

FAIRY TALES REINTERPRETED:
PASSIVE PROTAGONISTS TRANSFORMED INTO ACTIVE HEROINES

by

Lauren Ashley Price

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

Middle Tennessee State University

August 2014

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Martha P. Hixon, Committee Chair

Dr. Patricia Gaitely, Committee Member

Dr. Tom Strawman, Department Chair

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to research a field of academia that I am incredibly passionate about, and while this endeavor has been exhilarating, it has also been exhausting. In addition, writing is often an isolating task, but throughout this journey I have never truly been alone, since I have been blessed with a community of family, friends, and colleagues who have always been willing to listen to me speak about my progress, while also supplying me with endless notes of encouragement and words of wisdom. Often, multiple times throughout the day, I was reminded that I was kept in the thoughts and prayers of many of these special people. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Gaitely for generously agreeing to serve as a reader for this thesis, and for her insightful suggestions that strengthened the finished product. Words cannot express my gratitude to my director and mentor, Dr. Martha Hixon, for devoting endless hours to this project and to me, not only during the thesis process, but throughout my entire graduate school career. My life will forever be changed because of our work together. Finally, I would like to thank my mom, Julie, for too much to be shared here, but especially for the countless books that she read to me as a little girl, and for her constant encouragement and reminders to me, her grown-up girl, that she is my “biggest fan.” Her support gave me the courage to pursue graduate study and helped me to maintain my determination to finish, and for that, and so much more, I will always be thankful.

ABSTRACT

Much of the foundational folk and fairy tale scholarship regarding gender roles was written in response to the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s, harshly criticizing the female protagonists as poor role models and lackluster heroines. Surprisingly, these decades-old concepts are still influential, with modern academics often following suit without question or deeper analysis, continuing to argue that fairy tales are merely stories that portray women as passive and weak or victims. This thesis challenges these rigidly established but under-questioned theories by reinterpreting the actions of the protagonists in Charles Perrault's 1697 "Cinderella" and 1694 "Donkey-Skin," and Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 "The Little Mermaid." Although many modern critics continue to dismissively label these women as passive, if Jungian theory is applied, each woman's intellectual, psychological, and spiritual development becomes indicative of an active and intentional quest. All three protagonists embark upon a physical journey, which allows each to cultivate a unique identity—a true self—while also effectively navigating the confines of her current situation, assertively working against any imposed limitations, as she actively chooses and pursues her destiny.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: “The Coach Drove Me to the Ball, But I Determined the Course of My Destiny”: Perrault’s “Cinderella” As a Tale of Heroism.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: “I Found Her in the Mirror, and Then Chose My Future”: Perrault’s “Donkey-Skin” As a Tale of Heroism.....	38
CHAPTER THREE: “I Did Not Seek a Husband to Save Me, and Through My Sacrifices I Gained My Freedom”: Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid” As a Tale of Heroism.....	62
CONCLUSION.....	95
WORKS CITED.....	102

INTRODUCTION

Somehow existing beyond the restrictions of physical space and time, fairy tales are able to transcend generations and cultures, as elements of myth and magic weave together to form stories that seem to resonate with something inherent in the collective human psyche. No matter the language, and whether it be spoken word or print, “once upon a time” can evoke a response from people of all ages, enabling even the most cynical to suspend disbelief for a few moments to be transported to a kingdom far, far away. Marie-Louise von Franz proposes in *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales* that “because the fairy tale is beyond cultural and racial differences it can migrate so easily. Fairy tale language seems to be the international language of all mankind—of all ages and of all races and cultures” (18).

“Once upon a time”: a collection of so few, but so powerful words. This phrase carries significant symbolic authority, establishing specific expectations for readers or listeners, so no matter the events that may take place within the tale, this idiom implies that the story will end with a “happily ever after.” Since many of these fairy tale narratives conclude with the marriage of the protagonist and a prince, and as the woman may be part of an abusive family, or in some other dangerous or unfortunate situation until she meets her soon-to-be husband, this ending seems to present a powerful message: happiness is not only possible, but attainable through the bonds of traditional marriage. While this message encompasses several troubling social issues, many feminist critics

find it particularly unsettling because it seems to perpetuate the stereotype that a woman is not only incomplete without a husband, but she is also unable to independently care for herself. In the 1987 *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar labels the fairy tale narrative as a melodramatic plot that “begins with an account of helplessness and victimization” (xxxii).

In Kay Stone's 1996 essay “And She Lived Happily Ever After,” the landmark fairy tale scholar discusses a portion of her early research, which began in the 1970s as part of her doctoral dissertation, and eventually published in 1975 in the now foundational essay “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us.” Reflecting on her early work in the 1996 article, Stone describes her initial method for sorting the female fairy tale protagonists—that she identifies as heroines—into four categories: the persecuted heroine, who is in actual physical danger; the passive heroine, who takes little action on her own behalf; the tamed heroine, who begins assertively, but ends in the submissive position of marriage; and the heroic heroine, who takes charge of her own life and fate (14). During her early studies, Stone explored the power of the fairy tale narrative, and in the 1975 essay she argues that most of the stories and their protagonists present a romanticized idea of passivity and persecution to young girls, who in turn carry those ideals through to adulthood. Stone admits that her dissertation topic was greatly inspired by feminist critic Marcia R. Lieberman's 1972 essay ““Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale.” Indeed, Stone's early argument echoes

Lieberman's assertion that fairy tales effectively serve as "training manuals" for appropriate female behavior.

During her early fieldwork, Stone conducted interviews with girls and women of all ages, asking them to share their favorite fairy tale. While "Sleeping Beauty" earned a place in the top three, "Cinderella" was referenced nearly double the second place contender, "Snow White." Although Stone reasonably theorizes that these protagonists were chosen, at least in part, because of the popularization of the Disney films, there seems to be something more significant that is being presented by the clearly favored choice of "Cinderella." Stone's research indicates the identification of "Cinderella" as the most memorable fairy tale, at least in the 1970s when she began her study, a fact which becomes empirical data that demonstrates the tangible saturation of the tale within a contemporary North American society. Although the Disney film certainly made the story an iconic piece of culture, the "Cinderella" narrative is one of the oldest written tales that is based on an oral tradition, with the earliest version of the story identified by folklorists as the 9th century Chinese "Yeh-Hsien." As the "Cinderella" tale continues to be reinterpreted through innumerable textual, dramatic, and musical adaptations, perhaps there should be no surprise that the term "Cinderella story" and the phrase "happily ever after" now encompass meanings that have evolved into analogies for the whole fairy tale genre.

Perhaps one of the primary reasons that critics have found significant problems with fairy tales is that there is often a perception that a woman who is rescued by the

bonds of marriage, like the protagonist in “Cinderella,” is automatically passive or weak, and this interpretation has been applied to the majority of other tales’ protagonists; contributing fodder to this theory is the problematic misappropriation of “heroine” as a term that is interchangeable with “protagonist.” In Lieberman’s 1972 essay, the critic labels most women in fairy tales as passive, but all protagonists as “heroines,” and proposes that “even those few heroines who are given some sort of active role are usually passive in another part of the story. Since the heroines are chosen for their beauty (*en soi*), not for anything they do (*pur soi*), they seem to exist passively until they are seen by the hero, or described to him. They wait, are chosen, and are rewarded” (386). While Lieberman argues that Cinderella’s name is synonymous with female martyrdom (390), the critic also seems to consider “heroine” as synonymous with “protagonist”: “So many of the *heroines* [my emphasis] of fairy stories [. . .] are locked up in towers, locked into a magic sleep, imprisoned by giants, or otherwise enslaved, and waiting to be rescued by a passing prince, that the helpless, imprisoned maiden is the quintessential *heroine* [my emphasis] of the fairy tale” (389). Labeling a female character as passive, while then identifying her as a “heroine” effectively perpetuates the stereotype that women are, indeed, waiting and in need of rescue.

In an effort to construct a stronger presentation of a fairy tale protagonist, the last four decades have included a progressively increasing publication of texts by writers who continue to reinterpret traditional stories. In modern adaptations, female characters are given obvious agency, as these stories are reconstructed through numerous interpretations

by writers such as Robin McKinley, Jane Yolen, Donna Jo Napoli, Anne Sexton, and Tanith Lee, among many others. While these authors are certainly successful in their efforts at presenting active protagonists, upon reassessment it must be understood that there are powerful and capable protagonists in fairy tales, women who do exhibit heroic behavior, and as such, are actually heroines. Although in her early research Tatar initially identifies many fairy tales as representing feminine passivity and victimization, in her 1999 *The Classic Fairy Tales* she reexamines female characters, identifying women who display real acts of courage and discussing protagonists that often embark on dangerous journeys, or who refuse to conform to society's expectations, despite definite repercussions that may follow. Tatar notes,

While Catskin tales raise the charged issue of incestuous desire and place the heroine in jeopardy, they also furnish a rare stage for creative action [. . .] the heroine of Catskin tales is mobile, active, and resourceful. She begins with a strong assertion of will, resistant to the paternal desires that would claim her. Fleeing the household, she moves out into an alien world that requires her to be inventive, energetic, and enterprising if she is to reestablish herself to reclaim her royal rank, and to marry the prince. (105)

Identifying a need for a reclassification and reinterpretation of the elements contained within fairy tales, Helen Pilinovsky's observations in her 2004 "Russian Fairy Tales, Part I: The Fantastic Traditions of the East and West" are easily applicable to the collective genre: "rather than dividing the various types of the fantastic into unconnected

categories, or massing them into a single nebulous class, today's scholars must cultivate a developing system of classification for the various types of the fantastic in literature that contextualizes their various inter-relations." In *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, Von Franz also recognizes the need to establish a method for evaluating the themes contained in individual tales. While her theories primarily focus on the psychological interpretation of symbols contained in each story, she proposes an effective method of creating a baseline to understand the scope of change: "you have to know the average set-up, and that is why you need comparative material [. . .] That background will help you understand the specific much better, and only then can you fully appreciate the exception" (30-31).

Although many academics harshly criticize the representations of gender in fairy tales, arguing that many of the stories portray women as passive and weak or victims, this thesis will challenge these rigidly established but under-questioned theories by reinterpreting the actions of the protagonists in Charles Perrault's 1697 prose tale "Cinderella," Perrault's 1694 verse tale "Donkey-Skin," and Hans Christian Andersen's original story, the 1837 "The Little Mermaid." While much of the foundational folk and fairy tale scholarship was written in response to the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s, many of these now dated concepts are still perpetuated in contemporary analysis, as scholars continue to adhere unquestioningly to these previously established interpretations. I will argue that the protagonists in these three selected tales—the same women that many modern critics continue to dismissively label as passive—are actually heroic, and that each woman's intellectual, psychological, and spiritual development

becomes indicative of an active and intentional quest. All three protagonists embark upon a physical journey, which allows each to cultivate a unique identity—a true self; however, this same journey also effectively displays how each protagonist navigates the confines of her current situation, assertively working against any imposed limitations, as she actively chooses and pursues her destiny.

Chapter One of this study will assess Perrault’s “Cinderella,” Chapter Two will consider Perrault’s “Donkey-Skin,” and Chapter Three will examine Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid.” Each of these tales will be explored by considering the overall content of the narrative and plot, while also assessing the action and subsequent reaction of the protagonist, as well as some of the secondary characters. Although all three chapters will explore common fairy tale motifs such as magic, mirrors, and clothing, this exploration will be from a different perspective than is generally taken by fairy tale scholars, since the appearance of such elements—that are usually considered superficial or fairy tale filler—actually directly assist each woman as she actively cultivates her unique self. Additionally, other multi-layered themes that have received limited critical analysis will be explored, including the way that individual image and reflection are presented and represented, the way that the protagonist is able to communicate, as well as the evolution of time in the narrative and the way that this progression correlates to emotional growth and psychological development.

Critical to interpreting the extent of each protagonist’s psychological development will be the application of psychoanalytic Jungian theory, since Jung’s theory of

individuation is a useful tool in understanding or identifying an active quest to develop a unique self in a fairy tale narrative. Defining individuation, a core concept of his research, Jung writes that it is the “development of the psychological individual as being distinct from the general collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality” (qtd. in Meredith 21). According to Jungian analyst Margaret Eileen Meredith, “[the] ‘Self’ in analytical psychology refers to the totality of the psyche, which includes consciousness and the unconscious, as well as the phenomenon underlying the individuation process specific to each person. The Self is the archetype of wholeness and the regulating center of the psyche” (15). As each protagonist psychologically and spiritually evolves, she assertively chooses her own destiny. Reinterpreting these selected themes, and then applying the theories to the chosen texts, will ultimately reveal the unique and powerful differences between a protagonist and a heroine.

CHAPTER ONE

“The Coach Drove Me to the Ball, But I Determined the Course of My Destiny”:

Perrault’s “Cinderella” As a Tale of Heroism

Critical analysis addressing the study of fairy tales has increased exponentially since the 1970s, largely in response to the transformative effects of the second wave of the feminist movement. Representing a time of dramatic change occurring within the United States, critics consider the second wave as beginning during the early 1960s; while the official concluding year for this period is ambiguous, the completion of this second wave is generally considered to end during the early 1990s. However, the decade of the 1970s marked the publication of truly groundbreaking work, as writers of fiction and academics alike began to reconsider the representations of gender within the traditional fairy tale narrative. Feminist critics perceived the culmination of the historical and cultural events unfolding within the United States and internationally as a kind of catalyst, which prompted a deeper exploration of the themes contained within fairy tales. In a 2004 review of *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* published in *Journal of American Folklore*, Adam Zolkover proposes that it is precisely “because of its wide appeal across the humanities and social sciences, [that] the fairy tale has been the subject of more feminist critiques than any other genre of folklore” (370). Whether this commentary appears in the form of creative revisions from authors such as Anne Sexton,

Jane Yolen, Tanith Lee, or Angela Carter, or through literary analysis from academics in essays such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "The Queen's Looking Glass," or Karen Rowe's "Feminism and Fairy Tales," or Marcia R. Lieberman's "'Some Day My Prince will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale," all of these works became a kind of direct response and rebuttal from writers addressing what were the present perceptions of gender. Zolkover identifies the purpose of these literary and academic efforts as being united and "remain[ing] essentially the same: to address women's roles in the production and reception of fairy tales and to examine the modalities and consequences of their various portrayals" (370). However, upon reevaluation, such academic criticism appears to be more influential today than it was during initial publication, since the essays from Gilbert and Gubar, Rowe, and Lieberman have become foundational arguments on which contemporary scholars still continue to establish their own work. These essays are constructed through clearly defined assertions that dictate the nearly universal definition of a fairy tale. To fully evaluate the extent of the power that these critical voices possess, it is imperative to assess the way that these few arguments have rigidly established the perception of gender within the tales. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of the ways that this foundational scholarship continues to direct academic discussion while simultaneously sustaining gender perceptions within a contemporary culture, a brief summary of the evolution of feminism should be assessed.

The first wave of the feminist movement within the United States began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as the focus on suffrage and equality for women

developed within the climate of urban industrialization and socialist politics. While women sought equal voting rights, early feminists challenged the previous notions of a “true” woman’s traditional role in the home as wife and mother; eventually this argument evolved into a larger discussion focusing on the differences between the genders, and whether or not it was appropriate for women to participate in politics. The civil rights and anti-war movement of the 1960s marked a transition into the second wave of feminism, as these social and political efforts led to an increased awareness of class and racial minorities, both within the United States and globally. Historian Martha Rampton marks this progression in her essay “The Three Waves of Feminism,” describing the way that “the voice of the second wave was increasingly radical,” as advocates challenged reproductive rights, and an emphasis was given to social equality and the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. Additionally, Rampton identifies the 1968 Miss America pageant as a significant event that initiated the transition into this second wave. Responding to the “degrading ‘cattle parade’ that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by a patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home or in dull, low-paying jobs,” feminists retaliated in a mock counter pageant by crowning a sheep as the new Miss America and throwing away make-up, false eyelashes, bras, high heels, and other beautification methods that were deemed restrictive and oppressive.

While the initial first wave was predominantly led by white, middle-class women, the second wave represented multiracial and multicultural women seeking solidarity in their cause, as advocates identified “women as a social class as they coined phrases such

as ‘the personal is political’ and ‘identity politics’ in an effort to demonstrate that race, class, and gender oppression are all related.” Rampton argues this movement and its ideals became increasingly theoretical, as this phase merged psychoanalytic theory and neo-Marxism, and as activists considered the subjugation of women as being a broader critique of patriarchy and normative sexuality. Additionally, many feminists challenged the established roles for gender, arguing that women had been limited to traditional roles of wife and mother. Activists argued that sex and gender should be differentiated, “the former being biological, and the latter a social construct that varies culture-to-culture and over time.” The National Organization for Women was established 1967, and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argues in “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation: An Oxymoron” that feminist texts like Joreen’s 1967 “The Bitch Manifesto” initiated “symbolic reversals,” effectively transforming labels that were previously considered derogatory into words of empowerment, thus “exploit[ing] the power and fear lurking in these terms as potential sources of strength” (397). Joreen’s argument and other feminist writings produced during this time actively and assertively engage in mimicry, refashioning previously pejorative language into a powerful anthem, as Campbell summarizes the theme of “Manifesto”: “liberated women are bitches—aggressive, confident, strong” (397). According to Rampton, this motto resonated strongly with many women during the time, as these words elicited a deeply personal response, and in this emotionally charged social climate feminist advocates “initiated a concentrated effort to rid society top-to-bottom of sexism, from children's cartoons to the highest levels of government.” Perhaps the

combination of these voices and events could be considered kindling for the sacrificial altar of fairy tale protagonists, since it was amid this environment that a match was finally thrown onto the pyre of these tales.

