The Odd Things Just Stand Out More:

Brevity in Short Fiction and the Amplification of Uncanny Narratives in Motherhood

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Introduction

Short Stories are...

What is a short story? To James Cooper Lawrence short stories are the "oldest literary form," while Susan Lohafer qualifies that short stories are the young art form bred from the oldest literary expression—storytelling (Lohafer 8, 9). Mary Rohrberger describes short stories as short fiction, with many types of short fiction bearing a name besides "short story." "There are sketches, fables, tales, parables, and yarns that are sometimes called 'tall tales'" (4). Renate Brosch of cognitive narratology addresses "short stories as [a] specific reading experience," citing the power of images as the most defining, describing tendency of short stories (165). Allan H. Pasco formulates a short story as a "*short, literary prose fiction*;" each defining word escaping a conclusive meaning, and "*short*" being the most elusive of all ("On Defining Short Stories" 118). Pasco's definition encapsulates the breadth of short story definitions provided, but I want to focus on the particular attention he gives to the "short" quality of short fiction—to brevity.

Rohrberger's categorization of varied "genres" under short fiction speaks to the influence of brevity in uniting these works, in influencing a reader's perception of the genres enough to give a reason for cross-associating parables with a modern short story. Reading the numerous interpretations of what a short story is, it soon becomes clear that no matter which effect or technique the theorist spotlights in short fiction, narratively or formalistically, brevity can be traced back as the root cause of said effect. I argue that the structuring of brevity creates one specific, pervasive effect that can be found in all brief works under the umbrella of short fiction—myths, parables, fairy tales, tall tales, legends—and not just "short stories." The effect in question is a subtle feature that lies dormant within all short fiction, engendered by the brevity

of a work, and always present if not acknowledged, at times inducing an unfinished, unsettling, uneasy feeling.

It is the vague feeling of unease, a fleeting subtle feeling that was hard to grasp and hard to name that put me on the path of this thesis. At first, I noticed this feeling most in my readings of fairy tales and folktales. A suffocated oddness I could not really express, but I chalked it up to the fantastical happenings of these genres. I then began to notice it more in short stories toeing the line between ghosts and delusions, but again attributed it to the otherworldly aspects of the story. However, after reading stories where the off-feeling was easily connected to the plot, I became deeply familiar with the feeling I couldn't let go of. Attuned to its presence, I began to notice it in a wide variety of genres—always to a different extent but also always there. When reading short stories, I would feel this odd, liminal pulse no matter the subject matter or narrative or form. It did not matter if the story was realistic or bordering the realm of otherworldly; recording a conversation or spanning a lifetime; more lyrical or poetic; presenting a horror or love story—something seemed to unite these texts and all I could guess was the obvious—they were short.

Eventually, after much reflection and reading, I believe that the feeling I am searching for *does* in fact come from the brevity and I have decided to term this as "uncanny potentiality," the feeling that is created from short fiction's brevity. There are specific uncanny characteristics that are inherently present within short fiction; characteristics made indistinct by readers' expectations of the genre, yet still affecting the reader in a cycling of familiarizing and defamiliarization of the text. The existence of these characteristics and their relationship to brevity and the reader is what creates uncanny potentiality, and it is the development of uncanny potential and its effects in short fiction that I will examine in this essay. By analyzing the short

story 〝魔女〞 [Witch][i] by 歐陽子 (Ouyang Tzu),[1] I will identify uncanny potentiality as it presents in a short story and dissect the influence of uncanny potentiality in magnifying similarly uncanny narratives. I will specifically analyze the effects of uncanny potentiality in enhancing the theme of motherhood in 〝魔女〞—a theme that also contains inherent uncanny characteristics that can be overlooked or utilized similarly to uncanny potential. I will also compare 〝魔女〞 to the short film "Patision Avenue" directed by Thanasis Neofotistos, which similarly deals with motherhood. By comparing the processes of uncanny potentiality in the short film to the short story, I will identify the amplifying effect of uncanny potentiality as it is only found within short fiction.

However, before examining how short fiction can utilize uncanny potentiality, I will first begin by defining in-depth "uncanny" as it will be used throughout this essay. After understanding the use of the uncanny in relation to the hidden familiar and unfamiliar, and the "doubling" result, the connection to brevity becomes clearer; allowing me to outline the specific effects of brevity that develop uncanny potential in short fiction and illustrate the relationship between brevity and uncanny potentiality as it is found throughout brief works.

Uncanny

> The German word '*unheimlich*' is obviously the opposite of '*heimlich*' ['homely'], '*heimisch*' ['native']—the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar. Naturally not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation is not capable of inversion. (Freud 220)

In Sigmund Freud's essay on the uncanny, he dedicates much time to analyzing the relationship between unheimlich and heimlich, focusing on the complicated status of

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[i] Translations will be bracketed after the original Mandarin and are my own unless otherwise indicated. Pronunciations will be provided in parentheses when deemed helpful.

"opposites." Unheimlich, the uncanny or unfamiliar, could be considered the opposite of heimlich, the familiar. However, Freud clarifies that the opposition of these words is not so simple as to allow direct definitional inversions, since "some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny" (Freud 221). Uncanny, as I will use it throughout this essay, is built on the convoluted relationship between the unfamiliar and the familiar and the relationship's influence in supporting a doubling effect.

The caveat to "opposites" that Freud explains is illustrated in the subjective simplicity present in "inverted" definitions. One of the definitions of uncanny Freud lists is created from inverting the definition of heimlich as "what is concealed and kept out of sight," so that "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (224 – 225). This definition of unheimlich avoids the initial problem of inverting familiar-heimlich to define unheimlich, which resulted in the lackluster definition of uncanny as "novel and unfamiliar." However, it is plagued by a similar vagueness. What does it mean that unheimlich "ought to have remained secret"? Ought to have remained hidden for whom? What is better off having remained hidden? Which secrets should stay secret and become uncanny when revealed? There is a subjective quality to both heimlich and unheimlich that intertwines the concepts, making them inseparable and difficult to define. Uncanny is not just unfamiliar or revealed, but it is specifically that which is unfamiliar in comparison to the familiar; something revealed that people know of and believe should *not* be revealed. Identifying the uncanny is largely dependent on identifying the norm that it strays from, and it is this dependency that short fiction muddles, creating a near universal potential for the uncanny.

For a reader to identify the uncanny in short fiction, they must first have an established familiar from which to compare, but short stories withhold or imply much of their "norm." Like a puzzle with missing pieces, it is difficult to grasp a complete image of the story setting or narrative, with the reader having to infer hidden or implied information from the pieces that they are given. However, this is to be expected from short fiction, as a reader understands that not everything will be conveyed in a story due to its brevity. Therefore, the familiar *is* the hidden or unacknowledged gaps of short fiction, normalized by expectations—a typical secret accepted and unquestioned. It is in these familiarly vague gaps, which emulate the familiar-unfamiliar tension within "uncanny," that short stories can extend their uncanny potential to their narratives. The gaps in the narrative can be odd or misleading, but they are then pushed back into obscurity by the acceptance created by expectations. They do not disappear, just fade into the background, easily able to be pulled forward again to be used by the narrative to dismantle the reader's assumptions and rebuild a world—a process which in its own way is another expectation of fiction but holds more influence in the limits of short fiction.

Building off of the push-and-pull of uncanny gaps, another effect of uncanny potential in short fiction is the development of doubling. One definition of the "double" that Freud provides is when a subject has a "doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self," such as in doppelgangers or identity crises (234). This interpretation of doubling is closely interrelated with the relationship between familiar and unfamiliar. In the constant circling and adjusting of what is familiar and unfamiliar in short fiction, a process intensified by the brevity, the reader can find themselves faced with a multitude of narrative realities and interpretations constantly replacing themselves, reidentifying the narrative. For Freud, a double is a means of projecting "all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy," and while reading, a

reader will manifest similar doubles of possibility for a text (236). The possible expectations and

narratives are constantly in flux, held in a reader's mind until the end of a story when the chosen

path is revealed.

