ONCE UPON THE CIVIL WAR:

MONSTERS, MAGIC, AND MAKING AN AMERICAN FAIRY TALE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis probes the process through which I utilized elements of fairy tale and folk tale in writing *The Civil War Fairy Book*, both a novel-in-fairy-tale and a retelling of Arthurian legend set in nineteenth-century America. Fairy tale is a genre traditionally associated with brevity, flat characterization, lack of detail, a placeless and timeless setting, and a happy ending. While I intend this thesis to serve as a toolkit for writers of fairy tale, the scope of this research means it cannot be exhaustive in terms of its coverage, nor do I wish to be prescriptive about the elements of fairy tale writers ought to consider in their work. Rather than providing a formal, critical analysis of the genre—a project that already fills volumes in libraries—I have instead engaged in a personal but intellectually informed reflection on my own process. This takes the form of a travel memoir that combines fairy tale theory, commentary on my own writing process, and chronicles of my research trip to Natchez, Mississippi. As daily travel diary, each of this thesis' seven sections explores the ways I have stretched the edges of fairy story into a long work. The first section documents my process of writing a fairy tale with a specific setting while the second discusses my use of the fairy tale's brief, repetitive structure in a novel. Section three details the creation of my protagonist as both round character and flat fairy tale hero. Section four records my experimentation with various points of view, and sections five, six and seven argue for the importance of magical transformation and black magic; examine fairy tale themes through a survey of scholarly approaches to the genre; and question the fairy tale's traditionally happy endings, respectively. It is my hope that by sharing my journey, process and discoveries in writing a new American fairy tale, other writers may also create contemporary tales that push the boundaries of genre.

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INTRODUCTION

What is a fairy tale if not a journey? The hero leaves his parents to seek something he lacks. As he travels, he is met with magical helpers who aid him in overcoming three problems that block his path. In the end, he returns transformed—restored to his throne if he is noble born, risen to the level of king if he begins life as a poor peasant.[1] My tale consists of two journeys. In one, I leave behind my ordinary life to write a novel-in-fairy-tales set during the American Civil War which draws both its structure and characters from Arthurian legend. In the other, I leave my children with my in-laws and embark with my husband on a week-long research trip to Natchez, Mississippi, where I hope to meet the magical stuff of which such novels are made.

In neither story am I the typical hero—the foolish, youngest son or saintly third daughter whose innate goodness leads to a happy ending. Sometimes I am good, but more often, I am not, an only child journeying quite quickly into middle-age. I have husband and money and career and home, but once upon a hot, humid summer, I dreamt about a Confederate soldier who plucked the trapped souls of his comrades from a thorny battlefield. The souls were spongy and pink, no bigger than golf balls, and once released from the brambles, they floated up to heaven like tiny balloons. When I woke, I began writing down the scene before it, too, floated away. In this way, I took my first steps into creating a fairy tale which grew larger and larger until I found myself standing in the middle of a novel, watching as my story disappeared into the horizon.

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[1] Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales: A New History*, 10-13.

Before I traveled far on this path, however, it became clear that the traditional fairy tale form left little room for authorial innovation. Critic Vanessa Joosen says that readers expect a fairy tale to follow a familiar path. She defines traditional fairy tale as a story in which

> both time and space are beyond our reach . . . and the supernatural is not felt to intrude in human life. . . . The figures are 'flat characters'. . . . The action of the traditional fairy-tale plot progresses quickly, and its ending is optimistic. The narrative style is characterized by fixed formulas, repetitions, and symbolic numbers. . . Finally, traditional fairy tales are told in a linear manner and by an omniscient, third-person narrator who carries no distinguishing mark (gender, race, class, individuality).[2]

Contemporary fairy tale retellings, she claims, must disturb the reader's "horizon of expectation" through upending some or all of the traditional fairy tale elements[3] by giving fairy tales definite, concrete settings; changing the traditional fairy tale's repetitive, pattern-laden structure; creating well-developed characters; using non-traditional points of view; playing with boundaries between magic and realism; and renegotiating optimistic endings.[4]

Because so much of a traditional fairy tale is prescribed—from characterization to structure itself—the short fairy tale form also does not lend itself to long works. In fairy tale, says Philip Pullman, "[t]he speed is exhilarating. You can only go that fast, however, if you're traveling light; so none of the information you'd look for in a modern work of fiction—names, appearances, background, social context, etc.—is present."[5] A good fairy tale is deceptively simple in that it utilizes condensed character and condensed language to plumb a large social or psychological issue. But in my early attempts at Civil War fairy

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[2] Joosen, "Chapter 1: An Intertextual Approach," 13.
[3] Joosen, 13.
[4] Joosen, 13-15.
[5] Pullman, Introduction to *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm*, xv.

tale, I failed to capture the right balance between narrating and dramatizing, and I struggled with voice, emotion, and character development. How could I relate a terrible, violent historical event with a seemingly timeless, placeless form? How could I sustain adult reader interest in a protagonist that is often flat and unthinking and a story with a repetitive, simple, heavily-patterned style? In short, how could I stretch the boundaries of the brief fairy tale form in order to make it into a novel? This is the question that drove my journey through the novel itself.

My second journey began in early spring. The path we travelled started at our home in the Missouri Ozarks before winding south through Harrison, long a hotbed of white supremacists and racist billboards[6] and then onto the hilly, four-lane highway to Little Rock. Short lengths of road proclaimed that this patch of Arkansas had been adopted by a local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan as part of a national litter-free initiative. The trees changed from oak and hickory to short-leaf pine which towered over us, the longer growing season creating forests far taller than those at home. The asphalt transformed from smooth to rough, potholes as plentiful as double-wide trailers. It became clear that the Mississippi River was near as the land flattened and turned to wetlands. Then, the Louisiana line brought more smooth roadway, and there was Monroe and Vidalia and a bridge over the Muddy Mississip' until we were at last in Natchez, blinking in the dusky light.

Though both paths—novel and Natchez—looked different along the way, these two treks were essentially the same. Once upon a time I decided to write a novel, and the path was full of potholes and bordered with forests and rivers. This novel, *The Civil War Fairy Book,* blazes a new trail in that it is a both a hybrid

[6] Morris, "A Tale of Two Billboards."

form (a novel-in-fairy-tales) and fairy tale of the American Civil War, roads relatively untraveled by contemporary writers. Because fairy tales are full of journeys, the travel memoir seems an apt form for chronicling my Mississippi and book-writing adventures. What follows is the diary of my week-long trip to Natchez combined with lessons I've learned in my years-long journey of writing my novel. In particular, it focuses on how I've experimented and pushed the limits of the short fairy tale form in order to create a long, complex novel. Thus, I wish this thesis to act as a travelogue which pulls from fairy tale criticism, my own fairy tale analysis, and the journals of both my Natchez and novel-writing trips.

There were many roads I could have taken in writing this novel, among them the exploration of the relationships between fairy tale and Arthurian legend or Arthurian legend and the antebellum/postbellum Southern landscape. I have briefly touched on some of my work's Arthurian links in this thesis; however, the scope of this project does not permit me to delve deeply into Arthuriana, a topic I plan to pursue further in my post-doctoral research and in my writing of a sequel to *The Civil War Fairy Book*. With this thesis' emphasis on creating new fairy tales from old models, I hope my critical work will aid other fairy tale writers in negotiating fairy tale journeys of their own. Much fairy tale criticism exists, but there is very little practical advice for fairy tale writers. As Kate Bernheimer, both a fairy tale scholar and practitioner, states, "[I'd] like to demystify the idea that fairy tales are of use only to writers of fantasy or fabulism. I'd like to celebrate their lucid form. . . . For while the interpretation of fairy tales is a well-traveled path among writers, fairy-tale techniques remain little identified and appreciated."[7]

[7] Bernheimer, "Fairy Tale is Form," 62.

Day 1: Once Upon a Time

March 15

We pull into Natchez after sundown, driving past the darkened Visitor Center, past catfish restaurants and through neighborhoods full of houses, shabby and derelict in the moonlight. We are headed to our beds at Lansdowne Plantation which sits, somewhere, at the edge of town. My GPS warns me to stay on the path, and when I stray it threatens me: "Turn right," it says, over and over again. "Recalculating." Fairy tales are full of such prohibitions and the demise of those who fail to heed them, though it seems I have little to fear in Natchez proper, perched as it is on the bluffs of the great river. The last Mississippi wolf, *Canus rufus*, was shot in Claiborne County in 1946.[8] Gone are the canebrakes and Delta bottomlands which held the Louisiana black bear, the species that spawned the teddy bear when President Theodore Roosevelt refused to kill a bound bear near here in 1902.[9] Nearly gone, too, is the bear with its short snout and long ears.[10] The live oaks dripping with Spanish Moss are indeed magical creatures—almost impervious to fire, staying green (live) in winter, losing their leaves in spring and immediately regrowing them[11]—but harmless. But leave the Natchez bluffs, walk down the steep path to Natchez Under-the-Hill or drive northeast to the ghost town of Rodney, and the flooding river lurks, overtopping its banks and lapping at the road's edge.

[8] James T. McCafferty, "Once Bountiful."
[9] Jim McCafferty, "The Canebreaks."
[10] Sneath, "Has Teddy's Bear Really Recovered?"
[11] Staake, "Focus on Natives."

There is, perhaps, no clearer landmark of a fairy tale than its beginning in "Once upon a time." Storyteller Marcia Lane says such an opening sets a tone and acts as both a "disclaimer (don't worry about these things, they are not for your time and place) and an enabler (anything is possible, because the events that follow are not bound by the laws of the real world that we know)."[12] The fairy tale world is a familiar place just around the corner, and it was the timeless and placeless quality of fairy tale that initially drew me to the format. If we think of the "O" in "Once" as a little well into which past, present, future, and reader fall, then using fairy tale to relate an historical event could make the past present and the Civil War as familiar as home. Structuralist scholar Jessica Tiffin claims that "[f]airy tale has no history—a king rules, not a particular king. The countries of fairyland require no maps; its protagonists simply follow the road, or walk through the forests,"[13] but rather than being timeless, I believe tales are full of time, opening a door on "Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe."[14]

To walk the path of my novel, I've journeyed to Natchez, Mississippi, for its Spring Pilgrimage, the magical time of year when Natchez's two ladies' garden clubs and some of its private citizens open their antebellum homes for tourist traffic and Civil War history pageants. As the landscape turns from run-down cottages to antebellum mansions on our way to Lansdowne, it becomes clear that we are traveling into the land of *Once upon a time, the world wobbled into war*. "[T]he first thing you always know about a fairy tale is that you are in it," says

[12] Lane, *Picturing the Rose*, 10.
[13] Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry*, 16.
[14] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 10.

Bernheimer. "Immediately it announces that it is a form and that you are inside the form."[15] Along with Joosen's definition of genre, I like critic Maria Tatar's description of fairy tale as a story that takes place in a "fictional world where preternatural events and supernatural intervention are taken wholly for granted."[16] A fairy tale, she says, can belong to the category of folktale but also contrast the folk tale, "which is sharply biased in favor of earthy realism."[17] Thus, a fairy tale that situates itself in a particular time and place risks becoming something other than fairy tale.

Most critics would say, as Lane does, that a fairy tale is a story which "happens in the past tense, and a story that is not tied to any specifics. If it happens 'at the beginning of the world,' then it is a myth. A story that names a specific 'real' person is a legend (even if it contains a magical occurrence). A story that happens in the future is a fantasy."[18] If "Once upon a time" indicates a fairy tale, then "There was once a farmer and his wife, and they were forever arguing about who had the harder job" is the start of a folktale, a story that describes "a test of wills, silly accidents, [and] reconciliation."[19] It's important to note, however, that the Grimm brothers did not always make such clear distinctions in their fairy tale collections. The Grimms' work, says Ruth B. Bottigheimer, is a "mixed lot" of fairy tales featuring character transformations, animal tales, tales of warning, tales of origins, religious tales, and folk tales "whose characters usually end up where they started."[20] I think the Grimms' own mixture of folk and fairy tale types

[15] Bernheimer, "Fairy Tale is Form," 66.
[16] Tatar, *Hard Facts,* 33.
[17] Tatar, 33.
[18] Lane, *Picturing the Rose,* 5.
[19] Lane, 5.
[20] Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales,* 8.

gives credence to my use of both fairy and folk tales as inspiration for *The Civil War Fairy Book* and to the labeling of my work as a novel-in-fairy-tales, though it contains both fairy and folk tale elements. And though I believe the boundaries of fairy tale are a bit more fluid than Bottigheimer would indicate, I agree with Lane's claim that a tale comes from a "particular perspective," one that utilizes a "personal historical reference" within a timeless, placeless setting.[21] What, then, do I do with writing historical fact in my novel—with specific battles in specific locations fought by specific, named soldiers at specific times? To answer this question, I experimented with adding specific historical detail to my fairy stories. The writing in bold below indicates the historical detail I added to an otherwise traditional fairy tale draft of a chapter titled "Grit, Endurance, Wit":

> Once upon a picket line, Artie was keeping vigilant watch **over the Rappahannock River in front of him** and over all enemy movements. **Should the Federal forces decide to cross the swath of shallows at United States Ford, Artie must be ready to act as skirmisher and force the Yanks back across the Dare Mark Line. "I dare you Yankees to attack," thought Artie, suddenly most glad for the mountain spring that fed the river's run to Chesapeake Bay and glad for the rocky ledges that lined the waterway in this part of Culpepper County, Virginia.**
>
> **In February, before Artie's Company K and the rest of the 16th Mississippi Infantry had marched to the ford, winter quarters had been light duty along the quiet river where rebels fishing on picket could see their Yankee counterparts doing the same on the opposite bank.**
>
> "Hullo over there!" a voice might say. "Do you want to trade for coffee?"
>
> Newspapers and letters and cigarettes often crossed the picket line, but **now it was April and** Artie had nothing to give. **The brown jeans and bountiful clothing that the good people of Wilkinson County, Mississippi, had sent for Christmas were well-worn but serviceable. Artie's stomach, however, was empty and had been for quite some time**. **Listening to the river flow over the rocks,** he was feeling rather prickly about the whole thing—**the Mississippi on the Rappahannock**, the full moon **splashing across the ford in its endless march,** his heart in his mouth, growing smaller and smaller each time he nibbled on its edges.

[21] Lane, 5.

Though I liked the specific setting details of the above passage, when writing the longer, complete chapter, I found so many historical details distracting. They were difficult to wade through, said one reader,[22] and I concurred. Not only did so many details obscure the fairy tale form, they also made the chapter read as realistic fiction, stripping the work of some of its magic. In following the path of my novel, I must walk a fine line. Too few historical details and I can't evoke my Civil War setting properly; too many, and I cease writing fairy tale.

