

and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite', Aurora Leigh, like all the women artists whose careers we will trace in this book, tries to excavate the real self buried beneath the 'copy' selves. Similarly, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, staring into a mirror where her own mouth appears as a 'hideous wound' bleeding 'in silence and in secret,' strives for a 'voice to speak her dread'.

In their attempts at the escape that the female pen offers from the prison of the male text, women like Aurora Leigh and Mary Elizabeth Coleridge begin, as we shall see, by alternately defining themselves as angel-women or as monster-women. Like Snow White and the wicked Queen, their earliest impulses, as we shall also see, are ambivalent. Either they are inclined to immobilize themselves with suffocating tight-laces in the glass coffins of patriarchy, or they are tempted to destroy themselves by doing fiery and suicidal tarantellas out of the looking glass. Yet, despite the obstacles presented by those twin images of angel and monster, despite the fears of sterility and the anxieties of authorship from which women have suffered, generations of texts *have* been possible for female writers. By the end of the eighteenth century — and here is the most important phenomenon we will see throughout this volume — women were not only writing, they were conceiving fictional worlds in which patriarchal images and conventions were severely, radically revised. And as self-conceiving women from Anne Finch and Anne Elliot to Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson rose from the glass coffin of the male-authored text, as they exploded out of the Queen's looking glass, the old silent dance of death became a dance of triumph, a dance into speech, a dance of authority.

Notes

- 1 'Little Snow White'. All references are to the text as given in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 1972).
- 2 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976), pp. 202–3.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 205.
- 4 See Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 211–42.
- 5 Bettelheim, p. 211.
- 6 See 'The Juniper Tree', in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*.
- 7 Geoffrey Hartman, 'The Voice of the Shuttle', in *Beyond Formalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 337–55.
- 8 *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 133.
- 9 See Matthew Arnold, 'Philomela', in *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 144, l. 7.

19 Feminism and Fairy Tales

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To examine selected popular folktales from the perspective of modern feminism is to revisualize those paradigms which shape our romantic expectations and to illuminate psychic ambiguities which often confound contemporary women. Portrayals of adolescent waiting and dreaming, patterns of double enchantment, and romanticizations of marriage contribute to the potency of fairy tales. Yet, such alluring fantasies gloss the heroine's inability to act self-assertively, total reliance on external rescues, willing bondage to father and prince, and her restriction to hearth and nursery. Although many readers discount obvious fantasy elements, they may still fall prey to more subtle paradigms through identification with the heroine. Thus, subconsciously women may transfer from fairy tales into real life cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a female's cardinal virtues. In short, fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal *status quo* by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate.

Some day my prince will come.¹ With mingled adolescent assurance and anxiety, young girls for many centuries have paid homage to the romantic visions aroused by this article of faith in fairy tale. Even in modern society where romance co-habits uncomfortably with women's liberation, barely disguised forms of fairy tales transmit romantic conventions through the medium of popular literature. Degenerate offspring of fairy tales, such as *Real Romances*, *Secret Romances*, *Intimate Romances*, and *Daring Romances*, capitalize on the allure of romance, but sell instead a grotesque composite of pornography and melodrama ('He Brought My Body to Peaks of Ecstasy on His Water-Bed ... Yet I Knew I Had to Leave Him for Another Lover').² Traditional fairy tales fuse morality with romantic fantasy in order to portray cultural ideals for human relationships. In contrast, pulp romances strip the fantastic machinery and social sanctions to expose, then graphically exploit the implicit sexuality.

Chaster descendants of fairy tales, the 'ladies fictions' of *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, and *McCalls*, pass on homogenized redactions of romantic conventions. A 1974 version, 'The Garlands of Fortune' proffers the predictable narrative, only a shadow away from folklore fantasies of princes: 'She was a girl who didn't believe in luck, let alone miracles, or at least she didn't until that fabulous man came along.'³ These 'domestic fictions' reduce fairy tales to sentimental clichés, while they continue to glamorize a heroine's traditional yearning for romantic love which culminates in marriage. Distinguished from the pulp magazines' blatant degradation of romance into sexual titillation, women's magazines preserve moral strictures from fairy tales, even as they rationalize the fantastic events. They render diminished counterfeits of Victorian novels of sensibility and manners. More conscious imitators of commonplace nineteenth-century fictions and, thereby, of fairy tales, Victoria Holt, Mary Stewart, and Phyllis Whitney popularize the modern gothic romance. Tell-tale captions from Holt's *Legend of the Seventh Virgin* (1975) highlight the inherited elements: 'It was the most exciting night of my life! Mellyora had wangled an invitation to the masked ball at the Abbas for me, Kerensa Carlee the servant girl!' and 'Johnny St. Larnston danced with me out onto the terrace'.⁴ Virginal dreams of elegant balls, adored princes, and romantic deliverance become captivatingly mysterious when complicated by concealed identities, hints of incest, hidden treasures, ancient curses, supernatural apparitions, and looming mansions. Unlike either sexually exploitative or domesticated romances, these tales of horror maintain historical distance, suppress sexuality, and adhere to rigid social hierarchies. They perpetuate, virtually intact, earlier gothic adaptations of fairy tale motifs.

