When the Maiden Becomes Death: Contemplating the Monstrous Girl in the Fairy Tale Reimaginings of Angela Carter and Helen Oyeyemi

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Abstract for Masters

When the Maiden Becomes Death: Contemplating the Monstrous Girl in the Fairy Tale Reimaginings of Angela Carter and Helen Oyeyemi

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When Helen Oyeyemi's wicked stepmother, Boy, shows her friend her nightmarish engagement gift from her husband-to-be—a handcrafted bracelet of a white-gold snake whose body wraps around the length of Boy's forearm—her friend replies: "I mean, could that scream 'wicked stepmother' any louder?" (110). Boy's bracelet foreshadows her fate as the wicked stepmother, but her evilness is equivocal: she exiles one daughter to protect another. Angela Carter's Snow White seems to become somewhat monstrous, too, after she is violently assaulted. When Angela Carter and Helen Oyeyemi retell a fairy tale, they reject the black-and-white lens that the conventional fairy tale is told through. Both writers unsettle the fairy tale tradition by unearthing and exposing the darker meanings that remain buried in these original tales. I argue that it is most notably through the figure of the monstrous girl that Carter and Oyeyemi foreground the patriarchal and misogynist politics that the fairy tale encodes yet overlooks. Carter and Oyeyemi, in their respective "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty" retellings, turn the familiar character of the innocent girl monstrous to emphasize what it means to be monstrous—and that to be monstrous is not a simple question of being virtuous or cruel, good or bad. Carter's and Oyeyemi's female monsters are complex, and I further examine how their actions originate from a desire to attain agency over their bodies. When Carter and Oyeyemi retell a fairy tale, they do not complicate the fairy tale but rather reveal that it is already intricate, filled with hidden messages.

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Dedication

There's also something very female about fairy tales—

Definitely. Historically, they translate into something like "grandmother stories." Very much about the woman saying, "come, my children, let me tell you this."

—from an interview with Helen Oyeyemi by Emily Pohl-Weary

To my grandmother, who tells me my favourite stories.
Στη γιαγιά μου, που μου λέει τις αγαπημένες μου ιστορίες.

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Introduction

It is the pairing of the nonhuman man and the innocent girl that often makes a fairy tale a fairy tale. A monstrous figure, the male craves something from the female. A virtuous figure, the girl cannot know any better. But what happens when the pure girl becomes the monster? Angela Carter and Helen Oyeyemi are interested in the latent content of fairy tales, and examine what it means for the girl to become what she fears. I investigate how each writer reconfigures, and even distorts, traditional fairy tales to construct a female being who is antithetical to these more familiar tales. Looking at Carter's and Oyeyemi's retellings of "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty," I analyze how each writer depicts female monstrosity: where they take parallel approaches and where they diverge—and why. How do Carter and Oyeyemi make the character of the innocent girl unhuman, monstrous? What might it mean for her to be monstrous?

While there exists some research on female monstrosity vis-à-vis Carter's and Oyeyemi's work, I am interested in positioning these writers and their monstrous girls in conversation with one another. Unlike the male monster that frequently yearns for a form of sexual gratification through the girl in fairy tales, I argue that the desires of Carter's and Oyeyemi's monstrous girls are much more complex and are rooted in their struggle to attain agency over their bodies. I begin by studying their "Snow White" retellings, Carter's "The Snow Child" and Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird*, particularly calling attention to the significance of colours and their common emphasis on the symbol of the mirror and the act of mirroring. I then turn to their "Sleeping Beauty" retellings, Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love" and Oyeyemi's *White Is for Witching*, to weigh their constructions of the girl as ravenous-but-reluctant vampire.

It takes practice

to see myself

without a mirror.

—Damian Rogers

She bites!

"Sneewittchen" is a tale we all know. A girl, a stepmother. A girl, the shade of fresh snowfall; her hair crow-black and her lips as red as the poisoned apple that her stepmother will try to kill her with. It is a fairy tale whose translated title reveals itself when these chromatic images are assigned to a young girl: "Snow Drop," or "Little Snow White." As Cristina Bacchilega maintains, "The narrative structure and thematic interpretation [of the fairy tale] have…been comparatively homogeneous, fixing "Snow White" more firmly than most fairy tales in our imaginations" (29). But the tale of Little Snow White, or Snow White, is as much about her monstrous stepmother as it is about the title character. Indeed, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar propose that the centuries-old fairy tale should alternately be titled "Snow White and Her Wicked Stepmother" to emphasize the female-female relationship that assumes center stage in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's original tale. Retellings of "Snow White" largely preserve this vicious mother-daughter relationship, including Angela Carter's "The Snow Child," a two-page story featured in her collection of fairy tale retellings, *The Bloody Chamber*. A writer known for what has been labelled her distinctly feminist, gothic, and erotic fairy tale rewritings, Carter takes the fairy tale and points it to a magic mirror of her own making. A distorted mirror that returns a fractured reflection—and in the cracks lie the gendered and sexual politics that remain latent in the original telling of the tale.

When Carter submits the fairy tale to her pen, she knows that it is the stepmother's wickedness that dominates the tale of Snow White. She knows that to rewrite "Snow White" is to write a tale of "female development and female jealousy" (Bacchilega 31)—of female rivalry and female violence. Gilbert and Gubar assert that to know the tale of the girl "as white as snow and as red as blood and as black as…wood" (Grimm and Grimm) is to know the evil maternal figure that occupies the role of her antithesis:

> [T]he central action of the tale—indeed, its only real action—arises from the relationship between these two women: the one fair, young, pale, the other just as fair, but older, fiercer; the one a daughter, the other a mother; the one sweet, ignorant, passive, the other both artful and active; the one a sort of angel, the other an undeniable witch. (36)

Gilbert and Gubar consolidate their one-word characterizations of the two female characters when they label Snow White "the angel-woman" and her stepmother, the Evil Queen, "the monster-woman" (36). But what is most compelling about Carter's version is the revelation that the Countess, who inhabits the role of the wicked stepmother, is not the only one with a monstrous nature. In "The Snow Child," Carter's Snow White, who remains nameless, can also be perceived as monstrous.

Carter opens her tale with a vivid three-word phrase that details the setting of her tale, the first word of which is borrowed from the opening of the original tale: "Midwinter—invincible, immaculate" (115). Winter overtakes the landscape, snow is in abundance; the colour white prevails, a colour that will soon be reflected in—both literally and symbolically—an innocent little girl. Winter is also indomitable, unconquerable—reminiscent of a villainous entity that cannot be quelled. Carter disrupts our expectation of the wicked older woman, linking power (and potential evilness) to the lightness of snow—and to the virtuous girl who will materialize from it. Bacchilega

even confirms that the first words of Carter's tale "immediately play with mimesis. Apparently descriptive, and objectively so, [the] phrase seems to rely like the fairy tale on abstractly symbolic elements of nature" (36). Carter's portrait of the setting continues: "Fresh snow fell on snow already fallen; when it ceased, the whole world was white" (115). Here the natural setting functions as a mirror (or might even be the magic mirror of Carter's tale) that reflects the dynamic between the female characters: the virtuous girl, new and "fresh," versus the older Countess, unpure and "already fallen" (being an allusion to the fallen woman). Considering the remarkable influence of the natural world in both the original and Carter's tale, the setting can indeed be interpreted as a mirror that symbolically discloses the deeper themes of the narrative. New snow settles on old(er) snow; it conceals and is a commanding presence, analogous to how the girl will become the object of the Count's desire, eclipsing the Countess and spurring her fervent jealousy.

Nestled between the two phrases that specify the setting of Carter's tale is a description of the Count and the Countess: "The Count and his wife go riding, he on a grey mare and she on a black one, she wrapped in the glittering pelts of black foxes; and she [wears] high, black, shining boots with scarlet heels, and spurs" (115). Such a definite chromatic portrait of the Countess in the snow-layered land—her black against the white landscape—speaks to Max Lüthi's observation that whereas "[t]he real world shows us a richness of different hues…, the folktale prefers clear, ultrapure colors" (qtd. in Vaz da Silva 240). "Ultrapure" colours reappear when the girl emerges from the natural landscape, with her "white skin, red mouth, [and] black hair" (Carter 115). It is also worth noting that while the Countess is coupled with the colour black and the girl is defined by the colour white, the Count is associated with the colour grey—the combination of black and white. Francisco Vaz da Silva explains that, in fairy tales, colours fulfill a role as "concrete semiotic markers" (241). He specifies that colours function as "chromatic codes" that frequently expose

"folk notions regarding womanhood" (241). In regard to the significance of the chromatic trinity of white, red, and black in the tale of Snow White, Vaz da Silva, primarily drawing on cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, notes that "white and red stand for life—for they represent life-giving elements, such as milk and semen on the one hand, and blood and its attendant power on the other—whereas black symbolizes darkness and death" (250).[1] But red, as blood, can also symbolize violence, and death, which we see in Carter's tale. On the colour white, Vaz da Silva remarks that it "stands for luminosity and untainted sheen, thus for luminous heaven as much as for purity" (245).

