

WHY & HOW WE BRING FAËRIE FORWARD:  
AN EXPLORATION OF INTERMEDIALITY IN MODERN  
WESTERN RETELLINGS OF FAIRY TALES & FOLKLORE

by

Jessica Margaret Raven

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**Supervisor(s):** Sarah E. Maier, PhD, English & Comparative Literature

**Examining Board:** Sasha Mullally, PhD, History, Chair  
Daniel Downes, PhD, Communication  
June Madeley, PhD, Sociology

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## Abstract

Storytelling is an integral part of the human experience and has been since the days of our prehistoric ancestors who wove tales orally by the fireside. Storytelling brings people together, teaches lessons through immersion into unfamiliar scenarios, and reflects a culture's beliefs and values either to affirm or challenge them. The ability to tell stories, to create fictional worlds in which the imagination can explore, is what sets humanity apart from other animals.

This work explores why, and how, western culture tells the same fairy tales repeatedly, regardless of how much time passes and how much western society grows. Fairy tales remain relevant because they play upon basic human fears and desires, and they can be – and are – retold countless times in countless ways because they are full of intermedial motifs.

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who loves fairy tales as much as I do, with a special dedication to my Papa Billy, who taught me to believe in magic and to always, above all else, believe in myself.

Not a day goes by that you, your heart, and your treasure trove of stories are not missed.

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## Introduction

Storytelling is an integral part of the human experience and has been since the days of our prehistoric ancestors who wove tales orally by the fireside. Storytelling brings people together, teaches lessons through immersion into unfamiliar scenarios, and reflects a culture's beliefs and values either to affirm or challenge them. The ability to tell stories, to create fictional worlds in which the imagination can explore, is what sets humanity apart from other animals. In *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (2012), Jonathan Gottschall writes:

Tens of thousands of years ago, when the human mind was young and our numbers were few, we were telling one another stories. And now, tens of thousands of years later, when our species teems across the globe, most of us still hew strongly to myths about the origins of things, and we still thrill to an astonishing multitude of fictions on pages, on stages, and on screens – murder stories, sex stories, war stories, conspiracy stories, true stories and false. We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories. (2012, xiii – xiv)

Humanity's addiction to storytelling makes us unique because no other species, not even the smartest of our primate cousins, weave complex fictional narratives. Humans are the world's apex predator, and yet ruling the world does not seem to be enough; the alternate realities created by storytelling are just as important to the human experience

because fictional worlds are necessary spaces for safely making sense of, and questioning the state of, the real world.

One would assume that, as the human race progresses, the fictional worlds in which humanity plays would be many and plentiful – and one would not be wholly wrong in making such an assumption. However, even as new and exciting fictional worlds are generated in books, television, and film every year, humanity continually returns to one fictional world in specific time and time again: that which J. R. R. Tolkien called Faërie, or the fictional world of fairy tales. In the opening paragraphs of his oft-cited essay “On Fairy Stories,” he writes:

Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold. [...] The realm of the fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment; and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords. (1947, 109)

It is the intention of this study to explore both how and why humans return to the fictional world of Faërie and endlessly retell its fairy tales, centuries after they were first told by our ancestors at the fireside. Specifically, the following chapters demonstrate why key elements found in folklore and fairy tales continue to be carried forward as western society progresses – apart from the first chapter, which explores the roots of



fairy tale types and therefore requires a global analysis – and how it is possible to reuse near-ancient archetypes in an ever-changing social climate.

The how is infinitely simpler to explain than the why because how humanity retells fairy tales in new contexts can be explained by the communications theory of intermediality, whereas understanding fully why humanity continues to retell fairy tales would require an absolute understanding of the collective human psyche, which as of the year 2021 has never been achieved. It is therefore the author's goal to give a detailed explanation of how the intermediality of fairy tales enables their continued use in various social landscapes, and to explain why humanity continues to retell these stories.

To define intermediality, one must refer to two theoretical articles: Claus Clüver's "Intermediality and Interarts Studies" (2007) and Eli Rozik's "Medium Translations between Fictional Arts" (2007). As defined by Clüver, a symbol<sup>1</sup> is intermedial if it is "immediately recognizable" and if the symbol is inseparable from its perceived meaning, context, or origin (2007, 19). Consider the 'Cinderella' fairy tale and its many retellings. In the case of western versions of the tale, the most noteworthy intermedial symbol is the glass slipper because, while we do not associate every shoe

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<sup>1</sup> According to Cronkhite, "A symbol is a type of the more general class of 'signs.' A sign is that which, in some sense, 'stands for' something else, the 'something else' being its significate. A 'signal' is that type of sign that stands for its significate by virtue of a natural relationship, usually by some relationship of causality, contingency, or resemblance. A 'symbol' does not stand for its significate by any natural relationship; rather, its relationship is arbitrary, created by its use." (1986, 232)

with Cinderella, we do automatically associate glass slippers with the archetypal heroine and her narrative. The story has been retold enough times over the past three centuries in western culture—following the popularity of Charles Perrault’s 1697 retelling which introduced the glass slipper to the tale’s formula—that the iconic shoe has become an integral part of the cultural phenomenon of retelling fairy tales in the West and is immediately recognizable. It is not only the symbol of the glass slipper that is intermedial; the act of losing it at the ball is intermedial, too.

While Clüver’s research deals with intermedial symbolism, theatre scholar Eli Rozik deals with the intermediality of fictional characters’ actions. Rozik explains in “Medium Translations between Fictional Arts” (2007) that actions can be just as intermedial as symbols and that they play an equally important part in ensuring that the source narrative of a retelling remains recognizable even when the story overall is altered to suit a new cultural landscape. According to Rozik, the characters in iconic media, like fairy tales, possess “indexes of actions” (2007, 403) which, when a narrative is retold, must be referenced in some way for the iconic media (and its characters) to remain recognizable amidst change. These actions are what make fairy tale characters archetypal because they are formulaic; just as Cinderella must always lose something, be it her shoe or an equally identifying object, Little Red Riding Hood must always encounter a predator, be it a wolf, a tiger, or a sexually threatening man. There must be “deflection of reference” (403)<sup>2</sup> in a retelling back to the source material, either through

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<sup>2</sup> To elaborate, to ‘deflect reference’ when retelling a narrative means that intermedial scenes/characters/symbols must appear within a retelling that reflect/parallel the source

intermedial symbolism or through intermedial actions, because it is the intermediality of timeless narratives like fairy tales that make them instantly recognizable, whether they are set in an enchanted forest or in a modern setting, such as the blockbuster “Cinderella” retellings *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), and *A Cinderella Story* (2004).

In order to understand why humanity continues to retell fairy tales one must also understand why not all fairy tales have stood the test of time and why only certain elements from these archetypal narratives have been carried forward as opposed to retelling faithfully the tales exactly as they were originally told. In his 1946 book *The Folktale*, American folklorist Stith Thompson uses the literary device motifs to explain the phenomenon of selective retelling. He defines motifs as “the smallest element[s] in a tale [that have the] power to persist in tradition” (1946, 415). Motifs enable the retelling of fairy tales, through time and across cultures, because the rest of the tale can be shaped around those motifs to better serve the new social environment in which the story is retold. Only the motifs are carried forward, rather than the tale in its entirety, because the classic tales shaped around these motifs are often dated and problematic; for example, modern western retellings of the “Cinderella” fairy tale still contain the intermedial motifs of the glass slipper or a similarly identifying object that could only be hers (such as Samantha’s cellphone in the 2004 film *A Cinderella Story*) and the action of losing it, but the depiction of Cinderella being rewarded for her passive behaviour

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material and subsequently serve as prompts/reminders/triggers for the audience, making it clear that a retelling is a new version of an old, familiar narrative, like a fairy tale.

and silent suffering is changed in favour of presenting more empowered versions of the heroine with whom a modern audience can identify. The key, intermedial motifs of the story remain intact, but the narrative and characters are fluid to better suit the time and place in which it is being retold.

The combination of these motifs results in a product called a tale type. Described briefly, a tale type is a formula that outlines the motifs included in a particular fairy tale. The term stems from the ATU Tale Type Index, a tool used by folklorists and fairy tale scholars, that is based upon the combined efforts of German folklorist Antti Aarne, American folklorist Stith Thompson, and German folklorist Hans-Jörg Uther.<sup>3</sup> In 1910, Aarne published *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* [*Directory of Fairy Tale Types*]. The purpose of the *Directory* was to illustrate that all fairy tales can be broken down into basic sets of motifs. In 1928, Thompson expanded upon Aarne's *Directory* in *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. Thompson's text popularized the use of a classification system that sorts the various tale types and their motifs numerically; for example, what western culture calls the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale type is known by folklorists numerically as ATU>333 (Thompson 483), and a retelling can be

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<sup>3</sup> In 2004, Uther published a further-expanded revision of the Tale Type Index – *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography* – because Aarne and Thompson's twentieth century editions largely excluded international retellings of the tale types. While the original volumes focus primarily on western (colonial) and East Asian retellings, Uther's expanded edition sought to include "narratives from Central Africa, tales of North American [aboriginal peoples], etc." (Uther 1997, 211)

recognized as a retelling of ATU>333 if it includes the following motifs: a wolf or other animalistic monster that eats humans; a little girl on a quest to her grandmother's house; and the deception and devouring of the girl by the monster, disguised as a family member. Throughout this study, tale types will frequently be referred to by their critically accepted tale type classification number to differentiate between the discussion of a tale type formula, which is the foundation of motifs upon which a story is built, and the individual retellings themselves that will be analyzed.

The author of any fairy tale retelling uses a tale type outline when they include in their story the archetypal motifs associated with a given tale type; they then build upon the outline with a fully fleshed story. The retelling might be very much like classic versions of the fairy tale in question, such as those penned by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, or the author can write a tale that is extremely different, such as Emma Donoghue's short story collection *Kissing the Witch* (1997) that presents fairy tales in a lesbian context. As long as the tale type's intermedial motifs are included, a story will remain recognizable as a retelling of a specific fairy tale regardless of how traditional or modern the story that takes shape around the motifs is. It is also worth noting that the inclusion of intermedial tale type motifs is not always conscious; because fairy tales are told, in some capacity, to practically every child who grows up to be a writer, tale type motifs become deeply engrained in humanity's collective imagination.

Even the intermediality of tale types and their motifs still only speaks to how humanity has continued to recycle fairy tale narratives, not why. The simplest explanation for why humankind goes to the trouble of retelling old stories in new contexts instead of solely creating new ones is that, regardless of the passage of time and

the evolution of a society's beliefs, these old tales continue to have value because they play upon the inherent, even instinctual desires and fears of humanity which never change: the desire for safety, security, and success, and the fear that one feels at the prospect of losing, or never having, one or all three. The persistence of inherently human desires and fears and their relationship to why we continue to retell fairy tales will be explored in depth in the first chapter of this study, which provides a cross-cultural analysis of the continued retelling of fairy tales around the world.

While fairy tale retellings are indeed produced all over the world, the brevity of this study requires that only western fairy tale retellings be examined in full in succeeding chapters. Using the theoretical framework of intermediality and by citing tale types ATU>333 ("Little Red Riding Hood"), ATU>425C ("Beauty and the Beast"), ATU>510A ("Cinderella"), ATU>709 ("Snow White"), and a new tale type proposed for the purpose of the portion of this study devoted to "The Little Mermaid,"<sup>4</sup> the following research will use an interdisciplinary approach to demonstrate how, by combining works of communications and literary theory, and why, considering the psychological and sociological impact of fairy tales, these tale types are carried forward in western society's popular culture, particularly in the popular fantasy genre. Modern fairy tale retellings examined include *The Witcher* franchise; Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (1993); *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012); Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*

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<sup>4</sup> Please refer to Appendix A, Table 1 for a classification diagram which lists the tale types discussed and their respective motifs.

(1837) and Disney's film adaptation (1989); and Alexandra Christo's *To Kill A Kingdom* (2018).

## Chapter One:

### Desires & Fear: What Motivates Humanity to Retell Fairy Tales?

“Haven’t fairy tales been with us for centuries as a necessary part of our culture?

Was there ever a time when people did not tell fairy tales?” (Zipes 2002, 2)

The desire for safety, security and success, and the fear of losing or never having one of these three core tenets of the human experience is a powerful psychological motivator, both in reality and in the fictions woven by humankind. In this study, safety refers to protection from and/or being free of bodily harm; security refers to the desire to preserve one’s future physically and/or financially; and success refers to triumph over adversity. The folktales which have stood the test of time and gone on to be retold, time and time again, as fairy tales all include characters who desire one of the tenets or fear a tenet’s loss, which makes them relevant to the audience. To illustrate the universality of fairy tales, and therefore demonstrate why we continue to retell them to such an extent that the symbols and actions within them become intermedial, this chapter will outline how safety, security, and success factor into the formulas of ATU>333 (“Little Red Riding Hood”); ATU>425C (“Beauty and the Beast”); and ATU>510A (“Cinderella”).

#### SAFETY: ATU>333 (“Little Red Riding Hood”)

The desire for safety and therefore the fear of danger is best illustrated by the many retellings of ATU>333 (“Little Red Riding Hood”). The underlying message of “Little Red Cap,” the well-known Brothers Grimm version, is to follow the safe path



that one's parents point down, for danger lies beyond it; specifically, in the Victorian literary tale, the message is aimed at young women in an effort to preserve their virtue from the lecherous men who will try to tempt them. Little Red's mother cautions her, "When you're out in the woods, be nice and good and don't stray from the path, otherwise you'll fall" (Grimm 1812, 93), and her warning is one of the tale's most recognizable intermedial motifs. While it can be read as literally cautioning the heroine and the young listener of her tale not to stray from the path lest they get tangled in brambles and tree roots and take a tumble, there is a clear metaphor written between the lines that warns young girls and women about the dangers of falling from grace should they let a 'wolf' tempt them astray.

A well-known Chinese retelling of the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale type, titled "The Tale of the Tiger-woman,"<sup>5</sup> also plays upon the inherent desire for safety and fear of danger by invoking the motifs of ATU>333; however, the tale shaped around said motifs is drastically different than "Little Red Cap" in order to better suit an East Asian audience. In "The Tale of the Tiger-woman," the reader encounters a young girl (accompanied in this version by her little brother) who is on a journey "to pick up a basket of jube-jube-fruits and bring them to ... [their] maternal grandmother" (Chih-chün 1993, 517). Along the way, they encounter a monster who leads them astray with the intent to do them harm, but the monster in the Chinese ATU>333 retelling is not a "wolf" (Grimm 93). Instead, the children encounter an "old female [tiger] ... [who]

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<sup>5</sup> Other versions include "The Tiger Grandma" or "Grand-aunt Tiger" (Lontzen 1993, 513).

could at times transform herself into a human in order to harm people” (Chih-chün 1993, 517).

While the wolf, in most western versions, is a masculine figure who can metaphorically be read as a human man, as a realist “seducer” (Verdier 1997, 118) of young women, the monster in the Chinese retelling of ATU>333 pays homage to the spiritualistic nature of East Asian culture, where the threat of monsters and demons is perceived as literal rather than purely fantastical. In Japan, for example, folklore is not viewed as entirely fantastical fiction; what the Japanese people call *setsuwa* are “considered to have an oral origin and are secondhand stories. They are presented as true, or at least as possibly true” (Reider 2019, 423). In *setsuwa*, a common figure is the *yamauba*, “an ugly old woman who lives in the mountains and devours humans” (404). She strongly resembles the witch characters of western fairy tale tradition, who will devour anyone, young or old, with the misfortune to stumble into her path. The *yamauba* also strongly resembles the tiger-women of Chinese folklore. The tiger-woman is a “demon,” a “were-creature” (ter Haar 2005, 67) who takes on the guise of “an extremely old lady” (57) in order to eat children, like the wolf in western retellings of ATU>333.

The key difference between the demonic were-creature in “The Tale of the Tiger-woman” and the werewolf of western tradition is that werewolves are the product of fiction, while stories of tiger-women play upon the fear of *gui* “and the unfamiliar” (Esler 516) that remains prevalent in Chinese culture, and in East Asian culture as a

whole. The reality of the fear of *gui*,<sup>6</sup> and tiger-women in specific, is evident in the fact that women resembling the folkloric were-creatures were persecuted and tortured as recently as the nineteenth century. In an account published in 1847, recounted in B. J. ter Haar's *Telling Stories: Witchcraft And Scapegoating in Chinese History* (2005), an elderly woman is tortured and murdered after a child accuses her of being a tiger-woman:

Since the [farmer] woman was angry at the [boy's] scolding her, she said: "Better don't say anything anymore, or I will return to eat you." The boy was frightened and ran away to tell the people in his village. Since these were all country bumpkins that knew nothing, they mistakenly took it for real, sounded the gongs and gathered a crowd. Each was holding instruments or weapons. [...]

They pursued the woman and completely beat her up. Her entire body was covered in wounds. They tied her up and brought her to the county yamen. From Xinfeng to [the county seat of] Danyang was 30 *li* (Chinese miles) and along the road people spread the rumour [that the old woman was a tiger-woman]. When they reached the county capital no less than several thousand people pressed the magistrate to sit in the hall and hurriedly told him: "This

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<sup>6</sup> *Gui* is the Chinese word for "ghost" and, according to Joshua Esler, "can be used as a generic classification for all manner of spirit-beings, including malevolent ones, such as demons" (2016, 516). The tiger-woman is an example of a malevolent *gui*.

demon has eaten innumerable small children of the people, but now it has luckily been caught. We invite the magistrate to stamp it with his seal, to make it show its original form again[.]” The magistrate ... took out his seal and applied it three times, but the woman stayed the same. [...] The magistrate vacillated and was in doubt, [...] but the big crowd clamoured without stopping. They said: “We have spent great effort to bind it and bring it here, now the magistrate wishes to set it free which will harm the people.” When he asked how they knew it was a monster, they told him that its lower body was female and its upper body male. The magistrate ... looked at her. He saw that above the woman’s lips were small hairs, abundant as if she had whiskers, whereas her two breasts had already become flat because of her advanced age. He felt that the words of the crowd were very reliable and thereupon the magistrate pierced her lute bone [i.e. her scapula]. After they had finished piercing it, the woman expired. (62-63)

Because the folktales of tiger-women were perceived not as fiction but as spiritual truth, the popular Chinese retelling of ATU>333 remains a cautionary tale with the same motifs as the western retelling, “Little Red Cap,” but the figure being cautioned against is not a metaphorical sexual predator but a seemingly real, shapeshifting, child-eating monster. In 1961 the “Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ... rejected [*gui*] beliefs as ‘superstitious,’ and ... [sought] to show how ... [through] logical reasoning, modern Chinese citizens should also abandon such superstitious beliefs” (Esler 507), but “The Tale of the Tiger-woman” is still frequently told “to warn children to stop crying, or else Auntie Old Tiger [will] come and get them” (ter Haar 71). No matter how logical a

society becomes, the fear of what lurks in “the depth of the forest” (Łaszkiewicz 2017, 56), be it silver-tongued wolves with sharp teeth, witches in gingerbread houses, or shapeshifting tiger-women, is still prevalent across cultural boundaries, as is the moral that listening to one’s parents will keep the audience safe from these unknown dangers found in ATU>333, be they real or spectral.

#### SECURITY: ATU>425C (“Beauty and the Beast”)

The desire for security and fear of its loss is prevalent in ATU>425C (Thompson 483), known in western culture as the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type. In this tale type, the audience encounters the following intermedial motifs: a young man who is under a spell that makes him appear monstrous, even animalistic; an impoverished parent who struggles to provide for his or her offspring; and a deal that is struck between the cursed young man and the parent, wherein a child of incomparable beauty is sacrificed for security, either in the form of wealth, the preservation of the parent’s life, or both. In retellings of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type from all over the world, the audience sees two crucial components repeated in the quest for security; self-preservation and self-sacrifice; both of which are considered to be instinctual by behavioural biologists and psychologists.

In retellings of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type from various countries, the self-preservation instincts of the parent play a large role. Psychologist Denys de Catanzaro writes that:

All behaving organisms normally seek food, water, and shelter, and avoid harsh elements, predation, and other perceptible threats to survival. These patterns usually constitute the better part of the organisms' behavioral repertoires, and they clearly function to keep the individual alive. A perusal of any modern text in physiological psychology ... shows that there are stereotyped, heritable, physiological substrates of avoidance of pain and danger, of hunger and thirst, and of more complicated components of self-preservation, such as emotional behaviour. (84)

The reader of the well-known French retelling of ATU>425C, "*La Belle et la Bête*" (1740) by Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, sees the parental character of the merchant demonstrate the power of self-preservation. It is his survival instinct which causes him to agree to sacrifice one of his daughters "to preserve his life" (1740, 32) after the Beast declares that he "shalt not escape the death [he] deservest" for the theft of "enough [roses] to make half-a-dozen bouquets" (30) from the Beast's garden. When he accepts the bargain, the merchant prolongs his own life at the expense of the life of one of his daughters because he is certain that the Beast intends to "devour her before [his] eyes" (36).

While the parental figure in Villeneuve's retelling desires security in the form of the preservation of his life, in the Norwegian retelling of the ATU>425C tale type, titled "East of the Sun and West of the Moon," the "youngest daughter, who was so beautiful that there was no end to her beauty" (Tatar 2017, 41) is not sacrificed to a beast to save her father from imminent death, but rather to save her father and siblings from

encroaching death by crushing poverty. In “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” the father is not a merchant but instead “a poor farmer with so many children that he no longer had enough food for them, and barely enough to clothe them” (41). One night, a white bear comes knocking at his door and promises to elevate his fortunes if he will sacrifice his young and beautiful child:

“Will you let me have your youngest daughter? If you do, I will make you as rich as you are now poor,” the bear said.

Well, the man thought it would not be a bad idea to be rich, but he thought he ought to talk things over with his daughter before making any agreements with the bear. He went back into the house and told everyone about the great white bear waiting outside and how the bear had promised to make him rich in exchange for the youngest daughter.

The girl said “No!” outright. Nothing could make her change her mind. So the farmer went out and told the white bear that he should come back next Thursday evening for an answer. In the meantime, he started talking with his daughter and kept on telling her how rich they would be and how well she herself would do. Finally, she agreed to the exchange. (42)

Here, the father is eager to sacrifice his daughter to the bear in exchange for the security that elevated wealth will bring him, despite the fact that he has no idea what the bear intends to do with his daughter. He also chooses to ignore the daughter’s initial refusal and continues to pressure her until, finally, she agrees to leave with the white bear when

he returns. On the verge of financial ruin, the farmer sacrifices his daughter to a beast to prevent starvation in a display of self-preservation, just as de Catanzaro suggests instinct would have him—and any other living organism—do.

Self-sacrifice as instinctual is also prevalent in nearly every version of *ATU>425C*, but it should be noted that self-sacrifice is only believed to be an instinct in mammalian females. According to Howard M. and Kathleen S. Bahr (2001), there is a persistent belief in literature, both artistic and scientific in nature, “that mothers should [and will] sacrifice themselves for their children” (Bahr et al. 2001, 1243). Patricia Churchland agrees that female mammals are “wired for” self-sacrifice; while the brains of insects, reptiles and amphibians are not “made for offspring care,” mammalian females feel “pleasure when kith and kin are safe and fed and close by; [and feel] pain and anxiety when they are threatened or suffering or far away” (2019, 44-47). While, scientifically speaking, there is proof that female mammals will sacrifice themselves to protect their offspring, it becomes a toxic notion when the expectation of self-sacrifice is applied to human women, regardless of whether or not they are mothers; whether they are young or old; and whether they are cisgender<sup>7</sup> or transgender. There is a non-instinctual, but cultural expectation that all women will be self-sacrificing “in the name of virtue” (Gilligan 1982, 213), and that they will prioritize the security of others over their own security.

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<sup>7</sup> To be cisgender is to have one’s gender identity conform with one’s birth sex. Ex: a cisgender woman is a woman who was born female.



Because self-sacrifice is considered “a feminine ideal” (Bahr et al. 1243) in historically patriarchal cultures like that of the western world, the heroine of ATU>425C always sacrifices herself for the security of her family, regardless of the suffering that it may bring upon her and regardless of when or where a particular version of the tale type is told. One sees the intermedial motif of the heroine’s self-sacrifice as early as the Greek myth of Zeus and Europa, which is one of the first-known retellings of ATU>425C, along with the Roman myth of Cupid and Psyche. In the Greek myth, Europa is said to outshine even the most beautiful of girls “as the Goddess of Love outshines the sister Graces” (Tatar 4). Zeus becomes enamoured with the beautiful girl and, taking on the guise of a bull (and therefore a beast), waits until she climbs upon his back and then kidnaps her with the intention to rape her. She ultimately sacrifices her virtue to Zeus after he promises that, by succumbing to the rape, “she would bear him/Glorious sons whose sceptres shall hold sway/Over all men on earth” (5-6). Europa, unlike the heroines of modern tradition, does not sacrifice herself for the security of her living family but rather to secure glorious legacies for her lineage.

