

MAGICAL ILLUSION: FAIRY-TALE FILM

Film versions of fairy tale are inevitable, given the extreme adaptability shown by fairy-tale structures across the centuries, and its ability to continually reinvent its voices, settings, and message as well as its medium of expression. As with the adaptation of oral folktale into written literature, the adaptation of written literature into film brings with it the possibilities and the constraints of the new medium: if writing and the printed book reinvented the oral tale, cinema's impact on literary storytelling is perhaps even more profound. Film is a vitally different form of expression from the book, and its creation—technical, massively expensive, requiring the input and skills of a large and diverse body of contributors—hugely exaggerates the importance of technology in the transmission of cultural artifacts. This leap in the complexity of the process is enabled by the concomitant leap in audience: the twentieth century saw the development of the mass market, the ability of texts to reach more people more easily than ever before. The distance from the cozy oral storyteller in a small circle of listeners could not be greater. With the new costs and new audience naturally come new constraints on the narrative, which must be adapted to its viewers on a far broader and less personal scale to provide the necessary mass appeal which will recoup the enormous costs of production. Film thus has a dual nature as an exciting and powerfully visual form of artistic expression but also as a medium operating within the consumerist paradigm of modern mass culture. Both film-as-art and film-as-product retain the potential to offer an essentially self-reflexive notion of narrative, metafiction given new expression by a new technology.

From the earliest days of cinema, in texts such as the experimental fairy-tale films of Georges Méliès, fairy-tale film has been extremely successful. Fairy-tale motifs adapt easily to the visual, and fairy tale's

clear, simplified narratives are also far more conveniently adaptable to the time-scale of a film than are the detailed textures and events of a novel. This thematic simplicity also possibly explains why fairy-tale film has become strongly associated with the particular film medium of animation, a form which similarly refuses to reflect a realistically textured world. On the narrative level, fairy-tale film offers an obvious articulation of the classic Hollywood “fairy-tale” plot, which relies heavily on the comedic marriage resolution and on wish fulfillment and utopian impulses that empower the underdog. The close fit between film and fairy tale is also in some ways inevitable given folkloric narrative’s long history of happy interaction with theatrical as well as literary forms. Following the adaptation of folklore into the French aristocratic pursuits of the eighteenth century, fairy-tale motifs seem to have spread rapidly to the theater, ballet, and opera. The heyday of fairy-tale ballet in the nineteenth century saw the creation of such classics as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Nutcracker*, all with recognizable fairy-tale themes. In opera, fairy-tale awareness, although expanded into a more complex narrative, informs operas such as Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, Verdi’s *Vakula the Smith*, and Puccini’s *Turandot*.

As a symbolic genre, fairy tale has strong visual and dramatic potential. It is also obvious that the simple, ritualistic formulae of fairy tale would work well in ritualistic traditions, most notably ballet and opera, which are artistic productions whose meaning is expressed via a powerful system of structural codes (song, movement) rather than a process of realistic representation. Suzanne Rahn writes, “Like fairy tales, ballets are constructed as highly formalized narratives which make extensive use of repetition and tell their stories primarily through the physical actions of their characters” (in Zipes, *Oxford Companion* 34). In the twentieth century, the successful use of fairy tale in the Broadway musical follows a similar pattern; Stephen Sondheim’s 1986 musical *Into the Woods*, for example, explores the dangerous gap between fairy tale and real life in a manner similar to Pratchett’s *Witches Abroad*. Again, the musical is an artificial form whose encodings—the stock romantic characters, the likelihood of any character to break into song or dance at any moment—have very little to do with reality. Disney’s characteristic blending of the fairy tale and the musical is a good illustration of these similarities; films such as *Beauty and the Beast* not only use the musical format but also refer constantly to the Hollywood musical.

However, theater, ballet, and other live art forms face an inherent logical problem in visually representing the marvelous, relying on stylization or at times unconvincing mechanisms to pretend to the magi-

cal; Tolkien, typically, claims that “Fantasy . . . hardly ever succeeds in Drama. . . . Fantastic forms are not to be counterfeited” (49). This is in many ways an anachronistic view in the age of CGI (computer-generated imagery), and the verisimilitude of magical spectacle in film has seen a steady increase over the last hundred years, culminating in the giant leaps made by computer imagery in influential films such as Peter Jackson’s three-film version of *The Lord of the Rings*. Cinema’s tricky camera is thus ultimately able to overcome the difficulties of nonreal representation, harnessing fairy tale’s symbolic qualities to provide a rich visual texture. The contributions of special effects and CGI have made possible visual enchantments Tolkien could not have imagined, but the film/fairy tale fit is more profound than that; even in the early days of the medium, cinema has always been the site of magic. While apparently offering the real, it is a fertile ground for trickery, in which apparently real objects may disappear, reappear, change size or orientation, change shape—in fact, the whole of the special effects man’s box of tricks; David Galef’s discussion of Jean Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête* offers a detailed and interesting analysis of this kind of magical cinematic function. The authority of the camera is such that the impossible takes on the same status as the realistic, which is in any case a good working definition of magic.

On a more fundamental level, the magical paradigm of fairy tale finds echoes in the magic of the film experience even without special effects, in film’s ability to create the apparent three-dimensionality of the real on a flat, unmoving screen, through the trickery of light and image. Film powerfully realizes the transcendence over reality with which magical narrative is intrinsically concerned. This is, of course, another aspect of the debate André Bazin has called “the quarrel over realism in art” that arises from ongoing technical refinement; he suggests that the eye of the camera has the power to satisfy “our obsession with realism” and “our appetite for illusion” (12). Photography and film are particularly suited to the depiction of the fantastic because they are able to produce “a hallucination that is also a fact” (16); to blur, in fact, the boundaries between fiction and mimesis, although in a way which seldom denies its own illusion to produce the frame break which would signal metafictional play.

In addition to this, the absorbing effect of the film experience—the immersion of the viewer in a constructed reality—parallels the more traditional folk storytelling experience. Jack Zipes formulates a general theory of fairy-tale film, commenting on the importance of the storyteller’s ability to create a new, removed, and absorbing reality for his or her audience. He suggests, “A magic folk tale concerned not only the miraculous turn of events in the story, but also the magical

play of words by the teller as performer. . . . Telling a magic folk tale was and is not unlike performing a magic trick, and depending on the art of the storyteller, listeners are placed under a spell. They are . . . transcending reality for a brief moment, to be transported to extraordinary realms of experience" (*Happily Ever After* 63). In this characterization, cinema, like fairy tale, is a form of illusion, its viewers willingly suspending disbelief in order to surpass reality and experience the magical. Zipes notes the association between early filmmakers and stage magic—"magic lantern shows, magician's tricks, shadow theatres, animation devices . . ." (68). The filmmaker becomes the magician, the showman with the power of technological marvels, exerting the same spell as the storyteller, but with new, spectacular special effects.

The interaction of film and fairy tale does not, however, constitute an unproblematical romance. While the magic of film may parallel some aspects of fairy tale, at the same time a visual medium can be crippling to the kind of imaginative exercise usually required of the reader by almost any magical narrative. Tolkien goes as far as to deny the validity even of illustrated literary fairy tale: "The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a *visible* presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive" (80). In this context, film's presentation of realism is a problem as well as a strength. The recording eye of the camera intrinsically designates its objects as real, and the effect of watching a film is that of immersion in a highly detailed reality. In contrast, most forms of fantasy, fairy tale included, work on evocation, rather than being explicit; the process of imaginative interaction with the fantasy requires a tailoring of the fantasy world to the psychological reality of the individual. Film, in its extreme visuality, operates directly against this; a fairy-tale medium, in its metafictional awareness of craftedness, is specifically not realistic, and it may be jarring to have realistic representation on screen. Donald P. Haase's discussion of Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* raises the same point: "The one-dimensionality, the depthlessness, and the abstract style (Lüthi 4–36) of the fairy tale do not require the auditor or reader to envision a specific reality, and thereby they encourage imaginative belief in an unreal world. In the fairy tale, then, *not seeing* is believing" (90). Yet film paradoxically offers the potential for sending strong signals through visual details of setting and costume—the presence of self-conscious medievalism in a fairy-tale film, together with details of fairy-tale landscapes (forests, mountains, castles) may effectively signal the unreality of long ago and far away. Thus fairy-tale films such as *The Company of Wolves* and *The Grimm Brothers' Snow White* feature particularly vast and Gothic

stretches of forest, while *Ever After* makes effective use of medieval castles, sweeping landscapes, and beautiful costumes. Cocteau's unexplained surrealist images in the Beast's castle, and Jordan's dense use of apparently disconnected symbol (animals, roses, etc.) fulfill the same function. In this deliberate symbolic texturing, once again, fairy-tale film has the potential to realize visually the metafictional strategy at the heart of its structures, despite its illusory offering of realism.

FILM AND THE FOLK VOICE

A real fairy tale, a tale in its true function, is a tale within a circle of listeners. —KAREL CAPEK in Warner, *Beast to the Blonde* 17

There are various thematic matches between film and fairy-tale narrative, but cinematic versions of fairy tale can be seen to offer their own pitfalls and drawbacks. While the power of the film medium in modern society has provided a fertile new ground for fairy-tale cultural and ideological production, the medium of film offers problems as well as possibilities for fairy tale. One of the most insidious tendencies has been that of the powerful new visual medium, rooted firmly in modern technological popular culture, to supplant all other versions, and in so doing, to deliberately claim the folk voice originally excluded by the adaptation of fairy tale into a literary form. While parallel in many ways to the process by which oral folktale became written fairy tale, the adaptation from written fairy tale into fairy-tale film is more problematical precisely because of the power of the film medium, and the striking fit between some narrative aspects of fairy tale and the narrative function of film. To unwrap the dangers of this process will require examination of the uneasy, contested spaces of folk culture, popular culture, and mass culture.

As one of the more powerful and pervasive forms of popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first century, film offers an interesting context for the folk voice of fairy tale. Although the folktale has been replaced gradually with the literary fairy tale in the last few centuries, film versions of fairy tale tend to flirt superficially and self-consciously with the folk voice. As the most prevalent cinematic experience in Western culture, Hollywood film caters to a popular market, offering both entertainment and the opportunity to participate in a popular awareness of actors and film which centers on the Hollywood star system. Although a form of mass culture in its reliance on the budgets of wealthy studios, and the resulting need to commodify film

in order to fill cinema seats, film functions in modern Western culture as a group and social activity whose audience participates in an essentially nonliterary popular culture. Walter Ong argues for a modern notion of “secondary orality,” a development through literacy into a kind of postliteracy under technology; he points out that “the drive towards group sense and towards participatory activities, towards ‘happenings,’ which mysteriously emerges out of modern electronic technological cultures is strikingly similar to certain drives in preliterate cultures” (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* 284). The cinema experience offers far more of group participation than reading a written text. This inheres not only in the simultaneous experience of the film text, with shared reactions such as laughter, but also in the social activity around a common interest in film genres or specific stars, meeting to view a film, the discussion which often takes place either before or afterward over drinks or a meal. The experience of a home viewing of the video or DVD version of a film is an even more pronounced version of this communality. This is in many ways a superficial restoration of the communal folk experience of storytelling, in some senses reversing the historical translation of the oral folk voice into a written form experienced only by the individual, and reinstating it as shared cultural artifact. It also underlines the restitution offered the form after its appropriation by written narrative, and thus a social elite; Zipes comments that popular fairy-tale film “actually returns the fairy tale to the majority of people” (*Fairy Tale as Myth*, 83).