Carter's preservation—and even amplification—of the "ultrapure" colours of the original "Snow White" fairy tale in her retelling communicate her desire to preserve their symbolic significance. But these colours are not limited to the girl as they are in the Brothers Grimm's tale: they extend to—and are heightened in—her implied parental opposite, namely the Countess. Blackness envelops the Countess—it saturates her, mirroring her evil nature (a nature that will be revealed when the snow child appears, igniting her violent envy). As Bacchilega elucidates, the Countess, clad in black, "rides…through the snow-covered countryside with which she seems to share no whiteness at all" (37). Here she is destruction and death insofar as she attempts to destroy and kill the girl of/from snow who has stripped her of her (female) worth. She acknowledges that the girl is "the child of [the Count's] desire" and she therefore "[hates] her," asking herself: "how shall I be rid of her?" (Carter 115). Important, too, are the "scarlet heels" (115) that the Countess wears, further symbolizing her yearning for bloodshed. But it is imperative to also recognize that the colours black and red exist in the girl, reflecting her own ability to be monstrous (which I will expand on later). Nevertheless, the Count's proximity to the colour grey—a colour whose creation

[1] Julia Kristeva also notes that "blood, as a vital element,…refers to women, fertility, and the assurance of fecundation" (96).

depends on the mixing of black and white—might mirror the conflict between who he once desired (the Countess) and who he now desires (the girl), a conflict *he* provokes.

Before moving to a consideration of the prevalence of mirroring in Carter's tale, I want to briefly focus on the curious birth of the snow child. What particularly distinguishes Carter's tale from the original is the absence of the girl's birth mother. Unlike in the Brothers Grimm's tale where the girl's mother spurs her existence through her voiced longing for a child "as white as snow and as red as blood and as black as the wood of [her] window frame" (Grimm and Grimm), in Carter's version it is the Count who summons her into being. Stimulated by the natural landscape, the Count wishes for a girl as white as snow, as red as the blood that fills a hole in the snow, and as black as a raven's feather (Carter 115). With the Count functioning as the girl's father (insofar as he appears to "create" her), how might we perceive Nature itself as the girl's mother? (I capitalize Nature here to invoke its possible feminine/maternal identity.) After all, the girl materializes from the natural world as though birthed by it/her; nature quite literally becomes Mother Nature. Here the snow child is herself a mirror, reflecting the natural landscape that enabled her existence: she is the white snow, she is the red blood, she is the black raven's feather. Such is more so proven when she melts, returning to the natural world to become nothing more than "a feather a bird might have dropped; a bloodstain, like the trace of a fox's kill on the snow; and the rose she had pulled off the bush" (116).

But the girl as a mirror is not limited to her mirroring of the natural setting that enabled her birth—she further becomes a mirror of the Countess. When the Countess attempts to abandon the girl and fails, "the furs [spring] off [her] shoulders and [twine] round the naked girl" (115-6). Similarly, when she tries to drown the girl and fails, the Countess's "boots [leap] off [her] feet and on to the girl's legs" (116). Here the girl becomes a reflection of the Countess—and more so

becomes her completely by wearing the black and red clothes that once defined her. Naked, a blank canvas, the girl seeks meaning—and it is the Countess who assigns her that meaning. It is also interesting how the Countess's clothes "spring" and "leap" off of her, seemingly magically, as though the clothes are drawn to the girl and truly belong to her. Where once the girl was bare it is now her evil counterpart, the Countess, who becomes "bare as a bone" (116). But while the girl was bare, pure, and in need of meaning, the Countess is bare, stripped of and no longer deserving of meaning. She is denied meaning as the girl acquires meaning by becoming the Count's object of desire. Carter ultimately does not forsake the importance of the mirror: the Evil Queen's magic mirror that confirms her beauty in most versions of the "Snow White" fairy tale becomes the young girl of snow who reflects both the natural landscape and the cruel Countess. And the snow child's mirroring of the Countess especially foreshadows her own potential for monstrosity.

While the girl's mirroring of the Countess hints at her own monstrous nature, what cannot be ignored is that it is the Count who commits the most monstrous act in Carter's retelling when he violently assaults the dead body of the girl.[2] When the Countess demands that the girl plucks her a rose, the girl "picks a rose; pricks her finger on the thorn; bleeds; screams; falls" (116). Similar to the opening of Carter's tale, the demise of the snow child is detailed in three words. Yet these three words also seem to sum up—even condense—the life of the girl: she bleeds (allusion to menstruation and entering womanhood); she screams (suffers); she falls (dies). As Bacchilega puts it, "By plucking the rose, the 'eternal' symbol of femininity…, [the girl] comes of age—she bleeds—and then fulfills her function as passive object of the Count's desire" (37-8). Bacchilega's conclusion speaks to Carter's in *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* when she

[2] It is crucial to note that while I am emphasizing the monstrousness of the Countess and the snow child, it is the Count who is the most monstrous of them all. I am interested in female monstrosity—how the Countess and the snow child are monstrous in and of themselves.

argues that "woman has no other function but to exist, waiting…Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning" (4). Indeed, the girl goes from *she* to *it*: she is conjured into being for the Count and his violent desire, and she becomes it through her existence as something merely meant satiate the Count's monstrous impulse. She is lessened to nothing, void of subjectivity, agency, and humanity.

It is the snow child's return to the natural world as a body that has existed and was denied humanity that spurs her transformation into a monstrous being. When the girl melts and leaves behind a feather, a bloodstain, and the rose, the Count "[picks] up the rose, [bows] and [hands] it to his wife" (116). When the Countess accepts the flower and the renewed attention of the Count, she promptly drops it, exclaiming "It bites!" (116). Here the girl's transformation from *she* to *it* is confirmed. But she does not gently—submissively—return to nature. Instead, she becomes a sort of monster in her own right—and her bite communicates her desire for retribution. It is interesting how Carter maintains the female-female rivalry until the end despite the Count's violent assault on the girl: the girl, now a rose, does not bite him—she bites the Countess. Furthermore, the colour white vanishes from the narrative: the girl is black and red but not white, indicating her loss of innocence. In her essay on Carter's fiction titled "Running with the Tigers," author Margaret Atwood contends that the girl/the rose becomes "carnivorous" (128). While in the original "Snow White" tale the wicked stepmother consumes what she believes are her stepdaughter's lungs and liver, in Carter's tale the young girl is the one who endeavours to consume. Sibylle Birkhäuser-Oeri remarks that "death means not something final but rather a transitional stage, a transformation" (38). It is the snow child's transformation into a monstrous being that signals her longing to be something—to be an agential body—rather than nothing. But it is also crucial to recognize that here it is not a question of having versus not having agency: the snow child does

not magically gain complete agency. She remains dead, and her agency remains forever limited in a patriarchal, misogynistic context. Ultimately, fairy tales can be unnerving because they paint the world (literally!) in black and white when, clearly, it is not.

Nobody ever warned me about myself

While Angela Carter upholds the focus on the young girl in her "Snow White" reimagining—and magnifies the significance of her relationship with the figure of the monstrous stepmother—Helen Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird* presents a version of the tale that could alternatively and simply be titled *Her Wicked Stepmother*. In an interview where she shares the process of crafting her retelling, Oyeyemi says: "I wanted this to be a wicked stepmother story. It became clear to me that her wickedness was something that she would have been quite prepared for in her life." She later adds that "[t]here's something fun about an amoral woman in a story." Indeed, Oyeyemi takes the amoral figure of the wicked stepmother in "Snow White" and writes a story that is largely focalized through her. And, through her, she tells a story that prioritizes the politics surrounding beauty, vanity, mirrors, and reflections. More than that, she places the tale in 1950s America to grapple with an important question: What does it *truly* mean to be the fairest in the land, the fairest of them all? Or, as Helen Cousins specifies: "[W]hat is the effect of 'fairness' when both its meanings are considered: beautiful and light-skinned?" (173).[3] With Oyeyemi's novel-length reimagining of the "Snow White" fairy tale, I will evaluate how Oyeyemi takes this question to create a wicked stepmother who instigates a mother-stepdaughter rivalry that is—unlike in the original tale and Carter's—*not* rooted in jealousy. As Oyeyemi asserts in the

[3] Here Cousins neglects a third meaning: fairness as in justice. With Oyeyemi's retelling, I will also weigh how we might consider the actions of her wicked stepmother to be fair and just, given her situation. How wicked is Oyeyemi's wicked stepmother?

aforementioned interview, “I’m here to mess up all the good fairy tales.” And she most certainly does.

Oyeyemi’s wicked stepmother, Boy, is not introduced to us as such; her introduction even suggests that she might be the innocent, virtuous heroine in this version of the tale:

> Mirrors [show] me that I [am] a girl with a white-blond pigtail hanging down over one shoulder; eyebrows and lashes the same color; still, near-black eyes; and one of those faces some people call “harsh” and others call “fine-boned”…And my complexion is unpredictable, goes from near bloodless to scalded and back again, all without my permission. (3-4)

Boy is assigned the trinity of colours that define both Snow White and the snow child: she is white (as snow), black (as wood/a raven’s feather), and red (as blood) (there is even the direct mention of blood). Significantly, the colour white dominates—it is the colour of her hair and her skin—which hints at a virtuous nature. Boy also confesses that when “[her] hair [starts] to darken, [she combs] peroxide through it” (5) to conserve its (and her) Whiteness. With Boy’s introduction, Oyeyemi immediately confirms that—in this context—beauty is associated with Whiteness: Boy cannot let her hair darken out of fear that it will minimize her beauty, her worth. But Cousins affirms that “it is not the case that black and white have to correlate with ugliness and beauty in fairy tales. Many examples of enchantresses, evil queens and wicked stepmothers are beautiful” (171). Boy’s wickedness will surface when she becomes a mother to a Black child in a place where *White* beauty is praised. And it is Boy’s stepdaughter, Snow, the picture of White beauty, who will be the target of her (maternal) monstrousness.

