

RECLAIMING THE FAIRY TALE AS A FEMINIST GENRE AMONG
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS:
A DISCUSSION OF MOTHERHOOD, ECONOMICS, AND MARRIAGE

A Senior Honors Thesis

By

HEATHER E. HOLCOMBE

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs
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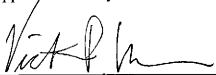
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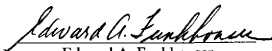
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Approved as to style and content by:



Victoria Rosner
(Fellows Advisor)



Edward A. Funkhouser
(Executive Director)

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ABSTRACT

Reclaiming the Fairy Tale as a Feminist Genre Among
Contemporary British Women Writers:

A Discussion of Motherhood, Economics, and Marriage. (April 2000)

Heather E. Holcombe
Department of English
Texas A&M UniversityFellows Advisor: Dr. Victoria Rosner
Department of English

A considerable number of British women writers have drawn on fairy tale narratives or themes in contemporary works from the late 1970's to the early 1990's. This trend is surprising because fairy tales have been criticized for idealizing limited gender roles and stressing the importance of marriage as a means to reaching happiness. Why are prominent writers such as Angela Carter, Carolyn Steedman, Fay Weldon, and Jeanette Winterson returning to the prescriptive and limiting texts of fairy tales, and how are they utilizing them?

These writers are reclaiming a domain of storytelling that historically originates with women, as well as challenging the narrow moral direction the tales have taken since the seventeenth century. Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson are adopting this female realm of storytelling and using it to develop a body of feminist writing. There is a striking similarity in the concerns among these writers, who are universally revising the terms of motherhood in fairy tales, and simultaneously addressing issues of economic status that force women to marry. Because the publications in this study occur

within a thirteen-year time period (1977-90), they suggest a cultural motivation for the uniformity of the revisions.

The value in understanding feminist revisions of fairy tales lies in the inherent function of the fairy tale itself, which is to provide a model of cultural expectations. The examination of fairy tales affords us an opportunity to identify our cultural values, and to change those that do not suit us best, as these writers demonstrate with their works.

Thank you Dr. Rosner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER	page
I INTRODUCTION: FAIRY TALES AS A FEMINIST GENRE.....	1
II ANGELA CARTER: RESTORING FAIRY TALE MOTHERHOOD TO A POSITION OF STRENGTH.....	8
III FAY WELDON: FAIRY TALES FOR EVERY DAY.....	23
IV JEANETTE WINTERSON: IF THE STORY DOESN'T WORK, CHANGE IT.....	38
V CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING A FEMINIST GENRE.....	49
REFERENCES.....	57
VITA.....	60

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FAIRY TALES AS A FEMINIST GENRE

“Fairy tale constituted in itself a genre of protest; at the level of content it could describe wrongs and imagine vindications and freedom; from the point of view of form, it was presented as modern, homegrown fabulism, perfectly suited to express the thoughts of a group also perceived as low.”

—Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde:
On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*

The basis of this study is to examine how and why contemporary British women writers have recently given fairy tales a privileged position in their works. Angela Carter, Carolyn Steedman, Fay Weldon, and Jeanette Winterson each published works containing fairy tales between the years 1977 to 1990. The number of women writers focusing on the fairy tale within such a specific time period is deserving of attention because it suggests a common motivation and a common goal. Published contemporaneously with or soon after a wave of feminist criticism that highlighted the damaging portrayal of gender roles in fairy tales, the texts in this study utilize the ideas cultivated by this criticism and actually revise the tales. Hence, Angela Carter, Carolyn Steedman, Fay Weldon, and Jeanette Winterson are not only women writers, but also feminist writers who have set out on a task of creating new fairy tales that can serve as positive models for women.

The observations of the feminist criticism of women's roles in fairy tales is broad, ranging from the fact that the tales are violent toward women to the idea that they constrict women to roles as beauty queens. Jack Zipes, in his work on “Little Red Riding Hood,” exposes the tale as one of rape “in which the heroine is obliged to bear the

responsibility for sexual violation” (209). Other critics such as Marcia Lieberman stress the asymmetrical roles assigned to boys and girls in fairy tales, where girls are valued only for their beauty, boys for their skill: “Girls win the prize if they are the fairest of them all; boys win if they are bold, active, and lucky” (in Zipes 187-88). Colette Dowling emphasizes the need for the princess to be rescued by the prince rather than having her own volition, something she has termed “The Cinderella Complex” (31). Yet even in acknowledging the importance of feminist criticism of fairy tales in creating a consciousness of the harm in fairy tales, there remains a central question to this study, which is the seeming irrationality of feminists using the fairy tale at all—why return to a genre that has proven itself to be sexist? What might seem to be a socially conservative task of maintaining the fairy tale is actually a logical political and historical motivation to adopt the fairy tale as a feminist genre.

The feminist political aim in returning to fairy tales centers on a recognition of the cultural power they have achieved, and to adjust the messages they send. Acknowledging the pervasiveness of the fairy tale, Christina Bacchilega writes that “we respond to stereotyped and institutionalized fragments of these narratives sufficiently for them to be good bait in jokes, commercials, songs, cartoons, and other elements of popular and consumer culture” (2). Bacchilega’s argument is strongly supported by the extent to which fairy tales reach into culture; Disney productions of fairy tales are immeasurably popular, other films such as Pretty Woman portray recognizable fairy tale “rags to riches” plots, and we all know and refer to the phrase “happily ever after.” Nowhere can the extensive reach or potential harm of the fairy tale be better understood

than in the work of psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, whose study *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, incorporates the tales into the psychological counseling of his patients. Bettelheim argues that fairy tales serve important psychological functions that help children to resolve conflict, and that they provide a proper moral example (5, 8). However, Bettelheim's analyses stand in the way of his intentions to help children, and reveal the danger in relying on fairy tales as behavioral models in his diagnoses.

When treating a young woman having difficulty in her relationship with her mother, whom Bettelheim reports as "cold and distant," he employed the story "Snow White" for the girl's treatment so that she could learn to cope with the troubled relationship. He reported that just as Snow White escaped from her wicked stepmother, "this child too, did not despair because of her mother's desertion, but trusted that rescue would come from males" (16). Not only has Bettelheim asked this young woman to abandon her relationship with her mother rather than deal with it, he has recommended that she become needy, helpless, and dependent on the prince, just as fairy tale heroines have been described. In a second instance, Bettelheim concludes that "in reality love between a woman and man is the most satisfying of all emotions, and the only one which makes for permanent happiness" (306). In this case, the client is a homosexual young man whom Bettelheim steers toward heterosexuality with fairy tales. The damage in this lesson is the assumption that people can change their sexuality, and that they will be happier in doing so. Bettelheim plays with fairy tale themes of metamorphosis that require that people change to fit one kind of ideal rather than acknowledging the variety

that should be available through shift and change; the boy is outside the boundaries of the traditional narrative, and therefore should change to be within it. Bettelheim posits one path to happiness for every person, which is a dangerous generalization because it assumes that a singular model can (and should) serve *every* person. This insistence on singularity automatically excludes those who cannot relate, marginalizing them by disallowing the existence of a legitimized cultural model of their lives.

Perhaps the most alarming issue present in Bettelheim's readings of fairy tales is that they are valid. He can easily derive his lessons from the tales. His readings are, in fact, very similar to those of feminist critics. The difference is that Bettelheim endorses models of female dependency and required heterosexuality that feminists show to be harmful. Bettelheim, in his argument for the benefits of fairy tales, does a very good job of displaying the potential damage in using them as behavioral models. Seeing the far-reaching and negative scope of fairy tales, it starts to become clear why feminist writers would have an interest in influencing their messages. Upon understanding the historical development of the tales, the reasons for feminists to return to them only become clearer.

Marina Warner's study *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* takes a historical approach to fairy tales, and she places the origin of tale telling with women. Warner describes a tradition of storytelling beginning with pre-Christian Sybils and traces the root of the word "fairy" to its feminine roots in Latin (14). She highlights that tale telling offered a realm where those without a voice in society could create one. The illiterate, the poor, and especially women found solace in gathering together to weave their own stories, giving them not only a chance to speak out in a world

that paid little attention to them, but providing an arena of fantasy where they could become rich, important, and lucky (21-22). Fairy tales did not achieve a moral status, nor were they meant for children until Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers recorded and adapted them in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (xvi-xvii). Until this time, fairy tales had been considered subversive by dominant cultural institutions of male authority, such as the church, because they often times took place among unsupervised groups of women over extended periods of time, in public laundries and spinning rooms, for example (35). That the tales took place largely among groups of working women will become an extremely important idea later in this study. Attempts to negate the significance of these stories resulted in the term “Old wives’ tale,” belittling the value of tales told by women (19). Considering this history of fairy tales, it seems natural that feminists would want to reclaim a tradition that once belonged to women, especially because it has become so detrimental, as we have seen through examples like Bettelheim. In returning to fairy tales, Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson are taking back a realm where women’s voices once dominated and appropriating it to re-create a body of feminist texts.

In their works Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson critique the fairy tale plot that defines the role of women as marrying the rich prince. Each articulates that marriage to the prince is portrayed as romantically desirable, but is in actuality a necessity, because princesses do not have their own money, nor are they given the option of taking care of themselves. Marriage is the only option in the fairy tale, something Bettelheim reveals in the section of his book subtitled *The Knight in Shining Armor and the Damsel in*

Distress: “Details may differ, but the basic plot is always the same the unlikely hero proves himself through slaying dragons, solving riddles, and living by his wits and goodness until eventually he frees the beautiful princess, marries her, and lives happily ever after” (208). The prince, in essence, is the key to survival. Because marriage to the prince is a necessity, it forces women into competition with each other. This competition causes various repercussions among them, from the stepmother who banishes Cinderella to servanthood so that her daughters have the advantage in winning the prince, to the stepdaughters who are willing to chop off their toes in order to fit the prince’s glass slipper.

