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Not So Grim: Liz Lochhead's Subversion of Patriarchy in *The Grimm Sisters*[*]

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Abstract

Although originally folk and fairy tales belonged to female story-tellers who had composed these tales, their hold on the stories was gradually lost due to the rising interest of writers like Perrault and the Grimms in these tales. While putting these narratives down, male authors never simply wrote these tales down as they heard them but adapted them in a certain way to promote their patriarchal ideologies through these texts. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, postmodern writers, relying on intertextuality and the fantastic challenged the ancient lore, subsequently re-writing and questioning the reliability of these so-called "original" tales. Particularly female authors writing in the postmodern tradition challenged the central by replacing it with the peripheral, through their employment of such techniques as irony, satire, parody and pastiche. Among these writers, Scottish poetess Liz Lochhead stands out with her attempt to recover the "absent" voices in fairy tales. Re-writing the fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers from a female perspective in *The Grimm Sisters* (1981), Lochhead via her poems subverts the role of the traditionally silent part attributed to women, while voicing the concerns of women as story-tellers, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, step-mothers, hags and the "other" women. In this regard, the aim of this article is to discuss the role of postmodern techniques and the fantastic in enabling Lochhead to subvert the conventional roles ascribed to women in her *The Grimm Sisters* and re-write the contemporary feminine experience as it is perceived and experienced by women per se.

Keywords: Fairy tales, postmodern poetry, re-writing, Liz Lochhead, *The Grimm Sisters*.

O Kadar Da Amansız Değil: *The Grimm Sisters* Adlı Eserinde Liz Lochhead'in Ataerkil Düzeni Altüst Edişi

Öz

Aslen halk hikâyeleri ve peri masalları bu eserleri yaratmış kadın hikâye anlatıcılarına ait olmasına rağmen kadınların hikâyeler üzerindeki tekeli Perrault ve Grimm kardeşler gibi isimlerin hikâyelere gösterdikleri ilgiyle giderek yok olmuştur. Hikâyeleri yazarken, erkek yazarlar asla bu hikâyeleri duydukları gibi kâğıda dökmez ve bu eserleri kendi ataerkil

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ideolojilerini destekleyecek şekilde uyarlar. Yirminci yüzyılın son çeyreğinde postmodern yazarlar, metinler-arasılık ve fantastik aracılığıyla eski öğretilerine meydan okumuş ve bunun sonucunda sözüm ona "orijinal" olan bu hikâyelerin güvenilirliklerini sorgularken adı geçen hikâyeleri yeniden yazmıştır. Özellikle postmodern kadın yazarlar, ironi, hiciv, parodi ve pastiş gibi teknikler yardımıyla merkeziyi dışlanmışla değiştiririp geleneği sorgular. Bu yazarlar arasında, İskoç şair Lic Lochhead fantastiği kullanımı ve peri masallarında "namevcut" olan sesleri geri kazanıp yeniden yazması açısından önemli bir yer tutar. *The Grimm Sisters* (1981) adlı eserinde, Grimm kardeşlerin masallarını kadın bakış açısından yeniden yazan Lochhead, geleneksel olarak kadınlarla özdeşleştirilmiş olan sessiz rolü ters düz ederken kadınların hikâye anlatıcıları, anneler, eşler, kız çocukları, kız kardeşler, üvey anneler, kocakarılar ve "diğer" kadın olarak endişelerini dile getirir. Bu bağlamda, bu makalenin amacı postmodern teknikler ve fantastiğin Lochhead'in *The Grimm Sisters* adlı eserinde kadınlara ithaf edilmiş geleneksel rolleri alt üst ettiğini ve kadınların güncel deneyimlerinin kadınlar tarafından anlaşıldığı ve deneyimlendiği üzere yeniden yazımını sağladığını savunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Peri masalları, postmodern şiir, yeniden yazım, Liz Lochhead, *The Grimm Sisters*.

INTRODUCTION

Although originally children's literature had been the domain of female story-tellers, the scales were tipped when writers like Giovanni Francesco Straparola, Giambattista Basile, Charles Perrault, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen claimed an interest in recovering traditional folk and fairy tales. Responsible for the children's edification, women had composed and disseminated these tales within the household mostly, yet female composers, deprived of the authorial power which deemed writing as a masculine activity, sunk into oblivion, while the aforementioned names collected these and transcribed them. Joyce sums up the issue as follows: "*Though we often associate some of the first fairy tales with Perrault, women authors were responsible for very early fairy tales, accounting for nearly two-thirds of written selections historically composed in the 17th century*" (2009: 31). Consequently, children's literature, which came into full bloom as a distinctive field of study in the nineteenth century, was dominated by male writers largely with latter names, such as Andrew Lang, added to the list. While putting these narratives down, the writers never simply wrote them down as they had heard them but rather adapted them in a certain manner to reflect their patriarchal ideologies. The binary oppositions that were set in these tales such as the golden-hearted maiden versus the old evil witch, passive female versus active male etc. illustrate only too well what the writers were trying to promote and, at the same time, control through these tales.

