ABSTRACT

LOST IN THE WOODS:
A THEATRICAL JOURNEY THROUGH
GENDER AND MEDIA ANALYSIS

by Lene Karine Martin

Myths affect children and adults because they help to construct our social worlds and our identities. My thesis includes a theatrical play in three acts describing the Norwegian myth of the hulder (huldre plural) and the influences of gender and media in myths and society. Through my thesis analysis, I show how a particular Norwegian myth represents women and is a reflection of our patriarchy, commercialism, and capitalism and how the media influences children’s imaginations and adult roles in society. Patriarchy has packaged women as products and has created myths out of women and fantasy; therefore, making women a form of fantasy that can be controlled and separated from reality and the public sphere. However, my theatrical play Lost in The Woods shows that it is possible to create new meanings for these roles in reading and writing against the grain; therefore, cross-cultural myths should be rewritten in a positive light.
LOST IN THE WOODS:
A THEATRICAL JOURNEY THROUGH
GENDER AND MEDIA ANALYSIS

A THESIS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPECIAL NOTE  iv

I. INTRODUCTION  1
   The Myth of the Hulder  1
   A Theatrical Play  3

II. LITERATURE REVIEW  5
   Myth and Society  5
   The Norwegian Imagination: Myth, Culture, and Play  6
   Gender and Myth  14
   Myth and Media: The Disney Doll  18
   Women as Myths and Products  21
   Mediated Myth and Gender: Choices in Tails  24
   Creating a New History  28

III. APPROACH TO THE PLAY  32
   A Postmodernist Structure and Play  32
   Reading and Writing Against the Grain  33
   Lost in The Woods  34

IV. REFLECTION  39
   Seeing Out of The Woods  39

V. WORKS CITED  40

VI. LOST IN THE WOODS: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS  43
   Act I: In the Beginning  45
   Act II: Out of Darkness  52
   Act III: Into the Light  63
Lost in The Woods was created in 2005 and designed as a Mass Communication and Women’s Studies masters thesis titled Lost in The Woods: *A Theatrical Journey through Gender and Media Analysis*. The inspiration for this piece was a passion for Norwegian heritage and culture and a desire to comment on the myths and representations of women in society and media influences on children and adults as we grow and function in our world full of myths and dreams. I dedicate this play to my mother for being my roots and my father for believing my roots could grow. And I dedicate my work to my Norwegian Grandfather Pappa who first told me the stories of Norway and who showed me forests full of trolls. I would also like to thank my professors along this graduate path of learning. I would like to thank Dr. David Sholle and Mr. Andrew Marko for their knowledge, guidance, and insight. And finally, a special thank you to my advisor Dr. Lisa McLaughlin who supported my need for creativity within my academic pursuits and gave me a stronger feminist voice; thank you for all of your time and encouragement. Thank you to my family, friends, and teachers for making my dreams come true. I hope that this play inspires and educates us on using our imaginations and making the world a more powerful place for all.
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INTRODUCTION

The Myth of the Hulder

Norway’s culture is deeply rooted in the stories of the huldre, the trolls, and other mythical creatures that live in the Norwegian forests, mountains, and lakes. These creatures were a way for the first Norwegians, who did not have electricity or close neighbors, to explain the mysterious sights and sounds that existed in the woods and mountains. These stories were also used as cautionary tales to teach children morals and lessons while they were growing up. Some stories may have been based on religion, but most were simply a part of tradition and culture. Many Norwegians strongly believe in the magic of their forests and some believe that they have seen these creatures.

Myths affect children and adults because they help to construct our social worlds and our identities. My thesis includes a theatrical play in three acts describing the Norwegian myth of the hulder (huldre plural) and the influences of gender and media in myths and society. Through my thesis, I show how a particular Norwegian myth represents women and is a reflection of our patriarchy, commercialism, and capitalism. Patriarchy has packaged women as products and has created myths out of women and fantasy; therefore, making women a form of fantasy that can be controlled and separated from reality and the public sphere. My play discusses how women are often forced to choose between being single and being married in society (including the pressures of the public and private spheres) and how the media influences children’s imaginations and adult roles in society. However, I show that it is possible to create new meanings for these roles in reading and writing against the grain; therefore, cross-cultural myths should be rewritten in a positive light.

A hulder (when not associated with the huldrefolk or underground people or trolls which can include men and women) usually refers to a beautiful woman, with long hair, a cow’s tail, and an enchanting singing voice. The huldre live in the mountains and forests of Norway where they can either lure innocent farmboys to be lost forever or they can fall in love with the farmboys and become the best wives ever. There are many pieces of literature and artwork that refer to the huldre but there are no specific stories or fairy tales such as Disney’s story of Cinderella with a particular beginning, middle, and end. However, there is a common pattern to this well-known myth involving characteristics such as the hulder’s physical appearance, where
she lives, and what she does. The myth of the hulder is what I call a “live” tale because she not only “existed” in the past but she also currently "exists" and there are no official endings to her tales; they are different each time because they are based on the personal choice of the hulder and the farmboy involved. Therefore, as a reference for my play, I have used Jan Bergh Eriksen’s basic description of huldre in his book *Trolls and Their Relatives* because he recalls the traditional and most common account of the hulder:

In the beginning was darkness… and in darkness *trolls* are born. For millions of years Norway was covered in darkness, snow and ice. When, finally, the darkness lifted and most of the snow and ice had melted away… the trolls were there. They were still there when the first Norwegians came strolling along… As time went even further on, the small trolls, living in the hills and under the ground, became envious of the Norwegians and formed their own world, a copy of the human one, complete with cattle, farms, churches, etc.… They are called the underground people. They are small, not very beautiful themselves, but they have beautiful daughters, called *Hulder*. She is well equipped up front to lure any innocent farmboy underground, where he is bewitched, and must stay as her husband forever. But just as a medal has two sides so does the hulder. She has a tail like a cow. Once in a while a hulder falls so much in love with a boy that she is willing to marry him in a Christian church. She then loses her tail, and becomes the best wife a man can have. When the holder grows older (some 400-500 years) she changes and becomes a *Trollkjerring*. She is then even able to take her head off and carry it under her arm… Ignorant foreigners often ask: Do the trolls still exist? Just take a trip into the nearest wood some dark and stormy night… So: Beware. They are watching you! (Jan Bergh Eriksen 1983)

My theatrical play shows that it is important to evaluate the stories and myths of a culture because they do form the values of a society and the identities of its people. I also feel that it is
possible to use stories and the media to develop new meanings in society, that many myths, stories, and theories are cross-cultural (which speaks to the local and the global), and that nostalgia for traditions and stories can unfortunately at times prohibit us from progress yet also protect us from experiencing too much progress within society and the media. I feel that it is important for children to be raised with imaginative characters instead of television as a primary teaching tool, but I also believe that children need to understand their culture and the messages that are sent through a culture’s myths and fairy tales. Once we understand how a culture’s values are constructed, we can better create new beliefs and roles for our children’s children.

A Theatrical Play

In order to portray the myth of the Norwegian hulder and discuss society’s influences of media and gender, I thought it was best to write a theatrical play. As Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary, “No audience. No echo. That’s part of one’s death” (Herbert Blau 1990: 1). An audience and actors that are invested in a medium of production are the best means to encourage change and reflection on society and one’s identity. Many myths were once told orally and according to Nick Lacey, “the oral tradition clearly involves ‘live’ performances: audiences have a different relationship to a text if they are present at a performance rather than being addressed by technology (written text, television, cinema and so on)” (Nick Lacey 2000: 83). At live performances the audience can feel more as if they are a part of the myth and the otherworld because unlike a television or movie screen, there is less of a boundary separating them from the action and from experiencing all their human senses. There are certain performative acts that work on a stage that do not work anywhere else. When sitting at home watching television there are many distractions that can occur in the house, it is easier to “believe” or accept what we see on a stage because we are in its universe (Mayo Simon 2003: 25-26). The audience that views and experiences a play is not alone, as a group the audience is cut off from the ordinary world. According to Mayo Simon, “Theatre is a group experience. When the group sees something enjoyable, it lets the stage know and the stage responds” (Mayo Simon 2003: 27).

There are some stories better understood and expressed, such as my play, when the audience must use their imaginations, especially when one of the topics for the audience to
consider is the concept of imagination versus media and societal influences. Imagination becomes stifled when a production uses special effects and the audience does not have to work for the meanings of the production piece (Mayo Simon 2003: 33). The content of the production becomes more believable when the audience becomes invested in and affected by the material presented. Sitting in a theatre watching a play is where the imagination flourishes. “Only in the theatre can the audience in its privileged position see literally into someone’s soul” (Mayo Simon 2003: 40).

According to Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “Many myths are acted out in the theater; this enactment is a moment in which myths take on the ritual aspect of communal experience” (Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty 1988: 121). The audience is joined through a common bond in the experience of production but also in the experience of the traditional story because of “the assumption that theatrical myths enter into the lives of the audience and change them” (Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty 1988: 122). By myths entering into the lives of the audience, the myth is better able to influence the people of a culture and therefore the values of a culture causing societal change. On a deeper level, plays may also reveal another aspect of reality, one that is masked and unconsciously denied (Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty 1988: 123). “A good play reaches deep…reminds us about the preciousness of life…gives us the hope of something that life doesn’t usually provide – the possibility that understanding is out there, though we may have to knock down old ways of looking at the world and start our thinking all over again (Mayo Simon 2003: 212). Through symbolism and myth, I hope to encourage my audience to question and reflect upon our society and the roles that gender and media play in our lives. As J.L. Styan stated, “Symbolism is the very essence of theatre… the value of a play lies in the elusive change produced in its audience” (J.L. Styan 1975: 236-239). Symbolism is an effective tool for conveying a message to an audience and society, particularly when a myth is involved that by nature includes morals and lessons that can be learned. My play addresses thoughts about how myths affect media and gender and how we should preserve and study yet also reread and rewrite traditional myths to empower women.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Myth and Society

Myths are a vital part of society because they represent and teach the ideology of a culture and its people. Jack Zipes, one of the leading authors in the relationship of folktales and society, believes that folktales do not focus on the performance and the teller as much as on the contribution of society. According to Jack Zipes, “Tales have been modified, often quite openly, to civilize children, and to socialize them into the ideology of adult society of the time. An institutionalized symbolic discourse lies at the base of the tales” (quoted in Peter Gilet 1998: 47). Zipes states that “We all pass through fairy tales, which inscribe indelible marks on our imagination and affect our behavior and role playing… and their discourse on manners and norms has contributed more to the creation of social norms than we realize” (Jack Zipes 1983: xi). Therefore, tales constantly change and become a part of the society of the time; that is, ideologies do not remain precisely the same.

The ideology of myths can also be seen through the media. However, the “storyteller” is no longer easily seen. According to Walter Benjamin in his essay titled “The Storyteller,” “the demise of the ‘old-fashioned storyteller’ is a symptom of alienation in the modern world: Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly…It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences” (quoted in Rita Barnard 1993: 41). Benjamin argues that people are no longer able to seek counsel and advice from interpersonal contact and this is due to the increase of media. Therefore, as the influences of media increase and the role of the storyteller decreases, there is more power in societal systems rather than the individual, and as a result, power is lost among the people and especially those that are oppressed. Media and gender share a reciprocal relationship where gender is affected by the media but in turn media is affected by gender; therefore, ideological norms are strengthened. However, by returning to myths and folk tales and decreasing alienation by increasing the role of the storyteller and audience, it is possible to rewrite ideology and create change and choice in societal systems. Through my theatrical play, the storyteller and the audience can be empowered and define their own stories and their own lives through myth and choice. Therefore, ideological norms and dominant
systems of power can be broken so that a new history for women and those who are oppressed can be written, much like my rewritten myth of the hulder.

The myths of a culture and its people are very powerful because they represent the values, morals, beliefs, and inner workings of a society. Myths are stories or narratives that have existed through time because myths reflect a culture’s needs and wants and also speak to a people’s unconscious. According to Bettina L. Knapp, myths “are invented sometimes for the sake of entertainment, but more often they reflect a living and burning reality that exists in the psyche and culture of a people” (Bettina L. Knapp 1997: xii). Myth helps to construct social reality; therefore, myth should be regarded as true based on its meaning, interpretation, and deep desires that represent a culture rather than its literal quality that may be seen as false. As Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty stated, “As the culture retells the myth over time, it constantly reinterprets it, however much the culture may claim that the myth has been preserved intact. The myth provides a paradigm on which a number of meanings may be modeled” (Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty 1988: 31).

The Norwegian Imagination: Myth, Culture, and Play

Norway has a long history of myths and folk tales that are deeply embedded in its culture. The Vikings believing in the Norse Gods, the Crusades and the spreading of myths and new beliefs, the occurrence of the Black Death, the Norwegian farmers that lived isolated in the valleys and mountains of Norway before modern technology may have all contributed to the creation and belief in folk tales. Myths were a part of oral tradition until the middle of the 1800s when the printed stories of Norway’s authors Per Christian (or Peter Christen) Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe emerged. The written stories were a way to document and discuss the many creatures that are thought to exist in the Norwegian waters and woods and reflected the thoughts, fears, interests, and beliefs of the Norwegian people.

The strong cultural belief in myths, fairy tales, and mystical creatures is not only well represented through my theatrical play but the belief in myths is possible because it represents a form of play in the culture of Norway. Play not only allows the creatures to become beliefs of fantasy and useful learning tools, but play encourages imagination and therefore an
understanding of culture and people and an ability to examine the influences of media and
gender in society. According to Cindy Dell Clark, “Insofar as childhood myths are early
excursions into culturally shared *imaginal* experience, they enlighten us about the benefits and
workings of such experience. Imaginal experience can be defined as that experience which is not
physically present, but which is actually experienced nevertheless” (Cindy Dell Clark 1995: 3). It
is important to have faith and to have beliefs. Even though trolls and beings such as Santa Claus
are not considered visible, it does not mean that some people do not believe in them. Exercising
the imagination and playing with mythical characters is an important part of childhood; it teaches
both creativity and common sense. For example, Norwegian children are told that trolls rule the
night and so children are hopefully reluctant to wander through potentially unsafe forests when it
is dark out. According to Jack Zipes, “Almost all critics who have studied the emergence of the
literary fairy tale in Europe agree that educated writers purposely appropriated the oral folk tale
and converted it into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that
children would become civilized according to the social code of that time” (Jack Zipes 1983: 3).
Through fairy tales and play, children developed an understanding of societal norms and
expectations. Play is an important and distinguishable part of a culture, but all types of play have
similar characteristics.