The uniquely mutable quality of uncanny in short fiction which contributes to its status as

potential in short fiction, instead of a steadfast defining trait, is indirectly acknowledged by

Freud when he questions the applicability of the uncanny:

> It may be true that the uncanny [unheimlich] is something which is secretly
> familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then
> returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition. But
> the selection of material on this basis does not enable us to solve the problem
> of the uncanny. For our proposition is clearly not convertible. Not everything
> that fulfils this condition...is on that account uncanny. (Freud 245)

Freud then goes on to list a series of stories that fulfill the qualifications for uncanny, some

fulfilling the uncanny feeling while others "produce no uncanny effect whatever" (246). What I

find interesting is that the examples that Freud compares are almost overwhelmingly examples of

short fiction. Hauff's fairy tale, Herodotus's story, Polycrates, fairy stories, Hans Christian

Andersen's works, and even stories of the New Testament. Freud outlines the qualities that are

found in the stories but only manifest in some and determines there must be another factor in the

production of the uncanny. His use of the "uncanny effect" in relation to his short fiction

examples confirms two things: what becomes uncanny is very much reliant on the perceiver, and

short fiction is a format which can contain the "other elements besides those which [Freud had]

so far laid down as determining the production of uncanny feelings" (247).

Short fiction *can* contain, but not always produce. I argue that the "other elements"

needed to produce an uncanny effect are the reinterpretations of heimlich/unheimlich and

doubling that I define, in conjunction with the expectations of the perceiver. What is the reader's

expectation of a narrative's norm? And how does the narrative defamiliarize it? The potential for

uncanny, without the necessity of fulfillment, becomes an expectation of short stories.

Short Stories are...short

> Overall, perhaps more is lost than gained if we say a short story is a story that is short, thus separating the elements of the compound noun and pointing the way toward a reduction of story to plot and plot to events ordered both in time (sequentially) and by means of cause and effect relationships (logically). But "story" is more than plot; "short" is more than temporality; and 'short story' names a complex entity, perhaps aptly described as "an inseparable web of vibrating energy patterns in which no one component has reality independently of the entirety; and included in the entirety is the observer." (Rohrberger 5)

—which is why I must elaborate the relationship between "short" and "story." I have

quoted Rohrberger at length as a reminder that I am not essentializing short stories to their length

but am instead striving to isolate and examine one thread in the web of connections between

brevity and reader. Brevity—briefness, conciseness—is the structure of shortness attributed to

short fiction. In his article "The Short Story: The Short of It," Allan Pasco adopts Paul Zumthor's

term "brevity" in his exploration of the "shortness" quality of short stories. In his adoption of the

term, Pasco builds off of Zumthor's article "Brevity as Form," and his focus on the narrative

limitations of brevity. Zumthor's argument outlines a series of characteristics emblematic of

brief works, concentrating on structural and narrative choices. One example is Zumthor's stance

on conclusions; "[a]s a rule, no causality extrinsic to the initial situation will be introduced

during the course of the narration: the end is an absolute end"—an assertion that I myself will

complicate later on (Zumthor 79). Another claim of Zumthor's is that brief texts focus on the

present and presentness, that the present is what "*every brief form of discourse aspires to* as its

desired end," making them unable to explore development (76).

While Pasco gives credit to Zumthor's perceived importance of brevity's influence, he

disagrees with Zumthor's "examples of formalizing factors imposed by brevity," ("The Short of

It" 444). In particular, Pasco presents Zumthor's argument of presentness as restrictive, generalizing and universalizing qualities not necessarily found in all short stories as requirements. In response, he reinterprets Zumthor's brevity definition, moving from specific formal qualities to an emphasis on an exploration of effects rising from brevity—elaborating the *relationship* between author choice and brevity effect. Pasco's reinterpretation of brevity is best displayed in his presented question, "What happens *because* short stories are short?" (444). It is this question that guides Pasco's examination of brevity's influence and will shape my own path and understanding of brevity throughout this essay.

The rephrasing of Zumthor's effects shifts the approach to brevity from consideration of the author's and text's aspiration towards a "desired end," to an emphasis on the author's consideration of reader. With this adjustment, Pasco defines qualities and effects that revolve around conceptions of the reader. How will the reader interpret? What will the reader remember? When deciding which information to provide in a short fiction narrative, "authors of brief works have no choice but to assume that readers not only forget nothing, but they also perceive and conceive everything" (445). It is not explicitly because of narrative limitations that brevity influences short fiction, but because of *desired effects.* The length of time a narrative spans, or the events that might be portrayed in short fiction are chosen not based on what can best be conveyed in brief texts—a possible argument for Zumthor's emphasis on presentness—but chosen depending on the author's desired response from the reader.

One effect that Pasco examines more thoroughly from a reader's perspective—the effect that he, in fact, considers the most influential of all of brevity's effects—is a resulting "noticeable intensity" (450). Readers pay attention to everything in short fiction to get as full an image as they can, so "not only are authors forced to assume that readers will perceive each

word, image, rhythm in a story, they tend to place extraordinary weight on every element" (449). All elements of a story from names, colors, smells, dialogue, geography, themes, patterns, sentences, single words and on and on are always placed under a hyper-focus—they are imbued with importance. "Even when the tale focuses on tranquility, the spotlight shines so brightly on the quality that it almost quivers with energy" (447). Therefore, the most leverage brevity exerts on the structure of short fiction arises from the reader's response to brief works—not necessarily because brevity limits authors' choices (though it might influence them), but because brevity changes how an author's choice is received by readers.

It is interesting to apply Pasco's reversal approach to other theories of short stories and see the connection to reader intensity. In the first chapter of *The Art of Brevity*, Rohrberger discussed how "[w]hat was usually stressed by academics at the time was the notion of necessary brevity and the bit about no word being written that did not contribute to the one preestablished design" (Rohrberger 2). However, by placing the root of influence on reader response, it can be understood that it is not so much that *every* word is written for a specific end, but rather, as Pasco said, every word remains fresh in the reader's mind throughout the story. Furthermore, as shown in Rohrberger's brief history, there is also the expectation of significance associated with short fiction. Readers believe the pieces presented to them were curated and chosen to be put into the work for a specific reason, consequently assigning a larger significance than would be present in a longer text and further emphasizing each puzzle piece themselves.

By understanding the intensity of brevity in relation to reader perception, the first hints of uncanny potentiality take root. Everything is intense. Everything is noticed. Everything is important. Intensity places many elements on the same level of importance. What happens when everything seems to be, and could be, important? It becomes easy for everything to then fade into

the normalcy of "importance." The push-and-pull of brevity's effects and consequences mimics the defamiliarization I find important to feelings of uncanny. Everything is intense and new, unfamiliar, but then *everything* is intense, establishing intensity as the normal and familiar. The intense normal is a situation which becomes a tool that writers can use to distract, muddle, overwhelm, or further emphasize. It becomes an expectation for the reader of short fiction to maneuver around; constantly vigilant for the potential that any element could suddenly be revealed and restructure the reader's perception of a story as they near the end.

From this approach, the importance of brevity's effects stems not so much from how it structures the narrative, but how it *presents* the narrative to the reader. Brevity imparts certain expectations on the reader, influencing how the reader will perceive certain elements of a narrative. The expectations of brevity then act as the familiarizing aspect of uncanny potentiality. Brevity's intensity pushes short fiction's uncanny characteristics back from the foreground of the reader experience, hiding the narrative's uncanny tension under the intense normal and generalizing expectations of the reader. The alternating effects of brevity created from the interaction between reader and text is the foundation of the text's spacial instability that then fosters uncanny potentiality.

"魔女" **Analysis**

Assembling the World

Written in 1967 Taiwan, Ouyang Tzu's "魔女" (mó nǚ) explores the relationship between an adult daughter and her "perfect" mother. Qianru's[2] mother has recently remarried after the death of Qianru's father, leaving Qianru terribly disillusioned with her mother due to not only the speed at which Mother remarried, but also her disagreeable choice of husband, Chao Kang. The story begins with Qianru reminiscing on her Mother while waiting for her roommate

Meiling—whose affair with Chao Kang Qianru enabled to punish and prove her mother wrong—

to return. Almost the entirety of the first half of the story takes place during that night of waiting

as Qianru wrestles with the tension between her perception of a perfect Mother and the

remarriage. The next morning, Qianru receives a letter from her Mother where Mother seems to

acknowledge and apologize for her mistakes, asking Qianru to return. The second half of the

story all takes place during Qianru's visit where she reveals the affair and her involvement, only

for her Mother to then confess her own truths of adultery, indifference, and deceit, directly

contradicting how Qianru had perceived "her mother [as] the incarnation of all virtues" (Chu

358).

