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Mouth to Mouth: Queer Desires in Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch*

Exemplifying the intertextuality of what Stephen Benson has called "post-Carter Generation" fairy tales, Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (1997) can be seen to "re-engage contemporaneously with an already multilayered polyphony, adding a further critical layer to the plurality" of the genre (Makinen 151). *Kissing the Witch* consists of twelve revisions of "classic" literary fairy tales from Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen, and one final "new" story.[1] Each tale recounts the trials of an innocent persecuted heroine figure based upon well-known characters such as Cinderella, Snow White, or the Little Mermaid. The narrator in each case is the character as an older, wiser self. Most of these heroines come to a kind of awakening to their own desires and experience a personal transformation with the help of a (usually older) female character—often the fairy godmother or wicked fairy/stepmother/witch transformed from their pre-texts into caring mentor figures. When she reaches the end of her telling, each narrator turns to this character and asks to hear a tale. On the page following the conclusion of each tale, set off in a framing border, italicized, and centered on the page, are variations of the following lines that follow the narration of the first tale, "The Tale of the Shoe":

> In the morning I asked
> Who were you

Before you walked into my kitchen
And she said,
Will I tell you my own story?
It is a tale of a bird.
(Donoghue 9)

For each successive tale the time and place of the first line, the meeting of the third, and the final line, which becomes the title of the next story, alter appropriately to make specific links between the narrations that precede and follow it. These interstitial moments work as an internal structural-framing device that provides a formula for the passing on of the storytelling duty, continuity between the tales, and cohesion for the book as a whole.

Because of its recursive structure, the proliferation and staged orality of its voices, and its overt representation of multiple types of female desires, *Kissing the Witch* is a particularly complex text to read from any perspective. It is one such perspective—queer reading—that I will attempt here, on the grounds of an apposite match of text and critical approach. The desires encoded in the stories are as varied as the tellers themselves. They include same-sex sexual desire between women, heterosexual desire of women for men, desires for autonomy and freedom, and desires for individual subjectivity, for belonging, and for knowledge. *Kissing the Witch* can unreservedly be called a feminist text, but as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick makes clear in *Epistemology of the Closet,* feminism and the study of sexuality are not coextensive—that is, "gender and sexuality represent two analytic axes that may productively be imagined as being distinct from one another as, say, gender and class, or class and race" (30). Part of this productive distinction makes intelligible the characterization of *Kissing the Witch* as feminist text but not necessarily as queer text. While it does represent various women's struggles for autonomy in heteropatriarchal culture, it does not attempt to conflate and then redress sexual and gendered hierarchies by merely presenting one or two universalized lesbian characters in opposition to heteronormative desire. Instead, each tale tells of the different complex and contingent desires of its female protagonists, and it is in the reader's approach to these desires and the book's structure that a queer reading can be produced, albeit far from automatically.

In fact, *Kissing the Witch* frustrates not only hegemonic patriarchal discourses and normative desires, but also the desires of the critic who wishes to describe its structure and themes in a tidy package. This structure is not amenable to diagramming, and all that can be said consistently of the stories— except the last, original tale—is that they reimagine some of the best-known fairy tales; that all of the narrators are women, except when they are birds or

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horse skulls; and that each of them learns something from the figure to whom she passes on the narration of the next tale. Several of the stories represent lesbian love, but others describe heterosexual relationships. Some of the stories end with lovers united and some with women in isolation, whether fearful or joyous at the prospect. At least three do not seem to represent sexual love at all, but the desire of a child or young woman for a familial bond or place to belong.

The book as a whole employs particular framing structures that "embody" the oral storytelling voice, a common device in literary fairy-tale collections. But the frames of Kissing the Witch are left radically open, and so can be said formally to present the linked stories as contingent upon a cooperative reading process. This cooperative storytelling situation creates the opportunity for multiple possible readings of the tales the tellers revise. At the same time, the passing of story from teller to teller also leaves significant gaps in the characters' lives, thus suggesting that these tales are "in process" and never entirely closed. Finally, the particular ways in which storytelling performance is represented in the text, the narration, not only resists closure through multivocality but also works to interpolate the reader as a teller of her own tale, thus adding to the proliferation of stories, each tale proposing the teller's desire as one among many and prompting the desire, in each narrator and in the reader/narratee, for more stories.

