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There Was a Little Girl: Fighting to Grow Up in the Academy (Or, No Barbies for Cheryl)

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A university tends to fall into the same category as religion, patriotism, and kinship: we seldom puzzle over it; we know what it means.

"There was a little girl
Who had a little curl
Right in the middle
Of her forehead.
When she was good
She was very, very good,
But when she was bad
She was horrid."
—Mother Goose

I haven't been a little girl for longer than I care to recall. And as for curls, I'm the perfect candidate for a permanent wave. Nevertheless, my own history in the academy tells me that despite the lack of resemblance between me and the little girl of the nursery rhyme, the binary established between good and bad--and more intensively between "very, very good" and "horrid"--suggests how female faculty are perceived, and, by extension, treated in the academic workplace. If we're not very, very good (by institutional definitions, of course), then we're horrid. And regardless of whether we are actually good or not, or whether we have curls or not, we remain little girls, to be either rewarded with beneficent smiles by department chairs and deans or punished by being sent to our rooms and having privileges abrogated.

Recently Terry Caesar compared the hiring process with a love affair: "it remains an affair with more than one connotation, and so many amorous overtones abide (from how either party 'woos' the other to how certain sorts of contracts are modeled on prenuptial agreements) that it would be tedious to list them" (239). He wonders rhetorically, "In the erotics of hiring, is the candidate always in the feminized position?" (239). I would argue that if getting hired resembles an amorous seduction, working in a department once the romance is over rehearses familial dysfunction. Or maybe not necessarily dysfunction. Rather, departments behave like families, with the chair (and the dean) in the position of patriarch and the female faculty member, once wooed and won, in the position of daughter in a family romance of Freudian proportions. To paraphrase Tolstoy and then flip him on his head (in what I recognize is a gross overgeneralization), each happy department is happy in its own way; all unhappy departments resemble one another. They feature a daddy administrator and kids who beg for the few favors. Granted, it's not Tolstoy, but you get the idea.

Institutional history may begin to suggest why women in the academy have been made to be perpetual

girls, have been made to endure a kind of enforced professional anorexia. We have had little of the power that accrues to numbers. Although women have made strides recently in terms of rank and salary, the fact remains that women are still clustered at the bottom of the institutional ladder. In 1982-83 women faculty and administrators "constituted 52 percent of instructors and 36 percent of assistant professors but only 22 percent of associate professors and 11 percent of full professors (Chamberlain 285). (And given the new economics of university employment, which seems to require that most tenure lines be converted to part-time or term positions, this situation is not bound to improve dramatically any time soon.) Without the muscle that accompanies a tenure line, women adjuncts especially lack a strong voice. Indeed, it is true that some women have more clout than ever before with more and more chairs and deans announcing budget reversions in soprano rather than baritone ranges. The number of women administrators has been steadily increasing: a 1985-86 Administrative Compensation Survey notes that of those administrators involved in Academic Affairs, 28 percent are women; in Administrative Affairs, 22 percent are women; in Executive Affairs, 9 percent are women (Chamberlain 320). While gains have been made in gross numbers, the gap in salary levels has widened (Chamberlain 321).

The 1992 study *Faculty Job Satisfaction: Women and Minorities in Peril* puts it most succinctly:

Today, women represent a small percentage of the faculty cohort, make lower salaries than their male colleagues, are found in the lower professorial ranks, are often employed in part-time rather than full-time positions, represent disciplines typically reserved for females, work in less prestigious institutions, feel that their supervisors do not value their input, and are not tenured.

The company, then, remains inequitable: the academic opera stars men, who permit the token diva to sing only occasionally (although the diva, impertinent as she is, often interrupts with demands for equal time and money).

But numbers tell only some of the fat facts. The real skinny must be inferred from the models used to explain academic culture. The first, and the one most often invoked by administrative types these days, especially administrators with experience in the business world rather than in academe, is the corporate model. As Seagren, et al. declare, "Department chairs in colleges and universities might feel somewhat distant from the boardrooms and executive suites of large corporations. But they face challenges of and opportunities for leadership not unlike those confronting the managers of industry and commerce" (26). The university president and his (generally "his") provost together become the chairman and CEO, students become customers, and universities are figured to be in business to provide a product in the McDonaldization of the academy. (A president becomes proud to say of enrollment "Over 22,000 served.") Using this model most women, whether bonafide staff, tenured faculty members, or senior administrators get figured as members of the secretarial pool, whose job it is to take the metaphorical minutes rather than to lead discussion, implement focus group discussions, or determine budget. They flip the burgers.

