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SANTA CRUZ

**ONCE UPON A SIBYL'S TONGUE:
CONJURING FAIRY TALE [HI]STORIES FOR POWER AND PLEASURE**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LITERATURE

by

Christina Luce

June 2013

The Thesis of Christina Luce
is approved:

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Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Once Upon a Sibyl's Tongue: Conjuring Fairy Tale [Hi]stories for Power and Pleasure

by Christina Luce

Abstract

The status of the fairy tale in present systems of value is decidedly shifting and incoherent, both within and beyond the realm of literary scholarship. My inquiry regarding the genre's perceived status and purposes—and the implications of those perceptions within academia and general society—is primarily informed by a comparative evaluation of Jack Zipes' and Marina Warner's perspectives, principles, and priorities for fairy tale analysis. I focus specifically on their differing conceptions of the genre's definition, origin, longevity, social functions, media presence, and the most representative tales. My research supports the notion that fairy tales demand more scholarly attention for many reasons. Widely misconceived as unsophisticated, inconsequential literature, fairy tales in fact present significant problems for literary theory and history; they have been used to socialize and control populations for centuries; they are survival tools, providing knowledge, hope, and escape; and they point to dimensions outside of themselves—social, political, historical, cultural—demonstrating connective, cross-disciplinary, and testimonial properties generally overlooked in conventional evaluations. Finally, fairy tales are not only artful platforms for speaking about often unspeakable realities; they are also potent tools for visualizing and cultivating change.

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I

Introduction



Arthur Rackham, *Cinderella*, 1919.

Once upon a time, I dreamt with abandon about a world in which I owned a horse and was a righteous, ravishing heroine caught in a fantastic bind. There was always a prince, and things usually ended well.

Fairy tales were ‘part of a complete breakfast’, a cornerstone of my childhood socialization diet, and I have become acutely aware of the degree to which they continue to influence my adult cognitive processes on an unconscious level, resulting in, among other things, expectations of the world to deliver on sometimes false promises. I would never have guessed that I would eventually be driven to write a graduate thesis devoted to fairy tales. But they have left permanent imprints on my mind, and the realization of this fact, and the fact that I am not alone in this, piqued

my interest in seeking out evidence of this unassuming genre's global influence over time, and what it all means.

The genre may be thought of as a secondary mother tongue, a language in which I involuntarily think and dream at times, even though I do not speak it aloud in the everyday world, an alien 'childish' language that is not an acceptable currency for serious adult exchange. I have vivid and fond memories of the vibrant illustrations in the tomes my mother read to me, preparing me for the dreams to come that night. I remember the delightfully independent, private experience of beginning to read the stories on my own; how much fun it was to put myself in Cinderella's shoes for Halloween; how I watched Disney films on repeat; how I sang Ariel's songs at the top of my lungs for a year, because they were catchy and because I recognized something familiar in her curiosity and longings for "a whole new world". Bursting with the kind of ecstatic imaginative energy permitted in children, I eventually began drawing and writing my own versions through the magical fairy-tale lenses I'd been given. I was a believer.

I don't know exactly when I stopped reading fairy tales, but I know that by the time I reached adolescence, they were no longer considered "cool", but "lame" and "childish". My fascination with fairy tales went into remission; I turned my attention to socially-determined age-appropriate fiction and non-fiction recommended by my teachers and parents, rocked out to music marketed for my age group, and began to write and draw less imaginatively and more realistically. I stopped pretending to be

something magical on Halloween. I was somehow aware that I had passed the socially-allotted time for such imaginative play.

Imagine my surprise when I discovered at the outset of this thesis-writing journey that fairy tales were originally written for adult audiences and that the traditional tales contained what our contemporary society has edited out due to its very ‘adult’ material! What a disconnect, I thought, between my total immersion in fairy-tale narratives as a child, and the abrupt severing of exposure to the genre as soon as I began to resemble a young woman. I have been inspired by reflection upon my own fairy tale socialization trajectory to explore the underlying social purposes of introducing such potent magic to children only to take it away as if it were but an infantile toy.

My questions concerning the fairy tale’s apparently systematic devaluation in adulthood gather at the intersection of my interests in comparative literature and childhood socialization processes. Among the many insights I have gained, a foundational one is that fairy tales are not just meant to be utilized for the entertainment and distraction of children, as most people assume. The genre has been institutionally quarantined for purposes of childhood socialization, moralization, and civilization according to precise agendas—a process of generic categorization with a very interesting past, present, and potential future. I was fed fairy tales like I was fed vegetables and fruit, to help ensure my proper human development, to aid in the

process of my individual acculturation and preparation for survival and coexistence as an accepted member of a specific society.

But fairy tales do even more than this: they comment on, propose solutions to, and offer temporary escape from serious issues threatening adult dimensions of society—yet their presence is often only visible in their enforced absence from public discussion. Fairy tales therefore also entered the foreground of my research due to what began to occur to me as their curious exclusion from many forums of ‘high culture’ and their relatively diminutive presence among subjects professed and studied at many institutions of higher education.

The traditional fairy-tale plot—particularly the “fairy-tale ending”—is almost exclusively referred to in denigrating terms. Outside of the earshot of children, a fairy-tale ending is a joke, a product and perpetuator of wishful thinking to be scoffed at, a lie that offends the educated adult mind, that according to our social norms should even offend the minds of children by the time they have graduated from elementary school, at which time they should be weaned from fairy tales in order to ensure that they embrace social prescriptions for adulthood. What is this fairy-tale ending? How does it simultaneously hold so much power and so little public respect? What makes it so dangerous that reference to it must be qualified by a tone of irony, one that implicitly admonishes those ‘out of touch with reality’, those with their heads in the clouds? Furthermore, if fairy-tale endings are really so unworthy of serious attention, why do we continue to care so much about them in secret, to long for them

despite ourselves? Are they not present, in body, in spirit, and even *in absence*, in so many of the seminal works of literature upheld as part of our cultural capital?

The status of the fairy tale in present systems of value is decidedly shifting and incoherent, both within and beyond the realm of literary scholarship. They are everywhere, in the faces of disappointment and divorce, in the ritualistic injustices of the ruling classes continuing to benefit from the overworked poor—but we are told to ignore them anyway—except, perhaps, in somewhat shameful and self-indulgent movie-going or fantasy novel reading. The “Hollywood Ending” is nearly synonymous with the “Fairy-Tale Ending”. Yet when one looks at the number of bestsellers and blockbusters, it seems that we need them so much that socially-imposed shame is not enough to restrict us to keeping our feet on the ground, eyes forward.

In recent years, Hollywood blockbusters have riffed upon traditional narratives to revamp Snow White, Undine/The Little Mermaid, Cinderella, The Princess and the Frog, and Rapunzel among others in both animated and non-animated forms, and with great success, incorporating several strands of popular culture centered around other-worldly creatures into stories about self-sufficient heroines fighting their glamorously villainous adversaries. For example the tale of *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) reconceives of the traditional fairy tale “...to appeal to an audience partial to high-decibel special effects, monsters and vampires, triangulated teen romance, epic battle scenes, and young warrior women who, like

Katniss Everdeen in ‘The Hunger Games’ or Merida in Pixar’s ‘Brave,’ have appropriated not only the wicked queen’s inventive energy but also the huntsman’s proficiency with weapons.”¹



Relativity Media and Universal Pictures, *The Brothers Grimm*: Lily Collins in *Mirror Mirror* and Kristen Stewart in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, 2012.

Many contemporary media critics anticipate greater attention to the relevance of fairy tales and folklore, especially in light of the seemingly viral popularity of sexy fantasy narratives in films, television series, and young adult fiction featuring the violent and passionate tension of beast-bridegroom themes (and reversals of that dynamic), in which vampires, werewolves, zombies, and witches rule the day—and in which the feminine is often presented as divine and all-powerful, virginal or not. ‘Family-friendly’ television series like *Once Upon a Time* offer audience-pleasing

¹ Maria Tatar, “Snow White: Beauty is Power”, Weblog. *Page Turner*. 8 June 2012. *The New Yorker*. 12 March 2013 <<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/06/snow-white-and-the-huntsman-and-fairy-tales.html>>.

images of empowered heroines who can darn well defend themselves, each other, and their frogs or princes. Darker series like *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *The Twilight Saga* books and films have taken adult and teenage audiences by storm, in part by presenting strong, physically attractive, and mouthy “kick-ass” heroines, both of the ‘undead’ and living varieties. These shows take great liberties with traditional plotlines, often rendering the altered narratives and characters directly applicable to everyday problems by depicting literal and figurative collisions of the real world with fantastic ones, troubling the signification of ‘reality’ and what kinds of power aspiring everyday ‘heros’ and ‘heroines’ might be able to access. In this digital age of visual media and virtual reality, fairy tales seem to be reaching the forefront of worldwide popular culture; they may be sought after, consumed, and fetishized just as much by adults as by children. Fairy tales are indeed finding public means of throwing off their eighteenth-century chains to the nursery.

The fantastical can be just as sobering as stark realism, as many creative writers, filmmakers, media critics, and some literary scholars attest, and this may mark a sea change of cultural systems of valuation, leading to higher regard for the importance of fantasy, fairy tales and folklore. These genres have contributed in irreplaceable ways to the languages we use to express contemporary longings for that which is unattainable in the real world; our evidently unrealistic hopes create the demand for dreaming up alternate existences. We fantasize about escaping into our individually defined utopias, and so mark the areas of everyday contemporary society that demand change for the better of the collective, for the many rather than the few.

A great deal of existing material challenges widely held assumptions about the childishness naïveté, simple-minded plots, and relative insignificance of fairy tales. However the fact that magical realism (and sometimes historical realism) in literature and cinema of ‘high culture’ often draw heavily from the fairy tale does not always protect the genre from widespread denigration as exclusively childish and low-brow fare marketed for mass consumption. Literary fairy tales evidently still belong in the Children’s Section of bookstores, despite the genre’s enormous contributions to seminal cultural and historical works of art and literature, and regardless of the valuable adult experiences historicized through the medium of fairy tale. With this I take issue, and intend to explore reasons for such continued sociocultural prejudices against fairy tales, as well as potential pathways for the transportation of the genre to a more commanding status among esteemed works of world literature and art.

Fairy tales demand more scholarly attention for many reasons. The generic narratives are embedded seemingly everywhere. They provide touchstones in relation to which we necessarily move, whether for or against. They present significant problems for literary theory and history; they point to dimensions outside of themselves—social, political, historical—a connective, cross-disciplinary testimonial property generally overlooked, perhaps due to the discomfort incurred by attention to it. It is also important that we study fairy tales and their usages because of the great potential they hold as tools for controlling populations of people. They are what

Michel Foucault would have called a “technology of power”.² These factors may present partial answers to the question of why the fairy-tale genre has been banished to the imaginary worlds enjoyed, without restriction or cover of darkness, exclusively by children, whose minds ostensibly remain untroubled by critical resonances between fantasy, history, and truth.

Literature devoted to the study of fairy tales is in fact abundant, despite the fact that it is not a particularly trendy subject of inquiry in mainstream academic forums and literary criticism. It is however remarkably scattered, in part because it does not publicly command a position of significance in league with other literary genres, and also because it is by nature cross-disciplinary, having anthropological and folkloric as well as literary dimensions. It exists largely in the margins of popular literary scholarship, though many scholars attuned to its profound cultural and social relevance have worked for decades to bring it to closer to the fore, to make audible to a wider audience their claims about the genre’s foundational relevance to nearly every other genre of global historical and contemporary literature, not to mention the cross-disciplinary relevance of the often overlooked fairy-tale tradition to modern feminist, historical, political, sociocultural, educational, and psychological scholarship of the

² Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2006).

past and present, and inevitably, the future. “The story of storytelling is a tale that will never be done.”³

There are several scholars worth noting in any attempt to broach the enormous subject of the fairy tale’s relevance and social functions—enormous even when one limits one’s scope to a merely introductory review of commentary on the traditional Western fairy-tale canon. I will name but a few whose influence remains visible in a variety of affirmative or reactionary scholarship as well as in creative revisionings or subversions of the traditional Western canon. Bruno Bettelheim is known for his highly influential work on the fairy tale from a Freudian psychoanalytical perspective grounded in practical expertise in the field.⁴ Marie-Louise von Franz on the other hand offers feminist-Jungian interpretations.⁵ Ruth Bottigheimer presents a formidable feminist reading of the traditional canon. She also offers thorough and insightful linguistic interpretations of various tales, particularly regarding observable speech patterns that systematically prescribe silence and submissiveness as proof of virtue in female heroines by editors such as the Grimm Brothers, and the comparative loquaciousness they associate with female villains as well as male heroes.⁶ Maria Tatar is another well-known and prolific contributor to the conversation, specializing in excavating the gruesome truths and little known falsities present in the Grimms’

³ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994) xxv.

⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

⁵ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales* (Boston: Shambala, 1993).

⁶ Ruth Bottigheimer, *Grimms’ Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

supposedly “pure” plots, and methods of gathering, composition, and editing of their world-renown compendium of canonical European tales.⁷

For the purpose of this project, I have elected to focus on the two fairy tale scholars whom I find most fascinating and useful for analysis and appraisal of the present moment. Jack Zipes and Marina Warner offer eloquent, well-informed discussions, both drastically differently and also remarkably similar to one another; but the moments in which they seem in harmony correspond more to philosophical content than analytical and syntactic style, factors I believe contribute greatly to the disparity of the two authors’ achievement of international readership and wide acclaim.

Zipes is seen by many as a veritable king of the field, and he has defended his crown honorably, with over sixty published works advocating for the importance of the fairy tale to society and in education. He has given attention to feedback from his critics, sometimes resulting in amendments to his characteristically absolutist claims and demands. Some of his more recent works demonstrate reflection in grayer areas, and begin to embrace solutions other than his usual hobbyhorses of patriarchal dominance and Western capitalist poisoning of contemporary society, culture, and related educational practices, particularly in the United States. In order to set his often

⁷ Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*. (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press).

vociferously argued and always earnest convictions against a more temperate background, Warner was the obvious choice.

Her lyrical, interwoven meditations on the genre's rich tradition and transformations reads at times like historical fiction, prose poetry, or a generous, creatively speculative work of art history. She strikes a gentle balance between attention to fact, to possibility, to beauty, to ugliness, to limitations, and to possibilities. Her reverent tone belies observations grounded in deep appreciation for the genre, and she seems to seduce the reader into the already attractive world of the fairy tale and its gorgeous siblings: ancient myth and pagan folklore, Biblical narrative, secular and religious fables, stories, and legends from around the world, and the subversive revisions of traditional works that have surfaced over the last century.

Warner recognizes subtle and critical aspects of her vocation; she is a teller of the story of storytelling, a contributor to storytelling's infinite (hi)story, and a creative writer who uses her own craft to inquire about the fairy tale's history, relevance, and continuous contributions to social processes of new meaning-making. She admits to her necessarily subjective understanding of the fairy-tale genre, and claims no heavy-handed authority in the field. She offers her insights to us without imposing the obligation of complete subscription to them. She describes her perspective on her personal process in characteristically lyrical terms in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy tales and Their Tellers*, a beautiful, meditative study that has received far

too little attention among literary scholars and the general public. “The happy endings of fairy tales are only the beginning of the larger story, and any study which attempts to encompass it wholly must stumble and fall before any kind of ending can be made: the story of storytelling is a tale that will never be done. As one traditional closing formula implies, the story is made by both together: ‘This is my story, I’ve told it, and in your hands I leave it’” (xxv). I am grateful to have been directed to her work, and hope to make some small contribution to its wider readership.

I have not attempted to accomplish anything resembling a truly thorough review; I am staging a specific confrontation that has not occurred. Though Warner and Zipes have made brief references to one another’s work, they have tended to do so in fairly neutral tones suggesting respectful acknowledgment and willingness to coexist despite their documented differences. Zipes does seem to praise what he perceives as Warner’s feminist insights;⁸ Warner also nods to Zipes’ observations concerning intergenerational female strife in fairy tales (219, 227, 237 *Beast to Blonde*). However neither author offers a critique of the other’s work as a whole; I therefore find myself in a position to stage a confrontation here.

In order to properly ground this confrontation in an at least cursory review of Zipes’ and Warner’s prodigious material, I begin by summarizing each of their perspectives, principles, and priorities for analysis of the fairy tale. Due to the fact that most fairy tale scholarship organizes around the following categories, I move

⁸ Jack Zipes, *Relentless Progress: The Reconfiguration of Children’s Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 122, 125.

methodically through six subsections in each of the first two chapters; the first chapter addresses Zipes, and the second Warner. My rubric for comparison consists of the following sub-sections around which I have structured each of the two summary chapters: 1) defining the fairy tale, 2) origins of the fairy tale, 3) the genre's longevity and success, 4) social functions of the fairy tale, 5) fairy tales in the media, and 6) five of the most representative tales according to Zipes and Warner.

Following these hopefully informative summaries of Zipes' and Warner's ideas concerning the fairy-tale genre's past, present and future uses and relevance, I provide a brief comparison of the authors' most significant assertions, including analysis of and meditation upon some of the larger social, political and historical implications of their various fascinating and controversial postulations. I arrive then at the concluding stage in which I present my personal opinions regarding the authors' respective treatments of the fairy tale, stating my preferences and my qualms. I close with reflection upon the genre's everlasting seductiveness, its crucial provision of roadside assistance, its persistent questioning of the status quo, and the real-world transformations demanded by the humble forum of fairy tale.

II

Zipes: To Subvert or Not to Subvert

Defining the fairy tale

In his rumination on the fairy tale's definability in *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*, Jack Zipes stipulates that his reference to "the modern term 'fairy tale'" explicitly "encompass[es] the oral tradition as the genre's vital progenitor," signifying "the symbiotic relationship of oral and literary currents".⁹ He objects to the tendency among folklorists to delineate between "wonder folk tales" originating from oral traditions and literary fairy tales because it is "almost impossible to define a wonder folk or fairy tale, or explain the relationship between the two modes of communication" (2) due to the quantity and diversity of types influenced by innumerable cultural patterns in both traditions. Operating within the terms and parameters he has selected, Zipes struggles in his persistent efforts to define what he himself concedes is impossible to define, a form of revisionism notable throughout much of his work.

Zipes observes that most traditional stories contain units of information contributing to some kind of instructive survival narrative, and that this basic

⁹ Jack Zipes. *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012. 2-3.

definition holds true even for the very earliest appearance of stories coinciding with the development of speech (2). The most basic and consistent criteria he proffers as required for inclusion in the fairy-tale genre is a story's ability to inform us about ourselves and the worlds we inhabit through depictions of various magical utopias in which narrative elements illuminate areas of discord, conflict, or critical lack from which society suffers in the real, everyday world. The fairy tale in particular expresses a longing for some kind of otherness from present reality, naming that reality in indirect terms facilitated by the imaginary. In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Zipes asserts that fairy tales "hint at happiness" and carry with them liberating and subversive possibilities, if the genre is correctly utilized.¹⁰ Invocation of the genre is a symbolic act; the emotional appeal of the magical possibilities embedded in fairy-tale narratives are symbolic expressions of the survival drive. Zipes suggests that our continued existence relies partially upon the accessibility of accounts of past human experience and knowledge so that we might attempt to construct solutions to troubling everyday scenarios. We need hope that things can be better than they are, and that ordinary people can exercise extraordinary powers. Fairy tales help us envision the potential for such realizations.

In his efforts to define the genre in *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, Zipes also entertains a scenario offered by Mircea Eliade: "The fairy tale or, to be

¹⁰ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 193.

more specific, the folk tale, as ‘an easy doublet for the initiation myth’.¹¹ That is to say, the folk tale is a camouflaged version of its formerly religious self. While he emphasizes the genre’s roots in pagan myth and folklore, he also acknowledges that some versions of canonical tales represent what remains “when the tale abandons its clear religious ‘initiatory’ responsibility, but appropriates the scenario and certain motifs” (2) in order to extend the pedagogy of initiation rites through the realm of the explicitly imagined. Zipes implies that the fairy-tale genre is in part defined by its shedding of the overtly dogmatic tones of the religious lesson while continuing to depict instances of exemplary behavior, but in obviously imaginary spaces in which anything is possible. This context allows room for the greatest conceivable reward or punishment to occur in relation to the specific behaviors chosen by character types in response to test circumstances—circumstances that may be called secular initiatory rites. In contrast to Biblical narratives, these impossible depictions of possibility proclaim their unreality through magical narrative motifs, including settings theretofore unheard of by any cartographer, and, perhaps most noticeably, enchanted character types—fairies, for example—that act as agents of miraculous change. Instead of calling upon God, fairy-tale characters invoke the saving graces of fantastic Good Fairy figures; instead of fearing Satan, they shudder at the powers of the Dark Fairies and Evil Witches, whose destructive curses must be braved and conquered in order for the heroes and heroines to complete the initiatory rites required for salvation, and to earn the reward of happiness forever after because of their proven

¹¹ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994) 3.

virtuousness—a quality whose proposed definition Zipes asserts often varies in problematic ways throughout the classical fairy-tale canon and its modern descendants.

Origins of the fairy tale

Zipes offers a complex genealogy of the fairy tale in the guise of a narrative of origins, a narrative he knows he cannot deliver. He in fact affirms the ultimate impossibility of accurately tracing the exact spatial and temporal loci in which stories and genres first appeared, citing the fact that humans began speaking to one another and exchanging stories long before they began to read and write. He points out that even at the moment when humans began reading and writing, the capacity and training for it were limited to such elite groups so as to render deductions about the contemporary status of storytelling practices inaccurate; these elite groups, according to Zipes, had little interest in popular modes of communication, including storytelling. He affirms that while utter accuracy with regard to the origin of the fairy tale is beyond reach, it is still possible to make certain assumptions concerning the development of human communication and storytelling. He asserts that considering the origins and evolution of language enables one to establish a common link among all stories, while acknowledging their social functions as rightfully distinct.

Zipes believes that the development of speech unites the paths leading to the emergence of the fairy tale because it expresses what Walter Burkert calls “programs

of action” (*Irresistible* 8)¹² common among all human beings from the beginning. Citing Marshall Poe’s work on the history of communications, Zipes asserts that evolutionarily speaking, “we talk to be relevant”(5), i.e. we talk in part because it is an ability that has signified and declared our elevated status above primates. He focuses on this theme of relevance due to its connection to the continuous practice of storytellers seeking to make themselves prominent, be it for the enjoyment of attention and status as a leader of a group, or in the service of gaining more generalized, institutionalized power over a community through an official position (priest, monarch, or medicine man).

