Feminine Bits: The Passive Bodies and Active Revisions of *Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel,* and *Red Riding-hood*

by

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Abstract

Using an interdisciplinary approach that includes sociological data, feminist and postmodern theory, and historical context, I analyze gendered representations of violence and sexuality in contemporary fairy tales, arguing against woman's often-unconscious perpetuation of our own oppressive stereotypes, such as the victim, virgin, seductress, and witch. My study recounts the matrilineal roots of several folk tales with female protagonists – Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, and Red Riding-hood – and addresses the first recorded versions written by Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers. These character histories aid my analysis of the subsequent feminist revisionary narratives and verses. Each of the revisions I address, compared with the Grimm or Perrault referent, demonstrate a transvaulation of values for women. Revisionary narratives react to the preexisting, passive depictions of folk heroines in an attempt to change the way we view and understand women and their relationship to sex and violence. This article advocates for representations of women in situations of low-risk anger expression. My analyses also give specific consideration for whether feminism and heteronormative culture allow women a space to represent their anger and, if so, of what that space consists.

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Introduction

Contemporary fairy tales, which reinforce and deviate from their oral, folk ancestry, advance the discourse on women's sexual development and expression of aggression and violence. My discussion focuses on the varying depictions of female protagonists in revisionary fairy tales from the 1970s to present day. The following chapters identify a variety of folk heroines – Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, and Red Riding-hood – who are rendered in situations of violence and sex in contemporary tales, with an emphasis on how these representations differ from the first recorded fairy tales. An array of recent folk-infused poems, short stories, and novels respond to the nineteenth century "feminine ideal," which assumed separate spaces for each sex, public for men and private for women. This censorship of women's experience continues in contemporary culture, evidenced by a 2014 study[1] that revealed an increase in the underreporting of rape statistics in America. Such findings have led me to examine the messages that folk representations offer to women regarding their sexuality and aggression within a potentially oppressive context.

In more recent years, women have attempted to recover power through altering their perceived relationship to sex and violence, which is evidenced in the stereotype of the 1920s flapper, a woman who was represented as both sexual and independent. Second wave feminism arose in the 1960s to further subvert the feminine ideal by revealing the sexist power structure that limits women's space and experience. However, it was not until the 1990s that third wave feminists sought complete sexual liberation for women, which encouraged the acceptance of

[1] Yung, Corey Rayburn. "How to Lie with Rape Statistics: America's Hidden Rape Crisis." *Iowa Law Review* 99.3 (2014). Print.

lesbian experience and multiple sexual partners. In the Brothers Grimm and Perrault tales, both of which preceded the historical movement towards sexual equality, the heroine is always the recipient of violence, and never its agent. Contemporary revisions empower women by changing their relationship to sex and violence in complex and often contradictory ways. While many of these alterations are successful, some accomplish the opposite of their intended goal. Narratives that feature heroines who appropriate forms of sex and violence that are associated with male dominant discourse are less empowering than those that attempt to take a new stance entirely. By taking a less socially acceptable position, rather than representing female protagonists that merely enact conventional masculine tropes, revisionary authors have more potential to bring about social change. Through analyzing my primary texts, I intend to discover the binary ideological systems (i.e. abusive/passive, sexually deviant/virginal) that limit representations of female protagonists and the methods by which these systems can be evaded in favor of a more complex view of womanhood. The differences and/or similarities in character development that I will discuss convey important information about the way our society views women and, by extension, the way women are socialized to acts of sex and violence.

Several of the revisionary fairy tales in my analysis feature families and relationships characterized by societal norms as "dysfunctional." I attempt to understand the role of sex and violence in the determination of these seemingly defective relationships, such as the act of incest in Anne Sexton's "Rapunzel" and the necrophilia fantasy in Angela Carter's "The Snow Child." Several of these taboo relationships surprisingly offer high-functioning fantasies for women (and often men) and allow for more flexibility in the creation of gender, effectively evading the binary ideological structures that restrain our capacity for representation. While certain fairy tales contain powerful, productive relationships that society would typically characterize as

"dysfunctional," there is also a negative side to these powerful relationships, which confirms the equally oppressive potential of sex and violence.

The representations in my discussion were developed within the historical context of either second or third-wave feminism. I explore issues of sex and violence in relation to these movements, considering whether or not they promote certain sexual/aggressive acts as empowering. Third-wave feminism is known for incorporating more sexual, racial, and gender diversity into the movement. I want to consider whether this diversity extends to expressions of aggression, a feminist issue which is so obvious as to be ignored. Some of the feminist theory that will inform my work comes from authors such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Julia Lesage, Adrienne Rich, Jane Flax, and Rosi Braidotti, among others.

Genre and geography are two contexts that influence my analysis of representations of women in recent fairy tale literature. I am sampling texts from American, British, Scottish, and New Zealand authors and a variety of forms and genres – from short story horror to poetic children's literature – in order to determine the ways in which these contexts alter the messages being sent about women and their relationship to sex and violence. Certain genres, such as horror, seem to necessitate more violent acts, whereas others, such as children's literature, suggest a different treatment of violence and sex. Messages about women's relationship to sex and violence should be considered in accordance with the intended audience (children/adult women/men) and social context (second/third-wave feminism and American/European literary tradition). With an awareness of these contexts, each chapter of this book ruminates on a popular fairy tale that features a culturally recognizable female protagonist (Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, and Red Riding-hood).

Literature Review

Several works by Judith Butler, such as *Gender Trouble*, *Undoing Gender*, and *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, will form the theoretical groundwork for my analysis of representations of women in revisionary fairy tales and their relationship to sexuality and violence in contemporary culture. The theoretical texts that I work with are primarily concerned with sexuality and gender construction, evidenced by a sampling of their titles: *This Sex Which is Not One* by Luce Irigaray, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" and *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution* by Adrienne Rich, "Women's Rage" by Julia Lesage, Jane Flax's *Thinking Fragments*, and Rosi Braidotti's *Nomadic subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. In addition, this book references a comprehensive collection of preexisting fairy tale scholarship from notable scholars, such as Alan Dundes, Jack Zipes, Donald Haas, Ellen Cronan Rose, Ruth Bottigheimer, Maria Tatar, Kay Stone, Sue Short, Jane Yolen, Vanessa Joosen, Cristina Bacchilega, and others.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler argues against the use of violence as a response to loss through her analysis of social phenomena, such as gay rights, AIDS and "the war on terrorism." Her argument for a non-violent stance towards grief and oppression is an idea which I will explore in my analysis of popular folk tales, which often feature the use of violence as a form of resolution. The primary chapter from the collection that will inform my work is "Violence, Mourning, Politics," which deals with evolving concepts of feminism and their political relevance as well as the place of violence and grief in our current culture: "The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well" (Butler 15).

These concepts of corporeal vulnerability, loss, and mourning are articulated in revisionary fantasy, which bears particular relevance to the story of *Cinderella*, where grief and vulnerability lead to acts of bodily violence. Butler argues that the recognition of vulnerability "has the power to change the meaning and structure of vulnerability itself" (43). If female protagonists in revisionary fairy tales are depicted as vulnerable, I want to understand how these vulnerabilities are dealt with, paying particular attention to the author's use of the body. *Undoing Gender*, which expands on several of the concepts from her older work *Gender Trouble*, will also be particularly useful in my analysis of Anne Sexton's collection *Transformations*, which features references to transsexuality in "Red Riding-hood" and lesbian incest in "Rapunzel."

While Butler's recent work will propel my theoretical analysis, I will also draw from the ideas of her predecessor, Michel Foucault. Foucault's texts *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish*, which are somewhat less concerned with gender, will prove useful in analyzing the relationship between the female body and power, a connection which is especially evident in Tanith Lee's revision of Rapunzel, "The Golden Rope." Foucault exposes the body as a site of power and struggle: "The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power….A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (136). Jaspre, the protagonist in Lee's revision of *Rapunzel*, is reared by the witch in the tower for the sole purpose of a bodily sacrifice to a male demon. Her body is transformed into a docile vessel, which reinforces the power of the reining androcentic ideology. Laura Mulvey's text, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," provides a more gendered analysis of the body and power structures, such as the oppression of the male gaze, in recent revisionary fairy tales (i.e. the visual objectification of Snow White in the glass coffin).

This Sex Which is Not One (1985), written by Luce Irigaray, offers a radical psychoanalytic perspective on representations of women and the domination inherent within the patriarchal order. Like Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous, Irigaray was one of the foremost French feminist thinkers of the late twentieth century. Irigaray posits the multiplicity of women's sexuality and identity, which is a productive notion in the deconstruction of simplified fairy tale heroines. Her radical conceptions of women's pleasure indicate a shift in our cultural perceptions of sexuality and identity.

Adrienne Rich, an American poet, essayist, and political activist, produced two works that left marks on the landscape of feminist thought in the late twentieth century: "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" (1980) and *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution* (1976). Both Rich and Irigaray were producing innovative interpretations of womanhood concurrent with the majority of the fantasy texts addressed in my analysis, such as Tanith Lee's collection *Red as Blood* (1983), Anne Sexton's *Transformations* (1971), and Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* (1982). While Rich and Irigaray help to assess the ideological topography in which these literary texts were produced, I have also found it useful to incorporate more recent feminist thought into my analysis.

"Women's Rage" (1988) is an article by Julia Lesage, a feminist scholar at the University of Oregon and the co-founder and co-editor of *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*. Lesage speaks out against "academic sexism and racism" and discusses the "texture of women's silence" (Lesage 425). The silencing of women's rage is invoked through Cinderella, a protagonist who is simultaneously silenced through the process of marriage to the prince while also vocalizing her anger by blinding her stepsisters. Jane Flax is another contemporary feminist intellectual and a current Scholar in Residence at American University. Her theoretical text

Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West (1990) is relevant in understanding the multiple, various ideological positions that influence contemporary revisionist literature.

Another current feminist thinker, Rosi Braidotti, is an international scholar who was born in Italy, educated in Paris, and holds the position of professor of Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht, in the Netherlands. Her book *Nomadic subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory* (1994) features topics such as feminism and biomedical ethics, European feminism, and the relationship between American feminists and European movements. The aforementioned writers allow me to establish a comprehensive context of feminist, postmodern, and psychoanalytic theories, including ideas which have informed the analysis of other fairy tale scholars.

Alan Dundes has produced a series of casebooks on fairy tales, such as *Cinderella* (1982) and *Little Red Riding-hood* (1989), both of which offer a detailed background for each folk tale, contributing specific attention to the oral lineage of the more contemporary texts. Jack Zipes is another leading fairy tale scholar who writes about the relationship between feminism and fairy tales. In his recent revision of an older text, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World,* he offers an updated explanation of the fairy tale's role in civilizing processes. "Semantic Shifts of Power in Folk and Fairy Tales: Cinderella and the Consequences," is an essay from this collection that discusses the "patriarchialization of matrilineal tales." His analysis of both the Grimm and Perrault collection offers points of comparison for my analysis of the revisionary texts. While his focus is predominantly on the adaptation from oral form to literary text, several of his points are useful in analyzing contemporary adaptations through concepts such as ambivalence.

In his essay “Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship,” Donald Haas summarizes the differing points of view on the feminist use of fairy tales; specifically, whether the genre has potential to advance women’s goals, or whether it is merely a tool to control and oppress. He focuses the majority of his discussion around the two opposing feminist views on fairy tales that developed during the 1970's. Scholars argued that they are either (1) able to perpetuate feminist ideals of equality and female empowerment through strong female characters and the recovery of women's voices or (2) they cannot advance feminist ideals because they are dominated by male discourse. Instead, I advocate for a less binary view that assumes revisionist fairy tales have the potential to reconcile this argument if they avoid attempting to empower female characters through forms of sex and violence dominated by male discourse and instead represent alternatives. Although Haas does mention scholarship on revisionist fairy tales, particularly Ellen Cronan Rose's work on Sexton and Carter, he advocates further research into "the meaning of fairy tales to women." This is an area of research that I examine through each author's differing and personalized approach to appropriating the fairy tale narrative. Haas seems to privilege this type of writing as it indicates a "productive reception of fairy tales by women," but notes that the passive reception of fairy tales merits more research (25). Haas also discusses the metaphors associated with revisionist tales, such as the notion that these writers are "female Prometheuses" or "thieves of language" (22). Scholars also discuss the metaphor of the "magic mirror," which some argue functions as the male projection of female identity. The mirror-as-metaphor manifests in my discussion of *Snow White*, but I also contemplate the meaning of metaphors that have not been as widely discussed, such as Rapunzel’s tower, which is typically a phallic symbol of power used to imprison the female body for the delight of the male gaze. “The Golden Rope,” a Rapunzel retelling by Tanith

Lee, inverts this symbol as the tower descends into a violent netherworld that liberates Jaspre from her corporeal being.

Ruth B. Bottigheimer is another notable scholar of fairy tale studies, who has advanced the field through her research into the historical contexts surrounding the development of the genre. Her article "Fertility Control and the Birth of the Modern European Fairy-Tale Heroine," discusses the historical contexts between 1400-1800, particularly noting events associated with the advent of capitalism that shaped the cultural perspective of women's sexuality and independence. Bottigheimer chronicles the changing perceptions of women's sexuality, which coincide with the advent of the modern fairy tale heroine. For example, evidence indicates that prior to 1500, women "with the help of knowledgeable midwives…were able to control their own fertility to a very large extent. Subsequently that ability diminished" (40). Because unwanted pregnancy was not an issue, the literature of the middle ages focuses less on fertility control and more on the pleasure of carnal acts. The literature of the 1800's, on the other hand, often features a fear of the "impregnating potential of genital penetration," a fear born of the female community's loss of fertility control (39). Another loss, the loss of employment options for women, such as brewing ale and sewing cloth (between 1400-1700), equated to a loss in independence for the female heroines, changing them from active and witty in the middle ages, to passive, "frightened damsels" (37). I engage with Bottigheimer's argument by showing that revisionist fairy tale heroines, particularly written by women, represent the shift from the 1800's, when women had little control over their fertility, to the present, when fertility control options abound as they never have before.

Kay Stone published "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us" (1975) in the *Journal of American Folklore*, which contemplates the absences, such as a lack of strong female characters,

in the Disney variants of popular folk tales. Similar to Stone, Maria Tatar provides a feminist critique of passive fairy tale protagonists in *The Hard Facts of the Grimm's Fairy Tales* (1987), which has since been widely discussed among fairy tale scholars. Jane Yolen, an American writer of fantasy and children's literature, has also produced notable scholarship in both "America's Cinderella" (1977) and *Mirror, mirror: forty folktales for mothers and daughters to share* (2000), two works which will inform my approach to feminism in fairy tale literature. Yolen writes both fiction and nonfiction for children and adults, so she offers an all-inclusive lens that benefits my discussion of diverse authors, from Helen Oyeyemi to Roald Dahl, who write for a wide-ranging audience. Another recent fairy tale scholar who considers folk narratives in both text and cinema is Sue Short, the author of *Fairy Tale and Film: Old Tales with a New Spin* (2014).

Vanessa Joosen, a scholar of fairy tales and children's literature at the University of Antwerp, has published recent work on postmodern revisionary fairy tales in *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between fairy-tale scholarship and postmodern retellings* (2011). In addition, Cristina Bacchilega is responsible for several books of fairy tale scholarship, which include the articles "An Introduction to the 'Innocent Persecuted Heroine' Fairy Tale." (1993) and "Not Re(a)d Once and For All 'Little Red Riding Hood''s Voices in Performance" (2010). She is also the co-editor of the journal *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, which features articles on contemporary fairy tales through feminist, postmodern, and psychoanalytic perspectives.

Four Women of Folk Fantasy: Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, and Red Riding-hood

Chapter One, "The Passive Bodies and Active Revisions of *Cinderella*," recounts the matrilineal roots of *Cinderella* and addresses the first recorded versions written by Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers. This character's history aids my analysis of the subsequent feminist revisionary poems by Roald Dahl and Anne Sexton as well as the short fiction of Tanith Lee and Kelly Link. Each of these revisions, compared with its Grimm or Perrault referent, demonstrates a transvaulation of values for women. Revisionary narratives react to the preexisting passive depictions of *Cinderella* in an attempt to change the way we view and understand women and their relationship to sex and violence. This chapter advocates for representations of women in situations of low-risk anger expression, as in the case of Roald Dahl's poem in the collection *Revolting Rhymes*.

The beginning of Chapter One, "Amputations and Happy Endings: *Cinderella* Poems by Roald Dahl and Anne Sexton," compares the approach of two authors with a disparate style and audience. Dahl uses the technique of meta-poetry, a common device in such revisions, to call attention to the notion of text as artifice, rather than text as reality. This technique allows Dahl and others to respond directly to other versions of the tale, such as the Disney variant. This reiteration will allow me to discuss the primary reason for revisionary writing, which is to address the values in the preexisting versions. One of the most obvious ways in which Dahl addresses these values is through the subversion of the "happily ever after ending." This transvaluation is most evident in the final stanza, when Cinderella marries "A simple jam-maker by trade" instead of the bloodthirsty prince, who chops off heads to solve his problems. Dahl

reflects the changing values of women, namely that we need to be more accepting of female anger, less concerned with marriage and beauty, and more attuned to male aggression.

"Cinderella," from Sexton's *Transformations* collection, features subtle changes that contribute to the evolving discussion on women's socialization. Sexton also uses meta-poetry in her opening to criticize the clichéd nature of the Cinderella story, which she sees as problematic, evidenced through her use of exaggeration and sarcasm. Like Dahl, Sexton demonstrates the danger in teaching women to value marriage and vanity over intellect and individuality. While violence does play a role in Sexton's poem, the specific violent acts do not differ significantly from the Grimm Brothers' version, a commonality worth further interrogation.

The second part of Chapter One, "The Woman Inside the Glass Slipper: Revisionary *Cinderella* stories by Kelly Link and Tanith Lee," discusses the ways in which acts of sex and violence, both towards and from women, are reinterpreted in recent fictional texts. Link's book *Stranger Things Happen* features a *Cinderella*-inspired chapter titled "Shoe and Marriage," which is comprised of several shorter pieces, further enhancing the fragmentation of the revisionary fairy tale. While Link subscribes to a postmodern, nonlinear style, Tanith Lee's revision perhaps features the most unique changes of all by recreating *Cinderella* in the form of a horror story. As with Dahl's poetic version, Lee's female protagonist eventually denounces the prince, though Lee takes this one step further by having the prince murdered. The use of violence here is very interesting because, although Ashella (Cinderella) presumably wills the prince's death to avenge her mother, she does not directly commit the act. This indicates a differing approach to violence. The men in the story haphazardly commit physical violence, but the women plot behind the scenes and instead use a more indirect, psychological form of terror.

Chapter Two, "Romancing the Lazy Heroine: Contemporary Variations of *Snow White* and the Occurrence of Passive Behavior Among Women," addresses revisionary versions of the Grimm Brothers' *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, such as "The Snow Child" by Angela Carter and Helen Oyeyemi's novel *Boy, Snow, Bird* (2014), as well as poems by Sexton and Dahl. Fairy tales are highly engrained in our culture and they persist and change over time. I want to examine the changes in women's engagement with violence and sexual "deviancy" in order to see how these representations function as a reflection of women's history and culture. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* has been revised in several different media forms since its original publication. The first, and perhaps most commonly known, "revision" was Disney's animated film. Since then, there have been numerous revisions in television (*Once Upon a Time*), film (*Snow White and the Huntsman* and *Mirror, Mirror*), and literature. Representations of figures such as Cinderella and Snow White are some of the first images of women our youth encounter and are thus connected to their socialization, which is why they are worth interrogating. If we want to change the negative perceptions of women – or even the very actions that may cause these misconceptions – we must start by considering what our culture teaches them about their relationship to the power that is exemplified through their corporeal being during acts of sex and violence.

To aid my analysis in this chapter, I use theoretical approaches from Althusser and Butler, concepts from Giroux's article "The Disneyfication of Children's Culture," an essay by Mary Kaiser on *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, and the article "Things Disney Never Told Us" by Kay Stone. The first segment, "The Androcentric Gaze, The Queen's Mirror, and the Woman Reflected," features a discussion of Dahl, Sexton, and Oyeyemi that employs Mulvey's notions of the male gaze and scopophilia. Although she alters the plot entirely,

Oyeyemi uses many of the symbols from the *Snow White* folktale in order to comment on racism and transgender identity. Jacques Lacan's definition of the "mirror stage" factors into my discussion of symbols in Oyeyemi's work and elsewhere.

In the second segment, "Familiar Violence: Aggressive Actions and Sexual Behavior in Variants of Snow White," the use of sexual diversity (are lack thereof) is discussed in the works of Sexton and Oyeyemi. Both women reinvent this tale in a manner that causes – to borrow Nietzsche's term – a transvaluation of values. This concept of "revaluation of all values" frequently appears in my analysis of female protagonists in an effort to discuss what our culture values in women, compared to what we *should* value. My analysis not only focuses on the character development of Snow White and the Queen, but also on the relationship between the two, which centers on acts of violence, such as the queen's desire to eat Snow's heart, or Snow's response of making her "fry upward like a frog" (Sexton). These revisionary writers demonstrate the problematic nature of our culture's value system for women by writing against the concepts of the female body in the older versions. Through the competition between Snow White and the older female antagonist in the Grimm tale, we learn that the culture values women for their bodies, not their intelligence or skills outside the home. The antagonist is less culturally valuable because her body is aged, signifying less physical attraction and an inability to procreate.

"Ageism and The Competition for Male Desire in Contemporary Revisions of *Snow White*" discusses the work of Sexton, Carter, and Oyeyemi with attention to the use of violence within interpersonal relationships, particularly those between women. These women write revisions that avoid the ageism too often directed at women within dominant masculine discourse. By depicting the older female as more sympathetic than the virginal Snow White, they alter the reader's sense of what constitutes power within the female body. In Carter's version, the

queen's use of indirect violence and wit allows her to maintain authority by deceiving Snow. Yet, this violence is in stark contrast to her husband's more direct method of necrophilic sodomy. The startling changes in each author's text allow me to present an argument on the importance of sexual diversity and anger expression among women. Through supporting one another, women can encourage diversity in both representation and action.

Chapter Three, "Representations of Gendered Violence and Sexuality in Contemporary Versions of *Rapunzel*," engages with variants of written by Sexton, Janet Charman, and Tanith Lee. The Grimm version of *Rapunzel* was recently adapted by Disney in the film *Tangled* (2010), which features a more aggressive, self-sufficient female protagonist. It is important to note that Disney was not the first to revise *Rapunzel* in such a manner. Anne Sexton's poetic revision, along with Tanith Lee's horror story, also deviates significantly from the original text.

Some current Disney films, such as *Tangled*, create heroines that are more reflective of our current values. This is a trend that should continue and amplify in order to create more effective role models for young women. In the Grimm text, Rapunzel relies on the prince to save her. Disney re-imagines this tale in a more feminist fashion by creating a heroine who is active and breaks out of the domestic sphere (the tower). Rapunzel uses her own strength and ingenuity to escape the tower. Instead of exhibiting domestic values, such as the scene where Snow White cleans the home and prepares to bake a pie, Rapunzel displays values based on intellect and strength. In one scene, she uses a frying pan – not to cook dinner – but to smash an unfamiliar man over the head. Despite Disney's attempt to empower Rapunzel through the use of violence, the film still fails to form a specifically female notion of aggression that avoids a mere appropriation of male violence and values. Rapunzel is still put in competition with an older,

powerful female and still forms an alliance through a heteronormative relationship (eventually culminating in marriage).

The two segments of the this chapter, "Sex Acts in the Garden, Discipline in the Tower" and "Disciplining Mechanisms and Gender Development in Contemporary Versions of *Rapunzel*," execute theoretical approaches from Butler and her predecessor, Foucault, in an attempt to understand the complex power dynamics among contemporary women. Many narratives suggest that women should compete with each other, when in actuality we should work together to achieve equality, despite our differences in age, class, or race (Butler). Sexton does more transgressive work with Grimm fairy tales, furthering a feminist agenda. Her controversial references to incest, lesbianism, and adolescent sexuality transgress cultural norms in order to question our perceptions of female sexuality and violence. Tanith Lee, who also falls into some of the same traps of masculine ideology as Disney, does cultivate a more effective approach to understanding female violence. To begin with, she shows that women, like men, use violence as a means to achieve power. However, Lee also seems to indicate that appropriating male forms of violence, such as the witch's draining of Rapunzel's blood, will ultimately hinder women instead of empowering them. Thus, by the end, the witch is stripped of her power and the nonviolent Rapunzel is freed from the tower.

Chapter Four, "Big Red, Little Wolf: Narrative Transformation in Recent Variations of *Red Riding-hood*," will look at the female protagonist Red Riding-hood in the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale and subsequent feminist revisionary tales by Carter, Sexton, Lee, and Dahl, among others. These revisions again speak to changes in cultural consciousness about what constitutes a "good" woman, a female role model. Snow White is almost always depicted as the vulnerable victim – an idea that I explore in the previous chapter – but Red Riding-hood teeters between

passive victim and active heroine. Red Riding-hood's tenuous status as a heroine makes her an interesting example for my argument because she offers such a contradictory representation of our society's perception of, and values for, young women.

The first section of Chapter Four, "The Woman Wolf: Rewritings of Red Riding-hood by Angela Carter and Tanith Lee," analyzes the use of aggression among female protagonists, which has the potential to empower women or to reinforce the androcentric order. Carter's revision, "In the Company of Wolves," features the sexualization of Red Riding-hood, which offers a paradoxical interpretation of the protagonist. Her sexualization can be perceived in two contradictory ways. First, her decision to bed her captor instead of being slain allows her freedom from her familial connections and obligations, freedom to roam and kill with the wolves. Thus, sleeping with her kidnapper is an act of sexual liberation. However, the very same sexual act also indicates a degree of servitude. She is still at the mercy of a stereotypically violent, animalistic male character. My inquiry into Carter's use of sex and violence helps to determine the ways in which she both empowers and diminishes the female protagonist. After her grandmother is murdered, she does not seek vengeance through violence, but survival through her use of wit and sexuality. Although this shows a distinct difference between male and female responses to, and use of, violence, her revision may still fall into the trap of dominant masculine discourse. Ultimately, the heroine still seeks to empower herself by adopting a male form of violence (becoming a werewolf like the hunter) and, in doing so, is converted into a sexual object for the wolf's pleasure.

In the second section of Chapter Four, "The Flesh Inside the Wolf's Belly," I focus my inquiry on the symbolic function of the wolf's bloated belly and the girl's body, cloaked in her red cape. This section includes references to the revisionary poetry of Olga Broumas, Carol Ann

Duffy, Sexton, and Dahl. Like Carter, Sexton's revision also focuses on the female body, but in a very different manner. The author conveys gender confusion through the character of the wolf "dressed in frills," which she describes as "a kind of transvestite" and a pregnant woman. I analyze this play of gender using concepts from Judith Butler's essay "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality." I also contemplate the "dysfunctional" relationship between the protagonist and the wolf, focusing on the violent scene when the wolf gives "birth" to Red Riding-hood. This scene alludes to the violent nature of childbirth, which shows that certain forms of violence may be specific to, and useful for, the female body. Of course, this is somewhat problematized by the wolf's ambiguous sex. Interestingly, Sexton parallels this narrative with a more contemporary one where women, instead of wolves, function as the deceivers, offering an even more complex commentary on women in positions of power. In this parallel narrative, women do harm to each other, not through physical violence, but through wit and lies.

Fairy tale revisions offer women (and even men, as we see in the case of Dahl) a way to reinvent their cultural role, contributing more positive and empowering narratives for the potential socialization of both sexes. According to Susan Bordo, women are particularly influenced by the representations they encounter, even going so far as to say that "Today, all that we experience as meaningful are appearances" (143). Thus, if we allow ourselves to absorb problematic representations of female protagonists, rather than analyzing their content and questioning their merit, then we open ourselves to self-imposed servitude. The aim of this book is to help initiate that very line of questioning.

Chapter One

The Passive Bodies and Active Revisions of *Cinderella*

Cinderella, the most popular girl at the ball, is also an international[2] narrative sweetheart. Cultures around the world have articulated her image around campfires, penned her person in ancient ink, and, more recently, rendered her further through the cinematic screen. The Aarne–Thompson system[3] – a tool designed to help folklorists classify and analyze folktales – defines *Cinderella* as type 510A, "the persecuted heroine," a title that immediately suggests the passive nature of the famed female protagonist. As several scholars have noted before me[4], the female characters in mass marketed fairy tales are often characterized in one of two ways: passive or villainous. The renowned folklorist, Jack Zipes, argues that this was not always the case: "the oral tale of Cinderella is traced back to matrilineal societies…type 510A may have originated in female rituals" (Zipes 137-138). An example of this hidden history appears in one of the first

[2] Jane Yolen addresses the international history of *Cinderella*, which "has endured for over a thousand years, surfacing in a literary source first in ninth century China" (Yolen 22).

[3]Aarne, Antti. *The types of the folktale: A classification and bibliography*. Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1961.

[4] Jack Zipes' recent revision of an older text, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, offers an updated explanation of the fairy tale's role in civilizing processes: "Semantic Shifts of Power in Folk and Fairy Tales: Cinderella and the Consequences," is an essay from this collection that discusses the "patriarchialization of matrilineal tales." His analysis of both the Grimm and Perrault version of Cinderella offer points of comparison in this study.

recorded versions of the tale, "Cat Cinderella" (1634), by the Italian writer Giambattista Basile. Basile's female protagonist, unlike the commercial Cinderella we have come to know, exhibits violence and action when she "kills her stepmother and stops her father's ship from returning…Some of this activism, in contrast to Perrault's narrative, can be seen in the Grimms' version" (Zipes 444). Although violence and sexual innuendo were key features of the early tales, they have been widely censored in the prevailing commercial narratives and further ignored in literary scholarship[5]. Considering that fact, my own scholarship will look to marginalized texts for representations of women that avoid such censorship.

The most pervasive versions of *Cinderella* in our culture – namely the mass marketed nineteenth century books and, later, the Walt Disney narratives[6] – continue to reinforce male dominance, obscuring certain representations of women that allow female subjectivity to be endowed with agency: "But the 'markings' in the dominant version of Cinderella in the modern world remain male and obfuscate the matrilineal tradition" (Zipes 141). In the Perrault version, Cinderella is described as "helpless" and "modest," and in the Grimm Brothers' tale she is depicted as "domesticated," obedient, and in a state of self-denial (Zipes 196). Kay Stone, an eminent folklorist and educator, addressed similar findings in her own work, arguing that

[5] As Jeana Jorgensen states, "there exists a wealth of scholarship on fairy tales, but only some of it deals with explicit sex" (27).

[6] Jane Yolen addresses the role of mass market versions of *Cinderella* in the creation of passive stereotypes: "Hardy, helpful, and inventive, that was the Cinderella of the old tales but not of the mass market in the nineteenth century. Today's mass market books are worse…" (Yolen 25)

"Cinderella (AT 5ioA) and Frau Holle (AT 480) succeed because of their excessive kindness and patience," not because of their actions (43).

In many of the first recorded fairy tales, such as the works of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, actions were relegated to the realm of men. Those few women who did act could only be characterized as villains that must receive punishment: "Some Grimm heroines do show a bit of spirit, but they are not usually rewarded for it" (Stone 43). The commercial versions of the tale offer two polarized models of womanhood: follow Cinderella's lead and shut up, listen, and wait for a "prince," who may not be worth the effort. If that option is not appealing, there is always the other path – that of the cruel stepmother, who will inevitably meet a violent end. The commodified, mass marketed *Cinderella* that readers are most commonly exposed to encourages women towards binary models, rather than embracing the diverse possibilities of female identity.

This precise problem, this impossible position, is what led me to seek out contemporary revisionary fairy tales that rework representations of women by upsetting these binary models. While teaching folk-themed college writing courses, I noticed that contemporary readers no longer feel connected to commercial archetypes in the dominant narratives. In response, recent revisionary writers seek new modes of representation that perhaps hark back to the matrilineal, oral origins of the story and the more violent, though less dominant, written versions, such as the work of Basile. The representations of female characters in revisionary fairy tales show that our literary culture has evolved past the stereotypes of active witch/passive princess into a much more dynamic portrait of womanhood. Revisionary authors Anne Sexton and Roald Dahl invoke, and even amplify, the starkness and simplicity of the fairy tale through their choice of verse, rather than the short story form. Sexton and Dahl direct their poetic narratives at two different audiences, adults and children, respectively. Both authors react to representations of women in

dominant versions of *Cinderella* (such as Grimm, Perrault, and Disney) in a manner that allows them to address women's changing relationship with violence and sexuality. Operating under Slavoj Žižek's premise that "violence is never just abstract violence," I will discuss each revisionary author's approach, often comparing it to dominant versions, to better assess the cultural representations that are used to socialize young and adult women alike (Fiennes).

The communication of emotions, such as anger and grief, is particularly gendered in dominant fairy tales. There are many disturbing features of the Grimms' *Cinderella* that elicit an emotional response, some of which are obvious and others more elusive: the sisters' visceral dissection of their own feet, Cinderella's birds plucking of the stepsisters' eyes, and the depiction of Cinderella as weepy and incapable. Cinderella and other protagonists often cry in response to situations of grief and anger; thus, the modern reader is left with repetitive statements, such as "Cinderella obeyed but wept," that reinforce women's inability to act in an androcentric culture (Grimm 469). Stone notes that active heroines "who confront the world…are not numerous in oral tales and do not exist at all in any of the Grimm tales or the Disney films," further emphasizing the problematic nature of dominant representations of Cinderella (Stone 46).