“She wears red amaryllis blooms in her hair” (Oyeyemi 18) is how Arturo, Boy’s husband-to-be and Snow’s father, introduces his daughter to Boy. “I bet she’s pretty,” Boy responds, and

Arturo returns: “Her name’s Snow” (18); Boy wonders to herself: “as if that explained it all” (18). When Boy sees Snow for herself, she describes her as a “medieval swan maiden, only with the darkest hair and the pinkest lips” (81). Oyeyemi undermines our perception that Boy is the innocent girl—the maiden—of her story when she links the young girl Snow to the colours of the heroine in the original fairy tale. Significantly, Snow’s beauty captivates all around her: her grandmothers’ “reverence [for her is] over the top” (81) and Boy—towards the end of the novel—asks herself if Snow feeds on the universal admiration (290). But when Boy gives birth to a Black child, Bird, she learns that Arturo and his family have been passing as White. Snow’s beauty is therefore a deception because, as Cousins argues, she is “[mimicking] a White ideal of beauty” (177). Oyeyemi highlights the notion that to be White is to be beautiful, and Snow can only be beautiful as long as she presents herself as White. Cousins articulates it eloquently:

> Snow, reflected in the White gaze, is not beautiful because she is ‘white’ (or fair) but rather, must be racially White because she is beautiful. The joke is not so much that Whites think Snow is White when she is in fact Black, but that Whites are oblivious to how enraptured they are by their own veneration of Whiteness. Black cannot be, is not, beautiful; they are sure of that. (175)

As Boy thinks to herself following Bird’s birth, “Maybe there is no Snow, but only the work of smoke and mirrors” (Oyeyemi 148). Snow is a mirror, reflecting, as Cousins notes, the beauty that White people worship in themselves. And she is a trick, as Boy is sure to make explicit: “Snow’s beauty is all the more precious to Olivia and Agnes [her grandmothers] because it’s a trick. When whites look at her, they don’t get whatever fleeting, ugly impressions so many of us get when we see a colored girl—we don’t see a colored girl standing there” (144).

When Boy shows her close friend, Mia, her engagement gift from Arturo, she replies: "I mean, could that scream 'wicked stepmother' any louder?" (110). Arturo's handcrafted gift to Boy is a bracelet, a "white-gold snake that [curls] its tail around [Boy's] wrist and [presses] its tongue against the veins in the crook of [her] elbow" (109). Before she touches it, Boy repeats to herself that she will "fear no evil" (109), but also wonders if the bracelet reflects Arturo's perception of her. She thereafter paraphrases Arturo who admits to her that, as a jewellery designer, he sometimes feels as though he is "making a monstrosity" (109). Arturo gifts his monstrous creation to Boy, an engagement gift that binds her to him and to her eventual identity as a wicked stepmother. She will become the evil she vowed not to fear, and it is Arturo who partly spurs her monstrousness by making her a mother to both a White passing and a Black child.

Boy transforms into the wicked stepmother when she realizes that Snow's White beauty only heightens Bird's Blackness in a racist, white supremacist setting. Boy observes that, when Snow bends over Bird's crib, she "[presses] the side of her face against the side of her sister's face as if showcasing the contrast between their features" (147). She continues that Snow "[gives her] a look of radiant, innocent virtue that [makes her] skin crawl" (147) and thereafter mentions that "Snow's daintiness [grows] day by day, to menacing proportions" (147). Birkhäuser-Oeri explains that a mirror "reflects our image, symbolically it points to a process of reflection, of contemplation with the purpose of self-recognition, insight" (35). As the fairest of them all, Snow is a mirror that reflects back to Bird what she is and can never be. And, as Cousins maintains, it is Snow's fairness/Whiteness contrasted with Bird's darkness that "seals her fate" (172)—a fate of exile. But Snow's White beauty also seals Boy's fate as the wicked stepmother. Boy banishes her stepdaughter to eliminate the racial difference she accents, convincing herself that "Snow is not the fairest of them all" (Oyeyemi 150) (or is, at least, not allowed to be). She makes Snow the

antagonist, the monstrous one. But by identifying Snow as such and exiling her, Boy merely solidifies her position as the true wicked one: she severs her young stepdaughter's connection to her family and to what she knows. As Birkhäuser-Oeri affirms, one thing that is certain about the wicked stepmother is that there is no possibility of breaking free from her; Snow cannot escape the fate Boy lays out for her. And Boy, conscious of her now cruel nature, cannot escape it. As she states about her monstrous bracelet from Arturo, "I can't discount the possibility that the bracelet's been molding me into the wearer it wants" (Oyeyemi 147).

Yet Boy fails to realize that, as Jean Wyatt puts it, "the threat to Bird comes not from Snow herself, but from the larger optic that sustains racism in the United States—the primitive visual binary between [W]hite and [B]lack" (86). When considering the mother-stepdaughter-daughter relation in Oyeyemi's "Snow White" retelling, Wyatt draws from Robyn Wiegman to emphasize how "the visual economy of race" permeates the connection between the three female characters. Wyatt specifically argues that notions informing the visual binary of Whiteness versus Blackness in the United States are what inform Boy's relationship to her White stepdaughter and Black daughter. Because "the markers of race are believed to be imprinted on the body," the construction of race in the United States depends on "a binary structure of vision" (Wiegman qtd. in Wyatt 85) that establishes a contrast between White skin and Black skin, where Black skin is perceived as inferior. Boy's wickedness is essentially entwined with this racist visual binary that characterizes American culture and society. As Wyatt states, it is Boy's "dawning perception that…her baby, Bird, will be judged on the basis of her skin color [that] makes her cast about for a way to protect Bird from racial oppression" (85). Boy recognizes that there is a contrast between "being seen as colored and being seen as Snow" (Oyeyemi 145). For Boy, Snow is the embodiment of the visual markers that are favoured on White skin. She is, as Wyatt notes, "a paragon of [W]hite beauty"

(86). “What can I do for my daughter?” (Oyeyemi 145) is what Boy asks herself, and she finds her answer in banishing Snow.

It is also imperative to acknowledge that Boy’s wickedness is not a consequence of her jealousy. While in the Brothers Grimm’s and Carter’s tale the figure of the wicked stepmother is motivated by a consuming envy, Oyeyemi’s wicked stepmother is driven by a need to protect her daughter. Unlike the wicked stepmothers who have preceded her, Boy does not forsake her maternal responsibilities and identity—she resolutely embraces them. By becoming the wicked stepmother to Snow she believes that she is also becoming the mother she needs to be for Bird. Consequently, Boy appears to desire agency not particularly as an individual subject but as a maternal body. She wants to control how her daughter will be raised in a racist, white supremacist setting, and how she can eradicate the visual threat her White stepdaughter poses to her Black daughter’s self-worth. Wyatt alludes to such when she remarks that Boy’s “commitment [to Bird] is so absolute that it wipes out…her own needs as subject” (87). But by committing to one daughter, she renounces the other. Boy’s monstrosity is not as precise as the Evil Queen’s—it is a monstrosity that is situated in the maternal rather than alienated from it. Unlike the Evil Queen in the original “Snow White” fairy tale who violently rejects her motherly, protective obligation when she learns that her stepdaughter has surpassed her in beauty—and behaves the opposite to how a mother should when she endeavours to annihilate her competition—Boy embraces her maternal responsibility to safeguard her Black child (although at the expense of her other daughter). Oyeyemi ultimately wants us to ask: How monstrous can Boy be, as a mother compelled by the need to protect her young daughter?

It would be remiss of me to examine Oyeyemi’s retelling of “Snow White” without giving consideration to her emphasis on the object of the mirror, and what the relationship between Boy

and her mirror image might disclose about her monstrosity. Unlike Carter's retelling, in which the influence of a literal mirror is absent, Oyeyemi preserves the significance of the mirror in the original tale, creating a mirror that is magic insofar as it appears to portend Boy's wicked disposition. Oyeyemi's novel opens by alluding to the influence of mirrors on Boy: "Nobody ever warned me about mirrors, so for many years I was fond of them, and believed them to be trustworthy" (3). Here the mirror is instantly marked as powerful, and, simultaneously, something to be suspicious of. Boy nevertheless trusts the mirror—and the image of herself it offers back to her. But Boy further perceives her mirror image as a separate entity that is divorced from her. When she is undressing before her bath, she gazes at her reflection in the bathroom mirror and "[imagines that she is] watching a lover undressing just for [her]" (40). Boy then refers to her reflection as a separate person, remarking that "[her] lover [isn't] shy" (40). And the most compelling scene comes when Boy approaches the person in the mirror:

> I [moisten] my lips with my tongue and [walk] toward the mirror, not too fast, giving myself time to change my mind, to stop if it [feels] too peculiar. But it [is] just peculiar enough. I [kiss] the glass with my fists against it, [kiss] wantonly until I [feel] an ache in my breasts and a throbbing between my legs. There [is] a taste of blood where my mouth [meets] my mouth, as if our lips [are] blades. (41)