"All play has its rules" (J. Huizinga 1944: 11). The game is over once someone breaks the rules. Rules help to create order, which is a positive
aspect of play because it makes play perfect and beautiful making the game enchanting.
According to J. Huizinga, “A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after
the game is over” (J. Huizinga 1944: 12). Even though one may leave the watchful eyes of trolls
that lurk in the forests, the game, the belief in mystical creatures, is so strong that the haunting
eyes will remain; and therefore the creatures become real, alive, and continue to survive. The
creatures become playmates to little children, but since most Norwegians believe in, or are
familiar with the mystical creatures, no rules are broken. As J. Huizinga stated, “Nature gave us
play, with its tension, its mirth, and its fun…it is precisely this fun-element that characterizes the
essence of play” (J. Huizinga 1944: 3). Play is the opposite of being serious, it is irrational and it
challenges reality, though “according to one theory play constitutes a training of the young
creature for the serious work that life will demand later on” (J. Huizinga 1944: 2). Play in the
context of mystical creatures in the culture of Norway is considered to be fun and educational. Children play in a fantasy world where trolls are their friends or are their enemies, but the fun and the imagination of a child stays with them through adulthood.

Trolls and other supernatural creatures represent the tradition and timeless existence of Norway. When children play they are not divorced from reality but rather they are involving skills of survival. Not only do fairy tales teach lessons of survival to little children, such as behaving and not talking to strangers, but, also, fairy tales have survived time themselves. Fairy tales and folk tales represent the culture, morals, and beliefs of a society. According to Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, “In the old days the Church was the sole authority in life and faith, but everyday problems were solved by belief-belief that was never questioned” (Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe 1990: 7).

Jan Bergh Eriksen explained that brave monks from England introduced Christianity to the Vikings of Norway, but the monks knew from the reputation of the Vikings that they would not be able to convert them only with godliness (Jan Bergh Eriksen 1983: 29). The Vikings were great sea-faring people thought to be savages; however, most of the Viking people probably were not the wild men portrayed in legend. According to Martin Hintz, “Recent historians have claimed that many Vikings lived quietly, as farmers or traders” (Martin Hintz 1982: 13). But, as the story goes, the monks brought with them a rather sinister character and planned to use him to scare Christianity into the Vikings. This sinister character amused the Norwegians and so they named him Old Erik; he is believed to be closely related to the trolls, maybe the master of them all (Jan Bergh Eriksen 1983: 29-31). However, the worship of a single god did not quickly replace the pagan belief of many gods. According to Jean F. Blashfield, “Tales of lesser spirits-such as trolls-who made life difficult for good Christians, continue into today’s storybooks” (Jean F. Blashfield 2000: 93). Trolls, for instance, have been described as “explaining the unexplainable.” Norwegians may call an “accident” the work of a troll. In addition, to encourage the christening of babies, the huldre or huldrefolk would be rumored to steal human babies that were not yet christened, from their homes (Bent Vanberg 1970: 139).

The mystical creatures that the Norwegians believed in substituted their many gods, the mystical creatures became their many gods living beside them on earth, tempting, rewarding, and punishing them at all times. The belief in mystical creatures was a part of the cultural religion of
Norway in the beginning, but now it is more a part of their cultural traditions. Furthermore, a belief in the mystical creatures required a type of “blind faith,” like the belief in God. Even though God can not be seen, though many claim they have seen God or experienced a miracle of his doing, some people still believe in God’s existence. This is similar to the belief in Norway’s mystical creatures. Though they can not be seen, though many claim they have seen them, they are still believed to exist because at an early age most Norwegians were introduced to them; so they became a part of their culture through ritual and myth “which are rooted in the primeval soil of play” (J. Huizinga 1944: 5). Norwegian children were not only exposed to societal norms through fairy tales and play, but they were learning about the ideology of their culture because myth works as ideology. According to Jack Zipes, “The writers of fairy tales for children acted ideologically by presenting their notions regarding social conditions and conflicts, and they interacted with each other and with past writers and storytellers of folklore in a public sphere” (Jack Zipes 1983: 3). It was this interaction that led to the symbolic discourse on the civilizing process of children that served as a basis for the fairy tale genre (Jack Zipes 1983: 3). The production of myth is ideological and therefore children, adults, and society are influenced through myths and play.

According to Reidun Mathiesen, “It was in the beginning, when the majestic and solemn Norwegian mountains emerged from the depths, that trolls as real beings became an integral part of our culture” (Reidun Mathiesen 1994: 5). The people of Norway have the reputation of being playful and relaxed in nature; however, there is something magical about the country. As Jean F. Blashfield stated, “Norway is a land where fairy tales come to life, where the people cherish and enjoy their beautiful countryside” (Jean F. Blashfield 2000: 9).

Tradition is highly valued in Norway; therefore, mystical creatures are highly valued by most Norwegians. The mystical creatures of Norway can be considered an invented tradition. According to Eric Hobsbawm, “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by… accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Eric Hobsbawm 1988: 1). In accordance with the myth of the Norwegian house god, it has become a tradition for Norwegian farmers to place a bowl of porridge out for the nisse (the house god) so that it will remain happy and bring luck to the crops and animals. The mystical creatures
are supposed to keep Norwegians happy and honest, because the trolls are always watching. Like the tale of Santa Claus, trolls know what you do, good or bad. The bad trolls also serve as types of demons that must be defeated, because many people have their own demons inside that must be destroyed. For instance, in the tale of the Ashlad, the Ashlad must kill a troll to save the princess. The Ashlad helps animals in the forest that in return help him to get closer to the princess, and in helping others he is rewarded. The belief in mystical creatures have been passed down through endless generations, the repetition has connected the people to their past. Many Norwegians have believed in trolls since the time of the Vikings; this is why their culture is so important to them. “Norwegians tend to regard themselves as one people, united by their pride in themselves and their traditions” (Jean F. Blashfield 2000: 9).

According to Elvajean Hall, “People who live most of their lives in the out-of-doors-farming, fishing, and lumbering- develop a special kind of folktale…. In Norway there grew up stories of trolls and other supernatural beings” (Elvajean Hall 1973: 56). The most popular supernatural beings that represent the teachings and playfulness of the Norwegian people are huldre, the huldrefolk or underground people, the trolls, the nisse, Fossegrimmen, Nokken, and Draugen.

The huldrefolk who live in the mountains, and their daughters the huldre, are related to the trolls. Trolls come in all shapes, sizes, and temperaments, but they only have eight fingers and eight toes. They are not too bright, and weeds or flowers tend to grow in their hair. In addition, they may have only one eye or multiple heads, but this is not common. However, all trolls have tails. Trolls avoid sunlight because they will turn to stone or even explode. Trolls represent the bad or less intelligent side of a Norwegian. They are a Norwegian’s counterpart that can be outsmarted. They are the reason for the mysteries that occur in Norway. A fallen tree or a missing goat may be the work of a troll; it is a good-natured way for a farmer to be upset. Many Norwegians can be described as being very relaxed and calm so they prefer to blame a troll rather than another Norwegian.

Sometimes one of the huldrefolk would move up into the farm of a Norwegian. They would then, in a sense, repent and become a type of house god that helped take care of the cattle. The tiny nisse has wooden shoes, a white beard, and a tall pointed red cap. The nisse will not cause worry if fed properly, especially on Christmas where he is then known as Julenisse,
Christmas-nisse. If a bowl of porridge is not set out for the nisse, then the animals will not eat; if it is set out, then the farmer can be assured a good crop. The Julenisse may resemble a tiny Santa Claus, but he is simply Norway’s own version of a house god that can punish or reward at will. The nisse helps the Norwegians to be good farmers and treat the animals well.

*Fossegrimen* lives in the waterfalls; he is an excellent music teacher, specializing in the Hardanger fiddle, the national instrument. One has to go to the waterfall three consecutive Thursday nights and then throw cured ham into the water in order for him to start playing and appear. It is believed that he taught all the great fiddle players of Norway how to play, further proving that the talent of the musician was given or taught by something magical or supernatural.

*Nøkken* resides in a mountain lake, and is a less friendly creature that can change into many appearances, including a beautiful white horse. He lures young boys and men, by appearing able to be bridled, into the depths of the water and claims them forever. But if a boy should happen to bridle the white horse then Nøkken becomes the best horse a young boy can ever have. However, this story teaches the lesson that something wild and beautiful as a horse should not be sought after and controlled, much like nature, unless of course the young boy is brave and able to conquer his quest and prove his manhood. However, Norwegians prefer to live in harmony with nature and do not like to taint its beauty.

*Draugen* is a large sea ghost that scared the Vikings. Draugen is the headless ghost of a sailor whose body was thrown into the sea without a proper Christian burial. He sails the seas doing sinister deeds and drawing unlucky sailors towards him. Draugen is the protector of the sea. The Norwegian people depend on the sea for much of its food and travel, and so they treat the sea with respect so as not to upset its keeper.

The mystical creatures of Norway are so embedded in its culture and folktales that “Painters, sculptors, and craftspeople of all kinds...have drawn on Norway itself as their ultimate inspiration” (Martin Hintz 1982: 104). Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is Norway’s most notable literary figure and his plays are still being performed to this day all over the world. “His most popular work is *Peer Gynt*, a play inspired by many Norwegian folktales” (Elvajean Hall 1973: 59). The play deals with a male character that is always running away from himself. He deserts his mother and sweetheart in the beginning to travel, and when he finally returns as an old man, he must then face himself. It is a fantasy with dream sequences and some of the characters in the
play are trolls. According to Martin Hintz, “Ibsen himself, through his plays, changed the face of the theater of his day by emphasizing characters rather than plot. He had many imitators all over the world” (Martin Hintz 1982: 107). As explained by J. Huizinga, drama is considered “actualization by representation” and “still retains the formal characteristics of play in every respect” (J. Huizinga 1944: 14). Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* is an example of play within a play because an act, a belief is being represented. In play, “the player wants something to ‘go’, to ‘come off’; he wants to ‘succeed’ by his own exertions” (J. Huizinga 1944: 10-11). Peer Gynt wants to succeed which is why he leaves home. Not only does the play give an example of a characteristic of play but it also serves as an example of a belief being represented, a belief in trolls and that they are real to him, his troubles to overcome are real.

“Next to literature and the theater, music is an important part of Norwegian culture” (Martin Hintz 1982: 109). Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) is one of Norway’s greatest composers. “Among his most famous compositions is *Peer Gynt*, written to accompany Henrik Ibsen’s play of the same name” (Jean F. Blashfield 2000: 111). “In the Hall of the Mountain King” is a composition that incorporates the sound of mystery and trolls. Grieg wrote music out of his love for Norway and its old folklore (Jean F. Blashfield 2000: 111). According to J. Huizinga, “The function of play…can largely be derived…as a contest for something or a representation of something. Representation means display, and this may simply consist in the exhibition of something naturally given, before an audience” (J. Huizinga 1944: 13).

Theodor Kittelsen (1857-1914) is “…Norway’s most popular illustrator of fairy and folk tales” (Bent Vanberg 1970: 154). Much of his artwork revolves around the fairy tales, folk tales, and beliefs of the Norwegian people. Martin Hintz states that “The Norwegians are deeply reflective people, fashioned by their beautiful countryside- the pine forests, the peaks, and the ocean waves” (Martin Hintz 1982: 111). One piece of Theodor Kittelsen’s art may appear to just be a drawing of a snow covered tree on a still night, but if one dared to look closer, it is actually a drawing of a troll carrying a princess. Art is his form of play, and he draws and paints Nøkken the water sprite and Draugen the sea ghost adding to the magic of the tales, bringing them to life. According to J. Huizinga, “The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics…. Play casts a spell over us; it is ‘enchanting’, ‘captivating’” (J. Huizinga 1944: 10). Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature, creation, and
appreciation of beauty. Kittelsen has a gifted way of captivating his audience with the beauty of his artwork that portrays the belief in mystical creatures. Writers, composers, and artists keep the belief of Norway’s mystical creatures alive by incorporating them into their work, but it also shows their devotion to the traditions related to their culture. Their culture and personal beliefs are what inspire them to create and carry on the fantasy of mystical creatures that so many Norwegians, including the genius and famous, claim are real.

“Its majestic open spaces, towering mountains, and spreading forests present a rich background for an imaginative people” (Martin Hintz 1982: 104). The landscape of Norway is the ideal playground for its mystical creatures and their tales. The tales instilled in children allow them to make an image on their own different from ordinary life. According to J. Huizinga, “One is a Prince…or a wicked witch or a tiger. The child is…transported beyond himself…he almost believes he is actually such and such a thing, without, however, wholly losing consciousness of ‘ordinary reality’” (J. Huizinga 1944: 14). A child wants to become the slayer of an evil troll because then the child feels empowered and successful, further able to conquer any other obstacle that may stand in the way of a reward. In the very isolated mountains and farms of Norway, children may not have many other children to play with and so the idea of trolls becomes real, they become a child’s playmates. Reality and imagination in regards to folklore are combined beautifully within the mountains and fjords of Norway.

It is important for children to play outside, as “‘wild spaces’ allow many more opportunities for children to modify their physical environment” (Henry Jenkins 1998: 267). Henry Jenkins explains that outside play spaces are where free and unstructured play occurs. Such spaces are on the lists of children’s most important places in their lives (Henry Jenkins 1998: 266). J. Huizinga stated that “One is always playing, regardless of what one does, because one is always outside the constraints of reality. This is why, I believe, many a philosopher has said that only when man plays can he be free. This is why Plato prescribed that one should live life as play” (J. Huizinga 1944: 19).

The culture of Norway is much more like the old childhood view of play in the fact that play involves the whole family (Stephen Kline 1993: 46). Spending quality time with the family is vital to Norwegians and so children and adults share the same games, toys, and fairy tales.
This is what keeps many adults of Norway so youthful and playful, their traditions and beliefs allow them to never escape their childhood.

“To understand culture in its full complexity, it is important to assess both juvenile and adult viewpoints and dynamically interrelate them” (Cindy Dell Clark 1995: 106). The people of Norway, both adults and children believe in the mystical creatures that inhabit Norway’s forests, lakes, oceans, and farmhouses. According to Cindy Dell Clark, “The individual believer, when given creative leeway respected by others, keeps a mythological figure ‘alive’ partly by sheer force of imaginal playfulness and acceptance” (Cindy Dell Clark 1995: 102). Both adults and children believe in the mystical creatures of Norway. Relying on children’s beliefs as a source of adult experience gives children a powerful role in the ritual and tradition of beliefs (Cindy Dell Clark 1995: 104). It is a culture’s traditions, myths, and beliefs that define a culture and its people and play is an important way to understand a culture’s traditions and the beliefs of its people. It is through play that gender roles can be defined and media influences are attracted. My theatrical play discusses the importance of play and imagination and the dangers of society’s media influences and rigid gender roles and expectations as it pertains to the people of a culture and their myths.

