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INTO THE MAGIC MIRROR:
THE NARRATIVES THAT REFLECT OUR LIVES
AND DICTATE HOW WE SHOULD LIVE

by
Chanyfehr Buchanan

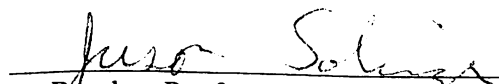
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2012

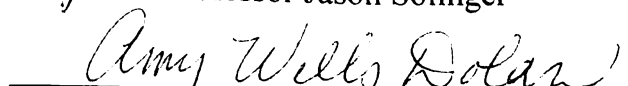
Approved by



Advisor: Professor Natalie Schroeder



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DEDICATION PAGE

To Mom:

For years you have always told me to pursue writing.
I knew that if I ever did, my first book would be dedicated to you.
Consider this a practice run.
I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Dr. Natalie Schroeder for being such a spectacular advisor to the most monumental project I have ever undertaken. You were so very patient, deeply insightful, and ridiculously encouraging. You gently curbed my errant enthusiasms yet allowed me to have so much independence to follow wherever the research took me. Thanks also to my mom who became my therapist during this time. I really value all the walks we took together where we brainstormed on incongruous ideas or you listened to the various stages of identity crisis that this thesis caused or you cheered me on. Moreover, I appreciate the years you spent teaching me to discern the messages within books and films, to engage with every storyteller, discover his conveyed worldviews and weigh them against the Truth. Additional thanks to the J.D. Williams Library for having such a wonderfully extensive collection and friendly and helpful staff and to Starbucks for brilliantly concocting the Java Chip ice-cream that has emotionally upheld me through so many nights this past year.

ABSTRACT

CHANYFEHR BUCHANAN: Into the Magic Mirror: The Narratives that Reflect Our
Lives and Dictate How We Should Live
(Under the direction of Natalie Schroeder)

This thesis investigates the influence fairytales have on society, how they dichotomously reflect cultural worldviews yet set standards for appropriate behavior and prescribe hegemonic ideologies. It specifically explores the fairytales told in America over the last couple of centuries, examining how those stories have evolved in correlation with the shifting values of the country. Each chapter lays a foundation for how certain characters are normally portrayed in fairytale tradition – the hero, the beauty, and the villain – and then evaluates how our culture has Americanized those figures, consequently making each of them less idealistic or archetypal and more realistic. Finally, this thesis traces the evolution of fairytale storytelling from oral tradition to literary narrative to film, observing the influence of each medium on the tales and the shifting relationship between narrator and audience and concluding that fairytales should not be dismissed as vapid children’s literature but understood to be the voice of society that reveals what that society is and what it wants to be.

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Introduction

“For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep, quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image; but behind it we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul - its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world, which is the reward of our struggles”

– Bruno Bettelheim (309)

One of the most iconic moments in fairytale lore is when the evil witch-queen stands before her mirror and utters, “Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who’s the fairest of us all?” (*Snow White*). The deeply fascinating aspect of this mirror is that it does not just reflect the queen’s image, allowing her to scrutinize her own looks and come to her own conclusions about her appearance. This mirror responds to the queen’s query, not even in her own voice but in a man’s, and holds a standard to the queen’s life to which she tries to conform herself. Initially, the mirror reflected and reaffirmed, but when the kingdom experienced a new or shifted ideal of beauty, the queen felt herself no longer living up to the mirror’s expectations, and its former reaffirming voice sounded more dictatorial.

Fairytales have a similar relationship with society; they are not merely a collection of stories that remain static in their content as they circle the globe and travel through the ages. Rather they are adapted by every culture not only to reflect that specific culture’s values, but also to hold up a standard of correct behavior and ideals for that culture to emulate. So as a society will evolve, the stories it tells will shift with it, resulting in numerous variants of the same tale.

This is splendidly exemplified by “Puss in Boots.” The first literary version of

this story was written by Giovan Francesco Straparola in Venice in 1550 and is called “Constantino Fortunato.” It begins with a poor woman dying, leaving her two eldest sons the equipment for making bread and the youngest son Constantino a cat. The elder two bully Constantino, but the cat is actually a fairy in disguise, and she sets about to make his fortune in the world. One day the king is traveling down the road, so the cat tells Constantino to take off his clothes and jump into the river. The king rescues him, and the cat weaves a fantastic story about how Constantino was robbed of priceless treasures. Believing this youth to be incredibly wealthy, the king immediately marries him to his daughter. When the king wants to visit his new son’s palace, the cat travels ahead to a poorly defended castle, warning all the inhabitants that they will be besieged by a large army if they do not do as Constantino says. They all pretend to be his loyal subjects, until the king dies and Constantino inherits that kingdom. This tale gives interesting insight into sixteenth-century Venetian society. Jack Zipes observes in *Happily Ever After* that the features of “Constantino Fortunato” involve the cat’s use of threats and show of force to help Constantino succeed; her knowledge of the civilizing process gives him a chance of moving upwards, a climb that is based on duplicity, spectacle, a marriage of convenience, and patriarchal absolute rule (21). Upward social mobility was extraordinarily difficult during this period, causing many poor people to use the picaresque method of relying on shrewdness and disguise to secure a wealthy marriage. This tale propagates reaching for success no matter what it takes, needing a whole lot of luck (embodied by the cat), and mastering the art of fooling others. The highest virtue for which a man could strive was represented by status (Zipes 22).

Almost a century later, in the 1630s, Giambattista Basile retold the tale, modifying it to fit the values of a very different Italian society. His “Gagliuso” opens

with a cat being the inheritance to the youngest son Gagliuso. She secures him a kingdom and a bride with similar tactics to Straparola's feline, but without the magic, relying solely on clever facade. However, after Gagliuso has become quite rich and heaps his gratitude on the cat's ingenuity and generosity, the cat decides to test how sincere Gagliuso's appreciation and oaths of fidelity to her really are. She pretends to die. When the newly married princess discovers this and tells Gagliuso, he responds, "May every evil go with her, better she than ourselves. . . . Take hold of one leg, and throw her out of the window" (139). The cat is horrified by his ingratitude toward her and leaves, repeating to herself, "God guard thee from the rich man who hath become poor, and from a beggarly clown enriched by fate" (140). By Basile's time a middle class was struggling to emerge, wanting to avoid the hardships of the peasantry but trying to circumvent the corruption of the aristocracy. The middle class is represented by the cat who must serve both a fatuous and unappreciative peasant and an avaricious and gullible king. Zipes writes that Basile parodied the peasantry and condemned the corruption of the court society, arguing for self-determination and the ethics of fairness through hard work and says that Basile's tale critiqued the current feudal system and the moral code that had not yet been fully instituted within Europe (26-27).

Some sixty years later in France, Charles Perrault rewrote the story, and for the first time, the cat actually wears boots. Once again Puss is an inheritance left to a poor man, and a drowning farce is used to catch the king's attention. The castle to be used as the young man's imaginary palace this time, though, is governed by a fierce ogre who can change forms. Puss visits the ogre and dares him to turn into a lion and pretends to be extremely frightened. He then challenges, "But I know not how to believe it, that you have also the power to take on you the shape of the smallest animals; for example, to

change yourself into a rat or a mouse; but I must own to you I take this to be impossible” (146). The ogre rises to the challenge; Puss eats him; the youth claims the castle; and the king is so impressed by the estate, he immediately marries off his daughter to him who is already madly in love with him. The most obvious alteration of this story is that the cat is now male. Female figures have been completely marginalized. Though Puss can still be interpreted as a representation of the middle class, Perrault’s version combines elements of Straparola’s and Basile’s stories. His tale emphasizes loyalty and obedience, gracious speech that is also duplicitous, cunning around the more powerful, forceful acquisition of wealth, and marriage of convenience (Zipes 31).

The next major modification of “Puss in Boots” is in one of Disney’s first cartoons in 1922. It tells of a commoner and a princess falling in love, but the king deeply disapproves. A cat offers help, female again this time, if the man will buy her a pair of boots. She then has him disguise himself as a bullfighter and secretly uses a hypnotic machine to help him defeat the bull and gain the king’s approval. The king is so impressed, he offers his daughter’s hand to the disguised hero, but is then enraged when he discovers who it is. The young man grabs the princess; and they flee in the king’s car, with Puss and the king’s white cat in the front seat. The cat’s role has been somewhat minimalized with the story focusing on the young man’s desperation and perseverance. Furthermore, the king does not become father-in-law so much as the authority figure that has been deposed. The commoner does not socially advance, and the day is saved through technology. These are proverbial American values: determination, rebellion to despotism, a zeal for technology and modernity, democracy.

DreamWorks Animation recreated the story last year; in this version there is no royal authority figure at all. There is no quest for social mobility, no undemocratic figures

to overthrow. Instead, the film emphasizes love, friendship, the importance of honesty in relationships. It also focuses on our culture's fascination with noble villains and what we think it means to be a hero, topics to be discussed more in depth in chapter three.

The significance of this story's evolution is not that it is just an interesting story that several countries kept alive by continually telling it. Rather, these cultures engaged in continually *retelling* it, shifting the character's roles and the narratives' emphases to reflect what each individual society viewed as important and worth pursuing in their own everyday lives. Fairytales like "Puss in Boots" act as a mirror to society, reflecting what society holds as important or true; yet at the same time, these literary mirrors have a voice that tell society what should be valued as important as well.

With this concept in mind, this thesis will examine some common motifs that have defined the fairytale genre for centuries. It will explore how Americans have adapted well-known tales to express our own worldviews and how we use these stories to socialize our children with what we believe to be crucial values. I will examine how the hero defines the fairytale and how we perceive a hero to behave. Because a man's role in society is directly related to the amount of agency a woman is able to have in that society, I will also observe the feminine image in fairytales and trace the evolving definition of what it means to be beautiful. The portrayal of villains also shifts in our culture, which completely redefines the archetypal nature of fairytales. And how we react to heroes and villains alters what we consider a "happily ever after" to be. Finally, the medium used to tell the fairytale alters its content, so in chapters four and five, I will trace the evolution of storytelling from oral to literary to film, exploring each stage's intriguing influence on society and illustrating the importance of understanding how crucial fairytales are to our socialization and being able to discern the messages they are conveying.

1

Hero: The Face of Culture

“The real hero is always a hero by mistake; he dreams of being an honest coward like everybody else” –

Umberto Eco (122)

Every culture has heroes. In works of literature, he is an individual to be admired and emulated, and because of this he is the embodiment of the greatest virtues of the culture that created him” –

Belen Lowry (1)

Hero is a coffer of implications and images: the sculpted beauty of a blond Greek youth who battles three-headed monsters with his bare hands; the calm resolve of the cowboy who blows the smoke from his deadly accurate barrel; the socially scorned mutant human who combats grotesque aliens to save the planet that hunts him. Heroes are dauntless, self-sacrificial, and able to overcome their own personal fears and flaws. Ordinary people seek to identify with heroes and are inspired by their lives to become better people themselves. Such quintessential individuals transcend the ages in tantalizing drama.

The heroes of fairytales, however, are constructed in a less glamorous, more socially-charged nature. Before these various characteristics of heroes are identified, I first want to separate the genres that inspire their existence. Terms like myth, saga, legend, and fairytale have been pulverized into a puree of synonyms to be used with an interchangeable fluidity, yet these forms of symbolic narrative contain many notable distinctions.

SYMBOLIC NARRATIVE GENRES

A myth is a story that is imbued with racial or national significance; J.C. Cooper describes how myth conveys an amount of history yet focuses on the supernatural – monsters, gods, creative powers (18). It appeals to the audience's intellect and serves a religious function. A saga, and the legends that stem from it, is also rooted with a race or nation, concentrating on historical events and aristocratic figures. Saga is primarily concerned with action and usually ends quite tragically. It is believable and sounds rational; supernatural occurrences within saga are of secondary import (18). Man battles against Nature and fellow man more than against gods and monsters.

Fairytales are less racial and cultural and more individual. J.C. Cooper further elaborates upon this concept in *Fairy Tales: Allegories of the Inner Life* when he writes:

The fairy tale largely concerns a person, often nameless, who represents some quality with which the individual can identify; it also recounts events within the experience and understanding of ordinary people. There are kings and queens, princes and princesses, woodcutters, soldiers and peasants, but few are named personally; even when such a name as Snow White, or Dornröschen, is given it is typical not personal. (19)

One cannot imagine Achilles voyaging outside the Greek culture or Gilgamesh's epic being retold by Brazilians or Pecos Bill being anything but a North American icon. These stories are bound by nation. The fairytale "Cinderella," however, has been around since the first century and has appeared in almost every country multiple times. Though there are specific value systems of each culture which reshape some of the narrative's elements, the structure of a fairytale is so basic that these tales cannot be limited by ethnic boundaries. Marie-Louise von Franz writes in *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, "Because the fairy tale is beyond cultural and racial differences, it can migrate so easily.

Fairy tale language seems to be the international language of all mankind – of all ages and of all races and cultures” (28).

Furthermore, a fairytale is irrational; supernatural occurrences are of primary import; there is no separation between the spiritual and secular; there is little to no history involved; it is romantic and appeals to the audience’s emotions. A fairytale is not restricted by time or reality; and death, which is a defining characteristic of a hero in the myth and especially the saga, bears no finality in the fairytale, for people are always being restored back to life. Spells and transformations are common motifs because through them one’s true identity is finally revealed, which is a principal focus within fairytales – one’s discovery of identity or initiation. A final noteworthy characteristic of the typical fairytale which von Franz explicates in her analysis of the Spanish tale “The Three Carnations” is its ending which brings a sense of unity (*Archetypal Patterns* 73-94). This unity is most often accomplished through a marriage, especially between a woman who lost her mother and a man who lost his father. In this way not only are two separate souls united, but an important parent-figure has been restored and there is again a family balance and sense of wholeness.

FOUNDATIONAL BLUEPRINT FOR THE HERO

Just as the purpose and structure of these symbolic narratives differ, so too do their portrayed heroes. In *The Psychological Meaning of Redemption Motifs in Fairytales*, von Franz points out that in the myths *The Odyssey* and *The Gilgamesh Epic* the heroes’ humanity is emphasized (9). Circumstances cause Odysseus and Gilgamesh to doubt themselves, to be afraid or eager, filled with despair or joy, to talk to themselves, to undergo a psychological transformation. As the center of a story, they are presented as

individuals with whom audiences can identify and sympathize. Fairytale heroes, however, do not feel or react; they just do. When the hero battles the dragon, there is no mention of his fear or the pain of his burns, just that he courageously keeps fighting until the dragon is slain. When the heroine is spited by her step-sisters, her hidden tears or confidence issues or longing for her mother are never described, just that she bore all her injustices quietly. These characters' lack of emotion or reaction makes them seem less than human and unrelatable. This is because fairytale heroes do not present specific individuals with whom audiences can identify, but rather an archetype, a generic, black-and-white model of behavior, a representation of an ideal.

There is no set pattern for how the hero is to behave. Sometimes he must battle a dragon, travel the ends of the world, and journey into the spirit realm before he can win his princess, and other times dawdling through life talking to animals is enough to merit him a bride and a kingdom. The message, though, is that everyone else, no matter their ingenuity or armies or gold, could not complete the given task; only the hero was the right man for the job, and however he accomplished it was the right way. Oftentimes the hero's behavior is eccentric or socially deviant, yet the audience does not question his methods because the narrative's framework dictates that his way is the only way.

