

Alice in Cambridge: Sylvia Plath, *Little Girls Lost*, and “Stone Boy with Dolphin”

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Throughout Sylvia Plath’s oeuvre, the children’s book is recognizably one of the most reliable resources to which she returned. In her *Juvenilia* and early work, as in such poems as “Cinderella” and “Bluebeard,” Plath uses forms, motifs, themes, plots, and symbols from children’s books as frames for her consideration of the lost paradise of childhood, the constructs of womanhood, and the difficult process of coming to voice as a female author. From the mid-1950s forward, Plath’s appropriation of children’s literature became ever more aligned with her personal experience, fragmented and interwoven sporadically into her individual consciousness, her work mirroring patterns in more-recognized postmodern feminist appropriations of children’s literature, especially the fairy tale. As Elizabeth Wanning Harries describes in her essay on autobiography and the twentieth-century feminist fairy tale, postmodern women authors, guided, like Plath, by “the problem of competing, even conflicting selves [...] woven out of different material exigencies and discursive possibilities,” developed the fairy tale into a “fractured” form, one which fragmented the traditional stories and imbedded those fragments in the adult female imagination (110). The fracturing of children’s books in Plath’s work allows for a continual rearranging of shards which illustrates how such stories have both limited opportunities for girls and facilitated the development of young female readers into serious artists.

Taking cues from the increasingly popular theories of Sigmund Freud, as well as an American culture that had become increasingly invested in children and the return to one’s childhood past, thanks in part to his work, Plath set for herself early in her professional career the project of “putting together [in her art] the complex mosaic of [her ...] childhood,” which required her to “captur[e] feelings and experiences from the nebulous seething of memory and yank them out into black-and-white on the typewriter” (*Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* [UJ] 168). “[U]nriddle the riddle,” she encouraged

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herself in 1958. “[W]hy is every doll’s shoelace a revelation? Every wishing-box dream an annunciation? Because these are the sunk relics of my lost selves that I must weave, word-wise, into future fabrics” (UJ 337). From this “nebulous seething of memory,” the sunken relics of children’s literature regularly surfaced as part of the complex mosaic of the self that emerges not only in the childhood past, but also in the adult present. As Plath worked on her poetry and prose, the children’s book offered her a particularly viable treasure map, one which could lead back to the girl within and forward to a better understanding of the present. Her work from the mid to late 1950s engages many of the same themes that she had begun to explore in her *Juvenilia* and early work. In this next stage of her career, however, Plath increasingly investigated the woman’s quest for selfhood and creativity in the face of a severe identity crisis that left her picking up her own pieces.²

“Stone Boy with Dolphin,” the only full extant chapter of Plath’s intended first novel *Falcon Yard* (which she had at first considered titling *The Girl in the Mirror*, an allusion to Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*), exemplifies her interweaving of children’s books and the adult female imagination during this period, juxtaposing sexual awakening against abundant imagery drawn from fairy tales and fantasy stories which deal with female coming-of-age (UJ 290). As her story progresses, Dody knits together, sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously, the pieces of popularized girls’ stories as she creates her own life, in turn demonstrating a consciousness that has been indelibly shaped by her culture’s tales. In “Stone Boy,” Plath braids together threads from children’s stories, especially Carroll’s *Alice* books and Grimm’s fairy tales, to produce the tale of a sadomasochistic girl who relishes the roles of both victim and

² As she “[fought] to return to [her . . .] early mind” during the mid to late 1950s, Plath also repeatedly used children’s books to consider the failure of fantasy and the invasion of the girl’s consciousness by the nightmares of the mid-twentieth century, her “mind again re-peopling itself with magics and monsters” (UJ 307, 381). For example, in a letter to her mother dated July 5, 1958, Plath reiterated how children’s stories, in this case Grimm’s fairy tales, were deeply intertwined with her sense of her identity. “I have begun to review my German again by reading one by one the Grimm’s Fairy Tales in that handsome book you gave me, which I just love,” she explains (LH 346). She then describes the relevance of these tales to her own life and personal ancestry, a connection she had begun to realize afresh through the process of translation. “I suppose as one grows older one has a desire to learn all about one’s roots, family, and country,” she continues. “I feel extremely moved by memories of my Austrian and German background and also my ocean-childhood, which is probably the foundation of all my consciousness” (LH 346). Funneling her mind back to both her ancestral and her childhood past, Grimm’s fairy tales, especially after the late-1940s, would become an inlet for Plath into the foundation of her consciousness as she sought to “speak out words & worlds” (UJ 305).

victimizer. Through her appropriation of these stories and her intermingling of them with the girl's imagination, Plath examines how Dody walks "Over the river and into the woods" out of the fantasies of girlhood and into the shadowy territory of adult sexual fantasy and desire (Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams [JP] 190).

