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MORPHING MYTHS AND SHEDDING SKINS:
INTERCONNECTIVITY AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE ISOLATED FEMALE SELF IN
ANGELA CARTER'S "THE TIGER'S BRIDE" AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S

SURFACING

By

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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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Morphing Myths and Shedding Skins: Interconnectivity and the Subversion of the Isolated Female Self in Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

Chairperson: Dr. Louise Economides

This project is an analysis of the utilization of mythmaking and human-animal relationships reflected in Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. Carter and Atwood show how societal restrictions can devalue the connections between the body, the mind, and the natural world. Through the theoretical lenses of primarily post-structuralism and ecofeminism, this project seeks to show how these two authors subvert isolated female identities through the use of the fairy tale element of the human-animal transformation. This subversion rejects dualistic tendencies of the dominant, patriarchal society, opening new ways of identifying the self through interconnections otherwise rejected or ignored out of the fear of encountering otherness. The formation of relational selves encourages both the communication with entities beyond the human realm and also the engagement in creative deconstruction that helps establish fluidity. Through their innovative uses of language, Carter and Atwood portray a movement away from normative society towards an ambiguity that promotes diversified multiplicity.

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Introduction

Female-Animal Associations and Understanding the Relational Self

I will be focusing particularly on the human-animal divide by analyzing transformations of females into animals within Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. Both Carter and Atwood represent the restrictions created by a dominant, patriarchal society that separates the body, the mind, and the natural world. These boundaries, and the negative connotations surrounding them, are deconstructed in a manner that places new emphasis on the environment and the changing perceptions of the female protagonists. To do so, these two authors take the fairy genre, seen particularly through the element of transformation, and actively engage in mythmaking to break down certain restrictions that limit relational selves. Carter and Atwood use mythmaking in uniquely different ways, which will be analyzed later in this introduction. Through innovative uses of language, these authors express the need for new human outlooks on the natural world that recognize interconnectivity as key to forming a fluid rather than fixed self.

My analysis of Carter's and Atwood's transformative characters draws upon several different theoretical lenses, including post-structuralism, postmodernism, animal studies, and several branches of feminism. In terms of interconnectivity, Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's postmodern and post-structural views on becoming and multiplicity, presented in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, provide an interesting base for understanding the role of metamorphosis in breaking normative and often oppressive patterns. In "Romantic Individualism, Animal Rights and the Challenge of Multiplicity," Louise Economides analyses these two theorists' ideas on becoming, stating, "The shift away from ontological absolutism to a phenomenology of becoming entails an understanding of how entities are, of necessity, always already interconnected with other entities in novel configurations which cannot be reduced to the

dualistic paradigms which structure desires in social strata.” Such transformative natures allow a connection to form between humans and animals, disintegrating the human/animal binary that has been established throughout Western history. Elizabeth Grosz, in *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, further notes the fluidity within Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas, stating, “Becoming means that nothing is the same as itself over time, and dispersion means that nothing is contained in the same space in this becoming” (96). Thus, the ever-changing quality of becoming directly associates with alterity as one has continual interactions with what has been deemed “other.” In this manner, the formation of a versatile self occurs through a multiplicity of relationships that cannot be ignored. Grosz furthers this concept, stating how sometimes

identity cannot be understood as what *we are*, the multiple, overlapping categories that make us into subjects; rather, we are what *we do* and what *we make*, we are what we generate, which may give us identity, but always an identity that is directed to our next act, our next activity, rather than to the accretion of the categories that may serve to describe us. (Emphasis added 98)

In other words, an identity does not exist as a fixed category determined by definitions of a society; rather, identity intermingles with past, present, and future *actions* that bring the self into constant interaction with other entities, both human and non-human.

This multiplicity leads to a destabilization of meanings that creates an ambiguous state of being, commonly associated with difference and otherness. The destruction of order can incur a certain fear of ambiguity and selflessness; this fear helps create the dualisms and other boundaries that separate the human from the other. This separation promotes sameness by making difference negative, as Mark Roberts discusses in *The Mark of the Beast: Animality and*

Human Oppression: “some people have the right to exploit and master others because they are different...Difference, in this respect, is a category of power, one that sets a particular group above others, and, in so doing, claims mastery over those distinguished as others” (182).

Consequently, these barriers form isolated selves cut off from valuable relationships with the environment and create a self-made blindness to the necessity of interconnections to humanity’s own vitality.

I. Dualities, Value Hierarchies, and the Human/Animal Binary in Relation to the Feminine

While there are many cultural dualities that lead to the bifurcation from the other, the central focuses for this thesis will be on the separation of the human from the animal, the male from the female, the mind from the body, and the rational from the irrational. Historically, dualisms have associated women with nature and men with reason (and therefore culture). In “Introduction and Overview: Animal Others and Animal Studies,” Aaron Gross explains how such binaries constrict movement, stating, “Western ontological dualism presupposes human beings to be unique among all living things in that we alone are in possession of ‘mind’—that creative and constructive cognitive apparatus that shapes, mediates, and imparts meaning onto the things of the world around us” (26). In this manner, humanity situates itself on top of a hierarchy that identifies and defines other entities, resulting in the oppression of those termed “non-human” or other. Such subordination is not limited to the non-human but includes humans as well. Ecofeminists, such as Val Plumwood and Karen Warren, have looked at the connections between women and nature, and are particularly interested in how both can be dominated and placed in the realm of the other. Plumwood argues in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* that “both the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent

conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power” (20). Western society thus reflects patriarchal domination over subordinated groups, including women and nature. As Warren explains, “It is oppressive conceptual frameworks and the behaviors, practices, policies, structures, institutions, and socioeconomic conditions with which they interact that are at the heart of oppression and unjustified domination of women, other human Others, and nonhuman nature” (“Introduction” 143). Along with this, Warren also associates these conceptual frameworks with what she defines as “value hierarchies” that have been put in place by patriarchal society (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 46). Plumwood agrees, arguing that the rationality given to the dominant group allows them to define what is valued and devalued: “Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness” (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 19). These dualisms exist because of cultural frameworks and restrictive language that attempts to categorize what should exist independently from definitions; binaries are often maintained through blindness or ignorance to the interconnectivity that exists between humans, animals, and the natural world. In *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice*, Erinn Gilson discusses willful ignorance as a “kind of unconscious self-deception and, more specifically, a self-deception oriented towards retaining privilege and eschewing recognition of those facts that would destabilize privileged subjectivity” (86). Therefore, willful ignorance as a means of maintaining privilege connects to Warren’s conversation on value and the logic of domination, in which the group on top of the hierarchy controls those below through a self-given sense of superiority (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 47).

Value hierarchies exist due to a history of subordination and should be deconstructed in a manner that does not reject the other but rather embraces it as part of the self. In order to do so, one must question what it means to be human. As Plumwood discusses, “The concept of the human is itself very normative. The notion of being fully or properly human is made to carry enormous positive weight, usually with little examination of the assumptions behind this, or the inferiorisation of the class of non-human world” (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 26). One way to get beyond determined definitions of humanity that favor sameness is through the recognition of multiplicity and the promotion of difference. Jane Bennett’s ideas on material feminism in *Vibrant Matter* develop a means of understanding the human as a part of the whole rather than being an isolated, superior entity in a supreme role. Bennett states, “What is also needed is a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body... Without proficiency in this countercultural kind of perceiving, the world appears as if it consists only of active human subjects who confront passive objects and their law-governed mechanisms” (xiv). In Bennett’s analysis, the other becomes not just situated outside of the human but inside as well in the forms of certain materials that have become part of the body; such materials include heavy metals and viruses (Bennett 112). This recognition of the inability to separate the human from the non-human, even at the level of organisms in the body, takes power away from hierarchies and oppressive ideas that seek to create such barriers. The human body itself is vulnerable to the natural world because it is situated within unseen ecological systems and not in the role of the master. Moreover, in *Becoming Animal*, David Abram’s ideas connect to the need for reevaluating what it means to be human. He questions patriarchal structure and the present concepts of value, stating, “They [feminists] questioned the privilege accorded to abstract, disembodied styles of reflection and began to disclose the hidden,

overlooked intelligence of the body itself, ascribing new value to corporeal forms of knowing” (105). The formation of new ways of understanding value by rejecting hierarchal systems creates a new means of viewing the body, human language, and identity in a way that expands rather than restricts the self.

This thesis also attempts to understand the bonds humans have with the natural world and why such connections are typically avoided out of fear, are negated, or are controlled by dominant categorizations. The above conversation on multiplicity and becoming connects to concepts presented by environmental theorist Robyn Eckersley in *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, where she discusses ecocentrism, a belief that “the world is an intrinsically dynamic, interconnected web of relations in which there are no absolute dividing lines between the living and the nonliving, the animate and the inanimate, or the human and the nonhuman” (49). Failure to recognize such interactions results in the formation of atomistic selves, or selves that view the surrounding world through a narrow, “particle-like sense of self” (Eckersley 62). Such a limited perspective forms an isolation that supports anthropocentrism, or “the belief that there is a clear and morally relevant dividing line between humankind and the rest of nature, that humankind is the only principal source of value and meaning in the world, and that nonhuman nature is there for no other purpose but to serve humankind” (Eckersley 51).

These Western viewpoints that separate the natural world from humanity set oppressive categorizations on certain groups of people in relation to dualisms such as the rational/irrational and the human/animal. Ecocentrism and other terms are used in an attempt to show the unavoidable connections that exist between humans and the natural world. For example, Warren discusses the term relational selves, defining it as “as beings-in-relationships” that make “relationships to others an integral, and not dispensable or ‘add on’ feature of one’s nature and

identity as a self” (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 128). Thus, the relational self counters the alienated, atomistic self. Historically, females in particular have experienced a negative categorization. As Eckersley relates, “At the symbolic and conceptual levels, both women and nonhuman nature have been associated and downgraded in the God-Man-Woman-Nature hierarchy of being—a conceptual schema that has served to *legitimize* the greater social status and power held by men vis-à-vis women and nonhuman nature” (68). Such social frameworks limit creativity and attempt to control the body as well as the mind. Furthermore, throughout Western history, categorical values have been placed on the environment. In “Mirrors and Windows: Sociocultural Studies of Human-Animal Relationships,” Molly Mullin shows how such values reflect, “Definitions of nature, like definitions of human, are not...neutral but have been continually constructed and reconstructed in political contexts in which they have reflected some interests and not others” (213). Similarly, Carolyn Merchant believes that the term “‘nature’ (like ‘woman’) is ‘historically and socially constructed’” (qtd. in Rose 78), and reflects the determined values of the dominant group.

The specific binary that separates the human from the animal becomes important to analyze within my thesis because of the human-animal transformations that occur within Carter’s and Atwood’s works; studying the ways they blur the boundary that separates humanity from the animal realm will help show at what level the binary is deconstructed in their writings. In *Animal Rites*, Cary Wolfe puts the separation between the human and animal into a historical perspective, stating,

The figure of the ‘animal’ in the West...is part of a cultural and literary history stretching back at least to Plato and the Old Testament, reminding us that the animal has always been especially, frightfully nearby, lying in wait at the very heart of the constitutive

disavowals and self-constructing narratives enacted by that fantasy figure called ‘the human.’ (6)

Wolfe’s statement helps show not only how long the separation between animals and humans has existed but also presents why the boundary between them can be seen as blurred and constantly moving—humans themselves can be defined as animals (Wolfe 6). Animals are deemed by many as categorically inferior to humanity, mainly because of their inability to utilize human language (Mullin 206). According Roberts, this lack of communication and therefore rationalization reflects how, “Animals had become...constituted by what they lack and what they fail to achieve of humanity” (14). The boundary between humans and animals therefore relates directly to Warren’s conversation about value hierarchy, where human qualities are termed more valuable than other intellects. Ironically, the definitions that seek to valorize humanity also serve as oppressive tools against people degraded as animalistic. Such animalistic qualities, as Roberts explains, “Bec[o]me[s] crucial to those who [seek] to victimize...the animal-like in the name of reason, humanity, religion, morality, intellectual superiority, profit, normalcy, social progress, or just plain good etiquette” (14). Roberts presents the negative manner animals and the animalistic are perceived in hierarchal society. Moreover, the separation between animals and humans largely exists out of a fear of being related to the animal. Mullin discusses this fear by studying the mind/body dualism in relation to the human/animal. Historically, the human body has been associated with bestial qualities that threaten the rational; due to this, the body represents something to be controlled since, “humans were often perceived as sharing behaviors and qualities with animals, encouraging the perception of a beast existing within humans, a beast that required taming and vigilance” (Mullin 204). Due to this animal association, the body became regulated and controlled within hierarchal constructions and norms (Gross 29). Furthermore, in

Animals Erased: Discourse, Ecology, and Reconnection with the Natural World, Arran Stibbe relates how, “In celebrating the linguistic and the rational, other aspects of being human (such as emotions, feelings, embodiment, mortality, or dependence on a physical environment for survival) are marginalized simply because they happen to be shared with other animals” (3). As seen above, such bifurcation leads to a disconnection of the body from the mind and the human from the animal, resulting in isolated selves.

It is important to note how individuals and groups of people are negatively associated with the animal and therefore oppressed by Western society. While this thesis focuses mainly on the relationship between animals and females, other bifurcated groups of people, such as the non-white, the colonized, the enslaved, the impoverished, and the insane, were commonly associated with animals to justify and/or reflect inferiority when compared to the dominant, rational, patriarchal culture (Mullin 204). Such restrictions span the issues of gender and race, and show the power of the dominant group. Post-structuralist Jacques Derrida relates this superiority and control of terminology in “The Animal Therefore I Am (More to Follow).” Derrida states, “Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give...They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept” (400). Such power over categorization creates groups that are both de-humanized and animalized, restricting identification within those groups. Richard Twine links this concept of inferiority and superiority to the body in “Ma(r)king Essence-Ecofeminism and Embodiment.” Twine states, “One’s membership of human citizenship (for this read membership of Western, male, white, bourgeois-defined human identity) was measured in terms of one’s ability to distance and deny such bodily functions which implied far too much commonality with the ‘irrational’ sphere of nature” (40). In a historical sense, women have been associated with the

body, the irrational, and the animalistic, especially in terms of female sexuality. Roberts particularly looks into the nineteenth century, where the patriarchy restricted female sexual desires, for fear of a destabilization of social constructions, by “negatively link[ing] female sexuality to animality, rendering it bestial, unspeakable, perverse, and humanly unthinkable” (27). Such negative associations between the female and the animal (that still exist today) serve to limit the freedom of the female body and remain embedded in a language created largely by man (Spender 227). For example, in “Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health,” Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen reflect on the “colloquialisms for women such as ‘pussy,’ ‘bitch,’ ‘old hen,’ ‘sow,’ and the like serve to animalize women and, in cultures where animals are seen as subordinate or inferior, thereby reinforce women’s inferior status” (159). Thus, the creation of subordinated identities based on value-laden perspectives of the dominant (male) group denies difference and serves to remove agency from humans, animals, and the natural world (Twine 38).

The body as a basis of identification becomes an important aspect in this thesis because of the impact culture has in forming identity. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler discusses how,

The category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative... ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the body it controls. (1)

Through this quotation, Butler reflects on how normative society creates barriers around sex and gender by controlling the body. In the works of Atwood and Carter, as the females begin to transform into animals or recognize their animal “base,” they confront social restrictions placed around them and seize the opportunity to enter a freeing state that does not limit movement of

their identity based on sex or gender norms. Rather, ambiguity erases definitive lines as identity becomes situated in interactions with the surrounding natural world. This ambiguity reflects Hélène Cixous's conversation about female individuality in "The Laugh of the Medusa": "But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their [womens'] individual constitutions: you can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another" (347). Rather than exclusion, this individuality and acceptance of difference relates to what Marilyn Frye defines as "loving perception." In "loving perception" or the loving eye, people, "Know the complexity of the other as something that will forever present new things to be known.' It is not an invasive, coercive eye that annexes others to itself" (qtd. in Warren *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 104). This loving perception rejects the "sameness" that "arrogant perception" creates through the value hierarchy that "maintains sameness in such a way that it expands the moral community only to those beings who are thought to resemble 'us' in some significant way" (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 105). Loving perception recognizes the differences and notices the similarities of both the human and nonhuman realm, drawing upon interconnections that are otherwise invisible in the dominant hierarchal value system.

Having interconnections with the surrounding world can disrupt the controlling boundaries society places around people and their bodies. Abram studies this disruption by looking at how the body interacts with the surrounding community and natural world:

The human body is not a closed or static object, but an open, unfinished entity utterly entwined with the soils, waters, and winds that move through it—a wild creature whose life is contingent upon the multiple other lives that surround it, and the shifting flows that surge through it. (*Becoming Animal* 110)

The recognition or rediscovery of the body becomes a means of communicating with the self, the community, and the environment. Abram suggests that reason and emotion as well as the body and the mind are all interconnected in a manner that allows the body itself to think (*Becoming Animal* 105). Cixous furthers this idea by stating, “Censor the body and you sensor breath and speech at the same time” (350). The expression and the identification of the self not only relates to the mind but to the senses and feelings the body provides. By recognizing that the body itself communicates, a new range of diversity takes form that does not limit but expands the nature, thoughts, and creativity of humanity through an individuality created by multiplicity. In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram states that awareness of “the intelligence that lurks in nonhuman nature...temporarily shatters habitual ways of seeing and feeling, leaving one open to a world all alive, awake, and aware” (19). This recognition of intelligence outside of humanity allows the self to reach beyond the normative structures set in place, creating a diversity of perceptions with a versatile sense of being. Rather than restrictive, language becomes innovative as it extends to include the ever-changing other within as well as without. This suggests that defining a permanent, fixed self is not possible because of the transformative nature of our identities in constant interaction with the surrounding world. Rather, “To acknowledge that ‘I am this body’ is not to reduce the mystery of my yearnings and fluid thoughts to a set of mechanisms, or my ‘self’ to a determinate robot. Rather it is to affirm the uncanniness of this physical form” (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous* 46). By studying human-animal transformations, the language of the body, once recognized, becomes a means of freedom from the limitations of hierarchal and anthropocentric viewpoints.

Directly relating to the body is the idea that human language has the capacity to limit but also expand conceptions of identity. The limiting factor of language is situated in the hierarchies

and defined values of a society, which Lori Gruen reflects upon: “Ecofeminists believe that facts are theory-laden, theories are value-laden, and values are molded by historical and philosophical ideologies, social norms, and individual processes of categorization” (qtd. in Warren, “Introduction” 146). Because values are directly associated to theory, there is a close association made with language and dualistic tendencies. In *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender discusses how language serves as a means of categorizing the world: “Language helps form the limits of our reality. It is our means of ordering, classifying, and manipulating the world. It is through language that we become members of a human community, that the world becomes comprehensible and meaningful” (3). Here, Spender recognizes both the capacity of language as a creator and as a limitation to individuals and relationships. The title Spender uses also serves to show how language has historically been man-made, serving to create, “only a partial view of the world and yet they [men] are in a position to insist that their views and values are the ‘real’ and *only* values; and they are in a position to impose their version on other human beings who do not share their experience” (Spender 1-2). Hence, language and rhetoric have been dominated by the perceptions of the dominant society, reminiscent of the arrogant eye. Cixous builds on this concept of domination, stating, “Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition” (350). According to Cixous, the “history of reason” limits the communication of the body by forming restrictions around the female that prevent the entire “Self” from speaking. In terms of gender, Butler recognizes how “The naming [of gender] is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” (*Bodies that Matter* 8). Thus, identity becomes situated within a language of a given society, restricting movement.

Language as constricting can also produce feelings of abjection that Julia Kristeva discusses in “Approaching Abjection.” She states, “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, and order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (5). Reflective of Butler’s discussion of the rejection of bodies that matter, Kristeva notes how disturbances in the set boundaries of social constructions can lead to feelings of abjection and fear. This fear, in turn, becomes a powerful wall that places the indefinable other in a negative light. Kristeva states, “But that word, ‘fear’—a fluid haze...no sooner has it cropped up than it shades off like a mirage and permeates all words of the language with nonexistence...Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confronts that otherness...the abject” (6). In this manner, the abject other becomes situated inside a language based on fear that serves to separate the other from the self. For example, Twine connects this abjection to the body, stating, “Bodies then (as conceived) can be seen as disruptive sources of abjection, which render uncertain the neat attempts at boundary construction of Western history” (38). Fear of disruption leads to the negative bifurcation of those different from the dominant group. In many ways, the environment and the animalistic (in relation to humanity) are placed in the realm of the abject other. For example, Stibbe states that certain languages support “a conceptualization of ecosystems as existing separately from humans, like supermarkets for humans rather than as systems where all life is mutually sustained” (66). In this sense, such alienation makes the constant interaction between humans and the natural world, including animals, invisible; this serves a negative purpose because it removes human perceptiveness on the dependency of the natural world, resulting in limited care. Similarly, Abram focuses on this fear and discomfort with the other, specifically the environment, claiming that “Only by welcoming uncertainty from

the get-go can we acclimate ourselves to the shattering wonder that enfolds us. This animal body, for all its susceptibility and vertigo, remains the primary instrument of all our knowing, as the capricious earth remains our primary cosmos” (*Becoming Animal* 8). In other words, despite the fear of ambiguity, Abram suggests that humans should embrace the different types of knowledge that can be gained through relationships outside of the human restrictions of sameness.

Recognizing the altering nature of social constructions encourages interrelationships and new modes of knowledge. Butler discusses how social constructions and “regulatory schemas are not timeless structures, but historically revisable criteria of intelligibility which produce and vanquish bodies that matter” (*Bodies that Matter* 14). This “revisable” quality leads to a hope that the other can be viewed in a manner that breaks through constricting boundaries. Warren expresses this revision as an ecofeminist goal, stating, “a central project of ecofeminism is to creatively replace structures, practices and policies of unjustified domination with genuinely non-oppressive liberating, life-affirming, cooperative, and just ones” (“Introduction” 140). The restrictions of language can be challenged with the language of the body (discussed above). I am interested in how language has the ability to transform negative, dualistic ways of thinking in an innovative manner and how storytelling/mythmaking can transform (and be transformed by) people, cultures, and identities. Cixous recognizes the boundaries of language but has faith in the power of words as well: “Writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (350). For Cixous, writing holds the potential for deconstruction and reformation of constricting social limitations.

II. Fairy Tales, Mythmaking, and Identity in the Fiction of Carter and Atwood

Thus, I will focus particularly on the divide between the human and the non-human by analyzing transformations of females into animals within the works of Carter and Atwood. I will address both the restrictive and freeing tendencies of language and the importance of recognizing interconnections with the natural world. Both authors show how language becomes important in reflecting on the restrictions of society but also in the deconstruction of boundaries surrounding one's identity. Cixous's argument that the body speaks relates to Abram's ideas of interconnectivity and the importance of recognizing that the world cannot be defined. For how can you define an ever-changing entity that experiences constant metamorphosis? Words have the power to control, as seen in the dualisms presented, but they also have the power to break through such restrictions. Therefore, language and storytelling become tools for rejecting boundaries, experiencing relationships, and encouraging creativity. I chose Carter and Atwood in particular because of their creative uses of language along with their unique perspectives on how both the female and the animal can experience degradation due to social constructions. Furthermore, the concept of the embodied, transforming self coincides with the disintegration of dualisms, leading to freedom and new ways of viewing other intelligences beyond the human. Carter and Atwood both reflect on societal restrictions of the self that devalue the connections between the body, the mind, and the natural world.

