To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by James Bucky Carter entitled "'Life Like a Fairy Tale': Fairy Tales as Influence in the Life and Works of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Mary Papke, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
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Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

"LIFE LIKE A FAIRY TALE": FAIRY TALES AS INFLUENCE IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to establish fairy tales as a major influence in the life and works of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and, further, to show how fairy tales helped shape Freeman's literary evolution. Primary and secondary sources are analyzed to show how trends developed in Freeman's children's literature continued to evolve in the adult fiction she produced both simultaneously with the children's literature and later independently throughout her career.

A close exploration of her work and the scholarship on her life, along with fairy tale scholarship, demonstrates that Freeman's life itself had many fairy tale elements. Further analysis suggests that Freeman's children's literature uses fairy tale themes and motifs in two distinctly different ways: to instill a Christian pedagogy within children or to suggest that magic is an accepted part of a child's imagination. Also, Freeman's use of fairy influences in her work places her in the great feminine tradition of tale-weaver. Finally, Freeman can be considered a proto-feminist fairy tale revisionist as well, linking her to yet another literary tradition.

The thesis concludes by demonstrating that Freeman might have manipulated her literary market to make the most of her early influences and shows that Freeman was more aware of the fairy tale aspects of her work, to her distinct economic advantage, than ever before thought.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....1

Chapter 1: The Infant Sphinx Roles On: An Overview and Analysis of Freeman's Critical Reception, And Her "Life Like a Fairy Tale".....7

Chapter 2: An Overview of the Children's Literature.....27

Chapter 3: Spinnerinnen and the Fairy Web: Sewing, Women's Work, and Feminine Empowerment From Freeman's New England Arachnes.....52

Chapter 4: Princes, Beasts, Or Royal Pains?: Men in the Revisionist Fairy Tales of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman.....70

Conclusion: A Market for Magic?.....90

Works Consulted.....96

Vita.....103

Introduction

When her story "The Prism" was published in the July 1901 issue of the *Century*, Mary E. Wilkins was forty-eight years old, an established writer with success in America and abroad, and still a single woman. In less than a year, she would marry Charles Freeman, and shortly thereafter, she would begin perhaps the saddest years of her life as her new partner squandered, drank, and gambled himself into a mental institution. Her marriage quickly became a disaster that would tax her strength until her death in 1930. In a letter dated from 1900, just one year before "The Prism" appeared, she remarked to a friend who was to be married, "here's to a life like a fairy tale." Yet, when matrimony came for her, she saw firsthand that fairy tales often have grim underpinnings. The work she produced after her marriage never matched the best that she fashioned earlier, most of that coming in the 1880s and 90s when she was very much young, single, vigorous, and largely independent from men besides her editors. Yet, ironically, from her marriage on, Freeman has been dominated by those who seem intent on keeping her life – and work – from being anything "like a fairy tale."

Diantha Fielding is a young girl of twelve when we are first introduced to her in "The Prism." She lies in an open field looking at "dancing colors" through a teardrop prism that she has snatched off her family's best lamp, the lamp being her last bit of connection to the long-deceased mother to whom the lamp once belonged. While in the field, she ignores the beckoning call of authority, that which wants her to return to the "real world" of feminine existence by having her "assist in preparing supper" (56).

Finally a cousin finds her, and Diantha shares the enchanting story behind her secret possession, the prism that Mrs. Zenas May, her newest stepmother, does not know she keeps around her neck at all times. Libby, the cousin, can see only the dancing colors through the prism, but Diantha sees more.

Diantha sees fairies dancing when she looks through the teardrop, and she herself is immersed in a grotesque mytheme of the fairy genre:

> her mother had died when she was very young, only a few months old; then her father had married again, giving her a stepmother; then her father died two years later, and her stepmother had married again, giving her a stepfather. Since then the stepmother had died, and the stepfather had married a widow with a married daughter. . . . She had not even a cousin of her own; the dearest relative she had was the daughter of a widow whom a cousin of her mother's had married for a second wife. The cousin was long dead. (57)

Exceptionally separated from any blood relations, she is an outcast among those who raise her and her practical peers who have never questioned their surroundings, and this distance is paralleled in the different visions she sees through the prism compared to Libby's visions. Yet, Libby is not the only person who gets a sacred glimpse through the crystalline orb. One day upon Diantha's maturation, Robert Black, a young college graduate just entrusted with running the local high school, takes her into the woods, where men of "Black" are apt to work evil, magic wonders of their own in American literature, and he asks her to marry him. She accepts, and marriage seems to become a key to her acceptance into the world around her. The stepmother who before constantly sent Diantha to bed without dinner because of her impudence now exclaims, "Folks

sha'n't say that she didn't have as good an outfit and wedding as if her own mother had been alive to see it" (63). For Mrs. Zenas May, Diantha is finally coming into the feminine realm of American reality, assimilating at last.

Accepting her role as wife-to-be, Diantha shares the secret of her prism with Robert Black. "What do you see, Robert," she asks (63-4), but he sees only myriad colors and responds, "what else should I see?" Her reply is a confession, a sharing. She offers to him that which is most sacred to her, normative behavior for a young wife of the 1800s. "You have read -- about fairies -- and such things," she prompts, "Ever since I was a child, I have seen, or thought so. . . beautiful little people moving and dancing in the broken light across the fields" (64). Robert pales, claiming this is nonsense. The following days bring reserved courting at best, a cold distance most harrowing to a young girl who has shared her sacred self with her prospective life-partner. Sensing his tension, Diantha buries the prism "out of sight," and she tells him of this, blaming her fairy visions on imagination. He responds warmly, "It's all right, little girl. . . but don't let such fancies dwell in your brain. This is a plain, common world, and it won't do" (65). Diantha serves her husband faithfully for the rest of her days.

Eighteen years after "The Prism" was first published, Freeman responded as follows to a letter from critic Fred Lewis Pattee: "most of my own work is not the kind I myself like. I want more symbolism, more mysticism. I left that out, because it struck me people did not want it, and I was forced to consider selling qualities" (Kendrick 22). For Freeman, the literary market, and the realist movement, was a "plain, common world" indeed, though lucrative for her, and from the moments of her earliest major successes, she was labeled a writer of local color, a New England regionalist, and a realist. The

labels took hold firmly, and Freeman, who was dependent on her writing as her primary source of income, never felt that it was a safe move for her to break too far out of the mold cast for her, though many of her works deal with women who do just that, or at least rigorously define their own roles in oppositional relation to their surroundings and the dominant cultural ideologies of their times. At first glance, Diantha and Freeman do not, however, and the result for both of them appears to be that the fairy element is buried, hidden away from their lives.

Sadly, by accepting the image that others made for them, Freeman and Diantha became too enmeshed in an obviously unfitting discourse. In both cases, the leviathan of expectation, accommodation, and conformity swallows the feminine individual. Diantha continues to "prepare her husband's supper" (65) because that is what she is expected to do, and Freeman continued to write stories of the local color genre throughout her career. Unfortunately for Freeman, the expectations and labels continued far after her death and still haunt her critical reception today. Edward Foster and Perry Westbrook, the two earliest modern Freeman critics, for example, cannot see her as anything but representative of regionalism, and more recent feminist critics who revived Freeman's popularity in the late twentieth century, such as Mary Reichardt, Leah Blatt Glasser, and Marjorie Pryse, while they acknowledge that dissident spark of resistance and uniqueness that, unlike Diantha, Freeman could not keep completely buried, even these scholars seek Freeman for their own purposes, again reappropriating Freeman into a discourse not quite of her own making.

But the fairy tale discourse *is* one of Freeman's own making. Her marriage may have been yet another factor forcing conformity, and her relationship with Charles far

from magical, but the distinctiveness of Freeman's own vision, one at times filled with fairies dancing across the fields, never completely leaves her, and this is reflected powerfully in her work. Further, at times Freeman's life paralleled fairy stories. For example, Freeman herself had to deal with Diantha's mytheme, losing all of her immediate family by the time she was thirty and spending the rest of her life with those of no real blood relation to her. Treated as a princess by her parents, who were protective of her due to the early deaths of their other children, Mary's earliest formative years were not without elements of fairyland. Also, from the time of her youth Mary read fairy tales, and when she was older, she would read them to children at the local library. Kendrick describes her as having a "childlike nature" even in adulthood (11), and conservative Foster states from the accounts he gathered of Freeman that "she loved fairy tales, which to her seemed completely real" (15). Wilkins' earliest fiction was children's poetry and prose, and in these she felt safe to embrace the fairy realm, those dancing figures gracing many of these works for American youth. In no small part, Freeman herself and her works do reflect "a life like a fairy tale."

It is folly to think that this fascination with the fairy realm, rooted in Freeman's life experience, would not seep into her work for adult readers. It is to look at her work through the eyes of her editors and critics and, so, through a nineteenth-century lens, a view that has too long dominated Freeman studies and even infiltrates the more recent feminist studies.

Casting off the labels that have been heaped upon Freeman and refusing nonchalant acceptance that she was forced, partially against her will and partially of her own making, into becoming something that she was not because of her time's resistance

to women who would not be "plain and common" when realism suggested that plain and common was the literary dictate of the age reveals something new in Freeman. Although the prism was buried, the trace of fairy still glimmers. The essence of fairyland still shines as the colors of conformity and individuality mingle quixotically together in the many times magical fields of Freeman's literary landscape, a landscape created in a time when what Freeman eagerly wanted to explore more deeply, to quote Diantha's suitor, just "won't do."

This study seeks to begin the scholarly conversation concerning Freeman's deep-rooted but so far ignored connection to folk and fairy as genre and influence. Further, the study illustrates that within her fairy tale connections, Freeman was in actuality not unlike her more powerful and enduring female characters: she may have sublimated an individuality of self and discourse, letting the influence creep into her work just as those women characters reappropriate the ideologies of their times and culture that engulf them so that they are no longer completely enslaved but are "forced" into conformity on their own terms. It is time to acknowledge the fairy influence in the life and works of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. An unearthing of Freeman's prism visions reveals more than colors plain and common.

Chapter 1
The Infant Sphinx Rolls On:
An Overview and Analysis of Freeman's Critical Reception, and Her "Life Like a Fairy Tale"

I. General Biography

Mary Ella Wilkins was born on October 31, 1852, in Randolph, Massachusetts, to Warren and Eleanor Lothrop Wilkins. The family lived on South Main Street in Randolph until 1867, when poor business ventures led Warren to move his family to Brattleboro, Vermont, to seek better economic prospects. At the time of the move, the Wilkins family had already grown and dwindled too many times. A baby born before Mary had died in infancy. Mary gained a brother, only to see him die at three. She also gained a sister, Anna, when she was seven years old, but Anna died in 1876 at the age of seventeen.

The family would continue to experience hardships throughout its brief existence such that in 1877 the remaining Wilkinses moved into the home of Reverend Thomas Pickman Tyler, whose son Mary had met in 1873 and to whom she had developed an apparently unrequited emotional attachment. By this time, young Wilkins had graduated high school and had attended one year at Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary, though it is unclear whether, after departing in 1871, she returned home because of ill health or because the school did not suit her sensibilities. Death continued to plague Mary, and by 1883, her father and mother (d.1880) were both gone. After her father's death, Mary returned to Randolph to live with her childhood friend Mary Wales, whose company she kept until her January 1, 1902, marriage to Doctor Charles Freeman.

During the early 1880s, Wilkins began to write seriously, first as a children's writer and shortly thereafter publishing her first adult story, "The Shadow Family," which won the author fifty dollars from the *Boston Sunday Budget*. By the time of her marriage, she was a well-established, popular author of over a dozen novels and story collections. She continued writing and even dabbled in theatre throughout the early years of the twentieth century before her marriage fell apart, which failure put major financial and economic stresses on her. Her husband was institutionalized in 1921, and a bitter separation followed in 1922, itself then followed by Charles' death in 1923. Before Freeman died of heart failure in 1930, in Metuchen, New Jersey, where she and Charles had lived, she received the William Dean Howells Gold Medal for Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and saw a collection of her best stories edited by Henry W. Lanier. However, her popularity had begun to wane as early as 1900, and she remained a relatively unknown author until her reemergence in the latter half of the twentieth century, due in large part to American feminist scholars seeking out hidden and forgotten women talents from earlier years.

II. Critical Reception

All the above facts have been documented in the three critical biographies written on Freeman to date: Edward Foster's *Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* (1957), Perry D. Westbrook's *Mary Wilkins Freeman* (1967, revised 1988), and Leah Blatt Glasser's *In a Closet Hidden: The Life and Work of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* (1996), none of which can be considered more comprehensive than the others. Further, Brent Kendrick offers biographical and critical opinion in *The Infant Sphinx* (1985), a collection of Freeman's

letters. Both Marjorie Pryse and Mary Reichardt have offered biographical sketches in their respective works, Reichardt considerate enough in her *The Uncollected Short Stories of Mary Wilkins Freeman* to include a helpful chronology to which my summary is heavily indebted.

Despite the varied attempts to create an accurate history, however, there are still sizeable gaps in our knowledge of the author's life. For example, Mary Wales, upon her death in the August of 1916, bequeathed all her papers and books to Freeman's husband Charles, documents which "surely included letters Freeman wrote during their [Charles and Mary Wilkins'] separation" (Glasser 178), but this collection is lost. Freeman's personal library too remains a mystery, especially those texts she read as a child. Documented proof exists that she read fairy tales while in her youth but no records of which ones and by which writers or collectors. Even within her adult library, we are limited to those which Kendrick mentions: "the Greek classics, Smollett, Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, Tolstoi, Poe, Lowell, Hawthorne, Jewett and other writers" (10), with the addition of De Maupassant, whom Foster claims she read (68).

Charles Johanningsmeier, in his article "The Current State of Freeman Bibliographical and Textual Studies" (*American Transcendental Quarterly*, 1999), reminds readers that Freeman's mystery expands beyond her life and into her work as well. Within the last thirty years, he writes, "the state of Freeman bibliographical and textual studies has hardly changed. Numerous gaps in the record of Freeman's publications still exist, no descriptive bibliography of her periodical contributions has been created, and no authoritative texts of her works are to be found" (1). Johanningsmeier also notes that most scholars, most notable among them Pryse, Foster,

and Reichardt, have ignored the children's literature, and, to date, I know of no other study outside of my own to explore the children's literature besides, possibly, a new book from Karl B. Terryberry that also is the only other study even slightly positioning Freeman's work in relation to fairy tales. Terryberry's book, *Gender Instruction in the Tales for Children by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*, which contains a chapter entitled "Freeman's Folk and Fairy Tales: Submissive Mothers, Fathers, and Idealized States of Motherhood," should be available by the time this thesis is complete. It is unknown whether the author will address fairy tales as strong structural and thematic influence on Freeman within her complete canon or to what degree Terryberry focuses on those tales strictly considered children's stories or if he favors those adult stories which predominately feature children. Regardless, children's literature is a large segment of Freeman's prolific career that is "currently rather difficult" to investigate since most "appeared as individual contributions to obscure short story collections such as Little Men and Women [sic] (1896) or appeared only in periodicals" (Johanningsmeier 3). Another area of neglected research that Johanningsmeier identifies deals with Freeman's connection to the literary market of her day, which topic this thesis will examine in its conclusion.

Because of the massive quantities of information simply not yet available and the discoveries concerning Freeman's life and works yet to be made, Freeman scholarship is just recently beginning to break out of the old and staid models that have predominated critical reception of the author for decades. Critically, in fact, Freeman's reputation neatly follows the historical moments associated with the three biographies introduced in the beginning of this section.

Foster and Westbrook's efforts both represent the earliest Freeman scholarship and criticism, dating back to that contemporaneous with the author. Glasser's work indicates the feminist revival of American women writers starting in the 1970s and still prevalent in much new Freeman scholarship, just as Johanningsmeier's work represents the more expansive, at times less specifically ideology-laced efforts of current scholars. All modern criticism dealing with Freeman, however, pursues the goal of proving that Freeman is more than a local colorist or regional realist.

The earliest criticism was eager to label the New Englander as such, and much of the nineteenth-century reaction to Freeman can be studied in *Critical Essays on Mary Wilkins Freeman* (1991), edited by Shirley Marchalonis. William Dean Howells, for example, noted in one of his Editor's Studies for *Harper's Monthly* (September 1887) that "the people [in Freeman's stories] are of one New England blood, and speak one racy tongue" (19), tying Freeman's skills to the region of her dwelling. Uncharacteristic for Howells, reputed to be too kind an editor, he also says, "When you come to the motives of these little tales, the simplicity and originality are not always kept; sometimes they ring false, sentimental, romantic" (20). Even at the onset of her literary career, Freeman is accused of being a very specific type of author and one whose realism, the predominant mode of the day, does not fit the normal mold, to the chagrin of the literary establishment.

