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PROJECT TITLE: The Disney Dilemma: Modernized Fairy Tales
or Modern Disaster?

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

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Comments (Optional):

Ivy Doster has done an excellent job of juggling a wide range of sources — from critical to cinematic to written creative versions of well known fairy tales. This project is fascinating in the way that it ① illustrates how different each retelling of the same stories is; ② how these differences reflect cultural deviations from one country to the next, and also over time; ③ how, in spite of all of these alterations, problems still persist in modern revisions of earlier difficulties. The writing here is tight and well organized; I think the topic is comprehensively treated and I enjoyed reviewing this essay.

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The Disney Dilemma: Modernized Fairy Tales or Modern Disaster?

American culture without the presence of fairy tales such as "Cinderella", "Sleeping Beauty", and "Beauty and the Beast" is nearly unimaginable. Almost everyone is familiar with some version of these tales. Besides older popular literary versions from sources such as Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, many people today gain knowledge of fairy tales from movie adaptations such as the "Cinderella"-remake, *Ever After*, Angela Carter's feminist retellings of tales, or Anne Sexton's satirical poetic adaptations. However, the most common way that people learn the stories of fairy tales in America is through Disney animated film versions.

Given the old and rich history of the literary fairy tale, the fact that so many people know only Disney's interpretations of the tales seems rather odd. The actual origins of fairy tales are unknown because they began as oral tales recounted among groups of peasants around the world. The tales were probably first written down in the 14th century, which process stemmed from "the literary activity that flourished in Florence of various collections of novelle in Italian and Latin under the influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron*" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 852). Gradually, more and more authors began writing versions of tales, and the stories moved from being entertainment for illiterate peasants to being accepted by the middle classes and the aristocracy.

Each time the tales were adapted by different writers, these writers could "adapt the motifs, themes, and characters to fit their tastes and the expectations of the audiences for which they were writing" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 3). Basic plot elements and themes remained the same in the tales throughout the years, but the changes that have been made are significant because they show "truthful metaphorical reflections of the customs of [the] times - that is, of the private and public interrelations of people from different social

classes seeking power to determine their lives" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 845). A comparison of the differences among popular versions of fairy tales, along with a study of the various authors and their backgrounds and motivations in writing, can give insight into the cultural changes that these differences reflect.

Three of the most popular fairy tale types over the years have been Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Beauty and the Beast. These tales have been adapted many times by different authors from different countries. A look at the most popular versions of these tales will determine what audiences from each time period expected and demanded from the stories that are so important as reflections of cultural values. The main authors of fairy tales are Basile, writers from the French courts such as Beaumont and Perrault, the Grimm brothers, and of course, Disney.

Since film versions of fairy tales produced by the Walt Disney Company are the most popular adaptations in America today, they demonstrate what has been accepted and demanded in society when each film was made. *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, produced in the 1950's, can be compared to the 1991 version of *Beauty and the Beast* to show how cultural values have changed and how they have remained the same. Although Disney edited out elements such as violence and sex to make the tales more palatable to American audiences, the things that were added to the films, such as sentiments about feminism and race relations, tell as much or more about American society of the 20th century.

Even though Disney adaptations of the films attempted to bring the themes into the 20th century, many problems in these versions can be found. Themes such as women's expected domesticity and the ultimate goals of women as wives and mothers are

still present in the films, even the one made in 1991. These inclusions show that although elements of political correctness and popular moral sentiments are expected by the public, they create only a thin veneer over the true message of fairy tales, which has remained the same for centuries.

Popular Authors of Fairy Tales

The earliest fairy tales were simply oral stories told by peasants. No conclusive records exist about when different tales originated, or where. Tradition shows that many tales were being passed down orally "from the late Middle Ages up through the Renaissance" (Zipes, *Beauties*, 1), but surely these tales must have originated even before these times. Scholars only know of these early oral tales because later writers claimed to have taken story ideas from peasants, who told their stories "among themselves at the hearth, in spinning rooms, or in the fields" (Zipes, *Beauties*, 1). The stories were naturally modified each time they were told, so thousands of variations of each type of tale must have existed. Interestingly, evidence seems to indicate that similar types of stories were being told almost simultaneously in the geographically disparate continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Since these tales were mainly told and enjoyed by illiterate peasants, no opportunity existed for the stories to be written down. Many centuries passed before the tales were transcribed by authors. Therefore, no one can imagine the different steps in the evolutions of the tales that we are familiar with today. Since "each group or individual [who tells a tale] may alter an item of folklore to make it fit local social or psychological needs" (Dundes 294), the tales must have changed many times.

Not until the tales were written down did their details and styles become concrete. Writing a story down "allows an author to edit, revise, and correct his text" (Dundes 294) in ways that oral tellings do not permit. One of the first important writers to transcribe oral tales was Giovan Francesco Straparola (1480-1558), an Italian writer and poet. Although Straparola was by no means the first person to publish versions of folk tales, he "was the first truly gifted author to write [tales] in the vernacular and cultivate for this kind of narrative a form and function that made it an acceptable genre among the educated classes" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 841). The tales in his book *Piacevoli Notti* (*Facetious Nights*), published in Venice in 1550, were gathered from peasants in the area.

Not much is known about the personal history of Straparola. Scholars are not certain if such a man actually existed, or if the name is a pseudonym. In any case, Straparola's tales had a great impact on the written history of fairy tales. Even though very few of his tales are recognizable as being similar to tales we are familiar with today, his "framework and tales influenced other Italian and European writers, among them Giambattista Basile, Charles Perrault, and the Brothers Grimm (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 841). For this reason, Straparola is known as the father of the literary fairy tale in Europe. He moved the fairy tale from the realm of the fields of the peasants to the drawing rooms of the literate aristocracy, giving later authors incentive to write down even more such tales. Without Straparola, the fairy tale may have never come to be regarded as a legitimate literary genre.

