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SARA MAITLAND'S REVISIONIST APPROACH TO LITERARY TRADITION: FEMINIST AND ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract. Sara Maitland's literary fiction engages deeply with the tradition of revisionist storytelling. Her short stories challenge and reconfigure biblical, mythological and folk literary tradition, voicing modern feminist and ecological concerns. The article explores how Maitland in some of her reworkings dismantles canonical literary forms and questions monolithic beliefs rooted in cultural identity. This revisionist process is analysed with particular focus on the use of fragmented and embodied narrative, subjectivity and moral ambivalence as well as foregrounding traditionally silent characters.

Keywords: feminism; revisionist literature; literary canon; mythology; ecocriticism

REWIZJONISTYCZNE PODEJŚCIE DO LITERACKIEJ TRADYCJI W TWÓRCZOŚCI SARY MAITLAND: PERSPEKTYWA FEMINISTYCZNA I EKOKRYTYCZNA

Abstrakt. Fikcja literacka Sary Maitland głęboko angażuje się w tradycję storytellingu rewizjonistycznego. Jej opowiadania podważają i rekonfigurują biblijną, mitologiczną i ludową tradycję literacką, dotykając współczesnych zagadnień feministycznych i ekokrytyki. Artykuł bada, w jaki sposób Maitland w niektórych swoich pracach rozbiera na części i ponownie składa kanoniczne formy literackie i kwestionuje monolityczne przekonania głęboko zakorzenione w naszej tożsamości kulturowej. Ten rewizjonistyczny proces jest w artykule analizowany ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wykorzystania fragmentarycznej i subiektywnej narracji, narracji opartej na doświadczeniu ciała, moralnej ambiwalencji, a także na wyeksponowaniu postaci, którym tradycja nie udziela głosu.

Słowa kluczowe: feminizm; literatura rewizjonistyczna; kanon literacki; mitologia; ekokrytyka literacka

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The opening lines of Helene Cixous's famous essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" seem to encompass everything that feminist literature aspires to be: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing…. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement."[1] The passage captures what many feminist authors of the 20th and 21st centuries have sought: a subversive attitude to literary tradition. Mythology, folk tales, biblical stories and other core literary genres have in the last decades provided fertile ground for feminist revisionist literary endeavours. Reviewing them from the point of view of feminist studies is, of course, merely a symptom of a more profound process at work—challenging what Lyotard called "grand narratives"[2] that perpetuate and legitimise patriarchal perspectives on culture and history. By dismantling literary tradition, feminist writers challenge monolithic cultural notions of class, gender, femininity and species.

Sara Maitland's novels and short stories can be easily situated in this tradition of feminist revisionist myth-making. Her often fragmented, narratively transformative and linguistically witty revisions of authoritative texts foreground feminine characters and voice feminist as well as ecocritical concerns. The article focuses on the types of narratives that are exceptionally often revised by Maitland: biblical and mythological stories as well as folk and fairy tales. The article briefly analyses a few selected short stories from different collections and discusses how Maitland explores the flexibility, adaptability and cultural potential of traditional literary texts.

1. REWRITING RELIGIOUS AND MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVES

One of the reasons that Sara Maitland gives for her interest in grand cultural narratives is that, in her own words, our "myth muscles are atrophying".[3] With the gradual loss of the ability to understand and appreciate myths, their generative and culturally transformative quality, "goes our access to allegory,

[1] Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976), 875, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239.

[2] Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[3] Sara Maitland, *A Map of the New Country*. *Women and Christianity* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1983), 62.

metaphor, and sacrament".[4] Her reinterpretations of biblical texts challenge patriarchal readings and take the form of fragmented narratives of individual experience, but at the same time they closely resemble the traditional versions in terms of events, characters and circumstances.

Maitland achieves her goal exceptionally well in *Angel and Me. Short Stories for Holy Week*, a collection celebrating female characters often silenced in theological texts; she explores their contribution to the traditional narratives and, by presenting their individual stories, she takes the notion of femininity as her main focus. In "Mary of Magdala", she depicts the scene of crucifixion, with the eponymous Mary of Magdala (the narrative focus) faithfully remaining at the site and being "the only one who is here knowing what it means and choosing to endure it".[5] Full of anger for the treachery of other apostles, and at the same time full of pride at being able to accompany her friend and teacher in his last moments, Mary lets down her red-gold hair, "like a wave in the hot sunlight".[6] This gesture becomes the story's focal point, linking memory, pride, and feminine independence.