The radical openness and fluidity of the structure and its troubling gaps, especially as highlighted in the final tale, along with the destabilizing narration and the multiple desires articulated in the text by a plurality of voices invite a queer reading. The following discussion of reading practices and structures of framing will be in the interests of a more specific explanation of what I mean by queer, following which I will turn to two tales—"The Tale of the Rose" and "The Tale of the Kiss"—in an attempt to accept the queer invitation of Kissing the Witch.

Veronica Hollinger's 1999 essay "(Re)reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender" suggests that science fiction is particularly suited to "queering" and that "complex and sophisticated inquiries into gender issues are by no means new to science fiction, even if our theoretical representations of these issues have not always kept pace with the fiction" (1). However, Hollinger goes on to claim, "All too often, heteronormativity is embedded in both theory and fiction as 'natural' and 'universal,' a kind of barely glimpsed default gender setting which remains unquestioned and untheorized," and "Both science fiction as a narrative field and feminism as a political and theoretical field work themselves out, for the most part, within the terms of an almost completely naturalized heterosexual binary" (2). I would suggest that the fairy tale can be seen to engage in a similarly sophisticated inquiry into gender and sexuality that nevertheless works within a naturalized

heterosexual binary in fairy-tale studies. In *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (2001), Elizabeth Wanning Harries argues that Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* "insists on the possible links between the best-known tales and the system of gender relations that they reveal" (130). While this is certainly true, Harries's reading of *Kissing the Witch* tends to gloss over a very important related point. These tales, narrated by and to woman-identified women, also disturb the unquestioned and normative binary of *sexual relations* that they reveal. Harries makes only glancing reference to lesbian desire in her reading of the text: she notes that the narrators of *Kissing the Witch* "are redeemed not by the traditional marriage plot but by the possibility of romantic love between women" (130). However, for Harries this possibility is less significant than the book's complex framing technique, "[t]he most startling innovation of Donoghue's book" (131). Like Harries, I, too, am concerned with this "startling innovation," but I argue that it is precisely such framing techniques and structures that encourage a queer reading. In conjunction with the thematic dynamics in the text, this structure in *Kissing the Witch* enacts a queering of fairy tales.

In literary criticism the term "frame" may refer to structural devices, cognitive aids, or ideological underpinnings; yet the multifaceted nature of the term, as useful as it is, can cause critical discussions of frames and framing to become confused.[2] Key to an appreciation of the complexity of Donoghue's innovation is an understanding of how frames have been employed to different (though not incompatible) ends by scholars in fairy-tale studies. For example, Cristina Bacchilega attends to the ways fairy tales are shaped socially, ideologically, and narrativistically. In her discussion of frames in "Snow White," Bacchilega "seek[s] to magnify norms at work in the fairy tale, the narrative frame which measures the voices, gazes, and actions of all the genre's female heroines" (*Postmodern* 29). In doing so, Bacchilega draws connections with the ways that framing strategies of diegesis and focalization in "classic" fairy tales are linked to gender, ideological hierarchies, and naturalizing tendencies in narrative production. Her deconstructive, feminist, and narratological approach highlights how the "[performative] context can be framed and reframed, resulting in different meanings which no one subject can master" (19). Frames shape, enclose, measure, provide methodological structures upon which to rest (or climb); they are cognitive, social, and ideological structures that work to naturalize reading practices.

