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McKinley May
Georgia Southern University

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Continuity in Color: The Persistence of Symbolic Meaning in Myths, Tales, and Tropes

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the
Department of Literature and Philosophy.

By
McKinley May

Under the mentorship of Joe Pellegrino

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the symbolism of the colors black, white, and red from ancient times to modern. It explores ancient myths, the Grimm canon of fairy tales, and modern film and television tropes in order to establish the continuity of certain symbolisms through time. In regards to the fairy tales, the examination focuses solely on the lesser-known stories, due to the large amounts of scholarship surrounding the “popular” tales. The continuity of interpretation of these three major colors (black, white, and red) establishes the link between the past and the present and demonstrates the influence of older myths and beliefs on modern understandings of the colors.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Dr. Joe Pellegrino

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

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Department of Literature and Philosophy
University Honors Program
Georgia Southern University

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INTRODUCTION

“Death is pitch-dark, but colors are light.

To be a painter, one must work with rays of light.”

Edvard Munch, *Edvard Munch: Psyche, Symbol and Expression*

Throughout storytelling—be it literature, film, or art—color has been one of the primary methods for communicating social, cultural and symbolic meanings. Each major color of the visible spectrum is imbued with a wide-ranging set of connotative significations; each conveys a culturally-conditioned message to the reader or beholder. These meanings can vary significantly from culture to culture, especially if we compare Eastern and Western cultures. But within hemispheric confines, those meanings resolve into a close-knit constellation of significations. That is, on the whole, colors tend to have universal meaning.

Perhaps one of the most accessible ways to present this sense of continuity is to offer not the most famous and obvious examples of the meaning carried by each color, but a sampling of more obscure representations in various historical and cultural contexts. We may look at less familiar mythological systems and stories, as well as some of the lesser-known tales collected by those famous nineteenth-century folklorists, the Grimm brothers. We can then round off this study with a look at the ephemera produced by contemporary western cultures.

The colors red, white, and black appear more frequently than any other color in the Grimm canon. This is due to the fact that these three colors in particular trigger clear, overt reactions in people. For example, red triggers alertness and, therefore, is often used

to signify danger (Morton); meanwhile, black commonly evokes images of death. The colors also hold substantial symbolic meanings across the world and its various cultures. These three pigments are universally recognized. In fact, words for both black and white exist in every language in the world; they are the first to colors to be signified in each language. If the name of a third color exists, it is always red (Morton). This shows that black, white, and red are three of the most important colors on the visible spectrum.

The symbolism of these three colors in particular has varied little across time. The meanings they held in ancient times are the same ones they held for the Grimm brothers and the same that they hold today. The fact that the interpretations of the colors have varied so little gives these interpretations their cultural power. The similar meanings reinforce one another, making each ingrained in cultural consciousness. The colors' individual symbolisms are socially taught, passed down from generation to generation, as well as partially triggered by human biology and psychology.

The particular myths examined in this paper demonstrate this continuity of meaning across time. Each example uses its respective color in a major capacity. The ancient myths (Egyptian, Greek, and Roman) demonstrate an early interpretation of each color, thereby providing the basis for the symbolisms examined in later stories. The use of Frazer in each section furthers each symbolic meaning by providing examples from cultures other than those previously mentioned. It demonstrates and emphasizes the universality of the various interpretations. The stories pulled from the Grimm canon of fairy tales provide a "middle ground" of interpretation between ancient and modern. Like the myths, each fairy tale clearly demonstrates the symbolism of each color. The modern examples show how these meanings carry through to today.

The stories from the Grimm canon included in this paper are not the enormously popular tales known by children and adults around the world; they are not the stories told in movies animated by Disney. Such stories are too obvious for the purposes of this endeavor. They have been too well-examined by previous scholars, to the point that little new insight could be provided. Examining the lesser-known stories allows for a finer level of detail than do the more famous works. Such a level of detail allows readers to see the pervasiveness of culturally-conditioned color symbolism in ALL facets, not just the most popular or famous.

BLACK

“Black is modest and arrogant at the same time.

Black is lazy and easy—but mysterious.

But above all black says this:

‘I don’t bother you—don’t bother me.’”

Yohji Yamamoto, Fashion Designer

Black is one of the oldest colors to ever be used in art. It is the color of the charcoal etchings on cave walls and the soot marks from fires. It is the darkness of a shadow and the indicator of depth. Black is technically the lack of color, since it absorbs all light on the visible spectrum, leaving none for the eye to perceive. A word for black exists in every language, as it, along with white, are the first two colors signified in a language (Morton).

In prehistoric times, black was one of the few colors used in art. Formed from either burnt wood (charcoal) or the remnants of burned bones, black was used as a major part of cave art. To the Egyptians, the color was indicative of death, as it was associated with the “necropolis [. . .] and the mummy” (Remler 43). Osiris, the god who ruled the Egyptian underworld was dubbed “the Black One,” and the god Anubis, who represented mummification and served Osiris in the Underworld, was depicted as a jackal with a black coat (Remler 43).

This association of black with death was also manifested in Greek civilization. The realm of Hades, the Underworld, was described as “‘the darkness of night,’ the abode of shades” (Atsma). In the tale of Apollo and Coronis, black is the result of a

death, instead of the cause of one. Coronis, princess of Thessaly, was a lover of Apollo and pregnant with his child. While expecting said child, she had a love affair with Iskhys. Apollo heard of Coronis' infidelity through his white raven familiar and ordered his sister Artemis to kill his lover. She did so, an act Apollo later deeply regretted. He blamed the raven for Coronis' death, for it was the bird who had brought tidings of Coronis' unfaithfulness in the first place. As a result, Apollo turned the raven's white feathers black as punishment for Coronis' death (Atsma).

The color also caused the death of Aegeus, the mortal father of Theseus, due to an unfortunate mistake. When a young Theseus was chosen as one of the fourteen mortal sacrifices to the Minotaur of Crete, as was demanded by King Minos, he promised his father that he will attempt to defeat the creature. If he was successful, the sails of the ship, which were initially black (presumably to indicate the fate of the ship's passengers), would be exchanged for white ones. If Theseus was unsuccessful and was killed, the ship's sails would remain black. After Theseus proved his worth as a demigod to Minos and defeated the Minotaur with the aid of Minos' daughter, Ariadne, he began his return to Athens. However, he forgot to exchange the sails, so Aegeus saw black sails on the ship returning from Crete. Upon seeing the sails, Aegeus believed his son to be dead and subsequently threw himself into the sea, hence the origin of the name of the Aegean Sea (Churchill).