Although Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti* was an important landmark in the literary development of the fairy tale, this collection was not widely known when it was published. Instead, the first truly popular collection of fairy tales was written by

Giambattista Basile (1575-1632), a Neapolitan aristocrat and poet. Basile's work, *Lo Cunto de li Cunti* (*The Tale of Tales*), was published posthumously from 1634-36. This collection, more commonly known as *Il Pentamerone*, was comprised of tales that Basile "had apparently heard in Naples" (Dundes 3). *Il Pentamerone* is noteworthy because it "contains some of the best-known of fairy tale types . . . in their earliest literary versions" (Canepa 11). For example, Basile included tales that are readily identifiable as versions of the "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty" stories.

Several of the characteristics of Basile's tales are important. First, and possibly most significant, is that the stories are written in Neapolitan prose dialect. By using this dialect, Basile made his tales readable for many people. He made extensive use of idioms, puns, and colloquial phrases specific to the Neapolitan language, keeping alive today parts of this language that may have otherwise been lost. The tales also contain many elements that may seem shocking to contemporary readers. While many of the types of tales recounted in *Il Pentamerone* are familiar to us today, the instances of rape, adultery, cannibalism, and incest are not. Basile's inclusion of such violent and socially unacceptable acts may indicate that the oral versions of the peasants' tales were full of such things. Basile did not feel the need to edit such elements out of his tales, because he claimed that he retold the stories as faithfully to the oral versions as possible. The violent parts of the tales give his collection the sense of being legitimately made of folk stories.

The next important group of writers of fairy tales was the French courtly tellers of the 18th century. In this time period, fairy tales became a popular entertainment for members of French salons, which were "developed by highly educated aristocratic women in the . . . 1630's in Paris and that continued to be popular up through the

beginning of the 18th century" (Zipes, *Beauties*, 2). At these salons, women and men gathered "in order to discuss art, literature, or topics important to them such as love, marriage, and freedom" (Zipes, *Beauties*, 2). Those who attended these salons took to retelling fairy tales as a source of amusement. Fairy tales were a good source of fun because almost everyone was familiar with them from childhood, and the retellings of the tales allowed the tellers to "picture themselves, social manners, and relations in a manner that represented their interests and those of the aristocracy" (Zipes, *Beauties*, 3). As this became an accepted pastime, the "French literary fairy tale was conventionalized and institutionalized" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 859). In fact, the term fairy tale is an English translation of the French term used to identify the tales told in salons, *conte de fées*.

The popularity of fairy tales as diversions for the educated members of the upper class gave authors a reason to write the tales down. The most famous French author to publish his versions of the tales was Charles Perrault (1608-1703). Perrault wrote *Histoires ou contes du temps passe* in 1697 for members of the court of Louis XIV. Like other courtly French tellers, Perrault was "given to making the tales wittier, more aristocratic, and sometimes more heart piercing than [he] found them" (Sale 25). He did this in order to make his tales more appealing to members of the court, who looked for amusement and entertainment from the stories. Perrault included many jokes and elements of sarcasm and wit into his tales; even the morals that he offers at the ends of the tales can be viewed as tongue-in-cheek references to the lessons that they supposedly offer.

Besides writing for entertainment, Perrault's goal was to transform fairy tales into works of modern literature. He did this by reworking "several popular folktales with all

their superstitious beliefs and magic into moralistic tales that would appeal largely to adults" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 839). He was careful to edit out any offensive elements of the tales, refining them to reflect a culture of enlightenment and the "modern development of French civility" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 840). Because of this, Perrault's tales are devoid of many of the instances of adultery, rape, and incest, which are present in earlier versions of the stories. His enlightened stories offer the suggestion that reason and culture inevitably will lead to happy endings like those enjoyed by his heroes and heroines.

Another important French author of the period was Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780), a governess who wrote what is probably the most popular version of "Beauty and the Beast" of all time. This story was part of her *Les magasin des enfants*, published in 1757. Beaumont's version of "Beauty and the Beast" was based on the longer, earlier version by another French courtly author, Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Gallon de Villeneuve. Her 362-page romance was published in 1740. Beaumont borrowed most of the main plot details from Villeneuve's version, but she simplified and shortened the story to make it more accessible to readers.

Beaumont's background as an instructor of young girls is evident in all of her stories. Her main objective in her tales was to teach girls proper behaviors. Beaumont was one of the first known authors of fairy tales to write especially for children; the Villeneuve version she based her story on was meant for adults. Beaumont's tales "depict how girls should domesticate themselves, support men, and prove their worth through industriousness and good manners" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 864). She used a simple plot and uncomplicated language in order to best convey her moral messages to readers.

Beaumont's version of "Beauty and the Beast" is significant because all later versions of the tale are obviously based on her story.

The next important step in the development of the literary fairy tale was taken by the literary scholars Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and his brother Wilhelm (1786-1859). The German brothers published the first volume of their collection of oral stories and fairy tales, *Kinder-und Hausmarchen (Children's and Household Tales)*, in 1812. The brothers claimed to have collected their tales "from oral sources in Hesse and Hanau" (Dundes 22). Although they "initially argued in favor of presenting tales straight from the folk" (Dundes 22), in reality they "re-created them for their new audience - one radically different from the illiterate country folk amongst whom they originated" (Hallett and Karasek 14). And although the Grimms wished everyone to believe that the tales they collected were strictly German in origin, their "body of tales rests on numerous Oriental, Italian, French, Scandinavian, and Slavic literary and oral stories" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, xii). Although the Grimm's tales were not purely German, the collection was important because of the reasons that the brothers created it.

