Tangled Up in Blue: Liz Lochhead's Grimm Sisters Tales

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The work of Scottish writer Liz Lochhead is emphatically concerned with the patriarchal inflexions of “cultural memory and legend” (Varty 644). Developing subversive narrative strategies that enabled her to explore the relations between traditional stories and myths, and male history, myth, and fantasy (McMillan 16; Crawford 62), Lochhead’s writing answered Adrienne Rich’s call for revisioning traditional and patriarchal narrative patterns (Anderson 128). In the 1970s, Scotland inherited a field of “old battle-grounds of religion and national identity” and a literary landscape that was dominated by male lyric voices and reflected men’s public role as guardians of the cultural heritage (McCulloch 25; Crawford 60, 62–63). Lochhead’s voice found its distinctiveness by exploring the conditions under which women could express their identities and experiences in this cultural environment. Her collection of poems *The Grimm Sisters* is an example of such an exploration.¹

The title of the collection reflects its concern with the fairy-tale tradition developed by the Grimm brothers, while also indicating the intention to represent the tales in a different gender perspective by reprocessing the value of authorship and authority they convey. Lochhead’s choice of fairy tales as subject matter for poetry is partly a response to specific cultural patterns of Scotland in the 1970s. It enabled her to focus on the identities and social experiences of women confined to the domestic sphere, midwives of the storytelling tradition, while men, masters of the written word, wielded cultural authority in the public sphere. However, Lochhead’s choice specific of the Grimms’ tales

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as the main subject of the collection, tales edited by male scholars of such public distinction, and that, according to Jack Zipes, “are probably the most reprinted and best known in the world and serve as reference points for all kinds of cultural productions” (Why Fairy Tales Stick 84), enabled her to also focus on how the male authority of the written word, wielded in the public sphere, permeates and governs women's storytelling voices, even as they are assigned to the domestic. Exploring how this relation of narrative government of women's subjective identity affects women's socialization, Lochhead's writing engages with larger cultural systems, myths, and ideologies whose power is reflected in Scottish contexts. The result is a multifaceted critique of the power of male curators of the cultural heritage to control women's voices and, thus, the means of expressing their social identities, a critique that is relevant beyond local or national contexts.

My analysis will focus mainly on how Lochhead deals with male-generated narrating agency in fairy-tale representations of women, and on Lochhead's critical view of the class and gender hierarchies this agency engenders. Zipes argues that social contexts and material conditions may demand that certain versions of fairy tales acquire the status and functions of myth (Fairy Tales and the Art 11). Having become “formative and definitive,” “certain fairy-tale texts [. . .] insert themselves into our cognitive processes, enabling us to establish and distinguish patterns of behavior and to reflect upon ethics, gender, morality and power” (Why Fairy Tales Stick 26). However, fairy tales may also change through retellings that enable “listeners and readers to envision possible solutions to their problems so that they could survive and adapt to their environments” (xii). Thus, we distinguish two effects of reiterations of fairy tales. The repetition of fairy-tale patterns fostered by specific social contexts and material conditions over a period of time engenders norms that govern our social orientation in relation to ethics, gender, morality, and hierarchies of power. In this case, fairy tales function as social myths that strengthen dominant ideologies. But reiterations of fairy tales can also be the occasion of heteroglossic intervention whereby narrative patterns and the norms they convey and naturalize are questioned, thus reorienting our bearing in social reality. Lochhead's storytellers narrate the *fabulas*, or series of events, that the male-dominated fairy-tale canon provides, but they devise competing arrangements of meaning through which the fabulas can be reinterpreted. This enables readers to question the social norms that are naturalized through the process of reiteration that establishes certain fairy tales as social myths.

Alison Smith emphasizes Lochhead's conviction that the voices of her poems come from the author's self (12). The poems of *The Grimm Sisters* suggest that these voices also come from dominant traditions that shape the self's predisposition to channel their expression. With regard to fairy tales, male-
generated traditions such as that of the Grimms eclipsed female-generated traditions that developed, for instance, in seventeenth-century France. As Zipes points out, the French term *conte de fée* “indicated the narrative power of women, for the fairies and writers/tellers of those texts are in control of the destinies of all the characters” (*Why Fairy Tales Stick* 69). In *The Grimm Sisters* the very possibility of voice as originating in the subject position of the storyteller is prescribed in the male-controlled tradition that this voice seeks to revise. I will argue that the first poem of the collection is concerned with the construction of the storyteller figure and that it explores the problematics related to situating a female storytelling voice in social and material contexts. I will then regard the other poems as they are strategically placed in the collection. Once the storyteller’s figure is defined, the two poems that follow, rendered in this storyteller’s voice, are concerned with the genealogy of the fairy-tale feminine in relation to the archetypal father and mother figures used in the tales. This genealogy is further explored in poems where the storyteller focuses on fairy-tale constructions of women’s social roles at different stages of social life between pre-sexual girl and elderly woman: the roles of daughter, wife, lover, spinster, seductress, bride, sister, and so forth.

Robert Crawford emphasizes that “in *The Grimm Sisters* and elsewhere Lochhead’s celebration of and use of orality can be seen as disrupting the fixed, orthodox forms of the written down,” revealing a “fluid and dialogic,” “particular rather than universalizing” narrative space (62). The first poem of the collection, titled “1: Storyteller,” defines the narrator who will be the teller in subsequent poems by disrupting the traditional discursive position constructed for fairy-tale narrators in the written-down masculine tradition. In doing so, it also explores the boundaries of the place of telling where the woman storyteller is situated. The poem begins by narrating:

she sat down
at the scoured table
in the swept kitchen
beside the dresser with its cracked delft.
And every last crumb of daylight was salted away.
(Lochhead, *Dreaming* 70)

Here we identify a female character in a scene that recalls the Cap o’Rushes tale. But this character can also be seen as a storyteller speaking from the subject position constructed in the male-generated fairy-tale tradition for the story of Cap o’Rushes. Developing this argument, I will use this story to provide a meta-perspective on Lochhead’s collection as a whole.
The Cap o’Rushes tale is classified ATU 510B in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale-type index as a version of Cinderella’s story (ATU 510). The main difference between Cap o’Rushes and ATU 510A versions (closest to the Grimms’ Cinderella story) is that the breach between father and daughter occurs because of the father (there is no stepmother), who is not satisfied with the daughter’s expression of love for him. The daughter is banned because when her father asks her how much she loves him, she replies that she loves him as food loves salt.