Black likewise indicated death for the Inca. In their ceremony of Muru-urco, where only "Incas of the blood" danced connected to a long cable which symbolized both the two-headed serpent of the heavens and the umbilical cord which linked all Incas together,

people dressed in black with their faces blackened with soot. The participants carried a long rope that spiraled around the king, and newly initiated teenage boys performed a mock battle dressed in black tunics. The ceremonies here were similar to the principal rites associated with the deceased Inca held one year after death when the deceased's corporate kin members painted their faces black. This culminated with the ceremonies of Purucaya, which involved four men with blackened faces who performed just before the spirit of the Inca was thought to arrive at its destination (Steele and Allen 136)

In Scottish folklore, black is linked to the concept of death through an object called the "Black Chanter." This object was "an enchanted musical instrument, part of a bagpipe [. . . that] permitted one to travel through the air if played by a Cameron, the traditional pipers of the area" (McKay 57). The Black Chanter served a function similar to that of a banshee, in that it predicted death: the chanter was said to crack on the evening before a death in the family that owned the chanter would occur. McKay points out that "[e]ach time this occurred, a ring of silver was placed around the chanter to repair [the crack], until the whole instrument was covered with silver rings" (57). Death was also predicted in Scottish, Irish, and English mythology by the presence of a black dog. The dog, called a "barguest" in Northern England, a "Black Shuck" in East Anglia, and a "Shriker" in Cumbria, was considered a sure portent of death. The beast, as English folk tales claim, "led all the dogs of a district on a rampage through an area where death was about to occur" (Monaghan 47).

Black is not only associated with and representative of death; it is additionally used to indicate evil. In Tibetan folklore, one of the two primordial essences is Black Misery. This substance, believed to be black light, paired with Radiance, or white light, to form the cosmic egg, from which the universe formed. The Black Misery was responsible for all of the evil that exists in the world (“Black Misery”). According to Norse mythology, the Black Sow is the personification of death and evil (“Black Sow”). The Mandan Indians of North Dakota conducted a ceremony in which they expelled devils. In the ceremony, a man painted himself black in order to represent the devil. He then entered the village to chase and taunt the women. After the ceremonial buffalo dance, the women chased the “devil” from the village (Frazer 1315-1316). North American natives in northwestern coastal tribes believed a spirit called “Black Tamanous” to be anthropophagic and evil (“Black Tamanous”). Such a cannibalistic character also exists in British folklore as a figure dubbed “Black Annis.” This entity, believed to be a degraded version of the goddess Danu, was sometimes depicted as having a blue face. On top of being a cannibal, Black Annis committed the additional horror of ambushing and killing children, using them as her food source (“Black Annis”).

The connection between black and evil is furthered by the concept of black magic. This half of the dichotomic practices of sorcery is typically associated with malevolence, demons, and witchcraft. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines such magic as that “involving the invocation of evil spirits; [or] harmful or malevolent magic” (“Black magic”). Those who practiced black magic, especially in medieval times, were typically accused of consorting with the devil and were subsequently killed, often by being burned at the stake. Perhaps the most notorious instance of this black magic is the Mass of Saint

Sécaire, a form of “black Mass,” which is so transgressive that it leads Frazer to this descriptive overload:

The Mass of Saint Sécaire may be said only in a ruined or deserted church, where owls mope and hoot, where bats flit in the gloaming, where gypsies lodge of nights, and where toads squat under the desecrated altar. Thither the bad priest comes by night with his light o’ love, and at the first stroke of eleven he begins to mumble the mass backwards, and ends just as the clocks are knelling the midnight hour. His leman acts as clerk. The host he blesses is black and has three points; he consecrates no wine, but instead he drinks the water of a well into which the body of an unbaptized infant has been flung. He makes the sign of the cross, but it is on the ground and with his left foot. And many other things he does which no good Christian could look upon without being struck blind and deaf and dumb for the rest of his life. But the man for whom the mass is said withers away little by little, and nobody can say what is the matter with him; even the doctors can make nothing of it. They do not know that he is slowly dying of the Mass of Saint Sécaire. (133-134)

Frazer notes that black has yet another association: rainclouds. The color has been used throughout the world in many ceremonies which seek to summon rain. Among the Nootka Indians of British Columbia, twins, who were believed to have the ability to control the weather, would “cause rain to fall by painting their faces black and then washing them, which may represent the rain dripping from the dark clouds” (Frazer 162). In India, the Brahmin who was to become the rain-maker had to live in isolation, wear

black clothing, and eat only black food. Such requirements served “to bring the Brahman [*sic*] into union with water, to make him, as it were, an ally of the water powers, and to guard him against their hostility” (Frazer 165). The color of both the food and garments is indicative of the rainclouds, as with the Nootka Indians. Frazer goes on to point out that the objects are black, “for such is the nature of rain” (Frazer 165). The use of black to summon rain was also repeated by several African tribes. Frazer describes these rituals thus:

[a]mong the Wambugwe of East Africa, when the sorcerer desires to make rain, he takes a black sheep and a black calf in bright sunshine, and has them placed on the roof of the common hut in which the people live together. Then he slits the stomachs of the animals and scatters their contents in all directions. After that he pours water and medicine into a vessel; if the charm has succeeded, the water boils up and rain follows. . . . In order to procure rain the Wagogo sacrifice black fowls, black sheep, and black cattle at the graves of dead ancestors, and the rain-maker wears black clothes during the rainy season. . . . The Garos of Assam offer a black goat on the top of a very high mountain in time of drought. In all these cases the colour of the animal is part of the charm; being black, it will darken the sky with rain-clouds. (175-176)

Black similarly contributes significantly to the canon of Grimm fairy tales. In these stories, black tends to have many of the same meanings and associations as it did in ancient civilizations, in addition to a few more. While the most common concept associated with black is death, only one such instance of this symbolism is presented in

the collection of tales. In “The Two Brothers,” twin boys eat an enchanted golden bird and wake every morning to find pieces of gold under their pillows. Their uncle desires this power, and convinces their father to abandon them in the forest. A huntsman finds them and takes them in, raising them as his own and training them in his trade. The boys grow up and become huntsmen themselves. As they travel, they come across a variety of animals; each offers the huntsmen two of its young if they will spare its life. The animals serve the brothers, who keep them as pets. After some time, the brothers split ways (Grimm 290-296).

One of the brothers, after travelling for a while, comes across a town “all hung with black crape [*sic*]” (Grimm 296). The brother asks a local innkeeper why the town is decorated in such a manner. The innkeeper replies that it is done because the “King’s daughter is to die to-morrow” (Grimm 296). He goes on to reveal that the area is plagued by a seven-headed dragon to whom a virgin must be sacrificed annually. The only remaining virgin is the King’s daughter, so she must be the one sacrificed. He also informs the brother that the King has offered his daughter’s hand in marriage to whomever can defeat said dragon. The brother accepts the challenge and vanquishes the beast. However, the King’s marshal, who witnessed the brother killing the dragon, kills the brother while he sleeps after his trial, returns the princess to her home, and takes credit for the serpent’s defeat. The brother, returned to life by his animals, finds the princess absent and presumes that she has no desire to marry him. He, therefore, continues on his travels.

A year later, the brother and his animals return to the town, which is now draped with red cloth. Again, the brother enquires as to the decoration, commenting that the

town had been covered with “black crape” a year prior. His host answers, “Last year our King’s daughter was to be delivered to the dragon, but the marshal fought with it and killed it, and so to-morrow their wedding is to be solemnized, and that is why the town was then hung with black crape for mourning, and to-day covered with red cloth for joy” (Grimm 300).