Rosemary Jackson studying fantasy as a mode in her *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* suggests that the fantastic "*aims 'to make visible or manifest'*" (1981: 13) what is oppressed in any given period. For her, fantasies are "never ideologically 'innocent' texts" (Jackson 1981: 122), but rather help trace "*the unsaid and the unseen of the culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent,'" as a result of which it attempts "to make visible the invisible and to discover absence*" (Jackson 1981: 4). Jackson's idea of fantasy as subversion and as an attack upon the male symbolic order, then, had much to offer to contemporary women writers who relied on the use of fantastic in their postmodern works to liberate female imagination and the patriarchal hold on fairy tales. With postmodernism, which challenged metanarratives by deconstructing dominant ideologies and replacing the central with the peripheral, "*[s]ubversion became the battle cry: the tales were to be turned inside out and upside down*" (Warner 2014: 133) through techniques such as irony, satire, parody and pastiche. Postmodern writers relying on intertextuality challenged the ancient lore mainly through the use of the fantastic, subsequently re-writing and questioning the reliability of the so-called "original" tales. Hence, in prose, writers like Jeanette Winterson, A. S. Byatt, Angela Carter, Tanith Lee, Emma Donoghue and Margaret Atwood, and in poetry, poets like Anne Sexton, Slyvia Plath, Carol Ann Duffy and Liz Lochhead employed the fantastic to re-write the experiences of the "absent" voices in one of the oldest genres: the fairy tale, subsequently reclaiming "*a literary history that once belonged to women authors whose contributions may have been overshadowed by predominantly male compliers and editors*" (Joyce 2009: 31).

Similar to her contemporaries who re-wrote the classical fairy tales from a feminist revisionist viewpoint, in her 1981 poetry collection *The Grimm Sisters,* Glaswegian poet Liz Lochhead re-told the fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers from a female perspective. Subverting the role of the traditionally silent part attributed to women, Lochhead's poems voice the concerns of women as story-tellers, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, step-mothers, hags and the "other" women by problematising the patriarchal ideologies that are

manifest in fairy tales and their reception by the contemporary audiences. The poems, of which subject matter is borrowed from mythology and legends to folk and fairy tales, show a wide variety of interests which represent the contemporary experience as it is re-imagined by a female poet. In this regard, the aim of this article is to discuss the role of postmodern techniques and the fantastic in enabling Lochhead to subvert the conventional roles ascribed to women in her *The Grimm Sisters* and helped her re-write the contemporary feminine experience as it is perceived and experienced by women per se.

Postmodern Revision of Fairy Tales

The classical fairy tale is established upon binaries, as the plot of the tales generally revolves around the conflict between good and evil, such as the opposition of the stepdaughter and the stepmother, the golden-hearted maiden and the old evil witch, knight in shining armour and lady in distress, vigorous hero and patient heroine etc. Reflecting the dominant ideologies of their time, nowadays "*fairy tales appear too backward looking to many progressive-minded critics and creative writers. Not only are the tales considered to be too sexist, racist, and authoritarian but the general contents are said to reflect the concerns of semi-feudal, patriarchal societies*" (Zipes 2006: 169). According to MacDonald, particularly feminists have recently voiced their discomfort with the stereotypical representations of women in fairy tales that show women as

> *either merely beautiful, passive recipients of good luck, usually in the form of a handsome and wealthy prince-husband, or ugly, churlish witches who have nothing but contempt for the world they live in. The fairy tale would have the reader believe that either women are malevolent outcasts or they are good but passive married women and that marriage happily ever after is enough of a reward for a girl* (1982: 18).

The sexual politics of fairy tales require that girls are raised as obedient and modest characters whose curiosity, pride, vanity, greed or laziness is rubbed off as they wait for their happy ending which is ultimately achieved through their rescue by an active questing male and their subsequent marriage. Harries argues that the

> *"sleep" of Sleeping Beauty or of Snow White in her glass coffin, the uncomplaining self-abnegation of Cinderella, the patience and silence of the sisters who work to save their seven or twelve brothers, the princesses who must be rescued from towers or briar hedges or forests or servitude –all these seem to provide the patterns for feminine passivity and martyrdom. The wicked stepmothers, witches, and fairies have come to represent the dangers older, powerful women seem to pose in our culture* (2003: 13).

Thus, while female characters passively submit to being "*male property, handed from father to suitor or husband without complaint or volition*" (Harries 2003: 137-138), patriarchal authority is ensured all the more by discouraging so-called feminine vices and promoting humility, submission and conformity instead. Close reading of fairy tales by contemporary critics reveals the classical fairy-tale elements as instruments serving the interests of patriarchy mainly. Hence casting patriarchal control aside, contemporary women writers aim "*to expose the prerogatives of aristocrats, fathers, and other authorities, to liberate the libido of young women from the taboos of politesse, to tell things how they are –and how they could be*" (Warner 2014: 156). In order to do so, a method that is commonly used by these writers is to deconstruct the patriarchal ideologies that are inherent in the texts and to re-write the tales from a strictly feminine perspective. Based on the premise that *"[e]very story can be retold differently*" (Warner 2014: 143), the first step in doing so was to demonstrate how the tales are

not pristine but rather "*expressions of the collectors' and authors' values, which are both time-bound and class-bound*" (Warner 2014: 133).