Qianru and Mother's relationship reflects the changing portrayals of women in literature,

portrayals utilized by Taiwanese women writers of the 1960s, such as Ouyang Tzu, to establish

themselves as national intellectuals, part of the literary canon through their "emulation of

Western 'high culture'" (Chang xx). Adopting the modernist styles such as stream of

consciousness and displaying a skepticism of "established ethical and social norms and

[attempts] to penetrate more deeply into human psyche" (xxi), "魔女" is one such text to

complicate the typical structures surrounding motherhood through the evaluation of Mother and

her fulfillment of that role. Through the exploration of Mother in "魔女," the reader is

encouraged to question the ideal expectations placed upon Mother in contrast to her personal

nature.

Instead of portraying Mother and Qianru as idealized women fulfilling their roles,

Ouyang Tzu delves into their desires and actions as simultaneously working within and against

the constraints of society. The expectations placed on Mother are most overtly developed, since

"one can state that heterosexual marriage and motherhood are mandatory institutions for

Taiwanese women," and Mother's depiction of filial piety, fidelity, and composure initially validate said statement (Chen 47). However, the story also conveys Qianru's contradictory roles as daughter and symbolic enforcer, and how they become convoluted and blurred by her personal feelings. As the story progresses, the contrast between desires and roles demonstrates the uncanny doubling inherently present within motherhood, with the uncanny potentiality of the short story format utilizing brevity's intensity to further highlight these uncanny characteristics within the narrative.

Due to the brevity of the text, the reader has to quickly infer the narrative setting and genre. As a result, one means by which "魔女" begins to develop the uncanny doubling of roles in motherhood is by exploiting the reader's expectations through the level of questions to mislead the reader. H. Porter Abbot presents the attainment of closure within narratives as achieved through the level of expectations and the level of questions. For "魔女," the first level the reader truly engages with in this specific story—excluding the default expectations created by associations of a "short story"—is the level of questions. The level of questions is when "we anticipate enlightenment" and goes hand-in-hand with the implied corresponding "level of answers" (Abbot 56). Compared to the level of expectations' anticipation of narrative structure, which is manipulated later, the level of questions is the method of engagement in which a reader searches for information about a character, storyworld, and narrative. The level of questions and answers act as a "thread of information (and disinformation) [that] keeps us going until the narrative (in most cases) provides the answer and closure comes" (57).

Just from the reading of the title, the story introduces particular questions to the reader, building the uncanny potential of the story by developing certain expectations of the narrative for the reader to anticipate. In particular, the title "魔女" introduces a pivotal presiding macro-

question. Elaborating the influence of questions on the narrative, Noël Carroll clarifies a difference in question types: "[q]uestions that structure and entire text or, at least most of it, we can call '*presiding* macro-questions'" (Carroll 5). Then there are micro-questions "whose answer will contribute eventually to answering presiding macro-questions, but which [do] not, on [their] own, answer the relevant presiding question directly and completely"—micro-questions could even be extended to include the inherent, default curiosities a reader might consider in an effort to parse out more of the storyworld (6). In the implications of its meaning, "魔女" presents the first presiding macro-question to drive the reader's engagement with the narrative. "魔女" is the Mandarin term for "witch" or "devil woman," with "魔" (mó) meaning "devil/magic" and "女" (nǚ) meaning "woman." Reading this title, the reader is told to associate the story with a witch and subsequently search for a woman to associate with "witch." It is important to note that there is no distinction made about what type of woman a witch must be; she could be a sister, friend, mother, daughter. The ambiguity further engages the reader through the level of questions, presenting the implied macro-question of, "Who is the witch?" Therefore, when the reader learns about Qianru's enabling of the affair and betrayal of loyalty for her mother, the seeming answer is presented as Qianru, the cruel daughter—making the latter reveal of Mother's twenty-plus year affair all the more shocking.

In Mandarin, the title introduces a question to ground the reader in the story and establish expectations that the narrative might address the question raised in the title. The two translations of the title into English approach the building of expectations from different routes. Ouyang Tzu's self-translation of the title into "Woman Possessed" retains the ambiguity of the titular woman's identity created in the title "魔女"—giving no clue as to whether the title is referring to the Mother or Qianru, and similarly leading an English reader to an initial assumption that the

woman possessed is Qianru. By refraining from the "Witch" translation, Ouyang Tzu is able to avoid the magical connotations strongly associated with "witch," instead focusing on the evil/demonic/*possessed* aspect of the story and influencing the direction of the reader's focus while reading. Considering Ouyang Tzu's desire to avoid the magical connotation in the English translation, her choice of "魔女" for the Mandarin text can be confusing since "魔女" still contains clear supernatural associations. However, in choosing to title the story "魔女" (mó nǚ), there is an audible evocation of the phrase 母女 (mǔ nǚ) [mother-daughter], potentially composing another means of expectations for the reader through verbal association.

In both the Mandarin edition and Ouyang's English translation, the title gains a deeper meaning in the ending's reveal—a twist not quite present in Chu Limin's translation of the title as "Perfect Mother." By titling the story "Perfect Mother," Chu immediately draws attention to the Mother's perfection and the daughter's perception of her Mother. Not only does this move suspicion away from Qianru, the possible red herring, but the title also keeps the reader's focus on the Mother, possibly encouraging more suspicious readers to question the statement of a "Perfect Mother," lessening the impact. Instead, Chu creates her own twist in the title by having the ending truth about the mother make the phrase "Perfect Mother" retroactively ironic.

Each title chooses which piece of the picture to give and guide the reader. Each piece then steers the reader's attention towards a particular expectation of the story's complete image, leading the reader to investigate a certain way to decipher that specific image. The implied question, "Who is the witch?" directs the reader's attention towards the women of the story, and the narrative itself visually maintains this focus by taking advantage of the intensity of brevity in conjunction with the inherent indistinct nature of fiction. With the guidance of the first question

raised in the title, and the resulting expectations of the narrative, the level of questions leads the reader in the process of visualizing the story, utilizing the spotlighting aspect of brevity.

Visualization, as defined by Ellen Esrock in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* is the "production of mental images in the process of reading (qtd. in "Experiencing Short Stories" 96). Visualization is an important aspect of the reader's engagement with a story because "[e]very narrative needs a certain amount of localized setting. In order to be able to imagine the actions, events, and characters of a narrative, we must attribute them to spatial coordinates, some indication of locality named or anonymous" ("Experiencing Short Stories" 99). In anchoring a narrative to a specific setting, the reader will shape their expectations to the circumstances of said setting. If a story takes place in a seemingly real-world setting with no otherworldly elements, then a reader might not expect a sudden alien invasion. Vice versa, an underworld epic suddenly having the main characters stop at a Starbucks is a different, unexpected tone. While the actual process of visualization is reliant on the reader's engagement, the reader still uses information provided by the story to assemble the setting. The information a story presents to a reader impacts the development of the storyworld. How a story influences the development of a story through the elements presented can then affect the story's connection to uncanny potential.

In "魔女," the story's means of worldmaking utilizes intensity and the necessity of visualization to further distract and redirect the reader, obstructing the visualization process. The first paragraph of the story immediately places the reader in an obscured setting.

> 宿舍裡靜寂無聲。同房間其他六個同學,早已安然入眠,倩如聽得到她們輕微而均勻的一呼吸. (歐陽 183)

> [It was silent in the dormitory. The six other roommates have been peacefully asleep for a while, and Qianru could hear their light and even breathing.]

The story is introduced into an environment emphasized as silent and dark. 靜寂 (jìngjì)

[quiet/silent] and 無聲 (wúshēng) [noiseless/silent] are used in conjunction to stress an

overwhelming quiet only disturbed by breathing. Compounded with the sleeping girls' implied

darkness of night—a darkness confirmed by a comment on the lights off curfew—muffles the

audible and visual senses of the narrative for the reader to visualize. Therefore, "魔女" builds off

the default vague environment that results from written works, not only mimicking but

emphasizing the inherent gaps of short fiction *as* the story's "normal." By constructing the

storyworld, the familiar, on vague, concealed grounds, "魔女" makes the uncanny characteristics

of the story its "normal"—diminishing the uncanny effect on the reader while retaining the

characteristics' influence and importance on the narrative. Essentially, at this point in the story

the normalization conceals the uncanny potentiality, neutralizing much of the uncanny feeling

that is actually felt by the reader.

     The canonically hidden environment, normalizing and combined with brevity's inherent

intensity, gives the text more leverage to direct the reader's eye—and it trains the eye to closely

follow Qianru.

