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Queering "Happily Ever After": Queer Narratives Expose Heteronormalcy in Fairy Tales

by

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"Once upon a time," fairy tales reinforced the heterosexual norms, or heteronormalcy, of society through their 'happily ever after endings." As the convention is to end with a marriage, these "happily ever after" endings involve heterosexual coupling which works to socialize children into the heterosexual norm. These original fairytales, however, have become subject to alterations by various writers who expose the oppressions that happen within these original fairy tales. Feminist writers have altered fairy tales in order to expose the way in which fairy tales portrayed women. Since then, authors like Olga Broumas, Leslie Feinburg, and Jeanette Winterson have used fairy tales and the feminist techniques of altering them to change or "queer" fairy tales in order to expose the heterosexual oppression that happens within the "happily ever after" ending. These writers use feminist techniques to emphasize various aspects of the original fairy tale in order to critique its heteronormalcy. Typically, these writer queer the "happily ever after" endings in order to create an alternate ending in which the future is left unscripted. Since the "happily ever after" can be seen as a reinforcement of social belief, then this open ending can be seen as an alternate temporality that goes against society's expectation that all actions should lead up to heterosexual coupling and reproduction.

There are similarities between the feminist and queer rewritings of fairy tales in the sense that both break down the social oppressions embedded within the tales. Queer narratives also can be seen to use the techniques of feminist writers in order to alter fairy tales and bring attention to heterosexual oppression. By looking at fairy tales and feminist means of altering them, it is possible to see how writers like Broumas, Feinburg, and Winterson set up their narratives in order to deliver this critique on the "happily ever after" ending. In order to look at this critique, I will first discuss fairy tales and their influence as a socialization factor. Then, by looking at the theory of queer temporality, I will discuss the alteration of the "happily ever after" ending that

appears in Leslie Feinburg's *Stone Butch Blues.* After that, I will analyze different feminist

techniques to help explain Olga Broumas's take on fairy tales in her collection of poems,

Beginning with O. I will use the idea of queer temporality, the techniques of feminist writers

like Angela Carter, and the works of Feinburg and Broumas as the theoretical foundation to

explain and analyze Winterson's "queered" fairy tale in order to explore her critique on the

"happily ever after" ending.

Throughout history, fairy tales have been used to help children learn how to behave in

society and are an important part of socialization. As Bruno Bettelheim states in *The Uses of*

Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, fairy tales include "material from

which children formed their concepts of the world's origin and purpose, and of the social ideals a

child could pattern himself after"(24). Fairy tales are used by the child to learn in what way

society expects them to act. With the "happily ever after" ending, a child is shown society's

heterosexual ideal, and is expected to "pattern" his or herself after this heteronormacy. As Neal

A. Lester explains in his"(Un)Happily Ever After: Fairy Tale Morals, Moralities, And

Heterosexism In Children's Texts," one of the ways that society's ideals are displayed to the

child is through fairy tales' endings. Fairy tales end in a manner that enforces heterosexual social

norm, usually in which the "happily ever after" follows a marriage. According to Bettelheim, the

"happily ever after" ending is an important socialization factor for children:

> 'And they lived happily ever after'- does not for a moment fool the child that eternal life
> is possible. But it does indicate that which alone can take the sting out of the narrow
> limits of our time on this earth: forming a truly satisfying bond to another. (Bettelheim
> 10).

While Bettelheim does not draw the connection to the heteronormalcy of these endings, Lester

expands on Bettelheim's analysis to argue that the 'happily ever after ending" indicates a 'truly

satisfying bond' as one that only happens between two people of opposite genders: "To live the proverbial 'happily ever after,' boys and girls must perform the omnipresent and omnipotent heterosexual script" (Lester 69). The 'happily ever after' ending of fairy tales thus socializes children to think that heterosexuality is the only option for a good future.

This heterosexual ending is problematic for young queers in society because they are isolated by it. As Lester claims, "Children's texts perpetuate a limiting heteronormalcy that negatively impacts identity development for those who do not fit in this model of behavior and desire" (58). In other words, the heterosexual "happily ever after" carries with it a message that heterosexual coupling is the only pairing that could or *should* happen. The heterosexual ending is associated with the happily ever after reward for 'good' characters for 'being good' which inevitably pairs non-heterosexual coupling as a consequence of being 'not good' or bad (Lester 58). If a child does not fit with the heterosexual ideals of the fairy tale, the tale consequently has a negative impact as it tells the child that they are being "bad." As Lester goes on to explain: "These traditional fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and childhood ditties conjoin morality and sexual identity. Heterosexuality is good and right" (61). If a child does not align with the heterosexual ideals portrayed in fairy tales, the child believes that he is doing something morally wrong (Lester 61).

By ending with heterosexual marriage, fairy tales reinforce what Judith Halberstam calls "reproductive temporality," the idea that life that is structured around procreating. Reproductive temporality is the name that Halberstam gives to the social belief that children are supposed to mature along a timeline of events that leads to their eventual marriage and children (4-5). With this belief, a child has the rest of their future already planned out in a series of actions leading to the child's own 'happily ever after' ending which includes marriage and producing children.

This temporality, since it revolves around heterosexuality, excludes queers and results in an alternate temporality that Halberstam calls "queer time," or queer temporality. Halberstam defines queer time as "the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing" (2). In other words, since those who are not heterosexual do not follow the reproductive script that society upholds, queer temporality embodies an unknown future.

