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**Cuisine and Punishment: Eating
Transgressions in Contemporary
“Hansel and Gretel” Retellings**

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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The fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel" by the brothers Grimm remains recognisable in today's culture in terms of the characters, the setting, and the way it deals with food and eating. "The Woodsman's Second Tale," a story found within John Connolly's novel *The Book of Lost Things*, and Leigh Bardugo's "The Witch of Duva" are both inspired by the narrative of "Hansel and Gretel." However, they are retellings of it, and as such, they propound different messages – they exhibit different socialisation objectives. Namely, stories can be used to socialise the audience, that is, to instil the desired characteristics, behaviours, and morals into the audience. Being retellings of "Hansel and Gretel", both stories make fruitful use of the staple food-related scenes found in it – overindulgence and cannibalism. The exploration of these eating transgressions and the punishments that follow them allows for an examination of the civilising aims of the texts. The paper investigates the instances in which food plays a prominent role in these two narratives and the ways in which they cast light on the civilising objectives of children's literature. This is done through an elaboration of the civilising process, the presence of food in children's literature, and the role of eating and subsequent punishment in "The Woodsman's Second Tale" and "The Witch of Duva".

KEYWORDS

abjection, Hansel and Gretel, John Connolly, Leigh Bardugo, socialisation, transgression

1. Introduction

With its vivid food imagery and the threat of getting roasted in an oven, "Hansel and Gretel" remains popular among children and adults, as evidenced by its frequent revisions in popular media. What inevitably comes to mind are the fairy tale's food scenes. The plot is motivated by a famine, inspired, in the classical tale, by the common real-life occurrences of hunger in the medieval and early modern periods, when the lack of food "drove people to commit atrocious acts" (Zipes, 1993, 23). The tale juxtaposes the widespread hunger with the overindulgence in sweets that comes to the fore in the rising plot. The tale can be seen as cautioning against "unrestrained giving in to gluttony [that] threatens destruction" (Bettelheim, "Hansel and Gretel"), which falls under the civilising aspect of fairy tales. This term refers to the didactic nature of a tale intended to educate children about proper, often restrictive and rigid, codes of conduct. Contemporary fairy tales frequently take it upon themselves to "transform the civilizing process" (Zipes, 2006, 177) found in the classical tales through the invention of new tales or through reimagining the classical narratives. Such texts were produced by John Connolly in *The Book of Lost Things* (2006) and by Leigh Bardugo in *The Language of Thorns: Midnight Tales and Dangerous Magic* (2017). Connolly's novel contains a short story, "The Woodsman's Second Tale" (told to the main character, David, by the Woodsman), about a boy and a girl who are left in the forest and sup on a witch's house. The girl saves them, but the boy encounters another witch and again fails to resist temptation. Bardugo's story, "The Witch of Duva", features Nadya, whose brother Havel leaves for the army and whose father, Maxim, marries Karina, a suspected witch, and Nadya is forced into the woods. Here she encounters a witch, who feeds her and makes her her apprentice. The witch, Magda, and Nadya bake a gingerbread girl who is sent to Nadya's home to defeat the evil presence that has been killing the village girls. Maxim is revealed to be the predator and is punished. This paper aims to investigate how these writers incorporate food and its potential different meanings into their narratives, as well as to show the changing nature of the civilising objective of fairy tales. Comprehensive studies have been written about food in children's literature, such as Carolyn Daniel's *Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature* (2006),¹ on which this paper partially relies. It also makes use of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, elaborated in *Powers of Horror*, to explain different instances of consumption in the stories. The paper first explicates the socialising aspect of fairy tales and then analyses the two stories through an investigation of food-related scenes – encounters with witches in "The Woodman's Second Tale" and the baking of human-like gingerbread children in "The Witch of Duva".

