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Let Sleeping Beauties Lie? On the Difficulties of Revisioning the Tale

Are fairy tales a genre which is ideologically so compromised that we should reject this narrative form and look for new stories or is it possible to rewrite the traditional tales in a less prescriptive format? In this article I will address the critique made of fairy tales as an inherently oppressive genre and will show that many of the structural and narrative features which have been criticised as enforcing a particular ideological voice and which are seen as central to a definition of what fairy tales are, relate to a very restricted corpus of tales but do not apply to either other types of fairy tales or earlier versions. I will argue that the re-visioning of fairy tales is not an impossibility but in fact the continuation of one of the constitutive characteristics of this genre and will demonstrate this in the analysis of three twentieth century versions of Sleeping Beauty.

The explosion in the production and consumption of fairy tales which we have witnessed in recent years suggests that the repudiation of fairy tales is an unrealistic approach and misses the central attraction the stories continue to exert and the role they perform in all areas of life. The interest in fairy tales applies not only to stories available in books, film or television, but there has also been a resurgence in the more traditional form of mediating tales: in storytelling. In addition, fairy tales have been the focus of much critical and literary interest, especially from feminist scholars and authors who have turned to the genre in an exploration of central questions such as gender and subjectivity.¹ This interest has not always been benign, and the fairy tale has had - and to some extent still has - to contend with critical attitudes which at times come close to demonising the genre as patriarchy's willing handmaid. Such vilification is, of course, nothing

new in the history of the fairy tale which through the centuries has been accused of its power to corrupt, lead astray and obfuscate the minds and attitudes of its audience.

Such anxieties can be taken as an indication of the power attributed to this simple narrative form. Walter Benjamin identified storytelling as the well-spring of art and truth and there are few major writers who have not at one time or another turned their hand to writing a fairy tale.² There are also very few of us who will not have been exposed to fairy tales as children and been influenced by them. My own, recent, experience as a teacher and researcher of fairy tales bears out the results of Liebermann's survey in the seventies and eighties in America.³ Though initially claiming not to remember fairy tales or rejecting them as childish or girlish nonsense, both male and female students respond with an amazing depth of information about and emotional investment in stories once they start to study them. Similarly, talking about my research into fairy tales, adults respond in both academic and non-academic environments with an almost unstoppable enthusiasm and desire to tell me about their memories of stories and the significance they had. Everybody has their individual favourites as well as tales they disliked intensely, and when asked to give reasons for their preferences and dislikes, people usually link the plot of the stories to their own patterns of biographical experience. Only recently, Jack Zipes has commented on the adult tendency to use fairy tales as mirrors and models for how we live our lives: 'it is uncanny how much we turn to this genre in all its forms to pursue our identities and the happy fulfilment of our goals.' (Zipes, *Happily*, p.7)

A common feature in various approaches concerned with the study of myth, folk and fairy tales has been to identify as one of the fairy tale's functions that it explains the world and

provides answers to fundamental existential questions. Claude Lévi-Strauss understood the development of successive versions of a tale as an ongoing process in a given society's attempt to identify its origin and define its identity.⁴ Bruno Bettelheim famously identified fairy tales as problem-solving devices, helping children to identify and confront their fears in growing up and coming to terms with their psychological and social development.⁵ Alternatively, fairy tales have been interpreted as escapist texts, providing consolation and the certainty of a happy end against the insecurities and disappointments of an increasingly uncertain world. Jack Zipes has analysed this function for periods marked by social upheaval and stress such as the second half of the nineteenth century suffering from the effects of industrialisation and, in this century, the economic depression of the thirties. The aim of fairy tales is, he argues, to produce wonder, and through this relief from hard times: "to read a fairy tale was to follow the narrative path to happiness." (Zipes, *Happily*, p. 4) However, he also points to the subversive function of fairy tales which can provide a critique of prevailing social conditions through the depiction of an 'other-world' which, freed from the constraints of the real and possible, can create and explore alternative possibilities.

The subversive function of using the unreal to critique the real has been defined in terms of the fantastic where the depicted 'impossibilities propose latent 'other' meanings or realities behind the possible or the known.... Presenting that which cannot be, but *is*, fantasy exposes a culture's definitions of that which can be.'⁶ Since 'the fantastic gives utterance to precisely those elements which are known only through their absence within a dominant 'realistic' order,' it names that society's fears and represents its excluded other. (Jackson, p.26) Fairy tales are one of

the genres which fall into the conglomerate which encompasses the fantastic, and much of recent literature has increasingly used fairy tales in precisely that subversive capacity to explode the constrictions of the real.

However, fairy tales have also been criticised for upholding and contributing to dominant models of social organisation. Representing an ideal world where good actions are always rewarded and bad ones always punished, and where good and bad is defined within a society's dominant value system, fairy tales can close off rather than open up alternative possibilities. The proverbial happy end is symptom and site of a static certainty which makes fairy tales rather problematic as subversive texts. This dogmatic certainty of fairy tales is fundamentally unlike the fantastic, which is defined precisely by its uncertainty. Fantastic texts do not resolve the representation of unreal elements by providing a rational explanation or identifying the supernatural as such. They enforce a hesitation which does not allow an unequivocal interpretation whether the unreal events should be believed or rejected. Thus readers of the fantastic are held in suspense; oscillating between the real and the unreal, they are denied resolution and closure in multivocal and polysemous texts. (Jackson, p.49) Popular fairy tales, in contrast to this, do provide one voice, one vision, and reassurance about the truth of this vision in the closure of its happy end.

