

Predatory Gardens and Rapacious Father Figures in *The Rose and the Beast*

by

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Predatory Gardens and Rapacious Father Figures in *The Rose and the Beast*

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in Children's Literature

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Abstract

Scholarly discourse surrounding Francesca Lia Block's novels tends to spotlight the author's interrogation of pedagogies concerning sexual trauma. Lee A. Talley and Elizabeth Marshall, for instance, argue that Block's texts invite the reader to rethink conventional approaches to sexual assault narratives. Block's texts shift the critical attention placed originally on the victims of sexual abuse onto the victims' male aggressors, whether that be the "skanky" (Block 102) rapacious father figure that "Wolf" recuperates from traditional fairytales (Marshall 218), or the cultural forces that enable predatory figures to both construct and enact their sexual fantasies in the first place (Talley 119). Like Marshall and Talley, my thesis examines cultural eroticisms of girlhood in Block's work, attending to the predatory man's imagination of eroticized girlhood. Specifically, my thesis focuses on three tales in *The Rose and the Beast* — "Beast," "Snow," and "Charm" — and explores the male characters' sexualization of girlhood by emphasizing their engagement with a critically overlooked feature of the collection: the garden. First, I situate Sarah Dinter's understanding of the literary garden as an expression of adult constructions of childhood within a psychoanalytic context, arguing, through Freud's theory of dreamwork, that flowers in the garden function as objects of displacement through which the father in "Beast" and the gardener in "Snow" repress their pedophilic fantasies about their daughters. My second chapter focuses on "Charm" and considers the rapacious father figure's pedophilia through a critical race and post-colonial perspective. Merging James R. Kincaid's theory of childhood as an erotic lens with Anne Anlin Cheng's work on racial melancholy and cultural constructions of the "yellow woman" (415), I interpret Pop's photographs as potent expressions of the infantilization underlying

ing the erotic racialization of the Asian woman — a racialization that both disavows and retains the character Rev as an ethnic other.

Lay Summary

My thesis is divided into two chapters. In my first chapter, I interpret flowers in the text as objects that give physical expression to sexual thoughts that male characters attempt to conceal and censor, both from themselves and from the reader. I focus on two tales — “Beast” and “Snow” — and scrutinize the male characters’ use of flowers as stand-ins for the young women whom they sexualize. By lingering on the flowers’ physical features, the reader can infer through metaphor the features of the young women that the male characters are sexualizing, which I interpret as the young women’s perceived childlike innocence. In my second chapter, I turn to the tale “Charm.” Observing the way in which Pop deploys flowers to articulate his desire for Rev’s presumed childlike innocence, I argue that “Charm” puts on display the infantilizing lens through which Western culture racializes the Asian woman.

Preface

This Master of Arts thesis represents the academic portion of a hybrid academic and creative thesis. This academic portion is an original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Corey Liu. The creative portion is a young adult horror novel titled *Horny Lover Boys*.

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Dedication

To my family and friends.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. The Rapacious Father Figure and Freudian Dreamwork

In her reading of Francesca Lia Block's short story "Wolf," Elizabeth Marshall links the fairytale adaptation's "strategic feminist rewriting" (218) to its recuperation of a lost male archetype she calls the rapacious father figure: a predatory male character in older fairytales whose sexual predation of his daughter is blotted out of subsequent adaptations. Marshall points to the Brothers Grimm's adaptation of "All Fur," which "cover[s] over the father's crime" by inserting "the mother's dying edict," thus making "the mother rather than the father... responsible for the daughter's violation" (218). Marshall's observation aligns with Maria Tatar's insistence that nineteenth-century fairytale collections "edited out" father-daughter incest plots either by overshadowing the father's culpability and placing greater blame onto the mother, or else by replacing the father altogether with a female antagonist (131).

By rendering invisible the father's crimes, fairytale censorship practices mirror a broader cultural approach to sexual abuse narratives that emphasize feminine agency — *i.e.* what can girls do to avoid being raped? — instead of examining the male aggressor's culpability. Observing the frequency with which her students resort to readings of "Wolf" that de-center predators in sexual abuse narratives, Marshall laments: "I have yet to have a student focus on the psychology of the rapist; to discuss in detail the damaged man, to critique compulsory heterosexuality" (230).

Taking up Marshall's plea, I centre the rapacious father figure in my psychoanalytic reading of three tales in *The Rose and the Beast*: "Beast," "Snow," and "Charm." Specifically, I explore the father figures' sexualization of girls within these tales by focusing on the father's inter-

action with a critically overlooked feature of the collection: the garden. While Lee A. Talley lauds Block's novels for their exploration of the systemic sexualization of girlhood (121), the garden's recurring appearance within Block's writing receives less scrutiny — a curious deficit when one considers the literary tradition of using the garden's spatial poetics to, in Sarah Dinter's words, "reflect shifting ideas of childhood" (218).

Following Marshall's plea for readers to psychologize "the damaged man" (230), I merge Freudian psychoanalysis with Dinter's understanding of literary gardens as cultural productions of childhood, interpreting Block's garden as a space that renders in sensual terms the rapacious father figure's taboo fantasies that are informed by a larger cultural eroticism of childhood.

Freud's theories on dream work provide a helpful theoretical framework. Marshall's description of a "cover[ed] over" father figure (220) — whose ghostly presence can be retraced through attempted literary displacements and projections of accountability— evokes the concept of repression, a "force" that prevents content "from becoming conscious and compel[s] it to remain unconscious" (Freud 28). To reframe Marshall's revisionist reading of *The Rose and the Beast* in Freudian terms, the project of "Wolf" — and of the broader fairytale collection, I will argue — is to pull back into the reader's consciousness the rapacious father figure's repressed presence.