Despite the numerous puzzling moments between Boy and her reflection, none are quite as sensual—and violent—as the one quoted above. It is a curious scene, one that cannot be limited to a single interpretation. Perhaps this moment acts as an analogy to Boy's monstrousness: her becoming the wicked stepmother parallels her becoming someone (and something) she cannot recognize. But Boy also appears to be confronting her position as both a subject and an object, where she is the subject that observes and sexualizes the object that is herself. Oyeyemi might

further be presenting a critique on a sort of narcissistic self-love, and if we accept Boy's reflection as a representation of her wickedness, then the question becomes: What does it mean for Boy to be intimate with her identity as the wicked stepmother to the point of being sexually aroused by this identity?[4]

In a podcast interview, Oyeyemi offers a provocative question: "[D]oes beauty in fact exist…if it can be imitated?" When Carter and Oyeyemi take the "Snow White" fairy tale and subject it to the process of rewriting (an act of imitation itself), it is the concept of beauty and imitation—or mirroring—that first attracts them. Carter's Snow White, the girl magically born from snow, absorbs and reflects the pristine white landscape. She is beautiful, fascinating even, because of her ability to imitate the beauty of nature. Similarly, Snow is beautiful because she is an imitation of White beauty. Although feigned, beauty is beauty to the male gaze—and, most of all, beauty is White. Oyeyemi highlights what Carter neglects, which is that the male gaze is racialized, with White women being perceived as innocent because they are framed as the picture of beauty. Carter accents the notion that the male gaze spurs female competition, and it chooses what woman has merit—as a beautiful thing to be manipulated and even violated, that is. Oyeyemi, however, confirms that to tempt the male gaze is to be White femininity incarnate. For Oyeyemi, the question is no longer "How can I annihilate my daughter to secure my position as the fairest—the prettiest *and* the Whitest—in the land?" but "How can I protect my Black daughter who will never be the fairest of them all?"

[4] This question is interesting to consider when examining the scene between Boy and her reflection, but it is one that goes beyond the scope of my research here. In "'As white as red as black as…': Beauty, Race and Gender in the Tales of Helen Oyeyemi, Angela Carter and Barbara Comyns," Helen Cousins applies Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation to assess the relationship between Boy and the mirror.

Like everything alive I was meant to be split open,

to blossom, to be sucked, to be eaten,

to lean, to bend, to wither,

to die and die and die until I died.

—Marie Howe

She herself is a haunted house. Can she possess herself?

While Snow White's name alludes to her innate beauty by invoking the fairness of her complexion and her proximity to the natural world (in terms of her purity), Sleeping Beauty's name is an explicit pronouncement of her loveliness. And yet her name is not merely *Beauty*—it is preceded by, as Maria Tatar asserts, the passive gerund *sleeping*. She is comatose, motionless—her name confirms as much; but in her unconscious state, she remains captivating. Similar to an artifact or a monument, she is a sight to behold—a sight for the eyes to linger over. Her curse may be unfortunate for her, but it yields a most pleasing sight for the male gaze. As Kimberly J. Lau proclaims, the princess becomes "nothing but a pretty face, a supple body, there for the gazing, there for the taking" (100). She is sleeping therefore she is submissive, she is submissive therefore she is available—there for the taking and wanting to be claimed. It is her unmistakable position as the fairy tale heroine with the least amount of agency that makes her, primarily to the feminist gaze, the most unappealing of them all (Tatar). Tatar maintains that it is precisely Sleeping Beauty's position as an immobile, visually-enthralling object that has spurred the condemnation of the fairy tale, a wish to see it—and any retelling of it—disappear. But what happens when the cursed princess becomes a ravenous vampire? What happens when her immortality is the consequence of an active, monstrous identity instead of a serene, everlasting slumber? I argue that Carter and Oyeyemi suffuse the "Sleeping Beauty" fairy tale with new life by transforming the princess into

the mythical figure of the vampire. And it is their respective retellings that grant the tale new meaning—or, as Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère cleverly puts it, new *bite*.

It is first necessary to emphasize what the figure of the female vampire represents; that is, why make the innocent princess a vampire, that which is entirely contrary to her? Lau states it perfectly: "If Sleeping Beauty is patriarchy's dream girl, then the female vampire is its worst nightmare" (100). She elaborates that the comatose princess is "the virginal innocent to the female vampire's whorish aggressor" (100)—the pure angel[5] to the female vampire's unbridled hunger, literal and sexual. While the enchanted princess sleeps soundly, arousing male desire, the female vampire embodies an awakening—an embracing of her unchecked sexuality. She exists as a body, a boundless site, that threatens—that destabilizes the heteronormative status quo, the restrictions intrinsic to the gender binary, and the patriarchal authority over women's bodies (Lau). Barbara Creed, in her appraisal of what she terms the "monstrous-feminine," echoes Lau's understandings of the figure when she declares that "the female vampire is monstrous—and also attractive—precisely because she does threaten to undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations of men and women essential to the continuation of patriarchal society" (61). Creed adds that the female vampire essentially "threatens to seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their proper gender roles" (61). By rewriting Sleeping Beauty as a vampire, Carter and Oyeyemi indeed seduce the virtuous princess away from her gentle and compliant fairy tale role to transform her into a resistant, anti-patriarchal being.

Significantly, Creed highlights the female vampire's unquestionable embodiment of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva writes that

[5] Charles Perrault writes in "La belle au bois dormant" ("The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood"): "She [is] as beautiful as an angel. Her trance [has] not yet taken the colour from her face; her cheeks [are] rosy and her lips like coral." Sleeping Beauty, like Snow White, is what Gilbert and Gubar call an "angel-woman" (36): young, ignorant, passive.

the abject is that which "beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced" (1). Kristeva's assertion is reminiscent of Creed's contention that the female vampire seduces—but she herself cannot be seduced; she is resistant to enchantment, unlike Sleeping Beauty who can only succumb to it. And the female vampire, like that which is abject, incites desire(s), which parallels Lau's argument that the monstrous figure "awakens desires that threaten the very foundations of patriarchal order" (100). Here the female vampire is abject because she provokes desires that should not be provoked—that *must* not be provoked for they challenge the hegemonic societal order that is the patriarchy. Kristeva further comments on the liminal, in-flux identity of that which is abject: abjection "disturbs identity, system, order. [It is what] does not respect borders, positions, rules. [It represents the] in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Simply, to be abject is to at once be nothing and everything. It is to be nothing that conforms to the established system, and everything that conforms to its own established metrics. Abjection, as Kristeva notes, is "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles" (4)—but also a horror that excites. Creed applies Kristeva's theory of abjection to the female vampire:

> The female vampire is abject because she disrupts identity and order; driven by her lust for blood, she does not respect the dictates of the law which set down the rules of proper sexual conduct. Like the male, the female vampire also represents abjection because she crosses the boundary between the living and dead, the human and animal…Because she is not completely animal or human, because she hovers on the boundary between these two states, she represents abjection. (61)

Perpetually traversing boundaries, the female vampire can solely exist within them; the female vampire is abject because it is on the boundary that she prevails.

Perhaps the significance of making Sleeping Beauty a vampire was not as obvious to Carter as it is to us now. Indeed, the inspiration for "The Lady of the House of Love" did not come from a wish (at least, not initially) to transform the enchanted, virginal princess into an empowered, carnivorous creature. It came, rather, from a *sound*. Carter relates her experience of first writing her "Sleeping Beauty" retelling for radio in the preface to *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*, a collection of four of her radio plays:[6]

> But I started writing for radio, myself, because of a sound effect. I made it quite by accident. Sitting in my room, pencil in hand, staring vacantly into space instead of getting on with whatever it was I was supposed to be doing, I ran the pencil idly along the top of the radiator. It made a metallic, almost musical rattle. It was just the noise that a long, pointed fingernail might make if it were run along the bars of a birdcage.
>
> Now, I thought, what kind of person might have such fingernails? Why, a vampire, famed for their long, sharp fingernails (all the better to eviscerate you with!). Now, what kind of vampire would have both long, elegant fingernails and an elegant, gilt birdcage? A lady vampire, perhaps. I alliterated her. A lovely lady vampire. (9)

And so a mundane moment became a monstrous tale. Carter continues that perhaps the lovely lady vampire would be her, creating a lovely melody out of boredom. And she would be bored with her "endless deaths and resurrections" (9). Carter determined that her Sleeping Beauty, her alluring somnambulist vampire, would be cursed not by a revengeful fairy's enchantment, as in Charles Perrault's original "Sleeping Beauty" tale, but by a familial fate. She would be a victim in her own right, forced to, as Carter writes in her version, "helplessly [perpetuate] her ancestral crimes" (117).

[6] Carter, in her preface, also ruminates on the difference between writing her retelling for radio and as a short story. She confirms that much needed to be excluded in the prose variation, but that "[t]he one is neither better nor worse than the other. Only, each is quite different" (10). In "Conjuring the Curse of Repetition or "Sleeping Beauty" Revamped: Angela Carter's *Vampirella* and *The Lady of the House of Love*," Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère carefully compares and contrasts both versions of Carter's "Sleeping Beauty" retelling.

And her imprisoned bird would be "an image of the lady herself, caged as she [is] by her hereditary appetites that she [finds] both compulsive and loathsome" ("Preface" 9). A noise would become Carter's "Sleeping Beauty" reimagining, a "Gothic tale about a reluctant vampire" (10)—a figure rarely, if ever, seen in vampire narratives.