Fairy tales provide life scripts which can be deeply reassuring because of the certainties they depict. 'As children, we all hear fairy tales and read our lives into them. But we also want to see and realize our lives as virtual fairy tales even as we grow older. We never abandon tales.' (Zipes, *Happily*, p. 1) It is, however, precisely this dogmatic certainty and the seductively

consoling function of many popular tales which is the basis for a critique of the fairy tale. Angela Carter has called them one of the most important forms of the fraudulent magic and bankrupt enchantments of romance. According to her, fairy tales disguise the facts of an objectified sexuality of economic exchange as consolatory fictions of romantic love and fulfilment. Encoding and producing dominant cultural notions of femininity and masculinity, fairy tales perpetuate in her view the myths of sexuality and of patriarchy.

As such, fairy tales function for women, not so much as problem-solving but instead as problem-creating scripts: female readers have to position themselves in relation to the paradigm of an ideal femininity as it is represented in the fairy tale.⁷ They are required to decide whether they identify with it (and participate in the pleasure of success and reward) or whether they resist the dominant definition in the popular tales (and are subjected to the dis-pleasure of punishment and exclusion). Narrative pleasure and displeasure operate to socialise the audience of fairy tales, and because the tales encapsulate dominant social values, they operate as cultural primers and actively participate in the production and construction of gender. The linking of pleasure and the inscription of dominant cultural values to ensure that women internalize the value-system and language of patriarchy has been pointed out before specifically in relation to fairy tales.⁸ More recently, it has also been asked of other narrative structures whether they are constructed in such a way that their comforting and pleasurable features are meant specifically to “solicit women’s consent and by a surplus of pleasure hope to seduce women into femininity”?⁹ Such an argument recognises, of course, that femininity is a cultural construct and needs constant work to be achieved and maintained, rather than that it is a natural given. And it is precisely the fact that the

popular fairy tale contributes to a naturalisation of gender, (Bacchilega, *Postmodern*, p. 23) and does it so effectively that its narrative construction of sexual difference and codification of socially acceptable gender roles appears invisible that has compromised the genre in the eyes of so many critics.¹⁰

Objections to the fairy tale centre on the narrative positioning of women which excludes them from central activity. (Bryant, p. 440) Traditionally conceived sex roles link activity with the male and passivity with the female and reinforce them through a gender specific system of reward and punishment. In a chain of mutually reinforcing characteristics goodness is linked with passivity and both with beauty and youth. Ugliness on the other hand is the physical correlate of female activity which is, in the popular tale, always inherently bad and usually centred on persecution of or rivalry with the passive heroine of the story. However, it is not only the case that gender roles are constructed in a very rigid way, but also that there is a greater variety of scripts available to men while the offering of possible roles for women is much narrower. The restrictive roles on offer for women are summarised rather polemically by Ellen Cronan Rose as madonnas and whores, saints and witches, good little girls and wicked queens.¹¹ The invisibility of certain women in the text is due to their unimportance in relation to men: the possibility of female roles and their coding as negative or positive in the story are defined through their usefulness to men. The functionality of good and bad is closely linked to reproduction and an (independent) articulation of desire for women.¹² Married women have no story expect in a reproductive function, and once that is achieved they are written out of the text by either dying or being subsumed into their husband. Unmarried, older women or beautiful, married older women

exist only in their role as persecutor and victimiser of the heroine, attempting to prevent the young woman's sexual success by either desiring the significant male herself or for her daughter. The model for positive relationships for women is primarily that with a male character (usually father, perhaps a brother, and then husband), while relationships between women are depicted as fraught with difficulties and defined around jealousy, competition and often active persecution and vindictiveness. Victimisation and suffering are presented in most of the popular tales as the condition for happiness and success for the young woman. Submissiveness to one's fate and suffering are rewarded while self-determination are punished.

This is particularly true for the tale of Sleeping Beauty which enshrines the myth of beauty, youth, passivity for the princess who is the necessarily compliant object of desire for the prince, but where the male functions furthermore not only as the centre of life but also as its source when his mere presence or his kiss awakes her. Persecution and an implied competitive jealousy motivates the relationship between the older, active woman, the thirteenth fairy, who curses the princess out of spite while the other women in the tale, the Queen and the good Fairies, disappear from the text after having fulfilled their reproductive and initiatory function. Thus the core motifs of the classic tale conform to all particulars of patriarchal inscription and make it one of "the bankrupt enchantments,"¹³ which ensure women's (and men's) interiorisation of cultural (fairy tale) myths about the construction of women's place in society.