Even more specifically, each writer is particularly concerned with the role of motherhood within this system. Their observations universally focus on the fact that it is the mothers, in caring for their daughters, who must teach the princesses to compete for the prince, and hence, sentence their daughters to dependency. The fairy tale plot creates a cycle of princesses marrying the rich prince and producing daughters who learn to do the same, a cycle that Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson are breaking.

I have structured the body of this essay by author rather than by theme, because the themes that occur are often too intertwined to separate, and also because each author takes a different approach to the themes of motherhood and economic marriage in fairy tales. Carter is most explicit about revising the tales. Her collection *The Bloody Chamber* and short story “Ashputtle of The Mother’s Ghost: Three Versions of One Story” are reworkings of recognizable tales such as “Cinderella” and “Bluebeard.” Carter’s answer to destroying the economic need for women in fairy tales is to create an

extraordinarily strong mother figure and an emphasis for relationships based on love rather than money. In contrast, Fay Weldon's novels *Words of Advice* and *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* situate everyday women within fairy tale plots, emphasizing the fact that the tales really are constricting to women's lives. Weldon is less articulate of a solution to break women out of these plots; her strength lies in her critique, and she leaves an open ending. Jeanette Winterson's autobiographical piece *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* demonstrates the ways in which fairy tales can be of use to women through modification, as the narrator turns to them to resolve the conflicts that arise when she doesn't fit into the pattern of marrying the prince because of her lesbianism. Carolyn Steedman's work *Landscape for a Good Woman* explicitly describes the damage to the mother-daughter relationship when it works within the fairy tale paradigm and resolves to break the cycle of economically dependent daughters through refusing to bear children in her own life.

These authors and texts grouped themselves naturally for this study; commonalities in time period, nationality, and theme demanded attention. The uniformity of both content and time period among the works has been fascinating, and raises questions outside of the scope of this study as to what cultural event(s) might have provoked such heterogeneity. Questions I have been able to address include: How are these writers able to assure themselves that they are not bound within the confines of the sexist tales that provide the framework for their revisions? How are they avoiding the trajectory of singularity that has dominated the original tales? What new roles for women and men do they endorse? The answers lie in the tales themselves.

CHAPTER II

ANGELA CARTER: RESTORING FAIRY TALE MOTHERHOOD
TO A POSITION OF STRENGTH

“...And he is the invisible link that binds both sets of mothers and daughters in their violent equation. He is the unmoved mover, the unseen organising principle, like God, and, like God, up he pops in person, one fine day, to introduce the essential plot device.”
—Angela Carter, “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost: Three Versions of One Story”

While analyzing the plot elements of Cinderella stories in “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost,” Angela Carter identifies one of the recurring themes in fairy tales: the vital importance of the father’s money. As she articulates above, in “Cinderella,” it is the father—even though he is primarily absent—who creates the conflict in the story because the women compete and fight over his estate, his money. Cinderella is reduced to the state of a servant so that the stepmother and her daughters may enjoy the full benefits of their new, rich home. These women will later engage in a much more serious form of competition over the prince (or, the future king, the future father) and his kingdom, one ending in self-mutilation in order to fit into the glass slipper. What Carter identifies is that because fairy tales are stories where the means to survival is marriage to the rich prince, fairy tales position women as competitors in a race for their own well-being. The result is mothers who teach their daughters to sell themselves into marriage (as in “Cinderella”), and fathers who put a market value on their daughters (as in “Beauty and the Beast”). In Carter’s fairy tale revisions in *The Bloody Chamber* and her short story “Ashputtle,” she shows that only when the father is not valued for his money can women maintain meaningful relationships between themselves and men, and only

when the purpose of marriage is non-monetary can husbands and fathers be figures of love.

There is criticism, however, that denies Carter this kind of feminist revisionary accomplishment. Robert Clark has charged Carter with reinforcing the ideology of the fairy tale rather than moving away from it. He goes so far as to label Carter's revisions as "Old chauvinism, new clothing" (149). Patricia Duncker has also been a strong critic of Carter, with a similar argument that Carter's work within the original structure of the fairy tale only reinforces its strength as a constricting genre. She writes: "But the infernal trap inherent in the fairy tale, which fits the form to the purpose, to be the carrier of ideology, proves too complex and pervasive to avoid" (227). For Duncker as for Clark, the inescapable ideology of the fairy tale is a sexist one, and hence, Carter's tales are inherently sexist. It is clear, however, that Carter works against sexist arrangements, much less writes within a sexist ideology.

Duncker argues that Carter's characters continue to exist as abstractions, or archetypes of the same variety that allow fairy tales to send out their sexist messages, thus perpetuating a sexist ideology (227). Bruno Bettelheim observes that in fairy tales, "all characters are typical rather than unique," which allows them to be simple and generic—or archetypal—enough to provide the same general message to any reader, and this message has been repeatedly identified as a sexist one (8). This is where Duncker's criticism of Carter takes its issue. She sees Carter's characters as filling the same generic roles (princess, prince, wicked stepmother...) that proceed to teach the same sexist lessons. It is true that Carter does (in some cases) utilize the generic fairy tale

roles, but it will be seen that her presentation of these archetypes is so laden with harm that it can hardly be said that she is reinforcing a sexist fairy tale ideology. “Ashputtle” and “The Snow Child” are filled with generic fairy tale characters. These tales are where Carter depicts the fairy tale at its worst, indicating that she too, disapproves of the overwhelming generality of the fairy tale that presents such limited options. In portraying generic characters as troubled ones, Carter makes them a less attractive option, limiting the tendency to identify or strive after them, and hence removing their power.

Carter strengthens her position against this generality further when she uses individualized characters in “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Tiger’s Bride,” where she works to provide solutions to the problems she identifies in “Ashputtle” and “The Snow Child.” Carter’s individualized characters in “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Tiger’s Bride” escape traditional fairy tale endings, whereas her generic characters remain within them. Again, this suggests that Carter’s message lie in breaking down the monolithic structure of the fairy tale, something reiterated further in the fact that she writes multiple versions of the same tales. If Carter is interested in ideology, it is one of multiplicity, not the static, sexist model in traditional fairy tales.

Additionally, both Duncker and Clark overlook the advantage Carter gains by working within the original structure of the fairy tale. Gina Hausknecht observes that by working within the original tales, Carter “reveals to us our own immersion in the values of these myths,” forcing an understanding that there are possibilities outside what has become familiar in the tales (36). Carter exposes “the discourses encoded in the

traditional tales” through revising them within their own structure (Cranny-Francis 94). She creates an interaction between the new and the traditional text that exposes faults in the original structure while simultaneously revising it. This process negates the power of the original tale by showing that it can be dismantled through its own devices. By changing fairy tales within their own structures, Carter shows that they are neither invincible nor permanent. As Lucie Armitt argues, by altering the material within the original framework of the genre (or the “straightjacket of their original structures” as Duncker phrases it), Carter demonstrates the pliability of the fairy tale structure itself, which actually holds very little power over its contents (Armitt 93, Duncker 227). Carter destabilizes the fairy tale by changing it through its own devices.

This interaction between revision and original can be best viewed in “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost,” where the new text actually converses with the original, suggesting new possibilities while exposing the existing faults of the story “Cinderella.” The narrator considers adding depth to the characters in “Cinderella”/ “Ashputtle” that would better explain the plot but then realizes: “But it would transform the story into something else...it would mean I’d have to provide a past for all these people, that I would have to equip them with three dimensions, with tastes and memories, and I would have to think of things for them to eat and wear and say. It would transform ‘Ashputtle’ from the bare necessity of a fairy tale, with its characteristic copula formula, ‘and then,’ to the emotional complexity of bourgeois realism. They would have to learn to think. Everything would change” (392). This example not only displays the self-referentiality in the new text that calls into question the norms of the original, but the norm it

examines is the use of generic characters that Duncker charges Carter with perpetuating. Here Carter is very clearly exposing the shallowness and one-dimensionality of typical fairy tale characters and the formulaic functions they fill; her utilization of these characters shows itself to be deliberate through the above example, and serves a purpose of critique. At the heart of this critique of generic fairy tale characters and their roles lie the mother and daughter, whom Carter portrays as both perpetrators and victims of the fairy tale plot that puts them in competition to win the prince and his money. Through these archetypal characters Carter displays the economic trappings of the fairy tale for women, indicating that she sees these roles as a harmful aspect of the fairy tale, much like Duncker.

“Ashputtle” reveals that although the male characters are all but absent in the story of Cinderella, they drive the conflict among the women through the promise of their wealth: “In the drama between two female families in opposition to one another because of their rivalry over men (husband/father, husband/son), the men seem no more than passive victims of their fancy, yet their significance is absolute because it is (‘a rich man,’ ‘a king’s son’) economic” (390). The reason for the women’s concern over the father’s/prince’s money is one of necessity; those who earn the liking of the father/prince are those who are taken care of—the fairy tale allows no other means of survival for women. There is only marriage, and marriage is of the utmost importance for this very reason. Because of the economic motivation for marriage, there is no relationship between women except that of competition, which is exactly what Carter displays in “Ashputtle.”

Motherhood and daughterhood become particularly difficult roles within this economic equation, where, as Carter shows, by acting in her daughter's best interest and helping her marry the prince, the mother encourages the daughter to perpetuate her helpless situation. "On her deathbed, the mother assures the daughter: 'I shall always look after you and always be with you.' The story tells you how she does it" (391). However, helping her marry the prince isn't really help. Carter paints it as deadly: "Mother love, which winds about these daughters like a shroud," and a mother exclaims: "'Her foot fits the shoe like a corpse fits the coffin! See how well I look after you, my darling!'" (393, 394). In their willingness to help their daughters, the mothers alienate them from each other, and inflict pain and mutilation: "Brandishing the carving knife, the woman bears down on her child," all for the sake of the prince (393).