However, while a film is certainly more communal than a single individual reading a book, it is not a true folk culture. The group may share the experience, but it is not *produced* from within the group, nor does the production come from a source which has the same status—here defined economically—as group members. Likewise, interaction with the film narrative cannot equal the folk experience since film is a one-way process. The film modifies the experience of the viewer, but the film is not a genuine oral voice and cannot in its turn be modified in response to the audience, other than on the macrolevel represented by the research done by a studio’s marketing arm before the next film is made. Walter Benjamin suggests, in fact, that the reproduction of mass images ultimately denies the authenticity of the artistic object, its ability to transfer value, and that film “is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic effect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage” (II); the denial of tradition in this formulation speaks directly to the divide between folk and mass culture. Film may imitate folk culture, but if it functions as a true form of modern folk culture, it is within a somewhat radically restructured notion of “folk,” and, indeed, of “culture.”

In keeping with film's apparently transparent offer of itself as a substitute oral and folk tradition, many fairy-tale films rely heavily on an explicit evocation of the folk voice in order to frame and contextualize their narratives. In apparently receiving the story from the physical presence or voice of an onscreen narrator, the viewer is able to participate in the removal of the tale from literary capture, placing him or herself in the position of audience to an oral storyteller. The self-conscious recognition of viewer as "listener" taps into a notion of orality which is both artificial and idealized. The purpose here is only partially to participate in the metafictional play of crafted tale and its self-conscious pleasures; it is also to access the notions of communality and trust which inhere in modern notions of orality. Thus many Disney films begin with a voice-over giving the initial scenario of the tale in traditional fairy-tale form: "Once upon a time." This is usually accompanied by static images that characterize tale as artifact—*Sleeping Beauty's* medieval stills, *Beauty and the Beast's* stained-glass windows, the Grecian vases of *Hercules*. At the same time, many of Disney's films characteristically hedge their bets: the voice-over may well be associated with stills that strongly associate the tale with the written tradition, in the form of a beautifully calligraphed and illuminated book whose pages are turned as the voice-over progresses (*Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*). As well as invoking the nostalgic memory of the parent-to-child oral voice and the familiar form of the literary fairy tale, this also claims the historical status of literature—generally, in its association with literacy and education, *higher* than that of the oral tale—for the film. The use of this motif in Dreamworks' *Shrek* was notable for its acute and cynical insight into the actual status of the original tale as written narrative—Shrek's voice reads out the dragon-slaying fairy tale, after which the camera pulls back to reveal that the book is being used as toilet paper. This nods ironically to the fact that film versions of fairy tale have all but replaced the written, but the film's ideological project affirms the status of the film version in its suggestion that they *should* replace the written, which entrenches the outdated and reactionary social assumptions the film sets out to upset.

It is important to note, however, that invocation of the oral and literary are not sustained through most fairy-tale films, which quickly give way to the immersing experience of the moving image. The result is effectively to overwrite the literary and the oral with the cinematic. Jack Zipes picks up on this erasure in readings of fairy-tale film which generally rely on the characterization of modern fairy tale within a somewhat totalitarian sense of the culture industry. He argues that film has "silenced the personal and communal voice of the oral magic tales and obfuscated the personal voice of literary fairy-tale

narratives”; it focuses on image rather than text, distances its audience, and transforms traditional tales into standardized units of mass production (*Happily Ever After* 69). In this characterization, rather as the upper classes appropriated folk narrative in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the folk voice in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is colonized by a ruling monolith, although one that is commercial rather than aristocratic. Such a colonization entails, in Baudrillard’s terms, an actual *re-creation* of a spurious notion of orality; simultaneously, its commercial aspect redefines the awareness of artifact central to metafictional storytelling as, effectively, awareness of *product*. Zipes’s characterization of fairy tale as “secular instructive narratives” offering “strategies of intervention within the civilising process” (*Happily Ever After* 65) becomes more sinister when, rather than reflecting the mores and beliefs of the folk culture, fairy tales are used to reflect the conservative and market-driven ideologies of large companies marketing consumer culture. Such characterizations of mass cultural productions sound a note of alarm in their sense of a production elite which seeks to duplicate and usurp the popular or folk voice. Zipes’s argument implies that any claim of nostalgic orality or literariness in fairy-tale film is entirely spurious; logically, the elements of self-conscious play that I suggest are present become in his terms a cynical appropriation of fairy tale’s metafictional project by what are effectively market forces. He is, of course, engaging in cultural criticism firmly in the mode of the Frankfurt School, and more specifically Adorno and Horkheimer, who suggest that modern consumer culture is a process of the deliberate discouragement of imaginative or intellectual response to the cultural products of the mass market. Instead, the receiver of such artifacts is lulled, via strategies such as nostalgia, familiarity, and superficial novelty, into the passive acceptance of a standardized cultural product. This logically suggests that the essentially reciprocal functioning of a folk culture is completely erased, as is its ability to mirror in any immediate or vital sense the day-to-day experiences and desires of its listeners. Adorno and Horkheimer stress the absolute lack of true participation by the public in mass cultural production:

The attitude of the public, which ostensibly and actually favours the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system and not an excuse for it. If one branch of art follows the same formula as one . . . with a very different medium and content . . . if a movement from a Beethoven symphony is crudely “adapted” for a film sound-track in the same way that a Tolstoy novel is garbled in a film script; then the claim that this is done to sat-

isfy the spontaneous wishes of the public is no more than hot air. We are closer to the facts if we explain these phenomena as inherent in the technical and personnel apparatus which, down to its last cog, itself forms part of the economic mechanism of selection. . . . In our age the objective social tendency is incarnate in the hidden subjective purposes of company directors. (32)

By this definition, mass culture and folk culture are mutually exclusive; there can be no true “objective social tendency,” in Adorno and Horkheimer’s words, because original and spontaneous cultural impulses are modified by the purposes of mass-cultural monoliths. There can therefore be no folk voice in mass culture. This means that the pretensions to the folk voice in many fairy-tale films are, as suggested above, “hot air”—their purpose is solely to conceal their commercial manipulations.

This is perhaps too sweeping a judgment, and more recent perceptions of popular culture as a site of struggle suggest that Adorno and Horkheimer represent only one end of the popular theory spectrum. Noël Carroll offers an opposing voice which explicitly denies the truth of such claims; he maintains that numerous examples of popular art demonstrate clearly the lack of “necessary connection between accessibility and a passive audience response,” and that indeed, “in some cases, the very success of the mass artwork presupposes active spectatorship” (38–39). This line of thought is certainly appropriate to the *sf/fantasy ghetto*, in which the highly specific readership may well require active participation in the text—or, indeed, to written narratives generally, as Carroll demonstrates (40–41); nonetheless, it is also true, to a greater or lesser extent, of film. The self-conscious narrative play found in texts such as Disney fairy tales or Dreamworks’ *Shrek* may empower a mass-market text, but it is equally able to give the artistic and intellectual pleasure of active reading to the viewer, and indeed would not be successful *without* such narrative pleasures. Theories of a mass-cultural monolith also deny the possibilities offered by the art-house end of the film spectrum, in which films are generally made on a far lower budget, and may be more able to balance their artistic requirements against the need to recoup their costs. A good example of film’s potential for self-conscious use of fairy tale is Jordan’s *The Company of Wolves*, in which frame narratives and tale-within-tale represent a sustained effort to reproduce the folk voice, and thus allow ongoing metafictional awareness. This is strengthened by the film’s attention to the character of the oral storytellers (unlike Disney’s disembodied voices),

and their association of that oral voice with the readily identifiable grandmother archetype.

However, despite innovative uses such as Jordan's of the folk voice in film, Zipes's characterization is valid in that many fairy-tale films seem to represent an appropriation as much as an exploration or celebration of folk narrative. This exemplifies the uneasy and problematical intersections between popular or folk cultures, and the mass culture of consumerism. Film narrative is dominated by Hollywood, and particularly by big-budget studio films whose economies of scale require appeal to a broad demographic; many recent fairy-tale films represent a process of identifying the kinds of narrative which are currently selling, and reproducing them as closely as possible. Disney's huge successes with fairy tale in the late 1980s and early 1990s could be seen to have prompted later films such as *Ever After* and *The Grimm Brothers' Snow White*, and ultimately *Shrek*, which has itself spawned two sequels and a host of imitators in the knowing fairy-tale parody mode, including *Hoodwinked* and *Happily N'Ever After*. At the same time, the production-by-committee effect of financial oversight on films exists in palpable tension with the impulses of particular directors or screenwriters, who may well see the artistic rather than the commercial potential in recreating a familiar folkloric text. In addition, the construction of a particular text in terms favoring commercial success does not in any way prevent countercultural readings of such a text, representing a very different notion of narrative pleasure from that intended by the producers. Audience-generated responses such as fan fiction demonstrate precisely the kind of active, potentially subversive receptions of mass-cultural texts described by critics such as John Fiske and Henry Jenkins. Even Disney films, perhaps the strongest example of deliberate mass-cultural packaging, are capable of being read on multiple levels which address child and adult audiences separately. Thus, like much of mass culture, fairy-tale film is a site of contestation, with the warping of metafictional play to commercial ends balanced by a wresting back of commercial requirements to artistic and individual purposes. The postmodern cultural environment of modern film also means that at times the two impulses are one: self-consciousness, irony, and the pleasures of recognition are highly saleable commodities.

LIVE-ACTION FAIRY-TALE FILM: NARRATIVE EXPLORATIONS

At one end of the wide spectrum of film's purposes and effects, fairy-tale films have precisely the same potential to offer self-conscious intellectual play with form and expectation as do the "high-culture"

literary texts of the postmodern writers. To the wealth of potential reference and shared generic understanding of fairy tale is added another dimension, that of film and film genre, after a hundred years a dense and colorful repository of exemplar, tradition, and textual expectation. Interestingly, while fairy-tale film has been equally successful in live-action and animated forms, live-action filmmaking has tended to offer the most serious and interesting fairy-tale explorations. This perhaps reflects the general tendency in Western cinema to associate animation fairly strongly with children's films; live-action fairy tale suffers the equal and opposing association with the fluffy and formulaic genre of Hollywood romance, equally the arena of stock characters, formulaic plot lines and the much-vaunted "Hollywood happy ending," but live-action film also has the strongest tradition of "art" cinema. In some ways this is once again a commercial issue, since animation is considerably more expensive to make than live-action film; experimental animation, comparatively less accessible and lacking in broader popular appeal, tends to be confined to festival-circuit film shorts.

