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Tales as Old as Time: Myth, Gender, and the Fairy Tale in Popular Culture

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Tales as Old as Time:
Myth, Gender, and the Fairy Tale in Popular Culture

By

Shannan Palma
B.A., The Ohio State University, 2000

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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This dissertation theorizes the contemporary political value of myth through an examination of metonymic and narrative invocations of fairy tales in primarily, but not exclusively, American popular culture. It is an interdisciplinary study that takes a feminist epistemological approach to merging twentieth-century semiotic and historico-religious theories of myth with twenty-first century scholarship on comparative media. Through close reading, semiotic analysis, and transmedia comparison of *Briar Rose, Beauty and the Beast*, and *Cinderella* in popular culture, the author shows how fairy tale myth functions as gendered cultural shorthand for narrating the splintering of possibility after the achievement of many, but not all of the goals of the 1970s feminist movement. Women in particular use fairy tale myths to reconcile the tensions between individual and collective experience, to question traditional modes of thinking about self and other, and to rethink assumptions about desirable endpoints. These case studies point to the ways cultural norms about gender remain in flux, the ways rationality-based logic and fairy tale logic occasionally come into conflict. The author argues that addressing these points of contention in the same mythic framework in which they are communicated is critical to continued feminist movement.

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INTRODUCTION

Years ago, I worked as a makeup artist and managed a small cosmetics business in a department store. I had been particularly interested in fairy tales myself since reading the Brothers Grimm in my early teens, but I was still surprised by the number of times my clients made fairy tale references during their makeovers with no prompting from me. "I had to kiss a lot of frogs," a bride might say with a smile, "but I found my prince." "It's not like I can wait around for Prince Charming," I heard from a businesswoman wanting a new look for an important interview. The references were off the cuff, meant to convey a long quest and hope in happily ever after or disillusion with rescue narratives and an embrasure of independence and ambition. Their comments assumed a shared referent with gendered components. They were using fairy tale references as a shorthand language, a way to communicate complex feelings about their experiences and expectations. I was intrigued. Eventually I began asking them questions about the fairy tales they referred to, but most of them had no idea of the folklore or literary referents. For the most part, they were thinking of animated Disney films, half-remembered children's picture books, images and jokes and a general sense of fairy tales as a common code. I realized they were invoking fairy tales as myth.

Wendy Doniger suggests conceptualizing myth on a "continuum of all the narratives constructed of words (poems, realistic fiction, histories, and so forth) — and all the various forms of narrations of an experience" (*Spider* 7). Myth is unique in that it accesses multiple points on the continuum. "Myths range from the most highly detailed (closest to the personal end of the continuum) to the most stripped down (closest to the artificial construct at the abstract end of the continuum); and each myth may be rendered

by the scholar in its micro- or macro- form" (Doniger 9). But Doniger's insight can be applied to more than just scholarly uses of myth. One of the most powerful aspects of myth is that it is not just accessible to the scholar, but also to the poet, the writer, the marketing executive, the random person on the street. "The essence of myth," Paul Veyne writes, "is not that everyone knows it but that it is supposed to be known and is worthy of being known by all" (Veyne 45). Myth is cultural shorthand, a coded language for an in-crowd that doesn't think of itself as an in-crowd. And just as anyone can access it (that's why it's myth), anyone can access its micro- or macro-form. Myth can render the personal, abstract; the abstract, personal. For contemporary women in the United States, the pervasiveness and range of fairy tales in popular culture capture a struggle over what it means to be a woman or a man at the ontological level. How do we think of gender when we aren't "thinking"?

In the academic and activist spheres, we may talk about heterosexism or the social construction of gender, but what do we do when confronted with the task of buying a last-minute birthday present for a child in a big box superstore world of pink and blue toy aisles? How do we engage with myths patterned on outmoded gender patterns so that they remain relevant to life today? Studying fairy tales as myth allows us to get at some of the tensions that complicate the lives of contemporary women and to ask the questions: how does myth influence and reflect emotional investments? How do women use it to make sense of their experiences in the context of collective experience?

The puzzle of the businesswoman who mentioned and dismissed the trope of waiting around for Prince Charming in the context of preparing for a professional interview led me to see the communicative value of myth and even the way it can serve

as a safe entry point into potentially loaded conversations. Rejecting the myth still signifies knowledge of it, familiarity with the coded language. Acknowledging the unspoken rules of heteronormativity and the marriage plot – the assumption that every woman's goal is to marry a man – highlights the agency invoked in breaking them. The businesswoman's goal is advancing her career, and her fairy tale reference signifies an acknowledgement that her choice opposes a traditional set of narratives about what a woman should want. It signals some of the potential complexities in her gendered experiences of a professional path. The brief reference coupled with tone of voice and manner could indicate sarcasm, ambivalence, irony, mischief, or multiple combinations of a host of other emotions regarding how gender impacts her interpretation of her life and choices. By positioning her in-the-moment relationship to an assumed shared myth, she proffers a casual conversational gambit for discussing gender, heteronormativity and work without alluding to the more politically-loaded language of feminism. The myth becomes a shorthand gauge for common ground at the macro level of cultural competency and the micro level of personal experience. It is a point of potential connection.

Connecting around and communicating with myth allows one to feel like a part of something greater, even if one is positioning oneself and one's actions in opposition to that myth. Some, however, reject opposition in favor of appropriation. The editors of a fairy tale-themed anthology, *Once Upon a Dyke,* explained their drive to offer up explicit lesbian versions of the classics, saying:

> For contemporary women, and especially for contemporary lesbians, the old fairy tales can be appallingly rigid. Young is beautiful, old is evil, and a woman's worst enemy is another woman. We all grew up with these tales, whether they

> were the original grisly stories or Walt Disney's "sanitized for your protection" Cult of the Princess versions. And for those of us who were not destined to grow up to be the heterosexual princess type, these stories raised some serious questions: Why were the heroines always pretty, pure, passive little things who needed rescuing? And even if a girl did need rescuing (as we all do from time to time), why did she have to be rescued by a handsome prince? Why not a handsome princess, or a comely peasant girl, for that matter? What was so charming about Prince Charming anyway? (Watts and Kallmaker viii)

These editors' simple questions have great subversive potential. The substitutions they suggest displace the heteronormativity of the myth while maintaining its fairy tale structure and assumed authority.

In *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, Bruce Lincoln offers up a conception of society as a synthesis, a constructed entity subject to reconstitution into larger or smaller groups. Social borders between societies and within subgroups are formed along lines of affinity (similarity) and estrangement (dissimilarity). These alignments are coordinated through ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation (9-10). Lincoln demonstrates how myth, ritual, and classification (taxonomy) function not only in the maintenance, but also in the *reorganization* of societies.

> In the hands of elites and of those professionals who serve them (either in mediated fashion or directly), discourse of all forms—not only verbal, but also the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like—may be strategically employed to mystify the inevitable inequities of any social order and to win the consent of those over whom power is exercised, thereby obviating the need for the direct coercive use

> of force and transforming simple power into "legitimate" power into "legitimate" authority. Yet discourse can also serve members of subordinate classes … in their attempts to demystify, delegitimate, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourse that play a role in constructing their subordination. (*Discourse* 4-5)

Among the methods Lincoln lists are debunking the authority of a myth or reinterpreting or retelling an existing myth to alter the sentiments of affinity and estrangement that it evokes (*Discourse* 25). The businesswoman implemented a mild version of the former, while *Once Upon a Dyke* attempts the latter project. It writes lesbians into social presence by incorporating them into myth. The significance of the editors' intervention should not be dismissed because of its lowbrow genre. Doniger has noted, in regards to B movies,

> The worse the film, the better the metaphysics. To make money, filmmakers take what works and copy it, from gross plots and titles right down to names of characters and stunning camera angles; motifs circulate and recirculate in Hollywood much as they do in the medieval cycles or in a Wagnerian opera. What we call mythemes when they occur in myths, we call cliches when they appear in B movies. (*Woman* 5-6)

In keeping with Doniger's approach, I have turned to popular culture to answer my aforementioned questions about myth and gender. Popular culture is an arena of folk culture through which new myths emerge in the interstices of individual creation, corporate production and audience response. For feminist theorists, the concept of myth has the added bonus of bringing with it a non-psychoanalytic theoretical language for discussing the contradictions between explicit and expressed beliefs and internalized

desires.

Myth as a hermeneutic resource

In *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye,* Madonna Kolbenschlag presents fairy tales as "parables of what women have become; and at the same time, prophecies of the spiritual metamorphosis to which they are called" (x). Her approach is both psychological and theological; her style, highly academic. "Inevitably," she argues "with the passing of time, mythology is translated into psychology" (25). Her argument integrates Jungian claims of a collective unconscious with the universalist principles of conventional pop-psychology. In this paradigm, mythology inevitably becomes psychology; the patterns of story are inevitably the patterns of life. Lives of necessity begin to pattern themselves after myth. By studying those patterns, one can achieve mimetic or at least contiguous results; or, as Kolbenschlag promises, *avoid* contiguous results. In order to challenge a lifetime of patriarchal oppression, a life naturalized and made to seem desirable in fairy tales, Kolbenschlag argues that women must reject the mythified life of passivity. In order to achieve spiritual fulfillment, they must kiss Sleeping Beauty goodbye. Though Kolbenschlag's core idea, that people use myths to perform interpretive acts of biography, is quite intriguing, her argument that mythology *inevitably* becomes psychology (and in predictable patriarchal ways) overlooks the capacity for critical thought. Paul Veyne's investigation of the question *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths?* suggests a more complicated process in keeping with the examples of the businesswoman and the editors of *Once Upon a Dyke* whereby people relate to the myths of their own culture within continuums that include irony and distance as well as belief. "The Greeks believe and do not believe their myths. They believe in them, but they use them and cease

believing at the point where their interest in believing ends" (Veyne 84).

This proactive approach to interacting with myth is the one that interests me. In an article titled "Beauty and the Beast: The Romanticization of Abuse in Popular Culture," Laura Beres draws on her experience as a social worker counseling abused women in order to consider "the possible meanings which could be taken from [certain popular culture texts] by women who are attempting to make sense of their context of living with an abusive partner" (195). Beres draws on the therapeutic method developed by M. White. White's method is based on the proposal "that the understanding we have of, or the meaning we ascribe to, any event is determined and restrained by the receiving context for the event, that is, by the network of premises and presuppositions that constitute our maps of the world" (White and Epston 2).

Where White's predecessors in this line of thinking refer to "maps," however, he prefers the metaphor of narrative in order to account for the way perspectives change over time (3). Thus, in his parlance, people "story" their experiences in order to make sense of them, to give them meaning (White and Epston 10). Rather than asking therapy patients to tell their own stories; however, White asks them to tell the story of the problem, thus externalizing it and creating a frame of reference in which the problem *is not them.* Together, he and his patients "read" the story, paying particular attention to "unique outcomes" — moments where the expected pattern of behaviors surrounding the problem do not occur. Every new "reading" is also, potentially, a re-writing (White and Epston 9). This analogy opens "space for the authoring of alternative stories" (White and Epston 6).

Beres is careful to distinguish White's method from psychoanalysis, which

positions childhood experiences as a filter for adult interpretations. “White believes that images start in the present and reach backwards, finding other elements with which to resonate. These texts, with which people engage, may contribute to people’s meaning-making in current situations, and these images may then move backwards in time, finding memories with which to resonate, which then consolidate the meanings” (Beres 194). Where Kolbenschlag would have her readers move from passive receiver of myth to active resistor, White theorizes that his patients are already active interpreters of their own experience — whether consciously or not — and that acknowledging their already *active* role in constructing the story is crucial to changing it.

Casework has led Beres to a similar conclusion. “As opposed to the general perception of abused women as being passive and victim-like,” Beres notes, “my experience of abused women has been that they are actively engaged in attempting to understand and improve their situations” (195). This particular subgroup of women, suffering daily abuse at the hands of their lovers, often find comfort in identifying with the character Belle in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. When Beres’ patients tell their stories as Belle’s story, they are no longer victims, but strong and intelligent heroines who are brave enough to tame beasts. Beres writes out of her understandable concern that this particular story, while allowing the women to see themselves as empowered, can justify and even strengthen their dedication to a dangerous relationship. Though she is concerned about the results, at least her patients are invested in a sense of themselves as agents. They already have a view of themselves as powerful. If they stop seeing their abuser as the one that needs saving, they remain equipped, in one sense at least, with the power to leave.

Similar to Beres and White, I focus more on myth as a narrative resource, a means of communication. The psychological benefit I am primarily interested in stems from integration into the community that shares familiarity with that myth. That said, neither they nor I would disagree with Kolbenschlag's argument that identification with a myth can be harmful. However, by denying the ways in which this identification is already an active process, Kolbenschlag misses the possibility that identifications are processed in multiple ways and that there are plenty of readings that emphasize other parts of the story than the princess' long sleep and the prince's kiss. For example, Beres' work shows that making personal meaning from myth is a two-edged sword. The curse in that story is on the Beast. He is the one who must be saved from his beastly nature. Saving him is the only way to save Beauty. The abused woman remains with her abuser, convinced at some level that she is acting in her own best interest. Happily ever after is, after all, the promised end to her tale. This structural inexorability is the core of what I refer to as fairy tale logic. Add to this implicit promise myth theorist Wendy Doniger's insight that, "in most myths, … character, except in the broadest terms (young or old, wise or foolish), doesn't count at all; myths say, this could happen to anyone" (*Spider* 7).

In the following pages I will juxtapose interpretations of fairy tale myths — novels, films, television series, songs, poems, advertisements, and artwork — to ask what tensions and anxieties are communicated within the texts. In doing so, I will of course commit my own hermeneutic acts: I will find my own commonalities and attempt to persuade the reader of their greater significance. My intention is to interrogate the mythic work of the tales.

The cases that follow

In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes notes with disarming transparency that his response to the problem of reductive taxonomies and analytic paradigms has been to err on the side of a subjective particularity (8). He studies the photographs that are significant to him. My case studies likewise skew towards my own priorities and interests. I am drawn to retellings that focus on gender and sexuality. I privilege cultural critical categories over psychoanalytic ones. When I use the language of "working through" with relation to trauma or cultural anxieties, I am referring to an individual or collective's cultural rather than psychic integration. I am interested in how myth functions in maintaining or challenging relationships of affinity and estrangement within society. That said, in selecting my case studies for each of the following chapters, I utilized the following principles of selectivity: first, that the case occur post-1970 and have reached or been aimed at a wide adult audience; second, that the case reference the myth explicitly through language or visual cue; and third, that its content address variations in women's agency — whether through feminist critique or pseudo feminist gesture.

In chapter one, "A mythic approach to fairy tales," I set forth a theoretical and historical framework for bringing together fairy tales, myth, and popular culture. Traditionally, fairy tales and myth have been studied as distinct taxonomical categories within the realm of folklore or collapsed into a pool for supernatural allusion in literature. I highlight the places where distinctions still remain useful while showing that in contemporary popular culture, fairy tales sometimes function as myths. Fairy tales' historical folkloric associations with female storytellers and feminine socialization make the resulting myths particularly relevant for studying the complexities of women's

experiences after the more visible feminist movement of the 1970s.

In chapter two, I show how *Sleeping Beauty,* the tale most critiqued by feminists as a paradigm of female passivity, has an unexpected mythic function as a resource for narrating traumas of ignorance and bodily violation. As Anne Sexton's poetic retelling shows, because of the nature of trauma, not every invocation of the myth ends happily. However, in those cases where the trauma is externalized as the curse, identification oscillates between multiple characters as needed, and the onward progression of fairy tale logic, which always ends in happily ever after, gets invoked, then authors and producers use the myth to tell tales of empowerment, survival, and reintegration into community.

In chapter three, I compare successive stand-alone retellings of *Beauty and the Beast* by the same authors/producers and find that the myth is invoked to explore anxieties about the unity of the self and the reliability of vision as a form of epistemology. When women are encouraged to become more fully realized as human beings, not just prepared to be a bride, the tensions around what exactly it means to be a fully realized human being come out more explicitly. Assumptions about beauty and love come into question, and the efficacy of judging by appearances lies in doubt. Some invocations of the myth reject community as necessarily patriarchal and oppressive to individual enlightenment; while others affirm its positive aspects in terms of mutual support. Taking a good long stare at the myth, retelling it multiple times, becomes a way of reflecting on real world tensions surrounding maturity, personal transformation and growth.

In chapter four, I show how *Cinderella* has become a synecdoche for fairy tales in general and a vehicle for questioning the efficacy of fairy tale logic. Invocations of the

myth in advertising and art reflect anxieties about the possibility or impossibility of happily ever after. Advertisers suggest that while money can't buy happiness, it can prepare the way as well as fairy tale magic could. Meanwhile, critics question the real-life consequences of wishing and the gap between desire and reality when it comes to "having it all." In particular, two visual artists utilize the iconography of Disney's *Cinderella* to showcase the ways in which dream can easily become nightmare.

My analysis of fairy tale myths in popular culture suggests ways that women are trying to cope with the splintering of possibility after achieving many, but not all of the goals of the 1970s feminist movement. As you will see, they use fairy tale myths to reconcile the tensions between individual and collective experience; to question traditional modes of thinking about self and other, about what we know and how we know it, and to rethink assumptions about desirable endpoints. The cases that follow point to the ways cultural norms about gender remain in flux, the ways rationality-based logic and fairy tale logic occasionally come into conflict. Addressing these points of contention in the same mythic framework in which they are communicated is critical to continued feminist movement.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MYTHIC WORK OF FAIRY TALES

The problem of the mermaid

Christine Shojaei Kawan, examining the influence of fairy tales on the work of feminist Simone de Beauvoir, notes Beauvoir's discomfort with stories such as Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." In Andersen's tale, the Little Mermaid of the title falls deeply in love with a human prince whom she rescues from a shipwreck. Soon after, her unsuspecting grandmother tells her the only way a mermaid can gain an immortal soul is through love from and marriage to a human man, and the combination of desires for both prince and soul lead the Little Mermaid to a dangerous bargain. She goes to the Sea Witch, a powerful and mistrusted figure in the underwater realm, and asks for the one magical alteration that will make her pleasing to the prince: legs. The Sea Witch warns her that the price of changing herself for her prince will be high:

> Your tail will then split in two and shrink into what human beings call pretty legs. But it will hurt. It will feel like a sharp sword passing through you. …You will keep your graceful movements—no dancer will ever glide so lightly—but every step you take will make you feel as if you were treading on a sharp knife, enough to make your feet bleed. … You'll never be able to swim back through the water to your sisters or to your father's palace. The only way you can acquire an immortal soul is to win the prince's love…. If the prince marries someone else, the morning after the wedding your heart will break, and you will become foam on the waves. …But first you will have to pay me…. You have a voice more beautiful than anyone else's down here at the bottom of the sea. You may be planning to charm the prince with it, but you are going to have to give it to me. I want the dearest thing you possess in exchange for my precious potion. …Well, where's your courage? Stick out your little tongue and let me cut it off in

> payment. (143-4)

The Little Mermaid gambles, takes the bargain, and loses. The prince takes to her at once, and allows her to "sleep outside his door on a velvet cushion," and to accompany him everywhere, not unlike a favored pet, but he never realizes she is the one who saved him from the sea (Andersen 147). "He loved her as one loves a dear, sweet child, and it never even occurred to him to make her his queen," Andersen writes (148).

Eventually the prince marries the human princess who found him unconscious on the beach after the Little Mermaid brought him to shore. On his wedding night, the Little Mermaid's sisters attempt to free her from her bargain: if the Little Mermaid will only stab the prince in his bed with a knife they got from the Sea Witch, then his hold on her will be lifted, her bargain reversed, and she will be a mermaid again.

The Little Mermaid cannot do it. She flings the knife overboard and herself, also. She can feel herself changing into something ethereal, but it isn't sea foam. Instead, she is informed:

> Mermaids do not have an immortal soul, and they can never have one without gaining the love of a human being. Eternal life depends on a power outside them. The daughters of the air do not have immortal souls either, but through good deeds they can earn one for themselves. … Once we have struggled to do all the good we can in three hundred years, immortal souls are bestowed on us, and we enjoy the eternal happiness humans find. You, my dear little mermaid, have struggled with all your heart to do what we do. You have suffered and endured and now you have been transported to the world of the spirits of the air. Through good deeds, you too can earn an immortal soul in three hundred years. (Andersen 153)

Citing *Memoires d'une jeune fille rangee,* Shojaei Kawan argues that stories such as this one stood out to Beauvoir's childhood self because they did not follow the rules. They did not "meet the customary pattern of the wicked being punished and the good being rewarded" (Shojaei Kawan 31). Shojaei Kawan claims that "it was then that Simone came to understand that reality did not correspond to the patterns of fiction: everything could happen to everybody, regardless of a person's merits or misdeeds" (31). Certainly the difference between reality and that customary pattern made an impression, as in *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir warns of the harmful effects of fairy tales on young girls, who learn to view themselves as love objects, their most important and exploitative quality, beauty. Beauvoir laments, "Everything still encourages the young girl to expect fortune and happiness from some Prince Charming rather than to attempt by herself their difficult and uncertain conquest" (136). Shojaei Kawan claims: "Beauvoir's reflections … show us that educatory tales may also contain other, hidden messages, that they can be reinterpreted in various ways by children and that they can also be rejected" (31).

Paul Veyne makes a related point while attempting to answer the question *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths?* He muses, "the Greek aristocracy wavered between two attitudes toward legend: to be pragmatic and participate in the popular credulity, for the people behave as docilely as they obey; or else to refuse, on their own account, a humiliating submission, which was perceived as a result of naivety. Understanding is the first of privileges" (Veyne 31). Beauvoir, in her rejection of fairy tales, chooses the second route, refusing "a humiliating submission" to fairy tales, but in doing so implicitly confirms their power. As you may recall from the introduction, Veyne argues that "the essence of myth is not that everyone knows it but that it is supposed to be known and is

worthy of being known by all" (45). Though Beauvoir would undoubtedly question the *worthiness* of fairy tales to be known, she nevertheless seems to take for granted the supposition that they *are* known. In her disavowal, Beauvoir argues against fairy tales functioning as myth, even as she bolsters their status as such.

However, Beauvoir's implicit assumption that she is unlike normal women because of her skepticism oversimplifies the relationship between myth and "the people." As theorized by Veyne:

> …Each individual, if he belonged to the ranks of the learned, internalized something of a peaceful coexistence in the field of relations of symbolic force, which resulted in half-beliefs, hesitations, and contradictions, on the one hand, and on the other, the possibility of juggling different levels of meaning. It was from the latter, in particular, that an "ideological"—or rather, rhetorical—use of mythology emerged. (43)

For the Greeks, belief in and rhetorical invocation of mythology are not necessarily separable so much as self-interested. Remember, "the Greeks believe and do not believe their myths. They believe in them, but they use them and cease believing at the point where their interest in believing ends" (Veyne 84).

I begin with this scenario — a young Beauvoir turning away distraught from "The Little Mermaid"; an older Beauvoir denouncing fairy tales passionately— because it so appropriately bridges the fields I will be working in and among in the following pages: namely, feminist theory, fairy tale studies, and mythography. Likewise, it sets up the central question of this chapter: what's the point for feminist theorists in examining fairy tales in popular culture as myth?

Make no mistake. Fairy tales do matter, possibly more now than at any previous

point in history, at least in terms of the sheer scope of their ever-increasing impact. In fact I hazard a guess that they will matter even more tomorrow than today, though whether they will still be recognizable as tales-per-se is in question. Between the aisles full of pink-clad fairy tale-inspired dolls, the dress-up clothes, the bedsheets, and even the toothpaste, the marketing of "princess culture" to young girls between the ages of 4 and 6 years old is one of the most successful campaigns in modern advertising history. If you are in the U.S., just look at the children's section of your local Target or WalMart and extrapolate for a moment. This project does not even begin to address the global impact of the large-scale exportation of U.S. popular culture. Fairy tales have come a long way from the collective efforts of the Brothers Grimm or the literary salons of Paris. Whether or not they are "worthy," certain tales are now very profitably *assumed to be known.*

Any fairy tale scholar worth her salt will now raise a hand to qualify *what* exactly is *assumed to be known* when the average child refers to "Cinderella" or "Snow White." Bloody feet and cannibalism, though characteristic of many oral and literary versions of the tales, are likely absent from our hypothetical child's accounts. The fairy tale as myth is only sometimes a story, and more often than not a commercialized fragment laden with meaning: Cinderella's mis/fortunes collapsed into and sold as a dress-up kit, including "glass" slippers and a tiara. Even fully narrated and plotted versions of the tales may differ drastically from their forebears. Americans familiar with Disney's animated fairy tale films will tell you they know the story of "The Little Mermaid," but the tragic ending that failed to resonate with Beauvoir is absent from the version they are familiar with. In the Disney film, the Little Mermaid gets her man, keeps her legs, lives happily ever after. Do these changes attempt to signal a new era for fairy tale maidens? Is the Little

Mermaid "empowered?" Empowered for what? Why?

Beauvoir is concerned not with fairy tales' narrative structures or technical aspects so much as with their formative effects—the constructions of femininity they make natural. This critique of fairy tales speaks to what Roland Barthes describes as a type of speech in which "what-goes-without-saying" is the real subject (*Mythologies* 11). Barthes, like and unlike Veyne, is describing myth. For me, one logical question arising out of Disney's alterations is what constructions of femininity *The Little Mermaid*'s new ending might make natural. The mermaid's trade of her voice for a chance at love may no longer seem like such a bad idea when her trade-off is later reversed, and she also gets the guy.

I do not wish to suggest that changes to fairy tales' narratives are a new or unwelcome event. The "fairy tale" is a genre with so many definitions as to be functionally useless without qualification and context. Neither would I imply that "myth" is an uncontested term. Before going further, let us consider the relevant histories of both.

Fairy tales and fairy tale studies: some relevant partialities

Though we have seen that feminist scholars as early as Beauvoir note the relationship between fairy tales and socialization, Jack Zipes' 1983 book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* can arguably be credited with expanding the borders of fairy tale studies beyond folkloristics; renewing and popularizing the socio-historical study of fairy tales. Zipes remains among the most influential of contemporary fairy tale scholars. The peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal *Marvels and Tales* was founded a few years later in 1987, and the journal's broadly interdisciplinary editorial policy has subsequently done

much to shape the inclusiveness of the field.[1]

The fairy tale, in the folkloristic sense, is rarely possessed of an "original" version, only multiple variants which must be somehow identified as similar. Propp thus defines the fairy tale by its structure "because fairy tales possess a quite particular structure which is immediately felt and which determines their category, even though we may not be aware of it" (6). Contemporary folklorists are encouraged to find and study variants of a folktale via an exhaustive and eternally incomplete index of folktale "types" first classified by Antti Aarne.[2] Fairy tales, according to Propp, are "those tales classified by Aarne under numbers 300 to 749" (19). Propp further delimits the fairy tale by articulating 31 functions which he sees as integral to its structure, and claiming the fairy tale is at heart "a story built upon the proper alternation of the above-cited functions in various forms, with some of them absent from each story and with others repeated" (99).

Maria Tatar, introducing her edited volume, *The Classic Fairy Tales,* demonstrates how this approach connects seemingly distinct stories into folkloristic variants:

> When we say the word "Cinderella," we are referring not to a single text but to an entire array of stories with a persecuted heroine who may respond to her situation with defiance, cunning, ingenuity, self-pity, anguish, or grief. She will

[1] "…The journal addresses a multidisciplinary audience and provides a central forum for fairy-tale scholars in disciplines such as literary studies, folklore, psychology, gender studies, children's literature, social and cultural history, anthropology, film studies, ethnic studies, art and music history, and others. …Because many contemporary questions in fairy-tale studies require interdisciplinary answers, *Marvels & Tales* also seeks to promote informed research addressing more general issues that cross or transcend traditional disciplinary borders.

"In addition to publishing original scholarly articles, *Marvels & Tales* publishes translations of historically important research, texts and translations of fairy tales and related primary documents, illustrations, critical exchanges, and reviews of recent books and other media." ("Editorial Policy")

[2] Antti Aarne first published his classification system in 1910. Stith Thompson published a revised and expanded version in 1955-1958. Hans-Jorg Uther's version came out in 2004. I use either the Thompson and Uther classifications, denoted by the preface "AT" and "ATU," respectively, when referencing the tale types throughout.

> be called Yeh-hsien in China, Cendrillon in Italy. Aschenputtel in Germany, and Catskin in England. Her sisters may be named One-Eye and Three-Eyes, Anastasia and Drizella, or she may have just one sister named Haloek. Her tasks range from tending cows to sorting peas to fetching embers for a fire. (ix)

Because of this multivocality, Max Luthi cautions against the over-interpretation of details of a fairy tale: "The comparison of the different variants shows that we must be cautious about our interpretation of details" (33). The Grimm brothers, for example, believed the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty was a remnant of ancient myths about natural processes.

> But when they claim to see a symbol for dawn in the hedge of roses and, likewise, in the wall of flames surrounding the sleeping Nordic Brynhild, we arrive at a point where interpretations become problematical. Narrow and rigid interpretations cannot be ascribed to a dynamic story. Can we see, in the twelve fairies, the twelve months which bestow their manifold gifts on the earth and on nature? The thirteenth fairy who has been provoked to anger would then be—yes, such suggestions have been made in all seriousness—the personification of the unthroned, neglected thirteenth month; and the whole thing would portray the transition from the lunar year, with its thirteen months, to the solar year, with its twelve … With such sophistical allegorizing the natural-mythological interpretation is carried to absurdity. (Luthi 33)

Luthi's caution is directed against those individuals who seek to find some timeless essential meaning in a fairy tale, not against those who find delight in close readings of individual variants *as variants*. But the risks involved in over-interpretation of details without the check of comparison is completely lost on psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, who uses single versions of each fairy tale he studies in *The Uses of*

Enchantment in order to make claims about their functions in child development. Bound by the limitations of his small sample size, Bettelheim insists that the single most important element of the fairy tale is a happy ending. Though often cited as an influential thinker in early fairy tale studies, his definition of fairy tales as a genre is ultimately as limited as his didactic readings of individual fairy tales. Nevertheless, in popular culture, his conflation of the fairy tale and the happy ending continues, perhaps accounting in part for Disney's feel-good alterations to ending of "The Little Mermaid."

Scholarship in fairy tale studies, including but not limited to feminist analysis, has as a whole trended towards analyzing fairy tales as case studies in folklore,[3] as psychoanalytic templates,[4] as pedagogical or cultural scripts,[5] or as postmodern literary tropes or narrative strategies.[6] Of the books resulting from these trends, perhaps the most important for my work is Jack Zipes'1994 book, *Fairy Tale as Myth / Myth as Fairy Tale*. In it, Zipes builds on and breaks from previous trends to propose a new direction: studying fairy tales as contemporary myths. Propp himself anticipates this argument in his *Morphology* when he writes cryptically (and heretically): "The study of attributes makes possible a scientific *interpretation* of the tale. From the historical point of view, this signifies that the fairy tale in its morphological bases represents a *myth*" (90). What Propp only gestures to, Zipes explores in more depth, as will I.

To date, only one scholar other than Zipes has addressed fairy tales as myth in any detail – literary scholar Susan Sellers. After providing a lengthy and abbreviated review

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[3] i.e. Dundes, *Cinderella: A Casebook* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Bottigheimer, *Grimm's Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987)

[4] i.e. Bettelheim, Franz

[5] i.e. Beres

[6] i.e. Bacchilega, K.P. Smith

of contemporary theories of myth and approaches to the fairy tale in the opening of *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, Sellers uncritically collapses the two, using the fact that scholars disagree about precise meanings to claim that distinctions are meaningless. One can see Bettelheim's influence when she writes, "I draw no distinction between myth and fairy tale as the terms seem currently synonymous even though I recognise important differences in their historical evolution and I continue to see a happy ending as the peculiar province of the fairy tale" (Sellers 16). Though I disagree with Sellers' oversimplified account of myth theory and her easy dismissal of any useful distinctions between myth and fairy tale, she is right about one thing: there is a great deal of disagreement in both fields about what the terms mean, and how they should be deployed.

Myth and the mythologists: another partial history

The field of myth studies has a well-documented history of contentious definitions and competing political projects. This history is perhaps most fully explored by Ivan Strenski in *Four Theories of Myth.* Strenski argues that myth is most often studied in one of two ways: the "applied" study of myth – wherein scholars analyze individual myths as I do in this project – and the formation of myth theories. Strenski is concerned with the latter, and with the fact that each myth theorist he discusses—namely, Ernst Cassirer, Mircea Eliade, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Bronislaw Malinowski—seems to dismiss out of hand all other theories of myth than his own.

Based on this state of confusion in the field, Sellers' conflation is perhaps understandable, though to my mind still ill-advised. Strenski himself ultimately argues that myth does not exist, and is nothing so much as an artifact of "the 'industry'

manufacturing the concept as it is used here and there;" however, this claim is less than convincing (194).[7] Strenski repeatedly states that myth does not exist, but never satisfactorily situates this claim so that it has some meaning. Notwithstanding the common colloquial definition of myth as a "traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation," if myth is defined differently by different theorists, how can one say categorically that it does not exist ("Myth")? *What* does not exist?

It seems myth, implied but denied by Strenski's view, has a great deal in common with the metaphor Wendy Doniger invokes to describe what she calls "the implied spider."

> If we take the spider to be … the shared humanity, the shared life experience, that supplies the web-building material, the raw material of narrative to countless human webmakers, authors, including human anthropologists and human comparatists. … The implied spider generates, and is therefore implied by, the stuff that myths are made on … I argue that we must believe in the existence of the spider, the experience behind the myth, though it is indeed true that we can never see this sort of spider at work; we can only find the webs, the myths that human authors weave. (*Spider* 61)

So, too, we may never—at least according to Strenski—see the whole of "*myth"* that myth theorists study. Better, perhaps, to say that myth *theory* manufactures different incarnations of "myth" according to the purposes of the theorist. And that — and this is where I differ from Sellers — the distinctions should matter to us in the kinds of claims we make about myth, and about what myth can tell us about Doniger's implied spider:

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[7] The "industry" in this instance, denotes scholars and theorists.

the raw material of human experience. I acknowledge the contentious history of the project of defining myth. In the following pages, I will attempt to work within the interstices of existing definitions rather than proposing yet another.

In *Fairy Tale as Myth / Myth as Fairy Tale,* Jack Zipes takes a different route, basing his argument in part on the work of Roland Barthes, who described myth as a second-order semiological system comprising:

> ... Language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the language-object, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and myth itself, which I shall call metalanguage, because it is a second language, in which one speaks about the first. When he reflects on a metalanguage, the semiologist no longer needs to ask himself questions about the composition of the language-object, he no longer has to take into account the details of the linguistic schema; he will only need to know its total term, or global sign, and only inasmuch as this term lends itself to myth. (Barthes, "Mythologies" 114-5)

Zipes then argues:

> [The fairy tale] has undergone and undergoes a motivated process of revision, reordering and refinement. All the tools of modern industrial society (the printing press, the radio, the camera, the film, the record, the videocassette) have made their mark on the fairy tale to make it classical ultimately in the name of the bourgeoisie which refuses to be named, denies involvement; for the fairy tale must appear harmless, natural, eternal, ahistorical, therapeutic. We are to live and breathe the classical fairy tale as fresh, free air. We are led to believe that this air has not been contaminated and polluted by a social class that will not name itself, wants us to continue believing that all air is fresh and free, all fairy tales spring

from thin air. (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 7)

I have taken the relationship Zipes proposes between myth and fairy tale as the catalyst for a theoretical and methodological shift in my approach to fairy tales. As I have noted, not all incidents of fairy tales in contemporary American popular culture are actually *stories*, some are intertexts, mere metonymic fragments. Thus there are methodological distinctions necessary between the study of fairy tales in folklore and the study of fairy tales in popular culture. Literary theorists have done a thorough job of breaking down fairy tale allusions and references in regards to their role in postmodern narrative strategies;[8] however, popular culture's multiple media expand beyond the scope of that project. Through the lens of myth theory, one can more transparently distinguish the study of fairy tales as texts and intertexts in popular culture studies from the study of fairy tales in folklore and literary studies. Theorized through Barthes' paradigm, metalanguage subsumes the distinctions of form and detail critical to fairy tales as literary narratives and / or folklore texts, flattening them into language-objects that it then consumes. In this way, historically situated texts occasionally and temporarily become unmarked by their context, becoming metalanguage, becoming what Barthes and Zipes call myth.

Zipes engages with Barthes' myth in order to theorize what he calls a "mythified classical fairy tale" (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 7). In order to situate this concept fully, we must also consider Zipes' other interlocutor: Mircea Eliade. Zipes is interested in blurring the hierarchy imposed taxonomically on fairy tales and myth with regards to the sacred. He writes, "… it is clear to Eliade that the myth preceded the folk and fairy tale and that it had a more sacred function in communities and societies than the secular narrative"

[8] see Bacchilega, K.P. Smith

(*Fairy Tale as Myth* 2). However, Eliade, like Zipes, is willing to blur this distinction when it suits his needs, arguing that fairy and folk tales could possibly present bastardized and camouflaged versions of initiation myths.[9] Zipes finds this idea "astonishing." He writes,

> It could mean that, from the beginning, individual imaginations were countering the codified myths of a tribe or society that celebrated the power of gods with other "non-authoritative" tales of their own that called upon and transformed the supernatural into magical and mysterious forces that could change their lives. Certainly, myths and folk tales blended very early in the oral tradition, and in many modern oral and literary narratives it is very difficult to tell them apart. They seem to be invested with an extraordinary mystical power so that we collapse the distinctions and feel compelled to return to them time and again for guidance, for hope that there is some divine order and sense to a chaotic world. (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 3)

Zipes uses Eliade's investment in finding the sacred everywhere to find the sacred where Zipes himself most desires to see it—in the fairy tale. However, Barthes' myth, as mobilized by Zipes in descriptions of the "mythified classical fairy tale," is perhaps more precisely paired with Doniger's myth than Eliade's, as Doniger's conception of myth more aptly describes the object of Barthes' metalinguistic theft.

> All myths are stories, but not all stories are myths. … A myth is above all a story that is *believed*, believed to be true, and that people continue to believe despite sometimes massive evidence that it is, in fact, a lie. … [A myth] is a story that is

[9] Zipes presents this reading of Eliade early in *Fairy Tale as Myth* (2-3). Invoking Eliade's creative hermeneutic method might prove less effective over time, however, as Eliade was explicitly vested in establishing "certain worlds of meaning in myths," whether those meanings are there or not (Strenski 119). Hence, I move to Doniger.

> sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it; it is a story believed to have been composed in the past about an event in the past, or more rarely, in the future, an event that continues to have meaning in the present because it is remembered; it is a story that is part of a larger group of stories. (Doniger, *Spider* 2)[10]

Zipes claims "the classical fairy tale has undergone a process of mythicization. Any fairy tale in our society, if it seeks to become natural and eternal, must become myth. Only innovative fairy tales are antimythical, resist the tide of mythicization, comment on the fairy tale as myth" (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 5). Zipes distinguishes between duplication and revision in analyzing classical fairy tale retellings.

> To duplicate a *classical* fairy tale is to reproduce a set pattern of ideas and images that reinforce a traditional way of seeing, believing, and behaving. … The purpose of producing a revised fairy tale is to create something new that incorporates the critical and creative thinking of the producer and corresponds to changed demands and tastes of audiences. … Revision for the sake of revision is not necessarily a change for the better or stimulating. However the premise of a revision is that there is something wrong with an original work and that it needs to be changed for the better. Qualitative transformation is of essence in a revision, whereas duplication is more concerned with maintaining whatever value was contained in the original. (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 9-10)

Zipes prefigures an argument made by myth theorist Bruce Lincoln. The power of story, or rather, the power of stories that are myths, is collapsed, fragmented, packaged, and consumed into the global sign that is Barthes' myth. For Barthes, myth is almost

[10] Though Veyne's work on the rhetorical uses of myth tempers Doniger's claims that myth is always believed, their disagreements are more over nuance and utility than definition.

always a tool of the right; thus the revolutionary move is to debunk the myth, to reveal the speech it has stolen, and denaturalize its ideology. Lincoln has other ideas which, when paired with Zipes' notion of revision as qualitative transformation, have revolutionary potential.