As Carter points out, if these women only decided to work together, they could be rid of the father/prince altogether, and if they wanted "he could have done the housework" (392). Yet wealth remains important in the fairy tale, and because of this, mothers teach their daughters how to survive through competition and send them on to what a fairy tale would call a "happy" fate, but in actuality, perpetuating a state of inferiority and neediness that will cycle through the next set of daughters. Carter calls attention to this cycle as a mother in "Ashputtle" "takes care" of her daughter: "'Step into my coffin.' 'No,' said the girl. She shuddered. 'I stepped into *my* mother's coffin when I was your age.' The girl stepped into the coffin although she thought it would be the death of her. It turned into a coach and horses. The horses stamped, eager to be gone. 'Go and seek your fortune, darling'" (396). Again, Carter parallels death with the

fairy tale customs: the magic stagecoach, the king's ball, the fortune awaiting in marriage; all are portents of a dependent fate for the princess. And this fate passes from mother to daughter.

This deathly association between women and the economic marriage appears in multiple characters of *The Bloody Chamber*. The mother in "The Tiger's Bride" did actually die as a result of her marriage to a wealthy man: "My mother did not blossom long; bartered for her dowry to such a feckless sprig of the Russian nobility that she soon died of his gaming, his whoring, his agonizing repentances" (52). "The Tiger's Bride" is one of two versions of "Beauty and the Beast" that Carter rewrites in *The Bloody Chamber*, indicating the multiple possibilities available in fairy tale narratives. Here, with the absence of the mother who already fell victim to a marriage she was sold into, the monetary dependence of fairy tale women becomes very clear. With the mother absent, there is no loving relationship that positions a wealthy marriage as the daughter's best interest; she is merely an object of possession to her father, much as he purchased her mother. Her father gambles her away: "My father lost me to The Beast at cards" (51).

Here Carter begins to revise the situation of the daughter she described in "Ashputtle." She gives her narrator her own voice, a thought process, awareness of her situation: "I watched with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly" (52). Her position—dependent—forces her to allow herself to be gambled away; she has no other choice. Someone must take care of her, just like the daughters in "Ashputtle." Her body, her marriage are the only resources she

has for financial survival: "For now my own skin was my sole capital in the world and today I'd make my first investment" (56). But Carter allows this narrator to choose a new kind of investment with her skin: the narrator becomes a beast herself; she is no longer the archetypal Beauty. This transformation, unlike the one Bettelheim proposed for his patient, lies in freedom, choice, and an expanded possibility for identity. It is also a reverse of the usual fairy tale transformation, which involves rags to riches, or ugly to beautiful; Carter creates a transformation for her character that lives by new rules of her choice, which are the opposite of a traditional fairy tale. Carter's narrator undermines any kind of material need that would allow her father to sell her, or The Beast to own her by becoming an animal, as her diamond earrings (a gift from The Beast) "turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur" (67). This narrator has broken the cycle she inherited from her mother of being sold into marriage by removing herself from the possibility; she is no longer "Beauty," but the "Beast." Beastliness not only removes this daughter from a need to marry in order to survive; her animal body provides her with everything she needs, where before her female body restricted her ability to take care of herself.

For women who remain women, however, Carter demonstrates the importance—and the danger—of winning the competition for the prince in "The Snow Child," a version of Snow White, where the reward for being desired by the father/prince is literally provisions of clothing and warmth in the winter. "The Snow Child" also displays a family dynamic that puts the mother and daughter in opposition in order to gain the attention of the father. Duncker sees this as a fault of Carter's, saying that she

ignores the “ideology implicit in the story” and endorses “the division between Mother and Daughter, and between Sisters,” which is “one of the cornerstones of patriarchy” (229). But Duncker fails to see Carter’s message. Again, in this instance Carter uses traditional, generic characters; they fill the same roles they have always filled in fairy tales, but to such an extreme that they expose the sexist politics at work. The Snow Child and the Countess are Snow White and the wicked Queen. They are the women Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe as victimized by the King’s evaluation, because it is his gaze that decides who is “the fairest of all” (202). The Snow Child and the Countess are forced to compete for the Count’s attention because he makes the rules. Carter exposes the faults of this system, rather than reinforcing it, through the display of its damage to its participants.

The attention of the father in “The Snow Child” results in necessities such as clothing for his wife (the Countess), and the daughter (the Snow Child). As the father expresses his preference for the daughter, the Countess’ clothing disappears from her body to the girl; only one of them is ever clothed though it is the middle of winter: “Now the Countess was bare as a bone and the girl furred and booted” (92). The Countess is extremely jealous of the young girl, because she becomes the Count’s object of preference (and it is clear there can be only one): “She was the child of his desire and the Countess hated her” (92). Much like the mothers in “Ashputtle,” she tries to teach the girl to value material things, but this time to distract her so that the Countess can be rid of her: “Then the Countess threw her diamond brooch through the ice of a frozen pond: ‘Dive in and fetch it for me,’ she said; she thought the girl would drown” (92).

Carter clearly emphasizes that the Countess and the daughter are victims of a system that forces them to compete. The clothing they vie for is highly sexualized, pleasing to the Count. The Countess was “wrapped in the glittering pelts of black foxes; and she wore high, black, shining boots with scarlet heels, and spurs”(91). It is clear that they are existing in a system working to the benefit of the father; he is the provider and therefore may do so as he chooses. The desperation of the Countess under this situation is such that rather than save the daughter from the same fate of dependency, she would cause her to lose her innocence by pricking her finger on a rose (and hence her desirability to the Count), and have her be the victim of the Count’s necrophiliac lust: “So the girl picks a rose; pricks her finger on the thorn; bleeds; screams; falls. Weeping, the Count got off his horse unfastened his breeches and thrust his virile member into the dead girl” (92). The Countess epitomizes the damage that competition between women can create. She in essence sacrifices the daughter so that she may continue to obtain the benefits of the Count’s attention: “Now the Countess had all her clothes on again” (92). Once the daughter is out of her way, she may continue on as before, comfortable and cared for.

If “The Snow Child” is the epitome of the damage that economic competition causes among women, then “The Bloody Chamber” is Carter’s remedy. Her reworking of the Bluebeard story allows mother and daughter, as well as father and husband to be reconciled in relationships that refuse to allow competition to occur. “The Bloody Chamber” is Carter’s most optimistic and most complete revision of economic marriage in the fairy tale. While “The Tiger’s Bride” allows the daughter to escape the cycle of

being economically dependent on marriage, it does not allow the narrator to restructure her relationships with her mother and father; they remain unchanged, with her mother dead because of her marriage; her father oblivious enough not to be able to distinguish between his daughter and the robot she sends home in his place (65). And as stated above, "The Snow Child" is more of a horrifying representation of the damage of economic dependence of the father/husband than a revision of the situation. In "The Bloody Chamber," however, Carter shows the danger of the economic marriage, but saves her character from it through restoring a mother/daughter bond that exists independently of any economic need.

In "The Bloody Chamber" the mother disapproves of her daughter's marriage to "the richest man in France," instead of urging this type of marriage (12). The mother, herself the daughter of a rich father, had broken the cycle of relying on his money, or a husband's, for she had "gladly, scandalously, defiantly beggared herself for love" (8). The mother had refused to marry for money, and chose love for a soldier instead, a choice that will have terribly important consequences for her daughter. As in "Ashputtle" and "The Tiger's Bride," the economic marriage in "The Bloody Chamber" forbodes death: the "funereal lilies," the "black silk dress" for her mother (7, 9). Even for the daughter, who chose the marriage, there is a sense of mourning; she loses her mother by marrying: "I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on my finger, I had, in some way, ceased to be her child in becoming his wife" (7). This marriage that has seduced her with wealth cannot allow her to maintain her relationship with her

mother because it forces her into the cycle described in “Ashputtle,” where the economic marriage supercedes relationships between women.

The narrator repeatedly describes the seduction of the wealth for which she married, but within these descriptions hovers a morbid message. She describes herself as a child bought “with a handful of coloured stones and the pelts of *dead beasts*” (18). She knows she is being taken away from her mother, yet “this ring, the *bloody bandage* of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poirer and Worth...all had conspired to seduce me so utterly that I could not say I felt one twinge of regret for the world of tartines and maman that now receded from me” (12) (emphasis mine). As Christina Bacchilega points out, “Carter reminds us how victimhood for women often carries with it the dangerously seductive companions of ‘willingness’ and ‘virtue’” (122-123). In this case, the victim’s willingness lies in a desire for her husband’s wealth; her virtue that she is her husband’s first virgin bride: “it must have been my innocence that captivated him” (19).

Yet Carter forces her narrator to face the mistake she has made in this marriage, by elaborately displaying the deadliness she has been speaking of since the mention of the coffin in “Ashputtle.” The rich husband, the prince, is Bluebeard - a serial killer, the epitome of Carter’s correlation between economic marriage and death. The narrator states: “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” (34). Is the “game” the economic marriage and “destiny” death by the rich husband,

“oppressive and omnipotent” because he forces women into a dependency which causes them to work against each other?

It is precisely this game that her mother escapes by choosing the husband who had no money, allowing her to exist without depending on him for her well-being. In the end, it is this choice that left the mother with a soldier's gun with which to save her daughter's life. It is this choice that allowed her to know her daughter, to have a relationship with her other than teaching her to be marriageable. It is this strength that allowed her to come and save her daughter: “On her eighteenth birthday , my mother had disposed of a man-eating tiger that had ravaged the villages in the hills north of Hanoi. Now, without a moment's hesitation, she raised my father's gun, took aim and put a single, irrefragable bullet through my husband's head” (40). Even Duncker cannot deny Carter's heroic mother figure who “invests in her daughter's career rather than her price on the marriage market” (234). The strong mother comes bearing the poor father's weapon to save her daughter from her rich husband. The inclusion of the father (through his gun) in this rescue allows him to partake in this new fairy tale family structure; it is a signal that the father can be a figure of love instead of domination. The same can be said for the narrator's lover, the piano tuner, whose presence suggests that there can be partnership between men and women based on love and common interests rather than money.