I would also like to note that this stereotype hinders men as well by forcing them into characterizations of maliciousness and insensitivity. The weeping Cinderella is typically partnered with the stoic prince, and both sexes are encouraged towards extremes in the dominant narratives. The false nature of this binary dynamic is illuminated if we consider the fact that men have emotions too, a notion that American culture tends to obscure to the detriment of male identity development. More importantly, this dynamic indicates that, as Judith Butler suggests, "To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction" (30). Cinderella is representative of the cultural narrative that grief, particularly as women

experience it, is characterized by a state of inaction[7]. Revisionary writers problematize this dynamic to diminish the prevalence of passive heroines and show that grief can be an empowering force that ultimately facilitates agency.

Feminism reacted to the constraints of these passive, predictable models by showing that women can, in fact, act on their own. Specifically, women can have sex *their way* (and enjoy it) and women can fight (and even win). Both American and European cultures have historically refused women access to these two, very human, activities[8]. Addressing this problem, the feminist scholar Julia Lesage encourages women to "tap our anger as a source of energy and focus it aesthetically and politically" (422). Many of the revisionary writers I discuss attempt to do just that by featuring female protagonists who use violence or sex as a tool for their social advancement.

Yet an extreme reversal of women's situation – punching and stabbing because we were told not to move, engaging in risky sex practices because we were taught to be virgins – will not

[7] Jane Yolen criticizes some of the more recent versions of *Cinderella* for reinforcing the stereotype of the passive female beauty: "But when a new version is presented, a helpless Cinderella is born…a weepy, prostrate young blonde" (Yolen 24).

[8]According to the scholarship of Ruth B. Bottigheimer, the literature of the 1800's references concern for the "impregnating potential of genital penetration," a fear born of the female community's loss of fertility control (39). Additionally, the loss of employment options for women, such as brewing ale and sewing cloth (between 1400-1700), equated to an absence of the characterization of independent heroines, changing them from active and witty in the middle ages, to passive, "frightened damsels" (37).

suffice as a remedy to sexual inequality. A mere reversal puts men and women further at odds, wasting the efforts and energy of both. The application of this reversal in literature and popular culture too often ignores the fact that sex and violence – both a locus of power – have the potential for creation and destruction, regardless of intention. Our cultural narratives need to represent both the costs and rewards of committing these acts in order to determine productive expressions of sexuality and anger and promote nonviolent means towards empowerment. Furthermore, our cultural narratives should be accepting of low-risk expressions of aggression, particularly in the case of women, while also adamantly rejecting high-risk violence directed at both men and women, such as psychological and physical abuse.

Amputations and Happy Endings: *Cinderella* Verses by Roald Dahl and Anne Sexton

One of the primary reasons for revisionary writing is to address the values in the old versions and create new values that are potentially more representative of contemporary culture and thought. In his poem "Cinderella," Roald Dahl uses a self-referential style, which enables him to start a discourse on the commercial censorship of contemporary children's stories, specifically the elimination of acts of sex and violence committed by and towards women. This absence of angry women in cultural production is controversial because it conceals women's repressed emotions: "Women's anger is pervasive, as pervasive as our oppression, but it frequently lurks underground" (Lesage 421). While our cultural representations of women have evolved, there is still a strong trend that urges women to hide their anger, to show indifference. At what cost, however, do women learn these lessons? Henry Giroux, a cultural scholar and

theorist of critical pedagogy[9], argues that when we leave it up to Disney to determine women's role models, we are inevitably presented with "specific and often sanitized notions of identity, difference, and history" (67). The following revisionary writers work to dig up and expose women's underground rage, unearthing it from years of hidden history[10].

Dahl's disapproval of such censorship is evidenced by the collection title *Revolting Rhymes*, which makes reference to his use of gory language written specifically with an adolescent audience in mind. Unlike many revisionary writers, Dahl employs humor in his description of violence, diminishing the romantic themes common to the mass market narratives. Fairy tale scholar Sue Short supports the importance of humor in revisionist films, citing "a number of Cinderella-inspired rom-coms in which humor undercuts romanticism" (Short 9). In the following excerpt, Dahl critiques the commercial versions, alluding to the ways in which they are used as a tool to pacify children:

> I guess you think you know this story.
>
> You don't. The real one's much more gory
>
> The phony one, the one you know,

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[9] Palmer, J. (2002) *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: From Piaget to the Present Day (Fifty Key Thinkers) (Routledge Key Guides).* Routledge Publishers. p. 208.

[10] Christina Bacchilega details the systematic silencing of women's voices by tracing the collected evidence on the editorial history of Cinderella. She lists Ruth Bottigheimer, Karen Rowe, Margaret Mills, and Kay Stone in her discussion of the scholarly "evidence of how the Grimms' editing silenced their heroines…[and] the historical silencing of female storytellers" (Bacchilega 10).

Was cooked up years and years ago,

And made to sound all soft and sappy

Just to keep the children happy. (Dahl, 1)

Dahl invokes the Grimm Brothers' *Cinderella* – known for the violent scene where the stepsisters cut off portions of their feet to fit the shoe – which he refers to as "the real one." Interestingly, this suggests that violence somehow makes the narrative more authentic. The connection between brutality and authenticity is discussed in *The Perverts' Guide to Ideology*, narrated by Slavoj Žižek, who defines violence as "a kind of brutal intervention in *the real* to cover up a certain impotence concerning what we call cognitive mapping" (Fiennes). Here he suggests that violence may allow for the expression of cognitive experiences that defy articulation. Yet, Žižek would surely agree that violence does not always function this way, particularly in the case of women's experience, where violent acts too often reinforce the dominant masculine ideology they seek to escape.

The question of authenticity among revisionary fairy tales is interesting because it connects to the larger issue of authority: who controls the narrative and what values do they suggest? Despite the influence of the Grimms and Perrault, Disney[11] remains the standard fairy tale factory in our modern culture. Dahl's use of the phrase, "Soft and sappy," refers to the Disney film remake, which he considers "the phony one" (1). This insinuates that Disney should

[11] As Jane Yolen states, Disney furthered the commercial success of the *Cinderella* narrative through the 1950 animated film: "The film was one of the most profitable of all time for the studio, grossing $4.247 million dollars in the first release alone. The success of the movie opened the floodgates of 'Disney Cinderella' books" (Yolen 26).

have less authority concerning representations directed at children, an idea that scholars have also articulated in recent years:

> But Walt Disney is responsible not only for amplifying the stereotype of good versus bad women suggested by the children's books based on the Grimms, he must also be criticized for his portrayal of a cloying fantasy world filled with cute little beings existing among pretty flowers and singing animals. (Stone, 44)

Dahl and other revisionary writers attempt to diminish the authority of such "sappy," commercialized versions by creating variations that more aptly reflect women's current cultural position, rather than holding onto tropes dictated by androcentric discourse. Disney narratives, which frequently avoid violence, sex, and gore, are also often depleted of conflict and realism. Stone and others suggest that the prevalent violence in the oral tales was not arbitrary, an idea that applies to the revisionary narratives as well. While I do not think that violence always functions as a "return to the real,"[12]or a source of empowerment for women, it can be effective in eliminating passive stereotypes and encouraging equality in action and anger expression. So while I question Dahl's choice to position violence as a form of authenticity, I want to underscore the importance of his decision to render heroines with access to agency.

As Lesage argues, women's rage is often obscured in popular cultural texts by men and women alike: "In the sphere of culture production there are few dominant ideological forms that allow us even to think 'women's rage'…We have relatively few expressions of women's authentic rage even in women's art" (Lesage 421-422). The implication here is that we need new

[12] Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the desert of the real!: five essays on September 11 and related dates*. Verso, 2002. Print.

forms to address this absence. Revisionary fairy tale writers, like Dahl and Sexton, are in a privileged position to create progressive narratives because they already have a discourse – the large body of preexisting folklore – that informs and complicates their own perception. Thus, the nature of their project begs response, particularly to the censorship and absences in the commercial narratives. Occasionally, Dahl falls into the trap of androcentric discourse by characterizing the heroine in trite diminutives, such as "darling little Cinderella," but even these serve the purpose of reminding the reader of the subject matter to which Dahl reacts (1). This phrase alludes to the problematic 17th century ideals that have influenced a portion of this tale's long history, which Jane Yolen describes as "the transfigured folk creature of a French literary courtier…[with] the well-bred seventeenth-century female traits of gentility, grace, and selflessness" (Yolen 21).

Dahl redeems this clichéd image by depicting Cinderella in an unexpected expression of rage: "She beat her fist against the wall, / And shouted 'Get me to the ball!'" (Dahl 1). Cinderella is characterized as angry with her circumstance to the point of physical violence, a vast change from the "gentleness and goodness" that described the heroine in Perrault's version (Perrault 449). In doing so, Dahl demonstrates that women are just as likely as men to experience anger, which could potentially lead to a physical or verbal expression, as in the case of Cindy. A study done by Archer et al found that, despite our cultural perception that women experience anger less than men, "Anger showed no sex differences" (Archer 1). The new interest in women's relationship to violence has led to other studies of this sort: "many studies have found that women, in general, self-report as much perpetration of physical aggression as men (but not sexual abuse, coercive control, stalking, or injuries)" (Swan et al. 268). From these studies, an interesting implication arises. While we had previously assumed aggression as a form of

difference, of separation, between the sexes, current data insinuates that anger is a more similar experience than previously thought, though its expressions vary widely.

The sexes appear to differ stringently in their application of aggression. Although Dahl represents acceptance of low-risk expressions of anger – such as Cindy pounding her fists – he does not appear to condone anger expressions that are used to impose male dominance. In refusing to accept the Prince in Dahl's poem, Cindy also refuses to accept physical violence as the only measure of power. An adult audience may also recognize that Dahl's Cinderella refuses to become the victim of rape.

> He grabbed her dress to hold her back
>
> As Cindy shouted, 'Let me go!'
>
> The dress was ripped from head to toe (Dahl 3)

This scene, something we would likely never see in a Disney film, offers a cautionary image of the raping Prince. This is not a new notion, though. Rape was a facet of several oral versions of *Cinderella* and other popular fairy tales, a fact that has been censored in the sterilized, commercial versions in the Disney tradition. Alan Dundes' *Cinderella* casebook references a derivative of the Cinderella tale, type 510B, "the folktale where the king demands his daughter's hand in marriage," which addresses an imposed, deviant sexual union (Dundes 234). "Catskin," one version of type 510B, "wherein the father unnaturally desires his daughter," is also discussed in Yolen's analysis (23). These examples indicate a surprising villain in early folklore, the raping father. This narrative history, and its cautionary message, is erased from commercial versions, instead replaced with the trope of the "wicked stepmother." Thus, the patriarchal culprit that ignites women's rage is hidden away, safe in the shadow of the cruel mother.

Mass market fairy tales obscure the reality that rape is fairly common in our culture. In recent years, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released the National Crime Victimization Survey, which found that 39,590 men and 164,240 women were victims of rape in 2008 (Criminal Victimization). If that number seems surprising, it is because our dominant discourse has gone a long way towards obscuring acts of sexual violence committed towards women. Perrault cleaned up raunchy oral fairy tales "so that it would appeal to an upper-class literate audience," while Disney censored works, I can only assume, for marketability to their target audience in the name of capital gain (Zipes 143). Unfortunately, the censorship in these narratives has a real-world precedent. In a study published in 2014, the falsification of rape statistics is discussed in detail:

> The results indicate that approximately 22% of the 210 studied police departments responsible for populations of at least 100,000 persons have substantial statistical irregularities in their rape data indicating considerable undercounting from 1995 to 2012. Notably, the number of undercounting jurisdictions has increased by over 61% during the eighteen years studied. (Yung)

This data shows that rape is being disregarded and mismanaged in official channels on an increasing level, demonstrating that, even in the 21st century, censorship is alive and well. An open discourse on the topic of rape might enable victims, particularly women, to speak out against high-risk violence, rather than hiding in fear. If our cultural narratives, both fictionalized and scientific, discuss this issue directly, exposing this vulnerability, more women will be emboldened against their aggressors: "Not only is there always the possibility that a vulnerability will not be recognized and that it will be constituted as the 'unrecognizable,' but when a vulnerability *is* recognized, that recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself" (Butler 43). Although Butler is referring to vulnerability in terms of

grief, we can apply the same notions to the more specific experience of rape victims. Dahl and other revisionary writers work to uncover this clandestine aspect of women's experience to showcase the ways in which androcentric discourse obscures the perspective and experiences of women.

One of the most obvious ways in which Dahl addresses women's relationship with violence is through his subversion of the "happy ever after" ending. Jane Flax offers a useful critique of closure in her book *Thinking Fragments*, stating that "closure is to some extent arbitrary, temporary, and conventional" (12). Despite this, closure is a common component of the commercial tales, which feature a happy ending that "renders further investigation unnecessary" (Flax 12).

> Poor Cindy's heart was torn to shreds
>
> My Prince! she thought. He chops off *heads*!
>
> How could I marry anyone
>
> Who does that sort of thing for fun? (Dahl 5)

This stanza showcases Dahl's choice to avoid the "happy ever after"[13] ending that results in closure through the marriage of Cinderella and the Prince. This transvaluation is furthered in the final stanza, when Cindy chooses to marry a jam-maker instead of the brutal Prince, who uses acts of aggression to solve his problems and maintain his power. Dahl's narrative reflects the

[13] Jane Yolen articulates the ways in which mass market narratives censor the cruelty present in many versions of *Cinderella*: "For the sake of Happy Ever After, the mass market books have brought forward a good, malleable, forgiving little girl and put her in Cinderella's slippers. However in most Cinderella tales there is no forgiveness in the heroine's heart" (Yolen 25).

changing values of women, with a focus on women's awareness of, and ability to act out against, high-risk forms of male aggression.

Dahl alters the classic narrative to put more emphasis on acts of violence committed against women. Violence exhibited towards women is present in the popular texts, but it is women, not men, that typically commit the violent acts in *Cinderella*. For example, an amputation is described in the Grimm text when one sister "cut her toe off" and the other "cut off a piece of her heel" to comply with their stepmother's wishes (Grimm 471-472). Dahl focuses less on these acts of self-harm and instead presents a more severe amputation committed by the Prince rather than the stepmother. In the following passage, Dahl characterizes the Prince as vehement and malicious, valuing beauty over mercy:

> This pleased the Prince. He smiled and said,
>
> 'She's prettier without her head.'
>
> He swung his trusty sword and smack–
>
> Her head went crashing to the ground.
>
> It bounced a bit and rolled around. (Dahl 5)

His descriptive language indicates the connection between male dominance and violence; the Prince amputates women, tearing them into manageable pieces, in an assertion of power. Despite the fantastical elements, Dahl exposes a real problem that is also examined in a recent study on aggressive behavior: "The overall pattern indicated males' greater use of costly methods of aggression rather than a threshold difference in anger" (Archer 1). Although men and women both experience anger, the data pattern shows that male aggression is more likely to manifest in risky behavior that harms others, particularly their female partners. We can only begin to find

less costly alternatives for anger expression if we choose to reject violence towards women as a natural and acceptable part of male behavior.

In opposition to the Disney tradition of the compassionate, courageous Prince, Dahl depicts the male protagonist as aggressive in both act and articulation. This highlights the fact that men, in their current privileged position, prove a threat to women not only through physical acts, but also through their very language: "The Prince cried, 'Who's this dirty slut? / Off with her nutt! Off with her nutt!" The Prince's generalized anger – the cause of which is never revealed – is accompanied by both physical and verbal abuse. Dahl's use of the word "slut" reminds us that women's sexuality is habitually under cultural scrutiny. Giroux discusses the simplified position of women in commercial narratives: "Disney's films appear to assign, quite unapologetically, rigid roles to women and people of color" (Giroux 74). Disney heroines, particularly Cinderella, are depicted as pure and chaste, an image that ignores the problematic reality of female sexuality in an androcentric culture, a reality that even the Brothers Grimm subtly acknowledged. The Grimm Brothers allude to women's sexuality through engaging symbolic references, such as Cinderella's foot sliding into an opulent slipper, though this desire is conceptualized along heterosexual parameters.

The ending of Dahl's poem is fairly conservative in that it still seeks the closure of a "happy" marriage, positioning heteronormative relations over all other women's goals[14]. This tradition of nicely ending narratives perpetuates "an appeal to cultural homogeneity and

[14] Jeana Jorgensen addresses this narrative feature in her analysis of eroticized fairy tales: "Though romances often feature spunky or rebellious heroines, they ultimately choose to be in a monogamous, heterosexual marriage, conforming to patriarchal norms" (Jorgensen 28).

historical purity, which erases complex issues, cultural differences, and social struggles" (Giroux 66). Unlike Kelly Link and Tanith Lee, who invent open endings in their short fiction folk revisions, Dahl employs a heteronormative resolution:

> Within a minute, Cinderella
> Was married to a lovely feller,
> A simple jam-maker by trade,
> Who sold good homemade marmalade.
> Their house was filled with smiles and laughter
> And they were happy ever after. (Dahl, 7)

Though the "happy ever" ending prevails, it requires Cindy to take action, to walk away from the Prince and toward something new and unknown. Although the "moral-of-the-story" ending promotes the idea of marriage as the primary concern of women, Cindy's choice of a loving partner over the bloodthirsty Prince provides a more transgressive message. The text shows that women's relationship to violence is changing. Dahl's heroine openly and consciously rejects masculine violence, recognizing that there is an alternative, though it might not be quite as "simple" as Dahl suggests.

Unlike Dahl, who redirects the violence from the Grimms' famous narrative, Anne Sexton maintains the violent acts, but adds an ironic tone that perhaps betrays her inability to "see what is beyond our rage" (Lesage 422). While "Cinderella" from Sexton's *Transformations* seems to be one of the least transgressive works in the collection, the poem does feature some interesting changes that contribute to the evolving discussion on women's relationship to sex and violence. As with Dahl, Sexton criticizes the romanticized nature of dominant versions of *Cinderella*, which she perceives as perpetuating unrealistic expectations, evidenced through her

use of sarcasm: "You always read about it…From toilets to riches. / That story" (54). Although she is far less idealistic than Dahl, Sexton also demonstrates the danger in teaching women passive habits.

She criticizes passive traits in fairy tale heroines when she writes, "Cinderella and the prince / lived, they say, happily ever after, / like two dolls in a museum case" (Sexton 56). There is a notable reaction to preexisting tales with the statement "they say," showing that she is in disagreement with the values in the commercial texts. Sexton's sarcasm and acerbic tone reveal the ways in which fairy tales have been used to promote heteronormative "happy endings" that occur by chance, not through intent or effort, and further encourage passivity in women. Yolen expresses the problematic result of this seemingly innocent resolution: "take away Cinderella's ability to think for herself and act for herself, and you are left with a tale of wishes-come-true-regardless" (Yolen 27). This statement bears particular relevance on the millennial generation, who has grown up amidst the commercial fairy tale boom, and who has also been accused by the popular press of being lazy and entitled[15].

In maintaining the violent acts written by her German predecessors, Sexton divulges her disillusionment with contemporary commercialized fairy tales – in the Disney fashion – that fail to show "our own just rage" (Lesage 422). Who better to articulate the absence of women's rage

[15] In his book, *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation is Shaking up the Workforce*, Ron Alsop mentions such stereotypes: "In my research, I found the millennials frequently written off as narcissistic, arrogant, and fickle. Although there is certainly some truth in such negative perceptions, the millennials can also be quite impressive in their ambitions and achievements" (Preface).

than an enraged woman in the throes of her pain? Linda Grey Sexton examines the origins of her mother's confessional poetry in a discussion of her therapy sessions, which were taped and collected: "The recordings were filled with the meander of her alternately drowsy and angry voice" (Sexton 238). Even progressive thinkers are susceptible to the dominant discourse, and Anne Sexton is no exception. While she sought to uplift herself and her sex, her expressions of rage in her personal life were often misdirected. Her daughter describes an incident of child abuse that illustrates Sexton's inability to fully recognize, and act against, the larger social sources of her rage: "She keeps spanking and I can't help crying now, my nose-running face slipper. She never counts. She just does it til she isn't angry anymore" (Sexton 56). Ellen Cronan Rose analyzes the distinctive anger in Sexton's narrative voice: "The most consistently critical and bitter attack on the male cultural myths embedded in fairy tales comes from Anne Sexton" (Rose 212). Sexton preserves certain elements of the gruesome Grimm plotline, such as the body modification – removal of the toe and heel – of the stepsisters in an attempt to wed the Prince: "That is the way with amputations. / They just don't heal up like a wish" (Sexton 56). The narrator comments on the suspect nature of the commercial versions in which women passively rely on the aid of magical forces to "heal" them. Focusing on the notion of healing also serves the purpose of indicating the longevity of violent acts and thus their destructive potential.

Most scholars who contemplate the use of feet in *Cinderella* focus their analysis on the sexual rather than violent aspects. For example, scholars take an interest in the scene where the Prince slips Cinderella's "foot" into her "slipper," which is understood to symbolize penetration: "As Freud notes, female symbols are those that suggest the possibility of either entry or entrapment. These would include rooms and houses, ovens, jugs and bowls, shoes, and forests and flowers" (Stone 47). Sexton uses such symbols, along with a sarcastic tone, to address the

romanticized Disneyification of women's sexuality: "This time Cinderella fit into the shoe / like a love letter into its envelope" (Sexton 56). This image symbolizes heterosexual consummation and reveals Sexton's cynicism towards such a resolution: "Sexton's anger is directed at 'that story' of 'romantic fulfillment' " (Rose 212). While it is clear that Cinderella's shoe represents her sex, it is not as obvious what role feet play in this particular metaphor. Oddly enough, the foot is absent in Sexton's language and instead replaced with "Cinderella," making the body part and the whole woman synonymous. Sexton thus shows that the foot – which appears to represent a phallus penetrating the woman's "shoe" – cannot function symbolically as male anatomy because it is of the woman's body. Woman's sex is both foot and slipper, both internal and external. This paradox is also embodied in the envelope, which represents (in the same fashion as Jacques Derrida's *la brisure*) both an opening and an enclosure. If we extend these notions to our understanding of the stepsisters in Sexton's work, we find some startling suggestions.

Sexton does not openly vilify high-risk violent behavior as in the case of Dahl; her approach is somewhat subtler and certainly more pessimistic. She creates sympathy for oppressed and often, as in the case of the stepsisters, brainwashed women through her depictions of self harm: "The other sister cut off her heel / but the blood told as blood will" (Sexton 56). Violence is directed towards the foot, a symbol of women's complex sexuality. Both sisters undergo a form of self-inflicted female castration – willingly mangling their useful bodies in pursuit of marriage – prompted, of course, by the presence of the Prince. This suggests that narratives that suppress women's expressions of anger and sexuality encourage the alternative of self-harm. There is some support in science for this idea, but it relates more specifically to internal harm: "Some studies have suggested that women are more likely than men to suppress their anger, turning it in toward themselves, which may partially explain why women are twice

as likely as men to suffer from depression" (Swan et al. 268). In the work of both Sexton and the Brothers Grimm, the stepsisters, stripped of almost all power to act, are left with one alternative: act on themselves. As Žižek narrates, "you should have the outburst of violence and you should direct it at yourself but in a very specific way...at what in yourself chains you, ties you, to the ruling ideology" (Mullen and Fiennes). Yet, the acts of violence in *Cinderella* fail to liberate the sisters as their actions do not force them outside of dominant ideology. They cut their feet not to escape male dominance, but to reinforce it. Consider the symbolic implications of a female protagonist who cuts the Prince, or her own hair, instead of her useful body. These changes would ascribe different meanings as evidenced in the revisionary prose of Kelly Link and Tanith Lee, who I discuss in other scholarship.

Although many fairy tales indicate the connection between sex and violence, the commercial tales ignore this feature to their social detriment. Adrienne Rich, the late poet and feminist activist, comments on the cultural anxiety regarding this connection: "While we fear the link between sex and violence, as do Women Against Pornography, we wish we better understood its sources in ourselves as well as in men" (Rich 38). Sexton explores the connection between sex and violence by evoking another female symbol, the "soup spoon," in her last description of the wounded stepsisters:

> and the white dove pecked their eyes out.
>
> Two hollow spots were left
>
> like soup spoons. (Sexton 56)

The bird is Cinderella's minion, helper, and godmother, indicating that she has influence over its actions: "According to Bettelheim, animals in fairy tales represent our animal nature—in general terms our 'untamed id,' more specifically our sexual impulses" (Rose 224). Faced with sexual

competitors, the protagonist employs violence to ensure her life with the affluent Prince. As Yolen reminds us, "'Cinderella' is *not* a story of rags to riches, but rather riches recovered" (21). This story illustrates the competition between women for money and male attention, ideals that Sexton criticizes through the subversion of female symbols. The spoons represent both the empty eyes and the barren wombs of the stepsisters, who have been emphatically removed from the process of heteronormative consummation. Cinderella strips the stepsisters of social value, making them inactive, "hollow" and useless under patriarchal rule. Sexton's ironic use of the "white dove," a sign of peace, to deliver Cinderella's brutal message indicates the author's disdain for heteronormative, romatically-driven competitions between women.

While Dahl directly implicates androcentric authority in Cinderella's physical and psychological oppression, both examples of violence in Sexton's fairy tale fail to connect directly to patriarchy. Instead, one violent act is directed at the woman's self and the other at female competitors, yet both occur on behalf of the Prince. This hidden projection of androcentric discourse through female agents often places women in unhealthy competitions for male attention. With sarcasm and humor, Sexton and Dahl explore these competitions and evade the censorship evident in other variations of *Cinderella*, creating new representations of women that alter and expand the discussion on sexuality and violence. Sexton's personal notes, which were amassed by her daughter, Linda Grey Sexton, discuss the intersection of intimacy and competition: "Linda is seeing a psychiatrist, supposedly to get over her closeness to me. She is succeeding in doing that. I adore her and we fight often" (Sexton 366). This comment reveals the real-world precedent to the fantasy of Sexton's poetry, making her work all the more valuable in understanding competition among women in contemporary society. Intimacy and anger are seemingly intertwined emotional drives. Whether this correlation is natural or learned, its social

prevalence merits representation and analysis, not the censorship and avoidance common to commercial images of women's experience.

The Woman Inside the Glass Slipper: Narratives by Kelly Link and Tanith Lee

As Sigmund Freud suggests in the theory of psychoanalysis[16], shoes represent female symbols that act as an extension of the womb or vagina. Given this interpretation, how is one to understand a shoe made of gold or glass? The glass slipper is a common feature associated with *Cinderella*, yet this symbol is "not found in the majority of Cinderella tales," according to Alan Dundes' Casebook (110). In fact, Perrault, who first made the glass slipper famous, likely added it as "an ironic joke since a glass slipper was likely to break if it were to fall off a foot" (Zipes 444). Considering these characteristics, one might ask why this symbol continues to thrive in our cultural consciousness. I imagine the beautiful glass grinding Cinderella's dimpled skin with every step. From a distance, it would appear that she floated just above the ground. Her slipper is phantasmatic; it is mundane and magical, a transparent cover, both fragile and unbreakable. A seemingly impossible concept, much like woman herself: capable of great pleasure and pain. Both Kelly Link and Tanith Lee use this symbol to reflect on women's relationship to sex and violence. As Dundes argues, "from a symbolic as opposed to literal perspective, glass is perfectly appropriate. Glass is a standard symbol of virginity. It is fragile and can be broken only once" (111). Through this symbol, both revisionary writers present alternatives to what cultural critic

[16] Freud, Sigmund. *A General Introduction To Psychoanalysis*. New York: 1969. I56-I77. Print.

Caroline Heldman dubbed "the fighting fuck toy,"[17] which I interpret to mean a woman protagonist who appears to have agency through violence while unknowingly remaining a tool of androcentric discourse (Newsom). The shoe is also used in these revisionary works to embody the ways in which passion and violence are bound together. Despite this connection, both authors support the notion that violence should not be a culturally acceptable way for men to demonstrate intimacy.

The prolific British fantasy writer, Tanith Lee, reconsiders Cinderella in her collection of folk-inspired narratives, *Red as Blood*. Lee's revision of *Cinderella* perhaps features the most unique changes of all by intertwining the horror and fairy tale genres, a natural partnership if we recall the gory, visceral scenes from the Grimm brothers. The female protagonist denounces the Prince, though Lee takes this rebellion even further by killing him off completely. The use of violence here is very interesting because, although the protagonist, Ashella, presumably wills the Prince's death to avenge her mother, she does not directly commit the act. This indicates a differing approach to violence, one that relies more on psychological, rather than physical, power. The men in the story haphazardly commit physical violence, but the women plot behind the scenes and instead use a more indirect, psychological form of terror. This posits the notion

[17]This idea is discussed in the scholarship of Abigail S. Arnold: "The Fighting Fuck Toy is all over popular culture. She is a staple of video games (primarily played by men). She is the 'heroine' of popular movies such as Lara Croft Tomb Raider, Kill Bill One and Two, and the X-Men series. And, as Heldman points out, these types of movies don't always do well at the box office, which makes film executives decide that movies with female action leads can't make money" (55).

that women do not need brute force to accomplish their goals, even when the goal itself is violence and vengeance.

The narrator, a mysterious tour guide in a decayed town, addresses the tourist in a meta-moment that references the dominant tale: "Possibly you have been told the story? No? Oh, but I am certain that you have heard it, in another form, perhaps" (Lee 39). This perspective allows Lee to confront the values within other versions of the story while also indicating that this narrative is culturally recognizable despite its varied forms. Lee calls attention to the false notion that women are non-threatening through her description of Ashella, nemesis to the murderous Duke, who was "so obscure he had not traced her – for it was a woman...there was such a descendant that he had missed in his bloody work. And she was a woman" (Lee 40). The Duke is blind-sided by his female adversary because of an assumption that women do not pose a threat to androcentric dominance. An exemplary female aggressor, Ashella's powerful mother uses her will on a voodoo doll to attain revenge against the slaughter of her ancestors: "The woman was capable in what she did. The Duke fell sick. He lost the use of his limbs and was racked by excruciating pains from which he could not be rid of" (Lee 40). In this manner, Lee indicates that women are equal opponents through our use of will power and wit, not the mere brute force employed by the male characters, such as the Duke and his son.

Lee makes the reader aware that women can, in fact, pose a threat to male power structures through her description of Ashella's mother, who is "seething with spite and a hunger for vengeance, and as bloody as the Duke, he had known it, in her own way" (Lee 40). However, this comparison between Ashella's mother and the Duke, which indicates that women are just as capable of violence and malice as men, is somewhat problematic. Mimicking stereotypical, aggressive male behaviors may not be the best source of empowerment for women. The mother

is portrayed as powerful, but she is no heroine. Once her power is found out, she is vilified and burned. While violence can be a tool for women, it can also undermine their power by detracting from their difference. The sexes are similar in their experience of anger, but their differing expressions, as long as they are low-risk, should be encouraged to promote a healthy level of diversity. This is perhaps the reason that Lee intentionally distances the female protagonists from direct violent acts, presenting their intellect, rather than their literal bodies, as a site of power.

Making the mother a more present character enables Lee to explore the mother/daughter relationship, which she describes as militaristic rather than loving, indicating the negative effects of violence as a source of female power. In Lee's text, violence replaces the intimacy between the mother and daughter: "The woman caught the girl by her red hair and shook her...I promise you stronger powers than mine" (Lee 42). Ashella is described as being "recruited to her [mother's] service," demonstrating an obligation rather than a caring connection (Lee 42). After being discovered as a witch, Ashella's mother is burned, and Ashella herself is later described as "bright fire spangled inside it, but she was the fire" (Lee 42). Thus, fire takes on a dual symbolism; it is clearly powerful, but that power can be used either to destroy or create. For Ashella, the fire becomes a part of her identity, the driving force behind her beauty; yet, the very same element consumes and destroys her own mother's flesh. This symbol is indicative of the double nature of violence. While it can prove a tool for individual empowerment, it also has the potential to harm not only the recipient, but even the very agent of its employment.

The symbol of fire is further developed through Ashella's character, an interesting alteration of the dominant version's focus on ash: "And there was one other invisible item – her power…the eyes of the girl burned through her ashy hair, like a red fox through grasses" (Lee 44-46). Lee's emphasis on fire provides the protagonist a more powerful symbol – that of both

creation and destruction – than the ashy, useless remnants of the flame, the cinders that remain the identifying characteristic of the dominant Cinderella. This power is exemplified in Ashella's hidden prowess, furthering the emphasis on women's hidden strengths: "He went toward the girl in the doorway as if she drew him by chain" (Lee). Ashella has a psychological strength, which offers an interesting alternative to male expressions of power, which are often presented in the form of physical violence. Yet, her fire is also synonymous with her beauty, a disconcerting idea that merely feeds into the objectification of women.

