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Letting Down Rapunzel: Feminism's Effects on Fairy Tales

Angela Smith

Abstract   The importance of stories written for young readers is undisputed, and in particular the central place of the fairy story in popular culture is clearly recognized. Whilst most of these stories are centuries old, they have been adapted by the cultures of the tellers to be more compatible with the ideological views of the audience. This article will explore how feminism has influenced two versions of the same story, published by the same publisher for comparable age groups through an exploration of the Ladybird versions of *Rapunzel* as published in 1968 and 1993. It will show how there are subtle changes in the text which do not affect the overall narrative structure but can offer an insight into the ways in which society has ideologically positioned men and women. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be used to show how a close linguistic analysis of the text can reveal the impact of feminism on the adaptation of children's books.

Keywords   Fairy tales · Power · Feminism · Masculinities · Cultural capital

Introduction

Fairy tales have been part of Western culture for centuries. They are the genre of fiction we choose to tell to our youngest members, and they provide the narrative tropes we return to in adulthood, as metaphors. We readily refer to a woman who loses a shoe when walking as having a "Cinderella moment," or urge a girl who has overslept to "Wake up, Sleeping Beauty!" People also draw on well-known phrases

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from specific stories in banter; for example, a woman unbraiding her long hair might hear, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair." The origins of these stories stretch back into the world of oral narratives and folklore. However, as Jack Zipes and others have argued, fairy tales were collected and written down in Western society from the sixteenth century on with the rise of print culture and increasing literacy across the aristocracy; and later, in the eighteenth century, they were canonized by the newly-emergent middle-classes. Initially intended as stories for the whole community, with the emergence of a children's book industry, these stories began to be adapted for a child audience, becoming hugely popular in the nineteenth century. However, the stories did not remain static. Each generation and nation has reshaped and retold these tales to reinforce the dominant beliefs of their time and place. As Zipes expresses it, "the most telling or catchy tales were reprinted and reproduced in multiple forms and entered into cultural discursive practices in diverse ways so that they became almost 'mythicized' as natural stories" (2006, p. 1). With specific reference to their use as tales for children, he argues that "the fairy tale assumes great importance because it reveals how social mores and values were introduced in part through literature and constituted determinants in the rearing of an individual child" (Zipes, 1983, p. 7).

This article will explore two retellings of one fairy story aimed at younger readers. The story of Rapunzel, classified as "The Maiden in the Tower" type of tale, is one that has been around for centuries, but is best known in the version collected by the Brothers Grimm in their 1812 volume *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* ("Children's and Household Tales"). The title of this collection indicates the conflation of tales for children and the wider, adult household at this time. As such tales took on a cross-generational appeal, their cultural resonance ensured their place in the collective consciousness, as described above. However, by focusing on two versions of this story, both published by the British children's publisher Ladybird, I shall explore the way in which the "social mores and values" that Zipes describes have been incorporated into more recent retellings. Ladybird, it should be noted, specialized in publishing simplified versions of texts for emergent readers from the 1960s onwards, illustrated in full colour throughout. The first version of *Rapunzel* that they published appeared in 1968, with a second version in 1993. By using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, explained below) to explore the social context of these publications, with specific reference to the gender politics that were prevalent at different historical periods, I shall explore how the adult writers of these books attempted to reinforce a dominant ideology of traditional gender roles in the face of changes that were emerging in what became known as "gender politics"— changes that sought to challenge such stereotypes.

Interest in ideology in children's fiction arises from the belief that such texts are culturally formative, and of vital importance educationally, intellectually, and socially (Hunt, 1992, p. 2; Levorato, 2003). More than other texts, children's fiction is thought to reflect society as it wishes to be, and, for many middle-class writers, as it might actually appear to be, in their eyes at least (Knowles and Malmkjær, 1996, p. 61). This will become clearer as I explore how changes in society can be either ignored or even challenged when they do not conform to the views of more conservative writers. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1983), readers are invited to draw

on the "cultural capital" of their own social world when they come to interpret texts. The concept is relevant here as access to the range of texts on which interpretation draws is not equally distributed. Thus, the person who has never come across "Rapunzel" or "Cinderella" will have little idea of the history and significance of the allusions mentioned above (i.e. to Rapunzel's hair or Cinderella's shoe problems), even if they have some appreciation of their context. Norman Fairclough, in developing his model of CDA, points out that a reader's cultural capital also forms part of wider social and cultural practices. As he argues:

> Discourses and texts which occur within them have histories, they belong to historical series, and the interpretation of intertextual context is a matter of deciding which series a text belongs to, and therefore what can be taken as common ground for participants, or presupposed. […] Discourse participants may arrive at roughly the same interpretation or different ones, and the interpretation of the more powerful participant may be imposed upon others. (Fairclough, 1989, p. 152)

Thus a text is a product of the contradictory and complex beliefs of the society that shaped it, and, in the case of texts written for children, there is even more of an attempt by the dominant voices to reinforce and naturalize mainstream views for those whom they see as its most impressionable members. It is here that the linguistic choices that a writer makes are particularly significant since they can serve to promulgate particular points of view. Moreover, as Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjær point out, this happens "whether the writer intends his/her linguistic choices to function ideologically or whether they merely reflect implicit ideology" (1996, p. 68). Furthermore, these linguistic choices occur not only at the level of lexical selection but at a grammatical level, too. M. A. K. Halliday's (1985) work on functional grammar helps us explain the possible reasons for a writer making certain choices from the range of syntactic and lexical possibilities available.

As discussed previously, ideological control is particularly significant when it comes to literature for young children. As Carolyn Baker and Peter Freebody (1989) suggest, the inculcation of a form of Standard English is widely acknowledged as being one of the main purposes of such texts. However, as they go on to show, there is also a model of ideal behaviour expounded in such works. For younger readers, the stories tend to be shorter, which can lead to underdeveloped, simplified characters and narrative tropes. Fairy tales are seen as ideal in this regard, for, in addition to their cross-generational appeal, discussed above, they make clear divisions between good and evil, with their established narrative and character conventions removing the necessity for detailed explanations of plot. In her discussion of the continuing relevance of fairy stories, Margaret Perkins comments:

> [it] is through stories like these that young children learn about their social and cultural heritage. The values, beliefs and practices are passed on, challenged and revised. It is also through these stories that young children become part of history and understand how and why things come to them. (2008, p. 28)

With such importance placed on children's books, it is clear that the revisions these texts undergo, as shifts in social and cultural practices occur, are reflected in the retellings of such tales. In the case of the traditional fairy tale "Rapunzel," it has recently been retold in such texts as *Rapunzel: A Groovy Fairy Tale* (Roberts and Roberts, 2003) and *Falling for Rapunzel* (Wilcox and Monks, 2003). These new versions have recast the tale, giving it a more contemporary setting, with neither story finishing with Rapunzel's marriage. There is also the Disney retelling in the film *Tangled* (Grena and Howard, 2010), with a much more proactive female character. These recent adaptations of this story reflect the growing sense of gender equality in Western society, where traditional expectations about the sexes are being challenged and subverted.

Gender Stereotypes and Social Shifts

The Enlightenment in seventeenth-century Europe marked a time when attitudes towards sexual and bodily functions shifted from open acceptance to being more censorious and restrictive (Ariès, 1962, p. 106). This was particularly marked in terms of gender roles which became more established and rigidly defined, moving towards what we now think of as "traditional stereotypes," with patriarchal power also becoming more entrenched, privileging men over women and children. Hegemonic masculinity increased its grip, having "the blessing of the church, the support of the state and ultimately the force and obviousness of common sense" (Talbot, 2010, p. 160). As Zipes has pointed out, men became more closely associated with reason, temperance, physical activity, and sovereign order, whereas females became more associated with whimsy, passivity and irrationality, the latter raising the prospect of subversive deviance (Zipes, 1983, p. 33). It was at this time that the older, oral narratives, including fairy tales, came to be written down; however, they were composed to suit a specific audience: the literate elite. Thus the French writer Charles Perrault modeled his heroines on the idea of the *femme civilisée* of upper-class society. They were therefore beautiful, polite, graceful, well-groomed and in control of themselves at all times. Such women must wait for the right man to come along and show reserve and patience until he did so. As Zipes succinctly puts it, "the male acts; the female waits" (1983, p. 25). This behaviour is seen very clearly in fairy tales such as "Sleeping Beauty" where the female character embodies this ideal of passivity, and in "Rapunzel," where the eponymous heroine patiently waits in a tower for a man to rescue her. In fact, these female characters are "heroines" only in the sense that they are central to the tales, for they carry none of the heroic qualities of strength and bravery associated with traditional masculinity (although as Margery Hourihan (1997) has pointed out, these qualities are neither the only qualities of heroism, nor are they qualities exclusive to male characters). The asymmetrical casting of "hero" and "heroine" clearly reflects the gender divide in the majority of these stories, such that any female protagonist who acts otherwise—giving, for instance, a more physically empowered performance—would today be accorded the colloquial accolade of "kicking-ass."