Through “The Bloody Chamber” Carter remedies the economic marriage that she shows to be so detrimental in “Ashputtle or The Mother's Ghost,” “The Tiger's Bride,” and “The Snow Child.” Though “The Bloody Chamber” comes dangerously close to

allowing money to separate mother and daughter with a rich husband, Carter portrays a character that falls victim to this process in order to critique it as well as to correct it through a mother who is strong enough to break herself and her daughter out of its cycle. The result is women who can help each other, and a model for marriage based on choice and love rather than economic necessity, where fathers and husbands can be placed in loving roles rather than controlling roles.

In Carter's revision of "The Bloody Chamber," as she undermines the foundations of economic marriage in fairy tales, she evades Duncker's accusations of reinforcing a sexist ideology. In "The Bloody Chamber," as in "The Tiger's Bride," Carter's narrator speaks in the first person. In revisions of the fairy tale, utilizing the first person narrator is a tremendously powerful tool, because the tale becomes a personal story, not a universal truth. Third person narrative has been identified as a fairy tale tactic to force the reader to read acceptingly: "Things 'happen,' are 'done to' protagonists, told to the reader, from a position of omniscience and authority, making the reader unquestioningly passive" (Jackson in Cranny-Francis 89). While this may be true in any third person narrative, it is especially effective in the fairy tale because the characters are so generic and impersonal—so archetypal—they never have their own authority. As Bettelheim has stressed, the purpose of the traditional fairy tale figure is to be archetypal, to portray a consistent, recognizable role so that they can teach readers exactly who fills what role and what that role is. This is how we know the prince is always the rescuer, the princess the rescued, and therefore learn to identify boys as active and girls as passive. Choice, thought and autonomy are not a part of archetypal

fairy tale characters, who simply perform their function. Carter clearly stresses through her use of these kinds of characters in “Ashputtle” and “The Snow Child” that the lessons they teach are detrimental and must be examined. By using a first person narrator Carter creates characters that can articulate their perspectives, their fears, their motivations, and demand that the reader deal with them. And by giving her characters the capacity to make decisions and analyze their situations, she creates readers who also gain the freedom to think and make choices.

Duncker insists that Carter’s revisions try to fit us “neatly into patterns or models as Cinderellas, ugly sisters, wicked stepmothers, fairy godmothers” (236). But Carter has taken powerful steps to avoid doing so. Her use of archetypal characters is in conjunction with her harshest criticism of marriage in fairy tales in “Ashputtle” and “The Snow Child.” The simple act of writing “The Bloody Chamber” and “The Tiger’s Bride” in first person signals that the solutions she provides in them are not universal, but particular. They exist for a character, not every reader. The very title “Ashputtle of The Mother’s Ghost: Three Versions of One Story” suggests the multiple possibilities in all stories, which is also present in *The Bloody Chamber*, where Carter provides two versions of Beauty and the Beast and three of Little Red Riding Hood. Carter hints at “the possibility of infinite revision,” where the “ability to imagine alternative endings is profoundly liberatory” (Hausknecht 36). Carter destabilizes the entire notion of the permanence of the fairy tale simply through the act of revision. She even undermines the authority of her own revisions by providing a model of the fairy tale that is so malleable. Finally, because Carter’s revisions are so invested in altering a system that

traps women in detrimental relationships and economic need, she clearly has a great interest in undoing a sexist ideology, rather than promoting one.

CHAPTER III

FAY WELDON: FAIRY TALES FOR EVERY DAY

“One story or another...what’s the difference? It is all the same. It’s the one-way journey we all make from ignorance to knowledge, from innocence to experience. We must all make it; there is no escape.”

—Fay Weldon, *Words of Advice*

Fay Weldon’s use of fairy tales differs from that of Angela Carter in that she creates characters whose lives revolve around fairy tale plots rather than revising the tales themselves. Nancy Walker identifies that in Weldon’s fiction, “fairy tales are among the many cultural scripts that her characters resist, revise, or are ensnared by” (64). Fairy tales are often, and usually, used to present a lesson for living life. Weldon emphasizes that the tales do influence real lives by placing her every day characters in the middle of fairy tale plots. In *Words of Advice* Gemma states this very idea: “Fairy tales, as I said, are lived out daily” (21). In this novel as well as *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, Weldon echoes many of Carter’s concerns about the fairy tale, motherhood, and money, but she makes these concerns more immediate by placing them in the lives of every day women rather than princesses in far-off lands. For Weldon’s characters as for Carter’s, fairy tales display an ideal that both appeals to and disappoints women: one that tells them they want and need to marry a prince in order to gain stability, but relegates them to a sphere of dependency and unhappiness upon accepting it. As Anne Hebert identifies, in her use of the ideal fairy tale romance, Weldon “begins her love story at this point, scrutinizing the ‘happily ever after,’” the point where the fairy tale ends. Weldon’s issue with the fairy tale plot is that it fails by leaving motherhood out of

the “happily ever after”: as will be seen, one cannot simultaneously be the princess and the mother, though women are forced to use their capacity for marriage, and hence motherhood, to snag the prince (and his money).

The protagonists of *Words of Advice*, Gemma and Elsa, are each in a position where marriage, and potential motherhood, will bring them the prince and his money. They each see their lives in terms of fairy tale plots, which they have adopted as models of behavior. Elsa wonders when “her prince will come to rescue her, using her yellow hair as a rope to climb the tower,” and Gemma narrates her teenage years in fairy tale motifs (8). Hebert applies Teresa de Lauretis’s “feminine script” to Weldon’s writing, to understand the role of fairy tales in the lives of Weldon’s characters. The “feminine script” is a definition of womanhood and femininity displayed in various cultural mechanisms—from stories to technology—and is adopted by women, thereby becoming a script that is performed. Hebert explains this process: “Ostensibly descriptive utterances regarding truth conditions in the world become performative utterances when they are circulated with the full weight of the dominant ideology behind them” (25). In essence, what is merely a descriptor of life, like the fairy tale, can become something undertaken in actual behavior when it achieves the power of a cultural ideology (and the fairy tale, if anything, has achieved this status). Hence, it is perfectly sensible that women such as Elsa and Gemma assume the role of the princess in the fairy tale, whose goal and purpose is solely to marry the prince and gain access to his kingdom.

Elsa, an eighteen-year old typist, is on her way to selling her body for a financially stable position. Victor, her married, accountant lover, knows the path she is

taking and that he is “just a rung on the ladder of [her] journey up in the world” (40). Elsa hasn’t yet considered trying to find someone richer than Victor—she would be satisfied to have his baby now and be done searching. When Victor chides her for forgetting her birth control pills, she states “I wouldn’t,” but thinks to herself that “she would if she could” (4). It is only later in her weekend stay at Gemma and Hamish’s mansion that she gains ambition in her marriage scheme: “Men are there to be made her allies, her stepping stones to fulfillment and worldly success. Herself, her children cradled in luxury and safety. (Well, how else is she to do that, with a typing speed of 35, and shorthand 53?)” (18-19). Here Elsa reveals not only that she does plan to marry and bear children in order to gain access to the prince’s wealth, but that she has no capacity for stability otherwise; she is without any other skill, just like the princess in fairy tales.

As in Carter’s “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost,” Weldon portrays mothers as transmitters of an economic need for marriage to their daughters. As Elsa sleeps with the rich Hamish, she thinks to herself that she is fulfilling a need her mother passed on to her at birth: “...as if streams of sensation, running strong again, the ground grateful after drought, had finally filled up and overflowed the black pool of desire and destiny; that same pool her mother bequeathed to her at birth, empty, dry, but waiting to be filled; as her own mother did for her, and her mother’s own mother, back to the beginning of time” (145). The need to marry for money is something cyclical, passed from mothers to daughters. In Aleta Cane’s discussion on Weldon’s treatment of motherhood, she draws on Nancy Chodorow’s observation that “women are prepared psychologically for mothering through the developmental situation in which they grow up, and in which

women have mothered them” (Cane 188). Cane writes that Weldon follows Chodorow’s model: “Weldon shows us children (and the adults they will become) as eternally linked to the ways they were mothered” (188). Hence, if the fairy tale ideal of marrying the rich prince ever took hold in one woman, as Anne Hebert shows us that it might, her daughter can inherit the same tendency, producing the cycle that both Carter and Weldon observe.

This cyclical idea is strengthened by the fact that both Elsa and Gemma are the daughters of mothers that had no money. Gemma comes from a line of poor, single mothers: “she was a love child, and so was her mother before her” (26). Her mother died of the cold and damp in her unfit home. Gemma’s mother tried but was unable to achieve the fairy tale outcome of a rich husband, yet she still encourages Gemma to do so. As Gemma fawns over the glamorous, rich, and dangerous Mr. Fox, her mother’s ghost whispers in her ear: “Yes...Listen, learn, advance yourself. This is the way to live” (175). Elsa feels a need to supplement her mother’s income with any money she might gain: “I would send any spare money at once to Sheila (her mother). The new school term is coming, the young ones will want new shoes and Sheila is struggling to pay for them” (84). Both Elsa and Gemma turn to marriage as something that can bail them out; their mothers had tried and failed, yet marriage to the prince remains the solution, and they passed this onto their daughters.