Next, appropriation takes place "*in order to revise or even reverse its [the literary genre's] assumptions, ideologies, or paradigms . . . [which] is by no means the exclusive property of women," so that the writers may alter "an inherited tradition*" (Walker, 1995: 4). Thus, the works of women challenge the canon by writing against the inherited tradition from oppositional and subversive points of view. Accordingly, re-writing has been employed as a feminist tool through which "*women writers modify and challenge patterns established by earlier male writers*" (Harries, 2003: 14). As a genre which shapes itself according to the different ages in which the tales are written, contemporaneity requires that the mode in which fairy tales are currently written is playfully subversive. If the statement "*fairy tales have always been revived, re-vised, and updated in the light of contemporary realities*" (Dutheil de la Rochère-Heidman 2009: 44) is to be taken for granted, then storytellers in every age would naturally be considered as adaptationists, just like the earlier male writers who disseminated their patriarchal ideologies through these tales.

Accordingly, contemporary re-writings of fairy tales are mostly undertaken by postmodern female writers whose revisions enable the previously ex-centric female characters who were silenced, pacified and marginalised to speak back from the margins. Makinen identifies the quest precisely as a postmodern mission which allows the readers to recognise whose voices get subdued (2008: 148), adding that feminist writers "*argue for women's active roles as tellers of stories and for tales that celebrate active female protagonists and feminine wisdom while acknowledging that these have been largely suppressed by the predominantly male compilers*" (2008: 148-9). Similarly wondering "*Why the fairy tale?*" Benson answers, contemporary fiction "*in all its variety, is concerned with the collapsing of barriers and the dismantling of hierarchies, both aesthetic and ideological, and with the admittance of otherness, or at least the uncovering of an otherness already working within*" (2008: 3), hence concluding that the binaries that are clearly at work in fairy tales posit them as likely resources to playfully subvert. Harries, too, maintains that

> *[s]ince the characters in traditional fairy tales are often polarized –the wicked witch and the innocent princess, the selfish stepmother and the long-suffering stepdaughter, the wicked wolf and the compassionate hunter– reversal is quite easy. Early feminist rewritings often favored this technique, turning passive princesses into questing heroines, illuminating the motives or justifying the tactics of the wicked stepmother. Their reversals do illuminate the patriarchal, often sexist systems that lie beneath most classic fairy tales* (2003: 100).

Thus, in re-writings conventionally marginalised voices are given a voice, re-presenting not "the" truth but the truths that postmodernism came to question regarding the characters under spotlight. Aiming to subvert meta-narratives as such, according to Connor, in post-war fiction, "*telling has become compulsorily belated, inextricably bound up with retelling, in all its idioms: reworking, translation, adaptation, displacement, imitation, forgery, plagiarism, parody, pastiche*" (1997: 166). Undertaken since the early 1970s (Benson 2008: 6), postmodern questioning of the fairy tales and their stereotypical representations of designated male-female roles eventually gave way to "*a critical deconstruction of tradition . . . with a critique of origins*" (Foster 1985: x). Accordingly enabling what Christina Bacchilega refers to as the "*conflictual dialogue with a pervasive tradition*" (1997: 146), postmodern re-writings through postmodern devices challenged the validity of earlier texts playfully. Agreeing with the

proposition that "*intertextuality as a strategy of polyphony [aims] to disrupt monologic narrativity*" (McHale 1987: 168), Makinen regards the use of postmodern techniques in re-writings as a politically charged act against meta-narratives (2008: 146). Thacker, likewise, suggests that "*the rejection of absolutes and essentialist thinking defines the ideolog(ies) of postmodernism*" (2002: 140), as a result of which postmodern writers

> *who embed fairy-tale intertexts generally "revise" or deconstruct them, using irony, parody, and sometimes satire of these intertexts alongside the tales' original character types, themes, motifs and images. Often turning fairy-tale plots upside down, reversing outcomes, and using unreliable narrators, anti-heroes/heroines . . .* (Wilson 2008: 99).

As stated above, deconstructivist techniques are part of the narrative strategies that are used to reveal the underlying ideologies in meta-narratives in contemporary re-writings, while the fantastic is employed to reinforce the endless possibilities that these tales may offer. Therefore, it is possible to see the use of these techniques abundantly in contemporary women's fiction. From prose to poetry, female writers have relied on postmodern techniques and the fantastic to challenge the authorial and patriarchal voices that have suppressed female voices by subverting the principles of a genre which originally belonged to women. Thus, through re-writing, the writers went beyond the limitations of the genre by opening the fairy tales to fresh interpretations that are in accordance with the contemporary experience of women; written solely from the perspective of women. Among poets who relied on the postmodern techniques of re-writing, Liz Lochhead particularly stands out with the direct antagonism of her collection's title. Positioning *The Grimm Sisters* against the Grimm Brothers, Lochhead fills in the absent voices and experiences of the original tales by providing a group of estranged and unique women with a protective sisterhood. Relying on the use of the fantastic to re-present the contemporary feminine experience with their clear allusions to the original tales, Lochhead in her poems aims to display a variety of female voices as voiced by miscellaneous representations of women, hence criticising the so-called feminine "virtues," such as silence, dependency, obedience, passivity and self-denial, that are conventionally encouraged as feminine qualities by male authors.