Just as Freeman's realism was being criticized, though, the ties between local color and realism were becoming so closely knit such that her work could be said to embody both. An article from an 1891 "Bookman" suggests, for example, that "Miss Wilkins's stories are realistic in the true sense of that much misused word . . .[,] a faithful

chronicling of such details of human affairs as have real meaning" (Marchalonis 22), and by the twentieth century, Freeman is well-established as a local color regionalist. In 1931, F.O. Matthiessen praised Wilkins as "unsurpassed among all American writers in her ability to give the breathless intensity of a moment" (Marchalonis 100) and tried to establish her as the American parallel to Emily Bronte (Glasser 248), one of the first documented instances of a critic or scholar attempting, no matter how small the effort, to place Freeman within the upper echelons of the already solidifying American canon. Leah Blatt Glasser points to David H. Hirsch's 1965 essay entitled "Subdued Meaning in 'A New England Nun'" as the

> first to reveal the value of giving Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's work the same attention that had been given to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, or Henry James. Hirsch's analysis of Freeman's language demonstrates that Freeman transcended the label of local color, that she had investigated [here Glasser quotes from the essay] "the minutest and most ordinary details with deeper psychic significance." (Glasser 33)

Yet, within the same essay, Hirsch acknowledges and foregrounds Freeman's place as a local color regionalist: "Mrs. Freeman does not seem to deviate greatly from the subject matter and methods of her sister writers in the New England local-color tradition" (Marchalonis 108). Not until the 1970s did scholars finally begin to make major concerted efforts to place Freeman within a more respected literary context. Susan Allen Toth's 1973 assertion, in her essay "Defiant Light: A Positive View of Mary Wilkins Freeman," that "it is time to release Freeman's best fiction from its restrictive label as morbid cultural documentation and to read these powerful and relevant short stories on

their own carefully and developed terms" (Marchalonis 124) is one of the earliest calls to arms of the second wave of Freeman scholars.

Between Hirsch's essay and Toth's article fall the first two biographies, Foster's 1956 book and Westbrook's effort in 1967. These books deserve special attention in that they, more than any of the smaller essays or articles, helped shape the public view of Mary Wilkins Freeman. They create, of course, a "for better or worse" reputation. That is, both seem excessively preoccupied with proving that Freeman was a normal (read heterosexual) Christian girl and woman who was talented from an early age and who, rather than deviating from standard norms for females of her time, simply wrote about what she saw within the accepted feminine sphere of her existence.

Foster, for instance, paints a portrait of a coddled, weak child forced to use her imagination for entertainment since her mother had designated her "too delicate" (9) to roam the streets, perhaps an overreaction to her previous child's short life. Foster describes a spoiled but bright girl imbued with a Calvinist work ethic: "Work, Thrift, Family, Gentility, the righteousness of the Ten Commandments – her men and women folks agreed in worship at these altars. Mary learned quickly that her people were determined to 'be something'" (20). The tone implied in "her people" is one that carries throughout the critical work, which attempts to situate every anecdote of Freeman's life as reflected in her fiction. Foster's biography reads more like an argument, its claim that this normal woman can be easily figured out and her work just as easily analyzed. Further, one particularly striking instance of Foster's attempt to read Freeman against his own cultural norms comes when he explores ever so briefly her sexuality and relations to men:

> It was not that Miss Wilkins disliked young men in general; she thought and dreamed in a normally romantic way [how he knew her dreams remains another one of those odd speculations in Freeman scholarship]. It was that she could not imagine herself falling in love with any of the boys who came her way in Brattleboro; they seemed to her dull, clumsy, self-conscious, and appallingly young. (32)

The highly speculative nature of Foster's claim need not be discussed at length, but it does indicate that this scholar is attempting to gain for Freeman a greater acceptance from a very conservative American reading public. He also admits that "her form is the local color story," but laments the tag, informing us that he uses the label with "misgivings" (66). Foster's work is most notable, nevertheless, because it is the first major work on Freeman, and, in historical hindsight, we see that it obviously has the conservative agenda of creating a life for Freeman suitable to readers with a mid-twentieth-century mindset.

Perry Westbrook's 1967 book too develops a particular persona for Freeman. Westbrook's Freeman seems a little smarter, a little more independent than Foster's, but his book focuses more tightly on actual facts than on preemptory claims. He ties Freeman's constant return to the themes of self-reliance and subserviency as major elements of her fiction to observations about her environs. He also deals with *will* as a major area of importance within Freeman's work, putting her on a par with Henry James (39) in her portrayal of willful and weak-willed characters. He is less invested in placing Freeman in the local color tradition, instead favoring the term regionalist, seeing it as

"the most useful . . . for it included local color and realistic evocation of a place and its people without excluding the idealism and the ethical didacticism that was part of the spirit of New England in her lifetime" (117). Just as Foster attempts to place Freeman in his historical moment, Westbrook tries equally hard to place Freeman within her own, and his thoughts on local color, regionalism, and realism helped perhaps more than any claim before it to divorce Freeman from the already stigmatized labels applied to the bulk of her accepted work.

Susan Allen Toth's essay, which called for an even more expansive account of Freeman's work, actually ushers in yet another groundswell of criticism eager to read Freeman through its own agenda. The second wave of Freeman scholarship is that of the feminist revival of American women's texts, the dominant approach to recent work on Freeman.

Josephine Donovan, Michele Clark, Elizabeth Meese, Mary Reichardt, Marjorie Pryse, Shirley Marchalonis, and Leah Blatt Glasser are a sampling of current and former Freeman scholars who have tried to join Toth in expanding Freeman's literary reputation in light of a feminist ideology. The central problem with many of their works is that, though they do indeed free the author from some of the stifling categorizations forced upon her, they at times go too far in response to their own theoretical slants to offer adequate proof to support their desire to establish Freeman's place in major canonical American literature. In essence, they sometimes force feminism on to Freeman.

For example, Elizabeth Meese's reconsideration of Freeman's stories called for an "exposing of the masculinist misreadings upon which criticism has relied. . . to understand more specifically what it means for women writers to become feminist

writers" (Marchalonis 158). The problem with this claim is that we have little evidence to suggest that Freeman would have ever called herself a feminist. Meese's assertion that Freeman's works show "a transitional phase when the interplay of feminism and anti-feminism are textually inscribed, and responses to her work demonstrate how this struggle is both suppressed and simplified through misreading" (158) is telling. It places emphasis not on Freeman herself or even on the work but, as do so many newer literary theories, on an ideology quite possibly foreign to that of the author; it situates the work within terms Freeman may or may not have desired to promote. Considering Freeman's close scrutiny of her own literary market and keen business sense, along with the fact that she at one time apologized for one of her most adamantly feminist characters – Sarah Penn in "The Revolt of 'Mother '" – there is ample evidence to suggest that Freeman would not see herself as a feminist or a proto-feminist and that even if she did privately, she would not have done so publicly for fear it might have stifled her sales. Meese also focuses on Freeman's "representation of women's sexual decidability" as offering "a bridge between women's writings of the past and feminist texts today" (159), but she seems here to appropriate the author and the text without much consideration of either in their own right.

The good side of the feminist wave of Freeman scholarship, like the best of the work that preceded it, breaks Freeman free of stereotypes (though it obviously runs the risk of forcing upon her new ones). In the same article, Meese strongly asserts that local color writers are "undervalued and misrepresented" (158). The negative side is, ironically, perfectly stated by Meese concerning those masculine misreadings:

> If we are to read Freeman's fiction in the tradition of her best-known critics, we substitute our own desire for narrative authority for the author's persistent denials and evasions and for the texts' own essential subversiveness. (173)

This quote perfectly illustrates the second wave's position of that which expands and reappropriates notions from Foster and Westbrook even as it pushes forward a too specific theoretical agenda.

Mary Reichardt, another Freeman scholar with feminist leanings, shows even more clearly how cultural norms have qualified Freeman's acceptance into the upper echelons of America's greatest writers. She focuses on a more historical analysis in her 1987 essay "Mary Wilkins Freeman: One Hundred Years of Criticism," stating that the "anti-feminist mood of our culture after World War One resulted in criticism by reviewers of both sexes becoming increasingly negative"; this is, in her opinion, in part the reason why Freeman "simply was no longer read" (Marchalonis 80). According to Reichardt, the empowerment of Freeman's female characters apparently rubbed a new readership the wrong way. In 1992, when she edited *The Uncollected Stories of Mary Wilkins Freeman*, Reichardt reasserted this claim, stating that "in the first decades of this century were larger cultural and literary shifts. Among other factors, the reading public's new taste for the exotic and the adventure story began to render her rural settings and feminine subject matter passé" (xi). Though Reichardt has since moved away from her work on Freeman, the essays and collections she did produce have been invaluable to newer scholars.

Marjorie Pryse, too, reveals Freeman as well-known and well-respected, despite modern-day critical neglect. She edited a book of selected stories in 1983 and states in the

"Introduction" that "the critic's neglect has kept us too long unfamiliar with one of the finest short story writers in our literature" (vii). She also joins the choir in asserting Freeman's place among America's best, such as Hawthorne, and alongside newer names than others had suggested, such as Wharton, Crane, Faulkner and Morrison. She states that "in presenting characters whose vision results from social exclusion, Freeman actually joins other American writers for whom marking also leads to vision" (xi). She attempts as well to show how Freeman stands out as unique among those writers: "Unlike her contemporaries Howells and James, who believed in a realistic fiction that reflected the nature of reality, Freeman makes us see that a literary realism that challenges perception can actually transfigure reality itself" (xiii). Like Meese, Pryse sees Freeman as an important author who can bridge nineteenth-century and the twentieth-century American literatures, and like Reichardt, she makes sure to base her thoughts as much in Freeman's actual historical context as in feminism.

Among the major feminist works dealing with Freeman, perhaps the most important is also the most recent. Leah Blatt Glasser's *In a Closet Hidden: The Life and Works of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* (1996) is the late twentieth-century equivalent of the work that Westbrook and Foster started at mid-century. A striking and well-organized biography, the book details Freeman's early life without the type of judgments that Foster made about the author's peculiarities and is the most pleasant to read of the three biographies in no small part because of its political and social acceptance of Freeman's habits and lifestyle, surely a testament to the changes in American views of otherness since the 1960s. The book's strongest distinction is, however, at times also its greatest weakness. As the dust jacket reads, it shows

> how [Freeman's] own inner conflicts repeatedly found expression in her art. As Glasser demonstrates, Freeman's work examined the competing claims of creativity and convention, self-fulfillment and self-sacrifice, spinsterhood and marriage, lesbianism and heterosexuality.

The last set of those competing claims that Glasser attends to is a bit of a stretch, the feminist agenda prevalent in second wave Freeman scholarship coming to an extremist head in chapters like "Sometimes I Think I am a Monster" and "The Tenderness of One Woman For Another." Therein, Glasser makes too much of Freeman's assertion that she once dressed like a man and found it thrilling and subtly hints that the relationship between Freeman and Wales *could* have been sexual. This assertion leads to the suggestion that Freeman's marriage could have been one of convenience, a chance for the author "to rid herself of the label of spinsterhood" (175), as evidenced in Freeman's eagerness to have all editions of her work bear her full married name once the event took place.

Glasser's ability to discuss Freeman without the constraints the other biographers placed on her is crucial to understanding how well her book stands out in contemporary Freeman studies. Even though lesbianism is hinted at, subtly suggested in the book from the title onward, Glasser is quick to point out that her claim is one built on educated conjecture; that is, she never makes the claim directly but only alleges the claim could be made. On a lighter note, Glasser's scholarship, though it discounts some of the stodgy conservatism of biographers, adds special ironical import to Foster's concerted efforts in 1957 at proclaiming that Freeman was indeed a normal, heterosexual woman!

Though at its worst the feminist revival freed Freeman from one set of assumptions only to impose another on her, this second wave of Freeman scholarship should not be discounted. Indeed, it is still the predominant mode through which scholars approach Freeman, though this is changing due to a sort of reconsideration of the importance of text and biography. If not for feminist interest in Freeman, the author would probably still be suffering the effects of her literary decline that began around 1900, and she most certainly would never have come close to shaking the local color stigma that is still proving a tough albatross. As late as 2000 Sandra Zagarell suggested that "Building especially on feminist scholarship, we may expand our understanding of Freeman's life and work" (x); scholars such as Charles Johanningsmeier, Gregg Camfield, Doris Turker, and I are attempting to approach Freeman in new ways that would have never been considered important if not for the feminist scholars.

III. "Here's To a Life Like a Fairy Tale"

Leah Blatt Glasser is quick to point out in her scholarship on Mary Wilkins Freeman that, in 1900, when a then engaged Mary Wilkins wrote in a letter to a friend about to be married, "here's to a life like a fairy tale," the "lighthearted reference . . . is a recognition that the life of a 'wife' is idyllic only in fairy tales" (57). I disagree, however, and suggest that this is a most telling quote from Freeman's personal correspondences for other vital reasons. Certainly, fairy tales themselves belie the notion that the women within them, wives or not, always lead a pleasant existence. Stories such as "Bluebeard," in which an ogrish man takes new wives only to kill them after testing them through temptations they cannot withstand, and "Beauty and the Beast," in which a woman is

essentially forced into wifehood, abound, proving that to be a married woman in a fairy tale is not always a desired or even safe situation. Freeman obviously was sincere in wishing her friend the best and hoped dearly for the lady friend that marriage would bring if not a fairy tale life, then a fairy tale ending to singledom, in which princesses meet the Prince Charming figure and live in happiness and abundance "forever after." Freeman herself was to be married in 1902, when she was just shy of turning fifty years old. But, if anyone could use the phrase "life like a fairy tale," understand it and mean it, it was Mary Wilkins Freeman.

This study attempts to show that fairy tales were instrumental in the life and works of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, that they influenced her development as a person and, moreover, that they affected her evolution as a writer, first of children's prose and poetry and later of major adult fiction. The study asserts that the fairy tale influence was one that Freeman encountered early on in her own reading habits and that fairy tale themes, characters, and structures held special meaning for Freeman as she reconstructed her and other women's sense of place in late nineteenth and turn-of-the-century New England and America, and that this is evident in the themes, settings, structures, motifs, and models that Freeman again and again turned to in developing her craft as a tale-teller. Fairy tales act as a major unstudied influence in the life of this author strongly established within the bounds of a realist tradition and as a solid start for her literary career. They offer her a chance to explore those uncannily abundant elements of her life that were "like a fairy tale." Fairy tales, then, allowed an ever-evolving literary talent to take what was her foundational mortar and to reconstitute it into her own revisionist building materials.

In the brief biography at the outset of this chapter, one theme emerged as dominant in Freeman's young life. Death disintegrated the Freeman household such that by the time she was in her early thirties, Mary was the only one left of her immediate family. Had fate allowed all her siblings a longer stay, Freeman would have been the middle child of three; instead, she was the only one to live past the age of twenty, and both her parents were dead by the time she was barely into her thirties. Even in light of this biography, the influence of fairy tales on Freeman's life wove its way into the tapestry of her life and career.

For example, Freeman is positioned in an American historic moment much like that of the setting of many fairy tales. Freeman was born into a rural New England town wherein "deserted factories were as common as abandoned farms" (Westbrook 23), a post-war society dominated by women due to "the loss of lives in the Civil War and the numbers of young men migrating westward or to urban centers" (Glasser 3). Fairy tales, too, are dominated by women: scholars such as Marina Warner even trace their very origins and proliferation to spinsters and other peasant women who revealed their tales to others at fire-lit gatherings (the *veile`e*). Further, many times they are set in an impoverished rural area in which death is not uncommon. As Eugene Weber notes in his essay "Fairies and Hard Facts: The Reality of Folktales," recurrent themes include

> hunger, poverty, death, danger, fear, chance. . . . There are many orphans; there are wicked stepmothers, stepsisters, and mothers-in-law; there are poor children who have gone out into the world; there are forests inhabited by woodcutters and charcoal-burners but also by wild animals and outlaws and frightening spirits –

> forests that provide a refuge, but whose darkness breathes danger, where it was easy to lose one's way and run into trouble. (96)

As a child and as an adult, Freeman was exposed to poverty, death, and foster or "stand-in" family members like the Tylers and Wales and would have more than likely understood the fascination with and fear of the forest evident in early American history and literature. As a writer, Freeman explored all of those themes in one way or another, whether in her children's work, most obviously derivative of the fairy tale, or in her adult canon. Characters from children's literature like Drusilla ("The Cow with the Golden Horns"), Ann Ginnins and Hannah French ("The Adopted Daughter"), and Dorothy, the little seamstress of "The Little Persian Princess," all share the burden of having foster or substitute parental figures due to missing or dead parents, and they are joined by a string of characters from Freeman's adult body of fiction too long to name. In view of these very essential commonalities, Freeman's life itself was indeed "like a fairy tale," and her work represents that as well.

The common ground shared by Freeman's own life experience and those of fairy tale characters and motifs extends beyond uncanny happenstance. We know for a fact that Freeman was familiar with the genre from a very early age, that she was a bright child and was therefore possibly able to recognize and incorporate the similarities in the recurrent themes of fairy tales and her own life and surroundings. In fact, according to fairy tale scholars and noted psychologists, this is not an uncommon strategy for children exposed to the tales. For example, Jack Zipes observes:

> It has been demonstrated by psychologists and educators time and again that stories and fairy tales do influence the manner in which children conceive the

> world and their places in it even before they begin to read. Arthur Applebee has shown conclusively how story characters become part of a child's "real world" and form part of their cultural heritage. Thus, tales play an important role in early socialisaton [sic]. For instance, upon hearing a fairy tale, children of four and five will "assimilate the story to their past experience of similar tales, providing themselves with expectations about such things as types of characters, patterns of behavior, and suitable endings . . . ." (*Don't Bet* xii)

A young Mary Wilkins would have found ample parallels to her own situation in that of the fairy tale tradition as she grew up in Randolph, where she "developed in what was primarily a woman's community, gathering a wealth of oral histories. . . in the kitchens of her grandmother[,]. . . her mother, and her childhood and lifelong friend, Mary Wales" (Glasser 3). Further, it is likely that upon maturing, Mary, who Foster points out was treated like a "little queen" (9) at home due to her parents' understandably overprotective nature, learned that for women in her particular historical moment, life was very rarely full of the charm that royalty figures often possess in fairy tales but, instead, was more similar to the plights of the everyday folk. All accounts of Mary's intellectual ability as a youth suggest that she "learned the dull lessons easily" at school and most probably at home as well (Foster 9). Foster also reveals that Mary "loved fairy tales, which to her seemed completely real" (15), this according to Freeman's cousin Hattie Lothrop Belcher.