Perhaps the reason these women continue to rely on an obviously failing solution to economic need is that it is portrayed as something essential in women through the basic structure of their anatomy. Elsa’s attraction to Hamish is described as “the desire

of the helpless for the powerful, the poor for the rich, the weak for the strong; it has its roots there in her womb, and from it, one might believe grows the whole structure of human society” (36). If the origin of this need lies in the womb, the fairy tale plot is naturalized through a dictum of biology, making women believe in a permanent and natural fate of filling an inherent economic need through marriage and motherhood. Indisputably, it is the women, the princesses, who have been cast as weak, poor, and helpless, and the men and princes who are powerful, rich, and strong. Cinderella sleeps in the ashes of the hearth; Snow White is a housekeeper for the dwarfs; Beauty lives with the Beast to pay her father’s debt; the heroine of Rumpelstiltskin spins gold but never keeps it; they all marry. Gemma speaks of the necessity of a husband; he is “one’s future meal ticket” (55). Fairy tales strongly suggest that being female, having a womb forces women into the role of needing the prince, and out of this womb they bear daughters who live by the same rules; the fairy tale script ensures the vitality of this cycle by creating roles bound by biology. The way out of this seemingly inescapable, biological path is in Weldon’s language, where she identifies that biology is portrayed as binding women, though it need not. She writes, “...and from it, *one might believe* grows the whole structure of human society. Weldon suggests that women must recognize that biology doesn’t bind them to a fairy tale plot as it appears, and to abandon any beliefs that it does.

Gemma, who was also a teenaged-typist, has already sold herself into marriage with the rich Hamish. As Nancy Walker observes, Elsa reminds Gemma of herself when she was young: “I was no different,” she says (62). Because she realizes the pattern of

Elsa's actions, Gemma actively creates a weekend saturated in fairy tales in order to show Elsa the reality of the script within which she is working, and to help her out of it. She wants to use her own experiences to save Elsa from following the fairy tale pattern: "If only we women could learn from one another," she says (183).

Gemma uses the fairy tale to try to help Elsa in two ways. First, she narrates her life as a fairy tale, showing that fairy tales damage women's lives; Gemma is unhappy in her wealthy marriage, which causes her to suffer a hysterical paralysis. Additionally, Gemma's tale-telling positions her as a storyteller, emphasizing that fairy tales are *stories*; she is trying to undermine the idea of the fairy tale as truth and to expose it as a constructed story, one that Elsa wouldn't want to follow. In order to do this, she embellishes her own experiences and paints them as a "Bluebeard" plot. Gemma is not concerned with telling the true story of her life, but rather the creation a fairy tale gone-wrong that is meant to steer Elsa away from a fairy tale fate. Gemma's friend Alice exposes her intent by asking "which version" of the story is she telling? Hamish states that he hopes the story she tells is true, to which Gemma replies "it will do" (224). Through her "life story" Gemma exposes the fairy tale plot as a harmful construction, one to be evaded.

Gemma's second method of helping Elsa is by designing the weekend around fairy tale plots. This active demonstration of the fairy tale as contrived plot is a very powerful method of "seeing the script as *script*:" the fairy tale becomes a recognizable construction (Hebert 22). Gemma forces Elsa to experience the fairy tale plot in order to show its harm, and to reveal that it is contrived, not absolute. Gemma's weekend events

reference many fairy tales including Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White, but she develops Rumpelstiltskin in greatest detail.

She puts Elsa in a room high up in their mansion with a typewriter. Elsa is expected to type for Gemma over the weekend, but she “is not a good typist” and wonders “who is her Rumpelstiltskin to be?” (7). Who will do the typing for her as Rumpelstiltskin weaved gold for the princess? It will be Hamish (Gemma’s husband) who both does the typing for her and asks her to “just call me Rumpelstiltskin” (143). The catch is that Hamish demands sexual favors for his typing services, and on Gemma’s insistence, tells Elsa he plans to impregnate her. Just as Rumpelstiltskin tries to take the princess’ first born child, so Gemma says she intends to take Elsa’s, and she plans to pay her for it. A dollar amount is assigned: “25 pounds a week from the day the pregnancy is established until six weeks after the birth” (199). This forces Elsa to realize that what she has been doing is literally offering her body up for money and requires that she be horrified by it. Further, because this realization comes in the terms of the fairy tale, she can learn to correlate it with such a terrible arrangement. It is at this moment of Elsa’s realization that Gemma encourages her to escape: “Run, Elsa! Run for all you’re worth. Don’t fall. Please don’t fall the way I did. You can do it...I know you can. You must! You must run for me and all of us!” (233). Gemma has constructed a living fairy plot for Elsa precisely so that she can run away from it.

While this analysis has observed the ways in which women partake in economic marriage looking for “happily ever after” in Weldon’s writing, it has not yet addressed the earlier mentioned idea that the definition of “happily ever after” does not include the

realities of marriage and motherhood. Hebert's discussion of the "feminine script" can again be of use; she points out that the script demands multiple but conflicting roles for women ranging between "the erotic and maternal" (22). The fact that these roles contradict within the script reveals a major flaw in its design; it becomes a model impossible for women to fulfill, restricting them to failure. All roles are required by the script, yet if all roles are filled, women are often punished for it; that this is the outcome of a system of marriage in which women are required to participate because of economic need, it only becomes more harmful and provides an even stronger need to dismantle fairy tale marriage plots. Women are dependent on a situation set up to hurt them. An example of this in the fairy tale is that the princess is expected to fill a role of beauty and innocence so that she will be attractive to the prince and therefore marriageable. What Fay Weldon emphasizes is that upon this marriage, the roles of mother and wife are also expected, and they are roles that supercede those of the princess. The demands of motherhood and wifehood are too consuming to allow the effort it takes to maintain the princess' beauty, and in having children, she has surely lost her innocent appeal. Yet as will be shown, the prince/husband wants a princess, wife, and mother of his children, a fact that greatly disturbs the marital bliss alluded to in the "happily ever after" ending of fairy tales.

The Life and Loves of a She-Devil provides a basis for investigating Weldon's critique of the outcome of the fairy tale economic marriage. *She-Devil* is a revenge novel in which Ruth, the ugly housewife loses her husband to the beautiful romance writer, Mary Fisher. The dynamics revealed as Ruth plots against Mary and eventually

becomes her double are exactly that of the failures of the fairy tale for a model of reality for women. Ruth can be seen as a sort of backward Cinderella, and Mary the ideal princess; it becomes clear that the housewife and the princess are incompatible, even though the princess's fate is to become a housewife. The discrepancy between the roles of housewife and princess is initially highlighted by Ruth's monstrous, giant physical appearance, and Mary's petite perfection, foreshadowing the long fall from princesshood to motherhood and the dichotomy this creates.

Weldon makes it clear that money is a central issue for the characters of *She-Devil*. Bobbo, Ruth's husband/Mary's lover is the primary male figure in the novel, and like Victor in *Words of Advice*, he is an accountant. Thus, he is equivalent to the money holding prince, for even if Bobbo is not rich, his job is to keep track of money. Ruth married Bobbo because she did not have money; in a reversal of the Cinderella story, Ruth the ugly daughter was turned away because of her stepfather who has two beautiful daughters. She was taken in by Bobbo's family, impregnated by Bobbo, and married to Bobbo. Mary Fisher, on the other hand, is an entirely different kind of woman; she is rich. Mary does not function in the real world as do Elsa and Ruth. She lives in a High Tower by the sea, and she sells fairy tales in the form of romance novels. Although she sells fairy tales, she does not live their outcome; she doesn't have to because the promise of "happily ever after" that she sells to other women buys her freedom from economic marriage. However, it is clear that the ideal that Mary Fisher sells and represents is as far from reality as possible. The readers of her books and followers of her plots inhabit the far off suburbs of "Eden Grove" and "Bradwell Park," and they are unhappy. Ruth,

living the outcome of Mary Fisher's plots, states that Mary "tells lies to herself, and to the world" (1).

The incompatibility of Mary Fisher's ideal and the women who actually live its results can be seen when the two worlds converge through Ruth's revenge on Mary. Through understanding the outcomes of the fairy tale ideal, it can be seen how this result cannot exist within Mary Fisher's world. Ruth and Bobbo live in the middle of a subdivision called Eden Grove, which is meant to emphasize the ideality of suburban life with wife, husband, and children, but in fact turns out to be anything but Edenic. Lorna Sage observes that Eden Grove is the place where Mary Fisher novels are consumed and that "it could be anywhere in the developed world;" it is the generic outcome of the fairy tale marriage (159). The women living in Eden Grove, who subscribe to Mary Fisher's fairy tale ideal, and probably hoped to find it in their marriages, are miserable. Ruth can be considered a symbol of every frustrated housewife, or as Nancy Walker phrases it, "Ruth is thus a dissatisfied Eve in a trumped-up Eden" (67).

Ruth knows how the system is supposed to work. Speaking for all women, she says: "One day, we vaguely know, a knight in shining armor will gallop by, and see through to the beauty of the soul, and gather the damsel up and set a crown on her head, and she will be queen" (63). But neither Ruth nor any of her neighbors became a queen: they became wives and mothers who live under the rule of their husbands/princes. Ruth's economic need for Bobbo forces her to live according to his rules, which give him the right to commit adultery and tell her about it. Bobbo's affair with Mary is the first hint that he requires a princess, a wife, and a mother to his children, but that a wife

and mother cannot fulfill the role of the princess. Ruth knows this is the reason why Bobbo cheats on her: “Mary Fisher was five feet four, self-supporting, *childless*” (51) (emphasis mine). However, Ruth is forced to accept this contradiction because she relies on Bobbo’s money; as she recites The Litany of the Good Wife, Ruth reminds herself that: “I must be grateful for the roof over my head, and the food on my table, and spend my days showing it, by cooking and cleaning and jumping up and down from my chair; for everyone’s sake”...“I must consent to the principle that those who earn most outside the home deserve most inside the home; for everyone’s sake” (26). Her need to marry Bobbo for his money forces her into total subordination; she is not a princess but a maid, which shows the contradiction in the fairy tale marriage, since the idea for most princesses is to marry the prince to escape their fate as a poor househand.