The mass popularity of these fictions — erotic, ladies, and gothic — testifies to a pervasive fascination with fairy tale romance in literature not merely for children but for twentieth-century adults. Moreover, folklorists counter any casual dismissal of folktales as mere entertainment by arguing that they have always been one of culture's primary mechanisms for inculcating roles and behaviors.⁵ The ostensibly innocuous fantasies symbolically portray basic human problems and appropriate social prescriptions. These tales which glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a heroine's cardinal virtues suggest that culture's very survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity. Just how potently folklore contributes to cultural stability may be measured by the pressure exerted upon women to emulate fairy tale

prototypes. Few women expect a literally 'royal' marriage with Prince Charming; but, subconsciously at least, female readers assimilate more subtle cultural imperatives. They transfer from fairy tales into real life those fantasies which exalt acquiescence to male power and make marriage not simply one ideal, but the only estate toward which women should aspire. The idealizations, which reflect culture's approval, make the female's choice of marriage and maternity seem commendable, indeed predestined. In short, fairy tales are not just entertaining fantasies, but powerful transmitters of romantic myths which encourage women to internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate to our 'real' sexual functions within a patriarchy.

As long as fairy tale paradigms accord closely with cultural norms, women can and have found in romantic fictions satisfying justifications for their conformity. But recent studies, such as Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, and Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, to mention only the forerunners, have exposed the historical conditions which subordinate women in all areas from the procreative to the political. With progressive suffrage and liberation movements of the twentieth century and radical redefinitions of sexual and social roles, women are challenging both previous mores and those fairy tales which inculcate romantic ideals. Although lingeringly attracted to fantasies (like Eve to the garden after the Fall), many modern women can no longer blindly accept the promise of connubial bliss with the prince. Indeed, fairy tale fantasies come to seem more deluding than problem-solving. 'Romance' glosses over the heroine's impotence: she is unable to act independently or self-assertively; she relies on external agents for rescue; she binds herself first to the father and then the prince; she restricts her ambitions to hearth and nursery. Fairy tales, therefore, no longer provide mythic validations of desirable female behavior; instead, they seem more purely escapist or nostalgic, having lost their potency because of the widening gap between social practice and romantic idealization.

It is a sign of our conflicted modern times that popular romances nevertheless continue to imitate fairy tale prototypes, while concurrently novels, such as Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*, Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, or Alix Kates Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* portray disillusionments, if not forthright defiances of romantic conventions. An examination of a few popular folktales from the perspective of modern feminism not only reveals why romantic fantasy exerts such a powerful imaginative allure, but also illuminates how contemporary ambiguities cloud women's attitudes toward men and marriage.

I

Among the classic English tales of romance, 'Cinderella', 'Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 'Snow-Drop', 'The Tale of the Kind and the Unkind Girls', 'Beauty and the Beast', and 'The Frog-Prince' focus on the crucial period of adolescence, dramatizing archetypal female dilemmas and socially acceptable resolutions.⁶ Confronted by the trauma of blossoming sexuality, for instance, the young girl subliminally responds to fairy tale projections of adolescent conflicts.⁷ She often achieves comforting release from anxieties by subconsciously perceiving in symbolic tales the commonness of her existential dilemma. Moreover, the equal-handed justice and optimistic endings instill confidence that obstacles can be conquered as she progresses from childhood to maturity. More than alleviating psychic fears associated with the rite of passage, however, tales also prescribe approved cultural paradigms which ease the female's assimilation into the adult community.⁸

The stepmother and bad fairy, who invariably appear odious, embody the major obstacles against this passage to womanhood. Not simply dramatic and moral antagonists to the youthful heroine, they personify predatory female sexuality and the adolescent's negative feelings toward her mother. In Perrault's version of 'Cinderella' (AT 510), persecution of the adolescent stems directly from the father's remarriage and the new stepmother's sexual jealousies.⁹ Because 'she could not bear the good qualities of this pretty girl; and the less, because they made her own daughters so much the more hated and despised', Cinderella's stepmother displays her 'ill humour' by employing the child 'in the meanest work of the house' (p.123). Similarly proud and vain, Snow-Drop's stepmother in Grimm's recounting plots against the seven-year-old child who 'was as bright as the day, and fairer than the queen herself' (p.177).¹⁰ Although fairy tales carefully displace animosities onto a substitute figure, they in part recreate the fears of a menopausal mother. For the aging stepmother, the young girl's maturation signals her own waning sexual attractiveness and control. In retaliation they jealously torment the more beautiful virginal adolescent who captures the father's affections and threatens the declining queens. Recurrent narrative features make clear this generational conflict, as the stepmothers habitually devise stratagems to retard the heroine's progress. Remanded to the hearth, cursed with one hundred years of sleep, or cast into a death-like trance by a poisoned apple, heroines suffer beneath onslaughts of maternal fear and vengeance. Ironically, both in life and fairy tale, time triumphs,

delivering the daughter to inescapable womanhood and the stepmother to aged oblivion or death.

In contrast to persecuting stepmothers, natural mothers provide a counter-pattern of female protection. The christening celebration in Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty' (AT 410) is a jubilant occasion for the 'King and a Queen, who were so sorry that they had no children, so sorry that it was beyond expression', and so sorry that they tried 'all the waters in the world, vows, pilgrimages, every thing' before successfully conceiving this babe (p.85).¹¹ Since the King and Queen do not survive the spell, the 'young Fairy' assumes the role of tutelary spirit and promises that the princess 'shall only fall into a profound sleep which shall last a hundred years, at the expiration of which a King's son shall come and awake her' (p.86). Similarly, Cinderella's deceased mother is lauded only briefly as 'the best creature in the world' and the source for the daughter's 'unparalleled goodness and sweetness of temper' (p.123); in her place the fairy godmother acts as guardian. This prominence of contrasting maternal figures offers a paradigm for traumatic ambivalences.¹² As the child matures, she becomes increasingly conscious of conflicting needs for both infantile nurturing and independence and suffers as a result severe ambivalences toward the mother. By splitting the maternal role to envision, however briefly, a protective mother who blesses the heroine with beauty and virtue, romantic tales assuage fears of total separation. Conversely, the stepmother embodies the adolescent's awesome intimations of female rivalry, predatory sexuality, and constrictive authority. As Bruno Bettelheim argues, romantic tales often recreate oedipal tensions, when a mother's early death is followed by the father's rapid remarriage to a cruel stepmother, as in 'Cinderella'. Kept a child rather than acknowledged as a developing woman and potential recipient of the father's love, a young girl, like Cinderella or Snow-Drop, feels thwarted by her mother's persistent, overpowering intervention. The authoritarian mother becomes the obstacle which seems to stifle natural desires for men, marriage, and hence the achievement of female maturity. Neither heroines nor children rationally explore such deep-rooted feelings; rather, the tales' split depiction of mothers provides a guilt-free enactment of the young female's ambivalences and a means through fantasy for coping with paradoxical impulses of love and hate.

