OUR LITTLE WORLD:  
THE BAKERS WIFE AND  
REFLECTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD  

by  
Kevin Nicholas McCarty  

December 6, 2011  

APPROVED:  
Graduate Advisor, Department of Theatre & Dance:  

ACCEPTED:  
Chair, Department of Theatre & Dance:  

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI  
WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI
OUR LITTLE WORLD:
THE BAKERS WIFE AND
REFLECTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

by

Kevin Nicholas McCarty

Library Paper
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of Theatre & Dance
University of Central Missouri
December 6, 2011
“Once Upon a time / in a far of kingdom / lived a young maiden / a sad young lad / and a childless baker / with his wife” (Sondheim 3-4). Into the Woods, the 1988 musical with music and lyrics composed by Stephen Sondheim and book written by James Lapine, intertwines the tales of Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk and Rapunzel. Each character “more than anything” and “more than life” have hopes and dreams that they are unable to obtain. My research began with my interest in Stephen Sondheim as a composer, lyricist and my love for the story of Into the Woods. The musical was written in a time when a new wave of feminism was born and gave women courage to become more independent. The new wave encouraged women to uncover their individual identities and rise against decades of patriarchal norms. In this paper I will analyze the relationship between the patriarchal relationship between the Baker and his Wife, their isolated interaction with others, and reflections of motherhood.

The 1980s was a time of much economic growth; industries were being shipped overseas and Europe was witnessing a new market following the collapse of communism. Ronald Reagan was the President from 1981 - 1989 and introduced the U.S. to the term “Reaganomics” which was his four tier plan to reduce spending in all areas of the government. In the U.S. the rich became richer and the poor became poorer. In the United Kingdom, the first female prime minister was elected and had set a precedence for women to move beyond their homes.

The 1980s gave birth to a new wave of feminism as well. Feminist author Gloria Steinem educates us on the new wave of feminism in her 1983 publication Outrageous
*Acts and Everyday Rebellions.* Steinem points out the progress feminism had made since the 1960s and 70s, “We have terms like *sexual harassment* and *battered women.* A few years ago, they were just called *life*” (Steinem 149). In the eighties, women were given recognition by the inclusion of the word *women* in front of titles such as *center* or *newspaper.* Colleges began to offer studies from a matriarchal perspective as opposed to the patriarchal perspective. Careers for women began to be more distinguished, women could now become police officers, and women could choose “Ms.” in front of their name as an alternative to “Miss” or “Mrs.” It is liberating because men are given only one salutation, whether married or not, and it was unfair to women to have to disclose their single or married status. The new wave in the 1980s gave a heightened awareness and inclusion of women into society.

Stephen Sondheim wrote *Into the Woods* as a commentary on society during the 1980s. Act One is a children’s fairy tale, filled with angst, conflict, and the good guys win and receive their wishes. Act Two intercepts these “perfect” lives and deconstructs them. According to JoAnne Gordon, as quoted in S.F. Stoddart’s critical essay “Happily ... Ever ... NEVER,” states:

> This communal threat, which has been interpreted by various critics to represent forces of evil as diverse as nuclear proliferation, AIDS, and the deranged individualism of Reaganomics, is a handy device that serves to reunite the characters. (Goodhart 215)
*Into the Woods* outlines autobiographical connections from Sondheim. The idea of parenting, as represented in *Into the Woods*, shadows Sondheim’s childhood experiences. When he was ten his parents divorced. He grew up with his mother and he was forbidden him to see his father which caused a disconnect in their father/son relationship. Little Red Riding Hood and Jack reflect Sondheim’s childhood experience as they act as observers to the challenges of adult life by watching the older characters around them. According to Stephen Banfield,

> *Into the Woods* enacts what has often been observed, namely, that we begin to come to terms with who our parents were and what they did when we ourselves reach the age or stage of their doings; but for Sondheim, if, as we surely must, we are to view his statements about reconcilement of generations in this musical and in *Sunday in the Park with George* as more than the mere reflection of the younger James Lapine’s preoccupations, the process seems to have taken place later, in his mid-fifties, and was still far from complete as far as his mother was concerned when she died in 1992. (Banfield 12)