1.2. Thesis Structure

In the first chapter of my thesis, I interpret the garden as a dream space through which the collection recovers repressed fairytale content related to the father. Drawing on Freud's theory of defence mechanisms, I examine key moments in the collection in which father figures indulge erotic fantasies of their daughters through coded interactions with flowers. First, I attend to the

garden in “Beast.” There, the father admires the forbidden rose and, in a dream state induced by the garden, draws unconscious associations between the flower and Beauty’s body. By placing under a microscope this quick moment of displacement, my reading scrutinizes the main feature of the rose that the father unconsciously associates with the daughter: its “openness.”

The exploration of this feature deciphers the collection’s broader use of floral imagery. Both the gardener in “Snow” and the father in “Beast” use the openness of flowers to articulate and project onto their daughters an “empty innocence,” which, for James R. Kincaid, is a cultural production of childhood imbued with a negative sexuality that positions the child as the object of adult sexual desire (55). Like the key that grants access into Bluebeard’s chamber, the rose in “Beast” and the floral imagery in “Snow” offer the reader privileged access into the father figure’s interiority. In the garden, flowers expose the defence mechanisms that enable father figures to simultaneously construct, indulge, and disavow pedophilic fantasies that the reader can then retrace to larger cultural fetishisms of the innocent child.

In my second chapter, I shift the focus to “Charm,” examining the rapacious father figure’s pedophilia through a critical race perspective. Merging James R. Kincaid’s theory of childhood as an erotic lens with Anne Anlin Cheng’s work on racial melancholy and cultural constructions of the “yellow woman” (415), I interpret Pop’s camera as the erotic lens through which society frames childhood. I then examine Pop’s pedophilic representations of Rev through his photographs alongside their orientalist reference points. Pop’s photographs function as potent expressions of the erotic infantilization underlying the racialization of the Asian woman — a racialization that both disavows and retains the character Rev as an ethnic other. Finally, I situate “Charm” within the collection’s broader aim to uncensor the rapacious father figure within tradi-

tional fairytales and consider Pop's infantilizing racialization of Rev in light of the tale's secondary source material, "The Little Mermaid." By lingering on Pop's predatory treatment of Rev, I spotlight, through comparison, the pedophilic tendencies of the prince in the original fairytale, thus inviting the reader to reinterpret the prince as a rapacious father figure.

Chapter 2: Interpreting the Garden as The Rapacious Father Figure's Dream-space

2.1 Gardens as Sleepy Spaces

The Rose and the Beast invites the reader to interpret the garden as an extension of the father figure's dream. Indeed, fathers in the collection tend to be sleepy whenever they enter garden spaces. In "Beast," the father stumbles across the courtyard after taking a long nap: "Beauty's father lay back on the cushions. He closed his eyes and fell asleep. When he woke he began to explore. He came to a courtyard garden where the flowers were even bigger and more lavish than the ones he had seen in front of the house" (106). That the father begins to explore the garden immediately after waking calls to mind the slow, gradual process by which human brains transition from sleep into wakefulness, a transition that is delayed when the sleeper, much like the father, gets up too abruptly (Lubin et al. 334). The accidental manner in which the father discovers the courtyard garden repeats an earlier moment where he happens into *another* garden with "melding rainbow light shining in the trees" to which he "felt compelled to go" (103). The passive voice of "compelled" emphasizes the father's lack of agency, mirroring the way in which a dreamer's actions are largely determined by subconscious operations, what dream psychologist J.A. Hadfield terms "dream activity": "[P]erhaps the broadest generalisation is that the characteristic of dream activity is that it takes place irrespective of any conscious effort or direction on our part" (17).

"Beast" attributes the father's loss of agency to the garden's aesthetics, which "compel" him forward. In his essay on the dream psychology of the Pearl manuscript, Piotr Sprya links the dreamer's lack of agency to an "aesthetics of dreams," which captivate the dreamer's attention

using “an overabundance of visual stimuli” (192). “Beast” reinforces the garden’s dreamlike status by describing both gardens in ethereally superlative terms. The front garden has the “biggest, richest, most succulent [flowers the father] has ever seen... ” (12), “showering him with droplets of moisture and sweetening the air,” accompanied with “music playing — light and tinkling and otherworldly” (13). The flowers in the courtyard garden are “even bigger and more lavish than the ones [the father] had seen in the front of the house” (13). Following the characteristics of dream psychology, “Beast” exploits the garden’s hyper-sensual aesthetics to transfix the father’s senses and induce him into a passive dream state.

Other gardens in the collection have a similarly soporific effect. In “Snow,” the gardener is lulled into semi-consciousness as he toils in the garden: “When [Snow] was of a certain age the gardener came to visit her. He had been reminded of her. The white petals scattering in the garden... something, something reminded him (Block 14)”. The ellipsis after the word “garden” creates the impression of a mind trailing off, as though the white petals propel the gardener into a reverie, the duplication in “something, something” imitating through its repeated sounds the acoustic techniques and monotonous gestures of hypnosis.

2.2 Flowers as Objects of Displacement for the Rapacious Father Figure

By activating dream states within characters, gardens provide privileged access into the father figure’s interiority. While the skeptic might argue that there is no concrete representation of a rapacious father figure in “Snow,” the gardener’s sexual relationship with Snow’s mother invites the reader to at the very least interpret him as fulfilling a stepfather role (Russell 109). As fixtures of the dream world’s aesthetics, flowers trigger the gardener’s dream state and pull into his consciousness repressed memories of his stepdaughter. Dancing white petals trigger Snow’s

image into the gardener's mind. Moreover, the gardener's decision to visit Snow when she "was of a certain age" (14) implies an underlying sexual motivation that anticipates the "incestuous kiss" (Russell 109) he forces onto Snow at the tale's end.