Similarly, Elizabeth Wanning Harries considers how framing demarcates the borderlands of the tales. She focuses on how stories frame other stories, on how layers of embedding, whether stories resting within stories or linked in a chain, work to place different discourses in relation or conversation. Structural framing devices are an accepted and even expected marker of the fairy-tale

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genre. As Harries notes, "Nearly all fairy tales are framed in some way. When we think of fairy tales, we think of them as bracketed between 'once upon a time' and 'happily ever after'" (104). The formulaic opening and closing phrases constitute a frame that invariably indicates to the reader the entering or moving out of a fairy tale. This framing tells her that she can expect to encounter particular types of characters and generic motifs. The "once upon a time" formula, however, is only one type of structural frame. For Harries it is particularly indicative of the "compact" or single-plot tales made famous by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. However, "[t]hese 'compact,' short narratives have dominated our conception of the fairy-tale genre and make it difficult for us to understand, appreciate, or perhaps even notice the more complex nested narratives that have been part of its written tradition since the beginning" (108). Harries argues that a "more traditional and extended structure . . . strings the various tales along like beads on a narrative chain" and that "the embedded tales and the frame that joins them are always symbiotic" (107). *Kissing the Witch* takes part in both of these traditions, revising "compact" or "classic" tales, but linking the tales within a complex narrative chain that is visually and verbally marked in between individual narratives.

Stephen Benson's *Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale, Theory* (2003) provides yet another important discussion of framing in relation to folktale and fairy-tale narrative cycles, specifically *The Ocean of Streams of Story, Arabian Nights, Il Pentamerone* and *Piacevoli Notti*. In addition to the cognitive contextualization and narrative structuration of Bacchilega's and Harries's discussions, Benson stresses how frames work to lend authority and authenticity to the embedded tales. As ancient stories that have moved from orality to textuality (and often back again), these are "liminal texts, situated on the fertile boundary between the oral and the literary" (46). The early textual cycles Benson discusses present storytelling figures who frame the embedded tales such that they appear "ostensibly authentic but implicitly literary [as they] . . . are structured, both implicitly and explicitly[,] around a staged orality: they mimic orality by staging the event of their narration, thus initiating a series of narratives which have narrative as their subject" (46). Frames, then, also establish a storytelling situation or narrational context in which to place the embedded tales, which, to one degree or another and depending on the length and complexity of the frame narration, create what Harries calls a "symbiotic" relationship between the individual tales and with the encompassing primary narrative.

Framing, for Benson, also contributes to the impression of the authenticity of the storytelling situation as a "sign of historical provenance" (46–47). Nicholas Paige argues that "[w]hat storytellers encode in their frame tales and embedded narratives is a record of how authors and readers understand their always changing relations to print and how generic conventions are modified

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by historical conditions that are no longer those that gave rise to the conventions in the first place" (143). Paige maintains that the storyteller figure in early French novels (and by extension other early European novelistic productions) works as a literal go-between from oral to written storytelling, one who smoothes the way and acts as a cross-generic figure by modeling to readers how novels should be read and understood. Paige's hypothesis mirrors Walter J. Ong's comment that "[e]arly writing provides the reader with conspicuous helps for situating himself imaginatively . . . so that the reader can pretend to be one of the listening company" (qtd. in Benson, *Cycles* 47). The storytelling situation—whether it is Scheherezade telling tales for her life, a group of people passing the time as they wait for the plague to go away, or a wise storyteller imparting life lessons to the next generation—provides a context for the embedded tales, literalizes a storytelling "voice" that creates the feeling of an oral performance, lets readers know why the embedded tales are important, and suggests how they might be read. In *Kissing the Witch* these "helps" appear primarily in the passages between the tellings and moments of direct address to the narratee as an unnamed "you." They encode dialogue between tellers that creates a feeling of intimate reciprocity among narrator, narratee, and reader.

While Bacchilega demonstrates how postmodern writers work to "unmask naturalizing gender constructions" in individual tales and tellings, Harries suggests that contemporary writers continue the literary fairy-tale framing tradition "as a way to direct our readings into new paths" (102); and Benson argues further that the formal framing structure of fairy-tale cycles critically informed those theoretical systems that aimed at describing all narrative: "it is in the representation of the commonplace act of narration, including the telling of tales about tales, that this paradigm of the framed story cycle self-consciously manipulates what later came to be proposed as the structural properties of narrative" (65).