Hence, this thesis specifically analyzes how the human-animal transformational experiences in "The Tiger's Bride" and *Surfacing* subvert isolated female identities to create relational selves that deconstruct the restrictions patriarchal society has over language, the mind, and the body; these fluid selves exist in the realm of creative difference rather than a sameness that forms oppressive (and potentially violent) binaries between the self and the other, the human

and the animal, and the male and the female. The ambiguity of Carter's and Atwood's writing styles as well as their use of fairy tales and mythmaking generate this realm of difference open to new ways of identifying the self through interconnections otherwise rejected or ignored out of fear of the other. In terms of mythmaking, Atwood and Carter both take part in recreating or forming new myths that involve deconstructing restrictions and showing the potential relationships between their characters and the natural world, particularly animals. However, they use mythmaking in different ways: Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" reveals an optimistic, post-structuralist approach that seeks to equalize relationships. Atwood's *Surfacing* reflects on the power myths have in our lives while recognizing the caution required when taking part in mythopoeic creations. These differences will be analyzed in further detail later in this introduction and the individual chapters.

I have structured my two main chapters in similar ways, with Chapter One focusing on Carter and Chapter Two on Atwood. In simplistic terms, my chapters can tentatively be broken down in the following manner: First, I analyze how patriarchal values, dualities, and language limit the female characters. Second, I go into how the two narrators' begin to break down these dualities and/or recognize their degradation, particularly through their relationships with animals (and the human/animal binary). Third, I study their transformational experiences from isolated into relational selves, and whether or not these transformations are successful. My chapter on Atwood contains a fourth step: the narrator's potentially problematic reintegration into society. Throughout both chapters, I analyze how Carter and Atwood utilize mythmaking and fairy tales, which I will now introduce in further detail.

Along with their utilization of animal-becomings, a particular focus will be primarily on how Carter and Atwood use fairy tales and mythmaking as means of mediating violence and

power within their works. In terms of fairy tales, the human-animal transformation is a popular theme in the context of many Euro-American tales. Importantly, traditional folktales of the past addressed (and attempted to understand) violent acts, existing relationships, and the position of power within a given society (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 191). For modern patriarchal society, fairy tales are a key genre in policing the boundaries between the human/animal and the male/female binaries (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 2). Such control is done through the utilization of morals and a distinct separation between good and evil. Also associated to the fairy tale narrative in Western culture is the concept of censorship, which appears in similar ways in Carter's and Atwood's works. Both authors criticize censorship, particularly the whitewashing of modern fairy tales, with Carter returning to the darkness situated in original tales and Atwood critiquing the economic motives of such censorship. In *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, Jack Zipes notes how this censorship exists in a capitalist context, "Profit mars [traditional] stories and their cultural heritage. Folk and fairy tales as products of the imagination are in danger of becoming instrumentalized and commercialized" (2). It is also important to note that while Carter recreates fairy tales in a manner that clearly shows connections with specific traditional tales, Atwood focuses more on specific themes of the fairy tale genre rather than one particular tale.

It is essential to show how I am viewing myths and mythmaking within my research. I take particular interest in not just recognizing myth as synonymous to the folktale/fairytale but also reflecting on myth in relation to social practices. In other words, my analysis includes how people engage with myths on an everyday basis and how mythmaking is an essential part to interpreting (and forming) an identity or collective society. In "Sociological-ideological Expression and Affirmation of Social Reality in Myth," Bronislaw Bajan establishes this role of

myths in society: “Myths grapple with contemporary problems and adjusts itself to the ever-changing social and cultural situation, and, as such, is subject to modification. In essence, to understand the structure and function of myths helps us to understand the social structure” (25). This statement acknowledges how myths, social and otherwise, can impact and be impacted by people and cultures. Because of these interactions, social myths, like fairy tales, can undergo transformations themselves throughout history. Taking part in mythmaking can be a means of limiting or expanding creativity and freedom in a culture, as my analysis of Carter and Atwood will show. I will now briefly review the critical lenses surrounding each author and their literary works to present the major concepts of focus.

Carter’s use of the fairy tale genre is one that self-consciously recognizes the social myths that exist in both past fairy tales and in her own re-created fairy tales. She deconstructs the concluding morals added to traditional fairy tales that support the patriarchal political agenda in order to reconstruct the relationships they present. She also breaks down the role of violence directed towards the other, particularly in the aggressor versus victim binary, in an attempt at equalizing the parties involved. In her deconstruction, Carter re-vitalizes the importance of understanding relationships and presents potential models of co-existence, particularly between humans and animals. Through this perspective, Carter appears to recognize that “the creative purpose and major themes of the fairy tales did not concern harmony, but the depiction of changing social structures and alternative forms of behavior so that new developments and connections between humans and things could be better grasped by the people” (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 191). In referencing traditional folktales, Carter also recognizes that fairy tales of the past were not meant solely for children (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 198). In this context, Carter’s many versions of the same fairy tale associate more with the ephemeral nature

of folktales within an oral tradition than the permanent morality of the penned down, literary versions of the tales (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 14). Carter does not seek to define a single, static moral—instead she presents a variety of interpretations that reflect the transformative nature of fairy tales and how they serve as a means of negotiating various identities and interrelationships. In terms of myths, both in fairy tales and in society, Carter states, “I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I’m in the demythologizing business” (qtd. in Gamble 12). This quotation reflects how Carter uses the fairy tale genre to challenge traditional beliefs and myths developed by society. Her “demythologizing business” is her post-structuralist style of deconstruction and reconstruction of social myths through the fairy tale genre.

Carter’s reinterpretations of the fairy tale genre analyze and reconstruct the roles of violence, human-animal relations, and sexuality. Her stories contain elements of the first print version of fairy tales, notably those written down by Charles Perrault, such as “Little Red Riding Hood.” However, the main focus for this thesis will be on Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride,” which is based on the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast.” According to Anne Altmann and Gail De Vos in *Tales, Then and Now*, the most popular version of “Beauty and the Beast” was written in 1756 by Madame Jeanne-Marie le Prince de Beaumont but can be traced back to Madame Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve’s 1740 novel length version (4). “The Tiger’s Bride” presents a female-animal transformation that grounds itself in equality between the protagonist and The Beast in a state of mutual vulnerability. The transformation focuses on freedom from hierarchal restrictions as the foundations of such limiting structures are shaken to the point of destruction. In this manner, the protagonist chooses to reject her mechanistic identity produced by the patriarchy in favor of an ambiguous state of being open to relationships beyond humanity. Furthermore,

through her transformation, her body is no longer objectified and she is able to embrace alternate forms of language and intelligence. An analysis of the fairy tale presents interesting ideas concerning the animal/human binary and ideas of anthromorphism, especially in relation to the social conformity of *The Beast*. Through this retelling, Carter questions definitive structures, the subordination of the feminine, and the fear that can exist in the face of the unknown; by overcoming this fear of indefiniteness, the protagonist experiences a freedom that involves the shattering of a fixed self.

In “Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality,” Merja Makinen comments on how Carter “argued that even though the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aristocratic writers ‘fixed’ these tales by writing them down and added moral tags to adapt them into parables of instruction for children, they could not erase the darkness and the magic” (4) of the tales passed down through oral tradition. Carter’s fascination with the original “darkness” of such tales is reflected in her writing and her own comments about her fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber*: “I was using the latent content of those traditional stories...And that latent content is violently sexual” (qtd. in Sheets 642). Her retellings also challenge (and destroy) the morals and conventions of the original fairy tales, which is reflected in Carter’s comment, “I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (qtd. in Makinen 5). Indeed, Carter’s fairy tales often lead to an explosion not just of the original structure but from critics as well. Carter’s writing was (and remains) under the particular scrutiny of feminists, and major controversies over her fairy tales revolve around gender relations, pornography, and sadomasochism. To provide an example of such controversies, consider Makinen’s statement: “Many a reader has found savagery with which she [Carter] can attack cultural stereotypes disturbing, even

alienating. Personally I found (and find) it exhilarating—you never knew what was coming next from the avant-garde literary terrorist of feminism” (2). Along with the elaborate categorization of Carter, this statement provides insight to the discomfort that Carter’s writing can cause. It is in this discomfort Carter’s power lies—she is not afraid to draw upon the abject. According to Kimberly Lau in “Erotic Infidelities: Angela Carter's Wolf Trilogy,” her fairy tales show, “Carter’s desire to voice instability, [and] to tell tales with a multivocal tongue” (Lau 79) in a manner that toys with the “animalistic” categorizations of sexuality and dualistic notions of gender.

Similar to Carter, Atwood’s use of fairy tale elements and mythmaking provides a method of negotiating violence, power, and relationships. Of particular concern in *Surfacing* is the patriarchal notion that having power inevitably produces violence against another. In the case of gender roles, this falls into the male as aggressor/female as victim binary, with Atwood’s protagonist perceiving herself in the role of the victim. Atwood’s use of the fairy tale genre is designed to critique the censorship of violence, fear, and the body in children’s tales. Fairy tale themes of metamorphosis, amputation, and power relations also are presented throughout Atwood’s work (Wilson 119). Atwood, like Zipes, seems to recognize and critique modern escapist versions of tales, wherein, “the tales no longer served their original purpose of clarifying social and natural phenomena but bec[o]me forms of refuge and escape in that they made up for what people could not realize in society” (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 196). Such escapism (and the issue with it) is presented throughout *Surfacing*. Furthermore, Atwood’s use of the fairy tale genre fits together with the myths of the masculine frontier, primitivism, and the narrator’s falsification of her own past as she unconsciously creates her own myths even as she criticizes others.

Atwood takes a critical perspective on how mythmaking is integrated into society within literature and culture. In particular, she recognizes the myths that surround female writers. In an interview with Bruce Meyer and Brian O’Riordan, Atwood was asked if there was one particular myth about herself and her writing that she would like to correct. Atwood responded,

Myths tend to explode themselves...I’ve had Medusa. I’ve had the Virgin Mary. You wouldn’t believe the stuff that started coming out when I had a baby...I was still the same person, but they used a different iconography. I’ve been accused of hating women. I’ve been accused of hating men. I’ve been accused of not hating either of them enough.

(Meyer and O’Riordan 153)

In this case, it is important to note how myths are being connected to gender prejudices in terms of female writers, with Atwood being presented as Medusa, the Virgin Mary, and the loving mother. Her response shows the variety of critiques Atwood gets from her works that revolve around representations of gender. In *Engendering Genre*, Reingard Nischik discusses Atwood’s frustration with what she calls “the F-question,” or the question of whether she considers herself a feminist writer (184). From this, Nischik remarks how, “a female writer presenting her stories from a woman’s perspective is branded a ‘feminist,’ whereas a male writer doing the same from a male perspective is simply the norm and is not branded a ‘masculinist’ writer” (184). Atwood resists these distinctions, and she reflects upon the possibility that the female writer can now be seen as “neither nun nor orgiastic priestess, neither more nor less than human. Nevertheless, the mythology still has power, because such mythologies about women still have power” (qtd. in Nischik 188). Atwood recognizes the *power* such myths can have in the formation of a social identity. Myths are within the very fabric of humanity, and Atwood appears to suggest the impossibility of ever truly separating from these myths. In “Social Myths in Political and

Literary Contexts,” Nurith Gertz studies how myths can be negative and controlling to identity, stating, “A society’s conventional myths...convey an agreed-upon meaning of which the individual is not always consciously aware” (623). Becoming aware of restrictive social myths becomes important to the demythologizing process. Though she focuses on how myths can be negative, Atwood also shows the positives that can come from recreating myths that were once restricting. Atwood’s praise of Carter in particular seems to suggest the importance of challenging order and how writing itself becomes a method of breaking down myths: “all things bright and beautiful, as well as all things gnarled and macabre, appeal to her [Carter], and she filches them with abandon, picks them apart, sticks them together again in a new order, and adds them to her deliberately cluttered verbal nest” (Atwood, *Writing with Intent* 152).

Atwood’s novel *Surfacing* focuses on how society and language can prevent interconnections from forming between humans and the natural world. Such boundaries limit the physical, social, and emotional movement of the main female characters, particularly the nameless narrator. The narrator’s isolation exists not only because of hierarchal boundaries but also her own self-made barriers that block out past traumatic events. Such alienation cuts her off from meaningful relationships both within and outside of the human realm. Hence, *Surfacing* reflects upon the danger of separating the mind from the body as well as the rational from the irrational. As the novel progresses, the narrator undergoes a transformation that leads her to reject everything human-made, including her friends and her job. She leaves civilization to become an animal, uniting herself with the natural world and developing a sense of nondestructive power. The narrator’s transformation does not physically change her into an animal; instead, she mentally becomes joined with the environment and the animals within it, developing a constantly changing, fluid identity that exists in ambiguity. Throughout the novel,

the narrator reflects on the killing mentality of humans, sympathizes with animals, and perceives the interconnections between humanity and the nature that others avoid out of fear or ignorance. There is a clear representation of how hierarchal definitions of value can be limiting and lead to violence against those undervalued (women) or outside (animals) of the value hierarchy. Atwood's writing reflects how language can be used in an innovative manner even as her story shows the restrictions that surround human communication.

However, Atwood's *Surfacing* takes a more conservative stance when it comes to mythmaking than Carter's "The Tiger's Bride." Primarily, Atwood reflects a more cautious approach to mythmaking in comparison to Carter's deconstruction of hierarchal morality in order to reconstruct the relationships they present (particularly between the human and the animal). In doing so, Carter celebrates deconstruction and reconstruction as potential equalizing agents. *Surfacing* presents mythmaking in a more pessimistic light. The narrator's use of myths in *Surfacing* becomes problematic in the manner she whitewashes violence from her life. In her transformative state, the flawed narrator begins to deconstruct the myths she has surrounded herself with by unconsciously clinging to new, problematic myths associated with primitivism and escapist ideals of wilderness. Particularly, the narrator attempts to negotiate the violence directed at women and nature by radically rejecting society for the natural world, unaware that she falls into the trap of living out a primitive, frontier myth that does not give her the means to "positively" re-join the dominant culture. Such unconscious mythmaking is dangerous because it creates idealizations and half-truths, forming barriers that restrict the potential of a co-existing relationship between humanity and nature. The "cautionary" aspect of mythmaking presented in *Surfacing* therefore has to do with the limitations existing in a mythologized "iconic" state that unconsciously blocks potential interconnections. In this manner, Atwood represents the

mythmaking process as far more risky when compared to Carter's post-structuralist optimism of the power that comes by appropriating myth.

Analyzing human-animal-nature relationships within the fiction of Carter and Atwood develops further perceptions on violence and power, interconnectivity, and the importance of recognizing relationships. Through the use of fairy tales and myths, both authors deconstruct the stable, egocentric self by positioning it in an indefinable realm where transformations can occur; such ambiguity opens the way for the development of relational selves existing outside of normativity. In doing so, other languages may form or be discovered; such languages can be based on feelings and connections that do not have to do with fear and exploitation but rather a care and deeper understanding of the surrounding environment. These innovative forms of communication place relevance on participatory actions of humanity, since "Each thing, each being, is in steady intercourse with the entities and elements around it, negotiating its passage and exerting its participation in the ongoing emergence of what it is" (Abram, *Becoming Animal* 51). By recognizing that the body itself communicates, a new type of intelligence is formed that expands thoughts and creativity. This unique communication blurs the divide between humans and the natural world. Rather than being restrictive, language and knowledge extend to include the ever changing other that exists within as well as without; this suggests that defining a monolithic, static self is impossible due to the transformative nature of our identities. Such multi-dimensional identities reflect Cixous's definition of womanhood: "If she is a whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble" (357). Through this recognition of interconnectivity, care for the environment can become engrained within the fabric of a culture, one that "defend[s] an ethic based on the moral significance of care and for a reconceptualization of the human self as a social, relational,

embedded ecological self” (Warren, “Introduction” 149). In forming such a self, more ecocentric outlooks can develop that do not restrict the other within destructive mentalities, such as hierarchal values, that often lead to the subordination of people and the natural world. As a whole, this thesis reflects on the isolation that results in the maintenance of structural boundaries, and the freedom that can occur in the deconstruction of a fixed self in favor of a relational, transformative identity that experiences constant exchange with others.

Chapter One

“I suffered a marvelous wound”: The Deconstruction of Isolated Selves into Multitudinous Entities in “The Tiger’s Bride”

In “Penetrating to the Heart of the Bloody Chamber: Angela Carter and the Fairy Tale,” Sarah Gamble states, “According to Carter, fairy tales have always existed in a kind of communal melting pot, narrative raw material that anyone who wishes to can access and reconfigure in forms to suit a particular purpose” (22). Carter utilizes the fairy tale genre to destabilize and question the restrictive structures of both stories and Western society. In “The Logic of the Same and Différance,” Anny Crunelle-Vanrigh analyzes how Carter’s innovative writing deconstructs order: “She [Carter] takes her reader along the paths of indeterminacy, reveling in a state of never-ending metamorphosis, as she disseminates her stories through *The Bloody Chamber*” (117). In other words, Carter’s fairy tales upend the idea there is an authentically “original” and authoritative version of fairy tales via her retellings and rejection of any sort of categorization. In this “deconstruction of form and genre” (Crunelle-Vanrigh 124), Carter’s stories leave room for questions concerning the relationships between the human, the non-human, and the surrounding world, thus rejecting essentialist beliefs that attempt to define entities based on particular boundaries and characteristics. These questions remain unanswerable because Carter’s writing rejects dualistic notions of control. “The Tiger’s Bride,” first published in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), takes elements from de Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” to reinterpret the relationship between humans and animals both within and outside of the constructed boundaries of a patriarchal society. Carter’s Beauty, an unnamed female protagonist, experiences alienation as a result of her objectified status in a normative culture that rejects difference in the form of the abject other. Through the process of a human-animal transformation, the female protagonist begins to connect with entities outside of

humanistic terms and in the realm of the other, namely the animal. In doing so, she subverts her socially defined identity and becomes a fluid rather than fixed self, undergoing constant change as she interacts with other beings; through her formation of a relational self, Carter's protagonist experiences a freedom of identity that cannot be defined and exhibits a high potential for creativity through her openness with other modes of intelligence outside of the anthropocentric sphere. Such a focus on interconnectivity shows Carter's interest in how original folktales were used as a means of understanding relationships. Through use of the fairy tale genre, Carter deconstructs relationships with a particular focus on power and violence, and then reconstructs them to show the polymorphic quality of a self in constant interaction with others. Carter therefore post-structurally engages in a celebratory mode of mythmaking that seeks to continuously break down and reform past and current myths. Carter's reconstructions serve to continuously negotiate relationships, particularly between humans and animals, in manner that progressively suggests the potential for a nondestructive co-existence based on equality.

Carter's writing serves to extricate meanings from traditional retellings and hone in on unacknowledged or ignored aspects of the fairy tale. Crunelle-Vanrigh particularly analyzes Carter's focus on the margins, stating,

She [Carter] is not one for comfortable truths....She goes for the margins—some might say the throat. She splits open closed texts and revels in what she finds there, blood, scars, perversion. She puts her dialectic of repetition and difference at the service of a revaluation of the marginal that is the feminine, sabotaging—as she would—patriarchal structures and pallogocentrism, indulging in the fantasy of an undecidable being. (130)

By existing within the margins, Carter's writing explores a territory of the objectified and abject other; in doing so, a new means of viewing "the other" forms, morphing traditional fairy tales

through the perspective of an “undecidable” or unidentifiable being. In doing so, agency is situated away from the dominant group and given to the subordinated, namely the female and the animal. Crunelle-Vanrigh notes the dominant structure as restrictive, especially for the female body in a patriarchal society. In many ways, Carter’s fairy tales reflect elements of what Aidan Day terms as fantastic literature in *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*. Fantastic literature “seeks to articulate what has been repressed, and hence articulates the unconscious...which lies outside the conscious, day-to-day dimension that is regulated through norms and codes...inseparable from language” (6). By articulating repression found inside the margins of society, Carter is bringing the unconscious into the light. Carter’s unconscious can therefore originate from the abject, a realm that exists due to fear or chosen ignorance, thus making her writing at times discomfoting. At the same time, Carter’s work does exist within the world of the conscious because her writing serves to question the individual in terms of the society that surrounds and creates the said individual. Particularly, Carter’s focus on issues surrounding sexuality and gender distinctions reflects how her writing can exist within the conscious, present society (Day 7).

Carter’s writing, particularly “The Tiger’s Bride,” provides interesting interpretations of the placement of value within the patriarchal society that shows how such value can be restrictive particularly for the animal and the female. In “Angela Carter’s Animal Tales: Constructing the non-human,” Mary Pollock studies Carter’s use of the animal, stating, “These contacts [between human and animal] take shape within an alien discourse, or alien discourses, which, if they can never be translated into the human, can at least be understood darkly when we manage to minimize our own investments in the symbolic order” (39). Pollock’s statement hones in on the “symbolic order” that attempts to structure and define existence. This connects

to Jacques Lacan's analysis of symbolic order that exists within a pre-destined context that structures the unconscious of humanity (Grosz 90); this order becomes a hierarchy based on a value system created by the dominant group. Ecofeminist Karen Warren terms this as value-hierarchical thinking, or "Up-Down" thinking, which "attributes greater value to that which is higher" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 46). Privilege and value go hand in hand, thus giving the dominant group power over what is determined as inferior. Particularly, the oppression of females and animals through binaries serve as examples of how value can lead to subordination, depending on what is valued in a given society. In terms of animals, language plays a major role in silencing the oppressed (similar to the silencing of "othered" human groups). Pollock's term, "alien discourse," in many ways reflects the confining nature of language as a whole. The term itself is restrictive but suggests the need for a communication beyond human language to exist in order to create a new understanding that deconstructs the nature of the "symbolic order," where humans hold a self-appointed supremacy and therefore control; "alien discourse" further suggests a discourse with the other that may underscore the dominant role of the human, particularly the men. This symbolic order connects to Wolfe's discussion of Western subjectivity's symbolic economy, defined as "an institution that relies on the tacit agreement that the full transcendence of the 'human' requires the sacrifice of the 'animal' and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy" (6). Wolfe's symbolic economy includes humans who have been oppressed by being associated with animalistic qualities. Therefore, the animal/human duality becomes used as a means of justifying domination based on the logic of the Upper group (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 47). Carter deconstructs this justification by rejecting the Western ideology that "allow[s] not only a classification of beasts based on empirical data, but placement[s] within a hierarchy of value [wherein]...it is man who decides

the relative value of other animals” (Pollock 36). Value becomes situated in the definitions created by the dominant society, as Warren suggests above.