In this story, black is clearly indicative of death, as it explicitly symbolizes mourning. However, the period of mourning typically *follows* a death; here the act precedes it. The fact that black presages death in this instance echoes the tale of Aegeus, in which this color plays a similar role. In both of these tales, black is not linked to the death one would first associate with it. In the myth, the black sails presumably indicate the death of Theseus, but instead they directly cause the death of Aegeus. In “The Two Brothers” black seems to indicate the death of the princess, but it ultimately leads to the death of the seven-headed dragon.

While the association of black with death only appears once in the Grimm canon, its association with evil is quite popular throughout the collection. In “The Pink,” a childless queen wishes desperately for a child. She is visited by an angel and told that she will have a son blessed “with the power of wishing, so that whatsoever in the world he wishes for, he shall have” (Grimm 355). After the child is born, the queen takes him out to the garden, where, after a while, she falls asleep. The palace’s old cook had heard about the child’s powers and decides to kidnap him. He takes the baby from his mother’s arms and sprinkles blood on her apron so she will believe the child was taken by wild animals. The cook takes the boy to a wet nurse who raises him. When the child is old

enough, the cook has him wish for a grand palace, a garden, and even a maiden to be the boy's companion.

Eventually, however, the old cook is consumed by paranoia, and fears that the boy will wish to return to his rightful place. Consequently, he orders the maiden to “plunge [a] knife into [the boy's] heart, and bring [him the boy's] heart and tongue” (Grimm 356). The maiden instead orders a hind killed, and plans to take its heart and tongue to the cook. Before the cook returns, she warns the young prince, telling him to lie under his bed covers. When the cook enters the room, the boy reveals himself and wishes for the cook to be transformed into a black poodle with a gold collar that is compelled to “eat burning coals, till the flames burst forth from [his] throat” (Grimm 358). The cook must repeat this painful process over and over, for the coals will not kill him.

The young prince then returns to his kingdom and seeks out his mother, who had been imprisoned in a tall tower by her husband, the king, who was laboring under the impression that she had neglectfully allowed their son to be killed by wild animals. The young prince reveals to his mother that he is indeed alive, and then goes to his father's court disguised as a huntsman. Once there, he offers his services to the king and kills enough game for an enormous feast, to which he is ultimately invited. There, the prince reveals both his presence and the old cook's deceit, transforming the latter back into his human form after having him consume more live coals (Grimm 358-359).

In this story, black is indicative of evil. The story's antagonist, the cook, is a kidnapper, a liar, and a greedy man. He allows the queen to take the blame for the loss of her son, and allows both royals to believe their son is dead. He even tries to kill the very person he took, fearing that the boy's powers will reveal the cook's deceit. The man is

also cowardly, asking the maiden to kill the boy, instead of doing it himself. As a result, the cook is transformed into a black poodle, the only time black is explicitly mentioned in the story. Such an overt relation between the cook and the color clearly links the character with black's connotation of evil. The fact that the cook is changed into a black dog echoes the black dogs of English, Scottish, and Irish mythology, though such dogs were explicitly linked with death, whereas this dog is only connected with a supposed death and an attempted murder.

Black appears in a similar context of evil in "The King's Son Who Feared Nothing." In this tale, a young prince goes out into the world seeking adventure. On one of his adventures, he comes across a castle that has been placed under a spell. He is greeted by a "maiden of beautiful form and fine face, but [. . .] quite black" (Grimm 549). She, too, is under an "evil spell" (Grimm 549) that can only be broken by someone staying in the castle for three consecutive nights, all the while silently enduring the torment brought upon him by the devils of the spell. The prince stays in the castle's great hall for three nights, suffering through the beatings, pinchings, and tortures of the devils. Each morning, the maiden greets him and treats him using a "little bottle wherein [lies] the water of life" (Grimm 549). This water heals him and rids him of all pain. Each day, the prince notices she is gradually becoming white, from the feet up. On the morning following the third and final night, the prince wakes to see "the maiden standing by him, snow-white, and fair as day" (Grimm 550).

Here, the evil associated with black magic is inscribed on the skin of the maiden. Her physical appearance, though still beautiful, is marred by the malevolent sorcery acting upon her. The prince's triumph over the forces of this dark magic, explicitly called

“devils,” is shown physically through the whiteness which ascends from her feet to her crown, shrinking the proportion of enchanted black skin on the maiden. Both the appearance of devils and the explicit reference to an “evil spell” further link the use of black in this tale to the wickedness of black magic. The devils are also reminiscent of the *Malebranche* (“evil claws”) demons in Dante’s *Inferno*, who tear at the flesh of those they punish.

The symbolic importance of black has not lessened over time. The color is still representative of many of the same ideas today as it was in ancient times. Perhaps most obviously, black is the traditional color of funerals in Western culture. According to *TV Tropes*, when emotions are “color coded,” black comes to represent someone who is cold or mournful (“Colour-Coded Emotions”). Women in mourning wear black dresses or veils, collectively known as “Widow’s Weeds,” while men outwardly display their grief through black clothing or a black armband. Such traditions were especially popular in the Victorian era.

Today, black still carries its ancient association with evil. This is most evident in pop culture in the trope of, as *TV Tropes* puts it, “Evil Wears Black.” This image can be seen in films such as the *Star Wars* original trilogy, in which the primary antagonist, Darth Vader, wears black, as do the rest of the Sith. It is also noticeable in many of the vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, especially the alternate-universe, vampire versions of Xander and Willow. This trope is also apparent in Disney animated films. For example, nearly every Disney villain, with the exception of Hans from *Frozen*, has a costume or appearance that consists of black, red, purple, or some combination thereof. However, *TV Tropes* points out that “even though wearing black doesn’t make someone

evil, being evil makes it more than likely one is going to wear black” (“Evil Wears Black”).

The connection between black and evil in modern culture is furthered in the trope of black eyes being used to denote evil, especially possession. When used in the eyes, which are the windows to the soul, a “perfect blackness indicates the purity of the evil within [a person] and [his or her] total lack of humanity” (“Black Eyes of Evil”). This image can be seen in again in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as a result of Willow’s foray into dark magic. It is also used to indicate demonic possession in the television show *Supernatural*.

All of these tropes involving black seem to culminate in the character of the Woman in Black. Despite the sensuality suggested by a little black dress, a woman clad entirely in black tends to have an eerie aura about her. As *TV Tropes* puts it, “the more skin the outfit covers, especially if it’s a long dress, the more ominous the woman will become,” going on to note that, unlike a woman in red, who conveys sexual desire, “the Woman in Black clearly conveys that desiring her is outright dangerous or forbidden or a free ticket to certain death” (“Woman in Black”). Such a character is often used as a story’s antagonist, as in the titular character of the film *The Woman in Black*, or the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*.