Freeman's fascination with the magical has been well-documented within her own letters as well; one can peruse them for constant self-reminders to rid herself of "this mystical vein that I am apt to slide into if I don't take care" (Kendrick 96). In 1922 Fred

Lewis Pattee analyzed Freeman's "The Prism" as an "authentic flash of childhood reminiscence" (Foster 15), though he failed to connect adequately Freeman's fairy tale fascination to the full body of her work, already established as representative of local color realism. Yet, it is true that Freeman never completely broke her fairy tale ties. J. Edgar Chamberlin informed Foster that an adult Freeman "would read fairy stories for her [Florence Pratt, a local child] in a high and rather sweet voice, enjoying both the tale and the child's delight" (Foster 43, n.195). Brent Kendrick says that in her maturity Freeman retained a childlike sensibility that "allowed her to see into the heart of childhood, which prompted her to start her career as a children's writer, and which gave her a life-long rapport with children" and "informed her own personality as well" (11). For example, she had many pet names for herself, with which she often signed correspondences, such as "Mamie," "Pussy Willow," and one that she carried with her throughout her life, "Dolly." Also, she apparently kept up the magic regality associated with her home life as a spoiled princess as well. Mrs. Frank Crehole, whose mother knew Freeman in Metuchen, remembers Freeman as follows: "I can't imagine Dolly Freeman walking [sic] across a floor. She glided [sic] along like a fairy" (Kendrick 13). From her earliest days in Randolph to the room on Brattleboro where she worked so many years, the same room once storage space for an old spinning-loom where Wilkins would play with her dearest friend; from wishing a confidant a "life like a fairy tale" to her own shambled marriage once her "prince" turned to substance abuse and gambling; and from reading fairy tales as a youth to reading them to youths and forever incorporating a "fairy essence" about herself, Mary Wilkins Freeman truly appears to have lived a life "like a fairy tale."

Leah Blatt Glasser says of Freeman that "she seems to have turned to writing as a way of reliving and reconstructing the meaning of her childhood. For this reason, an understanding of Freeman's youth can be best achieved through analysis of her fiction" (2). This is undoubtedly true, but the fairy tales and children's stories that Freeman wrote and the subsequent adult fiction that hinges on them have as of yet been ignored. The evidence of fairy tales as major influence in Freeman's life and works has been overlooked and largely unexamined by even the most thorough of her scholars. As Bruno Bettelheim says, "the most important and also the most difficult tasks in raising a child is helping him find meaning in life," and "nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale" (3,5). His words, along with Applebee's, strongly resonate in relation to Freeman. Fairy tales offered her a means by which to make sense of her world from an early age on throughout her life, a world that was, coincidentally, much like that in fairy tales and the traditions surrounding them.

Freeman incorporated elements of fairy tales more fully than any previous study has shown. They were among the major materials for shaping her literature and were significant in shaping her self and world. As a bright child and woman, she quite possibly used those pertinent real-life/fairy tale connections she saw to revise those influential tales – "for years . . . mainly articulations and representations of a male viewpoint" (Zipes xii) – to reflect better her tastes, desires, and literary aesthetics. A clear evolution of fairy tales' influence can be seen when one traces the *complete* literary output of this author. What also becomes clear is that many of the themes, characters, settings, motifs, and even structures she employed in her career appear culled from those fairy stories she read as a young girl in Randolph, Massachusetts.

Chapter 2
An Overview of the Children's Literature

Mary Wilkins Freeman owes much to her children's fiction for helping her career prosper. In fact, the first work for which she was ever paid was "The Beggar King," a poem which earned Freeman ten dollars from the editors of *Wide Awake* children's magazine (which published the story in March 1881). By 1882 Freeman was a regular contributor to that journal and to the popular children's magazine *St. Nicholas*, both high quality publications for their time (Westbrook 29). A close study of the children's stories and poems shows that Freeman was able to use such writings to help her mold her craft and to help prepare her for the realm of the adult short story. Indeed, many of the themes and tropes so well crafted in her adult literature can be traced back to those earliest efforts for more juvenile audiences.

It has, however, taken some time for scholars to realize the potency of Freeman's children's canon. For example, Perry D. Westbrook stated in 1967 that "competent though she was in telling tales for younger people, Mrs. Wilkins' work in this genre. . . need not concern the student. None of these works are [sic] read today, mainly because she created in them no compelling lifelike characters" (33). Further, Edward Foster ignored all but "The Beggar King" in his Freeman biography, calling the poem, which appeared in *Wide Awake* in 1881, "a fanciful expansion in some fifty galloping stanzas of the old nursery rhyme" (51) but seeing no other merit in her large children's canon.

Charles Johanningsmeier, in his 1999 essay published in the *American Transcendental Quarterly*, has recently attempted to overturn Westbrook's long-reaching assertions, calling for a major expansion of Freeman studies, one that he hopes will fill

the gaps in Freeman's extensive publication list, offer descriptive bibliography of her work, and create authoritative texts as well. "One of the greatest blind spots of current Freeman bibliography is that it includes very few of the works she wrote for children" (2), he states, noting that many eminent Freeman scholars to date, such as Marjorie Pryse and Mary Reichardt and the aforementioned Foster and Westbrook, exclude Freeman's children's literature in their analyses that they suggest give a "full" account of her canon. He continues by pointing out that "Freeman began her career trying to influence children who were not her own, and that she continued to do so later in her career, even when she had more lucrative options"; he also suggests that, if for no other reason, a study of the children's literature is necessary because it can "symbolize how American society sought to associate women with children" (3). He continues, "it is not my contention that all (or even any) of these stories reach the artistic level of Freeman's best works. Nonetheless, they are essential reading for those who wish to understand Freeman, her career, and her role in American culture" (3).

This study attempts to fill some of those major gaps concerning Freeman's children's literature and further shows how within the children's canon are the beginnings of themes and structures that would later resurface in her adult fiction. In a staggering number of examples, Freeman's children canon expresses a familiarity with fairy tale tropes and techniques that, with careful scrutiny, can be seen to constitute certain aspects of her adult fiction as well. Indeed, the two dominant modes in which Freeman deals with fairy tales represent tensions that the author says she many times felt between making her stories strictly realist or adding some aspects of the fantastical. When Freeman uses fairy tale elements in her children's works, she either dismisses notions of the magical in favor

of a Christian pedagogy or, somewhat paradoxically, embraces those same trends as a normal and necessary aspect of childhood development and imagination.

In addition to deepening our understanding of her entire canon, another reason to study the children's repertoire in relation to Freeman's adult pieces is that the early work reflects the author herself. As has already been noted, Freeman seems to have always had a childlike air about her. As Brent Kendrick states in his collection of Freeman's letters, *The Infant Sphinx*,

> the same sensibilities which allowed Freeman to see into the heart of childhood, which prompted her to start her career as a children's writer, and which gave her a life-long rapport with children, informed her own personality as well. In many ways she was childlike herself, and her childlike nature reveals itself repeatedly in her correspondence. (11)

Such a childlike nature can be seen in her adult fiction as well, but only when one scratches the surface of Freeman studies and gets to the heart of matters as of yet left unexplored can one begin to see why and how certain themes develop early and continue along with Freeman throughout her illustrious career. The children's literature, the earliest she produced, is logically the place to start to help inform us of those developments, since she would continue to embrace fairy tale themes for more than fifty years. "Indeed, by 1886 she had written enough children's literature to make three volumes: *Decorative Plaques, The Cow with the Golden Horns* and *The Adventures of Ann -- Stories of Colonial Times*," writes Kendrick (50). *A Humble Romance and Other Stories*, long considered a paradigm of local color literature, loomed only a year away,

showing that Freeman's more fantastic literature was appearing alongside her realist works.

For the purpose of this study, it is essential to see what folk and fairy tale themes were being utilized in the earliest poems and prose that were then incorporated into the adult literature. Unfortunately, creating a full sample of this work is a daunting task. Many of Freeman's children's collections are very rare, especially the 1883 *Goody Two-Shoes And Other Famous Nursery Rhymes* that Freeman supposedly coauthored. I was fortunate enough in the early stages of my studies to run across two collected volumes of *Wide Awake* magazine (Lothrop). One is a bound volume, complete with a full-color illustrated cover, that dates from 1882, when Freeman's career was just beginning to establish itself, and comprises issues from January 1882 to June of the same year. The other includes issues from December 1883 to May of 1884. Among those writers represented in these volumes are Alfred Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, George Macdonald, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mary E. Wilkins, as she was known at the time. I also have the fortune of owning a rare December 1887 edition of *St. Nicholas*, edited, or "conducted" as it says on the cover, by Mary Mapes Dodge, which contains Freeman's exemplary fairy poem "The Ballad of the Blacksmith's Sons," which I will soon discuss in greater detail. These volumes, along with selections from *The Pot of Gold and Other Stories (1882)*, *Young Lucretia and Other Stories (1892)*, and *Once Upon a Time and Other Child Verse* (1897), though in no way meant to act as a comprehensive representative of her children's works, go far in establishing the themes Freeman garnered from her children's literature for the adult work that she was writing

simultaneously with the appearance of collected editions of the children's literature she had been writing since 1881.

Fairies run rampant in the pages of the magazines; from illustrations to short poems to a selection claiming to be the last fairy tale of Charles Perrault, one cannot read one tale of realism in the publications without brushing up against a more fantastical story about fairyland, brownies, or fairies. In the 1882 edition, Freeman has ten separate entries among the issues collected, and magical creatures figure prominently in the two most artful pieces, "The Brownie's Xmas" and "The Christmas Ball" (both January 1882).

Before discussing the merits of those two fairy-stories, though, an overview of all the selections in this 1882 edition is required, for it sheds light on trends Freeman would carry forward for the totality of her career, namely her binary approaches to utilizing fairy tales within her works. Eight of the ten selections from Wilkins (as she will in this chapter be referred to from time to time, since that was the name she was known under until her marriage in 1919) are holiday-themed, seven of the eight works Christmas stories or poems. For example, Wilkins has a twelve-page section of the January issue all to herself in which she shares four Christmas poems. "Christmas Carol" is written in praise of the Christ-child. "The Brownie's Xmas" is followed by "Two Boys," a poem about two poor urchins, Patsey Long and Jim. Patsey, poor but undaunted, relates a dream to Jim in which all the presents under a Christmas tree were his, and he received gifts until his arms are full. Jim tells him his dream is silly, and asks, "Now wa'n't you blue when you woke up/ And all the presents under the tree was gone?" (ll.71-2,p.33). Patsey replies," I know that Christmas-tree's somewhere/I dreamed about last night!"

(ll. 79-80). This sentimental if not somewhat disturbing piece – Patsey is still a poor urchin at the end of the poem, after all, and seems content merely to dream away his abjection – is followed by the didactic "Puritan Doll," the aforementioned "The Christmas Ball, " and then "The Gift that None Could See," a poem in which a young boy learns "That thou mayst get Christ's loveliest gifts/ In ways thou cans't not see" (ll. 102-104, 39). In the February issue, a short poem entitled "A Valentine for Baby" appears, and in March a winter poem entitled "Sliding Down Hill" appears, foreshadowing some of the feminist appeal critics discovered in Freeman's adult fiction. Within the poem, John, Sammy, and Tom ride a broom down a slick, iced-over hill. "You can watch, sis, that's enough/. . . / Keep your hands warm inside your muff --/ Girls can't slide without a sled" (ll. 15-18, 163), state the male faction, to which admonition the nameless sister replies, "If I were boys like you. . . . / Watching as they downward flew/ I would make a girl a sled" (ll.23-6, 163). Freeman closes out her 1882 appearances to mid-year with "The Baby's Footprint" in May and the allegorical "Once Upon a Time." And the many holiday-themed stories foreshadow Freeman's use of such special days as the settings or situational surroundings of her adult stories.

It should also be noted that the poem entitled "Once Upon a Time" in the May 1882 issue of *Wide Awake* is not the same as that which appeared in the book by the same name, yet both deal with fairy tales, as do the best selections from the 1882 volume, "The Brownie's Xmas" and "The Christmas Ball." The two versions of "Once Upon a Time" pair up well with these two poems to show two distinctive modes of Wilkins' use of fairy tale themes and tropes.

For example, in the 1882 "Once Upon a Time," three young siblings "ramble/ Away from home, amid the wild greenwood/ And, once upon a time, they met a lambkin/ And not a wolf like poor red riding hood" (ll. 4-8, 365). This lambkin talks to the lost children, soothing them, and then leads them home, where their mother replaces the old daisy crowns they wear on their heads with crowns of fresher daisies. The religious allegory cannot escape the conscientious reader, who can also see that here Wilkins exposes her acquaintance with the "Little Red Riding Hood" story and the motif of the woods as a dark and mysterious place where children ought not to be. Wilkins seems to be working against such fairy tale drollery in favor of a deeper mythology, that of Christianity. The talking lambkin is obviously Jesus, and once the children accept his word, putting their trust in him as leader, they are delivered from evil and placed in the loving arms of comfort. The mother places a new crown of daisies on their heads as if to mark them through a flowery baptism as children of the lamb of God. Fairy tales and their conventions are thus utilized but downplayed in favor of Christian teachings.

Similarly, "The Brownie's Xmas" is a poem centering on mistaken but innocently good-hearted Christian charity. There is a "brownie who lives in the forest/ . . . / He has done for the farmer's children/ Full many a kindly thing" (ll. 1-4, 28), like driving home stray cows, helping bees to flowers, and even doing the sister's sewing once when she fell asleep on the job, and the children (the sister and her older brother), decide that this Christmas they should do something nice for the sprite. Though Eugen Weber states in "The Reality of Folktales" that fairy land is a world "where productivity is left to elves and dwarfs or other supernatural characters" (103), this tale, though situated within Weber's motif, is predominantly based on Christian customs and reality

as opposed to the fairy realm. The children imagine that this brownie, whom they have never seen, "never had a Christmas" in a thousand years (ll.29,28), so they "do up for the Brownie/ a Christmas bundle/ And leave it in the forest pathway" they suppose he regularly travels (ll. 58-9, 29). Instead, "Two wanderers," a father and his young daughter, both dressed in "ragged raiment" (ll. 79,92; 29), stumble upon the basket in the middle of the night, having just finished a conversation about their lack of Christmas in this "merry and thoughtless town" (11.108, 30), the village here sounding very much like the town Hetty Fifield will soon inhabit in "A Church Mouse." Upon discovering the basket, the hobo regains hope:

"Now if this be done," said he,
"Somewhere in the world perhaps there is
A place for you and me." (ll. 118-20;30)

Immediately following the lines detailing the reading of a note the children have placed on the offering, Wilkins places an ambiguous stanza in which either the man or the narrator appears to speak to either the absent children or directly to the child readers:

"Oh children, there's never a Brownie --
That sorry uncanny thing;
But nearest are the homeless,
When the Christmas joy-bells ring." (ll. 129-32;30)

The quotations around the lines suggest that the poor outsider is saying this aloud to himself and his daughter, but the shift in diction hints that it is possibly the narrator herself who speaks these didactic lines of wisdom, again, as was the case in "Two Boys," revealing somewhat odd thoughts on homelessness, and apparently to the only children

who can be listening, including the readers. The sister and older brother never receive the instruction. In fact, they awake the next morning, find their gifts gone, and wonder at their happiness at pleasing the brownie. The shift in voice and perhaps audience is a fault, to be sure, but what is notable is how the didacticism intertwines elements of Christian and fairy lore. Again we have the forest, or the edge of town in this instance, being a mysterious, liminal place for outsider figures, both of which aspects will continually appear in Wilkins' later literature, and again, as in the 1882 "Once Upon a Time," fairy elements are downplayed in accordance with more Christian ideals as the existence of a real brownie is undercut.

In contrast to these two poems' use of fairy tales, "The Christmas Ball" and "Once Upon a Time" from the 1897 book utilize fairy tales not to distinguish between true religion and silly folk superstition but as an appropriate aspect of children's play and imagination that is embraced and celebrated. For example, "The Christmas Ball" relates a dance around a Christmas tree in which "all of a sudden, a fairy land crew/ Came whirling airily into the room" (ll.17-18, 35). The fairies are described by gender, the girl fairies dressed in cobweb frocks, bedecked with butterfly wings and strings of dewdrops around their glistening locks (ll.21-24), the boys dressed in pansy-velvet, jeweled coats and wearing chains of daisies around their necks. When the dance music stops, the fairies disappear, but not before "every child at the Christmas ball/ had danced with a fairy first" (ll. 35-6; 35). As the children return to their parents, they inform them of their activities, and the mothers all speak as though, since their children are so intent on the story, the report must be true. Fairies and fairy tales are never downplayed or undercut. In fact, even the parents themselves lend credence to their children's imagined – or is it? – dance.

