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No One is Alone: Responsibility, Consequences, and Family in *Into the Woods*

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Stephen Sondheim's fairytale musical *Into the Woods* may start with the traditional "once upon a time," however the story is anything but traditional. The stories of Cinderella, Little Red, Jack (of beanstalk fame) and Rapunzel are brought together, along with two original characters: The Baker and His Wife, in a narrative that explores what happens *after* happily ever after. In Act I the characters pursue, and see the wishes fulfilled that their traditional tales are built around. The Baker and His Wife bring all the characters from these different stories together as they move in and out of the traditional fairytales interfering with the traditional characters pursuit of their desires as they pursue their own wish, a child. Act I ends with everyone having gotten what they desired only to discover in Act II that they are still unfulfilled. There is little time to meditate on that thought before the widow of the Giant that Jack killed when he chopped down the beanstalk arrives. Seeking justice for her husband's death she destroys most of the kingdom before the characters realize that they must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions and come together as a community to survive.

Before being recorded by The Grimm Brothers in 1812, fairytales were stories of oral tradition passed from one person to another. Since a story in the oral tradition will be slightly different every time, it relies on who is telling the story and who it is being told to. These stories are uniquely suited to visual storytelling, like theatre, since the stories invite varied, fantastic interpretations of their setting and are so familiar to most audiences that they can be altered significantly while maintaining their essence and still be recognizable. Lapine and Sondheim created *Into the Woods* as its own fairytale from specific but familiar stories. Within that fairytale are many opportunities for the director, functioning as the storyteller, to make slight changes in presentation that will slightly alter the message of the show. These changes stop short of specifically tailoring one show to one audience, but the director does have the opportunity to

personalize the message they wish to communicate. After examining the characters and themes as written, four New York productions will be discussed focusing on the alterations and spin the director put on the script.

Using fairy tales as the foundation of a larger project, in this case a piece of musical theatre, presents two distinct challenges if the essence of the source material is to be maintained. The first challenge is that by their very nature they are short stories. This was part of Stephen Sondheim's trepidation about working with a single fairy tale. He commented that fairy tales "are very simple and short-form stories and as you try to expand any given fairy tale to an hour or two, you run into padding and filler.... You simply can't and that's what led us to smashing all the fairy tales together." (Citron) By combining multiple fairytales, lyricist and composer Stephen Sondheim, in collaboration with book writer and director James Lapine, not only created more intricacy in the moral dilemmas the characters face but also created an onstage community directly affected, for better or worse, by the choices of the characters. By combining multiple tales, they also solved the problem the second challenge of working with fairy tales creates, namely, one-dimensional characters. The standard fairytale presents 'good characters' that must overcome obstacles to defeat the 'bad characters' and learn lessons about themselves along the way. Inside a short form story such as a fairytale this one-dimensionality is usually not problematic. Since one-dimensional characters are uninteresting and often not relatable inside a longer, deeper story, combing the stories creates greater conflict and enhances complexity. It gives the entire piece more weight for the viewer.

One of the ways that *Into the Woods* goes about developing the dimensionality of the characters is by simply bringing the stories together and allowing various characters to interact with each other. Having them interact creates a kind of ripple effect; an event that is clearly from

the source story will still occur but the catalyst for that event, or part of the outcome, has been altered in order to merge the tales together. Additionally, the situation has been morally complicated due in part to the ripple. Take the interactions Jack has with the Baker and then Little Red later on in Act I, all of which spur trips up the beanstalk. His first interaction with the Baker results in Jack coming into possession of the magic beans which will sprout the beanstalk that Jack climbs to find himself in the kingdom of the giants. He discovers that there is gold within easy reach and takes some when he is forced to flee. In an effort to buy Milky White back he offers the Baker the gold he has stolen from his host, instead of using that money to support himself and his mother, as indicated in the original tale. Further, because The Baker hesitates to sell Milky White back, Jack rushes up the beanstalk again almost immediately, this time with a desire to reunite with his companion.

