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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

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Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

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Article Publishing

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Editorial

1 This issue of *Gender Forum* is dedicated to the discussion of gender and how it is impacted by and reproduced in fairy tales. The influence that fairy tales have on our culture is indisputable even today – the Grimms’ tales remain present in children’s bedrooms in the shape of Disney movies, and many cultural tropes, from the evil stepmother to the potion-brewing witch, have their foundation in fairy tales. The contributors to this issue have examined a wide variety of diverse texts – from Angela Carter’s short stories to contemporary TV series – to trace the continued cultural impact of fairy tales in relation to constructions of gender and sexuality.

2 The first contribution, “From Courtly Love to Snow White”, comes from Baiqing Zheng. She draws parallels between chivalric romance and modern re-writing of fairy tales, both of which involve the agonies of unfulfilled love. Rather than providing a happily-ever-after ending, the relations between the heroes and heroines are often complicated by twists, suspension, revelation, confusion and subversion. Zheng traces these themes in short stories by Robert Coover and Angela Carter, as well as poetry by Anne Sexton and concludes that these revisions of “Snow White” draw a parallel between women in love and women in language, and are committed to disenchanting the constructed feminine myth.

3 In her article “Detectives and bail bonds ‘persons’ as fairy tale hero/ines: A feminist antimilitarist analysis of *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*”, contributor Nancy Taber explores the re/writing of gendered scripts in the television programs *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*. Using a feminist antimilitarist framework in her examination of these modern retellings of fairy tales, she argues that gender, violence, and militarism are represented in complex ways that variously position ideas of good and evil, protected and protector, masculinity and femininity through the programs' characterizations of heroic hunters and saviours who are also estranged mothers and sons.

4 Contributor Annette Schimmelpfenning in her article “Chaos Reigns – Women as Witches in Contemporary Film and the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm” makes an argument for the versatility and changeability of the figure of the witch. Starting with an analysis of the construction of the witch in fairy tales, she traces her development through the ages up to her inclusion in modern Hollywood film. Highlighting different types of witches, Schimmelpfenning shows how in all her different manifestations the witch is, above all, always both reflective of and a contributor to persistent tropes of femininity.

5 Lastly Caleb Sivyver, in his article “A Scopophilic Fairy Tale: Deconstructing Normative Gender in Angela Carter’s ‘The Bloody Chamber’”, illuminates Carter's rewriting of *Bluebeard* with a focus on the visual. He argues that Carter takes up the flexible structure of the fairy story in order to communicate the experiences of being a woman in a patriarchal society, subjected to certain ways of seeing and being seen.

6 The issue is rounded off with a review by Shu-Ju Ada Cheng, who writes about the 2011 publication of *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire Among Dominican Immigrant Men* by Carlos Ulises Decena. The book, based on academic research as well as personal interviews, examines the ways in which gay and bisexual male immigrants from Dominica to New York dealt with the multiple levels of oppression and stigmatization they were faced with.

From Courtly Love to Snow White

By Baiqing Zheng, University of International Business and Economics, China

Abstract:

In chivalric romances, courtly love often entails the love between a single knight and a married woman. This love cannot be consummated in a physical sense and, if it is, disaster and death ensue. Courtly love therefore involves the agonies of unfulfilled love. What Lacan finds of interest in these chivalric romances is its symbolic aspect. The poetic exercise of courtly love raised by Lacan has various manifestations in Robert Coover's "The Dead Queen", Anne Sexton's "Snow White" and Angela Carter's "The Snow Child", three contemporary revisions of the classical fairy tale "Snow White", where the conventional utopia ending of "Prince and Princess live happily ever after" is rarely seen. Instead, twists, suspension, revelation, confusion and subversion often accompany the plots, and complicate the relations between heroes and heroines, which can find equivalents of idealizing themes in courtly love. These three revisions of "Snow White" draw a parallel between women in love and women in language, and are committed to disenchant the constructed feminine myth.

1 In chivalric romances, courtly love embodies a whole philosophy of love and represents an elaborate code of behavior which governs the relations between 'aristocratic' lovers, turning the more bodily and erotic aspects of love into a spiritual experience and the most elevated form of passions. The courtly lover both idealizes and is idealized by his beloved and subjects himself entirely to her desires. However, there is an inherent impossibility, an obstacle to the fulfillment of love, in the very structure of courtly love. As it develops, courtly love often entails the love between a single knight and a married woman. This love cannot be consummated in a physical sense and, if it is, disaster and death ensue. Courtly love therefore involves the agonies of unfulfilled love, but the lover remains true to his beloved, manifesting his honor and steadfastness in an unswerving adherence to the code of behavior. What Lacan finds of interest in these chivalric romances is its symbolic aspect. Courtly love is "a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of conventional, idealizing themes, which couldn't have any real concrete equivalent" (148). This poetic exercise of courtly love raised by Lacan has various manifestations in Robert Coover's "The Dead Queen", Anne Sexton's "Snow White" and Angela Carter's "The Snow Child", three contemporary revisions of the classical fairy tale "Snow White", where the conventional utopia ending of "Prince and Princess live happily ever after" is rarely seen. Instead, twists, suspension, revelation, confusion and subversion often accompany the plots, and complicate the relations between heroes and heroines, which can find equivalents of idealizing themes in courtly love. It draws a parallel between women in love and women in language. In both cases their role is metaphoric. These three revisions of "Snow White" acknowledge the power

that such a metaphor has had, while on the other hand is committed to disenchant the constructed feminine myth.

The Lady of Inaccessibility

2 Just as Hélène Cixous claims that all mystery emanates from women being beautiful, but passive, hence desirable, “sublimation” is the word to describe the mystic lady in courtly love. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan’s fundamental definition of Sublimation is a process which “elevates an object to the dignity of the Thing (*la Chose*)” (152). Lacan later claims that *la Chose* has the character of an *au-dela du sacre*. From this point of view, the exemplary form or paradigm of Sublimation would be courtly love, which is dependent upon the very inaccessibility of its object. However, the first trap to be avoided apropos of courtly love is the erroneous notion of sublimation, of the Lady as the sublime object: as a rule, one evokes here spiritualization, a shift from the object of raw sensual coveting to elevated spiritual longing—the Lady is thus perceived as a kind of spiritual guide into the higher sphere of religious ecstasy, somehow in the sense of Dante’s Beatrice. However, Lacan emphasizes a series of features which belie such spiritualization. Lacan admits that the inaccessible lady itself is actually anything but sublime: “By means of a form of sublimation specific to art, poetic creation consists in positing an object I can only describe as terrifying, an inhuman partner” (150). That means this abstract character of the Lady has nothing to do with spiritual purification; it rather points towards the abstraction that pertains to a cold, distanced, inhuman partner.

3 In “Courtly Love, or, Woman as Thing,” Slavoj Žižek pushes forward Lacan’s statement: “This surface functions as a kind of ‘black hole’ in reality, as a limit whose Beyond is inaccessible” (91). The Lady is an impossibly idealized figure. “The object involved, the feminine object, is introduced oddly enough through the door of privation or of inaccessibility. Whatever the social position of him who functions in the role, the inaccessibility of the object is posited as a point of departure” (149). “The lady as a mirror fulfills a crucial role, a role as limit. It is that which cannot be crossed” (151). Human is perpetually in a state of desire, the desire to perpetually delay, distance and defer the signifier. That is, the object of desire cannot be possibly got, otherwise it cannot be desired. Courtly love inscribes the inaccessibility as the proper form of relation between man and woman. Žižek also points out the erroneous notion of sublimation, of the Lady as the sublime object apropos of courtly love. It should be clear in what precisely consists the difference from the usual dialectic of desire and prohibition: the aim of the prohibition is not to ‘raise

the price' of an object by rendering its access more difficult, but to raise this object itself to the level of the Thing, the 'black hole' around which desire is organized. (Žižek 92) It is the necessity of perpetually sustaining desire at the cost of fulfillment. The history of reading is the history of desire. It is human compulsion to read obscure object of desire, the empty center. Thus the inaccessibility makes the object sublime. It is never the happy ending in courtly love when the pursued lady condescends to the knight's courtship. Once desire is fulfilled, void and loss follow.

4 Robert Coover's short novel "The Dead Queen", a contemporary revision of the classical fairy tale "Snow White", is a vivid illustration of the concept of courtly love raised by Lacan and Žižek. It is a story about desire and perpetual *différance* (to use the word from Derrida), and Snow White therein acts as a lady of inaccessibility. The prince who has just married Snow White the day before and now is gazing speculatively at her dead stepmother in the glass coffin, which once contained his wife, retells the novel in flashbacks. In a quasi-existentialist and reflective mode, the prince supplements the tale, as we know it with unexpected details from his magic wedding night and with a new episode at the gravesite. In this retelling, the most traumatic moment comes in the prince's wedding night, which is a perfect variation of the theme of "courtly love": After having an overwhelmingly ecstatic night with Snow White on the wedding night, the prince waked to find "the bed unmussed and unbloodied, her hymen intact" (Coover 312). She is a representation of Bakhtin's classical body: a "smooth" and "impenetrable surface" that situates itself as "a separate and completed phenomenon" in terms of both image and the story that is intertextually invoked by the image (318). Paradoxically, the prince has the desire fulfilled and meanwhile it does not violate the law of the inaccessibility of the object, the limit and the "black hole." He finds a perfect balance in this seeming oxymoron or rather a utopian vision. Since it is the nature of unconsciousness to feed on desire, on lack, the chance is that after sexual ecstasy all is void and nothingness, and therefore men are eager for the original stage of irreversible wholeness and intactness. Men are fascinated by the myth of virginity, the virgin land no one has ever reached, accessed or explored:

A virgin body has the freshness of secret springs, the morning sheen of an unbroken flower, the orient lustre of a pearl on which the sun has never shone. Grotto, temple, sanctuary, secret garden—man, like the child, is fascinated by enclosed and shadowy places not yet animated by any consciousness, which wait to be given a soul: what he alone to take and to penetrate seems to be in truth created by him. (Beauvoir 311)

5 Virginity is one of the secrets that men find most exciting in that the girl's purity allows hope for every kind of licence, and no one knows what perversities are concealed in her innocence. Women's ambiguity is just that of the concept of the Other. The Other is evil, yet necessary to the Good. Is Snow White Angel or Demon? Her uncertainty makes her a Sphinx in the Prince's eyes, and Sphinx is also commonly represented as a woman. We find this fascinating combination and magic resolution in Snow White in Coover's version. The magic, unbreakable hymen makes Snow White a limit, the Thing whose Beyond is inaccessible despite the real or fantasized intercourse. Beauvoir thus concludes: "She is everlasting deception, the very deception of that existence which is never successfully attained nor fully reconciled with the totality of existents" (323).

6 At the wedding, the prince is troubled by the true meaning of bride's name. The prince's questions about Snow White challenge the truthfulness of the process of female initiation as the traditional tale presents it, and ask us to re-examine the meaning of her name. Marriage, which plays an important role in folktales—particularly if they are tales of female development—is certainly a climactic moment of revelation in "The Dead Queen," but it does not function as a symbolic reconciliation of oppositions which arise out of social and psycho-sexual conflicts. Rather, it intensifies differences and magnifies the "frozen" and ideological nature of Snow White as a metaphor. Consequently, Snow White is exposed as an empty and frozen signifier: completing the cycle of initiation always involves a loss, while Snow White has "suffered no losses, in fact that's just the trouble, that hymen can never be broken, not even by me (the prince), not in a thousand nights, this is her gift and essence" (53). She is cold, distanced, inhuman, inaccessible from outside, and corrupted from within, as the Prince meditates: "I could vouch for her hymen from this side, but worried that it had been probed from within" (52). She is static, she is always there, and because of it, she can see neither fore nor aft. She is the Other, she is other than herself, other than what is expected of her, and other than what she should be. She is in no way a warm, compassionate, understanding fellow-creature. She is a hazy enigma. The perplexity of her being rejects the Prince's decoding. If the Lady of courtly love can be said to act as a mirror upon which the male lovers project their idealized images and fantasies, then this can only take place if the mirror is there already. In other words, she is exactly the kind of figure that one can have no empathetic relationship with whatsoever.

7 In order to be Snow White whose image the mirror reflects and cherishes, she must be paradoxically denied the normalizing process of growth the tale overtly proposes; if Snow White were to become "whole" and experience her sexuality as reproduction, she would

undoubtedly become like her stepmother. Thus, in order to preserve the wholeness and innocence of Snow White, she becomes a unified subject who cannot grow or change, reflected in her impenetrable hymen, inaccessible virginity and unbroken femininity. This patriarchy's ideal daughter is actually a phallic construct. Coover's tale confronts us with the ideological, and therefore entropic, nature of the metaphor: to conform to a humanist authoritative idea of what woman "is," Snow White is condemned to be a heartless and unconscious child who cannot change, a unified subject who cannot grow. She is as "dead" as the dead queen. In bed with his bride, the prince gazes "into the mirror to see, for the first time, Snow White's paradigmatic beauty" (310). It is significant that only through the mirror can the prince find out the essence of Snow White. Since the mirror reflects the patriarchal gaze, it reveals the prince's complicity with that ideology in defining woman as 'paradigmatic beauty,' even without his own consciousness. The Queen has lived and died in full awareness of the authority of the mirror, while Snow White has been unconsciously framed by it, and she is frozen into an aesthetic object erotically gazed by the mirror. Puzzled by Snow White's passionate and anything but innocent lovemaking and then by the realization that her hymen cannot be broken, the prince is moved to believe that the evil queen has plotted the whole story to free herself from the mirror. Through the use of a self-conscious and inquisitive narrator, Coover uncovers the ideological implications of sexual and narrative production in the tale of "Snow White".

Woman as Thing

8 The tendency to reduce a woman to an aesthetic object, inert and passive, contributes towards the dehumanization of women as Thing. Men are fascinated and enchanted by cold, freezing, static and silent female body as art, object and the Other. Even if women are not like an object, men make them "perform," to use Judith Butler's term, in an artificial way to satisfy their desire. It is actually a highly symbolic act which signifies women's existential condition under male erotic gaze. Man's pursuit of woman leads him to the love, worship and elevation of woman as Thing. The male gaze is constructed according to structures of control inscribed by sadistic voyeurism and / or fetishistic scopophilia (looking as a source of pleasure). In Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she gave fresh impetus to the debate about the male gaze and voyeurism, masculinity, power and subordination. Mulvey employed Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze how the cinematic gaze is organized like a language, according to patriarchal codes and conventions, where

masculinity is empowered through the act of looking, while femininity is disempowered by being reduced to passively being looked at.

9 In *Woman Hating* (1974), one of the most aggressive fairy-tale critiques, the American radical feminist Andrea Dworkin focuses on Snow White and Sleeping Beauty as the embodiments of passive beauty: “For a woman to be good, she must be dead, or as close to it as possible” (42). The Brothers Grimm, gazing at Snow White through the prince’s eyes, seems to be fascinated by the beauty in the coffin, cold and dead. Snow White, or rather her body, becomes the prototype of passive, cold and distant woman without desire, but functioning as a mirror projecting man’s desire. Snow White is the impossible and inaccessible object of desire that inaugurates the movement of desire itself. In “The Dead Queen,” the Queen is regarded as a vicious monster when she is alive, but once she is dead, she has the dim possibility of mimicking Snow White in the coffin and arousing male desire. The dead Queen in the coffin is just like the former “dead” Snow White, sublimed or rather “debased” to be Thing.

10 In Anne Sexton’s poem “Snow White” collected in *Transformations*, Snow White is described as an artifact, a doll, a “plucked daisy,” a dumb bunny, an Orphan Annie (making the dwarfs “wise / and wattled like small czars”). This poem is preceded by a prologue on virginity which provides both context and interpretative clues for the ensuing tale. The word “virgin” in this poem does not have the “great primal sense of the word” it has for Adrienne Rich, denoting “the woman who belongs to herself” (Rich 96). “The virgin” is, rather, a commodity prized by men, whose voices blend to create the persona of the speaker of the prologue. We meet the huckster who calls her a “lovely number,” the connoisseur who itemizes her features in terms of fine tobacco, porcelain, and wine, the pimp who points out that she is “unsoiled,” and the sportsman who observes that “she is as white as a bonefish.” In the Grimm version of the tale, the dwarfs put the “dead” Snow White in a glass coffin so that they can see her. In Sexton’s retelling, they enclose her in glass and put her on a mountain “so that all who passed by / could peek in upon her beauty.” Their patience is rewarded when the prince arrives and covets “the glass Snow White.” (Sexton 152).