In her landmark 1972 essay “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale,” Marcia R. Lieberman argues that fairy tales are dangerous because they perpetuate an idealization of passive behavior to susceptible children, and therefore the “classic attributes of ‘femininity’ found in these stories are in fact imprinted in children and reinforced by the stories themselves” (395). Lieberman’s essay is a direct response to Alison Lurie’s two consecutive articles published in *The New York Review of Books*, the 1970 “Fairy Tale Liberation” and the 1971 “Witches and Fairies: Fitzgerald to Updike,” and to her assertions that parents should provide children with fairy tales in order to prepare them for women’s liberation, as the texts are the “sorts of classic children’s literature of which a radical feminist would approve” (qtd. in Lieberman 383). In her essay, Lieberman considers the dichotomy between sex and the “social construction” of gender, and proposing a rhetorical question, the critic inquires whether the tales accurately portray biological archetypal female behavior, or if these stories actually serve as training manuals for young girls; the latter becomes the basis for Lieberman’s essay, as she argues that the “tales as training manuals” effectively link passivity as being characteristic of an ideal woman, a concept that is then perpetuated from childhood to adulthood (395). Additionally, she examines what she perceives as

inadequacies of fairy tales protagonists, arguing that “active resourceful girls are in fact rare; most of the heroines are passive, submissive, and helpless” (387).

It is unclear whether Lieberman found fairy tales an ideal analogy for the passive woman from her personal readings of the stories, or perhaps it was because of Disney’s cinematic depiction of his princesses. Perhaps the most well known version of “Cinderella” is Charles Perrault’s 1697 tale. French translator and editor Stanley Appelbaum notes in the introduction to his collection of Perrault’s tales that although various versions of “Cinderella” do show the protagonist transformed by beautiful dresses, Perrault’s use of unique plot elements such as the fairy godmother, the transfigured pumpkin, and the glass slippers have allowed the French fairy tale to become the most widespread. Appelbaum references the numerous musicals, films, and television shows that are “based on [Perrault’s tale] directly” (xix), and calls Perrault the inventor of the glass slipper. Lieberman’s essay places particular emphasis on the appearance of the shoe in the story, so it would seem that she is referencing Perrault’s version of the tale. In any case, Lieberman does identify Cinderella as the quintessential representation of female passivity, arguing that the tale teaches children that “suffering goodness can afford to remain meek, and need not and perhaps should not strive to defend itself” (390). However, Perrault scholars Jacques Barchilon and Peter Flinders propose that Cinderella is just the opposite of meek or submissive, arguing that she is

On the contrary, very alive, very spirited, and full of initiative. Any reader of this tale can see for himself: all he has to do is read the dialogues

between Cinderella and her fairy godmother, or her conversations with her sisters, or the account of the ball at the royal palace, or the reference to the laughter of Cinderella pulling out of her pocket the other slipper which she had kept all along. (123)

Lieberman does offer that “some heroines show a kind of strength in their ability to endure, but they do not actively seek to change their lot” (393), while also asserting that there is a lack of agency and complete passivity represented by most women in fairy tales, even identifying Cinderella’s name as being “partly synonymous with female martyrdom” (390). While Lieberman cites specific protagonists from a number of commonly known fairy tales that, when taken out of context, may give plausible evidence for her conclusion, she contradicts herself in numerous other ways, and her analysis becomes detrimentally problematic because she has rooted the foundation of her argument in the inaccurate use of the rubric “heroine.” Ironically, just as feminist activists sought to invert derogatory language to assert power, Lieberman, although perhaps inadvertently, does the opposite by allowing “heroine” to become a synonym for “protagonist,” while also identifying all “heroines” in fairy tales as passive; this misuse irrevocably labels women in fairy tales as victims. Through the progression of Lieberman’s essay, the references to a “heroine” more recognizably become an oxymoron, as she asserts that “most of the *heroines* [my emphasis] in [Andrew Lang’s] *The Blue Fairy Book*, however, are entirely passive, submissive, and helpless” (388). While Lieberman argues that this is most “obviously true of the Sleeping Beauty, who

lies asleep, in the ultimate state of passivity, waiting for a brave prince to awaken and save her,” Lieberman also references Snow White who “lies in a death-like sleep, her beauty being visible through her glass coffin, until a prince comes along and falls in love with her” as a heroine (388). Both of these tales feature women who are trapped in an enchanted sleep, and because of the stipulations of a curse—notably cast though no fault of the princesses own—any possibility of reanimation and action apart from a man’s actual physical rescue becomes impossible. Creating a trifecta of passive princesses, Lieberman links Cinderella with Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, claiming that Cinderella is just as passive as the first two: “after leaving her slipper at the ball she has nothing more to do but stay home and wait” (389). However, as Barchilon and Flinders have recognized, Cinderella does take extensive action on her own behalf. Lieberman’s claim is not only inaccurate, but it also becomes a direct contradiction with her prior assertion that Cinderella is “just as passive” as the enchanted Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, since a return to home obviously denotes physical activity and agency on the part of the protagonist. Furthermore, even though Cinderella’s choices are severely limited by her abusive family, she manages to find means for survival, and eventually to escape. Cinderella does embrace agency and exhibits activity as she works within the confines of her dysfunctional home dynamic.

Although by definition inaccurate, the use of “heroine” as a synonym for “protagonist” is certainly common, so it may be perceived that this present argument has transitioned into the tedious quibbling of semantics; however, a thorough consideration of

Lieberman's article is critical to this present study for a significant reason: Lieberman's essay, in particular, has become the foundation on which many critics, both early and modern and across multiple disciplines, establish their own scholarship. As Vanessa Joosen explains in "Fairy-Tale Retellings Between Art and Pedagogy," Lieberman's work has become "an exemplary text of emancipatory feminism [. . .] illustrat[ing] a type of criticism that has greatly influenced today's thinking on fairy tales" (131). Since Lieberman's essay still maintains considerable influence on current academic discourse, there is an imperative need to reassess the language used within the article. The critic's misuse of "heroine," coupled with the synonymous transition between "passive" and "protagonist," inhibits an accurate assessment of feminine heroism within folk and fairy tales, which directly impacts modern interpretations of these stories, subsequently impeding future scholarship.

During the course of her field research, landmark fairy and folk tale scholar Kay Stone has extensively explored the differing critical and emotional responses to fairy tale protagonists from academics as well as casual readers. In the 1996 essay "And She Lived Happily Ever After," Stone describes the way that she was initially inspired to pursue the "narrow portrayal of women as passive objects, as romanticized innocents, as victims of mental and physical abuse" (14) after reading Lieberman's essay. The origins of Stone's research began during the process of writing her doctoral dissertation, a study that eventually produced her first published article, the now foundational 1975 "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us." During her early studies, Stone extensively interviewed women

to learn more about their personal response to fairy tales, and she was often surprised at the frequency in which these women identified seemingly passive and persecuted protagonists as being heroic. The critic even reveals her mother's interpretation of the heroism exhibited by Cinderella: "my own mother surprised me by regarding Cinderella as 'adventurous' because she disobediently went to the ball. 'I would never have done that,' she said admiringly" (14). Discussing the development of her own interpretation of these texts, Stone explains in the 1996 essay that during her research: "I was to learn [. . .] many years later, that my own perceptions of what was heroic and what was not were in need of transformation" (14).

Following the findings collected during her early research projects, in the 1996 essay Stone asserts that the interpretation of fairy tales, and by extension the protagonists, often becomes contingent on an individual's own experiences, as she explores the ways that other women could identify a protagonist's behavior as heroic, even if the character is seemingly victimized throughout the tale. Citing a specific example, Stone notes "The Handless Maiden," a story that depicts the paternal persecution of a princess who flees her home to avoid further abuse. While this tale could be perceived as one that only depicts a victimized protagonist, Stone instead references Susan Gordon's 1993 "The Powers of the Handless Maiden." Summarizing Gordon's reading of the tale, Stone explains that instead of focusing on the protagonist's suffering, Gordon identifies the "decisive acts of self-salvation" (16). While the princess is a victim of persecution by her father, she takes action by removing herself from the dangerous situation, marries a king,

and finally regains her rightful rank in a new kingdom where she will serve as queen. Not only does this seemingly victimized protagonist escape a dangerous situation, but she actually increases her power and position by the story's conclusion. Additionally, Stone describes in her 1996 essay how another female reader considers "The Little Mermaid" as a tale that presents a protagonist that actively embraces agency, rather than passivity or victimization, as the interviewee explains: "[the mermaid is] one of the most aggressive women I remember" (16). Despite the way that the mermaid princess endures extreme physical pain, trades her voice, and eventually sacrifices her own life to save the prince, Stone proposes that these actions do not negate the interpretation of heroism by this reader because the mermaid actively seeks to further what she wants for her life. Stone identifies Gordon and the anonymous interviewee as specific examples of how a particular individual could identify heroism in a fairy tale character, while another reader may interpret the same story as one that merely presents a passive victim. Stone explains that these readers represent people who focus on the distinct differences between action and inaction of the protagonists; instead of reducing the tale's plot to only consider a depiction of suffering, they "emphasized the competent acts of the heroines, their unwillingness to give in and accept their abusive situations, and their success in actively escaping them" (16).

The folklorist catalogue the Aarne-Thompson Index extends its 510A classification to include the numerous variants of the "Cinderella" tale, including the stories that have origins in many countries, represented by multiple cultures, told through

a variety of languages, and spanning hundreds of years. Most critics commonly refer to the “Cinderella” story as representing the tale type of “Innocent Persecuted Heroines.” In the 1893 *Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin, and Cap o' Rushes*, folklorist Marian Roalfe Cox identifies the numerous versions of “Cinderella,” cataloguing each story by using a system similar to the AT Index. Cox categorizes these tales into three headings: the ill-treated protagonist, who is abused by a maternal figure and her children; the unnatural father, who pursues a sexual relationship with his daughter; and what Cox terms the “King Lear Judgement,” also known as “Love Like Salt,” which depicts a father’s rejection and banishment of his daughter because of a verbal miscommunication that is based on his own ignorance, though this mistake is rectified by the story’s conclusion. Cox would identify the “Cinderella” tale as belonging to this first category, the ill-treated protagonist. While some of the specific details within each version of the “Cinderella” story may change, the core of the tale remains constant, as Maria Tatar describes:

The plots of ‘Cinderella’ stories are driven by the anxious jealousy of biological mothers and stepmothers who subject the heroine to one ordeal of domestic drudgery after another [. . .] In tales depicting the social persecution of a girl by her stepmother the central focus comes to rest on the unbearable family situation produced by a father’s remarriage. But while the father’s responsibility for creating turmoil by choosing a monstrous marriage partner recedes into the background or is suppressed

(even as the father himself is virtually eliminated as a character), the foul deeds of his wife come to occupy center stage. (*Classic* 102-103)

While the essence of the tale remains, since the story has numerous cultural sources and is translated into many languages, the protagonist's behavior can vary in extremes from vindictive to forgiving (Tatar, *Classic* 102); However, the Grimms' and Perrault's tales are the most universally known versions of the printed story, and in the essay "Beautiful Maidens, Hideous Suitors: Victorian Fairy Tales and the Process of Civilization"

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas artfully assesses the interpretation of the German and French "Cinderella" from the individual perspectives of two of the most established and leading names in fairy tale scholarship: Tatar and Jack Zipes. Talairach-Vielmas discusses Tatar's arguments presented in the 1987 *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, as she notes what she considers as the primary differences between Perrault and the Brothers Grimm as storytellers. While Tatar explains that the Grimms attempted to accurately represent "the authentic voice of the common people," she also seemingly discounts Perrault, arguing that his characters are merely "intensely aware of fashion" (qtd. in Talairach-Vielmas 287). Zipes also seems to find Perrault's protagonists superficial and passive, as Talairach-Vielmas explains that in the 1983 *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Zipes's contention with Perrault's "initial reworking of such folktales in [the] literary fairy tales changed heroines of the Cinderella type into submissive and industrious female characters who owe their rescue by fairy godmothers and princes to their good manners" (287). However, Christine A. Jones's essay "Thoughts on 'Heroinism' in

French Fairy Tales” presents a counter argument to any interpretation that reduces the plot of “Cinderella” to a story of a passive victim. In her article, Jones asserts that once French fairy tale culture and writing of the 1690s are accurately interpreted, even the most seemingly weak women will be shown to possess active agency, as Jones explains that “linguistic competence” and an “ability to interpret signs, deduce motive, and use irony” all become tools that even the perceived “inert” protagonists actively use to progress from their restricted state into one of power (17-18). While Jones argues that she could choose nearly any text produced during this time period as a primary source to prove her argument, she engages with Perrault’s tales because readers are often dramatically surprised at her reinterpretation, as she explains that although “many have come to know Perrault’s heroines for their weakness and helplessness” (18), she instead chooses to assess what heroines do “besides being confined and abused” (30).

Perhaps worth considering are the underlying reasons that Perrault’s tales have been nearly universally dismissed for supposedly containing superficial or helpless protagonists, and why Jones finds his texts to be the most effective examples to prove her point. Jones’s essay was published in 2013, and her work presents a revolutionary interpretation of Perrault and his tales. Although Zipes and Tatar are major names in the academic study of fairy tales, notably they are also Grimms and German scholars; whether they would care to admit it or not, it would seem that there is an apparent bias from both critics that seems to favor the Grimms. Much like Lieberman presents an argument in 1972 that modern scholars continue to build upon, Zipes’s 1983 and Tatar’s

1987 assertions effectively solidify the interpretation of Perrault's tales as being stories that are superficial and contain passive protagonists. Although these critical voices are so few, they carry incredible power, though it is ironic that Lieberman, Zipes, and Tatar resort to a superficial analysis by reducing the essence of Perrault's "Cinderella" to simply being a story that presents a weak or victimized protagonist, since superficiality is something all three critics seem to rigorously oppose. However, a more thorough evaluation of the tale will disprove any evidence that presents Cinderella as anything less than a resourceful protagonist and active heroine.

Perrault's "Cinderella" begins with a description of the dynamic of the protagonist's family. Cinderella's father is a gentleman, but not a king, and he has remarried a proud and hateful woman. Jealous of her stepdaughter's gentle disposition, which made her own daughters seem all the more lacking, the new wife re-assigns Cinderella to a life of servitude. The stepmother soon demands that her stepdaughter complete physically demanding household chores while also attending to the selfish whims of the woman's biological daughters. Further ostracizing her stepdaughter from the realm of the family unit, the new wife insists that Cinderella sleep in a garret at the top of the home, which only contains a straw mattress for a bed; however, "the poor girl endured all this patiently, never daring to complain about it to her father who would only have scolded her" (Perrault, "Cinderella" 165). While Cinderella is not the girl's birth name, it is the name that is cruelly bestowed upon her by her stepsisters, since after she finishes her daily labor the young girl sits in the ashes at the base of the fireplace. This

initial set-up has become somewhat universal when conceptualizing the traditional “Cinderella” narrative. Perhaps due in large part to the frequency at which the tale is retold or reinterpreted throughout various mediums, many critics have seized, with a self-appointed authority, the opportunity to judge the young woman by labeling her as passive and weak, or even identifying her as a martyr. Lieberman asserts that Cinderella’s “loneliness and her suffering are sentimentalized and become an integral part of her glamor; ‘Cinderella’ [. . .] show[s] children that the girl who is singled out for rejection and bad treatment, and who submits to her lot, weeping but never running away, has a special compensatory destiny awaiting her” (390). Reappearing in numerous print and film adaptations, the “Cinderella” story has saturated contemporary society, and perhaps because it has been unconsciously absorbed, what is actually happening within this dysfunctional family been suppressed by readers and audiences; so, it bears reevaluating the extensive physical and psychological abuse that the protagonist in “Cinderella” endures at home, a place that should provide safety, and from a stepparent while the birth parent refuses to acknowledge the mistreatment. Considering the situation from a literal perspective, this could be a true story about a real child, and if that were so it would seem that this protagonist behaves realistically, living and acting within the scope of her abilities. At this point, because of her youth, insufficient financial resources, and without a trustworthy guardian, she simply does not have many choices.