Zipes' argument relies in part on his audience feeling a connection to fairy tales, a sense that they *matter.* I am certainly a member of that intended audience, but I would also like to stress the existence of an entirely different audience, one that is, to speak colloquially, unconverted. One need not have full knowledge of the fairy tale's plot or any sense at all of its timelessness or value in order to have some sense of the meaning of a stone garden frog wearing a crown. Fairy tales are, as Zipes says, everywhere, and one need not be an aficionado in order to recognize their presence. As fairy tale scholar Cristina Bacchilega puts it:

> While many adults may not remember, and many children may not have been exposed to versions of "Snow White" or "Beauty and the Beast" other than Disney's, we nevertheless respond to stereotyped and institutionalized fragments of these narratives sufficiently for them to be good bait in jokes, commercials, songs, cartoons, and other elements of popular and consumer culture. (2)

In that moment of viewing the stone frog prince, should the shock of recognition occur, a multitude of meanings become available, and any number may register with varying degrees of impact depending on the individual's own past experience of the tale. Perhaps the most obvious of which is: *Be kind to frogs (and frog-like people,) you never know which ones are royalty in disguise*. As Doniger writes, "Sometimes the myth is formed not within a text, but rather in the intersection of our own lives with a text..." (*Spider* 23). The mythic status of fairy tales is *occasional* rather than ontological. By

occasional I mean that fairy tales become mythic in certain times, in certain places, and that this resonance is impermanent and contextual.[11]

Now, to return to Lincoln, and the revolutionary potential of myth: in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, Lincoln turns to an underdeveloped idea in the work of Dumezil and Levi-Strauss, "that myth may be understood as taxonomy in narrative form" (147). Taxonomy, Lincoln notes,

> …is hardly a neutral process, since the order established among all that is classified (including items treated only by allusion or implication, and above all human groupings) is hierarchic as well as categoric. … [Thus] when a taxonomy is encoded in mythic form, the narrative packages a specific, contingent system of discrimination in a particularly attractive and memorable form. What is more, it naturalizes and legitimates it. Myth then, is not just taxonomy, but *ideology* in narrative form. (*Theorizing* 147)

This definition synthesizes a primary claim of Wendy Doniger with a primary claim of Roland Barthes. Doniger: myth is a story that is believed. Barthes: myth is a tool of the right. Myth as "ideology in narrative form" implies both. Yes, there is some quibbling still over whether myth is inherently narrative, or rather might be conceptualized semiotically, but still, here is at least some of the coherence Strenski laments is absent from earlier myth theories.

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[11] Despite the absence of the term "genre" thus far, it may seem to literary scholars that I am proposing that fairy tales be read as a genre of myth. I am not. Genre may seem innocuous enough as a taxonomy of semiotic production, a definition I owe to Dr. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson; however, as Lincoln argues in *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification*, taxonomy is itself a mythologizing process naturalizing hierarchies between its constitutive categories as well as codifying certain differences while eliding others. This theoretical complication is made a practical one by the fact that the implied hierarchy of genre for fairy tale and myth is different depending on the field one comes from. Also, genre is generally seen as a semi-stable state, and my argument is not that fairy tales are always myths, but rather that they occasionally function mythically.

Contention rears its head soon enough, however, as Lincoln follows up *Theorizing Myth* with *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, in which he takes issue with Barthes' unilateral assertion that effective myth is *always* a tool of the right.

> …Myth—whatever its temporal point of reference—is a mode of discourse, the instrumentality of which is not restricted to the reproduction of those social relations of which it is itself the product. That it is frequently—and effectively—employed to this end is beyond question, yet there is no innate necessity that makes it so, and there are sufficiently compelling counter-examples that may be cited to discredit any neat and simplistic formulation that would reduce myth to a tool of the right and the right only. (49)

As I discussed in the Introduction, Lincoln's work in *Discourse* is predicated on a conception of society as a constructed entity subject to reconstitution into larger or smaller groups along lines of affinity (similarity) and estrangement (dissimilarity) coordinated through ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation (9-10). His project in this book is to demonstrate how myth, ritual, and classification function not only in the maintenance, but also in the *reorganization* of societies.

> In the hands of elites and of those professionals who serve them (either in mediated fashion or directly), discourse of all forms—not only verbal, but also the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like—may be strategically employed to mystify the inevitable inequities of any social order and to win the consent of those over whom power is exercised, thereby obviating the need for the direct coercive use of force and transforming simple power into "legitimate" power into "legitimate" authority. Yet discourse can also serve members of subordinate classes … in

> their attempts to demystify, delegitimate, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourse that play a role in constructing their subordination. (4-5)

Revolutionaries can use myth to agitate for change in a variety of ways. Lincoln lists three methods he considers among the most common (*Discourse* 25). First, by debunking the authority of a myth, they can destroy its usefulness in maintaining the status quo. This demystification is the only method advocated by Barthes. Alternatively, the revolutionaries may create a new myth out of history, legend, or fable, and use it as a model for "novel social forms." Thirdly, they can reinterpret or retell an existing myth to alter the sentiments of affinity and estrangement that it evokes. And in this third method, one may see the potential affinity between Zipes' revision and Lincoln's revolution.

Though I have presented several myth theories, and done so in such a way as to show their commonalities, nevertheless, Strenski's problem remains – the theorists' models more often than not reject each other's claims. My solution for synthesizing these contradictory frames into a vehicle with which to explore the mythic uses of the fairy tale is to bring feminist epistemology into the mix and take an interstitial approach to myth.

I would now like to return to Lincoln's second method: creating a new myth out of history, legend, or fable that could serve as a model for novel social forms, and to my prior review of accepted myth theorists, I would like to append the work of cyborg mythographer Donna Haraway. In a seminal essay of feminist theory, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," Haraway warns, "the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now" (181). She suggests the metaphor of the cyborg, a being that is part human, part machine, provides a useful

fiction: monstrous hybridity to combat the illusion of wholeness.

> Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. ... Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control. (Haraway 175)

I find Haraway's language, her disavowal of "once-upon-a-time wholeness" particularly provocative for a project on fairy tales. The article is Haraway's overt attempt to build "an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism" (149). Her stance is one of blasphemy, of ironic faith. Her project is Lincoln's novel social forms. Her subject is, as you might have guessed, the cyborg. She writes,

> This chapter is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. (150)

Building on and critiquing previous feminist theories, Haraway argues "we are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system -- from all work to all play, a deadly game" (161). In this new system, "the boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other" (Haraway 164).

What I have referred to twice previously as an "interstitial" approach to myth might even be called a cyborgian *theory* of myth. The two phrases denote very different aspects of the relationship I am proposing, and yet both are accurate. An interstice is simply an intervening space. Working in the space between myth theories, the shape formed by the negative space between previous theories, is a redeployment of the margins to center epistemology proposed by bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.*

Rather than continuing the project of mainstream U.S. feminist theory, much of which comes from the "centered" experience of white middle-class women, hooks proposes that feminist theory must instead come from the margins. "My persistent critique has been informed by my status as a member of an oppressed group, my experience of sexist exploitation and discrimination, and the sense that prevailing feminist analysis has not been the force shaping my feminist consciousness" (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 11). She advocates a definition of feminism as "a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires." (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 26). Within this framework, feminism is not an identity choice, but a political commitment.

Hooks is, in effect, advocating a reorganization of society based on Lincoln's lines of affinity and estrangement through a conscious deployment of affinity between like-minded individuals that centers the experiences of the most marginalized people rather than the experiences of those more powerful people already at the center, or

hierarchically, at the top, of society. This stance carries with it an explicit acknowledgment of and engagement with systems of privilege and oppression lacking in much, though certainly not all, myth theory. Likewise, the European genealogies of the classic fairy tales often permeate their more modern incarnations with pernicious racist and colonialist impulses necessitating an explicit theoretical engagement. Narratively, fairy tale heroines and villains often travel from the margins to the center over the course of a tale. Hooks' provides a powerful tool for delving into the unique content of fairy tales as *topsy-turvy tales* in which monsters and other cultural outsiders are for a while given stage.

From a more general epistemological standpoint, to work from the margins of previous myth theories, to work *between* the margins of previous myth theories, is to work in the space they all share, despite their differences. It is to acknowledge that in the field of myth theory, the center may in fact be outside the margins of individual theories to begin with. This conception of a body of knowledge formed by exclusion is in keeping with hooks' epistemology, though somewhat tangential to her point. Elsewhere, however, she has written that fairy tales were her childhood refuge, because "despite all the lessons contained in them about being a dutiful daughter, a good girl, which I internalized to some extent, I was most obsessed with the idea of justice—the insistence in most tales that the righteous would prevail" (hooks, "To Love Justice" 167). The relevance of her work to fairy tale studies thus has both history and context in her own writing.

An interstitial approach to myth depends on negative space, and stems from Strenski's position that the parts (individual theories of myth) do not compose a whole (an integrated or integratable Myth Theory). However, language gives us both inductive

and *deductive* frames for talking about wholes and parts. The parts, in this case, do not compose a whole; the whole, however, may *comprise* the parts. To comprise is to include not just the constituent parts, but also the space between the parts. Thus an inductive interstitial approach might be said to overlap with a deductive cyborg paradigm. Though my preference is to avoid articulating a "new" theory of myth, I find the assimilative properties of deductive theorizing seductive enough to necessitate some kind of accounting, and so I play word games in order to juxtapose contradictory theories in inspirational ways. An interstitial approach and a cyborgian paradigm are not the same. The processes of reasoning for each is distinct and to an extent contradictory, but *that is the beauty of cyborg writing.* Boundaries are permeable. Cyborg hybridization is not the same as eclecticism. The cyborg is intentional; a technological monster "without innocence." A cyborgian paradigm for myth is unnatural, fragmented, intentional. Together, these two frames are just the thing with which to treat the mythic work of the fairy tale in American popular culture.

Bringing Haraway and hooks explicitly into my approach to the tales is a point of divergence between mine and previous feminist approaches to the fairy tale. However, this project builds on that previous work as well. It is to the influential work of those feminists already working in the field of fairy tale studies that I now turn**.**

Feminist approaches to the tales

One of the most influential feminist studies of the fairy tale is Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. Warner argues for a gender-specific female experience of fairy tales. She writes persuasively about the historical links between non-mythologized fairy tales and their often-female storytellers,

claiming, “Although male writers and collectors have dominated the production and dissemination of popular wonder tales, they often pass on women’s stories from intimate or domestic milieux" (17). Warner argues that Western European fairy tales’ low status in literary circles may have stemmed from their origins as tales told by women, but their low status also “offers a case where the very contempt for women opened an opportunity for [the women] to exercise their wit and communicate their ideas” (XXIII).

Warner is not the first feminist scholar to take up criticism of fairy tales, only one of the most well-known beyond fairy tale studies. Indeed, in “Feminist Fairy Tale Scholarship,” Donald Haase identifies eight methodologically-distinct projects within feminist fairy tale scholarship, giving numerous examples for each. Haase’s project updates and expands upon “Feminist Approaches to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales” by Kay Stone, a key figure in fairy tale studies. Reviewing methodology rather than literature, Stone notes that previous feminist approaches to fairy tale studies range from overly generalized critiques of "happily ever after” to challenges of gender stereotypes. Stone then points out a departure from folklore research and a move toward exploring the psychoanalytic dimension of fairy tales as successors to myths. According to her, subsequent feminist analyses begin to incorporate Freudian and Jungian imagery. Stone suggests a subsequent view of *Marchen* (fairy tales) as "flexible paradigms for positive transformations -- female *and* male" (234). Haase conflates the three methods Stone distinguishes into one overall project, which he identifies as the formation of general theories of how fairy tales affect gender and socialization.

Haase identifies the other seven feminist projects in fairy tale scholarship thusly: the compilation and annotation of folktale and fairy tale anthologies that bring lesser-

known stories and variants to light; detailed historiographic and comparative scholarship illuminating the changing images of women in the Grimms' tales across revisions; contextualization efforts towards recovery of a historical female voice; archival and translation efforts towards recovery of the *individual* female storyteller's voice—and here he includes Warner's project; exploration of the work accomplished by fairy tales as intertexts in art and fiction by women; analysis of revisionist mythmaking in feminist retellings of fairy tales; and empirical studies of the effects of passive reception of fairy tales theorized in earlier work on gender and socialization.

Of all these approaches and the resultant volumes, Warner's treatise is perhaps the most epic in scope. She begins her history of the fairy tale by tracing the tradition of female storytellers: "the rich and fluctuating perceptions of women's relation to fancy and fairy tale became as my work progressed the absolutely necessary ground on which the familiar figures like Cinderella and her wicked stepmother stepped into place" (XXIV). Understanding the figure of Mother Goose as the product of a storytelling tradition that traces back through medieval gossips to the Queen of Sheba to the mythological Sibyl allows Warner to situate the claims regarding actual stories that she makes in the latter half of the book.

As mentioned, the Sibyl is the earliest chronological example of a female storyteller that Warner traces. As both teller and protagonist of her tale, the Sibyl claims a voice in the surviving literature, even as the imposition of Christianity throughout Rome co-opts and defames her in later stories as a pagan monster. Warner writes,

> Stories often described as fairy tales, be they told in the Caribbean, Scotland or France, can flow with the irrepressible energy of interdicted narrative and opinion among groups of people who have been muffled in the dominant, learned

> milieux. … [The Sibyl] offers the suggestion that sympathies can cross from different places and languages, different peoples of varied status. She also represents an imagined cultural survival from one era of belief to another: Sibilla exists as a Christian fantasy about a pagan presence from the past, and as such she fulfils a certain function in thinking about forbidden, forgotten, buried, even secret matters. (11)

Women's tales of these "secret matters" are domesticated and even mocked with the emergence of the old wives' tale, often conflated with the fairy tale. The prime distinction, to Warner, is the emergence of the fairy tale as a literary genre, but "though male writers and collectors have dominated the production and dissemination of popular wonder tales, they often pass on women's stories from intimate or domestic milieux" (17). Warner attributes the genre's low status to its intimate links with the low status of women. In this time period, ranging from the late sixteenth century into the early eighteenth, fairy tales were *pedagogical* stories that alternately upheld the morality and critiqued the injustices of society from or for the female perspective (Warner 21).

Women's speech became the topic of intense debate in late seventeenth century Europe. The gossip, originally referring to a godmother or –father, and eventually to a usually female friend, came to denote "a person, mostly a woman, especially one who delights in idle talk; a newsmonger, a tattler" (Warner 33). "Gossipy gatherings of women together were the focus of much male anxiety" (Warner 35). Literary women made a conscious effort to retrieve and reform this tradition in seventeenth century France through the *ruelles*, literary salons "created by noblewomen in the image of the humbler, more chaotic gathering, the gossiping, and among its varied pastimes it strove to give new value to that traditionally despised pursuit and talent of women, old and young:

to give tittle-tattle its due as an art of communication, as an aspect of storytelling" (Warner 50).

Having traced a female fairy tale tradition from the Sibyl through to the gossips and finally to the *ruelles*, Warner spirals her history back again to its beginnings, stepping back in time to point out one more key female figure influencing the art of fairy tale telling: the Queen of Sheba, famed for her interactions with King Solomon of Israel. Associated with the Sibyls, she is the main figure in a variety of stories with thematic resemblances (such as conversion and physical transformation) to fairy tales. "For the inherent tendency of the [fairy tale] genre to topsy-turvy, to turning pauper to prince, bane to boon, affects the brandings and birthmarks and deformities of the protagonists as well: fairy tale chronicles conversions, too, in the form of transformations" (Warner 125). Warner notes, "fairy tales … often seek to define, within a romantic contest, appropriate male and female conduct, to endorse the correct version and – usually – reward it with more than Solomon's bounty of sweets" (135).

Warner closes her history by returning to the ladies of the *ruelles* to argue that these women, actual female storytellers—though less famous over time than their male counterparts such as Charles Perrault—wrote fairy tales in a spirit of protest against the limitations society set on their gender. She posits,

> Murat's and L'Heritier's tales issue strong attacks on the feminine realm as traditionally prescribed, and this sets them against women who wield power by its rules; these collaborators are transmogrified into vicious fairies and wicked stepmothers and idle, addle-pated, babbling girls – but always in a spirit of challenging limits on women's expectations. (177)

The second part of Warner's project is concerned with the fairy tales themselves.

From the demon lover at the heart of "Bluebeard"[12] to the young bride's reluctance in "Beauty and the Beast,"[13] Warner shows how these fantasies reflect the historical realities of women. Her analysis of "Donkeyskin"[14] focuses on the possibility of escape from paternal control under certain terrifying circumstances. Social approval of this escape depends on the daughter's purity, however, and it is in the symbolism of purity and quality that Warner at last makes her way to the blonde of her title. The blondeness of the fairytale heroine, codified around the turn-of-the-century, is not, however, just a mythopoetic endorsement of quality. It is also a historical marker of the co-option of fairy tales from a genre of protest into what Ruth Bottigheimer, another feminist fairy tale scholar, would no doubt call a "paradigm for powerlessness" ("Silenced" 130).

In "Silenced Women in the Grimms' Fairy Tales: The 'Fit' Between Fairy Tales and Society in Their Historical Context," Bottigheimer addresses how silence became an admired characteristic of German women in the 1830s, linking this trend to numerous extended periods of female silence necessitated by a curse or spell in the Grimms' infamous folklore collection, published during this same period. In the Grimms' fairy tales, direct speech is the domain of male characters and the occasional wicked woman, while indirect speech is associated with "good" female characters, and even this indirect speech may be met with sexual vulnerability and punishment. Bottigheimer concludes that no matter what resistance German women might originally have felt to the virtue of

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[12] Bluebeard gives his young bride all the keys to his castle and leaves, telling her she can go anywhere she likes except one room. She opens the forbidden door and finds the bodies of all Bluebeard's previous wives, beheaded for their disobedience. (For the most popular variants on this tale-type, as well as the next few discussed, see Tatar).

[13] Beauty goes to the beast at her father's insistence, and is his prisoner for the majority of the story.

[14] "Donkeyskin," of the tale type "Catskin" (AT 510B), is a Cinderella variant in which the father does not die, but rather focuses an incestuous desire on his daughter and tells her they will marry whether she wills it or not. After delaying as long as possible, the princess flees the castle and lives in squalor until she wanders into a more traditional Cinderella tale through her wanderings.

silence, the women who heard these tales when the Grimms first wrote them down were being handed the aforementioned passive "paradigm."

This argument fits with Warner's claim that the fairy tale was co-opted in France as well.

> …[It] no longer issued any kind of challenge to the established code of femininity in the nineteenth-century nursery. By forgetting that fairy tales interact with social circumstances, we miss seeing how the copybook blonde princess becomes instead a stick with which to beat young women. … The conventions of fairy tale, including the shining beauty and goodness of the heroine, become clichés, used by moralists to enforce discipline (and appearance) on growing girls. (Warner 381)

As Warner sees it, fairy tales are currently reemerging as a genre of protest: "there has been a marked shift towards fantasy as a mode of understanding, as a lever against the worst aspects of the status quo and the direction it is taking" (415). I interrogate the truth of this claim in this project.

Cristina Bacchilega also explores this idea of the fairy tale's "seductively concealed exploitation of the conflict between its *normative* function, which capitalizes on the comforts of consensus, and its *subversive* wonder, which magnifies the powers of transformation" (7). She writes,

> As I read postmodern transformations of the fairy tale, I want to argue that they are doubling and double: both affirmative and questioning, without necessarily being recuperative or politically subversive. As literary texts, cartoons, movies, musicals, or soap operas, postmodern fairy tales reactivate the wonder tale's "magic" or mythopoetic qualities by providing new readings of it, thereby generating unexploited or forgotten possibilities from its repetition. …

> Semiotically speaking, the anti-tale is implicit in the tale, since the well-made artifice produces the receiver's desire to repeat the tale anew: repetition functions as reassurance within the tale, but this very same compulsion to repeat the tale explodes its coherence as well-made artifice. … The postmodern fairy tale's dissemination of multiple possible versions is strangely powerful—all re-tellings, re-interpretations, and re-visions may appear to be equally authorized as well as unauthorized. (Bacchilega 22-23)

The mythic power of the fairy tale to be both "normative" *and* "subversive" is connected socio-historically to its pedagogical qualities. Warner first opens the door to this argument when she claims:

> Fairy tales exchange knowledge between an older voice of experience and a younger audience, they present pictures of perils and possibilities that lie ahead, they use terror to set limits on choice and offer consolation to the wronged, they draw social outlines around boys and girls, fathers and mothers, the rich and the poor, the rulers and the ruled, they point out the evildoers and garland the virtuous, they stand up to adversity with dreams of vengeance, power and vindication. (Warner 21)

While Warner makes this claim generally, the immediate context of her discussion is seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France. I would like to extend Warner's claim into a specific contemporary context through the work of social worker Laura Beres, previously discussed in the Introduction. Beres builds in part on Henry Giroux's work on pedagogy.

> "Pedagogy is about the creation of a public sphere, one that brings people together in a variety of sites to talk, exchange information, listen, feel their desires, and expand their capacities for joy, love, solidarity, and struggle. …[And] it is precisely in [popular culture's] diverse spaces and spheres that most

> of the education that matters today is taking place on a global scale." (Giroux x)

In addition to her own experiences using the narrative therapeutic method developed by M. White, Beres draws on pedagogical theory in order to consider "the possible meanings which could be taken from [certain popular culture texts] by women who are attempting to make sense of their context of living with an abusive partner" (Beres 195). Arguing that "an abused woman's reading of *Beauty and the Beast* would, therefore, be different from that of an 8-year-old's or even of an academic's, since her affect and environment of which she needs to make meaning will be different," Beres maps the typical story of a victim of wife abuse onto Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (197-8). In the film, the bookish Belle valiantly trades her freedom for her sick father's, and goes to live with a brutish Beast as his prisoner. Despite the Beast's early bad behavior, which includes violent rages, and her own terror and desire to flee, Belle aborts her one escape attempt to care for the Beast after he performs a single act of decency, saving her from a dangerous situation into which his intimidation first drove her. The Beast takes Belle's subsequent kindness and patience to heart, and reveals a good and kind soul behind his monstrous appearance and manners. Eventually Belle's faithfulness is rewarded, as her love transforms the Beast into a handsome Prince. Beres concludes,

> For a viewer who is living in a violent relationship, who needs to maintain faith in something beyond her immediate situation, this story suggests that if she acts in a loving way towards her abusive partner, he might learn from her how to be loving, and might turn into a prince for her. This text might give her hope and a faith in the power of love to help her partner change, winning her consent to the power dynamics within heterosexual relationships. (198)

Beres' use of the fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast" to frame her interrogation of narrative resources available to victims of wife-abuse differs from the tradition of psychoanalytic readings of fairy tales done by Carl Jung and Maria von Franz, as well as the later work of Bruno Bettelheim. In fact, the most important aspects of Beres' article, for this project, are her strategic juxtapositions of her therapeutic method with the work of pedagogical theorist Henry Giroux, and her epistemological caveat: "Not believing that texts cause certain effects in viewers, but also not believing that all viewers are completely able to negotiate or resist texts freely, I have attempted to highlight aspects of popular cultural texts which could be perceived as romanticizing control and abuse, and which could elicit empathy for the abuser" (Beres 205).

Though a great deal of work has been done on the psychological uses and psychoanalytic meanings of the fairy tale by experts such as Marie Louise von Franz and Bruno Bettelheim, I have chosen to address the fairy tale as pedagogically important rather than as psychologically meaningful in part because of apt feminist and folkloristic critiques of the language and methods usually used in psychoanalytic analyses. For example, in "Religious and Social Dimensions of Jung's Concept of the Archetype: A Feminist Perspective," Demaris S. Wehr argues that Carl Jung's language in describing the archetype[15] invokes a concept of sacred validity that, rather than freeing people from stereotypes, reifies and naturalizes them (the stereotypes) (27). The key to Wehr's critique lies in ambiguities present in Jung's understanding of the archetype. Jung first

[15] *Webster's* defines an archetype as "a collectively inherited unconscious idea, pattern of thought, image, etc., universally present in individual psyches." Marie Louise von Franz, Carl Jung's protégé, rather vaguely adds: "Every archetype is a relatively closed energetic system, the energetic stream of which runs through all aspects of the collective unconscious…. An archetype is a specific psychic impulse, producing its effect like a single ray of radiation, and at the same time a whole magnetic field expanding in all directions" (2).

associates the archetype with instinct, using a biological model (Wehr 28). This understanding of archetype is then complicated by his claim that the archetype evokes the experience of numinosity. Wehr sees Jung's occasional conflation of the unconscious and the divine, implicit in his use of the numinous[16] and more explicit in some of his writings on psychology and theology, as a dangerous ambiguity. It allows the concept of the collective unconscious to be used to legitimize socially constructed roles for women (Wehr 32).

The works of Maria Von Franz, Jung's student who applied his theories most thoroughly to fairy tales, and Bruno Bettelheim, author of the influential book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales,* are also vulnerable to the following critique, launched with some incredulity by Alan Dundes:

> Psychiatrists writing about fairy tales … typically use only one version of a fairy tale, in most instances the Grimm version, and then they go on to generalize not just about German culture, but all European culture or even all humankind—on the basis of one single (rewritten) version of a fairy tale! This displays a certain arrogance, ethnocentrism, and ignorance. (263)

Likewise Mary Douglas, writing on how interpretations of the fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood"[17] change depending on whether one has a verifiable method for closely examining the cultural context in which a particular variant is told, derides this practice, perhaps overzealously:

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[16] Numinosity is a concept first coined by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* (1923). Otto theorized a further dimension to the experience of the holy or divine that "connects the qualities of creature-feeling, awefulness, dread, a sense of the weird or uncanny, and the element of overpoweringness with mysticism and its annihilation of the self and understanding of the transcendent as the whole and entire reality" (Wehr 30).

[17] In some variants of the tale, Red Riding Hood unknowingly eats her grandmother for dinner at the wolf's instigation. He feeds her the old woman's body in a soup (Douglas).

> To ask what the stories mean as stories hardly makes sense. They have some entertainment value, but that is because of the reference to well-known rituals and statuses. Their meaning lies in the play upon the current pattern of roles and upon their inherent conflicts and tensions. It is a joke, and at the same time it is not a joke but true, that little girls will always grow up to go into their grandmothers' houses and consume the substance of their mothers' mothers. (45)

I have no interest in reclaiming the psychoanalytic approach, as I am currently interested in how fairy tales are used in communicating and in creating cultural affinity, as opposed to how they affect personality formation. Thus in this project you will find no claims of archetypal revelation, but rather a deployment of myth theory and the occasional suggestion that mythic fairy tales can serve as Beres claims, as narrative resources, or as Douglas suggests, "as narratives that carry important meanings for the community in which they are narrated" (32).

I have purposefully chosen to approach fairy tales as pedagogical stories, in Giroux's extended sense of the word, rather than more broadly as *didactic* stories, because didacticism implies the stories are always meant to instruct. In certain historical moments that charge has truth; however, it also implies a tedious pedanticism and literality that could never be quite accurate in describing marvel tales. Fairy tales have at various points in history been a creative teaching tool, occasionally on purpose, often quite by accident. My concern with the tales in this project is as much with the lessons they impart simply by being widely available as narrative resources, as with those they are "meant" to convey. Giroux extends pedagogy from the science of teaching to a dynamic process of teaching and learning, and this extended use of the word is much more in keeping with the mythic work of fairy tales.

Fairy tales are uniquely suited to the work of myth. This suitability is related to the uniqueness of their fantastic content, to their previous incarnations as highly structured tales. As fairy tales' multivocal folkloric history stretches into an even greater intertextual multivocality through the mythic in popular culture, the tales take on what literary scholar Wai Chee Dimock calls *resonance*. "…Resonance is a generative (and not merely interfering) process, one that remakes a text while unmaking it, that pays tribute to time both as a medium of unrecoverable meaning and as a medium of newly possible meaning" (Dimock 1062).

As topsy-turvy tales, fairy tales contain the narrative tools to overturn gender roles through their portrayals of the general instability of bodies and stations, even when they overtly reinforce them through flat characters and reiteration of the marriage plot. Likewise, the reverse is true. This contradictory potentiality contains Bacchilega's tension between anti-tale and tale. Structural tensions are only increased by the intratextual presence of marvels, wonders and monsters.

> Every monster is … a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves. The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—must not—be crossed. (Cohen 13)

Significantly, fairy tale heroines and heroes are as likely to be physically monstrous as fairy tale villains. Their bodies contain tensions that must be resolved along with the more obvious elements of plot. For every narrative or semiotic reading, there is an unspoken alternative turning and returning us to an infinite multiverse of tales and anti-tales.

This tension within fairy tales is what allows them to have such extraordinary resonance over time. Tale and anti-tale vibrate against each other as well as against the "noise" of their reception. As Dimock puts it:

> Noise includes all those circumstances that complicate readers' relations to a text: circumstances that, filling their heads and ringing in their ears, make them uninnocent readers, who encroach on the text with assumptions, expectations, convictions. Noise includes all those circumstances that so quicken the pulse, so sensitize the interpretive faculties, as to call forth unexpected nuances from words composed long ago. An effect of historical change, noise is a necessary feature of a reader's meaning-making process. And even as it impinges on texts, even as it reverberates through them, it thickens their tonality, multiplies their hearable echoes, makes them significant in unexpected ways. (1063)

The particular combination of notes *within* the tales harmonizes and resists change because it contains it. However, when the "noise" of interpretive context alters that harmony, the tales themselves begin to change. They shift enough to retain resonance, or they cease function as myth.

Some Notes on Methods

When I first began working on this project, I found myself in a bit of a quandary. Most of the work that I was reading came out of folklore or literary studies, and I was coming at the tales from the interdisciplinary nexus of Women's Studies and was interested in the ideological work of the tales in popular culture. The various approaches I have covered here yielded fruitful inquiries into fairy tales in popular culture, but none of them translated wholly into the interdisciplinary approach for which I was looking. I was interested in the commonalities that I saw in very different invocations of fairy tale

language, and I was interested in the fairy tale as myth.

The quandary I originally encountered stemmed in part from the fact that not all incidents of fairy tales in contemporary popular culture are quantifiable as either folklore or literature; some are only the most generically conceived intertexts, some mere metonymic fragments. At first I thought my project might prove taxonomical, a genre study for fairy tales in popular culture, but in practice this proved less than, well, practic*al*. As you will see in the following chapters, when looking at mythic invocations of fairy tales in novels, poetry, films, television programs, songs, erotica, advertising, art, etc., there isn't really a need to delimit *more* differences; the obvious ones are challenging enough. Even the concept of intertextuality, so useful in literary analysis for addressing the way "individual texts relate to others" (Smith 2), is insufficient to the range of demands in a transmedia approach, where the analysis is of ideological work across forms.

Instead, I approached my project with media scholar Henry Jenkins' theories about convergence culture. Convergence is "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins 2). Cultural studies in general have been highly influenced by Stuart Hall's circuit model, where Hall theorized that language produces and circulates "cultural" meanings through *representation, identity, production, consumption,* and *regulation*.[18] Jenkins suggests that media producers and audiences now navigate that interconnected relationship in much more intentionally cooperative ways:

[18] For more on Hall's model, see Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Ed. Stuart Hall. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997.

"convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (Jenkins 3). The idea is that cultural production is more participatory than ever, though "not all participants are created equal" (Jenkins 3). Convergence is a personal and collective mental process. "Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives" (Jenkins 3-4). At this point, the connection between convergence culture and myth theory should become clear. As individuals pick up fragments of content and incorporate it into our personal mythologies, our social interactions allow us to put pieces together with others' personal mythologies, forming temporary interactive collective intelligences. This is how meaning-making works in the age of the internet and after. For this reason, I have chosen to approach my cases of fairy tale myth through a method of transmedia comparison, in keeping with Jenkins' theory of fragmentary knowledge and Barthes' semiotics. In the chapters that follow, I have situated each case in terms of its production context, while keeping my focus on fragmentary knowledge and transmedia meaning making. This paradigm for exploring fairy tale myth depends on the breadth of previous taxonomical and historical work done by folklorists and other fairy tale scholars on the tales as tales.

In "Fairy Tales from a Folkloristic Perspective," Alan Dundes writes,

> The first thing to say about fairy tales is that they are an oral form. Fairy tales, however one may choose ultimately to define them, are a subgenre of the more inclusive category of "folktale," which exists primarily as a spoken traditional narrative. Once a fairy tale or any other type of folktale, for that matter, is reduced to written language, one does not have a true fairy tale but only a pale

> and inadequate reflection of what was originally an oral performance complete with raconteur and audience. From this folkloristic perspective, one cannot possibly read fairy tales; one can only properly hear them told. (259)

Dundes goes on to distinguish the "oral tale with its subtle nuances entailing significant body movements, eye expression, pregnant pauses, and the like from the inevitably flat and fixed written record of what was once a live and often compelling storytelling event" (259). "What this means," he continues,

> …is that anyone truly interested in the unadulterated fairy tale must study oral texts or as accurate a transcription of oral texts as is humanly possible. The reality of far too much of what passes for fairy tale scholarship — including the majority of essays in this very volume — is that such fairy tale texts are not considered. Instead, a strong, elitist literary bias prevails and it is the recast and reconstituted fairy tales which serve as the corpus for study. When one analyzes fairy tales as rewritten by Charles Perrault or by the Grimm brothers, one is *not* analyzing fairy tales as they were told by traditional storytellers. One is instead analyzing fairy tale plots as altered by men of letters, often with a nationalistic and romantic axe to grind. … This does not mean that versions, composite or not, of tales published by Perrault and the Grimms cannot be studied. They have had an undeniably enormous impact upon popular culture and literature, but they should not be confused with the genuine article — the oral fairy tale. (260-1)

Dundes continues, critiquing the literary fairy tale scholar who fails to recognize the inherent "multiple existence" and "variation" of the fairy tale — no two versions of which will be the same, and no one version of which can be said to have more "truth" or "accuracy" than another (261). There is, of course, an inherent contradiction in Dundes' critique, as he is claiming the oral fairy tale as primary, if multivocal, text, but his claim

is based on form rather than content, and the distinction is vital to his disciplinary orientation as a folklorist. Saying no two apples are the same is one thing, but saying an apple is the same as an orange is quite another.

I take Dundes' critiques seriously, but I also think contemporary scholarship on fairy tales, particularly in the arena of popular culture, requires multiple theoretical lenses, and in some ways new paradigms altogether. This claim in no way diminishes the vitality of folkloristic methods. In particular, folklorists' methods for comparison of different tale types, using indexes and paying particular attention to differences between tales and to the contexts in which those differences first appear, is useful for distinguishing which variants of a tale a particular metonymic occurrence such as allusion is invoking, or what precisely is being reiterated or resisted in a particular narrative retelling. Fairy tales' mythic invocation in popular culture depends upon some kind of prior knowledge of the tales. The scholar must never forget the multivocality of the fairy tale, its leftover orality and locality, or she risks making the same kind of mistakenly broad generalizations that socio-historical scholars such as Karen E. Rowe have been debunking for some time.

For example, in "To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale," Rowe analyzes the role of the female storyteller in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Galland's translation of *The Arabian Nights.* Philomela and Scheherazade, the respective female storytellers, are textual reminders that while men historically read and wrote down stories, women were the oral taletellers; thus any attribution of modern folklore to the Brothers Grimm, Rowe argues, belies the maternal heritage of tale-spinning. Marina Warner, as we have already seen, argues similarly. While the essay does not, and this is

in part due to the author's strict adherence to traditional folklore definitions of the fairy tale, offer any direct insight into the female storyteller's role in the contemporary social context; it shows how broad generalizations about fairy tales can hide historical truths about the status of women in the times and places the stories originate. This epistemological limitation informs my case study approach to fairy tales in this project.

Unlike Dundes, however, I do not see the literary incarnations of fairy tales as secondary, but rather as an extension of their multivocality. I take my cue from Bacchilega's hypothesis that:

> …The "classic" fairy tale is a literary appropriation of the older folk tale, an appropriation which nevertheless continues to exhibit and reproduce some folkloric features. As a "borderline" or transitional genre, it bears the traces of orality, folkloric tradition, and socio-cultural performance, even when it is edited as literature for children or it is marketed with little respect for its history and materiality. And conversely, even when it claims to be folklore, the fairy tale is shaped by literary traditions with different social uses and users. (3)

Bacchilega's insistence on the fairy tale as a "borderline" genre is particularly useful, and her work on the fairy tale has greatly influenced my own conception of how to synthesize folkloric and literary methods. Bacchilega's work deals mostly with literary texts, and her methodological synthesis begins with literary theory.

Bacchilega uses a deconstructionist approach in order to renegotiate the hierarchy of writing and speech by collapsing their differences into "the continuity of the written and the oral in *mediated* meanings and *absence*—features traditionally identified with writing to brand it as a poor substitute for the direct fullness of speech" (13). Certainly we have seen Dundes claim that orality is a richer form than writing. Bacchilega uses

Derrida to challenge his assertion and to bring folkloristic respectability to literary versions of fairy tales as well. She is not interested in leaving literary fairy tales to literary scholars, though she is one; rather she is invested in bridging the folklore-literature divide in order to enrich the whole of fairy tale scholarship. In order to dethrone orality, she argues "the speaker or tale-teller cannot be considered the immediate or unified source of meaning, and the subject both *of* language and *in* language cannot simply be viewed as an active situational variable, but as problematic" (13).

Bacchilega likewise replaces the dichotomy of speech and writing with a synergistic conception of "voice."

> In the specific analysis of a folk or literary narrative … [Helene] Cixous's peopling of language helps us to articulate the ideological and semantic struggles at work in the narrative. And finally, the displacement of speech through "voice" emphasizes the material, bodily aspect of language—a questioning of the patriarchal body/mind split with important repercussions for the study of women's / feminine verbal narratives in particular, since it encourages a reading *and* writing of the body. Writing, then, is holding a mirror to our bodies (and subjectivities) so as to transform into symbols those bodily symptoms which want to speak but which on their own are iconic rather than verbal signs. (15)

Finally, Bacchilega integrates the work of Mieke Bal, whose "analytical approach to narrative's multi-layered production does not hierarchically distinguish between written and oral texts, since in both cases "interpretation" requires listening for lack (what is omitted or denied) and repetition (which can emphasize or displace)" (Baachilega 18). This approach calls to mind Bruce Lincoln's revolutionary uses of myth, and, indeed, my efforts to bridge the gap between folkloristic and literary methods incorporate some of his

ideas as well.

In my own work, I filter both folkloristic and literary methods through the lens of myth theory. I take Barthes' argument that "myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are not 'substantial' ones" (*Mythologies* 109), and use it to reformulate the relationship between myth and folklore from part / whole—myth as a particular type of story within the field of folklore—to whole / (stolen) part. This reformulation of the distinction between the two provides maximum epistemological relevance to a transmedia project. I use Barthes' description of myth as "speech stolen and restored" (*Mythologies* 125) to contrast myth with folklore; with folklore as a distinct arena from which mythic speech "steals" quite often. Myth, then, in at least one of its manifestations, is a second-order semiological system whereby ideology is naturalized and communicated, and folklore is a common source of historically variable "original" meanings for mythic speech to co-opt. This move is a logical extension of Bacchilega's claim that:

> An informed knowledge of both folklore *and* literature can help us to question and redefine their borders, to articulate how narrative rules are (re)produced: such an approach also has wide-ranging implications for an understanding of literary texts within a broader cultural dynamics—an understanding which I would define as semiotic. (4)

Insight into the motivations for and consequences of choices in source material, and alterations to that source material as fairy tales are adapted into popular culture, requires detailed attention to the tales' previous incarnations. When the Walt Disney Company adapted Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," retold earlier in this

chapter, as one of its animated 'princess' films, it altered key elements of Andersen's narrative. The masochistic qualities of the mermaid's deal and the indifference of the prince are nowhere in the Disney film. Invocations of *The Little Mermaid* in American popular culture bring vague memories of a bold and impetuous young woman whose sacrifice of voice for legs (there is no pain in Disney's version) is as much about seeing the world as it is about marrying the man of her dreams; and despite trials and tribulations, Ariel (the film's heroine) *does* marry her prince. Though contemporary audiences know that *The Little Mermaid* began as a fairy tale, most remain blissfully unaware of the changes made to the original story. The popular culture scholar studying this adaptation to make claims about the *mythic* fairy tale must first show that the film communicates some naturalized message unproblematically: for example, the mermaid gives up her voice and gets her man. She does this by contrasting the film with previous incarnations of the story that end differently. In order to "prove" the story as myth, the popular culture scholar must first recover the stolen speech that is "The Little Mermaid" as *fairy* (folk)tale.

The breadth of my field of inquiry in this project includes films, novels and short stories, commercials and print ads, princess culture, reality TV, and the self-help industry. Transmedia comparison presents many challenges, as the objects of study are not fully comparable in terms of their forms. I initially focus attention on the commonalities between different forms by relying on narrative analysis. This remains my primary critical mode; however, in later chapters, I expand my application of visual analysis as the case studies become more fragmented. Throughout, I ask what common themes and concerns show up in the mythic appropriation of fairy tales within American

popular culture. In presenting these case studies, I utilize semiotic analysis and close readings of the texts along with a comparative method drawn from Bruce Lincoln's *Theorizing Myth*. Lincoln argues, "our task is not finished until we have considered texts, contexts, intertexts, pretexts, subtexts, and consequences" (150).

Conclusion

I approach my multiple disciplines in this project — myth studies, fairy tale studies, film studies, literary studies, and popular culture studies—from an interdisciplinary location in Women's Studies. This paradigm takes the work of mythographers, folklorists, and fairy tale scholars and welds them into a framework of use to the feminist and the film scholar. My interest in the mythic work of fairy tales funneled through mythography rather than folklore, literary, or film studies, or even through the circuit model of culture popularized by Stuart Hall, is in part a search for a mechanism for theorizing the complex workings of hegemony and resistance far outside of traditional feminist frameworks.