The Grimm brothers were especially interested in representing German heritage in their collection of tales. In their books, they "sought to establish national cultural identities" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 846) through the telling of German folk tales. Nationalism and patriotism were especially important to them at the time they published *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* because the "modern Germany was being forged out of a patchwork of tiny states and principalities" (Hallett and Karasek 14), and many "German-speaking lands were occupied by, or dominated by, France under Napoleon" (McGlathery 8). Therefore, the Grimms and other scholars were particularly interested in finding

answers to questions about German identity in order to unite and strengthen the culture. The Grimms believed that they could help to forge this national cultural identity with their collection of tales gathered from the folk, because the tenets of Romanticism and nationalism claimed that the "true spirit of a people was to be found not in the palaces or even the cities, but in the countryside, far away from urban corruption" (Hallett and Karasek 14). They collected the tales that were told among the folk, but they were careful to revise the elements of the stories to fit their purpose: they added elements of German cultural life, edited out offensive sexual themes so as not to cast a negative light on the folk, and highlighted violence in the tales to make them seem raw and unchanged.

The work of the Grimms is important not because it is supposed to be a collection of true German folktales, but because it marks a change in the opinion about fairy tales. After the Grimms' tales were published, "fairy tales began to be studied as descending from ancient sources, and therefore as providing information about the past of nations and peoples and as preserving remnants of cultural treasures otherwise lost or unrecorded" (McGlathery 2). *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* also "inspired individuals in other countries to collect their own folktale traditions" (Dundes 22). Fairy tales then came to be regarded as important symbols of a nation's cultural identity.

The major shaper of fairy tales in the 20th century has been the Walt Disney Company. Disney took popular versions of familiar tales and created appealing, lucrative motion picture cartoons out of them. In fact, Disney versions of fairy tales have so permeated American culture that children's and adults "first and perhaps lasting impressions of [many fairy] tales . . . will have emanated from a Disney film, book, or artifact" (Bell et al. 20). Although Disney based the films on older versions of the fairy

tales, the stories were edited and revised to best suit American cultural expectations, the Disney image, and requirements of cinematic presentation.

Disney produced many types of animated films, but fairy tales were used often as subjects. The company chose to produce fairy tales because they have wide appeal for both adults and children. Fairy tales were, for Disney, a safe way to make sure that people would see a film, because audiences would already be familiar with and enjoy the tales. Disney therefore chose to adapt the most popular versions of tales: for example, the Perrault versions for *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, and Beaumont for *Beauty and the Beast*.

However, Disney by no means created faithful adaptations of these famous tales. In the first place, the stories had to be expanded to fill the time slot of a feature-length film. This task "requires considerable creative liberties [because] stories must be stretched and filled in" (Fjellman 261). Disney added additional characters such as cute animals or funny servants to provide sidelines to the main plots of the fairy tales. The stories also had to be retold "in the interest of commerce" (Fjellman 261), which means that they had to be reshaped to fill cultural expectations of audiences. Disney therefore strictly edited the tales to remove many suggestions of excessive violence or sexual misbehavior. Besides removing offensive elements from the tales, Disney added themes to cater to cultural trends. For example, "Disney has emerged . . . as a vigorous (and in many cases no doubt sincere) defender of American family values" (Fjellman 8) by putting strong pro-family messages into many of its films, especially those produced in the 1950's like *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Also, elements of feminism and a push

for racial harmony can be seen in *Beauty and the Beast*. All of these efforts made the films more palatable to American audiences.

Cinderella

The story of Cinderella is one of the oldest types of fairy tales in the world. Elements of this tale "can be found in Greek and Roman mythology" (Zipes, *Great Tradition* 444), and also in ancient Oriental stories. The basic plot of the tale, as we have come to know it, concerns a young girl who is degraded into servitude by her stepfamily, and is helped by supernatural elements to meet and marry a prince. The main conflict in the story is that the heroine "must prove that she is the rightful successor in a house in which she has been deprived of her rights" (Zipes, *Great Tradition* 444).

Basile's version of this tale is called "The Cat Cinderella." Although this was not the first time this type was written in Europe, "from a historical and esthetic perspective, [it] is probably the earliest full telling of the tale" (Dundes 4). Several significant elements stand out in this story. First of all, Cinderella, whose real name is Zezolla, plays an "active role in determining her future" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 444). When her mother dies and her father remarries, Cinderella finds that her new stepmother is an "evil, malicious, bad-tempered woman" (Dundes 5), so Cinderella kills her by closing the lid of a trunk on her neck. When Cinderella's father sails away on business, she prevents the return of his ship until he brings her the gift for which she asks. Cinderella also decides to make contact with the doves of the fairies, who eventually help her to meet the prince. Unlike other later Cinderellas, this one is cunning, shrewd, and crafty, and makes sure to take the correct steps to obtain what she wants. Most other Cinderellas are content to sit

back, accept whatever unjust punishments are dealt, and wait for help from supernatural sources.

Basile's Cinderella is also the only heroine who is not completely innocent. She commits murder when she kills her stepmother, so she partially deserves the punishment of debasement that she later receives. Although Cinderella's act may be justified by the fact that her stepmother is exceedingly cruel, her act of murder is quite shocking. All other Cinderellas lead completely perfect, obedient lives, so their punishments seem totally unfair. Zezolla, on the other hand, is not afraid to kill her stepmother in order to try to advance her own interests.