Queer, in itself, can be seen as a term meaning unaligned or askew. Queer temporality, in its most simplistic definition is a temporality that does not align with the norm, in this case reproductive temporality. Anything that is outside of the realm of what society holds to be "normal" can be described as being "queer" in the same manner that the temporality that does not align with reproductive temporality is named "queer" temporality. In another instance a "queer" can refer to a person that does not line up with heterosexual norms, or can be used as an adjective to describe something else that does not align with the norm (Jagose 2). This use of the term "queer" can be applied to narratives. Queer narratives are stories that do not follow the normal expectations of narratives. In some of these narratives, elements are "queered" or changed so that they do not align with normal expectations. For example, the narrative genre of the fairy tale follows a few normal conventions such as female passiveness and the "happily ever after" ending. Queer narratives that work within the fairy tale genre change aspects of the narrative so that it does not include female passiveness or the conventional ending.

A few queer narratives work in opposition to reproductive temporality by 'queering' fairy tales not to end in a "happily ever after." In *Stone Butch Blues*, the main character, Jess, overhears a fairy tale being told by a woman on a train to her daughter. This fairy tale can be seen as an example of queer temporality. Just as Halberstam defines queer temporality as an

unscripted future, the fairy tale also leaves the future of a girl open to possibilities. The fairy tale tells the story of a young girl who went on a journey to meet a sorcerer so that he could "tell her what she was supposed to do with her life" (Feinburg 225). Along the way, the girl encounters a dragon. In order to continue her journey she must get past the dragon. The girl kills the dragon with a large boulder, and finally meets the sorcerer (Feinberg 225-226). At this point, the girl asks the sorcerer: "'Mr. Sorcerer, please tell me what I'm supposed to do with my life.' And the sorcerer smiles and tells her, 'You are supposed to slay a dragon'"(Feinberg 225-226). This fairy tale does not end in a "happily ever after," or even a promise of a 'happily ever after," as it does not tell of the events to come in the girl's life. The rest of the girl's life is left unscripted by the sorcerer who only mentions what the girl has already accomplished, leaving the girl's future entirely in her hands. The notion of the term 'supposed to do" used by both the girl and the sorcerer also alludes to a set of actions that are laid out for the girl that she is "supposed to" follow. This is very similar to the actions that society sets up for people to follow within the norm. According to society's reproductive temporality, a girl is "supposed to" find a boy, get married, and have children. However, this is not the answer the girl receives. The only thing she is "supposed to do" is kill the dragon, an action that she took of her own will to accomplish what she wanted to. The phrasing of the ending adds another layer to the queer temporality of this tale, as not only is the future left open, but the notion of being "supposed to" follow certain actions or rules is questioned. The queer temporality exhibited in this fairy tale can be viewed as a reversal of the fairy tales that by ending in a "happily ever after" reinforce reproductive temporality.

Other queer narratives critique the "happily ever after" ending by using feminist techniques in order to break down the oppressions that exist within the conventions of the fairy tale. Feminist writers have been known to use techniques to show the oppression of women. One

of the ways that feminists alter stories is through the agency of their heriones. Feminists writers use agency in order to portray women "as agents of or actors in their own lives, rather than passive pawns" (Smith and Watson 42). This technique has been used to alter fairy tales in a feminist manner by allowing the women in fairy tales to have choices and decide their own fate rather than have the men in the story decide it for them. Lester mentions this use of agency: "Feminists liberate Cinderella and Rapunzel from their cages of female passivity, as female characters in these new renderings do not rely on a prince to rescue them from fairyland entrapment" (59). As Lester demonstrates, fairy tale heroines have often been portrayed as victims of circumstance in which all of their choices seem to be made for them. In feminist renderings, these fairy tale heroines take control of their future and are their own agents of change. One way that feminists make this switch is by rewriting the fairy tales that are originally told in third person, where events happen to passive and agentless women, to a first person perspective where the woman holds agency. In this first person perspective, the story is told through the perspective of the woman, showing her to be the agent of change through the decisions that she makes. Feminists, while giving their heroines agency, often use other techniques as well to help show the oppression within the tale.

Another technique that feminists use is restructuring the family bonds a character has so that their social ties are more women-centered. For example, a tale that holds a woman's relationship with her father to be most important may be restructured to have the importance on the woman's relationship with her mother or sisters. Rachel DuPessis in her book, *Writing Beyond the Ending,* explains that this strategy " involve[s] reparenting in invented families, fraternal-soroal ties temporarily reducing romance, and emotional attachment to women in bisexual love plots, female bonding, and lesbianism" (xi). This restructuring works to reduce the

ties between men and women and reconstruct the ties to be stronger between those of the same sex. Olga Broumas takes this technique and applies it to fairy tales in order to queer them. Broumas does this by altering fairy tales from having male-centered stories to focus on the bonds between women. In her poem "Cinderella," Broumas depicts Cinderella as a woman torn away from her family of women: "Apart from my sisters, estranged from my mother, I am a woman alone in a house of men" (1-3, 57). This is highly different from the Grimms original fairy tale "Ashiepattle." The Grimms version portrays the prince as saving Ashiepattle from her evil step mother and step sisters (225-231). In this revision, Broumas alters the traditional fairy tale in which women are constructed as being evil. Fairy tales often show the relationship between women in a manner that has evil women pitted against one woman who will eventually be saved by a prince. Instead, the Broumas's tale shows that the prince breaks away a woman, unwillingly, from the other women in her family who were unjustly described "witches". This restructuring works to display the oppressions that women face in fairy tales: their agentless role in which men decide their fate, and their portrayal as being evil or "witches."