From prehistory to the present, stories have emerged from shared experiences, a fact evident in archeological studies of ancient pagan stories present in various cave paintings and carvings. In his remarks concerning the movement of a story into the category of *traditional*, Zipes references Burkert: “A tale becomes traditional not by virtue of being created, but by being retold and accepted...[T]here are traditional tales in most primitive and even in advanced societies, handed down in a continuous chain of transmission, suffering from omissions and misinterpretations but still maintaining a certain identity and some power of regeneration” (7). Zipes subscribes to Alan Dundes’ theory of common “motifemes” of a tale, focusing especially on the element of a departure from home “to fulfill a lack”, agreeing that a tale may be

¹² These “programs of action” are derived from human biological and cultural dispositions, and are embedded in stories to provide applicable knowledge for future generations based on past experience and aspirations for the future. The phrase affirms Vladimir Propp’s idea of consistent patterns of functions/motifemes in most fairy tales involving the protagonist’s departure/banishment from home to fulfill a lack, through which he/she acquires qualities and capabilities that will be of help in conflicts with various antagonistic agents or forces.

defined as “a sequence of motifs; in linguistic terms: a syntagmatic chain with ‘paradigmatic’ variants; in more human terms: a program of actions...” (8). The program of actions contained within tales is derived from basic biological and social practices that precede and signal the need to communicate. Zipes affirms that genres of storytelling and types of tales originate from the application of this kind of communication to everyday life, such that they became crucial within families, tribes, and villages as ways of preserving “traditional verbalizations of actions and behaviors” (8).

According to Zipes, the gradual “crystallization” of fairy tales has rendered “both an elaborate and simple narrative” since the fairy tale, like all genres, borrows from other simple genres. He names the fable as an especially closely related genre, and traces what records he can of its development. He challenges the widely held belief that fables originated with Aesop, the alleged slave-storyteller, in 600 BC, allocating credit instead to the clay tablets and scripts of Sumer and Mesopotamia in 800 BC. These findings depict short, moralized fable narratives surrounding anthropomorphized animals, characters utilized, as they are in modern fables, to facilitate wider reception of the tales as part of cultural civilizing processes. The animal characters are also used to pose a larger question: “Adapters... have always been compelled to respect the genre’s penetrating gaze into the dark side of human beings portrayed as animals in a dog-eat-dog world. Fables... in this respect have generally posed a question that was at the heart of Aesop’s tales: Can human beings

rise above animals?” (13). Fables have been useful as civilizing tools in their capacity to demand that humans rise above their own animality.

Despite his questioning of Aesop’s actual historical existence and personal contributions, Zipes acknowledges the significance of the *figure* of Aesop in the dissemination of Sumerian and Mesopotamian tales throughout ancient Greece. He explores in detail the history of oral and literary cultivation of the fable throughout the world, asserting that various forms of fable are to be found in nearly every region of the globe. He chronicles their movement, naming the establishment of free speech in the Greek city-states as an important prompt in this regard, allowing *rhetoricians* to begin using fables to teach grammar and discuss morals and ethics with scholars. Fables also spread because of their ability to function as agile challengers of the hegemonic elite via what James Scott calls “anonymity of the messenger and indirection or obliquity of the message” (11).

In contrast to most fairy tales, fables tend to be less preachy “because they expose the contradictions of human behavior more than they dictate principles of behavior. They explore the human condition rather than instruct how one must behave” (13). Though it borrows motifs, themes, and characters from other genres such as the fable, the fairy tale “has always been created as a counterworld to the reality of the storyteller by the storyteller and listeners” and cultivates worlds governed by “naïve morality” (13), a kind of morality guided by an instinctual

judgment of good and bad. This dynamic orients the fairy-tale reader to “naïvely” view the everyday non-fairy world as immoral by comparison.

Zipes cites a few important instances of “crystallization” of oral folk tales, using “Puss in Boots” as an example closely connected to the fable and legend. He regards the versions by Giovan Francesco Straparola in the mid 16th Century, Giambattista Basile in the mid-early 17th Century, and Charles Perrault in the late 17th Century as responsible for making the tale “mimetically traditional in the Western world” (15). He asserts that the works by these writers reflect a mixture of genres, identifying Straparola’s as a particularly significant achievement of a “master frame tale that celebrates storytelling” (16). All of these authors reveal common features “closely bound to European, Middle Eastern, and Asian oral storytelling traditions about animal protagonists, and circulated hundreds of years before three educated writers shaped the tale in print” (15). Furthermore, says Zipes, all of the authors make clear that they do not own the stories, but that “they are to be told because they were told. Straparola and Basile set frames in which characters from different social backgrounds tell tales, riddles, fables, anecdotes, and morals, while Perrault suggests that his tales were told to him by a mother goose figure” (16). They wrote them down with the intent that they be read aloud, since oral storytelling was still the dominant mode in all classes during the Renaissance.

Zipes vehemently refutes the misconception that the literary fairy tale began with Perrault, maintaining that it was instead “groups of writers, particularly

aristocratic women, who gathered in salons during the seventeenth century and created the conditions for the rise of the fairy tale. They set the groundwork for institutionalization of the fairy tale as a ‘proper’ genre intended first for educated adult audiences and only later for children who were to be educated according to a code of *civilité* that was being elaborated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (19 *Myth*). Neither, says Zipes, is it correct to consider Perrault’s 1697 *Contes du temps passé* the original site of the children’s literary fairy tale. “Perrault never intended his book to be read by children but was more concerned with demonstrating how French folklore could be adapted to the tastes of French high culture and used as a new genre of art within the French civilizing process. And Perrault was not alone in this mission” (17). The salon fairy tale gained a sufficiently high level of acceptance by the 1690s such that both women and men began to write them down and publish them. The most notable of these writers were present at salon gatherings in the homes of Madame D’Aulnoy, Perrault, Madame de Murat, Mademoiselle L’Héritier, and Mademoiselle de La Force.

Patricia Hannon asserts that at the time of their conception and cultivation as literary genre, fairy tales were a decidedly female domain,

...inseparable from the femino-centric salons that nurtured it. Both modernist advocates of women’s tales such as the *Mercure*, and detractors such as the clergymen Villiers, understood the fairy tale to be a female genre... Thought to have been transmitted by grandmothers and governesses, the fairy tale was an eminently female genre in the seventeenth-century consciousness. Yet, the era expanded its delineation of women’s roles to encompass the composing of tales in addition to their mere recitation. (*Irresistible* 24-5)

According to Zipes the term “fairy tale” was coined by Madame d’Aulnoy in 1697, but did not enter common English usage until 1750. D’Aulnoy called her stories “contes de fées”, literally “tales about fairies”, without suspecting that the term would go viral. A central difficulty in scholars’ attempts to define the fairy tale is the fact that prior to d’Aulnoy, storytellers and writers had never used the term.

The most striking feature of the most foundational period of the literary fairy tale in Europe, 1690 to 1710, was the domination of fairies in the French texts. Up until this point, the literary fairy tale was not considered a genre and it did not have a name. It was simply a *conte*, *cunto*, *cuento*, *skazka*, story, *Märchen*, and so on. No writer labeled his or her tale a fairy tale until d’Aulnoy created the term. (23)

According to Zipes, d’Aulnoy never wrote a word about her reason for choosing this phrase, but the implications of it were revolutionary. “D’Aulnoy’s tales mark what is lacking in the mundane world and depict how fairies must intervene to compensate for human foibles. Within six years after the publication of ‘The Isle of Happiness,’ the *literary* fairy tale—heretofore a simple oral folk tale, or a printed *conte*, *cunto* or *favola*—became the talk of the literary salons, or what had been the talk in these salons now came into print” (23). These private salons were spaces in which women were able to demonstrate and perform their mastery of artful techniques and useful skills at a time when there were not many such alternatives for them. The development of the institutionalized literary fairy tale from a parlor game of aristocratic women reveals the connection between the origin of the fairy-tale genre and the human drive for self-realization through the intentional harnessing of one’s imaginative capacity. The telling of these tales allowed (aristocratic, educated) women to imagine and represent themselves and their interests in alternate spheres

free of the limits imposed by the dominant hegemony of the present everyday. Zipes considers the birth of the “fairy tale” genre title revolutionary because of its implicit “declaration of difference and resistance” (24), and the important fact of its conception in female hands. The fairies dominating the tales represented not only the female writers’ differences from men—they also represented the power to shape alternative realities to those enforced by the church and the court of Louis XIV, particularly those governing proper female behavior and relationships to power in civilized society.

The genre’s longevity and success

In *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* Zipes discusses possible explanations for the longevity and success of the fairy-tale genre by addressing the following questions: “What is it in the generic nature of the fairy tale that accounts for its cultural relevance and its attraction? Why do certain tales appear to spread almost like a virus, not only in the Western world but also in the entire world?”¹³ He acknowledges the reductionist fallacy in his early arguments concerning these questions: “To my mind it is not sufficient now to argue now as I have done in the past that the classical tales have been consciously and subconsciously reproduced largely in print by a cultural industry that favors patriarchal and reactionary notions of gender, ethnicity, behavior, and social class”

¹³ Jack Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 2.

(2). Zipes realizes that he cannot use that theory alone to account for the fact that certain tales become and remain more popular than others—that some seem implanted permanently in the collective consciousness. There must be reasons beyond conservative patriarchal agendas that explain why human populations across time and space have been irresistibly drawn to particular fairy tales that render us constantly “impelled and compelled to use them to make meaning out of our lives” (*Irresistible* xii).

Zipes expresses frustration that tales of the classical Western canon continue to command a certain authority over others he considers equally if not more culturally significant in their fulfillment of the fairy tale’s subversive and liberating potential. He searches for hidden elements, both internal and external to the fairy-tale narratives themselves, which account for their constant reproduction and transformation. Zipes appeals to “recent research on relevance theory, social Darwinism, evolutionary psychology, and linguistics” (*Stick* xii) to ground his recent assertions that the genre survives due to factors deeply rooted in basic human social and biological drives. These drives include seeking and creating sources to aid us in meaning-making and conflict resolution within ourselves and the worlds in which we live, in order to survive and prosper. Part of the survival drive also compels us to seek hope and happiness through temporary transportation to utopian worlds in which seemingly insurmountable realities are conquered by magical means. We also instinctually recognize the fairy tale as an unassuming platform for social debate about individual

conceptions of a better world. These practices eventually render certain tales “mythicized” in our minds.

Zipes communicates his philosophical devotion to social Darwinian patterns of “memetics” and “epidemiology,” processes that result in the constant reproduction of the fairy-tale genre/genus and the innovation of new subspecies worldwide.

I still very much believe that fairy tales have formed a relevant discourse within the Western civilizing process as analyzed by Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu. But I have found that it is important to know something about genetics, memetics, linguistics, and evolution to explain how the fairy tale has originated in an oral mode that was formed over thousands of years to stick in our brains in very peculiar ways. In other words, the classical fairy tales that evolved did not become stable and establish their values in the seventeenth century simply because they reinforced the ideological norms of patriarchal societies. They spoke to the conflicts and predicaments that arose out of the attempts by social order to curb and “civilize” our instinctual drives. The oral and literary tales enunciated, articulated, and communicated feelings in efficient metaphorical terms that enabled listeners and readers to envision possible solutions to their problems so that they could survive and adapt to their environments. The notion of miraculous transformation is key to understanding most of the traditional fairy tales that have stuck in us and with us. Just as we as a species have mutated, often in wondrous ways, so has the oral folk tale transformed itself and been transformed as literary fairy tale to assist us in coming to terms with the absurdity and banality of everyday life. Though canonical tales have been established to preserve male domination, as Pierre Bourdieu might argue, they have also been replicated to question them, explore them, change them, and reutilize them. In fact, we use the classical fairy tales in mutated forms through new technologies to discuss and debate urgent issues that concern our social lives and the very survival of the human species. (*Stick* xii-xiii)

Social Darwinism may be applicable to the phenomenon of perpetuation and decline of socio-cultural phenomena, such as the competition and survival of certain fairy tales. Zipes calls them significant memes, or units of cultural transmission, citing concepts developed by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*:

Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense can be called imitation... [M]emes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell. And this isn't just a way of talking—the meme for, say, “belief in life after death” is actually realized physically, millions of times over, as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men the world over. (*Irresistible* 17).

Zipes stipulates that the fairy tale is a successful meme because it has a “word-to-world fit” (19). Its applicability to the conflicts of our everyday lives, including problems with decision-making and identity formation, remains intact, no matter how many mutations the genre undergoes. While Zipes admits that “breathing and vigorous” fairy tales are not actual living agents, he argues for the usefulness of treating them as if they were.

Think of a gigantic whale soaring through the ocean, swallowing each and every fish of any size that comes across its path. The marvelous, majestic whale has once lived on land fifty-four million years ago and had been tiny. Part of a group of marine mammals now known as cetaceans, the land whale eventually came to depend on other fish for its subsistence and thrive on the bountiful richness of the ocean. To grow and survive, it constantly adapted to its changing environment. The fairy tale is no different. (21)

In defense of this metaphor, Zipes recalls his earlier discussions of the fairy tale's evolutionary path, beginning as a pagan oral folk tale (tiny, land-locked) that has undergone innumerable transformations, becoming a gigantic, formidable, fluid, ocean-dwelling whale of a genre. “The only difference between the whale and fairy tale is that the tale...needs humans—and yet at times, it does seem as though a

vibrant fairy tale can...latch on to their brains and become a living memetic force in cultural evolution” (22).

Zipes values Michael Drout’s theoretical work on the underpinning dynamics of constructed tradition, focusing particularly on the “dialogical and dialectical process of action, recognition, and justification” (19) leading to collective recognition of a certain meme as more consistent than its competitors with dominant cultural frameworks. He endorses Frederic Jameson’s notion “of the individual literary work as a symbolic act, ‘which is grasped as the imaginary resolution of real contradiction’” (10), applying it to the phenomenon of fairy tales functioning as symbolic platforms for working out everyday issues in the *real* world in the seemingly unlikely realm of *unreality*. Zipes also brings socio-linguistic issues into the conversation regarding the confounding “catchiness” of certain fairy tales. He references Mikhail Bakhtin among others in his discussion of dialogism and the fairy tale as a “secondary speech genre” that has absorbed everyday speech in its dialogue, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions, contributing to the creation of a certain “aesthetic and ideological relevance” (16) that outlasts time because of its ability to conform to it.

Social functions of the fairy tale

Zipes believes the fairy tale functions socially as the metaphorical whale-like figure he has described, ever evolving, ever shaping and being shaped by the spaces it

occupies. Many of its historical social functions remain intact, including its role as a cultural repository for embodying utopian longings as well as cultural knowledge and beliefs; its use as a powerful socialization tool; and its fulfillment of the human desire for entertainment, for temporary transportation. However an importantly different element of its modern literary presence in society is its formal institutionalized relegation to children's literature.

As Zipes discusses at length in his historical accounts of the origins of the fairy tale-genre, this was certainly not always the case; the first literary fairy tales were not intended for child audiences, but rather written by and for educated adult aristocratic and middle-class audiences. The common equation of fairy tales to light, relatively neutral (harmless, non-threatening, inconsequential, and merely enjoyable) literature for children results in the genre being taken far less seriously than it ought to be, given its effective role in institutionalized socializing processes and its potential to reinforce or subvert dominant ideologies of oppression—both among child and adult consumers. For while the fairy tale is now predominantly child territory in today's society, its memetic presence is actually felt in almost every corner of general consumer culture, including contemporary literature, visual art, and film and other media.

Insofar as fairy tales *are* in place as primary socializing tools for children, Zipes takes issue with the content and practices institutionally designated as appropriate, and thus funded and supported, both in public education as well as

outside social or familial learning environments. In *Speaking Out: Creative Storytelling and Drama for Children* Zipes advocates passionately for a cultural return to reverence for storytelling as an important cultural vocation and social responsibility. He views this shift as key to making progress on several social justice fronts, particularly those addressing inequality among genders, ethnicities, and social classes.¹⁴

Despite the genre's present designation in bookstores as children's literature, Zipes' current theoretical approach to the fairy tale's function treats it as a highly potent "meme", or unit of cultural transmission, present and visible throughout various intersecting layers of society, accessible to progressive change-makers (and conservative same-keepers) of every size and color. As a meme, it is reproduced and transformed on an unfathomably wide spectrum of modes, each version speaking of its own proposed agenda and ideology. The fairy tale functions as an effective platform, either for the subversion or the reinforcement of traditionally dominant conservative ideologies. While it has always shown itself equally well equipped for opposing results, the main differences between its function now and its function in the seventeenth century (aside from its formal relegation to children's literature) are due to the diversity of its new forms, and the massive quantity and accessibility of its memetic appearances on the global marketplace. These differences are determined by the ever-growing capabilities of humans with access to modern technology, a subject

¹⁴ Jack Zipes, *Speaking Out: Creative Storytelling and Drama for Children* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

that troubles Zipes, who expresses vehement disapproval of the manner in which fairy tales have come to function in the media, particularly in the realm of Disney, as will be further discussed below.

Zipes views the fairy-tale genre as an evolving vessel of accessible cultural norms and knowledge passed on from generation to generation in order to help societies prepare to meet the challenges of real life. This idea initially appears contrary to Zipes' previously postulated notion that fairy tales always present counterworlds and counterrealities. However he seems to try to reconcile the two ideas with the assertion that it is only in this kind of universalized imaginary space—given the potential for universalization by the very nature of its imaginary state, and therefore fluid and largely dependent upon the needs and desires of the teller and audience—that certain generational connections and socializing preparations can be accomplished.

Zipes identifies the fairy tale as particularly adept at civilizing human beings in terms of the necessary reining in of basic drives and base desires for the sake of personal and collective happiness. However:

This moral component of the fairy tale does not mean that the proposed morals or norms are good. Every moral code in every society is constituted by the most powerful groups...and serves their interests. What the fairy tale does—and it does this perhaps more efficiently and effectively than any other genre—is represent basic human dilemmas in tangible metaphorical forms that reflect how difficult it is for us to curb basic instincts. Fairy tales are all about basic instincts and genetic evolution within a civilizing process. (*Stick* 131)

Zipes contends that the moralizing disseminated through fairy tales is not always (or even usually) of the progressive strain, particularly in the case of classical and canonical fairy tales—those that seem to “stick” the most tenaciously to the walls of social and cultural psychology and find themselves most often reproduced and/or recast. Zipes derives hope, however, from the evident human drive to re-form fertile memes such as the fairy tale. He advocates strongly for the rewriting of all fairy tales, *particularly* those with which we are most familiar in the Western world, those which have become “like second nature to us” through ritualized methods of mythicization in their constant re-presentations.

Zipes discusses modern and contemporary movements of the fairy tale, referring to them as “collisions” and “explosions” of the genre under the fresh pens and through the fresh lenses of radical re-writers, especially those with feminist and/or anti-capitalist agendas (*Irresistible* 135). He asserts that significantly more attention needs to be paid to these important revisions in order for necessary social justice progress to occur. He presents several feminist revisions of canonical tales, as well as more original tales composed by women writers—some of them centuries old and containing protofeminist critiques, but lacking the audience Zipes contends they deserve (135-55). He examines the territory of contemporary fairy-tale visual artworks to demonstrate some of the ways that fairy tales are being used to radically question and challenge various aspects of the status quo.

One could possibly argue that in fact nothing is unimaginable these days. Everything has become so relative and liquid that the boundaries between reason and fantasy have collapsed. Consequently, it has become impossible

for serious artists to accept the traditional structures and “goodness” of fairy tales in a globalized world that appears to have gone haywire. And yet there are profound meanings in the classical fairy tales that stem from human conflicts of the past and still speak to us. As I have tried to show, fairy tales embody worlds of naïve morality that can still resonate with us if their underlying dramas are re-created and re-designed to counter as well as collide with our complex social realities. Collisions do not have to end in destruction. They are necessary to disrupt and confront clichés and bad habits. They are necessary to shake up the world and sharpen our gaze. In this regard, contemporary fairy-tale artworks, though often dystopian, still pulsate with utopian fervor. (136)

Zipes does not wish for the fairy-tale genre to die because of its largely conservative, patriarchal past. He recognizes its importance as a cultural artifact and its role as a vessel for human knowledge and connection meant to aid us in navigating the seas of reality through the expression of alternate realities, the construction of instructive utopias. Rather than removing the fairy tale from circulation entirely, for which some critics have advocated, Zipes argues for its resurrection in fresh, radical incarnations to be used as powerful tools to subvert the oppressive powers that be.

Fairy tales in the media

According to Zipes, the sacred connection between storyteller and audience has been sacrificed completely by “the culture industry” controlling modern and contemporary media in order to take full advantage of the exploitative potential of the fairy-tale genre for purposes of material gain and corporate control over both mindsets and markets. Zipes targets Walt Disney and Disney Studios almost exclusively in his critique, asserting in *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children,*

and the Culture Industry that even though more “experimental” animated and live-action fairy-tale films have been produced in recent decades, “the Disney model is slavishly copied or influences the work of contemporary filmmakers”.¹⁵

He credits Walt Disney with institutionalizing the fairy-tale film genre, beginning with 1937’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, “in a manner that was just as revolutionary as the collecting and editing of the Brothers Grimm had been for the print industry in the nineteenth century” (89). *Snow White* was in fact the first animated, color, musical feature-film about a fairy tale. Zipes acknowledges Disney’s “intuitive genius” and calls him “a pioneer in that he pointed out the great possibilities animation and film had for the expansion of the fairy-tale genre into the age of mechanical reproduction” (110). However he contends that the film mogul unfortunately used his powers for evil, as it were, making “use of the latest technological developments in the cinema to celebrate mechanical reproduction in animation and to glorify a particular American perspective on individualism and male prowess” (90). Zipes even postulates that Disney projected his imagined fairy-tale character self onto the screen in all of his films as “the stalwart prince...the prototypical American hero who cleans up the world in the name of ‘goodness and justice’” all the while communicating only one message again and again: “What is good in the name of Disney is good for the rest of the world” (90). In other words, the

¹⁵ Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 72.

morals of ‘goodness’ and ‘justice’ have been implicitly defined by Disney as good business—and business has always been good.

Zipes believes Disney does not take fairy tales seriously insofar as it ignores the responsibilities of the storyteller to his or her audience. These ought to include inspiring critical thought through the questioning of antiquated ideologies and power dynamics, as well as the stimulation of self-reflective practices leading to authentic and socially responsible individual identity development.