Though the third trip up the beanstalk is originally brought on by greed on Jack's part, Lapine alters that slightly to have Little Red injure Jack's pride sending him up the beanstalk in an attempt to prove his claim about the golden harp. Jack's third trip up the beanstalk to prove he was telling the truth also cements his status as a thief. He already has stolen from his host on two previous occasions, first seizing a presented opportunity and then later he ascending with the intention of stealing now that he knows what is in the Kingdom of the Giants. On this third trip he not only ends up stealing again but he also ends up killing a Giant. This creates not a ripple, but wave that will affect everyone in Act II. The characters are confronted with a choice: shelter Jack or turn him over to the Giantess, in order to save the kingdom. Not only are the characters asked to decide whose life is more important, but by sheltering Jack they are not only deciding his life is worth more, but they also condone theft and murder by insisting that he did nothing wrong.

This conundrum is the summit on the mountain of moral complications that the character's choices have created. The Baker and His Wife's manipulation of Jack created the scenario by which the beanstalk grew. Jack stole multiple times from the giants and when he got caught he killed one of them. In the retaliatory hunt to avenge the first killing, a second giant has now, unintentionally, killed some of their own. Little Red has also killed before, a fact the Witch reminds the group of and points out that to a mother, a child's death is equally agonizing be they human, wolf, or giant. In pursuing their individual wishes with self-serving zeal, the characters created a situation for themselves that has no easy or right answer. The ignored or forgotten repercussions of their choices have come back to them forcing them to decide which choice is the most acceptable of those presented them. Run and hide or stand and fight? Kill or be killed? Continue the cycle of blame or decide enough is enough and end it?

Through Sondheim and Lapine make a few changes to the traditional stories, Act I allows them to unfold much like the stories most audience members likely grew up with, except for interconnecting them and introducing song. Song is another vehicle that the authors use to amplify the dimensionality of the characters. The songs in Act I function like inner monologues during which characters sing first about what they wish for and later what they have learned. Musically the characters are tied together through the ensemble song 'Into the Woods', but outside of that number in Act I they are largely solo both in their songs and quests. As the characters start to realize the enormity of the challenge and the need to work together, the song structure changes. This change brings them together vocally into duets or ensemble numbers, musically reflecting the transition from individuals acting alone to the birth of a community.

Each character's wish has the potential to alter their lives and the challenges in achieving their wish allows multifaceted characters to develop. From their first obstacle each character

must make progressively more difficult decisions that not only challenge them but also reveal who they are as people. For example, The Baker and His Wife wish for a child. To see that wish fulfilled they must gather four items to bring the Witch. Since those items happen to be in the possession of others they must decide how to go about acquiring those items. The Wife has no issue whatsoever lying, stealing, or attacking people to achieve their ends whereas The Baker starts out very reluctant to achieve their goal through anything less than honest means.

BW - Do we want a child or not?! ...

There are rights and wrongs and in-betweens...

If the thing you do is pure in intent and it's just a little bent does it matter?

B - Yes!

BW- No what matters is that everyone tells tiny lies what's important really is the size...

If the end is right it justifies the (means) (Lapine, Sondheim 30-31)

As they struggle through the challenges of the woods, The Baker changes his view about how they should achieve their goal. This view changes so much that as the third midnight approaches, and after witnessing the results her methods have produced, he requests his wife stay to help him finish the task that the Witch has given them. In return his wife praises his changed attitude in the opening of 'It Takes Two'

BW - You've changed / You're daring/ You're different in the woods..

If you could see/ You're not the man who started (Lapine, Sondheim 54)

While The Wife may be praising her husband's changes, she is really praising that he has come around to her way of thinking. He has shown himself to be a pleaser, a person who wants what they want but who will not go to extremes to achieve their wish unless goaded on. The way that The Baker's Wife pushes him at times brings to mind Lady Macbeth hounding Macbeth for her desires. Looking at the exchanges that The Wife has had with Cinderella and adding them to the

exchanges she has had with her husband indeed reveals her to be one of the most manipulative and self-serving characters in the entire show.

Though the audience is supposed to consider her one of the 'good' characters, The Wife possesses certain traits that are not hallmarks of a 'good' character. Her methods for collecting the items the Witch demanded stand in stark contrast to the sweet, humble, self-sacrificing behavior of the typical fairytale heroine. She goes after what she wants, justifying herself when it becomes necessary, as her methods are not generally conducive to making friends, even if they do provide results. Further, though married to The Baker, she covets the attention the prince bestows on Cinderella, even going so far as to engage in a dalliance with the prince, knowing that they both have commitments to other people. Ultimately The Wife is a good character but she, like all the characters, has her flaws. It is in revealing and exploring these flaws as the show progresses that they are grown from one-dimensional types to developed, complicated, three-dimensional characters.