As previously mentioned, Paul Veyne has suggested that people relate to the myths of their own culture within continuums that include irony and distance as well as belief: "The Greeks believe and do not believe their myths. They believe in them, but they use them and cease believing at the point where their interest in believing ends" (84). This project represents a first step towards integrating feminist theory and myth theory in order to see what new insights and terminologies they might gift to each other. Myth studies can benefit from feminist theory's commitments to social construction, politics of location, and knowledge from the margins. Feminist theory can benefit from myth theory's non-psychoanalytic approach to affective appeals and non-rational belief

systems. I also contend an interstitial approach to myth can more fully excavate feminism's integration into and appropriation by American popular culture. Their mutual value thus becomes clear.

In closing, I return to the problem of the mermaid. The Disney film *The Little Mermaid* functions as a narrative retelling of Andersen's story, and the filmmakers, consciously or no, make the changes Bruno Bettelheim would have suggested — they ensure a happy ending, regardless of the source material. Though undoubtedly the filmmakers believed an unhappy ending would not sell, Andersen's continued success as a storyteller suggests there is indeed an audience for tragedy. But the shock of an unhappy ending to a Disney fairy tale would replicate Beauvoir's disillusion on a much wider scale, and *dis*-illusion is not what Disney sells.

Are fairy tales returning to their "origins" as a genre of protest, as Warner suggests, or, despite individual authorial intentions, are they more often a mass market vehicle for cooption of feminist critique? I have earlier argued, in keeping with Bacchilega, that the tension *within* the tales gives fairy tales their staying power. Perhaps the tension between these two external poles, between which most interpretive "noise" is found, is what gives contemporary incarnations of fairy tales, even those that don't actually retell familiar stories, their *mythic* power. I begin my exploration of this process with the myth of *Sleeping Beauty*.

CHAPTER 2: BRIAR ROSE

In "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale," one of the most famous early feminist critiques of fairy tales, Marcia R. Lieberman frames Sleeping Beauty as a harmful role model for young girls. She claims the story teaches girls to wait passively for a prince's rescue. Indeed, the real curse of the tale, many feminists feel, is its effect on young female readers who internalize this message and spend the rest of their lives waiting for some prince to come rescue them, not from sleep, but from responsibility for their own lives.[19] Whereas Lieberman and others have reiterated, and thus reinforced, the sleeping princess' powerlessness and the prince's agency, I will demonstrate that the myth can be turned to other purposes as well. In this study, I am concerned with retellings that engage with *Sleeping Beauty* as a stolen language through which to tell an *unrelated* story. Transmedia comparison of four case studies reveals that, through a process of dynamic revisions, the myth of *Sleeping Beauty* emerges as a valuable narrative device for structuring stories of trauma, knowledge, and agency.

The myth of Sleeping Beauty (Briar Rose)

There are myriad contradictions between what people think they know about a fairy tale, the literary and folkloric sources of that tale, and the transmuted or transmogrified combinations of the two that permeate popular culture. When I refer to *Sleeping Beauty*,[20] I am referring to more than just to a canonized body of folklore texts and accounts that revolve around a "Sleeping Beauty" (ATU 410), which most famously

[19] See Kolbenschlag, Lieberman.

[20] I will refer throughout this chapter most frequently to "Briar Rose," as this is the title of the Grimms' variant and is the tale most frequently cited in my case studies. Occasionally, however, I will refer to Sleeping Beauty, as the Perrault version served as the folklore antecedent (many times removed) for Disney's animated film version of the tale, arguably its most famous incarnation in popular culture.

encompasses Giambattista Basile's "The Sun, the Moon, and Talia" (1634-36), Charles Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods" (1697), and the Grimms' brothers "Brier Rose" (1812-57) (Goldberg). I also refer to an amorphous and continually expanding web of retellings, references, and interpretations. Each of these engagements with "Sleeping Beauty" contributes something to what I provisionally call the *myth* of the story. The version of *Sleeping Beauty* retold below is based on Jack Zipes' translation of the Grimm Brothers' variant. The story goes as follows.

A king and a queen desperately want a child, but are unable to conceive for a long time. Eventually they have a daughter, and the king is so proud of her beauty that he decides to hold a feast in her honor. At first he intends to invite all the wise women in the kingdom to the celebration; however, there are thirteen wise women and he only has twelve gold place settings. The king lets the number of place settings dictate the number of guests and foregoes inviting one of the wise woman. As the king may have hoped, the wise women invited to the party soon begin to gift his daughter with graces and talents and wealth-wishes. However, the *uninvited* wise woman, angry at being slighted, bursts in, and offers her own "gift" — "In her fifteenth year the princess shall prick herself with a spindle and fall down dead!" (Grimm 186).

A final wise woman steps in and lessens the curse to a hundred-year sleep. The king banishes spindles from his kingdom, hoping to avert the curse altogether, and the princess grows up never having seen a spindle and having no idea she needs to avoid them. On her fifteenth birthday, she wanders into an unused tower and finds an old woman spinning flax, the ignorant princess reaches out to touch the spindle without hesitation. The princess falls into a convenient nearby bed, deeply asleep, as does

everyone else in the castle. A briar hedge grows thick and tall around the grounds, hiding the castle from sight as well as time. The legend of the beautiful sleeping princess occasionally inspires intrepid princes to attempt to scale the wall, but they are invariably stabbed and pinned by the thorns in the hedge. They die horribly, and their bodies remain as a warning to others.

A hundred years go by and the latest in a long line of princes decides to chance the briars on the very day that Briar Rose is to wake up. The hedge is full of flowers that part before him, and he makes his way unimpeded to the bedside of the sleeping beauty. He kisses her, and she wakes and with her wakes the castle. Briar Rose and the prince marry and live happily ever after.

Since 1959, familiarity with the Grimm or Perrault versions of the tale — previously among the more popular variants — has been generally superseded by acquaintance with Walt Disney's animated feature, *Sleeping Beauty.* The Walt Disney Co. based its version of *Sleeping Beauty* on Pyotr Tchaikovsky's 1850 ballet. Tchaikovsky's version centralizes the conflict between the wicked fairy and the fairy who transmutes the curse from death to a hundred years sleep that can be broken by the kiss of a prince.

The ballet begins when the king announces the upcoming christening of his only child. Six fairies are invited to stand as godmothers to the infant, but a seventh fairy, Carabosse, crashes the party and curses the child to prick her finger on a spindle and die on her sixteenth birthday. The Lilac Fairy mitigates the curse as best she can, and Carabosse departs, signaling the end of the Prologue. Act One skips forward to the princess's sixteenth birthday. She receives various suitors, than defies her parents'

warnings to dance with a spindle presented to her as a birthday present. She pricks her finger, and the gift-giver is revealed as the disguised Carabosse. The Lilac Fairy intervenes again, putting the rest of the distressed kingdom to sleep for a hundred years as well so that Aurora will not wake alone. Act Two skips forward in time to the end of the hundred years. The Lilac Fairy seeks out a likely prince and shows him a vision of Aurora to entice him to rescue her. She then guides Prince Desire to the castle, where he defeats Carabosse and kisses Aurora awake. The newly awakened kingdom rejoices as the enamored prince proposes to Aurora. Act Three comprises preparations for the wedding, as well as the wedding itself. Various other fairy tale characters dance at the wedding, including Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, and Puss'n'Boots.

The Disney film, like the ballet, centralizes the conflict between the good and wicked fairies and repeats the plot device of the good fairy using the prince to defeat the wicked fairy and wake Aurora. However, the film collapses the timeline of the tale, reducing the hundred years sleep to a horrifying scenario with which the wicked fairy, now named Maleficent, taunts the prince. After Maleficent curses Aurora to prick her finger and die on her sixteenth birthday, Flora, the Lilac Fairy, transmutes the curse to an enchanted sleep that can only be broken by True Love's Kiss. The three good fairies take the infant princess into hiding in the woods and raise her ignorant of her heritage in order to keep her safe. On her sixteenth birthday, once the conditions of the curse have been thwarted, they plan to return her to the castle so she can meet her betrothed.

Perceptions of Sleeping Beauty's passivity have been mythologized out of proportion to the prince's agency in large part because Aurora is the only Disney fairy tale princess who is not the main character in her own story. The three fairies who raise

her, Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather, have more screen time. Prince Philip — her rescuer — has the climactic battle. Even Aurora and Philip's fathers have more actual dialogue than the princess. Aurora's only significant onscreen achievement comes in the form of a musical number in the woods, during which Prince Philip comes upon her and is instantly smitten, thus giving him the eventual ability to wake her. The film is also the variant that introduces the idea that only True Love's Kiss can wake the princess. In prior tellings, the kiss was, as implied in the Grimms' variant previously related, random (any prince would do) or even coincidental.

Further, from the moment of the curse, all the actions of the adults in Aurora's life are aimed at keeping her ignorant, as though her ignorance translates directly to Maleficent's. The fairies raise Aurora with no knowledge of what they are or who she is. They do not warn her that her life will change on her sixteenth birthday — the deadline for the curse. They do not even tell her she is danger. Sleeping Beauty's infamous passivity is thus a reputation that stems not so much from the folkloric or literary tale, as from more modern retellings such as Tchaikovsky's ballet or the Disney film. Certainly the seeds of this reputation lie in the tale — the princess does, after all, go to sleep for one hundred years; however, the Perrault version appends an entire post-wedding adventure in which the princess pleads for the lives of herself and her children with minions of her cannibalistic mother-in-law, which is simply to say that not all variants portray her as equally helpless. I certainly do not mean to imply that the Sleeping Beauty of folklore is a feminist role model. My point is merely that she is no more or less passive than many other classic fairy tale heroines (Snow White, Cinderella, Rapunzel), despite her time asleep.

By redirecting attention from the doomed princess to the helpful fairies and the heroic prince, the film also minimizes the importance of the curse itself. For this reason, it is perhaps understandable that most feminist readings of the tale have focused on the princess's passivity, her powerlessness. Feminist activists, scholars, and self-help authors have further solidified this reading through their exhortations to women to reject what *Sleeping Beauty* represents.[21] The myth of *Sleeping Beauty* now encompasses their commentary on the tale, but it goes beyond it as well. Whereas critiques of Sleeping Beauty's passivity tend to focus on the end of the story — the long sleep, the prince, the kiss — these critiques elide retellings that focus more on the curse itself, on Briar Rose's life before or after sleep. In the following pages I will present four case studies that show that when individuals — characters or hypothetical human beings — identify with Briar Rose as agent, they can demonstrate more empowering, or at least productive, ways to read the myth of *Sleeping Beauty*.

Four case studies

In the following pages I perform close readings of each case individually, followed by transmedia comparison of the four cases collectively. These case studies in particular were chosen because in each one, the fairy tale is invoked as Barthes' myth, as language stolen and repurposed. In Jane Yolen's award-winning Holocaust novel, *Briar Rose*, for example, a young woman is sent on a quest by her dying grandmother to uncover the truth of her family history, a story that the grandmother has only ever been able to speak of in terms of the fairy tale "Briar Rose." In Anne Sexton's poem, "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)," the poet uses the tale to narrate the ongoing trauma of an incest survivor. Yolen's character and Sexton's narrator invoke "Briar Rose" consciously

[21] See Footnote 19.

because of its parallels with their own "curses," traumatic knowledge. The familiar form of the fairy tale becomes a way to transmit that otherwise unspeakable knowledge across generations and possibly to generate understanding. In the third case study — Anne Rice/A.N. Rocquelaure's erotic *Beauty* trilogy — the fairy tale heroine is carried off immediately upon her awakening into sadomasochistic sexual slavery, where against all expectation she comes into power as a submissive. Rice's protagonist does not invoke the fairy tale at all, but rather lives it. Her curse is the history of ignorance and passivity that *Sleeping Beauty* is known for, and it is not the prince's kiss, but her own subsequent pursuit of self-knowledge and embrace of agency that ultimately lead her to happily ever after. Finally, in the television drama *Dollhouse*, the main character invokes "Briar Rose" to empower a raped child. Throughout *Dollhouse,* characters' identifications with the myth shift depending on their changing combinations of traumatic knowledge, self-knowledge, and agency, but ultimately multiple "Sleeping Beauties" embrace the notion that they can become their own princes and rescue themselves. As we shall see, these stories are open-ended in ways that allow people to vary their identifications with individual characters in the story. Thus, the *Sleeping Beauty* myth need not always and everywhere signify passivity. As we shall see in these case studies, the character of Briar Rose can "mean" something very active, whether it is the affirmation of another kind of agency or the integration of trauma into a larger life narrative.

Case 1: Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose*

Jane Yolen's award-winning novel *Briar Rose* was published in 1992 as part of Tor Books' Fairy Tale Series. The Fairy Tale Series, previously published by Ace, was a branded series of novels based directly on fairy tales. Each volume in the series was

introduced by writer / artist / editor Terri Windling, who was previously known for co-editing a series of fairy tale-themed fantasy anthologies. Yolen's book was arguably the most well-received in the series. It won the 1993 Mythopoetic Fantasy Award, was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, and was nominated for a Nebula Award. Yolen cites *Shoah*, the classic Holocaust documentary, as her inspiration for the book. In the film, Chelmno was described as "a camp in a castle. Castle, barbed wire, and the gassing of innocent folk." To Yolen, "it suggested the fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" in a horrible way" ("Briar Rose"). Having only recently written *The Devil's Arithmetic*, a Holocaust novel for young adults, Yolen was hesitant to again immerse herself in more of the gruesome details of the period. An invitation to write an adult-themed fairy tale novel for Windling's series was the deciding factor (Yolen, "Briar Rose").

In Samantha Powers's Pulitzer Prize-winning book on genocide, *A Problem From hell: America and the Age of Genocide,* she argues that "despite graphic media coverage, American policymakers, journalists, and citizens are extremely slow to muster the imagination needed to reckon with evil" (XVII). She quotes Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter, who, confronted with evidence of the Holocaust in 1942, said, "I don't believe you. … I do not mean that you are lying. I simply said I cannot believe you" (Powers 34, Shawcross 47).[22] This failure of imagination may be one of the reasons why Yolen's novel has received such acclaim. As of this writing, it is still regularly taught in secondary schools and colleges as a part of Holocaust curriculums (Yolen "Briar Rose"). It is a book used to bridge the gap between those who cannot imagine the kind of evil that genocide requires and the world of Holocaust survivors. This connection is forged not

[22] Powers's source for the quote is William Shawcross's *Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience.* See the bibliography for full citation information on Shawcross's book as well.

just by the immersive reading experience, but within the book itself, through the fact that the protagonist is herself a young American encountering the reality of the Holocaust for the first time. In both contexts, the familiar frame of the fairy tale is key.

In the novel, reporter Becca Berlin and her sisters grow up hearing the tale of "Briar Rose" as the story their grandmother, Gemma, claims is her own. On her deathbed, Gemma becomes agitated and turns to the granddaughter she is closest to with a strange, but urgent request. "Promise me you will find the castle. Promise me you will find the prince. Promise me you will find the maker of the spells." Becca promises, and Gemma finally relaxes, whispering to herself "I am Briar Rose. … I am Briar Rose" (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 20).

After the funeral, Becca feels compelled to keep her promise to her grandmother, and begins to investigate the little the family knows of Gemma's past. There are some unconventional details in Gemma's tale. For example, the king invites all the good fairies to a party after Briar Rose is born, "but not the bad fairy. Not the one in black with big black boots and silver eagles on her hat" (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 22). And the curse is more encompassing as Gemma tells it: "I curse you, Briar Rose. I curse you and your father the king and your mother the queen and all your uncles and cousins and aunts. And all the people in your village. And all the people who bear your name" (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 22). Eventually Becca discovers Gemma came to the States as a refugee during World War II and not before, as the family had previously thought.

With the support of her editor, Becca goes to Poland, hires an interpreter, and continues to investigate. She eventually a former resistance fighter named Josef, who tells her why Gemma's story really is the story of Briar Rose. Josef and his fellows came

across the mass graves of Chelmno through chance. They watched in horror as the guards dumped bodies upon bodies, and when the guards left they found one lone person breathing among the corpses. By the time they pulled her out, she was still, and they took turns breathing for her. Josef was the one giving her CPR when she finally started to breathe on her own again — this was the Prince's kiss. The woman recovered, but she had only one memory, a fairy tale. She told them, "I do not know its name. But in it I am a princess in a castle and a great mist comes over us. Only I am kissed awake. I know now that there is a castle and it is called 'the *schloss.'* But I do not know for sure if that is *my* castle. I only remember the fairy tale and it seems, somehow, that it is my story as well" (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 177). Since the woman did not know her real name, the partisans named her for the princess in her story — Ksiezniczka. She married another of her rescuers, but soon all died but Ksiezniczka and Josef. Ksiezniczka, pregnant, widowed, and determined to protect her child, left Poland.

Becca returns home with the truth of both Gemma's history and fairy tale. Before she leaves, she asks her interpreter, now also her friend, whether she should share what she's learned with her family or simply let things lie.

> "Let sleeping princess lie?" Magda laughed. "We are all sleeping princesses some time. But it is better to be fully awake, don't you think?"
>
> Becca considered for a moment. "Better for who?" …
>
> "Americans do not want to be awake?"
>
> "Oh," Becca said, "we like the truth all right. When it's tidy."
>
> "Truth is never tidy. Only fairy tales. This is a very Polish notion. And you are Polish, you know." (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 196)

Stan meets Becca at the airport when she returns. As they banter, Becca references the fairy tale to provoke Stan into kissing her. Both finally acknowledge their interest in each other is romantic, and that they're hoping to "get to happily ever after eventually" (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 198).

In Yolen's novel, *Briar Rose* first functions as a way for Gemma to partition her past away from her present, to bury knowledge along with the trauma that engendered it, but ultimately it provides a way for Gemma and Becca to connect across generations, first through their shared storytelling experiences and later through the revelation of their family history. Unable to face the trauma of her experiences during the war head-on, Gemma determinedly relegates them to the realm of fairy tale. She contains them within the "tidy" frame of a story so deeply structured that it is recognizable by its shape. As Vladimir Propp argues, in a fairy tale, certain functions *must* be performed — someone must cast a curse, someone must go to sleep, someone must wake the sleeper, and in *Briar Rose* inevitably someone *must* live happily ever after. It so happens that the structure of "Briar Rose" resonates deeply with Gemma's experiences, but more than that, it gives her hope. Gemma, having survived the un-survivable — in history it is believed no woman ever survived Chelmno — is heavily invested in the inexorability of fairy tale logic. The only way she can tell her story is when that ending is embedded in the opening lines. For all its subtle details or the history revealed to underlie it, Gemma's is essentially a mimetic retelling of the tale wherein "once upon a time" is ineluctably followed by "happily ever after." Similarly, the fact that the container for Gemma's most horrific memories doubles as Becca's favorite bedtime story reveals not only how deeply Gemma has buried the knowledge she does not want to face, but also how determinedly

she has shaped her present into something positive. After all, she uses the most deeply traumatizing events in her past as a way to bond with her granddaughters. That suggests a tremendous strength of will. Still, though Gemma uses *Briar Rose* to tidy up her past and prevent it from sullying her present, the frequency with which she tells the story and the urgency with which she begs Becca to search for the truth suggest that there is a limit to the magic of this compartmentalization.

Though Gemma cannot look back herself, neither can she forget. In containing the pain of the Holocaust within Briar Rose's curse, Gemma has effectively imprisoned part of herself within the bounds of Briar Rose's story. Thus Becca's questing role is to metaphorically "rescue" that part of her grandmother that never woke up. When Becca finds the Prince, ironically, *she* frees her grandmother. The Gemma revealed by Josef's story is not the same Gemma that Becca knows. Though Becca now understands the point of the fairy tale, that understanding is now dwarfed by the questions she has about what happened to Gemma in the intervening years. The focus at the end of the novel on the tidy finality of Becca's contemporary fairy tale romance only partially conceals the untidiness of Becca's search for Gemma's past. For all that Becca did indeed find the castle and the prince, she is quick to note to her editor that the fairy tale is only part of Gemma's story. Gemma's fairy tale ends: "After she was married, she had a baby girl, even more beautiful than she. And they lived happily ever after" (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 199). And yet from the little Becca is able to learn about Gemma's life after immigration, Gemma arrived in the U.S. pregnant, broke, and alone, and was immediately interned at a refugee camp. There are years of struggle hidden in the space between the last two lines of the tale. Gemma, herself, is as unknowable as ever. Her point of view is explicitly

denied us, and only the facts she chooses to tell remain. In *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, philosopher Susan Brison writes,

> Piecing together a dismembered self seems to require a process of remembering in which speech and affect converge. This working through, or remastering of, the traumatic memory involves going from being the medium of someone else's … speech to being the subject of one's own. The results of the process of working through reveal the performative role of speech acts in recovering from trauma: *saying* something about a traumatic memory *does* something to it. (56)

The novel ends by respecting Gemma's agency, her choice about what the important aspects of her story are: ""Happily ever after," Gemma [says] firmly, "means exactly what it says"" (Yolen, *Briar Rose* 200). Thus we — like Becca — are presented with both the fairy tale ending and the fairy tale exposed — tidiness and untidiness; the fairy tale fantasy and its ever-receding "truth."

Case 2: Anne Sexton's "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)"

Confessional poet Anne Sexton likewise invoked a fairy tale frame for traumatic experience when she rewrote "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)" as the concluding poem in her volume of fairy tale retellings, *Transformations.* Unlike Gemma, however, Sexton's narrator breaks the bonds of the fairy tale in an attempt to reveal, rather than conceal, the unbearable heart of her story. Written in 1970, the fairy tale theme of *Transformations* was inspired by Sexton's eldest daughter Linda. Linda remembers, "One day Mother came into the kitchen and found me reading my Grimm's fairy-tale book that I'd had since 1961. … She asked me which stories I liked, and wrote the titles down on a napkin" (Middlebrook 333). It was a book of what Sexton herself called "black humor", in which she gave fairy tales a "sadistic spin" (Middlebrook 333). Each of the poems in the

collection is structured as a straightforward mimetic retelling of the titular fairy tale embedded in a set of images and intimations that both frame and trouble the "original" tale.

The opening lines of the poem invite us to "Consider / a girl who keeps slipping off / arms limp as old carrots, / into the hypnotist's trance." The girl is unintelligible, "speaking with the gift of tongues" (Sexton, "Briar" 290). She is infantile, wanting to return to the safety of the womb, "struggling into her mother's pocketbook" (Sexton, "Sleeping" 290). This backwards journey, which the narrator labels "rank as honeysuckle," ends with her father luring the girl to sit on his knee so he can kiss the back of her neck. "Come be my snooky / and I will give you a root," he says (Sexton, "Briar" 291).

From this introduction, the narrator proceeds into a straightforward retelling of the fairy tale. As in the Grimm fairy tale, the king chooses not to invite the thirteenth fairy to Briar Rose's christening because he only has twelve golden plates. The thirteenth fairy shows up anyway, "her fingers as long and thin as straws, / her eyes burnt by cigarettes, / her uterus an empty teacup" (Sexton, "Briar" 291). She curses the little princess with a pricked finger and death at the age of fifteen. The twelfth fairy alters the curse so that the princess will only sleep for a hundred years. The king burns all spinning wheels and raises his daughter in smothering innocence. He is obsessed with her. "Briar Rose grew to be a goddess / and each night the king / bit the hem of her gown to keep her safe. / He fastened the moon up / with a safety pin / to give her perpetual light. / He forced every male in the court / to scour his tongue with Bab-o / lest they poison the air she dwelt in. / Thus she dwelt in his odor. / Rank as honeysuckle" (Sexton, "Briar" 291-2).

At the age of fifteen, Briar Rose comes upon the remains of a burned spinning wheel and pricks her finger. Everyone goes to sleep. “They all lay in a trance, / each a catatonic / stuck in a time machine” (Sexton, “Briar” 292). Princes come and try to fight their way through the briars that have grown up over the castle, but they are crucified on the thorns. When one hundred years have passed, a prince gets through and kisses the princess awake. “Presto! She’s out of prison!” (Sexton, “Briar” 293). The princess wakes calling her father’s name. The young couple marry, but Briar Rose is ever afraid to go to sleep, “and never in the prince’s presence” (Sexton, “Briar” 293). When she does sleep she dreams the thirteenth fairy sits in her place at the table.

The narrator’s voice returns, merging the girl from the introduction with Briar Rose as she speaks of their mutual fear of sleep. The final stanza of the poem merges girl, princess, and narrator into one voice:

> There was a theft.
> That much I am told.
> I was abandoned.
> That much I know.
> I was forced backward.
> I was forced forward.
> I was passed hand to hand
> like a bowl of fruit.
> Each night I am nailed into place
> and I forget who I am.
> Daddy?
> There’s another kind of prison.
> It’s not the prince at all,

but my father

drunkenly bent over my bed,

circling the abyss like a shark,

my father thick upon me

like some sleeping jellyfish.

What voyage this, little girl?

This coming out of prison?

God help —

this life after death? (Sexton, "Briar" 294)

Though scholarship on Sexton has from the beginning acknowledged the autobiographical elements in her work, the vast majority of critics and reviewers are reluctant to address the intimation of incest in "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty),"[23] perhaps finding it incongruous that one of her most intimate revelations would come in the fairy tale poems inspired by her young daughter Linda. Some treat *Transformations* as a whole, but ignore the closing poem completely (Gill). Others mention "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)" and go so far as to note the closing stanza, but make no commentary on it (Root, Martz). Still others note or detachedly laud the way the final lines serve as commentary on the story, on the Elektra-implications of a fairy tale father who keeps his daughter so innocent, so ignorant, she cannot protect herself (Hall, Lehmann-Haupt, Ostriker, Young). In the latter reading, when Briar Rose calls out her father's name at the prince's kiss, she is merely naming the prince a replacement. Given Sexton's extensive experience with psychoanalysis, interpreting the poem with Freudian overtones is a fairly

[23] One exception to this is Diane Hume George in *Oedipus Anne: The Poetry of Anne Sexton* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). However, thought George notes the possibility of a biographical element in the poem, she spends more time on discussing the universality of Oedipal desire.

safe assessment.

I do not disagree with this reading, but I am persuaded by circumstantial evidence that there is more to the poem. Sexton, like the fictional Gemma, is filtering traumatic experience through *Briar Rose.* Sexton's voice throughout *Transformations* is often comic, but its comedy is as grim as its folklore sources. In the opening poem, "The Gold Key," she writes of a young boy who has found a golden key and is looking for what it opens: "Presto! / It opens this book of odd tales / which transform the Brothers Grimm" (Sexton 224). In "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)," Sexton echoes that hopeful language when the prince kisses Sleeping Beauty awake: "Presto! / She's out of prison." Each time it is repeated, however, "Presto!" seems more ironic, less like magic and more like magical thinking. Its final repetition invites the reader to question whether Briar Rose's sleep, equated to death, is truly something she can escape: "This trance girl / is yours to do with. / You could lay her in a grave, / an awful package, / and shovel dirt on her face / and she'd never call back: Hello there! / But if you kissed her on the mouth / her eyes would spring open / and she'd call out: Daddy! Daddy! / Presto! / She's out of prison" (Sexton, "Briar" 294). The lines immediately following imply that her waking body is imprisoned as much as her sleeping one was. Biographical evidence suggests that Sexton suffered from some sort of childhood trauma, and the language she uses while describing that trauma is similar to language in the poem. She exhibits concern in letters written before and during the writing of *Transformations* about the legacy she is leaving behind her daughters. Given this context, *Transformations*, and especially "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)," may be read as an attempt to communicate to her daughters, perhaps especially to Linda, some of what drove her.

Sexton claimed on various occasions to remember incestuous incidents involving her parents, and on other occasions claimed she had made it all up. Her unreliability on the subject, coupled with her history of mental illness, led many in her life to dismiss her memories, while to others her instability, coupled with her suicide in 1974, only seemed to support them. Brison argues,

> The tendency to take certain memories – traumatic memories – as simply given, and retained as snapshots, exists in trauma theory, when a distinction is made between traumatic memories (viewed as bodily, fragmented, sensory, intrusive, recurrent, uncontrollable) and narrative memories (viewed as linguistic, more coherent, more under control). *Traumatic memory, like narrative memory, is articulated, selective, even malleable, in spite of the fact that the framing of such memory may not be under the survivor's conscious control* [italics mine]. (31)

Brison's point about the unreliability of traumatic memory supports advocates of the abuse narrative's argument that Sexton's changing story is insufficient evidence to disprove her initial claims. Regarding the question of whether or not Sexton was actually sexually abused, biographer Diane Middlebrook concludes,

> The point is, the veracity of the incest narrative cannot be established historically, but that does not mean that it didn't, in a profound and lasting sense, "happen." It is clear from many sources that Sexton's physical boundaries were repeatedly trespassed by the adults in her family in ways that disturbed her emotional life from girlhood onward. As she put it, "I have frozen that scene in time, made everyone stop moving. I thought I could stop this all from happening. That's what I want to believe — when I'm in that hard place — that's not what I believe now, just when I'm that child in trance. I can't grow up because then all these other things will happen. I want to turn around and start everything going

backward. (59)

Though I am not arguing for reading "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)" as proof of the poet's personal history of incest, I would nevertheless like to suggest that in the fairy tale Sexton finds an image and a voice for narrating a profoundly personal traumatic story of transgressed physical boundaries. The language of a "child in trance" that caught Middlebrook's eye recurs in the image of the "trance girl" in the poem. Likewise, when Sexton says, "I have frozen that scene in time, made everyone stop moving. I thought I could stop this all from happening … I can't grow up because then all these other things will happen. I want to turn around and start everything going backward," one sees again a corresponding image within the poem: "The king and queen went to sleep, / the courtiers, the flies on the wall. / The fire in the hearth grew still / and the roast meat stopped crackling. / The trees turned into metal / and the dog became china. / They all lay in a trance, / each a catatonic / stuck in the time machine" (Sexton, "Briar" 292).

Unfortunately, the efforts of the poem's narrator to freeze time always freeze it at the wrong moment, at the moment of waking. If sleep is death — "I must not sleep / for while asleep I'm ninety / and think I'm dying. / Death rattles in my throat like a marble" (Sexton, "Briar" 293-4) — and terrifying in its own right, than waking is no succor, but another kind of prison — "It's not the prince at all, / but my father / drunkenly bent over my bed, / circling the abyss like a shark… God help — / this life after death?" (Sexton, "Briar" 294-5). Sexton leaves the reader "awakening" from the text far from happily ever after with a nightmarish image – the narrator's despair upon waking from sleep to the sight of her father hovering over her. The poem transmits an awful knowledge of the world, a strange note with which to end a collection dedicated to a beloved child, unless the knowledge it transmits is in some way conceived as part of a legacy.

In an impassioned letter to daughter Linda sent the summer before Sexton began writing *Transformations*, Sexton wrote, "I love you. You are closest to my heart, closer than any other human being. You are my extension. You are my prayer. You are my belief in God. For better or worse you inherit me" (Sexton and Ames 342). Sexton was a very difficult mother — melodramatic, unpredictable, depressed, suicidal. *Transformations*, and especially "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)," might thus be read not just as a part of that inheritance, but also as the closest thing her daughters might get to an explanation addressed to them. Much, after all, can be inferred from Sexton's body of work, her letters, her papers, and confidants, but these poems speak in the language of fairy tales, stories passed on from parent to child.

The need for some kind of explanation for Sexton's behavior may have seemed especially crucial given her family's growing numbness to her outbursts. In a letter to a friend written on August 19, 1970, Sexton includes a copy of the just-finished poem "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)." She then recounts a psychotic episode that occurred during the period in which she was writing it. Sexton became convinced that a friend of hers had died (she had not) and as a result Sexton herself took an overdose of sleeping pills. Her youngest daughter, Joy was home during that time and was forced to call Sexton's psychiatrist for help. The doctor called Sexton's mother-in-law, who brought her to the hospital to have her stomach pumped. Though Sexton presents the incident as dire, and appears very frightened by it, family members remember the event "more as a melodrama than as a medical emergency" (Middlebrook 341). Given that Sexton immediately communicated what she had done to several people, the seriousness of the incident as an actual attempt at suicide was understandably in doubt, and, "hardened by

Sexton's self-absorption and perpetual exaggerations," biographer Diane Middlebrook writes, "[the family] had grown increasingly unsympathetic. 'I thought Mother took a certain pride in this kind of behavior," Linda later commented icily. "It began to seem very self-indulgent to me." (341). In the aforementioned August 19 letter, Sexton laments: "Poor Joy. How could I have left her with that" (Sexton and Ames 358).

Sexton's narrator remains the trance girl, always moved by others, unable to make any move for herself other than the one guaranteed to fulfill the thirteenth fairy's curse: sleep. The timing of Sexton's real-life attempt to sleep to death suggests writing the poem took a toll, just as the ambivalence of it highlights the terror of *both* sleeping and waking revealed in the poem. Sexton ultimately committed suicide on October 4,1974. Her actions on this date lack the signs of ambivalence that had characterized her previous attempts. She appeared calm and in good spirits while going about her day. She told no one of her intent. She came home, removed her rings, dressed herself in her mother's coat, sealed herself in the garage with the car engine running, and drank a glass of vodka. No one who knew her was surprised (Middlebrook 397).

Case 3: Anne Rice/A.N. Rocquelaure's *Beauty* Trilogy

Anne Rice, writing as A.N. Roquelaure, published the first book in the *Beauty* trilogy in 1983. The three-book sadomasochistic (SM) fantasy was Rice's first foray into literary erotica. Rice is better known for her best-selling Vampire Chronicles, the first of which preceded the *Beauty* books; however, the erotic trilogy was successful enough on its own that by the publication of the third book, she acknowledged her role as author. Both of our previous case studies have framed the myth as a narrative resource for communicating traumatic knowledge. Our third case invokes the fairy tale as backstory,

similar to Yolen's novel, and centers on scenes of sexual violation, similar to Sexton's poem; however, in this version the myth-as-backstory is straightforward history, and the heroine's changing relationship to her sexual violation becomes the eventual source of her empowerment. Sleeping Beauty awakens after one hundred years into a world of sexual dominance games, but her initial terror is quickly replaced by avid curiosity and willing participation. The trilogy follows Beauty's evolution as a masochist, and her drive to make a real emotional connection in an SM relationship.

Following the success of her 1976 novel *Interview With a Vampire*, Rice chose to write erotica very deliberately out of a desire to fight back against what she saw as antipornography feminists'[24] "contempt for women's feelings" (Ramsland 34). At the time, she said, "I regard my writing of pornography to be a real moral cause …. And I don't want a bunch of fascist reactionary feminists kicking in the door of my consciousness with their jackboots and telling me that sadomasochism isn't politically correct" (Ramsland 34). In *Exit to Eden*, a contemporary erotic novel written after the *Beauty* trilogy, Rice's characters make speeches in favor of sexual freedom and against moralizing. In the *Beauty* trilogy, the politics are less overt, but the message is the same: sexuality can be a pathway to exploration and growth.

The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty opens with the Prince's foray into Beauty's briar-bound castle. The Prince is a sexual sadist from a powerful nearby kingdom, and it suits his conceit to think he can claim the cursed virgin princess no one else has been able to reach. He wakes Beauty with concurrent rape and kiss, then informs her parents, also newly awoken, that he will be taking her back to his mother's kingdom, where she will

[24] The 1980s were a period of great division among feminists over the growing pornography industry. Some, such as Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, became known for their staunch stance that all pornography is oppressive to women.

serve as a sex slave along with hundreds of other young royals from neighboring kingdoms subservient to his own. The king and queen are familiar with this practice from a hundred years ago and acquiesce.

In the Queen's kingdom, slaves are trained to manifest a constant state of arousal, but their sexual fulfillment is strictly regulated by their masters. Beauty is a popular slave, and the Prince frequently allows her orgasm, but this release quickly proves insufficient for Beauty. An eager submissive, she finds pleasure in the pain the prince and his peers inflict; however, her growing desire for the male slaves around her outweighs her affection for and fear of the Prince, and she strays. Soon, it is evident to her that the castle is too soft for Beauty. There, she will always be a pampered plaything with too much room for rebellion, and what Beauty now desires is to be mastered completely, to have no existence outside of desire. At the end of the first book, Beauty seizes control of her journey and steers her own course: publicly disobeying the Prince in order to be sent to the more strict servitude of the Village.

Beauty's Punishment takes up where the first book leaves off. Beauty has been sent to the Village to serve out the remainder of her imprisonment under the harsh tutelage of commoners. The narrative now alternates between limited third person from Beauty's point of view and a first person account by Tristan, the male slave whose attractions inspire Beauty to disobey and be sent to the Village. The two become lovers briefly on the ride to the Village, but are separated almost at once upon arrival. In the Village they at last find a level of submission and humiliation that satisfies them both, however, at the climax of the second book they and a few others are spirited away by agents from the kingdom of the Sultan to serve in his palace.

Beauty's Release picks up as the captives arrive in the Sultan's kingdom. Though Tristan is present, the male point of view character in the final book is the rebellious Prince Laurent. Beauty is given over to be the plaything of the circumcised harem. There she experiences greater depths of passion and connection than ever before with a woman named Inanna. Laurent goes on his own journey as he plays the slave in public, but dominates his master in secret at night. Because of the alliances their families have with the Queen, Beauty, Laurent, and Tristan are soon rescued — against their will. On the voyage back, Beauty and Laurent find themselves connecting. Both are eventually sent home to their respective kingdoms, but they long for a return to the simplicity of their lives as slaves. When Laurent discovers that Beauty has turned away all suitors since her return, he believes he knows why and goes himself to woo her. Delighted to have found someone who also craves the totality of a BDSM (Bondage/Discipline, Dominance/Submission, Sadism/Masochism) relationship, Beauty accepts his suit. They live happily thereafter.

In Rice's retelling, the curse is ended almost before the story has begun. There is no awful knowledge hidden within Beauty's past. The curse has been her ignorance, her passive acquiescence to the life prescribed for her. Upon awakening, Beauty repeatedly directs her agency towards submission as an avenue to self-knowledge. Her experiences along the way dilute the sexism of an easy male dominant / female submissive dichotomy and suggest that sexuality is as much an avenue for playing with and subverting social relations as for reflecting them. In this world, the eroticization of power is a legitimate and perhaps even the most powerful path to self-knowledge.

Before getting to the details of how exactly the trilogy accomplishes these tasks, I

will provide some background into the phenomenon of sadomasochistic sexual relationships, as several popular perspectives on SM conceptualize it as "the domain of the mentally ill, the misogynistic, [and] the neurotic" (Cross and Matheson 134), perspectives which Rice herself has publicly rejected.[25] Rather, Rice's intention with the *Beauty* trilogy was to create "imaginative pornography wherein body and mind were focused together, totally possessed, and lost into something larger and more glorious than the individual ego" (Ramsland 36). Patricia A. Cross and Kim Matheson, researchers at Carleton University, performed a series of three empirical studies aimed at testing the accuracy of the former views. They found:

> …No support for the view that sadomasochism is an illness–our measures of mental illness did not differentiate sadomasochists from non-sadomasochists. Likewise we could not find evidence for the psychoanalytic view that SM reflects sexual guilt on the part of masochists or an id-driven personality on the part of sadists–our measure of sexual guilt did not differentiate masochists from others, and our measures of id-driven behavior did not differentiate sadists from others. We also could not find evidence that sadomasochists are anti-feminist–our measure of feminist attitudes did not differentiate sadomasochists from non-sadomasochists. (Cross and Matheson 159)

They found that power, not pain, is the dominant discourse for SM practitioners. In closing, they speculate: "One might wonder whether SM ought to be understood best as a game explored by the sexually sophisticated and adventurous, involving the manipulation of power for erotic purposes" (Cross and Matheson 161). This latter

[25] In Rice's next erotic novel after the *Beauty* trilogy, *Exit to Eden*, the two main characters explicitly address the flaws they see in these arguments in speeches that Rice claimed reflected her own views. (see Ramsland 52)

perspective of SM as an erotic power-game is the one with which I read the *Beauty* trilogy, as that is the perspective from which it was written and that is the perspective the fairy tale is invoked to support. Submission, not pain, is Beauty's ultimate desire, though pain is incorporated as an avenue to surrender the will and transcend the body — to give of oneself utterly.

Such submission, in the real world, is embedded with all the gender, class, race, et al, politics of society writ large. As Angela Carter argues in *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography:* "sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations, even if that is not, and never has been the intention of the pornographer" (20). In the fantasy world that Rice has created, politics exist, but they manifest quite differently from any real-world equivalents. In "Intellectualizing Smut: The Role of Tradition in Anne Rice's *Sleeping Beauty,"* for example, Sarah Lash points out that Rice has equalized the sexism critiqued in the fairy tale's portrayal of female passivity alone by lumping the young princesses and princes together in their slavery (71).