Liz Lochhead's *The Grimm Sisters*

Glaswegian dramatist-poet Liz Lochhead (1947-) established herself progressively as a feminist poet whose challenging viewpoints, combined with her invigorating humour and irony, resulted in such collections as *Memo for Spring* (1972), *The Grimm Sisters* (1981), *Dreaming Frankenstein, and Collected Poems* (1984), *True Confessions and New Cliches* (1985) and *Bagpipe Muzak* (1991) (Stringer 2004: 398). In her works, Lochhead focuses on explorations of female identity in a largely patriarchal society. In this sense, her situation "*invokes the 'canonical double-cross' of the Scottish woman writer: doubly othered, . . . [and] excluded from 'both the male and the English canons of literary excellence'*" (qtd. in McGnigal-Stirling 2006: 13). As a result, her poems reflect the "*struggle with her – predominantly male – Scottish literary heritage and with the dominant English discourse*" (Braun-Hansen 2006: 69). The issue of gender, after all, overlaps in many aspects with issues related to national identity. With their "*dominations and submissions, dichotomized social orders, anxieties of powerlessness, assertions of abiding strength, and questions of silence*" (Skoblow 2003: 327), the correlation between Anglo-Scottish relations and male-female relationships therefore offer inspirational poetic material for the Scottish poetesses.

Accordingly, in her poems Lochhead looked for ways to re-interpret Scottishness gender-wise. To this end, "*[o]ne way Lochhead explores the concept of female self-representation in a male domain is to transform conventional dramas, myths, ballads, and fairy tales into fresh and often darkly comic feminist revisions*" (Tannert-Smith 2008: 588) as a postmodern endeavour to speak from the margins. In her works, Lochhead re-wrote traditional myths and fairytales, by "*challenging cultural preconceptions and female stereotypes, often in a playful, ironic manner" and "bitter humour*" (Bell 2007: 194). Lochhead's satirical re-workings of traditional fairy tales allow readers to gain new insights to questions regarding voice and identity in Scotland. While the titles of her works at once indicate what Braun-Hansen defines as "*Lochhead's incessant fascination with monsters or the monstrous as that which never quite fits and is never quite in place*" (2006: 75), among them, *The Grimm Sisters* (1981) particularly stands out as an attempt to refresh the perception of female identities and roles as perceived initially by men, and to offer present-day alternatives to them. Aiming to overthrow the oppressions on female identity, Lochhead's *The Grimm Sisters* explores female identity through fairy tales and folk tales to argue against the patriarchal values of her culture. To do so, her postmodern re-writings rely on the subversive power of the fantastic, irony and parody to defamiliarise familiar settings, characters and motifs. As a result of this, her poems end up displacing the conventional fairy-tale plotline to make the marginalised subtext central, question the credibility of the happily ever after resolution, and "*revise or reverse the norms or ideology of an intertext*" (Wilson 2008: 100).

Throughout the collection, Lochhead mimics the common fairy tale motif of the importance of the number three by collecting three poems under singular subtitles generally. Thus, Lochhead's opening group of poems, which are collectively subtitled as "The Storyteller Poems," begins with "1: Storyteller." The poem strengthens the idea that women are the original distributors of folk and fairy tales at the outset:

she sat down
at the scoured table
in the swept kitchen
beside the dresser with its cracked delft.
And every last crumb of daylight was salted away.

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

And at first light . . .
the stories dissolved in the whorl of the ear
but they
hung themselves upside down
in the sleeping heads of the children
till they flew again
into the storyteller's night (Lochhead 1984: 70).

The association between "*spinning a tale*" and "*weaving a plot*" (Warner 1999: 315) is clearly visible in this part. The night, just like the fairy tales, is identified as belonging to the female story-tellers who had to wait for darkness to engulf them in its protective armour. Hiding in the shadows, women could tell their stories only when they have a break from their domestic duties. Yet, despite the late-hour, no one can say that their stories are without an effect. The stories, which disappear by day, stick to the imagination of children as is made clear through their association with dreams in which imagination runs wild. The poem in general, also reflects the contemporary undertaking of re-writings by women which, however late, are not without influence.

As for the chores that are evoked in the second stanza, these may be taken as references to imprisonment of female imagination through household duties. Particularly in the nineteenth century, when Evangelistic morals upheld the family as the sacred unit within which men and women had separate roles, the act of story-telling undertaken by women was generally accompanied with a household chore in order to prevent sloth among women. Regarded as a vain activity, traditionally listening to stories was accompanied with more useful activities like sewing, darning, grating and such. Promoting proper feminine conduct, which necessitates physical restraint and industry, the household duties that are enumerated in the poem are supposed to keep women under control. Yet despite this, through these lines it is revealed that women will still find a way out, as is indicated by the identification of the storyteller as a woman.

The two subsequent poems, "II: The Father" and "III: The Mother," on the other hand, are concerned with the one of the most commonplace binary oppositions in fairy tales: fathers and mothers. "II: The Father" combines the tale of "Sleeping Beauty" (the little Briar Rose) with the tale of "Beauty and the Beast." In the poem, the father is blamed for his carelessness either by "*offending the evil fairy by forgetting / her invitation to the Christening*" or getting "*tricked into bartering his beloved daughter / in exchange for the rose he only / took to please her*" (Lochhead 1984: 71). Moreover, the father compounds it all

> *by overprotectiveness and suppression*
> *(banning*
> *spinning wheels indeed*
> *when the sensible thing would have been*
> *to familiarised her from the cradle*
> *and explain their power to hurt her)* (Lochhead 1984: 71).