Fairy tales frequently use the woods as the setting of quests utilizing a metaphorical place of discovery set apart from the characters normal lives wherein they can experience fantastic and terrifying events and then return home wiser and better people for having survived their adventure in the woods. Bruno Bettelheim theorized that since the events of fairytales happen in a story placed outside of the real world, readers of and listeners to these stories have the opportunity to grow and change without being in any real danger themselves.(Bettelheim)

James Lapine elaborates on integrating the worlds of fantasy and reality had this to say:

“In the fairy-tale world the individual is liberated by his own choices and behavior; in the real world we are more dependent on each other. If you read Bettelheim or even the Jungians they say that the issues presented in fairytales are about individual or collective psychic development. It seems to me that the real

world is about being part of a whole, where as in the fairy tale world you are the whole and what makes up the stories are your varied parts.”(Citron)

Though the characters of *Into the Woods* start as simple one-dimensional characters working solely towards of the realization of their wish, they begin to progress beyond one dimension as Act I moves along. The choices that they make begin to affect others in small ways until in Act II the consequences of their individual choices come back to affect the group as a whole. Mirroring Lapine’s perspective of the real world the group moves from a group of individuals to a whole; a community dependent upon each other to defeat the threat to their shared world.

The one character that does not join together with the group or truly share the world of the story is The Narrator. Usually a bodiless omnipotent voice, The Narrator in *Into the Woods* is given a physical form and stands at that perfect balance point between fantasy and reality with a foot in each world but not favoring one over the other. In the case of *Into the Woods* The Narrator not only knows how the story is supposed to go but also sets the action in motion and also comments on it. Lapine always considered the Narrator essential to telling the story of *Into the Woods* commenting that “I tried telling the stories without a narrator and it just doesn’t work. A story needs a storyteller and the storyteller is the ultimate figure of authority.”(Mankin, et al). The loss of this authority figure in Act II not only adds to the fear and confusion of the characters, but reintroduces, on a larger scale, the theme of control over one’s own destiny first introduced in Act I.

In Act I this theme is explored with Cinderella’s attempts to control her own destiny. After her adventures at the ball, she debates what it is she truly wants, and she simply cannot make up her mind. It would seem that the only way Cinderella can find to choose between her desire and her indecision is to let someone else make the decision for her. Ensnared on the palace

steps by her clever (or devious) prince, she debates her next move before she makes a decision that appears to be no decision at all and leaves a test for the prince in the form of her shoe. Knowing that she will be dressed in her rags again should he decide to come find her, and of course assuming that he will find her, she arranges for him to prove that he accepts her regardless of her wardrobe. If the prince truly loves her, then her condition when he finds her should be meaningless to him. If his love proves to be insincere then she will remain at home as the kitchen maid and little will change except that she will have the memories from the festival. Analysis of Cinderella's non-decision reveals that she is controlling her destiny more than it may initially appear since she has made a decision, albeit one with a safety net. She has found a way to reconcile her fear with her desire in a manner that she can live with.

Act I of *Into the Woods* explores themes and ideas on an individual level, and then progresses that exploration to a group level in Act II. Much like Cinderella was faced with a tough decision about her future, the group must make a similarly difficult choice in Act II after being ordered to produce Jack and turn him over to the Giant. The situation does not appear to have any options that are acceptable until the group realizes that there is someone that could be offered to the giant without offering up one of their own. The Narrator is classified by The Baker to be 'always on the outside.' Therefore he could be given to the Giant without having to give someone a death sentence. After first cordially declining, The Narrator grows more and more panicked as he realizes the characters are serious.

N - Sorry, I tell the story, I'm not part of it... That's my role. There must always be someone on the outside... You need an objective observer to pass the story along.

W - Some of us don't like the way you've been telling it.

N- If you drag me into this mess, you'll never know how your story ends. You'll be lost... Do you think it will be fun when you have to tell it yourselves? (Lapine, Sondheim 102-103)

Realizing that he is right The Wife pleads with everyone to stop. The Witch overrides this request and gives The Narrator to the Giant, who promptly drops him forcing the characters to confront the realization that they have entered a part of their story that no one has any idea how it will end. By sacrificing the Narrator to the giant the Witch has forced the characters to take control of their own destinies, make their own decisions and tell their own story. Her criticism of the group later on in 'Last Midnight' would seem to indicate that she feels that the group was not ready to control their destinies, not unlike a parent decrying the lack of their teenage children's maturity. The parent/child metaphor of this moment is completed with the witch's sudden departure. Having lost their 'parental' figure, the group cease their childish bickering and finally come together to control their destinies and start the road to recovery.