The security-seeking motifs of the self-preserving parent and the self-sacrificing heroine are integral to ATU>425C since they transcend both time and space. Regardless of when or where the tale is retold, the teller and the listener will possess a universal understanding of the desire for security, both for oneself and one’s family (even if the latter is destructive for the woman-listener); thus, ATU>425C has stood the test of time because its relevance to the human experience, and the instincts inherent to it, have yet to fade.

## SUCCESS: ATU>510A (“Cinderella”)

The human desire for success and fear of not attaining it is plain to see in ATU>510A, the ultimate success story, known in western popular culture as the “Cinderella” tale type. In all examples of ATU>510A, a girl of low stature (either born there or placed there by cruel circumstances) is elevated suddenly from rags to riches and succeeds against impossible odds. It is inherently human to desire success, which subsequently makes humanity fond of an underdog success story. Rags to riches tales like the ATU>510A tale type tug at just “the right heartstrings” (McGinnis et al. 2017, 566) and provide “hope” (569). Underdog affection—as Lee Phillip McGinnis et al. (2016) call it—is why one always roots for those persons at a disadvantage, be it a person like the abused Cinderella, a sports team like the Toronto Maple Leafs, who have not won the Stanley Cup since 1967 but continue to try, or be it a small mom-and-pop business trying to compete against big box stores in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. According to McGinnis et al., the “underdog entity itself is one that consumers perceive to have dogged determination despite deficiencies in resources, abilities, or opportunities” (565). The very-human love for the underdog is why ATU>510A remains the most ubiquitous of all the tale types (Tatar ix). But why are humans drawn to the underdog to begin with? McGinnis et al. argue that the appeal stems from “balance maintenance ... and empathic concern” (569).

McGinnis et al. define balance maintenance as “the extent to which people desire to hold the powers in society in check, such that no entity in society (i.e. government, business, or individual) has too much power, thereby allowing freedom of choice” (574). In all retellings of ATU>510A, there is a clear imbalance of power between

Cinderella and her family. The stepmother, who holds all of the power in the family unit, completely strips the tale's heroine of her ability to make any choices for herself. Cinderella is forced to do the family's menial bidding and is repeatedly denied the opportunity to exercise her freewill, both to attend the ball(s)<sup>8</sup> and to try on the lost slipper. Because balance maintenance is one of the reasons that people love a good underdog story, Cinderella is adored because she, as the underestimated character, actively opposes the imbalance of power in her tale. She rebels against those who abuse her when she defies their orders; against the stepmother's express wishes, she does attend ball(s) and she does try on the slipper. It is her defiance of the power imbalance in her story that ultimately results in the restoration of a balance in power; because she attends the ball(s) and tries on the slipper, she marries the prince and escapes her family's power to control her.

It is Cinderella's success in restoring balance, and therefore gaining control over her life, that makes her tale timeless. The struggle to regain control when a corrupt force enters one's life will likely always be universal. Between the inevitable existence of abusive homes and relationships, the ascent to power of morally bankrupt individuals, and the perpetual financial gap between the rich and the poor, Cinderella's successful escape from those who wish to use, abuse, and harm her will always be a much-desired dream for those who suffer from the cruelty of another and yearn for a better life.

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<sup>8</sup> The number of balls within ATU>510A varies from one retelling to another. In some, there is only one ball, while in others there are multiple balls held in succession several nights in a row.

Cinderella's story is one of hope and, to quote Alexander Pope, "hope springs eternal in the human breast" (1733, III.19).

Humanity also continues to retell ATU>510A because the heroine and her story foster feelings of empathic concern, which can promote healthy psychological behaviour in real-life situations. The popular use of "Cinderella" as a didactic tool in the classroom can be linked to its use in teaching empathy. Because ATU>510A generates "the emotional reaction of warmth, compassion, and concern for others" (McGinnis 574), children are taught by the tale that they should feel warmth, compassion, and concern for the suffering Cinderella. That learned empathy can then later extend to real people suffering from similar circumstances. For example, in "Middle Ground: Relating School and Life through 'Cinderella'" (1996), Mary Mercer Krogness conducts an experiment where she visits classrooms in both public and private American schools and asks "young people to reconsider the old and familiar story *Cinderella*, to reconsider it from a different vantage point and engage in understanding it through improvised, classroom drama" (1996, 101).

The results of the experiment show that students use their own life experience, and that of their classmates, to better understand the story of "Cinderella" and, likewise, the story of "Cinderella" helps them to better understand the life experience of their classmates. For example, a thirteen-year-old girl named Missy describes her personal "Cinderella" story as follows:

I have two older brothers. Then there's me and my two little sisters. I share my room with the two little ones. I try keeping our room neat, but my little sisters

mess it up. Then my parents won't let *me* go out with my friends. And when I say it's no fair, they refuse to listen; they tell me that because I'm older, it's *my* responsibility. (103; emphasis in original)

Missy later explains how, to cope with her Cinderella-like plight, she “talks [her problems] over with [her] friends” (103). Said friends have the ability to feel empathic concern for Missy in part because her suffering at the hands of her unfairly authoritative parents so closely resembles the plot of ATU>510A. If one empathizes with Cinderella, who has to serve her stepsisters at the command of her stepmother, then one is also likely to empathize with Missy, who is unfairly made to tidy up after her younger sisters who appear to have no responsibilities in their household.

That ATU>510A is a cross-cultural tale type is clear in its multitude of retellings. While western society is most familiar with Charles Perrault's “Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper,” penned in France, and the Brothers Grimm version, “Aschenputtel” which was transcribed in Germany, these two retellings of the tale type are far from the only versions. “The Little Red Fish and the Clog of Gold,” a tale from Iraq, possesses all of the recognizable intermedial motifs of an ATU>510A retelling. There is a cruel stepmother who “leave[s] all the work for the girl to do” (Bushnaq 1986, 182); later in the story, the girl receives assistance from a magical helper (in the form of a little red fish) in her quest to find a husband but she loses a shoe in the process when “one of her golden clogs [falls] off her foot and into the river below” (184). While the story itself bears many cultural differences from the well-known western versions, such as the royal ball's replacement with a “day of the bride's henna” to which “every

mother brought her unwed daughters to be seen by the mothers of sons” (183), the familiar motifs of the wicked stepmother, suffering child, and lost shoe make it recognizable to the reader as an example of the ATU>510A tale type just as much as Perrault’s “Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper” or the Grimm Brothers’ “Aschenputtel.”

Fairy tale types like ATU>333 (“Little Red Riding Hood”), ATU>425C (“Beauty and the Beast”), and ATU>510A (“Cinderella”) have maintained their relevance and persisted in popular culture around the world in part because they depict trials and victories that pertain to timeless fears and desires; thus, it is safe to assume that the folk stories lost to time and/or those which were never recorded as literary fairy tales and were never sorted into the ATU Tale Type Index were possibly too era-specific. Granted, every version of a fairy tale is era-specific; the folktales transcribed by the Brothers Grimm were penned to suit a Christian agenda just like many modern fairy tale retellings suit a feminist agenda. The argument inherent is that humanity returns to these stories repeatedly to suit a variety of cultural agendas because even as a society’s cultural agendas change, the basic fears and desires which make one gravitate toward fairy tales never change. Whether a culture is extremely Christian or burgeoningly feminist, people will always desire safety, security, and success, and people will always fear their loss – and desires and fears can be manipulated, which make fairy tales infinitely useful to just about any social agenda.

## Chapter Two:

### Daring Damsels & Feminist Princesses: Why Fairy Tales Change

#### While Motifs Stay the Same

“I was starting a new writing class and needed an idea, so I thought maybe I could expand a fairy tale [like Robin McKinley]. “Cinderella” is such an important tale, it's the first one I thought of. But when I considered it, I realized I didn't like Cinderella or understand her. She's so disgustingly good! And why does she take orders from her horrible stepmother and stepsisters?” (Levine, [gailcarsonlevine.com](http://gailcarsonlevine.com), 2021)

Just because the core desires and fears present in tale types and their retellings stay relevant does not mean that every element of these classic stories does so. Many literary fairy tales that western culture considers to be classics (i.e. those penned by Charles Perrault, Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, and the Brothers Grimm to name a few) feature sexist themes, language, and behaviour that a modern audience would find problematic. To ensure that a retelling of a tale type both maintains the undercurrent of universal desires and fears whilst still appealing to a modern audience, storytellers must shape their retelling into one that reflects the beliefs and values of modern western society. To alter a fairy tale and still present a familiar model of a tale type is accomplished through the careful utilization of intermedial motifs (i.e. symbols and actions) throughout a retelling.

In the earliest examples of western literary fairy tales, penned between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries by writers like Charles Perrault, Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, the Brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen, helpless damsels and dashing heroes abound because when a tale is retold profoundly influences the story that takes shape around a tale type's intermedial motifs. While the first chapter of this study demonstrated why the intermedial motifs of a tale type remain unchanged, the second chapter will demonstrate why, as society progresses and culture evolves, the larger narratives in fairy tale retellings are constantly changing around those motifs.

Consider how Charles Perrault's "Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper" (1697) is drastically different from the film *A Cinderella Story* (2004) even though both versions were produced in the West. Perrault's version takes place in an unnamed seventeenth-century kingdom and features a silently suffering heroine who never stands up for herself, while the 2004 film, directed by Mark Rosman, takes place in early-2000s California and features a spunky high-school student as its title heroine who, while she does suffer, certainly does not do so silently. Samantha, the film's heroine, follows the majority of her stepmother's orders, but she is very vocal about how unfair they are. These changes occur because society's feminine ideals changed significantly between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries in the wake of first, second, and third-wave feminism. Until very recently, the ideal woman was thought to be passive while the ideal man was active, hence the establishment of literary archetypes like damsels in distress and knights in shining armour. Women, in classic literary fairy tales published in the West, could not save themselves from a life of servitude to a cruel family nor an enchanted sleep; for salvation, a masculine hero was needed.



On pre-feminism fairy tales, Carol Gilligan writes that “male identity [is] forged in relation to the world and ... female identity [is] awakened in a relationship of intimacy with another person... Since the adolescent heroines [exist] not to conquer the world, but to marry the prince, their identity is inwardly ... defined” (13). The notion of the man as active and the woman as passive relates to the historic, pre-feminism social norm that a man’s place was in the public sphere while a woman’s place was in the private sphere. Men took care of business affairs in urban settings and hard labour in rural settings, while women dealt with domestic affairs such as housekeeping and childrearing. Perrault’s Cinderella is an example of the passive and devoted, family-oriented heroine of pre-feminism fairy tales; she is “of an exceptionally sweet and gentle nature,” and because of her sweet and gentle nature she never complains when she has to “clean the plates and the stairs, and sweep out the rooms of the mistress of the house and her daughters” (1697, 67). She endures it all quietly and with patience because such is what the ideal woman of Perrault’s era would do to satisfy not just her family, but her entire society.

In *A Cinderella Story* (2004), Samantha is far from content to serve her cruel step-family while she waits to be rescued; as an early example of the feminist princess archetype, she strives to save herself. The feminist princess archetype is a trend that emerged following the 1991 release of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, with a screenplay written by Linda Woolverton. Woolverton wanted to write a different kind of Disney princess; she wanted Belle to be a “strong, active [woman]” (Guo 2016). On what makes a strong female character, and thus a feminist fairy tale princess, Woolverton says:

[A strong female character] means somebody who is proactive in their world, who affects their world, isn't a victim, even victimized by it – or if they are victimized by [the world], they take action to change that for themselves. They look at the world in interesting ways, maybe another way than the culture does. That makes a strong woman if she's vocal about it, or even goes about trying to make change without being vocal about it. There are so many interesting ways to describe women besides just strong, even this pure difficult strength. [A feminist character is] *strong-willed*. (Erbland 2019)

It was necessary that Samantha be modeled after the feminist princess archetype because in the twenty-first century the concept of girl power, which emerged in the 1990s, dominates. Young women are no longer satisfied to be quiet and endure their plight in life; they are vocal when they are displeased about something and strive to change it themselves rather than relying upon others to do so for them. The desire of young women to be empowered is subsequently reflected in Samantha's non-traditional behaviour in *A Cinderella Story* – and because her behaviour breaks the mold of the traditional ATU>510A heroine, the intermediality of the symbols and actions within the story's formula become all-the-more important to ensuring it remains familiar to the audience amidst feminist changes.

From the beginning of her aptly titled Cinderella story, Samantha models the feminist princess archetype because she is active instead of passive and does not need a prince to rescue her from her unsatisfactory station; she is on track to escape a life of servitude to her stepmother because she has applied, and is likely to be accepted, to

Princeton University (Rosman 2004, 00:05:48). Rather than settling for a life of inner, private fulfilment in the home, this modern Cinderella strives to strike achieve outer, public accomplishments on her own that previously would have been exclusively awarded to men: a university degree, followed by a career as a writer. She even goes so far as to demonstrate verbally her unwillingness to be a passive, pre-feminism princess who patiently waits for a prince to sweep her off her feet. Samantha says to Austin, “I know that guy who sent those emails is somewhere down inside of you, but I can’t wait for him because waiting for you is like waiting for rain in this drought: useless and disappointing” (01:21:12).

Instead of saving her, Austin (the character who embodies the prince-character of ATU>510A) causes Samantha a great deal of emotional strife by allowing her to be bullied when their email exchanges are read aloud in front of the entire school at a pep-rally. She realizes that the only person she can depend upon to save her is herself, which fits the feminist princess archetype model far more than the traditional Cinderella archetype model. This could potentially make the film unrecognizable as an ATU>510A retelling, if not for the fact that the film maintains the necessary motifs that make it a Cinderella story (a cruel step-family, menial labour, aid from a helper-character to attend an event forbidden to her by her stepmother, etc.) and frames the narrative around these motifs to make it a feminist Cinderella story. Samantha is not a suffering damsel who needs to be saved; she is the hero/ine of her own story.

Changes to the finer details of fairy tales, like the setting and how characters interact with each other, ultimately occurs because, while inherent fears and desires never change, society changes constantly. Ideals and beliefs shift, knowledge and

understanding expand, and a culture's most basic stories—the formulaic tale types borne from folklore—must change with it to remain relevant. While people will always yearn for safety, security, and success, fairy tales must lose the attributes that no longer serve a particular society.

To suit, for example, the beliefs of a more progressive western society in the twenty-first century, sexist themes in classic fairy tales must be removed, or at the very least addressed within the text itself as being sexist, to become feminist or they run the risk of portraying a version of the world that is, by western society's current standards, archaic. For the sake of brevity, only western fairy tale retellings will be examined throughout the remainder of this study to thoroughly examine why that specific culture continues to retell fairy tales, why the narratives change while the key motifs stay the same, and how that change is possible due to the intermedial nature of tale types.

In western culture of the present day, the tellers of literary fairy tales are no longer exclusively heterosexual, cisgender males in privileged positions within society; fairy tales are adapted by women, people of colour, and LGBTQ+ individuals. A few of the classic western literary fairy tales were indeed written by women; both best-known versions of ATU>425C were written in eighteenth-century France by female authors. “*La Belle et la Bête*” (1740) was first published by Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and was later abridged and published in *Magasin des enfants* (1756) by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. Despite being penned by a female hand, both Villeneuve and Beaumont's versions of “Beauty and the Beast” served as didactic tools that perpetuated masculine power over women, equally as much as the literary fairy tales of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen.

Villeneuve's "*La Belle et la Bête*" and Beaumont's abridged version sought to teach young women that self-sacrifice would be rewarded, specifically in relation to arranged marriages. Throughout western history, high-born women served as pawns in the forging "of advantageous marriage[s] and prudent family alliances" (White 1988, 55). A good marriage could bring wealth, higher social status, and respect to a young woman's family, but with an advantageous (and, at least in the beginning, loveless) marriage also came a fair fear of the unknown: who would the young lady marry; would he be cruel or kind; and would she be happy or live miserably for the rest of her life? The theme of consenting to an advantageous marriage for the sake of a young woman's family was central to the early western tradition of ATU>425C retellings; Zipes writes that, "She does not choose her husband-to-be and is expected to save her father and wed a male not of her choosing" (2006, 140). Villeneuve's heroine aptly demonstrates the self-sacrifice made by young women who submitted themselves to advantageous arranged marriages to opulent men for the sake of their families:

"Ah! And what do you think will become of you after [your father's] departure?"

[said the Beast.]

"What it may please you," said she; "my life is at your disposal, and I submit blindly to the fate which you may doom me to." (Villeneuve 50)

Beauty blindly submits to a union with an unknown, beastly gentleman and, in exchange, her father receives "two trunks" to fill with finery for her siblings, for the

Beast decrees, “It is right that you should send them something of sufficient value to oblige them to remember you” (51).

The implication of the eighteenth-century French retellings of ATU>425C is that women were bargaining chips to be traded off to the highest bidder to secure the longevity of the family. That implication thoroughly shapes “*La Belle et la Bête*” into an advantageous marriage metaphor which teaches young women that, although their future husbands may seem beastly at first, “perhaps the dreadful fate which appears to await [them] conceals another as happy as [it] seems terrible” (41). According to Zipes in *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (2006), “debates about appropriate marriages and the morals of [their] time” strongly influenced both Villeneuve and Beaumont; subsequently, their versions of “*La Belle et la Bête*” are “eminently didactic fairy tales [that exist to help] young readers, particularly girls, to improve their social status” (77) through advantageous marriages.

While Villeneuve and Beaumont’s presentation of ATU>425C as an arranged marriage metaphor may have been culturally relevant in the eighteenth-century, the progression of western society away from such exchanges meant that ATU>425C narratives had to become progressive, too, so as to avoid cultural irrelevance. As early as the nineteenth century, the heroine of ATU>425C is seen as a woman of agency rather than her father’s pawn because Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) is considered by critics to be the first “feminist fairytale [sic]” (Carlton-Ford 1988, 377). Modelled loosely upon ATU>425C, Brontë’s heroine is not promised to a beast but rather makes the conscious decision on her own to venture to Mr. Rochester’s home and serve as his ward’s governess, and then later to marry him. No male influence forces her hand. Jane

does not do so to save her father nor to better the prospects of siblings because she has none; everything that she does, she chooses to do for herself alone.

Unlike the heroines of ATU>425C retellings that came before her, Jane is a slave to no one's will; she is "no bird; and no net ensnares [her]; [she] is a free human being with an independent will" (Brontë 1847, 256). That she exercises her independent will when she chooses who she will (or, perhaps more aptly, who she will not) marry, rather than allowing a man to arrange her union for her, proves that Jane is a heroine who is very different from the heroines of previous ATU>425C retellings in western tradition. If her story is to be read as a ATU>425C retelling, then one can effectively read Jane as a proto-feminist princess, for she embodies the archetype over a century before Linda Woolverton established it in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

*Jane Eyre* demonstrates how fairy tale narratives are retold in a style which suits the time in which they are written. That Brontë drew inspiration from classic western fairy tales like Villeneuve's and Beaumont's respective versions of "*La Belle et la Bête*" when she wrote her novel is evident within throughout text; in "Bluebeard and the Beast: The Mysterious Realism of *Jane Eyre*" (2016), Jessica Campbell writes that the novel is "peppered ... with both overt and subtle references to fairy tales" (234). The central ATU>425C motif is clearly present in *Jane Eyre*: the heroine ventures to the home of an unknown, potentially beastly man of wealth and stature, uncertain at the time of her arrival what her fate will be. She is warned, just as Beauty is warned by her father, that engaging with the beastly man could prove dangerous, even fatal, but she chooses to engage with him regardless of the danger:

“... it is said the Rochesters have been rather a violent than a quiet race in their time: perhaps, though, that is the reason they rest tranquilly in their graves now.”

(Brontë 106)

If one has read or watched multiple retellings of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type, then one can recognize that Jane’s behaviour regarding Mr. Rochester – while more independently driven than Beauty’s historic behaviour toward the Beast which is encouraged in western tradition by her family – is modelled after ATU>425C. Her acceptance of Rochester’s beastly nature is a highly intermedial action, and thus highly recognizable.

Also reminiscent of ATU>425C in *Jane Eyre* are the intermedial symbols associated with the fairy tale that occur throughout the text. For example, Jane passes through “a lane noted for wild roses” (111) on Mr. Rochester’s estate; roses are “a recurring motif in ‘Beauty and the Beast’ tradition” (Dominguez 2008, 87) in western culture, and at least one rose makes an appearance in practically every western retelling of ATU>425C produced since the eighteenth century (when the French versions of “*La Belle et la Bête*” were published). Even more overt, Brontë named the estate “Thornfield” (108), a name which invokes imagery of a field of untrimmed roses. Rochester himself also bears a symbolic physical resemblance to the “horrible beast” (Villeneuve 30) of “*La Belle et la Bête*”:

His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared, and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height, and



considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now. (Brontë 113)

Draped in fur, with noteworthy bulk and a “decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty” (120), readers well-versed in the western fairy tale tradition will recognize that the unhandsome master of Thornfield, beast-like in personality and appearance, is a loose reinterpretation of the beast-character in ATU>425C, updated to reflect a perilous nineteenth-century suitor.

A far more blatant example than *Jane Eyre* of western retellings of ATU>425C maintaining the necessary motifs to remain familiar while altering the larger narrative to better suit the time in which a retelling is composed are Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* film adaptations, released in 1991 and 2017 respectively. If Jane was a proto-feminist fairy tale heroine, then Disney’s Belle is a concrete example of a feminist fairy tale heroine. She is “strong [and] active” (Guo 2016) rather than delicate and passive; like Jane, Belle is a woman of agency, an intelligent woman, a feminist woman who makes her own decisions.

The key difference between Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* and Villeneuve or Beaumont’s versions of “*La Belle et la Bête*” is that Belle’s father plays no active role in her venturing to the Beast’s castle. She is no longer presented as a bargaining chip by her father, who already completed the transaction with the Beast and bartered her life for his prior to Belle’s trip to the castle; instead, Belle independently seeks out the Beast and does the bargaining herself because it is her life, her future for which she bargains:

Belle: I've come for my father. Please, let him out. Can't you see he's sick?

Beast: Then he shouldn't have trespassed here!

Belle: But he could die! Please, I'll do anything!

Beast: There's nothing *you* can do. He's my prisoner.

Belle: Oh, there's must be some way I can – wait! Take me instead.

Beast: You...! You would... take his place?

Maurice: Belle, no! You don't know what you're doing!

Belle: If I did, would you let him go?

Beast: Yes, but... you must promise to stay here forever.

[...]

Maurice: No, Belle! I won't let you do this!

Belle: [to the Beast] You have my word. (Trousdale & Wise 1991, 00:23:20)

Unlike the parental figures of past western retellings of ATU>425C, Maurice never once considers giving his daughter to the Beast in exchange for his own life; in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, 2017), the decision to sacrifice herself is Belle's and her father has no say, regardless of his declarations that he will not allow her to go through with it.

Contrary to Maurice's statement that she does not know what she is doing, Belle is perfectly aware of the sacrifice that she is making in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, 2017) and her awareness makes the character embody the feminist principles of freedom of choice and morality. While in past retellings of the ATU>425C tale type the heroine agrees to venture to the Beast's castle in exchange for her father's life without seeing the

Beast, a glimpse of the Beast is always one of the Disney heroine's stipulations; in each film, before she agrees to stay with the Beast forever, Belle demands that he "come into the light" (Trousdale & Wise 00:24:03; Condon 2017, 00:29:30). Her decision is a fully informed one, rather than the uninformed decision of a virtuous, submissive daughter; in fact, Belle's decision to take her father's place makes her a defiant daughter rather than a submissive one because, even after her father forbids her from taking his place, she still does.

The films' audience sees Belle, the feminist fairy tale heroine, exercising her right to freedom of choice which "plac[es] bounds on responsibility by limiting duty" (Gilligan 147). She does not have to sacrifice herself for her father; Maurice has not gambled with her life to save his. Rather, he encourages her to "go, [to] live [her] life and forget [him]" (Condon 00:30:45). There is no pre-existing obligation, no promise made on her behalf. Belle is free to do precisely that: live her life and forget her father.

Instead, using feminist morality, she makes the informed choice to take his place. Feminist morality is comprised of far more than merely virtuous, daughterly self-sacrifice; as Gilligan writes in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), feminist morality "is aligned with 'the kind of integrity' that comes from 'making decisions after working through everything you think is involved and important in the situation,' and taking responsibility for [your] choice" (147). There are many factors which contribute to Belle's decision, including the physical evidence that she is sacrificing herself to a beast and the reality that she would live the impoverished life of a "spinster" (Condon 00:17:00) should she leave her father to die in the Beast's dungeon. She does not make an impulsive, irrational choice; rather, she

makes a fully considered and thoughtful choice. She behaves like the feminist women of the twentieth century, while ATU>425C heroines of the past behaved in ways fitting of the publication year of their respective retelling. Jane, a nineteenth-century heroine who came into being on the very cusp of feminism, behaves like a proto-feminist, and Beauty, penned by Villeneuve in a male-dominated, eighteenth-century society, behaves like a submissive daughter because such behaviour was idealized at the time.

