

PLUCKING THE ROSE: ATTITUDES TOWARD NATURE
IN THE MODERN AMERICAN
FAIRY TALE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis compares modern American fairy tales (hypertexts) with earlier influential fairy stories (hypotexts), in particular those bearing intertextual links to the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type, in order to identify changing American attitudes toward nature and to pinpoint prevailing trends of opinion in mainstream American culture today. The fairy stories chosen, through characterization, identify a human main character with civilization and a fairy main character with the wilderness. In this way, nature is made into an “Other,” something *supernatural* and thus something different from humans. Readers may, through fairy tales, accommodate modern ideas about the preservation of nature with the more traditional role of dominating nature in order to achieve a sense of safety in those spaces not under direct human control. Indeed, to a large extent in these tales the certain, mutually beneficial outcome is human domestication of the fairy creature through sympathetic guidance. This indicates that a belief in the primacy of human communion with nature is becoming a mainstream belief in modern American culture.

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Introduction

In fairy tales, the story often begins only when the main character leaves civilization behind and enters into the woods. Only there, away from the regulated and artificial peace of the city, may the adventures of the imagination spring to life. Though the description of the forest in these tales is often refined into nonspecificity, fairy tales that place the psychological adventures of their protagonists within a described space locate their actions, no matter how fantastic, within the tangible locations of reality. To use Marianne Moore's words, though the "gardens" are "imaginary," they contain "real toads" (41). This grounding of story in reality invites a reading of humanity's hopes and concerns within the mythological tradition that may be dismissed as lightweight children's tales. Because of the weighty themes that are inherent in them, fairy tales involving a binary between the woods and the city will here be considered to show that the way human protagonists interact with the fairy "Other" character demonstrates a broader cultural view of nature. This view, which has evolved along with the genre through the centuries, today shows both fear and mistrust of the wild aspects of nature as well as an urge to care for the apparently benign nature.

Humanity's contemporary relationships with nature may be played out in literature when one human character symbolizes a generalized human viewpoint and a supernatural character symbolizes the real environment. The relationship between these characters within the storyworld illustrates the relationship between humans and nature in the real world. A fairy tale in which the human and fairy elements within the storyworld are set against each other may be interpreted as humans viewing themselves as something different than and perhaps incompatible

with the natural world. Humans may confront their feelings for nature as “Other” using a symbol for the real natural world, the *super-natural*, a world of beings with powers surpassing those known through accepted experience to be found in nature. Some people today want to believe that we are superior to and separate from nature. However, this is contrary to what we know to be true, that humans are animals and a part of nature. Fairy tale critic Kate Bernheimer believes that a “proliferation of magical stories, especially fairy tales, is correlated to a growing awareness of human separation from the wild and natural world” (xix). These people must find a way to make competing theories of reality come together through a process known as accommodation.

The cognitive understanding attempted through the medium of fairy tales is best explained by the theories of Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. First, in a process called “adaptation,” humans build schemas of understanding from their environment. This is made up of two types of thinking: “assimilation” and “accommodation.” Using “assimilation,” people fit all new information into their currently accepted way of thinking (Piaget 5). This early stage of cognitive development may be identified with earlier views of nature; humans ventured into the woods and learned that the creatures within were dangerous, leading to the adaptive trait of fear for nature. In “accommodation,” however, humans change the preexisting schema to accommodate new environmental information that challenges the preexisting thinking. This strategy takes the person from a state of “disequilibrium,” in which previously held beliefs and new beliefs conflict, to a state of “equilibrium,” in which adaptation to the environment is as complete as can be managed at the present time (6). If a person is presented with information conflicting with the belief that all of nature must be feared, then that new information must be used to qualify previously held views. When humans use literature such as fairy tales to solve the

real-world problem of our role in nature in a symbolic way, the intended outcome is a state of equilibrium between long-held fear of nature and a more modern understanding of and yearning for union with nature. The distancing effect involved in turning the natural into the *super-natural* helps us understand humanity's place in nature in just this way.

Popular stories may be said to be representative of an overall cultural belief or desire due to the relationship between author and reader. Genre theorist Tzvetan Todorov says that "the literary genres" are "nothing but" "choices among discursive possibilities, choices that a given society has made conventional" (*Genres* 10). Authors play a role in the creation of genre expectations. Wayne Booth says, "an author's success or failure with particular readers depends in part on their conventional expectations" (366). Thus, whether an author wishes to reinforce or subvert the genre in which he or she is working, he or she must be aware of the previously established norms in order to create an effective work. The author must create and respond to an implied audience in order to meet that imagined audience's generic expectations. Works intended to suit a mass audience rather than intentionally crafted "Literary" works are even more likely to fulfill this expectation. Works of genre are separate from "Literature;" Todorov says that "only 'popular' literature (detective stories, serialized novels, science fiction, etc.) would approach fulfilling the requirements of genre in the sense the word has in natural science; for the notion of genre in that sense would be inapplicable to strictly literary texts" (*Fantastic* 6). Genres in general, and the fairy tale in particular, represent collaboration between artist and audience. The changing emphases displayed in the genre show the changing views of the society in which that genre is popularly read.

What is a fairy tale? Fairy tales have been around in various shapes for thousands of years. Blurry lines distinguish between "fairy tales," "folklore," "old wives' tales," "legends,"

“travelers’ tales,” and many other related story types. Each term implies certain components that are not mutually exclusive to other story categories. The problems of genre distinction are complicated by the historical roots of the stories. Must fairy tales be long-held tradition? Should all fairy tales be set in a long-ago constructed past? Must there be supernatural characters affecting events? Can a fairy tale be defined by its transmitter’s belief or disbelief in its contents? One or more of these distinctions have been held by scholars as intertextual markers of reader expectations for the genre. Since fairy tales have been chronicled and studied seriously, scholars have held differing views on the conditions deemed necessary and sufficient to make a fairy tale.¹

Both folklore scholar Stith Thompson (8) and the author and critic J. R. R. Tolkien agree that fairies as main characters do not make a story a fairy tale. In Tolkien’s words, “fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories *about* fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being” (38). Something else, according to Tolkien, defines “[m]ost good ‘fairy-stories’”: “*adventures* of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches” (38). Tolkien’s “Perilous Realm” is the land supernatural creatures like fairies naturally inhabit. This “Perilous Realm” echoes the earliest opinions of fairies: they were regarded as capricious and mischievous creatures, as likely to cause harm as good. Adventures in that realm would be adventures indeed, thrusting the humans into a world outside human civilization and fraught with potential dangers. According to this view of fairy tales, the genre is defined by a distinction between human and otherworldly realms; the distinction could also be between human civilization and the natural wilderness.

¹ For a good general overview of the history of Western fairy tale development, see the introduction by Terri Windling in *The Faery Reel: Tales from the Twilight Realm* or “A Brief History of the Fairy Tale” in *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed* by Ann Martin.

Some scholars would say stories chosen here do not fit the criteria of a fairy tale or are chosen using unnecessary criteria. For example, Stith Thompson speaks of a particular distinction used in England between “stories filled with incredible marvels, in contrast to legends, which are presumably based upon fact.” A fairy tale, to him, must be regarded as a “fictional tale” only (21). However, few argue that William Butler Yeats did not truly believe in the fairies he wrote about. The fact that Yeats’ tales were believed to be nonfictional does not change the fact that they are classified by others as well as Yeats as fairy tales and looked to as fertile ground for contemporary American fairy stories. Several modern authors crafting their stories into the fairy tale genre directly allude to Yeats in the epigraphs of their novels or paratextual comments on professional websites. In the traditional tales of Yeats as well as in all others, I focus on stories with a character fairy-born or otherwise markedly touched by supernatural powers. Though a fairy tale need not feature “fairies or elves,” stories that do personify nature in the form of a main character more directly illustrate the felt relationship between human and nature.