The activity of spinning, which is regarded as a feminine activity mostly, evokes the image of spinning a tale. Therefore, it is possible to read the poem as a representation of patriarchal suppression on female imagination which oppresses the story-weaving women. Instead of teaching these oppressive ideologies to the daughter, and let her understand the power of metanarratives which will hurt her, the father decides to prevent these from reaching the daughter altogether. Because of this reason, in the case of Lochhead's poem the role of the Sleeping Beauty is reversed, and the "sleeper" of the poem is identified controversially as the King who, with his conventional views, is "*absolutely a hundred years behind the times*" (1984: 71). Thus, occupying the untraditional passive role for a change, the King stirs; "*forgiven, full of love and terror*" (Lochhead 1984: 71), as he waits for his radically active daughter to reach his bedside.

The poem "III: The Mother" sets off immediately with the usurpation of a common binary opposition in fairy tales: that of birthmother and stepmother. Lochhead's speaker

claims that the mother "*is always two faced*," and then explains the statement by first describing the desirable "best mother" and its contrasting image, the "worst mother" (1984: 71, 72). The poem reads as follows:

> *Yes, it was she*
> *cried at the seven drops of blood that fell,*
> *staining the snow – she*
> *who bargained crazily with Fate*
> *for that longawaited child*
> *as red as blood*
> *as white as snow*
> *. . .*
> *But she's always dying early,*
> *so often it begins to look deliberate,*
> *abandoning you,*
> *leaving you at the mercy of the Worst Mother, the one who married*
> *your father.*
> *She doesn't like you, she*
> *prefers all your sisters, she*
> *loves her sons.*
> *She's jealous of mirrors.*
> *She wants your heart in a casket* (Lochhead 1984: 71-72).

Making clear allusions to "Snow White" and "Cinderella" both, the poem makes it clear that traditionally once the duty of the self-sacrificing best mother to procreate is fulfilled, the tales hastily get rid of her by replacing her with the worst mother, "whose sexuality, . . . not fully tamed through marriage," threatens "patriarchal visions of wedded bliss" (Balinisteanu 2009: 341). Lochhead throughout the poem problematises the patriarchal ideologies which set women off against each other, while the father cleanses his hands of this ongoing competition, Lochhead reverses the classical fairy-tale ideologies by presenting the two faces of the mother as identical. That the best mother and the worst mother are not at all that different from each other is confirmed finally with a reference to a completely different fairy tale, "Little Red Riding Hood: "*Tell me / what kind of prudent parent / would send a little child on a foolish errand in the forest / with a basket jammed with goodies / and wolf-bait? Don't trust her an inch*" (Lochhead 1984: 72). By evoking the image of little red cap, who is raised by her birthmother, Lochhead subverts the traditional critiques of classical fairy tales. Send off on a quest to visit her sick grandmother all by herself in the dark and threatening forest, through little red cap, Lochhead questions the essentialist patriarchal ideologies which equate being a birthmother necessarily with being a good mother and being a stepmother as being wicked by differentiating maternal instincts from the power to procreate.

Moreover, in the Grimms' tale, the "worst mother" is envious of the daughter's beauty. Constructing the mother-daughter relationship as one of opposition and envious female competition, "*the masculine fairy-tale tradition convicts mothers when they exceed the social roles to which the tales assign them. These fairy tales also render the relationship between mother and daughter as a split relationship, where mother and daughter compete for the favor of power implied in their association with a male, be that the father/king or prince/husband/son*" (Balinisteanu 2009: 342). On account of this, according to Balinisteanu, the final cautionary statement, "'*Don't*

trust her an inch' cannot but sound ironic, undermining the didactic seriousness of male-authored fairy tales such as those of the Grimms" (2009: 342). The ironic statement which aims to reduce the credibility of women by forewarning readers not to trust little red cap's mother an inch, paradoxically exposes the patriarchal ideologies that are at work in the classical fairy tales, thus stressing the problematic nature of patriarchal representations of women by male authors.

The transitory poem to another set of three poems, "The Grim Sisters," presents the speaker's memory of two spinster "*grown up girls next door*" (Lochhead 1984: 72) who would give the speaker a nice hairdo and many cautionary and instructional pieces of advice. The poem recalls the tale of Cinderella in which the speaker as a young woman gets ready to go to a ball with the help of the spinsters living next door in this case. Set in the modern world, the spinsters teach the speaker "*tricks of the trade*" (Lochhead 1984: 73) to avoid a grim disaster. The poem demonstrates "*a kind of femininity that [aims to] [fulfil] masculine expectations*" (Balinisteanu 2009: 333). In the poem, while female conformity to masculine expectations is problematised, the issue of sisterhood is, too, disrupted as women "*dressed to kill*" (Lochhead 1984: 73), start competing for men's attention which recalls Joyce's statement that in fairy tales women "*are represented as prizes if they are young or as fearful witches if they are old. They are pitted against each other, showing a vile interpretation of women's relationships as competitive in nature*" (2009: 32). In the end, the grim sisters end up doing the same thing Cinderalla's step sisters have done: "*Those days womanhood was quite a sticky thing / and that was what these grim sisters came to mean*" (Lochhead 1984: 73). By disciplining the "*young woman, however benevolently by contrast to the fairytale stepsisters' disciplining of Cinderella*" (Balinisteanu 2009: 334), the spinsters allow the speaker to meet patriarchal society's expectations.

"I: Rapunzstiltskin" is the first poem of the next set of poems entitled "Three Twists." The set combines two of the Grimms' tales, "Rapunzel" and "Rumpelstiltskin" together in a postmodern manner. The poem opens with elements borrowed brom "Rapunzel":

& just when our maiden had got
good & used to her isolation,
stopped daily expecting to be rescued,
had come to almost love her tower,
along comes This Prince
with absolutely all the wrong answers (Lochhead 1984: 78).