The most noticeable feature of Basile's tales is his inclusion of many puns, conceits, and metaphors in the Neapolitan dialect. Although most of these phrases that he uses are not familiar to us when translated into English, they give the sense of the artfulness and wit that Basile used when he constructed his tales. For example, in reference to the stepsisters' jealousy of Cinderella's natural beauty, Basile writes, "in the sea of malice, envy always exchanges ruptures for bladders, and when she hopes to see others drowned, finds herself under water or dashed to pieces against a rock" (Basile, "Cinderella," 5). Cinderella's fall from favored daughter to servant is described as a trip "from the salon to the kitchen, from the canopy to the grate, from splendid silks and gold to dish-cloths, from scepters to spits" ("Cinderella" 6). Finally, when the prince talks of his love for Cinderella, he refers to her as the "beauteous cork attached to the fishing-line of love with which she has caught his soul" ("Cinderella" 9). These colloquial phrases do not have the same meaning when translated, but they convey the descriptive language that Basile always used, and the witty style of the Neapolitan dialect.

Basile's tale, while embodying the main elements of the Cinderella type, differs from other versions because it is obviously not meant as a moral tale; Cinderella is not blameless and is eventually rewarded for the murder of her first stepmother. Therefore, it was not written as the instruction of children, but rather as entertainment for adults. The theme of entertainment is further emphasized by Basile's use of metaphors and puns.

Perrault was most likely influenced by Basile's "The Cat Cinderella," but his version differs in several ways. Perrault's heroine in "Cinderella" is quite bland when compared to Basile's Zezolla. She is utterly blameless and obedient, and has "unparalleled goodness and sweetness of temper" (Perrault, "Cinderella," 16). Even though her stepsisters are extremely cruel to her, Cinderella treats them with nothing but kindness. When the stepsisters demand that Cinderella style their hair for the ball, she helps them gladly, although "anyone but Cinderella would have dressed their heads awry" ("Cinderella" 16). At the ball, she shows "them a thousand civilities, giving them a part of the orange and citrons which the Prince had presented her with" ("Cinderella" 19). Cinderella is also quick to forgive her stepsisters; after they asked for pardon, she "took them up, and, as she embraced them, cried that she forgave them with all her heart, and desired them always to love her" ("Cinderella" 21). Cinderella then rewarded the evil girls by giving them "lodging in the palace, and that very same day matched them with two great lords of the court" ("Cinderella" 21). Cinderella's readiness to forget and forgive adds even more to her aura of goodness.

Perrault's Cinderella also lacks the initiative of Basile's heroine. She does not take any action until prodded by her fairy godmother. Cinderella probably would have remained in the ashes forever if her godmother had not appeared. When her godmother

asks Cinderella what she needs, Cinderella cannot even answer - she only cries. The fairy godmother has to tell Cinderella to ask for a dress, a coach, and an opportunity to meet the prince.

Perrault also changed the story by adding many supernatural elements which were not previously present in the tale. Perrault added the pumpkin that is changed into a coach, mice into horses, rats into coachmen, and lizards into footmen. He also invented the famous glass slippers. Perrault's tale contains a magic that other version had never possessed, and this element makes the story more charming, interesting, and light-hearted. The presence of the fairy godmother is also an invention of Perrault's; former versions had Cinderella's help coming from her dead mother.

Perrault's "Cinderella" notably showcases the 17th century aristocratic fascination with appearances. Before the ball, the stepsisters starve themselves for two days in order to fit into their dresses, they break numerous laces while attempting to tie their corsets tighter, and they spend all of their time in front of the mirror. Perrault includes a reference to a fashionable shop of the day when he mentions that the stepsisters "had their red brushes and patches from Mademoiselle de la Poche" (Perrault, "Cinderella," 17). Also, the obsession with appearances is noticeable in the fact that the prince notices Cinderella at the ball because of her beautiful attire.

Also important is that Perrault's version includes a definite moral lesson. Although Cinderella is disgraced for a time by her jealous stepmother and stepsisters, she is rewarded for her goodness and patience in the end. Her quality is recognized by the prince, and she ends up married and wealthy. Also, the stepsisters must realize their

wrongs and apologize for their jealousy before they receive the gifts from Cinderella.

This relates to the reader that repentance is necessary, but is followed by reward.

Perrault's version is a significant step in the evolution of the Cinderella story because it shows the movement from an active heroine to a passive one, which demonstrates the culture's expectation of women who are content to wait patiently in the background until fate deals them a chance at happiness. The story is representative of the 17th century ideas of the ideal woman; one who, like Cinderella, possesses "gentility, grace, and selflessness, even to the point of graciously forgiving her wicked stepsisters and finding them suitable husbands" (Yolen 296). Most importantly, Perrault's version "naturalized [the story] in the polite world, gave it for cultured circles an attraction" (Ralston 32), probably because he edited it and added elements to make it more acceptable.

The Grimms' version of the tale, "Aschenputtel," differs in several ways from previous versions, mainly because the Grimms' purpose with their tales was to form a new German cultural identity. In this tale are elements of violence not present before. For example, the stepmother encourages her daughters to mutilate their feet to try to fit into the slipper. Also, the stepsisters are cruelly punished at the end of the story when birds peck out their eyes; for "their malice and treachery they were punished with blindness for the rest of their lives" (Grimm, "Aschenputtel," 29). Such violence is in direct contrast with Perrault's version in which the stepsisters live happily ever after, side-by-side with Cinderella.