What was important for Disney was not the immediate and personal contact of the storyteller with a particular audience to share wisdom and induce pleasure but the impact that he as creator could have on as large an audience as possible in order to sell a commodity and endorse ideological images that would enhance his corporate power. (87)

Instead of using the potential medium of film to expand the fairy genre in socially progressive ways through the global market—as Zipes affirms a good storyteller would—Disney’s priority has been to produce only for profit, rendering mostly “univocal and one-dimensional” films and related swag (books, DVDs, audio CDs, toys, video games, home decor) that market themselves repeatedly via the mass-market commodity that is the Disney trademark.

Zipes denounces Disney’s abandonment of its ethical responsibilities as the most well-known and highly consumed and referenced storytelling conglomerate in the world, and laments its “stranglehold” over the fairy-tale film genre from the early-mid-twentieth century to the present. He attacks their successful efforts to “hook children as consumers not because they believed their films had artistic merit and

could contribute to the children's cultural development, but because they wanted to control children's aesthetic interests and consumer tastes" (91). Zipes asserts that "nothing new is ever told or explored" in these films, which merely reinforce "antiquated views of the world" (95) rendering the animated characters "lifeless" (92). It is paramount to Zipes that every new form of the fairy-tale genre use its generative power for good, specifically by challenging the minds of children and adult viewers by urging them to think for themselves, thus engaging them in possibilities for subverting the status quo rather than submitting to and subsidizing its continued reign.

Zipes has a very particular opinion about the attitude Disney films demonstrate toward their viewers, with severe implications not just for child audiences but for the general population:

Disney's films were never intended solely for children but were meant to captivate the 'child' in all viewers...[T]hey are to be swept away as objects by the delightful and erotic images. This sweeping away is an envelopment that involves loss of identity; that is, children viewers are to lose themselves in the oedipal wishes that are depicted on the screen. The process of viewing involves infantilization because each frame regulates the drives and wishes of the viewer according to rigid sexist and racist notions that emanate from the nineteenth century and are recalled in the film with nostalgia. (94)

There have been several attempts by recent filmmakers to counter the dominant discourse set by Disney; Zipes names Jim Henson, Shelley Duvall, and Tom Davenport among those whose productions communicate progressive messages meant to exercise the viewers' minds in new ways and explore issues from diverse perspectives, going beyond Disney's blueprints to affirm "that there are no

prescriptions for fairy tales or for happiness” (110). In contrast to what Zipes views as Disney’s commoditization of the audience by methodical seduction into commodity fetishism, these other filmmakers demonstrate conscious efforts to employ the new technologies available to storytellers of the modern era to reanimate the fairy-tale genre as a civilizing platform for social justice progress. However Zipes laments that “no studio can really challenge Disney Studios’ corporate power over the means of distribution and the market for fairy-tale films” (95).

In a broader discussion of the fate of fairy-tale socialization in “the culture industry”, Zipes applies Theodore Adorno’s postulation that participation in Western capitalist society necessitates total surrender of individualism, and that the culture industry works to continuously fool the masses into believing themselves to be unique and uniquely powerful, while seducing them with commodities to disempower individualist urges, rendering audiences mere cogs in the machine that systemically reinforces dominant capitalist discourse and executive power (114). Zipes believes that almost all mainstream contemporary media, including film, television, video games, music, and theater, enact this insidious socializing method in their promises to infuse consumers with a “false sense of power,” successfully molding what Marsha Kinder calls “a gendered subject who is supposed to believe he or she can develop protean powers to appropriate the world and buy his or her way into a world more concerned with commodities than with people” (115). The still-dominant Disney model is in Zipes’ estimation a prime example of ongoing media manipulations of the

fairy-tale genre to achieve these types of calculated cultural and socio-economic results.

Zipes' only espoused source of hope for a true sea change in the fairy tale's media function and public absorption of it is revolutionizing early childhood acculturation methods (127-8). He asserts that working within the culture industry framework to subvert it is not proving adequately effective. Likewise, winning significantly influential victories outside of the cultural industry framework "in the margins" to overturn it is also an "illusory" hope. Zipes maintains that the "stranglehold" of the Disney model and its relatives cannot be directly overthrown by current adult generations employed and/or consumed by the culture industry, but that it might be done by their children. This requires intentional changes to occur at home, including a cultivation of historical consciousness within families, such that children are being trained for commodity fetishism awareness and thereby better equipped to meet and work against the enticing Disney fairies that will inevitably approach and try to enchant them into submission. It appears that Zipes believes, or fervently hopes, that his desired fairy tale utopia can be achieved by utopian, not to say fairy tale, means.

The most representative fairy tales

Zipes' position becomes clearer if we examine his analytical approach to those canonical fairy tales he evidently considers most representative of the genre.

These include “Cinderella,” “Snow White” “Beauty and the Beast”, “The Little Mermaid” and “Bluebeard”. He names several others as equally indispensable to an accurate portrait of the classical Western fairy-tale canon in existence since the nineteenth century, such as “Hansel and Gretel,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” and “The Frog Prince”. However for the purpose of the present discussion, we will look at only a few. Zipes presents each of the tales as a potent memetic embodiment of a crucial social issue still under discussion in contemporary society. In each case, he reviews some of the literary tale’s history, followed by a discussion of how the tale has played out over time, through different media and ideological revisions.

Zipes asserts that “Cinderella” may best demonstrate memetics, epidemiology and dialogism among all the tales in the canon. He describes the basic image of the namesake heroine most familiar and “classic” in the West: “that dirty humiliated good girl who proves herself to be beautiful and a winner/survivor despite all the ashes and cinders that are heaped upon her. We recognize her for what she is—a true princess” (*Stick* 107). However he points out that the Cinderella meme has been so widely taken up that her iconographic identity has become almost indecipherable due to its overwhelming “multiculturalism,”¹⁶ as demonstrated by thousands of new renditions, including such titles as “Angkat: The Cambodian Cinderella,” “The Way Meat Loves

¹⁶ Zipes refers primarily to the “Cinderella” meme in the United States, where many authors and artists have appropriated it for use in a wide variety of narratives representing many different cultures and ethnicities. By contrast, according to Zipes, “Cinderella” is consistently French or European in the United Kingdom.

Salt: A Cinderella Tale from the Jewish Tradition,” and “Fair, Brown & Trembling: An Irish Cinderella Story”.

Zipes believes “Cinderella” is almost universally relatable due to its thematic representations of child abandonment, sibling rivalry, broken homes, family legacy, parental love, stepfamily dysfunction, and child abuse, and even some stifled images of incest in its close, much less often repeated relative, “Donkeyskin” (113). In his account of its continued memetic energy and importance, Zipes describes competing theories such as the “Cinderella epidemic” born of the rags-to-riches fantasy, versus the “Cinderella complex”, the latter being, as Colette Dowling calls it, “a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity. Like Cinderella, women today are still waiting for something external to transform their lives” (112). Zipes questions whether Cinderella is really such a passive figure, however, citing versions as early as D’Aulnoy’s in 1698 in which the heroine is ready to kill in order to get what she wants. If one explanation for the universal zeal with which the tale has been reproduced and retold is to be favored, Zipes advocates for an approach he calls the “Cinderella syndrome,” a descriptor meant to reference the tendency of abused children (be they step, foster, or simply unlucky) and their advocates to embrace and use this kind of tale to attract attention to the depravity of their conditions—to give a voice to those who are usually never heard at the time of the tale’s unfolding in their lives.



George Cruikshank, *Cinderella*, 1854.

Zipes contends that “the question the Cinderella discourse opens up, perhaps the underlying relevance of the tales from the very beginning, concerns child abuse or infanticide, which many of our canonical fairy tales touch upon—something that really should not come as a surprise to us” (112). He appeals again to Darwinian concepts of survival and competition, and believes the contagion of the Cinderella meme has mostly to do with a basic yet profound social problem that has plagued family units and child development for centuries: the natural tendency of parents to show discriminatory love toward biological versus non-biological children.

We live at a time when there are numerous divorces, numerous families with stepchildren and stepparents, numerous dysfunctional families, and a high rate of child abuse. “Cinderella” as imaginative narrative does not mince words but uses words and images to tell things as they are, or as they might potentially develop for stepchildren—with hope that we can understand and overcome abuse. But does it tell the whole story? (114)

Despite the thousands of fresh takes Zipes describes, many of which offer incisive and insightful commentary applicable to today's social problems and are communicated through various media aimed at audiences of all ages, Zipes laments that Cinderella is also perfectly representative of the fairy-tale genre's regressive function in mass media, as per his critiques and denunciations of Disney. In fact he contends that Disney's remains the most popular and well-known version around the world today, despite and because of the manner in which it glosses over and sanitizes the more salient features of the Cinderella tale that provide direct commentary on social problems, favoring instead the elitist aesthetic glorification of a female foot deemed perfectly royal by virtue of its smallness.

Zipes observes that the "Snow White" tale demonstrates similar concerns to those presented by "Cinderella," and that it nearly equals "Cinderella" in memetic popularity. However the discursive strain engendered by "Snow White" differs from that of "Cinderella" in part due to the many oral and literary versions of the former which cast a *biological* mother in place of a stepmother as the perpetrator of harm against the innocent and beautiful protagonist. He cites an 1810 version of the Brothers Grimm, "*Schneewitchen*" ("Little Snow White"), in which a "godless" mother attempts to eliminate her daughter because the child has become more beautiful than herself.

Social Darwinism is again at the fore of Zipes' reading. He asserts that the main reason "Snow White" remains so present in contemporary Western

consciousness is that it is “marked by the manner in which females cope with one another to select and attract a male whom they consider worthy of their eggs” (135). The tale reveals the vulnerability of older women in a patriarchal society that values women based on concepts of competition and selection, requiring the most desirable genetic material and a high level of reproductive potential. Zipes acknowledges the psychological analysis by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s in *Madwoman in the Attic*, which contends that “Snow White” plays out a deeply entrenched and highly problematic socially constructed female dichotomy inherent to traditional Western paradigms of power. “[T]he tale dramatizes ‘the essential but equivocal relationship between the angel-woman and the monster-woman’ of Western patriarchy.” Gilbert and Gubar assert that the construction of this polarizing force arises from a patriarchal culture that forces women to compete with one another for male attention and selection, so that women are systematically “victimized under social conditions beyond their control” (134).

Zipes believes there is more to the story’s relevance than this, however. He maintains that the women of “Snow White” should perhaps not be viewed as so absolutely passive, since “there are some basic features in the Grimms’ tale that reveal instinctual drives in women and infer [*sic*] that they are less victims than very much agents of their own destinies” (134). He offers up the notion that female characters embroiled in narratives of competition over and selection of a male for reproductive purposes may also be perceived as acting in self-interest from a position

of power, with the evolutionary instinct driving them to propagate their genetic material.

The story functions furthermore to illuminate common social concerns regarding gender roles, responsibilities, and levels of commitment in human family units. Zipes affirms that the ancient epidemic of absent and wandering fathers causes tales such as “Snow White” to resonate with a wide and sustained audience, quoting Robert Wright’s *The Moral Animal*:

That male commitment is in limited supply—that each man has only so much time and energy to invest in offspring—is one reason females in our species defy stereotypes prevalent elsewhere in the animal kingdom...[H]igh parental investment makes sexual selection work in two directions at once: Not only have males evolved to compete for scarce female eggs; females have evolved to compete for scarce male investment. (134-5)

Zipes also believes the tale to be highly representative due to its moral discourse concerning judiciary checks and balances for the maintenance of social order. “The moral of the story is capital punishment, if you will. But why should the queen be punished for doing what comes natural? One reason...is that she did not comply with the moral code of her times...Another reason is that the moral code is predicated on male hegemony and thus ruthlessly punishes women who actively pursue their self-interests” (136). Even more crucial than punishment, Zipes contends that the story’s moral poses “a dilemma that most women *feel* even today: “How do you fulfill natural inclinations and attract a partner (either for reproduction or for sexual gratification) without killing off the competition that may undermine your self-interests?” (136). He accounts for the canonization and memetic success of “Snow

White” by pointing to its effective dramatization of an apparently critical and universal female quandary.

“Beauty and the Beast” presents the memetic model for the important “beast-bridegroom” fairy-tale subgenre of the canon. Zipes speculates that the narrative most likely evolved from ritual practices associated with a young woman’s coming-of-age. Essential to the ritual is the requirement that the young woman succeed in “three arduous tasks to save a bestial male who must integrate himself into her society. Here the female is a civilizing force searching for a quality male who is chosen to procreate with her” (139-40). Zipes again advocates for the crucial function of social Darwinist principles embedded in the tale’s premise: the young woman approaching reproductive age is equipped with the natural instinct to select a male who will be the best provider and caretaker for her children.

In most contemporary retellings of the tale, courage and perseverance are among the most important qualities to be demonstrated as part of the young woman’s initiation rite. However in older versions of the beast-bridegroom fairy-tale narrative, “there is another emphasis: the female is expected to prove how submissive she is, first to her father and then to her future husband, the beast. She does not choose her husband-to-be and is expected to save her father and wed a male not of her choosing” (140). Zipes cites the classical version composed by Mme. Leprince de Beaumont, which he calls “a didactic tale of female domestication that furthered sadomasochistic relations between men and women” (140). He affirms that like many of the tales

composed by female members of seventeenth-century French salons, it reflects at the very least a great deal of ambiguity concerning appropriate guidelines for female behavior and comportment in relation to male hegemony. The name “Belle” connotes the idea that in order to be considered truly beautiful and desirable, a young woman must demonstrate domestic industriousness, diligence, gentleness, loyalty, submissiveness, and self-sacrifice. The classic tale advocates for emulation of these qualities in order to be considered a worthy mate for a prospective male partner—or rather, possessor. Zipes identifies “Beauty and the Beast” as seminal fairy-tale pedagogy of female self-denial in service of patriarchal needs and desires, and a prescriptive model for how to transition gracefully from one male possessor to another.

Zipes credits the feminist movement of the 1970s with opening up significant discourse about female desire, and with providing radical revisions of the “Beauty and the Beast” narrative to challenge the authority of the traditional narrative’s prescriptions for the feminine ideal. Works such as “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” and “Tiger’s Bride” in Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* have also effectively moved the discussion to focus on the morality and ethics of utilizing female physical beauty for specific ends. Zipes lists these among the questions demanded by Carter’s works and others like them: “Should a young girl be marketed by her father just so he can survive? Should a young girl sacrifice her body to protect her family? Is it right to oblige a young woman to repress her natural inclinations and

live according to the designs of male desire? Are there differences in how we define beauty for women and bestiality for men?” (140).

As usual, says Zipes, Disney has produced a wildly popular version of the tale that serves to undermine the severity of these issues and locate the conflict instead in “a power struggle between two macho men who vie for the affection of a pretty petite bourgeois maiden who wants to leave her provincial town and lead a grand and glamorous life” (140). Zipes concedes that Disney gave its new Belle what could pass for “a touch of feminist feistiness,” but asserts that the plot fails to support a significant feminist statement in response to the tale’s dark past, allowing socializing messages about the rewards of female self-denial to subsist, and the sadomasochistic undertones of the classical portrait of “Beauty” to survive and replicate.

Zipes observes that “The Little Mermaid” is the most-reproduced, revised, and adapted tale of Hans Christian Andersen’s oeuvre, and attributes this to the long history of European fascination with the mermaid, whose presence as a siren or water sprite in folk tale and myth traces back to ancient Greece and Rome. The mermaid figure has generally been imbued with a great sense of danger due to the seductiveness of her physical form and her voice, qualities systematically utilized to lure men to their deaths. However there are many folk tales in which mermaids are characterized as more “humane” beings in search of a human soul.

In *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller* Zipes argues that Andersen’s canonized 1837 version has important roots in Friedrich de La Motte-

Fouqué's 1811 *Undine*, and that Andersen radically transforms the story to meet the needs of his particular agenda.¹⁷ The original *Undine* is a mermaid who falls in love with a knight, but can only marry him once she performs a great sacrifice for him in order to win herself a human soul. She succeeds in all of this, but is betrayed in the end. Andersen manipulated the secular *Undine* into a Christian miracle narrative celebrating religious conversion and salvation. Even though the Little Mermaid falls in love with the prince, what she truly desires in Andersen's rendition is a Christian soul. In order to fulfill her desires she must undergo a series of tasks, learning first the mermen laws so that she can barter her voice to gain human status. In order to obtain the human *soul*, she must also learn the laws of human compliance with the Christian God, including principles such as compassion, charity and self-sacrifice. "Her story is not a coming-of-age story. It is a Christian conversion story based on a miracle: the pagan girl learns all about Christian love and devotion" (108). Part of the miracle is that she does not die in the end, but rather becomes "a daughter of the air" with only three hundred years of acting like a Good Christian to go before she can achieve an immortal soul and go to heaven. Of course this next leg of the journey also requires her to remain invisible and silent in all of her many benevolent Christ-like actions.

However Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* is not merely Christian propaganda with a peculiar dose of mysticism borrowed from the legendary material wrapped in

¹⁷ Jack Zipes, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Misunderstood Storyteller* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 107.

bourgeois-appropriate stylings; Zipes affirms that from a feminist perspective it is also an extremely misogynist tale. The heroine must become indoctrinated in human patriarchal rules, including the trading of parts of herself as a commodity, transforming her voice into a market good exchangeable for recognition as a human being. The conditions of her legitimacy among humanity are voicelessness along with endless, agonizing pain whenever she tries to dance, or move at all for that matter, in effect reducing her body's expressivity as much as her voice's. These elements of the narrative advocate for "dampening the sexual curiosity of a young female, who wants to explore other worlds. The mermaid must learn her proper place in the order of things, and it is apparently improper for her to pursue a young man, to express her sexual drives, and to change her social position" (110). Zipes argues that Andersen is intent in his suggestion of female submission induced by male violence and/or self-inflicted violence, and that the mermaid's plight represents a much larger social pattern of female domination, silencing, and marginalization for the purposes of maintaining the executive power of patriarchal Christianity.

It is not by chance that Andersen has her tongue cut out, and she feels as if her legs were piercing her like swords when she walks. Once she turns human, she enters a world totally dominated by male desire and has no choice but to commit suicide. She realizes that she will never fit into a world that does not accept her devotion, and murdering the prince will not bring her any satisfaction. The contrived miracle is nothing but a false compensation for a young woman who has lost hope in life and cannot fulfill her desires. The tragedy of depression due to social oppression runs through Western literature up to the present (110).

Zipes argues that as a general practice, Andersen "conceals his sadomasochism" and "punitive attitude toward women" in didactic Christian narratives (111). Zipes asserts

that this maneuver is part of what causes “The Little Mermaid” tale to remain so culturally relevant and historically representative. Zipes observes that the importantly subtextual and rarely discussed theme of female suicide in fairy tales has been explored extensively by those such as Anne Sexton (who saw no way out other than suicide herself) in *Transformations*, a provocative collection of revised Grimm tales.

“The Little Mermaid” meme has resulted in the propagation of many different adaptations, the most visible again attributable to Disney. In response to the desires of the market in 1989, Disney transformed Andersen’s tale into a coming-of-age narrative about “a feisty ‘American’ mermaid, who pouts and pushes until she gets her way: she is the charming, adorable, spoiled and talented princess, Daddy’s pet, who demonstrates that she deserves to move up into the real world by dint of her perseverance and her silence. Ariel must learn to channel her sexual desires and suffer for a man before she can win him as a prize” (112). Though the Ariel narrative mostly follows the sparkling goldmine of a formula Zipes asserts was hammered out by Disney in 1937’s *Snow White*, commoditization of the female body and voice, as well as the implicit requirement of silence and self-sacrifice in exchange for human status and male favor, are still present in this most popular incarnation of the tale.

The true and lasting cultural relevance of “Bluebeard” in Zipes’ view is in its depiction of male miscalculation of power and the story’s revelation of what Zipes calls “the empty secret” (161 *Stick*). “What disturbed Perrault and other male writers of the seventeenth century still disturbs men today: the deep knowledge that the

grounds for their superior power vis-à-vis women, backed by laws and rules, are groundless” (164). Perrault knew that the institutionalized phallogocentricity and entrenched patriarchal rule over women in the seventeenth century resulted from calculated maneuvers of manipulation, not from merit. He wrote “Bluebeard” in an effort to make this truth as clear as the inerasable blood on the villain’s magical key.

Men know and sense that power can only be obtained through calculating manipulation of the other...and by concealing this knowledge of power, storing it away, that power is arbitrarily determined and the male maintains the myth of superior power backed by brute force. Such force and violence must be ritualized and become sacred for males to keep their secret, and women must be kept out and prescribed a place in the symbolic order of things so that they will serve men docilely. For centuries, women have bodily and textually been compelled to undergo a test that turns into a contest mirrored in canonical stories about Adam and Eve... What is slightly different in “Bluebeard” is that its publication, making the secret public, revealed more fissures and anxieties in the ritual of phallogocentric secrecy than ever before in Western history. And perhaps this is why it finds such great resonance in both the print and oral tradition after the first publication of the tale in 1697. Perhaps this is why it sticks. (163-4)

One of the very few stories by Perrault that evidently lacks direct reference to any literary antecedents, “Bluebeard”...was created to play a role in the debate about the civilizing process, masculine domination, and the proper roles of men and women during the time of Louis XIV’s reign” (158). Zipes describes the baffling nature of the notorious tale as it was set down by Charles Perrault in 1697 in the seminal *Contes du temps passé*. When Bluebeard’s last wife opens the forbidden door with the magic key, “she never really learns his secret” (155). She finds the bloody chamber which echoes of Bluebeard’s murderous hunger for domination, but not the secret reason for its existence. She is furthermore supposed to simply forget her horror and

move on once her brothers have done away with her murderous former husband and she has inherited his money so that she can remarry. Zipes advances the notion that both Bluebeard and his wife are calculating individuals seeking personal financial and social benefits through the marriage of convenience. “[I]n sociobiological terms they select mates who will best propagate their genes, so they think. There is no magic in this tale, and Bluebeard becomes the victim of his own miscalculations” (157).



Gustave Doré, *Barbe-Bleue*, 1862.