Sleeping Beauty has come to stand for the archetypal, classic fairy tale; the prince's life-giving kiss to the prone woman has come to be the prototype motif, the master signifier for fairy tale allusions and it is often transferred to plots from different tales. It is also the scenario which

has aroused most condemnation; feminists have reacted 'critically to the standard canon representing catatonic females flat on their backs waiting to be brought to life by charming princes.'¹⁴ The fact is, however, that this is not really a correct definition of the Western fairy tale but the description of a sub-genre which has come to be classified as the 'Innocent Persecuted Heroine-'type. According to Steven Swann-Jones, this category initially derives from the classification of the Russian folklorist Aleksandr Isaakovich Nikiforov whose structural definition of the fairy tale had as its two main (of three) types the male and the female fairy tale. The female fairy tale has two sub-types: a) tales about winning a groom, and b) tales about suffering of innocent and persecuted protagonists.¹⁵ However, the latter only make up a tiny proportion of the fairy tales in Antti Aarne's important classification *The Types of the Folktale*.¹⁶ Of the just under 2500 types of tales (many of which have further sub-divisions), the Innocent-Persecuted-Heroine only account for twenty-one. And yet, these less than ten per cent of tales have come to stand for what we popularly understand a fairy tale to be. They are "tales especially conducive to being made to function as ciphers for a particular description of proper female behaviour. ... a narrow strand of tales that have become representative of a putatively universal tradition of children's literature."¹⁷

The perception of the Innocent-Persecuted-Heroine-subtype as the norm is related to two developments in the (print) history of the fairy tale: its appropriation as children's literature, a didactic genre with a pronounced socialising impetus, and its concurrent inscription into dominant, patriarchal value-systems. While traditional, oral tales were primarily mediated by female storytellers, the most famous and influential printed versions of fairy tales from the

sixteenth century onwards were collections whose editors were men. Consequently, the, in most cases, prominent authorial voice in these collections inserted the stories into a male framework, introducing a male perspective and in the process producing narrative patterns expressive of male values. Feminist scholars such as Marina Warner and Ruth Bottigheimer have traced the suppression of the female voice in the construction of a fairy tale canon; they have shown this to be a two-fold process which removed a female agenda from the tales themselves as well as silencing women as story tellers or denigrating their talk as useless..

In the course of these editorial changes, many tales were re-aligned in such a way that male and female roles conformed to the active-passive paradigm. As Jack Zipes has shown, for example, oral versions of Little-Red-Riding-Hood have a resourceful heroine who is quite capable to save herself from the wiles of the wolf.¹⁸ Similarly, precursors of the Bluebeard-type of tale have a protagonist who does not rely on her brothers to ride to the rescue but outwits her demonic husband herself. Furthermore, 'Fitchers Vogel' is a German Bluebeard-variant which depicts a resourceful and witty protagonist who not only saves herself but also her two older sisters and is instrumental in bringing her husband to a deserved punishment. This story is available in the complete edition of the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, but it is seldom anthologised and rarely translated.¹⁹ The construction of a fairy tale canon thus resulted from editing tales so that they conform to a patriarchal representation of gender roles and selecting, or de-selecting those tales which did not fit this pattern.

However, the fairy tale's socialising function of upholding the status quo of gender relations is a comparatively recent one and, as has been shown, fairy tales are themselves

products of a naturalising, mythicising process. This has resulted in what is now perceived as a rigid and monolithic narrative form apparently speaking only with the single voice of authority and the law. It has been argued that it is not possible to re-write the fairy tale because this ideological inscription is so pervasive that the genre cannot be re-appropriated into a discourse outside oppression. (Duncker, p. 3) But Patricia Duncker's view that the fairy tale's patriarchal inscription cannot be unscripted disregards the history of the traditional tale. Orally transmitted stories were a subversive attempt to interpret and re-align power relationships constructed around lines of class, rather than gender before they were appropriated by the middle-classes and turned into the "educational propaganda for children." (Duncker, pp. 4-5) Accusing writers who re-write fairy tales of upholding an oppressive narrative form and supporting ideological orthodoxy misses the point that these writers are reclaiming the genre's history. The view that it is impossible to re-inscribe patriarchally inflected fairy tale texts also disregards the mechanisms of reverse discourse where the dominant voice is increasingly inflected by the reformulations undertaken on the margins by the excluded other. The tale genre lends itself particularly to this because of its nature which is characterised precisely by change: the oral tradition is in fact a long line of historically and culturally specific inscriptions serving a particular need at a particular moment.

Traditional tales with similar plot configurations exist in widely differing cultures; they have crossed national, linguistic and cultural borders and have adapted to the new environment by losing some elements and incorporating others. Fairy tales have a long history of moving in and out of print and oral mediation, with both traditions informing each other. This process of

continual re-creation is intertextual by definition; stories function with reference to related tales, previous versions and alternative variants. The belief that the fairy tale is a rigid, monolithic form enshrining cultural propaganda and therefore resistant to change thus ignores the definitive characteristic of the fairy tale tradition. While it is true that the popular, canonical fairy tale speaks with one voice and enforces one meaning, there is no reason why this text cannot be rewritten in its intertextual and multivocal context or even read intertextually. Knowledge of other tales, of different interpretations, and even the reader's own conceptualisations of gender can introduce a challenge to the perceived authority of the canonical fairy tale's narratorial voice.