The announcement of the prince’s ball, in an opening that begins with “it came about” denotes the passing of time, and as all “eligible maidens” are invited, Cinderella’s

stepsisters included, it seems that the three girls are older than at the beginning of the story, and are of marriageable age. Thrilled with the news, the other girls immediately busy themselves with clothes, jewelry, and make-up choices. Even though she is not allowed to match them in their attire, apparently Cinderella has a flair for fashion and hair, as the sisters seek her advice for each selection, and even allow her to style their locks before the ball. Perhaps a more vengeful person might seize one of these moments to assign some swift justice, especially as the stepsisters mock Cinderella with inquiries of whether she would also like to attend the ball, but Cinderella resists, doing the best she can to make the siblings attractive. This scene certainly lends fodder to the critical scrutiny of “Cinderella” as a portrayal of a passive and weak protagonist, since she refrains, during a seemingly opportune moment, from enacting a justifiable retaliation. However, even though Cinderella is now older, she still does not have many options, and she instead displays incredible discipline and emotional strength by refraining from inflicting even a fraction of the humiliation and pain that she has been forced to endure because of the hateful whims of the sisters and their mother. During a moment of weakness Cinderella could do herself irrevocable harm. Even if she were to initiate some well deserved punishment, she still lives in the home with her abusers, and while her life is difficult, surely if provoked the other women could make it much worse. Even though she is older, Cinderella’s only choice is still to wait, while each day trying to survive.

As a child, Cinderella refrains from speaking to her father about her suffering, since she knows, Perrault is careful describe, that he does not care, and now, even as a

young woman, it is still not safe for her to fully articulate her true thoughts and feelings to anyone. Because she is not able to practice communication skills, the times that she does speak should be considered important. As the story progresses, the evolution of her speech and her linguistic style, and most significantly the sheer willingness she has to finally express herself, become indicative of agency and reflect extensive psychological development. While she is helping the sisters prepare for the ball, they ask whether she would also like to attend. Evading their question, she identifies the insincere inquiry: “Alas, young ladies, you’re making fun of me; that’s no place for me,” to which they answer, “You’re right, people would have a good laugh seeing a cinder-ass attending the ball” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 167). She does not provide a definite response because she knows from past experience that it is not safe to express her honest thoughts, and even if she did it would not matter, as no one cares enough to listen to what she has to say.

Helping the sisters prepare for the ball, an opportunity that Cinderella of course longs for, but is refused, seems to be her breaking point, since following their departure she can no longer suppress her sadness, and she begins to cry. The release of tears, a tangible display of inner emotions, become a form of truthful self expression, and is the most honest that she has been thus far in the tale. Although Cinderella’s family denies her the opportunity to use her voice, now that she is alone she can express her feelings without fear of rebuke, even if only to herself. This moment, and the truly sincere expression of her innermost feelings, provides some sort of cataclysmic shift within, because her fairy godmother suddenly appears and inquires the reason for her sobs:

Her godmother, seeing her soaked with tears, asked her what was wrong.

“Oh, how I’d like...oh, how I’d like...” She was crying so hard that she couldn’t finish. Her godmother who had magic powers, said to her:

“You’d like to go to the ball, isn’t that it?” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 167)

In the godmother’s overzealous effort to provide aid, the fairy actually inhibits Cinderella from articulating her feelings without interruption; however, speaking to Cinderella and providing the protagonist with an opportunity to communicate, but more importantly, just being willing to listen to what she has to say, seems to be enough, for as Cinderella responds with a brief affirmative, this scene becomes the first of a quick succession of events within the tale in which voice plays a critical role, and ultimately reveals the extent of the emotional growth that occurs within the protagonist.

While Cinderella’s dialogue has been considered problematic by many critics, Jones argues that “linguistic competence” is a frequently employed theme of French writers in the 1690s, and that a more thorough understanding of the language and the time period in which Perrault was writing will provide an opportunity to reinterpret the activity of protagonists, like Cinderella, who have “turned into cultural lore in North America as figures for passive women” (18). Jones proposes that the evolution of Cinderella’s voice, the ease and frequency with which she is able to articulate her thoughts, becomes indicative of a story of “subtle development,” and that Cinderella “receives more than magic from the fairy; she learns a lesson in rhetoric” (18). Reading the initial scene between the fairy and her godchild as one of modeling, Jones argues that

the moment Cinderella is asked the “all-important phrase, ‘go to the ball,’ [the godmother] models for Cinderella the performative power of language. Ask and you shall receive. Henceforth Cinderella learns how to use language to get what she needs” (18). However, there is something more significant occurring within this scene than just a lesson in communication, and inaccurately evaluating Cinderella’s developing voice severely limits the evaluation of the protagonist’s agency. Only considering this initial scene with the godmother as one of rhetorical modeling indicates that Cinderella does not possess the capacity to know how to communicate before being shown, which is simply not true. She learned from an early age that her father does not want to hear the truth about the abuse that is occurring within the home, and the stepsisters and their mother clearly do not care what she has to say, so it is no wonder that she initially has difficulty finding her voice, as the impatient fairy witnesses when inquiring the reason for Cinderella’s tears. Since this is the first moment in many years when Cinderella understands that she is in a safe space, she is finally able to express herself honestly.

While Cinderella’s developing communication skills become indicative of her emotional growth, the physical transformation that is provided by the fairy’s magic becomes directly intertwined with the cultivation of the protagonist’s true self. Helping Cinderella prepare for the ball, the godmother refashions a pumpkin into a coach, mice become horses, and lizards are made footmen. While Cinderella assists the fairy by selecting the pumpkin from the garden, raising the door of the mouse trap, and per the fairy’s instructions looking in the garden behind a watering can where she finds the six

soon to-be-footmen, the godmother suddenly seems at a loss when deciding what to use for a coachman. At this moment Cinderella asserts herself, offering to check the rattrap for a viable specimen: “I’ll go see whether there’s a rat in the rattrap, and we’ll make a coachman out of it.” “You’re right,” said the godmother, “go see” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 169). Jones explains that this scene could be read as a moment that indicates a momentary lapse in the fairy’s creativity, but argues that it should instead be interpreted as a deliberate move of strategy to test Cinderella’s developing abilities: “If we read the fairy’s ‘good idea’ as a validation of Cinderella’s rise to the occasion (she literally steps in for the fairy, telling *her* what they will do next), then it looks more like a stage in the process of a pedagogical experiment” (18-19). While a valid argument, Jones’s assessment seems to endow the fairy with a peculiar kind of manipulative power, and even though the godmother is seemingly altruistic, the interpretation of an “experiment” presents the fairy as morally ambiguous. Regardless, Cinderella’s own understanding that she is finally in a safe space in which to articulate her thoughts, coupled with the incredible transformations that she witnesses, finally gives her the courage to find ways to articulate her wants and needs, as is indicated when she asks for her own makeover next. Through the fairy’s magical intervention Cinderella is given an elaborate way to travel to the ball, though she has nothing appropriate to wear for the regal occasion: “Well, then this is how you’ll get to the ball. Aren’t you satisfied?” (169). While someone who has endured the kind of physical and psychological abuse that Cinderella has may not have had the courage to speak honestly, in this moment she speaks freely: “Yes, but

am I to go like this, with my ugly clothes?" (Perrault, "Cinderella" 169). This vocal display becomes clearly indicative of the extent of psychological growth that Cinderella is already cultivating, even in a brief amount of time. Additionally worth considering is Cinderella's response to the fairy's question of whether or not she is "satisfied." Although this may appear to be a conversation that is only about the ball, if considered metaphorically the question could be applied to Cinderella's current life. The godmother is giving her part of the package, but Cinderella recognizes the significance of the moment, identifying how crucial the timing is, and with complete authority she asks for what she wants, but more importantly, for what she needs to escape her current situation and exceed the strictures imposed by her family. No, Cinderella is not satisfied, but she understands that she could be, and she seizes the opportunity as a means to escape.

It would seem that Jones is correct in her assertion that Cinderella learns the importance of "ask and you shall receive," since the fairy grants the young woman her own physical transformation, not just once, but eventually three times. During the initial makeover scene in the garden "her godmother had only to touch her with her wand, and at once her clothes were changed into an outfit of cloth of gold and silver, and bedecked with precious stones; she then gave her a pair of glass slippers, the prettiest in the world [. . .] She departed, beside herself with joy" (Perrault, "Cinderella" 169). Upon arriving at the grand occasion, all onlookers are immediately captivated by Cinderella's beauty, but more importantly, the prince assigns her the seat of honor and chooses her to be his dance partner, and she "danced so gracefully that she was wondered at even more" (Perrault,

“Cinderella” 171). Even though they fail to recognize her, Cinderella speaks with the sisters and gives them oranges and citrons; although the fruit was given to Cinderella by the prince, she chooses to share her presents. If she wanted to take the moment to be vindictive, she certainly could assert herself, even if she were only able to in some small way, perhaps by casting a haughty glance or snobbish remark. However, instead, Cinderella actively bestows a gift, an act that in itself communicates a message: a display of her emotional restraint and intellectual enlightenment. By maintaining control over her emotions, Cinderella is eventually able to wield ultimate power over her stepsisters, since in the conclusion of the tale she is able to actively choose to forgive them, and by assigning them husbands and homes, she places them forever in her debt.

During Cinderella’s first trip to the ball she finds additional ways to communicate, not only verbally or by giving the sisters a gift, but also through the physical expression of dance. While on the ballroom floor she is able to creatively and artistically express herself, whereas her previous movements have been restricted to manual labor. Additionally, she is able to speak effortlessly to the other guests, and as her linguistic and physical capabilities far surpass all of her previous actions, she is rendered unrecognizable, even by her stepsisters. However, this metamorphosis becomes more than just a mere makeover, as her exterior transformation allows her to exceed her prior physical and emotional restrictions. The beautiful clothing allows Cinderella access to attend the event, which becomes a physical escape from the confines of her abusive home

life; additionally, as her change in behavior indicates, the garments endow Cinderella with the confidence to effectively articulate her true inner self.

The international, non-profit organization *Dress For Success* identifies the way that a woman's physical appearance can directly affect her psychological and emotional self. While a facet of the company's mission is to assist disadvantaged women, many who were once homeless or victims of domestic violence, by providing them with business attire that is appropriate to wear during job interviews, the organization recognizes that it is not just physical appearance that the interviewer is evaluating. As the non-profit's efforts indicate, there is an definite link between clothing and self-esteem, and as a client of *Dress For Success* explains: "The clothes are just the beginning. Building confidence and finding your voice is what [the organization] is about" (*Dress*). In the essay "Magical Dress: Clothing and Transformation in Folk Tales," Carole Scott identifies the transformative effects of clothing and the way that garments are able to alter much more than a person's physical appearance:

Clothes are used to break the rules of the ordered world and the boundaries of the reasonable expectations that life has taught. Not only are the social barriers shattered and the web of conventions dissolved; clothing is also used to express in outward form the psyche's deepest desires and shadowy dreams, by enchantment bringing about a fantastical transmutation into our other or into our ultimate selves. (151)

As another client of the organization explains, “it’s not really about the clothes at all [;] *Dress For Success* is about giving self-esteem and hope” (*Dress*). Cinderella’s makeover and the beautiful dress that she actively and with agency asks the fairy to grant become the necessary tools which enable the protagonist’s emotional evolution. This request for new clothing, followed with a physical departure from her home, displays the way that Cinderella is assertively seizing every opportunity that she is presented with to escape the confines of her current situation. By freeing herself from limitations placed upon her at home by her family, she is able to psychologically evolve into the person that she is wants to be, effectively determining the course of her destiny. Far from being a passive victim, Cinderella is an active agent of change once she gets a chance.

Per the fairy’s specific orders Cinderella leaves the ball before midnight, though upon returning home she immediately seeks her confidant to share news of the evening’s events: “As soon as she got home, she went to her godmother and, after thanking her, told her that she’d very much like to return to the ball the next evening because the king’s son had asked her to. While she was busy telling her godmother everything that had occurred at the ball, her two stepsisters knocked at the door” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 171). As indicated though the active use of her voice in this scene, Cinderella is now displaying significant emotional growth, for not only does she seek out her godmother to share the exciting news, when only a few hours prior she was barely able to articulate through her sobs a desire to attend the ball, but with agency she asks to go back the next night. After

hearing the sisters' version of the story of the "beautiful princess," Cinderella was "beside herself with joy":

"So she was really beautiful? Heavens, how lucky you two are! Couldn't I get to see her? Alas! Miss Javotte, lend me that yellow dress you wear every day." "Really!" said Miss Javotte, "what are you thinking of? To lend a dress to an ugly cinder-ass like you: I'd have to be crazy!" Cinderella fully expected that refusal, and was glad about it, because she would have been in a great quandary if her stepsister had consented to lend her dress. (Perrault, "Cinderella" 171)

Just before the ball, Cinderella would not even offer a definite response to her stepsisters' insincere inquiry of whether or not she would like to accompany them when they attend the event. While she previously submitted to their taunts, after her return home from the prince's castle she teases the sisters, asking to borrow one of their dresses. Cinderella's physical transformation, orchestrated by her fairy godmother, has enacted a significant and real emotional shift within the protagonist, and while the beautiful dress and expensive jewelry are now gone, their transformative abilities have left an invisible but permanent mark, effectively determining the next series of events within the tale, while also directly altering the trajectory of Cinderella's life.

The next evening Cinderella once again attends the ball, donning even more extravagant attire than the night before, and the prince, still smitten, is once again constantly by her side. Amid the festivities Cinderella loses track of time, and as the

clock strikes midnight she is forced to make a quick escape, though in her haste she loses her glass slipper. Upon returning home, Cinderella arrives “out of breath, without her coach, without her lackeys, and dressed in her wretched clothes, with nothing remaining to her of all her magnificence but one of her little slippers” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 173). Even though Cinderella’s glamorous attire and extravagant means of transportation have disappeared, her lone slipper, “the prettiest thing in the world” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 173), is still in her possession. Despite the strict parameters of the fairy’s magical spell and the promise that everything would return to its previous form after midnight, this single, beautiful shoe remains, and as should be evident through this break in magic, the slipper’s lingering presence becomes more than a memento of the night’s events, as Disney’s film portrays, or merely a superficial link that will effectively reveal the identity of the protagonist, as critics, such as Lieberman, continue to argue. Instead, the shoe is a tangible and irrevocable testament of Cinderella’s extensive psychological development. When a royal decree is issued, stating that the prince would marry “the girl whose foot the slipper would fit exactly” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 173), fittings begin to take place across the kingdom in an attempt to find the true owner of the shoe. The slipper eventually arrives at the home of the protagonist. While each stepsister tries to squeeze one of her feet into the shoe, Cinderella looks on, and finally she speaks up, laughing, and assertively proclaims: “Let me see whether it won’t fit me!” (Perrault, “Cinderella” 173). While the sisters first taunt her, Cinderella further shocks the two by revealing the shoe’s mate from her pocket. Instantly the fairy godmother appears and taps Cinderella’s

clothing with her magical wand, transforming the rags into an outfit more extravagant than any of her previous costumes.

The extensive internal development that Cinderella experiences throughout the tale is being presented in multiple ways within this final scene. As she displays through the progressively increasing use of her voice, Cinderella actively asserts herself, finally demanding that she also be allowed to try on the shoe. Although Lieberman argues that Cinderella has nothing more to do “but remain quietly at home [until] the prince’s servant will come to her house [to] discover her identity” (389), Cinderella’s laughter and ironic wit coupled with her rhetorical statement become reflective of a truth that she already knows full well: her family can no longer abuse her, and she is no longer a prisoner, she is finally free. Jones proposes that the story “demonstrates that language is a kind of magic” (20) since as soon as Cinderella is able to command her voice, she will no longer need the fairy’s magical intervention. While the godmother does appear, physically transforming Cinderella for a final time, she does so only after Cinderella seizes control of the situation. As is clear during the second evening at the ball when Cinderella loses track of time, literally and metaphorically releasing herself from the bonds of her former life, the young woman has fully embraced her true self, and she is thoroughly able to communicate by using her voice, in addition to other acts of expression including gift giving and dance. The fairy’s initial appearance in the garden is ultimately the result of a cataclysmic shift within Cinderella, as the godmother appears following the protagonist’s emotional breaking point, which occurs when the stepsisters leave the home to attend the

ball. Although the fairy does provide a physical transformation, this makeover allows Cinderella to gain just enough confidence to find her voice, as she progressively develops multiple verbal and physical communicative methods. The slipper remains, effectively marking a break in the fairy's magical abilities; this lingering token displays the way that Cinderella has surpassed the abilities that any magical assistance can provide. Effectively, the protagonist evokes her own magic, as she experiences an internal transformation that far surpasses the limitations of a purely cosmetic makeover. While Lieberman argues that Cinderella is the quintessential representation of female passivity, this protagonist is far from submissive and helpless. This heroine finds her voice and actively secures her own freedom, determining the course of her destiny.

CHAPTER TWO

“I Found Her in the Mirror, and Then Chose My Future”:

Perrault’s “Donkey-Skin” As a Tale of Heroism

There is something almost magical about a makeover. Perhaps a tangible testament to the public's fascination with metamorphosis, stories of transformation have saturated entertainment media, as television shows and even entire networks are now solely devoted to this theme. Such shows usually feature women, and each depicts the journey to the glamorous finale. Throughout the transformation process savvy professionals perform a fairy godmother type intervention, revealing the tricks of their trade during time segments dedicated to a careful selection of clothing by the fashion expert, while the hair stylist creates the most flattering color and cut. Whether this kind of reality television is worth watching or not is certainly a subjective judgement, though as indicated by the prevalence of these shows within contemporary popular culture, audiences continue tuning in to watch *What Not To Wear*, *Extreme Makeover*, *Ambush Makover*, or *How Do I Look*, just to name a few. Each television program has a staff of writers that carefully craft and condense the makeover recipient’s most significant life events and circumstances into half hour or hour segments, effectively presenting the most important moments of the contestant’s life in neat packages of air time. Once a audience viewer begins the program, the incentive to continue watching becomes the anticipation

of the final reveal. In the conclusion of the show, viewers become privy to something special: the opportunity to witness a person's physical transformation into someone new, or perhaps what might be considered an improved version of the original self. However, the moment that the individual's makeover is revealed to the audience is not the end, or even the most important part of the story, since the most emotionally evocative moment occurs when the recipient is placed in front of a mirror, and she is finally able to view that first glimpse of her newly transformed self. As soon as the woman's usually shocked and overjoyed expressions are captured, the camera cuts to her family and friends, who display, through a mix of laughter, smiles, and tears, happiness because their loved one looks so beautiful: her internal beauty, or at least the admirable qualities that allowed her to be selected for the makeover are finally able to coincide with her physical appearance.