Zipes contends that Perrault chooses a seemingly unsatisfactory end to what has nonetheless proven a mimetically powerful tale in order to point out in no uncertain terms that the *true* secret is that there *is* no secret male power locked away, beyond a woman’s grasp, as men would like women to believe. Zipes cites Philip

Lewis' Lacanian reading of the text, which offers among other ideas the notion that "the disobedience of the wife, represented as a supplemental castration threat, reveals Bluebeard's deficiency or impotence and mars his unique phallogentric role" and that "Bluebeard, as a representative of men, cannot guarantee for himself a satisfactory self-representation by a female. Hence...Bluebeard's need to murder" (162).

Zipes argues that Perrault was advocating for a modern reassessment of power relations among the genders—and not just striking for revenge against his nemesis Nicolas Boileau by revealing the latter's tragic and secret impotence, as some have argued. However this piece is relevant according to Zipes, as Perrault had been engaged in heated debate with Boileau about gendered civilizing processes, and wrote *Apologie des Femmes (The Vindication of Women)* as a direct attack upon Boileau's *Satire X*, a poem that clearly denigrates women. Though Zipes observes that "Perrault's defense of women is somewhat dubious because he still adhered to many conservative and stereotypical notions about women" (159), he considers both the *Apologie* and "Bluebeard" significant contributions to the fight for a modern reassessment of the validity and efficacy of contemporary gendered power hierarchy.

The tale "has become one of the more haunting and baffling fairy tales in the classical canon, one that keeps rearing its horrific head in all forms of art and literature when we least expect it" (155). Memetic stories involving male miscalculation of power, often related to men's deep anxiety about the potential encroachment of women on their power, abound in contemporary culture. Despite the

fact that the tale “stands virtually alone among our canonical fairy tales in a negation of a ‘happily ever after’ ending” it has found its way into many forms of reproduction and revision. “It is not by chance that the first three decades of the twentieth century, a period of great social and political turmoil, saw some of the most significant variations of the Bluebeard constellation” (173). According to Zipes, however, more recently resonant narratives reflect the tendency toward transformation into the generic “serial killer narrative”, a movement that Zipes says has somewhat diminished the original feminist power discourse embodied by the tale through sensationalizing the ritual murder of women by an often inexplicably psychotic male.

Zipes’ approach to the Western fairy-tale canon relies most heavily on evolutionary theory, particularly social Darwinist versions. His analytical interpretation is consistently grounded in perceived connections between fairy-tale narrative elements and evolutionary human instincts for survival and competition. In his estimations of past, present, and future fairy-tale socialization processes, he invokes a form of “progress” that would be *progressive* as a standard of judgment. Toward this end each of his discussions reflects unwavering dedication to the construction and animation of anti-capitalist and feminist perspectives.

III

Warner: Metamorphic Matters

Defining the fairy tale

Marina Warner offers the notion that the fairy-tale genre is primarily defined by the element of metamorphosis. Other ingredients such as “the presence of fairies, the moral function, the imagined antiquity and oral anonymity of the ultimate source, and the happy ending” (xix-xx) are of help in defining the genre, but are ultimately less essential to its identity. Indeed, a fairy tale need not even include the presence of fairy characters, as evidenced by several members of the traditional canon such as “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Bluebeard”. However there is always some form of magical shape-shifting operating in stories classified as fairy tales:

The marvels and prodigies, the seven-league boots and enchanted mirrors, the talking animals, the heroes or heroines changed into frogs or bears or cats, the golden eggs and overflowing supplies of porridge, the stars on the brow of the good sister and the donkey tail sprouting on the brow of the bad—all the wonders that create the atmosphere of fairy tale disrupt the apprehensible world in order to open spaces for dreaming alternatives. (xx)

Warner declares: “there is nothing in the least childlike about fairy tales” (xiv). They are not simply a frivolous indulgence to be outgrown, discarded in favor of successful development in adolescence and adulthood, and dismissed thenceforth as inconsequential flights of whimsy appropriate only for entertaining the immature minds of children. She defends human enjoyment of time spent in fairy-tale worlds as legitimate at any age, and openly celebrates the capacity for “blissful dreaming”

inspired by them. She adds that such dreaming can also be pragmatically useful to society in terms of helping to realize manifestations of productive social movements and changes in the fabric of the 'real world'. She regards fairy tales very much in light of the tellers' positions and interests. Since fairy tales are by nature accessible artworks that offer possibilities for evolution and revolution, their crafting and circulation connect directly to perceivable changes to guiding systems of everyday social organization. "The Tellers" are key players in Warner's approach to fairy tales, as will be further discussed below.

Warner believes there are at least two other defining characteristics of the traditional fairy tale: "pleasure in the fantastic; curiosity in the real" (xx). The seeming boundlessness of a fairy-tale atmosphere cultivates a twofold sense of "wonder": first, it inspires marvel at the magical characters and events in the story; second, it provokes curiosity about what may exist beyond the limits of one's present knowledge of the apprehensible world, including sources of individual and collective power to enact desired effects upon that world.

Warner believes that the fairy-tale genre bears a strong affinity to romance, insofar as it can "remake the world in the image of desire" (xvi). However she draws a clear distinction between traditional fairy tales and other genres such as fantasy, surrealist literature, and ghost stories, asserting that for all of their supernatural elements, fairy tales do not deal with "the uncanny" or "leave open prickly possibilities" (xx). They instead appear to use stories based on past events to talk

about the present and future, imagining potential symbolic scenarios and determining how to navigate them in order to achieve orderly resolutions, often in narrative voices attributed to a 'Mother Goose' type figure. Finally, fairy tales express a general attitude of "heroic optimism", as if to say, 'one day, we might be happy, even if it won't last'" (xx).

Origins of the fairy tale

Warner engages the question of the origin of the fairy-tale genre by spinning together enthrallingly interwoven stories about storytelling, following "its practitioners and images, in art, legend and history, from the prophesying enchantress who lures knights errant into her false paradise to the jolly old beldame, Mother Goose, and her masqueraders in the real world" (xxiv). Her narratives sprout veins into others, so that her discussion is always moving in concentric circles around colorful descriptions of the "The Tellers'" social, cultural, historical, legendary, and philosophical dispositions, through to narrative strands exploring claimed and unclaimed oral and literary influences, and into moments of collision, revealing the Tellers' direct and indirect interactions with one another.

She opines that the fairy-tale genre is feminine in nature, coming from the mouths of experienced women and speaking for, about, and to women. While men have historically dominated the formal collection and publication of fairy tales, Warner maintains that they are usually passing on (some version of) women's stories.

She calls this “a problem of transmission” (17), citing exemplary male giants of the genre who “can lay claim” to foundational work toward the modern literary fairy tale, including Giovan Francesco Straparola, Giambattista Basile, Charles Perrault, and the Brothers Grimm, all of whom relied heavily, and sometimes solely, on the stories they were given or actively solicited from female storytellers.

The related question of shifting historical attitudes toward women, especially women who tell stories, is a central fixture in Warner’s treatment of the fairy tale’s development.

The rich and fluctuating perceptions of women in relation to fancy and fairy tale became, as my work progressed, the absolutely necessary ground on which the familiar figures like Cinderella and her wicked stepmother stepped into place. Prejudices against women, especially old women and their chatter, belong in the history of the fairy tale’s changing status, for the pejorative image of the gossip was sweetened by influences from the tradition of the Sibyl and the cult of Saint Anne, until the archetypal crone by the hearth could emerge as a mouthpiece of homespun wisdom. I found that I was discovering a kind of fairytale origin for the figure of Mother Goose herself, as I followed the tracks left by the Queen of Sheba, taking me into Islamic as well as Christian territory. It turned out she had left a strangely shaped print—of either a hoof or a webbed foot—which led me on, deeper into the layered character of the traditional narrator. (xxiv)

Warner provides a foundational illustration in “the paradox of the Sibyl of myth: she is exiled, even abandoned, her voice is muffled, even muted. Yet from inside the ‘manacle’ of the monument, she goes on speaking.” She says, “I have not lost my sovereignty” (11). Antoine de La Sale’s 1420 voyage to plunder the famed ‘Grotta della Sibilla’ provides an emblematic instance of male collection; his early humanist ideals transform pieces of the pagan legends about Sybil of the Apennines into “a secular romance, and as such it becomes enriched and entangled with folklore and

fairy seductresses...” (7). However, as Warner says elsewhere of Perrault, “he wants to have it both ways”, meaning he does not go deeply enough into ‘truths’ about his controversial female subject as to truly endanger himself. In La Sale’s case, true risk-taking would mean directly undermining hegemonic patriarchal Christianity; instead he ultimately denounces the Sibyl as a false prophet. “Significantly, he does not relate the Sibyl’s prophecy of Christ’s birth from a virgin: the idea that the pagan and the Christian could overlap in truth-telling in this way perhaps struck too risky a note” (9).



Filippino Lippi, *Sibyl of Cumae*, Carafa chapel, 1489-91.

Warner connects the stifled but sovereign voice of the Sybil to a much larger story about female storytellers, including the rise of the mythicized Old Nurse/Old Wife figure of storytelling authority, and the corresponding development of fictional

female voices such as Mother Goose, often used particularly by male storytellers as a kind of seductive narrative disguise. Indeed “the Sibyl, as the figure of a storyteller, bridges divisions in history as well as hierarchies of class...She also represents an imagined cultural survival from one era of belief to another: Sibilla exists as a Christian fantasy about a pagan presence from the past, and as such she fulfills a certain function in thinking about forbidden, forgotten, buried, even secret matters” (11).

Warner does not intend to limit the historical subject of oppressed voices protesting their sovereignty to women by any means. She explains her focus on the connection between fairy tales and feminine speech partially in linguistic terms:

The connection of old women’s speech and the consolatory, erotic, often fanciful fable appears deeply intertwined in language itself, and with women’s speaking roles, as the etymology of “fairy” illuminates. The word “fairy” in the Romance languages indicates a meaning of the wonder or fairy tale, for it goes back to a Latin feminine word, *fata*, a rare variant of *fatum* (fate) which refers to a goddess of destiny...*Fatum*, literally that which is spoken, the past participle of the verb *fari*, to speak, gives French *fée*, Italian *fata*, Spanish *hada*, all meaning “fairy”, and enclosing connotations of fate; fairies share with Sibyls knowledge of the future and the past, and in the stories which feature them, both types of figure foretell events to come, and give warnings. (14-15)

Warner finds one location of the fairy tale’s origin in female gossip, a theme she explores in depth, discovering a long history of social battles to put an end to women’s gossip due to its seductive and generative power. In her discussion of medieval misogyny, embodied in gruesome propaganda imagery of women with padlocked lips, she says “the seduction of women’s talk reflected the seduction of their bodies; it was considered as dangerous to Christian men, and condemned as

improper *per se*” (31). Female gossip presented a formidable challenge to hegemony because it was so difficult to control and subdue. In early modern society, evening hearthside sessions of collective sharing and listening to stories and news (from both men and women), were referred to as the *veillées*, and became iconic. Warner notes the likely significant impact of one of the earliest books of secular tales attributed to (gossiping) women writers, *Les Évangiles des quenouilles* (*The Gospel of Distaves*), discovered in Bruges in 1475, which “relates a typical session—so it claims—of women’s gossiping and consultation. Numerous references...attest the wide diffusion of this book; there was a copy in the library of the château at Chantilly, and Colbert, the great statesman and financier of the early part of Louis XIV’s reign, owned another. Colbert was Charles Perrault’s patron and friend, so that the *Évangiles* were known in the circle of the first writers of fairy tales as literature” (36).

Before Perrault, there were the aristocratic ladies of the French salon: Mlle Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier, Mme Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy, Mme de Sévigné, among many others. “The women who inaugurated the fashion for the written tale, in Paris at the end of the seventeenth century, consistently claimed they had heard the stories they were retelling from nurses and servants” (18). These women writers delivered the earliest self-named “fairy tales” in *Le Cabinet des fées*, and worked to strengthen the genealogical image of old wise serving women passing down the fairy tales to their aristocratic wards. L’Héritier “defended the form with fighting spirit precisely because it conveyed the ancient, pure, wisdom of the people from the fountainhead—old women, nurses, governesses” (19).

Warner names Perrault as the first man—and the first *académicien*—to write fairy tales in France. His first published tale was, significantly, “*Peau d’Ane*” (“Donkey Skin”), a story that portrays a daughter rebelling against and fleeing from the would-be incestuous violations of her father. Perrault’s literary contributions to the fairy-tale genre interwove his interests in defending the value and rights of women with his general contentions as an active member in “The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns”. Warner credits Perrault as well as his cousin and close friend, L’Héritier, among those prominent early fairy-tale writers who openly battled to legitimize the genre, to protect it from those who sought to keep it out of acceptable French culture due to its supposed ignorance, foolishness, and bad taste, being as it was “the lot of ignorant folk and women” (19).

Warner paints images of winding, half-hidden rivers overflowing with storytellers borrowing from one another and sometimes masquerading as others, assuming the voices and figures of both historical and fictional storytelling figures, crossing time, space, social status, and gender in order to develop the most seductive of possible narrative voices. She describes a long history of male storytellers hiding behind figures of the old nurse, the grandmother, the old crone, “putting on Granny’s bonnet” in order to present the most seductive narrative voice possible, the voice of experience, the voice of one with authentic, “home-spun” knowledge, a voice with plenty of mother’s milk to share in the form of nourishing stories. She remarks on the historical figures and voices of Mother Goose, which have been alternately revered and laughed at—either in the form of invited laughter (since humor can be

rebellious), or in the form of ridicule. Children were also sometimes presented as the fictional authors of published tales. These trends became institutionalized as eighteenth-century British publishers sought to market the stories to children.

The interconnections of storytelling with heterodox forms of knowledge, with illicit science and riddles—the juggling tricks of the Devil—emerge, only to be themselves domesticated, contained by the context of the children’s nursery. Once this imagined voice was established as legitimate for certain purposes—the instruction of the young—writers co-opted it as their own, using it as a mask for their own thoughts, their own mocking games and even sedition—from the *élite salonnrière* in the old régime to Angela Carter in our time. (xxiv)

Just as fairy tales are defined by the element of metamorphosis, so too, apparently, are “the Tellers”.

The genre’s longevity and success

Warner provides insightful commentary on the matter of how the fairy-tale genre has managed to survive and flourish. She probes questions about why we continue to be seduced by it and desire it, and also addresses pragmatic questions about its ability to dodge silver bullets from a variety of vehement detractors, or else seduce them and lull them into ceasefires and peace talks.

Fairy tales can smuggle a disturbing theme across borders of consciousness without pushing the receivers’ faces in it. They’ve been told to children and youths for centuries for this reason: they’re stories about family strife and sexual danger, about intellectual curiosity and impatience with social hierarchy, but they remain in disguise, the in the land of far away and long ago and once upon a time.¹⁸

¹⁸ Marina Warner, *Signs and Wonders: Essays on Literature and Culture*. London: Chatto &

How such an “anarchic” genre managed to survive opposition from conservative cultural purists and threatened hegemonies is indeed a topic worth exploration. “The nature of the genre is promiscuous and omnivorous and anarchically heterogeneous, absorbing high and low elements, tragic and comic tones into its often simple, rondo-like structure of narrative” (*Beast to Blonde* xxi). Warner suggests that it is in part due to the genre’s ability to absorb, transform, and positively radiate these polarities—highbrow and lowbrow, tragic and comic, pagan myths and Christian narratives, childlike naivety and ancient wisdom—that it has survived. Its heterogeneous nature enables its appeal to exceptionally diverse audiences of different ages, cultures, social classes, and historical eras. It has also continued to attract an enormous pool of writers for centuries; one reason for this is that the genre’s childlike, whimsical flavor allows writers to genuinely express themselves without getting into too much trouble for it.

A central reason for the fairytale’s survival and growing popularity in late seventeenth-century France was the seductive ‘fountain of youth’ factor. Fairy tales provided (and still provide) ripe soil for the cultivation of religious and secular adult fantasies of a return to childhood. “The extraordinary fad for fairytale that the court and the salons fostered in the years 1694-99 in France coincided with the growing aristocratic enthusiasm for the Child Jesus and for Christ's demonstrative affection for

Windus, 2003. 403-4.

children ('Suffer the little children to come unto me'; 'Be ye as little children')".¹⁹ At the same time, detractors such as the Abbé de Villiers railed against Perrault's defense of fairy tales, "lumping women and children together as perpetrators of the new fad: "Ignorant and foolish, they have filled the world...with these reams of fairy tales which have been the death of us for the last year or so" (*Beast to Blonde* 18). Warner describes how the very terms used to refer to fairy tales spoke volumes about the dual effects of its associations with childhood: "The diminutive form of the nouns (*sornettes, bagatelles, histoirettes*) recurs in the rhetoric of detractors and supporters alike; the former branding fairy stories as infantile, the latter praising them as childlike. This tension between opposing perceptions of the child informs the development of the tales and continues to do so" (18).

Childish figures began to be used as fictional authorial figures; Perrault among others even compounded the figure of child and old woman (his own son and Mother Goose) into a fictional authorial stance which lends his seminal *Contes du temps passé* a simultaneous sense of innocence and authority—a dynamite combination that continues to be used to spread fairy tales today (182). Regardless of Perrault's frequent tongue-in-cheek moments, which cause Warner to be skeptical about his firm subscription to the idea of "aboriginal knowledge", this pattern of transmission served the trendy and profitable purpose of creating the most seductive

¹⁹ Marina Warner, "The absent mother: women against women in old wives' tales," *History Today*. April 1991, Vol. 41, Issue 4. 26 April 2013. <<http://www.historytoday.com/marina-warner/absent-mother-women-against-women-old-wives-tales>>.

narrative voice possible in order to attract a wide audience, which began to include children, and would eventually target them almost exclusively.

The philosophical and mythical idea that fairy tale writers could transmit “unadulterated” stories, straight from the innocent mouths of babes and straight from the salt of the earth, is a powerful and a staying one. It covered the tracks of the well-known, heavily edited collections of mostly women’s stories by male writers, the latter of whom usually profited greatly by them. But this is part of the story of the fairy tale’s survival and success: our hunger for the magical nourishment it promises. Warner introduces *From the Beast to the Blonde* by retelling a Kenyan story in which a Sultan’s wife withers away until a poor man teaches him how to ensure a happy, thriving wife, even in poverty: the immaterial “tongue meats...of fairy tales, stories, jokes, songs; he nourishes them on talk, he wraps them in language; he banishes melancholy by refusing silence. Storytelling makes women thrive—and not exclusively women, the Kenyan fable implies, but other sorts of people, too, even sultans” (xv).

The Romantic Brothers Grimm sought to nourish their nation with fairy tales, ideally of pure native origin. They provide a salient example of the genre’s survival and successful metamorphoses in the changing hands and voices of the tellers, a process hand-in-hand with the metamorphoses of the tellers’ identities, as they were presented. “Like Perrault, who hid himself in the skirts of ‘*ma Mere l’Oye*’, the brothers put on the granny bonnet of Dorothea [Viehmann], icon and voice of the

folk” (193). Of course the real Frau Viehmann did not exactly match the authentic German peasant portrait promoted by the Grimms, being in fact a French Huguenot and a tailor’s daughter; nor did the Grimms roam the country sniffing out tales—they received them in their study in Kassel. “The connections and kinship of other Grimm informants have been shown to be much more permeated with literary French influence than the Romantic brothers wished, but until recent scholarship examined the tales, this aspect was neglected in favour of the mythical dream of autochthonous purity, which then becomes available to all who hear or read the stories” (193).

‘The Brothers Grimm’ is itself a lovely, world-renown fairy tale. The Grimms were in the (imaginary) business of recovering a forgotten national literature of the vernacular. Said Wilhelm: “Not only did we seek something of consolation in the past, our hope, naturally, was that this course of ours should contribute somewhat to the return of a better day” (192). Warner describes the treasured status fairy tales enjoyed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century among German Romantics, who “prized the products of the imagination, of fantasies and dreams, with unprecedented conviction, and they consequently accorded fairy tales the highest literary status they had ever achieved...They identified the genre with the spontaneous, innocent, untutored mind—with children and with ordinary unsophisticated people. Both were pure, not-adult—literally, unadulterated” (188). Regardless of the many fictional aspects of their process and products, the Grimm Brothers were and still are key contributors to the fairy-tale genre’s survival and popularity—they identified a hunger for aboriginal purity of knowledge, and they fed

it the “tongue meat”, the soul food, of fairy tales, uniquely equipped to soothe the heart and the headache.

An equally important reason for the fairy tale’s longevity and success has to do with its usefulness as a tool for controversial self-expression and protest. When other genres have been censored for communicating similar material, fairy tales have managed to skate by on the merit of their childish, innocent, whimsical facades. “When writers want to speak their minds, they can step up onto a rostrum and put the matter openly, and risk that rostrum changing to a scaffold. Or they can pretend to be little old grannies telling well-worn homespun stories filled with the nonsense of dyed-in-the-wool wisdom” (“Absent” 24). Returning to seventeenth century France, Warner describes the ruinous social conditions under the rule of Louis XIV, and the special role fairy tales played in efforts to disrupt its dominance:

Louis XIV's capricious policies, his wars and depredations, were plunging the country and even the nobles - into ruin. The fairytale offered a coded way to dissent at a time of tough censorship and monarchical control, it created a picture of a possible escape from tyranny, and it used the naive setting of childish beliefs in magic, the simple structure of the marvelous tale with its binary oppositions and neat resolutions. They could adduce the unimpeachable claim of the genre to time-honoured, authentic, native tradition in order to mount a critique of the times. (24)

Fairy tale writers found access to a certain freedom of expression in the form of the fairy tale. There were able to say what was on their minds and usually get away with it, even in the face of conservative cultural purists and threatened hegemonies of the church and state.

Mlle L'Heritier and Perrault were valiant in their defensive efforts on behalf of the fairy-tale genre during this period. They knew, as other fairy tale writers did, what potential there was for the genre to be used subversively. Warner pays particular attention to the history of women using the fairy tale as veiled protest, be it in the act of passing on an oral tale about female silencing, or in radically imaginative writings of their own. "Fairytale offers a case where the very contempt for women opened an opportunity for them to exercise their wit and communicate their ideas: women's care for children, the pervading disregard for both groups, and their presumed identity with the simple folk, the common people, handed them fairytales as a nursery indeed, where they might seed their own gardens and foster their own flowers" (24). Warner draws attention to a distinction she observes in fairy tales written by women, namely their resonant theme of survival; more so than in tales by men, Warner contends, they "contain vivid examples of female evil: wicked stepmothers, ogresses, bad fairies abound, while virtuous figures like Cinderella's mother, are dead from the start" (24). Survival and dominance of the evil female character translates to rebellious female survival in the real world, in which following the laws of female virtue in the seventeenth century (and in many ways, long beyond it) included complicity with prescriptions of silence, passivity, and powerlessness. Women have played a key role in the continued rewriting, dissemination, and cultural relevance of the fairy tale because the genre provides them with a culturally and socially acceptable medium through which to speak about many things, including silent sovereignty, and to rebel at once publicly and secretly in the telling of it.