Beginning with an ampersand, Lochhead's poem indicates that Rapunzel's tale has an earlier beginning which precedes the events that are to be reported. Introduced at once as a solitary figure imprisoned in a tower, she is spotted by a Prince, just as she stopped dreaming about a rescue. Although traditionally the arrival of the prince resolves the problem, in Lochhead's poem, he complicates things all the more, as he begins to visit the tower

every day as though
he owned the place, bringing her
the sex manuals & skeins of silk from which
she was meant, eventually,
to weave the means of her own escape (1984: 78).

The visits of the Prince, eventually turn out to be another form of imprisonment. Preventing her from stepping outside to the public sphere, which is traditionally identified

as a masculine territory, the Prince acts as "Rumpelstiltskin" who considering Rapunzel as his own prize is resolved to keep her for himself. Balinisteanu argues that Grimms' version of "Rumpelstiltskin" transfers economic power from the sphere of the home, where women could claim the identity of skilled workers, into the public sphere (2009: 345). In Lochhead's poem, however, the speaker is strictly confined to the domestic sphere to be usurped by the Prince. Quoting the wolf from "Little Red Riding Hood" with the statement "*[a]ll the better / to see you with my dear?*", when Rapunzel finally confronts him and takes off her glasses in anger, the Prince is controversially associated with little red cap who dares to ask the question to the furious Rapunzel. Not getting her wish fulfilment of being rescued, in the end, Rapunzel is saved by herself when she, by cutting her hair off, releases herself from "*fairy-tale constructions of women, of their beauty, passivity, weakness*" (Balinisteanu 2009: 347-348).

The second poem, "II: Beauty & The" indicates an absent presence with its title at once. The enduring wife of "II: The Father," who has been rewarded with marriage, is transferred into a horrific setting this time which possibly indicates domestic violence in marriage (Balinisteanu 2009: 343): *"Beast / he was hot / he grew horns / he had you / screaming mammy daddy screaming blue / murder"* (Lochhead 1984: 79). Towards the end of the poem, however, something that upsets traditional fairy-tale patterns occurs, as this time the wife herself transforms into the beast and "*match[es] him / horror for horror*" (Lochhead 1984: 80). The image of empowered women is strengthened with the last piece of the set "III: After Leaving the Castle" in which deserting her husband a woman seeks one lover after another, as she grows tired of them. Denying the traditional role of passivity, obedience and fidelity that is assigned to women in fairy tales, the speaker forgets her husband altogether as she also gets tired of her current lover realising "*how monotonous it was going to be,*" and starts to "*make eyes at the merchant*" (Lochhead 1984: 81).

The image of strong independent women extends to the following poem "Tam Lin's Lady" which has its origins in a famous Scottish ballad "Tamlane." The original ballad is about a maiden's uncanny experience with a mortal man called Tam Lin who is being held as a captive of the Queen of Fairies ("Tamlane" 1959: 200). In order to save her captive lover, the fair maiden has to suffer through a series of transformations that Tam Lin undergoes at the end of which the lovers get united. Being a captive of the fairies is one of the most common motifs in traditional European folk and fairy tales. The poem usurping the conventional motif challenges the cautionary aspect of the original ballad which warns the maidens of the dangers of strange charmed, and charming, men. The poem's speaker is the confidante of the maiden who tells the truth as it is. The poem opens with a repetition of the original opening lines of the ballad by the maiden, upon which the speaker interrupts her friend:

> *So you met him in a magic place?*
> *O. K.*
> *But that's a bit airy fairy for me.*
> *I go for the specific – . . .*
>
> *But have it your own way.*
> *Picking apart your personal*
> *dream landscape of court and castle and greenwood*
> *isn't really up to me.*

So call it magical. A fair country.
Anyway you were warned (Lochhead 1984: 81-82).

Undermining the credibility of imaginary tales, Lochhead questions the validity of ancient tales for contemporary audiences as the intervening speaker reflects the views of independent modern women. Unlike the behaving listeners of classical fairy tales, who would believe anything that is told, Lochhead's speaker is someone who prefers reality to the magical. That is why she finds all these stories a bit "airy fairy" for herself. Her incredulous attitude reflects the stance of many of her contemporaries who dismiss the magic for the "specific" that would have given away clues as to how the guy in question would be trouble for the maiden involved with him. Calming the maiden down, the speaker goes onto suggest that the maiden was "*not the first to fall for it*" (Lochhead 1984: 82). The poem reads as follows:

All perfectly forgiveable.
Relax.

What I do think was a little dumb
if you don't mind me saying so
was to swallow that old one about you being
the only one who could save him.

Oh I see – there was this lady
he couldn't get free of.
Seven years and more he said he's sacrificed himself
and if you didn't help him he'd end up
a fairy fore ever! Enslaved.
Or worse still in hell without you (Lochhead 1984: 82-83).