A common cultural example of such a figure, who overtly embodies the lack of sexual availability associated with it, is the nun. A nun, having taken a vow of chastity, is unable to reciprocate amorous advances, and her all-black clothing reflects that fact. The figure of a nun is often an ominous presence in cultural thought. Nuns, especially in the context of Catholic schools, are typically viewed as “terrifying spectres of discipline, able

to strike fear into even the toughest men, wielding yardsticks like samurai wield katanas,” a trope perpetuated in the character of Sister Mary Stigmata in the film *The Blues Brothers* (“Hollywood Nuns”). The idea of the strict, fear-inducing, disciplinarian nun is also subverted in media almost as often as it is supported. The nuns in *Sister Act*, save perhaps Dame Maggie Smith’s Mother Superior, and practically all of the nuns in the cult hit *The Sound of Music*, are portrayed as benevolent, benign women, intent on helping others (“Hollywood Nuns”).

Black represents death and mourning in Western culture. It is the color used to desexualize women, unlike its more lurid counterpart: red. The color hints at fertility of soil and life-bringing rainclouds. It is also highly indicative of evil. All of these connotations exist and have existed in multiple cultures throughout time and continue today.

WHITE

“White is a colour.

It is not a mere absence of colour;

it is a shining and affirmative thing,

as fierce as red, as definite as black.”

G.K. Chesterton, “A Piece of Chalk”

After black, white is the most common color used in art. It is the visual antithesis to black, indicating light in contrast to shadow. The color is often used to convey goodness, purity, and innocence. It can also be used to signify the supernatural or otherness. White is the presence of every color of the visible spectrum being reflected back to the eye. The word for white is among the first two colors to be signified in a language (Morton).

In ancient Egypt, white indicated purity. The color was used in religious rituals, as many ceremonial objects were white, and priests wore white sandals to perform their ceremonies. This suggests that white, with its connotation of purity, was explicitly connected to religion. The name of the ancient Egyptian capital city, Memphis, translates to “White Walls”; the color signifies the city’s religious and political importance (Morton).

White also consistently appears in a number of Greek myths. In the story of Leuce and Hades, white symbolizes otherness and death. Hades, the Olympian god of the dead and the Underworld, fell in love with the nymph Leuce, a daughter of the titan Oceanus. As a result of this love, Hades kidnapped Leuce, taking her to the Underworld. There, the

nymph died; Hades transformed her into a white poplar and placed the tree in the Fields of Elysium. The white poplar then became sacred to the god (Atsma).

White was additionally associated with Aphrodite. The goddess's birth involved the color white to a large degree. She was born when Cronos castrated his father, Saturn. When the primordial deity's genitals fell to the sea, Aphrodite was born from the mixture of semen and white seafoam (Cotterell 19). Both elements that contributed to the goddess's creation were explicitly white, thereby linking the color to the goddess, and, by extension, to those whom she protected, such as brides and lovers. White was sacred to Aphrodite, as well, in the form of the myrtle tree. Brides in ancient Greece (who were under the protection of Aphrodite) wore garlands of myrtle on their wedding day. They would bathe in water scented with myrtle flowers prior to the ceremony.

The myrtle tree also plays into the myth of Myrrha. In the story, Myrrha, sometimes called "Smyrna," refused to honor the gods, Aphrodite in particular. As a result, the goddess cursed the maid to lust after her father. With the aid of her old nurse, Myrrha managed to sleep with her father for twelve nights without him recognizing her. When Myrrha's father learned of her deceit, however, he pursued her, bearing his sword. The cursed woman, fearing for her life, beseeched the gods to protect her. The deities took pity on her and transformed her into a myrtle tree. After nine months, the tree burst open, giving birth to Adonis, Aphrodite's lover (Atsma). Aphrodite then took the myrtle tree as one of her sacred plants.

The Greeks also saw white as representative of purity. Besides being associated with Aphrodite and young women about to be married, it was also associated with the virgin goddess Artemis, the huntress, who was the protector of young girls up until their

marriage. Frazer indicates the physical depiction of the goddess: her “image was simply a white cone or pyramid [which was] the emblem of Astarte at Byblus, of the native goddess whom the Greeks called Artemis at Perga in Pamphylia” (778). Such an image explicitly links her to the color. The fact that Artemis was a virgin deity, and therefore sexually pure, reinforces the connection between the color and purity.

This connection was also adopted by the Romans. The Vestal Virgins, female servants of the goddess Vesta, were “dressed entirely in white, with a coronet-shaped headband ornamented with ribbons suspended from it” (Mercante and Dow 1003). When performing their sacrificial rituals, the women would cover the coronet with a veil made of white cloth. The Vestal Virgins, as their name implies, were virginal, sexually pure. Such purity was strictly maintained; a woman who broke her vows of chastity was carried to the “field of transgression,” where she was beaten with rods and buried alive. The man who took the woman’s virginity was executed by scourging (Mercante and Dow 1003). This explicit association of white with purity influences the contemporary cultural perception of color.

The Hellenistic world was not alone in this interpretation of the color; the Hebraic world read it in the same way. In order to be considered pure enough to conduct the ceremonies for the Day of Atonement, the High Priest of Israel was required to robe himself all in white. He had to “put on the holy linen tunic, and have the linen undergarments next to his body, fasten the linen sash, and wear the linen turban; these [were] the holy vestments” (*New Revised Standard Version*, Leviticus 16:4). Such linen was made from white flax, so that the High Priest was the physical manifestation of purity before he approached God on the Mercy Seat on this holy day. These all-white

garments were never to be worn again. Instead, they were “hidden in the place where he [the High Priest] remove[d] them” (“The Priestly Garments”). After the garments were worn, they could no longer be considered pure, so new white robes were woven each year.

The association of white with otherness is also repeated in Jewish culture. In Levitical law, a man who came to the priests with “white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and [with] quick raw flesh in the swelling” (Leviticus 13:10) was deemed unclean. As a result of this, he was ostracized by his community, becoming “other,” cast out of “normal” human society. Here, the color is explicitly linked to the condition of existing beyond one’s community, since the presence of an unnatural whiteness on the skin is what precipitates the otherness.

White also represented otherness in Jewish culture in the context of the supernatural. When the Israelites were fleeing Egypt, headed for their “promised land,” they found themselves without food or fresh water while in the midst of the desert. They beseeched Moses to give them food, blaming God for their circumstances and complaining that they would have been better treated in Egypt. Moses prayed to God for aid, and it was sent to them, in the form of “a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground” (Exodus 16:14), which the Israelites called “manna.” This bread made “the ground [look] as if it were covered with hoar frost” (Seligsohn). Later in the same chapter the manna is explicitly described: “The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Exodus 16:31).

The color is representative of otherness in other cultures and mythologies, as well. In Germany, there is a belief that “the soul escapes from a sleeper’s mouth in the form of a white mouse or a little bird, and that to prevent the return of the bird or animal would be fatal to the sleeper” (Frazer 434). Here, white is clearly linked to the soul, and, by extension, to the spiritual world at large. This association of white with otherness, especially the supernatural and extraordinary, is one that continues today. Ghosts and spirits are nearly always portrayed as white, thereby indicating that they are not of this world.