Alongside the retellings' progressive heroine, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, 2017) both feature intermedial symbolism that ensures the films remain recognizable as retellings of ATU>425C. Even if the title was not a dead giveaway, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* films would still be recognizable as retellings of ATU>425C because, alongside the updated feminist themes, both films stay true to the core motifs of the tale type: a beautiful young woman encounters a cursed gentleman, and their eventual union breaks the spell that he is under. Also present in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, 2017) is the symbolic, intermedial rose common to ATU>425C tradition in the West. The cursed prince's fate is tied to "an enchanted rose. If he could learn to love another and earn their love in return by the time the last petal fell, the spell would be broken. If not, he would be doomed to remain a beast for all time" (Condon 00:03:50). Other symbols common to the western ATU>425C tradition are "an abandoned castle" (Zipes 2006, 141) and books (142), both of which make appearances in Disney's films. The Beast resides, with his enchanted servants, in a castle that is falling to ruin, and it is books and a mutual enjoyment of reading through which the Beast and Belle bond and "develop a mutual respect for each other" (141).

Because literary fairy tales, tale types, and the folkloric stories that they originate from are quite literally tales as old as time, they are filled to the brim with intermedial symbols and actions. After centuries of repetition, they are quite possibly the most recognizable stories in western culture, and therefore the possibilities for retellings are truly limitless. As long as the intermedial motifs are maintained, ensuring that the tale type in question remains recognizable, a fairy tale can be retold within a modern setting, with feminist themes, with characters of colour and LGBTQ+ characters. The succeeding chapters of this study will demonstrate just how powerful a tool intermediality is for keeping fairy tale retellings familiar in new contexts – primarily within the development of the fantasy genre of literature, which was heavily influenced by fairy tales and folk stories. They will also demonstrate not only how the larger stories built around tale types change, but why they change.

Chapter Three:  
Finding Faërie in the Other Worlds of the Fantasy Genre

“As time went on, and man’s inventive and imaginative faculties developed, these simple stories, from being complete in themselves, became incidents in longer tales.” (MacCulloch 1905, 457)

While the core motifs of fairy tale types remain the same in western retellings no matter how much time passes, the narratives that takes shape around those motifs are ever-changing. In “On Fairy Stories” (1947), J. R. R. Tolkien writes, “Speaking of the history of stories and especially of fairy stories we may say that the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty” (125). While the crucial parts, the broth in Tolkien’s Cauldron of Story, remain the same because the tale type is unrecognizable without them, new bits and pieces are added, and the story is expanded, from generation to generation –and nothing is more demonstrative of the expansion of the classic western tale types than the fantasy genre.

The fantasy genre is a descendent of the short, literary fairy tale. Both fantasy and the fairy tale present a “wholly other world” (Timmerman 1983, 15) that does not resemble our own. For writers like Villeneuve, that Other World was one wherein a powerful queen could lead an army, defeat kings, and leave her son in the care of a council of fairies whilst she wages war; Tolkien’s Other World was Middle Earth, a land where trees can walk and wars are waged over magical, all-powerful rings. It is the

Other World that sets fairy tales and fantasy apart from fables and science fiction, for the latter “projects our world” (Timmerman 16), albeit a strange version of it. While fairy tales and fantasy take place in fictional Other Worlds, entirely separate from our own, fables and science fiction are rooted in alternate reality. Fables, such as those penned by Aesop, are implied to take place in our own world, albeit an alternate reality where animals can talk, and science fiction like WESTERN.G. Wells’ novella *The Time Machine* (1895) and the sci-fi franchise *Star Trek* (1966-) take place in alternate versions of our reality that have been influenced by fictional scientific progress.

Fantasy writers like Tolkien, Sir Terry Pratchett (who wrote the behemoth *Discworld* series (1983-2015)), and Andrzej Sapkowski (author of *The Witcher* series (1992-2013)), have taken the otherworldliness of fairy tale types and expanded it into something more concrete, and far larger. While it is generally understood that fairy tales take place in Other Worlds that are entirely separate from our own, the Other Worlds in the literary fairy tales of Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, Andersen, and Villeneuve—among others—have no name. Their fictional kingdoms, forests, and villages are traditionally nameless, unknown lands in an unknown world dominated by wicked fairies, cannibalistic witches, and cursed princes. Tolkien, Pratchett, and Sapkowski, along with other modern fantasists, take the unknown Other World of the classic tale types and give it a name, a tangible geography, and—perhaps most revolutionary of all—they populate it with characters never featured before in stories of Faërie. For Tolkien, Faërie became Middle Earth; for Pratchett, it became Discworld, the fantasy world that “is carried through space on the backs of four elephants and a giant turtle” (Pratchett et al. 1994, 225), and for Sapkowski, that Other World became the Continent,

a fictional land that has been plagued by monsters and magic since the Conjunction of the Spheres, a cataclysmic, apocalyptic event during which a rift opened up between realms and Chaos<sup>9</sup> bled in. Each Other World, while unique, bears traces of its origin – traces of Faërie.

To start, one must consider why what began as short, oral folktales and were later adapted into relatively short literary fairy tales became longer fantasy narratives, and why fantasy continues to be one of the most popular types of genre fiction nearly a century after Tolkien published *The Hobbit*. First, one must have a solid understanding of what genre fiction is. Genre fiction is culturally juxtaposed with literary fiction, the difference between the two being that genre fiction is said to be written for the “mass-market” (Norman 2011, 38) reader, whilst literary fiction is generally considered to be more “serious” (54). Genre fiction is written to be sold to and read by the average person, while literary fiction is often written with a deeper meaning than lies at face value for an audience with the higher education required to understand the text. Genre fiction is meant to entertain; literary fiction is meant to educate, often through complex metaphors and allegories.

Because the main purpose of fantasy fiction is not to educate but to entertain, it falls firmly into the category of genre fiction. In the Foreword of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1966), Tolkien even goes so far as to express his distaste for allegorical literary fiction:

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<sup>9</sup> Chaos, in this context, is the term that Sapkowski uses throughout the *Witcher* series to describe magic.



I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and ware enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (1954, xxvi)

Tolkien’s desire with his works of fantasy fiction was not to dominate the reader; rather, he believed that “the prime motive ... of a tale-teller [is] to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them” (xxiv). At its core, a fantasy narrative is a really long fairy tale meant to invoke primal fears and desires. According to J. A. MacCulloch, “As time went on, and man’s inventive and imaginative faculties developed, these simple stories [i.e. oral folktales and short, literary fairy tales] became incidents in longer [fantasy] tales” (457).

As is the case with shorter fairy tales, the inherent fears and desires of humankind and their presence in the stories play an important role in the popularity of fantasy literature; in both short fairy tales and longer fantasy narratives, “there are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, [and] death” (Tolkien 151) which humans naturally fear, and their binary oppositions are also present: feasting, bountiful drink, wealth, pleasure, joy, justice, and lengthy life. In the larger, more definitive Other

World of fantasy narratives, an expanded glimpse into Faërie offers up another reason for humankind to love fantasy genre fiction: escapism.

In *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre* (1983), Timmerman states that fantasy literature is “essentially rejuvenative” (1); it allows the reader “not [only] to escape but to rejoin earth’s ‘pathless wood’ with a clearer sense of direction and purpose. [...] It permits us a certain distance from pragmatic affairs” (1). Fantasy fiction transports the reader to an Other World where realist problems do not exist, whilst literary fiction tends to hone in on real world problems. Faërie is, indeed, “a perilous land” (Tolkien 109) filled with as much, if not more, danger than the real world, but the important difference between fantasy and literary fiction is that the problems faced by Frodo, Geralt, and all of their companions are not realistic. In the real world, unless things get very strange very fast, one will never have to confront a dragon, toss a magic ring into a fiery pit, fight a striga, or tame a djinn. These are problems unique to the Other World, to Faërie, and by consuming fantasy literature that does not in any way resemble the real world, the reader’s brain is given the pause required for rejuvenation, a chance to decompress; then, when one returns to reality from the Other World, they are able to look at the real world’s problems with a fresh set of eyes. The opportunity for rejuvenation offered by fantasy literature is necessary for the reader’s mental health and plays a large role in the popularity of genre fiction.

Because fantasy has become a widely recognized, and appreciated, genre since Tolkien’s works, fantasy as a genre of fiction possesses its own intermedial motifs, separate from those of the fairy tale narratives that frequently reappear within it. Fantasy “has an additional significance uniquely its own” and “as a literary genre it must first of

all abide by aesthetic standards that will distinguish [its] enduring significance” (Timmerman 101). Sapkowski’s *The Witcher* series of books and the transmedial franchise that they inspired must be recognizable as works of fantasy, just as the fairy tales adapted within the series must be recognizable as retellings of specific tale types. Both the familiarity of the fantasy aesthetic and the recognizability of the tale types are achieved through the use of intermedial symbols and indexes of actions. Prior to the exploration of intermedial fairy tales in *The Witcher* that will be conducted in the next chapter, this chapter must first prove that *The Witcher* is intermedially a work of fantasy by comparing Sapkowski’s work to that of Tolkien, who is credited by many modern folklorists as “the inventor of a genre, the genre of fantasy as we now know it” (Pask 2013, 141).

#### GERALT & FRODO: THE FANTASY (HERO) ARCHETYPE

*The Witcher*, a series of books originally written and published in Polish by fantasist Andrzej Sapkowski between 1992-2013, is a lengthy fantasy saga that tells the story of the heroic trials and travels of the famed witcher Geralt of Rivia. In Sapkowski’s books, witchers are mutants, former-humans taken as children from their families and subjected to a series of mutations known as the Trial of the Grasses, during which they consume potions that painfully alter their body chemistry and turn them into enhanced, nearly immortal monster hunters. They are “itinerant killers of basilisks; travelling slayers of dragons and vodniks” (Sapkowski 1993, 6), among many other creatures that pose a threat to humanity, but the life of a witcher like Geralt is far from glamorous; unlike the knights in shining armour of Medieval legend, he is not hailed as

a conquering hero after slaying a dragon, nor is he revered as an expert saviour like the vampire hunters of the later Gothic tradition.

On the Continent, Geralt leads the traditionally lonely life of the intermedial, archetypal fantasy hero. Timmerman describes the fantasy hero archetype as follows:

First of all, [...] he is all too well aware of his frightful mortality. He knows he is not a god. The deeds to which he is called are engaged with mortal fear and trembling. Second, he is often lonely, terribly lonely, for his deeds are often engaged far from the idol-worshipping throng; sometimes in an altogether different world. Yet it is often for this unacknowledged crowd that he acts.” (45)

Geralt is, as Timmerman suggests, aware of his frightful mortality. Witchers are mutated to be nearly immortal so that they will not die instantly when faced with the venom and claws of monstrous beasts, they are not wholly immortal. They can live for centuries longer than the ordinary human, but too much venom or too sharp a claw can still bring about their death if they are not careful. He knows, as Timmerman writes, that he is not a god, despite his possession of godlike speed and strength, and thus he pursues monsters with the knowledge that each battle could be his last. It is Geralt’s so-called frightful mortality that motivates his actions at the conclusion of “A Question of Price,” one of the various short stories in *The Last Wish* (1993) collection:

“I still say I am in your debt, witcher. [...] What do you ask, Geralt?”

[...]

“Duny,” said Geralt seriously, “Calanthe, Pavetta. And you, righteous knight Tuirseach, future king of Cintra. In order to become a witcher, you have to be born in the shadow of destiny, and very few are born like that. That’s why there are so few of us [witchers]. We’re growing old, dying, without anyone to pass our knowledge, our gifts, on to. We lack successors. And this world is full of Evil which waits for the day none of us are left.”

“Geralt,” whispered Calanthe.

“Yes, you’re not wrong, queen. Duny! You will give me that which you already have but do not know. I’ll return to Cintra in six years to see if destiny has been kind to me.” (155-156)

Above, Geralt enacts the Law of Surprise: a practice in which an individual indebted to another promises to give their saviour the first thing they see, which they did not expect to find, when they return home. Not always, but often enough, the surprise which awaits is either an unexpected pregnancy or the sudden birth of a child. Because of this, the child then rightfully belongs to he (or she) who enacted the Law. The practice of the Law of Surprise is crucial to witchers like Geralt, for a child born bound by the Law of Surprise is then, as he states above, born under the shadow of destiny – and it is only such a child that can one day become a witcher. Because his mutant race is dying out, and because Geralt knows that he is frightfully mortal and will one day die, as well, it is essential that he find an heir to pass his knowledge to who will continue to defend humanity against the Continent’s monsters when he is gone.

The Law of Surprise contributes crucially to what makes Geralt a perfect model of the fantasy hero because he, like Tolkien's Frodo before him, does not choose to set out on the path of heroism for glory, as a medieval knight would; destiny, or fate, chose the path of heroism for him. He was called to the life of heroism by the Law of Surprise when he was born in the shadow of destiny and subsequently made into a witcher, and he fights monsters not for glory but to protect the innocent. Frodo Baggins is bound similarly by fate in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1966); Frodo does not choose to possess the One Ring to rule them all (Tolkien 66), but instead finds his fate sealed within an envelope when Bilbo leaves the ring to him in his will. Just as it was Geralt's destiny to be a witcher, Tolkien implies that it was Frodo's destiny to bear the Ring:

[Gandalf said to Frodo,] "There was more than one power at work, Frodo. The Ring was trying to get back to its master. It had slipped from Isildur's hand and betrayed him; then when a chance came it caught poor Déagol, and he was murdered; and after that Gollum, and it had devoured him. It could make no further use of him: he was too small and mean; and as long as it stayed with him he would never leave his deep pool again. So now, when its master was awake once more and sending out his dark thought from Mirkwood, it abandoned Gollum. Only to be picked up by the most unlikely person imaginable: Bilbo from the Shire!

"Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it.

And that may be an encouraging thought.” (73)

However, while it was both Geralt and Frodo’s destiny to become something unpleasant (a mutant witcher; the bearer of a monstrous, sentient Ring of Power), destiny does not dictate their behaviour.

The fantasy hero chooses to protect the innocent because he is compassionate. While destiny made Geralt a witcher, he actively chooses to protect the innocent, and that does not always equate solely to the lives of humans. If he were acting upon destiny alone and had no choice in his actions, then Geralt would be the monster that humanity believes all witchers to be: “a blind, bloodthirsty tool, [...] someone who kills [monsters] coldly and without question, who wipes his blade clean of blood and counts the cash” (Sapkowski 1993, 155). In reality, Geralt is neither blind nor bloodthirsty, and he never kills anyone, be they human or monster, without question. His personal code is demonstrative of that compassion; despite the notion that witchers will kill anything for coin, Geralt never kills “exceptionally rare [nor] intelligent creature[s]” (185) unless he is left with no other choice.

Readers see Geralt’s code of compassion demonstrated in *The Last Wish* (1993) when he refuses to kill Duny despite Queen Calanthe’s desire (or, rather, her order) that he do so. In “A Question of Price,” Geralt is summoned to the court of Queen Calanthe in Cintra for the coming-of-age feast of her daughter, the Princess Pavetta. It is there that she reveals her desire that he kill Duny, who has rightful claim over Pavetta’s hand in marriage after saving the King’s life and enacting the Law of Surprise. Because Duny is under a curse, he resembles a beast; he has “two bulbous, black, button eyes [...].

Eyes set to either side of a blunt, elongated muzzle covered in reddish bristles and full of sharp white fangs. [Duny's] head and neck bristled with a brush of short, grey, twitching prickles" (1993, 144). Duny's beastly visage make him appear monstrous, and Calanthe uses his monstrous appearance to justify her hiring a witcher to kill him. Geralt, however, refuses to kill Duny based upon his appearance alone; because he is an intelligent creature, and merely a man cursed to resemble a beast, Geralt sides with compassion and morality rather than bloodlust and greed, and thus opts to protect, rather than murder, Duny. Fate made him a witcher, but he chooses to protect the innocent, monstrous though they may appear; he has "never killed people for money, regardless of whether it's for a good or bad cause. And [he] never will" (125) because doing so would violate his moral code. Not only does he refuse jobs that he believes to be immoral, regardless of the rewards that they promise and how much he could benefit from them, but he also actively fights to protect the defenseless, even when the defenseless are not entirely (or at all) human.

Compassion at a personal cost is an intermedial action of the fantasy hero modelled early by Tolkien's Frodo Baggins. While fate made him the bearer of the Ring, it is his compassion that motivates him to seek its destruction. Frodo cannot bear the thought that his possession of the Ring may bring harm upon the peaceful, innocent hobbits that reside in the Shire:

"Yes, alas! Through [Gollum] the Enemy [i.e. Sauron] has learned that the One [Ring] has been found again. [...] And he has at last heard, I think, of *hobbits* and the *Shire*.



“The Shire – he may be seeking for it now, if he has not already found out where it lies. Indeed, Frodo, I fear that he may even think that the long-unnoticed name of *Baggins* has become important.”

“But this is terrible!” cried Frodo. [...] “...I am a danger, a danger to all that live near me. I cannot keep the Ring and stay here. I ought to leave Bag End, leave the Shire, leave everything and go away.” He sighed.

“I should like to save the Shire, if I could – though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid and dull for words, and have felt that an earthquake or invasion of dragons might be good for them. But I don’t feel like that now. I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again.” (77-82)

Frodo does not desire to leave the Shire; he likes the security of staying at home, as most hobbits do. It is thus his compassion that motivates him to act, his desire to preserve that security for all the other hobbits in the Shire if not for himself. While Geralt and Frodo could not be more different, for witchers are large and confrontational whilst hobbits are small and prefer to avoid confrontation, they still share that same intermedial, necessary trait that makes the fantasy hero recognizable as such: compassion for others as the motivator for action, regardless of personal cost.

It is not enough, however, for the fantasy hero to be compassionate; he must also, according to Timmerman, be “terribly lonely” (45) as a result of his selfless compassion and altogether unthanked for his toil. When he departs on his journey to see

the Ring destroyed, Frodo is cautioned by Gandalf to “be careful of what you say, even to your closest friends! The Enemy has many spies and many ways of hearing” (83). Therefore, no one in the Shire even knows of Frodo’s reason for leaving (save for Samwise “Sam” Gamgee, Peregrin “Pippin” Took, and Meriadoc “Merry” Brandybuck, who accompany him). They have no idea that Frodo left to keep them all safe, and therefore he receives no real thanks for his toil. Furthermore, Frodo goes so far as to attempt to isolate himself even further when he believes the Ring is now endangering those who do accompany him:

“I will do what I must,” he said. “This at least is plain: the evil of the ring is already at work even in the Company, and the Ring must leave them before it does more harm. I will go alone. Some I cannot trust, and those I can trust are too dear to me: poor old Sam, and Merry and Pippin.” (524)

It is Frodo’s plan to venture to Mordor on his own, in order to protect his innocent friends from the evil that lies in wait there, and it is his attempt to endure the toil of his adventure alone that makes Frodo a model of the fantasy hero archetype.

Geralt, like Frodo, also models the archetype because he too leads a lonely, thankless existence to protect the innocent. Despite the fact that he exterminates monsters that would otherwise make off with children in the night, terrorize villages, and devour travelers, he is not respected; humans despise and fear witchers, even whilst they pay for their protection. It is largely believed that they are brutal and money-grubbing mutants, no better than the monsters that they kill. Geralt is not revered as a

hero on the Continent, nor a saviour, even if he proves himself to be precisely that over and over; rather, he is referred to as “the Butcher of Blaviken” (1993, 72) and is spat upon and stoned wherever he goes:

A stone came flying from the crowd and clattered against the flagstones. A second followed, whizzing past just above Geralt’s shoulder. The witcher, holding himself straight, raised both hands and made a swift [protective] gesture with them. The crowd heaved; the stones came flying more thickly but the Sign, protecting him behind an invisible oval shield, pushed them aside.

“Enough!” yelled Caldemeyn. “Bloody hell, enough of that!”

The crowd roared like a surge of breakers but the stones stopped flying.

The witcher stood, motionless. (1993, 112)

Geralt risks his life daily for fragile, mortal people; as the bard Jaskier sings in the Netflix adaptation of Sapkowski’s series, “He’s a friend of humanity” (Belousova et al. 2020, 1:42), but it is an incredibly one-sided friendship in which Geralt gives but rarely receives. He is paid in coin but never in thanks, admiration, or true friendship. Because of the lonely life that he leads, he is the embodiment of Timmerman’s fantasy hero archetype, “for his deeds are often engaged far from the idol-worshipping throng; sometimes in an altogether different world. Yet it is often for this unacknowledged crowd that he acts” (45). The fantasy hero’s loneliness and thankless existence are highly intermedial, and they play a crucial role in maintaining the familiar fantasy

aesthetic when new fantasy sagas are created. Without this silently suffering hero, a fantasy narrative would be incomplete.

It is not only the hero himself that makes a fantasy narrative instantly recognizable; also crucial to the aesthetic familiarity of the fantasy genre is the hero's formulaic quest. In *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre* (1983), Timmerman dedicates the book's entire sixth chapter to explaining the fantasy hero's quest; it is that important to the genre. Without a quest at its core, a narrative cannot belong within the fiction category of fantasy. Timmerman describes the formula of the fantasy hero's quest as follows:

- 1) A precious object and/or Person [needs] to be found and possessed...
- 2) A long journey to find it, for its whereabouts are not originally known.
- 3) A hero. The precious Object cannot be found by anybody, but only by the one person who possesses the right qualities of breeding or character.
- 4) A Test or series of Tests by which the unworthy are screened out, and the hero revealed.
- 5) The Guardians of the Object who must be overcome before it can be won. They may be simply a further test of the hero's *arete*, or they may be malignant in themselves.
- 6) The Helpers who with their knowledge and magical powers assist the hero and but for whom he would never succeed. They may appear in human or in animal form. (93)

In *The Witcher*, while there are many side-plots which retell fairy tale narratives and will be discussed at length in the next chapter, the core quest of Sapkowski's saga is that Geralt must find, protect, and guide Princess Cirilla "Ciri" of Cintra, for they are each other's destiny. She is the precious Person, as Timmerman terms it, that he has been on a long journey to find – a journey that took a decade, in fact, because Ciri is the child who was promised to him when he demanded the Law of Surprise as payment in "A Question of Price." In *Sword of Destiny*, that Ciri is the fantasy narrative's precious Person becomes clear:

"You will not escape, Geralt."

"From destiny?" The Witcher [sic] tightened the girth of the captured horse.

"No," the druid said, looking at the sleeping child. "From her."

(Sapkowski 1992, 311-313)

Because they are linked by destiny, by the Law of Surprise, Ciri is fated to be the driving force behind Geralt's fantastical quest, just as the Ring and finding a way to destroy it is at the heart of Frodo's quest in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Without even realizing it, Geralt passes destiny's tests in "A Question of Price" by defending Duny; by saving her father, he proves himself a hero worthy of, and capable of, defending and aiding the Child of Destiny.

The hero does not necessarily choose to embark upon a quest in a fantasy narrative, as evidenced above by Geralt's initial attempt to escape from it; rather, "the

quest hero [sic] is appointed or ordained to his mission” by fate or a higher power (Timmerman 91), and the quest is “pursued only when grave events threaten the well-being of a society” (93). While he does his best to run from Ciri, from his destiny after their first official meeting in *Sword of Destiny* (1992), Geralt ultimately has no choice in the matter; when her grandmother the Queen Calanthe, her Guardian as Timmerman would call her, commits suicide in *Blood of Elves* (1994) rather than witness the fall of her kingdom, Ciri inevitably falls into Geralt’s care, just as she was destined to. He must then rely upon Helpers in the form of sorceresses, just as Frodo relies upon the Fellowship, to see his quest through to completion. If he does not complete his quest, the results could be deadly on a massive scale; just as Frodo failing to destroy the Ring could result in the destruction of the Shire, and possibly Middle Earth as a whole should Sauron get his hands on it, Geralt failing to care for Ciri and ensure she receives the proper education to control her Chaos (i.e. her magic) could result in the Continent’s end because she, like her mother before her, has “access to immense primal power” (Lopez 2019, 53:45) that, if left untrained, can rip cracks in the foundation of the universe.

Both the fantasy hero and his quest are highly intermedial, which contributes to the overall intermediality of the fantasy genre. While the heroes themselves and their plots differ wildly from one fantasy narrative to another (such as from *Lord of the Rings* to *The Witcher*), there are core elements that carry over from story to story, like the fantasy hero’s index of actions (he is aware of his mortality; he is self-sacrificing; his work leaves him terribly lonely) and the formulaic nature of the fantasy hero’s quest. One could even argue that the precious object/Person (Timmerman 93) at the heart of the hero’s quest is an intermedial symbol because, while it takes on a different form in

every story (such as the Ring vs. Ciri), it always represents the same thing: a vast, dangerous power that could bring about the end of the Other World. That these specific attributes of the fantasy genre are intermedial is proven by the fact that they make a story “immediately recognizable” (Clüver 19) as a product of the fantasy genre of fiction.

That fantasy narratives like Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and Sapkowski’s *The Witcher* can differ immensely and remain recognizable as products of the fantasy genre through the use of intermedial tools highlight the power of intermediality, particularly when it comes to retelling or revising formulaic narratives (be they short fairy tales or fantasy epics). Within *The Witcher* franchise, not only is the use of familiar fantasy actions and symbols intermedial, but so too are the various fairy tale types revised within it, particularly in the 1993 short story collection *The Last Wish*.