I want both historical fact and fairy tale format to complement each other in my novel because I believe that fairy tale can be a fitting format for capturing the Southern cultural climate, both before and after the Civil War. Numerous sources note both the antebellum South's veneration of medieval romance and the links between medieval romance and fairy tale, thus connecting medieval romance/fairy tale and Southern sensibility. In his *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies,* Jan M. Ziolkowski notes similarities between some nineteenth-century fairy tales and medieval Latin poetry, such as the Grimms' "The Donkey" and the medieval Latin "The Donkey Tale" or the Grimms' "The Turnip" and the Latin "The Turnip Tale."[23] "The corpus of 'classic' fairy tales owes much to medieval storytelling, since the former absorbed the latter . . .," argues Ziolkowski.[24] Helen Cooper's criticism of Malory's seminal *Le Morte Darthur* would seem to back up this notion, as she notes a tripling in Arthurian legends, such as the Welsh Triads or Lancelot's three rescues of Guinevere in Malory's text; a tendency for flat characterization in that Malory "presents

[22] Gerard Woodward in tutorial, December 5, 2017.
[23] Ziolkowski, Introduction to *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales,* 2.
[24] Ziolkowski, Introduction to *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales,* 6.

speeches and actions, not thoughts or motives, and the inner life of his characters has to be deduced from those"; and an absence of cause and effect,[25] all traditional fairy tale elements. Several chapters in Dorsey Armstrong's modern English translation of Malory's work also exhibit a fairy-tale-like structure in that they are short, both lacking in detail and employing the magic fairy tale number three. The brief Chapter 12, "Gawain, Uwain, and Marhault," for instance, tells of the tale of three knights who meet three maidens who oversee each of three adventures, all taking place over the course of only a few pages.[26]

As medieval romance found popularity in the antebellum South through the region's fondness for *Ivanhoe*, staged jousts, and its "cult of chivalry,"[27] Ritchie Watson, Jr., claims that Southerners circulated the myth that the Southern gentleman was of an "aristocratic and chivalric Norman race" while the Northerner was a commoner descended from Saxons.[28] There are further links to medievalism in Charles Sumner's 1856 claims that the "Senator from South Carolina has read many books of chivalry, and believes himself a chivalrous knight, with sentiments of honor and courage. Of course he has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight. I mean the harlot, Slavery,"[29] words which might have not only led to his severe caning on the Senate floor but also to the Civil War.[30] Some contend that Sidney Lanier's popular *The Boy's King Arthur* was written in order to "teach the ideals of chivalry to American youth after

[25] Cooper, Introduction to *Le Morte Darthur,* xvii.
[26] Armstrong, *Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur,* 88-91.
[27] Osterweis, "Part One: The Emergence of Southern Romanticism," 1-53.
[28] Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons*, 18.
[29] Sumner, "The Crime Against Kansas."
[30] Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons.*

the Civil War had destroyed what to many was a chivalric society in the southern United States."[31] It was likely the chivalric code present in Lanier's work that attracted Southern writers in Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction America[32] and that led many Southerners to see knighthood as the embodiment of antebellum values.[33]

Of all American writers, it is perhaps Mark Twain that draws the clearest parallels between Arthurian legend and the Southern climate of the nineteenth century. Introduced to King Arthur in Lanier's work and raised in a region with Confederate sympathies, Twain uses Arthur and his court to satirize Southern life both before and after the Civil War. In his *Life on the Mississippi,* Twain suggests that the castle-like exterior of the capitol building in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was no doubt inspired by Sir Walter Scott, who had "run the [Southern] people mad . . . with his medieval romances."[34] Critical of the influence of Arthurian legend on both American and British societies since the rediscovery of Malory's work in the early nineteenth century,[35] Twain declares that "[t]he South has not yet recovered from the debilitating influence of [Scott's] books. . . . [A]s a symbol and breeder and sustainer of maudlin Middle-Age romanticism, . . . [the sham castle] is necessarily a hurtful thing and a mistake."[36]

Twain's satirical *Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* also uses Malory's work, so revered by authors and artists such as Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites, to comic effect. As Edward Donald Kennedy notes, if many Victorian

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[31] Kennedy, "Mark Twain" in *Arthurian Writers,* 219.
[32] Lupack and Lupack, "Reaction to Tennyson," 80.
[33] Taylor and Brewer, "Arthur's 'Return' in the New World," 163.
[34] Twain, *Life on the Mississippi,* 237.
[35] Kennedy, "Mark Twain" in *Arthurian Writers,* 219.
[36] Twain, 238.

artists saw the medieval period as "a simpler time that had been uncorrupted by the Industrial Revolution,"[37] Twain sought to reveal the "ugliness" of that era.[38] Transported back in time after an accident at a munitions factory, Twain's Hank Morgan (the Yankee of the novel's title) at first believes Camelot to be an insane asylum and then a squalid land with hogs lying about in "reeking wallow[s]" and the royal court promenading "through the muck and swine, and naked brats, and joyous dogs, and shabby huts."[39] Though in the end Twain's novel, as Kennedy suggests, criticizes American politics and the differences between Northern and Southern society as much as it does nineteenth-century medievalism,[40] the work still stands as arguably the "first piece of significant, lengthy Arthurian fiction produced in the United States."[41]

No trip to Mississippi would be complete without a brief consideration of William Faulkner's work, in particular his 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!,* set in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, a thinly-disguised twin for the area surrounding his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi. Alan and Barbara Lupack indicate that Southern Arthurian retellings tend to focus on the post-Civil War South as Wasteland, or ruined Camelot,[42] a motif popularized by Jesse Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and made famous in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Taylor Hagood claims that Faulkner employs "Arthurian legend to articulate many of the major themes and motifs in his work. . ."[43] I would argue that Faulkner's novel is

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[37] Kennedy, 219
[38] Kennedy, 219.
[39] Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court,* 42.
[40] Kennedy, "Mark Twain" in *Arthurian Writers,* 223.
[41] Mathis, "Mark Twain" in *The King Arthur Myth in Modern American Literature,* 7.
[42] Lupack and Lupack. "Reaction to Tennyson: Visions of Courageous Achievement."
[43] Hagood, "Faulkner's 'Famous Immeasurable Camelots': *Absalom! Absalom!* and Le Morte Darthur," 45.

not a true retelling of Malory's text as it strays from Malory's model in terms of familial relationships between characters, but I would say that it is a work that references Arthurian imagery, characters, and ideas. I also agree with critics who argue that Faulkner intends us to see Thomas Supten, "a madman who creates within his very coffin walls his fabulous immeasurable Camelots,"[44] as an Arthur-like figure who stands for the Old South, his rise to power and subsequent fall into ruin an allegory for the destruction wrought by the Civil War.[45]

As with Faulkner, Southern writer Walker Percy also focuses on the Wasteland of post-bellum Southern culture in his 1977 *Lancelot,* the book's title alone indicating the endurance of Arthurian themes in Southern literature. Thomas Winn Dabbs argues that Percy's work is "profoundly Arthurian in that it exposes features of the modern world that do not hold up to the heroic, the sacrosanct, or the romantic."[46] Speaking from a mental institution after he murders his wife and her lover, the novel's eponymous Lancelot Andrews Lamar is interested in the horrors of the Civil War and antebellum culture, Southern racism, and chivalric sexual identity. Unlike Malory's knights, however, Percy's Lancelot is on "a search not for God but for evil,"[47] a quest for which he dubs himself "The Knight of the Unholy Grail."[48]

To borrow Marina Warner's boat metaphor of *The Ocean of Story,* the title of one of the earliest fairy tale collections,[49] my three ships—fairy tale, Arthurian

[44] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!,* 199.
[45] See Lupack and Lupack's "Reaction to Tennyson" and Hagood's "Faulkner's 'Famous Immeasurable Camelots.'"
[46] Dabbs, "Walker Percy," 289.
[47] Percy, *Lancelot,* 51.
[48] Percy, 138.
[49] Warner, *Once Upon a Time,* xvii.

romance, and the Civil War—all journeyed over this vast sea of story and met neatly at Fort Sumter and the firing of the war's first shots. But though traditional European fairy tale takes place in this vaguely medieval world, the path of American fairy tale requires explicitly named settings. By the term "American fairy tale," I mean tales written in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries by Americans of European ancestry. L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz,* perhaps the best known of these American fairy tales, begins in the grey Kansas landscape to which Dorothy longs to return. Washington Irving's hen-pecked Rip Van Winkle, who sleeps for twenty years and wakes to find his world changed, is set in the Catskill Mountains of New York.[50] The witch in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Feathertop" creates her animate scarecrow in colonial New England.[51] The relatively unknown Frank Stockton, called by critic Jack Zipes America's "first significant" fairy tale writer,[52] sets one of his tales in a land with an ineffectual king. When the king goes in search of the problem, he finds that the concept of monarchical rule is the issue and thus turns his kingdom over to a president (his wife) and state governors.[53]

One critic contends that American fairy tale writers of the nineteenth century attempt to create a "shadow-America in which the dream-logic of fairy tale could operate."[54] For example, Horace Scudder's "The Rich Man's Place" and Louisa May Alcott's "Rosy's Journey" are set in lands which contain "both America and not-America."[55] Neil Philip indicates that though neither story is

[50] Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" in *American Fairy Tales*, comp. by Philip, 9-28.
[51] Hawthorne, "Feathertop" in *American Fairy Tales,* comp. by Philip, 29-54.
[52] Zipes, Afterword to *Fairy Tales of Frank Stockton* by Stockton, 423-429.
[53] Stockton, "The Banished King" in *Fairy Tales of Frank Stockton,* 65-72.
[54] Philip, Afterword to *American Fairy Tales,* comp. by Philip 155.
[55] Philip, 155.

realistic (Alcott's tale contains camels and lions), the stories clearly take place in the United States: "Scudders' 'rich man' is a nineteenth-century robber baron industrialist, or a prototype of Citizen Kane; Rosy and her gold-rush father end up not in a castle or an enchanted forest, but a 'great city.'"[56] The American climate, according to the few scholars writing on the subject, shaped American fairyland into a place full of fairness, plenty, and good old-fashioned commonsense in which the setting of the story changes or is abandoned. Rip Van Winkle wakes from his twenty-year sleep to find that the British colony in which he lived has become a new nation. Carl Sandburg's "How They Broke Away to Go to the Rootabaga Country" tells the story of an American family which sells all of its possessions to migrate west, which is not so much a fairyland as a rich farmland named for a large turnip.[57]

Contemporary American author Laird Hunt evokes this "shadow America" in his novel *In the House in the Dark of the Woods*. Both fairy tale and horror story, Hunt alludes to "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Cinderella" to tell the story of his female protagonist known only as "Goody" (short for Goodwife) and her life in Colonial America. The novel's forest setting is reminiscent of Nathaniel Hawthorne's allegorical "Young Goodman Brown," with wolves, witches, faithful wives turned evil, and the devil always lying in wait. In Hunt's novel, British soldiers in red coats parade in the town square, a woman languishes in the stocks, grandmothers leave their old world across the ocean in search of a new one, and Native Americans visit Goody's little homestead on the edge of the European

[56] Philip, 155.
[57] Sandburg, "How They Broke Away to Go to the Rootabaga Country" in *Rootabaga Stories*, 3-17.

settlement to warn her of the evil in the dark woods. Though his setting details are subtle, Hunt's use of character names like Prudence, Hope, Faith, Charity, and Virtue and the Puritanical theology and admonishments from the "Holy Book" that rule the characters' lives outside the forest ensure that readers know this is an American fairy tale. "Once Upon a time there was and wasn't a woman who went into the woods," writes Hunt.[58] Though perhaps he intends to evoke America's British past by patterning part of his story on "Fairy Ointment" from Joseph Jacob's *English Fairy Tales* (in which the protagonist is also named Dame Goody),[59] Hunt's Goody needs no magical salve to see through glamour and view the fairy world in the wood for all its hideous wretchedness. Neither is Goody the good girl of European fairy tale but is, instead, a murderer who ultimately abandons her own child for the magic of the forest and the devil residing within.

From the New World's beginnings, American authors have found writing Old World fairy tales a difficult task, leaving some American writers to seek a new fairy tale form altogether. In his Author's Note to the 1908 edition of *American Fairy Tales*, L. Frank Baum notes that "[t]his is the first time, I believe, that a book has been printed containing fairy tales that relate mainly to American boys and girls and their adventures with real fairies in the United States. . . ."[60] Old World fairy stories, he says, date from

> many long years ago, and such histories would never do for American Fairy Tales, because our country has no great age to boast of. So I am obliged to offer our wide-awake youngsters modern tales about modern fairies, and while my humble efforts must not be compared with classic stories of my masters, they at least bear the stamp of our own times and depict the progressive fairies of today. My friends, the children, will find these stories

[58] Hunt, *In the House in the Dark*, 65.
[59] Jacobs, "Fairy Ointment" in *English Fairy Tales*, 211-214.
[60] Baum quoted in Gardner, Introduction to *American Fairy Tales*, by L. Frank Baum, ix.

> quite as astonishing as if they had been written hundreds of years ago, for ours is the age of astonishing things.[61]

The stories in Baum's "modern" collection are filled with hotels, electricity, telephones, and fairies riding subway trains. Baum sets many of these wonder tales in the streets of Chicago, which some critics found problematic. "*American Fairy Tales*, I'm sorry to tell you, are not good fairy tales," writes James Thurber. "The scene of the first one is the attic of a house 'on Prairie Avenue in Chicago.' It never leaves there for any wondrous far-away realm."[62] Such criticism, however, did not stop Baum from creating his particularly American brand of fairy tale. In his famous Oz, Dorothy acts as an "American tourist in fairyland—eager, innocent and likable,"[63] longing to return to her Kansas home despite the wonders of the Emerald City. The wizard himself is an "expatriate"[64] in Oz who longs for his Nebraska cornfields and eventually journeys back home with the help of a hot air balloon.[65]

Before my car followed this path to Natchez, I wondered if the Civil War could be written as a conflict between fairy tale traditions. A traditional European fairy tale's lack of setting might make it an excellent vehicle for portraying the Civil War divisions between North and South, divisions which roughly mirror the contrasts between European and American fairy tale. While the North was ruled by factories, egalitarianism, and what the South saw as a brutish, Anglo-Saxon lack of honor, Southerners viewed themselves as gentlemen planters descended from

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[61] Baum quoted in Gardner, ix.
[62] Thurber quoted in Gardner, xi.
[63] Lanes, "America as Fairy Tale," 97.
[64] Lanes, 97.
[65] Baum, *Annotated Wizard of Oz*.

kings and lords. They valued a class system with oligarchic overtones and based their rural, semi-feudal economy on an Arthurian chivalric code. In many European fairy tales, magical transformation signals social transformation. In American fairy tale, there is often an implication that no need for transformation exists since one lives in a land of abundance where anyone can be king or queen.