Similarly, in "Beast," the rose invoke incestuous thoughts of Beauty that hover at the border of the father's recall:

This was when Beauty's father noticed the rose. The rose that proved he loved his daughter too much. There was a little sign in front of it that read, Please Do Not Pick the Flowers. The rose reminded him of his daughter — open, glowing, pink, and white, fragrant. Did he know it reminded him of her because it was forbidden? He only knew he had to have it. (177)

The words "forbidden" and "too much" imply that the father's memories of Beauty are erotically charged. The father uses the rose's sensuality — its "open, glowing, pink, and white, fragrant" qualities — to catalogue, through analogy, his daughter's physical features: a blazon recalling a poetic convention wherein male speakers use flowers as stand-ins for the beloved's body (Harvey 320). In her analysis of floral imagery in Shakespeare's sonnets, Elizabeth Harvey notes the way in which the speaker invokes floral "visible reproductive structures" as well as their "color and perfume... stand by analogy for a less manifest human sexual and reproductive longing" (320). Literary flowers "infiltrate, expressing through color, scent, and emotional valence the intimacy of the body's inner psychic and imaginative life" (Harvey 321). Harvey attributes the flowers' externalization of psychic content in large part to their colours. Through their hues, flowers utilize a host of "semantic latencies" that the reader unconsciously associates with specific colours, drawing on what Harvey calls a chromatic lexicon (314) to image the

speaker's passions. Situating her observations on colour and interiority within a psychoanalytic context, Harvey draws on Kristeva's interpretation of colour as a "space where the prohibition foresees and gives rise to its own immediate transgression" (Kristeva 221). Colour thus causes an "irruption of the unconscious and defies censorship within the symbolic order" (Harvey 323).

By positioning colour as a countering force to censorship within the unconscious, Harvey's reading of literary flowers — and their deployment of colours to image interiority — models in "Beast" the simultaneous, opposing psychological forces at work within the father as he interacts with the rose. On the one hand, the rose prompts the father to recall sexual fantasies he has for his daughter; at the same time, the father disavows and attempts to censor such fantasies from the reader. The father describes his love for Beauty using the vague qualifier "too much," echoing an earlier moment in which the narrative insists the father "loved his youngest daughter... more than anything in the world. Maybe too much." (170). The mirroring of "too much" intensifies the qualifier's concealing function for the father, its nebulous wording both hiding and drawing attention to a feeling the father refuses to give explicit expression.

Similarly, flowers in "Snow" resurface for the gardener memories and censored feelings related to the daughter. The "scattering" (14) of white petals stirs feelings about Snow in the gardener that he can only describe in vague terms: "Something... reminded him, and he came to see what had become of her, if he had been right when he saw her baby face and imagined it grown, and knew he could not keep her" (14). By making reference to an earlier scene in the tale, in which the gardener sees Snow for the first time and decides against adopting her, this memory returns both the gardener and reader's attention to another moment of self-censorship. Curiously, this second moment also takes place in the garden: "She stared up at him with her eyes like black

rose petals in her snowy face. There was no way he could keep her himself, was there? (He imagined her growing up, long and slim, those lips and eyes)” (5). The simile drawn between Snow’s eyes and black rose petals mirrors the way in which the father of “Beast” deploys the rose’s physical features to describe, through analogy, Beauty’s body. The gardener’s mapping of floral attributes onto Snow’s face both articulates his desire for her and prompts a compensatory impulse to conceal that desire. The narrative of “Snow” is vague when it explores the gardener’s reason for rejecting the titular character, offering only glimpses into his thought process: his cataloging of Snow’s “long and slim” features, “those lips and eyes” (5). That these thoughts are bounded within parentheses expresses, through their clear demarcation from the surrounding passage, the gardener’s attempt to contain and thus conceal his sexual feelings from the narrative, the reader, and himself. Employing a strategy similar to the father’s “too much” qualifier, the gardener’s (bounded) thoughts of Snow gesture to an erotic fantasy in only ambiguous terms.

Through flowers, the garden-dream space enables male characters both to articulate and conceal their desire, a codification of affect that recalls Freud’s modelling of dream-work as distorted wish-fulfillment. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud writes, “Where the wish-fulfillment is unrecognizable, disguised, there must have been a tendency to defensiveness against the wish, and as a consequence of this defensiveness the wish was only able to express itself in distortion” (112). Freud interprets manifest dream content as the product of competing psychic forces: one that expresses the dreamer’s wish and a censor that deems this wish taboo (113). Consequently, unacceptable desires and impulses need to be disguised so they can bypass the dreamer’s internal censor and express themselves in the form of seemingly unrelated content.

Thought by Freud to be “the essential part of dream-work” (235), displacement is one type of defence mechanism that involves the transference of “psychical intensity” from one object — for instance, the dreamer’s desire for a specific person — onto another object “of low value” (235). By redirecting their affect onto another, apparently innocuous object within dreams, the dreamer indulges the same feelings, to the same intensity, but with less guilt. In “Beast,” the rose functions as an object of displacement for the father’s wish fulfillment. Initially absorbed by his thoughts about Beauty, the father’s attention then rebounds, within the next sentence, onto the rose: “Did he know [the rose] reminded him of her because it was forbidden? He only knew he had to have it. It looked fresh enough to last for days and he wasn’t that far from home — he could keep it in a jar of water” (121). If the rose functions as a stand-in for Beauty, the father’s sexual feelings, redirected onto the flower, are similarly disguised, expressed in this moment as an overwhelming need both to “have” and protect the rose. Here, the father’s desire to *have* the rose by stealing it activates a host of predatory connotations. Picking or plucking the rose entails defloration, which is a euphemism for the taking of a woman’s virginity, while the verb rape derives from the Latin *Rapere*, “to take.”