## Chapter Four:

### Finding Intermedial Fairy Tales in the Larger Fantasy of Sapkowski's *The Last Wish*

“There’s a grain of truth in every fairy tale,” said the witcher quietly.

(Sapkowski 1993, 68)

While both Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy move away from the intermedial, highly recognizable ATU fairy tale types in favour of forging an entirely new story within the Other World of Middle Earth, Polish fantasist Andrzej Sapkowski chooses to, within his Other World of the Continent, pay homage to various ATU tale types in the short story anthology *The Last Wish* (1993). In his anthology, Sapkowski both wholly revises and partially references western versions of the well-known tale types ATU>425C (“Beauty and the Beast”), ATU>709 (“Snow White”), and ATU>510A (“Cinderella”) through the utilization of the intermedial symbols and indexes of actions found within the tale types. It is the intermedial nature of these tale types that allows Sapkowski to retell “Beauty and the Beast,” “Snow White,” and “Cinderella” in such a way that fits within the Other World of the *Witcher* saga, thereby enabling these old tales to persist in western popular culture in new and inventive ways.

To begin, the short story “A Grain of Truth” refers heavily back to the intermedial western tradition of ATU>425C, with specific references being made to both Villeneuve's 1740 novella “*La Belle et la Bête*” and Disney's 1991 animated film *Beauty and the Beast*. That “A Grain of Truth” is a “Beauty and the Beast” retelling, like Villeneuve's and Disney's texts, is made clear through the deflection of reference that



Sapkowski makes to the intermedial actions of the beast, named Nivellen in his version, and through the intermedial symbolism of roses. While the story begins like many of the others in *The Last Wish*, with Geralt hunting a monster, that it is a “Beauty and the Beast” retelling becomes apparent as soon as the witcher stumbles upon a “mansion” (Sapkowski 43) in the middle of the woods:

Next to the fountain in what, a very long time ago, used to be a flowerbed, grew a rosebush. Nothing but the colour of the flowers made the bush unique – but the flowers were exceptional: indigo, with a faint shade of purple on the tips of some of the petals. The witcher touched one, brought his face closer and inhaled. The flowers held the typical scent of roses, only a little more intense.

The door and all the shutters of the mansion flew open at the same instant with a bang. Geralt raised his head abruptly. Down the path, scrunching the gravel, a monster was rushing straight at him. (44)

Monsters rushing at Geralt is not unusual in and of itself; witchers are “itinerant killers of basilisks; travelling slayers of dragons and vodniks” (6) and dealing with hostile creatures is common for Sapkowski’s protagonist. It is that Nivellen’s fury is sparked by Geralt touching the intermedial rose that sets him apart from other monsters faced by the witcher because it directly parallels an early scene in Villeneuve’s famous version of the “Beauty and the Beast” fairy tale:

Upon entering this charming castle [the merchant] had taken care, notwithstanding he was nearly perished, to unbridle his horse and let him wend his way to the stable which he had observed in the forecourt. An alley, ornamented by palisades, formed by rose-bushes in full bloom, led to it. He had never seen such lovely roses. Their perfume reminded him that he had promised to give Beauty a rose. He picked one, and was about to gather enough to make half-a-dozen bouquets, when a most frightful noise made him turn round.

He was terribly alarmed upon perceiving at his side a horrible beast, which, with an air of fury, laid upon his neck a kind of trunk, resembling an elephant's[.] (Villeneuve 18-19)

The intermedial deflection of reference is the action of the Beast-like creature attacking Geralt for touching the roses in his garden, just as the Beast attacks the merchant in Villeneuve's version; however, that action is not intermedial exclusively because it appears in Villeneuve's well-known "*La Belle et la Bête*." The Beast's anger over the theft of his roses is intermedial because it appears in *many* ATU>425C retellings.

Just as Persephone eating pomegranate seeds in the Underworld seals her fate and binds her to Hades in the Greek myth of Hades and Persephone, the theft of the rose (or roses) in ATU>425C is the intermedial action that seals the heroine's fate and binds her to the Beast in nearly every western retelling of the tale type. While many western readers recognize the theft of the rose, and the Beast's rage, from Villeneuve's "*La Belle et la Bête*," it is far from the only version where this intermedial scene occurs: the reader will also see the Beast's intermedial rage, triggered by the theft of his roses, in the Irish-American retelling titled "Rose" (Newell 1889, 213-214), in the German retelling titled

“Little Broomstick” (Bechstein 1847, 228-232), and in the Italian retelling “Zelinda and the Monster” (Crane 1885, 7-12). The action is not exclusive to Villeneuve’s French novel, and it is because the actions occurs in ATU>425C retellings from around the world that it is intermedial, and therefore instantly recognizable. Furthermore, while the theft of the rose is an intermedial action, the rose is an intermedial symbol due to its repeated use in western ATU>425C retellings.

It is not only intermedial motifs from Villeneuve’s literary fairy tale that appear in Sapkowski’s “A Grain of Truth” because the short story pays homage to Disney’s 1991 animated film released just two years prior to the publication of *The Last Wish*. Because of the tremendous popularity – and therefore the influence on popular culture in the west – that Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) cultivated, many post-1991 western retellings of the tale, like “A Grain of Truth,” not only reference the traditional intermedial indexes of actions and symbols that have appeared in ATU>425C retellings for generations, but also the new index of actions found in Disney’s film.

Disney’s films have been popular since the 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, so much so that their popularity can “be well illustrated by the fact that young children between three and six years old are already able to recognize Disney based on its brand logo” (de Leeuw et al. 2018, 160), but *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) was the first of Disney’s animated films to appeal to an adult audience.

While *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and its early predecessor princess films were films which adults would take their children to see, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) attracted not only children and their parents but also the solo adults. It was a Disney animated feature designed for an audience of all ages, not just children, indicated by the

fact that the Studio chose to premiere the film at the New York Film Festival. Prior to the premiere of *Beauty and the Beast*, the NYFF had never before featured an animated submission:

The idea of a much-anticipated animated family blockbuster premiering to a discerning crowd of highbrow film enthusiasts may not seem like such a big deal nowadays – after all, *Shrek 2* somehow opened Cannes in 2004 – but in 1991, it was downright inconceivable to many.

[...]

Any feelings of apprehension dissipated, however, when the first full musical number, “Belle,” was met with a rapturous festival audience response that September night. “They burst into wild applause just as though they were seeing a show on Broadway live,” recalls Wise. “...We knew at that point the audience was hooked.” (Ebiri 2019)

The early critical success at the NYFF and the film’s broad popularity among the general audience paved the way for *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) to receive a nomination for Best Picture at the Oscars, making it the first animated feature to ever receive such a nomination, and it went on to be adapted into Disney’s first major Broadway musical. Because of its widespread success both critically and among the general public, Disney’s version of *Beauty and the Beast* became firmly solidified in the modern popular imagination as the most recognizable version of ATU>425C, surpassing even Villeneuve and Beaumont. Such immense popularity and recognizability in the west of

the actions and symbols within the film effectively make it an intermedial media product when, in the past, achieving intermedial recognizability took centuries of repetition.

The most noteworthy of the new, intermedial ATU>425C motifs introduced into western culture by Disney's 1991 animated film are the recognizable index of actions of the justly cursed prince. He is "spoiled, selfish, and unkind" (Trousdale and Wise 00:01:25); the audience of ATU>425C retellings released post-1991 commonly see this behaviour imitated by the character of the cursed prince even if these are not part of the more distant ATU>425C tradition. In Villeneuve's version of ATU>425C, the prince is not justly cursed for poor behaviour but is the innocent victim of a snubbed, wicked fairy who wanted to marry him:

"It is the beauty, then, of this precious son of yours that renders you so vain," said [the fairy] to [the queen], "and has exposed me to so degrading a refusal! I appear to you unworthy of him..."

So saying, my terrible lover struck me a blow on the head. It was so heavy that I was dashed to the ground on my face, and felt as though I were crushed by the fall of a mountain. Irritated by her insult, I struggled to rise, but found it impossible. The weight of my body had become so great that I could not lift myself; all that I could do was to sustain myself on my hands, which had in an instant become two horrible paws, and the sight of them apprised me of the change I had undergone. My form was that in which you [i.e. Beauty] found me. I cast my eyes for an instant on that fatal [mirror], and could no longer doubt my cruel and sudden transformation. (Villeneuve 138-139)

While the Prince in Villeneuve’s tale did not deserve to be cursed, given his only transgression was not wanting to marry a much older woman whom he did not love, Disney gives the enchantress in the animated film a legitimate reason to curse the Prince:

Narrator: Once upon a time in a far-off land, a young prince lived in a shining castle. Although he had everything his heart desired, the prince was spoiled, selfish, and unkind. But then one winter’s night, an old beggar woman came to the castle and offered him a single rose in return for shelter from the bitter cold. Repulsed by her haggard appearance, the prince sneered at the gift and turned the old woman away. But she warned him not to be deceived by appearances, for beauty is found within – and when he dismissed her again, the old woman’s ugliness melted away to reveal a beautiful enchantress. The prince tried to apologize but it was too late, for she had seen that there was no love in his heart, and as punishment she transformed him into a hideous beast. (Trousdale and Wise 00:02:36)

Disney’s prince is punished for his cruelty, callousness, and utter disregard for the wellbeing of others, behaviour that is now emulated by many of the princes in modern ATU>425C retellings like “A Grain of Truth,” among others.

While Sapkowski’s *The Last Wish*—and “A Grain of Truth” within it—was released in 1993 just two years after *Beauty and the Beast* and traces of Disney’s intermedial influence are clear in the spoiled, selfish, and unkind actions of the cursed prince Nivellen. Rather than being an innocent prince punished by an angry fairy,

Nivellen—who is the young heir to a crime dynasty—is cursed by a priestess whom his fellow thieves convince him to rape:

“The lads overpowered the priestess and stripped her, then said I had to become a man. Well, I became a man, stupid little snot that I was, and while I was achieving manhood the priestess spat in my face and screamed something.”

“What?”

“That I was a monster in human skin, that I’d be a monster in a monster’s skin, something about love, blood...” (Sapkowski 1993, 52)

That he commits an act as vile as rape makes Nivellen as far from innocent as a cursed ATU>425C prince can be. He allows himself to be convinced that, as the powerful heir to a lineage of violent crime, he is entitled to take anything he desires, be it material wealth or a nonconsenting woman’s virtue. His actions prove that he is deservedly punished, just as Disney’s prince is deservedly punished along with many other post-1991 ATU>425C cursed princes.

The actions of the ATU>425C prince being spoiled, selfish, and unkind became almost instantaneously intermedial following the widespread, massive popularity of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and Disney’s cursed prince’s index of actions persist in western popular culture’s more recent retellings of the fairy tale. For instance, in Meagan Spooner’s 2017 retelling, *Hunted*, she writes that Prince Ivan is cursed because he is “greedy and careless” (2017, 120); he cares only for his own materialistic desires and naught for the happiness of others. In an earlier novel by Alex Flinn, *Beastly* (2007),

the cursed prince takes the form of a spoiled, wealthy news anchor's son who is cruel to those less privileged than himself, including the enchantress who curses him:

“If someone's so smart, they'd figure out how to *get* better-looking. You could lose weight, get plastic surgery, even get your face scraped and your teeth bleached.” I emphasized the *you* in the sentence, so she'd know I meant her and not just some general sort of *you*. “My dad's a network news guy. He says people shouldn't have to look at ugly people.”

“Is that what you think?” She raised a dark eyebrow. “That we should all transform ourselves to be as you want us to be, Kyle Kingsbury?”

[...]

“Yeah,” I said. “Yeah. That's what I think. That's what I *know*.” (2007, 5-6)

In Flinn's ATU>425C retelling, the reader sees traces of Disney's prince rather than the traditional innocent prince who did nothing wrong from Villeneuve's much older version. Kyle Kingsbury, like Disney's prince, is “repulsed by [the enchantress's] haggard appearance” (Trousdale and Wise 00:01:46) and he shamelessly makes his repulsion known to her, and his spoiled, unkind behaviour results in his curse. Unlike the models of the cursed prince archetype pre-1991, practically all post-1991 ATU>425C princes are far from innocent. That Sapkowski chose to model Nivellen after Disney's ATU>425C prince in his 1993 short story, rather than the older, innocent ATU>425C prince archetype, proves that Disney's influence on how fairy tales are



perceived in western popular culture is immense enough to generate near-instant intermediality within their films.

ATU>425C is not the only fairy tale that Sapkowski spends an entire short story retelling in *The Last Wish*; in “The Lesser Evil,” he revises ATU>709 when he tells the tumultuous tale of the doomed Princess Renfri and slips in several intermedial symbols and indexes of actions that, in western culture, make the “Snow White” tale type recognizable. While Sapkowski never outright calls Renfri “Snow White,” it is clear to the reader that she is modelled after the best-known versions of the archetypal character in western culture, the “Little Snow White” (1812) literary tale of the Grimm Brothers and Disney’s 1937 animated film, because of the deflection of reference to intermedial actions and intermedial symbols from these classic versions within “The Lesser Evil.” One of the most memorable intermedial symbols from “Little Snow White” by the Brothers Grimm and from Disney’s 1937 film is the vain queen’s magic mirror, which she repeatedly asks the question, “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of all?” (Grimm 171). In order to deflect reference back to ATU>709 before the reader is even introduced to Renfri, Sapkowski writes the following interaction between Geralt and the sorcerer Stregobor:

“Well, the story begins in Creyden, a small principality in the north. The wife of Fredefalk, the Prince of Creyden, was Aridea, a wise, educated woman. She had many exceptional adepts of the magical arts in her family and – through inheritance, no doubt – she came into possession of a rare and powerful artefact. One of Nehalenia’s Mirrors. They’re chiefly used by prophets and oracles

because they predict the future accurately, albeit intricately. Aridea quite often turned to the mirror-”

“With the usual question, I take it,” interrupted Geralt. “Who is the fairest of them all?” (Sapkowski 1993, 86-87)

By deflecting reference to the intermedial actions of the evil queen and by mentioning the intermedial symbol of the magic mirror, Sapkowski signals for the reader to be on the lookout for other ATU>709 references to come. The same deflection of reference to the queen’s intermedial vanity and to her magic mirror occurs in many other western ATU>709 retellings including Emma Donoghue’s short story “The Tale of the Apple” from the anthology *Kissing the Witch* (1997) and the 2012 film *Snow White and the Huntsman*.

Key to note is that in each of these retellings, including Sapkowski’s *The Last Wish*, significant changes are made to the narrative that is built around the intermedial actions and symbols found within ATU>709, and these changes are made possible by the tale type’s intermediality. For example, while the intermedial phrase “who is fairest of them all” is used in Donoghue’s short story, it is not uttered by the queen herself nor is it suggested that she says it, as one sees in the scene from Sapkowski’s “The Last Wish.” Rather than her intermedial vanity, and the actions that her vanity motivates, being the queen’s alone, which therefore makes her an indisputably shallow and evil archetype, Donoghue puts the phrase “who is the fairest of them all” into the mouth of the patriarchy:

[*Spoken by the Snow White character:*] My father cheered to see us so close. Once when he came into her room at night he found us both there, cross-legged on her bed under a sea of velvets and laces, trying how each earring looked against the other's ear. He put his head back and laughed to see us. Two such fair ladies, he remarked, have never been seen on one bed. But which of you is the fairest of them all?

We looked at each other, she and I, and chimed in the chorus of his laughter. Am I imagining in retrospect that our voices rang a little out of tune? You see, her hair was black as coal, mine as ebony. My lips were red as hers were, and our cheeks as pale as two pages of a book closed together. But our faces were not the same, and not comparable. (1997, 47-48)

In Donoghue's short story it is the king, Snow White's father and the husband of the queen, who asks whether it is his daughter or wife who is the fairest woman alive. He pits them against one another and, in doing so, Donoghue makes a poignant commentary upon the patriarchal roots of feminine vanity in western culture and its ties to survival.

Women in western culture are, metaphorically speaking, not allowed to age; youthful femininity is revered and, once a woman no longer embodies that ideal, she is scorned. There is a prevalent brand of ageism in western culture that is particularly cruel to women and has directly resulted in the unhealthy, internal belief that "a lady never tells her age" (Chrisler et al. 2016, 88) because, once she surpasses her mid-thirties, it is widely believed that a woman is supposedly "past her prime." In "Ageism can be

Hazardous to Women's Health: Ageism, Sexism, and Stereotypes of Older Women in the Healthcare System" (2016), Chrisler et al. write:

Why should a lady avoid revealing her age? A double standard of aging ... has been described in which signs of aging (e.g., gray hair, facial lines) are seen as making men look distinguished, wise, and experienced, whereas they merely make women look "old." [...] Ageism and sexism join hands as midlife and older women are judged more harshly than men of the same age for their looks and behavior (e.g., refusal to "act their age"). Hollywood actresses age out of lead roles decades earlier than actors do... (88)

Ultimately, western culture's ageist double standard results in a deep-seated feminine fear of replacement, and that fear starts early. Taylor Swift was only twenty-years-old when, in the song "The Lucky One" from her album *Red* (2012), she sang, "And they tell you that you're lucky but you're so confused / 'Cause you don't feel pretty, you just feel used, / And all the young things line up to take your place" (01:29). That fear of being replaced by someone younger, someone prettier, results in a horribly common vanity among western women, from celebrities like Taylor Swift to ordinary women in their own homes who worry that their marriages will fall apart if their hair turns gray.

Readers sees toxic feminine vanity, so common among western women, illustrated in ATU>709 retellings like "The Tale of the Apple." In Donoghue's short story, the vanity of the queen is framed in such a way that the reader cannot fault her for it because her vanity is rooted in the common fear of replacement. Donoghue writes that

there “was only room for one queen in a castle” (45), and when the king pits the princess against the current queen, it becomes clear to both women that they must now engage in a battle of survival for only one of them can reign:

Tell me, he asked, how am I to judge between two such beauties?

I looked at my stepmother, and she stared back at me, and our eyes were like mirrors set opposite each other, making a corridor of reflections, infinitely hollow. (48)

In Donoghue’s story, the intermedial mirror is not a physical object but rather a metaphorical one. In each other’s eyes, Snow White and the queen see an unchangeable, patriarchal future: one of them will have to kill the other to survive in a man’s world where only one of them—she who is most beautiful—is needed. The use of the intermedial phrase “who is fairest of them all;” the queen’s intermedial vanity; and the intermedial symbol of the mirror in innovative ways ensures that Donoghue’s story remains a clear retelling of ATU>709. Because the source material is clear, Donoghue is able to frame the tale type in such a way that it becomes a commentary upon the patriarchal value that western society places upon beauty and its ties to youthful femininity.

A similar commentary about the toxic nature of patriarchally motivated feminine vanity is made in *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), in which the queen resorts to even more drastic and brutal measures than the ATU>709 tradition dictates to prevent her displacement by Snow White or someone else equally young and beautiful. While it

is typical of ATU>709 retellings in western culture for the queen to push the dirty work, the act of bloody murder, onto her underlings, the viewer of *Snow White and the Huntsman* sees within the first twenty minutes of the film that this is a woman wronged by a patriarchal political system and that she will get her revenge with her own two hands. Rather than living in fear that she will be replaced when she ages, she takes steps to ensure that never happens, and she starts by murdering her royal husbands before they can cast her aside:

Queen Ravenna: I was ruined by a king like you once. I replaced his queen, an old woman. Then in time I too would have been replaced. Men use women. They ruin us, and when they are finished with us, they toss us to the dogs like scraps. [...] When a woman stays young and beautiful forever, the world is hers. First, I will take your life, my lord – and then I will take your throne. (Sanders 2012, 00:07:40)

By killing her husbands, Ravenna secures her own power, and her life, by ensuring that she is never replaced by a wife more youthful and beautiful than she. But *Snow White and the Huntsman* then takes the queen's intermedial vanity a step further; her fear of aging, of growing old and being cast aside, results in Ravenna using magic to preserve her youth forever, a spell that is sustained by her stealing the youth of beautiful young women (00:16:00). In doing so, she ensures that she remains the fairest of them all by both preserving her own beauty and by eliminating her competition. While the more traditional depictions of the queen in ATU>709 have her only perceive Snow White as a

threat, to Ravenna every pretty young woman in the land is viewed as her competition and must be destroyed.

The tale type revisionists behind *Snow White and the Huntsman*, “The Tale of the Apple,” and “The Lesser Evil” all employ creative license in their retellings of ATU>709, each for their own unique reason, and they can do so because they utilize the intermediality of the tale type. For example, the creative team behind *Snow White and the Huntsman* take the queen’s intermedial vanity and amplify it until she becomes a monstrous caricature because “really nasty” (Corliss 2007, 79-82) villains correlate with the success of summer blockbuster films. In the business of Hollywood filmmaking, a “bad [villain] is great” (79-82); between the 1930s and 1950s, the Universal Studios Monsters franchise – including *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *The Mummy* (1932) – were among the most popular films ever released and the characters depicted within them “remain pop culture icons” (Jones 2012). Fairy tale villains, especially in a post-Disney age, are equally iconic, and Snow White’s Evil Queen is no exception to the rule. Therefore Ravenna could not just be a threat to Snow White; for her to stand out from past versions of the iconic character and be a truly great cinematic villain, she had to be a threat to everyone in the kingdom.

Yet, even when it becomes an overly dramatized, caricatured version of the tale type, *Snow White and the Huntsman* remains recognizable as a retelling of ATU>709 because it maintains not only the queen’s intermedial actions, but also the tale type’s immediately recognizable intermedial symbols. As in nearly every western retelling of ATU>709, the intermedial seven dwarfs are present – although they, too, are caricatured. While the characters lend an air of familiarity to a very different version

of the “Snow White” tale type, a great deal of controversy was raised surrounding the characters’ casting. Rather than being portrayed by actors with dwarfism, the seven dwarfs in *Snow White and the Huntsman* are portrayed by full-sized actors who are made to appear short via special effects, a method which critics said was “akin to blackface” (Child 2012). As with any blockbuster film, the actors who portray the seven dwarfs were chosen for their “recognizability” (2012), but the result is that the characters appear to mock individuals who truly do have dwarfism. Because the film includes the queen’s intermedial vanity and the intermedial symbol of the seven dwarfs, it is indeed recognizable as an ATU>709 retelling, but the creative license that the film takes – specifically turning the characters into caricatures – ultimately make *Snow White and the Huntsman* a socially problematic retelling of the tale type, regardless of its recognizability.

“The Tale of the Apple,” on the other hand, is an ATU>709 retelling that employs creative license in a socially progressive way whilst it remains recognizable. With the use of the intermedial tools of revision, Donoghue ensures that her short story remains recognizable as a retelling of ATU>709 whilst it simultaneously makes a feminist commentary about patriarchally-fueled feminine vanity. Alongside the use of the queen’s intermedial vanity and the mention of mirrors, both of which are present in unconventional ways that contribute to the tale’s feminist moral, Donoghue’s “The Tale of the Apple” also deflects reference to the intermedial symbols of the seven dwarfs. After she is run out of the kingdom by the queen, Donoghue’s heroine (who is never referred to by the familiar western name of “Snow White”) is found in the forest and is “taken in by a gang of woodsmen” (52) who hide her from her stepmother.



The intermedial deflection of reference here is subtle; there is no use of the symbolic number seven, nor of their short stature, that the audience sees in both *Snow White and the Huntsman* and Sapkowski's "The Lesser Evil" (more on the use of intermedial symbols in "The Lesser Evil" will follow). It is the action of finding and taking in the ATU>709 heroine after she escapes from the queen that signals to the reader that these are intermedial characters. They are intermedial through their association with the heroine, who the reader already recognizes as a model of the Snow White archetype through Donoghue's early description of her hair as black as ebony, red lips, and pale skin (48). By saving the recognizable heroine, and therefore performing that intermedial action of the tale type's seven dwarfs, Donoghue's gang of woodsmen are recognizable as intermedial character retellings just as the story's heroine and queen are – and their recognizability is achieved without being offensive, unlike in *Snow White and the Huntsman*.

The most recognizable intermedial symbol in the western tradition of ATU>709 is not the seven dwarfs, nor even the use of mirrors; it is the poisoned apple that Snow White consumes, and Donoghue uses the apple above all else to ensure that her feminist ATU>709 retelling remains recognizable to her readers. The reader knows from the moment they reach this story's first page in the *Kissing the Witch* anthology that Donoghue's narrative is a retelling of the ATU>709 tale type because the intermedial apple not only appears throughout the text but also in the text's title: "The Tale of the Apple" (43). Because the title alone deflects immediate reference to the intermedial apple from the ATU>709 tale type, the reader goes into the story expecting it to be a

“Snow White” retelling and their expectations are confirmed when the heroine does, in fact, nearly die from eating an apple given to her by her stepmother:

...I turned, and there at the half door my stepmother stood, an apple in her upturned hand.

Stepmother, yes, that was the word, but there was nothing of the mother about her.