In “The Tiger’s Bride,” Carter reexamines and changes the conventional themes that exist in the traditional tales, particularly de Beaumont’s version of “Beauty and the Beast.” In recreating the fairy tale, Carter subverts the patriarchal “morals” and values that the original telling implied, particularly those concerning sexuality and gender. De Beaumont’s version exemplified the morality of the time period by supporting patriarchal value systems of female virtue and obedience. “Beauty and the Beast” was published in *The Young Misses Magazine*, with an intended readership of twelve to eighteen-year-old girls (Altmann and de Vos 4). Through this perspective, de Beaumont’s fairy tale placed importance on virtue over beauty or intelligence, especially when looking for characteristics within a potential spouse (Altmann and de Vos 6). This is clearly seen in the description of Beauty’s two sisters’ husbands: “The eldest had married a gentleman, extremely handsome indeed, but so fond of his own person that he was full of nothing but his own dear self...The second had married a man of wit, but he only made use of it to plague and torment everybody” (de Beaumont 144). Through this description, de Beaumont presents a warning to young girls who seek love in good looks or wit over virtue, a warning that is further established when Beauty tells the Beast, “Among mankind...there are many that deserve that name [Beast] more than you, and I prefer you, just as you are, to those, who, under a human form, hide a treacherous, corrupt, and ungrateful heart” (de Beaumont 143). All the quotations from de Beaumont’s version that I give on this page suggest that a virtuous “heart” should be valued above all else, positioning such a person (even with an “animalistic” lack of wit) as superior over other suitors who do not hold this virtue. Interestingly, it is the physical and mental inadequacies that Beauty needs to overlook to accept the marriage proposal

from the Beast (de Beaumont 145). In *From the Beast to the Blond*, Marina Warner notes that de Beaumont's job as a governess to young girls added to her wish to "rais[e] her pupils to face their future obediently and decorously, to hear her pious wish that her pupils obey their fathers and that inside the brute of a husband who might be their appointed lot, the heart of a good man might beat" (293). In such a manner, de Beaumont suggests that to obtain happiness her female pupils must hold the virtues of "industriousness, self-sacrifice, modesty, and diligence" (Zipes, *Beauties, Beasts, and Enchantments* 232). Such virtues concentrate on obedience and predates the angel of the house notion that would appear later in Victorian society where the feminine existed in a domestic, purifying realm for the corrupt, masculine society to come home to (Warner 294). Humorously, Warner states that Carter takes these conventional themes, and "turn[s] [them] inside out and upside down; in a mischief, she [seizes] the chance to mawl governessy moralizers" (308). Carter takes the traditional storyline of de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" and creates a tale of interrelationships that threaten (and destroy) the boundaries society has built to maintain the distinctions between the "bestial" male and the virtuous female, the self and the other, and the human and the animal.

In "The Tiger's Bride," the transformation of the main female character into a beast rejects a hierarchal value system that prevents or refuses to see the interconnections between the mind, body, and natural world. Carter's female protagonist in "The Tiger's Bride" at first exhibits an isolated identity restricted by boundaries based on the male/female, rational/irrational, mind/body binaries that exist in the patriarchal system. These dualities create a structure similar to that in Gilles Deleuze's discussion of Platonism in his article, "Plato and the Simulacrum": "Platonism...is content to stake out the territory, which is to say to ground it, to select it, to exclude from it everything that threatens to confuse its boundaries" (50). The

Platonic model, privileging ‘ideal’ forms over actual, sensory phenomena, is thus based on sameness rather than difference and “Domination is built in such dualisms because the other is negated in the process of defining a powerful self” (Gaard and Gruen 159). The “powerful self” in this case becomes the protagonist’s father, who represents patriarchal control and society. This power subordinates women (such as the protagonist) through oppression, which Gilson discusses,

Oppression not only works through rejection—rejection of ‘foreign’ and devalued others, rejection of relation and connection to these others, rejection of their impact on the self and the self’s formation in relation to them—but through the production of and adherence to norms...inciting us to attain the normative ideal. (92)

Gilson’s statement shows how people can be rejected not only by being undervalued but also by not maintaining the norms of society. Thus, a fear arises of being negatively perceived through the scope of conventional ideals, creating an oppressive force that limits difference. The protagonist of “The Tiger’s Bride” is aware of the patriarchal power that objectifies her beauty and her body into a commodity; she reflects upon the restrictions that societal and religious norms create based on her determined role as a female; this role alienates her by cutting her off from interrelationships that exist outside of the normative lifestyle. The protagonist’s reflections on such norms will be analyzed in greater detail later in this paper. The feminine role Carter creates for the protagonist resembles Butler’s perception of gender in relation to norms: “‘Sex’ is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (*Bodies that Matter* 2). In this manner, Carter’s protagonist is caged in a role that restricts her movement as an individual and, according to Susan Sellers in

“New Myths or Old?: Angela Carter’s Mirrors and Mothers,” creates a “destructive definition of woman” (118). This destructive categorization is based on social norms that place value on essentialist definitions, such as feminine surface beauty and virginity. These systems objectify women and destroy the fluidity of self. Similarly, these societal restrictions apply to the natural world. There is a clear association between the female and nature that serves to devalue both negatively. Twine presents this, stating that agency is “confined to the master’s sphere and a marked fixidity [is] projected onto the devalued sphere of nature, women, and the body” (37). Carter rejects this inflexibility and hierarchal sense of value in “The Tiger’s Bride” through the protagonist’s subversive transformation, whereby she gains a sense of agency open to alterity and reflective of the idea that “Pleasure lies in the unfixing of identity, in the recognition of its fluidity” (Crunelle-Vanrigh 127).

I. Hierarchal Restrictions of Value in Notions of Beauty, the Body, and Animality

In order to understand the protagonist’s transformation in “The Tiger’s Bride” as subversive, one has to analyze the hierarchal restrictions that surround and thus alienate her both internally and externally. Importantly, Carter’s “Beauty” remains unnamed, though Carter does mention nicknames her nurse gave her, such as “my beauty” or “Christmas rose” (Carter 167). The unnamed narrator has at least three implications within this story: it suggests a lack of identity, a freedom from identification, and it (ironically) subverts the notion of beauty in patriarchal culture. In terms of lacking an identity, the protagonist’s isolation that prevents relationships could suggest why she does not reveal her name. While lacking a name suggests a removal of human individuality, it also can be analyzed as an opportunity for self-identification—of finding a new identity based on interconnections rather than being born,

named, and placed into a value system. Interestingly, this can be connected to Derrida's analysis of the term "animal": "The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature" (392). In many ways, such categorization can also apply to the term the "woman" as a monolithic category, just as racial stereotyping becomes prominent in labels such as the Asian, the Black, and the Hispanic. The protagonist's status as an unnamed "woman" suggests the patriarchal restrictions that exist around her in "The Tiger's Bride." In "Exploring the Boundaries: Feminism, Animals, and Science," Lynda Birke builds on this idea: "Whatever notion of 'animal' we use, it is always a construction (just as 'woman' is a construction). Historically, ideas about animals and their role(s) in relation to (Western) society have inevitably changed as the needs and priorities of human society have changed" (42). Furthermore, the categorization of species through names can be linked to naming someone "Beauty." The name itself suggests the commodification of the feminine in a way that distorts and limits what is deemed beautiful; this commodification is clearly seen in de Beaumont's traditional telling of "Beauty and the Beast," where the woman is beautiful and the Beast is ugly (de Beaumont 137). Similarly, "The Beast" (like the protagonist) is also categorically labeled as animalistic instead of having a personal name that individualizes him. The title "Beauty and the Beast" therefore creates a binary between the lovely female and the ugly, bestial male.

Categorizing beauty with the feminine and ugliness with the masculine also draws upon the conventional "civilizing" effects feminine beauty has on "uncontrolled" masculine sexuality. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim analyzes this distinction in gender, remarking how in most Western fairy tales, "the beast is male and can be disenchanting only by the love of a female...[allegorically] it is the female who has to overcome her view of sex as loathsome and

animal-like” (285). Such a viewpoint points back to de Beaumont’s version that ends with a conventional, heterosexual marriage, fitting into the idea that sex only loses its aggressive, masculine animality through marriage (Bettelheim 309). The “taming” of masculine sexuality is exemplified through the transformation of the beast into not just a human, but “one of the loveliest of princes her eyes ever beheld” (de Beaumont 146). Carter questions both the sexual traits of gender and also the domestication of sex through marriage in her title, “The Tiger’s Bride.” Through this title, Carter takes the animalization of sex to a level that plays upon the fear of the uncontrollable and toys with the notions of conventional marriage and gender. The protagonist is deemed the “bride” of the tiger only in the title, and the union that occurs is one of the self embracing the “animalistic” other through the rejection of normative patterns, including official marriage rites. Furthermore, it can be suggested that this title creates a “marriage” between humans and animals in a manner that shows the potential for co-existence. “The Tiger’s Bride” takes this traditional tale and reinterprets sexuality in a manner that “begins to dismantle the phallogocentric underpinnings of both sex and language” (Lau 92) by questioning the limiting nature of phallogocentric constructions—namely, its rejection of female sexuality, animal or otherwise, which will be analyzed throughout this chapter.

The value patriarchal society places on surface beauty that serves to objectify and degrade the female into physical terms is also integrated in “The Tiger’s Bride.” Naomi Wolf studies this objectification by analyzing how society commodifies beauty in *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used Against Women*. Wolf states,

Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard...In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression

of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves. (12)

In other words, beauty relates to cultural definitions, economics, and patriarchal value systems based on external looks. The protagonist analyzes the value of beauty in “The Tiger’s Bride” when she considers the childhood tale her nursemaids told her about the waggoner’s lass: “the waggoner’s lass, hare-lipped, squint-eyed, ugly as sin, who would have taken her?” (Carter 158). Lacking beauty, the waggoner’s lass therefore lacks value in the nursemaids’ eyes and, according to them, men’s eyes. In the society Carter creates, where females depend on the patriarchy to materially survive, being defined as ugly suggests an inability to obtain those material goods for want of a husband. Twine expands upon this notion of value based on beauty: “Aesthetic markings not only devalue many bodies, but also provides a significant source of profit” (47). The profit exists in the products used to make a woman “more beautiful,” such as cosmetics. Beauty in this manner becomes generalized in terms of the conventions and norms of a given society, lacking the diversity and difference that exists in the aesthetic experience.

The notion of beauty and ugliness becomes negatively associated with the animal realm. The tale of the waggoner’s lass continues with the woman getting pregnant: “to her shame, her belly swelled amid the cruel mockery of the ostlers and her son was born of a bear, they whispered. Born with a full pelt and teeth; that proved it” (Carter 158-59). Consequently, ugliness becomes associated with the beastly. The waggoner’s lass lacks conventional beauty and thus is “perceived as occupying an ambiguous space between humanity and animality” (Twine 44). She exists in the abject realm of the other, having a child “born of a bear,” which crosses the taboo boundaries that separate the human and the animal. This tale, created out of gossip, contains the fear of being associated with the animal and suggests that a lack of beauty

diminishes the value of the female. However, in remaining unattached to the name Beauty, the protagonist has the ability to see beauty as a face value and not be entirely defined by it; this aloofness allows her to move away from defining entities in terms of conventional human beauty.

The value of beauty created by society can be connected further to the objectification of the female body. In “The Tiger’s Bride,” the protagonist is clearly being objectified—she becomes a piece of property her father loses at cards. In fact, the property value of the protagonist starts the story off with the following line: “My father lost me to The Beast at cards” (Carter 154). In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams defines objectification in the following manner: “Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment” (73). The protagonist recognizes her position as an object throughout the story, and her tone clearly reflects the bitterness of this position: “You must not think my father valued me at less than a king’s ransom; but at *no more* than a king’s ransom” (Carter 156). Note the term “value” is used here and not the term “love,” showing the strained relationship between father and daughter. The protagonist’s voice clearly reflects her bitterness of the situation and what she thinks of her father: “I watched with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly, while my father, fired in his desperation by more and yet more draughts of firewater they call ‘grappa’, rids himself of the last scraps of my inheritance” (Carter 154). This quotation also shows her restricted position in society that prevents her from having the power to make her father stop. She must passively watch while her father loses her wealth. When she finds herself reduced to a prize, she meditates “on the nature of [her] own state, how [she] had been bought and sold, passed from hand to hand” (Carter 165). Furthermore, when her father says goodbye to her, he

asks for a rose to show that she forgives him. As a gesture of protest, the protagonist “break[s] off the stem, [and] [she] prick[s] [her] finger...so he gets his rose all smeared with blood” (Carter 158). The rose does not symbolize forgiveness but rather is a reminder that the “object” he has just lost is alive, human, and yet unable to make choices. It also reflects ways in which the father has made his daughter subject to violence by giving her to The Beast; the protagonist tries to co-opt this violence for her own purposes, seen through pricking her finger on the thorn. Furthermore, using the rose in this manner (that shows disappointment and even hatred) radically changes its meaning in de Beaumont’s version in which the rose symbolized the undying love between father and daughter (Bettelheim 284).

The protagonist’s body is further objectified through the value placed upon virginity. Such a focus on virginity traces back to de Beaumont’s version, where the Prince states, “a wicked fairy condemned me to remain under that shape [the beastly shape] till a beautiful virgin should consent to marry me” (146). “The Tiger’s Bride” utilizes this focus on virginity but in a manner that reflects on the issues of the masculine gaze. What The Beast wants is told to the protagonist by his valet: “My master’s sole desire is to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude without her dress and that only for the one time after which she will be returned to her father” (Carter 160). Through this emphasis on seeing, Carter reflects upon the patriarchal power of the gaze that objectifies the female body. Such a pornographic request from The Beast, an animal attempting to be human, suggests the problem with trying to gain subjectivity at the cost of objectifying another. Furthermore, such a request connects to Gilson’s comment that “consuming pornography can be a way of avoiding one’s own vulnerability by supplanting feelings of powerlessness with those of control, however illusory” (170). In this sense, The Beast’s longing for power and humanity leads him to believe he needs to objectify the

protagonist to copy his human counterparts. It is also important to note that in the above quotation the valet is referring to the protagonist in third person, even though he is speaking directly to her. The use of “her” instead of “you” further objectifies the protagonist by distancing the action that she will have to do to avoid awkwardness for the speaker. The Beast’s request is furthered by his desire to see the body of a young woman that has never been seen by a man before (Carter 163). In response to these requests, the protagonist thinks, “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” (Carter 165). The false, dualistic notion of man as rational and woman as irrational is touched upon here—the protagonist sees men as irrational, especially her father. In her statement, she also recognizes that her gender is not the only “othered” subjectivity to be oppressed by men.

Just as the protagonist is denied a mind because of her gender, animals too are denied, largely based on their inability to communicate (or the failure of humans to recognize that animals do “communicate” in non-verbal ways). In *The Eye of the Crocodile*, Val Plumwood analyzes rationalist, hierarchal models of control, stating,

Rationalist models which treat communication as an exercise in pure, abstract, neutral and universal reason, and which delegitimize the more emotional and bodily forms of communication, operate to exclude non-humans from full communicative status just as they exclude various human others. (65)

These rationalist models look at rationality in terms of who has a voice. Because the narrator finds herself in the realm of the irrational, her power for communicating is diminished by her sex. She must find a new means of communication, one that does not involve words, to find power to stand against the patriarchal society that removes her voice and other voices from the

picture in an attempt to maintain boundaries. Furthermore, Butler argues, “The body that is reason dematerializes the bodies that may not properly stand for reason...one which requires that women and slaves, children and animals be the body, perform the bodily functions, that it [the rational man] will not perform” (*Bodies that Matter* 49). Therefore, the rational and idealized man, while impossible to uphold, perceives the body as negative and rejects it into the realm of the irrational where women and animals also find themselves placed.

The protagonist’s response to the initial request of removing her clothes gives her agency and a voice that allows her to regain some control over her body. The protagonist laughs and lays out her own much more detailed terms:

You put me in a windowless room, sir, and I promise you I will pull my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it...If you wish to give me money...you should give me only the same amount of money that you would give to any other woman in such circumstances. (Carter 161)

Day argues that by placing herself exactly in the realm of the objectified object, she is “asserting her own knowledge of the codes of masculine objectification of the female, as if she is saying: ‘If I’m going to be an object, then I’m *really* going to be one’” (141). Day’s comment takes notice of the protagonist’s awareness that the degrading request will take away her subjectivity; therefore, she will only do the request if they put “a sheet over [her] face,” and really make her an object rather than making it seem like removing her clothes is a small request. Furthermore, her statement about being paid for her services places her in the situation the valet attempts to skirt around, the position of herself as a whore or pornographic image. Similarly, she also wishes that “[she] had rolled in the hay with every lad on my father’s farm, to disqualify [herself] from this humiliating bargain” (Carter 163). She sees the degradations of this objectification and

rejects the notion of her body as a commodity by denying The Beast her body until it is her decision to do so. The protagonist sees that “[her] own skin was [her] sole capital in the [patriarchal] world” (Carter 159), and therefore will not let those around her control it. It is also worth noting that the protagonist has a voice (through first person narration) that allows her to reflect upon everything occurring to her. The protagonist has the ability to present the ridiculousness of the situation she finds herself in—indeed, she laughs at The Beast’s request—further degrading the power of the masculine gaze. Her viewpoint on the situation as ridiculous also suggests that the masculine need for such power over the gaze stems from discomfort in the man’s own self. In giving her protagonist a voice, Carter begins to transfer where the power is positioned as the protagonist rationally questions the patriarchal dualisms that place her into an objectified, irrational status.

The role of the clockwork maid further reflects the subordination of the protagonist by society. The clockwork maid is described by the protagonist in the following manner: “a marvelous machine, the most delicately balanced system of cords and pulleys in the world... This clockwork twin of mine halted before me... she raises her arm and busily dusts my cheek with pink, powdered chalk that makes me cough, then thrusts towards me her little mirror” (Carter 162). Again, the value of beauty is presented in the clockwork maid’s role—that of applying blush and holding a mirror. Furthermore, the clockwork maid is created in the protagonist’s image, which Sellers takes note of, stating, “The clock-work maid ‘The Beast’ sends to tend her is initially described as her ‘twin’ since it so exactly mimics the mechanical obedience she has been required to display” (118). The fact that the protagonist associates herself with a machine created and controlled by society connects to the idea of Platonism mentioned earlier in this chapter: “Platonism thus grounds... the domain of representation filled by iconic copies defined

not by an extrinsic relation to the object, but rather by an intrinsic relation to the model or ground. The Platonic model is sameness” (Deleuze 50). The clockwork maid is an iconic image of the protagonist, and the protagonist perceives herself as the image of a society that forms borders to maintain normativity. Sameness thus diminishes the differences of individuals and rejects interrelationships that attempt to destabilize that monotony. The protagonist furthers this idea when she asks the following question: “The clockwork girl who had powdered my cheeks for me; had I not been allotted only the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given her?” (Carter 165) The protagonist recognizes that lives a life created by the patriarchal system and recognizes herself as a doll in that system, one whose identity is attached to the makeup and the mirror that the clockwork maid wields. Hence, she conceives the “imitative” life she leads, isolated by her “loving” father and the society that marks her as inferior both rationally and physically.

The protagonist’s observations of The Beast build on the notions of value, commodity, and conformity that create boundaries of sameness and shows how the animal, like the female, experiences subordination in defined human structures. Known in society as The Beast, his name itself connects to the animal realm and shows how humans seek to separate the human from the animal “in order to identify themselves” (Derrida 400) as not animal. This categorization places The Beast unquestionably outside of humanity while he attempts to exist within the human realm by superficially conforming to its norms—he gambles, dresses in human clothing, has a wig, and wears a mask. The protagonist especially notes the painted human mask, stating, “Oh yes, a beautiful face; but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human: one profile of his mask is the mirror image of the other, too perfect, uncanny” (Carter 156). This quotation appears to reference William Blake’s concept of “fearful

symmetry” (Blake 129) in his poem “The Tyger” by representing the mask’s symmetry as “too perfect” and therefore disconcerting. This discomfort in the perfection of The Beast’s painted face portrays the existence of an “abject” symmetry between the self and the other or the Lamb (the innocent) and the Tyger (the dangerous predator). The Beast tries to cover up his animality (his otherness) with a mask, but it still remains in existence just beneath a surface too flawless to be real. Furthermore, the unease the protagonist feels as she looks at the mask seems to suggest the issue with a psychology that seeks to define “humanity” as an identity purged of any association with the animal (or with the other). Doing so leads to a fundamentally dishonest repression that goes into the creation of (so-called) ideal human “perfection.” The human mask therefore reflects how unnatural such an ideal can be.

Through his attempts to conform, The Beast tries unsuccessfully to be recognized as a “superior” human. He fails to do so because of his animalistic qualities and inability to speak. Even the heavy perfume he wears cannot mask his otherness that keeps him outside of human definition (Carter 155). The protagonist notes, “he [The Beast] has an odd air of self-imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself to remain upright when he would far rather drop on all fours. He throws our human aspirations to the godlike sadly awry” (Carter 156). This quotation shows how the protagonist rejects The Beast’s wish to be integrated because she does not place humanity in the superior realm. Also, the Beast’s battle to stand on two legs shows how he goes against his natural inclinations in his effort to reflect “ideal” humanity. The Beast’s attempt to conform connects to what Grosz discusses as the problem of recognition within an oppressive symbolic order:

The subject seeks to be known and to be recognized, but only through its reliance on others, including the very others who function to collectively subjugate the subject...if

the subject strives to be recognized as a subject of value in a culture which does not value that subject in the terms it seeks, what is such recognition worth? (84)

The Beast wants to be valued through the humanist ideal, hence his attempts to appear human under the masquerade of clothes, masks, and scents. Yet as his socially given name shows, The Beast does not obtain the definition he seeks and therefore remains in the realm of the other. This otherness is further developed by The Beast's inability to speak for himself: "He has such a growling impediment in his speech that only his valet, who understands him, can interpret for him, as if his master were the clumsy doll and he the ventriloquist" (Carter 156). The restriction of a spoken language, a category that places animals in an inferior status compared to humans, causes The Beast to lose power and become a "clumsy doll" (Pollock 36), similar to the imitative, doll-like life of the clockwork maid. This inability to speak the human language connects to what Stibbe addresses: "It is in the manufacturing of consent within the human population for the oppression and exploitation of animals that language plays a role" (20). In other words, the inability of animals to use human language allows an opening for humans to devalue, restrict, and utilize them for extrinsic purposes. The Beast's unsuccessful attempt to mimic humanity makes him "two-dimensional" in the protagonist's eyes (Carter 155) and takes away his uniqueness, placing his otherness in an inferior position.

Through his attempts to gain value by being perceived as a human, The Beast becomes a representation of a type of reverse anthromorphism. Carter swaps the roles by presenting an animal attempting to gain human characteristics rather than a person giving the animal humanistic qualities; such an attempt to gain human characteristics is presented as restrictive rather than liberating. Anthromorphism in animal rights can be perceived as both positive and negative. One perspective is that by giving animals human traits, they are added to the

“negotiation of value among humans” (Mullen 215), thus placing greater value on animals by the human perspective. Others argue that attributing human characteristics to animals in order to expand their value is based on sentimental connections and limits the animal to the terms of human subjectivity (Economides). Similarly, even giving inherent value to other entities loses strength because such value is identified by humanity while others may remain excluded. The Beast, in his human camouflage, represents how attributing human characteristics to animals can devalue the animal by taking away what the animal truly embodies. Pollock states, “Carter returns over and over again to the notion that, like race, class, and gender, animal nature is a human construct” (40). This anthropocentric construction of animal nature can position the animal in a negative role, presented by the initial doll-like imagery of The Beast. His character exists in a restrictive state of anthromorphic projection. Lynda Birke suggests in “Unnamed Animals: How Can Thinking about ‘Animals’ Matter to Feminist Theorizing?” that the exclusion of non-humans “[remove] us from biology, which [leaves] us inarticulate not only about other species in our worlds, but also about how to think about the biological body” (149). Thus, the human body becomes isolated within definitions and values solely based on humanist ideals.

