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KISS AND TELL: ORALITY, NARRATIVE, AND THE POWER OF WORDS IN “SLEEPING BEAUTY”

The metafictional nature of the Sleeping Beauty tale has gone largely unappreciated. Underlying the story's obvious themes and motifs – birth, death/sleep, rebirth – and complicating its gender dynamic is a preoccupation with orality and telling that gives the story a significant self-reflective dimension. This article examines how the tale reflects on storytelling and the medium of its telling, not only in the classical versions by Perrault and Grimm, but also in the *Roman de Perceforest* and Disney's animated film.

The article on “Schlafende Schönheit” in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* begins with this ten-word synopsis of the tale: “Zauber Märchen, das von einer verwünschten Jungfrau [...] und ihrer [...] Erlösung handelt”¹. More than doubling the number of words, the Aarne-Thompson index of tale types offers this nonetheless compact description: “The king's daughter falls into a magic sleep. A prince breaks through the hedge surrounding the castle and disenchant the maiden”². Of course, neither the *Enzyklopädie* nor the Aarne-Thompson index is referring to a specific text. They are both referring to a category, to the tale type now known as ATU 410 in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther catalogue of international

1. H. Neemann, “Schlafende Schönheit”, p. 13. The ellipses in my translation remove only the cross-references: “Zauber Märchen, das von einer verwünschten Jungfrau (→ Verwünschung) und ihrer → Erlösung handelt”.

2. A. Aarne, S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale*, p. 137.

folktales³. This distillation of many different versions into a basic type is a double-edged sword for scholars of folktales and fairy tales.

On the one hand, we bring to these descriptions our own experience of the type, our own memories of specific tellings and adaptations, and our own associations and responses that put flesh on the skeletal plot summary and turn the corpse of the lifeless type into a corpus of tales. Like *Sleeping Beauty* herself, the tale-type description lies dormant between the covers of the tale-type catalogue until we endow it with details reflecting our experience from the world of tales. In this respect, the tale type as a descriptive template is recognizable because it consists of pure potential and is – despite its brevity – profoundly intertextual.

On the other hand, distilling the narrative to such a sparse synopsis is an act of translation and interpretation that tends to direct our understanding of the story's essential elements and meaning, and that privileges those texts that are most clearly reflected in the tale-type description. It is no accident that the reception history of the *Sleeping Beauty* story has focused on the canonical versions by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, and that those canonical tales have influenced the Aarne-Thompson description, which almost insists that the tale type be understood in gendered terms – that the story is first and foremost about female dependence on a male rescuer. This is how the tale has been typically understood in Anglo-European contexts; and the numerous rewritings that have appeared in the wake of the feminist critique of fairy tales have deliberately questioned the representations of gender that are present in the canonical versions by Perrault, Grimm, and Walt Disney. This is what leads Carolina Fernández Rodríguez to write about the “male-rescuer archetype” in “*Sleeping Beauty*” and its deconstruction in contemporary feminist rewritings⁴. Similarly, Jack Zipes argues that the gendered messages of “*Sleeping Beauty*” promulgated in the classical versions have been frozen into myth – in a Barthean sense – and dominate the story's reception. However, Zipes also claims that there is more to the story than its gender politics, and that the mythic messages

3. H.-J. Uther, *The Types of International Folktales*, vol. I, p. 244-245. In his revision of the Aarne-Thompson index, Uther expands the original description of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale type to four paragraphs with more detail.

4. C. Fernández Rodríguez, “The Deconstruction of the Male-Rescuer Archetype in Contemporary Feminist Revisions of *Sleeping Beauty*”.

of “Sleeping Beauty” have not been able to eradicate the tale’s “utopian impulse”, which he calls “historically indelible”. According to Zipes, “*Sleeping Beauty* is not only about female and male stereotypes and male hegemony, it is also about death, our fear of death, and our wish for immortality”⁵.