Masochistic men also figure prominently in the *Beauty* trilogy, as do dominant women, and readers are invited to play with their identifications. The shifts in narration between third and first person comprise one such invitation. Though Beauty is the protagonist of the trilogy as a whole, readers only gain direct entry into the heads of the male slaves she encounters. In *The Roquelaure Reader*, Katherine Ramsland interviews Rice extensively about Rice's fantasies of being a gay man and their relation to point of view in the novels. (13-16, 42, 46). Fluid identification, coupled with the gender-muted

demands of Beauty's sexual slavery, demands a queer reading of power in the text — a scene-by-scene analysis beyond the scope of this case study. My point, however, is clear: for all that Rice's Sleeping Beauty is a masochist, one cannot draw a line between her desire for submission/pain and her gender.

Socio-economic class and other social relations are similarly transgressed. In "The Pervert's Progress: An Analysis of "Story of O" and the Beauty Trilogy," Amalia Ziv points out the contradictions inherent in Rice's construction of a society of sexual domination. The slaves are all foreign royalty, and yet while they are slaves, even the lowliest servants in the Queen's kingdom have dominion over them. When their slavery ends, many of the mistresses and masters who have bound, humiliated and tortured them are once more their social inferiors. In the Queen's kingdom, SM is a built-in part of the social structure. Those royals and citizens who might prefer a more submissive role are bound as securely to their roles as dominants as the slaves are to their roles as submissives. Which is not to say that role-reversals do not occur, but rather that the role reversal, rather than the SM scene itself, is the transgression inside the kingdom.

> The sexual domination represented in the Beauty story, then, both is and is not transgressive. It is not transgressive in the sense that it is institutionalized and incorporated into the general social structure, yet it remains transgressive in the sense that its interactions are such as would not be acceptable in any other social context in the fictional world itself and are unacceptable in the social world of the readers. Its transgressiveness is heightened by the fact that the sexual slavery institution disrupts and reverses the power hierarchy: the slaves belong precisely to that class that is endowed with the utmost power and is otherwise exempt from any kind of subjugation; and they are subordinated not only to their peers but also

to their social inferiors. (Ziv 64-5)

Ziv's analysis suggests that Rice is engaging in what Carter calls the pornographer's "power to become a terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerilla whose purpose is to overturn our most basic notions of [sexual] relations, to institute sexuality as a primary mode of being rather than a specialised area of vacation from being" (*Sadeian* 21-2). This power to create a topsy-turvy sexual world is perhaps the reason that the trilogy opens with a fairy tale. Rice's own commentary on why she chose the fairy tale setting is ambiguous. "I have no idea why the Sleeping Beauty myth inspired me," she says. "I just wanted to take those [masochistic] fantasies and put them into some form, being true to what they were and making the least possible concession to literary form or the market" (Ramsland 37). Perhaps the topsy-turvy structure of fairy tales themselves provides some key. An entire subgenre of fairy tale erotica has since come into existence, of which the *Beauty* trilogy was arguably the first instance,[26] and its scripts are seldom based on "straight" sexual practices. Rather, most are queer in the anti-heteronormative sense. Even those that are straightforwardly about opposite sex pairings tend towards the practices collectively referred to as kink, including fetishism, transvestitism, group sex, bondage, SM, and pony play to name a few, and most of which are featured in the *Beauty* trilogy. The juxtaposition of tradition and transgression, coupled with the tales' folkloristic earthiness and embedded restructuring of class relations — a soldier becomes king, a servant becomes queen, etc. — seems a ripe script for "overturning our most basic notions of [sexual] relations," as well as for stimulating readers' arousal (Carter *Sadeian*

[26] For example, the aforementioned *Once Upon a Dyke*, as well as *Fairy Tale Lust: Erotic Fantasies for Women* (Ed. Kristina Wright. Berkeley: Cleis Press, 2010), *Erotic Fairy Tales: A Romp Through the Classics* (Mitzi Szereto. Berkeley: Cleis Press, 2001), *Naughty Fairytales from A to Z* (Ed. Allison Tyler. New York: Plume, 2004).

21-2). The *Sleeping Beauty* myth, so often critiqued for its heroine's perceived passivity, has particular resonance for subverting the transgressive perception of masochistic fantasies, while remaining true to them in spirit. When one meaning becomes codified, one act becomes normalized, the only way to maintain the perverse fantasy's resonance is to break it open and find a new avenue to subversion.

Thus, Beauty awakens from a fairy tale into a completely sensual world of sadomasochistic sexual slavery where the lack of power implicit in her backstory — cursed infancy, over-protected childhood, dreamless lassitude ending in rape and kidnapping — is literalized, made explicit, and embraced as a turn-on. The Prince's kingdom's tradition of enslaving young royals from the surrounding kingdoms is apparently long-standing. It is immediately recognized by Beauty's parents, who both spent time there in their youths. In fact, when the Prince announces his intent to take Beauty with him to his mother's kingdom, her mother offers a token protest, only to have the King step in and instruct Beauty "Obey him. Obey the Queen. And though you find your servitude surprising and difficult at times, be confident you will return, as he says, greatly changed for the better" (Rice, *Claiming* 16). The King's words excise the social transgression of Beauty's subsequent experiences, relegating her enslavement to a liminal ritual space bounded not by the physical borders of the Prince's kingdom, but by the sadomasochistic collusion of state powers. Beauty's slavery begins in her father's own castle.

The real test of Beauty's agency is not her reaction to slavery, though her increasing attempts to steer her own course towards her own goals evidence her evolving self-knowledge and will. The climactic moment in her evolution comes in her reaction to

freedom. By focusing on Beauty's growing desire to be dominated and then removing Beauty from the world in which such transgression is normalized, the trilogy privileges the power she claims when she rejects all suitors but Laurent. Beauty's life prior to her sojourn in the Queen's kingdom may have been full of hypothetical power — as a princess, as a free agent — but she was always vulnerable to the "curse" of ignorance, of going along and doing what was expected of her. She never thought to examine what she herself might want. By the time of her return, however, she has changed for the better, though perhaps not in precisely the way her father hoped. She claims her desires, and in fact her pursuit of an all-consuming submission ultimately leads her to the fullest exercise of her own will.

Case 4: Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*

Our final case study is the television series *Dollhouse,* controversial brainchild of executive producer Joss Whedon. Though the format of this case is different, its mode of individual identification with the myth of *Briar Rose* has remarkable similarities to those modes employed by Yolen, Sexton, and Rice. The show itself is a one-hour, genre-bending, science-fiction / drama / thriller hybrid that aired on the FOX Network from 2008 to 2010.[27] The series was Whedon's second project for FOX after a previous unsatisfactory collaboration (Press). The series came about when actress Eliza Dushku signed a producing deal with FOX and asked Whedon, her friend and former boss, out for lunch to get his advice on the project. Dushku longed for a role that would showcase her

[27] Twenty-seven episodes were produced, including a never-aired pilot included as an extra feature on the DVD collection of season one. The revamped first season included a new pilot and eleven additional broadcast episodes. A thirteenth episode, set in a post-apocalyptic 2019, was produced to replace the unseen pilot and fulfill the episode quota for standing DVD distribution deals. That episode, "Epitaph One," never aired, but that future was returned to in the final episode of the series, aptly titled "Epitaph Two."

acting range. Whedon came up with an idea for one that would do just that, and they decided to move forward with development despite Whedon's rancorous history with FOX (Whedon). Though the studio was initially enthusiastic, conflicting visions for the series' overall tone led to clashes over the first few episodes (Ryan), and these episodes lack the character development and narrative complexity of Whedon's earlier work. The show's quality improved over time, though, and it became a cult favorite despite its poor time slot and complicated, controversial premise. Ratings never reached the levels that FOX was looking for; however, and the series was cancelled after only two seasons (Ryan).

The basic premise for the show is this: the Rossum Corporation has developed a way to wipe out someone's personality. They then imprint new personalities onto that body as they so choose. The main character, Echo, is a result of this profitable technology. She is a Doll. Echo used to be a girl named Caroline, but Caroline uncovered information that the company, personified by Adele DeWitt, head of the Dollhouse, could not risk getting out, and she was given a choice: she could die, or she could go to "sleep" for five years, giving her body to Rossum during that time to do with as it saw fit. At the end of her term of service, Caroline would regain control of her body and be free. Unable to see an alternative, Caroline went to sleep, and Echo was born. In her in-Active state — when she has no personality imprinted onto her, Echo is supposed to be a childlike idiot with just enough cognitive ability to follow simple commands and maintain her body in a fit and healthy state. Against all expectations, however, Echo begins to develop self-awareness, to understand that the person she used to be, Caroline, is trapped and needs rescuing.

As in previous Whedon-produced shows, fairy tale references abound, but at first they seem to serve no role outside of their immediate conversational context.[28] That *Briar Rose* is the myth driving the show as a whole does not become explicit until the penultimate episode of the first season. Though *Briar Rose* is only explicitly referenced in two of the episodes produced, analogues between *Dollhouse* and the fairy tale are woven throughout the series through the show's repeated verbal and visual emphases on "cursed" backstories, sleep and sleeping arrangements, and rescue. Mapping some of the more basic elements of the fairy tale — Sleeping Beauty, the curse, the thirteenth fairy, the prince — within the show is complicated by the fact that each of these elements repeatedly shifts. In the following pages I will first show the myriad ways in which *Dollhouse* doubles for *Briar Rose*, then demonstrate that, despite the complications of the set-up, the series makes a very clear argument regarding the myth: the only person who can really save Briar Rose is herself.

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[28] In the pilot, for example, Echo is imprinted with the personality of a young woman spending the weekend with a man she has just met. She is impetuous. She is in love. She has no idea who and what she really is. Matt, the client who has bought her for the weekend, is a good-looking young man celebrating his birthday by purchasing the perfect (temporary) girlfriend. When his time is up, he watches from out of sight as the personality drains from Echo's face and she heads back towards her handler, following a programmed instinct to return to the Dollhouse. A partygoer approaches him and asks him where his girlfriend is going.

Matt: "It's time for her to go. Had to get to her carriage before it turned into a pumpkin."
Partygoer: "What?"
Matt: "Stroke of midnight."
Partygoer: "Midnight?"
Matt: "End of the ball." ("Ghost")

The reference to "Cinderella" primes viewers to read Echo's "engagements" — incidents where she is imprinted with a personality at the request of a paying client — as delightful adventures. By the end of the first episode, this impression has been problematized. Echo's next engagement — as a kidnap victim turned hostage negotiator — is more nightmare than dream. The fairy tale is an illusion hiding a much more unnerving reality.

In another episode, an FBI agent named Paul Ballard tracks down human trafficking leads in an attempt to find and shut down the Dollhouse. His coworkers tease him about the fruitlessness of his obsession by comparing it to hunting the villains of "Hansel and Gretel" and "Little Red Riding Hood."

Agent: "Hey Ballard, we got a call. Couple of kids found a house in the woods all made of candy and gingerbread. Thought that might be up your alley."
Ballard: "Oh my god, that's hilarious," [He gestures to a package.] "Where'd this come from?"
Agent: "Oh granny left it. Man, her teeth looked big." ("Target")

No one "volunteers" for the Dollhouse without having experienced some sort of "curse," usually trauma. Caroline herself witnesses the death of her lover during her first encounter with Rossum. By the time she enters the Dollhouse she is obviously exhausted and worn-out; almost resigned to surrender. Of the other Dolls whose origins are revealed in the series, many have been preyed upon at their weakest moments — Victor, for example, was a combat veteran suffering from severe PTSD, November was a young mother whose toddler had just died. Yet another Doll, Sierra, is first taken on as a schizophrenic charity case, only her symptoms are later revealed to have been a fabrication of drugs forcibly given to her by a Rossum scientist. After more than a year as a Doll, Sierra is restored to her original personality and given the opportunity to confront her rapist, but the encounter goes badly, and she is forced to kill him in self-defense. Sierra, a character who originally enters the Dollhouse through another's malice, ultimately chooses to return to it of her own volition. She is unable to deal with the trauma of what has been done to her, not to mention that of killing a man, and Rossum's technology seems like an escape.

Whatever "curse" drives people into the Dollhouse — and make no mistake, the staff are as broken as the Dolls, just in different ways — the technology first takes it away and then takes its place. The series eventually reveals that even after a Doll is supposedly free of their contract, the programming is never completely erased from their mind, and they will always be subject to Rossum's control, should the corporation choose to exert it. When Victor's contract ends, he is released only to be kidnapped almost immediately by another division of Rossum for induction into their own version of the technology. Rossum itself takes on the role of the thirteenth fairy, the malevolent and

oppressive force that makes everyone fall asleep.

The Dolls are said to be "sleeping" for their time of service, but the sleep is far from the balm that they were promised. Indeed, when a Doll is considered broken beyond repair, they are sent to the eternal "sleep" of the Attic, a living computer where the Dolls' consciousness is kept in a constant fear-induced adrenaline dream-state and forced to run scenarios for Rossum. This technology exacerbates the curse. The ritual associated with the Dolls' transition to and from their Active state ties the technology even further to the curse: "Did I fall asleep?" Echo asks each time she awakens in her unprogrammed state. The technician handling the wipe is instructed to smile calmly and answer, "For a little while." Likewise one of the most frequently recurring visual motifs in *Dollhouse* is the procession of the Dolls into their sleep pods, sunken beds arranged in groups of five. Each night they file into the room, lay down in their individual pods, and are sealed inside. Drugs are pumped into the air they breathe, and, like the people in Sleeping Beauty's castle, they immediately fall asleep.

Even the staff begin to go to sleep morally and ethically, lulled by the beauty of the spa-like atmosphere they work in and the docility of the Actives they tend into believing that what Rossum does is not so very wrong. Adele de Witt, head of the Dollhouse and the woman who procures Caroline's "consent," acts as both the evil fairy and the good. Acting for Rossum, she is the explicit threat, the one forcing Caroline to sign over her life, but de Witt is also the savior, mitigating what could be a death sentence into a lesser evil. As the series progresses, the moral awakening of certain staff

members progresses along with the mental awakening of Echo.[29]

As the characters of *Dollhouse* shift personalities and allegiances constantly, it is perhaps no wonder that they shift allegorical functions as well. Any of the Dolls could be said to be Briar Rose in some sense, and I have shown that the curse of trauma they enter the Dollhouse with is soon replaced by the curse of the fragmenting and destructive technology itself. The series begins to bind these disparate doublings together to make an argument, though, when it makes the analogy explicit. In the aforementioned penultimate episode of the first season, Echo, imprinted with another personality, volunteers to read fairy tales to a group of young children. Echo chooses "Briar Rose," only to have one of the children react violently to the fairy tale. "Why didn't [the princess] run away?" the child rages. "Why did she touch that stupid spindle in the first place?" (*Dollhouse* – episode "Briar Rose").

Echo, or rather her current personality imprint, admits that she chose to read this particular story on purpose because as a child she reacted to it in the same way. The girl and Echo-of-the-moment share a history of childhood sexual abuse, and Echo hopes to teach the girl to read the myth, and her past, in a different way. "Imagine you're the prince," Echo tells the child. "Briar Rose was trapped by the curse. She couldn't free herself, so she dreamed up a rescuer to do it for her. She saves herself the only way she can. Next time you read the story, imagine you're the prince" (*Dollhouse* – episode "Briar Rose"). Whether through coincidence or in a continuance of Echo's unforeseen evolution, the personality imprint has picked up on Echo's truth. She is Caroline's dream of rescue, come to life. Echo is Caroline's prince.

[29] For at least one staff member, the process of moral awakening works in reverse. In the final episodes of the series, we discover that Boyd, Echo's primary ally throughout the series, has been a "sleeper" agent throughout and is actually the head of the Rossum Corporation and the ultimate villain.

As should be expected by now, the series complicates this identification by multiplying it. There are two men outside the Dollhouse who both see *themselves* as the prince in this tale. Paul Ballard, an FBI agent framed and disgraced by the Dollhouse when he gets too close to exposing them, comes to see Caroline as the ultimate victim. If he can save her, he succeeds in his mission, and all his losses along the way have been for something. Alpha, on the other hand, is a deranged and murderous escaped-Doll who is obsessed with Echo — not Caroline. He sees Echo as his perfect female counterpart. The ongoing storyline of the first season revolves around the efforts of these two men to "rescue" Caroline and Echo, respectively. These efforts culminate in the episode titled "Briar Rose."

Directly after Echo retells the fairy tale, Ballard finds a way into the Dollhouse and attempts to rescue her. He fails, but there is a moment when it seems that he might be the prince after all, called there quite literally on the telephone by Caroline in a previous episode. Instead, Alpha sets Ballard up and gains access to the Dollhouse in his wake.[30] Alpha then "rescues" Echo and imprints her with a personality that calls him her "prince." He forces her to experience a "composite event" in which every personality she's ever been imprinted with is simultaneously downloaded into her brain — every one except Caroline's. The result is a self-aware Doll capable of understanding her unique predicament, similar to Alpha himself. Alpha, however, is insane. He wants Echo to kill "Caroline," whose personality he imprints on another body. He wants Echo to embrace her mutability and multiplicity as a superior way of being and to see Caroline as a

[30] Alpha is so dangerous because he, like Echo, is self-aware. He is further evolved than she is, however, and can access any personality he has ever been imprinted with in order to become that person. He becomes an architect involved in the original construction of the Dollhouse in order to gain Ballard's trust as they break into the Dollhouse, then reverts to his own personality once they are both inside.

betrayer. To Alpha, himself a Doll, Echo is not Caroline's rescuer, but her victim.

"She abandoned you to the monsters while she went to sleep," Alpha argues. "She betrayed you" (*Dollhouse* – episode "Omega"). Echo, however, is set on her role as rescuer. Whereas Alpha's original personality is revealed to have been a psychopathic killer — Rossum apparently used prisoners for its early experiments — Caroline was always a crusader. In keeping with her original spirit, Echo chooses to save Caroline. "I'm just the porch light," she tells her "self." "I'm keeping house while you're gone" (*Dollhouse* – episode "Omega"). But there is a part of Echo that is angry at Caroline. Alpha is right. Echo is as much Briar Rose as the prince. She is the victim of circumstances beyond her control, choices others made for her. She pays the price for another's offense, and she has been abandoned to her fate by one who should have protected her.

Caroline's reaction to Echo's anger reinforces the theory that her surrender to Rossum was as much a result of exhaustion and trauma as blackmail — she argues weakly that she signed a contract and cannot back out now. Echo persuades Caroline that the Dolls are not just asleep, as she was promised, they are mind-wiped slaves, prostituted at their masters' whims. Yes, Caroline signed a contract allowing the Rossum Corporation to do this thing to "them," but as the fairy tale parallel makes clear, when the alternative is death, the invocation of "choice" is something of a joke. A curse is a curse.

Alpha's response to Echo's defiance is to kill the random body currently hosting Caroline's personality. The subsequent battle revolves around the "wedge" (presumably a portable hard-drive) holding Caroline's imprint. This time Ballard, not Echo, saves "her." Lest this final act suggest that Paul Ballard could be Caroline's prince after all, at the

conclusion of the "Briar Rose" arc, he agrees to become Echo's handler at the Dollhouse in order to help her take the House down from the inside. From that point on he is a helper character. By the end of the series, his character exists only as another personality imprint hosted within Echo's mind. Would-be prince and princess literally inhabit the same body, with Echo in control.

In the final scene of "Omega," the second episode in the explicit "Briar Rose" arc, Echo has presumably been wiped clean and reincorporated into the House in her Doll state, however, as the screen slides shut over her, the camera captures a close-up of her face as she whispers the one word guaranteed to prove she remembers her mission: "Caroline." As the series progresses, Echo evolves into a fully-realized human being in her own right, capable of accessing any personality she has ever been imprinted with, but always in control of them. She even questions whether Caroline deserves to have her body back, if that would mean Echo's own destruction. Ultimately, she decides to incorporate Caroline into her multiple selves, becoming in truth both Briar Rose and the "prince" — a Sleeping Beauty who wakes herself, and everyone else in the castle, up.

The cases in comparison

Most feminist readings of the "Briar Rose" tale point negatively to the main character's passivity, but when the above case studies are read side by side what emerges is a far richer intertextual commentary on trauma, sexual violation, ignorance, and knowledge. The passivity of the heroine – her helplessness against the curse – is only one factor in the tale's mythic resonance, and may even be a part of its appeal as a powerful narrative resource for integrating experiences of trauma into the story of a life.

Sexton's poem, *Dollhouse,* and Rice's trilogy utilize the framework of Sleeping

Beauty's curse to explore sexual violation and the ambiguity of agency. This frame bridges the gap between psychological and social integration processes by situating the individual experiences of the characters within the common cultural language of the myth. In each of these cases Briar Rose is raped. This element has its roots in the fairy tale – in Basile's version, for example, the prince rapes the sleeping princess, and she becomes pregnant with twins. She doesn't wake up until one of her children bites her finger while trying to nurse. The varying circumstances under which the characters are assaulted are in some ways as complicated as the different meanings the characters draw from them. Still, parts of the final stanza of Sexton's poem could refer just as easily to the plight of Rossum's Dolls or Beauty and her fellow slaves; even, to an extent, to Gemma. All are helpless for a time. All experience bodily violation, whether the perpetrators are clients, sexual sadists, parents, or Nazis. All frame what happened to them in terms of the myth.

> I was abandoned.
> That much I know.
> I was forced backward.
> I was forced forward.
> I was passed hand to hand
> like a bowl of fruit.
> Each night I am nailed into place
> and I forget who I am. (Sexton, "Briar" 294)

In Sexton's poem, the narrator unfortunately remains trapped in the moment of rape. For her, sleep is not the curse so much as waking to her father bending over her, and she never seems to move beyond it. Instead, she keeps trying to go backward, an

ultimately fruitless pursuit. The Dolls, on the other hand, are often programmed to be in love with their clients, so they do not experience their sexual activities as rape in the moment. Since they usually forget the events of an engagement directly after it ends, the staff of the Dollhouse reasons that no harm has been done. The flaws in this logic are particularly evident when any of the Actives become aware of what their bodies have done. Lack of memory does not prevent the "real" self from experiences of violation. When the lead programmer discovers Sierra's backstory and attempts to expose her rapist, for example, Rossum orders him to program her to fall in love with her rapist permanently and to hand her over. Faced with the explicitly immoral order, the programmer restores her memories instead. When Sierra confronts her abuser, the resulting conversation reveals the full extent to which she has been raped in mind as well as body. The rapist has an entire drawer full of pictures of her from all of the previous occasions he has had her programmed to adore him. Just because she does not remember those times, just because she was not knowingly suffering when she was with him, does not mean that she is safe from being violated by the knowledge of them.

Another former Doll, November, reacts with similar horror when she is shown pictures of herself sexually involved with Paul Ballard. The fact that Ballard had no idea that she was a Doll does not reduce November's sense of violation at seeing her body do things she did not will it to do. She is even more horrified when she realizes that she has killed people in her time as a Doll. That the man she killed was attempting to rape her does not negate the fact that in a real sense the people who programmed her to kill him were raping her as well, violating the link between her body and her will. Rossum's philosophy seems to have been fairly simple: ignorance is bliss. For the Dolls, like

Sexton's narrator, it is waking to knowledge that is most dangerous. However, for the Dolls, traumatic knowledge and self-knowledge are in many ways the same thing. Awareness of their suffering goes hand-in-hand with awareness of themselves as individuals. Taking responsibility for their lives by again inhabiting their bodies fully restores them to agency. Sierra's initial desire to return to Doll-state after killing her rapist demonstrates how difficult the return to consciousness can be. Eventually, she chooses to keep her memories. Sexton's narrator never quite gets there.

Gemma also has a self-knowledge deficit. She is unable to fully articulate the trauma of being gassed at Chelmno, and in fact may not even remember the truth of what happened, however, by situating her experiences during the Holocaust as the curse of an evil fairy, she is able to make sense of a depth of malevolence she cannot consciously face. More importantly, in terms of her continued functioning, she is able to confine that evil to a particular place and time, to a one-time only curse. In order to walk through the world without fear, Gemma needs her current life, her daughter's and granddaughters' lives, to take place in the happily ever after. For Gemma, containing the Holocaust within the bounds of an already-defeated curse wards against the senselessness of the Nazis' evil popping up in her present. She traps part of herself in the story, but gives her granddaughter the clues Becca needs to piece together the truth and release her. Though Gemma cannot speak explicitly of what happened to her, she is still able to give Becca the parts of her history that most directly affect why Gemma has never discussed Becca's grandfather. By making Becca promise to find the castle, the prince and the maker of (evil) spells, she sends Becca on the journey to self-knowledge that Gemma is no longer strong enough to face. Gemma herself never fully wakes.

Whereas in Sexton's poem, *Dollhouse,* and Yolen's novel, the characters invoke the fairy tale consciously, in the *Beauty* trilogy, it simply exists as factual backstory to show that there is no consciousness outside the fantasy that follows the tale, but rather only deeper immersion within it. The curse becomes an avenue to knowledge. Thus even when Beauty returns home, she remains in a world in which service in the Queen's kingdom is a common and much-admired activity for her peer group. She has not woken to an external world of shame and regret, but rather to an internal awareness of her own desires.

In *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, Angela Carter claims, "Myth deals in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances. In no area is this more true than in that of relations between the sexes" (5-6). Though she never goes so far as to engage in myth theory, Carter's views speak less to myth in the religious sense of Eliade's eternal return and more to the secular cynicism of Barthes' semiology. She goes on to argue that all pornography derives "directly from myth, [thus] it follows that [pornography's] heroes and heroines, from the most gross to the most sophisticated, are mythic abstractions.… Any glimpse of a real man or a real woman is absent from these representations of the archetypal male and female" (Carter, *Sadeian* 6).

> Although the erotic relationship may seem to exist freely, on its own terms, among the distorted social relationships of a bourgeois society, it is, in fact, the most self-conscious of all human relationships, a direct confrontation of two beings whose actions in the bed are wholly determined by their acts when they are out of it. … We do not go to bed in simple pairs; even if we choose not to refer to them, we still drag there with us the cultural impedimenta of our social class, our parents' lives, our bank balances, our sexual and emotional

> expectations, our whole biographies — all the bits and pieces of our unique existences. (Carter, *Sadeian* 9)

Rice complicates this claim by blurring the implied boundaries between society and the sexual self. Beauty's world is wholly pornographic. She is never, metaphorically, "out" of bed. Her entire existence is reduced to a constant state of unconsummatable desire.

Carter further argues,

> The function of plot in a pornographic narrative is always the same. It exists purely to provide as many opportunities as possible for the sexual act to take place. There is no room here for tension or the unexpected. We know what is going to happen; that is why we are reading the book. Characterisation is necessarily limited by the formal necessity for the actors to fuck as frequently and as ingeniously as possible. But they do not do so because they are continually consumed by desire; the free expression of desire is as alien to pornography as it is to marriage. In pornography, both men and women fuck because to fuck is their raison d'etre. It is their life work. (*Sadeian* 12-13)

The fairy tale frame is implicitly invoked in the *Beauty* trilogy to transform sex from a physical act into a metaphysical imperative, an ontological state where perpetual all-consuming desire is more significant than consummation. How does one transform an act or even a goal into a state of being? The fairy tale opening assures readers that in this world the fantasy is *all there is.* Rice viewed the *Beauty* trilogy as a form of mystical writing.

> I believe the sexual side of our nature is powerfully mysterious and not to be despised, and I wish more people would write true sex scenes rather than writing according to convention. There are moments in the Roquelaure books where the most profound feelings about exposure and sexual revelation are being examined.

> I experience them as a gradual transcendence and opening up. You get out of yourself, you're turned into something else, *you become the thing that is happening to you.* Only after I wrote those books did I come to see the connection between the erotic and the supernatural. … It was part and parcel of the sexual revolution, the knowledge that sex was spiritual. We've lost the intellectual edge of that in the dreary era of censorship and repression. Unfortunately, feminism has played a very large role in that because of the inability of some women to understand that there are all kinds of feminine experiences. (Ramsland 49-50 - emphasis mine)

Whereas Carter denies the capacity of pornography to include any tension other than the drive to climax, the slaves of Rice's fantasy are driven by something more. They desire spiritual transcendence. They wish to be emptied out, made into vessels for the will of their masters. Rice argues, "In the midst of the worst humiliations… they can attain the feeling of freedom and power because they went through with it. It's similar to the saints and the mystics. Their bodies were no longer important. They transcended the physical to become one with Christ" (Ramsland 37-38). Becca (acting as Gemma's proxy), Sexton's narrator, Echo, and Beauty all find their fairy tale experiences lead to a more complicated understanding of the relationship between body and mind. All of them locate the moment of awakening as a moment of rupture between ignorance and understanding. Perhaps Sleeping Beauty's ignorance, rather than her passivity is the more accurate focus of feminist resistance. In mimetic retellings such as Disney's film, Aurora is kept ignorant of the forces arrayed against her. She does not fight them because she does not know about them. In these retellings, though, Briar Rose actively pursues knowledge, often at greater cost than a hundred years sleep. Sexton's narrator acknowledges her father

leaning over her; Gemma sends her granddaughter on a quest to face the truth of Chelmno. Echo plays a dangerous game of strategy and concealment within the Dollhouse as she struggles to find a way to rescue Caroline. Beauty forsakes her prince in pursuit of more brutal pleasures, choosing what kind of submission suits *her*. If some of these choices are disturbing, at least their shared teleos is self-knowledge.

Conclusions

If there is a common factor in the above four cases beyond the fact that *Briar Rose* is language stolen and redirected towards revealing some greater truth, it is the value of the myth of *Briar Rose* for communicating bodily violation. Gemma steals the language of *Briar Rose* to contain the brutality of genocidal violence, of malevolence directed at one simply for being born. Read through Beres and White, the social worker and narrative psychologist discussed in chapter one, Gemma's obsession with narrating her life as a fairy tale is an effort to take control of her story. Drawing on myth, she parallels her past to the story that best allows her to imagine a viable future. For all that Gemma is unable to completely contain her own trauma in the story — it leaks out in the frequency with which she retells and reinforces it — she does manage to move on, to have a life beyond the tale. She has an ending. Sexton's narrator never gets to happily ever after. She is stuck in a loop where the curse is not going to sleep but rather facing what might be there upon waking. The final despairing lines of the poem "God help—/ this life after death?" (Sexton, "Briar" 294). suggest that the narrator has not solace. The contrast between the two narrators — one dead of old age with her beloved granddaughter by her side, the other dead in life — suggests that myth may be most useful as a narrative resource for integrating violation into the story of a life when the

narrator engages in a process of dynamic revision, turning the myth to her own purpose. Gemma invokes the myth to distance herself from her past and focus on a present that is located in happily-ever-after; Sexton's narrator, unfortunately, is locked in Briar Rose's supposed passivity, unable to see a way to wake from the curse, when her curse is waking itself.

The contrast between Gemma/Becca's tale and Sexton's narrator's reinforces Beres' conclusions that simply identifying with a common story is not necessarily a positive or empowering agential move. Rather, one must alter the myth, or alter one's identifications within the myth, in proactive ways. This imaginative exercise is promoted explicitly within at least one text, when Echo suggests to the traumatized child she counsels,

> Echo: "Hey, you know the story?"
>
> Susan: "Yeah."
>
> Echo: "Read it again, okay? But this time, think of yourself as the prince."
>
> Susan: "I didn't save anyone."
>
> Echo: "Hey, remember what you said. The prince shows up at the last minute, he takes all the credit — that means Briar Rose was trapped all that time, sleeping and dreaming of getting out. The prince was her dream. She made him. She made him fight to get her out. [She points at Susan.] Prince."
>
> Susan: "The prince was a boy."
>
> Echo: "Yeah, but that's not his fault." (*Dollhouse* – episode "Briar Rose")

What may be most significant about these iterations of the myth of Briar Rose in terms of their ongoing feminist resonances is their implicit argument for the inexorability of fate. For a story to be a part of the Sleeping Beauty myth-group, the curse cannot be

avoided.[31] The logic of the tale will out. There is a structure that must be maintained. One event follows another. The story is set. While the perceived helplessness of the tale's heroine can be read as a didactic model teaching women to wait for male rescuers, it can and is also frequently invoked as a rebellious commentary on the inevitability of powerlessness in a power-inundated world. More importantly, the dynamic ways in which the myth is subsequently revised can map strategies for survivors to incorporate trauma as discrete events in a larger, triumphant story. Thus, Gemma/Becca find the magic in survival, Echo rescues herself, Beauty eroticizes non-sexist subjugation and embraces and pursues her own transgressive desires; even Sexton's narrator finds a voice to speak openly about the trauma of being unable to wake to a better world.

White and Beres claim that storytelling is integral to processing experience and integrating it into a communicable conception of self. I want to suggest that myth is a particularly powerful narrative resource upon which to draw for this process, and that the myth of "Briar Rose," in particular, resonates for narrating bodily trauma. The story about the story — the pool of meanings from which storytellers draw — functions as a filter for universalizing, a guarantor of eventual triumph, and a vehicle for transmitting unbearable truths. Whether the curse be genocide, rape, or slavery, it is a curse. It is undeserved. It can be transmuted. Bad things will happen, but they are not the end of the story. If one lives to tell the tale, one lives.

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[31] Even in versions of the tale in which Briar Rose somehow escapes – such as Sherry Tepper's novel *Beauty* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) – an explicitly feminist retelling in which Sleeping Beauty escapes the curse and journeys through time – someone else takes her place.

CHAPTER THREE: BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

We have seen that while Sleeping Beauty is frequently derided as the most passive of fairy tale heroines, authors and characters are able to utilize the symbolism of her curse and long sleep in order to contain traumatic experience. Through proactive revision of the myth, some of them are even able to turn *Sleeping Beauty* into a tale of triumph. In my study of *Beauty and the Beast*, I interrogate a slightly different dynamic. Along with asking what the myth can do for the author/producers, I also explore what the author/producers seek to do for the myth. Once someone's told the story once, why do it again?

My reading of *Sleeping Beauty* suggests that proactive revisions of a myth allow the author to make the myth more personal to their characters and, occasionally, themselves. When I turned to examining successive retellings of *Beauty and the Beast* by the same authors/producers, my primary project was to interrogate what happens to identification with the myth over time. I chose as case studies two short stories, two fantasy novels, and two seasons of a reality television series. The struggle that emerges in these cases is two-fold. Within the myth, the authors/producers surround transformation with questions about truth and perception until (re)vision becomes significant as both an extra-textual and intra-textual act. The characters' perceptions of each other, the audience's perceptions of the characters, and the author/producers' perceptions of the myth itself all come into question. The case studies that follow suggest that while one-off revision may act to contain or communicate individual experiences, successive revisions act to illuminate and frequently shift some aspect of the myth itself.

The myth of Beauty and the Beast

Before going into the individual cases and how they showcase this dynamic, let us first situate the myth each case addresses, *Beauty and the Beast.* Animal groom and bride stories appear in the folklore of India, Europe, Central Asia and Africa (Hearne 2). *Beauty and the Beast* is perhaps the most famous of these to English-speaking audiences. Indeed, the fairy tale has become one of the most well-known in Western popular culture. Intriguingly, *Beauty and the Beast* is one of the few classic tales that emphasizes the heroine's agency. Against her father's will, Beauty takes his place as hostage to a mysterious and presumably quite dangerous Beast. The Beast makes her mistress of his house, treats her kindly, and proposes nightly, but respects her refusal. Beauty leaves the Beast briefly to care for her ill father, but returns because she has grown to love her former captor. Beauty's love for the Beast breaks his curse and transforms him into a handsome prince. They marry and live happily ever after.

While Beauty's initial role in the story seems to be as the sacrificed daughter, a closer examination of the story's turning points reveals that she repeatedly chooses her own fate. She insists on going to the Beast in her father's place because of her personal sense of honor — the debt is hers because she asked her father for a rose. She says no to the Beast's proposals because she neither loves nor desires him. She begs leave to care for her father because she *does* care for her family. She returns to the Beast because she has given him her promise, but she goes beyond obligation to desire when she tells him she loves him and wants to marry him.

In *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale,* Betsy Hearne notes, "The Beast assumes a passive role and Beauty an active one. The Beast basically sits around waiting to be rescued by the handsome princess as soon as she loosens her ties

with home and family, especially her father (in modern coinage, resolves her oedipal dilemma)" (16). The tale is, if not distinct, than certainly unusual, in its focus on such a willful heroine. However, social worker Laura Beres troubles this optimistic reading when she points out that Beauty's initial relationship with the Beast is still one in which he is her captor. This premise sets up a potentially disturbing dynamic for women who invest the tale with identificatory significance. Beres writes,

> As opposed to the general perception of abused women as being passive and victim-like, my experience of abused women has been that they are actively engaged in attempting to understand and improve their situations. My concern is that they find popular cultural texts that may reinforce, rather than challenge, their positions within abusive relationships. (195)

Beres goes on to cite pop-psychology texts elevating the romantic redemption-narrative in *Beauty and the Beast*, as well as her own interactions with patients, to argue that the fairy tale, particularly in its 1991 Disney film incarnation, provides a narrative framework through which abused women can conceive of themselves as the potential saviors of their violent male lovers, if only the women can love the men as they are and thus free them from the "curse" of their rage (199). Beres's concern is that abused women who identify strongly with Beauty focus their efforts on saving their partners instead of leaving them.

As noted in previous chapters, Beres's article prompted me to delve further into the question of identification with myth. However, Beres's reading of *Beauty and the Beast* speaks to its reception by a very particular audience. I draw attention to her concerns now only to nuance Hearne's more positive reading and open up a broader range of interpretations as we delve into the mythic reservoir comprising some of the

most popular literary and popular culture invocations of "Beauty and the Beast."

"Beauty and the Beast" (tale-type 425C) first enters the literary tradition under its current title, or rather, under the French translation, "La Belle et la Bête," in a collection authored by Madame Gabrielle de Villeneuve in 1740 (Hearne 21). Villeneuve's version is 187 pages long and includes a complex back-story through which it is eventually revealed that Beauty and the Beast are first cousins through his mother and her father. It was followed in 1756 by a much shorter and ultimately more popular version authored by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. I shall summarize Beaumont's version in detail as subsequent variants generally take it as their source.

Beauty grows up the favored youngest daughter of a rich merchant. Her two elder sisters are arrogant and jealous of Beauty's looks and kindness. They play at being socialites and dismiss Beauty's bookish tendencies. When the merchant unexpectedly loses his fortune, the elder girls' suitors disappear. Beauty still has several gentlemen who want to marry her, but she refuses them in order to stay with her father through the family's coming exile to the country. The merchant and his sons make a living farming while Beauty takes care of the house and her sisters loll about in self-pity. When the merchant gets word that one of his lost ships has come to port, he returns to town by himself. The elder girls request all sorts of expensive gifts from his trip. Not wanting to make her sisters look bad, but also not eager to add to her father's burden, Beauty requests only a rose.

The merchant's trip goes badly, and he returns poorer than before. On his way back he gets lost in a snowstorm and stumbles upon an enchanted palace. No host appears, but the merchant finds a meal laid out for him and a chamber prepared. All goes

well until he goes to leave the next morning. Assuming that his kind host will not mind the loss, he takes a rose.

The Beast appears and sentences the merchant to death for stealing, but says he will accept the sacrifice of one of the merchant's daughters as a substitute. The Beast sends the merchant home laden with riches and bids him or one of the daughters to return in three months. The merchant intends to return himself after explaining the situation to his children, but Beauty insists that the price is hers to pay as the rose was her gift. Her sisters rejoice at her bad fortune, while her father and brothers weep, but Beauty will not be dissuaded.

At the palace, Beauty dreams of a beautiful woman who praises her selflessness, and she quickly realizes that the Beast has no intention of harming her. She is mistress of the palace. Magic grants her every desire as soon as she utters it. The Beast is sensible, though not clever, and they have many fine conversations over dinner. Each night he proposes, and she refuses him because of his ugliness. Eventually he asks her simply to promise never to leave him, but she says she will die of grief if she never sees her father again, so the Beast agrees to let her go, although he will die of grief if she leaves him. This alternative doesn't suit Beauty either, so they agree that she will only go for a week.

Beauty's jealous sisters conspire to make her break her promise to return within a week, but on the tenth day Beauty dreams the Beast is dying and realizes at last that she loves him. She returns to the palace via magic and finds the Beast near death in the garden. Her declaration of love and acceptance of his proposal transform the Beast into a handsome and intelligent Prince. The beautiful woman from Beauty's dreams turns out to be a fairy. The fairy reunites Beauty with her father and brothers, curses Beauty's wicked

sisters and returns all of them to the Beast/Prince's kingdom, where Beauty and her husband live happily ever after.