The Baker mirrors Sondheim’s experiences as he seeks his identity as man, father, and husband. The Baker comes to realize that his father’s running away was because of his own insecurities with raising a family as well. The characters constantly seek their own directions throughout the play and look for mentorships. As he was growing up, Sondheim looked to Oscar Hammerstein II as a mentor and father figure.
Oscar Hammerstein gradually got me interested in the theater, and I suppose most of it happened one fateful or memorable afternoon. He had urged me to write a musical for my school (George School, a Friends school in Bucks County). With two classmates I wrote a musical called *By George*, a thinly disguised version of campus life with the teacher’s names changed by one vowel or consonant. I thought it was pretty terrific, so I asked Oscar to read it - and I was arrogant enough to say to him, “Will you read it as if it were just a musical that crossed your desk as a producer? Pretend you don’t know me.” He said “O.K.,” and I went home that night with visions of being the first 15-year-old to have a show on Broadway. I knew he was going to love it. (qtd. in Banfield 13)

Sondheim’s loss of his own father is a reflection of the Baker’s disconnect with his father, who has also disappeared.

The Baker’s Wife grows independent throughout the play as she helps her husband collect the items needed to reverse the anti child bearing curse that the wicked witch had put upon their family tree. Her wish to be a mother is echoed in the first words she sings in the score, “I wish” as her and her husband simultaneous sing “I wish we had a child / I want a child / I wish we might have a child” (Sondheim 4-5).

The Baker’s Wife is a character created by Sondheim & Lapine; although there are archetypes of this character in other stories, the Baker’s wife does not share the pop culture familiarity as Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood or Rapunzel. It is much more
challenging to relate with a character or story that is unfamiliar. The unfamiliarity creates opposition for the Baker and his Wife as they attempt to fit into everyone else’s own little world. This is similar to how women in the 1980s reinvented themselves as individuals. In order to reinvent themselves they distanced themselves from patriarchal norms.

Two visitors arrive to the Baker and his Wife’s tiny little cottage. First, there is Little Red Riding Hood who pleads for “A loaf of bread, please / It’s not for me, / It’s for my poor old hungry Granny in the woods ...” (Sondheim 7). During this visit, we see the maternal instincts of the Baker’s Wife and the Baker’s insecurity towards children. The Baker’s Wife confirms that Little Red Riding Hood is certain of her way and the Baker paternally reminds her, “Don’t stray and be late” (Sondheim 9).

According to Banfield, “The shoe stresses family and neighborly relationships in order to keep its tone and dramaturgy focused and didactic, it is impossible not to be drawn toward contemplation of the widest world issues, environmental and political, in response to it” (Banfield 389). Without these connections, the show would be a children’s tale of separate stories that did not relate with one another.

The second visitor is the Baker’s and his Wife’s next door neighbor the Wicked Witch:

NARRATOR: Because the baker had lost his mother and father in a baking accident - well, at least that is what he believed - he was eager to have a family of his own, and concerned that all efforts until now had failed (Into the Woods 12).
The loss of the Baker’s mother and father left him feeling as if he needed to fill a void.

No matter how much him and his wife tried, they were unable to reproduce. Sondheim himself was never married or did he become a father. Nevertheless, he filled the void of not having a father figure through befriending others who served as his mentor both personally and professionally. The Witch alludes to the sole reason the Baker and his Wife cannot reproduce:

WITCH: It’s not what I wish. It’s what you wish. (Points to Wife’s belly)

Nothing’s cooking in there now is there? (Sondheim 12).

The Witch continues by explaining the spell she had put on their house as a punishment for a deed his father committed:

WITCH: In the past, when you were no more than a babe, your father brought his young wife and you to this cottage. They were a handsome couple, but not handsome neighbors. You see your mother was with child and she had developed an unusual appetite. She took one look at my beautiful garden and told your father that what she wanted in world was greens ... (Sondheim 12)

The Witch continues into a rap about the “special beans” and that for redemption if his father lets her have the baby that his wife is bearing she will leave them alone. Later we find out Rapunzel is the Baker’s sister and the Mysterious Man, who mentors the other character’s decisions throughout the play, is his father. The Witch continues the story, “The big day came / and I made my claim. / “Oh, don’t take the baby,” / They
shrieked and screeched, / But I did, / and I hid her / Where she’ll never be reached
(Sondheim 14). She tells them that she put a spell on his now widowed father, “That
your family tree / Would always be / a barren one ...” (Sondheim 14).