My argument is that *Kissing the Witch* unmasks naturalized constructions of gender and sexuality through tales of nonnormative subjects and desires that actively resist heteropatriarchal ideologies. Its shifting narration, the proliferation of tales, and the gaps between them direct our reading toward multiple new pathways. As a consequence, while this ideological and narrative framing is not exclusive to a queer structure of desire or narrative system, I propose that it does generate the possibility of applying queer reading strategies to fairy-tale texts. In doing so, it enables queer readings of its intertexts and realigns reader expectations and assumptions about what it is possible for the fairy tale to do.

Queer theory has yet to significantly influence fairy-tale studies, but there are indications that our readings are beginning to change.[3] In the introduction

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to the recent special issue of *Marvels & Tales* on erotic tales (2008), Cristina Bacchilega, with a nod to the epigraph of her essay, taken from *Kissing the Witch*, concludes her remarks by insisting on the importance of "learning to read sexuality in fairy tales more openly, maintaining a critical tension between the language of heteronormativity and the languages of transgressive and queer desires" (20). And within that volume, too, Pauline Greenhill's essay, "'Fitcher's [Queer] Bird:' A Fairytale Heroine and Her Avatars," offers an analysis that reveals the tension between normative discourses of "The Robber Bridegroom" and "Bluebeard" and the languages of strange desires of "Fitcher's Bird," an analysis that demonstrates the potential of reading queerly. Nevertheless, queer is only now coming to fairy-tale studies—and, I might add, queer theory hasn't even *noticed* us yet.

Before this special issue of *Marvels & Tales*, two critical articles on Angela Carter by Patricia Duncker numbered among the earliest essays that seriously problematized compulsory heterosexuality in fairy-tale fiction. Duncker's essays "Re-Imagining the Fairy Tales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chambers" (1984) and "Queer Gothic: Angela Carter and the Lost Narratives of Sexual Subversion" (1996) take Carter to task for her lack of representation of lesbian desire. In the first essay, Duncker argues that Carter reproduces a "rigidly sexist psychology of the erotic" (6) in *The Bloody Chamber* and that although Carter boldly takes on the daunting task of unmasking patriarchy in fairy tales, ultimately "she still leaves the central taboos unspoken. Some things are unthinkable. She could never imagine Cinderella in bed with the Fairy Godmother" (8) (As it happens, Donoghue does encourage us to imagine just that in the first tale of the collection.) Duncker's primary criticism of *The Bloody Chamber* is that it could have been a more radical "re-writing" and "re-imagining" of fairy tales "had [Carter] studied the ambivalent sexual language that is there in the original tales" (12). Returning to Carter's work twelve years later, she expands her analysis to include post–*Bloody Chamber* novels. Again she voices her frustration at Carter's shortcomings, accusing the author of "never attempt[ing] to imagine queer subjectivity, although male subjectivity presents no problems" (67). Although Duncker is correct that there is no representation of lesbian subjectivity in *The Bloody Chamber*, and that all problems are worked through within the heterosexual matrix, I'm not so sure that Carter is dedicated to such a normative conception of heterosexual relations that she can be dismissed so categorically for not being feminist or queer *enough*.[4]

Looking back on them today, Duncker's essays seem to owe more to the Gay and Lesbian Studies model of identity politics that calls for representation and legitimation of gay and lesbian subjects than to a contemporary queer theory that has also grown out of the more de-centering, identity *troubling* impulses of poststructuralism and post-second-wave feminisms that see inter-

secting forms of difference as integral to an understanding of gender oppression. A contemporary understanding of "queer," then, is of a political mode of interrogation and critique that takes heteronormative, patriarchal, hegemonic discourses as its object and is often deconstructionist in its methodology. It explores gaps and fissures and recognizes the shifting and fluid desires and identity formations of the marginalized, both male and female, hetero and non, as contingent, specific, and transgressive. Further, queer insists that the power of the myth of the normal, dominant, and natural is very much indebted to that of "abnormal," "minor" perversity.

