman from the forest is made pregnant by an aristocrat who rejects her in favour of a wealthy young woman. On their wedding day, the forest woman enters the wedding tent and curses the newly weds and their families to be wolves forever. At the end of her story, Rosaleen's father returns with what he thought was a forepaw of a wolf. When he shows it to them it has transformed back into a human hand.

The next day Rosaleen decides to visit her Granny. Taking a kitchen knife for protection, she walks through the forest alone. Deep in the forest she encounters a handsome Huntsman, a man whose eyebrows meet in the middle. They sit and talk, their conversation concluding with a bet to see who can reach Granny's house first. They go their separate ways, with the Huntsman walking through the forest and Rosaleen following the path. The Huntsman wins and enters Granny's house. He quickly kills her, decapitating her and then burning her remains on the open fire. Rosaleen reaches Granny's house and finds the Huntsman sitting in her chair. Realising he has killed Granny, Rosaleen tries to shoot the Huntsman but only manages to wound him. The pain triggers his transformation and when in his wolf form he collapses and whimpers from the injury. Rosaleen kneels by him and, as she strokes his haunches, tells a story about an injured she-wolf.

The following morning, Rosaleen's parents search for her and, upon entering Granny's cottage, find only a wolf wearing a silver crucifix. The wolf looks at the adults and then jumps out of the window and into the forest. As the dream ends, the wolf that was Rosaleen joins a pack of wolves and they run out of the dream and into Rosaleen's reality. As the young girl wakes up screaming, the wolves burst through the windows and walls of her bedroom.

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