What bothers the speaker is not that the maiden made a mistake but that she fell for "the" old lie about her being "*the only one who could save him.*" In Lochhead's version of the poem, the Queen of the Fairies, who is to be identified as the "*old witch*" (1984: 83) a couple of lines later, is none other than the "other" woman. Marginalising the other woman as the "old witch" makes it more bearable for both parties involved in adultery to ignore the pain of the other woman, who has been clearly replaced by someone younger than her. Not bothering himself with ending things with the other woman himself, the guy who is identified as Tam Lin looks up to the maiden to save himself from the other woman by starting a relationship with her. Deceiving the maiden by pretending to be a vulnerable man who is madly in love with her, the lover has actually fooled both of the ladies. As a modern take on adultery, extra-marital sex and ensuing marriage, which is generally forcefully undertaken to conform to the society's norms, Lochhead's poem questions the validity of adultery and extramarital sex as taboos in the late twentieth century, and asks whether marriage is truly necessary under the circumstances:

everything turned out conventionally right
with the old witch banished to her corner lamenting,
cursing his soft heart and the fact that she couldn't keep him,
and everyone sending out booze for the wedding.

So we're all supposed to be happy?

But how about you, my fallen fair maiden
now the drama's over, tell me
how goes the glamourie (1984: 83)?

Subverting the characteristic happy ending of fairy tales which guarantees that the fairy-tale couple will live happily ever after, Lochhead concludes that the maiden has become an alcoholic, and questions whether the lover would be happy to accept the maiden's transformation as easily as she has suffered throughout his symbolic transformations. Thus, stripping the tale off of all its charming symbols, Lochhead tells the naked truth which reduces the other woman to a marginalised fairy tale character, while at the same time likening the maiden to a fallen woman who is possibly suffering due to her renunciation of female solidarity. In the end, the poem confirms only too well why the earlier listeners would have preferred the lies to the truth but, Lochhead affirms, there is no such need for contemporary audiences so long as they depend on themselves.

The title of the next poem in the collection titled "Six Disenchantments" at once indicates that fairy-tale motifs are to be turned upside down. Representing the disappointments in a couple's relationship, the mirror, who is supposed to tell the fairest of them all, identified as the man, contrastingly tells the speaker that she is not beautiful (Lochhead 1984: 84). Secondly, it is implied that the man, who is likened to a warm room and once provided the woman with a feeling of safety, does not do so any more. The sense of security that the room enabled yet, had more to do with the woman herself who was taking care of the room making sure that "*it was clean and decent*" (Lochhead 1984: 84). The latter lines, however, imply a drastic change in the situation: "*I spent a lot of time in it / scribbling and humming, rearranging / at my leisure / the objects on the mantelshelf*" (Lochhead 1984: 84). Taking Lochhead's principal aim in writing these poems into consideration, it is possible to read these lines as self-referential which insinuate the re-writing process Locchead herself has undertaken. Initially making sure that everything is in order, the speaker scribbles at her leisure now, which parallels the re-arrangement employed by Lochhead herself as she re-writes the patriarchal tales however she sees fit.

The next set of poems entitled "The Beltane Bride" start with its namesake which makes an allusion to the Celtic goddess of fertility, renewal and conception who is generally associated with Spring. Contrary to classical patriarchal tales which condemn female sexuality as a vice, Lochhead through her poem celebrates female sexuality freely. Likewise, "Song of Solomon" which refers to a section in the Old Testament celebrates sexual love. The following poem named "Blueshirt" is an adaptation of a famous Grimms' tale known as "Fitcher's Bird." Carrying echoes of Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard," the story is about a sorcerer who carries three sisters in a row testing each of them till, ultimately, he is outwitted by the youngest sister. Like Perrault's female character, Lochhead's speaker is entrusted with a singular key to the apartment of her lover whereby she starts to investigate the lover's apartment wondering curiously about the lover's former beloved. Not being able to find anything, she suggests perhaps she will find clues as to what has happened to the previous beloved, and how it has happened, in the fridge: "*I stare at this key printed on my palm /. . . I / pocket it. / In your innocent ticking fridge / I might find the forbidden egg / crowned with blood*" (Lochhead 1984: 91). In Lochhead's poem the metaphoric corpses in the fridge signify the secrets the parties each have hidden in their closets as to their past affairs, and the fears the discovery of such secrets entail in a flowering relationship.

Lochhead's "Last Supper" at once starts out with Biblical allusions: "*She is getting good and ready to renounce / his sweet flesh. Not just for lent. (For / Ever) / But meanwhile she is assembling the ingredients / for their last treat, the proper / feast*" (1984: 93). The poem is not much of a renunciation of faith as it is a renunciation of a couple's relationship. Implying that the lover is cheating on the speaker, "*[h]e could be depended on to bring the bottle / plus betrayal with a kiss*" (Lochhead 1984: 93), the image of the lover is gradually distanced from that of Jesus's to Judas, who is emblematic of being a traitor. As the first part of the poem regarding unfaithfulness comes to an end, Lochhead introduces the theme of sisterhood in its place as the poem moves away from its Christian echoes to represent pagan rituals of witches:

> *Already she was imagining it done with, this feast, and*
> *exactly*
> *what kind of leftover hash she'd make of it*
> *among friends, when it was just*
> *The Girls, when those three meet again.*
> *. . .*
> *Yes, there they'd be, cackling around the cauldron* (1984: 93-94).

Capitalised as "The Girls," Lochhead's speaker imagines she and her friends as devouring the feast hungrily, while they read bones and laugh at the stupidities of the lover: "*That's rich! they'd splutter, / munching the lies*" (1984: 94). Later, when full "*they'll sink back / gorged on truth / and their own savage integrity, / . . . / satisfied / till somebody would get hungry / and go hunting again*" (Lochhead 1984: 94). Unlike the classical fairy tales, the witches of Lochhead's poem are representatives of sisterhood who, identified as predators, feed on the lies of unfaithful men. Being completely done with one cheating man, they move onto the next disloyal one and rejoice in their joint effort to overthrow representatives of patriarchy.