Such traumatic rivalries between young girls and the mother (or heroine and stepmother) comprise, however, only another stage in a progressive cultural as well as psychological pageant. Frequently a good fairy, old woman, or comforting godmother (second substitution for the original mother) releases the heroine from the stepmother's

bondage and enables her to adopt appropriate adult roles. Godmothers or wise women may seem merely fortuitous magical agents who promise transformations to make external circumstances responsive to the heroine's inner virtue. Emancipated from enslavement as a cinderlass, Cinderella, for example, blossoms fully into a marriageable young princess at the ball. Functioning more subtly to exemplify cultural expectations, however, the 'dream' figure allows the heroine not only to recall the pattern embedded by the original mother, but also to claim that paradigm of femininity as her own. Aptly, in many versions of 'Cinderella' the supernatural helper is not a random apparition, but the natural mother reincarnated into a friendly creature, such as a red calf in the Scottish 'Rashin Coatie,' or memorialized by a hazel tree and a white bird to grant wishes, as in Grimm's 'Aschenputtel'.¹³ When the heroine gains sexual freedom by repudiating the stepmother, she immediately channels that liberty into social goals epitomized by the primary mother. Fairy tales, therefore, do acknowledge traumatic ambivalences during a female's rite of passage; they respond to the need for both detachment from childish symbioses and a subsequent embracing of adult independence. Yet, this evolution dooms female protagonists (and readers) to pursue adult potentials in one way only: the heroine dreamily anticipates conformity to those predestined roles of wife and mother. As Adrienne Rich so persuasively theorizes in *Of Woman Born*, the unheralded tragedy within western patriarchy is found in this mother/daughter relationship.¹⁴ If she imitates domestic martyrdom, the daughter may experience a hostile dependency, forever blaming the mother for trapping her within a constricting role. If a daughter rebels, then she risks social denunciations of her femininity, nagging internal doubts about her gender identity, and rejection by a mother who covertly envying the daughter's courage must yet overtly defend her own choices. Furthermore, romantic tales point to the complicity of women within a patriarchal culture, since as primary transmitters and models for female attitudes, mothers enforce their daughters' conformity.

By accentuating the young female's struggle with a menacing stepmother, many romantic tales only vaguely suggest the father's role in the complex oedipal and cultural dramas. But in other tales, such as 'Beauty and the Beast' the attraction to the father, prohibitions against incest, and the transference of devotion to the prince round out the saga of maturation. In the throes of oedipal ambiguities, a young girl who still desires dependency seizes upon her father's indulgent affection, because it guarantees respite from maternal persecutions and offers a compensating masculine adoration. Many tales implicitly acknowledge

the potent attraction between females and the father; but, as purveyors of cultural norms, they often mask latent incest as filial love and displace blatant sexual desires onto a substitute, such as a beast in 'The Frog-Prince' (AT 440) or 'Snow-White and Rose-Red' (AT 426). Madame de Beaumont's telling of 'Beauty and the Beast' (AT 425), for example, focuses on the intimate bonds between father and daughter which impede the heroine's rite of passage.¹⁵ Pursued by suitors, the fifteen-year-old Beauty 'civily thanked them that courted her, and told them she was too young yet to marry, but chose to stay with her father for a few years longer' (p.139). For a heroine Beauty acts with unusual decisiveness in consigning herself to a passive waiting and in prolonging her allegiance to the father. The abrupt loss of the merchant's wealth casts the family into genteel poverty, which again elicits Beauty's determination: 'Nay, several gentlemen would have married her, tho' they knew she had not a penny; but she told them she could not think of leaving her poor father in his misfortunes, but was determined to go along with him into the country to comfort and attend him' (p.139). She sacrifices individual happiness yet a third time by volunteering to die in her father's stead to satisfy the offended Beast: 'Since the monster will accept of one of his daughters, I will deliver myself up to all his fury, and I am very happy in thinking that my death will save my father's life, and be a proof of my tender love for him' (p.143). Lacking a jealous stepmother to prevent this excessive attachment and to force her into a rebellious search for adult sexuality, Beauty clings childishly to her father. The tale suppresses intimations of incest; nevertheless, it symbolizes the potent, sometimes problematic oedipal dependency of young girls. Well before her encounter with Beast then, Beauty's three decisions — to stay, to serve, finally to sacrifice her life — establish her willing subservience to paternal needs. Complementary to the natural mother's role as model for appropriate female adaptations the natural father's example of desirable masculine behavior likewise shapes her dreams of a saviour and encourages the heroine's later commitment to the prince.