An early and particularly interesting exploration of fairy tale in the live-action film medium is offered by Jean Cocteau's self-consciously artistic use of Mme. Leprince de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" in his 1946 film, *La Belle et la Bête*, a text which has influenced and informed many subsequent fairy-tale films. Rebecca Pauley has commented on Cocteau's film as a deliberately nostalgic and utopian use of fairy-tale structures as a response to the horrors of the war years: "his wish to return to the world of creative freedom and vitality which had been so crushed by World War Two and the German occupation" (86). On another, more individual level, the film provides a site for the exploration of Cocteau's sense of the filmmaker as artist or poet, which is possible through his status as auteur and his complete artistic control over the production, direction, and script (Hayward 47). Here, film as artifact becomes stylized, even aestheticized, presenting film as individual artwork rather than as either popular film or as simple reiteration of a traditional tale. Most strikingly, however, the film offers a particularly individual response to the problem of fairy-tale narrative in live-action cinema, in Cocteau's use of near-surrealist visual and narrative effects which echo and reinvent fairy tale's problematical relationship with reality.

To identify Cocteau with the surrealist movement is a thorny issue, but a useful link for my investigation of fairy-tale film's strategies to overcome the clash between the unreality of fairy tale and the realism of the camera. Critical responses to Cocteau's works often invoke surrealism; Pauley, for example, comments on the film as "an illustration

of the dangerous yet necessary sexual journey into the realm of the surreal” (89), and Arthur Evans comments that Cocteau’s films are “strangely reminiscent of the surrealists’ dreamworlds” (87). André Breton’s definitions of surrealism include an awareness of “interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming *one*” (116). Cocteau shares with the surrealists an interest in the unconscious, in dreams and images which are an end in themselves, and which do not need to be connected by reason or logic; what Breton has called “the omnipotence of the dream and . . . the disinterested play of thought” (122). Where Cocteau diverges from this, however, is in his awareness of aesthetics, structure, system: Breton calls for “thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations” (122), while Cocteau freely uses the strong structures and systems of fairy tale and myth, and has a dedication to beauty which has led to his films being described as “painterly” and “picturesque” (Hayward 47).

Where Cocteau’s common concerns with surrealism are interesting is in precisely this clash between structure and the free play of thought. Both fairy tale and surrealism reject the conventional, realist representations of most art and literature, but they also have different attitudes from realism, related but distinct. Surrealism entails a process of disconnection between elements, whereas fairy tale presupposes some kind of intrinsic connection, even if it is a never-explained magical connection; picking a rose has the direct causal effect of angering the Beast and leading to his demand for the merchant’s daughter, even if you never know why the rose is so important. In Cocteau’s film, the presence of living statues is never explained; the statues and living human arms of the Beast’s castle provide a surreal interpretation of Mme. de Beaumont’s invisible, magical servants, in a similar fashion to Disney’s transformation of invisible servants into animated domestic items. (Invisible servants are a terrible idea for film; a visual medium makes heavy work of the unseen). Essentially, fairy tale depends on the familiar, where surrealism insists on defamiliarizing it. Nonetheless, they share the metafictional quality of problematizing the real, a tendency Cocteau develops in various ways in the film, developing and intensifying the atmosphere of otherworldly strangeness which pervades *La Belle et la Bête*: the visual representation of the magical as a dislocation of the real. Thus gates open invisibly, statues have living eyes, living arms hold candlesticks or serve a meal, and Belle drifts down the corridor in a magical, dreamlike glide which gives, in Hayward’s words, “the illusion that she [is] floating into her unconscious” (45). Their dreamlike unreality underlines fairy-tale’s coding as antimimetic space, a world far removed from the real. The film’s

conclusion, shorn of the French tale's triumphal journey to a restored kingdom, and the celebratory presence of the families of both Belle and the transformed prince, offers a similar sense of dislocation. The couple rises into the air in a vivid symbolic gesture which removes them from narrative causation as much as visually celebrating the happy conclusion to the tale.

Not all aspects of the film counteract film realism by surreal elements; Cocteau's techniques are more varied than this. One of the best examples is the extreme stylization of acting technique in the film. The actors' exaggerated gestures, carefully posed static quality, and choreographed movements operate similarly to the frame narrative in other fairy-tale films—to heighten, highlight, and draw attention to the fairy tale's essential unreality. The film offers a system of encoding similar to that of ballet or opera, one of ritualized gesture rather than realistic emotion. This, together with the film's framing by blackboard messages which insist on its imaginative and constructed nature, goes some way toward metafictional awareness, counteracting the visual realism of the film genre. In addition, like more recent films such as *Ever After*, the film makes use of the visual in its careful seventeenth-century costuming, which explicitly invokes the distant unreality of the original French tale for the film's viewers. This is paralleled by the film's recurring interest in artifact: Cocteau expands the rose of the original tale into a series of magical symbols—rose, key, glove, mirror, and horse—all of which invoke fairy-tale traditions as well as rendering visual and concrete the Beast's magical power.

The choice of the "Beauty and the Beast" tale is interesting for Cocteau's surrealist quality. Many versions of "Beauty and the Beast," including the Disney version, suffer from a strange moment of regret at the transformation of Beast into handsome prince. Both Beauty and the audience find themselves mourning the loss of the Beast, with whom they have identified during the course of the film. Michael Popkin reports the classic response of Greta Garbo to Cocteau's film—"Give me back my Beast" (101, quoting Pauline Kael's study), and draws interesting parallels with *King Kong*, finding a similar process of audience identification with the Beast (101ff.). In Cocteau's version, the transformation of Beast into prince is utilized and highlighted as another moment of surrealist dislocation—the causal process of Belle's attraction to the Beast is disrupted, replaced by the necessary fairy-tale denouement which overturns the causal relationship already set up. This is complicated by the adaptations Cocteau has made to the original tale, in the form of Avenant, Belle's rejected suitor, played by Jean Marais, the same actor who plays Beast and Prince. There is no real reason why the Prince should be physically

identical to Avenant, who is identified as a complete cad despite his handsome exterior, and who brings about his own downfall by desecrating the Temple of Diana. The transformation attempts to render neatly symmetrical and obviously visual the theme of exterior versus interior value—the Beast looks ugly but is good, Avenant looks good but is worthless, and the transformation relocates all value in a strictly binary sense, with interior worth mirrored absolutely by exterior appearance. The stylized structures of fairy tale are here exaggerated, motifs of reflection and repetition taken to self-conscious extremes; however, this overly tidy self-consciousness is partially undercut by the processes through which the audience becomes identified with the visual presence of the Beast.

Cocteau's script calls for the Beast to have "the appearance of a werewolf, with long fangs and grotesque features" (209). This makes for notable parallels with the other twentieth-century film offering serious treatment of fairy-tale motifs, Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* (1984). This is a particularly interesting work given that the film was based on several stories from Angela Carter's *Bloody Chamber* collection, and Carter herself co-wrote the script with Jordan. While following Carter's interest in the development of female sexuality under patriarchy through the self-conscious rewriting of fairy tales, the film offers a stunning visual reinterpretation of Carter's Gothic-flavored tales, as well as a creative use of framing narrative, embedded tales, and the oral voice. Given that Jordan uses the framing narrative of the dream to both highlight and justify his use of disconnected and nightmarish visual images (unlike Cocteau, who simply includes them and leaves his viewers to deal with the resulting illogic), the self-possessed heroine Rosaleen could be seen as a twentieth-century Alice, moving through the potential threat of the dreamworld with unimpaired calm. (The name is explicitly given to her older sister, who is the frame dreamer in Carter's original script.) Rosaleen evokes beautifully the child in Carter's tale "The Company of Wolves," who "stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity . . . she is a closed system, she does not know how to shiver" (114). The closed system is also that of fairy tale, each self-contained narrative an investigation not only of sexual subjectivity but also of narrative.

Carter seems to have been aware of the problems of film for fairy tale: Susannah Clapp's introduction to a collection of Carter's radio scripts and screenplays quotes her as saying, in an echo of Tolkien, that radio is "the most visual of mediums because you cannot see it" (in Carter, *Curious Room* ix). *Company of Wolves*, however, rises triumphantly above the dangers of the visual, since its visual texture is am-

biguously symbolic enough to offer even more imaginative potential than it does imaginative realization. Like Cocteau, Jordan's techniques are many and various, but he is able to make use of more developed cinematic technology—special effects, color, a larger cast and budget, an audience more familiar with cinema and Freud—to achieve an absorbing and visually compelling film. Frame tale and embedded narrative allow for a self-conscious flaunting of narrative constructedness as well as an authentic sense of the folk voice. Numerous folktales—the wedding night werewolf, the wronged village witch, the young man meeting the devil in the forest—are told in voice-over by Rosaleen's grandmother or Rosaleen herself, and are given added impact by their rather sumptuous visual realization; the aristocratic wedding banquet, interrupted by witchcraft and general werewolf mayhem, is a visual tour de force. Such folkloric elements give depth and significance to the fairly straightforward tale of Rosaleen and her village, the site of the Red Riding Hood story; the folk voice, together with the use of visual symbol, diversify the narratives so that their visual realization is not restrictive. At the same time the oral framing insists on tale as craft, narrative as construction, intertextual resonances between the tales, and thus, visual reality as an illustration of structures more profound than the simple image.

Jordan's Gothic forest and the village itself, a peasant seventeenth-century setting, are another example of the power of live-action film to create the “long ago and far away” feel of fairy tale, an essential unreality despite the realism of the setting. Carter's script interestingly describes the forest as both “the mysterious forest of the European imagination” and “a brooding, Disney forest” (*Curious Room* 187): the film invokes modern visual intertexts as well as traditional, to add depth and texture. In addition the film is packed with images of nightmare and the unconscious which operate with metafictional and Freudian implication—animated childhood toys, a forest filled with snakes, toads and ravens, and apparently random cuts to, for example, white roses turning slowly red. Jordan manages the seemingly impossible feat of translating into visual terms the richness of Carter's Gothic prose. His special effects also access the element of brutal violence which critics such as Maria Tatar have found in fairy tale—the werewolf transformations in *Company of Wolves* are horrific even by the standards of the modern horror film, with heaving, warping bodies and splitting flesh. In Carter's exploration, this comes to represent the fear the inexperienced adolescent has for the purely physical—and potentially painful—aspects of the sexual act. In its translation to the constructedness of story, however, such pubescent anxieties are distanced, their removal into the realm of unreality allowing them to be

examined as fiction rather than mimesis. (One could make a similar case for teenage angst and the distancing effect of symbol in modern texts such as Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a TV series which frequently plays self-consciously with its own status as television narrative and as horror text.) Jordan's film invokes something of the violence of the Hollywood horror genre, but its images, while being the standard forests, wolves, and transformation scenes of the Gothic, are more self-consciously aware of symbolism. In one particularly memorable example the bloody severed head of a werewolf lands in a bucket of milk, inviting comparisons with the film's running use of white and red to suggest innocence and sexual experience, or virginity and deflowerment. Violence is never gratuitous, always carefully judged within the film's symbolic structures; such structures are never allowed to stand alone, requiring constant decoding so that the viewer must acknowledge the act of reception, and thus, of storytelling.