The final group of poems called "Hags and Maidens" attracts contemporary readers to another set of binary opposition that is old & ugly women and young & beautiful maids. "The Ariadne Version," as the title at once indicates, is about Ariadne's version of the mythological story regarding her conduct with Theseus. Lochhead's poem provides a version of why Ariadne decided to help Theseus escape the Minotaur's fury and find his way out of King Minos's labyrinth. Depicted as a bored teenager on a school break, Ariadne's act is described as an example of teenage rebellion against neglectful parents. While, her father is busy playing the law-maker, Ariadne's mother is busy with superficial worries such as changing her hair colour. Thus, playing the masculine and feminine roles that are assigned to them, Ariadne, in contrast, is painted as someone who wants to escape these essentialist roles: "*Oh they gave her Arty Crafty Kits / for her birthday . . . / to keep her hands busy at any rate with / tatting or / crochet or some such crap*" (Lochhead 1984: 97). For Ariadne, her parents' complicated relationship, in which the parties involved are both guilty of infidelity, is represented best by the labyrinth they owned: "*Some labyrinth. It fitted them like a glove*" (Lochhead 1984: 97). Deciding that the only way out will be through a man, whom she will use for her ends, Ariadne makes up her mind to "*kill off*" her masculine side, "*her own brute bit / her best friend / her brother: doll up to the nines go ultra / feminine (one hundred percent)*" (Lochhead 1984: 98). Her own brute bit, identified as a "he," does not necessarily mean masculinity per se but the conventional qualities that the word entails in classical tails, such as activity and recklessness. Thus, making up her mind, Ariadne resolves to go ultra feminine to trick the first man she ever sets eye upon to achieve her goals.

"Poem For My Sister" refers to a common experience among sibling-sisters. Aspiring to dress like a grown up, the speaker's twelve-year-old sister tries the speaker's shoes on: "*She says they fit her perfectly / but wobbles / on their high heels, they're / hard to balance*" (Lochhead 1984: 98). With its echoes of "Cinderella" and the stepsisters' attempts to fit the glass slipper on their feet, the poem points to the difficulty of walking in someone else's shoes, especially when one does not have the right qualifications for it. The speaker in the next stanza reveals that she would rather watch her sister play children's games instead. Believing that her sister should behave like the child that she is, the speaker voices her worries as such:

> *I try to warn my sister*
> *about unsuitable shoes,*
> *point out my own distorted feet, the callouses,*
> *I should not like to see her*
> *in my shoes.*
> *I wish she would stay*
> *sure footed,*
> *sensibly shod* (Lochhead 1984: 98-99).

"The Cailleach," identified as a divine hag in Gaelic myth precedes the aptly named last poem of the collection, "The Old Hag." Together with Beltane representing the two faces of the same goddess according to some sources, the poem draws associations between old age as the winter of a person's lifetime. Although not as spirited as the speaker of "The Beltane Bride," the speaker of "The Cailleach," identified as "*Mama Iron Hill*," is equally admirable for her "*rigour*" that will outlast anything (Lochhead 1984: 101). Finally, "The Last Hag" is concerned with a doll of "the" last hag as a "relic." Disrespected and dismissed by the speaker as an "*old has been*" her "*witchy whispering / saying daughter, successor*" (Lochhead 1984: 103) follows the speaker all around. Despite her protests, the little girl who has bought and stored away the old hag as a relic, ultimately transforms into the hag whom she despised initially. Then again, thinking about it, she comes to the conclusion that perhaps being a hag and storing one's resources is not a bad thing after all, and decides to wear her new title proudly.

CONCLUSION

Having been raised in a patriarchal society, through *The Grimm Sisters*, Lochhead aims to show the irrelevancy of the patriarchal ideologies of the classical fairy tales to contemporary timeline. Hence, introducing a variety of female roles in her poems, Lochhead aims to contribute to contemporary feminine tradition as experienced and written by women. Resting upon the themes of female solidarity, self-discovery, independence, adultery, and selflessness, Lochhead's poems aim to deconstruct the patriarchal ideologies behind women's representations as constructed by male authors. Problematising the roles that are assigned to women via postmodern techniques of parody, pastiche, irony and satire, Lochhead via her poems merge fantasy and reality together to explore women's multifaceted experience as lovers, wives, daughters, spinsters, seductresses, and the other woman. Building her poems on familiar images borrowed from the Grimms, Lochhead subverts the traditional roles that are assigned to women, which required that women grow up to be obedient, faithful, selfless and subservient beings by defamiliarising these elements and re-introducing the elements of classical fairy tales to contemporary settings. Playfully

subverting the dominant ideologies through the help of postmodern re-writing techniques, Lochhead's critique exposes the machinations that are at work where sexual politics is concerned. Thus, re-writing the classical fairy tales for contemporary readers, Lochhead relates the experiences of women at different stages in their lives while retaining the oppositional positioning of female characters in her poems, such as the maiden with the hag, the birthmother with the stepmother, the daughter with the mother, the wife with the other woman, the siblings with one another, the innocent with the wicked and so on. Yet, not favouring any one group over another, she rather aspires to show all these representations as parts of a whole making up the contemporary experience.

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