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# Once upon a time: fairytales past and present

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ONCE UPON A TIME:  
FAIRYTALES PAST AND PRESENT

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A Thesis  
Presented To  
Eastern Washington University  
Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree  
Master of Arts in Literature

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By  
Jordan L. Keithley  
Fall 2013

THESIS OF JORDAN L. KEITHLEY APPROVED BY

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MASTER'S THESIS

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## Chapter One: Introduction

All seniors in my high school, as part of their graduation requirements, were told to develop a project that would be the academic capstone of their high school career. Students had the freedom to design a project that touched upon their own interests and studies, just as long as it had an academic focus and could be completed within the duration of their senior year. Knowing that I had a keen interest in the literary arts and that one of my favorite classes in high school had been drawing, I decided that my project would be to create an illustrated book of fairy tales. I chose tales from all over the world with the hopes that I could highlight some lesser known fairy tales and, if I am being truly honest, to also get credit for having an international slant to my project which would probably net me a better score in the end. Most of the tales I chose ended up having a female protagonist and my illustrations all revolved around scenes of the protagonist conquering some beast or magical foe. I had mostly gravitated towards stories with interesting female characters, a popular trend within fairy tales. Some of the stories I chose had heroines that were far too passive in my mind, so without batting an eye, I rewrote these tales to make the princess more of the active hero I loved reading about. The thought that I might be corrupting the origin of these tales never entered into my mind. When I was asked in my project's defense why I had changed the nature of the fairy tales, I replied that I wanted to read about strong women and since it was my project I had the ability to do so. Fortunately for me and my parents, I passed my presentation and project and was able to graduate from school.

As I have been working on this paper and reflecting on my personal history with fairy tales, I realized that my rewriting of those stories in the twelfth grade was just

another entry in a long history of fairy tale revision. When I rewrote those stories to better reflect my personal outlook on the world, I was interacting with the tales as a multitude of others had for hundreds of years. By adapting the stories and by making them relevant to a current audience, I was making the stories stronger. Walt Disney adapted his tales and brought them into the homes of a new generation, just as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm brought their stories into the lives of millions. In my own small way, I was bringing these tales forward from the past to a new audience and participating in the cycle of revision and evolution that has kept fairy tales common in popular culture to this day. Like many scholars and artists before me, fairy tales had become the medium for which I would present my viewpoint to the world. The study of fairy tales often becomes the study of a culture or a people. Just like my high school project was based upon my thoughts and biases, fairy tales and their storytellers' perspectives often become intertwined though their tales. The job of the scholar is to try and find out how these tales illuminate or hide certain thoughts. Through the art of reflection, scholars can show greater understanding and insight of the world or culture they are studying.

Scholarship about fairy tales is as varied and diverse as the body of work it studies. Critics, anthropologists, scholars, and theorists have often used these tales as a framework for promoting ideas about everything from societal trends, to historical beliefs, to the nature of the individual, and more. Fairy tales are one of the more ubiquitous genres of art that can be found in today's society. The genre of fairy tales is more easily defined by its structure rather than by its content. Fairy tales are usually stories about fantastic elements, or people and about an individual completing a quest, or task. Fairy tales are a subsection of folklore along with myths and legends but fairy tales

can be distinguished from those other forms of storytelling through their specific lack of physical or real world material.

Fairy tales' main form of dissemination has evolved from era to era, as the preferred method of storytelling has changed. Fairy tales started out as oral narratives. Nailing down the oral origins of tales has been a tricky endeavor for many scholars because the form and content of a tale can change so drastically depending on the storyteller and the audience receiving the story. A successful retelling of a tale requires the participation of both the storyteller and their audience. The storyteller must adapt their tale to fit their audience, paying attention to the mood of the crowd, the age and socioeconomic status of the listeners, and how familiar the audience is with this particular tale. This has given rise to hundreds of versions of the same tales and has also clouded the origins of any particular tale. Maria Tarter wrote about the movement of fairy tales from an oral tradition to a literary genre in her book *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Tarter wrote that depictions of adults in sixteenth century France listening to folktales as they participate in household chores existed in Noël du Fail's account of the *veillée*. There was also a tradition of composing and narrating folktales in Germany up until the Franco-Prussian war. Tatar argues that industrialization lessened the need for adults to participate in collective household chores and caused the tradition of folktales for adults to gradually die out (23).

With the decline in the adult oral tradition and written works became cheaper and easier to create and disperse, fairy tales became more familiar to the population in the written form. The writing down of these tales did not provide authoritative texts on the works though. Fairy tales have always had the air of community property about them.

Even their most famous authors: the brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, Charles Perrault, have never claimed that they were the sole authors of the texts. These tales were gathered from the countryside, from history, from old men and women, from everywhere and nowhere all at once. They seemed to have emerged from the ether, giving the sense that they evolved and emerged in the same way that humans have changed and adapted until they took their current forms.

Cheaper and easier methods of printing led to a wider dissemination of the literary fairy tale. The reduction in cost was important for fairy tales as they made the jump from the mouths of storytellers to books. Fairy tales have always been an egalitarian form of artwork belonging in all ranges of society. Even in today's society, fairy tales are treated as almost ubiquitous forms of art. Disney has made a fortune broadcasting these tales around the world, as have many visual artists. The fairy tales of today are often found in television and film; visual media being the most accessible and permeating form of art in today's society. Multiple films based on fairy tales have been released in the last few years: *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013), *Tangled* (2010), *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), just to name a few. The popularity of fairy tales has also been shown in television with recent hits such as *Once Upon a Time* (2011) and the spinoff *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* starting soon. As film adaptations of fairy tales become more and more popular, fairy tales have begun returning to their original forms. The darker and more terrifying aspects of fairy tales are beginning to be highlighted in popular media. The stories are embracing the elements that had been stripped away from these tales when they moved into the realm of children's literature. Murder, death, sex, abuse—all of these themes were pervasive throughout the oral and early literary versions

of fairy tales. Much like today's horror films, fairy tales have a black and white morality that warns people not to stray from the right path. Horror films and fairy tales are connected genres, which share both structural and elemental similarities. Part of this paper will spend space linking and discussing these relations. Research into the association between fairy tales and horror films is an emerging area for critics and students, unlike traditional fairy tale research, which has a broad scope.

Research on fairy tales has a long history of scholarship, yet there is so much more for people to understand about this deceptively simple form of art. The history of fairy tale scholarship can be broken down into four very broad categories: structuralist, archetypal, psychoanalytical, and cultural/feminist/gender studies. Structuralists are interested in the structural makeup of the stories. Archetypal critics focus on the mythic and symbolic importance of fairy tales. Psychoanalytical scholars examine the ways fairy tales could be used to explain internal dilemmas that humans experience. While cultural, feminist, and gender studies look at fairy tales as representations of cultural beliefs or assumptions. As the breadth of research into fairy tales widens, most critics seem to focus on the overarching question of why these tales are so prevalent. This paper will explain the social and cultural relevance of fairy tales and how they function in today's culture. However, before we can focus on current research into fairy tales, it is helpful to explain the broad history of fairy tale scholarship.

The structuralists were some of the first critics to identify the themes within these stories and to categorize them into identifiable subgroups. Antti Aarne was one of the first to breakdown fairy tales into a scientific classification system based on recurring plot patterns in the tales. Aarne's system was revised in 1928 by Stith Thompson and

became the more familiar Aarne-Thompson classification system that is used today (Dundes 195). The Aarne-Thompson classification system inspired Vladimir Propp to create his *Morphology of the Folk-tale*, which was a classification system that categorized actions of the characters rather than story elements (Propp 73). Frustrated by the contemporary Aarne-Thompson method of categorizing folk-tales, Vladimir Propp published his *Morphology of the Folk-tale* in 1927. Unlike the Aarne-Thompson classification system, which focused on the elements of the different tales and assigning stories a number based on their structural elements, Propp's morphology categorized tales based on the function or actions that characters performed in, what he called, wonder tales. Propp's major criticism of the Aarne-Thompson system was that it was too large to offer a holistic approach to fairy tales. Fairy tales in the Aarne-Thompson system are numbered from 300-749 with subcategories for each individual number. By categorizing the actions of the characters, rather than focusing on them as individuals, Propp was able to pare down the system from hundreds of variations to just six elements that make up a wonder tale. The six are as follows: a family member leaves home, an interdiction is given to the hero, the interdiction is violated, the villain makes an attempt at recognition, the villain receives information about his victim, and the villain attempts to deceive the victim (74-75). By choosing to focus on the actions of the characters, Propp draws attention to the overarching similarities that the fairy tales share, rather than focusing on superficial difference in characters or plot points.

The focus on character's action was also a major theme in Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which deals with recurring plot elements in myth. A direct link can be drawn from Propp's *Morphology* to the work of Joseph Campbell and

especially his theory of the monomyth. Joseph Campbell's monomyth is the theory that many myths and stories, especially the ones that resonate with a culture and last from generation to generation, contain a set number of structural elements. "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (Campbell 23). Both Propp and Campbell focused on the elements that make up a fairy tale or myth. These men noticed repeated similarities among stories that are helpful when looking to the genre as a whole. The ability to group these two genres into a simple series of actions allows critics to make assumptions about the purpose of these stories. People can speculate about why this type of story is appealing rather than focus on the fantastic elements that make up such large genres.

A third major structuralist in the field is Claude Lévi-Strauss. Strauss was known for his idea of the fugue, which is related to both the monomyth and Propp's *Morphology*, though it is more esoteric and scientific in nature than either. Strauss became entranced with the idea that music and myth were inextricably connected through their use of repetition. In music, when a series of notes is repeated with different emphasis, or in different keys, it is called a fugue (71). Myth contains its own version of the fugue with the recurrence of different elements. "Sleeping Beauty" and "Snow White" both concern a young, royal, female protagonist who is tormented by a powerful female figure, is sent to sleep by the same character, and is awakened with a kiss from her true love. Analyzed at the structural level, we can see that these stories are almost identical, yet both tales are set apart by the details that dress these skeletal structures.

Both tales retain their individuality despite their parallels. Strauss likened these elements to that of DNA (80). Each story element becomes responsible for a unique whole much like a single difference in a gene sequence can result in vastly different species. The idea of the fugue was developed by Claude Levi-Strauss as a way of discussing these repeated occurrences in myth and in fairy tales. Strauss, unlike Propp and Campbell, thought the important part of myths and fairy tales were the small differences that separated the stories. The repetition was useful in the ways it highlighted the divergences between the characters, the stories, and the details. The work of the structuralists allowed other forms of fairy tale study to thrive by providing scholars the tools to help breakdown the genre into manageable or unifying pieces. Scholars were able to either focus on the genre as an entire unit in order to apply the theories of Propp or Campbell, or they could focus on the stories' structural details to correspond with the Aarne-Thompson system or Claude Levi-Strauss's fugue.

A different approach to fairy tale study is the one the psychoanalyst pioneered starting in the late nineteenth century. Psychoanalysts believed that individual stories could be treated as case studies and give patients ways in which they could cope with psychological trauma. Sigmund Freud, the forefather of psychoanalysis, believed that dreams and fairy tales shared symbolic language and found fairy tales useful to illustrate his theories on human behavior (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 1900). A famous case of Freud's was one in which a young doctor came to him suffering from a gonorrheal infection. The young man was known as the Wolf -man due to his reoccurring dreams, which heavily featured images from fairy tales like "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Wolf and Seven Young Kids (*Wolf-man*). Believing that Freud's work was especially

useful to children, Bruno Bettelheim wrote about the psychological benefits that could be gained by young people through the reading and identification with fairy tales (*The Uses of Enchantment* 1989). Bettelheim was one of the founders of the school of psychoanalytical fairy tale research, focusing on the ways in which tales could illustrate parts of the psyche and help people deal with psychological trauma.

