

“We must consider the possibility that the classical attributes of ‘femininity’ found in these stories are in fact imprinted in children and reinforced by the stories themselves.” (Marcia R. Lieberman)

**No Net Ensnares Me: Marriage, Stock Roles, and
the Beauty Myth in Feminist Retellings of Fairy
Tales**

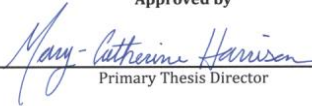
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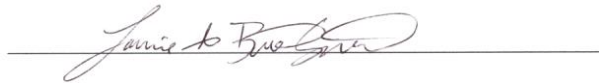
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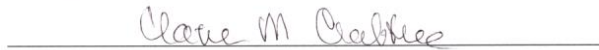
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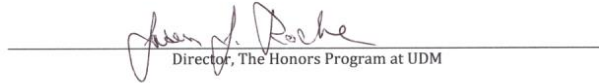

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Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Giulia Pink. Special thanks to primary thesis director, Dr. Mary-Catherine Harrison and the committee members, Dr. Laurie Britt-Smith and Dr. Claire Crabtree.

Introduction

Scope of the Project

This project has been brought together to analyze the continuity and historical change of fairy tale adaptations. Specifically, I build a timeline of fairy tale retellings and reconstructions beginning in 1848 with the publication of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, move on to Angela Carter's 1979 collection of short stories, *The Bloody Chamber*, and end with Christine Heppermann's 2014 poetry and image collection called *Poisoned Apples*. Through this timeline, an analysis of fairy tales and their retellings can be done.

I must point out the varying mediums that I use to achieve this analysis of adaptations. The original edition of *Jane Eyre* is 448 pages, with long chapters and lengthy sentences that create a sense of hesitation for the story. *The Bloody Chamber* contains short stories, of which the longest is 30 pages. These stories mirror the traditional tales Carter bases her retellings on, though they are mostly from a first-person perspective rather than third. The mixing of mediums in Christine Heppermann's *Poisoned Apples* creates a unique critique of the gender issue that Heppermann is eager to bring to light. With a society focused on receiving information in the now, perhaps vivid poetry and imagery is the most useful way to connect with today's audience. As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words," and

these pictures are adjoined with very powerful, even musical and provoking, words. Considering this take on the value of words, what is to be said of a full length film? In this analysis, I conclude with an analysis of the 2015 adaptation *Cinderella*.

My thoughts on exploring these different genres may look, of course, a bit disjointed and it would appear that these selections are random. However, these works play directly into my analysis of changing mediums to align with the times and historical contexts. As Ian Watt describes in *The Rise of the Novel*, novels became popular in the late 18th century, along with the Gothic novel. It would only make sense, then, for Charlotte Brontë to take advantage of this widely popular format and to include her own views on the equally popular and newly published fairy tales and the values they promoted. (The Grimms Fairy Tales were published for the first time in 1812). Exploring her own views in popular format would ensure that the work would be taken in overall, though it did not prevent Brontë from criticism and general awe as audiences and critics saw the book as a great stray from the status quo.

Angela Carter's contribution is timely in its publication, as it was first printed and shelved during second wave feminism, which rose to a peak in the 1970s and began a new era of thought and representation of women, particularly in critiques of pornography and violence against women. While Carter has not claimed outright that her stories are directly related to these

new critiques, she does report a wish to fully run from the original content of fairy tales, but rather to step outside of the “implied content” and to create a critique of the male gaze that is used to narrate the stories (EGS.edu – Angela Carter biography) Carter’s stories include characters who do not fulfill stock roles. These “stock roles” define any stereotypical character who exemplifies standard traits, such as the damsel in distress who needs to be rescued by a knight in shining armor. Typically, these roles are also two dimensional and do not allow for character development, much like flat characters as defined by E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*. Instead of creating stock roles for characters, Angela Carter’s protagonists show willpower and flaws, and quite honestly, make up everything that the original characters do not.

Many theorists criticized Carter for embracing fairy tales because they included stock characters and did not emphasize growth or deviation from well-known plots, as explored by feminist scholar Maria Warner. Significantly, as oral researcher Mike Maggio discovered, genre of short stories themselves derive from the oral traditions that stemmed fairy tales to begin with (*Atticus Books*). These oral tales told of culture’s values and traditions, and as Carter reinterprets these cultural stories, values are also reinterpreted along with the worldview of women and marriage.

As we approach modern times, more modern and advanced methods are needed to keep the continually growing and more easily bored audience to pay attention to a message. With poetry, this message can be given in only a few short lines, and the message can also vary depending on the reader. Formed on a foundation of feminist theory and thought along with her background in children's literature, Christine Heppermann put together a collection of poetry and images to reflect the change of society's views of women in Brontë's time to now, and also points out the need for further change in our society's values.

Significance of Oral Tales, Cultural Mores, and Gender Roles

Folklore has also long been recognized as a tool to relate to everyone and to be recognized as tales that eventually become part of the culture through oral sharing. Their worth is also acknowledged and has been the subject of research by pioneers into the field such as Jacques Barchilon and Jack Zipes, whose works surround the importance of fairy tales and their cultural significance, and even Sigmund Freud for the sake of psychology. Yet there is something more deceptive about these popular stories than the typical evil stepmother luring the reader in with a deliciously waxed poisoned apple, as the timeline described above has shown and explored. These tales have the ability to travel by word of mouth, as they have done through many cultures, and to stay in one's memory. Granted, humans are struck by the weird and fantastical, often purchasing many different forms of entertainment that have a basis in storytelling. However, it is more than a plot that sticks with people once a story has been told, ranging from gender roles perpetuated in these tales to a determination to read these tales against the grain and to decipher different meanings from what they perhaps first stood for.

Folktale scholars Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek in *Folk and Fairy Tales* explore the vast number of tale varieties that cultures from Europe to Asia have perpetuated and passed on, each version changed a bit

with each oral telling before it is cemented between covers. Simply said, these societies have created tales so that their cultures will continue to be passed on. However, there is not much acknowledgment for the individuals who are responsible for ensuring that these stories survive from one generation to the next.

Even today, stories are pictured as being told aloud and shared around a fireplace or in a mother's lap. Indeed, many of the well-known fairy tales and stories now widely known today were passed down orally, most times from small village women. This, in particular, has been explored and overturned by Grimms Brothers and German folktale researcher Valerie Peradiz in *Clever Maids*. While those who have physically documented fairy tales into collections of literature (i.e., the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault) are largely given credit for their compilations of fairy tales, Peradiz instead looks to the original tellers of these stories: the women who passed down these stories orally to the writers themselves.

First we must look at the distinguished differences between literary fairy tales and the fairy tales that were passed down orally through generations. According to folklorist and scholar Ruth Bottigheimer, literary fairy tales are implied to have been appropriated, as they were originally taken from an oral culture and were written down for the sake of preservation and study (38). The physical documentation of these tales does

not allow for further change that may have otherwise happened should the tales have continued to have been passed down only through oral sharing. In a sense, oral culture promotes a creativity and allowance to morph the tale to fit with the moral views of the culture that passes the story down.

This oral culture allows for numbers of similar versions throughout all countries. Plainly said, these tales are documents of the cultures that crafted them, holding and framing values of the cultures where they were first told and eventually molded to the societies that adopted the stories and used them to portray their own values. Oftentimes, these values are respondent to the outcome of characters in the stories, particularly along the lines of values associated with attributed gender roles. Should a character step outside these gender roles, they are punished severely. For example, the dangerous women storytellers have punished over the years.

To see these dangerous women represented by stepping outside of their gender roles, one looks no further than Pandora, Eve, or Psyche and the determination that femininity that steps outside of the box is evil. Feminist scholar Maria Tatar's *Secrets Behind the Door* indicates that the only suitable end for these dangerous women, particularly shown in select fairy tales, is through their deaths in order to fully maintain patriarchal values. Women were not accepted if they were seen as strong and outspoken, and so they

took refuge in stories, particularly in order to warn one another about the dangers of patriarchal marriage.

To provide a bit of definition to the preceding paragraph, patriarchy is defined through Merriam-Webster as control by men of a disproportionately large share of power. To combat this, a theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes was developed: feminism (Merriam-Webster). Following this theory, feminists challenge cultural mores and ways of life that condemn people from stepping outside of gender roles.

These specific patriarchal values and ways of life is inclusive of gender and the significance of gender in fairy tales. The compiled work *Fairy Tales and Feminism* specifically states that fairy tales are a “space where gender identity is constructed” (22). In typically patriarchal societies, the main heroic characters in fairy tales are male, and their success leads them out of poverty and with a prize to support themselves and their families (ex: Jack and the Beanstalk). Their violence is met with congratulations as they rely on force and strength to defeat the monsters and malice that work against them. Meanwhile, when female main characters are presented with happy endings, they end their tales with marriage, as this is the only success granted them. Should female characters step out of their assigned gender roles, they were sure to meet a rather messy end (this particularly applies to

stepmothers who are not nurturing as mothers, or women in general, should be.)