In her *Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003), Nikki Sullivan says, "Queering popular culture . . . involves critically engaging with cultural artefacts in order to explore the ways in which meaning and identity is (inter)textually (re)produced" (190). Sullivan refers to Alexander Doty and the ways that "queer moments" in literature "could be described as moments of narrative disruption which destabilise heteronormativity, and the meanings and identities it engenders, by bringing to light all that is disavowed by, and yet integral to, heteronormative logic" (191). Sullivan also points out, "Rather than functioning as a noun, queer can be used as a verb, that is, to describe a process, a movement between the viewer, text, and world, that reinscribes (or queers) each and the relations between them" (192).

It is important to note how Sullivan, Doty, Hollinger, and others insist on queer reading as a practice and process. That is, along with them I would not claim that *Kissing the Witch* is a queer text, but that it particularly lends itself to queer reading through "queer moments" that rise from the dynamics of the text. Keeping Harries's reading of *Kissing the Witch* in mind, it is clear that although woman-identified women and lesbian desires are thematized in the text, this does not make the text queer or queer reading inevitable. My reading of *Kissing the Witch* is an attempt to magnify the "queer moments" (textual and formal) that any reader may (or may not) notice and (re)focus them so that their disruptions come to the fore, thus realigning the relationship between reader and text. My hope is that in doing so this reading process will contribute to an understanding of how *Kissing the Witch* in conjunction with its reader can be said to queer fairy tales. My assumption is that having produced such a reading once, it becomes easier to produce, if not more difficult to avoid, similar queer readings of *Kissing the Witch*'s intertexts, and by extension the fairy-tale genre itself.

A queer reading of fairy tales, then, will be dedicated to interrogating the themes and structures that contribute to the fairy tale's popular reputation as a genre that has historically championed restricted subjectivities, and it will search for ways some fairy tales might not also do the work of de-centering, shifting, and troubling discourses that would wish to keep the genre fixed,

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stable, enmeshed in hegemonic discourse, and therefore predictable and immediately comprehensible.

As I have suggested, the disruptions enacted by *Kissing the Witch* are largely indicated by narration. In a discussion of frames, Mieke Bal notes the importance of forgetting the narrator: "When the embedded text presents a complete story . . . we gradually forget . . . the primary narrative" (53). And in the literary versions of the *Arabian Nights,* "this forgetting is a sign that Scheherezade's goal has been accomplished. As long as we forget her life is at stake, the king will too, and that was her purpose" (53). However, in *Kissing the Witch* we do not have a primary narrative or narrator who can recede during the narration and then be recalled to provide context and continuity. The structure of *Kissing the Witch* prompts a different kind of forgetting; in fact, the radical openness of the text rests on this point. Unlike the *Arabian Nights,* there isn't a single storytelling situation with a primary narrator and narratee to provide an external structuring frame for the tales. Although the style, voices, and diction of the narrators indicate an oral storytelling situation, we do not know where the stories are being told, or for the first and (possibly) last stories, to whom. Each of these narrations begins at the end of another, but its action is set in an unknown time and place earlier in the life of the new narrator, and the new story will end before the new narrator and the narrator of the previous tale have met. The linking intradiegetic and sectioned-off pages in which each previous narrator poses a question to the succeeding one, as well as the first lines of each story, appear to indicate that each of these stories is related tête-à-tête. By the end of each telling, we have become so caught up by the new voice, the drama of new obstacles to overcome, and the swirl of new desires that we have forgotten the previous teller, who is also the ostensible narratee. Just as Scheherezade must disappear into the background during her storytelling in the *Nights,* each previous narrator in *Kissing the Witch* fades into the background during each telling and is barely discernible by the end of the tale and the transfer of narrating duties from one teller to the next.

In the recounting of her tale, each protagonist discovers and reveals her own desires. Not all of these desires are sexual, but each in their own way is disruptive of the ideologies and normative behavioral codes embedded within their pre-texts. In speaking their desires, these characters reveal the normative, and therefore usually invisible, restrictive behavioral codes at the intersecting points of gender, sexuality, class, and/or cognitive ability. These characters often demonstrate disruptive queer desires, but even these are not fixed; rather, desires shift and realign themselves as the characters develop. Often the narrators are not sure where their desires will take them, but they suspect these paths will be neither predictable nor straight.[5]

I would like to turn now to two tales in particular, "The Tale of the Rose" and "The Tale of the Kiss," not because they are more exemplary of queer desires than any of the others, but because they represent different lesbian relations and because they stand out in terms of metanarrational commentary, so allowing me to magnify queer moments of narrative desire in storytelling and in fairy tales in particular.