Others, however, have taken issue with the corporate model, objecting that colleges and universities "are not comparable to business corporations, which are created to provide goods and services for profit. . . . They serve clients whose needs are ambiguous, have highly professional staffs who expect to have a substantial say in decision making. . . and use teaching methods and research processes that cannot be described precisely" (Seagren 29). Seagren, et al. offer a history of models to describe universities as organizations, presenting first the bureaucratic and then the collegial models of higher education. Because these paradigms failed to describe accurately the functioning of the modern university, the political model, which evolved into the Organized Anarchy Model, had to be invented (60). (This descendent model "focuses on nonpurposive behavior and postulates almost completely random decision making; the extent to which it adequately describes college and university decision making is not clear,

and it has been suggested that it applies only to peripheral decision making" [29]. Many readers will undoubtedly believe that their universities function almost exclusively using this model.) After establishing universities as political entities, that may function anarchically, he introduces the cybernetic model, which suggests that several models used in combination might more accurately describe how the system works (60).

In this welter of political and corporate modeling, another model gets nearly drowned, at least subconsciously, and for good reason, since it does not give women an active, subjective voice. This paradigm of university management and interpersonal relationships bobs insistently back to the surface, however, no matter how we seek to suppress it. In discussing her life in the "larger institutional family of academia" (201), Madelon Sprengnether describes the difficulties she has encountered with some of her students and younger colleagues: "some of the more intractable problems are rooted in a mother-daughter dynamic so insistent, yet obscured, as to defy all but the most thoughtful and committed efforts to address" (204). The familial model is relentless, stubborn, persistent. For example, university president David C. Hardesty, in his "Remarks to WVU Department Chairs," compares the chair to a servant then, without even realizing the weird disjunction in his comparison, continues, "In this sense, you are the head of a family." In his State of the University address, Hardesty compounds his comparison of the university with the family in multiple ways by relating the story of a current dean who was nurtured by the president's father-in-law, a former university faculty member: "Phil was to later say that he considered Professor Brown the 'grandfather' of his students." And just recently, Hardesty defended his hiring of a Special Assistant for Communications, a position with an annual salary of over \$75,000, by stating, "We're a very large family, and staying in touch is very important to the future of the University" (Hutkin). Indeed, it appears that Hardesty (and many, many other upper-level university administrators) has literalized the *alma mater* metaphor, making the figure serve as rationale.

Similarly, in their discussion of the work of the department chair, Seagren, et al. note that "A chair's work must be profoundly influenced by the internal workings of the *parent* organization" (35, my emphasis), sliding right over the implications of that conventional familial metaphor. More often than not, though, in these families the mother figures are either few or absent, despite the recourse to the nostalgic invocation of *alma mater*. The chairman and dean fathers wield their institutional power as a matter of course. A female faculty member gets to be the daughter, forever currying the favor of the academic dad so that every now and again she will be permitted to borrow the T-bird. (Suspicion is high, I expect, that we cruise to the hamburger stand, and forget all about the library like we told our old man.)

Granted, these corporate and familial models, may be used in tandem, like Seagren, et al.'s bureaucratic, collegial, political, and cybernetic paradigms of university governance; however, I would contend that when the corporate model is invoked, it appears only with a thick overlay of familial sentiment, like the human body in an old *World Book Encyclopedia*, which is covered with filmic representations of the various systems, muscular, skeletal, nervous, vascular. If the organs are the corporate structure, it's still the skin of community that holds the structure together and allows it to function. As Julius Getman has commented, academics like the idea of community and experience alienation and disappointment in its absence (266). And community is merely a stepped-up vision of family.