Social functions of the fairy tale

The quality of the fairy-tale genre that most readily opens it to attack is paradoxically the same quality that renders it such a useful and legitimate social tool. The luxury of the fairy tale's essential fantasticality enables its use as a discussant of reality and how it might be different. "The stories' fallaciousness, the very quality that inspired scorn, makes them potential conduits of another way of seeing the world, of telling an alternative story. The mythical hope they conjure actually builds a mythology in which utopian desires find their place" (415). Fairy tales provide more than simplistic escape routes from looking outside or in the mirror; the genre's primary defining characteristic, metamorphosis, engenders hope for change. "The idea of awakening, sometime erotic but not exclusively, goes to the heart of fairy tale's *[sic]* function" (417). The tales are available to us as mediums for the channeling of and connection with our keenest wishes and desires, even—or rather especially—those that seem entirely implausible. "The realms of wonder and impossibility converge, and fairy tales function to conjure the first in order to delineate the second: magic paradoxically defines normality" (133).

The genre has many social functions enabled by its home territory in the imagination. Fairy tales shake out the mind while reassuring it of the ground; they witness lived experiences in order to model survival techniques and communicate ideas for how to manage things better in the future; they warn and instruct, both children and adults, about where the boundaries are, and the consequences of

overstepping them; perhaps most importantly, they intimate the possibility of redrawing some of those boundaries. “Fairy tales offer a way of putting questions, of testing the structure as well as guaranteeing its safety, of thinking up alternatives as well as living daily reality in an examined way” (411). While they began as adult material, since the mid-eighteenth century literary fairy tales have been primarily identified with the moral education of young children. In Warner’s view, fairy tales fulfill a crucial social function, particularly by illuminating the plight of women and other historically marginalized and disempowered social groups.

The pedagogical function of the wonder story deepens the sympathy between the social category women occupy and fairy tale. Fairy tales exchange knowledge between an older voice of experience and a younger audience, they present pictures of perils and possibilities that lie ahead, they use terror to set limits on choice...they draw social outlines around boys and girls, fathers and mothers, the rich and poor, the rulers and the ruled, they point out the evildoers and garland the virtuous, they stand up to adversity with dreams of vengeance, power and vindication. (21)

The fairy tale is a natural site for protest, having long been in collusion with it. Traditional fairy tales paradoxically continue to offer innovative writers like Angela Carter a unique terrain for rebellious speech and meaningful topsy-turvydom. The fairy tale’s magical ability to enable change is activated by the social interaction required for telling it, receiving it, reviewing it, rewriting it. Warner asserts the malleability of reality if collaborative efforts are made using widely available resources:

For what is applauded and who sets the terms of the recognition and acceptance are always in question. Nor are the measure and weight of those terms assigned fixed values; unlike the statutory yards and metres kept safe in government vaults, they can and do change. Creating and

contributing to the inhabited culture is not just a matter of individual creative genius, the exceptional masterwork. We, the audience, you, the reader, are part of the stories future as well, its *[sic]* patterns are rising under the pressure of your palms, our fingers, too” (411).

Fairy tales are a moralizing structure; but their true charm, what really makes them different, is their capacity to tap into our stores of fantasy and make them dance.

“Fairy tales often claim the moral ground, but their spellbinding power lies with the enchantresses and giants, the magic, the wonders, the mishaps and the good fortune they relate” (11). The genre tells us it is acceptable and even personally and collectively beneficial to invest time and energy in plumbing our imaginative capacities for answers, for pleasure, for change. “An analogy would be the maxim of the Czech dissidents before the Velvet Revolution: Live as if the freedoms you desire were yours already. Only by refusing the constraints that are imposed can they be broken—this is also true of imagining another life, making a new world” (415).

For all of its flaws, the fairy-tale genre has a lot to offer for those looking to enact social progress. While they are usually assumed to favor the ‘Alpha’ characters, Warner maintains that fairy tales often argue on behalf of the underdog, opening up mental possibilities for shifts in stagnant social paradigms of power. They often “champion lost causes, runts of the litter, the slow-witted and the malformed” (415). And while its formal place remains predominantly in the nursery, the genre has seen considerable expansion in its audience demographic in recent years; perhaps out of desperation, adults have taken notice of an untapped resource for survival.

Fairy tales are indeed still criticized—and with reason—for the easy lies, the crass materialism, the false hopes they hold out, but in the last decade of the [twentieth] century, in conditions of radical change on the one hand, and stagnation on the other, with ever-increasing fragmentations and widening polarities, with national borders disappearing in some places and returning with bloody vengeance in others, as a millenarian feeling of ecological catastrophe gathers momentum, and the need to belong grows ever more rampant as it becomes more frustrated, there has been a strongly marked shift towards fantasy as a mode of understanding, as an ingredient in survival, as a lever against the worst aspects of the status quo and the direction it is taking. (415)

Warner's observations are as relevant in the present moment as they were twenty years ago. Fairy tales are uniquely useful as survival mechanisms in a world that often seems inevitably headed for disaster compounded upon disaster, natural and unnatural, as society wags its head, wishing someone had thought of something. Rather than resigning ourselves to the limits of such a monotonous and grim state of existence, says the fairy tale, we can use our mental faculties of foresight, enabled by a marriage of empirical data and unfettered imagination, to engineer new possibilities for the future and take the necessary actions to realize them.

Fairy tales in the media

Warner draws attention to a disconcerting trend in conventional media adaptations of fairy tales, of lost connections between the tongue and the tongue meat, as it were—significant erasures of important history which disable or disfigure the essential functions of the tales' traditional metamorphic narratives. The most visible media representations demonstrate a ritualized severing of the necessary

connection between older voices of past lived experience and younger audiences, endangering the ability of the fairy-tale genre to fulfill some of its most important social functions: identifying grave social problems; communicating experience and values between generations; modeling practices of shape-shifting for empowerment; championing difference and otherness; encouraging wishful thinking; and creating the necessary hope for eventual realization of positive personal and collective metamorphoses.

The genre's fortunes have entered a new phase: a certain view of fairy tales is being naturalized by companies like Disney, and then domesticated by publishers like Ladybird Books, who have now struck a deal with Disney so that all the illustrations are based on the films' graphics and storyline. The voices whom L'Héritier and Calvino and Schwartz-Bart heard, for instance, risk being lost in the noise of these loud standard numbers, with certain prejudices and values deeply instilled. This is one of the *prima facie* problems of corporate reach in the global village: in the same way as hedgerows are shedding variety of species, flora and fauna, the imagination of children reared on Ladybird fairy tales will be saturated with the Disney version graphic and verbal. (416)

The memory of the hearthside *veillées* is being dismembered, or its spirit falsely mimicked. Practices of cultivating individuality through freeing the imagination and heightening awareness of crucial social issues are being obstructed by corporate standardization of all sensory aspects of adapted fairy tales; the sounds, the sights, the songs are precisely homogenized and the scope and nature of their delivery predetermined by conventional media conglomerates such as team Disney-Ladybird. As for character types, they are stock and strict: the princes are banal and featureless, the heroines "saccharine" and sentimental; and all the authentic power

lies with the bad women, who laugh in the face of benevolent fairy godmothers, reinforcing subliminal messages implying the dangers of empowering women.

Disney's vision has affected everybody's idea of fairy tales...until writers and anthologists began looking again, passive hapless heroines and vigorous wicked older women seemed generic. Disney selected certain stories and stressed certain sides to them; the wise children, the cunning little vixens, the teeming populations of the stories were drastically purged. The disequilibrium between good and evil in these films has influenced contemporary perception of fairy tale, as a form where sinister and gruesome forces are magnified and prevail throughout—until the very last moment, where, *ex machina*, right and goodness overcome them. (207)

This trend of mass standardization of modern available forms of the fairy tale strengthens the genre's alienation from important cultural and historical elements remembered and examined by the traditional stories. It disables the rebellious capacities of fairy tales that open up space for imagining alternative realities and new identities beyond generic and conventional expectations. It renders the tales not just oversimplified, but stripped of their power to speak of the past truthfully in order to engender ideas in the audience for improving the present and future.

Of critical import to Warner is the gradual disappearance of historical female narratives of intergenerational strife and battles for coexistence and survival within patriarchal paradigms, crucial narratives which underlie the pivotal presence of wicked stepmother figures. "This process of loss has to be resisted: as individual women's voices have become absorbed into the corporate body of male-dominated decision-makers, the misogyny present in many fairy stories—the wicked stepmothers, bad fairies, ogresses, spoiled princesses, ugly sisters and so forth—has lost its connections to the particular web of tensions in which women were enmeshed

and come [*sic*] to look dangerously like the way things are” (416-17). This in effect serves to idealize and reinforce present states of gendered power relations and to limit women’s social value and ability to influence change, rather than inspiring society to improve itself; the potential capacities of the fantastical fairy-tale narrative form are being misused en masse in highly consequential ways. Warner believes a related symptom of this disconnect is discernable in the apparent increase in warning narratives about female villains in films related to traditional fairy tales, and a corresponding dimming of the spotlight on potentially threatening male characters; she says this is especially true in media aimed at child audiences, or at least meant to be able to legally include them, and translates into a troubling implicit pedagogical shift. “Generally speaking, the body of story has passed out of the mouth of the quiltmaker from Palermo, on to the lips of film-makers...the historical context of the stories has been sheared away, and figures like the wicked stepmother have grown into archetypes of the human psyche, hallowed, inevitable symbols, while figures like the Beast bridegroom have been granted ever more positive status” (417).

Warner insists however that bitter condemnation of convention media giants is not the ultimate solution, nor does it address the whole story. “It seems a simple admission of defeat to weep and gnash one’s teeth at the thought of EuroDisney...it is simply unthinking and lazy to denounce all the works of Disney and his legacy” (414). She encourages an active and critical perspective tempered by awareness of cultural and historical relativities, as opposed to simply harping on about absolutes. Disney does not fail the genre in all respects, after all, and it certainly aims to bring

joy to the ‘child within’. “Theme parks and popular entertainment quarry the tradition of fairy tale...they rely not only on the characters and the stories, but on the idea that adults enjoy being children again, that a public can include different generations and classes, who will lose themselves in the make-believe in a different way, united by the pleasures of enchantment” (414-15). Warner furthermore expresses hope for improvement in fairy tale depictions in the media based on the fact that the stories and tropes of the fairy tale are widely accessible for use and redefinition by many different storytellers, and that some (lesser-known) filmmakers have begun to produce exploratory socially aware pieces, citing the Quay Brothers’ *The Comb* and *Institute Benjamenta*, Joanna Woodward’s *Princess Brooch and the Sinful Clasp*, and Neil Jordan’s *The Company of Wolves*, the latter inspired by Angela Carter’s writings. While the dangerous disconnects between history and fairy story are visibly occurring, all is not lost—even within the existing media products in circulation. EuroDisney, for all its glitz and false promises, taps into a fundamental and unifying aspect of fairy tales: their power to bring pleasure to the masses, to engage and animate the wishes and dreams of audience members of diverse backgrounds, to infuse them with the sense of finally entering a world of magic. Warner validates this cause, and recognizes the magnitude of its success.

In a recent article in *The Telegraph*, “Meet prince, get married, live happily ever after”, Warner courageously and playfully admits to her own continued fascination with and attraction to the Disney princesses, rooted in vivid childhood

memories that persist in their influence upon her dreams, as well as her nightmares.²⁰ The article's occasion was the studio's latest animated release at the time, *Tangled* (2011), Disney's fiftieth animated film, featuring the tenth Disney princess: Rapunzel. "Liking Disney is a bit shameful" (1) Warner says, tongue-in-cheek. She ponders in a tone of open-minded humor why she is still drawn to Disney princesses despite her actively critical, feminist mind, and her expertise in mythography, folklore, and fairy tale. The result is a brief glimpse into her broadly humanist perspective on the fairy tale's function not just in society or the media at large, but also at the level of the individual human being who inevitably experiences some form of resonance with childhood hopes and dreams, and is drawn to participate by imagining himself or herself in fairy-tale territory.

Interestingly, Warner frames the discussion with Zipes in one corner, and the directors of *Tangled* in the other. She seems to locate herself somewhere in between.

For decades the academic Jack Zipes, one of the most vocal advocates of fairytales, has denounced the company for sentimentalising and sanitising the difficult psychological matters the stories face – and for peddling a global ethos of American greed. The directors of *Tangled* protest against this view: "Rapunzel's a rock-hippie chick," says [Byron] Howard. "She's very bohemian, with bare feet. If you asked her if she wanted the castle and the gold and the prestige, she'd say no." (2)

Warner notes that the film's other director, Nathan Greno, asserts belief in the importance of providing strong women as role models for girls in children's media.

As a result of these good intentions, says Warner, "Rapunzel is cast in the feisty

²⁰ Marina Warner, "Meet prince, get married, live happily ever after." *The Telegraph*. 24 January 2011. 26 April 2013. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/8260848/Meet-prince-get-married-live-happily-ever-after.html>>.

mould of the more recent princesses: Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, and Tiana from *The Princess & the Frog*” (2). “They want their princess to be a feminist and a beauty, a good girl and a tomboy, sweet-natured but... ‘a gorgeous bundle of trouble’” (2). The resulting (impossible) amalgam is an empowered princess who tears away against the grain through violent self-defense, rough verbal banter, and subversive acts like proposing repeatedly to the prince—all the while sporting seventy feet of hair animated as a golden waterfall of virginal, nubile female sexuality. The directors’ struggle to create a new Disney princess who sets an unprecedented standard of female idealization targeted to appeal to current audiences “inadvertently reveals something, as fairytales often do: the chaotic state around modern concepts of masculinity and femininity, individual autonomy versus coupledness, money versus virtue, social display versus moderation” (5).

Warner evaluates various aspects of the film, noting that it legitimizes itself as a fairy tale in its themes of redemption, recognition, and revenge, and most of all, through a cornerstone “principle of the genre”: the trapped princess who is lost and then found. She locates “the heart of the Disney princess problem” by holding up her vivid childhood memories of Arthur Rackham’s sinister, Gothic renditions as a comparison. “The flavour of fairytale is violent and deeply frightening—until the final sigh of pleasure at the metamorphosis, the reprieve, at the villains overcome, the princess found... Disney princesses by contrast have always avoided the stark depths of knowledge opening up beneath the fairytales” (4). While an important ancestor of the tale, *Petrosinella (Little Parsley)* deals with the dark matter of single mothers

seeking abortifacients to save themselves from the horrible fate of having an unwanted child out of wedlock in the face of utterly unforgiving, brutal social conditions for women (who were not queens or duchesses), Disney “prides itself on family values” and “wraps the material in sunshine”. In so doing it participates as a key player in the conventional and perhaps fundamentally conservative media’s ritual process of repeatedly silencing the disenfranchised voices that have protested their sovereignty via the expression of lived histories preserved and passed onto future generations through the fairy-tale medium for centuries.

Still, says Warner, it is alright to allow oneself to be swept off one’s feet by a Disney prince now and again; it is only human to desire and to need this—the caveat being that we must not forget what has been left out. Once the film credits begin to roll and we can let go of the suspension of disbelief necessary to enjoying temporary immersion in Disneyfied narratives, we must not forget the much darker truths passed on by the original sources: the lived experiences of the real old nurses, old wives, and grandmothers who persisted in telling fairy stories by the hearthside, and the many writers who advocated rebellion against oppressive dominant hegemonies by writing the stories down and publishing them, so that we would hear them too.

The most representative fairy tales

Among the tales Warner considers most representative of the genre, “Cinderella”, “Beauty and the Beast”, “Donkeyskin”, “The Little Mermaid”, and “Bluebeard” figure most prominently. Warner attributes the sustained cultural

relevance of the “Cinderella” cycle to the fact that it addresses social and personal problems associated with “the absent mother” (201). This is true even of the earliest recorded Cinderella story, China’s “Yeh-hsein”, AD 850-60. The ways storytellers have tried to replace the absent mother vary widely and significantly, be it with a monstrous wicked stepmother, enchanted animal helpers, or a fairy godmother disguised as a witch. The manner in which the good mother is replaced (or not) reflects the cultural and historical contexts and prejudices of the storytellers. “Tales telling of her miraculous return to life, like Shakespeare’s romances *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale*, have not gained the currency or popularity of ‘Cinderella’ or ‘Snow White’ in which she is supplanted by a monster” (201). There is something universally disorienting and compelling to humans about the possibility of our first known and most trusted keeper (traditionally, one’s mother), transforming into a foreign body, unrecognizable and even threatening.

The lost slipper is a motif that recurs across time and space in variations on the “Cinderella” tale. Sometimes it is made of glass, as is proposed by Perrault and the *salonnières* of seventeenth and eighteenth century Paris, or of golden fabric “as light as down [that makes] no noise even when treading on stone” in “Yeh-hsein” (202). The unbelievably tiny slipper that only fits the feminine ideal, Cinderella, resonates with the fetishism of bound feet in women introduced by the T’ang dynasty in the sixth century, a mark of “highborn, valuable, desirable women” (203). In the Grimm Brothers’ version, “the lost shoe likewise denotes the wearer’s beauty, and brutal imagery of deformation, cultural and literal, returns...[T]he [step]sisters hack

off their toes, hack off their heels to fit the slipper, and birds warn the prince: ‘Turn and peep, turn and peep,/ There’s blood within the shoe./ The shoe it is too small for her,/ The true bride awaits you’”(203). “Cinderella” represents and teaches dominant social morals concerning beauty, the love object, and the power of love to transform: “the fairy tale proposes a perfect foot from knowledge of the imperfections of feet....Love in the flow of the narrative undoes the perception of ugliness. The story advocates small feet only at its most literal, patent level of meaning; like other variations of the cycle, it promises that what is hidden and not known can be beautiful, if beheld in the right spirit” (204). Definitive standards of goodness and beauty embodied by Cinderella characters vary according to cultural and historical circumstances: “in China, intelligence and being skilled in pottery; in England, ‘long golden hair, and eyelashes that tur[n] up like the petals of a daisy’” (204).

Warner notes the pivotal help of animals throughout diverse variations of the tale, reflective of the traditional fairy-tale function of metamorphosis in order to reach a positive, ‘just’ resolution. In “Yeh-hsein”, it is the bones of the sacred golden fish murdered by the evil stepmother that function as the protector and provider; in Perrault’s “*Cendrillon*” various birds and squirrels provide comfort and companionship, along with a fairy godmother who saves the day; in the Grimms’ “*Aschenputtel*” (1812 version) it is a hazel sapling that springs up from the good mother’s grave that showers down the golden dresses and slippers with which Cinderella adorns herself in order to catch the eye of the prince. In keeping with their tendency to moralize through brutal punitive measures, the Grimms have birds peck

out the eyes of the evil stepmother and stepsisters; Yeh-hsein's abusers are stoned to death. The animal helpers are stand-ins for the dead mother, ghostly reincarnations who hover over the story, trying to help Cinderella escape. This universal aspect of the tales drew Angela Carter, resulting in her own uncanny take, "Ashputtle", in which the mother comes back in many different animal forms to try to help her daughter.

"Cinderella" is emblematic in its attention to historical patterns of women suffering at the hands of other women, a theme that runs throughout many different fairy-tale strands, including "Sleeping Beauty", "Snow White", and "The Little Mermaid", to name a few:

The misogyny of fairy tales engages women as participants, not just targets; the antagonisms and sufferings the stories recount connect to the world of female authority as well as experience. Also, as they so frequently claim to speak in a woman's voice (the storyteller, Mother Goose), it is worth pausing to examine the weight and implications of that claim before pointing the finger exclusively at Grimm or Disney (208).

Some versions of "Cinderella" do not even provide reassurance through the replacement of the good mother with a wicked stepmother—instead, a natural mother is overtaken by murderous jealousy and persecutes her own daughter. These versions have mostly disappeared from view, in part due to the Grimm's editorial practices.

"[I]n their romantic idealism, the Grimms literally could not bear a maternal presence to be equivocal, or dangerous, and preferred to banish her altogether. For them, the bad mother had to disappear in order for the ideal to survive and allow Mother to

flourish as symbol of the eternal feminine, the motherland, and the family itself as the highest social desideratum” (212).

Warner is critical of psychoanalytical readings such as Bruno Bettelheim’s, which advocate for the continued presence of bad mothers in fairy tales, citing children’s need to feel justified in their anger at authority figures who they believe treat them badly. “Bettelheim’s theory has contributed to the continuing absence of good mothers from fairy tales in all kinds of media, and to a dangerous degree which itself mirrors current prejudices and reinforces them...[It has] effaced from memory the historical reasons for women’s cruelty within the home and ha[s] made such behavior seem natural, even intrinsic to the mother-child relationship...” (212-3). Warner observes danger in the continued trend of excluding good mothers from fairy tales, biological or no; children should not grow up expecting to be mistreated within the home, nor should parents receive the message that abusive behavior is acceptable. Furthermore, lived histories of enforced child abandonment upon widowhood, for example, are effaced by simplistic views of the “bad mother” function.

The archetypal approach leeches history out of fairy tale. Fairy or wonder tales, however farfetched the incidents they include...take on the colour of the actual circumstances in which they are or were told....The absent mother can be read as exactly that: a feature of the family before our modern era, when death in childbirth was the most common cause of female mortality, and surviving orphans would find themselves brought up by their mother’s successor. (213)

Significantly, the heroine’s ultimate savior is a fairy godmother, not a prince. The prince receives the heroine into a better home and a better life as the princess she

deserves to be; but it is the good stand-in mother figure who delivers Cinderella from her purgatorial state into a heavenly one. In traditional versions, Cinderella is somewhat passive until she receives encouragement and material necessities to achieve her goal of escape from a good mother figure, in animal and/or human forms. The fairy godmother is often disguised as an ugly old crone herself, paralleling Cinderella's disguise of a dowdy kitchen maid. "[T]he fairy godmother is herself transformed and revealed to be a beautiful enchantress: the heroine's recognition reflected in her own" (217). The fairy godmother may also represent historical experiences of brides suffering at the hands of difficult mothers-in-law. Once they enter a new family and traditionally leave behind their own, they find themselves at the mercy of new forms of tyranny, be it a Prince Charming who does not turn out to be so charming, or his mother, who may disapprove or demonstrate jealousy of her new daughter-in-law.

