Three Drops of Blood:

Fairy Tales and Their Significance for Constructed Families

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Abstract

In an outback town, Esther Hayes looks out of a schoolhouse window and sees three children struck by lightning; one of them is her son, Michael. Silenced by grief, Esther leaves her young daughter, Aurora, to fend for herself; against a backdrop of an absent father and maternal neglect, the child takes comfort wherever she can, but the fierce attachments she forms never seem to last until, as an adult, she travels to her father's native Ireland. *If You Were Mine* employs elements of well-known fairy tales and explores themes of maternal abandonment and loss, as well as the consequences of adoption, in a narrative that laments the perilous nature of children's lives. Through the telling of various tales of abandonment and loss, the novel asks how one lives with a history of abandonment.

The exegetical essay analyses popular fairy tales in the context of adoption, locating the tales as a genre within adoption literature. While feminist fairy tale scholarship has illuminated the roles of women in fairy tales, particularly in those popularised by the Brothers Grimm, different versions of the tales published over extended time periods provide insight into the ways in which society has perceived and, perhaps, still perceives the roles of biological and non-biological/adoptive mothers. However, during the period of my research I did not encounter any critical studies in which the tales had been read and interpreted from an adoptive point of view.

In *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, psychologist Bruno Bettelheim asserts that 'giving comfort is one of the purposes of fairy tale' (62). This essay argues that the message subtly transmitted in many of the best-known fairy tales is of the almost supernatural power of maternal blood. Further, when read from the position of an adoptive mother, with an eye to the ways in which these old dark tales might affect an

adopted child, or one who is not being cared for by its biological mother, fairy tales appear as disquieting narratives, narratives concerned with questions of blood and genetics, while the acts of extreme violence they often include definitely lack the element of 'comfort' proposed by Bruno Bettelheim. Through writing *If You Were Mine* and this essay, I have been able to examine selected fairy tale narratives both imaginatively and critically in the context of adoption and their meaning for constructed families.

Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where reference has been made in the text.

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26th June, 2009.

Introduction

The fairy tales collected in the nineteenth century by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, and the earlier tales on which these tales were modelled, have been read and interpreted from many points of view – Freudian, Jungian, political, feminist, to name a few. As a genre, fairy tales abound with abandoned children, with good and evil mothers and ineffectual fathers and, while their function as exemplary or cautionary tales has been generally accepted, the family tensions depicted in the tales – particularly between children and their mothers, or the non-biological mothers who often replace them – still offers scope for critical analysis.

Different versions of the same tales published over extended time periods or even within the various editions of a single work such as the Grimm Brothers' collection, provide insight into the ways in which society has perceived and, perhaps, still perceives the roles of biological and non-biological/adoptive mothers[1], yet I have not encountered any critical studies in which the tales have been read and interpreted from an adoptive

[1] While the description 'biological' mother requires no explanation, 'non-biological' mothers can be said to fall into one of two categories: step-mothers, and adoptive mothers. Although fairy tales abound with step-mothers, adoptive mothers are not particularised, even when, as in "Rapunzel", the relationship between the non-biological mother figure and the child can clearly be interpreted as an adoption. This descriptive imbalance may reflect the fact that families constructed through the legal process of adoption are a relatively modern social occurrence – for example, the adoption of children was only legalised in Great Britain in 1926. Of course, informal adoptions have taken place in many countries over many centuries, both in real life, and in cultural representations.

'Step-mother' and 'adoptive mother' are not synonymous descriptions of 'non-biological' mothers. The former pre-supposes the presence of a biological father, at least temporarily, while the latter implies a strong intent to mother in the absence of a biological link. In taking an adoptive reading position, it would, perhaps, be logical for me to refer to 'blood' and 'non-blood' mothers throughout this exegesis, however, that would tend to interfere with the traditional language of fairy tales. If in interpreting the tales I appear to be merging these two types of 'non-biological' mothers, it is because I believe that invested readers, such as adopted children and adoptive parents, will search for themselves in texts and identify with whichever character seems to most closely fit their own situation. Since the tales do not particularise adoptive mothers, if adoptive mothers are to locate themselves at all in fairy tales they have little choice but to look within the 'non-biological' stepmother characters. For this reason, I assume a degree of flexibility and, at times, inter-changeability, in interpreting 'non-biological' motherhood.

point of view. This may reflect the silence and secrecy which has traditionally surrounded adoption, a silence generally intended to ensure the well-being of the adopted child but which has also, inevitably, silenced the difficult questions concerning motherhood and family which adoption raises. Within this silence, however, adoption has been continuously represented in literature.

In *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama*, Marianne Novy has investigated adoption in literature from ancient Greek to late-twentieth-century American works. Herself an adoptee, Novy says: 'I look for the way imaginary lives are like mine, and the way they are different. I look for those touched by adoption in fiction, in the thought that others will be able to understand their own lives better by seeing the way their lives are both like and unlike the fictions I discuss' (222). In her introduction to an anthology of essays on adoption, *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture,* Novy observes that, unlike many other minority groups, a 'history of silence and invisibility has made it difficult for members of the adoption triangle to form a community or communities' (5). Novy says that because of this, and also because the connection with adoption involves loss and even stigma for people at all points of the adoption triangle, 'the versions of adoption that they have seen in literature may have been particularly important to them' (5).

Like Novy, I have been intensely interested in lives touched by adoption. After becoming an adoptive mother in 1985, the attitudes I encountered towards my adoptive motherhood were often deeply unsettling, occasionally downright offensive. In common with other adoptive mothers, I was repeatedly told that I had 'done it the easy way', or I would find myself – at a dinner party, or waiting at the school gate – unexpectedly having to defend my ability to love and nurture 'someone else's' child. In "Redefining 'Real' Motherhood: Representations of Adoptive Mothers, 1900-1950", Julie Berebitsky says that

because adoptive mothers have not given birth, they have 'found themselves on the edges of the culture's ideal' (83). In my experience it is not only adoptive mothers who are marginalised in this way – adopted children also often find themselves on the edge of a cultural ideal they do not understand.

This realisation, along with the desire to gain a deeper understanding of what abandonment and adoption might mean, provided the catalyst for my creative work. My novel, *If You Were Mine,* asks the question: how does one live with a history of abandonment? This dilemma is explored in different ways in the novel through the telling of various tales of abandonment, while adoption, which very often follows abandonment, is explored from all points of the adoption triangle including that of the biological mother, a point of view which has been the least visible, both in life and in literature, because of its association with the stigma and shame of unwed motherhood.

It was while looking for ways of interpreting adoption for my daughter that I first connected with the writings of the child psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim. In *The Uses of Enchantment,*[2] Bettelheim asserts that 'giving comfort is one of the purposes of fairy tale' and his book had a great impact on my thoughts about raising an adopted child (62). Recognising that, for our family, the ramifications of adoption would be lifelong, and that the questions raised might never be definitively answered, I saw that comfort was, and would continue to be, needed in considerable quantities, and I read *The Uses of Enchantment* many times. Finally, convinced that Bettelheim's arguments were sound, I read fairy tales with my daughter, or at least put them in her way so that she might experience the comfort of their narratives. At that time, seeking a therapeutic use of fairy tales – a search guided by Bettelheim – my reading position – if I had thought to analyse it,

[2] Although Bettelheim's reputation as a pioneering child psychologist was blemished by his theories on autism as expressed in the book, *The Empty Fortress,* being 'scientifically' disproved and, to some extent, by the controversy following his suicide in 1990, his 1976 work on fairy tale remains unchallenged as an important twentieth century text.

was that of an adoptive mother seeking reassurance and comfort for herself and her child.

Having accepted Bettelheim's views for almost twenty years, it was not until I came to fairy tales afresh through the writing of *If You Were Mine* that I was struck by the way they appear to argue the invincibility of blood relationships. Blood is at the heart of many fairy tales. Sometimes it is a mere three drops from a pricked finger, sometimes a gruesome crimson river unleashed in the aftermath of a terrible crime; blood causes trouble, it will not be denied, just as it is a question of blood that lies at the heart of adoption, so that the two – adoption and fairy tale – seem inextricably bound. Reading fairy tales again from the dual perspectives of adoptive mother and writer, I have found myself challenging Bettelheim's 'comfort' theory (62). In his introduction to *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim states that, 'As with all great art, the fairy tale's deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life' (12). So, if more than two decades of adoptive motherhood has altered my perception of the tales, what help or harm might an adoptee distil from them, over time?

Bettelheim claims that children's lives are enriched by fairy tales, that they bestow 'an enchanted quality' even though the child does not know how the stories have worked their magic (19). While the tales certainly contain enchantment in the form of magic spells, transformations and resurrections, I would argue that the message subtly transmitted in many of the best-known fairy tales is of the almost supernatural power of maternal blood. I will further argue that when read from the position of an adoptive mother, with an eye to the ways in which these old dark tales might affect an adopted child, or one who is not being cared for by its biological mother, the fairy tales I grew up with appear as disquieting narratives, narratives concerned with questions of blood and genetics, while the acts of extreme violence they often include definitely lack the element of 'comfort' proposed by Bruno Bettelheim.

The Uses of Enchantment remains an influential text in the canon of literature concerned with fairy tale, but Bettelheim has not been the only scholar, or even the first, to propose that fairy tales contain elements of comfort and reassurance. In *Child and Tale: The Origins of Interest,* Andre Favat concludes that 'The present investigation shows that the children turn to the tale for a temporary denial of a world which is proving all too real for them' (64). In the same work, Favat refers to Kate Friedlander's "Children's Books and Their Function in Latency and Pre-puberty", published in 1942, in which Friedlander says that 'the unconscious content of the fairy tale, tallying with the conflicts pertaining to the child's age, offers solutions and alleviates anxiety in the child' (45). While fairy tales may be the most widely read of all adoption narratives, none of the studies of children and fairy tale, including Bettelheim's, have established adoption as a filter through which the narratives are read and interpreted even though, as Marina Warner observes in *From The Beast To The Blonde*, 'The stories concentrate on unions made by law, on the reshaping of families from the biological order to the social: on mothers and sisters bestowed by legal arrangement' (217).

In *Reading Adoption*, Marianne Novy states that European and American culture has typically used three stories to imagine adoption: Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale,* and Eliot's *Silas Marner*. These, she says, 'act as paradigms to shape feelings, thoughts, language, and even laws about adoption, and to reflect deep cultural beliefs about family' (7). Novy also observes that representations of adoption in film, theatre, literature, television and other media have been influential in forming cultural impressions of adoption. "Even people who are personally involved [with adoption] may find themselves interpreting their own experiences in terms of adoption plots well known in their culture."(1).

While Novy has not yet focused her adoptee's lens on fairy tale, she has examined

adoption literature from Shakespeare through Dickens and the novels of George Eliot, to tales of cross-cultural adoption in contemporary works by Barbara Kingsolver and Louise Erdrich. In *Imagining Adoption,* she identifies three typical adoption narratives: the 'happy adoption' of *Silas Marner, Oliver Twist, Anne of Green Gables*; the 'disastrous adoption' as exemplified by *Oedipus*, in which it is only blood relationships that count*;* and the 'happy discovery' narratives, such as Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1).

My own research into contemporary adoption narratives, such as A.M. Homes' *In A Country of Mothers,* and the story "Tresspasses" by Alice Munro, has identified a fourth type of narrative, 'the mistaken adoption', in which a woman who has relinquished a child at birth mistakenly believes that she has found it, a situation which generates uncertainty, with unhappy consequences. I see my research on abandonment and adoption in fairy tales, and fairy tales in contemporary fiction, as augmenting Novy's work on adoption in literature. Primarily, this will be achieved by analysing popular fairy tales in the context of adoption, a process that locates the tales as a genre within adoption literature. By showing how fairy tale elements infuse twenty-first century adoption narratives I have moved beyond the texts examined by Novy, and my hope is that the two distinct yet interconnected strands of my research will contribute to the general discourse on adoption as well as to the existing scholarship on fairy tales.

In my novel, *If You Were Mine,* I have employed elements of well-known fairy tales. These tales enabled me to find a way into the novel I wanted to write. At times, their presence in the text is overt, as with the choice of Aurora's name and the insistence on the significance of a kiss. Elsewhere, it is merely the sensation of fairy tale that is evoked in the consciousness of the reader or of one of the characters. While I was not always conscious of the ways in which fairy tale narratives found their way into the novel, in this essay I have been able to reflect upon both the tales themselves and the ways in which my

creative work has been informed by their narratives.

To avoid summarising fairy tales in the creative work, my focus, both in the novel and in my research, was directed to tales that most readers raised in Western European-Australian culture would already be familiar with, that is, those by Giambattista Basile, Charles Perrault, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm[3], and Hans Christian Anderson. Of the tales collected by the Brothers Grimm, this essay examines, specifically, questions of identity and maternal blood in "The Goose Girl"; the parented orphan and the 'Motherline' in "Cinderella"; abandonment and exploitation of the unconscious woman in "Little Briar Rose" (popularly known as "Sleeping Beauty"); the adoptive mother and maternal gaze in "Little Snow White"; the adoptee as captive and commodity in "Rapunzel"; Hans Christian Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" is considered in the context of adoption and difference.

The only fairy tale that is told and interpreted in my novel is "The Goose Girl" which appears as part of the development of the adopted character, Rose. The tale's presence in the novel offers an example of the way in which the emphasis on the power of maternal blood could be unfavourably construed by someone in an adoptive relationship. Choosing to interpret this fairy tale through my fiction was a conscious decision, one that allowed me to simultaneously challenge Bettelheim's view and signal my adoptive reading position, both from within the novel and as the writer of the creative work.

Adoption and fairytale are linked again and again in fiction, and alongside close readings of fairy tales I also chose seven novels published in Great Britain, the United States and Australia, most of them between January 2000 and March 2009, which present abandonment and/or adoption as an important theme. The novels were: *What Are You Like?*, by Anne Enright; *Run,* by Anne Patchett; *Fortune's Rocks*, by Anita Shreve; *Light on Snow*, by Anita Shreve; *The Good Parents,* by Joan London; *The Memory Keeper's*

[3] Unless otherwise specified, the edition referred to throughout the text is *The Complete Illustrated Fairy Tales*, published by Wordsworth Editions, 1997.

Daughter, by Kim Edwards; *In A Country of Mothers*, by A.M. Homes. Additionally, *Shadow Baby* by Margaret Forster, the stage musical *Honk!* written by Anthony Drewe and George Stiles, and the short story "Tresspasses" from Alice Munro's collection *Runaway* offered significant insights.

As a writer, and also as an adoptive mother, I have been fascinated by the frequency with which fairy tales and their symbols appear in adoption memoir. A study undertaken in the United States, *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self,* shows that fantasy is frequently employed by adoptees as a method of interpreting their lives (82). While my research extended to reading memoir, which was useful in gathering insights into the other corners of the adoption triangle, non-fiction and memoir lie beyond the scope of this essay, which concentrates primarily on abandonment/adoption in fairy tales as well as the presence of fairy tale narratives in contemporary fiction.

Of the novels I read, I will show that, although a minority of contemporary writers have either moved away from or subtly subverted traditional fairy tale motifs, many still infuse their adoption/abandonment narratives with the disturbing 'blood' messages found in popular fairy tales.

Identity and Maternal Blood in “The Goose Girl”

The Grimm’s fairy tale “The Goose Girl” contains the most powerful depiction of maternal blood found in all of fairy tale, a power which comes of the tale’s insistence that mere proximity to the mother’s blood will protect a child, even if the mother is not physically present. The tale can also be read as a warning against treating one’s heritage carelessly, against forgetting ‘who one is’, even when far from home. From this perspective it would appear that it is not just blood alone that has the power to protect, but a child’s awareness and certainty of it, the blood contact with the mother which instills, along with a sense of self, a conviction of self-worth.

Blood makes its appearance in the very first paragraph as a princess prepares to set out on a journey to meet her prospective husband. At the hour of parting, the old queen goes into her bedroom and cuts her finger with a knife until it bleeds, and even the secretive

nature of this ritual cutting seems designed to contribute to the resulting blood's mysterious power. Letting three drops of blood fall into a white handkerchief, the queen presents it to her daughter, urging the girl to preserve it carefully and insisting that it will protect her on her journey. However, almost as soon as she sets out, the princess is faced with difficulties.