In “Beast,” the father’s overwhelming urge to protect the rose is also erotically charged. In *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*, James R. Kincaid theorizes that mainstream culture disavows its own complicity in the sexualization of youth by re-framing its erotic fascination with the childlike as a “gothic narrative” (11). In its compulsive circulation of child sexual abuse narratives, mainstream culture casts children as victims that need constant saving from predators, thereby sustaining an erotic vision of the child and the childlike — “adults by the millions find children so enticing they will risk anything to have sex with them” (14) — while

denying that this eroticism takes place. Similarly, “Snow” draws a connection between the gardener’s erotic desire for Snow and his sudden, over-compensatory urge to protect her: “After all, she was young, perfect, untouched. And [the gardener] had to rescue her from these seven strange, deformed (suddenly he saw them as deformed) men who would suffocate her, make her a freak like they were” (21). The gardener tempers his guilt by channeling his desire for Snow into a burning need to rescue her “untouched” personhood from the dwarfs who wish to despoil her, which in turn reinforces Snow’s status as a desirable object in the gardener’s mind even as he denies his feelings. Likewise, in “Beast,” the father’s afterthought of keeping the rose alive in a jar of water can be interpreted as an overcompensatory gesture, a strategy of disavowal that preserves and retains the qualities of Beauty — “open, glowing, pink, fragrant” — that the father fetishizes in the rose.

2.3 Floral Openness as a Metaphor for Childhood Innocence

The rose’s status as an object of displacement within the dream space that the garden represents invites the reader to scrutinize the specific features of the rose that make it an ideal object of displacement in the first place. If flowers function as stand-ins for the beloved’s body, the reader can retrace, through the flowers’ physical features, the attributes being fetishized in the person. As an object of displacement, what do the rose’s “open, glowing, pink and white, fragrant” (177) qualities represent for the father about Beauty? And how are these fetishized qualities both entangled within and shaped by a broader cultural sexualization of childhood?

Of all the rose’s features that the father catalogues, “openness” appears first. Openness consolidates a host of cultural associations made with childhood. In her work on space in children’s literature, Susan Ang traces a “spatial movement” in nineteenth-century children’s litera-

ture, in which child characters operate from represented states of enclosure to open, outdoor spaces. Ang links this spatial movement to Romantic notions of the innocent child, which position children against pre-Industrial life and represent them as carefree and spontaneous. Such qualities were thought to approximate children to nature and the outdoors, both physically and spiritually. Situating her own reading of literary gardens within Ang's model, Sarah Dinter interprets the garden in nineteenth-century texts as open spaces in which child characters "aesthetically retain, perform, and affirm the naturalness and freedom of childhood as cherished in the Romantic imagination" (224). Through its openness, the literary garden's spatial poetics give physical shape to Romantic notions of childhood innocence.

The linkage made between openness and innocence invites the reader to interpret the rose's "openness" as a lens through which "Beast" interrogates larger scripts of childhood innocence. The rose's openness functions as a window not only into the father's erotic perception of Beauty, but into the perceived aspects of childhood that the father fetishizes when he sexualizes Beauty. Such a reading follows Dinter's claim that contemporary children's literature uses the garden to mirror shifting attitudes towards the Romantic child figure, which, Jacqueline Rose notes, is forged by late-eighteenth century philosophies that positioned childhood innocence as "a pure point of origin in relation to language, sexuality, and the state" (8). As Amanda Phillips Chapman writes of the unself-conscious Romantic child, "True innocence cannot know itself to be innocent" (138), thus entailing a model of childhood that is inherently "privative, characterized not as a positive quality to be willfully cultivated through self-reflection but as a "lack of self-conscious knowledge" (139). Chapman's use of words such as "cannot," "privative," "not," "lack," emphasizes a connection between innocence and negation, a view of childhood inno-

cence that mirrors Kincaid's claim that the constructions of both women and children are "largely evacuations, a series of eviction notices" (16). Childhood innocence in particular is an "empty figure": "The [Romantic child] was figured as *free of* adult corruptions; *not yet* burdened with the weight of responsibility, mortality, and sexuality... Childhood, to a large extent, came to be in our culture a coordinate set ... of negations... Its liberty was a negative attribute... as was its innocence..." (Kincaid 15).

Following Kincaid's theory of childhood innocence as an empty figure, the rose's openness in "Beast" articulates physically the cultural perception of childhood as a literal empty space. Kincaid's reading of the innocent child as vacant provides insight into the relative flatness of Beauty's characterization in the tale's beginning. While her sisters implore the father to return from his business trip with "pearled camisoles, lace nightgowns, ruby earrings, and French perfume" (116), Beauty expresses no interest in material possessions, has no need for "much else" than "her father's love... and a single rose," which "she knew would make [the father] happy" (116-17). While Beauty's characterization can in part be attributed to the tale's retention of elements from the original tale, Beauty's disinterest in anything beyond her father's approval also conforms to the cultural demands of the unselfconscious innocent child.

However, Beauty's flattened characteristics can be interpreted more as a projection of the father's imagination and less as an accurate representation of her character. At first, "Beast" focalizes its narrative through the father's perspective, and so the tale invites the reader to view his or her initial impression of Beauty as a reflection of the father's perception of her. Similarly, the sisters' caricature-like representations can be interpreted in part as further projections of the father's imagination. The narrative positions the sisters' materialism, their jealousy, their paranoia

and dizzying rationalizations — “But no, it was always Beauty who thought of those things first, making them look foolish and selfish” (117) — against Beauty’s comparable vacant-ness. The sisters’ characterizations can be interpreted as objects on which the father maps Beauty’s undesired qualities: specifically, any character traits that are not linked to her desire for her father’s love. The father’s mapping of qualities from one object onto another dramatizes a model of displacement that Freud calls “decomposition,” a psychic splitting in which “various attributes of a given individual are disunited, and several other individuals are invented, each endowed with one group of the original attributes” (Jones 105). Decomposition produces an idealized figure by embodying through one person undesirable qualities disavowed within the ideal (Jones 105). As an object of displacement for the father, the rose not only materializes childhood innocence as a literal emptiness, but lays bare the unconscious process underlying the construction of that emptiness. Through its physical openness, the rose represents decomposition as an evacuation, a process that empties figures of positive qualities, such as agency and subjectivity, and displaces them onto others.