But here in Natchez, the dividing line between North and South (or, perhaps, American and European) is less than clear. Because the region was settled by Northerners with strong ties to Pennsylvania and New York, many Natchez citizens supported the Northern cause and quickly surrendered their town to Union troops. Northern general Ulysses S. Grant loved Natchez and kept it from burning. To cross the Union picket lines that surrounded the town, one was required to pledge allegiance to the United States and condemn Southern secession. There were raids on those peripheral plantation and manor houses whose owners would not pledge their Northern loyalty, and a sly planter that sought the favor of both sides often found that neither kept its promise to leave his lands untouched. To write an American fairy tale of the Civil War, then, I must balance the European fairy tale tradition of timeless, placeless landscape and the American tradition of specific historical, geographical, and physical settings. My novel, like Natchez itself, will have divided loyalties, will walk two paths that seem different upon first glance but are actually part of the same country and tradition.

On our drive through Natchez, the path to our suite at Lansdowne Plantation has led us past a well-lit gas station and into darkness. "Turn right in 100 feet," the GPS intones, though there is no road in 100 feet, only an old gravel

path. "Turn right. Turn right!" it demands as we make a U-turn and circle around again. Past the GPS' laid path, we see a sign for Lansdowne and follow the arrow down a narrow dirt road, turn left at the fork, and drive through forest and past azalea trees until at last we arrive at our destination. This, then, is the way my journey begins: *Once upon a time, in a place at the edge of memory and in a time that is neither your time nor mine but also a bit of both, a novelist travelled to Natchez and stepped from the prescribed path. And the river gnawed away the bluffs and swallowed them whole, the Mississippi dirt roiling with the rock in its brown belly.*

Day 2: The Skeleton of Story

March 16

The Natchez Visitor Center sits next to the Mississippi River Bridge carrying cars to and from Louisiana. We can see the swollen river from the glass and steel sky ramp, and because the building also houses a Mississippi Welcome Center—"attractions unto themselves, each built to resemble the antebellum structures for which our state is famous"[66]—white columns line the circle drive. We've come early, and there are few people wandering the gift shop or history exhibits. I walk up to the ticket counter where Vickie hands me a Spring Pilgrimage brochure promising "Fabulous Tours, Events *and* Festivities" in a city "treasured worldwide as a living museum of southern history and a hallmark of hospitality."

The Pilgrimage is organized into morning and afternoon groupings of three house tours each, with three hours set aside to complete each grouping. This morning is the Movies & Architecture Tour; this afternoon, the Legacy Tour marked in forest green print. "Is three hours enough time to see all three houses?" I ask. It seems that at Pilgrimage, as in fairy tale, "things come in threes"[67]; the plot is linear, the story itself brief and condensed. In fairy tale, "[s]wiftness is a great virtue. . . . A good tale moves with a dreamlike speed from event to event, pausing only to say as much as is needed and no more."[68] But Vickie thinks it best not to overschedule. "You may need time to walk around the grounds," she says. I buy three tickets for today, and we head off to Longwood.

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[66] "Welcome Centers," Visit Mississippi.
[67] Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry*, 9.
[68] Pullman, Introduction to *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm*, xiv.

At 30,000 square feet and six-stories tall, Longwood is the largest octagonal house in America. It is also unfinished, however, so today's visitors have to imagine how the place would have looked had the Civil War and its owner's lost cotton fortune not halted its construction. We start in the furnished basement space, the only finished part of the house, then climb the stairs to the rotunda level. Our tour guide, dressed in antebellum period costume, walks slowly. "I broke my back a few months ago, and this corset may be the only thing keeping me upright," she says. We look up at the dome perched at the building's top, a head atop a spine. Everywhere are the house's bones: the cypress planks crisscrossing the rotunda space, the ornate fluted columns on the exterior, the chimneys serving 32 fireplace openings. All is repetition and pattern. "The first floor of the rotunda measures 24 feet across and is surrounded by eight rooms, four octagonal ones measuring 20 by 34 feet, and four rectangular ones 20 by 24 feet," records *Natchez Style*. "The octagonal rooms open onto covered verandas 45 feet in length. This plan is repeated on the floors above and below."[69]

At Longwood, we stand inside the skeleton of an oriental villa. Fairy tales, according to Bernheimer, are the "skeletons of story,"[70] the fairy tale containing "overlying structures which make sense of our lives."[71] Like myth, says Elizabeth Cook, the fairy tale "reveals patterns of adult feeling or behavior, or patterns in history."[72] Its patterns of repetition, absence of detail, tripling of episodes, isolated characters and scenes, and terse nature give fairy tales their precise beauty.[73] So

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[69] Bradley, Charboneau, and Green, "Longwood circa 1860: A Dream Never Realized" in *Natchez Style*, 28-43.
[70] Bernheimer, "Fairy Tale is Form," 65.
[71] Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry*, 38.
[72] Cook, *Ordinary & the Fabulous*, 41-42.
[73] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 51-52.

repetitive and pattern-laden are fairy tales, claims Soviet scholar Vladimir Propp, that all tales can be reduced to thirty-one functions, somewhat like building blocks of plot.[74] The important Aarne-Thompson classification system for folk tales assumes motifs as basic pieces of folktale and assigns numbers to nearly 2500 story lines from which European folktales are built.[75]

If we believe the structuralists' insistence on form as the driving force in fairy tale, then we see the fairy tale as endlessly mutable. Form drives both fairy tale meaning and popularity. In fairy tale, writes Warner, there are "patterns of repetition [which] widen out from the brief rhymes and charms into whole structure of incident, with internal architecture reprising similar episodes again and again. . . . [T]he tiny incantations at the core of the plot's driving magical powers. . . . cast a spell."[76] Read any fairy tale collection and you will likely be caught inside its shape, the tales—one after another—running together in a dizzying sameness until it is difficult to remember where one tale ends and the next begins.

Spring Pilgrimage is a good lesson in the power of patterns. We leave Longwood, climb into our silver Mercedes (a fairy tale has a "partiality for everything metallic and mineral, for gold and silver, for glass and crystal"[77]) and drive to Green Leaves, a town house built in 1838. Then it's on to Richmond, a country home built over a period of seventy-five years in three different architectural styles. "I can't look at any more houses today," my husband says after the last tour ends. Though we have only seen three of the six houses on show,

[74] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale.*
[75] Ashliman, Introduction to *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language*, ix.
[76] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 42-43.
[77] Lüthi, *Fairy Tale as Art Form*, 45.

they are already beginning to look the same in memory. Which house had the white fluted columns, 14-foot ceilings, and large galleries? In which house did we see the Old Paris patterned china, the silver service, the cypress doors faux-grained to resemble oak, the marbled baseboards, the expensive woolen carpets and family portraits and gasoliers and camellia blossoms littering the lawn? Where was the tester bed, the mosquito net, the slave woman rolling out the feather mattress over and over again, the young boy pulling the punkah back and forth, forth and back? We can admire one fairy tale its furniture and lighting and gardens, but visit several in a row and we quickly tire of the same steps, same faces, and same silver spoons.

Structuralist Max Lüthi claims that fairy tales should be read as a kind of "symbolic poetry,"[78] and it is the poetic nature of fairy tale that drew me to the format. As with poetry, form matters; repetition emphasizes important elements, keeps readers moving through the text, and echoes theme. Abstractions and emotion are necessarily simplified to fit the story's small space. "The hero escapes the tiresome clichés of reality by entering a world where the figurative or metaphorical dimension of language takes on literal meaning. Ideas become matter," says Tatar.[79] Ordinary stepmothers become witches, and fears transform into monsters because fairy tale "externalizes" feeling.[80] A poem's condensed language and ability to cut through extraneous detail and get to the heart of a matter is not unlike the way a fairy tale contains "the universe in miniature."[81] Though I don't believe in the Freudian logic that everything within a fairy tale is a

[78] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 66.
[79] Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 80.
[80] Tatar, 82.
[81] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 25.

symbol, that a tale can be "read" as one would a dream, there can certainly be symbols, allusions, and conceits.

What works beautifully in small doses, however, does not lend itself well to a novel. How can I keep an adult reader interested in such a repetitive, heavily-patterned story? I fear that too much play will strip away the fairy tale's familiar form, leaving me with what Tiffin terms a folklore "endoskeleton"—a text that looks like a short story rather than a fairy tale because it only alludes to folk tale rather than inhabits it. Such a work, says Tiffin, is not a fairy tale at all but a piece of literary fiction with fairy tale themes.[82] What I want is a story with a fairy tale "exoskeleton," a narrative which "offers an 'imitation of the form,'" a story that is a fairy tale in its own right.[83] Does the contemporary fairy tale writer have the ability to "question and redefine the nature of fairy tale without, in fact, necessarily destroying the structures which allow it to function"?[84] Does fairy tale, as Propp claims, "possess so much resistance that other genres shatter against it: they do not readily blend. If a clash takes place, the fairy tale wins"?[85]

To answer these questions, I looked toward Bernheimer's trilogy of short fairy tale novels, each of which follows a different Gold sister through twentieth-century American suburbia. As Bernheimer resets traditional German, Russian, and Yiddish fairy tales within a specific American backdrop, I thought these works would be similar to my own project. What I found, however, is that merely retelling a tale by changing only a few setting details can leave readers frustrated.

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[82] Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry*, 26.
[83] Tiffin, 26.
[84] Tiffin, 24.
[85] Propp quoted in Tiffin, 7.

In "The Star Pennies," a chapter in Bernheimer's *The Complete Tales of Ketzia Gold* that retells the Grimms' "The Star Talers," middle-sister Ketzia becomes the tale's generous protagonist. In the original story, a poor, homeless orphan gives away her last piece of bread and all the clothes on her back and is repaid for her goodness by money falling from heaven. In Bernheimer's version, which patterns its floor-plan after the original's plot structure, Ketzia is separated from her husband and so poor that she must "pay" for her small cot in a seedy hotel by undressing for the hotel owner in front of a one-way mirror. After roaming the "road of oracles" (whatever that may be) and a six-lane highway, Ketzia wanders into the desert where she gives away her good leather hat, her thrift-store rayon dress, her silk slip, and her last stale bagel. Naked, hungry, and alone, Ketzia at last "crouched on the ground, trying to gather the stars, which glittered darkly like jewels, or like pennies. I held some in my hands and found my way through the night."[86]

While Grimms' orphan giving away her last possessions to those less fortunate seems a plausible fairy tale story-line, I found the story of a young wife begging stale bagels from teenagers and stripping in the middle of a desert confusing. Is Ketzia dreaming? Is she on hallucinogenic drugs? Has she had a mental break? Should I read the chapter as metaphor? Vague references throughout, frustrating and unnecessary repetitions, and a heroine who is anything but good and pious make it seem as though Bernheimer is trying too hard to shoehorn a realistic, modern story into fairy tale format. Throughout the three novels, all of which utilize the same retelling technique, I questioned why

[86] Bernheimer, *Complete Tales of Ketzia Gold*, 20.

Bernheimer chose the fairy tale genre for her work. Clearly, merely changing the setting and details in traditional fairy tale to suit my purposes might baffle my readers as well. I needed a structure for my book that would echo that of traditional fairy stories but would not necessarily follow it to the letter.

Perhaps, I determined, if I think of my Civil War story as a white-columned house with many floors and grand galleries—a home tour spanning almost one hundred years—I can create a book that is both fairy tale and novel. My book will begin with "Once upon a time" and end with "happily ever after." I'll break my novel into three sections (before, during, and after the war). Though I may occasionally use traditional, patterned fairy tale structure, I also will diverge from said form and write chapters that allude to but do not necessarily retell familiar tales. My short chapters will move swiftly, rotate between point of view characters, and break into three pieces or two mirror images. Artie, my protagonist who goes off to war and returns transformed, can follow several of Propp's functions: I. One of the members of a family absents himself from home; IV. The Villain Makes an Attempt at Reconnaissance; and V. The Villain Receives Information About His Victim. Soon, XVI. The Hero and the Villain Join in Direct Combat. Eventually, XX. The Hero Returns, XXXI. The Hero is married and ascends the throne, but, again and again XXI: The Hero is Pursued by his past. [87] Since the Sword in the Stone story of Arthur's Kingship is also a kind of Cinderella tale,[88] my novel fits Aarne-Thompson tale type 510A, but the story arc can also be thought of as a series of fairy tales: 450 Little Brother, Little Sister; 504 the Changeling; 326 the

[87] All functions numbers and titles are direct quotes from Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*.
[88] Cook, *Ordinary and the Fabulous*, 107.

Boy Who Set Out to Learn Fear; 314A The Poor Boy and the Giants; 325 The Magician and His Pupil; 564 The Magic Purse; 403 The Black and the White Bride; 425A The Animal Bridegroom; 361 The Man Who Did Not Wash for Seven Years; and 318 The Faithless Wife. [89]

Standing inside my novel, I look at the rotunda's walls, its ribs and spine. The chapters allude to traditional fairy tale or folk tale, building upon one another. Once Upon a Time is the story's basement. Then up and up the structure goes, the same floor plan over and over again. The Moon, one of my novel's driving symbols, hides herself in the kitchen cistern. The Sun, emblem of the South, streams through the skylights and leaves strange patterns on the cyprus floor.

[89] All tale types from Ashliman's *Guide to Folktales in the English Language*.

Day 3: A Fairy Tale Hero

March 17

Because Natchez' famous Donut Shop does not sell old-fashioned doughnuts, we drive the 34 miles south on an empty stomach, taking US-61 until a water tower looms over the rolling landscape. "Woodville" declares a green metal sign on Main Street. "Chartered in 1811. Was Jefferson Davis' boyhood home. Gen. Poindexter lived here. West Feliciana R.R., begun by Edward McGehee in 1831, was first in state and second in Miss. Valley." There's a sign marking Beth Israel Cemetery and another for the *Woodville Republican*, oldest newspaper and business in the state, but I've come here to find David Holt, inspiration for my protagonist, Artie. Once upon a time, Private David Eldridge Holt enlisted with Company K of the 16th Mississippi Infantry, fought in many of the Civil War's most famous battles, and wrote his experiences into a memoir.[90] Since Holt seemed to me a real-life fairy tale hero on an historical adventure, I patterned Artie after the young, innocent Confederate who happily went off to fight. Specifically, I saw Holt as a character in a Grimms' fairy tale, a tale tradition that appealed to me because of its insistence on violence and infirmity,[91] particularly in the first edition's sparse, strange prose filled with murderous sausages and slaughtering siblings.[92]

Holt and his 16th Mississippi Infantry, Company K, fought with the Army of Northern Virginia in the many famous battles on the Civil War's eastern front.