Feminist scholar Ruth Bottigheimer explores the role of females as stock characters (characters that are based on social stereotypes) and states that “The pen, nearly always held by a male hand, inked directions for what women should and should not do and what constituted feminine and unfeminine behavior” (38). *Fairy Tales and Feminism*, consequently, explores the double edged sword that women in many stories are forced under while men remain the “literary conduits” of tales, and that women particularly realize that “storytelling, once again, is linked with survival” (130). Is it so surprising, then, that female authors throughout the timeline I propose have rewritten traditional tales that originally put them in danger?

This being said, could it also be expressed that women are taking back fairytales through retellings and research which shows that women were the initiators and creators of tales? It is safe to say that this knowledge has been previously unnoticed because men were the ones to put forward the efforts to physically collect and document tales, however, the documentation of oral stories does not warrant credit for authorship. Despite lack of credit for feminist fairy tale retellings, there are a number of well-known adaptations done by authors such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton and their mutually named poems, “Cinderella”, along with the *Collected Grimm Tales* by Carol

Ann Duffy and Anne Thackeray Ritchie's "Beauty and the Beast", and has even been explored in undergraduate Kylie Hammel's theses of feminist adaptations of fairy tales, including "The Little Mermaid", "The Seven Ravens", and "Little Red Riding Hood".

Feminist folklorists and scholars M. Jane Young and Kay Turner debate the supposed norm of women's roles in folklore in *Challenging the Canon: Folklore Theory Reconsidered from Feminist Perspectives*. The exploration of several theorists who look to the history of patriarchal culture to explain the lack of feminist study surrounding folklore and fairy tales. The theory that women are naturally associated with the private realm while men are associated with the public realm, and therefore are more apt to make their histories available for study, raises the issue of tracking folklore that has been attributed to the private realm. Additionally, this offers the point of women and men having different creative forces, with men's creativity perhaps being more direct or "worth" certain attentions in patriarchal societies. The importance of women's contributions and women's energies in folklore is acknowledged in these studies.

As Young and Turner reference to Kay Turner and Suzanne Seriff:

Folklore and feminism conjoin in the critical attention both disciplines pay to forms of women's symbolic expression that are hidden from, or considered unimportant to, the majority culture. The combined efforts of folklore and feminism enlarge our understanding of the way in which women create or use symbolic modes within the dominant culture of the patriarchy.

Folklore provides a unique data base of the traditional artistic means women have employed to express their own view of the world, and feminism offers a theoretical handle on that expression.” (13)

What feminist retellings of fairy tales accomplish is a rattling of the cage with the bones of women stuck in the trap of gender roles. These criticisms must be acknowledged when thinking about rereading literature and fairytales. Without new interest in the interpretation of these tales, they would not be reintroduced and studied in modern societies. These reintroductions account for the constant changes in tales throughout countries and time, as expressed in the coda of this thesis.

Analyzing Three Feminist Fairy Tale Retellings

While fairy tales have been previously explored and their different versions dissected and debated, I will analyze the largely autonomous reviewing of *Jane Eyre* and explore feminist retellings of fairy tales. This particular work is a study of feminist retellings of fairy tales and a comparison of these tales throughout the ages – from the first printing of fairy tales and their initial inspirations put together and highly analyzed in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to modern classics. No matter the background of these stories, a common theme of feminist ideals is absolutely present, along with the underlying point of a needed deconstruction of patriarchal standards in order for women to thrive.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* explores the struggle of a young girl as she discovers the problems of marriage through fairy tale references and also the discovery of her master/love interest's wife hidden in the attic. Brontë's character, Jane, is not a conventional beauty and works to support herself, though she is absolutely aided through extreme fairy tale circumstance, particularly in her role as an orphan and obtaining riches from a distant relative. Furthermore, Jane takes control of the traditionally masculine role of the savior, coming to Mr. Rochester's rescue three times as Brontë struggles to make the relationship between the wealthy and strong patriarchal character of Mr. Rochester and the demure and fragile character

of Jane equal. However, even with this break from tradition, Brontë ultimately places Jane in the role of the wife and server. Though she recognized this as a problematic role, Brontë was stuck in the mindset of women having to marry in order to lead complete lives. She was unable to break from this ideal, and in fact ends the novel with chosen subservience as Jane's liberation.

While Charlotte Brontë used snippets and allusions of fairy tales to accompany her characters, Angela Carter created an entire collection of fully fledged short stories, exploring the concept of the fairy tale from a feminist perspective. These tales are not only feminist because they place women in positions of power, but because they show women to be capable of demonstrating evil actions simply for their own gain, and not for the premise of marriage. This revolutionary view of female characters is particularly important as Carter's work reflects the second wave feminist movement, focusing on the sexual, familial, and legal equality of women (Schanoes 11).

Poisoned Apples creates a modern day tale about the dangerous expectations for women as they continue to be influenced by harmful gender roles. As a contemporary author, Christine Heppermann is able to look back on the work of other feminist authors and those who have reconstructed fairy tales in order to influence her own work. As Heppermann and other authors continue to reflect on work and critiques done before their own, fairy tale

retellings can do nothing but continue to prompt the growth of society,
particularly in how romantic relationships and beauty standards are viewed.

“How difficult Charlotte found the conventionally foolish behavior demanded of young women of the time, as if they were no more complex than dolls...”

(Rebecca Fraser)

Chapter One

Jane Eyre: Liberation in Subservience

Charlotte Brontë began her gift for storytelling as a child with her brother Branwell and sisters Emily and Anne. As the creators of the imaginary worlds of Glass Town, Angria, and Gondal, the Brontë children took turns composing poetry and stories involving their fantastical worlds, and often included inspiration from the everyday samplings of their time, including political schemes and household issues (Fraser 94-96). Later on in her career as a writer, Brontë often needed to speak out for herself as a female author. As a Victorian woman, Brontë lived under a double edged sword – struggling to support her life as a writer without being seen as a silly woman writing only of women’s novelties.

As Brontë scholar Rebecca Fraser explores in *Charlotte Brontë: A Writer’s Life*, as her work was published, Brontë almost hoped for a bit of backlash, as this would support that she was making a difference and going against the grain of contemporary romance novels of that time. Specifically, Brontë’s own wish to defend herself and her individuality is placed in her

much critiqued character, who Fraser describes as: “the assertive figure of Jane Eyre whose demands for her claims to happiness was so unusual as to seem to threaten the status quo” (223). Because this assertive nature was not typically seen as a feminine attribute, Brontë became responsible for defending herself as not just a “dreaming being” (Stoneman 16), and eventually grew to an appreciation for the independent life she held, especially in her initial refusal of several marriage proposals. Largely, Brontë based Jane Eyre’s character after her own experiences and reflected these misgivings of her own life through her novel and the retellings that she included as well.

Brontë was certain that she was in charge of her own writing destiny and exiting the separate spheres that divided male and female lives in the Victorian era, going so far as to even ignore the spheres that created such a division (Fraser 150). Despite this large unfeminine desire to chase her dream of a writing career and the intensely independent character of Jane Eyre that “would so amaze” her contemporaries, Brontë’s own individuality was often “regularly suppressed in real life” (Fraser 222). With this in mind, it is easily seen that Brontë’s character of Jane Eyre was used to express the independent life that she was always so near.

With this independent life came a few thoughts concerning the problems of marriage. Brontë acknowledged that marriages did not often

result in the way that women expected. She herself turned down a proposal before eventually conceding, and her distaste for the possible dangers of marriage is seen specifically in her novel *Jane Eyre*. Along with the discomfort of marriage in her own life, fairy tales that had been recently published in Germany served as a basis for *Jane Eyre*. Specifically, the problematic tales of Bluebeard, Sleeping Beauty, and Beauty and the Beast serve to show the type of violence and oppression that Brontë feared through marriage.

I argue that Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* served as a stepping stone into her feminist questioning of fairy tales in their marriage plots, and I also acknowledge that she was unable to fully recreate fairy tales and provide her character with a truly equal ending compared with her husband, especially as Brontë resorted to marriage as an ending for the novel. Brontë also unearths some difficulties within herself, particularly in her mistreatment of characters who were later seen in more compassionate views, particularly the character of the estranged and imprisoned Mrs. Rochester. Brontë recognized herself in this dark character, and incorporated Jane's role as a savior of her husband to counteract how women were treated in her time.

Though Brontë fit into the Victorian time, her writing often strayed outside of the prison of gender roles, as she expresses in *Jane Eyre*: "women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their

efforts as much as their brothers do...It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” (178). As Brontë saw the constraints for women in everyday life, she created women in her novel who were both strong, kind, and dangerous: effectively rewriting the passive characters who submitted to violent marriages in the fairytales that were just beginning to emerge in England.

Feminist and fairy tale scholars such as Patsy Stoneman, Huang Mei, and Micael M. Clark, and Maria Tatar have acknowledged the fairy tale connections present in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. With direct connections to “Sleeping Beauty,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Cinderella,” and “Bluebeard” through imagery and the Jane’s observations throughout the novel, the acknowledgment of these fairy tales has been documented since the novel’s publication, particularly as Grimms’ Fairy Tales became published and popular in England during the time Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre*. These connections include loose allusions such as Jane’s relationship with her stepmother and step-siblings in comparison with Cinderella’s hardships, are present in the imagery of the thorns that envelop Mr. Rochester’s home in alignment with the thorns that hold Sleeping Beauty, and also the more direct comparison of the manor with Bluebeard’s castle, along with Mr. Rochester himself as the dangerous Beast and Bluebeard figure.