In this version, the stepsisters, and not the stepmother, make Cinderella's life miserable. This source of the cruelty removes any possibility of competition between

Cinderella and her stepmother for the father's affection. In previous versions, this possible sexual rivalry caused the conflict of the story; by making the cruelty the fault of the stepsisters, all hints of sexual scandal are effectively removed.

Strangely enough, the prince has great difficulty in recognizing the true Cinderella at the end of the story. He rides away with each of the two stepsisters, thinking that each is his true love. He only realizes that he has been deceived when the birds point out the blood gushing from the girls' feet. He cannot recognize Cinderella by her appearance alone; he needs the confirmation of the slipper to know who she is. In other versions, the prince can tell right away who the real Cinderella is.

All of the changes the Grimms made to the story reflect their goal of uncovering a national identity through fairy tales. Violence gives the tale a feeling of rawness and legitimacy; the story really seems to come straight from the folk. The Grimms removed all obvious traces of illicit sexual themes because they did not want to cast a negative light on the peasants from Germany. Also, the fact that the prince has trouble recognizing Cinderella demonstrates that the theme of this tale is not finding true love; the story is not concerned with love as much as it is with valuing past traditions.

The Disney animated version of *Cinderella* reflects the fact that the story had to be altered for cinematic presentation. The story was made much gentler in order to be appealing to audiences of families with children. Disney chose to base the movie on Perrault's version, which includes much less violence than, for example, the Grimms' story. Cinderella's stepsisters and stepmother are not punished in any way for their cruel treatment of Cinderella; the story ends without any mention of these evil relatives.

The heroine herself in this story is even blander and more blameless than previous Cinderellas. Along with the cute animals of the story, Cinderella possesses a "quality of loveliness, thus changing the intent of the tale and denying the heroine her birthright of shrewdness, inventiveness, and grace under pressure" (Yolen 298). Cinderella silently obeys the ruthless commands of her stepmother. She quietly endures when her stepsisters rip apart her dress for the ball, and weeps passively in the corner when she does not see any opportunity for her to meet the prince. Cinderella simply believes blindly in the wish that her dreams will someday come true.

Like the Grimms, Disney was careful to remove all possibility of sexual competition between Cinderella and her stepmother. This is done by starting the story after Cinderella's father is already dead. Although this removes the chance of the father making sexual advances towards his daughter, the reason behind the stepmother's hatred of Cinderella is left a mystery.

Although this film was created to appeal to families, children, and the American population in general, it is not really a moral tale. The main message of the story is that if you truly believe in your dreams, they will eventually come true. This message seems to echo the feelings of many Americans of the 1950's, when everyone wanted to believe in the American dream of being able to achieve anything. The film also stresses family values by removing the chance for any hint of sexual immorality between father and daughter. The attitude towards women portrayed in the movie is also quite negative; all of the villains are female, Cinderella can only be rescued by a man, marriage is the goal that leads to a happy ending, and Cinderella's appearance is that of a typical movie star of

the 1950's - she is blond, blue-eyed, and slim. In general, the film presents to audience values not so different from older versions of the Cinderella story.

Sleeping Beauty

Like Cinderella, the true origins of Sleeping Beauty are unknown. However, the tale probably developed much later than Cinderella, because "there is little indication that there was an oral tradition of Sleeping Beauty in the medieval period" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 684). The first written version of the tale seems to be the 14th century French prose romance, *Perceforest*. The common elements of this type of fairy tale are parents who yearn for a daughter, a baby girl who is destined to fall asleep after being pricked when she reaches adolescence, and the rescue of the heroine by a male figure who falls in love with her. The author of the first popular version of the tale, though, was Basile, whose story is called, "Sun, Moon, and Talia."

Similarly to Basile's version of Cinderella, many shocking elements are present in this version of Sleeping Beauty. This tale is one of "rape, adultery, sexual rivalry, and attempted cannibalism - a far cry from what we have come to expect in this famous tale" (Hallett and Karasek 34). The heroine of the story, Talia, is raped by a king while she is still under the spell of sleep. The king does not only rape her; he also commits adultery, because he is already married to another woman. Even though the king impregnates the sleeping Talia, he leaves her and forgets about her and the children for quite some time. The king's wife is an ogress who longs for the flesh of children; she tries to eat Talia's twins, Sun and Moon. Also present is sexual competition between Talia and the queen, because the king is married to both of them at the same time.

A strange part of this story is that when Talia wakes, she seems to immediately forgive the king for raping her, impregnating her while she is asleep, and then abandoning her and her children to return to his first wife. When the king returns to her the second time and she is awake, they "developed a friendship and strong bond between them" (Basile, "Talia," 686) without a second thought. Also significant is the omission of any fairies in this tale; Talia's fate is foreseen by a group of wise men. No fairies give her gifts or curses, as in later versions; her future instead is due mainly to chance.

Again in the tale, Basile's use of the Neapolitan prose dialect, metaphors, puns, and conceits is quite striking. When Talia's father learns that she has fallen asleep, he "paid for the bucketful of sour wine with a barrelful of tears" (Basile, "Talia," 685). The queen asks her secretary to tell her who saved Talia's children, and he tells her everything because he is "prompted by his own interest, which is always a bandage over the eyes of honor, a twisting of justice, and a horse kick in the face of loyalty" ("Talia" 686). These and other expressions typical of the Neapolitan dialect are sprinkled throughout the text of the story, giving the tale the exclusive flavor of all of Basile's works.

In this story, all the women are portrayed in a negative light. Women are treated as chattel; the king does whatever he likes with Talia even though she is asleep and he is already married. The lesson the tale teaches seems to be for women to accept horrible treatment from men; Talia is greatly mistreated by the king, but she endures her difficulties and is eventually rewarded in the end by becoming the true queen. The only woman with power, the queen, is evil; she is an ogress and tries to eat the innocent children. This version of the story of Sleeping Beauty clearly gives the impression that women are dependent on men and often intrinsically evil.