11 In “The Snow Child” included in *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter employs the strategy of indirectly subverting the classical fairy tale, which means to follow the logic of the original, go one step further and push that logic to the extreme, thus making people reflect the validity and absurdity of the traditional ideology. In the story, the Count expresses the wish of having a girl as white as snow, as red as blood and as black as a raven’s feather. “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” (Carter 91-92). As an inhuman, cold and distanced creature, Snow Child is a transparent puppet without self-consciousness, whose existence is utterly at the disposal of the desire of her male master. Thus, by substituting the Snow Child as the result of male desire for the mother’s desire in the original story, Angela Carter’s version exposes the fallacy of the patriarchal construction of traditional fairy tales.

12 The socially prescribed characteristics of femininity are silence, immobility, and beauty of Snow White displayed in a glass coffin. Thus, Gilbert and Gubar point out that culturally we often seem to inhabit a misogynistic realm that wants to return women to reification in the coffin: “Dead and self-less in her glass coffin, she is an object, to be displayed and desired, patriarchy’s marble ‘opus,’ the decorative and decorous Galatea with whom every ruler would like to grace his parlor” (41). It is decided that the nature of woman is passive, that she is a vessel waiting to be filled. Elizabeth Wanning Harries talks about this passivity of women in *Twice upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of Fairy Tales*: “Rather than design a life for themselves, women ‘in thrall’ to fairy-tale patterns wait for male rescue or at least something to happen” (137). Feminist literary critics argue that most popular fairy tales, like “Cinderella,” “Snow White,” and “Sleeping Beauty” had heroines who were passive, apparently dead or sleepwalking, dependent on the arrival of the prince for any animation and for entry into a real life—though a real life that never was given any contour after the obligatory royal wedding. As the earliest feminist critics of fairy tales all agreed, women in the best-known tales were either beautiful, slumbering young girls or powerful, usually wicked and grotesque older women. Though there might be a muted tradition of tales in which women were admirable, active, clever, and self-assertive participants, the dominant tradition prescribed harmful roles for women that little girls could not help but imitate. Rather than design a life for themselves, the women “in thrall” to fairy-tale patterns wait for male rescue. They half-consciously submit to being male property, handed from father to suitor or husband without complaint or volition. It is the gender economy of the often-repeated fairy tales that has betrayed them.

13 Furthermore, the tendency to reduce a woman to an inert and passive object reveals the unrealistic simplification of human relationships. The objectification of women is fundamentally related to male fear of female power. Nancy Chodorow connects this phenomenon with the concerns of folklorists. According to her, dread of women is ambivalent: “Although a boy fears her, he also finds her seductive and attractive. He cannot simply dismiss and ignore her. Boys and men develop psychological and cultural /

ideological mechanisms to cope with their fears without giving up women altogether” (183). Thus, men create folk legends, beliefs, and poems that ward off the dread by externalizing and objectifying women. They deny dread at the expense of realistic views of women. On the one hand, they glorify and adore; paradoxically on the other, they disparage. This explains why female body is elevated or rather degraded as the Thing.

Narcissistic Nature of Courtly Love

14 The elevation of the female body as an aesthetic object and woman as Thing is essentially narcissistic in nature. At the end of “Courtly Love, or, Woman as Thing,” Žižek arrives at the conclusion that courtly love bears witness to a certain deadlock of contemporary feminism:

True, the courtly image of man serving his Lady is a semblance that conceals the actuality of male domination; true, the masochist theatre is a private *mise-en-scène* designed to recompense the guilt contracted by man’s social domination; true, the elevation of woman to the sublime object of love equals her debasement into the passive stuff or screen for the narcissistic projection of the male ego-ideal. (108)

15 The Lady is the Other who is *not* our ‘fellow-creature,’ i.e. with whom no relationship of empathy is possible. This traumatic Otherness is what Lacan designates by the Freudian term *das Ding*, the Thing. The idealization of the Lady, her elevation to a spiritual, ethereal Ideal, is therefore to be conceived as a strictly secondary phenomenon, a narcissistic projection whose function is to render invisible her traumatic, intolerable dimension. In this precise and limited sense, Lacan concedes that “the element of idealizing exaltation that is expressly sought out in the ideology of courtly love has certainly been demonstrated; it is fundamentally narcissistic in character.” Deprived of every real substance, the Lady functions as a mirror onto which the subject projects his narcissistic ideal. “It is only by chance that beyond the mirror in question the subject’s ideal is projected. The mirror may on occasion imply the mechanisms of narcissism” (151). Beauvoir echoes Lacan in stating that woman as the Other is indispensable to man’s self-projection:

Woman has often been compared to water because, among other reasons, she is the mirror in which the male, Narcissus-like, contemplates himself: he bends over her in good or bad faith. But in any case what he really asks of her is to be, outside of him, all that which he cannot grasp inside himself, because the inwardness of the existent is only nothingness and because he must project himself into an object in order to reach himself. (315)

16 The patriarchal tendency to reduce a woman to an inert and passive object, contributes towards the dehumanization of women and the unrealistic simplification of human relationships. Men are fascinated and enchanted by cold, freezing, static and silent female body as art, object and the Other. When the Prince in “The Dead Queen” gazes at the dead Queen in the glass coffin, the coffin that once contained Snow White, a sudden revelation comes to him that “maybe the old Queen had loved me, had died for me!” (A narcissistic vision) Then he wrenches open the coffin, throws himself upon her, and kisses the dead queen’s rubbery and cold lips twice, hoping to disenchant her, and when nothing happens, he leaves wounded in his pride and as nauseated as his spectators are. It is a postponed “prince’s magic kiss.” In the previous context, when the prince kissed Snow White on the wedding, he had pondered: “Why hadn’t I been allowed to disenchant her with a kiss like everybody else?”(59). “Everybody else” certainly refers to other princes who wake up entrapped beauties with true love’s magic kisses.

17 Male identity is established through the process of negation, and by the negative knowledge of the existence of woman as the Other, of what man is not. If she did not exist, men would have invented her. “Man has created woman — out of what? Out of a rib of his god — of his ‘ideal.’” said Nietzsche in *The Twilight of the Idols*. He projects upon her what he desires and what he fears. Woman sums up the World for him and upon her he has imposed his values and his laws. She is the source and origin of all man’s reflection on his existence. The very semblance of courtly love provides woman with a fantasy substance of her identity, with all the features of so-called ‘femininity’ and defines woman not as she is in her *jouissance feminine* but as she refers to herself with regard to her relationship to man, as the projection of the male ego, as an object of his desire, and as the Other.

18 However, the new myth of women deprived of pure ‘femininity’ is various and even contradictory, whose inner realm is beyond man’s comprehension and penetration. Behind the angel lurks the monster: the obverse of the male idealization of women is the male fear of femininity. Gilbert and Gubar mention characters like Shakespeare’s Goneril and Thackeray’s Becky Sharp, as well as the traditional array of such terrible sorceress-goddesses as the Sphinx, Medusa, Circe, Kali, Delilah, and Salome, all of whom “possess duplicitous arts that allow them both to seduce and to steal male generative energy” (34). The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell. The duplicitous woman is the one whose consciousness is opaque to man, whose mind will not be penetrated by masculine thought. Thus the Queen in “Snow White” becomes a paradigmatic instance of the monster woman in the male imagination, and the double for

feminists to release their anger and contrive their rebellion against the narcissistic nature of “courtly love”.

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Detectives and bail bonds “persons” as fairy tale hero/ines: A feminist antimilitarist analysis of *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*

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Abstract:

In this article, I explore the re/writing of gendered scripts in the television programs *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*. Using a framework of feminist antimilitarism, I examine how these programs, as modern retellings of fairy tales, interconnect with each other and with societal performances of masculinities and femininities. I argue that gender, violence, and militarism are represented in complex ways that variously position ideas of good and evil, protected and protector, masculinity and femininity through the programs’ characterizations of heroic hunters and saviours who are also estranged mothers and sons.

1 In 2011, two television programs based on fairy tales premiered: *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time*. These programs continue the long-standing tradition of building on, expanding from, and altering "original" tellings of fairy tales resulting in complex performances of genre, context, plot, and characters (Zipes, *Fairy Tale, Sticks and Stones*). The ways in which gender is taken up in these programs is similarly complex, with characterizations both mirroring and challenging representations common in fairy tales (Bacchilega; Haase; Harries; Parsons). Although both based in fairy tale lore, these programs at first appear strikingly different; as the Fall 2011 line-up was introduced and two competing programs introduced, I was immediately intrigued with how gender would be performed. These programs are not the only ones based on fairy tales (for instance, *Beauty and the Beast* began airing in Fall 2012), but they are distinct in that they draw on a multitude of fairy tales for their content, not just one. For instance, *Grimm* has explored tales and characters such as the big bad wolf and Little Red Riding Hood, the three bears and Goldilocks, Rapunzel, the Pied Piper, ogres, dragons, and step-mothers, while *Once Upon a Time* (hereafter referred to as *Once*) has done the same with Snow White, the Seven Dwarfs, Little Red Riding Hood (who is also the big bad wolf), Rumplestiltskin, Beauty and the Beast (the latter of whom is also Rumplestiltskin), Hansel and Gretel, the Evil Queen, Prince Charming, Jiminy Cricket, and Pinocchio. In the second season, characters such as Mulan and Captain Hook are also being introduced. *Grimm* focuses on more traditional Grimm stories while *Once* focuses on tales made popular by Disney (indeed, its publication company, ABC studios, is a division of Disney-ABC Television Group). Each of these programs makes the tales their own, mixing and changing characters and elements as required. Both programs also represent mothers as absent or evil. However, *Grimm* is firmly ensconced in the horror genre (rated 14+ in Canada), and *Once* in that of family (rated PG).

2 In this article, I discuss the ways in which gender is performed in *Grimm* and *Once*, as modern fairy tales, through my theoretical framework of antimilitarist feminism. I argue that gender, violence, and militarism are represented in complex ways (Enloe, *Maneuvers, Curious feminist, Globalization*) that variously position ideas of good and evil (Butler, *Precarious Life*), protected and protector (Young), masculinity and femininity (Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Connell). I explore how each program re/writes gendered scripts which interconnect with each other and with societal performances of masculinities and femininities through the programs' characterizations of heroic hunters and saviors, who are also estranged mothers and sons.

Grimm and Once

3 As a basic introduction to the stories, the programs' websites are the best explanation, as they also demonstrate how the network intends they be viewed. For instance, *Grimm* "is a drama series inspired by the classic Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tales" (NBC Universal Media, LLC para.1). The male protagonist, Nick Burkhardt, is a homicide detective in Portland, Oregon, who "discovers he's descended from an elite line of criminal profilers" (para. 1). In this program, the Grimms search out and destroy all "wesen" (German word for "creatures," pronounced vessen) who represent "all manner of ancient evils" (para. 3) except for two "reformed Grimm creatures" (para. 3), Monroe and Rosalee. In his work, Nick "attempts to shield his new fiancée, Juliette...and his partner, Hank...from the hazards of his new life" (para. 2). As such, despite a few exceptions, the program's description is presented as supporting a contrast of good (Grimms) and evil (creatures) as well as protector (Grimm, a white man) and protected (Juliette, a white woman; Hank, a black man; innocent civilians). Part of the storyline revolves around Nick's parents' death in a car crash, as it is revealed that, not only were they actually murder victims, but his mother is secretly alive.

4 *Once's* description is titled, "It's Not Always Happily Ever After," wherein "fairy tales and the modern-day are about to collide" (Bell Media, para. 1). The story revolves around female protagonist Emma Swan, a bail bonds collector who was orphaned as a baby. "When the son [Henry] she gave up years ago finds her" (para.2), Emma is introduced to "an alternate world" where she "is Snow White and Prince Charming's missing daughter" (para. 3). She had been "sent... away to protect her from the Evil Queen's curse, which trapped the fairytale world forever, frozen in time, and brought them into our modern world" (para. 3) via a town called Storybrooke, Maine. As the series opens, the characters in Storybrooke have lost their memories due to the curse, forgetting who they were and who they loved in the

fairytale world. The Evil Queen is the mayor of the town (as well as Henry's adoptive mother) while Rumpelstiltskin (Mr. Gold) owns the town. Snow White and Prince Charming are separated, and Emma is viewed as a saviour for their true love and the town itself. "The epic battle for the future of all worlds is beginning, but for good to win, Emma will have to accept her destiny and fight like hell" (para. 5). Good and evil are positioned as opposites, but are also made complex as viewers learn the backstories of villainized characters such as the Evil Queen and Rumpelstiltskin as well as victimized ones such as Little Red Riding Hood.

Re/writing Gendered Scripts

5 As protagonists, both Nick and Emma are employed to search out criminals. As such, they are on the side of the *good guys*, although Nick's position as a detective is more institutionalized and a greater part of the plot than Emma's as a bail bonds collector. (Emma later becomes the Sherriff of Storybrooke.) Additionally, Nick is characterized as a "hunter" of wesen while Emma is the "saviour" of fairytale land. They are the hero/ines who work to protect others from danger, creatures, and curses. These representations lend themselves well to a feminist antimilitarist analysis, which focuses on the ways in which militaristic ideals are embedded in societal notions of gender.

Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal. Militarization, that is, involves cultural as well as institutional, ideological, and economic transformation. (Enloe, *Maneuvers* 3, italics in original)

Militarism values conflict and violence as well as binaries of good versus evil and masculinity in opposition to femininity. It is interconnected with gender, giving preference to forms of masculinity and femininity that emphasize difference and deficiency. Men and women are divergently situated as strong protectors and weak victims respectively (Messner; Young), disregarding the ways in which their actual lives may challenge these constructed positions.

6 In much of her work, Enloe discusses how various popular culture artefacts are militarized, such as soup (with pasta the shape of Star Wars satellites), action figures (i.e., GI Joe and GI Jane), bikinis (named after the Bikini Atoll where nuclear testing was conducted), and clothing (with camouflage patterns and military styles). Others have focused on militarism in movies, with authors such as Cohn and Weber discussing the purging of the

feminine, compartmentalization of feelings, favouring of hegemonic masculinity, and heroizing of war. With respect to fairy tales, using the Grimm brothers' version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, Marshall discusses how there is a "history invested in disciplining young readers into normative heterosexual femininity and masculinity....Little Red emerges from the wolf's stomach only after she learns that curiosity and independence are dangerous traits for a young girl to possess" (261). Taber also explores how Mulan, an Americanized and "Disneyfied" (Dong 227) fairy tale character, is represented as a strong woman who fights with the military but is nonetheless essentialized as feminine and connected to domesticity. Mulan's story links to the experiences of real life military women, who succeeded in the military yet were constrained by their female bodies (Taber). As *Mulan* demonstrates and Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz argue, the fairy tales that seem to thrive and persist are those that are aligned with societal ideals of masculinity and femininity, linking to Connell as well as Connell and Messerschmidt's argument that the norms of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are often preferred over marginalized masculinities and other forms of femininity.

7 *Grimm* is a prime example of a story that privileges masculinity. It is male-centred as most of the main characters are male in masculine positions as police officers, creatures, or villains, with supporting characters as women in need of protection, most notably as represented by Juliette (who is frequently attacked and kidnapped, but does fight back to some extent). Interestingly, the creatures are alternatively represented as completely masculine and villainous, such as Kimura (a Siegbaste ogre creature), as well as somewhat feminized and dangerous such as Blutbad (bloodbath wolf) postal carrier murderers who do needlepoint, "not that I tell everyone," (Postman, *Grimm*, P)¹ or obsequious Eisbiber beavers who are no threat to Nick and need his help and protection. Most of the creatures are positioned as either evil or in unflattering ways, except for Monroe (see discussion below on good and evil), a complex creature who becomes Nick's unofficial partner. The main female characters are in feminine positions as a girlfriend needing protection from danger (which includes the dangerous knowledge of the wesen world), a wesen apothecary, and a witch.