As Stoneman observes in *Brontë Transformations*, a scholarly work analyzing the writing of the three Brontë sisters, the plot of many of Charlotte Brontë's works includes a fairy tale-like plot, and this is especially evident in *Jane Eyre*. "As in her other novels, Bronte charts a course of imprisonment, escape, and exclusion until the heroine, near death from starvation, fortuitously discovers a family of her own" (299). Just as in a fairy tale, Jane depends on fairy tale circumstances to leave her the ability to create her own life, such as the convenient inheritance from her uncle, which can be seen as a nearly fairy tale type of circumstance.

As far as Brontë's rewriting of these fairy tales, her own acknowledgement of the problem through Jane's narrative voice concerning patterns in fairy tales has arisen in scholarship, particularly in Huang Mei's dissertation, "Transforming the Cinderella Dream" where she states that it is obvious that "the narrator/heroine in *Jane Eyre* is very conscious of this fairy tale pattern" (105). At this point in scholarship, it is also obvious that Brontë was well aware of fairy tales and purposely included allusions to them in her novel. However, I argue that Brontë actually worked to change the ending of fairy tales because she was dissatisfied in their treatment of women and lack of choices for women to make concerning their own lives, particularly as she had experienced this lack of subjectivity in her own life.

Stoneman also seems to nod to this possibility of a retelling, especially as she notes that the novel, “though rebelliously feminist in its implications, used a sort of fairy tale structure to enable the novelist to conceal even from herself her deepening pessimism about woman’s place in man’s society” (399). This concealment, perhaps, is done because of the fairy tale structure, as Brontë felt she was able to hide her distaste within a familiar structure and also in her characters. Through her novel, Brontë used Jane’s character, in a sense, to voice her own distaste for marriage because of the dangers it presented to women. In this way, she intended to have this character create a change in the outcome of fairy tales, particularly as she engrained these tales in her novel through the previously discussed imagery and direct allusions.

Ultimately, this change includes the idea that marriage is a type of ownership of the man over the woman. Specifically, Brontë includes several scenes where Jane actually refuses a relationship with Rochester because she insists on equality in her relationship (mirroring Brontë’s own discomfort in marriage and her refusals to powerful men). She resents feeling below Rochester, and Brontë plans to solve this unfairness by clipping the eagle of Rochester’s wings down to Jane’s sparrow size through a symbolic maiming.

Jane herself recognizes that the relationship she imagines with Mr. Rochester is problematic as a possible marriage between them would represent a class irregularity. However, Jane also sees that there is potential

for a relationship with Rochester, and as she observes him interact with other women of his own class, she decides: “he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine...I do not mean that I have his force to influence, and his spell to attract: I mean only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him” (Brontë 253). Despite even Rochester’s insistence that Jane is his equal and his likeness (339), Jane remains doubtful and counsels herself through drawings. Specifically, she convinces herself that there is no hope for a marriage between them, and resolves to show herself complete honesty when she feels she will not get honesty anywhere else:

“It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her...place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully; without softening one defect: omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain’” (Brontë 237).

In this reminder to herself, Brontë has Jane recognize that the power structures in play would not allow for a fair marriage between herself and her employer. In a deeper sense, too, Jane’s attention to her flaws and her inability to stand on par with Rochester would save her from the type of marriage that she later discovers Rochester is capable of.

It is in Rochester’s earlier marriage to the woman who is trapped in the attic, Bertha, that Brontë places the terrible parallels between this character and Bluebeard, a violent character from the Grimms’ Tale of the same name. This tale follows a young woman and her sister, Anne, as they

move to Bluebeard's castle after the young woman's marriage to the rich man with blue streaks in his beard. After her husband announces his need to travel abroad for a few weeks, he gives his wife a ring of keys that can access every room in his castle. He warns her not to use one key to open a specific room that he wishes to remain private. When he leaves, his wife enters the room and discovers the bodies of all the wives he had before her. Frightened, she drops the key into a puddle of blood and whenever the stain is removed from the key, it comes back. The woman is forced to show her husband the key upon his return, and he tells her that her disobedience cost her her life. She and her sister remain on the lookout for their brothers, who were supposed to visit that day. The brothers arrive and slay Bluebeard before he can kill their sister.

This story leads to several concepts that must be discussed in comparison with Brontë's novel. The tale of Bluebeard and its many variations provides an insight toward the gendered roles of men and women: namely, the violence that men attribute to themselves based on their culture and the supposed inability of women to save themselves from a likely poor situation. As Bluebeard was demonized for his collection of dead wives, so is Rochester portrayed in this analysis as a ploy in Brontë's argument against marriage. Furthermore, the designation of men as the saviors in this tale is oppositely reflected in Jane's character as she saves Rochester three times in

the length of the novel. Ultimately, the attempt to absolve Jane from the burden of marriage on her independence and leaving her to act as her own savior fails, as she commits herself to a life of subservience as wife and nurse.

First, the issues of gender raised by Rochester's first marriage must be explored. Rochester himself appears to be a man who thrives on his power, giving Jane gifts to adorn herself with that she is clearly uncomfortable with, and even going so far as to change her name, calling her "Janet" and likening her to inhuman beings such as elves and will-o'-the-wisps. He seems to imprison her in his gifted jewelry (344). Rochester's first clue to his potential for violence, however, comes with his promise to tell Jane of the specifics with the third floor of Thornfield: "When we are married one year and a day, I shall tell you." Ironically, it states in English law that missing people after one year were claimed dead (Death in Absentia – English Law). Readers later find that the secret on the third floor is in fact Bertha Mason Rochester, the woman Rochester married largely because his father pressured him into the affair, but also because a marriage to Bertha meant a considerable sum of money. Through imprisoning Bertha, Rochester takes away her voice and readers are left with a male view of her character.

Mei acknowledges that not having a voice for women is problematic, as this leads to women being ignored and the male voice overpowering.

Similarly, Stoneman sees Bertha as something of an allusion to stand in for

Jane's own emotions that she is not allowed to portray in the novel, as gender roles commit her to a fragile state: "Bertha Mason who, by her very presence in the text, registers the anger which is also experienced by the heroine" (89). This anger, eventually released by Jane as she escapes Thornfield and sets out onto the moors, somewhat defeats the double edged sword of gender roles, particularly as Jane refuses to allow herself to become another wife in the attic.

At the first reading of Bertha Mason's character, readers see her as the monster Rochester intends her to be seen as when Jane first describes her sighting of what she claims to remind her of the "Vampyre": "It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face...the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black eye-brows wildly raised over the blood-shot eyes" (Brontë 371). This description, while no doubt terrifying, ends with Jane's wedding veil torn and stomped upon. When read through a different lens, Bertha can be seen as the victim, rather than the villain. She is Rochester's tormented bride who must watch another woman succumb to a violence that Jane cannot yet see. Her lack of voice ended in what she thought to be her only escape: death.

Despite this alternate view of Bertha, the role of women is almost always seen through the lens of men, as stated that specifically: "fictional types of women's possible fate is in relation to man" (111). Specifically,

because Rochester has presented Bertha as a monster, a woman driven mad from mental disease and intent on killing him despite his best efforts to keep her sane, readers take this initial introduction to Bertha as fact, much as the young girl first took Bluebeard to simply be a wealthy widower because that is how he presented himself. Bertha is not given a voice for herself, instead resulting to setting fires that eventually take Thornfield down in a blaze. In this way, Bertha effectively rewrites a Bluebeard tale in that she destroys the forbidden chamber that she was imprisoned in, but the same cannot truly be said of Jane.

Indeed, Jane's ending to her story is recognizable as a Bluebeard retelling, and many have seen it as a positive one, particularly because it is a "happy ending that reunites her with Rochester," as envisioned by Maria Tatar. Tatar claims that Jane acknowledged the possibilities of her story as taking inspiration from "Beauty and the Beast" and "Cinderella," but that these tales' endings did not satisfy her wish for further inspiration and happiness. Tatar observes that these tales end in the "catastrophe of marriage" (73), and that the unlikely happy ending for Jane is discovered alongside the charred forbidden chamber of Mr. Bluebeard Rochester.

While Jane's ending can be seen as happier than Bertha's, it cannot be ignored that Brontë still left her stuck in a marriage, which Tatar had herself seen as catastrophic in other fairy tales. Perhaps the only thing that sets

Jane apart from the passive princesses in the well-known tales that provided Brontë with inspiration for the novel is her ability to act outside of her stock roles as a woman and to be Rochester's savior on multiple occasions.