Carter begins the prose variation of her retelling by humanizing her fanged Sleeping Beauty, the Countess: "sobbing in a derelict bedroom…[,] a cracked mirror suspended from a wall does not reflect [her] presence" (117). Contrary to the mirror in Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird* that returns an intensified image of Boy, the mirror in Carter's tale cannot offer anything to the forlorn vampire. (Here Carter maintains the familiar vampire lore that vampires cannot surface in mirrors.) But the Countess's mirror appears to present an alternative reflection: fractured and broken, the object is itself a reflection of the Countess's internal condition. Her castle further mirrors her declining state, with "rot and fungus everywhere" and an "unlit chandelier…so heavy with dust the individual prisms no longer show any shapes" (118). She is "the mistress of all this disintegration [who] notices nothing" (118), "the châtelaine of all this decay" (127), herself disintegrating and decaying. She is everything she should be, "queen of night, queen of terror—except [for] her horrible reluctance for the role" (120). Her melancholy is a consequence of her resisting her monstrous nature, a vampire that refuses to easily yield to her unnatural appetite. Sarah Sceats confirms that the Countess perceives herself as a "victim of a passion that is both awful in its effects and terrible personally for her because it…entails atrocious loneliness" (112). She requires connection, longing to be human, but she "does not know if that is possible" (Carter 120). She has inherited an existence of appalling hunger, fated to monstrosity. She inhabits a strange position as a vampire who rebuffs her predatory nature.

Carter's exhaustive portrait of the Countess emphasizes her role in the ugly tradition she is heir to, as "the last bud of the poison tree that sprang from the loins of Vlad the Impaler" (119). It is a captivating portrait that Carter infuses with subtleties and charm, despite the evil nature of the person she describes: "Wearing an antique bridal gown, the beautiful queen of the vampires sits all alone in her dark, high house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, through her, projects a baleful posthumous existence" (117). Here the Countess's inheritance is a possession, in which her monstrous forebears—and their monstrous urges—remain alive and strong through/within her. But what is most noteworthy in Carter's illustration of the Countess is the revelation that she wears a wedding dress, and, as we later discover, that her wedding dress is "the only dress she has, her mother's wedding dress" (121). It is well-known what the wedding dress connotes: white, it is a symbol of innocence and purity. And, to return to Vaz da Silva, white represents "luminosity and untainted sheen" (245). But Carter has her own thoughts on what the white garment symbolizes: in an interview with Les Bedford, Carter argues that the white dress "is like a gift-wrapped girl. [It is] as though the wearer is only existing in transition" (qtd. in Gamble 23). Offered by her father to her soon-to-be husband, the girl dressed in white goes from being possessed by one man to another.

Carter's invocation of the transitional identity of the bride is reminiscent of Creed's claim that the female vampire is abject because she is a liminal figure, forever existing at the margins. By reconciling Carter's and Creed's contentions, it becomes clear that the Countess wearing a wedding dress is emblematic of both the ownership her forefathers have over her and her perennial liminal position as "a girl who is both death and the maiden" ("The Lady" 118). A virginal[7] perpetrator of ghastly crimes—a monstrosity hopelessly yearning to be human. It is further

[7] I use "virginal" to reference Carter's labelling of the Countess as a *maiden*. But vampires, as Sceats remarks, are "highly sexual, yet their penetration is nongenital" (107).

important to acknowledge that the Countess's wedding dress is "antique" (naturally, as an heirloom belonging to an immortal vampire). Sarah Gamble comments that Carter frequently features wedding dresses in her fiction, but when she does they are aged—deteriorated. Gamble notes that, for Carter, the wedding dress serves as a representation of "death and contamination," a (literal) materialization of the tension between "life/death and purity/putrefaction" (24). Gamble's interpretation of the role of the wedding dress in Carter's fiction supports the idea that the Countess's worn, white wedding gown mirrors both her worsening state and her liminality. Carter even writes it plainly: "She has the mysterious solitude of ambiguous states; she hovers in a no-man's land between life and death, sleeping and waking" (130). Vaz da Silva also affirms that "the purity of whiteness is there to be tinted" (246)—that is, *tainted*. Indeed, the Countess's "white lace négligé [is also] stained…with blood" (119). Like her "Snow White" retelling, Carter preserves the symbolic significance of colours: stained, white clothing becomes a manifestation of the conflict that perseveres in Carter's vampiric Sleeping Beauty, a maiden contaminated with a monstrous legacy—a girl cursed to live as death.

Although much can be inferred from a half-sentence portrayal of the Countess,[8] Carter is herself compelled to further spotlight the monstrosity and, above all, the loneliness that consumes her Sleeping Beauty:

> Her voice is filled with distant sonorities, like reverberations in a cave: now you are at the place of annihilation, now you are at the place of annihilation. And she is herself a cave full of echoes, she is a system of repetitions, she is a closed circuit. 'Can a bird sing only

[8] The second half of the sentence only further illustrates the Countess's tragic, permanent fate: "she counts out the Tarot cards, ceaselessly construing a constellation of possibilities as if the random fall of the cards on the red plush tablecloth before her could precipitate her from her chill, shuttered room into a country of perpetual summer and obliterate the perennial sadness of a girl who is both death and the maiden" (117-8). The Countess's cards reappear throughout the narrative as the Countess attempts to set out an alternative fate for herself: "She resorts to the magic comfort of the Tarot pack and shuffles the cards, lays them out, reads them, gathers them up with a sigh, shuffles them again, constantly constructing hypotheses about a future which is irreversible" (120).

> the song it knows or can it learn a new song?' She draws her long, sharp fingernail across the bars of the cage in which her pet lark sings, striking a plangent twang like that of the plucked heartstrings of a woman of metal. Her hair falls down like tears. (118)

Just as a sound was the source of inspiration for Carter's tale, the voices of the Countess's ancestors thrum, persistently and deafeningly, in the cave that is her body and being. Such a haunting exemplifies the Countess's monstrous heritage—one that she is victim to, and one that she attempts to reject. Indeed, as Carter writes, the Countess "herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening" (130). A haunting, she is haunted; a frightening, she is frightened. She cannot flee "the place of annihilation," a position that has annihilated her agency. She is "a system of repetitions," obliged to perform, again and again, the inhuman acts of those who have preceded her. She can resist her monstrous nature all she wants, but, after all, she is a ravenous woman. And, as such, she "wants fresh meat"—she "must have men" (121). Any effort to gain agency is fated to fail. Consequently, like her lark, the Countess can only sing the song she has always known—and cannot conceive straying from her fate. Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère also speaks to the Countess's thwarted agency, where her trapped bird "represents the conflict of body and soul, fate and free will, compulsion to repeat and capacity to change" (341). Carter begs the question: Can her Sleeping Beauty change, in her reimagining that sees "[t]he pleasant dreams of Sleeping Beauty turn[ed] into the nightmare of the living-dead condemned for all eternity to live in the castle of their flesh and feed on the blood of the living" (341)?

Before moving to an exploration of how Carter's Sleeping Beauty's prince might free her from her fate, I want to focus on the Countess's beauty—a trait she shares with her prototype. If the Countess's monstrousness is still questionable, Carter is sure to make it as unambiguous as

possible: “She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness” (119). Carter notably places the Countess’s monstrosity vis-à-vis her exemplary beauty rather than, perhaps, her ugliness, as a monster. She is unhuman because she is the most beautiful of them all, to reinvoke the language of the “Snow White” fairy tale. Her beauty reconciles her to the affliction that is her monstrousness, and Carter implies that someone who is as picturesque as the Countess might be monstrous—that is, severed from humanity—to some capacity. It is nevertheless crucial to recognize that, for Carter, to be beautiful as a monster is not the same as to be beautiful as an innocent, angelic princess: the Countess’s beauty is something that goes beyond what is not merely normal but human. And yet, like Sleeping Beauty, it is her inherent beauty that allures—that makes “shepherd boys and gipsy lads…[gape] at the Countess in her satin finery as she…chatters distractedly to put them at their fatal ease” (121).

Although Sleeping Beauty and the Countess are asleep in their own way, the former literally and the latter a somnambulist doomed to an existence of inescapable repetition, the Countess—as a vampire—can exploit the male gaze. She wields her beauty and seeming passivity to manipulate and dominate her male prey. And yet she remains trapped in a cycle of violence, needing to feed off men while yearning for humanity. She wants to be seen as a human subject, and by not being perceived as such, she simultaneously remains an object of the male gaze. As Sceats contends, the vampire—an ambiguous figure—“confuse[s] the roles of victim and predator. Combining dependence and rapaciousness, the vampire is an *embodied oxymoron*” (107-8; emphasis added). Gina Wisker argues the same in her exploration of the female vampire: “Disruptive and troublesome, female vampires are an *embodied oxymoron*, a thrilling

contradiction, fundamentally problematising received notions of women's passivity" (150; emphasis added). Sceats's and Wisker's emphasis on the female vampire as an oxymoron invokes the figure's liminal identity: she exists on the boundary, never thoroughly and continually fixed. Sceats articulates it perfectly: "the vampire figure straddles the most fundamental of borderlines: it is undead, poised between the two states of living and extinction…The vampire is one and the other, both and neither" (119). Sleeping Beauty, either awake or asleep, remains a perfectly lovely thing to both behold and control. Meanwhile, in her sleeping-waking state, the Countess uses her beauty to lead men into her own bloody chamber. But the Countess's agency, like Sleeping Beauty, remains nonexistent: Carter's Sleeping Beauty lures and annihilates because she has no choice. Ultimately, the aforementioned "place of annihilation" (Carter 118) could just as likely be the Countess herself.