The dream-sequence framing of the film obviously allows Jordan free play with the kind of unreality necessary to overcome live action film's reproduction of realistic scenes, although in some ways its formless, nightmare qualities work against the structuredness of tale. Tolkien denies narratives framed as dream the status of fairy tale; he argues, "If a waking writer tells you that his tale is only a thing imagined in his sleep, he cheats deliberately on the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realisation, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder" (14). Jordan's film seems to avoid this trap because of the substantial reality of Rosaleen's fairy-tale village setting, which allows the dream narrative to access the "long ago and far away" of fairy tale as a vivid *psychological* reality. This greatly empowers Carter's feminist explorations in psychological terms; while we explore Rosaleen's adolescent dream, we are encouraged to move more deeply into her unconscious, away from normal reality. Jordan's awareness of the marvelous apparently conflates the unconscious and dream with fairy-tale symbol, a particularly Jungian framework recalling the work of Marie-Louise von Franz. Unstructured dream narrative (Rosaleen's sister attacked by toys/wolves) gives way to a deeper, more structured dream (Red Riding Hood's village), which in turn moves deeper into embedded narratives (Granny's tales, and later Rosaleen's). While, paradoxically, structure intensifies the deeper we go, so too does psychological significance, as Jordan tempers the fairly standard revenge fantasies of a younger sibling with a more complex interaction between desire and social conditioning. As is appropriate to any reworking of Carter, the film explores the effect of social structures—the village, the folktales of the grandmother—on the adolescent sexual development of Rosaleen. Like Carter's other heroines, she must

escape the narratives imposed by her society if she is to function autonomously as a woman and a sexual being in her own right.

Women are the tellers of tales in the film, a characterization appropriate for Carter's feminist intentions, but which also recalls Marina Warner's identification of the female voice as the original purveyor of folklore. She argues that women's folktale narratives "reveal possibilities . . . map out a different way and a new perception of love, marriage, women's skills, thus advocating a means of escaping imposed limits and prescribed destiny" (*Beast to the Blonde* 24). Carter and Jordan would argue otherwise. Rosaleen's Granny is an archetypal tale-telling figure, the repository of experience and social wisdom, yet in Jordan's film she is the most reactionary figure. Her strictures ("Don't stray from the path!") and her social awareness are constructed entirely around warning and threat, the awareness of male sexuality as violence, and any female sexual impulse as transgressive and inviting disaster. Thus men are "nice as pie until they've had their way with you. But once the bloom is gone, the beast comes out." Her narratives, which are repeated either to or by Rosaleen in the film, are cautionary frameworks which insist on the dangers of untrammelled sexuality, of the deserved fate of a woman who chooses a "traveling man" whose eyebrows meet, rather than the known safety of a village man "not too shy to piss in a pot." This parallels the tension between Rosaleen's suitors, the Amorous Boy who stands for socially sanctioned sexuality ("A walk . . . in the woods, on Sunday, after service . . . Tell your mother I'll be with you"), and the more powerful and dangerous sexual presence of the Hunter.

Granny is a strangely ambiguous figure, though—she is at once protective and threatening, reassuring Rosaleen of her safety within the web of Granny's knowledge and experience, even while the old woman's spectacles catch the light to silver over eerily, like a wolf's eyes. Her animated fox-fur is another association between the old woman and the life of the wild predator. She represents an absolutely ideological investigation of tale-telling and cultural structure, to no degree compromised by the cinematic format. While Rosaleen's experiences with the werewolf Hunter ultimately deny everything Granny has told her, Granny is nonetheless a figure of female power in the text, and presumably, since she is Rosaleen's father's mother, one of sexual experience. She has moved through the processes of socially sanctioned sexuality and now stands outside them, isolated in her hut in the forest—and, similarly, isolated but powerful in the position of teller rather than participant in tales, her metafictional awareness embracing her society as text as much as the tales she tells. However, while apart, she is still very much a product of such structures: the

female patterns she offers Rosaleen are those of patriarchy, either the submissive woman of the wedding-night werewolf tale, or the demonized witch-figure of the aristocratic banquet. In Carter's original tale, "The Werewolf," the grandmother is the werewolf; the girl-child, besting the wolf, is also heir to her grandmother's house and, presumably, demonic female powers. Jordan's film chooses rather to play on the grandmother figure as a reactionary social force, attempting to indoctrinate successive generations into a limited rather than a powerful female sexuality, competing with her daughter-in-law for the attentions of her son in the classic patriarchal pattern. Ultimately she is reduced to a china doll, an image of fragile constructedness which shatters, as do her tales. The undercutting of her narratives brings into play a metafictional falling-domino effect as we are forced to acknowledge and distrust the Chinese-box tale-telling of the film.

Whatever Granny's intentions in the warning folklore she imparts to Rosaleen, the effect on Rosaleen is empowering; the lessons Rosaleen learns from the folktales are not those intended by their teller. Rather than being warned, Rosaleen's response to the tales is one of aroused curiosity. The folk patterns of wolf/man/woman are reinterpreted, not only through the lens of Rosaleen's adolescent sexual curiosity and the images offered by the horror film tradition but also through the motif of tale-telling and its exposure of the weakening patriarchal bonds in each succeeding generation. Rosaleen's mother offers an antidote to the superstitious fears of the grandmother: where Granny believes that men are beasts and girls who stray will be eaten, the mother has a strong sense of Carteresque equality: "your granny . . . knows a lot, but she doesn't know everything. If there's a beast in men it meets its match in women too." This, and the conclusion to Rosaleen's Red Riding Hood tale, parallels the conclusion to Carter's "The Tiger's Bride," where, at the moment of transformation, Beauty becomes Beast rather than Beast becoming Prince. In her analysis of the film, Carole Zucker notes that "it is only [Rosaleen's] mother, the character closest to the natural world, who recognises the wolf as her daughter and implores the group of gathered hunters not to shoot" (69). Like Carter's progression of stories in *The Bloody Chamber*, the film offers a successive sense of female sexual identity, each generation less entrapped than the one before. Self-conscious employment of narrative is central to this process; cultural critique is only possible from outside the tale, looking in.

In this investigation of female sexuality, Red Riding Hood's narrative is at the heart of the film, and awareness of its cultural history allows the invocation of powerful intertexts, an echo of Carter's metafictional project. The tale has always seemed inherently concerned with

sexual relations, even before Carter's feminist rewrites. Carter's script for the film specifically invokes the Gustav Doré illustrations to the Red Riding Hood story (*Curious Room* 187); Doré gives an essentially sexualized interpretation which tends to focus on the girl's horrified fascination with the wolf, depicted as a dark, voracious presence considerably larger than the child. Doré's illustrations pick up on essential undercurrents in the tale. The familiar Perrault elements—forest, animal, innocently straying girl, bedroom striptease, and symbolic rape—cast woman as victim and as transgressor who invites her own destruction. Zipes, in his introduction to a collection of Red Riding Hood retellings, argues that this is a distortion of the tale's original import. He traces the development of the tale from the original folk form, an adolescent initiatory scenario where the girl outwits the beast and escapes, through Perrault's adaptations into a patriarchal fable which transforms the girl into an object of sadistic exploitation (*Trials and Tribulations* 23–27). Carter and Jordan's self-aware heroine is in some ways an antidote to this patriarchal retelling; with a knife in her basket, she is unafraid of the forests, and even in the confrontation with the werewolf, uses the Hunter's shotgun against him rather than passively awaiting rescue. Her relationship to the original tales is thus that of her relationship with her grandmother's stories: critical onlooker selecting and rejecting from the proffered work of art.

At the same time, Rosaleen's interpretation of her granny's tales makes her perfectly aware of the sexual initiation she is being offered. This also echoes aspects of Red Riding Hood in popular culture, as noted by Zipes: "Almost all the commodified forms of Little Red Riding Hood as sex object portray her as thoroughly grown-up and desirous of some kind of sexual assignation with the wolf" (*Trials and Tribulations* 8–9). Thus, while the film attempts to address Red Riding Hood as victim, it perhaps fails to elude the process of film itself, both patriarchal and commodifying: the camera's association with a male gaze, and the female's inevitable designation as object. In fact, this also reflects entrapment within the structures of fairy tale. The picnic scene is an extended flirtation between Rosaleen and the Hunter, with what Carter's script describes as a "terrific erotic charge between them" (234); they tussle, exchange suggestive quips about the magic object the Hunter has in his trousers, and part with Rosaleen's suggestion that her reward for winning their bet should be the compass, the phallic object they have been discussing. Jordan's Hunter, urbane, foreign, and definitely upper class, is an icon of male sexual experience, set up in contrast to the callow village lad who most resembles the sailor doll of the frame narrative—"They're clowns, the village boys." The figure of Rosaleen thus becomes ambiguous,

moving between the two competing narratives. On the one hand, the objectifying male gaze of the camera highlights the tale's inherent interest in a transgressive female figure who responds to a promise of male skill that is also symbolized as male power—as Zipes has noted, this “reinforces the notion that ‘women want to be raped.’” (*Trials and Tribulations* 11). On the other, Carter attempts to revive the passive girl of Perrault's tale and to give her an awareness of her choices and access to genuine desire, although, like “The Tiger's Bride,” at the price of rejecting her society—and thus its narratives—completely.

It is possible to see some of this ambiguity and unease around the film's sexual politics as a direct result of film narrative as a process of multiple authorship. The film operates firmly within the modern film production system, which entails potentially enormous divisions between the script on one hand and the interpretations of the director on the other. Unlike Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête*, where the hand of Cocteau the auteur is discernible in the film's artistic integrity, *The Company of Wolves* represents Carter's script under Jordan's direction, and the differences between the original script and the final film product are striking. While Carter may be a feminist scriptwriter re-writing fairy tale, Jordan is a male director, and the gaze of the camera is his, not Carter's. The changes are most apparent in the ending of both the Red Riding Hood narrative and the frame narrative. Carter's script reproduces the strong female assertion of the child faced with the male monster: “I'm nobody's meat, not I!” Jordan's film omits this, and Rosaleen's admonishing tone as she instructs the transformed Hunter, “You must be a wolf for good and all. . . . Not a gentleman or a prince of darkness. But an honest, good wolf . . .” (241). Her scripted words acknowledge the dangers of the Hunter's seductive human identity; unlike the film version of Rosaleen, she can see through the facade of sexual experience. Rosaleen's concluding story, from the same scene in the script, is of “love between wolves,” not of a naked wolf-girl; the objectifying gaze of the camera is particularly evident in the largely pointless fragment of wolf-girl narrative and her problematic association with “the world below” and the demonic female.

The clash between Jordan and Carter's approaches here is possibly more extreme because of the tradition of horror film in which *The Company of Wolves* operates—fairy tale is not the only structural tradition at work. The classic horror movie is a particularly male tradition, based on the stereotype of a passive female victim under threat from forces that often represent exaggerated male sexuality (the vampire, the monster, the stalker of films such as *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*). Thus, despite Rosaleen's triumphant transformation at the end of the Red Riding Hood narrative, the ending of the actual

film is far from upbeat from a feminist point of view. In the frame narrative of Rosaleen dreaming, her dream is interrupted by the intrusion of wolves into her bedroom, to crash first through a portrait of a girl in the passage outside her bedroom, and then in through the bedroom window. This blurring of dream and reality effectively undoes all the resolution of the dream narrative; despite having come to terms with adult sexuality through the wolf-symbols of the dream, Rosaleen still undergoes metaphorical rape as she awakens to the sound of shattering glass. While she may celebrate metafictional awareness of tale within her story, she is revealed, in the end, to be no more than a figure in a larger narrative, the power ultimately not her own. The voice-over which concludes the film is a Perrault-style and patriarchalist warning not to stray, since “sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth.” Zucker comments, “The sweet tongue is Rosaleen’s dream of a mellifluous fusion of nature and culture, of powerful femininity and desire without reproach. The sharp tooth must then surely be the more painful reality into which Rosaleen must grow up. It is not a happy ending.” (70). The film’s ending thus extends fairy tale’s classic problematization of the borders between fantasy and reality, here blurring them to anxiety-causing effect. I would argue that the ending has much to do with the expectations of the horror film, which tend toward one last, unexpected scream from the passive female, one last resurgence of the evil (male) threat. Many horror films similarly refuse to completely destroy the monster, leaving an ambiguous and open-ended sense of menace, a lingering intrusion of the fantasy into the mundane (and, of course, the potential for a sequel). In Carter’s original script, the concluding image is very different:

ALICE is sitting on her bed. . . . The door is still open and the tangle of the forest can be seen sprouting through it.