Carl Jung also built on Freud's theory to develop his own interpretation of dreams and symbols. Jung believed that these symbols had a wider, more universal, purpose than that of the individual and so he produced the theory of the collective unconscious and further developed Freud's theory of the archetype. Jung's student Maria Von Franz specifically looked at fairy tales as an expression of the archetype of the Self (*The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, 1996). The symbolic natures of fairy tales were especially interesting to the archetypal critics. Von Franz believed that because fairy tales lacked cultural signifiers, such as place names or historical details, fairy tales could be taken as pure archetypal stories and therefore, used to highlight aspects of the Self archetype.

As the debate over the internal vs. external usefulness of fairy tales played out, a new group of critics began to examine the cultural value that these tales had, rather than solely focusing on the symbolic value. Maria Tatar argued in *The Hard Facts of the Grimm's Fairy Tales* that the reoccurrences in fairy tales were not archetypal but that these subject matters had preoccupied humans for so long because of their representations of persistent themes of everyday life (xxviii). The theory that fairy tales are reflections of the societies they emerge from and can illustrate aspects of those societies has occupied many current critics and scholars. Feminist theory and gender studies especially have used fairy tales to guide and highlight their work.

In the 1970s, a debate between two feminist authors highlighted the confusion many people have over the roles of women in fairy tales. Alison Laurie wrote “Fairy Tale Liberation” and “Witches and Fairies,” arguing that fairy tales showed active, progressive females not dominated by traditional gender roles and should be considered feminist works (Laurie 1970). Marcia R. Lieberman argues against this claim in her article “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come:’ Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale.” In this article, Lieberman claims that the best-known tales display women stripped of their agency, waiting for men to save them. She claimed that fairy tales are tools for the indoctrination of women to a passive existence, subjected to the dominance of men. The debate over whether fairy tales help or hurt women has continued for decades with arguments on both sides. Karen Rowe writes that romantic tales factor into female attitudes towards marriage, love, men, and society and that fairy tales idealized romantic patterns and cause disappointment later in life (*Feminism and Fairy Tales* 1979). Other critics argue that fairy tales are an essentially female genre (Warner xxiii) and that many women find fairy tales as a vehicle for more radical thoughts to be expressed (*Zipes Art* 22). The debate over fairy tales’ worth for women is a dispute amongst critics that continues to this day.

Moving away from the historical aspects of fairy tale study and focusing on the current trends in scholarship shows us that current studies of fairy tales are looking at the ways in which fairy tales have influenced other categories of art (*Zipes Culture, Gruss 2009*). Fairy tales have a great deal of influence on current art and culture and one emerging trend is to trace the ways in which fairy tales have been adapted or repurposed for newer audiences. This is where this paper ties into current scholarship. This essay

will illustrate many ways in which fairy tales have influenced contemporary genres and how the influence of fairy tales is tied to the ability of fairy tales to highlight universal struggles of peoples across many time periods and cultures.

While the worth of fairy tales as a genre and the ways in which these stories affect the individual and society have a large amount of scholarship, one area where there is a lack of research is the intertextual aspect of fairy tales. With more and more tales being translated to film and television and fairy tales being a common subject for theater and art, there is room for scholars to conduct more research on the adaptability of fairy tales. More research on fairy tales, not as historical artifacts, but as living and mobile aspects of society, would direct the field into a relevant and interesting place of study. This paper attempts to fill a deficiency in this subject, clarifying some aspects of fairy tales as cultural representations and attempting to understand the new ways fairy tales are being employed in today's society.

This paper will focus on the importance of fairy tales as cultural objects, show the ways in which they work in society, and how contemporary fairy tales are being created and transmitted. The first part of this paper will focus on the transmission and adaptation of fairy tales. Fairy tales can be traced back as far as the written record and each culture has put forth tales that reflect the thoughts and fears of that culture. The abilities of fairy tales to migrate from culture to culture and to remain relevant are characteristics of the genre that make them valuable for study. It is also through these transformations that we can see changing values of societies, from the focus on the family unit, to the changing roles of women; fairy tales highlight the best of societies and shine a light on the darker aspects of culture.

The second part of the paper will analyze the fairy tale “Donkeyskin” as it reflects the society it emerged from. Themes of patriarchy and female disenfranchisement are prevalent throughout the tale with a particular emphasis on the economic value of the female protagonist to her family. Donkeyskin is a tale that focuses on the incestuous relationship between a king and his daughter. Through this tale, we can infer what the values of the European society, from which this tale comes, held about female sexuality and female power. This chapter will also focus on the connection between women and fairy tales. The last part of this paper will discuss current modes of fairy tale creation and distribution. New fairy tales are no longer being produced in the same manners. People are no longer interested in creating brand new fairy tales; instead, the current fairy tale market is dominated by sterilized Disney movies. Old versions of fairy tales dealt with the darker aspects of human society, murder, abuse, death, and evil, but Disney versions of these tales often gloss over or eliminate these darker themes. One genre that shares both the morality and the genre markers of these old tales are horror films. It is through horror films that we can see the remnants of early fairy tales. Horror is also a genre in which current society is beginning to create new tales and tropes.

Fairy tales are a deceptively simple form of storytelling. They contain simple characters, plotline, and motivations. They depict happy endings and serve as a type of wish fulfillment for those who are fans. But despite these simple motifs, fairy tales are complex and interesting forms of art. Fairy tales dwell upon themes that have continued to intrigue societies for hundreds of years; themes like love, sacrifice, faith, duty, good and evil are all prevalent throughout this genre. The study of this genre and these stories has occupied scholars for generations and will most likely continue to occupy them.

Even though these stories are uncomplicated in appearance, their content is anything but unimportant.

## Chapter Two: The History and Importance of Fairy Tales

Fairy tales play a large role in our society. Fairy tales have been passed from generation to generation for thousands of years. Storytelling is a foundational part of our existence. People told stories to explain how the sun rose in the morning and set at night. Stories were told about the seasons, the gods, how things came into being, and how the world will end—everything has a story and fairy tales are one of storytelling's most basic forms. It is important to understand what constitutes as a fairy tale in this context. Fairy tales are a unique form of storytelling because of the ability to remain identifiable even when the characters and plot points change. A fairy tale can retain its identity even when adapted into different mediums. For example, there are hundreds of different versions of "Cinderella," a story of a young woman who is treated unfairly by those around her and ultimately is rewarded through magical means. In ancient Greece, there was a story of a young maiden whose slipper was stolen by an eagle and dropped into the hands of a king. In China, the young woman befriends a fish, the reincarnation of her mother, who helps her dress for a new year's celebration. At the celebration, the king finds her slipper and falls in love with the young woman. In Indonesia, instead of a slipper there is a magical swing that only moves when the right woman sits upon it. "Cinderella" has been adapted for the theater, into films, and onto the television screen. Yet, all these versions are just as much "Cinderella" stories as the European version that most Americans are the most familiar with. The adaptations and cultural differences that each country or region brings to the story enhances the essence of the tale rather than diluting it. Fairy tales have been adapted, retold, and restructured throughout many cultures and time periods. The adaptability and evolution of fairy tales have ensured their survival and make them all the

more valuable for contemplation and study. Within the tales, lies a rich history of culture and human desires. Fairy tales help illustrate basic truths about the human experience, truths that have been handed down from generation to generation, from storytellers to audiences for centuries. These tales focus on universally human themes of family, good versus evil, love, and more. These tales encompass a very specific part of the human experience and illustrate basic human thoughts and desires.

Fairy tales emerged from an oral tradition of storytelling, which explains their simple structures. We know that fairy tales emerged from oral tradition because many authors of literary tales took great care to preserve the oral tradition of the tales. The Grimm brothers especially tried to highlight the oral aspects of the tales in their works, lamenting the loss of the original form in their notes and the forewords in their books. It is believed that fairy tales as an oral tradition existed for thousands of years before their literary forms were created, but this is unverifiable because of their form. This makes it especially frustrating to attempt to trace the origin for any particular tale with the histories of certain tales being all but conjecture on the part of scholars. Because of fairy tales' simplicity and often-contentious topics, scholars have had a hard time agreeing on the role these tales play in culture and history.

The structuralists became preoccupied with the form of these tales. Picking them apart like a work of art or a piece of music, they reduced these tales to their core parts. Other critics fall into a more personal perspective, ascribing psychological significance to the tales. These critics felt that fairy tales showed the inner workings of a person and that they exemplified the growth of the individual. Other critics believe that fairy tales illustrate archetypal images from deep within the collective unconscious. They believed

that these stories dealt with ideas too big for the individual to understand and comprehend without these stories to guide them, while still others believe that fairy tales are cultural artifacts that describe the time and place they emerge from. This last group believes that, like an ancient piece of pottery, a story can be examined for context to a specific era and people.

The cultural perspective is the closest to encompassing the vast nature of fairy tales with its emphasis on a holistic approach to fairy tale study. Fairy tales can function in society and culture in a variety of ways. These tales can work to uncover cultural trends, psychological aspects, and moral values of the people who told them, as well as illustrate social expectations and norms in a particular group of people. Using archetypal and psychological methods to explore fairy tales is useful for critical work but it is important not to divorce these stories from their cultural significance. If we look at the narrative structure of each tale as a skeleton of the story, then we can learn about the human experience by noticing where this skeleton pops up again and again. For example, when we see a “Cinderella” tale in both Western European culture and Chinese culture we can conclude that there is something about this type of tale that transcends differences in geography and language. This type of tale must ring true to people from vastly different cultures which had very little contact with one another. Despite this lack of contact both cultures had stories that share plot points and themes. The tales that are found across cultures speak to the unifying experiences that all humans undergo. We can learn much about the collective unconscious by studying the bones of a tale, we can also learn by examining the flesh the bones wear. The cultural details, the flavor of the stories, the emphasis on characters, and the mannerisms that emerge from the stories

teach us about the specific time periods and traditions of the people who passed these stories on. Ultimately, it is through a combination of micro and macro study that we are best able to understand the underlying meaning and importance of fairy tales.

Fairy tales share a special, if strange, place in Western European culture. For many people, they are indicative of childhood and innocence. In the United States of America, the Disney versions of fairy tales are some of the first fully realized worlds that people will experience outside of their own. Disney has become a lifestyle for many people—from Disney stores, to theme parks, even to Disney-themed weddings. Most of Disney's best-loved works center around fairy tales; "Beauty and the Beast," "Cinderella," and "Rapunzel," are some of the studio's most popular works. It is not just Western fairy tales that get the Disney treatment. "Mulan," one of China's most beloved and well-known fairy tales, has become one of Disney's most popular classics. These staples of the American childhood are so common that it would be considered strange, if not outrageous, for a person to reach adulthood without having watched a majority of these Disney movies. Even the term "Disney Classic" implies a certain forgone conclusion that these movies will be central to Western culture. The appeal of Disney and Disney culture is directly linked to the appeal of fairy tales. These tales are often celebrated as essential parts of childhood, but despite their mass appeal, very few consumers will take the time to critically examine these works of art. Why are these tales so popular? Why do we connect so strongly with these stories? Where do these tales come from?