**Gender and Myth**

It is important that myths can change over time and be interpreted in different ways so that the meanings and desires of a culture can be discovered. It may be true that some myths may have core beliefs that cannot be denied or reinterpreted; however, most myths may have alternate readings and may change depending on the gender of the myth’s character or gender of the author and audience. According to Bettina L. Knapp, “Myths are generally believed to have been written by men, and perhaps that is the reason the portrayal and understanding of women in the mythical texts is sometimes rudimentary and distorted” (Bettina L. Knapp 1998: xiii). Gender is a culturally constructed notion and myths often perpetuate the oppression of women. However, it is necessary to look at the nature and culture of different and foreign myths in order to find ways to reinterpret myths that are oppressive or to find myths that empower women in both the public and the private spheres. Since nature and culture are inseparable, the anthropologist Edgar Morin
wrote “human nature is the key to a culture and the key to our nature is in the culture” (Bettina L. Knapp 1998: xiv-xv). Women must familiarize themselves with other cultures and other stories about women, because this “serves to expand one’s knowledge not only of the psyche but of the behavioral patterns of individuals and their interactions within the collective (Morin 1973, 19)” (Bettina L. Knapp 1998: xv).

When studying myths and folk tales, we must look at the “folk” that are being described or the folk that are being spoken to, which can include their psyche and behavioral patterns, but also must include their environment, because this has an impact on the version of the story that flourishes. According to Barbara Fass Leavy, “A people’s folklore is intrinsically bound to its culture and is therefore part of its identity and self-esteem, which some of the folk may not be ready to surrender to the abstraction of universal human problems” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 14). Therefore, it is vital to look at a myth’s surfacing issues as they pertain to a particular group, not only to understand a culture better, but to aid the problems that exist in a culture and across the globe. A “folk” is compiled of a group of people that share one common element or linking factor and so a group or folk that has formed over time will share common traditions and myths.

It may be difficult for some folk or cultures to relate to each other, especially if their traditions or meanings of happiness are vastly different. However, if there is a common thread tying different myths together, it would be easier for cultures and folks to share a common bond, which would also increase the knowledge of a culture and influence others. Barbara Fass Leavy, author of In Search of the Swan Maiden, discovered that “folk narratives reveal feminist themes when their subject is woman’s role in culture and fantasies about escaping that role” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 15). Leavy discusses the interplay between stories about a fairy captured by a mortal man and forced into a mundane domestic existence and about a mortal woman that is courted by a demon lover who offers her escape from that same mundane world (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 11). In all the myths that Leavy has encountered, collected, and studied, she has not found an analysis of the swan maiden or demon lover that was not applicable to societies outside the one being studied. Myths can contain elements that can be applied cross-culturally and do not have to be limited to the cultures in which they are found. It is also possible for the person who gathers the tales and is the storyteller to have an impact on the tale and its meaning and
perspective; therefore, folklore can serve as an instrument towards social change instead of simply perpetuating traditional values (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 17).

The universal concerns of gender and the oppression of women are found in many folk tales, but it is also important to study the storyteller and the storyteller’s perspective because the perspective speaks to the view of the story and therefore the meaning of values for the culture and its people. The folklorist Bengt Holbek revealed about Danish tales that “men tell stories with male protagonists, whereas women tell stories with both female and male protagonists” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 23). However, some female narrators may have completely internalized male views of reality and therefore can only see that view. “Perhaps the only hypothesis to be drawn… is that gender is an important factor down the line, from the telling of the tale to the reading of the book that the gatherer creates out of what she or he hears – that gender supplies keys for the interpretation of folktales, but that no single key fits all locks” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 24). However, through the journey of tales traveling from the storyteller to the listener to the collector to the reader of tales, there can be intrusions upon the traditional folk tale, and although this relationship may show the influence of gender, it may also take away from the traditional beliefs of the culture. We must first study the traditional folk tales and beliefs of a culture in order to recognize and influence the gendering of folk tales and therefore create social change.

The tale of the Norwegian hulder shares a bond with many other tales across the world, and this is the tale of the “runaway wife,” otherwise known as the swan maiden. The swan maiden can take the form of many animals, some are doves, geese, ducks, cranes, wolves, and some are seals that belong to the myths of Scotland and Scandinavia. Other swan maidens do not take animal form and instead they are bound to mortal form and their power lies, for example, in a secret name or dress. The swan maiden tale, however, is not the romantic story that it is so commonly know as; instead it is a tale of marital struggle. According to Leavy, the supposedly poetic and romantic tale of the swan maiden has been said to be one of the most beautiful stories that has ever evolved from the mind of man (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 33). However, the tale is not beautiful because it is told through a patriarchal lens and represents the oppression of women in the domestic and private sphere. In addition, the swan is not entirely an attractive bird, especially if she is female. Leavy explains that swans are aggressive, their voices are raucous,
and their snakelike necks can suggest evil and are sexually threatening (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 33).

The images of the swan maiden are similar to those of the hulder. Although the hulder has a seductive and enticing singing voice, the hulder and the swan maiden both have aggressive personalities and have elements of their bodies that suggest or warn of evil and are sexually threatening. The cow tail of the hulder serves as a warning to males because it is a distinguishing feature and because the males may come under the hulder’s spell and be lost in the forest forever. Furthermore, the tail is a phallic symbol and threatens the sexuality of the males because it suggests that the female hulder has power. It is the female hulder, with her long hair, beautiful voice, seductive body, and cow’s tail, that is most widely known in Norwegian culture as opposed to the male hulder. However, Barbara Fass Leavy discusses a different version of the tale, or rather confuses the huldrefolk with the underground people. But this confusion reveals that it is important to reverse the roles of gender in the hulder story and that perhaps the traditional story of the hulder is too gendered and focuses on the farmboy being adventurous and brave and the female hulder being dangerous and manipulative. Instead, there should be a new reading of the traditional hulder tale that empowers women and there should be a male hulder and female hulder or a seter boy and seter girl in the hulder story to balance the gendered notions of the hulder tale.

“Norway, rich in tales of supernatural lovers, tells many stories of the huldra folk, who seek salvation in human mates but who also can be dangerous to the mortals who must be rescued from them” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 286). Leavy explains that there are many stories that tell of seter girls that become the desired objects of huldra men. The seter girls live alone in the mountain huts or cottages, called seters, for part of the year where they make cheese, tend cattle, and weave. The stories follow that the huldra men prey on the seter girls because they are alone, vulnerable, and without the protection of the human men. “One folk tale tells how a young woman unwittingly finds herself about to marry the huldra, and how she must be rescued by her mortal fiancé, that is, brought once more within the bounds of patriarchal society” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 286). However, it is also described how the captured Norwegian woman’s independence in the otherworld may also offer strengths not exhibited by her women sisters. In addition, it is told that some Norwegian women are taken as children by the huldra folk and
when they grow up they may have mixed feelings about their new lives. Some of the women do not want to marry the huldre men and wish to return home, while some women are glad that their villages failed in their efforts to get them back. Furthermore, similar to the traditional female hulder tale, it is described that some huldre women do reject the “good” life in their other world and are willing to become ordinary women.

The Norwegian stories of swan maidens that Leavy discusses are primarily about the huldrefolk and the vulnerable seter girls being preyed upon by the huldre men. These stories are confused with the stories of the underground people, who are related to the trolls and created their own villages underground. The female huldre are the daughters of the underground people, but there are no common, traditional stories of huldre men capturing seter girls, but there are stories of underground men capturing seter girls. However, the idea of huldre men is interesting because it gives a different perspective to the hulder tale, but in both versions of the story, whether seter girls or seter boys are preyed upon, the seter girls or the huldre women are still forced to choose between independence and marriage. The two versions of the tales show that the issue of marriage is not always a choice and puts the woman in an oppressed and domesticated position. Therefore, the tale is patriarchal in nature because of the lack of power and choice. However, my theatrical play exemplifies reading against the grain and retelling the story through a woman’s perspective and may hopefully change the dominant and patriarchal perspective of the original hulder tale and therefore create societal change and more choices for women in the private and public spheres.

Myth and Media: The Disney Doll

My theatrical play *Lost in The Woods* discusses women’s roles in society and the influences of gender and media through their symbolic representations of the Disney doll and the cow tails of the huldre. My play uses television and the doll to portray how contemporary American society is based on the functions and control of patriarchy, capitalism, and consumerism. My play uses a Disney doll (which in this case has more to do with media than the gender of the doll), so Mickey Mouse could be used to show the media influence of Disney as an industry that has cultural characters that children grow up with and learn stories from that teach
ideological norms. The media and particularly television have roles in perpetuating these dominant influences. “Television is a complex combination of industry and artistry.... The term television embraces a range of social practices bounded by material constraints” (Horace Newcomb 1994: 563-564). According to Horace Newcomb, television is both industry and culture. It is motivated by capitalism, patriarchy, and consumption or production; however, it also provides stories, myths, and ideologies of society and culture (Horace Newcomb 1994: 563-564). The ideologies that drive our society are filtered through television, which in turn produces specific ideals and beliefs in its audience, in addition to creating consumption sources.

In a society such as ours that greatly values television, a society that is based upon capitalist and patriarchal norms, women suffer. Television usually reproduces and creates images and notions about women that fuels and continues the oppression of women. A woman should be able to decide whether to be part of the private sphere, be a mother, and reproduce, or be part of the public sphere, be a career woman, and produce. Television not only tells the stories and myths of society, but it also advertises products to society and supports a society of the spectacle.

According to Seven Best and Douglas Kellner, “The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life. The relation to the commodity is not only visible, but one no longer sees anything but it: the world one sees is its world” (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 81). The notion of society as a spectacle was created by a French avant-garde movement, the Situationist International in the 1950s and 1960s, which was led by Guy Debord. However, the movement emerged from Karl Marx and the Marxian vision that “capital created a world in its own image, and the commodity form of its products became a constitutive principle of social organization” (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 79). Guy Debord and the Situationists identified consumer capitalism as a new form of social control, “as a ‘society of the spectacle,’ that pacifies its citizens by creating a world of mesmerizing images and stupefying forms of entertainment” (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 79-80). The Situationists felt that the conception of the spectacle was a concept of separation. When consuming spectacles, one is separated from other people and from one’s own life, which is what a capitalist society does by separating the spheres of production and consumption. Best and Kellner explained that the Situationists wanted to encourage people to overcome separation and produce one’s own life (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 84). However, producing one’s
own life is not possible when television, advertising, and spectacles influence a person’s life and consumption choices. Furthermore, the Situationists, influenced by Antonio Gramsci, perceived social control based on consensus rather than force, “as a cultural hegemony attained through the metamorphosis of the consumer and media society into the ‘society of the spectacle.’ In this society, individuals consume a world fabricated by others rather than producing one of their own” (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 82). Through the society of the spectacle and media influence on consumerism, people digest a fabricated world and choose products that have already been chosen for them through such practices as advertising.

“Media spectacles are financed by advertisers, who in turn pass along costs to the consumers, who are doubly exploited in work and consumption. Consumers pay for the spectacles of entertainment, subsidized by advertising, in the form of higher costs for products” (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 88). However, as discussed by Best and Kellner, the entertainment and information that is offered is also what the culture industries think will sell, which also benefits their efforts, goods, and way of life (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 88). Spectacles are a way to control the public, make people submissive, and make people conform and buy certain ideals. “With cable and satellite TV, the spectacle is now so ubiquitous and accessible that one need not even rise from the reclining chair to shop; only a telephone and credit card is required to purchase a vast array of products from TV home-shopping networks” (Steven Best and Douglas Kellner 1997: 86). Television also mesmerizes its viewers through movies and characters that sell specific images and products.

Therefore, starting from when we are young, we have been influenced by our society’s stories and myths, which are filtered through the media, especially through the use of television and advertising. According to Jarice J. Hanson and David J. Maxcy, “In the case of television,…the individual is introduced virtually at birth into its powerful flow of messages and images. The television set has become a key member of the family, the one who tells most of the stories most of the time” (Jarice J. Hanson and David J. Maxcy 1999: 82).

Just as the television set has become a dominant figure in the family, Disney acts as a father figure in society by mesmerizing and directing children through methods of hegemony. Disney teaches the child traditional values through entertaining stories without force. According to Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, “The model of paternal authority is at every point
immanent, the implicit basis of its structure and very existence… Paternalism in absentia is the indispensable vehicle for the defense and invisible control of the ostensibly autonomous childhood model” (quoted in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner 2001: 149). In the example of Disney or Disneyland, the father figure, the controlling power, is physically absent so as to mold the child without direct command or confrontation, even though the father figure reemerges through other means and still has control over the child and therefore future adult. Therefore, the father figure, or patriarchy, is always in control, which means the elite powers are in control and convey their own particular ideals to children and future adults through commodities, fantasy worlds, spectacles, and nostalgia. Disney has marketed its name and values to create a business that can package all of its ideals concerning a patriarchal, capitalist, consumerist society into something as simple as a Mickey Mouse doll that sits on a store shelf, waiting to be bought, and transfer its meanings on to the owner who unwraps its packaging.

**Women as Myth and Products**

“Everything is packaged” (Susan Willis 1991: 1). The United States’ society and culture relies upon commodities and products. Packaged products and consumerism are an important basis of human identity and the function of society. Through media and industry, people are encouraged to buy and obtain packaged products that have use-value and exchange-value; however, these products not only support a capitalist economy, but they create a culture where identities and values can be bought and sold, where an emphasis is placed upon quantity instead of quality. When people buy products they are also buying identities that have been created by the dominant society and we in turn become products ourselves. People are conveniently and purposely packaged to support a society based on patriarchal, capitalist, and consumerist beliefs. The process of how we have become products of society has developed through common stories and histories, the influence of television and advertising, and the dependence upon consumerism and spectacles.

According to Susan Willis, in mass culture, there is a strong early influence on children of gender in the toy market. Children do not conceive of toys being made or having a life before being placed on the shelf of a toy store; therefore, they do not question the toy store’s gendered
universe. Children may think of certain toys as having no gender or being multi-gendered. Girls often seem less concerned with sex-roles involving toys than boys, but this is a result of society and educational environments. When a child is between the age of roughly four and pre-adolescence, children no longer see toys as multi-gendered, they are now influenced by such figures as Barbie and He-man, whose sexualities are clearly defined. The toys play on the child’s conscious and unconscious notions of adolescence. The toys suggest that change and the anticipations of and ability to cope with change are bound up in commodity consumption. Commodities are often sought out instead of family and friends when children are approaching adolescence. Barbie and He-man enable a child to conceptualize adulthood. Yet, oftentimes, play or how a child plays with a toy can disrupt gender roles and the commodity culture. According to Susan Willis, children transform commodities into use values and use these as a means for articulating their social relationships, and producing new imagined social possibilities, where gender is no longer so important but one among many qualities (Susan Willis 1991: 32). Marte, the child in my theatrical play, is able to leave the influences of Mickey Mouse and patriarchy behind her. In addition, Mickey Mouse, rather Disney, is a male figure itself that represented the child’s need for more power and control since she was female; however, the patriarchal figure of Mickey Mouse was not needed when Marte discovered the hulder and therefore discovered empowerment within herself and the forest.