In both "Cinderella" and "Rapunzel," Broumas incorporates a female-centered view to show the oppressions that women face through their portrayal and society's view of them. In "Cinderella," Broumas mentions the judgment that women face through society's narrow view of what a woman "should" be like. As Cinderella states: "I am a woman… co-opted by promises: the lure of a job, the ruse of a choice, a woman forced to bear witness, falsely against my kind, as each other sister was judged inadequate, bitchy, incompetent, jealous, too thin, too fat" (16-24, 57). Society's view of what makes a woman acceptable is so narrow that one is "too fat" and the other is "too thin." Agency also plays a part in this portrayal of society's treatment of women. Women are offered the "ruse of a choice" implying that women do not in actuality hold any

agency in the course of their life and what happens to them. Instead, women are depicted in a passive role, where even their choices are predetermined. In a similar manner "Rapunzel" shows how society views age through the taunts and stereotypes the women face: "*Old bitch, young darling.* May those who speak them choke on their words" (20-24, 59). With this line, Bromous depicts society's view of women in regards to their age. When women are young they are sexually desirable as a "young darling," but once they age they become an "old bitch." In her poetry, Broumas shows that, in traditional fairy tales, women are unfairly pitted against each other in a manner that breaks all female bonds. They are also depicted unfairly if they do not fit within society's expectations.

As Broumas describes in her version of "Rapunzel," the old woman was named an "old bitch" because of her age. This draws attention to the fact that in the Grimms version of "Rapunzel," the old woman is only referred to as a powerful sorcereress. With her poem, Broumas shows that when a fairy tale has a relationship between two women, one of the women is depicted as evil. In the original tale, Rapunzel is given as a child to an powerful sorceress because Rapunzel's father had stolen some of the sorceress's lettuce. A prince hears her voice from the tower and then decides to call to her and climb up her hair (Grimm 66-68). The sorceress, upon learning of the prince's visit, cuts off Rapunzel's hair and banishes her to the wilderness. She then waits for the prince, who after he has climbed up Rapunzel's hair encounters the sorceress and jumps out of the tower, blinding himself on thorns at the bottom of the tower. He hears Rapunzel's voice in the woods and finds her where she is raising the twins she has given birth to. Her tears heal his eyes. (Grimm 68-69).

In Broumas's version of "Rapunzel," the tale is altered to have a sexual bond between the two women. She starts with an Anne Sexton quote " A woman who loves a woman is forever

young" and tells of the love affair between Rapunzel and her older woman lover. Olga Broumas

seems to be writing in response to Anne Sexton's poetic versions of fairy tales. In the beginning

of Broumas's "Rapunzel," the poem appears after a Sexton quote that comes from Sexton's

version of the fairy tale "Rapunzel." Sexton's version is very similar to the original Grimms

version. It only differs on one point. The old woman, after raising Rapunzel, holds a sexual

relationship with her. Broumas takes this idea and develops it further. The point of view of the

tales switches from third person to second in order to show Rapunzel speaking to her lover. In

this poem, Broumas shows the old woman as not a witch, but as Rapunzel's lover. This is a

perspective that is not fully encompassed in Sexton's poem, which follows the original fairy

tale's heterosexual ending. Although the witch has a sexual relationship with Rapunzel,

Rapunzel ends up with the prince. Broumas not only adds a queer element to the story, like

Sexton, but incorporates queer temporality. Broumas's "Rapunzel" has no end except for the

description of love between the two woman. In this rewriting of the fairy tale, Broumas can be

seen to depict a queer temporality as any ending is possible, even a "happily ever after" for the

two women. Broumas's alteration of the Grimms "Rapunzel" and "Ashiepattle" can be seen to

queer the fairy tale in order to question not only the role of women, but the traditional "happily

ever after" ending which takes a woman away from all of her ties to other women in order to

bind her to a man.

      Some feminists, like Angela Carter, take a different approach to altering fairy tales in

order to explore the role of women. Carter uses gothic narrative to rewrite fairy tales in order to

make the tale more self conscious of the oppression that is taking place. In "Notes on the Gothic

Mode," Angela Carter explains her use of gothic narrative within her writing:

> [...] The Gothic mode tends to make abstractions from romanticism. It deals
> directly with the imagery of the unconscious – mirrors, the externalized self, the

world under the moon, automata, haunted forests, forbidden sexual objects. Character and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions. Its style tends to be ornate, unnatural – and thus operates against the perennial human desire to believe the world as fact. ..The moral lessons, perhaps, are implicit in the imagery. But it retains a singular moral function: that of provoking unease. (Carter 134).

Carter uses this method to fill her narratives full of "dread and glamour and passion" (Carter 132) in such a manner that it provokes a reader's uneasiness and draws attention to the uncomfortable oppressions that are taking place. Carter was drawn to gothic narrative because the narrative itself acknowledges the fact that it exists outside the realm of normal reality. Carter explains:"I really do believe that a fiction absolutely self-conscious of itself as a different form of human experience than reality can help to transform reality itself" (Carter 133). For this reason, Carter uses explicitly sexual and violent imagery to expose levels of oppression within the constraints of fairy tales, a narrative tool that queer narrative also explores in rewritings of fairy tales.

It is not surprising that queer narratives should use gothic elements, since gothic narrative is naturally quite queer. As Carter explains that gothic narrative differs from reality and creates a feeling of "unease," gothic narrative can be explained to be queer. By differing from reality, or the social norms, gothic narrative can be seen as not normal, and therefore queer. The feeling of unease, also, can be perceived as being queer since it is the feeling that something is not right, or even "askew."

While Carter uses this gothic method to "queer" her stories, she does not break up all the heteronormative elements. Instead, Carter works within the oppressive "happily ever after" endings in her fairy tales, using gothic narrative to help critique this ending. Sarah Gamble explores Carter's endings in her "Penetrating to the Heart of the Bloody Chamber: Angela Carter

and the Fairy Tale." Gamble takes a look at Angela Carter's rewritten fairy tales in order to explain the use of gothic narrative which exposes the oppressive form of the fairy tale. Gamble explains that Angela Carter weaves fairy tales and gothic narrative together so completely that it is hard to tell whether she is incorporating elements of gothic narrative to fairy tales, or whether she is writing gothic narrative within the constraints of the fairy tale (22). Gothic narrative and fairy tales both use as a central feature a passive heroine, and while Carter writes her gothic fairy tales in a feminist manner, she stays true to this feature:

> In its most simplistic form, the feminist fairy tale could be said to propound a principle of simple reversal, transforming the heroine from passive to active agent so that (for example) she becomes the rescuer rather than the one rescued. But *The Bloody Chamber* does not do this, as Carter's prickly and problematic heroines consistently refuse to occupy the moral high ground and behave as 'pollitically correct' feminist role models should. They frequently, for example, barter their bodies for gain…it is an investment that works to many of these heroine's advantage. (Gamble 25).