Lee shows Ashella asserting her power over the Duke's son, who is described in attractive and positive terms as "tall and slim and clear-eyed...liberal, charming and clever" (45-46). Blurring her position as a protagonist, Ashella tests the reader's sympathy as she turns the adoring Prince into a "lunatic": "His intellect had collapsed as totally as only a profound intellect can" (Lee 51). Interestingly, she attacks his mind instead of his body. The favorable Prince is diminished under Ashella's will, again reinforcing the notion that women have power outside of direct physical contact. Sympathy for Ashella is reestablished when the Prince reveals his violent habits in an attempt to capture the mysterious woman: "He struck out at those who argued with him…drawing a dagger, he killed, not apparently noticing what he did" (51). Lee privileges perception over violence as a means toward empowerment. The Prince's violent actions and failure to take notice indicate that the narrative will not result in the heteronormative happy ending that reinforces the outmoded imperative of the nuclear family.

In the dominant versions of the tale, Cinderella puts her foot in the lost slipper, thus consummating her relationship with the Prince, "but this did not happen" in Tanith Lee's version (Lee 52). Instead, one of the final images the reader is left with is not the happy consummation of the couple, but the Duke's son, alone, as he "ran through the city toward the merchant's house,

and on the road, the intriguers waylaid and slew him. As he fell, the glass shoe dropped from his hands, and shattered in a thousand fragments" (Lee 52). The shattering of the slipper signifies the destruction of the values inherent in the first-recorded tales. Lee abandons the heteronormative resolution in favor of a different kind of penetration. The Duke's son is presumably stabbed, making him the recipient of penetration, which strips him of all power, suggesting the powerlessness that women may feel in conceptualizing sexuality primarily in terms of penetration, an idea I will discuss further in the work of Kelly Link. As I mentioned earlier, Lee's characters often avoid direct acts of violence, and this example is no different. Ashella appears to will the son's death – perhaps organizing it behind the scenes – but cannot be implicated in the actual act. Lee's choice to distance Ashella from the violent act makes her less like the oppressed, "fighting fuck-toy" that feminists caution against. She empowers herself by avoiding direct violence, instead exercising her agency from a distance.

The beautiful Ashella then seemingly vanishes from the text, but it is inferred that she and the narrator, who is never named, are one and the same. Ashella, even more so than the dominant Cinderella, is described with a multiplicity of identities that often contradict one another. To further complicate the issue of fragmented identity, Lee suggests that Ashella/the narrator – invoking a third identity – is also the figure of death: "he saw a change in the loveliness before him. She grew thinner, taller…he beheld a thing in a ragged black cowl and robe. It grinned at him...Death might hide her actual appearance" (Lee 51). Thus, the moral of the dominant fairy tale – that things are not always as they appear – is maintained but in reverse, demonstrating not that beauty is often hidden, but that beauty itself can be a mask that hides the agent of violence. Emphasis on beauty in most of the dominant fairy tales teaches women to avoid action: "female narcissism is a male-dominated culture that perceives women as objects

and conditions them to become objects" (Rose 215). Dominant versions suggest that beauty is the source of Cinderella's power, but in Lee's text the protagonist's agency lies in her ability to transform and alter perception, to know when to hide and when to reveal. Lee indicates that beauty can be a useful tool, but it is not woman's only resource, nor our strongest. Woman has another, much better, instrument and it is not her face or fist. It is the ability, derived out of her own hidden history, to change her tint like the chameleon's skin.

Kelly Link's Cinderella-influenced chapter "Shoe and Marriage," strays even farther than Lee's revision from the dominant tale, but still ruminates on its themes and symbols, such as notions of beauty and female sexuality embodied in the sign of the foot and slipper. "Miss Kansas on Judgment Day," a fragment from "Shoe and Marriage," ponders on the relationship between violence and intimacy. Like the dominant Cinderella stories, Link's narrative focuses on the subject of a newlywed couple: "These words are so sweet: honey, moon" (Link 173). Although this quote suggests sarcasm in the fashion of Anne Sexton, Link positions marriage as a more positive union than most of the revisionary authors I have studied. The happiness of the honeymooning couple is juxtaposed with a televised, supernatural beauty competition, which features erotically deformed contestants in the midst of a tense competition for the crown. While engaging in sexual intimacy, the couple watches and/or dreams the competition that is occurring within the plaza of their hotel. However, it is not merely the bodies on display that excite the sexually ambiguous couple, but also the threat of violence that looms over the event: "(We have heard rumors in the hall that Miss New Jersey ate her chaperone. Certainly no one has seen the chaperone in a few days.) When she smiles, you can see all her pointy teeth" (Link 175). Many of the contestants are described with visceral, outlandish details that intimate the threat of violence.

The potential for violence among the contestants thus acts as an aphrodisiac, though the risk is minimized as the couple maintains a safe distance from the event by nesting in their hotel room. The contestants, with their seemingly impossible bodies, defy the heteronormative discourse on sexuality that guides the dominant fairy tales: "She twitches her ass, she lashes her tail; we both gasp. Her tail is prehensile. She scratches her big ass with it. It is indecent and we are simultaneously dismayed and aroused" (Link 176). The grotesque body becomes a safe sexual stimulant because the couple is comfortably removed from the act through the use of the mitigating screen. The interactions between the couple are also tinged with the threat of physical aggression: "We would both marry Miss Kansas. You squeeze my foot so tight when she comes out on stage in her blue checked dress" (Link 175). The repetitive use of the pronoun "we" emphasizes the absence of individualism in the cultural discourse on marriage, but also encourages a more fluid conception of sexual desire through the inclusion of a third party. This quote also presents an aggressive, albeit low-risk, response to desire through the "tight" squeeze of the sexualized body part, potentially suggesting that such a reaction is instinctual.

The couple finds the televised display arousing, candidly conveying a perceived partnership between sex and conflict, a connection that is only subtly alluded to in dominant versions of *Cinderella*: "You have one arm wrapped around my neck so tight I can hardly breathe. I can smell myself on your fingers" (Link 178). The initial body language represents the masculine conception of expressing intimacy through violence. For men, it is socially acceptable to display affection through violence; we need only look at a football field full of happy, butt-slapping, shoulder-tapping male players for confirmation. Interestingly, though, the second description of the couple's sex life indicates women's fragmented sexuality and places more emphasis on overall closeness rather than aggressive, penile penetration. The concept of

closeness over penetration decentralizes sex, altering the sexual power dynamic of penetrator/penetrated, the latter of which, in American culture, is commonly considered a position of powerlessness. If we can bring ourselves to redefine sex in terms of decentralized closeness, we can perhaps avoid some of the destructive power dynamics involved in sexual interactions that too often serve to perpetuate the acceptance of force as a form of intimacy.

In another fragmented, Cinderella-influenced story, "The Dictator's Wife," Link calls attention to the cultural acceptance of risky expressions of aggression committed by men. During the dictator's massacre of the protagonist's family, the future wife is rendered powerless, reinforcing the devastating consequences of accepting male violence as a means of power: "He picked up my mother's shoe and gave it to me, as if it were a love token. A souvenir" (Link 183). The shoe, which functions as a symbol of heterosexual consummation in the first recorded tales, takes on a much darker meaning as it falls from the dead mother's foot. This example again indicates that passion and violence are bound together in dominant discourse. Yet we understand – given the perspective of the dictator's wife – that it is hazardous for women to allow this to continue. For too long, men have been allowed to mask violent acts towards women as a form of intimacy. Link lifts this mask, showing the bruised and bloody face of the wife underneath. Violence cannot be accepted as a viable method to demonstrate affection or desire; this notion is the basis for the perpetuation of rape culture, a point that makes women's own use of violence all the more worth critique.

Link also addresses vision and its complex relationship with passivity and power dynamics in the same fragment. The wife is portrayed throughout the narrative as a passive object, who "lives in the shoe museum…with the rest of the exhibits" (Link 180). Even in her passive state created by the dictator, the wife is able to achieve some power over the museum

visitors. Link's revision of the dominant protagonist hints at women's attempts to reclaim power not through violence, but by controlling vision and perception:

> In the bed is the dictator's wife, covers pulled up to her chin. Visitors stop and stare at the dictator's wife. She stares back, old and fragile and crumbly. It is disconcerting to be stared at by this old woman. (Link 180)

In covering herself – hiding her corporal being – she achieves a strange power over the visitors, a power that is certainly not represented in the Grimm or Disney Cinderella. Recognizing that she cannot will away her vulnerabilities, she does her best to hide them, which provides her some agency. As Judith Butler argues, "The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence…" (Butler 26). Interestingly, the protagonist's age, which weakens her body and makes her "fragile," cannot deter the power of her "disconcerting" stare, indicating that the power of bodily presence does not always come from physical actions, such as those of the dictator, who mercilessly kills. Instead, the heroine's power of presence comes from the agency of perception. However, this notion is quite foreign in the fairy tale genre: "Heroes succeed because they act, not because they are" (Stone 45). Although physical action is a means of empowerment in some situations, the agency of the gaze may be a more effective approach, because it reinforces perception and diminishes risky outcomes. Women should embrace this form of empowerment in lieu of mimicking the physical violence too commonly associated with male dominance.

Men also have access to the agency of the gaze, which poses a problem for women's empowerment when it reinforces self-harm. Link describes the wife, now a widow, hiding "underneath a messy wig" to deter the vision of the museum visitors, indicating her own discomfort and awareness at being objectified through vision (Link 183). The wife states, "'the

dictator killed anyone – men, women – who stared at me too long...I didn't want people to stare at me. I thought if I had no hair, no one would stare at me because I'm beautiful'" (Link 183). The wife attempts empowerment not through violence or sex, but by removing a part of herself. While I wouldn't normally characterize a haircut as an "amputation," Link makes this connection by showing that the wife's hair – much like the heads of the stepsisters in Dahl and the feet of the sisters in Sexton – never grows back, is lost forever. The hair functions as an archetype of power that is as old as the story of Sampson and Delilah. These amputations also allude to castration, which is problematic (the cuts signify powerlessness) and demonstrates the influence of phallocentricism on female discourse. The act of self-destruction does not save the wife from her husband's killing spree, which takes the life of her hairdresser and later her daughter. Unfortunately, it is common in our culture for women to commit self-harm as a response to oppression: "Sometimes our suppressed rage feels so immense that the open expression of it threatens to destroy us. So we often do not experience anger directly and consciously, nor do we accurately aim our rage at its appropriate target" (Lesage 422). Lesage points out the reason women are inclined towards self-harm, yet it is clear that this is not a solution to our rage. Self-harm offers momentary relief from our deeper wounds merely by distracting our pain. Examining dominant narratives, such as those in the fairy tale tradition, will enable women to locate our "appropriate target," whatever it may be, which will no doubt disguise itself cleverly in every context.

As Lesage points out, the solution is never as simple as a singular act: "That is, we need to promote self-conscious, collectively supported, and politically clear articulations of our anger and rage" (Lesage 420). Kelly Link and other revisionary writers suggest that, while self-harm may be an outlet for female aggression, it is not the answer to male violence against women, but

neither is mimicking such violent acts that are too often rendered in contemporary representations of "feminist" heroines. This concept is presented when the dictator's wife states, "'I used to think all the time about killing him'," which shows that she feels an aggressive impulse but still maintains control by refusing to act in a manner that will result in more violence rather than resolution (Link 184). While the writers I address may be accused – as many contemporary feminist writers are – of offering no solution to women's problematic and paradoxical situation, I argue that the aforementioned revisionary authors posit communication and knowledge as an alternative: "'I never asked him why he killed her or why he killed anybody'" (Link 185). The protagonist does her best to ignore the dictator's acts of violence, thus Link shows that her situation fails to improve, which denotes the potential power of communication. While it is dangerous for women to speak up on the complex correlation between sex and violence, the greater risk resides in our silence. To begin developing solutions to this silence, we should consider Žižek's position on violent representations: "Every violent acting out is a sign that there is something you are not able to put into words" (Fiennes). This demonstrates the need for an open discourse – one that both men and women have access to – about the costs and rewards of using violence and sex as a means of empowerment. The revisionary fairy tales that I have cited above present a diverse discourse on representations of women engaged in acts of sex and violence. Like the music from Cinderella's mouth to her mother's grave, these revisionary tales rupture the still, silent air with a refreshing thread of discordant notes that sing the multiplicities of womanhood.

Chapter Two

Action and Identity in Contemporary Revisions of *Snow White*

That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (2004), 3

Women are taught - through television, film, and literature - that if we find our "Prince Charming," we will have a happy life. This idea perpetuates outdated values based upon the premise that women needed men for financial stability. That idea has been proven false, as we now see women taking an active role in the American economy, not to mention their increasing presence in the global economy. In fact, studies are just now beginning to indicate the positive impact of woman's increasing economic activity. A recent global study (2014) found that "higher female budget shares are associated with higher spending on food, higher spending on children, as well as a better nutritional status of children" (Doepke and Michele Tertilt 15). Considering the international issue of malnutrition, diabetes, and obesity, the aforementioned study provides proof of the productive work that women are doing when given the opportunity to act. Yet many of the persisting fairy tales, which have become mass-marketed through popular culture[18], teach values that contradict the current state of women in contemporary society. The lesson is this: whether you're abused by a mean stepmother, trapped in a tower or a home, in a

[18] Zipes, Jack. "Breaking the Disney spell." *From mouse to mermaid: The politics of film gender and culture* (1995): 22. "The evolution of the fairy tale as literary genre is marked by the dialectical appropriation that set the cultural conditions for its institutionalization and expansion as a mass-mediated form through radio, film, and television" (22).

life you don't want, pursued by men and monsters in the woods – the solution to your problem is to find an able-bodied man. Just wait, and he will fix *everything*.

Contemporary variations of fairy tales often seek to counter this inaction by cultivating scenes of violence and sexual deviance that in some ways hark back to the acts and sexual allusions within the Brothers Grimm collection (1812) and in other ways differentiate themselves by their unique positioning of female characters as active aggressors. While I question those representations of women in situations of violence that merely reinforce the androcentric order, I think that it is important to feature women using violence as a tool towards personal advancement. It is not a favorable view among feminists to consider violence an innate and potentially productive part of human experience, because this line of thinking has historically benefitted men. However, my analysis will reveal that an acceptance and understanding of certain forms of violence can benefit women as well by encouraging internal development and external empowerment. The world of mass-marketed fairy tales too often creates an ideology of women as passive objects, a passivity that is likely correlated to woman's more common use of psychological forms of violence. As the scholar Louis Althusser argues in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (1972), "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). Operating from this premise, I will discuss the ideology within fairy tales that embodies important elements of our engagement with an intangible reality. Thus, in my analysis of *Snow White*, I seek to expose the various ideologies on female action (or lack thereof) in situations of sex and violence through the pairing of theoretical methods and concrete social data in order to better comprehend the ways that representations reflect and distort women's experience.

The romanticized notion of the male rescue, common in the dominant, Disney versions of fairy tales, encourages women to be passive objects intended solely to capture male attention: "Heroes and heroines in fairy tales, more so than in epic or saga, do not ordinarily succeed because they act, but because they allow themselves to be acted upon - helped, protected, saved, or transformed - by the magic of the fairy world" (Giradot). While I agree with Giradot, I would argue that it is more often the heroine who must remain passive to ensure her success as a protagonist. In his theses on ideology, Althusser establishes the importance of action in identity development: "despite its imaginary distortion, that the 'ideas' of a human subject exist in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions, and if that is not the case, it lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform" (Althusser 168). The Grimm Brothers' tale of *Little Snow White* functions as a model that is used by various authors, such as Helen Oyeyemi, Anne Sexton, Roald Dahl, and Angela Carter, to critique the characteristics among women that a particular culture defines as either "perverse" or essential. Judith Butler, who discusses sexuality and gender construction in her book *Undoing Gender* (2014), will also inform my analysis of identity development in Oyeyemi's novel *Boy, Snow, Bird* (2014): "If my doing is dependent on what is done to me or, rather, the ways in which I am done by norms, then the possibility of my persistence as an 'I' depends upon my being able to do something with what is done with me" (Butler 3). Butler's arguments on gender construction apply to my discussion of both recurrent and divergent female character traits in the tale of *Snow White* – specifically beauty, sexual purity, and passivity. Revisionary writers use these characteristics in both new and familiar ways in order to more appropriately address women's current cultural role, which necessitates action – "perverse" and otherwise – to ensure personal and financial success.

In her recent novel, *Boy, Snow, Bird*, Helen Oyeyemi reacts to the romantic notions in dominant versions of *Snow White* to show that women must be held accountable for their refusal to act. Charlie, described as a contemporary Prince Charming-type character, allows Oyeyemi to comment on the treatment of love relationships in dominant fairy tales. Boy remarks on her relationship with Charlie, "I was always a little disturbed by him because I'd never heard him tell a lie. That was horrifying to me, like living in a house with every door and window wide open all day long" (Oyeyemi 39). The reference to an "open house" offers an interesting alternative to the glass coffin – where Snow White is enclosed and presented to the Prince – which is a key feature of both the Disney and Grimm versions. The speaker, Boy – who is both the "wicked stepmother" and the protagonist – questions the romaticization of "truth" and heteronormativity, which is widespread in mass marketed narratives. Oyeyemi makes a reference to the dominant tale when describing Boy's position of power: "She ought to know that where there's a queen there's often a plot to overthrow her" (Oyeyemi 195). This alludes to the dominant tale and conveys the idea that women in positions of power, like the "evil" queen, are often targeted to reinforce passive behavior.

Oyeyemi uses Boy to show that the romantic notions in dominant fairy tales, such as Disney's *Snow White,* feed into the oppression of women by convincing them to limit their actions under the ever-watchful, androcentric gaze. This notion is embodied in another familiar symbol from the text – the infamous talking mirror. Jacques Lacan considers the psychoanalytic implications of the experience of the "mirror-stage" and its relationship to the "ideal-I," which will inform my analysis of representations of the queen in revisionary fairy tales: "the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world" (Lacan 504). The mirror's relationship to the self as a visibly defined being offers an interesting interpretation of the

fragmentary nature of human identity, particularly in the case of the "evil queen." Advancing a more feminist perspective, Laura Mulvey discusses the gaze and its connection to romantic conceptions and sexual libido in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema": "There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at" (Mulvey 59). While the gaze represents an epicenter of intimacy and desire, it can also function as a site of contention and oppression. The Prince and the seven dwarves, representing the androcentric perspective, derive pleasure from the same gaze that keeps Snow White encased and stationary. In the Grimm version, the dwarves "made a glass coffin and placed her inside so that she could be easily seen" because Snow White "still had such pretty red cheeks" (Grimm 176). Despite the differing symbols of containment – Oyeyemi's glass house as opposed to the Grimm's glass coffin – both dominant and contemporary narratives operate under the assumption that vision is powerful; Oyeyemi takes this one step further to show that the gaze can also manifest into physical danger.

"True love," a romantic notion commonly evoked in dominant fairy tales (most notably in the Disney films) is critiqued by Oyeyemi to show the ways in which it converts women into passive objects. We might think of "true love" and the heteronormative couple as an ideological state apparatus[19], which Althusser argues, "while admitting that they do not correspond to reality, i.e. that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality" (162). Thus,

[19] Although Althusser reserves the term "repressive state apparatus" for organizations such as the police and the army, which function by violence, I find it useful to extend this definition to other institutions that enact ideological force, rather than literal violence. Thus, my use of this term will be applied more often to social "institutions" that create courtship and gender customs.

even if "true love" is a mirage, its fantasy makes reference to the reality that women are confined by our own romantic beliefs. This speaks to Althusser's notion that the individual is "always already a subject," meaning that the subject's actions are not freely chosen (178). This notion of the subject is evidenced in the Grimm narrative, as it is Snow's beauty that intrigues the male characters and ensures her safety. Just as the Huntsman is about to stab Snow White, "she began to weep and pleaded so much…the huntsman was moved to pity, also because she was so beautiful" (Grimm 171). Her beauty incites instantaneous "true love," which ultimately spares her from the Hunter's knife. In this sense, Snow White is hailed or "interpellated"[20] by the refrain that she is beautiful. Her existential value would appear to lie in her beauty, a problematic notion considering that beauty is culturally and contextually conditional.

In Oyeyemi's revision, the oppressive force of "true love" and the interpellative power of beauty are questioned through acts of physical violence. Oyeyemi exposes an idea that is not commonly taught in fairy tales: the notion that beauty often becomes a liability for the subject, rather than an asset, enabling danger rather than safety.

> There is no exquisite beauty without strangeness in the proportion, is that not right? Let's fix it so that Charlie is truly mesmerized by you. Let's fix it so that he stares. Seven scars

[20] Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review, 1972. 127-86. Print. "As a first formulation I shall say: *all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (173).

should do it...Do you think that if I scar you no one will love you? You've got the wrong idea, girl. This will help your true love find you. He'll really have to fight for you now. Oyeyemi, 122

Boy learns her fear of the androcentric gaze from her "father," the Rat Catcher. Given a distinctly villainous name, the Rat Catcher abuses his daughter, Boy, and threatens to destroy her beauty. To the Rat Catcher, Boy's beauty is a hindrance towards happiness. Through this characterization, Oyeyemini shows that the ideology of "true love" and beauty can produce unfavorable actions among influenced subjects. This idea is counter to the central themes in several dominant fairy tales, like *Cinderella*, in which the protagonist only succeeds when her beauty is revealed. Folk and literature scholars also question the prevalent role of beauty in dominant versions of *Snow White*: "Instead of a concern for physical beauty and bodily sexuality, the love that comes from self-sacrifice and spiritualization is necessary for real personal development" (Giradot 297-298). While the Rat Catcher's abuse cannot be characterized as "self-sacrifice," his actions do force the reader to question preexisting values for women. Thus, Oyeyemi explores both the empowering capacity of beauty – its usefulness as a tool – and its hindrance as a repressive value system that objectifies women, placing them in passive situations. The use of the phrase "true love" in the context of this abusive behavior forces the reader to question the positive perception of an oppressive cultural concept, which is made up of two words that are so overloaded with meaning that they have been rendered null from overuse and can only allude to the intangible experience of human emotion.

As with "true love," marriage and its customs are also privileged and romanticized in mass-marketed fairy tales. Oyeyemi addresses the privileged position of heteronormative relationships and criticizes their connection to the objectification of women. For example, Boy

discusses her marriage to Arturo through an uncommon comparison that challenges the typical perception of married women:

> Wives are uncanny creatures, the day is a boxing ring and we dart around the corners of it, pushing our luck with both hands. We risk becoming so commonplace to the men we've thrown our lots in with who can't see us anymore, and who pat the sofa when they mean to pat our knee. That or we become so incomprehensible that it repulses our husbands. Oyeyemi, 269

The author compares the wife to a boxer, an analogy that works against the passivity commonly associated with that often-repressive role. Oyeyemi is right to point out the riskiness in the role, which historically has given the husband economic and psychological power that has the potential – as Oyeyemi indicates – to make the wife invisible. Boy further comments on the implied necessity for wives to submit to their husbands to ensure the success of the relationship. Questioning her own marriage to Arturo, Boy asks, "How could anyone enjoy this, the possibility, the necessity even, of their being called to heel in this way?" Again, reference is made to the fact that heteronormative relationships appear to repress women's actions. Interestingly, though, a recent study found that long-term relationships are more inclined towards aggression: "This finding is consistent with cross-sectional findings that longer, more committed relationships are more likely to include partner aggression (see Lewis & Fremouw, 2001 for a review)" (Testa et al. 4). One possible explanation for this aggression is a misunderstanding of how relationships function successfully, which I believe is furthered by narratives that heavily romanticize relationships with little substance.

Oyeyemi crafts her central characters to show that some of the messages within mass market fairy tales no longer resonate for modern women readers. Boy's marriage to Arturo

begets them a baby girl, Bird, who functions as a way for Oyeyemi to critique the values in dominant narratives. In her youth, Bird questions her father about the tale of *Cinderella*, remarking, "I think they're lying to us, Dad" (Oyeyemi 281). Her resistance to the potentially oppressive messages in these narratives also relates to her own positive self-image. Bird is a foil to her half-sister, Snow, who is a white-looking African American girl/woman. However, Bird metaphorically sings the secret of her father's heritage by being born – unlike Arturo and Snow – with dark skin. While Snow and Arturo are easily able to pass as white, Bird cannot, a point that becomes a central conflict in the novel. Oyeyemi reiterates the connection between vision and power in her description of Bird: "She's growing up into a huntress, every line in her clear and strong. She got her eyes from me, and when I talk, she dissects me with my own gaze" (Oyeyemi 275). There is no "huntsman" in Oyeyemi's revision of the popular fairy tale; instead, women characters, such as Bird and Boy, take on many of the masculine roles in the dominant *Snow White* story. To acknowledge and reinforce her agency, Snow sends Bird a "small, square, white birdcage with a broken door…and I was happy" (Oyeyemi 192). This emphasizes the idea that women must look outside of the ideological apparatus and support one another in action to achieve freedom and success. In many of the narratives I discuss, freedom is characterized by brutality, or what the contemporary philosopher Slavoj Zizek refers to as "the extreme violence of liberation" (Fiennes). While it seems tempting to seek freedom through violence, over-correcting our passive prototypes with over-the-top action will only exacerbate misunderstandings between the sexes. Thus, I advocate for an approach that always considers action within the context of the larger, repressive forces that insinuate our reality.

Oyeyemi's clearest stance against passive female protagonists in the dominant tales comes through her description of the opening narrator, Boy, who paradoxically functions as both

the evil stepmother and valiant heroine: “It’s not my actions that raise questions, but my inaction, the way I’ve consciously and consistently avoided chances to reduce other people’s unhappiness” (Oyeyemi 298). This commentary on the nature of misconduct is far different than the ideas suggested in the mass marketed tales, where female characters are rewarded for inaction and punished for doing almost anything. In the Grimm fairy tale, anytime Snow White answers the door and dares to touch the outside world – one of her few action moments – she is tricked by the evil queen and falls “down as if dead” (Grimm 175). The dominant message encourages women to fear action, to equate it with evil. Oyeyemi hints at the very opposite. Women should fear inaction and equate a lack of agency with evil, particularly if we consider Althusser’s point that our identity is, at least in some sense, bound to our actions. Instead of relying on a male character to initiate action, we must seek to act outside of androcentric influence, which will first require recognition and understanding of that perceived authority.

The Androcentric Gaze, The Queen’s Mirror, and the Woman Reflected

It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article.

Laura Mulvey, 59

To be beautiful requires little action, skill, or knowledge, which makes it a very dangerous epicenter for female culture. I am not critiquing the field of aesthetics, which has great value and takes great skill, but I am skeptical of the privilege given to qualities that are socially defined as superior. This privilege – of age, skin tone, hair color, or body type – inspires a culture of vanity that is aimed primarily at women. Placing such a high value on visual qualities teaches women that if they are "pretty" in a socially normative sense, then they need not work or struggle or strive to become better. In our modern economy, we realize that this simply is not true. A study in 2009

of American women in diverse families found that "The majority of women reported they had conservative buying behaviors, desired financial independence, had a somewhat negative view of their current financial situation, had worries about retirement and their financial futures, and considered long-term care insurance a necessity" (Malone et al 63). This shows that no matter how beautiful a woman is, in today's society she is more aware of, and responsible for, her own wellbeing and financial success. Narratives that teach otherwise run the risk of stunting our cultural development and hindering woman's increasingly active role in contemporary culture. Lacan discusses the power of our personal visual understanding in his work on the mirror-stage, which, "once the image has been mastered and found empty," features the misrecognition of a cohesive self (Lacan 502). I advocate that women avoid the trap and trick of the mirror and instead accept their own fragmentary nature and contradictory actions. Such an acceptance would incite women to undertake the development of these diverse elements of self, rather than passively allowing repressive apparti to tell us who we are.

Revisionary fairy tale author Anne Sexton attacks the dominant versions of *Snow White* by revealing the ways in which these narratives use romance to reinforce passive behavior among women. The problem with fairy tales that feature inert females relates to a concept in the work of Althusser: "This ideology talks of actions: I shall talk of actions inserted into *practices. And* I shall point out that these practices are governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed…" (168). Using this line of thinking, rituals of vanity, such as looking into the mirror, govern the material practices of women, which facilitates the construction of passive subjects. For example, although the queen has agency, when she gazes into the mirror and becomes seduced by its compliments, she is interpellated into a larger structure and thus influenced by the ideological voice. Dominant romantic narratives, fairy tale and otherwise, too often encourage

women to be beautiful, not smart, to successfully secure a suitor that would appear to ensure their happiness. Scholars have noted this trend in various versions of this tale: “the figure of Snow White as heroine is hardly a developed personality or even very heroic. Snow White, in fact, is always acted upon and seems incredibly stupid in her repeated failure to see through the wiles of the evil stepmother” (Giradot 284). Sexton also blatantly criticizes this odd model of heroism, repeatedly referring to Snow White in diminutive terms, such as “dumb bunny” and a “dust mouse” (Sexton 8, 5). More importantly, she critiques the influence of romantic ideology, perpetuated by both men and women alike, in promoting vanity and passivity as valuable traits among females.

The narrator of Sexton’s poem emphatically states, “Beauty is a simple passion, / but, oh my friends, in the end / you will dance the fire dance in iron shoes” (Sexton 3-5). The author’s description of bodily punishment as a result of vanity, along with the switch to the second person, “you,” accuses those who overvalue beauty. As Ellen Cronan Rose points out in her astute analysis of Sexton, “Like Cinderella, Snow White is described as an artifact” and “a commodity prized by men,” reiterating the ways in which vanity produces the material practice of passivity (213 Rose). Using a key object from the dominant narrative, Snow White's coffin, Sexton shows the real reason why rituals of vanity are harmful to women. After the protagonist’s "death" – which comes about because of her desire for aesthetic items (the comb, corset, and apple) – the dwarves “made a glass coffin” and “took pity upon him / and gave him the glass Snow White...its doll eyes shut forever...to keep in his far-off castle” (Sexton 8-9). In these lines, Sexton demonstrates that rituals of vanity, such as habits associated with the aforementioned

aesthetic items, have the ability to "hail" women, converting them into passive subjects and, more specifically, into male-owned property[21].

The crucial symbol in *Snow White*, much like the glass slipper in *Cinderella*, is the magic mirror. On the surface, both symbols reinforce vanity as a characteristic of women. Despite this, revisionary writers such as Anne Sexton, Roald Dahl, and Helen Oyeyemi reimagine the mirror in a more dynamic way that allows the female characters access to agency, rather than maintaining the dominant message that women should be sedentary and attract the male gaze. The mirror is problematic for many reasons, one of which is addressed in the work of Lacan, who argues that the mirror-stage presents "the unthinkable of an absolute subject" (Lacan 506). The cohesive image in the mirror deceives our senses into believing that our identity can also be unified, whereas revisionary writers work to shatter this illusion. Scopophilia, the idea that "looking itself is a source of pleasure," is another problematic feature of the mirror (Mulvey 59). Sexton illustrates the danger in such pleasure through her description of the vain Queen: "And the mirror would reply, / You are fairest of us all. / Pride pumped in her like a poison" (Sexton 5). She refers to the pride of vanity as a "poison," reminding the reader of the mirror's potential to destroy the user that becomes too captivated with his or her own false unity.

[21] Although Althusser uses the notion of "interpellating" the subject to refer to police calling to a suspect, we can apply this notion to the ways in which the mirror calls to the queen: "I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing" (Althusser 174).

The pleasure women seek in the mirror can cause them to become complicit in their own objectification. As Laura Mulvey points out, "sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other" (Mulvey 59). The mirror too often functions as a stand-in for the male gaze, reinforcing androcentric views of woman's reflection. In conjunction with this idea, Rose points out that "the mirror represents the alienation of women from each other in patriarchal culture" (215). The mirror creates boundaries between women by focusing their energy on competing with their peers, and themselves, to meet repressive standards of beauty directed by androcentric discourse. Contemporary writers react to this alienation by rewriting the dynamics between the female characters to illustrate stronger bonds among women. For example, Sexton revises the mirror in another poem, "Rapunzel," to reflect love between women, rather than reinforcing the superiority of the "fairest" woman and further polarizing the female community.

Sexton shows that the mirror - which acts as a stand-in for the androcentric voice that promotes female vanity - is both convincing and forceful, manipulating the queen towards some ambiguous end: "The mirror told / and so the queen dressed herself in rags / and went out like a peddler to trap Snow White" (Sexton 7). Use of the word "told" and the causal effect of the queen's masquerade demonstrates the influence of vanity on not only young, impressionable women like Snow White, but also on the older, more cunning queen. The queen in dominant versions of *Snow White* is vilified partially for her relationship to the mirror. Lacan offers some insight into the queen's characterization in his discussion of the "ideal-I," an illusion/allusion that the mirror initiates: "But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction…he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality" (Lacan 503). The queen's quest to be "fairest of them all" is essentially the

pursuit of the ideal-I, a fictional, cohesive notion of self that drives her to commit heinous acts. This demonstrates the ways in which women are hindered in their attempts at "perfection," which ironically can result in the opposing value, imperfection or "evil."