Historically, women have been targeted as the primary shoppers for the home. Mothers that fall prey to consumerism have been influenced by society and patriarchal norms and standards and serve as an example of people that have become products themselves. Women have been placed in the position of the private sphere, meaning they take care of the household and buy products and food to feed to their families, while men enter the public sphere of work and careers. Television commercials, advertising, and the production world have reaped the benefits of women buying products and becoming consumers. According to Carolyn Kitch, women have always been labeled the major consumers, capable of being “both a proper homemaker and a modern shopper” (Carolyn Kitch 2001: 13). However, women are an example of how a society based on capitalism, patriarchy, and consumerism has caused people to become products themselves, not only can they carry the same ideals that the products represent, but women are also seen as commodities, something that can be bought and sold and can be used for
Gayle Rubin proposes that the exchange of women or trafficking of women is due to a social construct rather than a biological occurrence. And in the social construct, men have rights while “women do not have full rights to themselves” (Gayle Rubin 1975: 177). The historical defeat of women gained its birth through culture and it is culture that controls the oppression; it is men that have control of culture (Gayle Rubin 1975: 176). Marriage is the most general form of exchange for women in society, because many times women are treated as gifts to be exchanged. It was gifts or products that tied a society together when there was no government; it was a form of social discourse (Gayle Rubin 1975: 172-173). However, using women as gifts for men in terms of marriage is also another form of government or market because women are used as products or objects. In addition, women are promised to other men at an early age and act as debts or promises (Gayle Rubin 1975: 182). The exchange of women is part of a kinship system. As Gayle Rubin stated, “A kinship system is an imposition of social ends upon a part of the natural world. It is therefore ‘production’ in the most general sense of the term: a molding, a transformation of objects (in this case people) to and by a subjective purpose” (Gayle Rubin 1975: 176). The exchange of women places the oppression of women within social systems which therefore implies that biology is not the cause. Men are also exchanged or trafficked but in certain roles such as an athlete star while women are exchanged or trafficked in roles but also simply as women (Gayle Rubin 1975: 175-176). The organization of society, with men mostly in control, and women serving as gifts or products, promotes patriarchy and the oppression of women, but also the downfalls of a consumerist, capitalist society. Women lose their rights and identities when they are exchanged and treated as products of a patriarchal society. In the United States, women are used in our culture to adorn sales ads, magazines, and commercials, and anything else that revolves around a product to be sold. Therefore, through commodification and patriarchal influence, women are encouraged to shop, women represent commodities, and women are a form of commodities themselves, especially in the private spheres of marriage and motherhood.
Mediated Myth and Gender: Choices in Tails

The two choices or roles in the story of the hulder, of how she can lure farmboys into the forest or get married, show how huldre and therefore women in society are oftentimes forced to choose between being single and becoming a “hag” or being married. The tale of the hulder describes the choice of motherhood and how if the hulder marries she becomes the best wife ever; however, the tale also implies, but does not state directly, that with marriage comes the pressure and expectations of motherhood. If a woman is young and single, she can be seen as being independent and powerful by choosing a career and/or choosing her own sexual partners. According to Simone DeBeauvoir, “It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice” (Simone DeBeauvoir 1989: 679). However, if she is single then she will grow to be a spinster and will be alone and no longer attractive according to society’s standards of beauty. If she chooses to be married, she will be tamed and domesticated and therefore trapped in the private sphere through marriage but also motherhood, but at least society will approve of her.

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being… The young girl’s freedom of choice has always been much restricted… marriage is her only means of support and the sole justification of her existence… The first reason is that she must provide society with children… the second reason why marriage is enjoined is that woman’s function is also to satisfy a male’s sexual needs and to take care of his household. (Simone DeBeauvoir 1989: 425-427)

In both situations, the huldre are situated within a private sphere because the forest and the home lives represent the absence of the public sphere. The forest represents nature while the home, which includes marriage and motherhood, represents reproduction, and both are a part of the private sphere and not the public sphere. However, within the forest or nature, the huldre women have some freedom because it is their own domain, but society still tries to control nature and does not allow it to be part of the public sphere. Therefore, women must break free from the confines of their private spheres, and create a new history free from the male history that
mainstream society has established. Women must reclaim their bodies and create a new history for women and therefore men in order to empower women.

According to Adrienne Rich, women must regain possession of their bodies in order to bring change to society. This would create new ways of thinking in a patriarchal society and create choices for women surrounding the issue of motherhood. “Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed. This is where we have to begin” (Adrienne Rich 1986: 285-286). However, a new beginning needs a new history.

The current male-oriented social contract would be difficult to change since history is embedded in the lives of men. However, change in the social contract is possible by focusing on motherhood and the repossession of women’s bodies. When I speak of motherhood, I refer to the actual birth of a child and the emotional and physical strain a woman’s body endures. But I also refer to the acts of childrearing and domestication. However, I do not use the two concepts simultaneously; a mother can be a reproduction process and/or a caretaker. Motherhood requires so much time and energy from a woman’s body, but it is also another way that the social contract oppresses women; it gives them no choices and no freedom. According to Rich, the potential relationship is the relationship and power a woman has towards her children and ability to reproduce, while the institution of motherhood is the male effort to control this power (Adrienne Rich 1986: 13). When patriarchy is practiced and men have control over women and their reproductive capabilities, women lose their choices and their power of motherhood. In order for women to have choices about motherhood, sterilization, abortion, and career, they must first understand their powerlessness within the institution of a patriarchal society.

Motherhood is an institution because it has been placed upon women without much choice. But it also involves the pain and beauty of giving birth, in addition to the nurturing of a child (which does not come naturally by instinct). Women are expected to have children and care for their children, and even sometimes care for other people’s children. Motherhood is also an institution in the way that it prevents women from seeking other goals or opportunities in life. Motherhood is the sole career of most women. This is why the institution of motherhood is a problem for women, it does not always allow for women to fulfill all of their potential in life.
It was normal for women within our patriarchal society to marry and have children because it is what their mothers did and what their mothers did and so on. However, women can regain power and fulfill their own dreams by gaining control of their bodies and choosing for themselves whether to endure motherhood. I believe that women have become accustomed to their role within the institution of motherhood and are afraid to go against patriarchy, especially if their lives are satisfactory yet still degrading. I think that women must regain control of their bodies and choices of motherhood in order to allow women their freedom as a woman and as a mother. In accordance with Rich, I believe women must take control of their own bodies in order to be fully human, a reconnecting of the body and mind is necessary (Adrienne Rich 1986: 40).

Choice is very important for most feminists, including postfeminists. According to Rachel Dubrofsky, “Postfeminists… seem to believe that we have arrived as independent women, and are able to do what we want with our lives, that the battles have been won” (Rachel Dubrofsky 2002: 269). Postfeminism is a reactionary movement, but the goal is not to return women to the kitchen and to child-rearing; however, postfeminists do feel that “women have come so far that they can now reclaim these roles if they wish – it is, after all, their choice” (Rachel Dubrofsky 2002: 269). However, the danger for women according to postfeminism is that women have gone too far in renouncing their femininity, “and hence ‘today’s women is a lost soul, an ambitious career woman who has lost touch with that essential part of her femaleness – motherhood (Walters, 1995, p. 121)” (Rachel Dubrofsky 2002: 270). Drubrosky explains that postfeminism represents an introspective movement where women are the cause and the solution to their problems. Feminism is based more upon an outward approach where social and economic factors are addressed, such as an examination of how the personal is political (Rachel Dubrofsky 2002: 270).

The extent to which women actually have choice about their lives in relation to marriage, motherhood, and careers within a patriarchal society is minute. According to Leavy, Holbek points out that the majority of human beings lack the privilege of making meaningful choices in their lives. “Choice may, in fact, constitute for the folk the ultimate human fantasy: that they do not experience volition does not mean they cannot imagine an existence in which they do” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 288). Choice is very important, and it is the key to liberation, even if the choices are bleak, but making a choice grants us our independence, and finding choices
within myths allows us to exist in otherworlds and allows us to survive in our own worlds.

“Again, the questions remains of what can be said about the swan maidens who choose husband, domestic role, and children over the supposed advantages of the otherworld…” (Barbara Fass Leavy 1994: 291). Whether women choose the domestic roles or society influences them to do so, women need the ability to choose and find power where perhaps power is not so easily found, such as a myth that supports patriarchal ideals but still shows the wants and needs of women, and in this reading of power there is choice. The modern world may have forgotten many of its traditional folk tales, but one thing remains the same, the issues and desires of the folk tales still exist in everyday life. Whether women get captured or escape from one world or role to another, we still must strive for and find the choices that do exist so that we can survive in the world that our myths have created and therefore influence the way women in myths and reality should live and be represented.

As a storyteller and now being a part of the process of influencing the way women live and are represented, my theatrical play discusses many different themes and images of women. For instance, the hulder is very beautiful and seductive, and may appear to be the desire of most men; however, she does have a cow’s tail, which connects her to the “animal” world and nature. Oftentimes, men are scared or intimidated by women’s abject bodies because women’s bodies do bleed, swell, and constantly change, it reminds men of nature and their debt to her. In addition, women and nature serve as the connection between the animal and human worlds. When farmboys or seter boys see the tail of the hulder, they have been warned to run away, unless of course they think they can control a hulder, much like nature, but this is a risk for the farmboy because he may be lost in the woods forever, lost in the dark forest, the womb, or the vagina of the hulder, the “other” of man. But this tail, this warning sign, is also the power source of the hulder; it is what distinguishes her from the “real” yet subservient wife and mother that she can also become.

“It is both so important in itself and yet so clearly a sign or symbol referring to things outside itself in our culture” (Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick 1999: 122). Using Sigmund Freud’s analysis of women and lesbians having penis-envy, from Barbara Creed’s article “Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts,” I feel that the hulder does have a type of penis or phallic symbol, not only because of the shape of the tail, but because it is what
intimidates the farmboys and men when they see the hulder, much in the same way that lesbians intimidate men because they do not need the male penis, or the power that the penis implies. However, there is no discussion on whether the huldre creatures live lesbian lifestyles in the physical sense, but they have developed a female society where men are not needed, but rather used for pleasure. However, even though the men are preyed upon, if the hulder falls in love she is victim to losing her identity and her tail; therefore, the myth is again patriarchal in the end. However, when the huldre creatures are in the forest, men do find them intimidating, and this is a source of power, but since they are intimidating, men have also made them beautiful; here again is a man-made image of a “woman” or something that men want to control.

Creating a New History

Our capitalist and patriarchal society has created stories based on a male history; therefore, most of what is viewed on television and read about in texts is seen through the perspective of a male audience and the male gaze.

There are three ‘looks’ that constitute the male gaze. First is the gaze within the representation itself: men gaze at women, who become objects of the gaze; second, the spectator, in turn, is made to identify with this male gaze and to objectify the woman on the screen; and third, the camera’s original ‘gaze’ comes into play in the very act of filming; the camera here can be understood as an extension of the male eye. (Suzanna Danuta Walters 1995: 57)

However, according to Suzanna Danuta Walters, women are often denied subjectivity, seen as objects, and absent from cultural criticism and television; “women are absent because all too often politics (and therefore history) are absent” (Suzanna Danuta Walters 1995: 147). I believe that a woman’s history needs to be established, apart from a man’s history and the origins of women’s oppression. “To paraphrase Marx: up until now, cultural critics have been content to read a text; the point, however, is to write a new one” (Suzanna Danuta Walters 1995: 152). New texts, new discourse involving women, now and in the future, needs to be established, a new history needs to be made.
A woman is created by a male society that has been established through a male history and social contract. The social contract is a contract between men, and “it confirms between men a contract of appropriation of all women. For Levi-Strauss, society cannot function or exist without this exchange” (Monique Wittig 1992: 43). Women can only escape this social contract, this domination of men by being ‘run-away’ slaves. They must escape and create a new social contract. Breaking away is necessary for those that do not consent, because it is easy for women to accept this social contract as natural and not socially and politically created by men.

According to Monique Wittig, “If ultimately we are denied a new social order, which therefore can exist only in words, I will find it in myself” (Monique Wittig 1992: 45). Once finding it in one’s self, in the mind, it will affect one’s life, and therefore, the way that person thinks and acts, and perhaps this way a new contract can exist.

In addition to the importance of separating oneself from the influences of society and constructing one’s own meanings, perhaps another recommendation towards addressing the issue of people becoming products of society is that there should be less separation between production and consumption, which follows the beliefs of Guy Debord and the Situationists. I believe that a concept of “reconstruction” would be helpful, and by reconstruction, I mean people should be aware of society’s messages. People should be able to understand the messages while remaining an individual and reconstruct the messages to best benefit themselves and therefore society as a whole. By separating the areas of production and consumption, we lose the quality of products and more focus is placed upon the quantity or number of products. This is what happens to people, when an emphasis is placed upon money, mass-production, consumption, and conformity, people lose their identities and values. Through reconstruction, production and consumption can work together, because there is a sense of rebuilding and a relationship is formed between the two. Reconstruction however depends upon all forms of culture being used, not just the dominant culture.

There are many forms of culture, for instance, according to Raymond Williams, there is the dominant culture, the residual culture, and the emergent culture. The dominant culture is the culture that is most prevalent and is supported by the elite powers. The residual culture is a product of previous social formations that many people may still participate in but does not necessarily coincide with dominant practices. The emergent culture supports and creates new
meanings, values, practices, and experiences. Therefore, the residual and emergent forms are both of alternative and of oppositional culture (Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner 2001: 159). It is important that society does not focus primarily upon the dominant culture. A dominant culture may be necessary to maintain a level of stability and success and capitalism does have its advantages; however, when the dominant culture has complete control, people become the products of society and are not able to fulfill their full capabilities as individuals. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and strengthen other forms of culture so that women can make their own decisions, meanings, and experiences.

My theatrical play discusses the myth of the hulder and how it shows the complications of images of women in society. The hulder cannot be called a “bad” or “negative” image because many viewers of the myth may have different opinions, especially if one is reading against the grain. My play takes the fantasy of the hulder, the patriarchal notions, the beautiful body, the need to be married, and the expectation to be a mother, and breaks the fantasy by showing a young girl not solely interested in marriage and motherhood but rather with the power of the hulder in the woods. She is then able to “wake up” from the fantasy and become a real woman by taking her own perspective, the cow’s tail, and tale of the hulder away with her into reality as she heads out of the woods and out of the darkness of a male history. She chooses to create her own image and representation; she will be able to rewrite history and will be able to create her own future.

The huldre represent the idea that women and those who are oppressed can become more aware of themselves and their society and from this gain strength. It is important that the oppressed set their own terms to create change and choices in society. According to Patricia Hill Collins in her piece titled “On Our Own Terms: Self-Defined Standpoints and Curriculum Transformation,” “Dominant groups rule, in part, by encouraging women, men of color, and other historically marginalized groups to replace their self-defined standpoints with knowledge representing elite group interests” (Patricia Hill Collins 1991: 368). It is vital that oppressed groups and people regain their self-defined standpoints in order to create change and choices. “Restoring the self-defined but subjugated standpoints to the center of any subordinated group’s discourse can inspire a subordinated group’s resistance and activism” (Patricia Hill Collins 1991:
It is important to create this knowledge in order to actively create power and more choices for women in their lives.