The Witch serves as the antagonist in the show as her curse on the Baker’s father
was inherited, creating the journey through the woods to lift the spell. The Baker and his
Wife constantly interfere with the other character’s aspirations in Act One as they collect
the items necessary to create the magic potion. Cinderella wear the slipper as pure of gold
as she constantly runs and hides from her Prince. Little Red Riding Hood gives into
temptation from the Wolf and wears the cape as red as blood given to her by her
grandmother. Jack constantly tries to sell and buy back his cow as white as milk.
Rupunzel who lives high up in a tower and has hair as yellow as corn. The Baker and his
Wife must talk to all of these characters to obtain these items. The Witch orders The
Baker and his Wife:

    WITCH: Bring me these
    Before the chime
    Of midnight
    In three days’ time,
    And you shall have,
    I guarantee,
    A child as perfect
    As child can be.
The Witch disappears as the orchestra fanfares a transition to the carriage that will take Cinderella’s stepsisters and stepmother to the ball, the Baker prepares to venture out into the woods to reverse the curse so that him and his wife can start a family:

BAKER: Look what I found in Father’s hunting jacket.

WIFE: Six beans.

BAKER: I wonder if they are the -

WIFE: Witch’s beans? We’ll take them with us.

BAKER: No! You are not coming.

WIFE: I know you are fearful of the woods at night.

BAKER: The spell is on my house. / Only I can lift the spell. / The spell is on my house.

(Sondheim 17 - 18)

Simultaneously the Baker’s Wife reminds him that “The spell is on “our” house” (Sondheim 18). The Baker dominates his wife, isolating and forbidding her to go into the woods. During this confrontation, the Baker takes a patriarchal stance as he takes the responsibility for the curse and feels as if it is his duty to take care of it himself. However, the Baker’s Wife makes up a reason to go into the woods and delivers the Baker his scarf in hopes he will change his mind about her assistance. The Baker is alarmed by her presence:

BAKER: (overlapping) What are you doing here?
WIFE: You forgot your scarf.

BAKER: You have no business being alone in the woods. And you have no idea what I’ve come upon here. You would be frightened for your life. Now go home immediately.

WIFE: I wish to help.

BAKER: No! The spell is on my house.

WIFE: Our house. (Sondheim 28)

The Baker’s Wife frustrates the Baker by dealing with Jack and getting him to sale Milky White for a bag of beans. The Baker does not approve and thinks he could have handled the situation better himself and again begs her to go home. From a patriarchal perspective, the Baker’s Wife offends the Baker and makes him feel less of a man because she had control in the situation, a trait that he wishes he could have had. The dealings with her husband create a polarization in an already isolated world where she is seen as inferior because she is married without children. Her attempts to help her husband is to create a team effort in which she can feel superior and worthy. As she goes about the woods herself, she escapes the patriarchal strictures of her husband and the curse of the witch to create her own self identity and “choosing” her destiny.

Motherhood is the central part of women’s lives. It shapes their ultimate identity, their relationships with others, their careers and leisure activities. Mary Cunningham Agee in her essay *Motherhood at the Heart of the New Feminism: A Vocation of Love and Service* describes motherhood as:
... a special communion with the mystery life, as it develops in the woman's womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and 'understands' with unique intuition what is happening inside her ... this unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings - not only towards her own child, but every human being - which profoundly marks the woman's personality. (Agee 56)

As the Baker’s Wife travels through the woods alone, she searches for “wholeness” and a sense of completion. Now that she is away from the patriarchal ruling of her home and husband. The Baker and his Wife seek out their own prosperity learning about themselves along the way.

The reflections of the generations of motherhood are displayed through Jack’s Mother, the Witch and Little Red Riding Hood. As the Baker’s Wife ventures out into the woods alone, she interacts and is able to make her own conclusions on what type of mother she might be. For example, Jack’s mother cares a lot about her son, but wants him to grow up, “Your mother’s getting older / Your father’s not back / and you can’t just sit here dreaming pretty dreams” (Sondheim 15). The Witch could not produce a child on her own so she stole Rupunzel, “And I hid her / Where she’ll never be reached” (Sondheim 14).