The queen's inability to accept the reality of her own aging face serves as the impetus for action in most versions of this tale. In the Disney and Grimm narratives, the queen functions as "one who did not successfully make the passage to complete womanhood and lives only in terms of the externalized values of sexuality and physical beauty. In this way, she is a witch representing all the destructive and dark forces of a woman who is retarded in personal development and seeks to prevent the creation of new life" (Giradot 287). This presents the idea that vanity and sexual objectification can stunt personal development. Women have long understood that sexual objectification makes us *feel bad*, but I argue that it also has the potential to make us *be bad*. Also notice that Giradot's point about the queen's resistance to "new life" still serves to reinforce heteronormative behaviors, vilifying an older (seemingly single and childless) woman who does not subscribe to this repressive value system.

Even in contemporary children's literature, we can find cautionary messages about the prevalence of vanity within the female community. Roald Dahl, recipient of the World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement for his work in children's literature, references vanity in the fairy tale genre through his description of Snow White in the collection *Revolting Rhymes*: "She found it easy, being pretty, / To hitch a ride into the city" (12). This demonstrates – and also perpetuates – the idea that women achieve power through passively initiating the scopophilic gaze. This is further represented when Dahl writes about the queen's relationship to the mirror. While the queen remains stationary "in the parlor / Eating bread and honey," Snow White acts to secure her future: "So no one saw her as she crept / On tiptoe through the mighty hall / And

grabbed the mirror off the wall" (13). Dahl revises the mirror to emphasize action over passivity. The theft of the mirror, which Snow innovatively uses to bet on horses, gives her financial freedom and independence from the queen: "Each dwarf and Snow White got a share, And each was soon a millionaire" (Dahl 12). This message is more relevant to modern readers, because women are becoming increasingly more active in the American economy and invested in their own financial success: "Over half (52%) of women in married couple households are employed (U.S. Census 2005). In fact, wives earn more than their husbands in nearly one in three (32%) married couple households in which both spouses work full time" (Malone et al 64). Money potentially gives women more power, but it is a power that can be hindered by heteronormative unions that reinforce androcentric thinking. Some studies even suggest that never married people have a lower likelihood of accruing outstanding debt in old age, diminishing some of the privilege of this ideological state apparatus (Malone et al 65). In spite of this, the mirror is still personified with the romanticized, male voice, promoting a heteronormative union: "The mirror whispered sweet and low" (Dahl 13). Unlike the dominant versions, Snow White learns to use this androcentric voice to advance her own financial interests, rather than being corrupted by it. Interestingly, there is no prince in this version of the tale to "save the day." Instead, Snow White saves herself through theft and gambling, two actions uncommonly associated with female behavior. This ending serves to promote action among women, regardless of whether those actions are perceived as "sin."

Dahl uses characterization to change the perspective on gender offered in the dominant tales. For example, he devotes description of the king to demonstrate his culpability in Snow White's persecution, while dominant texts largely ignore the king's role by either killing him off or avoiding any mention of him altogether. In fact, in the first edition of the Grimm Brothers'

fairy tales that was recently re-released by fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes, Snow White's father is never mentioned at all (Grimm 170-178). Instead of maintaining this absence, Dahl alters the narrative to demonstrate the king's responsibility in the situation. By describing his "shifty smile," Dahl indicates a level of distrust for the paternal figure (Dahl 8). The king is made more villainous and the queen is somewhat humanized with the curious name "Miss Maclahose" (Dahl 8). Although her villainy is softened, she is infantilized and described as naïve and vain with her "toy" mirror (Dahl 8). Thus, the mirror becomes less a symbol of power and more a childish plaything, emphasizing its trivial nature. The Grimm Brothers also indicate the harm in vanity through the use of three key objects – the comb, the bodice lace, and the apple – that appeal to Snow White's vanity in order to deceive and incapacitate her: "But no sooner did the old woman stick the comb in Little Snow White's hair than the maiden fell down and was dead" (Grimm 174). This narrative discourages vanity – a productive message in socializing young women – yet problematically still encourages passivity and ageism through the competition between the young "maiden" and the "old woman."

Like the Grimms, Dahl also employs the stereotype of the violent, "spoiled and stupid queen," but takes this message one step further to show that vanity endangers through the enforcement of inaction. The vain queen learns to sit still and quiet, posed in front of the ever-watching mirror. As Maria Tatar points out, the tradition of fairy tales includes "graphic descriptions of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest that fill the pages of these bedtime stories for children" (Tatar 4). Also in the spirit of the Grimms, Dahl refuses to shy away from violent descriptions: "I'll cook her flaming goose! I'll skin 'er! / I'll have her rotten guts for dinner…Thereafter split her ribs apart / And bring me back her bleeding heart!" (Dahl 10). Although this description of the queen is somewhat common, Dahl introduces humor in his

discussion of violence to appeal to his target audience, young adults, who are increasingly important in analyzing trends in popular culture. The following excerpt illustrates the ways in which Dahl imbeds humor in the dominant narrative:

> Then (this is the disgusting part)
>
> The Queen sat down and ate her heart!
>
> (I only hope she cooked it well.
>
> Boiled heart can be as tough as hell.) Dahl 12

The joke pokes fun at the dominant narratives by replacing the severity of the carnivorous queen with a scene of her difficult, grotesque dining. Humor allows Dahl to keep many of the original details of the story – details, like the eating of innards or the magic mirror, which readers continue to connect with – while still staying outside of the dominant narrative.

Although Dahl maintains some of the specifics from the familiar tale, his ending differs in a manner that speaks to more current cultural issues, such as gambling and financial independence: “Thereafter, every single day, / The mirror made the bookies pay…Which shows that gambling’s not a sin / Provided that you always win” (Dahl 12). In this example, the mirror acts as Snow White’s advocate, helping her achieve financial freedom from the queen. Narratives that encourage women to be more financially active are beneficial not only to women, but also for the entire community as a whole: “...Increasing financial well-being among women can help prevent financial crises; such as, home foreclosures and personal bankruptcies, which have reached record levels in recent years" (Malone 64). Allowing women to be more active in our culture will encourage economic stability through equality between the sexes. Showing an awareness of this, Dahl eliminates some of the passive connotations of the mirror by associating it with Snow White’s financial action and success.

Dahl and Sexton initiate the criticism of passivity, along with revealing its connection to vanity, to promote new, active models of femininity in their contemporary fairy tales. Oyeyemi, given more space in the novel, depicts more developed alternatives to the common, androcentric perception of women. From the first line, Oyeyemi shows the postmodern woman's awareness and enjoyment of the fragmented self:

> Nobody ever warned me about mirrors, so for many years I was fond of them and believed them to be trustworthy. I'd hide myself away inside them, setting two mirrors up to face each other so that when I stood between them I was infinitely reflected in either direction. Many, many me's. Oyeyemi 3

This notion of the self as multiple and varied corresponds with contemporary philosophies, such as those of French theorist Luce Irigaray, who uses the metaphor of a vagina to develop a new discourse on womanhood and identity: "Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s) – that caress each other" (Irigaray 24). Her reference to the vaginal lips serves as a symbol of the manifold, disparate facets of woman's identity. This awareness of multiple selves in the novel is, oddly enough, mitigated by the use of the mirror – a powerful symbol of vanity, among other things, in folk narratives. Many scholars have noted the symbolic importance of the mirror, which "in many traditions represents a magical instrument of self-realization, a device which can reflect the true state of the soul…reflects what is physically present and does not in itself cause self development. Seeing oneself can be either the occasion for growth or decay" (Giradot 288). Our image can be a tool for reflection and development or a weapon of internal destruction. We can hide behind our image – pretending to be powerful or passive, sexual or pure, to fit the dominant discourse – or we can embrace and fine-tune our identity without regard for standards or trends. Although the mirror makes Boy more aware of

her various, uncanny selves, it also enables her to hide from her abuser and ignore her own victimization.

The awareness of the fragmented self, made possible by the mirror, also manifests in Boy's exploration of her sexuality. In a masturbatory mirror scene, Oyeyemi depicts Boy as not one, but two, both herself and the "other":

> I imagined I was watching a lover undressing just for me. My lover wasn't shy. Her motions were calculated, intent…I kissed the glass with my fists against it, kissed wantonly until I felt an ache in my breasts and a throbbing between my legs. There was the taste of blood where my mouth met my mouth, as if our lips were blades. (Oyeyemi 39-40)

Oyeyemi appeals to a more adult audience by demonstrating her awareness of the complicated, developing sexuality of contemporary women, who are learning how to create their own narratives of desire, demonstrating Irigaray's point that "Woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's" (Irigaray 25). Boy exemplifies this exploration of desire, finding sexual pleasure in both herself (through masturbation) and the familiar other, the doppelgänger in the mirror. The terms "ache" and "blades" relate to Zizek's discussion of desire and physical pain in a recent film documentary: "Enjoyment is precisely enjoyment in disturbed pleasure. Even enjoyment in pain. And this excessive factor disturbs the apparently simple relationship between duty and pleasures" (The Pervert's Guide). In Oyeyemi's scene, the mirror is used as both a site of desire and violence – much like many of the women's bodies in these stories – which presents a problematic, seemingly innate connection that merits more discussion.

Reinventing a theme from many dominant fairy tales, Oyeyemi shows her protagonist struggle with the deception of appearances. For example, when Boy is accused of being the

"wicked stepmother," her friend, Mia, defends her by arguing that "It only looks like that. That's not how it really is" (Oyeyemi 105). Using the second person point of view, Oyeyemi crafts Boy's commentary to include the reader in a discourse on deception: "it's perfectly clear to you that people can smile and smile and still be villains" (Oyeyemi 6). The author alludes to the deception of the evil queen, who "disguised herself as an old peddler woman, painted her face so that nobody could recognize her" (Grimm 173). As Zizek sympathetically points out in cinematic examples of popular antagonists, "They're never what they appear to be – cynical, brutal delinquents. They always have a tiny private dream" (The Pervert's Guide). Revisionary versions of this tale employ this multi-faceted view of villains, like the queen, whose disguise functions as a sort of mirror, reflecting the queen's internal fears of aging and accordingly losing power. In a moment of meta-fiction, Bird defines the mirror as "presenting convincing and yet conflicting images of the same object, thereby leading onlookers astray" (Oyeyemi 123). Beauty is depicted as a dangerous focus for female identity because it is so thoroughly bound up in the idea of deception. This should prompt us to call into question the voice in the mirror, the voice that speculates on the quality of our own reflected face. Is the voice we hear our own?

The mirror, which I argue is a paradoxical symbol of internal degradation and self-reflection, also functions as a stand-in for the androcentric voice. As Ellen Cronan Rose points out, the mirror answers "with the voice of the king" (Rose 210). In the Grimm narrative, the mirror uses diction that reinforces vanity and objectification: "The mirror would answer: 'You, my Queen, are the fairest of all'" (Grimm 170). This idea echoes in Boy's critique of a minor female character, who is described as "one of those women who are corpselike until a man walks into the room, after which point they become irresistibly vivacious" (Oyeyemi 16). Vanity encourages women to enact the male gaze through any means (including deception), yet remain

passive in its absence. The notion that women put on their "best face" for a male audience is embodied in the model of the vain woman posing passively in front of the mirror. The consequence of this dynamic is the creation of the deceptive seductress stereotype, the hyper-sexualized woman who is not what she appears to be. In the Grimm fairy tale, this particular portrait of womanhood manifests in the seduction of Snow White: “The Queen then took out the comb, and when Little Snow White saw it shine and that the woman was someone entirely different than the one she previously met, she opened the door and bought the comb” (Grimm 175). Snow White is thus tempted by the Queen’s deception and her appeals to Snow White’s own vanity, showing that both characters are guilty of the same moral shortcoming, which further suggests a need for women to focus less on external appearances.

The deception of appearance is evident in the description of Oyeyemi’s character, Snow, who is not the protagonist of the narrative, but the protagonist’s stepdaughter. “She’s a doll,” Oyeyemi writes of Snow, using diction that invokes Sexton’s bitter critique of the passive, ceramic protagonist common to the dominant tales (Oyeyemi 20). Like the doll, Snow’s beauty is characterized as unreal as she has “the darkest hair and pinkest lips, every shade at its utmost” (78). Color is a reoccurring preoccupation in this fairy tale, one that helps Oyeyemi reveal the ways in which standards of beauty have an influence on identity development. Evoking the skepticism Sexton demonstrated towards dominant fairy tale protagonists, Oyeyemi writes that Snow is “Nice to look at for an afternoon, but we’ll all breathe easier once she’s safely back at the museum” (Oyeyemi 242). This hyperbolic commentary speaks to a real problem – that beauty is too often used as an excuse to keep women restrained. Bird, Snow’s half-sister, remarks on the way in which Snow’s beauty has converted her into an object that lacks access to agency: “Does she know that she does this to people? Dumb question. This is something we do

to her" (Oyeyemi 266). In this scene, the author intimates that Snow's mean-spirited tendencies are the result of being treated like a precious doll. Thus, Oyeyemi establishes that valuing women for beauty alone stunts their personal development in other, more fruitful areas. This is further illustrated when Boy confesses, "and I don't look the way I feel," again suggesting the inability for image to express the contradiction of woman's multiplicity (140).

In Oyeyemi's revisionary fairy tale, Boy is often foiled by her own vanity, supporting the notion that excessive emphasis on standards of beauty hinders personal development[22]. Oyeyemi uses a modified mirror to show the ridiculous ways in which women are complicit in reinforcing these social expectations, when her vain protagonist, Boy, is caught "contemplating my mysterious smile in the back of my dessert spoon" (Oyeyemi 21). Given her preoccupation with beauty, it is perhaps no wonder that Boy chooses to marry a wealthy jeweler. Interestingly, her husband's job acts as a metaphor for the androcentric perspective, demonstrating the potential for violence within the enforcement of standards of beauty: "It's not work I could do, breaking something and then breaking it again and again until it looks the way I want it to" (Oyeyemi

[22] Zipes, Jack. "Breaking the Disney spell." *From mouse to mermaid: The politics of film, gender and culture* (1995): 21-42. It is important to note that the Grimm brothers played less of a role in establishing social and behavioral standards than the 17th century French writers and the late Walt Disney, whose "revolutionary technical means capitalized on American innocence and utopianism to reinforce the social and political status quo" (21-22).

104). Yet the flawed male characters in Oyeyemi's narrative are nothing new[23]. Arturo is a deceptive character, hiding his true heritage as an African American from Boy and the community. The stereotype of the deceptive hero is just as limiting to male gender development as the deceptive seductress is to female development, demonstrating that the androcentric perspective can potentially hinder the agency of the group it seeks to enable.

The androcentric gaze, which reinforces cultural and behavioral standards, has the ability to place women into passive situations that they desire to escape[24]. Laura Mulvey, a pioneering film critic, was one of the first scholars to address scopophilia and its relation to gender in cinema: "Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystalizes this paradox" (Mulvey 62). Desire and the potential danger of the gaze appear inextricably connected in androcentric discourse[25]. The other two primary male characters in Oyeyemi's narrative, Charlie and Frank, who represent two different generations, both employ the gaze in the manner Mulvey suggests, which causes the protagonist great discomfort and incites her desire to rebel through action: "They both turned to me and went on a looking spree. I left them to it and wished I could sail over their heads and into the acid blue

[23] Ibid. As Jack Zipes argues in the example of *Puss and Boots*, "Disney's hero...does nothing to help the people or the community. In fact, he deceives the masses and the king by creating the illusion that he is stronger than the bull" (33).

[24] Ibid. Walt Disney, "the orchestrator," exacted this kind of social control through his cinematic practices (Zipes 39).

[25] Ibid. In Disney's fairy tale, the focus on beauty, and the notion that it brings happiness in the form of a male suitor, creates "false promises of the images he cast upon the screen" (Zipes 22).

sky." Oyeyemi expresses the potential of the androcentric gaze to place women in vulnerable, submissive situations, a problem that I suspect would be heightened in cultures that encourage vanity among women.

The passive protagonist, who has the potential to be both threatened and redeemed by the androcentric gaze, is a common feature of the dominant fairy tales[26]. For example, in the Grimm and Disney narratives, Snow White is both encased and saved by the glass coffin that represents the androcentric gaze. While it is easy to fault white men, like Walt Disney and the Grimm Brothers, for the endurance of woman's oppression, we must recognize that the dominant, androcentric perspective is also violently reinforced by those women and minorities it seeks to undermine. One example comes from Boy's abusive mother, whom Oyeyemi describes as focusing her rage through the eyes, using them as a tool: "he scraped away at me a little more with his dull nickel gaze…He slapped me…Another slap, harder" (Oyeyemi 120). The "he" in this excerpt refers to Frank, the Rat Catcher, who Boy later learns is actually her long-lost transgender mother, Francis. Despite Frank's biological origin as a woman, he reinforces the submission of his daughter, attempting to convince her, through abuse, that her gender is inferior.

Racial generalizations are one of the problematic features of Disney's legacy, particularly in his early work. As Zipes points out regarding Disney films, "There is no character development because the characters are stereotypes" (Zipes 40). Oyeyemi uses her revisionary fairy tale to discuss racial conflicts and stereotyping, forcing the reader to acknowledge the discourse of racial superiority that directs many of our cultural narratives. Olivia, Bird's black

[26] Ibid. "Disney retained key ideological features of the Grimms' fairy tales that reinforce ninteenth-century patriarchal notions that Disney shared with the Grimms" (37).

grandmother, is also described as perpetuating the oppression of her own race and sex through an aggressive gaze: “she took one look at Bird, a cold, thorough look, then turned her gaze away.” Unlike Frank, Olivia’s gaze threatens with its absence rather than its presence, demonstrating the multiplicity of ways in which the gaze can be used as a tool to reinforce passivity. Although similar to Frank, Olivia also threatens physical violence to reinforce her dominance over Bird, a dominance that she feels entitled to found solely on surface appearances and standards of beauty (Oyeyemi 133). Boy, recognizing her mother-in-law’s self-defeating behavior, reflects that “it’s not whiteness itself that set Them against Us, but the worship of Whiteness” (Oyeyemi 275). In this way, Oyeyemi uses a common theme in the dominant tale – purity and whiteness – but makes the content more culturally relevant by addressing the “purity” of bloodlines, or lack thereof, and paying specific attention to the ways in which racial superiority determines standards of beauty.

The potential for physical violence latent in the androcentric gaze, again exemplified through Frank’s character, is directed at Bird, presumably because of her skin color and sex: “It was the look he’d given me when he understood I was his granddaughter. It was like a burn. And now that I was safe from it, the syringe scared me even more” (Oyeyemi 260). The interesting part about this excerpt is that the rat catcher's "look" has the power to make the physical danger more real. The aggressive actions that reinforce the androcentric perspective speak to the current cultural views on brutality: "the harshness of the violence as such was perceived and endorsed as a sign of authenticity" (Zizek 5). This alludes to the power of violent acts to validate and authenticate, further problematizing the privilege of the aggressive, androcentric gaze. Mulvey address this power imbalance in relation to the phallocentricism in cinema by arguing that woman is “still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey 58).

Frank threatens Bird through both vision and action to reinforce his dominance as a white male in spite of the fact that he is not biologically a man. Oyeyemi develops Frank to question the tradition of male-driven fairy tale narratives[27]. Oyeyemi avoids this narrative structure by framing her fairy tale through the mother and daughter, Boy and Bird, harking back to the matrilineal roots of the oral folk tale[28].

Physical protection by mother of daughter is not a common feature of the *Snow White* fairy tale. In fact, in the Grimm Brothers' first edition of the fairy tale, the mother and the evil queen are one and the same (Grimm 170). Oyeyemi also conflates the idea of mother and evil queen, but somewhat privileges maternal protection. In seeming contradiction with the previous examples, the violent tendencies of the gaze can also serve a defensive function. Boy uses brutality, killing the spiders in front of Bird, to make her feel safe: "I was mad at her but I was glad that she was watching over me…She'd killed four spiders. There were no bodies but their

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[27] Ibid. According to Jack Zipes, this tradition of male-driven narratives is furthered by Disney, whose films follow "the classic 'sexist' narrative about the framing of women's lives through a male discourse" (36).

[28] Zipes, Jack. *Fairy tales and the art of subversion*. Routledge, 2012.

"That is, by the time the oral folktales, originally stamped somewhat by matriarchal mythology, circulated in the Middle Ages, they had been transformed in different ways: the goddess became a witch, an evil fairy, or a stepmother; the active, young princess was changed into an active hero; matrilineal marriage and family ties became patrilineal; the essence of the symbols, based on matriarchal rites, was depleted and made benign; and the pattern of action that concerned maturation and integration was gradually recast to stress domination and wealth."

webs gaped at me" (Oyeyemi 196). Here the mother's gaze protects her daughter and, like the previous example, is accompanied by a physical act of violence to reinforce the power behind the look. Bird both accepts this act of protection and questions it, established through her negative description of the "gaping web." This skepticism likely stems from her awareness of the androcentric appropriation of the gaze, which reinforces the standards of beauty that she seeks to escape. Bird learns the power of the gaze from her mother, and during her showdown with the Rat Catcher she states, "I just took what was in his grin and gave it right back to him. He choked on a fry and I handed him a napkin" (Oyeyemi 251). Her ability to match Frank's gaze empowers Bird, manifesting in an almost-physical reaction that serves a protective function. It is interesting to note that female characters primarily invoke the protective function of the gaze, which is more commonly associated with the male characters – particularly charming princes – in dominant fairy tales. Neither Bird nor Boy needs a male champion; they both, instead, advocate for themselves.

Bird shows explicit anger towards mirrors and their associations, such as their affiliation with the androcentric voice and provocation of vanity, both of which I have argued promote passivity and objectification: "so I broke the mirror, and kept right on hitting it long after it broke" (Oyeyemi 157). This outburst relates to Lacan's discussion of the spatial mirror-stage, which causes "the effect in man of an organic insufficiency in his natural reality – in so far as any meaning can be given to the word 'nature' " (Lacan 505). Oyeyemi depicts Bird's violence against the mirror to showcase its commonly obscured use as a symbol of coherence and submission that must be acted against. Bird's mixed racial identity makes her particularly hesitant to accept the cohesive reflection of self. The negative associations of her own dark skin frustrate Bird to the point of physical violence, perhaps hinting at the ways in which "male

framing drives women to frustration and some to the point of madness" (Zipes 36). In line with this view, we might consider how repressive, androcentric standards spawn the queen's madness to maintain her beauty. Yet Bird is able to preserve her sanity through the aforementioned act of violence that functions as a cathartic rebellion against dominant images. As Zizek recommends in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, she directs this violence internally, towards the self, which enables her catharsis and empowerment. Unlike the Disney fairy tale, which avoids the brutality of the Grimm narrative and "is geared towards nonreflective viewing," Oyeyemi's story creates a more complex understanding of violence that suggests its relationship to identity development (Zipes 40).

This act of violence transpires because Bird, perhaps more so than her mother, realizes that "My reflection can't be counted on" (Oyeyemi 207). In Lacan's mirror stage, children experience *méconnaissance* through the identification with the image of themself, resulting in what Mulvey refers to as recognition "overlaid with misrecognition" (Mulvey 60). Although Bird is past the mirror stage, it bears some relevance to her seemingly random expression of anger at an inanimate object. During the mirror stage, the child "imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body" (Mulvey 60). The completeness of this image – which is perpetuated in androcentric discourse – disturbs woman's awareness of her own fragmented, internal identity by forcing reconciliation between the contradiction of the reflection and the perceived reality. As this suggests, Bird functions as a paradox, a site of *différance*. She engenders and reconciles binary opposition because she is described as simultaneously white and black and neither white nor black. This is only one paradox of the many present in human identity, a reality that dominant fairy tale stereotypes, consciously or not, stifle and distort. The simplification of identity development in dominant cultural narratives

provides a reason for woman's ongoing vexation with her own image and offers a possible explanation for the increase in aggressive fairy tale heroines in contemporary rewritings. These rewritings, by Oyeyemi and others, often promote diversity among their characters by avoiding passive stereotypes and simplified binaries found in the dominant fairytales that have recently seemed to proliferate within our culture through literature, film, and TV.

Familiar Violence: Aggressive Actions and Sexual Behavior in *Snow White*

Women's sexuality is often obscured in dominant fairy tales, such as the Grimm Brothers collection and Disney films, which present cultural narratives that reinforce passive behavior among women. Just as with acts of violence among women, we are now seeing a surge in media discourse on women's sexuality. We must take part and lead this discussion towards active models that allow for sexual diversity. It is impossible to talk about the tale of *Snow White* without discussing the associations around her sexuality, particularly the notion that she is a heroine because of her sexual purity. Many elements of the story, such as the "three drops of blood" on the white snow, represent the cycle of sexuality (Grimm 170). As scholars point out, the wicked queen is, in fact, the good queen at later stage of development: "So her window is replaced by a mirror, her passive goodness by a wicked rage at the discovery of life's limitations upon her" (Rose 210). Thus, Snow White, like the queen before her, is made wicked upon the realization of her acceptance into the patriarchal, heteronormative order. In order to understand the queen's "wickedness," we must first explore the nature of evil, which is discussed in Althusser's work on ideology and identity: "therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. If he does not do so, 'that is wicked' " (168). Positioned in this light, the queen's

evil is the product of her active disagreement with her own established ideology. Women can break this cycle by cultivating an awareness of, and a new discourse for, their own sexual diversity, which will enable less circular ideologies that present more possibilities for social development.

The plot of the Grimm tale "Little Snow White" or "Sneewittchen" culminates in the murder of the queen in a scopophilic spectacle that reinforces the repressive, patriarchal order: "Iron slippers were then heated over a fire. The queen had to put them on and dance in them, and her feet were miserably burned, but she had to keep dancing in them until she danced herself to death" (Grimm 177-178). Her failure to integrate into the normal order makes her a target of the community.[29] The queen disrupts that harmony by replacing the presence of the king, who is never mentioned, and thus she supersedes the patriarchal. Snow White's violent choice of wedding entertainment again symbolically suggests that valuing sexual innocence, rather than promoting sexual diversity, breeds competition among women: **"**There are also associations of slippers and shoes with the female sexual organs which, as expressive of the egocentric overestimation of the physical dimension of human nature, represent the root of the stepmother's evil" (Giradot 297). Her sexuality and refusal to participate in the heteronormative order make the queen a villain,[30] whereas Snow White is saved because of her innocence (what modern readers might recognize as naiveté) and acceptance of the patriarchal directive.

[29] Disney, instead, focuses on individualization, particularly that of the prince in his films: "The emphasis in most folk tales was on communal harmony" (Zipes 22).

[30] Fairy tale scholar Sue Short discusses the roles of women in films based on popular folk tales. She argues that "they fit a particular stereotype, or, rather, they have been made to fit one," suggesting that these roles are often reinforced through ideological force (Short 25).

Like beauty and its correlation to vanity, virginity also emphasizes inaction among women. In the introduction to her poem "Snow White," Anne Sexton writes, "The virgin is a lovely number" (Sexton 3). Her dehumanizing use of the word "number" as a descriptor for the "heroine" shows Sexton's skepticism towards narratives that equate virginity with virtue. Furthermore, she uses phallic imagery, such as "shut for the thrust / of the unicorn. / She is unsoiled," to suggest that overvaluing virginity can, perhaps unwittingly, reinforce rape culture. Ellen Cronan Rose describes the journey of Sexton's Snow White as "a wilderness of sexual menace" made more threatening by the fact that she is "unprotected by a strong and loving mother" (Rose 214). Despite the connection between rape and the veneration of virginity, the privileged place of the virgin remains "unsoiled" in popular cultural narratives.

Although Disney attempted to erase many of the problematic, violent elements of the Grimm's Collection,[31] revisionary writers have recently worked to recover these lost messages, such as the cautionary view of male sexuality. This idea is evident in Sexton's description of the woods in which Snow White gets lost: "his tongue lolling out like a worm, / The birds called out lewdly, / talking like pink parrots, / and the snakes hung down in loops" (Sexton 6). The phallic imagery of the woods creates the association between male sexuality and physical danger. The menacing male libido is also implied in other Grimm fairy tales, such as *Red Riding Hood*, which features a young girl who is threatened by the "wolf" when she leaves the safety of the domestic sphere for the freedom of the woods. Although Disney erases much of the violent details present

[31] Many scholars have addressed Disney's suspect sampling of popular folk narratives: "After all, Snow White was his story that he had taken from the Grimm Brothers and changed completely to suit his..." (Zipes 35).

in the Grimm collection, the two narratives have several significant features in common, such as the prevalent message of domesticity as a positive female trait: "one shared aspect of the fairy tale and the film is about the domestication of women" (Zipes 37). Snow White is taught to fear the public, the outside world where predators and evil queens roam, and instead remain passively within the presumably "safe" boundary of the home. While the Grimms' message – cautioning women against the dangers of the outside world – still has cultural relevance, domesticity is not a solution to aggressive male behavior. It is more likely that domesticity encourages male predatorial conduct by teaching women that their survival depends on passivity and fear of the public. Valuing domesticity and virginity among young women makes them less likely to challenge the reining androcentric ideology, thus reinforcing a cycle of oppressive thought.

Many revisionary fairy tales seek to address aspects of women's experience that are often ignored or subdued, particularly the uncomfortable subject of rape and its possible causes. Sexton describes Snow White as a victim, who is poisoned by the queen and "lay on the floor, a plucked daisy" (Sexton 7). The reference to a plucked "flower" conveys the idea that Snow White's virginity has been compromised: "In a shocking image, Sexton reveals that the male culture that defines and prizes her is in fact a rape culture. Here the unicorn, friend and companion of virgins, turns into the rapist's prick" (Rose 213). Rachel Jewkes, the Secretary of the Sexual Violence Research Initiative, states in her findings that "men who hold conservative ideas about the social status of women are more likely to abuse them" (Jewkes 1425). Jewkes' data suggests the problematic nature of the repressive views that pervade our culture. Supporting chastity among women – a conservative perspective on female sexuality – encourages male abuse on two opposing fronts, as both enforcement and defilement, placing women in an impossible position.

British-Nigerian author Helen Oyeyemi also criticizes the value our culture places on woman's sexual purity, an idea that manifests through her characterization of women in her revisionary novel, *Boy, Snow, Bird*, which is titled after the three main female characters. The importance of names in Oyeyemi's novel is both a nod to the Grimms – who titled their protagonists with symbolic weight – and a way for her to emphasize the novel's exploration of gender and sexuality. "Snow" symbolizes whiteness, beauty, and innocence, but what about the names "Boy" and "Bird"? Boy considers early in the novel "what kind of person the name was supposed to help me grow up into" (Oyeyemi 68). While trying to catch the attention of her soon-to-be husband, Arturo, Boy states that she wants to be seen as "not too animal, not too pure," demonstrating that the idolization of either purity or "animal" sexuality among women can restrict their access to agency (Oyeyemi 69). The liberal attitudes of women, such as the one posed here of dual sexuality, threaten the hegemonic models of femininity established from patriarchal perspectives, such as those of Boy's father, Frank. The threat of women's sexual and psychological freedom is often met with physical violence: "Women who hold more liberal ideas are at greater risk of violence" (Jewkes 1425). This quote proves interesting when applied to the dominant tales, where the conservative, abiding Snow White, kills the "evil" queen – a woman who presumably rebels against the patriarchal order by refusing the maternal role. Like the queen, Boy also functions as a site of conflict and violence because of her liberal ideas, such as her compassion for the bi-racial identity of her daughter, Bird.

The name "Boy" for his only daughter speaks to the Rat Catcher's androcentric perspective on gender identity, which is further complicated by the fact that he is transgender and is Boy's biological mother. Frank represents the androcentric perspective and believes women to be inferior because of the abuse he experienced during his life as a female: "You know how

Frank says he became Frank? He says he looked in the mirror one morning when he was still Frances, and this man she had never seen before was just standing there, looking back" (Oyeyemi 294). This notion reinforces the power mirrors have on our perception and development of identity, particularly in the case of women. When Frances looks in the mirror, she thinks she sees a villain – her abuser – and that is exactly what she becomes. A recent study among college couples found that predictors of intimate partner violence (IPV), "which tend to be consistent for male and female perpetration, include witnessing or experiencing parental violence" (Testa et al 2). This is not to suggest that all men are villains and abusers, but that those few who are construct a cycle of violence, a cycle that women are also capable of producing. Frances is an example of such a woman, who commits violence against her own sex, her own daughter, to reinforce androcentric superiority. Thus, Frances changes her form and her name to Frank and forcefully encourages her offspring to do the same through one word: *Boy*.

Common to all the dominant fairy tales, the intermingling of violence and intimacy is also prevalent in Oyeyemi's revision, particularly within her discussion of Boy's relationship with her mother, Frances/Frank. The "villain" of the story, Boy's abusive, transgender parent, is easily one of the most complex and intriguing characters in the novel. The reader learns that Frances "was interested in proving that homosexuality isn't a mental illness. But she never finished her paper…" (Oyeyemi 291). This redeems Frank, to a degree, by showing that he was once on a path to empower homosexual women before suffering his own victimization. Oyeyemi describes Frank's sexual relationships with women in gendered terms: "she was playing possessive, her arms tangled around the woman on her lap" (Oyeyemi 292). The word "possessive," along with the placement of the woman's body, indicates the associations between masculinity and ownership. Representations of intimacy and objectification may explain some of

the recent findings on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): "Moreover, low relationship satisfaction was not associated with IPV…findings suggest that college students may accept IPV as a part of relationships or view it as largely independent of relationship quality" (Testa et al 10). This suggests that violence is accepted in intimate relationships by both sexes, an idea that the Grimms alluded to and which many revisionary fairy tales take interest.