White as supernatural other is continued in the image of the white stag. Prevalent in Arthurian legend, the stag is considered to be “a true faerie-beast, and represents mankind's quest for spiritual knowledge” (“Symbol Analysis”). The creature lives in forests, which were believed to be gateway to other, supernatural realms. It typically signifies the beginning of adventures, especially in Arthuriana. The stag, though often pursued, is never caught. This characteristic contributes to its otherness, as well as its purity. Since it cannot be caught, it cannot be corrupted by humanity. In the Christian tradition, the stag came to represent Christ, thereby deepening the creature’s connection with purity.

This concept is furthered in the figure of the white horse. Most famously associated with the Christian End of Days, the white horse bears a supernatural figure, the identity of whom is contested. The entity is described in Revelation 6:2: “I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.” Some believe this figure to be the antichrist; others, Christ himself (“Four Horsemen”). Later in Revelation, a savior-like entity appears. He is

described as appearing on a white horse, and is “called Faithful and true, and in righteousness he judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11). A similar character exists in Hindu mythology. The deity Kalki, an avatar of the god Vishnu, will “appear at the end of the world cycle seated on a white horse, with drawn sword blazing like a comet, for the final destruction of the wicked, the renewal of creation, and the restoration of purity” (Mercante and Dow 555-556).

White also shows up in a significant capacity in the Grimm canon. In the story “The Two Brothers,” the two brothers go their separate ways. After one of the brothers arrives in the town draped with black crape and rescues the princess, thereby becoming king, he decides to go hunting. While out on the hunt, he sees a white hind and decides to pursue it. However, he is “never [. . .] able to overtake it; when he [thinks] he [is] near enough to aim, he instantly [sees] it bound away into the far distance, and at length it vanishe[s] altogether” (Grimm 307). Now lost in the forest, the king makes a fire and camps for the night, surrounded by his animals. While sitting by the fire, he hears a voice complaining of the cold and looks up to see an old woman sitting high in the tree beside him. The king invites the woman to come warm herself by his fire, but she refuses, claiming to fear the man’s animals. The woman, who is in reality a witch, says she will come down if the king strikes each animal with a wand she will give him. The king does so, turning each of his beasts into stone. The witch then turns the king himself to stone (Grimm 307-308).

Meanwhile, the king’s brother, with whom he had parted ways years earlier, comes across a knife the pair stuck into a tree at their parting. Seeing that his brother’s side of the knife is “half rusted, and half bright” (Grimm 308), he goes to his brother’s

aid. He travels to the brother's kingdom, where he pretends to be the king. Eventually, he, too, goes out hunting and pursues the white hind. He also builds a fire, camps, and encounters the witch. He invites her to warm herself by the fire, and she requests of him what she asked of his brother. This time, however, the brother is wary of her and refuses to comply with her wishes. Instead, he fires his gun at her, but she is unharmed by the lead bullets. Seeing this, the brother removes silver buttons from his coat and uses them as bullets. This successfully brings the witch down from the tree. He then demands to know the fate of his sibling, the real king. The witch reveals that the king and his animals are still stone and in her vault. The brother threatens her, ordering her to return all of her victims to their former states. The brothers are reunited, and, together, they burn the witch, thereby releasing the darkness from the forest.

In this story, the hind, described as being "snow-white" (Grimm 307) serves a function similar to that of the white stag of Arthurian mythology. The hind works as a catalyst for adventure, which includes a supernatural element. Both the hind, which, like the stag, is uncatchable, and the witch, who bears supernatural powers, represent a preternatural otherness when compared to the earthly brothers. The hind leads both men to the forest, where they each encounter a being that is beyond their ken. Each man goes on his own quest; they both end with the brothers being reunited.

White also appears in the story "The Pink." In this tale, a queen, after years of barrenness, gives birth to a child who has the power of wishing. As seen in the previous chapter, the queen is imprisoned in a tower by her husband, the king, who believes her to be guilty of allowing their son to be killed by beasts. She is sustained through the years by "two angels from heaven in the shape of white doves, which [fly] to her twice a day,

and carr[y] her food” (Grimm 356). The boy, who has returned to his father’s kingdom in the guise of a huntsman, climbs the tower and reveals to his mother that he is still alive. He then goes to a banquet at the king’s court. There he wishes for someone to ask the king what has become of his queen. The boy then reveals his identity and relates the true events of his life, thereby exposing the cook’s guilt. The boy then brings forth the poodle and makes it consume live coals yet again. He wishes for the cook to return to his human state, and the dog is transformed into a man dressed in a “white apron, [with] his knife by his side” (Grimm 359). The king orders the cook to be thrown into a dungeon and the queen to be freed (Grimm 359-360).

In this narrative, white is used to indicate innocence, or purity of conscience. The first explicit appearance of the color in this story, the white doves, are specifically linked with the presence of angels. These supernatural entities are commonly seen as physical manifestations of complete goodness and purity. The fact that they serve the queen thereby transfers the connotations associated with them to this mortal woman. The doves also underline the queen’s innocence, a fact to which the audience is already privy. Here, the link between white and innocence is unambiguous; it is clearly applied to the queen, whose conscience is indisputable.

White’s other appearance in the story is not so clear-cut. Instead, its use in the description of the cook’s apron is ironic; it indicates the guilty party, not the innocent one. The text distinctly mentions that the cook’s apron is white, a detail which one would presume would indicate his guiltlessness. However, the audience is clearly aware of the falsehood of such a presumption; the cook’s evil deeds and obvious guilt have been overtly established in the story, leading to an irony in the color’s use. This irony is

reiterated by the fact that the queen, who is the true innocent party, is given an apron that has been sprinkled with blood. While the garment is never explicitly described as being white, the conjecture that it is so is not too preposterous. In this instance, the purity of the white apron is marred by the redness of the blood. As will be addressed in the next chapter, this red represents danger, as it implies that the queen endangered her young child, supposedly leaving him to the mercy of wild animals, as well as exposes the queen herself to the dangers of her husband's wrath. It also suggests guilt, almost like the "bloodstained" hands of Lady Macbeth. These connotations, paired with those of white, lead to the ironic symbolism of the colors in this example.

The meanings of white presented thus far are continued into modern-day interpretations. This is especially true in regards to the concept of the color indicating virginity. *TV Tropes* examines this idea through the trope it dubs "Virgin in a White Dress." This explanation points out that,

[i]n Western cultures, white symbolizes moral purity, and so (according to this trope) the classic virgin wears a dress that's as pure as she is. In older times, any unmarried women was supposedly expected to remain chaste, so she could be identified by the color she was wearing [. . .] This color-coding is traditional for a bride on her wedding day, a *débutante* at her coming out party, and the Virgin Sacrifice ("Virgin in a White Dress")

While this trope is seemingly ingrained into Western culture, especially in regards to brides and weddings, the white wedding dress is a fairly recent tradition. Despite the color being explicitly linked with virginity, as seen with the Vestal Virgins and Jewish priests, it was not applied to brides until Queen Victoria chose it as the color of her

wedding dress. This trend became the fashion, not necessarily due to the implications of the color, but because it denoted wealth, as white was a color difficult to maintain and the dress was meant to be worn only once (“Virgin in a White Dress”).