The distinct constructions of animal nature and human nature create an absolute boundary between the human and the animal that fails to recognize how these two natures are actually interconnected within the self: “What is the ‘animal nature’ that they [animals] allegedly have...Each species, including ourselves, is more or less adapted to the environment in which it finds itself: and each is different. Humans are indeed unique, but so are dogs, ostriches, and parrots, or anything else” (Birke, “Exploring the Boundaries” 38). In many ways, these constructions feed upon the fear of the other on an external and internal level; the other exists in order for the majority to be defined, valued, and safe within boundaries that uphold notions of

sameness. Reenee Askins furthers this idea in “Shades of Grey,” stating, “We are a nation that longs for things to be black and white. We do not like ambiguity. We do not like the uncertain, the unpredictable, [or] the uncontrollable. We like secure borders” (376). Crossing such boundaries can bring a terror of the unknown, as “The Tiger’s Bride” represents with the tale of the waggoner’s lass as well as the following example give by the protagonist: “The wondering peasants once brought my father a skull with horns four inches long on either side of it and would not go back to the field...until the priest went with them; for this skull had the jaw-bone of a *man*, had it not?” (italics in original, Carter 159) In this case, order, through society and religion, seeks to minimize the connection between the self and the other as well as the human and the animal out of fear of finding similarities. But in creating such barriers, society rejects the relationships that exist between all entities of life. Instead, it anthropocentrically projects restrictive meaning upon the world and creates isolated identities.

II. Terrifying (Sexual) Devourment, Sadomasochism, and Acknowledging Subjectivity

The Beast’s role as a predatory animal portrays the fear related to carnivorous animality and the connections between the male/female, predator/prey, and aggressor/victim binaries. Following my analysis concerning ways in which predatory identity is sexualized in “The Tiger’s Bride” will be a discussion regarding how and why Carter’s fairy tales are critiqued for being sadomasochistic in nature. In Carter’s fairy tale, the protagonist relays the terror of being consumed, stating, “My English nurse once told me about a tiger-man she saw in London...to scare me into good behavior....If you don’t stop plaguing the nursemaids, my beauty, the tiger-man will come and take you away....Yes, my beauty! GOBBLE YOU UP!” (Carter 158) This passage shows a predator and prey relationship that exists between men and women in

patriarchal culture as well as the human fear of being recognized as food. It also relates to de Beaumont's original tale, where Beauty "firmly believed Beast would eat her up that night" (de Beaumont 142). Pollock reflects on Carter's own statement on how the "treatment of animals in the West is not only philosophically flawed, but rooted in primitive emotions, especially fear: humans are 'shit-scared...of carnivores because, presumably, they would eat us'" (qtd. in Pollock 40). Carter presents this fear in "The Tiger's Bride" through the use of devourment as a tool to scare children into obedience. Val Plumwood recognizes this fear of becoming food for predators, stating, "Horror movies and stories also reflect this deep-seated dread of becoming food for other forms of life: Horror in the wormy corpse, vampires sucking blood, and alien monsters eating humans" ("Prey to a Crocodile").

The terror of being eaten drives many of Carter's stories, but she also derails it through a sexual lens that initiates a different type of dread. While the nurse's tale suggests the horror of being prey, the nurse continues to scare the protagonist by further describing the tiger-man, who bears little resemblance to a human as "his hinder parts [are] all hairy" (Carter 158). Again, there is this morphing of man and animal that ignites fear within the human. This passage also suggests how predation is often sexualized in our culture by bringing up the tiger-man's "hinder parts." Accordingly, the notion of being gobbled up has sexual connotations, animalistic in nature, which the protagonist reflects on near the end of the story: "Nursery fears made flesh and sinew; earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment. The beast and his carnivorous bed of bone and I, white, shaking, raw, approaching him as if offering, in myself, the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction" (Carter 168). This quotation assumes a predator and prey relationship that places the beast as the devourer on his "carnivorous bed" and the protagonist "white, shaking, [and] raw" as the devoured. Like meat,

she describes herself as “raw,” and the use of the color white connects to her status as a virgin. The protagonist’s statement also suggests that “his appetite need not be my extinction,” bringing to mind a sexual appetite rather than one based on eating. Carter utilizes this image to show the fear of the other often established in (specifically) female children before deconstructing the predator/prey and aggressor/victim binaries.

In connection to the fear that derives from the thought of being devoured, Merja Makinen comments in “Angela Carter’s ‘The Bloody Chamber’ and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality,” that Carter’s use of beasts in her fairy tales can represent female desire as an appetite that “women have been taught might devour them, but which, when embraced, gives them power, strength, and a new awareness of both self and other” (10). Representing female sexuality as powerful counters the “polarization of gender roles” where “women are positioned as submissive, passive, powerless, acted upon, harmed objects, and men are positioned as dominant, active, powerful, acting, harming subjects” (Gilson 157). Carter continuously studies and warps these roles in her fairy tales. In particular, Carter’s “The Company of Wolves,” a retelling of Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood,” reconsiders the devouring nature of the wolf by giving Little Red agency when she “chooses to act upon her own animal drives” (Lau 88). The power she gains by asserting her sexuality allows her to laugh at the wolf’s traditional response of “All the better to eat you with” (Carter 219) because “she knew she was nobody’s meat” (Carter 219). Rather, Carter’s story ends with Little Red sweetly sleeping “between the paws of the tender wolf” (Carter 220), switching the role of “meat” from Little Red to the wolf by describing him as “tender” (Makinen 11). This ending also challenges the morals of Charles Perrault’s original tale of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the major one being the importance of being cautious of the wolves (men) who seek to devour innocent young ladies (Perrault 26).

Through her fairy tales, Carter challenges the traditional gender distinctions that uphold the aggressor and victim binary that perpetually places the female in the role of victim; yet her utilization of violence and use of this binary has led to criticism. As presented by “The Company of Wolves,” Carter often reverses the roles of aggressor and victim, placing the female in the role of the dominant, masculine gaze (Lau 86). Carter has been criticized for her use of phallogentric violence as a tool for her female characters to gain power because (in some assessments) this does not truly challenge the ethos of domination. To some critics, doing so negatively involves her female characters negotiating sexual violence by embracing or returning the aggressive masculine gaze in order not to become rape victims. It has been argued that such phallogentric power supports sadomasochism and the dominator/dominated roles it produces through violence. For example, in Carter’s “The Company of Wolves,” Little Red “laughed at him [the wolf] full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing” (Carter 219). This can be read as Little Red aggressively accepting her fate and “since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (Carter 219).

In regards to the above criticism, I would argue that Carter’s fairy tales reach beyond what some critics have classified as “a reproduction of male pornography” (Makinen 4). The way Carter handles violence in her fairy tales is more complex than merely reversing gender roles in the aggressor/victim binary and supporting phallogentric violence. Rather, there is a constant exchange of gazes (of power) which attempts to get beyond the binaries that divide “the world cleanly into victims and perpetrators, sufferers and darers, or protectors and those in need of protection” (Gilson 159). In doing so, Carter seems to recognize the futility of trying to define complex sexual relationships dualistically and also the danger in “Identifying women’s bodies as

inherently susceptible” to violence because it “naturalizes violence (as an inevitable outcome of male aggression and female violability), prevents apprehension of male vulnerability, and obscures the fundamentally ambiguous character of sexual vulnerability” (Gilson 153). Rather than critiquing Carter’s use of sadomasochism as completely negative, Robin Sheets suggests in “Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism,” that Carter “urges women to challenge assumptions about female masochism and to define a sexuality outside of dominant-submissive power relations” (655). Makinen follows a similar line of critique by noting that though Carter’s use of violence can be disturbing, her

strength is precisely in exploding the stereotypes of women as passive, demure, cyphers. That she therefore evokes the gamut of violence and perversity is certainly troubling, but to deny their existence is surely to incarcerate women back within a partial, sanitized image only slightly less constricted than the Victorian angel in the house. (9)

Carter is not afraid to utilize the marginalized, the dark, or the abject and she does so to study all angles of human nature and sexuality, even those censored from the surface. Fear of the abject exists for the very reason that it is unknown and yet exceptionally close; no one can deny that sometimes the abject contains things that one would prefer to leave hidden, particularly what would be considered a darkness inside the self (Kristeva 1). Carter may not necessarily condone sadomasochism but she recognizes the “polymorphous potentialities of female desire” (Makinen 14), and she presents these different desires (and relationships) in her writing (Makinen 12). Doing so brings to the surface the ambiguity of sexual relationships and suggests a truth in Gilson’s statement, “if the aim is to alter a misogynistic and moralistic status quo, then refraining from giving expression to the intertwining of sex and subordination, power and pleasure, submission and dominance, and violence and vulnerability seems akin to burying one’s head in

the sand” (161). In other words, denial of such relationships fails to present the whole picture, and Carter recognizes and shows these different relationships; she does so not necessarily seeking to say what is positive or negative, but rather what exists—what needs to be acknowledged.

Building up to the transformation of the isolated female identity, it is interesting to note that Carter’s male protagonists must also experience fear and vulnerability along with their transforming female counterparts. Such an occurrence in Carter’s fairy tales is not unusual, an example being in “The Company of Wolves” where the devouring wolf is placed in a position of fear: “She [Little Red] will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt” (Carter 219). In “The Tiger’s Bride,” the vulnerability that fear creates is often perceived as negative and best to be avoided since “fear of our embodied being manifests in the abjection of those others who remind us of these dimensions of ourselves” (Gilson 90). In other words, to evade a loss of identity (often entailed in bodily vulnerability) and a sense of weakness, the “other” is placed into the realm of the abject. However, Gilson suggests the following: “vulnerability is an openness to alteration and to being affected in ways that cause such alteration. Understanding oneself as vulnerable therefore involves an understanding of the self as being shaped through its relationships to others, its world, and environs” (86). This sense of vulnerability provides a new means of discerning identity. Blurred boundaries open up new relationships that can exist without the need to dominate the vulnerable or seek to be invulnerable as a form of power (Gilson 143). It is important to note that such vulnerability, which Gilson identifies as positive vulnerability, does not erase the negative use of vulnerability nor the historical violence females and animals have particularly been subjected to due to their “othered” status (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 28). Carter’s use of vulnerability in “The

Tiger's Bride" presents both negative and positive vulnerability, the positive primarily appearing in the relationship between the protagonist and The Beast at the end of the story. In studying the connection between humans and animals, Birke suggests, "what can be learned is to question not only boundaries of difference within humans (or between women), but also to question the boundaries of what constitutes humanness" ("Exploring the Boundaries" 49). Questioning what it means to be human breaks open the realm of the feared other—in order to face the abject, one must be susceptible to various ways of viewing the other beyond a dominant lens.

The protagonist in "The Tiger's Bride" works up to this acceptance of vulnerability and fear, ultimately leading to her transformation into a relational self. She starts by recognizing the similarities that exist, not necessarily between herself and the animal but the boundaries that they are both restricted by in a social and religious sense. The protagonist notes these similar restrictions as she rides out on a horse with the valet (a type of simian) and The Beast; she states that none of them "could boast amongst us...one soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things when the good Lord opened the great Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out" (Carter 165). This point suggests that the animals in "The Tiger's Bride" are more than just symbols of suppressed female desires that Makinen suggests (10). Rather, connections between the social stigmatization of females and animals are addressed and analyzed. Through this recognition of similar barriers, the narrator also notes the strangeness of her companions, namely the valet and The Beast, and how that strangeness seems to be associated with her now as well. She knows that her companions "[live] according to a different logic than [she] had done until [her] father abandoned [her] to the wild beasts...This knowledge [gives] [her] a certain fearfulness still: but...not much" (Carter 165). The "different logic" opens the protagonist up to

viewing her position in the world differently (Day 142). Through the recognition of a logic existing outside of the dominant hierarchy, the protagonist builds the foundation for a relational rather than isolated self. This new type of logic is suggestive of Abram's view on intelligence existing outside of the human: "And the more I linger with this other entity, the more coherent the relation becomes, and hence the more completely I find myself face-to-face with another intelligence, another center of experience" (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 127). The protagonist begins to expand on her own identity through her relationship with The Beast and the surrounding environment.

The sense of strangeness and fear the protagonist feels in facing the unknown other is amplified when The Beast decides to remove his clothes. Her response is one of terror: "My composure deserted me; all at once I was on the brink of panic. I did not think that I could bear the sight of him, whatever he was" (Carter 166). In this passage, the reader sees the terror of the unknown—in removing his clothes and mask, the definitions the protagonist and society have given The Beast will be wiped clean. Despite this terror, she does not refuse as she has done when asked to remove her own clothes. In undressing, The Beast becomes the other, "How subtle the muscles, how profound the tread. The annihilating vehemence of his eyes, like twin suns. I felt myself ripped apart as if I suffered a marvelous wound" (Carter 166). The protagonist's experience with the other appears almost as an annihilation of the self. Such annihilation draws upon violence as the protagonist describes the experience as being "ripped apart" and suffering a "marvelous wound"—such terminology arguably can be perceived as idealizing violence. Importantly, however, the self being demolished by gazing upon The Beast is the mechanistic one created by society. This moment allows the narrator to perceive the true, wonderful nature of another, rejecting surrounding boundaries and notions of conformity to

embrace the true, non-restricted self; it is a self that holds more wonder and more potential for creativity based on uniqueness and not sameness. The quotation above recognizes this wonder by using the term “marvelous” in describing her experience and the “annihilating vehemence” in the tiger’s eyes serves to acknowledge a power that has the capability of destroying boundaries. This is exemplified when the protagonist thinks about the tigers she has seen before in comparison to the one before her: this Beast is so different “...from the poor, shabby things I’d seen once, in the Czar’s menagerie at Petersburg, the golden fruit of their eyes dimming, withering in the far North of captivity. Nothing about him reminded me of humanity” (Carter 166). According to this quotation, the very power the other has for the protagonist is in the total separation from humanity. In viewing the other as a unique entity, she rejects the human construct in which animals “have been reviled, or sentimentalized or eroticized but seldom known by us... We have become the boundary, the cage, the walls of captivity for all the rest” (Hogan 17). Conversely, to escape the cage around the human (around herself) the protagonist undresses as well and she feels “at liberty for the first time in [her] life” (Carter 166) by being present and seen by something other. Day suggests that this stripping “does not place her as the object of the masculine gaze. It incorporates into her subject position an animality which cultural construction...has sought to mask” (143). At this point it could be argued that the masculine gaze becomes neutralized—the protagonist views The Beast naked despite her terror and in doing so she accepts the power of the gaze; however, her gaze does not objectify but rather *acknowledges* the subjectivity of The Beast outside of his false, object-like humanity; this acknowledgement (by implication) enables her to accept her own animal identity. She then *chooses* to undress and gain the liberation of being viewed as a subject and unleashes her own

passions. From this moment, the protagonist recognizes and seeks to form a relationship with the other within and outside of herself.

III. The Transformation into a Relational Self and the Establishment of Equality

The protagonist's subversion of her isolated identity allows her to experience a mental and physical transformation into an interconnected being. Her identity therefore becomes one based on multiplicity rather than an isolated self. The transformation allows the protagonist to form an identity beyond societal restrictions. This conversion, sparked by the protagonist, connects directly to Grosz's idea of "making something, inventing something, which will enable us to recognize ourselves, or more interestingly, to eschew recognition altogether" (84-5) instead of waiting to be recognized and defined by a dominant society that hinders movement. Identity thus becomes creative by its ever-changing indefiniteness. Furthermore, the protagonist's subversion through transformation reflects James Clifford's ideas of viewing the relationship between the self and the other in a nonviolent way in *Predicament of Culture*. David Moore studies Clifford's ideas in "Decolonializing Criticism: Reading Dialectics and Dialogics in Native American Literatures," putting forth Clifford's question:

Yet what if identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject...How do stories of contact, resistance, and assimilation appear from the standpoint of groups in which exchange rather than identity is the fundamental value to be sustained? (qtd. in Moore 9)

In this line of thought, the value of identity switches from the hierarchy of value that rejects difference, and becomes connected to a multiplicity of relations, thus questioning the limitations derived from separating the human from the other.

The protagonist's physical and mental transformations are intertwined, reflecting on how the body and mind, often dualistically separated, exist together. Physically, she goes beyond the social restrictions of the body by not returning to her father; instead, she strips off her clothes. Her rejection of societal norms that limits her volatile body is seen in the clockwork maid. Originally perceiving the maid as her twin, by the end of the narrative the protagonist is able to conclude that the maid is "no longer the spit [image] of my own" (Carter 167), and decides to do the following: "dress her in my own clothes, wind her up, and send her back to perform the part of my father's daughter" (Carter 167). This decision marks the change in thought the protagonist has experienced and a blurring of boundaries occurs that allows her to explore herself in relation to the world rather than being passively defined by the world. She rejects the copy of herself that represents the limitations of a culture obsessed with sameness. Moreover, the protagonist describes how the clockwork maid looks at her as she strips herself naked, stating,

the smiling girl stood poised in the oblivion of her balked simulation of life, watching me peel down to the cold, white meat of contract and, if she did see me, then so much more like the market place, where the eyes that watch you take no account of your existence...And it seemed my entire life...had passed under the indifferent gaze of eyes like hers. (Carter 168)

The indifference of the patriarchal gaze connects to a lack of care that hinders the formation of meaningful relationships; within this gaze, the protagonist becomes the "meat of contract," a material good rather than a living being. The protagonist realizes that her alienation relates to this indifference. Rather than being a mechanism acting out societal roles, the protagonist embraces deeper connections that destabilize meaning and welcome a difference that acknowledges the "incomplete forces at work within all the entities and events that can never be

definitely identified” (Grosz 94). This new way of viewing the world that goes beyond surface value and societal relationships also connects to Abram’s conversation about participation with the natural world:

As we become conscious of the unseen depths that surround us, the inwardness or interiority that we have come to associate with the personal psyche begins to be encountered in the world at large: we feel ourselves enveloped, immersed, caught up within the sensuous world. This breathing landscape is no longer just a passive backdrop against which human history unfolds, but a potentized field of intelligence in which our actions participate. (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 260)

By being open to multiple modes of being and recognizing the expanse of interconnections that create a fluid self, the protagonist opens herself to this sensuous world; she allows herself to interact with the so-called “abject” realm of the other.

The protagonist’s physical transformation does not occur without the notions of vulnerability and pain. She changes into another version of herself, much like the becoming that Grosz discusses, “becomings undo the stabilities of identity, knowledge, location, and being and...elaborate new directions and new forces that emerge from these processes of destabilization” (3). As the protagonist removes her clothes, she notes the pain that goes along with it: “I felt as much atrocious pain as if I was stripping off my own underpelt” (Carter 168) and “I was so unused to my own skin that to take off all my clothes involved a kind of flaying” (Carter 168). While some critics argue that this moment objectifies the protagonist and represents “the ritual disrobing of the willing victim of pornography” (qtd. in Makinen 12), I would disagree against this sentiment. Rather, the protagonist deconstructs herself in order to reconstruct a self more in tune with other relationships beyond just the human. Through this

painful process, she separates herself from the norms of society and thus is making herself, and her body, vulnerable but not to male objectification in a pornographic setting. Instead, this vulnerability allows her body to experience a change, one that opens her up to new forms of communication in which the body is no longer something to be marked and valued by humanity. The protagonist's clothes, and eventually her skin, represent that shell of a mechanistic identity, similar to the tiger's abandoned clothes that are "The empty house of his appearance" (Carter 168). As she rejects her clothes, so does the rest of the house: the valet "reveal[s] himself, as... a delicate creature, covered with silken moth-grey fur" (Carter 168); the fur coat she covers herself with becomes "a pack of black squeaking rats that rattled immediately down the stairs" (Carter 168); and The Beast abandons his human visage, "pacing backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, the tip of his heavy tail twitching as he paced out the length and breadth of his imprisonment between gnawed and bloody bones" (Carter 168). In such a manner, there is a blurring and near disappearance of boundaries; the one that remains is the human structure of the room that entraps The Beast.

The protagonist's recognition that vulnerability and fear are important to establishing an equal ground with The Beast becomes an essential part in the protagonist's transformation and deconstruction of boundaries. She experiences pain and embarrassment by stripping her clothes and exhibits a fear of the predator. But she also recognizes that the beast "was far more frightened of [herself] than [she] was of him" (Carter 169). The notion of becoming is associated with the acceptance of vulnerability in relation to other beings. Gilson explains,

More specifically, a process of becoming occurs because of a connection between something in oneself and something in the other being that draws one out of

oneself...Accordingly, becoming is a process of transformation that exceeds the bounds of activity/passivity dichotomy; it requires the kind of receptive openness. (139)

By allowing herself to be vulnerable in her nakedness, the protagonist acknowledges the vulnerability in *The Beast*. This recognition allows her to interact with *The Beast* in an open manner, connecting to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of becoming that Economides reflects on: "the subversive 'symbiosis' involved in this mutual experience of becoming-other cannot be reduced to a feeling of pity, imitation or identification." Thus, the transformation or recognition of the fluidity of self that is occurring here involves a sense of equality between two entities that exist within the realm of the ambiguous.

In opening up relations and facing the fear of difference, the relationship formed between the protagonist and *The Beast* is one that destabilizes structure; this deconstruction is exemplified when *The Beast's* content purring begins to destroy his final entrapment: "The sweet thunder of this purr shook the old walls, made the shutters batter the windows until they burst apart and let in the light of the snowy moon...rocked the foundations of the house...I thought 'It will all fall, everything will disintegrate'" (Carter 169). This particular section, brought on by the protagonist petting the tiger, presents the positive qualities associated with deconstruction. Deleuze analyzes this positivity in the midst of destruction as it makes hierarchal notions "impossible in relation to the idea of the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, and the determination of value...Far from being a new foundation, it swallows up all foundations, it assures universal collapse, but as a positive and joyous event, as de-founding" (53). Moreover, the purring presents the care that exists between the protagonist and *The Beast*, as does *The Beast's* licking. The protagonist notes the sandpaper feel of the tongue that she recognizes will lick off her skin. Again there is this notion of pain associated with the process of becoming, one

less associated with sadomasochism and more with the difficulty of breaking away from normative society. The protagonist states, “And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shiny hairs...my beautiful fur” (Carter 169). There is a clear transformation occurring here. Because her fur is underneath her skin, the transformation is not external but rather internal—it is the human skin, created by society, that hides the other self, reflecting Wolfe’s argument that “the other-than-human resides at the very core of the human itself, not as the untouched, ethical antidote to reason but as part of reason itself” (*Animal Rites* 17). The protagonist contains the other and describes her new fur as beautiful, contrasting greatly with the conventional, surface beauty discussed earlier and showing that beauty can also be associated with the beast.

The Beast similarly experiences liberation from the patriarchal structures of society. His “imprisonment,” noted in the quotation above, exists due to the surrounding humanistic structures in the form of the house. In this sense, though The Beast rejects his clothes and mask, there remains a conventional structure that entraps the animal in the realm of the other—a confinement of societal beliefs reflected by de Beaumont’s version when The Beast states, “I know very well that I am a poor, silly, stupid creature” (143). The protagonist in “The Tiger’s Bride” breaks down these conventions by meeting The Beast on an equal ground established by a vulnerability that matches his own. This equality goes against de Beaumont’s negative portrayal of animality where the Beast’s “animal nature is...revealed by his muteness, uncouthness, [and] inability to meet Beauty as a social and intellectual equal” (Warner 299); this social issue is solved when the Beast becomes a handsome prince as a reward for virtuous Beauty. In contrast, “The Tiger’s Bride” does not place the human in the superior category. Rather, equality frees the protagonist and The Beast from societal limitations and opens the way for positive encounters

otherwise rejected. This mutual experience of liberation can be seen through The Beast's "purring" (noted above) that shows his *pleasurable* encounter with otherness and his acceptance of the animal aspects of his identity. Such a positive interaction between The Beast and the protagonist destroys the house that entraps both of them, making his "purring" a symbol of pleasurable destruction of restrictions.