Discussing the "Stone Boy" chapter in her journals, Plath had tellingly described Dody in fairy-tale terms as a "cinderella in her ring of flames, mail-clad in her unassailable ego, [who] meets a man who with a kiss breaks her statue, [...] and changes forever the rhythm of her ways" (UJ 313). Plath's heroine was also modeled partly on herself; this chapter was to be based upon a formative experience in her life: her meeting of Ted Hughes at the St. Botolph's Review Party in early 1956 while she was studying abroad in Cambridge.³ In the chapter, Dody is portrayed as a fairly naive American girl foraging in a foreign land. Displaced and alienated, she dotes from the window of her attic room on the statue of a dolphin-carrying cupid in her college's garden, which appears, early on, to represent romantic love and Dody's quest for the ideal mate, as well as her virginity.⁴ Curious about sex and willing "Something terrible, something bloody" to happen, Dody invents herself as a modern-day little girl lost, wandering in the Wonderland of adult sexual desire (JP 182). Dressed in accents of red (red coat, red headband, red belt, red shoes, and "Applecort Red" nail-polish), Dody, as both vamp and Little-Red-Riding-Hood ingénue, desires to try out men like Alice, in Lewis Carroll's children's stories, samples edibles, attempting to figure out which man will make her the right size – and which men might devour her. She encounters men who salivate over her like wolves and leer at her with "Cheshire-cat" grins, men who leave her feeling as misshapen and oversized as Alice feels in Wonderland when her body suddenly "mammoth[s]" (JP 190, 189). Confronted with a "dandy little package of a man," for example, Dody imagines, in language straight out of Carroll's first Alice book,

³ See Plath's journal entry for February 26, 1956, in which she describes her first encounter with Hughes in great detail (UJ 210-14).

⁴ The statue is a facsimile of Andrea del Verrocchio's "Putto with Dolphin" in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. See <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/v/verocchi/sculptur/pdolphin.html> for an image of the sculpture.

that “Her limbs beg[inning] to mammoth, arm up the chimney, leg through the window. All because of those revolting little cakes. So she grew, crowding the room” (JP 189).⁵

Dody finally encounters a man, Leonard, whom she both desires and dreads. Asking him to help her break her stone-boy statue, which transforms as the chapter progresses from a stone angel into a revolting gargoyle, Dody violently bites Leonard, leaving on his cheek a set of teeth marks which resemble “a ring of bloodied roses,” language drawn from the oft-chanted children’s rhyme (JP 203). Having angered Leonard with her aggressiveness, Dody, now picturing herself as a victimized Alice in Wonderland whose extendable neck is separated from her body, resorts to having sex with a boy who is completely detestable to her (JP 198). After this encounter, she pricks her finger on a splinter from the stair-rail in Queen’s Court, spoils the virginal white snow while running in red-hot shoes, shoulders her way through a rough thicket of briars, and then imagines herself as a forlorn Rapunzel, locked in a tower with only her books. Back in her attic room, contemplating how to fuse the fragments of the identities she has imaginatively, and actually, performed, Dody attempts to strip them as she leans naked from the window frame over the garden and considers her situation, her world “stained, deep-grained with all the words and acts of all the Dodys from birth cry on” (JP 203). The chapter ends with the sun “bloom[ing] virginal,” and Dody sleeping “the sleep of the drowned” (JP 204).