“The folktale tradition itself problematises any attempt at narrative fixity by offering multiple alternatives to any standardised, official version, such as that exemplified by the orthodox reading of the Bluebeard tale-type. This is not a process of uncovering a hidden meaning - text as palimpsest, substituting one orthodoxy for another - but rather a challenge to narrative orthodoxy itself. It is out of such orthodoxies that normative roles and rules are produced, suggesting certain story patterns - life stories - as natural, and it is through an awareness of the intertextuality of genre that these can be critiqued as merely constructions, readings that can be rewritten.” (Benson, pp. 111-2)

What has been constructed, can both be un-constructed and re-constructed. Views which insist on the dominance of the patriarchal text only contribute further to an essentialising and naturalising of the genre's orthodoxy. Christina Bacchilega has succinctly summarised the feminist dilemma with regard to the im-possibility or desirability of revisioning fairy tales: feminists need not make an either-or-decision of either whole-heartedly endorsing the texts or

rejecting them; the question is one of negotiating the meaning of these texts.²⁰ The project of reclaiming the fairy tale does not only involve the deconstruction of confining patterns but it is just as important, and, in fact, necessary to confront and acknowledge the genre's "complicity with 'exhausted' narrative and gender ideologies." (Bacchilega, *Postmodern*, p.50)

There is now a large body of both critical and creative work on a feminist, post-colonial revision of fairy tales. Earlier work often employed the alienating effect of gender-switching to show the underlying linking of gender and rigid plot configurations. But there are other strategies for revisioning: a displacement of hegemonic meaning is possible through changes in narrative perspective which affects core meanings. This introduces, for example, a reversal of patriarchally inflected power distributions and gender specific reward schemes which link beauty with passivity and a suppression of sexuality. A doubling of stereotypical roles, for example when the rescuer and the rescued are the same person, overcomes the split representation of women as aspects of princess, stepmother, witch and at the same time opens up possibilities by replacing, or making unnecessary, the male as the prototypical rescuer. This technique not only offers opportunities for upsetting the dichotomy of good and bad but it also works against the binarism of the genre where no shading in characterisation or narrative function is possible. A revalidation of female experience was achieved through a re-interpretation of core motifs or a shifting of the narrative voice and focus to reflect female concerns. In privileging the muted text of the non-canonical Other or by voicing the sub-plot an unexpected, and often, critical story produces a delegitimation of the dominant text. Like the doubling of characters, the displacement of plot

lines disturbs narrative expectations and thus makes underlying structural features of the genre visible and available for critique.

Alternatively, revisions have employed the strategy of re-discovering and opening up the buried female voice by investigating the history of traditional tales and tracing alternative and suppressed versions or undoing the changes introduced by male collectors and editors and returning to an approximation of female mediated 'precursors' of the classic versions. This later work has increasingly turned to questions of narrative paradigms and an awareness of the process of canon formation. Such revisions address the appropriation of the traditional tale by raising questions about the status of the text and experimenting with formal features which show up the canonical fairy tale as a naturalised artifice. They interrogate the interlinking of the narrative construction of fairy tales with assumptions about gender and employ narrative techniques which directly subvert the single vision and narrative authority of the canonical tale. These draw on the multi-dimensionality of the tale which is capable of reflecting different perspectives simultaneously, (Jones, p. 24) the multiplicity of meanings which are introduced through an exploitation of the intertextuality of the genre, the duality of ironic vision and the interplay of alternative voices. An important aspect is the rejection of the fairy tale's closure in its 'happy end' which enforced one female life script and closed off any expectation or development beyond the wedding. Rejecting the happy end, subverting it or inserting an alternative ending allows a writing beyond the ending and explodes the stasis of canonical texts.

Many of these strategies pose problems in the revision of Sleeping Beauty, because the tale's core motifs are so heavily negatively inflected and difficult to recuperate. Unfortunately

turning to the archaeology of Sleeping Beauty, that is to say, digging down into deeper layers and releasing variants which do not validate a patriarchal system of values presents even more difficulties. Sleeping Beauty is not an oral tale but of literary origin and although there are orally mediated versions, these derive from literary precursors, all of which are heavily male inflected. There is such no obvious female tradition to return to and the direct precursors of the tale are even more problematic than the classic version. In these versions, the sleeping princess is raped and impregnated by the passing king, who in some versions is married. He leaves her and the protagonist bears twins, a boy and a girl, still unconscious. She is only woken, when the baby boy sucks her thumb and dislodges the thorn which had induced the sleep. Some time later, the King returns to the woods, and finding the princess awake, a mother and still compliant, they conduct a secret affair which is only disrupted when the betrayed wife becomes suspicious and attempts to solve the problem by persecuting her younger rival. Her attempts to have her killed, however, are thwarted and it is she who is, instead, punished.