Indeed, these are major literary and cultural themes, and they are easily identified in a tale type described specifically in terms of “redemption” and disenchantment from a “magic sleep”. Even when we are drawn in the direction of the tale’s irritating gender politics, it would be difficult not to recognize in the tale-type description and the richly resonant motifs of sleep and awakening the equally evocative themes of birth, death, and rebirth. Nonetheless, I am skeptical of the severe shorthand used in describing tale types, especially since it abstracts stories in such an interpretive manner and tends to define what a given story is supposedly “about”. Isn’t it possible that the tale of *Sleeping Beauty* is “about” something else, that it has a different potential – multiple potentialities – that can give us reason to think of canonical tales in new ways? In an illuminating study of Perrault’s “*La Belle au bois dormant*”, Carolyn Fay has identified “the tale’s underlying preoccupation” with the inevitable death of women who “withdraw from the societal and the narrative order”⁶. What interests me here is not Fay’s specific finding about the fate of women living outside the social and narrative order. Instead, I want to underline her effort to expose what actually “drive[s]” Perrault’s tale (p. 260-261) and what lies – as she says – “at the heart” (p. 273) of the story.

Like Fay, I am interested in the “underlying preoccupation” and driving force of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale. However, my own readings take me in a different direction than Fay, both methodologically and thematically. I am interested in a constellation of dominant versions that seem to have an underlying preoccupation with the creative power of language and storytelling. In other words, I attempt to understand the tale of *Sleeping Beauty* as a narrative that is driven by a fundamental concern with the agency of speech and the speaker, story and the storyteller. I intend this article as an exploration of that phenomenon. In

5. J. Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm*, p. 215. Zipes’s discussion of Barthes and “*Sleeping Beauty*” as myth is on p. 209-214.

6. C. Fay, “*Sleeping Beauty Must Die*”, p. 261.

doing that, I do not want to suggest that the metafictional aspects I discern have been exploited and developed in every version. Based on early and canonical versions, I hypothesize that this self-reflexive dimension of the story surfaces in certain texts in response to historical contexts and each author's preoccupation with the form and medium of storytelling⁷.

I first explored the metafictional dimension of the Sleeping Beauty tale in my 1990 article "The Sleeping Script: Memory and Forgetting in Grimms' Romantic Fairy Tale (KHM 50)". The present article explores the topic further from a different point of view. The fundamental argument of my earlier study was that Grimms' "Dornröschen" exhibited the self-reflexive characteristics of the Romantic literary fairy tale. I reached that conclusion by showing that the tale thematized memory and alluded to Grimms' mission to preserve ancient oral traditions as they had described it elsewhere in their writings. A pivotal figure was the old man who tells the prince the tale of Brier Rose as it had been passed on to him by his grandfather, an act of storytelling that not only inspires the prince's quest to redeem the maiden but also serves as a self-reflexive commentary on the Grimms' confidence in oral tradition and mirrors the very story in which it is told.

I now want to look further into orality in Sleeping Beauty tales – at speakers and the effect of their speech, at storytellers and the effect of their tales, and how these drive the story forward and address the agency of storytelling itself. The Sleeping Beauty tales I discuss include the story of Troylus and Zellandine in the *Roman de Perceforest* (origins in 14th century; manuscripts from 15th century) and the versions by Perrault (1697), Grimm (1857), and Disney (1959). I also consider the German Romantic novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) by Novalis. *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is not typically viewed as a Sleeping Beauty variant, but I will suggest that it stands in a revealing intertextual relationship to "Sleeping Beauty" generally and Grimms' "Dornröschen" in particular, and that it illuminates the metafictional potential of the tale type.

My intertextual exploration begins with the story of Troylus and Zellandine, the earliest version of ATU 410 and one that clearly demonstrates the role of narrative and storytelling in this tale type. What

7. For the idea that the fairy tale is an inherently metafictional genre, see J. Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry*. See also S. Ballestra-Puech, M. Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère and M. Monnier's articles in the volume.

drives the story of Troylus and Zellandine is telling by word of mouth, a banal observation in the context of a medieval romance perhaps, but the ubiquity of the phenomenon, which becomes a pivotal motif and preoccupation of important Sleeping Beauty stories, demonstrates its special significance.