As superficial as these makeovers might initially seem, the moment that someone's internal being finds a means to be externally expressed is powerful, and must not be discounted. Maria Tatar notes that there is “something almost magical associated with being able to see your image from head to toe” (*Annotated Classic* 30), and while magic and fairy tales are intricately linked, perhaps magic and mirrors are, too. The Grimms certainly saw the potential for magic in a mirror, using one as a tool to perpetuate the insatiable vanity of the queen in “Snow White.” However, mirrors appeared in fairy tales long before the publication of the 1812 *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, though in other texts reflective imagery is not given the same obvious power that this queen's looking glass possesses, so perhaps that is why the multiple functions of mirrors

have received such little analysis by academic scholars. Perrault incorporated mirrors into his 1694 verse tale “Donkey-Skin,” as well as into his 1697 “Cinderella.” In his latter tale, just like in Grimms’ “Snow White” though to a lesser extent, mirrors are used in rituals of vanity, as the haughty stepsisters primp and preen before the prince's ball. However, in “Donkey-Skin” there is not only an increase in the appearance of mirrors, but also a significant shift in a mirror’s purpose, and its powers far surpass simply reflecting the viewer's physical visage.

The folklorist catalogue the Aarne-Thompson Index identifies Perrault’s “Donkey-Skin” as a version of “The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars” or “Catskin,” listing the three tales under the heading of 510B. While “Cinderella” and “Donkey-Skin” are connected numerically, both placed in the 510 section of the folkloric catalogue (“Cinderella” is 510A), these “Catskin” tales are often referred to as the darker version of “Cinderella.” Incarnations of the “Catskin” stories appear from other tellers besides Perrault, including Straparola’s “Doralice,” the Grimms’ “Thousandfurs,” and “Basile’s “The She-Bear.” In the 1893 *Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin, and Cap o' Rushes*, folklorist Marian Roalfe Cox identifies the numerous versions of “Cinderella,” cataloguing each story by using a system similar to the AT Index. Cox categorizes these tales into three headings: the ill-treated protagonist, who is abused by a maternal figure and her children; the unnatural father, who pursues a sexual relationship with his daughter; and what Cox terms the “King Lear Judgement,” also known as “Love Like Salt,” which depicts a father’s rejection and banishment of his

daughter because of a verbal miscommunication that is based on his own ignorance, though this mistake is rectified by the story's conclusion. "Cinderella" has arguably become the most well-known fairy tale, and while textual variants span continents and centuries, modern revisionists surpass the boundaries of print by adapting this story into film, television, song, and dance. However, the "Catskin" stories are rarely reinterpreted. A natural assumption as to why not may be that this tale has fewer story sources, so perhaps less of a chance for adaptations to be disseminated within a modern society. This does not seem to be the case, however: Tatar notes that Cox identifies the variants of "Cinderella" as only slightly outnumbering the "Catskin" stories (*Classic* 103-104), so instead, Tatar proposes that the repression of this tale becomes indicative of several larger cultural issues, as she examines potential reasons that a modern society might suppress stories of paternal abuse while perpetuating ones that present maternal mistreatment. Although versions of "Cinderella" and "Catskin" are obviously troubling because both portray an abusive family dynamic, the latter's incestual theme and the presentation of a cross-cultural taboo partly accounts for the repression of the tale during the time of its original print publication, as well as in modern form. As Tatar points out, these stories make adults uncomfortable, so they are less likely to appear in a collection of children's stories. In "The Silence of the Fathers: Donkeyskin II" in *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner proposes that this suppression becomes reflective of the power of a fairy tale's ability to elicit an emotional response from the reader. Additionally, Warner argues that the "Donkey-Skin" story is retold less because it presents a kind of "psychological

realism” which is unlike other magical motifs commonly present in fairy tales: “Because it is not impossible [sexual abuse], because it could actually happen, and is known to have done so. It is when fairy tales coincide with experience that they begin to suffer from censoring, rather than the other way around” (349).

Although Warner’s argument might naturally evolve into a broader analysis that explores ways that “Catskin” tales could potentially serve as a positive tool to help victims of sexual violence, her book chapter does not address this, and there is little critical scholarship that considers this interpretation. While some psychoanalytic theory exploring this tale type does exist, critics almost solely assess the story from a Freudian perspective. Bruno Bettelheim’s work as a Freudian psychologist and his now foundational 1976 *The Uses of Enchantment* has largely influenced the way that fairy tales are used within psychoanalysis—arguably with much the same power that Marcia R. Lieberman’s 1972 essay has had on shaping the interpretation of gender within these tales for literary critics. Building on Bettelheim’s assessment, Tatar also offers a Freudian interpretation of “Cinderella” and “Donkey-Skin,” arguing that both versions of the tale represent oedipal desires, since each story suppresses one element of the plot: hatred for the mother or love for the father (*Classic* 103). Additionally, she examines the repetition of the theme of a “perfect fit,” and whether the object that fits perfectly is a ring as in Straparola’s “Catskin” and Perrault’s “Donkey-Skin,” or a slipper as found in the Grimms’ and Perrault’s “Cinderella,” Tatar argues that these elements depict a specific path to happiness, one that is found in a heterosexual marriage. This relationship depends

on a successful transfer of love “from a father to a ‘prince,’ in a move from a false ‘perfect fit’ to a true ‘perfect fit’” (*Classic* 105).

Perrault’s “Donkey-Skin” begins with a choice: forced to decide between marriage to her father or leaving the only home she has ever known, the protagonist resigns herself to a self-imposed exile and flees the king's castle early the next morning. Upon the advice of her fairy godmother, the princess disguises herself beneath the hide of her father's former magical, gold-producing donkey and begins her journey. Unsure of where she will find shelter and safety, the princess begs for work from anyone willing to hire her as a servant. Finally she finds employment in the home of a farmer's wife, though once there the protagonist is constantly tormented by the other farmhands because of the donkey skin, which she continues to wear, so her station quickly becomes that of the most lowly of all the servants. However, every Sunday after finishing her chores during the morning, the princess is afforded a few brief moments alone, and she uses this time to try to cultivate a semblance of personal identity. Going into her room and closing the door, she meticulously begins her weekly ritual, the culmination of which will become the marker of the beginning of her metamorphosis. Removing the donkey hide, she thoroughly cleans her skin of the grime accumulated during her servile duties, and then spreads out her cosmetics cloth where she neatly arranges her makeup; so begins the first of three parts of the weekly Sunday ritual she enacts to reclaim a sense of identity.

The second part begins when the protagonist tries on the clothes of her former life. While these dresses could be seen as painful reminders of her past, since they were

originally gifts from her father given in an attempt to woo her so she would accept his marriage proposal, by adamantly refusing his request—displayed through her physical act of leaving the castle—and taking the dresses with her, she has removed and even reinterpreted any negative connotations associated with the dresses. Jungian contemporary Jolande Jacobi proposes that “every created thing, big and little, lowly and sublime, can become a symbol of the self according to the state of the individual's consciousness [. . .]ymbols provide the necessary bridges, linking and reconciling the often seemingly irreconcilable between the ‘two sides’” (115). Made from celestial elements—azure of the sky, silver of the moon and stars, gold and diamonds of the sun—the dresses become beacons of hope, helping the princess navigate between the “two sides” that Jacobi references. For the princess, these sides could be considered as the binaries of her past and present. While the princess’s physical journey becomes the first step of her emotional transformation, ultimately these dresses become symbols that directly assist her throughout her psychological evolution. During her Sunday rituals the protagonist’s past and present collide, which is visually presented to the princess when she sees her reflection in the mirror. Allowing the dresses to have new and positive associations equips them with an undeniable power, as they become invaluable instruments that guide the protagonist on her path of self discovery.

Finally, the third, and perhaps the most important, part of this ritual occurs when the princess see her reflection—her fully transformed physical self—in the mirror. Considering a mirror's practical purpose, it unquestionably serves as a way to present the

viewer with his or her physical reflection. However, when a mirror is considered as a symbol by using the Jungian theory of individuation, the reflective tool can also be seen as a way to present the viewer with a tangible image of his or her understood and conscious self, thus illuminating the unconscious self. E. A. Bennet explains that the process of individuation can be seen during

important stages in life and at times of crisis when fate upsets the purpose and expectation of the ego-consciousness. By its unaided efforts the ego-conscious personality cannot bring the complete man to our awareness; usually this requires a joint effort of consciousness and the unconscious [. . .] the one-sidedness of conscious life is corrected, compensated for, by the interaction of the conscious and unconscious. (171)

When the princess views her reflection in the mirror, she sees herself in the clothes from her past, though she is now in a new physical location. While she previously tried on the same dresses in her father's home, at that time she was in danger; however, when she tries on the dresses in a different location, the princess is provided with an opportunity for psychological development, which Jung argued is inherent in everyone (Bennet 171).

Although the protagonist is now working as a servant in the farmer's home, and usually dirty and covered in the donkey hide, she is safe from her father's sexual advances, even though the situation is certainly not ideal. While performing her daily chores she surely thinks about a future when she can move beyond her transitional life as a servant, so each Sunday that the princess tries on the dresses and then sees herself in the mirror becomes a

moment when she does not have to only imagine this new life, but can actually see it presented to her in the reflection. Bennet argues that individuation progresses not because of what “we intend to do, but in the actual way in which life is lived” (171). While the cleansing and makeup application are important, as they are an attempt to elevate herself from status as a servant, it is the mirror and the clothes—and the way they work together—that allow the protagonist to experience a physical transformation, and subsequently, an internal, emotional renewal. The protagonist’s clothes have physically transformative qualities in that they turn the donkeyskin-clad servant into a beautiful princess, so when she is presented with her changed exterior self via the mirror, her unconscious, or her undiscovered self, is able to be fully realized through her physical reflection in the mirror. Jacobi argues that among the symbols that serve as tools to help the individuation process progress,

special stress must be laid on those which characterize the process of individuation [. . .] highly variegated symbols accompany the process and mark its stages like milestones. [These] appear regularly in the material of the unconscious, e.g., in dreams, visions, fantasies, and which compel the individual to come to terms with them. The 'guise' in which they appear as well as the time of their emergence are highly characteristic of the specific conscious situation of the individual. In connection with this situation, [the symbols] take on a particular importance and enhanced effectiveness. (113-114)

Applying Jungian theory to “Donkey-Skin,” Bettina Knapp proposes that the dresses may be considered “concrete objects” which subsequently “hide an individual's identity, as well as the real motives of his or her acts [. . . .E]ach dress may be viewed as a metaphor, or artificial means of disclosing the princess's need to assume or to develop other identities or personality traits that would help her solve her dilemma” (72).

However, although the repetition of the wardrobe sessions do allow the princess to experience a transformation, the clothing does not serve as a mask to provide her with an alternate or false identity, nor should the dresses be considered superficial artifice. While these Sunday rituals might be interpreted as acts of vanity, as they could, quite literally, be seen as a princess playing dress-up, these garments should instead be identified as the crucially significant tools or symbols that Jacobi references; in this instance, the clothing is integral to the protagonist’s psychological evolution, effectively propelling her journey of individuation. These dresses must not be considered as a costume to hide the princess, since when used in conjunction with the mirror, the repetition of the visual presentation of the protagonist’s reflection effectively enacts a change that provides a way for her internal self, or her soul, to be visually externalized. When considered individually, the mirror and the clothing obviously serve in their intended purposes; however, when the princess dons one of her dresses and is able to view her physically transformed self in the mirror, her interpretation of that change enacts a catalytic effect, the culmination of which will lead to her ultimate inner transformation.

Explaining his theory of individuation, Jung wrote:

it transcends our powers of imagination to form a clear picture of what we are as a self, for in this operation the part would have to comprehend the whole. . . [ellipsis in original] But the more we become conscious of ourselves, through self-knowledge, and act accordingly, the more the layer of the personal unconscious that is superimposed on the collective unconscious will be diminished. In this way there arises a consciousness that is no longer imprisoned in the petty, oversensitive, personal world of the ego, but participates freely in the wider world of objective interests.
(qtd. in Bennet 173)

In the essay “Magical Dress: Clothing and Transformation in Folk Tales,” Carole Scott explores the transformative effects of clothing in fairy tales and real life, arguing that “clothes mark the point at which the inner and outer vision meet, the point at which the physical self and the world touch. Clothing is the outer expression of an inner identity, an imaginative vision transformed into tangible form for others (and ourselves) to see” (151). In order for the princess in “Donkey-Skin” to truly experience a complete physical and emotional metamorphosis, it is not enough that she puts on her makeup and wears the beautiful dresses. While she must physically alter her appearance by shedding the animal hide, in order to experience an internal transformation she must actually view her physical transformation in the mirror. In the moment that the princess sees herself in the floor-length mirror, she views not her past self, but her future self; in her reflection

she is able to actually see a beautiful woman who, despite facing tremendous obstacles, has overcome and is living the life to which she is destined. The princess will never be able to return to the life of her past self, since when leaving her father's home she forsakes her former life. However, viewing her physically transformed exterior gives the princess hope for a better future which “kept up her spirits and got her through until the next Sunday” (Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 85). It is the culmination of these Sunday rituals which will ultimately enable the princess to experience a complete physical and emotional transformation.

Although Perrault does not specify, the events and character development suggest that the tale takes place over the course of several months. While the princess continues her weekly Sunday ritual, she begins to admire a prince from a neighboring town; appreciating his appearance, the protagonist calls the prince “regal” and identifies his “bearing [as] martial, one that would make the fiercest battalions tremble” (Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 85). Although the princess can only watch the prince “lovingly from afar, that boldness of hers made her realize that beneath the grime and rags she still had the heart of a princess” (Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 85). The protagonist’s inner dialogue indicates the extensive emotional growth that she is able to cultivate while hidden beneath the cloak of animal skin: while disguised, she is able to reflect on her current self and situation, as well as hope for a better future. Recognizing that she still maintains the heart of a princess indicates that the protagonist fully acknowledges that this is a transitional time in her life, and that working as a servant is not her true destiny. Jungian

contemporary Marie-Louise von Franz describes the way that Jung defined the actual process of individuation, explaining that the “guiding factor from the beginning is what finally turns out to be the goal, namely becoming conscious of the Self. The Self exists at the very beginning and generally in the process of individuation is what guides or regulates the process of inner growth” (*Individuation* 99). While the AT Index and most other fairy tale critics consider this tale type as one that represents “Innocent Persecuted Heroines,” this protagonist’s active quest to escape the confines of the sexual abuse that confronts her at home displays how she works within the scope of her abilities to ensure that this will not define her; for even though she is persecuted by her father through his attempt at consummating a sexual relationship through marriage, she does not allow sexual victimization to become her identity. By seeing the prince and acknowledging the “boldness” that remains within in her, while also realizing and affirming that she still has the heart of a princess, the protagonist is able to contemplate a future where she can shed both the donkey skin and her servile role in the farmer’s home. After she completes her entire physical and emotional transformation the princess can choose to marry someone who will love her, not just because she is beautiful on the outside, but also because of her inner beauty.

Through the repetition of the Sunday ritual, the princess is eventually able to accept her physical reflection in the mirror as a manifestation of true self, thus, she is able to embrace her future and the destiny that she understands that she is meant to pursue. The concept of a physical journey becomes intricately linked to the evolution of the

princess's psychological transformation. Consciously abandoning her former life and all that was familiar, the protagonist knows that she must aspire to be more than the person she would ultimately have become if she stayed in her father's home. If she did remain in the king's castle, she would effectively be agreeing to become her father's wife.