Fairy tales can be recognized first and foremost by their basic structures. Usually, a tale involves one main character, a young person whom the reader stays with during the

entirety of the tale. Staying with the main characters is important to the make-up of the tale. Very rarely does the listener, or reader, of fairy tales understand the motivation, or truly anything internal, about other secondary characters of the story. It is only the hero of the story that is given focus. The hero leaves home to undergo a quest, or to right a wrong, and then returns, having successfully completed their mission. The basic skeletons of these tales—the woods, a prince or princess, a quest—are so simple but their variations are a multitude. With so little variation in the action of a fairy tale, it seems that the stories would become repetitious and boring, but fairy tales have a way of presenting the same structure in unique and interesting variations. It is put best in the following quote:

A girl is in the woods. Give her a brother and one has ‘Hansel and Gretel,’ give her many brothers and sisters and one has ‘Hop o’ My Thumb,’ send the girl to dwarfs and one has ‘Snow White,’ to bears and one has ‘Goldilocks,’ to grandmother and one has ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ (Sale 29).

The basic structure is what defines fairy tales as their own genre. The woods, the evil queen, the deserving young person are all elements that make up the basic structure of the fairy tale.

One of the closest forms of story to fairy tales is myth. Fairy tales and myth share similar structural elements and can function in the same ways from time to time. Both myth and fairy tales usually concern supernatural beings and entities, use magic as central plot devices, and mingle ordinary humans with the extraordinary. The supernatural beings in myth and fairy tales are usually presented in two categories: adversaries to the

hero of the tale or as helpers who provide advice, or magical assistance on the quest the hero undertakes. These beings can take the forms of gods or goddesses, tricksters, humans with magical powers such as magicians, sorcerers, witches, fairy godmothers, people who possess magical objects, or mythical beings such as dwarves, ogres, dragons, or elves. These supernatural beings use their magic to push the plot line forward; in fairy tales, this might look like a fairy godmother giving a deserving maid a dress and a magical carriage to attend the prince's ball, or a talking animal providing assistance in repayment for a hero's kindness. In myth, this might look like three goddesses fighting over a golden apple and bringing in a human to judge their beauty or a god seducing a mortal and fathering an extraordinary child. The ways magic and supernatural beings interact with mortals vary, but they are usually the driving force behind both myth and fairy tales.

Myth and fairy tales differentiate in many ways, but especially in one key way: the physical world application. One theory in the interpretation of myth is that it can be related to some physical, real-world landmark or actuality. For example, the story of Hades and Persephone can be interpreted as a story of how the season came into being. This application to the physical world is not the same for fairy tales. Fairy tales are almost never related directly to the physical world. The stories often take place "a long time ago in a place far far away." Countries are never named and markers of reality, such as historical leaders or sovereigns, physical landmarks, or even religions, are very rarely named. The narrative structure of these stories often seems to defy logic and the tales dismiss the internal logic that occupies most myth. How can a little girl be fooled into thinking a bloodthirsty wolf is her grandmother? How can a magician place his heart

in a jewel, then that jewel inside a duck, then that duck inside a cat? The point of fairy tales is not to explain the world we live in, which is the reason why they tend to defy the rules and logic of the everyday world. Another critical interpretation is that fairy tales exist to illustrate more esoteric aspects of human nature and of the storytellers themselves. Jack Zipes writes in his introduction to *Fairy Tale as Myth* that fairy tales and myth are inextricably linked to one another (1-4). Myth has the ability to convey a religious or supernatural experience to its audience. There is a connection to a spiritual entity for those who deal with myth. Zipes argues that fairy tales, while being extremely similar to myth, no longer have a connection to a spiritual entity. Fairy tales connect people with one another and teach important ideas and values but they lack a spiritual element. Fairy tales are the secular versions of myth.

The Jungians, especially Marie Louise von Franz, tackled aspects of fairy tales and myth in their studies. The very nature of the fairy tales and myth are ripe for Jungian and archetypal criticism because of their symbolic plotlines and metaphoric atmosphere. Myth and fairy tales are filled with symbols and imagery that correspond closely with the aspects that most concern the archetypal critic: good, evil, the wise old man, the shadow, and more.

That myths can be considered as narrative elaborations of archetypal images (the conscious representations of the unconscious instincts) makes sense, once one accepts the proposition that archetypes were originally ‘situation,’ that they are imprinted patterns of behavior left behind by untold ages of human evolution. Seen from this perspective, myths are culturally elaborated ‘representations of situation.’ They enable us to re-

experience consciously the unconscious instinctual processes of the psyche (Walker 18).

Myth and fairy tales are important socially because they allow people to represent internal parts of their psyche into stories. Through these expressions they can then learn more about parts of themselves that would otherwise be unknowable. If we use the interpretation of myth as a representation of situations that untold generations of people have found themselves in before, situations that have become so synonymous with the human experience that they are somehow imprinted in our collective unconscious, almost genetically handed from generation to generation, then it makes sense for fairy tales and myth to be as popular and encompassing as they currently are.

Von Franz postulated that fairy tales have one purpose: to illustrate the Self. She proposed that all fairy tales instruct and illuminate different aspects of the Self. While this overarching and monolithic statement can at times be limiting, it does explain some of the more mystical parts of fairy stories. The battle with the ogre by the hero then represents the battle between the Shadow and the Self. Various stories highlight and explain the archetypal struggles that all humans undergo. Von Franz believes that fairy tales are the best way to understand the unconscious because of their simplicity. “In myths or legends, or any other more elaborate mythological material, we get at the basic patterns of the human psyche through an overlay of cultural material. But in fairy tales there is much less specific conscious cultural material, and therefore they mirror the basic patterns of the psyche more clearly” (1). The emphasis on the lack of culturally specific material is interesting for the Jungians and their work with fairy tales. Von Franz’s claim is that understanding the Self is the central goal for all fairy tales. This is why they

continue to be popular throughout history. But Franz's theory fails to take into account the amount of cultural material that fairy tales do carry with them. By ignoring these details, we lose a bounty of historical and cultural material that is useful to scholars.

Fairy tales are important cultural artifacts because they encompass the human experience. Many psychoanalysts in the twentieth century perceived fairy tales as teaching tools and, in some instances, as case studies because of their focus on problems that seemed to reflect the experiences they underwent themselves. One of the most famous of these critics was Dr. Bruno Bettelheim. Bettelheim writes that fairy tales are psychologically important because they help children navigate through their psychological development. Bettelheim closely followed the teachings of Freud and used this philosophy to develop theories on the meaning and uses of fairy tales. Fairy tales were psychological tools that were used to help transition people from one stage of development to another.

Bettelheim mostly worked with children who suffered from emotional and developmental disabilities. During his work with children, he found that many of the milestones that they dealt with and suffered from could be found mirrored in the fairy tales and children's stories that were so popular with his patients. Many of the tales featured child-aged heroes and heroines and Bettelheim believed that children would read and experience the stories on a personal level. For example, "The Little Goose Girl," a story about a young princess who travels with her magic horse to meet her new husband and is usurped by her handmaiden, becomes a teaching tale about how a girl moves to womanhood, how she will pass through puberty and claim her sexuality on the other side (Bettelheim 136-143). Unlike the Jungians, Bettelheim believed that the fairy tales had

intensely personal value since his patients directly lived their own experiences through the characters they identified with.

People in the psychoanalytic school of criticism thought that fairy tales were tools to help people deal with psychological road blocks, that by reading these tales they were able to better understand themselves and the things they were experiencing emotionally. But like the Jungians, by only focusing on this internal aspect of fairy tales, psychologists ignored other important areas that are present throughout fairy tales. Again the cultural aspects of the tales were ignored and often Bettelheim and his followers would claim that there were universal interpretations for certain tales, almost always about the psychological development of a child. By postulating that fairy tales have one interpretation and tying it so closely to that of the transition from childhood to adulthood, psychologists forced meaning onto symbols, and ignored elements of tales that did not fit their analysis. The decapitated horse's head in "The Little Goose Girl" must then stand for menstruation because the blood has become a signifier for that interpretation. The goose boy, who tries to cut off a lock of the princess's hair, must then be about the gendered power dynamics in sexuality because he is thwarted in his attempted follicle theft. Bettelheim and his followers often reverse engineered solutions, rather than examining tale itself and allowing the evidence presented before them to lead them to conclusions. Bettelheim was right to claim that most of these tales seemed to address common problems that children face when growing up. "Hansel and Gretel" is a story about the abandonment of children by their primary caregivers. A story like this could be a helpful way to illustrate to children in similar situations that they are not alone and that

they can triumph in the end similar to the heroes of that tale. The argument that all stories that have young protagonists are intended for young people is a false claim.

Historically, the fairy tales that we are familiar with today were tales told by adults and for adults. The Grimm Brothers collected their oral tales from adults and young people alike. Often storytelling was the primary form of entertainment and certainly not looked upon as a childish pastime. It was only when the ideas of childhood became more solid and started to encompass the ideal of children as natural innocents that we get the idea that fairy tales are clean, and sweet, and only targeted at children. Fairy tales are vastly different compared to before and after the Grimm Brothers and the Victorian emphasis on children as pure and innocent. Before these events, fairy tales were usually darker and often extremely violent. Tales were cleaned up and sanitized as they made their way into the nursery, but these tales were not originally meant for children. Taking an ancient art form, like storytelling and then advertising it as only for a very young group of people is illogical and leads to many problems that later critics had with Bettelheim and the psychological approach to fairy tale study.

Fairy tales have always contained elements that are tied closely to the cultures they emerged from. As fairy tales travel from region to region, they began to assume different aspects from their storytellers, the audiences, and the social norms of the nation. Maria Tater wrote about the changes fairy tales underwent from region to region:

Blue Beard acquired distinctly new personality traits once he crossed the Rhine; Little Red Riding Hood became more prim when she entered the pages of *Nursery and Household Tales*; and Snow White became

progressively sweeter and tidier as her story was translated into print and made its way from Germany to the United States (Tater xxxi).

Fairy tales change constantly. They acquire new aspects with every culture that embraces them and every storyteller who presents them with their own emphasis and interpretations. It is impossible to say that a tale has one meaning and that everyone will consume it in a predictable way.

Fairy tales have a hard time being tied down to a strictly defined purpose. The main flaw most psychoanalysts had with their treatment of fairy tales was their insistence of ascribing static meaning to the symbols in fairy tales. Fairy tales greatest attribute as a work of art is their ability to adapt and to be relevant within multiple cultures. By tying the symbols to a single defined meaning, it limits the broad appeal of these tales. Therefore, when the psychoanalysts looked at the various stories like “Little Goose Girl,” they claimed it was about the distancing of the mother figure. “Red Riding Hood” was now about sexual awakening. And “Hansel and Gretel” was now about separation anxiety (and the dangers of binge eating, probably). All of these prescriptions do work, to a point, and that is one of the problems. It becomes like the parable of the blind men describing the elephant. When divided up, each section takes on its own complete meaning, but only if you ignore the entirety of the work. Fairy tales do not fit easily into a box. They are strange stories with ambiguous morals that do not follow the rules that govern the world we live in. To say that fairy tales have only a teaching imperative is to dismiss the darker aspects of the tales, while highlighting the parts of the stories that have often been tacked onto these tales to make them acceptable for children. These tales are

not teaching tools; they are much closer to archetypal stories with palpable cultural significance.