In addition to the love that motivates Troylus to search for the beautiful Zellandine, it is the amazing story told about her that drives him and the marvelous narrative of the two lovers itself. At the very beginning of his quest, Troylus encounters a sailor who has heard an account of Zellandine's having fallen into a deep sleep, which he characterizes as "une merveille sy grande qu'a paine est elle creable"⁸. Upon hearing this brief but amazing news from the sailor, Troylus is deeply saddened, then filled with courage, and exclaims, "Par ma foy, seigneurs, vous m'avez racompté une grant merveille" (p. 59). Later, a lady who offers him food and shelter on his journey tells him a more elaborate (but still incomplete) version of Zellandine's story, which offers details about her having handled flax and a distaff before falling into her profound sleep, and about the surprise and wonder her condition elicits. After losing and regaining his memory – undergoing his own awakening when Venus wets his eyes and forehead with saliva from her mouth – Troylus is told another part of Zellandine's story by a guardian at the temple of Venus, who recounts the story that is told by midwives and that is presumed to lie behind the curse upon Zellandine – namely, that one or more of the three goddesses who are to be worshiped before the birth of a baby were for some reason insulted and pronounced the curse⁹. Subsequently, at the temple of the three goddesses, Troylus pleads for help from Venus, who speaks to him not in narrative but in poetic form. Astonished by her words, whose significance he is not yet able to understand, Troylus is inspired to resume his journey in quest of both Zellandine and the meaning of the words Venus has spoken – which, as we and Troylus come to find, predict Zellandine's disenchantment through the couple's erotic union and the birth of a child (who sucks the splinter of flax from his mother's finger).

8. *Perceforest*, l. III, t. III, p. 58. Hereafter I cite only page numbers.

9. For a discussion of the role and representation of midwives in Antiquity, see C. Frank, C. Spieser and V. Dasen in the first section of the volume.

Although Troylus is the primary recipient of stories that have been passed on by word of mouth and propel his quest to revive Zellandine, it is important to note that she, too, upon awakening from her enchanted sleep, has her own story told to her by her aunt, who tells her the entire tale from beginning to end: “Alors elle luy racompta du commencement jusques en la fin” (p. 201). Most significantly, the reunion of Troylus and the now-conscious Zellandine is also marked by an exchange of stories. In the final episode, the young knight tells Zellandine “tout au long” (p. 234) of his journey to her and his amazing adventures, and she tells him the full story of her enchantment, just as her aunt had told it to her: “Adont elle lui compta tout son fait de point en point et comment il avoit esté destiné a sa naissance que ainsi lui devoit advenir, comme sa tante lui avoit recordé” (p. 235). So the chain of storytelling and transmission of stories reaches its climax when Troylus and Zellandine both speak their own stories – in full and in their own voices.

I have catalogued all this to make the point that this very early version of the Sleeping Beauty tale type has a clear preoccupation with storytelling. The tales that Troylus hears – transmitted from teller to teller – affect him deeply and drive his search for the sleeping beauty. The ubiquity and the deliberate organization of these tale-telling incidents also suggest their fundamental importance. The individual narratives that Troylus hears are only parts of the complete story of Zellandine’s enchantment, and they unfold the fuller tale in reverse chronological order, beginning with Zellandine’s fall into a deep sleep and working backwards towards the source of the curse at her birth. The full story is only complete at the end of the tale, when Troylus tells Zellandine of his quest, and she tells him the story of her wonder-filled destiny.

The metafictional thrust of this early literary version of the Sleeping Beauty tale sets the stage for considering subsequent variants and the degree to which that original preoccupation inheres in versions of the story that follow. So let us turn first to the Sleeping Beauties of Perrault and Grimm.

We know that Perrault and his contemporaries were deeply engaged in literary debates – in the context of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns – and the fairy tale was consciously employed in that contest on the side of the moderns. And we know that the role, power, and effects of speech and language were deliberately and explicitly thematized in fairy tales by those same writers to advance the modernist

agenda. The best-known examples include Lhéritier's "Les enchantements de l'éloquence" and Perrault's "Les fées". What is so striking about Perrault's version of "Sleeping Beauty" – at least at first glance – is its relative silence on speech and storytelling.