Many stories are cross-cultural and universal because many myths describe the oppression of women through common tales such as the “runaway wife,” the swan maiden, the demon lover, and the hulder. However, the hulder tale is unique because it offers multiple endings, but the character and the basic storyline resonate around the globe. According to Jack Zipes, “the best fairy tales are supposedly universal” (Jack Zipes 1983: 1). Zipes believes that fairy tales are supposed to be universal and ageless, mysterious and beautiful for children because this is how fairy tales are enchanting (Jack Zipes 1983: 1). However, this is also how fairy tales mold children’s values and ideals as they grow into adults. Fairy tales often share common themes, and these fairy tales show how women in this world share in similar oppressions. Women may be connected through struggles as women, wives, and mothers; we are all influenced by the stories and myths that are embedded in our languages and societies. The women of Norway and their story of the hulder can benefit the women of other countries and cultures because we can learn from each other and help each other write a new history of women. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, women are often, within feminist discourses, described as a singular group based on shared oppression (Chandra Talpade Mohanty 2003: 23). Therefore, women are also joined on a global basis due to their oppressions. “It is at this point that an elision takes place between ‘women’ as a discursively constructed group and ‘women’ as material and subjects of their own history” (Mohanty 2003: 23). When women gain a sense of their own history or the possibility of constructing one, then this can be empowering for women. Men have always had their own history, but women have not been so privileged. I feel that the future of women depends upon an established history of women that can be achieved through the union of struggle; however, we must focus upon the celebration of women instead of the oppressions of women. We must celebrate the stories of our cultures that provide us with guidance and an understanding of who we are and where we want to be, whether it is in our own forests or homes; we can break free from the private spheres of a patriarchal society and discover our true selves, with or without a cow’s tail.
APPROACH TO THE PLAY

A Postmodernist Structure and Play

My theatrical play, with its discussion and symbolic references to gender and media, is a self-reflective piece that falls under the genre and structure of postmodernism. I blend fiction with theory through symbolism in order to present a play that is not only reflective of culture and tradition but is also entertaining and has literary value. I feel that a play is an appropriate medium and communication resource to show how a culture’s popular myth can be incorporated into its society and how it possibly affects the lifestyle of its people.

According to Linda Hutcheon, “Postmodernism is a period label generally given to cultural forms since the 1960s that display certain characteristics such as reflexivity, irony and a mixing of popular and high art forms” (Irena R. Makaryk 1993: 612). The term postmodernism was first applied aesthetically in the area of architecture, but it has found favor in many fields, one of which is theatre. There are specific characteristics that describe postmodernism that can be applied towards my theatrical play and thesis. The first characteristic of postmodernism that is used in my theatrical play involves a combination of self-consciousness and historical grounding (Irena R. Makaryk 1993: 612). My theatrical play is based on a cultural myth yet it also questions the myth’s roles in society and the lives of its people.

The second characteristic of postmodernism that I use to describe my theatrical play shows how postmodernism tends to abuse or subvert mainstream conventions. I hope to address and challenge audiences’ views on society and the influences of gender and media. Postmodernist pieces tend to de-naturalize the things we take as natural (Irena R. Makaryk 1993: 612). This includes an ideological structure such as feminism that is encouraged and presented in my theatrical play. The postmodern practice values what is different from mainstream society or what is “other.”

The third characteristic of postmodernism that supports my play states that postmodern discourses challenge boundaries and genres. However, postmodernism also has a tendency to exist in a “middle ground,” but this also allows for two sides to be represented, which can be beneficial to my play in order to present the option of change. My play reveals the traditional myth of the hulder but it also presents an alternative reading of the myth and these two views allow the audience to reflect on their own views of identity and society. However, the modern
day uses and description of postmodernism has become more blurred than in the past, and it is common for artists to now use different elements and characteristics from different theories and discourses, which is why my play’s use of modernism works well with its structure of postmodernism. The structure of postmodernism for my theatrical play is an appropriate model for presenting and discussing the narrative of the myth and the issues of gender and media that exist in my play because of its use of symbolism, reflexivity, and alternate readings.

**Reading and Writing Against the Grain**

My play addresses issues of commercialization, gender roles, and childhood influence and imagination. Around these issues, there are contradictions within the hulder tale. For instance, is the hulder a figure of empowerment for women? In addition, does the myth support or criticize patriarchy? Many of these questions depend on the perspective of the reader or storyteller; yet, within the dominant ideology of the tale there is a different story when reading against the grain that supports the empowerment of women. These contradictions allow readers the freedom to interpret the text for themselves. Contradictions also expose the “truths” of both sides of a myth and enable the myth not to reach a linear and patriarchal ending. The dominant myths usually have a narrative closure that the hulder tale does not; however, the hulder myth does operate through ideological recuperation.

Ideological recuperation is the process within a text where there is a return to ideological norms. Ideology is a body of ideas that reflect and form an individual, group, class, and culture and forms the basis of its system, such as politics and economics. The ideology that is referred to in my theatrical play is society’s beliefs in patriarchy, consumerism, and capitalism. My theatrical play does begin with ideological norms in Act I, but through the text and symbolism of Act II, the norms are challenged and Act III offers a non-patriarchal ending. However, the ending is open because it offers the audience a chance to imagine the ending of the play and to take the issues presented and create their own endings in their own lives. Therefore, in order to discuss the play’s concepts, to challenge societal norms, and to read against the grain, there is ideological recuperation within the play, there is a return to societal norms in order to change and discuss them. According to David J. Sholle, “The problem is not changing people’s consciousness – or
what’s in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (David J. Sholle 1988: 26). Through my theatrical play, I am challenging the audience’s own thoughts, but I am leaving the ending open so that the audience can also see that there needs to be a change in society’s system of power and not just the thoughts of its people. Therefore, in order to change society, we must put power back into the hands and heads of those that are oppressed, and the way to do this is through rewriting and rereading ideological norms, such as fairy tales and myths, that reflect and form society and its people. By using Roland Barthes’ ideas on reading and writing against the grain (the grain is “the emergence of the text in the work”), I am able to show the importance of the challenges to the dominant ideology within the hulder tale (Roland Barthes 1977: 188). Since the hulder tale does not reach a narrative closure, I am challenging the notion that it ends only with ideological recuperation and therefore does not follow dominant ideology.

According to Roland Barthes, there are many different readings for one text. Rereading a text is not merely consumption but also play; it is the return of the different and saves us from repetition and reading the same story everywhere. The text then becomes a plural text, the same and new text. Rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology and recaptures a mythic time (Roland Barthes 1974: 16). Within myths, some topics seem patriarchal and suited for society’s expectations, yet another reading can offer empowerment for women, and can therefore exist and survive through time. Through different voices and different readings of a text there is a gap which enables a shift from one point of view to another (Roland Barthes 1974: 42). Through reading and writing against the grain, an audience is better able to see and understand the alternative view which enables a larger possibility for change and the empowerment of women and imagination in society.

Lost in The Woods

Through my play, *Lost in The Woods*, consisting of three acts, I have created a text that comments on the reciprocal relationship of society’s influences upon and gained from gender and media. Act I titled “In the Beginning” is an example of the original and traditional tale of the hulder as it was created in the beginning and has been told in the past and is commonly known
today. Act II titled “Out of Darkness” describes the journey out of a male history and presents a family with Norwegian roots that are closely connected to the setting and the myth of the hulder in Act I. Act II discusses the myth of the hulder and how it relates to societal influences of media exposure and gender roles. It analyzes the myth of the hulder and suggests new ways of rereading and rewriting the classical myth in order to empower the imagination of children and independence of women in the private and public spheres. Act III is the rewritten and retold version of Act I and the traditional tale of the hulder. Act III is titled “Into the Light” and portrays women entering a new history that not only better represents women and men altogether but that encourages the imagination of children and denounces the negative influences of the media in regards to gender roles. All three acts and its characters are connected through the myth of the hulder, and the setting through all three acts remains the same. It is the rise and fall of the days and the changes in characters’ costumes that show time has lapsed. The play’s acts, themes, and characters are also connected through time and ancestry, the interweaving of concepts through the transitions of the acts, the repetition and development of the characters, and similar themes such as matriarchal influence and voice and societal influences of media and gender.

Act I is the traditional version of the hulder myth with three boys that serve as the main patriarchal perspective. Act III is the rewritten version of Act I that includes a seter girl so that the myth is not seen primarily through a male perspective but has multi-perspectives. Act II is the modern day story of a family that incorporates the hulder myth into their daily lives and society. In other words, Act II is a more realistic account of the hulder story and how a modern day family deals with the fantasy and reality of the hulder tale and its impact on society’s media and gender roles, therefore showing that myths influence social reality and are a reflection of social reality. As a result, Act II takes Act I and explores its traditional concepts which creates Act III, the rewritten version, and consequently tradition and history is rewritten in a positive light.

Act I begins with the matriarchal voice of the mother figure in the play. She represents the importance of oral tradition but also the need for women’s voices to be heard in narratives. Her voice and text is also repeated in Act III to show a comparison of the two acts and the two versions of the hulder myth. When the play begins, a hulder is on stage hiding in the woods. She is the first character seen by the audience and she encourages the imagination of the audience
and plays a vital role in all three acts. Three brothers are then seen walking onto the stage, each brother has a specific quality that defines who they are. Jonas the oldest is the most brave, Inge the second oldest is very wise, and Erik the youngest is unfortunately easily distracted and very curious. These qualities are characteristic of Norwegian myths where the young boys are often encouraged to be brave but not foolish, implying that it is foolish to chase a hulder unless she can be captured. Towards the end of the act, Jonas has achieved capturing a hulder for his wife, Inge has remained wise, and Erik is lost in the woods. The end of the act reveals the hulder putting an apron on and entering her new home of the private sphere as a new wife, a traditional and patriarchal glance into the common version of the hulder myth. However, Act III is my rewritten version of the story (with original folklore) as told through a multi-perspectival lens by using a farmgirl (or seter girl) named Marte. Marte meets the huldrefolk and makes different decisions other than simply getting married and being forced to live in a private sphere. Marte is the main character and she represents two different characters as a modern day little girl and a seter girl (joined through the myth that the two characters are possibly related and have the same roots since the seter remains in the same family). Marte proves to be positively influenced by the huldr women and is therefore empowered as a woman who can make her own choices and uses her own imagination in the private and public spheres.

Act III begins with the mother figure’s voice and the hulder in the woods, but instead of the three brothers walking up to the seter in the beginning of the summer season, the act shows Marte with her three brothers preparing for their return to the farm at the end of the summer season. The progression of the summer season simply adds to the flow of the play and shows the progression of time. Marte is busy helping her brother prepare for their trip back, but unlike Act I, the brothers and sister help each other with all the chores that need to be finished. Jonas is still the oldest and is brave, Inge is still wise, and Erik is still too curious for his own good, but Marte, although very independent, still wants choices in her future as a woman. Act III reveals that Jonas still marries a hulder, Inge is still wise, and Erik is still lost in the woods; however, this time, Marte is also lured by the huldrefolk and is taken by a troll or underground man. She manages to escape from the huldrefolk and decides to return to her old world, but she is changed. After visiting the other world and seeing the powerful huldre wild and free in the woods, she is now inspired to reclaim her identity, share in the huldre spirit, and decide her own life, full of
choices and freedom. Marte is finally no longer lost in the woods and is able to leave her confining position in the private sphere and enter public society and challenge the cold winter world ahead of her as an empowered woman no longer influenced by society’s expectations of marriage and motherhood.

Lost in The Woods includes theories and discussions of media and gender roles through symbolism and myth and concentrates on two particular symbols that represent gender and media: the cows’ tails of the huldre and the “Disney” doll. These symbols are specifically presented in Act II, the modern day version and discussion of the huldre where the little girl Marte is encouraged to use her imagination and be empowered as a woman. Act II includes five main characters (Pappa, Mamma, the son Hans, the daughter Marte, and the Hulder) and takes place at the seter or cottage in the Norwegian woods. The family is American, but since they have Norwegian heritage, they are vacationing at their cottage in Norway. Act II begins with the family getting ready for dinner. However, Marte, the young girl is late. Finally, the girl comes home, but she is crying because she has lost her precious Disney mouse doll. All that Marte wants to do then is watch television. The mother is concerned because when she grew up she relied more on her imagination and the creatures of the forest to play with instead of toys and television, and she wishes Marte would do the same and enjoy the outdoors more. After dinner, there is a strange knock at the door. A stranger visits the cottage and it is a beautiful young woman. The family talks with her, but they think she is strange because they have never seen her before and because she does not have any shoes. Once the young woman leaves, Hans wishes to go for a walk in the forest and Marte wants to find her doll. The parents jokingly tease the children that the woman could have been a hulder, but the children are unfamiliar with the tale and so the mother tells them the story, which represents a matriarchal storyteller. The children finally leave into the forest, the son to supposedly and bravely look for the woman or hulder, and the girl to look for her doll. However, Marte meets the stranger that had come to her cottage and it is indeed a hulder. The hulder talks to Marte, and Marte learns that imagination and personal empowerment is more important than her doll, television, and societal norms. Finally, Marte finds her doll, but she does not want it anymore. Marte then leaves the hulder and skips home for the end of her bedtime story (which questions whether or not her experience in the woods was real or just a dream) but she now has a cow’s tail, a symbol of empowerment.
In Act III, the play ends by the mother figure appearing on stage and finishing the bedtime story to Marte that was started at the end of Act II. Marte then returns on stage as the little girl from Act II and she promises her mother that when she wakes up she will make all her dreams of using her imagination and being a powerful woman come true. The hulder makes one last appearance on stage, she smiles at the audience and then returns to her woods. The play ends with merely the dark forest before the audience, challenging the audience to find their own ending, their own way out of their own woods and into the light of empowerment and freedom from society’s negative influences of gender and media.

I have created a theatrical play that addresses the issues of the representation of women and breaks from the normal patriarchal, linear closing of most myths. In addition, I have broken free from and used ideological recuperation by challenging patriarchal norms and by not allowing Marte the main character to choose marriage or motherhood or mainstream ideals in the end as myths often do. In the end of my play, the young woman, after meeting the hulder, skips back home and the audience understands that she has now grown a tail. This tail symbolizes that she has broken the fantasy, the patriarchal norms of myths, and has become a “real” woman, empowered with the spirit of the tail (a phallic symbol). With this power, the girl exits the forest and enters the public sphere and not just the private sphere because although she is headed home she also has her tail. The script does not end with marriage or motherhood or even having to make a choice; the ending is open and simply encourages the imagination of youth and the empowerment of women.
REFLECTION

Seeing Out of The Woods

I have shown how the hulder myth represents women and is a reflection of society and culture. I have applied these findings to the representation of women on a local and global basis and have discussed how women and myths are incorporated into the media and commercialized products. I have shown that women (and myths) are packaged much in the same way that products are and that myths sustain these roles. However, I have also suggested that it is possible to create new meanings for these roles in reading and writing against the grain and by appropriately and positively discussing and rewriting the myths of our cultures, which is the intention and goal of my play Lost in The Woods.