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[90] Holt, *Mississippi Rebel*.

[91] See Tatar's *Hard Facts*.

[92] Grimm and Grimm, *Complete First Edition of the Original Folk & Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*.

The youngest son of a slave-holding family, Holt did not agree with the institution of slavery but did agree to fight for Southern "honor." His elder brothers, however, thought him too much a child to be a soldier, a sentiment echoed by the men in his own company, who found Holt overly naïve, immature, and sensitive. In his memoir, Holt presents himself as a child-like "character" with, to my estimation, clear parallels to fairy tale heroes. Before leaving for the front, Holt's mother stuffs his pockets with cakes and cookies and sews the pockets shut, commanding him to not eat the goodies until he arrives at his destination. As Holt can't wait to finish the sweets, I picture him leaving a trail of crumbs in his march through forests and over rivers. Other parallels include Holt's proclivity to lie down in the middle of the road and sob from homesickness and soreness; his rather flat, matter-of-fact tone in relating battle scenes, which are long on action and showing but short on narration, emotion and thoughts; and his march through a strictly structured and repetitive soldiering life.

To form Holt into my fictional Artie, I turned to Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales,* in which she argues for two types of fairy tale heroes in the Grimms' tales: the kind, "naïve hero," the youngest and weakest of three sons who must use magical helpers or magical powers to achieve his tasks, or the village boy whose "earthy naiveté" can be cunning or courageous.[93] Tatar further notes that tale protagonists are typically humble, passive, cowardly, lucky, compassionate, and the least likely to succeed; they can best be described as "innocent, silly, useless, foolish, simple" and "guileless,"[94] all terms which apply

[93] Tatar, *Hard Facts,* 95.
[94] Tatar, 86.

to the teenaged Holt. That several of Holt's actions or experiences mimic those of fairy tale, such as the crumb-leaving Hansel or the youngest son in "Queen Bee," who sits down on a rock and cries when tasks become too much for him, furthered the link I saw between the real-life Holt and my fictional Artie.

"The fairytale hero is a deficient creature," claims Lüthi.[95] "[H]e moves and acts, he does not stand still in astonishment, contemplation, or meditation."[96] In my opinion, the flat, unemotional style of Holt's battle scenes echo Lüthi's claim that a hero "strides from place to place without much concern or astonishment. . . . The fairy tale depicts its heroes not as observing and fearful but moving and active."[97] In describing his experiences during Jackson's Valley Campaign, Holt writes matter-of-factly with no attempt at emotional connection or psychological exploration: "We started on a march very early. There was not a mouthful of food in the company. A company of cavalry near the road had just fed their horses with corn on the cob. I slipped an ear from a horse and divided it with Johnnie Stockett, and that was all we had for that day and up to noon of the following day. Two in our company died on that march and they were big strong men."[98]

Flatness (lack of depth) seems the hallmark of a fairy tale character. Bernheimer argues that "[f]airy-tale characters are silhouettes, mentioned simply because they are there. They are not given many emotions—perhaps one, such as happy or sad—and they are not in psychological conflict. In a traditional fairy tale, a child who has escaped an incestuous advance does not become a grown-up

[95] Lüthi, *Fairy Tale As Art Form,* 137.
[96] Lüthi, 50.
[97] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time,* 141, 142.
[98] Holt, *Mississippi Rebel,* 72.

neurotic."[99] Pullman states that in fairy tale the expected "tremors and mysteries of human awareness, the whispers of memory, the prompting of half-understood regret or doubt or desire that are so much part of the subject matter of the modern novel are absent entirely."[100] These claims hold true when one considers that Cinderella feels sad when she cannot attend the ball but does not question her step-mother's cruelty nor her father's failure to save her from persecution. Surely the rape of the sleeping princess in some versions of Sleeping Beauty, an assault which impregnates her with twins whose birth and suckling finally awakens both the princess and her household, should be cause for concern from both Beauty's father and Beauty herself. However, the story only tells of the rejoicing in the marriage of Beauty to the prince.

Also contributing to this fairy tale flatness is the lack of names for fairy tale characters.[101] Of the 75 Grimm tales that feature male protagonists, 36% are named; of these named characters, most seem to be caricatures and types, many of them called Hans.[102] That many of the unnamed fairy tale protagonists are identified only as soldiers gives further credence to my idea of Holt as fairy tale hero whom I can fictionalize into a flat, naïve foundling with only a slip of name and no known history. Though the real-life Holt was certainly no simpleton, his older brothers' sentiments towards him parallel those of the fairy tale siblings. "Do you suppose," said one of Holt's older brothers when David expressed his desire to be a soldier, "we can carry along a wet nurse for your benefit, have the boys sit up at night making your sugar teats, telling Mother Goose stories and

[99] Bernheimer, "Fairy Tale is Form," 66.
[100] Pullman, introduction to *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm,* xiii.
[101] Tatar, *Hard Facts,* 85.
[102] Grimm and Grimm, *Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm,* trans. by Zipes, 2 vols.

singing nursery rhymes to get you to sleep? Get out of here, you damn little shirt-tale shaver, the diaper marks ain't off you yet."[103] Holt's fellow soldiers also echo this idea: "Doctor Snell ought not to have let Dave Holt push him off the perch with his sentimental talk of how he came out here to die if needs be for his state. He should have exercised his authority and sent him home to his mother. Anybody can see that Doc was right when he said this was no place for children, and that boy is only a child. He is as immature as a boy of twelve, his ways and manners are that of a child. . ."[104]

In the army, as in fairy tale, "a few well-chosen words . . . merely suggests the sequence of events. . . . [Fairy tale] has a preference for action rather than lengthy descriptions."[105] The army and fairy tale prefer structure; their "changelessness is expressed in the inflexible repetitions of entire sentences, indeed whole sections."[106] The chaotic, disjointed, nonsensical world of battle echoes that of fairy tale:

> The language of traditional fairy tales tells us that first this happened, and then that happened. There is never any explanation of why. In fact the question why does not often arise. Things usually happen in a fairy tale when they need to happen, but other things happen that have no relevance apart from the effect of the language. *This* is not logically connected to *that*, except by syntax, by narrative proximity.[107]

The fairy tale's familiar pattern requires its hero follow a rigid path which begins with "Once upon a time" and usually ends with "happily ever after." The plot is linear, the story itself brief. A fairy tale achieves this brevity by getting rid of the elements found in most modern works of fiction, namely appearance details,

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[103] Holt, *Mississippi Rebel*, 62.
[104] Holt, *Mississippi Rebel*, 99.
[105] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 28.
[106] Lüthi, *Fairy Tale as Art Form*, 53.
[107] Bernheimer, "Fairy Tale is Form," 67-68.

names, character backgrounds, and cultural context. This, Pullman says, explains the fairy tale's flat characters since tales are "far more interested in what happens to them, or in what they make happen, than in their individuality."[108] Fairy tale "moves everything onto the level of action."[109] Tiffin posits that in the swift fairy tale, "logic, . . . psychology, and cause and effect are deliberately unrealistic."[110] Thus, according to Tatar, the fairy tale hero embarks upon a "three-act drama, with a test in the first act, tasks in the second, and a final trial crowned by success in the third."[111] A fairy tale hero, she states, must be humble, must acquire the traits he lacks at the beginning of the tale by tale's end, and must contain opposites such as passivity with courage or compassion with cruelty as contrasts play a role in most fairy tales with male heroes.[112]

The contrasts between my expectations of Woodville and the reality are also striking. I'd hoped to find Holt here in the old buildings on the town square, but all from Holt's days seems locked, greatly changed, or missing entirely. Despite its posted hours, Rosalee Plantation, childhood home of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, is closed. Closed is the old Office and Banking House of the West Feliciana Railroad Building (built 1834) which now houses the Wilkinson County Museum on the square; closed, too, the African American museum in the 1819 Branch Banking House with its "exceptional Federal millwork, mantels, and original wood graining."[113] The Old Woodville Hotel (c.

[108] Pullman, Introduction to *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm,* xv.
[109] Lüthi, *Fairy Tale as Art Form*, 9.
[110] Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry,* 7.
[111] Tatar, *Hard Facts,* 99.
[112] Tatar, 99.
[113] "Welcome to Woodville!" The Woodville Civic Club.

1840) gained a second story in the 1920s and has now been turned into storefronts. The pretty, yellow-brick courthouse was built long after the Civil War. I stop to take a picture of the Jefferson Davis Oak, which according to a plaque began its life between 1775-1780. Perhaps Holt passed by here on the frequent trips to town from his plantation house somewhere nearby, but the tree would have been far less grand then and its surroundings quite different.

In contrast, too, are the European fairy tale hero and its American counterpart. In what little criticism of American fairy tale exists, all sources note the differing desires, plots, and transformations of the characters. A hero in European fairy tale lives in a "fixed social world,"[114] and its protagonist, whether poor peasant in hopes of riches or displaced princess looking to regain her throne, can only hope to find success within the rules of this system.[115] But American fairy tale, says Alison Lurie, criticizes its world's values.[116] Rip Van Winkle wakes to find his world changed but not himself. In Stockton's "The Bee-Man of Orn," a sorcerer's apprentice believes a bee keeper has been transformed from his original shape. When the magician helps him regain it, the Bee Man finds that his original shape was that of a baby, and once the infant bee keeper grows up, he turns back into himself. In Sandburg's Rootabaga Country, families leave their old worlds, never to return**.** In nineteenth and early twentieth century America, it seems, there was no need to change one's lot in life since everyone was his own king and the roads were paved with gold. Thus, "there is often not much to be said for wealth and high position, or even good looks. . . . [A]n American does not need to become

[114] Alison Lurie, Preface to *American Fairy Tales,* comp. by Philip, 7.
[115] Lurie, 7.
[116] Lurie, 8.

rich or 'marry up' in order to be happy; in fact, one should avoid doing so if at all possible. Happiness is all around one already."[117]

In early drafts, my fictionalized version of Holt was a European fairy tale hero—flat and unthinking, naive and frightened of the world around him, marching through military life in a repetitive, rigid pattern. In short, Artie was a male Cinderella, a restoration tale in which he overcame obstacles only with supernatural animal help, faced battle scenes full of fairy tale logic with its lack of causality and three-day rhythms, and distanced himself from distracting emotions by a subversion of all feelings and thoughts until he became only robotic action. I wrote Artie thusly in hopes that my audience would see him as an "everyman" figure, the fairy tale's spare style cutting through all extraneous detail to magnify his few feelings and create emotional impact for the reader. The fairy tale, then, seemed a good choice for writing the Civil War because "[t]he principle actors in the fairy tale are neither individuals nor character types, but merely figures, and for just this reason can stand for a great many things."[118] But a novel requires well-developed character, and I had a "simple" fairy tale hero so full of contradictions—Old World and New World, Southern and slavery-hating, cowardly and brave, young and experienced, kingly and common—that he was bursting at the seams. How, then, could I make Artie flesh and bone without losing the fairy-tale feel of my work? As with other issues I've faced in my novel writing journey, I looked to contemporary fairy tale for answers.

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[117] Lurie, Preface to *American Fairy Tales*, comp. by Philip, 8.
[118] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 126.

Jack Zipes says of Wendy Walker's fairy tale collection *The Sea-Rabbit Or, The Artist of Life*, that "[s]he accomplishes her modernist goal of restoring the unspoken of the traditional tales by fleshing out the lives of the original characters, probing their psyches, and altering narrative perspectives."[119] Walker's work certainly proves that a tale can be stretched to accommodate character psychology, though it's the shortest tales in her collection that pack the largest punch. The titular story retells Grimms' "The Sea-Hare" in which a princess decrees that whoever wishes to marry her must hide from her, an impossible task given that she has a tower containing twelve windows overlooking every portion of her kingdom. After ninety-seven suitors fail and are beheaded, three brothers attempt to hide, though only the youngest succeeds. Though the original is quite brief, Walker's version lasts nearly fifty pages and is broken into eighteen chapter-like sections. Thoughts abound in Walker's work—each character, no matter how minor, has them, and Walker writes each in such a detailed manner that I found her tale to be both overly long and overwrought. Clearer and more surprising is the two-page "The True Marriage" in which a childless old woman who lives in a boot turns the village idiot into her husband. The old woman gives this husband more than he could ever ask for and then asks for something in return: "'You must give me a baby' she said to him one day as he was eating his bowl of soup with his pipe. 'That is what husbands are for. No more soup for you until you perform your duty.'"[120] When the Idiot kidnaps a baby and brings it back to their boot-house, his wife is happy. "'Now that is what I wanted,'" says the old woman as she gazes at

[119] Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 154.
[120] Walker, *Sea-Rabbit Or, the Artist of Life*, 182.

the infant on the kitchen table. '"You are a good husband.' Then she went to fetch the kettle, well pleased. 'It will make a fine soup.'"[121]

I believe that Walker's tales, most of which are quite lengthy, prove that less is more when it comes to fairy tale characterization and serve as a caution when I write Holt into my fictional Artie. Bernheimer claims a fairy tale hero's "flatness functions beautifully; it allows depth of response in the reader."[122] Author Kellie Wells echoes this sentiment. "I like the idea that a character can be flat and complex at once if one abandons attachment to conventional notions of character psychology and allows characters to become a container for ideas," Wells writes. "If you flatten a character, the reader doesn't have to feel anxious about sniffing out motivations and you make way for other kinds of interpretive subtextual richness."[123] The key to making Artie flesh and bone, then, lies partly in my novel's hybrid form and its use of small stories, like pearls in a necklace, to construct a whole. By documenting multiple pieces of Artie's journeys, I hope to show different facets of my protagonist's personality and thereby create a character who may appear flat at the chapter level but who gains roundness and depth once all of his pieces are put together.

Like that of my fictional Artie, Holt's story began in Woodville. He was, in one sense, a fairy tale hero: the youngest son, the immature fool who left a trail of crumbs all the way to Virginia and lay down in the middle of the road and cried. He flattened himself during war—pressed his body against the ground, forced all thoughts from his head, became all march and action—until he made himself so

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[121] Walker, *Sea-Rabbit Or, the Artist of Life*, 183.
[122] Bernheimer, "Fairy Tale is Form," 66-67.
[123] Wells, "The Girl, the Wolf, The Crone" in *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father She Ate Me*, ed. by Bernheimer, 359-360.

small he could only hold one trait at a time. He was Hungry. He was Scared. He was Emptied or Sad. When war was over, he spoke of it in matter-of-fact terms, afraid to touch the horrors he'd witnessed. But Holt was also complex and contradictory, a man who embarked on several journeys (childhood, soldiering, life-after-war). In fairy tale, says A.S. Byatt of her own stories, "I felt a need to *feel and analyse* less, to tell more flatly, which is sometimes more mysteriously. I found myself crossing out psychological descriptions, or invitations to the reader to enter the characters' thought-process. I found myself using stories within stories, rather than shape-shifting recurrent metaphors, to make the meanings."[124] And it is through this vehicle of fairy story that I have turned Holt into Artie—an emotionally and psychologically complex character forced to deal with complicated events, multiple journeys, and numerous stops along the way.