Mary displays her hair to share the humiliation of Christ on the cross, drawing the attention of the gathered soldiers and reminding them about her undignified profession. At the same time, however, her intention is to remind the pain-stricken and barely conscious Christ of happier days and "an old joke"[7] between them that eventually brought her to his feet; the story alludes to the biblical narrative of a sinful woman wiping Jesus's feet.[8] Maitland interprets them as tears of gratitude for helping Mary regain her self-respect. Finally, Mary is full of pride for her long hair that allow her to cover the wounds of Christ "so that his mother will not have to touch them",[9] a gesture of solidarity and compassion. Ultimately, her brave act at the cross brings relief and comfort to those who grieve and suffer at Golgotha.

Extraordinarily long fair hair, universally recognised as a symbol of beauty and femininity, and in the specific context of Jewish tradition seen as a sign of frivolity and promiscuity, in Maitland's story acquires much greater

[4] Maitland, 62. Maitland explains her interest in the notion of sacrament and engagement with the Christian theological tradition in a published collection of lectures on theology, science and feminism. Maitland, *A Big-Enough God. Artful Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1994).

[5] Sara Maitland, *Angel and Me. Short Stories for Holy Week* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 62.

[6] Maitland, 63.

[7] Maitland, 63.

[8] Luke 7:36–50. All references to biblical texts are taken from New International Version, available at https://www.biblegateway.com.

[9] Maitland, *Angel and Me*, 66.

importance: from a source of shame and humiliation, through a symbol of love, acceptance and appreciation, they eventually become a display of freedom, independence and bravery and, in the final moments of the story, of consolation and sacrifice. Perhaps the most powerful exposition of the figure of Mary of Magdala is made in one of the final statements in the story: "She who has anointed him in his life, will be there to anoint him in his death."[10] Since the Christian tradition recognises anointing as a sacramental act, Maitland gives her protagonist the status of a priest-like figure delivering the sacrament to the one who traditionally marks the beginning of the sacramental life of the whole Church.

In "Mary of Magdala", Maitland explores femininity through the notion of beauty and constraints that derive from social expectations towards women, and eventually asserts female power as a source of comfort, consolation and liberation to those partaking in the events on Golgotha.

In another short story, "Lilith" (from the collection *Telling Tales*), Maitland ventures to explore and challenge the traditional concept of femininity by juxtaposing two biblical figures, Eve and Lilith. Both of them are designed by God to fulfil the role of Adam's companion, but they ultimately represent two strikingly different images of femininity. In constructing her story, Maitland draws from the Jewish folklore[11] and places Lilith, the first wife of Adam, at the centre of the narrative. Lilith is introduced as a "daughter of God, made in his image and pure in her substance, free and unfallen in her nature".[12] Uninvolved in the Fall, she still carries the features of God's original design, as there are "no conditions on the perfect image of Herself … the image of God the Feminine".[13] The similarities between herself and her creator are further indicated by her definition of herself: "I am and am

[10] Maitland, 66.

[11] The myth of Lilith originates from a rabbinic midrash and was an attempt to interpret discrepancies between two accounts of the creation of humans in Genesis. One of the earliest versions of the myth, dated ca. 1000 CE, presents Lilith as a rebellious being who proclaims her equality to Adam and, in an act of disobedience, pronounces the ineffable name of God and flees, leaving her companion devastated and in need of another, more compliant, wife. Aviva Cantor, "The Lilith Question," in *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 40.

[12] Sara Maitland, *Telling Tales* (London: Journeyman Press, 1983), 75.

[13] Maitland, *Telling Tales*, 75. Maitland's theological view of God displaying masculine as well as feminine features, the idea that is prominent in "Lilith", is presented more elaborately in her lectures published as *A Big-Enough God. Artful Theology.*

alone[14]. To say not who, but what I am, is to speak of Lilith as she is to others, and I will be only for myself."[15] Unrestrained and powerful, Lilith leaves Eden voluntarily, abandoning Adam to wander in the distant Land of Nod, constantly "seeking for herself".[16]

Of Eve, Adam's second wife, Lilith speaks with derision and contempt, calling her "a concubine, a slave, a whore", made "in the image of Adam's dreams".[17] The characters of Eve and Lilith are constantly contrasted in the story, and Maitland delivers in them strikingly different images of femininity, revising in particular the stereotypical view of a female smile and the role of women as mothers.