By giving the women agency, but only in a way that goes against the "politically correct" or socially acceptable manner, Carter evokes a sense of unease through her heroine's choices that leads to her "happily ever after." Carter stays true to the traditional fairy tale formulae by not altering the "happily ever after" ending. Instead, as Gamble mentions, Carter writes within the ending in a manner that the ending is still put into question:"[..]While Carter may skirt perilously close to becoming ensnared within the very limited opportunities offered by the narrative resolution of 'happily ever after,' she also triumphantly writes her way out of them with 'adult wit and glittering style'" (21). Through Carter's use of the Gothic element to write within the boundaries of the 'happily ever after' ending, the audience is forced to look through "the violence and eroticism of these tales …to recognize their deeper deconstructive purpose" (Gamble 27), to recognize the fairy tales as an "active perpetuation of- the circumstances of its

own oppression" (Gamble 27). The gothic narrative works to emphasize the oppression

happening within the fairy tale by making it so unsettling that it cannot escape notice. Carter uses

gothic narrative to deconstruct the "happily ever after" ending in this manner. She further

deconstructs this "happily ever after" ending through her use of female sexuality as power. In

this sense, Carter has been claimed to mix fairy tales with pornography in order to pair unease

with the "happily ever after" ending:

> Fairy tale and pornography might be considered to be fundamentally incompatible narrative modes. One is for small children, offering them adventure and the comfort of "living happily ever after," while the other explores the infinite permutations and perversions of adult desire. Yet *The Bloody Chamber* brings them, shockingly, together, melding fairy tale and pornography in a deliberately provocative exercise (Gamble 23).

While Carter uses elements of pornography and gothic narrative to show the oppressions of the

"happily ever after" endings, other feminists alter the ending itself.

As Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains in her book, feminists use a method in which they

continue stories past the point in which they would typically end, which DuPleiss calls "writing

beyond the ending." DuPlessis states that in most stories, women are oppressed by the socially

acceptable endings: "Once upon a time, the end, the rightful end, of women in novels was social

– successful courtship, marriage – or judgmental of her sexual and social failure – death" (1).

Feminists, in order to combat this oppression, changed these endings so that women were offered

more choices. DuPlessis states, "It is the project of twentieth-century women writers to solve the

contradiction between love and quest and to replace the alternate endings in marriage and death

that are their cultural legacy from nineteenth-century life and letters by offering a different set of

choices" (4). Some queer narratives use this technique to show what happens after "the happily

ever after" endings of fairy tales.

The feminist techniques I've been discussing of restructuring, gothic narrative, and writing beyond the ending can all be seen in Winterson's retelling of the Grimms fairy tale "The Worn-Out Dancing-Shoes" in her novel *Sexing the Cherry*. Winterson starts out her retelling of this fairy tale by giving it a new name. "The Worn-Out Dancing-Shoes" becomes retitled 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses" and is referred to as such within *Sexing the Cherry*. Winterson takes a title that is focused on a single aspect of the women in the story, their shoes, and refocuses it on the women themselves. More specifically, Winterson focuses on the aspect of the princesses' dancing. Not coincidentally, in both the original and rewritten fairy tale, this aspect of dancing is forcibly taken away from the twelve dancing princesses through the influence of male control.

 In the original Grimms version, the twelve princesses awake with worn-out shoes every morning. Wanting to know how this occurs, their father, the King, promises the choice of one of his daughters in marriage and the inheritance of his kingdom to whatever man can figure out where they are going. The man would have three nights to discover the secret, and if he fails, the man would be beheaded (Grimm 187). A poor soldier comes to the city, and with the advice of an old woman, goes to the king to figure out the secret. The old woman warns him not to drink the wine that the princesses would give him, which would have a sleeping draught in it, and she gives him an invisibility cloak (Grimm 187-188). After pretending to be asleep, the soldier follows the princesses into a tunnel hidden under the eldest princess's bed which leads to a forest of silver trees, then a forest of gold trees, a forest of diamond trees, and finally a river that has twelve princes in boats waiting for the princesses. The princes row the princesses, and the concealed soldier, to a castle where they dance all night with these enchanted princes. The princesses were hoping to be able to break the spell that the princes were under (Grimm 189). This happens for three nights and then the soldier reveal the princesses' secret to the king. Since

the soldier was older, he chooses the eldest sister to be his wife. The enchanted princes then have a day added to their spell for every night they had spent dancing with the princesses (Grimm 190).

This original story has three people who are involved in stopping the princesses from dancing: the King who is their father, the old soldier who becomes a husband, and an old woman who acts as a source of advice and wisdom. These three people represent sources of oppression that women face within a patriarchal system. The father acts as the most powerful figure of the tale. He searches for someone to restrict the freedom of his daughters by asking suitors to figure out how the princesses were escaping their room each night. The soldier, by figuring out their secret, succeeds in taking away the princesses' opportunity to escape and dance. By doing so, he ascends to a higher status with more power, not only in the kingdom through his inheritance, but over the eldest princess who becomes his wife. The last person, the old woman, acts as an indirect source of oppression as she is the voice of wisdom that allows the man to achieve control. She represents an old woman complicit in the patriarchal system who works to keep this system intact. It is her words of wisdom that encourage the soldier to figure out the princesses' secret, and tells him how to accomplish it. Without this voice 'of reason,' the princesses might not have been caught. However, the old woman does not receive an award as the soldier does.