As this brief summary of the chapter suggests, Dody’s quest for sexual awakening takes place on the borders of a fantasy land. Filled with allusions to children’s books, the chapter primarily contemplates the contours of Dody’s sexual and romantic fantasies. Throughout the “Stone Boy” chapter, Dody harbors masochistic fantasies from which she seems to derive pleasure that involve her, like many fairy-tale victims, being tortured and

⁵ Compare the following excerpts from Plath’s novel and Carroll’s texts: excerpt from “Stone Boy with Dolphin,” “Dody lifted her glass and the drink rose up to meet her mouth. The ceilings wavered and the walls buckled. Windows melted, belling inward. [...] Dody looked down at Brian, who looked up at her, dark-haired, impeccable, a dandy little package of a man. Her limbs began to mammoth, arm up the chimney, leg through the window. All because of those revolting little cakes. So she grew, crowding the room” (JP 189); excerpt from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, “There was no label on it this time with the words “DRINK ME,” but nevertheless she uncorked it and put it to her lips. “I know *something* interesting is sure to happen,” she said to herself. [...] She went on growing and growing, and very soon had to kneel on the floor: in another minute there was not even room for this [...]. Still she went on growing, and, as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney, and said to herself, “Now I can do no more, whatever happens. What *will* become of me?” (Carroll 39-40).

humiliated. Identifying with women who suffer violent deaths or imprisonment because of their assumed madness and social transgressions, especially wicked witches, Dody wallows dramatically in her imagination of herself as a persecuted woman whose body is violated, punctured, caged, and burned (JP 182). She relishes the idea of bearing pain, at one point conflating sexual intercourse with crucifixion by subtly equating the piercing of her hands on metal spikes with the breaking of her hymen (JP 196). Disturbingly, Dody's masochistic sexual fantasies are particularly intermingled with imagery drawn from Lewis Carroll's *Alice* stories and Grimm's fairy tales, foregrounding an unsettling link between adult sexuality and the education girls receive about their bodies and sexual desire through such primers.

Plath often relies, for instance, on the tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" as she establishes her heroine's role as a passive sexual victim. Dody, donning red-accented accessories for her evening out, often sees herself as a Little Red Riding Hood who is fated to be desired and devoured by men. To emphasize this, Plath positions Dody throughout the chapter as an innocent Red-Riding-Hood virgin and depicts men as wolves or wolf-like creatures. For instance, Dody chants lines from the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale to herself as she imagines being confronted by prospective, carnivorous dates: "Grinning at her from far, from farther away, he receded. *Over the river and into the woods*. His Cheshire-cat grin hung luminous. Couldn't hear a word in his canary-feathered heaven" (JP 190, my italics). Plath also references "Little Red Riding Hood" as Dody is surrounded at the gates to "Queens" by boys who appear to be wolves salivating over her figure: "The five boys surrounded Dody. They had no features at all, only pale, translucent moons for face shapes, so she would never know them again. And her face, too, felt to be a featureless moon [...] 'My, you smell nice.' 'That perfume.' 'May we kiss you'" (JP 195). As the boys disappear, shooed off by her date, Dody imagines them "Sheep-counting sleepward" (JP 196). Furthermore, in the violently passionate encounter between Dody and Leonard which follows, Leonard is portrayed as playing the wolf in man's clothing to Dody's Little Red Riding Hood (As an aside, it is interesting to note that Plath and Hughes went to a New Year's Eve costume party in 1958, the same year she worked on this chapter, as Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf [UJ 454]). Leonard strips off Dody's red hairband and bends his head to her

body as if “to his last supper” (JP 192). Up to this point, and after, when confronted with other young men, who all seem to be effeminate and diminutive, Dody concentrates on her large frame and intense intellect (to render Dody’s frustration at always being too big, too smart for the men who desire her, Plath especially draws upon Carroll’s use of edibles and beverages that cause the girl’s body to “mammoth”), but when she encounters Leonard, Dody, now diminutive, revels in his aggressiveness and his magnetic power (JP 189). In this encounter, Plath characterizes Dody as a girl who wants to be overpowered and devoured and Leonard as a man who is aggressive, ferocious.