Beauty's apprenticeship in her father's house reveals an early conformity to domestic roles; but, her subsequent palatial captivity by Beast symbolizes a further stage in her maturation. Relinquishing filial duties, she must confront male sexuality and transmute initial aversion into romantic commitment.¹⁶ Comparable to the substitution of a stepmother, replacement of Beast for the merchant exemplifies the adolescent's ambivalent yearning for continued paternal protection, yet newly awakened anxieties about masculine desires. Initially horrified by Beast's proposal of marriage, Beauty first ignores his overt

ugliness, an act which signifies her repression of sexual fears. When she then discovers his spiritual goodness, her repugnance gradually gives way to compassion, then romantic adoration, and finally marital bliss. Having schooled herself to seek virtue beneath a physically repulsive countenance, she commits herself totally: 'No dear Beast, said Beauty, you must not die; live to be my husband; from this moment I give you my hand, and swear to be none but yours. Alas! I thought I had only a friendship for you, but the grief I now feel convinces me that I cannot live without you' (p.149). The magical transformation of Beast into a dazzling prince makes possible a consummation of this love affair which is no longer grotesque. Not just literally, but psychologically, the beast in the bedroom becomes transmuted into the prince in the palace. Just as Cinderella's prince charming arrives with a glass slipper, or Sleeping Beauty's prince awakens her with a kiss to reward these heroines for patient servitude or dreamy waiting, so too Beast's transformation rewards Beauty for embracing traditional female virtues. She has obligingly reformed sexual reluctance into self-sacrifice to redeem Beast from death. She trades her independent selfhood for subordination. She garners social and moral plaudits by acquiescing to this marriage. While realignment of her passions from father to prince avoids incest and psychologically allays her separation anxieties, still the female remains childlike — subjected to masculine supervision and denied any true independence.

Romantic tales require that the heroine's transference of dependency be not only sexual, but also material. Beneath romantic justifications of 'love' lurk actual historical practices which reduce women to marketable commodities. In Perrault's 'Diamonds and Toads' (AT 480) the King's son hardly restrains his pecuniary impulses:

The King's son, who was returning from hunting, met her, and seeing her so very pretty, asked her what she did there alone, and why she cry'd! *Alack-a-day! Sir, my mamma has turned me out of doors.* The King's son, who saw five or six pearls and as many diamonds come out of her mouth, desired her to tell him whence this happen'd. She accordingly told him the whole story; upon which the King's son fell in love with her; and considering with himself that such a gift as this was worth more than any marriage portion whatsoever in another, conducted her to the palace of the King, his father, and there married her' (p. 102).

Despite this gallant's empathy for a pathetic story, he computes the monetary profit from such an inexhaustible dowry. Heroines do not so crassly calculate the fortune to be obtained through advantageous marriages, bound as they are by virtue to value love as superior.

However, the tales implicitly yoke sexual awakening and surrender to the prince with social elevation and materialistic gain. Originally of regal birth, both Sleeping Beauty and Snow-White only regain wealth and a queen's position by marrying a prince. Although Cinderella and little Beauty experience temporary reversals of fortune which lead to servitude or genteel poverty, these heroines also miraculously receive fortunes from their marriages. A strict moral reading would attribute these rewards solely to the heroine's virtue; but, the fictional linkage of sexual awakening with the receipt of great wealth implies a more subtle causality. *Because* the heroine adopts conventional female virtues, that is patience, sacrifice, and dependency, and *because* she submits to patriarchal needs, she consequently receives both the prince and a guarantee of social and financial security through marriage. Status and fortune never result from the female's self-exertion but from passive assimilation into her husband's sphere. Allowed no opportunity for discriminating selection, the princess makes a blind commitment to the first prince who happens down the highway, penetrates the thorny barriers, and arrives *deus ex machina* to release her from the charmed captivity of adolescence. Paradoxically this 'liberation' symbolizes her absolute capitulation, as she now fulfils the roles of wife and mother imprinted in her memory by the natural mother and re-enters a comfortable world of masculine protection shared earlier with her father.

Not designed to stimulate unilateral actions by aggressive, self-motivated women, romantic tales provide few alternative models for female behavior without criticizing their power. The unfortunate heroines of 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses' (AT 306) initially elude marriage by drugging suitors and magically retreating at night to dance with dream princes in an underground kingdom.¹⁷ Apparently unwilling to forgo romantic fantasies for realistic marriages, the twelve princesses are eventually foiled by a clever soldier, who promptly claims the eldest as reward. Not alone among heroines in this aversion to marriage, nonetheless, most reluctant maidens, including little Beauty, a proud daughter in Grimm's 'King Thrushebeard' (AT 900), haughty All-Fair in d'Aulnoy's 'The Yellow Dwarf', and the squeamish princess who disdains the frog-prince, ultimately succumb. Romantic tales thus transmit clear warnings to rebellious females: resistance to the cultural imperative to wed constitutes so severe a threat to the social fabric that they will be compelled to submit. Likewise, tales morally censure bad fairies and vain, villainous stepmothers who exhibit manipulative power or cleverness. Allowed momentary triumph over the seemingly dead Snow-White or comatose Beauty, eventually these diabolic

stepmothers are thwarted by the prince's greater powers. Facing punishment through death, banishment, or disintegration, the most self-disciplined and courageous villainesses execute justice upon themselves, thereby leaving the sterling morality of the prince and princess untarnished. Thus, in Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty' the ogreish mother-in-law voluntarily casts 'her self head foremost into the tub' which she had 'filled with toads, vipers, snakes, and all kinds of serpents' and where she is now 'devoured in an instant by the ugly creatures she had ordered to be thrown into it for others' (p.92).¹⁴ In condign punishment for jealousy, Snow-White's stepmother dances herself to death on iron-hot shoes, while the witch of 'Hansel and Gretel' (AT 327) roasts in her own oven. Because cleverness, will-power, and manipulative skill are allied with vanity, shrewishness, and ugliness, and because of their gruesome fates, odious females hardly recommend themselves as models for young readers. And because they surround alternative roles as life-long maidens or fiendish stepmothers with opprobrium, romantic tales effectively sabotage female assertiveness. By punishing exhibitions of feminine force, tales admonish, moreover, that any disruptive non-conformity will result in annihilation or social ostracism. While readers dissociate from these portrayals of feminine power, defiance, and/or self-expression, they readily identify with the prettily passive heroine whose submission to commendable roles insures her triumphant happiness.