The dominant versions of *Snow White* address the issue of intimacy and violence through conflicts between mother/daughter (the queen/Snow White). Many women during the 1700's died in childbirth because of poor healthcare, which ultimately led to the instatement of young stepmothers[32] who were barely older than their new stepdaughters.[33] Taking a cue from the Grimms, Oyeyemi also uses current cultural conflicts to discuss the connection between violence and intimacy. Although rape is subtly alluded to in many dominant fairy tales (*Briar Rose*, *Little Red Riding Hood*) it is never explicitly discussed (although this may not be true of oral tales,

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[32] Trumbach, Randolph. *The rise of the egalitarian family: aristocratic kinship and domestic relations in eighteenth-century England*. Elsevier, 2013.

A study on eighteenth century England found that "Some men waited until their daughters had grown up and either needed a woman to take them into society or could move out on their own to avoid conflicts with a stepmother."

[33] Aiyagari, S. Rao, Jeremy Greenwood, and Nezih Guner. *Looking Back: Marriage, Divorce and Out-of-Wedlock Births*. No. 516. University of Rochester-Center for Economic Research (RCER), 2005.

Among eighteenth century English families, data on children showed that "24% lived with a widowed father and 7.5% lived with fathers and a stepmother…"

which had more matrilineal roots). Revisionary authors, Oyeyemi and Sexton, expand on these references without the fear of cultural stigmas that the Grimm Brothers and Charles Perrault, who was writing for the French bourgeoisie, would have likely faced.

In Oyeyemi's novel, Frances changes gender identity in an attempt to empower herself after she is raped and impregnated with Boy: "Frances was raped. It was an acquaintance of hers" (Oyeyemi 292). Using medical provider data in Massachusetts, an analysis of college campus rape reports found that "Of the cases of rape/sexual assault at a campus where the victim-offender relationship was reported, the perpetrator was most commonly an acquaintance (46%), followed by a friend (21%), and then by a stranger (19%)" (Patrick et al iii). Oyeyemi modernizes her fairy tale by revealing the seemingly obvious relationship between closeness and rape. Further expounding on the nature of this conflict, Oyeyemi uses Frank to discuss the impact rape has on identity development, specifically gender construction. This event causes Frances to see womanhood as a painful, pejorative experience that requires passivity and submission.

Gender identity and socialization are a preoccupation of many dominant fairy tales, although Disney – in a clever marketing ploy to institutionalize wholesomeness – erases the diversity and complexity of these subjects within the French and German tales: "Disney film not only 'cleans up' history and political struggles, gender and sex/uality, but elevates sanitization to pedagogy" (Haas et al 8). Going against the Disney tradition of sterilized stories, Oyeyemi uses Frank as a tool to enter the discourse on gender while also making the discussion more relevant to modern concerns, such as the transgender experience. Boy's initial impulse is to understand transgender identity as an illness, a common and erroneous belief: "Stop calling her 'him.' You're telling me my mother has been desperately ill for decades." However, Mia interjects with

the opposing perspective in support of the character's chosen gender identity: "I don't know that I can…he's been Frank longer than he was Frances" (Oyeyemi 295). This begs the question, does violence have an impact on gender development? I think this text points to the fact that yes, in fact, it does influence our identity development, but not in any predictable, uniform way. As Judith Butler discusses in her book *Undoing Gender*,

> This means that we must learn to live and to embrace the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of a more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take. It means we must be open to its permutations, in the name of nonviolence. Butler 35

Butler advocates for more malleable concepts of human identity that are accepted without violence. Oyeyemi's characters, particularly Frank, Boy, and Bird, demonstrate some of the many forms "humanness" takes. Frank and Boy are both the victims of male physical violence, yet Boy reacts differently than her mother/father. She names her own daughter after an animal commonly associated, not with masculinity and anonymity, but with femininity and freedom: *Bird*. Both women develop their identity in defiance of, and accordance with, their respective names. For example, Bird often takes on the traditionally masculine role of protector: "I walked on the outside of our trio, taking the position of gentleman protecting ladies from roadside traffic" (Oyeyemi 85). Although she defies stereotypes of femininity, she does begin to sing loudly and regularly by the end of the novel, symbolizing the impact of labels on identity development.

The connection between intimacy and violence is also apparent among women, which is indicated in the relationship between Snow White and the queen. In the Grimm narrative, the queen familiarly dresses and entices Snow White into danger with a commanding voice: "Come,

I'll lace you up properly for once" (Grimm 174). The queen exhibits physical familiarity towards Snow while simultaneously committing an act of aggression by lacing the bodice so tight that it cuts of the protagonist's oxygen. Oyeyemi reinterprets this relationship through the kinship between Boy and her friend Mia, who tells her, "Kiss me now, right this minute, and I'll take it as a promise that the next time you get mad at me it'll be a fight that's actually worth having" (Oyeyemi 33). Mia and Boy share an intimate moment that demonstrates the importance of anger expression in interpersonal relationships, whether they are platonic or sexual, hetero or homosexual. Their friendship is an especially interesting feature of the text because it so often mimics romantic love, yet remains platonic and even indifferent at times: "Mia was tickling me under the nose with a feather" (39). Their bond, like the bond between Snow White and the queen, conveys the complexity of female relationships and also demonstrates the important ways in which women mimic the behavior of other women we respect. The intimacy between Boy and Mia is invoked in their very language: "'Oh, I'm nothing but a pack of cards,' I echoed Mia to protect myself" (Oyeyemi 59). This shows the ways in which women are more powerful when acting together to allow for individualization, rather than competing against one another to reinforce generic, repressive models.

Ageism and the Competition for Male Desire in the Work of Carter, Sexton, and Oyeyemi

The dominant Snow White fairy tales center around one main plot point: the violent, ultimately deadly competition between Snow White and the Evil Queen. This dynamic is made clear through their very titles – young versus old, innocent verses experienced, humble versus prideful. The late British author, Angela Carter, is another fairy tale revisionist who makes many

curious changes to the dominant *Snow White* narrative in a piece of short fiction titled "Snow Child" from her collection *The Bloody Chamber*. While I have argued elsewhere that violence may serve a necessary social function, it is problematic when used by women to reinforce the repression of themselves and their peers, which we see in the case of many fairy tales, but most notably in *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Rapunzel*. This seeming contradiction is not uncommon, according to Althusser's work on the Repressive State Apparatus: "The individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which 'depend' the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject" (Althusser 168). Both the queen and Snow White act according to the androcentric apparatus, which many revisionary writers address through allusions to these characters' complicit behavior. For example, the competition between women, which often culminates in violence, does not fundamentally empower those more physically "powerful" women, but rather enforces the androcentric discourse that continues to stunt women's ideologies.

Carter's revisionary story is brief, less than two pages, but retains some key elements from the dominant tales, such as the symbolic use of color. Although "white" is absent from the title, replaced instead with an allusion to age, the color is referenced in content. For example, the Count (rather than the Countess) proclaims a mantra that has become synonymous with the story of *Snow White* or, in this case, the "Snow Child": "'I wish I had a girl as white as snow' said the Count" (Carter 91). In the Grimm tale, the wife/mother is the one who wishes for a beautiful daughter, whereas Carter places this desire on the Count's lips. Carter reinforces the view within Maria Tatar's scholarship that "this litany of atrocities leads to the mistaken view that women are the sole agents of evil in German fairy tales" (Tatar 5). In Carter's revision there is no *sole* agent

of evil, but two: Count and Countess. Despite this, the Countess is arguably less villainous than the Count, because she does not wish the beautiful, objectified girl into being only to kill her (as is the case in the first edition Brothers Grimm tale[34]). Thus, Carter illuminates the ways in which androcentric desire shapes our ideological approach to beauty and forces women into competition with one another.

Carter changes the narrative to suggest that women hold other characteristics besides normative beauty in high esteem, indicating that the Countess would more likely conjure an intelligent or skilled girl than the Count's beautiful doll-child, with lips "as red as blood" (Grimm 170). The Count makes superficial features a priority, again implying that vanity and standards of female beauty are propagated through androcentric discourse. Interestingly, Carter also describes the Countess in the familiar colors used to bring Snow White to being. The Countess is "wrapped in the glittering pelts of black foxes" and wears "high, black, shining boots with scarlet heels, and spurs" (Carter 91). The author's use of black and red to describe the beauty of both women is telling. It signifies the potential for competition between women inspired by male desire, a common theme in dominant fairy tales. Her choice to reserve the color white for the child, never using it to refer to the Countess, indicates the child's privileged position. This minor detail hints at the binary characterization of women as passive, pure, and pretty or active, used, and ugly: "The Count lifted her up and sat her in front of him on his saddle but the Countess had only one thought: how shall I be rid of her?" (Carter 92). The child is silently moved by the Count, yet appears unable to act on her own, whereas the Countess

[34] Zipes, Jack. "Breaking the Disney spell." *From mouse to mermaid: The politics of film, gender, and culture* (1995): 21-42.

immediately begins to conceive a plan of action, seemingly setting herself up as the infamous Evil Queen. This dynamic is addressed in the fairy tale scholarship of Nancy Taber, who argues that dominant tales "portray passive, good, beautiful young women who are rescued from evil, ugly, old women by active, handsome, heroic men" (Taber et al 591). Carter references these stereotypes in order to reveal their influence and intimate their agent.

The competition between Snow White and the Evil Queen is closely connected to concepts of ageism and sexuality perpetuated in androcentric ideology. Vaginal symbols, like the slipper in Cinderella, also appear in versions of *Snow White*, particularly at the beginning of the story when Snow White's mother pricks her finger and sees a drop of blood on the snow, which initiates her wish for her daughter to be beautiful: "The red looked so beautiful on the white snow" (Grimm 170). This scene symbolizes the cycle of menstruation and fertility, a theme that Carter expounds on: "'They come to a hole in the snow; this hole is filled with blood.' He says 'I wish I had a girl as red as blood'" (Carter 92). The blood is symbolic of the girl's fertility, which, in androcentric discourse, empowers her over the older, presumably less fertile Countess (or "queen" in the dominant versions), privileging the heteronormative order. Thus, Carter and the Grimm Brothers show that ageism, which abounds in our current cultural narratives, spawns antagonism between women while concealing the underlying cause of conflict, which is often the influence of androcentric desire.

Snow White's sexuality seems to have evolved in some ways, through revisionary texts, to address the carnal problems of our contemporary culture. In androcentric discourse, what men imagine comes to life; we need only look at the pornography industry for confirmation. Within this industry, depictions of women and their sexuality, derived from hyperbolically masculine fantasy, lead to the stereotypes of women as passive blow-up dolls with unrealistic proportions.

The contemporary intermingling of fantasy and the "Real Thing" is referenced in the scholarship of cultural critic Slavoj Zizek:

> The authentic twentieth-century passion for penetrating the Real Thing (ultimately, the destructive Void) through the cobweb of semblances which constitutes our reality thus culminates in the thrill of the Real as the ultimate 'effect', sought after from digitalized special effects, through reality TV and amateur pornography, up to snuff movies. Slavoj Zizek, *The Desert of the Real*, 12

The Real is thus constructed as an "effect" in contemporary narratives spanning from pornography to fairy tales. The problematic aspect is that these narratives are often dictated by androcentric thinking. Carter uses fantasy to demonstrate the influence of the male imaginary – which is constructed and passed off as "the Real Thing" – in female identity development. When the Count has finished the familiar refrain of the dominant tales, the girl he wishes for manifests in a more direct way than the typical story of *Snow White*: "As soon as he completed her description, there she stood, beside the road, white skin, red mouth, black hair, and stark naked; she was the child of his desire and the Countess hated her" (Carter 91-92). Thus, the "real woman," like the Countess, is placed in competition with the blow-up doll creation designed to satisfy male desire. While there is no easy circumvention from the cycle of art that produces reality and reality that produces art, woman can seek freedom by acting and speaking out against restrictive cultural models.

The competition between women – instigated by androcentric thinking – requires a resolution and, in the world of fairy tales, that resolution is often violence. The queen in the dominant tales executes the first act of violence towards an "innocent," which positions her as a villain. Unlike the dominant queen, the Countess avoids any act of direct physical violence,

never once moving from her horse throughout the course of the narrative. After dropping her glove and asking the girl to fetch it, the Countess "meant to gallop off and leave her there," demonstrating her passive, deceptive approach to conflict. The Count responds, "I'll buy you new gloves," indicting the relationship between money and marital power. In Malone's study on the financial perception of American women, she finds that "Relative to men, women remain economically disadvantaged despite gains in earnings among some groups of working women" (Malone 64). This economic inequality may account for man's differing perception of money, specifically on what can and cannot be commodified. Unlike the Countess, the Count's response to conflict is money, which demonstrates the androcentric view that women's bodies can be readily "bought." The Countess responds to this offer by bitterly throwing her diamond brooch into the frozen pond, asking again that the girl retrieve the item: "she thought the girl would drown." Eventually the competition for the Count's desire, and possibly wealth, culminates in an act of violence, which the Countess achieves through passive, psychological manipulation, reminiscent of the queen's use of deception to poison Snow White in the dominant tales (Carter 92).

Women's use of more passive, distanced methods of aggression, such as the queen employing the huntsman[35], is just as dangerous as the more overt male violence featured in popular cultural narratives. A recent study of intimate partner violence among college students found that "psychological aggression predicts physical aggression not only cross-sectionally

[35] Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2014. 170. "Her jealousy kept upsetting her and so she summoned the huntsman and said…"

(Edwards et al, 2009); but also longitudinally…" (Testa et al 3). It is important to recognize that many of the fairy tale narratives, particularly the Grimm collection, illustrate this escalation in violence from a verbal form, such as the queen's mantra, to a physical act. Male sexual desire, often masked by romantic stereotypes, fuels the plot of many dominant fairy tales. Carter strips away the romantic ploys – such as the Prince's magical kiss in the Disney film – to show the frightening reality of this desire. With each malicious psychological act, the Countess loses an article of clothing to the girl until she is naked and the girl clothed: "the furs sprang off the Countess's shoulders and twined round the naked girl" (Carter 92). The Countess loses power as the Count's imaginary begins to make the representation more real than the woman. This is an odd twist of the expectation that the Countess' nakedness would incite the Count's lust. It instead inspires pity from the Count, who "felt sorry for his wife." Thus, the clothes are a status symbol, a symbol of the power of the Count's desire. The fact that the Count is never made nude and vulnerable like the two women indicates the male influence on the competition between women. The Countess commits acts of aggression only to ensure her status as the object of the Count's desire. Carter demonstrates that this message is perpetuated by androcentric discourse, encouraging women to question its merit.

Just as Snow White is discouraged from action by the seven dwarfs – who bid her to stay indoors (for her safety, of course) – so is Carter's "snow child." The girl, born from blood and snow, commits only one act in the narrative, an act which directly leads to her death and postmortem rape: "So the girl picks a rose, pricks her finger on the thorn; bleeds; screams; falls. Weeping, the Count got off his horse, unfastened his breeches and thrust his virile member into the dead girl" (Carter 92). This sudden shift in the narrative implicates the Count as the primary villain, by demonstrating that his desire remains untethered by any moral obligation to women,

whom he sees as inferior. The Countess emerges as a secondary villain through her complicity as she merely stands by and allows the Count to act. This follows a common occurrence within fairy tales, mentioned in the work of Maria Tatar: "In fairy tales, nearly every character – from the most hardened criminal to the Virgin Mary – is capable of cruel behavior" (Tatar 6). Carter shows that both man and woman are responsible for perpetuating the acceptance of the unbound male desire that influences women through its projections. The mare, which the Countess never dismounts, represents her id and, more specifically, the frustration with accepting her husband's perversions: "The Countess reined in her stamping mare and watched him narrowly; he was soon finished" (Carter 92). Carter also reveals her criticism of androcentric desire through a subtle jab at the longevity of the Count's sex-drive. Thus, Carter indicates that women are often accepting of the very androcentric desires that oppress and create conflict among women.

Without the underpinnings of androcentric desire, these blow-up dolls deflate into nothing, indicating that we need to reevaluate our cultural focus on male desire. In Carter's revisionary fairy tale, the girl dissolves into the snow after the Count's desire is satisfied: "Then the girl began to melt. Soon there was nothing left of her but a feather a bird might have dropped; a blood stain…and the rose she had pulled off the bush" (Carter 92). Although it is difficult to describe this as a literal rape scene, due to the girl's liminal status as both real and imaginary, Carter makes it obvious that the Count's sexual desire comes with dangerous consequences. Rape converts victims into property, erasing the woman's identity by valuing them only for their sex organs. As Carter points out, rape culture is often directed at the young and innocent, for reasons I discussed in Part 1, which demonstrates the ways in which the ageism present in androcentric discourse hinders the young as well as the old. Interestingly, though, Carter also suggests that women's sexually is threatening, if not deadly, through the Count's use of the

magical rose that kills the girl: “The count picked up the rose, bowed and handed it to his wife; when she touched it, she dropped it…‘It bites!’ she said” (Carter 92). The rose is symbolic of a woman’s sex, which “bites” and kills the girl, insinuating that competition for male desire is the impetus for submission and aggression between women. The union between romance and submission is common in cultural narratives and represents, or rather creates, a problematic reality: "women’s anger is most often elicited in heterosexual, romantic relationship contexts" (Fisher and Evers 24).

As with all her poetic revisions, Anne Sexton pulls no punches. Her revision of *Snow White* reinforces the notion that ageism, propelled by androcentric discourse, breeds violent competitions among women**:** “But now the queen saw brown spots on her hand/ and four whiskers over her lip/so she condemned Snow White/to be hacked to death” (Sexton 5). The Queen's first act of brutality is spawned by an awareness of her own bodily ageing. Without Sexton's sarcasm, and perhaps even with it, this facet of fairy tales risks teaching women that aging equates to a loss in social value. Despite this, Sexton’s tone hints at her pride in rendering this "killer-queen," who has failed to properly integrate into the heteronormative order. As Giradot states, the queen in dominant Snow White narratives “directly embodies the negative and destructive dimension of death and decay,” which is showcased in the final stanzas (291):

> The wicked queen was invited to the feast
> and when she arrived there were
> red-hot iron shoes,
> in the manner of red-hot roller skates,
> clamped upon her feet.
> First your toes will smoke

and then your heels will turn black

and you will fry upward like a frog,

she was told.

And so she danced until she was dead,

a subterranean figure,

her tongue flicking in and out

like a gas jet.

Meanwhile Snow White held court, Sexton 9

In Sexton's cynical version of the tale, Snow White appears present during, and in control of, the acts of violence directed at the aging Queen. The dynamic in this excerpt is illustrative of the paradoxical position of female sexuality: "sexuality is both the locus of the destructive and demonic powers of the stepmother and the basis for the transforming union of love being celebrated at the wedding" (Giradot 298). Giradot points out the complicated position of women as either the lover (Snow White) or the demon (the Queen). While it is clear that fairy tales like Snow White often characterize women along these stereotypical lines, I am more interested in the ways in which these lines become blurred, showing that woman is not demon or lover but demon *and* lover. Sexton shows her awareness of the paradoxical, and occasionally violent nature, of women's sexuality. The "red-hot iron shoes," much like the glass slipper in Cinderella, is meant to symbolize a woman's sex organ. The word choice "red-hot" may indicate two things. First, the queen's sex organ is no longer fertile and, second, Snow White (and the court) attack her because of a demonic power that appears to stem from her sexuality or, possibly, her refusal to be sexualized. Like men, women appear in the excerpt above to fight as a means of establishing their virility, illustrating the role sex plays in competitive behaviors.

Helen Oyeyemi also addresses the competition between Snow White and the queen through her protagonist, Boy, and her stepdaughter, Snow. Boy exhibits anger and the desire to commit violence towards Snow because of her beauty and deceptively white skin: "every little gesture of hers made me want to shake her" (139). Boy expresses frustration with her new role as a mother, which posits a deeper meaning for the queen's anger in the Grimm fairy tale. A recent study on aggression among women in intimate partner relationships found that "Physically aggressive actions may reflect developmental inexperience in dealing with conflicts and not necessarily an established pattern" (Testa et al 10). Although this study focuses on conflicts within the context of romantic relationships, this idea can also be applied to the situation of motherhood, whether it is biological or inherited, in the case of the stepmother. Boy's inexperience with the conflicts that motherhood brings leads her to feel aggression towards her daughter, but she does not physically harm her. Mother to daughter anger is a natural part of human experience, although it is socially less acceptable than daughter to mother anger, again suggesting the privileged position of youth in our culture.

Anger expression is a key outlet for the frustrations that naturally build within modern family dynamics. As such, we should encourage a discourse that offers innovative, productive responses to anger. Oyeyemi also demonstrates the importance of anger in a bonding scene between Snow and Boy. When Snow relents her anger against her stepmother, Boy responds, "Who told you it isn't like you to get mad?" (282). She teaches Snow that anger expression is healthy, although, because Boy is influenced by her own abuse as a child, she takes this lesson one step too far, allowing Snow to give her a black eye: "I had her by the wrists and I used both her hands to strike at my face until she began doing it for herself. That girl slapped me so hard my ears rang, and she said, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry, even as she hit me'" (Oyeyemi 284). While

competition between women is normal and healthy, our narratives should not emphasize physical rivalry over male desire, which is a common feature of the dominant fairy tales, where the male characters “appear at the end as the fulfillment of her dreams" (Zipes 37). This message teaches women to play passive to attain the “dream” of the prince, but remain hostile towards the women that present more potential to help them succeed.

Chapter Three

Gendered Violence and Sexuality in Contemporary Versions of *Rapunzel*

Dominant versions of *Rapunzel,* such as the Brothers Grimm fairy tale from Germany, include a central conflict between the ageing mother-witch in the garden and the young maiden in the tower. The Aarne-Thompson classification system defines the Rapunzel narrative under the category of "Supernatural Adversaries" and, more specifically, as type 310, known as "The Maiden in the Tower."[36] Both of these designations suggest the intertwined motivations behind the central conflict, which are power and space. The violent acts common to this story – such as the blinding of the prince and the shearing of Rapunzel – occur around the dynamic relationship between two opposing women. Contemporary versions of this tale explore expressions of women's rage and our resistance to, or assimilation of, dominant discourse, such as heteronormative pressure: "Coercion and compulsion are among the conditions in which women have learned to recognize our strength. Resistance is a major theme in this essay and in the study of women's lives" (Rich 12). Adrienne Rich, whose views represent a portion of the feminist landscape of the 1970's-1990's, makes arguments about women's rage that are central in understanding the popular fiction of that time, such as the fairy tale revisions by Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee, and Janet Charman. For example, Sexton shows both awareness and defiance of the heteronormative compulsion Rich discusses through the sexual bond between two women. Tanith Lee, on the other hand, demonstrates some complicity with the dominant ideology by

[36] Uther, Hans-Jörg. *The types of international folktales: a classification and bibliography, based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004.

designing a plot that drives towards heterosexual resolution. Analysis of the representations of both resistance and compliance in contemporary fairy tales allows acumen on the evolving cultural role of women's rage, namely its expression and location.

The correlation between space, power, and commerce is evident in the tale of *Rapunzel*, which makes it particularly fruitful in analyzing the circumstances in which women's rage is rendered acceptable or intolerable. In the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, Mother Gothel, the "fairy" who tends a lush, inaccessible garden, demands that the male intruder to give away his child: "In his fear the man agreed to everything" (Grimm 38). Thus, this encroachment into the Mother's physical space establishes a basis for power structures. This also has interesting implications for women's participation or exclusion from commerce, which the French feminist Luce Irigaray comments on in her essay "Women on the Market," which is representative of some of the formidable feminist views initiated during the 1970's: "Men make commerce of them, but they do not enter into any exchanges with them" (Irigaray 172). Irigaray's statement about women's function in commerce shows the power that Mother Gothel must have in order to demand trade with a man, which appears to go against the patriarchal order. Thus, in the case of Rapunzel, women are both agents and objects of commerce, an idea that is introduced through the spatial designations of the tower, the garden, and the outside world. The limited mobility of the protagonist is a key feature of the plot in which the tower is purposed as a "machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing" (Foucault 202). Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon prisoner relates to the ways in which women, like Rapunzel, internalize the dominant, heterornormative discourse.

Rather than committing direct acts of violence, Mother Gothel exercises power over both men and women through her ability to command space and the commodification of her own

kind. Even before birth, Rapunzel is used by Mother Gothel as a bartering token, foreshadowing the ways in which she would later be objectified by both men and women because of an external feature, her "radiant hair as fine as spun gold" (Grimm 38). This act of commerce – which propels the plot and initiates the competitive dynamic between the two women – speaks to Irigaray's critique of the dominant discourse: "The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into anarchy" (Irigaray 170). Women's role in commerce is often relegated to the state of a passive object. This offers a potential explanation for women's rage at being excluded from a primary impulse to participate in social exchange. In the case of Rapunzel, her rage is expressed through a rebellion against her position as an aesthetic commodity when she lets the prince inside the tower, exhibiting recognition of the power of spatial designations.

Rapunzel's function as a commodity is arbitrary in that it depends on external features, such as her long, fair hair, which are valued according to the dominant, androcentric discourse that defines women's beauty. The competition between the mother and maiden suggests the impact of this ideology on physical appearance: "American history has developed a focus on the individual, emphasizing the modification of one's outer appearance as a public display of one's own ideals, values, and beliefs" (Manning 35). Rapunzel's long, fair hair – a symbolic feature of the narrative – is used by contemporary authors to indicate the ways in which women's bodies, their external appearance, can be used to reinforce or diminish power structures. My discussion of *Rapunzel* will address the violent underpinnings behind such spatial designations and superficial values to better comprehend the causes of, and outlets for, women's systemic rage.

Creating an interesting alternative to the dominant tale, Anne Sexton reverses the competitive dynamic between the two female characters to show love rather than conflict. In the

prologue to her poetic version of *Rapunzel*, Sexton writes, "A woman / who loves a woman / is forever young. / The mentor / and the student / feed off each other." This alludes to the ageism in the dominant tales, instead offering the interesting alternative of female kinship. As Jack Zipes states, “The answer to Sexton is sisterhood. That is, Sexton talks about this in her poetry, but she never envisages it as a real possibility” (Zipes 22). Kinship cannot become a real prospect for Sexton because of her own inability to connect with women. Printed in her daughter’s memoir, a letter from the late Sexton reveals the competition she felt towards her own child: “Well, Linda – it was my fault too. I was jealous and I provoked him…” (Linda Gray Sexton 9). Though her candid admittance suggests a bitter self-insight, her envy discloses a desire for dominance in her relationships with other women. This represents one of the many ways in which women can become complicit in their own domination through the power of discourse.

The woman-on-woman conflict in the dominant versions of *Rapunzel* is replaced by female kinship, which is confidently positioned as morally superior: "We are the good ones. / Do not discover us" (38). Thus, Sexton undercuts the taboo nature of this relationship by uplifting it as virtuous, rather than accepting it as deviant. Although Sexton is touted for her transgressive verse, she also demonstrates collusion with dominant sexual power dynamics, showing how difficult this ideology is to overcome even for the most thoughtful among us: “Sexton, who never considered herself a feminist, does not pose the possibility of sexual rearrangement, but she does nevertheless question the present arrangement in such a radical way that the reader of her poems must ask why sex roles must be so destructive” (Zipes 21). For example, her descriptions of female sexuality still include conventional notions of possession and submission, demonstrated as Mother Gothel beckons,

Let me hold your heart like a flower

lest it bloom and collapse. Give me your skin

as sheer as a cobweb,

let me open it up

and listen in and scoop out the dark.

Give me your nether lips

all puffy with their art (Sexton, 38)

Though this passage shows an image of romanticized female kinship, the repetition of "Give me…Give me" suggests the narrator's desire to overtake the young woman. Although her sexualization of the female kinship bond reinforces the very stereotype of unbalanced romantic relationships that she seeks to defy, this aspect of the text also incites "an increased awareness about the alienation and reification of women" (Zipes 21). In fact, the most seemingly offensive part of the prologue is more accurately read as a celebration of self: "Old breast against young breast...come touch a copy of you" (35). Evoking three taboos – age difference among sex partners, homosexual relations, and incest – Sexton amplifies her message of anti-ageism and female intimacy. Though her life suggests that Sexton was threatened by age[37] – much like Mother Gothel's own fear of losing Rapunzel, a younger version of herself – it is clear that she both savored and struggled to maintain her relationships with women.

[37] In discussing Anne Sexton's suicide at the age of forty, Linda Grey Sexton reflects, "But when I reached the time in my life that matched the anniversary of my mother's death, I found myself as depressed and suicidal as my mother had been." It is through a connection with her mother's writing that enables her to survive her mental condition (5).

Symbols common to the *Rapunzel* narrative, such as the golden hair, the stark tower, and the magical garden, help to explain the reasons behind women's rage, which is often defined in dominant discourse as irrational and unnecessary. As with the tale of Snow White, the mirror in Sexton's version of Rapunzel takes on an emblematic quality that reveals more about women's perceived lack of agency: "We are two birds / washing in the same mirror. / We were fair game" (38). The mirror reflects the birds' position as prey, much like the way that Snow White's mirror echoes androcentric discourse to the queen. Through the double-meaning of the phrase "fair game," Sexton suggests that women are made vulnerable through their assimilation of socially dominant standards of beauty, an idea that resonates with Rich's feminist views: "The retreat into sameness—assimilation for those who can manage it—is the most passive and debilitating of responses to political repression, economic insecurity, and a renewed open season on difference" (Rich 11). Both Rich and Sexton encourage collaborative action among women as a resolution to the oppression of dominant discourse. For example, the action of the two women, who are represented by the birds reflected in the water bath, is emphasized inside the confines of a taboo relationship between two women: "They play mother-me-do / all day." Despite the collaborative associations of this game, the linguistic configuration illustrates the paradoxical power dynamics at the center of this tale. The phrasing of "mother-me-do" emphasizes the authority of the mother to bend the will of the daughter, Rapunzel. This idea problematizes Sexton's anti-ageist sentiment when we consider the sexual connotations of a game that requires the young maiden to do as the old witch orders.

While Sexton attempts to question conventional representations of women's sexuality through a radical rendering of female kinship, she is still unable to evade an engagement with the oppression of her own sex. In the following observations, I will discuss the ways in which Anne

Sexton, Janet Charman, and Tanith Lee simultaneously deviate and engage with gendered representations of violence and sexuality in versions of *Rapunzel*. In particular, I seek to explore the possible connections between sex and violence, one of which is articulated in the feminist work of Adrienne Rich: “The depth of women’s rage and fear regarding sexuality and its relation to power and pain is real, even when the dialogue sounds simplistic, self-righteous, or like parallel monologues” (12). Rich thus suggests that the discourse on women’s sexuality inspires rage through its oppressive, polarizing standards, illustrated through the conflict between the barren “witch” and the virginal “maiden.” Despite these tropes, authentic expressions of women’s rage can readily be found, if only we know where to look.

Sex Acts in the Garden, Discipline in the Tower

"Sometimes a strong woman as a role model is not enough" (Yolen 169).

In the story of *Rapunzel*, physical space is divided into three distinct realms: the garden, the tower, and the outside world. The Grimm Brothers describe Mother Gothel’s space as a fecund "fairy's garden filled with all kinds of flowers and herbs" (Grimm 37). The overgrowth of the garden, which is teeming with life, “with carrots growing like little fish, / with many tomatoes rich as frogs,” is juxtaposed with the restriction of the tower (Sexton 39). Anne Sexton’s tale describes the infamous witch’s garden as luxuriant and fertile, hinting at Mother Gothel’s nurturing impulses, a notion that strays from the vilification of the fairy in the dominant tales. Making reference to the seemingly emotionless witch in the tower, Sexton writes of “onions as ingrown as hearts” (39). In defiance of the stereotype of the cold mother – common in dominant tales, such as *Snow White* and *Cinderella* – Sexton creates empathy for Mother Gothel

by conveying the devastating loss of female kinship. The rampion in her garden acts as a metaphor for women. She describes it as a "root" that is "more potent than penicillin" (Sexton 39). This exemplifies Sexton's attempts to empower the feminine, yet it also indulges in the stereotype of woman's privileged connection to nature. This connection is evidenced in the English language through the common phrase "mother nature," a problematic notion in that it encourages the same idolatry imposed by standards of beauty. Women's expression of rage is one reaction to this idolization, which is meant to pacify and misdirect our attention.