Smiling is one of the first actions Lilith performs in the story, and Maitland repeatedly refers to it. Lilith's smile is described as "free from both the knowledge of Evil and the sadness of it", with "all the fruits of Eden" and "the knowledge of immortality" in it;[18] the smile exhibits qualities that clearly separate her from Adam and all mankind, most importantly women: "her smile was not beautiful like the smiles of women; it was without allure, it asked no questions and demanded no response."[19] In the story, it becomes a feature that contributes to her presentation as a highly individual, independent and unique being. In opposition to Lilith, the smile of Eve is always directed at Adam, "inviting him to make himself complete again, by taking her into him; inviting him to give her existence, by coming into her."[20] The smile of Eve is a sign of submission and inferiority, of being incomplete and looking for completeness and acceptance in others. Such understanding does not only concern Eve herself; the story presents all women as inheritors of this smile, constantly looking for approval and support, being highly dependent on what Laura Mulvey calls "the male gaze".[21]

Another element that serves Maitland to elaborate on the notion of femininity is the concept of motherhood. In the early version of the myth, Lilith,

[14] Compare to Exodus 3:14: "I am who I am." In defining themselves, both God and Eve assert their independence and self-completeness.

[15] Maitland, *Telling Tales*, 77.

[16] Maitland, 76.

[17] Maitland, 76–78.

[18] Maitland, 76.

[19] Maitland, 77.

[20] Maitland, 77.

[21] Although Mulvey in her 1975 essay refers mainly to the visual aspects of narrative cinema and the way the masculine perspective defines the presentation of women and contributes to their objectification, the term she coined has been applied to the study of gender dynamics in literature as well.

pursued by the angels, refuses to return and accepts God's punishment—every day one hundred of her children die.[22] Maitland follows this narrative, but also reinterprets it, describing Lilith's "proud knowledge that she could destroy, daily and without caring, as they were born, her hundred children".[23] Maitland goes further than merely suggesting the possibility of Lilith killing her offspring; in a later scene in the story, the act is vividly described: "she lay back and waited for her children to be born … [she] took each as it came. She set her long teeth into each neck and sucked the blood back into her body until there was nothing again."[24] She devours her children without remorse, as they provide nourishment and allow her to continue her search. Interestingly, Maitland describes the scene of childbirth in exactly the same way as the birth of Lilith's thoughts and dreams: "without pain, breaking the surface of her skin".[25] In this way, Maitland seems to bring together the act of bearing a child and creating artistic or literary piece. A contrasting image of motherhood concerns Eve, who "has no self … she fears that without [Adam] she will cease to exist … she seeks for her name in actions, in functions, relating always to him: mother, wife, companion, helpmeet."[26] She gives birth in painful labour, defines herself through acts of submission and measures her own value only in the approval of others.

In the character of Lilith, Maitland challenges the traditional male-governed picture of femininity delivered in the figure of Eve and associated with companionship, motherhood and dependence on others. Lilith claims that such an image of a woman is deeply disturbed and that future generations of women will be courageous enough to "abandon Love, Beauty and Service" and discover their true identity.[27] What the image of Lilith offers, apart from loneliness, sacrifice and the relentless search of the self, is also a promise of unlimited freedom, self-reliance and truth. In Maitland's story, "the daughter of Adam's dreams" is starkly contrasted with "the daughter of Word and Chaos"[28] and it seems that the truth and final victory belongs to the latter, making the narrative a statement of feminine wisdom, independence and power. Maitland's reinterpretation is one of countless literary revisions of Lilith. Michele Osherow in her work devoted to revisionary myth-

[22] Aviva Cantor, "The Lilith Question" (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 40.
[23] Maitland, *Telling Tales*, 76–77.
[24] Maitland, 81.
[25] Maitland, 81.
[26] Maitland, 78–79.
[27] Maitland, 80.
[28] Maitland, 79.

making in literature claims that the diverse presentations of this mythical figure clearly reflect the changing roles of women in a patriarchal culture.[29] Other notable literary examples involve for instance *Lilith: A Romance* by George MacDonald, or *Descent into Hell* by Charles Williams.