Conceptualizing the rose as an object of displacement for the father enables the reader to revisit and reinterpret other tales in the collection in which father figures draw on floral imagery to describe the girls they are sexualizing. Standing over a comatose Snow, the gardener employs the strategy of decomposition to define Snow’s idealized emptiness: “He wanted this stillness. She was completely his, now, in a way she would never be again. His silent, perfect bride. Not like the woman who had come screaming to him—what have I done?... He leaned closer to her, breathing her like one would inhale a bouquet...” (27). The qualities that the gardener fetishizes in Snow — her silence, her stillness — appeal to larger fantasies of empty childhood innocence.

The gardener defines Snow's perceived emptiness by relocating her positive attributes onto the mother. That he compares Snow to a bouquet of flowers concretizes the collection's more general use of flowers as potent metaphors for empty innocence. The tale represents the gardener's splitting of undesired qualities from the ideal as a mapping of floral imagery onto Snow's body.

That the gardener describes Snow as a "bouquet" invites the reader to similarly interpret her "half parted" lips as extensions of her imagined floral features: "[The gardener] looked at her lips, half parted as if waiting for him. He wanted to possess" (27). By drawing attention to Snow's half-parted lips, the gardener emphasizes Snow's openness, mirroring the father's fixation on the rose's openness in "Beast." The gardener's attention to Snow's openness activates a host of associations with the child's emptiness. This emptiness is distinctly sexual, perceived by the gardener as an invitation to kiss Snow without her consent.

2.4 Openness as a Physical Expression of "Empty" Childhood Innocence

The gardener's figuration of an erotically open feminine body mirrors Angela Carter's analysis of pornographic and mythic representations of women's bodies as negative spaces: "The hole is open: an inert space. The man is positive. The woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing" (4). As a figure of negation, Snow embodies for the gardener a desire to be filled by the positive presence the gardener thinks he represents. Drawing on floral imagery, the gardener rewrites Snow's body into an erotically vacant space that is "waiting for him" to "possess" her, activating cultural discourses that position women's bodies as "pre-defined rape spaces" (Marshall 226). The gardener's mapping of floral imagery onto Snow articulates his projection of desire onto an ideal figure, which allows him to preserve his saviour self-image.

The gardener's deployment of floral imagery also draws attention to the emptiness overlapping both the construction of the innocent child and the sexualized "negative" woman, which follows Kincaid's theory that the innocent child's emptiness entails a negative sexuality:

[A]s time went on, the idea of innocence and the idea of 'the child' became dominated by sexuality — negative sexuality, of course, but sexuality all the same. Innocence was filed down to mean little more than virginity coupled with ignorance; the child was, therefore, that which was innocent: the species incapable of practicing or inciting sex. The irony is not hard to miss: defining something entirely as a negation brings irresistibly before us that which we're trying to banish (55).

By defining innocence as virginity, cultural productions of the child and its innocence positions the child more closely to sexuality. The framing of the child as an asexual figure makes it impossible to conceive of the child without also thinking about the sexuality that the child negates. Carter's analysis of the negative woman suggests that the negative sexuality attributed to childhood invests the child with erotic meaning. Like the fetishized woman, emptiness renders the child's body a pre-defined rape space around which "tales of childhood eroticism (molestation, incest, abduction, pornography)" are constructed (Kincaid 13).

The gardener's use of flowers to eroticize Snow develops our reading of the rose in "Beast." Through its openness, the rose expresses visibly the father's projection of empty innocence onto his daughter, as well as the negative sexuality underlying that innocence. An erotically-charged reading of the rose invites closer attention to the rose's other sensual features: namely, its white and pink petals. Whiteness evokes purity, which Kincaid views as another empty quality of childhood. Pinkness too is linked to childhood, connoting an incipient sexuality associated

with girlhood, expressing “ornamental, submissive, and childish seductiveness” (105). Pinkness can also connote the ambivalence of the child’s negative sexuality: its mixing of white and red a colourful way of representing the negotiation between innocence and the erotic. The rose’s colours thus condition the associations that the rose’s openness already makes between emptiness and innocence, expressing chromatically a negative sexuality that is cherished within the innocent child. That the father dotes on Beauty because she asks for “didn’t feel the need for much else” than “a single rose” (112) implies his fetishization of her perceived negative sexuality: the absence of want surrounding Beauty’s exclusive need for the father’s love, which the rose represents. Like the gardener, the father views himself as the positive presence desired by Beauty’s negation.

Chapter 3: Using Childhood to Racialize the Ornamental Woman in “Charm”

3.1 Pop’s Photographs and Underage Mermaids

Through the mapping of floral features onto the daughter’s body, the father and the gardener project empty innocence and its implied negative sexuality onto girls— a practice repeated and rendered most explicitly in “Charm.” Pop’s fixation on Rev’s “opium eyes” (57) in his photographs not only references her drug-induced state but also mirrors the gardener’s mapping of floral openness onto Snow’s face, imaging through Rev’s eyes the opium poppies that hollow Rev out after she injects them into her veins. Pop maps more flowers onto Rev’s body when he forces her to wear a rose-embroidered kimono. That Rev should be wearing a kimono at all shores western portrayals of the East as a “receptive” and “sexually alluring” culture to be penetrated (Pettman 97), which correlates to the father’s use of flowers to redefine Rev’s body as a sexually negative space.