Several elements suggest that the storyteller in Lochhead’s poem is a version of Cap o’Rushes. “She” stops to rest after a day’s work: the table is scoured and the kitchen is swept. As in the tale of Cap o’Rushes, there is a strong allusion to salted food: “And every last crumb of daylight was salted away.” The voice in this poem belongs both to a character resembling Cap o’Rushes and to the storyteller whose narration sketches her tale. But in the male-generated fairy-tale ethos, Cap o’Rushes is never a narrator, only an actor. Attempting to tell herself into being, Lochhead’s storyteller cannot but convey her voice through the authority that sanctions what Cap o’Rushes may say in the male-constructed fairy-tale canon. The disjunctive conjunction of the voice of storyteller and narrative actor suggests that in the male-generated fairy-tale canon women remain unrecognized as tellers of stories, being recognizable only through their reflections in the stories’ characters. However, Lochhead’s storytellers/subjects overtake narrating agency so that their subjection through male fantasies becomes itself a subject of narration.

Thus, the poem “Storyteller” begins by introducing a female character similar to Cap o’Rushes who attempts to appropriate the voice of the storyteller that, litera(ri)lly, tells her into being. And then “every last crumb of daylight was salted away.” The last stanza suggests that the night that comes belongs to this storyteller: at first light next morning, “the stories dissolved in the whorl of the ear [. . .] till they flew again / in the storytellers night” (Lochhead, Dreaming 70). The second and third stanzas define the storyteller’s work by highlighting the imbricature between realms of fantasy and material spaces where folktales steer social practices. In the context of these stanzas, the phrase “daylight was salted away” suggests that the events of work and social interaction are stored in the stories through which we fantasize reality to taste: stories make the reality of work and social living palatable, richer, and tastier; they “cook” reality. Thus,

No one could say the stories were useless
for as the tongue clacked
five or forty fingers stitched
corn was grated from the husk
patchwork was pieced
or the darning done. (70)

This stanza offers reflections on the possibilities of realness of the storyteller’s place. It is suggested that the telling of stories serves to comfort women working in the domestic sphere, accompanying the “stitching,” the “grating of corn,” the “piecing of patchwork,” and the “darning.” But underlying this conventional painting of women as primitive, domestic “common folk,” we discover a potentially empowering representation of women storytellers: as “the tongue clacks,” perhaps not only cloth is stitched, corn grated, quilt patchwork pieced, or garments darned, but also, as with the clacking of a typewriter, events are joined in narratives, the raw fabula is refined and transformed into a story, patchwork paragraphs are pieced together, and thus reality is mended.

According to Dorothy McMillan, this stanza serves to characterize “the function of both story and teller as useful rather than merely decorative” (17). Storytelling is presented as a material process that intervenes in, and transforms, the state of matter: “To tell the stories was her work. / It was like spinning, / gathering thin air to the singlest strongest / thread” (Lochhead, Dreaming 70). By highlighting the physical properties of the speaking voice, Lochhead underlines the materiality of the very action of storytelling. At the same time, through the metaphor of spinning, the poem suggests that changing the material reality through storytelling is similar to processing material objects in domestic work to which the storyteller is destined through the tales’ scenarios. Thus, storytelling is seen as an activity that shapes material life by transforming the materiality of social locales—that is, by using the vibration of voice to disseminate the significance of material environments in ways that entice us to accept or change set patterns of material life, potentially creating new resonances between individuals and material places, with consequences for the material configuration of one’s relation to place. At the same time, storytelling is seen as being shaped in turn by social practices that produce the socialization scripts mirrored in the tales and by the reality of work environments. The poems that follow “Storyteller” expand this framework to include other cultural forms that are determined by, and which determine, the tales’ scenarios—for instance, marriage, patriarchal authority, or other corpuses of tales and myths. In these poems, as in “Storyteller,” the weaving of tales into the texture of reality is seen as having both empowering and disempowering effects.

The metaphor of spinning draws a potentially empowering woman storyteller figure as someone who could change material configurations of social locales, but it is also used to suggest that it locks this storyteller within the world
of fairy tales, where spinning often plays an important part in the plot and definition of women characters. Lochhead’s storyteller is a woman spinning tales in order to weave a reality in which she may become a different kind of woman than Cap o’Rushes, but the threads of the texture of fairy-tale “reality” she must work with are interwoven with those of the material reality in such ways that the resulting design always yields a Cap o’Rushes. This raises questions regarding the role of narrating agency in creating socialization scenarios. The woman storyteller figure drawn here is a domestic worker because of the tales that make her show herself to herself as such, because of tales like that of Cap o’Rushes. Suspecting that the voice that tells her into being is not entirely her own, the storyteller proceeds to undo realms of fantasy as masculine dominions and provides instead fantasy scenarios as tools for “spinning,” “piecing together,” and “darning” a more empowering social reality. The subsequent poems in the collection can be read as tales told by this storyteller, marked by her efforts to reconstruct the male-generated fairy-tale ethos and other elements of cultural memory that reinforce this ethos.

For instance, the poem “Harridan” begins with a reflection on Peter Bruegel the Elder’s painting Dulle Griet, also known as Mad Meg (see figure). The central figure in the painting is a woman depicted running in a scene of

Peter Bruegel I, Dulle Griet (1562?). Copyright Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerpen © collectiebeleid. Reproduced with permission.
nightmarish intensity. In Margaret Sullivan’s analysis, “Madness and Folly are the dual—and related—themes of the Dulc Griet” (55). In Lochhead’s poem the storyteller asks: “Was Meg ‘mad’ or more the Shakespearean Fool?” (Dreaming 74). We are tempted to ask the same question about Cap o’Rushes: was she “mad” to challenge the authority of the father, or the wise fool who teaches a lesson without openly challenging authority? The fairy-tale Cap o’Rushes, although challenging her father, eventually renews patriarchal authority by recreating her subservience in marriage. Her apparent folly as unmarried daughter is in the end revealed as wisdom, yet wisdom in the service of male authority. Lochhead’s poem can be seen as providing a framework for us to interpret Cap o’Rushes’ figure in light of Bruegel’s painting. According to S. J. Boyd, Lochhead’s reference to the Mad Meg painting “sets the crazy and the grotesque in the most heimlich context imaginable” (40). This heimlich is “homely” space of the scullery. The Cap o’Rushes whom we may imagine to inhabit this space, rather than confirming masculine hierarchies, exposes them as conducive of nightmarish madness.