Carter's Sleeping Beauty's prince comes in the form of a young British officer. A stranger to the horrors of existence, it is "in his youth and strength and blond beauty, in the invisible, even unacknowledged pentacle of his virginity" (125) that the officer enters the lovely somnambulist's crumbling castle. Before seeing the Countess, he hears "the most seductively caressing voice he had ever heard in his life" (126).[9] But when the officer does see her, it is not her inhuman beauty that agitates him—it is her withering condition: "And then he [sees] the girl who [wears] the dress, a girl with the fragility of the skeleton of a moth, so thin, so frail that her dress [seems] to him to hang suspended" (126). He also alludes to the Countess's unwilling role in an inherited, monstrous tradition when he likens the Countess, in her wedding dress, to "a child dressing up in her mother's clothes, perhaps a child putting on the clothes of a dead mother in order to bring her…to life again"

[9] When the Countess later speaks to the officer, her voice seems to him "to come elsewhere than from her white, still throat" (128)—a reference to the ancestors that possess her. Such a reference continues: "she is like a doll, he thought, a ventriloquist's doll, or, more, like a great, ingenious piece of clockwork. For she [seems] inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she [is] not in control" (129).

(127). (Interestingly, the Countess's inability to properly fit into her mother's gown mirrors her inability to easily conform to her monstrous heritage.) But the young officer is most perturbed by "her extraordinarily fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson, a morbid mouth" (127). His preoccupation with the Countess's mouth is compelling: not only is it itself the perpetrator of violence, it is also the gateway to a new fate for the Countess. As Carter writes, "A single kiss woke up the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" (123).

Prior to the young officer's arrival, when the Countess performs her ritual of shuffling her tarot deck, the cards yield—for the first time—a different fate for her: "The waxen fingers of the Countess…turn up the card called Les Amoureux [The Lovers]. Never, never before…never before has the Countess cast herself a fate involving love" (123). But because the Countess "only knows of one kind of consummation" (130), the officer, similar to her, occupies a unique liminal position: he is at once her prey *and* her salvation. She might "not mean to hurt [him]" (130), but violence is the only consummation she comprehends. He is "now…at the place of annihilation" (131), and his end will bring about her beginning—her freedom. She has "always been ready for [him]" (130), eternally asking herself: "And could love free me from the shadows? Can a bird sing only the song it knows, or can it learn a new song?" (130). Can a vampire girl, a "poor night bird, poor butcher bird" (129), emerge into a new way of being through what she believes to be love? Can love be her remedy for loneliness and monstrousness? It is when Carter summons such questions that she begins to refer to the young officer as the hero, hinting at his selfless act. But though he is heroic, he remains oblivious to horror and the nature of the girl before him: "And though he feels unease, he cannot feel terror; so he is like the boy in the fairy tale, who does not know how to shudder"

(131).[10] Nevertheless, he "would like to take her into his arms and protect her from the ancestors who leer down from the walls" (132). And it is when he touches her that he will "invite her fatal embrace" (132).

It is when the Countess's glasses "slip from her fingers and smash to pieces" (133) that the concept of a human fate is equally broken. When she cuts her finger collecting the fragments of glass, the hero "kiss[es] it better for her, as her mother…would have done" (133). But the kiss in Carter's tale generates another type of awakening. As Carter writes poetically, "How can [the Countess] bear the pain of becoming human? / The end of exile is the end of being" (133). Carter's Sleeping Beauty's monstrosity is inherited and inherent—to cease being monstrous is to cease being entirely. As Sceats postulates, the Countess "longs for a romantic relationship, but her nature makes it impossible, for her desire for dependence is vampiric and thus destroys that on which it would depend" (113). Consequently, the hero's kiss spells out the Countess's annihilation—and only in death can she be human: "In death, she [looks]…less beautiful and so, for the first time, fully human" (Carter 135). Her minimized beauty reconciles her to "the imperfection of the human condition" (119), and the hero "turn[s] her into the lovely girl she is" (134) by kissing/killing her. Similar to the snow child, the Countess can only possess herself in death.[11] And, like the snow child, her existence becomes marked by a "monstrous flower," leaving the hero with "the dark, fanged rose [she] plucked from between [her] thighs" (135). On the ending of Carter's "Sleeping Beauty" retelling, Lau remarks that, for the Countess, "there is little possibility for a female desire free from patriarchal construction and control," and therefore, for her, "the happiest endings exist

[10] Carter's use of the word "shudder" also evokes orgasmic connotations. Interestingly, when the Countess envisions her imminent encounter with the hero, she sees his "eyes roll upwards in a spasm [he] will mistake for that of love and not of death" (132).

[11] Or, as Sceats articulates it, "[the hero's] kiss renders her human and adult, but also mortal—in fact dead—so that her moment of wholeness and completion becomes her moment of obliteration" (112).

only in death, in escape" (113). Like Carter's "Snow White" retelling, the final question becomes: How much agency can a girl *truly* possess in nonexistence?

what can I taste, what can I taste, what am I

Despite being written close to thirty years apart, Angela Carter's and Helen Oyeyemi's "Sleeping Beauty" retellings are more similar than not: the two recast the too-innocent princess as a vampire girl plagued by a ravenous hunger—that is, a ravenous *hereditary* hunger. Just as Carter's Sleeping Beauty is "herself…a haunted house" (130) tormented by the incessant voices of her progenitors, Oyeyemi's Sleeping Beauty, Miranda, is similarly possessed by her gluttonous maternal ancestors who are a controlling presence in her home—and in her.[12] In an interview with Neelanjana Banerjee, Oyeyemi states the following about *White Is for Witching*: "Initially, I wanted to write the book about this [B]lack family moving into this racist house, but it just seemed far too obvious…I thought it would [be] much more interesting to have a girl living in this house that's essentially poisoning her, and for her to not understand fully what is happening." Ben Machell maintains that Oyeyemi's retelling is about "a starving girl and a xenophobic house," and Oyeyemi speaks to the inspiration for her novel in an interview with Machell: "I thought, what's an unnatural appetite? A girl who eats chalk, but probably with a desire to eat something else." Miranda's unusual appetite manifests as pica, in which she seeks to satisfy her hunger with non-food, particularly chalk. But as the narrative progresses, her hunger transitions beyond simple things as the target of her appetite becomes her Black girlfriend, Ore. Her monstrous appetite is only encouraged by her ancestral house and her ghostly maternal progenitors, who coalesce into an all-consuming force that wants Miranda to succumb to who—and what—she is destined to be.

[12] Although Oyeyemi's novel is not a confirmed retelling of the "Sleeping Beauty" fairy tale, I frame it as one when considering Miranda's sleeping-waking/dead-alive state, which I will focus on.

Oyeyemi's "Sleeping Beauty" retelling is filled with monstrous feminine *and* maternal entities, including the racist house itself, which I will bring attention to. Miranda might be the more obvious monstrous girl, but Oyeyemi's tale is replete with female monstrosity (namely *White* female monstrosity).

Miranda's monstrous lineage originates from her maternal great-grandmother, Anna Silver (ironically née Anna Good). "GrandAnna" to Miranda and her twin brother, Eliot, Anna is closely—and even overwhelmingly—linked to the colour white:

white

> was a colour that Anna Good was afraid to wear. Her fear reflected her feeling that she was not clean. She had, of course, been baptised in white. As a child she had been buttoned into frilly white pinafores and had subsequently been too frightened to move. At school, her gymnastics class had been filmed for a programme on British sports and pastimes, and she'd been picked to wear a bronze-coloured helmet and a white gown and a blue sash and sit at the top of a chariot built of the other girls' bodies. She was Britannia… (134)

White followed Anna—from babyhood, to childhood, to girlhood. Like every previous fairy tale retelling examined, the colour white carries with it a special significance, most notably in Oyeyemi's narratives where the colour is analogous to race. It is the symbolic importance of the colour white, a metaphor for purity, that Oyeyemi maintains in her retellings when she aligns the familiar fairy tale colour with race and white supremacy. When Anna found out that her husband was killed in World War I, she donned her white dress—because "[w]hite is for witching" (136)—and magically witched the house to life. As the house, a recurring narrator, reveals, Anna declared: "I hate them…Blackies, Germans, killers, dirty…dirty killers" (137). Her proclamation a seeming incantation, the house—before a mere conscious being—transformed into a racist force that

personified Anna's racist sentiments. Jean Wyatt, in her essay on the maternal ethics and racial politics of Oyeyemi's novel, confirms that "Anna's magic animates the house…to enable it to perform [her] rage" (262). Anna, the matriarch of the Silver family, is indeed Britannia: she is an embodiment of the British imperialist fear of the Other who is accepted as a threat to White hegemony. As the house, now an extension of Anna and her xenophobic feelings, states, "We [the line of Silver women] are on the inside, and we have to stay together, and we absolutely cannot have anyone else" (Oyeyemi 137). Interestingly, too, Oyeyemi's isolation of the word "white" in the above excerpt might reflect the British imperialist want, or rather need, to conserve Whiteness through separation and seclusion.