"The Tale of the Rose" is a reimaging of "Beauty and the Beast" narrated by the Beauty character. Its plot follows closely the best-known variants of the tale, with queer moments arising from its attention to desires encoded in narrative, as well as from the narrator's discovery and decoding of their construction. As in most versions of "Beauty and the Beast," the Beauty character is promised by her father to a beast in a castle who has offered him shelter after his fleet of ships is lost at sea. When this Beauty comes to the castle of the masked Beast, she finds a door with her name on it, with "dresses cut to [her] shape" and keys to every door except to the beast's bedroom. She finds she is in need of nothing: "I had a room of my own, and time and treasures at my command. I had everything I could want except the key to the story" (Donoghue 34). The shelves in her room are so full of wonder tales that she "could live to be old without coming to the end of them" (36). However, although she has the minimum requirements that Virginia Woolf indicates as necessary for a woman's creative independence, neither the fairy tales nor feminist politics provide her with the key she needs to understand *this* story. The desires and relations of her new life are not accessible to either heteropatriarchal or heteronormative feminist discourses, and their logics lead her to misread her situation.

As she is leaving the castle to return to her father, the beast stops her and says, "I must tell you before you go; I am not a man." The narrator thinks that the stories she has read have prepared her for this revelation: "I knew it. Every tale I had ever heard of trolls, ogres, goblins, rose to my lips. The beast said, You do not understand" (37). It is not until she returns to the dying beast and discovers that behind the mask is a woman, and that she loves her, that the narrator really begins to acknowledge and struggle with the queer desires of her relationship with the beast: "This was a strange story, one I would have to learn a new language to read, a language I could not learn except by trying to read the story" (39). The queer moment of the discovery of the woman behind the mask disrupts Beauty's reading of her own desires and leads her to try to continue to unmask other normative discourses she has never before questioned.

But this new language is not an easy one to acquire; she calls herself a "slow learner but a stubborn one," and it takes her some time to understand that the woman is not monstrous for "refusing to do the things queens are

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supposed to do" or why she would choose "the faceless mask and the name of a beast . . . over all the great world had to offer." Finally, "After months of looking, I saw that beauty was infinitely various, and found it behind her white face" (40). This learning process becomes an extended queer moment that awakens the narrator to the subversion of not only heteronormative desire and naturalized feminine behavioral codes that insist on the search for happiness in a husband, but also of a reading practice that takes these discourses of desire as natural, normal, and inevitable. The narrator understands that it takes a concerted effort to resist hegemonic discourses, and further, that learning to read queerly does not ensure that others will be able or willing to participate in the same process.

Although they live by themselves in the castle, these women do not live in total isolation, and their story is not told, read, or interpreted by them alone. At the very end of the tale, before she asks who her lover was before she "chose a mask over a crown," the narrator turns our attention to the larger social community and other possible readings of their tale: "And as the years flowed by, some villagers told travelers of a beast and a beauty who lived in the castle and could be seen walking on the battlements, and others told of two beauties, and others, of two beasts" (40). In looking outside of her own story and recognizing the divergent interpretations, the narrator further destabilizes "The Tale of the Rose" and reminds the reader of the multiple possible readings of any story, including one's own. With the lack of evaluative statements or indication of which of the villagers' tales is the "right" version, the narrator seems further to support the notion that any reading is contingent upon often unnamed and unquestioned discourses that impinge upon the tale's reception. In this way the "The Tale of the Rose" emphasizes its own dialogism while at the same time providing clues for a queer reading, should the reader wish to learn to read *that* story.