Winterson retells this tale with elaborations in order to emphasize the sources of oppression that women face in the patriarchal system. Winterson takes out the old woman completely and tells the story as if the idea not to drink the sleeping potion originated with the man. Also, the man who figured out the secrets of the twelve princesses happened to be the youngest of twelve princes, not a soldier. Winterson then continues the stories to show the princesses after their marriages, none of which ended happily. With her rewritten version of "The

Worn-Out Dancing Shoes," Winterson uses many of the feminist methods to further explore the oppression that these princesses face because of their father, the prince, and their husbands. One of the ways that she exposes the level of oppression that the princesses face is by elaborating on their dancing. Through her revision, dancing is shown to have a more important role to the princesses, establishing a greater loss when the men of the story take it away.

The twelve princesses, instead of traveling through a tunnel to meet enchanted princes, escape their world entirely. This is an important alteration as the tale moves away from the male –centered story that portrayed the princesses as leaving to dance *with princes*. Instead, Winterson depicts the princesses as being drawn away *to dance*. The focus of the princesses activities is changed in order to make the story revolve around the princesses, not men. The princesses are described as very light, floating to a flying city that was free of the bounds of gravity (Winterson 107). Winterson describes this city by saying that the city started having constant earthquakes which caused people to string up tight ropes as supports and then started walking on them (107). After generations of this, the people began leaping and dancing. One day, a girl fell off the rope, but to everyone's surprise, floated in the air (Winterson 108). Winterson explains: "for the people who had abandoned gravity, gravity had abandoned them" (108). When this city was overhead, the twelve princesses were drawn to it, and they floated to it . After dancing all night in the city, the princesses sit on a sheet of lead that is attracted to the Earth because of gravity and its weight, causing them to float back to the roof of their house (Winterson 110-111). A prince, the youngest of twelve princes, figured out their secret. He was also light and hid himself under the sheet of lead on their descent back to earth. The princesses were going to leave and live in the flying city, but on the night of their final departure, the prince revealed the secret and

the princesses' ankles were chained. They were then promised to each of the prince's brothers (Winterson 111).

In Winterson's version, the prince prevents the princesses from living their lives as they choose. Winterson's description of the princesses show that they defied gravity from birth. One even "was prevented from banging her head against the ceiling only by the umbilical cord" (109). As the princesses grew older, they were "fattened up and given heavy clothing" so that they could no longer fly- except for when they danced (Winterson 109). The princesses were born to defy the laws of gravity and belong in the city where everyone danced, but the male influences changed them. The princesses were weighted by being "fattened up and given heavy clothing" in order that they look and dress as society told them. Their only escape was through dancing. When they were caught, they were bound, not only physically, but also through marriage. The princesses were then forced not only to obey the laws of gravity, but the laws of society. Winterson restructures the story away from the male influence to show the oppression that the women face by the men in society, and shows the princesses being forced into a heterosexual marriage.

Winterson does not stop her critique with these marriages, but rather uses the marriage as a new starting point. She also has each of the princesses make an appearance recalling their own stories about what happened after their supposed 'happily ever after' ending. With this, Winterson not only integrates the 'writing beyond the ending' technique to her retelling of "The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes," but also expands her critique from a feminist stance against patriarchy to a queer stance against the heterosexual "happily ever after" endings. She starts by questioning the "happily" part of "happily ever after." When the main character of the novel meets the eldest of these twelve princesses, she says, "You know that eventually a clever prince

caught us flying through the window….He had eleven brothers and we were all given in marriage, one to each brother, and as it says lived happily ever after. We did, but not with our husbands" (Winterson 48). The stories of the twelve dancing princesses' marriages and their future lives follow this statement, each incorporating different narrative techniques to expose the different oppressions that the women face. One of the oppressions Winterson exposes in four of the princesses stories is the sexual oppression of a heteronormaltive society.

The story of the first princess is an example of how Winterson exposes the heterosexual oppression of fairy tale endings. The first princess was forced into a marriage that did not end up happily for her. After her so called "happily ever after," the first princess fell in love with a mermaid. She then left her husband to live with the mermaid. After a few years, the eldest princess regained contact with her sisters and they all bought a house together and live there. She states, "I discovered that we had all, in one way or another, parted from the glorious princes and were living scattered, according to our tastes" (Winterson 48). In this first princess's story, Winterson reveals that not only is she retelling the fairy tale "The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes," but is also referring to and retelling other fairy tales as well. The first princess's pairing with a mermaid recalls Hans Christian Anderson's "The Little Mermaid." The original fairy tale ends, not with the "happily ever after" ending, but rather with the death of the mermaid. Winterson, by using an allusion to Anderson's fairy tale, queers both "The Worn-Out Dancing-Shoes" and The Little Mermaid," two tales that portray the female characters in an oppressed manner. In "The Little Mermaid," the mermaid gave up her speech to turn into a human, becoming a woman who is "seen, not heard" for the man that she loved. As a result of becoming human, the mermaid also suffered the pain of knives stabbing her feet with every step. Despite this pain she dances for her prince. When the prince marries another girl, the mermaid has the choice of dying or killing her

prince to become a mermaid again. She chooses to die and becomes sea foam (Anderson 79-87). In the original version, the mermaid gives up her voice, lives in pain, and dies for her prince, who does not appreciate the sacrifice she made for him. Winterson retells this story in a manner that the mermaid did not need to give up anything for her love. Instead the first princess and the mermaid live together in a well where both can live without unfair sacrifice. Winterson queers the typical heteronormative "happily ever after" by creating a new, queer, "happily ever after" ending for both the princess and the mermaid.