As might be expected, Perrault's version of "Sleeping Beauty" is much less harsh than Basile's. One of the main omissions is that the element of adultery is removed; the prince who rapes Sleeping Beauty is unmarried. Perrault did this because he "did not feel it appropriate to tell at the French court a story in which a married king ravishes a sleeping maiden, gets her with child, forgets it entirely, and remembers her after a time only by chance" (Bettelheim 229). Instead of having a wife who is an ogress, the prince's mother is one. This also omits the sexual rivalry between the queen and the heroine.

Perrault also added fanciful parts to the story to make it more appealing to audiences. For example, seven fairies are present at Sleeping Beauty's christening to give her gifts of beauty, an angelic temper, grace, musical ability, and singing and dancing talents. The place settings for the fairies at the christening are made of "fine gold, studded with diamonds and rubies" (Perrault, "Sleeping Beauty," 689). The fairy who saves Sleeping Beauty from death rides on a "chariot of fire drawn by dragons" ("Sleeping Beauty" 690), and the dwarf who informs her of Sleeping Beauty's state of sleep has "a pair of seven league boots" ("Sleeping Beauty" 690) that allow him to travel great distances quickly. Perrault adds a description of "little Pootsie, the princess's tiny dog" ("Sleeping Beauty" 690). These descriptions add charm and interest to the story, and make it more delightful to the reader.

The humor that Perrault put into the story also makes it more attractive to audiences, and also helps to give a sense of levity to the tale. His wit is evident in phrases such as the "king and queen . . . were quite vexed at not having any children" ("Sleeping Beauty" 688). When the members of the court awake from their sleep, they discover that "since they were not all in love, they were dying of hunger" ("Sleeping Beauty" 693).

When the prince wakes Sleeping Beauty, she is fully dressed, but "he took care not to tell her that she was attired like his grandmother, who also wore stand-up collars" ("Sleeping Beauty" 693). These bits of humor demonstrate that Perrault's goal in writing this story was to entertain his audiences.

Just as appearance played a key role in Perrault's "Cinderella," it is important in Sleeping Beauty. The prince falls in love with Sleeping Beauty at first sight, because even while asleep, "one would have said she was an angel, so lovely did she appear, for her swoon had not deprived her of her rich complexion; her cheeks preserved their crimson color, and her lips were like coral" ("Sleeping Beauty" 690). When the princess awakens, she too loves the prince right away; she "bestowed upon him a look more tender than a first glance might seem to warrant" ("Sleeping Beauty" 691). Both prince and princess fall in love based solely on the appearance of the other.

This story shows how Perrault catered to his audience, the French court. He refined the sexual elements of the story to make it more acceptable, he added humor, wit, and fancy to capture the attention of educated readers who wanted to be entertained, and he emphasized the importance of appearance, a strong focus of the members of the court. Perrault's version also gives a slightly more positive view of women, because the female fairies have good powers to counteract the evilness of the evil fairy and the queen. Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty" still gives the impression that women must be rescued by men, but it does make a step towards showing women in a better light.

Unlike the two previous versions of Sleeping Beauty, the Grimm version, "Brier Rose," makes no mention of Sleeping Beauty's children or of a child-eating ogress. The story ends "with the happy union of the prince and Sleeping Beauty" (Bettelheim 230).

Another difference is that the heroine, Brier Rose, is not raped by a visiting prince. Instead, the legend of a princess asleep in an abandoned castle draws many suitors to the gates; when the time is right for the prince to waken her, he simply kisses her. The story is thus simplified and modernized to make it more acceptable.

The Grimms also relied less on extraordinary supernatural elements than previous authors of this tale. For example, fairies do not bestow gifts upon the young princess. Instead, wise women from the kingdom give her virtue, beauty, wealth, politeness, kindness, sensibleness, and adorableness. The king forgets to invite one wise woman, and she retaliates by cursing Brier Rose.

As can be expected from a Grimm story, violent elements are present throughout the tale. One example of violence is that the princes who tried to get into the castle to rescue Brier Rose became caught in thorns and "died miserable deaths" ("Brier Rose" 697). These poor men did not do anything to deserve such punishment; they are simply trying to rescue the Sleeping Beauty before her one hundred years of sleep are finished. Previous versions of the tale do not include this occurrence of violence because her sleep is kept a secret.

Interestingly, "Brier Rose" is the most familiar to modern audiences of all the written versions of "Sleeping Beauty." This popularity is due to the fact that the Grimms' version is more acceptable to us because they "refined the tale by omitting the rape and the incident with the evil mother-in-law" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 684). Usually, the Grimm versions are not as accepted because they are more shocking; this tale is an exception.

The Disney film *Sleeping Beauty* is purported to be based on Perrault's version of the tale. However, the Disney story is actually more similar to the Grimm version, because it omits the rape of Sleeping Beauty, the ogress, Sleeping Beauty's children, and it includes the thorns that surround the castle and the prince who wakes Sleeping Beauty simply with a kiss. Although the film has more similarities to "Brier Rose," Disney may have chosen to claim to base it on the Perrault tale because Perrault is generally viewed as a more child-friendly author. Disney avoided the negative connotations of violence and gore that usually accompany thoughts of Grimm fairy tales.

