

The wolves in the woods: staging Carter's Gothic

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Angela Carter's fiction re-inflects many voices of Gothic literary tradition and draws upon subcultural and degraded forms, like pornography and pantomime (what Hutcheon has termed 'ex-centric' genres), in characteristically Gothic spirit. This lush terrain – marked also by Carter's wit, ironic self-consciousness and sense of play - has unsurprisingly proved appealing for dramatic adaptation. However, while recreating that Gothic iconography – castles, forests, incarcerated heroines – is relatively straightforward, in live performance especially it is harder to sustain qualities of the liminal, the fluidity of position that is equally important in her work. For where Carter's fiction *is* Gothic, I argue that it is so in a Radcliffean tradition (itself inspired by Burke's notion of the sublime) that favoured *terror* above *horror*: in 'On The Supernatural in Poetry' (1826), Radcliffe argued that while the bodily gore of simple horror annihilated the senses, the suggestive hints and suspense of terror awakened the faculties to 'a high degree of life'. Carter knew the power of obscurity; underlining the imaginative potency of radio drama, she emphasised that 'no werewolf make-up in the world can equal the werewolf you see in your mind's eye.'

Building on Radcliffe's argument, I argue that theatrical adaptation might effectively reinterpret Carter's Gothic, not through representational enactment, but by relocating qualities of uncertainty - and concomitant risk - onto the formal structures of the event itself. My central example is Burn the Curtain's *The Company of Wolves* (2015), a nighttime promenade performance in woodland which audiences join on either a Walker's or a Runner's ticket. This physically demanding show necessarily provokes a visceral as well as a contemplative response: the werewolf figuration at its heart implicitly invites participants to question the boundaries between urban and country, human and animal, regulation and liberation. I argue that this playful production effectively constructs a contemporary Gothic 'terror', literally through blood rush and by muddying the borders of the performance event.

Frances Babbage is Reader in Theatre and Performance at the University of Sheffield. She has published widely on the subject of theatricality within fiction, and adaptation of non-dramatic literature for performance. Her monograph *Re-Visioning Myth: Modern and Contemporary Drama by Women* (2011) examined the persistence of classical myths in women's drama and the potential for feminist theatrical reframing. Her next book, *Adaptation in Contemporary Theatre: Performing Literature*, will be published by Methuen in 2016.