Warner defends the validity of what is known as "a fairy-tale ending", the generic concluding image of the heroine's triumph for which Cinderella is perhaps best known. She asserts that many people misinterpret the phrase as referring to a careless life of bliss, a neat conclusion to a tale that in no way mirrors present or past social realities. She asserts that "[w]hen critics reproach fairy tale for the glib promise of its traditional ending—'And they all lived happily ever after'—they overlook the knowledge of misery within marriage that the preceding story reveals in its every line. The conclusion of fairy tale works a charm against despair, the last spell the narrating fairy godmother casts for change in her subjects and her hearers' destinies" (217).

Operating at the fore of “Beauty and the Beast” is the most critical defining characteristic of the fairy-tale genre: metamorphosis—in this case, animal metamorphosis. Warner calls it “a classic tale of transformation, which, when told by a woman, places the male lover, the Beast, in the position of the mysterious, threatening, possibly fatal unknown, and Beauty, the heroine, as the questor who discovers his true nature” (275). The emphasis on who must change, however—the Beauty or the Beast—depends on the teller. This tension around the question of which party’s is the central deficit (of character, of appearance, of belief), and who is therefore the Other, underlies the compelling discrepancies among the bevy of beast-bridgroom tales produced over the centuries. Changes in expectations, attitudes, and social conventions of marriage, especially *love and choice* in marriage, along with varying definitions of beauty and beastliness, also account for the many changes of the meaning of the tale over the years.

The historical and social context of the printed versions alters the message and reception of the lovers’ perennial conflict and quest; remembering the changing background in which the tellers move constitutes a crucial part in understanding the sexual politics of the tale. The theory of archetypes, which is essentially ahistorical, helps to confirm gender inevitability and to imprison male and female in stock definitions. By contrast, attitudes to the Beast are always in flux, and even provide a gauge of changing evaluations of human beings themselves, of the meaning of what it is to be human, and specifically, since the Beast has primarily identified with the male since the story’s earliest forms, what it is to be a man. (279)

Warner elaborates on the tale’s roots in Apuleius’ “Cupid and Psyche” myth, “the earliest extant forerunner of the Beauty and the Beast fairy tale in Western literature, and a founding myth of sexual difference” (274). Many episodes of the

myth, along with its early interpretations, have been carried through by fairy tales to domestic settings. These roots bring with them an array of implications. For one, it is Psyche's error—her distrust, impatience, and disobedience to Eros/Cupid, and her eventual realization of her monumental mistake—that drives the plot, so that the tale is essentially about the heroine's corrective journey to redeem herself for trespassing against the will and wisdom of her male counterpart. "Her lover is no beast, but only concealed from her, and she is wrong to fear him. Her journey towards true knowledge of her hidden lover became perceived as the journey of the soul toward the concealed godhead, '*deus absconditus*', in the writings of the Neoplatonists who adopted the story as a form of secular gospel'" (274). The dynamic also presents an interesting "reversal of the more expected pattern of chivalry": Psyche "functions as the chivalrous questor" while Cupid/Eros remains the goal.

Various gospels, both secular and Christian, have been expounded upon through the beast-bridegroom tale. Its many variations illustrate avenues for confronting monumental social issues including female autonomy, sexual discovery, the expression of carnal or 'animalistic' desire, human relationships to animals, what it means to be "beastly", what true "beauty" is, and the complexities of personal and external otherness.

One dominant curve can be discovered in the retellings from the seventeenth century to the present day: at first, the Beast is identified with male sexuality which must be controlled or changed or domesticated through *civilité*, a code chiefly established by women, but later the Beast is perceived as a principle of nature within every human being, male and female, young and old, and the stories affirm beastliness's intrinsic goodness and necessity to holistic survival. (280)

Warner holds that the pattern of the tale's historical evolution reveals "one of the most profound changes in human sensibilities in modern time: the re-evaluation of animals" (280). Indeed the beast is used for an array of purposes, sometimes positively aligned with childishness, something that must be outgrown, but a state that is privileged in its temporary freedom and authenticity. The Beauty-Beast dichotomy most universally represents human confrontations with otherness, including otherness within ourselves, and efforts at reconciliation. The many variations of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale are fundamentally united by the fact that they all "work out this basic plot, moving from the terrifying encounter with Otherness, to its acceptance, or, in some versions of the story, its annihilation. In either case, the menace of the Other has been met, dealt with and exorcized by the end of the fairy tale; the negatively charged protagonist has proved golden" (276).

The general pattern of the story most familiar today was crafted by seventeenth and eighteenth century French fairy tale writers concerned with addressing the problematic custom of arranged marriages—the tyrannical father passing off a silenced daughter to another, perhaps even more monstrously tyrannical husband, for personal and/or material gain. In the hands of the women *salonnières*, beast-bridegroom tales were composed to boldly critique or denounce the patriarchal ritual of handing over one's daughter without her consent, and the socially accepted equation of women with property.

Fairy tale as a form deals with limits, and limits often set by fear: one of its fundamental themes treats a protagonist who sets out to discover the unknown and overcome its terrors....When women tell fairy stories, they

also undertake this central narrative concern of the genre—they contest fear; they turn their eye on the phantasm of the male Other and recognize it, either rendering it transparent and safe, the self reflected as good, or ridding themselves of it (him) by destruction or transformation... (276)

Bodies and voices are owned and valiantly fought for in beast-bridegroom tales by those such as d'Aulnoy, l'Héritier, and Mme de Villeneuve (Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot Gallon), the latter of whom penned the first fairy tale entitled "*La belle et la bête*". Warner describes the tumultuous lives and brave socio-political battles of these aristocratic proto-feminist women, who often fell from social grace or teetered dangerously at the edge of it, speaking out in their stories and in their salons against male tyranny and on behalf of women's rights and abilities to think and choose for themselves, as much in life as in love. For them, the fate of becoming the property of an unknown beastly bridegroom was an everyday social reality, and they railed against its injustice, imagining worlds in which everyone, even royalty, is allowed to marry "according to their inclinations" (290).

Warner attributes the version of the tale that has become canonical to Mme Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, whose decisive infusion of Christian moralizing and a "governessy" voice carries through to the most popular contemporary version: "the worried tone of a well-meaning teacher raising her pupils to face their future obediently and decorously...to obey their fathers and that inside of the brute of a husband who might be their appointed lot, the heart of a good man might beat, given a bit of encouragement" (293). A comparison of d'Aulnoy's, Villeneuve's and de Beaumont's versions reflects the larger contemporary movement away from "*ancien*

régime raffishness toward the romantic cult of *sentimentalité* and *bonne volonté*” (293). De Beaumont had, in fact, fallen from French aristocracy due to an unhappy marriage, and started over in London as a pious-minded governess, publishing prolifically, including an anthology of didactic tales for young people, *Le Magasin des enfants*, in which the canonized form of “Beauty and the Beast” first appeared. She “pioneered the use of the fairytale form to mould the young in this way. Her vision of female love and sympathy redeeming the brute in man has made ‘Beauty and the Beast’ one of the best-loved fairy tales in the world, and it has not stopped inspiring dreams of experiencing love’s power in little girls—and little boys” (297).

Warner observes the shift toward acceptance, emulation, and even fetishization of the wild animal in present culture, as reflected by modern and subversive forms of the tale, including its appearances in film and other media.

Tapping the power of the animal no longer seems charged with danger, let alone evil, but rather a necessary part of healing. Art of different media widely accepts the fall of man, from namer and master of animals to a mere hopeful candidate for inclusion as one of their number...The [current] attraction of the wild, and of the wild brother...cannot be overestimated (307).

Warner comments on Cocteau’s 1946 film, which casts Beauty in the role of having to awake to the inherent goodness of the Beast, as opposed to the Beast needing to transform. She describes how Carter turns beast-bridegroom formulations inside out in *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Bloody Chamber*, so that the beast no longer stands clearly outside of beauty. “The journey the story itself has taken ultimately means that

the Beast no longer needs to be disenchanting. Rather, Beauty has to learn to love the beast in him, in order to know the beast in herself” (312).



Beauty and the Beast, © The Walt Disney Company. 1991.

Warner also addresses the immensely popular Disney version, which continues to dominate the social imagination around beast-bridegroom subjects. It offers “a heroine of spirit who finds romance on her own terms” exemplary of “Hollywood’s cunning domestication of feminism itself” (313). Despite Belle’s spunk and air of internal emancipation, the Beast “steals the show”; we are enchanted by his magnificent size and strength, his brutish, animalistic urges, and his surprise displays of gentleness and even love. Warner asserts that Disney has done such a wonderful job of animating and equipping their Beast to seduce audiences that most viewers experience some level of disappointment when he transforms into a comparatively scrawny, “candy-colored prince.” “[T]he beastly or less than human becomes an

index of alienation, and often of one's own otherness; the story relates the possibility of acceptance, an end to the ache of longing to belong" (416).

Warner argues that "Donkeyskin" is a significant representative of the fairy-tale genre in part due to its near disappearance and partially successful censoring by editors and collectors since the eighteenth century. It continues to be excluded from the classical canon of Western folk and fairy tale literature, despite a long history of immense popularity and social relevance. Until the nineteenth century, it was one of the most prolifically re-told tales, from its roots in the Biblical "Seduction of Lot", to the late-antique romance of *Appolonius of Tyre*, to the oral and written folktales of the Middle Ages, to Shakespeare's Oedipus story, to Straparolla's and Basile's versions in the sixteenth century, to seventeenth-century French salons and Perrault's pioneering *Peau d'Ane*, to the Grimms' decisively censored take. It has been expressly omitted by collectors and publishers over the last few centuries such that its name no longer echoes in the halls of the canon alongside those of "Cinderella" (of which it is a variant) and "Beauty and the Beast" (to which it also bears strong affinities). Warner explores reasons for the quiet, gradual banishment of "Donkeyskin" from the canon, as well as the implications of the tale's evolution over time. Her inquiry reveals the significance of the tale to understanding social history, particularly that of the hidden, domestic sphere, the homes, rich or poor, dominated by unchallenged patriarchal rule, and the all-too-common plight of the daughters—"the runaway girls" (319).

“Donkeyskin” and other “She-bear” variations function to hold up a crucial social norm that proscribes against incest, particularly between a father and his daughter, the combination considered most vulnerable to consummation given the domestic organization of patriarchal societies. “The exemplary parable of Lot and his daughters, as they survive while foreigners are blasted, as they mate against inclination for the good of the family, begins to preach an entirely different lesson: against incest. Fairy tales, adapting different materials which also tell of transgressive family unions, encode a story of cultural and social change in this respect as well as contributing profoundly to its establishment as the norm” (334). The prevalence of plots depicting paternal incest suggests, uncomfortably, “that desire between father and daughter is stirred as it were by nature if the ban on incest is lifted or somehow effaced, intentionally or not” (333). Admission of this possibility—and indeed, its basis in historical social realities—through the act of teaching against it was unbearable to the (largely male) collectors and publishers responsible for molding and disseminating the canon, particularly as the genre began to be aimed more at child audiences in the eighteenth century.

The overwhelming offensiveness of depicting the disturbing historical reality of paternal sexual abuse through fairy tale has caused the “comparative disappearance or partially successful repression of the ‘Donkeyskin’ cycle from our culture.” The Grimms, for example, omitted the father’s incestuous motivations in a “Donkeyskin” variation, “The Maiden Without Hands”, because “they simply could not bear it; they were too squeamish for the motive, though not for the mutilating itself” (348). They

could not bear it because they knew the figure of an incestuous father coincided with a social possibility and reflected actual lived experiences in contemporary practice, which crossed the line into intolerable personal discomfort for the brothers.

When interest in psychological realism is at work in the mind of the receiver of traditional folklore, the proposed marriage of a father to his daughter becomes too hard to accept. But it is only too hard to accept precisely because it belongs to a different order of reality/fantasy from the donkeyskin disguise or the gold excrement or the other magical motifs: because it is not impossible, because it could actually happen, and is known to have done so. It is when fairy tales coincide with experience that they begin to suffer from censoring, rather than the other way around. They are not altered—or even dropped—by editors and collectors to shear them of implausibilities and foolish notions, but this pretext is invoked to justify changes which constitute responses to profound, known threats. Dymrna's situation, Peau D'Ane's predicament are at one and the same time ridiculous, unsuitable extremes of invention which will give children ideas, and at the same time veracious and adult, and children are no longer to be exposed to such knowledge. (349)

This fascinatingly disruptive collision of the possible and the impossible plays out in the “Donkeyskin” stories as well as the stories surrounding the tales’ systematic repression.

Until storytellers of the Middle Ages and seventeenth-century *ruelles* took hold, stories of incest between fathers and daughters tended to blame the daughter for her seductive qualities and/or actions. Warner views this pattern as rooted in the Biblical story of Lot, who is seduced by his daughters in order to ensure the continuation of their father's genetic material, and in a larger sense, the human race, as Sodom goes down in flames—doomed to obliteration by God, ironically, due to the city's infestation with immorality, especially sexual. “Donkeyskin” represents an important movement toward sympathy with the daughters’ position as a victim in

what were likely common familial situations, and advocacy for her active rebellion against patriarchal injustices, even within the home.

[T]he emphasis in incest tales shifts from the daughter's responsibility to the father's, the point of view revolves to consider her actions, her motives and her rights in a most interesting proto-feminist way. Genesis 19 portrays the daughters of Lot doing their duty by patrilineage and sustaining their father's line by bearing his children; medieval and later incest stories by contrast strike a new note. They uphold the daughter, by dramatizing, often violently, her refusal... These stories mark awareness that a young woman may step out from paternal control and be praised for it. Such texts become important documents of social history, incorporating prevailing prejudice and morality and opening fundamental questions about them. (334)

Perrault's "*Peau d'Ane*" is the best-known version of "Donkeyskin", though it remains the least reproduced of his much-reproduced body of work. He first published the story in verse form in 1694, and later included it in his famous *Contes*, a move generally considered to imply that a story about father-daughter incest should be included in the canon. His choice to introduce a magic donkey whose excrement provides the gold that funds the kingdom signals a tone of mockery of the all-powerful patriarch and his 'unlawful love' for his daughter. There are significant parallel motifs in common with the "Cinderella" narrative, including the absent mother; the beautiful, abused daughter; the aid of a fairy godmother in the daughter's escape from a dangerous home; and the employment of a disguise, which eventually functions to place her in Prince Charming's line of sight. However there are several important differences, motifs that speak volumes about social history and were undoubtedly the cause of the story's systematic exclusion from the canon.

Perrault “marks the daughter with her father’s sin: the sign of the donkey conveys his lust. She becomes a beast, after her father has behaved like one” (325). Her disguise “reproduces the traditional iconography of the very passion she is fleeing”; she assumes an animal shape historically associated with the Devil (a donkey, a cat, or a bear, depending on the story’s variation). In contrast to Cinderella’s animal helpers, *Donkeyskin*’s assistance from the world of animals occurs at the level of her own skin; she is transformed into a social outcast. In order to protect herself, “the wronged daughter takes creaturely shape and keeps company with creatures”, an act which “simultaneously seals her connection with nature and splits her off from the society in which such an offence as marriage with her father was proposed and urged” (354-5). However Warner asserts that this motif does not communicate a moral of ascetic rejection of sexuality; rather the daughter’s willful embodiment of her repugnant, beastly disguise to escape from violation by her own father reflects the realization of her own sexual development, the potential scenarios society will demand of her in response to it, and her own ability to claim agency in what is to come.

The action in such fairy tales looks forward to the young woman’s future; the father’s unlawful demand opens the daughter’s eyes to the choice ahead, now that she is no longer a child but a nubile woman. The particular animal forms or degradation she accepts, the insults she bears, as she is reviled in her sluttish condition as stinking and filthy, anticipate the pollution of virginity’s loss. The stories express the difficulties experienced by young women entering a sexual life in a social context where the pattern of sinful woman is Eve, who had carnal knowledge and was fatal to humanity, and the pattern of goodness is Mary, the Virgin. (355)



Harry Clarke, *Donkey Skin*, 1922.

Perrault recognized the injustices women faced within family units, whether they were born into them or married into them against their will. “Donkeyskin” is the first fairy tale he chose to publish. In so doing, he boldly announced the need for a modern reevaluation of gender dynamics and women’s rights, and his willingness to battle others in the name of this cause. “The Frenchman’s romantic assertion of the goodness of choice and love in marriage conforms to the principles the women in his literary circle were struggling to establish” (345).

In his original verse form of the story, Perrault concludes with the following lines (as translated by Warner): “The tale of Donkeyskin is hard to believe, but as long as there are children, mothers and grandmothers in the world the memory of it

will not die”. In contrast to his generally blithe, flippant air of delivery, Perrault seems to make an uncharacteristically straight-faced, incisive comment signaling a concrete history with actual living referents, in order to draw attention to the unsavory present. “‘Grandmothers, mothers and children’ could accept an incestuous father placed centre stage in full view, till the eighteenth century. But then he begins to stir anxiety in the disseminators of fairy tales, and this anxiety leads to tinkering, and eventually [*sic*], to evasions and suppression” (347). Perrault’s words imply that “there is something of absorbing consequence to tell” (346), that this is no fanciful tale of wonders unseen.

Warner meditates on “The Little Mermaid” as a representation of the long and varied history of social perceptions of the siren figure in Western literature, and her relationship to social norms for female speech and behavior. Echoing Sybil and Venus in the mountains, the siren’s legendary song is said to entrance sailors into the sea. However, the magic of the siren’s song was originally associated with much more than sexual enchantment; it promised all manners of knowledge about the world and the future otherwise inaccessible to humans, rendering it infinitely seductive to the ears. “The content of the song is knowledge, the threefold wisdom possessed by beings who are not subject to time: knowledge of the past, of the present, of the future” (399). However Cicero’s efforts to transmit the long-extant mythology of sirens as omniscient oracle figures could not compete with the rise of Christian folklore, in which they are depicted as *femmes fatales*. “In [medieval] Christian

interpretations, the encounter [between Odysseus' boat and sirens] became an allegory of the soul's struggle with vice—a *Psychomachia*” (402).

Connections are easily made to Eve's facilitation of the fall of man by spreading the forbidden fruit of knowledge to Adam, tempting him with words to fulfill his appetite.

The anxiety about word-music and its lure—the fear of seductive speech—changes character and temper down the centuries, but the sirens' reputation does not improve. Their connection with carnal danger, with moral breakdown, with potent fictions, with bewitchment, deepens, and, under the influence of the rich Northern mythology about undines and selkies, mermaids and sea-nymphs, they shed their relation to wisdom and retained only their ones with sex and death—though knowledge of these is a form of wisdom. (402)

An easy solution to the dangerous powers of the female voice, which necessarily include expression of sovereignty from patriarchal control along with the expression of sexuality, is to silence her. Andersen's tale is emblematic of traditional tendencies toward gendered speech patterns in fairy tales, specifically the noticeable trend of glorifying female silence as an esteemed virtue demonstrating humility, strength, and selflessness in service of some greater good. In contrast, villainous women in fairy tales tend to have a lot to say, and say it loudly. “The equation of silence with virtue, of forbearance with femininity, does not only hold up an entrancing ideal of loving self-abnegation, harmony and wisdom; as transmitted in fairy tales told to children, the ideal also meets particular socio-cultural requirements of the nineteenth-century... which persist as desiderata” (394).

Warner brings up an important alternate or simultaneous reading of female silence in fairy tales as a translation of mutiny. She cites the Little Mermaid's sisterhood with the virtuously mute, honest daughter in "Love Like Salt;" Cordelia in *King Lear*, who refuses to falsify her love for her father by speaking it on command; and the sister who sacrifices her voice and her body for her twelve brothers in the Grimms' *Die zwölf Brüder*. Andersen's 1836-7 rendering of "The Little Mermaid" in fact pulls from varied strands of historical myths as well as folk and fairy tales about siren figures, both Eastern and Western, and its status in the classical fairy tale canon resonates with the paradox of women speaking about silence through stories.

It is a paradox frequently encountered in any account of women's education that the very women who pass on the legacy are transgressing against the burden of its lessons as they do so; that they are flouting, in the act of speaking and teaching, the strictures against female authority they impart: women narrators, extolling the magic silence of the heroic sister...are speaking themselves, breaking the silence, telling a story. (394)

Rebellion can be communicated silently, in writing, or in some form of strike. Silence can even be seen as an assertion of determination to survive against the odds, or rather in harmony with them. The tradition of female gossip also navigates these waters: the staking out of selective venues for free reign of their voices restricts certain knowledge to the feminine realm, often through the passing on of stories, and memories, sometimes about female oppression and ways to fight back.

"The Little Mermaid" also resonates with histories of female mutilation "by frustrated and desiring patriarchs" (405). Andersen teaches a graphic, punitive lesson against the discovery and use of sexual knowledge. Amazingly, the brutal physical

violence he unleashes upon the mermaid has not deterred the story from achieving and maintaining enormous popularity.

Sister to Philomel, and to Lavinia from *Titus Andronicus*, and to other raped and mutilated figures of myth and tragedy, the silenced mermaid of Hans Andersen instantly became an approved and much-loved nursery character. In the Andersen version, her transformation into a human brings her explicit pain: the witch tells her: “your tail will part and shrink into what humans call nice legs but it will hurt just as if a sharp sword were passing through you...every step you take will be like treading on a knife sharp enough to cause your blood to flow.” (398)



J. Leech, *The Little Mermaid*, 1846.

As the master of his heroine's fate, Andersen is the actual mutilator; however he replaces himself with an evil *matriarch*, the Sea Witch, absolving the male of his involvement—except, of course, for the fact that the Little Mermaid agrees to the loss of her tongue and the splitting open of her tail out of love for a prince who betrays and rejects her, and she ultimately takes her own life in order to avoid having to take his. The male is not absolved of responsibility here, as Andersen would seem to have it, at least not in Warner's reading of the tale.