2. REWRITING LEGENDS AND FOLK TALES

Maitland's revisions of theological texts and myths essentially take the form of fragmented narratives complementing and developing the traditional stories by giving voice to silent and background female characters. Maitland frequently engages with folk literary tradition in a similar way, by shifting narrative perspective, giving voice to figures traditionally silenced or openly vilified, in order to recontextualise the stories themselves, often suggesting altered historical, social, or emotional realities. These are not simply reversals of familiar tales but charged reconstructions that rely on the reader's cultural memory to recognise what is left unsaid, misremembered, or warped. In this sense, Maitland's retellings resist closure; they are fragmentary, subjective, and deeply embodied. This fragmentation may be read as a feminist strategy: in contrast to the unified, linear, and didactic logic of many man-centred tales, Maitland's fractured voices foreground contradiction, emotion, and bodily experience. As Jack Zipes argues in *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, the durability of the genre lies precisely in its adaptability: tales are always culturally marked yet they circulate across traditions because they tap into universal motifs and deep oral roots. Maitland's work, then, participates in this "evolvability", showing how the fairy tale form is not exhausted but continuously reactivated to address new social and emotional concerns.[30] It may be claimed that in stories like "Rapunzel" and "The Wicked Stepmother's Lament", Maitland invites readers not only to rethink the logic of fairy tale morality but to confront the affective shadows those tales cast across cultural consciousness.

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[29] Michele Osherow, "The Dawn of a New Lilith: Revisionary Mythmaking in Women's Science Fiction," *NWSA Journal* 12, no. 1 (2000), 69, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4316709. Similar views concerning the role of myth are presented by Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement who assert that it "transmits itself making changes in accordance with … cultural evolution". Cixous and Clement, *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 6.

[30] Jack Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 42–44, 96.

In "Rapunzel" (from *Gossip from the Forest*), Maitland radically shifts the narrative point of view by allowing the stepmother—traditionally the villain—to speak in the first person, revealing not malice but a tangle of love, desire, possessiveness, and grief. The woman who takes Rapunzel in begins not as a witch but as a neighbour—one who visits the newborn with the intention of kindness: "I even took the silver coin to slip under the baby's pillow, to welcome her and help her family, as we do in these woods."[31] But upon holding the child, something irreversible happens: "I fell in love there, for ever—a thing I have never done before. Nor since."[32] This love, however, becomes entangled with possession. The narrator justifies her claim by condemning the biological parents' neglect—"They sold me their child for a handful of salad greens"[33]—and reimagines herself as Rapunzel's "real mother".[34] The tale evolves not into a confession, but into a conflicted account of maternal desire, control, and loss.

The stepmother's efforts to protect Rapunzel are reframed as acts of care distorted by power. She creates a space in the forest not of punishment but of imagined safety. The building she calls the Belvedere or Tree House—never a "tower"—is meant to be a haven. Her voice is lyrical and obsessive, recalling hair brushing as ritual, binding, and prayer: "In my dreams I am still brushing her hair.… It twined like honeysuckle around my fingers, my hands, my arms, my heart." The recurring song—"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, / Let down your long hair"[35]—is first sung in moments of happiness and later haunts the narrator's solitude. It underscores the cycle of devotion and loss: "I still keep her hair … it still twines like honeysuckle around my fingers, my hands, my arms, my heart."[36] This dynamic illustrates what Zipes identifies as the "transgressive" potential of fairy tales: they excite by crossing boundaries and by offering the possibility of transformation.[37] In Maitland's retelling, transgression is not merely Rapunzel's but the stepmother's—she exceeds the cultural script of the villain and becomes a subject marked by ambivalence.

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[31] Sara Maitland, "Rapunzel," in *From the Forest: A Search for the Hidden Roots of Our Fairytales* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint: 2012). Kindle.

[32] Maitland, "Rapunzel."

[33] Maitland, "Rapunzel."

[34] Maitland, "Rapunzel."

[35] Maitland, "Rapunzel."

[36] Maitland, "Rapunzel."

[37] Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 49.

What makes this retelling especially rich is the narrator's inability to fully comprehend her own motivations. She lashes out in fury upon learning of Rapunzel's pregnancy: "I beat her and then I threw her out, as any decent woman would,"[38] she claims—only to unravel the very logic of that action: "I do not know why I behaved that way. I do not know.… I stole her hair and I sold my love too cheap.… I was a fool."[39] This moment of collapse, of not knowing, of being undone by emotion and cultural scripts of morality and femininity, resonates with Cixous's insistence that female writing must embrace emotional and bodily contradictions: "Her speech, even when theoretical or political, is never simple or linear."[40] The stepmother's voice is not consistent, not trustworthy—but deeply human. Her song, repeated in the absence of its recipient, and the tactile memory of the hair she still owns, become symbols of narrative residue—love that could not save, control that turned into violence, and tenderness that was not enough. Here Maitland's narrative echoes what Zipes calls the memetic quality of fairy tales: they endure not because they deliver stable morals but because they transmit, across time, deeply affective knowledge of danger, longing, and loss.[41]