[124] Byatt, "True Stories and the Facts in Fiction," in *On Histories and Stories*, 131.

Day 4: The Voices in Your Head

March 18

The Natchez Garden Club owns The House on Ellicott Hill, the 1798 structure we are touring this morning, as well as Magnolia Hall, a recently renovated town house mansion whose exterior paint is meant to resemble brownstone. Here, at the place where the first American flag was raised in Mississippi, a member of the club leads the tour, clearly proud of what they have accomplished in restoring the once dilapidated structure. It was the Natchez Garden Club that started the Pilgrimage in the 1930s after a late freeze killed off all the flowers just before a large convention came to town. Needing something to show conventioneers, club members decided to open their antebellum homes for tours, and the annual Pilgrimage was born.[125]

But not everyone here is happy with the Pilgrimage: "The Pilgrimage focuses on Natchez's palatial antebellum homes and a bygone way of life. Women, volunteering as tour guides, still wear hoop skirts, and the horrors of slavery are seldom mentioned."[126] Problematic, too, is the Garden Club's annual Natchez pageant, its Confederate Court a staple of Natchez white society. Until recently, this event "depicted a fairy-tale view of pre-Civil War Natchez" and was obviously intended as an "unapologetic celebration of the slaveholding South."[127] This Historic Natchez Tableaux even split the town's two pilgrimage clubs—Natchez Garden Club and Pilgrimage Garden Club—last year. For several decades, the two had come together to host the event, but the Pilgrimage Garden Club wanted a

[125] Parker, "In Mississippi, Glorifying the Old South."
[126] Parker.
[127] Amy, "Author Iles Reworks Natchez Pageant."

different approach to the pageant that "resonated with the current generation of tourists."[128] The Tableaux has received an overhaul in an attempt to acknowledge the horrors of slavery and the Southern defeat, but some still criticize the event. "They've tried to include other voices in the pageant," says our bed and breakfast host at Lansdown Plantation, but it's clear that she thinks it not yet enough.

Fairy tale, too, has its critics and divisions. Zipes claims that the traditional European fairy tale model is overly sexist, racist, authoritarian and reflective of patriarchal societies and, as such, "cannot be considered enlightening and emancipatory in face of possible nuclear warfare, ecological destruction, growing governmental and industrial regimentation, and intense economic crisis."[129] Feminist fairy tale critics like Marina Warner, Elizabeth Wanning Harries, and Cristina Bacchilega concern themselves with uncovering the missing or marginalized female voices in traditional fairy tale. Contemporary fairy tale writers often challenge traditional gender roles in their work, turning the format on its head and pushing and pulling it inside out to show what's been hidden there all along. My novel addresses the need for a many-voiced fairy tale by focusing on a different character in each chapter. But there is another voice in fairy tale—the narrator's voice, that voice you hear in your head as you're reading a tale—that I find problematic.

The traditional fairy tale narrator speaks in a familiar voice. Roger Sale rightly indicates that "the teller is never self-conscious, never calls attention to himself or herself, seldom calls attention to particular details or offers to interpret

[128] McDaniel, "All You Need to Know About Spring Pilgrimage."
[129] Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 10.

them; never . . . apologizes and never explains."[130] Pullman cites part of James Merrill's long poem "The Book of Ephraim" as a prime example of fairy tale voice, which has "a tone licked clean/ Over the centuries by mild old tongues, / Grandam to cub, serene, anonymous."[131] The tone of any written, literary fairy tale comes to us from the genre's oral roots, from years and years of Old Wives telling these fairy tales round the fire. It tells of "strange things in the most matter-of-fact tone."[132] That tone says "[t]hese things happened' . . . . The narrating voice knows exactly what they were, and what order they happened in, and how best to make these events clear and unambiguous."[133] Tiffin indicates that voice is an important part of fairy tale structure and, as such, integral to fairy tale meaning:

> [M]uch of the authority of the fairy tale rests in the status of the narrator. . . . Fairy tale's narrator is omniscient and far less present than the oral voice of the folkloric narrator, but the structures and patterns of the fairy tale dictate that the reader can never quite forget that behind the unrealistic artifact must be an artist. . . .Thus the enjoyment of the fairy tale's marvelous structures requires not only unquestioning enjoyment of its marvelous world and unrealistic structures, but also the power of the tale-teller whose words make possible the fairy tale itself.[134]

In practice, I've found the familiar fairy tale point of view strangely difficult to work with. Widely labelled as omniscient, it is actually "multiscient" in that it has "knowledge of many things."[135] In fact, I would call the fairy tale point of view an example of limited third person omniscient, though the narrator is not limited to the thoughts/feelings of just one character but is instead limited to very little in the way of a character's physical description or inner life. Because of this, the traditional fairy tale voice seems closer to the reporter narration type—a kind

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[130] Sale, *Fairy Tales and After*, 27-28.
[131] Merrill quoted in Pullman, Introduction to *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm,* ix.
[132] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 75.
[133] Pullman, "The Classical Tone" in *Daemon Voices*, 251.
[134] Tiffin, *Marvelous Geometry*, 20
[135] Pullman, "The Classical Tone" in *Daemon Voices*, 247.

of hybrid of omniscient mixed with purely objective, "just the fact" reportage. A look at almost any Grimms' fairy tale will show the swift movement between the flat characters' points of view, as in the following passage from "Little Brier-Rose" (Sleeping Beauty), in which I've only removed a few sentences here and there:

> The king, wanting to rescue his dear child, issued an order that all spindles in the entire kingdom should be burned. . . .
>
> Now it happened that on the day when she turned fifteen years of age the king and the queen were not at home, and the girl was all alone in the castle. She walked around from one place to the next, looking into rooms and chambers as her heart desired. Finally she came to an old tower. . . . There in a small room sat an old woman with a spindle busily spinning her flax. . . .
>
> 'What is that thing that is so merrily bouncing about?' asked the girl, taking hold of the spindle, for she too wanted to spin.
>
> She had no sooner touched the spindle when the magic curse was fulfilled, and she pricked herself in the finger. The instant that she felt the prick she fell onto a bed that was standing there, and she lay . . . in a deep sleep. . . .
>
> Many long, long years later, once again a prince came to the country. He heard an old man telling about the thorn hedge. It was said that there was a castle behind it, in which a beautiful princess named Little Brier-Rose had been asleep for a hundred years, and with her the king and the queen and all the royal attendants were sleeping. He also knew from his grandfather that many princes had come and tried to penetrate the thorn hedge, but they had become stuck in it and died a sorrowful death.[136]

As evidenced in this example, we hear four different points of view (the king's, his daughter's, the public's and the prince's) in short order. In patterning my own work after this style, I've found the swift shift between point of view characters to be both difficult to replicate and difficult for the reader in determining the main character in each chapter. I've also found little room in this narration technique for thoughts and explanations. Pullman says that "[t]he narrator is a very unusual character, mind you, only manifest as that disembodied voice. I believe that the narrator is not actually a human character at all and his or her relationship to time is one of the ways in which his or her uncanny inhumanness is manifest."[137]

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[136] Grimm and Grimm, "50: Little Brier-Rose."
[137] Pullman, "The Classical Tone" in *Daemon Voices*, 246.

Merrill's "serene, anonymous," nonhuman fairy tale voice also precludes much in the way of strong emotion and hampered my ability to explore the humanity of my narrator, thus obscuring my theme. For my novel, I needed a narration technique that would allow me to explore my protagonist's interior life but not necessarily give insight into that of minor characters.

Fairy tale theorists note that "[i]f we think all fairy tales must be narrated by an invisible, third-person teller, we will be unable to hear the play of voices in many tales."[138] A look at some contemporary fairy tales/short stories confirms that point of view is a commonly disrupted horizon of expectation for current writers. Of the ten fairy tale retellings in Angela Carter's important *The Bloody Chamber,* only two use the traditional omniscient point of view, though even in these tales the narration perspective occasionally shifts into second or first person. In Bernheimer's anthology *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me: Forty New Fairy Tales*, nearly half of the tales are told using a first person point of view, eighteen using a limited/close third, and six using second person. Only three of the forty utilize omniscience, although even in these tales the multiple perspectives are so fragmented that the story seems strung together from limited third-person paragraphs. Margaret Atwood's retelling of the Bluebeard story, "Bluebeard's Egg," is in first person.[139] Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* and *Brier Rose* flip flop between close third points of view or use narrators that are clearly creating their own metafictional stories.

[138] Harries, *Twice Upon a Time,* 6.
[139] Atwood, "Bluebeard's Egg" in *Bluebeard's Egg and Other Stories*, 144-84.

Such examples indicate that playing with fairy tale voice (perspective and point of view character) can be one way to create contemporary fairy tale novels for adults. Perhaps in breaking away from the literary point of view conventions, authors of contemporary retellings wish to harken back to the oral fairy tale tradition. In her introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, Angela Carter notes the fairy tale's "anonymous and genderless" narrator.[140] Fairy tale makers, she claims, are not creators of unique tales: "[T]he story was put together in the form we have it, more or less, out of all sorts of bits of other stories long ago and far away, and has been tinkered with, had bits added to it, lost other bits, got mixed up with other stories, until our informant herself has tailored the story personally, to suit an audience. . . ."[141] Since the traditional fairy tale is a hodgepodge of many voices and parts, I would argue that in changing traditional fairy tale point of view, contemporary fairy tale authors are remembering the genre's oral roots, evoking the image of a Mother Goose spinning a yarn around the fireplace, adding her own voice to the many voices inherent to the story itself.

As contemporary tales often contain "carefully constructed first-person narrative voices,"[142] I decided to play with first-person in the early drafts of my novel, converting some of my third person chapters into first person and leaving some in third-person limited as I believed a mixing of several voices might still allow the contemporary fairy tale to seem familiar to a modern audience. Though I altered narration method, I kept the fairy tale hero's rigid, three-part, formulaic march. I patterned my chapter entitled "The Boy Who Went Forth to Learn the

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[140] Carter, Introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, x
[141] Carter, x.
[142] Harries, *Twice Upon a Time,* 15.

Sun" after the classic fairy tale "The Boy Who Went Forth to Learn Fear," making my Artie a cowardly contrast to the original. "Artie the Giant Slayer" pulls from both "Jack and the Bean Stalk" and "Jack the Giant Slayer" for its structure. Even those Artie chapters which do not borrow from a particular tale still employ the traditional fairy tale patterns.

To experiment with narration method in my otherwise traditional tales, I tried third-person limited and first person points of view. This process is illustrated in the following paragraphs from "The Boy Who Went Forth to Learn the Sun," the first being the original third-person version and the second using a first person point of view:

> Once upon a time, when wishing still worked and the world wobbled from one war to the next, there was a boy who feared nearly everything. Young Artie was afraid of his bare toes, the naked knobs of his ankles, and even his own name. Although he called his foster parents "Sir" and "Ma'am," they had longer labels in the family Bible. Aunt Bessie and Uncle Joe, the old kitchen slaves, were made of entire sentences written in the scars on their backs. But Artie was just a few letters, barely a pebble. And Artie was suspicious of all pebbles and stones, caves and crags, and every rock and mountain. Of all the things he feared, Artie was most frightened of the moon and the way it tore itself to pieces in the trees before settling into the branches in a most unsettling way or thrusting through the surface of the pond out back of the big house. He hated the way the moon could make itself a sliver or a stone, and Artie was careful not to kick the rocks he encountered on his walks to and from school for fear that he would find the moon underneath each one, waiting to rip apart the evening with its giant teeth.

> Once upon a time, when wishing still worked and the world wobbled from one war to the next, I was a boy who feared nearly everything. I was afraid of my bare toes, the naked knobs of my ankles, and even my own name. Although I called my foster parents "Sir" and "Ma'am," they had longer labels in the family Bible. Aunt Bessie and Uncle Joe, the old kitchen slaves, were made of entire sentences written in the scars on their backs. But I was just a few letters, barely a pebble. And I was suspicious of all pebbles and stones, caves and crags, and every rock and mountain. Of all the things to fear, I was most frightened of the moon and the way it tore itself to pieces in the trees before settling into the branches in a most unsettling way or thrusting through the surface of the pond out back of the big house. I hated the way the moon could make itself a sliver or a stone and was careful not to kick the rocks I encountered on my walks to and from school for fear that I would find the moon underneath each one, waiting to rip apart the evening with its giant teeth.

Although all I altered in this example was the pronouns, I think that the two versions have a very different feel. One supervisor indicated she liked Artie more after reading the first person draft even though little else in the story had changed.[143] First person certainly seemed the natural choice for point of view as it allowed me to keep the intimate, matter-of-fact fairy tale tone but do away with the distancing effects of third person. Perhaps, I thought, first person might allow me to change nothing but the pronouns of the third-person story, keeping Artie as a fairly flat character while still retaining reader sympathy and interest. In other words, in first person Artie might simultaneously act as a flat, symbolic "everyman" and a trustworthy friend. His voice could echo that of David Holt's Civil War memoir and keep the "feel" of a traditional fairy tale, still confirming to reader's expectations.

As with much of my novel, however, what worked well at the chapter level did not in the novel as a whole. When used in more than one Artie chapter, first person was problematic. "It doesn't have the feel of a first person narrative," said one reader, rightly calling my protagonist flat and my point of view perplexing.[144] Using first-person throughout the novel had done nothing to increase characterization or clarity, effectively losing all of first person's advantages and gaining only confusion and a piece of writing that neither resembled fairy tale nor exhibited the depth required of good fiction.