Soon, the drops of blood speak to the princess, bemoaning the impudent behaviour of her maid-in-waiting: 'If this your mother knew, her heart would break in two' (405). So the blood also has the power to reproach the girl, to remind her that she is a princess and ought to have the courage to behave like one. Although the Brothers Grimm describe the princess's nature as humble and forgiving, the role she enacts appears to modern sensibilities as evidence of a dangerous lack of self esteem and confidence.

Once the princess loses the handkerchief, her scheming maid-in-waiting knows that, with the loss of the blood, the princess has become 'weak and powerless' (406). Before long, the maid takes the princess's talking horse for her own use; she also forces her to switch clothes and, therefore, identities, extracting a promise of secrecy in the process. Had there not been such an initial fuss about preserving the drops of blood, the princess's troubles could be interpreted as simply the perils of being away from home, but no detail is superfluous in these time-honed tales and the detail of the maternal blood insists that, once severed from contact with the biological mother, as in adoption, a child becomes vulnerable. The only hope of making a safe journey into adulthood, the tale implies, is for the child to carry physical evidence of the maternal bloodline.

In the tale, when the princess and her maid reach the court, the true bride is sent into the fields to tend geese while the impostor is entertained as a royal princess. Once established as the royal bride, the false princess has the talking horse's head cut off so that the animal will not give away her secret. But the true princess arranges for the horse's head to be

nailed up above a gate, which she passes through every day on her way to the fields with the geese. Each morning the head speaks to her: 'Alas, young Queen, how ill you fare! If this your mother knew, Her heart would break in two' (408). So the death of the horse has been in vain, for it has not lost the power of speech; as it laments that the princess has lost her identity and her position in the world, its voice is identical to that of the drops of blood on the lost handkerchief. With the princess apparently trapped in a fictitious identity, adrift among strangers, the voices of both blood and horse insistently remind the girl of her genealogy.

The princess's maid has now become that archetypal character from fairy tale, the false or substituted bride. Like the true princess, the maid is disconnected from her mother, wearing fine clothing which does not belong to her, a detail that – within a context in which princesses and maids are defined by their clothing – effectively transforms her life, and that of the true princess, into fiction. Of the two, it could be argued that the maid is the most deeply lost, for if she is to carry on her false bride role, everything that she has been in the past will have to be permanently suppressed. The true princess, however, retains certain magical abilities, such as the power to call up the wind to blow away the hat of the Goose Boy who is threatening to pluck out one of her golden hairs. Despite this, like Cinderella, she has no name except the one that relates to her new role; she is simply known as the Goose Girl, exploitable by all and sundry.

Finally, the king hears of her daily conversation with the horse's head and persuades the true princess that, if she will not tell her secret to him, she may safely relate it to an 'iron stove' (410). The stricken girl pours out all that she has been afraid to reveal so far and ends with a repetition of the blood words: 'If this my mother knew, her heart would break in two' (410). Revealing her identity and royal heritage generates new power and certainty, for upon learning the details of her abuse, the king quickly restores the princess to her

proper station and the maid-in-waiting is put into a barrel studded with nails and dragged away by horses, a fate she herself had suggested.

It is not unreasonable to speculate that the maid may actually be an orphaned child who has been forced to find work within a royal household. From the maid's point of view, having been sent forth on a journey as companion to a princess who appears to have everything and yet lacks authority or self-esteem, she seizes her chance to establish an identity for herself; riding the magical horse and wearing the fine clothes of a princess, she becomes a fictional princess, a character with whom an adopted child might empathise. If this is the identification route taken, the maid's fate warns of the hazards facing those, like adoptees, who may feel that their identity is founded on fiction rather than blood.

Because the first instance of disrespect on the part of the maid occurs while the princess still has possession of the bloodstained handkerchief, it is necessary to question why the power of the mother's blood appears diminished. The tale relates that, after a sorrowful leave-taking, the princess had 'put the piece of cloth in her bosom, mounted her horse, and then went away to her bridegroom' (504). At this point she seems to be focused on her future (marriage) at the expense of her past (heritage), looking forward to who she will become rather than valuing who she has been. Even the casual stowing of the cloth hints at her distraction. Then, her behaviour towards the maid is rather peremptory. 'Dismount, and take my cup which you have brought with you for me, and get me some water from the stream' (405). The maid responds rudely, and the princess is 'not allowed to drink out of the golden cup' (405). Some little time later, this scenario is repeated, with the princess demanding a drink in her golden cup, 'for she had long ago forgotten the girl's ill words' (405). This repetition, and the revelation of the princess's forgetfulness, seems to underline a state of distraction and carelessness which, inevitably, leads to the loss of the handkerchief and the precious DNA it contains.

In my novel, for the purpose of revealing the discomforting aspects of the maternal blood messages found in "The Goose Girl", I chose it as a fairy tale that is known to the adopted child, Rose. After repeated readings, Rose insists that her adoptive mother provide her with a handkerchief containing three drops of blood. But when this talisman fails to protect her from the class bully, she begins to wonder where she might find the magic drops that will keep her from harm (173).

Aurora's connection to the tale occurs at the moment when the scrap of paper, which bears the lipstick-imprint of her mother's mouth, drops from an old bush hat into her lap. The kiss, remotely delivered, represents metaphorical rather than actual maternal blood; although Aurora doesn't know that the kiss is an imprint of her mother's mouth, it is, nonetheless, something of her mother, which has the power to comfort.

The comfort of the maternal connection has been described by Jungian psychoanalyst and writer Naomi Ruth Lowinsky. In *Stories from the Motherline: Reclaiming the Mother-Daughter Bond, Finding Our Souls,* Lowinsky says: 'The Motherline is a name for…the oneness of body and psyche, for the experience of continuity among women' (4). In the same work she points out that 'We have forgotten that in Hebrew the word *blood* also means mother' (12). Other writers have embraced Lowinsky's 'motherline' concept, and in *Motherless Daughters*, Hope Edelman writes: 'Without knowledge of her own experiences, and the relationship to her mother's, a daughter is snipped from the female cord that connects the generations of women in her family, the feminine line of descent…the "Motherline"' (200).

With its two leading female characters, both of whom describe young women set adrift from the motherline, "The Goose Girl" resonates with Anne Enright's novel, *What Are You Like?* The novel focuses on twin sisters, split at birth, who do not know that they have a twin and yet somehow sense the lack. Both girls are raised by non-blood mothers, Maria

by a step-mother and her biological father, and Rose – who was relinquished at birth following the death of the twins' mother – by adoptive parents.

Like the character of Rose Mulcahy in my novel, Enright's Rose in *What Are You Like?* is 'looking for something of her mother: a photograph, or some piece of her, a film she liked, or a book she had read. She just needed to know if she had smelt of lavender, or rosewater, or Wright's coal tar soap. And whether she could sing. And where her grave was' (227). Her twin, Maria, is also deeply troubled by a sense of mislaid identity. 'Maria stood in front of the mirror and closed her eyes. Some days she was just nothing. Some days she was a woman who was just waiting for herself to walk in the door' (202).

The identity confusion experienced by Rose in *If You Were Mine* is revealed when she visits Bewley's Café with Aurora and silently muses on the fact that, although she lives within walking distance, she has never had lunch there with her adoptive mother. But her birth mother might have brought her there, Rose thinks, immediately visualising an idealised intimacy, a recognition of sameness: 'They would have sat in one of those booths eating cakes and dainty sandwiches, so close their heads were almost touching. Her mother's skin would have the same scent as her own; their fingernails would be the same shape' (147).

Rose's longing to see herself reflected in another is a yearning that is frequently expressed in the memoirs of adoptees, as if the mother is a 'mirror' into which daughters gaze to gather clues to their own identity. In the essay, "Adoption, Identity, and Voice: Jackie Kay's Inventions of Self", Nancy K. Gish says of non-adoptees that 'they can feel a sense of knowing their own identity since it is continually mirrored back to them in the faces of relatives and behaviours of friends and neighbours. For the adoptee there are no comparable mirrors' (182). In the same essay, Gish interviews Kay, who remarks, 'Everything could have been

different but for that moment in fate' (172).

For an adoptee, that 'moment in fate' is the severing of the tie between a child and its biological mother – the loss of the vital drops of blood as described in "The Goose Girl". For Rose, in my novel, there is the same sense of a fateful severing and of her own difference. Even when still too young to articulate her confusion, she is susceptible to nameless yearning, and while attending a hospital appointment with her adoptive mother and grandmother, ironically at the 'blood' clinic, she succumbs to the embrace of a strange woman whom she seems powerless to resist (219). Even when Grace retrieves her and delivers a lecture, Rose clings to the experience, 'thinking of the precise feel of the woman's arm around her, the rub of her woollen coat and its wet smell, the smell of the woman, even. Yes, the smell. It was that which had stirred something inside Rose. Suddenly she felt weak and warm and awkward inside her skin' (220). Similarly, in *What Are You Like?,* Enright deftly describes an adoptee's sense of confusion, that her face is 'full of people' she does not know (126).

I was not familiar with Enright's novel before writing Rose's scenes in *If You Were Mine*, but when I did read it, it was with a sense of recognition. For one thing, the fact that we had chosen identical first names for our fictional adoptees seemed to suggest that widely-held beliefs and theories about adoption wield enormous influence, even upon writers intent on creating new adoption narratives. In this case, the belief at work seems to have been that of identifying an adoptee as 'the chosen child', the special child, the cherished rose. However, as both fictional characters once had other names, it may not be mere coincidence that the name, Rose, also embodies a hint of the identity crises to come (in both novels) through its association with Shakespeare's questioning, in *Romeo and Juliet,* of whether a rose,

if differently named, would smell as sweet. Secondly, I was interested to realise that as writers we had given the adoptees in our novels a common yearning to reconnect with their heredity, metaphorically, to regain the lost handkerchief bearing the drops of maternal blood.

In *The Uses of Enchantment,* Bettelheim notes that the three drops of blood play such a crucial role in "The Goose Girl" that a German version of the story, found in Lorraine, is known by the title "The Cloth with the Three Drops of Blood" (139). However, he goes on to interpret the blood as a symbol of sexual maturity rather than a connection to the maternal line, saying, 'it does not seem farfetched to think that these drops of blood spilled onto a piece of white linen symbolize sexual maturity, a special bond forged by a mother who is preparing her daughter to become sexually active' (139). In summarising the tale, Bettelheim omits the detail of the blood speaking to the princess, with a corresponding lessening of maternal connection, however his summary of the tale contains one or two revealing phrases, for example, he introduces the princess's journey by explaining that the 'child had to travel into the alien country', an ambiguous description which, when placed in the context of adoption, seems less obviously concerned with gaining sexual maturity than with the fateful moment of mother/child separation (136). Then, the Goose Girl is persuaded to tell her secret to 'the hearth', a household symbol which Bettelheim stresses elsewhere, in relation to "Cinderella", is synonymous with the biological mother (137).

As often occurs with Bettelheim's interpretation of fairy tales, it is the princess in "The Goose Girl" who is singled out for criticism, although – like the princesses in "Sleeping Beauty" and "Snow White" – apart from her initial carelessness in losing the handkerchief, she appears to me to be a victim of abuse rather than at fault. Bettelheim interprets "The

Goose Girl" as depicting 'an oedipal problem', in which the child desires to take the place of the parent of the same sex (138). 'He begins to realize that it is *he* who wishes to be the usurper, and *he* who desires to take the place of the parent of the same sex' (138).

In *Off With Their Heads!,* Maria Tatar criticises Bettelheim's treatment of fairy tale heroines, saying that the stories were attractive to him because 'they could be harnessed into service to support Freudian oedipal plots that position the child as a transgressor whose deserved punishment provides a lesson for unruly children. Stories that run counter to Freudian orthodoxy are, to a large extent, suppressed by Bettelheim or rewritten through reinterpretation' (xi). As with his interpretation of "Sleeping Beauty", Bettelheim's reading of "The Goose Girl" delivers a Freudian explanation at the expense of other possible readings. Tatar says: 'Warning six and seven-year-olds about the destructiveness of premature sexual arousal (in however veiled a fashion) seems more than odd' (xxiii). Certainly, considering the tender age at which most children are exposed to fairy tale, Bettelheim's approach to "The Goose Girl" prematurely addresses concerns more appropriate to older children while ignoring anxieties around blood, identity and belonging, and the lost motherline connection, which might already be troubling six and seven-year-old children in adoptive families. Here, as in his interpretation of other tales, Bettelheim's point of view is not that of a child but of an adult Freudian psychoanalyst interpreting a child's viewpoint.

In the princess's favour, according to Bettelheim, is the fact that she refuses to divulge the secret, obtained under duress, of the harm that has been done to her by the maid. This, he says, 'proves her moral virtue' (137). While the princess is undoubtedly virtuous, I would argue that her silence indicates the level of intimidation she has been subjected to, since the maid has threatened her life if she tells. Like the Goose Girl, Rose in *If You Were Mine* remains silent when tormented about her adoption, but 'the handkerchief's lack of

power distressed her more than the way the boy twisted her arm up behind her back and whispered those cruel things' (173). As readers of fairy tale, it is likely that not only adopted children but all children, everywhere, will recognise this silencing as a re-enforcement of the power of the bully and the abuser.

In the end, the result of Bettelheim's insistence upon a Freudian reading, in which he somehow converts maternal blood to menstrual fluid, has the effect of obscuring the underlying message of "The Goose Girl", which can be seen from any point of the adoption triangle as stressing the magical, protective aspect of maternal blood, and especially its power – which the un-adopted take for granted – to hold a child's sense of identity intact. If this message were more available to adoptive parents, for instance, it might go some way towards defusing their fear of adoptees making contact with birth parents, a fear which Novy points out in *Reading Adoption* 'contributes to the practice of sealing records' (3). It might influence prospective adoptive parents who are in the process of adopting a child from another culture, where specific information about biological parents is often difficult to obtain, to be more persistent in their efforts to obtain this material for their child's future peace of mind.

Where birth records are closed and it is difficult to access birth information, the ending of "The Goose Girl" may suggest to adopted children that if the true details of their lives were to be made available to them, if the fiction of altered birth certificates and names were to revert to the original versions, (the swapped identities of the princess and the maid) then there is a possibility that their fractured narratives would be mended and they could become the individuals mapped out by their bloodlines.

“Cinderella”:
The Parented Orphan and the ‘Motherline’

The story which we know as “Cinderella” is one of the very oldest, with a version traceable to China around AD 850. The Chinese Cinderella, Yeh-hsien, is, like the girls in later versions, suffering at the hands of a mother and sister who are not related to her by blood. A magical fish, reduced to bones by the wicked step-mother, continues to help her until she gains the protection of the powerful king. This early version contains the detail of the tiny lost shoe, which is a defining element of the many tellings of the Cinderella story.

As with Yeh-hsien’s fish bones, some later versions include animal helpers who

embody the dead natural mother. A Scottish version, *Rashin Coatie,* features a red calf that feeds and protects the child, and continues to do so, even when slain. As noted by Marina Warner in *From the Beast to the Blonde*, in Angela Carter's version, "Ashputtle", 'the mother's ghost returns in the form of one animal after another to give back life to her child' (205).

In the Grimm's reworking of this tale, the wife of a rich man dies, leaving behind her only daughter. On her deathbed, she promises to look down from heaven and be near her child, as long as the girl remains good and pious. Most parents worry about what will happen to their offspring if they should suddenly die, but this final act of the mother at the beginning of Cinderella portrays maternal love as omnipotent, with the woman vowing to transcend even death to care for and protect her daughter. The presence of the father is not regarded by the mother as sufficient to ensure the daughter's safety; probably she knows that he will quickly remarry.