¹ Due to the large amount of data from which this article derives (22 episodes of approximately 45 minutes each for each program), as well as the complexity of the plots, the quotations in this article are limited to the pilot and season finale of each program's Season 1. These episodes are rich in detail pertinent to my argument, serving as exemplars, as they set- and wrap-up the story lines, with particular focus on protection, family, and the battle between good and evil. Each quotation is identified by character name, program name, and P for pilot or SF for season finale. For ease of understanding, where there are two character names in *Once* (one for fairytale land and one for Storybrooke), I use the former.

8 Two exceptions to this are Nick's aunt, who is sick and dying (but still talks tough and puts up a fight when attacked) and his mother, who abandoned Nick as a child. She is a formidable warrior, someone who is described by Sgt. Wu, unaware of who she is, as "a woman not to be messed with" (*Grimm*, SF). However, before she proves herself, she is underestimated, with Wu and another officer, who have tracked down a violent criminal, politely asking, "ma'am, stop now" and "hold up" (*Grimm*, SF). While there are, therefore, various representations of masculinity and femininity in male and female bodies, masculinity is still privileged and respected, with even big bad wolves feeling the need to hide traditional feminine behaviours, such as doing needlepoint. Furthermore, when Hank meets the Blutbad kidnapper and killer, he immediately judges him as incapable of violence, based on his feminized dress, speech, and mannerisms, stating, "are you kidding me?" (*Grimm*, P).

9 *Once* could be considered as female-centred, as most of the main characters are women, yet it too favours hegemonic masculinity, although this time in emphasized feminine bodies. Emma is an independent "loner" (Emma, *Once*, P) who is introduced to viewers in a slinky dress and high heels; the "sexiest friendless orphan that I have ever met" (Ryan, *Once*, P). In order to apprehend a wanted man, Ryan, she arranges a blind date with him, flirting until she informs him that she is bringing him in and chastizing him for betraying his wife. Emma calls him on his behaviour, stating he is a "handsome, charming...embezzle[r]... [who] got arrested and skipped town." However, for Emma, "the worst part of all of this is your wife. Your wife loves you so much...how do you repay that loyalty? You're on a date" (Emma, *Once*, P). When Ryan calls her a bail bondsman, she corrects him, stating that she is a "bail bonds person." He then tries to flee, with Emma calmly following him out, literally stopping traffic with her appearance as she walks across a busy road. He fails to drive away because Emma's had his wheels locked, and then knocks him out on the steering wheel. So, although Emma is a tough woman in a masculine job who can take care of herself, her femininity is emphasized, as is her attractiveness.

10 In other examples, Snow White is variously positioned as femininely weak and masculinely capable, but generally good (although she is vilified by Storybrooke as an adulteress), whereas the Evil Queen is strong and evil. Of the two main male characters, one is good and handsome, Prince Charming, and the other is evil and ugly, Rumplestiltskin. Both can fight and take care of themselves, and both are entwined in their (often troubled) relationships with women, Snow White and Belle respectively. Contrasts of masculinity and femininity are present in these representations of good and evil, often connecting beauty and passivity to goodness (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz), whereas:

strong women appear in patriarchal tales, but if they are powerful, they are also physically ugly and evil.... to identify with a strong female means, implicitly, identifying with someone who is ugly and evil. To identify with an active character who is also "good," one has to identify with a male. (Trousdale and McMillan, 23)

11 However, in fairytale land, Snow White is often portrayed as strong, capable, and beautiful, but she also is so heartbroken that she cannot be with Charming that she takes a potion to forget him. Later, after remembering him, she bites an apple from the queen in order to take her own life and save Charming's. She is then saved by her prince, with a kiss that awakens her. Viewers learn about the characters' backstories in flashbacks, but the series opens with the image of Charming racing through the forest, kissing Snow with the statement that "I will always find you" (Charming, *Once*, P) with the next scene moving to their wedding. As such, the program is set-up from the beginning to reflect traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity, with a man saving a woman, and then marrying her. As Butler argues, "the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (31). In an interesting twist, in *Storybrooke*, it is Charming who is in a coma, but Snow, instead of saving him as he did her, watches helplessly. He awakens not with true love's kiss, but as a result of Emma's effect on the town. When he awakens, he has amnesia, and is married to someone other than Snow. The season continues with he and Snow being drawn to one another and having an affair, a love triangle common in popular culture novels and films (i.e., see Petersen's discussion of feminism/postfeminism in *Twilight* and Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane's discussion of gender in *The Hunger Games*), with Snow and his wife in conflict over Charming. Eventually, when the curse is lifted, Snow and Charming rejoin as a couple.

12 Despite these intricacies in plot and character, overall the programs demonstrate the pervasiveness of a "belief in character dichotomy" wherein "women are supposed to have one set of traits, men another. Women are supposed to be nurturant, suggestible, talkative, emotional, intuitive and sexually loyal; men are supposed to be aggressive, tough-minded, taciturn, rational, analytic and promiscuous" (Connell, 60). This character dichotomy permeates everyday experiences in real life and popular culture, despite the fact that "the modern liberal state defines men and women as citizens, that is, as alike. But the dominant sexual code defines men and women as opposites" (Connell, 75). The binary ignores the performance of a plurality of masculinities and femininities, working instead to triangulate

sex, gender, and desire in a matrix matching biological identification, gender performance, and attraction (Butler, *Gender Trouble*).

13 Compulsory heterosexuality is similarly present in *Grimm*, through Nick's relationship with Juliette (he is about to propose in the pilot, with Hank stating that Nick is "a happily ever after guy"), Hank's with Adalind (who turns out to be a witch), and Monroe's with Rosalee. Indeed, it is forefronted in the first scene of the pilot when Nick and Hank are introduced, as they watch three women across the street, commenting that one of them "wears Armani, makes low six figures, drives a BMW and is falling for a senior partner at her law firm" (Nick, *Grimm*, P). Hank then asks, "why can't you just look at her ass" (*Grimm*, P). The woman turns into a wesen. These first scenes set women up as, for the most part, objects of desire, evil creatures, or in need of protection (the case they are called to while watching these women is a murder of a young female college student, with a little girl later being kidnapped and rescued).

Narcissistic Nature of Courtly Love

14 Nick's role as a protector due to his roles as detective and creature hunter therefore apply not only to Juliette in particular, but to all civilians in general. As his Aunt Marie states when she tells him of their family's history in relation to fairy tales, "we have the ability to see what no one else can" (*Grimm*, P), impelling Nick to use his ability in order to mitigate his own vulnerability and protect others. Nick is "one of the last Grimms. I wish I had more time.... You're vulnerable now, you need to be careful" (Marie, *Grimm*, P). Marie also wants Nick to "end it" with Juliette and "never see her again" (*Grimm*, P) because his work as a Grimm is "just too dangerous" (Marie, *Grimm*, P), putting those close to them in peril. At the end of the pilot, Nick is by Marie's bedside. "There is so much I don't understand...I love Juliette. I don't want anything to happen to her.... Whatever it is I'm supposed to do, I'll do it" (Nick, *Grimm*, P).

15 When viewers are introduced to Nick's mother in the season finale, it puts forth the idea that perhaps she left in order to protect him, similar to how Marie is urging Nick to leave Juliette. Nonetheless, Nick stays with Juliette, hiding his secret from her which Juliette interprets as his pulling away. It is only when Juliette is scratched by a witch's cat that Hank finally tells her about the wesen in order for her to take the scratch seriously. Nick argues that, "you don't understand....you don't know her [Adalind] like I do....we need to get you to a doctor right now...your life could be in danger" (*Grimm*, SF). Juliette responds, "That's ridiculous....I'm tired of this....what is it that you're not telling me?" (*Grimm*, SF). When Nick

does tell her, Juliette yells at him to "stop, okay, you're really scaring me!" (*Grimm*, SF). Juliette faints soon after, falling into a coma where she is awakened by a kiss from a "prince" in the second season, creating a bond between them that neither can resist, in yet another example of compulsory heterosexuality and woman as passive victim saved by a man.

16 This "logic of masculinist protection" (Young, 2) results in "the subordinate relation of those in the protected position" (4), whether male or female, with the protected being thankful for security, willing to give up democratic rights and voice in exchange for protection from outside enemies and "bad citizen[s]" (15) or, in this case, wesen. "Chivalrous forms of masculinism" (Young, 19) prevail; while, in politics and popular culture, men may be represented as caring, "with situationally appropriate moments of compassion and, sometimes, vulnerability" (Messner, 466), "toughness, decisiveness, and hardness are still central" (466). As Enloe argues, "militarization may privilege masculinity, but it does so by *manipulating* the meanings of both femininity and masculinity" (Maneuvers 289, italics added).

17 Emma is also introduced to fairy tales by a family member, in this case her 10-year-old son. Henry, who she had given up for adoption, searches her out to tell her that she is the "saviour" (Henry, *Once*, P) of Storybrooke and fairytale land. Once in Storybrooke, she eventually takes on roles as the Deputy Sheriff and then Sheriff, formalizing her protector role and facilitating her investigations in the town. She resists the idea of her being a saviour, finally fulfilling her destiny when Henry is in a coma due to accidentally ingesting a sleeping potion created by the Evil Queen. Nonetheless, Emma still feels inadequate to the task, going to Pinocchio for help, telling him "I gotta save Henry..need your help. ...I can't do it...no normal person can" (*Once*, SF). Pinocchio, who is turning back into a wooden man, responds, "Luckily for us, you're not normal. You can save Henry, you can save all of" us (*Once*, SF). When Emma does save Henry after defeating a dragon, she is positioned not so much as a warrior but as a mother, whose love wakes him up. Crying over his body, she tells him, "I love you Henry" (*Once*, SF) and kisses him. Henry wakes up, telling her, "I love you too. You saved me" (*Once*, SF).

18 Over the course of the season, Emma changes from a woman who is a stranger to her child, calling him "kid" and even, somewhat affectionately and ironically, "sneaky bastard" (*Once*, P), to his saviour. It is her love as a biological mother who is good, not the Evil Queen's love as an adoptive mother, that is viewed as "true," just as Snow White and Charming's love is characterized as the "most powerful magic in the world, the only magic powerful enough to break any curse" (Rumplestiltskin, *Once*, SF), further reinforcing

compulsory heterosexuality and a contrast of good versus evil. In fact, Emma and the queen's positions as Henry's mothers situate them as enemies, with the good and true biological mother against the evil adoptive one. The queen states that "you may have given birth to him, but he is *my* son" (*Once*, P), warning Emma to leave town or "I will destroy you if it's the last thing I do" (*Once*, P). The queen attempts to poison Emma in order to keep Henry for herself: "as long as you're alive, Henry will never be mine" (Evil Queen, *Once*, SF).

19 The fight of good against evil is a main theme in both programs. When Nick kills someone for the first time while protecting his Aunt Marie, he was told "this was a bad guy" (Hank, *Grimm*, P) and "if you had to shoot somebody, you sure picked the right guy" (Captain Renard, *Grimm*, P). With a few exceptions, creatures are viewed as evil and Grimms as good. Monroe is the most complex character with respect to where he fits in a binary of good against evil, which perhaps calls the binary itself into question, creating more of a continuum. As the season progresses, Monroe shifts from being good yet not dependably so, to becoming Nick's trusted friend. When he first meets Nick, he states, "I don't want any more trouble, okay. I'm not that kind of Blutbad. I don't kill anymore" (Monroe, *Grimm*, P). He continues, "I am not that big and I am done with the bad...a reformed Blutbad"; presupposing that all Blutbad's are inherently bad. While Monroe is reformed and therefore, at the moment, good, he explains that "bad things happen when we [Blutbadden] get into a pack, especially when we see red" (*Grimm*, P). When later helping Nick rescue a kidnapped girl from another Blutbad, Monroe states that he "can't guarantee what'll happen if I go any closer. It's too dangerous. I might be on your side, I might be on his side, I might even go after the girl. I'm sorry. There's nothing more I can do, I'm outta here" (*Grimm*, P). He is also characterized as masculine in the pilot, peeing on a fence to mark his territory, crashing through a window to attack Nick, and then laughing, "Lighten up. I'm just making a point. C'mon, let's grab a brew. And by the way, you're paying for that window" (Monroe, *Grimm*, P).

20 With respect to *Once*, evil is also constantly contrasted with good, although viewers learn of the backstories of evil characters such as the Evil Queen and Rumpelstiltskin, helping to create understandings of them. However, similar to the ways in which other modern fairy tale characters have been given histories (such as the Wicked Witch of the West, see Kruse and Prettyman), they are still generally positioned as evil characters doing evil things. The Evil Queen is characterized as "nothing more than an evil witch" (Snow White, *Once*, P) who "poisoned an apple because she thought I was prettier than her" (Snow White, *Once* P) which, it turns out, is not really the story, as the queen was seeking revenge

for Snow White's unwitting role in the death of her lover. As a result, the queen wishes to "destroy your [Snow White's] happiness" (Evil Queen, *Once*, P). Good is linked to light, bad to darkness (although the Queen herself is beautiful, not ugly, as is commonly seen in fairy tales, as Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz argue). "We all must have faith" (Blue fairy, *Once*, P) that "good will always win" (Snow White, *Once*, P) because "good can't just lose" (Prince Charming, *Once*, P). Good and "true love proved more powerful than any curse...bringing light to the darkness" (Snow White, *Once*, SF), defeating evil once again.

21 Viewers also explore backstories of so-called innocent characters, calling their virtuousness into question. Red Riding Hood is an apparently harmless girl as well as the villainous big bad wolf in fairytale land, and a promiscuous woman who is "out all night" and has "plans to sleep your way down the eastern seaboard" (Granny, *Once*, P) in Storybrooke. Protectors and protected morph, depending on their sometimes contradictory positionings within and between the fairytale world and Storybrooke. As another example, in the latter, before Snow White regains her memory of her true self, her alter ego Mary Margaret is gentle and unsure. However, in the former and after regaining her memory, Snow White is most often presented as a strong warrior who can and will do anything to protect her family and land. As such, throughout the first season, it is ironically the alter ego in the real world who conforms to the idea of a passive princess, and the fairy tale character who, despite falling into a deep sleep, is an active agent.

22 Notwithstanding these exceptions, the concepts of good and bad are held in an overall contrast that works against complex representations (after all, how can a character named the "Evil Queen" be anything but evil?). This contrast works to vilify *others* and categorizes all those not identified as allies as enemies. After 9/11, Butler (*Precarious Life*) critiqued this line of reasoning, stating that "In a strong sense, the binarism that Bush proposes in which only two positions are possible - 'Either you're with us or you're with the terrorists' - makes it untenable to hold a position in which one opposes both and queries the terms in which the opposition is framed" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 2). In wars where it is good against evil, as is played out in the news media as well as in popular culture, "certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable'" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 32). Indeed, this is a common conception in fairy tales, making "it appear that we [in the West] are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms, that we are all striving for the same happiness, that there are certain dreams and wishes which are irrefutable" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 5). The heroes and heroines of

fairy tales and real life expect to be "living happily ever after with lots of gold in a marvelous castle, our castle and fortress that will forever protect us from inimical and unpredictable forces of the outside world" (5, italics in original). Zipes (*Fairy Tales*) connects his argument to patriotism, stating that "we need only have faith and believe in the classical fairy tale, just as we are expected to have faith and believe in the American flag as we swear the pledge of allegiance" (5). Indeed, happily-ever-after is a common concept in *Once*, with several characters stating they must have "faith" that good will triumph over evil.

23 Furthermore, this triumph is positioned as coming only through a "final battle" (Rumplestiltskin, *Once*, P). When Jiminy Cricket speaks out against violence, arguing that "fighting is a bad idea. Giving in to one's dark side never accomplishes anything" (*Once*, P), Prince Charming responds with derision, "and how many wars has a clear conscience won?" (*Once*, P). Most of the characters are positioned in opposition to the Evil Queen, as afraid of her and/or willing to fight against her. For instance, when Henry is poisoned, Emma and the queen reluctantly team up only to help him, but do not trust each other. Emma warns the queen, "let's be clear about something, your majesty. The only reason you're not dead is because I need your help to save Henry. He dies, so do you" (*Once*, SF).