Likewise, in the book version of "Once Upon a Time," Wilkins invites her audience to embrace a world in which sprites fly freely. The poem is even illustrated with a frontispiece depicting four young children watching fairies fly into a nearby flowered brush, in and of itself seeming to illustrate Wilkins' already established integration of the fairy tale motif of spaces on the edge of society. The short poem relates a story of fairies flying around a cluster of violets until a "troop of children" spy them "with shouts of joy and wonderment" (ll.9,9). As the fairies fly deeper into the violets, the children follow them until the airy creatures vanish, but not before they find the fairies' empty nest. The poem is short and sweet, and nowhere do fairies receive poor treatment from the narrator, who has the children embrace their existence even as they disappear, never to be seen again. Hence, in the earliest of Freeman's fairy tale adaptations, a duplicity of intent develops, that of using fairy tale themes to exalt Christian theology as it downplays or appropriates fairy influence along with that which seems to embrace fully the mysticism and magic of the fairy realm and fairy tale elements.

The 1884 volume of *Wide Awake* does little to forward Wilkins' use of fairies as a whole, but one story, "The Patchwork School," does embrace fairy tale elements most eloquently. Besides this exception, the other 1884 offerings, all poems, are slim and unsubstantial. Wilkins' poem "Christmas Day" was the very first work in the December 1883 issue, and she continues her holiday trend with January 1884's "Her Proof," in which a young child confirms that God is king by noticing that even the cows bend their knees in awe of baby Jesus, an old folk belief of which Freeman here shows her awareness. "A Beggar" and "A Baby's Reverie" appear too, but, again, neither is exemplary.

In contrast to the forgettable poetry, " The Patchwork School" stands as quintessential in establishing a sense of Wilkins' use of fairy tale elements in her children's fiction that would reappear in her adult canon. "The Patchwork School" begins with the fairy phrase "Once upon a time," which by the 1880s is apparently a phrase already intentionally indicative of genre, easily marking this tale as a folk or fairy story. After the obligatory fairy tale introduction, Wilkins exposes the crux of the plot before getting to the essential exposition, an aspect of her writing noticeable throughout her career and one that clearly parallels folk and fairy tale techniques, though Wilkins draws the process out a bit longer than do many fairy tales, giving more attention to detail. Consider "Rapunzel," for example, which begins "Once upon a time there was a husband and a wife who for quite some time had been wishing in vain for a child. Finally, the dear Lord gave the wife a sign of hope that their wish would be fulfilled" (*Complete Fairy Tales*, Zipes 47). Similarly, in "The Patchwork Quilt," readers learn right away that the city is possessed of a celebrated institution for the reformation of unruly children, especially "ungrateful and discontented children" (66). Just as it is easy to guess in the fairy tale that the good couple will soon have a child whose birth will lead to the crux of the narrative, Wilkins sets a clear stage that unambiguously suggests that the reader will experience a tale of a child or children dealing with said institution. Further, the school is "in the charge of a very singular little old woman" (66), one of the many tender-hearted but tough old birds Wilkins will write into her stories, adult and children's, for years to come and yet another well-known fairy tale trope. Baba Yaga, Hanzel and Gretel's captor, evil stepmothers and foster grandmothers – fairy tales are full of them, and so is the full canon of Mary Wilkins Freeman. This particular old woman's pedagogy is a

simple one – "Set 'em to sewing patchwork" – because, as she sees it, if they are sewing, whether they be boys or girls, they cannot be getting into "mischief" (66). Along with the old woman character and the introductory narrative structure, Wilkins also utilizes sewing as elemental to her story, once again exploring an age-old fairy tale theme.

The story begins to develop when Julia, a poor but gracious young boy who never whines or complains about his taxing familial condition, an offense for which the police of the town gladly snatch up young folk and send them to receive correction at the school, finally snaps his streak of silent days when he receives eight pairs of blue socks from his four grandmothers (two great-grandmothers and two "common ones") on yet another Christmas. The grandmothers, who constantly lose their balls of yarn – the expense of which has kept the mother and father from buying other things, for they are afraid of the old women and buy them the yarn to keep them mollified – and who as well always misplace their spectacles, constantly sending Julia on search missions within the home to find or pick up something missing or dropped, have given him these toe-warming tokens of love for one year too many. In fact, Julia has never known any other type of Christmas. This monotony prompts his outburst of complaint, which is overheard by a local policeman, and he is hauled off to the correctional school.

While there, Julia works hard and well and has a particularly serendipitous experience when the town's Mayor visits. The Mayor brings along a Chinese Ambassador, and when the two overstay their trip, they are locked in the school for the night because, as Wilkins waits opportunistically to inform the reader, the doors lock at a certain time of night and cannot be reopened until morning. Julia spends much of the night entertaining the two men as he "really knew a great many stories which his

grandmothers had taught him" – this quote in and of itself sufficient nod to another well-established thematic element of fairy tales of which scholars such as Karen E. Rowe and Marina Warner have recently made much: the strongly feminine aspect of fairy tales' origins and propagation.

Julia also tells his own story to the magistrates, and the two potentates take such pity on the boy that they immediately free him, upon the gates' opening, and send him home. They then somehow reach the young child's home before he does and reward him for his story-telling by filling his stockings full of goods, many of which are oriental clothes and fabrics that the grandmothers – and probably the reading public's parents as well, considering the connection of the Orient to the exotic in the late nineteenth century – find particularly pleasing. The story ends here, and though the words do not appear, readers are led to believe everyone lives happily ever after. This 1884 tale, though surrounded by fragments of Freeman's repertoire that can without consternation go unstudied, is critical in proving that Freeman utilized fairy tale themes in her work. Fairies are not even mentioned in this story, as they are in so many of her poems. Nor is there any enchanted "magic" that takes place. However, there is certainly the extraordinary, and the narrative structure, down to a genre-specific signifier in the introductory phrase, a particular type of exposition, and telling themes and motifs such as a termagant old woman, sewing, and story-telling as something passed from the feminine all give proof without a doubt that Freeman was not only familiar with fairy tales from her youth, which her biographers have shown, but that she took the familiarity and translated it into her own stories. These stories, when compared thematically, and even

structurally many times, with her adult work show significant links between the earliest of Freeman's children's stories and poems and even her latest adult short stories.

Another significant example of a far-reaching fairy tale of Freeman's own hand appears in the December 1887 issue of *St. Nicholas* magazine. Reprinted in 1897 in *Once Upon a Time and Other Child-Verses*, as were most of the selections already mentioned along with many others from her publications in *Wide Awake*, is the illustrated poem "The Ballad of the Blacksmith's Sons." Appearing along with selections such as Santa Claus in the Pilpit" (Rev. Washington Gladden), "A Winter Elf" (Amelia Reves), and "The First Christmas Tree in New-England" (Sarah J. Pritchard), as well as with ads selling Chas. E. Carryl's novel *Davy and the Goblin*, Mary Brine's *The Stories Grandma Told*, a $2.25 "standard authorized edition" (4) of *Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales*, the notorious Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's *Prince Little Boy, and Other Tales Out of Fairy-Land*, the magazine's own collection of poems and artwork from illustrator Palmer Cox, and even "[a] delightful and very popular collection of very easy Piano Pieces for beginners" (6) entitled "Fairy Fingers," the tale of two very different brothers is firmly entrenched in a folk tradition and apparently focused toward a market largely comprised of readers eager for such folk and fairy products.

The text of the story begins with the blacksmith at work "while my two fair sons are away" (ll.4, 90). When they enter, he asks them where they have been; the elder remarks "fairy land" (ll.15, 91). Upon further inquiry, the boys say that they have shod the fairies' white horses with golden shoes while in the enchanted realm. In exchange, they were given "a seed of wonderful fairy flower" each (ll.29, 91). They plant the seeds,

and soon bulbs grow. The eldest is sure they will bring silver or gold and dances with joy as he imagines buying a hat, gold chain,

A waistcoat o' satin fine,

A ruff o' lace, an' a pony an' chaise,

An' a bottle o' red old wine! (ll.64-66,93)

The younger replies, however, "O joy! If I hold but my fairy gold/ My father's toil is done" (ll.69-70,93). Many times in fairy tales, children of extremes take center stage. For example, it is not uncommon for the youngest to be the best, or fairest, and subsequently most ill-treated, as in "The Three Brothers" tale from the Grimms, in which three sons learn a "decent and useful trade" (443) to win their father's house on his passing. While the two older brothers scoff at the youngest's seemingly injudicious decision to become a swordsman, they are "foiled" when the brother uses his sword to provide shelter for his poor father, beating out his brothers, a barber, and coincidentally (?), a blacksmith.

Also noteworthy is what happens when Wilkins' blacksmith brothers discover no riches in the bulbs. The oldest yanks his out of the ground: "And it gave out a sound, as it left the ground/Like the shriek of a fairy flute" (ll.81-2,94). "Old Woman Magoun," a story published much later, first in October 1901's *Harper* (Kendrick 514), and one of which Freeman herself says she is fond, though she states in a letter (Kendrick 350) that she never received much praise for it (it is now one of her most anthologized works), makes much of a plant with a very similar mythos. In the story, one of Freeman's most fairy-tale-influenced works, Old Woman Magoun lets her young granddaughter Lily eat some berries off a plant with pretty berries which are poisonous and so delivers Lily into Heaven instead of surrendering her to her lascivious and until recently absent father who

has come to retake his "property" for less than charitable or loving reasons. We later learn the plant is nightshade, also known as belladonna, or mandrake. According to folklore, the "mandrake" moniker was bestowed upon the plant because of its bifurcated root system that slightly resembles a person. Further, it supposedly screams, or shrieks, when it is uprooted, much like the elder son's fairy plant. That Freeman is herein showing a convincing folk knowledge of the plant in 1887 and returns to it years later suggests that she was not averse to allowing her previous writings, even her children's writings, her children's poems, no less, help her craft stories that are enduring to this day, though read, ironically, as examples of a stoic Realism in many cases. "Old Woman Magoun" does make use of the nightshade lore, and it also incorporates the theme of a tough, old grandmother figure, Magoun herself, who is raising Lily on her own, Lily's mother dead by the same type of sickness, indicative of Freeman embracing the foster-relations motif that is so common in fairy tales and much, much of her own work.

The younger blacksmith's son continues to care for his plant until a powerful frost comes, and the plant dies:

> Then he tenderly pulled up the fairy plant,
> And, lo, in the frosty mold,
> Like a star from the skies to his dazzled eyes,
> Was blazing a bulb of gold! (ll.105-8,96)

Wilkins then speeds her tale along hastily, ignoring any trace of the son's informing his father of their good fortune, and the older son is never punished for his prodigal behavior, as would probably happen in a "purer" fairy tale. As Weber explains it, in fairy land "there is always retribution" (108). The last stanza simply ends, "This happy old smith,

will shoe ye no more/ For he sits at his ease, all day!" (ll.111-12,96). In conclusion the poem is somewhat reductive in its following of standard and popularly known fairy tale motifs. One would prefer to have the moral incentive played out so that the good child is praised and the greedy child chided, as Weber suggests should happen; nonetheless, "The Blacksmith's Sons" is a most important poem in establishing Wilkins's use of fairy tale form and themes in her earliest work and is one of the most artistically written examples of such as well.

The selections studied so far are indicative of much of Wilkins' children's fiction and poetry, but important tales in her collected volumes of children's literature also foreshadow themes in her adult canon, though by the time they were collected the author was well-established as an adult writer. *The Pot of Gold and Other Stories* (Lothrop, 1892) and *Young Lucretia and Other Stories* (1892, Harper and Brothers), mostly comprised of her magazine works, clearly show magical and fairy tale elements at work in Wilkins' writings.

Young Lucretia and Other Stories contains its share of seemingly obligatory holiday tales – "Ann Mary; Her Two Thanksgivings" and "Where the Christmas-Tree Grew," for example. The title story itself centers on Christmas. Sewing as feminine domain shows up again in "Ann Lizy's Patchwork," but none of these stories is the most exemplary example of Wilkins' use of fairy tale elements and themes. That distinction falls to one critically obscure story, "The Little Persian Princess."

"The Little Persian Princess" is one of Freeman's most distinctively magical and fairy tale-esque short stories and begins, appropriately, with the lines "And you must spin faster, Dorothy, or you'll go to bed without your supper" (85), introducing conflict before

setting. Dame Betsy speaks the words to Dorothy, described as a "pretty little girl" (85), who watches Dame Betsy's oldest daughter, one of six, eat honey-cakes while the others have dressed in their best and left the house for a walk. The opening scene is one of hardship versus privilege. "She [Dorothy] did not have a great deal to eat at any time, as she lived principally upon the scraps from the table," writes the narrator, "and she also worked very hard, and never had any time to play" (87), her situation in direct opposition to that of the six lazy and difficult sisters.

The narrator also informs readers that "All Dame Betsy's daughters were so plain and ill-tempered that they had no suitors, although they walked abroad every day" (86), while Dorothy is nothing but a workhorse taken in from an almshouse and not at all someone to be considered an object of desire. By spinning flax into linen, Betsy and her daughters hope to be able to attract marriage partners eager for whatever dowry the great chests of linen they have accumulated can snag. Dorothy is the spinner who does the bulk of the work, though, and lives a life very much like a Cinderella figure. Though she is not related to Dame Betsy, she receives treatment similar to that from Cinderella's step-mother, and it can be logically argued, especially since Dorothy has no relative except for an old, distant grandmother, that Dame Betsy acts much like a surrogate step-mother to Dorothy in this tale even as the six sisters act like the spoiled sisters in "Cinderella."

In fact, the eldest sister's laziness helps propel the story's action. When Dame Betsy must run to the store, she orders the eldest to mend her apron. That daughter will have nothing of work, though, and bribes Dorothy to do it for her overnight in exchange for a half-eaten honey-cake. Dorothy, even as hungry as she is, does not eat the cake alone but shares it with the young boy who lives across the way:

> He lived with his old grandmother, and they were very poor; it was hard for them to get the coarsest porridge to eat. The little boy often stood looking through the fence and smiling at Dorothy, and the old grandmother spoke kindly to her whenever she had an opportunity. (89)

After sharing her bounty, Dorothy returns to her duties, only to be caught by the Dame who punishes her for being away from her wheel by revoking her supper but allowing her the opportunity to see the meal on which the rest will sup. As the sisters eat, a stray, gray cat enters the scene. Though the daughters all hate cats, as does the mother, the girls wish to adopt the cat to oppose their mother. The cat

> came stepping across the floor with a dainty, velvet tread. She had a tail like a plume and she trailed it on the floor as she walked; her fur was soft and long, and she caught the light like silver; she had delicate tufted ears, and her shining eyes were like yellow jewels. (90)

After finishing their meal and seeing they have just enough left to feed a cat, they offer the regal creature the food, but she wants nothing to do with it. Dorothy is reprimanded for watching this uncanny cat instead of working, but what the sisters do not know is that "she saw, instead of a cat, a beautiful little princess, with eyes like stars, in a trailing robe of gray velvet covered with silver embroidery" (91). Dorothy is wide-eyed and trembles as Dame Betsy screams at her to get back to her work, but it is not for hunger or fear of reprimand but because the cat appears to her to be a real, human princess.

That night, while all are in bed save for the ever-working Dorothy, the cat informs her that she is indeed "a true princess from Persia" (92) and that Dorothy is the only person ever to see through her disguise. The princess also orders Dorothy to eat the

leftover portion of dinner and informs her that she is traveling "to see the world and improve my mind" (94) as well as to find her brother, now a Maltese cat due to some evil enchantment. In return for listening, the princess offers Dorothy one wish, and she responds by saying that she wishes her grandmother was out of the almshouse. The cat is more than willing to oblige and leads the girl outside, promising her a plan by which she might escape her current situation, to her portmanteau, which grows to human-size proportions upon their finding it. Inside is a robe "woven of silk, with gold and silver threads, and embroidered with jewels" (95) that the princess swears will grant Dorothy freedom if she "will give this to Dame Betsy for her eldest daughter's bridal dress" (95). She does so and returns to the cat, who has now turned the chest into a wallet.

Magic is an obvious element of this most fantastical story. Besides the Cinderella theme inherent in the initial setting, a talking cat, enchantment, and transformation of mystical objects are all utilized with great precision and skill, proving Freeman's imaginative prowess but as well showing that she was familiar with and comfortable using elements that would be absurd to consider if she saw herself only as the realist many see her to be. Further fairy tale themes appear as Dorothy and the princess embark on their journey away from Dame Betsy's. For instance, upon renting a cottage, the princess teaches Dorothy how to sew beautiful objects from her dresses. What comes of this is a sort of capitalist rags to riches story, the earnings from selling the goods allowing Dorothy to invest, save, and eventually to spend to free the old grandmother, who comes to live with her in the cottage, which the princess, now returning to her travels, allows them to keep, along with a never-ending supply of royal fabrics. The Cinderella framework for the story has by this time resolved into something a little more original,

although the princess can still be said to illustrate the animal guardians that appear in the Grimms' version of the work or the fairy godmother figure that appears in others.