Jane's role as Rochester's savior occurs upon their first meeting. In the first scene with Mr. Rochester, Jane spooks his horse and Rochester is thrown off, twisting his ankle. He begrudgingly asks her to aid him back to his horse as he cannot walk himself: "He laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse" (Brontë 184). This moment particularly brings to mind the image of a knight in shining armor approaching on a steed to the damsel in distress. In Brontë's version, however, the knight is thrown and requires the assistance of his female staff to carry his weight.

As the novel progresses and Jane recognizes that Thornfield holds a secret that no one else acknowledges, a manic laugh that unsettles her and precedes some sort of anarchy, another scene requires her to act as the savior. "I thought no more of Mrs. Fairfax; I thought no more of Grace Poole or the laugh: in an instant, I was within the chamber. Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of the blaze and vapour, Mr. Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep" (221-222). Jane wakes Rochester and helps him to smother the flames.

Brontë's work to bring Jane on par with Rochester is evident in her casting of Jane as the savior, and perhaps she saw it as completely successful at the conclusion of the novel. Jane escaped from another possibility of marriage to the preacher St. John and returned to Rochester to find him maimed from the final blaze that Bertha set. Rochester questions her intention to stay with him, seeing himself for his wounds and blindness. However, Jane assures him that she plans to stay for good and to act as his obedient wife when he expresses his disbelief at her wish to stay with him, as he expresses: "A poor blind man, whom you will have to lead about by the hand?" "Yes, sir." "A crippled man, twenty years older than you, whom you will have to wait on?" "Yes, sir." (Brontë 547).

Jane's final attentions to the reader begin: "Reader, I married him" (552). Despite Brontë's distaste for marriage and the dangers that they present to women, given in her connection to Rochester and his home to Bluebeard and the castle of death, Jane is married and determined to a life of subservience. Her acts as a savior are no longer, and she has succumbed to the Cinderella plot that she had escaped when she left her cruel step family and the boarding school. She will live with the Beast, albeit a maimed Beast.

Is living with a handicapped Beast a type of liberation from what Jane would have initially faced as Bluebeard's wife? Mei's dissertation epilogue specifically addresses an idea that raises the issue in seeing Jane's marriage

to Rochester as any type of liberation, as “the liberation of all women is but another illusion, an extension of the Cinderella myth” (143). As Jane’s story essentially ends at her decision to marry Rochester, it would seem that she does participate in a prototype of the “Cinderella” ending. Specifically, this ending with the agreement of marriage further plays into the “illusion of a mutually satisfying relation between men and women in patriarchy” (Seifert 67).

Charlotte Brontë crafted *Jane Eyre* to choose a subservience as her liberation in the end of the novel. Though she struggles to step out of gender ideologies for her characters, she nonetheless falls back into them, as her vision could only go so far in that time period. Although Jane had determined that she would marry in a sense of equality, this equality was gained only after Rochester is blind and maimed. In a sense, she is stuck in this narrative of a trapped Sleeping Beauty in the thicket.

“You will feel no pain, my darling.” (Angela Carter)

Chapter Two

The Bloody Chamber: Bloody Brides and Grooms

Angela Carter took particular offense to the idea of men’s possession of women in the majority of fairy tales, and explored this detrimental theme in her retellings. Though this idea of possession through force and dependence seems to remain present in a large amount of the stories, it must also be acknowledged that Carter succeeded in creating large numbers of female characters who escaped from stock roles and fully adapted to the large range of personalities that have otherwise been saved for male characters. For example, rather than constantly only serving as the role of mother, or temptress, or victim, these women act as mothers and heroes, temptresses and victims at the same time. Carter’s work does successfully retell these stories, though possibly not in the way that she initially intended them, supposedly for the good of the women who starred in the stories.

It is Carter herself, however, who states that she did not merely write retellings (as far as new versions) of fairy tales. She gives her intention in these stories in an interview with author Helen Simpson as “extract[ing] the latent content from traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories” (The Guardian). Specifically, Carter took advantage of the popular

field of fairy tale retellings in order to get her own voice out into the world, and especially to expose her writing to an audience who perhaps had never heard of her. As Carter herself writes in *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography*, “To be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case - that is, to be killed. This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman.” It is these stories that have lasted so long in society that promote the idea of what perfection really is, and Carter actively destroys this idea in her collection of short stories.

Carter sees herself as someone who actively works to demythologize the stories our society has accepted as tales to spread to our children, and also actively critiques these stories that are so often repeated throughout the world and in all eras (Tatar 115). Carter states: “I am all for putting new wine into old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (Notes from the Frontline 47). Specifically, she takes control of the narrative that has been long accepted in terms of gender norms and traditions and turns them on their heads. It is obvious that Carter’s characters are not passive in the majority of the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* collection, and a further analysis of these works reveals that this was not the only goal for these writings.

Carter's goal to create entirely new stories from pieces of old and recognizable tales results in the breaking down of stock roles for female characters. While this collection has been acknowledged in literature as a feminist adaptation of fairy tales, these adaptations are in fact top to bottom rewritings that incorporate roles for female characters that were previously unavailable and unwritten. While these stock characters are given a chance to grow into fully developed characters, problematic themes are also acknowledged and rewritten to fates that are not determined by a character's gender and lack of meeting specific gender roles, but by how the author chose to compose the story.

Like Charlotte Brontë, Angela Carter nods to the potential danger in marriage for women, and this message has been acknowledged by other readers, including the bloggers for *Villains in Literature*. This danger is emphasized particularly in "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Tiger's Bride." However, the relationships with men are also seen to be detrimental, especially in "The Erl King." Carter's characters are most definitely not one dimensional, as even Donald Haase argues in *Feminist Fairy Tales and Scholarship*. To be put more adequately in Haase's words, her stories center with a female protagonist, "be she clever, or brave, or good, or silly, or cruel, or sinister, or awesomely unfortunate" (8-9). Primarily, what it comes down to is that Carter's main female protagonists are real people, and unlike the

fairy tales written for real people that demonstrated how individuals should behave, Carter's retellings expose how people really are, complete with flaws.

Specifically, Helen Simpson sums up Carter's stories: "In each one of them, lovers are lethal, traditional romantic patterns kill, and sex leads to death." (The Guardian Interview). The first story of the collection, and also the longest, is not only based on Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard," but also the Grimms Brothers' "The Robber Highwayman". Like the traditional tales, "The Bloody Chamber" begins with a young bride traveling to meet her husband and leaving home for the first time. However, in this version, the girl travels by herself and becomes her new husband's prisoner as a result of her own curiosity and her failure to comply with her husband's sole demand: not to enter a room opened by a certain key on a large set given to her before his departure.

The girl's initial gut feelings upon her marriage provide a large amount of foreshadowing to her mother's role and a sense of foreboding to the marriage overall: "in the midst of my bridal triumph, 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" (2). These discomfiting feelings are factually supported on her discovery of a morbid torture chamber during his absence, which reveals the location of his previous wives' corpses who had supposedly disappeared and ultimately foreshadows her own fate as she drops the key

that opened the forbidden chamber into a puddle of the deceased women's blood. This accident clearly marks her to be the next victim of violation of her husband.

The original stories save the role of savior for the doomed bride's brothers, but Carter's version leads the young woman to escape because of her mother's violence. Her mother's ferocious entrance to her daughter's intended execution results in a hasty end to the beastly husband: "... without a moment's hesitation, she...took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband's head" (40). The mother's role as aggressor is far from the standard passive woman that is so often seen in fairy tales, particularly in "Bluebeard" types where the wife awaits her fate and is saved by her brothers. Carter's goal, however, is not only just to save the bride through a different savior, but to create a completely different story. In this case, the bride leaves the castle of nightmares with something to always remind her of the violence that she narrowly left.

As the story comes to a close, the young bride is able to escape her beheading, but does not leave the castle without a distinct scar on her head from her struggles. This scar remains to symbolize her trials in the marriage, and perhaps to serve as a sign for other women to avoid the danger of marriage. However, this scar can also serve as something even more eerie. Although she is still alive, she continues to serve as much of a symbol of her

husband's abuse as the other dead brides in the forbidden chamber. In a sense, her husband lives through her because of this permanent violent mark.

The young girl in "The Tiger's Bride" further demonstrates the detrimental effect on women's character through marriage as she is trapped in a life as the possession of others and is able to be won and traded quite literally. Her childhood bedtime stories starring the Erl-King warned her of men's beastly behavior and their appetite for young girls (56). This symbolizes the wide attitude of women toward men as a group to be feared because they consume and destroy what is feminine in order to make it their own, specifically, in order to take control of what feminine power is available.

As the girl begins her life as property, she lives as a symbol of men's power over women because she cannot escape possession. Her fate is foreshadowed just as the young bride in "The Bloody Chamber" as the Beast she has been doomed to marry arrives in a carriage "black as a hearse", symbolizing her nearing death through marriage. As the girl leaves her father, she humors his wish for a white rose to show that he is forgiven, and he receives blood smeared on the petals because the girl pricked herself on one of the flower's thorns. With her hearse to carry her to her grave and her blood on her father's hands, the girl leaves to accompany her new husband and to live a married life.