In some other fairy tales of the "Cinderella" type, notably the Grimm's tale "Allerleirauh", the dying wife extracts a promise from her husband that he will marry 'no one who is not quite as beautiful as I am, and who has not just such golden hair as I have' (326). Following her death, after an extensive but fruitless search, the husband/king notices that his daughter in every way resembles his late wife and suddenly feels 'a violent love for her' (327). He informs his councillors that he intends to marry his daughter and, despite her protests, names the wedding day. The girl runs away on the eve of the wedding, and ends up fulfilling a "Cinderella" role in another king's kitchen, from where she emerges in beautiful clothing to enchant the King and thwart his romantic intentions by slipping away and resuming her disguise in the kitchen. Inevitably, they marry, but while the king shows enthusiasm for the match, there is no record of Allerleirauh's feelings.

Other daughters who become the subject of incestuous paternal advances often suffer

even more harshly than Allerleirauh, with hands and breasts being severed by enraged fathers. In *Off With Their Heads!,* Maria Tatar remarks that, 'Interestingly, …our own age has suppressed tales of paternal incestuous desire even as it has turned stories about maternal evil into cultural icons' (127).

Certainly, the step-mother in "Cinderella" is one such cultural icon of wickedness, while the image of Cinderella which persists is of a girl whose ragged dress is transformed by a kindly fairy godmother. However, Marina Warner describes Cinderella as essentially 'a child in mourning for her mother' (206). Warner also makes the point that, 'The absent mother may not have died in fact, though many did; she may have died symbolically' (219). Read in the context of adoption, the mother may simply have relinquished her child, since relinquishment involves a symbolic death and, historically, it has not been uncommon for adopted children to be told that their biological mother has died.

In *The Enigma of Symbols in Fairy Tales,* Robert S. McCully writes that 'Cinderella was virtually orphaned in her father's house. No one was around to further her' (51). This orphaning finds a resonance in the first part of my novel as the neglected Aurora mourns the loss of 'her old loving mother' and wishes she would return and replace the woman drinking beer in the kitchen (48). As for the father, McCully writes: 'In any version of the tale her father is at best indifferent, at worst negative' (51).

While Aurora's father, William Hayes, is neither indifferent nor negative, his almost permanent absence causes the same lack of positive connection for his daughter as that experienced by Cinderella. My decision to re-enforce this paternal role was dictated by the demands of the novel since, if William had been at home more often, Aurora's day-to-day life would have needed to develop a different narrative trajectory.

The heroine of the Grimm's tale begins the story with no name. "Cinderella" is only acquired by the role she will be forced to adopt within the newly blended family, for within

a year the father marries a woman with two daughters. The daughters are fair of face but vile of heart. They mistreat the girl and make her sleep by the hearth among the cinders. Bettelheim makes the distinction between cinders and ashes, pointing out that Cinderella is a poor translation from the French *Cendrillon,* and stresses the importance of ashes (the clean substance resulting from complete combustion, or cremation) as opposed to dirty cinders *(*253). Thus, her name is formed. Even the father calls her Cinderella, apparently forgetting that she is his biological child. Bettelheim wrote in *The Uses of Enchantment*: 'The hearth is associated with the mother, and living so close to it as to be in with the cinders and ashes is a sign that the girl was symbolically trying to return to the mother' (248).

Every day the girl visits the mother's grave. When asked by her father what he should bring her from town, Cinderella asks for the first twig that knocks against his hat on the way home. He brings a hazel twig, which she plants on the mother's grave. Watered by her tears, it becomes a tree. Three times a day she sits and weeps there and soon a little white bird perches in the tree and throws down to her whatever she wishes for. This bird has been generally interpreted in critical texts as the soul of the watching mother, maternal love made manifest, as promised. Bettelheim acknowledges this, saying that 'The white bird is easily recognized as the mother's spirit conveyed to her child through the good mothering she gives him' (259). The branch and its connection with Cinderella's father seem to link father/ mother/ child again, a wishfulness on the part of the grieving daughter.

When the king announces that a three-day festival will be held at which his son will choose a bride, Cinderella asks to go, but the step-mother sets her the impossible task of separating an upturned bowl of lentils from the ashes in the hearth. This is not something her 'good' or biological mother would have done. According to Bettelheim, the good and evil mothers are in greater contrast in Cinderella than in almost any other tale. Here again,

the absence of the father leaves Cinderella vulnerable.

The task set by the step-mother is fulfilled with the help of birds, those manifestations of maternal support, which are messengers from the biological mother and, through her, the maternal line described by Lowinsky as the 'motherline'(4). The helpful birds in "Cinderella" stress the strength of the maternal connection, with its power to overcome any adversity, but an adoptive mother who attempts to play the same role as an absent birth mother may be seen as an interruption in this unbroken motherline. The maternal support which is offered may, therefore, be considered by an adoptee as of a weaker order, since it emanates from a fictional line rather than a blood line. For an adoptee, such a loss consists of the whole motherline stretching back to Eve; it would be easy for such a child to conclude that the kindly birds which help Cinderella are unlikely to be available to someone for whom this profound connection has been severed, since the random element introduced by adoption may be regarded as escalating in randomness with each step back through previous generations.

Lowinsky, who as well as being a step-mother is both a biological and an adoptive mother, writes about the pattern of meaning evoked in her by each of her children: 'An adopted child, whose life was conceived in another woman's body, evokes a different pattern of imagery' (43). Lowinsky admits that there are painful differences and that 'the bond between adoptive parent and child requires conscious and physical attention' (44). While elucidating the force of the Motherline connection in her work, Lowinsky does not belittle non-biological bonds: 'To say that biology is a potent part of the Motherline does not exclude the power of the non-biological connection. She and I made our bond conscious through the recognition of its nonbiological nature' (45). Since an adopted child cannot help but carry traces of a past life, however brief, however unknown, the adoptive bond, given its fragile beginnings, must be consciously nurtured, as Lowinsky says. In my

novel, Grace discovers that physical closeness brings about the bonding she craves, when she sits with her feverish child through the night (210).

From the point of view of Cinderella's adoptive mother – she has married a man whose daughter is unable to stop grieving for her dead mother. Three times a day, Cinderella sits on the grave and weeps. Presumably, the woman's own daughters have had to adjust to the new father-figure in their lives, and have done so, while Cinderella is acting out, perhaps unsettling her step-sisters. The step-mother reacts badly, not intervening when her daughters bully Cinderella. She may believe that the girl is curling up on the hearth, wallowing in the memory of her dead mother, in order to shame her with her grubby, unkempt appearance. She therefore sets an impossible task that she believes will prevent the girl from attending the festival.

But Cinderella has assistance from the motherline and amazes her step-mother by completing the task. When she asks again to go to the festival, the step-mother sets another task that is even more difficult, but this is once again completed by birds. At last, refused outright, Cinderella goes to the tree and wishes for 'silver and gold' and the bird throws down a gorgeous dress and slippers (124).

Although a tiny slipper has been the symbol most consistently associated with "Cinderella" since the earliest versions, it was Charles Perrault, writing at the end of the seventeenth century, who invented the slipper made of glass. Perrault was also responsible for adding the fairy godmother, the pumpkin coach, and mice that are magically transformed into horses, leading the way for the 1950 Disney film, which was based on his version. Disney's only significant deviation from Perrault's tale was to kill off Cinderella's father soon after his marriage, thus neatly absolving him from any blame for the abuse his daughter suffers.

In the Grimm's version, Cinderella is a sensation at the festival, but each night she slips

away from the prince. Versions, such as Perrault's, which contain a fairy godmother, also contain a warning that Cinderella must leave the ball before midnight, otherwise her coach will revert once more to a pumpkin, her sumptuous gown to rags. The desire not to be publicly exposed in ragged clothing provides an explanation for Cinderella's flight from the prince, but in the Grimm's telling, with no promise to the fairy godmother hanging over her, this behaviour becomes more difficult to understand, unless as an example to girls that 'playing hard to get' is the way to fan a sweetheart's ardour.

On the third evening of the festival, Grimm's Cinderella sheds a dainty shoe as she leaves, a detail that reaches back to early versions from China, where feminine beauty was measured by the smallness of a woman's foot, achieved through foot-binding. An empty shoe exerts a powerful suggestion of its owner's presence; of all items of clothing, shoes retain the shape and even sometimes the impression of the wearer's foot, although in the Perrault version, the glass slipper is an object of glamour and beauty in itself. The step-sisters in the Grimm's version, at the urging of their mother, cut off their toe and heel in a bid to fit the shoe, but the birds in the hazel tree alert the prince to their deception. The prince 'looked down and saw that the blood streamed so from the shoe that her white stockings were quite red' (128)[4]. This mutilation is omitted from Perrault's tale, presumably because a bloody amputation would have been visible through the glass and very ugly, and it is reasonable to assume that he chose style (glass) over this detail of characterisation.

In Perrault's version, it is not the prince but one of his servants who goes from house to house in search of the foot that will fit the glass slipper, so the prince never sees Cinderella

[4] This detail of the bleeding foot and bloodstained stocking appears in a version of "Cinderella" entitled "Ashputtel", which was published in London by Blackie and Son simply as *Grimms Tales*, and which is described in the introduction as a reprint, without alteration, of the edition published by C. Baldwin, London, in 1824-26, which was well before the publication of the Grimms definitive 1857 version of the *Kinder und Hausmarchen.*

in her servant girl role. But the Brothers Grimm introduce a ragged Cinderella to the prince, and despite being cruelly described by her father to the king's son as 'a little stunted kitchen-wench which my late wife left behind her', the prince is undeterred by Cinderella's grimy appearance and recognises her qualities shining through (127).

Surely it is this element that explains the tale's appeal to children who feel that their qualities and efforts are overlooked in favour of siblings, and especially to those who feel undefined or misplaced within an adoptive family. Bettelheim interprets Cinderella as a story of sibling rivalry, but I would argue that the competition between Cinderella and her step-sisters is little more than an aggravating sub-plot when set against the girl's grief following the loss of her mother.

The prince and Cinderella marry in all versions of the tale. In Perrault's ending, Cinderella forgives the step-sisters and marries them off to lords of the court, but in the Grimm's version the 'mothers' exact gruesome retribution when the step-sisters are blinded, their eyes pecked out by birds. The most interesting ending, from the point of view of the mother/child relationship, occurs in the Grimm's "Ashputtel". In this telling, the prince puts Ashputtel on his horse and rides away, and as they pass the hazel tree the white dove sings out to the prince that he has the true bride at last. Finally, the dove 'came flying and perched upon [Ashputtel's] right shoulder, and so went home with her' (128). The bird, or birds, fly to Cinderella's shoulders in later editions but their action does not end the tale. By choosing to close on this final union of child and 'mother' in "Ashputtel", the Grimms, perhaps unconsciously, re-enforce the importance of the maternal/blood bond, which is the tale's true centre.

Certain other tales contain important elements of the "Cinderella" tale, and some are more blood-thirsty than others. "The True Bride", a Grimm's story with marked similarities to "Cinderella", features an old woman who helps a young girl perform the

impossible tasks set by her step-mother. As with the birds in Cinderella, the old woman, who is loving and kind, seems to be a manifestation of the biological mother, or the child's desire for her protective presence. After the tasks become extreme (build me a castle and complete it in a single day), the girl finds her true love and then loses him, only to be reunited over three evenings at a ball, a return to the Cinderella story (752).

In the Grimm's "Sweetheart Roland", the step-mother hates her daughter so much that she plots to murder her with an axe while she sleeps. In the dark, she unknowingly murders her biological daughter, and the drops of blood from the girl's severed head – dripped on the stairs, in the kitchen, and in the bedroom by the escaping heroine – speak out loud to the mother, alerting her to the mistake. This tale is reminiscent of both "Cinderella" and "The True Bride", and perhaps its most discomforting aspect is contained in the opening paragraph where it is made clear that the beautiful and good daughter is hated *because* she is not a biological child: 'Your step-sister has long deserved death,' says the witch/step-mother (268).

The witch's ferocity and spite, coupled with the voice given to the biological child's blood, refutes any possibility of comfort. On the contrary, from the point of view of an adoptee, the attitude of the step-mother is all too clear and terrifying while, for an adoptive mother, the thought that an adopted child might, however briefly, hold this murderous tale in consciousness, is alarming. It is a scenario that seems designed to open the door to doubt concerning the relative strengths of blood and non-blood maternal bonds, with the adopted child typically drawing the short straw.

In recent fiction, the feelings of alienation such a situation might summon in the adopted child are expressed by the adopted character in Joan London's *The Good Parents* who, when asked if her adoptive parents miss her, replies, 'How can you miss a child who always held herself apart? I never let them near me' (166). London's character, Cecile, a

Malaysian child adopted at the age of three by Australian parents, embodies what Marianne Novy has labelled in *Imagining Adoption* as the 'disastrous adoption' narrative (1). 'Her mother – her adoptive mother – used to go red in the face and start to cry if Cecile stared at her when she was a child. She would overhear her mother on the phone to friends: "To be perfectly honest she frightens me."' (43). From the very beginning, it seems, Cecile has rejected her adoptive family and says of them: 'I wasn't allowed to say I wasn't happy. There is a wall of glass between me and my parents and there always has been' (155).

As with the introduction of Cinderella's name, which is a sign of her lowly status in the newly constructed family, Cecile's parents had a new name ready for her but Cecile refused to answer to it. She later changed her surname back to Wong, her mother's name, an outward sign of her yearning for her biological mother. Of her early days in the orphanage in Kuala Lumpur, Cecile says, 'I remember a beautiful young woman who used to visit me sometimes before I was adopted, and of course it would have been my mother. And I loved her. I remember loving her with a passion. Her name was Phyllis Wong' (293). This gives the reader a glimpse of Cecile in the orphanage, living out her "Cinderella" existence and visited from time to time by her fairy godmother/biological mother.

In the fairy tale, Cinderella's escape route from poverty and abuse lies in marriage with the prince, while for Cecile it is through adoption and, ultimately, education and an independent life. While this seems preferable to her previous life in the institution, the 'disastrous' nature of it is in the loss of her blood mother and her failure to bond with her adoptive parents (155). The fairy tale Cinderella – either with the assistance of the spirit of her mother, or Perrault's fairy godmother – adopts a fictional persona to attract the king's son, but although the Prince is struck by Cinderella's beauty, which leads us to suppose that he must have fallen in love with her, Cinderella's love for the prince is not described.

For her, the marriage seems primarily an escape from the abuse at home. For Cecile, her difficulty in forming emotional attachments, the narrative implies, is the result of her loveless relationship with her adoptive parents and the omnipresent yearning for her biological mother who, as it turns out, dies before the adult Cecile can be reunited with her.

Bettelheim states that the "Cinderella" tale 'offers parents much-needed comfort, for it can teach them why and for what good purposes they are seen temporarily in a bad light by their child', although this is clearly not the case for the adoptive parents of Cecile, since their estrangement is a permanent one (276). While Cecile is a secondary character in *The Good Parents*, her pervasive sadness, which is the result of maternal loss and disconnection from the motherline, creates a strong "Cinderella" thread that resonates with the original fairy tale.

In my novel, Aurora's "Cinderella" existence ends when she leaves home to take up a music scholarship. Like Cecile, as an adult she finds emotional attachments difficult, and even the Irish musician Liam, whom she has a sexual relationship with and admits to being fond of, is ultimately turned away when she 'flees the prince' in the tradition of Grimm's "Cinderella". At the end of the novel, however, Aurora appears to have found peace and happiness with Danny, a character who has been an important element in her life story since childhood. So while there is a subtle fairy tale quality to the novel's final scene, this ending, which shows a contented Aurora, both avoids Cinderella's more businesslike union with the prince and bows in the direction of the definitively happy ending that fairy tale demands.

Abandonment, Exploitation and the Unconscious Woman in "Sleeping Beauty"

"Sleeping Beauty" is one of the most widely known fairy tales, popularised and sanitised in the animated feature produced by Walt Disney in 1959, but reaching back to Giambattista Basile's "Sun, Moon, And Talia" in the early seventeenth century. It is a tale that has been interpreted by Freudians and feminists and a great number of others in between, but, read through the lens of adoption, its bloodshed and blood ties, and vengeful acts of cannibalism, take on fresh significance.