2. Socialisation and Food in Fairy Tales

The canonical, classical fairy tales came into being by the authors' appropriation and adaptation of the folktales. The authors often fine-tuned these

stories "into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children and adults would become civilized according to the social code of that time" (Zipes, 2006, 3). This means that the tales were used to instil the hand-picked characteristics into their audience; the same trend permeates the later children's literature in general, not only fairy tales (Daniel 213). Therefore, the tales also represent fertile ground for educating the readers about the proper ways of eating. Scenes of transgressive eating events often cause the reader (and the characters) to feel disgust and horror (Daniel 24), thereby making the tales cautionary, as well – these narratives spark fear within their audience, "warn of material dangers, and didactically reinforce the notion of the child's rightful place in the social hierarchy" (Daniel 150). Food-related misbehaviours in stories include overeating, lack of manners, ingestion of unwholesome foods, eating outside of meal times, cannibalism, and so on. When focusing on desserts in a work of fiction, it should be noted that sweet foods are allowed when they are a constituent of a meal and, again, should not be sought out outside of meal times. Furthermore, the sweets should follow the savoury segment of the meal and should be consumed in moderation to be considered wholesome. When characters do not abide by these rules, their transgressions are punished to show the audience what should and what should not be done.² Children's stories often end with the return home and a domestic scene in which the adult provides food for the child, demonstrating "the benefits for children of an adult authority" (Nodelman 132). Hence, the important civilising components of food-related scenes in fairy tales include the eating transgression and the punishment of it.

3. The Witches of "The Woodsman's Second Tale"

Connolly opens his narrative in a formulaic exposition that outlines the existence of a boy and a girl and the remarriage of their parent. What is unusual is that it is the mother who is still alive in the story and the position of the villainous stepparent is actually occupied by a stepfather. The trouble starts "[w]hen the crops failed and the famine came" (Connolly ch. 11) – this dearth prompts the characters to consider resorting to cannibalism, which, along with overindulgences, is the capital transgression present in the story. At the very beginning, the stepfather "began to suggest to his wife that they might eat the children and thereby save themselves from death, for she could always give birth to more children when times improved" (Connolly ch. 11). The mother is "horrified" at the idea (Connolly ch. 11) because of the abject nature of it. Abjection is, as defined by Julia Kristeva, that which is "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). In the cases of food ingestion, which "is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (Kristeva 2), the notion boils down to the person being "reminded of the body's physical and semantic proximity to meat produces disgust, horror, and abjection" (Daniel 21). The mother in the story is disgusted by her husband's idea because it upsets the "social and symbolic order" (Kristeva 68) – she is forced to consider the social conception

of what is viewed as food and what is not. Simultaneously, she faces the image of her children and, by extension, herself, not as subjects, but as food. Still, she knows she is unable to feed her children so she leaves them in the forest to fend for themselves, in fear of "what her new husband might do to them when her back was turned" (Connolly ch. 11). This points to the husband's firm intention to have his way, although it would mean upsetting the order and crossing the line into the abject. This transgression is continued in the children's meetings with the two witches.

Wicked Witch of the Forest

After they are left in the forest, the children try to adapt to their new life. The girl is more successful and she "learned to trap small animals and birds, and to steal eggs from nests", while the boy only "missed his mother and wanted to return to her" (Connolly ch. 11). His wandering leads him to discover a marvellous house: "Its walls were made of chocolate and gingerbread. Its roof was slated with slabs of toffee, and the glass in its windows was formed from clear sugar. Embedded in its walls were almonds and fudge and candied fruits. Everything about it spoke of sweetness and indulgence" (Connolly ch. 11). The house is a typical fairy tale creation brimming with sweets and allure. The boy is already enjoying himself, "picking nuts from the walls when [the girl] found him, and his mouth was dark with chocolate" (Connolly ch. 11). His face is dirty from all the food, which is already an element of improper behaviour, and he is aware that he is engaging in a transgressive act – namely, he invites his sister to join him and says: "Don't worry, there's nobody home" (Connolly ch. 11), which signifies that he knows he is operating outside of (adult) authority. Like the classical Hansel and Gretel, they "know what they are doing is wrong, that it is sinful, but they cannot control themselves" (Cashdan ch. 4). On top of that, as has been mentioned, sweets are not regarded as proper, real food when they are not part of a meal (Daniel 56) and should not be tasted in this case. The girl shows more resistance, possibly due to her more definite separation from the mother and the oral phase (Daniel 94), the phrase of maternal influence (Freud, 1976, 88-89). Still, "the smell of the chocolate was too much for her, and she allowed herself to nibble on a piece. (...) and together they ate and ate until they had consumed so much that, in time, they fell into a deep sleep" (Connolly ch. 11). The punishment for their overindulgence and misbehaviour ensues – the witch catches them and puts them in a cage. The witch herself seems to be decaying – she smells and her teeth are ruined – which may represent both the detrimental effects of overindulgence in sweets and her own cannibalism (Daniel 25). The children see that "[p]iles of bones lay stacked on the floor by her feet, the remains of the other children who had fallen prey to her. 'Fresh meat!' she whispered to herself. 'Fresh meat for old Gammer's oven!'" (Connolly ch. 11). The witch faces children with the abject notion of their flesh becoming meat and it makes the children themselves the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4) and therefore both disturbed and disturbing.