Though other fairy tale authors, including Charles Perrault, also wrote versions of the tale, Beaumont's remained definitive until, in 1946, French filmmaker Jean Cocteau adapted it for the screen, creating *La belle et la bête,* one of the most famous fantasy films of all time. Where a writer might use descriptive language, Cocteau uses casting, camera angles and movement and editing in order to make focus his audience's attention on particular aspects of the myth. Cocteau's storyline follows Beaumont's story in most respects, including a scene in which the wicked sisters rub their eyes with onions in order to fake tears. However, Cocteau reduces the number of Beauty's brothers to one and gives him a profligate best friend, Avenant, who wants to marry Beauty himself. Avenant is played by the same actor who stars as both Beast and Prince. In Beaumont, the narrator emphasizes Beauty's virtue in contrast to her sisters. Cocteau's casting strategy establishes a parallel set of dualisms between the Beast's kindness and Avenant's selfishness. At the climax of the film, Avenant conspires with Beauty's siblings to gain access to the Beast's palace and steal his treasure. Avenant supposedly intends to kill the Beast in order to free Beauty from the monster's magical influence so Avenant can marry her himself, but once on the palace grounds, he gets distracted by the treasure. Just as Belle's love turns the Beast into a handsome prince, Avenant's greed turns him into a Beast in the moments before he falls to his death. The surrealist imagery of the film – mysterious arms extend from the walls to hold torches to light Belle's way or open doors for her; the palace statues' eyes blink and move, observing the characters' actions – lends it a dreamlike, internal quality. Belle admits to loving both Avenant and the Beast, but

only the Beast respects her feelings and priorities and thus wins her heart.

The casting of Jean Marais as the self-centered rake, the kind-hearted Beast, and the handsome Prince shines a light on the central ambiguity of the *Beauty and the Beast* myth, which nominally claims that beauty and virtue are not the same and yet closes with a transformation implying they should be. In fact, the shot for shot composition of the dual transformations could not make this latter argument more clear. After Belle has declared her love for the Beast, the Beast appears to die. As his eyes roll back in his head, we cut to an establishing shot of Avenant and Belle's brother as they try to steal the Beast's treasure. Avenant breaks the glass on the ceiling of the treasure chamber and bids the brother to lower him in by the hands. "Glass is just glass," Avenant tells the brother scornfully, implying a worldview in which appearance and reality are the same (*La belle et la bête*). The next cut is to a full shot of the two men arguing over Avenant's plan. The camera begins to push in just as the brother begins to lower Avenant into the chamber. The camera motion continues even as the shot changes to a full shot of a statue of a huntress within the chamber. The statue's head begins to turn. A brief cut to a wide low-angle shot encompassing both statue and the would-be thieves scrambling overhead establishes the spatial relationship within the treasure chamber, then the scene cuts back to a medium-shot pushing in on the huntress as she aims her bow and arrow at the oblivious intruders. There is another cut to a medium close up from behind as the arrow hits Avenant's back as he hangs through the hole in the ceiling.

What follows are steady-paced, rhythmic cuts from a close up of Avenant's face as he screams in agony to a close up of the brother's face trembling with fear, back to the close up of Avenant as his now-still face ripples and transforms into that of the Beast,

then a close up of their clasped hands as the brother lets go, then a slightly wider shot of the vines ripping away from the walls as Avenant falls, and finally a full shot of Avenant's beastly body falling to the ground. The continual camera movement across different shots lends a sense of inexorability or inevitability to Avenant's actions. We are seeing into him in this scene, and he is becoming what he is inside. The rhythm ups the tension and speeds viewers past the fact that we are seeing Avenant's transformation instead of the Beasts. Just as Avenant hits, the scene changes again to a full shot of Belle stumbling away as if in horror at what has just happened. Belle's reaction further blurs the lines between the two scenes; however, she is reacting to the offscreen transformation of the Beast. A handsome Prince who looks just like Avenant flows to his feet before her. Belle cries out for the Beast, but the Prince tells her, "Love can turn a man into a beast. But love can also make an ugly man handsome" (*La belle et la bête*).

On the surface, this sequence seems to suggest that such is what has just occurred; however, when the Prince goes to touch Belle, she recoils slightly. He worries that she misses his ugliness, but it is his resemblance to Avenant that bothers her. When the Prince asks her if she loved this other man, she says yes, but Avenant never knew. Does all this doubling suggest that Belle's reward for making the right choice is to get both Avenant's beauty and the Beast's heart? Belle's discomfort seems to suggest otherwise. Will the Prince's new face lead him to emulate Avenant in other ways now that the curse is broken? Certainly that tension is there, though unremarked. Perhaps the only unambiguous part of this ending is Belle's ambivalence about the whole thing. When the Prince asks her if the resemblance bothers her, she replies first yes, than no. When he asks her if she is happy, she says only, "I'll have to get used to it" (*La belle et la bête*). A

final cut to a shot of Avenant's beastly corpse before Belle and the Prince fly off to their happy ending interjects a jarring note into these proceedings. Belle has just admitted to loving Avenant, who she believes safe at home. There is an unsettling quality to her ignorance of his death, especially since he now wears the beloved face of her Beast. It reminds the audience of the continued presence of secrets and layers to the characters' perceptions even after all has been nominally revealed. These ambiguities are only heightened when one includes the extra-textual knowledge that Cocteau and Marais were themselves lovers as well as creative collaborators (Williams). The film's thematic statements about love as a way of knowing or seeing the beloved thus gain an even more idiosyncratic resonance.

Cocteau's film is arguably the most significant retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* since Beaumont's, in part because it continues to have such a powerful influence on those who see it. The auteur qualities of its production are well documented — Cocteau notoriously oversaw every aspect of the film's construction (Amberg ix). Evidence for the film's long-standing reach beyond the art cinema crowd may be seen in popular songwriter Stevie Nicks's multiple recordings of her song "Beauty and the Beast," a tribute to the film.[32] Traditionally, Cocteau's film plays in the background when Nicks sings the song in concert, further widening the influence of the film, as well as framing it for audience members. Nicks' lyrics pivot on Belle's claim in the film that she is the monster, not the Beast. The refrain asks, "Who is the Beauty, who the Beast?" As the song continues, the lyrics change to "Who is the Beauty? Where is my Beast? There is no Beauty without my Beast." The song's multiple points of identification with the myth,

[32] Recordings of the song appears on *The Wild Heart* (Modern Records, 1983), *Timespace – The Best of Stevie Nicks* (Modern Records, 1991) *Enchanted* (Atlantic Records, 1998), *The Soundstage Sessions* (Reprise/WEA, 2009).

similar to Cocteau's casting choices, hearken back to the type of individualistic revision discussed in the last chapter. These retellings situate themselves within the mythic tradition of the fairy tale, but have a personal quality to them, reflecting the romantic concerns of their "authors" and the auteur style of their production.

Ironically, Cocteau's film's influence reaches its pinnacle in its effect on and subsequent displacement as the most famous film retelling by the Walt Disney Co's 1991 animated film, *Beauty and the Beast.* Disney's film substitutes a cast of talking household objects — a teakettle and a candelabrum to name a few — for the invisible servants of Beaumont's tale. Disney's Belle is an only child, a beautiful girl who loves to read and longs for adventure; however, she is pursued by a handsome suitor, Gaston, whose profligate ways are reminiscent of Cocteau's Avenant. Though Disney's film now rivals Cocteau's as the most recognizable visual representation of the tale onscreen – it has even been adapted into a successful Broadway musical – the above genealogy of the tale suggests that *Beauty and the Beast* achieved mythic status in popular culture decades earlier.

The mythic reservoir that is *Beauty and the Beast* in popular culture extends far beyond the versions I have glossed so far. For example, the 1980s included a television drama where Beauty was an Assistant District Attorney in New York City and the Beast was a mutant living underground. The Broadway musical played for years (Haune). Picture books, animated films, novelized retellings, etc., abound. However, Beaumont, Cocteau, and Disney remain among the most influential versions for English speakers, and the central question of this chapter is what happens when the same authors/producers engage with one myth *multiple* times. Having established the range and influence of

Beauty and the Beast, let us know turn to that question.

The case studies

The case studies that follow juxtapose multiple engagements with "Beauty and the Beast" by the same authors or producers. Angela Carter retells the tale in a fairly straightforward fashion in her short story, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon." In "The Tiger's Bride," however, she transforms the myth into an erotic commentary on patriarchy's oppression of both women and beasts. Robin McKinley likewise first retells the tale with minimal alteration in her novel *Beauty* and then returns to it again in *Rose Daughter* in order to imbue it with a more mature understanding of the nature of happily ever after. The producers of the reality television series *Beauty and the Geek* attempt to associate their program with *Beauty and the Beast's* myth of desirable transformation, but as the series progresses this rhetoric becomes increasingly superficial. At the heart of each of these retellings is a statement about perception, an insight into the link between seeing and being seen, knowing and being known.

Case 1: The stories of Angela Carter

In 1979, Angela Carter published *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* a collection of fairy tales retold. Within the collection appear two back-to-back retellings of *Beauty and the Beast.* The first, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," is a fairly straightforward retelling, while the second "The Tiger's Bride" takes greater liberty with the source material. Together, these two retellings create space for an anti-essentialist position in a myth that traditionally relies on the reveal of an essential self.

Carter's fiction reflects a near obsession with deconstructing female sexuality within heterosexual relationships in patriarchal society. As you may recall from the

previous chapter, in *The Sadeian Woman,* she expresses some rather provocative views on the power of pornography to illuminate social mores. Jessica Tiffin notes in *Marvelous Geometry: Narrative and Metafiction in Modern Fairy Tale* that early feminist criticism takes "issue with Carter's provocative treatment of female sexuality and argue[s] that the reactionary power of either fairy tale or pornography is sufficient to warp and flaw any real attempt at establishing female subjectivity or empowerment within its structures" (69). In other words, whatever Carter's intentions, for many feminists, Carter's stubborn engagement with fundamentally flawed forms will always compromise her work.

Later critics, Tiffin among them, challenge these assumptions from a postmodernist position privileging theories of deconstruction and gender performativity. Robert Clark, a critic of the first school, contends that "in assuming an ideology that is so universally powerful [Carter] also seems to anticipate her writing's subjection to it" (156). Clark implicitly assumes that no invocation of myth can have a revolutionary effect. Tiffin, however, contends that Clark misses Carter's "fiercely critical approach to structure, her invocation of system only in order to break it down, as well as the rootedness of her writing in a powerful awareness of historicity and its implication in structures of meaning" (70). The debate between these two camps encapsulates controversies in both feminist and myth studies — is it ever possible to critique ideology from within? Conversely, is it ever possible to critique ideology from without?

Others have done a thorough job of explicating and critiquing the narrative complexity of Carter's work,[33] My own interest in Carter lies in the way her retellings

[33] I highly recommend both Tiffin and Bacchilega for those interested in exploring this topic further.

deconstruct the notion of the self at the center of the myth of *Beauty and the Beast.* Beaumont's climactic transformation scene, where the Beast is revealed as a handsome prince whose intellect and good looks were stolen from him by a curse, suggests that each person has a core nature that can be found if one looks hard enough. Carter troubles this notion by shifting her emphasis from objective reality to point of view. In "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," the Beast's climactic transformation is coded more as a shift in Beauty's perceptions than any fairy tale magic. In "The Tiger's Bride," the layers of masks and artifice worn by all the characters are so dense that any and all revelations become questionable.

The plot of "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" relies heavily on Beaumont's tale. Beauty's father seeks shelter at a nearby estate when his car breaks down during a snowstorm. The house is eerie in its stillness, its obvious wealth, and its perfect state of readiness for meeting his immediate needs. A spaniel guides him around. Upon his departure, he steals a rose. The Beast appears, enraged at the theft, but lets the old man go with a dinner invitation that includes Beauty. At dinner, the Beast/Mr. Lyon promises to lend his influence to helping Beauty's father regain the family fortune and invites Beauty to stay with him while her father returns to London. By the time Beauty leaves, she has come to enjoy the Beast's company, and she promises to visit before the end of winter. However, once in the city, Beauty forgets her promise. One day the spaniel claws at her door, and Beauty knows the Beast is dying. Stricken, she takes the next train out of the city. Eventually she finds Mr. Lyon dying in the attic. As she cries over him, she sees that he is just a brutish, but noble-looking man, not really a beast at all. The story ends with the image of them some time later, married, strolling through the garden with the now

elderly spaniel nearby.

Tiffin argues that Carter's "return to the traditional third-person voice of fairy tale signals very clearly the lack of subjectivity of the protagonist, the inadequacy of this pale vision which is so trapped within the symbolic system of virtue, and which so dramatically de-fangs the erotic potential of the beast-symbol" (92). She both praises and disdains the chaste romance of "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" as detailing the "flavorless, colorless upshot of the eradication of desire" that Carter's critics would prefer (77). This reading, while persuasive, elides the story's subtle thematic continuities with "The Tiger's Bride," particularly with regard to the mutability of characters' perceptions of themselves and each other.

Mired down in caring what other people will think, neither Beauty nor her father sees Mr. Lyon clearly. Though Mr. Lyon's appearance suggests beastliness, the story's climactic transformation takes place in Beauty's perceptions more clearly than in his body. This resolution, coupled with Beauty's near-transformation in the city, suggests the near-impossibility of ever seeing another person without a filter of expectation and projection. The story is told in fluctuating points of view, but mostly in third person, further distancing the reader from any conception of the "true" self of the characters.

Readers' initial view of Mr. Lyon's beastliness is filtered through Beauty's father's perceptions of his own criminality.

> The being who now confronted Beauty's father seemed to him, in his confusion, vaster than the house he owned, ponderous yet swift, and the moonlight glittered on his great, mazy head of hair, on the eyes green as agate, on the golden hairs of the great paws that grasped his shoulders to that their claws pierced the sheepskin as he shook him like an angry child shakes a doll. (Carter, "Courtship" 146)

The father has thus far partaken of his mysterious host's kindness with wonder, but seems to feel no sense of obligation in return. Rather, all his focus is on Beauty's reaction to the news of their continued financial ruin. He steals the rose for her out of love, but his focus on the gift implies it is not just apology but distraction. Lyon's reaction to him cannot be likewise positively affected. Rather, to Lyon, the father is already a thief as well as an ingrate. Thus, Lyon's monstrosity perhaps more truthfully reflects the father's views of himself in that moment than any reality of Mr. Lyon's appearance. Cristina Bacchilega has pointed out the similarities between Beauty's father's description and a door knocker he noticed earlier at the evening (93) "in the shape of a lion's head, with a ring through the nose… not, as he had thought at first, made of brass, but, instead, of gold" (Carter, "Courtship" 145). "He saw the lion's eyes were made of agate" (Carter, "Courtship" 146). Beauty's father's second description of his host, given after Lyon has named himself a Beast and Beauty's father a Thief, is even more fantastical. Instead of a mazy head of hair, the Beast now has the "head of a lion; mane and mighty paws of a lion; he reared on his hind legs like an angry lion yet wore a smoking jacket of dull red brocade and was the owner of that lovely house and the low hills that cupped it" (Carter, "Courtship" 147). Beauty's father's descriptions of the Beast's animality increase in relation to his fear.

This escalation in hyperbole is not even our first cue as readers that the characters' perceptions may not be entirely trusted. Though there is ample evidence that magic exists in this world — doors open by themselves in Lyon's castle, the food is labeled "Eat me" and "Drink me" in sly reference to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* — Beauty's father dismisses the evidence of his eyes as part and parcel of "the pervasive atmosphere of a

suspension of reality" stemming from his entry into "a place of privilege where all the laws of the world he knew need not necessarily apply, for the very rich are often very eccentric and the house was plainly that of an exceedingly wealthy man" (Carter, "Courtship" 145). Carter thus cues readers that this is a world where great wealth is interchangeable with great magic. Neither Beauty's father nor Beauty herself wonders at the strangeness of a monster who lives on a great estate, keeps a mechanic on account, and has legal influence in the city. Stranger still, neither one wonders at the Beast's generosity in going out of his way to help a penniless thief and his daughter without demanding anything in return. Lyon's monstrosity and eccentricity are both covered under the suspension of reality ensuing from his wealth and privilege.

We next see Mr. Lyon through Beauty's eyes. By accompanying her father, Beauty has already accepted responsibility for atoning for his crime. Her perceptions of Lyon are likewise filtered through her sense of what their relationship will be: "…When she saw the great paws lying on the arm of his chair, she thought they are the death of any herbivore. And such a one she felt herself to be, Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial" (Carter, "Courtship" 148). This metaphoric language again complicates a straightforward reading of Lyon's beastliness, as Beauty frames herself in animalistic terms as well. Her acceptance of Lyon's invitation to stay relies on her acceptance of herself as one of her father's few remaining expendable assets. She sees Lyon as a predator for taking advantage of her sense of filial obligation. Tellingly, at the climax of the tale, when she begins to see the Beast as a man, she wonders if her previous blindness came from the fact that when she looked at him "she had only looked at her own face, reflected there" (Carter, "Courtship" 152).

Perhaps because Beauty's initial view of Lyon is based on a projection of her fears rather than a reflection of her own dishonor, her perceptions remain malleable and subject to change in response to his actions, as when, at the end of the first night, "he flung himself at her feet and buried his head in her lap. She stayed stock-still, transfixed; she felt his hot breath on her fingers, the stiff bristles of his muzzle grazing her skin, the rough lapping of his tongue and then, with a flood of compassion, understood: all he is doing is kissing my hands" (Carter, "Courtship" 149). Despite the undeniable eroticism of the scene, the animality of Mr. Lyon's affection is and remains innocent. Lyon never ties Beauty to him. She accepts both his kindness and courtship out of her own sense of obligation, first for her father's crimes against him, and secondly for his offer to help her father regain the family fortune. Despite Beauty and her father's views of Lyon as terrible and monstrous, he never acts towards them with anything less than kindness and generosity, especially considering the felonious manner by which they made his acquaintance.

At first Beauty is loath to accept the difference between her projected fears and the reality Lyon offers. The love between Beauty and her father is selfless only in their relation to each other. In fact, they are quite selfish in the exclusivity of their devotion. Neither one has any qualms about using or abusing Mr. Lyon's hospitality, whether one is stealing his roses, or the other is making empty promises to visit. When Beauty's father regains his fortune, and Beauty joins him in the city, she feels gratitude to Lyon and, most urgently, relief at her near miss.

> She sent [Mr. Lyon] flowers, white roses in return for the ones he had given her; and when she left the florist, she experienced a sudden sense of perfect freedom, as if she had just escaped from an unknown danger, had been grazed by the

> possibility of some change but, finally, left intact. Yet, with this exhileration, a desolating emptiness. (Carter, "Courtship 150-151)

But Beauty *has* changed. Life in the city requires a plasticity that Beauty no longer recognizes as desirable. By the time spring comes her features have begun to acquire "instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterises certain pampered, exquisite, expensive cats" (Carter, "Courtship" 151). As her opinion of herself has changed, so too has her perception of her physical self. When she forsakes the city and rushes back to Mr. Lyon, her new perceptions of him now reflect a combination of his actions and her own feelings.

> When her lips touched the meat-hook claws, they drew back into their pads and she saw how he had always kept his fists clenched, but now, painfully, tentatively, at last began to stretch his fingers. Her tears fell on his face like snow and, under their soft transformation, the bones showed through the pelt, the flesh through the wide, tawny brow. And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man, a man with an unkempt mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all beasts. (Carter, "Courtship" 153)

Is this final view any more accurate than the first? Does it matter? Bacchilega, referencing Perrault's 1697 retelling, "Ricky of the Tufts," writes:

> Stories and looks, telling and seeing, have the power to transform, but the ontological status and the effect of such change are ambiguous. The transformed being may very well be what our word or eye has wished into existence; and "real" or not, the transformation may either embody what we agree to speak of and see within social norms — "realistic" indeed —or incarnate the transgressive voice and peek. (90)

Carter's suspension of objective reality has this effect on "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," effectively rendering the question of the Beast's actual physical transformation moot. According to the logic of the story, how one sees the world has more to do with how one feels about it than with any essential truth. When Beauty's father steals a flower in order to influence his daughter, he can see in Mr. Lyon only the monstrosity of his own disrespect. When Beauty lets her father's guilt pre-determine her obligations, she sees only the culprit in her victimization.

In *The Sadeian* Woman, Carter disdains myth as "consolatory nonsense" and pronounces herself in the "demythologizing business" (5). With these views, it is no wonder that she continually attacks the heart of the *Beauty and the Beast* myth, problematizing the idea that there is some core truth which love or magic may reveal. In "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" she suggests the impossibility of ever seeing without the filter of expectation. In "The Tiger's Bride," she makes her argument more explicit, deconstructing the myth at all levels until the only certainty is that nothing is certain.

If, as Betsy Hearne contends, the crucial elements defining a *Beauty and the Beast* tale are "storm, rose, garden, mirror, ring" and "the measure of each version's effectiveness is not its cleverness of invention but its fidelity to these core elements" (32), then neither of Carter's retellings pass muster, but "The Tiger's Bride" steps even farther away from its mythic source. When *Beauty and the Beast* acts as myth, the specific elements which distinguish its folkloristic incarnations become less crucial. They need be only nominally invoked to convey the message that this is a *Beauty and the Beast* tale. In "The Tiger's Bride," there is no storm, no ring, no garden. The Beast gives the rose from his lapel to the narrator directly before winning her from her father in a hand of cards.

When her father later begs a rose back from her as a symbol of her forgiveness, she gives him one with blood-stained thorns in bitter mockery of his betrayal. Only the mirror seems to serve its traditional function — showing the narrator her father's actions in her absence — but rather than making her long to go home, it prompts her to reject her father for good.

The stock characters of the tale are employed with similar license to its iconography. Beauty's father is a whoremonger and profligate gambler who does not value his daughter "at less than a king's ransom, but *no more* than a king's ransom" (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 156). The narrator keeps her father's bargain and goes to *La Bestia,* but out of pragmatism instead of filial love. She recognizes that her "own skin was [her] sole capital in the world;" her attendance on the beast, her "first investment" (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 159). In contrast to the terrible visage encountered in "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," our first view of this Beast reveals only that he wears the mask of a lovely face.

> Oh yes, a beautiful face; but one with too much formal symmetry of feature to be entirely human: one profile of his mask is the mirror image of the other, too perfect, uncanny. He wears a wig, too, false hair tied at the nape with a bow, a wig of the kind you see in old-fashioned portraits. A chaste silk stock stuck with a pearl hides his throat. And gloves of blond kid that are yet so huge and clumsy they do not seem to cover hands. (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 156)

This Beast does not speak with the heroine, or dine with her, or propose to her, he simply requests — through his simian valet — to see her naked.

The bulk of the story subsequently centers on the narrator and the Beast's delicate negotiation of a mutual unmasking, while simultaneously cuing us to the project's

impossibility. The Beast's mask displays his difference as much as it hides it. When he demands that the narrator remove her clothing for him, he is asking her to acknowledge that it, too, is a form of masking. The valet, who mediates the Beast's human interactions, is more conscious of the inappropriateness of the request. He blushes and stammers as he conveys it to the narrator.

> My master's sole desire is to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude without her dress and that only for the one time after which she will be returned to her father undamaged with bankers' orders for the sum which he lost to my master at cards and also a number of fine presents such as furs, jewels and horses — . (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 160)

The manner of the narrator's refusal to comply implies that she understands the Beast is asking for something much more intimate than sex. In this exchange, skin has become synonymous at some level with soul, and while Beauty is willing to whore her body for her father's honor and her own survival, she will not expose her soul. She rejects the Beast's offer with the same spite she offered her father; both men having offered her unequal bargains.

> You may put me in a windowless room, sir, and I promise you I will pull my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it; though the sheet must be laid over me so lightly that it will not choke me. So I shall be covered completely from the waist upwards, and no lights. There you can visit me once, sir, and only the once. After that I must be driven directly to the city and deposited in the public square, in front of the church. If you wish to give me money, then I should be pleased to receive it. But I must stress that you should give me only the same amount of money that you would give to any other woman in such circumstances. However, if you choose not to give me a

present, then that is your right. (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 161)

So far, the Beast has offered the narrator a continuance of the same sexual economy she has experienced during life with her father — her body as capital — while asking for her to strip off the polite social mask that makes her participation in that economy bearable. Her response highlights his arrogance: he will have his mask, and she will have hers. Though later she dismisses the extremity of her reaction by claiming "that he should want so little was the reason why I could not give it," her initial anger suggests the strength of her frustration with the rules of patriarchy (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 163).

Though the Beast expresses a desire for the narrator's nakedness, he shuns his own. He is obsessed with imitating man while shunning humanity. Even in the solitude of his own palace, he goes masked and robed and covered in perfume to mask his animal scent. The valet tells the narrator, "nothing human lives here," then goes on to inform her with some pride, "We have dispensed with servants…. We surround ourselves instead, for utility and pleasure, with simulacra and find it no less convenient than do most gentlemen" (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 162). Beauty later affirms that "nothing about [the Beast] reminded me of humanity," missing for a time the valet's more subtle implication that most gentlemen, believing only gentlemen to be of value, do not distinguish between simulacra and women (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 166). When the Beast asks for the narrator's nakedness because of a desire for "the sight of a young lady's skin that no man has seen before," he shores up his own mask by staking a claim on her as part of the patriarchal order (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 163). Only when he is willing to set aside that mask and that claim does he inspire Beauty's trust and compliance.

The narrator, likewise, must strip herself of the idea that the mask of her clothing is anything but a pretense to civilization or protection. When the Beast ends their multi-

day standoff by inviting her to go riding, she has that epiphany.

> I was a young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied me rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason. If I could see not one single soul in that wilderness of desolation all around me, then the six of us — mounts and riders, both — could boast mongst us not one soul, either, since all the best religions in the world state categorically that not beasts nor women were equipped with the flimsy, insubstantial things when the good Lord opened the gates of Eden and let Eve and her familiars tumble out. (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 165)

When the Beast subsequently strips off his clothing to show her his own nakedness, the narrator acknowledges his break with patriarchy as "the pact he had made with his own ferocity to do me no harm" and reciprocates with her own disrobing (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 166). Though the Beast keeps his promise and makes arrangements for her to return to her father, the narrator sends the clockwork maid in her place, reasoning that her father won't notice the difference. The story ends when the narrator goes naked to the Beast, now revealed as a tiger. He licks her hand, performing a final transformation: "And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shiny hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur" (Carter, "Tiger's Bride" 169).

On one level, this ending seems to privilege the revelation of some essential animal self free from the patriarchal oppressions of society. By qualifying this transformation as a shedding of the "skins of a life in the world," however, the narrator implies that the fur is simply a more appropriate costume for her new life on the Beast's

estate. As Bacchilega puts it, “when the protagonist admires her pelt, her “beautiful fur,” more than her raw skin, this fur could be yet another “mask,” liberating rather than oppressive perhaps, but still not her inner being” (100). One may make a convincing argument for either reading, but together they highlight a central contradiction within the *Beauty and the Beast* myth: Beauty must fall in love with the Beast (because true beauty comes from within), but the Beast must transform into a handsome prince before they can marry (because they must be compatible mates). Appearance both does and does not matter.

Throughout, Carter makes doubles visible in order to blur the lines between them, to merge or disrupt the implicit binary of society and nature—“The Beast had given his horses the use of the dining room” (“Tiger’s Bride” 159)—the North and the South—“[The snow] followed us from Russia as if it ran behind our carriage” (154)—the Bear’s son and the Tiger—“At home, the bear’s son directed the winds at his pleasure; what democracy of magic held this palace and the fir forest in common?” (154)—the Beauty and the clockwork girl—“I will dress her in my own clothes, wind her up, send her back to perform the part of my father’s daughter” (167). Similarly, she allows both the reality and unreality of monsters to coexist. While riding to join the Beast, the narrator dismisses as superstition her old childhood stories of a tiger-man and a powerful bear’s son even as she muses on the nature of the Beast’s “beastliness.” Later, she is truly astonished when the Beast gives her her own riding habit, left behind in Russia, for their riding expedition, and she wonders if its appearance is a result of magic or “proof of the axiom my father had drummed into me; that, if you have enough money, anything is possible” (Carter, “Tiger’s Bride” 164).

Even the fact of Carter's two retellings, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" may be read as another set of doubles. In both stories, Beauty's father disavows a distinction between fairy tale magic and great wealth. Likewise, in both stories Beauty positions herself as a lamb and the Beast as a predatory feline. Whereas Ms. Lamb becomes Mrs. Lyon, the narrator of "The Tiger's Bride" concludes, "the tiger will never lie down with the lamb … The lamb must learn to run with the tigers" (166). Both separately and together, then, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" frame *Beauty and the Beast* as a set of *matryoshka* dolls, where transformation reveals transformation reveals transformation, *ad infinitum*, forever more.

Case Study 2: The novels of Robin McKinley

Award-winning young adult writer Robin McKinley published her two novel-length retellings of *Beauty and the Beast* approximately twenty years apart; however, like Carter's short stories, the two variants resonate with each other to complicate either's individual commentary on the tale. In *Beauty* (1978), McKinley uses first person narration and a climax emphasizing Beauty's transformation over the Beast's to position the tale as a utopian female coming-of-age myth in which a young woman's agency and integrity are a magic all their own. When McKinley returns to the myth in *Rose Daughter* (1997), however, she puts a different value on integrity, suggesting that "happily ever after" requires more than simply being true to oneself or one's love; it also entails reciprocity with and participation in a sympathetic community. Taken together, the two novels show a definite shift in emphasis away from the project of "knowing" and towards one of acceptance and mutual recognition.

Beauty is apportioned into three parts. Part one describes how Beauty, whose real

name is Honour, came by such an unfortunate nickname, and it gives readers a brief glimpse of the family's life in the city, which comes to an abrupt end when Beauty's father's shipping business meets with unexpected ruin when she is fifteen. Her sister Grace's fiancé Robbie is presumed lost with their father's ships, so the family retreats en masse to the village of Blue Hill, where sister Hope's fiancé has relatives and can find steady work as a blacksmith. The father's encounter with the Beast in the storm composes the second part of the book, while part three comprises Beauty's sojourn with the Beast, her visit home to tell Grace that Robbie is indeed alive, and her desperate flight back to the Beast's castle after staying away too long.

McKinley embeds Beauty within a supportive community from birth. Her parents have an idyllic marriage — "Our father had doted on his lovely young wife … and she had worshiped him" (*Beauty* 5) — and after her mother's death, Beauty is raised as much by her loving sisters as by a succession of affectionate nurses. In the first few pages of the novel, variations of "doting" and "kind" appear five times in relation to Beauty's family. In contrast, Beauty describes her own appearance and attitudes with adolescent disdain. She attributes her family's heightened respect for her cleverness to tact (McKinley, *Beauty* 11). Her ability to get around their father, for instance, she dismisses as a product of being the spoilt youngest child rather than of any extraordinary eloquence on her own part. This juxtaposition in tone reflects Beauty's appreciation of her family's support and her strong sense of her own individuality and distance from them. She is at once the center of her family's life and an observer of it. Their love and support give her the firm foundation that allows her to go live with the Beast, but their overwhelming goodness, which she feels keenly in contrast with her own faults, also provides the motivation for

her to *want* to leave.

Beauty's idyllic community encompasses not just her blood relatives, but also the family's friends and servants in the city, along the road, and in the village of Blue Hill. The family's former servants beg to stay with them until they leave the city. When the house is auctioned off, their city friends bring them an abundance of food and goods for their journey out of the city. The teamsters whose caravan they join for the journey become so fond of them that the members go out of their way to visit Blue Hill in subsequent trips. The villagers themselves, many of who are related to Hope's fiancé, welcome the family with open arms, easing their transition to country life. Beauty's world contains no true villains or even ill-meaning neighbors. Even the invisible servants at the Beast's castle fuss and worry over her like nursemaids. Cosseted on all sides, Beauty greets the chance to save her father's life by taking his place with the Beast as an almost welcome opportunity to separate from her loved ones and exercise agency on her own behalf, in some ways breaking with the established patterns of her family, and in other ways only exacerbating them.

As a young teenager, Beauty acts as the conduit through which her sisters approach their father when they are not certain of his response to their request. For example, when Hope wants to marry Gervais, one of their father's ironworkers, instead of making an advantageous society match, she solicits Beauty's intervention with their father to clear the way as Beauty can ""get around" father best" (McKinley, *Beauty* 11). Their father's indulgence of his youngest child may have first established the pattern of her getting her own way, but Beauty's own strength of will solidifies it until, on the day their father returns from the Beast's castle and tells his daughters that he has come home

only to say goodbye, Beauty overrules him and says she will go instead.

> "What will you do then, tie me up?" I said. "I *will* go, and what's more, if you don't promise right now to take me with you when the time comes, I will run off tonight while you're asleep. I need only get lost in the woods, you said, to find the castle." … "You know I always wear you down in the end," I said.
>
> "I see you are very determined," [Grace] said. "I don't understand why."
>
> I shrugged. "Well, I'm turned eighteen. I'm ready for an adventure." (McKinley, *Beauty* 98-99)

The above exchange is in keeping with Beauty's habitual determination and optimism, but it also suggests her nascent desire to leave behind the safe world of her childhood, a world in which she wins every argument before it even begins, and to try her hand at something new. Beauty understands that her desire to go is as much about her own needs as it is about duty, but she has trouble articulating how exactly. She says, "I believed that my decision was correct, that I and no other should fulfill the obligation; but a sense of responsibility, if that was what it was, did not explain the intensity of my determination" (McKinley, *Beauty* 102).

Though in choosing to save her father's life and go to the Beast, Beauty has taken the first major step away from the indulged safety of her childhood towards self-determination, she still hesitates to articulate her desires to the Beast, in part, perhaps, because she is not entirely certain what those desires are. The desire to keep her first adult bargain and the yearning to go home to her family are directly at odds. Upon her arrival at the castle, the Beast makes clear that Beauty is to have whatever she wants.

> "Come; it's getting dark. Shall we go in? May I join you at your dinner?"
>
> "Of course," I said. "You are master here."

> "No, Beauty; it is you who are mistress. Ask for anything I can give you, and you shall have it."
>
> "My freedom" sat on my tongue, but I did not say it aloud.
>
> "Is your room as you wish? Is there anything you would change?"
>
> "No—no. Everything is perfect. You are very kind." (McKinley, *Beauty* 169-170)

Note that Beauty does not actually ask him for her freedom at this time. The idea of an adventure and the reality may not match up as well as she might have hoped, and she is alternately terrified of and full of pity for the Beast, but for now she chooses *by her silence* to stay. After several months, in response to a query from the Beast regarding her somber mood, she is slightly more forthcoming.

> "But you have been so kind to me that I have—I have occasionally wondered perhaps if—perhaps if after some terms is completed, that you would—might let me go. I would still wish to remain your friend." He was silent, and I went falteringly on: "I know it is too soon yet—I have only been here a few months. I know I shouldn't have mentioned it. It is very ungrateful of me—and dishonourable," I said miserably. "I didn't want to say anything—I wasn't going to—but you kept asking what was wrong—and I miss them so very much," and I caught myself up on a sob.
>
> "I cannot let you go," said the Beast. I looked up at him. "Beauty, I'm sorry." He seemed about to say something more, but I gave him no time. (McKinley, *Beauty* 216)

Though upon first reading, this second scene may suggest the Beast has lied about who is really in charge in their relationship, a closer examination reveals that he has held true to the letter of his word because again Beauty has still not asked him outright to let her

leave. She suggests he might *offer* to release her from her bargain, and then cuts him off when he tells her he will not. Beauty eventually states her desires outright.

> "Then let me go home—just for a day—an hour—to tell Grace. … And then they'll know too that I'm all right, that I'm happy here, that they needn't worry about me anymore. And then I'll come back. And I'll never ask to leave again. Please, Beast. Please." I knelt down in front of him and put my hands on his knees. The room was still dark, the curtains unopened, and his face was hidden in the darker shadows of the wing chair; all I could see was a glitter of eyes. There was a long silence, while I could hear nothing but the quick heave of my own breathing.
>
> "I can deny you nothing," he said at last, "if you truly want it. Even if it should cost me my life." (McKinley, *Beauty* 261-262)

Though objectively Beauty has been through a number of trials — her mother's death, her father's ruin, her own imprisonment — the love and care of the people around her have cushioned each blow. Her most difficult times at the Beast's castle stem from her naive assumption that indulgence and agency are the same thing and that the Beast's refusal to go against his own best interest in their earlier encounter is an outright refusal of her request to go home. She does not even realize that she has not actually asked him yet. When she does ask him, he lets her go at once. For all her love for her family and her fondness for the Beast, Beauty frequently exhibits an adolescent's self-absorption. She never shows any interest in learning more of the Beast's curse, despite ample hints—a carving around the front door of the castle, portraits of the castle's ancestral keepers in the halls, whispers from the invisible servants—and when the Beast tells her that he will die if she does not come back within a week as she promised, she asks no questions and

barely pauses before leaving.

At several points, Beauty pushes back against the knowledge that the Beast loves her: "A stray thought, less substantial than a wisp of smoke, suggested, The Beast loves me, but it dissolved immediately and I forgot about it" (McKinley, *Beauty* 218). Likewise, she ignores her own feelings for him:

> And much deeper than all of this in my mind, where I probably couldn't have reached it even if I had wanted to, was that the thought that I couldn't leave my Beast now even if the opportunity were offered. I still wanted to visit my family, and I missed them desperately; but not if leaving this world to return to theirs meant that I could not come back here. (McKinley, *Beauty* 246)

Though her age and immaturity are significant factors in her inability to fully access her emotions or his, we must also not forget that she is, at least in her own mind, still the Beast's prisoner. Only after she asks him outright to release her and he complies is Beauty able to admit her feelings for him, and even then she has a hard time fully embracing her change of heart and explaining it to her family. Eventually, safe in the knowledge that only her promise to and love for the Beast truly bind her, she comes to terms with her emotions. "I knew now what it was that had happened. I couldn't tell them that here, at home with them again, I had learned what I had successfully ignored these last weeks at the castle: that I had come to love him. They were no less dear to me, but he was dearer yet" (McKinley, *Beauty* 282).

Tellingly, the plot climaxes not with the Beast's transformation, but with Beauty's. Beauty states the inappropriateness of her nickname early in the novel.

> As I grew older, my hair turned mousy, neither blond nor brown, and the baby curl fell out until all that was left was a stubborn refusal to co-operate with the

> curling iron; my eyes turned a muddy hazel. Worse, I didn't grow; I was thin, awkward, and undersized, with big long-fingered hands and huge feet. Worst of all, when I turned thirteen, my skin broke out in spots. … By the time it was evident that I was going to let the family down by being plain, I'd been called Beauty for over six years; and while I came to hate the name, I was too proud to ask that it be discarded. (McKinley, *Beauty* 3)

After Beauty's family leaves the city for Blue Hill, she rarely has time to look at herself in a mirror, and at the Beast's castle, she never once sees her reflection, so by the close of the novel she has not really had a good look at herself for several years. When her promise to marry the Beast breaks his curse, and he transforms, her old insecurities threaten to ruin their happiness. Only when he is able to show her that she really is beautiful is she willing to accept him in his transformed state.

> The girl in the mirror wasn't I, I was sure of it, in spite of the fact that the man in golden velvet was holding my hand as he was holding the girl's. She was tall—well, all right, I said to myself, I do remember that I'm tall enough now. Her hair was a pale coppery red, and her eyes, strangest of all, weren't muddy hazel, but clear and amber, with flecks of green. … No, there, it *was* I, after all: The quirk of the eyebrows was still there, the dark uneven arch that had always said that the eyes didn't believe what they saw; but then since I had only seen them in mirrors, perhaps this was true. (McKinley, *Beauty* 320)

The novel is not the Beast's story, but Beauty's, and thus true narrative closure only occurs when Beauty acknowledges her own transformation from child to woman.

Earlier, I called *Beauty* a utopian tale. Throughout, the novel aligns Beauty's drive towards independence and self-knowledge with her innate tendency towards honor. Doing the right thing for her family, for the Beast, for herself — all these things are

ultimately the same. There is no lasting tension between the desires of the individual and the needs of the community. McKinley has written, "*Beauty* is not merely a first novel; it is also a young writer's first novel. I wrote it when I was twenty-four" ("Story"). Plot holes occasionally rupture the story — the vagueness of the Beast's curse, for example, and the collapse of time at the end of the story. The over-the-top goodwill of everyone that Beauty encounters and the extremity of the happily-ever-after ending, when juxtaposed against the complexity and craft in McKinley's later books, demonstrate in many ways a coming-of-age for the writer as well as the character. The elements of the tale that McKinley highlights in her first novel reflect a young woman's concerns with agency, identity, and voice, and the novel's abrupt and all-encompassing happily ever after ending is particularly indicative of the youthful perspective on fairy tales. McKinley's second retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Rose Daughter*, invokes many similar plot elements, but reveals an entirely different set of preoccupations.

In this version, the family's life in the city is less than ideal, and Beauty is a neglected child who spends most of her time in the garden. Following the merchant's ill-fortune, Beauty, her father, and her sisters, Lionheart and Jeweltongue, are driven out of the city by angry creditors. They retreat to Rose Cottage, a small house in the village of Longchance that the girls have inherited via their mother. Lionheart disguises herself as a boy in order to get work, a ruse which proves unexpectedly fortuitous when Beauty learns of a curse on the village if three sisters ever take up residence in Rose Cottage. Despite their reduced circumstances, the family begins to thrive, but eventually the merchant's theft of the rose leads to Beauty's imprisonment with the Beast. The Beast offers nightly proposals and hints that he is even more a prisoner there than she is, but

Beauty refuses the first and ignores the latter. Instead, she sets herself to bringing the Beast's dying roses back to life in hopes that he will then release her. When the roses bloom again, and dreams and visions convince her that her family is in danger of being driven out of Longchance because of her strange disappearance, she begs the Beast to let her stand beside them in their hour of need. She promises to return soon to visit. He tells her he will die of loneliness without her, but he could never keep her against her will. She is distressed by his revelation, but he sends her home before she can question him further. Once home, she realizes that her family is in no real danger and that she loves the Beast, but it is almost too late by the time she returns and confesses her love. After a final confrontation with the malicious magic of the curse, Beauty awakens in Rose Cottage attended by the Beast, who remains as he has been.