The voice I'm looking for in my novel can be found in Byatt's *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye: Five Fairy Stories,* specifically, the limited third person

[143] Comments by Joanna Nadin in May 21, 2018, tutorial.
[144] Comments by Tracy Brain in December 6, 2018, tutorial.

point of view found in the novella of the same title. The voice in Byatt's story is interesting because it includes specific setting and time period details, qualities that can be found in all stories in her collection, but still retains the feel of a fairy story:

> Once upon a time, when men and women hurtled through the air on metal wings, when they wore webbed feet and walked on the bottom of the sea, learning the speech of whales and the songs of the dolphins, when pearly-fleshed and jeweled apparitions of Texan herdsman and houris shimmered in the dusk on Nicaraguan hillsides, when folk in Norway and Tasmania in dead of winter could dream of fresh strawberries, dates, guavas and passion fruits and find them spread next morning on their tables, there was a woman who was largely irrelevant, and therefore happy.[145]

As the story continues, Byatt manages to create a fairy tale hero that notices, thinks about, and comments on the events, objects, and places that surround her. Though we are only a few pages into the story, we already have some idea of what motivates and interests this character. Also notice how the lack of quotation marks around the character's thoughts below make the text read as though it were in first person. Byatt's use of storytelling within this story coupled with a large amount of dialogue allow the piece to seem both multi-voiced and multi-narrated, as though serval narrative points of view exist within one tale:

> She had a phrase for the subtle pleasures of solitary air travel. She spoke it to herself like a charm as the great silver craft detached itself from its umbilical tube at Heathrow, waddled like an albatross across the tarmac and went up, up, through grey curtains of English rain, a carpet of wooly iron-grey English cloud, a world of swirling vapour, trailing its long limbs and scarves past her tiny porthole, in the blue and gold world that was always there, above the grey, always. . . . [A] male voice spoke in the cabin, announcing that there was a veil of water vapour over France but that that would burn off. . . . Burn off was a powerful term, she thought, rhetorically interesting, for water does not burn and yet the sun's heat reduces this water to nothing; I am in the midst of fierce forces. I am nearer the sun than any woman of my kind, any ancestress of mine, can ever have dreamed of being. . .[146]

As I sit down this evening to write in my diary, it is not the voice of the guide at Ellicott Hill I hear but the guide from Longwood, the woman with the

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[145] Byatt, "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" in *Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, 95.
[146] Byatt, 97-98.

broken back and tight corset hired to walk pilgrims around the octagonal house. "Yesterday, someone gave me grief for saying 'servant' and 'field hand.' But these people were slaves, the lady said. They weren't paid for their work and had no choice in the matter. Well, I guess they were, but they were treated so well and were practically members of the family," said the tour guide. Did the guide know that it was the voice of the slave master coming from her mouth, his voice and his insistence on the term "servant" because it sounded so much more pleasant that "slave" against the tongue?

I wish for a story that gives voice to the marginalized, the soldier, the slave and the mistress alike. I wish for a book that has the feel of a fairy tale but also the ability to use multiple points of view. Perhaps I wish for too much, but the voice of Pullman encourages me onward:

> Can the writer of any version of a fairy tale every come near to James Merrill's ideal tone, 'serene, anonymous'? Of course, the writer might not wish to. There have been many, and there will be many more, versions of these tales that are brimful of their author's own dark obsessions, or brilliant personality, or political passions. The tales can stand it. But even if we want to be serene and anonymous, I think it's probably impossible to achieve it completely, and that our personal stylistic fingerprints lie impressed on every paragraph without our knowing it. The only thing to do, it seems to me, is to try for clarity, and stop worrying about it.[147]

[147] Pullman, Introduction to *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm,* xix-xx.

Day 5: It's a Magical World

March 19

In the dim candlelight, our tour guide and home owner points out the Civil War-era bullet hole in the front door and recounts the story of the ghost who lives in the back bedroom. "She's tall, dark-skinned—likely the servant girl who helped take care of the children one hundred and fifty years ago or more," explains Marjorie. A child on today's ghost tour begins to cry. "There are only friendly ghosts here, honey," Marjorie assures her. If such tales are to be believed, Miss Marjorie and her family live side-by-side with haunts in a house that looks much as it did when the ghost slave was flesh and bone. For them, magic is sewn into the fabric of daily life, hidden just underneath the skin of everything, and the skin of everything here at Glenfield Plantation is chipped, stained, peeling, or coated with dust. "This is the strangest house I have ever seen on Pilgrimage," writes one reviewer on TripAdvisor. "If you want to see a house that has gone through time with no changes or cleaning, this is the place for you."[148]

It's this sense of strangeness and the uncanny that helps differentiate fairy tale from its folk tale cousins. Of all the expectations that readers have of fairy tale, it is perhaps magic and magical transformation that is most important. Metamorphosis, says Zipes, is "the key theme of the fairy tale up to the present."[149] In fairy tale, such magic is normative—mirrors talk, trees change shape, frogs fetch your favorite toy and no one inside the tale (or outside of it) questions that the story happened in just that way, that it was just so. Bernheimer notes that the

[148] Reejje, "Potential But Needs Help, Disappointed."
[149] Zipes, Introduction to *Spells of Enchantment*, ed. by Zipes, xvi.

"naturalized world in a fairy tale is a magical world. The day to day is collapsed with the wondrous."[150] Some critics use the term "wonder tale" when referring to fairy stories, as in a wonder that "causes astonishment . . . . and gives rise to admiration, fear, awe, and reverence."[151] Warner argues that a fairy tale ought to be better labelled a "magic tale," a term that "points to the pivotal role that enchantment plays, both in the action of the stories and the character of its agents."[152] In the introduction to their contemporary fairy tale anthology *Silver Birch, Blood Moon,* editors Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow define a fairy tale as a story "about mortal men and women in a world invested with magic."[153] Stephen Swann Jones insists that a fairy tale "must include the protagonist's interaction with something magical, an interaction that serves to validate the existence of things magical in this world."[154]

In traditional fairy tale, magic drives causation, with plots and setting governed by magical laws. Fairy tale protagonists will likely be changed, both literally and figuratively. Objects in fairy land can be charmed by the correct combination of words, which can bind or loose. The structure of fairy tale itself weaves a spell through repetition and pattern making.[155] Both white and black magic coexist in fairy tale, with the ability to enchant the purview of the wicked—i.e. the evil fairy's enchanted spindle which pricks Sleeping Beauty or the evil queen's enchanted apples given to Snow White. Fairy tales "mix light and dark in

[150] Bernheimer, "Fairy Tale is Form," 69.
[151] Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, xxv.
[152] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 19-20.
[153] Windling and Datlow, Introduction to *Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, 1.
[154] Jones, *Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination*, 10.
[155] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 20, 31, 40-41.

equal measure."[156] As Warner indicates, fairy tale evil begins in the home, with wickedness dominated by female characters: "[F]airytale magic works through the uncanny activity of . . . inert objects, and it deepens the sense that invisible powers exist around us, and intensifies the thrill, the strangeness and terror of the pervasive atmosphere of enchantment. Magical worlds are a danger zone."[157] James Roy King states in *Old Tales and New Truths: Charting the Bright, Shadow World* that

> to be enchanted is to experience delusion, to have one's heart and mind captured by evil forces offering some alluring but insubstantial prize; to be lured to one's death by powers one is too weak to oppose; to be turned to stone because one's own personality structure is weak; to have one's head stuck up on some Baba-Yoga's fence; to be obsessed, like Sinbad, with distant and difficult places; to be drugged, diverted, put to sleep, or otherwise rendered forgetful; to be incapable of distinguishing true from false.[158]

Enchantment drives Jane Yolen's young-adult novel, *Briar Rose*, which uses the Sleeping Beauty story to weave a tale of world war. When Becca's grandmother declares on her deathbed that "I am Briar Rose," referring to the protagonist of the Sleeping Beauty story which she has told her granddaughter many times, Becca journeys to Poland to learn more about her Gemma's past. In this novel, each aspect of the Sleeping Beauty tale has a correlative moment in Gemma's history, with Joseph Potocki (nicknamed "Prince") and his band of partisans saving Gemma from extermination at a German death camp housed inside an old castle. After "kissing" Gemma awake with CPR, the rosy bloom of gas poisoning present in her cheeks and her memory wiped clean of all but the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale, Prince names her Księżniczka (Princess), and she settles in with the forest-dwelling resistance fighters who live on stories, cast-off

[156] Windling and Datlow, Introduction to *Black Thorn, White Rose*, 6.
[157] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 30.
[158] King, *Old Tales and New Truths*, 65.

clothing, and dreams of food. Księźniczka marries Aron, one of the partisans, and is with child when all but she and Prince are killed by machine-gun fire. Widowed and pregnant, Princess applies for transportation to the United States as a refugee. Thus Gemma hides her own story, too tender to touch without the filter of fiction, inside the magical fairy tale she passes along to her grandchildren. Through a conversation between Becca and Magda, her Polish translator and guide, Yolen comments on the way that we sometimes can only approach the truth of terrible event through a magical lens:

> "We are all sleeping princesses some time. But it is better to be fully awake, don't you think?" [said Magda.]
>
> Becca considered for a moment. "Better for who?"
>
> "For whom? I know this grammar. But I do not understand the question," Magda said. "Perhaps my English is not so good after all."
>
> "Good grammar, bad English. Or rather, it may be your *American* that's lacking," Becca said.
>
> "Americans do not want to be awake?"
>
> "Oh," Becca said, "we like the truth all right. When it's tidy."
>
> "Truth is never tidy. Only fairy tales."[159]

Tatar writes that fairy tales "capture human drama and emotion in its most extreme forms and conditions and thus provide the appropriate narrative vehicle for capturing the melodrama of historical events that defy intellectual comprehension."[160] Perhaps a fairy tale can relate the horrors of the Holocaust or the Civil War just as well, if not better, than a realistic genre because magic helps us understand truth. But as with setting and character, American fairy tales wield magic and evil enchantment differently than their European cousins. Referencing the Wizard of Oz's lack of magic but surplus of gumption and braggadocio, Lanes claims that in American fairy tales, magic is nothing more than "plain American

[159] Yolen, *Briar Rose*, 234.
[160] Tatar, Preface to *Hard Facts*, xxii.

common sense."[161] While Lanes' claim does not hold true for all American fairy stories, she is correct in implying that magical transformation differs in American tales, the lack of protagonist transformation a hallmark of American fairy texts. But evil, too, is treated differently in American tales, with the American authors often failing to recognize this evil or intentionally stripping it of its power.

In the introduction to his *American Fairy Tales,* a collection with far fewer nightmarish elements than his *Wizard of Oz,* Baum indicates that he is interested in writing a new kind of fairy tale for a New World child:

> The old-time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as 'historical.' . . . Time has come for a series of 'wonder tales' in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated together with all the horrible and blood curdling incident devised by their authors to point to a fearsome moral. . . . [I aspire to write] a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares left out.[162]

Evil, notes Lanes, was "always treated with the utmost respect and seriousness as an inescapable fact of life in traditional fairy tale,"[163] but American fairy tales regard evil as mere character flaw, thereby stripping it of "menace and authority as evil."[164] American fairy stories rarely face evil head-on as they prefer to believe that good will always win in the end: "There is in the American fairy tale none of that unalterable wickedness so common in European tales, a wickedness which requires real and powerful magic to vanquish."[165] Thus, American fairy tales may seem too sweet, overly optimistic, and more practical than magical.

Stockton's "The Bee Man of Orn," long held up as a model for the lack of protagonist transformation in American tale, also writes out the wickedness by

[161] Lanes, "America as Fairy Tale," 99.
[162] Baum quoted in Lanes, 97.
[163] Lanes, 103.
[164] Lanes, 103.
[165] Lanes, 103.

giving the Bee Man's demonic guide to the underworld a wicked sense of humor rather than a wicked soul and by turning the baby-eating dragon into a comical plot point. Stockton writes of his work,

> I was very young when I determined to write some fairy tales because my mind was full of them. I set to work, and in course of time, produced several which were printed. These were constructed according to my own ideas. I caused the fanciful creatures who inhabited the world of fairy-land to act, as far as possible for them to do so, as if they were inhabitants of the real world. I did not dispense with monsters and enchanters, or talking beasts and birds, but I obliged these creatures to infuse into their extraordinary actions a certain level of common sense.[166]

But the lack of true evil in American tales has consequences. "There was never any feeling in the old fairy tales," says Lanes, ". . . of Good being more powerful than Evil. It was the very evenness of the match which gave these tales their powerful narrative hold over the reader."[167] Without wickedness, there can be no redemption, a concept at the heart of traditional fairy tale.[168] Without evil and dark magic, a fairy tale can no longer help readers recognize that "violence and horror coexist with wonder and beauty,"[169] and witches, wicked step-mothers, ogres, and cruel older siblings can no longer symbolize the "malignant forces over which ordinary actors are powerless."[170] If, as Warner states, fairy tales have been used to transform everyday horrors in a way that helped authors conceal their warnings of killers and cruelty and violence through the guise of magical storytelling, [171] a fairy tale without said horrors serves little function for readers beyond entertainment.

How, then, do I write a tale of the Civil War when American fairy tale tradition typically favors common sense over magical transformation and

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[166] Stockton quoted in Zipes, Afterword to *Fairy Tales of Frank Stockton* by Stockton, 152.
[167] Lanes, "America as Fairy Tale," 104.
[168] Yolen, *Touch Magic*, 61.
[169] Tatar, foreword to *Brothers & Beasts*, ed. by Bernheimer, xix.
[170] King, *Old Tales and New Truths*, 63.
[171] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 80.

minimizes the impact of evil on our daily lives? While Lanes' claims for American fairy tales largely hold true, most if not all of the writers of the tales she references hale from the northern or mid-western regions of the country and thus ignore the Southern Gothic tradition. As in European fairy tales, evil wanders the dark woods and cotton fields of the Southern story landscape, and citizens, such as Marjorie at Glenfield Plantation, rub elbows with ghosts on a daily basis. In my novel, Artie often resembles a European protagonist rather than an American one, with the book as a whole pulling primarily from European models in terms of character and theme. My novel's use of Arthurian legend also helps lend an air of the magical to my work, as such tales

> carry into fairy tales motifs and plot devices—enchanted objects (swords, mirrors, cups), tests and riddles, dangers from monsters and forests, dream journeys, and sense of the other world near to hand. The actions of such distant predecessors then add to the sum of knowledge of our situation now; from a distance, the other zone throws light on circumstances in the one we know. Fairy tales evoke every kind of violence, injustice, and mischance, but in order to declare it need not continue.[172]

Though I am telling an American tale, it is important that my novel contain both transformation and a healthy respect for the harm evil can wreck. Making meaning in fairy tale requires magic.

Zipes points to a tale's ability to enlighten us to the reality of the social order and to "awaken our regard for the miraculous condition of life and to evoke in a religious sense profound feelings of awe and respect for life as a miraculous process, which can be altered and changed to compensate for the lack of power, wealth, and pleasure that is most people's lot."[173] Warner insists that fairy tales

[172] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, xxv.
[173] Zipes, Introduction to *Spells of Enchantment*, ed. by Zipes, xiv.