Of all the fairy tales under discussion in this essay, "Sleeping Beauty" is the most potentially troubling for young female readers. In versions other than those by the Brothers Grimm, its prospect of abandonment offers little reassurance to children already sensitised to separation as a result of adoption or other divisive life events, for Sleeping Beauty is the most vulnerable princess in all of fairy tale, a young girl left to sleep alone in a remote

palace, at the mercy of anyone willing and able to hack a path through the barrier of thorns.

In Basile's tale, a great lord is blessed with a daughter whom he names Talia and, rather than being cursed by a disgruntled fairy, it is the court astrologers who predict that Talia will be in danger from a chip of flax. When the prediction comes to pass, in his sorrow, the lord leaves Talia alone as if dead and abandons forever the house where he has suffered his loss. In this vulnerable state, Talia is raped by a passing (already married) king who then goes home and forgets her. Talia gives birth to twins in her sleep and, rather than the kiss of a prince, it is her infants trying to suckle, which dislodges the sliver of flax from her finger and causes her to wake. In this version, blood ties once again work their magic.

When the king finally remembers Talia and returns, he is delighted to find her awake and nursing their offspring. Soon, he can think of little else. Unfortunately, the king talks in his sleep, and his wife, suspecting the existence of a rival, arranges to have Talia's two children slaughtered and served up to her husband for his dinner. A compassionate cook smuggles the children to safety and kills and prepares two lambs in their place, to the unsuspecting queen's satisfaction. As a final act of vengeance she has Talia brought before her and is about to cast her into a fire when her husband appears. Upon having it explained that he has dined upon his own children, the king cries out in despair: "Alas! Then I, myself, am the wolf of my own sweet lambs; alas! And why did these my veins know not the fountains of their own blood" (376). This lament clearly embodies the belief that blood will mysteriously yet infallibly recognise its own.

The motif of a child being killed and served up as a meal for the father appears elsewhere in the Grimm's tale, "The Juniper Tree", which contains an element of blood recognition on the part of the father, albeit a rather oblique one. The good mother has died giving birth and left a son who is ill-treated by the new wife. The child is eventually killed, chopped up and turned into black pudding, which the father finds so delicious that he calls

for more and more. ‘And the more he ate the more he wanted to have, and he said, "Give me some more, you shall have none of it. It seems to me as if it were all mine"’ (224). At this, his grieving daughter is seen ‘weeping tears of blood’ (224).

While Charles Perrault’s “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” removes the rape of the princess, it retains the slaughtering of the two children born of her secret marriage to the prince. In this version, the threat comes from an ogreish mother-in-law who attempts to eat both her grandchildren and their young mother, while her son – now made king – is away at the war. Perrault, a great stylist in his crafting of folk tales into what would come to be generally regarded as a new genre of literary fairy tale, introduces the details of the fairies invited to be godmothers to the princess, along with the wrath of the aged fairy whose presence has been overlooked. He also brings to the tale the curse involving the spindle, the subsequent banning of spinning wheels, and the young princess’s ascent to a high turret in a remote part of the castle.

In the scene where the young princess pricks her finger, neither Perrault nor the Grimms describe a single drop of blood. At this moment, the culmination of a curse, the blood spilled is metaphorical rather than actual, the piercing of the princess’s finger, a magical rather than a physical event. The old woman with the spinning wheel in Perrault’s tale is benign. She has never heard of the banning of spinning wheels and spindles; the ‘good’ woman does not even know the identity of the princess when she enters the garret (5). The woman spinning in the Grimm’s version is rather more ambiguous and, with no hint of either innocence or goodness, it seems likely that she is a manifestation of the slighted wise woman who issued the original curse.

Despite the lack of blood on the page, Bettelheim’s interpretation of “Sleeping Beauty” assumes the presence of blood when the princess pricks her finger although his Freudian analysis connects it to the onset of menstruation. ‘Removing all the distaffs from the

kingdom cannot prevent the girl's fateful bleeding once she reaches puberty, at fifteen, as the evil fairy predicted' (232). For Bettelheim, the girl's long sleep represents the period leading to sexual maturity. 'However great the variations in detail, the central theme of all versions of "Sleeping Beauty" is that, despite all attempts on the part of parents to prevent their child's sexual awakening, it will take place nonetheless' (230). Bettelheim identifies the reassurance in this tale as emanating from the message that sex 'loses none of its rewards if one has to wait a long time for it' (231).

In *If You Were Mine,* Aurora's actual and metaphorical slumber at Cluain Meala is a protective measure for the child character, a way of making a difficult childhood pass. She discovers the homestead on the morning of her ninth birthday, which is on the young side for the onset of menstruation. By the time she leaves it, however, she is seventeen, undoubtedly sexually mature, even if still a little naïve. For Aurora, Cluain Meala becomes a refuge, but, for her friend, Iris, the period of 'slumber' ends rather differently. Soon after telling Aurora that a young man with whom she has been flirting has followed her to Sugarbag, Iris disappears. 'Once, Aurora arrived at the old homestead to find that Iris had been there without her; she had left her old straw hat on the kitchen table and a handkerchief on the washstand in the bedroom' (87). Iris's pregnancy could be described as echoing the way in which Talia falls pregnant in her sleep, although I was unaware of a connection at the time of writing. But through creating differing needs for Aurora and Iris during the period in which they inhabit the empty house, my narrative, in this instance, both rejects and embraces Bettelheim's suppositions of sexual awakening.

Compared to Basile's "Sun, Moon, And Talia", and Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" the Grimm's tale, "Little Briar Rose", is a shorter, happier and less gruesome working of the same material. The young princess's life is similarly overshadowed by a curse from a disgruntled wise woman but, since the King has banished all spindles from

the kingdom, the royal couple believes they have averted danger and carelessly absent themselves from the castle on the day their daughter turns fifteen. Inevitably, the princess climbs the stairs of a disused tower and, at the moment when she feels the prick of the spindle, falls down upon a bed, insensible. 'And the wind fell, and on the trees before the castle not a leaf moved again' (238). Between the princess's fall and the falling of the wind, we are told that every person and thing in the palace begins to drop off to sleep, and 'even the fire that was flaming on the hearth became quiet and slept' (238).

This sudden erasure of the familiar world corresponds with the moment in my novel when the child Aurora returns home to find her mother completely altered, silenced by her grief (31). Later, as an adult, she will hold the baby boy, Jem, immediately following his birth, and experience again the sensation of falling, of the familiar world dropping away.

> His eyes were squeezed against the light, but as she leaned over him they flicked open and their blueness pierced her, the prick of the spindle, she thought, and this starburst of colour was an opening into which she fell headlong – the entrance to a winding stair that led her up, up, up into the highest turret. Whatever happened in the rest of his life or hers, Aurora had been the first to hold him and she had felt the magic door fly open. It was wide open now, and that was all there was to it (180).

For Aurora, as for the princess in "Sleeping Beauty", the entrance to the winding stair and the turret is an ascent into danger, and Aurora acknowledges that 'she would recognise this as the moment when she opened her heart to his loss' (180).

Reading "Sleeping Beauty" from the point of view of an adoptee such as the novel's Rose Mulcahy, the magic door all too often flies open without warning. For Rose, the prick-of-the-spindle experience coincides with witnessing a small child falling from a pedestrian bridge above a river (170). 'Other people, she now saw, were as dangerously poised in their own lives as she, as ready to tumble into oblivion as the unknown child in the red coat' (171).

For Sleeping Beauty, as for Aurora and Rose, this catastrophic falling seems to relate to

the moment when a child fully inhabits their situation, whatever that happens to be. Often it is a moment of such harsh realisation that the world around them freezes and "not a leaf" moves again.

In the fairy tale, a hedge of thorns springs up around the castle where the princess sleeps, a barrier which resonates with the barbed silence in which the young Aurora lives with her mother during her father's long absences. From the point of view of the adoptee, Rose, the hedge of thorns represents both the difference between herself and other children, and the thorny emotional state that separates her from acceptance and understanding, a state of mind that must be broken down before she can feel comfortable with her life.

'All "good" [fairy tale] heroines accept their fate passively, unquestioningly' comments Joyce Carol Oates in *Mirror Mirror On The Wall* (251). In *Reading Adoption*, Marianne Novy writes that 'Being adopted is a passive situation. Looking for birth parents, by contrast, is a choice' (2). Like Sleeping Beauty, who passively waits for outside help, my character, Rose, remains passive until stung into action by a romance which ends in pregnancy. From that point on, she becomes active in the search, albeit a covert one, for her natural mother. But passivity is not limited to either fairy tale heroines or adopted children. The kings and queens depicted in different versions of "Sleeping Beauty" are often strangely passive, closing up the palace and leaving it, and their child, forever, presumably too affected by grief to watch over her.

One notable difference between the Grimm's "Little Briar Rose" and earlier versions is that when the hundred-year spell eventually serves out its time, the prince arrives to find the entire court unconscious. Up on the throne, the King and Queen are asleep, and this is, I think, a more realistic portrayal of the parental lot, where loving parents find their own lives arrested for the duration of whatever curse has been inflicted upon their child, unlike

the versions by Basile and Perrault who have the parents leave the scene of their unhappiness, thus effectively abandoning their sleeping daughter.

Remaining faithful to the sequence of events in Perrault's version, in "The Sleeping Beauty In The Wood", Angela Carter describes how, after the King and Queen have kissed their daughter farewell and left the castle forever, a great thorny hedge grows up 'for the fairy had made a safe, magic place where the princess could sleep her sleep out free from prying eyes' (*Little Red Riding Hood...*20). In my novel, this safe and magic place is the abandoned homestead, Cluain Meala, which Aurora comes upon at a moment of need and often returns to to fall asleep as she waits out her childhood. Of this period of waiting in childhood, Francine Prose writes in her essay, "Sleeping Beauty":

> As girls we loved this story best of all for its heartening promise that the long nap we knew we were taking would eventually end; perhaps when we least expected it, the mystical – predestined – kiss would provide the piece of the puzzle that, even fast asleep, we knew was missing (284).

For Aurora, it is maternal care that is missing, and the other safe and magic place for her in the novel is her relationship with the schoolteacher, Kilkie Bleecker. The abandoned church where Kilkie lives, with its stone angels and stained glass windows, is, to the child Aurora, reminiscent of a castle, a place remote from the hardships of her everyday life. Kilkie nurses her there before the two undertake a journey to Death Rock, a place that is considered both safe and magical in Kilkie's Nukunu culture. Comfortably settled in the shade above the waterhole, Aurora falls asleep and wakes to a scene she cannot fully comprehend. This almost hypnotic slumber followed by chaotic waking resonates with the confused awakening of Basile's Talia who finds she has conceived and given birth to twins in her sleep.

Unlike the earlier versions of "Sleeping Beauty", the Grimms end their story happily, foregoing ghastly cannibalistic dinners in favour of the moment when the prince ascends to the room where the princess sleeps. This ascent echoes that of the inquisitive young Briar

Rose, and yet, unlike her ascent into danger, the prince's ascent precedes an event of great happiness, for a little while later they celebrate their marriage 'with all splendour' (241). Over the centuries, artists and illustrators have depicted the princess sensuously reclining, deeply unconscious, sometimes surrounded by furs and richly coloured robes that seem about to unwind or slide from her body. Beauty can be seen as the projection of a particular male fantasy, that of the eternally available, utterly undemanding, unsullied female body, which writers such as Basile take full sexual advantage of.

It is a scenario that has survived intact since the earliest known version of "Sleeping Beauty". In *From The Beast To The Blonde,* Marina Warner cites the story of Troïlus and Zellandine, a narrative that forms part of the fourteenth century, six-volume prose romance *Perceforest,* as being an earlier version of the tale (220). In *Perceforest*[5], Troïlus rapes Zellandine while she is in a deep coma, and she gives birth without waking. Basile's Talia is clearly a later rendering of Zellandine, and since the *Perceforest* books were printed in Italian around 1531, Warner speculates that the earlier narrative was probably known to the Neapolitan-born Basile (220).

[5]The Wikipedia entry for *Perceforest* credits Gilles Roussineau as having identified the *Perceforest* origins of "Sleeping Beauty". http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perceforest

Of this sexualised sleeping woman, Francine Prose writes: 'By now it's probably clear that what I'm talking about is a sort of modified necrophilia: not exactly sex with a corpse – literal graveyard *amour* – but rather sex with a woman who only *appears* to have left the world of the living' (286). Prose goes on to cite examples, showing that this scenario has been imagined again and again by writers from Basile to Edgar Allan Poe, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Heinrich von Kleist, Tommaso Landolfi, Thomas Hardy, Yasunari Kawabata, and even Alfred Hitchcock in his film masterpiece, *Vertigo*. Prose notes that:

> Once you look it's everywhere, though mostly – again – in art, since not even one's most voluble, open, forthcoming, least paranoid male friends (and certainly not, for obvious reasons, one's husband or lovers) are about to confide that their deepest secret fantasy is sex with an unconscious woman (now commonly thought of as rape) or with an inflatable sex doll or ingenious female robot (286).

With the notable exception of the seventeenth and eighteenth century French *conteuses,* such as Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, fairy tales have historically been collected, written and published by men, a fact which seems to support Prose's view that 'It's men who have imagined this – that is, imagined *other* men capable of falling in love with an artificial "woman" or a living woman convincingly impersonating a dead one' (287). This sexualisation of the unconscious woman in "Sleeping Beauty" appears to be an early literary manifestation of the male gaze: 'There she lay, so beautiful that he could not turn his eyes away' (241).

Fairy tale scholar, Jack Zipes, has commented upon male gaze in relation to "Sleeping Beauty" in an introduction to a 2008 edition of Angela Carter's *Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and Other Classic Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, however, Zipes interprets the gaze of the prince as a rescue: 'She must lie in a comatose state until a prince rescues her, twice – once from the curse of a fairy and then from the prince's own ogresslike mother' (xviii).

Remarking on the Basile version, in which one of Talia's babies mistakes her fingertip

for a nipple and sucks out the poisoned sliver of flax, rousing the princess from her coma, Francine Prose concludes, 'Perhaps it's not love – but motherhood – that finally makes a girl's eyes blink open' (294). Bettelheim, too, comments on the significance of the nursing child who brings the mother back to life. In doing so, he refers back to *Perceforest*, in which it is Venus who causes the sleeping girl's baby to suck the splinter from her finger. 'The self-involvement which was suggested by the heroine's long-lasting sleep comes to an end as she gives to the infant and he, by taking from her, restores her to the highest level of existence: a mutuality in which the one who receives life also gives life' (235).

In *If You Were Mine* it is the experience of sharing Jem's birth, of being the first to hold him and, later, of caring for him when Rose is distracted by the sudden contact with her birth mother, which affects Aurora more profoundly than almost anything else that has happened to her up to that point. Only the relationship with her own mother – whose silent grief has effectively transformed her into an unconscious or 'sleeping' woman – has wielded greater emotional clout. Aurora is well past the stage of breastfeeding when Esther's grief first strikes, but although she does her best to care for her mother, often suppressing her own needs in the process, she is unsuccessful in restoring Esther to life. Having accepted this failure, Aurora's disappointment is no less sharp; from the moment Esther's life is all but extinguished by the loss of her son, her daughter observes how other children, usually boys, are loved:

> Renata Kenny looked at baby Lloyd sometimes as if she wanted to gobble him up. Aurora had seen Renata kiss his baby feet, suck his tiny toes until he smiled his wet, blue, bubbly smile at her. Renata always looked younger and less tired when she held Lloyd. This was how boys were loved. It must have been how her mother loved Michael, which was why she was silent and empty now that he was gone (66).

With only the occasional hug from her father, the child Aurora is always on the outside looking in. Like Sleeping Beauty, abandoned to wait out her destiny, it is many years before Aurora finds herself – unexpectedly – experiencing the impact of unconditional

love. Unfortunately, she directs this emotion towards a baby that does not, and never will, belong to her. The bonding of Aurora with Jem, a non-blood related child, runs counter to the emphasis on blood relationships found in fairy tales. I meant it to show that maternal love can exist independently of blood ties, however, upon reflection I see that Aurora's actions could be interpreted as fulfilling the suspicion that childless women hanker after other women's babies, or even, in the freighted language of relinquishing mother, Evelyn Robinson, that adoptive mothers are intent upon 'robbing them [biological mothers] of their children' (197). This possibility did not occur to me at the time of writing, but it does make Aurora's encounter with the benign and intuitive 'witch', Maggie Logan, even more fortuitous. In the cottage setting that strongly evokes fairy tale, Maggie's timely awakening helps Aurora to place her feelings in perspective.