The Baker is very patriarchal toward his wife and feels a lot of guilt for his father’s mistakes. Since the Baker did not grow up with a good paternal role model, he
has had to figure out how to be a man all on his own. The Baker draws from norms within our society which portrays men as the sole providers and decision makers. As his wife makes her plea that she would like to help their cause, the Baker reminds her that the spell is on *my house*. By doing this the Baker possesses sole control disregarding that they *both* live there and bear the child *together*. The Baker continues to become frustrated at the situation. The Baker’s Wife deceits Jack into believing she possesses magic beans in order to buy Milky White from him. “No what matters is that / Everyone tells tiny lies - / What’s important, really, is the size. / (Sondheim 31). The Baker, who is annoyed, tells her to take the cow, go home and let him handle gathering the items for the magic potion himself, which, again alludes to patriarchal learned norms by the Baker possessing control of the situation.

The Baker who often becomes defeated by his actions, does not have the same success his Wife had when dealing with Jack. As he runs into Little Red Riding Hood, he asks to borrow her cape. He steals her cape and attempts to run away. Little Red Riding Hood throws a fit and gives Little Red Riding Hood back her cape. After the confrontation with Little Red Riding Hood the Baker resides himself to thinking, “Things are only what you need them for, / What’s important is who needs them more -” (Sondheim 32). The Baker has an inner conflict in the knowledge that as human beings we attach ourselves to our possessions. The Baker similarly takes possession of his wife and home. As he tries to take Red Riding Hood’s cape so that he can add the item to the potion, he realizes that maybe Red Riding Hood’s cape is not all that
important, putting to rest his patriarchal tendencies and realizing that having a child
might not be worth deceiving others.

According to Diane Richardson in her book *Women, Motherhood and Childrearing* she states, “Women are told that if they do sometimes experience strong
negative feelings towards their children they should not feel guilty, or that they are failing
as a mother. Motherhood is not always fun, and women should not expect automatically
to love their children” (Richardson 50).

In Scene 3, the Baker’s Wife and Jack’s mother meet in her search to find Jack:

WIFE: Have you seen the cow?

JACK’S MOTHER: No, and I don’t care to ever again. (Confidential)

Children can be very queer about their animals. You be careful with your
children ...

WIFE: I have no children.

JACK’S MOTHER: *(Beat)* That’s okay, too (Sondheim 50).

In the above conversation, Jack’s mother is very fed up with chasing after her son
and reprimanding him for his actions. Through Jack’s mother we see the struggles of
motherhood and being responsible for someone else. Motherhood is said to be a
rewarding experience, but can also consume a woman’s whole being, "A mom is a
woman whose maternal behavior is motivated by the seeking of emotional recompense
for the buffets which life has dealt her own ego. In her relationship with her children,
every deed and almost every breath are designed unconsciously but exclusively to absorb her children emotionally and to bind them to her securely" (Friedan 191).

Society is filled with different opinions and views on what the role of a mother and motherhood means, childrearing advice before the 1980s focused on the moral upbringing of the children. Major impacts reflected in western culture begin in 1800’s with Freud’s published works that claims infantile sexuality has influence on infant control. John Wesley in Britain, John Calvin in America, John Watson and Truby King also provided advice to mother’s during the 18th and 19th centuries. Early researchers John Wesley and John Calvin believed that "all children are born with an innate tendency to sin and evil, they regarded it as a parent's duty to the child to defeat the 'devil within'. Parents were advised to 'break the will of the child,' by imposing strict controls. If they did not their child would surely go to hell" (Richardson 29). High infant mortality rates during this time created urgency in sustaining a spiritual life for the child. According to Richardson, "Women, through their actual or potential maternity, were seen as 'saviours of race', engaged in the vital task of moulding the future generation on whom society's hopes rested" (Richardson 30). Past centuries’ views are necessary to assess how far we have come.

Throughout the play the Baker’s Wife vicariously lives through the young virginal character of Cinderella and her adventures being pursued by the Prince. Older than Cinderella, the Baker’s Wife, although content with her life, seems to want more.
Cinderella, who is beside herself with confusion about what has happened at the ball, seems very disinterested in the Prince.

WIFE: Oh, yes. Now, the Prince, what was he like?

CINDERELLA: He’s a very nice Prince.

WIFE: And?

CINDERELLA: And - it’s a very nice ball.

WIFE: And?

CINDERELLA: And when I entered they trumpeted.

WIFE: And? The Prince?

CINDERELLA: Oh, the Prince ... (Sondheim 38)

The Baker’s Wife prods Cinderella for information on the Prince. As she listens to Cinderella’s experience at the ball, she imagines what it would be like to dance with the Prince.