> 她從床上側起身，在黑暗中，看到她書桌上的鬧鐘，已指著兩點半。而
> 美玲的床鋪，卻還是空的。(歐陽 183)

> [She got up from her bedside, and in the dark, she looked at the alarm clock on
> her desk, it already pointed at two-thirty. And Meiling's bed was still empty.]

The text provides limited information on the setting, only offering objects to ground the reader's

visualization as Qianru interacts with them: her bedside, the alarm clock, the desk, the clock

hands, then Meiling's bed. The methodical approach to the description of Qianru's interaction

with her surroundings simulates Qianru's gaze, placing the reader within Qianru's perspective

and setting up the practice of visualizing the setting directly in relation to Qianru.

Even the quiet of the dormitory was given significance through Qianru with the only sounds heard immediately tied to her. Qianru was depicted as "聽得到她們," directly meaning "can hear them." Instead of using "能" or "会," the characters meaning variants of "can do" and commonly used to depict ability, the phrase used is constructed of "聽" [to listen/hear] and "得到" [to obtain or receive]—explicitly tethering the sound of breathing in the dorm to Qianru's reception of it. The quiet of the dorm and breathing are sounds as she perceived. Overall, the reader's introduction to the environment is closely tied to and comes from Qianru, directing the reader's attention towards her and prompting the reader to inhabit Qianru's perspective.

"In following the trajectories of gazes, observations, and movements from one place to another, visualization constantly resituates the reader. Yet the reader is able to move around in a largely unspecified environment where certain features may stand out, but the general surroundings remain quite indistinct" ("The Iconic Power of Short Stories" 182). The transition from the first to second paragraph utilizes the unspecific nature of a reader's movement in text by validating the darkness and using it as a technique to foreground Qianru and her thoughts. "在黑暗中，她睜著兩眼，凝視旁邊空空的床位，感覺心頭的急躁與不安，一陣陣加深" (歐陽 183); [In the darkness, opening both eyes, she stared at the empty bed next to her, feeling her irritable, uneasy thoughts deepening]. By constantly situating the reader in darkness, a metaphorical black, blank page is presented to the reader—a page on which Qianru's thoughts are then drawn. From the blank page, the text presents the empty bed and the negative feelings Qianru feels, and the feelings are amplified by the fact that they are some of the only concrete details presented to the reader at this time—the only details a reader can direct the entirety of their brevity-intensified attention towards.

The means of obstruction "魔女" employs is effective because of how it makes use of the uncanny potentiality present within its form as a short story. The unknown aspect of the short story's environment is already emphasized due to the intensity of attention provided by the reader, but the narrative actively furthers the unknown development, making it familiar and distracting the reader from the vague environment in the process. It is a technique uniquely effective in short fiction. The short film "Patision Avenue" simulates the same utilization of intensity, but as a visual medium it is unable to employ a similar visualization distraction and must rely on other techniques to ultimately support an uncanny motherhood narrative.

"Patision Avenue" is a long-take short film that follows a woman through Athens on her way to a final audition for a part in a Shakespeare performance. As she walks, the woman, named "Yannis' mum" in the synopsis, has a series of phone calls with her son, Yannis, her sister, and her son's father as she tries to find a caretaker for Yannis, who has been suddenly left alone by the nanny, Mary. From the outset, "Patision Avenue" has a stronger grounding in "normal" by virtue of its visually provided setting. Throughout the whole short film, the camera follows Yannis' Mum, keeping close to her and moving with her. She is always center screen, her face never showing and the camera almost directly behind her head, jostling along with her and providing the viewer with the perspective of someone following right behind Yannis' Mum.

The closeness of the shot replicates "魔女's" spotlighting of Qianru. While the darkness in "魔女" kept the reader's visualization of the setting directly surrounding Qianru, due to Yannis' Mum taking up the majority of the screen's focus, the background provided to the viewers is always peripheral. Both on the streets of Athens and on the screen, the background is visually and physically directly relational to Yannis' Mum. Furthermore, the speed of much of the film is fast. Yannis' Mum is very animated and walks at a quick pace through Athens,

constantly in motion. Even when she stops at a crosswalk, she talks on the phone energetically and bats at the balloons of a balloon-seller passing by ("Patision Avenue" 1:40). The energy and emphasis placed on Yannis' Mum keeps the viewer's attention on her.

As a result, the viewer of "Patision Avenue" is simultaneously less distanced and more distanced from Yannis' Mum than a reader of "魔女" is from Qianru—separate from Yannis' Mum's perspective yet given more opportunity for immersion within the narrative. While the viewer of "Patision Avenue" is placed behind Yannis' Mum, watching her more than embodying her like the reader can Qianru, the viewer has another means of engaging with the film. "In short stories, the images never become concrete as in a movie but remain transient and evanescent, always potentially adaptable and amendable to new knowledge presented by the narrative" ("Experiencing Short Stories" 96). The necessary adaptability required of a reader of short stories keeps them distanced from a work, unable to fully immerse and commit to a story. They are constantly faced with unanswered micro-questions about the environment—questions about the dorm structure, campus structure, orientation of Meiling and Qianru's beds—that are not necessarily expected to be answered, but the possibility that they could be keeps the reader's visualized setting nebulous.

The short film has less need for a viewer's adaptability. Instead of the assembling puzzle of written works, the viewer is already presented with a complete image of a visual environment and all of the details it provides—a background on which to isolate information to make assumptions and draw conclusions; instead of using information to make assumptions about the background. Therefore, the short film holds less inherent potential for possibilities and uncanny doubling, less potential for the effacing of distinction between familiar and unfamiliar, and overall, less uncanny potential—which is strongly founded in the structure of a text. The

reversed process allows the viewer to direct more of their attention to the narrative itself, immersing themselves in the characters.

In a short film particularly, which holds the same limited expectations of brevity and intensity that short fiction has, the narrative is the main means of deciphering story possibilities. The spotlight placed on Yannis' Mum emphasizes her dialogue as the means of presenting questions, which can then either be quickly confirmed or denied by her surroundings—depleting the tension and intensity of her words. "On Patision Avenue? I can't see any demonstrations" ("Patision Avenue" 1:53). And neither can the viewer. Many questions are introduced to the viewer. What is Yannis' Mom doing? Who are Yannis and Anne? Is she a performer? Where is she going? Where did Mary go? But they are either immediately answered by setting or conversation or overshadowed by the presiding macro-question, "What will happen to Yannis?"—demoting them to background micro-questions.

The setting even contributes to the importance of the Yannis macro-question. When Yannis' Mum learns that Mary isn't with her son, she is walking under some trees. The trees cast her in shadow and block some of the street sounds so that "Are you home alone now?" is followed by a sudden quietening, with the sounds of bugs louder and more prominent (2:40 – 2:57). In this way, the visual becomes the means of distraction, either confirming or complicating the dialogic narrative. There is still the expectation of brevity, the understanding that only so much narrative can be told in twelve minutes, and since the narrative seems so linear and straight-forward, "What will happen to Yannis?" is the question and expected closure the viewer pays attention to, pushing other aspects of Yannis' Mum's conversation out of one's mind. The visuals are immediately pushed into the background, but its presence gives the viewer less motivation to dedicate the same amount of attention to every bit of information provided—

lessening the intensity of the film's brevity. Yannis' Mum mentions demonstrations, she mentions short hair, but these comments, with no obvious visual grounding, are forgotten under the suspense of Yannis. So, when Yannis' Mum tears off her ponytail extension (3:25), and loud bangs and screaming sounds out (5:55), the viewer is startled, surprised by the seemingly sudden interjection before they can recollect her conversations and fill in the context.

Both the short film and the short story utilize the intensity of brevity to create a visual tension in support of the narrative's uncanny characteristics. While the visual nature of "Patision Avenue" prevents it from experimenting with the uncanny potential created from the gaps of short fiction, it utilizes its visual medium to distract the reader with immediate, lackluster answers and direct the viewer's intense attention where it wants—recreating gaps in expectations within film. Contrariwise, in the first half of the story, before Mother's revelation, "魔女" maintains the hazy, instability of the storyworld; particularly through the constant interjections of "darkness:"

> *在黑暗中*，倩如翻了翻身，把頭埋進枕頭裏。 (歐陽 183)
> [*In the dark*, Qianru turned over, burying into her pillow.]

> 從枕頭裏，倩如擡起頭，又望望鬧鐘。 *在黑暗中*指針閃出磷光，指著
> 三點十分。 (187)
> [From her pillow, Qianru started to rise, again glancing at the alarm clock.
> *In the darkness* the middle needle glowed, pointing at 3:10.]