ALICE suddenly springs off the bed, up into the air, as if off a diving board. She curls, in a graceful jack-knife and plummets towards the floor. The floor parts. It is in fact water. She vanishes beneath it.

The floor ripples, with the aftermath of her dive. Gradually it settles back into plain floor again.

We see the room, for a beat, half-forest, half-girl’s bedroom. There is a whining at the door. It opens, under the pressure of one wolf’s snout. First the he-wolf enters, then the she-wolf. They nose their way around ALICE’s things. (Curious Room 244)

This beautifully reversed image of female rather than male penetration provides a triumphant and transcendent moment in which the

adolescent girl is transformed into the sexually mature adult, equal to the male, and in which the girl chooses to abdicate her innocence in an act which celebrates as well as relinquishes it. The moment is also ultimately metafictional, the girl choosing to break the frame of her narrative reality, rejecting it as spurious construct, and choosing simply to go elsewhere. It is a great pity that Jordan could not have used this final image, since his choice of conclusion plunges Carter's script back into the darkness and male threat of Perrault's version, while also succumbing to the pressures of the horror film genre. Thus, although offering a powerful and complex use of film's visual capacity, *Company of Wolves* is ultimately a flawed artwork, its cinematic format the site of the familiar tension, and its treatment of fairy-tale narrative reactionary as well as innovative.

LIVE-ACTION FAIRY TALE: THE HOLLYWOOD MOVIE

Quite apart from the narrative explorations of filmmakers such as Cocteau and Jordan, the fairy tale occupies a fairly prominent place in the commodity arsenal of the popular Hollywood movie. The classic happy-ever-after conclusion of the fairy tale, together with its recurring theme of the rise to success and happiness of a disadvantaged protagonist, is a fertile ground for commercial cinema. The American Dream so beloved by Hollywood is itself a fairy-tale narrative—hard work and obeying the rules is all that is needed for wealth and the happily-ever-after of marriage and a family. The use of fairy tale also provides an interesting counterpoint to the decline of the importance of story or script in popular Hollywood film. Fairy tale provides strong and recognizable narrative which is not too demanding or complex, and which fills the painful gap left in commercial film by the diminishing importance of the actual script against big-name stars, high production values, and special effects.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen a run of fairy-tale films, most notably *Ever After* (1998) and *The Grimm Brothers' Snow White* (1997), but also productions such as *Freeway* (1996) and the recent slew of films including *Ella Enchanted* culminating in *Enchanted* (2007). In some senses this trend looks back to Gary Marshall's 1990 production, *Pretty Woman* or even to the Richard Chamberlain vehicle *The Slipper and the Rose* (1976), which retold the Cinderella tale as romanticized social comedy. Marshall's self-conscious use of the Cinderella tale was highly successful: the structure of the Hollywood romantic comedy merged seamlessly with the rags-to-riches tale of Cinderella, rendered contemporary by the modern setting and innovative use of recognizable modern archetypes which simultaneously

echo fairy-tale antecedents—the whore-with-the-heart-of-gold redeems the soulless big businessman in a direct parallel to Beauty’s civilizing of the Beast. While successful, the film’s use of fairy tale was also intrinsically uncritical, relying on an audience response of nostalgia for the familiar fairy-tale motifs, and ignoring their more unpleasant patriarchal implications. This, together with the film’s modern setting, allowed *Pretty Woman* to negotiate the familiarity/novelty tension Cawelti argues is such an important feature of popular cultural productions. Later films such as *Freeway* and *Ever After* followed the same, highly successful formula, although *Freeway* explored a far darker aspect of Red Riding Hood than *Ever After* does with Cinderella. Both *Freeway* and *Pretty Woman* function as contemporary films which use fairy-tale motifs, rather than being fairy-tale films; I am thus more interested in the more explicitly fairy-tale texts of *Ever After*, despite its quasi-historical feel, and *The Grimm Brothers’ Snow White*.

Andy Tennant, the director of *Ever After*, insists that the film “is not a cartoon or fairy tale—it’s an adventure with completely unexpected attitude” (in “Ever After” production notes). This is not entirely true. While the film’s approach to the Cinderella story is in some ways innovative, its basic structure—the despised stepdaughter, unpleasant stepmother, prince in search of a wife, and grand denouement at a glittering ball—remain intact. Where *Ever After* is interesting is in its use of realism, since fairy-tale story and setting are completely denuded of their magical elements, and the film attempts to present some kind of historical narrative (albeit, as John Stephens and Robyn McCallum argue, one that is “tongue-in-cheek” [202]), framed by the storyteller who claims to be a descendant of the “real Cinderella.” The film’s insistence that it is offering the “real story” is an acute narrative play that highlights the constructedness of the fairy tale by contrasting the film’s reality with the more unrealistic expectations attached to fairy tale. Cathy Preston’s review of the film makes valid points about the translation of the tale from the folkloric to the legendary, with its assumptions of possible reality rather than a resolutely marvelous space (175); however, the viewer’s awareness of the Cinderella story is strong enough that it exists in tension with the claim of realism in a rather enjoyable narrative clash. The traditional “long ago and far away” narrative of fairy tale is anchored in specific figures such as Thomas More and Leonardo da Vinci, while Prince Henry is probably Henry II of France. The film uses some historical details: problems with Spain, Francis’s fascination with Italian artists, including da Vinci (Duruy 479), and the establishment of the College of France, although historically this was by his father Francis, not Henry (522). As Stephens and McCallum point out, this is a chronologically

impossible mixture of elements; the awareness of the clash, ultimately, “might only reinforce the power of a metanarrative to impose teleology on culture” (204). This renders the elements of historicism and the “real” ultimately false, an effect supported by the film’s haziness on historical detail, the conglomeration of medieval styles in its costuming, and the sweeping grandeur of its landscapes—mountains, woods and castles—which explicitly invoke a timeless and essentially fairy-tale experience. In addition, the imposition of the Cinderella narrative onto actual history moves the entire story into ahistorical space: in reality, marriages of the time were political, not personal, and Henry II married Catherine de Medici, not a commoner. The film thus uses a superficial gloss of historical accuracy to lend credence to its attempt at realism, but historical elements in no way disrupt the workings of the fairy-tale plot, and serve in many ways to highlight them. Something similar is seen in Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty*, where the costumes and visual feel are medieval, and the Prince admonishes his father with a reminder that “This is the fourteenth century!” while in fact, the film’s costuming and sense of medieval pageantry are largely fifteenth-century.

Ever After’s invocation of fairy tale is thus quite deliberate, whatever its director might claim. Like many fairy-tale films it makes use of the frame narrative and oral voice, in the nineteenth-century frame which presents the tale as oral history told by the Grande Dame of France to the Brothers Grimm—an aging, female, oral voice, corresponding to Marina Warner’s analysis in which she comments that “the connection of old women’s speech and the consolatory, erotic, often fanciful fable appears deeply entwined in language itself, and with women’s speaking roles” (*Beast to the Blonde* 14). This becomes the site for metafictional play as reality, fairy tale and film blur and shift status. In a process similar to that followed by Disney’s fairy-tale features, the film in effect claims *higher* status than the literary or folk narrative: the old woman maintains that she intends “to set the record straight,” thus characterizing the Grimms’ Cinderella story as a distortion of the reality represented by the film, rather than the film as a version of the story. Nonetheless, the film’s fairy-tale narrative is explicitly that: apart from the film’s title, the old woman begins “Once upon a time,” and the Cinderella tale ends on an interchange between Danielle and the Prince in which they play in a particularly self-aware fashion with the fairy-tale stereotypes and the idea of “living happily ever after”:

DANIELLE: You, sir, are supposed to be charming!

PRINCE: And we, princess, are supposed to live happily ever after.

DANIELLE: Says who?

PRINCE: Do you know . . . I don't know?

Despite the director's desire to repudiate it, the invocation of the fairy-tale narrative is perfectly explicit, although less accomplished than similar occurrences in Byatt or Pratchett, and problematized by the fact that they do not know *what* dictates the pattern. The film's dispute is also not with the pattern, but with its status as folklore/unreality, so that the characters' self-awareness lacks instrumentality; while aware of pattern, they leave it uninterrupted. Stephens and McCallum argue that the film "opposes postmodern ideology through its reaffirmation of the agency of the subject, its thematization of discourses of 'identity'" (202), but in fact I find the opposite to be true: while the film may indeed deny postmodern dissolution, it does this through the affirmation of structures which ultimately deny individual agency in favor of a reactionary utopianism.

This becomes interesting given Preston's argument for the feminist potential in the film's rewriting of characters; Danielle is an intelligent young woman with a strong personality, her qualities set up to counteract the passivity of the original Cinderella, but, unlike Byatt's or Carter's heroines, she does not actually escape the narrative to achieve anything other than marriage to the prince. Rather like Disney's Belle or Byatt's Eldest Princess, Danielle is a heroine who reads—a recurring archetype in the modern fairy tale, which underlines the self-aware sense of narrative in both characters and creators. She is also far from the gentle sweetness of Cinderella's acceptance of her role: perhaps the most effective scene in the film is Danielle's rescue of the stunned and unresisting Prince by picking him up and slinging him over her shoulder. As well as giving the odious Marguerite a black eye, Danielle, once she has triumphed and wed the prince, punishes her stepmother and sister in the antithesis of meek forgiveness. A further self-conscious play with fairy-tale expectation is in the characterizing of the stepmother and at least one of the two stepsisters, whose nastiness is rounded out by psychological victimization of Danielle and by their own motivations (lack of money and hopeless social climbing). The casting of Angelica Huston, a noted character actress, as Baroness Rodmilla assists materially with the three-dimensionality of the character. The film thus takes advantage of the metanarratives of the star system to access a kind of character depth by association, relating the character to other, equally recognizable stereotypes and to a certain kind of cinema entertainment—offbeat, amusing, and slightly dark. Despite its naive delight in oversetting the traditional fairy-tale stereotypes, however, the film must necessarily remain

aware of those stereotypes at all times for their effect to be felt, and in the end they are not actually transcended. This is fairy-tale film packaged as Hollywood romance and, despite its play with fairy-tale expectation, it ultimately celebrates a fairy-tale romance which ends in the heroine's acquisition of wealth and social position through marriage. Tennant may argue that he "did not want [his daughters] growing up believing you have to marry a rich guy with a big house in order to live happily ever after" ("Ever After"), but in the end this is exactly what Danielle does. The play with archetypes is superficial, and fairy tale's basically reactionary principles remain undisturbed.