If one were to argue that the aim of re-visioning is to provide a validation of female perspective then clearly Sleeping Beauty is one of the tales which would need to be removed from a revalidated corpus of fairy tales. However, it begs the question whether a validation of female concerns is only achieved through positive role models, that is providing a tale which presents a description of female experience which is not conceived within the constraints of patriarchally inflected systems of power and gender. As we have seen, strategies for re-visioning tales take different approaches but they also have various aims. The function of the fairy tale in my view lies also in its particular ability to critique social conditions and it is in this sense that

Sleeping Beauty offers a valuable format. The three literary re-visions I am going to discuss all use the fairy tale as a powerful analysis of prevailing assumptions about gender and power. Irmtraud Morgner's *Trobadora Beatriz*, Angela Carter's 'The Lady of the House of Love', and Sheris S. Tepper's *Beauty* all use the fairy tale and its core motifs as a social critique of femininity constructed in patriarchal society, exposing the destructive framework of rigidly defined gender hierarchies in which women are constructed as objects of exchange.²¹ In showing these social conditions they unmask them, make them visible and raise them as questions which demand to be answered thus making closure impossible. Furthermore, the particular strategies employed by Morgner, Carter and Tepper also engage with the problematics of the fairy tale as a naturalised artifact by employing narrative strategies which undermine the single voice of authority and truth which the canonical fairy tale has assumed. The three versions under discussion all query the single voice of the fairy tale's social authority by constructing their texts as a web of intertexts which reinforce each other's meanings but also challenge them, setting up a dialogue with each other and with the reader.

Instead of universal and assured 'truths', the reader encounters uncertainty and ambiguity and is forced into an active interaction with the text. This encounter involves the reader in an active participation of the text's meaning rather than being passively situated as a consumer of the text and receiver of its truths. This construction of meanings occurs in the space between the 'text' of the revisioned fairy tale and anterior texts. Thus, the fairy tales we all remember from childhood are one of the most important intertexts in re-written versions, the sounding board against which the new stories reverberate, and which, in turn, appear in a new light through the

re-written versions. This sets up a dialogue between the revisioned text and the patriarchal text where every deviation from the generic conventions of the canonical tale shows the possibility of change in one story but also extends this as a principle to all other texts. This inserts every institutionalised tale into a frame of intertextual readings, having to contend with the opening up of the 'what if ...' which revisioned tales have shown to be possible. In this sense, the formulaic nature of the fairy tale works in favour of a 'dissemination' of revisionist reception.

Morgner's, Carter's and Tepper's versions are all extraordinarily complex, working on both the level of generic convention, narrative construction and content. While contextualising the versions and summarising the particular form of social critique, my discussion has to be necessarily selective and I am going to concentrate on how these three versions negotiate the problematics which the tale's core motifs present. These are: 1) the female persecution of younger 'rival': how is the fairy's curse dealt with and is the 'bad' fairy represented as evil and spiteful? 2) how is Sleeping Beauty's passivity and her male-defined reactive sexuality articulated, and linked to this: how is the invasive male sexuality of the prince's rape, or kiss addressed? 3) Is the male agent retained as the source of life and marriage to him as the only desirable identity?

Irmtraud Morgner is one of the early East German feminist writers who investigated in her formally highly innovative writing the condition of women in the GDR. Her montage novel *Life and Adventures of Troubadour Beatriz as Chronicled by her Minstrel Laura, A Novel in Thirteen Volumes and Seven Intermezzi* came out in 1974 and queries both in content and in form "the claim of the GDR government to have achieved political, legal and economic equality for

women.”²² While acknowledging on the one hand the GDR’s tentative “evolution” toward sexual equality, it nevertheless remorselessly shows up existing and unacknowledged patriarchal oppression by raising questions of family structure, sexuality and patterns of emotional and political dependency for women which have not been recognised by the dominant discourses of conventional Marxist theories of (mostly economic) equality. *Trobadora* introduces “unnamed, irrational desires, the fantastic and the unconscious into the repressive stability of GDR socialism” to counter the dominant discourses of scientific rationality and to improve women’s situation through the liberation of the productive forces of female imagination and sexuality. Threatening the certainties of a hierarchical social and cultural order, “the emancipation of women is linked to the emancipation of desire and imagination” (Martin, p.62) from the restraining context of pragmatic rationality. Myth and legend, for Morgner, enable subjectivity for women and femininity is identified with historically repressed forms of cognition and ordering social space and the suppressed history of a different way of desiring and interacting is represented by figures from myth, fairytale and superstition who literally operate in the underworld of the “Arthurian Round Table of the Persephonic Opposition” working for a return of matriarchal conditions. These mythical realms “are exploded out of the continuum of mythical and historical time into the socialist present. They constitute a hidden accessory to the real, a secret resource from the past for the future.”²³

Weaving together elements of myth, fairytale, legend, superstition, and even Biblical motifs, *Sleeping Beauty* is central to an exploration of the im-possibility/ impossibility of female subjecthood under patriarchy. The eponymous Beatriz, a historical 12th century French countess,

attempts to determine her own fate by actively inviting the extended period of sleep, not as a curse passively suffered but as a conscious decision to withdraw from her unbearable life. She asks the dethroned goddess Persephone, who has been allotted a yearly portion of magic by the patriarchal God-Father, to put her to sleep for 810 years in the hope of awaking in a world not determined by men. Thus, the figure of the witch and the curse are both radically re-interpreted. Instead of Beatriz passively suffering the victimisation of another woman, she actively seeks out her help in order to escape victimisation by her male dominated environment. The "curse" has become a device to facilitate the shared female desires of "princess" and "witch" since both Beatriz and Persephone seek to undo the effects of patriarchy. Instead of taking self-determination away from Beatriz, the curse is a measure of her desire to live by her own rules and confirms her identity as an independent subject.