My criteria for a “fairy tale” come in large part from scholars who implicitly recommend an intertextual approach to distinguishing fairy tales from other fantastic types of stories. Intertextuality is a part of narrative theory exploring the many ways in which texts interact with each other, described by Gérard Genette as “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts” (1). The “hypertext,” a later work (“text B”), responds to and “unite[s]” with the “hypotext,” a work that was created earlier (“text A”). The hypertext “is grafted” upon the hypotext “in a manner that is not that of commentary,” and so this relationship is often seen between two works of fiction, such as fairy tales (5). I rely for specific guidance on the subject upon the book exploring intertext in fairy tales by Kevin Paul Smith, *The Postmodern Fairy*

Tale: Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction. In his book Smith discusses “eight identifiable ways in which the fairytale can operate as an intertext” (10). Using these “elements” as guidelines, readers can understand movements made by the author to orient a text within the fairy tale tradition. An example of the “writerly” element, in which authors include a reference to a traditional fairy tale within the title of a work, is Holly Black’s *Valiant: A Modern Tale of Faerie*. She refers in the title of her novel to the fairy tale genre rather than a specific story type such as “Beauty and the Beast.” This points to the fact that her novel will incorporate the element of fabulation, the creation of a “new” fairy tale within accepted genre conventions. While many writers today capitalize on the trend of a “re-vision” of old tales, other writers spin the webs of their tales relying upon “the architextual features” of these elements to create fabulations, trusting that readers can “recognize the fairytale... [even] if it does not closely follow the plot of a previous fairytale” (Smith, Kevin Paul 42).

For all the defining factors that have been suggested and debated over the decades, several scholars realize the impossibilities of certain boundaries and leave the burden of recognition through intertextual cues up to the individual reader. Genre critic Tzvetan Todorov says that “[w]hat distinguishes the fairy tale is a certain kind of writing” (*Fantastic* 54). This sentiment is echoed by Kate Bernheimer, who in the introduction to her anthology *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me* defines “fairy tale” as simply “a story with a fairy-tale feel” (xxii). Scholars and casual readers alike can discern the different versions of a fairy tale, whether they are a holdover from a much earlier telling or a version that has changed drastically a bit at a time due to many popular retellings over generations.

Using these features as guidelines for selecting stories with both the “fairy-tale feel” and a marked binary between the city or civilization and the forest or supernatural as shown by the

movements of the main character, I have chosen texts that best illustrate humans in the modern-day “Perilous Realm.” Tolkien states that a fairy-story “does not, then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of *Faërie*: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country” (39). Despite any other aspects of the tale, as long as the features of the unfamiliar fairy world are made apparent to the humans fumbling with the supernatural, the Perilous Realm is present. With this region, also called the “Secondary World,” (Tolkien 62), apparent through its fairy ambassadors, any interactions between human and fairy shadow our contemporary perceptions of the world. The main character, a human, may be identified with civilization while the primary fairy character may be identified with nature. Finally, the main character interacts with the fairy “Other” in either a city or a wilderness. The touchstone text for the American version of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type is examined, as well as modern stories with intertextual links to this tale type. Context for the use of nature as “Other” in fairy tales in general is provided through older stories referenced in the paratexts of these contemporary American fairy tale authors—i.e., the forewords, titles, epigraphs, and other commentaries associated with the text which are nevertheless separate from the main body of text (Genette 3).

I am looking for one motif within the broad fairy-tale tradition: that which shows a symbolic interaction between Beauty and Beast. The following fairy tales may have intertextual links with the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type, but most do not fit into the Aarne-Thompson classification system, a method for classifying folk stories into increasingly specific related types. To study the relationship between human and nature in literature, the literature must include characters symbolizing those two forces. In fairy tales, that means that the human character and *super-natural* characters in a relationship together are often in a romantic

relationship resembling that between the Beauty and the Beast. This does not mean, however, that the story of their relationship include the prescribed interactions of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type. Charles Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood” certainly is not “Beauty and the Beast”—it is its own tale type—but the main character is a beauty interacting with a beast. William Butler Yeats’ Thomas Connolly is not a woman, but in comparison with the supernatural banshee, with her face “as pale as a corpse, an’ a most o’ freckles on it, like the freckles on a turkey’s egg; an’ the two eyes sewn in wid thread,” the ordinary man is a beauty (101). Melissa Marr’s Aislinn is compelled into a relationship with the fairy although neither she nor her unknown father traded her freedom away. Yet even the tales that do not follow the steps laid out by Aarne contain intertextual links to “Beauty and the Beast” because the interaction of those two main characters is necessary to represent humanity’s evolving relationship with nature. In older tales, the relationship is marked by fear and a desire to escape. Modern tales more often move from instinctive fear to tentative love made possible by understanding.

When examining the evolution of relationships between human and supernatural characters, several terms recur and should be explained. Older views of nature are those peculiarly prevalent in cultures of a *preindustrial* age—in America, this was the time period before the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. Before this time, when large swaths of the world were comparatively undeveloped and uninhabited, views of this *wilderness* or *wasteland* inevitably came around to *domination*. Living in these undeveloped areas were beasts that had to be controlled for the good of mankind. The many inventions and social innovations occurring during the broad time period of the Industrial Revolution changed the way people interacted with and perceived their environment, leading to an *industrial* culture and frame of mind. America today is comparatively developed and densely inhabited. History has proven us

able to *dominate* nature, so we feel confident in our abilities to do so. This security has led to a softening in perception; now beasts are *domesticated* and both groups are better off for it. This view we have *assimilated* from our experiences to date; it is time to *accommodate* new realities. The *green movement* or *ecocritical* perspective emphasizes the fact that humanity and nature are inseparable and must either survive or perish together in *symbiosis*. This leaves both reality and storyworld in *disequilibrium*. Humanity must turn from a perspective of *dominance* to one of good *stewardship* of nature in order to reach *equilibrium*, a state of *communion* with nature. In this way the *wasteland* becomes a *garden*, and both human and nature truly will be improved by the relationship.

In the several stories examined, several motifs emerge. First, the reader of fairy stories is made to identify with contemporary values as represented by the human character. Fairy characters may be benevolent, malevolent, or neutral toward humans. These motifs are different in character or degree in older tales compared to newer tales, but largely they are similar. However, contemporary American tales introduce an identification of the human character with nature through the fairy character. The changes in the fairy character shown through the climax of the tale are brought about with ease; the reader is made to be confident that the new relationship dynamics are right and proper. This last recurring feature in the fairy tales says the most about the prevailing contemporary American mindset: Though our perception of the domination of nature is nuanced, overall this relationship is seen as inevitable and beneficial for the entire ecosystem. As defined by Cheryll Glotfelty, ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” I hope to here take “an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty xviii). We may now examine a sampling of hypotexts that influenced the fairy tales popular in contemporary America.

Older Influences on Modern American Fairy Tales

A large part of the motivation for telling fairy tales seems to be, as Jack Zipes says in *When Dreams Came True*, that fairy tales “emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways” (1). Early fairy tales in particular use the metaphors of the supernatural to explore humanity’s fears about the inevitable destruction brought by “bestial and barbaric forces” in the wider environment (1). Indeed, this wish to understand the frightening larger world around us seems to be the reason fairy tales sprung up. Older fairy tales may be more likely than contemporary tales to be wholly associated with the functions of escapism as catalogued by Tolkien: “Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation” (67). As seen in this scheme, through fantastic works humans escape into an unreal world to devise innovative solutions to real-world problems. The “bestial and barbaric” forces of the wilderness are then understood in their opposition to humanity through the device of the *super-natural*.