Once we recognize the pervasiveness of the familial model, we can understand some of the curious dynamics both within university departments and within university colleges; and prepare to address what a Freudian model might reveal about academic culture. Gayle Greene, for instance, talks about expending during her years at Columbia "enormous energies trying to get the attention of people who turn out not to have been looking, over what turns out not to have been the point" (269). This seems to me clearly to describe not only how feminists during Greene's era attempted to make their presence felt at academic institutions but also how girls try to get their fathers to take them seriously, often to no avail. As Emily Toth laments that women in academe must always play the dual role of teacher and woman: "They may be

asked for advice about sewing, interior decoration, and gift giving; if they're short, they may be called 'our little assistant professor,' and even be patted on the head" (Toth 38).

While I have never been called "our little professor" (perhaps because I am 5'7"), I have several times been hugged, not sexually but familiarly--yet nonetheless inappropriately--in a professional setting. (I have also been consulted on gift-giving and on party-throwing.) The first time occurred when I protested sectarian prayers being offered at the state university where I taught. I was hugged by the provost and asked, "Cheryl, honey, would you feel better if we got a rabbi to come in and do it?" (Such is the paternal response to a daughter: "What can I do to make the hurt better, dear?") The second time occurred when I introduced a candidate for an endowed chair whom I was touring around campus to my dean, who proceeded to hug me and briefly explain to my professional friend how endearing I am. In academe, the failure of women's attempts to catch the eye and ear of their superiors on a professional level has often left these teachers and researchers, feeling, according to Madelon Sprengnether, as though they had been "'wildly unmentored[,] [a]bandoned by [their] institutional fathers" (203).

What exactly is going on with these father-daughter dyads? How is it that this familial model so fraught with potential for disaster continues to be perpetuated? If one checks not the research on mentorship but rather the administrator's--chair's and dean's--"conduct" books, "how-to" texts for the contemporary administrator/manager in the know, one will see that the language used to describe the ideal administrator uncannily (or perhaps not so) resembles the language Shere Hite reports in *The Hite Report on the Family: Growing Up Under Patriarchy* as used in describing fathers.

The Introduction to the Hite Report begins the following paragraph:

Love and anger, love and obedience, love and power. Love and hate. These emotions are all present in family relationships. It's easy to say that they are inevitable, that this is "how it has to be", that stresses and strains are unavoidable, given "human nature". To some extent this is true, but these stresses and strains are clearly exaggerated by a tense and difficult family system that is imposed upon our emotions and our lives, structuring them to fit its own specified goals. (1)

If we substitute "academic" for "family," the paragraph makes a different kind of sense than Hite intended; however, the shift in meaning is not too terribly far removed from the subject at hand since relationships in the family and in the academy elicit very similar emotions indeed. In fact, the family, as I will continue to argue, serves administrators as the chiefest metaphor for the academy, loaded as it is with warm, fuzzy connotations. Administrators, however, seem to forget that the family can also be the battleground for some of the bloodiest skirmishes of a young girl's life. Hite explains, "The family was left out of the democratizing of political life beginning in the West over two centuries ago" (1). As we shall see, the academy, too, has been left undemocratized under patriarchy.

According to Hite's historical narrative, "[t]he family in patriarchal religious tradition has always been a hierarchical family, one headed by the father" (353), where, as a result, sexism finds its originary site. The father is a God-like entity whose power is unquestioned (353). Hite reports 59 percent of her respondents describing their love for their fathers as "respect," a term used ten times as often in reference to fathers as to mothers (193). Fathers also elicit "fear," a term employed in "81 per cent of answers about fathers, but only 7 per cent answers about mothers" (193). The tone used by respondents in describing their "love" for their fathers is "remote." During the twenty years Hite compiled her results, responses varied little: Children knew and understood their mothers far better than their fathers, who were taught as boys to be authoritative and distant.