Jung wrote about myth and archetypes, saying that mythic stories were representations of cultural ideas and situations. The same situations have been experienced time and time again until they have become imprinted into our collective unconscious. This is why a reader can tell a story is an animal bridegroom tale, whether it is “Cupid and Psyche,” “Beauty and the Beast,” or the movie *Alien*. These are archetypal stories, stories from deep within our subconscious, or as Jung would call it, our collective unconscious that nevertheless has cultural and societal significance.

More recent critics have embraced the social aspects of fairy tales and the role they play in culture. Feminists especially have categorized fairy tales as either outdated teaching tools on the roles of women or as case studies on the worse offenses of societal pressures on young women. Many claim that these tales teach women that they should embrace passivity and wait for their prince to come. But these critics fall into the trap that many have before them by ascribing only social significance or personal significance. This study of fairy tales attempts to reconcile these two viewpoints into one cohesive outlook on fairy tales as both internally enlightening and culturally significant.

One of the biggest traps for the psychological reading of tales is the personal identification with the main character. Identifying personally with the hero in a fairy tale is easy, which is probably why using a psychological approach to fairy tales is so appealing for many. The characters themselves rarely have distinctive characteristics that would identify them as individuals. It becomes easy to see yourself as the main character, the prince or princess, the woodcutter, or the fool. Each fairy tale can only

revolve around one central character. The stories are tied so closely to this figure that they cannot distinguish between any other characters. The central figure is the only person that matters in the story.

Take, for instance, the tale of “Sweetheart Roland.” The main character of this tale is a young woman, the stepdaughter of a witch. The witch has two daughters, the mentioned stepchild and one biological daughter. One day the stepchild has on a beautiful apron that the biological daughter decides she must have. The witch tells her true daughter that in the night she will kill the stepchild and give her daughter the apron. The stepchild hears this and that night switches places with the witch’s daughter. The witch kills her daughter in the night and the stepdaughter escapes with her sweetheart, Roland. As they hide from the witch, Roland asks the stepdaughter to wait for him until he returns with food for their journey. While he is away, he falls for another woman and forgets about his sweetheart. The girl eventually finds out her man is to marry another and on the day of his wedding she shows up to sing for him, as all the unmarried women in the area are required to do. Roland sees his old love, remembers his duty and love for her, and casts aside his new bride. Thus ends the tale, a happily ever after ending for all involved.

A personal reading of this text can find the story somewhat limiting. The girl waits for her love, renounces all agency, and is immediately forgotten by her lover. But in the world of fairy tale, this is a happy ending. The girl ends up with her man and all is forgiven. The real focus, though, is not what is happening with Roland and this new woman, but the faithfulness of his lover. It does not matter in the context of the story that he was to wed another; it only matters that he did not. The main character’s happiness is

the only thing that matters in the context of these tales. It is impossible for the reader to follow Roland once he leaves the main character and therefore, the audience cannot see Roland fall for the other woman. Once he left the sphere of influence of our main character, his actions cannot be viewed.

If the readers look at the stories through a cultural lens rather than personally identifying with the character of Roland's lover, then the readers can begin to postulate about whom the people were who told this tale and what their cultural values of the time were. Roland lover's main trait is her steadfastness, her belief that if she remains true to what she believes in she will be delivered from evil. The tale of "Sweetheart Roland" comes from the Grimm's *Household Stories* and was gathered during the mid-nineteenth century in (mainly) Germany. Because of the place and time of this story, we can make some inferences about the people who told this story.

Fairy tales have an air of optimism about them. Almost every fairy tale finishes with a marriage or a birth, symbols of hope and prosperity. The rest of the story can demonstrate things about the values of that particular society. In "Sweetheart Roland" the main character is praised for her steadfastness and her loyalty. She is not shown to be demanding of her lover nor is she shown to be jealous. Using these highlighted qualities, we can infer that mid-nineteenth century Germans valued faithfulness in women. The story does not show itself to be satirical in any way so it stands that the traits and values praised in the story would mirror those praised in daily life. Using a cultural lens for examination, the *Household Stories* say as much about the hopes and fears of the nineteenth century Germans as *Tangled* (2010) could potentially say about contemporary Americans.

Fairy tales illustrate relationships, fears, hopes, desires, and dreams. It is the persistence of these tales along with their ability to change and reflect current culture that makes them one of the most valuable literary and cultural tools in our possession. By studying the details that are in fairy tales and the details that have changed from era to era, we can make assumptions about how cultures and people have changed. The values that are held up as important and the traits that are looked down upon are often discussed within the context of fairy tales. By examining these tales and their cultural context, scholars can conjecture about human nature, the past, and the present.

### Chapter Three: Female Agency in the Fairy Tale World

Women have often been given credit in shaping the genre of fairy tales. Terri Windling, an author, poet, and scholar who has written extensively on the genre of fairy tales, wrote an essay about the connection between women and fairy tales. In her essay, Windling wrote about the origins of some of the most popular fairy tales and especially the influence of French women on the genre. The French fairy tale writers of the seventeenth century produced so many works that they eventually were collected and published in the massive work *Cabinet des Fées*. Charles Perrault, the most famous of the *Cabinet* authors has been singled out by history for remembrance, but the majority of these authors were educated French women from upper-class families. Women ran and attended the salons where the majority of the *Cabinet des Fées* was penned. *Cabinet des Fées* is actually where the term fairy tales originated from. Women like Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Henriette Julie de Murat, Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier and numerous others shaped French fairy tales. Even male fairy tale authors have often given credit to women as the originators of their popular tales. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm collected their tales from German peasants, often crediting their tales to old women. Giovanni Straparola, when faced with a charge of indecency from the Vatican for his bawdy collection of fairy tales, told the church that he had heard his stories from a group of old women (Windling). Old women as authors seem to give an air of authority over these stories that they otherwise would lack. Mother Goose, nursemaids, and mothers are all imparted with a type of feminine narrative authority. Fairy tales have often been depicted as a female genre of storytelling, despite fact that the most famous and popular fairy tale tellers are men: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Anderson, and Walt Disney.

Marina Warner writes in *From the Beast to the Blond* about the feminine connection between the sibyl as a feminine oracle and the nursemaid telling stories to her charges. For Warner, the female storyteller and the fairy tale are intrinsically interconnected.

The matter of fairy tale reflects such lived experience, with a slant towards the tribulations of women, and especially young women of marriageable age; the telling of the stories, assuming the presence of a Mother Goose, either as a historical source, or a fantasy of origin, gains credibility as a witness's record of lives lived, of characters known, and shapes expectations in a certain direction. Fairy tale offers a case where the very contempt for women opened an opportunity for them to exercise their wit and communicate their ideas (XXIII).

Females and fairy tales are linked through the act of storytelling. Women tell the tales to their children and by doing so embrace the genre as significant to their own struggles.

One major subcategory in fairy tales is stories that concern female protagonists and traditionally female problems. These problems might include topics like marriage to an unsuitable husband in "Beauty and the Beast," domestic cruelty in "Cinderella," and child/sexual abuse and a predatory father in "Donkeyskin." But the question must be asked if this is a female genre and often perpetuated by female storytellers, why are the cruelest villains in the tales female? The stepmothers, the evil queens, the wicked fairies are often the most violent and the most interesting villains? Why do they perpetrate the violence they do on their (often) female victims? One would think that if fairy tales are in fact a female genre, then women would be treated with more kindness and generosity than violence.

The answer might be as simple as reflection. Fairy tales highlight certain aspects of society; often they reflect the darker aspects of the time and place they emerge from. “On the whole fairy tales are not passive or active; their mood is optative—announcing what might be. Imagining the fate that lies ahead and ways of dealing with it (if adverse—as in ‘Hansel and Gretel’ and ‘Donkeyskin’), or achieving it (if favorable—as in ‘Puss in Boots’), is the stuff of Mother Goose tales” (Warner xx). These tales told people what they could hope for, what they could work for, and what might happen if they strayed from the approved path. In societies with limited resources, stepmothers were dangerous to their stepchildren if they were more concerned about their own natural children or if they themselves were fighting to establish their own place in their new families either for affection or for means. Children were also a threat to mothers in a pre-modern society with the majority of adult female deaths resulting from childbirth. Fairy tales could be a way for these societies to explore these ideas and fears in a way that was exorcising and safe for the storytellers and listeners.

Taboos are discussed freely and often throughout fairy tales with many stories dealing with the subject of breaking taboos or heroes falling outside of moral imperatives. The Bad Mother archetype or narrative runs throughout fairy tales. A good mother is someone who protects and comforts her children. So how could people deal with a female who refuses to take on the role of protector? By making mothers the villains of fairy tales and by making the parent a stepmother rather than natural mother, people could understand and explore their feelings about this taboo subject. Sexual taboos especially are focused on in fairy tales. “Beauty and the Beast” and “Little Red Riding Hood” can be read as ruminations on bestiality. “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty”

both have sleeping figures that are kissed awake, whereas older versions of the tales have the kiss being remarkably less chaste than the modern-day version of the tales. One tale, “Donkeyskin,” is a story focused on the taboo nature on incest between and father and his daughter. This type of tale is remarkably less prevalent in the fairy tale genre, but because of its scarcity, it becomes all the more interesting to examine.

One of Charles Perrault’s first stories, “Donkeyskin” was published as a pamphlet in 1694. “Donkeyskin” is a tale of a father who wants to marry his daughter and the lengths she goes to in trying to avoid this fate. This tale has often been excluded from popular collections of Perrault’s tales because of the uncomfortable nature of the plot. In fact, it was not included in his popular tales until 1781, a full 87 years after he first published the pamphlet (Warner 321). “Donkeyskin” is not a unique tale; many different versions of this type of tale exist throughout the world. So many tales in fact, that this type of story was awarded its own Arne-Thompson numbering system: 510B unnatural Love/persecuted heroine. Other tales that follow this same line are “The She-Bear,” by Giambattista Basile, and “Allerleirauh,” by the Grimm Brothers.

“Donkeyskin” starts out like many other tales, with the disposal of the mother figure. A young queen falls ill and tells her husband, the king, that he cannot marry anyone who is less beautiful or talented than the former queen. In some tales, it is out of concern for the kingdom and the king that she forces this promise; the dying queen is a benevolent presence who hopes to protect her children and people by ensuring that her successor is kind and worthy of their task. More often, though, the promise is filled with an overtone of malice. The queen does not wish to ever be replaced and forces the promise on the grief stricken king when he is most vulnerable. The queen never wants to

be usurped by a rival. Her securing of the king's promise ensures that she will never be replaced. The queen's proposition is almost a riddle: find someone more beautiful and cleverer than myself, an impossible task unless the king uses unconventional means. The king becomes inconsolable in his grief and slips into madness. In this mad state, he decides that the only solution to the riddle of his remarrying is to marry his daughter. The daughter has all the characteristics of the queen but heightened because of her innocence and youth.