Such empowered heroines are mostly a product of the last quarter of the twentieth century, which witnessed huge changes in the way gender came to be

understood in Western society as the status of hegemonic masculinity became increasingly open to challenge. The effects of second-wave feminism, which emerged in the 1960s, led to a heightened awareness of patriarchy and the way it conceived women as domesticated, passive and dependent beings. This traditional portrayal was usually justified in terms of a biological essentialism, whereby the physical traits of each gender were seen to delimit cultural performance (Macdonald, 1995; Talbot, 1995). This tendency to "naturalize" gender inequality in society resulted in women being both denigrated (as powerless and weak) and, simultaneously, idealized (as "domestic goddesses"). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, second-wave feminists challenged such stereotypes, leading to changes in the law in Western societies, such that men and women had more "equal" roles, with equivalent rights in terms of employment, educational opportunities, and legal entitlements. Many authors of children's stories took on board the messages of second-wave feminism, writing stories with more proactive female central characters, including many that drew on the fairy tale genre. For example, *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch and Martchenko, 1980), in which the heroine rescues the prince, and Babette Cole's *Princess Smartypants* (1986), wherein the eponymous princess decides not to get married at the end of the book. As Hilary Crew has argued, writers such as the above, and others like Donna Jo Napoli, have "reworked the conventions of [fairy tales] so as to encode discourses that contradict or challenge patriarchal ideologies that are increasingly viewed as anachronistic in today's society" (Crew, 2002, p. 77). However, alongside such reworkings, the traditional versions of these stories continued to be produced and consumed, as can be seen in the case of the 1968 version of *Rapunzel.*

By the 1990s, women finally seemed to have won many of the battles fought by second-wave feminists, gaining a more equal standing in society as far as legal changes could establish. However, as Susan Faludi identified in *Backlash* (1991), the newly-empowered women and their supporters started to come under attack from those who sought to return to traditional gender divisions, particularly from men who felt their masculinity had been somehow diminished by women who no longer needed to be rescued: women could now rescue themselves. Masculinity was therefore seen to be in crisis (Rutherford, 2003, p. 2) with reports indicating a growing catalogue of the failings of men, as evidenced in the rise in "broken" families, the inadequacies of paternal authority, the educational failure of increasing numbers of young men, plus their sexual immorality and promiscuity. As John MacInnes commented, this was symptomatic of a "psychic insecurity" in the face of the "terrors of modernity" (1998, p. 1), mainly brought about by the female challenges to patriarchy. In such a context, fairy stories were seen as an acceptable way of reinscribing the traditional gender divisions that second-wave feminism had so successfully tackled elsewhere.

Rapunzel by Ladybird

In the middle of the twentieth century, the Wills and Hepworth publishing house in Britain started to produce simplified versions of classic stories under the Ladybird

imprint. This imprint produced a wide range of subjects for reading ages stretching from beginner reader to independent early reader. The "Well-loved tales" (series 606D) focused on the canon of traditional fairy tales for reading grades 1 (beginner) to 3 (independent), and were often set in vaguely medieval times. Here I will examine their two retellings of "Rapunzel." Both were written for children with the reading abilities of 7–10 year olds. The first was published in 1968, coinciding with the emergence of second-wave feminism, appearing in the same year that also saw the strike by women workers at Ford's Dagenham plant, their protest leading directly to the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970. The second text was published in 1993, after the major gains of this feminist movement, but, as a result, at a time when there was a backlash against such female empowerment (Faludi, 1991), for it had led to the crisis in masculinity mentioned earlier. Undertaking a close analysis of both the verbal and the visual features of the two texts, I will explore the perceptible shifts in the way that gender is represented.