Fairy tales can inform us about society. The fairy tale is “historically determined and, far from being timeless, speaks volumes about the society and historical time in which it was told” (Smith, Kevin Paul 165). Unlike in the critical theory of “new historicism” explained by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, I do not aim to pick “outlandish and irregular” fairy tale episodes in order to “undermine” “epochal truths” and “[preserve] the radical strangeness of the past by gathering heterogeneous elements” in literature. This thesis identifies more with the “old historicism” they decry (Gallagher 51); it is my opinion that, though they cannot be said to reflect the beliefs of every member of a society, the themes recurring in the literature of a period mimic prevailing beliefs in that culture. Fairy tales, particularly those not intended to fulfill “high literary” goals, intentionally respond to the prevailing concerns of a group of people at a

particular time. A culture maintains a story because of its value to that culture through its applicability to a wide base. The transmitters of folklore will not waste their time telling stories that have no bearing on their lives, and so there must be a reason that this motif has survived and thrived in so many fairy tale types. The forest survives as the setting of so many fairy tales because the danger it represents has a real world referent. I wish to use popular tale types from the fairy tale genre to identify what “epochal truths” may exist therein. Individual tale tellers betray their individual outlook in individual tales, but enough tales put together can reveal the prevailing regional mood at a particular time.

For example, in the 19th century Americans generally believed in manifest destiny, the right to move west across North America and claim everything for the jurisdiction of their nation. Henry Nash Smith, author of *Virgin Land*, says that this “pull of a vacant continent, pulling population westward” is believed by many to have “shaped” “American life and character” (3). Likely this belief was popularly reinforced by a Biblical passage that would have been well-known to the largely Christian population: “And God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (*King James Bible*, Gen. 1:26). Americans come out of a global tradition of environmental dominance that began long before the Mayflower. The fact that some Americans currently believe nature may, can, and should be mined to its limits to fulfill our every need and desire should not be surprising. It is a long-held, long-reinforced cultural view that likely stems from a basic desire for personal survival. Today, as in the industrial age about which Smith writes, the resources of nature “promise of a power greater than any in the past” (9), extending the comforts of human life far beyond mere survival.

Views of nature explored in preindustrial fairy tales draw on this global tradition. A person's outlook on the world was then influenced by a different background than it would be in the same region after the exponential growth of technology brought innumerable changes to daily life. Compared to the interconnected world of today, groups of people lived in relative seclusion from other groups, separated by field and wood. In real life, as well as in literature, things to fear existed in this no-man's-land. A human wandering alone through the woods or along a lonely road could encounter human beings with malicious intent for strangers. The woods typically carried the danger of travelers being attacked by wildlife. Isolated groups of people living so close to nature had to be aware of the many risks of the wider world where the laws of man held no sway. The villages and castles where people gathered together for protection became their fortification against the wilderness. Lines would be drawn between civilization and the wasteland, and these human concerns would be explored in metaphor through narrative.

These are the prevailing ideas that go into older fairy tales. In contrast to contemporary fairy tales, certain recurring themes take on meaning. Human characters in older tales are uncertain of their fates when they encounter the fairy "Other." Adaptation causes them to fear the supernatural creature as powerful and threatening. The humans wish to escape this danger through their wits or physical power, but have little confidence in their desperate actions to do so successfully. Every escape from the perilous woods to the walled safety of civilization is cause for celebration. Impulses toward use of the fairy character are bred out of uncertainty and reinforce the difference between human and supernatural. There is here little of the impulse toward communion between Beauty and Beast seen in more contemporary tales.

The earliest things we acknowledge as fairy tales were told orally, and this non-definitive style of transmission meant that story elements could be divided or combined upon retelling. The

resulting variants maintain certain intertextual links with the “original” story as well as the larger fairy tale genre. For example, several variations of stories like “Beauty and the Beast” and “Little Red Riding Hood” have been recorded in the Aarne-Thompson index. Certain of the tales passed down through our literary history have become well known, if only through the popularity of Walt Disney cartoons, to the majority of the American public. As Kate Bernheimer notes, “a reader will easily recognize a version of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ that contains *no* cape, *no* woods, and *no* wolf” (xix) thanks to certain intertextual markers retained through the many permutations of the tale through time. Most of the fairy tales from across Europe have hundreds of recorded variants. These variants can show the beliefs of a people shifting and refining over time.

When considering the relations between humanity and the larger world of nature as told through fairy tales, the tale type of “Beauty and the Beast” must be considered due to its inherent conflict between human and beast. This tale type, branching off from “The Search for the Lost Husband” as 425C in the Aarne-Thompson index, has over fifteen hundred recorded variations (Aarne 143, Bacchilega 72). Fairy tales that are not intentional retellings of this story inevitably still have obvious intertextual links if they at all discuss the relationship between humans and the threat presented by the wilderness. Just as readers may mark a version of “Little Red Riding Hood” with no cape, woods, or wolf, so too may readers identify as “Beauty and the Beast” a story containing not a single rose. Little Red Riding Hood is described as a beauty; she interacts with a beast; yet her story does not fit the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type. William Butler Yeats’ princess is born out of a mother’s wish for a beautiful child; she interacts with her brothers, turned into beasts; yet her story does not fit the “Beauty and the Beast” tale type. The stories in this section, as well as in the later section, reflect their time period’s prevailing

attitudes toward nature not because of a repetitive, formulaic story structure, but because of the simple fact that in them human and supernatural characters interact.

A. Little Red Riding Hood—A Warning

In its earliest incarnations, the fairy tale served an adaptive function in regard to people's perception of the dangers of their society. Certain stories to be found in anthologies of fairy tales popular centuries ago in Europe are familiar to most Americans who know anything about fairy tales; Little Red Riding Hood is one of these tales. Although the tale had been spread through the oral tradition of French peasants for at least two centuries before Charles Perrault wrote it down (Tatar 3), his 1697 version is perhaps the earliest written record of the tale (11). This story exemplifies the use of fairy stories as cautionary tales: hearers of this story learn unequivocally not to venture alone into the dangerous wilderness.

The titular character is introduced in Perrault's version of "Little Red Riding Hood," as translated by scholar Maria Tatar, as "a village girl, the prettiest you can imagine" (11). Readers are meant to immediately identify with this character, styled as an archetype of innocence and goodness appealing to broad audiences. This lovely girl is one day tasked by her mother to take some cakes to her ailing grandmother, and so she walks to her grandmother's cottage in "another village." To get to this village, Little Red Riding Hood must travel through a wood, a no-man's-land of danger, in order to attain the safety provided by mass human settlement. The wolf will not attack her then and there, for he knows "some woodcutters [are] in the forest." He must get her away from others, far into his own territory, to get his way. The girl, "who did not know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to a wolves," tells him her specific destination: She is going "beyond the mill that you can see over there [to] the first house you come to in the village." The

wolf speeds directly to the house on the fringes of civilization, while Little Red Riding Hood meanders slowly down a longer path. The wolf, pretending to be her granddaughter, tricks the grandmother into telling him how to open the locked door to her home and “devour[s] her in no time” (12). When Little Red Riding Hood finally appears, the conversation familiar to most lovers of fairy tales occurs:

“Grandmother, what big eyes you have!”

“The better to see with, my child.”

“Grandmother, what big teeth you have!”

“The better to eat you with!”