Figuring Dody as a naive girl led astray by a man who is hungry like the wolf, one of “the biggest seducers in Cambridge,” Plath underscores the misguidedness of Dody’s belief that she can take care of herself, as well as the fact that she is turned on by a man who seems both brutal and sadistic, demonstrating that this desire has been learned at least partially in the imaginative worlds that the girl inhabits when reading (JP 185). Later in the chapter, after Dody has sex with another young man, Hamish, an event which is thoroughly uneventful (their encounter is confined to the brief space between parentheses), Dody again calls up fairy-tale and fantasy imagery to imagine herself as an assaulted woman, seeming to heighten, in her view, the excitement of an act that, with Hamish, has been totally unexciting, a performance in which she plays the passive role of a mostly dead girl, her hair, which she imagines growing rapidly like Rapunzel’s, entwining with the threads of the carpet on which she lies (JP 198). In this scene and the following passages, Plath demonstrates Dody’s masochistic reliance on fiction to refurbish her reality by heightening her use of fairy-tale imagery. Following her encounter with Hamish, for example, Dody puts on red-hot shoes warmed by the fire, linking herself to the jealous queen who must dance to her death for her transgressions in the Grimm fairy tale “Little Snow-White.” She also subtly links herself to Sleeping Beauty, her finger pricked by a splinter as she runs her hand along the stair rail while descending from Hamish’s room in Queens’ Court, relishing the pain that the splinter causes as symbolic of her sexual awakening.

Plath also disquietingly conflates in this section Alice imagery with the anxious humiliation and alienation from her body that Dody experiences in her sexual awakening, demonstrating that Dody is, in many ways, still a little girl at heart, one trained by the

social strictures she has received as a white, middle-class American girl. As she lies with Hamish, she asks him, like a contrite child, to scold her, calling herself a “bitch” and a “slut,” and imagines herself as Alice “after eating the mushroom, with her head on its serpent neck above the leaves of the treetops. A pigeon flew up, scolding, Serpents, serpents. How to keep the eggs safe?” (198).⁶ Here, Plath draws directly upon Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, in which the girl’s neck at one point stretches so far from her body that her head seems to separate from her shoulders. Taking on new qualities, the pigeon’s protection of its eggs in Carroll’s story, which it imagines Alice as endangering, is conflated here with Dody’s girlish terror at becoming pregnant. The separation between the girl’s head and her body, juxtaposed against pregnancy, clearly demonstrates the separation that Dody imagines between her intellect and her body’s sexual functions, as well as her learned lack of control over her body as sexual victim. Portraying Dody as a masochist by interweaving into the chapter symbolism drawn from girls’ reading, Plath subtly accentuates the ways in which her heroine’s sexual fantasies have been shaped by the narratives she read as a child, in which female bodies are constantly assaulted, particularly due to brutal masculine desire or adult female jealousy, or are experienced as a site of utter confusion and dislocation, as in Carroll’s Alice texts, in which the girl’s body alarmingly metamorphosizes.

Plath also examines Dody’s learned need to embellish her reality with the gilt of a fairy tale romance.

Dody refuses to play only the role of victim, however. She has clearly understudied the role of sadist, deriving pleasure from exploiting others or causing them

⁶ Compare the following excerpts from Plath’s novel and Carroll’s book: excerpt from “Stone Boy with Dolphin,” “Hamish’s mouth moved against her neck, and she felt now again how unnaturally long her neck was, so that her head nodded far from her body, on a long stem, like the picture of Alice after eating the mushroom, with her head on its serpent neck above the leaves of the treetops. A pigeon flew up, scolding, Serpents, serpents. How to keep the eggs safe? ‘I am a bitch,’ Dody heard her voice announce from out of the doll-box of her chest, and she listened to it, wondering what absurd thing it would say next. ‘I am a slut,’ it said with no conviction” (JP 198); excerpt from Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, “As there seemed to be no chance of getting her hands up to her head, she tried to get her head down to *them*, and was delighted to find that her neck would bend easily in any direction, like a serpent. She had just succeeded in curving it down a graceful zigzag, and was going to dive in among the leaves, which she found to be nothing but the tops of the trees under which she had been wandering, when a sharp hiss made her draw back in a hurry: a large pigeon had flown into her face, and was beating her violently with its wings. ‘Serpent!’ screamed the Pigeon. [...] ‘But I’m *not* a serpent I tell you!’ said Alice, ‘I’m a – I’m a – ‘Well! *What* are you?’ said the Pigeon. ‘I can see you’re trying to invent something!’ ‘I – I’m a little girl,’ said Alice rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through, that day. ‘A likely story indeed!’” (Carroll 56-57).

pain, a tendency which again becomes provocatively conflated with fairy tale and fantasy imagery in the chapter. When she employs traditional children's stories to explore Dody's sense of herself as victim, Plath usually follows the expected trajectory of these narratives. However, when Plath explores Dody's sadistic side, she tends to invert the tales, to rearrange the narratives in alarming ways. Through this, Plath shows Dody's exploitation of girls' stories to write the trajectory of her desires according, in her mind at least, to her own rules.