> report from imaginary territory—a magical elsewhere of possibility; a hero or a heroine or sometimes both together are faced with ordeals, terrors, and disaster in a world that, while it bears some resemblance to the ordinary conditions of human existence, mostly diverges from it in the way it works, taking the protagonists—and us, the story's readers or listeners—to another place where wonders are commonplace and desires are fulfilled.[174]

For feminist Bacchilega, the fairy tale is a mirror which reflects true life[175] while for Jungian theorists, it is a magical realm that symbolizes the unconscious mind. "The fairytale's ultimate message is that there is a magic to existence that defies charting. And the charm of the best of the old tales lies in the convincing manner in which they record how bits of such magic can transform lives wholly," says Lanes.[176] It is this matter-of-fact, miraculous element that sends our heroes into the dark woods of "danger and despair and enchantment and deception, and only then offers them the tools to save themselves. . . The power in old fairy tales lies in such self-determined acts of transformation."[177] Fairy tales are, as Yolen puts it, the most "potent" kind of magic because they allow us to "catch a glimpse of the soul beneath the skin."[178] Magic in fairy tale, I offer, is both driving force within the tale and reason for readers to return to familiar tales again and again.

"The fairy tale attracts writers for various reasons, but many prize it for the way in which it allows them to slip, as it were, *behind* reality. In the fairy tale world, where the laws of magic supersede the laws of logic, writers abandon the *real* in search of the *true,"* says Neil Philip.[179] If, as I believe, fairy tale can point to the extraordinary in the ordinary, illuminating the magic waiting just below the skin of everything; use the fantastic supernatural to subtly warn us about the evil

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[174] Warner, *Once Upon a Time,* xxv.
[175] Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, 28.
[176] Lanes, "America as Fairy Tale," 94.
[177] Windling and Datlow, Introduction to *Black Thorn, White Rose*, 5.
[178] Yolen, *Touch Magic*, 50.
[179] Philip, Afterword to *American Fairy Tales,* comp. by Philip, 151.

next door; and create "a series of image-repeating glasses, a hall of mirrors that brings past and future into focus and calls it the present,"[180] then my own novel will use magic to make a 150-year-old event and even older story form relevant to a contemporary audience.

Back at Glenfield Plantation, I watch the candlelight throw shadows across the wall as Miss Marjorie tells us more about the ghost slave. "This is where we see her most often," Marjorie says matter-of-factly, pointing to one of three beds in the small bedroom. "My grandson felt her presence just the other night when he came back here to take a nap." When I close my eyes, I can almost believe I hear footsteps on the thin carpet, something wondrous and magical brushing up against my shoulder.

[180] Yolen, *Touch Magic*, 54.

Day 6: Making Meaning

March 20

For $2 apiece at the Visitor's Center gift shop, we buy tickets to a twenty-minute film on Natchez history. After the theater lights dim and an image of the Mississippi River at sunset floats across the screen, a voice tells the story of the area's early native peoples, its "discovery" by Hernando De Soto's 1502 expedition, and the movement from French, British, and Spanish rule to American sovereignty. It's important work, this making meaning of the past, and I think it a shame that soon this film is to be retired in favor of a new one which "will present a more forward-looking vision for Natchez and for the tourists who will come here."[181] The new production will be one, I hope, that does not forget history entirely and indicates how Natchez's past still influences its present.

My interest in writing the Civil War through fairy tale stemmed from the way I saw both past and present American conflicts as essentially the same. The Charleston church massacre, in which a white supremacist gunned down nine African Americans during a prayer service, had occurred the summer before I began my novel journey. The Confederate flag still flew from trucks and windows and NASCAR campsites; Confederate statues fell or stood through vociferous debate. The past, I believed, was not a foreign country but a place that lived, side by side, with the present and present politics. How could an event from one hundred and sixty years in the past still seem so current and contemporary? How could ordinary people, past and present, support evil-doings and still consider themselves good, Christian citizens? At the start of my novel journey—that hot,

[181] Hillyer, "Park Service Staff Asks 'What If?'"

hazy summer full of Civil War stories, British folklore, and dreams of pink souls trapped in battlefield grasses—I hoped that fairy tale could give me a way to better understand the meaning of contemporary American political and religious conflicts and to carve out a meaningful place for myself within this landscape.

Making meaning is, of course, the purpose of fairy tale scholarship and this scholarship shows us that fairy stories can mean a great many things. Eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars saw fairy tales as fragments of ancient sun and moon mythology or survivors of primitive civilizations.[182] In the early-twentieth century, Anti Aarne and Stith Thompson's famous motif and tale-type indices attempted to trace a tale back to what they believed to be the one, original version. By and large, this scholarship, claims Andrew Teverson, tried to "locate the meaning and the significance of the folktale in the past."[183] It was not until Propp's 1958 formalist morphology of fairy tale and the structuralism which followed that scholars have viewed the genre as a "narrative that speaks meaningfully of the present."[184]

As a writer, I'm drawn to structuralism as a guide in helping me put together my own work, but in order to determine what meaning my work might have for readers, I've also considered the dominant approaches in current fairy tale theory. Psychoanalytic theorists posit that fairy tales reflect the human unconscious, an idea that began with Freud and his claim that tales are symbolic acts giving insight into an individual's desires and anxieties and that continued with the Jungian's claim that fairy tales are full of universal and archetypal

[182] Teverson, *Fairy Tale*, 87-96.
[183] Teverson, 95.
[184] Teverson, 95.

symbolism that tell the collective human narrative: "The fairy tale journey may look like an outward trek across plains and mountains, through castles and forests, but the actual movement is inward, into the lands of the soul. The dark path of the fairy tale forest lies in the shadow of our imagination, the depths of our unconscious. To travel the wood, to face its dangers, is to emerge transformed by this experience."[185]

Bruno Bettelheim's 1975 study, *The Uses of Enchantment*, helped begin the late twentieth-century boom in fairy tale scholarship by claiming that tales "represent in imaginative form what the process of healthy human development consists of, and how the tales make such development attractive for the child to engage in."[186] Though criticized for its failure to look at a large sampling of tales and their variants and for discounting tales without happy endings, Bettelheim's study nonetheless remains influential. J.C. Cooper's *Fairy Tales: Allegories of the Inner Life,* posits that Cinderella's position in the cinders of the hearth links her with

> the vestal virgins and with Hestia, goddess of the hearth; she is also associated with the Roman Lar, the house spirit who had the hearth as his shrine. The dead were buried under the hearth as the entrance to the otherworld. . . . Tending the fire, Cinderella is the Spirit, the Soul, the Beautiful One, while the two step-sisters are body and mind; together the three sisters represent the three stages of evolution of man's understanding from merely bodily and sensual response to mental powers and on to the soul. . . .[187]

Certainly, fairy tale contains "a richly symbolic language, distilling the essence of the human experience into words of deceptive simplicity. The imagery found in fairy tales is rooted in the ancient oral folk tradition, giving these stories a mythic

[185] Windling, "Introduction: White as Snow," 10.
[186] Bettelheim, *Uses of Enchantment*, 12.
[187] Cooper, *Fairy Tales: Allegories of the Inner Life*, 25.

power and resonance few art forms can match,"[188] though it seems to me that some psychoanalytical studies ascribe more meaning to traditional tales than the original tellers intended. To me, the most interesting aspect of the psychoanalytical approach is its insistence on the possibilities of symbolic and figurative speech within fairy tale. The world of fairy tale, says Warner, is a place "where knowing depends upon one's ability to think in metaphors,"[189] and "[m]etaphor-making is central to a world where much is based on analogy and similarity, where little dramas that enlarge the framework or context sometimes help resolve various kinds of problems."[190] This means that

> the startling, even brutal imagery to be found in older versions of classic tales provides useful metaphors for the challenges we face in modern life. . . . [which] is still full of wicked wolves, neglectful or even murderous parents, men under beastly spells, and beautiful women hiding treacherous hearts. We still encounter dangers on dark and twisty paths leading through the soul, as well as fairy godmothers and animal guides to light the way.[191]

While I've found a survey of psychoanalytic theory to be helpful in thinking about meaning in my novel, particularly in determining what resonance my tale retellings or allusions might have for readers, the popular socio-historical approach has played a larger role in considering my novel's themes. Socio-historicists examine fairy tales as historical documents with political potential. Zipes' Marxist *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* and *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk & Fairy Tales* helped popularize the idea of fairy tale as a tool for political discourse, and there is certainly no doubt that fairy tale can have a powerful voice. Hitler used Grimms' tales to further his nationalism;[192]

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[188] Windling and Datlow, Introduction to *Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, 2.
[189] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 60.
[190] Warner, 174.
[191] Windling and Datlow, Introduction to *Black Heart, Ivory Bones*, 3.
[192] See Zipes' *Art of Subversion*, 142-143; *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 23; and *Relentless Progress*, 145.

the Soviet Union produced Cold War-era fairy tale collections which "used the fairy-tale paradigm as a deconstructive device built on the very underpinnings of the Soviet system."[193] Carter, Atwood, and other feminist authors rewrite traditional fairy tale to give female heroines agency. "Some of the best recent literary fairy tales," says Alison Lurie in her introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Fairy Tales*, "use the form to comment on twentieth-century events,"[194] a thought which I believe can be easily extended to the twenty-first century as well. Gillian Cross's young adult novel *Wolf* retells "Little Red Riding Hood" to explore IRA terrorism in 1980's London; Robert Coover's *Briar Rose* uses three voices and multiple variants of the Sleeping Beauty tale to examine violence, sex, and heroism in traditional fairy tale as well as the nature of language and story-telling itself. Mallory Ortberg's gender-fluid tales in *The Merry Spinster* reflect the author's own transgendered identity while Daisy Johnson's *Everything Under* blends fairy tale and Oedipal myth to tell a story of incest, language, and fate. But the impetus to alter old tales, to rewrite history or rewrite the tale to make history familiar, is not a new concept. "The literary fairy tale is a wonderful, versatile hybrid form which draws on primitive apprehensions and narrative motifs, and then uses them to think consciously about human beings and the world," argues Byatt. "Both German Romantic fairy tales and the self-conscious playful courtly stories of seventeenth century French ladies *combine the new thought of the time* with the ancient tug of forest and castle, demon and witch, vanishing and shape-shifting, loss and restoration."[195]

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[193] Mahmud, "Those Beautiful Soviet-Era Fairy Tale Books."
[194] Lurie, Introduction to *Oxford Book of Modern Fairy Tales*, ed. by Lurie, xvii.
[195] Byatt quoted in Harries, *Twice Upon a Time*, 160, italics my own.

Socio-historicists claim that "the necessary presence of the past makes itself felt through combinations of familiar plots, characters, devices and images,"[196] but I would argue that fairy tale can perhaps also help us explore an historical event. Tales make history, says Zipes. Tales are "history in the making through innovative symbolic acts,"[197] and are at their heart both "utopian"[198] and "subversive"[199] in that they offer the possibility of a hopeful, happy ending for the marginalized, powerless, and oppressed. If we believe, as Zipes does, that an important function of fairy tale is as historical statement which shows the "stark realities of power politics without disguising the violence and brutality of everyday life,"[200] then contemporary fairy tale can make a statement about history as well.

In *Old Tales, New Truths,* King affirms the usefulness of fairy tale to today's writers with his argument that contemporary authors blend old fairy tales with new stories because "the possibilities described in traditional stories relate to our world"; "the structure of old tales 'replicates and intensifies the structure of ordinary experience'"; and a fairy tale's characters, setting and events "constitute a coherent world of their own that real people choose to inhabit."[201] Modern crises such as the Holocaust, wars, and nuclear threats, says King, "have convinced many that terrible forces consciously seeking to do evil are indeed at work in the world. In their sheer horror, such events seem to transcend any rational understanding human actors might work out. In grasping the implications of such events, the

[196] Warner, *Once Upon a Time,* xx.
[197] Zipes, *Art of Subversion,* 10.
[198] Zipes, Introduction to *Outspoken Princess,* ed. by Zipes, x.
[199] Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth,* 14
[200] Zipes, *Art of Subversion,* 8.
[201] King, *Old Tales, New Truths,* 5

imagination plays a critical role."[202] Thus, a fairy tale can be an excellent vehicle for a world at war in which, as in fairy tale, "want stalks everyone . . . . [and] injustices are endemic in a society that's itself unfair."[203] The Grimms collected their tales during a time of revolution, invasion, and bloodshed when "the concept of home culture was engulfed, replaced by a hubbub of voices, the narrative melee of the past jostling to find a place to speak for the present."[204] As fairy tales are domestic and tell of everyday conflicts fought by ordinary human being, they should be able to speak of home front and battlefield alike. In his *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, Lüthi argues that "[o]ne of the basic themes of our fairy tales is battle."[205] In fairy tale, says Tatar, "nearly every character . . . is capable of cruel behavior,"[206] and the violence does not end when the tale itself does because the intent of the tale's "Once upon a time" beginning is to indicate that "what once occurred. . . has the tendency continually to recur."[207]

A history of American fairy tale shows that "even from the beginning, many of the best American stories had a different underlying message than the ones from across the Atlantic."[208] The difference in the nature of transformation and evil between the two fairy tale traditions likely has much to do with this, though Yolen's *Briar Rose* and many American canonical fairy tales seem to have clearer political purposes than their European cousins. Irving's Rip Van Winkle wakes in a different country; Hawthorne's Feathertop, though scarecrow, is more

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[202] King, *Old Tales, New Truths*, 64
[203] Warner, *Once Upon a Time*, 78.
[204] Warner, 59.
[205] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 121.
[206] Tatar, *Hard Facts*, 5.
[207] Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, 47.
[208] Lurie, Preface to *American Fairy Tales*, comp. by Philip, 7.

gentlemanly than the "real" aristocrats in the story; Stockton's king in "The Banished King" learns the problem with his kingdom is that it is a monarchy instead of a republic.

Zipes claims that L. Frank Baum was perhaps the first fairy tale writer to give "uninhibited expression to the forward-looking optimism of the American dream."[209] Zipes notes that throughout his 14-volume Oz series, in which Dorothy and her aunt and uncle escape Kansas and move to Oz permanently, Baum uses "fairy tale as a radical mirror to reflect what was wrong with the general discourse on manners, mores, and norms in society."[210] Zipes continues, "It is to L. Frank Baum's credit that he spent nearly twenty years of his adult life portraying a fairy-tale utopia with strong socialist and matriarchal notions to express his disenchantment with America."[211]

Helen Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird*, a retelling of "Snow White" set in mid-twentieth century New England, is a good example of a contemporary fairy tale that explores the author's dissatisfaction with elements of American society. Flax Hill, Massachusetts, is, in some ways, a town out of storybook—beautifully blanketed in snow, its people makers of the finest crafts and fabrics. Boy arrives at Flax Hill after escaping her abusive, rat-catcher father in Manhattan; marries widower Arturo Whitman; and becomes stepmother to his little daughter, Snow. But when her child, Bird, is born with dark skin and black, curly hair, Boy learns that she has married into an African American family trying to pass as white, and Flax Hill becomes less than idyllic.