Upon saying these words, the wicked wolf threw himself on Little Red Riding Hood and gobbled her up. (13)

If Little Red Riding Hood had known to fear the “Other” found in the woods, a beast with supernatural abilities of mind may not have eaten her. If she had sped straight to the village and not dawdled in the woods, her grandmother might not have been tricked. A mistrust of the dangers found in the real world wilderness is shown through this instance of literary supernatural “Othering.”

Most tales that do include physical description of the story’s surroundings include a sketch of a wilderness. Here, away from society, is where the most potent magics occur. This fairy tale in particular obviously serves as a warning to young girls. This story, in all its permutations, is one of the most frequent examples used in contemporary fairy tale criticism, illustrating theories from feminist to psychoanalytic.² The danger could be interpreted as rape, physical mutilation, the girl’s desire for seduction and/or death—any number of things a stranger can do to a young girl (Tatar 4-5). A wealth of criticism explores these variants and implications,

² For a sample, see *The Classic Fairy Tales*, edited by Maria Tatar; *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed: Modernism’s Fairy Tales*, by Ann Martin; or *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, by Cristina Bacchiega.

but for my purposes it only matters that the girl finds some type of danger embodied in the woods and that this tale shows the perceived values and dangers of the time periods during which it was told.

In this older version of the familiar story, there is no happy ending. Little Red Riding Hood violates basic strategies of safety by becoming too familiar with the supernatural element of the forest that insinuates itself into her good graces. Whereas in modern tales this identification with nature is often a means to salvation, here identification with the supernatural leads only to death. In fact, Perrault in his version includes a moral. He specifies that “not all wolves / Are exactly the same,” but when he closes with the warning to “watch out if you haven’t learned that tame wolves / Are the most dangerous of all” (13), the difference between types of wolves is negligible. Creatures here vary between dangerous and more dangerous, not between tame and wild. Older tales like this one do not illustrate a society comfortable enough with the wilderness to believe both human and nature may exist peacefully without effort. Humans in these tale types wish to be safe from the dangers of nature, but deaths much like Little Red Riding Hood’s are all too likely to happen. There is here no sense of certainty that domination of nature is likely or wholly possible. The wilderness here is worthy of fear alone. The escapist function of this tale exists not for the pleasure of leaving behind real world concerns, but for the adaptive function of understanding in fuller depth the real relationships between human and nature. Though the talking wolf is a fantastic element, the concerns of Little Red Riding Hood are entirely real and worthy objects of introspection by the tale tellers of the contemporary society.

B. Orality and William Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats tries in *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* (1889), his collection of traditional tales from around the island, to maintain the oral folkloric roots of fairy stories in part through the intertextual markers of dialect and syntax. In this way the warnings about the “Other” of preindustrial folklore is retained in his written retellings and accessible to modern scholars. Because Yeats is one of the most commonly referenced authors in both the primary texts and paratexts of contemporary works, and because his work links back to a much older tradition of storytelling, some of the tales collected by Yeats will be considered here as foundation texts influential to the modern American fairy tale.

Though Yeats was writing about magic in contemporary times, he “sought a simplicity that the nineteenth-century world of advancing industrialism seemed to deny” (Yeats xi). He retreated into the beliefs of the past as well as, apparently, the same beliefs present in rural communities in his present day. Much of Yeats’ information came from printed sources, but his primary method of information collection came through talking to his countrymen across Ireland. The persons from whom these stories were collected felt, as far as we know, in earnest about their experiences with the supernatural existence and influence of fairies. The knowledge transmitted through the folk community illustrates what were contemporary credible sources. They explained the abnormal things that had happened in their lives as best they could using the best folk knowledge of the day, that gathered by tradition of history. As evidence of his claim that “In Ireland [fairies] are still extant,” Yeats asks “a woman of a village in County Dublin” about mermaids and also asks “an old man in County Sligo” if he had ever seen a fairy (3). Both answer with the casualness of someone answering that he had seen rain before. Though Yeats

cautions, “If you are a stranger, you will not readily get ghost and fairy legends” (4) from the country dwellers, it is obvious that Yeats himself was able to gain the information he needed by becoming close to his interviewees and ensuring they did not fear his ridicule. This attitude Yeats carried into his presentation in *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*. His attitude toward fairies was acceptance bordering on belief: “I have not rationalized a single hobgoblin,” he says of his work (8). This signifies, if not his own belief in the supernatural, his intention to present, within the world of his book, fairies in the unironic, unwinking tone later advocated by Tolkien when he says that “the magic” presented within the storyworld must “be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away” (39).

The stories Yeats compiles have real people as characters; the characters reveal the lives of the real people who had encountered the fairies because the folk themselves are the actors. Thus the work of Yeats gives a uniquely direct link between contemporary belief and literature. He sums up the various stories told to him in 1891 by “Old Biddy Hart,” a storyteller from his hometown. Though she believes it dangerous to talk about fairies (“How firmly she believed in them! how greatly she feared offending them!”), she is enamored of “the gentry,” a flattering name given to the fairies by the humans who feared their mischievous powers. The woman “endowed them with all she knows of splendour, although that is not such a great deal, for her imagination is easily pleased.” Though she fears the fairies’ powers, she is also fond of the idea of their existence and possible benevolence. “We,” Yeats and the reader, more cultured citizens of the world, have seen more “fantastic glories” in “picture-books and read of in stories” fairies grander than anything described by Hart (Yeats 301).

Yet her fear and awe of the fairies in her immediate environment is compared with her base visions of heaven—“to them her soul goes out,” to Heaven “in love and hope” and to

Fairyland “in love and fear” (Yeats 302). Both are supernatural destinations real in the storyworld of her beliefs. Her fairies, having the unpredictable ability to be either benevolent or malevolent, deserve both her love and fear. In the same way the Judeo-Christian God has the power to both forgive and smite, the fairies could use their magical abilities for good or ill. Fairies were wild things: wild as wolves, wild as God. They could be admired, but from a distance. God was remote enough to prompt hope mixed with love, and humans wished for everlasting union with that supernatural being. But fairies were too close, here on earth in the nearby forest, for a human to feel anything but fear mixed with that love. Seven years at a fairy court filled with dancing was enjoyable enough, but humans always retreated to civilization in the end (301). We do see that despite her love for it, Hart avoids Fairyland. She views the fairies as “the gentry,” a group of people far above the common people in magnificence and power, in part due to her belief that they are so and in part due to her fear that they would punish her for calling them anything less flattering. She views them positively due in part to fear, and common sense tells her to stay away from the fairies and their power. She would never intentionally go to or stay with them forever. Old Biddy Hart and people like her do not identify with the supernatural.

If Hart’s beliefs match those of other people in her region at that time, as they seem to do in Yeats’ recording, then Old Biddy Hart represents well the folk mind that kept these tales alive among the children who would grow up to spread the tales to succeeding generations. Hart’s dread of fairies is also seen when Yeats presents the tale “How Thomas Connolly Met the Banshee,” as told by J. Todhunter. The story is simple enough: As Connolly is walking home from work “in the dusk o’ the evening” down a “lonesome road,” he meets what he first takes to be an old woman but soon realizes is a banshee, her face “as pale as a corpse...an’ the two eyes

sewn in wid thread” (100-1). He is deeply afraid and mindlessly flees to the safety of home immediately upon his realization: “[H]ow I brought meself home that same night the Lord in heaven only knows,” he says (101). His claim of the woman’s status is proven, he says, because later that night other villagers heard the wild shrieking of a banshee when a visitor to the town died (102). Fairy stories then were linked to uncertainty and death. The human characters were unable to confront the supernatural “Other” with the confidence that the meeting would end well for the human side. Traditionally, the natural forces outside humanity’s control were explored in metaphor with nature as “Other,” and humanity did not sympathize with this “Other.”