The heroine of the tale, Aurora, is in many ways similar to the heroine of Disney's *Cinderella*. She is "pleasant, attractive, and largely nondescript" (Maltin 155), a portrait of a typical movie heroine of the 1950's. Like Cinderella, Aurora takes little initiative. She leaves her parents to live in the forest with the three fairies without any objections. She meets the prince secretly in the forest, and wants to see him again, but sadly gives up this hope when the fairies tell her she must not. She shows some spirit in the fact that she at least has feelings for the prince, but all she does about these feelings is sit in her bedroom and cry. She takes no personal action to try to obtain what she wants. However, Aurora is eventually rewarded for her passivity and obedience; this same prince finally rescues her from her sleep.

Because Disney omitted a large portion of the story by leaving out the ending, many elements had to be added to the film to make it long enough for a feature presentation. Considerable time is filled by silly banter between the fathers of Aurora and the prince; they debate heatedly and comically on the subject of their children's forthcoming marriage. Another element of humor is added by the presence of the three

fairies. They must perform simple household tasks such as cleaning and baking without the use of magic, and they have numerous difficulties doing this. Because the fairies are not typical domesticated women, they have trouble doing these chores.

The usual Disney focus on family values is evident in this film. The king and queen desperately long for a child in order to complete their family. No American family could be complete without at least one child. Also, they advocate marriage for their young daughter. By doing this, they give the impression that young girls are expected to marry and start families of their own. The family values portrayed in the film are modernized, however, in the fact that Aurora and the prince both reject the idea of a prearranged marriage. They both want love to be the determining factor in a union, not wealth or social standing. This reflects the American obsession with true love that leads to happiness.

Sleeping Beauty basically contains the same view of women that Disney's *Cinderella* does. The only villain of the story, the evil fairy Maleficent, is female. *Sleeping Beauty* must wait for a prince to rescue her and allow her to fulfill her destiny of becoming a wife and mother; she is helpless to save herself from the sleeping spell. A slightly more positive role is filled by the three fairies, who show that some women can have power. However, the impression is given that powerful women are not able to do household tasks; only domestic wives and mothers can truly fill a woman's role in society.

Beauty and the Beast

While "Beauty and the Beast" has a more recent written history than either "Cinderella" or "Sleeping Beauty," the tale has similarities to one of more ancient origins.

Scholars believe that the seeds of the story idea come from the "Roman writer Apuleius, who published the tale of "Cupid and Psyche" in *The Golden Ass* in the middle of the second century" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 787). All modern written versions of the tale, however, have several elements in common: a grotesque Beast who eventually becomes a handsome man, a father who loses his fortune, and a young and virtuous Beauty who must live with the Beast in order to save her father's life.

The most important version of this tale was written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. Her version, while immensely popular, was not very original; it was based on the much longer narrative by Madame de Villeneuve, which was published in 1740. Beaumont's version, however, is the one that has greatly influenced all later tellings of the story, because it shortened the tale into a more manageable form.

Beaumont's main objective in rewriting Beauty and the Beast was to provide a lesson about behavior to young girls. Her Beauty is a model of comportment, showing girls how to be obedient, domestic, and self-sacrificing; all these qualities were greatly admired in women at the time Beaumont penned her story. Beauty is noticeably industrious around the house; she is always occupied with chores, while her selfish sisters sit around lazily. When her father asks his daughters what gifts they would like for him to bring them when he goes on a journey, Beauty's sisters clamor for expensive jewelry and clothing. Beauty, instead, asks for a single rose - not because she greatly desires one, but because she does not want to hurt her sisters' feelings by asking for nothing. Beauty is also readily willing to sacrifice her happiness for her father's life; she says that she is "very happy to be in a position to save [her] father and prove [her] affection for him"

(Beaumont 809). All Beauty's behaviors and actions in the story provide didactic lessons to young readers.

Beaumont also offers to readers the idea that love should transcend outward appearances and cleverness. Beauty's sisters marry for the wrong reasons, and are punished with miserable unions. The oldest sister marries a man who is "remarkably handsome but was so enamored of his own looks that he occupied himself with nothing but his appearance from morning until night, and he despised his wife's beauty" (Beaumont 812). The other sisters marries a "man who was very intelligent, but he used his wit only to enrage everyone, first and foremost his wife" (812). Beauty gives the correct example to readers; she claims that it is "neither handsome looks nor intelligence that makes a women happy; it is good character, virtue, and kindness and the Beast has all these good qualities" (813). Because Beauty is able to look past the Beast's outward ugliness and focus on his genuine nature, she is rewarded with a happy marriage to a handsome man.

Beaumont's entire story stresses "industriousness, self-sacrifice, modesty, and diligence as the qualities young ladies must possess to attain happiness" (Zipes, *Great Tradition*, 835). This shows what things were valued in women in the 18th century; unsurprisingly, they were taught to be obedient to men. Her story is important because it was one of the first fairy tales to be written with children as the intended audience. Beaumont's story changed the objective of main fairy tale authors to come, because she concentrated on instructing youth. Her simplified plot and easily understandable language make the story accessible to more readers, and clearly demonstrate her moral messages.

The Grimm brothers' version of this tale is called "The Summer and Winter Garden." While this version has several similarities of plot to Beaumont's, it is less of a moral tale and more of an entertaining story. Like Beauty in Beaumont's tale, the heroine of this story requests a rose from her father. However, Beauty does not ask for this gift out of unselfish reasons. The story emphasizes the fact that she asks for a rose in the middle of winter, when no roses should be available. Therefore, Beauty's untimely request forces her father to trespass into the Beast's private Summer garden and steal a rose for her, leading to his punishment.