The version of "Rapunzel" that I will examine here is Grade 2, which is described on its back cover as "a book which younger children will enjoy having read to them, and which will encourage older children to gain extra reading practice." This Ladybird version of 1968, is "retold" by Vera Southgate and illustrated by Eric Winter. Southgate and Winter worked on several other stories in this series, with Winter's detailed and colourful illustrations later assuming iconic status as Ladybird covers, being reproduced on a wide range of merchandise in the early part of the twenty-first century. The 1993 version is credited to Nicola Baxter with illustrations by Martin Aitchison; it also claims to be "based on the story by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm." Both Baxter and Aitchison owe a great debt to Southgate and Winter, with lengthy passages of the Southgate text being repeated in the new version, and Aitchison's compositions and the styling of Rapunzel bear some close resemblances to Winter's work. However, the 1993 edition is much shorter than the 1968 version: twenty-four pages compared with the 50 of the earlier edition. The layout is also different, with the traditional verso text/recto picture format of the 1968 version being "updated," such that text and pictures appear on both sides, with the pictures themselves often forming a double-page spread.

As mentioned above, the story of Rapunzel is best known as a German fairy tale in the collection of the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, first published in 1812. Their version of the story is an adaptation of the French fairy tale "Persinette," by Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force, which was originally published in 1698, but there are similar elements (such as the princess being trapped in the tower) to be found elsewhere, and particularly in Persian folklore. The name "Rapunzel" comes from the German name for the salad herb, rampion, a member of the campanula family. In these more traditional versions of this story, a woman's pregnant cravings for this herb lead her husband to try to steal it from a witch's garden. But he is caught in the act by the witch herself, so, in exchange for the herb, he agrees to hand over the newly-born child to the witch, who, as a result, names the child after the herb. Most modern retellings omit detailing the etymology of Rapunzel's name, perhaps owing to a lack of familiarity with the herb amongst contemporary readers.

I will look at two sections of the story, which are common in most retellings of the tale: first, the section that I have just mentioned, where the deal is struck

between the witch and Rapunzel's parents; and second, the section that covers the period of Rapunzel and the prince's courtship and its eventual discovery by the witch.

The Witch: Menace, Magic and Motherhood

The Grimms' version of the story begins with the pregnancy of a couple who have long wanted a child. This Ladybird version, though it keeps the details given above, omits the fact that the wife is pregnant. As a consequence, her cravings now seem like self-indulgent foolishness. Moreover, it is not now rampion that the wife craves, but "salad," which, at that time, was the generic name for a non-specific medley of leafy green plants. However, by 1993 the connotations of "salad" had become more sophisticated, suggesting a more carefully prepared dish, such that it made no sense for the husband to be rooting about in a garden for it. Consequently, it is, more specifically, "lettuce" that he searches for, this being the source of the woman's craving. Regardless of these changes, however, all versions of the story are consistent in making a woman's weaknesses—her uncontrollable appetites—the reason for her husband venturing into the witch's garden to steal her crops. The wife thus follows in what might be seen as a long ancestry, reaching back to Eve with the apple, of women who could not contain their appetites. Thus her husband is rendered the more innocent party, although he was the one picking the forbidden food. He, in effect, is seen to have helped out, or rescued, his weaker half, in line with traditional gender role stereotypes.

This is reinforced in the 1968 Ladybird version as we learn that the man creeps into the witch's garden under cover of darkness to "quickly gather" and "fetch" the salad (1968, p. 12). It is in the words of the witch, who catches him in her garden, that this action is seen for what it is: the husband is not fetching anything; he is "stealing" (1968, p. 14). But this euphemism makes us feel more sympathy for the man, in contrast to the witch, whose lack of compassion and understanding tends to distance our emotions.