To further show that The Beast's freedom from the patriarchy is on an equal level with the protagonist in "The Tiger's Bride," it becomes important to note the tears The Beast sheds. When the protagonist first refuses The Beast's request that she remove her clothes, she notes how The Beast cries: "A tear! A tear, I hoped, of shame. The tear trembled for a moment on an edge of the painted bone [the mask], then tumbled down the painted cheek to fall, with an abrupt tinkle, on the tiled floor" (Carter 161). The Beast's liquid tears become a solid "pair of diamond earrings of the finest water in the world" (Carter 163) and are gifted to Beauty—a gift that she refuses to wear until the end of the narrative. Their transformation from liquid to solid form suggests a movement away from fluid nature to defined structure; this is further exemplified when the tears are given material value as jeweled earrings and are thus linked with the commodification of female beauty that demands women adorn themselves (preferably with expensive trinkets). The Beast's sadness, made by his attempts to be human, is therefore commodified. Furthermore, the solidified diamond tears reflect the frozen, "burned-out" landscape (Carter 159) where The Beast chooses to live and the protagonist's own feeling of her life being "locked in ice" (Carter 157). The "diamond" tears and the frozen landscape both convey a sense of entrapment in defined conventions. Hence, when The Beast's "irreproachable tears" (Carter 168) that the protagonist wears as earrings "turn back to water and trickle down [her] shoulders" (Carter 169), a melting of structure is occurring similar to the breaking down of

the house. The return to the fluid suggests a freedom of self that moves away from defined human structures. In this sense, the falling tears can be perceived as tears of happiness rather than entrapment; they no longer serve as material evidence of The Beast's conformity and surface materiality, becoming something deeper and ever-changing in nature.

With the tears, Carter also seems to be toying with de Beaumont's use of water to awaken the dying Beast as a form of purification that eventually leads to the Beast's transformation (de Beaumont 145). Rather than showing the motif of a cleansing "baptism" that offers a "redemption from [the Beast's] reduced, animal condition" (Warner 291), Carter represents the transformation of the protagonist herself into an animal, following the path of the tears until she "shrug[s] the drops off [her] beautiful fur" (Carter 169). In this manner, the rejection of conventional virtues set by religion and society occurs, and the protagonist and The Beast both experience liberation through their interconnection with one another. A new form of acceptance develops, one that crosses the boundaries of the human-animal relationship in a manner that reflects the human as an animal. This recognition opens the way to acknowledging "the life and the body, and to affirm our solidarity with this physical form...acknowledge[ing] our existence as one of earth's animals, and so to remember and rejuvenate the organic basis of our thoughts and our intelligence" (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* 47).

The protagonist's transformation allows readers to see the openness needed to develop relationships that exist outside of boundaries and cultural constructions. The protagonist rejects not so much humanity but those boundaries that separate the self from the other, the animal from the human, and the female from the male. In this manner, a new way of being develops in which the "body itself speaks" (Abram, *Becoming Animal* 167), and becomes open to a new mode of communication that does not have to do with superior, disembodied humanity. It is a language

that engages with others, that denies domination, and that tries to move beyond isolation that would keep people, according to Deena Metzger in “Coming Home,” “from a web of intelligence whose development and the extent we cannot even begin to imagine” (364). Creativity becomes situated in difference and in being open to otherness, avoiding boundaries that attempt to maintain sameness in order to evade discomfort. Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” reflects how “Each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of Nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari 254). Thus, the protagonist is not so much changing completely into another entity as she is shedding a skin to replace it with a deeper, multi-dimensional one, aware and open to the interconnections surrounding her. Furthermore, these interconnections prevent the human from having “the right to name, to categorize, the rest of the world but is now...enticed, to listen, to respond, to observe, to become attuned to a nature it was always part of but had only aimed to master and control” (Grosz 24). Carter’s use of the fairy tale genre and mythmaking allows the liberation of constricted identities by reflecting upon and studying different types of relationships. She is undeterred by the abject and attempts to present the ability of a non-destructive co-existence between the self and the other, the human and the animal. In this manner, Carter progressively negotiates violence and power by studying all angles and suggesting, especially in “The Tiger’s Bride,” the ability to create relationships based on equality rather than domination. Hence, Carter’s fairy tales reflect the societal role of folktales of the past by “respect[ing] our autonomy and leav[ing] the decisions of reality up to us while at the same time they provoke us to think about the way we live” (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 22). “The Tiger’s Bride” and other stories by Carter suggest a new mode of being, one that embraces vulnerability, faces fear, and opens an ever-changing existence that disassociates from a defined, restricted self.

Chapter Two

“Why talk when you are a word”: Human-Animal Relationships and (De)Mythologizing Identities in *Surfacing*

Atwood's 1972 novel, *Surfacing*, analyzes how an isolated individual can undergo transformations that lead to an interconnected self. As a writer, Atwood crafts language to develop a realm of uncertainty and instability, which becomes a promising ground for creativity and metamorphosis. In “Power, Madness, and Gender Identity in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*,” Erinç Özdemir, states that her “writing, literary and otherwise, emerges...as a subversive tool for women in trying to create a space for a feminine, ‘heterogeneous *difference*’ outside the static enclosure of the binary oppositions that underlie patriarchal ideology” (italics in original 58). Similarly, *Surfacing* breaks through dualistic notions that separate body and mind, humans and animals, men and women. The inventive use of language in Atwood's writing raises unanswerable questions and veils this novel in ambiguity. David Ward puts it well in his article “*Surfacing*: Separation, Transition, Incorporation”: “*Surfacing* is a novel which both invites and resists interpretation: its force is bound in with its indeterminacy” (95). Atwood's unnamed narrator experiences alienation due to social constructions and her own falsified biography she uses to block out past trauma. Atwood creates an isolated self that questions the boundaries that surround not only her but environmental entities as well, including animals. The transformative experience the narrator undergoes allows her to escape an identity formed by lies and restrictions in favor of a fluid self based on interconnections with the natural world. Her new identity exists in ambiguity but listens and interacts with alternate forms of communication beyond the human language. Unlike Carter, Atwood uses elements of the fairy tale genre to focus primarily on the problems with censorship in relation to the narrator's own mythmaking as a form of escape. Furthermore, while Atwood presents creative aspects of mythmaking

(particularly during the narrator's transformation), she also shows how problems can arise via the mythmaking process. Overall, *Surfacing*, through the use of ambiguity, explores the struggle of an initially alienated narrator to establish an "interconnected" self, one that leads to the rejection of prohibitive dualisms influenced by (patriarchal) language systems. However, this project is not fully realized by the narrator because of her unconscious adherence to the misanthropic or mythic belief that humanity is irrevocably violent.

Surfacing reflects on how human language, both spoken and written, creates hierarchal limitations to communication and identification. The narrator feels constricted by language, seen through her following statement: "Language divided us into fragments, I wanted to be whole" (Atwood 147). The fragmentation of the narrator suggests her need for other forms of discourse beyond the product of humanity (Spender 3). Language in its traditional anthropocentric sense becomes situated in the realm of rationality and used as a means of creating boundaries, particularly between humans and animals. Cary Wolfe develops this concept in *Before the Law*: "Here, it is worth remembering that the capacity to 'respond' is quite obviously highly contextual. It's no surprise that we humans tend to be 'best' at it within the parameters of the particular world that we've built for ourselves, with an eye very much to ourselves" (85). The ability to respond is thus given to the privileged group that controls language; it becomes restricted in itself and blind to other modes of communication. Hierarchal language creates barriers in the forms of binaries and definitions, largely created out of what Stanley Cavell designates as a fear "that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rests upon very shaky foundations—a thin net over an abyss" (qtd. in Wolfe 47). In attempts to avoid instability through the development of binaries, language, "far from being a liberating resource, becomes an

instrument of control, of confinement” (Ward 99), especially for those whose voices are restricted by the language and negatively associated with the animalistic, silenced realm.

Similar to Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride,” *Surfacing* exhibits how language, especially the term “animal,” actively maintains the boundary between humans and animals. In particular, Birke points out that the main problem “in thinking about ‘animals’ is the enormous difficulty of escaping from a word, which does enormous cultural work in maintaining human exceptionalism” (“Unnamed Others” 150). The word “animals” is challenging to get beyond because it is heavily used in categorizing, creating, and upholding the human/animal binary. Although the boundary of this dualism keeps moving as new ideas are formed about animals, the fundamental drive to separate remains intact. Such dependence on language maintains barriers that limit the formation of new communications and relationships, as Abram suggests in

Becoming Animal:

As humans, we rely upon a complex web of mostly discrete, spoken sounds to accomplish our communication, and so it’s natural that we associate language with such verbal intercourse. Unfortunately, this association has led many to assume that language is an exclusive attribute of our species...and to conclude that all other organisms are entirely bereft of meaningful speech. It is an exceedingly self-serving assumption. (167)

In this case, “language” not only shuts out other modes of communication (as suggested earlier) but also limits who participates in the discourse. This ignorance to other forms of communication (willful or otherwise) Abram terms “self-serving” because it supports dominance and control rather than openness to difference. The dominant group can place value at will upon beings unable to respond, promoting essentialist categorizations based on sameness.

In *Surfacing*, the narrator wonders what response animals would give if they could speak, stating, “what would they really say? Accusation, lament, an outcry of rage; but they had no spokesman” (Atwood 131). Similarly, she brings up experiments done on children to test their language ability: “depriving them [the children] of words, they [the doctors] found at a certain age the mind is incapable of absorbing any language; but how could they tell the child hadn’t invented one, unrecognizable to everyone but itself?” (Atwood 76). In these quotations and several others throughout the novel, the narrator questions the dominant language of society and the limitations it places on her and the surrounding environment. She finds herself incapable of conforming to such restrictions, particularly when she encounters the term love: “It was the language again, I couldn’t use it because it wasn’t mine. He [Joe] must have known what he meant but it was an imprecise word; the Eskimos had fifty-two names for snow because it was important to them, there ought to be as many for love” (Atwood 107). This statement is interesting not just for the reflection on the limitations of words but also how they relate to emotions; the narrator finds that words are not enough to express feelings, such as love, because the definitions are too overarching to serve her individual feelings. Words in this sense are products of a culture that impact the utilization of certain words. Particularly, Atwood’s narrator studies the societal impact on language by looking at how words with the most negative connotations are associated with the body: “the worst ones [words] in any language were what they were most afraid of and in English it was the body” (Atwood 42). Here, the fear of the body is reflected in the English language; it becomes important to understand this connection mainly because the body itself can play a role in alternate forms of communication. Such associations with fear and the body can prevent new discourses from developing. According to the narrator, language restricts the body, and, “She [the narrator] is depicted as enacting a painful but

determined search for another language, one that would allow non-destructive relationships with others and nature” (Özdemir 58). Her attempt to find this new communication will be analyzed later in this chapter.

I. Restrictive Languages: Naming, Fairy Tales, and Mythmaking

Developing her analysis on the limitations of language, the narrator finds herself rejecting existing definitions and yet creating a myth that further alienates her from forming meaningful relationships. The narrator’s namelessness throughout the novel can be connected to her resistance to definitions. Gina Wisker suggests in *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction*, that the narrator’s undisclosed name presents “a link between naming, language and the limitations imposed by civilization” (27-8). Spender also studies the power of names, stating,

Names are essential for the construction of reality for without a name it is difficult to accept the existence of an object, an event, a feeling. Naming is the means whereby we attempt to order and structure the chaos....By assigning names we impose a pattern and a meaning which allows us to manipulate the world. (163)

In this sense, naming positions individuals or animals in a place of societal order, confining their movements. This interpellation is also reflected in Butler’s analysis regarding how societal norms constrict those placed in particular essentialist categories, particularly based on sex and gender (*Bodies that Matter* 2). Furthermore, such naming is linked to Gregory Bateson’s conversation about children learning about nouns in *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*: “They are taught that a ‘noun’ is the ‘name of a person, place, or thing’ ...they are taught at a tender age that the way to define something is by what it supposedly is in itself, not by its relation to other

things” (17). By placing a name on any entity, it suggests that that entity is determined with no consideration for the outside influences of others. Spender recognizes this in her own argument, stating, “We are dependent on names but we are mistaken if we do not appreciate that they are imperfect and often misleading” (163).

Just as names can be inaccurate, so can stories. In *Surfacing*, the narrator cuts out of her life the loss she feels after the abortion of her child: “It was all real enough, it was enough reality for ever, I couldn’t accept it, that mutilation, ruin I’d made, I needed a different version. I pieced it together the best way I could, flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts” (Atwood 144-45). The story she creates protects her from the pain of losing the child. In her tale, she is divorced (though she never married) and the baby is living with its father, a child the narrator never identified as hers: “I didn’t name it before it was born even, the way you’re supposed to. It was my husband’s, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator” (Atwood 30). She believes her own lie, becoming willfully ignorant of the truth. Moreover, the narrator attempts to make herself invulnerable to such pain to protect herself (Gilson 88). By doing so, she cuts herself off from relationships that could help her heal. Gilson develops this idea, stating, “in seeking invulnerability we specifically ignore the constitutive aspect of vulnerability, the way in which we become who we are through our openness with others” (86-7). The narrator creates a lie to live by, one that she can accept and control, a world that Plumwood suggests is “structured to sustain the concept of continuing, narrative self; we remake the world in that way as our own, investing it with meaning, reconceiving it as sane, survivable, amenable to hope and resolution” (“Prey to the Crocodile”). Maintaining the story detaches the narrator; the lie holds her loosely together but prevents her from substantial relationships and emotions.

The cut off life of the narrator appears when she looks at old pictures of herself: “I was in most of the pictures, shut in behind the paper; or not me but the missing part of me” (Atwood 108). These pictures reflect her alienation by suggesting the removal of significant parts. The way she remembers the past is based solely on her own interpretation, and she lives in fear of losing that meaning: “I have to be sure they’re my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it” (Atwood 70). Thus, the myth becomes her lifeline to free her from pain. In “Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*: Strange Familiarity,” Peter Quartermaine studies this evasion in the title of this novel, commenting, “‘surfacing’ also describes that shared survival instinct which looks only rarely beyond immediate specifics; we prefer self-reflections on a calm surface to any glimpse of monsters beneath” (120). Quartermaine helps to understand why the narrator grips her fabricated biography so intensely—she does not want to glimpse that nightmarish past that mars and twists her into the monstrous.

Similarly, the fairy tale genre in *Surfacing* reflects on how some fairy tales dilute gruesome ideologies in favor of superficial stories of childish fantasy. Interestingly, the censorship used to hide the horrid in such tales directly connects to the narrator’s own fabricated biography in the way she buries violent acts (like her abortion) into her unconsciousness. Irony exists in how the narrator utilizes censorship but also critiques it, especially in her current job as a fairy tale book illustrator. The fairy tale pictures the narrator creates do not fit in the boundaries of society and are rejected by her publisher, Mr. Percival, who, “said one of my drawings was too frightening and I said children liked being frightened. ‘It isn’t the children who buy the books, he said, ‘it’s their parents’” (Atwood 50). Immediately, the notion of fear becomes censored, picking and choosing what children do and do not see. This censorship is

common in social media and representational of how the narrator is not the only one who attempts to avoid fear and horror, especially since many original fairy tales were in fact gruesome. Additionally, the narrator notes the complete avoidance of the body in the fairy tales, stating, “they annoyed me, the stories never revealed the essential things about them [the characters], such as what they ate or whether their towers had bathrooms, it was as though their bodies were pure air” (Atwood 51). Her recognition that the body does not exist in these stories exemplifies the distancing from the uncontrollable and grotesque qualities that have historically been associated with it. Whitewashing the body and violence from fairy tales relates to Bettelheim’s definition of “optimistic meliorism,” in which, “The dominant culture wishes to pretend, particularly where children are concerned, that the dark side of man does not exist” (8). Atwood’s narrator is wary of this “optimistic meliorism” but also guilty of it herself when she tries to efface or hide the violence in her own life. This conflicting position of critiquing and utilizing censorship shows up in the narrator’s illustrations:

I wanted my third princess to be running lightly through a meadow but the paper’s too wet, she gets out of control, sprouting an enormous rear...I give up and doodle, adding fangs and a moustache, surrounding her with moons and fish and a wolf with bristling hackles and a snarl; but that doesn’t work either, it’s more like an overweight collie.

(Atwood 54)

This passage reflects on the narrator’s inability to capture the expurgated versions of fairy tales (and she fails to do so throughout the novel). The conventional princess will not form on the page and becomes altered—she has both masculine (the mustache) and animal characteristics (the fangs). Through the drawing, the princess takes on several identities that associate with the narrator’s final transformation and her gravitation towards the animal. This passage also is

symbolic of the narrator's avoidance of the negative, reflected in the potentially violent wolf becoming "an overweight collie." Such a change from dangerous animal to spoiled pet reflects on the narrator's domestication of violence in her own life and her initial choice to see herself situated in the position of victim with no power.

Through fairy tale imagery, Atwood also shows how the narrator sees violence as the direct result of having power. The narrator finds rotten beans and imagines them as magical: "Inside were pebbles, purple-black and frightening. I knew that if I could get some of them and keep them for myself I would be all-powerful...if I'd turned out like the others with power I would have been evil" (Atwood 33). Such a statement reflects on how women with power in traditional tales became "evil" in the eyes of a patriarchal society where the virtues of women were based on submission and gentility. The narrator rejects power because of her belief that all power is frightening and malicious, an assumption stemming from her painful choices of the past, such as the abortion of her child. In this manner, power holds a troubling role for the narrator because she does not want it and yet still wields it through her dominant position as a human. Atwood's use of fairy tales in *Surfacing*, "reminds us of our own entrapment in patterns of reading and belief" (Wisker 11) and of the need for extrication from such cycles in order to recognize (and question) the surrounding structures. While the narrator fails to change the fairy tales she illustrates, other modern women writers, such as Angela Carter, alter the very fabric of fairy tales so that traditional meanings and morals are progressively transformed. Such alterations (seen in Carter's fairy tales) can also occur by returning to original tales and uncovering the violence censored across generations and societies. Wilson remarks on how, "*Surfacing* opposes the fragmenting force of fake, censored, and socially 'sanitized' fairy-tale images to the paradoxically real power of the main embedded tales" (97), suggesting that

Atwood recognizes how original tales that do not refrain from violence hold a power over stories restricted in content for younger readers. In this case, the power does not exist in the violent acts themselves, but in the ability to recognize violence and *choose* what to make of it. In her article, “Don’t Tell Us What to Write,” Atwood discusses the censorship that plagues authors and social media. Recognizing that while some censorship tries to protect those deemed innocent, she states, “We want to know how bad things are, and whether they might affect us; but also we want to make up our own minds. For if we don’t know the truth of the matter, how can we have any valid opinions about it?” (Atwood 60) Likewise, fairy tales that attempt to shield do so at the cost of a further understanding of what has been deemed grotesque (where violence and the body are often positioned).

Similar to fairy tale censorship, *Surfacing* confronts the frontier myth and explores the way it censors violence and forms boundaries. Masculine wilderness ideologies are social myths that produce a problematic separation between wilderness and civilization. Drawing upon such ideologies means taking part in mythologizing (and limiting perceptions of) wilderness. In “Myth and Identity,” Jerome Bruner reflects on how myths interact with society and identity, stating, “It is not simply society that patterns itself on the idealizing myths, but unconsciously it is the individual ... as well who is able to structure [his/her] internal clamor of identities in terms of prevailing myth” (283). As such, myths, like censored fairy tales, reflect the time period and the structured identity formation that can “establish barriers between groups by defining the lines of separation” (Bajon 26). William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness,” helps put in perspective idealizations of the wild, defining the “mythic frontier individualist” as “almost always masculine in gender: here, in the wilderness, a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his

masculinity” (14). This position of the wilderness as masculine resonates in *Surfacing* in the characters of David and Joe, city men entering what they perceive as the wilderness of Quebec, a place to get away from the “feminizing tendencies of civilization” (Cronon 14). Notably, these two men decide to create a documentary to capture aspects of the wild. In “Decapitation, Cannibalism, and Rebirth in *Surfacing*,” Sharon Wilson correctly terms this video as “fakelore,” stating, “Joe and David’s ‘folklore’ collection, ‘random samples,’ containing footage of a bottle house, a stuffed moose, a ‘captured’ log, and a nude woman, comments on folklore snobbery and cultural and gender imperialism...and a global twentieth-century wasteland as well as the Canadian and U.S. ones” (109). Breaking down this catalog, the images included in their documentary are all artificial in contrast to the wilderness image David and Joe seek to capture: the moose is dead (as is a heron also presented in the video), the house is made of human waste, the log is where they “took turns shooting each other [with a camera] standing beside it [the log], arms folded and one foot on it as if it was a lion” (Atwood 81), and the woman is forced to strip for the video. These images of domination remark upon the imperial nature of the documentary and relate the objectification of the female to the destruction of the environment. Wilson’s comment concerning “folklore snobbery” critiques the one-sided quality that comes with capturing history, and is similar to the penning and moralizing of fairy tales that once existed in an ever-changing oral tradition. David and Joe both project themselves upon the environment by capturing in the camera lens what they believe it should contain. Cronon reflects upon such projections on wilderness, stating, “As we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires” (7). Thus, the ultimate destruction of the video by the narrator serves to critique the artificiality of the enterprise. Along with their documentary, the two men want to

learn how to catch and kill fish, nodding again to the idea of the masculine fantasy of enjoying “the regeneration and renewal that [comes] from sleeping under the stars, participating in blood sports, and living off the land” (Cronon 14-5). One of the major issues with the frontier myth is that it does not take into account the actual violence that was inflicted upon the environment and other native peoples when settlers first arrived/invaded new areas (Cronon 15). Such violence, especially in terms of Canadian history, will be analyzed in further detail later in this chapter.

Both the delusional masculine wilderness fantasies and the censored fairy tales in *Surfacing* reflect the world through a skewed lens; neither discourse maintains a connection with its violent and terrifying origins, catering instead to fantasies of masculine empowerment and childhood innocence. Such an omission of the abject disconnects one from reality and limits perceptions into categories, often in the form of binaries. The narrator initially views her life through such binaries, identifying with certain social constructs, such as rationality, beauty, and gender. She attempts to avoid blurring any of the social boundaries because doing so would produce uncertainty and draw her closer to what she has censored from her own life. She seeks to preserve order to avoid the abject within herself, because the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, [and] order. What does not respect borders, positions, [and] rules” (Kristeva 4). The following section will analyze the narrator’s relationship with the value system and norms produced by a restrictive society.

II. Personal and Societal Alienation of the Self

In *Surfacing*, the narrator experiences a patriarchal society that controls value systems, makes power a mode of violence that instigates subordination, and uses human language as the overarching weapon to dominate others. The environment and the treatment of animals as

inferior exist at the forefront of the narrator's observations about this restrictive society. Hence, a large portion of this chapter will analyze the various comments the narrator makes about animals and their relationship to humans. The value system reflects Warren's ideas on how the dominant group is self-privileged, a position that allows the group to control not just value but the morality and justice associated with it: "representing the moral situation in a value-hierarchical way...conceals the fact that in contemporary society the point of view from the top of the hierarchy functions as an invisible, unmarked, and privileged point of view" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 107). In other words, the dominant group that defines value also deems what "subjects" should be treated in an ethical manner. Animals, the environment, and "othered" humans fall through the cracks of this justice system, opening the way to violence. Warren continues to develop this idea by terming it as the "logic of domination," which "assumes that superiority justifies subordination. A logic of domination is offered as the moral stamp of approval for subordination, since, if accepted, it provides justification for keeping the Downs down" (*Ecofeminist Philosophy* 47). The use of such logic as a means of subjugation reduces the power of the body and the emotions. Özdemir looks to this moral superiority in *Surfacing* and notes how morality and rationality are closely connected since society "[justifies] its transgressions against nature and human beings by the false ethic of rationality and logic, which in turn constitutes the pillars of the humanistic belief in science and social progress" (59). Such restrictions and potentially detrimental notions of value exist throughout *Surfacing*. In particular, the narrator points to herself, animals, and the environment as bound by these notions of patriarchal value largely presented in dualistic modes of thought.