At its very core *Into the Woods* is a show about parents, family, and the legacy that parents leave to their children. Although there are multiple stories in progress that have been joined through interaction in their shared world and each has a lesson to be gleaned from that story, the larger connecting thread between all of the pieces is the family unit in various incarnations. Jack and Rapunzel are both adolescents looking to start establishing themselves in the world despite highly protective single mothers. Cinderella is a grown woman looking for something more from life while still grieving a deceased parent and dealing with cruel adoptive family. The Baker and His Wife are looking to start their family. None of these characters, like real world parents and families, are perfect and they all make mistakes. Perhaps the Witch sums it up best when she tells Rapunzel "I was only trying to be a good parent." The original 1987 production kept production focus on the family and an atmosphere of fanciful story telling. The productions that followed the original would find new ways of looking at legacies and family but no matter how much spectacle was layered on family remained the heart of the production.

In his book *Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim not only theorized that fairytales allow people to work through issues that frighten them without actually being in danger but also that the ability of fairy tales to do that was diminished when the stories were written down, because now that the story was recorded it would not change telling to telling of the story. (Bettelheim) Onstage, the storyteller is the director and, as mentioned, *Into the Woods* has many places directors can slightly alter the fairy tale to set their telling of the story apart from previous productions. Most of these moments live in the metatheatricality written into the script and create onstage a fantasy world that can present uncomfortable issues to the audience in a non-threatening manner in much the same way that the original fairytales allowed children to work through issues without actually placing them in any danger.

The original production presented the metatheatricality written into the show but held back from placing too much emphasis on it. In the production The Narrator did not interact directly with the characters until the moments leading up to being sacrificed to The Giant, nor did he have any props that would help him tell the story. He could easily be reciting for the audience a memorized lecture or delivering the evening news rather than telling a fairy tale. The 2002 revival however embraced the metatheatricality and staged accordingly. Here The Narrator introduced the audience to the fairy tale and then opened three books onstage to allow the characters to literally emerge from the book and begin their quests. Throughout the show The Narrator would make a comment and then physically interact with a character in the story, such as when he would bring in Cinderella's bird friends as puppets on a stick. The puppets interacted with the characters of the fantasy as though they were part of that world instead of puppets. However since they *were* puppets and the audience could clearly see The Narrator working the prop, this behavior, along with the small book that was The Narrator's constant companion and

the stage books that continued to appear throughout the show as towers and houses, served as unspoken but frequent reminders that this was all just a story.

The 2012 revival took the metatheatrical concept a step further yet by breaking the barrier down even further. Director Timothy Sheader grounded the story in theatrical reality while at the same time emphasizing the fantasy element of the story by making The Narrator a far more visible presence, visually controlling the story throughout. The Narrator was changed from an older man, who previously would double as The Baker's Father, to a young boy and the show was bookended with a fight and reconciliation between the boy and his father in the real world. The story of *Into the Woods* sprang from this Narrator's imagination and he would frequently set the scene and then watch the action happen around him, occasionally using his toys to manipulate the action. Only rarely would he actually exit the stage while the scene unfolded, unlike Narrators before him who would set the scene and then exit the stage right away as the action played out. Since The Narrator was now a young boy, he could no longer double as The Baker's Father. To fix that problem, Sheader split the roles and cast an older man to be The Baker's Father. Few actual changes were made in terms of songs and spoken word, but these small Narrator changes impacted the concept of the show.

The 2012 revival of *Into the Woods* was imported from London's open air theatre Regent Park and had a reasonably traditional family focus. There were a few significant changes in both design and concept. Design wise the show was moved to an outdoor theatre, staged on a treehouse like structure that invoked the Swiss Family Robinson, and costumed like a storybook steampunk nightmare. Despite the visual differences from the previous productions, the change in casting young boy to be The Narrator was the way director Timothy Sheader chose to put his unique stamp on the material. Although he never did say if the choice to make The Narrator a

child purposely came back to one of the ideas that Lapine first began with when he started *Into the Woods*, a child narrator does play into and portray something that Lapine was analyzing from the start, namely how children interpret the ideas that their parents pass on to them.