The witch's transgressive eating behaviour is represented by the bones of the deceased children. The boy is terrified of the witch, while the girl offers herself to the witch, explaining: "I am plumper than my brother, and will make a better roast for you. While you eat me you can fatten him up, so that he will feed you for longer when you cook him" (Connolly ch. 11). Curiously, neither of the children expresses the disgust related to the object, although the boy is evidently afraid. The reason for this may lie in the scope of the story and its adherence to the classic fairy tale structure, in which there is usually no place for deeper characterisation, as figures in folk and classic fairy tales are flat characters or character types (Forster 67-70), "figures without substance, without inner life, without an environment; they lack any relation to past and future, to time altogether" (Lüthi 11). The witch is delighted by the girl's suggestion and prepares to put her in the oven. The girl takes it upon herself to punish the witch for her cannibalism and succeeds in this by tricking the witch into entering the oven. "So hot was the oven that the fats of her body began to melt, creating a stench so terrible that the little girl felt ill" (Connolly ch. 11). The girl does what the witch threatened to do, but, as she has no desire to eat the witch's meat, she is not punished for roasting her.

A Witch in Mother's Clothing

After the defeat of the first witch, the girl begins to prosper in her forest life. Instead of coming from 'not home' to 'home', the two places that often frame the narrative of children's literature (Stott and Doyle Francis 223),³ she remains in the forest and makes a new home for herself. She does not seek adult authority. The boy, however, does not adapt at all. He has continually exhibited a desire to go back home – primarily, he "yearned always to be back with his mother" (Connolly ch. 11). This desire, in Freudian terms, hints at his wish for oneness with his mother – his desire to revert back to the period when "[a]n infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world" (Freud, 1962, 13-14). The boy is still stuck in the oral phase. Therefore, he is susceptible to the influence of the second witch of the story. He follows a berry path deeper into the forest, eating the berries as he forages them (Connolly ch. 11). Such recklessness and his refusal to gather provisions, choosing instead to gorge on the berries immediately, are subsequently punished. The boy happens upon "a pretty little house, with ivy on the walls and flowers by the door and a trail of smoke rising from its chimney. He smelled bread baking, and a cake lay cooling on the windowsill. A woman appeared at the door, bright and merry, as his mother had once been" (Connolly ch. 11). The house he encounters emulates wholesomeness and cosiness, while the woman becomes a substitute for the mother the boy has lost. In short, he finds everything he has been looking for. This is an instance "of a return to the primal mother-infant relationship" (Daniel 125). The link between the woman and the mother is reaffirmed when she offers to nurture him by providing food and comfortable lodging and it is finally explicitly stated when she offers: "Stay as long as you wish, for I have no children, and have long wanted a son to

call my own" (Connolly ch. 11). The boy falls under the spell and is so blinded by the promise of a motherly embrace that he does not recognise the danger he is in. Again, this misstep is immediately punished and, this time, there is no sister to save him from demise: "he followed the woman into the house, where a great cauldron bubbled on the fire and a sharp knife lay waiting on the butcher's block. And he was never seen again" (Connolly ch. 11). The cauldron and the butcher's knife hint at his destiny and represent the abject notion of the boy becoming a witch's meal. The tale simultaneously destroys the social and symbolic order by having the boy become food and establishes the social order by having him ruthlessly penalised for not learning from his mistakes. Connolly's version of Hansel and Gretel still "tells about the debilitating consequences of trying to deal with life's problems by means of regression and denial, which reduce one's ability to solve problems" (Bettelheim "Hansel and Gretel").