Insofar as she internalizes this value system, the narrator identifies herself as a subject defined by the rational/irrational binary, by surface-level beauty norms, and by commodified

images of the female body even though she also finds fault with these ways of thinking. She recognizes how in society she is categorized as a commercial artist, a position she went into largely because of her art teacher, the man she was having an affair with: “for a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided” (Atwood 49). Her relationship with this man places her in a role of inferiority in which her creativity and individuality are devalued. Furthermore, her past relationship with her art teacher impacts how the narrator defines the worth of her current lover, Joe. She values him for his physical body and for his failure as a potter. She lacks any emotional connection that may be considered love, stating, “Perhaps it’s not only his body [she] like[s], perhaps it’s his failure; that also has a kind of purity” (Atwood 54). The narrator placing value on his body serves to objectify the male; placing value on his failure “makes him less self-assured, therefore less masculine, less threatening, and more vulnerable” (Özdemir 73); the narrator therefore flips the position of being devalued and used by becoming emotionally separated. Herein lies a sense of vulnerability mentioned briefly earlier in this chapter: she does not want to be situated in an uncontrolled, emotional sphere where she feels unable to protect herself. Gilson considers how people avoid vulnerability for fear of being subjugated by another:

denials of vulnerability find their root in our rejection of our embodied and animal nature.

We perceive ourselves to be most vulnerable, most subject to injury, least in control of ourselves and our fates, most at the mercy of others, and most like other nonhuman animals as corporeal beings. (90)

This fear paralyses the narrator’s relationships and keeps new ones from forming. She finds it far safer to fall back into rationality and avoid the so-called “animal” nature that relates more to the emotional, bodily, and “inferior” side of the rational/irrational dualism. Despite these

separations, Atwood's narrator also recognizes problems associated with splitting the mind and the body: "I'm not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate. The language is wrong, it shouldn't have different words for them...they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body both of them will die" (Atwood 75). This passage suggests the importance of a connection between the mind and body that does not deny one or the other. A balance must be reached. In her separation, the narrator feels like a floating head of logic rather than a being that feels emotions: "At some point my neck must have closed over, pond freezing or a wound, shutting me into my head; since then everything has been glancing off me" (Atwood 106). There is pain in this separation, brought on by the narrator's will to avoid agonizing past memories. This willful ignorance is "an attempt to avoid what might unsettle us...when we ignore we are necessarily avoiding our own vulnerability" (Gilson 86). In evading fear and vulnerability, the narrator rejects her emotional side; this keeps her from forming worthwhile relationships, even with Joe: "What impressed him that time...was the way I took off my clothes and put them on again later very smoothly as if I were feeling no emotion. But I really wasn't" (Atwood 24). Her lack of emotion keeps her from the pain but also isolates her in such a way that she feels no longer alive: "if my body could be made to sense, respond, move strongly enough, some of the red light-bulb synapses, blue neurons, incandescent molecules might seep into my head...But the only thing there was the fear that I wasn't alive" (Atwood 112). Thus detached from her senses and relationships, the narrator has an "unfeeling body" (Özdemir 67), that suggests, in Tom Ingold's words, "Minds cannot subsist without bodies to house them, and bodies cannot subsist unless continuously engaged in material and energetic exchanges with components of the environment" (33). Hence, this separation from the body that

leaves the narrator wondering about her vitality provides another possible reason for the narrator remaining unnamed: she believes her existence does not warrant a name.

Along with her own mind-body alienation, the narrator reflects how mirrors and cosmetics are restrictions created by patriarchal society to promote female conformity to superficial beauty norms. Particularly, she observes her traveling companion, Anna, and how she is confined to a realm of surface beauty that fails to acknowledge any subjective depth. The narrator's reflections on beauty connects to Wolf's point that beauty is socially controlled and, "Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that they [women] will buy more things if they are kept in the self-hating, ever-failing, hungry, and sexually insecure state of being aspiring 'beauties'" (66). Anna's beauty is essential in her relationship with her husband, David; her appearance is built off of slathering her face with makeup, and she claims David has never seen her face without it (Atwood 41). The narrator also has not seen her face without it: "I realized I had never seen her without it [makeup] before; shorn of the pink cheeks and heightened eyes her face is curiously battered, a worn doll's, her artificial face is the natural one" (Atwood 41). Anna's very image is made synthetic by her application of cosmetics and this takes away her identity, making her appear doll-like even without the makeup. Such intensive use of cosmetics can be associated with Wolf's conversation on airbrushing wrinkles off women's faces in magazines, which makes a "value judgment...about the value of the female life: that less is more. To airbrush ages off a woman's face is to erase women's identity, power, and history" (83).

For the narrator, Anna's use of mirrors and cosmetics artificially create a false self and limit individual power. While Anna has control over her appearance, it is the only power she has left. The compact mirror Anna uses contains "her other self" (Atwood 169) and she "unswivels

a pink stick and dots her cheeks and blends them, changing her shape, performing the only magic left to her” (Atwood 169). The narrator understands this lure of cosmetics when she remembers how she was once drawn to the glamour of “Ladies in exotic costumes, sausage rolls of hair across their foreheads, with puffed red mouths and eyelashes like toothbrush bristles: when [she] was ten [she] believed in glamour, it was a kind of religion and these were [her] icons” (Atwood 39). These images she once looked up to are like Anna; they reveal a man-made beauty that creates a world where “attraction grows blander and colder as everyone, first women and soon men, begin to look alike. People lose one another as more masks are assumed” (Wolf 176-77). There seems to be a close connection between these tendencies toward surface beauty and the superiority of humans set within the logic of domination that Warren discusses. Furthermore, Abram suggests that “Our fascination is elsewhere, carried by all these *other* media—these newspapers, radio broadcasts, television networks, computer bulletin boards—all these fields or channels of *strictly human communication* that so readily grabs our senses and mold our thoughts” (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 258). The human communication he discusses relates to these beauty ideals that can lead to the self caring for artificiality and surface perceptions, consequently forming a muted version of the self (Wolf 3). Such a superficial self can lose sight of the need to care for other, deeper relationships, such as with the natural world.

A link can be made between the airbrushing of female bodies and eco-pornography. My discussion here presents an example of why the narrator experiences a socially conditioned sense of alienation in the form of female identification with unrealistic (pornographic) body images, which I link to “ecoporn” as an instance of how this can similarly alienate subjects from nature. In “Ecoporn and the Manipulation of Desire,” Jose Knighton defines ecopornography as photography of the environment that seeks to “appeal to, even seduce, the beholder with an

image removed from its physical context, amplified into a commodity by technique...to evoke a subjective response for commercial gain, to sell calendars and magazine subscriptions” (168). Such photography fails to capture the reality and actual experience of the landscape, limiting attachment or selling what is deemed beautiful at the expense of other profound landscapes. Value becomes based on these particular advertisements in a manner that causes a “distorted perception” (Knighton 169) situated in sameness. Eco-pornography associates with the objectification of the female body in pornography, in which “close-ups of sexualized parts of women’s bodies...[reduce] women to those parts of their bodies and [reduce] those parts to tools for another’s sexual pleasure” (Gilson 158). In *Surfacing*, the narrator notes how David perceives women as objects existing for the completion of his own desires when she thinks the following: “he needed me [the narrator] for an abstract principle; it would be enough for him if our genitals could be detached like two kitchen appliances and copulate in mid-air” (Atwood 153). This quotation relates how women can become “tools” for pleasure by focusing on particular parts of the body rather than the whole person, much like the pictures of landscapes. The removal of blemishes to create “perfect,” idealized images of both landscapes and women serves to create an artificiality that erodes our capacity to appreciate natural beauty and a healthy environment.

The false beauty the narrator analyzes extends to the objectification of the female body that can lead to adverse vulnerability. The connection between negative vulnerability and the objectified body is seen in the relationship between Anna and David, where Anna is susceptible to derogation. In Gilson’s words, their relationship shows the “oppressive exploitation of vulnerability” that connects to “the belief that vulnerability is a negative condition and the desire to continue to avoid, ignore, and repudiate vulnerability by projecting it onto others” (91). The

power dynamic between Anna and her husband exists on a battlefield where each attempts to place the other in an inferior, vulnerable position. Anna does so by using her body: “Anna was more than sad, she was desperate, her body her only weapon and she was fighting for her life, he was her life, her life was the fight: she was fighting because if she ever surrendered the balance of power would be broken and he would go elsewhere. To continue the war” (Atwood 155). Anna’s body thus becomes a “weapon” she uses against David by having sex with his friend Joe. However, such use of her body does not give Anna a healthy sort of power; rather, she plays into the objectification of the female body and David’s misogynistic vision that “turns all women into fashion models or dolls” (Wisker 24).

The objectification of Anna’s body is further presented when David tells her to get naked for the documentary, “Random Samples,” he and Joe are creating. When Anna refuses, he states, “It’s token resistance...she wants to, she’s an exhibitionist at heart. She likes her lush body, don’t you? Even if she is getting too fat” (Atwood 136). David’s control over Anna situates in the dominance he feels he has by being her husband (Atwood 136). He states, “I’m all for equality of women; she just doesn’t happen to be equal and that’s not my fault, is it? What I married was a pair of boobs” (Atwood 139). Their marriage is one of possession, with David as the possessor who judges and humiliates Anna through her body. When Anna complies with David’s wishes and strips, the narrator watches her come out of the water, “She was really crying now...Her pink face dissolving, her skin covered in sand and pine needles like a burned leech. She went into the cabin without looking at me or saying anything” (Atwood 137). Anna’s mortification leads the narrator to compare her image to a leech, a description she provides earlier in the novel with the memory of her brother burning leeches: “they would writhe out and crawl painfully, coated in ashes and pine needles, back towards the lake. Seeming to be able to

smell where the water was. Then he would pick them up with two sticks and put them back in the flames” (Atwood 132-33). This quotation shows that the narrator relates Anna’s helplessness to those of the leeches—just as the brother controls the leeches’ cruel fates Anna’s husband tries to control hers.

The narrator recognizes David as a liar and a man who likes to exist in the dominant realm where he can take what he likes sexually from women. When the narrator denies his sexual advances she gains power over him; she takes away his language and places him in the awkward position: “The power flowed from my eyes, I could see into him...verbs and nouns glued on to him and shredding away...he didn’t know what language to use, he’d forgotten his own” (Atwood 153). In denying him, the narrator does not allow him to get back at his wife for sleeping with Joe, preventing him from assuaging a vulnerability he does not wish to feel. The narrator’s recognition of her capacity for power over patriarchal forces, including misogynistic David, allows her to begin to overcome restrictions placed around the female body. She rejects David and begins to favor the animal over the human, reflecting on how “he [David] was lying about [her], [but] animals don’t lie” (Atwood 154). The animal becomes a central focus for the narrator and further illustrates how value and language can negatively subordinate those considered to be different within a patriarchal society.

III. The Blurring Human/Animal Binary: Value, Predator-Prey Relationships, and Science

The restrictions surrounding the narrator can be further analyzed by studying how the human/animal binary leads to violence and limitations to both animals and groups of people, particularly women. *Surfacing* reflects on the self-appointed “superior” position of humans in comparison to animals through the notions of hierarchal value and willful ignorance. The

intermingling between the two sides of the human/animal binary can be seen through the narrator's perspective on violence done to animals, predator-prey relationships, and the role of scientific specimens throughout this novel. This analysis expresses the dangers of dualistic thinking and shows how the narrator begins to associate more with the animal than the human, leading to her transformative experience to escape patriarchal limitations.

Hierarchical value systems can separate humans from animals and lead to violence against those deemed other. Stibbe analyzes the socially constructed values given to animals. He suggests that animals remain restricted as "entities whose value lies either in rarity, size, or in their ability to mimic human behavior" (83). Human superiority via categorization remains in place because humans choose which animals have rights, which are extrinsic and exploitable, and which are ignored entirely. A chilling connection exists between value and violence that can be observed in *Surfacing* and will be analyzed in further detail shortly. Furthermore, the novel studies the notion of chosen blindness via a logic that justifies violence against animals, which Derrida touches upon: "No one can deny seriously, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty [against animals] or hide it from themselves, in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding" (394). The animal/human binary that exists encourages violence towards not just animals but humans categorized as animalistic. Birke builds on this notion, stating, "The category of the sub-human...serves both to erase specificities and to justify violence" ("Unnamed Others" 149). Hence, refusing to see connections between humans and animals can lead to the justification of cruelty.

In this novel, the power of the "superior" human that solidifies the boundary between the human and the animal becomes especially apparent through the relationship between the predator (the human) and the prey (the animal). Plumwood studies the placement humans have in these

predator-prey relationships, stating, “This concept of human identity positions humans outside and above the food chain...as external manipulators and masters of it” (“Prey to a Crocodile”). The narrator at first attempts to rationalize this superior positioning of humanity by attempting to convince herself that humans act violently toward the environment largely to obtain the sustenance needed to support life, such as food and resources. An example of her attempts to rationalize this violence is when the narrator feels guilty about killing a fish, then thinks, “that’s irrational, killing certain things is all right, food and enemies, fish and mosquitoes; and wasps, where there are too many of them boiling water down their tunnels” (Atwood 62). In this passage she draws on several examples of why killing has been justified: for food, for enemies, for pests, and for population control. This rationalization of violence becomes increasingly difficult to uphold until the narrator can no longer come up with excuses for such destruction. She begins to acknowledge that cruelty done to animals can be (and is) done to other groups of people.

Recognizing the injustice of violence against animals, the narrator particularly criticizes hunters; her criticism shows the association between value and violence and the fact that animals are not the only ones that suffer at the hands of the “superior” human. The narrator states,

There is nothing inside the happy killers to restrain them [the hunters], no conscience or piety; for them the only things worthy of life were human, their own kind of human, framed in the proper clothes and gimmicks, laminated. It would have been different in those countries where an animal is the soul of an ancestor or the child of a god, at least they would have felt guilt. (Atwood 129)

This passage clearly demonstrates how value and violence connect. Atwood studies specifically occidental (Western) human “superiority” not just over animals but also over people who do not

fit properly in the definition of “their own kind of human.” The narrator also touches upon the notion of guilt, a guilt that, as Derrida suggests, is something to be ignored or desperately forgotten (Derrida 394). Avoiding guilt can lead to a loss of sensitivity and care because such evasion distances one from the problem at hand (or the wrong committed); in doing so, no active solution or amendment can be reached, whether such avoidance is done consciously or unconsciously. Furthermore, value becomes a justification for the violence discussed in the above quotation; value acts as a means of forgetting those devalued by sweeping aside the suffering of other entities. Stibbe develops this idea by analyzing how some view animals as objects, stating, “Since inanimate resources cannot suffer, the discursive constrictions of animals as resources contributes to an ideology that disregards suffering” (9). In the novel, this objectification is presented in the violence done to the heron: “it was hanging upside down by a thin blue nylon rope tied round its feet and looped over a tree branch, its wings fallen open. It looked at me with its mashed eye” (Atwood 116). The narrator is greatly impacted by this scene of unwarranted violence against a creature whose killers

...had strung it up like a lynch victim, why didn't they just throw it away like the trash?

To prove they could do it, they had the power to kill. Otherwise it was valueless; beautiful from a distance but it couldn't be tamed or cooked or trained to talk, the only relation they could have to a thing like that was to destroy it. (Atwood 118)

This passage shows how the heron's value exists in the violent realm of maintaining power through destruction. The narrator wants an explanation for this heartless violence, the way history books identify why wars are fought or why lynchings were committed (Atwood 131). However, she can find no reason but that of corrupt power that seeks to control through subordination and extermination.

Comparing the heron to a lynch victim also has implications towards the unjustified violence that occurred in slavery and its animalization of human beings. This relates to the narrator's belief that violence done to animals can just as easily be done to humanity itself: "Anything we could do to the animals we could do to each other: we practiced on them first" (Atwood 121-22). Such animalization also connects to Stibbe's following statement: "The idea that all humans have intrinsic value has been naturalized across a wide range of discourses, meaning that it is assumed as a taken-for-granted and obvious fact about the world, rather than something to be discussed or asserted" (95). In other words, history shows that all of humanity does not have the right to intrinsic value, as can be seen by looking into past violence against humans. Both the heron and the lynch victim represent an unwarranted brutality warped into justification through the logic of domination.

David's derogatory statement in *Surfacing* further shows how the separation between humans and animals can create violence towards animals and specific groups of people. David states, "Do you realize...that this country [Canada] is founded on the bodies of dead animals? Dead fish, dead seals, and historically dead beavers, the beaver is to this country what the black man is to the United States. Not only that, in New York it's now a dirty word, beaver" (Atwood 36). This passage, particularly through the use of the term "beaver," shows the link sexism and racism have with animality; such negative, animalistic connotations serve to empower patriarchal authority. Robert McKay studies this implied animality in "Identifying with the Animals': Language, Subjectivity, and the Animal Politics in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." He accurately states that these denigrations shows how "the bodiliness of female genitalia and animality itself are both repressed, even symbolically butchered" by David in a "misogynistic and speciesist" manner (216). Furthermore, David's comment draws attention to the fact that

countries have built by exploitive and violent practices, connecting slavery to the economic dependency on animals. This passage also reflects that domination and exploitation of animals is maintained in order to keep that sense of control and to avoid the realization that “Man is not the center of animal life, just as the earth is not the center of the universe” (Grosz 24-5). The maintenance of such control and ignorance of the interconnectivity of the world leads to this violence against animals and “othered” groups of humans constructed as animalistic, such as blacks and women.

David’s above statement unsettlingly shows how nations are often founded on violent acts against others and how such horrors are often hidden from the surface. Similar to the censorship of fairy tales, *Surfacing* reveals the danger of mythologizing national history in a manner that conceals violence. Such concealment is another form of willful ignorance, perceived particularly through the narrator’s claim to victimhood. This novel reinterprets the myths that place Canada in the position of a vulnerable victim (as a dominated country colonized by Britain and shadowed by the U.S.) by presenting similarities between Canada and the narrator’s own victimization. Along with the destruction of animals, Canada’s history contains violence against the natural world and other humans, particularly Native Americans, in the name of development (Kapusinski 116). The removal of violence from history prevents a holistic understanding of the culture from forming or, in terms of the narrator, an understanding of herself. Cronon articulates how avoiding history negatively creates a false identity, stating, “The flight from history...represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past” (16).

The critique on national myths and the victim/aggressor binary begins to break down when the narrator can no longer place the blame on the American tourists for the violence done

to animals, particularly the heron. McKay suggests the Americans serve as a type of scapegoat that provides her with “an object onto which [she] can project the unwanted parts of [herself]” (216). This becomes problematic when the protagonist discovers that the fishermen who killed the heron are actually Torontians (Kapusinski 113). The realization that fellow Canadians are responsible for the bird’s mutilation begins to shatter the myth the narrator has created—namely, the myth that the capacity of violence does not originate in Canada or herself. At this point in the novel, however, she does not see her own capability for violence and retains what Janice Fiamengo defines in “Postcolonial Guilt in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*,” as a “victim fantasy” that “brings a kind of peace, an escape from the anger and shame of acknowledged responsibility” (148). In this manner, the narrator attempts to distance herself from the power she sees as corrupt (Özdemir 68) while criticizing human cruelty towards animals (and other humans). She analyzes and/or breaks down humanity’s self-appointed “superiority” by observing the relationship humans have with meat, positioning herself in the role of prey, and recognizing the link between humans, animals, and specimens in scientific research.

The narrator deconstructs the hierarchy that places humans in a superior position outside of (or on top of) the food chain by seeing the link between humanity’s consumption of animals and the fear of being consumed by them; this link poses a threat to notions of human identity as separate from the animal, showing how the human/animal binary can be broken down. Adams studies the dominant role consumption has, suggesting that meat becomes symbolic of the authority men possess over animals (29). Moreover, Adams links this patriarchal authority over animals to the dominance over women who are (symbolically) consumed within the pornographic gaze. If meat is seen as power, hunting becomes another mode of asserting categorical value. In “The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood,” Emma Parker

considers this dominance, stating, “The way that killing is linked to eating... suggests that eating, like killing... is an expression of power” (114). The narrator in *Surfacing* interprets meat in such a way, “The animals die that we may live, they are substitute people... And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death” (Atwood 141). Here the narrator does not describe the animals as “meat”—instead, the image that comes to mind is consumption of a carcass or something dead (Adams 93), making humans “eaters of death.” For the narrator, animals are “substitute people,” which connects the eating of animals to cannibalism. Atwood develops this idea by comparing animals to humans, such as the frog on the fishhook that “goes down through the water, kicking like a man swimming” (Atwood 61), and by looking at humans as a form of food, “Starvation, bite your arm and suck the blood, that’s what they do on lifeboats; or the Indian way, if there’s no bait try a chunk of your flesh” (Atwood 60). These images move past the supreme role humans give themselves to reveal humans as prey with the same ability to become the “meat” of a predator, reflecting the “shocking reduction, from a complex human being to a mere piece of meat” (“Prey to a Crocodile”). Furthermore, Plumwood notes, “It seems to me that in the human supremacist culture of the West there is a strong effect to deny that we humans are also animals positioned in the food chain. This denial that we ourselves are food to others is reflected in many aspects of our death and burial practices” (“Prey to a Crocodile”). Interestingly, Atwood touches upon a similar idea when the narrator discusses her wish to bury her mother naturally in the forest: “The reason they invented coffins, to lock the dead in, preserve them, they put makeup on them; they didn’t want them spreading or changing into anything else. The stone with the name and date was on them to weight them down” (Atwood 151). This description brings up the idea of transformations at death and the fear of becoming something other than human, such as meat or worm food. The quotation also touches

upon the restrictive language that categorizes human individuality and attempts to maintain it even in death with the gravestone as a marker.

Moreover, the narrator (as a woman) identifies with the negative vulnerability of animals in patriarchal society, often constructing herself as the “prey” of aggressive men and/or a victim of violence. Atwood continues to present the issue with human dominance over animals when the narrator considers herself being hunted: “Behind me they crash...they talk in numbers, the voices of reason. They clank, heavy with weapons” (Atwood 191). The men searching for her are connected to logic and become the voices of reason she runs from. The narrator considers the following: “They will be plotting a strategy for recapture or will they really go off and discard me...stashing me away in their heads with all the obsolete costumes and phrases” (Atwood 172). This passage provides a glimpse of her potential entrapment and how definitions and words are used to confine—the narrator will either be physically captured or logically placed in their minds, bound by the word “madness.” An analysis of the narrator’s so-called madness will appear later in this chapter. Overall, the narrator as “prey” shows insight into the destructive tendencies of humanity as violence against others is excused through the moral superiority that exists in the logic of domination. Hence, in Plumwood’s words, there is a “need to acknowledge our own animality and ecological vulnerability” (“Prey to a Crocodile”) for the good of the whole as well as the parts. To be invulnerable is to reject the notion Abram touches upon: “The body is an imperfect and breakable entity vulnerable to a thousand and one insults—to scars and the scorn of others, to disease, decay, and death” (*Becoming Animal* 6). Such evasion of vulnerability can result in the belief of superiority the logic of domination upholds; invulnerability thus becomes a means of avoiding fear and one’s own susceptibility to other surrounding entities.