In "The Wicked Stepmother's Lament" (from *On Becoming a Fairy Godmother*), Maitland offers a voice to one of fairy tale's most maligned figures, not to clear her name but to expose the emotional dissonance and cultural contradictions embedded in her role. The speaker immediately refuses the victim/perpetrator binary: "I'm not willing to be a victim. I was not innocent, and I have grown out of innocence now and even out of wanting to be thought innocent."[42] This refusal frames the piece not as a plea for forgiveness but as a raw confrontation with the constraints of her narrative and her own failings. The stepmother articulates the impossibility of winning within a patriarchal and moralistic system: she tries discipline, rage, instruction, even love—but Cinderella remains unreachable. Her attempts to shape the girl into something hardened enough for the world are met not with rebellion but with maddening, passive sweetness: "I just could not believe the sweetness of that little girl and her wide-eyed belief that I would be happy and love her."[43] Her frustration grows precisely because Cinderella's virtue,

[38] Maitland, "Rapunzel."
[39] Maitland, "Rapunzel."
[40] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 881.
[41] Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 100–101.
[42] Sara Maitland, *On Becoming a Fairy Godmother* (London: Arcadia Books, 2003), 28.
[43] Maitland, 31.

patience, and grace cannot be cracked. "I could not shake her good will, her hopefulness, her capacity to love and love and love such a pointless and even dangerous object. I could not make her hate me,"[44] she confesses. "I violated her space, her dignity, her integrity, her privacy, even her humanity."[45] The stepmother becomes a figure of relentless contradiction—violent yet lucid, despairing yet calculating, aware of her own cruelty yet unable to stop. This destabilisation of the stepmother figure can also be read through Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*: in classical fairy tales, characters embody positions within family and society rather than individual psychology.[46] The stepmother is habitually inscribed as antagonist—a role as fixed as the witch or ogre—but Maitland unsettles this inscription by giving her voice and subjectivity, allowing her to move across boundaries of maternal care and cruelty.

Maitland crafts a layered narrative that assumes the reader's knowledge of Cinderella, allowing her to leave much unsaid. The gaps between what is told and what is inferred create a tension that demands cultural familiarity: this is not a retelling that simply inverts good and evil but rather a rewriting that fractures certainty. The stepmother's voice moves between confession, lament, and sharp critique of social expectations: "Living is a harsh business, as no one warned us when we were young and carefree under the apple bough, and I feel the weight of that ancient harshness and I want to embrace it."[47] Her voice, like the one Cixous imagines, "does not hold back, it makes possible."[48] She writes herself as a fragmented figure whose pain, ambiguity, and maternal exasperation refuse simplification. Maitland's stepmother writes not for redemption, but to inhabit the space of failure, anger, and care distorted by decades of narrative flattening. Her lament is not about innocence lost, but about being denied the complexity of feeling—maternal rage, erotic confusion, weary authority—that male-centred tales have refused to acknowledge. This resonates with Zipes's account of the late-twentieth-century fairy-tale renaissance, in which feminist authors revised patriarchal tales with greater awareness of gender roles and sexuality.[49] Maitland's stepmothers seemingly continue this project by reclaiming narrative space for female figures flattened by tradition.

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[44] Maitland, 33.
[45] Maitland, 33.
[46] Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 49–50.
[47] Maitland, *On Becoming*, 28.
[48] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 890.
[49] Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 102–3.

Drawing on Hélène Cixous's call in "The Laugh of the Medusa" for women to write themselves into history through the flux and contradiction of lived experience,[50] Maitland crafts female voices that are contradictory, affectively intense, and often ambivalent. Her protagonists do not seek absolution or triumph but instead insist on the right to tell their version—flawed, impassioned, and incomplete. These retellings perform what Cixous calls a "new insurgent writing",[51] one that acknowledges complexity, vulnerability, and transformation through language that "does not contain, it carries".[52] In doing so, Maitland demonstrates precisely why, as Zipes argues, fairy tales "stick": they survive not because they deliver fixed morals but because they continually evolve, absorbing new voices and speaking to new historical moments.[53]

3. ECOCRITICAL RETELLINGS

Apart from offering space for exploring feminist concerns, moral ambivalence and shifting narrative point of view, in her fragmentary short fiction Maitland also manages to voice ecocritical concerns. Her collection of short stories *Gossip from the Forest* includes reworkings of folk and fairy tales that Maitland sees as deeply and inseparably connected with the history and cultural relevance of forests. According to Maitland, the multilayered relationship between literary tradition and natural environment allows for the emergence of stories that are deeply rooted in our cultural imagination and identity. Apart from exploring this profound connection, Maitland also places interspecies feminist ecocritical perspective at the centre of many of her stories. According to Greta Gaard, this direction marks one of the possibilities for the development of ecofeminism: "In the near future, ecofeminism and feminist ecocriticisms will need to articulate an interspecies focus."[54] After A. Walker and T. Morton, Gaard advocates the elision of the human/nonhuman animal barrier and supports a more inclusive definition of people, where only some of them are human beings. A similar process of blurring the boundaries between species characterises many stories by Maitland.