I am fascinated by what is read to children and how susceptible they are to it. I (was) reading fairytales and asking myself how children heard them and what they thought. I started to imagine how kids today might interpret these stories. *Into the Woods* is most successful when it engages people in conversation with their children. The issues raised are things that twelve year olds are very interested in, that they face every day; these are not necessarily issues that they discuss with their parents. (Mankin, et al)

The relationship between The Baker and The Mysterious Man was written to be about sons repeating the mistakes of their fathers, or recognizing they have begun to and choosing a different path. In previous productions, this was heightened by doubling the Father and the ‘all knowing’ Narrator character, and in this production, that seemed lost until the very last couple of minutes when it is revealed that the director has actually taken that particular concept further.

It was reasonably clear from the top of the show that the child narrator was telling this story in an attempt to distract himself from the menacing woods he has run away to. What doesn’t become apparent until the last few minutes of the show is that the boy is actually The Bakers son twelve or so years after the events of the story being told. As The Bakers Wife tells The Baker to “tell him the story of how it all happened” The Baker disappears with the baby only to re-appear a few moments later minus the baby and calling for his son. Instead of starting to tell the story to the baby, he instead utters the first few lines of the story to the boy he now clutches tightly to him as the Witch makes her entrance singing, and warning, that children will listen.

Sheder manages to tie all his threads together within the reprise of ‘Children Will Listen.’ In this version of the song, the Witch is given more lyrics that serve a dual purpose. From a practical standpoint they facilitate the reunion between father and son, while the

characters clean up the son's campsite. More importantly, the extended lyrics not only reinforce that children are always listening regardless of whether it seems that way or not, but also the importance of the example a parent sets for their child and the legacy they leave them.

W - What do you leave to your child when you're dead?

Only whatever you put in his head

Things that your mother and father have said which were left to them too (Sheader 2010)

The Baker didn't just begin to tell the story to his son. He has been telling the story to his son for a long time and the son has indeed been listening. What originally appeared to be a story that the boy was creating off the top of his head is instead a story that seems to have been told him many times and one that he takes enough comfort from that he tells it to himself to fend off the perceived dangers in his current situation. Elizabeth Ellis published an article in the American Journal of Psychotherapy exploring a connection between separation anxiety and children's literature. She extrapolates on the theory that children build a skill set to overcome separation anxiety by learning to mentally summon the image of their absent parent at will. She suggests that in addition to an image of their parent perhaps children are conjuring images of home, a story, or something that gives them a sense of security in order to summon the courage to move further and further into the world and away from the security of home. (Ellis) By bookending the production, Sheader embraced its metatheatrical possibilities. In doing so, he extended the generational theme and illustrated how stories can serve as emotional support in times of stress.

The first Broadway revival of *Into the Woods* was in 2002 and seemed to focus on the themes of family and community in a similar manner to the original 1987 production. Unlike the original production however, largely because of similarities to September 11<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath, the family and community themes became even more metaphorical. The show opened a mere seven months after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and had a great many moments that seemed to

parallel occurrences in the aftermath of the tragedy. The small community onstage seemed to represent the United States as a nation with the characters and family units within them representing different groups of Americans. In an interview after the show's premiere, book writer and director James Lapine commented on the parallels to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

“The trouble with fables is everyone looks for symbolism. This is a show in which people's lives are disrupted, a show in which destruction falls down on them. There is no way at all that we wanted to call attention to September 11, and we want to discourage it -- the show was decided upon and designed way before then -- but I can understand people relating it to what happened.” (Weinraub)

Lapine would know if parallels truly were unintentional since he was once again directing. However he was directing a fairytale, a story constructed of metaphors with the intention of the listener being able to take the lesson of the story and apply it to life in the real world. Outside of the theatre people were still dealing with the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Even if Lapine merely wanted to revisit his initial concept of a families and community coming together, it stands to reason that an audience that had experienced great tragedy, on at least some level, in the last few months would correlate a show with destruction in it to their most recent tragedy.