As the girl enters her new life, she becomes aware of the large role that her sexuality and the wish to control this sexuality plays for her husband. Particularly, she reminisces that what could have led her to escape a fate of sexual possession cannot be achieved because of her appealing lack of sexual experience. The only thing her husband wishes to have from her is the sight of her naked, as no other man has (61). In order to combat this fate, she builds a determination to save her honor from the Beast, which proves her violent desire to conserve herself in spite of everything: “That he should want so little was the reason why I could not give it” (61). This piece of herself is what she still holds power over, and to relinquish it would be to give away the only piece that she still owns.

The girl gradually believes she cannot save herself short of suicide: “I shall twist a noose out of my bed linens and hang myself with it” (59) and is constantly reminded of her inhuman status by the doll that serves to accompany her. As her husband’s valet tells her, nothing human lives in the palace, and her imprisonment in the cell that is her room, along with being denied the right to wash herself, leaves her with a lack of subjectivity that would typically be given to something that is human.

The girl actually completely changes at the close of the story, and it is through her husband’s influence that she changes. “And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world,

and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur” (64). The physical contact of her husband literally skins her of the person that she was, leading to the death of one person and the birth of another.

Carter’s illustration of this possession is physical, with a large deviation from the original “Beauty and the Beast” tale that leaves behind a handsome prince in place of the Beast. In this case, the young girl, first owned and traded by her father, becomes a beast to match her husband. Accepting her role as wife, the girl is removed from the stock role of victim eager to escape and becomes what seems to be an extreme Stockholm syndrome victim.

Possession continues in a morbid theme through the story “The Erl-King.” The narrator of the tale, a young girl in love with a manlike beast who embodies the forest, becomes this beast’s prisoner through her love for him. Through her attraction to the Erl-King, however, she recognizes the danger she is confronted with, and she states these dangers through descriptions of his sharp teeth and colorful eyes: “There are some eyes can eat you” (86). Despite these dangers, the girl is unable to help herself from returning to his cottage, as her relationship with him has possessed her.

The Erl-King is also a victim through his own violence: “But in his innocence he never knew he might be the death of me, although I knew from the first moment I saw him how Erl-King would do me grievous harm” (90).

He is unable to recognize the cruelty (or perhaps enjoys the cruelty) he prompts his caged birds to suffer, and the girl realizes that ultimately she will be in the same position as those birds that were caged through a relationship with the dangerous Erl-King. In order to escape this harm, the girl plans her violent escape and the rescue of the previously incarcerated brides.

It is through this violence that the girl attempts to avoid the Erl-King's possession. Her thoughts of turning into a bird, albeit a mute bird, prove her determination to act in some sort of rebellion from the Erl-King's ownership. However, it is also through her thoughts that she plots the ultimate violence: the assassination of the Erl-King: "I shall take two huge handfuls of his rustling hair...I shall strangle him with them" (91). This planned execution will kill the Erl-King with his own body, which would be the ultimate escape from his possession; however, there are still the imprisoned birds to deal with. Though free, their lives carried out as something other than what they were proves the ultimate possession: they are forever changed by the relationship with a dangerous man they knew would bring them down, and remain with the girl who planned to kill the Erl-King as characters who seem to run into their unfortunate fate with open arms.

Carter creates not only complex female characters who love their captors and aggressors, but female characters who are captors and aggressors

themselves. “The Lady of the House of Love” features the queen of the vampires, doomed to an undead existence wearing a bridal gown. She sleeps in a coffin and keeps a pet bird whose sad songs make her happy. Most of all, the lady is described for her beauty: “She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness” (100). It is this beauty that she uses as a trap for her prey.

This tale is rather set apart from the previous stories, especially as Carter’s prose incorporates several different tales. Along with the widely known vampire myths, “The Lady of the House of Love” holds allusions to “Jack and the Beanstalk” and also “Sleeping Beauty,” leaving the lady of the vampires in the role of a rather grotesque Sleeping Beauty. However, the lady’s namesake is that of a character in a 1922 horror film, *Nesferatu*, a film based (without permission) on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Essentially, “The Lady of the House of Love” is a retelling in many parts, though in this case, the female character, the undead lady, is the dangerous character who instigates a marriage between herself and her victims.

Angela Carter’s collection of fairy tale retellings explores the dangers of marriage for female characters, but also allows for these traditionally passive women to break out of their stock roles. While Angela Carter’s new

roles for these women focuses on heterosexual female sexuality, it is important to acknowledge that in this time period, the 1970s, a work from the female perspective had not yet been done (The Guardian).

“But here’s the great thing about stories: they can be retold.”

(Christine Heppermann)

Chapter Three

Poisoned Apples: Intertextuality as a “Poetic Attack on the Beauty Myth”

Christine Heppermann’s author’s note to her collection of poetry, *Poisoned Apples*, sets off her goal for the collection: to retell stories so that they can promote a modern take on fairy tales, and the messages of these tales, particularly. In response to others’ fairy tale adaptations through text and images, Christine Heppermann explores the relationship between fairy tales and society’s expectations of women’s appearances and their involvement in romantic relationships. Through an intertextuality of images from photographers (several of whom worked specifically for the collection) and her own poetry, Heppermann creates a dialogue that critiques standard gender roles and unrealistic relationship and beauty expectations.

Right from Heppermann’s poetry collection title and the cover with a distinct form that resembles Red Riding Hood, readers understand that fairy tale references will be a large part of the work. Furthermore, Heppermann herself also acknowledges that this title creates a lead into how society can create poisonous standards for girls and women (Late Night Library). This

collection is marketed as young adult poetry, as the jacket cover explicitly describes the collection as poems that “[place] fairy tales side by side with the modern teenage girl.” With the majority of feminist fairy tale adaptations and comparisons made in novels and short stories written for adults, this new audience (and genre) stands out as significant. Clearly, Heppermann is cognizant of the way feminist adaptation of fairy tales is significant to an audience of individuals who are on their way to becoming women.

Heppermann’s understanding of feminist ideals and fairy tales stems from her graduation from a children’s writing program from Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts and also accomplished an MFA from Hamline University in Minnesota in writing for children and young adults (christineheppermann.com). This is significant as she has studied the fairy tales used in her adaptations in depth, particularly along the outcomes that they have on societies that use them to influence children and the young people and adults that these children become. While this new audience is cause for interest, Heppermann also incorporates separate mediums that work together to form an intertextuality that creates an even stronger critique of society’s view of women. It is further cause for interest that she hand selected photographs to accompany her work, as she is quite knowledgeable of the power that images have in their portrayals of the subjects.

Heppermann's collection has touched many and brought well-deserved attention to the link between mindsets of the past and changing and liberal mindsets of the present and future. Particularly, comments on this collection acknowledge how close to both well-known poetry and contemporary new poetry Heppermann's arguments concerning fairy tales actually are:

"Sometimes the fairy tale path meets the fast shiny freeway of now. Christine Heppermann's poems come from both of these places" (cover praise by author Lynne Rae Perkins). This recognition of Heppermann's work as both touching on the consistency of well-known fairy tales and incorporating modern ideas.

Heppermann's strong messages critiquing society's views of women's body image and other gendered roles have been recognized by magazines, bookstores, and blogs. A contributor to *Population We*, a blog dedicated to acts of social justice and selfless acts, describes their reactions to the collection: "After reading the book and examining the messages about body image, beauty, roles of women, I think that society needs to take a hard look in the mirror. Preferably, one very large enchanted mirror showing society as it is and society as it could be." This recognition is one of the first for this collection, though most certainly not the last, as Amanda McConnon describes the collection as "address[ing] the insidiousness of this quest for 'perfection,' how it manifests in disordered beliefs and behavior" (Late Night Library interview).

Indie Bound, an online bookstore company, provides a small description of Heppermann's collection with a small background of how little girls grow up wishing to be princesses. This description states: "But then we grow up. And life is not a fairy tale." However, this is perhaps exactly what Hepperman hopes for: the end of accepting fairy tales as something perfect to wish for in life. Specifically, the description tackles this search for perfection as something of a cruelty to ourselves and to other young women: "There are expectations, pressures, judgment, and criticism. Self-doubt and self-confidence. But there are also friends, and sisters, and a whole hell of a lot of power there for the taking." Perhaps life isn't a fairy tale, and maybe that's ok.

In fact, it is Heppermann's author's note that unveils her intentions with the collection. She emphasizes that fairy tales and reality "run together, even though the intersections aren't always obvious" (109) and nods to Marina Warner, the folklorist who acknowledged that fairy tales were a sneaky way of documenting women's lives in a non-threatening way, as these tales were too fantastic to be true, really. Through the mask of these stories, women said what they wanted "Because they were *just* stories, right? Harmless little fantasies?" (110). Heppermann follows the footsteps of these crafty women through her own retellings, and steps outside the standard novel and short story with her collection of poems and images.

Heppermann also deviates from the original format of fairy tales as she writes retellings in a shorter medium than novels and short stories, but interweaves relevant images to further illustrate and complement her poetry. Through these poems based on personal accounts and retellings of fairy tales, the larger message of supporting young women through a time of self-deprecation and encouraging them to thrive regardless of society's determination to package them into impenetrable boxes is further emphasized in the images that are present with the text. I have included selected images in this project to further support my own claims and to connect the ideas of Heppermann to the images even further.