The hero's actions are also never predictable no matter how familiar the structure of the story might feel. Giovan Straparola's "The Pig Prince" tells an about English king marrying a Hungarian queen. When they have a son, three fairies come to bless the child, but the third fairy's ambivalent gift dictates that the prince will be born as a pig, "and he will be obliged to live in this shape until he has wed three times" (52). When the pig becomes twenty, his parents try to secure a bride for him from one of the three beautiful daughters of a poor washerwoman. Wanting his inheritance, the first two daughters try to

marry and then kill the pig, but he manages to slay them first. The third is too loving and gentle to even consider such a thing and strives to be happy with her lot in life – which is made easier by the fact that the prince is granted human form at night. At one point the parents walk into his room and see their son in human form in bed, his pig skin discarded on the floor: “The king ordered the pig’s hide to be torn to shreds before anyone was allowed to leave the room” which permanently broke the prince’s theriomorphic curse (56). However, not always does destroying the animal skin bring about the “happily ever after” for the hero.

The Russian fairytale “The Frog Princess” tells of a czar who had three sons (23-27). They were to shoot an arrow as far as they could and where the arrow fell, there they would find their brides. The eldest scores a czar’s daughter; the second a duke’s daughter; and the youngest son’s arrow falls in a swamp and is retrieved by a frog who he then has to marry. To determine who has secured the best bride, a cooking and sewing competition is held, both of which the frog wins. For the latter contest she makes herself a beautiful dress, and when she dons it for a banquet during a stormy night, she is transformed into a radiantly beautiful woman. During the banquet, the youngest son discovers her frog skin in the bedroom and burns it, but when she discovers this, she tells him, “You should have waited a bit longer. I’d have been yours, but now God knows! Good-bye! Search for me beyond the thrice-ninth lands, in the thrice-tenth kingdom,” and vanishes (“The Frog Princess” 25). He waits a year before looking for her, during which time she is forced into an engagement to someone else. The prince does find her just in time, though; an old woman gives them a flying carpet; and they successfully make it back home. So despite the fact that common sense or past traditional stories dictate that burning the animal skin will free the human, these juxtaposed stories illustrate

that the hero behaves surprisingly, that there is no set formula for his conduct as each individual society adapts his story to reflect its own values, its own specific approach to how the hero's problems should be solved.

Sometimes, though, the hero irrevocably fails, and the signature happy ending is compromised. There is a North American Indian story which tells of a young man who falls in love with a star¹ (Alexander 203; von Franz *Animus* 65). When he does, the star appears to him as a beautiful woman who spends every day with him. Yet he cannot stifle his curiosity as to where she goes at night, and against her warnings he follows her into heaven. There he discovers that she dances with skeletons – and is a skeleton herself. The next day he dies of shock, being unable to handle that sight or knowledge.

Von Franz explains this harsh situation:

It seems that in many, many stories a hero performs great deeds all along but then suddenly there is a tiny little mis-step, a little mistake that marks a tragic end to the hero's life. This little mistake always has to do with inflation, with transcending human limitations.... So the bad endings must be told in order to warn us: "Don't identify! It's the hero, not you; you can survive, but the hero himself will come to an end!" (*Archetypal* 164)

Thus no matter whether the fairytale ends happily or not, the hero serves as a model of behavior, demonstrating to the audience how one should or should not act. He is not there to arouse sympathy or identification so much as to represent an ideal and portray the world as black-and-white with each choice having an inescapable consequence.

¹ This story is actually a folktale, an oral story which precedes the literary fairytale. The evolution from folktale to fairytale will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The hero's character is not limited to a predestined stereotype; he has assumed a wide variety of attributes throughout the ages. He appears as the devastatingly handsome prince under a spell as in Mme de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" and Mme d'Aulnoy's "The Ram;" the trickster who wheedles his way into a monarchical position through cunning and artifice as in Straparola's "Cassandrino the Thief" and Perrault's "Puss in Boots;" or the youngest and stupid son of a peasant who just happens to do all the right things that win the favor of an insipid king as in the Grimms' "Simple Hans" and Basile's "Peruonto." Regardless of his temperament, he often becomes the hero through accident. Dire circumstances or fate coerce him to try to save the day; struggle reveals to the world his true mettle when before he had been living under the modest disguise or ordinariness that a comfortable life had offered. The tests the hero must face are typically for the purpose of bringing about his initiation, proving his masculinity, dominance over nature, wit, humanity, or the ability to withstand the temptations that have felled other men. The hero is also always royalty. Even when he begins as the son of a peasant or woodcutter, in the end his deeds will win him a kingdom and royal bride, demonstrating to everyone that he actually had a royal nature or identity all along.

THE DUMMLING

In light of our own times, the archetypal hero that is of particular interest falls under the "youngest of three sons" category. This character is typified by being known as the fool; he bumbles into solving the crisis that his two elder competent brothers could not overcome. He is gentle, kind-hearted, and open-minded; he learns from experience rather than reason, maintains a childlike innocence, and is spontaneous. Because of all these attributes, he is able to see things for what they really are rather than how they

appear to everyone else. We see this hero in stories like “Simple Hans” in which a hunchback has the ability to receive anything he wishes for yet does nothing to improve his life until a princess discovers his gift and inspires him to create his own kingdom (Grimm 136-137). The Irish tale “Princess on a Glass Hill” is about a third peasant son Cinderlad who is mocked and neglected by his two older brothers, yet he still manages to pass the test that the king sets in order to win his daughter as bride (Asbjørnsen and Jørgen 1-4). And “The Three Feathers” tells of two sons seeking to prove their worth to their father so as to inherit his throne, while the third son inactively laments his lot in life and is guided by a toad to treasures that impress his father enough to name him heir (Grimm 319-322). Von Franz dubs this character the Dummling, a moniker that will be employed for this rest of this literary exploration.

Von Franz makes a fascinating observation about the Dummling individual when she records that he is found statistically more frequently in the white man’s society than in others (*Interpretation* 64). She credits this to the fact that societies – specifically characterized by rigid social structures yet anti-patriarchal philosophies – have an overdevelopment of the consciousness, causing the people within to lose the ability to take life as it is. Dummling stories, wherein the hero prospers through just sheer laziness, are especially valuable: “These stories also compensate for the collective attitude which puts too much emphasis on efficiency: then those lazy hero stories are told and retold with great delight – and with a healing meaning in them” (von Franz *Interpretation* 64-65). Arguably, however, there is more to this relish of the Dummling story than an overworked society living vicariously through the haphazard, *c'est la vie* actions of a fictional character. To better understand why the Dummling is socially valued, it will be helpful to examine the prevalent portrayal and reception of the hero in the American

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culture as exemplified by recent blockbusters.

THE FACE OF THE AMERICAN HERO TODAY

Last year Fox News had a fascinating article which discussed how the alpha-male in Hollywood is dying. Cinematic heroes today are no longer cut from the same cloth as Rocky, Rambo, and *Die Hard*'s John McClane. *The Expendables* seemed to be a nostalgic last hoorah for the alpha-male adventure; yet even so, the year it was released the top five films at the box office were *Alice in Wonderland*, *Toy Story 3*, *Shrek Forever After*, *Twilight Saga Eclipse*, and *Inception*. Of the leading men in these films one of them had a hat fetish, one was a toy, another was a sensitive ogre, one was a sparkling vampire, and the last one could literally only *dream* about all the action in his life. Not very intimidating figures. In comparison the number one film fifteen years ago was *Independence Day*; five years before that *Terminator 2*, and a few years before that *Top Gun* (“Alpha-Male Role” 1).

Culture expert Andrew Hunsaker said, “The alpha male in movies these days is much less in the burly blood-soaked ‘Rambo’ vein than it is the slick smooth operators like George Clooney’s ‘Danny Ocean,’ or the thinking man’s fighter like Matt Damon’s ‘Jason Bourne’” (“Alpha-Male Role” 1). Fox News credits this evolution of masculinity to the fact that women have become more financially and socially independent. They do not want to be partnered with such completely dominating males but with men who are suave, more in touch with their sensitive sides, and more compatible as partners to women who are coming into their own. Rambo just doesn’t leave a woman feeling empowered.

Many cinematic genres are reflecting these altering definitions of what it means to

be a man and a hero. Compare Rocky Balboa and his demure and supportive Adrian to the assassins Mr. and Mrs. Smith from that eponymous film (2005), the pirates Jack Sparrow and Angelica from *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2011), or the Persian royalty Prince Dastan and Princess Tamina from *Prince of Persia* (2010). These latter couples are much more evenly matched in their capabilities to save the day and each other. Cartoons – a genre nearly synonymous to fairytales for their fantastical approach of socializing children – also show these shifts. In the recent *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010), Astrid is an aggressive, danger-seeking warrior Viking. Snotlout is the alpha-male character who likes her, yet because he is a dense, unrefined, lumbering brute, she does not like him but is attracted to Hiccup, the social failure, the one who is quiet, nerdy, sensitive, artistic, and intelligent, the one person in the entire village who cannot bring himself to kill a dragon. In *MegaMind* (2010) Roxanne Ritchie is a self-assured, confident, risk-taking career woman who is not at all attracted to the alpha-male MetroMan, despite the fact that he is played by Brad Pitt. Instead, she is drawn to MegaMind, the one who has confidence issues, who is a technology nerd, and who has a smaller physical frame than she does. Again in *Open Season* (2006) the doe Giselle is aggravated by the dominating, burly buck Ian, favoring the forest goob Elliot instead.

Kate Fridkis solidifies the concept of the American Dummling in her review of Kay Hymowitz's book *Manning Up*. Fridkis describes a generation of young people that sociologists have now distinguished as "preadults." Twenty-something women are actively pursuing college degrees and high-paying jobs and becoming "choice mothers" (choosing to raise their children on their own). Their male counterparts, however, are not quite ready to grow up; instead, they are relishing a period in their lives wherein they feel they are socially allowed to hang out with their buddies playing video games and

worrying about work and family when they hit thirty or forty. They are feeling the pressures of time less and less even though women are inversely aiming to hit the capstones of adulthood as quickly as possible. The article questions why “this persona is so popular in the media; the kinda goofy, schlubby young guy. Who is he appealing to and why is he so prevalent? Why are we getting all these movies with stars like Will Ferrell and Adam Sandler?” (Fridkis 2). She credits the existence of this recent subculture to the fact that Generation Y grew up being told that fathers were nice to have around but really quite optional; the male role has been dismissed as essential to the family (Fridkis 4). Due to women’s increasing self-sufficiency, it has become socially acceptable for males to take longer to grow up and to fulfill the defined roles of manhood.

As a magic mirror reflecting the values a society esteems, fairytales are widely portraying the Dummling character in accordance with the decline of the alpha-male and the rise of the “preadults.” Gail Carson Levine’s book *Ella Enchanted* describes Prince Charmont as a youth not eager to assume the throne, who secretly slides down the banisters of his castle, who is attracted to women who make him laugh, and who watches in amazement as Ella breaks her own curse. Prince Edward from the film *Enchanted* (2007) resembles a lovable puppy more than a knight-in-shining-armor. He sings and cavorts around on buses and checks his smile in the reflection of his blade, and ultimately stands by as the dragon is slain by a woman who formerly could not be revived from an enchanted death by his kiss. And in *Stardust* (2007) Tristan is an immature teenager with a quirky giggle and a senseless crush on a self-centered girl. His quest to retrieve a fallen star is fraught with peril, but rather than these dangers forcing him to become a proactive hero, he is multiple times saved from a particularly depraved witch by a self-sacrificial

unicorn, his power-hungry swordsman uncle, and finally by the star herself. Evil having been defeated for him, he inherits the throne.

Now it is more apparent that these emergent designations of what it means to be a man and a hero are the result of shifting demarcations of femininity and not the catalyst. Yet it was important to begin with the hero, for his attributes are what define the fairytale as a genre, separating it from sagas and myths and their own unique protagonists. The next chapter will trace the evolution of the feminine image in fairytales, specifically looking at their casted roles in America.

2

Beauties: Bashful and Brazen

“What is beautiful is good, and who is good will soon also be beautiful”

– Sappho (43)

“The perception of beauty is a moral test”

– Henry David Thoreau (126)

Charles Perrault’s “Toads and Diamonds” is my favorite fairytale. It tells of a widow with two daughters; the eldest is as ugly and proud as the mother, while the younger is beautiful and sweet and therefore jealously forced to do all the labor around the house. One day she goes to draw water from the well and kindly assists an old woman asking for a drink. The latter is actually a fairy in disguise, and she gives the girl the blessing of spewing forth gems whenever she speaks. When the mother finds out, she quickly commissions the elder daughter to be sweet to old ladies. This time, though, the fairy is disguised as an imperious noblewoman, and when she asks for a drink, the older daughter replies, “‘Am I come hither,’ said the proud, saucy slut, ‘to serve you with water, pray? I suppose the silver tankard was brought purely for your ladyship, was it?’” (276). The fairy curses the girl’s arrogance by making vipers and toads come out of her mouth whenever she speaks. The mother is horribly angry with the younger daughter and beats her. The maiden flees into the forest, weeping bitterly, where she is discovered by a kind prince who wants to know what the matter is (and who is fascinated by her account told while out diamonds). He immediately falls in love with her and marries her.

This little story contains many familiar motifs: the disguised fairy set out to test people's characters, the persecuted heroine, the absence of a father to be restored with the entry of the father-in-law, upward social mobility, a marriage bringing about the happily ever after, and people's outward appearances being the expression of their inward condition. This fairytale takes this last concept quite literally, so that even the words these two girls speak give a visible indication as to whether their hearts are pure or venomous. Yet for our culture, the traditional beautiful fairytale heroine has morphed into a perceived victim shackled by social constraints, whose behavior does not inspire us and whose beauty might be regarded as only skin-deep. In this chapter I will examine what we consider a beautiful heroine to look like and how her attributes have evolved over the last couple of centuries in America.

WHO WANTS TO BE A FAIRYTALE PRINCESS?

Jennifer Waelti-Walters voices the opinion of so many modern literary critics and feminists when she writes, "Nobody in her right mind could possibly want to be a fairy tale princess. After all, what do they do except play dead across the path of some young man who has been led to believe that he rules the world?" (1). Nowadays, the fairytale princess does not evoke feelings of longing or enchantment or reveling in one's own femininity. Rather feminists and literary and cultural critics interpret this image of woman as being an object stripped of her humanity by an over-bearing patriarchal system, leaving her no other place in society than to try on shoes, compare herself to others in mirrors, clean dwarfs' houses, catch men's attention by dancing, and ultimately be rescued from the clutches of unattractively aggressive women by getting married. Waelti-Walters writes, "Fairy tales teach girls to accept at least a partial loss of identity,

and thus endanger all the relationships in which they must take part in a lifetime” (7); and Jack Zipes comments in *Don't Bet on the Prince* that many fairytales are detrimental to the autonomous development of young people (5). Today fairytales are adamantly contested for how they portray women, a “crime” that began with industrialization.

THE THREADS OF SOCIETY

The development of women’s roles in the fairytale, both as fictional character and as storyteller, is best exemplified by “Rumpelstiltskin.” Contrary to popular belief, this tale is not about the power of naming. Many fairytales – such as the German “Mistress Beautiful,” the Austrian “Purzinigele,” the Italian “Tarandandó,” and the English “Tom Tit Tot” – focus on the power one can have over someone else because he wields that person’s name or about the journey that must be undertaken to discover a secret name to break a curse (Ashliman 1). This story, however, is not meant so much to focus on the social power of a name but more upon the initiation of a young woman.

“Rumpelstiltskin” dates back to the Middle Ages and is rooted in oral tradition, not being transcribed to a manuscript until 1810 (Ashliman 3). The basic frame of the oral narrative begins with a young woman who is given a wealth of flax to spin, yet she can only spin gold thread instead of yarn. After she begins to feel desperate about what a social failure she is, the little man appears and offers to help in exchange for the first child she will have with a prince who will soon marry her. The young woman agrees, but when her infant is born, she tries to back out of the deal. The little man gives her three days to guess his name or else he will still come for the child. The new princess sends her handmaiden to search for this name, which the handmaiden overhears the little man say while gloating to himself in the forest. When Rumpelstiltskin comes to collect the

child, the princess toys with him until finally throwing his true name at him. He screams at her, “Das hat dir der Teufel gesagt!” [“The devil told you that!”] and then flies out of the window on a cooking ladle (Rölleke 240).