II

Romantic tales exert an awesome imaginative power over the female psyche — a power intensified by formal structures which we perhaps take too much for granted. The pattern of enchantment and disenchantment, the formulaic closing with nuptial rites, and the plot's comic structure seem so conventional that we do not question the implications. Yet, traditional patterns, no less than fantasy characterizations and actions, contribute to the fairy tale's potency as a purveyor of romantic archetypes and, thereby, of cultural precepts for young women. Heroines, for example, habitually spend their adolescence in servitude to an evil stepmother, father, or beast, or in an enchanted sleep, either embalmed in a glass coffin or imprisoned in a castle tower. On one level an 'enchantment' serves as a convenient metaphor to characterize the pubertal period during which young women resolve perplexing ambivalences toward both parents, longingly wish and wait for the rescuing prince, and cultivate beauty as

well as moral and domestic virtues. Perrault's sixteen-year-old Beauty slumbers blissfully for a hundred years, but retains her capacity to dream, even to plot gambits for her opening conversation with the prince: 'He was more at a loss than she, and we need not wonder at it; she had time to think on what to say to him; for it is very probable (tho' history mentions nothing of it) that the good fairy, during so long a sleep, had given her very agreeable dreams' (p.88). By dramatizing adolescence as an enchanted interlude between childhood and maturity, romantic tales can, however, aggravate the female's psychic helplessness. Led to believe in fairy godmothers, miraculous awakenings, and magical transformations of beasts into lovers, that is, in external powers rather than internal self-initiative as the key which brings release, the reader may feel that maturational traumas will disappear with the wave of a wand or prince's fortuitous arrival. This symbolic use of enchantment can subtly undermine feminine self-confidence. By portraying dream-drenched inactivity and magical redemptions, enchantment makes vulnerability, avoidance, sublimation, and dependency alluringly virtuous.

On another level, tales of romance frequently employ a structure of double enchantment, the stepmother's malevolent spell and the seemingly beneficent counter-charm instituted by a guardian spirit. In 'Sleeping Beauty', for instance, the double enchantment occurs early: two different fairies bewitch the young princess. The narrator reports that 'the old Fairy fancied she was slighted and mutter'd some threats between her teeth. One of the young Fairies, who sat by her, heard her, and judging that she might give the little Princess some unhappy gift, went as soon as they rose from table and hid herself behind the hangings, that she might speak last, and repair as much as possibly she could the evil that the old Fairy might do her' (p. 85). Though the narrative centers on the fulfilment of the old fairy's dire curse, the promises of the young fairy linger in the background, finally to emerge for the denouement. Both the pernicious and felicitous enchantments receive fulfilment: 'The princess shall indeed pierce her hand with a spindle; but instead of dying, she shall only fall into a profound sleep which shall last a hundred years, at the expiration of which a King's son shall come and awake her' (p. 86). Likewise, in 'Beauty and the Beast' the disenchanted prince attributes his monstrous disguise to the wiles of 'a wicked fairy who had condemned me to remain under that shape till a beautiful virgin should consent to marry me' (p. 150). Appropriately enough, it is a 'beautiful lady, that appeared to her in her dream' (p. 150) who reunites Beauty with her family, transforms the envious sisters into statues, rewards Beauty's judicious choice of Beast, and

transports everyone to the prince's kingdom. This supernatural lady stage-manages the finale with a 'stroke with her wand' (p. 150), counteracting the wicked fairy's earlier enchantment. Double enchantment thus reinforces cultural myths about *both* female adolescence *and* maturity. It suggests that marriage, like the adolescent sleep or servitude, is also an 'enchanted' state with the prince or a fairy godmother rather than evil stepmother or bad fairy as charmer. Not really disenchanted into reality or self-reliance, the heroine simply trades one enchanted condition for another; she is subjected in adolescence to anticipatory dreams of rescue and in womanhood to expectations of continuing masculine protection. Romantic tales thus transmit to young women an alarming prophecy that marriage is an *enchantment* which will shield her against harsh realities outside the domestic realm and guarantee everlasting happiness.

Nuptial rites conventionally climax trials through which the heroine passes: separation from the original mother, a stepmother's persecutions, the father's desertion, adolescent waiting and dreaming, and a final awakening by the prince. But marriage stands for more than a single individual's triumph over psychic tribulations. Festive nuptials signify the heroine's conformity to the socially dictated roles of wife and mother and signal her assimilation into the community. Although usually absent from central portions in which the heroine endures her trials *en famille* or alone, a royal court frequently appears at the tale's beginning and end to emphasize the communal context for the individual's passage. For instance in 'Sleeping Beauty' the kingdom gathers at the christening, a ritual which auspiciously celebrates the heroine's birth. Then as part of her benevolent charm, the good fairy who thinks that 'when the princess should awake she might not know what to do with herself, being all alone in this old palace' (pp. 86–87) enchants the household staff. Decorously they remain aloof from the actual bedchamber in which the princess receives the prince's revivifying kiss. Nevertheless, the palace household comes awake in time to prepare a festive ball in honour of the rebirth and subsequent wedding, when 'after supper, without losing any time, the Lord Almoner married them in the chapel of the castle, and the chief lady of honour drew the curtains' (p. 89). Comparable to the christening which acknowledges the birth, the ceremonial wedding here expresses the community's approval of sexuality within marriage. Typically in romantic tales, births, parental remarriages, and the prevalent 'debutante' balls mark the preliminary stages in the heroine's progress toward maturity. But as the culminating event in most folktales and in life, marriage more importantly displays the victory of patriarchal

culture itself, since the female receives her reward for tailoring personal behavior to communal norms.