The example I wish to explore first is the poem "Sleeping Beauty's Wedding Day":

After the kiss and the trip to the castle comes the
showering, shaving, shampooing, conditioning,
detangling, trimming,
moussing, blow-drying, brushing, curling, de-frizzing,
extending, texturizing,
waxing, exfoliating, moisturizing, tanning, medicating,
plucking concealing, smoothing,
bronzing, lash lengthening, plumping, polishing,
glossing, deodorizing, perfuming,
reducing, cinching, controlling, padding, accessorizing,
visualizing, meditating,
powdering, primping, luminizing, correcting, re-curling,
re-glossing, and spraying.
No wonder that hundred-year nap
just doesn't seem long enough. (11)

Perhaps Heppermann exaggerates the beautification process that a bride undergoes for her husband. However, it cannot be argued that this ritualized changing of a woman's body is something that has not become widely accepted and even encouraged, particularly if a woman is to be considered beautiful. This societal pressure is strong for all women, and especially important that feminists address this societal bullying and focus on a woman's autonomy and decisions for herself to make concerning her own body.

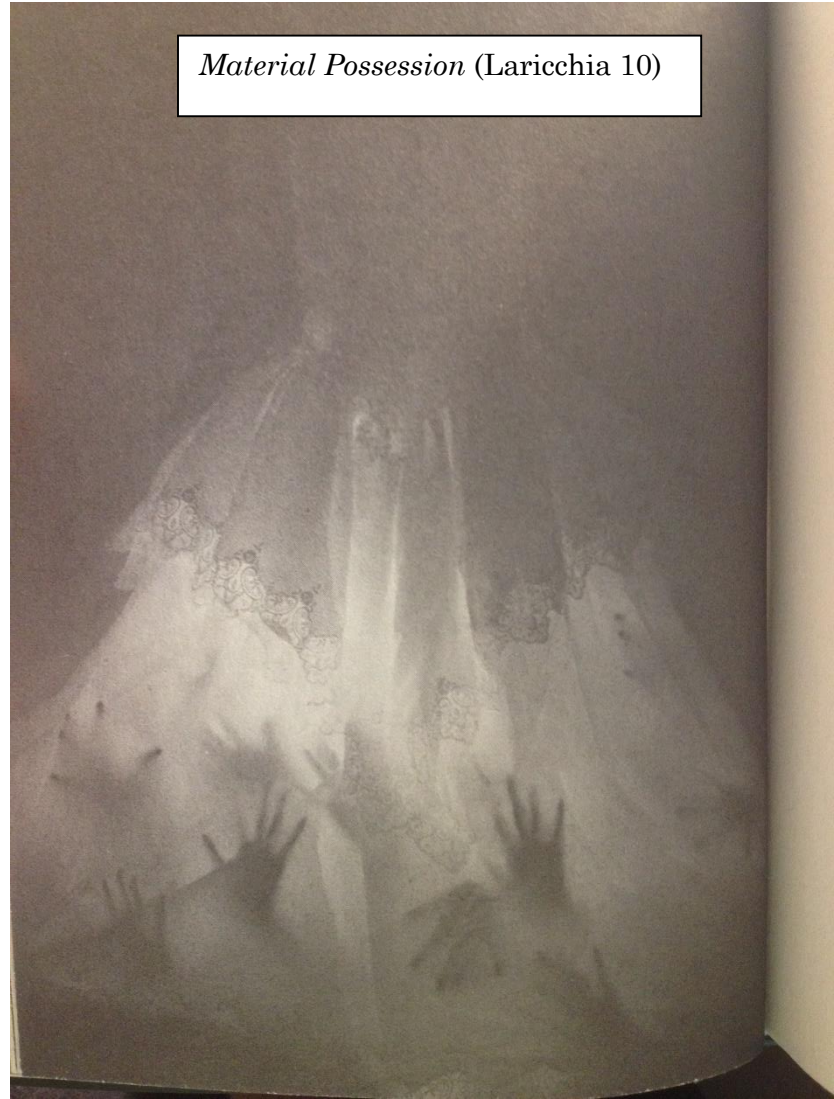
To show this control and encouraged relentless burden on women to participate in a painful and time consuming process, the image *Material*

Possession by Lissy Laricchia precedes Heppermann's poem.

The image shows a wedding dress illuminated at the bottom with the shadows of many hands beneath the fabric. Symbolic of all the burdens that a bride must undergo in her marriage and in preparation for married life, these hands appear to grasp at the dress and will, presumably, also reach for the wearer. Such a violation of privacy and the inclusion of this violation into

something that is largely seen as beautiful and a symbol of love speaks to Heppermann's insistence that a wider understanding of gender issues must be acknowledged.

"Retelling" directly falls into the idea of retelling fairy tales to empower the character. This specifically addresses "Rumpelstiltskin," as it

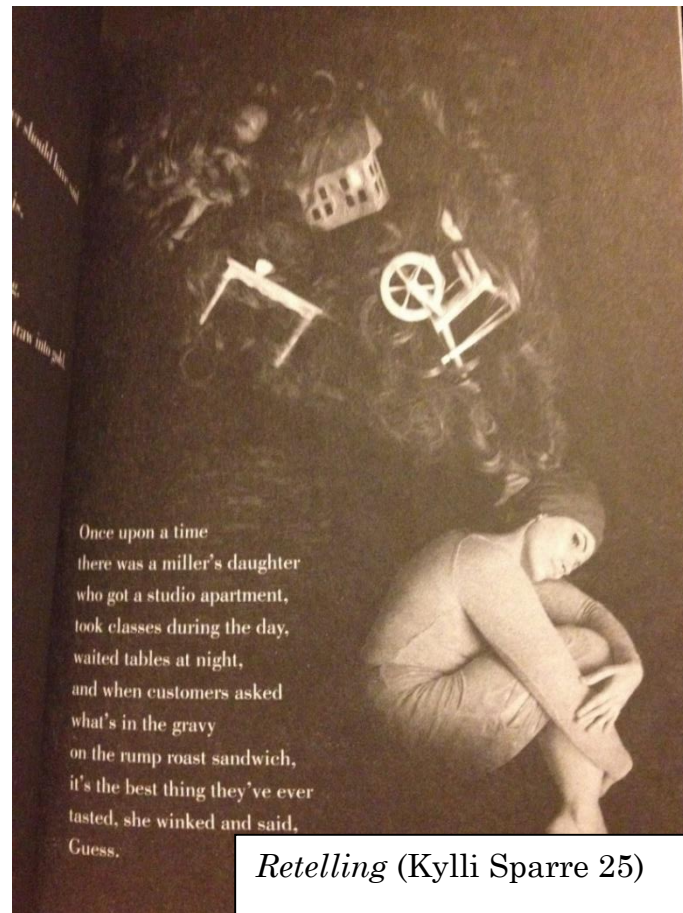


Material Possession (Laricchia 10)

tells the tale of the miller's daughter who, in this case, refuses to spin straw into gold or to give up her child because she will not have a child. The second part of the poem tells of the miller's daughter's new life after refusing to be pushed into addressing the king and getting involved with Rumpelstiltskin in the first place:

Once upon a time
there was a miller's daughter
who got a studio apartment,
took classes during the day,
waited tables at night,
and when customers asked
what's in the gravy
on the *rump* roast sandwich,
it's the best thing they've ever
tasted, she winked and said,
Guess. (25, italics mine)

The image sharing a name and page with this poem shows a girl lying with her arms around her knees, and a mass of objects appearing from what looks like her thought cloud. Of these objects, the viewer can most easily make out a doll, house, table, and spinning wheel, all significant in the original story of “Rumpelstiltskin,” and ironically positioned on the same page as the portion of the poem that spells out Rumpelstiltskin’s fate as a roast to be sold to hungry customers.



The image *The Sharing Game* by Brooke Shaden on page 34 shows a girl being pulled in different directions by eerie arms that look like tree branches. Her hair literally leaves her faceless as it falls over her features, and her arms are limp at her sides as she appears to simply give in to the forces that drag her in the directions they choose. The overwhelming sense of this girl's lack of power and the complete disregard of the arms for her autonomy creates a great significance in Heppermann's critique of how society pressures young women to appear and to act.