In Sexton's tale, organic matter and Mother Gothel are described as one and the same through the imagery of the garden: "growing leaf by leaf, skin by skin, / as rapt and as fluid as Isadora Duncan." Through this striking simile, Sexton suggests that such a taboo bond between two women is both natural[38] and aesthetically pleasing. Yet, through her reference to Isadora Duncan[39], she proposes a correlation between beauty and physical danger. Duncan embodies the

[38] Arienne Rich poses the notion that intimacy between women is inherent. It is only through a type of reprogramming in dominant discourse that women are directed towards heteronormativity: "If women are the earliest sources of emotional caring and physical nurture for both female and male children, it would seem logical, from a feminist perspective at least, to pose the following questions: whether the search for love and tenderness in both sexes does not originally lead toward women why in fact women would ever redirect that search…" (Rich 17)

[39] Ann Daly opens her biography of Isadora Duncan by pointing out that her strange, violent death is likely the most well-known fact about the woman who should have been remembered more for her accomplishments in life: "everybody knows at least *something* about Isadora Duncan. Probably not that she read Plato or that she considered her development of successive

threat of vanity, the potential costs of standards of beauty. Duncan's free-flowing dance moves offer a representational contrast to the repressed Rapunzel of the dominant tales, who is locked "in a very high tower that had neither doors nor stairs, only a little window high above" (Grimm 38). The tower establishes Rapunzel's body as a commodity, a utility without agency to be traded amongst all three main characters in the text – the father, Mother Gothel, and the prince: "This trans-formation of women's bodies into use values and exchange values inaugurates the symbolic order" (Irigaray 189). In dominant versions of the tale, the tower restricts Rapunzel's sexual exploration – ushering her towards a heteronormative rebellion – but in Sexton's tale this space figures somewhat differently. Sexton's tower stifles Rapunzel's heteronormative impulses, rather than encouraging them, and also appears to allow for the free expression of female love.

Mother Gothel's reign over the garden, along with her access to the outside world, empowers her over Rapunzel, who is trapped by the authority of her mother's love. Using cliché romantic language, Sexton describes Mother Gothel's objectification of Rapunzel, as the fairy "treasured her beyond all things" (40). The physicality of this possession is underscored when Sexton writes "None but I will ever see or touch her," reminding the reader of the obstructive tower (40). The Grimm brothers also accentuate this entrapment, yet they focus more on the intimacy between Rapunzel and the prince: "He looked up and saw beautiful Rapunzel at the window" and when he heard her voice "he fell completely in love with her" (Grimm 37). Like an exotic, caged bird, Rapunzel's agency is removed, replaced instead with her image and sound.

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movement a significant artistic achievement. More likely, they know that she died in a sports car, her neck snapped by her own trailing scarf" (Daly IX).

As with Mother Gothel, the prince also objectifies Rapunzel by valuing her for external qualities, which introduce the sexual lust that the Grimm Brothers obscure under the catchall of "love."

Sexton uses the garden to explore the themes of sexual development and deviancy that may aid in the comprehension of the causes that underlie women's rage. Rapunzel describes the prince in the language of nature, since that is her only referent, having never experienced the outside world. When Rapunzel sees the prince, she comments, "What is this beast, she thought, with muscles on his arms / like a bag of snakes?...What prickly plant grows on his cheeks? / What is this voice as deep as a dog" (Sexton 41)? Much of Sexton's language, such as "beast," "snakes," and "prickly plant," insinuate that the prince is dangerous. As with Rapunzel, the prince is described as a part of nature, suggesting that nature is both feminine and masculine. This would appear to evade the idolatry of women as more "natural" creatures than men. Yet unlike Rapunzel, the prince's nature is depicted as evil, exemplified by the reference to a "snake." Through this symbolism, Sexton evokes a cautionary message about the dangers of male predators. Though once Rapunzel learns sexual pleasure, she becomes more accepting of the threatening traits that once made her wary: "Yet he dazzled her with his dancing stick…At first Rapunzel was terribly afraid, but soon the prince pleased her so much she agreed to see him everyday and pull him up into the tower" (Sexton 38). Her sarcastic depiction of seduction reacts to the gendered cultural narratives that teach women to fear their own sexual desire. Sexton's humorous representation of the male anatomy indicates her disdain for the courtship rituals and heteronormative unions that pervade dominant cultural narratives. This suggests that the root of women's rage grows from the discouragement of female kinship and sexual exploration.

After Mother Gothel suffers Rapunzel's betrayal – learning that both the tower and Rapunzel's body have been breeched – she demonstrates rage and employs violence, exercising

her authority over space to reassert her power. Comprehending the loss of Rapunzel's virginity, Mother Gothel threatens violence to the prince to reinforce her authority: "you are a thief and now you will die" (Sexton 39). This description is somewhat similar to the Grimm Brothers' own rendering of the garden breech by Rapunzel's father. They depict the fairy, "who angrily berated him for daring to come into the garden and stealing her rapunzel," to indicate the injustice in this boundary crossing, which insinuates a bodily penetration as well (Grimm 37). Through her use of the word "thief," Sexton positions Mother Gothel as an authority through the right of law, presenting an outlet for the expression of women's rage. Additionally, Sexton's excerpt foregrounds the virgin as an object to be stolen, prized, or even thrown away, demonstrating the ways in which the dominant discourse on sexuality can be used as a tool of oppression through the commodification of women's bodies.

In her short story collection, *Red as Blood*, (1983) Tanith Lee also uses references to Rapunzel and the fairy's garden in the story "The Golden Rope," to explore representations of female sexual development. As with the dominant tales, Lee focuses the narrative around the entrapment of a young, fertile woman, Jaspre, by a sexless witch. Writing in the horror genre, Lee describes the garden in darker, much less maternal terms than Sexton: "the bones of trees gave evidence of waste" (Lee 58). References to death in the outside world are juxtaposed with lively depictions of the heroine, Jaspre. Instead of lettuce, or rampion, Lee uses a flower, a romantic cliché, to describe the heroine's sexuality: "She will die for you with ecstasy and joy, in all her beauty, virgin, innocent, and wise…a matchless unplucked flower" (Lee 68). Romantic notions of female submission, often under duress, are all too common in the horror genre, shown here by the protagonist's willingness to die for the male she idolizes. This suggests that

romanticizing virginity[40] encourages submissive behavior among women, while it ought to do the very opposite – reinforce their active resistance to sexual pressure. Although Lee initially describes the outside world as "A waste, a wilderness," as the heroine learns sexual desire, she seeks to leave the tower: "It was an intuitive response, to evade him. And yet it was the house she now wished to evade" (Lee 69). The tower, or home, thus represents sexual restriction, while the outside implies sexual freedom, an idea that is presented in many versions of this tale, including the Grimm narrative.

Lee's narrative references Rapunzel's insinuated sexual submission, but heightens the stakes with the protagonist's violence against herself, which is revealed through imagery within the garden. She allows the witch to cut her wrists in the center of the tower as a sacrifice to pacify her beloved male demon-god[41]. Her suicide is illustrated with references to the garden as "an unraveling scarf of butterflies like winged blood…which were born from her wrist" (65). Using "butterflies" to describe suicide idealizes female self-harm, particularly when the violent act is committed on behalf of an already empowered male, or in this case a male that is elevated to the status of demon/deity. The romanticization of this violent act diminishes Jaspre's agency, making her less relatable to the contemporary woman. For example, the protagonist is described

[40] Adrienne Rich lists two of the central characteristics of male power as "(1) to deny women [their own] sexuality, (2) or to force it [male sexuality] upon them" (Rich 18). Lee demonstrates both of these characteristics through Jaspre, who is both virginal and sexually obligated to the male figure she is taught to valorize.

[41] In Lee's description of the male figure, the distinction between his identity as a god or demon is left intentionally unclear.

without sarcasm as the "witch's servant and doll" (Lee 72). Lee implicates the older woman in Jaspre's objectification – perhaps proposing that women are culpable in our own oppression – which presents another potential cause for women's rage.

The dynamic between the two female characters begs the question: must desire always lead to the objectification of the lusted-after individual? This sense of objectification is passed down to Jaspre, who "came to gaze on him, gaze and gaze, entranced by his features" (Lee 72). Jaspre's sexual awakening causes a rift between the elder and younger woman, questionably signifying that older women are sexless and undesirable: "The woman, who had no lust for human flesh, who lusted only for one thing" (Lee 59). The older witch is depicted without sexual desire, demonstrating that ageism still pervades our modern depictions of women. Interestingly, the one thing the witch desires is the approval of a patriarchal demon, depicted as a statue in the witch's tower. The statue features "large bloody gems" and an "ambiguous gesture of offering or beckoning" (Lee 61). The sight of this male figure incites Jaspre's sexual awakening: "Slowly, the young girl's cheeks stained red with blood. The lights in the eyes of the statue blazed and sang, as if he saw and smiled at it" (Lee 61). Jaspre sexualizes the statue, which presents an odd parallel to the objectification of Jaspre by the demon and witch. This narrative progression diminishes the significant influence of older women in the sexual development of young women, such as the example of the protagonist in Sexton's poem.

Referencing the leafy plant – rapunzel or rampion – from the dominant tales, Lee uses the flower as a metaphor for a woman's sexual coming of age: "Like a certain flower, her love died in one area, sprang upward in another" (Lee 72). A woman's relationship with her maternal figure often wanes as her sexual relationships with men begin. It is worth considering the following: if women were not commonly objectified in society by both sexes, would this rift

between mother and daughter be as common? Lee suggests that the ideology of objectification influences the characters towards conflict-riddled interpersonal relationships, offering another source for women's rage. The prince gazes on Jaspre, who is displayed in the tower like a trophy: "He had watched the garden now for a month, from a high window, from a hidden portico" (Lee 73). Here the garden represents the sexual mystery of woman, a potentially problematic glorification of our sex that prohibits equality through exclusion. Yet, in an obvious allusion to the garden of Eden, Lee demonizes sexual knowledge: "these were the apples with which demons were tempted…Once bitten into, bruised, the spoiled fruit was useless and must be flung away" (Lee 74). Her use of negative diction, such as "spoiled" and "useless," to describe Jaspre's sexual activity implies that sexual women are immoral, an outdated notion that incites women's rage and stunts the feminist discourse on women's sexual development.

Lee extends this metaphor further, showing the degree to which Jaspre's sexual desire perturbs the witch. The older woman is repulsed by the union of Jaspre and the young man, who "marred the delicious fruit in some insidious manner the woman neither knew nor cared" (Lee 79). Fruit serves as the analogy for woman's sex, again reminding the reader of the paradox of the witch's garden, which is both deadly and fertile. This idea is exemplified when the witch exacts revenge on the young man through passive means, exercising her power over the garden: "once the shrubbery came alive, lifting on its stems to seize and tangle, and the long briers like spined serpents thrashed and fell down on him" (Lee 79). Interestingly, the symbols from the garden that Lee uses to execute violence – "stems" and "spined serpents" – are primarily phallic, rather than relating to the feminine. These images convey the notion that violence is male, which perpetuates women's oppression by refusing them access to physical expressions of anger.

Janet Charman, an award-winning New Zealand poet, is another author who takes up Rapunzel's garden as her subject matter in her collection of poems titled *Rapunzel, Rapunzel*. She relates to contemporary women by crafting poems that feature a female protagonist "marooned in a suburbia, the fairytale conceit adding part-ironic, part poignant resonance" (Keneally 316). While Lee cultivates a gothic setting through her description of the horrific, Charman, instead, details the seemingly mundane world of home life. Most of Charman's poems follow the fairy tale heroine after the tower, as she "has slid down the tresses and got herself well and truly locked into domesticity" (Keneally 315). Charman uses the garden foliage as a metaphor in the promisingly titled poem, "her fresh start." Alluding to Rapunzel's yellow hair, the poem opens on the subject of a lemon tree being planted by a lover: "for you Cherie / no householdy lemon would do." This quote recalls the Grimm fairy tale, making reference to the husband who attempts to satiate his pregnant wife's desire with an obscure plant: "the rapunzel tasted so good to her, so very good, that her craving for it became three times greater by the next day" (Grimm 37). Thus, plants are used as a veiled mechanism to discuss female appetites, such as sexual desire, which in the Grimm tale reinforces Rapunzel's domestic oppression[42].

[42] Rapunzel is left to wander the forest with two children after one sexual encounter: "Some years later, he made his way to the desolate land where Rapunzel was leading a wretched existence with her children" (Grimm 39).

Contemporary writers, such as Charman, demonstrate the need for new symbols to convey the complexity of women's sexuality, often reduced to romantic clichés or violent penetration[43].

Charman's use of the word "householdy" in a negative context suggests that domesticity fails to fill the depths of female desire. Charman's loving language quickly turns dark, demonstrating the potential for danger within the domestic space: "Yet bruises vanish / in purple leaf…protect from / frost and wind" (Charman). In this interpretation, the protagonist is both a part of nature and susceptible to its violence. Charman carefully chooses the word "bruises" to personify the "purple leaf," insinuating the equal potential for violence in both the natural and domestic sphere. The implication is that our protagonist – an unnamed, Rapunzel-esque figure – has covered up some domestic physical abuse. Thus, Charman replaces the abuse of Mother Gothel with the mistreatment of a romantic interest. Charman's choice to avoid the more traditional plants used to represent the female figure, such as tulips and roses, allows her to undercut the romantic associations common to floral symbolism. As I have argued elsewhere, romantic representations perpetuate passive behavior by privileging heteronormative unions that reinforce women in a supporting role, rather than encouraging independence and individuality.

In another poem, "Rapunzel's Mothers," Charman uses the garden to comment on the conflict between mother and daughter: "but she saw I was brought up / by a woman who kept a plainer table…a woman who kept hair brushed grew / ornamental rampion / not to be eaten…" (Charman). She employs two key symbols from the dominant narrative – the fairy's lettuce and

[43] Rich discusses the violence laden in pornographic representations of women, which I would argue also apply to mainstream narratives: "the most pernicious message relayed by pornography is that women are natural sexual prey to men and love it" (Rich 20).

the maiden's hair – to demonstrate the repression the elder woman exercises over the younger. Both the lettuce and the hair signify the daughter's sexuality, demonstrating that the mother attempts to repress its expression. The representation of an almost-violent maternal oppression is evident in many popular versions of this tale – such as in the animated Disney film, *Tangled* – suggesting that this conflict is still culturally relevant. Fairy tale scholar Heidi Stemple comments on one of the ways that contemporary women might reimagine this conflict: "But for me now, as a mother--especially the mother of an adopted teenager--the witch is the hero. I see the prince as a villain, a young and horny man who sneaks in (and then out) to sully the virginal beauty of the mother's young innocent daughter" (164). Stemple comments on three versions of the popular tale, including *Rapunzel* (Germany), *Lanjeh* (Morocco), and *Katanya* (Turkey). She notes that the most successful mother character allows the young woman a degree of freedom, while the more repressive mothers never see their daughters again (Yolen and Stemple 171). Though pop feminism is quick to vilify men[44] for stifling women's sexual development, we must also address the culpability within our own community[45]. Recognition of women's role in our own sexual oppression will alleviate our repression by allowing us to make informed choices outside of the influence of dominant discourse.

[44] Even in the increasingly diverse digital age, McGurran argues that white men continue to dictate the direction of gender development: "The future of gender relations will be decided in an obscure corner of the Internet populated primarily by angry white men" (McGurran 3)

[45] McGurran cites Katy Perry and Salma Hayek as two famous women advocates who have stated that they do not identify as feminists, in spite of their activism for women's rights (McGurran 3).

In dominant versions of this popular fairy tale the prince seemingly functions as Rapunzel's sexual liberator, yet he impregnates her with twins upon one sexual encounter, leaving her in a different sort of prison than the tower she had left behind. This construct represses female desire by suggesting that it will lead to further, more substantial oppression. The prince thus exemplifies the types of male power that Rich discusses in her critique of dominant ideology, which she describes as a "pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness" (Rich 20). Through the figure of the mother-in-law, Charman reveals this cyclical prison – the young woman who trades in the repression of the mother for the repression of the husband – to suggest that sexually repressed daughters grow up to become sexually repressive mothers. In the last lines of the poem, it is revealed that the repressed maiden has become the oppressive mother: "…and I was green for certain / when my tears opened / and let out another little prince / who grew / and got himself a green daughter / in law / i hate her" (Charman). Reference to the color green recalls the garden and leaves of rampion, suggesting fertility and youth. The "green" thus shows that the narrator's hatred correlates to her daughter-in-law's burgeoning sexuality. Charman alludes to a culture that privileges youth and maligns age, leading to competitive social dynamics, particularly within the confines of marriage. As Irigaray puts it, "heterosexuality has been up to now just an alibi for the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men" (Irigaray 172). Her critique reveals that the heteronormative union, often perceived in fairy tales as the woman's goal and a means towards happiness, is better recognized as an instrument of women's oppression and a cause for our seemingly irrational rage. The final lines of Charman's poem show that within the confines of androcentric discourse there is no "happy ending," but rather a circle of suffering. In the second portion of this article, I will address in further detail the

controlling mechanisms represented within this fairy tale in order to expose the causes of, and posit potential outlets for, women's dynamic rage.

Disciplining Mechanisms and Gender Development in Recent *Rapunzel* Variants

"The gaze is alert everywhere" – Michele Foucault

Another space used to represent gendered violence and expressions of anger in versions of *Rapunzel* is the tower, which acts as both a prison and a home to the young woman. Bentham's panopticon[46], much like Rapunzel's tower, represents the isolation of the individual from society. The tower, like the panopticon, functions as a controlling mechanism that causes Rapunzel to internalize the authority of the androcentric voice, which recalls the Evil Queen from *Snow White*, who internalizes the voice of the mirror that acts as a stand-in for the absent King. Drawing from published sociological data from the seventeenth century, Foucault writes that during a time of plague, "meat, fish and herbs will be hoisted up into the houses with pulleys and baskets," illustrating a type of isolationism that proceeded the building of panoptic prisons in modern society (Foucault 195). While Foucault avoids a gendered approach to his analysis of authority, Rich discusses the controlling mechanisms that are directed primarily at women though dominant discourse: "These forcers, as I shall try to show, range from literal physical enslavement to disguising and distorting of possible options" (Rich 18). Although Foucault does

[46] This is the architectural figure featured in Foucault's discussion of disciplining mechanisms. The structure was built as a prison that included an officer's tower in the center with cells radiating out so that the officer can observe each individual cell, while the cell mates' views of each other are obscured by the presence of the tower (Foucault 200).

not take a specifically gendered approach to his analyses of disciplining mechanisms, building on his work in this particular direction offers fruitful discussion of gendered representations of violence in revisionary versions of *Rapunzel* by calling attention to the ways in which citizens, in this case women, are psychologically influenced by male power structures. It is the pressure from this psychological violence that instigates women's rage, which we can see in the figure of Jaspre in Tanith Lee's short story, "The Golden Rope," and in Anne Sexton's revisionary poem, *Rapunzel*.

Fairy tales like Rapunzel defy the dust of history – and remain a part of the cultural consciousness – because they include recognizable power structures and desires. Foucault argues that "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (202). Thus, power is determined by the context of these interrelated factors, a context that is often gendered. Like the citizens, or prisoners, that Foucault discusses, Rapunzel is also limited in mobility and bodily contact. In the Grimms' tale, these physical limitations are addressed through the representation of Rapunzel's body, which becomes completely utilitarian when "she unpinned her braids and wound them round a hook on the window" (Grimm 37). The oppressiveness of the Mother's tower – perhaps a metaphor for domestic space or prison – is demonstrated through the unbalanced interpersonal relationship between the elder and younger woman. This appears to suggest that the mother's authority oppresses Rapunzel, a point that is both reinforced and deconstructed in the work of contemporary revisionary writers.

Through her sarcastic tone, Sexton renders Mother Gothel's dehumanizing treatment of the young, fertile Rapunzel to demonstrate that she has internalized the authority that oppresses

her: “When the witch wanted to enter…Rapunzel’s hair fell to the ground like a rainbow, and as strong as a dog leash” (Sexton 40). The intertwining of love and possession is thus symbolically represented through Sexton’s depictions intermingling the garden and the tower. While the tower looms large as a symbol of ownership and control, the garden appears more sympathetically as a sign of freedom and sexuality. These two contradictory spaces speak to the character of Mother Gothel, who is both loving and controlling. The notion of possession and interpersonal connection manifests in Sexton’s own biography, which is not surprising considering her classification as a confessional poet, which further demonstrates her struggle to establish new methods of relating to women outside of heteronormative perception. According to her daughter’s memoir, Sexton once wrote to Linda: “Be your own woman. Belong to those u love” (Linda Grey Sexton 9). This contradictory message encourages both independence and submission via objectification committed in the name of “love,” which shows just how difficult it is to break free from the gendered discourse on sexual possession.

Rich discusses this issue of heteronormative dominance in her theoretical work: “It was not written to widen divisions but to encourage heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women—and to change it” (Rich 11). This dominance is executed primarily through psychological, rather than physical, force in the form of gendered standards that can be perpetuated through narrative representations. Gendered standards of beauty, such as those proposed in *Rapunzel*, are akin to Bentham’s panopticon, both a “project of a perfect disciplinary institution,” a project worth exposing and undermining (Foucault 208). Rapunzel is thus influenced on two fronts – by the overt, androcentric voice of the prince, beckoning from the seemingly liberated outside world, and the internalized voice of the mother, who oppresses from within. In either case, both characters

objectify the woman and seek to possess her. Mother Gothel's proprietorship is symbolized by the tower itself, whereas the prince's possession is indicated through Sexton's mention of his "dancing stick," both of which are phallic symbols (Sexton 41). When Sexton's narrative switches to the prince's perspective, Mother Gothel is referred to as "witch," illustrating the conflict between the two competing voices, much like the conflict between the enclosed tower and the outside world.

The tower that holds the witch's authority restrains Rapunzel, like the prisoner in Foucault's panopticon, both physically and psychologically: "It is a segmented, immobile, frozen space. Each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment" (Foucault 195). As with the threat of the police, the inte rnalized threat of the "witch" reinforces the importance of Rapunzel's stationary body. Both examples indicate the ways in which psychological authority is strengthened by restricting the body of the individual. This limitation is indicated as Sexton invokes the perspective of the Grimms' "fairy": "As she grew older Mother Gothel thought: / None but I will ever see or touch her" (Sexton 40). Thus, the elder woman's authority is exercised through physical restriction, which functions as a type of psychological violence. This type of force is also addressed in the work of Rich in her discussion of male power structures: "Yet the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness" (Rich 27)

Mother Gothel's gaze enforces her position of power, which is exemplified by the small tower window that she and the prince use to view Rapunzel, a common feature in the work of the Grimms, Sexton, and Tanith Lee. This authority is demonstrated within the Grimms' version of

Rapunzel, showing the extreme level of Rapunzel's submission: "Whenever the fairy wanted to enter the tower, she would stand below and call out" (Grimm 38). This type of psychological violence is also depicted in Foucault's study of disciplining mechanisms in the architectural design of panoptic prisons: "This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point…in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located" (Foucault 197). Tanith Lee's portrayal of the tower in a gothic style offers more comparisons to Foucault's critique of Bentham's panopticon. For example, she describes Jaspre's home as "the tower was small, and, of course, pentagonal," much like the "annular building" that Foucault details in his genealogy of punishment (Lee 64, Foucault 200). Lee alludes to the ways in which space is manipulated to create what Foucault calls the "docile body," a submissive subject, whose body is the "object and target of power" (Foucault 136). In a step further than Foucault, Lee goes so far as to completely negate the subject's body, describing Jaspre as "incorporeal and weightless," so passive that she becomes nothing (66). This narrative structure suggests that women may be more susceptible to such disciplining mechanisms because we are socialized against acts of violence and sexual expression, suggesting a strong cause for women's rage.

As in the Grimms' tale of *Rapunzel*, the conflict in Lee's narrative is initiated when the young protagonist, Jaspre, realizes the isolation she has suffered at the hands of the elder woman, the witch: "Entrapped, she shuddered. She had been kept from her own kind" (Lee 69). Yet, Lee makes a unique change in her construction of the tower by depicting it as an inverted, underground structure that defies logic: "the sub-earth cellar of the insularium could be also the top of a tower because such a place thrust on, by sorcerous means, deep into the core of the world" (Lee 65). In a spatial paradox, the apparent bottom of the witch's tower becomes the top

of the prison of the netherworld. This "inverted abyss" erases the binary of top/bottom, which functions as a metaphor for the erasure of the power binary between Jaspre and the witch (Lee 66). However, Lee does not go as far as to ally the two women, as in the case of Sexton.

Lee uses multiple phallic images in her description of the tower, which creates the association between androcentric authority and disciplining mechanisms: "She lay at the tower's foot, and before her the shaft of it ran up and up, becoming a slender pole, an awl, a needle, nothing" (Lee 77). The masculine imagery of the tower is undercut in the progression of Lee's description, which starts by privileging the tower as a vast phallus, and then reduces it to a "slender" shaft, finally culminating in the depiction of the tower as a complete negation. Lee intertwines the psychological and physical violence of the panopticon by placing the prisoner in the center and the authority on the outside. The authority figures – the witch and her demon – execute physical violence against Jaspre, illustrating the seeming vulnerability of the female body: "Her body hung far away, out of her sight, screaming no longer, already dead…leaving the tower…an empty vessel of flesh" (77). Evoking the power of the demon-god, the witch cuts the willing Jaspre, whose blood loss causes her consciousness to become untethered from her physical being. This exhibits the type of psychological violence, such as isolation and the perpetuation of the "docile body" – that could cause suicidal impulses in women, such as in the example of Jaspre. Acceptance of our rage at these dominant pressures will empower us against such a passive resolution.

Hair and eyes are two significant symbols within dominant versions of *Rapunzel* that offer insight into the nature of the "docile body"[47] and its implications for gender socialization. Hair is an external trait that is presumably used to convey individualism, but can also function as a tool to reinforce the dominant discourse on gender. Jane Yolen comments on this symbolic feature in her text *Mirror, Mirror*, where she provides a collaborative analysis of various versions of *Rapunzel* with the help of her daughter, Heide Stemple: "such a bush of maidenhair can also symbolize the maidenhead--or virginity--and its loss (when the witch cuts off Rapunzel's hair). In other words, the story is a metaphor for Rapunzel's initiation into sexuality" (Yolen 166). Contemporary revisionist authors also use hair to discuss the valorization of both physical beauty and sexual purity, equating the two concepts. In a 2010 study of hair styles among college women, Jodi Manning discusses the reasons hair functions as such a highly symbolic trait: "Head hair is similar to style of dress because it too is easily manipulated, changed, and given meaning" (Manning 35). In fact, the story of Rapunzel is so widespread in American culture that its namesake is even used in the medical field[48]. Thus, it is no wonder that

[47] The docile bodies appears for Foucault during the classical age: "The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely" (137-138).

[48] Rapunzel Syndrome is a symptomatic condition of trichotillomania that is defined as a trichobezoar with a "long tail that extended past the duodenum, a rare complication of trichotillomania referred to as Rapunzel syndrome in the surgical literature" (Frey et al. 243).

Rapunzel has maintained its narrative prevalence in our contemporary culture considering that its symbols and themes still speak to a modern audience.

Despite its contemporary variations, the narrative regularly features a maiden with long, blond tresses that act as both her power and her weakness. Women continue to identify with this tale because it reflects on a bodily feature that enables individualization, which can reinforce ego: "For women and girls, hair has been the primary way in which their identity is declared to those they meet. They are socialized to accept this connection to hair at an early age and develop an emotional attachment to their hair" (Manning 36). I find it troublesome that women are still socialized in terms of their physical features, which can be used as a controlling ideology brandished by men and women alike.

Like the dominant tales, Sexton's poetic version of *Rapunzel* also features a blond protagonist, whose hair is pictured "as yellow as a dandelion" (Sexton 40). Yet, her beauty makes her a target for disciplining mechanisms because of the threat she presents through her ability to procreate. In the Grimm narrative, this threat is met by the authority of the mother figure: "'Do you know what, you villain?' The angry fairy said. 'Rapunzel is lost to you forever!'" (Grimm 38). Her language again suggests that Rapunzel, or perhaps her virginity, is a possession to be "lost," privileging sexual restraint. In both the Grimms' and Sexton's narrative, Mother Gothel executes her force differently with respect to Rapunzel and the prince, demonstrating her favor towards the female by leaving her body intact. Despite her preference for the young woman, punishment is enacted on both characters through the use of spatial authority. For

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Unsurprisingly, trichotillomania, or the eating of human hair, "is far more common in girls than boys" and "begins either in early childhood or in adolescence" (Frey et al. 244).

Rapunzel's punishment, she cuts off her hair and "took her to the forest to repent," while the prince receives a somewhat harsher sentence (Sexton 41). The prince receives bodily punishment for tempting the young maiden. In the Grimm narrative, Mother Gothel "banished Rapunzel to a desolate land" and "In his despair the prince threw himself from the tower…he lost both his eyes." (Grimm 38). In both versions, the older woman commits no direct act of physical harm to either character. This insinuates that women are just as likely to employ psychological disciplining mechanisms as men, or perhaps even more so. Since women are often denied physical authority in dominant narratives, it seems natural that they would seek a psychological outlet for their rage.

Although Rapunzel is the obvious victim of the fairy's psychological discipline, the prince is also susceptible to her power. At the awareness of Rapunzel's exile, the prince "flung himself out of the tower, a side of beef. He was blinded by thorns that prickled him like tacks. / As blind as Oedipus he wandered for years" (Sexton 41). In a hyperbolic romantic act, the prince mutilates himself at the loss of his "love." Sexton shows her skepticism towards this destructive romanticism through the biting word "beef." Once again, she dehumanizes the prince much in the same way that men are criticized of objectifying women (i.e., "that's a nice piece of meat"). Sexton's incredulity towards the prince and Rapunzel's "love" is further demonstrated by her sarcasm regarding the dominant ending to the story: "and in the manner of such cure-all's / his sight was suddenly restored" (41). Her general, unconcerned description of the tears that cure the prince destabilizes the privilege placed on the heteronormative union that commonly concludes dominant fairy tales.

Sexton's critique of the common romantic resolution is revealed through her sarcastic tone: "They lived happily as you might expect/proving that mother-me-do/ can be outgrown"

(42). Furthermore, she questions the necessity of heteronormative unions in the production of healthy female sexual development: "The world, some say, / is made of couples. / a rose must have a stem" (42). Her use of the phrase "some say" shows her difference of opinion, proposing that the individual woman can be more empowered than the couple. Furthermore, Sexton develops sympathy for Mother Gothel by offering an explanation for the creation of the cold "witch": "As for Mother Gothel, / her heart shrank to the size of a pin,… and only as she dreamt of the yellow hair / did moonlight sift into her mouth" (Sexton 42). Mother Gothel mourns the loss of female kinship after the intrusion of the sexualized male. Yet, even in these sympathetic lines, the elder women still appears to value Rapunzel for her physical presence, the privileged yellow hair, much in the same way that the prince idolizes her from the window; neither case amounts to a healthy interpretation of female sexual identity.

Hair, like other aesthetic traits, is often employed as a controlling mechanism to establish arbitrary gender binaries. Women are more susceptible to the objectification that comes along with such standards of beauty if we fail to undertake attempts at narrative authority. For example, Tanith Lee's witch reduces Jaspre to nothing but a head of hair, referring to her as "a golden rope," which "had been placed in her hands. She had only, with patience and wisdom, to draw it in" (Lee 57). In this fashion, Lee demonstrates that the witch is the villain through the repression of her kin through the narrative authority of the patriarchal demon she serves. In Lee's tale, Rapunzel irritates the witch, serving as "a reminder of her youth which she had given up" (Lee 55). Like many fairy tales, the two women oppose one another, an opposition which serves the interest of a third male party (the demon/prince). Thus, Lee suggests that the conflict between women, and even our rage towards one another, is derived from the psychological pressure of androcentric discourse.

Rapunzel represents the naïve, innocent girl, whereas the witch is aged, learned, and corrupted[49]. To illustrate this conflict, Lee writes that Rapunzel "understood her scholarship and disliked it," indicating that she thinks little of the witch's dark studies (Lee 55). Although Jaspre is presented as Lee's protagonist, she is not without flaw. She is often in a state of contradiction, being both physically enslaved, yet mentally free: "freedom held no particular allure. Jaspre's world was of the intellect and spirit" (Lee 59). Though Lee describes both Jaspre and the witch as intellectuals, neither woman seems incredibly smart nor free as they both depend on the validation of a male demon-god with a questionable moral code. This demonstrates the need for more radical revisionary work that avoids the caricaturing of these two women characters.

Although Lee maintains the conflict between the two central female characters, she differs wildly in her approach to Rapunzel's origin story. Lee depicts the father as a pimp, who has been employing Rapunzel's mother: "that he came seeking a witch implied no love, merely that his wife was some use to him" (Lee 55-56). Rapunzel's biological mother, a destitute prostitute, is rendered powerless through her sexual promiscuity. The old, presumably barren witch, on the other hand, is depicted as powerful in the face of Rapunzel's father: "her visitor was afraid of her." Fearless in front of the man, the wise witch remarks, "your wife sells her body and brings you a fair wage from the enterprise. You suppose that when she grows big and cumbersome, her customers will dwindle" (Lee 56). Thus, while Rapunzel's father is normally portrayed as a devoted husband, Lee differs in her depiction of Jaspre's father as a person who

[49] Zipes, Jack. "Introduction." *Don't Bet on the Prince*.

"…numerous fairytales, such as Gilbert and Gubar have suggested in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, often pit old women against the young…" (22)

commodifies and uses women as objects. Lee addresses the modern topic of abortion when the father asks for the witch's "clever herbs so the trouble goes away" (Lee 56). Elaborating on Rapunzel's origin story with references to contemporary concerns, such as prostitution and abortion, makes these topics less taboo within dominant discourse, which will make these topics less morally polarizing, giving women more freedom to redirect the conversation.