The power and danger of social norms upon bodies, lives, and desires is recalled in "The Tale of the Kiss." The witch of the previous tale relates her own multiple transformations. As a young woman she discovers she is barren and, knowing she will be considered worse than useless by her community, seeks freedom by going to live alone in a cave. Once there, she learns that the people of the nearby town believe that as a solitary woman living on the outskirts of society she must be a witch; and because they believe it to be true, that is what she becomes. She is mocking of the power they have conferred upon her, but also weary, knowing that this power came "not from my own thin body or my own taut mind, but was invested in me by a village. Power I had to learn how to pick up without getting burnt" (213). Living as a feared outsider with borrowed power, she finds that over time she begins to desire less and less: "All that was different about me was that every year my needs were fewer. . . . Nothing touched me in the night except the occasional spider. I was complete"

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(214–15). In contrast to the cinder-girl of the first story, who believed she deserved nothing, the witch begins to believe she desires nothing until her solitude and self-containment are broken by a girl who dares to kiss her. The kiss shatters the witch's equilibrium and shakes her self-knowledge, leading her to wonder if "[p]erhaps it is the not being kissed that makes [one] a witch; perhaps the source of her power is the breath of loneliness around her. She who takes a kiss can also die of it, can wake into something unimaginable, having turned herself into some new species" (226).

Just as the only thing more useless than a woman past childbearing is a barren woman, the only thing more queer than a solitary woman is an older woman in love with a younger one. The witch understands that as much power as the villagers have bestowed upon her, they also hold over her, and she must consider carefully whether she will risk their censure and possible reprisals by leaving her cave to search for the girl who has awakened new desires within her.

"What could I do?" she asks, "Could I bring myself to follow her down into the village? Could I lower myself so far, to let the little children throw sand at me? . . . And if I did, I swore to myself . . . I would not let pride stop up my mouth. I would ask her to come live in my cave and learn all I knew and teach me all I didn't. I would give her my heart in a bag and let her do with it what she pleased. I would say the word love" (227). With these considerations the witch seems to have come to the end of her tale, having rediscovered desire and a willingness to risk everything in its pursuit. But then she suddenly shifts her attention to her narratee: "And what happened next you ask? Never you mind. There are some tales not for the telling" (227–28). In shifting from speculation in the past tense to direct address to the narratee in the present, the witch refuses to offer closure to her story. We are never to discover if she sought the girl, if she found her, if the girl accepted her love or not. Instead, her refusal to end the story opens the way for further speculation: "whether because [the tales] are too long, too precious, too laughable, too painful, to easy to need telling or too hard to explain" (228). The frustration of the narrative desire for closure works here to multiply the possible stories that may exist; rather than with an ending, we are left with the potential for more stories and more desires.

A further consequence of this potential proliferation of tales is a drastic realignment of the relationship between the reader and the text. The surprising shift in the witch's narration from an experiencing-I of the past to the narrating-I of the present, who is also directly addressing her audience, both pulls the reader further into the storytelling situation and simultaneously pushes her further out. If not all stories are for the telling, then what stories have we been missing all along? This denial recalls the initiating appeal to memory followed by a kind of forgetting that takes place during the narration of each tale. The

formulaic question: "Who were you before . . . ?" is a call to memory as well as a request to learn about another woman's story. This transition marks a "passing on" of the storytelling performance, but also a desire to fill in gaps and refocus upon the helper/donor/sought-for person of the previous tale. The response: "Will I tell you my story? It is the tale of a . . ." is an answer to the question, an acceptance of storytelling responsibility and authority, but also a promise. The answering formula promises to fill the gaps, to address the curiosity that the previous narrator/heroine has about the other main character in her own story. But in beginning her own story the next teller does not entirely fulfill her promise. She never tells her *whole* story, only the part of her story that responds to the story she has just been told. We never learn how the beauty of "The Tale of the Rose" became the bird that embodies and engenders the desire for freedom to the narrator of "The Tale of the Bird," or what circumstances brought that narrator to the kitchen of the narrator of "The Tale of the Shoe," or, for that matter, where her story will go after her telling. As queer moments these gaps alert the reader to the contingency of the narrative choices made in the telling. Each narrator has chosen to tell only part of her story, and she has chosen to leave much out. The fairy tale as unified and coherent whole is disrupted by these gaps, which expose its narration as partial and fragmented while also destabilizing the "ever after" part of happily ever after.