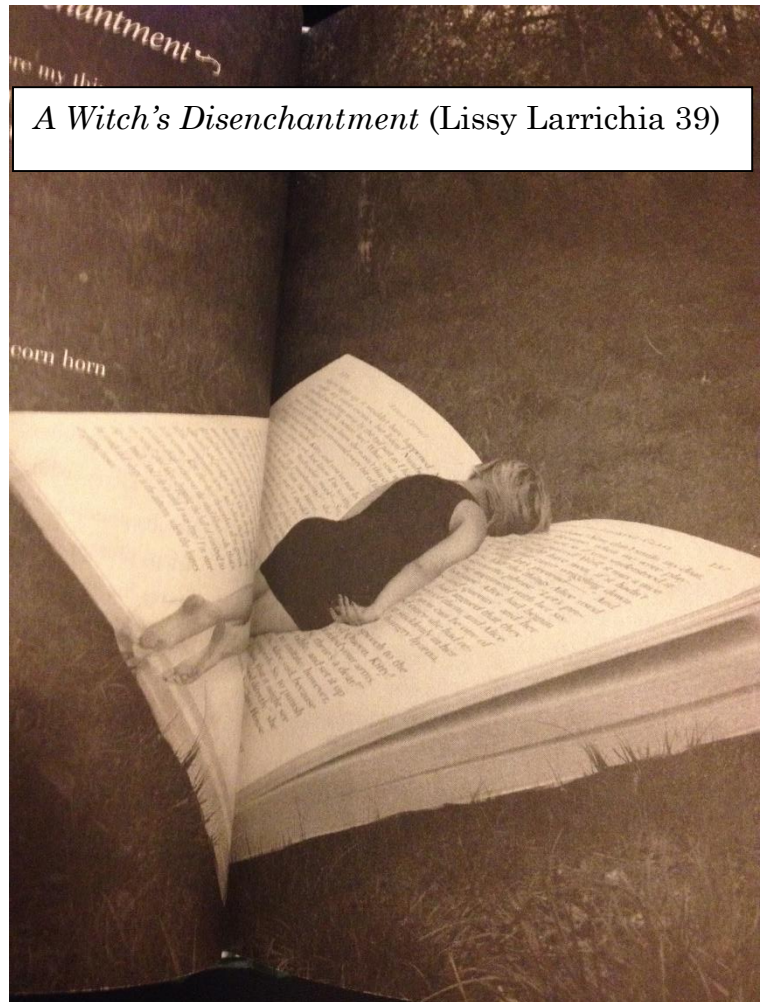


The Sharing Game (Brooke Shaden 34)

These societal pressures and their control over young women is further explored in “A Witch’s Disenchantment”, which is a poem in the first person narration of a witch creating a love charm. This specific spell requires a variety of non-traditional ingredients that are attributed to typical beauty standards of women: “plump lips... smooth skin... big tits.” She decides on her “only no-fail potion:/Boredom mixed with/ lack of options” and accepts a stranger’s touch, though she is afraid of it. This poem speaks strikingly along

with the image, particularly in how the girl is passed out in a book that encourages the heroine to change her body in order to survive.

This particular image includes the book *Alice in Wonderland*, which is of great interest, as Alice's character tries to make sense of Wonderland and to change herself accordingly just as young girls in modern society do. In this particular image, the girl's face rests between the pages at the spine of the book. Her arms are at her sides, and she appears to be unconscious – a very defenseless demeanor.

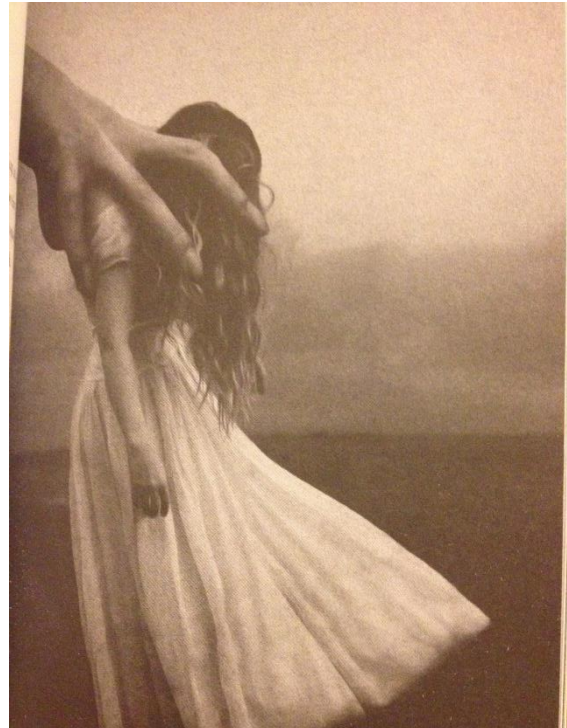


It must also be mentioned that this girl looks so defenseless because she is so much smaller than the book where she lays. This idea of smallness as defenseless can also be interpreted as smallness as something to strive for in “Thumbelina’s Get-Tiny Cleanse – Tested”, yet this poem also addresses the double standard that women must be subjected to. In this poem, Miss Muffet expresses her concerns over her weight gain and begins a new diet to

“reach her goal weight” (56). After four weeks of this diet, Miss Muffet “was so tiny they couldn’t even *find* her! They did interview a spider that was in the area, wrapping something in its web.” While Miss Muffet may have lost her desired amount of weight, she also contributed to the new diet fad as told by the spider: “small portions of lean protein” (58).

In just a few lines, Heppermann addresses the double standard that women must maneuver when participating in ways to achieve a slim figure. While women who do achieve their desired weight losses are praised, they are, at the same time, seen as vain for being so concerned with their appearances. Though society’s beauty standards demand constant upkeep and control over women’s bodies, the constant judgment waits to eat them up like a spider in a web.

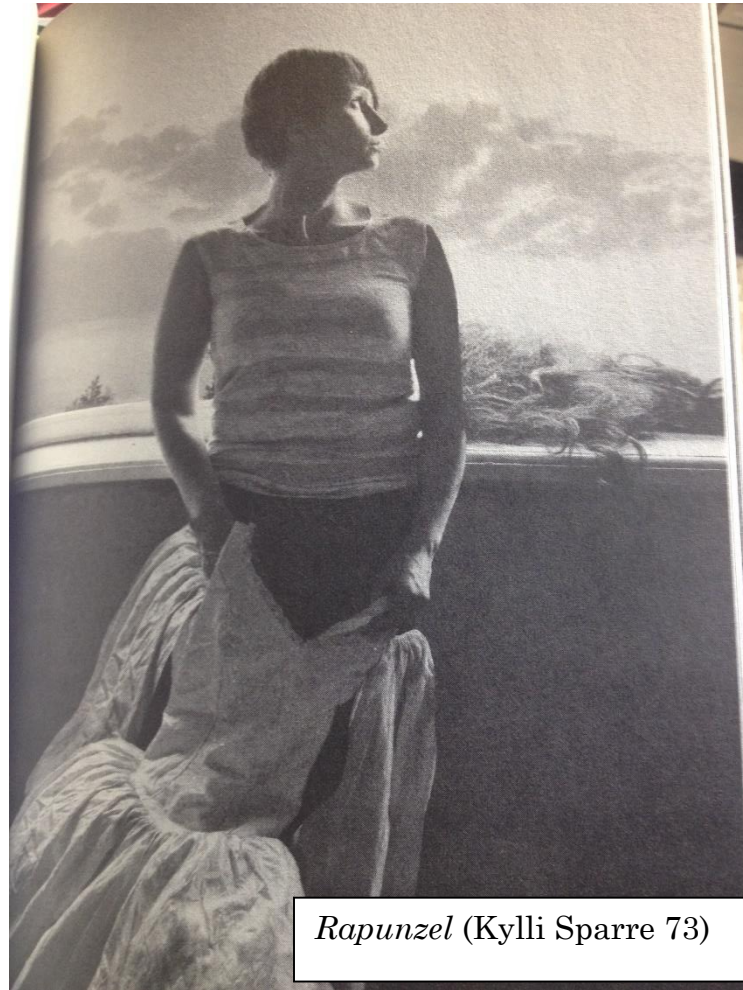
The image on the next page is “What Moves Us” by Brooke Shaden. With a large hand grasping a small girl and appearing to place her down and the girl’s hair, again, covering her features, this image provides even more insight into the control that Heppermann wishes to critique in her poetry.



What Moves Us (Brooke Shaden 59)

Finally, a complete retelling of “Rapunzel” in a poem of the same name gives power and independence to the main character herself, though she still remains at the top of her prison tower. This Rapunzel expresses that she realizes she was “foolish” to accept the men who asked to climb her hair to visit her. Because she is in a tower, she realizes that they see her as a challenge to be conquered rather than a person, and she concludes that she will stay in her room and pay no more attention to her hair for these unwanted visitors (72).

The image that accompanies this, *Rapunzel*, shows a girl with a pixie haircut holding what the viewer can assume to be her proper princess attire. She wears simple pants and a top. Behind her on the ledge is a mass of hair that perhaps she once brushed and tended to in order to keep it strong for her visitors to climb. This is perhaps the most fitting example of Gayle Forman's cover praise for Heppermann's collection, as she says that these poems "chronicle how the



Rapunzel (Kylli Sparre 73)

world tries to rob young women of power while at the same time handing them back that power." Indeed, *Rapunzel* has taken her hair back for herself by cutting it off and refusing any of her visitors...but she is, nonetheless, still stuck at the top of a lonely tower.

Christine Heppermann's collection of poetry and corresponding images creates an intertextuality that viewers can use as a tool to explore the gender issues that society perpetuates for young women. Using both her own poetry and photography to complement one another, Heppermann has developed a

critical dialogue of what society believes is beautiful and the dangers this provides young women. Especially with short, stabbing lines and dark images, this entire work begs readers to challenge the largely accepted and overwhelming standards that young women are expected to follow.