The way the witch is illustrated in this 1968 version is of particular interest. She appears as an old hag, her decrepitude emphasized by her missing teeth, use of a walking stick and spectacles. She is dressed in a black-hooded robe, with her lank grey hair just visible. She is also slightly stooped, which reinforces the fact that she is clearly shorter than the now-repentant man, who stands with his hands impotently folded in front of him, his medieval-style robe giving him the air of a monk. However, in the next picture, the menacing visage of the witch has mellowed, which is in line with the written text, describing how she "lost her anger and took pity on him," having heard the man's story. With an open-handed gesture she offers him more salad in return for the child which, she assures him, she will "treat well and look after … like a mother" (1968, p. 16). The fact that the man agrees to such an unequal exchange is not uncommon in fairy stories, as, for example, we see in the exchange of a cow for some beans in "Jack and the Beanstalk." Bruno Bettelheim (1976) sees such transactions as being part of the required suspension of disbelief expected of readers implied in stories of this nature.

In the 1968 version of *Rapunzel*, when the witch appears on the day of the child's birth, she is represented visually as very maternal, cradling the infant and bowing her head in a comforting gesture. Thus, by this point, there is no evidence of any sorcery on her part, and her only act of evil has been to bargain for a child in exchange for some stolen salad. The weakness of the man in agreeing to such a bargain is emphasized by the fact that he hands over the child without argument or discussion, and that is the last we hear of him.

In contrast, the 1993 version has far less verbal interaction between the husband and the witch; moreover, the passage of time has also been compressed. Whereas in the 1968 version there were several nocturnal visits to the witch's garden to steal salad, in the 1993 version the witch immediately confronts the man on his first visit to the garden. She is described as "snarling" in a very unfeminine way, as she accuses him of trespassing. On hearing why he needs what has now become "lettuce," she then establishes the standard bargain, that, in order to keep the produce of her garden, "in return you must give your firstborn child to me." Whilst in the 1968 version the text informs us that the "poor man was so frightened that he agreed" (1968, p. 16), in the 1993 one, the man's fear seems to have increased, as his agreement is now secured because he has been "so terrified" (1993, n.p.). It could therefore be argued that his masculinity is further undermined in this more recent version, as a result of a dreaded feminine power. This briefer text offers no further information about his state, although it is otherwise closely aligned with Southgate's version. But the single visual image (compared with the three that illustrate the 1968 version) is remarkable for its departure from the earlier text. Rather than the old hag, we have the towering figure of a much younger woman with flame red hair, heavy eye make-up, and a black corset. She stands with her hands on her hips, emphasizing both her power and her femininity. She is now much taller than the man, who barely reaches her shoulders. He is presented as hapless, with a gawky, unbalanced stance and an open mouth, reflecting the terror the verbal text describes, as he stares at the dominatrix before him. This physically domineering female is not maternal in any way, although, when we next see her, she is holding the infant she has received as her side of the bargain. However, rather than cradling the child, she holds the baby to her shoulder, casting a sly and triumphant look at the biological father, emphasizing her power and domination. There is no hint of the more maternal side of the witch, such as can be seen in the 1968 version.

In comparing this brief but crucial scene in the two versions of the story, we can begin to see how the authors have reflected the ideological context of their respective retellings. The traditional gender stereotypes of 1968 have been amended in the later version to reflect the growing emancipation of women, as embodied in the revised character of the witch who now appears visually more powerful and less maternal, in line with the perceived threat to society posed by the liberated career woman of the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast, the diminished physical power of the male character is shown in both his enhanced fear and his gawky visual stance, reflecting the more recent crisis in masculinity. In this way, the 1993 text apparently acts as a warning against such advances in gender politics.

Rapunzel: Purity, Courtship and Punishment

The second, longer episode that I shall consider shows more clearly how these changes were reflected in the retelling of 1993. This episode relates to Rapunzel's courtship and the witch's discovery of her love for the prince. In both versions of the story, the earlier statement that Rapunzel is locked in her tower at the age of 12 is consistent. This is in line with a common theme in fairy stories; namely, that girls at the onset of puberty need protecting from society, or, more explicitly, from male desire. In fairy stories, this often takes the form of imprisonment or banishment, where the ubiquitous beauty of the helpless heroine is the key to such actions. Aside from her burgeoning sexuality being seen as a threat to patriarchy, it is also seen to threaten the power of older women; for example, in "Cinderella" the eponymous heroine is banished to the kitchen, and in both "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty" the heroines are threatened with death. Likewise, in the 1968 version of *Rapunzel*, it is her beauty that makes her vulnerable, being described as "the most beautiful girl in the world." In contrast, in the 1993 version, her beauty is more explicitly linked with the threat of her blossoming sexuality, as shown in the adverbial clause, "so that no one should ever see how beautiful she was, the witch shut Rapunzel up in a high tower in the forest" (1993, n.p.). In both cases, there is a temporal glossing of events with "years passing" until her singing attracts the attention of a young prince who is riding through the forest.