The apple was half ripe. One side was green, the other red. She bit into the green side and swallowed and smiled. I took the apple from her without a word, bit into the red side, and began to choke. Fear and excitement locked in struggle in my throat, and blackness seeped across my eyes. I fell to the ground.

(56-57)

The reader recognizes all these intermedial actions: the queen giving the heroine an apple; the heroine taking a bite of the apple; the heroine falling to the ground afterward, seemingly dead. They are all distinctly reminiscent of ATU>709. However, the events that follow in “The Tale of the Apple” defy convention, just as the retelling’s approach to feminine vanity as patriarchally motivated defies convention. Rather than conforming to the norm and pitting the heroine and the queen against each other, Donoghue maintains the story’s feminist thread through to the end because the heroine is not really a victim, nor is the queen really a murderous villain:

When I came to I was jolting along in an open coffin. Sunlight stabbed my eyelids. The woodsmen were bearing me down the mountain, out of the woods. I gagged, coughed, sat up. How their eyes rounded; how they laughed to see me breathing. But lie down, one said, you are not well yet. Until you were poisoned we had been forgetting who you are, said another; now we're taking you to another kingdom, where they'll know how to treat a princess. Lie down and rest, little one, said a third; we have a long way to go.

My head was still swimming; I thought I might faint again. But my mouth was full of apple, slippery, still hard, vinegary at the edges. I could feel the marks of my own teeth on the skin. I bit down, and juice ran to the corners of my lips. It was not poisoned. It was the first apple of the year from my father's orchard. I chewed till it was eaten up and I knew what to do. (57-58)

At the conclusion of Donoghue's story, the reader learns that her heroine was not fed a poisoned apple; the queen did not, in fact, try to kill her. Rather, the apple was meant to be a peace offering, an extension of goodwill and the queen's attempt to close the gap that the king, with his patriarchal gaze, drove between them.

Donoghue uses the intermedial symbolism of mirrors and apples, and the intermedial actions sparked by patriarchally motivated feminine vanity, to ensure that her retelling of ATU>709 is recognizable, but she shapes the narrative around the intermedial symbols and actions into a feminist fairy tale. In "The Tale of the Apple," unlike in the famous western versions of ATU>709 penned by the Brothers Grimm and animated by Walt Disney Studios, women are neither villains nor hapless victims; they

are human, and they therefore have manipulable fears and desires that are warped by the patriarchy's toxic influence. While *Snow White and the Huntsman* may be full of caricatures that make it unpalatable, "The Tale of the Apple" is – while fantastical – just realistic enough that it makes the reader think about the patriarchal beliefs and values that dominate most traditional, western literary fairy tales – and why we continue to view those problematic retellings as the 'classic' fairy tales of western popular culture.

Despite Sapkowski insisting in interviews that he is not a feminist, "The Lesser Evil" proves to be a uniquely feminist critique of the patriarchal treatment of women not only in western retellings of ATU>709 ("Snow White"), but in the classic western fairy tale tradition as a whole. In an interview with the Italian branch of *Wired*, published a few weeks before the premiere of the Netflix adaptation of *The Witcher*, Sapkowski denied that he is a feminist; he said, "I love women, I love their role in a story and in the world, but I don't make a philosophy of it" (Curiat 2019). Yet, for someone who claims to not be a feminist, Sapkowski's Other World of the Continent is about as feminist as a fantasy world can get, particularly when compared to the highly praised, yet highly patriarchal, works of fantasy published by J. R. R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and George R. R. Martin. In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, for example, only "eleven women" are mentioned by name as the Fellowship ventures across Middle Earth, and those eleven "are criticized [by modern fans and scholars alike] for their passivity, insignificance, and stereotypical roles" (Łaskiewicz 2015, 17). By point of comparison, women play a significantly larger role than men in Sapkowski's saga; two of the most important characters in the series – Ciri and Yennefer – are women, and women are

among the most powerful people on the Continent and wield that power as sorceresses, queens, and liberated priestesses, all of whom Geralt respects and admires.

The respect and admiration for women throughout Sapkowski's series contrasts starkly to the disdain with which C.S. Lewis describes women who have left the innocence of girlhood behind for adolescence and womanhood. Arguably the most common critical complaint about *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) is Lewis's dismissal, and possibly even damnation, of Susan Pevensie at the conclusion of *The Chronicles*. In *The Last Battle* (1956), the reader learns that Susan "is no longer a friend of Narnia" (Lewis 1956, 154) because she has become "a rather silly, conceited young woman" (Coffin 2014, n.p.) who is "interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations" (Lewis 154). Susan is condemned by Lewis – whose fantastical Other World is deeply steeped in Christian metaphors – for having progressive feminine desires; she is therefore left behind, either alive on Earth or to burn in Hell, while her supposedly more virtuous brothers and younger sister are led into Paradise. By comparison, young women in Sapkowski's Other World are free to embrace their desires, sexual and otherwise, without fear of patriarchal punishment:

"Wait," [Geralt] repeated. "Iola... I wanted-"

"Don't speak to her, Geralt," said Nenneke. "She won't answer you anyway. Off with you, Iola."

Wrapped in her mantle the girl pattered toward the door, her bare feet slapping the floor – troubled, flushed, awkward. No longer reminding him, in any way, of -

Yennefer.

“Nenneke,” he said, reaching for his shirt. “I hope you’re not annoyed that- You won’t punish her, will you?”

“Fool,” the priestess snorted. “You’ve forgotten where you are. This is neither a hermitage nor a convent. It’s Melitele’s temple. Our goddess doesn’t forbid our priestesses anything.” (Sapkowski 1993, 33-34)

Geralt appears to not only have forgotten where he is in the context of *The Last Wish*, but in the context of the Other World itself. This is not Narnia, where women are punished for simple desires, for the enjoyment of nylon stockings and red lipstick; this is the Continent, where women are free to pursue their desires, both innocent and sexual, if it suits them – and *only* if it suits them.

Unlike in George R. R. Martin’s extremely popular *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) series, which inspired the HBO drama *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), Sapkowski’s *Witcher* series does not try to validate sexual violence as a ‘realistic’ product of war; on the contrary, Sapkowski makes it clear that rape is, in every circumstance, intolerable in the feminist Other World of the Continent. Martin’s fantastical Other World of Westeros is extremely patriarchal, a fact that both readers of his novels and the audience of the HBO television series can plainly see in how rape is depicted. Martin’s characters use the threat and execution of rape “to humiliate and ultimately degrade the enemy” (Borowska-Szerszun 2019, 5), be that enemy a powerful man whose wives, daughters, and subjects are brutally violated as the spoils of war or, in the case of Cersei, a powerful woman who is punished by misogynists for claiming and

wielding power in the patriarchal Other World of Westeros. Rape is used as a tool of punishment in *A Song of Ice and Fire* far more often than it is depicted as a punishable offense, and Martin justifies this particular use of rape in his novels and the television adaptation by claiming that it is his “obligation to tell the truth ... about the historical reality of the Middle Ages,” a reality in which “sexual violence [has] been a part of every war ever fought” (3). However, Martin’s claim that realism is a justification for the use of rape as a punishment in *A Song of Ice and Fire* goes against the basic tenants of the fantasy genre of fiction, in which the potential of the Other World, of Faërie, is boundless and untethered to reality. The point of a fantastical Other World is that it is wholly separate and that it need not conform to the patriarchal practices of Earth’s realistic history. Martin’s choice to make Westeros a patriarchal Other World was precisely that: a choice.

Essentially Martin’s polar-opposite, Sapkowski made the choice to make the Continent a feminist Other World when he wrote the *Witcher* series – and, based upon his claims that he is not a feminist, that choice appears to have been influenced unconsciously by the modern, feminist culture in which he lives. Whilst Sapkowski chooses not to label himself as feminist, his work still reflects the feminist values of modern western culture just as much as Martin’s work reflects the patriarchal values of the western Middle Ages. During the suffragette movement of First Wave feminism, it was written “that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Gilligan 128). Even if Sapkowski claims he does not want to “make a philosophy” (Curiat 2019) out of the respect that he holds for women, traces of feminist

philosophy do slip into his writing, particularly when it comes to the treatment of rape in *The Last Wish*.

While rape is used as a patriarchal punishment in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, often to strip prominent female characters of the power and respect that they have earned, the women who fall prey to rapists in *The Last Wish* are not rendered powerless; on the contrary, these are the moments where multiple female characters in the text, including the heroine modeled after ATU>709's archetypal Snow White character, show just how powerful they really are and that they are not to be trifled with. Consider the priestess who is raped by Nivellen in "A Grain of Truth." She does not allow herself to be victimized by the gang of criminals and takes her revenge before the violent act even finishes, which demonstrates just how differently rape is treated on the Continent when compared to Westeros. While rapists may eventually be punished in Martin's Other World, rapists on the Continent receive immediate retribution; the priestess raped by Nivellen places a blood curse upon him, dooming him to be "a monster in a monster's skin" (Sapkowski 52), thereby violating his body as he has violated hers. She then takes back power over her own body when she enacts the blood curse with her suicide, refusing her attacker any further enjoyment of her living body. Sapkowski's ATU>709 ("Snow White") heroine also enacts immediate retribution when, rather than killing herself, Renfri kills her attacker:

Stregobor sighed, raised his eyes to heaven, where the rainbow was still shimmering colourfully and picturesquely.

"I wanted to isolate [Renfri], but Aridea decided otherwise. She sent the



little one out into the forest with a hired thug, a trapper. We found him later in the undergrowth... without any trousers, so it wasn't hard to recreate the turn of events. She had dug a brooch-pin into his brain, through his ear, no doubt while his attention was on entirely different matters.”

“If you think I feel sorry for him,” muttered Geralt, “then you’re wrong.”

(87)

In “The Lesser Evil,” Sapkowski recreates the intermedial scene in which the queen sends Snow White into the forest with a huntsman to be butchered, but he does so in such a way that the princess is not presented as a hapless victim, terrorized by her stepmother and by the lecherous huntsman; instead, Renfri is a survivor.

Sapkowski’s decision to pen his version of the Snow White archetype as a survivor rather than a victim is a large part of what makes his portrayal of fairy tales in *The Last Wish* feminist, even if he does not use that label for himself. In the past decade, academic discourse arose surrounding the use of the word “victim” to describe an individual who was raped. In its place, the word “survivor” has been recommended for use because “overall, ‘survivor’ [is] associated with positive valence, activity, strength, and optimism, whereas ‘victim’ [is] associated more with negative valence, passivity, weakness, and helplessness” (Papendick et al. 2017, 16). In his feminist Other World, Sapkowski’s treatment of rape reflects this modern logic. Women who are raped are not victimized, stripped of power, nor are they weakened by the act; they are each survivors in their own way. Renfri is a survivor because she literally survives the experience by killing her rapist before he has the chance to kill her, and the priestess raped by Nivellen

ensures that her power survives, even if she does not, by cursing Nivellen in her final moments rather than letting him get away with rape unpunished.

Through his presentation of Renfri as a survivor, Sapkowski critiques the common depiction of the Snow White heroine as a weak victim in traditional western versions of ATU>709, and he accomplishes his critique by ensuring his readers recognize that Renfri is, in fact, modeled after the Snow White archetype. Sapkowski deflects reference to Renfri's ATU>709 roots when Renfri describes to Geralt the circumstances of her fall from grace as Creyden's princess and the heir to the throne:

“Jewels and trinkets, ponies, goldfish in a pond. Dolls, and a doll's house bigger than this room. That was my life until Stregobor and that whore Aridea ordered a huntsman to butcher me in the forest and bring back my heart and liver.” (100)

The description of the action commanded of the huntsman by Aridea is nearly identical to that of the queen in the Grimm Brothers' tale, wherein she “summon[s] the huntsman and [says]: ‘Take the child out into the forest to a spot far from here. Then stab her to death and bring me back her lungs and liver as proof of your deed’” (171). Further intermedial symbols from western retellings of the tale type appear throughout Sapkowski's story; the “seven gnomes” (Sapkowski 88) whom Renfri takes refuge with parallel Snow White's “seven dwarfs” (Grimm 172), and Aridea attempts to poison Renfri with “an apple seasoned with nightshade” (Sapkowski 100) just as the queen attempts to kill Snow White with “a deadly poisonous apple” (Grimm 175) in nearly every western ATU>709 retelling. Through the use of intermedial tools, Renfri stands

out to the reader as a revision of the ATU>709 Snow White archetype, and it is because of her inherent recognizability through intermedial symbols and actions that Sapkowski is able to change her personality, and the narrative that takes shape around her. From her western roots as a hapless victim, Sapkowski's Snow White rises from the ashes and becomes not only a survivor but a warrior who takes control of her narrative; not content merely to survive, Renfri intends to kill those who have wronged her.

Sapkowski also takes a feminist approach to ATU>510A, albeit briefly, when he references the tale type in "A Question of Price." In the story, Sapkowski mentions the familiar "Cinderella" narrative in a way which, defying the traditional western portrayal of Cinderella and her prince in popular culture, is not romantic; instead, his description of the intermedial events that transpire at the ball are disturbing because they shine a light on the total disregard that the tale type has for the heroine's consent. At Princess Pavetta's birthday feast, Geralt tells Queen Calanthe, "Last winter Prince Hrobarik, not being so gracious, tried to hire me to find a beauty who, sick of his vulgar advances, had fled the ball, losing a slipper" (127). The key word in the description is that the Prince *tried* to hire Geralt; Geralt did not accept the commission, just as he did not pity the rapist that Renfri murdered, because he believes in the value of consent.

By retelling ATU>510A in such a way that the prince is a villain rather than a hero, Sapkowski draws attention to how dubious the nature of consent really is in western culture's best-known "Cinderella" retellings. Even if Cinderella did not necessarily want to leave in the tale type retellings by the Brothers Grimm and Walt Disney Studios, to leave the ball was still her choice – and it is a choice that the prince does not respect. In the Grimm Brothers' retelling of ATU>510A, the prince "prepared

for [Cinderella's departure] with a trick: he had all the stairs coated with pitch, and when Cinderella went running down the stairs, her left slipper got stuck there" (Grimm 83). He disregards her decision to leave when he tries to force her to stay, and Disney's 1950 animated film is similarly problematic; when she repeatedly says that she has to leave, the prince repeatedly says "no" (Geronimi et al. 1950, 00:54:20) and then his guards attempt to trap her within the castle and, when they fail, they chase her through the dark like hounds after a rabbit. Cinderella's decision to leave is not respected, and thus many western versions of ATU>510A strip the heroine of her right to refuse the prince's advances. When he calls the prince's advances and disregard for Cinderella's consent "vulgar" (127), Sapkowski forces the reader to consider the misogynistic, patriarchal nature of the ATU>510A tradition in western culture as a whole.

Sapkowski's feminist approach to the revision of fairy tale types, regardless of whether he takes a feminist approach intentionally, plays a large role in the construction of the Other World of the Continent. Through the inclusion of fairy tale narratives, both wholly retold – as with ATU>425C ("Beauty and the Beast") and ATU>709 ("Snow White") – and briefly mentioned, as with ATU>510A ("Cinderella"), Sapkowski makes it clear that the Continent is, in fact, his version of the Faërie world where these tales are said by Tolkien to take place, and the feminist revision of the classic western fairy tales to better suit his version of Faërie is wholly necessary. The Continent is a feminist landscape where women are empowered and do not need to be saved by true love's kiss or the goodwill of a prince who admires tiny feet; the women of the Continent can fight their own battles, be it with brooch-pins, magic, or swords, and the tale types included within Sapkowski's feminist Other World must reflect that reality. Damsels have no

place on the Continent, and thus the previously weak heroines, and the misogynistic narratives in which they historically resided, must be reshaped if they are going to fit into the new environment. Because these tale types are filled with intermedial symbols like poisoned apples and intermedial actions like losing a slipper when fleeing a ball, the stories – and the heroines themselves – can be and are reshaped in *The Last Wish* and remain recognizable.

The tale types retold within Sapkowski's *The Last Wish* must also be revised because, in the Other World of the Continent, the fairy tale characters are no longer the main protagonist; Geralt of Rivia is. Sapkowski's series is an original work of fantasy fiction and, as MacCulloch suggested would be the case in 1905, fairy tale types have been reduced to mere footnotes within the larger realm of Faërie (457). The archetypal characters found in ATU>425C ("Beauty and the Beast"), ATU>709 ("Snow White"), and ATU>510A ("Cinderella") are not the only characters of significance in Sapkowski's novel; on the contrary, they do not even qualify as protagonists. They are side-characters at best, only mentioned in one short story each and then left behind in the 1993 anthology while Geralt, Yennefer, and Ciri – the true protagonists of the *Witcher* series – continue to appear in the full-length novels that follow. Through the retelling of fairy tales not as the main plot(s) of his series but as side-plots, Sapkowski pays homage to the tale types that the fantasy genre has roots in whilst also making it clear that the genre of fantasy, and world of Faërie, has expanded significantly and is no longer limited to the revision of core tale types found in western tradition, nor to the traditional ways that the 'classic' fairy tales have been retold throughout western popular culture's past.

## Chapter Five:

### Silencing the Siren: A Brief History of the Mermaid's Vocal Transformation from Folklore to western Fairy Tales

“Were you *silent* or were you *silenced*?” (Winfrey 2021)

As the reader can see in past chapters of this study, the revision of intermedial fairy tale types is traditionally, at least regarding feminist ideals, a progressive process. The heroines of tale types like ATU>425C (“Beauty and the Beast”), ATU>709 (“Snow White”), and ATU>510A (“Cinderella”) gain more intelligence, independence, and agency as their stories evolve to suit the period of time in which they are retold; in short, powerless fairy tale heroines progressively gain power century by century, revision by revision because their tale types are intermedial, allowing for their larger stories and characterization to change. The heroines need not remain the puppets of misogynists, used to teach patriarchal lessons; instead, the heroines of intermedial fairy tales can be – and, in modern retellings, are – altered to reflect feminist values because the familiar symbols and actions of the tale types, if properly utilized, will ensure that they remain recognizable even when the characters undergo extreme change.

Yet not all fairy tale heroines have been awarded the luxury of a steadily feminist progression toward empowerment from their literary transcription onward. In western culture, the folkloric figure of the mermaid has undergone an extreme power reduction through the erasure of her roots in siren folklore and mythology following the Christianization of western society, and through her domestication in Hans Christian

Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" (1837) and the fairy tale's 1989 animated Disney adaptation.

Before it can be argued that "The Little Mermaid" is an intermedial fairy tale, first it must be addressed that folklorists and fairy tale scholars dispute whether or not "The Little Mermaid" should be classified as a fairy tale at all. This study takes the stance that it is, in fact, a fairy tale, but many experts do not believe Andersen's tale, written in 1837, belongs among the ranks of stories like "Beauty and the Beast," "Snow White," and "Cinderella." Because it is so strongly believed that "The Little Mermaid" is not a fairy tale, it does not appear within any edition of the ATU Tale Type Index; the closest example is ATU>316, or the tale of the "nix of the mill-pond" (Thompson 482) who desires a human boy. Yet, the presence of a mermaid who desires a human is not enough on its own to claim that "The Little Mermaid" is a retelling of ATU>316; Andersen's mermaid tale features many unique intermedial symbols and actions that one does not see in ATU>316, and therefore "The Little Mermaid" cannot rightfully be called an ATU>316 retelling. The sheer number of differences between ATU>316 and Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" are evident when one reads Thompson's 1946 description of ATU>316 in *The Folktale*:

In [ATU>316], best known from the Grimm collection, a boy has been unwittingly promised to a water nix and tries to avoid carrying out the promise. From grateful animals he receives the ability to transform himself into their shapes. He does fall into the water nix's power, but is finally rescued partly by the help of his wife, who has received advice from an old woman, and partly

through his ability to transform himself. The story goes on to tell how after a long time the hero succeeds in being recognized by his wife and finally reunited with her. (58)

If similarities alone were evidence enough to classify a narrative as a revision of a tale type, then all “Beauty and the Beast” retellings would also be classified as “Bluebeard” retellings and vice-versa. Such is simply not the case, and the unique intermediality of “The Little Mermaid” should have earned it an ATU classification number of its own decades ago. For the purpose of this study, “The Little Mermaid” will be discussed as a fairy tale regardless of popular scholarly opinion because the author firmly believes that “The Little Mermaid,” because it has origins in folklore and has become a pillar in western popular culture, is indeed a fairy tale. The following two chapters will demonstrate how the unclassified “The Little Mermaid” tale type has origins in western folklore and mythology; how it came to be intermedial; and how the fairy tale has changed over the course of multiple retellings.

The fact of the matter is that “The Little Mermaid” has been denied classification as a fairy tale by most folklorists and fairy tale scholars because its origins in folklore are disputable while the folkloric origins of other fairy tales, like ATU>425C (“Beauty and the Beast”) and ATU>510A (“Cinderella”), are evident. In the Introduction of their 2019 text *The Penguin Book of Mermaids*, Christina Bacchilega and Marie Alohani Brown write:



Mermaid stories did not emerge as fairy tales – that is, as [folkloric] fictions – but as myths and legends. Folklorists explain that, in different ways and in contrast to folk and fairy tales, myths and legends raise questions of belief – meaning not that every teller believes the events in the tale really happened, but that somewhere, at some point in time, people (not just one individual) believed or believe in the material and/or symbolic truth of the tale. (xvi)

The widespread opinion that “The Little Mermaid” cannot be classified as a fairy tale because mermaids originate in myth and legend, rather than only in common folklore, is problematic and unfounded for one simple reason: if origins in mythology discredit a story from becoming a fairy tale, then “Beauty and the Beast” should be disqualified from fairy tale classification, as well, because it too possesses origins not only in folklore but also in mythology.

As was discussed in the first chapter of this study, it is believed, by most folk and fairy tale scholars, that the myths of Zeus and Europa & Cupid and Psyche, from Greek and Roman mythology respectively, are among the earliest examples of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type. Likewise, just as people in the days of antiquity when Homer penned *The Odyssey* believed sirens and other aquatic maidens like sea nymphs truly existed, so too did the Greeks and Romans believe in the existence of the gods, like Zeus and Cupid, and believed myths about them to be factual. Thus, because these early examples of ATU>425C were once believed to be true as the Bible’s stories are believed today by followers of Christianity, should “Beauty and the Beast” not also, by

the logic of folklorists and fairy tale scholars who reject “The Little Mermaid” as a fairy tale, be denied classification as a fairy tale?

Of course not; “Beauty and the Beast” resides among the fairy tales of the ATU Tale Type Index because it stems not only from mythology but also from the common folk’s tales, and “The Little Mermaid” deserves ATU acknowledgement and classification because it, too, stems both from the myths and legends of antiquity and from common folklore, even if most scholars claim otherwise. To rectify this gross oversight, one must turn to John Swan’s 1635 text *Speculum Mundi*, published in England two-hundred years prior to Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid.” Swan’s *Speculum Mundi* is a religious account of natural history and contains references to scripture and folkloric stories, one of which contains an intermedial attribute that western culture now commonly associates with Andersen’s fairy tale. In *Speculum Mundi*, Swan recounts a medieval folktale, passed from generation to generation, about a silent, Christianized mermaid in the section in which he describes God’s sea-creatures:

Neither can I but admire what I find recorded in the history of the Netherlands, of a Sea-woman who was taken up in the streights [sic] of a broken dike near to the towns of *Campen* and *Edam*, brought thither by a sea-tempest and high tide, where floating up and down and not finding a passage out again (by reason that the breach was stopped after the flood) was espied by certain women and their servants as they went to milk their kine [sic] in the neighbouring pastures, who at the first were afraid of her, but seeing her often they resolved to take her, which they did; and bringing her home, she suffered herself to be clothed, fed with

bread, milk, and other meats, and would often strive to steal again into the sea, but being carefully watched she could not: moreover she learned to spin, and perform other pretty offices of women; but at the first they cleansed her of sea-mosse which did flick about her. She was brought from *Edam* and kept at *Harlem*, where she would obey her Mistress, and (as she was taught) kneel down with her before the crucifix, never spake, but lived dumb and continued alive (as some say) fifteen years; then she died. [...] They took her in the year of our Lord 1403. (1635, 333-334)

While Swan's *Speculum Mundi* contains the first literary reference to the folkloric figure of the silent, Christian mermaid, Andersen perfected and popularized her as an archetypal character. The key difference between Swan's depiction of the mermaid and Andersen's version is that, while Swan acknowledges the existence of sirens as well as their "tremendous power" (Naroditskaya 2006, et al. 3), Andersen endeavours to domesticate the siren by turning her into the silent, Christian mermaid, thereby stripping her of said power and erasing the siren altogether from the popular imagination. In Homer's *Odyssey*, it is written that the sirens could...

...spellbind any man alive,  
whoever comes their way. Whoever draws too close,  
off guard, and catches the Sirens' voices in the air -  
no sailing home for him, no wife rising to meet him,  
no happy children beaming up at their father's face.