As they continue their quest the Baker and his wife meet up once again, they report to each other what they have. The Baker finds out his wife lost Milky White and tells her that, “I should have known better to not have entrusted her to you” (Sondheim 45). The Baker’s Wife apologizes for losing the cow and once again pleads to her to go home because he is feeling as if she is taking his control away, “I will make this right. And we can just go about our life. No more hunting about in the wood for strange objects. No more witches and dimwitted boys and hungry little girls” (Sondheim 46). In the emphasis of “I” will make this right, the Baker can not release his patriarchal control
and if he did allow his wife to take care of tough situations it would make him feel inferior.

The Baker and his Wife continually are at odds, the Baker’s Wife is stubborn and in a sense of self liberation wants to prove to him that she can help and she has to help to secure their togetherness. The Baker, who continually has bad luck securing the items because of his lack of good tactics, finally submits to his Wife and their reason for both working on this task as one. According to Raymond Knapp in his book *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*, he states that “As we watch the Baker and his wife manage their moral dilemmas while gradually growing together as a couple ("It Takes Two") and falling into the rhythm of the other tales, we are led to forgive - or, perhaps, just to forget - that they have compromised their own "goodness" along the way, however "nice" they might remain (Knapp 154). It is in the song, “It Takes Two” that the Baker’s Wife proves to her husband that he needs her help and they need to work with one another. “It takes two / I thought one was enough, / It’s not true: / It takes two of us. / You came through / When the journey was rough / It took you. / It took two of us” (Sondheim 54). The Baker finally releases his control so he can focus on completing the quest instead of fighting with one another.

The temperament of the Baker and the exhaustion of their task in the woods has really made him impatient. Now that his wife is helping him, we see that he does depend on her more, but he is still guilty for the entire situation he has got them in:

BAKER: Then steal it.
WIFE: Steal it? Just two days ago you were accusing me of exercising deceit in securing the cow.

BAKER: Then don’t steal it and resign yourself to a childless life.

(Sondheim 59)

The Baker often forgets that he will also benefit from having a family; however, he constantly reminds his wife that if the task is not complete, she will be childless. The Baker shifts back into his learned patriarchal attitude. He puts his Wife down, in the dialogue, “resign yourself to a childless life” the Baker negates her ownership. In the book, Lapine, emphasizes the words you, our, me, mine in the dialogue exchange between the Baker and his Wife to show the internal patriarchal struggle within their marriage.

In Act One, the Witch sings the most haunting song of the show to Rapunzel whose Prince had helped her escaped the tower to experience the outside world. In Stay with Me, the Witch describes the pain of being a mother and how much Rapunzel means to her. “Who out there could love you more than I? / What out there that I cannot supply? / Stay with me. / Stay with me, / The world is dark and wild. / Stay a child while you can be a child / with me” (Sondheim 60). The witch, angry with Rapunzel, cuts her long hair as a punishment for her disobedience, so that no other visitors can enter the tower and they can continue in their little world. The Witch serves as a reflection of an overprotective and domineering mothering style.

A song cut from the 1988 production, and added back into the 2002 Revival, displays more depth in the relationship of Rapunzel and the Witch which foreshadows the
song, “Children Will Listen” in “Our Little World” the Witch proclaims that “Children are a blessing / If you know where they are / nothings so distressing as when they keep you guessing / be sure you don’t leave any doors ajar / make a little world” (Sondheim) as Rapunzel claims her world is big enough for her and it is “perfect” and all she does is comb her hair all day. The Witch has protected and shielded Rapunzel from the world, so selfishly when everyone else turns against her because of her “ugliness” she still has Rapunzel. The shielding of Rapunzel is an example of our society being influenced by others and the Witch’s maternal instinct to keep her safe from harm.

According to Stephen Banfield in his book *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals*, "In the fairy tale world, the individual is liberated by his own choices and behavior; in the real world we are more dependent on each other" (Banfield 383). Our society is influenced by what we see and hear on a daily basis that it is difficult to form our own perceptions and opinions. As with the Baker’s Wife, she is judged because she is childless. It is other people in our society that tell women that they must have children by a certain age or they have an affliction.

The Witch holds on to Rapunzel in the similar way the Baker’s Wife is holding onto her impression that if she had a child she might be perceived better. According to Richardson,

It is perhaps not difficult to understand why women should 'choose' motherhood in a society in which the efforts to socialize girls into wanting babies are so pervasive. However, it is important to recognize that the
social pressures to become mothers operate on women of varying degrees. For example, being childless by choice is seen as selfish in a married couple while to choose to have a child as a single heterosexual woman or as a lesbian is to invite disapproval (Richardson xi).