Accepting the king's incestuous proposal would not only put the princess in physical danger, but this would also surely harm her psychological health. While the princess may not know the full extent of the emotional journey that she will ultimately experience, she does understand that she cannot stay in her father's home, and that she is meant to seek a different life. Exploring the individuation process, Jacobi explains that while it may begin as "no more than a 'trace' [it] becomes deeply engraved in the course of the individual's life, and to deviate from it involves the danger of psychic disturbances" (115). During the repetition of the princess's Sunday rituals, the mirror and the dresses serve as symbols that enable the progression of the protagonist's individuation process. When the princess wears the beautiful clothes, and then views herself in the mirror, this action effectively becomes a physical presentation of the woman that the protagonist knows that she must become. Jacobi argues that an individuation process is successful if a person's conscious and unconscious self unite, and visual "symbols" can serve as a "goal" to facilitate the progression of this process:

Symbols that rise up out of the unconscious in dreams point rather to a confrontation of opposites, and the images of the goal represent their successful reconciliation. Something empirically demonstrable comes to

our aid from the depths of our unconscious nature. It is the task of the conscious mind to understand these hints. (116)

A critical scene that depicts the extent of the princess's internal transformation begins when the prince is wandering the neighboring farmland; happening along the protagonist's temporary home, he spies her through a keyhole in her door. As he watches her, the prince sees as she adorns herself with “costly jewelry and those splendid clothes of hers which, woven of wire-drawn gold and large diamonds equaled the utmost brightness of the sun” (Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 87). As the princess draws ever nearer to her final emotional transformation she becomes more embellished with descriptors of sparkles, jewels, and images of light; as she actively cultivates a more clearly defined concept of her true self, reflective imagery seems to be physically drawn to her like a magnet. Although these elements of light do serve to highlight her evolving physical beauty, they also become another mirror, capable of both being reflective of and reflecting her inner being. By projecting the protagonist’s inner self through visual display, the adornments on the dresses present a physical representation of her soul's beauty, so these reflectors become a compass, guiding the princess toward her ultimate goal of self-actualization. Evidence of the princess's emotional transformation is apparent when the prince's internal dialogue is revealed: “However fine her clothes were, the beauty of her face, its lovely shape, her fair complexion, her delicate features, and her youthful freshness affected him a hundred times more; but a certain air of greatness and, even more, her well-mannered, unassuming modesty, sure evidence of her *soul's* [my

emphasis] beauty, seized his heart completely” (Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 87). While this episode could easily be passed over as just one more clichéd scene of love at first sight, this actually proves to be a crucial moment that displays how clothing and mirrors work together to reflect not just external appearance, but also internal beauty.

While the princess was participating in the Sunday ritual for weeks or months, each time became one more opportunity for her to literally and metaphorically reflect on her outer appearance and current situation, all of which affected her inner being. However, all those Sundays led to the precise moment when the prince is allowed to see her, and although her back is to him, he is able to see her face reflected in the mirror. Thus, he is watching her face as she simultaneously sees herself; in this moment, while she is dressed in the beautiful clothing and exquisite jewelry, the princess sees herself physically transformed, which allows her to also experience an emotional transformation. Because she thinks she is alone, the princess is able to be her true self, and the prince is afforded the opportunity of seeing her internal beauty reflected in the mirror. As Jung proposed: “It is the whole, conscious and unconscious, what I myself am, and it involves much we do not know is there [. . .] this process is, in effect, the spontaneous realization of the whole man” (qtd. in Bennet 172). By mentally processing and then emotionally accepting the physical reflection presented to her as her own, the princess's internal transformation is able to progress, and the prince is able to witness a moment in her metamorphic journey.

While the reflective qualities of the mirror reveal to the protagonist her true inner being, this visual presentation proves to be transformative, not just for the princess, but also for the prince. His internal dialogue is described following the moment where he spies on the princess, which indicates that this scene is a pivotal one that displays the prince's own emotional development as well, since his life shifts dramatically after he sees the beauty of the princess's soul in the mirror. This experience is so cataclysmic that it leaves the prince mentally and emotionally altered, and subsequently his priorities change, so that he is no longer interested in frivolous amusements. However, as the days pass, his emotions begin to affect his physical health, and he languishes about in a love-induced stupor: "He no longer wished to attend the ball even though it was Carnival time. He shunned the chase, he shunned the theater; he had no more appetite, everything sickened his heart, and the tenor of his illness was a sad, fatal languor" (Perrault, "Donkey-Skin" 87). While the prince sees the inner beauty of the princess—describing it as her soul's beauty—as it is externalized through the reflection in the mirror, he also subsequently sees her acceptance of the presented image. Her reaction gives him cause to internally reflect upon his own life, and the prince demonstrates his willingness to change by abandoning his childish ways in favor of embracing his responsibilities of becoming a king. According to Jung, a mirror can serve as a tool which allows an individual's unconscious and conscious self to unite, so in this particular tale the princess's reflection effectively presents and reveals her true self to her, and because she accepts this presentation, her own individuation is able to progress. The passing of one more Sunday

and the completion of another weekly ritual effectively propels the protagonist further from her transitional life as the donkey skin servant, and closer to the time when she will be able to reclaim her royal status. However, key to this emotional progression is the princess's acceptance of the reflection. Because she accepts this physical transformation, her conscious and unconscious self are able to unite, and as Jung proposes, this unification has a kind of ripple effect, subsequently affecting others, and in this case the prince: "We can now see that the unconscious produces contents which are valid not only for the person concerned, but for others as well, in fact for a great many people and possibly for all" (qtd. in Bennet 174). While the repetition of the princess's Sunday ritual of trying on her dresses and then viewing her reflection becomes the means for her own emotional transformation, the cause for the prince's metamorphosis becomes the sight of the princess. However, the prince's change would not be possible without the protagonist's acceptance of her physical reflection as representative of her true inner self.

The full extent of the prince's own emotional growth appears near the conclusion of the tale when he insists that the ring he found in the loaf of bread must be tried on every woman in the land. When no matches are found, and the prince realizes that the woman whom everyone else disdainfully calls "Donkey-Skin" was not given a chance, he demands, to the horror of all the onlookers, that she must also be allowed to try on the ring. "Finally it was thought that the trial was over, because, in fact, no one was left but poor Donkey-Skin at the back of the kitchen. But, people said, how could it be believed that Heaven destined her to reign? The prince said: 'And why not? Have her brought

here” (Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 95). The prince's refusal to submit to the pressures of his society indicate the extent of his own emotional maturation. He is not only indifferent to what others deem as acceptable behavior for a royal, he all but demands that someone defy him on his quest to find the woman he loves. The transformative effects of the first encounter with the protagonist allow the prince to reach a level of psychological enlightenment that surpasses the other, more superficial, members of society. Ultimately, the prince seems to understand the connecting factors between the ring he found in the bread and the glimpse of the princess in the mirror. While the bread provides sustenance that allows him to continue living in his physical body, the moment that the prince views the princess as she experiences her own emotional transformation becomes an event that metaphorically nourishes his soul, effectively facilitating his own internal catalytic change.

Through “Donkey-Skin” Perrault seems to be deliberately exploring the magic of mirrors and the significance of a person's reflection. In her book *The Mirror: A History* Sabine Melchior-Bonnet proposes that it is by:

extending the field of sight and revealing images that would be impossible to view directly, the mirror questioned the visible, the appearance, and the real, and thereby demanded a critical mind. An instrument of reflection, it also offered itself as a model of reflection. In the seventeenth century, the experience of the self was rooted in a clear-sighted gaze sharpened by the mirror and the exercise of reflective thought. (164-5)

In the seventeenth century mirrors were not only a luxury, but a rarity. After the mirror-making process was perfected in Venice, Louis XIV employed expert Venetian craftsmen to construct the Galerie des Glaces or Hall of Mirrors for his Palace of Versailles. The beauty of his hall was unmatched, and official chroniclers of the day seemed tireless in their loquacious praise for the “palace of joy.” One admirer described the hall as a “dazzling mass of riches and lights, duplicated a thousand times over in just as many mirrors, creating views more brilliant than fire and where a thousand things even more sparkling came into play” (qtd. in Melchior-Bonnet 46). While this is obviously an example of mirrors at their most extravagant, it does demonstrate how Parisian society recognized the significance of mirrors and the power of reflection. Additionally, this language becomes comparable to Perrault’s descriptions of the princess when she is wearing her beautiful dresses, especially in the concluding scene when she crosses the halls while wearing her “magnificent garments, whose sumptuous beauty was never equaled; when her lovely blonde hair, adorned with diamonds whose flashing light threw as many beams as there were stones” (Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 95). At the time of the tale’s initial publication, large working mirrors had only recently been perfected; before then, anything except compact-sized or pocket mirrors were rarely able to provide any clear reflective abilities. Only the wealthy would have been able to afford a floor-length mirror, though only the most affluent would even have the resources to find a mirror to purchase. Perrault’s princess might have found a mirror in her father’s palace, but she certainly would not in the farmer’s house; thus, placing a floor-length mirror in her room

seems to be a deliberate choice by the writer, perhaps one made in order to make use of the unique metaphorical implications of mirrors and their function. As Barchilon and Flinders note, “For Perrault, anything which is not necessary to the action or movement of the story should be cut out” (108). Perrault described his own writing process, explaining that “one must compose as a painter and finish as a sculptor, that is to say, when one writes, first jot down many ideas on paper and then finish up by removing as much as possible. I sketch as a painter and I finish as a sculptor” (qtd. in Barchilon 108). Therefore, Perrault’s choice to include mirrors in “Donkey-Skin” should be considered deliberate, so the appearance of these objects must not be cast aside as mere filler for the tale. In fact, the repetition of visual displays is associated not only with mirrors, but also in the countless references to reflective imagery and light which are used with exceptional frequency to describe the protagonist. Considering the appearance of mirrors in such transformative moments of the tale, and evaluating the significant role that objects and symbols play in propelling the physical and emotional character development of the princess, mirrors act as an especially significant symbol, one that has been overlooked by most fairy tale scholars. Common now, the mirror has lost much of its magic, though Perrault would have understood that a mirror provided something special, that until recently most members of his society had gone without: the ability to see one's own face. Effectively it seems that Perrault is proposing that without some idea of physical representation, internal identity cannot be formed.

While the association between mirrors and magic has lessened through the centuries, the importance of finding a way to represent a person's internal self through physical appearance is still acknowledged in a modern society. While a mirror's practical purpose serves to present the viewer's physical image, when Perrault's princess sees herself in the beautiful clothes, physically transformed, the mirror allows her to psychologically evolve by reflecting on her outer transformation. Her internal beauty, or as the prince identifies it, the beauty of her soul, is given a way to be externalized. When the princess wears the dresses and then sees her reflection in the mirror, this visual presentation tangibly displays the princess's inner beauty. Perrault's mirror, quite literally, reflects the princess's soul.

The full extent of the princess's metamorphosis is displayed when she reveals her newly transformed self to the prince and his kingdom; representing her physical and emotional growth, this moment becomes the culminating marker that displays the significant power that physical reflection has on the transformation of the internal self. Following the prince's vow to marry the woman whose finger fits the ring he found in a loaf of bread, a kingdom-wide search ensues to find his bride. Although every woman tries on the ring, it is destined for only one woman: the princess who was finally ready to claim and embrace her new life. Despite the naysayers who cannot believe that "heaven destined her to reign" the "fateful" ring is a "perfect match" that marks the donkeyskin-clad servant as the kingdom's new princess (Perrault, "Donkey-Skin" 95). However, before being formally presented to everyone, the protagonist asks that she be given time

to change her clothes. This request becomes significant because the decision to reveal herself without the animal hide means that she can no longer be called “Donkey-Skin.” By shedding her disguise publicly, she surpasses the identity that society has assigned, which enables her to leave her current transitional life as a servant, shrouded in secrets and shadows, to embrace her new self, and her internal transformation is physically represented through the beautiful dress that she dons. The princess's metamorphosis is complete when she reveals herself to the kingdom:

To tell the truth, the thought of those clothes was beginning to cause universal laughter; but when she arrived in the royal apartments, and had crossed the halls with her magnificent garments, whose sumptuous beauty was never equaled; when her lovely blonde hair, adorned with diamonds whose flashing light threw as many beams as there were stones, when her big blue eyes, soft and wide, which filled with proud majesty [. . .] all displayed their charms and their divine grace, all the appeal of the ladies of the court and of their finery was vanquished.

(Perrault, “Donkey-Skin” 95)

Perrault has dressed his princess in regalia fit for royalty, and her final costume dazzles the onlookers as the beauty of her self-actualized soul is brilliantly magnified and multiplied through the mirror-like diamonds that adorn her clothing and hair. Through this glamorous and spectacular conclusion, the princess's internal beauty is finally physically presented to the world. This woman did not require a fairy godmother or other

means of magical intervention to experience her final transformation, as her own reflection proved to be more powerful than anything magic could conjure. While clothed in the splendid garments from her past, the repetition of her reflection provided an opportunity for the princess's own soul to guide her; by witnessing her physical transformation, she was able to not only imagine, but literally view her future self. The presented physical reflection enabled the princess to understand her true self, which endows her with the ability to actively determine the course of her own life. Despite her painful past, the protagonist will not allow herself to remain a victim. By recognizing who she is, and consciously understanding, and then acknowledging all that she is meant to be, the princess is able to embrace her destiny. By envisioning and determining her own fairy tale, it might appear that the story ends just as the princess finds her happily ever after, though as soon as Perrault's tale ends the princess's real life can begin.

CHAPTER THREE

“I Did Not Seek a Husband to Save Me, and Through My Sacrifices
I Gained My Freedom”:

Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid” As a Tale of Heroism

Far from any darkness or tragedy that shadows the introduction of Charles Perrault’s French fairy tales—a cold garret with an ash-strewn fireplace that serves as a bedroom for the protagonist in “Cinderella” or a lonely space in a foreign farmland that the princess in “Donkey-Skin” flees to—begins the tale of a mermaid. In a lavish, underwater kingdom, Hans Christian Andersen sets his story of a princess who, despite a royal birth that affords her wealth and privilege, longs for a life filled with something more than she is initially even able to interpret or articulate. Finally understanding who she is, but more importantly who she wants to be, she actively seeks to achieve what she so desperately longs for: a soul and its promise of eternity. Embarking on this quest represents the princess’s active and assertive embrace of all the resources available to her; just like the protagonists in “Cinderella” and “Donkey-Skin,” the mermaid works within the confines of her current life by determining and pursuing her own destiny.

While Andersen was a prolific writer, producing hundreds of works including poetry, songs, drama, autobiographical sketches, and novels, what solidified his position in the literary canon is the publication of his fairy tales. During his lifetime these stories,

totaling two hundred and ten in all, allowed him to gain notoriety, though perhaps what he wanted above all else was acknowledgement of his talents and acceptance from his peers. For the purposes of contemporary study he is often linked to tale collectors like the Grimms and Perrault, and although some of Andersen's earlier stories do have folk tale origins, unlike other writers who produced texts which stemmed from oral tales, Andersen produced truly original work. Although his later stories followed a fairy tale narrative, his writing established a new tradition which eventually inspired fantasy writers like George MacDonald, Oscar Wilde, and C.S. Lewis. Even if modern readers are unfamiliar with the evolution of fairy tales as a genre, "The Little Match Girl," "The Ugly Duckling," "The Princess and the Pea," "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "The Little Mermaid" have all endured the test of time, and are often readily recognized as a product of the writer's imagination.

While two volumes of stories were published in May and December of 1835, Andersen was confident that his third collection, the 1837 *Eventyr, fortalte for Børn*, was particularly special. In a letter to his friend Henriette Wulff, Andersen describes how H.C. Ørsted anticipated a positive reception of the stories within this new collection: "Ørsted says about them that if *The Improvisatore* makes me famous, these tales will make me immortal, and that they are the most perfect things I have written" (qtd. in Dal 7). Although Andersen acknowledged the literary merits of all his stories, he considered "The Little Mermaid" especially significant, as he explains in the pages of his 1862 autobiography, *Mit Livs Eventyr* [*The Story of My Life*]. However, beyond the critical

success that the tale garnered, Andersen credits the mermaid's story as one that allowed him to explore his own inner truth, explaining that the tale "encouraged me to invent myself" (qtd. in Dal 12). Shortly before the publication of this third collection, he describes in a letter to B.S. Ingemann the way he felt during the composition process of the story:

Except for "The Little Abbess's Story" in *The Improvisatore* ["The Little Mermaid" is] the only one of my works that has affected me while I was writing it. You smile, perhaps? Well now, I don't know how other writers feel! I suffer with my characters [. . .] I have not, like [Friedrich] de la Motte Fouqué in *Undine*, allowed the mermaid's acquiring of an immortal soul to depend upon an alien creature, upon the love of a human being. I'm sure that's wrong! It would depend rather much on chance, wouldn't it? I won't accept that sort of thing in this world. I have permitted my mermaid to follow a more natural, more divine path. No other writer, I believe, has indicated it yet, and that's why I am glad to have it in my tale. You'll see for yourself! (qtd. in Dal 12-13)

In this letter Andersen succinctly presents the core of his story, describing the way that his mermaid's quest was about much more than winning the love of a prince, as she deliberately seeks, through a "divine path," a method to attain an immortal soul. Maria Tatar notes that Andersen became "deeply invested in conveying Christian messages about immortal souls and eternal life" (*Annotated Classic* 315), and in her 2008 annotated

collection of Andersen's tales she proposes that the stories are largely dominated by Christian symbols and themes of piety (xxviii). Religious imagery appears in overt ways, such as in the use of units of measure that are calculated by the height of church steeples or through references to cathedral bells; additionally, Tatar posits that Andersen was devout in his faith—which proves to be a critical piece of information. As he indicates through his own letters, the writer's spiritual proclivities directly affect the construction of the events and characters within his tales. While the predominantly Christian society that Andersen was working within would have easily interpreted this religious symbolism, the full extent of the theme's influence has remained surprisingly under-assessed by the majority of contemporary critics. Even though the mermaid's sincere longing for a soul becomes indicative of the story's overarching theme, somehow the dramatic scope of the mermaid's emotional growth and spiritual development has been reduced to a lesson in morality.