The film's focus on psychological motivation gives added dimension to Prince Henry as a character who, while "supposed to be charming," is humanly flawed and uncertain. The contrast between the apathetic prince and Danielle's passionate engagement in her life reinforces the feminist subtext (worthless man made acceptable by spirited woman) but also speaks to the film's nascent awareness of structure as confinement, its insistence on itself as reality rather than fairy tale. Trapped in his social role as prince, Henry's life is robbed of meaning and zest. Danielle, who might be expected to be passive under the daily grind of her truly awful life, has the character to rise above the role (abused stepdaughter) which defines her. The message, while less explicitly developed, is curiously similar to that of Pratchett in *Witches Abroad*: to define anyone by their function is dehumanizing. The film comes closest to articulating this metafictional awareness of fairy-tale function in the closing comments of the Grande Dame, when she insists that "while Cinderella and her prince did live happily ever after, the point, gentlemen, is that they *lived*." The point of recasting fairy tale as history is to insist that the figures in the tale should be real human beings, not simply symbols in the narrative. However, this message is largely masked by the overwhelming feel-good effect of the film; while the play with fairy tale is a valiant attempt at innovation, in the end the characters escape fairy-tale stereotype only to become equally predestined symbols in the powerful romantic narrative of the Hollywood film.

As a complete contrast to the somewhat saccharine Hollywood romance of *Ever After*, Michael Cohn's *The Grimm Brothers' Snow White* (also variously released as *Snow White in the Black Forest* and *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*) is in many ways a deliberately nasty piece of cinema. Where *Ever After* plays with the perfect, fated romance of fairy tale, *Snow White* is an exercise in self-conscious Gothic, a return to the dark, sexy, and violent roots of fairy tale, à la Angela Carter, Tanith Lee, or Maria Tatar. Like *Ever After*, the film is motivated by psychological undercurrents, but here they represent a rediscovery

of the metaphorical power of fairy tale to depict an explicitly post-Freudian awareness of individuality and desire. At the same time, it partakes wholeheartedly of the trappings of the modern horror film, to a far greater extent than does *The Company of Wolves*; as well as bloody violence, *Snow White* flirts with black magic, sex magic, mass murder, and psychosis. The “Grimm Brothers” rider on the title is entirely necessary in order to distance the film from the sugary sweetness of Disney’s more famous *Snow White*. While the film is aware of the Disney version, it invokes it ironically (Lily’s terrified dash through a threatening forest, the fact that the “dwarves” call her “Princess”), or sets out to invert it completely (sexualized members of the underclass rather than childlike little old men).

The film is very aware of fairy-tale narrative, not only in its title but also in the Gothic forests and castle of its setting, and in its deliberate invocation of Grimm through use of German names—Baron Hoffman, Dr. Gutenberg, Lady Claudia. The symbolic import of the Snow White figure is carried through not only in Lily’s name—constructed similarly to Lee’s Bianca—but also in the motif of snow, the snowy woods into which Lily is born, and the film’s climax with Lily, her lover and her father reunited as snow begins to fall. The standard associations of snow with chill purity are a sharp and ironic contrast to the bloody sexuality with which the film is actually concerned. The film also plays rather vaguely with the folk voice, in the child Lily asking for the tale of her birth from her nurse, the standard old woman figure of folklore. The tale the nurse begins is almost word for word from the opening of the Grimm version.

The film makes full use of the visual medium to dramatize the classic elements of the story, but in a manner that takes symbol to excess. Thus the blood-on-the-snow motif from the Grimm original, where “three drops of blood fell upon the snow,” becomes a disturbing flood of red on white as the Baron uses a dagger to deliver his daughter from the body of his dying wife. The pig’s heart which represents Snow White’s, seen as a discreet box with a dagger and heart motif in the Disney version, is here a rather disgusting raw lump of meat, eventually eaten by Lily’s dog after a bloodstained Claudia has been gloating over it. No cheerful popular feminism motivates this production; the tale revolves, simply and uncomplicatedly, around the very primitive roots of the Snow White tale in incestuous sexuality and jealousy between women. Sigourney Weaver as Lady Claudia is the film’s central figure, her tormented awareness of her fading beauty providing the impetus for events. Her black magic is deliberately stagy and self-indulgent, a creative reinterpretation of the three attempts the stepmother makes on Snow White’s life in the Grimm version.

The magic mirror is a legacy from her mother, in the classic fairy-tale motif of a dead mother assisting her daughter seen in tales such as “Cinderella” and “The Juniper Tree.” Lady Claudia’s interactions with her idealized self in the mirror provide an effective visual metaphor for female beauty as power in fairy tale’s patriarchal system. In the final scenes of the film, Lady Claudia’s existence is seen to be intrinsically and narcissistically bound up with her beauty—when Lily stabs the image in the mirror, Claudia dies.

While both films are enjoyable artifacts of popular cinema, one cannot help feeling that both are essentially self-indulgent responses to fairy-tale narrative: *Ever After* in the sense of fairy-tale romance, *Snow White* in its use of horror. While the films are aware of the structures of fairy-tale narrative, their explorations and rewritings are limited by the popular arena in which they play; as I have discussed in a previous chapter, popular narratives cannot disrupt their popular genres, however much they may play with fairy tales. Thus the films are essentially using fairy tale as a basis for creating undisturbed genre films, either romance or horror; social comment, particularly around issues of gender, becomes subordinate to the expectations of the popular form, either marriage, or the demonic female. While the films are visually clever and appealing, the visual encodings speak more to the modern popular genre than to the fairy tale, and thus tend to obscure rather than illuminate fairy-tale structures.

ANIMATED FAIRY TALE: THE DISNEY PRODUCT

Animation and fairy tale have had a long and distinguished association. In the earliest days of film, Lotte Reiniger’s silhouette fairy tales pioneered visual techniques and the use of fairy tale’s narrative structures to add coherence to film. Charles Solomon’s *History of Animation* gives recurring examples of fairy-tale themes in early animated works: Disney’s series of fairy-tale films in the 1930s, including *Three Little Pigs*, *Red Riding Hood*, and *The Four Musicians of Bremen*; the Fleischer studio’s Betty Boop version of “Snow White,” and Popeye shorts with Sinbad the Sailor, Ali Baba, and Aladdin; and the Mintz studio’s *Little Match Girl* (37–98). Despite the long history of animated fairy tales, however, the second half of the twentieth century saw Disney animated fairy tales rising to replace most other kinds of fairy-tale narrative in the popular consciousness. This grasp on the genre reached its height with the extreme success of the flagship fairy tales in the early 1990s, most notably *Aladdin* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Only recently has Disney’s monopolistic association with fairy tale begun to wane, with the rise of other animation studios such as Dreamworks

and Pixar. These companies could be seen as taking full advantage of the waning artistic and commercial success of Disney films, a decline interestingly correlated with their tendency to abandon the fairy-tale format in favor of more contemporary, historical, or vaguely folkloric narratives. Disney's recent acquisition of the Pixar company seems to suggest an attempt to sustain the monopoly, and to ensure that animation and fairy tale, in the broadest possible sense, remain synonymous with Disney to the bulk of the moviegoing public.

While the generic conflation of animation with fairy tale is partially a result of the power of the Disney marketing machine, there are also some sound structural reasons for the successful alliance of fairy tale with the animated form. In the case of fairy tale, the potential of film to offer a dizzyingly full visual canvas in some ways works directly against the characteristic textual sparseness of the fairy-tale narrative. However, in the marrying of the fairy tale to the animated feature form, these problems have been at least partially overcome. Animation as a medium shadows the features of metafictional writing as defined by Waugh, and thus those metafictional features I have attributed to fairy tale; like fairy tale, animation continually signals its own problematized relationship with reality, offering no attempt at a realistic mirror, but rather a ritualized, simplified, and antirealist process. Animation signals *constructedness* as strongly as fairy tale's classic opening of "once upon a time." Like fairy tale, it operates in a framework composed of smooth, simple lines and bright colors which visually echo the characteristic symbolic compression of fairy-tale narrative. Both fairy tale and animation deal in stereotypes, archetypes, and clichés, the stock characters of metaphorical writing, magical narrative—and, most importantly, of the formula fiction which makes up the bulk of the popular market. In addition, animation is perhaps the most perfect site of the magical; the power of animation is to represent figures that can *change* completely outside the bounds of reality in precisely the same way that magical transformations occur in fairy tales. Paul Wells discusses the overlap of fairy tale and animation in this context, quoting Marina Warner—"metamorphosis defines the fairy tale" (*Beast to the Blonde* xvi) and continuing:

Clearly, here "metamorphosis" is about changes in characters and situations that may be termed "magical" or impossible within the concept of a real world served by physiological, gravitational, or functionalist norms. Virtually all animated films play out this definition of metamorphosis as a technical and narrational orthodoxy, thus rendering the adaptation of fairy tale on this basis, a matter of relative ease. (Wells 201)

The plasticity of the animated figure—its ability to stretch, compress, fragment, transform, defy gravity—is magical, unreal, and a prime site for magical narrative. This aspect of marvelous visual play is underlined by the tendency of the Disney studios to focus on the technical rather than the artistic aspects of the animation process: Disney films pushed the boundaries of new techniques and effects (as discussed by both Solomon and Richard Schickel), focusing on this far more than on the requirements of script or story.

Another important feature of Disney fairy tale is in the extent to which the animated feature film has come to have an accepted and powerful association with children. Like fairy tale, which Tolkien characterizes as having been relegated to the nursery, along with other worn-out and unwanted furniture, in the nineteenth century (34), animation is seen as a children's medium, an identification broken only by a fringe of serious films or, more recently, by the rise of the Japanese tradition of adult animation in anime. In Western cinema, in both fairy tale and animation, an initial artistic seriousness—oral folktale, the experimental films of Georges Méliès—has given way to a mainstream nonadult intention with the progression of the twentieth century. The tendency has been exaggerated by the prevalence of the animated series on children's daytime television, many of them distinguished by poor technical animation, violence, and lack of innovation (Solomon 285). This has been alleviated only in the late twentieth century with the reclamation of the form in both mediums—fairy tale's adaptation to adult concerns such as erotic, feminist, or self-aware narrative, and animation's development into the adult sex and violence of anime, adult films such as Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat* or *Heavy Traffic*, or the self-conscious artistry of experimental forms. However, it is possible to identify a mutual unease around the status of animated and fairy-tale narratives, a feeling that both animation and fairy tale ought really to be clean, innocent, suitable for children. If there is an awareness of animation as a children's medium, Disney's animated fairy tales play deliberately straight into this, creating an association which has defined their products from the start, as Brenda Ayres demonstrates (3); the occasional furor around the apparent discovery of obscene motifs in various Disney films, such as that chronicled by Ronald E. Ostman, underlines the power of this association. In the formulation of Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells in their influential collection *From Mouse to Mermaid*, whatever popular cultural debates might rage around the Disney product, this assumption of child-friendly values is both a defining feature of Disney texts and an uncontested area in Disney studies. It becomes an "ideological center that *does* hold, against both metonymic and monolithic constructions"

and a “trademark” of Disney innocence that masks the personal, historical, and material relationship between Disney film and politics” (5). Critics such as Henry Giroux extend this notion of “family values” to express their concern with Disney’s appropriation of childhood innocence and the ideological power of the corporation over children. Giroux’s consumer-culture sense of Disney’s functioning echoes that of the Frankfurt School and Zipes, and serves to highlight the extent to which associations with folk culture, with its status as a universal and trustworthy expression in the popular consciousness, can be twisted to serve the ends of marketing.