When I return to the woods of Norway, I am able to be a child again and play with the myths that surround me. The wind carries the feeling of the supernatural and envelops me; it is my culture that envelops me, and my roots are there within the forest, under the trees of Norway. As Antoine de Saint Exupery once said, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”
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LOST IN THE WOODS

A Play in Three Acts

By

Lene Karine Martin
Lost in The Woods

Characters:
-Marte (pronounced Mar-ta): she plays the young girl in Act II. She is eleven years old and wears a child’s dress and pigtails. She also plays the seter girl and sister in Act III. She is sixteen years old and her hair is tied up. She wears a long plain skirt, an apron, a white blouse, and a shawl. However, in the end of Act III, she wears the child’s dress once more.
-Mamma: she is the voiceover in Act I and Act III. In Act II, she plays a modern day mother and makes an appearance towards the end of Act III. She wears jeans and a nice cottage sweater in Act II and Act III. There is also the option to make the voiceover sections for Mamma into a visible storyteller role on stage.
-Jonas: he is a seter boy and the oldest brother in Act I and Act III. He is eighteen years old and wears plain slacks and a white shirt and jacket or sweater.
-Inge: he is a seter boy and the second oldest brother in Act I and Act III. He is seventeen years old and wears plain slacks and a white shirt and jacket or sweater.
-Erik: he is a seter boy and the youngest brother in Act I and Act III. He is fifteen years old and wears plain slacks and a white shirt and jacket or sweater.
-Pappa: he is the modern day father in Act II. He wears jeans and a nice cottage sweater.
-Hans: he is the brother in Act II. He is fifteen years old and wears jeans and a t-shirt.
-Troll: he is an underground man. He is slightly ugly and scary and appears in Act III. He is dressed in pants and a top that are dark in color, torn, and blend into the scene of the forest.
-Hulder 1: she is the main hulder that appears in Act I, Act II, and Act III. She is very beautiful and has long hair and a cow’s tail. She is dressed in a long plain skirt and a white blouse.
-Hulder 2: she is very beautiful and has long hair and a cow’s tail. She is dressed in a long plain skirt and a white blouse.
-Hulder 3: she is very beautiful and has long hair and a cow’s tail. She is dressed in a long plain skirt and a white blouse.

Setting:
This play takes place in the woods on a mountainside in Norway. Act I and Act III take place in 1905 and are two different versions of the Norwegian myth of the huldre. Act II is a modern day discussion of the myth of the huldre. Hulder is the singular spelling of the mythical character while huldre is the plural spelling. There are trees and green grass seen on the stage, mountains and valleys below, and a small lake and farms with fields are seen in the background. There is a small cottage or seter stage right, on the left side of the stage for the audience. A seter is a small cottage that was used in the summers by local farmboys and farmgirls to live, tend livestock, and make cheese and butter. The seter is open to the audience and inside is a table with chairs, a stove, a fireplace, and a back door that supposedly leads to bedrooms. From the audience view, on the right of the seter, there is an entry door and on the left is a window. The seter is on wheels so that when it is turned around a forest scene that is painted onto the back of the seter is seen and blends in with the woods. The stage remains the same for all three acts.
ACT I
In the Beginning

It is 1905 and it is early in the morning, just as dark creeps out of sunlight. On stage, blended in the background, slightly hidden by trees, is Hulder 1 who is being very still.

MAMMA’S VOICE
Another early summer’s night is ending on the side of a mountain in Norway a long, long time ago. This is the time, after the glaciers had melted, after the Vikings had conquered, and after the Black Death. This is the time farmers prospered while also, some unknowingly, sharing the land with others living in the neighboring woods and lakes. This is the hour that all of Norway’s special creatures must hide away from the day’s early light, so as not to be seen by the humans soon approaching.

Hulder 1 suddenly moves and runs across stage to another tree and crouches, still hiding but with a good view of the stage.

MAMMA’S VOICE
However, the creatures can always see you.

Light starts to flood the stage and the sounds of cattle and cow bells are heard off stage. Three boys walk onto the stage. They are tending the cattle, but the cattle are not seen by the audience. The boys are carrying bags with supplies and are busy with the cattle, but they stop walking when they see the seter, they are unaware of Hulder 1 hiding in the forest.

JONAS
Here we are finally. Inge, you make sure the cattle are settled and Erik you can, well, you can make some food for us to eat.

INGE
Ya Jonas, I will do that, and later I will make sure we have all the supplies we need for the summer.

ERIK
(Being distracted) Why do I always have to make the food? Why can’t I be in charge of the cattle?

JONAS
You are the youngest Erik, you are not ready. Now please, I am hungry, we should eat before we unload and prepare the supplies.
Inge goes off stage to take care of the cattle. Erik is upset and, distracted again, starts to go off into the forest.

**JONAS**

Erik, what are you doing? Come back here, we have much to do.

Erik turns around and goes into the seter. Jonas joins Inge off stage. Hulder 1 moves again from her position, she approaches the window of the seter, her movement makes a noise, and she runs off stage. Erik comes out of the seter after hearing the noise, sees nothing and goes back inside. Jonas and Inge come back on stage and are seen busily preparing supplies and carrying food and pieces of wood. Erik brings out sandwiches and they begin to eat.

**MAMMA’S VOICE**

The seter boys would leave their family farms in the valleys for the summers and live in their mountains cottages called seters to tend their cattle and make cheese and butter. The cattle would feed off the green pastures in the mountains while the grass and hay near the farms were saved for the cold winters. These three seter boys were brothers. Jonas was eighteen and the oldest and he was the bravest. Inge was seventeen and very wise. The youngest was Erik. He was fifteen, and although he wanted to be brave and wise like his brothers, he was instead easily distracted and too curious for his own good. Like many brothers, they were different, and like most brothers they cared for each other. However, they also needed to prove to each other who was the bravest and the strongest.

The boys finish eating and get back to their work. Erik goes back in the house and Jonas and Inge continue their work outside.

**JONAS**

I am going to cut this wood. Inge, you should go help Erik prepare the seter for tonight. We need to make dinner and prepare our beds. He will need your help.

**INGE**

Ya, I will go help him. I will also figure out what needs to be done tomorrow and the next day, you should check on the cattle when you are finished chopping the wood.

**JONAS**

Ya, you are right.

Inge goes inside the seter while Jonas finishes chopping the wood. But as he is chopping, he hears a rustle in the woods off stage. He stops and looks around. He sees nothing so he starts chopping again. All of a sudden the trees on the side of the stage move. Jonas sees this and stops chopping. He puts down the axe.

**JONAS**

Hello? Anyone there? Must be the cows, they may be wandering. I should go see.
Jonas goes off stage in the direction of the noise. Inge comes outside with Erik; they are carrying
the wood into the seter. The sun starts to go down, the light outside is fading.

INGE
Jonas must be with the cattle. We cannot wait on him any longer. We should eat dinner before it
gets too late and too dark. Is it ready?

ERIK
Ya, the stew is ready. But Jonas should be back by now. I wonder where he is.

INGE
The cows may have strayed somewhere, much like you do.

ERIK
That is not funny. I am brave and strong.

INGE
Ya ya Erik, we will have to wait and see. But Jonas is brave and strong. He will be fine. Let’s
eat.

The boys go into the seter and sit at the table to eat. Outside the seter on the other side of the
stage, we see Jonas appear in the forest trying to grab a cow’s tail.

JONAS
Got you, where do you think your going?

All of a sudden the tail moves and Hulder 1 stands up. Jonas, surprised and bewildered, drops the
tail. The hulder backs away a few steps and stares into the eyes of Jonas. She is very beautiful
and Jonas is mesmerized. They stand in the forest staring at each other.
Erik and Inge continue eating in the seter.

MAMMA’S VOICE
Many of the seter boys while living in the mountains of Norway would hear strange noises in the
woods. Stories were told of the hulder.

ERIK
Inge, I heard a strange noise earlier while I was making lunch.

INGE
What kind of noise? Where did you hear it?
ERIK
I heard it outside, right outside the seter. It sounded like someone was walking around, but you and Jonas were not there. No one was there. It was as if the forest had come alive. I felt like I was being watched.

INGE
(With a grin) Well, it could have been a hulder.

ERIK
What is that?

INGE
The huldre are beautiful women, with long hair, that live in the mountains.

ERIK
Why do these women live in the mountains?

INGE
Well, they are not quite like the women you and I know. They are different… they have cows’ tails.

The hulder gestures to Jonas to follow her into the woods. He follows her off stage.

ERIK
What do they want? Why are they watching me?

INGE
Well, they want you to go into the forest with them. They have beautiful singing voices, and if you follow them into the woods, you could be lost forever. But if you are strong enough and brave enough to follow them, there is a chance that one will fall in love with you. And if she falls in love with you, she will marry you in a church, cut off her cow’s tail, and be the best wife a man can ever have. But if she does not marry, the hulder continues to live in the woods luring farmboys and grows to be 500 years old. She then becomes a trollkjering. She is now ugly and can take her head off and carry it in her arms to scare little children and the creatures of the forest.

ERIK
I am not scared of the huldre, I will make one marry me, and she will be my wife. That’s better than growing old and ugly anyways.

INGE
Be careful Erik. When they are young they are very beautiful, but they can also be very dangerous. They have a lot of power in these woods.
MAMMA’S VOICE
The huldre were the beautiful daughters of the underground people. The underground people were small trolls that were jealous of humans and their farms, towns, and homes, so they made their own societies similar to those of humans underground. Sometimes the underground people would steal or capture the seter girls when they were unattended by their male protectors. But more often the beautiful daughters of the underground people, the huldre, would lure the seter boys deep into the forests never to be found again.

It turns dark outside and from off stage there is a beautiful and seductive voice quietly singing.

ERIK
Do you hear that? That sounds like singing.

INGE
Erik, this may be a story that we just tell each other to explain the strange noises that we hear in the woods, but many men have claimed to see these huldre and some men have gone missing. So if you hear singing in the woods, do not listen, and do not go to find them. It is not wise.

ERIK
But Jonas may be out there. I could save him.

INGE
You are not brave and strong enough to save him, and it would be foolish to go out there. You may be lost forever. Even if you find the hulder or not, you may just become lost in the woods. It is dark outside. We should just wait for Jonas to come back. I am going to bed. You should get some sleep too. We are getting up early.

ERIK
Ya, I will, but I just want to wait outside a little while longer for Jonas. Good night brother.

INGE
Good night, but… good luck.

Inge goes through the back door of the seter to go to bed and Erik goes outside and sits down on a wooden log. The singing gets louder. Erik stands up and looks into the woods.

ERIK
I will save you Jonas, even if I can’t save myself…

Erik runs into the forest the direction of the voice and where Jonas had gone.
MAMMA’S VOICE
During the summers up at the seters, many boys had heard what seemed like singing or strange
noises deep in the forests and mountainsides of Norway. Sometimes things would happen that
would become a story, and this story after some time would turn into myth, and this myth would
become nothing more than a favorite bedtime story told by a mother and father to their daughter
and son. But this story still had meaning, still had truth, still had magic for a little girl’s ears, a
story forever told and never forgotten, at least not by those who were there, who remember, and
who make sure their great great grandchildren know the roots and myths of their being.

The sun starts to rise and light is cast upon the seter. It is morning.

MAMMA’S VOICE
But just as bed time stories lead us into deep slumber and powerful dreams, we must always
awake to face our myths.

Inge opens the bedroom door and walks through. He tidies himself up and checks the bedroom
again. He is looking for his brothers and goes outside.

INGLE
Jonas? Erik? They must be checking on the cattle.

Inge starts to chop some more wood; he goes inside, grabs some bread to eat, goes back outside
and continues preparing supplies. He hears the cattle making noise. He then hears laughter
coming from off stage. He looks around. Jonas comes running onto the stage. He turns around,
goes off stage very quickly, and comes back on stage carrying a woman in his arms. It is Hulder
1, but this time she has no tail and is wearing a fancier skirt and blouse. Her long hair is up.

JONAS
You are so slow, I must carry you my love. I can’t wait for you to meet my brothers. Oh Inge,
hello. Inge, you have to meet someone very special. Where is Erik?

INGLE
What? I thought he was with you. And who is this special creature?

JONAS
This is my wife. She lives around here. I met her last night. We went to church this morning and
got married. Isn’t that wonderful? She can help us up here at the seter. She can clean and cook.
She will be the best wife ever. I am just going to take her into the house. She can settle in and
make our beds for us tonight.

Jonas takes his wife into the seter. He shows her the kitchen and gives her a red apron. She goes
into the bedroom, the back door of the seter. Jonas leaves the seter and goes to sit next to Inge
outside.
INGE
Jonas… Erik is gone.

JONAS
Perhaps he is with the cattle.

INGE
Let us go see, but I think he has strayed too far this time to return. I fear he is lost.

The two boys get up and walk off stage.

MAMMA’S VOICE
The two brothers, the brothers that were both brave and wise, feared that their younger brother Erik was lost in the woods forever. But from the myths of the beginning, the myths of our pasts, there is loss and confusion and darkness. From this darkness, through the woods, through the loss, we may once more emerge into the light with our dreams and create myths that reveal our roots but also set us free.

END OF ACT I
ACT II
Out of Darkness

It is modern day and summertime in Norway. An American family with Norwegian heritage is vacationing at their family’s seter, now a cottage in the mountains. It is starting to get dark outside. Inside the cottage, Mamma comes out of the bedroom, the back room of the seter, and is tying the red apron on (the same apron that Hulder I wore in Act I). Mamma is preparing the kitchen for dinner. Pappa and Hans walk on stage with their fishing gear and the fish they had just caught down by the lake.

PAPPA
Hans, the fish that you caught will make a wonderful dinner tonight.

HANS
Thanks Pappa. I love fishing here in the Norwegian lakes. Can we go again tomorrow?

PAPPA
Sure.

Pappa and Hans walk into the cottage.

MAMMA
Hello there. Look at all those fish, they look delicious. Here, give them to me so I can start dinner.

Mamma starts dinner while Pappa sets the table. Hans is sitting on the floor cleaning his fishing gear for the next morning.

HANS
I wish we were able to bring some fish home with us after our vacation here in the mountains of Norway.

PAPPA
I know, Hans. But maybe we can find some other place for you to fish when we get home to the States.