Andersen's story brings quick tears, but not in any pleasurable way, as it seems to gloat on the morbid outcome. The story's chilling message is that cutting out your tongue is still not enough. To be saved, more is required: self-obliteration, dissolution. Unlike Philomel, who metamorphoses into a nightingale, so that out of dumbness may come forth strength and sweetness, the Little Mermaid sacrifices her song to no avail—except for the story which keeps faith in her memory. Her siren song condenses all inherited belief in women's sexual powers; the Little Mermaid surrenders them when she becomes bifurcated and bleeds, as if, once the innocence of childhood has passed, that very sexuality turns against its possessor and makes the young woman herself a victim...the only redemption through self-sacrifice. (398-9)

Despite the terrors of Andersen's vision of the implications of female sexual maturity, Warner underlines the potential social benefits enabled by the survival of the story itself, which, like other tales of the canon, preserves the memory of lived experiences and adds to the chronicle of changing social perceptions of women. In the course of its many retellings over the years, storytellers often exact revenge on behalf of their silenced heroine, or offer a radically or alternatively empowered siren figure (Jane Campion's *The Piano*), subvert traditional gender dynamics and reverse the suffering parties (Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*), and/or reward the mermaid with only a tiny bit of pain and a Disney happy ending. The latter, as usual, paradoxically runs the

risk of cutting out the heroine's tongue again, by erasing the history of her prolonged and profound suffering.

In order to ensure the sting of his warning against seeking out carnal knowledge, and especially against the dangers of opening oneself to—or as a woman, utilizing—feminine powers of seduction, Andersen exacts a morbid reversal of the Homeric fantasy of sirens bringing death by killing the Little Mermaid in the end, allowing the fair-weather prince to live: “to defeat death by sexual surrender, [Andersen] himself deals death to the principle of desire. The marvelous kindles appetites—to know, to live, to experience—but that very principle of wonder, which drives the story, is crushed by its outcome” (402-3). Andersen sets it up as a suicide, glorifying the heroine's complete self-effacement from the story in service of pious self-cleansing and salvation.

Disney replaces the bloodied, betrayed, and suicidal Little Mermaid offered by Andersen, who receives nothing for her troubles except a metamorphosis into air, with the bright, spunky, beautiful, and successful Ariel, who flouts her father's patriarchal commands in favor of following her heart, singing her own version of Madonna's “Pappa Don't Preach” (404). “The writer-directors John Musker and Ron Clements adapted the story to suit present sensibilities, giving the story a last-minute happy ending, above all. The issue of female desire dominates the film, and may account for its tremendous popularity among little girls: the verb ‘want’ falls from the lips of Ariel...more often than any other—until her tongue is cut out” (403). This

version is designed to please its 1989 audience with marvelous images of a heroine free to metamorphose into the shape of her own desire, in order to achieve knowledge, and with it, happiness and love through choice in marriage.

Yet even according to Disney, “the seductiveness of women’s tongues still seems a paramount issue in the exercise of their sexuality; directing its force, containing its magic, is still very much to the point. Female eloquence, the siren’s song, is not presented as fatal any longer, unless it rises in the wrong place and is aimed at the wrong target” (404). This caveat is embodied by the evil Sea Witch, who appropriates Ariel’s magical voice in an attempt to supplant the mermaid’s place in the prince’s heart. The typical fairy-tale dynamic of intergeneration strife among women for male favor and survival in a patriarchal system is evoked again; viewers are given the option to root for and identify with either a loud, powerful, ugly, hyper-sexualized, bad witch, or the quiet, powerless, beautiful, virginal, good mermaid. The feminine voice is still infused with mysterious power, but a more positive spin is conferred upon its role as a magical tool for women’s self-discovery and expression, sexual and otherwise, and as a weapon potent enough to free them from patriarchal rule, and enable them to secure the object of their desire, ensure their own survival, and exact revenge.

The “Bluebeard” cycle presents a particularly knotted and thorny case among the tales of the classical canon. On the one hand, says Warner, it

...can hardly be said to be a fairy tale: the only magic features the fatal key, which Perrault characterizes as *Fée*, with a capital letter, using the word as an adjective, (enchanted or fey), for the only time in his work.

The key, with its smear of blood which will not wipe off, betrays the errant wife to the ogre on his return: a symbol of her pollution, connected to loss of childhood innocence and of virginity, of irrepressible sexuality. (269)

One of the main characteristics separating it from the other tales in the canon, severing it from use in the realm of child-rearing, is its possession of “a characteristic with particular affinity to the present day: seriality. Whereas the violence in the heroines’ lives [of other tales] is considered suitable for children, the ogre has metamorphosed in popular culture for adults, to the mass murderer, the kidnaper, the serial killer: a collector” (269). The journey of the “Bluebeard” cycle demonstrates the deeply sexist prejudices underlying historical determinations of what is selected for the canon at particular times, and what is elided. Certain material, as we have seen, either disappears or is relegated to the world of adult-only fantasy, so as not to disrupt dominant pedagogical trends. “Bluebeard” anticipates the popular culture of slasher and serial killer stories, and the moral ambiguity written into those narratives as well as audiences’ apparent pleasure in their consumption: “the fairy tale written by Perrault in 1697 thrills like a Hitchcock film before its time, it foreshadows thriving twentieth-century fantasies about serial killers and Jack the Rippers. Only it has a happy ending” (241).

“Bluebeard” is exemplary of the fairy tale’s ability to be molded and remolded to fit whatever prejudice or agenda the teller has in mind. Despite his flippant tone and ambiguously snide closing remarks, Perrault intended his “Bluebeard” story to advocate on behalf of the oppressed heroine, to open up questions about male authority over women, and to legitimize female curiosity and desires for knowledge.

Perrault, in this story, as in the first tales he published—‘Griselda’ and ‘Donkeyskin’—dramatizes the abuse of male privilege and plucks his heroine from disaster and injustice in the end. ‘Bluebeard’ is a story, like ‘Cinderella’, in which the mighty are cast down. The overbearing husband, like the wicked stepmother and ugly sisters in ‘Cinderella’ and the incestuous father in ‘Donkeyskin’, is thwarted, to the joy and edification of all. (244)

“Bluebeard” has long been associated with the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, but these parallels have been drawn, and used to retell the story, to very different ends:

[Perrault’s] ‘Bluebeard’ is a version of the Fall in which Eve is allowed to get away with it, in which no one for once heaps the blame on Pandora ... Bluebeard acts like God the Father, prohibiting knowledge—the forbidden chamber is the tree of knowledge of good and evil—and Fatima is Eve, the woman who disobeys and, through curiosity, endangers her life. (244)

In this sense, Perrault’s tale functions as a revolutionary response to fundamental Christian doctrine which blames women for humanity’s fall from God’s grace and eternal damnation to the toils of earthly existence. It proclaims Eve’s innocence; it denounces punitive violence against her; it declares that seeking after knowledge is a good thing—even if one is a woman; and it includes men in the image of humanity’s search for enlightenment, rather than relying on a convenient female scapegoat. The potential implications of this prescription for the fate of social and cultural history are enormously subversive—which is why “Bluebeard” had to be transformed by many writers into a Christian moralizing narrative, to keep Eve firmly in her place of shame and eternal submission.

“After Perrault, the story often comes with a subtitle, ‘The Effect of Female Curiosity’,—or, in case we should miss the point—‘the Fatal Effects of Curiosity’, to bring it in line with cautionary tales about women’s innate wickedness: with Pandora who opened the forbidden casket as well as Eve who ate of the forbidden fruit” (244). Warner cites the Grimms as participants in this movement to ensure that “Bluebeard” would be canonized properly by rewriting it to privilege the authority of the murderous patriarch. “In many of the later retellings...the blue chamber is presented as the fitting penalty for his wives’ previous wickedness in defying a husband’s commands....It is often difficult to tell which side the authors are on, for an air of glee hangs around the telling” (246-7).

The many variations of “Bluebeard” function as explorations of potential consequences of curiosity, especially female sexual curiosity. Versions after Perrault’s often equate Fatima’s disobedience with her inevitable deflowering by the monstrous male, lending the narrative a terrifying tone in relation to its motifs of curiosity and sex. The “forbidden fruit” in this case is a forbidden key to a forbidden room. The fatal key functions as a phallic symbol, and the disobedient heroine as the inevitable activator of its aggressive sexual (and murderous) potential; this notion is supported by a bevy of accompanying illustrations, in which “the key looms very large indeed, a gigantic forbidden fruit, so engorged and positioned that the allusion can hardly be missed” (244). Fatima’s inability to cleanse the blood from the key after her use of it warns of the inevitable horrors accompanying the loss of virginity.

It is also a refracted image of Adam and Eve's attempt to hide from God after their trespass against his command.

A profoundly confusing element of the tale is Bluebeard's easy association with both God and the Devil, simultaneously "the patriarch whose orders must be obeyed on the one hand, and on the other the serpent who seduces by exciting curiosity and desire and so brings death" (246). Warner accounts for this contradictory dualism by referring to the historically popular Christian principle that "Satan is the true ape of God"; the Devil's actions often perfectly mirror God's by separating sinners from saints through temptation, reward, and punishment.

The motif of the beard associates Bluebeard with both, and recalls pagan stories and myths as well, particularly those involving the god Pan and associated figures embodying lust and other 'animal desires' of the flesh. The blueness of the beard of the "demon lover" is another interesting aspect, with potential connections to a wide array of associations. "Bluebeard is represented as a man against nature, either by dyeing his hair like a luxurious Oriental, or by producing such a monstrous growth without resorting to artifice" (242-3). He is by necessity an outsider, a social outcast chosen in an arranged marriage for Fatima solely due to his financial assets—not his social standing, much less his social graces. His very blueness seems to straddle affiliation with God and the Devil; this blueness of "ambiguous depth, of the heavens and of the abyss at once, encodes the frightening character of Bluebeard, his house and his deeds, as surely as gold and white clothes the angels... The fairy tale was first

known in France as a *conte bleu*...It is a polar tint: of origin and end, and in consequence adumbrates mortality, too” (243).

Warner compares the misogynist tales that followed Perrault’s proto-feminist original to other versions such as Calvino’s ‘Silver Nose’, which “does not resemble in tone and message the horrid sermons which Perrault’s version spawned, tut-tutting about female curiosity and unwifely behavior. It represents, within the Bluebeard cycle, an alternative triumphant, gleeful approach, mostly vanished from nursery shelves...in which quickwitted female doubledealing overcomes the tyrant” (257). By contrast, in Perrault’s version and its take-offs, the heroine is saved by the call to her brothers, her appeal to her blood-related patriarchal figures for help. Like many other tales of the canon, “Bluebeard” functions as a fluid platform for discussion about women’s ability to be sovereign, to save themselves as opposed to relying on a man to come to the rescue.

“The excessive, heightened, sadistic side of fairy tales has made them even more compelling in the last decades of the century, especially among adults who value more highly than ever the imagined pristine clarity and depths of childlike fantasy” (270). Warner laments the fact that modern tastes in storytelling tend toward the horrifying, citing contemporary society’s evident addiction to sources of narrative diversion such as serial killer and horror films. Referencing the dark illustrations of Cindy Sherman that accompany a recent production of the Grimms’ nasty version of “Bluebeard” (“Fitcher’s Bird”), Warner observes that “the story, in this version,

misses altogether the redemptive mischief of L'Héritier's 'Finessa' or the comic high spirits of Calvino's 'Silver Nose'. Sherman's love affair with horror captures one interpretation of narrative power in this fin de siècle: hair-raising, rather than laughter, has become the motive of the teller, and damage the key motif of the tale—and anyone who escapes damage is lucky" (271). Warner hopes that fairy-tale representations engaged in provoking joy and delight in the marvelous will not give way completely to those designed for triggering horror-driven adrenaline kicks, because the latter trend has a tendency to drown out the sovereign worldly-wise voices with dangerously unintelligible bouts of screaming.

IV

Relativity and Humanism Beyond the Academy: Reading Warner Against Zipes' Grain

In order to begin to grasp significant theoretical polarities within contemporary fairy-tale scholarship, it is useful to broach a comparison of Zipes' and Warner's approaches to studying and meditating on (respectively) the genre's origin, social function, and presence in the media. The two make an interesting pair for several reasons, not the least of which being that Zipes' views are widely accepted and his prolific scholarship has become internationally canonized, while Warner's writings on the subject remain relatively on the fringe, appreciated by a, quantitatively speaking, comparatively modest audience. It is worthwhile to pause for a moment to contemplate why this representative disparity might exist, and what social implications such gaps in readership may have. These questions will be revisited later.

The differing outcomes of Zipes' and Warner's analyses of tales they both consider most representative of the canon reveal key underlying differences in their respective theoretical approaches and principles. For the purpose of the present analysis, I have limited the scope of this review to the most significant areas of harmony and discord evident in Zipes' and Warner's assertions regarding the fairy tale's origin, social function, and modern media presence, as illuminated by their treatments of "Cinderella", "The Little Mermaid", and "Beauty and the Beast",

respectively. A truly thorough comparison of the authors' approaches would require a much longer work than the present one, which aims only to provide an introduction.

The similarities and disparities between Zipes' and Warner's perspectives on the fairy tale's origin are apparent in their approaches to the "Cinderella" cycle. Zipes frames the origin of the fairy tale in social Darwinist terms, characteristically employing established academic jargon. His treatment of "Cinderella" exemplifies the central functions and ideological implications of the stylistic and linguistic decisions he makes throughout his writings. Though he asserts repeatedly the impossibility of accurately tracing the 'true' origins of the genre, he nevertheless persists in attempting to achieve the impossible task of providing a comprehensive genealogical narrative of the birth and growth of the fairy tale generating a formidable *oeuvre* consisting of sixty-plus volumes. According to Zipes the primary impregnating factor leading to the birth of the fairy tale is the pressing human needs inspired by basic biological drives, especially those related to competition and survival and the urge to propagate one's genetic material. Human development of speech and the subsequent tapping into the capacity of telling, and eventually writing, stories met the human need to transmit specific "programs of action" to future generations in order to ensure survival of the species.

Zipes names "Cinderella" as the most mimetically successful of the canonical tales due to its consistent embodiment of a theme that underlies the relevance of the genre "from the very beginning" (112 *Stick*). The theme arises from the intra-familial

struggle for survival and procreative success. These drives resulted in historical patterns of child abuse, abandonment, even infanticide. The construction of fairy tales is fueled by our natural instinct to pass on to future generations instructions for winning favor and gaining dominance, particularly aimed at our own biological offspring. It also corresponds to the human need for a utopian vision of a better world, in order to encourage persistence despite the many difficulties of real life. Zipes treats “Cinderella” as an especially potent representative of these elements of the genre’s genesis and its continuing dissemination and mutation. Patterns set by classical versions of the story depicts the deadly competition that often occurs within families, especially among siblings and women of different generations—family members traditionally dependent upon the favor of the patriarch. “Cinderella” specifically represents the critical heightening of competitiveness in the home environment caused by the unwelcome addition of non-biological family members, particularly stepmothers and stepchildren. Cinderella’s character also sets standards of ideal feminine beauty, both internal and external, a prioritized practice intrinsic to the development and spread of fairy tales as didactic tools. These standards related to Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest ideology represent a further dimension of intergenerational female competition for valued status within patriarchal societies, and reflect a plight that Zipes asserts is universally suffered by women. The imperative to meet societal standards of beauty and docility is thus a key instigator for the initial conception of fairy tales.

Zipes asserts that the contagiousness of the “Cinderella” meme in the fairy-tale genre reflects correspondence to persistent threats to personal and familial stability and subsistence, especially within mixed families. It addresses ageless social problems familiar to all societies and moments in history: the natural tendency of parents to show preferential love and support to their biological children, and subsequent patterns of intergenerational and/or biologically heterogeneous strife among siblings and women for patriarchal favor. Zipes’ analysis of “Cinderella” demonstrates the fundamental grounding in his approach, social Darwinism, which he considers the central agent of cause and effect in the story of the fairy tale’s origins and development—though an accurate, provable genealogical narrative of the genre (that parallels the kind of precision provided by present scientific knowledge enabled by evolutionary theories)—ultimately proves impossible. Zipes’ efforts are thwarted by the frustratingly uncrackable mystery of this particular species.

Warner’s discussion of “the Cinderella cycle” likewise supports her theoretical stance concerning the origins of the fairy tale. Her position shares some ground with Zipes’; both, for example, privilege “Cinderella” as exemplary due to its evocation of an ageless family drama, one which diminishes feelings of safety in women and children in the domestic sphere. However Warner’s focus is more keenly directed in this regard; she highlights the specific presence in “Cinderella”—and its myriad progenitors and offspring—of the figure of “the absent mother”. The thousand-year-old “Cinderella” cycle rotates in concentric circles around this pivotal theme. In the classical “Cinderella” tale, the absence of the “good” mother typically

results in her replacement by an evil stepmother, at whose hands non-biological children have often historically suffered. It usually results in her simultaneous replacement by a fairy godmother figure and/or magical animal helpers who coexist with the wicked stepmother in order to dramatize a battle for power between women, traditionally ending in the triumph of ‘good over evil’ in favor of the innocent parlor-maid-daughter-cum-princess.

This universally familiar pattern that Warner identifies reveals her ideas about reasons for the fairy tale’s creation: firstly, women’s desperate and spirited resourcefulness, beginning in private circles of gossip, leading to the innovation of a socially-accepted medium through which to speak out publically against the historical degradation and brutal rituals of silencing women into unquestioned submission to patriarchal powers dominating domestic, socio-political, and religious spheres, as well as protesting against historical patterns of intergenerational “women against women” within the home. Secondly, fairy tales in her view originate in the human drive to conceive of alternate realities in which these injustices are no longer tolerated by the disenfranchised, in which gender and social equality reign, in which hope in fairy-tale endings do not always go unrealized. This resonates with Zipes’ postulations concerning the human need for utopian visions.

Warner emphasizes the fact that Cinderella represents the silenced heroine who somehow finds it within herself to protest against her oppressors and assert her sovereignty, assisted of course by the replaced/reincarnated good mother, a fantastic

figure whose presence in fairy tales affords storytellers and audiences a degree of hope necessary to their survival and persistence in the process of rebellion, of speaking out against silence in order to break its terrible spell.

Zipes and Warner further demonstrate their ideas about the primary social functions of fairy tales in their analyses of “The Little Mermaid”. Zipes consistently focuses on the social-Darwinist qualities of the genre, identifying it as an evolving creature whose forms and levels of influence fluctuate, and whose memetic power is widely accessible for use in all kinds of media, serving equally well as a socializing platform for conservative and progressive agendas. His account of the canonized form of “The Little Mermaid” meme, initiated by Hans Christian Andersen, supports the assertion that fairy tales function as potent moralizing tools for civilization purposes—and that those tales which uphold conservative agendas in support of patriarchy and capitalism tend to “stick” in our minds and in the canon more often than those which do not. His discussion of “The Little Mermaid” accumulates evidence supporting the notion that fairy tales are uniquely powerful transmitters of specific cultural knowledge and beliefs required for survival, because they have the mysterious ability of becoming “like second nature to us”.

In Zipes’ account, “The Little Mermaid” presents an exemplary instance of the fairy tale’s social function as a critical pedagogical tool for advocating the reining in of natural (base) desires—another aspect of the genre designed to maintain the status quo, supposedly for collective happiness. Andersen’s heroine is a seductive

siren with too many desires and questions, a woman who must be silenced and mutilated due to her sexual interests and her threat to the survival, interests, and Christian salvation of the male patriarch. Zipes asserts that this depiction exhibits the traditional underlying priority assigned to fairy tales that teach female submission and male domination. It also instructs its audience to follow ascetic Christian morals and practices; according to Zipes the classical version of the tale, whose general pattern remains canonized, is a misogynist narrative thinly disguised within a Christian miracle narrative, a package that delivers an apparently admirable depiction of thwarted female seduction through silencing, mutilation, torture and glorified self-sacrifice in order to preserve the life and power of the self-serving male 'hero'. The commodification of the female voice and body proffered by both classical and contemporary versions of the tale furthermore upholds Western capitalist principles and motivations for maintaining patriarchal hegemony.

Zipes asserts that another central function of the genre, and of all art forms, is to provide a vessel for human expression of utopian visions and desires. This presents an additional reason why "The Little Mermaid" is so troubling as a narrative. In addition to representing the terrible misuse of the genre's potential to teach social progress, it offers a truly frightening vision of utopia in which social equality does not even exist as a permissible dream.

Warner's analysis of "The Little Mermaid" is demonstrative of her general theory of the fairy tale as a site conducive to experiencing personal and social

“wonder” as well as “remembrance”, and its related function as a medium for unfettered female expression, both about past wrongs and possibilities for future change. Warner emphasizes that even the most brutal canonized depictions of female suffering, such as Andersen’s, preserve lived histories of women and memorialize fluctuating social perceptions of them at various temporal and spatial moments in history. The tales are repositories of socio-cultural information necessary to the possibility of imagining and enacting social change. In this respect, Warner differs somewhat from Zipes; he recognizes fairy tales as historical documents, but he advocates for the most part that traditional versions be buried and replaced by exclusively subversive revisions used to teach social justice. Warner on the other hand sees the value in the coexistence of both forms, provided that traditional versions are read and taught critically, especially to children, whose consumption and understanding of pedagogical stories such as “The Little Mermaid” directly affect their perceptions of what is socially accepted in the treatment of women and other historically oppressed members of society. The canonized classical version of the tale has historically served to reinforce ideas about female inferiority, largely through the evocation of parallels to the Biblical narrative blaming Eve for the downfall of man through her mysterious seductive powers, powers often expressed through something as seemingly harmless as speech. Male fear of the potency of feminine speech, gossip, and songs as communicated by the obliterated siren in “The Little Mermaid” resonates especially with the mythical sirens of Homer, who lured sailors to their deaths through enchanting songs. These songs were depicted in ancient myths as

containing promises of access to exclusive knowledge beyond the reach of other mortal beings, which proved irresistibly seductive to all men—more compelling even than the physical beauty of the sirens. Warner also locates the roots of enforced female silencing in the myths of Sibyl and of Venus, infamous enchantresses renowned for tempting errant travelers into their deadly mountain caves using their powers of speech.

Warner contends that “The Little Mermaid” has traditionally provided proscriptions against female equality, freedom of speech, sexual and intellectual curiosity, and most of all, against any privileging women’s needs and desires over those of their male counterparts, whether biological kin or potential love-objects. Andersen paints a picture that glorifies female physical and emotional suffering in silence as a model of virtue to be followed and enforced by the tale’s audience. Adherence to the misogynist principles proposed by the tale implies acceptance of the Christian God’s commands, obedience required to avoid eternal damnation and obtain access to salvation.