The daughter tries to dissuade him, as do his councilors, but the king will not be put off and demands to marry his daughter. The daughter, in turn, sometimes with the aid of a fairy godmother, sometimes on her own, demands three dresses. The first dress is as brilliant as the sun, the second like the moon, and the third as sparkling as the stars. Believing that the king will not be able to complete these tasks, or that the difficulty involved in these errands will cause the king to rethink his demands. Time and time again, the king is easily able to produce these gowns. Again trying to delay or derail the marriage, the princess demands the skin of the magical donkey that is the king's favorite pet and the source of his wealth. In Perrault's "Donkeyskin," the magical ass leaves droppings of gold every night. In the Grimm's version, golden coins fall from the donkey's ears each morning. Perhaps the image of a donkey who defecates gold, while fine for the Parisian audience, was a bit too risqué for the German and English nurseries. The king kills the donkey with no hesitation and gives his daughter the skin. Seeing that he will not be put off of marriage, the princess disguises herself in the skin of the beast, packs up all her belongings, dresses and jewels, and runs away, renaming herself Donkeyskin. While in the woods she encounters a prince who, thinking she is an

enchanted creature, kidnaps her and takes her to his castle to be a servant in the castle farmhouse.

The wearing of the donkey's skin is a symbolic act. The donkey is a working creature who toils on farms and in the dirt. The donkey is also a symbol of the ridiculous, used in plays like Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* for comedic effect. When someone is said to bray like a donkey, they are not being complimented. By donning the donkey skin, the daughter is making a physical representation of the psychological trauma that she has been put through. The princess has been symbolically dirtied by the king's sexual claim. She has been turned into an animal by her father's sexual demands and turned into a beast of burden by the counselor's willingness to trade her body for continued prosperity. She is also making a link between the donkey as a source of wealth and herself as a commodity to her father.

The society demonstrated in "Donkeyskin" is that of an absolute patriarchy. The councilors to the king are horrified by what he has done, but they advise the daughter to listen to what the king demands. Rather than helping the daughter and defying the king, the councilors would rather have the head of state in an illicit marriage. It is more important that the councilors respect the king's wishes than for them to conform to the social taboo against incest. The father is so powerful in this story that his society is forced to adapt to his strange behavior rather than paint the king in a monstrous light. In some versions of the story, the councilors feel that the daughter has enchanted the father into acting out these taboo urges. They postulate that she is a witch and using some kind of magic has hypnotized him into this transgression. Robin McKinley novel, *Deerskin*, a retelling of this tale, focuses on the societal tendency to blame the victim of such abuses.

The advisors in McKinley's version of the tale decide that, rather than take up the side of the daughter, they will blame her for starting this affair.

*What spell is this?* We have though her so weak and timid! We cannot understand it! He has been so fit and well; his judgments have been faultless. What has she done to him, this witch-daughter, that he should devastate his country and his people this way...how evil this girl must be, to have brought her own father to this pass (73-74)

Freud claimed that the incest taboo was universal. All societies have a taboo against sexual relations between biologically-related family members. The reasons for this taboo are both physical and social. Children produced by genetically similar parents have a greater chance of developing both physical and mental impairments. Freud believed that all people had unresolved sexual urges for their close family members and that suppression of these thoughts and feelings were part of the natural order. To combat these urges, societies created fixed and unbreakable taboos against the sexual congress of closely related people. Critics of Freud's work rarely attacked the validity of the incest taboo; critics instead questioned the reasoning behind it. Finnish anthropologist Edvard Westermarck theorized that siblings, or other young people who spent their first few years socialized and raised in close physical proximity to one another, will develop a natural desensitization to later sexual attraction. This also applies to caregivers and parents of children (Westermarck). Despite the difference in reasoning between Freud and Westermarck, the conclusion remains the same: there exists a universal prohibition against close family members engaging in sexual relations.

The king in “Donkeyskin” is working outside the bounds of respectable society. His attempt to have sexual relations with his daughter is culturally, physically, and morally wrong, but because of his political position and power he is beyond the reach of the law. For the king’s councilors the societal taboo against incest is contrasted against the idea that the king must be infallible. The two ideas cannot exist together so one must be subverted by the other, or the blame must be reassigned. The only way for the society in “Donkeyskin” to reconcile these two beliefs is to put the blame on the daughter. It must have been her fault. She must have tricked, or enchanted him to behave this way. Authors and editors often have trouble with the taboo nature of Donkeyskin and her father’s relationship. Many versions of the tale omit the incestual themes altogether or ascribe more socially acceptable motivations for the father/daughter marriage. In some versions of the story, the father is not capable of recognizing his daughter and all the incestual advances are attributed to his incapacitated mind. In Andrew Lang’s *The Grey Fairy Book*, the paternity is clearly denied: “The king’s eyes fell on his adopted daughter, who had lived in the palace since she was a baby” (2). Lang has pardoned the king of the incest charges and has made him guilty only of child abuse. Other versions of the tales have the father and daughter reuniting at the end of the story, either with the father firmly married off to a widowed queen or recovered from the evil spell he was under and completely forgiven by the now happily married princess.

Donkeyskin is then taken to her new castle to live with the prince who has abducted her from the woods. Like the beast of burden whose skin she wears, Donkeyskin is forced to do work outside her previous experience and abilities. The servants in the castle treat Donkeyskin poorly; she is made to do the meanest chores and

the dirtiest work. Once a week she bathes herself and tries on her beautiful dresses to remind herself who she once was. The prince of the castle is wandering around the farm one day, opening doors and looking around. When he comes to the door of Donkeyskin, he finds that the door is locked. Peeping into the keyhole, he sees a beautiful girl in a fantastic dress, which dazzles him with her beauty.

The prince falls ill after that and the royal doctors declare him lovesick. The only thing that will make him better is a cake made by the creature known as Donkeyskin. The king and queen summon Donkeyskin and bid her to make a cake. While she stirs the batter, a small gold ring falls from her hand into the cake. The prince eats the cake and finds the golden ring. He declares that he will marry no one but the girl whose hand fits the ring. Many women try the ring, but none have hands as slender and beautiful as the ring demands. At last every woman in the kingdom has tried the ring and it has fit none. The prince demands that Donkeyskin be given a chance to try the ring. She is summoned and the ring slips easily onto her finger. Throwing off the donkey skin, she dazzles the king, queen, and prince with her beauty. The prince immediately declares that they will be married and everyone rejoices. The princess's father, the king, attends her wedding, now quite recovered from his illicit sexual urges, and they rejoice in her marriage.

Though the story seems to end on a note of happiness, it's hard to fully accept that this is a happy story. Professor D.L. Ashliman from the University of Pittsburgh, a scholar who has written extensively on fairy tales with incestuous themes, writes, “‘they lived happily until they died,’ tacked onto a long account of abuse and suffering, is not convincing. The final sentence notwithstanding, this tale is a tragedy, a story that symbolically—but lucidly—portrays the unhappy life of a sexually abused child.” The

abuse that Donkeyskin suffers at the hands of her father is extreme. She is forced to leave her home and her family because of the deviant sexual urges of her father, her monarch, and the head of her family. When Donkeyskin leaves her home, she gives up her family and national ties. She is homeless in the full sense of the word, without a physical home but also without a homeland. When she is taken by force to her new residence, she is neglected and abused. Ultimately, she is never able to achieve fully satisfying justice from either her father, her sexual abuser, or her new husband, her kidnapper.

“Donkeyskin” is unique in that, unlike most fairy tales, justice is not achieved for the protagonists. The father is never called to question for his earlier behavior, and all abuses at the hands of the king (and prince) are never revisited. Perrault’s “Donkeyskin” ends with the line “The story of Donkey Skin may be hard to believe, but so long as there are children, mothers, and grandmothers in this world, it will be remembered by all” (Donkeyskin). The social commentary rings throughout this line. This is a narrative that will not die because it is a female duty to make sure it carries on. Perrault is specifically calling out to women with this line. It is a female duty to guard against incest. Perhaps this is a result of a culture that values a home/work dichotomy. In many cultures where women do not have employment outside the home, the home life becomes a feminine realm. Females are responsible for ensuring that the children are raised properly and that everything that falls under the umbrella of home life would fall under the expertise of women. Women would be in charge of guaranteeing that the moral conduct of the household was beyond reproach, including safeguarding their husbands’ sexuality within

the home. In the story of “Donkeyskin,” the mother cannot protect her daughter and therefore, Donkeyskin becomes a target for the men around her.

In the story of “Donkeyskin,” the father is in such a position of power that he is unassailable. There is no recourse for the daughter, no higher authority for her to prevail upon. In the world of “Donkeyskin,” she is shown as the property of her father and must bend to his will. “Donkeyskin” is an extreme illustration of a situation that could happen to unprotected females. Women would recognize this tale when hearing it as a warning and impetus – a warning of the dangers they could face from predatory men and an impetus to protect those who could not protect themselves. But “Donkeyskin” is not just about the sexual abuse of a child by her parent. “Donkeyskin” is about female power and presence. It is a tale about sexual politics and the transition that young women go through in their development into adulthood.

The theme of women as financial and social commodities is strong throughout “Donkeyskin.” The beginning of the tale focuses on the king and his great wealth and power throughout the kingdom. Most of his power comes from his financial stability. The story begins “Once upon a time there was a King, so great, so beloved by his people, and so respected by all his neighbours and allies that one might almost say he was the happiest monarch alive” (Perrault). The king does not fear his people or his neighbors. Kingdoms with this amount of stability could be expected to be relatively prosperous and this leads to financial affluence for the king and his people. The story then continues on to focus on the magical donkey that lives in his stables. The donkey is, of course, a major source of his wealth. When the princess asks her father for the skin of the donkey, she is asking for the wealth of the kingdom. The fact that her father gives this up without a

blink of the eye demonstrates how far he's willing to go to control and keep his daughter. The amount of wealth he's willing to risk for jurisdiction over his daughter is less improbable when looking at the financial cost of her leaving him.

Daughters were seen as a financial liability to their families during the time "Donkeyskin" was written. Daughters could not hold jobs outside the home, nor could they live on their own. Families had to pay dowries to suitors in order to pay for the cost of taking on a bride. Even today, in some southern Asiatic cultures, dowries are the norm. The king's desire to marry his daughter can be interpreted as both sexually and financially beneficial to him. By marrying his daughter, he controls her physically and controls the wealth that she would have contributed to a potential suitor. When Donkeyskin runs off with the skin of the magical ass, she steals away with a powerful source of wealth from her father.

The financial loss of the daughter in the story is a secondary disruption. The primary offense seems to be the imbalance of power, which is central to the tale. The power of the father in this tale and in many other fairy tales was something that often got softened or censored by many editors or storytellers. Fairy tales have often been the targets of censorship and editing so as not to offend the sensibilities of their readers. Perrault's claim that Donkeyskin would stand the test of time due to the mothers and grandmothers of the world almost did not turn out to be true. The tale itself is one of the least reproduced of Perrault's stories, most likely due to the sensitive nature of the storyline. In early versions of "Hansel and Gretel," the natural parents leave the children in the woods to die, unlike the more common version now where Hansel and Gretel are left in the woods at the urging of the stepmother. In some "Sleeping Beauty" stories, the

prince wakes the princess not with a chaste kiss but by impregnating her with twins. During the Victorian age, many tales that centered around less desirable themes, especially those that revolved around sexuality, were edited or removed completely. In 1853, Charles Dickens wrote an essay entitled “Frauds on the Fairies”, in which he laments the editing that George Cruikshank implemented in his version of “Cinderella” to promote teetotalism. What Dickens failed to realize, though, was that Cruikshank was taking part in a long tradition of repackaging tales for modern audiences. When “Donkeyskin” gets overhauled so that the subject of incest does not even make an appearance, as it does in Lang’s adopted daughter version, some assumptions about that society’s view on sexuality can be made.