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, stories such as this one were told when women were the primary storytellers with their perspectives being the focus of the narrative². The fact that the main character is spinning gold rather than yarn is merely a spoof; a woman’s social and economic value was based on her ability to spin yarn. Spinning was an entirely female production charged with social significance. Patricia Baines writes in *Spinning Wheels: Spinners and Spinning*, “Spinning has always been connected with women, and the spinning wheel, once established, became a symbol of virtue and thrift, for indeed the industrious housewife spent every spare moment spinning” (175). She later observes that during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, a woman’s hopes of receiving a decent marriage were directly related to her ability to spin, making her an economic asset to her husband within her domestic realm. Spinning consumed their lives so much so, that even when there were social gatherings, women would bring their spinning wheels and have spinning parties (Baines 175).

The young people often told stories to each other throughout the day to pass the time with most of the stories containing spinning motifs. Many of the tales focused on a woman who was clumsy or incapable of spinning and who encountered a dilemma because of it. The dilemma was overcome through the magical intervention of an older, wiser woman who could spin, and then the girl married royalty as her reward for learning to become the perfect woman (Cooper 69-70; Zipes 62-63). The heroine of

¹ The French aristocratic women, especially, were avid storytellers, inventing parlor games where they would draw upon their memories of oral folktales and then demonstrate their competitive cleverness as they retold the tales to emphasize their ideals such as love and etiquette (Zipes *When Dreams* 30-33).

“Rumpelstiltskin” was exploited by her intervening magical helper – the eponymous dwarf – during a time in her life when she was still incapable and naïve. But with the help of another woman, her handmaiden, she was able to rescue herself from his perfidy. Jack Zipes comments on the ending scene, “Symbolically he flies through the window on a cooking ladle. That is, he is banished by a utensil associated with women, who have united to defeat him” (*Fairy Tale* 57).

The Industrial Revolution, however, displaced women as narrators and limited their social agency. Zipes writes, “For a woman, to spin is to create, to produce the threads that will hold society together. It is through spinning that a young woman was initiated into society” (64). Industrialization reduced their productive autonomy and usefulness to society. With the invention of the spinning machine, women’s productivity was over-ridden by men’s ingenuity and the standardization of machinery. Spinning soon became a lost art, something someone did as a hobby (Baines 190). It soon took on negative implications along with the word “spinster” for those socially inept women who had not yet married because they had nothing to contribute anymore to future families (Zipes 66).

During these changing times, in 1857, the Brothers Grimm retold the tale. They added in the character of a boasting father and made the king harsher. Rumpelstiltskin remained demonic, and it was a soldier, a *man* this time, who discovered the name. The woman’s entire life was framed and orchestrated by men. With the advent of the sewing machine, women were completely dependent on men. Zipes observes that whereas previously the spinning stories told of how women held the threads of society together and could thus be initiated as a woman, the Grimms lived during a time where this mode of productivity was in the hands of the men; machines took women’s places to hold the

threads of society together (66-71). In the Grimms' tale, the young spinner cannot be initiated as a woman; she has no character evolvment, no personal growth. Everything happens to her and around her through the actions of the men.

THE IDENTITY REVOLUTION

At this point it would be valuable to take a closer look at the Industrial Revolution and its effect on the relationships and social expectations of Western European and American men and women. Nancy Percy records how pre-industrial families and businesses operated the way they had for centuries previously; the barrier between private and public spheres was highly permeable with most families being autonomously economic units who either lived on self-sustaining farms or in small villages wherein they owned their own shops which were located in the front of their houses (327). Women contributed much to making families self-sufficient; they spun wool, wove cloth, sewed clothes, preserved foods, concocted medicines, made candles and soap, and demonstrated a host of other skills. Additionally, women worked alongside their husbands in the family-owned stores. Not only were the women active in the business world, but the men were just as involved in the domestic realm. Today cookbooks and parenting books are mostly directed toward women, but in the colonial period they were addressed to the fathers, the heads of the households (Gillis 183; Margolis 12-22). Quality time with the children was not needed when the father came home from a long day of work because he spent all day long with the children, training them in good work ethics and spiritual matters as they helped him with his business. Being a father was not a separate activity.

The Industrial Revolution demolished this system as it pulled work outside of the

home. Individualized work was no longer based on the personal relations between a farmer and his children or a craftsman and his apprentices. New-forming hierarchies between managers and factory workers made work standardized and impersonal. Self-sufficiency was sacrificed for wages. Percy describes the result of industrialization, “The new workplace fostered an economic philosophy of atomistic individualism, as workers were treated as so many interchangeable units to be plugged into the production process – each struggling to advance himself at the expense of others” (330).

Men followed the work from their shops to the factories, causing their presence and involvement with their families to decline significantly. The definition of manliness also transformed. A good man was no longer characterized by self-restraint and self-sacrifice for the sake of the common good, but was instead encouraged to be competitive, aggressive, ambitious, and individualistic (Percy 332).

Their departure from the home severely altered women’s roles in society. In the 1820s, after laws and sermons demarcated a woman’s place as being in the home, she became solely responsible for the rearing of children and was seen less and less in the public realm (Percy 331). Married women were encouraged to make their homes a haven for their husbands after they returned from the aggressive competition of the business realm. They were commissioned by their pastors to be the keepers of virtue, to subdue their men, to exemplify Christian behavior to them, to renew them and refine them. This is why women zealously took up causes like prohibition. By this time women were viewed as more spiritual than men, a religious phenomenon which was solidified when the Second Great Awakening of the mid-nineteenth century drew three women to every two men (Cott 15), making virtue and self-sacrifice to be viewed as feminine qualities rather than human qualities. Men were told that they were naturally

brutish in order to survive. By the 1950s, America had developed another cultural phenomenon: the breadwinner-homemaker family model which solidified the separation of men's public and women's private spheres (Cherlin 66, 225).

EARLY AMERICAN HEROINES

The fairytales reflect these evolutions. In the early days of the Industrial Revolution, before roles were shifted so drastically, there was a fairytale told in Massachusetts called "Lady Featherflight" (which William McCarthy tenuously dates to the early to mid-nineteenth century). It tells of a young man named Jack who has to leave his impoverished mother to try to make his way in the world. He travels for a few days and discovers a castle where the lovely Lady Featherflight urges him to leave before her giant of a father eats him. She eventually succumbs to his pleas to allow him to be fed and rested. The giant returns home and smells Jack out, but Featherflight persuades her father not to eat Jack but to use him to do a few chores around the place in return for some food. Wanting Jack fattened up anyway, the giant agrees. He first commands Jack to re-thatch the barn from a gigantic hill of feathers, or else. . . . Jack tries to make noticeable progress in this work when Featherflight comes along, singing to the birds to come and thatch the roof for her, which they do in no time, leaving Jack and Featherflight the rest of the afternoon to laugh and talk with each other. "Soon they went back to the house, and Jack helped, and Lady Featherflight prepared supper, which tonight was fourteen loaves of bread, two sheep, and a jack-pudding" (McCarthy 43). The next day the giant orders Jack to separate an immense heap of seeds. Completely overwhelmed, Jack sits down and cries until Featherflight comes by again, singing to the birds and requesting their help. The third day the giant orders Jack to make a large rope which will

keep all his cows tethered. The task proves impossible; and when the giant returns home that evening, he orders Featherflight to cook Jack up in some pieces of bacon. She assures him she will, but when he goes to bed, she helps Jack escape the castle and secures a horse for both of them to ride. When the giant discovers this the next morning, he puts on his seven-league boots and gives chase. Featherflight's ingenuity saves them twice when he gets too close, and later she has to save herself from some villagers who think she is a witch. In the end they marry and live quite happily and wealthily.

The most interesting thing about this fairytale is the sharing of roles between Jack and Featherflight. She helps him with his work; he helps her cook dinner; she helps him make money. "Lady Featherflight" reflects how husband and wife worked together in business and at home to do the best job in both realms. Furthermore, Featherflight is lovely and gentle and kind-hearted, but not an inept or helpless spectator. This is especially made apparent when Featherflight is hiding in a tree over a stream of water. Various villagers' wives come to draw water but then see her reflection and think it is their own. They each exclaim, "What! I, a carpenter's wife, and I so handsome? No, that I won't" and down she threw the pitcher, and off she went. . . . In the same manner come the wives of the publican, scrivener, lace-maker etc., etc." (McCarthy 47). The villagers' wives thought that their "beauty" excluded them from labor, yet the lovely Featherflight works and cooks throughout the story. Finally, Jack heeds her ingenuity and encouragement every single time and never feels threatened by her; he is a more prosperous man because of her advice. The story ends:

The newly married pair lived happily for many months, until Jack began to wish for more of the giant's treasure, and proposed that they should go back for it. But they could not cross the water. Lady Featherflight said,

“Why not build a bridge?” And the bridge was built. They went over with wagons and horses, and brought back so heavy a load that, as the last wagonful passed over the bridge, it broke, and the gold was lost. Jack lamented and said, “Now we can have nothing more from the giant’s treasure-house.” But Lady Featherflight said, “Why not mend the bridge?” So the bridge was mended, and my story’s ended. (McCarthy 47-48)

“The Girl without Hands, Breasts, or Eyes,” a retelling of one of the Grimms’ tales, comes from the Cape Verde Tales of New England of the early 1900s and defines how gender roles were prescribed after industrialization (this story was found and recorded in 1916-17). It tells about how a man has a daughter who was building asylums for the poor without his knowledge. When her godfather tells her father about it, he is enraged to be losing his money in such a way. He drags her into a forest, ties her to a tree, and cuts off her hands, breasts, and eyes, and leaves her. A king discovers her when he is out hunting, and against his mother’s wishes, immediately decides to marry the girl. He then goes to war, and during his absence, the girl gives birth to beautiful twins. The queen-mother writes him the news, but the letter-bearer rewrites her words to say that the queen has birthed two puppies. The king writes back that they are to be treated well, but the letter-bearer again tampers with the wording and says that the queen and her twins are to be cast out. The queen-mother is saddened but feels compelled to obey. The girl leaves with her babies, prays to God for help, and immediately discovers a body of water. Reaching into it with both arms, she feels her hands grow back. She then douses some water on her chest so that her breasts can grow back and she can nourish her babies. When they are fed, she drops some of the water in her eye-sockets, and her sight is

restored. She returns to her former home where she discovers that her father has died and has become a demon and that his soul cannot receive rest until he tells her people what he has done to her and wills her his house. “She came into possession of the house at eleven o’clock. At twelve she had given an order that the house was to be an asylum again for the poor and for strangers” (McCarthy 136). The king then returns from the war, and when he discovers that his wife has been banished, he wanders the countryside for years looking for her. “He traveled for so long that his clothes wore out, his beard reached to his waist, his hair to his shoulders” (136). He reaches her asylum and quickly discovers that it is his wife and children managing the place. He brings them all back to the palace, and he and his wife resume ruling as king and queen.

This story reflects how the aggressive husband was expected to leave the home to do his job, i.e. go to war, while the gentle wife was to stay with the children and commit her life to helping the less fortunate. William McCarthy comments on the selfless Christian charity of this particular wife, “Her generosity leads to her initial trials. Her selflessness is vividly expressed at the moment in which she feeds her hungry children from her restored breasts before she restores her own eyes” (137). By the end of the story she has resorted to her former generous ways when she creates an asylum out of her inherited home. The husband’s wanderings left him literally looking like an animal – remember industrialization had left men feeling that their primitive nature was what made them men and made them successful – but he was refined and re-tamed by his wife, the keeper of virtue.

Finally, by the time the breadwinner-homemaker family model had been implemented in the mid-twentieth century, Disney was producing fairytale films like *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) which shows how Prince Phillip leaves his castle to battle the

dragons of the world, while Aurora collects berries, sings while she cooks, and remains in her room in an enchanted stupor while all the action happens outside her realm and outside her help. Even the earlier *Snow White* (1937) portrays the same storyline: Snow White's original role is cleaning her step-mother's palace; she advances to cleaning the home of dwarfs; and once she succumbs to her own enchanted stupor, the prince sweeps in and saves the day. Such stories mirror how American society had dictated that men and women's spheres were separated into public and private realms which were impermeable to each other.

VIRTUE, VANITY, AND VICE

By the mid-twentieth century, women had also begun to notice the shackled position they were in; though as Percy notes, they were not imprisoned by male dominance but male desertion (341). Envious of men's care-free lives, many women observed that they merely had to follow the work outside the homes themselves to find the same freedom. Where they had once been considered selfless and giving, society now viewed women as dependent and helpless, and their private realm of home was now devalued and considered to be "cut off" from the "real" world (Percy 341-343; Turner 81).

The feminist movement, which developed in waves beginning in the late eighteenth century to the 1990s, was an outcry against women being restricted solely to the home, against being considered ignorant and incapable of conversing with men on the same intellectual level, against stories that portrayed women preening in front of mirrors, trying on shoes and fairy-made ball-gowns, and sleeping while the men did all the action and solely saved the day (de Staël 293-297; Gilbert and Gubar 1531-1544). Without

spending too much time on one of the most well-known movements in American history, it is important to note for now that the feminist movement inadvertently brought about the same thing for women that the Industrial Revolution did for men. Industrialization degraded virtue as a feminine quality rather than a human quality; feminism demeaned virtue again to the quality of a weak woman living under a harsh patriarchal system rather than a human quality to be cherished and cultivated. As we will soon explore, fairytale heroines are now created to be less beautiful.

For millennia fairytales have indicated a woman's level of virtue as associated with or expressed by her outward beauty. Melissa C. Thompson wrote an article called "If the Shoe Fits: Virtue and Absolute Beauty in Fairy Tale Drama" in which she explores five variants of the Cinderella story to prove that, "fairy tale drama presents female beauty as a moral absolute, not merely as a physical characteristic" (115). The heroine's beauty is effortless and natural; she is usually unaware that she is outwardly beautiful because her inward goodness does not allow her to dwell on herself. As her foils the step-sisters may sometimes actually be pretty, but the ugliness of their hearts mars their looks, causing their vanity to be unfounded. Their continual primping reveals how misplaced their priorities are because they are consumed with self rather than doing good for others. Thompson argues that for beauty to be morally valid within fairytales, it must appear effortless, whereas false or manipulated beauty will always be exposed for the deceitful slave-master it is (117, 120). Fairytale tradition mandates that inward selflessness produces outward beauty; the two attributes are inseparable.

By the twenty-first century, however, the typical attributes connoting a heroine's beauty have dramatically shifted. Earlier children's stories glamorized women such as the delightfully innocent and child-like Snow White (1937), the infinitely patient martyr

Cinderella (1950), and the angelically peaceful and nature-loving Briar Rose (1957). Yet their gentle passivity, or voluminous skirts, did not last, and cartoons very quickly began to depict more aggressive women who saved the day all by themselves, while their male-counterparts watched in a helpless shock which quickly morphed to saccharine gratitude and awe. To save her nation Pocahontas (1995; 1998) challenges the British court and the sadistic Radcliff. John Smith is much too masculine a character to just stand by and watch, so he is conveniently shot. John Rolfe is a more decorous and temperate man whose presence does not threaten Pocahontas' autonomy. Mulan (1998) dresses as a boy, joins the Chinese army, and single-handedly buries the Hun army in an avalanche. She then takes on the Hun leader Shan Yu in one-on-one combat, while the leading male Captain Shang lies in a dazed stupor from Shan Yu's vicious kick. Mulan saves all of China. And Princess Fiona (*Shrek* 2001) knows martial-arts, kills mother birds, and associates with ogres. More recent heroines have become a little tamer, allowing there to be more of a partnership between them and the men. They both save the day. These relationships are portrayed by Sinbad and Marina in *Sinbad* (2003), Mr. and Mrs. Parr in *The Incredibles* (2004), and Flynn Ryder and Rapunzel in the recent *Tangled* (2011).