No matter whether they be men or women, deans and chairs are perceived (and perceive themselves) as filling a patriarchal subject position. Julius Getman's description of faculty response to the upper administration virtually echoes Hite's report on the reactions of children to their fathers: "the attitude of the rest of the faculty toward high-level administrators is often a complex mix of resentment, respect, fear, and envy" (97). This characterization only thinly veils the fundamental familial relationship underlying the professional veneer. From the other perspective, chairs and deans maintain the prerogative of the patriarch to reward and punish:

High ranking administrators. . . have the power to affect the lives of faculty. They play a key role in appointments, have primary responsibility for setting salaries, vote on leave requests, assign teaching responsibilities, appoint committees, and represent the institution to the outside world. (97)

They are accused of "play[ing] favorites," "holding back the development of a school or department" (98). They freely exert the power accorded them by virtue of the authority of their positions. In fact, according to Seagren, et al., "Chairs are expected to have personal power, a power that must be earned by gaining the respect of faculty members and others in the university and beyond" (32). Power and respect (and the frequently attending fear and resentment) describe responses to father figures both within the academy, that is to deans and chairs, as well as within the family to "real" fathers.

Which is not to say that the "children" all perceive their "dads" as power-hungry monsters programmed by eons of gender patterning to eat them alive. Joan Jeruchim and Pat Shapiro tell the story of Gina Carbone, a 42-year old tenured associate law professor, and Stan Risosky, her mentor at a prestigious West Coast law school. We are told "Stan, like a caring father, initiated her into the elite world of tenured male professors" (67). Gina and Stan experience, the authors suggest, a model mentor-protégé relationship: "Intimacy, which forms the core of mentoring, creates special feelings on the part of the protégé toward the mentor, who is an authority figure" (68).

Jeruchim and Shapiro continue:

Such figures lend themselves to an identification with a parental figure. Some of this is conscious, such as when the mentor is an older man, but much is unconscious. A woman many not recognize that she perceives her mentor as a father figure. She understands only that she's relating to an authority figure of the opposite sex in a way that feels safe, comfortable, and nonsexual. Perceiving the mentoring relationship as a father-daughter pairing makes a sexual liaison unthinkable because of the incest taboo. (68)

The mentor is like a nurturing parent (71). Bringing familial models into workplace relationships, they reason, is "safe [and] comfortable" (85).

As Cathy, today's daily comics working-woman might say, "ACK!!!" Granted, Jeruchim and Shapiro get closer than any of the administrators' conduct books in describing the influence of the family model on academic relationships. They are entirely blind, however, not only to the eroticism Hite notes in fathers' responses to their daughters' sexuality (which is a topic for another day) but also to the additional complications raised by the use of the father-daughter model. In other words, although they recognize rather than dodge the familial model, sublimating it to the corporate model or even to the Organized Anarchy Model, they completely disregard the implications of making an administrator the father figure for the faculty daughter.

As Roland Barthes remarks: "Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? . . . Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred"?

(qtd. in Hirsch 52). The story we have told thus far about fathers and deans, dads and chairs, does, I would suggest lead precisely back to the blind spot in the dream of symmetry. It is at our own peril--and at the peril of the health of the institution--that we disregard or even ignore Dr. Freud here. For his family romance can tell us quite a bit about the organization and behavior of the academic family. In this narrative, women are children, specifically daughters. As Sarah Kofman puts it, "By virtue of [their] unassailable libidinal position, women can be compared with children, with great birds of prey and cats, with great criminals as represented in literature, and with humorists. . . . they are fascinating because of their because, which constitutes the basis of all desire" (53).

Marianne Hirsch uses her feminist rewriting of the Freudian Family Romance to explain why mothers are significantly absent in the nineteenth-century realist novel, their disappearance opening up the space for creative daughters (and the creators of the daughters, like George Eliot, the Brontes, Jane Austen) to function. As Hirsch explains: "My argument here is that nineteenth-century women writer's resistance to those plots [of the family romance, e.g., the "foundling" plot and the "bastard" plot] existed but was limited, indeed, that they, like Freud, saw the woman's story through what Luce Irigaray has called 'the blind spot of an old dream of symmetry,' that is, through a fundamentally male economy of desire in which the woman is other but cannot be different" (130). The males (fathers and brothers are interchangeable, really) retain all power: sons dream of inheriting it by taking the father's place; daughters dream of marrying it and thus obtaining access to the phallus (or to a substitute penis, i.e., a baby). Thus, Hirsch continues, the "'female family romance' implied in Freud's essay is founded on the elimination of the mother and the attachment to a husband/father" (). Freud's family romances are "plots which explore the consequences both of maternal repression and paternal alliance" ().