The gap in this respect between Perrault's version and the tale of Troylus and Zellandine is especially remarkable. This is due in part to Perrault's evident reliance on Giambattista Basile's earlier version of the tale, "Sole, Luna e Talia", which had already eliminated the storytelling episodes that filled the tale of Troylus and Zellandine, which Basile probably knew¹⁰. This is not to say that Basile's collection of stories, *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1634-1636), possesses no metafictional dimension. But in Basile's work the storytelling has been concentrated in the frame narrative and does not occur within "Sole, Luna e Talia" as a motif that drives the king's discovery of the sleeping princess.

There is, however, one episode of storytelling in Perrault's version that recalls the tale in the *Roman de Perceforest* and reveals the self-reflexive dimension of "La Belle au bois dormant". As the one-hundred-year curse is expiring, the young prince glimpses the castle towers rising above the trees while out hunting. Unaware of their significance, he inquires about them and is told stories about them, each account depending on what each teller had heard from others. In each case, however, it is a supernatural or marvelous tale that he hears. Some offer what amount to ghost stories and claim that the old castle is haunted by spirits; others, offering something akin to a local legend, claim that the witches of the region hold their Sabbath there; others, representing the most common folklore in circulation, tell him of a child-eating ogre who inhabits the castle, to which he alone has access through the dense woods surrounding it. This episode, with its account of local beliefs and narrative variety, can be taken as an acknowledgement of popular folklore and storytelling – real or idealized – which is the purported source of the Sleeping Beauty tale itself.

The episode is not without irony, for the erroneous stories circulating among the people – if they are taken for their truth value – bespeak their superstition and ignorance. Moreover, the prince is bewildered by the conflicting stories and cannot decide what to believe. In terms of the

10. See J. Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm*, p. 292, note 10; and G. Roussineau's introduction to *Perceforest*, l. III, t. III, p. XXI-XXIII.

unfolding narrative, these accounts of ghosts, witches, and ogres could also conceivably dissuade the prince from trying to penetrate the castle, and so – if he were to turn away from the castle because of them – they would disrupt the course of romance and redemption lying at the heart of the Sleeping Beauty tale. Of course, there is another story to be told to the prince, the very story of the Sleeping Beauty, the fairy tale the prince himself has just entered.

And it is at this point in Perrault's version that we hear the echo of the tale about Troylus and Zellandine, where self-reflexive storytelling drives the fairy tale forward. The prince now hears the marvelous story of the beautiful sleeping maiden, who awaits the arrival of a prince to awaken her from a one-hundred-years sleep. Recounted by an old peasant, who had heard it from his father more than fifty years ago, the tale has a long tradition (as long as Sleeping Beauty's sleep) and has been passed by word of mouth from one generation to the next. This description of the tale's ancestry is meant to imply its authority, and – indeed – its effect on the prince is immediate and powerful. At the moment he hears the old peasant's words, he feels as if he is on fire. Inspired by the tale to find love and glory, he sets off to redeem the enchanted maiden. The incomplete fairy tale he hears drives him to join the narrative and complete it himself.

The story of enchantment and disenchantment that the old peasant tells to the prince is among the strongest acts of speech and language described in Perrault's story. It compares favorably with the words spoken by the fairies, who set the tale into motion with their powerful predictions and thus evoke, in line with arguments made by Allison Stedman¹¹, the authors of fairy tales themselves. The peasant's tale also has more power to facilitate the disenchantment of the princess by inspiring the prince than the king's public edict does to counteract the fairy's curse by forbidding the use or possession of spindles¹². Even the monarch's later proclamations forbidding anyone from approaching their sleeping daughter are without effect because they are unnecessary,

11. A. Stedman, "Charmed Eloquence" and "Proleptic Subversion". This aspect runs through the history of the tale, as several contributions to the present volume show.

12. "Le Roi, pour tâcher d'éviter le malheur annoncé par la vieille, *fit publier aussitôt un Edit*, par lequel il défendait à toutes personnes de filer au fuseau, ni d'avoir des fuseaux chez soi sur peine de la vie" (Ch. Perrault, *Contes*, p. 132; my emphasis).

having been preempted by the magical growth of impenetrable vegetation around the castle conjured by the protective fairy. Speaking in the tongues of fairies and storytelling peasants trump royal edicts and proclamations of the male monarch.