In the 1968 version, the prince is unable to find a way to reach the tower and its singer, "so he rode sadly home" (1968, p. 26). However, Rapunzel's "sweet song" entices him back to the forest "every day" (ibid.), where he stands and listens. After a vague passage of time, which is faithful to the Grimms' indication of "several months," he witnesses the witch arriving at the tower and uttering the incantation, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair" (1968, p. 28), followed by the iconic action of the witch using Rapunzel's plaited hair as a rope in order to access the tower's high window. In a brief monologue, the prince declares that, "If that is the ladder by which to enter the tower, then I too will try it" (1968, p. 30), resolving to return the following day at twilight. In the 1993 retelling, the compression of time restricts this action to just one evening, with no faithful, daily returns. The narrative of the prince's attraction to the singer is glossed over again in a brief monologue, where he testifies to his passion: "I shall not rest until I have found out who the voice belongs to" (1993, n.p.). But in both versions, the prince is the active agent in seeking access to the tower, his physical acts echoing those of the witch.

On entering the tower, the 1968 version offers us this meeting between Rapunzel and the prince:

> Rapunzel was surprised, and rather afraid, when she found that a man had climbed up to her room in the tower.

> As for the prince, when he saw the beauty of Rapunzel, he was overjoyed. He talked kindly to her and she soon lost her fear. He told her how, for many months, he had stood outside the tower every day, listening to her sweet singing. (1968, p. 32)

Here we can see the emotional transition of Rapunzel, shifting from initial surprise to fear, thence to a loss of that fear. She is represented as passive, in that she is described only through these mental process verbs, whilst the prince is described using material process verbs ("climbed," "stood") and engaging in verbal processes ("talked," "told"). Grammatically, this gives the male character greater power in the text, as the former verbs have an impact on the world, whereas the latter rationalize his actions in a cause-and-effect manner: he "sees" Rapunzel's beauty and is "overjoyed."

Following in the tradition of courtly love, the prince asks Rapunzel's permission to return to see her and we are told that,

> for many months, the prince visited Rapunzel every evening and they grew to love each other. After a while, the prince asked Rapunzel to marry him and she replied, "I will gladly do so". Then they talked together of how Rapunzel could get out of the tower. (1968, p.34)

In this paragraph, the period of time is once again described as "many months." The prince is once more the active agent, visiting Rapunzel, but there is a greater sense of togetherness as they are given equal weighting in the statements that they "grew to love each other" and "talked together." Rapunzel finally speaks, but this is in response to the prince's question rather than as a result of initiating a conversation herself. Readers are then informed that "Rapunzel thought of a plan":

> "Every evening, when you come to see me," she said to the prince, "bring a skein of silk. I shall weave the silk into a ladder. When it is long enough to reach the ground, I shall come down. Then you can carry me away on your horse." (1968, p. 36)

Whilst it is puzzling that they have alighted on a plan that will involve yet more delay through the laborious manufacture of a ladder, rather than the prince returning with a ready-made one, it is significant that this is Rapunzel's idea, not the prince's. In line with the traditional division of labour between domestic and public work, it is Rapunzel who will weave the ladder, this braiding form of weaving being a traditional female occupation closely related to the iconic task of spinning. However, once the ladder is removed from the domestic domain, in this case the tower, the prince will assume his traditionally masculine, active role and carry Rapunzel away on his horse. The rescue narrative is one that repeatedly occurs in fairy stories and other traditional narratives. In this story, though, the actual rescue does not occur. Instead, this sudden burst of industry on Rapunzel's part results in punishment. Whereas in the Grimms' earlier version of the story it is the signs of pregnancy that trigger the discovery of the courtship by the witch, in both Ladybird retellings, it is other devices that prompt this revelation. In the 1968 version, the witch's ignorance of the courtship is undone when,

> One day, after the witch had climbed up the tower by the plait of hair, Rapunzel spoke without thinking. "How is it, good mother," she asked, "that you feel so much heavier than the prince?"