HANS
Ok, but it won’t be the same. There’s something different about this place. I feel like I have really found myself here, being with nature and living in the cottage that belonged to my great great grandparents.
MAMMA
Ya, I know what you mean. This is a special place. I just wish your sister enjoyed this place as much as you do. Maybe she would like to pick some blueberries for us in the morning. I hope she will anyway. All Marte does is watch TV while we are here in the summers, she does not like to go outside in the Norwegian woods. I know when I was young, my parents could never find me. They always wanted me to help cook and clean, but I always wanted to be in the woods looking for trolls, swimming in the lake, climbing trees, and picking flowers. I never wanted to come in. But now Marte has been gone awhile and I am nervous. It is starting to get dark outside and she is never gone this long. She might miss dinner.

PAPPA
I am sure she is just fine. She has not been gone that long. Maybe she found a troll or something to talk to.

MAMMA
Don’t tease. She does not believe in those.

HANS
Mamma, you don’t still believe that they exist do you?

PAPPA
Now Hans, you know your Mamma saw one, here in these woods actually, when she was a little girl. I think you were about Marte’s age, right?

MAMMA
Ya, I was her age. I was young, but I know what I saw. You have to want to believe in them or they will never let you see them. I just wish she would come home soon. This is not like her to stay in the woods so long.

Mamma, Pappa, and Hans sit down for dinner and start to eat.

PAPPA
She will come home soon. But for right now, let’s enjoy the great food and the quiet evening. If she is not home when we are finished, I will go look for her.

MAMMA
You’re right. She is probably just losing track of time, but she should be home since she hates the woods so much. It just seems too quiet out there.

From off stage in the woods, Marte comes running into the cottage crying.

MAMMA
What’s wrong? Why are you crying?
Marte
I hate the woods. I tore my shirt.

Mamma
Again? I am already fixing another one for you. And why do you hate the woods so much?

Marte
I don’t know. I think it hates me. I got lost. I tore my shirt, I fell in a hole, and I can’t find my doll.

Mamma
Your Disney mouse doll? Your favorite. Oh Marte, I’m sorry. I am sure you will find it tomorrow.

Marte
(Holding back tears) Fine, I don’t want to go back out there anyway. Can I watch TV?

Mamma
Ya, if you eat your dinner.

Marte
Ok.

Mamma gets some dinner for Marte. Marte sits and eats at the table. Mamma starts to clean the dishes. Pappa helps clear the table then goes to sit next to the fire and read his book. Hans lies down in front of the fire and starts reading a comic book. Then there is a knock at the door.

Pappa
Who could that be? I’ll get it.

Pappa answers the door, and on the other side, is a beautiful woman with long hair and a long dress. She walks into the cottage.

Hulder 1
Hello. I-I live around here, and I heard a child crying. Is everything alright?

Mamma
Ya ya, everything is fine, thank you. She just lost her favorite doll, but she will find it tomorrow.

Hans
(Standing up and smiling at the beautiful hulder) I did not know there were many other cottages within walking distance of here. There are some across the lake, but which one do you live in?
PAPPA
(Also smiling a little) Oh, Hans, don’t be so nosy towards our guest. Let’s start with names first.
We are the Hansen family, and what is your name?

HULDER 1
Oh, I-I do live across the lake, but I am taking my evening walk.

Hans and Marte then notice that the woman is not wearing any shoes.

MAMMA
Would you care for any coffee, or a piece of cake?

HULDER 1
Nei, no thank you. I should be getting on my way before it gets too dark. (Turning towards Marte) I hope you find your doll. I am sure that what you are looking for is right outside in these woods. I would look again. It could be right outside your cottage. (And turning towards Hans) And if you ever want to join me for one of my walks just stroll into these woods outside of your cottage one evening and you can find me. Good night.

PAPPA
Uh, ok then, good night to you too.

The woman quickly leaves through the door and disappears into the woods. The family stands still for a couple of seconds in confusion and shock after meeting such a strange creature. The mother then sits in a chair across from Pappa’s chair in front of the fireplace and starts sewing one of Marte’s shirts. Pappa sits down in the other chair and continues reading. Marte finishes her food and goes to sit and watch TV. Hans, mesmerized, is still standing watching the door through which the woman had left.

HANS
Uh, I think I ate too much for dinner. My stomach feels kind of funny. Maybe I should go for a walk now, ok, maybe that would make me feel better. (Hans starts walking towards the door)

PAPPA
Wait. Hans, that is not your dinner that is making your stomach feel funny. That is young love. The lady was very beautiful, but you should be careful. (Pappa winks at Mamma)

MAMMA
Oh, ya, ya. You should be careful. You might have just met a hulder.

HANS and MARTE
A what?
MAMMA
A hulder. You do not know what a hulder is? (Hans and Marte shake their heads no) Well then, I will have to tell you a story. But it is a story that has to be told, it is not a story that you will see or hear on television.

MAMMA
Ok. Wait. Then let me turn off the TV.

The whole family gathers around Mamma to hear the story of the hulder.

MAMMA
These stories usually start at a cottage, or a seter, just like this one used to be. A seter was a place in the Norwegian mountains where young shepherds, around Hans’ age, would live in the summers so that the cows, sheep, and goats could graze on the side of the mountains. At the seter, there were men that tended the cattle and women that would make cheese and butter from the milk of the animals so that the farms could have food for the winter. But in the evenings, when the boys were done with their chores, they could hear women singing in the woods. They were called huldre, and they were beautiful women with angelic voices and long hair, but also cows’ tails.

HANS
Cows’ tails? What? Why?

PAPPA
Well, they are relatives of the trolls. But even though they look like they are human, they are not like you and me. And even though they sing like angels, they do not behave like them either.

MARTÉ
Sort of like me sometimes, right Pappa?

PAPPA
Not quite my daughter. You see, huldre have beautiful voices because they want to lure young innocent farmboys into the woods.

HANS
That does not sound so bad.

MAMMA
Ya ya, but you see, when young farmboys follow these huldre into the woods, they are never seen again.

PAPPA
That’s right. The farmboys are lost forever. But…
MAMMA
You’re right. There is another side to the story.

PAPPA
Well, if a young farmboy feels brave…

MAMMA
Ya, ya, very, very brave, then he can try to make a hulder fall in love with him. And when a hulder falls in love with a young man, she does not lure him into the woods. Instead, she is willing to marry him in a church. And when the hulder marries, she loses her cow tail, and becomes the best wife a man can have. But, if he fails to capture her, he becomes lost in the woods, and then the hulder eventually grows to be hundreds of years old and can take her head off to scare little children. But the hulder is then old, ugly, and alone. Some say that the hulder wants to be married, but I think she enjoys being wild and free.

MARTE
What do you mean wild and free?

MAMMA
Well, the huldre are wild beings. You can tell by their cow tails. But they are also independent and enjoy having a bewitching power over men, except of course when they fall in love with them and are willing to live in our world instead of their world beneath the mountains and hills. You see, the huldrefolk have many stories about them, but it is up to you to decide if they are good or bad. But huldre are a part of the magical spirit of the forest.

MARTE
Can I be a hulder?

PAPPA
No, you can not turn into a hulder, but you can have their spirit of freedom and their spirit of the forest.

HANS
So, do you think the woman that stopped by here really could have been a hulder?

MAMMA
(Smiling) Well, did you see a cow’s tail? (And then in a serious voice) But if you ever do see a cow’s tail, you run away, ya?

HANS
Mamma, ok, wow, you really believe in these things.
MAMMA
It was the way I was raised. We did not have television or Disney dolls to play with. We used our imaginations. We created neighbors for ourselves when there were none around. The creatures in the woods were our playmates and neighbors. And we knew better than to ever make them mad. Otherwise, they would make the animals sick or make a crop bad. We respected them and lived with them.

MARTE
Well, I don’t know if she was the type of neighbor that lives in a cottage. I didn’t see a cow tail because of the long dress, but I did notice that she was not wearing any shoes, and do you think that someone who lives in a cottage would be going on a walk without shoes?

Pappa and Mamma look at each other with a startled expression.

MAMMA
Are you sure?

HANS
Oh Marte, I saw that too, but I am sure it was nothing. She probably just left her shoes outside the cottage.

PAPPA
Ya, that is the respectful thing to do here in Norway, but that is very interesting, maybe she was a hulder because huldre do not wear shoes.

MARTE
Well, I think it was a hulder, and she said that my doll was probably outside, so can I go outside to look for it?

MAMMA
Ya, for a little bit, but then you have to go to bed.

PAPPA
You should not let her go outside my dear. She may get lost again, become a hulder, and never come back.

MARTE
Oh Pappa, I will come back. Just let me go, please.

PAPPA
Only if your brother goes with you.
MARTE
Oh Pappa, I can go by myself.

HANS
I’ll go. Maybe that woman is still outside.

MARTE
If she is, then she will take you away forever. Oh, maybe, you should go with me.

HANS
Ha ha, very funny Marte. And if it was a hulder, I would capture her and make her fall in love with me. Then she would be my wife.

MARTE
You’re not that brave, and even if you were, I don’t know who would want to marry you. But I know if I get married, I want to be wild and free just like a hulder in the woods.

MAMMA
That’s right Marte. You can always be independent and still love someone.

PAPPA
Ya, maybe your Mamma was once a hulder, and I was a seter boy that captured her.

HANS and MARTE
Ughh, stop it. That’s gross.

Marte puts her shoes on, grabs a sweater, and starts heading for the door.

MARTE
I promise I will be back soon and go to bed. And you should tell Hans to stay here or he will try and find the hulder.

HANS
No, I am not going to try and find a hulder. And the lady is probably gone by now too. But you can go outside and find your doll yourself. I think I am just going to go for my own walk in the woods. But don’t tell me you believe in those huldre now.

MARTE
Maybe I do, and anyways, it’s a better story than anything else I have seen on TV. So what’s wrong with that? I’ll believe what I want to believe.

Marte and Hans open the door to leave and step out.
MAMMA
Don’t be long you two.

Marte shuts the door, and Hans and Marte start running around the cottage. As they are running, they turn the cottage (which is on wheels) around so that the back of the cottage is shown, and on the back is a forest scene so that the set now looks like a forest without a cottage, as if Marte and Hans went running farther into the forest. Marte starts heading towards the middle of the stage, while Hans is walking in the opposite direction and heading for off stage.

HANS
Be careful Marte. Don’t let the forest scare you.

MARTE
I won’t. And don’t let a hulder get you.

HANS
Well, if you see one make sure you send her my way. I’ll see you back at home.

Hans leaves the stage. Marte starts looking for her doll, but as she is looking, there are things that are moving behind the trees and bushes in the forest. Hulder 1, Hulder 2, and Hulder 3 are now hiding in the forest (all with visible cow tails). They are watching Marte. Marte feels like she is being watched, but she keeps looking for her doll. Marte then hears a branch snap and she becomes startled.

MARTE
Hello? Is anyone there? Hello?

Marte hears the huldre singing. Hulder 1 steps out from the forest.

HULDER 1
Don’t be frightened. We are not going to hurt you.

MARTE
It’s you. You were at our cottage. You must be singing for my brother.

HULDER 1
We like to sing. We have beautiful voices. Are you still looking for your doll? Because I think it is over by that tree.

Marte looks over at the tree and there is her Disney doll, but she leaves it there untouched.
MARTE
Oh, I see it. But, have you always been here? Why have I never seen you before?

HULDER 1
You were not looking for us. You did not respect the woods. But now that you believe, would you like to join us as we dance and sing through the night?

MARTE
Will I be able to go back home?

HULDER 1
Oh ya, you are one of us now, you may come and play with us whenever you like. You can choose to be free here and when you go home.

MARTE
Really?

HULDER 1
Ya. Now come with us.

The other huldre come out from the woods and join Marte and Hulder 1 as they dance, skip, and play in the woods. They play with each other’s hair and play catch with the doll. The huldre and Marte have fun, but soon Marte gets tired and wants to go home.

MARTE
I should go home now. (She yawns) It feels like I am dreaming even now. I should go to sleep.

HULDER 1
You are not dreaming, you are just believing in us and yourself as a woman and using your imagination. We are as real as you want us to be. How else can you explain the voices you hear in the woods late at night, or the feeling you get when you know you are not alone?

MARTE
Will I ever see you again?

HULDER 1
Maybe. But that is up to you.

MARTE
Can I see you tomorrow?

HULDER 1
We will always be with you.
MARTE
Then I’ll see you tomorrow, maybe while I am picking blueberries. You can show me a good spot where they grow.

HULDER 1
What about your doll?

MARTE
Oh, I don’t need that anymore.

Marte waves goodbye as the huldre women run off stage, but Hulder 1 hides in the woods. Marte then starts skipping home and, as she starts moving across the stage, the audience can see that Marte now has a cow’s tail coming out of her dress, the spirit of the huldre. She then skips around the cottage and turns it around again. Hiding behind the cottage is Mamma, not seen by the audience. Once the cottage is turned around, Mamma appears through the back door, the bedroom door of the cottage.

MAMMA
Marte. Marte is that you? Come inside so I can finish your bedtime story.

Marte goes inside and follows her mother through the back door to go to bed. The door shuts and the stage is still. The rest of the family is supposedly asleep.

END OF ACT II
ACT III
Into the Light

It is 1905 and it is early in the morning, just as dark creeps out of sunlight. On stage, blended in the background, slightly hidden by trees, is Hulder 1 who is being very still.

MAMMA’S VOICE
Another late summer’s night is ending on the side of a mountain in Norway a long, long time ago. This is the time, after the glaciers had melted, after the Vikings had conquered, and after the Black Death. This is the time farmers prospered while also, some unknowingly, sharing the land with others living in the neighboring woods and lakes. This is the hour that all of Norway’s special creatures must hide away from the day’s early light, so as not to be seen by the humans soon approaching.

Hulder 1 suddenly moves and runs across stage to another tree and crouches, still hiding but she can be seen by the audience.

MAMMA’S VOICE
However, the creatures can always see you.

Light starts to flood the stage. Marte, the seter girl, comes through the bedroom door and puts the red apron on. She is dressed with a long plain skirt and a white blouse and shawl. She has no cow’s tail. She has just woken up to do her chores. Erik is in the kitchen preparing breakfast.

MARTÉ
Good morning little brother.

ERIK
Good morning Marte. I have just made some sandwiches. Will you tell Jonas and Inge that the food is ready when they come back from tending the cattle?

MARTÉ
Ya. And I am going to finish collecting and chopping the wood. We must also finish the weaving after dinner so that we can be ready to leave in the morning.

ERIK
Is it time to go back to the farm in the valley already?

MARTÉ
Ya Erik, the weather is starting to change, summer is ending and we must help the rest of the family at the farm get ready for the cold season approaching.
Marte goes outside. The audience can see Hulder 1 hiding in the forest watching Marte as she is busy carrying and chopping the wood. Jonas and Inge come from off stage having just tended the cattle. The audience can hear the cattle and a few cow bells in the distance.

MARTE
Hello my brothers. And how are the cows this morning?

JONAS
They are well sister. But I think the cows have been straying into the woods. The woods have been making a lot of noise, and I keep thinking I see the cows scurrying through the trees.