The idea of white representing otherness, especially the supernatural is also echoed in modern times. This continuation is most evident in the trope of the “Man in White.” Such a character often puts audiences at unease because, as *TV Tropes* points out, “conservative men's attire has been dark-colored for the longest time (black, charcoal, and navy) [; therefore] looking upon a man in white creates a sensation not unlike a color-inverted image” (“Man in White”). The figure of the man in white does not seem to fit in with common standards of normalcy, often making him “uncannily otherworldly” (“Man in White”). This can be seen in characters in popular films, such as Morgan Freeman as God in *Bruce Almighty* and *Evan Almighty* or Sir Ian McKellan as Gandalf the White in the last two of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (“Man in White”). The female counterpart of this trope also exists, but often contains other implications, such as purity. The otherworldly aspect of such characters is typically of a spiritual nature, in addition to the powerful nature, be it either good or evil, which can also be seen in the male version. One of the more popular examples of this trope is the Lady Galadriel in J.R.R Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, as well as the movies based on them (“Woman in White”).

The association of white with both otherworldliness and purity is further emphasized by the tradition of portraying divine characters as wearing white, often paired with gold. This is due primarily to the fact that “the colors gold and white are associated with goodness and divinity. White and gold invoke images of Heaven and angels, and

embody purity and incorruptibility” (“Gold and White Are Divine”). Such a portrayal is also extended to mortals who have close contact with divine beings. This trope can be seen in films such as the original 1981 version of *Clash of the Titans*, in which the gods are shown to be dressed all in white, and the previously-mentioned presentation of God in *Bruce Almighty* and *Evan Almighty* (“Gold and White are Divine”).

White, due to the pure nature of the color and the fact that it is so easily marred, has long been associated with purity and innocence. From the Vestal Virgins of old, to modern brides in white dresses, the color conveys a sense of immaculateness, especially sexually. White has also been used to symbolize the supernatural, from the white stag of Arthuriana to Morgan Freeman as God. The color is a pure mixture of every color of the visible spectrum reflected back to the eye, and it provides a stark contrast to nearly every other color paired with it.

RED

“Red. Red. RED. RED, Charlie boy.

Red is the color of sex!

Burgundy is the color of hot water bottles!

Red is the color of sex and fear and danger

and signs that say, ‘Do. Not. Enter.’”

Lola, *Kinky Boots*

Red is one of the most vibrant colors on the visible spectrum. It is the color of blood, symbolic of both life, in its presence, and death, in its absence. It is also the color of fire, and, therefore, is representative of danger. Red is also one of the most popular colors in the world, as well as one of the oldest. According to J.L. Morton, “[t]he history of language reveals that red is the first color after black and white” in the formation of language (*Colormatters.com*). In every language, black and white are always the first two colors which are developed and signified within the language. If at least three colors exist in the language, the third is always red. (Morton).

Historically, red has had several different symbolic meanings. In the prehistoric era, red symbolized the female principle (Douma). It was also associated with Mother Earth, who “provided” the red ochre, which was both used to create pigment for the paintings on cave walls and “credited with life-giving powers” (Douma). This is perhaps due to the similarities of the substance formed by red ochre and the aforementioned color of blood. To the ancient Egyptians, it meant life and victory (Douma). Due to this association, the Egyptians would paint their skin red during religious ceremonies. They

would also use a red pigment to depict themselves in hieroglyphics on temple and tomb walls (Douma). The Egyptians also used red to indicate anger and violence (Douma). Such associations were applied especially to redheads, as they were rumored to have temperamental dispositions.

A true embodiment of the Egyptians' understanding of the implications of the use of the color red was Set, the god of the desert, storms, disorder, violence, and foreigners. He was portrayed as having red hair and eyes, both of which denoted his "fiery temper" (Douma). All of the matters of which he was the patron were things which the Egyptians came to be wary of, and so red was associated with something that was potentially dangerous. The god also represented victory in that he defeated Apep, the archenemy of Ra. However, he was also considered the "Satan" of Egyptian mythology (Mackenzie xlvi). When Set's brother Osiris ruled over Egypt, Set grew jealous and developed a plan to usurp the throne using his guile "for his heart was full of evil and he loved warfare better than peace" (Mackenzie 16). Set then had a chest created in the exact dimensions of Osiris, setting forth a challenge that whosoever could fit in the chest would win it. When Osiris laid in it, Set had his minions nail the chest shut, sealing the king in his coffin, and setting it afloat in the Nile. Set then ruled Egypt in his brother's stead, placing Egypt under a regime of tyranny and chaos. Later, when Osiris's wife Isis discovered the body of her now-dead husband, Set had the body dismembered into fourteen pieces, in order to continue his tyrannical rule. Eventually, however, he was defeated by Osiris and Isis's son, Horus (Mackenzie 17-23). This myth, along with Set's association with the color red, reflects the symbolism of violence and evil of the color. The depictions of Set in a number of myths show the variability of associations for the color red in ancient

Egypt. But Set was not the only god in the Egyptian pantheon to be associated with this color. In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer notes a connection between red hair and Osiris himself:

With regard to the ancient Egyptians we have it on the authority of Manetho that they used to burn red-haired men and scatter their ashes with winnowing fans, and it is highly significant that this barbarous sacrifice was offered by the kings at the grave of Osiris. We may conjecture that the victims represented Osiris himself, who was annually slain, dismembered, and buried in their persons that he might quicken the seed in the earth.

(890)

The ancient Greeks, in part, echoed the Egyptians in their understanding of the meaning of red. To them, this color was associated with the gods of war, Ares, and his sons, Deimos and Phobos (Atsma). Deimos was the god of fear, dread, and terror, and his twin brother Phobos was the god of panic, fear, flight, and battlefield rout (Atsma). They accompanied their father into battle, driving his chariot and spreading fear in their wake. The Greek symbolic use of red is similar to the association with anger and violence the color had in ancient Egypt.

Separate shades of red were also seen by the Greeks as symbols of both human genders. The “bright, luminous red [was associated] with the male principle” (Douma), but the darker, richer reds, like that of the pomegranate, symbolized the feminine (Atsma). Red flowers in ancient Greece were nearly always sacred to a female deity. The pomegranate itself was sacred to both Aphrodite and Hera, due to its association with

fertility. As a result of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the fruit—and thereby its color—also came to represent temptation (Atsma).