Because it is a major social institution, marriage functions not merely as a comic ending, but also as a bridge between the worlds of fantasy and reality. Whereas 'once upon a time' draws the reader into a timeless fantasy realm of ogresses, fairies, animistic nature, metamorphoses, and wish-fulfilment, the wedding ceremony catapults her back into contemporary reality. Precisely this close association of romantic fiction with the actuality of marriage as a social institution proves the most influential factor in shaping female expectations. Delivered from the inherent improbability of extreme fantasies, the impressionable young girl falls prey to more subtle fancies, seemingly more real because thought possible. For example, one rarely expects fairy godmothers to transform rags into ball gowns, beasts into men, and the spoken word into diamonds and pearls. Even wealth, beauty, and position may be viewed skeptically as magical accoutrements suitable for princesses, yet hardly accessible to most social classes. But marriage is an estate long sanctioned by culture and theoretically attainable by all women; thus, the female may well expect it to provide a protected existence of happy domesticity, complete with an ever hovering male to rescue her from further dangers. As irrational as this translation of fantasies into ideals for real life may seem, it is often true that romantic myth rather than actual experience governs many women's expectations of men and marriage. If she cannot be a literal princess, she can still hope to become the sheltered mistress of a domestic realm, admired by a 'prince of a man' and by children for her self-sacrifices to keep the home fires burning. Certainly marriage need not be a totally unacceptable or self-abnegating goal. Nonetheless, fairy tale portrayals of matrimony as a woman's *only* option limit female visions to the arena of hearth and cradle, thereby perpetuating a patriarchal *status quo*. Whatever the daily reality of women's wedded or professional life, fairy tales require her *imaginative* assent to the proposition that marriage is the best of all possible worlds. Hence, the comic endings call upon young females to value communal stability over individual needs, because their conformity is the cornerstone for all higher social unities — as moral plaudits and festive celebrations testify. As long as women acquiesce to cultural dicta set forth so mythically in romantic *Märchen*, then the harmonious continuity of civilization will be assured. We cannot ask fairy tales to metamorphosize into Greek tragedies. But we should recognize that the conventional patterns of double enchantment, communal rituals, and nuptial climaxes have serious implications for women's role in society.

III

It is perhaps too easy to ignore the significance of romantic tales in forming female attitudes toward the self, men, marriage, and society by relegating them to the nursery. Or one can dispute their impact by asserting that worldly education enables women to distinguish fantasy promises of bliss from conjugal actualities. Either dismissal of fairy tale implies that adult wisdom is entirely rational, thus negating the potency of cultural myths and personal fantasies in shaping one's experience. Precisely this close relationship between fantasy and reality, art and life, explains why romantic tales have in the past and continue in the present to influence so significantly female expectations of their role in patriarchal cultures. Even in the 'liberated' twentieth century, many women internalize romantic patterns from ancient tales. They genuinely hope that their maturation will adhere to traditional prototypes and culminate with predicted felicity — they desperately fear that it won't. Although conscious that all men are not princes and some are unconvertible beasts and that she isn't a princess, even in disguise, still the female dreams of that 'fabulous man'. But as long as modern women continue to tailor their aspirations and capabilities to conform with romantic paradigms, they will live with deceptions, disillusionments, and/or ambivalences. Dedicated romanticists will reconstruct their reality into tenuous, self-deluding fantasies by suppressing any recognition of a secondary status and defending more vehemently the glories of matrimony and the patriarchy — witness the popularity of Marabel Morgan's *The Total Woman*, Phyllis Schafly, and the anti-ERA forces and corporate profits from sales of historical, gothic, and Harlequin romances. Grown skeptical by the constant discrepancy between romantic expectations and actual relationships, other women will feel disillusioned. Consider Anne Sexton's acerbic irony as she dissects fairy tales in *Transformations* or those fictional characters who radically renounce all romance and all men, as in Marge Piercy's *Small Changes*. Between these two extremes, other women wallow in confusion, some blaming themselves for failing to actualize their potential as human beings, some assuming a personal guilt for their inability to adapt fully to widespread cultural norms. Think of Edna Pontellier in Chopin's *The Awakening*, Martha Quest in Lessing's *Children of Violence*, or Isadora Wing in Jong's *Fear of Flying*.

While feminist political movements of the last century may seem to signal women's liberation from traditional roles, too often the underlying truth is far more complicated: the liberation of the female

psyche has not matured with sufficient strength to sustain a radical assault on the patriarchal culture. Despite an apparent susceptibility to change, modern culture remains itself stubbornly antithetical to ideals of female and male equality. Politically and existentially, women still constitute, to adopt Simone de Beauvoir's classic terms, the Other for the male Subject. Whether expressed in pornographic, domestic, and gothic fictions or enacted in the daily relations of men and women, fairy tale visions of romance also continue to perpetuate cultural ideals which subordinate women. As a major form of communal or 'folk' lore, they preserve rather than challenge the patriarchy. Today women are caught in a dialectic between the cultural *status quo* and the evolving feminist movement, between a need to preserve values and yet to accommodate changing mores, between romantic fantasies and contemporary realities. The capacity of women to achieve equality and of culture to rejuvenate itself depends, I would suggest, upon the metamorphosis of these tensions into balances, of antagonisms into viable cooperations. But one question remains unresolved: do we have the courageous vision and energy to cultivate a newly fertile ground of psychic and cultural experience from which will grow fairy tales for human beings in the future?