As aforementioned, the 2002 revival embraced the metatheatricality of the show and took advantage of the ability to put characters through various dangers. By doing so the creative team was freed to explore dark and intimidating issues. Dark and intimidating also seemed to be the keyword for the design of the production. Unlike the original production that took both set and costume design cues from Germanic folk-tale illustrations, the 2002 production had costumes that appeared to take inspiration from animated fairytales and a dark, gnarly, claustrophobic forest. Besides these changes in design that gave this production a far darker feel than its predecessor, the first act of the show flowed much like the 1987 production.

Then, the illusion is shattered. Act II has stronger and more direct connection to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> than Act 1, and the similarities begin immediately. The initial destruction of the characters' world is sudden, devastating, and has no clear culprit. Amidst rumbling, flashing lights, and falling set pieces, someone or something ravages the idyllic world of the characters, leaving no clues except for 40 ft footprints in the remains of the Witch's garden. The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks had no return address attached to them; most people did not realize an attack was underway until the second plane crashed into the twin towers. Children of today will grow up being taught that al-Qaeda was behind the attacks of September 11, but what will likely be left out is the time it took to connect all the dots back to al-Qaeda. Just as the characters run through a list of options as to who could possibly have destroyed their world, US authorities had to piece together the backgrounds of each of the perpetrators before they were able to conclude that al-Qaeda was ultimately responsible for the attacks.

The Narrator's commentary upon identification of a Giant is a metatheatrical moment that has been altered within each production depending on the director's focus. The 2002 production changed the line to place the focus more on size and action than fear. The original line is: 'More than possible, their fears would prove to be well founded.' and the revival statement was: 'Giant indeed, our friends were about to encounter a force much greater than their collective selves.' Rather than be frozen by their fears, this group will go investigate and respond to what happened.

Much like the American public, the responses to the destruction vary. The Baker suggests telling the royal family, to which the Witch replies not to trust the royal family to snuff out a rat, and then goes on to describe giant's as:

“The worst. A giant has a brain. It’s hard to outwit a giant. They are just like us only bigger, much much bigger. We are just expendable, like little bugs under their feet.” (Musical Theatre Lovers)

To emphasize her point, she tromps on a bug, grinds it into the ground, and then grandly exits stage left. The Witch’s identification of the royal family references questions Americans were pondering in one way or another about their government being able to keep them safe. After all, the most powerful nation in the world had just gotten blindsided by a vicious and devastating attack. How then *did* they intend to keep their citizens safe? Was keeping them safe something the government *could* even do? Not content to sit and wait for an answer or solution, the Witch leaves to find what action she can take herself and to do it.

While most of America looked for a way to contribute something after the attacks, the Witch is not the only character acting as a theatrical mirror for the American public, rather the whole core group of characters is. Jack’s eagerness to join the group and fight the giant mirrors the young men and women who joined the armed forces right after the attack. Little Red, who has lost her whole family in the incident, becomes a mirror of the families immediately impacted by loss; hence The Baker and his Wife becoming those Americans who patriotically put up the flag, maintained their faith in the leadership to protect them, and provided what supplies, aid, and what comfort they could to the families who lost someone in the attacks or in the immediate aftermath.

As the giant continues to rain destruction down on them, and takes a couple lives in the process, the tension grows and leads to finger-pointing which all reaches a climax by the time the show arrives at ‘Your Fault.’ As the other characters move around each other hurling and dodging accusations, blame floats around and everyone gets wrapped up in the blame game while the Witch just stands there, not really involved in the bickering and watches disgusted until

the group manages to make blame stick to someone: her. The community has managed to lay blame completely on the doorstep of the one character who has been the most honest and least involved with the whole mess. In a not dissimilar way, after September 11, Muslims began to be treated as scapegoats or pariahs, largely because of their religion and/or their appearances. Americans were still casting about trying to adapt to their changed world feel safe again and that resonated past the months following the attacks into the years after. As recently as 2012 a group of four associated press writers collaborated on a report that documented racial profiling of Muslims in New York as part of anti-terrorist proceedings, and in 2013 the Senate held their first hearing on racial profiling post September 11. (Hanley)

The Witch responds to the onslaught of those around her with 'Last Midnight.' She lambastes the group for their inability to handle changes in their world. In particular she chastises them for being too concerned with distributing blame to solve the situation. Although disgusted with the group, she also agrees to shoulder the blame if they will turn Jack over to her and she will give him to the Giantess to appease her.