In a few other princesses stories, Winterson continues to queer the heteronormative aspect of fairy tales, but in a much different way. In the third princesses story, for example, it is the husband, not the princess, who is oppressed through heteronormativity. In this story, Winterson can be seen to use a feminist technique in order to show the heterosexual oppression that men can face. By doing so, Winterson breaks away from the feminist aspect of this technique, and shows the woman as the oppressor. The princess married a man who was in love with a boy. The husband, however, does not receive a queer "happily ever after" like the first princess and the mermaid. Instead, his wife kills him and his lover with a single arrow in a Carter-like manner. After describing how she murdered her husband, the third princess states calmly, "'I still think it was poetic'" (Winterson 50). The detached manner in which explicit violence is narrated in this story evokes the sense of unease that Carter attributes to gothic imagery. The narration of the deaths of the princess's husband and his love is quite similar to Carter's narration in "The Werewolf," a retelling of the Grimms "Little Redcape" most commonly known as Little Red Riding Hood. After describing the murder of the grandmother, the narrator states calmly "Now the child lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered" (Carter 211). The calm tone of the narrator following violence evokes a sense of unnaturalness

and unease that adds a gothic element to Carter's tale. This is the same feeling that results in the story of the third princess who recalls such violence in their husband's murder in such a nonchalant manner. However, Winterson increases the unease through first-person narration, when Carter used third-person. By doing so, Winterson gives the princess more agency for she is the one who is telling the story, rather than simply being told about. The princess, in her narration, is shown to make her own decisions. This first-person narrative works to increase the "unease" felt about the detached reference to violence since the narration is more personal. Third-person narration is detached, in itself, from those that it tells about, so the detachment of one of the characters is harder to show. In first-person, since the narration originates from the narrator's experiences and feelings and cannot be separated from the narrator, the sense of detachment comes across as more unnatural. The unease is also escalated by the fact that the princess acts unethically as the heterosexual oppression. In this sense, Winterson uses gothic narrative is in a much different manner than Carter. While Carter uses gothic narrative to expose the oppressions that women face, Winterson shows the princess as the one violently enforcing the oppression. Since first person narrative makes the story more personal and typically aligns the reader's sympathy with the speaker, the princess's choice to be the aggressor leaves the reader in an uncomfortable position. While the reader would like to sympathize with the speaker, in this case, the speaker is in the wrong. Winterson leaves readers with a sense of unease as they are forced to realign their sympathies from the princess to the victims of the princess's violence.

Winterson also uses first-person narration for different effects in other princess's stories. In the fifth princess's story, Winterson tells a version of Rapunzel from the point of view from the witch, or old woman. Winterson uses this first-person narrative to recast the original fairy

tale so that the witch, who was portrayed as the evil character, is now the tragic heroine of the story:

> You may have heard of Rapunzel. Against the wishes of her family, who can best be described by their passion for collecting miniature dolls, she went to live in a tower with an older woman. Her family were so incensed by her refusal to marry the prince next door that they vilified the couple, calling one a witch and the other a little girl. Not content with names, they ceaselessly tried to break into the tower, so much that the happy pair had to seal up any entrance that was not on a level with the sky…One day the prince, who had always liked to borrow his mother's frocks, dressed up as Rapunzel's lover and dragged himself into the tower. Once inside he tied her up and waited for the wicked witch to arrive. The moment she leaped through the window, bringing their dinner for the evening, the prince hit her over the head and threw her out again. Then he carried Rapunzel down the rope he had brought with him and forced her to watch while he blinded her broken lover in a field of thorns. After that they lived happily ever after, of course. As for me, my body healed, though my eyes never did…My own husband? Oh well, the first time I kissed him he turned into a frog. (Winterson 52).

Instead of being portrayed as an evil witch, the princess is depicted in a more empathetic role. She is not even mentioned to be old. The only time that the term of 'witch' is used, it is said by those who did not accept the princess and Rapunzel as lovers. In this sense, Winterson's version of Rapunzel recalls Broumas's poem which also shows the labeling as a witch as a type of violence the lesbian couple had to endure. Other than this solitary mention, there is no other witch reference in this story. However, there is a reference to another fairy tale that casts this fifth princess as a witch. The only time the princess mentions her husband, she states that when she kissed him, he turned into a frog. This is a reference to modern day versions of the Grimms fairy tale "The Frog King."

In the Grimms original version of the "The Frog King" a princess loves a golden ball and accidentally drops the ball into a well. A frog hears her crying and tells her that he will return the ball if she will let him be her companion, and she agrees. The king forces the unwilling princess to honor her promise, but eventually the princess throws the frog against the wall as hard as she

can. When he hits the wall, the frog turns into a prince, explains that he had been under a witch's spell, and becomes the princess's husband (Grimm 271-273). In modern day versions of this story, the frog becomes a prince after the princess kisses her. Winterson, by explaining that the fifth princess turns her husband, a prince, into a frog, connects the fifth princess to "The Frog King." By doing so, Winterson recasts her as the "witch" who turns the prince into the frog preceding the tale. The princess thus is charged with being a witch from two sources, each is shown to be an inaccurate portrayal of her character. The prince in "the Frog King" blames his hideous nature, being a frog, on a "wicked" witch (Grimm 273). Winterson shows this to be untrue, as the princess is shown to have no control over that occurrence. The prince is now recast as unfairly blaming the princess and giving her the attribute of being "wicked." Likewise, the princess is labeled as a "witch" simply because Rapunzel took the princess as a lover. Winterson uses these two instances to critique fairy tales for their inclusion of "witches." This label is portrayed to be a societal device of blame and violence on the princess for what is viewed to be "unnatural," the lesbian coupling and turning a man into a frog. The labeling is thus shown to be a force of social violence for one that does not conform.