Although many of the tales do end in relative happiness, these gaps show that there is always more to the story. Each tale is narrated in the past tense, related in an ongoing present of storytelling that does not develop toward an inevitable ending, but elaborates upon an in-progress queer futurity that does not depend on heterosexual marriage or procreation for its meaning. Instead, the stories are open-ended and the narrators are aware of the uncertainty of their futures and the unlikelihood of unending happiness. The proof of this lies in their transformed appearance in the tales of other women later in their lives.

Another effect of the direct address to "you" at the end of "The Tale of the Kiss" is that the narratee of the witch's story becomes particularly ambiguous. In the very last line of the book, the witch passes on the responsibility of the storytelling task to the next teller. "This is the story you asked for," she says, "I leave it in your mouth" (228). And although when we stop and think back to the beginning of the tale, the narratee would logically be the young woman from the previous tale, we find ourselves in a metaphoric game of hot potato: A passes telling to B, who tells and passes to C, and so on until finally the stories and the telling are passed to U and are left "in your mouth." If we accept my proposal that a kind of temporary forgetting is necessary to learn to read these tales, a forgetting not only of normative gendered and sexual relations based on linear marriage plots and static happily ever afters, but also a forgetting of the individualized voice of each previous tale, then we must also ask to

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whom is the last sentence of the book addressed? I would suggest that the answer produced through queer reading will always be "me"—that is, the real reader who has actively explored and expanded the "queer moments" throughout the text. A sense of intimacy is established in the passing of stories from one mouth to another that draws the reader into not only the tale-telling cycle but also its sensuality, reminding her of her own desires while at the same time daring her to voice them. The witch's final declaration is a gift that presents a choice: what will *you* do with the stories? Chew on them, swallow them, spit them out, or pass them along with stories and kisses?

Notes

1. The pre-texts are, in order of appearance: "Cinderella" ("The Tale of the Shoe"); "Thumbelina" ("The Tale of the Bird"); "Beauty and the Beast" ("The Tale of the Rose"); "Snow White" ("The Tale of the Apple"); "The Goose Girl" ("The Tale of the Handkerchief"); "Rapunzel" ("The Tale of the Hair"); "The Snow Queen" ("The Tale of the Brother"); "Rumpelstiltskin" ("The Tale of the Spinster"); "Hansel and Gretel" ("The Tale of the Cottage"); "Donkeyskin" ("The Tale of the Skin"); "Sleeping Beauty" ("The Tale of the Needle"); and "The Little Mermaid" ("The Tale of the Voice"). Many of Donoghue's tales also make additional intertextual references to other motifs and tales. For example, the Cinderella figure in "The Tale of the Shoe" says, "Every word that came out of my mouth limped away like a toad" (1) in reference to the "Kind and Unkind Girls;" and the narrator of the "Beauty and the Beast" variant, "The Tale of the Rose," alludes to "Bluebeard" when she says she was given all of the keys to the house except one (34). This character will also make a reference to Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own."
2. Writing in 1997, Manfred Jahn notes more than ten different uses in literary theory alone (441).
3. See, for example, Santiago Solis's "Snow White and the Seven 'Dwarves'—Queercriped." Pauline Greenhill's essay "'Fitcher's [Queer] Bird:' A Fairytale Heroine and Her Avatars" is discussed below. Martine Hennard Dutheil also looks at *Kissing the Witch* in her chapter "Queering the Fairy Tale Canon: Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch*."
4. In fact, Carter's representations of BD/SM relations that problematize the simple victim/villain binary in heterosexual relationships and recognize the pleasure in masochism, particularly in "The Bloody Chamber," suggest that her interventions into fairy tales could easily be read through a queer lens that complicates, rather than capitulates to, normative heterosexual sexual relations.
5. Pun intended.

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