Hebert argues that “Fay Weldon foregrounds the fissures and the frictions within the feminine script, thus undermining its performative weight” (26). Understanding the contradictions of the feminine script is the key to undoing its power. For example, Bobbo states that Ruth is not a woman because “You are a bad mother, a worse wife, and a dreadful cook. In fact I don’t think you are a woman at all. I think that what you are is a she-devil” (47). Bobbo’s comment implies that to be a woman is to be a mother, a cook, a wife; if she does not properly fulfill these roles, then she cannot be a woman; and as shown above, if she does perform them she cannot be a princess, which is also a role in the feminine script, and she is therefore doomed to fail within this system.

Ruth’s solution to this dichotomy is to eschew identity within the feminine script and to actually become a she-devil, taking control of her life sexually and monetarily

while performing her act of revenge against Bobbo and Mary, who perpetuate the ideal of a system that fails her so miserably. She states, “I though I was a good wife tried temporarily and understandably beyond endurance, but no. He says I am a she-devil. I expect he is right...I am a she-devil. But this is wonderful! This is exhilarating! If you are a she-devil, the mind clears at once. The spirits rise. There is no shame, no guilt, no dreary striving to be good. There is only, in the end, what you *want*. And I can take what I want!” (48). Ruth’s recognition of the contradictions within the feminine script allows her to begin forming a model of identity outside of it. In the suburbs, the fairy tale script fails Ruth and other women because they have to live beyond the wedding. But the promise of “happily ever after” is enough to subscribe to Mary Fisher’s “lies”: “For it is the novels that conscript the women in Eden Grove and Bradwell Park into the feminine script” (Hebert 29).

Nowhere is it clearer that the feminine script falters when housewife and princess intersect than in Ruth’s revenge on Mary. Mary lives far off in fairy tale land in her High Tower by the sea. She has no children, is not married and can therefore maintain the fairy tale ideal that she sells. However, Ruth forces suburbia into the tower and it falters. Ruth’s first step in revenge on Mary is to leave her children with her in the tower. The fairy tale ideal literally begins to crumble with “Nicola’s casual heel grinding crisps into the Persian rug, and Andy spurting Coca-Cola from his mouth all over the whitewashed walls, as he accidentally sneezed” (83). The children start to wear on Mary, “These days she was not looking her best, and knew it” (116). She doesn’t have time to paint her nails; in fact her duties invoke stress that causes her to bite them

“down to the quick” (116). Mary eventually suggests remodeling the High Tower to be more practical, but Bobbo warns her: “You must be careful Mary, not to turn into a suburban housewife!” (117). Mary cannot be princess and mother, Bobbo states it very clearly, though it is precisely the fate of the princess to become a suburban housewife. As Mary performs the duties of motherhood she loses her perfect princess image, and Bobbo starts sleeping with other women who have yet to fall from this pedestal; his redundant message then, is that women can be wife/mother or princess, but not both; Mary is caught in the paradoxical feminine script.

Mary’s career as a romance writer begins to fade because she begins to question the ideal she sells: “Were they not themselves the living proof that romance was real? Bobbo and Mary, happy forever in the High Tower? But Mary Fisher’s voice faltered just a little as she proclaimed it” (118). Her book sales are fading because “A kind of gritty reality kept breaking in” (120). And for Mary “the High Tower totters, crumbles, stands derelict” (152). She has been forced to live the result of the plot she sells to women everywhere, and realizes its fault: “Her lies are worse now because she knows they are lies” (210). Mother and princess are roles that cannot be held simultaneously; motherhood destroys the ideality of marrying the prince.

Weldon has come nearly full circle at this point in her critique of the fairy tale and the institution of marriage it presents. In *Words of Advice* she demonstrates the ways in which women come to learn and depend on a system that forces them to marry for need of economic security. In *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, she displays the detriment to the lives of women in the experience of this marriage. Yet she does not

provide a solution to the perils she so relentlessly describes. We do not know what becomes of Elsa as she runs away from Gemma's nightmarish fairy tale weekend. Ruth effectively revenges Bobbo and Mary by destroying the ideal they each try to achieve, but in the end she assumes the same pattern, taking Mary's place in the High Tower and living with Bobbo. I would suggest that Weldon would prefer to remain in a mode of critique rather than to provide solutions; to leave the possibilities open for women to imagine their own desires and roles after being restricted for so long; to give her readers the chance to create their own she-devils, because "Nothing is impossible, not for she-devils" (49).

CHAPTER IV

JEANETTE WINTERSON: IF THE STORY DOESN'T WORK, CHANGE IT

"...[W]e were all given in marriage, one to each brother, and as it says lived happily ever after. We did, but not with our husbands."

—Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*

If Angela Carter directly modifies fairy tales, and Fay Weldon shows their workings in the lives of everyday women, Jeanette Winterson writes about women who have changed the tales in order to suit their own unconventional behavior. Winterson's women find the tales useful in their lives, but not until alterations have been made. The message in their use of fairy tales is threefold: it indicates that the tales do serve a function that helps women to create a model for their lives; that women can indeed mold these tales themselves; and also that the tales do need to be reworked because they are too constricting as they exist. Rather than being encompassed by the tales, Winterson's women are active creators of their own stories that help them to make unconventional decisions and to cope with their struggles. Winterson expands the usage of fairy tales for her characters by making them something that can be usefully appropriated, rather than something that confines them. As with Carter and Weldon, Winterson addresses the pattern of marriage in fairy tales, its economic motivations, and its disappointments for women. In her novel *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Winterson shows us women working against their scripted fairy tale fates as dependent wives and needy daughters.

The importance of fairy tales in *Oranges*, which Duncker finds neither "convincing or helpful," is unquestionable because of the function they serve for Winterson's narrator Jeanette, which is to provide a mode of fantasy in which to work

out the problems of her real life (Sisters 179). Bettelheim has persuasively argued that fairy tales provide an arena where struggles can be projected and resolved (5, 25). Jeanette relies on her made-up fairy tales at the most crucial points of her development. For example, she resorts to fairy tales at the moment of her “first theological disagreement” and when she realizes that she must leave home rather than have a heart that turns to stone (Winterson 60). As Isabel Gamallo points out, fairy tales appear at moments in the text that “lay stress on the most crucial moments in the girl’s development” (121). After all, “stories helped you to understand the world” (Winterson 29). But for Winterson, as for all of the authors in this study, the stories need to be modified in order to help understand their situations, because the tales do not provide a broad enough range of roles and possibilities. In an aside about the importance of questioning stories so that one does not get stuck inside of them (as we have seen with the fairy tale), Winterson concludes that there is harm in passively accepting existing narratives. There should be no story that binds, only stories that suit one’s own purposes; thus, one should actively participate in storymaking. She compares stories to sandwiches as she writes, “If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches” (95). In order to keep things that are important the individual’s life, the individual must create his/her own stories and models; there can’t, and shouldn’t be, a universal model. And so she sets to task on her own fairy tales.

Considering the importance Jeanette attributes to storytelling, it is difficult to understand why Duncker finds the fairy tales in *Oranges* superfluous. She sees them as irrelevant and “unnecessary” to the story. Her reason for this analysis is that “the central

narrative effectively operates as a fairy-tale, the story of how the enchanted princess escapes from the wicked witch,” the witch being Jeanette’s mother (Sisters 179). However, this argument not only negates the clear function the fairy tales serve in helping Jeanette to cope with her conflicts, it overlooks the fact that *Oranges* in no way continues to function according to traditional fairy tale plots, but rather works against them. While Jeanette’s mother may be antagonistic and zealous, she is not the wicked witch, but a woman much like her daughter who is also trying to bend the fairy tale plot in order to escape the tradition of being a powerless mother transferring an economic neediness on to her daughter that will end in marriage. If trying to change the plots of fairy tales makes Jeanette’s mother a witch, then perhaps Duncker has established a new category of witches; those who actively try to change the narratives functioning around them, and this can hardly be “wicked” or useless. Jeanette’s mother tells her “You can change the world,” and helps her to learn this by manipulating the plots of fairy tale stories like *Jane Eyre* and using her faith to establish a position of strength rather than neediness for herself and for her daughter (10). Jeanette and her mother are “powerful story tellers and revisionists” working in different ways to alter the traditional fairy tale plot (Cosslett 24).

Jeanette’s mother is not interested in marriage, neither her own nor the potential for her daughter’s. Her focus is on the church and her own and her daughter’s function within it. Jeanette’s mother’s obsession with the church and Jeanette’s “destiny” as a missionary stem from her desire to exist beyond the married princess of the fairy tale. In her youth, Jeanette’s mother “walked out one night and thought of her life and thought

what was possible. She thought of the things she couldn't be...She liked to speak French and to play the piano, but what do these things mean?" (9). Jeanette's mother realizes the limited potential offered to her within existing scripts, such as the fairy tale. Jeanette suggests this by narrating a tale in which her mother is a princess initially unhappy in the kingdom where she lives, when she comes across a sorceress that offers her the autonomy and responsibility of leading a village. This offer sounds strikingly like the position her mother occupies in the church, and the princess' acceptance of this offer parallels her conversion. The sorceress and the church gave Jeanette's mother a purpose and a role other than wife and mother. This is not to say that Jeanette's mother did not have roles as wife and mother, but the church was a domain that offered her power: "radical protestant churches where there is a great emphasis on the Spirit are often women-dominated," thereby offering a unique domain in which to function with a significant role outside of the home (Sisters 179). Jeanette acknowledges this: "The women in our church were strong and organised. If you want to talk in terms of power I had enough to keep Mussolini happy" (124).