Yet these partnerships do not mirror the relationships men and women had with each other before the Industrial Revolution. A different set of attributes are still being cultivated in women today than were being pursued in the 1800s. Our culture places a large emphasis on ideals such as independence, autonomy, self-respect, self-sufficiency, self-fulfillment, and liberation. Obviously, these words are appealing, yet anything to an excess is unhealthy. To what expense are these ideals being pursued?

From reading a variety of genres, I have concluded that most heroines are no longer expected to cultivate self-sacrifice, obligation to duty, a willingness to serve

without recognition, lady-like demeanor, or a desire to make others great at the expense of their own glorification. Instead, for a woman to be an interesting literary character, many authors create heroines as sarcastic, manipulative, power-hungry, or self-absorbed, complete with combat boots. Girls today admire the modern kick-derriere heroines whom they perceive as getting to have all the fun.

Fairytales do not usually portray this type of woman, just the two outer extremes: sweet but helpless or capable but vicious. In “Break the Spell: Fairy Tales Are Unfair to Women” Jenny Dolan notices this generalization:

There’s no doubt that our stories – the ones we tell and retell across generations – shape the way we see ourselves. Fairy tale women are witches, hags, evil stepmothers and femme fatales. Or they’re sleeping beauties, women who long to be rescued by Prince Charming, who live happily ever after keeping house in his castle. (1)

Revolting against how fairytales perpetuate women as being only sweet or only wicked, Dolan harkens back to Greek mythology when “Gods and goddesses were deliciously flawed but also comfortable in their own skin” (1). Then after retelling an antiquated version of Snow White in which there is a huge amount of promiscuity between the heroine and the dwarfs, Dolan concludes, “It isn’t about being bad. It’s about not being ashamed. It’s about being whole and being assertive and bold and not apologizing for that” (2). And Sarah Appleton Aguiar mirrors this concept when she writes, “The bitch is found to have vital existence. No apologies, no excuses. Each woman comes to the realization that she has been seriously hampered by her rejection of the bitch” (115). The archetypal nature of fairytales, with their black-and-white messages and quintessential figures, are being sacrificed for more realistic retellings and relatable characters for a

society that seems to consider being flawed as a delicious relief and being assertive as more valued than being noble.

THE MOST SELF-SUFFICIENT IN THE LAND

One of the earlier authors of the new fairytale princess, Tanith Lee retells the Cinderella story in her “Princess Dahli” (1972). Though Dahli and the prince still end up living happily ever after, Dahli’s tactics are much different from the traditional journey of rags-to-riches-as-reward-for-being-sweet. Dahli is a princess but poor, so she is sent to live with her rich uncle and his two pampered daughters. Her cousins make a servant of her, though, pompously ordering her about to further their own comforts. At first Dahli bears this treatment meekly, doing her best to make everyone happy. When she finds that a humble disposition does not endear her to others, she decides, “It seems to me that when I try to do things right, I can’t please anyone at all. So I shall do them wrong for a change, and see what happens then” (63). She supplies her cousins with vegetables for hair decorations, coaxes a family of mice to live in her cousins’ rooms, causes overall chaos, and blatantly insinuates that her cousins are fat. Her creative rebellious side wins the prince’s attention.

Colleen Houck, author of *Tiger’s Curse*, *Tiger’s Quest* and *Tiger’s Voyage* (2009, 2010, 2011) has created a story in which her heroine Kelsey is on a dangerous quest to rescue two royal brothers from their enchantment of being imprisoned in tigers’ forms. The story itself is gripping, but Kelsey’s character is left wanting. She ends up falling deeply in love with both brothers, yet her indecision over which one to choose causes her somewhat callously to toy with their hearts, breaking up with them and then getting back together with whichever brother she feels in the mood for or who at the time is the most

forgiving and accepting of her. She continuously raises their hopes and then breaks their hearts, expecting them to respect her whims yet still secretly craving the adoration of whichever brother she is not currently with. Colleen Houck has framed the narrative in such a way that readers are not left to learn from her selfish lifestyle but to be jealous of this girl who has more romantic attention than she knows how to handle.

The modern fairytale film *Shrek* (2001) very potently portrays the new heroine. Princess Fiona is a under typical fairytale spell wherein her outward beauty is hidden at night; when the sun sets, she is a green, overweight ogress. As expected, finding true love is her only hope of breaking the curse. The story takes an unexpected twist when she falls in love with the ogre Shrek, and in the end she permanently remains an ogress herself. An initial perusal of this film can leave audiences feeling delighted – if they can get past the eye-ball eating and mud-bathing – that the emphasis of the film is placed on people's inner worth rather than their outward qualities. Princess Fiona learns that Shrek, though grouchy, is not the stereotypical ogre with cannibalistic tendencies but someone who has feelings and self-worth issues and who has been told his whole life that he is a monster. Likewise, Shrek learns that Fiona is not the snotty, entitled person he assumed all beautiful aristocrats are but someone who is brave and charismatic and deeply insightful. In a cosmetically-hyped culture, this movie brings emotional relief with the reminder that a person's worth or value or beauty comes from within.

However, in light of the progressing argument here, this movie conveys a deeply interesting revelation. To recap: 1) fairytales portray archetypal characters who serve as models of behavior rather than sympathetic individuals for audience identification; 2) previous heroines were innately self-sacrificial; 3) inward virtue is synonymous to outward beauty; 4) modern heroines cultivate self-satisfaction; 5) Princess Fiona, and

many other recent fairytale heroines like her, follows her heart and becomes a complete ogress; conclusion: *our culture is literally losing beautiful heroines.*

I am not at all extolling pre-industrialization or pre-feminism epochs. Every generation has its own set of flaws which are not worth trading in for another. But it is critical to evaluate the times we live in now and to realize what it is that we consider being worthwhile. Independence is an inherently good quality; self-satisfaction is not evil. Yet should these things be pursued so zealously that along the way people sacrifice nobility, chivalry, generosity, servants' hearts, or virtue in order to feel self-satisfied? Has the quest for autonomy become the mutually agreed upon code-phrase for the excuse to be selfish?

Fairytales are the mirrors of society. And the beauty of our reflection is waning.

3

Evilution

“I realize the full power of evil – it makes the ugly seem beautiful, the good seem ugly and weak”

– August Strindberg (*The Dance of Death* 2.2.37-39)

“To use evil acts in order to defeat evil will bring about the eventual weakening of good”

– Michael O’Brien (82)

In 1812, the Brothers Grimm published “Hansel and Gretel,” a story that had been rooted in German oral tradition for several centuries. As the Grimms narrated it, Hansel and Gretel are the children of a very poor woodcutter and his wife. One day the step-mother devises that while they are all out working in the forest, the parents should leave the children as they can no longer afford to feed them. The woodcutter is opposed to this idea, but his wife convinces him that it is the only way to avoid all four of them dying of starvation. Hansel and Gretel overhear their step-mother’s plan and father’s regretful acquiescence. Hansel consoles his sister, goes outside and gathers some white pebbles, and tells Gretel that God will protect them. The next day the family travels into the forest to gather wood with Hansel secretly marking a trail with the pebbles. They reach a spot where their parents tell them to rest by the fire until they come back for them. When the children wake up from their nap, they follow Hansel’s stones back to their house and furious step-mother. This is repeated for two more days; though on the third day Hansel is forced to use breadcrumbs rather than stones, only to have the birds eat his trail and leave him and his sister truly lost. After wandering for three days in the woods and

thinking they should die from hunger, they discover a house made of pastries which they ravenously commence to eat. The inhabitant – a child-devouring witch – sweetly invites them in, whereupon she locks Hansel in the stable and forces Gretel to help her prepare meals to fatten Hansel up. After four weeks of prayers and tears, Gretel sees her opportunity. The witch orders Gretel to put herself in the oven, so feigning stupidity, Gretel asks the witch to show her how to get inside. The witch demonstrates, and Gretel shoves her all the way in and slams the door, “and the godless witch was miserably burnt to death” (Grimm 93). The children raid the house of its jewels and follow a duck home to their father (their step-mother had died) who lovingly embraces them.

I do not mean to be arduous by so thoroughly recounting a well-known fairytale, but for future purposes it is necessary to have the Grimms’ version of “Hansel and Gretel” to hold in comparison to other stories. For now the Grimms’ version serves as an excellent example to demonstrate what typically happens to fairytale villains. This chapter will focus on how traditional icons of evil have been tamed and how that has altered the defining nature of the fairytale itself.

VANQUISHED ABSOLUTELY

Just as the fairytale hero and heroine are archetypes – representatives of an ideal behavior rather than an individual who arouses the reader’s sympathy and identification – the villains are also archetypal and can be portrayed by a vast array of characters: the witch, the wizard or magician, the dragon, the giant, the old hag, the incestuous king, the dwarf, the jealous servant, of course, the infamous stepmother, and on rare occasions, Death or the devil himself. These beings display just as extensive a range of evil behavior. The actions of Snow White’s stepmother are fueled by vanity; the treacherous

maidservant from "Goose Girl" is motivated by jealousy for her mistress's opportunity to wed a prince; Rumpelstiltskin's crime is his duplicity to a naïve and victimized girl; Cinderella's stepfamily is consumed by selfish ambition. On the disturbing level there are the villains that exhibit more monstrous sins than human flaws. The giant from "Jack and the Beanstalk" is cannibalistic; Bluebeard is a psychopath who mutilated at least seven wives and keeps their bloodied body parts in a reserved chamber; the mother-in-law from "Sleeping Beauty" is an ogress who craves the flesh of children (her character obviously did not make it to the Disney film); the father from "The Girl Without Hands, Breasts and Eyes" disfigures his daughter and leaves her tied to a tree in revenge for her spending his money to help the poor.

Because as a genre fairytales are archetypal, their messages or intended morals are narrated as universal or absolute. Fairytales are very black-and-white: do what you are supposed to and you may live happily ever after, but if you exhibit jealousy, vanity, greed, or inhumanity, you will die. The antagonists' ultimate subjection to macabre deaths serves as a serious warning to audiences to avoid living errant and selfish lifestyles. As the Grimms record it, Snow White's stepmother goes to her wedding to see for herself the beautiful bride the prince has taken, is astonished to see Snow White still living, and then is forced to put on red-hot iron shoes and dance in them until she falls down dead (258). Rumpelstiltskin gets so angry that his name has been discovered that "he plunged his right foot so deep into the earth that his whole leg went in; and then in rage he pulled at his left leg so hard with both hands that he tore himself in two" (268).

Most fairytales have a keen sense of justice, and the nature of the villains' deaths is related to their individual malevolence in a self-fulfilling manner. In "Goose Girl" the maidservant overpowers her mistress, a princess on her way to an arranged marriage, and

swaps places with her. The soon-to-be father-in-law discovers what had happened and sets a riddle before the maidservant in which he relays that exact incident and asks the imposter what punishment would be deserved. Unwittingly, the maidservant answers, "She deserves no better fate than to be stripped entirely naked, and put in a barrel which is studded inside with pointed nails, and two white horses should be harnessed to it, which will drag her along through one street after another, till she is dead" (Grimm 411). This is immediately done to her. Charles Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty" portrays the mother-in-law as an ogress who wants to eat Beauty's twins when the king is away. The cook fools her and feeds her pork instead. When she discovers that her grandchildren are still alive, she prepares a huge vat and fills it with reptiles, mostly snakes, in which to throw Beauty and her children. But the king returns in time, making the ogress so livid that she jumps into the vat herself and is immediately devoured. And to return to "Hansel and Gretel," there is the witch in the woods who is preparing to cook Gretel, but through Gretel's cleverness the witch herself is burnt to a crisp in her very own stove. There is symmetry to fairytales, a sense of balance and completeness. Though oftentimes characters spring up inexplicably by the end of the story, as a whole there are rarely loose ends or unsettled scores. Good is triumphant; evil is vanquished. The victimized heroine will typically demonstrate forgiveness toward her oppressors, but nature or fate will make sure justice is still dispensed with "an eye for an eye" stringency.

Sometimes, the evil appears internally, making the plot hinge not upon a battle between man and monster or woman and witch, but within a person's very own soul. These types of evil are often expressed through enchantments. The Disney film *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) is a good representation of this kind of conflict. Beast was a spoiled prince with no sympathy or selflessness in his heart and no ability to look past physical

appearances to see a person's true innate worth. Thus an enchantress transformed him into a monster until he could make his heart beautiful to someone who could see past his appearances and love him for who he was. His enchantment was an outward expression of his inward evil that could only be undone by the conquering force of love.

The Austrian fairytale "The Black Princess" tells of a king and queen who desire to have a child (von Franz *Animus* 67-70). The queen daily goes to a bridge that has a cross on one side and a statue of the devil on the other; she kneels before the cross to pray for a baby. Feeling her prayers are unanswered, she turns to the devil. Three months later she is pregnant. She gives birth to a baby girl who is coal black and who grows as quickly in one hour as a normal person does in a year. After twenty-four hours, the grown princess, says, "Oh, you unhappy father and unhappy mother, now I must die. Bury me behind the altar in the church, and always keep a guard in the church during the night, or I will bring a terrible catastrophe on the land" (68). All of this is done, but every morning when the church is opened, they find the guard torn to bits. Soon the country is about to revolt against the palace as the men are tired of being drafted to stand watch over a cursed coffin. The king turns to mercenaries who have not heard about the cursed, dead princess. Three brothers come to town: a major, a captain, and a soldier. The soldier is the typical Dummling hero, the amount-to-nothing little brother who often finds himself in debt, trouble, or jail. He is manipulated by his brothers to guard the church in their stead. As time goes by, he prays, draws crosses, and loiters near the altar. At midnight the princess explodes out of the coffin, enveloped in flames, and tries to butcher the soldier but cannot approach him because of the crosses. After heeding an old woman's advice, the second night the soldier hides behind the statue of the Virgin Mary, and the third night he gets into her coffin after she leaves it and will not move no matter how

desperately or savagely she tries to get him out of it until she calmly says, "Rudolph, get up" (69). When this happens, he gets up, and she is transformed into a white maiden. Later they marry, and he becomes king. There is no external agent of evil in this tale; the princess is born with a type of demon-possession. Her internal evil is the threat to the happiness of the kingdom, and like Beast she is not killed but redeemed from her curse, living the rest of her days as the loving human spouse to the story's hero.

The gamut of evil in fairytales is extensive; there are so many characters and individual vices to use to portray the villains. Yet regardless of whether the evil comes from a vain stepmother, a cannibalistic giant, or an enchanted heir, fairytales have always given distinct demarcations between good and evil. Though maybe the villain is initially deceptive, audiences have been able to identify the evil in the story and the social warnings that its presence signifies.

Until now.

THE MEDUSA SYNDROME

Traditional icons of evil are experiencing a curious transformation, demonstrating what I like to call the Medusa Syndrome. Originally, Medusa is unequivocally portrayed as monstrous. Two Attic black-figure potteries from 600-590 BC and 550-530 BC demonstrate this by exploring the gorgon's horror, exaggerating her supernatural wings, snaky hair, protruding tongue, wide fanged mouth, flattened nose, and unnaturally large venomous eyes in a broad face that always looks straight ahead, never giving someone a side view of her as we receive with Perseus. Both scenes are tense; Perseus is either fleeing from the revenging sisters or just about to deliver the killing blow as he turns his face from this hellion. By the fifth century, however, there is an unusual shift in

Medusa's character. A vase from 450-440 BC shows Medusa as sleeping peacefully with Perseus aggressively seizing her to slay her. Not only is she victimized in this scene, she is also shown as beautiful. The monstrous features are all gone, with only cherubic wings to identify her as a gorgon. There is still a sense of danger conveyed; Perseus would not need flying shoes if his target is sleeping, and the goddess Athena is standing by. So Medusa is not made out to be innocent, but this scene does stir an amount of pity for her as we view her beautiful and subdued form. After that, Medusa's portrayal becomes somewhat comically ambiguous. The Attic red-figure *hydria* from the 400s humorously shows Perseus skipping away, Athena holding her skirts and daintily following, and Medusa's severed head nestled in permanent peace in Perseus' bag. Overall, the image is playful without any real allusion to the danger Perseus has just endured or the revulsion of the creature he just decapitated. Other vessels from the end of the 400s BC show multiple chase scenes between Medusa and Perseus, the body language of the two characters similar to that of Pan or Apollo chasing an errant maiden, giving the story an erotic, still comic nature.