Notes

- 1 See Marcia R. Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale", *College English*, 34 (December 1972), 383–95; Kay Stone, 'Things Walt Disney Never Told Us', *Journal of American Folklore*, 88 (1975), 42–9; Alison Lurie, 'Fairy Tale Liberation', *The New York Review of Books*, 17 December 1970, pp. 42–4; and Alison Lurie, 'Witches and Fairies: Fitzgerald to Updike', *The New York Review of Books*, 2 December 1971, pp. 6–11.
- 2 'He Brought My Body to Peaks of Ecstasy on His Water-Bed', *Real Story*, May 1975, pp. 17–19, 66–8.
- 3 Leonhard Dowty, 'The Garlands of Fortune', *Good Housekeeping*, December 1974, pp. 75, 175–83.
- 4 Victoria Holt, 'Legend of the Seventh Virgin', in *Gothic Tales of Love*, April 1975, pp. 13–33.
- 5 See William Bascom, 'Four Functions of Folklore', *Journal of American Folklore* 67 (1954) rpt. in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 279–98. Inheriting his assumptions from anthropologists and folklorists, such as Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, Melville J. Herskovits, and Bronislaw Malinowski, Bascom succinctly articulates the functional approach to folklore: 'Viewed in this light, folklore is an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture. It is used to inculcate the customs and ethical standards of the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him with ridicule or criticism when he deviates, to provide him with rationalizations

when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are, and to provide him with a compensatory escape from "the hardships, the inequalities, the injustices" of everyday life. Here, indeed, is the basic paradox of folklore, that while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions impose upon him' (p. 298). See also Bascom's 'Folklore and Anthropology', *Journal of American Folklore*, 66 (1953), rpt. in *The Study of Folklore*, pp. 25–33.

- 6 Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). All further references to the tales will be to this edition which gives the texts of the 'best-known fairy tales as they were first printed in English, or in their earliest surviving or prepotent text' (p. 5) and will be cited parenthetically in the text. The most significant European literary collections appear first in Renaissance Italy (Gianfrancesco Straparola, *Le piacevoli Notti*, 1550–53, and Giambattista Basile, *Lo Cunto de li Cunti*, often called the *Pentamerone*, 5 vols., 1634–36), then in France (Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé. Avec des Moralitez*, 1697), and eventually in England with Robert Samber's translation of Perrault (*Histories or Tales of Past Times*, 1729). Comtesse d'Aulnoy contributes the now familiar term by titling her tales *Contes des fées* (1697–98), establishes fairy tales as a literary genre through imaginative retellings of older stories in *A Collection of Novels and Tales, Written by that Celebrated Wit of France, The Countess D'Aulnois* (1721); and introduces 'The Story of Finetta the Cinder-Girl' into English (1721). Another French woman, Madame Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, clearly perceives the value of tales for the engagement and instruction of the young when she publishes her *Magasin des enfans, ou dialogues entre une sage Gouvernante et plusieurs de ses Elèves* (1756), translated as *The Young Misses Magazine* (1759). The eighteenth century tolerates this new vogue of fairy tales, popularly attributed to Mother Goose and Mother Bunch, by relegating them to the nursery. However, such folktales gain a new and lasting respectability with Edgar Taylor's publication of *German Popular Stories* (1823–26), translated from the three volume *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–22) of the Brothers Grimm. Illustrated by George Cruikshank, this volume provides permissible fantasies for the young, a learned account of the antique origins and diffusions of tales, an inspiration for romantic poets and novelists, and the basis for all future studies of folklore in English. Consult Opie and Opie, 'Introduction', pp. 11–23; and Michael Kotzin, *Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972) for more complete histories of the fairy tale in English literary tradition.
- 7 See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976) for a thorough-going Freudian analysis of fairy tales; Marie-Louise Von Franz, *Problems of the Feminine in Fairy Tales*, ed. James Hillman (New York: Spring Publications, 1972) and Hedwig Von Beit, *Das Märchen: Sein Ort in der geistigen Entwicklung* (Bern: A. Francke, 1965) for Jungian analyses; and Max Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (1962; reprint, ed., New York: Ungar, 1970). Lüthi reads 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Cinderella', and particularly 'Rapunzel' as representations of maturation processes and acknowledges that 'behind many features in our fairy tales there are old customs and beliefs; but in the context of the tale, they have lost their original character. Fairy tales are experienced by their hearers and readers, not as realistic, but as symbolic poetry' (p. 66).
- 8 See J. L. Fischer, 'The Sociopsychological Analysis of Folktales', *Current Anthropology*, 4 (1963), 235–95. In this rigorous survey of recent trends Fischer argues cogently for the complex interaction of psychological, sociological, and

structuralist interpretations of tales and formulates a functionalized approach: 'For a tale to persist, therefore, some sort of balance must be achieved between two sets of demands: one, the demands of the individual for personal pleasure and the reduction of his anxiety, and the other, the demands of the other members of the society that the individual pursue his personal goals only in ways which will also contribute to, or at least not greatly harm, the welfare of the society' (p. 259).