Aside from its disturbing sexual aspects, "Sleeping Beauty" raises the prospect for children that they may not even be secure when they sleep; for parents, it carries the message that if they leave a child at home alone they must expect the worst. In recent times, public sympathy for the parents of Madeleine McCann – the young child snatched from her bed in a Portuguese holiday resort while they wined and dined nearby – has been tempered by the knowledge that the parents (like the king and queen in "Sleeping Beauty") absented themselves at a critical moment and thus lost control of their child's destiny.

Rather than offering safety, which Bettelheim identifies in the princess's sleep, I would argue that "Sleeping Beauty" hints at the perils of losing consciousness. In a recently published novel, *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*, by Kim Edwards, a woman rendered unconscious to alleviate the pain of childbirth suffers catastrophic loss. The story is set in 1964 when, during a blizzard, Dr. David Henry's wife, Norah, goes into labour and, with the help of his nurse, the doctor delivers his own twins. Before Norah becomes unconscious, the writer signals her princess status: 'Snow had melted in her hair and glittered like a diamond tiara' (13). Between contractions, the doctor recalls his residency years when 'the practice had been to put the woman in labor out completely until the birth was over, but times had changed – it was 1964 – and Bentley, he knew, used gas more selectively' (14). However, after the first baby is safely delivered, Dr. Henry realises that there is to be a second birth and quickly asks the nurse to sedate his wife. '"More gas," he said. He saw her surprise and then her quick nod of comprehension as she complied. His hand was on his wife's knee; he felt the tension ease from her muscles as the gas worked' (16). Norah is still sedated when it becomes obvious that the second baby has Downs Syndrome. The doctor gives it to the nurse to take away to an institution. Later, he tells his wife their baby daughter has died, but the nurse keeps and raises the child.

Similarly, the birth mother in another contemporary novel, Anita Shreve's *Light On Snow,* falls into the category of unconscious women who suffer loss; like Norah Henry in *The Memory Keeper's Daughter,* Charlotte gives birth assisted by her boyfriend, and then passes out at a critical moment. 'He just laid her across my stomach. I put my hand on her, but I was drifting by then, drifting in and out' (206). When Charlotte wakes, her boyfriend tells her they have to get out of the motel room, fast, and that the baby is already in the car. In fact, he has carried the infant into the woods and abandoned it in the snow. When they reach home, he tells her the baby died while she was unconscious and it is only when

Charlotte reads a newspaper report of the baby's miraculous survival that she realises what he has done.

In a review written by Motoko Rich of *The Memory Keeper's Daughter,* which appeared in the *New York Times*, the president of the Penguin publishing group, Susan Petersen Kennedy, says, 'That's the kind of book you all love because it means that not only is word of mouth happening, but you know that something mysterious about this book is really seeping into people's hearts and minds' (2). *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* has been so successful that its publisher has gone through eight printings. This astonishing success, I would argue, is based upon a single scene – the powerful moment at the beginning of the book where snow falls outside 'silencing the city and the land beyond' and the unconscious woman, like Basile's Talia, gives birth to twins in her sleep (14). For although *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* might be somewhat disguised by its 1960s setting, close reading exposes its "Sleeping Beauty" type narrative and goes some way towards explaining the novel's 'mysterious' appeal, since the elements in play have already been subtly embedded in the hearts and minds of readers through cultural contact with the fairy tale.

Bettelheim's interpretation of "Sleeping Beauty" is firmly rooted in twentieth century philosophy and psychology and, as with his interpretation of other tales, emphasises Freudian sexuality at the expense of other possible readings. He points out, too, that in shortening the tale, as the Brothers Grimm did, something important is lost. 'In Perrault, as in Basile, the evil principle is done away with, and thus fairy-story justice is done. But the Brothers Grimm's version….is deficient because the evil fairy is not punished' (230).

While evil deeds may go unpunished, what the Grimms and Disney dispensed with is the role played by Sleeping Beauty's infant children. Their awakening effect upon their mother as they suckle, an expression of the power of blood ties to resurrect, may provide

biological children with the ‘feeling of consolation characteristic of fairy tales’, which Bettelheim insists upon (37). However, children lacking the blood-given right to suckle from a mother might experience feelings of inferiority and loss if the older versions are the only ones they are raised with.

Like Sleeping Beauty, who, in all versions, grows up in the shadow of a curse that was issued before she was old enough to be aware of it, adoptees are likely to identify with a story that links fateful actions and omissions to the birth of a child. The princess’s very passivity echoes their own helplessness. Similarly, in my novel, the child Aurora lives with the effects of a curse, the lightning strike that kills her brother. Ultimately, as with adopted children who grow up and move from the passive state of having been adopted to the active state of searching out their heritage, Aurora eventually shakes off the numbing effects of her particular curse and strikes out in search of her own destiny.

The Adoptive Mother and Maternal Gaze in "Little Snow White":

In her essay, "Redefining 'Real' Motherhood: Representations of Adoptive Mothers, 1900-1950", Julie Berebitsky argues that society has believed adoptive motherhood to be different. 'Adoption provided a woman with a child to love, but it did not necessarily provide her with a completely recognized claim to '"real" motherhood' (85). Drawing on early twentieth-century magazine articles about adoption, Berebitsky points out that prospective adoptive mothers have frequently been portrayed as 'desperate, conniving, and mentally unstable' (87). This, she believes, was due to the special reverence reserved for the biological mother/child bond. While the childless woman's yearning was understood, having failed to give birth, adoptive mothers were regarded as 'failures as women and not really mothers' (87). But this profile of adoptive motherhood represents equally well the

wicked step-mothers of fairy tale, women who for centuries have been relentlessly portrayed as desperate, conniving, and mentally unstable, not real mothers, in fact, for the real mothers in fairy tale almost all succumb to early death.

In "Little Snow White", the adoptive mother embodies the worst qualities of the wicked step-mother; in addition, she is obsessed by her own beauty, and illustrations often show her gazing into a mirror. Once again, this unflattering image bears a striking resemblance to the ways in which women who fail to bear children have commonly been portrayed, encompassing both the narcissist and the woman desperate to see herself reflected in a younger, more beautiful version, in other words, a prospective adoptive mother who longs for a child. In either reading, the significance of her gaze is, at best, ambiguous.

If, as Marianne Novy suggests in *Imagining Adoption, '*Adoption makes ambiguous the definition of parenthood and of such other important terms as *family*, *kinship*, and *identity*, as well as *father* and *mother*', so too do fairy tales (1). In *The Brothers Grimm*, Jack Zipes has noted that in the Grimm's 1812 edition of this tale, it is not Snow White's step-mother but her biological mother who is murderously jealous (13). The Grimm brothers apparently became uncomfortable with this detail, and by the time their standard, final edition was published in 1857, they had transformed the biological mother into a step-mother, presumably to make the tale less alarming for children and to re-enforce social ideals of motherhood.

The Grimm's tale, "Little Snow White", opens with a queen looking out at the snow while sewing. When she pricks her finger, three drops of blood fall on the snow and she wishes for a child 'as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window-frame' (249). The queen's yearning is rewarded, but when the child is born, the queen dies, and within a year Snow White has a step-mother to contend with.

In my novel, I deliberately chose language that echoes the opening of "Little Snow

White" to describe the newly married Grace's desire for a child:

> The room had been silent enough that she could hear the needle as it pricked the layers of cotton. Over and over, thousands of tiny stitches crisscrossing the starry surface; when her fingers grew stiff she slipped them between the layers and turned to watch snowflakes sift into the narrow grey channel of the street…She had stitched into that quilt all her dreams of her and Pat having a child of their own, a child with skin as white as snow, with hair as black as ebony and cheeks as red as blood, like in the old story (187).

From a position of such wistfulness, it is difficult to imagine a narrative unfolding in which, when the queen has her longed-for daughter, she becomes so envious of her beauty that she orders a hunter to take her into the forest and kill her. This must have been how the Grimms felt. Perhaps their sense of revulsion made them kill off the queen and replace her in later editions with a wicked step-mother.

However, in my novel, Grace remains a gentle character. The little red shawl she wears, less regal than the lavish robes generally worn by the queen in illustrations of the tale, is a reminder of her humility and wishfulness, of her archetypal, fairy tale yearning for a child. In recognising that her husband does not feel as driven as she does to become a parent, and that his yearning is all for her rather than for a child, Grace speculates that perhaps maternal love is the only pure love that exists, the only true escape from loneliness. However, once reconciled to the idea that she and Pat will adopt a child, she reassures

herself that it will be no different than a child of their own, 'Except that she would forgo the intimacy of pregnancy, that sharing of blood, body space, flesh, food and air' (191).

On reflection, I can see that by making this sharing of blood a matter of importance to Grace, I am restating the power of maternal blood depicted in fairy tales. At the same time, when Rose suddenly becomes ill, Grace comforts the child with her own body. 'She unbuttoned the neck of her nightgown and held the child's cheek against her skin. Rose relaxed then, nestled close to Grace's heartbeat' (209). This is the moment of bonding and it comes through hours of physical intimacy, skin against skin, its outward sign expressed by Grace's thoughts of laughter rather than of blood. At this point, my novel turns away from the laws of attachment laid down in fairy tales, the 'blood' laws that work the puppet strings of so many princesses and their adoptive/step-mothers.

In the first draft, while Grace was waiting for the baby to become available for adoption, I wrote that she simulated a developing pregnancy by strapping a small cushion to her stomach. This stressed the importance, to Grace, of the experience of carrying a child, of entering parenthood in the same way that friends and neighbours did, or, at least, to be perceived as having achieved a natural pregnancy. But when Rose eventually arrived she was already past her first birthday. The feigned pregnancy caused Grace great embarrassment in the neighbourhood, and she had to face it down at the same time as adjusting to the role of mother. If, in the light of current adoption practice, this behaviour seems improbable, in *The Many-Sided Triangle: Adoption in Australia,* the authors confirm that before the 1965 Adoption of Children Act it was not 'uncommon for a hospital to conspire with a couple to enable the wife to attend the clinic, progressively padded, until finally she would be admitted', citing a case in which a lengthening pregnancy caused embarrassment when a child that was to have been adopted suddenly became unavailable (102). Following my mentorship with Jane Rogers, I decided to cut

this aspect of Grace's story. The decision was made for structural reasons, although I had realised by then that this behaviour made her seem unbalanced when, in fact, she was merely anxious, as most adoptive mothers are, an anxiety born of the cultural 'blood' messages absorbed throughout childhood from fairy tales such as "Snow White". As Irena Klepfisz says in her essay, "Women Without Children; Women Without Families; Women Alone": 'We are taught very early that blood relations, and only blood relations, can be a perpetual, unfluctuating source of affection.' (21).

In "Little Snow White", the queen orders a huntsman to take her child into the forest and kill her, but he slays a young boar instead. The action of the tale now shifts to the forest, and the house of the seven dwarves where Snow White takes up residence. In fairy tales, alliances, such as the one Snow White forges with the dwarves, appear as random and unlikely as any adoptive relationship could be. Indeed, it could be argued that randomness is an indispensable and recurring factor in the structure of most, if not all, fairy tale narratives. For example, king's sons have a habit of riding by at critical moments, when the witch is climbing the tower by means of Rapunzel's hair, or when the lonely castle where Sleeping Beauty slumbers is about to reach the end of its one-hundred-year spell cycle. Characters bump into other characters, changing the course of the narrative as sure as fate. In my own essay on adoption, "Kissing It Better", while arguing for the significance of aleatory motherhood, I have noted that randomness appears to be the quality about their lives which adoptees find most disturbing. 'It is the random element of the attachment that adopted children find unbearable. And yet the profound and loving relationships that sustain and shape our lives most often spring from random collisions' (224).

And so it proves in "Little Snow White", for the dwarves may be seen as either surrogate parents or, at the very least, *in loco parentis*. When the magic mirror alerts the

queen to Snow White's whereabouts and she succeeds, at the third attempt, at persuading the girl to eat a poisoned apple, it is the dwarves who wash her apparently dead body with water and wine, who comb her hair and lay her out upon a bier ready for burial. In demonstrating their sincere affection for this randomly acquired child, the dwarves weep for 'three days long' (256). In the end, they cannot bear to bury her but enclose her in a glass coffin. All the while she is thus exposed under glass one of them stands watch beside her until, eventually, in another random collision, a king's son rides by and falls in love with her.

This is another instance of the male gaze falling upon an unconscious woman and desiring to possess or rescue her. In the tale, the prince bargains with the dwarves until they take pity on him and relinquish Snow White's body. Luckily, his servants stumble as they carry the coffin away, and the poisoned apple flies from the stricken girl's throat. Before long, Snow White is sitting up, surprised to find herself on the way to her wedding, her restoration to life due to a random encounter with the prince.

In fairy tales, the male gaze is both constant and direct; with the exception of an occasional woodcutter, or huntsman, who turns out to have a soft spot for a young child, or the ineffectual father whose gaze is too often focused elsewhere, it falls between the behavioural extremes of Bluebeard and the romantic ardour of any number of young, smitten princes and kings. By comparison, the maternal gaze is more complex and troublesome, split over and over again between the selfless devotion of the good, biological mother, as in "Cinderella", and the scheming, violent, sometimes ravenous gaze of a wicked step-mother, or a jealous one, as in "Little Snow White".

Angela Carter's story, "Snow Child", from her collection of re-interpreted fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber*, is said to have been based on a very early version of "Little Snow White" that was collected from folklore sources by the Brothers Grimm but never

published by them.[6] Carter's version does away with the queen and her pricked finger; instead, a count and countess are riding through snowy woods. 'I wish I had a girl as white as snow, says the Count' (91). When he and his wife come to a mysterious hole in the snow which is filled with blood, the Count wishes again for a girl as red as blood; upon sighting a raven, he wishes again for a girl as black as the bird's feathers, and 'As soon as he completed her description, there she stood, beside the road, white skin, red mouth, black hair and stark naked; she was the child of his desire and the Countess hated her' (92).

This opening puts a completely different emphasis on the arrival of the child/girl and, unlike the Grimm's "Little Snow White" – in which the queen's jealousy develops until the young woman is banished to a forest to be killed – Carter zooms in on the opening of the story, in particular the elements that bring Snow White into being: the Count, and the Count's desire. In Carter's telling, Snow White appears to have no function other than as an irritant for the Countess and a brief sexual adventure for the Count; the girl cannot be described as the Count's sexual partner, since she is already dead when he penetrates her. The girl dies when the Countess demands that she pick a rose. 'So the girl picks a rose; pricks her finger on the thorn; bleeds; screams; falls' (92). Snow White is then raped by the Count in the presence of the Countess. Soon, she conveniently melts, leaving no messy body to dispose of, only 'a bloodstain, like the trace of a fox's kill on the snow' (92).

In re-telling the well-known tale in such a brief and brutal fashion, by pushing the passivity of the fairy tale heroine to new extremes, Carter seems intent upon dispelling centuries of complacent readings of fairy tales. In the process, she exposes both the paternal and maternal gaze, creating an unattractive portrayal of parental desire in which the commodified child exists solely as a source of gratification.

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[6]Under the heading Modern Narratives, the Wikipedia entry for "Snow White" asserts that Carter's "Snow Child" was based upon an early version of "Little Snow White" that was collected by the Brothers Grimm but never published by them, a version in which Snow White is the child of the father's desire rather of the mother's. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow_White

Bettelheim describes “Snow White” as a tale that warns both parent and child against narcissism, but in Carter’s vivid and brutal rendering, the passive young woman seems oblivious to everything, including her own naked beauty. Commenting on parenthood, Bettelheim remarks that while it is usually the parents who create the child, in “Snow White” it is ‘the arrival of the child which causes these two people to become parents’ (201). While the girl’s arrival transforms king and queen into parents in the early Grimm version, the Count and Countess in Carter’s story are hardly parental material. But although their behaviour is aberrant and abhorrent, Carter has conjured them out of the earlier narrative and the result is a story that seems to stress that the child’s value, or even its life, is contingent upon satisfying the demands and desires of the parents. Failure to do so will result in a melting away, an erasure of self to a mere bloodstain, a dirty mark, an embarrassing stain.