Years later, once Dorothy is a woman, she again meets the princess, who is now living with a number of adoring ladies. Dorothy informs the princess of her good fortune and happiness with her grandmother as well as the fact that she will soon marry the man who was once the poor boy with whom she shared the bread years ago. The princess also informs her that her brother is living with her now but that he will remain a cat until he can force one of his mistresses to chase him out of the house with a broom. The joke is subtle but informs the reader that the story is circular in structure. The poor girl is now wealthy, not a princess as is Cinderella, but economically sound and surrounded by family. The princess, too, is happy but is not so sure she wants her brother in human form: "A cat has a more peaceful life than a princess" (103), she states directly after saying, "I hope you will live happily ever after" (103). The phrase is poignant, and it is repeated as the last lines of the story, as Dorothy hears the princess calling after her upon her departure. "Once upon a time" as a fairy tale structural phrase with which Freeman was familiar has already been discussed. Here we see the author adapting a rags-to-riches motif as one might find in "Cinderella," one of the more popular fairy tales in America then and now, as well as other tropes such as transformation – as if the turn from abject to sound was not enough – of objects, animals as protective and mystical creatures, and, of course, the happy ending for those who earned it. Freeman's strong ties to the Cinderella story in the beginning of "The Little Persian Princess" and adherence to its themes throughout, along with the tag phrase "happily ever after," prove that Freeman is aware of certain established motifs, structures, forms, and methods of story telling found in fairy

tales. Her ability to transform those elements to advance her own creative ideas place her in the tradition of those such as Jewett and, more recently, Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee, Margaret Atwood, and Angela Carter, in that we see Freeman can not only write superbly in the fairy tale genre and does so but that she can incorporate enough of herself and her own time's values – the stress on paying one's dues, charity, economic stability, family, and marriage as central to happiness in the story – to make the story sellable and enjoyable. "The Little Persian Princess," a story that as of yet has received little to no critical attention, is not only crucial to an understanding of Freeman's utilization of fairy tale themes but influential in proving, as I assert about such adult stories as "A Church Mouse" and "Old Woman Magoun," that Freeman was in some cases an accomplished fairy tale revisionist.

The Pot of Gold and Other Stories contains more examples of Wilkins' acceptance of fairy tale themes or magic for magic's sake. "The Cow with the Golden Horns," for example, again follows the formula of concentrated explication of crisis rather than setting or character in the introduction and shows Freeman playing with the motif of extreme values:

> Once there was a farmer who had a very rare and valuable cow. There was not another like her in the whole kingdom. She was white as the whitest lily you ever saw, and her horns, which curved very gracefully, were of gold. (25)

One page over more superlatives are used to describe the cow, which is said to have the best milk and cream around; the animal is quite literally the cash cow for the farmer, her goods being highly sought by the gentry (26). This all, of course, sets the stage for the cow to get lost when Drusilla, the farmer's daughter, falls asleep while watching the cow,

and it takes little time for this story to introduce many, many fairy tale motifs. Drusilla, for example, is described as "a beautiful spinner" on page twenty-nine, and when the king decides to lead a search for the cow, it is noted that "it had always been a great cross to the King and his wife, the Queen, that they never had a daughter" (31), wanting parents' lack of a child being one the more popular themes in fairy tales.

The idea of a crucial bargain is yet another notion that comes up again and again in folk and fairy stories, and that, too, appears in the story. In return for finding the cow, Drusilla agrees to become the adopted daughter of the royal family. When she weeps at having to leave her father, the king sends her back to him but only to wish him goodbye. The bargaining is reminiscent of that in De Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast," save instead of her living with her "new" family, the king ships Drusilla off to a boarding school where she will learn to be a princess and where, appropriately enough for a fairy-influenced story, the girl learns, among other things, further sewing techniques.

At the school things turn sour, as a jealous classmate who also wants to be the princess starts a rumor that Drusilla had been plotting all along to be placed in the king's favor. When the royal search for the cow continually fails, the King, not wanting to admit his own ineptness, begins to believe the rumor and sends Drusilla back to her father, now in the throes of poverty, only to have the cow mysteriously return with baskets of jewels and gold on its horns. When the King tries to repair relations with Drusilla once again, she refuses his advances and establishes a kingdom and castle of her own with the riches, and she is known as "Lady Drusilla" from then on. The story ends with no explanation as to why the cow came or went, and Drusilla's rise and fall and subsequent rise seems particularly subject to whimsy, or fate, an odd development for a Wilkins story of any

kind. Usually there is some slight moral tinge to the tale, some pedagogical slant, but besides Drusilla's nature, which is described as inherently stately and regal, there is very little of that present in this story as opposed to "The Little Persian Princess" or others. Drusilla simply seems to embrace her destiny in the end. Despite the absence of a pseudo-moral undertone, the story is still a great example of Freeman's ability to balance a number of fairy tale themes in one story, despite some structure weakness.

In opposition to the poetry, which is rich in fairy imagery and fairies themselves, the short stories for children break away from so blatant a nod to fairy tales and the fantastical in favor of showing a more sophisticated use of the themes, motifs, structures, forms and even phrases of the fairy tale genre. A maturation of style and refined sense of influence is apparent as Wilkins moves from poetry, her earliest work, to short fiction, with fairy tales as influence at its central core. In many of the early poems and later more artfully in a large number of short stories, one sees an author becoming more comfortable with the more complex aspects of a genre, the formal and structural elements of a subject that had popular appeal in the market and which depended on a large degree of familiarity with themes on the part of both the writer and her audience. The advertisements and indexes of popular children's magazines of the 1880s and 90s are filled with references to fairies, and as was noted in my short biography of Freeman in an earlier chapter, Freeman herself, according to witness accounts, from her youth on always held a spot in her heart for fairy tales.

What a study of the children's canon suggests is that there are adequate grounds, especially considering the stylistic and artistic evolution apparent in her move from poetry to short stories, for arguing that fairy tales played a significant role in establishing

the groundwork for Mary Wilkins Freeman's fiction, and what the remaining chapters of this study will seek to prove is that through an analysis of the themes, structures, character types and other salient elements of her *complete* canon, one can say with authority that Freeman continually used those elements of fairy tales that she found to work for her in terms of her own comfort as a writer and her place in the market. Further, her move from children's to adult fiction illustrates another step in the evolution of a skilled writer ever gaining a better and more adept understanding of her thematic beginnings. Even in some of her most canonical work, that which is popularly considered among scholars as a hallmark of stoic New England local color or 19th century realism, Freeman not only utilizes fairy tale elements in her craft but becomes adroit enough to mesh these with her own mature agenda, becoming a fairy tale spinner and a fairy tale revisionist on a par with any that has come since.

Chapter 3
Spinnerinnen and the Fairy Web: Sewing, Women's Work, and Feminine Empowerment From Freeman's New England Arachnes

In an 1989 article published in the *New England Quarterly*, Lorne Fienberg states that "women's work serves . . . as a central action in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's fiction, from her earliest collections of short stories, and also as a primary metaphor for the self-definition and personal fulfillment of her characters" (503). This statement suggests that the scholar has not taken accurate measure of Freeman's children's poetry and hints that he has probably not considered her large collection of children's stories. Nonetheless, Fienberg is correct in his general assertion. Work is central to Freeman's characters in the *totality* of her creative output, from early poems such as "The Ballad of the Blacksmith's Sons," wherein the toil and patience in one boy's care for a magic plant ends up as that which saves his family from all future financial hardship, to short stories such as "The Patchwork School" and "The Little Persian Princess," in which the lead child characters find themselves constantly at work, whether it be in fetching eyeglasses and balls of yarn for senile grandmothers or doing the labor of six other girls who are too lazy and privileged to lift a finger. From her earliest work to her latest short stories, many of Freeman's characters are instilled with a staggeringly strong work ethic: work *is* central to their being.

Feinberg is also correct to suggest in his article that the women in Freeman's stories do a particular kind of work: domestic functions, cooking, cleaning, sewing, or what was commonly referred to as, appropriately enough for the 19th century, "women's work." Leah Blatt Glaser says of these tasks that Freeman's "fictional spinsters find their

greatest fulfillment in their work, whether it is gardening, singing, writing [. . .], quilting or sewing" (Glasser 60). Among those labors Glasser mentions, sewing is one of the most common and most telling in establishing fairy tale connections within Freeman's adult opus. Further, sewing, or other such women's work, is often an element of cohesion among the female characters in a Freeman story in which women establish power or find the means of gaining some authority in their respective societies.

Through her multiple uses of sewing, Freeman fits the tradition of femininity inherent in fairy tales that has been established by scholars such as Karen E. Rowe and Marina Warner. Freeman herself is one of the *Spinnerinnen* (298), as Rowe calls them, referring to the German for "spinning women." Further, Freeman creates *Spinnerinnen* of her own, and there is a particular appropriateness in arguing that Freeman is, to use suitable language, cut of the same cloth as Philomela, Scheherazade, Arachne, and other famous spinning women. Freeman's association with fairy tales as a reader in her youth and beyond is evident, and her earliest children's writing demonstrates a working knowledge of fairy tale elements, such as the inclusion of fantastical creatures, like fairies themselves, in the poetry. Freeman's fairy tale knowledge evolved to explore more complex notions of structure, form, theme, and the type of content that clearly establishes the genre, and an examination of the adult fiction in relation to the children's work shows a further evolution and sophistication of those obvious earliest artistic influences in Freeman's products. In this chapter, I will focus specifically on sewing as fairy tale inspired theme in Freeman's works, and in my exploration of specific *Spinnerinnen* in their Freemanesque incarnations, I will show how those weaving women use feminine crafts to establish acceptance, influence, and power.

Connection with spinning or sewing, women, and fairy tales places Freeman within the context of an ancient tradition well examined by Rowe and Warner. Both scholars trace spinning, sewing, and weaving back to the very core of mythology and folklore from which fairy tales and other subsequent fictions grew, making sure to note the important connections between the activities and women's "intertwined" relationship to them.

Marina Warner, for instance, sees this history of women's work and tale-telling as evident in old wives' tales, *Mother Goose*, and in the communications that must have surrounded women's social circles in many early societies. These social circles often revolved around domestic labors such as spinning such that, over time, the metaphorical connection between the two seemed logically made:

> Spinning a tale, weaving a plot: the metaphors illuminate the relation; while the structure of fairy stories, with their repetitions, reprises, elaboration and minutiae, replicates the thread and fabric of one of women's principal labours – the making of textiles from the wool or the flax to the finished bolt of cloth. (23)

According to Warner, boredom occasioned by monotonous, mundane tasks and the opportunity to socialize among women helped bring about the modern fairy tale. She even provides evidence that "fairy" and "women" have been semantically linked for centuries in Romance languages in that "'fairy' . . . goes back to a Latin feminine word, *fata*, a rare variant of *fatum* (fate) which refers to a goddess of destiny" (14-15). She also quotes Czeck writer Karel Capek, who in 1931 stated, "A true folk fairy tale does not originate in being taken down by the collector of folklore but in being told by a grandmother to her grandchildren" (Warner 17), establishing feminine origin as a crucial

element of such tales and arguing that not only has domestic labor been categorized as women's work but so has the craft of story-telling.

Karen E. Rowe, in turn, traces the connections of women's work and spinning to "the image as Philomela as weaver" in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Philomela, "[c]apable of weaving in tapestry the brutal story of rape that leads to the terrible enactment of a terrible revenge," represents "the quintessential [and archetypal] type of woman as tale-teller" (297). Rowe provides other examples from antiquity through her research, such as Penelope and Scheherazade from *The Arabian Nights*, and explains that Greek culture, and our culture as well, "inherited from Indo-European culture a tradition in which poets metaphorically defined their art as 'weaving' or 'sewing' words" (300). This historical tradition leads her to the assertion that

> the intimate connection, both literal and metaphoric, between weaving and telling a story [. . .] establishes the cultural and literary frameworks within which women transmit not only tapestries that tell stories, but also later folklore and fairy tales. (300)

My supplement to her contention is that this historical trend is still apparent and was especially strong in late nineteenth-century America, when the distinctions between masculine and feminine spheres were well-ingrained in the social fabric, even as it was beginning to be challenged by early feminists, and, as many have contended since, in the writings of such women authors as Mary Wilkins Freeman.

That spinning, weaving, or, most frequently, the 19th century New England equivalent, sewing, occur time and again in Freeman's adult work suggests that Freeman

was able to see herself as "spinning" within this very particular literary convention that offered select, capable women financial success.

Evoking an uncanny connection between fairy tales and Freeman's life, Edward Foster has pointed out that as a child Mary Wilkins and her friend Mary Wales would often "go to the attic [of the Wales home] to play with a dusty old loom and a spinning wheel [. . . . Wilkins] did not know that after much testing, she would return to the room and live in it for nearly twenty years" (11). Even if Freeman did not see herself in the vein of fairy-weaver at all times or acknowledge the centrality of that old loom and spinning wheel within her own work space, certainly she was aware of women's roles in her own culture, which parallel strongly those in societies that Warner sees as instrumental in the development of folk and fairy tales. Therefore, just as women, weaving, and story-telling have been inextricably linked, Freeman's life and career and the entirety of her written works are inextricably linked to that tradition as well. What, after all, is local color if not turn-of-the-century folk? As Ann-Janine Morey argues, "Women, located relative to men in androcentric cultures, always seem to have produced fiction of local proportion, of domestic import," these "contributions relative to the transcendent epics of cultural mythology" (745). Further, what is early feminism but the attempt to weave a new pattern of equality or to recognize the importance of what Freeman herself calls "the fairy web" of feminine life? Rowe asserts that the fairy tale is "semiotically a female art" (Tatar 308) and that the early fairy spinners "foreshadow, perhaps foster, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century emergence of a passion for romantic fictions, particularly among women writers and readers" (308), and I further

take this claim to apply to literary trends well beyond Romanticism or romance novels – that is, in Freeman's fiction.

The "fairy web" is first and most prominently mentioned in "A New England Nun," featuring Freeman's most notorious and critically accepted *Spinnerinnen*, Louisa Ellis. This title story of Freeman's 1891 collection from Harper Brothers is the one story most responsible for Freeman's current rediscovery, dating back to David Hirsch's "pioneer essay in 1965," which was "the first to reveal the value of giving Freeman's work the same attention" given to other great American writers (Glasser 33). Spinning, or in this case sewing, is central to Louisa's self-created life of work, order and solitude, and when Joe Dagget, the lover who left her fourteen years earlier to make a fortune suitable for her – in terms of fairy tale tropes, her prince figure – returns to fulfill his obligation, seeing "marriage as the inevitable conclusion of things" (*NEN* 7), it becomes obvious that this princess is not in need of saving. In the end, she lets him out of his promise in order to return to what James D. Wilson calls her "artfully constructed world of domesticity that proves the self-drawn perimeter of her existence" (Wilson 42).

Indeed, sewing is so central to the story that it frames the piece and becomes that which best represents Louisa herself. The opening features Louisa "peacefully sewing at her sitting-room window all the afternoon" (*NEN* 1), watching men trudge home from their hard but satisfying labors. Her sewing gives the reader a first glimpse into Louisa's punctiliously self-imposed and, at times, seemingly self-repressed order:

> Now she quilted her needle carefully into her work, which she folded precisely, and laid in a basket with her thimble and thread and scissors. Louisa Ellis could not remember that ever in her life had she mislaid one of these little feminine

> appurtenances, which had become, from long use and constant association, a very part of her personality. (1)

Louisa has many other exacting quirks, such as the arrangement of her books and her neurotic sense of cleanliness, but Freeman chooses to focus most on sewing. It is Louisa's chief pleasure. For instance, "[m]ore than once she had ripped a seam for the mere delight of sewing it together again. Sitting at her window . . . drawing her needle gently through the dainty fabric, she was peace itself" (9). Further, when Joe comes to visit, acknowledging their upcoming marriage, tracking in dust and knocking over objects in her neatly arranged home, much to Louisa's chagrin, Freeman describes him as feeling "surrounded by a hedge of lace" (6). In fact, here Freeman uses the telling phrase that is my focus: "He was afraid to stir lest he should put his clumsy foot or hand through the fairy web, and he had always the consciousness that Louisa was watching fearfully lest he do so" (6).

The fairy web is, of course, more than just the lacy collections of his betrothed's craft. The fairy web in "A New England Nun" is Louisa's crafted life itself, what Wilson calls "a weblike world" of "repetitive, ambitious activity" in which Louisa, whom he describes as both an artist and a spinster, is "the weaver at the loom, the spider in the web" (43). Wilson, as have many Freeman scholars, precariously tiptoes around my central argument without ever recognizing the consequences of all the fairy tale elements he is ignoring. He continues to state, "what is a web if not a trap? And are not fairies, capricious, magical, sometimes sinister? The fairy Louisa, with her delicate female artistry, has the power to devise and create, seduce and entrap" (44). Of course, what Louisa wants with her domestic web is to be left alone, arguing against the scholar's

innuendo that the "fairy web" of Freeman's fiction is always a sort of ruse-laden device. Clearly it is not such in "A New England Nun." Instead, Louisa's web is one in which, simply, as Perry Westbrook asserts, "a strong but healthy will is directed towards legitimate ends which it eventually attains after heroic struggle" (Westbrook 68). The web Louisa has crafted for herself is a form of empowerment: by not allowing it to be broken, she keeps her life as she wishes it, but, quite the contrary to Wilson's claim, it is never that which traps anyone but that which empowers Louisa to work towards its preservation, in the end actually freeing Joe Dagget to pursue his own desired life outside the web.