The basic components of *Rose Daughter* have more in common with Villeneuve than Beaumont, although as of an interview in 1983, McKinley had never read that version (Hearne 125). As in Villeneuve, a succession of ancillary characters comes on stage at the end in order to reveal a convoluted backstory that links Beauty and the Beast since before her birth. McKinley has added her own spin to this process; however, as each version of this backstory overlays and contradicts the others, leaving the reader's perception of the truth up to our opinions of each storyteller's motives and access to knowledge. This implicit commentary on the variability of myth also functions as a series of morality plays from which Beauty must learn to make the right decision regarding her future with the Beast. Ultimately, Beauty must choose for both of them between a return to privilege (and in his case, handsomeness) and a humble future together in Longchance. The final confrontation takes place in the glasshouse where Beauty has been reviving the

roses, foreshadowing that Beauty, a gardener, will choose the option which honors growth.

Beauty's connection to Longchance and the Beast is revealed on the very first page, although there is no way for the reader to intuit the nature of that bond until much later in the book. Roses and dreams are inextricably linked throughout Beauty's life, ultimately leading to the revelation of her own blood-tie to the curse. Beauty's earliest memory is of her mother coming to comfort her after she wakes crying from a bad dream.

> Her only memory of her mother's face was from the night she woke from the dream for the first time, crying in terror. In the dream she had been walking — she could barely walk yet in her waking life — toddling down a long dark corridor, only vaguely lit by a few candles set too far into their sconces, too high up in the walls. The shadows stretched everywhere round her, and that was terrible enough; and the silence was almost as dreadful as the darkness. But what was even worse was that she knew a wicked monster waited for her at the end of the corridor. It was the wickedest monster that had ever lived, and it was waiting just for her, and she was all alone. … She remembered the dream — she remembered crying — and she remembered her mother coming, and bending over her, and picking her up, whispering gently in her ear, holding her against her breast, softly stroking her back. Sitting down quietly on the nurse's stool and rocking her slowly till she fell asleep. (McKinley, *Rose* 2)

Beauty assumes the woman from her memory is her mother, despite the fact that her mother never again comes to her when she cries, because the woman smells like her mother's strange floral perfume. Even before her mother's untimely death, young Beauty fixates on the flower that gives off that same scent. Eventually one of Beauty's nurses tells her the reason she cannot find the flower anywhere in the family gardens: only

sorcerers can grow roses (McKinley, *Rose* 5). Only at the climax of the novel does Beauty finally realize that the woman who smelled of roses and came to her when she cried was not her mother at all, but actually the greenwitch who used to live in Rose Cottage. This same greenwitch was a friend of the Beast's before his curse and a lover-by-proxy of the sorcerer who cursed him. She also eventually adopted and raised Beauty's mother, who may or may not have been the sorcerer's daughter by another woman. Thus Beauty is connected to the Beast and his curse from birth through her mother, who may have been a blood relative of the sorcerer and whose foster mother was one of the Beast's closest friends. Her early dreams of a waiting monster are a blood inheritance signaling the inevitability of her eventual meeting with the Beast and the resolution of their shared history.

If this genealogy seems confusing, said quality is directly related to the ambiguity in which McKinley shrouds the backstory within the novel itself. Three different characters tell versions of the events which led to the Beast's curse. Though all three versions utilize the same basic players — a sorcerer, a philosopher, and the greenwitch — they vary wildly in details and in their depictions of the characters' motivations. The first version is told by a friendly Longchance native. The second version of the tale is told by Jeweltongue's spurned suitor, Jack. He bursts in upon the villagers just as the village woman finishes telling her tale and immediately contradicts her with his own "true" version, which infers that there is a curse on Longchance that will now come to fruition because of the presence of the three sisters. Jack tells his version of the tale in an attempt to rally the villagers to drive the women from their home.

The third version of the tale comes directly from the greenwitch at the climax of

the novel. She claims the true story is a combination of the earlier two tales. The philosopher, who was a good man, but perhaps overly curious, sought knowledge too powerful for any human. He survived the experience, but was turned into the Beast. The Beast withdrew into self-imposed exile. Eventually a sorcerer named Strix came along and tried to find out the secret of the Beast's transformation. Concerned for the Beast and hopelessly in love with Strix, the greenwitch created a simulacrum to be Strix's lover, and she placed her own heart in its chest. Eventually, out of malice over his thwarted ambition, Strix struck at the Beast. The Beast used his magic to save the village of Longchance, but was himself lost to "a dungeon of solitude, where no living creature could come" (McKinley, *Rose* 313). The greenwitch stayed away a long time, but eventually she came back to Longchance herself and tried to find ways to penetrate the Beast's magical prison and ease his solitude. She also adopted a daughter. The greenwitch tells Beauty, "Your mother looked as if she could have been Strix's daughter—or his great-granddaughter—I do not know" (McKinley, *Rose* 314). Thus in the greenwitch's version of the tale, the story comes full circle. Beauty is not only the Beast's savior; she is also quite probably the descendent of the man who set the curse in motion in the first place. She dreams of the Beast from the time she is a child because she has inherited a share of the magic that entraps him.

To scholars and hobbyists familiar with the evolution of "Beauty and the Beast," *Rose Daughter's* convoluted backstory and staggered revelatory monologues cannot help but recall the multiple reveals of Villeneuve's retelling. However, the three tales also function as implicit arguments against the pursuit of power and for the importance of community, themes which run through the narration of the merchant's ruin as well. The

merchant and his two elder daughters all abuse their power and influence in the city, and as a result, when they fall, no one will help them. In Longchance, however, they work hard and treat their friends kindly, and when Jack threatens them, the villagers rally to their defense, suggesting that community can be a source of strength under the right circumstances. Likewise, the philosopher's isolation in pursuit of knowledge leads first to the isolation of his ugliness and eventually to isolation by the curse. Until Beauty comes to stay, he does not realize how awful his situation is, but once he does, he can no longer bear it: "I cannot live without you any more, Beauty. Not now, not when I have had you here, not now that I have learnt how lonely I was, and am—was—for a little while—no longer" (McKinley, *Rose* 266).

In the final climactic confrontation with the curse, Beauty has to choose the Beast's fate, and her choice is framed as a question of either beauty and power or mutual acceptance and embeddedness in a community. Remember, in *Rose Daughter,* the Beast's transformed appearance is an entirely different matter than his curse. His appearance is a result of an intellectual misadventure that he brought on himself. It is not a result of anyone's malice against him. In fact, it is a side effect of surviving an encounter with the closest thing to gods this world seems to have. Perhaps for this reason, his human name is never revealed, even though the greenwitch must know it. He is, and was before Strix ever met him, the Beast. His *curse* is isolation from the rest of humanity, specifically, from Longchance. The way the greenwitch words Beauty's choice is thus particularly significant:

> "You may return your Beast to what he was before, if you wish. He was a good and a wise man then, and he will have you with him, and you will keep him mindful of the world outside his studies. He had great wealth and influence, you

> know, and you will have that wealth and influence again, and you will be able to do great good with it, and your names will be spoken in many lands, and you may raise your sisters and your father to greatness with you. And — have I told you that your Beast was beautiful? He was the most beautiful man I have ever seen, and I have seen many men.
>
> "Or … you may take him back to Longchance, and be the sister of the baker and the squire's horse-coper son, and daughter of the man who tots up sums for anyone who hires him, and make your Beast the same.
>
> "You choose." (McKinley, *Rose* 309)

If Beauty returns the Beast to "what he was before," the greenwitch implies that he will return to his studies and *need* reminding of the world outside them. All three versions of the tale of the curse imply that the Beast's single-minded focus was what brought him to trouble in the first place. Beauty and the Beast are both good people, and presumably they will intend to do good with their money and power, but intention is no guarantee of effect. In each of the three versions, someone sought more power, and whether that power came at another's expense or not, the result was always ruin. The Beast intended no harm with his pursuit of knowledge, but neither did he think through its potential consequences for himself or others. Later, under attack by Strix, he protected the village of Longchance at his own expense, so presumably he had learned to think outside his books by that point. If Beauty returns him to what he was before his transformation, how many of those lessons, how much of that character growth, will be lost?

The wording of the second option emphasizes the lowliness of Beauty's family connections, but it also emphasizes the *fact* of them. These ties are not only to her blood

relatives — *sister, daughter* — but also to the village itself — *the sister of the baker and the squire's horse-coper son.* This second option addresses the actual nature of the curse — isolation. If Beauty chooses to make the Beast "the same," she chooses to keep his appearance, true, but she also chooses to tie him to the community through family relations to that same baker and the squire's horse-coper son.

Having experienced her family's ruin and listened to all three tales of the Beast's curse, Beauty is savvy to the perils of unforeseen complications. Instead of answering the greenwitch right away, she asks,

> "How will our names be spoken?"
>
> "Ah!" said the voice, and it sounded as light and merry as a little girl's. "That is the right question. Your names shall be spoken in fear and in dread, for no single human being, nor even the wisest married pair, can see the best way to dispense justice for people beyond their own ken."
>
> "Then I choose Longchance, and the little goodnesses among the people we know," said Beauty. (McKinley, *Rose* 316)

Thus happily ever after in the novel is constructed as a combination of romantic fulfillment and community involvement. *Rose Daughter* closes with the Beauty and the Beast safely ensconced in Rose Cottage, surrounded by her family and making plans for a triple wedding with her sisters. According to the story's logic, the Beast's curse is broken because Beauty is wise enough to understand that they do not need power or good looks: they need to maintain the wisdom that comes with having learned from their experiences. Like the roses, they need to grow.

McKinley's emphasis in *Rose Daughter* on acceptance of the thorny consequences of maturity represents quite a shift from the mutual physical

transformations at the close of *Beauty*. While the 1978 novel follows the fairy tale in suggesting that inner beauty manifests physically, affirming the contradiction I noted in reference to Carter — that appearance both does and does not matter, the 1997 novel addresses this contradiction directly and explodes it. Beauty learns from her own and the Beast's experiences that appearance need not ultimately reconcile with character. The Beast's ugliness comes as a direct consequence of his goodness as much as from his attempts at knowing:

> He was a great sorcerer. But he was not interested in the usual sorts of power, and he called himself a philosopher. But it is not for any human to learn the first and last secrets of the universe, as other men have discovered before your Beast —before he was a Beast—did. You have heard the legends, I imagine. But your Beast was a different sort of man, and the Guardians of those first and last secrets whom he awoke were confused by him. They, who were set there when the world began, had come to believe that any man who came near enough to disturb their solitude can have got so far only through greed and pride, and they therefore are free to eat him up, hair, toenails, and all. But your Beast was not only greedy and prideful; he was also kind and painstaking and responsible, and he knew that his weaknesses were mortal and never pretended they were not. (McKinley, *Rose* 311)

The Guardians let him live because of his character, but their touch accidentally transforms him. Seeking power, even over knowledge, has consequences. After the Beast's transformation, he rejects his studies outright: "And the change had … changed him, for he studied his philosophy no more, and what he knows, or does not know, or knows no longer, he has said to no one, not even me. And his life became a burden to

him, for philosophy had filled his heart" (McKinley, *Rose* 312). This passage should not be read as a form of anti-intellectualism. In *Beauty*, the Beast has a library that spans the whole of time, and part of Beauty's enjoyment of her time at his castle comes from trying to make sense of books that haven't been written yet. Likewise, in *Rose Daughter*, the Beast affirms that his rejection of his studies is in part an emotional decision: "I told a sorcerer I believed magic to be a false discipline, leading only to disaster. It was a foolish thing to say, if not always untrue, or — I would not be as I am" (McKinley, *Rose* 264). What is rejected in *Rose Daughter* is not the attempt to learn — Beauty spends a great deal of her childhood asking questions and learning about flowers — but the attempt to *know,* which is linked through the story of the Beast's transformation and Strix's plotting to the pursuit of power.

Rose Daughter, like *Beauty*, is in many ways a coming of age tale, but its insights go beyond the growth and maturity of the fairy tale heroine and delve into the processes of growth and maturity themselves. Beauty learns and grows and ultimately chooses to transform the myth rather than the Beast. There is no central contradiction in McKinley's intervention. Heart really is more important than appearance. Neither the Beast's nor Beauty's looks have anything to do with their access to happily ever after. Beauty's family accepts the Beast because Beauty loves him, and they love her. The villagers will presumably do the same. As the villagers' folktales show, people are capable of malice and greed, but they are also capable of great love and acceptance. The choices are to learn or to know, to attempt to serve or to rule, and these choices determine one's fate. The novel as a whole is as much a morality play as the folktales the villagers tell within it. In its own, more mature, way, *Rose Daughter* is just as optimistic as *Beauty*.

Throughout *Rose Daughter*, Beauty's greatest fear has been being driven out, and the Beast's curse has been isolation, so, in contrast to Carter, McKinley's happily ever after is heavily dependent on the support of a community. The role of community in identity formation takes on a primary focus in my final case study of *Beauty and the Beast*, the reality television series *Beauty and the Geek.*

Case 3: *Beauty and the Geek*

Beauty and the Geek is a reality television program that aired first on the WB network in 2005. Created by Ashton Kutcher and Jason Goldberg, it quickly became the WB's first successful foray into the reality market. As such, it was one of the programs that survived the WB's 2006 merger with UPN and made it onto the newly-formed CW network. The show aired five seasons before halting production in 2009 with the promise of a sixth season down the line. As of this writing, production has not resumed, and the chances of the series coming back for a sixth season seem slim. The show's name invokes the *Beauty and the Beast* myth by metonymic association, substituting the last word of the fairy tale's title for "Geek" to signify that the series' premise will be different, but that the same rules of desirable transformation apply. Reality TV's oft-noted structural similarities with fairy tale and its thematic concerns with the nature of the "real" and the policing of the self make *Beauty and the Geek* a particularly useful text through which to observe and analyze the struggle to maintain mythic coherence over time. Like Carter and McKinley, the producers of *Beauty and the Geek* frame the myth of *Beauty and the Beast* in terms of the mature self's relationship to society, but whereas Carter's project is critical and McKinley's conciliatory, *Beauty and the Geek's* is both conservative and didactic. Rather than altering the myth to induce or reflect a paradigm

shift, over time the producers of *Beauty and the Geek* alter the structure of the show itself in order to ensure that no such shift occurs.

Each season of the show functions as a self-contained "social experiment" in which beautiful, "academically impaired" women and "brilliant but socially challenged men" pair up while in temporary residence at the production's mansion ("WB"). Over the course of the season, the Beauty/Geek pairings compete in an episodic series of competitions/challenges testing how much they are learning from each other. The prize for winning a challenge is immunity from that week's elimination and the ability to send another team to the Elimination Room. At the end of each episode, two teams square off in said room and answer questions having to do with that week's challenge. The winning team stays another week, the losing team goes home. The last team standing receives a $250,000 grand prize ("WB"). The series entire comprises over 48 episodes, each of which contains its own narrative arc and a constantly shifting cast.

At the beginning of season one, seven Beauties and seven Geeks are paired up to compete. However, the season increasingly focuses on the rivalry between Chuck, a serious-minded med student invested in the game's rhetoric of transformation, and Richard, a jester-figure who irritates his housemates and takes it upon himself to torment Chuck as much as possible. As the season progresses, their two teams emerge as frontrunners: Chuck and his partner Caitilin win challenge after challenge, and Richard and his partner Mindi, despite being sent to the Elimination Room repeatedly, continually return for another round. The final elimination quiz pits Mindi and Richard against Chuck and Caitilin. Each contestant is tested on their knowledge of their partner's background and preferences. In the second tie-breaker round, Chuck and Caitilin win.

Television scholars frequently describe the genre of reality TV in fairy tale terms. This analogy holds up surprisingly well in a comparison of the two genres' conventions, particularly when the fairy tale is compared to the gamedoc, which employs documentary conventions such as interviews and "candid" footage alongside more obviously staged gameshow setups in order to more fully capture and dramatize the immersive effects of the game on the daily life of the contestants. Both genres feature flat, frequently stereotyped characters leaving home and entering into a topsy-turvy liminal space where they encounter challenges on their way to achieving a goal.

The episodic format of most reality television, and of *Beauty and the Geek* in particular, calls to mind Propp's thesis in the *Morphology of the Folktale:* the functions of characters (rather than the characters themselves) are the constant elements in a tale. Though individual functions may repeat within a story, their over-arching sequence is always both logical and identical. Their sequence, not the manner of their fulfillment, is the vital stable point.[34] I have shown that such formal limitations on fairy tales are of little use when studying their invocations as myth in popular culture, but I find Propp's breakdown useful in explaining why fairy tales resonate so well with the genre of reality TV. Propp lists thirty-one functions possible in a fairy tale. Allow me to demonstrate the ease with which his morphology can be mapped onto *Beauty and the Geek.* For example, function twelve is: "The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper" (Propp 39). As noted above, in each episode Beauties and Geeks compete in order to win immunity from that week's elimination, as well as the right to send another team to the elimination room. Propp's

[34] I frequently refer to the identical sequence of functions in Propp's thesis as the inevitability or inexorability of fairy tale logic. In a fairy tale, one event *must* follow the other.

functions map the show with surprising accuracy. Reality TV as a whole, and *Beauty and the Geek* in particular, is formally very similar to the folkloric fairy tale. Both rely on structure to propel story.

Beauty and the Geek's narrative of personal growth and change climaxes with the award of a monetary prize to the most transformed pair—incorporating, but subtly overshadowing the important point that the show is a game, not just a "social experiment." Throughout the series, documentary footage of the challenges and the contestants' interactions in the house is intercut with interview footage of the contestants reflecting on recent events in order to affect audience's perception of events as ironic, poignant, or humorous. The juxtaposition of unscripted footage with contestants' commentary gives the rhetorical impression that the contestants' view of events meshes with the show's dramatic narrative and functions to persuade the audience of the story's "truth." When the contestants' words or actions conflict with that narrative, they are simply edited out.

Reality TV reflects contemporary anxieties about the "real" in a culture where one of the first lessons young people must learn is how to manipulate their social media profile to project their desired image. The genre invokes voyeuristic pleasures by framing entertaining content as unmediated reality (Corner). While there are myriad financial reasons why the explosion of reality TV in the last decade makes sense for U.S. media conglomerates, particularly in the wake of the 2007-2008 writer's strike[35] and a financial recession, the genre also reflects citizens' uneasy reconciliation to the post-9/11 culture

[35] The Writers Guilds of America, East and West went on strike from November 5, 2007 to February 12, 2008 after the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers refused their demands for adequate compensation for the growing markets of DVD sales and digital content and for union jurisdiction over reality and animation writers.

of surveillance. In the introduction to their edited volume, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*, Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray theorize that reality TV teaches us that "in order to be good citizens, we must allow ourselves to be watched as we watch those around us. Our promised reward for our compliance within and support of such a panoptic vision of society is protection from both outer and inner social threats" (6). *Beauty and the Geek* is a prime example of this process, particularly in the way that the producers alter the very structure of the series in season three in response to threats to its mythic coherence from within the cast.

However, Ouellette and Murray resist collapsing reality TV into a simplistic, totalitarian project of governmental oppression. Instead, they point to the complexity possible in viewers' engagement with the genre.

> Reality TV promises its audiences revelatory insight into the lives of others as it withholds and subverts full access to it. What results is an unstable text that encourages viewers to test out their own notions of the real, the ordinary, and the intimate against the representation before them. Far from being the mind-numbing, deceitful, and simplistic genre that some critics claim it to be, reality TV supplies a multilayered viewing experience that hinges on culturally and politically complex notions of what is real, and what is not. (Oullette and Murray 6)

What is shown onscreen does not, in the end, encompass the whole of the narrative. The producers present their version, and viewers negotiate their own reading of the edited footage through individual viewing and through discussion of both textual and extra-textual content with fan communities both on and offline. Extra-textual content such as post-series interviews with cast members may confirm, mitigate, or explode viewers'

initial conclusions, but regardless of the result, these aspects force viewers to remember that there are events they do not see onscreen, evoking a more complicated experience than is often credited.

The first season of *Beauty and the Geek*, for example, is edited to suggest that Scarlet, one of the Beauties, is only flirting with Chuck, a Geek, in order to form an alliance and keep from being eliminated. They go on a "romantic" date, and Chuck drones on about the Quakers while Scarlet looks increasingly bored. These scenes are intercut with footage of Scarlet saying their relationship has no future and Chuck saying how very much he likes her. In an interview with *TVGuide.com* that aired after the first season finale, Chuck takes issue with the footage that wound up on the cutting room floor.

> In fact, I'm pretty furious with the way they treated her in that exchange. We both agreed from the start of things that there was no long-term potential for the two of us. It was like a summer camp kind of thing. We were both telling the cameras, "We have a great deal of respect and affection for each other and we're really enjoying our time together, but we really don't see long-term potential" — and they would give me the "respect and attention" and give her the "no long-term potential" lines. It really came out making her look like a manipulative bitch when, in fact, she's a very caring, very kind person. (Weiss)

Is Chuck's representation of events a more accurate reflection or merely an attempt to salvage his pride? The answer is not nearly so interesting as the possibilities posed by the question. Viewers must draw their own conclusions about what is or is not true, but always with the niggling room for doubt. They know that footage abandoned on the cutting room floor might have changed their perceptions, but even that footage is

mediated.

The complexity which Carter teases so carefully out of *Beauty and the Beast* in regards to perceptions of the self and the other is in *Beauty and the Geek* a generic given. Every presentation is a representation, another set of *matryoshka* dolls. Postmodern suspicion of essentialism has converged with Facebook culture, where profile pictures and status updates allow everyday people to strategically manage their image within their network of friends. In the age of social media, savvy television audiences need not be told that face value is different from real value. But what is "real" value? Every aspect of the digital self is mediated by technology. Face value is, in many ways, one's only value in the digital realm. One must be seen in order to exist.

With its blatant commercialism, reality TV brings a sense of play and lightness to working through these rather terrifying existential conundrums. As media scholars Anita Biressi and Heather Nun point out,

> [It] extends and plays upon the notion that the daily existence is in some senses inauthentic or hyperreal or simulated or performative. It foregrounds the ways in which subjectivity more broadly is formed through a matrix of looks, of processes of seeing, being seen and of our self-conscious knowledge of being seen. It suggests that within media culture being publicly regarded can constitute an affirmation of the self. (102)

Beauty and the Geek makes this process even more explicit, using the myth of *Beauty and the Beast* to naturalize the media-constructed self as a happily ever after to which anyone can aspire. Contrasting events in seasons one and three best highlights the producers' obsession with this message. In season one, producers foreground the tension between the gamedoc format and the transformation myth, while in season three

producers attempt to protect the myth at the expense of the game.

Notably, season three marks the end of the original format for the series. In season four, producers continue to shake up the formula by integrating a male Beauty, female Geek pair into the cast, and in season five they separate the game elements from the fairy tale completely by pitting the Beauties against the Geeks. Producers quickly returned to the paired competition in season five, but the constant tweaks to the format never return the audience enthusiasm of the show's first few seasons. Perhaps the series' concept was simply played out, but the continued popularity of other formulaic shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* even after ten seasons suggests that perhaps it was the divergence of the game from the show's central myth — that smart men and beautiful women could change each other — that hastened the series' demise.

From the beginning, the audience is instructed to view the show as a narrative of desirable transformation, a journey through which the contestants will learn to value themselves and others at a deeper, more meaningful level. Season one begins with a voiceover explaining the show's premise. This voiceover is intercut with scenes from throughout the forthcoming season. For example, while scenes from future episodes play out on screen, the narrator asks, "Can people with nothing in common learn from each other?" The season preview then cuts to a medium close-up of one of the Geeks (Chuck Munyon) telling an unseen interviewer, "The more time I get to spend here the more I'm going to be able to approach somebody that I wouldn't necessarily have the guts to talk to." The latter part of this statement becomes voiceover for images of Chuck enjoying a romantic dinner with one of the Beauties (Scarlet). Scenes from the rest of the season continue to play out as the narrator's voice returns, nominally continuing his earlier

question, but phrasing it as a statement: "And find out you can't always judge a book by its cover." One of the Beauties' voices takes over, and we cut to a medium close-up of a blond woman (Erica) crying as she tells the off-camera interviewer: "I just realized…how superficial girls that look like us can treat guys who look like some of them, and that all these guys are…some of the greatest guys I've ever met" (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 101).

The structure of the season preview suggests that over the course of the season the Geeks will develop social confidence, in keeping with the series' premise, but instead of then making a parallel claim about the Beauties' increasing intellectual confidence, the preview focuses on Erica's condemnation of her and her peers' superficiality. This disparity between the series' premise and execution in some ways reflects the original fairy tale — the Geeks/Beasts must learn the proper way to behave in company, and the Beauties must overcome their prejudices based on looks and see a person's true value. However, it also puts the Beauties at a disadvantage in the game, as they are not challenged on their growing depth, they are tested on spelling, auto maintenance, and rocket science. The idea seems to be that they will do well in their challenges if they study with their hyper-intelligent partners, but frequently their partners know as little as they do on the particular topic of the day.

The teams' communication skills become slightly more useful during the Geeks' challenges because the Beauties' bodies are frequently the object of said challenges. In one, for example, the Beauties must put on bikinis and masks and lie on a table while the Geeks massage them. The Beauties then rate each massage. The Beauties are thus asked not only to put forth their bodies for their partner's practice attempts, they are then asked

to strip down and submit to physical contact with all of the other men in the house as well. Interview footage of the women's discomfort is framed to highlight their disgust with these particular *unattractive* men touching them. The subtext is that if the men were attractive, the women wouldn't mind. This juxtaposition primes the audience to read the challenge as another way to further the women's transformation away from superficiality, instead of as the show's co-optation of their right to say who touches them and how. Note that wearing a bikini and getting a massage have very little to do with increasing intellectual confidence, again suggesting that the women's true transformation is supposed to focus on their depth of character, as measured by their sexual receptivity to geeky men.[36]

Criticism of reality TV frequently centers on its portrayal of gender, race, and class.[37] In the absence of substantive class or race disparities among the first season cast, *Beauty and the Geek*'s cultural commentary leans towards gender. The sexism built into the structure of the show minimizes the Beauties' transformations and inherently favors the Geeks'. This bias plays out in the showdown between the final two teams. Both of the women who make it to the final round — Caitilin and Mindi — demonstrate intelligence

[36] In another challenge, the Geeks select and purchase three outfits — swimwear, casual wear, and evening wear — for their partners. The Beauties then have to strut down a runway in each outfit, regardless of fit, in front of a panel of judges. Again, the Beauties' bodies are put on display in order to judge the Geeks' transformation. The subtext, again, is that the men have the *right* to dress and display a woman's body. From these two challenges, we can extrapolate the assumption that a properly socialized male will know how to touch a woman in a manner that pleases her and how to dress her body for display, but that neither of these activities requires her permission, only his skill. These assumptions reflect important story moments in *Beauty and the Beast* – the Beast's touch is anathema to Beauty at first, her clothing options are determined by his largesse – but by taking away the filters of monstrosity and magic, the underlying sexism emerges more clearly. Beauty's body *belongs* to the Beast. They must both simply come to terms with how to negotiate that economy.

[37] i.e. Jon Kraszewski, "Country Hicks and Urban Cliques: mediating Race, Reality, and Liberalism on MTV's *The Real World*" (*Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. Eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette. New York: New York University Press, 2004); Yael D. Sherman, "Fashioning Femininity: Clothing the Body and the Self in What Not to Wear" (*Exposing Lifestyle Television: The Big Reveal*. Ed. Gareth Palmer. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Press, 2008).

and communication skills, though both initially lack confidence. Mindi is arguably the most serious opponent to Caitilin and Chuck's eventual win. However, the show structures the escalating dramatic arc around the conflict between Chuck and Richard, subtly attributing their respective teams' successes more to the men than to the women despite the fact that both partners win an equal number of challenges within their respective teams.[38] Given that the women are portrayed as fairly well-matched, the teams' successes increasingly hinge on the men, particularly in their treatment of women — both their teammate and the female cast in general—and in their adherence to the rhetoric of transformation.

Chuck and Caitilin's greatest strength is their ability to function consistently as a team despite the previously-mentioned gender imbalances built into the structure of the show. After some early hiccups in their partnership, they speak of each other with increasing respect throughout the series. Chuck shows concern over the fact that Caitilin, not he, will be put on the spot in his fashion choices: "All the guys were really nervous about this challenge, just because we weren't the ones who were really on the line. I mean, this was a challenge where we really ended up putting our partners on the line because they were the ones who were actually going to be looked at" ((*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 103).[39] Caitilin, in return, protects his feelings, though she hates the

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[38] Chuck and Caitilin win three challenges each. Mindi and Richard win one each.

[39] During some of the show's more egregiously sexist moments, Chuck steps into different non-threatening personas. This strategy frequently works as a control mechanism, distancing him from uncomfortable situations, as when, prior to the massage competition, he situates himself as a physician trained in anatomy. Though his claim is unselfconsciously arrogant, he is the only one of the men to articulate something other than a strictly sexual mindset. The other Geeks speak only of touching women's bodies, something the majority of them have never done before. In another challenge, the Geeks are asked to approach strange women on the street and get as many phone numbers as they can. Chuck politely asks a couple of women for their phone numbers, and when the women ask if he's hitting on them, he tells them he's gay. "Slowly this idea began to evolve… I was sort of developing a persona, and pretty soon I was a screenwriting student…. The sort of real *coup de grace* moment was when I just sort of naturally discovered that my

clothes he picked out for her at the fashion show. “Don’t laugh,” she warns Lauren, “because I don’t want my partner’s feelings to get hurt when he sees this on.” Later Caitilin again affirms her loyalty to her partner: “I know he did his best, and I am so appreciative, and I know he had my best interest in mind” (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 103).

Richard, on the other hand, is more of an inconvenience to Mindi than a partner. His playing to the cameras alienates the other contestants on multiple occasions, leading him and Mindi to visit the Elimination Room a record four times. Mindi asks him to back off from his childish antics, but he does not (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 103). Mindi is both frustrated by and resigned to her partner, but she does know how to motivate him. Richard relates to women best as objects of desire, not as thinking beings. Mindi’s ploy of promising kisses in order to get him to take the final round seriously is predicated on his past behavior over the course of the show. At the end of the Elimination Round in episode three, Richard kisses Krystal, the Beauty on the losing team. His tag line, “Has never kissed a girl,” a caption that appears throughout the series to inform viewers of his name and most memorable trait, appears on screen briefly, then changes over to “Has kissed 1 girl.” Though Krystal does not invite his actions, neither does she reprimand him. From this point on, Richard makes it a point to kiss the losing Beauty, excepting Scarlet, at the end of every elimination. His tag line changes to accommodate each new kiss, until the series ends with “Has kissed 3 girls.”

The dramatic arc of the conflict between Chuck and Richard increasingly centers

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persona was gay,” he tells the camera (104). This disclaimer happens after the woman in question is already giving him her number, which suggests he is motivated by discomfort with the challenge itself rather than by strategy alone. For the rest of the challenge, Chuck plays this role with increasing openness and charm. He approaches women without scaring them, and consequently, he wins.

on the two men's willingness to transform. Chuck is shown reiterating the rhetoric of the show, stating repeatedly that this experience is supposed to be about transformation, that the contestants are present to learn from each other. Richard, on the other hand, more clearly demonstrates and parodies the conventions of the gamedoc. In the second episode, he smears a brown substance on his nose and carries around a hand-lettered sign: "I want to form an alliance | Nothing I say or do should be taken seriously" (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 102). Later, he dons a dunce cap and again darkens his nose to indicate his willingness to play the game, to (colloquially) kiss his housemates' asses if necessary — anything in order to stay longer (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 103). Regardless of whether Richard brought these props with him to the mansion or obtained them later from the production team, his actions highlight a fissure in the show's claim to the pseudo-scientific language of "experimentation." Richard and Chuck are arguably the most self-conscious of the contestants — both very aware of how they present themselves at all times — however, Chuck, unlike Richard, does not seem in the moment to fully grasp the extent to which he is being constructed as a character within generic constraints. The key words are *in the moment.* In the post-air date interview quoted earlier, Chuck demonstrates a clear understanding and acceptance of the ways in which his persona has been constructed onscreen. Any hints of that same clarity during filming are limited to Chuck's critiques of Richard's performance-mindset. Chuck's atypical earnestness conveys an almost innocent or virtuous quality. Richard understands why they are in the house; Chuck *believes.*

Chuck privileges the rhetoric of the experience over the rhetoric of competition. Though portrayed as extremely uptight and relatively humorless in contrast to Richard,

Chuck becomes the season's de-facto hero because of his willingness to throw himself wholeheartedly into each challenge and to reflect on how events are affecting him. He agreeably performs transformation for the audience. Chuck is too self-important to entirely edge out Richard with viewers or their housemates. As annoying as Richard may be, he is still only a pest, more comic relief than true villain. The producers edit strategically to highlight the vast difference between the two men's personas and strengthen the dramatic tension: Will the fool who plays to the camera and refuses to change somehow beat the overly solemn hero who nevertheless wants to transform?

More important than the winning team's actual degree of transformation is their adherence to the *myth* of transformation promised in the show's allusive title. Richard's rejection of it positions him antagonistically to the other cast members and to viewers who seek to lose themselves in the series' narrative. Both Chuck and Caitilin are portrayed as capable, respectful individuals at the start of the season, and these pre-existing traits prove most important to their ultimate success. Mindi likewise demonstrates patience and competence early on, suggesting that transformation is not the key difference between the teams, so much as teamwork and reiteration of the series' premise. Richard continually calls attention to the constructedness of the contestants' situation. His antics demonstrate a familiarity with the genre and a desire to be noticed. They apparently worked at one level — he has since been a regular on at least two other shows and has landed a number of guest spots on others. Richard cannot win, but he nevertheless performs an important function within the show, providing narrative space for the reclamation and quashing of the suspicious viewer, the anti-myth.

By pointing to the conventions of the gamedoc — the alliance strategy, for

example — Richard calls into question the very possibility of transformation, destabilizing the series' ties to the myth of *Beauty and the Beast* on a fundamental level. Roland Barthes describes the functioning mythic process thusly:

> The meaning [of the original sign (in this case, the fairy tale)] loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment. The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment; above all, it must be able to hide there. It is this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth. (*Mythologies* 118)

If Richard were to win, the myth would be revealed once and for all as Barthes's theft. The series would lose its claim, however loose, to the fairy tale's meaning. The producers repeatedly act to ensure that such a revelation does not occur. In Season One, the final challenge plays to Chuck and Caitilin's strengths, almost certainly assuring their victory. In Season Three, when a similar challenge to the myth plays out, this time *within* the strongest team, the producers more obviously manipulate the game, altering the very structure of the show to protect the myth's integrity.

By Season Three, most contestants enter the game familiar with the structure of the show. The choosing sequence at the beginning of the season sets up the group dynamics that follow.[40] One of the Beauties, CC, provokes strong antipathy in the majority of the Geeks. No one wants to be partnered with her. At last, Nate volunteers to

[40] Similarly to the previous two seasons, this one opens with the Beauties and Geeks alternating picking their partners for the game; except that this time the groups are seated facing away from the person introducing her/himself, and we see much more frank and often negative footage of the groups' discussions after each introduction.

take her because he believes he can work with anybody. Throughout the season, the Geeks are portrayed as the more mature and congenial group. Faced with an awkward situation, they talk a bit, and then wait until someone volunteers. In contrast, when one of the Geeks, Mario, makes a bad impression on the Beauties, the other women gang up and use peer pressure to force Nadia to take him as her partner. Footage of Mario waiting in the hall is intercut with the scene with Nadia in order to reveal that he can hear everything the women say about him, including the fact that his partner has been pressured to take him on against her will. Though he and Nadia eventually end up working well together, this breach early in their relationship is typical of season three's focus on peer pressure and intra-group gender policing. The early emergence and subsequent machinations of a blonde clique among the Beauties almost immediately overshadow the series' rhetoric of individual transformation and fracture the contestant's small community*;* however, the structure of the game soon undercuts the blondes' alliance. Significantly, the season's ending twist causes the community to reemerge in judgment of the final teams, with the myth of *Beauty and the Beast/Geek* their binding force, their rhetoric of inclusion.

The aforementioned blonde clique, led by CC, fully emerges in the second episode. The remaining two brunette Beauties, Sheree and Andrea, push back angrily by criticizing the blonde girls for schoolyard bullying.[41] The early formation of the blonde

[41] When a single team wins both of the challenges in the second week, its members, Mario and Nadia, are able to choose both teams to send to the Elimination Room. Mario tells the interviewer, "I think the blondes are running the show to some extent, and I'm not a hundred percent comfortable with it." He wants to send CC and Megan, two of the blonde girls, to the Elimination Room because they are "not trying hard enough. They are not benefiting from this experience," but Nadia is scared of the consequences. Instead, they send both of the brunettes. One of the other geeks, Niels, tells the interviewer that he thinks the girls could learn a thing or two about social interaction from the guys, as the guys at least all get along with each other. Ironically, CC and Nate and Megan and her partner Scooter eventually comprise the season's final two teams.

clique or alliance sabotages the majority of the cross-gender partnerships almost at once, dividing the house along lines of gender, more specifically, a racialized performance of gender. By waiting to introduce the concept of the blonde alliance until episode two, the producers neatly sidestep accusations of racism in the immediate elimination of Tori and Sanjay, two of the three contestants of color, in episode one. When Andrea and Sheree claim that they are excluded and discriminated against because they do not conform to the other Beauties' standards, they cite schoolyard bullying rather than some kind of latent Aryan impulse, again minimizing the racial dynamic implied by alliances founded on coloring (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 302). Significantly, Sheree's partner Piao is the last remaining contestant of color, and he is of course eliminated when she is.[42]

The depth of the schism between the Beauties and the Geeks — the occasional insinuations of active dislike coming from the men — make the centrality of the season's one romantic pairing particularly vital. Producers balance the extreme tensions among the cast by focusing on the ups and downs of an over-the-top romance between Nate and Jennylee, the blonde partnered with Niels. In episode three, tensions rise as the blondes' alliance is compromised by the rules of the show and by the Geeks' growing dislike of CC. Then Jennylee announces to the camera that she has developed a crush on Nate. Their subsequent relationship proves key to shifting the group dynamics and setting up the season's twist ending. When Niels decides, despite his friendship with Nate, to send

[42] This policing of the boundaries of acceptable gender performance extends to include the blondes' judgments on the men as well. Jennylee and CC both denigrate Niels' masculinity when he cries while announcing his choice to send Nate and CC to the Elimination Room (episode 304). Later in the season, the producers edit an incident in which Niels and Scooter hose each other off following a particularly messy challenge into a parody of homoeroticism (episode 307). This parody is later voted one of audiences' favorite moments in the season, suggesting that the audience shares the blondes' judgment that, in the absence of demonstrable heterosexuality — which in the series is coded almost exclusively as performing sexism — the physicality of the men's friendship is an object of derision.

CC and Nate to the Elimination Room, he alienates both CC and his partner Jennylee, though Nate himself appears fine with the decision. This choice leads to the blondes' derision of Niels' weakness, as well as a major schism among the women, as CC develops increasing animosity towards Jennylee. The romance plot further isolates CC as a villain, as her snide remarks and attempts to eliminate Jennylee alienate CC even from her own partner.

Megan and Scooter receive surprisingly little air-play throughout the season considering their eventual win. The depth of Megan and Scooter's transformations is underwhelming, but relatively unimportant in comparison to CC's continual machinations. The final elimination definitively links CC's villainy with her refusal to transform. In the aforementioned twist, the final elimination pivots on the return of the eliminated contestants for a night. They will judge who has transformed the most. Megan, who has been CC's ally since day one and thus is presumably complicit in CC's treatment of the others, somehow escapes her cohorts' condemnation in the aired footage, leading viewers' expectations for redemption or comeuppance to center solely on CC.

Though CC rules through peer pressure throughout the season, she refuses to give into it herself. When the rest of the cast returns to the house to pass judgment, CC refuses to apologize for her past actions. CC vents her frustrations to Nate, claiming that the show rewards fake transformation and "ass-kissing." Although Scooter also remarks on the discomfort of this unexpected peer-policing, CC's scenes are intercut with clips of the other cast members denigrating her personally, thus leaving the viewer with the impression that CC's protestations are mostly defensive posturing. Later, Megan tells the others that CC turned on her as soon as it began to look as though Megan and Scooter

might win (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 308). Though the scene Megan refers to is never shown, her testimony, coupled with a shot of a subdued CC passing through the kitchen where Megan and the others are talking, further constructs CC as selfish and untrustworthy. Ultimately, Megan and Scooter are coded as little other than *not-CC*. Instead, CC's heroic counterpart is her own partner, Nate.