Warner observes that fairy tales provide space for discussing and imagining changes to social realities through the unlikely medium of a supposedly childish genre grounded in fantasy, qualities that have caused fairy tales to not be taken very seriously. But this trivializing of the genre has enabled subversive thinkers who use it to get away with communicating imaginative alternate realities, inspiring both delight in magical marvels as well as provoking thought and even action toward realizing

some of the desired changes. Tales involving metamorphosis, such as the Little Mermaid's efforts to become human, often provide hope for the disenfranchised to someday rise above prejudice and be recognized as equal members of society, free to speak truth to power, and perhaps be heard. The fairy tale performs a critical social function as a pedagogical tool for passing on important knowledge 'learned the hard way' by older generations to younger ones so that they might find ways to spare themselves painful repetitions of the past.

According to Warner, Andersen's classical tale and its relatives, even in their evident attempts to kill curiosity and wonder and to reinforce the status quo of Christian patriarchal rule, have ironically stimulated the imagination and inspired rebellion. Revisionary retellings of tales such as "The Little Mermaid" have spread these inspired effects, during hearthside gatherings; in feminine spheres of labor and gossip; in published volumes usually penned by men speaking through female voices to create the marketable illusion of "home-spun wisdom"; and now, in modern versions that have reached worldwide audiences of every age through the advanced technologies of mass media.

Zipes and Warner present strong opinions regarding the modern media presence of fairy tales; their readings of "Beauty and the Beast" provide ample ground for engaging comparisons. Zipes' vehement criticisms regarding the function of fairy tales in the media primarily address the prodigious body of persistently popular Disney productions and related commercial swag. His description of

Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* sharply attacks the studio for shirking the sacred responsibilities of the storyteller to pass on the important cultural knowledge contained in fairy tales, and for ignoring the great potential and ultimate duty of using the power to circulate fairy tales via mass media to inspire critical thought in its diverse international audiences.

Zipes names *Beauty and the Beast* as an exemplary work of “the culture industry”, a socio-economic construct engaged in appropriating cultural capital and turning it into just plain capital. The classical beast-bridegroom fairy tales speak of the historical objectification of women as male property to be utilized to serve male interests, and of the deeply frightening, beastly masters at whose hands new brides often found themselves. The classical tale proposes but also questions definitions of beauty, ugliness, beastliness, and humanity. In typical form, Disney dramatically undermines these serious issues, reducing the conflict to a cockfight between two macho men for the love of Belle, who displays adorable attempts to appear bold and independent-minded—attempts that are not taken very seriously by her male counterparts, who remain in control of her destiny. In keeping with contemporary patterns, Disney seeks to please its audience for a profit by providing a heroine who demonstrates *just the right amount* of feistiness; however the film fails, as Disney films always do, to make a legitimately feminist statement regarding the dark history embodied by the beast-bridegroom tradition from which it has selectively pulled profitable motifs and bits of storylines.

Zipes asserts that on the surface, the tale has been cleansed of its fundamental misogyny and brutality, and sugar-coated in typical Disney fashion, using the marvels of cutting-edge technology to seduce its audiences into commodity fetishism. Belle's goal throughout the film reinforces Western capitalism and "the American Dream" of breaking out of the socio-economic situation of her birth to embrace a more glamorous, exciting life. Meanwhile, she remains the property of one patriarch, passed off to another, perhaps beastlier patriarch, in order to save the former's hide, and ultimately the latter's as well. As usual, says Zipes, Disney sells a false sense of power and individualism fueled by capitalism and commodity fetishism, glorifying the profitable art of mechanical reproduction to the point of manufacturing every imaginable *Beauty and the Beast* swag product, from costumes to catchy audio recordings, for audiences to take home with them so that they will continue to identify with this false sense of power, which is actually working insidiously to rid them of individualist urges. The original sadomasochism underlying the classical portrait of "Beauty" remains intact, and the fairy tale is used only to temper audience appetites for change rather than inspire critical thought or the urge to challenge the status quo, because the status quo is good for business.

In Zipes' estimation, Disney has not shown appropriate respect for the fairy-tale genre; it has created univocal and one-dimensional films out of material that requires complex handling, because its priority is profit, not the art of storytelling nor its potential usefulness for achieving social progress. Zipes is so passionate in his denunciation of Disney's domination of the market that his advocacy for more

experimental and subversive fairy-tale films brushes up against his evidently overwhelming skepticism about the possibility of any studio overcoming the “stranglehold” on the market Disney has held since its first animated goldmine appeared in 1937’s *Snow White*.

Warner is less cynical in her discussion of contemporary media utilizations of fairy tales, and even concedes some degree of legitimacy to Disney’s often ingenious and innovative attempts to entertain, to enthrall, admitting to some personal enjoyment of them. She is nevertheless just as alarmed as Zipes by the ritualized loss of history enacted by conventional media renditions of classical fairy tales, particularly the loss of women’s true stories. She delivers spirited criticism of popular media’s tendency to detach the teller from the story and thus detach its audience from historical awareness, such that the spirit of the hearthside interactions required for activation of the fairy tale’s magical powers is somewhat lost, and crucial (hi)stories forgotten in the process. The passing on from one woman’s mouth to the next of wisdom and hope developed out of miserable lived experiences—such as the horrors of arranged marriages and abusive husbands, fathers, and mothers—cannot effectively happen in such a detached state.

Disney’s commitment to (selling) “family values” is paradoxically the reasoning behind its unwillingness to get to the heart of dark matters that provoked women to speak in the tradition of the Sybil about things most had determined were better left unsaid in order to ‘maintain the peace’. Warner constantly probes the

question of *whose* ‘peace’ that is, whose peace is being worked for within the stories’ narratives as well as in the act of telling them, and whether the utopian ideals of establishing truly collective peace by achieving gender and social equality can be imagined with enough collaborative force to be eventually realized.

Warner’s discussion of Disney’s take on “Beauty and the Beast” reinforces her general emphasis on the importance of “The Tellers” to the genre’s enduringly critical social function. Many elements change depending on the identity of the teller of a beast-bridegroom tale, including the pivotal matters of who must change into what—whether it is the Beauty or the Beast who must metamorphose, as well as what the correct definitions of beauty and beastliness are, and what those lessons imply about contemporary perceptions of women and men.

Warner expresses admiration for the aesthetic and cultural sensibilities of Disney artists, scriptwriters, and songwriters; she does not deny the overwhelmingly charming and even enchanting spell *Beauty and the Beast* casts on its viewers, nor does she entirely condemn the whole enterprise as inherently evil, with no good intentions whatsoever working backstage. She asserts that storytellers must be like stand-up comedians, attuned to the desires and needs of their audiences. So while she holds up to the light the critical losses of history that must be resisted and answered in other, realistically less mainstream media productions, she simultaneously maintains the inherent value of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* as artwork in its own right. It follows the prescription of metamorphosis necessary to the legitimate fairy tale, and it

succeeds in transporting its viewers to a version of utopia that the writers and producers believe most pleasing to contemporary audiences. It may not be ultimately most pleasing to current feminist viewers, but one woman's utopia is another man's hell. What it is missing, of course, is adequate tribute by Disney to its storytelling predecessors.

Warner notes, as Zipes does, that Belle is presented as a heroine for the modern age, who openly says what she wants, is bookish and sways her hips, is dark-haired and spunky and shows courage while facing her fears. Warner offers a more positive feminist reading of Disney's Belle than Zipes, asserting that Belle is infused "with all the willfulness and determination to make her mistress of her own fate. The Disney studio, sensitive to the rise of children's rights, has replaced the father with the daughter as the enterprising authority figure in the family" (*Beast to Blonde* 318). The assertion that Disney has deliberately withdrawn significant power from the traditional patriarch and handed it instead to the heroine, enabling her to choose love in marriage and even discover her sexuality without punishment, presents a formidable contrast to Zipes' absolutist claims that *Beauty and the Beast* supports the very same patriarchal, misogynist portrait of gender relations Disney has always endorsed. Warner points out, importantly, that Belle lacks the Beast's remarkable visual and emotional appeal in Disney's rendition, and as a result the story becomes more about maleness and what it means to be a man in the world, rather than a story about how to be a good feminine feminist in a man's world.

Contemporary storytellers working in the conventional media are, for the most part, failing their ancestors by severing ties between the voices of the old and the young. However they are also doing something new, Warner says, contradicting Zipes' contention that *nothing new* (i.e. progressive) is ever told in Disney stories. She cites Disney and other conventional media outlets' chronicling of modern social trends of fascination with, glorification, and even fetishism of, the wild. Fairy tales have traditionally been used as civilizing tools, as recommendations for how to become a properly socialized human being. The Beast is supposed to be transformed into a proper human, inspired and guided by his love for the pretty, virtuous, well-mannered Beauty given to him as a gift, a way to salvation. However the enormous commercial success of new versions of *Beauty and the Beast*, as well as werewolf, vampire, and zombie films that might be considered *Beauty and the Beast's* 'more adult' relatives, represent an ironic twist on the traditional social function of the fairy tale: it sometimes, now, reminds its audience members of the animal within, and validates forbidden animal urges, as if to say that communing with the animal nature that inevitably contributes to the genetic makeup of human nature is not altogether bad, that beastliness need not perhaps be wholly outgrown with the passing of childhood.

Warner observes that coming to peace with "the wild" within is paradoxically being depicted as a social healing mechanism through a medium traditionally used to destroy it in the name of civilization. The social function of the fairy tale is changing drastically because of its media function, as Zipes also asserts, but to his great

dismay; by contrast, while Warner maintains that we must not forget the past and must continue to teach it to younger generations, we must also not attempt to stifle new voices that reflect what is happening now. Warner's meditations on the genre consistently observe that fairy tales provide important testimonies to shifting social perceptions of women, and that the genre, by nature, metamorphoses over time. No single interest group, not even the most prominent academics engaged in folklore scholarship, can lay claim to rightful control of the outcome.

Despite agreement on many points regarding the fairy tale's past, present, and future, Zipes and Warner clash in some critical ways, revealing, perhaps, some of the reasons for the former's comparative domination of the field of fairy-tale scholarship. Though Zipes is openly critical of contemporary educational systems, he writes from deep within the academy, and speaks its language fluently. His fairly absolutist, easily encapsulated feminist, social-Darwinist, and anti-capitalist principles popular among many liberal academics render his enormous body of work extremely accessible to interested parties, both in content as well as market availability. His is, furthermore, a male voice. Warner on the other hand speaks as perhaps only a woman can. She also keeps academia and its favored jargon at a safe distance from her own work, reserving the room for creative engagement with the many-layered, unstable, and inexact nature of the metamorphic genre. As an imaginative writer of fiction, she is at ease in the nebulous world of fairy tales; she shows more interest in exploring relative truths than in defining absolute ones, and she privileges the cultivation of fertile ground for further inquiry in this vein.

V

Conclusion

I have endeavored in this work to present an informative summary of the priorities and principles proffered by two of the most interesting contemporary fairy-tale scholars, followed by a brief comparison of the most significant ways in which their approaches affirm or contradict one another, and what the overarching social implications are for the status of the fairy-tale genre according to each perspective. I now turn to the concluding phase of my inquiry, in which I will present a subjective evaluation of what I have learned in my research thus far.

It is a dangerous and a delicate thing to study fairy tales. The apprehensive gardener feverishly pruning and hunting down pests is always in danger of trampling and under-watering the flowerbeds. At times Zipes resembles such a gardener; he is so dedicated to revealing and weeding out the conservative forces that feed off of the fairy tale's charming nourishment that his ideological discussions often stifle their subject.

Part of his trouble is that he wants to own the field of fairy-tale scholarship. Zipes is remarkably thorough in his stated efforts as a leading advocate for fairy tales, as Warner and many others have called him—but his efforts often miss or efface central 'morals of the story' of storytelling. Warner on the other hand shows no vested interest in dominating the field; she instead models and cultivates connection,

conversation and revelation across diverse groups of readers, writers, listeners, viewers, historians, and artists, and succeeds in producing work that does not exclude those outside of academia—such exclusion is an integral chapter in the story of storytelling of which she is quite aware, and a problem she seeks to remedy in order to make way for newly liberated voices.

Warner loves fairy tales and writes for others who do. While I agree with many of Zipes' principles of social justice and admire some of his ideas for reintegrating storytelling practices in educational environments, his writing lacks the flair of genuine love and enjoyment of fairy tales. He values them very highly, that much is clear—but love is another matter; love requires some abandon. Zipes never abandons the ideological jargon of the academy, so he is never swept away by the fairy tales he studies, as receivers of fairy tales are meant to be. Missing that essential ingredient, his enormous body of critical scholarship remains incomplete. His readings, while insightful in some ways, are full of innumerable blind spots, so that he never seems to really *taste* the magic of the “tongue meat” Warner feasts upon so readily and without apology. These fundamentally conflicting priorities and correspondingly opposing choices of how to experience the adventures offered to every traveler of fairy-tale worlds orient the authors' works very differently. Reading Warner is reading for pleasure, because that is largely what she herself is doing. Reading Zipes is reading for work, because that is what he always seems to be doing—one might say that he works, ironically, without end for a certain kind of “relentless progress”, a phrase he associates with a very different referent: namely the

insidious Western capitalist agendas he believes have hijacked contemporary human experiences of fairy tales worldwide, such that “when a child encounters a book, often mediated by a teacher, librarian, parent, or friend, the relationship with the book is no longer the young reader and the text, but young consumer and a myriad of products associated with the text that the child will be encouraged to buy and buy more of the same...CDs, DVDs, games, dolls, toys, t-shirts, watches, cups, clothing, food...” (*Relentless* 1).

Warner shows more insight in her gently-worded, non-militant advocacy of broadly humanist approaches to the social implications of the fairy-tale genre that do not limit themselves to belabored critiques of contemporary consumer culture by which the genre has been contaminated and from which it must be immediately and entirely rescued. Her treatment of fairy tales emphasizes what is an ultimately much more productive reverence for the genre’s effectiveness as a powerful, socially accessible, and, due to its deceptively childlike façade, a relatively invulnerable historical and artistic medium for freedom of speech—of *all* kinds—that wilts under the glare of absolutism but flourishes under the gaze of relativism. As much as any other genre, fairy tales demonstrate that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, and historical context; they are not absolutes, and the projection of absolutes onto them stifles and distorts them. It shows deep ignorance of essential aspects of the fairy tale’s magical properties, which necessarily include the provision of miraculously safe platforms for all kinds of speech, and encourages the gathering of circles, of modern-day *veillées*, in which women and other historically

oppressed groups are free to gather, connect, commiserate, and even plot their escape, their revenge, their revolutionary actions empowered by the kind of hope fantasy and fiction thankfully provide.

As Warner has so creatively and eloquently shown, looking upon fairy tales in any sort of comprehensive way requires attention to the genre's demand for ample space in which to move, to morph, to speak with other genres, to point back to its mythological relatives, to echo the Sybil, to send ripple effects into Victorian literary depictions of marriage, and even to set the precedent for the next commercial Disney flick. She is wise in her recognition that Disney's productions are not all bad, and that certain contemporary efforts demonstrate signs of scriptwriters' and filmmakers' attunement to popular feminist principles, for example—principles to which the writers and producers might subscribe themselves.

As we have seen, the metamorphic actions of fairy tales allow them to creatively reflect and comment upon key elements controlling different times and spaces, and to meet the needs and desires of many different audiences, as a good storyteller must. I disagree with Zipes' contention that all "good storytellers" must always be like "good thieves", stealing from the rich to feed the poor (38 *Speaking Out*); storytelling must be allowed to be much more than an act of progressive education or socio-political protest. As Warner demonstrates, storytelling is also about the free exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experience, not necessarily toward aggressive revolutionary ends; it can also be about cultivating the imagination and

wishful thinking, which Warner asserts is much more powerful than its traditionally diminutive signification implies:

The story of fairy tales, that blue chamber where stories lie waiting to be rediscovered, holds out the promise of just those creative enchantments, not only for its own characters caught in its own plotlines; it offers magical metamorphoses to the one who opens the door, who passes on what was found there, and to those who hear what the storyteller brings. **The faculty of wonder, like curiosity, can make things happen; it is time for wishful thinking to have its due** (emphasis added). (*Beast to Blonde* 418)

I furthermore applaud Warner's brave affirmation of the legitimacy of deriving a degree of simple *enjoyment* from fairy tales—and her attention to the importance of *plot*, an element of literature that has lost a great degree of credibility among modern and contemporary literary theorists. Warner recognizes that it is in the plot of a story that human experience is articulated. She once again offers a perspective unpopular within present systems of value, as Frederic Jameson,²¹ Wlad Godzich,²² Peter Brooks,²³ and Thomas Pavel²⁴ have observed.

The divide that Frederic Jameson found to be characteristic of modernist ideology appears to operate here as well: little or no plot in the works of high culture, plot in those of mass culture, and the uneasy mediation of literary scholarship, which, though a decidedly high-culture activity, studies plot in both the artifacts of low culture and in those of past high culture, in the attempt to effect a reconciliation between the two poles of present Western culture...(*Culture of Literacy* 116)

²¹ Frederic Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979), 130-148.

²² Wlad Godzich, "Where the Action Is" in *The Culture of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) 116-122.

²³ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

²⁴ Thomas Pavel, *The Poetics of Plot: The Case of English Renaissance Drama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

Correspondingly, a major cause of academic and social underestimation of the fairy-tale genre's cultural and historical relevance is the sustained undervaluation of plot in modern and contemporary narratives.

In our value system, plot ranks low. We do recognize that it is important to the activity of reading, but at a relatively unsophisticated level: school children write plot summaries for their first book-report assignments, but, as they progress, we expect them to go beyond this elementary level of narrative and to consider the intricacies of characterization and point of view, as well as to engage in a rudimentary form of exegesis. In other words, we treat plot as too obvious for critical discussion, and we do so primarily because it seems to be the element of narrative that least contributes to art... The apparent artlessness of plot may explain why literary criticism has tended to disdain it, as well as why those folklorists who view the object of their studies as artless tales value it. (116)

Godzich's observations concerning the evolution of literary criticism and the standards and values to which contemporary educational systems adhere provide useful grounding for examination of Warner's assertion that the narrative element of plot is just as important to the function and worth of literature as are point of view, characterization, linguistic tropes and even the explicit seizure of artistic license in contemporary rejections of traditionally cohesive plot structures in favor of deliberately disorienting fragmentation within literary narratives.

The plot of a story relates directly to pivotal assertions and troubling of matters of *agency* in fictional genres (*Culture of Literacy* 119). Warner is well-attuned to this fundamental truth, and advocates for renewed scholarly, social and cultural attention to the important questions of agency represented by the supposedly silly, trifling, and pointlessly imaginative or dangerously escapist low-brow fairy-tale genre, fit, we are told, only for consumption by children. Warner awakens us from

hypnosis by this type of trendy, ideological, over-stuffed academic perspective: “There is nothing in the least child-like about fairy tales.” While they have the unique power to appeal to ‘the children within’ each of us, fairy tales do not therefore limit us to cognitive processes of an only partially developed mind of a young child. They can open doors in adult minds otherwise inaccessible due to modern societal expectations of maturity, of complicity with the harsh demands of the real world. The wisdom of human experience often communicated by fairy tales qualifies them as legitimately historical narratives.

By ignoring the importance of “emplotment”, the assembly of a series of historical events into a narrative with a plot, critics miss a crucial truth that will always be a difficult one to swallow: as Hayden White postulates,²⁵ literary writing mirrors historical writing in many respects, in that both genres rely heavily on narrative for meaning, *therefore ruling out the possibility for truly objective or scientifically-determined history*. White furthermore argues that the composition of history is most successful when it embraces this undeniable “narrativity”, since it is precisely what allows history to be meaningful. It is crucial that we study, tell, and teach fairy tales in productive, sustainable ways that honor the nature of the genre and the historical—and *historiographical*—act of storytelling itself.

Warner presents a useful corrective to the field of fairy-tale scholarship, so that it does not go over a cliff, landing in a place where we must stop reading fairy

²⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

tales altogether, due to their dark conservative pasts or their supposedly frivolous nature. It is critical that fairy tales not only be taken more seriously as potent literary works worthy of critical attention, but furthermore revered as sovereign works of art whose metamorphic natures present useful refractions of real time and space—irreplaceable cultural artifacts that demand preservation alongside revision. Fairy tales are historical documents; they reveal important social problems, solutions, and questions; they are safe locations for freedom of speech and protest; they encourage self-liberating faculties of imagination and creativity; they nourish our hearts and minds; they give us hope and escape routes, because that is what dreams do; they help us work out utopian ideals in response to daily realities; they are survival tools for the body and spirit; they imply that ordinary people can find the power within themselves and through collective action to overcome terrible obstacles and live to tell of it afterwards.

The degree and kind of attention we give to fairy tales reflects the state of our relationship to the language of the culture we inhabit. It is in part through the quality of our individual connections to language, and to the stories recreated and passed on through language, that we can hope to engender liberating personal and social shifts. Those relationships are indicative of human commitment to the creation of a better world, whatever such a world looks like according to the bias of an individual speaker and author of dreams.

The French thinker Félix Guattari, in a powerful historical essay,²⁶ has asked some fundamental questions about the direction in which the century and its achievements in technology are taking us; he calls for a new vitality in the relations between individuals and the language of the culture they inhabit: “Unconscious figures of power and knowledge are not universals. They are tied to reference myths profoundly anchored in the psyche but they can still swing around toward libratory paths/voices”. He too sketches the possibility of a utopia, dreaming of “transforming this planet—a living hell for over three quarters of its population—into a universe of creative enchantments.” (*Beast to Blonde* 418)

Fairy tales embody the metamorphic electricity available to us each time we plug into the miraculous faculties of written and spoken language, the building blocks of the stories we construct, collect, retell, and debate in order to make meaning of history, and to shape fortifying utopian projections for ideal personal and social futures. It strikes me as a simultaneously obvious and profoundly surprising fact that we actually *create* history by taking up the magical powers offered to us by fantastical fairy-tale narratives. The genre can perform, figuratively speaking, as the Fairy Godmother we never had, if we will only deign to conjure her.

²⁶ Félix Guattari, “Régimes, Pathways, Subjects,” tr. Brian Massumi, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, *Incorporations: Zone 6* (New York, 1992).

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