When a monster is no longer feared as a real threat, it will no longer be artistically presented as horrific but rather more humorous or even sympathetic. Our own former monsters have been undergoing this revolution. For instance, a witch never used to be considered a benevolent character; especially with the Salem witch trials marring our history, a person would not dare tell a story featuring a good witch. Historically, witches were believed to have contact with the devil himself, even to a sexual degree; they were feared and proactively hunted as indicated by Kramer's infamous treatise "Hammer of the Witches." The evil witch has been quite prevalent in our fairytales until well into the twentieth century, some of the most famous being Disney's gluttonous sea-witch Ursula

from *The Little Mermaid* (1989), the creepy hag from *Snow White* (1937), and the demonically horned Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). In 1900, L. Frank Baum first published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* featuring the good and beautiful witch Glinda, a popular character but one who was still overwhelmed by the prevalence of other literary evil, ugly witches like the Wicked Witch of the West. Now, however, with the rise of Wicca and the immense popularity of the *Harry Potter* series, our culture widely accepts the possibility of sweet and compassionate witches. One of the most recent fairytales depicting a benevolent witch (aka voodoo priestess) is Mama Odie from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), a comical, little old woman living in the remote Louisiana bayou and who is eager to help the young lovers restore peace and order to their world.

Dragons have undergone the transformation from innately evil to socially misunderstood. For millennia in the Western world, dragons have been symbols of uncompromising iniquity. There is Nidhoggr, an avaricious dragon from Norse mythology who feeds on the dead; the Greek, self-loathing Scylla who feeds on whatever sails too closely to her island; the terrible Smok Wawelski that a Polish apprentice slew; Whiro, the lord of darkness and embodiment of all evil from Māori mythology; the Greek Typhon who had a hundred dragon heads and was considered the father of all monsters; Jormungandr, the enemy of the Norse god Thor; and, of course, the famous evil dragons that Beowulf and St. George both killed (“Famous” 1-2). Modern fairytales, though, take a less absolutist-evil view on these creatures. Most dragon stories portray them as having been misunderstood but wanting to bridge the gap between themselves and humans.

A good example is Jessica Day George’s *Dragon Slippers* wherein the young woman Creel lives with her poor aunt and uncle. Unable to care for her anymore, they

have the brilliant idea to have Creel kidnapped by a dragon so that a knight errant might rescue her, marry her, and move all of them to his castle. It is a colossally stupid idea and Creel knows it, yet she knows she has no say in the matter. But when she meets her would-be draconic captor, she discovers that he does not eat maidens, has no desire whatsoever to battle knights, and usually lives quite peacefully collecting – wait for it – *shoes*. In fact, all the dragons in the region are collectors; Creel makes friends with another one who amasses stained-glass windows. One of the most emotional moments in the book is when this dragon's hoard of windows is ruthlessly shattered by humans who are purposefully prejudiced against dragons due to their own fear and ignorance.

The dragon in *Shrek* (2001) is initially feared as well; she guards the tower imprisoning Princess Fiona. Yet Donkey is able to sweet-talk her, so thoroughly winning her over, that she becomes a more laudable character, several times saving the day for the protagonists and eventually becoming a gentle-hearted mother. The theme of misunderstanding friendly dragons is further reflected by Christopher Paolini's *Eragon*, Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonsong*, Michael Ende's *The NeverEnding Story*, and Cornelia Funke's *Dragon Rider*. There are also films, such as *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010), *Braveheart* (1995), *Pete's Dragon* (1977), *Quest for Camelot* (1998), and *Mulan* (1998), which all show an initial reaction of fear and distrust to a dragon who is actually kind and noble. Dragons are no longer the embodiment of evil; it is being prejudiced against them that is presented as the social evil to be overcome by the characters in our stories who teach us the same lesson as we witness them learn it.

And, of course, we cannot ignore the vampires. They are more associated with paranormal literature than fairytales, but their fantastical nature and similar social evolution serve to further illustrate what is happening in American fiction and culture.

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The iconic vampire story, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, describes the eponymous monster as:

The mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were goutts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran over the chin and the neck. Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood; he lay like a filthy leech exhausted with repletion. (57-58)

Similar to the original perception of witches, vampires were not just considered mythic monsters, but spiritual perversions, anthropomorphic demons representing religious depravity. Van Helsing urges the others gathered to help him hunt Dracula so that they cannot become like the count or else the gates of heaven would be barred to them and they would be an arrow in the side of Him who died for man (Stoker 265). There is a gradual evolution of the portrayal of vampire revealed by Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and Charlaine Harris's *Dead Until Dark* which is the inspiration for the TV series *True Blood*, leading up to the second most famous vampire, the recent sensation Edward Cullen from *The Twilight Saga*. He is a mysterious, suave humanitarian who battles his blood-thirsty side, exhibits self-sacrifice, and secretly protects humanity against the more murderous vampires in the world. And in the true archetypal nature of fairytales wherein one's outward appearance is an expression of the inward condition, Edward is described:

His skin, white despite the faint flush from yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare. His glistening, pale

lavender lids were shut, though of course he didn't sleep. A perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal.

(Meyer 260)

This scene is identical to Stoker's: the vampire has recently hunted and is resting, being observed by someone who has been closely associating with the vampire for some time. Yet the vampire has completely morphed from hideous demon to sparkling angel. Susannah Clements traces the evolution of the vampire and comments on the resulting image exemplified by Edward in her book *The Vampire Defanged: How the Embodiment of Evil Became a Romantic Hero*, "As the vampire has become an idealized romantic superhero, he has lost his potential for spiritual and theological reflection. He has also become rather tame, repressed, pretty, glittery, and vegetarian. He has lost his fangs" (123). As Medusa illustrated thousands of years ago, when iconic evil is no longer viewed as a spiritual or physical threat, the depictions of that creature are socially made tame and beautiful, creating a comic, sympathetic, or romantic effect.

EVIL IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Supernatural monsters are not the only ones experiencing the transformation from evil to endearing. Human criminals are being portrayed from a more compassionate perspective. Our culture is saturated with stories in which we find ourselves rooting for the villains. *The Italian Job* (2003) is a film about a heist in which the protagonists are gold thieves. The movie opens with them expertly stealing a safe, but then one of the gang turns on the rest, killing the leader, taking the gold, and leaving the others stranded in the snow. The rest of the story is about them trying to track down the traitor, retrieve their hard-won gold, and exact revenge for his killing their father-figure. As an audience

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we are made to sympathize with these good-looking, humorous characters who have undergone so many trials and who are just trying to restore a little happiness to their world. We excuse the fact that they are felons and hope they get away in the end. All four of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003; 2006; 2007; 2011) portray this same idea. The central characters are pirates who are trying to maintain their way of life against the increasing tyranny of the British Navy. As a military branch, the British Navy is supposed to be the representative of justice and upstanding conduct, yet it is the pirates – people who pillage, rape, and kill – whom we support, cheering at their victories and laughing whenever officers are made to look foolish.

Children are getting the same messages. The traditional cartoon clearly demarcated the lines between good and evil by illustrating the hero's complete vanquishing over the villain with notably defeated characters like Cruella de Ville, Frodo, Scar, Gaston, Ursula, Maleficent, McLeach, Syndrome, and Doctor Facilier. *MegaMind* (2010), however, shows a new kind of villain. We are given MegaMind's life story, starting when he was an infant. We are able to see how circumstances changed him so that he resorted to using illegal tactics, but by the end of the story, he has chosen to do the right thing, is forgiven by the courts, and lives as an upstanding citizen who gets the girl. He is never identified as evil – he is too lovable for that – and he is not punished for his crimes. *Despicable Me* (2010) portrays the same theme: Gru is an introvert who is merely trying to please his mother by doing something extraordinary. He eventually resorts to stealing impossible things – like the moon – when three little orphan girls make a difference in his life and he tries to be good instead. In *The Tale of Despereaux* (2008), we witness the events which change the adventurous, brave and noble sea-rat Roscuro into a twisted being filled with revenge, bitterness, and deep sorrow. Yet because we saw

what he used to be, we can never hate or fear him or call him evil and celebrate when his heart begins to slowly heal and he does the right thing in the end.

THIEF CHARMING

Is there a reason that pirates, super-villains, thieves, and rats get to be the “good guys” in our stories? These characters represent our society’s changing ideas about the nature of evil itself. Our existentialist culture denies life as being black-and-white but insists reality is composed more of varying shades of gray. Author Michael O’Brien writes, “By and large the social sciences are saying that there is no such thing as objective good and evil. They admit that there are social “evils” and social “goods.” But there is no such thing as truly evil people or evil forces” (18). Cultural analyst Brian Godawa comments about recent pulp fiction villains, “The main characters in these stories are usually small-time criminals who are portrayed as making bad choices rather than as being bad people” (113). And in their article “Reaching for Virtue, Stumbling on Sin,” Buchholz and Mandel observe that modern behavioral and social sciences have replaced the idea of evil with a set of norms; people are now labeled as sociopaths or deviant instead of evil, as absolute evil no longer exists in modern thought (124). In 2007, Richard Corliss wrote in *TIME Magazine*: “They [“bad people”] think they’re the good guys in a world that can’t understand them, and must be punished for that mistake. Villains see themselves as victims” (1). And in that same article actor Peter Dinklage says about villains, “They’ve been cheated out of something by the hero. They’ll do anything to get it [recognition, affirmation, or a “happily ever after”] because they’ve been overlooked in the past” (Corliss et. al. 1).

Our society is being presented with symptoms rather than transgressions, with

victims of circumstances rather than villains of choice, with deviant behavior rather than misbehavior, with the idea that evil is in the eye of the beholder. Redemption in our stories no longer comes from making moral decisions but in making decisions apart from any external rules (Godawa 69). Two fascinating concepts are revealed here. Our society has become more compassionate toward societal renegades than it used to be. It is delightful to know that our stories are socializing children to believe in second chances for everyone, that we should try to rehabilitate criminals, that everyone needs love to heal their hearts and inspire them to do the right thing in the end. The other revelation is not quite as encouraging. In a new world of varying shades of gray, good cannot be allowed to remain absolutist and untarnished. The new villain is soiling the hero, so that often times the two have indistinguishable characteristics. The two most recent fairytale films demonstrate this confusion quite excellently.

Tangled (2011), a retelling of the story Rapunzel, is commendable for so many reasons: the heroine is not inept or catatonic, nor is she aggressive or indecorous; the family unit is restored by the end of the film; true love is expressed by Rapunzel and her lover Flynn Rider committing the greatest act of self-sacrifice they can for each other; the animals are fiercely loyal; and the musical numbers are lively and inspiring. However, Flynn Rider is no Prince Charming; he is a thief seeking refuge in Rapunzel's tower from the royal guard and from the two thugs he just double-crossed. Yet we find ourselves breathing a sigh of relief every time he eludes capture. He is never actually punished for his crimes; the audience is left unsure of whether he has even reformed. As a character, though, he elicits sympathy rather than condemnation. He is good-looking, funny, brave, and protective. Furthermore, we discover that when he was a child, he grew up in an orphanage with the embarrassingly unfortunate name Eugene Fitz Herbert. Clearly

circumstances were unkind to him, and admiring his resilient spirit, we brush over his acts of theft.

Puss in Boots (2011) is about a feline outlaw with wanted posters in every town, but the audience soon discovers that Puss was not always a thief. He used to be San Ricardo's hero, much to the jealousy of his best friend Humpty Dumpty. Humpty framed him for a bank heist; Puss was able to elude capture, but his reputation had been ruined. With no one left to believe in him, he resorted to becoming a real thief. But now the nerdy and enthusiastic Humpty is back in his life, wanting to make amends and fulfill both of their dreams of finding the goose that lays golden eggs. Puss is extremely distrustful, but he agrees to the quest, only to be set up by Humpty again. But when San Ricardo is in the most danger, Puss tells Humpty he will forgive him everything if Humpty will help save the villagers. Humpty ends up sacrificing his life for them, falling off a bridge, shattering, and revealing that all along he was a golden egg inside. San Ricardo's militia still believes Puss is a thief, and the ending is very ambiguous to whether he has reformed. But the villagers know that he is their hero, his adoptive mother is proud of him, and he finds true love (another gentle-hearted feline thief). The both of them are last seen fleeing town.

Tangled and *Puss in Boots* reveal how much more compassionately we regard villains. We realize that not every thief is one by a deliciously malicious choice, but sometimes extenuating circumstances left a hopeless individual with good intentions and a gold heart in an inescapable predicament. We understand that there is always another side to the story. Latifa Ouaou, the producer of *Puss in Boots* says of Humpty Dumpty in the Behind-the-Scenes, "[We] made the character multi-dimensional because you empathize with him and that was important to us. We didn't want him to be a black-and-

white villain; we wanted people to like him.” But in removing the absolutely black criminal from the stories and replacing him with villains of varying shades of gray, it is unavoidable that the absolutely white hero be supplanted as well by characters of a more murky color. Flynn Rider and Puss are thieves who constantly elude justice, but they do save the lives of others and win the hearts of the audience. Are they lovable thieves or unlikely heroes? They demonstrate that our society sometimes views these roles as being indistinguishable from each other.

Blurring the lines between good and evil does cause our fairytales to undermine or maybe redefine themselves. They are defined by being archetypal, by portraying the world in black-and-white scenarios, by propagating, “Do what is right and you will get the *happily ever after*; do what is wrong and you will likely be burned in an oven.” We are actually inventing the genre to suite the moral and philosophical voice of our own shifting cultural values, changing the standard inspired by fairytales from *Be the best there is* to *Be the best you can be*.

4

Happily Ever After?

“If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story”

– Orson Wells (1)

“Classic fairy tales do not deny the existence of heartache and sorrow, but they do deny universal defeat”

– Greenhaven Press (1)

Before Charles Perrault transcribed the story of “Sleeping Beauty” in the 1600s, this oral tale was quite different from the one we know today. Some wise men prophesy to the king that there is poison in the flax that will kill his daughter. The king immediately orders all the flax in the kingdom to be burned, but the princess still manages to get a spindle splinter stuck underneath her fingernail. The trace poison puts her in a death-like trance, with the rest of the castle’s inhabitants succumbing to that enchantment. Meanwhile, there is a young man with seventeen younger siblings who goes out to make his way in the world. He comes to the seemingly deserted castle and discovers the beautiful princess. He then *rapes* her unconscious form, raids the castle of some of its treasures, and returns home. He decides he will move his family to the castle where they can live quite comfortably. While all this traveling is going on, the comatose princess gives birth to twins. They are looking to suckle and one of them discovers her finger. He sucks the poisoned splinter out, and she wakes up to discover that she is a mother. At this point the young man returns with the family, decides to visit her chamber again, and finds that she is awake and that he is a father. She thanks him, for without his

actions she never would have awakened, and offers herself in marriage to him, making him a prince. When he accepts, the rest of the castle wakes up as well. The two of them ride throughout the land to greet the people, but when they return, they cannot find their children. They finally find his mother in her bedchamber where she has chopped the children up, cooked and eaten them. He immediately decapitates her, and when she falls to the floor, her stomach splits open and the children spill out. Apparently, knitting them back together is all that is needed to bring them back to life, and the new family lives happily ever after (Conradt 37).