Atwood's narrator continues to blur the boundary between humans and animals by portraying the link between the construction of scientific subjectivity and the domination over animals and women. She does so by reflecting on how her mother and eventually herself are specimens in the eyes of science, like animals being studied in a lab. The narrator's memory the laboratory her brother had when they were children connects to the perception of animals as objects of study. In her memory, the animals are dead or dying in the jars so the narrator frees them. Her brother berates her, claiming that these specimens belonged to him, and, "Afterward he trapped other things and changed the place; this time he wouldn't tell [her]. [She] found it anyway but [she] was afraid to let them out again. Because of [her] fear they were killed" (Atwood 132). The fear the narrator experiences that prevents her from saving the animals relates to her "sickening complicity, sticky as glue, blood on my hands, as though I had been there and watched without saying No or doing anything to stop it" (Atwood 131) that she feels with the heron; fear overrides her ability of reacting and saving the animals.

The objectification of animals in experiments relates to her mother's terror of being objectified by doctors and how science and technology can limit interconnectivity. The narrator states, "She [her mother] hated hospitals and doctors; she must have been afraid they would experiment on her, keep her alive as long as they could with tubes and needles even though it was what they call terminal...and in fact that's what they did" (Atwood 17). Her brother's laboratory and the experimental treatments on her mother in the hospital present a scientific detachment from the living world. For the narrator, animals and her mother become specimens in the eyes of science. Connecting to this viewpoint is Lorne Everndon's following statement in *The Natural Alien*: "We pride ourselves on our ability to get to the bottom of life's mysteries, that is, to reduce them to their basic components...knowing the nature of those parts and the

way they are put together, man can not only understand but also control nature” (14). This mechanistic model of control fails to recognize the subjectivity and ambiguity of nature, including animals. In failing to do so, violence occurs, particularly in experiments involving animals who are “replaced with abstractions” (Everndon 15) in order to alienate the scientist from the empathy he/she might otherwise feel towards the test subject. Furthermore, breaking down nature into categories rejects the unknown (and the fear sometimes associated with the unknown). If science and technology create a detachment from nature to avoid emotions like fear, the interconnections that could also be experienced are lost, leaving behind a normative society.

Surfacing’s reflections on separation and loss of affection aligns with the narrator’s perspective that humanity itself is “turning to metal, skins galvanizing, heads congealing to brass” (Atwood 160). This lack of care rising from the estrangement between humans and the natural world is what Hogan sees as a failure: “Through our failed humanity they [animals] are vanishing, and along with them we are losing something of utmost importance: the human traits of love, sympathy, and grace” (15). Like language, technology and science can restrict the formation of a relational self that overcomes anthropocentric perspectives. According to Abram, technology and science can be “interconnected facets of an astonishing dissociation—a monumental forgetting of our human inherence in a more-than-human world” (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 260). This is not to say that all technology and science is negative; rather, some manifestations of these enterprises can (at times ignorantly) strengthen the schism between humans and the living world by making animals, nature, and even humans into objects that exist outside of caring perceptions. Such a separation leads to categorizations that reject the other and

result in an isolating lifestyle based on sameness and lacking in creative forms of interconnectivity.

In comparing herself to the animal during her abortion, the narrator reflects on how she loses her power and subjectivity as a scientific specimen. As discussed earlier, the narrator attempts to rid herself of the memory of her abortion, creating her story rather than facing the pain associated with it. She relinquishes her power to the art teacher she had an affair with and to the doctors that perform the abortion. The art teacher encouraged the narrator to get rid of baby by comparing it to an animal: “He said it wasn’t a person, only an animal; I should have seen that was no different” (Atwood 145). This quotation shows that the narrator (in contrast to the art teacher) does not separate humans from animals on an ethical level (or as subjects of ethical treatment). Her description of the aborting process furthers the notion of her being objectified and her self-connection to animals:

They stick needles into you so you won’t hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or snickering practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar. (Atwood 79)

This description presents a horrifying image of the narrator’s subordination; it connects to her perception of the cruelty towards animals in laboratories, such as the frog experiments in science class or the “Pickled cat pumped full of plastic, red for the arteries, blue for the veins. At the hospital...donate your body to science” (Atwood 121-22). All the narrator’s power to bring new life into the world is taken from her in the hospital, further seen in the following passage: “they shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don’t let you see, they don’t want you to understand, they want you to believe it’s their power, not yours”

(Atwood 79). She is tied down, shaved, and trapped. For the narrator, her inability to say “No” makes her a killer, one of the humans that destroy lives (Atwood 144). Consequently, the abortion leaves her unfeeling and she states, “[She] carried that death around inside [her], layering it over, a cyst, a tumor” (Atwood 146). This notion of being complicitous in a death that causes “[her] to be cut in two” (Atwood 109) results in the creation of the myth of her life. However, by facing reality and acknowledging the abortion, the narrator opens herself to new modes of communication and interconnections that allow a healing process to begin, one that cannot occur in the restrictive, patriarchal society that surrounds her.

IV. Fluid Transformations and the Deconstruction/Embrace of Denigrating Myths

Throughout the transformational process, the narrator breaks down myths and boundaries that denigrate women and animals in order to create a fluid self. She does so by rejecting restrictive barriers formed by patriarchal society, deconstructing the fabricated story of herself, finding new modes of communication, and opening up to relationships beyond humanity. However, her attempts to deconstruct malign myths also entail a problematic embrace of myths connecting to primitivist ideals and the viewing of native cultures as archaic and static. This issue with mythmaking will be addressed in the next section following this analysis of the narrator’s transformational experience into a relational self and her so-called madness.

The transformation of the narrator’s alienated identity begins when she recognizes that the patriarchal boundaries have power over her in the form of human language that dominates and devalues “inferior,” silenced voices. The narrator seeks to find a new means of communication based in the ambiguous state in order to interact with other entities outside of human society. She realizes that in order to transform into another type of intelligence she must

first “immerse [herself] in the other language” (Atwood 159). This “other language” has nothing to do with humanity. Rather, she “breaks down versions of language, space and self” (Wisker 30) to be able to listen to different forms of communication. According to Ward, in order to separate herself from the dominant language, she must “painfully...deconstruct all the acquired meanings which protect and enable a social self—to separate and, perhaps, after a process of transition, to begin to acquire the rudiments of a new, seemingly alien, ‘language’, to become incorporated into a different state” (98). The breaking down of meanings therefore becomes the breaking down of the self. She opens herself up to a deconstruction of the familiar self without fearing otherness or vulnerability as she has done in the past when she “would hear a rustling in the forest and know it was hunting [her], a bear, a wolf, or some indefinite thing with no name, that was worse” (Atwood 70). She originally fears otherness because she connects it to predators but more importantly to the “indefinite.” Indefiniteness resists definition and creates an ambiguity that threatens the flimsy order she has surrounded herself with in the form of her myth. In breaking down her already fractured identity, the narrator opens up to “shattering the ego and ideas of species superiority and privilege. This means recognizing animals as other intelligent beings” (Metzger 361). Hence, she embraces the ambiguity and the otherness that exists inside and around her.

The narrator’s deconstruction of her mythic identity provides an opening for her to become interconnected with the life cycles, other animals, and the “animal” part of herself. First, she has sex with Joe in order to replace her lost child and in doing so, she “can feel [her] lost child surfacing within [her], forgiving [her]” (Atwood 165). The forgiveness presented here is important because it allows the narrator to face and overcome the guilt she feels over her abortion (this guilt being a major reason for creating her mythic life). Moving past this remorse

can only occur when the narrator *acknowledges* it and no longer hides from it. According to the narrator, her future child will be another being entirely, one covered with “shining fur” (Atwood 165). She claims that she “will never teach it words” (Atwood 165), further rejecting the dominance and limitations of language. In this experience, she regains her power as a mother and creator of life, stating, “This time [she] would do it by [her]self...The baby will slip out...and [she’ll] lick it off and bite the cord, the blood returning to the ground where it belongs” (Atwood 165). This statement shows her entrance into the natural realm, a place where life cycles exist with no separation between humans and the earth. The being growing inside of the narrator allows her to experience a physical transformation that connects her to both the environment and the animal: “My body also changes, the creature in me, plant-animal, sends filaments in me” (Atwood 172). Her identity thus becomes based on changeability that relates to Derrida’s definition of *différance*. Grosz presents Derrida’s *différance* as “the irreducible movement of self-transformations that defies identity confinement, definition, or control; the endless possibilities of the world rewriting itself” (91). The narrator’s power in her transformations comes from her own indefiniteness; she recreates herself, flitting from one identity to another, and refuses to settle into any one constricting definition.

To become open to new forms of discourse that allow her to hold a communion with the ambiguous state, the narrator destroys the materialistic, socially constructed human objects that restrict her. The new intercourse the narrator seeks is similar to what Hogan describes as “...a language, an opening between species, where something [is] spoken and communicated, not by words as we think of them, but by feel[ing], by body, by pure life” (18). To be receptive to this communication, the narrator violently rejects humanity in favor of the natural world and animal self. She destroys the materials in her home, turns away the mirror so “it no longer traps [her]”

(Atwood 181), and burns restrictive human language, “[she] rip[s] one page from each of the books...to burn through all the words would take too long” (Atwood 182). Furthermore, she damages past pictures of herself and the film that entraps Anna, “The film coils in the sand...hundreds of tiny naked Annas no longer bottled and shelved” (Atwood 170). This destruction of images associates cameras with “symbols of the split self and alienation presumably because they falsely capture people in an objectified, hence distorted form” (Özdemir 70). The burning of the pictures frees the bits of the narrator’s self that confines her to being one particular thing just as the turning away of the mirror breaks away from the patriarchal construction of narcissistic beauty as core to feminine identity. Moreover, the cabin becomes a cage, a place that denies her power, and she escapes to the outdoors (Atwood 183). Such a deconstruction of human order brings to mind Cixous’s description of women who choose not to be restricted by patriarchal society: “They go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down” (357). The narrator discards the whole system of hierarchy through her rejection of the human and of narcissistic identity by becoming an ambiguous being that resists interpretation. Instead, she loosely identifies herself as an animal, exemplified by her belief that she can grow fur (Atwood 182), and her choice to live outdoors where she “leave[s] [her] dung, droppings on the ground and kick the earth over. All animals with dens do that” (Atwood 183).

The relationship the narrator begins to form with the natural world goes beyond simply recognizing the other; she opens herself up to the possibility of being a relational self, interacting with a world such as the one Bennett presents: “In the world of vibrant matter, it is thus not enough to say that we are ‘embodied.’ We are, rather, *an array of bodies*, many different kinds

of them in a nested set of microbiomes” (italics in original 112-13). Bennett’s notion of multiplicitous identity closely associates with the idea of “becoming” that Deleuze and Guattari discuss: “A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity” (239). Becoming open to multiplicity allows the narrator to experience a positive type of vulnerability on an emotional and physical level, permitting a reconnection between her mind and body through interactions with the natural environment. She begins to change, experiencing types of becoming that “undo set normative patterns and rigid ways of thinking and feeling [to form] novel modes of living in their stead” (Gilson 139).

Emotionally, the narrator’s transformation or acceptance of herself as animal is part of a healing process that as an isolated ego/alienated human being she could not obtain. Stibbe discusses how connecting with nature can be a healing process, stating, “Learning to listen again is important not only to relieving the suffering of animals, but also for relieving the psychological damage that is occurring in technological societies as humans become isolated from each other, from other animals, and from nature” (63). Atwood’s narrator experiences this healing by opening up to animals and the environment, wordlessly communicating with, “A light wind, the small waves talking against the shore, multilingual water” (Atwood 184). When she dives into this water she is symbolically baptized, emerging as a different individual: “When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface, a cloth decoy” (Atwood 183). The use of the term “multilingual” to describe the water suggests a conversation that comes from a multitude of angles that the narrator recognizes through her listening state; in paying attention, she forms a “greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans” (Bennett 112) and the interrelationships between them.

The narrator heals by being open to these new forms of communication, and she feels herself physically transform into other beings, opening up especially to the frog and the trees. In observing the frog, she feels that it “includes [her], it shines, nothing moves but its throat breathing” (Atwood 185). The narrator intimately connects to the frog and notes it with immense detail; by viewing the frog in such close proximity, she feels included and part of an entity outside of humanity. She continues to form new relations and thus feels herself transform away from and back to herself as an animal. For example, open to sensuous and continuous transformations, she becomes a tree:

The forest leaps upward, enormous, the way it was before they cut it, columns of sunlight frozen, the boulders float, melt, everything is made of water, even the rocks. In one of the languages there are no nouns, only verbs held for a longer moment. The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word. I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning.
(Atwood 187)

Through this transformation, the narrator’s body becomes one of the “living bodies” that Abram describes as “not [locked] up [in] awareness within the density of a closed and bounded object...[but] open and indeterminate; more like membranes than barriers, they [living bodies] define a surface of metamorphosis and exchange” (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 46). The above description of everything melting and becoming water suggests the fluidity and openness to multiplicity during her transformative experience. The narrator transforms again: “I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place” (Atwood 187). As an animal, a tree, and a place, the narrator is openly receptive to her surrounding environment and new languages that allow difference to prevail over sameness. Such relationships fill her with life, replacing the death she has carried with her since the

abortion (Kolodny 32). She finds a power in herself that, unlike the power in human society, is not destructive because of her newfound awareness that bridges the gap between herself and the environment. Thus, the narrator's experiences as different entities cause a loss of restrictive, human categorizations in the wake of a creative, deconstructive power.

While several critics perceive the narrator's transformations as a descent into madness, I would argue that they are her method of healing and dealing with a restrictive civilization. Susan Schaeffer questions the narrator's sanity, writing in "It is Time that Separates Us: Margaret Atwood's 'Surfacing'" that "From the moment [the narrator] decides she must become an animal, she is insane" (326). However, the narrator presents an awareness of what the humans hunting her might think: "They can't be trusted. They'll mistake me for a human being, a naked woman wrapped in a blanket: possibly that's what they've come here for, if it's running around loose, ownerless, why not take it" (Atwood 189). This imagery is similar to the treatment of a stray animal (or a woman without a patriarch). She knows the stereotypical definition they will place upon her is insanity; hence, she cannot be caught out of the fear of what they would do to her: "That's the danger now, the hospital or the zoo... They would never believe it's only a natural woman, state of nature" (Atwood 196). Ward helps develop this conversation about the narrator's madness: "If the reversion of the narrator in *Surfacing* to a quasi-animal state is to be thought of as madness, then it may be that some kinds of madness are approaches to sanity in a society which resolutely defines its own sickness as a norm" (96). In other words, the perception of madness in the narrator can be seen as a sane response when compared to the madness of the culture as a whole (Özdemir 71). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, humans, according to the narrator, are machine-like monsters; she fears them, and "can smell them and the scent brings nausea, it's stale air, bus stations and nicotine smoke mouths lined with soiled plush, acid taste of

copper wiring or money” (Atwood 190). These humans are completely separate from the natural world and she knows they will negatively take control of the vulnerability she allows herself to feel in her relationship with the environment (Gilson 139). Interestingly, the narrator’s choices are connected with N. Fairclough’s discussion of common sense: “If one becomes aware that a particular aspect of common sense is sustaining power inequalities at one’s own expense, it ceases to be common sense, and may cease to have the capacity to sustain power inequalities” (qtd. in Stibbe 22). For the narrator, destructive power comes from the dominant, self-appointed placement of patriarchal humanity. It is a power that works to limit her. Thus, she discards the so called “common sense” of humanity by entering into the animal state; in doing so, she rejects male-dominated, “rational” hierarchy and praises the natural world, the female, and the ambiguous (Wisker 24).

V. The Protagonist’s Utilization of Malign Myths During her Transformation

Despite the numerous benefits incorporated in the narrator’s deconstruction of her own biographical myths as well as those of a patriarchal society that promotes separation from nature, her attempts to create new myths capable of overcoming isolation engage in politically problematic appropriations of “otherness” that ironically bolster a racist ideology. The following analysis will show why the myths she utilizes are problematic, especially the ones that draw upon native cultures and primitivist ideals. The narrator attempts to appropriate Native American beliefs of the natural world when she relies on cave drawings and nature gods as sources of power and guidance during her transformation. This reliance, as well as her rejection of society, connects to primitivism or “the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world [is] a return to simpler, more primitive living” (Cronon 13).

The use of primitivism is problematic because it creates a type of mythic escapism that valorizes the wilderness as pure and degrades civilization as tainted. Such a limited perspective strengthens the binary between wilderness and civilization and they ultimately remain separated at the end of this novel. According to Kathryn Spanckeren in “Shamanism in the Works of Margaret Atwood,” the narrator experiences a primitive, “spiritual” journey to a new understanding through Native American beliefs (183). The issue with this is that she defines and uses Native American practices for her own purposes: “The Indians did not own salvation but they had once known where it lived and their signs marked the sacred places, the places where you could learn the truth” (Atwood 146). This statement shows how the narrator utilizes ancient cave drawings in her attempts to discover “true vision” (Atwood 146) or the truth about herself. Her reflection about native peoples “not own[ing] salvation” is the narrator’s way of noting that the specific term “salvation” derives from Christianity and the belief in deliverance and not from Native American tradition—she herself is not religious but interested in finding the “truth” that can be found in the sacred places of Native Americans (Atwood 146). In order to find this truth, the narrator places meanings on the cave paintings that guide and aid her through her transformation. This projection of meaning is clearly seen in the following passage: “I had to read [the drawings’] new meaning with the help of the power” (Atwood 159). The “power” here comes from the “nature gods” the narrator constructs to help lead her through her transformation.

Similar to the frontier myth, the narrator’s use of primitivism erases both a history of violence perpetuated by Europeans upon Native Americans as well as the specificity of difference in native cultures (and their dynamism) in order to place her own definitions on the cave drawings. The issue with this is that the narrator is mythologizing native cultures as monolithic, archaic, and static without recognizing change. Fiamengo analyzes this erasure of

native history in *Surfacing*, stating, “Native people are conveniently unnecessary (in fact, are a hindrance) to the narrator’s appropriation of a timeless Native essence, and thus the narrator’s sudden acknowledgment of Native gods depends...on the absence of Native people” (156). In other words, the narrator’s connection with the cave drawings and imagined “nature gods” removes contemporary Native Americans from the area. Her primitive escapism is thus repeating a past history of clearing away Native American culture in favor of her own transformative experience (Fiamengo 156). The narrator notes the absence of Native Americans in her memory as a child, stating,

There weren’t many of them on the lake even then, the government had put them somewhere else, corralled them, but there was one family left. Every year they would appear on the lake in blueberry season...condensing as though from the air...faces neutral and distanced, but when they saw that we were picking they would move on...It never occurred to me till now that they must have hated us. (Atwood 85-6)

This quotation shows the Native Americans being “corralled” by the government and also positions them as almost mythic themselves in their sudden appearance “as though from air.” The hatred the narrator takes note of reveals the tensions between Native Americans and settlers, a tension unrecognized during the narrator’s childhood and during her transformation. The narrator uses these pictographs and the power of the nature gods to lead her to metamorphosis and self-identification through the acknowledgment of her dead parents (Spanckeren 152). In doing so, she recreates a myth similar to primitivism in which her truth can only be discovered through her limited perceptions of Native American ritual and practice within the natural realm. Problematically, this false “Native subjectivity is itself a form of denial” (Fiamengo 157) that

entraps the narrator and hinders her re-entrance into society, largely due to the upkeep of the wilderness and civilization binary.

Throughout her transformation, the narrator also draws upon mythic elements that support a feminized version of the earth and which construct her parents as powerful archetypes; these myths are less dangerous than the primitivist ideals discussed above because she ultimately “humanizes” her parents rather than maintaining their mythic qualities. However, their roles serve to separate wilderness from civilization and her mother’s archetype particularly idealizes wilderness in a problematic manner. In the environment, the narrator discovers a power existing outside of humanity, one that she sometimes fears. The power comes from the “gods” that exist in the natural surroundings (discussed above), as seen when the narrator states, “I know they [the gods] have gone finally, back into the earth, the air, the water” (Atwood 194). Her fear comes from the vulnerability she feels, but the power does not position her in a victimized role. Rather, she interacts with the power, largely because she personifies it into the forms of her dead parents. While her father represents rationality, seen through his scholarly writings about the cave drawings that “breathed reason” (Atwood 103), her mother is undeniably associated with the natural world and holds a Mother Nature or Demeter-like role (Grace 38).

In a Mother Nature role, the narrator’s mother exists within the cycles of birth and death. The narrator believes that her mother possesses the power of these cycles, originating from the memory of her mother saving her brother from drowning (Atwood 28). This incident, along with the mother’s affinity with nature, leads the narrator to mythologize her. Through this mystification, the narrator reflects on the cycles that she herself is part of. Particularly, she connects back to the dead heron, stating, “I remember the heron; by now it will be insects, frogs, fish, other herons. My body also changes, the creature in me, plant-animal, sends out filaments in

me...I multiply” (Atwood 172). Such a statement show the continuity of life even after death, and the narrator reflects on this ever-transforming cycle by seeing her unborn “plant-animal” baby as the embodiment of this multiplicity. In this manner, the narrator sees her mother, her unborn child, and the natural world as one. The narrator idealizes the wilderness setting through her mother’s embodiment of goodness that “prohibit[s] cruelty” against others (Atwood 132), contrasting with the violence the narrator positions with humans (such as the doctors exploiting her mother’s body as a specimen). Thus, the narrator upholds the wilderness/civilization binary by representing her mother as “pure” nature and civilization as “tainted” and violent.

While primitivism problematically remains a myth in the narrator’s life, she does break down the mythic versions of her parents. Part of the narrator’s experience of becoming involves letting go of the ghosts of her parents and allowing herself to see them as just humans: “They dwindle, grow, become what they were, human. Something I never gave them credit for. But their totalitarian innocence was my own” (Atwood 196). This quotation is important because it shows the narrator’s recognition that she placed her parents outside of the capacity of human error by making them god-like. Removing that “innocence” from her parents helps the narrator to recognize her own capacity for violence. This violent capacity is further seen when the narrator comes in contact with what she at first thinks is her father but then realizes it is not. She describes the creature in the following manner:

I’m not frightened, it’s too dangerous for me to be frightened of it; it gazes at me for a time with its yellow eyes, wolf’s eyes, depthless but lambent as the eyes of animals see at night in the car headlights. Reflectors. It does not approve or disapprove of me, it tells me it has nothing to tell me, only the fact of itself. (Atwood 193)

The figure the narrator describes is monstrous, powerful, and suggestively has a predatory nature (“wolf’s eyes”). The important connection comes when the narrator goes to where it was standing after it disappears. She describes the following observation: “When I go to the fence the footprints are there, side by side in the mud. My breath quickens, it was true, I saw it. But the prints are too small, they have toes; I place my feet in them and find that they are my own” (Atwood 193). This moment is one of self-recognition—the creature, “too dangerous” to be frightened of, is actually herself. She can no longer deny her power or her ability to be violent.