Jack Zipes considers class and social issues in the 1983 *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, as he argues that the mermaid's physical pain becomes representative of the trials that a member of the dominated class must submit to in order to achieve status as an elite member of society (84). Notably, however, Zipes later expands on his previous interpretation in the 2006 *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, exploring the timely publication of Andersen's stories, and proposing that the writer's work was able to transcend the age gap between child and adult, as well as surpass the boundaries of the middle class to find readership among even the most affluent:

Andersen brilliantly combined humor, Christian sentiments, and fantastic plots to form tales that amused and instructed young and old readers at the same time [. . .] the sociocultural setting in Europe and America had become more propitious to receive the fairy tale, and Andersen opened it up for the proper grooming of good Christian children. (86)

Like Zipes, many critics that do recognize the religious themes within the story often do so casually, and although this imagery may be noted, it is often done so without much consideration regarding the way that its implications directly determine the events within the tale; subsequently, the academic interpretation of Christianity in “The Little Mermaid” has been limited to being synonymous with “good” and proper behavior.

While Andersen’s awkward final lines of the story seem to lend fodder for this superficial analysis, the core of the tale is about much more than the brief conclusion that P. L. Travers famously finds so egregious: “a year taken off when a child behaves; a tear shed and a day added whenever a child is naughty? Andersen, this is blackmail. And the children know it, and say nothing. There’s magnanimity for you” (qtd. in Tatar *Andersen* 155).

Additionally, the story is often aptly read as one that describes the progression from child to adulthood, though Rhoda Zuk argues in “The Little Mermaid: Three Political Fables” that the story melds the female marriage plot with the male *Bildungsroman* (166). Since Andersen describes through his personal letters how he identifies so strongly with the mermaid, many academics interpret the text as an allegory

of unrequited love that Andersen felt for Edvard Collin, the son of his benefactor, Jonas Collin. Critic Rumer Godden links the physical pain that the mermaid endures with Andersen's own awkward social tendencies and subsequent isolation in the essay "Hans Andersen, Writer" (557). There should be no surprise that extensive feminist study and scholarship has been devoted to the representation of gender within the text, along with the visceral descriptions of pain and the mermaid's loss of voice. In *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner considers the tale's combination of morbidity and power, and argues that Andersen tells the story specifically to children, which alters the core essence of the tale, thus "intensifying its moral preachiness about feminine love and duty, self-sacrifice and expatriation" (397). However, Andersen's stories are not solely written for children, and in the essay "Hans Christian Andersen: Father of the Modern Fairy Tale" Terri Windling notes the writer's exasperation upon seeing the initial designs for a statue that depicted him surrounded by a group of children:

I said loud and clear that I was dissatisfied. . . [ellipsis in original] that my tales were just as much for older people as for children, who only understood the outer trappings and did not comprehend and take in the whole work until they were mature—that naiveté was only part of my tales, that humor was what really gave them their flavor.

However, Warner's feminist argument sidesteps Andersen's assertions, and in her own interpretation she instead proposes that the tale is overtly didactic, following an examination of the verbal silencing of the mermaid and the extreme pain that the

protagonist endures once transformed into human form. Warner explains that the mermaid's sacrifice is dangerous because the act presents a resounding and chilling message: "Andersen's story brings quick tears, but not in any pleasurable way, as it seems to gloat on the morbid outcome [. . .] cutting out your tongue is still not enough. To be saved, more is required: self-obliteration, dissolution" (398). Warner notes the popularity of the Disney film, particularly among little girls, and proposes that Ariel has become "a fairytale heroine of our time" (404). Exploring the differences between the tale and the film, Warner argues that the animated mermaid's frequent use of "want" becomes a clear indication of the way that feminine desire is the dominant theme of the movie, while asserting that further evidence of this as a theme is found in the final scene, as co-writers/directors John Musker and Ron Clements substitute a marriage and traditional happy ending instead of Andersen's daughters of the air conclusion (403).

Warner is not alone in her comparative evaluation of the film's adaptation of the text; in fact, it is rare to find any scholarship on the tale that does not, at least briefly, note Disney's animated version. In *The Little Mermaid and Other Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen*, Neil Philip explains that Andersen's story became the writer's first attempt at exploring his personal spiritual beliefs, and though Philip does acknowledge the popularization of the Disney film as overshadowing the printed tale, he argues that the "deeper meaning resides in Andersen's bleak and painful original" (qtd. in Altmann 188). While neither Warner or Philip seem particularly offended by Disney's modifications, there is little positive scholarship that discusses the film, as most critics that do explore

the movie choose to do so through scathing essays, disparaging Disney's interpretation and scrutinizing the messages and animated character representations. Notably, A. Waller Hastings accuses *The Little Mermaid* of "moral simplification" by arguing that it "accentuates the most sentimental and romantic aspects of the story at the expense of its moral and psychological complexity" (85). While this present study is not the appropriate place for thorough analysis of the motion picture, it is worth considering how the overwhelmingly negative reception of the film becomes comparable to the dissent with which feminist critics discuss Andersen's tale. Many academics, like Hastings, will not acknowledge the merits of the movie, as they argue that Disney dramatically alters Andersen's spiritual tale in favor of a cliché happy ending; however, Warner and other scholars also disparage the printed text, arguing that it encapsulates feminine sacrifice through depressing and devastating methods.

Another seemingly irreconcilable paradox presents itself when feminist critics, such as Marcia R. Lieberman, scoff at "Cinderella" and tales that conclude with a traditional marriage. Much of the scholarship published during the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s, including essays from academics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Karen Rowe, encompass arguments that present fairy tales as portrayals of victimized or passive women; such critics explain that this weak and passive behavior is most succinctly represented by the prince's "rescue" of the protagonist through marriage. Lieberman argues in her 1972 essay "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale" that this "happily ever after" is

magnified into the most important and exciting part of a girl's life, brief though courtship is, because it is the part of her life in which she most counts as a person herself. After marriage she ceases to be wooed, her consent is no longer sought, she derives her status from her husband, and her personal identity is thus snuffed out. (394)

While Alison Lurie professed in 1970 that Andrew Lang's fairy tale collection contains women that even the most radical feminist would approve of—inciting a scathing response from Lieberman in the 1972 essay—in the 2003 *Boys and Girls Forever* Lurie describes her personal reaction to Andersen's tales, stories that she was initially introduced to when she was a child. The critic observes that although Andersen wrote numerous texts, only a few of these appear in collections for children; she posits the reason is that the themes that dominate Andersen's stories are “sad, distressing, or even terrifying” (9). Lurie explains that as a child she was most deeply disturbed by “The Little Mermaid,” and the critic interprets the mermaid's choice to exchange her voice for time on land as a decision that is made solely in the attempt to attain romantic love. However, Lurie likens the mermaid's unattained marriage as a kind of failed quest, which the critic argues finally causes the protagonist to die of grief. Lurie explains that although the mermaid was “presented as romantically admirable, I took her story as a warning against self-sacrificial and hopeless love” (11).

Notably this critic's interpretation of the mermaid's behavior was established early in life, and was then carried through and maintained into her adulthood. In Lois

Josephs Fowler and Kathleen McCormick's 1986 essay "The Expectant Reader in Theory and Practice," the critics propose that often readers allow preconceived expectations for a story to directly construct their perception of the actual events presented within a text.

Addressing student responses to the themes in fairy tales, Fowler and McCormick note that while a reader may accept the stereotypical wicked stepmother or abused princess trope, the same person may avoid questioning a character's motives, consequences of decisions, or realism in the stories; subsequently these texts remain unevaluated because readers consider it "inappropriate" to question the tales: "students assume that the events of a fairy tale should be accepted, not analyzed" (46). While Lurie claims in 1970 to know what active and heroic behavior looks like, as she identifies Lang's collection of tales that contain "Cinderella" as an example of the "sorts of classic children's literature of which a radical feminist would approve" (qtd. in Lieberman 383), she objects to "The Little Mermaid." Although the protagonist in each of these stories endures physical and psychological pain, it seems that Lurie's real objection to Andersen's conclusion is not that the mermaid suffers, but that she does so seemingly in vain, since the protagonist does not receive the traditional "reward" of marriage. Lurie's focus on the mermaid's bodily sacrifice and physical pain irrevocably limits the interpretation of the tale.

Additionally, other feminist critics, such as Warner, resist a deeper exploration into the character's psyche and the motivations for the princess's decisions, so the actions that the mermaid willingly and assertively chooses remain unevaluated—even in recent scholarship. Currently there is a gap in critical analysis, a significant disconnect which

fails to evaluate the reasons why Andersen's protagonist actively seeks a physical and spiritual existence beyond the limitations that the sea and life as a mermaid may allow.

Perhaps the most severe feminist commentary comes not through printed words, but through physical acts. In 1913 Edvard Eriksen created a bronze mermaid statue commemorating Andersen's efforts as a literary ambassador for Denmark, particularly Copenhagen, which now adorns a rock near the waterside of the Langelinie promenade. Finn Hauberg Mortensen argues that Andersen's story has become iconic for Danish culture, linking this status to an intimate correlation between Eriksen's statue and Andersen's text (437). Mortensen explains that the complexity of the story makes the sculpture even more symbolic, however he proposes that there is so little scholarship that addresses these connections because the statue is continually vandalized; subsequently, these violent events provide more newsworthy fodder, overshadowing critical discussion. Beginning in 1961 the bronze mermaid's hair was painted red and she was dressed in a bra and underwear, though this seems a mere prank considering the violent assaults that were to follow. In 1964 the statue's head was sawed off, though the culprit was never apprehended. Although she was repaired following this initial attack, in 1990 half of her head was once more removed, and in 1998 her head was again severed entirely. Finally, in 2003 explosives were used to blast the mermaid from her stone. In addition to these displays of physical violence, the mermaid has been shrouded in a burka, and in numerous instances been painted with crude phrases. These acts of defacement have been identified as social and political commentary, and Tatar notes that the Radical Feminist

Faction claimed credit for the 1998 beheading, as members professed that the statue is symbolic of a woman's willingness to sacrifice all that she has for a man's love (*Andersen* 122-123), though protesting the supposed silencing of a repressed woman by physically removing her head seems to be an ironic and counter-productive act. Later, in 2006, the mermaid was creatively refashioned into a sexually explicit position through the malicious addition of props, then covered in green paint, and scrawled with the date March 8th—which incidentally is International Women's Day.

While these assaults were obviously not taken against a living being, they are nonetheless extreme, and such aggressive actions represent much more than examples of vandalism; indicative of a crime that is fueled by passion, decapitating the mermaid, albeit only a statue, becomes a gruesome and willful act. However, from a broad cultural perspective these attacks become physical manifestations of the power that fairy tales still possess, graphically presenting a modern response to previously established feminist theory—critical commentary that has largely dominated the interpretation of fairy tales. The arguments presented by second wave feminist critics constructed a rigidly defined system, in effect determining the way that female behavior is perceived as being either passive or active, weak or heroic. Since many people, like Lurie, first experience these tales while they are children, and still maintain the same strong response to the stories as an adult, perhaps the multiple assaults on the mermaid sculpture should be considered as an adult reaction to the inculcation of feminist theory within the study of these stories.

In *Reading Otherways* Lissa Paul explores how an interpretation of a text can be largely based upon the individual's academic or professional, political, and national background: "What you see depends on who is looking, when, and from what ideological vantage point" (10). While Paul admits that she is a feminist critic, she recognizes that there are other ways to understand a text, especially since critical interpretations are often historically located, and thus, malleable (17). She notes the way that "The Little Mermaid" is traditionally read as a story about "selflessness, silence, self-sacrifice, patient endurance and suffering in the face of monumental injustice" (37), which echoes Warner's argument and Lurie's objections, though Paul also notes how the decade of the 1980s produced adaptations in textual narrative, art, and, of course, in Disney's film, that depict the mermaid as more active. Positing a reasons for this shift, and referencing the second wave feminist movement, Paul describes how binaries were favored by academics and creatives: "in the mid 1970s there was a fairy-tale fashion for 'active' heroines (of the masculine sort, understood as preferable). The preference for activity over passivity persists" (39). Paul summarizes what she perceives as the current state of scholarship that addresses "The Little Mermaid," though her assessment also becomes reflective of her own interpretation of critical discourse. Paul's evaluation references the sentiments of the second wave feminist movement, which called for a shift in the rhetoric of traditional fairy tale narratives, demanding active protagonists. While Lieberman's essay, "Some Day My Prince Will Come," is a landmark text, it represents a single critical voice, though it is a foundational argument that many modern academics still continue to refer

to and build contemporary scholarship upon. Since Lieberman is limited by her own perception of what constitutes heroic behavior, as she identifies a protagonist as a “heroine” regardless of the extent of their activity, the essay irrevocably inhibits an accurate interpretation of a fairy tale protagonist’s agency. As Andersen describes, his mermaid’s story is about much more than a tale of romantic love, though critics still fail to thoroughly examine the interconnectedness of the mermaid’s physical sacrifice with the emotional and spiritual quest that she actively pursues. However, allowing the protagonist’s choices to remain unevaluated forces the mermaid into an inescapable passivity and silence.

Introducing his underwater realm, Andersen constructs a kingdom through vivid description and sensory images. In water that is as blue as the petals of a cornflower and clear like pure glass, grow plants and trees where fish swim between the branches, just like birds do through the air. Since this is a story of a princess, there is inevitably a castle, though instead of being constructed with mortar and stone its walls are built of coral, which supports a roof that is shingled with shells, each with an individual pearl. The narrator describes the inhabitants of this kingdom and reveals that a king, who is a widower, lives with his mother and six daughters. Andersen depicts the beauty and life found below the surface of the water through numerous synonyms, producing textual creations that become nearly tangible images, enabling the reader to envision *another* world; however, while the sea has aspects of land, the comparisons also serve to

immediately set the underwater world apart, establishing the distinct differences and the way that it truly represents an *other* world.

Although the narrator introduces the princesses by describing their physical beauty, instead of an exterior evaluation, the dowager queen's intellectual and personal attributes are presented: "she was an intelligent woman, but proud when it came to her noble birth. That's why she wore twelve oysters on her tail, while everyone else of high rank had to settle for six. Otherwise she deserved great praise, for she was very devoted to her granddaughters" (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 304). These oyster shells and the emphasis placed on physical adornments serve to establish the significance given to exterior beauty and a decadent display of wealth, and this significance is reiterated when the queen helps her youngest granddaughter prepare for her first trip to the surface. Just like her sisters, the queen ensures that the princess is dressed in royal refinery, and although the granddaughter protests through cries of discomfort, her grandmother explains that sacrifices must be made for aesthetics, which is something of particular importance to the mermaid community: "Yes, beauty has its price" (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 310). While the princess wishes to "shake off all this finery and put away the heavy wreath" to simply wear red flowers from her garden, as they "suited her much better," she dares not defy her grandmother's orders (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 310). Just before the queen's introduction, the narrator describes the high quality of the materials that construct the castle, as even each shingle on the roof is decorated with a pearl that could serve as an ornament for the crown of the queen. The palace is trimmed with excess

worthy to be worn by the aristocracy, which becomes a direct physical correlation to the pride that the queen has regarding her royal lineage; coupled with the queen's insistence that she wear additional shells to display her status, the connection that the mermaid matriarch has to the underwater kingdom is firmly established, which sharply contrasts with the princess's protests against these societal strictures. The protagonist's early distaste for the imposed refinery reveals an active desire to deviate from the superficial requirements dictated by the queen and the mermaid society.

Following her birthday trip to land, after the youngest mermaid saves the prince from drowning, she seeks information on humans, eternity, and a method of attaining an immortal soul; however, she does not go to her sisters, but to her grandmother for guidance. This is significant because the conversations between the princess and the queen are the only verbal exchanges where advice is given between mermaids. Although it is noted that the little mermaid speaks with her sisters and the sea witch, allowing only the grandmother to give council through direct dialogue effectively enables the queen to become the spokesperson for all the merfolk:

“If human beings don't drown,” asked the little mermaid, “can they go on living forever? Don't they die, as we do down here in the sea?” “Yes, yes,” replied the old woman. “They too must die, and their lifetime is even shorter than ours. We sometimes live to the age of three hundred, but when our life here comes to an end, we merely turn into foam on the water. We don't even have a grave down here among those we love. We lack an

immortal soul, and we shall never have another life [. . .] But human beings have souls that live forever, even after their bodies have turned to dust. They rise up through the pure air until they reach the shining stars. Just as we come up out of the water and survey the lands of human beings, so they rise up to beautiful, unknown realms—regions we shall never see [. . .] We must be satisfied with what we have,” said the old woman. “Let’s dance and be joyful for the three hundred years we have to live—that’s really quite time enough. Tonight we are going to have a court ball.” (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 315-316)

The emphasis that the queen places on monetary wealth, along with the advice that encourages the princess to relish in worldly pleasures, serves to represent the moral consensus of the mermaid community. However, instead of finding comfort in the queen’s words, the youngest mermaid meets this newfound information with dismay:

“Why can’t we have an immortal soul?” the little mermaid asked mournfully. “I would gladly give all three hundred years I have to live to become a human being for just one day and to share in that heavenly world” [. . .] “You mustn’t go worrying about that,” said the grandmother. “We’re much happier and better off than the human beings who live up there.” “So then I’m [the princess] doomed to die and float like foam on the sea, never to hear the music of the waves or see the lovely flowers and

the red sun. Isn't there anything at all I can do to win an immortal soul?" (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 316)

The queen does reveal the stipulations that would allow the princess to achieve immortality, explaining that as a mermaid she may access the heavenly realm if she finds a human to love her with his whole heart and soul, and be willing to enter into the covenant of marriage; only then could she share in the same happiness that he, as a human, is guaranteed. Tatar argues that this passage, in particular, becomes indicative of the mermaid's "deepest longing [which] is not for the prince but for an immortal soul" (*Andersen* 140). The princess's desire to deviate from the moral code of the mermaid community indicates early inclinations that she possesses inherently, as she actively seeks a way to pursue a psychological existence that surpasses the limitations that she was born into. Much like the protagonists in "Cinderella" and "Donkey-Skin," the mermaid must work within the confines of her current situation until she is able to achieve enough agency to escape her present physical existence and life underwater.