In doing away with the child while allowing the ‘parents’ to survive, Carter has reversed the fairy tale form, for it is almost a defining element of the tales that children survive but parents, particularly mothers, do not last. However, since the mother figure in Carter’s story cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered as either good, or maternal, perhaps, by endowing the mute girl with qualities usually associated with the good mothers who do not last, it is really the perishable nature of goodness that Carter is describing. In the end, goodness dissolves, leaving a mark upon the snow. It is interesting to note that this mark is composed of blood, and although the blood does not speak out loud as, for example, in “The Goose Girl”, or “Sweetheart Roland”, its presence upon the snow functions as a powerful reproach.

According to Maria Tatar, the erasing of benevolent maternal figures in fairy tale can be laid at the door of the Grimms ‘who cleared the way for emphasizing maternal evil by magnifying female villainy in successive versions of the stories they had collected’ (232).

However, Marina Warner sets the absence of good mothers and the prevalence of maternal evil firmly at the door of Bruno Bettelheim, whose Freudian principle of splitting, in which the wicked step-mother 'acts as the Janus face of the good mother, who can thus be saved and cherished in fantasy and memory', thus allowing a child to separate the good mother from the bad (221):

> The bad mother has become an inevitable, even required ingredient in fantasy, and hatred of her a legitimate, applauded stratagem of psychic survival. Bettelheim's theory has contributed to the continuing absence of good mothers from fairy tales in all kinds of media, and to a dangerous degree which itself mirrors current prejudices and reinforces them (212).

Fortunately, in contemporary fiction, there is a greater prevalence of 'good' mothers, both biological and aleatory, than in fairy tale. The step-mother in Anne Enright's *What Are You Like?* is full of good intentions towards both her biological children and her step-child, Maria, yet ultimately remains beaten: 'Evelyn had wanted to make a go of her children, to make friends of them, but they were all strangers to her still. If you thought about it, it was the loneliest job of them all' (76). Evelyn's slight bitterness has a touchingly pragmatic edge. 'Another woman would have done just as well, a woman in a houndstooth hacking jacket, a woman in the palest blue' (64). Up until the end, Evelyn remains a benign character far removed from the evil stereotype of the fairy tale step-mother, making endless excuses and excursions to keep an eye on her unresponsive step-daughter: 'Life had put them in the same room, they might as well take a look at each other now and then. Though you got the feeling from Maria that she did not even look at herself, with that acre of mirror in front of her' (65). While Enright does not directly mention fairy tales, it is interesting to note the way in which she subtly subverts their iconic elements, such as the mirror into which Maria does not look.

In contemporary fiction, the maternal gaze is frequently depicted as a life-affirming force. For example, in Anne Patchett's *Run,* a birth mother who has relinquished her two

sons spends her life shadowing her children, literally standing outside the house where they live and looking in the lighted windows. Finally, on a snowy street, she throws herself into the path of a car that is about to hit one of her grownup boys, a life-saving act of devotion by a blood mother that is a fictional re-enactment of the latent message of the power of maternal blood in tales such as "The Goose Girl" and "Cinderella". However, in a notable reversal of fairy tale narrative, it is the *adoptive* mother in *Run* who has died and is almost dismissed from the text, even though the children think of her as the 'good' mother and initially resist contact with their biological mother.

In *Fortune's Rocks*, by Anita Shreve, an infant is removed from his unmarried mother, Olympia, by paternal force. Later, Olympia mounts a court case to recover him from his adoptive parents but, although the judge rules in her favour, she is unable to bring herself to take him once she observes the strength of the bond he has formed with his adoptive mother. The courtroom scene is reminiscent of the biblical tale in which two women argue over possession of a baby (3 Kings 3:26). When King Solomon proposes cutting the child in half, the true mother is revealed by her willingness to relinquish if it will save her baby's life. In *Fortune's Rocks*, Olympia's second relinquishment is voluntary, an expression of her maternal 'goodness', as well as a re-enforcement of the old model.

In Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", which is a reworking of the "Bluebeard" tale, the maternal gaze is not only good but telepathic. 'I can only bless the – what shall I call it? – the *maternal telepathy* that sent my mother running headlong from the telephone to the station after I had called her, that night' (40).

Still, just as the heroine in "Little Snow White" is abandoned to her fate in the woods, abandoned baby narratives continue to be written by contemporary novelists. In *Light On Snow*, a newborn baby is found abandoned in snowy woods. 'It's like those fairy tales my wife used to read the kids, Sweetser says. "Carpenter goes into the woods and finds a

baby" (57). Nicky, the child narrator, and her father, have moved to a remote house following the death of Nicky's mother and baby sister in a car crash. The death of the mother is the real beginning of Nicky's tale, as in many fairy tales, and there is a point at which Nicky rationalises that the baby she and her father find in the woods and save would have died, if her mother and sister had lived, because she and her father would not have been in their remote house, walking in the woods. Blood figures in this narrative, with Nicky's perception that she and her father and the woman, Charlotte, do not have blood in common but are united by the presence of the abandoned baby. Then there is the blood of Nicky's first period, and her sight of the bloody sheets in the motel room where Charlotte gave birth.

There is a mooted 'happy adoption' at the end of the novel when, on Christmas Eve, the abandoned baby is observed at the heart of a foster family prior to certain adoption. Its blood mother, Charlotte, although professing love, has admitted that she doesn't have the resources to care for her baby and the reader senses she is not going to fight for her. Finally, there is the cottage that Nicky and her father keep passing, small and white, with candles in the windows, a woman with brown hair, and a clutch of boys, and no father in evidence. This is not exactly a gingerbread house, but a tantalising tableau of family life for Nicky, and the merging of the two families is subtly sketched as a desirable outcome beyond the actual ending of the book.

In *If You Were Mine*, a similar happiness beyond the ending of the book is projected for Aurora. Like Snow White, Aurora has survived abandonment and loss and even a number of what might be described as 'little deaths' – the series of disappearances of people close to her, as well as the abortive journey through southern Ireland with Rose's baby. Having reached a place of contentment, one in which it appears that Aurora is still on amiable terms with Rose and Jem, it's clear that she intends to explore this happiness further (276).

The ending of the novel, then, is the fictional equivalent of a fairy tale ending where the marriage of the prince and princess leaves the real narrative to begin beyond the page.

"Rapunzel": The Adoptee as Captive and Commodity

Many a girl
had an old aunt
who locked her in the study
to keep the boys away.
They would play rummy
or lie on the couch
and touch and touch.
Old breast against young breast…

Anne Sexton's "Rapunzel"
Transformations (30).

As with the princess in "Sleeping Beauty", the young woman incarcerated in the tower, which is the defining image of the "Rapunzel" tale, presents a disturbing portrait of captivity, passivity and sexual exploitation. Like the Count's desire, which drives the

narrative of the Grimm's earliest version of "Snow White" as well as Angela Carter's reworking of it, "Rapunzel" is driven by the desire of an enchantress. From desire, the narrative moves through betrayal, revenge, and, finally, the healing power of love.

The tale begins with the couple who long for children but have none. The wife gazes down from a window that overlooks the garden of an enchantress and is overcome with a desire to eat the lush green rampion that grows there (73). When the wife insists that she will die if she does not eat some, her husband climbs over the wall into the garden and picks the rampion for her. But once the wife has tasted the stolen leaves, her desire increases and, inevitably, the husband is caught by the enchantress in the act of stealing. She tells him that his wife will soon deliver a child and that the couple must hand it over to her: 'It shall be well treated and I will care for it like a mother' (74).

This arrangement, which the couple honours, can be read as a type of surrogacy contract, manipulated into being by the prospective adoptive mother who is portrayed here as an enchantress, or witch. Clearly, she wants a child, and although she is described as powerful, feared by the whole world, we also understand that she is too old to bear the perfect baby she desires. So the enchantress transfers her own hunger for the forbidden to the wife, focussing the woman's desire on the green leaves of the rampion. When the child is born, the enchantress takes her away and names her Rapunzel, which is only another name for rampion, reinforcing the fact that the child was the object of desire all along.

In *The Good Parents* by Joan London, there are several "Rapunzel" type narrative strands: the runaway daughter, Maya, meets and falls under the erotic thrall of her boss, Maynard; as a schoolgirl, Maya's mother, Toni, was picked up by the gangster, Cy Fisher, and kept for years in a mysteriously passive marriage, estranged from her own family, until she found the will to break free. In describing the office where the daughter, Maya, has fallen into a sexual relationship with her boss, London writes that in Maya's mind 'it was a

room at the top of a tower, floating amongst the clouds, detached from the world', an image with which the author, knowingly or not, connects Maya to "Rapunzel".

In a *New York Times* review of London's novel, entitled "Kept Women", Roxana Robinson asks: 'What is the nature of erotic thraldom? What sort of secret pact does it imply?' And again: 'What's the appeal of subservience?' (1). These are questions that naturally arise when reading "Rapunzel", for her captivity is the result of a secret pact, made before she was born, between her biological parents and the enchantress. Unlike the heroine in "Sleeping Beauty", Rapunzel is fully conscious in her passivity, and in this respect her position is identical to that of an adopted child. Robinson offers no answers to her own questions, hypothesising instead that 'it's human nature, a female yearning towards yielding. Perhaps there's something irresistible and necessary about this kind of enchantment' (4). I would argue, however, that while the adult women in *The Good Parents* may exhibit a desire to yield, in "Rapunzel" the powerless child is represented as a commodity, tradeable, intended as a life-time captive, an adoptee.

In *If You Were Mine,* Rose's birth mother, Cristina, is a twice 'kept' woman. Of Eastern European origin, she has been the victim of human trafficking for the sex trade and finds herself incarcerated in a farmhouse outside Dublin with little hope of escape from her vicious and unpredictable courier, Ludo. Cristina craves the luxury of hot baths as badly as the wife in "Rapunzel" craved the witch's rampion. When finally she resorts to flight, she ends up in the house of the music teacher, Maeve McGinnis, who develops what Cristina delicately describes as a crush. Cristina earns a little money but it is not enough to live on. 'I sensed that suited Maeve, as she seemed to want to keep me close' (258).

Aspects of Cristina's character belong both to Rapunzel and to the relinquishing mother, since Cristina's pregnancy and, eventually, her newborn child proves something of an inconvenience in Maeve's quiet household. Cristina's poverty and kept-woman status

ensure that, in the end, she gives up the baby for adoption, freeing her to become the unfettered object of Maeve's affection. But in a move that reverses the order of the fairy tale narrative, once Cristina has deposited her baby with the nuns, she escapes to America. Once established there, Maeve's letters go unanswered, so rather than the betrayed 'enchantress' being the one who banishes her young slave, Maeve McGinnis is instead banished by her lesbian lover. Unlike the fairy tale enchantress, however, Maeve has a conscience, and ultimately suffers the guilt of having made Cristina relinquish her baby.

It is a strange aspect of this fairy tale that once Rapunzel's parents have parted with their child, nothing more is heard of them. Although they must have been heartbroken by the loss of this longed-for baby, they slip so quickly from the page that a reader must suspect manipulation of the point of view this story is being told from. Is it really the enchantress in control here, relegating the biological parents to mere donors of egg and sperm, privileging nurture over nature? If this is so, the enchantress does adoptive mothers no favours, for the sympathy of the reader is not with her but with the captured child, Rapunzel. Having paid for the baby in quantities of fresh rampion, the enchantress asserts her ownership. "I Am Your Mother; She Was a Carrying Case" is the indignant yet poignant title of an essay on adoption by Margot Gayle Backus, and it would be difficult to find a more succinct summation of the fairy tale enchantress's attitude towards her adopted child.

In discussing "Rapunzel", Bettelheim says that 'the sorceress wanted Rapunzel more than her parents did, or so it seems' (148). In fact, Bettelheim is remarkably uncritical of the enchantress's behaviour, charging her only with having 'acted from too much love for Rapunzel and not out of wickedness' (149). The logic of this interpretation is difficult to fathom, since the enchantress had already negotiated possession of Rapunzel before her birth; rather than having 'loved' an actual child, she desired to possess one. However,

Bettelheim only remarks that 'to love so selfishly and foolishly is wrong, but not evil' (149).

In my novel, Aurora takes Rose's baby and drives away from Dublin. While the reader must be concerned about her state of mind, which is greatly overwrought, her love for Jem is never in any doubt. Aurora is acting from too much love, and must either come to her senses or suffer the consequences, for simply wanting something more than someone else does not bestow the right of ownership. While Bettelheim may be correct in stressing how 'consoling it is to the child to be told, in symbolic fashion, that in his own body he possesses the means to gain what he wishes', and by this he is referring to the tresses which carry the prince to Rapunzel and, later, her healing tears that reverse his blindness, equally, it may be disquieting for an adopted child (who will doubtless have been told how much they were 'wanted') to believe that their adoptive parent/s gained possession by wanting them more than the biological parent/s (149).

When Rapunzel reaches the age of twelve, the enchantress incarcerates her in a high tower in the middle of a forest, to which there is no entrance. Now, Rapunzel is in a precarious position, as dangerously poised in her life as my fictional character, Rose Mulcahy, or the unknown child in the red coat, for the enchantress may tire of Rapunzel and leave her to die of hunger and thirst. Outwardly calm, Rapunzel embodies the passivity of the adopted child and, as it turns out, the enchantress does not abandon her but visits every day. From the enchantress's point of view, she too endures a type of captivity, since she is tethered to the incarcerated child, although we hear no complaint from her.

The familiar refrain from this tale runs 'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair to me', a command that hints at other physical demands which the isolated Rapunzel may be subjected to (74). When a prince is drawn to the vicinity of the tower by the sound of the young girl's singing, he observes the enchantress climb up to Rapunzel by means of the

girl's long hair. After that, it is inevitable that he will find his way up into the tower, and so he does, repeatedly visiting her by night. This rescue, and eventual escape from the tower, also occurs in my novel, when Cristina, having been rescued by Maeve, departs for America in the unsatisfactory role of nanny but soon establishes a fully independent life. As with Rapunzel's hair, the means of Cristina's escape – her talent for dressmaking – comes from within herself.

In *The Brothers Grimm,* Jack Zipes notes that in the Grimm's 1812 edition of the tales Rapunzel asks the enchantress why her clothes are all too tight and no longer fit (13). This revelation of pregnancy unleashes her captor's fury. Rapunzel is subsequently banished to a desert, where she lives with her children. The children are described as twins, who, it must be assumed, were conceived with the prince, a sexual and emotional betrayal that the enchantress was unable to forgive. Had the adoptive relationship been a healthy one, the prince and Rapunzel could simply have declared their love and arranged to marry. The fact that they were forced to meet clandestinely means that they understood that Rapunzel's sexual relationship with the prince was robbing the witch of something she wanted. Bettelheim makes the point that when the enchantress visits Rapunzel it is via 'the same tresses which permit Rapunzel to establish a relationship to the prince' (148). But rather than drawing a sexual similarity from this he interprets it as symbolic of the transference of power from parent to lover, although there is no sign in the tale that the enchantress intends to relinquish Rapunzel to a lover, quite the contrary (149).

As with other tales, Bettelheim criticises the heroine: 'Both Rapunzel and the prince act immaturely…and Rapunzel also cheats by not telling what she did' (149). His summary of the tale is that it 'illustrates fantasy, escape, recovery, and consolation,' (149). However, when read in the context of adoption, "Rapunzel" presents surrogate motherhood as acceptable, baby-buying as unpleasant yet fair, provided one promises to 'care for it like a

mother' (74). Through its omissions and silences, "Rapunzel" is dismissive of biological parents, skewing the adoption process towards the adoptive parent's point of view, although the adoptive mother is portrayed as scheming and manipulative, her love represented as a desire for exclusivity. By keeping Rapunzel captive, her attitude echoes that of the adoptive mother in A.M. Homes' novel, *In A Country of Mothers*: 'We love you very much. Why isn't that enough?' (262). It is the pain of unrequited love that causes the enchantress to cast Rapunzel into the desert. Similarly, in my novel, it is a sense of unrequited love that hovers between Maeve McGinnis and Cristina, and which flares in Grace's bafflement following Rose's abrupt departure from home.