The storytelling episode in Perrault's "La Belle au bois dormant" becomes a pivotal moment for understanding the tale's metafictional nature. That Perrault included it – despite its absence in Basile – strengthens the possibility that he may indeed have known the tale of Troylus and Zellandine¹³. Given the compact nature of Perrault's tales – to use Elizabeth Wanning Harries's useful distinction between complex and compact tales¹⁴ – it is logical that he would reduce the multiple storytelling moments found in the prototype to a single episode. Its singularity, however, in no way diminishes the role of speech and storytelling as driving forces in the narrative. In fact, Perrault uses the single episode effectively to legitimize the fairy-tale genre in which it appears.

In their compact tale about the Sleeping Beauty, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm have retained the single storytelling episode in which the young prince learns of the beautiful enchanted princess asleep in the castle. The changes that the Grimms have made to this episode, however, reflect the different literary and cultural context in which the brothers were collecting and rewriting their tales. If there is some ambivalence about folk traditions and superstition in Perrault, there is none here. And if the fairy tale and oral tradition are valued by Perrault and his contemporaries because they legitimize genres, subject matter, and a creative impulse that serves the modernist agenda, this is not precisely the case for the Grimms. Rather, the Grimms valued oral traditions in their own right as natural expressions of cultural identity, and the tale of "Dornröschen" and the storytelling episode embedded in it become a metacommentary on orality.

Like Perrault's tale, Grimms' version introduces the episode by telling us that the protected castle had become the object of storytelling in the surrounding countryside¹⁵. However, in Grimms' "Dornröschen" it is not merely the castle that is the object of popular speculation; it is

13. See G. Roussineau's introduction to *Perceforest*, l. III, t. III, p. XXIII-XXIX.

14. E. W. Harries, *Twice upon a Time*, p. 16-17.

15. The following two paragraphs are based on my interpretation in D. Haase, "The Sleeping Script", p. 172.

the tale's eponymous heroine Brier Rose herself who captures the folk's imagination. And, whereas Perrault seems to treat the peasants' superstition and confusion about the actual story with some irony by telling us that they told several erroneous versions that were quite frightening, the Grimms show that they unequivocally revere the oral tradition of the folk by writing only of a single tale in circulation: "Es ging aber die Sage in dem Land von dem schönen schlafenden Dornröschen"¹⁶. The singularity of this legend – as the Grimms' call it here – is not meant to suggest the literal uniformity of the oral tradition. Rather, it suggests the power of the popular memory as it is embodied in the folktale.

Consequently, the Grimms endow the tale and the act of storytelling with a different significance than does Perrault. Whereas Perrault's prince is curious to hear stories about the mysterious forest after he first *sees* the still visible castle towers rising above the trees, the Grimms' prince first learns about the enormous hedge and then the legend of Brier Rose by *listening* to the tale of the old storyteller¹⁷. For the Grimms orality precedes the visual. Hearing – and not principally seeing – is believing. So when the old man of Grimms' tale relates the story of Brier Rose to the prince, the young man is so inspired by what he has heard that the old man's subsequent words of reason cannot dissuade him from venturing to the once forbidden castle, where his kiss awakens Brier Rose. As the Grimms write:

Da lag [Dornröschen] und war so schön, daß er die Augen nicht abwenden konnte, und er bückte sich und gab ihm einen Kuß. Wie er es mit dem Kuß berührt hatte, schlug Dornröschen die Augen auf, erwachte und blickte ihn ganz freundlich an (p. 260).

With that, her one hundred years of enchanted sleep – during which the folk has not forgotten her – have come to an end.