Yeats relates “The Twelve Wild Geese” by Patrick Kennedy, another tale in which fairies create havoc for humans living on the border of their domain. When a queen idly wishes for a beautiful “daughter with her skin as white as that snow, her cheeks as red as that blood, and her hair as black as that raven,” and says that she would “give away every one of [her] twelve sons for her,” a “severe-looking old woman” appears to grants her unmeant wish. Twelve years later, the daughter learns that her unknown brothers had been turned into geese. Being a loving sympathetic character, she stops at nothing less than sneaking out of the castle to “try to restore them to their own shapes” (255). When she finds them deep in the woods, the fairy woman informs the siblings that the girl “must spin and knit twelve shirts for [her brothers] out of bog-down” and never once speak, laugh, or cry. (256). The task seems unreasonably hard and implausible for this young human princess to complete. A prince from the kingdom outside the forest comes upon her in the siblings’ garden when she is eight shirts deep into her task. They fall in love immediately, and he takes her away with him to marry. The task becomes even more impossible to complete when the prince’s jealous stepmother throws their first two children into the jaws of a “wicked-looking wolf in the garden” (in reality the fairy woman in disguise) and

makes it look like the young queen ate her own son. In a superhuman effort to avoid crying or speaking in her own defense, the princess is able to finish the twelve shirts and return her brothers to their human state (257-9). There is no reason for the former geese to continue living in exile. The forest is a place of wolves and fairy enchantments, not a place to make a permanent home. When the fairy returns the children and vanishes, the supernatural leaves their lives and they have no desire to continue the experience. At the end of the story, all may go back to their lives as untroubled royalty; all is happily ever after. The human has somehow, despite all odds, completed the task set her by the supernatural. Though the fairy is the force uniting the princess with her husband and the savior of her children, no gratitude is felt for her interventions; if not for her cruel spell on the brothers, the heroine would not be in this situation. Though the fairy “Other” has the potential for both benevolence and malevolence, the overall tone of the story does not encourage sympathy with the supernatural.

C. America’s Touchstone Beast Tale

If fairy tales featuring the relationship between Beauty and Beast characters symbolize the real world interactions between humanity and nature, then “the version of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ best known to Anglo-American audiences” (Tatar 26) must be considered in this investigation of American fairy tales even though its originators were not American. According to Maria Tatar, in 1757 Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont wrote the “canonical text in Anglo-American and European cultures” (Tatar 27), a short story she based upon “a baroque literary version more than one hundred pages written in 1740 by Mademoiselle Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve” (26). “Beauty and the Beast” can be read merely as the attempt to assuage the fears of brides forced into marrying an unpleasant “beast” of a man (27). However, the tale found its

relevance in the eighteenth century, as it does today, by the assimilation and accommodation of contemporary values with a much earlier, farther reaching tradition of humanity coming to terms with the potentially dangerous unknown.

In this version, Beauty has the love of a father and three brothers as well as the jealousy of her two sisters. She chooses, in her never-ending desire to see the happiness of her family, to give her life to a beast in order to spare her father's life. When she consents to marry the beast due to the beast's good character, she is rewarded with his transformation into a smart, handsome man. "Beauty and the Beast" begins to bring into the fairy tale tradition certain motifs that are familiar in modern American tales. Most notably, the final union of human and beast begins to show humanity identifying with nature, dangerous though it has the potential to be. However, this early version of the tale has a pervasive sense of fear and mistrust for the beast, indicating that the implied audience had a different relationship with nature than contemporary American audiences.

De Beaumont largely (although not fully) separates her heroine from the humans around her, indicating that Beauty is an unusual person with constitutional abilities exceptional from those of the other major characters. Though the men in the family love Beauty, their roles in her life are downplayed compared to the sisters'. De Beaumont dehumanizes Beauty's sisters by calling them "nasty creatures" (Tatar 40). The sisters try "to act like ladies of the court" and "spend time only with people of rank." They have entirely bought into the constructed societal hierarchy and "[pay] no attention at all to girls from merchant families," girls who are less refined into a time-specific mold. Although the sisters are themselves daughters of a merchant, they act as though their familial wealth elevates them to a more 'civilized' position than those around them. They are jealous of their good and beautiful sister and "[make] fun" of her

regularly (32). Though Beauty still loves her sisters (36), following the time period's trend of using fairy tales, as Tatar says, as "vehicles for indoctrinating and enlightening children about the virtues of good manners, good breeding, and good behavior" (26), the fact that her sisters say things like "She is so stupid and such a simpleton" means that the reader dissociates Beauty from her sisters and, by extension, the high society they so value. Beauty, we feel, is a deeper person than her sisters, and she can understand real value in the world. The other citizens in the story take this view; while they joy in the fact that the two sisters' "pride take[s] a fall" when their father loses his fortune, they simultaneously are "upset" for Beauty's misfortune. The family leaves the expensive city for the countryside; there Beauty "[becomes] stronger, and the hard work [makes] her very healthy" (33) while her sisters stay idle, bored and reminiscing about the fun they had in society. Physically and emotionally, Beauty is a paragon of womanhood compared to her sisters. Life outside of human society is not easy or something to be desired, but the heroine is equipped with the fortitude to live on the edge of civilization.

Beauty's father first enters the environment that will change his daughter's life. Returning home from a failed attempt to recover his fortune through a newly returned ship full of his merchandise, he has "to cross a dense forest" and there gets lost. Nature is unrelenting; the wind of a "fierce snowstorm" twice knocks him off his horse, prompting him to seek shelter in a brightly lit castle "at the end of a long avenue of trees." Everything he needs—food, fire, bed, clothing—is left invitingly out for him. These he believes to have been left by "some good fairy who has taken pity on [him]" (Tatar 34). This shows the ambivalent attitude of people towards fairies and their supernatural powers. In cases such as this, in which uncertain, unusual circumstances appear to the advantage of the human, the human may infer that his salvation was due to favor from the supernatural world. However, things change for Beauty's father when he

takes a rose that had not been left out for him. Instantly the ruler of the castle, the Beast, appears to rebuke him for his ungratefulness. He tells the man he will have to “pay for [his] offense” with his life after “exactly a quarter of an hour to beg God’s forgiveness.” However, the Beast offers “to forgive” him “if one of [his] daughters consents to die in [their father’s] place.” Though the man does not intend “to sacrifice one of his daughters to this hideous monster,” he returns home and tells his six children of his misfortune. As soon as his children surround him, he cries and tells Beauty, “[T]ake these roses. They have cost your poor father dearly” (35). Her sisters blame Beauty for the fate of their father—“She’s responsible for Father’s death,” (36) they exclaim, continuing their lifelong pattern of attacking their sister.

Beauty’s three brothers exemplify the older attitude toward our ability to dominate nature when they say “We will find this monster, and we are prepared to die under his blows if we are unable to slay him” (Tatar 36). They recognize the importance of asserting human dominance—if they do not protect their family, either their sister or father will die at the Beast’s hand. The battlefield is markedly drawn between civilized people and the supernatural, and there humans must fight for their survival. However, though all are convinced of the importance of this act, they are not confident in their ability to execute the act. They do not feel the certainty readers today would feel for the heroes of a tale. The merchant replies to his sons, “The beast’s power is so great that I don’t have the least hope of killing him” (36). At the time, people felt the necessity to fortify against the dangers of the wilderness, but there was little they could do with confidence. People like Beauty’s brothers were prepared to fight against the unknown in order to save their fellows, but the fight against the “Other” was an uncertain battle. This meant that happy endings were not the assured outcome of fairy stories. Indeed, Beauty is so certain of their

inability to protect her that she becomes “determined to go to the palace” and take her father’s place (36).