Though the author makes many transgressive changes to the dominant narrative, she maintains some of the outdated fairy tale values, such as the privilege of beauty. The witch says of Jaspre, "She is whole and will be lovely" (Lee 58). To illustrate Jaspre's status as "heroine" and opponent, Lee paints her image in shades of white, such as "pale lemon silk and cream satin and blanched-almond brocade" and "skin like pearl melting in the dress of pearl silk" (Lee 58-59). The shades of white scream Jaspre's innocence, which is met with "neither love nor friendship" from the witch that she calls "my Lady," suggesting a rather cold dynamic between the two (Lee 58). This hostility is akin to that of the Grimm version, though amplified to extract any implication of maternal love. This approach runs counter to the female kinship evidenced in the work of Anne Sexton.

Any maternal traits are excised from Lee's witch, who becomes more monstrous as the narrative progresses: "the witch's face above her, malevolent and intent, its eyes alive, its lips parted" (Lee 76). Instead of the passive, psychological violence prevalent in in many versions of Rapunzel, Lee's antagonist commits direct acts of physical violence against her young ward: "With one last stroke of the knife she had severed Jaspre's hair. She had stripped her of everything…" (Lee 78) Thus it would appear that Jaspre's naiveté would constitute her undoing. Instead, Jaspre is miraculously rescued by the demon-god after willingly sacrificing her life on his behalf: "But as he held her now, the bandaging upon her healed wrists turned to jewels…He

mounted Jaspre before him" (Lee 80-81). Romanticized notions of self-harm depict suicide as a solution for the dissatisfied woman, which is a dangerous lesson that encourages passive behavior among women as a means towards success. As Irigaray advocates, women should seek to represent our anger "Not by reproducing, by copying, the "phallocratic" models that have the force of law today, but by socializing in a different way the relation to nature, matter, the body, language, and desire" (Irigaray 191). Women will learn to recognize the disciplining mechanisms that surround them – whether they be spatial, psychological, or aesthetic – in order to better advocate for their individual concerns regarding social welfare, rather than being pawns in someone else's initiatives. Yolen also cautions against passive behavior when she argues that women "allow for a cycle of abuse through our non-actions" (Stemple 168). Finding healthy representations for women's rage, unlike the self-harm depicted here, will reduce inequality through the creation of a new discourse.

Chapter Four: Part I

Big Red, Little Wolf: Narrative Transformation in Recent Variations of *Red Riding-hood*

The girl in red goes by many names. An international darling, the French know her as "Le petite chaperon rouge," while the German refer to her as "rotkäppchen." Her renowned English title, "Little Red Riding-hood," garners recognition from both children and parents around the world. Charles Perrault, who was elected to the Académie Française in 1671[50], is responsible for the first literary version of "Little Red Riding-hood," which originally appeared in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (*Stories from Times Past, with Morals*: *Tales of Mother Goose* 1697). Another widely accepted version, published over a century later in 1812, was included among the collected fairy tales of the distinguished German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Since then, history has seen the disobedient, red-caped girl age into a spirited woman with an atypical appetite for sex and blood.

The Aarne-Thompson classification system categorizes *Little Red Riding Hood* as type 333, identified by folklorists as The Glutton (Red Riding Hood)[51]. The excess suggested by "The Glutton" gets reinterpreted in recent literature to address the sexual appetites of both sexes, but principally women. Since the first-recorded tales, contemporary revisionist writers have demonstrated "the impact feminist criticism has had in generating alternatives" to the models

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[50] "Charles Perrault". *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online.* Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 23 Dec. 2015.

[51] Aarne, Antti. *The types of the folktale: A classification and bibliography*. Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1961.

present in many of the mass marketed fairy tales (Short 25). Christina Bacchilega, a prominent fairy tale scholar and the editor of *Marvels and Tales,* indicates a commonality between the narratives of the Grimm Brothers and Charles Perrault. Despite their differing publication date and geography, "their gender ideology and their sexual politics are remarkably similar" (Bacchilega 58). Contemporary writers have addressed these similarities by both acknowledging this restrictive ideology and attempting, though not always succeeding, to rebel against some of the more simplistic characterizations of sexual behavior and violence present in many commercial fairy tales.

The importance of recent revisions of *Little Red Riding-hood* is validated through the research of such notable folk scholars as Jack Zipes, who makes a connection between the work of Angela Carter and Tanith Lee, two contemporary prose writers: "There is a haunting quality in all of Carter's tales which can also be traced in the narratives of Lee…While each tale is poignant in its own way, the version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, entitled *Wolfland* is especially significant since it picks up the thread of transformation in the figure of the wolf developed by Carter, Ursula Le Guin and other writers" (Zipes 25). Lee and Carter use the theme of transformation to discuss women's sexual development in a society that is seemingly outfitted with predators. Maria Tatar, who chairs the Program in Folklore and Mythology at Harvard University, references a French version, several centuries old, titled "The Story of Grandmother," that "shows the not-so-innocent heroine eating the flesh and blood of her grandmother, performing a striptease for the wolf, and then asking to go outside to relieve herself before getting in bed with the wolf. Once outdoors, the girl runs back home, outwitting the Gallic predator" (Tatar xxxii). During modern times, inventive, erotic narratives such as these were widely obscured in favor of the more simplistic narratives that convey messages of physical

restraint and compliance. Even in today's society, this cunning, seductive character is still censored or belittled in picture books and on the television screen.

However, contemporary writers have begun to recover much of this hidden folk history by reviving some of the more bawdy themes. For example, Sandra Beckett, a scholar of popular culture and children's literature, acknowledges that "Many authors have retold *Little Red Riding-hood* for an adult audience. Among the English-speaking writers that immediately come to mind are Olga Broumas, Angela Carter, Anne Sexton, and James Thurber" (Beckett 4). My discussion will address three of the writers Beckett mentions, along with a few others: Broumas, Carter, Sexton, Roald Dahl, Tanith Lee, and Dame Carol Ann Duffy. Though, my attention to Thurber will be marginal considering that his work preceded the publication of the aforementioned authors by thirty years or more. Instead, my discussion will focus on contemporary texts from the 1970-1990's in order to analyze the impact that feminism and postmodern thought have had on representations of women's use of sexual manipulation and anger expression.

Perhaps as a reaction to the censorship evident in the work of Perrault, whose target audience was the French bourgeois,[52] the following contemporary fairy tale authors attempt to retrieve elements of the visceral content that prevailed in the oral folktales. The most stimulating writers show a fondness for evading the censorship of bodily mechanisms, which was evidenced

[52] "Charles Perrault". *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online.*

Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 23 Dec. 2015.

Due to his training as a lawyer, Perrault first worked as an official for the management of royal buildings, which indicates the class of company he kept.

in the early editions of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales. No strangers to censorship,[53] the Grimm brothers also "created a heroine who, once rescued by a hunter, vows never to disobey her mother," exhibiting the presumed moral importance of women's obedience that is embedded in older versions of this tale (Tatar xxxiii). Countering this message, the critically acclaimed author Angela Carter characterizes the protagonist as able-bodied and defiant in her 1979 collection *The Bloody Chamber*: "It went for her throat, as wolves do, but she made a great swipe at it with her father's knife and slashed off its right forepaw" (Carter 109). Though the agency of Red Riding-Hood is diminished in popular versions, which often feature the young girl succumbing to the manipulation of the "wolf," Carter's quote reimagines a protagonist with both power and prowess. Scholars define Carter's work as a radical, postmodern[54] revision that alters the disposition of the protagonist to make her more aggressive and less obedient.

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[53] Tatar discusses the Grimm brothers' censorship of oral tales in *The Hard Facts of the Grimm Fairy Tales*: "When it came to passages colored by sexual details or to plots based on Oedipal conflicts, Wilhelm Grimm exhibited extraordinary editorial zeal. Over the years, he systematically purged the collection of references to sexuality and masked depictions of incestuous desire" (Tatar 11).

[54] Jorgensen distinguishes her analysis of erotic, mass marketed fairy tales from postmodern depictions of women's sexuality, such as Angela Carter's "In the Company of Wolves": "I would further argue that the category of postmodern fairy tales can encompass eroticized fairy tales, but the uncritical portrayal of desires separates eroticized fairy tales from other, more radical postmodern fairy tales such as those of Angela Carter" (Jorgensen 29).

The prolific writer Tanith Lee published the commercially successful, mass marketed revision of *Little Red Riding-hood* in 1983, just four years after Carter, under the title "Wolfland" in the collection *Red as Blood*. Although Carter and Lee were contemporaries – both English natives, both writing during the same time period, on the same subject matter – they differ stringently in their target audience. While Carter's work shows a stronger engagement with a more specific literary audience, Lee seeks to reach the masses. While Carter has achieved scholarly acclaim, and through such acclaim has had the power to change representations of women in situations of sex and violence, Lee has had an equally important impact through her ability to influence a broader audience. Though their direction may differ, both women establish a commitment to the critique of ideological boxes that attempt to hold women safely in the corner of a room, collecting dust. Lee's detailed depiction of two central characters – the grandmother and granddaughter – offers insight on the changing representations of women's sexuality and anger expression. Lisel, the protagonist, succeeds through compliance to her grandmother, Anna, which reinforces messages of obedience and matriarchal authority. However, Lisel also flourishes through her rebellion against normative society, instead opting for the company of wolves and outcasts, such as the male dwarf named "Beautiful."

British feminist prose writers are not the only authors to take on the tale of Little Red. A diverse group of contemporary poets – Roald Dahl, Olga Broumas, Anne Sexton, and Dame Carol Ann Duffy – have all attempted to render the protagonist anew. Roald Dahl, who is most known for his children's books, such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, also took an interest in children's fairy tales when he wrote *Revolting Rhymes*, a collection of poems that, although addressed to children, contains themes that engage all ages. In her discussion of *Little Red Riding-hood* revisions, Beckett points out a connection between the titles, "Little Red Riding

Hood and the Wolf" by Roald Dahl and "The Little Girl and the Wolf" by James Thurber, "both of which give equal billing to the wolf and the heroine" (Beckett 129). This positions the two characters as either peers or rivals while revealing the central conflict. Beckett also notes the influence of earlier works, such as the texts by Thurber, the Grimms, and Perrault, on Dahl's narrative approach: "A number of other striking similarities suggest that Dahl was familiar with the much earlier prose work" (129). Through his representations of the recognizable protagonist, Dahl both deviates from, and pays homage to, the preexisting Red Riding-hood narratives. In crafting a more aggressive heroine, Dahl demonstrates the transformative capacity of violence.

Unlike Dahl, the Greek feminist poet Olga Broumas writes for an adult, literary audience and employs sexual language that provokes female agency. Broumas was the first non-native English speaker to be selected for the Yale Younger Poets series (1977)[55] for her collection of poems, *Beginning with O*, which feature revisionary texts, such as "Little Red Riding Hood," that employ lesbian language in an attempt to characterize the experience of marginalized women. Through inventive diction, Broumas challenges the social order established in the first-recorded tales by avoiding the resolution of heterosexual marriage, which is common to many of the mass marketed narratives from Cinderella to Rapunzel: "Romances, like fairy tales, typically deal with a series of fantastical transformations that end in heterosexual marriage" (Jorgensen 28). Broumas rejects this ideological closure through her use of open, evocative language that intertwines intimacy and violence to create a new portrait of the woman who wears her sexuality like a "red hood" (67). Her work is often discussed in relation to Anne Sexton, the confessional

[55] Bradley, George (Editor). *The Yale Younger Poets Anthology*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London. ISBN 0300074727. Print.

American poet who also writes on themes of female kinship in the collection *Transformations* (1971), particularly in the poem "Rapunzel," which I address in other scholarship.

Sexton has received a wide range of scholarly attention regarding her collection *Transformations*, which exaggerates "the passivity of the traditional fairy-tale heroin to such a degree that it becomes hyperbolic parody" (Joosen 47). Although the poem *Little Red Riding Hood* has received less critical consideration than Sexton's poplar revisions of *Cinderella* and *Snow White*, I would argue that it is one of the more transgressive treatments of gender within the collection. The poem features a "pregnant" wolf that births the hooded girl shortly before his death, creating new symbolic associations regarding womanhood and the sexual/social order.

As with Broumas and Sexton, Dame Carol Ann Duffy also supports new representations of female sexuality and agency within her revisionary verses. Duffy is the first Scottish and openly gay poet to be awarded the position of British Poet Laureate[56] in 2009. Although her works have been widely taught in the UK within the General Certificate of Secondary Education, National 5, A-level, and other educational formats – suggesting their accessibility to a vast audience – in 2008 her poem "Education for Leisure" was removed from the Assessments and Qualifications Alliance due to concerns over the violent content. Despite the controversy surrounding her writing, her literary agent, Peter Strauss, argued that the poem in question is "an anti-violence poem. It is a plea for education rather than violence."[57] This conflict suggests a progression towards an extreme politically correct society that would rather obscure difficult

[56] Duffy, Carol Ann. "Duffy Reacts to New Laureate Post." *BBC News*. BBC, 01 May 2009. Web. 08 Jan. 2016.

[57] Ibid.

issues, such as the violent tendencies that are evident in human nature, rather than speaking up about problems that readers will likely face in the world outside the book.

The Woman Wolf: Rewritings of *Red Riding-hood* by Angela Carter and Tanith Lee

By the late 1970's, feminist and postmodern discourse were becoming more accessible and mainstream, though they often clashed with the reigning culture of consumer capitalism and androcentric thought. This conflict is evidenced in the revisionary works of Angela Carter and Tanith Lee, two British writers who have revived the famous fairy tale *Little Red Riding-hood* in their own works of fiction. In 1979, a year marked by a rise in global feminist discourse, the U.N. General Assembly adopted The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[58]. That same year Carter published *The Bloody Chamber*, which was preceded in 1978 with the critical, feminist text *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*[59]. Carter and Lee both incorporate elements from other famous fairy tales, such as

[58] Although CEADW, the global treaty for women's rights, was introduced in 1979, it would not become effective until 1981. By 1998, 161 nations had joined the CEADW, yet the United States was not included in this list. Currently, the United States remains the only signatory that refuses to ratify the Convention.

[59] This was a critical review of three novels by Marquis de Sade, who Carter argues is a "moral pornographer" in that he offers the potential for a new ideology on women through the problematic tool of sexual spectacle. Carter devotes much of her analysis to the sexual and

the work of the Grimm brothers and Charles Perrault, which endow their narratives with layered meaning. Yet, the revisionary work of the former male authors differs vastly from the approach of Carter and Lee: "Both Perrault and the Grimms worked hard to excise the ribald grotesqueries of the original peasant tales" (Tatar xxxiii). Contemporary writers work to revive the references to bodily fluids and functions that made the oral narratives so fascinating. Although the Grimms kept several of these grotesqueries, they also heavily revised the oral narratives to make "a cautionary tale that accommodated a variety of lessons about vanity and idleness" (Tatar xxxiii). Both Carter and Lee deviate significantly from the moral lessons in the first-recorded versions of *Little Red Riding-hood*. In her discussion of contemporary fairy tale revisions, the folk scholar Christina Bacchilega states that they "foreground their layered, genealogical construction…this plural self-reflexivity can (re)produce empowering possibilities for women and narrative" (Bacchilega 52). These possibilities are substantiated through the characterization of women in Carter and Lee's narratives, which represent women as physical and aggressive without resigning them to sexual objectification.

"The Werewolf," a short story from Carter's critically acclaimed collection *The Bloody Chamber*, revises the roles of both the grandmother and the granddaughter to explore the occurrence of violence and aberrant sexual behavior among women. This short story is followed by another LRRH-inspired tale, "The Company of Wolves,"[60] which has been venerated among

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physical victimization of the female protagonists in each novel, rendering her awareness of the ways in which these representations impact the discourse on womanhood.

[60] The popularity of Carter's short story was such that, in 1984, it was made into a feature-length film directed by Neil Jordan, which included notable actors Angela Lansbury and Stephen Rhea.

fairy tale scholars. My analysis will focus on "The Werewolf," which has also received critical success, though its symbolic interpretations are less commonly studied. This tale explores the relationship between intimacy and violence in an attempt to understand their long-standing partnership and the ways in which that enterprise manifests itself in women's experience.

Carter begins her tale with a description of the woods, the townspeople, and the lore on witches. She depicts the witch with an erotic image of the devil provocatively sucking the old woman's wart: "they strip the crone, search for her marks, for the supernumerary nipple her familiar sucks. They soon find it. Then they stone her to death" (Carter 108). This excerpt recalls the German term Warnmarchen, which referred to cautionary tales that warned "Any neighbor or relative could be such a shape-shifter and turn dangerous when called upon by the Familiar or the moon" (Bacchilega 55). Evidenced by Bacchilega's comment, the connection between intimacy and menace has been explored across history and territory in variants of *Little Red Riding-hood*. Carter's tale references and revises this history by turning two intimates – grandmother and granddaughter – against each other to the point of mortal violence. Imbedded inside the violent act of the townspeople, who bludgeon the witch for living outside of their social law, is a sexualized image of the "deviant" nipple sucking. Through this image, Carter is able to avoid the ageism that often prevails in fairy tales by creating a sympathetic, sexualized older character. Yet, it is this very sexualization that demonizes the woman, resulting in her merciless death.

The second relevant scene in Carter's story features the familiar meet-cute between the girl and the wolf, though in this narrative variant an interesting change occurs; the wolf is eventually revealed to be the girl's grandmother. The Italian feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti articulates the importance of recent representational changes, like the aforementioned scene, that have begun to infiltrate the dominant cultural ideology: "feminists have been working precisely

to put into images that which escapes phallologocentric modes of representation" (Braidotti 227). Carter seeks such an escape through visuals that shock our preexisting notions of womanhood as a passive and naïve state. She uses the initial set-up of the witch and the townspeople to inform her revision of the familiar scene of the hooded girl in the woods who is met by a wolf. The young maiden in Carter's tale is on her way to attend to her sick grandmother, but her progress is impeded by the appearance of a wolf on the prowl. This part of the narrative is reminiscent of the plot by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, but what comes next is not. Instead of reacting with naiveté, as the protagonist of *Little Red Riding-hood* often does[61], Carter's character responds with cunning and physical agility. When the wolf attacks her, she expresses agency through the power of her "father's hunting knife," which she uses to sever the animal's right paw: "The wolf let out a gulp, almost a sob, when it saw what had happened to it" (109). In brandishing the father's hunting knife to commit this act of violence, Carter represents the girl as an agent of masculinity, diminishing her relationship with the maternal. Repeated references to this familial weapon demonstrate that this phallic daughter is influenced by the androcentric order. With this alignment, Carter diminishes sentiment for the girl and instead crafts compassion for the "antagonist" through her description of the "sob." This brief moment proves to humanize the wolf, creating a conflict with the reader's sympathy. The young protagonist's use of brutality makes her wiser but less likeable. By reducing sympathy for the protagonist, Carter encourages

[61] Perrault characterizes the protagonist of LRRH as infantile and ignorant in order to teach women to exercise caution around strange men, who are represented by the wolf: "The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stay and hear a wolf talk…" (47)

the reader to question their perception of the wolf and the aged woman, allowing for a reconsideration of their social status as predator and victim.

In several versions of *Little Red Riding-hood*, the wolf seems to symbolize a predatory male who presents the risk of sexual harm. Yet, as Tatar points out, this is only one of many possible interpretive approaches, which include "some critics reading the story as a parable of rape, others as a blueprint for female development, and still others as a seasonal allegory" (Tatar xxxiii). Through a narrative twist, Carter endows the wolf with a new symbolic weight when she reveals that the grandmother and the wolf are one and the same:

> She pulled back the sheet but the old woman woke up, at that, and began to struggle, squawking and shrieking like a thing possessed. But the child was strong, and armed with her father's hunting knife; she managed to hold her grandmother down long enough to see the cause of her fever. There was a bloody stump where her right hand should have been, festering already (Carter 109).

As with the opening scene, Carter combines wolf and woman into one in an effort to deconstruct some of the simplistic binaries that abound in the fairy tale genre. In her examination of the wolf, Bacchilega defines the creature's role in most narratives as "merely a mediator or the symbolic representation of an aged woman" (56). In Carter's variation, the wolf is definitively female but also male in that she undergoes a violent castration of her useful body, the "bloody stump" symbolizing the loss of her socio-sexual value under the dominant ideology. Through her antagonistic diction, Carter establishes compassion for the wolf (elder woman), which in this example renders the grandmother's pain and isolation. This narrative development also has a familiar fairy tale feature – the competition between a young girl and an aged woman – that alludes to our cruel cultural perspective on elders, particularly women, who are often cast out

and demonized. This cruelty is personified through the figure of the granddaughter, who is positioned as the grandmother's enemy, which creates a combative dynamic between the two women that contradicts the amiable relationship that is rendered in most narrative variants.

Carter conflates two fairy tale villains – the witch and the wolf – into the figure of the grandmother, cultivating a more complex female character than the frail, bed-ridden woman from the mass marketed tales. In a reference to the opening mythology of the woman in the woods, Carter again announces the "deviant" female body part that signifies her cultural difference: "They knew the wart on the hand at once for a witch's nipple; they drove the old woman, in her shift as she was, out into the snow with sticks, beating her old carcass as far as the edge of the forest, and pelted her with stones until she fell down dead" (109-110). The grandmother is made an outcast because of her "witch's nipple," which signifies both her advanced age and female gender. Using violent, unsympathetic diction to describe the "old carcass" being battered, Carter exposes the disconcerting ageism that guides the narrative of many popular fairy tales, such as commercial variations of *Snow White* and *Rapunzel*.

The "disposable" quality of women's bodies is portrayed in Carter's narrative through the stoning of not one, but two older women – the witch in the woods and the grandmother in the snow. A correlation between aspects of physical identity and violence is discussed in the theoretical work of Braidotti, who argues that "the 'disposable' bodies of women, youth, and others who are racialized or marked off by age, gender, sexuality, and income, reduced to marginality, come to be inscribed with particular violence in this regime of power" (Braidotti 6). Age and gender, among other factors of identity, are frequently misrepresented in service of the reigning ideology to reinforce arbitrary standards for women. Through the visceral language in

Carter's scene, we see this process of enforcement at work. The reader then becomes unsettlingly aware of this subtle injustice to the wolf – the loner, outcast, sexual deviant – that is woman.

Carter's story concludes with the instatement of the granddaughter in the grandmother's place, demonstrating the granddaughter's opposition to the maternal order: "Now the child lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered" (Carter 110). The child's development into a woman is thus initiated through the death of the maternal figure, which can be read more benevolently as a symbolic loss of naiveté, the killing of childish behavior and the development of an adult identity. Yet, by the end of the story, the reader still sympathizes with the wolf-woman through the castration she endures at the hands of her own bloodline and townspeople. Braidotti's theories on subjectivity, especially in the case of women, offer insight into the resolution for both of Carter's central characters. In her analysis of identity, Braidotti writes, "I am struck by the violence of the gesture that binds the self to the performative illusion of unity, mastery, self-transparence" (39). Both Braidotti and Carter recognize power as a positive and multilayered force, which is presented through their understanding of difference. For Carter, the importance of power is reinforced in the phallic daughter's overthrow of her grandmother and also in the reader's lamentation over the powerful matriarch's death. The reader may thus conclude the story torn between the two protagonists, whose resolutions are equally compelling from an ideological standpoint. The acts of brutality entrenched in Carter's representations of power show anger expression among women as a source of both emancipation and destruction, illustrating the duality that makes violence suspect to context.

Tanith Lee, winner of the 1983 and 1984 World Fantasy Award, is known for her revisionary fairy tales that were heavily influenced by the horror genre. Among her vast body of

work, which includes 90 novels and over 300 stories, is the 1983 collection titled *Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimmer*. This collection features a retelling of *Little Red Riding-hood* that delves into women's use of anger expression and sexual development. The story is set in 19th century Scandinavia and features gothic elements that speak to an adult audience more so than children, who were the target readers for Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. There are three key features regarding women in violent and/or erotic scenarios that distinguish Lee's narrative from the approach of other mass-marketed fairy tales. The first significant feature of Lee's approach is her alteration of the victor/villain dichotomy. Like Carter, Lee blurs the distinction between victim and predator to illustrate the implementation of violence in the pursuit of power. A second literary technique that merits attention is Lee's use of meta-narrative to demonstrate the constructive role of fantasy in women's sexual development by making reference to both fairy tales and erotic novels. The final textual aspect that I will consider is her use of the grandmother's origin story, which depicts a history of spousal abuse. The reader later learns that the grandmother's response to spousal abuse leads to the creation of the werewolf.

Rather than being old and infirm, the grandmother, Anna, is presented as a powerful matriarch with no husband, hunter, or father to curb her rule: "A recluse, she had manipulated like a puppet-master from behind the curtain of the forest" (Lee 91). Instead of presenting the aged woman as a victim of the forest, as is the case in the Perrault and Grimm version, Lee depicts her as its enigmatic master, who is perhaps a more captivating character than her younger counterpart. Lisel, the granddaughter that Anna has watched and controlled from a distance, retains some of the naiveté of her hooded predecessors, but lacks their passive demeanor. The adaptations of both women counter the ageism that commonly infiltrates the mythology of fairy tales. These representations combat the problematic images of women that are discussed in a

study on physical and sexual abuse, *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women by New York Radical Feminists*: "We must change the image that men have of women as passive, delicate sex-objects upon which they can take out their frustrations and anger" (Connell and Wilson 216). The causality between passivity and a susceptibility to victimization is also apparent in Lee's depiction of both grandmother and granddaughter as having physical agency.

The red hood symbolizes[62] the sexual target on Red Riding-Hood's back, which is evidenced in Perrault's cautionary tale[63] that warns women against male predators. Perrault's moral demonstrates an awareness of the repressive culture in which women are socialized, though he is unable to present a satisfying solution. The repressive system that appears to dictate women's experience is discussed in the analysis of Conner and Wilson: "the conviction grew among feminists that women are victimized and abused not only by street violence and deviant sexuality but, indeed, by the total sexual system of the present culture…" (82). Unlike Perrault's cautionary symbolism, Lee references the famous red cape in a positive manner to indicate the

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[62] *Versuch einer Darstellung der psychoanalytischen Theorie: 9 Vorlesungen gehalten in New York im September 1912*. Deuticke, 1913. In a famous essay at a critical point in his career, Jung argues that the wolf in Little Red Riding-hood symbolizes the father; the child's fear of being swallowed by him denotes her fear of sexual intercourse.

[63] Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (Paris, 1697). Although it has been extracted from many editions of the story, Charles Perrault chose to conclude his fairy tale with a very explicit moral: "Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf…" (11).

protagonists' entry into sexual maturity, described here as a gift that is handed down from woman to woman: "A swirling cloak of scarlet velvet leapt like a fire from its box to Lisel's hands" (Lee 91). Diction with active connotations, such as "swirling" and "leapt," help to endow Lisel, the wearer of the cape, with agency that avoids the sexualization common to erotic fairy tale revisions. Later in the plot, it will be revealed that this gift was born from the violence between the matriarch, Anna, and Lisel's grandfather, who died mysteriously in the forest.

Like the girl in Carter's tale, Lisel is represented as fearless and agile, signifying the protagonist's increasing agency. Yet, in Lee's characterization, the hooded girl is endowed with the agency of the preceding maternal power. When wearing the cape from her distant grandmother, Lisel imagines "flying in it across the solid white river like a dangerous blood-red rose" (Lee 92). The romantic associations of the rose are lost, replaced instead with an image of a lone girl who matches the menace of the forest. Lee maintains associations between the cape and the potential for peril, though she expands the discourse by connecting that danger to the distinct experience of spousal abuse. The reader later learns that Anna, Lisel's grandmother, once owned the red hood, which she wore into the woods after deciding that she would no longer be a victim of domestic abuse. Lee thus revises the hood to represent independence and power. In their study of sexual abuse, Connell and Wilson warn women against "…a culture that deprives them of sexual autonomy and exploits them as inferior sexual objects" (82). Lee extracts the heteronormative suggestions that appear in many contemporary fairy tales, which allows her to imagine women's sexual development without the hindrance of repression or objectification.

Although the young protagonist retains the naiveté common to the hooded girl in the mass marketed narratives, she is made more complex by her show of courage: "Lisel was not at all afraid, not of the problematic wolves, not even of the eccentric grandmother she had never

before seen" (Lee 93). This excerpt reveals some significant changes in Lee's approach, such as eliminating the preexisting relationship between the two women and diminishing the danger the wolves signify. The threat of the wolf is curtailed by the presence of the girl's bravery, which Lee interestingly equates with malice, effectively distorting the moral center of the story: "A malicious streak in her lent her the extraordinary bravery of desiring to inflict as many hurts on her killers as she was able…" (Lee 96). Lisel's desire to enact violence is related with the morally substantive concept of bravery, an idea that promotes action among women and demonstrates the social value of violent impulses, which are referred to here as a necessary survival mechanism. As the folk scholar Bacchilega notes, the fairy tale of *Little Red Riding-hood* "demonstrated the importance of women's knowledge of survival" (Bacchilega 56). In Lee's narrative, the woman-as-wolf reinforces the importance of endurance, removing the passivity associated with the female protagonists of most dominant *Little Red Riding-hood* variants: "Her eyes also blazed, her teeth also were bared…she appeared ready to attack the wolf in its own primeval mode, and as her hands struck the glass against its face, the wolf shied and dropped away" (Lee 97). Lisel's ability to use violence serves a protective function and reinforces her superiority. Again, violence is postulated as serving a primal function that contemporary civilization seems eager to forget.

As with many popular fairy tales, such as *Cinderella* and *Rapunzel*, Lee's narrative uses age as a point of contention between the two female characters. Ageism is addressed in unfavorable descriptions of the grandmother that are given from Lisel's perspective: "But her nails were very long and discolored, as were her teeth. These two incontrovertible proofs of old age gave Lisel a perverse satisfaction. Grandmother's eyes, on the other hand, were not so reassuring" (Lee 98). Interestingly, though, Lee also demonstrates the potential power that comes

with age. For example, she ruminates on her description of "Anna's strong yet senile teeth" (Lee 99). Lee reimagines the wolf's teeth – a significant symbol in many versions of *Little Red Riding-hood* – in an unconventional manner. In the example above, Anna's teeth act as a sign of her superiority and diminish the negative associations with age that plague many fairy tales. While Lee does not equate age with physical weakness, she does imply that age inhibits sanity through the use of the term "senile." In spite of this negative reference, Lee is efficacious in establishing empathy for both women, but the grandmother in particular.

Like Carter, Lee also takes up the issue of female sexual development that is common to commercial versions of *Little Red Riding-Hood.* Early in the story, she demonstrates Lisel's internalized fear of rape through the symbolism of the wolf in the woods: "what more violent than to be torn apart by long pointed teeth under the pine trees" (Lee 102)? The teeth, which signify the phallus in this description, take on a different meaning when used in reference to Anna, the matriarch. By adding allusions to other fictional texts, Lee is able to develop an intertextual discourse on the ways in which fantasy texts inform the sexual imaginary of women. The young girl, Lisel, often remarks on semi-erotic novelettes that she is reading during her stay at her grandmother's estate: "Partly nude, a lovely maiden had been bound to a stake and the first torch applied, but Lisel no longer cared very much for her fate. Setting the book aside, she rose from her chair" (Lee 102). Lee shows that these erotic novels, which are not all that different from some of her own texts, provide Lisel with a liminal space to explore sexual urges and violent impulses. Yet, the fantasy in Lisel's book, which partners physical danger and eroticism, also carries over into her interactions with other characters, such as her fear that the coachman might "drive her into the forest and violate her" (Lee 104). Lisel thus demonstrates an awareness

of sexual predators, a concept that is also addressed through the symbolic associations of the wolf in the work of both Perrault[64] and the Grimms.

Through the meta-fantasy of Lisel's novelettes, Lee shows that the fear of rape is a present concern in the female imaginary and also in the real world. After Lisel awakes from a faint during her encounter with a wolf, "Recollections of unseemly novellettes led her to a swift examination of her apparel – unscathed" (Lee 107). The feminist activist and poet, Adrienne Rich, comments on the relationship between women's sexual psyche and their acceptance of violence in the article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," which was published in 1980, three years prior to the publication of Lee's collection *Red as Blood*: "that sexuality and violence are congruent, and that for women sex is essentially masochistic, humiliation pleasurable, physical abuse erotic" (Rich 20). It is important to note that sadomasochism is not inherently androcentric and certainly plays a part in women's culture and pleasure. However, Lee shows that – when dictated by the prevailing androcentric ideology – sexual experience can be used to oppress women when it is internalized and converted into fear. Thus, we must replace this fear with positive representations of women's sexual expression.

In Lee's version of *Little Red Riding-Hood*, violence is not a primarily masculine concept, which is evidenced by the author's description of the young protagonist: "Lisel had the urge to bite him viciously" (Lee 108). By depicting Lisel as aggressive and wolf-like, Lee shows

[64] An excerpt from the end of Perrault's tale reveals his symbolic intentions for the antagonist: "…I say 'wolf,' but there are various kinds of wolves…who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all" (11).

that women are just as susceptible to violent impulses as men. Yet, Lee does not show Lisel acting on these urges, which indicates that – although violent inclinations may be an essential part of human experience – how we choose to address those impulses is varied and circumstantially dependent. The elder protagonist is rendered in a similar manner to her young counterpart, but perhaps with more power and less impetuousness: "She looked very cruel and indomitable…Eat you? Hardly necessary. The forest is bursting with game. I won't say I never tasted human meat, but I wouldn't stoop to devouring a blood relation" (Lee 109-110). Anna freely exercises violent behavior without harming her interpersonal relationships, which suggests that aggression does not always serve a negative social function and can be used instead to reinforce positive social dynamics, as in the case of Anna and Lisel.