In Lochhead’s poem, this madness is further explored with the awareness that it is a male-generated notion that makes sense of women’s anger on men’s terms. Lochhead’s storyteller evokes the figures of Queen Margot and of a virago in Mad Meg’s company:

Mad Meg, Sour-Tongued Margot,
maddened slut in this mass of misery, a Virago,
at her wit’s end, running past Hell’s Mouth, all reason gone,
she has one mailed glove, one battered breastplate on.
Oh that kitchen knife, that helmet, that silent shout,
I know Meg from the inside out. (Dreaming 74)

The poem warns that women like Queen Margot, who placed love and independence before loyalty to family, are often branded as prostitutes. The reference to virago recalls the Latin phrase *femina virilis*—a virile, masculine woman, a reference that implies a remaking of feminine identity to meet expectations of masculinity. We are led to ask to what extent the Cinderella-type figures of banned daughters in the male-generated fairy-tale canon are more similar to viragos, sharing the predicament of a Queen Margot, maddened by their misunderstood anger, “at their wit’s end,” rather than being witty, wise Shakespearean fools.

In Lochhead’s storyteller’s voice, the painting of Mad Meg, Queen Margot’s history, and the reference to virago all tell a different story of women who reject the law of the father than the story told in Cinderella-type fairy tales. These contrasts suggest that what has not been told about Cap o’Rushes was
the story of how her anger was misunderstood as madness and then tamed as 
mere folly—the unwritten story that lingers in the interstices of male-generated 
fairy-tale narrative scenarios. This is the story of the “silent shout” of women 
whose only weapons are “that kitchen knife” and the “mailed glove.” In the 
imagery of the poem, the figure of the housewife is superimposed with that of 
one of the Furies. As Meg turns into Megaera, we realize that her madness is 
not shiftless. The figure of Megaera offers an alternative to the women figures 
obtaining through male-generated versions of Cap o’Rushes’ tale, Queen Margot’s 
history, or the virago identity:

Oh I am wild-eyed, unkempt, hellbent, a haridran. 
My sharp tongue will shrivel any man. 
Should our paths cross 
I’ll embarrass you with public tears, accuse you with my loss. 
(Dreaming 75)

The Furies in Greek mythology are daughters of the night who avenge wrong-
doings that escape human public justice. For Lochhead’s storyteller, the “story-
tellers night” (Dreaming 70) could become, as the realm of the Furies, a space 
where alternative views of social justice may be conceived and legitimated.

Thus, the voice of these poems belongs to a storyteller whose presence is 
fantasized, for it is someone who cannot escape the spell of myth: she is a Cap 
o’Rushes of sorts. However, she works to make visible the unthinkable, which, 
in Judith Butler’s words, is “fully within culture but excluded from dominant 
culture” (Gender Trouble 77, original italics). If Cap o’Rushes or Cinderellas 
were to turn inside out the texture of their sanitized reality, woven in the male-
generated fairy-tale canon, madness like that of Megaera, which is conducive 
of more reasonable social roles, would be released. This “madness” means “not 
sane” only to the extent that it has been foreclosed in realms of the unthink-
able, a foreclosure upon which rests the foundation of the legitimate subject of 
male-dominated gender regimes.

The ways stories come across in social roles is more pointedly explored in 
Lochhead’s “The Grim Sisters.” The poem tells the story of a young woman 
preparing to go out to a ball in the late 1950s, in a rendering that references 
Cinderella’s tale. The dressing-up occurs in a domestic space, where “the grown 
up girls next door” are called to help:

I sat at peace passing bobbipins 
from a marshmallow pink cosmetic purse
embossed with jazzmen,
girls with pony tails and a November
topaz lucky birthstone. [. . .]
[The girls next door] doused my cow's-lick, rollerd
and skewered tightly.
I expected that to be lovely
would be worth the hurt. (Dreaming 72–73)

Examining Lochhead's references to fashion accessories in her poems, Anne Varty finds that Lochhead's technique of evoking "brand names together with more general terms" provides clues regarding the characters' "temporal and social location, asserts the immediately spoken quality of the verse, and at the same time generates a metaphoric gloss about commerce as a means of social control" (645). In "The Grim Sisters," too, fashion is exposed as disciplinary discourse. The public event of the ball is shown as an occasion for demonstrating a kind of femininity that fulfills masculine expectations. In order to become feminine on these terms, the woman's body "must take the social order as [its] productive nucleus," to use Elizabeth Grosz's words, thus becoming the subject of "representations and cultural inscriptions" that "quite literally constitute bodies and help to produce them as such" (Volatile Bodies x-xi). The social order that subjects the young woman is also a gender regime of masculine dominance whose power is distributed through the interlinked cultural and economic networks that produce fashionable bodies.

According to Grosz, "ritualistically inscribed scars and incisions become the marks of one's social location and position, creating a (provisional) fixity from the flux of the body's experiential intensities." As Grosz suggests, such marks are inscribed on bodies also through using makeup ("Bodies and Knowledges" 34–35). In "The Grim Sisters," an entire array of cosmetic tools for fashioning women's bodies to please and entice the male is evoked toward the end of the poem:

In those big black mantrap handbags [. . .]
were hedgehog hairbrushes,
cottonwool mice and barbed combs to tease.
(Lochhead, Dreaming 74)

The issue of women's consent to disciplining their bodies to meet masculine expectations is problematized with the awareness that the masculine myths of
femininity are transmitted through the very “sisterhood” that binds women to a common fate. The women next door are “grown-ups” who transmit “women’s wisdom” to their younger sister:

They read my Stars,
tied chiffon scarves to doorhandles, tried
to teach me tight dancesteps (73)

The teaching of “tight dancesteps” suggests a teaching of prescribed patterns of movement in social spaces. The metaphorical sisters model the young woman’s mind and body to fit the kind of realm of fantasy instituted through fairy tales of the Cinderella type. They must overcome the young woman’s halfhearted resistance, hinted at, for instance, when she is shown thinking that “you’d no guarantee / any partner you might find would ever be able to / keep up” with her dance steps. The “tricks of the trade” the young woman learns from the sisterhood are all tips for disciplining the body, the failure of which is a grim “disaster” (73).

We are thus offered a rendering of the process whereby women’s fantasizing of themselves as “lovely” is conducive of body markings that belong in male-generated “maps” of women’s bodies. According to Marina Warner: “[T]he body is still the map on which we mark our meanings; it is chief among metaphors used to see and present ourselves, and in the contemporary profusion of imagery [. . .] the female body occurs more frequently than any other: men often appear as themselves, as individuals, but women attest the identity and value of someone or something else” (Monuments 331). With a critical, ironic eye, the female actors in “The Grim Sisters” are shown to attest the identity and value of Cinderella-type fairy-tale figures and women’s socialization modes enshrined with the fairy tales: “dressed to kill,” the young woman must go in search of the lover and the partnership that guarantees future domestic bliss. The use of irony also conveys the grimness of a sisterhood in which the bond between women is materialized only in the domestic sphere while, we infer, in the public domain they compete for men’s favors.