Pop’s camera thus provides snapshots into the father figure’s sexual fantasy, consolidating through Rev’s pornographic representations all the unconscious associations other father figures make between flowers, innocent childhood, and negative sexuality. Indeed, the pornographic photographs that Pop takes of Rev capture the childlike features that Pop fetishizes and reproduces onto Rev’s body: “He photographed her as witch, priestess, fairy queen, garden. He photographed her at the ruins of the castle and on the peeling, mournful carousel and in the fountain” (57). Rev’s appearance as a garden in Pop’s photographs invokes the collection’s entanglement of associations made between flowers, childhood innocence, and negative sexuality. More importantly, the garden’s inscription onto Rev’s body draws attention to other childlike references in Pop’s pictures, such as the carousel, as well as various associations related to the Romantic

Child. The fairy queen, for instance, recalls Edwardian myths that approximate children to fairies due to the former's innocence (Talley 121), while the unicorn horn that Pop fashions onto a pool in another picture with Rev (58) draws on the artistic tradition of using unicorns to reflect the child figure's purity of heart.

Pop's photography also eroticizes another magical, childlike reference: importantly, one of the two source fairytales upon which "Charm" is based. While most critics interpret "Charm" exclusively as an adaptation of "Sleeping Beauty" because of its reference to cursed spindles through heroin needles (Russell 114; Susina 223), less attention is given to the parallels the tale draws between Rev and the lovesick heroine of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." The silent image of Rev lounging onto "leopard couches and velvet pillows" (56) calls to mind the "velvet cushion" (Andersen 157) on which the mermaid sleeps, at the prince's request. That Pop sexualizes Rev even as she is forced to call him "Pop" — that he describes Rev's origins as "nowhere" (55) and erases her past before he entered her life — intensifies the paternalistic and pedophilic relationship the prince cultivates with the mermaid, whom he loves as "a good child" (158) and calls his "little foundling" (Andersen 158) within the same breath that he promises to marry her.

However, the most potent connection the tale draws between Rev and the mermaid is that both characters are described as soulless. The mermaid bemoans her lack of an immortal soul, one that she, as a mermaid, can only gain with the love of a human man (Andersen 153). Rev is similarly described as soulless: "Rev felt her empty insides trying to jump out of her as if to prove there was no soul there, nothing anyone had to be afraid of, nothing left for them to want to have" (61). Attributing her soullessness to the predatory men who sexualize her — the men

“with cameras [who] had sucked away her soul in tiny sips, because any form that lovely must remain soulless so as not to stun them impotent” (59) — Rev describes the psychic process of decomposition engaged by both the father in “Beast” and the gardener in “Snow” as they imagine adolescent women as sexually vacant objects.

By attributing Rev’s soullessness to the men around her, “Charm” revises the soul trope in “The Little Mermaid” and, through its representation of Pop’s predatory relationship with Rev, illuminates the pedophilic tendencies of the prince in the source text, which invites the reader to reinterpret the prince as a rapacious father figure. Similar to Pop, the prince fetishizes the mermaid’s perceived empty innocence, inferring from her silence the same lack of interiority and negations that Pop, the gardener, and the father in “Beast” project onto daughter figures in order to define their own centralized, positive presence. As the prince instructs the heartbroken mermaid after informing her that he will marry the princess: “Oh, now I am too happy... You will share my joy, for I know you love me more than any of the others do!” (169).

3.2 Childhood as an Erotic Lens

In addition to inviting new interpretations of the source secondary text, the references that “Charm” makes to “The Little Mermaid” also position the mermaid as a figure through which the reader can better conceptualize the childlike and racial features at play when Pop sexualizes Rev. Before this chapter can unpack such a claim, it is important to first emphasize that Rev is not a child when Pops photographs her. Rev’s sexualization operates on Pop’s continued infantilization of her. Whether they be gardens, carousels, fairies, or unicorns, Pop’s projection of childlike reference points onto Rev calls to mind larger cultural practices that make children out of anything deemed erotic.

Observing the frequency with which mainstream images of adult celebrities conflate the desirable with the childlike — for instance, portraying the ideal mid-twenties woman with a dainty girlish chin and pore-less, baby skin — Kincaid observes: “We are told to look like children if we can and for as long as we can, to pine for that look. This imaginative dwarfing of cute adults into children suggests the extent to which ‘the child’ is both a fetish and a flexible construction that is... independent of outside standards like age” (18). Pop’s pornographic representations of Rev imitate and expose larger cultural practices that reassemble parts of the innocent child to visualize the erotic. By transforming Rev into a composite image of the childlike and the erotic, Pop’s camera literalizes Kincaid’s point that childhood is a kind of lens: “a product of ways of perceiving, not something that is there” (10).

3.3 Racializing the Yellow Woman through Ornament and Childhood-as-Erotic-Lens

Kincaid’s notion of childhood as a lens through which people eroticize others provides context for the tale’s orientalist imagery. Earlier, I interpreted Rev’s kimono as Pop’s engagement with tropes that position the East as a negative, open space. Paired with the kimono, the opium eyes too are historically loaded, recalling the Chinese-owned opium dens in Victorian England. Pop’s blurring of Chinese and Japanese reference points onto Rev’s body recalls the “Orient” in Western discourse. Edward Said describes the Orient as a geographic and ideological space that is thought to be exotic, feminine, and inferior to the imperializing force of the Western colonizer (138). Crucial to Said’s notion of the Orient is that it is discursively produced and managed by Euro-American cultures, a racial and colonial form of control that hovers over Pop’s words when he tells Rev, “It’s like you’re from nowhere. I like that. It’s like I made you inside my head. I made you just the way I want you to be” (78). Rev’s origins are imagined here as a “nowhere,”

suggesting that Rev's ethnic and racial displacement plays an important role in her eroticism, another means of evacuation. To an extent, Pop's erasure of Rev's origins speaks to the social and political deployment of childhood-as-erotic-lens to erase "various social and political complications... and render nearly invisible — certainly irrelevant — questions we might raise about race, class, and even gender" (Kincaid 20).