The anemone poppy was sacred to Aphrodite, as it had been colored with the blood of her lover Adonis (Atsma). In this myth, Adonis was the son of Smyrna, a woman whom Aphrodite cursed because she would not honor the goddess. Smyrna (“Myrrha” in some versions) was cursed to lust for her father. Because of this, she managed to sleep with her father for twelve nights, keeping her identity secret. But when she was discovered, she fled to the woods, where the gods transformed her into a tree. Nine months later, the tree burst open, bringing forth Adonis. Aphrodite was captivated by the child’s beauty and had him hidden away under the care of Persephone, who also fell in love with the boy and refused to return him to Aphrodite. When Zeus was called upon to settle the disposition of the child, the king of the gods ruled that Adonis would spend one third of each year with Aphrodite, one third with Persephone, and one third with whomever he pleased (note the parallels with the Persephone myth). The beautiful youth decided to spend that final third of each year with Aphrodite, as well. Later, while hunting in the woods, Adonis was wounded by a boar and died. Aphrodite created the red anemone poppy from his blood, and claimed it as her sacred flower (Atsma). The name of the flower comes from the term “naaman,” meaning “darling,” which was ostensibly an “epithet of Adonis” (Frazer 792). The anemone poppy was not the only flower to gain its color from the death of Adonis. According to Frazer, “[t]he red rose also was said to owe its hue to the same sad occasion; for Aphrodite, hastening to her wounded lover, trod on a bush of white roses; the cruel thorns tore her tender flesh, and her sacred blood dyed the white roses for ever [sic] red” (Frazer 792). Red was also associated with Adonis by

the Phoenicians. His death was commemorated annually in spring when the youth's namesake river was colored blood-red with the soil washed down from the mountains. The color was attributed to Adonis' blood, flowing from the wound he received from the boar on Mount Lebanon (Frazer 791).

The association of this color with the various manifestations of love can be seen throughout the Greek mythological cosmology. The pomegranate, so integral to the myth of the Rape of Persephone, is both a manifestation and a thwarting of parental love. The poppy, made from the spilled blood of the lover of the goddess of love, can be seen as a referent to romantic love. The Greeks, always prizing the rational over the emotional, also set the cultural mainstay that red, like love, is a signal of potential danger. An excess of love can cause one to act irrationally, and place the good of the individual above the good of the *polis*.

Such mythological interpretations of red are echoed throughout many other world cultures. Many of these associations are catalogued in James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The "uses" of red include links to magic; ancient Hindus used red (through leather made of the hide of a red bull and infusions of water and the hair of a red bull) in homeopathic magic to rid the body of the yellow of jaundice (46-47); red face paint was used in magical ceremonies by women of indigenous tribes in British Columbia to ensure the victory of the men of the tribe in war raids (72); and red objects were used, in various primitive societies, to control the rain, sun, and wind through magic (155-199, *passim*). The Narrinyeri of South Australia used red ochre in a spell to curse a man via the food left on his plate after a meal (Frazer 477-478).

Red also denoted fertility in cultures other than the Greeks. For example, in Northern India, red string was used as a part of an offering to a tree spirit to ensure fertility in women, livestock, and crops (Frazer 285). In Europe, both the Maypole and the May King were decorated in red to symbolize fertility (Frazer 294-295). Also in Europe, the straw man condemned to “death” by the Whitsuntide King and Queen to ensure the fertility of the land was given a red cap prior to his “execution” (Frazer 317).

Red also had various other uses and indications. It was used in amulets to ward off illness. A skein of red wool wound around one’s arms and legs was thought to ward off fevers, and nine skeins draped around a child’s neck was believed to prevent scarlet fever in the child (Frazer 573-574). The color was associated with the Roman god Jupiter, and, as such, the statue of the god located in the temple on the Capitol in Rome was dyed red for festival days (Frazer 354). Red was also used in Maori culture to denote the one whose job it was to attend to the needs of those deemed unclean through menstruation or the handling of a dead body (Frazer 490).

Red also plays a major role in the canon of fairy tales recorded by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. It ranks with black and white as one of the three most commonly mentioned colors in their collected tales. Within these tales, it carries out all of the associations attached to it in the ancient world, but it also picks up at least one other symbolic meaning. Since it is one of the most visible colors, it triggers alertness, which is a good thing, since it also warns of potential dangers (Morton, *Colormatters.com*). In the tale “The Twelve Brothers,” the queen, who had borne twelve sons, becomes pregnant with a thirteenth child. Her husband, the king, claims that if the child is a girl, the kingdom will fall to her. In order to ensure this, the king asserts that he will kill his sons,

and even has twelve coffins made. The queen, out of love for her sons, reveals their father's plan to them, and concocts a plan of her own to save them. She sends the boys out into the forest, instructing them to sit in the highest tree and look for a flag she will wave upon the birth of the newest child. If the child is male, the flag will be white, and the boys can return home. If the child is female, the flag will be red, and they must flee. A girl, is born, and the queen waves her red flag. Here, the meaning of the flag's color is obvious: danger. The boys see the red flag; they cannot return home. If they do, it will cost them their lives. The text of the story explicitly describes the flag the queen waves as being "blood-red" (Grimm 60). This detail obviously specifies the connection with potential danger. If blood is visible, it typically means that someone is wounded, and, therefore, possibly in danger of dying. The danger associated with the color is also distributed by the boys, as they decide amongst themselves that, if they find their newborn sister, her "red blood will flow" (Grimm 60). Again, the red color of blood is brought to reader's attention to highlight the potential danger towards a character. In this case, however, the danger is not only to the boys, but also to the baby girl, their sister.

Later in the text, the girl, now living with her brothers, picks a bouquet and, in doing so, accidentally turns the boys into ravens. In order to redeem herself and return her brothers to human form, the girl must take a vow of complete silence for seven years. During that time she marries a king and is eventually accused by him of treason. As punishment for her supposed crime, she is to be executed on a pyre. The day her vow is to end, the girl, now a condemned queen, is tied to a stake, and a fire is lit. The fire begins "licking at her clothes with its red tongue, [when] the last instant of the seven years expired" (Grimm 64). This serendipitous timing allows the girl to proclaim her

innocence. Once again, red is used to explicitly indicate an immediate danger that is ultimately averted.

It is interesting to note that the color red represents potential danger to both the boys and their sister, but through different hues. The darker hue, blood-red, warns of the danger presented to the brothers by the girl. But the girl is threatened by the orange-red of the flames around her. If, as with the Greeks, different shades of red are representative of the two different genders, then at first glance these two hues in Grimm do not match up to the genders they historically represent. However, while they appear cross-gendered, these hues are appropriated not by the gender of the characters threatened by them, but by the gender of the characters *presenting* the danger. The boys, warned by the dark blood-red flag, are threatened by a female, their newborn sister. The girl, on the other hand, about to be consumed by the luminous red flames, is placed in danger by her husband, the king.