For female faculty members, these romances could appear under the title of a well-known nineteenth-century novel, say (*Non*)*Sense and Sensibility* or *Jane Eyre (I Become a Tenured Associate Professor)* or even *The (Diploma) Mill on the Floss*. These romances are performed daily: maternal repression is the rule; paternal alliance the name of the game. And the female faculty member? The daughter? She must necessarily curry favor with her father figures--chair, dean, head of various committees--if she is to get appropriate course assignments, be granted research opportunities and funding, be awarded tenure and promotion, get her own students, and thus be transformed, egad, into a mother, that most threatening of figures. As Madelon Sprengnether puts it, "As long as the Oedipus complex remains identified with the stage of mastery in masculine development which acts as a prerequisite for civilization, moreover, the mother will continue to represent a threat to both" (227). The body of the mother *is* the uncanny, and an "aura of fear" surrounds the mother "as a cultural as well as a personal phenomenon" (243). In the Lacanian child's game of "Phallus, Phallus, Who's Got the Phallus," when Mom's got it, we've arrived at Armageddon.

It is in the father's best interests, then, not to allow Daughter to grow into the castrating Mother; better Mary, Mary Quite Contrary be kept underage (and underpaid though overqualified), the better to be disciplined, my dear. For as object relations theory points out, a vocal mother, who expresses her own needs and desires, is one seriously threatening babe: "When she ceases to be self-sacrificing, her power manifests itself in harmful ways" (Sprengnether *Spectral Mother* 187). She is a threat to the development of her infant; but more significantly, perhaps, she is a threat to the culture.

This woman is the grown-up girl who, in Freudian terms, has refused "to recognize the 'fact' of her castration, a fact that does not suit her at all" (Kofman 203). She has not followed the "normal" path to adulthood through the Oedipus complex, instead, choosing the path of "a powerful masculinity complex" whereby the girl refuses to discard her masculine tendencies, clinging instead "with defiant self-assertiveness" to her masculine side (Freud qtd. in Kofman 203). Kofman critiques Freud's language, which suggests, she asserts, someone incredibly stubborn, someone who has the audacity not to hold herself in contempt, not to feel humiliated. . . . not to recognize her own inferiority; someone who, as a

result, endangers the supremacy of the male sex and at the same time the Freudian speculation that attempts to legitimize that supremacy. (203)

Such a woman never experiences penis envy; she believes she is a male, that she actually *has* a penis. This woman is often a lesbian and is thus exempt from the psychoanalytic paradigm, from participating in the Freudian family romance. She is, as Kofman explains, an exception that proves the rule (204).

Such a woman imperils patriarchal control of the family, of the institution. Better to arrest the masculinized girl's growth early. Better to make her beg for discretionary dollars. Better to punish her before she does anything subversive as a warning: take away the T-bird *before* she cruises to the hamburger stand. Just recently a male colleague asked me why I, a full professor, was teaching Freshman Composition, when I had explicitly asked not to be assigned to the course because I am untrained in the specialty and feel inadequate in the composition classroom. I said I had no clue. He replied, "You are being punished for being outspoken." (Naive and, perhaps "daughterly" as academic as well as familial culture has expected me to be, I hadn't even entertained such an idea before that moment. And the fact is that I am, frankly, *not* that outspoken: I am only perceived as such. Perhaps because I played women's rugby while in graduate school?)

Apparently, although some men on my campus figure me in a daughterly role, others have rewritten me as just this girl who refuses to recognize her own castration, who has the audacity not to hold herself in contempt, not to feel humiliated. . . not to recognize her own inferiority; someone who, as a result, endangers the supremacy of the male sex. (It is true, I will admit, that my single ambition as a little girl was to grow up to be a big boy: I knew who had the power in the world, and I wanted some for myself. No Barbies for Cheryl.)

Two unrelated incidents measure how my refusal to recognize my own castration has written itself all over my academic history. The first example occurred in a committee reviewing my grant application for summer research funding to complete a book-length project. The chair of the committee, a member of my department, noted that my referees were all men and thus could not be expected to give an unbiased report, implying in no uncertain terms, of course, that women/girls/I, the case in point, sleep with our referees. (Finishing the book, of course, would have given me leverage in terms of job opportunities and external funding not available to most of the committee members at the time.) I was not funded despite the fact that my rankings for the project on Henry James were among the highest in the batch of applications.