INGE
Jonas, the cows are fine. You are just tired and ready to go home. But these are old woods, and many creatures still leave here among us. The woods have a memory and a purpose of its own, it breathes and grows and gives us life. The woods are our culture, our roots, but there are many things we do not know, and so the woods gives us dreams and teaches us about the past and the stories of our people. There are many stories and many ways to live and tell these stories, but we must be wise and brave and independent to understand these woods and ourselves. We have been at the seter another long summer. Jonas, it is time to go home. It is wise to concentrate on what needs to be done at the farm when we go back. But Marte, do you think we will have enough cheese and butter for the winter?

MARTE
Ya, I think we have plenty. But just to be sure, perhaps we should churn some more butter after we eat.

INGE
Ya, I think that is a good idea. I will churn the butter for you after breakfast.

MARTE
Thank you Inge. Now let us go eat the sandwiches that Erik has prepared for us in the kitchen.

The siblings go into the kitchen and sit down with Erik to enjoy open face sandwiches and milk for breakfast. Hulder 1 goes to the window and looks in on the siblings as they eat.

MAMMA’S VOICE
The seter boys and girls would leave their family farms in the valleys for the summers and live in their mountain cottages called seters to tend their cattle and make cheese and butter. The cattle would feed off the green pastures in the mountains while the grass and hay near the farms were saved for the cold winters. These three seter boys were brothers and Marte the seter girl was their sister. Jonas was eighteen and the oldest and he was the bravest. Inge was seventeen and very wise. Marte was sixteen and very independent. The youngest was Erik. He was fifteen, and
although he wanted to be brave, wise, and independent like his brothers and sister, he was instead easily distracted and was too curious for his own good. Like many siblings, they were different, and like most siblings they cared for each other and shared the daily chores in and outside of their seter. However, they also needed to prove to each other who was the bravest and the strongest.

JONAS
Thank you for the sandwiches Erik. Now after breakfast while Marte and Inge churn butter and prepare the rest of the cheese, I will help Erik with the rest of the food and supplies that must go back to the farm. We must get up early in the morning so that we can make it back before it gets dark out. We do not want to be in these woods when the sun goes down. Many people have gotten lost in these woods.

MARTE
What do you mean? Because it is too dark?

JONAS
(Winking to Inge) Ya, because the woods are dark, but also because of the huldre. They may be what Inge and I think we see and hear in the woods.

INGE
(Nudging Jonas on the arm) Oh, ya, the huldre, one of the many stories of these woods. If I was not so wise and Jonas was not so brave, I am sure the huldre would have gotten us by now.

MARTE
Now stop that. You are worrying young Erik. The huldre will not harm us. They live in these woods too. This is their home. Perhaps they are watching us, but we must respect them. They are very powerful creatures. Now let us clear the table and get back to our chores.

The siblings clear the table and go outside. Hulder 1 leaves the window and rushes to a nearby tree. Marte and Inge work on the butter and cheese while Jonas and Erik collect supplies and clean tools. Hulder 1 makes a noise while moving through the forest and leaving off stage.

MAMMA’S VOICE
Many of the seter boys and girls, while living in the mountains of Norway, would hear strange noises in the woods. Stories were told of the huldre.

ERIK
What was that? Did you hear that? Over there? Was it a hulder? What is a hulder?

INGE
(Smiling) The huldre are beautiful women, with long hair, that live in these mountains.
ERIK
Why do these women live in the mountains?

INGE
Well, they are not quite like the women you and I know. They are different, they have cows' tails.

ERIK
What do they want? Why are they watching me?

INGE
Well, they want you to go into the forest with them. They have beautiful singing voices, and if you follow them into the woods, you could be lost forever. But if you are strong enough and brave enough to follow them, there is a chance that one will fall in love with you. And if she falls in love with you, she will marry you in a church, cut off her cow’s tail, and be the best wife a man can ever have. But if she does not marry, she continues to live in the woods luring farmboys and grows to be 500 years old. She then becomes a trollkjering. She is now ugly and can take her head off and carry it in her arms to scare little children and the creatures of the forest.

ERIK
I am not scared of the huldre. I will make one marry me, and she will be my wife.

INGE
Be careful Erik. When they are young they are very beautiful, but they can also be very dangerous. They have a lot of power in these woods.

MARTÉ
That is right, the huldre have a lot of power in these woods and we should not disturb them. Now enough of this talk, there is much to do.

ERIK
You do not believe in them?

MARTÉ
Ya, I do, but I am too busy to dream all day about the huldre. There is too much to be done in the seter before tomorrow. I do not have time to dream of places where women have and create choices in their lives, are powerful, and independent. I must stick to my chores and this way I am strong and independent.

ERIK
Would you be stronger and more independent out in the woods? Perhaps you should be a hulder.
Marte

If I was, I would tell them to take you away because you dream too much. Now let us concentrate on preparing the butter and cheese. (Smiling) The huldre will enjoy watching us work.

All of a sudden a little underground troll man appears in the woods from off stage, hidden but highly noticeable to the audience. The underground troll watches Marte closely. Erik takes over churning the butter for Inge and Marte helps Erik. Inge and Jonas continue chopping wood and collecting supplies. They are unaware of the little troll watching Marte.

Mamma’s Voice

The huldre were the beautiful daughters of the underground people. The underground people were small trolls that were jealous of humans and their farms, towns, and homes, so they made their own societies similar to those of humans underground. Sometimes the underground people would steal or capture the seter girls when they were alone. When the seter girls are captured by the underground men or trolls, they are in a position where they must either marry the troll or escape back into their own world or be rescued by the seter or townspeople. However, sometimes, the girls do not want to leave the huldrefolk because they have discovered another world than their own where the huldre women have power within the woods. However, it is more commonly the huldre women, the beautiful daughters of the underground people, which lure the seter boys deep into the forests never to be found again.

Marte

(Shuddering) Oh, it is getting cold outside, what a strange breeze. Perhaps you three should finish here and I will go inside and start preparing dinner. Come inside soon so we can eat.

Erik

Are you alright, Marte?

Marte

Ya ya, I am fine. I just felt something… I am just cold, I will be fine. Finish your work.

Marte goes inside the seter and cooks dinner. The little troll leaves off stage when Marte has gone inside. He makes a noise when leaving.

Erik

(While working) There was another noise. Did you hear that?

Jonas

Don’t worry Erik, you are safe here with us. But if you did hear something, perhaps we should check on the cows again.
INGE
Good idea. Come, let us all go check and then we can eat dinner.

The brothers leave the stage to check on the cows. After they have left, Marte comes outside.

MARTE
Jonas… Inge… Erik? Dinner is ready…

Marte sits down on a log and begins work on her weaving. The little troll man appears in the woods again. He makes a noise. Marte is startled.

MARTE

The little troll makes another noise. Marte puts down her weaving and goes towards the direction of the noise. The little troll slowly moves off stage and Marte follows the noise into the woods and off stage as well. Hulder 1 soon appears in the background again, and off stage cow bells are heard. Jonas, Inge, and Erik come on stage and begin to go into the seter.

JONAS
Do you smell that? The stew must be ready.

INGE
Ya, the stew is ready, but where is Marte?

ERIK
Maybe she ate already and is doing more work outside. I saw her weaving laid out.

JONAS
Ya, or maybe she is sleeping. Marte? Marte? Maybe she is outside. Perhaps we should just eat quickly and continue our work because it is getting dark outside.

INGE
Ya, but we should wait for Marte.

JONAS
Ya, Erik you should start eating, you are hungry. Inge and I will wait outside for our sister.

Erik sits to eat his stew. Jonas and Inge go outside and continue to collect their supplies. As they are working, Hulder 1 makes noise in the woods.

JONAS
Did you hear that?
INGE
Ya, I heard something.

JONAS
Maybe Marte came looking for us? Perhaps she is lost. I will go get her.

INGE
Fine. I will go inside and eat.

Inge joins Erik for dinner and Jonas goes into the woods and off stage. Hulder 1 follows him and goes off stage.

ERIK
It is getting late. Where are they?

INGE
Maybe one of the cows is missing. Don’t worry. Let us finish up and go outside and work on the weaving for Marte.

Inge and Erik clear the table and go outside. Inge works on the weaving and Erik is cleaning tools. It is now dark outside. They light a candle and continue to work. As they work they hear beautiful singing in the distance.

ERIK
Do you hear that singing Inge?

INGE
What did you say Erik?

ERIK
That singing, it is so beautiful.

INGE
Singing in the woods? Ya, I think I hear something, maybe that is Marte and Jonas coming back, I am sure they are hungry. See, it is getting louder now.

MAMMA’S VOICE
During the summers up at the seters, many boys and girls had heard what seemed like singing or strange noises deep in the forests and mountainsides of Norway. Sometimes things would happen that would become a story, and this story after some time would turn into myth, and this myth would become nothing more than a favorite bedtime story told by a mother and father to their daughter and son. But this story still had meaning, still had truth, still had magic for a little girl’s ears, a story forever told and never forgotten, at least not by those who were there, who
remember, and who make sure their great great grandchildren know the roots and myths of their being.

ERIK
It is so beautiful. Can I go meet them along the way?

INGE
Nei, Erik, there is too much to do, and it is dark out. They are on their way, don’t be foolish, it is best to finish our work, we must get up early and leave in the morning. We should get some sleep soon. Now, I am finished here, but you must finish cleaning those tools and get some sleep too. Now, I am going to check on the supplies that we have ready, and you will be wise and finish your work then go inside and get some sleep.

ERIK
Ya Inge…

INGE takes the candle and goes behind the seter.

ERIK
(Talking to himself) Ya ya Inge. But I would rather be brave… I’m coming Marte and Jonas…

Erik runs off stage in the direction of the singing. And soon the singing stops completely. Inge comes from behind the seter.

INGE
Erik? Erik? Time for sleep. You must already be dreaming…

Inge goes inside and goes to bed.

MAMMA’S VOICE
But just as bed time stories lead us into deep slumber and powerful dreams, we must always awake to face our myths.

The sun starts to rise and light is cast upon the seter. It is morning. Marte comes running onto the stage. Her hair is down and tangled. Her dress has been torn and her clothes are dirty, but she is smiling. She runs into the seter.

MARE
Jonas, Inge, Erik! Wake up. Wake up. I have a story for you. Wake up!

She searches the doors of the seter. Inge awakes and enters the main room of the seter.
INGE
Marte, what is wrong? What has happened? And why is your dress torn?

MARTE
Where are Jonas and Erik? I must tell them too. The strangest thing has happened.

INGE
Well, they are asleep, but I am sure you have woken them by now. We should leave for the farm. They will follow us with the cattle and more supplies when they are ready. Now calm down. What is it?

MARTE
Oh, Inge, I saw them.

INGE

MARTE
Inge, I saw them. I was captured by the underground people, the huldrefolk.

INGE
What? Nei, you were dreaming. You were asleep here.

MARTE
Nei Inge, I was not here last night. I followed a noise into the woods, and I thought it was you, Jonas, and Erik, but it was a troll and he wanted me to stay with him. He wanted to marry me. But I saw the huldre women, and they were singing and they were so beautiful and they were full of life, so free, so independent, and so powerful in their woods. I was frightened but I felt so alive. It was like being in a dream... but it was real.

INGE
Marte, it was just a dream.

MARTE
Nei Inge, listen to me, it was not a dream. Look at me, I escaped, I had to run all night, I did not know where I was going, but I was not lost anymore, don’t you understand! I was not lost in the woods.

INGE
I do not know what you are talking about. Are you feeling alright?
MARTE
I have never felt better. I saw them, I became them, and I chose to leave, I wanted to come back, but now I am stronger, wiser, braver, and forever free.

INGE
Marte, what do you mean?

MARTE
I can now leave the woods.

Inge and Marte collect some belongings and supplies and start to head for the farm. They walk around the seter and both Marte and Inge turn it to show the forest scene on the back; they are walking deeper into the woods down to the valley. They are headed stage left. Inge walks ahead and off stage while Marte walks slowly behind, admiring the woods.

MAMMA’S VOICE
Marte had experienced something wonderful, but she learned that it would have to be her secret for now. Time would go by and soon her secret could be shared for many, many stories to come. But for right now, it was hers, but it would soon free many more women. From the myths of the beginning, the myths of our pasts, there is loss and confusion and darkness. From this darkness, through the woods, through the loss, we may once more emerge into the light with our dreams and stories of bravery, wisdom, strength, and choice and create myths that reveal our roots but also set us free.

Marte walks off stage. The lights start to dim and the stage is quiet. Out walks Mamma from ACT II from stage left. She walks to center stage and speaks directly to the audience. A soft spotlight shines on her.

MAMMA
Now go to sleep Marte, this is the end of the story. Inge had been wise and did not follow the sounds of the huldre into the forest. For this he was able to go back to the farm and prepare for the winter season. Jonas had been brave and had entered into the woods to search for his sister but instead encountered many huldre. For this, he found a hulder and fell in love with her and she fell in love with him and they were later married in a church. The hulder lost her tail and became a very good wife to Jonas. Erik had been foolish and followed the beautiful voices of the huldre into the forest. For this, he became lost in the woods. But Marte was no longer lost. She found her way…

Marte walks on stage from stage left and walks behind Mamma. They are unaware of each other. Marte is now dressed as the child from ACT II with a cow’s tail. Marte is walking around on stage marveling at the woods.
MAMMA
And the cows were eventually taken back to the farm when Marte went back up to the seter to get the rest of the supplies. She looked for Erik from time to time, but he was somewhere else, perhaps with a hulder or perhaps still lost. But Marte refused to be lost. She was given a choice about which world she wanted to live in and how she wanted to live in it. She decided to leave the powerful world of the huldre and return to her own society, but when she returned, she had changed. She now had the spirit of the huldre and could exist in the woods and in her society as a wise, brave, strong, and independent woman. Marriage, love, and work were now her own decisions and she was going to share her story with society one day very soon. The summer had ended and now she was leaving the woods and headed for her new life as a powerful woman. She was no longer lost in the woods. She can now brave the cold, dark winter world because of her new beginning, the new light of her story.

Marte walks beside Mamma and takes her hand. Mamma turns to Marte.

MAMMA
Now Marte, when you go to sleep tonight you can dream of many stories, you can dream of the huldre in these woods, you can dream of playing with them and picking blueberries with them, you can dream of your future and all the wonderful things you want to do and see, but remember, to take those dreams with you when you wake up.

MARTE
I will Mamma.

Marte and Mamma turn to walk off stage.

MARTE
Mamma, do you think she still visited the woods after she grew up?

MAMMA
Ya, she is still here to tell her story, her mother’s story, and her grandmother’s story, because the creatures of the Norwegian woods are always watching. They are us, and we are the story.

Marte and Mamma walk off stage towards stage left, the spot light follows them. All of a sudden, Hulder 1 appears from stage left in the spotlight and runs to center stage. She looks into the audience, smiles, and runs off stage towards stage right. The spotlight goes out, and the dark forest remains.

THE END