It is the terrible fate of Jennifer Silver, Anna's daughter and Miranda's grandmother, that confirms the Silver house's vehement and violent need to protect the Silver women (and Whiteness). Jennifer, as the house narrates, became displeased with her mother and her daughter, Lily (Miranda's mother), and her confining position as a young mother: "Jennifer had convinced herself that she hated them both, the child and the crone. She was modern and couldn't countenance being held by four walls just because she'd had a baby at a young age" (97). Jennifer planned to flee and forsake her daughter and her maternal responsibility. But the house refused to allow her to, and admits that it might even be lying about some parts of her story to defend what it did to stop her: "Maybe she was not really like that. It's just that I would prefer you to think that what happened to her was justified" (98). Because Jennifer resisted being "held by four walls," that was precisely what the house did: it "opened up for her" (98) and essentially absorbed her. "Don't feel sorry for Jennifer" (99), the house reassures. Jennifer is the first victim of the house, but the house does not interpret it as such: it is compelled to protect the Silver women, a White lineage that must not be contaminated by crossing the White space. White, as the house spells out when Anna clothes

herself in the colour, is “a colour to be worn so that all other colours can enter you” (136). White is vulnerable, just as Vaz da Silva suggests: “the purity of whiteness is there to be tinted” (246). And therefore the house cannot let “other colours” tint/taint the racial purity of the Silver women.

Oyeyemi’s novel begins with three focal questions, each presented as headings: “Where Is Miranda?,” “Is Miranda Alive?,” and “What Happened to Lily Silver?” Each question is answered by Ore, Eliot, and the Silver house (referred to by its address, 29 Barton Road). When responding to the final question (I will return to the other two), it is the house of all the narrators that offers the most straightforward answer: “The twins were sixteen and a half when their mother died. She was shot in Port-au-Prince; gunfire sprayed into the queue at a voting station” (9). It further comments that “[t]hat day two bullets were for her; they found her and leapt into her lung” (9). And, of course, the house inserts its opinion: “Stupid, stupid; Lily had been warned not to go to Haiti. I warned her” (9). Here the house marks Lily’s tragic death as a consequence of her doing what the house once prevented Lily’s mother from doing, which is leaving the White space. Significantly, the house asks: “Why do people go to these places, these places that are not for them?” (10). Wyatt remarks that the Silver house “thinks exactly as a house would think—everyone belongs in one place only, and that place is in the house” (257). A place compelled to cocoon and confine the line of Silver women, the house becomes a heightened feminine and maternal space. But before exploring the concept of the house as itself maternal, I want to sustain my focus on the women it is seeking to protect—and their everlasting presence in the house, and in the present.

Miranda, the last Silver woman, suffers from pica, “an appetite for non-food items, things that don’t nourish” (Oyeyemi 25). She inherited her pica from her great-grandmother, Anna, as the house explains: “It runs in the family. Anna Good had it in 1938; a year before she became Anna

Silver. She ruined her work stockings and skirt with crouching in the mud searching for acorn husks that would splinter down her throat" (26). A singular craving for chalk, a young Miranda would "[count] bites of food and [smile] with breathless relief when she had met her quota" (25) and thereafter would "[cram] chalk into her mouth under her covers" (26). Miranda recounts to Lily and Eliot a moment when her GrandAnna smeared her blood on her and her twin brother's lips: "The bird that pecks itself to death to feed its children. She tried to give us her blood but we didn't want it" (84). Only Miranda remembers this strange moment when her great-grandmother turned vampiric (in the sense of giving her own blood), which might speak to their profound connection—a connection formed out of their common anomalous eating inclinations. Aspasia Stephanou's understanding of Anna's ostensible sacrificial act is especially sharp: she proposes that Anna's "auto-vampirism" is an attempt to protect the purity of her blood—and, by offering her blood to her heirs, the purity of her (White) bloodline. When invoking the hi/stories of the Silver women, it becomes apparent that each woman is deviant—even somewhat monstrous—in her own way: Anna who, encouraged by racist sentiments, performed witchcraft and vampirism; Jennifer who felt the need to abandon her young child; Lily who went to a place not meant for her (according to the xenophobic house, that is); and Miranda who engages in abnormal eating practices. But it is crucial to note that their hi/stories are narrated by the house, who admits that it is unreliable. As it voices when speaking to Jennifer's disappearance within it, "Believe it, don't believe it, as you will" (Oyeyemi 100), and even claims that—maybe, maybe not—it was Anna who killed her.

It is, however, in their spectral, post-life forms that Miranda's foremothers become emphatically monstrous. Miranda—already weak and sickly due to her pica—becomes even more so following her mother's death, suffering from a mental crisis that results in a brief clinical stay.

When she returns, Miranda notices that her clothes fit her even less, so that "[t]he cold [trickles] down in the gaps between the material and her chest" (42-3). She is a "[s]carecrow girl" (43), akin to Carter's somnambulist Sleeping Beauty who is "so thin, so frail that her dress [seems]…to hang suspended" (Carter 126). And, much like the Countess, Miranda is withering away because of her refusal to eat what she is meant to. Perhaps the most haunting scene in the narrative comes when Miranda, in a liminal asleep-awake state, hears her great-grandmother whisper in her ear: "You must eat" (Oyeyemi 146). Miranda soon enters the house and sees a table set for four, her foremothers expecting her:

> Jennifer and GrandAnna [sit] side by side with their elbows on the table. They [lean] forward, anticipating a meal. They [are] naked except for corsets laced so tightly that their [desiccated] bodies [dip] in and out like parchment scrolls bound around the middle. They [stare] at Miranda in numb agony. Padlocks [are] placed over their parted mouths, boring through the top lip and closing at the bottom. Miranda could see their tongues writhing. (147)

Decorated with food, the table is "made of pearl, or very clean bone" (147). Here the colour white resurfaces, the table a likely representation of the White, pure or "very clean" bloodline it is hosting.[13] A spectral Lily confesses to Miranda that she trapped Anna and Jennifer, and Lily beckons her daughter to eat. "Eat for us" (149), Jennifer pleads, while Lily promises Miranda that she is safe, "Us Silver girls together" (149). When Jalil, an Arab classmate of Miranda's, appears, Miranda becomes covered in his blood. She is then presented with a padlock by her mother, and, seemingly accepting, "gratefully [kisses] its cold loop" (150). After her bewildering, horrendous dream—or vision, or maybe possession—Miranda "[runs] her tongue around the inside of her

[13] Lily, also present, is even described as "angelic, too pure to be plainly seen" (148).

mouth" (150), asking herself: "*what can I taste, what can I taste, what can I*" (150). She moreover realizes that she cannot remember her birth year, and consequently feels as though she is "becoming someone [else]" (153).

I sit with this moment in Oyeyemi's retelling because it is where the intimate and intricate relationship between the authority of Miranda's wicked ancestors, consumption, and Miranda's own intensifying monstrosity becomes unquestionable. Stephanou explains this scene eloquently:

> Lily uses padlocks to seal the dangerous mouths which symbolize unquenched and unrestrained appetite. Anna Good, being racist and from an older generation, desires to consume the Arab boy Jalil, while she and her daughter Jennifer are prevented from eating him by Lily, who does not hate the [O]ther and finds consumption dangerous. Their tongues writhe like snakes with agony promising animalistic consumption. (1252)

Stephanou continues that Miranda, tempted by her foremothers who represent the monstrous appetite she has inherited, consumes Jalil, while Lily offers her daughter a padlock "to protect [her] from eating the [O]ther and thus becoming a monster" (1252). After her maybe-maybe-not fantasy, Miranda also glimpses at herself in the mirror and sees "a cube instead, four stiff faces in one" (Oyeyemi 150). Similar to Oyeyemi's "Snow White" retelling, the mirror is a powerful object that is capable of predicting what is to come: Miranda is indeed four in one, becoming an amalgamation of her maternal forebears. She is not just becoming someone, but *something* that, like Boy, she cannot recognize. But the four is split, therefore creating a conflict within her: Anna and Jennifer represent the impulse to consume, while Lily and Miranda herself represent the refusal to consume and be monstrous. Miranda's appetite is going beyond non-food items, and it is this

inhuman want that she must suppress.[14] Central to Miranda's burgeoning monstrosity is also her constant invocation of "the goodlady," which Wyatt interprets as a "signifier which seems to refer to the composite figure of all [Miranda's] maternal ancestors" (260). Miranda aligning herself with this label parallels Birkhäuser-Oeri's contention: citing Jungian theory, she maintains that every woman should "realize that she is merely the stage on which the eternal mother-daughter drama is performed, not one of the actresses herself" (30).