The high, thrilling song of the Sirens will transfix him,  
lolling there in their [island] meadow, round them heaps of corpses,  
rotting away, rags of skin shriveling on their bones... (Homer 12.45-52)

In *Speculum Mundi*, Swan highlights that mythic, legendary power alongside the folktale of the silent, Christian mermaid:

But above all, the *Mermaids* and *Mer-fish* seem to me the most strange fish in the waters. Some have supposed them to be devils or spirits, in regard of their whooping noise that they make. For (as if they had power to raise extraordinary storms and tempests) the winds blow, seas rage, and clouds drop, presently after they seem to call. [...] The Poets feign there were three *Mermaids* or *Sirens*; in their upper parts like maidens, and in their lower parts fishes: which dwelling in the sea of Sicilie [sic] would allure Sailers [sic] to them, and afterwards devour them; being first brought asleep with hearkening to their sweet singing... (333)

It is true that total erasure of the siren may not have been Andersen's end goal, as that kind of foresight into the impact a story will have is impossible for any writer, but domestication and Christianization, based upon textual evidence, was clearly on the agenda with "The Little Mermaid."

By making the mermaid Christian in his fairy tale, Andersen strips the siren of her heretical power and influence over men. In both mythological and folkloric depictions, the siren appears as a hybrid woman who is either half-bird or half-fish, or -

in rare instances - a combination of both, such as when sirens appear as “winged serpents” (Holford-Strevens 2006, 26) in Arabian folklore, wherein they possess the upper-body of a woman, the wings of a bird, and the lower body of a sea-serpent. They are “beings of foam and fantasy [...], born of the desires of simple river-folk and ancient sailors” (Naroditskaya et al. 1), but as western society progressed from the days of simple river-folk and ancient sailors into the patriarchally-dominated, hyper-Christian Victorian era during which Andersen wrote “The Little Mermaid,” what men desired from mer-women did not progress; rather, from a feminist perspective, it regressed.

The days of antiquity in Greece and Rome were far from feminist, but women’s power was not wholly discounted because the presence of female deities lent female power credence. The goddesses of ancient Greek and Roman religion held great power, many in areas that patriarchal societies now view as traditionally masculine: *Aphrodite* (Greek) / *Venus* (Roman) was the goddess of “sexual attraction” (March 2014, 60) and was believed to be responsible for human arousal; *Artemis* (Greek) / *Diana* (Roman) was “the goddess of hunting” (79), a traditionally male pursuit in patriarchal societies, both for sport and sustenance; and *Athena* (Greek) / *Minerva* (Roman) was “the goddess of war” (88) and “was seen as the personification of wisdom” (89), while patriarchal societies value a delicate nature in women and often devalue women’s education.

The Olympian era of Greek and Roman religion is male dominated, like Christianity, with *Zeus* (Greek) / *Jupiter* (Roman) acting as King upon Olympus, but the presence of powerful female deities alongside the dominant god suggests that those who worshipped the Greek and Roman goddesses at the very least acknowledged that women could embody their traits, as they physically resemble the goddesses of sexual prowess;

of the hunt; and of war and wisdom, to name a few. The hypothesis that ancient western societies acknowledged female power is supported by the Mother Goddess theory of prehistory, which argues that “female dominance in religion may indicate a feminine force in other spheres of a society” (Pomeroy 1975, 14). While the Greek and Roman Olympian goddesses may not be dominant, their power was still acknowledged and worshipped by men, and thus while women in ancient Greek and Roman culture may not have held dominant positions in society, their capability and power likely would still have been acknowledged by their male counterparts.

Ironically, it is the acknowledgement of women’s power – and the fear of it – that results in their societal oppression throughout recorded human history, and the fear of women’s power is directly linked to the silencing and domestication of the folkloric siren in patriarchal literature. Like the goddesses of antiquity, sirens in both myth and folklore from all over the world “are often alluring, but can also be frightening” (Bacchilega et al. 2019, xii) because of the power that they possess over men. While the Greek and Roman goddesses discussed above each embody one traditionally masculine trait, perhaps two (such as in the case of *Athena / Minerva*), the siren embodies sexual prowess, intelligence, and the hunter’s lethal capability and, to quote Sarah Pomeroy:

A fully realized female tends to engender anxiety in the insecure male. Unable to cope with a multiplicity of powers united in one female, men from antiquity to the present have envisioned women in “either-or” roles. As a corollary of this anxiety, virginal females are considered helpful, while sexually mature women

... are destructive and evil. (8-9)

That the siren is a destructive, even evil creature and “a symbol of dangerous femininity” (Bacchilega et al. xvi) is evident both in Homer’s mythic *Odyssey* – wherein they lure sailors to their death through a combination of the beauty of their siren song and the promise of all-encompassing knowledge (12.204-207) – and in folklore, such as that of the siren’s Slavic counterpart:

The *rusalka* is closely connected with European mermaids – amazing, passionate creatures, half-fish and half-woman, who rise from dark water to play dangerous games with men, and whose power is linked to their voices. Through centuries of Christianity, these water sprites came to represent unrestrained and irresistible sexuality, illicit paganism, and the chaos of creation. (Naroditskaya 219)

Like the European siren, folktales about *rusalkas* suggest that “eroticism, malevolence, and metamorphosis are inherent to female nature” (220), but in neither mythology nor folklore is there an attempt to silence or domesticate the alluring, powerful mer-woman. On the contrary, Odysseus goes out of his way to ensure that he can hear the sirens’ beautiful, hypnotic song without suffering the fatal consequences of listening to it:

‘Friends... it’s wrong for only one or two  
to know the revelations that lovely Circe  
made to me alone. I’ll tell you all,

so we can die with our eyes wide open now  
or escape our fate and certain death together.  
First, she warns, we must steer clear of the Sirens,  
their enchanting song, their meadow starred with flowers.  
I alone was to hear their voices, so she said,  
but you must bind me with tight chafing ropes  
so I cannot move a muscle, bound to the spot,  
erect at the mast-block, lashed by ropes to the mast.  
And if I plead, commanding you to set me free,  
then lash me faster, rope on pressing rope.’ (Homer 12.167-179)

Rather than silencing the sirens, Odysseus “[stops] the ears of [his] comrades” (12.193) with beeswax so they will not be able to hear the mer-women’s song. Such gives his crew the ability to resist the sirens’ power without destroying that power entirely. Through this method of evasion, Homer both illustrates a healthy fear of the sirens’ power juxtaposed alongside a respect for its existence.

Andersen’s fairy tale, and the Dutch folktale recounted within *Speculum Mundi* that inspired it, demonstrate no respect for the siren’s power. With the western shift from the worship of the pagan gods and goddesses to widespread Christianity following the fall of the Roman Empire, that respect gets lost – likely in part due to the erasure, even outlawing, of powerful female deities. If the Mother Goddess theory suggests that the presence of strong female deities in religion implies a strong female presence in society, then their erasure in Christian culture implies an erasure of women’s power in



patriarchal Christian societies throughout western history, like that of seventeenth-century England when Swan penned *Speculum Mundi* (and the fifteenth-century in the Netherlands, when the folkloric tale of the silent mermaid reportedly took place), and nineteenth century Denmark, wherein Andersen wrote “The Little Mermaid.”

Christianity is a monotheistic<sup>10</sup> religion that, with its rise in popularity, quite literally demonized the worship of polytheistic deities. Jonathan Kirsch writes:

Because the final and decisive battle in the war of God against the gods was fought in the heart of the Roman empire at the very peak of its power and glory, as the most rigorous Jews and Christians saw it, the principal enemy of monotheism was the high culture of the classical world, a culture that began in Greece, reached its zenith in Rome and spread throughout the Roman empire. “Classical paganism,” then, was the official religion of a civilization that is recalled and honored today in the classical texts that are studied in our universities, the statuary that fills our museums and the architectural styles that grace our monuments and public buildings.

Still, the bad odor that clings to paganism begins with the alarming and sometimes revolting depiction of pagan ritual that we find in the Bible – paganism, we are taught, is hopelessly tainted with harlotry, idolatry, sorcery

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<sup>10</sup> Monotheism: “the doctrine or belief that there is only one God (as opposed to many, as in polytheism)” (OED 2021).

and, at its most wretched, human sacrifice. (40)

Idolatry, which began as a Biblical sin<sup>11</sup>, became a punishable criminal offense under Roman Emperor Theodosius, who was a Christian; in the year 392 AD, he became “the first emperor to prohibit the whole established pagan religion of the Roman State” (Hillgarth 1986, 45). When the law proved ineffective, idolatry was made punishable by death in 435.

While the ban on the classical Greco-Roman religions did not, strictly speaking, ban respect for women, its diminishing effect is undeniable. With Christianity as the dominant religion in the Roman Empire and, after its fall, in the modern western world, women were no longer hailed as powerful in religious texts. On the contrary, while intelligent women in the Greco-Roman context resemble *Athena / Minerva*, intelligent women in the context of Christianity resemble Eve – the original sinner who damned herself by eating from the Tree of Knowledge and then damned Adam by sharing its fruit.

In the Christian context, sirens are not powerful beings who resemble the goddesses and should justly be both feared and respected, but are rather temptresses who resemble Eve and, like Eve, should be punished. In fact, when sirens and other hybrids are mentioned in Christian texts, they are meant to “symbolize persons in the Church who are outwardly pious but harbor heretical and godless thoughts with which they mislead the innocent” (Holford-Strevens 26). Sirens, in Christianity, are no longer

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<sup>11</sup> “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (*Exodus* 20:3) – (Janzen 2000, 254).

fearsome beings worthy of respect; they are instead akin to demons and, subsequently, must be destroyed. Such is hardly a novel concept; as Bacchilega and Brown write in the introductory section of *The Penguin Book of Mermaids*, “A woman who oversteps the boundaries of gender propriety has, over centuries, risked being defined as monstrous” (xiii). The demonization and persecution of powerful, non-conforming women occurs often in reality. In the fifteenth century, Joan of Arc’s “historical contemporaries labeled her a witch [and burned her at the stake], in part because she chose to break free of the sex-gender system of her time” (Waltonen 2004, 187), and she is just one of many women throughout western history persecuted and murdered on suspicion of the paganistic practices of witchcraft. Women who dared to defy patriarchal norms, who possessed power and used it, were brutally exterminated by misogynistic forces that typically stemmed from within the Christian church – and the powerful sirens of western myth and folklore have historically suffered the same fate in Christian-dominated western societies.

In “The Little Mermaid” (1837), Andersen presents a fully domesticated, silent mermaid who is wholly robbed of the power possessed by her siren ancestors – but perhaps the reader may now be wondering how the siren, who in artistic depictions from antiquity was a winged, bird-like female hybrid, became one of the earliest descendants of fish-tailed mer-women that western society recognizes today as *mermaids*. The answer is rather amusing, for the siren’s transition was an evolutionary accident prompted by a faulty medieval description. In the bestiary titled *Liber Monstrorum*, or the *Book of Monsters*, the text’s unknown author incorrectly describes sirens as fish-like rather than bird-like:

The *Book of Monsters*, by an anonymous, seventh-century [...] Anglo-Saxon, redefined the siren's appearance. Where the siren had inhabited the shore until that time, in the *Book of Monsters* she slipped off her rock, becoming the first mermaid in medieval literature. Only an author sufficiently removed in time and space from the siren tale could have made such a startling blunder, though of course the confusion has its own logic, as a being associated with the sea has simply become a sea-creature. From that point forward the Middle Ages knew two kinds of sirens: the harpy bird-woman and the mermaid fish-woman. (Travis 2002, 39)

Ultimately, the depiction of siren-as-mermaid won out over siren-as-harpy in the trial of popularity. To medieval clerics, the description of the siren as a mermaid made logical, religious sense; by submerging her in water, the siren became wholly associated with moisture and, according to the aforementioned clerics, "lechery is made by moisture" and thus it was declared "a female trait" (Leach 2006, 197). By aligning the siren with lechery and sexual seduction, rather than the bird-like siren's seduction via knowledge, she became an even more sinful, evil creature – and thus all the more dangerous, for the combination of beauty and the promise of "prophetic knowledge" (Naroditskaya et al. 9) made her doubly attractive to her male victims.

In "The Little Mermaid," Andersen renders harmless the fully realized femme fatale that was the siren of myth and folklore through her transformation into a silent, domesticated, little mermaid. In western myth and folklore, while her beauty is an asset, it is the siren's song that makes her deadly because "anyone who hears it becomes [her]

captive” (Peraino 2006, 2), but in Andersen’s fairy tale, the song of the mermaid – while beautiful – holds no power. Early in the tale, he writes that the little mermaid’s older sisters “had more beautiful voices than any human being could have” (Andersen 1837, 162) but, despite the beauty of their voices, their music lacks the hypnotic quality of the sirens’ song:

... before the approach of a storm, and when they expected a ship would be lost, they swam before the vessel and sang sweetly of the delights to be found in the depths of the sea, and begging the sailors not to fear if they sank to the bottom. But the sailors could not understand the song, they took it for the howling of the storm. (162)

While the context of the mermaids’ song resembles that of the sirens’ song in both myth and folklore, in that it tempts men not to fear death by drowning, the song holds no real power over the men in Andersen’s tale because it is indecipherable. Despite possessing the ability to sing to men, men do not find their song tempting, which renders the mermaids powerless to begin with, but Andersen takes the destruction of the siren’s power even further with his young protagonist.

The little mermaid, who Andersen writes “had the loveliest voice of any on earth or in the sea” (169), is made completely powerless and, to satisfy the author’s patriarchal, Christian social structure, reliant upon men for survival through the sacrifice of her voice. The young ancestress of the siren is silenced, and in the most brutal way imaginable; in order to become human, she must give her voice to the sea witch, and the

sea witch takes it by “[cutting] off the mermaids tongue, so that she became dumb and would never again speak or sing” (173). Punishment through the brutalization of the female body is a common theme in Christian tradition, originating with Eve’s original sin in *Genesis*; because Eve gave into the temptation to defy God’s rules and then tempted Adam to do the same, she (and all women who descend from her) “accepts the pains of labor [and childbirth] as a deserved punishment for personal wrongs” (Brownlee 2015, 1298).

Andersen’s mermaid is physically punished both for descending from Eve and for descending from sirens. When she drinks the magic draft given to her by the sea witch to become a human girl, she immediately experiences an agonizing pain between her legs that “seemed as if a two-edged sword went through her delicate body,” but she “bore [the pain] willingly” (175). When the mermaid becomes human, Andersen’s Christian background dictates that she must suffer for Eve’s sin, just as all human women do, which is likely why the pain of her transformation so strongly resembles the “sharp pain” (175) that women feel during childbirth. The little mermaid is also punished for the sinful power that her siren ancestors dared possess; because Christian tradition<sup>12</sup> dictates that, as per the second half of Eve’s punishment, women must be subservient to men, the siren’s power over men could not be allowed to continue. Thus, in contrast to Homer’s tactic of stopping the ears of Odysseus’s men with wax which

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<sup>12</sup> “Since [Eve] had ordered the man to eat of the tree, the wife would no longer be able to command him, but he would command her to do whatever he wished” (Roded 2015, 65).

preserves the sirens' power while protecting men from it, Andersen physically rips away that which gave the siren power over men, which makes his mermaid equally subservient to men as human women were under Christian tradition in the Victorian era.

Without her voice, the little mermaid's narrative is presented as the opposite of folkloric tales about sirens. In Andersen's fairy tale, the power over life or death is taken from the siren and given to her victim of yore: a man. If she fails to make the prince fall in love with and marry her, she will "become foam on the crest of the waves" (172); in simpler terms, she will die. The only power that she has left without her voice comes from the manipulation of the male gaze:

"But if you take away my voice," said the little mermaid, "what is left for me?"

"Your beautiful form, your graceful walk, your expressive eyes; surely with those you can enchain a man's heart." (172)

Yet, the manipulation of the male gaze cannot truly be called power. All the power still resides solely in the hands of the prince, for the implication behind Andersen's narrative is that the only way the mermaid, the now voiceless descendent of the siren, can save her life and obtain holy salvation is if she reduces herself to being a silent, pretty, obedient wife who will be seen and never heard. For Andersen's mermaid, obtaining holy salvation is crucial because the prince is not all that she desires; she also desperately longs for an "immortal soul" (168) and to reside in the kingdom of Heaven with God when she dies. The once powerful mer-woman, who bewitched men with her

siren song, is thoroughly domesticated and Christianized by Andersen; she willingly gives up the source of her power, her voice, to become a subservient, Christian wife.

Andersen turns the deadly siren into a harmless helpmeet by turning her into man's saviour rather than man's doom. While the sirens of myth and folklore used their voices to lure men to crash their ships on craggy rocks and drown in the icy depths of the sea, Andersen's little mermaid saves her prince from a shipwreck; she tows him to shore, "kissed him ... and wished that he might live" (165). The little mermaid's saviour scenario is as far from the actions of the siren as possible; in the fallout of Homer's *Odyssey*, the sirens are so enraged by their failed attempt to kill Odysseus and his crew that, after the ship sails away unscathed, they commit suicide (Holford-Strevens 19). Andersen, through silencing and domestication, renders the homicidal siren harmless in "The Little Mermaid" – and the patriarchal archetype of the silent mermaid gained immense popularity following the fairy tale's publication. The tale's popularity then saw a huge resurgence following the release of the equally patriarchal animated Disney film adaptation in 1989.

The silent mermaid archetype remains popular with misogynists because she fulfills a revenge fantasy about the sexual domination of the siren. In myth and folklore, the siren is a dominant, unbeatable force who is only bested by Odysseus with the help of Circe, an equally powerful female character; among misogynists, the indomitable nature of the siren and her kin inspires a fierce desire for domination, for male dominance is considered an implicit right in patriarchal, Christian social circles. Early examples of this desire to dominate mer-women that predate Andersen's literary fairy tale appear in folkloric tales such as those about selkies, or seal women, wherein "a man



marries her by stealing her animal skin or hood, thereby precluding her return to the water and her kin” (Bacchilega et al. xviii). In these early tales, the man’s attempt at sexual domination of the mer-woman almost always fails, for the selkie steals back her skin and goes back to the water, never to return to land again. According to Bacchilega and Brown, “While these tales have in the past often cautioned men not to marry an outsider, they also may be read as narratives of violence against women, in which the mer-wife must be considered the victim of an abduction” (xix) or, in the context of the theft of her “hood” (xviii), the victim of rape.

The key difference between the folkloric tales of the selkie and the now archetypal tale of the silent mermaid is that, while the selkie almost always escapes, there is initially no hope for escape for the mermaid and, even when an escape route is offered, she does not take it. Fated to die if the prince does not love her, the little mermaid is presented by her elder sisters with the opportunity to return to her savage, siren roots:

This was the last evening that she would breathe the same air with [the prince], or gaze on the starry sky and the deep sea; an eternal night, without a thought or a dream, awaited her: she had no soul and now she could never win one. [...]

The little mermaid leaned her white arms on the edge of the vessel, and looked towards the east for the first blush of morning, for that first ray of dawn that would bring her death. She saw her sisters rising out of the flood: they were as pale as herself; but their long beautiful hair waved no more in the wind, and

had been cut off.

“We have given our hair to the witch,” said they, “to obtain help for you, that you may not die tonight. She has given us a knife: here it is, see it is very sharp. Before the sun rises you must plunge it into the heart of the prince; when the warm blood falls upon your feet they will grow together again, and form into a fish’s tail, and you will be once more a mermaid, and return to us to live out your three hundred years before you die and change into the salt sea foam...

(Andersen 180)

Although her sisters offer her salvation, the little mermaid refuses to act on the siren’s instinct to murder men. She will not kill the prince, even though it means condemning herself to death (181). Through the act of not only saving the prince at the story’s beginning but also refusing to kill him at its end, Andersen paints a portrait of a fully dominated, domesticated siren who allows herself to be physically brutalized so that she may be subservient to a man: a man who holds all power over her life and, in the ultimate act of symbolic revenge, resists her allure so fully that she, not he, must die. While Andersen’s mermaid ultimately does gain the immortal soul that she longs for, it is important to note that, in more recent adaptations of “The Little Mermaid” (like Disney’s 1989 animated film) the Christian elements of the story are abandoned which leaves only the intermedially silent, patriarchal heroine and her desire to sacrifice her powerful voice for a man.

The little mermaid’s voicelessness is the most recognizable motif from her intermedial index of actions; it is what makes a retelling of Andersen’s fairy tale

recognizable as an example of “The Little Mermaid” tale type. As was covered previously, minute similarities to a narrative do not necessarily make a text a retelling of that narrative; just as every story in which a human falls in love with a monster is not necessarily a retelling of “Beauty and the Beast,” not every story that contains a mermaid is a retelling of “The Little Mermaid” simply through the aquatic creature’s inclusion. For clarity’s sake, Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* (2005) is not a “Beauty and the Beast” retelling and J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911) is not a retelling of “The Little Mermaid,” even though Barrie’s novel does, in fact, feature mermaids. For a text to be a true retelling, it must contain several intermedial actions and symbols and, for retellings of “The Little Mermaid,” the mermaid’s sacrifice/loss of voice is the fairy tale’s most crucial intermedial action. The silent mermaid archetype is what sets the tale type apart from other mermaid stories.

Disney’s extremely popular animated retelling, *The Little Mermaid* (1989), takes the patriarchal theft of the siren’s voice a step further than Andersen because she is not only robbed of her voice; control over her voice is given fully to her prospective husband, Prince Eric. While the little mermaid’s tongue is cut out in Andersen’s version of the tale type, which thereby ensures that she will never speak again, there is an escape clause in the contract that Ariel signs with Ursula, the sea witch, in Disney’s animated film; if Prince Eric kisses her “before the sun sets on the third day, [she] will remain human permanently” and regain her voice (Clements & Musker 1989, 00:42:00). Thus, just as power over the mermaid’s life is given to the prince in Andersen’s fairy tale, control over her powerful voice is given to the prince in Disney’s film. Disney’s approach to the mermaid’s voicelessness is therefore more patriarchal than the

voicelessness of the mermaid in Andersen's tale; at least in the latter, control over her voice is never given to someone else. She knowingly, and willingly, sacrifices her voice forever when she allows the sea witch to cut out her tongue. In Andersen's context, control over the mermaid's voice is given to no one; it simply ceases to exist.

In Disney's film, Ariel becomes an even more subservient model of the silent mermaid archetype because Prince Eric, like a dominant prospective husband, chooses when (or, more appropriately, if) Ariel will speak. The control that he holds over her previously powerful voice is the subject of the musical number "Kiss the Girl," wherein Sebastian sings, "She don't say a word and she won't say a word until you kiss the girl" (01:01:25). While Prince Eric does not explicitly know that he holds power over Ariel's voice, the film does explicitly imply that men prefer women to be seen and not heard:

Ursula: We haven't discussed the subject of payment! [...] What I want from you is... your voice.

Ariel: My voice? [...] But without my voice, how can I-?

Ursula: You'll have your looks; your pretty face; and don't underestimate the importance of body language – ha! The men up there don't like a lot of blabber; they think a girl who gossips is a bore! Yes, on land it's much preferred for ladies not to say a word – and after all, dear, what is idle prattle for? Come on! They're not all that impressed with conversation; true gentlemen avoid it when they can. But they dote and swoon and fawn on a lady who's withdrawn; it's she who holds her tongue that gets her man! (00:42:43)

Ursula's speech is far more overtly misogynistic than that of Andersen's sea witch; while the character's prototype in "The Little Mermaid" (1837) does cite the importance of what Ursula calls "body language," there is no mention of the fact that men prefer silent women in the original text.

Because Ursula is overt in her lesson on the patriarchal values of the human world, *The Little Mermaid* (1989) becomes more patriarchal than Andersen's literary fairy tale. Ariel is not just giving up her voice; she is giving control of it to her future husband. Her understanding when she signs the contract is that, even if she gets Eric to kiss her and regains her voice, it will still be expected that she remains silent and just looks pretty during the vast majority of her time on land. Andersen's mermaid, if she had managed to win her prince, never would have been able to speak even if she wanted to; Ariel, regardless of if she wants to speak, enters the human world under the expectation that she will need a man's permission to use her voice. While the sequel – *The Little Mermaid II: Return to the Sea* (2000) – demonstrates that Prince Eric does not turn out to be a tyrannical husband and allows Ariel to speak whenever she wishes, such is not the kind of marriage that she so eagerly signs up for in the original film. With all of her knowledge about humans and their customs coming from a very ill-informed seagull and the misogynistic teachings of a sea witch, Ariel fully expects control of her voice to remain in Prince Eric's hands should she succeed in winning his heart and hand in marriage.

Furthermore, in both Andersen's fairy tale and its 1989 Disney film adaptation, the siren is not only robbed of her power through the destruction of her voice but also through the loss of her ability to tempt men with her knowledge and sexuality through

the infantilization of the 'little' mermaid character. The descriptive term 'little' is important because it makes it clear that the character is not a woman; she is a girl, only fifteen in the original story and sixteen in Disney's film. Gone is the fully realized temptress that was the siren of yore and in her place resides a child with fins.