> 宿舍房門咔嚓一聲，慢慢開啓。 *在黑暗中*，倩如辨認出美玲的身影，
> 走進房來。 (188)
> [The dormitory door clicked, slowly opening. *In the darkness,* Qianru
> recognized the figure coming as Meiling, entering the room.]

—to mislead the reader. While Qianru reflects on her mother and the complicated situation in which she's put herself, the text continuously forces the reader to embody Qianru's perspective, preventing them from visualizing a larger storyworld outside of Qianru. "In the dark" Qianru

fidgets as she waits for Meiling; the figure of Meiling enters from "[i]n the darkness." As a result, the reader is distanced from the setting beyond Qianru, only including other main characters as they enter Qianru's sphere of attention. The distance increases the odds of the reader fostering empathy for Qianru, encouraging the acceptance of her actions' justifications and disappointment in her mother.

By making the reader adopt Qianru's perspective to understand the world, it is through Qianru that the reader comes to understand the world of "魔女." Qianru is the lens through which the reader decides what is normal, the main factor in how the uncanny potentiality of a text will be used. Seeing through her eyes influences which "visualisations that accompany a reading process [will] hover below the threshold of awareness" for the reader—which characteristics, typically uncanny or not—are pushed back into the obscurity of "familiar," and which will stand out to the reader as unfamiliar ("The Iconic Power of Short Stories" 169). The influence Qianru exerts on the reader can be best shown in her introduction of Mother.

Uncanny Motherhood: To BE Mother

> 媽媽的再婚，破壞了倩如心中對媽媽一向保持的完美印象。倩如不能原
> 諒媽媽如此使她失望。從出生以來，她一向愛媽媽甚於任何人. (歐陽
> 184)

> [Mother's remarriage, it destroyed the perfect impression of Mother that
> Qianru had held of her. Qianru could not forgive Mother for disappointing her
> this way. Since she was born, she had always loved Mother more than any
> other.]

After the revelation of Qianru's betrayal and immense guilt, but before Mother's own confession, the initial, apparent answer that Qianru is the witch of the title prompts a deeper engagement from the reader on the level of expectations. "At the level of expectations we recognize, by numerous signals, the kind of action or sequence of events that we are

reading…Once actions start in a certain way, we expect what follows to be consistent with the overall code" (Abbott 54). If Qianru is the witch and feels guilty about the affair, it would make sense for the narrative path to include Qianru accepting responsibility and seeking forgiveness— a reader wouldn't be faulted for expecting a family story of growth and reconciliation. However, alongside Qianru's guilt are her justifications of her actions, not only introducing the reader to the Taiwanese role of motherhood[3] via Mother's portrayal, but consequently also creating roughly outlined pockets of expectations that then lay the foundation for the psychological study the narrative becomes. The presentation of these justifications utilizes the familiarity aspect of brevity to simultaneously highlight and normalize the uncanny aspects of motherhood, complicating the narrative expectations by constructing hidden uncanny gaps around Mother.

  Mother is first introduced to the reader through Qianru's perspective, only referred to as "Mother" throughout the story as the reader becomes intimated with Qianru's complicated feelings: the immense love and disappointment that she feels towards her mother. In Qianru's first thoughts of her mother, she remembers how Mother dismissed Qianru's doubts about Chao Kang, Mother's new husband. In her dismissal, Mother comes across as passive in her choosing of Chao Kang, implying some weakness in Mother's character that makes her unable to see Chao Kang's flaws. But Qianru quickly establishes that Mother's imprudent choice is not the norm, and so unexpected as to have "破壞了倩如心中對媽媽一向保持的完美印象" (歐陽 184); ["destroyed the perfect image [Qianru] always had of her"] (trans. Chu 358). "破壞" (pòhuài) meaning destruction and "to break," is a powerfully negative word, conveying the extent of Qianru's perceived betrayal by Mother's seemingly thoughtless and passive remarriage. Qianru's *perfect* image of her mother was not only changed by the marriage, but it was *destroyed.*

Qianru's violent rejection of her mother's actions convey not only Mother's betrayal, but also introduce the imposing expectations Qianru has placed on her perfect mother. Qianru claims that [since she was born, she had always loved Mother more than any other], and so placed Mother on a pedestal, building her love around a perceived perfection and developing the standards of motherhood within the story. In her detailed listing of every quality of Mother's perfection, Qianru focuses on superficial qualities and descriptions with an emphasis on how Mother was perceived by others. After stating "[s]he loved everything about Mother," Qianru follows with the qualities of "her slim figure, clean-favored face, her steadfast as well as gentle character;" very outward facing qualities that affect how Mother would present herself to others (Chu 358). Qianru's love for Mother is built around her social performance and Mother's ability to meet standards of character and beauty.

Since Qianru is the reader's means of understanding the world of "魔女," her building of Mother's pedestal of perfection is presented as, not quite common, but acceptable, and even socially desired. It was Mother's horrible error, dismantling said pedestal, that Qianru paints as the true perversion of how things should be—the real corruption of the norm. With the initial macro-question seemingly answered, Qianru's disappointment has created the new presiding macro-question of the story: "媽的轉變，又能怎樣解釋？" (歐陽 185); [Mother's transformation, what else could explain it?] However, even as Qianru establishes the real fault in Mother and directs the reader towards the "change" in Mother, there are inconsistencies in Qianru's accounts of past perfection that highlight the doubled uncanny characteristics within both Qianru and Mother.

As shown by others' attitude towards her, Mother was both reified and isolated for achieving the perfect qualities. Qianru presents the isolation as further justification for praising

Mother. Mother was so perfect that "人們和她在一起，難免有點戰戰兢兢，總覺得她像是他們的「良心」" (184); [that people are always cautious with her because they always feel like she is their "conscience"]. Qianru further elaborates on the usual response to Mother, qualifying her description with "難免" (nánmiǎn), a word comprised of the characters "難," meaning "difficult," and "免," to "spare/evade," therefore quite literally meaning "difficult to escape." By using "難免" instead of another word that would directly mean "unavoidable," the use of "難免" emphasizes the struggle in trying to approach Mother well-meaningly, but unable to escape the negative feelings that arise. Mother's uncanny perfection will always inevitably be met with "戰戰兢兢" (zhànzhànjīngjīng). "戰戰兢兢" is composed of the characters "戰," meaning war or battle, and "兢," meaning cautious, and can be used to mean "quivering or trembling with fear," or to do something cautiously due to the association of battle and caution with fear.

Instead of using another word to convey hesitation, "戰戰兢兢" not only conveys hesitance to the reader, but an unspoken unsettlement and fear of Mother's perfection. Any interactions with Mother are situated as predetermined to follow an ostracizing path, normalizing unease as a common, justified reaction towards her and further implying Mother is someone deserving of a reaction so universal. The following sentence further confirms the fear-inducing qualities of perfection, when "因此，人們雖然敬愛她，有時卻不敢正視她。甚至想逃避她" (184); [As a result, even though people love and respect her, they nevertheless sometimes cannot dare to face her. So much so they want to escape her.] The use of "敢" (gǎn), meaning to dare or to venture, quickly followed by "逃避" (táobì), meaning to escape, evade, or run away, illustrates the anxious effects of Mother's perfection. Neighbors and friends' undisguised discomfort contrasts the reality of Mother's behavior against the norms that Qianru expects.

Qianru presents perfection as a familiar given and to stray from perfection is deviant, unfamiliar; but the apprehension with which others approach perfect Mother borders on agitation, sharply contradicting Qianru's love and revealing the uncanny reality of Mother's perfection.

The peak example of Qianru's familiarization of the unfamiliar is her usage of "良心." Altogether, the beginning of Qianru's explanation conveys people's resistance to Mother as stemming from their confrontation with her uneasy, shaming status as "conscience." However, "良心" (liángxīn), while directly translating to "conscience," holds a uniquely negative connotation. Although, objectively, "良心" as Qianru structures it implies a good meaning— Mother *is* a conscience, she is fair and just—in Mandarin, "良心" is most often used in accusing contexts to imply a lack: such as, "Have you no conscience?" The quotations around "良心" in the text seem to refer to the ironic usage of the word, however, it is applied to Mother in such a way that *she* becomes the judgement of lack. Qianru does not imply that Mother lacks "conscience" herself, but instead is so perfect as to seemingly hold the authority to judge others for their lacking what she holds.