Lochhead’s story about the Cinderella of the 1950s and the Grimms’ fairy tale are disjunctive in relevant points. Both Cindereillas have uncomfortable relationships with their “sisters.” In the fairy tale this is clearly because of envy and self-centeredness, but in the Cinderella story of the 1950s the metaphorical “grim sisters” do everything in their power to help, instead of preventing, her gaining a lover. However, the poem shows that a mere reversal of the sisters’ ethics is unsatisfying, since the grim sisters, while appearing helpful, also discipline the young woman, however benevolently by contrast to the fairy-tale stepsisters’ disciplining Cinderella. With this comes the realization that it
is not Cinderella’s relationship with her stepsisters that is most damaging, but rather the masculine cultural regime that entices women to fantasize themselves through their competitiveness for winning the male-organized beauty contest. Rereading the fairy tale with this understanding we realize that in the dynamic between Cinderella and her sisters women only hurt women. The condition of the 1950s Cinderella with her hair “skewered tightly,” learning uncomfortably “tight dancesteps,” may be not so different from the condition of the fairy-tale stepsisters who must cut their toes to meet the body parameters the prince expects. The enmity between the fairy-tale Cinderella and her stepsisters is thus revised to point out a common ground, one that is not divided to suit a male-dominated cultural regime.

Another relevant disjunction is achieved by contrasting the two stories with regard to Cinderella’s flight when the clock strikes midnight. In the fairy tale, this only means a postponement of the recognition scene in which Cinderella gains the reward of wedded bliss. But for the 1950s Cinderella the prospect of marriage seems distant. In the absence of the masculine measuring gaze, the young woman appears as a parody of the more “successful” seductresses:

But when the clock struck they
stood still, stopped dead.
And they were left there
out in the cold with the wrong skirtlength
and bouffant hair,
dressed to kill (Lochhead, Dreaming 73)

In the contrast between the two stories there emerge questions that challenge the social myths that define women’s stance in public spaces (positioning women as competing for winning a male partner); that script their socialization patterns (i.e., how young women must make their charms available to men in order to gain their company); and that prescribe requirements of bodily beauty and engender female body discipline.

The second poem of the three-piece set “The Furies” offers an image of women for whom the promise of wedded bliss remains unfulfilled in spite of their disciplining themselves for the Cinderella role. According to Varty, the poem “presents from inside the problem of having no obvious function as wife or mother” (646). Titled “Spinster,” the poem turns on its head the folktale idea that the young girl’s perseverance guarantees fulfillment in marriage. It points out that the alternatives offered by the same society that believes in wedded bliss to Cinderellas who have not secured a prince are void of the
sense of fairy-tale marvel. The Cinderellas’ perseverance, the anonymous social voice insists, must be invested in resigned acceptance of isolation and of the idea that if women’s identity as women cannot be fulfilled as wives, their efforts must be directed toward the traditional womanly concerns with public good and spiritual causes: “Accept. / Support good causes. [. . .] Go to evening classes. [. . .] Try Yoga. Cut your losses. / Accept” (Lochhead, Dreaming 75). If the first poem explores the figure of Megaera, the poem “Spinster” seems to reinterpret the figure of Alecto, who in the sisterhood of the Furies is the one who is unceasing in anger. The voice speaking in this poem seems to belong to a Cinderella for whom unceasing perseverance in satisfying masculine demands turns into unceasing anger, demanding a reconsideration of the social values that the fairy tales corroborate.

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The third poem of the “Furies” set offers yet another disjunctive realm of fantasy. The female identity in “Bawd” is apparently an alternative to that of the subservient 1950s Cinderella. The poem portrays a woman whose night out is not an attempt to please the male gaze but to master it with an assertion of her “fatal dame” sexual power (Dreaming 76). No longer credulous and innocent (“I’ve hauled my heart in off my sleeve” [76]) like the 1950s Cinderella going out to secure a marriage partner, this woman is more like the mythic Tisiphone. She sees herself haunting masculine realms of fantasy with a vengeance. McMillan comments that she seems “to be reserving a hidden strength rather than protecting a secret fear” (25). Rather than learning “tight dancesteps,” the woman in “Bawd” will

rouge my cleavage, flaunt myself, my heels
will be perilously high, oh
but I won’t sway. [. . .]

There is mayhem in my smile. (Lochhead, Dreaming 76)

However, unlike the wide-eyed 1950s Cinderella, this woman is aware that the male-generated image of the femme fatale is a fantasy. She adopts it with theatrical excess in order to subvert it, but eventually we are uncertain whether such fantasies construct empowering women’s identities: “I’ll be frankly fake. [. . .] No one will guess it’s not my style” (76). As Varty puts it, “the linguistic cast-offs [the woman in this poem] has picked up, together with too solid a protestation of bad intent already labelling herself as others will, reflect the inauthenticity of the stance and a bitter sense that there is a better life (both in terms of pleasure and ethics) than the one she adopts” (647). The three poems
of “The Furies,” providing intertextual references between a wider corpus of myths and fairy tales, supply complexity where the fairy tales simplify. Varty argues that “although the three ‘furies’ do not emerge from any one narrative, they are archetypes which lurk in many stories, and stereotypes which figure in social attitudes today. In each case Lochhead invites the reader behind the scenes, to hear how the woman determines to construct herself according to type. “The tales [. . .] reveal various kinds of difficulty experienced by the single woman in securing her social place” (645). The sisterhood inspired by the mythological figures of the Furies is empowering by comparison with the divided sisterhood of Cinderella-type tales and with the grim sisterhood of the 1950s Cinderella. Yet it paints a troublesome portrait of empowered women: while the “harridan” is “hellbent” and ready to “shrivel any man” by “embarrassing them with public tears” and “accusing them with her loss,” she sets out to do so as a Mad Meg, a “maddened slut” Queen Margo, and a virago “at her wit’s end”; the spinster figure is likewise tense; and the “bawd,” in spite of her confident display of female sexuality, is bitterly aware that this is men’s style, not hers. We have been given a range of myths and shown how they construct feminine identity in social reality. With this knowledge we may return to Cinderella-type stories to fill in the gaps and flesh out the sketchy contours. The marvel of the ball has been exposed as a bitter occasion of feminine contest to win masculine favors. The banned Cap o’Rushes may now be seen not only as the wisely patient daughter but also more like a Mad Meg at her wit’s end. And the alternative to Cinderella’s displaying her beauty to lure the prince into marriage is an oversexualized she-devil behind which we distinguish a woman who is not herself.13

The correlation that stories effect between reality and myth is further explored in other poems, by focusing on the roles of father, mother, son, daughter, sister, seductress, seducer, spinster, daughter-in-law, pre-sexual girl, lover, husband, and wife. The poems exploring the father and mother figures of fairy-tale fantasy are the most revelatory in terms of their force to construct social roles. I will therefore focus on these in order to examine their potent influence on the fantasies through which social identity is gained.