W - Fine if that's the thing you enjoy/ placing the blame, if that's the aim

Give me the blame/ just give me the boy

All - No!

W - You're so pure/ but stay here and in time you'll mature/ And grow up to be them..

You're all liars and thieves/ like his father/ just like you will be to/ Why bother?.. (Sondheim, 02, Track 18)

Fed up with the inability of the group to make any decision about how best to handle the hard choices facing them and convinced that nothing will change one generation to the next, she decides to leave them to clean up their mess rather than subject herself to this nonsense any longer. By the time the American public reached the point where they could really face the changes brought about by the attacks, the nation was already embroiled in the War on Terror.

Boots were on the ground chasing down al-Qaeda leaders in Afganistan, and the country's healing process was in flux because Osama Bin-Laden, leader of the al-Qaeda network and the man symbolically responsible for the September 11 attacks, had not been located.

The ballad 'No One is Alone' guides the show to its end on a sober note, containing a message of both comfort and warning from one generation to the next. The younger generation has metaphorically come of age by helping to defeat the giant and realized that they now have no family to go home to. With no one to show Jack or Little Red right from wrong they have to make those difficult decisions for themselves now. Cinderella and The Baker help them to face that fact by reminding them that no one is alone.

C - Mother cannot guide you/ Now you're on your own...

Sometimes people leave you/ Halfway through the wood

Others may deceive you/ You decide what's good

You decide alone/ But no one is alone...

C/B - You move just a finger/say the slightest word

Something's bound to linger/be heard (Lapine, Sondheim 128-130)

The losses of their loved ones were in tragic and unexpected ways, but loss is a part of life and life is not always fair. There is comfort in the thought that they are not alone, but within that comforting phrase also lies the warning to remember that they are not alone because their actions may have unexpected and far reaching consequences. The lesson and warning here is to remember that every choice has repercussions, nothing comes truly free.

Actress Vanessa Williams remembered that at the end of a run-through she looked out to find many of the invited audience crying. Williams played the Witch in the 2002 production and stated that within the production "There were parallels to September 11." (Weinraub)

Unintentional though the parallels may have been, ultimately the fact that people could connect *Into the Woods* with September 11, and that people did, meant that Lapine had succeeded in his presentation of the fairytale. People had found away to connect the events of the fantasy story with their lives in the real world.

As *Into the Woods* moves towards its 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is being revived in New York for a third time, this time as a ‘stripped down and unplugged re-imagination.’ (Gioia) It is not possible to draw any concrete conclusions about this particular presentation until it actually opens, but the show teasers do allow for a few observations. The show is promoted as both re-imagined and unplugged because of two major changes. First the full orchestra has been removed in exchange for a single piano onstage. Second, the cast has been reduced from seventeen or more down to ten people. Stills from the initial production by Fiasco Theatre in New Jersey show the actors gathered around the piano dressed in simple pioneer clothes and easily bring to mind a family before the advent of television or the internet that spent time together around the piano singing and telling stories. In today’s high-tech society, amid growing criticism that we are more in touch and yet less connected than ever before, it would seem the creative team at Fiasco Theatre saw and seized an opportunity to theatrically highlight family and community then and now. Before the advent of the television or internet families would gather together in the parlor, often around a piano, to sing songs and tell stories. A 2013 survey revealed that, due to the demands of modern life, the average family will only spend eight hours of quality time together a week and one in ten of those families will spend that time silently gathered around the television. (McCann)

Pioneer families made their own entertainment together and the pioneer image is reinforced in the other stills that were released. They show the use of a bare stage with sparse, but innovative, ‘makeshift’ props, staging, and costumes. For example the witch is made



ugly by using a crocheted quilt, Rapunzel’s golden locks come courtesy of a yellow knit hat with long ties on either side, and the wolf becomes a mounted wolf head held by the male actor singing the wolf’s part. It should not go without mentioning that the primary costume color palette is comprised of textured whites livened up by a few khaki patterns. The white creates a strong visual contrast to the additional (colorful) props and costume pieces. However in this simplified production it seems unlikely that the choice to use the signature color of technology giant Apple as a base color is mere coincidence. The pre-show teasers present the distinct possibility that this trip *Into the Woods* will be the least visually fantastic while having the most terrifying implication: a reflection upon the loss of family connection and the havoc it can wreak.

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