Both Andersen and Disney solidify that the little mermaid is childlike, and therefore powerless, through the utilization of her almost painful naivety. In Andersen's text, despite never formally speaking to the prince, she naively believes that he will love and marry her, thereby saving her life and gifting her an immortal soul. Such is the kind of blind faith that only a child unfamiliar with the intricacies of both love and marriage would possess, and her faith ultimately proves to be ill-placed; the prince only "loved her as he would love a little child" (177) and never has any intention of marrying her, resulting in a painful dose of reality for the naïve little heroine. Because the prince views her not as a woman but as a child, even her "beautiful form" (172) holds no power over him. She lacks both the knowledge and the sexuality needed to seduce a man which her siren ancestors possessed in abundance.

Likewise, Disney infantilizes the little mermaid through Ariel's naivety about the human world and her poor decision making. Her endless curiosity and total lack of understanding about the world of humankind and their customs makes her resemble a child far younger than sixteen, which the viewer sees in some of her earliest interactions on land. Because her tutor in human behaviour is an extremely ill-informed seagull, Ariel makes a fool of herself at her first dinner with Prince Eric and his steward, Grimsby; she uses a fork to comb her hair and, thinking a pipe is a musical instrument, blows tobacco directly into Grimsby's face (Clements & Musker 00:51:39). While her

naïve behaviour is, at best, endearing, it does not hold a candle to the temptation of the siren's all-encompassing knowledge.

Ariel's naivety turns her into, quite literally, a fish out of water and, because she is so childlike, she needs to be taken care of and requires constant rescuing – by men, both human and aquatic. Sebastian, her crab companion, must help her navigate the human world because, without him, she would be “hopeless” (00:56:00), and she relies upon both her father and Prince Eric to save her at the film's climax when her deal with Ursula expires (01:14:08). When King Triton comes to save her, she childishly declares, “Daddy, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to! I didn't know” (01:10:45), which implies that she naïvely signed Ursula's contract without understanding the consequences – but that is untrue. She knew precisely what would happen if she failed but, like a child and like Andersen's little mermaid before her, she naïvely believed that success was inevitable. Subsequently, also like a child, she needs to be rescued when her naivety leads her into dangerous waters and, along with her voicelessness, renders her powerless.

Because the character of the little mermaid is so childlike, her lack of knowledge is accompanied by a lack of sexuality which further diminishes her power in the narrative. While the little mermaid (especially Disney's Ariel) is undeniably sexualized, she is not overtly sexual in the same way sirens are depicted throughout history. The key difference lies in the mermaid's lack of understanding, or innocence, when it comes to the use of her sexuality as a tool. Using her sexuality to get what she wants, as a siren would, does not even occur to the little mermaid; it is the older, more seasoned sea witch who suggests that she use her “beautiful form” – or “body language” (00:43:00) – to “enchain a man's heart” (Andersen 172). The character is meant to be read as sexually

innocent as well as naïve; it is the readers themselves, or in Disney's case the animators, who sexualize the little mermaid. It comes as no shock that sexualization of the silent, little mermaid occurs; when stripped of her voice, her character is reduced to her physical appearance alone, which results – intentionally or not – in the objectification of the little mermaid. Without her voice, Sebastian tells Ariel that she has “gotta look [her] best” (00:56:00) to get Prince Eric to kiss her; her personality does not matter, and neither do her thoughts nor her opinions. She is more an object than a character and, because her primary objective is winning a man's affection in both Andersen's fairy tale and Disney's adaptation, the character becomes sexualized even if her actions are not overtly sexual.

That the little mermaid is sexualized rather than sexual is clear in the lack of power that she wields. Andersen's little mermaid, whom the prince views as a dear “dumb child” (178) and nothing more, fails to seduce the prince because she is too childlike to be sexual; and Ariel, unversed in the art of feminine wiles, fails to seduce Prince Eric within the three days that she is allotted to do so. Sirens in both mythic literature and folklore seduce men to their deaths within a manner of minutes; the silent little mermaid is unable to do so after days of trying. By stripping the little mermaid of her sexuality, along with her voice and her knowledge, both Andersen and Disney remove the only power that the voiceless, naïve mermaid has left.

Disney's misogynistic hatred of the siren and her power is not only demonstrated in the weakening of Ariel and their adherence to the silent mermaid archetype popularized by Andersen, but also through the vilification of Ursula. Unlike Ariel, who is willing to give up the power of her siren ancestors and submit to being a quiet wife,



Ursula is extremely powerful – and she is punished for it. The viewer learns early in the film that, for an unknown reason, Ursula was “banished and exiled” (Clements & Musker 00:11:30) from the film’s patriarchal, underwater society of Atlantica – perhaps, given the context of her actions throughout the film, because she tried to usurp King Triton’s power. Because of the power that she wields, which goes unchecked by the patriarchy, Ursula is labelled as “a demon” (00:38:28) and a “monster” (01:12:00), much like the Christian demonization of the sirens of ancient myth of folklore.

While she may not possess Ariel’s textbook beauty, Ursula does possess the siren’s greatest tools – knowledge and sexuality – and therefore she acts as a direct foil to the naively innocent, and ultimately rewarded, Ariel. Ursula possesses knowledge which, like that of the siren, is dangerous and dooms those who listen to her; merfolk “come flocking to [her] cauldron” (00:41:07) in search of spells that will improve their lives, but each and every one ends up eternally trapped, shrivelled and corpse-like in her “little garden” (00:27:35) that can be viewed as an homage to the siren’s “meadow, [filled with] heaps of corpses / rotting away, rags of skin shriveling on their bones” (Homer 12.52-53).

Ursula also possesses an almost parodic level of sexuality. Modelled after the iconic drag queen Divine (Barounis 2016, 201), Ursula’s sexuality is dramatic and performative in a way that flagrantly mocks the objectifying male gaze. While the *sexualization* of Ariel gives men power over her, for she is only sexual if they choose to see her in such a way, Ursula owns her sexuality. Like the drag queens who inspired the character, Ursula “perform[s] cultural critique by highlighting the performativity of sexual and gender identities and the constructed nature of the normative alignments

between anatomical sex, gender role[s], and sexual identity” (Valocchi 2005, 758). She, unlike Ariel, recognizes that sexuality is a tool: a tool of self-expression, self-empowerment and, if used correctly, a tool that can be used to get what one desires.

The ultimate culmination of Ursula’s siren-like power comes in the form of her transformation into her alter-ego, Vanessa, and her seduction of Prince Eric. In the series of scenes in which she disguises herself as a human woman to ensure that Prince Eric does not kiss Ariel, Ursula demonstrates her ability to act as the ultimate, powerful oceanic temptress. She uses her knowledge of powerful magic to claim Ariel’s voice as her own; she uses her understanding of sexuality as a tool to take on a seductively beautiful physical appearance; and she weaponizes Ariel’s stolen voice in a way familiar to mythologists and folklorists alike, in that she turns it into a bewitching siren song (Clements & Musker 01:03:11). Ursula, for the briefest of moments, reclaims the power that Andersen, and the Dutch folktale that inspired his fairy tale, stole from the siren – but she is killed for it at the film’s climax while the submissive little mermaid is rewarded for conforming with patriarchal society through marriage to her prince. Ursula, like the many sirens before her, ceases to exist while the infantilized mermaid is idolized.

## Chapter Six:

### From Voiceless to Vocal: Returning the Siren's Power in a Modern, Intermedial

#### Retelling of "The Little Mermaid"

"Sirens deserve better." (Morrow 2020, 286)

Because the little mermaid's silence is an intermedial action, it can be interpreted and presented in different ways while remaining recognizable, so long as it is accompanied by other intermedial symbols and actions from the tale type that preserve its familiarity. Over the past decade, storytellers who revise "The Little Mermaid" have taken advantage of the fairy tale's intermedial flexibility to reshape it into retellings that directly comment upon the misogyny inherent in silencing the siren, and to comment upon the larger misogyny that runs rampant within western society.

Because "The Little Mermaid" is a unique fairy tale in that much of the tale type's structure can be attributed to Andersen's literary fairy tale whilst the formulaic structure of other tale types possess no clear origin, Andersen does deserve to be credited as the creator of "The Little Mermaid" as western society knows it today. He took a folktale about a silent, Christian mermaid and, rather than merely transcribing it as the Brothers Grimm and other collectors of folktales did, he took inspiration from the folk story and used it to create a unique narrative. In the Dutch folktale, a stranded, silent mermaid is found by a group of Christian women and is assimilated into a patriarchal society, but the folktale says nothing about the mermaid's experience under the sea, nor her hopes and dreams. In "The Little Mermaid," Andersen turns the silent,

Christian mermaid of the Dutch folktale into fully developed character who is a princess from an underwater kingdom that longs to marry a prince and obtain an immortal soul. The folkloric elements of silence and Christianity are still there, which ensures that Andersen's character resembles the folkloric blueprint, but it is to Andersen that one must attribute several of the fairy tale's original elements that have become intermedial motifs through repetition over the past century and a half, such as the little mermaid's fascination with and love for humanity, her status as a princess, and the action of sacrificing her powerful voice for legs in a dangerous transaction with a sea witch.

Published in 2018, Alexandra Christo's *To Kill A Kingdom* challenges the misogynistic vilification of the siren for her powerful vocality found in Andersen's intermedial fairy tale and Disney's animated film by returning the silent mermaid archetype to her roots in siren myths and folklore. As was demonstrated in the last chapter of this study, the siren's use of her voice and feminine wiles to exert power over men was vilified and deemed "monstrous" (Bacchilega et al. xiii) following the mass conversion in the West from the Greco-Roman polytheistic religions – in which powerful goddesses were worshipped alongside gods – to monotheistic, patriarchally-led Christianity. The vilification of empowered women who oppose patriarchal standards undoubtedly contributed to the silencing of the mermaid in Andersen's Christian fairy tale. In *To Kill a Kingdom*, published in the wake of the feminist #MeToo movement, power is restored to the siren when she is given back control over both her voice and sexuality.

Just as the patriarchal, Christian society in which Andersen wrote "The Little Mermaid" influenced how he wrote the fairy tale, the feminist society in which Christo

wrote *To Kill a Kingdom* influenced how she wrote her retelling of “The Little Mermaid.” Central to her retelling’s narrative is the power that sirens possess through the utilization of their bewitching voices and sexuality:

It’s a well-known fact that sirens are beautiful[.] ... We have eyelashes born from iceberg shavings and lips painted with the blood of sailors. It’s a wonder we even need our song to steal hearts. (2)

It is for this power that Christo’s sirens are persecuted. Their persecution resembles the real erasure of sirens from western literature post-Christianization and the persecution of real women accused of witchcraft because Christo’s sirens, in the fantasy narrative of *To Kill A Kingdom*, are relentlessly hunted down and murdered for their opposition of the Other World’s patriarchal power system. Lira, one of the novel’s dual protagonists and a profoundly powerful young siren, is referred to as “the Princes’ Bane” (14) for the role she plays in the sirens’ precise dismantling of the patriarchal surface world:

What [Kahlia] thought was that princes were mine and I didn’t share. That’s not untrue, but where there are princes, there are kings and queens, and I’ve never had much use for either of those. Rulers are easily deposed. It’s the princes who hold the allure. In their youth. In the allegiance of their people. In the promise of the leader they could one day become. They are the next generation of rulers, and by killing them, I kill the future. Just as my mother taught me. (5)

When Lira murders princes, she disrupts the patriarchal power lineage of the Other World's surface society as she was taught to do by her mother, the Sea Queen – the matriarch of the sirens' underwater world. Because the sirens seek to disrupt the patriarchal power structure of the surface world, Christo's retelling can be read as a feminist revenge narrative wherein power is restored to the sirens, and they use it to dismantle the social structure that silenced and erased them.

However, because the sirens are still persecuted for their power, Christo uses *To Kill a Kingdom* to make a larger commentary on the misogynistic persecution of women not only for being empowered, but for merely existing. Since the Middle Ages, women's bodies have been viewed as sexually tempting objects – a perspective which places the blame for sexual violence upon women and presents their assailants as blameless. The medieval-to-modern preference for the fish-tailed, wet siren rather than the avian, land-dwelling siren of antiquity emphasizes the misogynistic disregard for sexually violated women intrinsic to western society's patriarchal structure. If a man is seduced by the knowledge promised to him by an avian siren's song, then that is a reflection of his character because knowledge is a concept, not a physically tangible thing, and therefore one's desire for it is intrinsically motivated rather than externally stimulated. By point of contrast, the apparent sexual availability of the water-maiden, with her lecherous moisture (Leach 197), prompts an involuntary physical response. The involuntary nature of sexual arousal has been used to vilify the siren as a shameless seductress, a monster who uses bodily desire to lure men to their deaths – and it has been used as a defense in countless, very real cases of sexual violence against women.

The concept of *victim blaming* lies at the heart of the modern, feminist #MeToo movement and is metaphorically referenced in Christo's *To Kill a Kingdom*. In their article "Why Women Are Blamed for Being Sexually Harassed: The Effects of Empathy for Female Victims and Male Perpetrators" (2020), Bongiorno et al. define *victim blaming* as the belief "that women are sexually harassed [or assaulted and/or murdered], at least in part, because of their provocative behavior toward men" (12). Along with bringing to light the reality of just how many women are sexually harassed and/or assaulted on a global scale but never speak up due to a fear of social ostracization or the situation not being properly handled by law enforcement, the #MeToo movement has also forced western society to address its toxic tendency to empathize with the perpetrator in sexual assault cases rather than the person who was assaulted. Bongiorno et al. explain that "empathy for a male perpetrator contributes to increased victim blame" in cases of sexual harassment and sexual violence (24), and the tendency to empathize with the perpetrator in cases of sexual violence can be linked to the historical tendency in western culture to portray men as blameless when presented with the sexual temptation of basic femininity.

The siren – turned into a "symbol of dangerous femininity" (Bacchilega et al. xvi) by a patriarchal, Christianized western society – became a misogynistic symbol for the inherent temptation in the actions of all women. Due to their connection to Eve, all women in Christian tradition are implicit seductresses whose mere existence constantly tempts men to sin:

She was infected with evil even before the fall – a temptress, a wanton seductress, a serpent herself. Since Christian antiquity, the image of Eve had been distorted, and by Milton’s time the negative view of Eve had extended to all women, who were considered corrupt simply because they were her descendants. (Moore 2002, 1)

Eve tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit; sirens, with their lecherous bodies and hypnotic song, tempt men to death; and, by that same logic, it is the allure of the female body that tempts men to rape. western, Christian depictions suggest that the man in every scenario – be it Biblical, folkloric, or real – has no self-control and that the woman, be she Biblical, folkloric, or real is to blame for a situation’s violent outcome because she is a temptress. western society has been programmed, since the rise of Christianity, to empathize with – and even victimize – the man in moments of temptation while the woman is villainized.

Christo criticizes the misogynistic, Christian vilification of the female existence in *To Kill a Kingdom*. Because female sexuality has been vilified in western society since the rise of Christianity, the concept of female punishment for temptation has been normalized. Eve is banished from the Garden of Eden and forced to endure painful childbirth and subservience to men for her defiance of God – and therefore the patriarchy – through the temptation of Adam. The siren is silenced and infantilized in Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid” for her dangerous temptation of men in pre-Christian myths and folklore. If a woman wears an outfit that is deemed sexual and is then raped, the patriarchal western society in which she exists shows her no sympathy and declares



that she was “asking for it” (Greene et al. 2020, 450) because she was dressed in what is deemed by men to be a sexually provocative fashion. While it can be argued that Eve’s temptation of Adam was not – unlike Lucifer’s temptation of Eve – inherently malicious, for she only wanted to share with her husband the knowledge she had gained, and while no woman ever asks to be raped, it can be difficult to *not* view the sirens’ temptation of men as monstrous. After all, Eve does not tempt Adam with the end goal that they both fall from grace, but the siren – in both mythology and folklore – tempts men with the express intention of bringing about untimely death. Yet, in *To Kill a Kingdom*, Christo aligns the punishment of the siren with the punishment of all women by suggesting that their mere existence, and therefore factors that are out of their control, is what the sirens are punished for by the patriarchy of the surface society.

The sirens in *To Kill a Kingdom* are not inherently evil; their actions are instinctual, engrained within their culture by the Sea Queen and her hatred of humanity and the patriarchal power structure of the surface world. Late in the novel, the siren protagonist Lira declares, “I was a siren and so I was a killer. It was never wrong or right; it just was” (252). By that logic, sirens are no more evil than other ocean predators like great white sharks; hunting humans, most often human men, is simply what they are born – and taught – to do. Like great white sharks, a species made universally familiar through the popularity of the *Jaws* film franchise, the siren only becomes evil when the mass-consumed literature of western culture dictates that she is so – and both great white sharks and sirens suffer profoundly from being labeled evil. In the case of great whites, being labelled evil killing machines by the *Jaws* franchise has resulted in “a plunge in [great white] shark populations worldwide” (Francis 2012, 59) and, for sirens,

being labelled as evil man-killers and deadly temptresses resulted in them being replaced by docile mermaids in western popular culture. In the fantastical Other World of Christo's *To Kill a Kingdom*, in which sirens are real, being labelled as evil results in them being hunted down and killed by pirates who seek to "destroy the sirens forever" (42) by turning them into an extinct species.

While, on the surface, Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" could not be more different, they do share one similarity aside from the fact that both are about sea-creatures with ill-fated obsessions with humanity; both texts are exceedingly intermedial. That both *Jaws* and "The Little Mermaid" possess intermedial power is clear in how they defined the perception of a creature – one real and one fictional – in western culture. Ironically, the intermediality of *Jaws* and "The Little Mermaid" had opposite impacts on public perception; *Jaws* turned the great white shark, which was previously believed to be "harmless" (Francis 46), into a "killing machine" (44), and "The Little Mermaid" turned the previously lethal siren into a harmless, domesticated mermaid.

The mass transformation of the great white shark and the siren was accomplished through the power of intermediality. Because *Jaws* – and its subsequent sequels – gained such massive popularity not only in western culture but globally, great white sharks themselves, and their dorsal fins, became an intermedial symbol. While other species of shark remain relatively unrecognizable to the general public, the great white is instantly recognized and the sight of it is forever intermingled with "John [Williams'] ominous soundtrack as the [shark] prepared to attack" (47) – and with the terrifying, bloody aftermath of those cinematic sequences. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" and the

intermediality of his fairy tale had an undeniably powerful impact on the public perception of sea maidens, but the fairy tale had the exact opposite impact of the *Jaws* effect. While the action of the sea maiden rising from the water in the presence of a human man was previously a deadly symbol, made intermedially recognizable through the mythic nature of Homer's *Odyssey* and folktales of sirens from around the world, the extreme popularity of Andersen's tale of a docile, human-loving little mermaid changed that perception entirely. Now, when one is presented with an image of a sea maiden rising from the water to greet a human man, his imminent death is not one's first thought; instead, one recalls Andersen's little mermaid and her love for the prince – or, due to the widespread popularity of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989), one may alternatively think of Ariel and her innocent love for Prince Eric. What once was an action intermediality associated with death is now intermedially associated with heterosexual romance and the mermaid's submission to the patriarchal power structure of the surface world that she adores.

Recognizing the mass-familiarity of the mermaid and her submission to the patriarchal surface world within western culture, Christo uses the intermedial actions and symbols from Andersen and Disney's fairy tale(s) to present a feminist critique of the siren's transformation in *To Kill a Kingdom*. From the very beginning of the novel, Christo defies convention when she divides sirens and mermaids into two groups rather than presenting them as one synonymous creature. Sirens belong to a group that loath men by nature and mermaids belong to a group that, by nature, are obsessed with men. Because of their obsession with humankind and the surface world that men inhabit, mermaids are portrayed as the weaker of the two aquatic maiden species and the sirens

view them as lesser and insane. Lira “hate[s] mermaids” (2) and the adoration of the patriarchy that they represent, and to be compared to a mermaid is the greatest insult imaginable for a siren; Lira is “outraged” (78) when the Sea Queen, her mother, states that she has “grown weak. Silly little girl, bewitched by a prince. Tell me, was it his smile that did it? Did it bring your heart to life and make you love him like some common mermaid?”

While the division of sirens and mermaids into two separate species has the potential to eliminate any possibility that *To Kill a Kingdom* will remain familiar as a retelling of “The Little Mermaid,” Christo maintains the familiarity of the fairy tale by including intermedial symbols in her description of Lira. While Lira is distinctively described as a siren, not a mermaid, her appearance bears a stark resemblance to Disney’s Ariel. Lira’s hair “was as red as hellfire” (36), and the image of the redheaded sea maiden has been intermedially associated with Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* (1989) for more than thirty years. Around the world, young women “proudly announce that [they] wear [their] hair red in homage to Disney’s Ariel” (Matthew et al. 2009, 230). That Christo chose red hair for her siren protagonist can be no coincidence; in doing so, she intentionally aligns Lira with Ariel in the imaginations of her readers. Through the alignment of her retelling’s protagonist with Disney’s Ariel, and by default with Andersen’s little mermaid, Christo redefines the silent mermaid archetype because Lira may physically resemble Ariel, but she is in no way helpless nor naïve. The association of her red hair with “hellfire” (Christo 2018, 36) makes that clear. While Disney’s redheaded mermaid is childlike in her behaviour and decision-making, Christo’s redheaded siren is, like hellfire and the ancient sirens who came before her, a formidable

force to be reckoned with. Through the juxtaposition of the intermedial physical description of Ariel's hair with the power of the sirens of yore, Christo makes it clear to her readers just how much the patriarchal, Christian rewriting of the sea maiden's nature weakened her as a character – a patriarchal power reduction that Disney's animated film perpetuates.

Christo further challenges the weakness of the silent mermaid archetype by presenting the intermedial actions of Andersen's and Disney's little mermaid through a critical, feminist lens. Because the mermaid's silence is crucial to the maintenance of her familiarity, Christo could not eliminate it entirely, misogynistic though the mermaid's sacrifice of her voice for acceptance within the patriarchal surface world may be. Without the loss of her voice, it would no longer be a recognizable retelling of Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" nor of Disney's film; it would simply be an original narrative that somewhat resembles "The Little Mermaid" tale type.

Christo maintains the loss of the protagonist's voice because it is a necessary intermedial element of any "The Little Mermaid" retelling, but in *To Kill a Kingdom* the protagonist is not silenced nor weakened *entirely*. Unlike the little mermaids who came before her, Lira does not want to join the patriarchal society of the human world; she is content to remain in the sea but is forced to become human as punishment for defying her mother, the Sea Queen. What truly sets *To Kill a Kingdom* apart from Andersen's misogynistic source tale and Disney's equally misogynistic adaptation is that Lira does not choose to give up her voice; like the sirens who came before her and were erased from popular culture by the Christian patriarchy, her voice is stolen from her. She is forcibly silenced, but not entirely; while Andersen's mermaid has her tongue cut out and

Ariel willingly gives her voice to Ursula, all that the Sea Queen takes from Lira is her siren song. She is still able to speak, and even to sing, but the magical power that her voice holds over the humans who hear it is taken from her. One would think that, as in Andersen's fairy tale and Disney's animated retelling, the loss of this power would render Lira helpless, but it does not; in *To Kill a Kingdom*, sea maidens are not "naïve little [princesses] to be molded as [men] wish. [They] are warriors" (Christo 272).

With the presentation of a siren who is still powerful without her bewitching song, Christo challenges the sexist notion that a woman's only power comes from her ability to be a temptress. Even without her siren song, Lira wields power during the time she spends as a human woman and that power manifests itself both mentally and physically. Throughout the novel, Christo makes it clear that Lira is exceptionally quick-witted and the human pirates that she accompanies admire her for it:

When I turn to Lira, the ends of her hair are white with frost. "Try not to breathe," I tell her. "It might get stuck halfway out."

Lira flicks up her hood. "You should try not to talk then," she retorts. "Nobody wants your words being preserved for eternity."

"They're pearls of wisdom, actually."

I can barely see Lira's eyes under the mass of dark fur from her coat, but the mirthless curl of her smile is ever present. It lingers in calculated amusement as she considers what to say next. Readies to ricochet the next blow. (254)

Without her siren song, Lira's words still hold power and that power stems from her intellect in a direct parallel to Homer's ancient sirens. Yet, unlike Homer's sirens, Lira does not use her intellect to tempt the male-speaker, Elian, to his destruction; she uses it to challenge him constantly to a battle of wits, placing them on an even playing field. She holds no power over him, and he holds no power over her; unlike the ancient folkloric sirens of yore who held immense power over men, and unlike the patriarchal power structure of Andersen's Christian mermaid fairy tale which gives men total power over mermaids, Christo's narrative presents a truly feminist power dynamic in which both men and women, aquatic and human alike, share equal amounts of power.