"Oh! You wicked child!" cried the witch. "I thought that I had separated you from all the world. Now I find that you have deceived me!" (1968, pp. 39–40)

At this point, the more maternal representation of the witch, the person that Rapunzel named "good mother," is replaced by the more traditional stereotype of a powerful, active woman. Moreover, it is Rapunzel's loose tongue that has ended their carefully planned courtship. The traditional division between a female, domestic realm and a male public one is made plain here, as the witch describes the intrusion of a male character as an invasion by "all the world" (1968, p. 40). Because Rapunzel has disrupted this artificial separation, she must therefore be punished. After the ritual cutting off her "beautiful hair," she is banished in great sorrow to a desert.

In the 1993 version of the story, the compressed time-frame and removal of much of the descriptive detail is particularly noticeable at this stage. The courtship, which in 1968 took "many months," is here reduced considerably:

Rapunzel was astonished to see a young man climb through the window. And the prince was dazzled by the lovely girl. As they spoke to each other, they realized they were in love. "I will come back tomorrow night to rescue you," the prince promised. (1993, n.p.)

The mental process verb "astonish" is attributed to Rapunzel, but no other verbs describe her dawning attraction. In fact, the prince's reaction on seeing Rapunzel is to be "dazzled" by her, thus placing Rapunzel in the more powerful position. This puts both characters on a more equal basis in terms of their grammatical positioning, although semantically "girl" carries less authority than "young man." As with the 1968 edition, the act of falling in love is represented as a mutual thing, even though it has occurred over the space of just a few hours' acquaintance. However, in the 1993 version, it is the prince who, in a declarative speech act, announces his intention to rescue Rapunzel: she is mute, having no explicit part in hatching this plan. The prince is therefore the more powerful agent in this version. Interestingly, this version does not explicitly mention "marriage," either, something that is a highly unusual omission from such fairy stories, according to Jane Sunderland (2011). That said, this whirlwind courtship still results in the same outcome as the many months' wooing of the 1968 version. The witch's discovery of their love, however, does not come as a result of Rapunzel's words but of the witch's own observations:

When the witch returned the next day, she saw at once that Rapunzel's heart was full of love for a stranger.

"You have betrayed me, you wicked girl!" she shrieked furiously. (1993, n.p.)

The compressed timeline is again clear, with the discovery of the plot occurring the following day, rather than several months later. However, this compression takes on supernatural connotations as the witch sees "at once" that Rapunzel is in love. This more demonic side of the witch's personality is made clear from the illustration, where Aitchison depicts a flame haired harridan to match the furious, shrieking tones of the written text. With a sense of vigorous movement the golden

plait is cut from Rapunzel's head and snakes out across the page to the right-hand margin. As with the 1968 version, Rapunzel's love for another is depicted as a personal affront to the witch: an act of betrayal. However, it is the fact that the rescue plot is uncovered by the witch's own powers of divination that is most noticeable in the 1993 version.

Both stories have the same ending, with the prince happening upon Rapunzel in the desert some years later as a result of her singing. As in most versions of the tale, the prince had been blinded by thorns when he fell from the tower. Rapunzel cures his blindness with her tears of joy and they return to his kingdom where they are married. Unlike the traditional versions of "Rapunzel," which feature the narrative device of the pregnancy, there is no mention of the twins she has with her when they are reunited. The common theme of Rapunzel being somehow the agent of her own demise—through physical manifestation of pregnancy or vocal intervention as in the 1968 Ladybird retelling—is consistent in all versions of the story. It is never the discovery of the prince in situ that triggers discovery.

This section has shown that the 1968 version presents a world of clearly demarcated, traditional gender roles, ignoring the contemporary advances in second-wave feminism. The powerful, active woman is seen to be a threat, with even the pure Rapunzel being punished for her transgression, resulting in the long-term loss of her prince. By 1993, the changes in society that had occurred as a result of the actions of second-wave feminism had been largely achieved. However, 1991 had seen the publication of Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, in which she detailed the adverse reactions to gender equality with the perception, among many, that women had achieved too much power. On this basis, I would suggest that the 1993 version of *Rapunzel* reflects this fear, showing the submissive Rapunzel's courtship being thwarted by an overly powerful woman.