In the Beast’s castle, Beauty cries at the imminent loss of her own life. The Beast, desiring Beauty’s love, tells her she is the only mistress in the castle and that he will obey her. Despite this, she remains afraid of him. When she sees a bedroom with her own name marked on the door, she is cheered and gives herself up to Heaven’s pity—another supernatural force (Tatar 37). Though she believes she will not yet die, she still fears him and the roles of master and supernatural force he represents. Beauty has the power in the relationship, but she is too scared to use this agency. The only agency she makes use of is her refusal to marry, as she had before in the human world. The only power shown here given to humanity is the power given within the social structure of human civilization; such agency is meaningless in the animalistic wilderness.

This version is in some ways anticipating the love of nature of our time. By the end of the tale, Beauty doesn’t fear the Beast, she loves him (Tatar 39). Beauty is rewarded with a human husband when she consents to marry due to his being “very kind” and having a “good heart” (38). The Beast, in Beauty’s own words, has “character, virtue, and kindness,” and she feels “respect, friendship, and gratitude toward him” (40). Significantly, Beauty is given a husband with more of the qualities held high in human esteem than a sole person usually possesses. While he is still transformed, she tells the Beast “There are certainly men more monstrous than you.” Beauty prefers his kindness and honesty to falseness hid behind “charming manners” (38). One is reminded of the courtly manners of her sisters’ suitors who abandoned them when they fell into poverty (33). Beauty was right to spurn their type. The main character here survives because nature tames itself for her; as in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* and *Valiant*, this is something that the protagonist’s human suitors are unwilling to do. But the fear and uncertainty present in

all human parties until the end of the tale marks this version as one early in the history of the tale type.

This tale retains its place as a representation of the older adaptive perspective toward nature because of the amount of fear within it. In “Little Red Riding Hood,” the wolf is simply bad for humanity, something to be feared and fought. In “The Twelve Wild Geese,” the fairy brings hardship into the humans’ lives and is a force to be feared. Although “Beauty and the Beast” ends with a marriage due to the inherently romantic tale type, the fear toward the beast’s power and threat of vengeance through murder firmly place this tale within a preindustrial tradition. In comparison with contemporary fairy tales, the prevailing attitude toward nature consisted of fear and desire to dominate rather than sympathy and a desire for understanding and unity.

The confluence of older fears and oral tradition with a more modern written literary tradition laid the groundwork for modern fairy tales. These tales are able to remain relevant to contemporary audiences while retaining their traditional generic classification of “fairy tale” precisely because of the audience’s expectations of genre. Because the genre relies upon older, timeless human concerns to address topics of contemporary relevance, the contemporary attitude toward nature, in particular, becomes almost contradictory. This is why the need for accommodation of beliefs asserts itself in the genre.

In several modern fairy tales, the fairy stand-ins for “nature” can be seen as overall good or overall evil forces, reflecting our varying experiences with nature. Now as then, human characters need to assert dominance to preserve their own self-interests. However, now the need of the preindustrial society comes into conflict with the world of industrial mechanical abilities and intellectual movements calling for the preservation of the environment. Contemporary

audiences feel no great fear that the human character cannot subdue nature. They even go so far as to believe that the actions of the main character, with whom the audience is aligned through modern-day popular ideology, will be for the fairy character's own best interests. What is good for humans, in the past few decades' popular fairy stories, is good for nature as well.

Modern American Fairy Tales

Today, combined with the much older motivation of escapism into a fantasy world to understand the dangers of the wilderness is the desire to grapple with our fear that the natural world is changing for the worse and that we are the primary cause of that downward spiral. We turn to the world of metaphor and formulae to understand our own mind and accommodate this new information into a better schema. While modern fairy tales have inherited the older function to a large degree, the style of contemporary American fairy tales may be seen as more likely to serve the more mundane function of escapism as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary: “The tendency to seek, or the practice of seeking, distraction from what normally has to be endured” (escapism, *n.*). This is a different kind of self-interested literature because it shows an escape from and mitigation of guilt instead of solely fear. This type of story appeals to persons who wish to believe that our domination of the natural world is in the best interests of all concerned rather than that unchecked domination of the natural world will eventually create an environment barren for human life. Literature that serves this function may be seen as a midway point on the journey to complete accommodation of new information to old schema.

While all genres need to conform to (while in small measure extending) reader expectations, this seems especially necessary for fairy tales. Due to the developmental history of the fairy tale, expectations are varied and thus not impossible to meet at least in part. Even though our culture today relies primarily on written tradition rather than an oral tradition, this latter history is remembered when people think of fairy tales. When people tell fairy tales, they are at least dimly aware that they are telling a version of events that has been retold in slightly

different variations for generations. Thus, because all fairy tales, even new, literary ones, to some respect have to remain within the genre, we can still look at fairy tales to discern the beliefs and values of a group of people at any given time. Due to changing conditions in the real world, beliefs and thus reader expectations are constantly evolving, bringing variety into the preexisting strictures of the genre.

Here I make a distinction between so-called “literary” works and genre fiction. Fictions labeled “literary” can stand primarily on their own, irrespective of genre, because they are written with a primary intention to represent an author’s particular ideology, a style of writing, or something else that makes the work complete in itself. This contrasts with genre fiction, which succeeds primarily because it draws on a reader’s expectations of what the genre should look like and conforms to those expectations. Though small violations of these expectations are necessary to provide freshness and maintain reader interest, many of the choices made in writing must provide intertextual links to the wider genre. Thus, the intentions of the implied author of a fairy tale should be taken into consideration when deciding whether the fairy tale is intended to represent the views of a group of people at a particular time or just the ideology of the author. The “literary” fairy tales may be more likely than “pure genre fiction” to play around with genre expectations, thus either advancing the genre into a reflection of the contemporary day or reflecting a worldview that is not widely held or likely to ever be widely held. Both intentionally “literary” texts as well as intentionally “mass-market” genre texts can teach us things about the genre and therefore about the American society who is consuming these books. Thus, by analyzing the shifts found within the fairy tales over time, we may be able to chart or predict ideological movements that are gaining or losing traction, both in the past and in real time. This can tell us about, as I posit, the American people’s changing views of nature in recent years.

Several “literary” retellings of “the Beauty and the Beast” exist, such as Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” and the even further removed “Wolfland” by Tanith Lee. These versions both involve a human taking on an animal form. Their transformations into and thus acceptance of the supernatural could also provide support for the claim that fairy tales reflect a contemporary sympathy for nature. However, I have chosen to support my claim with three works intended for a mass market rather than primarily metafictional commentary intended for a literary audience. I use the Disney movie *Beauty and the Beast* and the Young Adult-designated novels *Wicked Lovely* by Melissa Marr and *Valiant* by Holly Black to illustrate the evolving American schema. The popularity of these works, crafted especially to match audience expectations for the fairy tale genre, suggests that they resonate with a large percentage of the modern American consumers of fairy tales.