Plath draws, for instance, upon Carroll's descriptions of Alice's curious voraciousness in which Alice often tests out various edibles just to see what will happen in order to demonstrate Dody's ravenous desire to experiment sexually with different men, whom she describes as "dandy little package[s]," until she can find the one who will match her physically and intellectually (JP 189). When Dody encounters Leonard, she literally tries to taste him, a sinister appropriation of Alice's oral curiosity. Yearning to claim him for herself, Dody viciously bites him, a bite which reverberates in Plath's writing about girlhood (as in her story "The Shadow" and her novel The Bell Jar): "Waiting, sighting the whiteness of his cheek with its verdigris stain, moving by her mouth. Teeth gouged. And held. Salt, warm salt, laving the tastebuds of her tongue. Teeth dug to meet. An ache started far off at their bone root. Mark that, mark that" (JP 192). In addition to radically revising Alice's orality here, Plath also inverts Little Red Riding Hood's story to demonstrate Dody's desire to distinguish herself from the passive girls against whom she is competing. Whereas in the Grimm tale, the totally naïve Little Red Riding Hood is swallowed up by the wolf, in "Stone Boy" Dody attempts to voraciously swallow up Leonard. Importantly, the natural order of the fairy tale is herein reversed; *he* bleeds, not her, the inverse of what would normally happen when a female is initiated into sex. In Dody's sadistic fantasizing of reality, she has performed a wildly transgressive act, one that, in her mind at least, initiates her into the raw world of adult sexuality on her own terms.

The role of sadist, however, has its limits for a girl, especially when that role derives from Wonderland. Plath, again through the use of fantasy imagery, demonstrates Dody's sadistic act to be falsely liberating. Through Plath's emphasis on the "whiteness" of Leonard's "cheek," and given the other fairy-tale symbolism in this chapter, Leonard's

flesh is subtly linked to the “cheeks” of the poisonous apple eaten by Snow White and the Wicked Queen in the Grimm tale, although Snow White eats the poisoned “red cheek,” while the Wicked Queen bites from the white (the word “cheek” is used in the Grimm tale to describe the two sides of the apple) (JP 192, Grimm 255). Dody’s biting of Leonard’s white cheek can be viewed as signifying that she has begun to transform into the malicious older woman of fairy tales through her initiation into adult sexual desire and, more importantly, sexual jealousy, as the conflict between girls and women in such stories regularly pivots on the waxing and waning of female desirability and the good/evil binary of womanhood. Plath describes this process in “Stone Boy” as “the game of queening,” which is further symbolized by her contrasting characterization of Dody as a Rose Red figure and Dody’s competitor, Adele, as a modern-day Snow White; while the dominant color attached to Dody is red, Adele, her sexual competitor, is related to lilies, virginity, and “white-blondness, all pure” (JP 181, 193). Tellingly, as Plath describes, “at the game of queening, Adele [always] won: adorably, all innocent surprise” (JP 181).

Furthermore, Leonard is angered by Dody’s refusal to passively allow him to devour her. He shakes free of her and disappears through a door that seems to fantastically pop up from the floor (as tends to occur in the topsy-turvy world of both the *Alice* books and “Stone Boy,” in which spaces regularly shapeshift). More terrifyingly, in biting Leonard and in his refusal of her aggressiveness, Dody’s mouth has, in the mirror which she, like the Wicked Queen in “Little Snow-White,” calls for and then gazes into, vanished: “She leaned to the mirror and a worn, known face with vacant brown eyes and a seamed brown scar on the left cheek came swimming at her through the mist. There was no mouth on the face: the mouth place was the same sallow color as the rest of the skin” (JP 193). In this, Plath implies that because Dody has tasted true sexual desire, she will no longer be able to taste or speak. She, in biting this flesh, is portrayed as having made, like Eve and Snow White before her, a fatal mistake, after which she must paint her mouth back on with *the* ultra-femme cosmetic tool – red lipstick – in that most dangerous fairy-tale symbol, the Magic Mirror (JP 193). As Dody leaves Falcon Yard, she imagines her experience becoming a story passed down orally from generation to generation, told as a cautionary moral tale by mothers to their children: “[...] her act would mark her tomorrow like the browned scar on her cheek among the colleges and all

the town. Mothers would stop in Market Hill, pointing to their children: ‘There’s the girl who bit the boy. He died the day after’” (JP 194).