This sleep is abruptly cut short by two years when her castle is blown up by engineers to make way for a modern development. This undercuts both the idea of the right moment of awakening, central to the classic tale, and the concept of disenchantment. The moment of awakening is complicated by sneezing, dust, creaking joints and other annoying realities. There is also no prince to rescue her, although Beatriz does believe herself in love with the engineer, but only because of her sexual needs after such a long time. The engineer's objectifying response to her operates a further, and different kind of disenchantment when she realises that men's nature has not changed in the meantime. This is confirmed when she is casually raped later on and the fairytale figure is forced into the 20th century to engage with its problems and disappointments as a woman in a world, still run by and for men. Disenchantment in terms of understanding harsh

realities, is in fact, a central theme and is further followed up by Beatriz witnessing and participating in the 1968 uprisings in Paris. A supposed moment of revolution and sexual liberation, this is again shown to be in male terms only. Beatriz' second attempt to find the promised land of equality, the 'ideal' conditions of the GDR, also prove to her that female subjecthood is impossible. Beatriz' attempts to subvert patriarchal structures by the fantastic, irrational, desire and the erotic fail and her difference is increasingly incorporated into the dominant discourse until she dies as an almost fanatic impersonation of the ideal housewife. However, her desires and excluded energy have been taken on by Laura, her minstrel, who is Beatriz's realistic 20th century counterpart. As Beatriz's double, the pragmatic GDR woman undergoes exactly the opposite development to the idealistic and naive Trobadora. While Laura conducts Beatriz's education into pragmatism, she herself learns to accept the possibility of magic and incorporates Beatriz' excluded desire, irrationality and fantastic aims, finally taking Beatriz's place at the Round Table to work for the overturning of patriarchal relations of domination. The relationship between the two women is crucial to the novel and relevant in terms of fairy tale conventions. Rather than remaining in fixed positions of opposition, the two women work together and support each other, thus negating the paradigm of competitive rivalry between women set up in the fairy tale (they even go so far as to decide to share Laura's lover Lutz). It is also Laura who sends Beatriz on the quest for the unicorn to divert her from her terrorist plans for the overthrow of patriarchy. In this quest, Beatriz takes on the typical role of the male protagonist, thus again exploding fairy tale expectations. Narrative expectations are, in fact, doubly transgressed; not only is Beatriz the active agent in search of a desired object (which

is not her lost beloved as it is in other female quest narratives), but she engages in her travels *after* her awakening from her sleep. The closure of the traditional tale functions as precisely the opposite in Morgner as the starting point for a life in search of (an albeit frustrated) self-determination. However, while Beatriz fails to achieve this herself, nevertheless the seed is carried on in Laura her double. Such hope is not held out for the protagonist in Angela Carter's version of *Sleeping Beauty*.

In 1979, her collection of ten rewritten classic fairy stories, *The Bloody Chamber* appeared. It deals with the processes of how femininity and masculinity are constructed in terms of a sexual economy of opposition. It is one of her aims to reveal these constructs of opposition as naturalised myth rather than immutable fact. Carter argues that sexual relations mirror social relations, and that by describing sexual relations most explicitly, their social implications are uncovered. This is what she calls the function of the moral pornographer, and on one level her tales are merciless in exposing the unfree, contractual relations of a sexuality of domination and subjection. However, she admits such violently confined relationships only insofar as they describe the status quo. Opposed to this view of sexuality as violent exploitation which inherently links pleasure with power, she develops her utopian vision where sexuality is defined by the free and mutually desired and desiring exchanges of both partners. Independent of the economics of opposition and exclusion, these relationships are signalled not by the barter of meat but by the contact of flesh with flesh.

The stories in *The Bloody Chamber* are divided into those which are a stark description of the status quo, exposing the "romantic" relationships between men and women as unfree and

conceived in terms of domination and subjection where sexuality is bartered in ultimately economically driven contracts. Carter explores this objectification of desire around the central interpretative metaphor of meat, using the Sadeian symbolic of the victimiser and victim, predator and prey, the carnivorous eater and the herbivorous eaten. On the other hand are the utopian stories in which Carter develops her vision of a sexuality outside the constrictions of the binary paradigm of violence and opposition.