Winterson, however, does not stop the violence with name-calling there as Broumas does. Broumas does not depict the ending of the "Rapunzel" fairy tale, but instead writes the poem in an instant of queer temporality, where there is no set future, and anything is possible. Winterson shows the couple to have an intimate relationship as Broumas does, but Winterson continues the fairy tale so that it has its conventional "happily ever after" ending. In Winterson's verson, Rapunzel is still taken away from the woman she lived with in the tower and ends up marrying the prince. However, Winterson's portrayal of oppression and extreme violence questions the "happily ever after" aspect of this ending.

Winterson starts out with her portrayal of Rapunzel's family as being a source of oppression that Rapunzel breaks free from. The fifth princess mentions that Rapunzel's family had a passion for collecting dolls, and with this comment, shows how controlling Rapunzel's family was. The reference to collecting dolls can be seen as an allusion to Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. In this play, the wife Nora explains that throughout her life she has been controlled, first by her father, and then by her husband. This state of oppression she equates with being a doll in a doll house:

> When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls…I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you—or else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which… I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child. (Ibsen 3.1).

The imagery of the doll house shows the patriarchial system that controls women. Women first are controlled by their father, and then by their husbands. This is the same control that can be seen in Winterson's version of "The Worn-Out Shoes." The princesses are shown to be controlled by first their father, the King, and later by their husbands. This overarching theme of patriarchal control can be seen in Winterson's description of Rapunzel's family through this allusion. Rapunzel's family is shown to be an oppressive force that tried to dictate how Rapunzel's life should be, as if she were a doll in a doll's house. When Rapunzel breaks free of her family's control, she also escapes from the prince's future control over her through the marriage her family supported. She and her lover become the victims of violence that aim to have the patriarchy reassert control. This not only happens through the family's name calling, but through the violence of the prince.

Winterson alters the ending of the original "Rapunzel" to have the prince initiate the violence. By doing so, the "happily ever after" ending that reinforces patriarchy is shown in a questionable light. In the original tale, the witch sets a trap for the prince, after banishing Rapunzel to the woods. The prince leaps out of the tower, falls on thorns, and is blinded. In this original version, all violence starts with the witch. Also, the violence she is depicted to cause is not too graphic as the prince ultimately causes his own injuries by jumping out of the tower. The only actions the witch took were the banishing of Rapunzel and tricking the prince. Winterson changes all of this; not only does all the violence originate with the prince, but it is depicted to be much more graphic. Tricking Rapunzel, he forcibly ties her up, and attacks the princess when she came home. He hits her over the head and throws her out of the window. As if this violence was not enough, Winterson shows the prince as forcing Rapunzel to watch as he blinds her lover with thorns. Winterson depicts the prince as enjoying the violence against the women and using it to torment them. Winterson depicts the blinding, not to have taken place with simply falling from the tower into a field of thorns, but rather as a type of torture. The princess is described as being already "broken" when the prince maliciously blinds her with thorns in order to have Rapunzel witness his assertion of gruesome control.

This extreme violence is an example of Winterson using Carter's gothic technique to expose the inhumane treatment and control that the women of the story face. The pleasure the prince takes in violence and torture ties this story to Carter's "The Bloody Chamber," a retelling of the Grimms "Bluebeard". In Carter's tale, the husband tells his wife not to go in one particular room, a 'double-bluff' as Gamble explains. While the woman seems to have a choice whether to go into the room or not, she is actually playing into the husband's game. He wants her to go into the room to see the murders he has committed because her horror and fear gives him pleasure

(Gamble 29). Winterson uses gothic narration in this story to exaggerate the violence and emphasize the Prince's male control. However, Winterson also undercuts his masculinity by portraying the prince in a "queer" way, depicting him as a cross dresser. She states that he "had always liked to borrow his mother's frocks" (Winterson 52). Winterson uses these two traits of the prince, the violence and crossdressing, in order to portray him in a much different way than in the original "Rapunzel."

By depicting the prince in this manner, Winterson questions the "happily ever after" that Rapunzel receives afterward. The 'happily ever after" ending is mentioned immediately after the description of the prince blinding the princess. The princess states, "After that they lived happily ever after, of course" (Winterson 52). Just the placement of this line implies that Rapunzel will not be happy with the prince. Winterson goes one step further, however, and has the princess tack on the "of course." This simple comment, and the tone behind it, depicts the statement to be somewhat ironic. By stating that the two lived "happily ever after" in this manner, Winterson implies that this "happily ever after" ending does not exist.

In the story of the seventh princess, Winterson queers the "happily ever after" ending in a much different way. Winterson queers the original "happily ever after" by having the princess reveal that her husband was, in fact, a woman in disguise. The princess says that she "never wanted anyone but her" (Winterson 54). The two women were shown to enjoy eighteen years of blissful marriage to each other in which the two were never separated and "made love often" (Winterson 54). While this marriage between the two women proved to be happy, Winterson does not have the happy ending last. Since the marriage went against society, in a similar way to the fifth princess's story, society tries to assert their control over the couple through violence.

Winterson uses the violence in a different manner with the seventh princess in order to show

power to be associated with violence, using a few of Carter's narrative tools.

Like Carter, Winterson also incorporates erotic elements within the fairy tale as well as

using instances of extreme violence in an unsettling manner. The seventh princess opens her

story with a sexual description of her lover. From this point, the erotic starts to mix with some

gothic imagery. The princess states, "We kissed often, our mouths filling up with tongue and

teeth and spit and blood where I bit her lip" (Winterson 54). Like Carter's fairy tales, Winterson

mixes the sexual side of the characters with a gothic focus on blood and social taboo. This more

violent nature of the women's love can be seen as an emphasis on the violation of the social

taboo that the two were engaging in by being together. The violent aspect continues to increase

in the story as the women's secret love is discovered and society retaliates against them. Before

the people of the town get a chance to kill the women, the princess kills her lover. The princess

explains this by saying:

> Someone found us and then it was too late. The man I married was a woman. They came
> to burn her. I killed her with a single blow to the head before they reached the gates, and
> fled the place, and am come here now. I still have a coil of her hair (Winterson 54).