Other versions, like Giambattista Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia," allow the young man to be a king or portray his mother as an actual ogress (420-425). Sometimes it is not even his mother who is the villain but a previous wife who is jealous of the princess he had raped and now prefers over his wife's own company. The rape scene is rather constant though. So in light of having just explored the topic of evil and how fairytales as a genre are traditionally absolutist in their morals, there are a number of seeming incongruities that immediately rise up when one examines the older tales. Archetypal stories should not allow a thief and a necrophiliac rapist (or someone who engages in matricide or adultery, depending on the version) to better his social position, marry a ravishingly beautiful woman, and live happily ever after. Furthermore, this tale is not an isolated incident, for the earlier versions of numerous other tales depict themes of rape, incest, cannibalism, self-inflicted mutilation, and overall extreme brutality, and oftentimes there is not even a "happily ever after." To understand how fairytales can uphold their reputation of being morally archetypal and atmospherically cheerful, it is important to look at how fairytales first originated and briefly trace their evolution.

BEFORE ONCE UPON A TIME

In *Fairy Tale as Myth*, Jack Zipes describes how the fairytale's evolution begins with rituals which told stories to explain natural phenomena and give meaning to the tribal members' daily lives. The stories emphasized communal harmony and described the common experiences of initiation, worship, warning, and indoctrination. "Told in person, directly, face to face, they were altered as the beliefs and behaviors of the members of a particular group changed" (Zipes 10). Because the stories were oral, they were not static in nature but continually changing with every retelling to reflect the current attitudes of the group or teach them a lesson they all needed to hear. The tales were generic and the voice of a community (10).

In primitive societies the stories were myths used to explain the supernatural. They were divine and historical at the same time. They told of how Time began, where the rain came from, what the stars were. In an earlier chapter I recorded the Native American Indian story of the young man who falls in love with a star who then appears to him as a beautiful woman. Against her wishes he follows her on one of her nightly excursions only to discover that she becomes a skeleton in heaven dancing among other skeletons. He dies of the shock. For the primitive mind this story serves as an explanation for what the stars really are and as a warning for people not to engage with the divine as they do not have the mental or emotional strength to handle the knowledge of what the divine might reveal (Alexander 203; von Franz *Animus* 65).

As society evolved, so did the stories. They were no longer myths used to explain the incomprehensible but folktales used to entertain adults. As the stories were still presented orally, they continued to be the generic voices of a community that the storyteller modified to reflect the listeners' moods or to fulfill the audience's collective

couple happens upon Renard and gives chase. Renard loses Isengrin, but Hersent doggedly pursues him through a hole where she gets lodged half-way. Renard emerges in another spot and finds Hersent truly in no position to escape a raping. Isengrin arrives in time to see Renard's intentions, and when Renard flees the scene, Isengrin lodges a complaint with the king. The story ends with Renard managing to escape both judgment and Isengrin's consequent plans for revenge. Most of the other tales are equally bawdy. Told by the unrefined lower classes, these tales were meant to mock courtly romances with stock characters, inverted plots, and parodistic characteristics (Bottigheimer 2).

Other folktales are not so much crude as appallingly grisly. In *Folktales and Reality* Lutz Röhrich records a folktale from Lower Saxony wherein an executioner cuts off some robbers' fingers before frying the perpetrators in a cauldron of oil. Yet as Röhrich notes, "The more a narrative is rooted among the peasantry, the less it is intended for children over adults. The more primitive a folktale is, the closer its connection to folk belief and the more it is a statement of reality" (155). Folktales reflected life as the peasantry knew it. Folktales told of witches and child-stealing faeries because such threats were perceived as real. Peasants told ghastly tales of burying pregnant women alive or rolling traitors through town in nail-studded barrels or immuring people who displease the king in windowless towers or mutilating people and leaving their remains in public viewing places as warnings because such punishments were dealt out to criminals during those time periods. "Most of these cruel forms of execution correspond to actual punishments in history" (Röhrich 129).

Folktales were the voice of a community. They expressed superstitious fears, told lewd jokes, criticized social inequalities, revealed the inner-workings of the current justice systems, and brought about a sense of unity to poor people looking for amusement

in their hard lives. Zipes explains that folktales were to be shared and exchanged, used and modified according to the needs of the tellers and the listeners (*When Dreams 2*). With the invention of the printing press, the narrator was no longer a community but an individual, and as the story's perspective shifted, so did its content and intended audience. The printing press caused there to be a rupture within folktales, creating two separate literary genres. Since only the wealthy could afford these newly printed books, the stories within were created to reflect elitist values. It is these stories that begin the classical fairytale tradition. Folktales did not disappear, however; the poor continued to tell them to each other throughout the centuries. They even provided the fodder for the stories that the aristocracy told each other; though of course, the stories were modified to convey ideas that would hold meaning for their new audience.

LIFE AS IT SHOULD BE

In the 1630s, Giambattista Basile, an Italian poet, courtier, and soldier, wrote the first European compilation to be later considered as a collection of "fairytale" (Canepa 1). His stories were sophisticated and intended for courtly audiences; though they did not necessarily describe courtly values. Nancy Canepa observes about his tales:

They included rhetorical flourishes, references to popular culture and ordinary life in the late Italian Renaissance, and the satire of court culture and literature – Basile was particularly critical of aristocratic behavior of his time. Perhaps fittingly for the more adult audience, his tales less often match "happily ever after" ideals. ("Giambattista" 2)

The opening story to Basile's *Il Pentamerone* tells of Princess Zoza who never once smiled despite her father's valiant attempts to induce her to do so. But then one day

she is standing on the terrace and sees an old woman and young beggar boy get into an altercation, involving the most creative of foul names. The old woman underscores her insults by “rais[ing] the curtain of her clothes, and show[ing] a truly rural scene” (Basile 2). Princess Zoza begins laughing so hard that she almost passes out. The old woman becomes even more irked and curses Zoza so that a turn of events temporarily causes a deceitful slave-girl to take Zoza’s place as princess and marry the prince meant for her.

Basile conveys his intended lesson in the very beginning with an opening proverb:

It was a proverb established after those of an antique usage that whoso seeketh what he should not findeth what he would not; and clear thing it is that the ape, for drawing on boots, was trapped by the foot. This also befell a beggarly handmaid, who, never having worn shoes to her feet, must needs wear a crown on her head; but, as all wrongs meet their requital. . . she was caught at the wheel. (1)

On the surface level this tale reinforces the concept of rigid and static social hierarchy. A slave tries to cheat her way into a social position not meant for her and is punished by being buried alive (455). The allusion to the ape indicates a subtext here, though. Hunters would commonly take off their boots in front of apes and fill the boots with glue, so that when the ape tries to emulate the hunter by putting the boots on, it is trapped (*Canepa From Court* 83). The subversive message whispering here is not that everyone should be content with their social status and not try to alter it. Rather, as Canepa deciphers, “What causes the ape’s downfall is its slavish imitation of the human model. The proverb cautions against unquestionably “aping” a model, and thus dramatizes the necessity of *not* assuming popular tradition as an absolute authority” (83). This and other of his tales subtly questioned social norms and criticized courtly values.

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The French had made fairytales a literary institution by the end of the 1700s. It was during this time that they coined the word “fairy tale” (Zipes *When Dreams* 13). Fairytales were a form of entertainment and education for the ruling classes, and unlike the purpose of Basile’s tales, the French fairytales featured aristocratic heroes and heroines who served to further separate the elite from the illiterate poor. Women particularly engaged in creating fairytales; in fact, they created the genre (Zipes *Fairy Tale* 20). Basing their narratives upon the newly institutionalized genre, they entertained themselves by telling each other fairytales to pass the time in their parlors and salons and to demonstrate their intellectual prowess in being creative and moralizing in an impromptu setting. Madame D’Aulnoy was a famous tale-spinner from this era, and she is credited with paving the way for the literary “Beauty and the Beast” among other well-known stories (Zipes 25).

Charles Perrault frequented these salons, listening, recording, and reinventing the stories he heard. Many of his stories were founded in folktale tradition, but he dramatically cleaned them up and reinforced them with aristocratic values. His version of “Sleeping Beauty” is much tamer than the one described above. It opens with a christening; the young man is not the eldest son of a peasant woman trying to find his way in the world, but a prince on a hunting trip who, when he hears of the mysterious castle, is fueled by “the wish for love and glory” (Perrault 6). His gaze is all that is required to wake the princess, after which they just sit there for hours merely talking to each other. And overall there is exquisite attention paid to food and courtly manners and clothing: “The Prince was already dressed, and in most magnificent style. As he helped her to rise, the prince refrained from telling her that her clothes, with the straight collar which she wore, were like those to which his grandmother had been accustomed” (10).

His mother is still a cannibalistic ogress who jumps into a vat of snakes; but given the courtly and virtuous aura of the story, her scene becomes more of a plot enhancer, her character more of a foil to the gentle lovers rather than the capstone of horror the original folktales displayed with morbid fascination. Finally, as Perrault did with all his tales, he concluded with a spelled-out moral. The lesson from this story was:

To wait a bit in choosing a husband / Rich, courteous, genteel and kind; /
That is understandable enough. / But to wait a hundred years, and all the
time asleep, / Not many maidens would be found with such patience. /
This story, however, seems to prove / That marriage bonds, / Even though
they be delayed, are none the less blissful, / And that one loses nothing by
waiting. / But maidens yearn for the wedding joys / With so much ardour
That I have neither the strength nor the heart / To preach this moral to
them. (15)

Fairytales did not become intended for children until the early eighteenth century (Zipes *When Dreams* 16). Initially, they were a critique or reflection, depending on the elitist notions of the author, of courtly life. But as the literature became more popular, they became more accessible to the wealthy children. They became more moralizing in nature, reinforcing patriarchal structures, discouraging character traits like curiosity, encouraging obedience, and overall served as tools used to socialize young minds. Zipes writes, “Fairy tales with clear didactic and moral lessons were finally approved as reading matter to serve as a subtle, more pleasurable means of initiating children into the class rituals and customs that reinforced the status quo” (*When Dreams* 16).

So folktales and fairytales are not only distinct as oral tradition of the peasants versus literary narrative of the aristocracy, but their functions differ as well. Folktales

mirror the lives of the communities that tell them, reflecting reality as they know it. Fairytales moralize to their audience, emphasizing the hegemonic values. Folktales are a social reflection; fairytales are a social dictation. So to return to our opening incongruity, fairytales are morally archetypal because they are deliberately written by authors for the intent of socializing their children or critiquing current social conditions. Tales of an undeserving peasant achieving upward social mobility to the rank of king, or bawdy stories wherein animals mock the courtly romances are not fairytales at all but folktales, the voices of the down-trodden poor telling life like they know it and seeking for a laugh.

A GRIMM MISUNDERSTANDING

I would pinpoint the confusion between these distinct genres with the arrival of the Brothers Grimm. They were avid story-collectors; they invited people over to dinner, mostly educated women, to hear stories that they could later record. They also gathered many of their tales from existing literature. They were keenly interested in German folklore and wanted to capture the “poetry” of the people (Tatar xiv). In 1812, they published their first volume of *Children's and Household Tales*, but this compilation was actually an amalgamation of genres. The Grimms had recorded fables, legends, anecdotes, jokes, religious tales, folktales, and fairytales (Zipes *When Dreams* 75).

They also took a lot of liberties when retelling many of these stories. Zipes explains their reasons for their major modifications:

The Grimms made major changes while editing the tales. They eliminated erotic and sexual elements that might be offensive to middle-class morality, added numerous Christian expressions and references, emphasized specific role models for male and female protagonists

according to the dominant patriarchal code of that time, and endowed many of the tales with a “homey,” or *biedermeier*, flavor by the use of diminutives, quaint expressions, and cute descriptions. (*When Dreams* 74)

Harkening back to an earlier chapter, we saw some of these alterations happen with the story of “Rumpelstiltskin.” In oral tradition it was a handmaiden who discovered the little man’s name, and together she and the victimized female protagonist were able to overcome his chicanery, banishing him on a cooking utensil. When the Grimms retold the tale, they added a father and replaced the handmaiden with a soldier who saved the day instead. The men began and ended all the action.

The Grimms did not remain staunch to their own retellings either, though. They republished *Children’s and Household Tales* in 1857 with several changes. As a whole they rewrote it with less sexual innuendo and violence. “Rapunzel” and “How Children Played Butcher with Each Other” exemplify these shifts. In the 1812 edition of “Rapunzel” there is the passage:

At first Rapunzel was frightened, but soon she came to like the young king so well that she arranged for him to come every day and be pulled up. Thus they lived in joy and pleasure for a long time. The fairy did not discover what was happening until one day Rapunzel said to her, “Frau Gothel, tell me why it is that my clothes are all too tight. They no longer fit me.” (Ashliman “Rapunzel” 4)

In 1857, this passage was modified to:

At first Rapunzel was terribly frightened when a man such as she had never seen before came in to her. However, the prince began talking to her in a very friendly manner, telling her that his heart had been so

touched by her singing that he could have no peace until he had seen her in person. Then Rapunzel lost her fear, and when he asked her if she would take him as her husband, she said yes. . . . The sorceress did not notice what was happening until one day Rapunzel said to her, "Frau Gothel, tell me why it is that you are more difficult to pull up than is the young prince, who will be arriving any moment now?" (Ashliman "Rapunzel" 4)

The revised edition openly spoke of marriage instead of implying Rapunzel and the prince were "playing house;" the evil nature of Mother Gothel was emphasized by redubbing her enchantress instead of fairy; and she discovers the prince's visits, not because Rapunzel is pregnant but because Rapunzel accidentally observes that Mother Gothel weighs more than the prince does as she hoists them up her braid.

"How Children Played Butcher with Each Other" is a macabre story. One boy grabs a knife and pretends to be a butcher, while his brother pretends to be a pig. The former literally butchers his brother. This all happens in front of their mother who retributively plunges a knife into the first son's chest. She returns to her youngest son who she was bathing to discover that he had drowned in her absence. Completely grief-stricken, she hangs herself. The devastated husband dies soon afterward. This ghastly tale never even made it into the 1857 edition. Maria Tatar speculates in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, "Wilhelm Grimm rewrote the tales so extensively and went so far in the direction of eliminating off-color episodes that he can be credited with sanitizing folktales and thereby paving the way for the process that made them acceptable children's literature in all cultures" (24).

Though their sanitizing stories leads to an interesting point to be discussed in the

next chapter, it is first notable that the Grimms' prolific revisions of culture tales blurred the defining boundaries between folktale and fairytale. By eliminating innuendo, decreasing violence, infusing their stories with morals and contemporary social values, and in general presenting folktales and fairytales as one homogenous mass of literature, *folktale* and *fairytale* have become terms that are used synonymously with each other, causing the confusion of how fairytales can uphold their reputation of being archetypal when so many tales depict unpunished crimes and express bawdy behavior.

Disney and the Beast

“It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not schoolteachers or university professors but filmmakers, advertising executives and pop culture purveyors”

Benjamin R. Barber (Giroux 63)

“All of us who professionally use the mass media are the shapers of society. We can vulgarize that society. We can brutalize it. Or we can help lift it onto a higher level”

- William Bernbach (3)

The next revolution in the institutionalization of the fairytale genre made these stories even more sanitized. The remaining violence within the Grimms' tales has been continually contested and revised; the tales even received partial blame for the unthinkable brutality executed by the Nazis during the Second World War, and the British-led occupation forces sought to ban further publications of *Children's and Household Tales* (Zipes *Sticks and Stones* 99-100). Yet such outright attempts to bar the stories from nurseries have failed to quell the legacy the Grimms left for us in literature. However, the next revolution of storytelling has nearly obfuscated the names synonymous with fairytales such as Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen, and the Brothers Grimm, replacing them instead with Walt Disney.