[50] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 857.
[51] Cixous, 880.
[52] Cixous, 890.
[53] Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 93–96.
[54] Greta Gaard, "New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 17, no. 4 (2010), 651.

"Little Red Riding Hood", one of the revisions collected in the volume *Gossip from the Forest*, is a strong claim against the anthropocentric view of our literature and culture, and undermines the division into human and non-human animals. Although the narrative remains structurally close to the original, as with so many reworkings by Maitland its focus and point of view shifts, in this case presenting the perspective of the tree feller. The man is described as a loner who favours the safety of the forest over other people's company. He is said to be "at home in the wilderness, the secrecy. Other people broke into those secrets and into the dark places in his guts. They gave him a fierce headache, which was hatred, although he did not know that."[55] Already in this early passage in the story, a strong connection is suggested between the man and the wolf whose guts in one of the versions of the story are cut open and his stomach filled with stones. Such similarities intensify as the story progresses. When a girl is lost in the forest and the tree feller is reluctantly asked to join the search, his sympathies do not lie with his own kind. He sees the girl's grandmother as "a hideous heap of blubber and peroxide blubbering" and calls her "stupid old woman, fat and flubbery in the chair, wailing";[56] the girl is in his eyes "a stupid child, a little fat spoiled poodle dragged into the forest by her foolish grandmother, ignorant, arrogant".[57] His hatred and headache eases, however, at the sight of the wolf, beautiful and wild.

In the culminating moment of the story, the wolf is about to ruthlessly attack the helpless child, and even then the tree feller hesitates and delays his reaction, imagining almost with delight what the animal would do to its victim: "Its claws would rip off the silly jacket; the weight of its leap would bowl her over; the fangs would sink into her flanks and into her neck … and he could go home to his bed and no one would ever know."[58] He only intervenes in the last possible moment and ultimately though unwillingly kills the wolf, following the instinct of self-preservation rather than out of genuine compassion: "No peace for the wolf. No peace for him. They were not free. They were not wild."[59] However, Maitland does not stop there in her depiction of their strong bond. In the final scene of the story, the tree feller returns to recover the animal's body and buries it under the ice, in the loch.

[55] Maitland, *Gossip*, 244.
[56] Maitland, 247.
[57] Maitland, 247.
[58] Maitland, 248.
[59] Maitland, 248–49.

The concluding sentence ultimately confirms the strength and intensity of the relationship: "Then he went home and hung himself. They did not find him for eleven days. He was the wolf."[60] Through a strong identification of the tree feller with the wolf, and a careful characterisation of the two, Maitland undermines the traditional oppositions between the species and invites correspondences between them. Their lives are presented as essentially similar, with the same predatory drives affecting their decisions. Maitland metaphorically "offers" the wolf a voice in the story through the perspective of an animal-like human.[61]

For many other feminist writers from the 1970's onwards, such as Angela Carter, Pat Barker or Ali Smith, the reworkings of myths, legends and folktales constitute space for fruitful re-evaluation and redefinition of sexuality, gender dynamics and power relations. Maitland belongs to this genealogy and at the same time develops her own techniques for re-evaluation and remodelling of monolithic literary and cultural traditions. Her oeuvre constitutes a diverse collection that transforms religious, mythical and folk canonical narratives. She reimagines them through feminist and ecocritical lenses to challenge patriarchal and anthropocentric literary discourse. Her revisionist method relies on narrative fragmentation, subjectivity, moral ambivalence, and an interspecies perspective. Her stories exemplify Adrienne Rich's notion of "re-vision" as survival: a means for women to confront inherited assumptions, reclaim voice and know themselves.[62]

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[60] Maitland, 250.

[61] Sara Maitland's fiction provides many other examples of interspecies perspective. See for instance "Bird-Woman Learns to Fly" in *On Becoming a Fairy Godmother* and "Moss Witch" in *Moss Witch and Other Stories*.

[62] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *College English* 34, no. 1 (1972): 18.

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