In order to fully repudiate CC's contention that the show is not really about transformation, producers exaggerate Nate's transformation from Geek to romantic hero. The finale, in which Nate, fed up with CC's behavior, petitions his friends among the eliminated contestants to vote against him and his partner and to choose Megan and Scooter as the winners instead, is bizarrely theatrical, in keeping with several other moments throughout the season in which Nate is shown to be the team player that CC is not. From his initial willingness to take on CC when no one else will through to his final sacrifice of his team's chance to win, Nate is portrayed as a friendly and agreeable young man with a dramatic streak. However, his moments of heroism often seem particularly staged. In the episode in which Jennylee is finally eliminated, for example, Nate climbs down from one of the upper balconies and crashes her exit interview in order to give her one last (on-camera) embrace (*Beauty and the Geek* – episode 307).[43]

CC, like Richard in season one, threatens the myth that this "experiment" actually rewards transformation. Richard's threat stems from his sense of play — playing the game. He is fully aware that his social skills are lacking. Richard does not reject the idea that change is possible or desirable so much as he rejects the idea that change is the *most*

[43] That producers think Nate and Jennylee make good TV is confirmed when the couple returns in the first episode of season four to host a casting special. In their last appearance, the romance narrative between the two is largely elided. They hug and cuddle up to each other on camera, but make no claims to an ongoing relationship.

desirable aspect of the production experience. His antics on the show lead him to continued work in the entertainment industry. Despite losing the game, one gets the sense that Richard ultimately won what he wanted most. CC, on the other hand, claims she has no need to change, thus rejecting the idea that the game is tied to the myth at all.

Carter and McKinley both play fast and loose with aspects of the myth in ways that suggest a desire to intervene in its meaning, but the producers of *Beauty and the Geek* have no such revolutionary agenda. *Beauty and the Geek*, like much of reality TV, is predicated on the idea that contestants suffer from a debilitating lack that can only be rectified through conformity to the norms enforced by the series. As Biressi and Nunn note,

> The politics of reality TV is a cultural politics. It is usually implicit rather than explicit, concerned with the politics of identity rather than the politics of collective action or group solidarity. … Sometimes, too, the politics of reality TV will be conservative, retributive and judgmental and this should not go unnoticed. (3)

The series invokes the myth conservatively, as a way of imbuing the game's cultural politics with the feeling of inevitability and naturalness, of common sense, associated with myth. Viewers need not believe with their rational minds that the show rewards transformation in order to experience the emotional "truth" that CC's win would be a violation. As Paul Veyne writes,

> The difference between fiction and reality is not objective and does not pertain to the thing itself; it resides in us, according to whether or not we subjectively see in it a fiction. The object is never unbelievable in itself, and its distance from "the" reality cannot shock us; for, as truths are always analogical, we do not even see

it. (21)

This *not even seeing it* is what Barthes is talking about when he talks about form *hiding* in meaning. In *Beauty and the Geek,* the myth of *Beauty and the Beast* ends up in tension with the instability inherent in the reality genre – mainly, the unpredictability of the cast – and this ability to hide is continually compromised. Producers use the cast members' adherence to or rejection of the series' rhetoric of desirable transformation, of self-improvement and the right of observers to police individual presentations of self, as a benchmark for good citizenship. Good and governed citizenship is thus constructed as the logical precedent to happily ever after. Transformation may or may not be rewarded, but outright refusal to transform *cannot* be rewarded, or the myth is exposed, or worse, it gets transformed.

However, in altering the game to ensure a happy ending to season three, producers make visible the artificiality of the tie between game and myth in a way that escalates the game of hide and seek and destabilizes the link anyway. Thereafter, the format of the show remains in flux. The producers repeatedly make controversial changes to attempt to regain the series' original popularity, but to no avail. The conclusion of season three confirmed that there could be no true surprises in the series. The producers' allegiance to the myth wouldn't allow it. With the myth exposed and the possibility of any true surprises gone, viewers lost interest and simply drifted away.

Conclusions: Re/Vision

In each of these cases, a discreet set of investments and concerns regarding *Beauty and the Beast* emerges through juxtaposing the successive retellings. While Carter frames the myth as a lesson in the impossibility of extricating knowledge, even of another person, from preconception; McKinley leaves the conception of an essential self

unchallenged and instead focuses on the myth as a coming of age tale. What maturity means for McKinley changes over time, and she comes back to the myth to reflect those changes. In contrast, the producers of *Beauty and the Geek* co-opt the myth to naturalize the creation of a media self for their contestants, then undermine the connection between the two even as they act to protect it. When considering all three cases together along with the singular retellings discussed prior, the common theme that emerges is perception. The transformations in each of these retellings, as various as they are, increasingly pivot on revision; the key focus being vision.

This focus is not a recent preoccupation. In the classic Beaumont tale, as in McKinley's *Beauty*, the protagonists are watched by invisible servants. In *Rose Daughter*, it is a malevolent sentient magic and a kindly community observing. In Cocteau's film, the statues' eyes move, following the action with dispassionate curiosity. In the Disney film, household objects watch and actively interfere with events. In "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride," as well as in *Beauty and the Geek*, the characters' looks at each other become paramount. The cases here bolster the primacy of seeing in the myth as both epistemology and ontology. I see, therefore I know. I am seen, therefore I am. I see you, therefore you are, and I know you.

In *Staring: How We Look*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson teases out the subtleties of ocularcentric interactions, those which give primacy to the visual. Staring, she suggests, is all at once a physiological response, a culturally-embedded practice, an interpersonal interaction, and as indicated by the cases here, an epistemological tool. These qualities mark the stare as fundamentally different from the singular or panoptic gazes, which discipline and contain. In contrast, the stare is generative.

> We stare when ordinary seeing fails, when we want to know more. So staring is

> an interrogative gesture that asks what's going on and demands the story. The eyes hang on, working to recognize what seems illegible, order what seems unruly, know what seems strange. Staring begins as an impulse that curiosity can carry forward into engagement. (Garland-Thomson 3)

As we have seen, both the gaze and the stare figure prominently in *Beauty and the Beast* tales. Intriguingly, both work as a metaphor for engaging with a myth as well. Carter and McKinley's multiple revisions of *Beauty and the Beast* suggest a struggle with the myth, a sense of fascination that promotes one long look. However, something in that first gaze stands out. As Garland-Thomson puts it: "the rawest, most basic form of staring is the physiological expression of being caught off guard, captured by the unexpected" (19). Something about the myth has become strange. Perhaps some of the intangible myth-stuff heretofore hidden has been suddenly glimpsed out of the corner of one's eye. The sense of dis-ease, of something unfinished, catalyzes a second look, a harder stare, a more determined interrogation. In *Beauty and the Geek*, however, the metaphor of the stare becomes more contentious. When cast members actions' disrupt the myth, the producers step in to right it through authorizing a communal disciplinary gaze and protecting the perceived integrity of the myth.

Format plays a part there. In Carter and McKinley's literary engagements, the staree is a myth. The attraction and the agency remain with the starer. The long-term impact of the authors' interventions in the myth is an active process that cannot fully be quantified. We might cite book reviews, awards, sales figures, anecdotes, and intertextual references to get an idea of these retellings' scope, but one of the key points I hope to emphasize in this dissertation is that myth functions most powerfully in popular culture during dynamic encounters. Everyone embedded in a particular culture at a particular

time carries an idiosyncratic and ever-changing relationship to that culture's mythic reservoirs. When context and content come together to create a sense of connection between people and a myth, the impact of that connection can be more powerful than reason. As Paul Veyne has previously argued, "it is imagination that rules, not reality, reason, or the ongoing work of the negative" (xii). As Carter and McKinley wrestle with their own connections, they highlight themes and situations within the myth that may not have been visible before. They dispute fairy tale logic and open up other possibilities that will for some readers now carry the same resonance as the original myth.

The authors/producers revising *Briar Rose* co-opted the myth as a vehicle for naturalizing their own stories. Their efforts exemplify one mode of engaging with myth, a mode in which the myth is itself stolen and repurposed, where Barthes' second-order semiological system is once removed. Carter and McKinley's revisions of *Beauty and the Beast* suggest a second mode of engaging with myth in popular culture, whereby the myth is not used so much as challenged. Perhaps the language of either/or is too strong. The myth is still used, still turned to the user's purpose; however, challenge, rather than naturalization, is the primary mode of engagement, and the end is ideological rather than personal. The difference is one of repurposing the myth or revising it.

Towards the beginning of this chapter, I noted Laura Beres' concerns about the potentially harmful identificatory potential that *Beauty and the Beast* holds for women in abusive relationships. McKinley takes a more Hearnian view of the story, framing it firmly as Beauty's coming of age. Carter is more political, locating the abusive relationship in patriarchy through tamely-worded invitations and profligate gambling and making Beauty's relationship with the Beast a source of agency and strength.

Unlike the Carter and McKinley retellings, *Beauty and the Geek* has no particular revolutionary purpose. Rather, it relies on the commercial applications of the strong sense of illogical connection people will hopefully make between the myth of desirable transformation invoked by the show's title and narrative and the actual content in order to draw viewers. More viewers lead to more advertising dollars. The relationship is at some level as simple as that. In acknowledging this simplicity, we must not elide the greater ideological functions of the reality TV genre and of this particular series' participation in authorizing certain kinds of gender performance as desirable and others as pathetic. *Beauty and the Beast's* history as a somewhat moralistic tale about good manners and good heart has an effect on viewers' perceptions of the transformations within the show. When the producers alter the format of the final round in season three, they assert a similar rhetoric of worthiness to that which breaks the curse in the fairy tale, blurring the boundaries between myth and invocation while at the same time making them visible.

This visibility brings us back to the notion of the stare. In Barthes's model, myth acts as a sort of distortion filter whereby form and content and meaning all blur together. He invokes metaphors of constantly moving turnstiles and landscape glimpsed through a moving car window. When one halts this blur of activity and reasserts the static and individual character of each aspect of the thing studied, one acts as a mythologist (Barthes, *Mythologies* 123-124). Unlike Carter and McKinley's unidirectional interventions, *Beauty and the Geek* incorporates multiple starers and starees. The cast members at the time of the recording both see and are seen, but there is also the unseen production staff who monitors the cast and shapes what the audience sees within the context of the series format. Later, in wrap-up episodes and post-broadcast interviews,

the cast looks and comments on the representations of themselves within the series. Finally, there is the audience who looks at the series and its transmedia extensions – reviews and interviews, water-cooler discussions, previews, recaps, website extras and promotional materials.

The format of reality TV highlights the dynamism and contestation that always surrounds sustained invocation of myth. When the production team finds its long look at the cast members challenged by the agency of the cast as living starees, as when CC points out the performative aspects of their supposed transformations, they invoke the intra-textual disciplinary gaze of the cast to contain and redirect viewers' extra-textual interrogative stares from the show's artificiality to CC's superficiality. This gaze implicitly reduces CC from unpleasant person to monstrous ego, reminiscent of Avenant's physical transformation into a beast at the end of Cocteau's film. The myth then naturalizes CC's transformation even as the cast claims none has taken place.

Though the above-studied author/producers turn *Beauty and the Beast* to their own discreet ends, the theme of vision as epistemology recurs across them all. One must see to know. One must be seen to be known. Particularly intriguing, given that Garland-Thomson grounds her anatomy of the stare in visual interactions that center on spectacular bodies, is the transformative physical effect that several of the cases attribute to perception. "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" blurs the lines between perceptual and physical transformation. The narrator of "The Tiger's Bride" comes to see herself as one of the beasts and luxuriates in her new fur. The heroine of *Beauty* manifests her inner maturity as outward beauty. The hero of *Rose Daughter* becomes a beast when he sees things no human should. The men of *Beauty and the Geek* are given actual makeovers so

that their inner "transformation" is manifest on their bodies. This theory of visual knowledge is also at work in the act of revisiting/revisioning the same myth more than once. The long hard look, the interrogative stare, attempts to understand the myth and in some cases to work a physical transformation. This transformation may be generative or disciplinary or some mix of the two. Because myth is intangible, multivalent, historical, contextual, idiosyncratic, it functions with the same potential for resistance as a living staree, though without a living person's ability to consciously direct that resistance. Thus attempts to revise a myth more accurately might be said to expand its purview and, through multiplying its meanings, to increase its resonance. *Beauty and the Beast's* climactic reveal of the Beast's true inner self manifested in the transformation of his outer self has expanded in contemporary retellings into an exploration of the reliability of visual knowledge.

CHAPTER FOUR: "WHERE EVERY CINDERELLA STORY COMES TRUE"

In the previous chapters, I have shown how individuals might utilize the myth of *Sleeping Beauty* to communicate and contain trauma, and how the myth of *Beauty and the Beast* can become a site of cultural contestation for working through anxieties about vision as epistemology. At first glance, *Cinderella's* pervasiveness in popular culture resists any such straightforward thematic connections. The tale pops up everywhere — in children's books, romance novels, films, fashion photography, commercials, theater, ballet, toys, jokes, cards. What characterizes the myth of *Cinderella* more than anything else is its mutable functionality, its emptiness. Perhaps because it is the most popular of the classic fairy tales, *Cinderella* is frequently appropriated as a synecdoche for fairy tales in general. It has come to mean everything, and in so doing, has come to mean nothing at all. It has the transparency of glass and the fetishized functionality of a slipper. It transforms whatever it contains into an object of desirability, unless, of course, the glass begins to crack.

In this chapter I will explore the diffusion of the *Cinderella* myth into the frequently alluded to "*Cinderella* story." I will look closely at a selection of advertisements that use *Cinderella's* iconography to fuse myth and marketing and art pieces that invoke that same iconography as ironic commentary. At stake is the possibility or impossibility of happily ever after itself. As with each of the previous chapters, I begin my discussion of the myth with its grounding in folklore and popular culture.

The myth of Cinderella

The Aarne-Thompson index divides *Cinderella* tales into two main branches, AT

510A, which is "Cinderella," and AT 510B, known as "Catskin." The first set of tales is further tagged with AT 511 for female Cinderellas and AT 511B for male Cinderellas.[44] The classical fairy tale that functions mythically in American popular culture is most clearly of the Cinderella-lineage, in which the girl is persecuted by her stepmother; however, the Catskin tales, in which the girl flees her home because her father desires to marry her, also pop up very occasionally.[45] The heroine of "Catskin," having fled her unnatural father, generally wanders for a time before winding up as servant in a foreign kingdom, and from there the more familiar story of the mysterious beauty at the ball unfolds.

Variants of the Cinderella tale can be traced back as far as 850 A.D., to a Chinese tale known as "Yeh-shien." The story occurs in Indian and Arab lore as well; however, by far the most common variants of the Cinderella tale for our purposes are Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Aschenputtel" and Charles Perrault's "Cinderella or The Little Glass Slipper."[46] In the Grimm version, the heroine's widowed father marries a woman with two daughters of her own. The stepsisters dress the heroine in ugly clothes and force her to work as their kitchen maid. She gets so dirty that people begin to call her Cinderella. She plants a hazel branch on her mother's grave and weeps there so often that the branch grows into a tree, and a white bird sits in it and grants her wishes.

Eventually, the king announces a three-day festival meant to find his son a bride. Cinderella begs to go, and her stepmother sets her a series of impossible tasks to fulfill in

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[44] The male Cinderella very rarely pops up explicitly. One example, however, is the 1960 film *Cinderfella,* starring Jerry Lewis (Dir. Frank Tashlin, Paramount Pictures).

[45] Most notably, within recent years, award-winning Young Adult author Robin McKinley published *Deerskin*, a novel in the Catskin tradition.

[46] "The Story of the Black Cow" (India) and "The Princess and the Suit of Leather" (Arab) can both be found in Maria Tatar's *The Classic Fairy Tales: texts, criticisms*, along with "Yeh-shien."

order to gain permission. Cinderella completes all the tasks with the help of her bird friends, but the stepmother still refuses to let her come along. Once everyone else has left, Cinderella goes to her mother's grave and wishes for a dress to wear to the ball. The white bird throws down a dress of silver and gold, and Cinderella attends the festival. She is so dazzling that none of her family recognize her, and the Prince dances with her alone all that night and those that follow. However, each night she flees before the Prince can find out her name. On the third night, the Prince spreads pitch on the staircase, and when Cinderella flees, she loses one of her slippers. He goes to Cinderella's father's house, which is near where he has seen her disappear each night, and declares he will only marry the girl whose foot fits the shoe.

The stepmother, desperate to have one of her daughters marry well, convinces one of them to cut her toe off to make the shoe fit. The Prince is fooled and rides away with the stepsister intending to make her his bride; however, when the couple rides past the hazel tree, the birds tell him to look at the blood in the shoe. He returns to the house to find his real bride, and the scenario repeats when the second stepsister cuts off a bit of her heel. The Prince returns to the house a final time and insists on having Cinderella try on the shoe. The shoe fits, and when the Prince looks at her full on, he recognizes his dancing partner and announces that Cinderella is the true bride. When they ride together past the hazel tree, the birds confirm that this time, he's made the correct choice. On the day of the wedding, the stepsisters attend with the hope of gaining some advantage through Cinderella's marriage, but birds peck out their eyes on the steps of the church, punishing them for their wickedness (Tatar 117-222).

Perrault's version shares many of these characteristics: a widower with a virtuous

young daughter marries a mean-spirited woman who has two daughters of her own. The stepsisters partake in the household's finery while Cinderella does the housework. However, in Perrault's version, the king's son throws the ball himself, and it lasts only two nights. Cinderella dresses her sister's hair and advises them on their clothes, but makes no request to join them. After they leave, her godmother, who happens to be a fairy, comes upon her crying and asks her what is wrong. Cinderella cries that she wishes she, too, could go to the ball, and her godmother decides to help her. Cinderella gathers a pumpkin, which the godmother turns into a golden coach; six mice, which the godmother turns into horses; three rats, one of which the godmother turns into a coachman; and six lizards, which she turns into footmen. The godmother then transforms Cinderella's rags into a fine gown, gives her a pair of glass slippers, and sends her off to the ball with the admonition to leave before midnight, which is when the enchantments will end.

Both nights of the ball, the king's son only has eyes for Cinderella, but she flees at quarter to twelve without giving him her name. On the second night, she loses one of her glass slippers. Perrault's version omits the gruesome mutilation of the stepsisters' feet and proceeds directly to Cinderella getting an opportunity to try on the slipper. Cinderella further seals the deal by pulling the slipper's mate from her pocket and completing the pair. She marries the king's son and, because of her great kindness, forgives her sisters and arranges advantageous marriages for both of them.

Though variants of Cinderella appear throughout most of the last three thousand years in various cultures around the world, the above versions are the most influential for discussions of U.S. popular culture. The Perrault version is the primary source for Disney's *Cinderella*, which is the most common referent for the non-expert, while the

Grimm's version is the source for other retellings such as Anne Sexton's in *Transformations*, as well as for Cinderella's Act One storyline in Stephen Sondheim's fairy tale pastiche musical *Into the Woods*, which has continued life after Broadway as a popular high school and college theater production.

The majority of the cases I will examine in this chapter refer to Disney's *Cinderella* (1950). The opening of the film features a female narrator reading from a picture book. The pen and ink illustrations of the book gradually give way to the animation style of the film as Cinderella's contented childhood gives way to oppression under the thumb of her menacing stepmother after her father's untimely death. This visual transition subtly elides the fact that the entire film is drawn and gives the spectator the impression of the fantasy of the book giving way to the more "real" world of the film. The main storyline follows Perrault, but audience identification is primarily with original characters in the forms of Cinderella's animal friends, primarily two mice — quick-witted Jack and bumbling newcomer Gus — who watch her struggles and attempt to help her achieve her dreams in between battles with the stepmother's mean-spirited cat, Lucifer. A secondary subplot involves the troubles the King's desire for grandchildren cause his right-hand man, the Duke, who becomes responsible for making certain that the Prince marries after the ball.

The film's musical theme is also in many ways its narrative theme: Cinderella's first musical number is the song, "A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes." The lyrics promise, "No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, the dreams that you wish will come true;" however, Cinderella's dream remains unformed until she hears about the ball. Bruno the kitchen mutt, on the other hand, has a very specific dream in

which he chases Lucifer the cat. Cinderella wakes him from said dream early in the film, and later, at the climax of the film when the mice battle Lucifer for the key to Cinderella's bedroom, where her stepmother has locked her in, Bruno's dream comes true. The King, likewise, is shown dreaming about something very specific — playing with his two small blonde grandchildren. The King's hair is white, but the Prince's is dark, making the choice of blonde children in the King's dream almost seem prophetic, presuming Cinderella is their eventual mother.

Cinderella dreams only of happy endings until she hears about the ball, but then her wish becomes quite specific as well. She wants desperately to attend. The mice and birds work together to make her a suitable dress since she does not have time, but when she puts the dress on and goes down to meet her stepfamily, the stepsisters rip her dress to shreds. They claim that the discarded beads and sash the mice used in its construction are stolen goods. Following this disastrous scene, Cinderella flees to the garden to sob in despair, and when the musical theme fills the air around her, she rejects its message, whispering that she can no longer believe in dreams. That, of course, is when her fairy godmother appears and sends her off to the ball. The musical theme plays once more at the end of the film. As Cinderella and the Prince ride off together in a carriage following their wedding, "the dreams that you wish will come true!" plays over the crowd's cheers and the couple's long-awaited kiss.

Apparel is likewise a recurring motif. As Cinderella sings the opening number, her animal friends first listen in bliss, then scurry about helping her dress for the day. She has provided clothes for all her bird and mice friends. The opening scene is immediately followed by one in which she picks out a shirt, hat, and shoes for a new mouse caught in

a trap downstairs. She frees the little mouse and subsequently dresses him and gives him the name Gus, at which point he becomes an integral part of the household. Soon after, she picks up the laundry and the mending from her stepsisters and stepmothers. When Cinderella asks her stepmother if she can go to the ball, the older woman tells her that she can go if she can find something suitable to wear, then keeps Cinderella too busy to modify any of her dresses. As mentioned previously, the animals make Cinderella a dress themselves. The division of labor is antiquated at best — the mouse women sew, while Jack and Gus battle Lucifer for appropriate trim. The stepsisters destroy the dress and Cinderella's faith with it. Finally, when the Fairy Godmother uses magic to make the necessary travel arrangements for Cinderella to get to the ball, she absentmindedly tries to send Cinderella off in rags, and her lack of attention to Cinderella's garb creates a brief moment of humorous suspense that makes the final appearance of Cinderella's blue and white ballgown and glass slippers that much more dramatic. As in prior folklore versions of the tale, the gown is so magnificent that not even her stepsisters recognize her at the ball — although her stepmother suspects — and her shoes remain central to her actual happy ever after.

In 1957 another influential musical production, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella,* was commissioned and produced for television by CBS-TV. This version, similar to Disney's, was based on the Perrault tale. It featured a live cast starring Julie Andrews in the title role. The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization proudly boasts that the original broadcast was seen by the largest audience in television history: "107 million people in the U.S. (60 percent of the country's population at that time) and another 10 million internationally. It was truly an event, a golden moment in the Golden

Age of Television" ("Happy Anniversary"). A second production was filmed, starring Lesley Ann Warren, and aired in 1965. In 1997, Disney incorporated the Rodgers and Hammerstein version into its own corpus by staging yet a third production through ABC's *The Wonderful World of Disney.* This most recent film relied on an updated script and featured a colorblind casting strategy. Popular singer Brandy was cast as the lead, and Whitney Houston, who also produced, starred as the Fairy Godmother. Similar to its predecessor, this broadcast was also a smashing success. "Over 60 million people watched CINDERELLA, making it the highest-rated television musical in years. It was not only the most-watched program of the night; it was also the most-watched program of the week. CINDERELLA gave ABC its strongest showing in its time slot in 14 years" ("Happy Anniversary"). In December 2011, the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization announced yet another production of the musical is headed to Broadway in 2012-2013 ("New Production"). The classic *Cinderella* tale remains exceedingly marketable.

However, the distinction between *Cinderella* and Cinderella stories begins to blur as we move into more recent popular culture, and with this blurring comes a more critical engagement with the myth. Given that *Cinderella* is the most popular of the classic fairy tales, as well as the wide range of the folklore base for the myth, this inclusiveness is hardly surprising. The concept of the "Cinderella Story" gains such ubiquity that Anne Sexton's 1971 poetic treatment of the myth, found in the same volume with "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)," discussed in chapter two, invokes it as a frame:

> You always read about it:
> the plumber with twelve children
> who wins the Irish Sweepstakes.
> From toilets to riches.

That story.

Or the nursemaid,
some luscious sweet from Denmark
who captures the oldest son's heart.
From diapers to Dior.
That story.

Or a milkman who serves the wealthy,
eggs, cream, butter, yogurt, milk,
the white truck like an ambulance
who goes into real estate
and makes a pile.
From homogenized to martinis at lunch.

Or the charwoman
who is on the bus when it cracks up
and collects enough from insurance.
From mops to Bonwit Teller.
That story. (Sexton, "Cinderella" 256)

Thus Sexton introduces a retelling of the complete fairy tale that for the most part stays close to the Grimm version. Rather than pitch, the prince spreads cobbler's wax on the stairs to catch his runaway dancing partner, but that is one of few alterations. The slippage between narrator and fairy tale princess so notable in "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)" is absent here. Sexton's commentary on the story is acerbic, as when the prince

discovers he has ridden away with a second false bride: "The prince was getting tired. / He began to feel like a shoe salesman. / But he gave it one last try" ("Cinderella" 258). One gets the sense that narrator is bored with her own story — "Next came the ball, as you all know," she quips ("Cinderella" 256). The implication is that Cinderella's story is so well known as almost not to need telling. Nothing in it is a surprise. The poem closes with biting irreverence:

> Cinderella and the prince
> lived, they say, happily ever after,
> like two dolls in a museum case
> never bothered by diapers or dust,
> never arguing over the timing of an egg,
> never telling the same story twice,
> never getting a middle aged spread,
> their darling smiles pasted on for eternity.
> Regular Bobbsey Twins.
> That story. (Sexton, "Cinderella" 258)

Sexton's tone reflects disaffection with the portrayal of perfect marriages and the possibility of happily ever after in general. Other feminist retellings of fairy tales reflect similar concerns, giving voice to the anti-tale, the notion that the Cinderella story was a lie.[47] The myth of Cinderella broadens to embrace this tension. Is happily ever after possible?

The pervasiveness of this question can be seen in even the more classically-inflected retellings. A 1976 British musical film retelling, *The Slipper and the Rose*,

[47] See in particular Jack Zipes' anthology, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

incorporates a foreign policy subplot that results in Cinderella's secret exile after the final climactic slipper scene. The prime minister goes himself to inform Cinderella that they are sending her away without the Prince's knowledge. He undercuts her fairy tale romance: "You see only love and happiness staring you in the face. I see nothing but war and destruction, unless a sacrifice is made." Cinderella, all too familiar with the cruelty of the world, immediately understands that she is the sacrifice. The Prince searches in vain for her, but ultimately gives in to his father's demands for a political marriage, swearing that his vengeance will be to ensure it is a childless union and that the royal line ends with him. Only renewed interference from the Fairy Godmother puts the story back on course and reunites the lovers in time for the wedding, while also magically resolving the political roadblocks. The aforementioned 1997 production of *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella* likewise makes a gesture to the plausibility of happily ever after in these circumstances. It features a new opening in which the Fairy Godmother sings, "Impossible, for a plain yellow pumpkin to become a golden carriage. Impossible, for a plain country bumpkin and a prince to join in marriage. A slipper made of glass is just a shoe, and dreamers never make the dream come true. Impossible!" The story that follows, as well as publicity materials for the show itself, call back, "It's possible!" ("Adding," "It's Possible: 60 Million," "It's Possible: Original").

This tension regarding the real-world feasibility of a fairy tale ending permeates one of the most influential Cinderella stories of the latter twenty-first century – the 1990 film *Pretty Woman,* starring Richard Gere and Julia Roberts. The film, in which a millionaire, Edward, hires a hooker, Vivian, to be his companion at various business events for a week, and the two fall in love, positions itself as a Cinderella story through

both allusion and theme. In an early scene, a street busker walks around in the background calling out to passersby, "What's your dream?" and "Everybody's got a dream!" This same man is heard calling out his refrain over the film's final scene, in which Edward re-enacts a scene of fairy tale romance in order to win Vivian back. The film's explicit *Cinderella* reference comes during a scene in which the vast class difference between the lovers leads Vivian to despair. She asks her roommate to name one person who they both know that it all worked out well for, and the roommate pauses for a moment, then exclaims in triumph "Cinda-fuckin-rella!" The two women laugh, but the moment captures the dramatic tension driving the film — is a happy ending for this romance possible? — and collapses it into a larger question about the *Cinderella* myth. The scene falls in the middle of the latter third of the film and is bookended by much less specific fairy tale references.

The film at first validates Vivian's concerns. Edward's initial proposal upon realizing his feelings for her is to suggest that she become his mistress. She refuses, however, citing her childhood fantasy of being a princess locked in a tower by a wicked queen and rescued by a knight on a white horse. Edward tells her that what she wants is impossible. Later, during the climax of the film, Edward rides up Vivian's street in a white limo and climbs her fire escape — a statement that he is willing to give her the relationship she wants — the mythologized fairy tale. What follows is a quippy attempt to add a pseudo-feminist twist: Edward asks Vivian what happens after the knight rescues the princess, and Vivian replies, "She rescues him right back." Similar to *The Slipper and the Rose* and the 1997 production of *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella, Pretty Woman* questions the realism of the myth only to affirm its possibility.

Critics deride *Pretty Woman*'s fairy tale ending. David Thomson labels *Pretty Woman* "lunatic fantasy… so cunning and so well done that its white lies become creamy and intriguing" (580). Claude J. Smith, Jr. charges that the film is "set in a dreamworld classless society, one in which disparities in wealth, taste, experience, and education raise no impediments to romance." Smith's argument is particularly harsh. He attacks the transactional nature of heterosexual gender relations in a patriarchal society while tying them inextricably to the elements of the film that mark it as a Cinderella story. He charges that "expensive clothing masks the essential amorality of the females as well as the extremes of social class disparity with the male partner" (C. Smith). In a *NYTimes.com* article published in April, 2011, Carina Chocano laments the film's continued resonance on similar grounds.

> Ultimately, "Pretty Woman" wasn't a love story; it was a money story. Its logic depended on a disconnect between character and narrative, between image and meaning, between money and value, and that made it not cluelessly traditional but thoroughly postmodern. Revisiting "Thelma and Louise" recently, I was struck by how dated it seemed, how much a product of its time. And "Pretty Woman," it turns out, wasn't a throwback at all. It was the future.

Can romance exist in the "real" world, where class disparities cannot be overcome by the simple application of magic and wishing? Can happy endings exist when life goes on? These negative responses speak to the tensions surrounding happily-ever-after in a way that transcends the specifics of *Cinderella* and yet is integral to its particular modern mythos. Fairy tales disrupt the taxonomy of the real world and make it seem like that disruption can turn out simply and well. The allure of that fantasy might be measured by the severity of its critics.

As the glass slipper is to "Cinderella" the fairy tale, so *Cinderella*-the-myth has become to fairy tales in general. The part stands for the whole. *Cinderella* is the most popular of the classic fairy tales. Its ubiquity has led to a certain kind of emptiness. Despite the focus of critics of *Pretty Woman,* one cannot point to the myth of *Cinderella* in popular culture and say that it is clearly about class mobility or the tensions of blended families or even about heterosexual romance. It is about all of these things and none of these things. The cases that follow suggest that more than anything else *Cinderella* has come to represent what I have previously called fairy tale logic — the inexorability of Propp's morphology — the idea that in a fairy tale, one event inevitably leads to the next within a rigid and predetermined structure. The tension between that tidy inexorability and untidy reality manifest in a growing body of work that questions the myth of fairy tale life itself.

The case studies

So far in this chapter, I have looked primarily at novels, poetry, and films. The cases that follow focus on visual culture and advertising in order to continue to get at the ways in which Cinderella has been invoked as a myth about the possibility or impossibility of fairy tales themselves. As the concentrated genealogy of the myth discussed above demonstrates, rarely does a contemporary retelling of Cinderella neglect at the very least a self-conscious nod to its fairy tale status.[48] In advertising, Cinderella's ubiquity makes it ripe for synecdoche. Its invocation in a popular advertising suggests that happily ever after is as simple as making the right purchases, while its treatment in the Twisted Princesses and Fallen Princesses series intimates that Cinderella's may not be

[48] The film *Ever After: A Cinderella Story* (Dir. Andy Tennant. Perf. Drew Barrymore and Dougray Scott. FOX, 1998) is another such example.

all that desirable a fate.

Case 1: Priceless

The so-called "Priceless" campaign emerged out of an impetus to develop a sense of "aspirational cachet" for the MasterCard brand that would make MasterCard competitive with Visa and American Express. The campaign is characterized by vignette-style scenarios associated with emotional satisfaction. Each scenario is broken down; its components accompanied by price tags, essentially putting together a grocery-list for emotional fulfillment. Emotional fulfillment is clearly "priceless:" all the components leading to it, however, can be put on your MasterCard.

As the *Cinderella*-themed commercial begins, the city is portrayed as a fairy land; its fantastic qualities enhanced by a haze of falling snow and rows of light-strewn trees. A beautiful young woman in a periwinkle party dress and fur coat strides purposefully down the street. She carries a cleaning bucket and a broom at odds with her fanciful outfit. Strangers pause and turn to watch her go by. A crane shot highlights the sign for the Magic Wand Hardware Store. From voiceover, we learn that cleaning supplies cost this woman $48 on her debit card. The caption reveals the supplies are for cleaning the chimney. An "express package to godmother" cost $14; "shoe repair (too loose)" costs $9. A close up reveals those shoes are glass slippers.

The woman arrives at the Ballroom Diner, smiling brilliantly when she sees the person she has come to meet. Three waitresses glare jealously, while an attractive man smiles back. Finally, the point of the commercial becomes clear. The narrator proclaims: "finishing chores in time to meet Prince Charming? Priceless. The Debit MasterCard's the fast way to get things done. There are some things money can't buy, for everything

else there's MasterCard" ("MasterCard "Fairy Tale"").

The Cinderella-themed MasterCard commercial, like *Beauty and the Geek* in chapter three, makes explicit visual and textual references to the myth — the sign for the Magic Wand Hardware Store, the reference to a godmother and Prince Charming, the three waitresses in the diner representing her stepmother and stepsisters, the glass slippers — on the premise that its happily ever after is an aspiration generating a powerful emotional response. In a roundtable discussion printed in *Advertising and Society Review*, the McCann Erickson New York team who developed the Priceless campaign[49] was interviewed about the creative processes behind it. In order to successfully brand and market MasterCard, the team had to find away around the fact that going into debt was generally considered a negative thing. John Kottman describes the angle that they took for identifying which "revolvers" — the term refers to the fact that credit cards allow people to accrue debt, to pay it off, and then to accrue more on the same revolving line of credit — to target with their campaign:

> A conceptual target is a target definition that factors in psychographics—not just demographics. In other words, we were kind of looking for the MasterCard equivalent of "Soccer Moms." All the research that we'd done led us to put one word in front of the word "revolvers," which was the word "good." Seems simple, but it changed everything. That one word gave us our conceptual target, "good revolvers," and it sort of took away that stigma of using a credit card because you're bad and suddenly you're going to get into debt. It allowed us to kind of shift the perspective on the category. Instead of the focus being on

[49] For the purposes of this roundtable, the team included Joyce King Thomas, Executive Vice President and Group Creative Director for McCann Erickson New York, Amy Fuller, Group Executive for MasterCard, John Kottmann, Executive Vice President and Co-Director of Strategic Planning for McCann Erickson New York, and Craig Bagno, Senior Vice President and group account director for McCann Erickson New York.

> spending and fear of debt, the focus was on access to meaningful experiences. So that was big. Since then the conceptual target has evolved from "good revolvers" to "good spenders" because of the growth of products like debit and prepaid where there is no revolving. But that insight was and is a very important part of the whole strategy and unlocking that consumer piece of it. (Bagno, et al.)

The most interesting aspect of the campaign is embedded in how the team approaches each segment. As Craig Bagno notes:

> I think that is one of the greatest strengths of the campaign, that there is not just an emotional component, but a functional component as well. That's one of the things people don't realize because the emotional part of the campaign is so powerful—I think they imagine that we are sitting around, trying to think of special moments. We tend to start more with the functional—What do we want people to spend on? What do we want people to do? What do we want people to understand about the business? —and then work back to the actual emotion. You see some campaigns out there that are just about the emotional. I love the fact that this is about functionality first. If you go back to the very first Priceless ad, which was set at a baseball game, they picked a ballpark not so much because of the emotion that can exist there, but because it was news that you could use your card at a ballpark at the time.

"Priceless" thus clearly attempted from the start to create a contiguous or even causal association between using MasterCard and experiencing happiness. When the new Debit MasterCard debuted, the *Cinderella* commercial launched it. The national promotion efforts accompanying the commercial included a "sweepstakes that offers a grand prize of $10,000 and a fairy godmother (aka personal shopper, or trip planner) to help spend the cash" (Lefton), playing off the myth once again. The quotidian aspect of the

purchases suggested in the commercial — cleaning supplies, hardware, postage, shoe repair, a meal at a diner — infer that the convenience of using one's Debit MasterCard for even the smallest purchases clears the way for a happier life, for a happily ever after, in fact. Kottman points out, "MasterCard is the best way to pay for everything that matters. It means it's really not about the money, it's about the experiences in life" (Bagno, et al).

The success of the Priceless campaign has long been evident. As Joyce King Thomas notes, "The campaign was picked up and used everywhere—in Jay Leno monologues, comic writers would use it for a sitcom, like a preview. Filmmakers asked us if we could use the format to introduce *Austin Powers II*, and we said, "Yes!" Pop culture would never have absorbed the idea if it wasn't truly relatable" (Bagno, et al.). The associations of causality and contiguity between use of the MasterCard and joy depend upon the cognitive processes of *metonymy*, or associative thought. Though McCann Erickson's creative process focused on creating a straightforward and positive association between the card and the vignettes, the appeal of the Priceless campaign functions ironically for those who roll their eyes at the myth of happily ever after as well. The price tags accompanying each item purchased on the way to happiness acknowledge the economic tensions and transactional nature of heterosexual romance derided in reviews of *Pretty Woman,* while implying, "so what?" You may not be able to buy happiness, but spending money the right way can certainly help you get there. By focusing on a "grocery list" approach to fulfillment, the priceless campaign integrates MasterCard into the same conceptual domain as classic Americana, through the baseball commercial, or fairy tale, through the Prince Charming commercial. It lends magic to the

Debit MasterCard and possibility, half seriously and half tongue-in-cheek, to the fairy tale ending.

Case 2: Year of a Million Dreams

Cinderella again played a key part in a marketing campaign in Disney's 2006 "Year of a Million Dreams" promotion for Disneyland and Walt Disney World. The Walt Disney Company blurred the lines between its entertainment properties and their consumers by promising to grant one million dreams from late 2006 through the end of 2007 ("Where Dreams"). Cast members at the parks randomly selected patrons to receive any number of special prizes — several of which were touted as a "many "money-can't-buy" experience" — one of the most-hyped being a pampered one night stay in the Cinderella Castle suite in the Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World ("During," Sloan). An article in *Disney Insider* promises: "Suddenly you are not watching a parade, you are IN the parade. Not only do you see a princess, you BECOME a princess. Or a pirate. It's imagination in full-force. Make believe, made real" ("Where Dreams"). Guests' reports emphasize the luxury of the experience. A woman who won the overnight Cinderella suite stay along with her daughter and grandchildren reported, "In the morning after we won, in the office on Main Street, they asked if we had any medical needs. One granddaughter had been diagnosed with juvenile diabetes, and when we got there, there was all kinds of candy, and it was all sugar-free. They really paid attention to the details" ("It Could Happen"). The "Year of A Million Dreams" promotion was the most visible component of "Where Dreams Come True," Disney's first global marketing campaign incorporating all its theme parks and resorts. The company cited consumer research that said people viewed Disney Parks as "transformational experiences." The initial press

release promised,

> The ideology of "Where Dreams Come True" will permeate virtually every consumer touch-point, beginning with the vacation planning process and continuing during the Disney Park vacation experience through to the return home. Consistent global messaging and visual iconography will be centered on the universally understood principle of dreams to ensure emotional resonance with audiences around the world. ("Disney Parks Introduces")

The Year of a Million Dreams was ultimately so successful that Disney extended it through 2008 as well ("Another Year," "Disney Parks Extends").

At the beginning of the campaign, Disney recruited famed celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz to stage scenes from various Disney films that would "convey how these experiences transport people from the ordinary to the extraordinary" ("Disney Parks Introduces"). Ultimately Leibovitz produced three series of images for the "Year of a Million Dreams" campaign, but the images were so successful that the partnership between Leibovitz and Disney morphed into an ongoing "Disney Dream Portraits" series, the latest of which, as of this writing, was released in March 2011.