Red makes another appearance in the tales collected by the Grimm brothers. In “Snow-White and Rose-Red,” the titular characters are named for roses with their respective colors. The two girls befriend a black bear, who comes to their cottage every winter night in order to keep warm. When spring comes, the bear must depart from the kind little family in order to “guard [his] treasures from the wicked dwarfs” (Grimm 666). A few weeks later, the girls are sent by their mother to gather firewood. While doing so, they come across a dwarf “with an old withered face and a snow-white beard a yard long,” as well as “fiery red eyes” (Grimm 668). His beard is caught in the crevice of a tree. The dwarf, extremely angry at his circumstances, demands that the girls help him, so they cut off the end of his beard, freeing him. The dwarf then bitterly bemoans the loss of his beard and runs off, carrying a bag of gold with him (Grimm 668). A few days later,

the girls encounter the angry dwarf again. This time, the dwarf's beard is tangled in his fishing line, and a fish attached to the line is pulling the dwarf towards the water. Again, the girls are forced to cut the dwarf's beard in order to save him, an act that, once again, upsets the dwarf. He storms off, this time bearing a sack of pearls and cursing the girls (Grimm 669).

Several days later, Snow-White and Rose-Red come across the dwarf yet again. He is in danger of being carried off by a large bird, so the girls grab him and pull him from the bird's clutches, tearing holes in his coat as they do so. The dwarf indignantly berates the girls for destroying his coat before he runs off with a bag of precious stones (Grimm 669-670). As the girls return home later that day, they cross paths with the dwarf again. He has spread out his precious stones on the heath and is counting them. Upon noticing the girls watching him, his "ashen-gray face [becomes] copper-red with rage" (Grimm 670), and he once more yells at them. When he notices a large black bear, the girls' friend, coming towards him, he begins begging for his life. The bear does not grant his request, and kills him with a single blow (Grimm 670). The girls then discover that the dwarf had transformed the son of a nearby king into the bear that had befriended them. The treasure the dwarf had constantly carried with him actually belonged to the prince, and was stolen by the dwarf (Grimm 670-671). By killing the dwarf the prince regains both his form and his treasure.

This story echoes one side of the Egyptian beliefs about the color red. The character of the dwarf is reminiscent of the Egyptian god Set. Like Set, the dwarf is red-eyed and fiery-tempered. He is mischievous and, ultimately, wicked. He also presents a danger to a member of a royal family, recalling both Set's betrayal of his brother and the

general associations of red with danger. The dwarf's indignant ranting at the girls indicates his violent nature, yet another facet of his personality hinted at by his red eyes.

Red also carries another set of meanings in the Grimm canon. In the story "The Two Brothers," which was told in the earlier section about black, red appears in the form of cloth draped over the town when the huntsman returns a year after his initial encounter with the dragon. When he inquires as to the meaning of the cloth, he is told that this is done "for joy" (Grimm 300), to celebrate the wedding of the princess. The huntsman, as the rightful groom, prevents the wedding by presenting the tongues of the dragon, which he removed when he defeated the creature (Grimm 300-306).

In this instance, red is used to symbolize something different than anywhere else in the Grimm canon: happiness. This harkens back to the other side of the Egyptian interpretation of the color red. Here it represents life and victory, for it is used to celebrate the marshal's supposed success over the dragon that beleaguered the town. The color also marks a moment of revelation for the huntsman, as he now understands that that princess did not leave him of her own will. This occasions his victory over the ambitious and deceitful marshal.

The symbolic weight of red is not diminished by the passage of time, as it has been used in modern and contemporary culture as well. While the color does retain many of its associations from ancient times, its most common identification in western culture is with sensuality and seduction. One of the most common examples of this is the "lady in red." From Hester Prynne to Marilyn Monroe to Jessica Rabbit, the color red on a woman typically denotes "a strong personality," as well as "a form of sexual availability, a signal that she's ready to fulfill a guy's sexual desires" ("Lady in Red"). Red is also

used to indicate areas associated with sex and pornography—think “red light district”—in nearly every European country (Morton). While such indications of the color red may have their origins in ancient mythology, the association of an available sexuality with the color is more modern. And although this association with sexuality is commonly considered solely western, in most of Southeast Asia the color red is connected with love and marriage, not just sex (“Lady in Red”). However, in Japan a red underkimono is considered scandalous and is typically worn only by courtesans (“Lady in Red”).

But red also retains many of its old associations in the modern period. The most notable of these is a connection with danger. This is often portrayed through wardrobe, such as the “Red Shirt” characters on *Star Trek* and what TV Tropes dubs “Little Dead Riding Hood” (“Little Dead Riding Hood”). In both of these examples, characters wearing red are often in very serious danger of dying. Illustrations of the latter trope include the little girl in the red coat in *Schindler’s List* and the red coat Buffy Summers wears when attempting to fight vampires after losing her slayer powers in the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (“Little Dead Riding Hood”). The fact that red triggers alertness and captures attention leads to its use on fire trucks, which, in action, signal danger: fire (Morton). Another example of red being equated to danger is the cultural trope of the “big red button.” Said button is typically “initiat[es] the Self-Destruct Sequence, activat[es] the Ejection Seat, us[es] the Nitro Boost, sound[s] the Red Alert, [or] launch[es] a missile, rocket, or air strike” (“Big Red Button”).

The Greek story of Adonis is also echoed in modern times. In the United Kingdom, cloth anemone poppies are worn in remembrance of the fallen soldiers of World War I. This poppy is the same flower that grew from the blood of Adonis and

made sacred to Aphrodite in remembrance of her fallen lover. In this instance, red is used to denote commemoration of a tragic event.

Red, as the quote at the beginning of this section points out, is the color of danger and sex. It is indicative of love and even hate, since it is the color of the blood pumping through one's veins in the passion of both emotions. It is the color of the blood of angry men, and it is the lurid counterpart to the shades mentioned earlier. Its meanings were established in ancient times through the god Set and the myth of Adonis. The color, along with its significations, appeared in the Grimm canon, and it clearly shows up in modern culture as a symbol for sex, danger, and remembrance.

CONCLUSION

If we accept the limits of historical contexts and the cultural conditioning evident in every situation, we can see that the symbolism of color, and of these three colors in particular, has remained relatively unchanged throughout time. Yes, there has been some variance in the symbolic functioning of black, white, and red from culture to culture place, to place, and era to era. But from ancient times to modern, in the cultures of the West, black has meant death or evil; white has meant purity or otherness; and red has meant love, sex, or danger.

Each symbolic meaning has been socially constructed and transmitted, taught and deeply ingrained in the consciousness of multiple cultures. This process of cultural transmission, so closely interwoven with the very fabric of the culture itself, leads to the promulgation and reinforcement of the distinct messages generated by each color. These messages and associations become more subtle and nuanced within certain contexts, but the main thrusts of their symbolic associations are consistently solidified through time, growing continually stronger across the temporal spectrum. The various meanings of each color are both represented and supported in ancient myths, nineteenth-century fairy tales, and modern film and television.

This buttressing of connotative and allusive accretions is not performed solely in universally recognized myths, tales, and tropes. As has been seen, even the most obscure particles of knowledge—be they primitive myths, lesser-known fairy tales, or ephemeral productions of contemporary mass media—participate in and promulgate the symbolic meanings which have adhered to each of these colors.

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