Her involvement with the church additionally allowed Jeanette's mother to modify her roles as wife and mother. It is clear that Jeanette's mother entered into marriage under the economic premise of the fairy tale, but she moves away from the confining outcome of this arrangement through the church. When Jeanette asks her mother why she married her father, she responds: "Don't be silly...We had to have something for you" (74). This response appears to be an acknowledgement that she married for whatever small economic benefit this man provided. Jeanette's grandfather

disapproved of the marriage for this reason: “He told her she’d married down, that she should have stayed in Paris, and promptly ended all communication. So she never had enough money and after a while she managed to forget that she’d ever had any at all” (37). The church offers Jeanette’s mother an alternative to needing money. In the church, the poor are welcome, and materiality frowned upon, and she sees this as an alternative for Jeanette as well. After explaining why she married Jeanette’s father, she assures Jeanette: “But don’t you worry, you’re dedicated to the Lord, I put you down for missionary school as soon as we got you” (74). Being a missionary gives her daughter a divine purpose, one that is higher than needing a husband and his money, autonomy from men, a new kind of script for her life.

Jeanette’s mother reveals her intent to modify the fairy tale plot in her rendering of *Jane Eyre*, a story that many critics have paralleled with a ‘Beauty and the Beast’ plot. In her version, rather than marrying Mr. Rochester, Jane stays with St. John Rivers to join him in his missionary life (Cosslett 24). “Remember Jane Eyre and St. John Rivers,” he says (74). While in this version Jeanette’s mother does include a marriage between Jane and St. John, the marriage follows the model originally proposed in *Jane Eyre*; one based on a higher purpose than marriage, God. Jeanette’s mother is trying to give her daughter a new kind of role that will allow her to exist beyond marriage or the money that comes with it. Though the existence Jeanette’s mother has in mind for her will prove to be confining as well, through the church’s disapproval of Jeanette’s sexuality, there is no doubt that her mother intends to create a better role for her daughter than the fairy tale offers.

Jeanette's mother saved her from inheriting the role of the helpless princess from her birth mother, a privilege many of the characters of Carter's and Weldon's works did not receive. In the BBC production of *Oranges*, written by Winterson, when Jeanette's birth mother comes to try to visit her, she cries that she was only seventeen when she gave birth (Anshaw 17). This statement indicates that she was young and incapable of caring for her daughter, probably in more ways than one, including financially. Her real mother is clearly a woman who, for lack of money, was desperate enough to be forced into giving her child to someone else. Desperation for money is something that leads to trouble for women, and it is something that Jeanette's mother tries to save her from through her adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and Jeanette's "destiny" in the church.

In using her religion to modify the fairy tale script for her daughter, Jeanette's mother alters her own role as mother and wife. The church offered her a realm outside of the home in which to operate, and she took full advantage of it: "I am busy with the Lord in Wigan.' She didn't come home for three weeks" (56). In addition, her motherhood is divine and important under this paradigm she creates for herself. Jeanette's "destiny" as a missionary gives her mother special existence: "She would get a child, train it, build it, dedicate it to the Lord" (10). In one instance, Jeanette's narration reveals that her mother sees herself on a similar level to the Virgin Mary: "She was very bitter about the Virgin Mary getting there first. So she did the next best thing and arranged for a foundling. That was me" (3). This attitude from her mother enhances Jeanette's image of her own purpose: "I cannot recall a time when I did not know that I was special" (3). Not only does Jeanette's mother actively choose her motherhood, she

chooses to experience it in a way that gives it an exalted importance. This is a way of appropriating the role of motherhood she is supposed to fill and making it something that gives her power. She is raising a child for the Lord, not for a future husband.

This is not to say that Jeanette's mother takes the best route in revising the fairy tale plot. The church, which is intended to give her daughter a certain freedom and power, is also restricting; it casts Jeanette away because of her sexuality. The script Jeanette's mother creates remains a devastating one for her daughter because even if it does not stress marriage, it stresses in numerous ways that heterosexuality is still a necessary aspect of her existence. The requirement for heterosexuality emerges slightly through the idealization of Jane and St. John's marriage, even if sex is not a component in their marriage, it is clear that heterosexuality is a proper example. Jeanette reveals her mother's significance in the expectation of heterosexuality as she describes a recurring nightmare in which she dreads marriage. She is walking down the aisle to be married, a crown on her head getting "heavier and heavier and the dress more and more difficult to walk in" (71). When she turns to face her groom, various faces appear which she associates with marriage, including a pig and her mother, indicating that her mother provides some force in stressing the importance of a union between a *man* and a *woman*. Her mother's investment in heterosexuality is further disclosed when she expresses her disapproval of homosexuals, like the women at the comic shop who "dealt in unnatural passions" (7). If these examples are not enough to prove her mother's rejection of homosexuality, her treatment of Jeanette when she discovers her daughter's sexuality, treating her as if "possessed by demons" and forcing her to leave the church and home.

Jeanette spends a significant portion of her involvement in fairy tales discovering that she does not identify with its ideal of marrying the prince. She concludes, "I don't think I want one" (73). Echoing her mother's revision of "Beauty and the Beast" in *Jane Eyre*, Jeanette doubts the fulfillment of marrying the Beast. Winterson writes: "There was a woman down the street who told us all she had married a pig. I asked her why she did it, and she said 'You never know until it's too late' (71). Jeanette postulates that if this woman had read "Beauty and the Beast" she must have been very disappointed, because according to the story, the Beast was supposed to turn into a prince. Upon hearing of the disappointment that comes with the prince (or Beast), Jeanette equates the fairy tale with a "conspiracy" that tells women they will be happy if they married the Beasts because the Beasts will turn into princes. However, Jeanette figures out that most men remain beasts: "Why are so many men really beasts?," she asks (72-73). She overhears women who are married to alcoholics and who suffer abuse from their husbands, but rely on their money, and rejects the fairy tale heterosexual union as ideal. She relies on her "destiny" to offer her another option: "It was a good thing I was destined to become a missionary" (76-77).

Jeanette's need to revise fairy tales is unique because she absolutely does not fit into the existing plot; there is no story with which she can identify because she is a lesbian. Everything around her, including her mother's already revised fairy tale plot, functions on a basis of heterosexuality. It is because the destiny in the church her mother has created for her fails to include lesbianism that Jeanette is forced to create new fairy tales that legitimize the choices she makes. Upon her decision to accept her

sexuality, when her entire church and family are against her, Jeanette relies on fairy tales to console herself. Isabel Gamallo points out that Jeanette works through her situation with an orange demon, a “fairy-tale-like figure” who helps her to come to terms with the struggles she will face as a lesbian (129). “Fantasy becomes a means to survive and explain outer reality” during Jeanette’s struggles (Gamallo 128).

In conjunction with the idea that fairy tales help one “survive and explain,” Jeanette constructs one of her most elaborate tales as she deals with her greatest challenge—her grief over being forced to leave home. Jeanette’s story of Winnet and the sorcerer, while helping her to cope with her struggle, reveals the ways in which the original fairy tales failed to serve her well. Her mother’s parallel in this story is a male sorcerer, and Winnet had been “entrusted to his care by a powerful spirit” (145). In addition, the lover who results in Winnet’s expulsion from the village is male. These gender reversals are particularly interesting because in the end, Jeanette’s mother betrays her by accepting a new church dictum that women should not have power, and that men belong in positions of authority. Her mother thereby aligns herself with a male figurehead, stripping away the freedom and strength the church had once offered women as an alternative to the traditional fairy tale role ending in marriage. And as in Winnet’s story it is the prince who causes her to be cast away, it is the engrained heterosexual plot that fails Jeanette in real life, leading to her expulsion from her family.

Even though the traditional fairy tale plot has contributed to Jeanette’s troubles, she is still able to use fairy tales to help her. As she reveals through Winnet’s story the failings of fairy tales in her real life, she also uses the story to help her understand that

she has to move on, even if it hurts her. “She had left her school and her followers far behind...she knew her old world had much in it that was wrong” (153). It is through the story of Winnet that Jeanette creates advisors such as Abednego, who teach her that if she stays in her home “You will find yourself destroyed by grief,” warning her that her heart will turn to stone if she does not escape: “You see I chose to stay, oh, a long time ago, and my heart grew thick with sorrow, and finally set” (147-148). It is to her own stories that Jeanette must turn, because those constructed by others have failed her.

The ability to construct one’s own story is an extremely valuable tool in Winterson’s novel. It is what carries Jeanette through her difficult situation. The greatest fault in her mother lies in the fact that she insisted on a single revision for everyone (this is paradoxical, after all, because she had already modified stories, indicating they should be changed to fit one’s needs). Jeanette’s mother recognizes the need for revision; it manifests itself in her religious zealotry, which then fails to let her see that everyone should be allowed the chance to revise as needed. Jeanette’s mother insists that her revision is *the* revision: “Her mother has taught her that there is only one right ‘reading’ and interpretation of the world” (Gamallo 121). Insisting on a single appropriate plot is what created confinement within the original tales, which is Winterson’s message when she warns against accepting stories as absolutes. The difference between Jeanette and her mother is that “Winterson’s narrator recognises what she is doing, admits to her sandwich making, while her mother claims to be in the possession of the truth” (Cosslett 24). It is extremely important to recognize that stories are malleable constructions and not dictums of truth; this realization is the mechanism for variation, for multiplicity, for

acceptance, as opposed to the confinement that an insistence on singularity creates. If Jeanette's mother succeeded in any realm, it is that she showed her daughter the potential of taking control of stories and using them, rather than being stuck inside of them. This is what she passed to her daughter rather than the goal of marriage and the need for a man's money. "You can change the world," she tells her daughter. And while she may be skewed in what the right way to change the world is, she gave her daughter the message of possibility. For Jeanette this means there should be endless stories, everyone should be able to make their own: "If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches" (95). Make your own stories to fit your own needs; there is no need to marry the prince.

CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING A FEMINIST GENRE

“The tea is poured, the stitching put down.
 The child grows still, sensing something of importance.
 The Woman settles and begins her story.

Believe it, what we lost is here in this room
 on this veiled evening...”