4. The Gingerbread Children in "The Witch of Duva"

In Bardugo's story, when the famine strikes, it takes its toll on the whole village, but the society still manages to push through, even to organise celebrations, albeit without food (Bardugo 86, 88), that all-important societal adhesive (Keeling and Pollard 5, Cashdan ch. 4). When faced with a lack, the people of Duva show their worst sides – "mothers smothered infants in their cribs to stop their hungry howls, (...) the trapper Leonid Gemka was found gnawing on the muscle of his slain brother's calf when their hut was iced in for two long months" (Bardugo 82) – reflecting the atrocities conducted in times of need. The story exposes some of these violations of the social order, but, interestingly, they do not seem to extend to the improper eating of sweets. Namely, when first arriving at Magda's house and smelling the alluring scent, Nadya is afraid, but her fear is intermingled with the instinctual desire: "she smelled it, hot and sweet, a fragrant cloud that singed the edges of her nostrils: burning sugar. Nadya's breath came in frantic little gasps, and even as her terror grew, her mouth began to water" (Bardugo 93). When finally inside the witch's house, "[s]he lifted her spoon, but still she hesitated. She knew from stories that you must not eat at a witch's table. But in the end, she could not resist. She ate the stew, every hot and savory bite of it, then flaky rolls, plums in syrup, egg pudding, and a rum cake thick with raisins and brown sugar" (Bardugo 96). Here, Nadya goes against the common warnings about sharing a meal with a witch – which could also be more broadly interpreted as the danger of accepting food from strangers – and gives in to a similar temptation as the boy and the girl from Connolly's story. However, instead of eating away at the house itself,⁴ Nadya ingests meals that are all wholesome, properly sequenced, and not overly-indulgent, for example: "stuffed cabbage leaves, crispy roast goose, little dishes of apricot custard"; "butter-soaked blini stuffed with cherries and cream"; "potato pie and sausages" (Bardugo 97, 98). Interestingly, the story does not condemn candy and sweets like the classical "Hansel and Gretel" story does. The father is said to bring candy as gifts to his

children (Bardugo 79), sugar is a highly-prized rarity (80), and Magda is apparently known for her sweet tooth (99), but this is not seen as an unhealthy or disgusting overindulgence.

The protagonist of the story, Nadya, sometimes engages in improper behaviour related to food – she licks the leftovers from Karina and Maxim's plate of cake and her determination not to eat witch's food wavers and is dispelled. However, she is never punished for these transgressions, as would be expected in the typical narrative dealing with gluttony and children. These instances could be written off as motivated by her extreme hunger, and therefore not breaking the social order. However, Nadya is also seen as eating candy outside of meal time, as well as overeating at specific, excusable situations after extended periods of malnourishment (Bardugo 100), which could arguably be interpreted as misbehaviour, but she still does not suffer because of it. The descriptions of food she gets to eat do not play a crucial role in the story. In fact, Bardugo reclaims the food scenes as aesthetically pleasurable, unlike many authors who represent food as "an abject object in contemporary culture" (Daniel 213). The abjection is reserved for the instances in which the parents begin to see their children as food.

The Comfort of the Gingerbread Baby

The first major incident in which a child explicitly becomes food occurs when a grieving mother arrives at Magda's doorstep. They confer in hushed tones and it is revealed that the woman wants Magda to bake a gingerbread replacement for her dead baby. "Before the woman left, she took a tiny pouch from her pocket and shook the contents into Magda's palm" (Bardugo 100) and the content of the pouch remains a mystery, but it is probable that it was the ashes of the late baby and that Magda uses it to bake the gingerbread creation. Nadya is horrified at Magda's baking project, but the woman is beyond speech when "Magda wrapped her hands in towels and pulled open the oven's iron doors. A squalling cry filled the room" (Bardugo 102). The baby hence becomes literal comfort food, as it brings solace to the woman (Bardugo 102). Because of this, the woman is not coded as the bad mother, who is the "evil, possessive and destructive all-devouring one" (Kaplan 48), or the smothering mother, who is "over-indulgent, satisfying her own needs" (Kaplan, 48) – although the connection between the food baby and the devouring motherhood is obvious. She is motivated primarily by her wish to be reunited with the baby, which could be read as her desire for oneness. Usually, it is the child who craves the return to the mother, and not *vice versa*, like in this story, but it serves to emphasise the mother's grieving. Hence, the incident is not villainous *per se*, although Nadya feels abjection. She is distraught because she views the baby as human, or human-like, similar to Nadya herself; this view disagrees with concurrent notion of the baby being food: "And then she heard it again, a gurgle followed by a plaintive coo. From inside the oven. Nadya pushed back from the table, nearly knocking her chair over, and stared at Magda,