As Act One comes to a close, “And it came to pass, all that seemed wrong was now right, the kingdoms were filled with , and those who deserved to were certain to live a long and happy life. Ever after ... “ (Sondheim 74). The Baker and his Wife secured all the items necessary for the magic potion. As the potion is being prescribed, the Baker finds out the Mysterious Man was his father. The Baker, who has been fatherless since he was a child, is ecstatic by this reunion but once the potion is made, the mysterious man dies. The Baker still does not get to know his father. The Witch turns into a beautiful woman and the Baker’s Wife is magically impregnated. In exchange for the Witch’s youth and beauty she loses her power:

WITCH: I was perfect.
I had everything but beauty.
I had power,
And a daughter like a flower,
In a tower.
Then I went into the woods
To get my wish
And now I’m ordinary.
Lost my power, and my flower.

(Sondheim 76)

As Act One ends the ensemble, in a joyous celebration, abandon their characters to dance and sing as a whole. With the exception of the Witch, everyone gets their wish. *Into the Woods* shows that real life is different than fairy tale life. In Fairy Tales we receive Happy Endings; while in real life that is not always the case. Raymond Knapp describes the parallels between fairy tale and real life as reflected in *Into the Woods*, "The most important way that the show undermines the closed systems of traditional fairy tales is by demonstrating how different real life is from imagined life in these insular far-off kingdoms. Life as we know it, after continues beyond the achievement of specific goals, with unforeseen and inadvertent consequences arising from nearly any choice or action" (Knapp 153). We learn that the choices we make, no matter how big or small, creates our outcome good or bad.

Act Two begins in the same fashion that Act One began, this time everyone has gotten their wish, with the exception of the Witch and Little Red Riding Hood. The Narrator begins, “Once upon a time / later / in the same far off kingdom / lived a young princess / the lad jack / and the baker and his family” (Sondheim 85). The story repeats, but this time everyone has gotten their wish and find out that what they most wished for is not everything. Act One the character fought to make their wishes come true and Act Two they learn the consequences of their wishes.
The Baker and his Wife earns the family they have always wanted, but now their cottage is too small to raise a family and they wish for more room. Besides that minor inconvenience, their wish has come true and they are both content:

BAKER: I will expand our quarters in due time.

WIFE: Why expand when we can simply move to another cottage?

BAKER: We will not move, this was my father’s house, and now it will be my son’s.

WIFE: You would raise your child alongside a witch?

BAKER: Why does he always cry when I hold him.

WIFE: Baby’s cry. He’s fine. You needn’t hold him as if he were so fragile.

BAKER: He wants his mother. Here.

WIFE: I can’t take care of him all the time!

BAKER: I will care for him ... when he’s older.

(Sondheim 87)

The cottage has very sentimental value to the Baker since it is his childhood home. The Baker’s confidence in being a father is overshadowed by his own childhood. His father was not around for him, so he was not able to watch and learn what it means to be a father as he did not have that figure growing up. The Baker does not want to deal with the responsibility of aiding to a crying child. In a patriarchal society it is taught that caregiving is dependent on the woman and that as the Baker lamented earlier “it takes
two” reverses his perspective and pushes all the responsibility on his wife. In Act One, The Baker did not allow his Wife to have responsibility in the dangerous task of going out into the woods. In Act Two, the Baker pushes the responsibility on his Wife to tend to the child because he is uncomfortable with maternal tasks.

The bond between mother and child begins at the start of conception and the relationship they develop within the womb:

Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery life, as it develops in the woman's womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and 'understands' with unique intuition what is happening inside her ... this unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings - not only towards her own child, but every human being - which profoundly marks the woman's personality. (Agee 56)

The Baker’s Wife who already possessed strong and independent qualities in Act One, has to enforce her strength to take care of their son and rebound her husbands inadequacies in caregiving. A decade ago, “Experts were beginning to question traditional family roles, in using terms such as ‘parent’ or ‘caretaker’ rather than ‘mother’, even though the majority of books addressed to ‘parents’ continued to assume that the child’s main caretaker would be the mother” (Richardson 51). In a patriarchal society, the view is taking care of a child is the mother’s sole responsibility.
The Baker’s uneasiness around children is again displayed after Little Red Riding Hood’s cottage collapses, she comes to visit the baker and his wife. Little Red Riding Hood explains her situation and that she needs to visit Granny to assure she had not been harmed:

WIFE: We’ll take you to Granny’s.