However, "Charm" complicates Kincaid's view of childhood as a lens through which adults erase all distinctions between social categories. Far from producing the raceless, genderless erotic child that Kincaid describes, Pop's mystifying of Rev's origins through a childhood lens reinforces her status as an exotic and erotic other. The blurring of ethnic distinctions does not prevent adults from inferring "numinous possibilities" (56) into Rev's "darker" (56) brown complexion. "Numinous" is itself an infantilizing adjective, one applied almost exclusively to so-called exotic cultures, whose perceived mysticism and magical practices were believed to situate them developmentally behind the West, the latter of which was in turn characterized as enlightened (Said 57). Drawing on stereotypes of the vague, mystical orient, Pop reimagines Rev as a Japanese geisha, or as the sex workers of a Chinese opium den. In their reproduction of orientalist fantasies, Pop's photographs of Rev enact a broader racialization of Asian women.

Applying a racial and postcolonial framework to "Charm" enables the reader to reinterpret Rev's infantilization as a process tethered to her racialization. In her analysis of the so-called "yellow woman's" racialization (415), Anne Anlin Cheng differentiates the discursive construction of racialized femininity imposed onto Asian women and Black women. Comparing and contrasting two nineteenth-century images of racialized femininity — Sarah "Sartjie" Baartman and

Afong Moy — Cheng suggests that while Black femininity is constructed around “bare flesh” (416), the yellow woman’s femininity is associated with the synthetic:

Her appeal does not derive from her naked flesh but from her decorative (and projected ontological) sameness to the silk, damask, mahogany, and ceramics alongside which she sits. While primitivism rehearses the rhetoric of flesh, Orientalism, by contrast, relies on a decorative grammar, a fantasmatic corporeal syntax that is artificial and layered. (416)

For Cheng, the racialization of the yellow woman hinges on the flattening of her personhood into an ornament. Although her race and ethnicity are never explicitly mentioned in the text, Rev’s representation in Pop’s photos deploy similar strategies of ornamental racialization at work in the Afong Moy image. While Rev’s fetishized femininity is on one occasion constructed around a stereotypically Asian artifact — the kimono — Rev’s femininity is also constructed more broadly around and through objects associated with girlhood, such as unicorns, fairies, and carousels. That Pop’s photographs conflate Rev’s body and personhood with both childhood objects and racialized sexual objects expresses the intersection of eroticism and infantilization at play in the racialization of the yellow woman. Stereotypes of the dainty China Doll and the diminutive butterfly, which were disseminated during the Opium Wars (Lee 1), persist in updated forms. Simon May points to the limiting and mistaken perception of Japanese Cute Culture as “largely about girl culture and its devotees... or about the self-presentation of young women playing up to expectations of demure, vulnerable femininity; or about kinkiness or the fetishization of adolescent girls” (88). Chyun Oh also induces the continued infantilization of Asian women as fragile, dependent girls in her analysis of the childlike portrayals of Asian American female athletes in Western media compared to their white male and female counterparts (720). In Pop’s pho-

tographs, ornamentalism becomes a tool through which Pop conforms Rev's body and personhood to the erotic aesthetics of childhood, a conformation that in turn reinforces broader cultural constructions of the infantilized Asian woman.

3.4 The Mermaid as Figure of Racialized Melancholic Object

By considering Rev's ornamental representation in Pop's photographs, the reader is invited to interpret Rev's literary antecedent, the mermaid, as a model of Asian feminization. The mermaid certainly shares qualities with the yellow woman, in all her discursively produced archetypes. Like the tragic Japanese Butterfly character, who commits suicide after her "love affair with her white partner ends" (Lee 1), the mermaid, also occupying a foreigner status in the prince's human world, chooses to end her own life after her prince chooses another human to be his lover. Similar to the docile China Doll, who often speaks in broken English, the voiceless mermaid is also infantilized for her inability to communicate with the prince through spoken language. Both the yellow woman and the mermaid's silence inform their treatment as aesthetic objects, the mermaid's positioning on the pillow outside the prince's door a reminder of the yellow woman's status as "ornamental/surface/portable" (Cheng 416). The mermaid's soullessness also positions her as a figure of racialized Asiatic femininity. The mermaid's tragic story of rejection by a human lover and subsequent loss of a potential eternal soul — coupled with the threat of her turning into "foam on the ocean" (Andersen 153) — resembles the "spectral drama" (Cheng 10) through which racialized subjects are rejected, then excluded by a white national ideal and rendered into "melancholic objects" (Cheng 124).

Before this chapter can explore the mermaid's status as a racialized melancholic object, some theoretical context must be provided. For Freud, melancholia is a pathology in which the

subject experiences the traumatizing loss of an object and then incorporates the “shadow of the object” (248) into its ego formation. After incorporating or “devouring” (Freud 250) the lost object, the melancholic subject both loves and reviles the lost object that becomes so integral to his or her own ego. Building on Freud’s theory of melancholia, Cheng suggests that melancholia entails a continued process of denial and exclusion that prevents the subject from consciously acknowledging its loss while ensuring the lost object does not return: “[F]or such a return would surely jeopardize the cannibalistic project that, one might note, is a form of possession more intimate than any material relationship could produce” (Cheng 9).

Cheng interprets melancholia as a paradigm through which the reader can conceptualize American race relations, which rely on a system of racial exclusions — for instance, enslavement, internment, or the exclusion of Chinese workers — that have been “repeatedly covered over” (10) in order to preserve national myths of liberty and freedom. Moreover, racism’s strategic practices are melancholic in that they operate on the same ambivalent responses of incorporation and rejection: “[R]acist institutions in fact often do not want to fully expel the racial other; instead, they wish to maintain that other within existing structures... Segregation and colonialism are internally fraught institutions not because they have eliminated the other but because they need the very thing they hate or fear” (12). Racism operates on the rejection and retention of a racialized other that is continually excluded and rendered a ghostly melancholic object.