24 When the curse is lifted, the queen is further warned that "if I were you, your majesty, I'd find a place to hide" (Blue Fairy, *Once*, SF). As such, the characters, whether male or female, do not decide to connect with each other based on their shared grief and vulnerability (Butler, *Precarious Life*), but through anger and violence, core aspects of hegemonic masculinity. "Contemporary hegemonic masculinity....is dangerous because it provides a cultural rationale for inter-personal violence...in alliance with state and corporate power, it drives arms races, strip mining and deforestation, hostile labour relations and the abuse of technologies from motor transport to genetic engineering" (Connell, 143). What drives the *Once* plot is a use of violence by good characters due to their love for and need to protect each other, and its use by evil characters due to hate and revenge. Although the queen began her quest to destroy Snow and Storybrooke when her own love died, the plot focuses not on her love for him but her hate for Snow.

25 In *Grimm*, Nick is constantly fighting with and killing creatures, which is viewed as acceptable because they are inherently evil. Nick starts seeing creatures everywhere, but in particular as felons in the precinct, at crime scenes, and as suspects. When searching for the kidnapped girl, a data search results in "23 known predators within 5 square miles of the crime scene" (Nick, *Grimm*, P). It is not known if these are human or wesen, but it certainly establishes a sense of danger and need for protection. The program also focuses on violence

done to innocent victims, with the pilot episode showing a woman's ripped off arm. The violence is often viewed by the detectives in a rather blithe manner. Discussions of "what a way to go" (Nick, *Grimm*, P) and "hope it happened fast" (Hank, *Grimm*, P) are immediately followed upon by a change of subject to Nick's intended proposal: "Big night, don't blow it Romeo" (Hank, *Grimm*, P). At another crime scene, Sgt. Wu states that "it's a little messy...looks like someone took a weed-whacker to his throat" (*Grimm*, SF) with the dialogue continuing: "you weren't kidding about the weed-whacker" (Hank, *Grimm*, P), "looks more like a hatchet" (Nick, *Grimm*, SF), "except his head's still here" (Sgt. Wu, *Grimm*, SF).

26 Nick uses his position as a police officer to signal that he is good and wesen are either with him or against him: "I'm a cop, and if you know who's got her you had better tell me right now" (Nick, *Grimm*, P). His abruptness comes from his concern for the young innocent girl victim, as it does when he is looking for Kimura who murdered his parents. Nick states he "wants him alone and not in an interrogation room" (*Grimm*, SF). He takes to the *Grimm* life well, getting very excited when he finally tells Juliette about his double life and shows her the medieval-like weapons he uses.

27 The characters of Charming, Emma, and Nick (as well as, periodically, Snow) are apt examples of how:

Hardness and violence, plus compassion and care, is a potent equation for hegemonic masculinity in public symbology today. And what tethers these two seemingly opposed principles is protection—protection of children and women from bad guys, from evil robots from the past, or from faceless, violently irrational terrorists from outside our borders. (Messner, 467)

Their enactment of hegemonic masculinity in order to protect weaker characters from danger in a fight of good against evil are core aspects of a gendered militaristic approach to life and lore. These representations are not fixed, although they circulate persistently in *Grimm* and *Once*, as well as connecting to other historical and contemporary versions of fairy tales and societal understandings of gender.

Conclusions

28 *Grimm* and *Once* are enjoyable, well-made programs that have achieved much success. They tap into particular western approaches to fairy tales, expanding from some of the more popular stories. While incorporating many traditional elements, they also challenge certain aspects, with some female characters as good and strong (Emma), and some formerly

evil characters as "reformed" (Monroe). Nonetheless, with the programs, plotlines, and characters taken together, although they add complexity, they ultimately do not defy societal norms in relation to gender and violence. Good still triumphs over evil as hegemonic masculinity saves the day.

29 A main difference in the two programs, however, are the ways in which actual violence is portrayed. *Once* has no graphic bloodshed with many scenes quite bright and airy, while *Grimm* emphasizes carnage in night scenes or enclosed dark spaces. As such, *Grimm* retains much of the dread in the original Grimm stories, while *Once* reflects its Disney connections. While once Nick becomes aware of the fairytale world there is no indication that there will be a happily-ever-after in *Grimm* (indeed, one episode is titled "Happily Ever Aftermath," that focuses on the murder of an evil stepmother), *Once* is the product of the "Disney-like uniformity" Bacchilega discusses that "reproduces and sells itself internationally by turning the fairy tale into a standard values-and-dreams package" (143), although it is not as simplistic as the Disney tales that Zipes (*Fairy Tales*) critiques. Nonetheless, the values of both programs hinge on beliefs that hegemonic masculinity and a fight against evil will result in a dream of family security and safety, with true love restored and mothers and sons returned to each other. Indeed, perhaps it is the sons who are the true heroes. Nick is obvious as a hero as the male protagonist in *Grimm*, but Henry is a more covert one in *Once*. As Henry is the one who finds Emma, brings her to Storybrooke, and convinces her to believe, he is arguably the hero.

30 *Grimm* and *Once* engage in similar ways with militaristic societal ideals. Fights, violence, and battles are viewed as accepted and required, save for the occasional voice of conscience through Jiminy Cricket. Men and women perform a certain balance of hegemonically masculine traits, working to ensure the protection of innocents. Evil continues to lurk nearby, with good always ready to respond. And yet both programs also provide space for critiques of the ways in which western society views men and women, good and bad. It is this space that will hopefully develop as the programs move into and through future seasons.

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Chaos Reigns: Women as Witches in Contemporary Film and the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm

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Abstract:

The image of the witch is etched on the memory from childhood on, characterised by her portrayal in fairy tales and shaped by popular culture, especially contemporary film. Although of pre-Christian origin, and exploited during the peak of the witch-hunts from the late 15th to the middle of the 18th century, the belief in witches has barely forfeited its sometimes dubious popularity. While the commercialisation of other magical and monstrous creatures such as vampires, elves and werewolves follows the trend of Hollywood marketing experts and the development of youth culture, the witch appears to be a constant fictive companion in bed-, child's and living rooms. Be it as animalistic grandmother-gone-bad in the Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel* or as narcissistic queen in the form of Charlize Theron in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the depiction of female witches is versatile.

1 An obscure hut in sinister woods, secluded from the outside world, inhabited by an old and wicked, often deformed woman. The image of the witch is etched on the memory from childhood on, characterised by her portrayal in fairy tales and shaped by popular culture, especially contemporary film. Although of pre-Christian origin, and exploited during the peak of the witch-hunts from the late 15th to the middle of the 18th century, the belief in witches has barely forfeited its sometimes dubious popularity. While the commercialisation of other magical and monstrous creatures such as vampires, elves and werewolves follows the trend of Hollywood marketing experts and the development of youth culture, the witch appears to be a constant fictive companion in bed-, children's and living rooms. Be it as animalistic grandmother-gone-bad in the Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel* or as narcissistic queen in the form of Charlize Theron in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the depiction of female witches¹ is versatile, as can be seen by comparing diverse cinematic witch characters with their literary ancestors by the Brothers Grimm.

2 Like every legendary figure, real or imagined, the witch is attributed a certain set of characteristics which distinguishes her from others and makes her identifiable. First of all, it is curious that while there is no consistent definition of witchcraft (Kiekhefer 7), many resources are able to draw a clear picture of it. Jacob Grimm in his work about German mythologies for example described witches as old women, who have become unable to love

¹ The term witch is not exclusive to the female sex but it is less common to use it for a male, who would more rather be described as sorcerer, wizard or warlock. However, in this paper I will use it exclusively for female characters.

and work (cf. Grimm 599). He considered women in general to be predestined for clandestine magic because they, as opposed to the hard working and war conducting men, have enough time to dedicate themselves to the preparation of healing ointments and from there on it is only a small step to the practice of witchcraft (cf. 599). Their high powers of imagination make them receptive for superstition of any kind. Further it was believed that witches are women who had been seduced by the devil² and “achieve their malevolent, destructive effects only with the aid of Satan and demons” (Easlea 7). The use of “malevolent” here clearly shows a value judgement. The witch’s magic is equated with black magic that is used to harm others, for example by bringing them illness, turning them into animals or objects or influencing their love lives. This is opposed to the so-called white magic, which for example was believed to restore health with herbal medicine among others. The witch’s magic however is a “tapping into the forces of nature” (Berger 19) which changes its order, as often believed to the worse.

3 The witch’s outer appearance may not be further described by sources, but her supposed behaviour and disposition all the more. From a sociological perspective, the witch was the opposite of the woman’s image as propagandized by the church, “the repentant woman who spent her life cloistered or serving men in order to do penance for her original sin” (van Vuuren 72). She was used to point out difference (Sempruch 2), namely between the good, virtuous woman and the foul one. Especially sexuality plays a crucial role here, because witches were believed to fornicate with the devil and precipitate the demoralization of society. While the ordinary woman was chaste, the witch was characterized as knowing no sexual boundaries and seducing helpless men whenever she got the chance to do so. But it was not only men who were threatened by witches. It was common belief that witches engage in infanticide and cannibalism (cf. Levack 20), which not only changed but also perverted the idea of the woman as nurturing mother. The witch-hunts hence functioned as a necessary means to secure society’s “moral boundaries” (Ben-Yehuda 14). In times reigned by poor survival conditions, witches became scapegoats that were held responsible for moral decline and epidemics and led to the so-called witch craze.

4 A popular instrument which played an important part in the witch-hunts, and also focussed heavily on women’s sexuality, was the so-called *Malleus Maleficarum*, the “Hammer of the Witches”, a tract composed in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer and James

² It is important here to remark that it was general belief that the women let themselves be seduced by Satan and were not forced by him to do so. This is crucial because it denies these women the role of the victim, since they deliberately chose to turn away from God, a popular argument used for example by the Church in the famous witch trials.

Sprenger, which was supposed to serve as evidence for witchcraft and the evilness of women. Unlike the fairy tales, this is not a work of fiction, which is why it serves well to offer valuable insight into the historical understanding of the witch and why she was feared. Divided into three parts, their work argues that “the fragile feminine sex” (Kramer and Sprenger 99) is “chiefly addicted to Evil Superstitions” (ibid), an opinion similar to the one of Jakob Grimm, as mentioned earlier. They reinforce their implementations with quotes from Roman thinkers such as Cicero and Seneca and, more importantly, the Holy Bible, a policy stroke in this regard because by doing so they could count on the church for support of their theses. Kramer and Sprenger conclude that “since [women] are weak, they find an easy and secret manner of vindicating themselves by witchcraft” (101). Particularly the mention of “secret manner” is remarkable here because it emphasizes the devious character of the witch, yet this is not the strongest point they try to make. If one accords credibility to their ideas the most crucial reason for woman’s fascination with witchcraft lies in her degenerate sexuality, or as they put it, “the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear in her many carnal abominations” (102), with its origin in the biblical Fall of man.³ Were it not for the sexually tainted woman, man would not have to fear the horror of defenceless seduction. Ultimately it appears only logical for them to declare that the woman “is an imperfect animal, she always deceives” (ibid). It is remarkable how throughout the text the terms “woman” and “witch” become synonyms. What begins as a treatise on the witch turns more and more into a polemic pamphlet on the evil nature of women in general. The *Malleus Maleficarium* proclaims in summary that women are credulous, deceptive and sex-driven creatures who are bound to fall for the temptations of evil, or more exaggerated: there is the potential of a witch in every woman.

5 How is the historical image of the witch now translated into the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm?⁴ Initially, the typical witch appears in the tales either as old woman or as a stepmother without further age statement. As already mentioned, descriptions of physical appearance are rare in their tales. *The Riddle* is one of the few tales by the Brothers Grimm which offers a minimal description, where the old woman is described as having “red eyes” (Grimm 22) and consequently established as a more animalistic rather than human creature. Apart from that, characters are often either labelled young and beautiful or old and ugly

³ The fall is caused by Eve who is tempted by the serpent to taste a fruit from the forbidden tree and then shares it with Adam. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum* this scene repeats itself whenever a woman seduces a man.

⁴ The fairy tales the analysis is based on were chosen on how often the witch appears and how explicitly her actions are described.

without further explanation. This procedure may serve several purposes. On the one hand it may train the reader's or listener's⁵ power of imagination and give him or her the freedom to create his or her own image of the characters presented. On the other hand it may not have been necessary to further describe the differences between the appearance of a princess and a witch because of the social propaganda burnt into the mind of the collective society. Good in a multitude of tales is personified by either already wealthy royalty, as in *The Frog King*, or *Iron Heinrich* where a princess later marries a prince who was turned into a frog by a witch, or poor but beautiful peasants who marry into the noble rank towards the end, as the poor maiden in *The Old Woman in the Forest*. Evil by contrast is always ugly and often moves in the opposite direction, namely by either losing their rank and/or wealth, as for example the old woman in *The Blue Light*, or not owning anything to begin with. Using the model of the witch in this way reveals a lot about the thinking of the estate-based society. She cannot win because her rotten character is already displayed in her outer appearance and vice versa.

6 The typical witch as presented in the tales is envious, nobody loves, likes or pities her. She seems to have brought disaster upon herself and lives on the margins of society, visualised by her residence in the woods. However, the woods are also of importance for another reason:

As in real life, forests are places through which one wend one's way uneasily, especially if one is alone, most especially if woman or child, not knowing what to expect from the dark solitude. The sounds of forest or waste are not part of the villager's symphony: their dwellers do not participate in the net of relations that makes one feel secure. (Weber 97)

The witch's residence immediately establishes her as a vile character who cannot be trusted because she uses the uncanniness of the woods to her advantage. In *Brother and Sister*, the protagonists' "evil stepmother, who was a witch" (Grimm ch. 11) abuses her stepchildren after their mother's death, until one day they run away and end up exhausted in a forest. The stepmother slinks after them, "as witches often slink" (ibid), and curses all springs since she knows that sooner or later the children will be so thirsty that they will have to drink from them. Shortly afterwards it is the boy who cannot bear the thirst anymore, drinks and is changed into a fawn. Nature appears here as the witch's ally. She may be unable to control the children but the forest is her territory. Where the normal, i.e. the good and pure human experiences terror, that is to say in the woods, the wicked woman is at the peak of her dark power. Remarkable is also the solution of the curse, especially with regard to the historical

⁵ It shall be kept in mind that during the time of the first publication of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* in 1812, fairy tales were still a strong part of the oral tradition and not, as often assumed today, exclusively for children.

witch-hunts. In the course of the story, the witch not only casts a spell on the boy, she does even more mischief. Unbeknown to her, the girl does not die in the forest, as she assumes, but grows up to become the wife of a king. This causes the witch's daughter, who is "ugly as sin" (ibid) and has only one eye, great jealousy and they plot to kill the new queen and her newborn baby. They temporarily succeed but the queen returns as a ghost, is recognised by the king and returns to life. The witch daughter is taken into the forest, "where wild beasts [tear] her to pieces" (ibid) and her mother is burnt to death. The tale closes with a happy ending: "When there was nothing left of her but ashes, the fawn was transformed and regained his human form. From then on sister and brother lived happily until the end of their days" (ibid). Here an example is made of the witch. By burning the origin of all evil, chaos, in the form of the transformed male, is eradicated and order is restored.⁶ Also it is shown that from a witch, nothing good can come which is demonstrated by her offspring. The daughter is in no way inferior to her mother. What she lacks in beauty, she compensates in viciousness and malice.