The advent of film brought about a new way to tell stories, shifting once more the relationship between narrator and audience. Many culture and literary critics argue that film has a dictatorial influence over audiences, suppressing people's imaginations, and indoctrinating them with packaged and marketed worldviews (Adorno 55-60; Schweizer

and Schweizer 278; Zipes *Fairy Tale as Myth* 94). Looking more closely at Disney's life and sociological concepts like cultural competency and the culture industry, this chapter will explore how fairytales are portrayed in films and what they are now revealing about our society. To set the stage for the controversy surrounding film, I want to begin by telling the story of Pinocchio.

A PUPPET – GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA?

Carlo Collodi first wrote the story of Pinocchio in 1881 as a series of adventures to be published weekly in the Italian newspaper *Giornale per I bambini* or the *Newspaper for Children* (Zipes *Happily Ever After* 76). Two years later the numerous installments were gathered and published as a novel, which was so successful that Collodi witnessed four editions of it in his lifetime. A story about boyhood, pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, and trying to navigate through the difficulties of realizing and fulfilling social expectations, this story has an appeal for audiences everywhere. The novel can be read as a *Bildungsroman*, the development of a poor boy who must make the most of the opportunities presented before him if he is to survive in nineteenth-century Italy. Reflecting the harsh truths of Collodi's own times, the themes of education and personal development are pervasive. Zipes observes how it is a story of punishment and conformity, a tale in which a puppet without strings has strings of social constraint attached so that he will not go his own way but respond to the pulls of superior forces, symbolized by the Blue Fairy and Geppetto (*When Dreams* 144).

Unlike the Disney film adaptation, in the novel there is no mention that Geppetto is a woodcarver; he is, in fact, quite poor. Collodi writes, "Geppetto, who was poor, and had not so much as a farthing in his pocket, then made him [Pinocchio] a little dress of

flowered paper, a pair of shoes from the bark of a tree, and a cap of the crumb of bread” (35). Geppetto’s original motive for wanting a puppet has nothing to do with unfulfilled paternal affection but is purely economic. He wants a wooden doll by which he can entertain others and earn money. The cricket has a much less significant role in the novel; he is not narrator or conscience. In fact, when the cricket warns Pinocchio that disobedient boys turn into donkeys, Pinocchio throws a hammer at it, accidentally killing it (20). Pinocchio himself is childish in that he is motivated by his own wants. He is not necessarily a selfish child, just one who is in that universal stage of being oblivious to others’ needs and desires and thinking the world revolves around him. His adventures slowly teach him to look beyond himself and to care selflessly for others. His transformation is more than just wood to child, but rather from child to adult. He becomes human after he risks his life to save Geppetto from the shark, toils for hours to nurse his consequently ill father, and then gives all his saved money to the Blue Fairy when he hears that she is dreadfully ill. Richard Wunderlich observes in his essay “Deradicalizing *Pinocchio*” that Pinocchio is now an adult, performing the roles toward Geppetto and the Blue Fairy that they had earlier played toward him (20). He comments that Pinocchio’s transformation is empowering; he is an adult who cares for others, makes his own choices, and is responsible for them. He regards Pinocchio’s “transformation” within the film much more pessimistically.

Disney’s *Pinocchio* (1939) was released during the Great Depression, and its telling was heavily influenced by this economic crisis. Collodi’s novel emphasizes the poverty in which Pinocchio grew up. Geppetto’s house is described as:

A small ground-floor room that was only lighted from the staircase. The furniture could not have been simpler – a bad chair, a poor bed, and a

broken-down table. At the end of the room there was a fireplace with a lighted fire; but the fire was painted, and by the fire was a painted saucepan that was boiling cheerfully, and sending out a cloud of smoke that looked exactly like real smoke. (12)

The film, however, did not seem to want to portray traumatic themes that would have been too harshly personal for Americans at this time. Geppetto's cozy little cottage is painted in cheery colors, but to create more of a sense of affluence than illusion; he conveniently possesses clothes and schoolbooks for Pinocchio; he seems to have a steady trade; he has made his home a haven of comfort, physically and emotionally.

Richard Wunderlich argues that the Great Depression influenced how the characters are portrayed as well. He observes that Pinocchio's transformation in the film leads him to become quiet and obedient when Collodi made him bold and independent; in the film Pinocchio remains a child and is never shown to make that transition into adulthood. The villains in the film – Honest John, Stromboli, the coachmen – are not punished for their crimes but are allowed to continue roving in the world committing their nefarious deeds, implying that the outside world is cruel and unjust and terrifying and definitely no place for children. Finally, the film fosters consumerism and suppression. Wunderlich writes:

First, encouraging children to remain dependent is useful for consumer culture: their purpose is to enjoy life and focus on play. Children make the best consumers for they buy irresponsibly and use products to ensure happiness and relieve any form of distress. . . . The second factor encouraging this new Pinocchio is political control. When the outside world is frightening and dangerous, and especially when it is beyond

personal control (as portrayed by Disney), threatened adults seek a leader free to take charge in their behalf, just as little children, who are weak, seek a grownup for defense. (24-25)

The devastation of the Great Depression influenced this film to propagate messages that would encourage people to spend money to restore the economy and to listen to the all-knowing and protective benevolence of the government.

PRINCE DISNEY

It is interesting that the same dynamics occurred during the shift from literary to film story-telling as happened between oral and literary. A story reflecting the voices of the poor was adapted and represented as a form of political control. At least that is how many films are interpreted, yet examining the life of Walt Disney does not seem to produce any evidence of political motivation, though perhaps a serious god-complex as later demonstrated.

Disney's story very much resembles a fairytale with themes such as rags-to-riches and the little guy withstanding the current ruling power. Disney grew up in a poor family, had an unaffectionate father, was rejected by his sweetheart, and was initially incapable of being recognized within the film industry; yet because of his tenacity and ingenuity he became the next "monarch" within this industry, making his name practically synonymous to the entire genre of fairytales. During the early 1900s, many animators were using fairytales to explore new methods of creating trick films or cartoons. Disney's zeal, however, was unrivaled, and after animating a few black-and-white shorts like the nine minute *Puss in Boots* (1922), he moved on to the three year endeavor of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the first full-length animated

fairytale film ever (*Zipes Fairy Tale* 86).

He did make considerable alterations to the plotline. Snow White is immediately introduced as an orphan, whereas the Grimms told of her having a father and dedicated the opening scene to the mother's wish for a child and then death. Disney's prince is more involved in the story, showing up in the very beginning and restoring Snow White to life at the end, whereas the Grimms cast him as more negligent; in the original it is a dwarf's clumsiness which wakes up Snow White, not the prince's kiss. Disney also made the dwarfs more involved, naming them and fleshing out their characters and allowing them to be the agents to defeat evil. Finally, to sanitize a somewhat violent story, Disney kills the witch by having her accidentally fall off a cliff, whereas the Grimms wrote her ending scene, "But iron slippers had already been put upon the fire, and they were brought in with tongs, and set before her. Then she was forced to put on the red-hot shoes, and dance until she dropped down dead" (Grimm 258). Disney's changes serve to further celebrate perseverance, hard work, and the triumph of the underdog. As this movie was released during the Great Depression, Zipes observes that the dwarfs can be interpreted as the humble American workers, who pull together and keep their spirits high by singing and who have the determination of knowing that they will succeed just as long as each one does his share of the work (*Fairy Tale* 90).

The film also seems to be a retelling of Disney's career, his character being portrayed by the prince. He was known for obstinately taking all the credit for all of his films; the animators working for him had to fight to be acknowledged (*Zipes Fairy Tale* 91). Just as the dwarfs did all the work in the story – mining, protecting Snow White, pursuing the evil queen – and then the prince swoops down out of nowhere and takes Snow White and the credit, Disney obfuscates the efforts of his workers, stamping his

name and logo in vast lettering over the film and taking sole recognition. Yet drawn as he was to fairytales for the reflection they gave of his own life struggles, it hardly seems odd that he would seek to project himself in his stories. As Donald Crafton observes in *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928* about animators during Disney's time:

To interject oneself into one's film is a fairly audacious thing to do. But this tendency, which persisted throughout the three decades, seems on the evidence of the films' contents and the memories of veteran animators to have been real and conscious. . . . Usually these [self-projections] were very flattering, for he was pictured (or implied to be) a demigod, a purveyor of life itself. (11)

Disney was also particularly fascinated with the technology of his profession; as Crafton suggested, animators like Disney were practically creating life, making still images move with a fluid totality. Because of this Zipes believes that Disney caused technique to take precedence over the story (*Fairy Tale* 94). Wunderlich propagated that Disney had turned a fairytale originally told to reflect an impoverished yet perseverant way of life into a tool of political control; but Zipes maintains that Disney took fairytales and made them mere commodities which have dictatorially suppressed audience's imaginations ever since (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 139-142).

In *Happily Ever After* Zipes presents four developments that film brought to the fairytale: image now dominates text; the true hero or magician of the story is no longer the central character but the filmmaker; film further distances the audience from the storyteller; and fairytales have become standardized, mass produced commodities made with cost efficiency and for maximum profit (69). He queries if fairytales now give audiences a false sense of hope, an artificial utopia through amusement, if they have

contributed to the destruction of community and the deception of the masses (70). With the standardization of storytelling, listeners seem to have been turned into mere consumers. By the 1930s, people were not just buying movies but the books, t-shirts, jewelry, dolls, backpacks, lunch boxes, pajamas, and stickers that capitalized on the stories within the movies. We are used to these marketing schemes in our consumer age, but it is odd that such story exploitation has been occurring from the very beginning of film's existence. In 1934, *Fortune* magazine criticized Disney for concentrating less on the sake of exploring the story as an art form or for educating children and stimulating their imaginations but for the sake of promoting the Disney label (Zipes *Happily* 92).

STORIES ON THE CONVEYOR BELT

The actual content within a film itself seems to have suffered from its commodification. The storylines are arguably quite homogenous: the domesticated heroine is thrust into an adventure which proves to be more dangerous than she can handle, but the hero arrives in time to save the day with a kiss, battle scene, important discovery, or declaration, and then marries her. Consider the consistent plot lines of *Snow White* (1937), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Cinderella* (1950), or *Aladdin* (1992). These uniform storylines are disguised to be novel by employing increasingly new artistic or technological developments, catchy musicals, and quirky side-kicks like *Aladdin's* genie, *Cinderella's* mice, or the anthropomorphic furniture from *Beauty and the Beast*. Because of this artful disguise of homogeneity, Zipes contends that watching Disney's films involves a loss of identity, even an infantilization, as viewers allow themselves to be swept away in the story, blindly swallowing nineteenth century sexist and racist notions that are packaged in vivacious songs, innovative technology, quirky characters,

and an overall feeling of nostalgia (*Happily* 94). His argument heralds back to Adorno and his "culture industry."

Theodor Adorno propagated in "Culture Industry Reconsidered" that the culture industry incessantly parades the new and progressive when it is really offering a disguise for the eternal sameness, that a product's individuality is an illusion, making the consumer's individuality artificial as well. He argues that the world wants to be deceived, that people want the culture industry to dictatorially provide them with a sense of orientation, satisfaction, and approval in a chaotic world (Adorno 56-58). He writes, "The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness" (59). People would rather be told what to value by the media and conform to those standards than to autonomously discern for themselves what values are worth upholding. Near the end of this essay he mentions how films specifically make people's minds develop retrogressively, turning adults into eleven-year-olds (59). Overall, the culture industry promotes a sense of anti-enlightenment.

Wunderlich and Adorno seem to be presenting the opposing extremist viewpoints of what the new mode of fairytale storytelling is accomplishing. It seems as dramatic to suggest that fairytale films are the subversive arsenal of a totalitarian government seeking to further its political control as it is to dismiss the films as vapid commodities which are tranquilizing the masses with mind-numbing entertainment. Rather it seems that this media evolution is achieving exactly what the oral-to-literary evolution before it did: the singular narrator is relating a fairytale infused with his own worldviews and life values and sharing it with society with the majority of his readers agreeing with his perspective and using his retelling to socialize their children. Yet films are somehow viewed more suspiciously than their literary counterparts. Films are not a more sinister purveyor of

messages than literature; however, modern audiences are increasingly fulfilling Huxley's *Brave New World* wherein people ultimately seek to be amused. Thus films are superciliously dismissed with an "Oh, that was just entertainment," causing alarmed critics to blame the films as being either vapidly homogenous or subversively despotic. What needs to be realized is that films, especially those telling fairytales, do indeed convey specific predetermined messages and those films need to be approached more cautiously than literature because the wide-spread assumption that they are merely for entertainment causes these messages to slip past many people's defenses, making them subconsciously adopt philosophies that they would normally dismiss.

Disney himself admitted several times to using his films to educate children. Henry Giroux records in *The Mouse That Roared* that Disney challenged the assumption that entertainment has little educational value and is simply for leisure, instead espousing that education was not confined to schools but implicit in the broader realm of popular culture and its own mechanisms for the production of knowledge and values (18). To give a more specific example of Disney's self-perceived influence, Peter and Rochelle Schweizer give the back-story to the creation of his *Pocahontas* in their book *Disney: The Mouse Betrayed*. After an enthralling account of interviews between the Disney team and Native American activists in Virginia, of basing the script upon the animistic lyrics of "Colors of the Wind," of describing the symbolism of the colors deliberately portrayed by the different characters, and of getting Native Americans to approve the script and perform some of the characters' voices, the authors conclude about this film:

What began as a characteristically American story about an Indian princess's rescue of an English captain, became an anthem about spiritualism, ecology, and racism. In the words of Glen Keane,

supervising animator for *Pocahontas*, Disney viewed the film “not just as entertainment, but as an attempt to convey things in which we truly believe.” (161)

With the knowledge that movie directors like Disney operate with the same purpose as authors – telling fairytales with their own specific slants to socialize children – it is interesting to observe what the fairytales are conveying now. As a society that is no longer struggling through a depression, films like *Pinocchio* and *Snow White* merely bring nostalgia with their antiquated themes. Ours is commonly labeled a postmodern world, and the fairytales we tell now very heavily reflect this.

IRRESISTIBLY IRONIC

Postmodernism is a curious philosophy; with a seeming deathly allergic reaction to tradition, postmodernism seeks to defy social norms and reinvent genres. It is defined:

A late 20th-century style and concept in the arts and architecture, which represents a departure from modernism and has at its heart a general distrust of theories and ideologies as well as a problematical relationship with the notion of *art*. . . . In the culture generally, postmodernism is associated with a playful acceptance of surfaces and superficial style, self-conscious quotation and parody, and a celebration of the ironic. (Oxford Reference Online)

Focusing on postmodernism’s attributes of self-conscious contradictions and a parodic intertextuality, Cristina Bacchilega explores fairytales in her book *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*. She writes:

Postmodern transformations do not exploit the fairy tale’s magic simply to make

the spell work, but rather to unmake some of its workings. Postmodern fictions, then, hold mirrors to the magic mirror of the fairy tale, playing with its framed images out of a desire to multiply its refractions and to expose its artifices. (24)

In our postmodern world of questioning norms, roles, and literary boundaries our fairytales defy themselves, rewriting the motifs that have defined this genre for millennia.