Importantly, Plath’s interweaving of different fairy tales and fantasy stories strengthens as the story draws toward its close, with Plath fixating on the splinter in the girl’s finger and its symbolic penetration of her body as Dody grows ever more confused about her sexual encounters with both Leonard and Hamish. In “Stone Boy,” Plath carefully and painstakingly collages popular fairy tale and fantasy imagery into an arrangement that places women’s sexuality and the imaginative processes of female fantasy, and more importantly, how such fantasies are formed, under scrutiny. Her heroine emerges as a young woman who assumes and delights in the roles of both victim and victimizer – realizing fantasies that she is shown to have learned as a little girl while devouring stories of assaulted, innocent girls and wicked queens. Dody Ventura, her very name implying an adventurous “Dodo,” in turn becomes symbolic of the perilous naïveté of and the resultant fragmentation wrought by her ongoing reinvention of herself as both passive virgin and violently passionate femme fatale; yet she also seems to represent the invigorating power to be found in reprising both of those roles. In the end, Plath demonstrates in this “kernel chapter” that life is, like the fairy tale itself, a story that can be continuously retold from the threads of the fictions that have been offered (UJ 312). She “keep[s] the story on the tongues, changing, switching its colors” – but therein lies the poisoned apple, offering up its red and white halves: good girl, horrid girl; assaulted innocent, wicked queen; choice, fate; fairy-tale, reality; inherited story, self-inscription (JP 194). As Dody tellingly muses just before she crosses the threshold into the party that will change the course of her life: “Life is a tree with many limbs. Choosing this limb, I crawl out for my bunch of apples. [...] Such as I choose. Or do I choose?” (JP 187).

At the root of Plath’s appropriation of children’s literature during this stage in her career is the conceptualization of girls’ identity crises and their fall into consciousness, both of which Plath considers through the image of the cracked, seamed, and recomposed self. In “Venus in the Seventh,” an incomplete draft of a chapter also from the Falcon Yard novel, Plath actually describes this broken self through the figure of Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty; unlike Humpty Dumpty, however, this girl, once broken, can actually

be put back together again: “[...] she sat, warm in herself, somehow put back together by this return, like humpty dumpty; all the king’s men didn’t do it: but some strange principle of growth, knitting the cracked pieces” (68). According to Plath, the girl’s broken persona primarily results from the role of chameleon that she is often forced to play. As Plath again writes in “Venus in the Seventh,” also using imagery from children’s literature, the girl recreates her identity over and over again to suit the circumstances:

She was a golden goose, or the quick of her was, laying eggs day after day: eggs of her selves. Which broke, opened, letting out parti-colored chickens on the world. Everybody wanted a different color chicken, to keep with an Easter ribbon around its neck. Nobody wanted the whole goose, with its disturbing potential for laying innumerable and startlingly different eggs. (64)

While Plath portrays this “parti-colored” self as partially debilitating, she also recognizes its “disturbing potential.” In her work from the mid to late 1950s, the constant process of self-revision, which treats the self as story, becomes provocatively freeing; the recurrent attempt to break her identity down and then knit it back together as a new narrative gives voice to the competing and conflicting selves that Plath herself experienced, allowing her to begin to come to terms with her past and present. In this, her work mirrors what Elizabeth Wanning Harries has described as *the* controlling metaphor of contemporary women’s autobiographical writing which draws upon the fairy tale: “the *broken mirror*, the mirror that does not pretend to reflect subjectivities or lives as unified wholes” (109-10). In the next stage of her career, Plath’s work would emerge into the Ariel voice, a voice dominantly spoken by a female narrator who assumes a wide range of parti-colored roles: Earth Mother, “Barren Woman,” snared rabbit, “lioness,” “pure acetylene / Virgin,” harem-girl, “negress,” holocaust victim, “living doll,” and “Lady Lazarus,” to name a few (The Collected Poems 157, 239, 232, 226, 221, 244). As in the early stages of Plath’s career, this work partially evolves from a continued investigation of the legacy of children’s texts and a continued transformation of children’s stories into alarming new versions that call into question girls’ experiences of childhood and adolescence, as well as the adult female perspective which emerges when Sleeping Beauty truly awakens.

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