Cinderella was the first in the original series of images. Leibovitz photographed actress Scarlett Johansson as the titular princess. In the final image, Johannson wears a variant on Cinderella's iconic blue gown from the Disney cartoon. Her dress's most notable difference is the long billowing train flowing down the steps behind her as she flees. Her blonde hair is held back from her face with a barely visible band of silver. One shoe peaks out from under the hem of her gown. She looks intently off to the left, and viewers are left to project their own versions of what she sees outside the frame. Is it the coach racing round the bend to pick her up and carry her off before it again becomes a

pumpkin? Is it simply a likely exit? Is it a crowd of tourists watching the photo shoot? One's projections, after all, will change based on one's familiarity with the details of the story, allowing for ironic or tongue-in-cheek readings of the scene as well as for romanticized ones. Guests at Disney Parks may be presumed to have at least superficial familiarity with the iconography of *Cinderella,* but that does not necessarily mean they know any more than that. Someone more familiar with the Grimm version might snicker over the way the image would have looked had they staged it with pitch spread out over the stairs.

Cinderella's flight positions her in the lower right-hand quarter of the frame. Balancing out the composition of the frame is the Disney castle in the upper left quarter. A spotlight shines from the castle straight down on Cinderella's other shoe sitting perfect and shining on the landing. Landscaping fills in the upper right, and over the steps in the lower left quarter appears the phrase: "Where every Cinderella story comes true."

Leibovitz's photo layouts appeared in a variety of high-volume periodicals, including the March 2007 issues of *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *W*, *GQ*, *Conde Nast Traveller*, *Cookie* and *The New Yorker* ("Disney's Dazzling"). One of the most frequently mentioned bits of trivia that comes up in press coverage of the campaign is the fact that Johansson is wearing a $325,000 Harry Winston tiara as she flees down the stairs. The piece is barely visible in the image itself, but a more detailed photograph of Leibovitz wearing the tiara herself with the *Cinderella* image in the background was included in behind-the-scenes promotional materials for articles about the campaign. Given all the press surrounding the barely visible tiara, I would be remiss in discussing Leibovitz's *Cinderella* without also discussing contemporary fashion photography. The image of a

beautiful woman in an evening gown who has lost a shoe captures the promise of the fashion industry — an unappreciated woman's entire life can be transformed by being seen in the right clothes. The combination of image and context encompasses and subverts the idea that Cinderella's life changes simply because she is a woman of good character.

The trajectory of fashion photography in the twentieth century may be viewed in many ways as one long slow shift away from the detail-oriented photographic representation of a haute couture garment common in the 1940s towards a more moody and mythic style aimed at a diverse pop audience:

> One of the most significant changes in fashion photography, in this fertile chaotic environment, has been that its subject — clothing — has become subordinate to the photographic description of lifestyle: transformed from a frozen object of beauty to a tantalizing aspect of a narrative. As a consequence, much fashion photography has ceased to capture a timeless moment, and instead attempts to represent a moment in time. (Kismaric and Respini 30)

Scholars frequently make reference to the co-evolution of fashion photography and art photography, as well as the increasing influence of cinema (Kismaric and Respini). As the fashion photograph became more elaborately staged, the photographer became more like a movie director. The resulting images, whether standalone or part of a multi-page spread, invite the audience to extend the fantasy aspects of their voyeuristic pleasure by filling in the gaps between their limited access and an implied but unknowable overarching narrative (Kismaric and Respini 34-5). Disney's choice of Leibovitz, a reknowned portrait photographer, as a partner in this campaign signals understanding of the ways in which voyeuristic pleasure is integral to the emotional and aspirational

attachments it hoped to tie to Disney Parks. Leibovitz's artistic reputation stands behind each image, giving it a cultural weight beyond its origin as an advertisement.

A similar savviness comes through in the choice of celebrities as stars in a series of images that will supposedly transport people "from the ordinary to the extraordinary." This choice has two intriguing effects. It plays on the "Year of a Million Dreams" promise to make ordinary Disney Parks guests into princes and princesses themselves, but it also infers that even the most famous among us long for the fairy tale. The popular culture of celebrity worship thus colludes to add an extra gloss of desirability to the fairy tale fantasy. Johansson is quoted saying, "It wasn't hard to coax my foot into the iconic glass slipper; it's every little girl's dream, mine included ("Disney's Dazzling"). Emphasizing the notion of the Cinderella story has a similar duality. *Cinderella* may be a fantasy, but Cinderella stories happen every day. Beginning the series with the *Cinderella* image attaches these disparate dualisms to the series as a whole and thus to the marketing campaign. The fairy tale fantasy unites everyone, and while it may not be possible to become Cinderella, it is certainly possible to get caught up in a Cinderella story. Look at Scarlett Johansson. She was a normal girl once. Now she's a star. If you go to Disney Parks, then for one night, you might be, too.

Case Study 3: Twisted Princess

While advertising campaigns tend to invoke *Cinderella* for the positive emotional associations consumers have with fairy tale logic and happily ever after endings, independent artists frequently engage with the associations themselves more directly. Jeffrey Thomas, who describes himself as a character designer / story artist, is known primarily for his Twisted Princesses series, horror-inflected incarnations of Disney's

animated princesses. His deviantArt.com portfolio has had over 1,500,000 page views in its three-year existence, and the series has been highlighted on numerous blogs as well (Thomas). The images are arresting. Though the focus of this case is on his "Cinderella," his portraits of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Beauty and the Beast* tie in with the myths I've examined in previous chapters. His gothic Sleeping Beauty gazes down. Mascara streaks line her cheeks as though she has been weeping, and her black lipstick is smudged. Her face is scratched, her finger pricked and bleeding. An owl in a prince's cloak has its claws wrapped around one of her wrists, but it is unclear whether the bird is her pet or her attacker. The image recalls innocent Princess Aurora's fantasy of romance and her dance with her animal friends right before she meets Prince Philip. Her scars suggest the inevitability of the curse still to come, but her posture isn't particularly defeated. Her downcast eyes allow for the possibility of hidden defiance. Likewise, Thomas's *Beauty and the Beast* portrays a salivating, malevolent Beast with a torn noose around his neck. Belle, wearing a ripped version of her yellow Disney ballgown, faces the viewer from underneath the curtain of her hair. She is as beastly as he in aggressive posturing. Both of them have glowing pupil-less yellow eyes. They stare, but the viewer cannot know if or what they see. Both images tend towards the disturbing, the malevolent. They are impressionistic renderings of the myths as a whole rather than representations of a single scene in the film. *Beauty and the Beast* was the first image in the Twisted Princess series.[50] *Cinderella* was fourth in a planned series of five. *Sleeping Beauty* was supposed to be the final image, but by the time of its release the series had proved so popular that Thomas announced he was continuing it. Intriguingly, of the sixteen portraits in the series

[50] Unless otherwise noted, all information regarding Thomas's intentions for the series comes from his notes on the images on DevientArt.com.

to date, *Cinderella* is the only princess who is portrayed as completely inhuman.

She is a scarecrow dressed in the garb of Disney's *Cinderella.* Her hair is the same yellow straw that is peeking out of her ripped seams. A red-eyed, malevolent looking crow perches next to her. She's covered in dripping pieces of pumpkin pulp, what one might colloquially call the pumpkin's guts in order to convey the sense of gore. Her eyes are blue buttons. Her hair ribbon is tattered and worn. The glass slippers sit abandoned and broken outside the pumpkin in the lower left corner of the frame. There are vines and leaves growing out from underneath the pumpkin. Cinderella exclaims in delight at an angry-looking, red-eyed rat dressed in a tiny green shirt. The crow appears to be wearing a hat made from the same material as the rat's shirt. The sky is darkens to violet behind them. There are shadowy leaves overhead and additional pumpkins behind. They are all alone.

Whereas MasterCard and the Walt Disney Company invoked the *Cinderella* myth as something to which to aspire, the Twisted Princess *Cinderella* is transmuted into an ineffectual warning. Scarecrows are meant to ward off crows, but this one makes them clothes instead. She seems more villain than heroine. Where the classic Cinderella labors at whatever task is put in front of her, this one laughs. Nothing about her says a fairy tale ending is a good thing, or that she cares.

Case Study 4: Fallen Princess

While the Twisted Princess conveys abstract criticism of the myth, the pseudo-realistic style of the Fallen Princess image, which is the focus of my final case study, takes a much more specific approach. Photographer Dina Goldstein credits her inspiration for the Fallen Princesses series to watching her young daughter develop a fascination

with Disney princesses. She attributes her own previous ignorance of fairy tales to her upbringing outside the U.S., implying an experience of U.S. culture that presupposes a familiarity with fairy tales or at least with Disney's interpretations. Fascinated by the dynamics she observed with her daughter's three-year-old peer group -- particularly their desire to dress up like the Disney princesses -- Goldstein explored the Grimms' stories and began to conceive of a series of images that set the perfect Disney princesses up against contemporary real-life women's issues. Her mother's ongoing battle with breast cancer also influenced Goldstein's questioning of "happily ever after." Goldstein posted the series on JPG.com and was overwhelmed by the audience response. Eventually she was forced to set the series up on a separate website to accommodate the volume of web traffic. Since 2008, images in the series have won multiple awards, and nine of them became an exhibit at the Buschlen Mowatt Gallery in Vancouver, British Columbia. The series has been featured in publications all over the world (Goldstein).

Visitors to the website where Goldstein now hosts the photo series are greeted with a Flash animation that zooms in on a castle while *Sleeping Beauty*'s "Once Upon a Dream" plays. "Cinder," the piece that will be the focus of my analysis, is the second image in a series of ten. Others in the series include a barefoot "Snowy" (*Snow White*) overwhelmed by a lazy prince and a number of crying children and a bald, post-chemotherapy "Rapunzel" sitting despondent in a hospital bed with one hand on an IV drip and the other on a wig of long blonde hair. An overweight "Not-So-Little Red Riding Hood" sips a fast food soda while she carries a basket of burgers and fries through the woods. Sleeping "Beauty" remains young and beautiful and asleep while her elderly prince sits resigned at her bedside in a retirement home, waiting for the hundred years to

pass. "Jasmine" (from Disney's *Aladdin*), machine gun in hand, stands ready for battle in a war-torn Middle East combat zone. "Ariel" (from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*) is an aquarium curiosity who presses her hands up against the glass of her prison while a small boy looks on. "Belle" (of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*) undergoes plastic surgery. "The Princess and the Pea" sits on a pile of mattresses in a landfill. "Pocahontas" sits surrounded by cats in a dark and dingy cabin that looks like it was decorated out of a Reservation tourist trap.[51]

"Cinder" sits alone at a small red cloth-covered table in the middle of a dive bar. She's the lone woman in the place, and several of the men have turned their heads to watch her. She doesn't appear to notice their stares. Dressed in the iconic blue gown and hairstyle made famous in the ball sequence of Disney's animated film, she hunches over, elbows on the table, and contemplates a half-raised shot glass. A neon sign in the upper left corner of the image spells out "Blue" in the same shade as Cinder's gown. The contrast between the working class garb of the men – a ripped denim jacket, a cowboy hat, baggy t-shirts and sweaters – and Cinder's ballgown is a stark reminder that she does not belong in this place. There is no clear source within the shot for the spotlight that illuminates the details of her expression and garb. The clearly staged nature of the shot reinforces the fantasy elements even as it deconstructs them. If one sees the image in the context of the full series, there is no doubt that this woman is the fairy tale princess herself, but even then the viewer is left with questions: What is she thinking? Is this before the ball or after? Is this after the wedding? When in the story's timeline does this

[51] As with the Twisted Princess series, the images for *Sleeping Beauty* and *Beauty and the Beast* add to without overriding our earlier discussions of those myths. Sleeping Beauty will wake to the traumatic discovery that everyone she knows — including her prince — has aged and possibly even died while she slept. She will have to make her way on her own. Belle is so obsessed with appearances — with what people see — that she is having surgery to try and maintain her youth.

moment take place? Could this dive bar possibly be where happily ever after ends up?

In a television interview for the show *Urban Rush*, Goldstein revealed that the bystanders in the dive bar were simply patrons in the establishment who happened to be there when she staged the shot. The men's confused expressions while gazing at Cinder are real. They do not understand this woman's presence in their bar. Their reactions raise another set of questions regarding experience of the final image: if one does not know the fairy tale or sees the image out of context, then one might only see an anachronistically overdressed woman staring down a shot. Is she an underpaid amusement park employee? Is she on her way to a costume party? Whereas the mythic context — weighted as it is towards the love story – might indicate romantic dissatisfaction, the stark contrasts in the Fallen Princesses image hold the tension of class suspicion as well.

Though only one Cinderella image is included in Goldstein's online gallery, a second image of the same woman hitchhiking on the street outside the bar has been in circulation on the internet for just as long as the series proper. Goldstein says her inspiration for both was a "what if?" scenario. "What if she had — what if the prince has walked out on her, or she's — she found out that he has a few other princesses on his schedule for that week? … What if — what if she just felt really down and out, and she ended up in a bar and had a few too many drinks?" (Goldstein, *Studio 4*).

"The characters are symbols used to relate a scenario," Goldstein says. She chose to use Disney-esque costuming in order to make them instantly recognizable so that she could make a connection with her audience (Goldstein, *Urban Rush*). She invokes *Cinderella* quite consciously as a vehicle for critiquing the idyllic promise of happily ever after so heavily marketed to little girls. Real women's lives are much more

complicated than that, her Cinder seems to say, seeing in that shot glass the harsh reality of life ever after the fairy tale ends.

A language of aspiration

The case studies in this chapter serve a variety of purposes and are aimed at a variety of audiences, but to an extent they all fall into one of two approaches to the myth: Cinderella as aspiration or Cinderella as warning, as dream or as nightmare. The Priceless campaign's aim was to create a sense of "aspirational cachet" for MasterCard and The Walt Disney Company's was to create a sense of emotional resonance between Disney Parks and dreams come true. Both campaigns invoke fairy tales in a generic sense while foregrounding *Cinderella* in particular, collapsing the distinction between the two. Both invoke positive experiences as a rationale for consumerism, equating real life actions with fairy tale endings. The Twisted and Fallen Princesses images, in stark contrast, put the desirability of *Cinderella*'s fate into some doubt. The Twisted *Cinderella* calls back to Anne Sexton's disaffection in its transformation of the fairy tale princess. Neither scarecrow nor doll appears to be a fate to which one might aspire. Fallen *Cinder* takes that doubt out of gothic fantasy and into the dim light of a Vancouver dive bar. One cannot buy happily ever after, if indeed it exists at all outside of a shot glass.

To return to my opening metaphor, the myth of *Cinderella* holds the tension of the potential of the glass slipper to either fit or to shatter. When we refer to a Cinderella Story, we are referring to the triumph of the underdog, whether through romance or upward class mobility. The latter in particular aligns with the quintessential American myth exemplified in the Horatio Alger, Jr. tales so popular in the nineteenth century, wherein a poor young lad with a good work ethic pulls himself up by his bootstraps,

ascends through a triumph of will and work.[52] Popular films such as director Ron Howard's 2005 *Cinderella Man,* in which a down-and-out boxer overcomes the odds to become a champion once more in 1930s, appropriate the fairy tale myth for all who overcome the odds, regardless of gender. As Elizabeth Wanning Harries writes, "When we say, "It's just like a fairy tale," or "It has a fairy-tale ending," we mean that something has turned out mysteriously, even unnaturally, well; that an equilibrium has been reestablished when only catastrophe seemed possible" (10). The nuances of the two phrases are of course somewhat different. Rarely does anyone invoke the phrase "It's just like a fairy tale" during a period of hardship. It can be atmospheric, a nod to magic and the fantastic possibilities of a topsy-turvy world – a reference to the mood at a wedding perhaps – or it can be retroactive, a glossy cast over an adventure that may or may not have included trials and tribulations, but for sure is going well at the moment – a waitress winning the lottery or a prince dating a girl he met at school. "It has a fairy tale ending," on the other hand, focuses on outcome. It implies that trials and tribulations are now ended; the story is over. The label of "Cinderella story" has become a battleground for the tensions around the desirability of a fairy tale ending, transmuting the *Cinderella* myth into a myth about fairy tales in general, about the possibility or impossibility of magic and optimism and about the nature of happiness and the meaning of "ever after."

The cases in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which *Cinderella* gets invoked to then sell people on the idea that fairy tale life is a consumable good. They also show the ways in which this use provokes doubt in fairy tale logic more generally. The two images providing ironic commentary on the notion of an aspirational *Cinderella* both reference the Disney film in the princesses' clothes and hairstyle for a reason. Disney has

[52] Alger was a popular and prolific American novelist.

been the most obvious corporate factor in the sale of fairy tales, not just in the "Year of a Million Dreams" campaign, but for years prior to that in its marketing of its fairy tale films and related merchandise. Walt Disney Pictures' logo is even a fairy tale castle. Cinderella-as-warning cautions against buying into the myth of happily ever after without first clarifying the price.

In earlier chapters we discussed the ways in which fairy tale myths have become "stories to think with, stories that do not necessarily determine lives but can give children (and adults) a way to read and understand them" (Harries 139). Both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Beauty and the Beast* manifest particular sets of concerns over and over again, no matter what the invocation's nominal purpose. *Sleeping Beauty*'s curse frequently aligns it with trauma narratives. *Beauty and the Beast*'s climactic transformation aligns it with anxieties about disguise, vision and knowledge. In contrast, *Cinderella* has become a story for thinking through the desirability of wishing, of hoping, of dreaming.[53] It's become a myth about happily ever after, and from that comes its appeal for advertisers.

Famed singer Dusty Springfield covered a song called "Wishin' and Hopin'" that instructs a woman that wishing alone isn't enough to consummate a heterosexual romance. The listener should "do the things he likes to do. Wear your hair just for him." The message echoes Cinderella's actions -- attending the royal ball, dressing the part of the prince's mate. However, in the absence of a fairy godmother or help from a haunted tree, a woman must spend money for that sort of thing. The promise of happily ever after catalyzes a positive emotional reaction and sets up *Cinderella* as a powerful iconography

[53] Though Cinderella has become the central fairy tale myth where the desirability of wishing, dreaming, and hoping comes into question, most of Disney's fairy tale princesses sing a song of longing or wishing: *Snow White* ("Some Day My Prince Will Come"), *Sleeping Beauty* ("Once Upon a Dream"), *Cinderella* ("A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes"), *The Little Mermaid* ("Part of Your World"), *Beauty and the Beast* ("Belle" and "Belle (reprise)"), *Enchanted* ("True Love's Kiss"), etc.

for metonymically associating consumerism with happiness. *Cinderella* functions in the Barthesian sense of myth as a type of speech. It becomes a language of aspiration.

Metonymy is key to understanding the myth of *Cinderella*. Though often confused with synecdoche, a simple part for whole substitution, actually, synecdoche is a subset of metonymy. In *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice*, Laurie L. Patton distinguishes between the various kinds of associative thought as follows: "in metaphor two elements from different conceptual domains are related. In metonymy, two elements from the *same* conceptual domain are related" (45). The popular confusion of synecdoche with metonymy, in and of itself a part for whole substitution, can elide the potential scope of metonymic thought. The semiotic processes which inscribe a common conceptual field or "frame" depend on "beings, things, processes, and actions that generally or ideally occur together" (Patton, *Bringing* 46). As the Priceless campaign shows, these frames are open to manipulation and can be powerful marketing devices. MasterCard has no "naturally" occurring link to fairy tales, however the frame of the commercial brings the two into contact in such a way as to make the association seem inevitable, a favorite hat-trick of marketers. The closing voiceover strengthens the association and goes so far as to imply causality. If our Cinderella didn't have a MasterCard debit card, she never would have gotten to meet Prince Charming on time. There would not have been a fairy tale.

A similar scene occurs in the fairy tale pastiche Disney film *Enchanted* (2007). The heroine, Princess Giselle, played by actress Amy Adams, has been invited to a ball, but has nothing to wear. In an obvious example of product placement, the young daughter of Giselle's one true love, Robert, played by Patrick Dempsey, produces her father's

emergency credit card to rectify the problem. By metonymic association with the structure of the Cinderella story, the child, played by Rachel Covey, becomes Giselle's fairy godmother; the credit card, a sort of magic wand. Keep in mind that the only storefront sign visible in the MasterCard commercial, other than that for the Ballroom Diner, is for the Magic Wand Hardware Store. In neither case is the association accidental. In the commercial narrative, the target audience may be starry-eyed young women, but in the film, the target is children as well as adults. For both, the message is this: preparing for true love – the action plan that actualizes all of that wishing and hoping – has a cost, and credit cards can help you pay it. Credit cards can help ensure your own personal fairy tale comes true.

As a pastiche narrative,[54] *Enchanted* both is and is not a Cinderella story. Rather than retelling or referencing one fairy tale predominantly, it references a slew of Disney properties, including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Sleeping Beauty* and others, and uses them as a framework for an original tale. *Enchanted* aligns with a trend in contemporary fairy tale narratives towards hybridization and generification – invoking multiple fairy tales in piecemeal fashion alongside original stories that lack a classic provenance but have a fairy tale "feel." Perhaps because of their generic qualities, these particular pastiche tales center most on the tensions we've seen in the *Cinderella* myth regarding the desirability of fairy tale life. Reviewing *Enchanted* for *Marvels and Tales,* I noted,

> Despite the film's allusive and nostalgic appeal, *Enchanted* is troubling in its

[54] For more on the concept of fairy tale pastiche, see Cathy Lynn Preston's "Disrupting the Boundaries of Genre and Gender: Postmodernism and the Fairy Tale" (in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches.* Ed. Donald Haase. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 197-212).

> ham-fisted post-feminism. While nominally providing a message of female self-actualization and empowerment through Robert's attempts to provide his daughter with strong female role models such as Marie Curie, as well as through his paternalistic, if well-meaning, attempts to educate Giselle about the importance of getting to know a prospective partner as a person rather than relying on fairy tale plot lines involving Prince Charming and the perfect kiss, the film cues viewers to the undesirability of these same messages. The little girl disdains her father's suggested role models in favor of Giselle, a real live fairy-tale princess, and Robert himself is forced to realize that he is wrong about the impossibility of fairy-tale romance when true love's kiss saves Giselle from death. (195)

The film sets up feminism in opposition to fairy tale logic and then uses the male lead's epiphany to drive home the point that the fairy tale triumphs.

The Stephen Sondheim stage musical, *Into the Woods,* also a fairy tale pastiche, arrives at a very different conclusion when it takes on the importance of wishing and dreaming so crucial to Disney's *Cinderella* and offers more of a cautionary slant. Over the course of the play, the Grimms' Cinderella's story intertwines with that of various other fairy tale characters. A Baker and his Wife discover that a witch has cursed them with barrenness, but she is willing to undo the spell if they fetch her several magical items. Among the items is "a slipper as pure as gold" which belongs to Cinderella. Act One of the play involves the various characters getting their wishes just as they do in their individual tales. Cinderella, for example, marries the Prince, while her stepsisters get their eyes pecked out by birds for their mean-spiritedness. In Act Two, a giant tramples the kingdom looking for the boy who killed her husband in Act One — Jack of *Jack and*

the Beanstalk fame. Cinderella disguises herself as a servant in order to leave the castle unnoticed and check on her mother's grave. During her adventures, she discovers the Prince's infidelity — he is more interested in the agony of unattainable love than in the day-to-day reality of marriage. Ultimately, Cinderella chooses to return to the life of a commoner and become the newly widowed Baker's housekeeper and nursemaid rather than return to her glamorous, but empty life as a princess.

Whereas *Enchanted* acknowledges the unreality of fairy tale endings only to affirm them, *Into the Woods* relies on showing the consequences of the characters' actions — the happily ever aftermath, if you will. Both of these tales continue the tension of the *Cinderella* myth, the possibility and impossibility, the dream coexistent with the nightmare. In *Into the Woods*, the disillusioned Cinderella is given dialogue to that effect. She tells the cheating Prince Charming: "My father's house was a nightmare. Your house was a dream. Now I want something in between." Soon after, the ensemble cautions each other and the audience: "Careful the wish you make. Wishes are children. Careful the path they take. Wishes come true, not free. Careful the spell you cast, not just on children. Sometimes the spell may last past what you can see and turn against you. Careful the tale you tell. That is the spell. Children will listen." *Into the Woods* raises the stakes of fairy tale logic. Wishing becomes a moral act with consequences for the entire community.

Conclusions

The morality around wishing is a vital source of the tension around possibility at the core of the modern American myth of *Cinderella*. The ideal of a meritocracy remains influential in popular culture despite structural inequities of class, race, gender, ability,

etc., and an abundance of evidence suggesting people rarely "deserve" what happens to them in any consistent way.[55] There is nevertheless something seductive about the belief that one earns one's fate, because then one can do something to affect it. Thus, when Vivian rejects life as Edward's mistress in *Pretty Woman*, turning her back on a prostitute's life just when it is about to become most profitable to her, Edward is suddenly willing and able to commit to her despite both of their pasts. Vivian's wish, similar to the Disney Cinderella's, is self-focused. Vivian wants commitment. Cinderella wanted to go to a ball. For the most part, the advertising-oriented invocations of the myth play on the harmlessness of these desires if one has the money to buy them or the luck to win them. Notably, they skip over the meritocracy aspects in favor of the magical possibility. McCann Erickson invokes *Cinderella* in order to get people to put even small purchases on their new debit card instead of paying cash. One cannot buy true love, but one can facilitate it with MasterCard. Disney promises the chance of a night spent in a castle for one million lucky guests simply because they came to one of the Disney Parks, but they do have to spend the money to get to one of the Parks. Advertisements replace virtue with financial investment.

Enchanted's Giselle, who may qualify as an occasional Cinderella, carries her pastiche over to her happily ever after ending, which is part virtue-rewarded and part financial investment. The final scene shows her in her new role as mother, wife and successful businesswoman – unsurprisingly, she is a seamstress, having whipped together clothing at the drop of a hat throughout the film. For the ironically-minded viewer, the perfection of the scene recalls Anne Sexton's Bobsey twins-derision, but within the film,

[55] The French philosopher Alain de Botton examines the roots and consequences of this belief at length in his book, *Status Anxiety*.

there is no doubt of the characters' happiness.

While reading Giselle's happy ending irreverently requires reading it against the grain of the text, other cases reflect Sexton's suspicion more explicitly. The Twisted "Cinderella" and Fallen "Cinder" reject virtue altogether with their emphases on malevolence and despair, respectively. Both are similarly presented in isolation from any sense of community or ongoing narrative. Twisted Cinderella is ineffective in her scarecrow persona. She doesn't show any evidence of caring about her work or her situation. Her seeming disinterest may qualify as a further moral failure in a status anxious society where one is *supposed* to want to better one's condition. Fallen Cinder comes across as similarly un-industrious. She has abandoned the geography of her fairy tale for a dive bar and appears on the verge of a drinking binge. These pessimistic invocations of the myth reflect disbelief in happily ever after. They imply dissolution, but without a context to say whether it is a cause or effect of the princesses' difficulties. The importance of context in identifying the locus of critique of the myth become explicit when one factors in the Cinderella of *Into the Woods*, which argues explicitly that people must be held accountable for the consequences of their wishes and their actions as they sought to make those wishes come true. Each of these three cases reflects a down-and-out Cinderella, but whether she is cursed, malevolent, despairing or disillusioned remains up to the audience's interpretation. In this light, the myth of *Cinderella* becomes a meditation on what we dare to hope for and what we might be willing to do to get it. Perhaps wishing is harmless, as is magic, as is spending, and perhaps good things happen to good people. Or perhaps happily ever after isn't all it's cracked up to be. Perhaps one should think long and hard about what one wishes for and how far one is willing to go to

make that wish come true.

CONCLUSION

Trauma, the unity of the self, the efficacy of vision as a form of epistemology, the possibility or impossibility of happily ever after – all of these themes emerge as contemporary concerns in fairy tale myth. What they have in common is that each addresses the splintering of possibility in narrative ways. As myth, fairy tales function as stories with which to think, tools for making sense of one's relationship to a larger body of cultural concerns. For my purposes, the most interesting set of tensions in the themes that have emerged here surround attempts at reconciliation between the promises of women's liberation and the prescriptions of fairy tale logic.

Insights gleaned from fairy tale myths

In chapter one, I discussed the fact that myth can be political as well as theological, and it is always ideological.[56] Chapter two's examination of *Briar Rose* proves that myth can also be intensely personal, a vehicle for engaging with one's place within society, for fitting one's own story into a common cultural framework. The identifications one forms with a myth need not map along straightforward gender-specific lines. When myth is a tool for creating meaning, the meanings can get creative. Jane Yolen's invocation of *Briar Rose* to narrate the Holocaust shows the utility of the myth for reconciling the persistence of evil with the possibility of living happily in its aftermath. Sexton's "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)" can't quite make that leap into reconciliation. She remains locked into the curse part of the story, unable to fully wake up.

Dollhouse's multiple Beauties, on the other hand, take control of the story, as when Echo tells the little girl to "imagine you're the prince." The older woman instructs

[56] See in particular my discussion of Doniger, Lincoln, and Barthes.

the younger in how to tell the story of the problem as separate from herself and in how to distinguish between helplessness and actual passivity. The gender-switching gives agency to the child's desire while maintaining the familiar framework and happy ending. It reconciles her need to feel empowered with her rage over her helplessness in the situation. In a cultural context where passivity is devalued and yet victimization still occurs, creatively retelling a myth criticized for its passive heroine becomes a method for reconciling one's individual experiences with the collective societal experience in a positive way. A different sort of reconciliation occurs when Rice's heroine subverts the assumption that masochism and internalized sexism are one and the same by wholeheartedly pursuing her desire to be the plaything of others. Rice's Beauty refuses the label of victim because she enjoys playing the role so much.

Most fairy tale myths remain geared towards women in a general sense. These specific examples suggest that even when they veer away from the personal to address broader cultural concerns, they do so within a history of women-oriented narratives. Running through all the retellings of the myth of *Beauty and the Beast* discussed in chapter three are tensions between the fractured or unknowable self and the desire to belong to oneself, to another, to one's community, to one's cultural narratives. Carter's heroines – the virtuous and naïve heroine of "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" and the anonymous, gambled-away narrator of "The Tiger's Bride" – find themselves more and more isolated as they come into their own until finally life with beasts seems more beneficial than life in society. McKinley's heroines, on the other hand, find their self-actualization depends in part on *not* remaining isolated, and thus on reuniting their lonely Beasts with the outside world. The contestants of *Beauty and the Geek* must embrace the

desires the show's rhetoric lays out for them or risk total alienation within the house's community.

Bound up in these explorations of desire and belonging in the myth are the effects of being under constant surveillance, whether by unseen servants or a camera crew for an eventual unseen audience. Some of the characters – the Tiger's bride, for example – claim the agency of the return gaze – the staree's stare – as part of their desire, but most do not. The contestants on *Beauty and the Geek* in particular rarely look back except in retrospect – as when Chuck laments the vilification of Scarlet. Each engagement with the myth suggests a different possible relationship between individual desire and group belonging, surface and subtext, self and other.

These existential explorations of desire and social integration play out within contexts of contradictory and restrictive gender relations. The constrictions around women's choices are evident even in McKinley's apolitical retellings, as both sets of sisters' options for bettering themselves following their father's ruin are so frequently tied to marriage or, in one case, cross-dressing. Carter's retellings make sexism more of an explicit focus through highlighting the economic and social powerlessness of the women compared to their male counterparts. The two seasons of *Beauty and the Geek*, which is the only case study of *Beauty and the Beast* to take place in the present, are perhaps most revealing of the gaps that remain between the overt presumption that today's women and men are considered equals and the implicit cultural biases that allow the producers to position the Beauties' bodies as property of the Geeks through the structure of games such as the massage contest. This disjunct between what is seen on the surface and what is revealed to be underneath runs throughout the myth of *Beauty and the*

Beast, and, occasionally, highlighting the myriad contradictions between appearance and reality causes retellings of *Beauty and the Beast* to lose their way. The forced resolutions of McKinley's *Beauty* and the third season of *Beauty and the Geek* suggest the impossibility of repacking all that complexity into the neat ending required by fairy tale logic. The topsy-turvy world occasionally collapses in on itself, and that, too, reaffirms a reality of contemporary women's lives.

The question of resolution comes into play most strongly in the myth of *Cinderella*, which questions the efficacy of fairy tale logic and the possibility of ever attaining a happily ever after. When the question is redirected towards preparing the way for happiness through good moral character or financial investment, the answer becomes yes – wishes can come true; such is the case with *Pretty Woman* and *Enchanted* or with the MasterCard and Disney Parks advertisements. Of course, while these invocations suggest that wishes are more likely to come true if the right conditions are met, they discreetly forbear from guaranteeing results. Even *Into the Woods* suggests that one can get one's wish, though it, along with the Twisted and Fallen *Cinderella* images, cautions whether getting what one thinks one wants and living happily ever after are ever quite the same thing.

When one looks at the myth of the fairy tale in general, as seen in the diffusion of *Cinderella*, one sees why the corpus of classical tales continues to resonate. Fairy tales turn the world upside down; reverse the "natural" order of things. Peasants become princesses. Beasts become princes. Terrible things happen, but everything turns out all right in the end. *Cinderella* becomes a tool for externalizing the challenges of internalized sexism, the contradictions of the popular post-feminist goal of "having it all" in a context

of limited emotional and economic resources. Engaging with fairy tale logic, with its promise that things will eventually come out right, allows for a collective questioning by the producers and receivers of given text: is the end as promised? If not, is it not yet the end? If the world is still topsy-turvy, perhaps the story isn't over yet.

The significance of fairy tale myths to gender scholars

Rhetorics of social justice and gender equity can overlook individual women's complex emotional investments in old narratives, which promise closure, even if their delivery is in doubt. The tensions between traditional modes and new ways of being exist on a continuum. The language of internalized sexism, while useful, privileges certain choices over others and assigns an implicit negative value to investments in women's traditional sphere. Arguing instead for the supremacy of women's ways of knowing just reverses the bias. Engaging with myth — relating to it as the Greeks did, with irony and distance as well as belief — is one of the crucial and frequently overlooked ways that society works through such paradigm shifts.

This is not to say that feminism died when the visible and vocal movement of the 1970s receded from public view after many of its goals were achieved. Rather, it diffused into hundreds of more specialized activist efforts, became institutionalized in Women's Studies programs on college campuses, became a part of daily life. In 1985, socialist feminist and science historian Donna Haraway[57] mused on the tension that to this day exists in activist, as well as academic, circles,

> It has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective – or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun. Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. With the

[57] See chapter one for a further explanation of how Haraway's work has influenced this dissertation.

> hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity. There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state of 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class-consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. And who counts as 'us' in my own rhetoric? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called 'us', and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? (155)

Perhaps the only thing binding "women" is the continued experience of a less-than status based on their perceived gender. Feminism's successes have not led to a new utopia, and despite our differences, or sometimes because of them, women still have to navigate gender-related disappointments, anxieties, and burnout as well as opportunities and successes. News magazines occasionally question if or announce it is the end of feminism,[58] but perhaps the most frustrating aspect of narrating feminist movement is that it necessarily continues. Ongoing struggle does not have a mythic script. There is no post-revolution happily ever after in sight, no *end*.

I have shown how contemporary women may engage with myth to reconcile transgressive personal experience with communal narratives and thus write themselves into social presence or may use myth to make sense of contradictions between the way they've been told the world is supposed to work and the way things actually play out. This latter mode is where understanding the lure of fairy tale logic becomes crucial to

[58] For example, "Is Feminism Dead?" (*TIME Magazine* 151.25, 29 June 1998).

studying tensions surrounding gender and desire in popular culture. When women try to make sense of external political contradictions such as being told on the one hand that gender disparities no longer exist and on the other that the Equal Rights Amendment cannot pass Congress, there are public forums for discussing the disjuncture, but when they try to make sense of more personal contradictions in their own desires and behavior or in those of their loved ones, they may turn to myth, to stories with emotional resonance and cultural authority, as social worker Laura Beres has seen with regard to her abused patients' cooptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, and I have shown in the past chapters with regard to that and other tales.

Regardless of the kind of authority fairy tales have arguably had in earlier times and places, the popular perception today is that they have some kind of meaning greater than ordinary stories. That this meaning is individual, contextual, and temporary is no barrier to their mythic authority. In fact, mythic authority depends on lack of clarity, on ambiguity. I refer to Bruce Lincoln's claim that authoritative speech "is best understood in relational terms as the effect of a posited, perceived, or institutionally ascribed asymmetry between speaker and audience that permits certain speakers to command not just the attention but the confidence, respect, and trust of their audience, or — an important proviso — to make audiences act *as if* this were so" (*Authority* 4). The ambiguity of myth, its lack of detail and emphasis on magic rather than reason, leaves a crucial gap so that each individual does the work of relating to a myth on her own terms, thus creating personal meanings that could be ironic, distancing or disbelieving, as well as believing. Whether fairy tales have intrinsic meaning is immaterial to their mythic authority. A common *perception* that they have meaning is enough to give them authority

in certain times and places and thus to make them useful for integrating personal experiences into cultural narratives that simply don't map onto each other in any straightforward way.

Political work happens in the everyday through creative engagement with myth. When I wrote in the introduction of working as a makeup artist and becoming intrigued by my clients' offhand references to fairy tales in speaking of their daily lives, I was telling you how my interest in this project began. Now, at the project's conclusion, I would like to highlight some of the investments revealed in those off-the-cuff remarks. The bride who referenced kissing frogs and finding her prince communicates a desire for heterosexual romance and a likely emotional buy-in to laws that privilege married couples and grant them tax deductions and other rights. Finding love is a quest narrative in which she was an active participant. Recognizing these investments can translate into creating more effective political appeals. Someone seeking to win this woman's support for legalizing gay marriage would perhaps be better served by appealing to her investments in romance as a quest that gets rewarded than by making a more general justice-based argument for marriage equality. Engaging with myth mobilizes an emotional investment this woman has in her own life and turns it towards the other.

The businesswoman who rejects waiting around for Prince Charming as a strategy has a more complex investment in heterosexual romance and gender equality. She communicates disbelief in fairy tale logic and a desire and aptitude to bring about her own happy ending through professional success, but the fact of her allusion also signals confusion, an explicit awareness of that other story and its promises of happily ever after, the magic mirror life that shadows the one she's chosen and pops into her head when

she's tired or wrung out, a source of doubt. Her ambivalence reflects the fatigue of living in the midst of quiet, sustained cultural resistance, of ongoing struggle.

Myth is a vehicle for people to engage with the story of a societal problem – and in the case of fairy tale myth, the problem is how to live in a world where gender is recognizably in flux and yet simultaneously very prescriptive. Sometimes these engagements occur in a spirit of protest, as Marina Warner's work has shown, but not always. Fairy tale myth converges in popular culture as a form of epistemology, and as such, its lessons are affirmed as often as they are questioned. How much does changing the details matter when the structure remains the same? Is wishing for closure or an end to the trials-and-tribulations part of the story an act of optimism or a doomed cop-out? These are questions that arise in the context of fairy tale logic and demonstrate the importance of understanding myth for activists as well as scholars.

In the 1985 essay quoted above, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," Haraway answers her own questions by proposing feminist affinity as an organizing principle rather than "female" identity. Central to her heterogeneous conception of feminism is the image of the cyborg, a partially human, partially machine being who comes into existence on the margins and has no use for unitary identities. "There is a myth system waiting to become a political language," she writes (181). What I have shown in this dissertation is that in popular culture, a similar process is going on whereby fairy tale myth provides women with a personal-political language for relating to changes in gender and society.

The cultural work fairy tales have done for women historically[59] continues in contemporary popular culture, where fairy tale myth functions as an adaptable

[59] See chapter one.

hermeneutic for relating to gender-in-flux. When feminists turned their attention to the effects of fairy tales on gender socialization in the 70s, the mostly dismissive or negative interpretations that resulted implied that fairy tales would be left behind as women broke from norms of passivity and the marriage plot. While scholars such as Bottigheimer and Warner have shown that the relationship between fairy tales, gender and society have historically been much more complex than that, contemporary feminist theorists outside of fairy tale studies frequently refer to the 1970s readings as definitive and neglect fairy tales' relevance to contemporary gender issues outside of concerns about the influence of Disney's princess culture. However, the lens of myth theory turned towards the cases examined herein shows that the relationship between gender and fairy tale myths is by no means static or definitive and that studying it has political relevance outside of folklore or literary studies. Fairy tale myth is a political language, and feminist scholars interested in political action need to pay attention to it.

Interpretation of fairy tales is a vital and ongoing activity both in the academy and outside of it. As such, it requires continual attention. Fairy tales remain a dynamic resource for studying gender socialization and struggle, a complex locus of history and response that changes as each generation confronts gender for the first time. Fairy tales signal the need for deeper, more sustained attention to the ways in which women engage with myth in popular culture because the hesitations and questions and contradictions and conflicts revealed in these engagements affect these same women's behavior when it comes to polls and political stances. The ways in which individuals collectively come to terms with these contradictions are what will constitute continued feminist movement.

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