Still, even if at face value the text and Qianru attribute to Mother the moralizing, *just* authority ascribed to a "conscience," the word itself still holds negative connotations for a Mandarin reader and creates an association between Mother and the perception of lack implied with the word. Through this association, the text builds up within the reader another pocket of uncertain, contradictory feelings in relation to Mother—providing the reader with a means of questioning Qianru's outline of "normal." However, even as the text provides a means of questioning Qianru, it continues to simultaneously prevent the reader from extending beyond her, further utilizing the uncanny potential of familiar/unfamiliar tension to heighten the motherhood tension within the narrative. While Qianru's description of Mother's excessive perfection is

plagued by odd anecdotes and the reader's understanding of the mere unlikelihood of perfection, Qianru believes it to be and presents it as normal. Qianru's adamant interpretation that Mother's remarriage is the one flaw of an otherwise perfect being, instead of a normal misjudgment or moment of weakness, compels the reader to dismiss any suspicious interpretations of Mother—but the signs are still there, lying in wait as uncanny potential. A dissonance between two perceptions of mother, concurrently bred from the narrative just beyond the reader's perception—the root of motherhood doubling.

Mother's perfection is to the extent of inhuman, presenting the reader with a modified characteristic of the uncanny, the "uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton" (Freud 227). While Mother's actual status as a flesh-and-blood human is not called into question, the way that people besides her daughter react to her put into play an uncertainty about the validity of her perfection and personhood outside of Qianru's eyes. Perfection should be unattainable, but the weight of that reality is quickly dismissed in the narrative because of the framing of Qianru's thoughts and limited time. Qianru frames her Mother's remarriage as the shattering of her perfection, but the neighbors' and friends' reactions are a small acknowledgement that the initial, perceived perfection might not have been as respectable as Qianru believed and lead the reader to believe. The reader can acknowledge these inconsistencies, since another important aspect of a reader's cognitive engagement with a text is the process of conceptual blending, "not just a fusion of images and ideas, but a simultaneous awareness of different possibilities" ("Experiencing Short Stories" 97). But again, the reader is constantly absorbed into Qianru's perspective, using the constant obstruction technique earlier to ease the vigilance with which the reader considers potential possibilities. As a result, the reader quickly dismisses the others' reactions as Qianru did, and now "[the reader's] attention is not

focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately" (Freud 227).

Besides developing uncanny potentiality around Mother, Qianru's description of what Mother has done to earn her love relays the superficiality of Qianru's love and admiration for her mother, creating a doubled role for herself as well. By highlighting Mother as comprised of ideal qualities, Qianru establishes that it is not Mother as a person herself that has garnered respect, but instead Mother's ability to fulfill her societal role and expectations. Qianru's source of love is the foundation for her own doubling as she is not only a loving daughter in awe of her mother, but she is also a participant of the society which makes demands of Mother.

Qianru is a daughter who feels entitled to her Mother, expecting she forever be the ideal woman in Qianru's eyes that she had always been before. Qianru's entitlement as daughter demonstrates the standards placed upon mothers in Taiwan while simultaneously questioning their existence by making the upholder of these standards a daughter cruel and vindictive in her spoiled demands of her mother. When her mother makes a mistake in her virtue, instead of respecting her mother's personal wishes and autonomy, Qianru feels betrayed and becomes deeply disappointed in her mother. In the Mandarin text, Qianru's comment on loving her mother is phrased as, "一向愛媽媽甚於任何人" (歐陽 184). In Mandarin there are several words to mean "always" with different uses and connotations for each word. The specific connotation of "一向" (yīxiàng) translates to "*had* always," a past perfect translation, elaborating the lasting change in opinion Qianru now holds towards her mother. The destruction of opinion has already been irreparably changed. No matter the respect previously held for her Mother, no matter that this was the first time Mother fell short of perfection throughout Qianru's, a college student, entire life, Qianru would not forgive her mother. Instead, Qianru takes it into her own hands to

punish her mother and prove her wrong. Instead of acting as the child, Qianru behaves as a disappointed parent disrespected by their child's improper behavior.

Even as Qianru displayed a devotion to her mother, she simultaneously becomes a manifestation of the extreme societal entitlement surrounding expectations of motherhood, "the deeply-rooted cultural notion of women as patriarchal tools…[as] a further reification of the female body, making motherhood per se more an institution of oppression and less a source of emancipation" (Chen 48).[4] Since the reader's introduction to Qianru's dilemma is filtered through her perspective, Qianru's uncanny doubling of her genuine love for Mother (shown in her favorite quality of Mother's) juxtaposed with her authoritarian mentality do not contain uncanny effects to the same extent of Mother's doubling. Brevity's intensity makes it easier for the text to guide the reader's attention through the narrative, allowing Qianru to direct the reader towards Mother while pushing back the implications of Qianru's unreliability by foregrounding Qianru's entitlement, both shaming and justifying it throughout the story.

Eventually, when Mother confesses, her faults mirror Qianru's, pulling Qianru's own doubling back into the spotlight, hidden before in plain sight by taking advantage of the brevity of the text. Due to the limited time allotted to the qualities of both Qianru and Mother, each must be taken at face value, enhancing the build-up of Mother's doubling through the foil of Qianru's. Daughter enacts the oppressive force of motherhood by monitoring Mother's actions and behaviors, enforcing the identity of "Mother." Mother is "Mother" and "Mother" is not allowed a single mistake. Understanding this, it becomes easier for the reader to understand Mother's perspective in the second half of the story.

The revelation of Mother's true nature explores the tensions between motherhood expectations, changing female perceptions of motherhood, and the reality of women's minds.

When Mother reveals her true nature, she is shown as a woman who sees herself as neither the mother nor wife by which she is known. Mother was more selfish for far longer than Qianru's entitled enablement of Chao Kang's affair. Mother didn't care at all for Qianru or her previous husband, and none of the virtuous roles that she fulfilled were driven by faithful intentions; instead, her ideal actions resulted from or hid her affair and hidden love.

Besides her devotion to Chao Kang, Mother has no feelings towards anything. Mother's complete admission of indifference towards Qianru and Qianru's father illustrates the reality of Mother's obligatory acceptance of a position as wife and mother. Mother admits,

> 我求他，我告訴他，他不必同我結婚，只要收我做他的情婦，我就心甘
> 情願。只要給我那麼一年兩載，和他日夜廝守，那麼，等他對我厭了，
> 我死也甘心，死也瞑目. (歐陽 198)
>
> [I begged him, I told him, he didn't need to marry me, if only he would accept
> me as his mistress, I would happily be his right away. So long as he would give
> me a year or two like that, to be like that with him day and night until he
> rejects me, I would be willing to die, I could die peacefully.]

If Mother could have been with the man she loved, she would have refused marriage and its cultural benefits. When she couldn't be with the man she loved, she found herself forced to wait in secret under the pretense of social norms because any woman who did not adhere to the social expectations of a woman—any woman "who is not heterosexual, [is] an overage single woman, or an unwed mother is...culturally defined as a deviant with defects and is legally disadvantaged as such" (Chen 47). While Mother would have waited for Chao Kang, societal pressures around her compelled her to follow normal conventions and get married, have children. By marrying Qianru's father, Mother was able to wait, unjudged and undisturbed, until Chao Kang would accept her love. Mother actively created another persona to perform, a completely separate identity of "Mother," whose performative perfection provided her with the confidence and skill

to maintain a marriage, motherhood, and affair simultaneously without any suspect. She was

aware of the doubling aspect of motherhood, the adoptable identity, and weaponized it.

The extent of Mother's performativity as "Mother" is shown in her use of the first person

"我" ["I" or "me"]. Throughout much of the story, Mother is not referred to by any other name

or title but "Mother." In the Mandarin text of Mother's letter, the first time the reader is

introduced to Mother's perspective, role as identity became unavoidably obvious when even

Mother referred to herself in the third person "Mother" and not "I"—emphasizing the importance

of her role. Excluding "我們" [we], there is only one usage of "我," and it was used to

emphasize Mother's relationship to her daughter with "我親愛的女兒" (歐陽 189); [my dear

daughter.] Otherwise, Mother continues to refer to herself in third person, even in person. When

first welcoming Qianru home, Mother says, "Ma thought of you a great deal," and "Ma was

thinking all the time about you, whether you were well" (Chu 366). The change to first person

shown in the above passage doesn't begin until, after violently grabbing her head, Mother

releases Qianru, apologizing, "I frightened you, didn't I?" (Chu 367). Afterwards, Mother

exclusively uses "我" to explain her feelings and story. "I begged him--," "--I told him--," "--

accept me--," "--I would be," "--give me--" "--I would be willing to die--," "--I could die

peacefully." Her violent action, directly contradicting the gentleness Qianru had praised so

much, was the first crack in her "Mother" mask. As Mother continues to claim her possessed

identity, a split between "Mother" and the woman in love with Chao Kang becomes apparent.