horrified, but the witch did not flinch" (Bardugo 101). Nadya is at first attracted by the smell of gingerbread and is looking forward to enjoying the dessert after dinner so her disgust at realising it is a baby is furthered by her subconscious desire to eat it. The abjection stems from the baby, as Magda says, being "real enough" (Bardugo 102), meaning, human enough, which may additionally lead to the abject realization that if the baby is food, Nadya, too, can become food. Nevertheless, the grieving woman will die of the same illness that her baby had suffered from, but she will not have eaten the gingerbread baby before that, as Magda speculates that at some point the baby "will be nothing but crumbs" and the woman "dead long before that" (Bardugo 102). This disconnects the woman from the image of the devouring or smothering mother and takes away some of the abjection due to the baby not being eaten.

The Gingerbread Girl Sits in a (Gingerbread) House

Nadya manages to overcome her disgust over the gingerbread baby: "She did not go inside for lunch. She meant to skip dinner too, to show what she thought of Magda and her terrible magic. But by the time night came her stomach was growling, and when Magda put down a plate of sliced duck with hunter's sauce, Nadya picked up her fork and knife" (Bardugo 102). This is significant because the incident with the baby sets the stage for the culmination of story.

This takes place after Nadya expresses her desire to go home and Magda offers her a way to do it. The girl concedes to having two of her fingers cut off and "Magda took the two fingers and ground them down to a wet red meal that she mixed into the batter. When Nadya revived, they worked side by side, shaping the gingerbread girl on a damp plank as big as a door, then shoved her into the blazing oven" (Bardugo 105-106). A part of Nadya is transferred into the gingerbread girl and, despite the inherent abjection, Nadya feels the desire to eat the girl: "All night the gingerbread girl baked, filling the hut with a marvelous smell. Nadya knew she was smelling her own bones and blood, but still her mouth watered" (Bardugo 106). Of course, she makes no attempt to actually eat the sweet, as she recognises it would be beyond unacceptable – she remains within the social and symbolic order and the girl, the abject, belongs outside of it. The girl who is the abject part of Nadya exhibits agency when "the oven doors creaked open and the gingerbread girl crawled out. She crossed the room, opened the window, and lay down on the counter to let herself cool" (Bardugo 106). She willingly lets herself cool and be prepared to be eaten, going against the human instinct for survival and therefore showing herself to be outside of the order.

The gingerbread girl is sent to Nadya's home, and Nadya follows her in the guise of a crow. The meeting of Nadya's gingerbread twin and Maxim results in the girl being eaten whole. The consumption is made explicitly sexual, which is not surprising considering the connection between food and sex is a well-es-

established one and food scenes often liquidate the lack of sexuality in children's literature (Nikolajevna 129, Daniel 81). In this narrative, the link is hinted at in the beginning. First, the girls who are abducted and murdered are described as "full-grown girls near old enough to marry" (Bardugo 83), hinting at their maturity and level of development. That only girls are taken away is significant in itself, because they are a fitting target for the heterosexual Maxim. While discussing what kind of a monster haunts their village, a member of the community notes: "'Maybe it just likes the taste of our girls,' said Anton Kozar, limping by on his one good leg and wagging his tongue obscenely" (Bardugo 83). There is nothing subtle about Kozar's implication and the text continues in the same line. In a scene that foreshadows Maxim's predatory nature, Nadya is locked in her room by Karina and she hears "the tentative scratch of his fingers at her door. Before she could answer she heard Karina's voice, crooning, crooning. Silence, the rustle of fabric, a thump followed by a groan, then the steady thud of bodies against the wall" (Bardugo 92).⁵ Here, Maxim's hunger for his daughter is exchanged for the sexual gratification his new wife gives him and the line between the two types of desires becomes blurred. The sexual connotation is carried on in the scene where Maxim eats the gingerbread likeness of his daughter. From the outside, Nadya witnesses the whole scene, despite Karina's warning that "Some things are better left unseen" (Bardugo 110):