The kiss introduced by the Grimms begs to be understood in the context of orality. Conventionally, the kiss coinciding with Brier Rose's

16. J. and W. Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. I, p. 259. Hereafter I cite only page numbers.

17. The importance of hearing the tale as opposed to seeing the castle exists already in the 1810 manuscript version of Grimms' "Dornröschen", which was based on a variant told by Marie Hassenpflug that seems otherwise to rely on Perrault's version. See *Die älteste Märchensammlung der Brüder Grimm*, p. 106.

awakening is taken to be an expression of romantic love. In Perrault's tale the prince's arrival at Sleeping Beauty's bedside is enough to wake her at the end of the hundred years. Their exchange of words, however – hers charming, his incoherently eloquent – is an expression of their love, which results in their marriage and a sleepless wedding night. Grimms' single kiss seems almost a faint echo of the infinite number of kisses that Troylus gives the comatose Zellandine when neither his touch nor spoken words succeed in waking her. When Zellandine is aroused but not awakened by his endless kissing, he is encouraged by the voice of Venus and allows desire to overtake him completely. While Grimms' kiss certainly has an erotic dimension, I wonder whether this climactic motif in "Dornröschen" is not also suggestive of the orality that gives birth to storytelling¹⁸.

This is a distinct possibility if we read Grimms' "Dornröschen" not simply in the context of Grimms' folkloric interests but also in the context of German Romanticism and the Romantic literary fairy tale, a famously self-reflexive genre. A particularly relevant intertext presents itself in the novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by Novalis, a pioneering theorist and creator of influential literary fairy tales during early German Romanticism. Novalis's complex, metafictional novel of development recounts the journey of its young hero, Heinrich, who sets out from his parental home in search of poetry and the spirit of poetry – love – which is embodied in Mathilde, the daughter of the master poet Klingsohr. Throughout his journey, Heinrich encounters people who engage him in conversations about poetry, history, and nature, and who, above all else, tell him stories – fairy tales – that stimulate his desire to become a poet and drive his quest. At the very beginning of the novel, Heinrich is kept awake by the stories he has heard from a stranger – stories not exactly about a Brier Rose, but about a blue flower. While his parents sleep, Heinrich lies restlessly in his bed thinking of the stranger and the tales he has told. Falling finally into sleep, he dreams the first of several dreams – prophetic stories that he tells himself – and envisions the blue flower, the symbolic incarnation of Mathilde, love, and the spirit of poetry. He is awakened the next morning – the first of several awakenings – by the voice of his mother, and soon his journey begins,

18. See also E. W. Harries's article in the volume for a discussion of the sexual politics of the tale in light of its modern reception.

motivated by his desire and the stories of the stranger, just as Grimms' prince begins his quest after hearing the old man's tale.

Heinrich von Ofterdingen's intertextual relationship with Grimms' "Dornröschen" offers what I think is a valuable insight into the kiss that the Grimms' allow their prince to give the Sleeping Beauty at the moment of her awakening. Throughout Novalis's novel (and in his other fragmentary novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*¹⁹ [1802]) kissing consistently couples the erotic with the poetic. Orality, poetry, and love are one, and the kiss embodies all three. Consider the scene in which Heinrich, having finally met Klingsohr and Mathilde, engages one evening in conversation with the master poet:

Mathilde schwieg. Ihr Vater fing ein Gespräch mit ihm an, in welchem Heinrich mit der lebhaftesten Begeisterung sprach. Die Nächsten wunderten sich über des Jünglings Beredsamkeit, über die Fülle seiner bildlichen Gedanken. Mathilde sah ihn mit stiller Aufmerksamkeit an. Sie schien sich über seine Reden zu freuen, die sein Gesicht mit den sprechendsten Mienen noch mehr erklärte. [. . .] Im Feuer des Gesprächs ergriff er unvermerkt ihre Hand, und sie konnte nicht umhin, manches was er sagte, mit einem leisen Druck zu bestätigen. Klingsohr wußte seinen Enthusiasmus zu unterhalten, und lockte allmählich seine ganze Seele auf die Lippen. Endlich stand alles auf. Alles schwärmte durch einander. Heinrich war an Mathildens Seite geblieben. [. . .] Er hielt ihre Hand und küßte sie zärtlich. Sie ließ sie ihm, und blickte ihn mit unbeschreiblicher Freundlichkeit an. Er konnte sich nicht halten, neigte sich zu ihr und küßte ihre Lippen. Sie war überrascht, und erwiderte unwillkürlich seinen heißen Kuß. Gute Mathilde, lieber Heinrich, das war alles, was sie einander sagen konnten (p. 276).