In the fairy tale, the enchantress's revenge is not only directed towards Rapunzel; when she confronts the prince he falls from the tower and is blinded, thus paying the penalty for his nocturnal visits. In the end, after a period of suffering, Rapunzel meets her prince in the desert and, once her tears restore his sight, they live happily ever after with their children.

The relationships that dominate this tale are between the enchantress and Rapunzel, and Rapunzel and the prince. However, in an adoptive reading, the relationships that matter most are between Rapunzel and her adoptive mother, the enchantress, and the blood bonds between Rapunzel, her biological parents, and her own children. Since the parents never search for Rapunzel once they have given her up, for an adoptee like her, and my novel's Rose Mulcahy, it is their newborn children who represent the first tangible blood-relationships of their lives. The adopted character, Jodie, in A. M. Homes's novel, *In A Country of Mothers*, tentatively explores this possibility when she asks a doctor about her chances of getting pregnant: 'It was something she had to ask. Not that she was planning on it, but she supposed it was one way of getting grounded in this world. If you have no lineage, make one' (210).

A.M. Homes is an adoptee who has explored adoption in both memoir and fiction. In

her novel, Jodie is stalked by a woman who believes she is Jodie's biological mother. The woman, Claire Roth, is also Jodie's therapist, a fact which places the girl in a doubly vulnerable position. In an uneasy parallel of this fictional narrative, Homes's autobiographical essay, "Witness Protection", documents her anxiety at being contacted, at the age of thirty-one, by her biological mother. They speak for the first time on the telephone and, 'Hers is the most frightening voice I've ever heard; low, nasal, gravelly, vaguely animal and kind of witchy' (22). When Homes receives a letter from her mother – via a lawyer – which has clearly been opened and presumably read, Homes exclaims, despairingly: 'that's one of the pathological complications of adoption, adoptees don't really have rights, their lives are about supporting the secrets, the needs and desires of others' (21). In fairy tale, the same is true of the captive adoptee in "Rapunzel".

The 'mistaken adoption' narrative of *In A Country Of Mothers* adds a further category – although one that is less frequently found – to Marianne Novy's 'disastrous adoption', 'happy adoption' and 'happy discovery' narratives. It is a pattern that also occurs in the short story, "Tresspasses", by Alice Munro, in which a couple and their only child set up home in a new town; before long, a woman, Delphine, who works at the local hotel, manipulates the ten-year-old into a secret friendship, convinced that she is her biological mother. In fact, the couple had adopted Delphine's baby, but that baby had died in an accident.

With their tendency to treat the adoptee's affections as a commodity that can be bargained for, mistaken adoption narratives are unsettling because once the claim to maternal blood becomes contested and uncertain, affected characters have no firm ground on which to stand. In "Tresspasses", the adopted child says of a television soap show: 'Children and grown people too in these stories had often turned out to belong to quite different families from those they had always accepted as their own. Strangers who were

sometimes crazy and dangerous had appeared out of the blue with their catastrophic claims and emotions, lives were turned upside down' (224).

While Rapunzel appears to be unaware of her adoption, never acknowledging the absence of a blood relationship between herself and the enchantress, in her ignorance she becomes a commodity, the result of a bargain struck. However, her readiness to accept the prince into the tower may indicate that she is not so much ignorant as merely biding her time until an escape route presents itself.

A modern re-working of Rapunzel as an adopted child would inevitably include, after her expulsion from the tower, a search for the lost birth parents, particularly as by then she has her own children to introduce to them. In my novel, the young, unmarried Iris gives birth to a baby and is immediately spirited away to a convent laundry, her baby boy adopted out whether she likes it or not. Iris escapes in a similar fashion to Rapunzel, marrying an electrician who comes to rewire the convent. But whereas Rapunzel seems to love her prince, all Iris cares about is the weekly pilgrimage from one garden centre to another in the hope of finding her boy. Unlike the biological mother portrayed in "Rapunzel", Iris's mother, Renata, 'worries every day of her life where that baby went to' (266).

Neither the biological nor the adoptive mother emerges from "Rapunzel" as a good mother. Only Rapunzel, bartered for a quantity of rampion and thus clearly defined as a viable commodity, embodies any sense of goodness, though this is countered by her necessary act of deception. Potentially, the tale offers a way for the disconnected to connect through the forging of new blood relationships, for this seems to be where Rapunzel's happiness ultimately lies, however, as published by the Brothers Grimm, and interpreted by Bettelheim, the significance of its mother/child narrative remains remarkably understated.

Adoption and Difference in “The Ugly Duckling”

In Hans Christian Andersen’s tale “The Ugly Duckling”, genetic difference is signalled from the beginning as a mother duck patiently hatches her eggs. She sits for a long time on the largest, which stubbornly refuses to crack, but when the last duckling finally emerges he is bigger than her other children and rather ugly and ungainly. However, he takes easily to the water and in less than a heartbeat the mother duck, watching from the bank, exclaims ‘how well he uses his legs, and how upright he holds himself! He is my own child, and he is not so very ugly after all if you look at him properly’ (16). She also remarks early in the tale that the other ducklings are the image of their father, who is ‘so unkind, he never

comes to see me' (15). In contemporary terms, the mother defines herself as a single parent, raising her brood alone. In the context of adoption, she is a well-meaning adoptive mother, patient at the hatching stage and quick to point to her child's accomplishments. However, when the animals in the farmyard torment the Ugly Duckling, his mother attempts to defend him but is told by a spiteful duck that her son 'is so big and ugly' that 'therefore he must be turned out' (16).

This out-of-hand judgement is reminiscent of the behaviour of the wicked step-mother in the Grimm's tale, "Sweetheart Roland". In Andersen's tale, the cruel reaction of the other animals, both in the farmyard and in the wider world beyond, insists that society's natural inclination is to reject and eliminate difference, whereas the vengeance of the step-mother in "Sweetheart Roland" appears to be focussed upon the absence of a blood relationship between herself and her stepdaughter.

Whether either notion would comfort or reassure a young reader who senses their own difference from the family (a same culture adoptee), or from the culture and race as a whole (an inter-country adoptee), is doubtful. At an age when an adopted child would be reading this 'literary' fairy tale, they would also be beginning to explore questions of identity, as Rose does in my novel, and are probably already experiencing the kind of schoolyard/farmyard bullying that both Rose and the Ugly Duckling endure.

Using Andersen's tale as a model, flight would seem to be the obvious escape route. In my novel, we do not know whether or not Rose has read this tale, but her flight from home echoes the flight of the miserable duckling. She is searching for her biological mother, while the duckling is escaping an abusive situation. Like the duckling, Rose finds refuge with a stranger.

In a cottage on the moor, where he has been given temporary shelter, the Ugly Duckling says to the old woman's hen, when trying to describe his longing to swim and dive beneath

the water, 'You don't understand me'. 'Who can understand you, I wonder?' says the hen. 'Thank your good fortune that you have been received here. Are you not in a warm room, and in society from which you may learn something' (19). The hen ends by advising the duckling to learn to lay eggs and purr, in other words to fit in with his surroundings as soon as possible, an attitude which reflects common assumptions that the adopted child should both be grateful and blend chameleon-like into his or her constructed family and the wider community.

Unable to comply with the hen's advice, the Ugly Duckling goes out into the world again. When he sees a flight of wild swans he feels an overwhelming excitement, stretching out his neck towards them and uttering a cry so strange that he frightens himself. This inchoate recognition reinforces the view, expressed elsewhere in fairy tale, that blood will somehow recognise its own.

During winter, the lake freezes up and despite his efforts the Ugly Duckling becomes frozen fast in the ice. Rescued by a passing peasant and revived at his cottage, he becomes afraid of the peasant's wife and children and runs away again. However, spring is on the way, and with the change of season he feels stronger. When he sees three beautiful swans on the lake he decides to let them kill him: better that than to be pecked by ducks and hens and harmed by children. But the swans welcome him as one of their own and stroke his neck. Children come and throw bread and cake and he is declared the most beautiful of all the swans. He had never dreamed of such happiness, and such is the euphoria an adoptee may dream of experiencing in a reunion with people to whom they are genetically linked.

Hans Andersen's story, with its elements of autobiography[7], is all about genetic links, blood truths that will erase all that has gone before, if only they can be salvaged. Unlike

[7] As the plain and often awkward son of a poor couple, Andersen's rise from obscurity to literary fame echoes the transformation narrative of "The Ugly Duckling". Andersen's sexuality is often described as having been ambiguous, and "The Ugly Duckling", with its emphasis on difference, has been interpreted as a queer tale.

my fictional character, Rose Mulcahy, the Ugly Duckling never returns to the duck pond, indeed, there is no reason to suppose that he could even find his way there, or that he would be welcomed if he did; there is no attachment drawn between him and the adoptive mother duck, who did her maternal best but in the end was unable to protect him, either from the unkindness of others, his perception of his own difference, or the longing to be like the beautiful swans.

In Andersen's original story, the Ugly Duckling endures great suffering before the story is transformed into one of 'happy discovery', a narrative type which Marianne Novy believes 'encourage[s] the dreams of adoptees that meeting their birth family will tell them who they are' (2). However, in a modern British stage musical reworking of the tale, *Honk!,* writers George Stiles and Anthony Drewe have drastically altered Andersen's tale. Instead of being bullied by farmyard animals, Ugly, as the duckling is called, is lured from home by a cat that plans to eat him. Ugly escapes from the cat but has no idea how to get back home. He is trying to find his mother, Ida, whom he loves. After many perilous adventures, Ugly is frozen in a blizzard until the tears of his adoptive mother restore him to life with their warmth. He emerges from the snow as a swan. Invited to migrate with the other swans, and urged by his adoptive mother to join them, in the end he chooses kith over kin and returns to the duck pond with his adoptive mother and his new love, a young swan called Penny.

Allowing the mature bird to return to the duck pond in this production radically overturns the blood bias of Andersen's story. In the musical, the adoptive mother is portrayed as offering unconditional love to her ungainly baby and, best of all, her love is reciprocated by the child. Since adoption was only made legal in the United Kingdom in 1926, this modern adaptation of Andersen's narrative perhaps reflects the shift in social attitudes towards adoption and adoptive parents, from the mistrust of the past to something

approaching acceptance and respect. With its target audience of young people and over three thousand productions worldwide, I would argue that *Honk!,* with its positive adoption message, offers greater comfort and reassurance to constructed families than Andersen's original tale, or, indeed, any of the other tales under discussion.

Adoption novels which put adoptees through an "Ugly Duckling" search for identity, inevitably involve a search for the birth mother. Once she is found, there is the dilemma of whether or not the adoptee will return to the adoptive family, and on what terms. George Eliot's *Silas Marner* famously depicts the adoptee, Eppie, as unwilling to leave her adoptive father, even though her biological father is wealthy. In Margaret Forster's *Shadow Baby*, the birth mother says to her daughter of her adoptive mother, '"And you, without knowing why, felt alien to her, and then when you found you were adopted you thought that was why, didn't you? That you'd been a cuckoo in a nest and if you could find the right nest – Oh my God, nests and cuckoos…"' (319). In Foster's novel, the adoptee, Shona, finds her birth mother and remains with her and her family for two years before finally returning to live close to her adoptive mother. In fairy tale terms, Shona returns to the duck pond.

In my survey of contemporary adoption fiction, such returns are rare. The adoptee Cecile in *The Good Parents* remains resolutely opposed to any form of return. Likewise, Michael Ondaatje's *Divisidero,* which incorporates within its wandering narrative a number of informal adoptions, describes almost the same number of permanent separations.

In *If You Were Mine,* at the moment when Rose is first shocked by Jem's disappearance from child care and then slightly reassured by the knowledge that he is with Aurora, she compares her two mothers and expresses her previously unexpressed concern for her adoptive mother's wellbeing. 'At this very moment Grace could be slowly dying from

something that could've been fixed all along. Anyone would be wasting their breath trying to persuade her though' (252). Following this surfacing of emotion, Rose heads homewards along 'the old route she had taken so often after a trip to town with Grace' (252). At the end of the novel, I used Aurora's internal thoughts to convey the information that, although Rose has visited Cristina in Boston, she and Jem have returned to Ireland (276). The two will spend Christmas day with Rose's adoptive parents – a reversal of Andersen's original ending, but one that is in harmony both with Forster's novel and with *Honk!*

Conclusion

In consciously employing fairy tale influences in *If You Were Mine*, particularly in the development of characters and the creation of atmosphere, I wanted to present the powerful maternal blood messages contained in the tales as unsettling, discomforting, an added burden to a child already burdened with uncertainty. From the point of view of an adoptive mother, this seemed to me to be a true reading of the tales, which are possibly the most widely read of all adoption narratives. As such, fairy tales may exert a profound influence upon adoption-affected readers; possibly only international media coverage of celebrity adoptions, ubiquitous in recent times, is as readily accessible to young adoptees, or other children in constructed families, who might be beginning to secretly wonder about their own origins, identities and ethnicities.

The fairy tales discussed in this essay have been translated into many languages and are still being published and read. Clearly, despite social changes and the passage of time, their narratives of blood connection and disconnection, comfort and discomfort remain potent, both to children and adults. While writing my novel, and especially while researching both fairy tale and adoption literature, it became natural to question why, as parents, we continue to buy and tell such old, dark tales to our children. Surely, contemporary children's literature has more to offer than these violent and often bloody stories of abandonment and mother loss. And yet children in our society are often raised in families that have been divided and restructured by divorce and re-marriage, a factor which has made step-parenting perhaps even more common than in the days when mothers were lost in childbirth. In families that have been wholly or partly constructed by adoption, many children are raised in countries and cultures very distant from the one they were born into;

such children travel to the 'alien country', as Bettelheim put it, but in a very real sense (136).

Aside from constructed families, even children being raised by both biological parents may, from as little as a few weeks after birth, encounter a seemingly endless stream of 'step-mothers' or 'wicked witches' in the form of child carers, nursery assistants, teachers, breakfast club and after-school club supervisors. Even school holidays may be passed in vacation care. Although accepted as perfectly normal child-rearing practice, the relatively recent phenomenon of frequent mother/child separations may be one reason why the day-to-day lives of twenty-first century children appear to resonate as strongly as ever with the lives of their fairy tale counterparts.

With the power of fairy tales' archetypal narratives remaining undiluted, as one generation passes them to the next, inevitably the tales find their way into fiction, although their underlying presence there is often largely invisible through deep familiarity. In my research I discovered that many contemporary Western novels concerned with family relationships contained fairy tale elements. Sometimes the old stories appeared as the tightly stretched warp upon which new contexts had been woven; sometimes they acted as the weft, their familiar characters and storylines entwined with, and built upon, twenty-first century landscapes and culture.

Of the adoption and abandonment novels I read, most, like *The Good Parents; What Are You Like?; Fortune's Rocks; Light On Snow;* and *The Memory Keeper's Daughter,* had chosen to re-enforce fairy tale stereotypes. Anne Patchett's novel, *Run,* differed somewhat by depicting adopted children who regarded their adoptive mother as the 'good' mother. Ultimately, however, *Run* revolved around the all-consuming devotion of the children's relinquishing blood-mother and, in this respect, the narrative reverted to re-enforcing the blood messages found in fairy tales. Perversely, it was not a novel but the

stage musical, *Honk!,* which alone stood out as an instance of writers deliberately re-ordering a fairy tale narrative. *In A County of Mothers* was unusual in that it offered an example of the mistaken adoption narrative, providing me with a further category to add to the three types of adoption narrative already identified by Marianne Novy. Alice Munro's story, "Tresspasses" presented another example of a mistaken adoption narrative and, at the end of that story, the child, Lauren, is in the back seat of a car with her pyjamas covered in burrs. She wants to yell, 'but she knew that the only thing she could do was just sit and wait' (235).