7 Nevertheless it is interesting to see that while the witch remains an outsider in society, she has a strong bond with her biological children, who are invariably daughters. As in *Brother and Sister*, the witch appearing in *Sweet Roland* is both mother and stepmother, yet she feels love only for her ugly and evil biological daughter and not for the nice and beautiful stepdaughter. Again, her hatred makes her attempt murder, as she tries to chop the beautiful stepdaughter's head off, but she is deceived and accidentally chops off the head of her own daughter. There is a certain tragedy in this solution but interestingly enough the tale makes the death of the witch daughter seem as a necessary evil. Generally peace is only restored when the witch and her whole family, again the biological one and not the innocent stepchildren, are dead. Yet remains the question why there is never a father figure mentioned in the witch families. Since the witch herself is always introduced as a single mother this prompts two conclusions: either her child was conceived while fornicating with the devil or the father is absent because he cannot exist next to a woman possessed of dark forces. The lack of a male equivalent in the stories, and with it the lack of a male scapegoat, may therefore be interpreted as a continuation of female oppression by men (cf. Green and Bigelow 199). Bluntly said, in a patriarchal society as portrayed in the fairy tales single, unattractive women like the witches appear suspicious and must be involved with the devil because they lead lives diverging from the norm.

⁶ The burning of the witch as solution of the story and deliverance from all evil can also be found in *The Six Swans* and *The Two Brothers*.

8 Two of the Grimm's most popular fairy tales, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Snow White*, contain simultaneously two probably iconic witch characters, when it comes to the portrayal of witches in literary fiction. Albeit it shall be pointed out that only the old woman in *Hansel and Gretel* is explicitly denoted as witch, whereas in *Snow White* the term is used not once. Nevertheless she can clearly be identified as one because of her magic mirror and her dark intentions, i.e. to pamper her own vanity and so replace Snow White, her stepdaughter, as "the fairest of all" (Grimm ch. 53) by poisoning her. Her death is also typical in its cruelty, although it appears as a stylised version of the known witch-burning. The evil stepmother is punished by having to wear heated iron slippers and dancing herself to death. The old witch in *Hansel and Gretel* by contrast dies, one might say, the traditional witch death, when she is pushed into the fire of the oven by Gretel. Snow White's stepmother and the old witch in the gingerbread house may appear different in their relationship to the children and their intentions for killing them but both women succeed in luring their victims into a trap with food. Again it seems as if the role of the mother as the child's nurturer and guardian is perverted. Instead of nurturing the children the witch feeds on them and reveals a preference for cannibalism. This aspect further emphasises her inhuman character. The witch is not only a dangerous woman, she is downright a monster and a "familiar female monster" (Creed 2) at that.

9 The monstrous appearance of the witch may be ascribed to her affinity for animals. Many mythological figures have been attributed animalistic features, such as the vampire with its bat-like fangs and wings and the werewolf as half man-half canine creature. In early illustrations of storybooks the witch is often drawn with claw-like fingers and a long, bent nose, similar to the beak of a bird. Again in *Hansel and Gretel*, one can find the following comment on witches in general: "[w]itches have red eyes and cannot see very far, but they have a keen sense of smell, like animals, and can detect when human beings are near them" (Grimm ch.15). The witch is clearly separated from other humans here and it is emphasised how her animalistic skills enable her cannibalism. Once again the witch is denied her humaneness. If she is not depicted as animalistic herself it is striking how the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm that feature a witch almost always contain a multitude of animals as well. Take for example *The Two Brothers*, *The Golden Children* and *The Old Woman in the Forest*. All three contain several animals, among them typical forest dwellers such as foxes and hares, but also magical and precious creatures, such as a talking dove (*The Two Brothers*), a talking golden fish (*The Golden Children*) and a living bird made of gold (*The Old Woman in the Forest*). This peculiarity may be interpreted in two different ways. On the

one hand, since witches were thought to be close to nature it does not come as a surprise that they get along well with wild animals and are able to use them for their purposes. On the other hand it was also common belief that witches are able to morph into animals themselves (cf. Merrifield 175). The appearance of golden and talking animals may then be read as a reincarnation of the witch, which also revalues her. Her life is enhanced by the golden skin or plumage, her complete outer transformation into an animal enables her to contact people on the other side of the woods, who would otherwise be repelled by her witch-like looks. Ironically enough this would also mean that for the societies described in the fairy tales a manlike, i.e. talking animal is easier accepted, or even welcomed, than an animalistic woman. The circle of human animals and animalistic humans is finally completed in *The Bremen Town Musicians*. Here, the cat, unexceptionally referred to as “he” throughout the tale, is mistaken for a witch by a robber. “There’s a gruesome witch in the house! She spat on me and scratched my face with her long claws” (Grimm ch.27). In a way mistaking a male animal for a woman can be seen as yet another depreciation of the witch’s femininity. Not only is she a gruesome creature, she is also not seen as a real human being.

10 The witch as fictional character owes her popularity partially to the Brothers Grimm for incorporating her in many of their stories. Nowadays this popularity is not restricted to fairy tales, as can be seen in her numerous appearances on screen, both in adaptations of said fairy tales and other fiction. Here, a crucial aspect is the importance of the witch’s visual appearance. In contrast to the historical reports concerning witches and the meagre descriptions by the Brothers Grimm it can be said that Hollywood gave the witch a face, or several, rather different faces. As a movie character, she can be found in every genre, from child- and young adult-oriented movies to horror and romantic comedies which attributes her a versatility that is unexpected if one compares it to her portrayal in fairy tales. In the stories discussed beforehand the witch had neither a name nor a history, just like the majority of fairy tale characters. Nonetheless it becomes clear that her sole purpose in the stories is to cause havoc and trigger an incident the protagonists have to endure in order to “live happily ever after”. By giving the witch a name and telling her own story she sometimes becomes, paradoxically, more human, as can be seen in many horror movies, where a woman without witch powers changes, or is changed, into a witch or witch-like creature. It is also striking how the movie-witch is given a new dimension, that is to say a sexual one. In the fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, the only hint at the witch’s sex life is her being a mother. Nobody falls in love with her or is attracted to her because of her good looks, the witch even needs spells or potions, such as the stepmother in *The Riddle*, to participate in basic human

interaction. In *The Six Swans* for example the young maiden who becomes the new queen is mute yet the king marries her because “her beauty moved the king’s heart” (Grimm ch.49). At the same time, the witch’s daughter is described as “very beautiful” (ibid) but the king “[does] not like her, and [cannot] look at her without secretly shuddering” (ibid), hence he never fathers any children with her, which causes her to take revenge upon him and his family. The witch is denied sex appeal here, her intention is destruction rather than seduction. However, in many movies the witch is both beautiful and seductive, her sex-appeal is rooted in highly reserved aloofness (*Snow White and the Huntsman*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*) or naïve girlishness (*I Married a Witch*) but it always exists. Nevertheless, this new, sexualized trait of the witch is not free of controversy and besides has become a popular device in many horror movies, as will be seen later.

11 The highest recognition value, with regard to the witch’s classic fairytale-like appearance, can be found in the influx of film adaptations of popular fantasy novels. Here, L. Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz*, Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* and C. S. Lewis *The Chronicles of Narnia – The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* come to mind. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) introduces the audience to two different kinds of witches: Glinda the Good Witch and the otherwise nameless Wicked Witch of the West. Their outer appearance already makes it easy to identify who is good and who is bad. Glinda looks more like a cross between a fairy and a princess. She is blond, light-skinned, wears a sparkling crown and carries a magic wand. Her evil sister by contrast is dark-haired with a pointed nose and claw-like hands, has green skin and instead of a crown and wand has a black, pointy hat and carries a broom with her. Character differences are here expressed through beauty or the lack thereof. Beautiful Glinda surpasses her evil sister in every aspect, so much that the Wicked Witch’s death is not mourned but celebrated with the cheerful “Ding Dong! The Witch is dead!”, which Glinda joins in singing. The Wicked Witch’s skin colour may be interpreted as a giveaway of her feelings, especially towards her sister and her beauty. Therefore, as a figure she is yet again portrayed as envious and, in the true sense of the word, green with envy, a character trait that already turned out to be fatal for the stepmother/queen in *Snow White*. *The Witches* on the contrary, released in 1990, draws a parallel with *Hansel and Gretel*, whereby the witches adapted to the modern times. In order to catch children, their favourite prey, they have formed the “Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children”, a pseudo-organisation with the true intention of eliminating all children. The protagonist Luke, who earlier escaped a witch who tried to lure him with sweets just like the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, randomly stumbles upon the organisation’s annual convention, hides, but is later on exposed by a group

of witches who turn him into a mouse. *The Witches* shows a change, or rather a development of the witch on several levels. Firstly, the witches are not only strictly old women, they come in all ages and also in all kinds of professions, they are chambermaids and business women and part of everyday life, not wicked women living in a forest. Secondly, they know how to disguise, both themselves and their evilness. The Grand High Witch dresses like a businesswoman, she wears a lifelike mask to hide her grotesque witch face and goes in public by the name of “Miss Eva Ernst”. While the witches in the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm stand out through their appearance alone, precisely through their stooping position and their raddled and scarred faces, these witches know how to blend in with the other hotel guests and society in general. The Grand High Witch is both charismatic and distanced but this may well be attributed to her job as businesswoman. Her dark secret is only revealed when the mask is removed. Interestingly, when she literally drops the mask, her behaviour changes drastically, once she reveals her true self, madness can run freely, including shrill laughter and extroverted manners.⁷ But *The Witches* also introduces another good witch, namely the Grand High Witch’s assistant Miss Irvine, who changes Luke back into his human form. She is portrayed as a witch with a conscience, as she undoes the evil work of the boss. The audience is thus presented with a conciliatory ending, as if to say that while there are many evil witches, there may also be nice and helpful ones.

12 *The Chronicles of Narnia – The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* builds on as the witch as a children’s nightmare, yet not because of her terrible looks but rather her winning manner. Jadis, the White Witch, is introduced as a caring philanthropist, as she charms Edmund, the third of the four Pevensie children. She wraps him into her coat to keep him warm, conjures up tea and promises, that she “can do anything [Edmund] like [s]”. Jadis knows how to seduce children and she knows her effect on others. Clad in a snow-white dress with a crown made of ice, she lives up to her name and is an impressive appearance. She is not bent over a crutch like the old and ugly witches in the fairy tales yet she seems similarly distanced like the Grand High Witch in *The Witches*, except that she does not need a mask. In all her fake cordiality her chilly demeanor still shines through and her striking complexion can switch between loving and hateful. Jadis is a good example for the visual power of witches in film, which is also apparent in the latest, and very loose, fairy tale adaptations, such as *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) and *Hansel and Gretel Witch Hunters* (2013).

⁷ Bellatrix Lestrange, the witch from the *Harry Potter*-series, can be cited as another famous example of a witch who has gone insane and whose power has gone to her head. Her character does not lack a certain tragedy, yet like the Grand High Witch she qualifies as fright figure for children, because of her unpredictable and violent behaviour.

The evil stepmother of Snow White, called Ravenna in the movie version, looks like an haute couture-version of the Grimm-queen. She can morph into other people and a horde of ravens, always in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Ravenna is almost more threatening in her exquisite fashion taste than in her actions. Where the original stepmother demands the huntsman to bring her Snow White's lungs and liver, and thus makes it sound like the preparation of a cannibalistic meal, Ravenna wants to suck youth and beauty out of her, yet without actually eating her. It is only with her death in the end that she returns to the roots of the witch myth: She is burned and turns into an old, ugly woman.

13 Ravenna is not only a visually impressive appearance, she is also exemplary for the depiction of femininity and evil as expressed through the witch in contemporary Hollywood movies. She is introduced to the audience as a woman on her personal vendetta. When she was a child, her village was attacked by warriors and she was fed a potion of milk and blood by her mother, which turned her into a witch - or did it awaken the witch inside her? By having been fed this potion, Ravenna is established as an impure creature because she drinks the clean life-giving mother's milk and blood, the literary regular nutrient of monsters such as vampires, gained by draining it out of their victims. And now her main intention is to drain the life out of anybody who poses a threat to her; women, who are younger and more beautiful than her, men who have deceived her. Like her fairy tale-equivalent, Ravenna has to deal with the disloyal Huntsman, but in the movie adaptation her hate towards men is considerably stronger. Before killing King Magnus, Snow White's father, she provides rare insight into her sentiments: "I was ruined by a king like you once. I replaced his queen, an old woman. And in time, I too would have been replaced. Men use women, they ruin us and when they are finished with us they throw us to their dogs like scraps" (*Snow White and the Huntsman*). By saying that she was "ruined", Ravenna implies that she was raped and her bad experience is also reflected when she says to a young boy, again before killing him, "there was a time I would have lost my heart to a face like yours and you, no doubt, would have broken it" (ibid). She may once have been vulnerable but the trauma she suffered from men has left her unfeeling. In one scene, which does not appear in the fairy tale-original, she bathes in milk, a strongly femininely-connoted fluid, as if she wants to whitewash herself from her crimes but she nevertheless remains menacing in her rage against men and beautiful, young women. Snow White in contrast seems to get along well with everybody, although she turns into a warrior in the course of the movie, her femininity is still reflected in her charm and tenderness. She, the epitome of innocence, who is referred to as "life itself" (ibid) by the dwarf Muir, is opposed to Ravenna, whose name already refers to the raven, a symbol of bad

omens. Therefore the path through life is for both women predetermined from childhood on. Ravenna's dark style of clothing, again as opposed to Snow White's, emphasises her vengeful and gloomy character even more, her beauty may be striking but also intimidating, as it helps her to literally cast a spell over other people and manipulate them for her purposes. Her femininity is linked with evilness, a phenomenon that is not exclusive to fantasy/adventure movies, the genres *Snow White and the Huntsman* is considered to belong to. As can be seen in the following, another genre employs the witch as a disturbing factor as well and uses the dread and horror she causes as a signature feature.

14 A look at the list of movies containing witches or witch-like characters shows that a greater part of them are considered to belong to the horror genre or at least contain horror elements. *Antichrist*, *Silent Hill* and *The Evil Dead* are all examples of movies which use witches as their central "monstrous element", a device that Paul Wells defines as follows:

The monstrous element in the horror text is usually an interrogation of the amorphous nature of evil, or an address of the limits of the human condition; physically, emotionally and psychologically. The prevailing archetype of the monster is the Devil, the symbolic embodiment of evil that is a constituent element in monist religions and which appears in various forms in myths from across the globe. (Wells 8)

Keeping in mind that witches were believed to be the devil's helpers, have intercourse with him and are often shown as inhuman, this definition can as well be applied to the witch as horror film monster, but also to the witch in fairy tales. The "limits of the human condition" are nevertheless depicted more strongly in the horror movie. The witch is here shown as a border crosser, in particular the borders between the tolerable and the intolerable, physically and emotionally. What is striking is that many of the witches are troubled women, i.e. they seem to have suffered a traumatic experience that turned them into a witch or made the inherent witch come out. *Antichrist* and *Silent Hill* show women who became witches after the loss of their child, one accidentally and one as part of a ritual, and now are unable to deal with their guilt. All the women mentioned here show the witch as an extremely gendered monster, because they are connected to female experiences such as menstruation and childbirth. Mia's witch-turning is also strongly associated with the female body because the demon of the witch-burnt girl enters her through her vagina. As opposed to the witch in the fairy tale, the horror film witch is also highly sexualized, although it needs to be mentioned that here her sexuality almost always has a negative connotation. Mia starts cursing obscenities and She, the nameless woman in *Antichrist*, turns into a sex-crazed maniac who castrates her lover and circumcises herself. The witch as overly sexualized woman seems yet

again undesirable, because she cannot be handled by men. The horror film's usual solution of this problem is hence the destruction of all her loved ones, preferably as brutal as possible.

15 Details are of special importance in these movies because they relate the new stories to the old fairy tales. Lars von Trier, the director of *Antichrist*, indicates watching a documentary about witch-hunts as a main source of inspiration (cf. Knud 8) and sees a connection between sexuality and horror (cf. Knud 5). This is reflected not only in her collection of witch materials and her "thesis", but also in the setting of the movie. The hut in the woods, ironically called "Eden", reminds one of the typical witch residence in the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. The same applies to the hut in *The Evil Dead*. The namelessness of *Antichrist*'s protagonists may be read as a warning: there is a witch in every woman that comes out once she suffers a trauma. Interestingly, the death of the child, which occurs while She seduces her husband, may be interpreted as infanticide, because She is negligent, i.e. she keeps the window in the nursery open. She may try to blame him for her condition by telling him "you have always been distant from me and Nic", which can be seen as the average situation of the witch in the fairy tales, i.e. without a husband or father, but it remains the impression that she caused her own misery. While He, a psychiatrist, tries to cure his wife from her demons, she obsesses more and more over witchcraft and almost succeeds in killing him. The woman-turned-witch is here, yet again, presented as origin of all evil and an incurable fanatic. When He encounters a deer suffering a stillbirth in the woods and a talking fox tells him that "chaos reigns", it seems as if his wife is speaking to him through the animals, just like the witches in the fairy tales transform themselves and others into beasts. As long as the witch is alive and in control, there is no order and cruel things happen, similar to the killings in *The Evil Dead*.