In this remarkable passage, conversation with the master poet has freed Heinrich's tongue. Fired by his lively speech and new-found eloquence, Heinrich is overcome by an irresistible impulse to kiss Mathilde, first on the hand and then, bending towards her, on the lips. She responds

19. "Bey unsern Festen löst sich seine Zunge, er sitzt oben an und stimmt Lieder des fröhlichsten Lebens an. Du hast noch nicht geliebt, du Armer; beim ersten Kuß wird eine neue Welt dir aufgethan, mit ihm fährt Leben in tausend Strahlen in dein entzücktes Herz. Ein Märchen will ich dir erzählen, horche wohl" (Novalis, *Schriften*, vol. I, p. 91).

impulsively by returning his kiss after gazing at him “mit unbeschreiblicher Freundlichkeit”. It is intriguing to note how closely this description of Heinrich and Mathilde’s first kiss on the mouth echoes the more modest but no less significant kiss in Grimms’ “Dornröschen”: “Wie er es mit dem Kuß berührt hatte, schlug Dornröschen die Augen auf, erwachte und blickte ihn ganz freundlich an.”

Whether or not the Grimms’ text deliberately alludes to the kiss in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is not ultimately my point. The fact is that the kiss between Heinrich and Mathilde shows the impossibility of separating the erotic from the poetic, which are inextricably linked in this pregnant moment of oral expression, where love gives birth to speech, and speech to love. This intimate coupling of love and poetry in the form of a kiss is repeated throughout *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*²⁰.

One passage in particular evokes the tale of the Sleeping Beauty. It occurs in the fairy tale told by Klingsohr at the conclusion of the novel’s first part. Near the end of this complex allegorical fairy tale, which reflects Heinrich’s own story on mythical, cosmological, and even scientific levels, the figure of Eros sets out on a quest ultimately to awaken the slumbering princess Freya, and redeem the realm of King Arctur. Upon his arrival, he is encouraged by the character Fabel (in English, Fable) to awaken his beloved:

Eros [. . .] flog auf die Prinzessin zu, und küßte feurig ihre süßen Lippen. Sie schlug ihre großen dunkeln Augen auf, und erkannte den Geliebten. Ein langer Kuß versiegelte den ewigen Bund (p. 313).

The shifting roles of the allegorical characters in this Sleeping-Beauty moment only underline their inseparability. And, here again, story – Fable/narrative – motivates the awakening, redemption, and happy end, enabled through the kiss – the symbol and literal embodiment of the powerful agency of orality.

What I am suggesting, then, is that the kiss in Grimms’ “Dornröschen” necessarily resonates with the kisses in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, and that it expresses not only the romantic conclusion to the quest for love, which is so frequently criticized in the Sleeping Beauty tale, but also the central role that orality and storytelling have played in bringing the prince to this climax. In this reading, the prince’s kiss is not simply a chaste echo of

20. See Novalis, *Schriften*, vol. I, p. 221, 279, 290, 318, and 363.

the sexual relations that Troylus and Basile's King have with their comatose beauties, but a metafictional gesture expressing the creative power of orality.

Perhaps the most famous kiss associated with the Sleeping Beauty tale occurs in Walt Disney's animated version of 1959. As nearly every man, woman, and child under the spell of Walt Disney knows, when the evil fairy Maleficent utters her curse that the princess Aurora will die on her sixteenth birthday, the good fairy Merryweather counters with a blessing that provides for the princess to sleep instead of to die, and to be awakened from that deathlike sleep by "true love's kiss". Along with the phrase "Some day my prince will come" from Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the motif of "true love's kiss" has been firmly lodged in popular consciousness as an icon of the idealized romantic love that is a trademark of Disney's films. While I do not wish at all to dispute that, I do think that the kiss in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* also has a metafictional dimension²¹.