After revealing the extent of her passion, Mother forwent her performance and embraced her

individual identity as "I," the contrast revealing the purpose of "Mother" and "Ma" as a means of

hiding Mother's illicit true feelings.

The sharp contrast between Mother as Qianru perceived her and Mother as "I" is amplified by the text's earlier concealment of any uncanny characteristics through familiarization. The extreme to which Mother was perfect is objectively odd—ideals are ideals because they are unattainable. Yet, Qianru was absolutely convinced that Mother truly was her perfect mother, and so presented, to both herself and the reader, a mother previously uncomplicated but now suddenly "changed." By presenting perfect Mother as the familiar from which to refer to when searching for a reason behind Mother's transformation, the consideration that Mother was actually returning to her own familiar was obscured by the text's normalized ambiguity.

Instead of the mistress position Mother begged for, she adopted an unfamiliar identity as her new norm. By marrying Qianru's father, Mother was able to wait, unjudged and undisturbed, until Chao Kang would accept her love. She was not allowed to openly pine for an impractical man who

> ---卻是個最墮落的，不務正業的花花公子。他瞧不起婚姻。寧可嫖妓女，不要一個固定女人。他有時收養情婦，有時情婦收養他。但總是喜新厭舊，總沒一個固定的. (歐陽 196)

> [—is really the most depraved, a playboy who never does honest work or attend to his duties. He looks down on marriage. He would rather have a prostitute, not an assigned woman. He will sometimes take in a mistress, sometimes a mistress will take him in. But he always prefers the new and gets bored of the old, he will never have a fixed woman.]

In her explanation of Chao Kang's unfavorable habits, Mother breaks down the social barriers preventing her from waiting for Chao Kang. Chao Kang provided none of the social benefits or social commitment that would have allowed for Mother to become a good wife and wise mother—fulfilling her womanly duty. He did "不務正業"; [not engage in honest work], meaning he would have had no means of providing for her and a family. The possible interpretation of

"not attending to one's duties" also conveys the wrongness of choosing Chao Kang, a man who would not have fulfilled his husbandly duties, not allowing Mother to attend to her own duties, neither performing the expectations of an ideal family. He refused to commit to a woman, instead preferring prostitutes, revealing his financial priorities and stubborn refusal of marriage. Furthermore, the use of "收養" (shōu yǎng), which is usually used in the context of adoption between a parent/child, adult/child, or person/pet, further emphasizes Chao Kang's impracticality in both his immaturity and preference for younger women. He either needed to be taken in and taken care of essentially as a dependent; or he took someone in to "take care of them," "收養" implying someone younger. Overall, an unstable livelihood.

Chao Kang would have held her back, and to openly wait for him when he wouldn't even provide her the status of mistress would ostracize her through her rejection of norms since "women who make personal choices not to become wives and mothers find themselves on the margins of acceptability and, thus, of social acceptance" (Chen 47). The reality and fear of ostracization can be shown in Mother's weakening stability in her marriage to Chao Kang. While before, Mother was confident enough in her perfection to maintain a marriage and affair, in marring Chao Kang Mother has lost her perfect armor, and so lost her perfect confidence. The cover and protection provided by Mother's ideal performance can no longer be maintained when she is married to such an obviously imperfect man. Mother is no longer untouchable, and she knows it, and it makes her weak.

Compared to the amplification of uncanny motherhood through the violent revelation of and extreme difference between Mother's roles in "魔女," "Patision Avenue" takes a more exploratory approach to the doubling nature of motherhood, attempting to familiarize the uncanny characteristics. The fact that the viewer follows Yannis' Mum in the film instead of

Yannis provides less opportunity for uncanny concealment of the unfamiliar; both providing greater opportunity for empathy with Yannis' Mum and the chance to familiarize the unfamiliar. Fully utilizing Yannis' Mum's perspective in conjunction with the reduced uncanny potentiality of short film, "Patision Avenue" dissects the uncanny nature of motherhood roles. Instead of utilizing uncanny potentiality to amplify the production of an uncanny feeling in the viewer, "Patision Avenue" actively tries to acknowledge the doubling nature of motherhood in an attempt to normalize it. Ultimately, unlike "魔女's" eventual magnification of motherhood's uncanny effect on the reader, by the end of the short film "Patision Avenue" attempts to openly examine the creation of motherhood's uncanny doubling and neutralize the uncanny feeling produced in the viewer.

While "魔女" used its uncanny potential in both visualization and brevity to misdirect the reader and subtly build up the sudden reversal of Mother, "Patision Avenue" mostly uses the uncanny potential of brevity to interrupt the viewer's intense focus on anything besides Yannis' crisis, directing the viewer towards the macro-situation. The interruptions act as opportunities to set up bursts of tension throughout the film, recreating for a viewer the tension of juggling the doubled identity of motherhood. As a result of the short film's visual approach to redirection, it does not have as much inherent uncanny potentiality to employ in relation to the viewer's conception of familiar/unfamiliar. Without the inherent ambiguity created by the visualization necessary for written works, what is "familiar" in "Patision Avenue" is less-easily challenged or capable of concealment. Instead, "Patision Avenue" heavily relies on the uncanny effects of brevity's intensity to hyper focus the viewer on the presiding macro-question of the dialogue—hiding the micro-questions and their possible, informing answers by pushing them back from the foreground of intensity. Furthermore, since the mother is the main character, Neofotistos'

decision to follow her relatively unobstructed, with the only ambiguities arising from hearing half of the conversation, encourages the viewer to focus on Yannis' Mum and her feelings throughout the film. Highlighting Yannis' Mum's struggles so straightforwardly, using the setting and brevity of the short film to mitigate the push-and-pull of the viewer's intense focus persuades the viewer to simply empathize with Yannis' Mum. By distracting the reader from the smaller details of Yannis' Mum's conversation, each instance of foreshadowing is able to startle the viewer and mimic the tension felt by Yannis' Mum as the story becomes increasingly more stressful.

Throughout her conversations, the viewer is able to see the multiple identities Yannis' Mum must wield and the strain they cause on her. The sudden tonal shifts prepared by the redirected micro-questions emphasize the unwieldy nature of the motherhood roles. The first conversation Yannis' Mum has in the short lays the foundation for one of the more startling visual changes of Yannis' Mum's roles. On her first phone call, Yannis' Mum is talking to Annie about a part when she says, "Short hair? Fuck!" while placing her hand on her ponytail ("Patision Avenue" 3:32). Since Yannis' Mum seems to be talking to Annie about a role, there is a vague connection between the short hair comment and the audition that Yannis' Mum might be going to; but she provides no further explanation and continues in an exuberant tone, laughing, and so the comment is quickly dismissed by the viewer as unimportant. It isn't until she tries to call Mary with no success that the comment is elaborated. When Mary doesn't answer, Yannis' Mum remarks "Fucking useless" before reaching up and violently ripping her ponytail extension (3:19 – 3:27). From Yannis' Mum's first call with Yannis, to calling Mary, and then ripping off her extension, she uses three different tones in conversation (2:57 – 3:19). She tries to sound more upbeat when talking to Yannis and attempts to hide her worry. While talking to Mary's

voicemail she is direct, careful not to let out too much frustration. However, in between, she curses with a sharp tone, letting out her frustration with the situation, and the hair change as the culmination of her frustration physically manifests the difficulty of maneuvering multiple personas.

The sudden transformation of Yannis' Mum's hair, compounded with the different personas presented to the reader, initially produce an uncanny defamiliarization effect for the viewer—a stark presentation of the differences between her roles. However, the previous comment about short hair and its associating vague text should have been hovering in the peripheral of the viewer's memory, just under the normalized intensity. As a result, the sudden change brings the previous comment back into the foreground as the foreshadowed explanation it was meant to be. While the sudden shift and defamiliarization exemplify the uncanny characteristics of motherhood, the narrative uses its structure and dialogue to proactively explain and familiarize said qualities. The viewer is then able to understand the uncanny characteristics without the distance of the uncanny feeling.