1. Shifty Fathers

The patriarchal authority to define social identities, shared by male curators of the cultural heritage, is disseminated in fairy tales through the figure of the father. Lochhead’s poem “II: The Father” focuses on fairy-tale constructions of the image and role of the father in order to highlight his complicity in the legitimation of male-dominated gender regimes. It also explores the consequences
of daughters' fantasizing such father figures in scenarios derived from fairy tales, which they may use in social interaction.

The poem unmasks the father's ineptness through reference to the tale of the Sleeping Beauty—or, in the Grimm brothers' version, the little Briar Rose—and to the tale of Beauty and the Beast: the father, we are told, is "tricked into bartering his beloved daughter / in exchange for the rose he only / took to please her" (Lochhead, Dreaming 71). Beauty's tale, like that of the Sleeping Beauty, is an instructional tale. Beauty's compassion and patience, both for her father and for the Beast, are rewarded in marriage. But in the ironic voice of Lochhead's storyteller, the father's attempt to obtain the rose to please his daughter sits uneasily with the idea of bartering. The two tales referred to in Lochhead's poems compound the figure of the father as loving, yet also as in complicity with, and mediating, the social order through which daughters are given into marriage. The father "compounds it all" "by overprotectiveness and suppression" (71). Lochhead's storyteller suggests that the father could have acted in a different way than the classical versions of these tales legitimate, where he is

(banning
spinning wheels indeed
when the sensible thing would have been
to familiarise her from the cradle
and explain their power to hurt her). (71)

The passage shows that the classical tales do not serve to familiarize young women with, or explain to them the implications of, the social role of wife. Rather, they serve to trick them into becoming wives through the promise of reward in marriage. A different image of the father than in the classical tales is revealed when we are told that:

But when she comes,
the beautiful daughter,
leading her lover by the sleeve, laughing—
"Come and meet my daddy, the King,
he's absolutely a hundred years behind the times
but such a dear."
and she's (note Redeeming Kiss)
wide-eyed and aware.
Stirring, forgiven, full of love and terror,
her father hears her footstep on the stair. (71)

Here, the young woman’s voice is inflected by the conventional voice of the
daughter of classical versions of such tales when she refers to the typical fairy-
tale character of the King. But we also recognize it as the voice of casual con-
versation in social reality. This intermingling shows how the voice of the tale
permeates and scripts what is spoken in the realm of social reality where social
relations are set up and performed (such as the daughter’s introducing the
lover to her father). The King figure of fairy tales lies behind thinking the
“daddy” in the girl’s mind.

The final lines of the poem unmask the fathers’ willful ineptness by sug-
gest ing their remorse vis-à-vis their hidden complicity in legitimating male-
generated myths about women’s social roles. Although the father is forgiven,
he stirs, “full of love and terror,” as he understands that the daughter knows
about his taking advantage of her innocence and trust: although “wide-eyed,”
she is “aware.” Unlike the daughters of classical tales, the young woman of
Lochhead’s storyteller, awoken into a masculine world, may have been credu-
lous, but in time she became suspicious.

Maria Tatar points out the masculine bias of the Grimms’ tales by showing
that the daughter characters must undergo trials to prove their social worth,
while male characters are endowed with qualities that make them fit for social
success and are thus in the position to redeem the innocent daughters (“Born
Yesterday” 100–01). Lochhead’s storyteller uses cliché as a device in the service
of irony to construct the daughter figure as a woman who is aware of the im-
lications of such redeeming (the storyteller insists: “note Redeeming Kiss”).
In Lochhead’s own words, you cannot use cliché “without acknowledging it to
be a cliché. You enter into a relationship with the reader whereby you have the
reader join in the game with you, to complete the acknowledgement” (qtd. in
Nicholson 216). In “The Father,” the suggestion that the young woman is
aware of fairy-tale clichéd socialization scripts, even while she performs the so-
cial role of lover and future wife, undermines the fairy tales’ construction of
young women as innocent and foolish daughters. Quite the contrary, saying
about the father that “he’s absolutely a hundred years behind the times / but
such a dear” betrays the confidence of a young woman who is aware that it is
the father’s feigned bungles that lead her into the role of wife but forgives his
scheming.

According to Susan Sellers, fairy tales “can impact on adult life with all the
resonance and force childhood memories produce—whether the emotions
stirred by the tales are ones of terror, grandiose dreams of achievement, or
puerile satisfaction in justice being dispensed” (12). In Lochhead’s poem we are given a daughter figure whose fantasizing identity is shown as being underwritten by the kind of memories that fairy tales produce. Her speech carries echoes of the language employed by the daughters of the classical tale tradition. Her emotions are partly stirred through the recognition in herself, as adult woman, of the fairy-tale figure of the Sleeping Beauty. The poem thus makes visible the interrelation between fairy-tale fantasy and social identity.

“The Father” highlights the difficulties of imagining, in a patriarchal context, how women may exercise agency within the subject positions to which fairy tales confine them, and how they may escape the social roles the tales prescribe. The exploration of these difficulties is continued in the poem that immediately follows “The Father,” titled “III: The Mother,” which focuses on the mother figure constructed in the Grimms’ fairy tales while also invoking tropes of the maternal figure of male-generated myth and legend.

2. The Witch Mother: Constructions of the Mother-Daughter Relationship

The poem “III: The Mother” entices readers to reflect on how the Grimms’ tales, dovetailing with patriarchal myths, misrepresent women’s experiences of the mother-daughter relationship in order to create women’s subjective identities that suit male-dominated gender regimes. The poem begins by claiming that the mother “is always two faced” (Lochhead, Dreaming 71). It then explains the statement by first describing the mother figure that fairy tales legitimate as desirable: the “best” mother.