16 When it comes to establishing a character as witch the imagery knows no boundaries. Before facing the final demon, i.e. the girl who was burnt as witch in the beginning of *The Evil Dead*, Mia changes into a scarlet-coloured dress, a popular image in the description of man-eating witches (cf. Poole 40). One might wonder why her clothes appear as such a concern to her in a situation like this, especially since the dress does not offer her any protection. The answer may be simple, it must be purely symbolic, much like the river of blood flowing next to the hut, which can be related to menstrual blood. Where the fairy tales are, figuratively speaking, anaemic with the exception of *Sweetheart Roland* which features talking drops of blood, the witch in horror movies seems to think the more blood, the better and she spares no-one. In *Silent Hill* the audience encounters Alessa, a young girl sacrificed in a Christian cult and accused of witchcraft. Her mother is presented like the epitome of the

witch, a seemingly old unkempt woman who walks bent-forward and utters scattered thoughts. Ironically enough, in the course of the story it is not Alessa's biological mother and the religious fanatic who influences her that are accused of witchcraft, but her loving adoptive mother and the upright police officer who accompanies her. *Silent Hill* clearly refers here to the church's role in the witch-hunts and shows how easily the label "witch" can be applied to practically every woman, not only those who have a witch-like appearance or practice dark magic. The horror here lies in how easily Alessa's mother is willing to sacrifice her for her beliefs. A fairy tale-equivalent is *The Two Brothers*, where a broom-maker abandons his two sons in a forest because a goldsmith tells him that "[t]he devil's got them in his power and can also bring about [him]" (Grimm ch. 60). This gender inversion, at one time it is the mother and then it is the father who sacrifices them, is especially interesting with regard to the prevailing misogyny both in the fairy tale and the horror movie. While the father is never blamed for his actions, Alessa's mother is constantly bullied. "Sinners deserve to lose their spawn", is what she is told by another young woman of her community, which implies that she led an excessive, sinful lifestyle. The father in *The Two Brothers* however is never brought to justice, on the contrary, here as well it is a woman who is mistreated and exposed to misogyny. The huntsman threatens the witch: "You old witch, if you don't tell me right away where my brother is, I'll pick you up with both my hands and throw you into the fire" (Grimm ch. 60). "Witch" has a strong negative connotation here, it is used like an invective. Later on he continues denouncing her by calling her an "old monkey" (ibid). Alessa and her mother are subjected to similar hostilities, whereas the community focuses its deadly hate on the young girl as origin of evil and demonic offspring. This brings up the question why the horror genre seems to favour young women as witches. One reason might be that young women are especially threatening because they are sexually desirous and still physically able to produce a spawn of the devil. From a psychoanalytical point of view the witch in general hence concerns primal fears of the man: "fear of castration, fear of the all consuming mother" (Bovenschen, Blackwell, Moore, Weckmueller 91). Additionally, her role as mother makes the witch even more menacing as a monster because it is a betrayal of confidence, she is willing to kill her own children and men and women alike, thus becomes a universal, both human and inhuman threat.

17 That the sexual witch does not always have to be a monster in the sense of a horror figure becomes obvious when one takes a look at the witch in dark or romantic comedies. Here she may be sexually aggressive as well, but in a sensual, seductive and not consuming, flesh-eating way. Although set in a lighter atmosphere, the witch is nevertheless threatening,

mainly because her ways of seduction are in great contrast to those of the other women appearing in the movies. Good examples here are *Dark Shadows* and *Death Becomes Her*, where women use witchcraft and thereby reinforce their sexual attraction. Both movies are considered dark comedies or horror comedies, as they blur slapstick humour with horror elements. Their behaviour is opposed to the witches of the Brothers Grimm, they do not have cannibalistic or bad intentions to begin with, all they long for is an acceptable partner. Love as the origin of wicked events is here the prevailing motif. In both movies women battle for the love of a man, in *Death Becomes Her* with the use of a magic potion promising eternal youth, in *Dark Shadows* with the use of full physical strength. Madeline, the narcissistic actress may not be a witch in the classical sense but she uses witch-like techniques, namely the ominous potion, to reach her goals but like the witches in fairy tales, she is only temporarily successful as the potion shows side-effects and the man turns out to be not quite the catch she expected him to be. Angelique, the witch in *Dark Shadows* is similarly unlucky. Although blessed with a heavenly name, she turns into a wicked fury when her object of desire, Barnabas, does not return her love. Witchcraft is here not only used as a weapon, it also serves to emphasize their femininity as favourable as possible and the witches are shown as a further development of the 'femme fatale' who seduces man to gain sexual pleasure and is, intentionally or not, responsible for his moral and social downfall. Interestingly enough it is rarely the male character who gets blamed in these situations. Barnabas may leave Angelique for another woman but it is she who is blamed. Helen and her rival Madeleine in *Death Becomes Her* need to stay physically attractive for Ernest so he stays with them while he lets himself go. Like a sexy dress and good make up, witchcraft is portrayed as a female accessory, a must-have to be desirable at all times. Jealousy and envy are, same as for their fairy tale-ancestors, important aspects but in the end they just want to please not themselves but the man they are in love with.

18 The opposite of the highly seductive witch, the good and homely one that wants to live a regular life, is shown in *I Married a Witch* and *Bewitched*. *I Married a Witch* from 1942 introduces the seductive witch who gives up her powers in the end for a life as a supporter of her husband and housewife, with the words "love is stronger than witchcraft". While in the beginning Jennifer is introduced as a seductress that no man can resist, this changes when she falls in love herself. Her attraction for many men clearly lies in her witchcraft which becomes obvious when she tries to make the man she loves fall in love with her without a use of her powers and fails. Witchcraft as a seductive feature is here condemned, the overly sexual woman has no appeal for the morally obliged man and she is

forced to retire. Isabel, the TV-witch in *Bewitched*, choses to abjure her powers voluntarily but sees herself forced to frequently resort to them when she discovers that she is only used as pretty attachment for Jack, the protagonist of the show she stars in. Her appeal lies, as the title already suggests, in her effect on the audience and Jack. Even when angry, Isabel is still charming and enchanting. The destructive power of the classical witch is extremely toned down, her sex appeal tends to approach zero. The destructive side of witchcraft as exposed in horror movies is opposed with a constructive, love-enabling side, the dark, wicked witch becomes the friendly neighbour next door. The absence of a father-figure or husband may nonetheless be read as a reference to the classic fairy tale-witch and her existence as widow, single mother or even old spinster. If the old witches in tales such as *The Frog King*, or *Iron Heinrich* and *The Iron Stove* can cast spells on princes, then young movie-witches can just as well bewitch their modern-day equivalents, intentionally or not. Nevertheless, she is never excessive, but rather virtuous and has mostly good intentions. One might claim that after the over-sexualisation of the witch this is yet another male fetishism,⁸ precisely the tamed woman as ultimate fantasy. At any rate it is interesting to see that in romantic comedies the witch may not die the death of the fairy tale-witch, but she nonetheless loses her magic.

19 In summary it can be said that the witch, both in the fairy tales and in contemporary film, is a fantasy. Whether one believes in her or not, she is always connected to extremes, extreme beauty, extreme malice, extreme madness. Her diverging from the norm endangers her and makes her desirable. The image of the wicked woman may have developed further but it can still be traced back to its historical roots and although it may not always be apparent, many movie-witches can be compared to their counterparts in the tales by the Brothers Grimm. Is this intentional? Well, just like beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the same can be said about witchcraft, it can be seen as a deliberate stylistic device or the supernatural appeal of a woman. At any rate, the witch is a fairy tale character come to life on the big screen who keeps up with fashions but never gets out of style. As a gendered monster she lets chaos reign wherever she appears, be it as a bringer of bad luck, social scapegoat or seductress.

⁸ Fetishism here shall be understood not as applied to an object, but as a sexual stimulus triggered by a certain appearance and behaviour.

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A Scopophiliac Fairy Tale: Deconstructing Normative Gender in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"

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Abstract:

Angela Carter's short story collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* is a reworking of traditional fairy tales, or as she suggested "stories about fairy stories." Carter takes up the flexible structure of the fairy story in order to communicate the experiences of being a woman in a patriarchal society, subjected to certain ways of seeing and being seen. In this article, I explore the economy of vision in the title story of Carter's collection, arguing that she deconstructs the violent structure of seeing embodied in the two main characters in the story. I conclude by looking at two alternatives that appear in the story, both of which move beyond the violence and seductiveness of ways of seeing within a patriarchal society.

1 In 1979, after having published two novels that set out to thoroughly debunk myths – those "extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree" (Carter, *Notes* 38) – Angela Carter published a collection of short stories under the title *The Bloody Chamber*, a set of reworked fairy tales, or "stories about fairy stories" as she puts it (Carter, *Notes* 38). Unlike the falsity of myth, Carter saw fairy tale and folktale (she uses the terms synonymously) as having a radical political edge. Whilst myths have to be "argued with, dismantled through the act of writing", folklore is "a much more straightforward set of devices for making real life more exciting and is much easier to infiltrate with other kinds of consciousness" (Carter, *Notes* 38). This is thanks to the flexibility of the form of folk and fairy tales: transmitted orally, each new teller could modify the tale to suite the particular context in which it was told. Since tales are thus "embedded in social and material conditions" (Warner xvii), they are perfectly suited for the interrogation of the kind of issues that preoccupied Carter, such as the deconstruction of gender norms and ways of seeing.

2 One dominant aspect of Carter's oeuvre is a concern with the visual. An early scene in her novel *The Magic Toyshop* involves the protagonist Melanie gazing at herself in a mirror, whilst in *Love* the character of Annabel is described in terms of still images from expressionist films. Carter's interest in the visual is always in relation to the myths and conventions that structure society, and how they relate to the construction of identity. Susan Sellers notes that Angela Carter views mythic images of women as 'consolatory nonsenses', and goes on to say that Carter "attacks this mythic inscription for dealing in what she calls 'false universals,' since it ignores the complexity of individuals as well as the mutability of history" (108). The stories collected in *The Bloody Chamber* certainly explore mythic images

of women and show both their violence and attraction. They also feature many scenarios in which looking and being looked at are the central focus, along with the consequences of certain ways of inhabiting the visual world.

3 In this paper I have chosen to examine the title story from this collection, arguing that “The Bloody Chamber” foregrounds the ambiguity of the visual world, revealing both the violence and the seductiveness of certain ways of seeing or being seen. It does this by showing the relationship between ways of seeing and gendered identity, examining both how subjects take up positions within the visual world and the potentially violent consequences of such positions. As noted above, Carter uses the genre of fairy tale because of its flexible structure, the most evident demonstration of this occurring at the level of narration: Carter’s female first-person narrator is able to flood a familiar fairy story with her own form of consciousness. In this way, Carter is able to retell a traditional story and explore it from her own point of view, foregrounding her interest in the politics of gender and vision. My analysis will look at two forms of vision that relate to gendered identity, examining both the pleasure and the violence of such ways of seeing, and will conclude by considering the alternatives that Carter’s short story offers to such a violent economy of vision. Throughout my analysis I draw upon influential theories of vision, such as Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of “the look,” John Berger’s dichotomy of ways of seeing, and Laura Mulvey’s notion of “the male gaze.” These ideas will be used to shed light upon Carter’s explorations of gender and the visual.

Bluebeard and The Bloody Chamber

4 Before commencing my analysis, some background information about the story is useful to note. “The Bloody Chamber” is a modern re-telling of the fairy tale *Bluebeard* by Charles Perrault. This tale tells the story of a young woman who discovers that her newly wed husband is a violent psychopath who keeps the dead bodies of his previous wives in a secret room. She discovers this fact by entering this secret chamber, against her husband’s declared wish that she not do so. Although her husband finds out about her transgression and attempts to murder her, her two brothers arrive just in time to prevent her death. As well as coming to their sister’s rescue, the brothers also kill the husband and the tale ends felicitously by noting that the woman eventually marries a “worthy man” (Tatar 156). The two central themes of the tale are thus caution in marriage and the dangerous consequences of a too-strong desire for knowledge. But this latter theme is not gender-neutral. Instead, there is an emphasis upon the dangers of curiosity for women, which draws on traditional images and

archetypes of the dangerous woman. As Maria Tatar explains, “Perrault aligns the intellectual curiosity of Bluebeard’s wife with the sexual curiosity of women in general, thus hinting that his protagonist is very much a daughter of Eve” (146). Although the tale is resolved through her being rescued by her brothers and her marriage to a “worthy man,” these two themes continue to resonate so that the tale does not simply end “happily ever after.”

5 Carter’s short story takes up both of these themes but gives them a feminist twist. Firstly, the theme of caution in marriage is shown to be haunted or complicated by the privileged status of masculinity – for example, the young woman is rescued from poverty by her wealthy husband. Secondly, the theme of cautioning women about the desire for knowledge (linked to the myths of Pandora and Eve) is revealed as a fiction that supports the hegemony of male desire and the inequalities of patriarchal society. Carter brings out these ideas through the use of vision – through visual encounters and visual metaphors. The different ways in which characters see and take pleasure in seeing is the central mechanism in her short story, as I will demonstrate in my analysis.

6 Carter makes a number of changes to the tale of *Bluebeard*. Firstly, the young woman is rescued not by her brothers, but by her mother, who is presented as a strong, independent, fearless and loving woman. This change alone shows an alternative characterisation of women – as active, courageous and capable. Secondly, as noted above, Carter presents the theme of temptation differently. Instead of seeing the young woman’s entering the forbidden chamber as proof of a dangerous feminine curiosity (as in the myth of Eve or Pandora), Carter turns it around and presents the act of transgression as conditioned by the sadistic and dominating desire of man. As the young woman says towards the end of Carter’s story: “I knew I had behaved exactly according to his desires [...] I had been tricked into my own betrayal [...] I had played a game in which every move was governed by a destiny as oppressive and omnipotent as himself, since that destiny was himself; and I had lost” (137).

7 Thirdly, Carter fleshes out the character of the “worthy man” from the fairy tale, giving him a more substantial role in her story. She writes this character as a blind piano tuner and by doing so gives us a character that can be read as offering an alternative to the economy of the violent male gaze, as represented by the husband. Lastly, Carter’s rewriting of the tale of *Bluebeard* emphasises the material conditions of the lives of the characters, as opposed to the timeless or mythical quality of many fairy tales, or at least their modern, educational versions. For example, Carter renames the violent husband “the Marquis,” following a tradition of linking the figure of Bluebeard with Gilles de Rais (1404-40), a Breton knight who was a companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc and an infamous child-murderer.

Likewise, by setting his castle in Brittany and describing the villagers' fears of the Marquis, Carter also "evokes the brutal feudalism of the historical Gilles de Rais" (Sheets 645). At the same time, as Sheets goes on to point out, Carter clearly sets her story in the modern age with its references to telephones, the stock market and drug trafficking, and these also help to ground the story in material reality.

8 Carter sets up the relationship between the Marquis and his young bride as one that is typical within a patriarchal society: the man assumes an active and dominant role whilst his bride is positioned as passive and timid. Although the differences between them partly concern wealth and age, Carter foregrounds their differences in terms of the visual. The Marquis represents the dominant scopic position within patriarchal society: the active, gazing position, the one who looks. His perspective dominates his wife's and their relationship is conducted in such a way as to satisfy his desires. His visual engagement can thus be seen as a form of scopophilia or pleasure in looking, and is characterised by both voyeurism and fetishism. By contrast, his bride occupies the passive role of the object gazed at, assuming her husband's perspective on herself (seeing herself as he sees her) and identifying with the self-images he offers her. I will begin by analysing the Marquis as fetishistic voyeur and then turn to the young bride's way of looking in order to examine how it is that she is seduced by her husband's way of seeing, given that it is so violent. In the conclusion, I will look at the two alternatives to this visual economy of voyeurism and identification: the blind piano tuner's economy of the ear, characterised by openness and attentiveness to the other, and the figure of the strong mother, an image of independent and active femininity, and who shares a kind of maternal telepathy with her daughter.