Lee acknowledges two historical realities – that domestic violence was common in 19th century marriages[65] and women often died in childbirth – which are obscured in the dominant fairy tales. For example, the powerful matriarch, Anna, cautions Lisel about the "marriage vow that binds you forever to a monster…you may die an agonizing death in childbed, just as your mother did" (Lee 101). In his study on maternal mortality and its implications for developing countries, Irvine Loudon presents compelling supporting data on the risk of pregnancy in the time period (19th century) that Lee addresses in her fiction: "The trend in maternal mortality rates

[65] In his study on 19th century family life, James A. Hammerton gives data to support the occurrence of spousal abuse: "Contrary to popular belief, upper-class men were as likely…to strike their wives with pokers or similar weapons, throw them down the stairs, threaten murder, beat them during pregnancy, enforce sexual intercourse after childbirth, and indulge in marital rape or enforced sodomy, as were those lower in the social scale" (Hammerton 87).

in England and Wales between 1880 and 1980 was such that the rate of maternal mortality remained on a high plateau through the mid-1930s, after which there was an abrupt and steep decline" (Loudon 241S). Lee's historical reference underscores the severity and violence inherent in undertaking motherhood, an idea that still exists in a symbolic/psychological capacity in contemporary culture, despite modern medicine's success in diminishing the mortal threat.

Lee crafts an engaging origin story for Anna, the *Little Red Riding-hood* protagonist, whose wolf is born from the fires of domestic violence: "Her husband hit her across the head…the fire flared on the swirl of her bloody cloak as she moved to obey him" (Lee 112). In this manner, Lee still retains the tension of disobedience – the girl that strays from the path – in the mass-produced tales. Anna's origin story concludes with a primal act of violence that frees her from the oppression of her marriage to an abusive partner: "The final thing he sees through the haze of his own blood, which has splashed up in his eyes, and the tears of agony and the enclosing of a most atrocious death, are the eyes of the wolf, gleaming coolly back at him. He knows they are the eyes of Anna. And that it is Anna who then tears out his throat" (Lee 116). Taken as a metaphor, this passage reinforces the familiar notion that women must be prepared physically to act to ensure our freedom. The more literal message is that violence is cyclical; it is learned and met in turn.

The odd final message in Lee's narrative deviates significantly from the more common fairy tale resolutions, which typically end in heterosexual matrimony (see the Grimm Brothers' "Cinderella," "Snow White," and "Rapunzel"). Although Lee avoids a heteronormative resolution, she does suggest that childbearing is a necessary part of women's experience – with or without the involvement of a male partner: "Bear a child. You will be mistress here. You can command any man to serve you" (Lee 117). It is somewhat problematic that the matriarch's

power necessitates the servitude of a man, which diminishes the equality of the sexes that feminists aspire towards. This reversal of roles is disconcerting in that it has the potential to create a cyclical conflict between the sexes, defining servitude as an acceptable expression of power. In addition, the aforementioned ending defines female power in accordance with fertility, which does not offer an interpretation of power that goes against tradition.

As numerous fairy tale scholars have suggested, androcentric ideology is so pervasive that "heterosexual sadomasochism eventually shows its teeth," which explains why the aforementioned revisionary texts are so rife with representations of women's sexuality positioned within the context of violence (Bacchilega 51-52). Lee's tactic to combat this ideology runs the risk of reinforcing it through a reversal of the oppressive relationship, which does not effectively remedy inequality between the sexes. Lee is most successful when she instead seeks to eliminate the gender binaries related to sexuality and violence. The more fruitful final message occurs in the final line of the story: "She hastened out through the doors and over the winter park and followed her grandmother away into the Wolfland" (Lee 118). The girl learns to follow the direction of her grandmother, a moral that is similar to the tales of Perrault and the Grimms. The main difference in Lee's approach to this moral is that she places the grandmother in the role of confident leader, rather than the hunter or the wolf. This sends a positive message about the influence of women's relationships, which can teach women about productive expressions of sexuality and violence.

The Flesh Inside the Wolf's Belly

> …the wolf in disguise waits for the girl and welcomes her with something to eat and drink: some of the grandmother's flesh and blood, presented as sliced meat or local

specialties and wine. In most versions, the girl accepts. Then she strips, one item of clothing at a time, and following a formulaic question-and-answer sequence, she burns her clothes in the fire and joins the wolf in bed....(Bacchilega 54)

In the early 1970's, a trend of revisionary fairy tales, often with erotic[66] undertones, arose in both the British and American writing community. These revisions increased in popularity throughout the late 1990's and were no longer limited to the short story form, but instead were rendered through novels, cinema, and poetic verse. With the intensification of sexual and violent content, which harks back to the oral fairy tale tradition, these narratives appealed to an audience of adults and children alike. *Little Red Riding-hood*, also known as "Little Red Cap," is featured among the fairy tales that still call the attention of contemporary readers. This famous fairy tale is featured among the 20th century poetic works of Anne Sexton, Olga Broumas, Carol Ann Duffy, and Roald Dahl. While the works of Anne Sexton and Olga Broumas appeased a more adult, literary readership, Roald Dahl and Carol Ann Duffy sought to reach the masses. Poetic form afforded these writers the opportunity to concentrate the images from the familiar folk tale, imbuing them with fresh meaning. Each writer's representation of the wolf's fat stomach and the girl's able body – cloaked in red – reveals elements of the current cultural discourse on human sexuality and dominance. Scholars who have studied variations of *Little Red Riding-hood* have produced a variety of "interpretive pronouncements that cast the wolf as an allegorical figure

[66] As the fairy tale scholar Maria Tatar notes in her introduction to *The Hard Facts of the Grimm's Fairy Tales* "Cinematic adaptations have moved in many different directions…but they unfailingly emphasize the erotic elements in the story" (xxxiv).

representing night and winter, as a beast suffering pregnancy envy, and (during the Third Reich in Germany) as a rapacious Jew" (Tatar xxxiii). Contemporary writers build on these associations in ways that challenge readers to reconsider the binary structures that limit our perception, specifically the separation and polarization of the male/female body.

The turbulence associated with women's bodies[67], particularly the maternal corpus, is evidenced in Anne Sexton's personal and professional life. Sexton's biographer, Diane Middlebrook, points out the influence that her therapist had on her writing career, which followed her short-lived success as a model: "she thought her only talent might be for prostitution: she could help men feel sexually powerful…he later proposed that she might try to do some writing" (Middlebrook 42). This demonstrates that, although Sexton never explicitly considered herself a feminist, late in life she learned to value herself for more than her body. The value she places on her intellect is reflected through the bitter wit that seeps through each of her fairy tales. Sexton uses the wolf's belly to question the moral posturing of many variants, such as

[67] Taking a cue from Foucault, Braidotti reinforces the body as site of power, yet she extends this premise to her discussion of the mother's body and its representational authority: "As the site of primary repression, and therefore what escapes representations, the mother's body becomes a turbulent area of psychic life" (Braidotti 227). Thus, the wolf becomes an outlet for writers like Sexton and Broumas to explore the psychological associations underlying the maternal body.

those of Charles Perrault[68], who cautioned women to recognize and evade male sexual predators. Instead, Sexton pursues an inquiry into the body's enchanting ability to deceive.

In the fashion of all the poems in the *Transformations* collection, Sexton begins "Red Riding-hood[69]" with a prologue that makes connections between the familiar folk tales and contemporary, middle-class culture. As in the Grimm[70] and Perrault version, Sexton also demonstrates the danger in a woman's inability to recognize deception:

> Many are the deceivers:
> The suburban matron,
> proper in the supermarket…
> getting ready to meet her lover
> a mile down Apple Crest Road
> in the Congregational Church parking lot (Sexton 73)

The name of the road, "Apple Crest," calls to mind the sexual act through the image of the nude body, which Sexton leaves unsexed and ungendered. This lack of gendering eliminates the necessity of a binary conception of sexuality and morality. Sexton shows her indignation towards defined "moral" space by partnering a reference to the church with the intimation of a "sinful"

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[68] The moral sentiment that exudes from a variety of familiar fairy tales was first popularized by the work of Charles Perrault, whose "text shaped the ensuing literary tradition, and powerfully affected oral retellings as well" (Bacchilega 54).

[69] Note that Sexton drops the diminutive "Little" from her title.

[70] The brothers Grimm "placed the action in the service of teaching lessons to the child inside and outside the book" (Tatar xxxiii).

space – the carnal body. Through this juxtaposition, Sexton demands skepticism towards the moral authority of the church-going middle-class, an audience which has become less targeted by recent popular culture variants[71] of *Little Red Riding-hood*.

Sexton shows a lack of concern for conventional moral strictures that so often reinforce women's objectification and victimization. Instead, she opts to question the narrative structure of preexisting tales through her discussion of the knife, an object which appears in most *Little Red Riding-hood* textual variants:

> Where is the moral?
>
> Not all knives are for
>
> stabbing the exposed belly (Sexton 74)

Instead of imposing moral pronouncements, as in the case of Perrault's resolution, Sexton uses the knife to question moral authority. The knife that Sexton wields is her narrative, each word a puncture in the skin of tradition. Through her opening question, Sexton pokes fun at the little red protagonist's moral quest to save her grandmother (and her virginity). By following the question "Where is the moral?" with a firm and direct "Not," Sexton removes the claim to any ethical high ground, thus destabilizing the binary of good/bad that frequents the fairy tale genre. The

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[71] Fairy tale scholars discuss the shift from an innocent heroine to the sexualized, commercialized heroines rendered in popular cultural: "the sweet, innocent heroine of the Grimms' story has come to figure in our culture as a seductively alluring young woman who has been recruited to sell everything from rental cars and Pepsi to Max Factor lipstick and Chanel perfume" (Tatar xxxiv).

first image she evokes is one of potential violence committed to a vulnerable, ungendered body. Yet, her metaphor also suggests the potential for weapons that do not wound, for power without punishment.

Although known for her confessional style, Sexton backs away from the first person point of view in many of her fairy tale revisions, making her *Little Red Riding-hood* variant an interesting exception. Her prologue takes a darker tone when she invokes the paradoxical perspective of the comedian who struggles with extreme depression, which she personally related to:

> The standup comic…
>
> slits his wrists the next morning…
>
> the razor in his hand like a toothbrush...
>
> and then the slash
>
> as simple as opening a letter
>
> and the warm blood breaking out like a rose…
>
> And I. I too. (Sexton 74)

The shocking images of self-harm are partnered with mundane objects, such as the tooth brush, letter, and rose, which eerily renders the normalcy behind the human desire for violence. These objects are also associated with romanticized notions of heterosexual domestic bliss. Her critique of such "bliss" is evidenced in both her personal[72] and writing life: "She would combine alcohol

[72] Anne Sexton's biographer comments on the writer's inclination towards self-harm and violence directed at others, particularly those she had intimate relationships with: "Taking her 'kill me' pills was another kind of action: punishment of a self she hated. Like rousing her

with an overdose of pills, which she considered 'the woman's way out'" (Middlebrook 216). This indicates that Sexton considered womanhood a struggle and believed that women chose more passive methods of violence, such as self-harm, as a coping mechanism.

In her version of *Little Red Riding-hood*, Sexton describes the girl, who is covered by the red cloak, which is commonly used as a symbol of the girl's newly acquired fertility. Versions written by Perrault and the Grimm's insinuate the cape as a symbol of both menstruation and danger. This symbolism was inspired by the lack of accessible and reliable prophylactics in the 16th and 17th century. Sexton changes the reader's perception of the cape through her distinctive descriptions: "It was her Linus blanket, besides / yes it was red, as red as chicken blood" (Sexton 76). The analogy of the cape to a "Linus blanket" makes reference to the personification of lamentation in Greek mythology; Linus[73] was the son of Apollo and the music teacher of Hercules. Linus provoked the anger of Hercules, resulting in his death. The term also recalls the famous comic strip *Peanuts*, which features that character Linus who is commonly seen carrying around a security blanket and sucking his thumb. The girl's cape also offers psychological security by covering her body. This allusion gives Little Red Riding-hood's cape the new weight of fear, anger, and violence. In fact, her comparison of the cape concludes with a violent image of a mundane part of human experience, considering the common consumption of chicken in contemporary American culture. Anger and violence are thus reinforced as natural and common pat of female experience. The reference to a chicken creates a juxtaposition with the wolf and suggests the potential for either character's cowardice.

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therapist's anger or her husband's physical violence, the suicide attempts would, from the…" (Middlebrook 216).

[73] Bulfinch, Thomas. *Bulfinch's mythology*. Random House Digital, Inc., 1998.

Another site of cowardice – the wolf's belly – figures into Sexton's representation of gender and the gendered body's capacity for violence. The belly of the wolf exemplifies his deception, an idea that Sexton expands on through her characterization of the wolf as a "transvestite," a term which todays speaks to the interests of the LGBTQ community. Scholars note that Sexton's "wolf obviously takes great pleasure in cross-dressing" (Beckett 136). The wolf then becomes a gender liminal figure, which makes him a target for the cultural suspicion towards the absence of binaries:

there was a strange deception:

a wolf dressed in frills,

a kind of transvestite (Sexton 76)

The etymology of the word "transvestite" demonstrates that it is a relatively new cultural term, gaining popularity in 1910 with the publication of *The Transvestite*[74] by Dr. Magnus Hirschfield, a sexologist and advocate for transgender patients. Frills on the wolf's garb prove to feminize a character that is both dangerous and powerful, suggesting that strength is not gender specific.

Despite the feminized description of the wolf, Sexton by no means ignores the male body and its representational authority. Sexton's use of phallic imagery serves the same purpose as Perrault's overstated moral, cautioning women against the dangers of male predators:

There among the roots and trunks

with the mushrooms pulsing inside the moss

[74] Adams, Mary Alice. "Traversing the transcape: A brief historical etymology of trans* terminology." *Transgender communication studies: Histories, trends, and trajectories* (2015): 173-186.

he planned how to eat them both… (Sexton 76)

Her description of the woods features images of male anatomy, rather than the commonly feminine depictions of nature. The "pulsing moss," partnered with the wolf's desire to "eat," makes the comparison between predatory hunger and sexual desire. This relationship between danger and desire is alluded to in scholarship regarding initiation ceremonies, which "involve a ritual of death, often in the form of being swallowed up by some type of symbolic monster, followed by a rebirth as an adult and a return to the community" (Beckett 42). In Sexton's *Little Red Riding-hood* narrative, it is through the sacrifice of the symbolic monster – the mother, the transvestite, the ungendered – that the girl is able to be reborn into society as a woman.

Distilled narratives – those that are concentrated like the fairy tale, poem, or parable – have the power to surpass geographic and cultural boundaries because there is something in them that speaks to our conception of self, a pattern in our species that we can recognize. One writer who both contributes to, and problematize, this recognition is the Greek-American poet Olga Broumas. Acknowledged for her intellectual prowess at a young age, Broumas' emigrated from Greece to the United States at eighteen under a Fulbright fellowship. *Beginning with O*, Broumas' collection of poems based on fairy tales and mythology, has received substantial critical acclaim since its initial publication in 1977. The story of *Little Red Riding-hood* offers an intriguing playground for this multicultural poet in that it "lends itself to a certain interpretive elasticity" (Tatar xxxiii). In her fairy tale revision, Broumas challenges the binary dynamic of pain/pleasure to expand our understanding of women's sexual development and inclinations towards violence. Her work is a response to some of the problems discussed in a 1974 case study on rape and women's sexuality: "There is little in womanhood that we can identify with power or

sexual dynamism. Women are called sexy, to be sure, but more for their physical qualities than their sexual sensitivity" (Connell and Wilson 92). Broumas pursues this sexual sensitivity through her maternal description of the wolf's belly.

Broumas' delves deeper into the perspective of the Little Red Riding-hood protagonist by imagining her experience inside the belly of the wolf. Like Sexton, Broumas also creates visuals that suggest a traumatic birthing, demonstrating the symbiosis between intimacy and violence, which is manifested in the representation of the pregnant body:

> once through your pelvic scaffold, stretching it
> like a wishbone, your tenderest skin
> strung on its bow and tightened
> against the pain. I slipped out like an arrow, (Broumas 67)

Broumas reminds the reader of the popular fairy tale by referencing the tools of the hunter – the bow and arrow that signify pain and release. The pelvis of the wolf-mother acts as an epicenter of both pain and pleasure, life and death. Drawing on the famous work of the Bulgarian-French philosopher, Julia Kristeva, Braidotti reiterates the representational weight of the mother's body, which is a "site of the origin of life and consequently also of its insertion into mortality and death" (Braidotti 227). Broumas' sexually loaded language – such as "stretching it," "your tenderest skin," and "slipped out" – suggests both a violent birthing and a euphoric orgasm. This representation carries two opposing ideas simultaneously in a way that forces the reader to reconsider the binaries that are so often used to render women's experience. The blurring of such binaries insinuates the potentially productive function of pain.

Broumas makes reference to the hood and the wolf in her description of the protagonist. The author comments on the naiveté of the female protagonist, but also endows her with agency

by comparing her to the howling wolf: “my baby feet. Dressed in my red hood, howling, I went – ” (67). Although her feet are diminished, she is given mobility and protection through not only her hood, but also her voice. Her wolf-call proceeds her movement into the “woods,” a symbolic space which is modernized in this version as the physician’s delivery room:

> evading
> the white clad doctor and his fancy claims: microscope,
> stethoscope, scalpel, all
> the better to see with, to hear,
> and to eat – straight from your hollowed basket
> into the midwife’s skirts. (Broumas 67)

Broumas continues to repeat the word “evading” to invoke the danger common to *Little Red Riding-hood*, though she directs the protagonist’s fear at a different figure. It is not a wolf the frightens the girl, but a “white clad doctor” whose tools are represented as a part of the phallic symbolic order. Although the threat of the wolf is removed, Broumas still cautions that “a cape and a hood cannot protect you” (Beckett 45). Her hood, representative of the social fabric that censors women’s experience, cannot protect the protagonist from the cold reality of the surgeon’s scalpel. The doctor stands in for the wolf as a symbol of the dangers of androcentric ideology. This weapon of male dominance cuts through women’s bodies, indicating both a literal – as in the case of rape – and an ideological threat.

The marginalized role of the wolf in Broumas’ poem is not the only inventive narrative technique that she employs. The symbolism of the protagonist’s hood is articulated in sexual terms that speak to the physical pleasure of lesbian experience:

> the hood secret, kept what it sheathed more

secret still. I opened

it only at night, and with other women…

and waiting, across this improbable forest

peopled with wolves and our lost, flower-gathering

sisters they feed on. (Broumas 68)

The author removes "the customary meaning of shameful or sinful behavior…" from her description of the girl's red hood (Beckett 45). Instead, Broumas uses the hood to signify the positive aspects of lesbian sexual experience, such as community building between "flower-gathering sisters," who act as an antithesis to the violent wolves. The woods, a space where society ceases, function as a haven for sexual exploration. Yet, lesbian sexual experience carries the threat of a looming wolf. Even in the absence of heterosexual curiosity, women are still threatened by the sexual predators that reside in the woods of their unconscious.

In the same manner as Broumas, the Scottish poet Carol Ann Duffy is not bound by a heteronormative motivation. Duffy is the first openly lesbian[75] poet to hold the position of British poet laureate. For this reason, she offers a unique perspective on the fairy tale of *Little Red Riding-hood,* which is commonly written from a heterosexual position[76]. Her work reacts to

[75] Griffin, Gabriele, ed. *Who's who in Lesbian and Gay Writing*. Routledge, 2003.

[76] Like many writers before her, Duffy uses *Little Red Riding-hood* to explore women's initiation into the sexual order. The difference in her approach is that it is not bound by the heteronormative agenda: "Though Perrault's tale also has an initiatory function, the focus is strictly heterosexual" (Bacchilega 57).

the repressive social apparatus and demonstrates the authority underlying sexual codes. Duffy's interpretation of *Little Red Riding-hood* reveals the institutionalization of certain sexual roles that problematically place women in vulnerable positions. This supports the contemporary conception that "Sexuality as power, that is, as institution, is also a semiotic code that organizes our perception of morphological differences between the sexes" (Braidotti 128). Given the perceptual importance of sexuality as power, women should seek recognition of their sexual difference. Duffy brings this heroine into the domestic sphere to address differences between the sexes, with specific attention to the relationship between intimacy and violence.

The tale of *Little Red Riding-hood* commonly features a symbolic interpretation of the wolf's gluttony in the context of what "psychoanalysts call the dread of being devoured" (Tatar xxxiii). In Duffy's poem, the wolf acts as a male sexual partner, who is characterized as both loveable and risky:

> Kept, like mistresses, by kneeling married men…
>
> In his wolfy drawl, a paperback in his hairy paw
>
> Red wine staining his bearded jaw. What big ears… (Duffy 3)

Duffy uses the symbol of the wolf, along with the reference to an affair, to explore the connection between danger and pleasure. This association gets reiterated in most variants of *Little Red Riding-hood*, which is referenced by fairy tale scholars who point out that "it is not by chance that the pleasure-seeking girl falls into the hands of a savage wolf" (Tatar xxxiii). Although Duffy's content is adult, the repetition of the exact rhyme scheme would appeal to a younger audience, as is the case with Roald Dahl. Both writer's refuse to censor physical components of human experience that are often deemed inappropriate for children. Duffy's complex use of familiar symbols proves to create a productive discourse that readers of all ages

can engage with. The author generates an image of the "wolfy" man engaged in mundane activities, such as reading and drinking. This diminishes the obvious threat that is typically conveyed through the wolf, suggesting the predator turned partner.

Yet, the menace underlying the wolf-man's mundane activities alludes to concerns regarding women's cultural experience of sexuality and violence. Duffy's wolf reminds readers that "You can examine the rapist, depicting him as a weird deviant compelled to crime against the sentiments of a proper society and good people everywhere. Unfortunately, evidence indicates he differs in no significant way from any other man" (Connell and Wilson 173). Such recent studies on sexual violence and women's experience indicate that Perrault's cautionary message is still socially useful. The hidden nature of the sexual predator is reinforced in a later line when Duffy makes reference to rape through her depiction of the character's cape. She uses the cape as a symbol of the protagonist's sexual assault when she writes "My stockings ripped to shreds, scraps of red from my blazer / Snagged on twig and branch, murder clues. I lost both shoes" (Duffy 3). The red garment no longer carries the heroic associations of a cape, but is instead reduced to a commonplace blazer, which again suggests the ordinary occurrence of violence in women's sexual development. Though her exact rhyme seems to make light of this leviathan subject, by equating the rape to a "murder" scene, she suggests the enormity of her topic. In fact, her use of seemingly simplistic rhymes makes the taboo subjects of sex and violence accessible to a younger audience. Much in the fashion of Dahl, Duffy evades censorship in order to increase awareness of a continuous social problem, rather than skirting difficult issues under the guise of protection.

The violence that is alluded to through the girl's apparel is complicated by a complementary reference to intimacy that follows. In spite of the previous scene of violence, the narrator references romantic love, which she associates with the sexual predator, the wolf:

What little girl doesn't dearly love a wolf?

Then I slid from between his heavy matted paws

And went in search of a living bird – white dove – (Duffy 3)

Although "love" is projected onto the wolf, Duffy sarcastically questions this affiliation in a demonstration of her skepticism towards a heteronormative order. She shows the girl leaving the wolf in search of a contrasting symbol, the white dove. An omen of peace, the white dove is juxtaposed with the predatory connotations of the wolf.

This dove is featured in other fairy tales, most notably the Grimms' version of *Cinderella*, in which the birds pluck out the stepsisters' eyes in an act of violent revenge. The Grimm's show the correlation between violence and power by turning the dove into a weapon. Duffy also associates the dove with violence, though her differing approach is rendered in the following lines:

Which flew, straight, from my hands to his hope mouth

One bite, dead. How nice, breakfast in bed, he said

Licking his chops. As soon as he slept, I crept to the back (3-4 Duffy)

The wolf's mouth replaces the dove as a symbol of hope, which signifies the potential for violence to both destroy and create. These two desires are often discussed alongside one another in psychoanalysis in terms of Freud's outline of unconscious, specifically "Thanatos," the death

drive, and "Eros," the sex drive[77]. There is also speculation within the hard sciences regarding the neurological connection between sexuality and aggression. Neurological study of the hypothalamus, one of the oldest parts of the human brain, reveals that "The tuberal hypothalamus contains integrative circuitry for feeding, but output circuitry for sexual behavior, aggressiveness, and many autonomic and endocrine response" (Saper and Bradford R112). Thus, society may attempt to censor the relationship between sexuality and aggression, but such censorship will never erase this innate, biological connection. Representations of this connection, along with further scientific study, are ways in which we can begin to better understand this seemingly primitive, yet socially complex, part of the human condition.

Duffy's poem takes a dramatic turn in the final verses, which feature the protagonist engaged in increasingly violent, natural acts. The first person point of view allows Duffy to enter the perspective of Little Red Riding-hood, instilling an intimacy between the character and the reader:

> Season after season, same rhyme, same reason. I took an axe…
>
> To a willow to see how it wept. I took an axe to a salmon
>
> To see how it leapt… (Duffy 4)

The progressive violence in the author's depiction of the young girl reveals her skepticism towards representations of passive protagonists, particularly those within the fairy tale genre. Her reference to the changing seasons establishes violence as a necessary component of the natural world. Yet, these harmless images of the protagonist cutting wood and catching fish abruptly

[77] Freud, Sigmund, and Princess Marie Bonaparte. *The origins of psychoanalysis*. London: Imago, 1954.

shift to a description of her dissection of the wolf's torso when Duffy writes "I took an axe to the wolf / As he slept, one chop, scrotum to throat, and saw…" (4). In a seemingly natural process of discovery, the girl shows no remorse at cutting the wolf in his sleep in an attempt to discover her grandmother. This privileges the maternal bond as a motivational force.

Typically, a male hunter comes along to rescue the girl and her grandmother by slicing through the wolf's belly. However, in Duffy's tale, it is not the hunter who rescues the women from the beast's restrictive stomach. Instead, the girl becomes the agent of her grandmother's freedom:

> ...The glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones
>
> I filled his old belly with stones. I stitched him up
>
> Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone (4 Duffy)

Yet, the girl's attempts to retrieve the maternal bond are met with a symbolic death – represented by the grandmother's "virgin" bones – that comes with adulthood and initiation into the sexual order. Thus, the story of these two lovers concludes with a role reversal; the girl becomes the hunter and the wolf-man becomes the prey. While this ending might seem shocking, even deviant, it works to eliminate the passive characterizations of women that frequent popular culture. For example, Connell and Wilson argue that if "we do not perform our supportive, submissive, and decorative roles, then a battery of 'experts' are called upon to interpret our 'deviant' behavior" (28).

While my analysis has thus far focused on women poets, fairy tales are also an enjoyed subject among contemporary male authors and readers. Scholars have touted the work of James Thurber and Roald Dahl as "healthy antidotes to the traditional tale" of *Little Red Riding-hood*

(Tatar xxxiii). Dahl's version stands out in its treatment of gender and violence through his depiction of the protagonist, who brandishes a gun in the fashion of a hunter: "Although Roald Dahl's heroine is undoubtedly the most famous gun-totting Red Riding Hood, she was certainly not the first" (Beckett 129). This quote makes reference to F'Murr, the closed comic strip at the end of *Au loup!* that also featured Red Riding-hood with a gun. Yet, I still find Dahl's treatment of the *Little Red Riding-hood* protagonist to be useful in expanding our perception of women in situations of aggression. His work demonstrates that "Terms such as 'masculine' and 'feminine' are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose" (Butler 10). By intermingling different gender traits in "Little Red Riding-hood and the Wolf," Dahl is able to address the productive and problematic ways in which intimacy and violence are interwoven in women's experience.

Dahl's poetic revision, titled "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf," gives equal billing to the girl and her male nemesis, which propels the conflict between the sexes that is a central aspect of most LRRH variants. Despite this archetype, Dahl also uses a self-referential writing style that pokes fun at the repetition of the fairy tale tradition. In the following example, the wolf attempts to maintain the narrative structure of the familiar tale, which indicates his perpetuation of the traditional gender dynamics in dominant versions of *Little Red Riding-hood*:

> What a lovely great big furry coat you have on.
> 'That's wrong!' cried Wolf. 'Have you forgot
> to tell me what BIG TEETH I've got?
> Ah well, no matter what you say,
> I'm going to eat you anyway. (Dahl 35-36)

The female protagonist refuses to follow the familiar narrative progression of "What big eyes…what big ears…what terribly big teeth…"[78] and instead leads with a description that is unique to Dahl's poem. Little Red's interest in the "lovely" furry coat diminishes the threat of the wolf, who is thus described in feminine terms. Though the title suggests the binary dynamic of feminine/masculine and prey/predator, Dahl overturns these polarizing tropes to create an innovative discourse of gender that is more fluid and empowering towards women. In a 2013 conference on fairy tales, scholars noted that even in recent revisionist fairy tales "binaries of good versus evil and masculinized protectors saving the feminized protected persist" (Taber 591). Although Dahl maintains the binary moral structure of a "good" girl verses an "evil" wolf, he disregards the gendered representation of male protector/female protected.

The female protagonist's use of violence indicates that she needs no protection from a hunter, mother, or lover, as is the case in other variants. Her body language conjures confidence and intent, two qualities that are rarely associated with the vulnerable, naïve protagonists of the 16th and 17th century fairy tale literature:

> The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers.
>
> She whips a pistol from her knickers.
>
> She aims it at the creature's head
>
> And bang bang bang, she shoots him dead. (Dahl 36)

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[78]Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2014. 86.

This quote comes from the Grimm brothers' version, *Little Red Cap*, which has subsequently been reiterated in other textual variants and in popular culture.

The girl's posture is reminiscent of old western scenes, which typically feature a male protagonist whose authority is heightened by his weapon, the phallic gun. Yet, it is a girl who wields the gun in Dahl's tale. This firearm establishes a female willingness to use violence to achieve power, a power that is exemplified by the wolf's skin.

As with other poems in the *Revolting Rhymes* collection, Dahl concludes the fairy tale with a violent, unfamiliar resolution. He does not cater to reader expectations, but instead deviates in ways that problematize binary ideological patterns that so often frequent the fairy tale genre.

A few weeks later, in the wood,
I came across Miss Riding Hood
But what a change! No cloak of red.
No silly hood upon her head.
She said, 'Hello, and do please note
My lovely furry wolfskin coat.' (Dahl 36)

Earlier in the poem, the protagonist is referred to as "Little Miss Riding Hood," but after killing the wolf she is referred to as "Miss Riding Hood," dropping the diminutive. This signifies her transformation from childhood to womanhood, a change that Dahl associates with an act of violence, perhaps illustrating the transformative capacity of violence. This transformative capacity is also rendered in the revisionary work of Duffy, whose protagonist achieves agency through the death of her lover/predator, suggesting that sex and aggression are similar drives that often get tangled together in complex and problematic ways.

Feminists have articulated the importance of cultural representations in the creation of a discourse that defines our reality: "Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality

forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside" (Butler 29). As many scholars argue, the mass-appeal of fairy tales makes them a valuable tool for socialization because "they are prime material for discussion, as they build on childhood understandings that connect to adulthood" (Taber et al 591). The aforementioned revisionary poets speak to this socialization through their depiction of the caped girl and the gluttonous wolf. Each revision evades censorship in order to explore the often obscured relationship between sexuality and violence. Allowing both adults and children access to this discourse gives more women the opportunity to recognize when a relationship is productive and empowering, or when it becomes dangerous and oppressive.

Certain contemporary theorists, such as Salvoj Zizek, understand violence as a sign of "symbolic deadlock," meaning that acts of aggression may arise out of an inability to express a particular emotion or desire. This perspective gives credence to representations in the realm of fantasy, which are too often written off by intellectuals as childish or insubstantial. The revisionist writers that I have discussed use established folk symbols – such as the shoe, mirror, hair, and cape – in unconventional ways that allow the expression of complex, often incongruent concepts regarding the relationship between gender, sex, and violence. Recent research shows that people involved in relationships with mutual intimate partner violence (IPV) express more relationship satisfaction than people in nonviolent relationships: "witnessing mother to father aggression, higher psychological aggression, more frequent partner marijuana use, partner antisocial behavior, and, surprisingly, higher relationship satisfaction, discriminated mutual IPV from the no IPV" (Testa et al 1). These findings expose the need for further research on the function of violence and anger expression in intimate relationships and identity development. I have proposed throughout this project that aggression is experienced equally among the sexes

and that violence is an innate, elusive part of human experience. Thus, if violence is a continuing social problem with no foreseeable conclusion, then fantasy offers potential answers that will allow us to better understand these complex human drives that impact the sexes in both comparable and disparate ways.

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