In these works, certain motifs appear again and again. The main character becomes a sympathetic character due to her identification with some habit or belief held in common with the contemporary implied audience. Due in part to the character’s identification and subsequent reader identification with the sympathetic character, the reader is able to believe that anything the heroine does will be in the best interests of both herself and the supernatural world she enters into. Moreover, readers believe that, despite whatever dangers may stand in her way, the heroine will have the ability to dominate all dangerous elements and domesticate the sympathetic fairy character. In so doing, the “happily ever after” ending will be easily and definitely achieved, resulting in the environment of a garden rather than wasteland. All of these tales begin with a sense of fear, a holdover from the paradigmatic adaptive beliefs of an ancient tradition. However, modern American fairy tales begin a move toward accommodating new environmental factors with these ancient concerns. These fairy tales help readers come to terms with modern desires to

become good stewards of nature and live in a state of symbiosis, even though we know not all of nature is beneficial for humanity.

Much of the difference between preindustrial and industrial fairy tales comes from the psychological adaptation necessary for the heroine. In contemporary stories the Beauty comes to grow and change through understanding. All Beauties, as well as the humans they symbolize, must become the answer to the question ending the introductory sequence of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*: "Who could ever learn to *love* a beast?" (*Beauty and the Beast*, emphasis added). The difference between the Beast at the beginning of the movie, hiding in shadow, and the Beast near the end, dancing with Belle in a coat and tails, is obvious; the mental changes Belle must make are more subtle. As Belle comes to discover during the song "Something There," the realization that appearances may be deceiving comes as "new and a bit alarming" information. She is used to a traditional view of the Beast as "mean," "coarse," and "unrefined," but when she realizes that "now he's dear and so unsure" as well as "sweet and almost kind," she "wonder[s] why [she] didn't see it there before" (*Beauty and the Beast*). Belle, and the humans she symbolizes, must accommodate the truths about the supernatural creature she now sees with the earlier notions she held. Belle is able to successfully complete the process laid out by Piaget; humans viewing this tale should be inspired to imitate art and play out this same process with the environment in real life.

A. Identification Through Ideology or Insight

In writing a successful story, authors seek to make the audience sympathetic with the main character so that her misadventures and successes resonate with the audience. The first thing accomplished in most modern American fairy tales is the establishment of characterization,

specifically the identification of the main character with accepted cultural values. The heroine is also set against other humans in order to make the reader, who identifies with the successful heroine, feel that the shared cultural values are superior to those less desirable values espoused by the other humans in the storyworld.

No discussion of the contemporary American conception of fairy tales would be complete without a mention of Walt Disney. The film company has been influencing the fairy tale field since its production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937. Though Madame de Beaumont's version of the tale type called "Beauty and the Beast" is the definitive version to scholars, Disney's feature length animated version of the tale is the one that contemporary Americans would most likely recognize. The story is about a beautiful young woman who leaves her village in search of her missing father, and in a castle in the woods she finds a beast keeping her father prisoner. Belle takes her father's place and comes to realize that she would rather spend her life with the Beast, in reality a transformed human, than with any of the villagers from her old life. The movie ends with both main characters human, in love, and no doubt planning a wedding that will make them joint rulers over the once-enchanted kingdom in the woodland. This story, beloved by viewers for many years, is indicative of the expectations of the American implied audience for whom it was crafted, an audience used to Hollywood-style happy endings.

In Walt Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, the heroine is quickly identified as a loving young woman who appreciates character and adventure over handsome features and social conformity, preferences that are often shown as best in various forms of contemporary American media. The movie begins with words that immediately evoke the genre of fairy tale: "Once upon a time." Through stained glass pictures, we are introduced to the basic plot. An enchantress has cursed a human prince to remain a beast until "he [can] learn to love another and earn her love in

return;” if he cannot do this by his twenty-first birthday, he will “be doomed to remain a beast for all time.” The narrator asks, “Who could ever learn to love a beast?” ‘Probably the eponymous heroine of the title,’ the audience thinks as the title of the movie appears. As her introductory song informs us, the main character Belle’s “name means beauty” (*Beauty and the Beast*). The establishment of the main character is integral to the success of this tale.

The first song introducing Belle and her village home instructs the audience in how to perceive the storyworld. Belle’s house is made of white stone with green shutters, surrounded by a warm yellow sky, green grass and trees, a wooden fence, and a roofed well. Everything is charmingly rustic. The “little town” is a “quiet village,” Belle sings, with “every day like the one before.” The village is pleasant and safe, the way civilization should be. However, Belle is not perfectly content in part due to her desire to read. In one of her most animated moments, Belle talks about her favorite book, “the most wonderful story about a beanstalk, and an ogre,” and enthuses that she loves it because it also includes “far-off places, daring swordfights, magic spells, a prince in disguise.” Belle alone among the villagers, it would seem, has the ability to appreciate an adventure worthy of a fairy tale heroine. Since there exists one particular day that Belle and her father came “to this poor provincial town,” we may believe that Belle has interests strange for the town because she came from a different, probably larger town with different cultural values. The townspeople sing about how “strange, no question” Belle is “with a dreamy, far-off look and her nose stuck in a book.” This character should appeal to a great many American audience members who feel out of place in the prevailing society and desire to seek “adventure in the great wide somewhere” (*Beauty and the Beast*). We recognize that the quaint countryside village is the perfect setting for the beginning of what we acknowledge to be a fairy tale, but we also recognize through our identification that Belle is a heroine for contemporary

America. The quaint village does not match up with the prevailing view of America as a superpower. Our industrial lifestyles do not match the preindustrial life seen on the screen. Americans, like Belle, may feel fondness for the village, but our self-image does not fully align with the ways of the past. The setting may be out of date in order to better fit genre expectations of folk stories, but the heroine must represent a stylized, shorthand version of contemporary America. The audience identifies with Belle through her values and sees the villagers as “Other.”

This motif is also seen in *Wicked Lovely*, the first in a five-book series by Melissa Marr. In it a human teenage girl, Aislinn Foy, has the Sight, the ability to see fairies and “the other world—the ugly one” (Marr 4). However, she has had to pretend to be normal her entire life. All the humans “would think she was utterly mad” (5) if she began interacting with the fairies surrounding her throughout the day—at a pool hall, on the sidewalk—and the fairies would try to destroy her (245). As the lore of centuries claimed, any fairy who learned of her ability would likely blind or kill her in fury. The main character views the fairies as monsters plaguing the “real world” (4). Guided by her grandmother, who teaches her to use her inherited ability, Aislinn hates and fears the fairies who play tricks on the unsuspecting humans all around her. She perfectly embodies the fear schema present in older tales. However, she becomes the focus of Keenan, the Summer King of the fairies. He has been hunting for his queen for over nine centuries (210), putting girl after girl to the test. From the moment Keenan chooses her, her humanity begins slipping away, and she cannot live her life as anything other than a fairy. This becomes the fate of the one girl who sees fairies for the manipulative creatures they are.

The main character is not particularly distanced from the people around her in this novel; except for her best friend Seth, we do not see much of the humans. The most interaction between Aislinn and the wider human world comes at school. Her friends constantly encourage her to

“live a little,” knowing she has a crush on Seth. One friend says, “There’s nothing wrong with a little quick love *if* they’re good. I hear he’s good.” Aislinn would rather “be just friends than one of his throwaway girls,” and so she will not take her friend’s advice to become a sexually active teenager with someone she likes and risk losing his respect (Marr 36). This ideological disconnect puts the main character at a slight distance from her friends and the values they all represent. For most of the book she relies primarily on her friend Seth and the converted train cars (made of iron, the primary poison of fairies) he lives in. In *Wicked Lovely*, Marr constructs her audience’s identification with the heroine not due to obvious human failings, but because of Aislinn’s superhuman ability to see the supernatural cruelty of the fairy “Other.”