That Wilson sees Louisa as a fairy, though, does help forward the notion that even in this most representative example of what Freeman has become associated with – local color, realism, proto-feminism – fairy tale elements and themes are at work, sewing paramount among them. Other such fantastic motifs in the story include liminal spaces, such as Caesar's dog house "half hidden among the tall grasses and flowers"(2); a termagant old maid in Joe's mother, who sees no value in Louisa's lifestyle; and the evocation of royalty. All these elements combine, along with Freeman's deliberate use of the phrase "fairy web," to provide ample evidence that the author is coherently engaged in this story with fairy tale genres and that an ample understanding of fairy tale themes and motifs is presented within the story. For example, when Louisa finally sees Lily Dyer, the new object of Dagget's affections, Louisa views a girl "with a masterful way which might have beseemed a princess" (13). As for herself, once she allows the love-match between the two, freeing Joe of his bonds to her, "she felt like a queen who, after fearing her domain be wrested away from her, sees it firmly insured in her possession"

(16). In fairy tales, princesses need princes; queens, however, need no one. Freeman's mastery of the fairy tale genre is also shown in that the story ends with an inversion, a reversion, and a true follow-through of a fairy tale: Louisa through her "sacrifice" is the princely figure who saves the day for the two lovers instead of the male figure. This virgin maiden in need of rescue really does not need saving at all and is capable of supplying her own happiness; and the prince and princess live together happily ever after, while the spinster ends the tale just as she began it – the circular pattern of the tale, too, indicative of fairy tale motifs – by watching out her window men return from the fields while she sews linen seams. She spins a story for Joe that saves the day for all the main characters.

In 1965, David Hirsch wrote of "A New England Nun" that "the story seems to be, no matter how skillfully done, one more among the good many tales [which] concern single women" and that within the tale "Mrs. Freeman does not seem to deviate greatly from the subject matter and methods of her sister writers in the New England local-color tradition" (Marchalonis 108), but clearly the tale is situated within a larger tradition than Hirsch recognizes. That the story which is so widely considered the quintessential Mary Wilkins Freeman tale foregrounds fairy tale elements suggests that scholars need to revise what is seen as quintessentially Mary Wilkins Freeman to include a more rounded view of her possible influences, skills, and self-awareness of her artistic development. "A New England Nun" is not the quintessential or only adult work in which Freeman utilizes fairy tale elements; it is, rather, but one of many that illustrates the multitude of fairy tale themes inherent in her fiction. This is apparent by analyzing any number of tropes or motifs, but sewing or other derivative forms of "women's work" are of particular

importance in demonstrating that Freeman's characters and works do indeed come into their own by passing through a fairy web of relation and influence.

Though Freeman never again uses the specific phrase "the fairy web" to describe feminine relations in her stories, women's work and empowerment are strongly connected within several other works. For example, in "A Mistaken Charity," Freeman describes this bond as simply the "web of life" (*HR* 242), and within this web women are oftentimes jockeying for acceptance, control, place, or position. Other fairy tale elements come and go depending on the story, but sewing in one form or another is one element that ties Freeman forever to the tradition of the *Spinnerinnen.*

For example, many of her characters sew for economic mobility, as is seen in the children's story "The Little Persian Princess," in which work a princess disguised as a cat helps an abject and ill-treated hired girl escape poverty and abuse by teaching the girl to sew and sell items made from her royal garments. In "Calla Lilies and Hannah," an adult story, Hannah Redman, dismissed from the church and harshly snubbed by her town after being falsely accused of stealing money, must travel to the nearby towns where she finds work "sewin' boots" (*NEN* 106) and so provides for her household. Sewing is also an act of personal empowerment, as when Hannah sews a new dress out of old material such that the townsfolk think she has bought a new one: When she overhears her fellow church-goers accuse her of being a common thief, she sews and wears the new garment to the next meeting out of utter indignance over their whispers and callous treatment. They may treat her poorly, but she has privileged herself with the confidence to snub them even as they snub her.

Others sew for the same reason Louisa Ellis sews: the sheer love of the activity as a pastime and the feeling of peace it evokes. Among these women are Clarissa May in "The Scent of Roses," who sews with "a certain patience and tranquility" that characterizes her (*NEN* 203). Sewing is here again a form of personal empowerment.

In yet another example, sewing is again social empowerment but with less singularly capitalist ties. Though often still coupled with a sort of economic stability, sewing more importantly becomes something shared, and so it helps women establish status in society and among women or aids them to accomplish other important goals. In "A Gala Dress," this social acceptance is something so coveted by two poor sisters that they "wore one dress between them for the best, taking turns going out" simply to be accepted as more than abject (*NEN* 44). Having only the one dress, their solution is to turn to their sewing, alternating sewing lace and velvet trim onto the dress, depending on which material they deem most appropriate for a given social situation. And, when Hannah of "Calla-Lilies and Hannah" is finally cleared of the false accusations of her theft, she again turns to sewing to help establish her new place in society as a worthy innocent, wearing to church on the meeting after she has been cleared a white dress of "old muslin, [that] she had washed and ironed it nicely, and sewed some lace in the neck and sleeves" (119). Her sewing acts as a social signifier, then, of her place and reputation among her community.

In "A Church Mouse," sewing as means of acceptance is superbly illustrated through Hetty Fifield's special penchant for worsted works. Hetty's main concern, having been told "to clear out" (*NEN* 411) of her recently deceased employer's home which has been sold, is to find a new position in the town for herself now that, having no family, she

has no place to go. This novel positioning entails a degree of social acceptance and economic stability in that she is looking for a new occupation, but, even more crucial to Hetty's essential needs, it entails the literal finding of a new space in which to live. Her solution is to convince minister Caleb Gale to let her become sexton of the local church and to live there, but Gale and the rest of the community scoff at the idea. Yet, Hetty's feminine skills soon resolve her position as sexton, and the meeting house becomes her new home.

The importance that Hetty places on her women's work is noted early on when she informs Caleb in a failed plea for sympathy that her belongings, among them an old stove and bed, are sitting out in the yard of her old house. Further, she cannot find lodging with anyone in the town, Hetty acknowledging that she is known for her headstrong ways and that all of a sudden "most everybody in the town has got company" (409). She points to the fate of her sewing as a particular tragedy of homelessness, stating, "My worsted-work, all my mottoes I've done, an' my wool flowers, air out there in the yard" (409). The magnitude of this is lost on Caleb Gale, however, and it is not until the story reaches its climax that Hetty makes the most of her weaving talents.

Having earned the scorn of the community's men for settling in the meeting house for longer than the one day Gale finally permitted her, Hetty makes her appeal based on what the town's women will deem as satisfactory work even if left unrecognized by the townsmen. As Freeman writes, for as long as Hetty has inhabited the meeting house, she "swept and dusted" and "garnished the walls with her treasures of worsted-work" (416). One learns that these treasures "went far to quiet the dissatisfaction of the people" (416), and that fact suggests the bonds Hetty has established within the fairy web:

> Hetty's skill in fancy-work was quite celebrated. Her wool flowers were much talked of, and young girls tried to copy them. So these wreaths and clusters of red and blue and yellow wool roses and lilies hung as acceptably between the meeting-house windows as pictures of saints in a cathedral. (417)

Further, Hetty has crafted a worsted motto that she sees as her best artistic achievement over the pulpit. The motto is a "white wax cross with an ivy vine trailing over it, all covered with silver frost-work," and, when Hetty finishes it, she states, "I guess when they see that they won't say no more" (417). Here, however, Hetty is relying too much on crafts unappreciated by a large segment of her society, but when her defining moment comes, she weaves herself into the web of life with flawless application. When Hetty locks herself in the meetinghouse to keep the townsmen from throwing her out, she makes a desperate plea to her community, and she still sees her craftwork as central to her acceptance into society. Like a gray-haired Rapunzel seeking salvation, she peers out of an upper window and speaks:

> If I can just stay here in the meetin'-house, I won't ask for nothin' better. I sha'n't need much to keep me, I wa'n't never a hefty eater; an' I'll keep the meetin'-house jest as clean as I know how. An' I'll make some more of them wool flowers. I'll make a wreath to go the whole length of the gallery, if I can git wool 'nough. Won't you let me stay? I ain't complainin', but I've always had a dretful hard time; seems as if now I might take a little comfort of it, if I could stay here. (424)

Hetty's rhetoric is perfectly spun. She appeals to her denigrated sisters whose own mundane tasks such as cleaning and sewing have most probably long gone unappreciated

by their men folk. Weaving, by way of her worsted works, is key in winning her acceptance from the women of the town, who hear and respect her appeal and then use their own rhetorical webs to spin Hetty into the fabric of the small town. Wilson's notion of the fairy web as trap rings true not because Hetty has tricked anyone but because Hetty has used her sewing skills both physically and rhetorically to help her women counterparts trap their mates in the web of feminine consensus. Hetty gains acceptance into the whole of the community by asking for an appreciation of her feminine skills, evidenced in her worsted-works, and she earns it through an appeal as amazingly woven as are her mottoes. For Hetty, acceptance into the fairy web of feminine discourse helps her find her place in the whole of her culture.

In terms of fairy tales, "A Church Mouse" can be read as a proto-feminist revision of the "Rapunzel" mythos, just as "The Little Persian Princess" gives evidence of being a revised "Cinderella" and "A New England Nun," though not a direct revision of any one tale, a revision of several obvious fairy tale elements. The emphasis on spinning or weaving is apparent in both "Rapunzel" and "A Church Mouse," and Hetty and Rapunzel are both figures that are exiled and alienated from the rest of their worlds. Hetty locks herself in her tower, of course, but she might as well do so as a symbol of being locked out of the homes of the townspeople who have locked her out of their hearts and minds.

Further, in many versions of the "Rapunzel" motif, Rapunzel goes to the window to let down her hair so that she can connect with her suitor, the only real tie she has to the outside world. The woven worst-works and the rhetoric Hetty weaves act as a sort of revised "letting down one's hair." At the window, after all, Hetty finally articulates her exact needs and wants, which is what the long-locked Rapunzel does as well. It is no

coincidence that Freeman makes sure to inform readers that as Hetty speaks through the window, "the wind blew her poor gray locks over it" (423). Also, relating to the motif of rhetoric as spell-weaving is Hetty's use of Tommy, a young boy and the closest thing to a prince she has. Tommy is the boy whom she convinces to help her move the stove and bed into the meetinghouse, and to gain his help Hetty must blind the boy and his mother to reason. Tommy's mother swears "he ain't able to lift much" (413), but Hetty's rhetoric soon gains her his help. In some versions of the "Rapunzel" story, the prince figure, too, is blinded when he falls from Rapunzel's hair into a grove of thorns, both men here giving up their sight, or insight, to cross community lines of accepted behavior. Also appearing within the "Rapunzel" mythos is a ladder made of silk that acts as the girl's only link to the outside world. That Rapunzel and Hetty both have weaving skills and face very similar situations proves that Freeman may once again be using the fairy tales of her youth, those stories which so obviously inspired her children's work, to help her create a contemporary revisionist version. Glasser notes in her work concerning "A Church Mouse" that Hetty's shift from adamantly and independently refusing to leave the meeting house to appealing to a sympathetic audience "is a matter of survival. It was what Freeman did when she at times added a sentimental ending to an otherwise sharply realistic story so that it would sell" (Glasser 50). Glasser also states, pulling quotes from Freeman herself in a 1919 letter to Fred Pattee, that she always wanted " 'more symbolism, more mysticism' in her work, but that she found she often 'left that out' because 'she was forced to consider selling qualities'" (50-1). I will remark on Freeman's place alongside other feminist fairy tale revisionists in more detail elsewhere, as I will the connections between fairy tales and "selling qualities," but what the fairy tale tradition

and that of the *Spinnerinnen* show in relation to Hetty's tale is that it is likely that Freeman is not leaving out as much symbolism or mysticism as she implies in her letter.

Another excellent example of actual sewing and the fairy web of feminine empowerment or entrapment working together thematically is found in Freeman's "Amanda and Love," wherein the aged Amanda sews throughout the story, just as she weaves a reality for her younger sister Love. Freeman introduces Amanda sewing "with a diligence which seemed almost fierce" in the first sentence of the story (*NEN* 288), and it soon becomes apparent that her skills extend into the fabric of life. Amanda promises her sister that she will "look out for [her] as faithful as I know how" (291), the two having been "left alone in the world when Love was just a baby" (292), Amanda clearly the stand-in mother figure. When Love gains a suitor who eventually begins to neglect his calls, Amanda asserts, "He'll come again fast enough, don't you worry" (299). Amanda then sets about weaving the proper spell to set things right, visiting the suitor's mother to assure her that Love is not snubbing the young man as he thinks but that the youngster is merely bashful, informing the mother that Amanda herself thinks her son is "one of the likeliest young men in town" (301). After working her spell on the mother, she heads for the just-arrived man, Willis, himself:

> I'm kind of stiff sometimes, but I don't mean to be; an' Love is a little quiet an' bashful, but you mustn't think we mean to act offish. If you ain't goin' anywheres to-morrow night, we'd be glad to see you. Love, she ain't very well. (302)

The rhetorical web ensnares Willis perfectly. His true affection for Love comes to the fore once he learns she is worried, and he agrees to visit soon. Upon further entreaty he clears his schedule to visit that very night. Amanda then returns home to complete the

artistic frame that Freeman has again contrived through sewing. Amanda "sat down with Love and sewed until supper-time" (303) before combing Love's hair and generally helping her to "pretty up." She leaves the results of her conversations a secret to her sister, but her sewing is no less effective. Wilson does visit, and Amanda ends her day looking out of her kitchen window, the lovers in the sitting room, listening to the two fall deeper in love. Here the fairy web of feminine life becomes a web of desirable entrapment through the spinning of Amanda, her empowerment illustrated in her rhetorical prowess at weaving a story that will have a positive effect on her sister's desired web of life. That Freeman uses sewing as a frame for Amanda's quest is not happenstance. The author is clearly aware of her own facility with metaphors for feminine experience, those evoking the fairy web, women's work, feminine motives for acquiring desired results, and the power one gains thereby.

Amanda is one of Freeman's most potent weavers, just as Louisa Ellis is one of her most skilled seamstresses, and both transcend their talents with cloth into distinctively female penchants for creating desired realities. Amanda combines the rhetorical spell-weaving of Hetty with the literal sewing skills of Louisa to prove once again that Freeman embraces the *Spinnerinnen* as she herself sets about spinning new yarns from old themes. "The fairy web," or "the web of life," in Freeman's fiction is, therefore, another version of the strongly feminine-influenced fairy tale, what Rowe calls "semiotically a female art." That Freeman is so adept at using this specific trope suggests awareness on her part that folk, fairy, sewing and women have always comprised a particularly feminine tradition of empowerment. Mary Reichardt wrote in 1987 that "Freeman remains an anomaly in the American literary tradition: no one quite knows

where or even if she fits in" (Marchalonis 73). Within the tradition of the *Spinnerinnen*, though, Freeman finds an appropriate home.

Chapter 4
Princes, Beasts, Or Royal Pains?:
Men in the Revisionist Fairy Tales of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

Many critics and scholars consider Mary E. Wilkins Freeman a realist or local color regionalist, but her use of fantastical imagery and fairy tale elements in her children's poetry and prose illustrates that early in her career she did not always seek realism as a hallmark of her work. Her adult work continues to draw from the copious fairy tale themes that she so often employed in her children's canon, and if scholars are to consider her a realist, they must also recognize the streaks of fairyland that run deep within her adult stories, even in those considered exemplary realist or local color texts. Freeman is often not working with a stoic realism but within the boundaries of magical realism.

Further, Freeman has been overlooked as an important revisionist of fairy tales. She revises and revamps classic fairy tale tropes in her adult works, as have such twentieth-century women writers as Tanith Lee, Angela Carter, Olga Broumas, or Jane Yolen. Whereas Freeman may only draw from fairy tales rather than always directly rewriting them, she still joins a strong cast of women writers whose work shows clear evidence of fairy tales as influence. Jeannette Evelyn Green, for example, in her work on women authors working from 1940-1980, notes that

> Elizabeth Bowen, Angela Carter, Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, Anne Sexton, and Eudora Welty have revised traditional folktales, aware of how they could be updated, told from different perspectives, or illustrate [sic] different morals. (Green 1)

The works of these writers, Green argues, "demonstrate how these folktale and literary fairy tale revisions subtly critique traditional notions" (1). Freeman's absent revisions do the same, though, commenting on gender roles and sexual politics. Sarah Orne Jewett, Freeman's contemporary and friend, has had her story "A White Heron" hailed by scholar Josephine Donovan as "a kind of reverse fairy tale in which 'Cinderella' rejects the handsome prince in order to preserve her woodland sanctuary" (Marchalonis 152). Freeman wrote to Jewett in August of 1889, "I never wrote any story equal to your 'White Heron". [sic] I dont [sic] think I ever read a short story . . . that so appealed to me" (Kendrick 97). Although Freeman has stated in many other instances that she does "not approve of this mystical vein that I am apt to slide into" (Kendrick 96), her admiration of "A White Heron" and the considerable connections among her adult and children's works belie such commentary. She also notes in a December 1889 letter to Jewett in reference to their inspiration for writing that "I suppose it seems to you as it does to me that everything you have heard, seen, or done, since you opened your eyes to the world, is coming back to you sooner or later, to go into stories (Kendrick 99). For Freeman, this "everything" includes fairy tales, which she read often as a girl and continued to read as an adult.

This study seeks to place Freeman within the tradition of women fairy tale revisionists. However, rather than focus now on the multitudes of female characters within her works and how Freeman revises their roles, I will herein enlarge the scholarly debate concerning her place as a fairy tale revisionist by examining Freeman's male characters. These figures have received very little critical attention throughout the history of Freeman studies. Whereas her women characters do revise fairy tale tropes, many

times suggesting that women are not helpless princesses in need of saving but are more than capable of taking care of themselves, as is the case with Louisa Ellis in "A New England Nun" or Sarah Penn in "The Revolt of 'Mother,'" Freeman's male characters also help the author revise fairy tale motifs, so they deserve special attention.