Her father had pulled the gingergirl into his lap and was stroking her white hair. "Nadya," he said again and again. "Nadya." He nuzzled the brown flesh of her shoulder, pressed his lips to her skin. (...) "Forgive me," Maxim murmured, the tears on his cheeks dissolving the soft curve of icing at her neck. (...) But her father's hand slipped beneath the hem of her skirts, and the gingergirl did not move. *It isn't me*, Nadya told herself. *Not really. It isn't me.* Maxim opened his wet mouth to kiss her again, and the sound he made was something between a groan and a sigh as his teeth sank into the sweetness of her shoulder. The sigh turned to a sob as he bit down. Nadya watched her father consume the gingergirl, bite by bite, limb by limb. (Bardugo 110-111)

The physical and sexual hungers are almost inextricable from each other. The scene upsets Nadya on several levels – she is astonished that her father is revealed as the villain; she is disturbed by the sexual violation, coupled with the fact it is conducted by her own father; and, finally, she is faced with her body being consumed for food. The gingerbread girl not only bears her image, but is also made from her flesh and bones. Nadya recoils from the act because it is outside of the symbolic order and she tries to preserve it by repeating that it is not actually her that has become the object of Maxim's attack.

In the end, the father is punished for his abject, cannibalistic eating habits: "They found Nadya's father there the next morning, his insides ruptured and stinking of rot. He had spent the night on his knees, vomiting blood and sugar" (Bardugo 111). His death is a clear sign that disregarding the symbolic order and delving

outside of it cannot be tolerated. Additionally, it could also be an indication that his nutrition is also outside of the social order. Namely, his stomach becomes "distended" from the amount of food he consumes (Bardugo 111), which points to his overeating. The act is harmful to the rest of the society, the members of which suffer from famine, because "whoever consumes more than their share, deprives others of theirs" (Claude Fischler, qtd. in Probyn 132). Therefore, he can be seen as threatening the social order by his bad habits and his disregard of cultural taboos; his swollen belly is "indicative of excessive appetite, of a lack of self-control, of laziness, and of an unwillingness to conform to accepted paradigms of beauty. Arguably it also signifies a lack of morality" (Daniel 185, 187).

The Object Potential of the Feminine

Maxim's wife and her connection with food also lend themselves to fruitful analysis. Karina Stoyanova, the stepmother and the suspected villain of the story, is a particularly interesting character. The food she makes or possesses is linked to magic through its unknown origin; on top of this, she seems to use her pastries to unwholesome ends, apparently poisoning Nadya's mother: "The only thing [Nadya's mother] seemed to crave were little cakes made by the widow Karina Stoyanova, scented with orange blossom and thick with icing. Where Karina got the sugar, no one knew" (Bardugo 80). She seems to imbue the food with properties that let her influence Nadya's father, as well (Bardugo 84, 89). Nadya is all but certain that Karina is a supernatural being, a *khitka*, responsible for the horrors that have become the everyday of the village: "[t]he *khitka* might take any form, but the shape it favored most was that of a beautiful woman. Soon Karina seemed to be everywhere, bringing Nadya's father food and gifts of *kvas*, whispering in his ear that someone was needed to take care of him and his children" (Bardugo 84). Except for her beauty, which links her to the otherworldly and the dangerous, another aspect of Karina's physical appearance comes to foreground. Namely, the narrator describes her: "Karina leaned in close to Nadya. When she smiled, her lips split wet and red around what seemed like far too many teeth" (Bardugo 87). This visage of Karina's mouth is a clear invocation of the *vagina dentata*, the voracious representation of the "monstrous feminine" (Grosz 194, Creed 2). However, the description is immediately followed by Karina telling Nadya to go away from home because she is "just another mouth" that Karina and Maxim would have to feed (Bardugo 87). By using this PART-FOR-WHOLE metonymy and equating Nadya with a mouth, Karina actually aligns Nadya with herself, the devouring mouth, and hints at the final reveal – that Karina and Nadya are not truly enemies, but that they should both work against Maxim. Working against the reader's expectation of the beautiful woman as evil (Kinyon 2), Bardugo is, like feminist fairy tale writers, "shifting the narrative voice, undoing plots, and expressing the concerns of women through new images and styles of writing" (Zipes, 1992, 35).