'The Lady of the House of Love' is one of the stories which describe the status quo of a sexuality of domination and subjection and the restrictive forms of masculinity and femininity. Sleeping Beauty is an unnaturally beautiful countess, whose curse is to have been born as a vampire, a fate which she desperately rejects but cannot escape through her own attempts. Carter's version thus transposes the originator of the curse from one identified woman to a diffuse sense of hereditary tradition. However, to some extent the witch figure is transposed into the figure of Sleeping Beauty who is one of the voracious carnivores of Carter's sexual economy of predator and prey. While she displays all the features of the eroticised vampire of Gothic tradition, the Countess is nevertheless disgusted by her drives and longs for the possibility of a kiss which is sexual rather than deathly. **ROLE OF KISS** While she desires to escape her fate (**INVERSION OF MOTIF: DESIRE TO ESCAPE FATE**), her desire for change is cast in the delusory and restrictive forms of romance and fairy tale: instead of attempting to break out of her prescribed role herself, she longs for a saviour from outside to free her from her nocturnal existence but only in order to enter another prescribed role. Wearing her mother's wedding dress, it is clear that for her liberation means the normality of daylight and the closure of marriage. The

prince arrives in the shape of a young English soldier, who comes upon the castle on a bicycle excursion. His attitude to her is one of slightly condescending rational humouring; he can only relate to the mysterious, nocturnal and mythic as delusions produced by an immature, childish mind. When the countess invites him into her bedroom for the consummation of her desires, which she casts as a seduction, but knows will end like all her other encounters in killing him and sucking his life blood, this script is broken and inverted. Piercing her finger on a shard of her broken glasses which she had fumbled in her confusion, it is he who sucks her blood in an attempt to still its flow and then peacefully sleeps. He awakens with plans to take her to be 'cured,' and normalised within the modern world in which he is so securely ensconced only to find her gone and dead. Thus while the soldier is constructed by her as her saviour, the male's life-giving force of the classic tale is inverted into death which nevertheless is presented as release from an existence which could only see her as excess.

Sheri S. Tepper

Sheri S. Tepper was writing children's stories before turning to adult fantasy and science fiction novels and writing full-time. All her works are infused with a strong ecological agenda, arguing against the destructive effects of the egotistic pursuit of individual desires over the community's good, of the advances of technology and science and the consequent despoliation of the earth. While gender is not her central concern, nevertheless it plays a crucial role, in that the destructive aspects are linked to patriarchal structures, hierarchies and an understanding of status and power which foregrounds the individual. Her novel 'Beauty', published in 1991, uses the fairy tale plot and its core motifs for an explicit ecological quest in an overtly religious context of

a fight of good versus evil. Her prefatory note addresses the destruction of habitat and how 'Beauty' can serve as a metaphor: *'It seems to me sometimes that all beauty is dying. Which makes me hope that perhaps it isn't dead but only sleeping. And that makes me think of Sleeping Beauty and wonder if she - Beauty, that is - might not be a metaphor for what is happening to the world at large: perfect beauty born, Beauty cursed with death, Beauty dying - but with the magical hope of being reawakened, maybe by love. The result of all this is Beauty, a novel of the human spirit, a book-length fairy tale, a meditation on various questions of religion - or maybe just a prayer.'* Tepper uses an abundance of myth, folklore, fairylore, apocryphal religious motifs, utopian and romance elements, as well as well-established conventions from science fiction and fantasy and weaves them together into an extraordinarily richly textured story which however confirms a rather essentialist view of nature and gender. Beauty finds herself in the course of the story to be half-fairy and partly the novel is a Bildungsroman in which she negotiates her human and fairy inheritance and learns to judge both environments and their inhabitants outside received notions of their respective values. She learns to interpret facts independently, outside the dominant discourses of fairy-world and human world, both of which are shown to be male dominated, driven by selfish desires of aggrandisement and power, both contributing to the destruction and despoliation of the earth. Both humans and the fairies had received special abilities and have corrupted these in the course of gaining power over others for their self-gratification. The fairies use their power of magic only for enjoyment and pleasure, while the humans have subjugated their power of curiosity and learning to mechanistic drive for progress and technological advance. Thus Beauty's heritage from both her mother's fairy

lineage and her father's human family-line are ultimately the same as they are both driven by the need to exploit their environment in order to gratify their desires. Beauty grows towards an understanding that characters presented as evil by the dominant discourses of both patrilineal and matrilineal tradition are in fact quite the reverse, and that the dichotomy of fairy world and human world does not make up all of what is presented as reality. Outside the dominant groupings are marginal characters, such as the apparently evil fairy Carabosse who had cursed Beauty at birth but who is ultimately recognised to be one of the few good characters. She is a force for the good like the angelic fairies, a split off group of good fairies. However, these live on a utopian mountain peak in the imaginary, separate from and only marginally involved in the world, while Carabosse has chosen to live in the world but on the margins of both human and fairy society. Her curse of sleep was to protect Beauty from the attentions of the Evil One (and the self-serving fairies who are in danger of being in thrall to this devil-figure whose aim it is to destroy the world. Carabosse, together with the help of the angelic fairies, has taken the essence of all living forms and embedded them in Beauty's chest turning her, in effect, into a living Noah's Ark. Thus the curse is meant to function as protection and a device to enable Beauty to fulfil her role as saviour of the world. Nevertheless, Beauty escapes this fate of a passive vessel by being in the wrong spot at the time, and it is her illegitimate, and almost identical sister, who falls under the spell. It is this sister who acts out the fairy tale plot, sleeping in the enchanted castle and waiting for a prince to kiss her awake. The 'real' Beauty, on the other hand, is more than active, leading an almost picaresque life of switching between alternative forms of reality and engaging in both forward and backward timetravel. Unlike her double whose life, though

unconscious, is extended beyond its normal span and whose physicality remains unaffected by the effects of time, Beauty's, on the other hand, is, due to the effects of time-travel, shortened to only a few years of actually lived time, while her body has aged. Furthermore, she has come to the same conclusion as Carabosse did before her and has engaged in her own process of saving the world by turning her enchanted sleeping castle into a Noah's Ark with the help of her grandson (who will be the saviour prince for her enchanted half-sister). The novel thus has parallel plots, with the traditional fairy tale acted out on the surface, and as a COVER, for the real plot of life affirming action to take place out of sight. The apparently dominant discourse of the canonical fairytales is shown as a diversion, becoming marginalised and utilised by the subversive and apparently marginal forces of Beauty and Carabosse who ultimately drive the plot.