Giroux and Bell, Haas, and Sells represent earlier documents in the growing area of modern Disney studies, but already the ideological lines are drawn, demonstrating a critical tendency to assess Disney’s films in terms of their identity as ideological and consumer artifacts before their operation as works of art. This propensity to identify the Disney product as having a commercial purpose inextricable from its artistic status reflects to some extent the nature of the Disney corporation, which self-consciously and unambiguously treats its animated images as products. Their consumerist treatment not only inheres in the deliberate construction of a consistent and recognizable Disney film formula and the tireless marketing of spin-off products, merchandise, and theme park experiences but also in the company’s extreme protectiveness of trademark and image. Bell and coauthors report the difficulties they faced in publishing a critical volume on Disney, which was ultimately not permitted to use Disney’s name in the title (1); while this restriction has clearly relaxed in later years, as seen in the titles of the works by Ayres and by Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, Disney remains famously litigious. Again, this demonstrates the distance between the communal nature of genuine folk texts and the ownership-slanted operation of the mass media. It also suggests the existence of a new level of potentially metafictional awareness: artifact not only as crafted work, with particular reference to technical proficiency, but film narrative as a specifically *commercial* product rather than artistic construction. Thus, while the visual spectacle of a Disney animated film successfully submerges the viewer in a noisy, vivid world, an element of self-consciousness inheres in the construction of the characters and images as trademarks, already familiar from merchandise and fast-food packaging. Their independent existence outside the text irresistibly embodies the film text as artificial construct.

An essential component of this focus on commercial purpose is ideological, in some ways related to the Frankfurt School’s sense of mass culture as entrenching reactionary ideologies in order to pacify

their markets, but on a broader level relating simply to the need for mass-market texts to appeal to the widest possible demographic. Given the genesis and nature of the Disney corporation, the ideological values entrenched in its product tend to be those of a white, American, conservative middle class, which also resonate particularly well with the fairy-tale forms emerging from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, appropriated from oral tradition by French aristocrats or the German bourgeoisie. This element is largely taken for granted in recent critical accounts of Disney films, as exemplified, for example, in Ayres's collection of postcolonial accounts of Disney, which offers sustained interrogation of gender, racial, and cultural stereotypes in the films. Byrne and McQuillan acknowledge the general tendency throughout the critical history of Disney to attack it as being "synonymous with a certain conservative, patriarchal, heterosexual ideology which is loosely associated with American cultural imperialism" (1–2); importantly, however, they also suggest that it is precisely the ongoing attacks of the critical/intellectual/left-wing strata which allow Disney to deliberately define its ideological nature in conservative terms. This opposition is also what allows Disney texts to construct themselves as truly representative and democratic institutions in the face of elitist criticism. At the same time, such critical approaches echo the broader issues of popular culture criticism in their tendency to entrench an absolutist view of culture. Miriam Hansen's discussion of Benjamin and Adorno's responses to Disney is interesting in its treatment of the more antistructuralist possibilities of Disney criticism; she suggests that the debates sparked by early Disney texts represent a broader attempt to come to terms with the new mass culture, to identify "which role the technical media were playing in the historical demolition and restructuring of subjectivity: whether they were giving rise to new forms of imagination, expression and collectivity, or whether they were merely perfecting techniques of total subjection and domination" (28). The debate has continued to rage, and contemporary theory suggests that mass texts can, indeed, do both.

Benjamin's characterization of film insists on its ability to democratize art, to, in Hansen's terms, "[destroy] the fixed perspectives that have naturalised social and economical arrangements"; she quotes Benjamin's comments on the identity of film as an absolutely new form of expression which "exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of one-tenth seconds, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly advance on adventurous travels" (Benjamin, in Hansen 30). In tension with the limitations of the mass market, Disney animated films also represent a kind of freedom from realism as well as a sense of energetic enjoyment. Few critical approaches to

Disney seem to address the ability of the animated feature to mine the form for its sheer fantasy, its ability to produce screen magic on a level far above that of the live-action film. This offers an intensification of the idea discussed above, of filmmaker as magician. More than any other filmmaker, the animator is an enchanter manipulating a magical medium, and thus a self-aware producer of crafted, metafictional artifact (Zipes, *Happily Ever After* 68). In keeping with the notion of commercialized metafiction, technical wizardry is part of Disney's extreme narrative self-consciousness, offering a sort of "look at me" sense of its own cleverness that spills over into narrative games and cultural reference, becoming a potentially comic and ironic awareness which sells enjoyment on an intellectual level as well as on the level of technical spectacle. However, this exuberance is generally expressed only in subjection to the overall Disney formula, with its associations of child-friendly ideological safety and predictable content. Effectively, the partial adaptation to a popular sense of contemporary postmodern irony has left Disney films slightly behind in the market; the success of *Shrek* and its sequels demonstrates Dreamworks' more sophisticated ability to balance the needs of mass marketing with a sense of subversive narrative play. The uniformity of the Disney product, originally a selling point, has thus ceased to function given its comparative resistance to adaptation with time; in a sense, innocence has become outdated to a certain segment of its previous market.

This uniformity is an important technique in negotiating the tension between the novelty and color of the animated format, and the familiarity of the fairy-tale forms. Disney fairy-tale films have developed their own, distinctive and instantly recognizable formula, which works in deliberate concord or, at times, dissonance, with the structures of fairy tale. The extent to which a promise of a particular experience and ideological content inheres in Walt Disney's signature on each film, is a powerful marketing tool. Janet Wasko refers to this as "classic Disney" (110), the film format established under the rule of Walt Disney himself, which remains relatively undisrupted in contemporary Disney animated features. From the early success of *Snow White*, the Disney formula has refined its original components—the musical format, the presence of cute animals in interaction with the main characters, an easily recognizable antagonist, the elements of slapstick comedy, the romantic conclusion—but has not materially changed them. The Disney formula intersects with and overwrites any kind of narrative its films use, whether popular children's literature (*101 Dalmatians*, *Peter Pan*), folklore (*Robin Hood*), history (*Pocahontas*), or fairy tale. More than the tales themselves, the familiar Disney format is reassuring to children as well as to their parents, who can send children to see

Disney films secure in the knowledge that sex and realistic violence will not be on the menu. In some senses this formulaic function parodies the nostalgic certainty associated with fairy tale, and lays claim to an equal status as a given of Western culture. Nonetheless, as Byrne and McQuillan note, contemporary poststructuralist analysis dictates that the Disney formula suffers an inevitable shift in meaning: “On every occasion the Disney signature does not signify the same thing” (6). In this the formula shares with folkloric structures not only the status of a legitimate cultural tradition but also the appearance, rather than the reality, of an unassailable, monolithic authority.

The history of Disney fairy-tale features occupies a trajectory from the initial success of *Snow White* (1937), one of the earliest animated features, through similar adaptations of *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). After a break of some thirty years, during which adaptations were made from literature rather than fairy tale, Disney moved back into fairy tale—and into a reclamation of blockbuster success—with their rather mutilated version of Anderson’s “Little Mermaid” in 1989. The peak of their fairy-tale production is with the two great successes of the early 1990s, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992), which represent a pinnacle of Disney achievement in terms of commercial success and in successful adaptation and technical innovation. It would appear that the combination of fairy-tale narrative with Disney formula is a winning one that has not been equaled since by other generic frameworks used by the studio; subsequent semi-folkloric offerings such as *The Emperor’s New Groove* and *Brother Bear* were fairly damp squibs, and *Lilo and Stitch*, while successful, did not reach the heights of the great fairy-tale films.

Made in successive years, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* are nonetheless very different films, at least partially because of the divergent nature of their sources; the feel and texture of Mme. Leprince de Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” are very different from the *Arabian Nights*’ “Aladdin,” a difference exaggerated by Disney’s disparate approaches in the two films. However, both films rely centrally on the familiarity of the tales they rework; “Beauty and the Beast” is a staple of the child’s fairy-tale collection, while “Aladdin,” although Eastern in flavor, has been long adopted into the corpus of Western fairy tale, and in fact, as Ulrich Marzolph intimates, has a somewhat vexed origin which suggests it was not actually an authentic part of the *Arabian Nights*. The films thus reflect the standard Disney fairy-tale practice, following *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *The Sleeping Beauty* in the tradition which allows the studio self-consciously to assume the mantle of storyteller, inheritor of fairy tale. Both films retell their original story only in the loosest sense, retaining sufficient features for recognition while adapt-

ing to the demands of the formula and of contemporary culture. The reassuring predictability of the action—the self-conscious investment of the audience in the structures of fairy tale—provides a firm base for technical innovation, formula characters, and peripheral disturbances of the familiar plot. At the same time, Disney’s formula in these films works slightly differently from its earlier incarnations, offering some familiar figures with a slightly ironic slant: the Genie’s stand-up-comic intertextuality, for example, or Gaston’s construction as an antifeminist villain, not only play against the assumptions of classic fairy tale but also invite the audience to make ironic comparisons with early versions of the Disney formula.

Beauty and the Beast uses only the barest bones of de Beaumont’s tale, but focuses on the figure of Belle, another Byatt-style “reading princess” whose yearning for “more than this provincial life” demands comparison with the passive heroine of both Disney and classic fairy tale. Narrative impetus is gained by imposition of a time limit (the rewriting of the rose’s significance), and the addition of Gaston as the villain serves a similar function as Avenant in Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête*; the film medium seems to require some visual realization of the Beast’s antithesis, all surface looks and character flaw. The overall visual feel of the film is textured and slightly cluttered, often achieving an effective Gothic atmosphere; the muted colors and heavy shadows are a strong contrast to *Aladdin*’s clean lines and bright, rich colors just a year later. *Beauty and the Beast* appears to be nostalgic rather than contemporary in overall tone, accessing the same “old European storybook” feel of *Snow White* (Solomon 59) and, to a lesser extent, *Sleeping Beauty*. This is underlined by its particularly self-conscious use of the musical format, another familiar popular formula whose stylization suitably reinforces fairy-tale essentialism. Sequences in the village invoke the ensemble vocals of operetta such as Lehar’s *Merry Widow*, enhanced by the opera-trained voices of the villagers and, particularly, Gaston. Other intertextual references include Belle doing a *Sound of Music* routine in the golden fields around her house, and of course the rousing Busby Berkeley–style “Be Our Guest” routine headed by Lumière. The audience is continually prodded to admire the film’s achievements as musical in a long tradition of musical cinema. Despite this, the film also lays claim to the status of authentic fairy tale, through the opening voice-overs and reverential stained-glass windows as much as through the song lyrics which proclaim the film a “Tale as old as time / True as it can be . . .” Overall, the film plays self-consciously with its identity as fairy tale, with particular emphasis, through use of other formulae, on its unrealistic qualities of naive romance.