I was made aware of the second example through a phone call by a colleague who is an acquaintance rather than a close friend. One evening he could keep his incredulity to himself no longer and needed to get to the bottom of what was a moral dilemma for him: whom to believe. "Cheryl, I'm sure you've heard about the rumor circulating in the hallways." "No, in fact, I haven't." "I heard that you are planning a coup and seizing the department chairmanship for yourself." "Huh?" "And the chair knows all about it." I called my chair, who confirmed that, yes, he had heard the rumor, which he hadn't really put much stock in. As I investigated, I got the full narrative, which included additional intrigue. I was supposed to be a radical lesbian separatist--Freud's masculine-fixated exception to the normal course of female development; moreover, I was supposed to be the surrogate--in fact, the academic daughter--of another department faculty member, who was spending the year abroad on a Fulbright Fellowship. He was phoning and e-mailing with instructions on how to achieve revolution.

I have no illusions about my power when I am assigned courses that I specifically request not to teach (because I have been taught to sacrifice for the "family") and when rumors are spread to undermine the credibility of my scholarship or other professional activity on the basis of my sexuality. I have no illusions about the power of other women in the academy when my best girlfriend had to endure a year of sheer hell

as she was harassed by the faculty member in the office next door, who broke into her office, ripped up her plants by the roots, and stole her young daughter's doll, returning it with freshly scribbled genitalia. Neither do I have illusions about other Others in the academy, when an administrator dismisses an articulate but emotional analysis by a gay faculty member as hysteria.

The family model has been mystified and naturalized in academic culture so as to be as invisible as the anatomy transparencies in the World Book Encyclopedia. The transparency that tells the difference is the one indicating the reproductive system. For those of us with wombs, Bartleby's Tombs are too good. (Moreover, we are denied the privilege of saying that we prefer not to if we prefer to be tenured.) What, then, is to be done?

I would fervently argue that we must recognize the implications of reading academic relationships through a familial scrim. The organizational model of the family imposes the problems of patriarchy upon even the most well-intentioned chairs and deans, not to mention presidents. Thus scripted, they treat the women in their units as daughters or as their daughters' mothers. At best, we are petted and treated like fragile day lilies, like Daddy's Pride and Joy; at worst, we are condescended to, used, and abused. Granted, I may be overstating my case here: plenty of women in the academy are treated respectfully by their chairs and deans, who sometimes are other women.

The point remains, however, that the familial model is pervasive. We need to work with it, to see it in all of its Freudian complexity rather than to see it as a sort of reductive nostalgia that makes us think we know what we're dealing with when we sing along with Sister Sledge "We are family." We needn't be reminded one more time of the out-of-whack statistics on divorce or child abuse or dysfunction or unhappiness in family life at the fin de siecle. I don't think a nostalgic appeal to "family" is the answer; it cannot function as what T. Barry Brazelton calls a "lovie," i.e., a security blanket to keep us feeling in control. We all need to grow up and put our Linuses behind us: in the working world, at least.

We *could*, in fact, borrow some concepts from industry. A mentality that encourages team work, cooperation, and collaboration might be instituted across academic culture, which would mean that the administrative hierarchy (and patriarchy) would need to be reformulated. I think this unlikely, however: all-encompassing paradigms do not change without a scientific revolution (pace Thomas Kuhn). Would the family need to become something altogether different first? (It is changing its constitutive parts rapidly these days: Beaver Cleaver seems as though he's living in Bedrock.) Am I putting the cart before the horse or, as it were, the T-bird before the keys?

It is enough of a struggle to grow up within one's nuclear as well as extended family. Long ago I came to terms with being assigned the familial role of the Wicked Son (even though I am a daughter), not only at the Passover Seder but throughout the year. (Comments, Dr. Freud?) But I expect to be treated differently in the public sphere. My administrators are not my fathers. I am not their daughter. And when they play the paternal role, I am horrid indeed.

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