Fetishistic Voyeurism

9 The Marquis' scopophilia is established in several important ways, including the history of his previous wives, his adorning of his young bride, his way of looking at her, and his obsession with pornography. To begin with, his scopophilia is hinted at from the description of his previous wives, which we learn about throughout the story. One of his previous wives was a lady of high fashion, whilst another was famous for being a nude model for painters (112, 113). Both of these roles illustrate what Laura Mulvey describes as the primary function of woman in patriarchal society: exhibitionism (Mulvey 19). It also illustrates the primary role of man as voyeur. This is further confirmed by the young woman when she notes that her husband had "invited me to join his gallery of beautiful women" (113), and that when sitting with him ("on his arm") at the opera, "all eyes were upon me"

(114). Through this exhibition of his fiancée (and his previous wives before her), the husband takes pleasure not only in gazing upon her, but also in receiving recognition from others – from the gaze of others. In this way his desire is not for her as an individual but for what she signifies, what she is worth in the eyes of others. As Mulvey succinctly puts it, women “are being turned all the time into objects of display, to be looked at and gazed at and stared at by men. Yet, in a real sense, women are not there at all. The parade has nothing to do with women, everything to do with man” (13). The young woman clearly fits this idea, for it becomes apparent later in the story that she is just one in a line of women whose most important function is as object of the Marquis’ selfish desire and, in visual terms, as object of his gaze.

10 An illustration of the way in which the Marquis fetishizes his bride can be seen in the lavish clothes and jewellery that he gives her. Not only does he buy her an expensive dress, but he also adorns her with two family heirlooms: an opal ring and a ruby choker. Commenting on the dress the young woman says: “I wore a sinuous shift of white muslin tied with a silk string under the breasts. And everyone stared at me” (114). In this way she has been turned into an object of display, with particular attention drawn to her breasts, a typical object of male fetishism. The jewellery he gives her is more complex. The opal ring and ruby choker not only place her within his family tradition, thereby subjugating her individuality to the formal structure of lineage (in a similar way to how she is merely one wife in a line of wives), but also focus attention on her hands and neck respectively. Firstly, the opal ring is captivating and therefore distracts her from her piano playing: as she says, “I could not take my eyes off [the opal ring] when I played the piano” (115). The ring therefore not only fetishizes her, but also distracts her from her musical talents and encourages her to focus her attention on her appearance. It is thus a metaphor for her husband’s desire to turn her into a visual object and to coerce her into adopting his surveying perspective of her. His fetishization of her conceals his fear – fear of her becoming an independent subject, fear of her sexual difference, perhaps even fear of castration. This latter idea is hinted at by the ruby choker: another family heirloom, originally worn by his grandmother to signify her escape from the guillotine during the Terror of revolutionary France. This object in particular seems to prefigure the bride’s death sentence: when her husband discovers her transgression he instructs her to wear the choker for her decapitation. The choker as fetish object is heavy with signification. In a footnote to her essay “Perverse Pleasure and Fetishized Text,” Becky MacLaughlin notes that what is “[m]ost striking about this fetish is its paradoxical potential

for castrating (death by strangulation) and at the same time concealing castration (a cover for the mark of the guillotine – or, perhaps, for a vampire bite)¹.

11 One of the best illustrations of how the Marquis' voyeuristic gaze is both violent and seductive occurs in an early scene in the story, when he takes his young bride to the opera. Here, adorned in expensive clothes and jewellery, his bride is shocked at encountering his violent gaze: "I saw him watching me in the gilded mirrors with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh, or even of a housewife in the market, inspecting cuts on the slab. I'd never seen, or else had never acknowledged, that regard of his before, the sheer carnal avarice of it" (115).

12 This passage highlights the different positions that men and women have traditionally occupied as visual subjects within a patriarchal society. John Berger captures this distinction in a famous and succinct passage in his book *Ways of Seeing*: "*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (47). I will return to this distinction later on in the analysis of the young woman's particular form of seeing. For now I wish only to note the distinctions Carter creates in this passage, with the Marquis taking the active, gazing position and his young bride passively reflecting on his look at her. The sense of his gaze as active is emphasised by the violence of his look in the metaphor of her body as dead meat. By contrast, the passivity of her own look is highlighted by the fact that she is looking at herself not only through his eyes but also through the reflection of a mirror, an object traditionally associated with women's vanity, as depicted in the tradition of the nude painting.² As we will see in the course of my analysis, part of Carter's aim in this story is to reveal how this opposition is both violent and conventional (or normal), and that deconstructing this power-structure is both possible and important. The significance of this gesture lies particularly in the comment above that the young woman had perhaps noticed the Marquis' gaze before, but had not acknowledged it. This distinction reveals the normality and therefore invisibility of certain ways of looking, despite the violence in them. It is this opacity that writers like Carter, and feminist theorists like Mulvey, have sought to bring to light.

13 The power of this way of looking is also revealed in a couple of other key passages. Here, we get a sense that the Marquis' gaze is not tied to him as an individual but is rather an abstract position of power that is assumed by him, a generalised way of looking within a certain form of society, and also in part a condition of being part of the visible world. This

¹ In this context it is also worth noting that Freud associated decapitation with castration. See his short piece entitled "Medusa's Head."

² The hypocrisy that constitutes the association of women with vanity in the nude tradition is well analysed by Berger in chapter 3 of *Ways of Seeing*.

idea can be found in many theories of the relationship between subjectivity and the visual: both Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Lacan argue that the gaze of the Other is a kind of formal structure that both constitutes and haunts subjectivity, so that we come to feel that we are always in the presence of the Other's look. Similarly, for Mulvey and Berger the gaze is assumed by the male subject within patriarchal society as a means of domination over female subjects, but in principle it need not be this way – the roles could be reversed so that women occupy the dominant scopic position. One main difference between the two sets of thinkers is that Sartre and Lacan are more interested in the way in which the subject, male or female, exists in the presence of the Other as an existential condition of being – we all inhabit a visual world and are all subject to being seen at any moment. By contrast, Mulvey and Berger are more interested in conventional ways of seeing, tied to particular art-forms, that place gendered subjects in different positions so that the structures of patriarchal society tend to place men in the position of subject of the gaze, whilst placing women in a passive, self-reflexive position, or object of the gaze. Nevertheless, they all seem to share the notion that subjects internalise the structure of the gaze (the condition of visibility), whether this be an abstract and universal gaze that derives from being part of a visual world, or a gendered gaze that derives from the unequal distribution of power within a particular form of society, highlighted by paintings and films.³

14 As mentioned before, “The Bloody Chamber” contains at least two important scenes which can be read with respect to this notion of a disembodied gaze that is internalised, in this case the Marquis' gaze that is internalised by his young bride. Firstly, en route to the Marquis' castle by train at night, the young woman, who cannot sleep, has the feeling that her husband is looking at her through the darkness. Despite the fact that she detects no change in his breathing, nonetheless her “heightened excited senses told me he was awake and gazing at me” (116). It turns out that he is in fact awake, but this passage hints at the fact that his gaze is starting to exercise an almost omnipotent power over her – that she feels the presence of his gaze independently of the recognition of his eyes on her. A later scene demonstrates this

³ The relevant texts are: Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Mulvey's “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, and Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. Whilst there are considerable differences between each of them, such as their different disciplines and backgrounds (philosophy, psychoanalysis, film theory, art theory), they all seem fascinated with the distribution of power within the visible world. Sartre's account of the look stresses the inter-subjective battle of looks between two people, whilst Berger and Mulvey both argue (in their own ways) that women are subjected to the gaze of men, a gaze that places them in a passive, self-reflexive mode of being. What I find most relevant in these accounts for the passage above is the shared conviction that such a structure is internalised by subjects, so that one feels watched as if by objects – that gaze being not tied necessarily to the eyes of another, but manifesting its power all around us.

notion even more strongly. After entering the forbidden chamber and discovering the bodies of his previous wives, she notes that “[t]he light caught the fire opal on my hand so that it flashed, once, with a baleful light, as if to tell me the eye of God – his eye – was upon me” (132). Even more than in the previous passage, here the Marquis’ dominating male gaze is revealed as a kind of all-seeing eye, tied not to his body but manifesting its power and presence in objects associated with him. In his account of what he refers to as ‘the look’, Sartre argues that the feeling of being looked at is not necessarily tied to the eyes of another person, but can be triggered by any number of phenomena: “a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain” (Sartre 257). A phrase from Peter Wollen’s essay on the gaze captures this idea succinctly: “[w]e cannot see the look, but we can feel its force” (96). John Berger’s argument in *Ways of Seeing* that women internalise the look of men in order to try and master how they are seen in a bid for power within a patriarchal society seems to agree with this general point about the location of the look of the Other.⁴ In all these different accounts, there is a recognition that our lives take place within a visual field, and that because of this we internalise the notion that we are always open to the look of another. What Carter does in these passages, in a similar way to Berger and Mulvey, is to highlight the power of a (conventionalised) male gaze, to show how it manifests itself in multiple ways, and to communicate both its violence and its seductiveness to us.

15 Further confirmation of the Marquis’ scopophilia can be found in the sexual confrontations between him and his bride, which highlight the pornographic nature of his way of seeing. In a first scene, in the woman’s bedroom, the Marquis seems to place his young wife into a highly visible position, as if putting her on show for the purpose of exciting his desire. The bedroom contains an enormous, gothic-style bed, surrounded by many mirrors which have the effect of reflecting and multiplying her image. Upon seeing this “multitude of girls” the Marquis jokes that he has “acquired a whole harem” for himself (118). Despite her shyness, he undresses her “as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke” (118), a metaphor that conveys both the violence of his selfish desire and the pornographic sense of wanting to see everything – to penetrate behind the façade and see all. Further emphasising the visual dimension of his desire, she describes him as an “old, monocled lecher” who

⁴ See chapter three of his *Ways of Seeing*. Lacan’s famous example of the gaze emanating from a tuna-can floating in the sea also develops this point about the location of the gaze. For him, the gaze is not tied to the eyes but is located at the level of the object. Hence the gaze is something that slips past us, eludes us. As Lacan writes, “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides” (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 72)

examines her like “a lamb chop”,⁵ and refers to the situation as “[m]ost pornographic of all confrontations” (119). Despite the Marquis’ desire to strip his wife bare in this pornographic fashion, this mode of seeing paradoxically fails to encounter the object aimed at. For as his wife remarks, “when nothing but my scarlet, palpitating core remained, I saw, in the mirror, the living image of an etching by Rops from the collection he had shown me” (118). From the woman’s point of view, being stripped naked reveals not herself but a generic pornographic representation.⁶ Furthermore, since the young woman has been coerced into adopting her husband’s point of view (seeing herself as he sees her) we can infer that this pornographic image by Rops is what he sees when looking at her naked too. The Marquis’ desire is both mediated through and caused by this pornographic etching, and the young woman is only necessary in so far as she helps realise this image – making it/her ready for consumption/consummation.

16 Surprisingly, perhaps, the act of consummation does not then take place and the scene ends abruptly with the Marquis telling his bride that “[a]nticipation is the greater part of pleasure” (119), thus demonstrating further that she is playing his game of desire. Becky MacLaughlin argues that the Marquis’ desire is based in perverse fantasy so that he needs a fantasy screen to consummate his desire. The pornographic etching by Rops clearly functions in this way. However, as she goes on to say, “[i]t is not until the marquis finds his wife looking at a pornographic book that he is able to perform the sexual act” (MacLaughlin 412). Furthermore, she explains that the pervert needs the object of desire to be seen as innocent. Both of these conditions are met in a later scene that takes place in his library, and it is then that she can finally be projected into his fantasy long enough for consummation to take place (MacLaughlin 6). The Marquis finds his young bride perusing some of his pornographic

⁵ These metaphors of the artichoke and the lamb chop are also worth remarking on for their domestic quality and recall the earlier metaphor of dead meat. All three metaphors not only place the young woman firmly in the domestic sphere, a traditional move in itself, but also transform her into an object for consumption. In this set of associations, it is also noteworthy that the French word “consommation” means both “consumption” and “consummation.” It is clear that the Marquis is not just one who takes pleasure in looking (scopophilia) but also pleasure in consuming. As I will go on to argue, the Marquis’ ability to consume/consummate is dependent on his ability to enjoy visually the object of his desire.

⁶ Peter Brooks makes a comparable point in his analysis of Zola’s *Nana* in his book *Realist Vision*, arguing that we never truly see Nana naked. In his analysis of the scene in which Nana undresses and is naked in front of Muffat, Brooks makes the following point: “At this moment of *maximal* seeing in the novel, there is an *avoidance of seeing* what is there. Nana’s *sex* is presented as hidden, an occult source of power, as of heat and energy, all the more powerful for not being seen, or seeable. And the descriptive prose veers into the mythic, toward the biblical beast, and a larger-than-life monster” (119). In “The Bloody Chamber” we find something similar: a moment of “maximal seeing”, to use Brooks’ phrase, but also of unseeing. Instead of seeing the young woman’s naked body we see a pornographic sketch. This is not just what we and the young woman see, but also what (we infer) the Marquis sees. It is another mythic image of woman, which veils the actual naked body of the woman. Later on, we will see further evidence of this repression of the female body in the symbol of the blood-stained key.

books, and in particular an image displaying a violent sadomasochistic scenario. Upon seeing her shocked face the Marquis appears excited and takes her up to her room again, where the act of consummation finally takes place. The image itself is further evidence of his voyeurism and fetishism, and also foreshadows the events that take place later on, when the young woman falls into the Marquis' trap, enters his forbidden bloody chamber, and is then caught and sentenced to death. The theme of dangerous curiosity, of a too-strong desire for knowledge, is thereby related to and emphasised by the theme of ways of seeing. The Marquis' voyeurism and pornographic obsession actually seems to fuel the young bride's desire to see what is in his secret chamber. Throughout the story then, it is the Marquis' way of seeing that determines the sequence of events up until the finale when the mother rescues her daughter.

17 In addition to the different facets of the Marquis' voyeuristic gaze, it is equally important to examine the young woman's way of seeing in order to better grasp how it is that she is seduced by it, adopting his point of view, internalising his gaze, and identifying with the mythic images he provides for her. For it is clear that the dangers Carter writes about concern women just as much, or perhaps even more so, than men. Although the Marquis is clearly oppressive in the ways in which he gazes at his bride, turning her into a fetish object, and projecting her onto a fantasy screen for the purpose of exciting his own desire, to a certain degree she is complicit with this. How and why she comes to occupy this position is the focus of the next section.

Seduction through Narcissism

18 The second mode of vision in "The Bloody Chamber" that I will consider is that of narcissistic identification. This way of seeing is adopted by the young woman and is partly responsible for her complicity with the Marquis' violence. For the Marquis is able to gaze at her, fetishize her, and project her into his fantasy screen precisely because he preys upon the structure of narcissistic identification, seducing her with flattering images that promise her a level of mastery and control she lacks.

19 Returning to the scene at the opera analysed earlier, we find an example of how his gaze seduces her into assuming his way of looking at her, his image of her: "When I saw him look at me with lust, I dropped my eyes but, in glancing away from him, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. And *I saw myself*, suddenly, *as he saw me* [...] And, for the first time in my innocent and confined life, *I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption* that took my breath away" (115, emphasis added).