Aladdin is, by contrast, a more superficial film, its prevailing mode the comic rather than the Gothic or melodramatic. Its adaptation of a story traditionally regarded as Eastern offers a notable departure from Disney's hitherto unvarying use of Western cultural classics. The position of Middle Eastern culture in *Aladdin* is very similar to that of French culture in *Beauty and the Beast*—the films present an essentially superficial and patronizing view of a culture effectively defined in terms of being non-American, and therefore exotic and interesting, if not to be taken seriously. The film's view of Eastern culture is basically Orientalist: the outcry among the Islamic community when *Aladdin* was released was sufficient for Disney to recall the prints and excise an offending lyric in the opening song: "Where they cut off your nose if they don't like your face / It's barbaric, but hey, it's home." (Timothy White and J. E. Winn in their *Kinema* article summarize the Islamic point of view.) *Aladdin's* fairy-tale structure—poor boy, evil magician, lamp, genie, princess—is familiar from fairy tale, but is rendered even more familiar by the imposition of Western fairy-tale motifs onto the Eastern tale; thus the limitless power of the genie is reduced to three wishes, in the style of the Grimm tale, adding narrative impetus and closure. This familiarity is strengthened by the film's play with the trope of "poor boy makes good" associated with the American Dream, and Aladdin himself is a trickster archetype in the Puss-in-Boots mold, using cunning to persuade the villain to his own destruction through the use of his power. Jafar being persuaded to wish himself a genie is a pattern found in many fairy tales, most notably "Puss in Boots," where the ogre turns himself into a mouse, only to be pounced on and destroyed.

Aladdin offers a particularly interesting example of Disney's adaptation of fairy-tale narrative to the rather different demands of film; as well as limiting the wishes, the film makes various changes to the details of the original, which is in many ways a sprawling narrative unsuited to a dramatic or visual medium. Thus the Moorish magician, the Wazir, and the Wazir's son become one in the figure of Jafar, who neatly encapsulates the magician's sorcerous power and abuse of Aladdin, the Wazir's scheming, and the Wazir's son's lust for the Sultan's daughter. This gives the necessary single villain figure of the Disney formula, and a visual focus for the dangers besetting the hero. Likewise, the two genies are conflated in the Robin Williams character while the ring, a boring object offering little scope for animation, becomes the carpet, a familiar visual icon of the East and a fertile ground for the computer animations which distinguish this film. The carpet's computer animation is groundbreaking and innovative, a superb and magical creation of character and emotion for an

essentially two-dimensional object. Other elements of the tale—the Cave of Wonders and Aladdin’s grand processional entrance—are simply elaborate visual renditions of elements already in the tale. In fact, the structure of the film seems to owe as much to the plot of Alexander Korda’s 1939 film *The Thief of Bagdad*, as to the *Arabian Nights* original, with similarities including a villain named Jafar, a thief called Abu, a djinn of personality, and a flying carpet. The clichés of the classic film narrative are as importantly nostalgic as are the fairy-tale elements.

Both films engage in the classic Disney oral invocation at their opening. *Beauty and the Beast*’s stained-glass windows invoke tale as artifact as well as claiming oral status through the initial voice-over which gives background to the Beast’s curse. This is a novel rearrangement of de Beaumont’s use of flashback; here, the audience has events explained unambiguously from the start. Belle’s interest in reading fairy tales also confirms the film’s claim to storybook authenticity. However, these techniques pale to insignificance besides *Aladdin*’s adept framing of film as oral narrative. The disembodied voice-over gives way to an actual figure, whose direct interaction with the film audience parallels the realization of the folk voice through Granny in *Company of Wolves*, although gaining comic vitality through its obvious distance from the archetype of the old Western female storyteller. The figure of the Middle Eastern salesman, together with his camel, the “Arabian Nights” song, and the magnificent sweeping deserts of the opening sequence, sets the cultural tone, allowing the film to lay claim to the status of a genuine Middle Eastern oral voice, while also playfully satirizing the film’s commercial purpose. The oral voice is cleverly counterfeited; the salesman’s interaction with us, the audience, evokes an involuntary response as the camera, losing interest, starts to slide away from the speaker—we are, the film intimates, too discerning an audience to be taken in by spurious junk. The salesman must run after us to regain our attention, and our illusion of power and control in the oral interaction is further reinforced when his invitation to come a little closer—and thus partake in the intimate relationship between storyteller and audience—is taken too literally, plastering the camera against his face. The sequence plays equally on our awareness of the oral storytelling tradition and on the audience familiarity with film conventions, once more equating the film version with the original, and effectively replacing and erasing the original, but also inviting the audience’s enjoyment of the comic clash of modes.

The viewer’s self-conscious participation in the conventions of the film medium highlights the film’s metafictional qualities. At the same

time, the storyteller's status as *salesman* rather than actual storyteller underlines that aspect of Disney narrative which goes right through metafiction and out the other side—awareness of the tale's nature as artifact, certainly, but artifact as *product*. Having attempted to sell us spurious merchandise (a combination hookah and coffee grinder that also slices and dices, and an example of the Dead Sea Tupperware), the salesman moves on to the genuine product, the lamp which embodies the tale—and, by extension, the Disney film. The encapsulation of tale in static artifact parallels similar Disney characterizations of tale as book (*Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*) or stained-glass window (*Beauty and the Beast*); as in these cases, the point is the dramatic juxtaposition of the lively, dynamic Disney film version with the static original. It becomes evident that Disney's *Aladdin* is firmly rooted in contemporary culture, far more so than in the Eastern culture it professes to depict. The film assumes the audience's familiarity with cinematographic conventions such as the camera's point of view, but it also takes for granted the viewer's essential situation within modern commodity culture. *Beauty and the Beast* contained its fair share of consumer reference—Belle's "I want much more," the voice-over's regret that the Prince, before his transformation, "although he had everything his heart could desire, was spoiled and selfish"—but it is in *Aladdin*, and in subsequent productions such as *The Lion King*, that this becomes overt. The choice of "Aladdin" as a basis for Disney fairy-tale film is thus relevant, since the original tale is more than a little preoccupied with the desire for wealth, and with fabulous riches in the form of the cave of the lamp, the sumptuous processions with which Aladdin dazzles the Sultan, and Aladdin's miraculously constructed and glittering palace. Robin Williams's Genie is literally a genie of commodity culture, able to offer a dizzying array of consumer artifact to the stunned Aladdin, and to flaunt his power as synonymous with Disney's: "You ain't never had a friend like me!" Thus, to Aladdin and the consumer, "Life is your restaurant / And I'm your maitre d' . . . Say what you wish / It's yours!" As with many forms of cultural commodification, the product is presented as a matter of choice, and the consumer as an empowered individual who chooses with discernment and is above the blandishments of the commercial process. *Aladdin* represents the consumerist approach—the desire for wealth, a palace, a trophy woman—as natural and inevitable; Aladdin claims, "I steal only what I can't afford—and that's everything," suggesting that the consumer has some kind of a *right* to everything he or she desires. The classic empowerment process of fairy tale—the poor boy, youngest son, or despised stepdaughter making good to marry the wealthy prince or princess—is close enough to the consumer pro-

cess to make for a strong message, but the message hinges ultimately on the tale's self-conscious status as product. Rather than being the passive dupes of the consumerist process, however, the audience is invited to enjoy an ironic and self-conscious awareness of the culture in which both they and the film exist.

If *Aladdin* offers tale as commodity artifact, it extends this even further to conflate the tale with the experience of Disney, and thus to claim to sell experience as commodity. The lamp stands for the Disney experience of the tale, complete with music, image, and color. By extension, what *Aladdin* (and *Beauty and the Beast*) offers to the viewer is also culture as commodity. In packaging and selling story, the film also packages and sells the idea of a foreign culture, presenting it to a gaze that is essentially that of the American tourist. This is seen in the opening sequence of *Aladdin*, where Aladdin leads the city guard on a merry chase through the streets of Agrabah, passing sword swallows, fakirs on beds of nails, fire walkers, rope tricks, and snake charmers—all the unthinking stereotypes of a generalized “Eastern” culture that does not care to distinguish Indian from Arabian traditions, but which immerses the viewer in a sense of non-specific participation in a broader sense of “folk culture.” Disney claims, “I can show you the world,” and proceeds to do so, in a process paralleled in *Beauty and the Beast*'s view of French culture, all baguettes, berets, and the salacious womanizing of Lumière. Later in *Aladdin*, momentary vignettes of Grecian temples and Chinese dragon dances encapsulate the tourist viewpoint, equating the Disney experience with Aladdin's “magic carpet ride,” and entrenching the studio in the position of the controlling wizard/storyteller. The folkloric status of the narratives is thus shored up by the film's authoritative control over folk *culture*, in the more superficial sense of the word.

While the sheer spectacle and visual entertainment of the Disney animated fairy tale cannot be denied, there are ways in which the constraints of the animated format work directly against inherent aspects of fairy tale—most strongly, its elements of wonder, beauty, and seriousness. What sinks the otherwise interesting potential of these films is, ultimately, Disneyfication—the problem so pilloried by Pratchett, the paralyzing of the narrative by sheer cuteness. *Aladdin* is perhaps a more successful film because, paradoxically, it most completely loses sight of the elements of beauty and threat in the original tale. Its comic framing cheerfully accommodates anachronistic references and slapstick interactions where *Beauty and the Beast*'s storybook Gothic produces some uncomfortable clashes with the animated formula. The accomplished craft of the animators gives perky character to the castle's furniture and utensils, emphasizing the marvelous

unreality of animation and the absolute awareness of artifact which characterizes fairy tale and consumer text. However, the potentially real Gothic threat of the Beast's castle is effectively undercut—no one can take seriously the looming gargoyles, shadows, and marks of violence when ridiculous cultural caricatures of a French candlestick and British clock are conducting the tour. This is, of course, deliberate to some extent: the Disney formula's comforting provision of unthreatening entertainment works to mitigate the Gothic undertones, rendering them controlled and slightly sanitized. In the competing frameworks of the real and the unreal, the film also succumbs even more completely than Cocteau's does to the lure of visual identification, here exaggerated by the essential unreality of the animated format. The moment of the Beast's transformation is a complete anticlimax despite its excessive effects, partially because of the cardboard cut-out prince, but mainly because of the visual cues attached to the Beast—his animated figure is simultaneously masculine and comic, idealized and endearing, having more in common with the animated beast-fable of children's Sunday morning cartoons than with the underlying violence and eroticism of the classic fairy tale.

In discussing Disney as an example of metafictional fairy tale, it becomes evident that self-awareness in this context cannot be separated from commercial appeal. Disney's self-consciousness about tale as artifact is playfully entertaining, but like popular literary forms, tends to sacrifice genuinely innovative narrative play to the demands of marketability. The result is to trivialize fairy tale, losing the potential depth of the form, and to somewhat unreflectively perpetuate the stereotype of fairy tale as monolithic ideological entity whose structures permit only reactionary concepts of culture. At the same time, however, Disney films also powerfully display cinema's potential to mimic oral function in its ability to adapt to and to shape the culture within which it is retold, and to recreate itself as an unquestioned cultural given. The films remain sufficiently acute, relevant, and entertaining to have almost usurped the role of fairy tale in the lives of many Western children.