When Beauty's father learns that the Beast will take one of his daughters in his place, he offers Beauty. This is strange because in previous versions, Beauty often offers herself to save her father. However, this difference is understandable because it is Beauty's request for a rose that endangers her father's life in the first place. Beauty is not the selfless and obedient daughter that she appears to be in the Beaumont version; characters in this story are all more self-serving.

In general, this tale has less emphasis on Beauty's inherent goodness. She does go to the Beast to save her father, but she does this rather unwillingly. This makes the tale less of a moral one. The main objective, instead, is to demonstrate that appearances are not what love should be based on. The fact that this story is less of a moral tale and that it does not give a glorified image of Beauty is in keeping with the Grimms' goal of telling a story that seems to have come straight from the folk.

Like other Disney animated fairy tales, *Beauty and the Beast* is not based on the Grimm brothers' version of the story. No mention is made of which version the film is based on, but it seems to be most similar to Beaumont's story in that the Beauty, Belle, is

an inherently good character who willingly goes to live with the Beast to save her father's life. The Disney film is, if it is possible, even more didactic in tone than Beaumont's story. Throughout the film, numerous lessons on tolerance, acceptance, self-control, and women's accepted position in society are offered to audience members.

While the heroines of Disney's *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* are blond, blue-eyed, and fair, Belle has brown hair and brown eyes. Her physical appearance shows that standards of attractiveness changed from the 1950's to the 1990's - a woman no longer had to be a standard Hollywood beauty to be considered appealing. Belle also differs from other Disney heroines in the fact that she is portrayed as intelligent and independent. She loves to read books, and is constantly wishing for something more than her provincial life. She does not long for love or marriage, but for adventure and new experiences.

A strong lesson is presented against love based solely on appearance. A handsome young man of the village, Gaston, wishes for Belle's hand in marriage simply because she is beautiful. While Gaston is wealthy and has good looks, Belle refuses to marry him because he is selfish and bad-tempered. Gaston is a direct contrast to the Beast, who is ugly but is kind, gentle, and giving. Belle obviously makes the correct choice when she chooses the Beast over Gaston; she is then rewarded when the Beast transforms into a handsome prince.

The story of the Beast is another lesson against judging people based on appearances. The reason given for his beastly form is that he once refused to help a beggar woman because he thought she was ugly. The woman then changed him into the Beast until a woman could fall in love with him despite his unattractiveness. This reason

is not offered in any previous versions of the tale; Disney added it to reinforce the film's message.

Another part where the story of the film differs from previous versions is when Gaston convinces the townspeople that Belle's father is crazy and needs to be committed to an insane asylum. Gaston does this in hopes that Belle will consent to marry him to save her father from the asylum. He tells the villagers that her father must be crazy and dangerous because he looks different than the rest of them, and because he keeps to himself all of the time. This section of the film seems to offer a lesson in favor of tolerance, an important topic in the later decades of the twentieth century.

In general, this film seems to have been created as a reaction against earlier Disney animated fairy tales that portrayed women in a negative light. Belle is more of a modern woman in that she is independent, headstrong, intelligent, and longs for adventure in life. However, all her dreams eventually end in marriage to the Beast. Although at the beginning of the movie she claims that she wants to see the world and experience new things, she is happy at the end to simply become the Beast's bride and live with him in her home village. This behavior sends the message to viewers that women may believe that they want adventure and excitement, but that they are truly happy when they marry and settle down with a man. Also, although the movie's main moral is that appearances do not matter in love, Belle is ecstatic when the Beast turns out to be a handsome prince. This transformation contradicts the lessons in the movie and implies that attractiveness is indeed important. Although this film was made in 1991, it has many of the same problems that previous Disney fairy tales possess.

Disney's Mark

On the surface, the Disney versions of fairy tales may seem very different to audiences than the versions that were written by authors in previous centuries. Understandably, none of the animated films contain any hint of sexual immorality or scandalous incestuous relationships. While the movies do have frightening villains, no real elements of violence are present. The villains such as the wicked stepmother in *Cinderella*, Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*, and Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* may be scary, but their roles in the films are only to provide cinematic interest. No characters are wounded or killed in any of these Disney films; none are even really punished for their misdeeds.

Apart from the elements that have been removed from the fairy tales, the Disney versions have been further changed to make them more appealing to American audiences. This is especially apparent when one compares the films made in the 1950's with Disney's 1991 return to the fairy tale genre, *Beauty and the Beast*. Because of all the elements of political correctness that seem to abound in the story, this film gives the impression that it is a fairy tale for the modern age, adapted and corrected to reflect society's evolved view of women and expectations of tolerance of those with differences. With this film, Disney wanted to show viewers that times had changed, and the film company had changed as well.

Unfortunately, a close inspection of all three of the films shows that nothing has actually been changed in the stories, even in *Beauty and the Beast*. As has been shown, all heroines of the movies are rescued by marriage to powerful men. Women are basically helpless; they need assistance from males or from supernatural sources in order to escape

from bad situations. A woman's place is generally inside the house, and she is usually occupied with household chores and with taking care of men's' needs and desires. Each story ends "happily" with the marriage of the heroine to the hero; it is as though nothing else is important, nothing else needs to be told. As long as the woman gets married, the rest of her life will proceed "happily ever after."

The fact that these Disney films are shown to almost all American children sends the message that these views of women and domesticity are accepted by the majority of our society. We can see that the opinion of women has not changed much since the 1950's; by looking further back at the origins of the fairy tales it is not since Basile's versions that heroines had spunk, independence, and initiative. By adapting the tales over the years, authors have shown that women have been gradually placed further and further inside the domestic realm. Even a politically correct, modernized version of "Beauty and the Beast" cannot do enough to rescue women from this role.

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