The Victorians had family structure with clearly defined gender roles. Men and women had different spheres of influence when it came to life inside and outside the home. The father was the head of the family and had authority to make almost all decisions that concerned the family and their affairs, especially financially if he was the only person working outside the home. During the Victorian period, many stories that dealt with what appeared to be the father’s excessive control began to be edited away or altogether omitted from collections. The villains increasingly became stepmothers or other non-related personages, with the emphasis on the righteousness of the nuclear family. The definition of nuclear family in this case includes mother, father, and blood-related children. Stories from that time tended to emphasize the nuclear family but also de-emphasize sexuality in young women. “Little Red Riding Hood” became increasingly tame in Victorian England, dropping her violent and sometimes sexual encounters with

the Big Bad Wolf until she became the sweet and chaste heroine that is familiar in contemporary versions of the tale.

Sometimes it is not the father that pushes the girl into marriage but the princess herself. In some versions of “Donkeyskin,” the Queen makes the King promise not to wed unless he finds a woman who can wear the Queen’s wedding ring. The ring is tried on all the ladies of the land but fits none. One day while playing, the princess goes to her father’s room and tries on the ring, though she has been warned not to. When she is discovered, there is no choice but to go through with the wedding. One such tale like this is “Sapsorrow,” in Jim Henson’s *The Storyteller*. In “Sapsorrow” the daughter is playing in her father’s room, which she has been told is off limits, when she finds her mother’s ring. She has also been warned not to play with the ring but she tries it on and is discovered.

The action of the daughter trying on the ring suggests that subconsciously she wants to marry her father and her push for this unnatural relationship. Bruno Bettelheim’s book, *The Uses of Enchantment*, suggests that fairy tales are used to help children come to terms with their own Oedipal complex for male children and Elektra complex for female children. According to Freud, the Elektra complex is when the daughter is obsessed with her father and desires a relationship, in this case a sexual one, in order to cement her claim on her father and usurp the place of her mother. “Donkeyskin” specifically deals with female sexual maturation. Bettelheim stresses that while a female child might desire her father, the feeling is not exhibited through sexual relations with the father; rather, it is an unconscious desire to please (112). The versions of “Donkeyskin” in which the daughter pushes her father into the marriage would be a

literal interpretation of the Elektra complex and not the symbolic action that Bettelheim suggests the healthy development would be. Also, according to this idea, the mother's death at the beginning of the story would be an unconscious wish fulfillment. The daughter wants the mother to die, either subconsciously or in actuality and creates situations where this wish can be fulfilled.

Electra complex envy of the mother's relationship to the father has an easy resolution in fairy tales: Let the mother die, and even let her extract a promise from the father that will justify a sexual union between him and his daughter. However, because the young woman cannot openly admit that she herself desires this union, she projects her forbidden urges into her father, thus experiencing the event as though he and not she were the principal instigator of the relationship (Ashliman).

Donkeyskin, in the versions where she is the instigator of the union, is acting on her desire to possess her father and usurp her mother. She has maneuvered the situation to force her father into a union he might not desire but she herself wants. But because of the taboo against incest and the devaluing of female sexuality, the daughter must make certain that she is not seen as an instigator in the relationship.

In almost all the variants of this story, the father is absolved of blame either due to his mental state or because he was pushed into the behavior by the women in his life. The king is forgiven for wanting to marry his daughter because society cannot blame a powerful man for something as taboo as incest; instead his incestual desire must be something beyond his control. The version of the story is sympathetic to the poor grief-stricken king and, in fact, seems to blame the women in the story for what happens,

painting the king as a victim of circumstance and the queen and his daughter as the real evil. Great time and detail is spent on the queen in these versions of the tale, long passages portray her as beautiful and clever and above all, bewitching and enchanting. It is through these characteristics that she is blamed for the incest rather than placing responsibility on the king.

When the queen forces the king into the promise that he will not remarry until he finds someone as beautiful and wise as the queen herself, she becomes a willing participant in the abuse. In many fairy tales, the mother is blamed more than the father for the abuse children suffer and, even in death, more responsibility is placed on the mother's role than the father in the tale of "Donkeyskin". The father is merely obeying the dying wishes of his beloved queen. The queen becomes the real villain in the tale. She has laid a trap for the king and her daughter. The end of "Donkeyskin" demonstrates this. The princess forgives her father, who has recovered his wits, while the Queen remains dead, and harmony is restored to all. This is not a surprising view from which to interpret this tale since Europe during this time was an entrenched patriarchy.

In most of the versions of "Donkeyskin," the victim is clearly the daughter. She is coerced into an undesirable marriage and the people she should rely on have abandoned her. The attempt to dissuade her father from the notion of marriage by assigning him unachievable goals backfires. When she asks for dresses that exactly match the sun, moon, and stars, a task that should be impossible, she is again disappointed. "The fact that the father can easily acquire these dresses patterned after celestial bodies must lead her to believe that the heavens themselves have joined in a conspiracy against her, leaving her no alternative but to flee" (Ashliman). The father

seems to have supernatural powers in acquiring his daughter; even the stars in the sky are seemingly on his side.

The abuse that the girl suffers does not end at the hands of her father, though. The girl is pushed out of her home and even after she leaves, the cycle of abuse continues. The prince whom she falls in love with resembles her father in both character and status, being both royal and accustomed to power. The prince takes great pleasure in throwing his boots at the disguised princess. He also exploits her by making her a slave in his household. Despite, or perhaps because of, the mistreatment at the hands of the prince, the princess falls in love with him and tempts him with her femininity and her beauty, characteristics that led her to her downfall in the first place. Many victims of sexual and physical abuse fall into relationships that mirror the patterns of abuse they suffered before. Dr. Ashliman writes about the reoccurrence of this pattern seen in "Donkeyskin,"

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of "All-Kinds-of-Fur" and other tales of this type is the apparent passivity with which the heroines accept the verbal abuse, the physical blows, and the sexual harassment dealt to them by their future husbands. Not only do they forgivingly subject themselves to this mistreatment, but they themselves initiate contacts with the very men who are abusing them.

Much like a victim of any type of abuse might do, the princess chooses a man that resembles the man she escaped from. Furthermore, she tempts the new prince with symbols of her domestic prowess. She displays her domestic prowess by cooking wonderful dishes for him, wearing fabulous dresses, dropping miniature household

implements like golden thimbles and miniature spindles into his food and finally a gives him a golden ring, her symbolic marriage proposal. These items suggest that the princess is both a willing participant in her plight and that she understands that she herself is a commodity. She has offered him her hand in marriage and with the monetary value that is placed on the union.

The ring is also the gateway into the idea of Donkeyskin's own compliance in her fate. Perrault's version of the story infers that Donkeyskin purposefully ensnared the prince into marriage. In Perrault's "Donkeyskin," there is a line concerning the ring dropped into the cake, 'some who know the outcome of this story think that she may have dropped the ring on purpose, and they are probably right, for when the prince stopped at her door and looked through the key hole, she must have known it. And she was sure that the ring would be received most joyfully by her lover.'" The belief that a woman must always be an object of aesthetic value for the male gaze is one that persists throughout fairy tales and society alike. The prince glances into the keyhole the princess's room uninvited, and nor at any time does Donkeyskin indicate that she desires the prince for marriage. It is the male narrator, Perrault, who infers that she must have desired the union. All the males in this story desire to possess Donkeyskin so therefore, the princess must have known that she was an object of desire, a commodity for the males around her. Perrault frames the prince's act of looking as a mutual exchange. The prince looked at Donkeyskin and she agreed to be looked upon. But because the reader only has the narrator's word that the exchange was mutual we must be skeptical about the underlying assumption. The narrator is supposing that she must have known, but how could she

have? The prince was in a place he should not have been. The princess had locked the door and taken reasonable precautions.

This story is about a young girl desired by two powerful men. The first is completely unsuitable and the girl takes it upon herself to flee. The second, though he might not be better than the first, is the princess's choice. She drops the ring in the cake. It is through her hands that the prince is saved. The character herself offers a silver lining to her readers. She has seized control of her own situation and made a choice about her future, which becomes the most promising aspect of "Donkeyskin". If the story is a tragedy as Professor Ashliman claims, then the small ray of hope is that the character has decided that she will no longer be pushed around. She will save the prince, even if he might not deserve it, and she will decide whom she is going to marry. With the archaic versions of marriage that are presented at the beginning of the book, to have the female protagonist decide whom she is going to marry seems like a fairly progressive aspect to the story.

## Chapter Four: Horror Films as Modern Day Fairy Tales

For many people the thought of horror films is, well, horrifying. These films are all blood and gore with little, if any, substance or artistic merit to them. Horror films have often been underappreciated if not outright mocked in popular culture. The detractors of horror films generally have similar criticisms of the genre: they are too violent and/or sexual, they lack fully fleshed out characters, and they all have essentially the same plot lines. These accusations are not without merit. Horror films are often violent, terrifically so. The film's characters are often one-dimensional. And most of these films do tend to follow the same patterns. What is interesting about these criticisms is that fairy tales are afflicted with many of these same issues.

The original fairy tales often depict terrific violence and abuse. From a prince having his eye torn out by thorns in "Rapunzel," to the queen in "Snow White" being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes at the wedding of her stepdaughter, fairy tales do not shy away from violence. Fairy tale characters are often one-dimensional, most characters lacking even a distinct name. Fairy tales have brave little tailors, princesses, deserving woodcutters, or youngest sons. Even if a character has a name, more often than not, it will be a reference to their station or to a physical characteristic. Beauty, Snow White, Goldilocks, Little Red Riding Hood—all of these names are physical markings of the character as opposed to distinctive titles. As for patterns, fairy tales almost all follow the same structure: a young person must leave home for one reason or another, travel into the woods or to a castle, meet a beast or magical being, defeat an evil or fulfill a quest, and then return home to live a life of peace. Joseph Campbell and Vladimir Propp were both able to identify distinct patterns of storytelling in their work

with fairy tales. The genres of fairy tales and horror films are related to one another in that they share both the same artistic form and many of the same cultural functions.

This chapter will focus on the connections between the genres of fairy tales and horror films and the ways in which they share a similar function within society. By exploring the history of horror films, we are able to see similarities in structure between the two genres and how each genre has influenced one another. This chapter will also focus on common tropes and themes within horror films, including the advent of what Carol J. Clover dubbed the Final Girl. The Final Girl character highlights the moral structure that is present in horror films. Horror films and fairy tales share a rigid, black and white morality, which makes them appealing for audiences who are looking for simple storytelling with an instructive quality. Horror films in many ways are a continuation of the tradition of fairy tales. Horror films are a relatively new art form and it is through this structure that contemporary authors are able to create new fairy tales with modern themes and contemplate contemporary issues.

Horror has a cultural tradition as ancient as that of fairy tales. The monsters of myth and legend—the Minotaur, the Sphinx, the Hydra, not to mention the countless devils, vampires, ghosts, and ghouls—that blanket ancient stories and tales are the stuff of both horror and legend. Horror has always been a part of storytelling. In Ancient Greece, theater patrons used to watch plays filled with gore and spectacle just as modern audiences watch slasher films. Audiences would recoil at the gouged out eyes of Oedipus, the tragic suicide of Antigone, or Agave bringing home the head of her son, ripped off in her bacchant fervor. It might be that modern horror can trace its roots all the way back to the plays of ancient Greece, but the conventions and structure that audiences

would recognize today began to take shape around two hundred years ago. In literature, the gothic movement of the eighteenth century relied heavily on many of the elements we recognize in today's horror films: supernatural shocks, the breakdown between the living and the dead, grand swells of emotion, and bodily horror like dismemberment, gore filled scenes, and blood. It is no surprise that some of the first horror films ever created were adaptations of these gothic novels. Edgar Allen Poe's stories have a long tradition of being transferred to the silver screen. "Murder in the Rue Morgue," "The Raven," "The Cask of Amontillado," and "The Mask of the Red Death" were all made into short films between 1908 and 1919. In 1897, The Grand Guignol Theater in Paris opened. This theater specialized in plays that celebrated and highlighted the macabre and grotesque. Theater patrons would flock to the playhouse to watch shows renowned for their grotesque special effects and bleak worldviews. Audiences were craving these types of body shocks and horrific images.