- 9 Tale type numbers are taken from Antti A. Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, trans. and ed. Stith Thompson, 2nd rev., Folklore Fellows Communications, no. 184 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961). See Marrian Roalfe Cox, *Cinderella*, Publications of the Folk-Lore Society, vol. 31 (London: D. Nutt, 1893) and Anna Birgitta Rooth, *The Cinderella Cycle* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1951). Although this tale dates back 2,500 years, the earliest recorded version occurs in a Chinese book written about 850 A.D. See Arthur Waley, 'The Chinese Cinderella Story', *Folk-Lore: Being the Quarterly Transactions of the Folk-Lore Society*, 58 (1947), 226–38.
- 10 Grimm's 'Snow-Drop' is the most well-known modern version, popularized in America by Walt Disney's film adaptation, although Basile's variation in the *Pentamerone* makes clearer the oedipal entanglements which give rise to the stepmother's jealousy. See also Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York: Holt, 1946), pp. 123–4; and Ernst Böcklen, *Sneewittchenstudien*, Mythologische Bibliothek, vols. 3 and 7 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1910 and 1915).
- 11 Thompson in *The Folktale* notes that stories only slightly variant from the familiar Perrault version of 'Sleeping Beauty' appear in Basile's *Pentamerone*, Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, and in outline in the French prose romance of *Perceforest* from the 15th century (p. 97). Lüthi uses the three versions by Grimm, Basile, and Perrault for an analysis of differences in literary content and style (pp. 21–46), while Bettelheim notes significant psychoanalytic variations (pp. 225–36). Consult also Hedwig von Beit, *Symbolik des Märchens; Versuch einer Deutung*, 2 vols. (Bern: A. Francke, 1952–56); Johannes Bolte and George Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, 5 vols (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1913–32); Fritz Ernst, ed. *Dornröschen. In drei Sprachen* (Bern: H. Huber, 1949); Karl J. Obenauer, *Das Märchen: Dichtung und Deutung* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1959); Jan de Vries, 'Dornröschen', *Fabula: Journal of Folklore Studies*, 2 (1958), 110–21, for further commentary.
- 12 Bettelheim, pp. 236–77, focuses upon the sibling rivalry in 'Cinderella', but also examines variants of this tale, the 'basic trust' between mother and child which asserts itself later with the godmother, the displacements of anger to the stepmother, and the oedipal tensions which the tale dramatizes. Although heavy-handed in his Freudian reading, Bettelheim argues convincingly that 'in order to achieve personal identity and gain self-realization on the highest level, the story tells us, both are needed: the original good parents, and later the 'step'-parents who seemed to demand 'cruelly' and 'insensitively'. The two together make up the 'Cinderella' story. If the good mother did not for a time turn into the evil stepmother, there would be no impetus to develop a separate self' (p. 274).
- 13 Opie and Opie, pp. 117–21; Rooth, pp. 153–6.
- 14 Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1973). Defining 'matrophobia' as the fear of 'becoming one's mother,' Rich articulates the tension between mothers and daughters: 'Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted . . . Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother

stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery' (pp. 235–6).

- 15 Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp. 97–102, discusses the variant tale types of the monstrous bridegroom, a theme given its classical form in the story of Cupid and Psyche, recorded in Apuleius' narrative *The Golden Ass* (2nd c. A.D.) Consult also Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche; The Psychic Development of the Feminine: A Commentary on the Tale by Apuleius*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series, no. 54 (1952; reprint ed., Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956); W. R. S. Ralston, 'Beauty and the Beast', *The Nineteenth Century*, 4 (1878), 990–1012; Jan Öjvind Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1955); and Ernst Tegethoff, *Studien zum Märchentypus von Amor und Psyche*, Rhein: Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur Germ. Philologie und Volkskunde, no. 4 (Bonn: K. Schroeder, 1922).
- 16 See Bettelheim, pp. 277–310, for a strict Freudian reading of the animal-groom cycle of fairy tales.
- 17 Opie and Opie, pp. 188–89, report that in its current form, 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses' is 'unlikely to be earlier than the seventeenth century'. Recorded first by the Brothers Grimm, it appears in English translation in Edgar Taylor's *German Popular Stories* (1823–26).
- 18 In Perrault's version of 'Sleeping Beauty', the prince discourteously rapes and deserts the slumbering princess, unknowingly engendering twins who remove the offending splinter while sucking, and then returns to discover the awakened woman. The prince keeps his marriage secret for two years, but makes regular hunting trips into the forest to visit his wife and children. After the King's death, the prince proclaims his marriage and departs to the wars. During his absence, the queen-mother, who is descended from the race of ogres, plots to kill and eat the princess and her children. Although they escape through the compassion of the clerk of the kitchen, the queen discovers the deception and is about to execute them when the prince providentially returns. The second portion of Perrault's version closely resembles Basile's original, although Basile makes the hero an already married King, whose wife discovers his adulterous relationship with Sleeping Beauty.

20 A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood's Trials and Tribulations

Jack Zipes

In my book *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*,¹ I demonstrated that the origins of the literary fairy tale can be traced to male phantasies about women and sexuality. In particular, I showed how Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers transformed an oral folk tale about the social initiation of a young woman into a narrative about rape in which the heroine is obliged to bear the responsibility for sexual violation. Such a radical literary transformation is highly significant because the male-cultivated literary versions became dominant in both the oral and literary traditions of nations such as Germany, France, Great Britain, and the United States, nations which exercise cultural hegemony in the West. Indeed, the Perrault and Grimm versions became so crucial in the socialisation process of these countries that they generated a literary discourse about sexual roles and behaviour, a discourse whose fascinating antagonistic perspectives shed light on different phases of social change. In discussing this development, however, I did not devote sufficient time to an examination of the illustrations which in many cases are as important or even more important for conveying notions of sexuality and violence than the texts themselves. Since a complete re-examination of the illustrations would require another book, I should like to limit my study here to one particular scene, the traditional depiction of the young girl encountering the wolf in the woods, with the intention of exploring further socio-psychological ramifications of the Perrault and Grimm versions. Before re-examining the key illustrations of the standard Red Riding Hood texts, however, I should like once more to summarise my arguments about the socio-psychological implications of the changes