Cheng’s melancholic theory of racism seems to operate on the same psychic process of decomposition that rapacious father figures use in the collection to evacuate Snow, Beauty, and Rev of their interiority. Rev’s description of the men “with cameras [who] had sucked away her soul in tiny sips” (59) in spite of the fact that “there was no soul there... nothing left for them to

want to have” (61) dramatizes not only her sense experience of the empty innocence projected onto her, but the devouring process of a melancholic ego that continuously retains and rejects an object that is made into a ghostly shadow.

Pop’s consumption of Rev as a lost object invites the reader to consider the mermaid too as an object of racial melancholia. The mermaid’s reliance on a human man’s love for an eternal soul, coupled with her willingness to die and turn into sea foam after he rejects her, overlaps with other tragic Asian female archetypes such as the Diminutive Butterfly or China doll, “both of whom ‘conveniently elect’ suicide to avoid challenging the happiness and success of their White lovers, building the imagination of colonial dominance over the subordinate East Asia. In essence, screen Asians prioritize the lives of White characters and disappear when they are unneeded” (Lee 1). Similar to the way in which Pop uses his camera to conflate Rev with childlike and Oriental objects, the Diminutive Butterfly and China doll archetypes are discursive productions that turn Asian women into ghostly melancholic objects that must be retained and killed off, in a loop, to secure the positive presence of their white male counterparts. Likewise, the mermaid’s soullessness positions her as a metaphoric figure of the racialized and infantilized Asian woman, one whose interactions with the human prince dramatize her prioritization of the prince’s inner life and her willingness to be made into a ghostly melancholic object — a pure negation — after she is rejected.

Chapter 4: Conclusion: Resisting Childhood through Childhood

In *The Rose and the Beast*, flowers function as objects of displacement through which father figures disguise and indulge fantasies of adolescent women. The rose in “Beast” provides the reader with privileged access into the rapacious father figure’s inner world, expressing through its openness the “negative” attributes of childhood — empty innocence, negative sexuality — that the father fetishizes more explicitly in “Snow” and “Charm.” By focalizing Pop’s orientalist fantasy around its floral imagery, “Charm” demonstrates that childhood is less a developmental stage as it is a fiction, a lens through which an entire culture defines the erotic.

Strangely, the tale’s portrayal of childhood as a mode of perception rather than as a developmental stage does not prevent Rev and Charm from clinging onto the same fantasies of childhood innocence that inform their traumas as coping mechanisms for those traumas. Rev is well aware of the erotic meanings men graft onto her perceived innocence: “Sometimes Rev dreamed she was in a garden gathering flowers that bit at her hands with venomous mouths... She was lying in a coffin that was a castle, suffocating under roses” (67). In its characterization of the garden as a predatory space, Rev’s nightmare interrogates Romantic notions of the garden as a figuration of childhood innocence. If innocence is linked to openness, the flowers, with their “venomous mouths,” render the father’s weaponization of that openness, dramatizing the predation underlying projected innocence.

Nevertheless, Rev clings to fantasies of childhood innocence even as her nightmares register childhood as a “suffocating” fantasy imposed upon her. In contrast to her nightmarish portrayal of the garden, Rev presents a second fantasy of the garden as an Eden-like space:

Only with each other were they young. They would take each other’s hands and run screaming through the night. No one could touch them, then. Dressed as ragged, raging

boys; people were afraid of them. Devouring stolen roses and gardenias, stuffing their faces with petals. Rolling in the dirt, scratching so that their nails ached, filled with soil. The fair-skinned one would bind the other's breasts, gently, gently, so they were hidden away in the flannel shirt. The dark skinned one would wipe the powder and paint from the other's face. They would trace each other's initials with a razor blade on their palms and hold hands till their blood was one... untouched except by one another. (68)

Rev and Charm de-sexualize their bodies by presenting themselves as boys. Their “screaming” and “raging” subverts cultural demands for them to remain passive, hollow images. But even as Rev and Charm resist representations of the innocent child, their fantasy — of being “untouched,” of blurring distinctions between genders, of merging in spite of their different races — indicates a longing to conform to the asexual, genderless, and, at least in Kincaid's view, de-racinated innocent child (20) that mainstream culture cherishes and against which Rev and Charm are rebelling.

That Rev copes with her sexual trauma by engaging in the same fantasy underlying that trauma follows Renold and Ringrose's observation that girls' subjectivities can both subvert, and be regulated by, hegemonic codes of gender, race, and class (392). Drawing on the distinction Deleuze and Guattari make between the molar and molecular, Renold and Ringrose write: “Molar lines are those hard and sedimented structures which work to constrain and bind subjects in social space... and the molecular are those micro process and tiny movements in everyday relations which make visible... the fragility and malleability of the molar” (394). Renold and Ringrose envision girls' molecular resistance within the molar as a de-territorializing of space. Rev and Charm's incorporation and reworking of cultural beliefs surrounding childhood enact

“molecular” moments of resistance within the molar, dramatizing through their vandalism of the garden a literal “de-territorializing of space.”

In her essay on Block’s novel *I Was a Teenage Fairy*, Talley notes that Block’s writing clings to a “type of nostalgia, a yearning for a past that never was, as well as unintentionally reifying some ideas of childhood the text interrogates elsewhere” (121). As they devour roses and “stuff their faces with petals,” Rev and Charm de-territorialize the cultural demands of the garden by literally incorporating its features, absorbing within their shared fantasy romantic ideals associated with childhood innocence and stripping them from their underlying negative sexuality.

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