Gail Carson Levine is a prolific postmodern fairytale author; her pages abound with plain heroines who must learn to accept themselves, tactless princes who must learn to accept others, and bumbling fairies who aggravate already difficult circumstances. Her retelling of Cinderella, a story whose motifs can be traced back to first century BC Greece ("The Original"), is called *Ella Enchanted* (made into a movie in 2004) and is about how a young infant was given a fairy blessing at her birth, but due to the fairy's incompetence, the blessing was actually a curse. Young Ella grows up trying to hide her dangerous curse – the gift of obedience – and to track down the fairy to beg her to take the gift back. She meets and falls in love with Prince Char who kills ogres, secretly slides down the castle's banisters, and does not want her to go to finishing school. In the end Ella finds the fairy only to learn that all along she herself is the only one who can undo the curse. In Margaret Peterson Haddix's version of "Cinderella," *Just Ella*, the heroine secures her glass slippers through a wager and slips away to the ball in one of her deceased mother's gowns. After becoming engaged to the prince, she discovers him to be dull and palace life to be stifling. She falls in love with her tutor but eventually runs away from the castle, marrying no one and becoming a doctor at a refugee camp.

These stories are not just a reflection of feminist ideals wherein the woman learns to become her own hero and not be dependent on others. These retellings unmake some of the defining aspects of the fairytale genre. With the exception of "Rumpelstiltskin,"

the magical helper has always been a wise and powerful creature whose omniscience exudes comfort to the reader who now knows that the hero is in safe hands and can now accomplish what he needs to. In *Ella Enchanted*, however, the fairy Lucinda is a self-absorbed, emotionally volatile ditz – she even gets a Flying Under Intoxication ticket in the film version – whose mistakes launch the plot for the story. The role of magical helper has been made farcical, perhaps reflecting that in our humanist world, help should not be sought from supernatural aid but from within oneself. Other undeniable motifs are the happy ending brought about by a union of families, most often accomplished through a marriage and a rags-to-riches social mobility. *Just Ella* undoes the fairytale by insisting that a happy ending is not defined by union with another person but a union with oneself, a Rousseau-ideal of self-discovery and self-fulfillment, and by not moving the heroine from poverty to palace but from royalty to refugee camp.

Postmodern fairytales rewrite themselves by more than just demonstrating an increase in the heroine's agency as they reverse the roles of maiden and prince. They also rewrite the roles of the villains. I have already examined Jessica Day George's *Dragon Slippers* wherein the dragons are mistakenly feared as evil, maiden-devouring monsters but are actually sensitive fine-art collectors. James Finn Garner wrote *Once Upon a More Enlightened Time*, a collection of rewritten, politically correct fairytales. In it he tells the story of Hansel and Gretel, two pre-adults whose father was a tree butcher. The economically disadvantaged father abandoned them in a forest where they found the witch's house made of "carob brownies, sugarless gingerbread, and carrot cake" complete with FDA label (5). The "wommon" was actually a kind-hearted Wiccan who taught them herbology and how to be in harmony with Mother Earth. Sometime later the children and their new-found coven discovered that the tree butcher had returned to the

forest, this time with a crew ready to decimate the forest for commercial development; but with the right spells Hansel and Gretel (aka Heathdweller and Gaia) were able to deflect his plans, and they and the trees lived happily ever after.

Though the postmodern fairytale literature is abounding, with authors like Tanith Lee, Angela Carter, Jane Yolen, Michael Ende, James Finn Garner, Melissa Marr, and Tamara Pierce, it is important to return to our culture's more pervasive form of storytelling. Because so many people view a movie as requiring less contribution from its viewer than a book demands of the reader, the philosophies within films are sometimes nearly imperceptible. Yet postmodern ideas are still being intensely conveyed as fairytale films contradict gender and family roles, probe ideas about villainy, and question what it means to achieve a happily ever after.

FAIRYTALE FILMS THAT UNMAKE FAIRYTALES

The four *Shrek* films (2001; 2004; 2007; 2010) are classic anti-fairytale films with prevalent irony and narrative deconstruction. Prince Farquaad and Prince Charming are both eager to rescue a distressed maiden, yet they are vain, whiny, puerile, and downright iniquitous. The unlikely hero of the story is actually a grumpy ogre who sets out to rescue Princess Fiona, not out of chivalric bravery but to selfishly save his swamp from intrusion. Fiona herself is hardly a damsel in distress, knowing martial arts and having no reservations against harming little forest creatures; furthermore, she twice chooses to be an ogress rather than the traditionally beautiful human princess. Even one of fairytale's most popular motifs – the helpful talking animal – is deconstructed. Though Donkey can speak – to Shrek's eternal irritation he will in not shut up – he is hardly helpful, being more of an accident-prone clown who often gets Shrek further into trouble

than out of it. A further litany of the films' parody is a bra-burning scene by the princesses Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and Cinderella; Pinocchio constantly serves as a beacon of truth because his lies are so apparent; a dragon becomes an ally to Shrek and his friends; the three little pigs and a wolf are a regular club; there is a transvestite barmaid; and the Fairy Godmother and Rapunzel are actually evil (the latter is really bald as well).

These films are also steeped in scatological humor. Previously, fairytale films were frequented with scenes like the one from *Beauty and the Beast* wherein Mrs. Potts is singing "There May Be Something There That Wasn't There Before" as Belle shows Beast how to daintily eat with a spoon, how to read and dress better, and overall, how to act like a *gentleman*. Through her training and love, he ultimately overcomes his beastness and is able to live amongst humanity again. In *Shrek 2* this plotline is reversed when Shrek and Fiona, victims of accidents and external evil intentions, become human and handsome. The novelty of this experience quickly wears off for Shrek as he finds himself more than ever bound by the confines of society and what it means for him to be a prince, an inheritor to the throne, and human. He misses his swamp, his questionable dietary habits punctuated by loud belching, and his mud spa which is fueled by his own bodily eruptions. In *Beauty and the Beast* the prince's shackle was his curse to live as an unrefined, isolated beast; his happy ending was to become human again, rejoin society, and regain his rule over his kingdom with a beautiful princess by his side. In *Shrek 2* the ogre's shackle is to live as a human prince restricted by society's expectations; his happy ending is to become a crude monster again, resist the responsibility to rule a kingdom, and return to his isolated swamp with his ogress wife.

Hoodwinked! (2005) similarly challenges traditional fairytale motifs as it begins

at the end of Little Red Riding Hood's story. Red has just discovered that her granny is actually a wolf in disguise; the woodman bursts through the window; and then the police arrive, passing out charges like they're hors d'oeuvres: breaking and entering, disturbing the peace, intent to eat, and wielding an axe without a license. All the characters are heavily interrogated back at the station, revealing that no one is as they seem. Red is a kung fu expert; Wolf is an investigative journalist; the woodsman is a clumsy, aspiring actor; and Granny is a secret adrenaline junky. Though their individual stories on how they all arrived at Granny's house are barely credible, the detective believes each of them innocent when he realizes all their stories have one common element – the presence of a little bunny named Boingo, a thief with truly nefarious intentions.

The sequel *Hoodwinked Too! Hood vs. Evil* (2011) continues in the vein of postmodern irony by reinforcing Red's independence and Wolf's likeability. Furthermore, the assumed villain of this story's plot is a witch who turns out to be a jealous schoolmate from Granny's younger days who wears a mask as she tries to find success and approval in the world. The real masterminds of the plot are Hansel and Gretel, two big-eyed children who staged their own kidnapping to kidnap Granny.

What both the *Hoodwinkeds* have in common is that a character will narrate what happened from his point-of-view, and it will seem very open and clear-cut. But when another point-of-view is introduced, it conflicts with the interpretation of events given by the first speaker. Finally, by the end of the films, the plots resemble mosaics, the whole of which none of the characters could see until his experience had been fitted together with everyone else's to create what really happened. This is where the heart of postmodernism starts to appear.

CONFUSING REALITY WITH FICTION

Postmodernism is about more than just questioning tradition, contradicting gender roles, and pushing literary boundaries. Jonathan Fitzgerald explains in his article "Postmodernism, the Big Green Ogre" that it posits that we cannot know anything absolutely, and therefore everything is open to interpretation, just like a text. Postmodernism rejects absolutes and queries, "What is reality?" This question is pervasive in all genres. *The Matrix* propagated that what people perceive to be reality is actually just a dream externally inflicted upon humanity to blind them to their true condition in life. *EXISTENZ* is about people playing a deadly virtual reality game. When they quit the game, thinking they have reentered real life, they discover they have just entered another stage of the game. Someone asks, "Are we still in the game?" whereupon the screen goes dark and the story ends. *Inception* is about people being able to construct layers of reality within a dream. One man keeps a special top with him that he spins if he needs confirmation of where he is. If the top eventually falls over, he is in reality; if it spins indefinitely, he is still in a dream. At one point he spins the top to reassure himself that he is in the real world and then is distracted by his children. The camera focuses on the spinning top and then fades to black. Postmodernism plays with our conceptions of reality, questioning if we can really believe what we know to be real as being real and exploring how we will react when we discover our reality is illusory. The fictional nature of fairytales makes them particularly convenient mediums for this illusion-focused philosophy, for in denying objective reality postmodern stories fuse and confuse reality with fantasy. Two modern fairytale films demonstrate this principle exceptionally well.

Enchanted (2007) opens with the traditional cartoon fairytale: Giselle is singing

about true love as talking birds and rodents help her around the house. An ogre attacks her, but fortunately, a handsome prince is in the vicinity and is able to rescue her. They immediately fall in love, and a wedding is set up the following day. Yet his step-mother is actually a witch, and she sends Giselle to a place "where there are no happily ever afters." Two worlds collide as Giselle is sent to the hustling streets of New York City. The portal between the two worlds is heavily trafficked throughout the rest of the film as the prince, a chipmunk, a squire, and finally the witch-queen herself all journey to the "real world" with the prince and chipmunk making a return trip, taking an interior decorator back with them. Giselle and the squire remain in New York, and she starts a business based on her memories from home. Though initially confused and irritated by Giselle's naïveté (after all, the woman believes in love at first sight and randomly breaks out into song), a lawyer finds himself falling in love with her. Overall, the fairytale world is given as much credence as what we like to call the real world.

Jack and the Beanstalk: The Real Story (2001) tells of the rich CEO Jack Robinson whose casino developers unearth the skeleton of a huge giant. His life becomes one chaotic quest for truth as he discovers that several generations ago one of his ancestors climbed a magic beanstalk and entered giant-land. However, he did not accurately relate what happened while he was there. The giants were actually kind and civilized and welcomed the first Jack into their lives. He took advantage of them, though, and stole the harp and the goose whose absence caused a famine in the land. One of the giants followed Jack back to try to reason with him and get the harp and goose back, but Jack's mother killed the giant, causing Jack's family to be rich but cursed. The giants are returning again, this time for the CEO Jack because his life will end the famine inflicted on their land and will somewhat appease their broken hearts over the loss of their friend

Thunderdale. But this Jack is not the thieving rogue his ancestor was, and he seeks to find the lost harp and goose and heal the giants' land before they take his life. The story presents an interesting fusing of worlds and once again questions our ideas of fact and fiction and of who is good and who is evil.

The advent of film has altered the relationship between storyteller and audience and has influenced the content of the stories told as well. Oftentimes plot and novelty are sacrificed for technology, resulting in rather homogenous stories. And watching a film does require less imagination than reading a book; the director focuses our attention on what he considers important and constricts the portrayal of characters and landscapes to what he imagined and wants us to see. Yet as we saw, films are portraying very specific worldviews; they are still made with the intent to socialize immature minds, portraying the philosophies most prevalent with the times. In this way fairytales continue to reflect our values, yet for those who read or watch them without discernment or without recognizing that fairytales are not just entertainment but do convey predetermined philosophies, fairytales become dictatorial as well, subtly subjugating unaware minds.

Conclusion

"At the center of every fairy tale lay a truth that gave the story its power"
Susan Wiggs (501)

Going back to *Hoodwinked!* and the concept that everyone will approach the same situation but arrive at different conclusions based upon their own predispositions and focused knowledge, this film is reminiscent of some relevant sociological theories. Sociologist Charles Winick describes his theory of tendency systems as the relationship between a viewer's personality and how he perceives a film's themes ("Tendency Systems" 45). Similarly, Eunice Cooper and Helen Dinerman define selective perception as when each member of an audience, consciously or not, modifies the stimulus he perceives according to his own predispositions ("Analysis of the Film" 30).

Richard Wunderlich saw *Pinocchio* as a political tool of totalitarian control, encouraging consumer spending and reliance on a "benevolent" government (24-25). Because of who I am based upon my experiences and what I value in life, I saw this film and thought *How neat! There are so many biblical truths reflected in this cartoon!* This movie repeatedly said, "Avoid Temptation," "Listen to your conscience," "Be honest," and "Walk the straight and narrow." I also saw the story of Jonah and the Prodigal Son in it, and the story of Creation and Redemption. Geppetto created a child; he then spoke that he wanted the child to have life and it did. It was both a puppet yet had free will. Geppetto then treated it as a son. It encountered various trials in life, each one for the purpose of improving its character and eliminating flaws. Through an act of self-

sacrificial love, the puppet was redeemed and sanctified, becoming a real human child and equal in value to his father. For me the story was a really good representation of God first being our Creator, speaking us into existence, and then becoming our Father. We encounter numerous temptations throughout life yet are admonished to live honorably and to be truthful and unselfish. Then through an act of self-sacrificial love from God's Son, we are redeemed from a fallen state to a more holy one, becoming worthy of His love and glory. Wunderlich and I both saw the same film, yet because of who we are and the sociological theories at work, our interpretations could not have been more different. Our worldviews influence how we interpret anything presented to us.

Through the character of the Woodsman, *Hoodwinked!* reminds us of another theory -- dominant response. The Woodsman could be described as succumbing to dominant response, accepting what is presented without question and lacking cultural competency, the store of understanding that a normal viewer brings to interpreting a cultural product. For some viewers Adorno and Zipes are very right; the culture industry subjugates them to conformity and infantilizes them with standardized amusements, while technique takes precedence over story or special effects becomes more important than character development. Yet even people who approach stories with a dominant response are still receiving stories' messages, just at a subconscious level where they cannot evaluate and *deliberately* dismiss or accept the presented philosophies; rather the philosophies sneak in past zoned-out mental defenses and secretly kidnap their minds. They do not recognize the pantheism in *Pocahontas*; the New Ageism in *Brother Bear*; the secular humanism in *Kung Fu Panda*; the liberalism in *Happy Feet*; the existentialism in *Shark Tale*; the socialism in *Antz*; or the postmodernism in *Shrek* and *Hoodwinked!* (I am not advocating any of those ideologies as beneficial or harmful, but clarifying that the

harm lies in adopting worldviews without conscious deliberation.) Many viewers superciliously dismiss stories with an, "Oh, that's just a movie," or "That's just a fairytale. It's only for entertainment."

With the vapid homogeneity that Adorno and Zipes associate with films, the new medium of film for telling fairytales compounds the fairytales' repute of being immaterial and childish. Yet the method our culture uses to tell stories has not undermined the purpose of those stories. As I illustrated, fairytales have been and always will be the voice of a society. When they were orally conveyed, they were told by the entire community, modified with each retelling to address current emotional needs. When they began to be transmitted through literature, the narrator became just one person addressing an aristocratic audience, yet the stories still voiced society's ideals. Now with film, the narrator has shifted from author to screenwriter and director, the audience from aristocrats to everybody; but the messages still are a society's most prevalent philosophies, ideals, and reflections.

We use fairytales to explore the ideas most important to us. These tales probe ideas about what it means to be a hero, to be a man; what it means for a woman to be considered beautiful and the internal attributes she must cultivate for that outward appearance; what our culture thinks about evil and how we should react to villains; how the happy ending is determined by what happens to the hero and villain; we even use fairytales to delve into our notions of reality and where the lines between reality and illusion lay because that is a very real concern for us. Furthermore, our culture is reinventing the genre, making it less idealistically archetypal, less black-and-white absolutist, and more realistic, more of a reflection of the human struggles and questions we naturally face and how we get through them. For these reasons, we cannot dismiss

fairytale as quaint children's stories to be eventually outgrown. They will always be relevant; we use them to tell ourselves who we are and what we want to become.

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