You always read about it: That story. (Anne Sexton)

Coda

Cinderella: Retelling the Beauty Myth Ever After

We are all familiar with the “Cinderella” story. The continued popularity of this tale in modern culture is significant to the gendered cultural norms that are still present in what is considered to be a contemporary and forward thinking society that has moved past traditional gender roles. It must also be noted that through the many retellings of this tale, from films to children’s stories, the quintessential adaptation that repeats over and over is based on gender ideologies inscribed through the outcome of the characters. Though some versions contain a critique of these traditional ideologies, the adaptation continually retold focuses on success as a result of following traditional gender roles.

Specifically, this story, through its many different versions, demonstrates that kindness will bring success, particularly if one is exceptionally beautiful and succeeds in winning a marriage proposal. Though popular in a wide variety of cultures starting in the first century from the Egyptian version (Herodot Book 2) perhaps the best known retelling in western society is the 1950 Disney cartoon, which is a direct adaptation from Charles Perrault’s tale.

While the original Disney cartoon is based on the Perrault version, however, the new film released on March 13, 2015, *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, takes aspects of both Grimm and Perrault's versions: specifically, the film borrows the Grimm's detail of the hazel branch that Cinderella wishes her father to bring home from his journey. The Grimms' version also relates most to the great connection Cinderella held with her mother, particularly her wish for Cinderella to remain good and kind (though in the film it is "you must have courage and be kind"). The adamant advice given to Cinderella to remain kind has not changed through the versions, though a higher value has been placed on courage, which is arguably not a traditionally feminine value. Other changes included avoiding the violent self-mutilation committed by the stepsisters to fit into the glass slipper and the later blinding of the sisters by Cinderella's bird friends.

Considering this new film is directed toward an audience that includes children, it is not surprising that these aspects of the Grimms' version were left out of the new remake, just as many children's versions of fairy tales are censored to prevent exposure of children to disturbing sequences. In fact, "Cinderella" was the twenty-first tale in the first published Grimms collection titled *Children and Household Tales (Kinder-und Hausmärchen)* in 1812. Most of these 86 stories were met with resistance as "children's stories," particularly because they involved great violence (Tatar 15-17). In order for

the tale to be appropriate for younger audiences, it had to be censored and retold, making what many consider to be an original tale from the Grimms Brothers a retelling.

Many popular movies have incorporated some form of fairy tale retellings into their plots. Consider the *Shrek* movie franchise. Though the main characters are monstrous yet friendly royal ogres, the storyline has expanded immensely. Rather than focusing on beauty and marriage for riches and success, the characters in *Shrek* instead decide to marry for happiness regardless of status or looks. Similarly, other animated movies have expanded to explore not only romantic love, but the great love between family (*Frozen*, *Brave*). However, despite these expanded fairy tales, society is still wrapped up in what is still considered to be traditional fairy tales, such as the 2015 retelling of “Cinderella.”

This new film adaptation brought in a total of \$67,877,361 on opening weekend, with a worldwide gross of \$354,161,118 as of April 1, 2015 (ProBox Office). Given this, people are still willing to pay to see a story that they are familiar with and have heard over and over. However, how traditional really is this new “Cinderella”? Considering the many retellings that have occurred since the first textual documentation of the story, what is really out in theaters is an adaptation of a tale that already exists as a retelling.

Therefore, children are not receiving this fairy tale in its original form, but in adaptation. This adaptation really is the text that they absorb.

This adaptation, then, is responsible for the shaking of the plot, particularly in the roles of female characters. For instance, one must look to the stepmother in all versions of the story. As a female character who is also a villain, the stepmother presents an example of stepping outside of traditional stock female roles. Though the stepmother is cruel and acts outside of traditional female standards through her behavior in most versions, she is no longer a stock character, particularly in the 2015 remake. She is a woman of power who knows how to challenge and threaten the powerful men around her to the best of her daughters' benefit along with her own.

As viewers are first introduced to the stepmother, Cinderella's father convinces Cinderella that she will learn to love their new family. The stepmother abruptly begins filling the house with people who love eating and drinking and do not hold the most respect for the house. During one particular party, Cinderella speaks with her father alone, and her father reveals how much he misses his deceased wife. Meanwhile, the stepmother lingers nearby and hears the conversation with a look of obvious pain on her face. This insight into her character provides a deeper understanding of her for viewers that has not been available in previous versions, as viewers get a

firsthand look into her difficulties and the pain that motivated her to act less than kind to her stepdaughter.

The stepmother's pain is further revealed when she locks Cinderella in the attic to prevent her from trying on the slipper that the Grand Duke brings to the house. She tells Cinderella how much she loved her first husband and how quickly she and her daughters fell into debt after his death. Her views of love have been forever hindered after this loss, and this character development makes her a bit easier to understand, particularly in the extent she goes to ensure she and her daughters remain successful and provided for.

The means that the stepmother goes to protect and provide for her daughters is not to be looked down on. As a woman in a time where men are the sole providers for the family and where women must entertain and keep house, the stepmother uses manipulation and fear to control others and to bribe her way into survival. When she overhears the Grand Duke discussing his agreements to marry the prince to a princess from another country in order to keep the line to the crown truly royal, she does not hesitate in blackmailing the duke for her own gain. In exchange for her silence over the marriage scandal, the stepmother makes the duke promise that she and her daughters will be given money and housed comfortably. Considering her devotion to her daughters, it cannot be said that this character is truly

unredeemable, especially considering that her disdain toward Cinderella is based on her inability to be with the one she loves most.

Despite this progressive retelling of the stepmother, Cinderella's character does not stray far from the traditional path in this adaptation. Cinderella is beautiful and considerate toward all she comes into contact with. While it is true that she provides the prince with some insight into how he can fairly lead the kingdom and at first only regards him as a dear friend, she also does not hesitate in accepting his proposal for marriage. What holds her back from truly stepping outside of her traditional role as the Cinderella character is this lack of hesitation considering what has been important to her for her entire life with her stepmother and stepsisters: caring for her mother's memory inside the house. With her marriage to the prince, she leaves her step-family with her mother and father's possessions, though she does not consider this when the promise of life in a castle is presented.

With Cinderella's lack of autonomous decision and failure to stand by what is truly important to her is the detrimental portrayal of her beauty and waistline, particularly in that this film's audience contains a majority of young children, who will absorb what is beautiful on the screen and will expect themselves to live up to those standards. As Abby Rosmarin explores in "Why the Viral Phenomenon of Realistic Disney Princesses Matters," the portrayal of cartoon Disney princesses as excessively thin creates an

emphasis in children's minds on the importance of appearance (2). As she states, it does not matter if we know that these cartoons are unrealistic, "We look in the mirror and a lifetime's worth of experiences that created our schema of 'ideal beauty' are reflected back" (2). Critics of the 2015 *Cinderella* film do not hold that beauty images held up by the main character are much better.

While actress Lily James, who portrays Cinderella, claims that her naturally slim waist was only made smaller by a corset rather than Photoshop, the efforts taken to promote an unnaturally thin waistline reveal Hollywood's inability to let go of the schema of beauty standards that have followed children throughout their lifetimes. With these standards comes the effort to keep up the charade of the waistline in the movie. As James' costar Cate Blanchette (the stepmother) states, "she could barely breathe when she was dancing that waltz with the Prince. It was remarkable" (Fox via John Dundas).

While gossip articles concerning James' waistline are perhaps not the most scholarly and cannot adequately measure how much of an impact is made on children and society, it is worth exploring the comments by readers, as they reflect the true responses of society. While some demonstrate genuine concern over the use of corsets and the affect these will have on teenagers wishing to model the same look, such as commenter Lacolle Anderson who

states: “don’t forget, as most of you already have, what effect is all this ‘waist training’ having on teenagers today?” However, as Anderson expresses the health and self-esteem concerns bred by corset advertisement, others take a more apathetic approach, even sexualizing the look such as LAProf on March 5: “Too skinny? Not if you are into banging bones.”

Considering the changed roles and amount of feedback from viewers, the 2015 retelling *Cinderella* has come farther than the 1950 cartoon that it roots from. With a basis in a story that western society is deeply familiar with, this new film allows at least one female character, the evil stepmother, to burst from the chains of stock roles. With a larger emphasis on her background and her motivations for her actions, viewers can gain a better understanding for her character and even demonstrate empathy for her situation. However, the filmmakers fail in further developing Cinderella’s character. A soft-spoken girl with a beautiful face, small waist, and passion for kindness toward all around her, Cinderella is not a character with more depth than the two-dimensional cartoon that she is based on. While she is beautiful to the eye, the beauty ideals that her costume supports are less than attractive, paving the way for concerned viewers who blame the use of corsets for their daughters’ lack of self-esteem, and even promoting a disturbing sexualization of unhealthy standards. It would be beneficial as a society to look back on the timeline of retellings at a particular quote from

Jane Eyre: “I am no bird, and no net ensnares me.” Though we can see the security in falling into the net of societal beauty and relationship standards, we must not lose sight of the importance of trying to fly.

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