If horror films are the modern versions of fairy tales, then what has happened to fairy tales? Fairy tales have not disappeared from today's society, but quite the opposite; fairy tales are vastly popular forms of art. Television, film, and popular literature are filled with adaptations of popular fairy tales. But contemporary society seems to be content with the old stories rather than striving to create new fairy tales. Jack Zipes claimed in the introduction to his book *Fairy tales as Myth* that contemporary society was unable to create new fairy tales. Zipes claims that society shuns narrative innovation because they are content recycling classic stories; this is especially true with fairy tales. Society is not creating stories in the same way that it once was. Technology and contemporary modes of communication has changed the ways in which we tell stories

and create art. Today's most popular storytellers are not bards or poets. Storytelling is now done primarily through visual mediums. Television and film are the most universal forms of storytelling in today's society. Especially with the advent and focus of social media, television and movies are the most shared cultural artifacts of today's society. Watching visual media has become a collective experience, a social commodity. When was the last time you saw someone live tweet a novel or gather in a public venue for storytelling? If you ask a child today what their favorite fairy tale is, more than likely they will talk about their favorite Disney movie or television show. It is becoming less and less likely for children to be familiar with the literary versions of these classic tales and more likely for them to have seen them on the small or silver screen. The focus of society on film and television means that the most culturally relevant art is being created in these genres. Popularity in this case equals relevance.

The popularity of fairy tales has translated to the visual mediums. Fairy tales make excellent subjects for movies and television series. The stories follow comforting patterns that are familiar to audiences. The characters are recognizable and take little introduction so directors and writers can spend less time introducing the motivations of a character and dedicate more time on developing action and storylines. These tales can be directed at young audiences and families and can be written to appeal to adult audiences. Recently, there has been a spike in darker adaptations of fairy tales targeted towards an older audience. Movies like *Snow White and The Huntsman* (2012); *Ondine* (2009), an adaptation of "The Little Mermaid"; *Red Riding Hood* (2011); *Alice in Wonderland* (2010); *Beastly* (2011); *Mirror Mirror* (2012); *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013); and *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013) were all released in the last five years. There are more

adaptations to come, with a Disney version of “The Snow Queen” called *Frozen* (2013) to be released, and a “Cinderella” movie, as well as two different adaptations of “Snow White” planned for 2014. The theme of adult targeted fairy tale movies continues to grow in popularity.

Horror movies, through their violent tendencies, sexual themes, and disturbing visuals, are not marketed towards children. Fairy tales go hand in hand with childhood, so how can horror movies be their natural successor? Fairy tales used to be much darker with more sexuality and violence than they exhibit today. The imposter queen in “The Little Goose Girl” was forced to strip naked and get into a barrel that had been studded inside with sharp nails. The barrel was then hitched to two white horses and dragged through the streets until the false queen was dead. In an early version of “Sleeping Beauty,” the prince impregnates the sleeping girl with twins. When she gives birth, the children crawl up her body to suckle, accidentally dislodging the magic spindle from her finger and causing her to awaken. Fairy tales started out as stories filled with sex and violence. They showed both the dark and the light side of the cultures they mirrored. It was only when these narratives moved into the nursery that they began to lose their teeth.

It is important for the readers to understand that the violence found in fairy tales is inextricably tied to the ideas of justice. Evil characters enact violence *because* they are evil; violence committed by good characters is under the guise of justice and therefore permissible. The punishment of evil is a staple of fairy tales. Audiences who are familiar with the genre of fairy tales would expect good to conquer evil by the end of the story and for peace to be restored. By removing the violent endings of these stories, audiences are left with genre confusion. The stories no longer seem to wholly fit in with the rest of

its field. G. K. Chesterton wrote a review of the play *The Blue Bird* in 1922. In the play, two siblings are trying to seek happiness with the help of a fairy. Chesterton remarked that the children he saw it with seemed disappointed with the play's ending. The story lacked the strong culmination that the children had expected from a play that had, up until this point, followed the familiar fairy tale formula.

The children were partly dissatisfied with it because it [the play] did not end with a Day of Judgment; because it was never revealed to the hero and heroine that the dog had been faithful and the cat faithless. For children are innocent and love justice; while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy (*Gods and Goblins*).

Children appreciate a stark black and white morality in their tales. They crave the punishment of evil and the triumph of good. Lawrence Kohlberg, a child psychologist, proposed a theory of moral development based on Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Children who display normal development of morality will move from a stage of rigid and binary moral systems, to a more complex, and situational sense of morality as they age and advance through their cognitive levels. Young children see the world with a black and white, self-involved system of morality. It is *wrong* to steal that object because *I* will get in trouble. Rules are handed down from on high, either from adults, God, or other moral authorities. As a child ages, a more complex moral system is used to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of a given situation. Older children understand that rules are not always fixed and that something can occupy a grey area when it comes to the question of what is morally right or wrong (Crain 118-119). This complexity shows the child moving to a higher cognitive stage, but it also introduces

ambiguity to the child's world. Ambiguities can become mentally exhausting for both children and adults. The simple morality of fairy tales is a relief from a world that offers very little moral certainty. Rules are clear in fairy tales and horror films alike. Mandates are clearly given to the protagonists in the form of geasa, or warnings. Warnings are present to clearly illustrate the right and wrong paths for the protagonist and the audiences. It is imperative for the structure of fairy tales that characters choose to break rules rather than accidentally violating mandates. Chesterton wrote a piece about the morality of fairy tales where he expounds on this idea that rules must be clearly outlined in fairy tales.

If you really read the fairy-tales, you will observe that one idea runs from one end of them to the other - the idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some condition. This idea, which is the core of ethics, is the core of the nursery-tales. The whole happiness of fairyland hangs upon a thread, upon one thread. Cinderella may have a dress woven on supernatural looms and blazing with unearthly brilliance; but she must be back when the clock strikes twelve... This great idea, then, is the backbone of all folk-lore - the idea that all happiness hangs on one thin veto; all positive joy depends on one negative...if one does the thing forbidden, one imperils all the things provided. (Fairy tales)

The idea that all fairy tales depend on one negative is the same as horror films. The main character will be fine if they do not go into the dark woods, if they do not open that particular door, if they do not say Candyman's name three times in a mirror, as long as they are kind, polite, and above all, *good*. This kind of simplistic morality is appealing

for fans of fairy tales and horror films alike. Fairy tales and horror films construct a world where morality is a fixed idea and everyone plays by the rules. Not only do they play by the same rules, but those rules are clearly laid out for the protagonists at the beginning. There is no ambiguity in either fairy tales or horror films.

The first horror films began to emerge at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is hard to determine the exact start of the horror film because these films are by their nature genre bending. Some scholars state the *A Trip to The Moon* (1902) might qualify as the first horror film because of its bizarre visuals and science fiction themes. In this film, an astronaut flies to the moon and is harassed by the alien creature he finds there. But most people can agree that horror as a genre began to take recognizable form with movies such as *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919), *Nosferatu* (1922), and the films produced by Universal Pictures in the 1930s: *Frankenstein* (1931), *Dracula* (1931), and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) (Jancovich 3). While these movies were loose adaptations of literary works, the movies themselves began to show conventions that would become staples of the horror genre. The gloomy settings, the jump shots, and the damsels in distress all began to emerge from these early monster movies.

Studios recognized that audiences would pay money to see this type of film and began to produce more movies that fit into this genre. Audiences who were interested in this type of movie wanted to see films that offered new experiences and did not follow the same story outline with a different monster. Audiences created a demand, studios fulfilled this need, and horror films came to be recognized as distinct genre in the film world. As directors, actors, and writers embraced the genre of horror, many artists began to use the genre as a vehicle for storytelling, outside of the shocks of a scary tale. It was

no longer enough to make a good scary movie, artists wanted to use these films to create meaning around culture, societal issues, and collective fears. Some artists wanted to expose fears of a culture, some to comment on underlying issues. Horror films are a powerful vehicle for reflecting the fears of a culture. Just as fairy tales deal with specific human experiences, horror deals with human fears dressed up in the garb of the present.

In the 1950s, there was a boom in the production of technological and scientific horror films. *Them!* (1954), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) all involved science and the government run amok. The dropping of the atom bomb and the Red Scare left many people with a distrust of the governments and unchecked scientific exploration. These films all involved hostile invaders either from an outside source coming in and taking over or things that had previously been deemed benign, such as ants or the neighbors which might suddenly pose a threat. Horror films illustrated a world not yet comfortable with the leaps and bounds that science was making.

The 1970s saw the rise of the slasher film and the horror auteur. Many widely acclaimed horror directors began creating films in the 1970s: Tobe Hooper with *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), Wes Craven with *The Hills Have Eyes* (1978), and John Carpenter with *Halloween* (1978). The rise of the slasher film has been denounced as anti-woman by some critics. They argue that these films show a conservative view of women because of the framing techniques developed within these films. Women are often the victims in this type of film, especially women who have just engaged in premarital sexual relations. Viewers are encouraged to identify with killers early in many of these films, through the use of point-of-view shots. Often the audience will ‘stalk’ the

women in these films with the camera showing what the killer sees as he follows his victims. Critics, like Robin Wood, argue that by placing the audience inside the killers, the filmmakers are aligning the moviegoers with the antagonists of the films (Wood 197). *Halloween*, arguably the most famous of these slasher films, begins the film with a four-minute shot from the eyes of Michael Myers, ending in the murder of his sister. The shock of the scene comes when the camera pulls back and we discover that Michael Myers was only six-years old at the time he killed his sister.

These films show movie monsters enacting great violence on women, especially sexually active young women. Despite the punishment of women, these films also give rise to what Carol J. Clover's Final Girl. The Final Girl is a young woman who is put in conflict with the film's monster. Often this woman is the only character to be given any psychological development or a compelling story narrative arch. While the Final Girl might start out the movie weak-willed and complacent in her terror, she will eventually confront and defeat the monster. In *Halloween*, we can see Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) transform from passive to active, from victim to Final Girl. The audience starts the film by looking through the eyes of the killer, giving credence to Wood's claim that viewer have an allegiance with the antagonists of these films. But as Laurie begins to realize that she will have to save herself and the children that she is babysitting, the audience begins to become more and more aligned with Laurie. The film uses more and more close-ups of Laurie. Viewers see more shots from her perspective and fewer from Myers'. Soon the film *Halloween* is completely shown from Laurie's perspective. The audience follows her as she runs through the house, trying to escape Myers. At one point Laurie is hiding in a closet waiting with a wire hanger for Michael Myers to enter the

room. Laurie looks through the closet door and sees Myers entering the room. The camera shot mirrors the shot audiences had earlier of Myers watching Laurie, but this time we are in the role of the potential victim and rooting for her escape. Laurie stabs Myers through the eye with her hanger. The eyeball, the one the audience had seen through at the beginning of the film and the object that is used to hunt Laurie is destroyed by Laurie, herself, severing any remaining tie the audience might have had to Myers. No longer does the audience view Laurie as a victim but as a powerful perpetrator of violence. But because this is a horror film, with horror film morality, violence done by a good character is permissible and even encouraged when justice supports it.