And yet the most monstrous figure that Miranda becomes is the vampiric soucouyant, a self that originates from the inherent inhuman hunger she attempts to repress. When her girlfriend, Ore, is given a collection of Caribbean myths from her parents, she instantly turns to her favourite tale: "I read about the soucouyant, the wicked old woman who flies from her body and at night consumes her food, the souls of others…in a ball of flame. At dawn she returns to her body, which she has hidden in a safe place" (Oyeyemi 170). Such a malicious, ravenous spirit can only be conquered by burning her skin with salt and pepper before she reenters her body, and the legend assures that once "that unnatural old lady" is killed, "all shall be as it should" (170). Despite the plain monstrousness of the soucouyant, which is characterized as "wicked" and "unnatural," Ore questions her true essence: "the soucouyant [seems] more lonely than bad. Maybe that [is] her trick, her ability to make it so you couldn't decide if she [is] a monster" (170-1). Ore soon after sees Miranda and observes how frail she looks—but also serene, "like someone accustomed to sickness, someone who lay[s] back to back with it in bed" (179). Ore further observes her "enormous eyes" and "the curve of her lips," and admits that she cannot "imagine ever touching her" (179). Miranda's weakly appearance uniquely parallels the myth of the soucouyant, in which

[14] An earlier scene also includes Miranda looking at her reflection in water and seeing someone/something unlike herself: "Miranda [wants] to say, *That is not my face*. No, it [isn't] hers, she [has] to get away from it, peel it back" (113).

she is coming away from her body as a consequence of her intense need to consume. And, like Carter's Sleeping Beauty, Miranda is consequently bound to a liminal position, confined to an existence of waking death. It is an existence she is intimate with, as Ore accentuates. Ore's focus on Miranda's mouth is also meaningful: Sarah Ilott posits that "the physical workings of the mouth…are frequently used to symbolise the formation of Oyeyemi's protagonists, as the mouth functions as border between inside and out and involves processes of identification, internalisation, and assimilation, or abjection, dissociation, and disgust" (135). Ilott frames the mouth as a liminal site where the friction between formation/annihilation—and even humanness/monstrousness—prevails.

While Sleeping Beauty requires a male touch to liberate her (which comes in the form of a kiss), Ore cannot imagine touching Miranda in her sick, vulnerable state.[15] Ore's hesitation—perhaps even fear—functions as a premonition, because when she *does* touch Miranda, she only intensifies her hunger:

> Last night had been the fifth, perhaps the sixth night that Miranda had lain by Ore, smelling her, running her nose over the other girl's body, turning the beginning of a bite into a kiss whenever Ore stirred, laying a trail of glossy red lip prints. Ore's smell was raw and fungal as it tangled in the hair between her legs…Miranda had needed Ore open. Her head had spun with the desire to taste. She lay her head against Ore's chest and heard Ore's heart. The beat was ponderous. Like an oyster, living quietly in its serving-dish shell, this heart barely moved. Miranda could have taken it, she knew she could. Ore would hardly have felt it. (Oyeyemi 220)

[15] Miranda even tells Ore: "You can see exactly how sick I am. That's why you don't want to touch me" (190).

Ore's touch—or alternatively the feeling of Ore—becomes Miranda's affliction rather than her liberation. Here the narration, as focalized through Miranda, implies that it is Ore's smell, the feel of her, and the rhythm of her fast-beating heart that spurs Miranda's need to consume her. And it is this potent craving that makes Miranda completely vampiric, completely animalistic, completely carnivorous—completely monstrous. She, like the soucouyant, must violently consume to appease her inhuman appetite. But as with Ore's perception of the soucouyant, her monstrousness is not as explicit as it may seem. When Miranda imagines consuming Ore, she asks herself: "would I really?" (220). She then bites her wrist to calculate how she might consume Ore without hurting her, but later writes to herself: "*Ore is not food. I think I am a monster*" (221). Miranda, to the frustration of her maternal ancestors, attempts to spurn her monstrous nature—a nature that confuses and perturbs her. Sceats, in the context of Carter's "Sleeping Beauty" retelling, observes that "vampires are figures of appetite and longing as much as they are of power and abuse" (112). But the same applies to Miranda—the starving soucouyant who yearns to be free from her monstrous heritage. When Ore tells her the story about the girl who kills the soucouyant, Miranda believes that the soucouyant—also a girl—becomes free through her demise (Oyeyemi 192). Miranda likely sees herself in the monstrous girl, who Ore thinks deserves to die because she is bad (192). It is Miranda's becoming that, as Wyatt suggests, evokes prominent ethical questions: "What is good and what is evil, and how can one distinguish between them? Where is the line between the innocent and the monstrous?" (256). Miranda's liminal position further encompasses such opposites: she is at once good and evil, innocent and monstrous.[16]

When Miranda returns home from college with Ore, the house announces that Miranda's enfeebled appearance is most favorable: "She [looks] so beautiful. Tiny. Immaculately carved; an

[16] As Wyatt puts it, "Good and evil do not inhabit opposite poles of a binary but mix and shift in unpredictable ways. Heroines can act like monsters, and victims become victimizers" (260).

ivory wand" (Oyeyemi 222).[17] Pleased with her worsening health, the house affirms that Miranda "[is] no longer able to eat comfortably, even if she [wants] to" (222). Here the house glorifies Miranda, marking her as a divine thing (note, too, the mention of "ivory" to emphasize her Whiteness). Her monstrousness, for the house, is a sign of her purity. And her unbecoming is her becoming—becoming less of her human self and becoming more of who/what she is meant to be. As Wyatt confirms, Miranda's frail condition brought on by her hunger "brings her closer to the moment she can be absorbed into the company of dead mothers the house encloses" (269). Before they leave for her house, Miranda tells Ore that "[t]he house wants [her]" (Oyeyemi 203) and threatens to jump out the window. Ore assures her that "[i]t wants [her] back in one piece," to which Miranda replies: "She doesn't. She doesn't care how I come back. You can't hear how we…how they're calling me" (204). Similar to the snow child's transformation into a monstrous flower in Carter's "Snow White" retelling, when Miranda refers to the house as *she* and not *it*, she recognizes the agency and power it/she exercises over her. She also appears to acquiesce to the house's want for her when she mentions *we*, already feeling part of the incorporeal maternal collective that the house confines. Wyatt proposes that the house is a maternal entity, too, since it/she is compelled by the need to safeguard the lineage of Silver women "even if that means depriving them of their lives" (257). When Miranda is later sleeping in the house, the house chooses not to kill her because she is already dying and therefore it/she will shortly be able to "take her away" (Oyeyemi 224). It becomes evident that the house, as a maternal subject, exemplifies a "perverse maternal ethic" (Wyatt 268), spurred to protect by annihilating. Ultimately, the house is monstrous, even vampiric, as it/she endeavours to consume Miranda—to give her life in death.

[17] Expectedly, the racist house also rejects Ore's presence within it and Miranda's relationship with Ore. On their relationship, the house professes: "Disgusting. These are the things that happen while you're not looking, when you're not keeping careful watch. When clear water moves unseen a taint creeps into it—moss, or algae, salt, even. It becomes foul, undrinkable" (223).

I end my exploration of *White Is for Witching* the same way Oyeyemi concludes her novel: by returning to the beginning. When the question "Where Is Miranda?" is asked in the prologue, the house states that "Miranda is at *home*…she is stretched out inside a wall" (Oyeyemi 3). Meanwhile, to the question "Is Miranda Alive?," the house answers: "She has *wronged* / me I will not allow her to live" (4). Such is, as promised, Miranda's fate: at the end of the novel—not long after asking herself "What am I?" (273)—Miranda becomes one with the house and her foremothers (275). Unaware of what precisely happened to his twin, Eliot reveals that the only thing that remains in her wake are her shoes that continuously and mysteriously fill with a strange substance: "Water that [is] red and [smells] of roses. It [is] thick,…[gathering] in viscous lumps" (281). Perhaps blood, except for the overwhelming rose smell—the most potent Eliot has ever encountered (280). Like the snow child and the vampiric Countess, a rose—or, at least, the smell of them—becomes a reminder of and a substitute for Miranda. And the colour red, to reinvoke Vaz da Silva, becomes a metaphor for both life and death. Carter's and Oyeyemi's Sleeping Beauty can only exist in nonexistence: their ancestries restrain them to a life of inhuman compulsions, and to escape monstrosity is to cease being entirely. But while for the Countess to cease being means to actually die, for Miranda it means to relinquish her physical body and to replace it with a nonmaterial one.

Conclusion

Rewriting a fairy tale, for Carter and Oyeyemi, brings the fairy tale back to life. But to resurrect a fairy tale is not just to restore the existence it once had; it is not an effortless process of preserving and protecting what once gave it meaning. When Carter and Oyeyemi retell a fairy tale, they aspire to disconnect it from whatever images the label "fairy tale" reinforces: the picture-

perfect girl miraculously born from snow who can be nothing but innocent; the jealous stepmother whose evilness is unambiguous and limitless; the enchanted princess who patiently waits to be claimed. “There’s a sense that fairy tales are lightweight stuff, and we need to see them as the incredibly complex tales that they are in their own right,” Oyeyemi posits in an interview. Carter and Oyeyemi are not complicating fairy tales because fairy tales are already inherently complex. Alternately, their fairy tale retellings become magic mirrors themselves, exposing the ugliness that remains obscure in the original telling of the tales they are remaking. And in some way, these retellings become anomalous themselves, too, refusing to be plain reflections of their textual progenitors. It is through the figure of the monstrous girl that Carter lays bare the patriarchal and misogynist politics that deny the fairy tale heroine agency and selfhood. Oyeyemi does the same, except she further accentuates the racial politics that the fairy tale encodes. Carter’s and Oyeyemi’s monstrous girls are envious, vengeful, threatening, abject, liminal, and ravenous. But they are also protective, alienated, lonely, and trapped. Carter and Oyeyemi take the pure fairy tale girl and fill her with incoherencies, tensions, and conflicts. She is herself complex, filled with potential.

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