Most often in Freeman's revised fairy tales or in those stories that clearly draw upon folk or fairy elements, men fall into three categories. They are princes, beasts, or royal pains. If they are princes, which term I define as *goodly, nice,* or *simply worth the while of the women folk with whom they associate*, they usually must experience some sort of transformation of attitude, appearance, or reputation. In essence, they may appear to be beasts before showing their true colors. If they are truly beasts, on the other hand, they tend to stay beasts. If they are royal pains, weak-willed, or a general nuisance, Freeman often finds ways to disregard them or to have her female figures overpower them. As Perry Westbrook states, "In Miss Wilkins' stories, New England villages were the habitat of termagants whose ferocious wills reduced their luck-less men folk to a state of whimpering subserviency" (60). Of the three categories, royal pains receive the brunt of the willpower from Freeman's reborn Cinderellas, Rapunzels, and Little Red Riding Hoods.

Royal pains, though perhaps never before named as such, are the one category of male characters that critics have given some attention to in their analyses. For example, Leah Blatt Glasser deals effectively with these men in her book *In a Closet Hidden*, in which she explores "the intense level of protest evident in Freeman's descriptions of conflict between men and women" (214). Doris J. Turkes has also recently discussed these types of characters in a sociological interpretation of Freeman's elder women in her

"Must Age Equal Failure?: Sociology Looks at Mary Wilkins Freeman's Old Women" (*American Transcendental Quarterly*, September 1999). Within the study, Turkes argues that the success that Freeman's elderly women have in fending off assertions of masculine power relates directly to how they handle eight psychological life crises. Among those older women who, she argues, have chosen vigor over defeat through their dealing with those crises, in effect allowing them to cast off their royal pains, are Esther Gray of "An Independent Thinker," Hetty Fifield of "A Church Mouse," and Christmas Jenny from the story of the same name.

Other stories in which royal pains assert their authority over women include "A Poetess" and "A Village Singer." Instances in which men do not directly oppose women but take actions that nonetheless interfere with women's desired lifestyles include "A New England Nun," wherein Joe Daggett is intent on keeping his promise to marry his betrothed, Louisa Ellis, who, in turn, is intent on living her own life. Since other scholars have adequately traced the paths of these assorted royal pains, this study will focus on the male characters in the other two less studied categories: princes and beasts.

Though one might easily gain the impression that Freeman held little regard for men in her life or in her fiction due to her late marriage, the relative lack of commentary about men in her letters, and her overwhelming focus on women and girls in her adult literature, Freeman is far from a militant feminist. In fact, many of Freeman's men are honorable, charitable, loving human beings who sometimes play the role of the quintessential fairy tale prince. Even when these men do not become princely saviors, they rarely are treated with the scrutiny that many of Freeman's lesser men receive. Or, at least the scrutiny ends once they are seen for who they truly are. Like the prince in De

Beaumont's most famous tale, Freeman's best men, her prince charmings, at first seem beastly and gain little respect among the powerful, queenly women of her fiction. Ultimately, however, they experience a change that shows their true natures.

This theme of positive transformation is evident in Freeman's children's fiction, as is readily seen in "The Dickey Boy." First published in *St. Nicholas* children's magazine in 1891 and later collected in *Young Lucretia and Other Stories* (1892), it is a tale that sees Dickey, recently orphaned, change from suspicious outsider to accepted son. The boy experiences a transformation of reputation that, along with the changing views of the women folk who take him in, eventually gains him new status as one of Freeman's princes.

The story begins with Mrs. Rose and Mrs. Elvira Grayson worrying about Mrs. Rose's son Willy, who has been away digging up sassafras roots for longer than they would have liked. The boy finally appears and is followed by Mrs. Rose's brother, Hiram, who arrives in an open buggy pulled by a white horse. With him is a small, white-haired boy (195). Hiram asks if the two women need the boy to help them with chores, but once they learn he is a Dickey, they are immediately suspicious: "'One of those Dickeys?' Mrs. Rose said 'Dickeys,' [sic] as if it were a synonym for 'outcasts' or 'rascals'" (196). Hiram has the boy run off to play with Willy as he tries to convince the ladies that the boy is better than his reputation, but they are not easily convinced. Mrs. Rose believes "his folks are nothin' but a pack of thieves" (197), but Hiram finally persuades her to give the boy a trial run.

Hiram's method of persuasion is essential to the story's overall theme of transformation. He uses feminine authority to help place the boy in his sister's home.

Even when men or boy characters are truly good, Freeman judges them in the context of feminine approval before they can be recognized as such. Three times Hiram explains to the women that the boy's former neighbor, Mis' Ruggles, has utmost faith in the boy. He states, "Mis' Ruggles. . . says he's a real nice little fellow" (198) and elaborates that she "says she'd trust him with anything" (198) and "he was perfectly safe" (199). This feminine approval finally wins the boy entrance into the new home, and Hiram leaves him there with a few clothes and a small box, which is nailed shut. Though Dickey, as he comes to be called, is accepted into the home, he is far from trusted. Mrs. Rose is convinced that he has a pistol in his nailed box, and the women immediately hide their valuables, such as silver spoons and assorted jewelry.

Dickey, however, has already proved them wrong. While Mrs. Rose and Elvira were examining his mysterious box, he had joined Willy in cleaning sassafras roots, proving himself to be a good helper. As time passes, "finally suspicion was allayed if not destroyed" (203), but there is still a rift among the household. Dickey sees Mrs. Rose as "almost impressive as a queen," and her son "seemed to him like a small prince" (204). Likewise, Dickey seemed to them "like an animal of another species" (205). Further, they still will not leave the boy by himself and continue to guard their valuables, even though the boy has earned some acceptance in the family. This is most notably seen when Hiram gives Dickey a sweet-apple tree from his nearby orchard, a gift the boy cares for religiously.

Finally, the women have what they believe to be a reason for all their suspicions. One morning a silver spoon comes up missing, and they immediately suspect Dickey, who denies all charges to no avail. The women simply will not trust him: "It won't make

it any easier for you, holding out this way," states the adamant Mrs. Rose (209). Deeply hurt by the allegations, Dickey runs away, and the two are sure he does so "to escape a whipping" (210). Mrs. Rose then decides the spoon must be in the boy's nailed box, but when it is pried open, the impetus for transformation in the story begins. Inside, the women find the boy's mother's calico apron and his father's pipe. Sentiment overwhelms the women, who see in these items the true soul of the odd lad. The moment of truth is played out for greater drama when Willy enters with a muddy silver spoon, which he explains he used for digging in his garden days ago but forgot to return. At this moment the women are transformed. They no longer see Dickey as a "rascal" but as a caring, loving boy. They immediately search for him but do not find him until the next morning, by which time a May storm has blown through. Hiram finally finds the boy, "like a little drenched, storm-beaten bird" clinging to some branches of his sweet-apple tree; "he had flown to his one solitary possession for a refuge" (214). He is then nursed back to health, and *his* transformation is completed when he becomes as much a son to Mrs. Rose as her own Willy. She "kissed him just as she kissed Willy"; Elvira lets him hold her golden watch, and Hiram even gives the boy a silver dollar (214). Freeman drives the theme of transformation home in the last line: "She [Rose] had made room for him in her staunch, narrow New England heart" (215).

"The Dickey Boy" has received little critical attention, despite its artistry and the important themes that carry over into Freeman's adult canon. Henry Steele Commager of *St. Nicholas* deemed it so exemplary that he placed it in *The St. Nicholas Anthology* (c.1948), a book that May Lamberton Becker, in her introduction, calls "a living memory" (xvii), but few, if any, have touched on it since. The story was written when

Freeman was already established as an adult writer, actually postdating *A Humble Romance and Other Stories* by four years, and illustrates that Freeman was exploring themes of transformation in her children's work alongside her adult fiction. In terms of fairy tales, the story shows a rascal or beastly young man transformed into a perfect son. He, too, has become a prince to the queen in the end of the story, his transformation at the hands of her feminine authority yielding total acceptance into a new family. As Jack Zipes says in his preface to *Don't Bet on the Prince*, a collection of feminist fairy tale retellings, women fairy tale revisionists "challenge conventional views of gender, socialisation [sic], and sex roles, but they also map out an alternative aesthetic terrain for the fairy tale as genre to open up new horizons for readers and writers alike" (xi). By obviously situating Dickey's transformation of reputation within a feminine discourse and beholding to feminine approval, Freeman challenges cultural notions of what makes a good man (or boy) good, and reminds her reading audience of the palpable if not many times downplayed power of women in terms of the development of such good men. Dickey, though obviously a good child from the beginning, is recognized as such only when the women in his life accept his goodness as fact. Essentially, the women have symbolically *made* Dickey a good boy through their recognition, just as women have always had a large part in "making men" through their roles as mothers.

Dickey is not alone in his transformation. Many other male characters in Freeman's fiction experience similar changes from that which is, or which appears to be, foreign, frightening, or ill-spirited to that which, in fairy tale terms, makes them seem more princely. Sometimes the "prince" imagery is subtly present within these tales of transformation, as it is in "The Dickey Boy." In others it is more obvious.

For example, Adoniram Penn is a man who also undergoes a transformation after feminine authority asserts itself. At first glance, many might see Adoniram, who has put off fulfilling a promise to his wife to build a new house for forty years, and who has recently begun to build a new barn instead, as a candidate for being a royal pain. However, his wife's strong assertions of her own will and desires for her family that are manifested when she moves her family into the new barn reveal to readers another side of Sarah Penn's husband, one that causes readers to see him in a new, transformed light. Freeman says of him, once he realizes the magnitude of his ignorance, "Adoniram was like a fortress whose walls had no active resistance, and went down the instant the right besieging tools were used. 'Why, mother,' he said, hoarsely, 'I had no idee you was so set on't as all this comes to'" (*NEN* 468). The war imagery established through such words as "fortress," "besieging tools," and "triumph," evokes scenes of medieval conquests, or fairy or folk tales dealing with knights, castles, dragons, and conquests. Elizabeth Meese informs us that early Freeman scholar Edward Foster called the story a "comic folktale" (Marchalonis 172). Further, it is not too far of a stretch to suggest that Sarah is like one of the women in a nursery rhyme with which Freeman undoubtedly would have been familiar, given her inclination to the genre throughout her life. Sarah Penn, in her cluttered, small home that has rapidly outgrown her family's need, is very much like the old woman who lives in a shoe, but in Freeman's revised tale, she knows exactly *what* to do.

Further credence to seeing this otherwise seemingly realist story as fantastical or uncanny comes from Freeman herself, who later in her life, in an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* (Dec.8, 1917), said it is "the story by which I consider myself lamentably

best known" (Marchalonis 65). Freeman's discomfort about the story may have something to do with the claim that "all fiction ought to be true"; she says of Sarah's story, it "is not in the least" (65). Freeman continues, "There never was in New England a woman like Mother. . . . New England women of that period coincided with their husbands in thinking" (65-6). Freeman clearly sees the story as something other than realism. It is also a distinct possibility, though, that Freeman is doing what many authors have done in similar situations: toying with her reading audience. After all, Freeman had published hundreds of poems and short stories saturated in the fantastical in children's magazines for over thirty years when she wrote the above retraction, and she had only fourteen years before published a collection of uncanny tales in *The Wind in the Rose-Bush and Other Stories of the Supernatural*. Having experienced a decline in her popularity that began as early as 1900, Freeman's retraction could be a subtle criticism of those who in 1917 were already espousing reductive readings of her astoundingly diverse body of work.

The transformation motif so dominant in many fairy tales is undeniably present in this controversial work. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. has stated of Sarah that she is "the real thing, a female who successfully revolts against and liberates herself from a familial situation of pernicious male dominance" (Marachalonis 132), but by the story's end, Adoniram has transformed into a warm, loving, even sentimental figure whom we are led to believe will no longer thwart Sarah's attempts to make a new home for her family. "Pernicious" seems a strong choice of words considering Adoniram's transformation in the face of his wife's assertion of feminine authority. Adoniram appears to be truly

touched by his wife's actions. Hence, Adoniram, on the surface a royal pain, has, at the end, the possibility of becoming one of Freeman's prince figures.

Freeman introduces more definite prince figures in other stories. George Arnold in "Calla-Lilies and Hannah," for example, is the quintessential "hero to the rescue," saving his lover even as he transforms both their reputations and social status. However, George is unique in that he defines his own terms for his transformation and is actually the driving force behind Hannah's as well. Having been accused of stealing money from local religious leader John Arnold years ago, Hannah Redman is the town outcast. She has been dismissed from her church congregation and is the subject of much gossip. As with Dickey, no one trusts her. However, when her betrothed George returns to town after an extended absence, he is shocked to learn of Hannah's circumstances and reputation. George informs her that he took the money from his father (John Arnold), and, further, that it was his own money to begin with. He then selflessly proves himself an honest man and a sincere suitor: "I'll clear you, dear. Every soul in town shall know just what you are," he pledges (116). At the next church service, directly after the two are wed, he makes good on his promise. As "his yellow, curled head towered up bravely," George states to the congregation, including his father, "This lady beside me, who is now my wife, has been accused of theft from my father. She had born [sic] what she has had to bear from you all to shield me" (119). Then, the two leave for her house to gather her things. George has also promised to "take [her] away from the lot of them, out of the reach of their tongues" (116). His confession transforms Hannah's reputation, and his, too, is changed now that he no longer has a secret to hide.

George thus reveals himself to be a perfect prince-figure in this story, which does not so much revise folk and fairy tropes as it embraces them in a modern incarnation. Unlike the case with many of Freeman's other princes, George does not have his transformation come about through feminine authority but from his own strong sense of morality. To be sure, his masculine authority with Hannah and the congregation is what leads to Hannah's transformation. Faye Wright Hardiman, in her dissertation "Mary Wilkins Freeman's Men: Finding Masculinity in a Women's World," asserts that Freeman's work oftentimes "reflects the literary images of masculinity that emerged over the century, supporting and challenging the historical models that shaped masculinity" (1). "Calla-Lilies and Hannah" shows that whereas Freeman is adroit at revising those folk notions of damsels in distress and their dashing young saviors, she is indeed just as comfortable embracing them if this means revising masculine models as well.

In contrast, "Louisa" presents a suitor who is even better established as a prince than is George Arnold, but disagreements among feminine authorities lead to a fairy tale revision in which the perceived princess, Louisa Britton, would rather do without this prince. According to Bruno Bettelheim,

> Every child at some time wishes that he were a prince or princess – and at times, in his unconscious, the child believes he is one, only temporarily degraded by circumstances. There are so many kings and queens in fairy tales because their rank signifies absolute power, such as the parent seems to hold over the child. So the fairy tale royalty represents projections of the child's imagination. (205)

Freeman revises this notion in "Louisa" by making Louisa Britton's mother the one whose imagination is being projected. Mrs. Britton, a born aristocrat who has recently

fallen "in sore straights" (*NEN* 394), sees Jonathan Nye as the young hero who will save her daughter from a life of hard work and servitude to the more wealthy Mitchells, for whom Louisa works to help make ends meet. Freeman informs her readers that Mrs. Britton "had a feeling of a queen for a princess of the blood about her school-teacher daughter [Louisa] . . . . The projected marriage to Jonathan Nye was like a royal alliance for the good of the state" (394-5). However, although Louisa has never met a man she favored more than Nye, she does not love him, of which fact she informs her mother. For Mrs. Britton, however, "there was not more sense, to her mind, in Louisa's refusing him than there would have been in a princess refusing the fairy prince and spoiling the story" (395). But that is exactly what happens. Freeman revises those norms to her own end. In fact, at the next church meeting Louisa and Nye attend together, Louisa makes sure to thrust her dirty hands as far out from her sleeves as she can, profoundly disturbing Nye's sensibilities when he sees the brown stains on her worker's hands:

> She had never heard of a princess who destroyed her beauty that she might not be forced to wed the man whom she did not love, but she had something of the same feeling, although she did not have it for the sake of any tangible lover. Louisa had never seen anybody whom she preferred to Jonathan Nye. There was no other marriageable young man in the place. She had only her dreams, which she had in common with other girls. (396)

Freeman is determined that this will not be one of the multitudes of fairy tales in which the young girl finds herself forced to marry. Instead, Louisa rejects her prince, her feminine inclinations clashing with those of her mother. In the conclusion, her overpowering feminine authority again forces transformation of the prince figure. This

time, however, the transformation is a change in affection and direction as Nye takes Louisa's hint and finds a new girl to court. When she later sees him walk by her window, "Louisa turned again from him to her sweet, mysterious, girlish dreams" (406). Just as "Calla-Lilies and Hannah" embraces fairy tale modes, revising them by placing them in a more contemporary setting in which their representations of male and female behavioral patterns are still widely accepted cultural norms, "Louisa" turns those norms on their heads as Freeman portrays a worthy prince whose princess would rather be left alone with her own notions of happily ever after.

Hardiman says of Freeman's men that they are "often depicted as weak or despicable" (1). This is true to the extent that in many of Freeman's stories, men do their best to thwart the harmless desires of women simply because those desires do not mesh with social standards. These men are royal pains and are despicable mostly because they are to readers, in Freeman's age and today, annoying, closed-minded chauvinists. However, one man within Freeman's canon is despicable for more dubious reasons, and this beast appears, appropriately, in one of Freeman's most haunting fairy tale revisions.