--Eavan Boland

Carolyn Steedman, in her study *Landscape for a Good Woman*, writes explicitly about the role of the fairy tale in her mother's life and her own. For Steedman, the economic themes in fairy tales dominated and stigmatized her relationship with her mother. The relationship is characterized by her mother's material longing, for which Steedman is made to feel responsible because of the money it requires to raise a child. Steedman understands that there is a fairy tale paradigm underlying her mother's actions, one that told her she could marry and find money. Steedman repeatedly mentions that “fairy-tales tell you that goose-girls can marry kings” (16). As with the characters of Carter, Weldon, and Winterson, the promise of wealth through marriage hovers over the actions of Steedman's mother. Steedman's mother learns a material desire from fairy tales—where “things are desirable in the story simply because someone wants them”—that manifests itself in her longing after a New Look skirt, and prompts her decision to have children (43). She thinks that children will force a marriage with Steedman's father and guarantee access to his money, securing her well-being: “She made us out of her own desire, her own ambition... We were an insurance, a roof over her head, a minimum income” (57). Like the women in the fairy tales, Steedman's mother relies on marrying

the king because it is the sole option available to her: “My mother did what the powerless, particularly powerless women, have done before, and do still: she worked on her body, the only bargaining power she ended up with, given the economic times and the culture in which she grew” (141). However, Steedman’s mother, the goose girl, did not marry a king—she never married at all—and her children then became something that stood between her and a New Look skirt because caring for them required that money be spent on food rather than fashionable clothing. Steedman writes, “For my mother, the time of my childhood was the place where the fairy-tales failed” (47).

The effects of the system creating her mother’s fairy tale desire are detrimental to Steedman’s childhood. She constantly feels she is a burden to her mother, and she states, “All children who are brought into the world for some particular purpose will find their own guilt for not bringing happiness to those who produced them” (97). Steedman compares herself and her mother to the Little Mermaid, who, for the sake of being loved by the prince, must walk every step as if on the points of knives. Even after this sacrifice, however, the prince marries someone else. The prince has failed both Steedman and her mother. He never married Steedman’s mother, in fact, he is married to another woman just as the prince in “The Little Mermaid,” and in his absence, her mother’s longing superseded her love for her children. It is the hurt Steedman experienced under this paradigm that motivates her to change it, but it required that she understand it first. She speaks of fairy tales as “interpretative” devices that helped her to recognize her mother’s actions and her role within them (143).

Upon reaching her understanding of the economic paradigm of fairy tales, Steedman undertakes two actions to deny its power. The first is to simply refuse to become a mother herself, which breaks the cycle of creating needy daughters: “refusal to reproduce oneself is a refusal to perpetrate what one is...” (84). As the other authors in this study have shown, the fairy tale passes economic neediness from mothers to daughters. If there are no daughters, the system is forced to fail. Steedman’s second action of repudiation is through her book, which is a refusal to reproduce on a level other than biological. She is denying the overriding cultural authority of the dominant narratives in society, de-legitimizing “the official interpretative devices of a culture,” one of which is the fairy tale (6). As we have seen with each author in this study, the fairy tale enjoys a great cultural authority in defining appropriate plots and roles for women. Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson have each demonstrated the confinement and damage of these plots and roles while working their way out of them

A basic, fundamental idea brought about by these writers is that motherhood in the fairy tale functions not in accordance with an ideal that revolves around love and maternal instinct, but around money. Fay Weldon has been recognized as echoing Adrienne Rich’s observation that there is a difference between motherhood as an institution and motherhood as an experience; the same is true for each of the writers in this study (Dowling 35). Motherhood in the fairy tale results not from an inherent, female desire to mother, but a system that forces women into marriage, and hence motherhood, through their economic need. Caring for daughters in fairy tales is secondary to achieving economic stability, and upon achievement of economic stability,

caring for daughters means teaching them how to follow the same techniques of survival: marriage and motherhood. Steedman is most poignant in articulating the detriment of this economic basis for motherhood by revealing the pain it causes her as a daughter; both the product of her mother's economic need and the start of a new cycle of needing: "she made me believe that I was her" (141). Steedman's is the last text discussed in this study because it provides a point of departure from which to understand the works of these women writers as a group. Her use of the phrase "refusal to reproduce" becomes of particular use under the light of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's discussion of authorship in their study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Gilbert and Gubar examine a metaphor for authorship that reveals a paternal lineage, where the author is male and the text he creates is his child. The parental, or reproductive, act for the male is to create a text (6). Working from this metaphor, it is very interesting that within Perrault and the Grimm Brothers' reproductive act of authoring fairy tales, their plots define motherhood (the female reproductive act) as a role that originates from and perpetuates dependence on a male. As seen with each of the authors in this study, the essential feature of the fairy tale plot is that the princess has an economic need for and dependence on the prince, which results in marriage and motherhood that produces more needy daughters. The male reproductive act, then, is to create a story in which the plot requires a female reproductive act that reinforces and continues it, ensuring the vitality of the male story and male authority. The male reproductive act becomes one of infinite repetition because its plot conscripts women to a role of motherhood that continually reproduces it. The reproduction of the male story

means the continuation of male authorship, or male authority. Gilbert and Gubar emphasize the dual levels of meaning of the word authority: it is power and control; it is also the capacity to write, to create stories (4-5). Through the male authorship of fairy tales in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women were removed from both realms of authority; their power in telling the tales was removed, and they were consigned within the tale to reproduce their own powerlessness, assuring the succession of paternal authoritative lineage. It is in this sense that Steedman's refusal to reproduce takes on great significance; by refusing to produce a daughter, she breaks the link that ensures the vitality of the fairy tale cycle: there is no needy daughter to depend on the prince and so male authority, the male text of the fairy tale begins to falter.

Carter, Weldon, and Winterson—if less literally than Steedman—also refuse to reproduce the needy daughter in their texts; they fight for her autonomy instead. Carter's heroine in "The Bloody Chamber" refuses to submit her daughter to the power of Bluebeard; Weldon's Gemma teaches Elsa not to marry for money; Winterson portrays a mother with a divine mission for her daughter. The daughters in these texts will not be confined to a fairy tale dependence. On this level, the actual power of the male authorized story begins to fade. On a second level, these writers are reclaiming their capacity to create plots rather than exist within them; they are reestablishing their own authority. The simple act of returning to the tales signifies that there is no need for women to accept a paradigm that requires their dependency, it can be changed. Adrienne Rich, in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," stresses that feminist writers must understand the texts that have come before them in order to

move away from them: “We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” (35). Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson are literally reforming the literature of a harmful tradition and making it useful.

The fairy tale lends itself particularly well to revision because it is a genre that, because of its oral origins, has been very malleable. This malleability was lost when recorded by Perrault, the Grimm Brothers and others; the tales have become quite static and monolithic in their message, which has been shown throughout this study. Thus, the revisionary task undertaken by Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson is restoring an essential function of the fairy tale if it is to be of positive use, which is multiplicity. A universal message in this group of revisions is that the tales must be flexible enough to provide any solution for any person. Carter demonstrates this by actually writing multiple versions of the same tale; Steedman by refusing to allow her story to become centralized; Weldon leaves Elsa’s destiny wide open after she learns her lesson; Winterson compares stories to sandwiches, saying that every person must make their own. The new fairy tale characters are allowed freedom to cope with their situations rather than complying with a defined role. The options for the characters in this study range from adopting beastliness, to lesbianism, to participating in a satisfying marriage, and no one proposes a single answer. Critics such as Duncker, who assert that the tales have become too static to work with, and Bettelheim, who praises this singularity, ignore that the original intent was for the tales to be available to everyone, to shift according to those who used them, those who needed them. It is unfortunate that the use for the last

two centuries has developed so unfavorably for women, but this should be no discouragement from reshaping the tales to serve women better now, in fact, the fairy tale begs revision in its malleable structure.

As a final method of recovering women's authority in fairy tales, Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson are removing the basis for the dependency of women in fairy tales: economic need. The fairy tale, which prescribes a dependent role for women that revolves around needing access to the prince's money, has become a source of income for these writers. They have successfully appropriated the genre as a means for achieving their own livelihood. This fact provides another link to the tradition of female storytelling mentioned at the beginning of this study, which is that the original storytellers were working women, using the tales to pass the time while at work; the current storytellers earn their living through the work of telling tales. There will be no needy daughters born out of this set of fairy tales because their mothers can provide them with both the money and the ideas they need to exist autonomously. The parallel between this fact and Rich's call for "re-vision" is uncanny: "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of *survival*" (35).

To end by speaking about motherhood seems necessary. It is no question that the revisionary work of Carter, Steedman, Weldon, and Winterson has taken the gargantuan task of replacing a powerful and prominent system that stipulates marriage and children for survival and given new options in the form of a pedagogical and persuasive genre

with the potential to empower women. Regardless of each writer's approach to the tales, they have each developed a solution that remains unsaid, and is perhaps the most important of any of their suggestions. This unstated solution is that in their revisions of motherhood in fairy tales, they have all committed an ultimate maternal act. They have given life to the possibilities of change, question, exploration, and multiplicity.

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VITA

HEATHER E. HOLCOMBE
HC 01 Box 6098P
Palmer, AK 99645
(907) 745-1681

EDUCATION:

1996-2000 Texas A&M University, College Station, TX. B.A. May 2000.
Major in English. Minors in History and Women's Studies
Graduated with Honors.

HONOR SOCIETY MEMBERSHIPS:

Lambda Sigma
Sigma Tau Delta
Golden Key National Honor Society

ACADEMIC HONORS AND AWARDS:

University Undergraduate Research Fellows, 2000
Second Place, Student Research Week – Humanities Division, 2000
Eisenhower Leadership Development Program, 1999
Academic Incentive Award, 1996-2000
Study Abroad to Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy, Spring Semester, 1999

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