CONCLUSION:

In fact, Teresa de Lauretis identifies Sleeping Beauty as the patriarchal 'ur-plot', the story underlying all narrative. QUOTE/DESCRIBE DESIRE OF THE TEXT

What is most important in the history of the appropriation of the fairy tale is how the tales encoded a male world-view, suppressing the female voice of the story and a female narrative perspective, selecting and de-selecting text to fit the male paradigm and/or editing them to fit it. The revision project addresses all these aspects. Archaeological work of digging down and exposing the genealogical layering of a tale exposes woman-centred texts and/or precursors. Validating these by using them as plot structures in modern texts.

In this sense, the revision of fairy tales can function as social action offering up the possibility of cultural transformation. ("re-vision is not merely an artistic but a social action, suggesting in narrative practice the possibility of cultural transformation")²⁴

¹ Christina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales, Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 3 and Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After, Fairy Tales, Children and the Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.1 & pp.11-2

² Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller, Reflections on the Works of Nikolaj Leskov", *Illuminations* (DETAILS), pp.83-109

³ Marcia K. Liebermann, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale", *College English*, 34, 1972, pp.383-95

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', *Structural Anthropology*, vol 1 (London: Peregrin Books, 1978), pp. 206-31

⁵ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977)

⁶ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981), p.23

⁷ Kay Stone, 'The Misuses of Enchantment: Controversies on the Significance of Fairy Tales', *Women's Folklore, women's Culture*, ed. R. A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 125-45 (p. 143)

⁸ Patricia Duncker, 'Re-Imagining the Fairy Tales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chambers', in: *Literature and History: A New Journal for the Humanities*, 1985, 10:1, Spring 1985, pp. 3-14

⁹ This argument, proposed by Teresea de Lauretis in her analysis of the mechanisms of narrative in film, is eminently applicable to fairy tales which have a similar structure of reader/viewer address. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice doesn't, Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.10

¹⁰ Sylvia Bryant, 'Re-Constructing Oedipus Through "Beauty and the Beast"', *Criticism, A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 1989, 31:4, pp. 439-53 (439)

¹¹ Ellen Cronan Rose, 'Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales', *The Voyage In' Fictions of Female Development*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 211

¹² cf. Cathy Lynn Preston 'Cinderella' as a Dirty Joke: Gender, Multivocality, and the Polysemic Text', *Western Folklore*, 53:1 (1994) pp. 27-49 (36)

¹³ Angela Carter, 'Introduction', *The Virago Book of Fairy Stories*, ed. by Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1991), pp. ix-xvii (pivx)

¹⁴ Jack Zipes, 'Introduction', *Spells of Enchantment, The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture*, ed. by Jack Zipes, (New York: Viking, 1991), pp.xi-xxx (xxviii)

¹⁵ Steven Swann Jones, 'The Innocent Persecuted Heroine Genre: An Analysis of Its Structure and Themes', *Western Folklore*, 52:1 (1993), pp.13-41 (p. 13)

¹⁶ Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale, A Classification and Bibliography*, translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1964, second revision)

¹⁷ Stephen Benson, 'Stories of Love and Death: Reading and Writing the Fairy Tale Romance', *Image and Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham (London: Longman, 1996), pp.103-116 (109)

¹⁸ Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood, Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context*, (London: Heinemann, 1983)

¹⁹ KHM 46, *Brüder Grimm Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Ausgabe letzter Hand mit den Originalanmerkungen der Brüder Grimm, 3 vols, ed. by Heinz Rölleke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982)

²⁰ Christina Bacchilega, 'Introduction', *Western Folklore*, 52:1 (1993), pp.1-12 (6 & 11)

²¹ Irmtraud Morgner, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura, Roman in dreizehn Büchern und sieben Intermezzos* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1974), Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (London: Gollancz, 1979), Sheris S. Tepper, *Beauty* (London: HarperCollins, 1991)

²² Bidy Martin, 'Socialist Patriarchy and the Limits of Reform: A Reading of Irmtraud Morgner's *Life and Adventures...*', *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, Fall 1980, 5:1, pp. 59-74, (p.59)

²³ Alison Lewis, *Subverting Patriarchy; Feminism and Fantasy in the Works of Irmtraud Morgner* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), p.44

²⁴ Nancy A. Walker, *The Disobedient Writer: Women and Narrative Tradition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 6-7, quoted in Bacchilega, *Postmodern*, p. 23