BAKER: What?!

WIFE: We’re not going to let her go alone.

BAKER: All right. I will take you.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD: I don’t need anyone to take me. I’ve gone many times before.

BAKER: But not when there have been such winds blowing.

WIFE: That’s right. We’ll all take you.

BAKER: No!

WIFE: I’m not about to stay here with the baby when a “wind” might return to this house, too.

(Sondheim 93)

In Act One, Little Red Riding Hood stresses that she has grown from her experiences in the woods in Act One and has gained a sense of independence for herself. The Baker no matter how much independence his wife has shown before, still constrains her.

As the Baker and his Wife venture out into the woods, this time the environment of the musical is darker. Rapunzel escapes the tower and faces a world unknown to her.
She states to her mother that she was locked in a tower for fourteen years and because of her she will never be happy, in which the Witch replies, “I was just trying to be a good mother” (Sondheim 95). The witch is blind to the facets of motherhood and assumes that by her locking Rupunzel in the tower she was caring for her in the most nurturing way.

Compared to Jack’s mother, the Witch’s intentions in motherhood are selfish. She did not allow for an autonomous environment for Rapunzel. Even though Jack’s mother wishes her son could stay in one place and that she did not have to chase after him, she still allows her son to be independent from her household. Jack’s mother reflects the 1980s style of motherhood which educates that mothers should allow their children to grow autonomously.

The Witch and Jack’s mother both meet their demise due to the irresponsibility of their children. Jack, climbs the beanstalk, steals the Giant’s riches, which has caused the Giant to come into their land and wreck havoc causing his own mother’s death as she sought to protect him from the Giant. “I’ll hide my son and you’ll never find him,” (Sondheim 104). Jack’s mother’s maternal instincts were to protect her son by putting her own life on the line.

When Rapunzel meets her demise by the hands of the Giant, the Witch laments her death. As the Witch’s life takes a tragic turn and loses all that she had, she sings, “Children Will Listen” the song describes the independent minds of children and how you can not provide for them forever as she sings, “From something you love to something you lose” (Sondheim 106). Lamenting that one cannot hold onto their
children forever, because sooner or later they are going to leave. The Witch protected Rapunzel from the world for many years inside the tower, Rapunzel’s curiousness to explore the outside world let her to the desires to disobey her mother and her untimely death. If the Witch would have allowed Rapunzel the freedom to grow and become an independent woman, they could have had a stronger bond with one another. Instead, Rapunzel grew up despising her mother.

The Baker and his Wife split up in the woods to complete their investigation. The Baker’s Wife leaves their son with Little Red Riding Hood, who serves as a maternal figure in the Baker’s Wife’s absence. The Baker’s Wife runs into Cinderella’s prince, who as mentioned earlier in this paper, the Prince commits adultery with the Baker’s Wife. The Baker’s Wife comes to the realization it was just a “moment” “Back to life, back to sense / Back to child, back to husband / No one lives in the woods” (Sondheim 112).

Through the song, “Moments in the Woods”, the Bakers Wife explains her exhaustion that impair her moral choices and how the woods transforms into a tight incestuous community where everyone’s decisions are marred. “For her - [the Baker’s Wife] - what matters is psychological disjuncture between the nowness of moments in the woods and the fact that those moments become vivid, lasting memories. But the apparent nowness of the woods is misleading in other ways as well’ (Knapp 160). Her view on society is rooted in her husband’s patriarchal control. Trying to be good does not have its rewards and the sins of the flesh always win. As echoed in the song, there are times we need to live in the “moment.”
The Baker blames himself for the death of his wife and that he shouldn’t have let come into the woods and should have insisted that she stayed home. The Baker blames himself for his lack of patriarchal control. The Witch reminds him that remorse will get him no where and people are dying all around and he is not the only one to suffer loss (Sondheim 114). With the death of his wife, the Baker faces the challenges of being a single father and he has to raise a child alone. The Baker does not allow himself to let go of his patriarchal views in order to collaborate with his wife and learn from her. The Baker comes face to face with his deceased father implores in him advice:

    MYSTERIOUS MAN: Running away - we’ll do it.
    Why sit around, resigned?
    Trouble is, son,
    The further you run,
    The more you have left undone
    And, more, what you’ve left behind.
    (Sondheim 124)

The Mysterious Man explains that running away from one’s problems is never the answer. If one refuses to face their problems, they will become further behind in life. The mysterious man serves as a reminder and a token for the Baker to forgive himself so that he can be a better provider for his son. The Mysterious Man serves at the Baker’s mentor in the same way Oscar Hammerstein II served as Sondheim’s mentor.
In the end, the woods does not put structure on the society in the woods. Throughout the play the characters are faced with choices which they are unable to retreat from and they forced to make their own decisions. According to Knapp, "... the value of being right - does not give its characters the freedom to operate without such codes but rather demands that they determine their own values, which will then take shape in their actions and will in turn bear real consequences, both material and psychological" (Knapp 161).

The world of the musical is justified in the song, “No One is Alone.” As Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Jack and the Baker face their fears of the giant together they come to the realizations of forgiveness and moving forward. As the song lyrics state, “People make mistakes, / Holding to their own, / Thinking they’re alone / Honor their mistakes / Fight for their mistakes” (Sondheim 131).

After the slaying of the giant, the three characters have grown close and as the Baker and his wife had wished for a family in Act One. The Baker gets the family he has always wanted as Jack, Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella move in to his tiny little cottage. The woods created turmoil but had also created close knit friendships. The Baker states how proud his wife would be of him and how sad that their son will never know her.

The Baker doubts himself as a father and resigns to the thought that he should have never had children’.
BAKER: But how will I go about being a father with no one to mother my child?

WIFE: Just calm the child.

BAKER: Yes, calm the child.

WIFE: Look, tell him how it all happened, be father and mother, you’ll know what to do.

(Sondheim 135)

As the Baker’s Wife tells her husband, “Be father and mother, you’ll know what to do” (Sondheim 135). Before the 1980s, parents found that they could “learn” parenting through a book. As the Baker’s Wife tells her husband, “you’ll know what to do.” According to Richardson, “Maternal instinct can be defined by knowing instinctively how to look after and care for a child; as a natural desire to have children; as an instinctive love for one’s child; or a combination of these” (Richardson 44). The Baker’s Wife encourages the Baker to go with his own instincts to raise their child in her absence. Her love for her child and trust in her husband are evident. Through their own personal quests each and every character learns something about themselves and grow as the story progresses.

The reflections of motherhood in a dysfunctional society which is “the woods” heeds a warning “wishes come true / not free” (Sondheim 136). Women in the 1980s had fought the ideologies of what motherhood meant in the previous decades, the cost of their fights did not come without a cost, however, the rise of feminism in the 1980s "led to
positive changes in many women's lives. Since then, women have been entering the
labour market in increasing number in the expectation of balancing traditional mothers'
and wives' roles with career aspirations” (Mamabolo 480).

A parent’s role is very important within the context of our society as it provides
guidance, strength and wholeness. *Into the Woods* demonstrates children’s freewill
without guidance and a parent’s autonomous role to make the right decisions in order to
guide their children forward on the right path. As the Witch sing in “Children Will
Listen”, “Children will look to you / for which way to turn, / to learn what to
be” (Sondheim 136). The society of the woods, though dangerous at times, is a
representation of our society and without guidance can become dysfunctional.

The Baker’s Wife becomes a strong and independent character throughout the
musical. She boldly braves the woods and guides her husband through his conflicts with
the other characters. The men in the musical constantly struggle with their identities. The
new wave of feminism provided the encouragement for women to become more
empowered. According to Richardson, “Women, through their actual or potential
maternity, were seen as ‘saviours of race,’ engaged in the vital task of moulding the future
generation on whom society’s hopes rested” (Richardson 30).

*Into the Woods* was a representation of the 1980s and the new wave of feminism,
which humanized women, and made them important in society. Stephen Sondheim
writes a play that, not only entertains, but allows the audience to consider their own role
in society. We are indeed never alone, even when we feel like it, but that there are others
in our society that have faced the same turmoils as ourselves and as Jack points out, “The difference between a cow and a bean is (that) a bean can begin an adventure ...” (Sondheim 40). An adventure in which life and the world around us continues to evolve. In the end, who knows what lies ahead on the journey!