Conclusion

I have argued that Southgate's 1968 version of *Rapunzel*, despite appearing at a time heralding huge shifts in gender relations, endorses clearly defined, traditional gender models. This simplified and sanitized version of the story remains wedded to the notion that motherhood is women's biologically determined role in life, even if she be a witch, although it simultaneously shows that powerful women are dangerous. There is also the warning that even an idealized female character should not be diverted from her passive, dependent role, and that any deviation from this will be punished, as in the fateful utterances of Rapunzel herself when she compares the witch with the prince.

The reduced text of the 1993 version, with its removal of much descriptive detail, relies more on the illustrations to help readers understand the characters. In comparing the two versions, a shift in focus is evident, as the old hag has been replaced by a younger version of the witch. I have argued that this revised representation typifies the more sexually confident, powerful and liberated woman of the 1980s and after, who is more predatory and dangerous precisely because she is more alluring. It may be argued that she represents the threat of the emancipated

women who had won equality in the workplace and elsewhere in society, but at the expense of her traditional roles as mother and housewife. In this way, she has more in common with the character of Alex in the film *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne, 1987). She is the type of character to which Faludi alludes: powerful but dangerous, and thus a threat both to men (emasculating them) and to women, undermining their biologically determined roles as mothers and "the weaker sex." In a further contrast to the 1968 version, this witch also seems to have supernatural powers, as seen by her instant divination of Rapunzel's love for the prince, a feature which enhances the notion that she is "going against nature." Moreover, in the 1993 retelling of the story, only two women speak: Rapunzel's mother and the witch. The mother's only words are those that send her husband into the witch's garden to steal the food. Rapunzel herself does not utter a single word. This reinforces the impression that, when proactive, women are a disruptive force.

The male characters in these two retellings of "Rapunzel" are also interesting in the shifts that have occurred in their representation. Whilst both versions show the emasculated man losing his child in exchange for some food, this is more marked in the 1993 version with Aitchison's illustration showing a gawky, shrunken version of the character in contrast to Winter's more virtuous, upright man. The male has therefore been belittled, if not emasculated, in the face of the new, empowered woman.

As I have argued, then, these two versions of the same story, although written for the same age group and published by the same publisher, show evidence of gender shifts in politics and popular culture between 1968 and 1993. Whilst the 1993 retelling is considerably shorter, brevity alone does not account for the changes in the narrative. Beyond lexical choice, a comparison of these specific scenes in the two Ladybird versions has shown how issues of gender and power become more prominent, reflecting the different social contexts of production. Thus the characters in the 1993 version enact an explicit rejection of female empowerment. The malign force invested in the figure of the witch serves as a warning of the consequences of allowing women such "unnatural" power. In this way, the 1993 version appears to reject the tenets of second-wave feminism and warns of the dangers of diverging from traditional gender roles.

As mentioned earlier, several retellings of "Rapunzel" since the 1990s have sought to challenge gender stereotypes and expectations. For example, the Roberts' version from 2003 sees Rapunzel befriend a budding rock star, Rodger. Whilst much of this narrative reproduces the tropes found in traditional versions of the tale, this Rapunzel is an orphan whose parents are completely absent from the tale; moreover, she lives not in a tower but in a high-rise block of flats with a cruel aunt who will not let her out of the house. There are similarities between this text and the 1968 Ladybird one, with Rapunzel being the author of her own fate through her careless disclosure of her friendship with Rodger. This evil aunt has no magical powers, and is illustrated as stereotypically overweight and unattractive. In a coda to the traditional version of the tale, the aunt's final punishment is to have to use the stairs in lieu of Rapunzel's accommodating braid of hair. However, the tale does not end with a marriage, as Rapunzel and Rodger become "best friends," and Rapunzel earns a living through making wigs out of the hair from her cut-off plait. Rapunzel's

independence and industry act in her favour here, thus demonstrating an engagement with the achievements of second-wave feminism that Baxter's text rejects. In contrast, I have suggested that the Ladybird version from 1993 acts as a cautionary tale against second-wave feminism in its strengthening of traditional gender stereotypes rather than engaging with the more positive approaches found in other retellings from this time.

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