Since "Patision Avenue" is unable to utilize visualizations, is has no easy means of moving from intensity's familiarization back to defamiliarization and avoids the overwhelming presence of uncanny potentiality inherent in the act of visualizing. By presenting the narrative in a form which inherently contains less uncanny potential, it is easier to counteract and analyze the inherent uncanny potentiality within motherhood. Throughout the short film, the utilization of intensity without additional uncanny potentiality from the media means that the reader is able to critically question the uncanny double characteristic of motherhood without being overwhelmed by the uncanny feeling it produces. There is less uncanny effect within the viewer distracting them from the narrative's dissection of doubled motherhood—less uneasy feeling distancing the

reader from Yannis' Mum and consequently distancing the reader from the narrative's exploration of the stress associated with doubled identities.

So, when Yannis' Mum is in the middle of the demonstrations, Yannis has probably started a fire at home, she now has to return to keep him safe, and she then says, "Fuck my life… I'm coming back, Yannis. This always happens, you fuck everything up…" the viewer can fully grasp the exhaustion of performing as mother without judging her too harshly (9:37 – 9:42). "There are also all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will" (Freud 236). Yannis' Mum having to choose between the career she loves and her son is the unfulfilled double explored by "Patision Avenue"—dismantled and humanized where "魔女" amplifies and others.

Technically Closure...

> 逃命似地，倩如逃開這跪在地上的女怪物，逃出這熟悉的家門。她沒有停步，沒有回頭，一直奔向公路局車站，喘著氣，卻加速腳步，彷彿身後有魔鬼追趕著她似的。從她額上，背一上，冷汗一滴又一滴沁了出來。(歐陽 200)

> [Fleeing for her life, Qianru ran from this kneeling monster woman, running through this familiar doorway. She didn't stop, she didn't look back, she hurried straight to the highway station, gasping for air, but speeding up, as if there was a devil chasing after her. From her forehead, her back, cold sweat dripped and dripped, seeping out.]

"魔女" ends with Qianru running away from her Mother, the female monster who completely turned Qianru's reality on its head; absolutely breaking Qianru with the final confession that Chao Kang might be her true father. "Patision Avenue" ends with Yannis' Mum breaking her role, betraying her frustration at *being* Yannis' Mum before she is caught up in the demonstrations. Both works lack proper closure, closure created "not simply when all the

presiding macro-questions and auxiliary micro-questions have been answered, but only when the audience member *realizes* they have been answered," (Carroll 8)—"the impression that exactly the point where the work [short film or short story,] does end is just the *right* point" (2).

"Why did Mother do this? What changed?" Qianru's presented presiding macro-questions could technically be said to have been answered. Qianru wanted to know the reason behind Mother's sudden distance and her imperfect choice in Chao Kang; and together, both Qianru and the reader learn that Mother's transformation is not so much a change-from but a return-to. The questions are technically answered. Mother herself answers them. She answers them in very explicit detail. Yet the ending of "魔女" is arguably more unsettling than "Patision Avenue's" high-stakes, open ending. One of the presiding macro-questions introduced at the beginning of "Patision Avenue" is raised after learning that Mary has disappeared: "What will happen to Yannis?" The end of the short film provides no answer, as Yannis' Mum's return, the proposed solution to the question, is quickly derailed with the apartment fire and demonstration rioting. The viewer is left with no certainty as to what might happen next, only hopes that someone might reach Yannis in time, that Yannis' Mum will make it out of the demonstrations unharmed, that everything will work out.

Both "魔女" and "Patision Avenue" make use of the intensity created by brevity and any resulting uncanny potentiality to investigate motherhood and create for the reader/viewer a specific perception of the ending. "Patision Avenue" endeavored to utilize the familiarization of intensity and uncanny potentiality in an effort to defuse the uncanny effects of motherhood's uncanny doubling. By taking advantage of the normalization effect of brevity, without being plagued by the inherent potential for defamiliarization connected to visualization, "Patision Avenue" was able to redirect their viewer's emotional engagement towards an understanding of

the personal tension of doubled identities. Any possible uncanny feelings created by watching Yannis' Mum navigate her social relationships were explained and sympathized by the filming—leaving only the empathetic stress for the viewer to feel. Therefore, when the viewer watches the open end, while some uncanny effects might still be felt seeing the Yannis' Mum break, it is overshadowed by the stressful environment and previous sympathetic normalization of Yannis' Mum's identities. "Patision Avenue's" end presents motherhood's uncanny characteristics as uncannily as it can—not quite resolved, but not unfamiliar.

"魔女" presents motherhood in the opposite light. The story is able to use uncanny potentiality to an extent far surpassing "Patision Avenue," and effectively uses the excessive uncanny potentiality as a tool to create the powerful uncanny effect produced by the ending. Due to the brevity of the work, the reader has no time to sit with the answers and really probe Mother's motives. While we know "why" Mother did what she did, we don't know *why*. It is hinted at and it can be surmised, but there isn't the time to mull and dissect Mother's truths. Even though the final challenging of Qianru's paternity does not truly reveal more about Mother's character—since, considering her honesty about the affair and what she revealed, it makes sense—the story's building up of Qianru's familiar only to have it so violently overturned saturates the story with uncanny unease right up to the end.

What creates such an uncanny end is how the surprise of the revelation casts "a light backward over the whole [story], giving it a new shape and tone as the sense of surprise wears away and the ending is seen to fit" (Abbott 55). The reader is not explicitly told why Mother revealed everything to Qianru, or how the revelations will affect Qianru's relationship with her mother from this point on, but the story's end is the *right* point, because by then the reader can only submit to the hopelessness of the situation for Qianru. She runs but it won't change the

truth. The narrative breaks down the contradictory impulses of doubled roles in motherhood by utilizing uncanny potentiality as the tool to emphasize the contrasting expectations of motherhood. The constraining structure of motherhood creates multifaceted identities for both Qianru and Mother, and once the truth is revealed it becomes clear that doubling is unavoidable for any participant in the social construction of motherhood, as both child and mother have roles to play.

Each work's narrative on motherhood is supported by its medium to present the inherent uncanny nature of motherhood in the light that it wants to expand upon. "Patision Avenue" argues for an investigation of motherhood unimpeded by uneasy feelings produced from the opposition between mother as mother and mother as person. Its medium of a short film allows for easy dialogue with the uncanny potentiality of motherhood without being overwhelmed by it. On the other hand, "魔女" investigates motherhood through an amplification of the uncanny characteristics, analyzing the cause behind said characteristics by placing them directly in front of the reader. The short story form, containing more uncanny potentiality, was an effective structure to support the approach of fully manifesting the uncanny in motherhood. The brief, written format provided the text the tools to influence uncanny production to a more extreme degree than a short film would have been able to do. Both works showcase the different uses of uncanny potentiality across media and narratives—confirming the inherent existence of uncanny potentiality as a tool in brief works.

However, "魔女's" status as a short story provided it the means to effectively investigate a motherhood narrative through amplification with minimal narrative "otherworldliness." Brevity in short fiction is uniquely constructive to the production of uncanny potentiality because of the

built-in ambiguity of brief expectations and visualization—creating uncanny characteristics that

can lie unacknowledged or be utilized as in "魔女."

Notes

1. From this point forward, I refer to Ouyang Tzu by the Taiwanese romanization of her pseudonym and order the romanization as it is written in Mandarin, with family name first and given name last. All other sources are cited first name-last name as presented in their sources.

2. Historically, Taiwan has used a variety of romanization systems besides Hanyu Pinyin. In the story's English translations I reference, 倩如 is romanized as Chi'en-ju in Ouyang Tzu's translation and Tsing-ju in Chu's translation. I have decided to use the Hanyu Pinyin system to romanize 倩如 as Qianru since it is the system I am most familiar with. I kept Meiling and Chao Kang, as both names were consistent across translations.

3. An interesting language fact: in Mandarin Chinese there is no official term for "motherhood." The closest term presented when asking a native speaker is "母爱" which directly translates to "mother love."

4. "The deeply-rooted cultural notion of women as patriarchal tools of 'chuanzong jiedai' (producing a son to carry on the paternal family), supported by the legal presumption of legitimacy and the paternal preference rule of surnames, is a further reification of the female body, making motherhood per se more an institution of oppression and less a source of emancipation" (Chen 48). Qianru's status as a daughter and the assumed only child would affect her relationship to her mother due to the importance of sons and the security women gain from having sons. An important issue, but to explore it would stray too far from the purpose of my thesis.

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