This ending is very similar to Carter's use of gothic narrative, as violence can be seen as an

unsettling link to power. Rather than witness others use violence against her lover, the princess

decides to murder her lover herself. The princess uses violence as a way of controlling her fate

and the fate of her love instead of allowing society to control them. By having the princess take

control through violence, Winterson emphasizes the forces of oppression happening within the

story and gives agency to the princess. Rather than have the princess be a victim of violence like

the fifth princess, the seventh takes control and acts as the agent of violence. This agency can be

seen as quite similar to that in Carter who has her heroines act as agents that often use eroticism

as power. By reversing the agency of woman while still depicting the oppression that they face,

Carter and Winterson create a gothic sense of "unease" as the heroines have no options but to use

violence and eroticism as devices to gain power and control of their future. This agency works to

bring emphasis to the forces of oppression that cause the women to act in that manner, in this

case, society's heteronormalcy.

　　With this story, Winterson queers the "happily ever after" by having the princess marry a

woman. Winterson also shows the possibility of a happy ending with a nonheterosexual

marriage. However, she uses this potential in a manner to show the heteronormalcy of society

that oppresses those who are queer. The happiness of the couple turns to violence as society

interferes with it. Winterson can be seen to use this story to critique society's influence over

"happily ever afters" in the manner that the only "happily ever after" endings that society allows

are heterosexual. When the seventh princess enjoys her queer "happily ever after," society

attempts to destroy it.

　　Only one of the twelve princesses is shown to escape the social pressure for a

heterosexual "happily ever after" ending. This is the last princess whom Winterson names

Fortuna. She is the only princess to be named, and the only one who is not forced into a

marriage. She is the best dancer of the princesses, and was supposed to marry the youngest

prince who discovered the princess's secret. However, she escapes the marriage by flying "from

the altar like a bird from a snare and walked a tightrope between the steeple of the church and the

mast of a ship weighing anchor in the bay" (Winterson 61). The princesses never saw her again,

but the main character of Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry,* Jordan, tracks her down. He discovers

that she is the only one who is still dancing, and she founded her own school of dance.

(Winterson 105-106).

When Jordan finds Fortuna, she begins to tell the story of the day that all of the princesses were to get married as if it were her first memory. "'My name is Fortuna,' she said. 'This is the first thing I saw'" (Winterson 104.) With her story, Winterson implies that Fortuna began her life in this instant, the day that she was about to get married. She then describes the days leading up to the marriages of the twelve princesses with what can be seen as a reference to the story of "Snowwhite:"

> It was the winter of our marriage, my sisters and I. We were to be married together, all twelve of us on the same day. On New Year's Day, in blood-red dresses with our black hair. We decided to build a church in our garden. We built it out of the ice, and it cut our hands and the blood stained the snow like the wild red roses in the hedges. (Winterson 105).

The blood on the snow is a main part of the Grimms fairy tale "Snowwhite," as Snowwhite was born out of a wish for a child that looked like the Queen's three drops of blood upon the snow (Grimm 7). The blood can be seen as a use of gothic imagery that ties the structure of the church with the blood of the women that marriage oppresses. Fortuna is the only one who does not face this oppression as she escapes. Rather than following her father's wishes, Fortuna flees from her set-up marriage. This day can be seen as the day that Fortuna achieves her freedom. She escapes from her father, and the prince who was about to become her husband. By doing so, Fortuna freed herself from the oppression she was facing as a woman and gained for herself a new life and identity. Her sisters, however, with their blood-stained marriage, are not awarded this new life. The fact that Fortuna is the only named princess can be seen to be a portrayal of the fact that she was the only princess who was allowed her own identity by escaping the oppressive "happily ever after."

Fortuna is the embodiment of queer temporality throughout Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*. Not only does Fortuna escape her marriage to the prince, she does not settle down with

Jordan, even though he loves her. She said that "for years she had lived in hope of being rescued; of belonging to someone else, of dancing together. And then she had learned to dance alone, for its own sake and for hers" (Winterson 112). Fortuna chooses to live her own life, not tied down through a traditional "happily ever after" ending. With this decision, Winterson does not end her novel with a "happily ever after" where Jordan ends up with his love Fortuna. Instead, Winterson creates a queer temporality in which her characters have a future full of potential.

Winterson, in *Sexing the Cherry*, "queers" the fairy tale "The Worn-Out Dancing-Shoes" in a way that incorporates the different feminist methods of altering fairy tales in order to explore the "happily ever after" of fairy tales. She uses the different princesses stories to expose different aspects of the "happily ever after" ending and create alternate endings. Winterson first has a heterosexual ending dissolve and lead to a queer "happily ever after" with the first princess. She then shows how the "happily ever after" ending is oppressive to queers in the third princess's marriage. Winterson also shows the extent of society's heteronormalcy in the fifth princess's story as Rapunzel is violently forced into a typical "happily ever after" ending. Finally, Winterson shows that not all fairy tales need to end in a "happily ever after," as the twelfth princess, Fortuna, escapes marriage and lives her own life, happily dancing. In these stories, Winterson gives her heroines agency as well as using feminist techniques of restructuring, writing beyond the ending, and gothic narrative in order to expose the oppression within the original fairy tale. Winterson critiques the "happily ever after" ending for its heteronormalcy and creates an alternate to the typical reproductive temporality through Fortuna, who embodies the idea of queer temporality. Using Winterson as an example, and the feminist and queer writers that preceded her, it is possible to see that queer narratives work to expose the heteronormalcy of the "happily ever after" ending of fairy tales through their act of "queering." These queer

narratives can therefore be seen as a critique of the "happily ever after" endings for socializing

children to uphold this herteronormalcy.

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