At best, she wished you into being. Yes, it was she cried at the seven drops of blood that fell, staining the snow—she who bargained crazily with Fate for that longawaited child as red as blood as white as snow (71–72)

These lines highlight the oversimplified portrait of the mother with which male-generated fairy tales operate. The “best” mother is defined in these tales through reduction to the basic biological function of procreation (Zipes, Why Fairy Tales Stick 132). For instance, the introductory paragraphs of the
Grimms' version of Snow White's tale offer an image of the wedded bliss that the Sleeping Beauty or the little Briar Rose might expect: the Queen is found performing domestic tasks, the carrying out of which is disturbed only when, again, she pricks her finger and bleeds (Grimm and Grimm 48). The event marks, perhaps, the woman's access to a new social stage: that of motherhood. As soon as the task of motherhood is performed, the tale summarily disposes of the benevolent mother figure.

This oversimplification of the role assigned to married women as mothers is underlined with irony in Lochhead's poem: “But she's always dying early, / so often it begins to look deliberate” (Dreaming 72). These lines register anxiety about the stories' reiteration of the best mother's death scenario, and the following lines, investigating its effects, pick up and develop its psychological resonances. For the daughter, the "best" mother's dying means

abandoning you,
leaving you to the terrible mercy
of the Worst Mother, the one who married your father.
She doesn't like you, she
prefers all your sisters, she
loves her sons.
She's jealous of mirrors.
She wants your heart in a casket. (72)

Here, the emphasis on the Worst Mother as being “the one who married your father” suggests that fairy tales demonize the sexually active mother, guarding readers against women whose sexuality is not fully tamed through marriage. Such mother figures threaten patriarchal visions of wedded bliss. In the Grimms' Snow White story, the “worst mother” is a stepmother, but Lochhead's poem suggests that the best and worst mother may be sides of the same woman, albeit mutually exclusive sides: the Mother “is always two faced” (Dreaming 71). Lochhead's poem entices us to think that the “worst mother” in the Grimms' tale represents what must be repudiated in order for the good mother to exist. In light of Butler's theorization of discursive reiterations (Bod- ies That Matter 129), we might say that it is the repetition of such talk about the mother in the social space where tales circulate that materializes "the mother" as a social persona, giving her realness.

In the Grimms' tale, the “worst mother” is constructed as envious of the daughter's beauty. On the one hand, the reduction of the mother-daughter relationship to a beauty contest trivializes it. On the other, it constructs the
mother-daughter relationship as one of opposition. While the daughter is allowed to use her charms in order to gain a husband, the mother who attempts to preserve her sexual appeal is punished severely through torture and death. This happens at the daughter’s wedding. Since the young wife witnesses the punishment, perhaps this is a lesson for her, too, teaching her which ways of socializing her body as wife and future mother are legitimate.\(^\text{15}\)

Thus, the masculine fairy-tale tradition convicts mothers when they exceed the social roles to which the tales assign them. These fairy tales also render the relationship between mother and daughter as a split relationship, where mother and daughter compete for the favor of power implied in their association with a male, be that the father/king or prince/husband/son.\(^\text{16}\) The value of the “worst mother” figure as social myth also consists in erasing the mother-daughter bond. This erasure is arranged as a narrative event in such ways that the daughter’s availability for exogamous partnership that obtains is seen as reason for celebration, while the repudiated mother’s punishment appears rightful. Adrienne Rich argues that “Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. […] Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers’; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery” (235–36). In many classic fairy tales, such surgery serves a male-dominated gender regime. In Lochhead’s interpretation, the fairy tales’ warning against the mother appears damaging, as it also implies a repudiation of the mother’s assistance and support during the daughter’s sexual awakening:

\[
\text{Tell me}
\text{what kind of prudent parent}
\text{would send a little child on a foolish errand in the forest}
\text{with a basket jammed with goodies}
\text{and wolf-bait? Don’t trust her an inch. (Dreaming 72)}
\]

Thus, an alternative way of fantasizing the mother is proposed that modifies how audiences perceive the suggestion of distrust carried in folktales. In the realm of fantasy thus opened, “Don’t trust her an inch” cannot but sound ironic, undermining the didactic seriousness of male-authored fairy tales such as those of the Grimms.
3. Reversals of Fairy-Tale Patterns and Roles

Several poems that follow Lochhead’s storyteller’s reflections on the fairy-tale mother and father figures focus more emphatically on the fairy-tale daughter. A rewriting of the tale of Beauty and the Beast, the second poem of the “Three Twists,” highlights the fairy-tale requirement that the daughter should show patience in living with a “beastly” companion in order to be rewarded. Translated into a real-life social situation, women’s fantasizing of the role of patient and understanding wife after the image of Beauty is seen disjunctively as a horror story rather than a story of rewarded endurance. The connotations of rape implied in the description of Beauty’s life with the Beast explain the power of “spinning wheels” to hurt the daughter and break the taboo on sexuality in fairy tales by foregrounding the possibility of abuse in the relationship between daughters and their fated husbands:

Beast
he was hot
he grew horns
he had you
screaming mammy daddy screaming blue
murder.
From one sleepy thought
of how like a mane his hair . . .
next thing
he’s furred & feathered, pig bristled,
warted like a toad
puffed & jumping—
the green cling of those
froggy fingers
will make you shudder yet.
Then his flesh gone
dead. Scaled as a handbag.
He was that old crocodile
you had to kiss (Dreaming 79–80)

The final stanza points toward realms of fantasy that, in being disjunctive in relation to stories shaped like those of the Grimms, offer a reversal of roles that may be empowering for women:
Oh, but soon
(her hair grew lang her breath grew strang)
you’ll
(little One-Eye for little Three-Eyes, the
Bearded Lady)
Yes, sweet Beauty, you’ll
match him
horror for horror. (80)

The second line evokes an anonymous medieval Scottish ballad known as “Kemp Owyne,” where the test for the male champion (“kemp” is a form of “champion”) consists in showing patience and perseverance in wooing the bride, in spite of her turning into a beast: “Her breath grew strang, her hair grew lang, / And twisted thrice about the tree, / And all the people, far and near, / Thought that a savage beast was she” (Child 309). However, the references to the Bearded Lady and to the Grimms’ tale of little Two-Eyes render ambiguous the meaning of such matching of the Beast “horror for horror”: while the reference to “Kemp Owyne” suggests that the power to horrify the opposite sex into submission is also available to women, we are also reminded of the painful status of women perceived as monstrous. Even though the Grimms’ story of little Two-Eyes begins by showing how she is marginalized by her sisters for being the same as everyone else, it is little One-Eye and little Three-Eyes who end up destitute, punished for rejecting normality (a normality that, it turns out, also implies marriage). And the figure of the Bearded Lady is a reminder of the painful practices of Victorian circus parades of women whose features did not conform to norms of femininity. It may be that turning into a beast is not more than turning into a Bearded Lady who performs in the circuslike “wham bam menagerie” (Lochhead, Dreaming 80) of the domestic realm of the home. The third poem of “Three Twists,” titled “After Leaving the Castle,” reinforces the doubt that simply performing masculine roles is empowering for women.