Mortensen notes the way that Andersen contemporary Carsten Hauch questioned the mermaid's pursuit of an enlightened spiritual existence in a letter dated May 22, 1837, as Hauch considered the princess's desire to surpass her current spiritual existence as being indicative of an immortal soul that she must already possess (445). Additionally, Mortensen proposes that the religious elements present in the tale indicate that it "deals with the relationship between the temporal and the eternal in a process of development necessary for taking possession of oneself" (445). The critic's interpretation summarizes

the mermaid's developing psychological state, while also presenting the extent of the protagonist's assertive embrace of her agency, even though it is limited in the sea.

However, while Mortensen argues that the mermaid's "good" behavior is seemingly assured, it is never indicated in the story that there is an absolute certainty that the young princess will choose her eventual path, especially since she receives bountiful encouragement from her grandmother to embrace her "true" mermaid nature.

Eventually each of the mermaid's emotional and spiritual proclivities becomes physically represented within the tale through her overt and active choices, culminating into a presentation of her true self in the conclusion of the tale.

While all the princesses are intrigued by what might be found above the surface of the sea, the youngest mermaid yearns for this most of all. Beginning as a child, subtle actions set her apart from her sisters, and this becomes physically presented in the castle's gardens where each mermaid has a plot of the sea bed to plant and decorate as she chooses. One sister arranges her portion in the shape of a whale, and another constructs hers in the form of a mermaid, but the youngest princess makes hers "quite round like the sun" (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 305). Although the elder sisters fill their sections with objects obtained from sunken ships, the youngest "wanted nothing but flowers that shone red like [the sun]. She was a curious child, quiet and thoughtful" (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 305). In a literal illusion of the adage of reaping what one sows, the youngest princess physically establishes her own personality and character differences, which are presented through the flowers in her garden; this connection is comparable to the one that

the queen shares with her palace, but while the princess's link provides an opportunity for emotional and spiritual development, the queen's superficial and aesthetic connection inhibits any kind of enlightened growth. Although the princess does not yet seem to know how to articulate what her flowers might represent, these blooms soon grow into a symbolic presentation of the princess's most sincere desire: life beyond that which she was born into. Tatar notes that this young mermaid's "aspirations are clear early on. She is upwardly mobile, reaching for the sun and striving to transcend her nature" (*Annotated Classic* 305). Elsewhere, Tatar expands on the interpretation of this passage, explaining that "while the two other sisters remain wedded to marine life in choosing the shapes for their gardens [. . .] she [the youngest princess] moves out of her own realm and her own being to represent something otherworldly" (*Andersen* 126). Much like the queen, the older sisters allow their portion of the garden to become a direct link to who they are, since choosing forms of a mermaid and whale becomes indicative of identifying and embracing life in the sea.

Margaret Eileen Meredith explores the garden as a symbol of the Jungian process of individuation in *The Secret Garden: Temenos for Individuation*. She argues that this transformative process is aided by symbols which have particular significance for each individual person, as she expands her own interpretation of Jung's theory from his *Collected Works* in which Jung proposes that: "a symbol really lives only when it is the best and highest expression for something divined but not yet known to the observer. It then compels his unconscious participation and has a life-giving and life-enhancing

effect” (qtd. in Meredith 15). While a physical symbol may manifest in various forms unique to each person, Meredith argues that if the individual chooses to embrace its call, and if the symbol is “alive for a person it emanates a luminosity which is hard to ignore. It attracts one’s attention because it generates an energy approaching desire, even longing, in the person for whom it manifests” (15). Jungian theory proposes that the individuation process is directly guided by symbols, so effectively the youngest princess’s individuation begins in her garden, as this space provides refuge from the noise and stimuli of a secular society. In Jungian terms the princess’s decision to retreat into the garden becomes indicative of her own desire to develop a true version of her internal self, as opposed to unquestionably conforming to the ways of the mermaid society. Additionally, the garden serves as a place where the mermaid princess is able to psychologically evolve, and as presented through her efforts in the garden, by physically cultivating the ground, planting and watching the symbolic red flowers grow becomes representative of the initial stages of the evolution of her own emotional and spiritual enlightenment.

Following her first trip to land, the mermaid princess returns to her home underwater where she purposefully withdraws into a self-imposed silence: “She had always been silent and thoughtful, but now more so than ever. Her sisters asked her what she had seen during her first visit to the surface, but she told them nothing” (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 313). Indicative of a true individuation process, the princess’s psychological development is not an instantaneous event, and a progression of time is

depicted in the narrative. The passing of time ultimately makes the princess's decision to leave her mermaid life all the more significant, since every day becomes a conscious choice to continue to pursue a different life. The mermaid silently ruminates on her decision to save the prince from drowning, and what that choice might represent:

Many a morning and many an evening she rose up to the spot where she had left the prince. She saw the fruits in the garden ripen and watched as they were harvested. She saw the snow melt on the peaks. But she never saw the prince, and so she always returned home, filled with even greater sorrow than before. Her one comfort was sitting in her little garden, with her arms around the beautiful statue, which was so like the prince. She gave up tending her flowers, and they grew into a kind of wilderness over the paths, twining their long stalks and leaves around the branches of the trees until the light was quite shut out.

(Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 313-314)

While the mermaid's silence could be perceived as evidence of a passive princess who is linking her self-worth to an unreciprocated human love, this is no mere crush, and while she has yet to learn exactly how to surpass the confines of her underwater existence—her first home, though a place where she feels so much an outsider—the human prince becomes a tangible symbol, representing in equal parts the life that she longs for and the place that she hopes to escape. Saving the prince provides a cataclysmic shift in perspective, and although it takes some time for her to formulate her thoughts and

articulate her needs, she is no victim. While she eventually pays a costly price, she does so actively and without complaint, through deliberate and calculated choices. The statue effectively becomes the underwater representation of the prince and a manifestation of the human existence that the mermaid princess longs for, while the human prince becomes the means to an end. Ultimately marriage and an earthly “love” is the only method that is available to the mermaid that will allow her to achieve what she determines as her destiny. Additionally, the flowers that are so key to the princess’s individuation express what she is not able to articulate: just as the blossoms grow wild and exceed beyond the boundaries of the garden, they mimic their gardener’s desperate desire to escape the emotional and spiritual limitations of the underwater realm.

Sabrina Soracco assesses the tale from a psychoanalytic perspective, considering both a Freudian and Jungian interpretation of the story. Although her essay is dominated by Freud’s theory—she interprets the removal of the mermaid’s tongue as a form of castration and identifies the mermaid’s desire to leave the female-dominated underwater realm as representative of the princess’s wish to escape the confines of the pre-Oedipal mother—Soracco offers that there are elements of the tale that are more accurately assessed through an application of Jungian analysis: “one of the reasons a Jungian approach might work more effectively with [the story] is [because of] its ability to incorporate better the text’s spiritual aspects” (410). Contrasting Freud and Jung’s interpretations of religion, she proposes that since Freud considered scientific thought superior to spiritual development, solely relying on his theory might inhibit a thorough

interpretation of Andersen's tale, since Jungian theory privileges spirituality and views it as a primary and "organic part of the human psyche" (410). After the grandmother reveals that marriage to a human is the only way for a mermaid to be granted an immortal soul and a chance for eternity, the princess realizes that she can no longer happily live in the world that she was born into; even though she is surrounded by an excess of beauty, wealth, and privilege—all markers that, at least from a secular or worldly perspective, are indicators of success—these offer little comfort for the mermaid. The grandmother attempts to appease her granddaughter with the reminder that there is to be an extravagant ball that evening, and even though the princess is able to sing in front of the kingdom, and does find a brief moment of joy in that escape, she remembers the prince and is suddenly overcome with great sorrow, for in that moment she experiences a true recognition of what is missing from the life that appears perfect: she "lacked the immortal soul [that] he had" (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 316-317). Leaving the ball where everyone else in the kingdom stayed, reveling in the decadence, the princess resolutely affirms her quest:

"There he is, sailing up above—he whom I love more than my father or my mother, he who is always in my thoughts and in whose hand I would gladly place my happiness. I would venture anything to win him and an immortal soul [. . .] I will go to the sea witch. I've always been dreadfully afraid of her, but perhaps she can help me and tell me what to do."

(Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 317)

Repeating her grandmother's words, the stipulations that allow a mermaid to attain a soul, seems to be the princess's attempt at a self-fulfilling prophesy. Whether she "loves" the prince or not is of little consequence because she mentally associates the correlation between marriage to the prince with the chance for immortality. The princess actively seeks a way to pursue this higher spiritual existence by working within her mermaid confines, assertively taking charge of her own life through the only method available. Mortensen proposes that "life as a human being is first and foremost a means to eternal life. She wishes, through love, to surpass finitude and temporality and to achieve eternity. Human life is a mode of existence that makes it possible to connect the animal and the divine" (451). This internal drive is synonymous with an emotional or spiritual calling, because despite all family and societal circumstances that attempt to claim her, striving for an eternal soul seems to be an inherent part of the princess's psyche, and on a grander scale, become indicative of an active and chosen pursuit of her destiny.

In *Individuation in Fairy Tales* Marie-Louise von Franz describes the way that "absolute knowledge" can appear following the culmination of a succession of significant moments in a person's life; these "synchronistic events" become important to the individual through a meaningful connection between outer circumstances and inner "facts," though this kind of awareness can only appear if there is a "deep unconsciousness about the situation, but it *looks* (her emphasis) as though—*somewhere it was known* (her emphasis)" (153-154). Von Franz argues that this absolute knowledge can be made evident through the appearance of telepathic dreams or synchronistic events,

and these experiences can manifest as symbols, whether tangible or symbolic within a person's life, assisting and propelling the process of individuation. Rescuing the prince becomes a catalytic experience in the mermaid's life, or as Von Franz might describe, a synchronistic event, and this becomes a significant marker in the princess's individuation process. This episode, along with the psychological growth that the mermaid cultivates while in her garden, affirms the protagonist's resolute decision to actively pursue her chosen destiny.

Jungian contemporary Jolande Jacobi identifies symbols within the context of Jungian theory as crucial components that aid in the development of a person's true self, as these "accompany the process and mark its stages like milestones" (114). While Jacobi explains that symbols could appear in fantasy, vision, or physical form, the guise they take and the time of their emergence become indicative of an individual's conscious state: "in connection with [the] situation, they [the symbols] take on a particular important and enhanced effectiveness" (114). Because the form that symbols take are unique to each person, Jacobi argues that when the symbols are finally interpreted and understood, they allow the individual to become aware of the interaction between the conscious and unconscious, so symbols effectively "provide the necessary bridges, linking and reconciling" these previous unknowns (115). For the mermaid, these symbols initially appear in the garden, manifesting in the actual space, as well as through the physical elements that the garden contains—most significantly the statue of the boy and her flowers. Defining his theory of individuation, Jung wrote:

It is the whole, conscious and unconscious, what I myself am, and it involves much we do not know is there [. . .] this process is, in effect, the spontaneous realization of the whole man [. . .] it transcends our powers of imagination to form a clear picture of what we are as a self, for in this operation the part would have to comprehend the whole...But the more we become conscious of ourselves, through self-knowledge, and act accordingly, the more the layer of the personal unconscious that is superimposed on the collective unconscious will be diminished.

(qtd. in Bennet 172-173)

Ultimately, the protagonist's garden serves as a kind of sanctuary, allowing the princess time alone where she can reflect on her current life below the surface, while also considering the way that actively pursuing a different existence on land may provide a spiritual afterlife. The act of gardening, both planting the flowers and watching them bloom, mimics her own psychological evolution.

While the mermaid princess fully acknowledges her fear of the sea witch, and perhaps on some level anticipates that any bargain she agrees to will not come without paying a steep price, she proceeds with her plan. Although Lurie and Warner focus on the sacrifices that the mermaid makes and the extreme physical pain that she endures following her decision, it should be reiterated that the mermaid willingly and actively chooses her choice. Notably, Tatar recognizes that even though academics often bemoan the mermaid's "self-effacing" behavior, these same critics frequently neglect to consider

that the protagonist is also “more adventurous, spirited, and curious than most fairy-tale heroines” (*Annotated* 323). No one forces or manipulates the princess while she is making her decisions, in fact, she seeks the witch’s assistance because she recognizes that this magical intervention is the only way that she may have a chance at achieving what she longs for the most: not human “love,” but an eternal afterlife. The witch warns the princess that the quest is futile, telling the mermaid that she is foolish for pursuing her endeavor:

“I know exactly what you’re after,” said the sea witch. “How stupid of you! But you shall have your way, and it will bring you misfortune, my pretty princess. You want to get rid of your fish tail and in its place have a couple of stumps to walk on like a human being so that the young prince will fall in love with you and you can win an immortal soul.”

(Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 318-319)

Even though the witch predicts that the mermaid’s journey will end in failure, she also sees the princess’s desire to become human as a direct correlation to attaining an immortal soul. The witch reveals the directions for the magical charm, as well as the subsequent repercussions of the princess’s choice:

“Your tail will then divide in two and shrink into what human beings call ‘pretty legs’ But it will hurt. It will feel like a sharp sword passing through you [. . .] You will keep your graceful movements—no dancer will ever glide so lightly—but every step taken will make you feel as if you were

treading on a sharp knife, enough to make your feet bleed. If you are prepared to endure all that, I can help you.” (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 318-319)

Although the princess is understandably afraid, she agrees after she “turned her thoughts to the prince and the prize of an immortal soul” (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 319). Three times the witch offers the mermaid a chance to change her mind, while also reiterating the consequences of taking the magic: not only will the princess experience physical pain, but she will be permanently human, and this choice will effectively sever all ties with her family. Additionally, the witch emphasizes the stipulations of the charm, noting that the prince must be fully devoted to the princess in marriage, and if he chooses another partner, the mermaid will die and be doomed to an existence that ceases to be anything but foam on the crest of the sea waves. All of the witch’s warnings graphically depict what is an absolute certainty if the mermaid chooses to take the magical assistance; however, even if the mermaid does accept the offer, she is not given any promise of a positive outcome. Instead, what is guaranteed is physical and psychological pain. Besides bodily mutilation, the princess is considering permanently isolating herself from her mermaid family, as well as from her birth home. Despite all this, the protagonist actively agrees to the gruesome request without complaint, indicating her willingness to endure physical suffering for a more important purpose as she actively pursues what she determines is her rightful destiny. Ironically, but significantly, while the queen prepares her granddaughter for her first trip to land, the princess protests to the uncomfortable

aesthetic alterations, though now, the mermaid submits to the extreme pain inflicted by the sea witch.

Explaining the process of individuation, E.A. Bennet explains that “man operates with design and purpose; he has a goal in sight. This is brought nearer not by what we intend to do, but in the actual way in which life is lived and inborn capacities realized” (171). While the princess does endure physical pain, there is still an enduring hope for the future, and it would seem that nothing eases suffering like the prospect of this hope. While nearly all scholarship addresses the physical sacrifice that the mermaid submits to, few critics, if any, consider the emotional pain that the mermaid feels at the prospect of a continued existence in the sea—which would subsequently mean a denial of her true self: for the princess, this life seems to be much worse than any temporary physical pain. While she recognizes that she could not psychologically survive living this kind of existence, furthermore, she understands that as a mermaid she is denied any opportunity for a spiritual afterlife, so either way, her days are literally numbered. Continuing to maintain her current existence as a mermaid becomes an impending and permanent death sentence. However, if she did embrace being a mermaid, she would be guaranteed a comfortable and pampered lifestyle—she is a royal after all—but instead she actively chooses to trade all this for one day as a human, because it includes the chance of gaining an eternal life.