Unlike Perrault and Grimm, Disney the artist-animator is principally preoccupied with storytelling as a *visual* and not a verbal art. Consequently, orality and storytelling play a much less conspicuous role in Disney's animated film than they do in any of the other Sleeping Beauty variants discussed here. The pivotal storytelling episodes that propelled the heroes in those tales virtually disappear in Disney. The framing device of a book containing the written text of "Sleeping Beauty", which opens as the film begins and closes as it ends, accompanied by the voice of a narrator, pays homage to the literary source of the tale, but the viewer is quickly engaged by the colorful animated images that proceed to tell the tale. Most conspicuous is the absence of the pivotal storytelling episode, in which an old man tells the tale that inflames the prince and inspires him to begin his quest. Disney replaces this episode with a scene in which the sadistic Maleficent actually tells the captive Prince Phillip the tale of Sleeping Beauty. That tale, however, recounts her own perverse plan to keep him captive for one-hundred

21. Until very recently, the spinning wheel was represented as a reel on Disney's official website, so that the ambivalent "magic spell" of fairy tales (and of Sleeping Beauty as emblematic of the power of fairy-tale magic) was associated with cinematic technology. I am indebted to Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère for this observation. See M. Viegnes' article in the volume for another instance of "merveilleux scientifique" in turn-of-the-century culture.

years, making him an old, old man before he can awaken the still youthful Sleeping Beauty with “true love’s kiss”. To be sure, Maleficent’s anti-fairy tale does serve to anger and embolden Prince Phillip, but it does so not simply because of what she has *told* him but also because of what she has *shown* him – for the tale she tells is not only verbal but also visual. Indeed, she commands the Prince to “Behold”, not to listen; and in the globe atop her scepter, her tale plays out in moving images picturing the colorful beauty of the sleeping Princess Aurora and the defeated old prince who rides off on his aged steed. Like the viewers of the film itself, in that moment Phillip is a spectator of the fairy tale, strengthened in his resolve to defeat Maleficent not simply by the words she has spoken, but by the images with which she has told her tale.

If the self-reflexive literary fairy tales I have discussed present themselves as stories that are driven by magic deriving from orality and the power of words, Disney’s animated fairy tale tells us that its special magic comes from the power of the visual. The moment of “true love’s kiss” in Disney’s film confirms this, for it is a moment in which the powerful symbolic potential of the oral is co-opted by the visual artist. As spectators, we see very clearly that Phillip’s kiss not only awakens Aurora from her enchanted sleep, but that it re-animates her – bringing literally (or better: visually) beautiful, vivid color to her face and clothing, animating and coloring the unconscious inhabitants of the castle, whose deep sleep is visually conveyed not only by their lack of movement, but also by their drab, muted, shadowy figures and settings. Indeed, following the kiss, speech is virtually disabled and seems superfluous. Prince Phillip and Princess Aurora speak not a single word for the remainder of the film, and King Hubert – Phillip’s father – stutters, sputters, and speaks nearly incoherently. The final scene shows us the couple dancing, with constant movement and color. And from above, the fairies use their magic wands to repeatedly change the color of Aurora’s gown as she dances, creating a magical spectacle reflecting and paying tribute – in a final self-reflexive moment – to the animators’ own powers to create, re-create, and enchant.

I have tried to show that the canonical versions of Sleeping Beauty have an underlying preoccupation with the power of storytelling that gives these tales a metafictional dimension. The presence of this self-reflexive interest suggests that it may constitute an inherent potential of this tale type. After all, it should come as no surprise that a cultural

narrative about the fundamental themes of birth and death also invites reflection on creativity and creative powers. Such a story resonates with writers and artists who use their media to create and re-create. So, if the Sleeping Beauty tale type is a love story about birth, death, and re-birth in a context of fantasy and enchantment, then it is also a story that is necessarily occupied with acts of creation and re-creation, the power of enchantment and imagination, kissing and telling.

The repetition of Sleeping Beauty's story throughout cultural history, our own compulsion to tell it – or our readiness to hear it, read it, see it, experience it – again and again, tells us something important about the genre of the fairy tale, about the tale of Sleeping Beauty itself, and about ourselves. Like the prince, we are driven by stories – driven *to* them *by* desire and driven *by* them *to* desire. We sort through the many, conflicting tales we hear, seeking to make sense of them, to find and understand the *one* that shows us the way. And, of course, as scholars, we are not content just to hear the story. We insist on telling our own stories about those stories, proffering and professing our own critical versions, as I have just done.

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