In the 1980s, movie monsters became slick and shiny with character such as the androgynous vampires in *The Lost Boys* (1987), the wise-cracking Freddy Kruger in *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and the valley girl heroines in *Night of the Comet* (1984). The monsters of the 80s were cool and clever. They repelled while at the same time they drew in their audience, imposing a connection between the viewer and the monster. The self-aware movies of the 80's gave way to self-referential horror films such as *Scream* (1996) and meta-films such as *Cabin in the Woods* (2012), where the rules and conventions of horror films are mocked and openly displayed for the audiences' enjoyment.

But beyond the fads of monsters and plot structuring, one of the real elements that horror films and fairy tales share is the setting. Fairy tales usually take place in the woods, sometimes in large, isolated estates or palaces such as "Bluebeard." Typically, isolated areas and wilderness are essential settings for horror films and fairy tales. The woods, the forests, and, of course, the haunted house, dominate horror movies. Terrible

events happen when characters leave the safety of their friends and neighbors, when they leave the suburbs, or the trappings of civilization. Getting lost in the woods and sending someone to look for help is used so often in horror films that it has become a cliché. Almost no good (American or European) horror films take place in cities and the few that have urban environments take place in the marginalized parts of the landscape. *Candyman* (1992) and *Attack the Block* (2011) are both set in government housing and concern the neglect that is shown to the poor and destitute. The horror in these films comes from the idea that society has abandoned these people. The poor black protagonist in these films cannot rely on the police or other government entities to help them out. They have become so disenfranchised by both their race and their socioeconomic status that they have become isolated despite their location in the middle of a major metropolitan area. Horror films have to take place on the fringes of society because society is usually a bulwark against horror. The exceptions to this isolation rule are Japanese horror films. One of Japan's biggest and most beloved movie monsters, Gojira (Godzilla), rampages unabashedly through cities. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed Japan that terrible atrocities could happen in the heart of urban environments. Godzilla, who seems like he might be the result of nuclear testing, rampages through cities destroying the infrastructure without reason or remorse. In these movies, the horror stems from the idea that something that should have been both safe and reassuring, a city, can easily be destroyed by an outside force that cannot be understood or reasoned with.

Horror films and fairy tales share both common settings and lessons of morality, but they also share very similar structural elements. Mikel Koven, a senior professor

from the University of Worcester in Film Studies and one of the few critics doing specific work on the link between fairy tales and horror films, wrote a blog post titled *On Fairy Tales and Horror Films* which theorizes that all horror films share four basic fairy tale structures. The first of these structures is the “Little Red Riding Hood” plotline. The hero of the story goes out into the unknown and is followed home by a monster. The next plotline is the “Hansel and Gretel” story. This involves the heroes going out into the wild and encountering a horror on its home turf. Next is “Bluebeard,” where the hero finds out that someone they trusted is different and more horrifying than they previously thought. The last one is “Beauty and the Beast,” where someone or something previously thought to be a monster reveals themselves to be more human than the people around them.

These categories are helpful in reducing the vast array of plotlines in both fairy tales and horror films into digestible units. Using this organization, *Alien* (1979) would be categorized as a “Little Red Riding Hood” tale. Ripley, our heroine, and her crew explore alien terrain and disturb the eggs of a monster. The monster, unbeknownst to them, follows the crew back home, putting them all at great risk. Themes of sexuality and birth are dealt with in both these works, linking the stories beyond a superficial plot synopsis. “Red Riding Hood” has often been used as an allegory for sexual maturation. For example, Angela Carter’s story “In the Company of Wolves” was adapted by Neil Jordan into a movie of the same name where a young woman deals with her first menstruation and the attentions of a young man/werewolf. Other adaptations have focused on the sexual nature of the story from Tex Avery’s animated character Red Hot Riding Hood to the horror film *Hard Candy* (2005), where a young girl deals with the

pedophilic attentions of an older man. But in *Alien*, the focus is on sexuality and birth, which have been twisted for horrific effect.

Birth and sexuality in *Alien* are almost always symbolically shown as twisted or inverted. The first encounter that the crew has with the alien is when they invade the ship. Inside the ship, they find thousands of eggs in a state of suspended animation. The eggs need an outside force to activate or inseminate them. The crew accidentally disturbs the eggs and a creature erupts from the vessel and attaches itself to the face of the crewmember. The alien then forces itself down the throat of the man, laying its eggs within the body of its victim. The alien has essentially impregnated its host by forcible rape. Later, when the alien bursts out of its prey, it simulates birth in a violent and deadly manner. The expulsion of the alien form from the crewmember is a violent parody of the birthing process this is also parodied in the story of "Little Red Riding Hood." In "Little Red Riding Hood" the grandmother and Red are also born from the body of the wolf in a deadly manner. The huntsman slices open the belly of the wolf freeing the two women just as the chest of the crewmember in *Alien* was ruptured by its labor. In both cases, the living being needs to destroy their hosts in order to survive. The chest-burster needs to be free of the crew member to evolve to its next form, just as Red Riding Hood and her grandmother need to be freed from the wolf's body in order to survive.

The stories also share the idea of trespassing. *Alien* and "Little Red Riding Hood" both have characters that are warned against straying off the beaten path into the unknown. Red Riding Hood's mother knows that danger exists in the woods and warns her daughter not to leave the path and not to talk to anyone on the way to her grandmother's. The crew in *Alien* receives a distress call and leaves their scheduled route

to investigate the home world of the alien creatures. The plot type of “Red Riding Hood” requires an outside force to act as a catalyst for the action to take place. The crew needed to activate the eggs in *Alien* and the wolf needed a pretty girl to interact with him before he pounced. The wolf is not going to go into the safety of the town to stalk his victim nor would the alien go out to find the crew. The plotlines of both stories depend on the act of instigation. The main mistake that people make in this type of tale is venturing away from ‘safe’ places. These tales are built on the ideas that conformity and tradition are safe places to be. Overall, this is a very conservative plot line. If you go out into the unknown, there is a good chance that the unknown might follow you back home. Other films that follow a similar pattern as “Little Red Riding Hood” and *Alien* are *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Halloween* (1978), and *Attack the Block* (2011).

The second plot line that the blog post goes into is the “Hansel and Gretel” storyline. This plotline is where the hero of the story ventures out into the dangerous area and fights the evil that he or she finds there. *Jaws* (1975) is a “Hansel and Gretel” story. The shark menaces the coastal town in this monster movie but the heroes must go out into the shark’s territory to fight it. Most stories that are easily categorized as horror films would fall into this category. Any movie where teens venture out into the woods and get mutilated would work as a “Hansel and Gretel” story. *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980), *Cabin in the Woods* (2012), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) all fall into this category.

“Blue Beard” tales are ones in which a previously trusted or loved person turns out to be more dangerous than previously believed. This can also apply to settings, such as haunted house films, or possession films. *Psycho* (1960) has elements of the

“Bluebeard” tale, though it also shares aspects of the “Hansel and Gretel” storyline as well. The haunted house is an especially interesting example of the “Blue Beard” plotline. Houses have often symbolized safety and a barrier against both the elements and harmful people, or creatures. The haunted house takes this safety symbol and inverts it so the thing that should protect becomes the most dangerous place for a person to be.

“Beauty and the Beast” tales are companions to the “Bluebeard” storylines. They provided a sort of bait and switch, where the audience expects one thing and then is delivered another. *King Kong* (1933) might be the most famous of these tales. King Kong was exploited by the people who kidnapped him and brought him to New York. Even though King Kong was the traditional “monster,” it was the people who exploited him that are revealed as being the least sympathetic by the end of the film. An amendment to Koven’s theory feels necessary. The “Bluebeard” and the “Beauty and the Beast” plotlines seem to be inexorably connected. “Beauty and the Beast” cannot exist without some element of “Bluebeard.” If the perceived villain turns out to not be the evil that they were once thought to be, the story dictates that something else must take their place. In *King Kong*, the beast turns out to be sympathetic and it is the humans, the ones whom the audience finds themselves drawing farther and farther away from in their allegiance, that assume the role of villain. In *Frankenstein* (1931), the townspeople transform into a vicious mob, taking on the “Bluebeard” role. If there is a change in the audience’s perception of a character or their role in a story, there leaves a void that must be filled by another character or event.

Horror films and fairy tales share structure and moral outlooks. The stories are related through their use of plotline and their unyielding moral idealism. Audiences love

both genres because they show worlds where faith is rewarded and evil is punished. Jack Zipes claimed that our society is not creating new fairy tales. He claimed that society is content with the old versions of the stories. The older versions of the tales portray the archetypal images that society craves that we do not need updated versions. Perhaps because horror films are not immediately recognizable as fairy tales, society is better able to absorb and embrace them. Horror films are where new versions of fairy tales can be created and disseminated throughout culture. Horror is not just a place for audience to experience shocks and fulfill a metaphorical need for blood. Horror is a genre where people can experience a world in which monsters can be beaten and virtue will be rewarded, just like in fairy tales.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

The study of fairy tales has a ripe history of scholarship. Critics and scholars have focused on the tales themselves, their structural elements, and their psychological importance. But it is only recently that these tales are beginning to be treated as both a source of internal, psychological insight and as cultural artifacts for the study of times and places. It is through the combination of personal and societal scholarship that the most can be garnered from these tales. Fairy tales illustrate universal truths while still being useful for the study of the psyche. Fairy tales would not have survived as an art form nor remained as culturally significant through different adaptations, if they did not illustrate something universal about the human experience. The fact that these stories are told again and again over many different time periods and play a significant part in many cultures shows that these stories can reveal a great deal about societies and their people.

Horror films are the newest form of fairy tales, with the two genres sharing both structural and cultural elements. Both types of stories function in the same way in society and because of this link they share their cultural significance. If fairy tales are the dreams of a society, then horror films are their nightmares. Both the hopes and fears of a culture, a people, a time, or an individual are important to understand, observe, and document. These tales are as old as their cultures and exist in multitude. It is by paying attention to these tales that we begin to better understand ourselves and where we come from.

Fairy tales and horror film plotlines are related to one another because they deal with the same subjects: good, evil, innocence, power, and growing up. Both horror films and fairy tales are enjoyable in the same way. They both offer a simpler view of the

world where morality is black and white –the good will always win, the youngest child will always succeed when others have failed, the faithful will always be rewarded, and the wicked and greedy will always get their just rewards. These tales act as both wish fulfillment and warnings. If Marina Warner’s view of fairy tales as optative is correct, then horror films are the stories that show the darker side of what could be. Horror films highlight the depravity and dangers of society. But more importantly than highlighting the dangers and revealing to people what fears lie in the darkness, horror films prove that people can triumph over the darkness. It has been said that fairy tales show children that dragons can be slain, well horror films show people, in very great detail, how to go about that slaying.

The critical study of horror films and fairy tales is an area that needs more and more research. Further study in these subjects could explore the thematic links between the genres and show where they overlap in regards to societal influence. These stories are often overlooked and underappreciated, but through a refocusing of scholarship and efforts by critics and artists alike, these genres will continue to evolve and grow in fascinating areas.

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