The equality of power between men and sirens is further illustrated through Lira's physical demonstrations of power. To understand how the climactic scene in *To Kill a Kingdom* – in which Lira and Elian fight the Sea Queen – uses intermediality to challenge the sexist nature of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* in specific, several intermedial elements from the animated film must first be discussed. Because *The Little Mermaid* (1989) is such a massively well-consumed piece of media, the characters and the symbols and indexes of actions associated with them are highly intermedial. That means that not only is Ariel instantly recognizable, but so too is Ursula, the film's villain. While Ariel's vibrantly red hair and voicelessness are intermedial, Ursula is recognizable by her squid-like tentacles and power-hungry actions. Many of Ursula's intermedial attributes, physical and behavioural, are illustrated in Christo's Sea Queen:

Every queen begins as a siren, and when the crown passes to her, its magic steals her fins and leaves in their place mighty tentacles that hold the strength of

armies. She becomes more squid than fish, and with that transformation comes the magic, unyielding and grand. Enough to shape the seas to her whim. Sea Queen and Sea Witch both. (25)

In Christo's novel, the reader sees what may have come to pass had Ursula not been defeated at the end of *The Little Mermaid* and instead remained "the ruler of all the oceans" and had "the waves obey [her] every whim" (Clements & Musker 01:13:20). The Sea Queen, who is written in such a way that directly parallels Ursula, is a monster, a caricature who embodies the very feminine superiority that made the Christianized, patriarchal, post-Roman western society ban goddess worship and strip the siren of her power. The Sea Queen seeks to destroy lineages of kings to destabilize the patriarchy's hold on the surface world, and she teaches Lira to do the same – but Lira, as the feminist's version of a siren, recognizes that the destruction of men is not the answer to the sirens' problems; obtaining equality is.

While the siren has historically been portrayed as a dangerous symbol of feminine superiority, and therefore as a threat to the patriarchal western power balance in need of neutralization, Christo turns the siren and the silent mermaid archetype into feminist symbols through her introduction of an equal power dynamic into "The Little Mermaid" tale type's formula. Naroditskaya et al. (2006) write that "the artists who accomplished [the siren's] transmission from the oral to the written realm were, for the most part, men" and that these "male artists acquired an often uneasy ownership of the siren and her various relations, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (8) when Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" and Disney's film adaptation were



produced. Homer, who transferred the siren from oral tale-telling to the literary format, presented the siren as a model of dangerous feminine superiority, but he did not vilify them for it; post-Christian writings were responsible for the vilification of the sirens for their dangerous superiority, which resulted in their erasure from the popular imagination in western culture.

Through her use of the intermedial actions seen in the climactic scene of Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, Christo reclaims the siren for feminists when she preaches equality rather than feminine superiority or inferiority. In the climactic scene of Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, feminine superiority is vilified through Ursula while feminine inferiority is rewarded through Ariel. Ursula, who now wields King Triton's trident which gives her power over all the world's oceans, attempts to kill the helpless Ariel, who embodies the patriarchal ideal of what a woman should be: silent and reliant upon men. Eric then saves Ariel, the ideally inferior woman, by killing Ursula, the dangerously superior woman. An almost identical scene plays out at the climax of *To Kill a Kingdom*, but it is written very differently by Christo. Just as Ursula attempts to kill Ariel by trapping her in a whirlpool and striking her with lightning (Clements & Musker 01:13:43), the Sea Queen uses the same method when she attempts to kill Lira:

The Sea Queen shrieks, and a crack of thunder shoots beside me. Above, the clouds begin to rumble and turn black. Thunder moans, and I smell the electricity of the incoming storm.

"You have a lot to learn," my mother says.

She raises her trident in the air, swirling it around and around. With every

circle, the sky seems to twist, clouds lurching and swarming until the entire sky is made of nothing but gray.

Then lightning rains down around me. (Christo 330)

The key difference between the climactic scene of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* and that of Christo's *To Kill a Kingdom* is that Lira does not rely upon Elian to rescue her; instead, the sea maiden and the prince that she falls in love with fight the Sea Queen, who embodies the misogynistic past portrayals of 'evil' sirens, together:

"I have to get you to safety," I tell Elian. "We can swim under. If I put out the fire, you can take cover behind your crew."

Elian eyes me savagely. "I'm not *hiding*," he says.

[...]

"Fine," I snap. "Don't hide; run instead. I don't care just as long as you get out of here."

Elian laughs an offbeat, exhausted sound. "You're not understanding me," he says, grabbing my hand. "I'm not leaving you." (332-333)

Here, in the final battle scene that so closely resembles that of Disney's highly intermedial "The Little Mermaid" retelling, two crucial feminist messages are conveyed: the first being that Lira, as a feminist model of the silent mermaid archetype, is powerful even without her siren song because she is physically capable of fighting her mother, the Sea Queen, without it, which therefore proves that temptation is not all that makes

women powerful; and the second message being that women need not always be damsels in distress and men need not always be their saviors, because the two can – and should – possess equal amounts of power and fight side-by-side.

By using intermedial actions and symbols like the action of the sea maiden losing her voice, which gained intermedial status through the telling and retelling of Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid,” and the intermedial symbol of the redheaded mermaid from Disney’s adaptation, Christo is able to ensure that her audience recognizes that *To Kill a Kingdom* is, indeed, a retelling of “The Little Mermaid” tale type. The utilization of the tale type’s intermedial familiarity allows Christo to criticize the misogynistic nature of the western fairy tale. Christo does so by presenting her readers with a version of the silent mermaid archetype who resembles that of “The Little Mermaid” tradition and also resembles the sirens of ancient myths and folklore in the west, but who defies expectation in how she behaves.

Lira, although she aesthetically resembles Disney’s Ariel, does not share her helplessness nor her naivety, nor does she share the little mermaid’s desire to assimilate into a patriarchal power dynamic. Lira also, at the beginning of the novel, possesses the irresistible power of the siren’s song, but she does not necessarily enjoy the feminine superiority that it lends her; she kills princes because she was born and bred to do so, but feels like an outcast in her mother’s presence because she does not enjoy killing, as it appears a siren should, and is “not quite cold enough for the ocean that birthed [her]” (27). Christo’s siren is neither wholly superior to men, nor is she inferior to men like Andersen’s and Disney’s little mermaid; she is not the misogynist’s siren, feared and

domesticated, but instead has been reclaimed as the feminist's siren who is a symbol of and a beacon for gender equality.

In the current feminist climate of the year 2021, amid the #MeToo movement which has sparked a fourth wave of feminism, the feminist reclaiming of the siren is essential because, through it, Christo reminds her readers what feminism is truly about: it is not a fight for superiority, but a fight for equality. As is the case with every feminist movement, the intention of the #MeToo movement and of feminism in general is often misunderstood; it is not motivated by misandry, but by anti-misogyny. The goal of fourth-wave feminism is not to oppress men, but to empower women of all kinds; according to Master et al. (2017), "Digitally driven, [fourth-wave] feminists use technology to extend third-wave's call-out culture; they are body positive, trans and queer inclusive, and anti-misandry" (2-3). Because feminism has for so long been misunderstood as the desire of women to assert superiority over men, anti-misandry becomes a crucial part of twenty-first-century feminist literature, both of the non-fictional and fictional variety. By rewriting the siren not as a dangerous symbol of feminine superiority, but instead as a positive force for gender equality, Christo reclaims an archetype of toxic femininity and makes it feminist, and she could not have done so without the essential utilization of the many intermedial symbols and actions that exist within Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" and Disney's animated film.

In order to change a toxic rhetoric, it is crucial that one address the source of that toxicity. After all, one does not solve a problem like a toxic waste spill by constructing a new body of water; the solution is never to ignore the problem, but to fix it. One cannot fix the misogynistic nature of the silent mermaid archetype by erasing her any more than

the patriarchal Christians could fix the threat that sirens and goddesses posed through their attempted erasure. The silent mermaid archetype will always exist; it is too intermedial to simply disappear. She is too deeply engrained in western culture. She, like all intermedial fairy tales and the characters within them, cannot be erased – but she can be updated and changed to better suit the feminist climate in which she finds herself. She can adapt – and this thesis has thoroughly demonstrated that adapting to suit a new environment is the key to a fairy tale’s survival.

## Conclusion:

### Fairy Tales Must Adapt to Survive in an Ever-Changing Cultural Landscape

“There is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change.”

(Wells 1895, Chapter XIII)

Over the course of six chapters, this study has demonstrated that change is a necessary component of the process of retelling a tale type, for it is impossible for a tale type to remain relevant if the story constructed around its archetypes does not adapt to suit the time – and culture – in which it is being retold. If a story does not remain relevant, then storytellers will cease telling it – and that is how a culture’s folklore dies and how narratives go extinct.

The creative process of retelling a tale type requires revision, which necessitates the exclusion of the often dated, even offensive elements of the fairy tales that western culture deems to be classics, such as those produced by the Brothers Grimm, Gabrielle Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, Hans Christian Andersen – and, as the last chapter demonstrates, even Walt Disney Studios is guilty of dated, misogynistic storytelling as recently as 1989. While the intermedial motifs (*symbols* and *actions*) that make up the basic structure of a tale type must always be included when a fairy tale is retold, the story constructed around those motifs can – and must – change as much as the current society deems is necessary for the fairy tale’s survival in a modern environment.

The biological process of adaptation necessitates change and alteration just as much as the retelling of a tale type. If an animal or a plant refused to change and instead

continually produced carbon copies of itself, every species on planet Earth would be dead in a matter of years. As the environment in which a species lives changes, so too must the species to avoid extinction. The same goes for the retelling of fairy tales. To quote Albert Einstein, the definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results” (Nissen 2020, 1383), and he was undoubtedly onto something because to tell a story in the exact same way, repeatedly, regardless of the changes to a culture and its societal beliefs over time would, indeed, be insane. If the audience’s reaction to the exact same story being told repeatedly, regardless of cultural progress, *were* to change, it would only ever change it negatively. Either the audience will demand that the story, no longer relevant to their cultural landscape, cease being told, or they will just stop listening altogether in favour of more culturally aware and relevant narratives. In both scenarios, the result is the eventual extinction of the fairy tale.

The fact of the matter is that most people, especially in the West, do not in the year 2021 want to consume dated narratives and tend to view them as offensive. Particularly in the case of portrayals of gender and/or gender norms, “women increasingly reject dated ideas regarding their gender role, and men are changing, too. The UK’s National Centre for Social Research (2000) reported that their annual survey of social attitudes found that [the] traditional view of women as dedicated ‘housewives’ seems to be all but extinct” (Gauntlett 2002, 4). Particularly in the case of folk and fairy tale retellings, the desire to see updated and inclusive portrayals of gender necessitates that the original narratives – which stem from oral cultures around the world and were

popularized in western culture by writers like Perrault, Villeneuve, the Brothers Grimm, and Andersen – be changed.

Even Disney has, in the past decade, attempted to present more balanced portrayals of gender in their fairy tale retellings. In *Frozen* (2013), a retelling of Andersen's "The Snow Queen," neither of the heroines are damsels in distress and, when danger does strike, they rely upon each other rather than a male hero, and gender norms are flipped on their head in *Tangled: The Series* (2017-2020), a retelling of the "Rapunzel" fairy tale and a sequel series to Disney's *Tangled* (2010), wherein it is Rapunzel who wants the freedom to explore the world and have adventures while Eugene is the one who yearns to get married, settle down, and live a simple life. Disney has gradually learned, along with other fairy tale revisionists, that failing to update archaic versions of a fairy tale has the potential to "alienate [a] possible target audience" with stereotypes now deemed to be offensive (Gauntlett 81).

Because dated narratives are no longer acceptable in western culture, the key focus of all fairy tale revisionists who seek to retell fairy tales in the west must be narrative progress, beginning with an increase in inclusivity in fairy tale retellings. Given that fairy tales have historically been transcribed and retold in the west by white people, primarily by white men with the exception of most "Beauty and the Beast" retellings, they often exclude people of colour; the heroines in the classic western fairy tales are often blonde with light eyes and even when their hair is dark, as is the case with Snow White, their skin is always idyllically fair. To combat the exclusionary nature of these historically white narratives, a push for inclusivity in fairy tale retellings has already begun on a large scale in western popular culture. Modern fairy tale revisionists



are using the intermedial symbols and actions found within fairy tales to retell the stories in more racially inclusive ways, much like how Sapkowski and Christo use the intermedial symbols and actions of fairy tales to present feminist retellings in *The Last Wish* (1993) and *To Kill a Kingdom* (2018), as this study has demonstrated.

Every fairy tale takes place in a fantasy world, the world of Faërie, and fantasy worlds need not be bound by the constraints of reality; to quote Timmerman once more, fairy tales and fantasy narratives take place in a “wholly other world” (Timmerman 15), and that Other World is entirely separate from our own. If Tolkien can create an Other World in the realm of Faërie wherein trees can walk and speak, then modern fairy tale revisionists have the right to create their own Faërie-like Other Worlds wherein people of colour are princesses and mermaids, among countless another fantastical archetypes.

The western audience sees the revisionists’ attempts at inclusivity in modern fairy tale retellings both on screen and on the page. As early as 1997, audiences were presented with a black fairy tale princess in *Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella*, executive produced by Whitney Houston; later, in 2009, Disney released their retelling of *The Princess and the Frog*, which became their first animated movie with black protagonists; in 2020, Bethany C. Morrow published *A Song Below Water*, a loose retelling of “The Little Mermaid” tale type with black heroines; and Disney is slated to produce a live-action adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* in the coming years with black actress Halle Bailey portraying Ariel. Other recent fairy tale retellings led by people of colour include Julie C. Dao’s *Forest of a Thousand Lanterns* (2017), an East Asian retelling of the “Snow White” fairy tale; Ai-Ling Louie and Ed Young’s picture book *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China* (1996); and *The Rough-Face Girl* (1998), a

retelling of “Cinderella” led by an Indigenous heroine. Because each of these retellings maintains the use of the fairy tale type’s intermedial symbols and actions, the stories remain recognizable to the audience while simultaneously making that audience larger by promoting inclusivity within the narrative(s), which therefore makes them more accessible.

A similar endeavour to produce inclusive, accessible fairy tale retellings is actively occurring within the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in the realm of literary fairy tale retellings. While retellings produced for film and television, which Disney has a great deal of control over, largely remain heteronormative, there is now a plethora of young adult literature that retells classic fairy tales with LGBTQ+ protagonists. In 1999, Irish-Canadian writer Emma Donoghue published *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, a short story collection in which many of the adapted fairy tale protagonists who tell the collection’s stories are queer; Claire Eliza Bartlett’s *The Winter Duke* (2020) is a retelling of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type (ATU>410) with a lesbian protagonist and the heroine in Melissa Bashardoust’s *Girls Made of Snow and Glass* (2017) is a lesbian version of Snow White; Brandon Goode’s *The Secrets of Eden* (2017) retells ATU>510A (“Cinderella”) from the perspective of a gay man; and S.T. Lynn’s *Cinder Ella* (2016) adapts ATU>510A from the perspective of a transgender girl. Because fairy tales are primarily written for and told to children and young adults who are in the process of self-discovery, it is crucial that queer retellings of what western culture considers to be the ‘classic’ fairy tales be written so LGBTQ+ youth can see themselves represented in western culture’s most iconic stories.

At the end of the day, because modern western culture strives toward inclusivity and because the rejection of dated narratives becomes more commonplace with each passing year, the continued production of exclusively white, heteronormative, cis-dominant fairy tale retellings is not only offensive, but it also does not make economic sense. The western world is diverse, made up of a plethora of cultures and peoples; it is not only white, cis-gender, heterosexual individuals who spend money on entertainment media in Canada, the United States, the UK, and other western areas. In diverse countries, audiences want to see diversity in the media that they consume. For example, in a 2007 survey conducted by Elizabeth J. Tisdell and Patricia M. Thompson of Penn State University, data revealed that 87% of the people surveyed chose to consume entertainment media that featured people of colour (2007, 660), which indicates that representational media is in high demand and has been for well over a decade. Likewise, there is an increasing demand for LGBTQ+ representation in mainstream entertainment media now that we are in what television producer Carter Covington calls the ‘post-gay era’ of television (Monaghan 2021, 428-429):

...audiences [are] finally ‘ready for shows that don’t focus on character’s differences and sexuality’ but rather speak to ‘our common characteristics as human beings’ (qtd in Goldberg, 2016). While same-sex attracted and gender diverse characters were once limited to television’s margins, depicted via narrow frames of reference or not at all [...], queer representation has since proliferated the small screen in [the west]. Though there are many contexts where LGBTQ individuals and groups continue to be marginalized by mainstream media,

LGBTQ characters have become a staple of television in this context and have found inclusion in long-form drama, episodic comedy, reality television, and everything in between. (429)

Because LGBTQ+ individuals are, in most of western culture, no longer ostracised and instead are accepted openly into the majority of public spaces, the entertainment media produced in the west must reflect that inclusion or risk excluding an extremely large audience-demographic.

It is not just economics that suffers by the historically exclusionary nature of fairy tale retellings in the west; western youth suffer without representation, as well. For children of colour and children with LGBTQ+ backgrounds to not see themselves, or their family structures, represented in fairy tale films, picture books, and other mainstream fairy tale retellings is extremely ostracising. Fairy tales are often used in didactic contexts, wherein teachers and parents present them to children to teach them important life lessons and caution them against dangerous behaviours. These archetypal narratives “are supposed to depict or prescribe for us what is true, as well as what forms of behavior are typical, normal, and acceptable” (Haase 1993, 393). If a child of colour only sees white heroes or heroines depicted in the fairy tale media presented to them, then they may unintentionally learn the lesson that they cannot be a hero or heroine, even if that is not the explicit message being conveyed – and a child with two mothers or two fathers who is only presented with heterosexual relationships in fairy tale media may begin to wonder if that means their family is in some way flawed. In an

increasingly diverse culture, these ostracising scenarios are a risk in western popular culture as well as many, many more just like them.

Representation in the media consumed in early childhood and adolescence plays a tremendously large role in a child's developing self-understanding and the formation of identity. Fairy tales in specific help to "[shape] the self-image and belief system of children" (Hurley 2005, 221) and can help a child understand the world around them and the role that they play in it. If they do not see themselves represented in fantastical Other Worlds in youth, then they may question their place in reality or even the validity of their very existence, which can have long-lasting ramifications that extend well into adulthood.

It is the genuine hope of this study's author that the reader now has a better understanding of why western culture continues to tell fairy tales, and how intermedial motifs enable tale types to be endlessly retold. To recap, it is likely that cultures continue to retell the same fairy tales, regardless of the passage of time, because the formulas of these stories are timeless; they play upon humanity's basic fears and desires, the ones that never change, such as the fear and/or desire for: safety, security, and success. While society is progressing and changing at a rapid pace, we never outgrow these basic, instinctual feelings.

western culture, among many others, are able to retell these stories because they are full of intermedial motifs, which means that a tale type has been retold and distributed on such a massive scale that many of the symbols and actions within a tale type are instantly recognizable, like Little Red Riding Hood's red riding hood, Cinderella's glass slipper and its loss, the roses in the Beast's garden, and so on. The

intermediality of tale types, and of fairy tales like Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" which does not have an assigned tale type number in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Tale Type Index (but, this author argues, should), allows for them to be revised and retold in unfamiliar contexts, like the fantastical Other Worlds of Sapkowski's *The Last Wish* and Christo's *To Kill a Kingdom*, whilst still remaining familiar enough to be recognized by the audience as a retelling. Because fairy tale retellings like *The Last Wish* and *To Kill a Kingdom* utilize intermedial symbols and actions to remain recognizable, the authors are not only able to present tale types in unfamiliar Other Worlds, but they are also able to use them to make social commentaries about the reality in which they live, which helps to keep these classic narratives relevant so that they may continue to withstand the test of time.

Now that this study has demonstrated why western society continues to retell fairy tales and how doing so is possible, it is the intention of the author to further explore the need and demand for representational fairy tale retellings – which was touched upon in this concluding chapter – in a succeeding research project. Said research will seek to understand precisely how damaging the exclusionary nature of the sexist, white, heterosexual, cis-gender western canon of fairy tales has been; what steps have been taken since the 1990s to rectify the exclusion of strong women and diverse peoples from fairy tale retellings and to provide positive representation for previously excluded groups; and the extent of the impact that positive representation can have on marginalized communities and peoples.

Appendix A

Table 1:

TALE TYPE #	WESTERN TITLE	MOTIFS
ATU>333	“Little Red Riding Hood”	A wolf or other animalistic monster that eats humans; a little girl on a quest to her grandmother’s house; and the deception and devouring of the girl by the monster, disguised as a family member.
ATU>425C	“Beauty and the Beast”	A youth who is under a spell that makes them appear monstrous, even animalistic; an impoverished parent who struggles to provide for his or her offspring; and a deal that is struck between the cursed youth and the parent, wherein a child of incomparable beauty is sacrificed for security, either in the form of wealth, the preservation of the parent’s life, or both.
ATU>510A	“Cinderella”	A child of low stature (either born there or placed there by cruel circumstances) is elevated suddenly from rags to riches and succeeds against impossible odds.
ATU>709	“Snow White”	The wicked stepmother/evil queen tries to kill the stepdaughter/princess out of vain jealousy over her beauty; methods of attempted murder are cutting out Snow White’s

		heart and/or liver, and a poisoned apple; Snow White takes refuge with seven men (often dwarves); Snow White has skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as coal.
N/A: This tale type is not presently included in the ATU Tale Type Index and thus does not have a corresponding tale type classification number.	“The Little Mermaid”	A young mermaid, said to have the most beautiful voice on land and in the sea, loses/sacrifices her voice; she is in love/falls in love with a human; makes a deal with a sea witch to become human herself at the expense of her voice.  Post-Disney: the mermaid is often depicted with bright red hair.



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# Curriculum Vitae

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## Education

2019 - 2021

**Master's of Interdisciplinary Studies**, University of New Brunswick (Saint John)

**GPA:** 4.3

**Research Area(s):** Fairy Tales & Folklore, Adaptation Studies (Literature & Film)

**Disciplines Used:** English Literature, Communication Studies, Education Theory, Sociology, Psychology, and History (western)

**Awards:** SSHRC Research Grant (2019-2020); Magee – Third Century Postgraduate Merit Award (2019-2020); NBIF Graduate Tri-Council Scholarship (2019-2020)

2015 – 2019

**Bachelor of Arts**, University of New Brunswick (Saint John)

**GPA:** 4.0

**Honours Thesis:** “Bittersweet and Strange, Finding You Can Change, Learning You Were Wrong: Turning the Toxically Masculine Male Feminist in Post-Disney ‘Beauty and the Beast’ Adaptations” (English Literature)

**(Double) Major:** Communication Studies

**Graduated with First Class Honours**

**Dean's List:** 2017, 2018, 2019

## Poetry Readings

Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> (2019)

**Selections from VOX XVII**, Emily Davidson's *Lift* Launch Party

Aug. 17<sup>th</sup> (2019)

**Selections from VOX XVII**, *VOX XVII* Launch Party\*

\*Raven received the publication's annual Poetry Prize for my poems “Him to Her: I” and “Her to Him: II.”

April 7<sup>th</sup> (2017)

**Selections from VOX XV**, *VOX XV* Launch Party

## Research Contributions: Conferences

**R:** Accepted: “*Free Willy* and #EmptyTheTanks: The Interdisciplinarity of Captive Cetacean Rehabilitation Efforts” by Jessica Raven. Paper proposed for the Sport, Animals & Ethics Conference, hosted by the Faculty of Kinesiology at the University of

New Brunswick in Fredericton and Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, USA from May 25<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

**R:** Accepted: “Once More, But With(out) Feeling: (Un)successfully Selling Nostalgia in a Decade Dominated by Reboots” by Jessica Raven. Paper was scheduled for presentation at the University of New Brunswick’s 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Research Conference on March 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

**R:** “A Psychological Prelude: Coleridge’s Commentary on Killing the Inner Child in *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*” by Jessica Raven. Paper presented at the Annual Atlantic Undergraduate Conference on March 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

### **Research Contributions: Publications**

**R:** In Press: Maier, Sarah E (author) & Jessica Raven (author). “Gen Z Cinder(f)ellas: Girl Powered Gender Adaptations in the *A Cinderella Story* Films.” *Woke Cinderella: Twenty-First-Century Adaptations (Remakes, Reboots, and Adaptations)*, edited by Suzy Woltmann, Lexington Books, 2020.

### **Creative Outputs: Publications**

2020: “Chinese Folklore, Illuminated: Janie Chang’s *The Library of Legends*.” Book Review. *The Lorenzo Review*. Author: Jessica Raven

2019: “Celestial Noise.” Poem. *VOX XVII*: 7. Author: Jessica Raven

2019: “Him to Her: I.” Poem. *VOX XVII*: 15. Author: Jessica Raven

2019: “Her to Him: II.” Poem. *VOX XVII*: 29. Author: Jessica Raven

2019: “The First Time.” Poem. *Distortion(2)*: 4. Author: Jessica Raven

2019: “A Q&A with Amy Spurway, author of *Crow*.” Interview. *The Lorenzo Review*. Author: Jessica Raven

2018: “The Lorenzo Society & the Arts – Staving Off Dystopia.” Creative non-fiction. *Distortion(1)*: 7-8. Author: Jessica Raven

2017: “Updated: NBCC Building on UNBSJ Campus Closed Due to Health-Related Concerns.” Investigative Journalism Article. *The Baron*. Author: Jessica Raven

2017: “Vintage Dreams.” Poem. *VOX XV*: 16. Author: Jessica Raven

2017: "Separated by Glass Windows." Poem. *VOX XV*: 60. Author: Jessica Raven