20 Here we see how the Marquis' gaze, whilst clearly violent and voyeuristic, nevertheless appeals to the young woman because of the way in which it stirs something within her, giving her a sense of empowerment – that she has the power to excite the gaze of others. In a later scene, as her husband is watching her naked, she notices this “potentiality for corruption” again: “And, as at the opera, when I had first seen my flesh in his eyes, I was aghast to feel myself stirring” (119). Both these passages reveal how her desire has been incited and remoulded by his. When she sees his desire for her she takes pleasure in it because she feels a sense of control and mastery. These two passages tie in with John Berger's argument in *Ways of Seeing* that in a society that privileges men and their ability to act upon the world, women learn to see how they are looked at by men in a bid to determine how they are treated. As Berger puts it, “[a] woman must continuously watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. [...] From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually” (46). Through the figures of the sadistic Marquis and his young bride, Carter shows us the violence of this power-structure: his visual domination, his way of seducing her into seeing herself as he sees her, is exposed for what it really is when she discovers his bloody chamber and finally recognises his character. But Carter also shows us how it is possible that women are persuaded to adopt a man's perspective on themselves. The young bride is attracted to her husband's point of view of herself because these self-images promise her a level of beauty and mastery that she feels she lacks. Part of Carter's brilliance, displayed in “The Bloody Chamber” and the other short stories in this collection, lies in her unflinching exploration of the dynamics, social and psychological, of human relationships. She shows that violence is not always and straightforwardly abhorrent and repellent, but also sometimes seductive and opaque.

21 Another relevant example of this structure of narcissistic identification is to be found in the painting of Saint Cecilia that the Marquis hangs in his bride's music room. This painting provides her with another image with which to identify. As she says: “I saw myself as I could have wished to be” (118). Here, the young woman reveals the way in which images are seductive because they flatter one's narcissism. This passage can be productively read alongside Lacan's work on the Imaginary, in particular his concepts of the ‘mirror stage’ and the ‘ideal ego.’ Lacan's idea is that the formation of subjectivity begins with the attempt to overcome a deficiency (the infant's motor unco-ordination) by identifying with a specular image of oneself that creates a compensatory fantasy of self-mastery. In short, the dependent infant misrecognises her image of herself as a whole, complete and independent being because she is motivated by the desire to overcome the actual deficiency or lack experienced

corporally. The ideal ego is thus the image of ourselves as we would like to be seen, and what is most important is that this process of identification is a never-ending one: throughout our lives we continually identify with images that give us a kind of narcissistic pleasure. We take pleasure in this process because it allows us to fantasise that we have obtained a level of self-mastery which we usually lack.⁷

22 In Carter's story, the numerous images that the Marquis provides for his wife, such as the painting of Saint Cecilia and the mirror-scene at the opera, function in a similar way. They are offered to (or forced onto) her ego, the part of herself which desires wholeness and autonomous agency. The Marquis thus exploits the situation that Lacan outlines, playing on the structure of identification and the assumption of images in order to coerce his bride into adopting images and a view of herself that excites or plays into his desire. Carter's story thus shows the seductiveness as well as the explicit danger of identifying with man's, or to be more precise, patriarchal society's, image of woman. The young woman is clearly seduced by the self-images that the Marquis gives her, as well as his wealth and power. As she notes, "This ring, the bloody bandage of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth [...] all had conspired to seduce me..." (115), though she neglects to add the painting of Saint Cecilia and the Marquis' gaze, which she internalises.

23 Whilst her ego is offered seductive images that flatter her, the price the young woman pays for this is her freedom as an independent subject, highlighted in the strongest possible way in the story by her sentence to death by her husband. But the image of Saint Cecilia hanging above the piano also demonstrates a more concrete and less extreme aspect of what she sacrifices in internalising such flattering images: the young woman sacrifices her project of playing the piano. As Berger argues, in an attempt to create a successful life for themselves within a patriarchal society, women internalise the perspective of the surveyor and thus become both surveyed and surveyor. The price they pay though is that they can never just act – they will always be accompanied by the image of their acts. As Berger puts it, "[woman's] own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another" (46). This has the consequence that her social presence is constituted by this treatment of herself by herself. Her presence is not based on what she does, but on how she treats herself and by implication how she would like to be treated. In the case of "The Bloody Chamber", the young woman has devoted herself to years of study of the piano, her mother even selling her own jewellery in order to pay the fees of the conservatoire – sacrificing part

⁷ See Lacan's essay "The Mirror Stage" in his *Écrits: A Selection*.

of her ability to look beautiful in order to help encourage and develop her daughter's talent. In contrast to the mother's self-sacrifice and encouragement of her daughter's independent and active project, the Marquis hangs a seductive image in the music room as if to distract his bride from her piano playing and encourage her to spend more time on her outward appearance.

24 Before moving on to consider alternatives to this visual power structure, one further visual detail with respect to the young woman warrants attention. Whilst inside the Marquis' bloody chamber, the young woman drops the key to the door in a pool of blood, and no matter how hard she tries, she cannot remove the stain. This detail is intriguing for what it simultaneously reveals and conceals. Upon discovering this bloody key, the Marquis recognises her guilt in entering his forbidden room and then presses the key to her forehead, leaving a red mark there which we learn at the end of the story has forever remained imprinted on her. What is of particular interest in this visual stain, though, is that it can be read as signifying not just her guilt but also sexual difference, the former revealed explicitly whilst the latter remaining concealed or repressed. McLaughlin argues that the stain signifies menstrual blood and therefore reminds the Marquis, as pervert, of what he has repressed, namely sexual difference (MacLaughlin, 6). This visual stain functions therefore as a condensed signifier of the central issue of vision in Carter's short story, bringing together the seen and the unseen, sexual difference, and the power structure of property, ownership, and desire.

Alternatives to the Gaze

25 I conclude by considering two alternatives to this destructive economy of vision in "The Bloody Chamber." The first alternative is glimpsed briefly in the figure of the mother. At the beginning of the story, we read that she had once "outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates; nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand" (111). The mother is thus a fearless, independent, and successful woman. But she is also unselfish and generous: we read just a few lines down that she had "beggared herself for love" (111), such as selling her jewellery to pay the conservatoire fees for her daughter as noted earlier. At the end of the story the mother comes to the rescue of her daughter and saves her from imminent death, thus occupying a heroic figure that is usually the province of male characters. The young woman describes her mother as "wild", her hair like "a white mane", confidently holding onto the reins of her rearing horse with one hand only while her other hand "clasped my father's service revolver" (142). Before she successfully shoots and

kills the Marquis, her confident, assertive image paralyses him, and he stares at her “as if she had been Medusa” (142). This reference recalls not only Freud’s famous remarks on the myth of Medusa (about castration anxiety and the repression of sexual difference) but also Hélène Cixous’ influential essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” with its call-to-arms for an affirmative feminine mode of being and “écriture féminine.” The mother is thus both strong and sensitive. Both of these qualities are also evidenced by her decision to come to the rescue of her daughter in the first place. Earlier in the story, the young woman had telephoned her mother, clearly upset but not revealing anything about her husband’s violence – she had not yet discovered the secret of his bloody chamber and had not thus recognised the true violence of his character. On the basis of this telephone call though, the mother seems to have had an inkling of her daughter’s true distress and therefore made a decision to come to her daughter’s aid immediately. The young woman refers to this sensitivity as “*maternal telepathy*” (143), which can be read as an attentiveness to others, by contrast with the Marquis’ self-centred character, focused only on turning others into objects of visual pleasure. This first alternative is thus an alternative image of femininity: unlike her daughter, who is seduced by the Marquis’ powerful and violent male gaze, the mother recognises the violence of this economy of vision and confidently asserts an alternative way of being. Whereas the Marquis adorns his bride with expensive jewellery, the mother sells her own jewels for the betterment of her daughter’s skills at the piano. This example reveals a difference between mother and daughter at the level of the visual: the latter a model of passive femininity seduced by the male gaze, the former dispensing with this form of unfreedom and affirming a more active mode of being.

26 The second alternative to the visual economy of the gaze is represented by the blind piano-tuner. One way in which he represents an alternative lies in his blindness, which precludes any form of scopophilia – he is unable to subject others to a voyeuristic gaze. Some critics, such as Becky MacLaughlin, have read his blindness as a form of castration. As she explains, “Once [the young woman] escapes the clutches of her murderous husband, she gives herself to the blind piano-tuner, a man whose blindness signifies him as castrated. Though a man who could offer emotional support to her at the castle, he is completely ineffectual in saving her from the marquis” (408). Contrasted with the powerful mother-figure, the blind piano-tuner appears powerless and a maimed figure. On this reading, he represents an alternative to the Marquis’ violent scopophilia in so far as he is unable to look,

rather than in the conscious choice not to. In this sense, he cannot easily be read as a heroic figure that challenges patriarchal norms, but rather as a disempowered male figure.⁸

27 A more positive way of reading this character lies in his choice of profession as piano-tuner, as well as his developed sense of hearing caused by his blindness. His skill in tuning pianos demands that he listen carefully and exercise patience, qualities wholly absent in the Marquis. Indeed, we can even read the piano-tuner's blindness in a similar fashion: it forces his hearing to become more proficient, thereby encouraging qualities of receptiveness and attentiveness. When the young woman and he first meet, he demonstrates these qualities by asking to hear her play sometimes, for "he loved music," and upon hearing her affirmative answer he "seemed to know that I had smiled," demonstrating his sensitivity towards her (126). Later, he remarks that "When I heard you play this afternoon, I thought I'd never heard such a touch. Such technique" (134). Instead of turning the young woman into an object of visual pleasure, the piano-tuner listens to her "touch" and "technique," impressed at her skill rather than her appearance. The difference between the Marquis and the piano-tuner is also revealed in their eyes. Although the piano-tuner is blind his eyes are described as "singularly sweet" (134), and he has a "tender look" (135). By contrast, the Marquis has "eyes that always disturbed me by their absolute absence of light" (112). We might also recall the Marquis' "assessing eye" that the young woman sees in the mirror at the opera. The contrast between the Marquis and the piano-tuner also shows that the male gaze is not tied exclusively and necessarily to the male gender. Carter's story works against essentialist accounts of gender and the visual. Rather, the piano-tuner demonstrates that there are alternatives to this visual economy of active-male and passive-female.

28 In his essay on storytelling, Walter Benjamin argues that the storyteller communicates experience through his/her tales. Despite his fear that this is becoming a thing of the past, Angela Carter seems to reassert the power of storytelling, communicating the experience of being a woman in a society that places women in a position of passivity, forced to reflect on their appearance, and turned into objects of a male gaze. The fairy tale genre is thus harnessed by Carter for the purposes of consciousness-raising, adapting a familiar tale for her own purposes, as well as implicitly commenting on the traditions and uses of such tales. Her female first-person narrator communicates her experiences and the social and material conditions of her life through the flexible structure of the fairy tale. To be sure, this tale does not present a violent economy of vision as set in stone for all time, and neither does it suggest

⁸ Somewhat similar to Mr Rochester at the end of *Jane Eyre*.

that the gaze is always male. The figures of the mother and the blind piano-tuner suggest that there are alternatives. But what stands out most about the “The Bloody Chamber” is its dark and bloody journey into the seductive power of a violent economy of vision. The dominant experience communicated through this fairy story (that is also a fairy story about a fairy story) is that of the dangerous ease with which one is seduced by powerful structures of vision.

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Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant

Men. By Carlos Ulises Decena. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

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1 Gay men in racial minority and immigrant communities encounter multiple levels of oppression and stigmatization, e.g., the intersectional construction as the racial other and the sexual deviance. Minority and immigrant gay men also face homophobia from their community members. They are blamed for bringing shame upon their communities, which demand men to uphold the dominant ideology of hegemonic masculinity in a racist and sexist society. In this globalized world under which national boundaries are often blurred, how do immigrant gay men negotiate their sexual identity in the process of transnational migration? Exploring an uncharted territory, Decena in *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men* examines experiences of Dominican immigrant gay and bisexual men in New York. Central to the text are the following questions: How do Dominican immigrant gay men in New York reconfigure their sexual identity and gender presentation through transnational migration? How do they refashion themselves as modern subjects? How does their migration reshape their relationships to their homeland and their identification with Dominicanidad (Dominican identity and community)? What are the implications of their ambivalence toward the US colonial legacy as well as their simultaneous construction of the United States as the modern and Dominican Republic as the backward? What does all this mean in terms of their stigmatization as the racial/sexual other and their idealization of white gay men and identification with whiteness?

2 Decena makes several contributions substantively. One central theme in his text is the disciplining of the body. Many gay men in his study discuss the necessity to present themselves as “real men,” which requires them to erase signs of effeminacy through changing their mannerism and speech since childhood to the present. They have to consciously discipline their own body presentations and produce the facade of heterosexual masculinity in front of others. For many, the pressure for masculine performance persists after they migrate to the US. For example, some gay men conceal their sexual identity at work since heterosexual masculinity signifies “seriousness,” which confers privileges and power. Whether one stays in or out of the

closet depends on the context. The author uses the term “code swishing” to describe the two worlds that these men have to traverse and switch their performance accordingly.

3 While some gay men continue to remain in the closet, many of them perceive the transnational migration as their entry into modernity and their opportunity to present their authentic selves as well as refashion themselves as modern sexual subjects in an emancipatory milieu. They idealize (white) gay men as liberated and progressive, thus identifying with whiteness. However, they embrace their sexual freedom and liberation in the United States with ambivalence due to the American colonial legacy in Dominican Republic.

4 Many gay men in the study deliberately distance themselves from Dominicanidad (Dominican identity and community) for various reasons. For them, Dominicanidad replicates Dominican Republic in New York, particularly the problematic aspects. Rather than embracing the modernity, they don't utilize what transnational migration offers them, such as education, better job opportunities, and self-improvement. Still clinging on to their national identity and loyal to the Dominican nationalism, they work to save money with the hope to return home to live a better life. For these gay men, Dominicanidad continues to reproduce sexism, genderism, and homophobia prevalent in the Dominican society. However, these gay men's idealization of the United States reproduces the ideological construction of US as the modern and advanced and Dominican Republic as the backward and repressive.

5 One way they show their distance from Dominicanidad is their sexual practices. Refusing to carry on the activo/pasivo role and perpetuate the racialized sexual image of Dominican men as the masculine and dominant in sexual encounters, these immigrant gay men adopt “democracy in bed.” They look for men who do not hold on to the ideology of machismo and are willing to be versatile in bed. Yet, as the author argues, the racialized sexual image of Dominican gay men and the ideology of machismo continue to be upheld by both whites and non-whites, including Dominican men. Non-white groups are thus complicit in reproducing Dominican men's images for sexual consumption. The constructed sexual image of Dominican men and the consumption of their masculine body circulate across transnational borders. One example would be sex tourism. Men from the West, white men in particular, travel to Dominican Republic to consume Dominican male bodies and continue to deem them as sexual objects in these sexual encounters.

6 One major missing piece in the text is the lack of methodological reflections, which I believe warrant discussions. He names his interview method as retrospective life-history interviews. Twenty-two men reflect upon their experiences of growing up as children, teenagers, and adults in Dominican Republic and their settlement in the United States. They describe major events related to their struggles with family pressure and social stigma. They discuss their shifting performativity as they traverse in and out of the closet. Yet when we describe events in the past, our recollections do not reflect how events happen in actuality. Our memory is always selective and our reflection of the past is always interpretive. We use the present as the lens to interpret the past and our interpretation changes depending on our temporal and spatial locations. Since the interviews were conducted ten years ago, these gay men's retrospections of their past and reflections of their present would most likely be different today. A discussion of how people recollect and interpret the past seems to be necessary, particularly for the retrospective life-history approach.

7 Most of these gay men are the author's friends and acquaintances. The author uses semi-structured interviews to gather data. Yet, it raises some interesting questions. For example, how do we define data? How does data get legitimated? Is the line between "formal" interviews (legitimated by scientific method) and informal conversations between the author and friends that clear-cut? How does the author's familiarity with his friends shape his interpretation of their narratives? Further, the author is part of the Dominican gay community. My questions are: How does he negotiate his dual positions as both an insider (a Dominican gay man) and an outsider (researcher)? How do his own views, partially shaped by his socioeconomic and educational statuses, about Dominican Republic and Dominicanidad in New York shape his questions and interpretations? The author acknowledges that writing this book is an interpretive act. However, he misses the opportunity to explore and reflect on above central issues and methodological implications.

8 The book is written mainly for an academic audience. Since this topic is understudied, it might be better for the author to write for a wider audience. Nevertheless, this book integrates knowledge from multiple disciplines and is a must read for scholars in different fields, such as transnational migration, immigration, sexuality, gender, race, and area studies.

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