Once in human form, the princess is unable to verbally express herself through speech or her gift of song, so critics frequently consider the mermaid’s inability to speak

as direct evidence of her status as a victim. Zipes argues that the mermaid is “voiceless and tortured, deprived physically and psychologically” (*Fairy Tales* 84). However, such an analysis is short-sighted: the princess does actively use all methods of communication that she can think of to convey her thoughts and feelings. In addition to her “expressive eyes,” she offers an impromptu dance for the prince’s court attendees, and guests watch as she becomes “more and more lovely with every step, and her eyes appealed more deeply to the heart [. . .E]veryone was enchanted, especially the prince” (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 323). The princess’s dancing is indicative of her process of individuation, since this display becomes a form of communication that allows her to cultivate and express her own unique voice apart from her former mermaid society that imposed restrictions which demanded conformity from its citizens. While she cannot verbally speak, it must be reiterated that she *is* still able to artistically express herself through her movements, finding means to actively develop her true self. Von Franz argues in *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales* that dance can lead to the creation of a symbolic life, while also proposing that the physical expression of dance is an artistic form that enables performers to create a kind of fantasy world; this psychological space becomes unique to each individual, and is ultimately revealed when a person actively pursues daydreams or fantasies, or impulses that appear from the unconscious. However, Von Franz cautions that “fantasy” in this context should not be considered as mere frivolity, as it provides life with “a glow and a color which the too

rational outlook destroys [. . .] it constellates symbolic situations which give life a deeper meaning and a deeper realization” (74).

Although the princess experiences excruciating pain while performing, she continues, and all these displays culminate into her final dance onboard the prince’s marriage ship. Here the former mermaid reflects on her entire journey, which is represented in both physical distance and psychological maturity. The princess considers the agonizing external pain that she has endured as trivial when compared to the realization that she has failed in her quest, and despite all her efforts, the destiny that she actively sought is permanently unattainable: “sharp knives were cutting into her delicate feet, but she felt nothing, for the wound in her heart was far more painful” (Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 327). Although the protagonist experiences tremendous sorrow, it is not because of the prince’s unrequited love, but because of a much greater loss:

She knew that this was the last night she would ever see the prince [. . .]

This was the last evening that she would breath the air with him or gaze on the deep sea and starry sky. An eternal night, without thoughts or dreams, awaited her who had no soul and would never win one [. . .] She laughed and danced with the others while the thought of death was in her heart.

(Tatar, *Annotated Classic* 327)

Stone argues in “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us” that what is most noteworthy about active fairy tale protagonists is that these “heroines are not victims of hostile forces beyond their control but are, instead, challengers who confront the world rather than

waiting for success to fall at their pretty feet” (46). Just as the direct correlation between marriage and gaining a soul is repeated over and over throughout Andersen’s story, in what the mermaid anticipates are her remaining moments, she reaffirms the enduring purpose of her quest.

The mermaid princess never intended to pursue a life that fairy tale critics might interpret as a traditional “happily ever after.” The extent of the psychological and spiritual transformation that the protagonist experiences is far too complex to allow for such a neatly packaged conclusion. Stone’s noteworthy essay, the rhetorically and—especially when considering this protagonist—aptly titled “And She Lived Happily Ever After?” is particularly effective when assessing the mermaid’s deliberate and actively chosen decisions. Stone artfully proposes that “‘happily ever after’ is not a Disneyesque state of romantic bliss, but a deeper spiritual or, if you prefer, psychological state” (18). The mermaid’s chosen destiny is always about pursuing an immortal soul and gaining a spiritual eternal life, not attaining romantic love. However, just like Perrault’s protagonists in “Cinderella” and “Donkey-Skin,” Andersen’s mermaid must work within the confines of her current situation, exploring all methods at her disposal. As she displays through her intentional pursuit of a soul, with determination she seeks an existence that exceeds far beyond the limitations of the finite world.

CONCLUSION

“Once upon a time”: this collection of few, but powerful words carries significant symbolic authority, establishing specific expectations for readers or listeners. When studying the basic components of a fairy tale, this idiom could also be considered the first part of a formulaic equation since “Once Upon a Time” plus magic, clothing, transformation, beauty, a prince, and a protagonist equals “Happily Ever After.” While the variables within the introduction and the conclusion of the story may vary, just like any formula, if the key factors are present, there will be a guaranteed result, and it is precisely because of this concluding evidence that fairy tales have garnered a particular kind of critical analysis.

Increasing exponentially since the 1970s, the academic study of fairy tales can be considered a response to the transformative effects of the second wave of the feminist movement. Representing a time of dramatic change occurring within the United States, social and political events of the mid-1960s to the late 1970s prompted scholars and fiction writers to reconsider the representations of gender within the traditional fairy tale narrative. While Kay Stone is now a foundational folk and fairy tale scholar, in the early 1970s she was a doctoral student, and she found inspiration for her dissertation topic after reading Marcia R. Lieberman’s 1972 essay “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale.” In the article, Lieberman strongly disparages fairy tales, claiming that the stories serve as a kind of “training manual” depicting what women

should expect of life, while dictating appropriate female behavior: “Millions of women must surely have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded, and of the nature of reward itself, in part from their favorite fairy tales” (385). Stone’s dissertation eventually produced her first published article, the 1975 “Things Walt Disney Never Told Us.” In this early essay, Stone’s argument echoes Lieberman’s assault on the fairy tale narrative, as Stone notes what she then perceived as a frequently idealized representation of “passive” protagonists within the tales. Stone proposed that these women are “not only passive and pretty, but also unusually patient, obedient, industrious, and quite. A woman who failed to be any of these could not become a heroine” (44). However, unlike Lieberman, Stone did not rely simply on her own assumptions, and she began to create a case study, interviewing girls and women of all ages in an effort to learn more about their personal responses to fairy tales. While some of the interviewees described admiration for the “passive” princesses found in the tales, many of the women and young girls recognized the protagonists as “victimized” or “so beautiful and helpless” (49).

While Stone conducted these early interviews, the responses that she received seemed to be empirical evidence validating Lieberman’s assertions that fairy tales do present victimized and passive protagonists. However, near the end of Stone’s 1975 essay, in a note that seems to practically be an afterthought, Stone references some unusual responses from a few of the individuals that she interviewed. These women did not consider the protagonists—that Stone thought were so obviously victims—as passive

at all, in fact, quite the opposite: “Others [women that Stone interviewed] performed a fascinating feat of selective memory by transforming relatively passive heroines into active ones” (49). Stone moved past these interpretations, considering them as an anomaly in her research. However, much later the critic would realize that these responses became undeniable proof of the power of individual perception and a critical need to reevaluate the previously established definition of heroic behavior: “I was to learn [. . .] many years later, that my own perceptions of what was heroic and what was not were in need of transformation” (“And She” 14).

While Stone initially found some of her original interviewees’ responses puzzling, in her 1996 essay “And She Lived Happily Ever After?,” she explains that the women focus on the distinct differences between action and inaction of the protagonists, so instead of only considering the depiction of suffering, the women “emphasized the competent acts of the heroines, their unwillingness to give in and accept their abusive situations, and their success in actively escaping them” (16). In this later essay Stone reflects on her early research and proposes an interesting question: “how did I, the researcher, fail to see what the others had seen in these heroines? It seemed that we were all speaking a different language. We meant different things by ‘heroic’” (17). By admitting her own need to reassess the previously established definition of heroic behavior, Stone effectively calls for a reinterpretation of fairy tale protagonists. However, this essay is nearly twenty years old, and few critics have responded to Stone’s call.

While Stone admits in 1996 that she established her early research on Lieberman's 1972 essay, at present, many modern academics still continue to build their own work on the same foundational essays from feminist fairy tale critics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Karen Rowe. As Vanessa Joosen explains in the essay "Fairy-Tale Retellings Between Art and Pedagogy," Lieberman's work has become "an exemplary text of emancipatory feminism [. . .] illustrat[ing] a type of criticism that has greatly influenced today's thinking on fairy tales" (131). Lieberman's essay still maintains considerable influence on current academic discourse, so there is an imperative need to reassess these now dated concepts, since they are still perpetuated in contemporary analysis.

While Stone recognizes a need to reconsider the definition of heroic behavior, it seems that academics must learn to question the terms that are frequently used in fairy tale scholarship. In Lieberman's essay, the critic labels most women in fairy tales as passive, but all protagonists as "heroines," and proposes that

even those few heroines who are given some sort of active role are usually passive in another part of the story. Since the heroines are chosen for their beauty (*en soi*), not for anything they do (*pur soi*), they seem to exist passively until they are seen by the hero, or described to him. They wait, are chosen, and are rewarded. (386)

Although by definition inaccurate, the use of "heroine" as a synonym for "protagonist" is certainly common in most forms of literary analysis, though this present thesis argument

is not merely quibbling with semantics. Lieberman's misuse of "heroine" coupled with the synonymous transition between "passive" and "protagonist" inhibits an accurate assessment of feminine heroism within folk and fairy tales. Since present scholars still continue to adhere to Lieberman's terms, building on her original argument, and unquestioningly repeating her assertions, contemporary fairy tale analysis has been rendered into a state of inertia.

The purpose of this thesis is to question the rigidly established ideologies that are frequently used when analyzing fairy tales and their protagonists. Fairy tales have a particular kind of power, viscerally resonating with something inherent in the collective human psyche; but, people are unique, and as Stone's research indicates, individuals may have a different response to the same tale. However, each person must be allowed to decide for himself or herself whether the protagonist in the story is active or passive, weak or heroic. The job of any scholar is to present ideas and arguments in the most lucid and convincing way possible, but it is also imperative that these academics begin to question the common terms that are being used. While it seems a rudimentary concept, it should be reiterated that words have many layers of meaning. Academics must assess the language that they incorporate. "Protagonist" cannot represent "Heroine" because the words obviously mean different things; the former can be any lead character in a story, while the latter represents someone who is active, seizes agency, and is heroic. In academia there is frequent discussion of academic integrity, however, it is irresponsible to

continue to perpetuate ideas, calling it “modern scholarship,” without questioning the accuracy of the terms or the validity of the research.

Second wave feminist theory of the 1970s established specific parameters, restraining the interpretation of fairy tales. Through agenda pushing, critics identified fairy tale protagonists as the most effect representation of female passivity, and perhaps out of context, that is not completely inaccurate. However, while many of the protagonists in fairy tales are persecuted or victimized, few are weak or submissive as Lieberman and others have argued. While this thesis presents how the coupling of Lieberman’s term “passive heroine” is an oxymoron, this study also reinterprets the behavior of even the most seemingly “passive” women. The extent of the intellectual, psychological, and spiritual development of the protagonists in “Cinderella,” “Donkey-Skin,” and “The Little Mermaid” becomes indicative of an active and intentional quest. All three protagonists embark upon a physical journey, and through the lens of Jungian theory, specifically Jung’s theory of individuation, this physical journey can be interpreted as an act that enables each woman to cultivate a unique identity—a true self; however, this same physical journey also effectively displays how each protagonist navigates the confines of her current situation, assertively working against any imposed limitations. Cinderella’s choices were limited by an abusive family, though she finds a way to survive, and eventually escape. By finding her voice, she actively secures her freedom. Despite a painful past, the princess in “Donkey-Skin” does not choose to remain a victim. By using a mirror as a tool to view her true self, recognizing who she is, and

consciously understanding, and then acknowledging all that she is meant to be, she determines the course of her own life. The mermaid princess chooses to pursue a method to gain an immortal soul and achieve a spiritual eternal life, not attain an earthly romantic love. It is not the academic's job to identify what "Happily Ever After" *should* represent for the protagonists in these tales. Instead, the choices that the women actively and assertively seize must be reassessed. While the selected tales in this study conclude differently, each heroine gains what she was seeking, as she actively chooses and pursues her destiny.

WORKS CITED

- Altmann, Anna E., and Gail de Vos. *Tales, Then and Now: More Folktales As Literary Fictions For Young Adults*. Englewood: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001. Print.
- Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Little Mermaid." *Eventyr, fortalte for Børn*. 1837. Trans. Maria Tatar. *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*. New York: Norton, 2002. 302-331. Print.
- Appelbaum, Stanley. *The Complete Fairy Tales in Verse and Prose: A Dual-Language Book*. Mineola: Dover, 2002. Print.
- Barchilon, Jacques, and Peter Flinders. *Charles Perrault*. Boston: Twayne, 1981. Print.
- Bennet, E. A. *What Jung Really Said*. New York: Schocken, 1967. Print.
- Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron." *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-Century Perspective*. Eds. Bernard L. Brock, Robert L. Scott, and James W. Chesebro. 3rd Ed. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990. 388-402. Print.
- Dal, Erik. Introduction. *The Little Mermaid. By Hans Christian Andersen*. Trans. David Hohnen. Copenhagen: Host & Son, 1994. 5-20. Print.
- Dress for Success*. 2012. Dress for Success Worldwide. n.d. Web. 1 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.dressforsuccess.org/>>.

- Fowler, Lois Josephs, and Kathleen McCormick. "The Expectant Reader in Theory and Practice." *The English Journal* 75.6 (1986): 45-47. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 June 2014.
- Godden, Rumer. "Hans Andersen, Writer." *Horn Book* (1990): 554-562. Print.
- Jacobi, Jolande. *Complex/Archetype/Symbol: In the Psychology of C. G. Jung*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959. Print.
- Jones, Christine A. "Thoughts on 'Heroinism' in French Fairy Tales." *Marvels and Tales* 27.1 (2013): 15-33. *Project Muse*. Web. 2 March 2014.
- Joosen, Vanessa. "Fairy-Tale Retellings Between Art and Pedagogy." *Children's Literature in Education* 36.2 (2005): 129-139. Print.
- Knapp, Bettina. *French Fairy Tales: A Jungian Approach*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2003. Print.
- Lieberman, Marcia R. "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale." *College English* 34.3 (1972): 383-395. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 July 2013.
- Lurie, Alison. *Boys and Girls Forever: Children's Classics from Cinderella to Harry Potter*. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.
- Melchior-Bonnet, Sabine. *Histoire du Miroir*. 1994. Trans. Katharine H. Jewett. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Meredith, Margaret Eileen. *The Secret Garden: Temenos for Individuation*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 2005. Print.

- Mortensen, Finn Hauberg. "The Little Mermaid: Icon and Disneyfication." *Scandinavian Studies* 80.4 (2008): 437-454. Print.
- Nodelman, Perry. "The Hidden Meaning and the Inner Tale: Deconstruction and the Interpretation of Fairy Tales." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 15.3 (1990): 143-148. *Project Muse*. Web. 2 March 2014.
- Paul, Lissa. *Reading Otherways*. Portland: Calendar Islands Publishers, 1998. Print.
- Perrault, Charles. "Cendrillon ou La petite pantoufle de verre." *L'intégrale des Contes en vers et en prose*. 1697. Trans. Stanley Appelbaum. Mineola: Dover, 2002. 164-175. Print.
- - -. "Peau d'Ane." *L'intégrale des Contes en vers et en prose*. 1697. Trans. Stanley Appelbaum. Mineola: Dover, 2002. 68-99. Print.
- Pilinovsky, Helen. "Russian Fairy Tales, Part I: The Fantastic Traditions of the East and West." *The Journal of Mythic Arts at The Endicott Studio*. 2013. Terri Windling. 2004. Web. 30 Jan. 2014. Rpt of "Folkroots." *Realms of Fantasy Magazine* (April 2004): 14-33. Print.
- Rampton, Martha. "The Three Waves of Feminism." *Pacific* 41.2 (2008): n. pag. Web. 3 March. 2014.
- Scott, Carole. "Magical Dress: Clothing and Transformation in Folk Tales." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 21.4 (1996): 151-157. *Project Muse*. Web. 27 Sept. 2012.

- Soracco, Sabrina. "A Psychoanalytic Approach" in "Splash!: Six Views of 'The Little Mermaid.'" *Scandinavian Studies* 62.4 (1990): 407-412. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 June 2013.
- Stone, Kay. "And She Lived Happily Ever After?" *Women and Language* 19.1 (1996): 14-18. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 14 May 2012.
- - -. "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us." *Journal of American Folklore* 88.347 (1975): 42-50. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 May 2014.
- Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. "Beautiful Maidens, Hideous Suitors: Victorian Fairy Tales and the Process of Civilization." *Marvels and Tales* 24.2 (2010): 272-296. *Project Muse*. Web. 27 Sept. 2012.
- Tatar, Maria. "Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper." *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*. New York: Norton, 2002. 28-43. Print.
- - -. "Denmark's Perfect Wizard: The Wonder of Wonders." *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen*. New York: Norton, 2008. xv-xxxv. Print.
- - -. "Introduction: Cinderella." *The Classic Fairy Tales*. New York: Norton, 1999. 101-107. Print.
- - -. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987. Print.
- - -. "The Little Mermaid." *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*. New York: Norton, 2002. 302-331. Print.
- - -. "The Little Mermaid." *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen*. New York: Norton, 2008. 119-155. Print.

Von Franz, Marie-Louise. *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales*. Dallas: Spring Publications, 1970. Print.

- - -. *Individuation in Fairy Tales*. Dallas: Spring Publications, 1977. Print.

Warner, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. Print.

Windling, Terri. "Hans Christian Andersen: Father of the Modern Fairy Tale." *The Journal of Mythic Arts at The Endicott Studio*. 2013. Terri Windling. 2003. Web. 29 March 2014.

Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre For Children and the Process of Civilization*. New York: Methuen, 1983. Print.

- - -. *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Zolkover, Adam. "Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches (review)." *Journal of American Folklore* 121.481 (2008): 370-371. *Project Muse*. Web. 7 Oct. 2013.

Zuk, Rohoda. "The Little Mermaid: Three Political Fables." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 22.4 (1997): 166-174. *Project Muse*. Web. 28 June 2013.