This acknowledgement of the child's lack of agency, of the need to bide one's time, seems to embody both the helplessness of the adopted child as well as the message generated by fairy tales that, although children lack power they seem to have a greater facility than adults for attracting magical assistance. At the very least, if they wait quietly, they will eventually grow up and gain control of their own lives.

In general, the adoption narratives I read, with their inherent uncertainty, seemed to open up both fiction and fairy tale to destructive forces just as adoption narratives sometimes have the power to do in real life. Mothers and children who were split following the child's birth tended to gravitate towards relationships that would split again and again, which was why I chose to evoke Aristophanes' legend of the *Origin of Love* in my own novel.

While Bettelheim sparked my initial interest in fairy tales, on renewed acquaintance with his work I often found his Freudian interpretations even more disturbing than the tales themselves. Although *The Uses of Enchantment* remains an interesting and influential text in the canon of literature concerned with fairy tale, Bettelheim has not been without his critics; Marina Warner accuses him of having been responsible for the absence of good mothers from fairy tale, and Maria Tatar has strongly questioned whether his Freudian

interpretations are appropriate or even applicable to young children. In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion,* Jack Zipes says: 'it is time…to evaluate how they [fairy tales] impart values and norms to children which may actually hinder their growth, rather than help them to come to terms with their existential condition and mature autonomously as Bruno Bettelheim and others maintain' (54).

My own research into adoption in fairy tale focused on the ways in which adopted children and their adoptive mothers have been portrayed in the tales, as well as how fairy tale narratives continue to influence the way contemporary writers portray adoption in their fiction. In the latter case, it was disappointing to realise that, despite the sweeping social changes effected since the Grimm's tales were first collected and published, much the same underlying, obstinately held conviction that blood, as the saying goes, always has been, and always will be, thicker than water, appears to persist. With few exceptions, neither the fairy tales nor the fiction I read offered any alternative interpretation of adoptive relationships and yet, as an adoptive mother I would argue that maternal love based upon genealogy is not necessarily a given, and that an adoptive mother/child bond may, over the course of a lifetime, prove to be at least as thick or even thicker than many blood bonds.

So, if fairy tales and contemporary fiction re-enforce old prejudices, if fairy tales are still, as Elizabeth Wanning Harries says, 'stories to think with', how are adopted children and their families to move beyond them (101)? One positive improvement would be if fairy tales could become clearly situated as a genre within adoption literature. If adoptive parents were to realise that fairy tale narratives generally emphasise biological relationships at the expense of adoptive ones and that this, for the most part, is a reflection of an historical tendency for society to privilege nature over nurture, at least they would be forewarned when choosing which versions of these texts to read with their children. That

adoptive parents should be aware of fairy tale content seems particularly important in a social climate described in *The Many-Sided Triangle: Adoption in Australia,* as 'unsupportive of adoption' (74). So prevalent are fairy tales in Western culture, not only in literature but in film, theatre and advertising, that it would seem to be impossible to limit children's contact with the tales, however, parents who are aware of the messages being passed would have the opportunity to replace negative images of abandonment and adoption with reassuring interpretations.

As to the question my novel poses about how one lives with a history of abandonment, the answer appears to be (in the words of a relinquishing mother quoted in *The Many-Sided Triangle)* that 'what you give away you can never have back' (235). Those affected, such as adoptees, often reunite with biological parents with varying degrees of success. As I wanted to show in my novel, in which Aurora is never fully reconciled with Esther, nor Rose with Cristina, the way forward seems to lie in acknowledging the past yet forging new, meaningful relationships, in strengthening the conscious bonds formed with loved ones. Something of this process is described in *The Many-Sided Triangle,* where an adopted woman describes herself and her two mothers as 'in a way, pioneers of a new bond. A new relationship. A new kind of love. One that destroys all beliefs and boundaries created by an institutionalised society' (248).

Finally, my hope is that twenty-first century writers will begin to rework fairy tales, re-enforcing the value of maternal nurture in adoptive relationships and constructed families, defusing these tales of the eternal bigotry, the 'blood-ism', that has been passed down through their texts for so many centuries.

Appendix

The Child in the Red Coat:

Notes on an Intuitive Writing Process

Consider
a girl who keeps slipping off,
arms limp as old carrots,
into the hynotist's trance,
into a spirit world
speaking with the gift of tongues.
She is stuck in the time machine,
suddenly two years old sucking her thumb,
as inward as a snail,
learning to talk again.
She's on a voyage.
She is swimming further and further back,
up like a salmon,
struggling into her mother's pocketbook

Anne Sexton's "Sleeping Beauty"
Transformations. (90)

An intuitive writing process[8] resists explanation and is difficult to observe in action since, as Margaret Atwood states, 'If you started observing it while it was happening, you would kill it' (29). However, with hindsight, it has been possible to articulate the events, experiences, thoughts and ideas that collided to become *If You Were Mine*. Writing a novel-length work within a degree program meant that themes which would have emerged gradually during the first draft were forced to the surface even before I started writing, and perhaps it was the artificiality of the need for explanation and self-examination, while preparing my proposal in the early stages, that resulted in the lack of a narrative question. So, rather than working forwards from a narrative question or questions, *If You Were Mine* was mainly realised through the slow accumulation of material that could then be arranged in a way which the painter Joanna Field has described as 'what the eye likes'(17). However, there were moments when material arrived in my consciousness from sources other than the everyday, working, writing mind. As a part of the creative process that never fails to intrigue and surprise me, I believe that this aspect of my writing practise is a

[8] By intuitive I mean a method of writing fiction which is open to, and values, along with research and a disciplined writing practice, contributions to the finished work from dreams and other altered states of consciousness. The appendix to this essay contains notes on this aspect of my writing process.

valuable tool that ought to be included in any exegetical exploration of the creative work. Since the length limitations of this exegesis prohibit anything other than a brief discussion of this topic, I include, as an appendix, notes towards a future essay for any reader who may be interested.

In *Trance, Art and Creativity*, John Curtis Gowan describes various states of consciousness including 'the hypnagogic (falling asleep) and the hypnopompic (waking up) states with their special openness to suggestibility, vivid imagery, and the collective preconscious' (185). For me, the arrival of creative thoughts and ideas occurs at the crossover between sleep and waking and, more rarely, vice versa. Since accepting that this method of problem-solving, or moving the narrative forwards, produces valid results, I have grown to trust the process, actively encouraging the trance-like state that allows this material to surface.

It is a process that could be described as daydreaming, in that awareness is present, an element that is lacking during the involuntary process of dreaming. In *Prelogical Experience*, Tauber and Green describe the daydream as a state closely allied to true dreaming. Like the true dream, they say, the daydream 'calls upon the ordinarily more inaccessible sources of inner experience' (46). I visualise the transition from sleeping to waking as a kind of mental patrolling of liminal space in which one sometimes stumbles across things – words, phrases, images, ideas – that can be carried away and made use of.

More dramatic still is the content harvested from dreams. Many writers, from Robert Louis Stevenson – who is said to have dreamed the plot for "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" – to Coleridge, Jean Cocteau and Philip Roth, have documented their use of dreams. In *Night*, a book concerned with nocturnal experiences of all kinds, including the physiology and interpretation of dreams, A. Alvarez writes: 'Like most artists

of his generation, Roth assumes that Freud essentially got it right; dreams are a way of speaking' (209). In the chapter entitled "Art and Dreams" Alvarez states that 'Dreams are thinking without the intellect, thinking in bodily terms' (174).

> But that, of course, is also how the arts work – even the arts whose medium is language. They make thoughts thinkable and feelings apprehensible by using words or paint or clay or marble or musical notation or film to give, among other things, a kind of physical immediacy to the mental and emotional world. So it also makes sense that dreams should figure large as a source of creative inspiration (174).

Other writers appear to agree. In an interview on ABC Radio National's *Poetica* Podcast, Les Murray talks of poetry being like the daylight moon:

> It's a thing of dreams and the darkness and yet it persists in the day. It's like a dream that goes on during the times of rationality. And I think poetry's like that. It's a thing that contains the world of dream at all times. As well as the world of reason and the world of gesture, you know, of body; the three have to be there, all three of them have to be present.

In a recent interview with Miriam Cosic in *The Weekend Australian*, David Malouf says of his writing: 'I want books to unfold as if they were dreams and even to have the logic of dreams' (8). In the past, material which has arisen in my own dreams has often turned out to be more graphic and memorable than scenes that I have patiently worked at in a more orthodox manner. This might be because the action of dreaming, which Alvarez describes as 'thinking without the intellect', produces images rather than language, and images, like music, speak in a visceral way, short-circuiting the complex network through which we process language and which may, in the long run, slightly dilute a highly potent image

In *If You Were Mine,* the scene in which an unnamed child in a red coat is observed falling from a bridge arrived in this way. In the published work, the child falls on page 191, but in early drafts it occurred much nearer to the middle, soon after the point where I had allowed myself to run out of plot. (Initially, Grace and Rose's story, entitled *Swan Light* after a poem by May Sarton which I planned to incorporate in the text, made up part two of a planned three parts, but as this resulted in the main character, Aurora, being absent from

the narrative for very many pages, I later broke up their story and filtered in the important scenes as flashbacks.)

So, I had allowed myself to run out of words and become agitated; I then spent many hours 'daydreaming', moving slowly around the material like a water-diviner dowsing for subterranean supplies. One evening, working late in bed on my laptop, I grew drowsy as I stared at the text on the screen, and drifted off to sleep. Sometime later I woke, having dreamed of the child walking on the bridge, and of the inattentive mother deep in her own thoughts walking ahead; I had dreamed of the child reaching for the balloon and falling from the bridge. It was all still so vivid when I woke that it felt like an event which was actually happening nearby. Afraid that it would evaporate, as dreams are prone to do, I typed it as quickly as I could into the laptop, and the finished scene appears in the final draft much as it did when I first wrote it down; it is a piece of fiction that arrived fully formed, rising from the subconscious mind and negotiating its passage into consciousness via the medium of dream.

The scene continues to intrigue me with its sense of 'otherness'; it is as if I had not written it but come across it on a scrap of paper blowing along the street. Simple in concept, it is laden with meaning. The child in the red coat is an archetypal character from fairy tale, sometimes, obviously, Red Riding Hood, the good little girl who, without a protective maternal presence, is in danger of being raped and devoured by the wolf who has already devoured her grandmother. By the time the character, Rose, observes the child's catastrophic fall she is already uneasy about her supposed 'goodness', troubled by whether or not this quality has rubbed off on her from the nuns who cared for her before she came to live with Grace and Pat. She has drawn a picture of her family as a pyramid with herself balanced precariously on top, about to fall. But the red coat is also a recurring motif in illustrations of many fairy tales where young girls flee through dark woods with

scarlet cloaks wrapped about their vulnerable, childish bodies. My own feeling is that, in the context of the novel, the child in the red coat is representative of all children in peril, both in fairy tale and in real life, of the precariousness of children's lives, which is my novel's underlying lament.

Other writers have found their material being shaped not only by dreams but arising unexpectedly from other sources. In "Bones and Black Puddings", Linda Gray Sexton writes of details from fairy tales cropping up in the novel she was writing.

> I was startled to realize that the fairy tales were still deeply twined into my unconscious life, and because the act of writing taps the vein of the unconscious so silently, the tales flood back into my current stories with their metaphors and morals at the times when I am most unaware, most deeply immersed in creation (316).

In the same essay she recounts a dream she experienced while writing a memoir about her relationship with her mother, the poet Anne Sexton, and the poem she carried intact out of dream into consciousness. 'The dream and the poem's meanings both whirl around the central image of cannibalism – as does "The Juniper Tree", where the step-mother and father eat the child' (312).

In *Trance, Art and Creativity*, Gowan insists that, 'As we become more aware of our dreams, preconscious material becomes more accessible to the ego; hence we become more spontaneous and as a result, more creative' (203). Certainly the spontaneous arrival of a scene that is both moving and symbolic comes as a gift to a writer, especially when one has deliberately moved towards a point of uncertainty and yet feels driven to proceed, to finish the draft in a way that will not only give the eye what it likes but also the ear, the publisher, and possible future readers. At the point of harvesting such dream material one simply writes it down, gratefully, and moves on; there is no attempt to analyse the process through which it has become available. However it is not possible to research creativity, intuition, and dreams without passing through the territory mapped out by Sigmund Freud

and the many others since who have theorised dreams and the dreaming experience.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Freud asserts that, however far-fetched the material of dreams, it is composed entirely from within the dreamer's own experience. He says, 'the dream has at its disposal recollections which are inaccessible to the waking person' (14). In remarking on memory in dreams, Freud concludes that once we own something we can never lose it.

What is most interesting to me as a writer is the way material in dreams is organised, with fragments of remembered experience cropping up – sometimes years after the event – to create unusual juxtapositions. Of this apparent recycling of experiences, Kristjana Gunnars comments, in the essay "Theory and Fiction": 'The acceptance of the derivative nature of writing conditions us toward a form of humility, which is far more poetic and human than the arrogance we associate with the idea of originality' (59). This magpie tendency to horde and utilise the minutia of life, to organise it into graphically played out scenes, brings the act of dreaming remarkably close to the act of creating fiction.

As with the sleight-of-hand operating between conscious memory and dream memory, a large part of the research undertaken for my creative work remains invisible in this exegesis. I refer to the research trip I made to Ireland to gather geographical information and, most importantly, to listen to the Irish language as spoken on the streets and in the shops and cafes of Dublin, and in the small towns of County Tipperary. As a non-Irish writer intending to represent Irish characters in my novel, this was an intense and vital aspect of information gathering if I was to avoid creating stereotypical Irish dialogue. When I returned home, the problem became one of holding Ireland and its language in my head until I could finish writing it down. I approached this by sticking exclusively to reading Irish authors, listening for the sound of the Irish language in their work, carefully noting how they represented this sound on the page. By the time I had finished writing and

revising the novel, I felt able to eliminate almost all rendered dialect and rely on syntax alone to express the sound of Irish voices. While I had no model for this approach and my decision to adopt it was purely instinctive, it seemed to work to the extent that the published novel survived, unscathed, the eye of an Irish-born literary critic.

As a result of examining the contribution made by intuition to this novel, I understand that, as a writer, there will always be something about what I have written that I do not understand or did not mean to say out loud. If I do understand, it may not be until some time later; if what has been said was something I never meant to express out loud, I must accept that I have let this particular cat out of the bag. In *Prelogical Experience*, the authors state that, 'The dream is a message. What one does with the message is the vital issue. If one, so to speak, cripples the message and does not permit it to express its meaning, then one has done the dream a disservice' (177). In other words, cats cannot be kept in bags, particularly by writers.

In the case of the child in the red coat, the book was written, published and launched, before I really gained an inkling of what the scene might mean to me, personally. Now, in interpreting that scene in the light of Freud's belief that the image is not made up but belongs to me, I imagine that it constitutes part of my complex, inner landscape; the scene on the bridge is, perhaps, symbolic of my own, unobserved at the time, loss of fertility. In this scenario, I am the woman walking with my hands in my overcoat pockets, indifferent to the child who skips behind, neither noticing nor mourning her loss until much further on into my own narrative. As *The Many-Sided Triangle* points out, the concealed effects of unacknowledged grief are a continuous thread in the lives of many adoptive parents (100). While it is probable that some part of my research, or else an incident or observation barely registered at the time, was responsible for reactivating what is now an old, private wound, I am guessing that my subconscious mind, with the whip of publication cracking day and

night, obligingly hijacked the whole experience to put together a scene that would stand memorably in the finished work. The great thing about being a writer is that nothing is ever wasted or lost; we may horde with impunity.

Finally, I can only agree wholeheartedly and from personal experience with the beautiful metaphor employed by Jean Cocteau on the subject of the contribution of dream to creativity, as quoted by R. Ochse, in his book *Before The Gates of Excellence*: 'The poet is at the disposal of his night. His role is humble, he must clean his house and await its due arrival' (232).

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