By the end of her transformation, the narrator at some level seems to recognize the danger of engaging with mythic representations (seen through her demystification of her parents), but she also remains unconscious to certain malign myths that she uses. This newfound awareness of myth in her life is reflected in her description of the jumping fish:

From the lake a fish jumps. An idea of a fish jumps. A fish jumps, carved wooden fish with dots painted on the sides, no, antlered fish thing drawn in red on cliffstone, protecting spirit. It hangs in the air suspended, flesh turned to icon, he has changed again, returned to the water...I watch it for an hour or so; then it drops and softens, the circles widen, it becomes an ordinary fish again. (Atwood 193)

This ambiguous passage shows movement from the real into the imaginative realm and then a final return to quotidian experience. The narrator observes the fish and it becomes an “idea” that connects back to the “protecting spirit” of a cave painting. This concept of “flesh turned to icon” and back to “an ordinary fish” reflects a transformation in itself—one that shows how humanity can mythologize and change reality into representations to suit certain needs. It appears that the jumping fish allows the narrator to perceive some of her own iconic creations in her attempts to find herself. Importantly, the jumping fish passage in the novel lies just above her realization

that the footprints are her own; hence, the myth that is being demystified is herself as an innocent victim rather than her problematic embracement of native cultures and frontier ideals. Therefore, while the narrator's mythmaking during her transformation supports a creative release from her initial lifestyle, it also serves as a problem, especially when she draws upon primitivism in an unconscious manner. In failing to consciously recognize her problematic utilization of the primitive notions of wilderness, she does not obtain a means of positively re-entering into the dominant culture. Instead, she separates "healing," pure nature she associates with primal cultures from modernity's corrupt, civilized world.

VI. Potentially Problematic Social Reintegration and Reconstructing (Violent) Separations

The narrator's debunking of myths and (simultaneous) reliance on them in her transformative experience leads to an ending that, while ambiguous, remains problematic in terms of her potential return to society. One particular area of concern is the narrator's continued failure to conceive positive ways to negotiate power dynamics within her society. This failure manifests in two ways: first, her dogmatic renunciation of "victimhood" and second in her displacement of misanthropic violence that helps maintain the binary between wilderness and civilization. The narrator's complete renunciation of victimhood becomes an issue at the end of this novel largely because of its idealized nature. She emerges from her transformation "refus[ing] to be a victim" (Atwood 197) and states the following: "Unless I can do that [refuse victimization] I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone" (Atwood 197). In "Margaret Atwood: Beyond Victimhood," Marge Piercy studies victimization in Atwood's works, stating, "To cease to be a victim, each of her protagonists fights an entirely solitary battle... Yet they must live

among others. Somehow the next step is missing. I don't believe that one woman can single-handedly leave off being a victim: power exists and some have it" (44). This quotation connects to the narrator in *Surfacing* because it reflects the issue of her "single-handedly" refusing victimization. Such a rejection of victimhood problematizes her reintegration into a society that remains unequal. Societal inequality suggests an inability to avoid victimization entirely, calling attention to her "Unless I can do that I can do nothing" statement from above. Such a comment suggests that "do or die" mentality that the narrator exhibits and falsely suggests that all solutions to the problem of victimization are in the control of the victimized classes. Whether the narrator chooses to stay or go back to humanity remains ambiguous. Joe becomes a motivator that pushes her in the directions of wanting to stay in or leave the wilderness. She presents him as a type of mediator, "offering [her] something: captivity in any of its forms, a new freedom?" (Atwood 198). This type of freedom provides another potential means of being a relational self. She observes Joe as "only half formed, and for that reason [she] can trust him. To trust is to let go. [She] tense[s] forward, towards the demands and questions, though [her] feet do not move yet" (Atwood 198). Such a comment suggests that she will join Joe because she places trust in his "half formed" qualities that remain outside of patriarchal normativity, such as his own vulnerability. While a possible relationship of equals is suggested between Joe and the narrator, an alternative interpretation would be to perceive the narrator as working her power over the "half formed" Joe. This would place him in a vulnerable role that might fall into victimhood, especially if the narrator rejects any possibility that she could be a victim unless she "wills" this fate.

Another issue is that the novel ends with the narrator maintaining the misanthropic idea that power in the hands of humanity always leads to violence. The narrator still perceives homo

sapiens in a negative manner and feels a sense of duty to watch them: “Then back to the city and the pervasive menace... They [humans] exist, they’re advancing, they must be dealt with, but possibly they can be watched and predicted and stopped without being copied” (Atwood 195). This quotation is disconcerting because the narrator still perceives humans as menacing and wants to stop them without presenting a means of doing so. Disturbingly, earlier in the novel the narrator wishes she had “a button [she] could press that would evaporate them [humans] without disturbing anything else, that way there would be more room for the animals” (Atwood 155). The narrator’s perceived powerlessness at the beginning of the novel leads to this repressed rage and misanthropic fantasies directed at all of humanity; such violent thoughts still exist at the end of this novel. If such a button existed, it would be extremely violent as a tool of mass extermination, and would “reveal[-] that attempts to rid the world of abusive power can so easily slide into a terrorism that replicates that power’s very logic” (McKay 222). In this sense, the narrator does not see power as existing without violence, making her newly accepted power dangerous. Such a statement also reflects on the narrator’s incapacity to actively negotiate power and violence in her own life as she perceives herself on the outside, referring to humanity as “them.” Similarly, her statement at the end of the novel, “They exist, they’re advancing...” uses the term “they,” maintaining her separation from humanity.

Cronon critiques these misanthropic wilderness ideologies that see the mere presence of humans in wilderness as destructive (19). He states that a misanthropic notion is unproductive, existing as “a self-defeating counsel of despair” (19) that does not serve any useful solution because it suggests, “the only way to protect sacred wilderness from profane humanity, would seem to be suicide. It is not a proposition that seems likely to produce very positive or practical results” (19). The narrator actively separates “profane” humanity from “sacred” wilderness

while maintaining her belief that violence and power go hand in hand. She fears “copying” humanity and becoming like them, connecting to the virus imagery she uses earlier to describe the “American” hunters who killed the heron: “they’re what’s in store for us, what we are turning into. They spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells” (Atwood 130). Humanity as virus-like, dangerous, and violent all feed into the misanthropic fantasies of the narrator, making her potentially destructive. Even the narrator’s transformation exhibits these destructive tendencies because she attempts to obliterate all things human in the cabin; this is problematic because she herself is human and seeking to deny such a link opens the way for violence against what she “others” (namely, her human side). The narrator’s failure to adequately address her own misanthropy (even at the end of her story) runs the risk of *mythologizing* modern humanity as irrevocably destructive towards the natural world; this leaves little room for the creation of a co-existing lifestyle that does not revolve around violence and the destruction of the other.

The narrator fails to conceive power as a positive or affirmative alternative to patriarchy, instead only seeing the violence associated with it. This failure is another obstacle to the narrator’s “positive” reintegration into society, leaving behind bitterness and a reconstruction of binaries. She states how originally she, “was not prepared for the average, its needless cruelties and lies. [Her] brother saw the danger early. To immerse oneself, join in the war, or to be destroyed. Though there ought to be other choices” (Atwood 195). This passage is interesting. While the narrator now has the ability to choose she still only recognizes two options—to be powerful and join “the war” (human existence) or be demolished by that “average” human power. She realizes that “withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death” (Atwood 197), choosing to live with the acceptance of her power and therefore her capacity to

harm others. She appears willing to take part in “the war” but as a pessimistic outsider existing in her individual self-empowered state that separates her from active (and potentially positive) integration with society where power can possibly lead to change without falling into violence. Furthermore, her choice to take part in “the war” is attached to her unborn baby that may or may not exist: “I can’t know yet, it’s too early. But I assume it: if I die it dies, if I starve it starves with me...it must be born, allowed” (Atwood 198). The narrator’s life therefore connects to this potential child, making one wonder if she will become self-destructive if it does not exist.

But why does the narrator see no other options besides joining “the war” or being destroyed? Within her transformative state, the narrator experiences a type of power based on multiplicity and interaction rather than destruction; similarly, she experiences vulnerability in a manner that does not place her in the role of the victim. Positioning the narrator to choose between embracing destruction or being destroyed herself reactivates that power-violence association; it makes the transformative process a healing experience but also a type of mythic escapism similar to her initial lifestyle. Fiamengo builds on this issue, stating that her “[p]ersonal transformation does nothing to alter the relations of domination that structure our lives...for the future to which the narrator returns promises only marginal change and potentially renewed isolation from the horror of the world” (158). The hope in the novel’s ending lies in its ambiguity. The fact that the narrator has a choice and *wants* other options leaves some room for an existence beyond the perspective of humanity being hardwired for destructive tendencies—but not much. The major issues exist in the primitivist myth she embraces as a form of escapism and her misanthropic fantasies that separate human violence from the “pure” environment. The narrator’s negotiation of this violence, particularly through the fairy tale element of metamorphosis, is therefore flawed; it creates a nondestructive, co-existent relationship between

humanity and the natural world that can only exist within a wilderness setting, “fail[ing] precisely because it...entails a rejection of human community” (McKay 222). I would therefore argue that while the ending and the narrator’s ultimate choice is ambiguous, by maintaining her misanthropic perspective and unconsciously supporting the myth that humans are wired for violence, her relational self exists only within an idealized realm of nature uncontaminated by other humans. In this manner, humanity and its violent potential is abjectly othered by the narrator, once again creating a dangerous separation from the natural world.

The notions of transformation in *Surfacing* are ambiguous and deconstructive. The narrator removes the skin of societal definitions in favor of animal-becoming. Her transformations place importance on the body and emotions over logic while at the same time working to destroy mind and body dualism. In returning to her human state there is hope that the narrator’s body is now whole and the humanist means of separating the body from the mind are defeated. However, the ending also presents a return to a mode of thinking that promotes violence and suggests the unattainability of a nondestructive existence between humans and the natural world. The narrator’s relational self is therefore threatened by her incapacity to separate power and violence, which in turn reveals that the protagonist’s negotiation of violence in relation to identity as problematic. In this manner, the process of mythmaking is potentially dangerous, especially when the myths created are done so at an unconscious level. *Surfacing* therefore reflects a cautious outlook on the mythmaking approach.

Despite this, the transformations themselves show the importance of openness towards various modes of being, including recognizing the other that has been restricted and pushed away because of its ambiguity. Butler develops this point well,

The task is to refigure this necessary ‘outside’ as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability. (*Bodies that Matter* 53)

The outside, or the ambiguous, is a place of creativity and imagination. It allows for transformations to occur, ones that exist outside of the realm of order and the justified logic of domination that serves to restrict the body, the environment, and society into dualistic notions that place meanings on those who cannot be identified in such simplistic terms. The movement away from such limitations leads to an “unsettling [of] ‘matter’ [that] can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter” (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 30). *Surfacing* exhibits the destruction of the human/animal binary in favor of recognizing interconnectivity and difference as positive fields of invention. Bennett speaks in favor of this engagement with diversity: “Give up the futile attempt to disentangle the human from the nonhuman. Seek instead to engage more civilly, strategically, and subtly with the nonhumans in the assemblages in which you, too, participate” (116). The self is built on relationships and therefore experiences constant changes through each new encounter, demonstrating the fluidity of the self. Rather than engaging in sameness, *Surfacing* suggests the importance of being open to the unfamiliar. Atwood’s writing creates an ambiguous realm of uncertainty where the imagination runs into various complications and expands beyond structure; her writing invigorates a language that can be restrictive but also alive with changing perceptions.

Conclusion

Encountering Ambiguity and Encouraging Difference

Analyzing the role of myths and fairy tales in Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" and Atwood's *Surfacing* opens up an *awareness* to societal restrictions that seek to separate the self from the other, the human from the animal, and the male from the female. There is a need to recognize how certain social myths and norms in Western culture are limiting in the way they reject difference, define value, and negate otherness. In becoming conscious of these myths, one can potentially break them down or recreate them to better fit a more ecocentric sense of living—a living based on care rather than violence and multiplicity rather than singularity. Focusing on the role of mythmaking (in literature and in society) provides another means of interpreting the various relationships humans (can) have with the environment. Similarly, studying female-animal transformations through the theoretical lenses of post-structuralism, postmodernism, animal studies, and various types of feminism (particularly ecofeminism) encourages a more diverse understanding of the interconnections that exist in the world. My research reflects how oppressive frameworks can be broken down through the engagement in mythmaking and transformative processes that lead to a self more situated in fluidity rather than stagnation. These two authors' literary works reflect an innovative creativity that seeks to evaluate, deconstruct, and reconstruct relationships based on interactions with the more-than-human realm.

Carter and Atwood use mythmaking and fairy tales in different ways that show an impressive array of interpretations on how myths can impact people's lives and identities. Carter states, "I never believe that I'm writing about the search for self. I've never felt that the self is like a mythical beast which has to be trapped and returned so you can be whole again" (qtd. in Gamble 10). Carter's words act as freeing agents for the self; she acknowledges that her writing does not attempt to discover, reclaim, or provide an exact definition of a person's being. To "be

whole again” through an ultimate discovery of the self becomes restrictive and limiting in its singularity. Carter recognizes a world of diversity and continuous interaction, a world made up of constant alterations to the self through relationships. This recognition promotes multiplicity and joins in the celebration of creativity. Her writing displays the promise of how active engagement in mythmaking can lead to a fluid self that exists in equality. Atwood’s work similarly reflects on the freedom that can come from demythologizing certain myths in life and taking part in mythopoeic creations. At the same time, *Surfacing* reflects the danger of unconscious mythmaking that can re-form binaries based on hatred. This hatred is seen at the end of the novel where the narrator perceives civilization as corrupt and thus threatens her “positive” re-entrance into society. The use of myth becomes a major difference between these two authors, with Atwood’s more cautionary approach contrasting with Carter’s post-structuralist approach that seeks to break down (and at times destroy) all boundaries in a celebratory manner.

Studying human-animal transformations in Carter and Atwood provides a further understanding of the detrimental separation between humanity and the natural world, particularly with the animal. Analyzing these transformations reveals the interconnections that exist between the human and the animal and how certain binaries create barriers to prevent these connections. Limiting these potential relationships connects to what Everndon describes as “sever[ing] the vocal cords” (17) of the earth, much like what is done to an animal in a lab: “He [the physiologist] was denying it [the animal] in that he was able to cut the vocal cords and then pretend that animal could feel no pain...the desperate cries of the animal would have told him what he already knew, that it *was* a sentient, feeling being” (Everndon 17). In this passage, Everndon acknowledges how humans can destroy such connections to the “sentient, feeling

being” out of guilt and a fear of association that blurs the boundary separating the human from the animal. The cutting of the vocal cords connects to the inferior positioning of animals based on their incapacity to speak the human language. Such oppression of animals directly connects to the subjugation of other human beings associated with animals in derogatory and discriminating ways. In particular, female-animal transformations seek to deconstruct the separation between the human and the animal while breaking down other binaries upheld by patriarchal frameworks of Western society, such as the rational/irrational, the mind/body, the aggressor/victim, and the male/female. The experience of metamorphosis encourages a movement away from dualistic thinking and towards the embracement of diverse relationships based on alterity, creativity, and the establishment of a fluid self. Furthermore, these transformations reveal the importance of listening and being open to different modes of language based on feelings and reflections more than words.

Through the creation and development of this thesis, I have encountered numerous questions, ideas, and reflections that can serve as foundations for further analysis if future opportunities of study present themselves. I would like to go into further detail in both of my chapters on how various religious beliefs can oppress women and animals and how such beliefs impact patriarchal societal norms; it would be interesting to study how various creation myths, such as Genesis and the fall from Eden, connect to “The Tiger’s Bride” and *Surfacing*. Furthermore, I wish to extend my research to encompass other works by Carter and Atwood. For Carter, I would welcome the chance to study her other retelling of “Beauty and the Beast” called “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon,” and how this story compares and contrasts with the “The Tiger’s Bride” in ideas on relational selves, subordination, and animality. Carter’s other fairy tales about werewolves, such as “The Company of Wolves,” “The Werewolf,” and “Wolf-Alice,” also

connect to female-animal transformations, and would be a great extension for my project in terms of understanding how Carter mediates violence in her fairy tales. Furthermore, studying how contemporary society presents these fairy tales in movies, television shows, and other literary works might be an interesting way of reflecting the influence these stories continue to have on people's lives and in their imaginations.

In regards to expanding my research on Atwood, I would be drawn to her other works that study the blurred binary between humans and animals, such as the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy. In particular, these books contain interesting passages on science in relation to animals and women, and also the threat to human language in an (post) apocalyptic setting brought on by humanity. The danger of viewing humanity as the "superior" controller, especially in terms of science, would also add more depth to my thesis as a whole in relation to the research done by Lynda Birke and Lorne Everndon. Moreover, *Oryx and Crake* also reflects on the stories of creation and ideas on God, connecting to my wish to expand on how religion influences societal norms and vice versa. Another one of Atwood's novels, *The Robber Bride*, might also be interesting to study in terms of reverse gender victimization and violence; this novel also is a retelling of the fairy tale, "The Robber Bridegroom," which would allow me to analyze how Atwood uses a whole fairy tale (rather than just elements of the fairy tale) and how that compares to Carter's use of fairy tales.

I would also appreciate the chance to extend my research to other authors who utilize human-animal transformations and myths in unique ways. In particular, from when I first started this project I was interested in the contemporary Native American author Linda Hogan and how she represents the relationship between humans, animals, and the environment in her works. In particular, Hogan's novel *Power* and her book of poetry, *Rounding the Human Corners*, drew

my attention because they both reflect how the interconnections between humans and animals require respect. *Power* takes place in contemporary society and the narrator is a young Native American woman; this would add another dimension to my conversation concerning the narrator in *Surfacing* and how she problematically views native cultures as archaic. Studying Hogan's works would therefore provide an alternative to the Eurocentric perspectives in Carter and Atwood's texts. Two other ways of expanding my research would be to analyze other non-Western writers in relation to human-animal transformations and also to study in depth how other groups of people are derogatorily connected to animality. These two topics of expansion would allow me to gain a more holistic perspective on my research, but I also believe that they can stand as separate projects entirely from my current thesis.

One of the major questions I came across throughout my research was the following: but what if the abject "other" encompasses truly negative qualities that impede positive, fulfilling relationships? I feel that this question could raise criticism and would lead to further research analysis. Working largely with the ambiguous realm in analyzing the writing of Carter and Atwood, my conversation resists distinct definitions and remains open to interpretation with the recognition that everyone has different experiences and opinions. The positive strength of difference existing in ambiguity and the creativity that can expand from it is something I attempt to articulate throughout this project. However, I found myself wondering about the abject other and recognizing that ambiguity can also contain negatively violent and destructive tendencies that could not possibly lead to positive relationships. Kristeva notes how abjection rejects order, connecting it to "The in-between, the ambiguous, [and] the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, [and] the shameless rapist. The killer who claims to be a savior...Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law" (4). The above

examples Kristeva gives provides an understanding of why abjection and the ambiguous other might be feared and avoided. In her example, the law exists in order and sameness, while criminal actions can be considered “other” (criminals have also been connected to animals in the past through studies in mental degeneration). Thus lines appear, boundaries of morality that each person contains; it was hard for me at times to find a way to express the celebration of ambiguity while recognizing the darkness that can lie in it as well. This problem came up in Carter’s chapter with the discussion on vulnerability and how, while Gilson promotes a positive vulnerability, it is important to recognize the existence of a negative vulnerability that oppresses and promotes violence. I took solace in the fact that analyzing ambiguity meant that I did not need all the answers, but I still needed to find a way of handling this quandary that existed in relation to my own moral ideas.

In an attempt to answer this question, I found myself reflecting on the abject other as something that could be internal as well external. For example, the fear of being associated with the animal could be seen as an internal struggle. I focused particularly on the concepts of otherness that extend from oppressive binaries, such as the placement of animals, the environment, and women in the realm of the other. Value hierarchies also became important to my analysis in the way they are used to elevate some and devalue others. By limiting what I analyzed as the other, I was able to focus my analysis and comment on how relationships can be restricted due to separations. Such separations, particularly between the self and the other, can potentially be crossed to limit degradation. This idea of crossing is seen in my analysis of human-animal transformations that attempts to reveal the blurring binary between humans and animals; it also reflects upon the potential goodness that can come from recognizing these similarities (between humans and animals) because it encourages more diverse thinking.

Interestingly, while I critique the restrictive sameness social hierarchies put in place, I am also using similarities to reach across the gulf between humans and animals. This in itself would be another question to answer with further research: how can similarities be both positive and negative in understanding relationships?

I am not saying that all oppressions can be solved by breaking down or reaching across restrictive boundaries—doing so would not be recognizing the diversity of world cultures, people, and the complexity of frameworks and structures that hold power over others. However, I do believe that acknowledging the existence of all types of otherness (even the negative) is important to interacting with the world. For example, choosing to be blind to or to censor a country's historical violence, such as the ill treatment of Native Americans, cannot lead to caring perceptions, open communication, or reparation. Not understanding the history or the creation of oppressions can lead to the maintenance of these suppressions or the danger of a repeat offense. This danger also extends to environmental crises that occur repeatedly through the continuance of human practices that are harmful to both humans and the natural world with fear, attempts to avoid guilt, and greed leading to limited viable solutions. There needs to be an acknowledgement of what is othered and/or ignored in order to recognize and begin to understand why certain groups of people, the natural world, and the individual self can be oppressed by what is deemed “the norm.” There is a hope that through this acknowledgement, stronger relationships and creative solutions can form. As Abram states, “Some of the most versatile ideas are entirely multiple, embodied by a thousand humming lives lofting and veering in concert” (*Becoming Animal* 118). Interconnectivity, whether visible or not, exists. Being interconnected with the past, the present, and the future, as well as the natural world, makes it necessary to protect and appreciate what we depend on in living our lives.

My thesis therefore shows on a small scale how the recognition of oppression/censorship can help lead to the formation of relational selves that do not exist in isolation (and the problems that arise from remaining in a static state). At a large scale, these ideas can be the basis of further analysis related to (non-academic) social and environmental oppressions. These ideas can show how openness and outreach can actively inform and battle against subordination and degradation (particularly in the ill treatment of animals and women). In this sense, the relational selves that seek to “develop a more complex and sophisticated understanding of the ways in which natural forces, both living and nonliving, frame, enrich, and complicate our understanding of the subject, its interior, and what the subject can know” (Grosz 86), become essential to these transformative projects that encourage participation. Grosz’s above statement reflects that knowledge can be continuous, definitions can be broken, and that alterity can be a positive, unique experience for all entities involved. Hence, life based on these interactions encourages a means of “apprehending the world” not as a “matter of construction but of engagement” (Ingold 35).

Overall, Carter and Atwood utilize language in an innovative, imaginative manner that deconstructs certain myths and reestablishes the importance of interrelationships. Both authors encourage new modes of thinking by operating in the realm of the ambiguous and often the abject to destabilize hierarchal structures. Writing becomes a method of reflecting upon relationships, and, according to Stibbe, “through this symbolic world [of writing]” people can “be reached initially and encouraged to enter into new relationships with the more-than-human world” (146). In this manner, the writings of Carter and Atwood take part in “a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between” (Cixous 353) that resist boundaries and take pleasure in knocking down

oppressive frameworks. The very ambiguity of “The Tiger’s Bride” and *Surfacing* resists definition and promotes inventive thought developed *through* ever-changing relationships between the self and the natural world. In this manner, a vibrant kaleidoscope of continuous interactions and exchanges, one that shifts with every transformative encounter, comes into being.

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