Structurally and thematically, it is hard not to see "Old Woman Magoun" as a revision of "Little Red Riding Hood." Both tales have at their center young girls who take dangerous journeys into the unknown for their grandmothers. Both also incorporate "the traditional depiction of the young girl encountering a wolf in the woods" (Zipes, *Don't Bet* 226), though Lily, the young girl in Freeman's version, enters symbolic woods on her first lone walk to the local general store. Jack Zipes, who has done extensive work with this particular fairy tale, says of the two most popular versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" that both "Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers [who collected versions of the

story] transformed an oral folk tale about the social initiation of a young woman into a narrative about rape in which the heroine is obliged to bear the responsibility for sexual violation" (*Don't Bet* 227). Zipes has also said of the Grimms' version of "Little Red Riding Hood" that it is one of the tales which the brothers edited to remove most of the "erotic and sexual elements"; he further states of the tale that it "underline[s] morals in keeping with. . . patriarchical notions of sex roles" (*When Dreams* 74-5). Freeman discounts those patriarchal notions in her version by having a strong grandmother figure save her granddaughter from the wolves, though at great cost. Further, Magoun makes it her mission, once Lily is placed in a similar situation as Perrault's and the Grimms' Little Red, to see to it that Lily does not "bear the responsibility of sexual violation" through rape as, it is very possible, did her own daughter, Lily's mother.

A version of "Little Red Riding Hood" from *The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales* (Gramercy, 1981) appears to be the one with which Freeman might have been most familiar. Both stories begin similarly with the charge to the young girl to embark on a journey. The tale's mother demands,

> Come, Red Riding-hood, I want you to go see your grandmother, and take her a piece of cake. . . . Make haste . . . and go straight on your road while you are out, and behave prettily and modestly . . . . When you pass through the village, do not forget to curtsy and say "good-morning" to everyone you know. (109)

Similarly, Old Woman Magoun, Lily's grandmother, sets her granddaughter on her path. Lily's mother is dead, and within Magoun's appropriation of motherly authority we see the first trace of Freeman's revision. Magoun, who is out of salt but is too busy to go to the store herself, tells Lily, "Don't stop to talk with anybody, for I am in a hurry for that

salt. Of course, if anybody speaks to you answer them polite, and then come right along" (Reichardt 363). The orders are strikingly similar, too similar to be disregarded. Further, Freeman sneaks in a subtle signifier when Magoun tells Lily to put on her hat, making sure her granddaughter, too, is bedecked with a riding hood of sorts. Freeman also makes sure to focus on the hat once Lily comes into contact with her first beast-figure, informing readers that the hat "form[ed] an oval frame for her innocent face" (364), just as a hood would.

Shortly after venturing into their respective new territories, both girls encounter sexual forces for the first time: "No sooner had Little Red Riding-hood entered the wood than she met a wolf" (109). Likewise, Jim Willis, who Lily notes "was very handsome indeed" (Reichardt 364), appears along Lily's way, and he begins to warm up to her upon "start[ing] at the revelation of her innocent beauty" (364). Willis eventually takes her hand and walks with her. However, Lily, who at first "felt complete trust in him" and who feels an initial attraction towards Willis, soon grows uncomfortable. He asks her age, to which question she replies "Fourteen." His response is "As old as that?" and Lily shrinks from the man: "She could not have told why. She pulled her little hand from his, and he let it go with no remonstrance. She clasped both her arms around her rag doll, in order that her hand should not be free for him to grasp again" (364). Lily's awakened sexual adult self, that which felt a strong pull to the man, appears to understand innately the sexual undertones of his surprise. From that moment on, Willis wants Lily. He does not talk with her much while they walk besides to ask her age, but, later, when her father tries to give her to Willis in order to settle a gambling debt, it becomes clear that Willis is

of the same mindset as Little Red's wolf, who thinks to himself "this little delicate thing would be a sweet morsel for me" (110).

Little Red's wolf eventually does get the better of her, tricking her into moving ever closer to her grandmother's bed, which he now inhabits, having eaten the grandmother. The girl pays for her curiosity and is also eaten by the wolf. Since, as Zipes says of the tale, "Only a strong male figure can rescue a girl from herself and her lustful desires" (*Don't Bet* 230), a nearby hunter resolves the story by splitting open the wolf and freeing the two entombed but whole and still alive bodies. Zipes points out that many scholars see this eating as a "sexual motif" (230). He continues, "As every reader/viewer subconsciously knows, Little Red Riding Hood is not sent into the woods to visit grandma but to meet the wolf and to explore her own sexual cravings and social rules of conduct" (239). Little Red escapes when the male-figure arrives, but Freeman gives Lily no such prince. Instead, Magoun saves her from the belly of the wolf, as Freeman's revision features rather an authoritative female who sets things right as best she can.

At the store, Lily meets her father, the deadbeat scoundrel Nelson Barry, whom Magoun despises for how he treated Lily's now-deceased mother. Lily's mother, Freeman says, "was married at sixteen. There had been rumors, but no one dare openly gainsay the old woman. She said that her daughter had married Nelson Barry, and he had deserted her" (362). It is little wonder that Magoun sees Barry as a "fairly dangerous degenerate" (362). It is also possible that Barry did not marry Lily's mother, or, even more odious, that he raped her. He is indeed the most beastly of Freeman's few beast figures in her fairy tale revisions, Willis a close second. Upon talking with his daughter, he kisses her. The kiss cannot be passed off as a fatherly peck, though. Lily again "shrank

away" and immediately "rubbed her mouth violently," to which action Barry replies "Damn it all! I believe she is afraid of me" (365). Though his breath does reek of whisky, that Lily rubs her mouth proves that the kiss was more intrusive, more intimate, than she cared for. Lily, however, cannot escape all his advances. When he offers her candy, she gladly accepts, stepping ever closer to the bed of his personal designs for her.

In the Gramercy version of the Grimms' tale, Little Red Riding Hood meets another wolf later in her journey as well. Further, his plans are thwarted by the grandmother who "knew what was in his mind" (113). When Magoun learns of Lily's visit with her father, she, too, seems to know that Barry is up to no good. "You go right up-stairs to your own chamber now," she says, already knowing she needs to protect her granddaughter (367). Sure enough, Barry soon visits Magoun, and in their exchange he proves himself to be a most beastly character.

Barry is direct in his intentions: "I want her," he says (369), the sexual overtones obvious. He is direct with his desires to Magoun, and he has already physically embraced Lily in an inappropriate manner. In fact, by this time readers are aware that he and Willis have a mysterious deal in the works – he tells Willis, "Jim you got to stick to your promise" (371) – that might suggest that Lily will be swapped between the two of them, that Barry has his mind set on doing to Lily what he possibly did to her mother. Magoun appears cognizant of it all, though, and she does her best to thwart Nelson Barry's ghastly scheme.

It is no easy task, however. Freeman instills Barry with an almost supernatural will of iron to rival that of any of her women characters'. He tells Magoun, "Well, there is no use talking. I have made up my mind . . . and you know what that means. I am going

to have the girl" (370). Magoun, strong-willed herself, crumbles in apparent defeat, acquiescing to his demands and agreeing to have Lily ready for him within a week. Once he leaves, though, her role as Lily's savior, her prince-figure in a skirt, comes into play. She will not have Lily suffer the same fate at the hands of those wolves as did her mother. She attempts to get a prominent couple from a nearby town to adopt Lily, but that fails when the couple learn Lily is of Barry blood. At her wit's end, Magoun turns to drastic measures on their walk back home. She allows Lily to eat berries from a bed of nightshade. Here, too, sexual undercurrents become overt. Nightshade has a root system that some suggest appears to be in the form of a human body. As long as Lily lives, she is in danger of sexual predators, the beasts, in her small town. If the old woman can no longer keep the girl from the temptations of man, she chooses to let ruin happen through indulgence of a literal forbidden fruit rather than at the hands of savage men.

Lily dies of the plant's poison, which death Magoun blames on the sour apples and milk Lily ate while in town. In her delirium, Lily tells her grandmother, " it is dark" (Reichardt 376), perhaps a revising of Little Red's similar statement, "it was dreadfully dark in the wolf's stomach" (Grimm 113). There is no hunter, no prince to save Lily. Freeman leaves it up to a capable, desperate woman who will see her granddaughter escape the domineering men of her village, no matter what the cost. The last line of "Little Red Riding Hood" in the Gramercy version, after both wolves have been vanquished, reads "no one attempted to hurt her on the road" (113). Magoun makes sure of the same, leaving Barry to wonder why his daughter and his "wife" both died of sour apples and milk.

Nelson Barry shows that within her fairy tale revisions, Freeman many times turns to women characters to play traditionally male roles, but that within those roles, women still have to work against a male-dominated social order. Within the authority that women do maintain, however, is the power to influence that order. Indeed, feminine influence is such that Freeman's men can be divided into three categories based on how they interact with her women characters and how those willful females view them: as princes, beasts, or royal pains. These groupings are apparent in stories that show little trace of fairy tale influence but are especially strong in those stories in which Freeman explores and adapts obvious fairy tale themes. Therefore, Freeman's men deserve more study not only in relation to the already established approaches to her work but, also, as Dickey, George Arnold, Nelson Barry, Jim Willis and others perfectly illustrate, in attempts finally to recognize the fairy tale influence in Freeman's complete canon and her place within the tradition of feminist fairy tale revisionists.

Conclusion:
A Market for Magic?

This study began by exploring Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "The Prism" as a story permeated with interrelations between its main character, Diantha Fielding, and the life and works of its author. Establishing the story as highly biographical, this analysis used the story as a frame to suggest the potent influence that fairy tales and the fantastical had on Freeman throughout her tenure as a successful writer, exploring her obvious use of fairy tales in her children's fiction and her aesthetic evolution as a writer by exposing how she continued to mesh fairy tale elements into her own adult agenda. But, were there economic motivations behind Freeman's now clearly illustrated incorporation of fairy tale elements into her work? Was there a market for stories with a tinge of magic, for those tales such that Freeman wrote which on the surface seem to be catering to the dominant literary force of its day – realism – but also subversively integrating elements of the fantastic and uncanny? Further, does evidence indicate that Freeman was conscious of these undercurrents if indeed they existed?

The answer on all accounts is a convincing "yes." An examination of Freeman and the market in which she worked shows that fairies, magic, and the supernatural was indeed in vogue throughout much of the late 1800s and even into the twentieth century. Further, Freeman's adroit business sense has been well documented, providing evidence that such a keen purveyor of the literary market as Freeman might have had more motivation for incorporating uncanny components within her work beyond simply using the materials from the genre with which she was very familiar.

The volumes of *Wide Awake* spanning 1882-1884 and the *St. Nicholas* magazine discussed in Chapter 2 prove, through the sheer number of works referencing uncanny characters in their titles, that, among children's publications especially, fairies, goblins and other magical creatures were in high demand throughout the 1880s. For example, appearing within the same pages of *St. Nicholas* as Freeman's "The Ballad of the Blacksmith's Sons" in December of 1887 were stories such as "Santa Claus in the Pilpit" and "A Winter Elf." Advertisements for Chas. E. Carryl's novel *Davy and the Goblin*, Mary Brine's *The Stories Grandma Told*, an edition of *Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales*, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's *Prince Little Boy, and Other Tales Out of Fairy-Land* also appeared. Even a collection of children's piano compositions entitled "Fairy Fingers" was offered to the reading public.

This desire for magic among readers of such publications as *Wide Awake* and *St. Nicholas* does not apply only to adolescent audiences. As Ellen Garvey has noted, in the late nineteenth century, "Magazines such as *Munsey's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Ladies World*, and even *St. Nicholas* became women's trade press" (Garvey 1). The magazines were by this time appealing to women as readers and women as consumers, and, apparently, based on the numbers of stories with uncanny elements central to them, women were in the market for magic, if not for themselves exclusively, then for their children. Intelligent conjecture may also suggest that women of the 1880s and 90s, as readers and consumers, would have had a special interest in the fantastic. After all, this is the period of American history during which women were expected to adhere to strict social codes of behavior, what Barbara Welter has described as the Cult of True Womanhood in an article of the same name. "Divided into four virtues – piety, purity,

submissiveness, and domesticity" (Welter 152), the Cult was composed of such high standards that "if anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues. . ., he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization, and of the republic" (152). Though Welter says these standards were greatest from 1820 to 1860, women continued to feel this oppressiveness, which restricted their learning, their actions and their overall potential, in later decades. These same women might very well have seen in stories of fairies, goblins, and magic a means through which to escape the rigors of the Cult of True Womanhood. Jack Zipes says,

> the flowering of the fairy tale in Europe and America during the latter half of the nineteenth century has a great deal to do with alienation. As daily life became more structured, work more rationalized, and institutions more bureaucratic, there was little space left for daydreaming and the imagination. It was the fairy tale that provided room for amusement, nonsense, and recreation. (*When Dreams* 21)

Many women of late nineteenth-century America knew that all too well.

Conversely, it is just as likely that men, immensely empowered by the social code of behavior, would have supported women's reading such material. Fairy tales are to this day still stigmatized as children's literature, as a sort of lesser echelon within *belles lettres*, and, as Welter points out, " No matter what later authorities claimed, the nineteenth century knew that a girl could be ruined by a book" (166). So, the reading of the right kinds of books would have been essential to the preservation of male authority. Fairy tales or books and stories similar to them would have, from the points of view of many, kept women occupied with material that in their eyes would not present intellectual stimulation enough to challenge notions of masculine discourse and authority.

In fact, such stories often reinforced such notions. As Zipes says, "It has been generally assumed that fairy tales were first created for children and are largely the domain of children. Nothing could be further from the truth" (*When Dreams* 1). Zipes also points out that by 1870, fairy stories were appearing in primers throughout the Western world. Fairy tales or fairy tale types of stories, from the male perspective, could have been doubly beneficial to upholding feminine standards in that they reinforced notions of accepted gender roles and, though the perception degraded the genre, were perceived as children's literature suitable for those with children's minds.

Further, Caroline Silver has recently explored the Victorian fascination with magic in her novel *Strange and Secret Peoples* (Oxford, 1999). She reveals that fairies were very much on the minds of nineteenth-century folks on the other side of the Atlantic: "The Victorian's enthrallment [with fairies] is vividly revealed in the fairy tales and fantasies, written for both children and adults, that surface to create the 'Golden Age of Children's Literature' and to begin the passion of the twentieth century for fantasies for grownups" (4). Silver, in fact, suggests that among many nineteenth-century British writers, such as George Eliot, Dickens, Wilde, and Carlyle, subversive fairy tale allusions were already popular. She points to an allusion to "Rumpelstiltskin" in *Middlemarch* as pivotal: "George Eliot's allusion suggests that fairy lore and fairy myth penetrated even the so-called realist tradition" (5).

Freeman is indeed within that very "so-called realist tradition." Within the terms Silver sets forth, we see that Freeman had very strong motivations for lacing her stories with magical elements outside of the fact that fairy tales were the stories with which she had always had a strong familiarity. Further, that such canonical giants as Eliot and

Dickens use fairy tale allusions in their works places Freeman within yet another greater tradition than has as of yet not been credited to her. As Charles Johanningsmeier has noted, Freeman was immensely popular in England: "By 1890, there was 'something like a craze' for Freeman's stories in Britain" (*The Current State* 6), and as he has elsewhere noted, "Wilkins fully recognized that in the modern world [her] stories were not only works of art but also commodities to be bought and sold" (*Two Shrewd* 82). By writing stories with interwoven fairy elements, Freeman was not only working with material with which she was at ease but tapping the prime market of her eager British public as well. Furthermore, doing so could have helped her reputation overseas all the more by showing that her work was in the popular vein of major British contemporaries.

On her home soil, there is much more documented evidence to show that Freeman was a market-savvy writer. Brent Kendrick's collection of her letters shows a woman aware of her good fortune at having found a stable outlet for her fiction in Harper and Brothers, for example. In one letter she informed a rival publisher, Lee and Shepard, that "I cannot now let any but my publishers, Harper and Brothers publish one of my books. I am very sorry, and I thank you sincerely for your offer " (Kendrick 128). She later told Horace Elisha Scudder that Harper and Brothers "have treated me very fairly, and expect me now to send my stories to their periodicals" (129). She was being treated well, indeed. As Kendrick has noted, Freeman was eventually getting paid upfront and on the back end as her stories were collected into books.

But American realism has appeared less interested with those elements of magic than British realism. What motivations for using fairy tale themes and tropes could Freeman have found at home? By creating stories fringed with magic but which

ultimately have female characters face punishment for their rebellious ways, which happens often in her stories, she is feeding the popular masculine authority with material that, like fairy tales themselves, on the surface reinforce that gender discourse. Therefore, she does not run the risk of disrupting the sensibilities of her male-dominated publishers. On the other hand, she is providing restricted women at all levels of American reading culture an outlet for escape from their own oppression. In this manner, her stories act as therapy, much the way Janice Radway suggests contemporary romance novels do: they "allow the women to refuse momentarily their self-abnegating social role" (Rivkin and Ryan 1043). "The Prism" suggests that American audiences wanted Freeman and other writers to bury the hints of magic in their works in favor of more realistic texts. However, Freeman's subversive use of those self-same elements within stories she might well have known would be considered realist by her American editors but would at the same time reach a trans-Atlantic audience pining for those tinges of magic, whether for escapism, fashion, or custom, proves that Freeman was quite possibly a woman even more aware of the literary marketplace than ever before considered. That she was able to embrace the masculine discourse of the market and of everyday life even as her characters time and again defied it shows her extreme savvy. That she was able to see in the larger market a subversive desire for fairy tales – the types of literature she read as a child, always loved, and let shape her complete canon – lends that much more credence to the claim that scholars must recognize in all their complexities the fairy vein that runs throughout her fiction.

The prism is, after all, not destroyed but buried deep.

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