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[209] Philip, Afterword to *American Fairy Tales*, comp. by Philip, 156.
[210] Zipes, *Art of Subversion*, 107.
[211] Zipes, 127.

Oyeyemi's book turns a critical eye on American views of race, beauty and gender and expresses discontent with all three. Few of the characters in this novel are content within their own skins, which might account for the book's plentiful transformations—Boy turned evil-stepmother when she sends pale-skinned Snow away to relatives so that her own daughter will not be overshadowed; a black family passing as white; Boy's "father" really her transgendered mother living as a man. When Bird, who narrates the second half of the novel, confesses in a letter to her half-sister Snow that "I'm your usual kind of thirteen year old with the usual kind of personality . . . except that I don't always show up in mirrors,"[212] she is perhaps expressing her feelings of invisibility as a biracial teenager. Even the story's setting feels a need to transform itself, "misbehav[ing] a little, collapsing when [Bird] went to sleep and reassembling in the morning in a slapdash manner; [Bird] kept passing park benches and telephone booths and entrances to alleyways that [she] was absolutely certain hadn't been there the evening before."[213]

Like Oyeyemi's work, my American fairy tale is, at least in part, meant to express my disenchantment with portions of American culture—the racist remnants of slavery; the tribalism and partisan divides; the use of religion to sanction such problems. "The fairy tale," says Stephen Benson, "offers to fiction a ready-made store of images and plots, of gender relations, class conflicts, scenarios of sexuality, and dramas of ethnicity, each ripe for scrutiny and overhaul via a contemporary ideological agenda committed to the overturning of conventions of inequality and restriction."[214] To write my novel, I've pulled from both fairy tale

[212] Oyeyemi, *Boy, Snow, Bird*, 197.
[213] Oyeyemi, 15.
[214] Benson, Introduction to *Contemporary Fiction*, ed. by Benson, 12-13.

and British folk tales for my recognizable images, characters and plots, and in so doing, often found the tales would take on a mind of their own. The symbols inherent within the traditional tales would not lie still, transforming themselves into meanings I had not considered when I sat down to write. Rewriting or referencing familiar canonical tales like "Cinderella," "Jack in the Beanstalk," "Rumpelstiltskin," "Little Red Riding Hood," etc. means that readers will have expectations for each chapter that my work must either affirm or dispute. By harnessing Arthurian legend to fairy tale, I add even more potential meanings but also create more opportunities for making meaning within my work:

> [T]he fairy tale arrives laden with history, not just as a genre but at the level of individual content. The history, as encoded in the repeating plots of these tales, speaks to modern readers of the divisions and exclusions of gender and class, as well as of their overcoming; of national cultures and of nationalism; above all, of the extraordinary scope of the narrative imagination and of the ways in which fantastical imaginings can tell of real-world difficulties and hope of resolution.[215]

Zipes claims that contemporary fairy tales have become more complex, more "aggressive,"[216] and more questioning of societal rules and norms.[217] "[M]ost intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the bottles explode," says Angela Carter.[218] In a clear play on Carter's words, Elizabeth Wanning Harries indicates that "[t]he history of the fairy tale is history of pouring old wine into new bottles, forcing new wine into old bottles, and often 'distressing' new bottles to make them look old,"[219] a statement which quite nicely

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[215] Benson, Introduction to *Contemporary Fiction*, ed. by Benson, 4.
[216] Zipes, Introduction to *Spells of Enchantment*, ed. by Zipes, xxvii-xxviii.
[217] Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 103.
[218] Carter quoted in Harries, *Twice Upon a Time,* beginning epigraph.
[219] Harries, *Twice Upon a Time,* 18.

sums up what I've endeavored to do in my own work. Through my novel, I attempt both to make sense of the past and look toward the future. As Zipes indicates,

> American fairy tale will certainly play a role in designating imaginative directions as correctives to the political short-comings of our politicians and statesmen. In this respect, though there may not be an *American* fairy tale, American writers of fairy tales have already distinguished themselves by keeping alive alternatives for a better future in their innovative narratives that refuse to make compromises with the mythicization of classical tradition.[220]

A politically charged topic coupled with a politically-charged genre can make for difficult writing. Windling and Datlow say that like jazz, fairy tale "is best appreciated by those with an ear for the original melody on which it is based. The pleasure lies in savoring the writer's skill as she or he transforms a familiar story, bringing it *their* own unique vision of the tale, and of world around *them*."[221] I hope that by using familiar "children's stories" or folk imagery, I can clothe myself "in fairytale themes and motifs in order to communicate political and philosophical thinking . . . in the interest of amusing [my] audience and persuading them more effectively."[222] For whether it examines the past for meaning, looks to the future, or explores the depths of the human heart, "[i]t is the particular beauty of fairy tales that no one interpretation is the true one, no one version is correct."[223]

[220] Zipes, *Fairy tale as Myth*, 161.
[221] Windling and Datlow, Introduction to *Black Thorn, White Rose,* 5.
[222] Warner, *Once Upon a Time,* 146.
[223] Windling and Datlow, Introduction to *Ruby Slippers, Golden Tears,* 6.

Day 7: Happily Ever After

March 21

On this the last day of our journey, I take my clothes from the antique armoire and check under the canopied bed for anything left behind. Though I've enjoyed our week of Natchez living, I am pleased that this trip is near its end. Were I living here 154 years ago, however, the end of the war would have been anything but sweet. "White Southerners emerged from the Civil War thoroughly beaten and largely unrepentant," claims Gary W. Gallagher.[224] And without a happy ending of their own, they set about making one, championing the Lost Cause myth as justification for their enormous losses and rewriting history to mask the war's true causes and meanings.

The war was not fought over slavery, claims Lost Cause mythology, but over tax conflicts, cultural differences, and a state's constitutional right to fight against a Northern aggressor; enslaved blacks were a happy and peaceful race, fiercely loyal to their masters and much benefited by "servitude"; and the Southern soldier was a brave hero, honorably fighting a sectional duel he was bound to lose in that the South had not so much been defeated as "overwhelmed," outnumbered, and out supplied by the Union. [225] In the decades just after war's end, Lost Cause proponents created for themselves a "romantic past of graceful plantations, contented slaves, righteous secessionists, and valorous Confederates,"[226] crafting an American legend that echoes legendary Arthurian tales for "[w]ithout its own distinctive past upon which to base its nationality, the Confederacy appropriated

[224] Gallagher, Introduction to *Myth of the Lost Cause*, para. 1.
[225] Nolan, "One: The Anatomy of the Myth," sec. 3-4.
[226] Gallagher, Introduction to *Myth of the Lost Cause*, para. 14.

history and created a mythic past of exiled Cavaliers and chivalrous knights."[227] So popular was Lost Cause thinking among white Southerners, says Gallagher, that it changed the "public memory" of the entire country, successfully substituting the Southern interpretation of the war for the real history of the conflict.[228] We can count the current flying of Confederate flags, veneration of Robert E. Lee, and continued displays of memorials to Confederate generals all contemporary nods to Lost Cause thinking. If there is still any doubt that this Southern "happy ending" permeates the present, one need only consider that hundreds of pilgrims, myself among them, have paid good money to tour antebellum homes filled with museum-quality antiques, gracious ladies in hoop skirts, and stories of loyal black "servants" so beloved by their masters that they were buried in white family cemeteries.

As with the South's revisionist history, the happy ending is a hallmark of fairy tale, with most critics insisting a traditional tale must have one. Tolkien lauds the "joy" of tale endings:

> The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending; or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale): this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially "escapist," nor "fugitive." In its fairy-tale — or otherworld — setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance. . .[229]

Contemporary writers, however, tend to focus solely on the "dyscatastrophe," doing away with this happiness. Of the contemporary tales I've studied, Byatt's "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" is one of the few stories with a happy ending.

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[227] Beringer et. al quoted in Nolan, "One: The Anatomy of the Myth," sec. 3, para. 6.
[228] Gallagher, Introduction *Myth of the Lost Cause*, para. 1.
[229] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 22.

Much more common is the ambiguous ending—such as the possibility for reconciliation at the end of Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird* but also the very real prospect of its opposite—or the patently unhappy one. "In the end I was not a good wife for Adam," [230] says Bernheimer's Ketzia Gold. Hunt's Goody becomes trapped in the cabin in the dark woods with the Devil himself, a horrific ending little allayed by the hint at hope in the epilogue. Only one story in Walker's *The Sea-Rabbit* collection has a clearly happy ending, with most indicating that if happiness ever exists, it is always troubled happiness. [231] Yolen's *Briar Rose* ends happily enough, but the Author's Note after the last chapter soon breaks the merry spell. "This is a book of fiction," the note proclaims. "All the characters are made up. Happy-ever-after is a fairy tale notion, not history. I know of no women who escaped from Chelmno alive."[232]

In negotiating new endings for old stories, a contemporary fairy tale renovates traditional fairy tale—that old crumbling house—into something more livable. "There are two ways a lovely old house can be saved from the developer's wrecking ball," says Windling. "One is to declare it historic and inviolate, to set it carefully aside from life and preserve its rooms as a museum to the past. The other is to adapt it to modern use: to encourage new generations to live within its walls, look out its diamond windows, climb its crooked staircase, and light new fires in its hearth."[233] It is the job of a folklorist to preserve fairy tale under glass; a writer must be the "carpenter who adapts the house for modern use."[234]

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[230] Bernheimer, *Complete Tales of Ketzia Gold*, 183.
[231] Walker, *Sea-Rabbit Or, the Artist of Life*, 80.
[232] Yolen, *Briar Rose*, 241.
[233] Windling, "Introduction: White as Snow," 5.
[234] Windling, 5.

"Which house tour did you like best?" I ask my husband as we zip up our suitcases and carry them to the car. He chooses the small, one-storied Airlie "[u]sed as federal hospital during union occupation of Natchez. Preserved rough hewn [sic] beams, fireplace, and small paned windows. Built during the Spanish period."[235] There, the tour guide showed us a few antique pieces but also a big screen T.V, a comfortable sectional sofa, a microwave oven, and a teenaged boy's baseball collection. "I liked it because it wasn't a museum," my husband said. "It was the only house that looked like you could live in it."

In fairy tale, the renovation work never ends, spooling itself out from the opening "Once upon a time," the new and the old twined together into a kind of labyrinth. "All stories have this form," writes Rebecca Solnit, "but fairy tales are often particularly labyrinthlike."[236] In a maze, we seek the middle, but in labyrinths, we walk an indirect path to the starting point: "The end of the journey through the labyrinth is not at the center, as is commonly supposed, but back at the threshold again: the beginning is also the real end. That is the home to which you return from the pilgrimage, the adventure."[237] My own fairy tale curls up upon itself, beginning and ending with Artie in a boat on the Mississippi, twisting together new and old tales until the whole thing returns to where it started. Emma Donoghue's lesbian-themed *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* is another good example of the endless nature of story. This book weaves together tale after tale, with a minor character in the first tale becoming the protagonist in the next until the entire work becomes one long story with no clear beginning or end. "And

[235] "Spring Pilgrimage: Airlie Circa 1790."
[236] Solnit, *Faraway Nearby*, 189.
[237] Solnit, 188.

what happened next, you ask?" says the witch in Donoghue's "The Tale of the Kiss," a first-person narrator who may or may not be the first person narrator of the first chapter (or the second, or third, etc.) as all voices sound the same. "Never you mind. There are some tales not for telling, whether because they are too long, too precious, too laughable, too painful, too easy to need telling or too hard to explain. After all, after years and travels, my secrets are all I have left to chew on in the night. This is the story you asked for. I leave it in your mouth."[238]

As our car winds its way towards home, the place where my journey began, I watch Lansdowne disappear into the rearview mirror. If "stories are portable, part of the invisible luggage people take with them when they leave home,"[239] then it follows that I'll return with them as well, toting more tales than I packed when I began the journey. I have gained several pounds from tamales and fried catfish and barbeque dinners. I have toured houses and museums and churches and a jail with the hangman's trapdoor still in place. I've viewed Natchez from a horse-drawn carriage, climbed the Emerald Mound built by the native Mississippian peoples, and walked the Sunken Trace, the holloway formed from hundreds of years of foot traffic. But will I emerge from this fairy tale somehow changed? Will home hold the happiness I seek? The answers depend on whether I am a Southern (thus European) fairy tale or a Northern, American story. In the end, a traditional, European, utopian fairy tale offers hope of change, but those stories on this side of the Atlantic do not: "There are no permanent magical transformations in American

[238] Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch,* 227-28.
[239] Carter, Introduction to *Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, xiv.

fairy tales. No one lives happily ever after except by returning home with perhaps a new and deeper appreciation of the magic of his own day-to-day existence."[240]

We stop at Natchez Under-the-Hill to appreciate the Mississippi one last time. Once a port full of prostitutes, flop houses, and criminals, it has remade itself into a new tale, a neighborhood of delicious eateries and pretty little boutique shops. The river covers the parking area and laps at the foundation of a store selling antique books and upscale gifts. My novel, like this flood water, has burst through the banks of fairy tale, stretched into new shapes, tested and overtopped Joosen's "horizon of expectation"[241] for the genre. My characters transform yet also revert to their original shapes. I have kept the magic of the fairy tale as well as some of its familiar framing and archetypes, but I have also given my fairy tale a specific time and place; have turned a brief form into a long work (albeit a long work made up of small pieces); have created thinking and feeling characters related by a narrative voice that is slightly different from the conventional fairy tale "multiscient" point of view;[242] and have written a most unhappy conclusion for Artie. But in the end, I think my novel a fairy tale at heart and hope it will seem so to readers as well.

This vast sea of stories, the water that inspired the first fairy tales, still flows through contemporary life. It contains tales of all sorts, some seemingly endless and others mere fragments. One can never step into the same river twice: an author makes new endings from old ports and creates beginnings and middles which loop in on themselves. All contemporary writers know, says Harries, "that

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[240] Lanes, "America as Fairy Tale," 96.
[241] Joosen, "Chapter 1: An Intertextual Approach," 13.
[242] Pullman, "The Classical Tone" in *Daemon Voices,* 247.

they are retelling old stories, and that each retelling is both a new version of an old tale and, simultaneously, a new beginning."[243] The Mississippi at our feet begins and ends my novel, the chapters in between make the familiar seem strange and unfamiliar settings and plots strangely familiar. Artie transforms into soldier then villain and sails off on a river barge, mortally wounded but with the possibility that he might, someday, return to the beginning of his story. And through it all—my novel's journey, my trip to Natchez—the great river rolls on without end, flowing endlessly ever after.

[243] Harries, *Twice Upon a Time,* 161.

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The creative section of the thesis has been redacted from this digital version at the author's request.