The poem “Rapunzstiltskin,” the first in the “Three Twists,” merges the Grimms’ “Rapunzel” with their “Rumpelstiltskin”:

& just when our maiden had got
good & used to her isolation,
stopped daily expecting to be rescued,
had come to almost love her tower,
along comes This Prince
with absolutely
all the wrong answers. (78)

Here, the range of social meanings associated with the activity of spinning, attribution of skills, and marriage in “Rumpelstiltskin” is brought to bear on the meanings carried in “Rapunzel.” Zipes argues that the Grimms’ version of “Rumpelstiltskin” devalues the female activity of spinning by placing the emphasis on capital accumulation (straw must be turned into gold) in ways that reflect the rise to power of male industrialists (Fairy Tales and the Art 11). The transference of economic power from the sphere of the home, where women could claim the identity of skilled workers, into the public sphere allows the fantasizing of young women as workers who need men’s help in order to fulfill the tasks deemed valuable by the capitalist fraternity. In this context, one wonders to what extent the manikin figure in the Grimms’ “Rumpelstiltskin” reflects the identity of the anonymous male worker of nineteenth-century industrial society and so to what extent the relationship between him and the miller’s daughter, unskilled and unable to prove her worth, reflects the divisions of class (the manikin lives in a shabby house and the miller’s daughter remains poor, as opposed to the king, who accumulates wealth) and gender (the manikin is skilled while the daughter’s skills are worthless) as well as class interests (the tale rewards the daughter, who brings riches to her husband, and punishes the manikin, who threatens to end the passing of wealth to the king’s children by claiming the child).

In Lochhead’s “Rapunzstiltskin,” Rapunzel occupies the position reserved for the manikin in the Grimms’ tales, so the poem undermines the class and gender hierarchies envisioned by the latter. Rapunzstiltskin is able to spin straw into gold, but for Lochhead’s storyteller this is also a matter of spinning a story. Rapunzstiltskin’s strength is her ability to offer a realm of fantasy that departs from clichés and stereotypes of femininity while at the same time speaking from the position of someone excluded through class (as is the position of the manikin figure). Her reaction to the Prince’s talk is rendered thus:

Of course she had not been brought up to look for
originality or gingerbread
so at first she was quite undaunted
by his tendency to talk in strung-together cliché.
(Lochhead, Dreaming 78)

The male suitor’s inability to escape modes of socialization scripted through fairy tales is highlighted, while the woman is shown to be aware of, and
condescending toward, the persistence of fairy-tale elements in the contemporary narratives of consumer mass culture:

"Just hang on and we'll get you out of there"
he hollered like a fireman in some soap opera
when she confided her plight (the old
hag inside etc. & how trapped she was); (78)

The young woman is aware of the power of these narratives, when taken up as socialization scripts, to shape constraining social experiences for women:

So there she was [. . .]
throwing him all the usual lifelines
till, soon, he was shimmying in & out
every other day as though
he owned the place, bringing her
the sex manuals & skeins of silk
from which she was meant, eventually,
to weave the means of her own escape. (78–79)

Rapunzstiltskin realizes that the figure of the male rescuer carried through male-generated myths cannot fulfill the promise of women's escape from the conditions of a marginalized existence and intuits that this promise may be forever deferred ("'All very well & good,' she prompted, / 'but when exactly?'" [79]) as long as new ways of fantasizing women are not allowed in the stories about them. Rapunzstiltskin appears, on one level, as a version of the woman storyteller who finds it difficult to escape the subject position to which the tales she can tell confine her, and on another level, as the narrative embodiment of a woman whose story remains unheard because it cannot be rendered in the narrative patterns legitimated in the masculine tradition of fiction/fantasy. In spite of her efforts to put new meanings into the masculine voice ("She mouthed at him, hinted, / she was keener than a T. V. quizmaster" [79]), he doesn't "get it right":

"I'll do everything in my power," he intoned, "but
the impossible (she groaned) might
take a little longer." He grinned.
She pulled her glasses off.
“All the better
  to see you with my dear?” he hazarded.
She screamed, cut off her hair.
“Why, you’re beautiful?” he guessed tentatively. (79)

In the male’s voice “the impossible” refers to his task, augmenting the identity of rescuer promoted in male-generated traditions of myth and fairy tale. Rapunzstiltskin groans with exasperation when he misses the opportunity to realize that, for her, “the impossible” refers to the inability of his voice to accommodate hers, which would alter the fairy-tale script. He unwittingly hits the mark when he utters the wolf’s line from “Little Red Riding Hood” but fails to see the irony about vision that the line carries in the context of the poem. When Rapunzstiltskin, pulling her glasses off, mimes to him to stop seeing her through the lens offered by myths, his use of the fairy tale to hazard a chat line betrays his understanding of her gesture as a call to impersonate the identity of male preying on women that the fairy-tale wolf figure conveys. Finally, assuming the identity of the seducer, he fails to see that by cutting her hair off Rapunzstiltskin invites a subversion of fairy-tale constructions of women, of their beauty, passivity, weakness, and so forth—as referenced in the tale’s ascription of metaphorical value to Rapunzel’s hair.

The end of the poem offers the opportunity to comment on interweaving gender and class issues. Although by inhabiting the position of the manikin from the Grimms’ “Rumpelstiltskin” the Rapunzstiltskin figure subverts traditional associations between gender and skill, she shares the position of class exclusion. However, unlike the manikin, whose name was found out, who could eventually stand forth from anonymity if only to be banned again, Rapunzstiltskin’s identity remains unfathomable, because her story is not accommodated in the fairy-tale discourses of the masculine tradition:

  she
  shrieked & stamped her foot so
  hard it sank six cubits through the floorboards.
  “I love you?” he came up with
  as finally she tore herself in two. (79)

Rapunzstiltskin is torn between two identities constructed in tales that deny her narrating agency—that is, the agency through which she may construct herself. She is assigned subordinate positions in the male-dominated gender regime legitimated by the tales, both in terms of class and gender. Catharine
MacKinnon argued that “the organized expropriation of the work of some for the benefit of others defines a class—workers—the organized expropriation of the sexuality of some for the use of others defines the sex, woman” (516). Lochhead’s poem suggests that fairy tales legitimate this organized expropriation, which, although working along the two coordinates of gender and class, does not permit the recognition of how both coordinates define the position of women. Such recognition would show that the gender of the fairy-tale “woman” is a function of class hierarchies, and would expose the inequalities of the partnership of wedded bliss that the tales promote. The lack of this recognition leaves women, as Lochhead’s poem suggests, unnamable, bracketed between the identities of a Rumpelstiltskin and a Rapunzel, torn between these identities generated by a masculine narrating agency. The name “Rapunzstiltskin” as a combination of “Rumpelstiltskin” (referencing, for Lochhead, class exclusion) and “Rapunzel” (referencing women’s sex as beautified objects in male-generated fantasies) suggests that gender and class exclusions should be viewed in a framework that allows us to see how they define each other. But such a story is difficult to tell unless one views critically the familiar, naturalized women’s identities that are defined through male-generated stories like that of Cap o’Rushes. The very use of the name “Rapunzstiltskin,” as a forced cutting and pasting together of two different names, invites defamiliarization and reflection on how fairy-tale characters convey normative identities.