5. Conclusion

In different ways, both John Connolly's and Leigh Bardugo's tales are cautionary. They warn against the hidden dangers, embodied either in strangers or in those closest to us, because, as Bardugo appends in the author's note in her story collection, "predators come in many guises" (282). To do this, they both utilize images of food and food consumption. Connolly makes the witches in the story, as well as the stepfather, cannibals, while the children recklessly and improperly indulge in unwholesome foods. The boy and the girl are punished for their transgression, as is the first witch. Both encounters with the witches serve to civilise the children – within the plot of John Connolly's *The Book of Lost Things* the target is David, the protagonist, who is thereby warned not to be reckless in the fantasy world he has found himself in. This civilising point is firmly embedded into the tradition found in the classic structure of the "Hansel and Gretel" story, where the child is punished for gluttony – the boy's final misfortune is merely a repetition of the first sequence with the witch. It ends differently because he is alone now and has learnt nothing from his previous experience. However, Connolly steps back from the tradition when he has the children's paths diverge and the sister learns from her mistakes and prospers. She continues to live alone, in the forest, and does not re-enter the familial sphere, abandoning the segment of civilising procedure that favours the family life and the reestablishment of the social balance. Instead, Connolly is attempting to instil independence and adaptability. Additionally, the girl's new life allows her greater freedom and a woman living in a forest is no longer inherently viewed as evil or as a witch, despite the presence of other witches in the story; this potentially points to the girl's escape from the repressive, patriarchal society and the need to stop viewing agency in women as evil.

On the other hand, Bardugo does not have her protagonist engage in transgressive behaviour; or, rather, Nadya does eat too much sometimes and has sweets outside of meal times, but this is not represented as harmful. In a new aspect of the civilisation objective, Nadya's desires, signified by her enjoyment of food, are not suppressed and forced into a strict framework that holds no place for even a small amount of indulgence. The story sees another kind of consumption/consummation as problematic. The villain of the story, Nadya's father, is the secret predator who eats human flesh. His punishment does not come immediately, as he has been feeding on young girls throughout the story and even before its beginning. Only at the very end is he discovered as the culprit, but his punishment is then severe and results in death. The punishment is doled out by women and the tale argues against seeing women's agency as harmful or wicked, which contributes to the feminist aspect of the story. On the whole, Bardugo's narrative could be said to civilise the audience by deconstructing their preconceptions about women as evil, children as gluttonous, and by making them examine different kinds of predators in today's society.

End Notes

- 1 Others studies include Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard's *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature* (2009) and *Table Lands: Food in Children's Literature* (2020). An overview of research on food in children's literature can be found, for example, in the introduction to their 2009 study. Prominent works include Wendy Katz's 1980 article, "Some Uses of Food in Children's Literature," Norman Kiell's 1995 *Food and Drink in Literature: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography*, and Lynne Vallone's 2002 article "'What Is the Meaning of All This Gluttony?': Edgeworth, the Victorians, C. S. Lewis and a Taste for Fantasy".
- 2 Carolyn Daniel notes that it is the girls who are more often punished for their eating misbehaviour, rather than the boys (60). This points to the patriarchal view of the juxtaposed notions of "good girls" and "boys will be boys".
- 3 According to Stott and Doyle Francis, children leave their 'not home', a place that does not meet their needs, at the beginning of the story. At the end of the narrative, "Ideally, the setting which at first was 'not home' now becomes 'home'" (224) due to the changes and challenges the child character has gone through or overcome. In Connolly's story, the girl does not see her parents's abode as 'home' like her brother does. Conversely, as the brother has not transformed, the situation at the place he attempts to return to would probably not have evolved beyond the initial stepfather-mother dynamic and would still not have been a proper 'home.'
- 4 Notably, Magda's house has more in common with the Slavic Baba Jaga's house on chicken legs than with the decadent sugary abode of the "Hansel and Gretel" witch. This is not surprising, since Bardugo sets her story in a fictional world inspired by Russian customs and mythology.
- 5 Notably, Maxim likens himself to a wolf, calling the mystery monster "an animal (...) mad with hunger" (Bardugo 83). The metaphor is extended and his true nature is foreshadowed by his prowling, and the already mentioned scratch of his fingers on Nadya's door (89, 92). The wolf, as a very evocative symbol familiar as the predator from the "Red Riding Hood" tradition (Zipes, 2006, 66), intertextually establishes the sexual nature of the danger Maxim presents.

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