In “Rapunzstiltskin” the storyteller’s failure to tell a different story is the story that makes a difference. A parody of the recognition scene from the Cinderella-type tales, the poem conveys a different figure of the young woman than that of the daughterly, patient character who is rewarded with wedded bliss: Rapunzstiltskin reminds us of the portraits given in “The Furies” poems, a Mad Meg seen from a different angle that contributes to complete the image of the grim sisters.

Such questioning concerning the relationship between narrative and social reality brings under scrutiny the processes accompanying the transformation of folktale material into cult fairy tales, of narrative versions of myths into corporate mythologies that exploit the myths’ social value in order to maintain male-dominated gender regimes. Cult fairy tales and corporate mythologies fashion human experience, in Hayden White’s words, “into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific” (1). Lochhead’s revision of fairy tales and myths highlights the contingency of their narrative expression: her narrations introduce elements specific to class, time period, and geographical space.
4. Conclusion

The poems in *The Grimm Sisters* deal with representations of women at all stages of social life: daughters, young lovers and wives, mothers and elderly women. By disassembling the conjunction between myths and social order whereby a male-dominated gender regime is legitimated, Lochhead's storyteller reconstructs the realms of fantasy wherein identity is forged with disjunctive stories that help rematerialize more empowering identities of women. Offering opportunities of reinterpreting realms of fairy-tale fantasy, the poems are not mere artifices of fancy, for they create an awareness of stories as tools for challenging the sense of social interrelationships established in masculine gender regimes, to the purpose of revisiting the legitimacy of the social goals these regimes enshrine.

These analyses of Lochhead's poems offer examples of how stories derived from myths prescribe social roles by prescribing ways of fantasizing subjective identity. This collection is not the only text where Lochhead is concerned with these issues. For instance, in her play *Dracula*, she challenges the vampire myth born in the Gothic genre as serving, among other things, to make sense of women's bodies and sexuality in ways that legitimate male-dominated gender regimes. Derived from myths but remythologized to fit the requirements of contemporary societies, the male-generated tradition of folk and fairy tale serves similar purposes. We may regard the poems of *The Grimm Sisters* as examples of narratives challenging the norms legitimated through a male-dominated cultural network in which discourses discipline subjects to meet the specific needs of the social structure and its hierarchies at a particular historical moment.

Notes

1. The poems were completed in 1978 while Lochhead was in residence at Glendon College in Toronto as a beneficiary of the Scottish Arts Council first Scottish/Canadian Writers’ Exchange (Smith 8). *The Grimm Sisters* was first published as a collection in 1981. I am using the edition published by Polygon in 1986 in *Dreaming Frankenstein and Collected Poems* (69–104).
2. A version of the tale can be found in Gurdon 40–43.
4. “I love you as fresh meat loves salt” in Gurdon 40.
5. Valerie Paradiz’s analysis of the Grimms’ sources shows their frequent recourse to women storytellers, a contribution often left unacknowledged (*Clever Maids*). On the other hand, Zipes notes that “we have absolutely no proof that women were the ‘originators’ or prime tellers of tales, the primeval spinners [. . .] both sexes contributed to and continue to contribute to the tale-telling tradition.”
Lochhead's retellings do not idealize women as storytellers, but she is concerned with the difficulties of women's speaking within the literary fairy-tale tradition, which, although consisting "of appropriated tales from women and men alike, was firmly in the hands of men" (Zipes, Why Fairy Tales Stick 54, 55; see also 86).

6. According to Lochhead, The Grimm Sisters relates "familiar stories from another angle" in which women are not treated as simply objects of male fantasies, but as individuals possessing complex subjectivities (Lochhead and Wilson 9).

7. The "night" is not just a period of darkness, but it also metaphorically refers to the dark recesses of the mind as a kernel of creative forces. According to Lochhead, speaking about literary creativity in general, "until an image exists the word is just there, in the night" (approximate quotation from Lochhead's unpublished keynote address at a roundtable discussion organized by creative writing students, University of Glasgow, February 2006).

8. The phrasing is inspired by Lévi-Strauss's The Raw and the Cooked.

9. Sullivan shows that Bruegel's Mad Meg "is based—both formally and iconographically—on his earlier engraving of Ira from the series of the Seven Deadly Sins done in 1558" (55).

10. Interviewed by Alison Smith, Lochhead remembers Dalziel High School, where she was a student, as a place where girls were "proxy boys complete with ties and blazers [. . .] there was nothing that actually allowed you to express your femaleness" (qtd. in Smith 4, original italics).

11. The social pressure on the spinster for resigned acceptance of her outcast status is emphasized in Varty's interpretation (646).

12. In Varty's interpretation, "the spinster is both social aggressor and victim" (646).

13. In this context one notes Varty's argument that the characters of Elizabeth and Mary in Lochhead's play Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off posture "as queenly versions of 'Harridan,' 'Spinster' and 'Bawd,' each monarch" seemingly "unable to eschew stereotype" (Varty 652). The play, "drawing upon the emblematic aspects of language as a symbol of national identity" (Mugglestone 94), is another example of Lochhead's use of elements of the oral tradition, especially ballad material such as "The Twa Corbies," to revise perceptions of historical characters, in this case Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, as established in male-dominated history discourse and in its ramifications in popular imagination (Crawford 61).

14. For an extensive analysis of Snow White tales, see Zipes, Why Fairy Tales Stick 133–39.

15. For analyses of such corroboration of masculine gender regimes by fairy tales, see, for instance, Gilbert and Gubar 36; Tatar, Classic Fairy Tales 74; Zipes, Why Fairy Tales Stick 15.

16. See also Warner From the Beast, 213–14.

Works Cited