Marr distinguishes between the parts of human civilization that encourage life to flourish. Aislinn must find “relative safety” in the more rundown sections of town with defensive “iron bars and steel doors.” She prefers to stay in her small hometown of Huntsdale, which “wasn’t thriving. It hadn’t been for years. That meant the fey didn’t thrive [t]here either.” Larger cities are “too thriving, too alive, too filled with parks and trees” (7). Though the neglect and poor stewardship of the natural world works out here to the main character’s benefit, the dereliction of the environment remains a sign that the relationship between human and nature is in dire need of repair. Humans are harming their own sustenance by poisoning the supernatural weeds in their vegetable garden. The same things that humans should desire in their homes, the sustaining forces of nature, allow fairies to grow. A town without greenery should be to both fairies and humans a prison, as it is to the fairies in *Valiant*.

Valiant by Holly Black is the story of a teenage runaway who becomes immersed in the fairy poisonings that implicate her coworkers and employer, a troll who lives inside the Manhattan Bridge (83). The first chapter effectively cuts off the main character from everyone

close to her in her daily life. Seventeen-year-old (29) Valerie Russell is removed from her lacrosse team for fighting with an insulting, homophobic teammate (10). She walks in on her mother and her boyfriend on the verge of having sex in her living room, and then she finds out her best friend knew but had not told her (17). When Val goes to New York City and sleeps in a subway rather than returning to those people that night, the reader can sympathize with the decision to flee from the societal heartache and find “contentment” in a place where her home in New Jersey seems “far away, and school an odd and nonsensical ritual” (174). Within the human world of New York City, Val stumbles into a smaller world of solitary fairy expatriates.

Though the story takes place in a city, Val lives anything but a civilized life. Black describes her feelings as “removed from everything, a sleepwalker who had stepped off the path of normal life and into the forest where anything could happen” (28). She and her fellow runaway friends live like wild creatures within an abandoned subway platform of the urban jungle. She feels “invisible” and completely cut off from the impersonal inhabitants of New York City: “It was supposed to make you feel small, but she felt liberated. No one was looking at her or judging her based on whether her outfit matched or who her friends were. They didn’t see her at all” (63). Val has in one day become pitifully estranged from her normal life, even cutting her hair bald to mark the change. She has embraced an entirely new and wild reality in her metaphorical “forest where anything could happen,” feeling “as though she had never had any other life but this one” (197). Here, in the urban wilderness, she will encounter the supernatural and confront the inner demons plaguing her life within society.

Black dissociates the human elements of the city from the darker fairy world Val is entering. Early into her adventures Val becomes too close to the fairy world by becoming addicted to “Never,” the medicine her employer Ravus makes to protect the fairies exiled to the

city from the prevalent iron, a primary symbol of human industry and the one element poisonous to the supernatural (Black 72). This exile to an environment of urban industrialism is torture to the fairies used to untainted groves of trees and flowers or stalactites and shimmering rock. Ravus describes the punishment as “difficult” since in the city “[t]here is poison everywhere, and iron so close that it makes my skin itch and my throat burn.” (169). When the human runaways steal spoonfuls of the fairy drug on their deliveries, they get high on the ability to perform magic. Val’s mind becomes totally altered, and she is unable to perform to the height of her physical potential. Only when she rejects the fairy drug can she use her sober wits and defeat her fairy enemy in the duel for Ravus’s physical heart. She has to use her wit developed in her human life to defeat the showy moves of her fairy opponent Mabry. Even if the *super-natural* elements should through power and cruelty have the upper hand, the cunning of humans allow us to dominate nature. Just as iron bent to the will of humans destroys fairies, we have the knowledge and ability to use elements of nature against itself.

B. Duality of Fairy Disposition

As in older times, modern American fairy tales portray some fairies as good, while others are evil. Here, all three heroines at first fear the fairy “Other,” but they are able to realize during the course of the story’s adventures that the supernatural hero is overall a character whose good qualities override any negative tendencies. All of the enchanted characters in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* are good. Belle immediately becomes fond of the servants; in the shapes of typical household objects, they wait cheerfully on her every wish and make her feel like a welcome guest. It takes time for Belle to warm up to the gruff master of the castle, however. Only after he

proves he cares for her by defending her from a pack of wolves with his bare claws does she attempt to interact with him as a peer.

Belle does not know that the Beast was human ten years ago, so she at first interacts with him as a woman caged with a wild animal. To understand why the Beast does not act like a debonair human prince, we must know that the Beast was ten years old when he met the sorceress who enchanted the entire castle. The rose, the all-important indicator of the Beast's chances of reentering the world of humanity, has begun to wilt because the Beast is approaching his twenty-first birthday, making him twenty years old. At most a few weeks pass between Belle meeting the Beast and her love allowing him to become human again; Belle's village is full of the bright orange leaves of autumn when her father leaves it, and the castle is surrounded by bare branches and winter snow while Belle lives there. According to information in the "Be Our Guest" song, "for ten years [the servants have] been rusting;" The Beast's current age of 20 minus 10 years of enchantment equals an age of 10 years old when the Beast was enchanted. The ten-year-old child, apparently living in command of a castle full of servants without guidance from parent or guardian, has grown up like the animal he appears to be without any example of a human adult to follow. He cannot eat with a spoon. In a scene released on the 2010 DVD version of the film, the Beast reveals that he has forgotten any ability to read he ever acquired (*Beauty and the Beast*). He is a brilliant animal who doesn't fully understand how primed and yearning he is to embrace all aspects of humanity. He may be proud and unpleasant due to a childhood of unchecked power and separation from normal civilization, but the Beast is not malevolent toward Belle or even the other humans who wish to kill him.

Wicked Lovely does not portray fairies as the sparkling, miniature bringers of joy they are often portrayed as in children's products. In the first chapter, we learn Aislinn's rules for

interacting with the fairies: “*Don’t stare at invisible faeries, Rule #3*” (11); “*Don’t answer invisible faeries, Rule #2*” (12); and “*Rule #1: Don’t ever attract faeries’ attention*” (13). If they knew she had the Sight, they would blind or kill her, likely torturing her for the remainder of her life. Girls chosen by Keenan lose their human lives. Once he chooses a target, that girl loses her humanity and faces a terrible choice. She may choose to become a Summer Girl, a fairy with no desire other than serving the king and the fairies of court. Alternatively, she may undergo the test of “the Winter Queen’s chill” to either become the destined queen or a perpetually pained, frozen fairy who aspired to greatness beyond her destiny (1). When Keenan, years earlier, was drawn to Aislinn’s mother and by his interest stole her humanity, she chose a third option of death by running away from the life-sustaining fairy world (272-3). The Winter Queen herself is the villain of the novel. She tries anything she can to prevent her son from finding his destined mate and finally becoming the full powers of a ruler. She previously killed her own husband and would rather kill her son, his potential mate, and her own pawns than allow another ruler’s influence to threaten her own. Keenan here is not malevolent like his mother, but in this book he simply looks out for the main character’s best interests. No matter how much Keenan protects Aislinn from various attackers, his kindness does not override the dark elements coloring the politics of the fairy world the heroine is forced to rule. Marr, in this first book of a series, creates the impression that the main fairy hero will grow to be fond of Aislinn in her own right rather than merely protecting her for his own benefit, but that shift is now obviously incomplete.

Holly Black’s novel also builds upon the tradition of potential for mischief or kindness seen in older fairy tales. In the first meeting between *Valiant*’s hero and heroine, Ravus does not take kindly to Val’s friend stealing from him while breaking and entering into his home. As Madame de Beaumont’s Beauty volunteers to save her father’s life by taking his place, Val saves

her friend's fingers from being broken or dislocated by offering him her service. She says to Ravus "I'll stay if you let her go." Ravus responds with "eyes narrowed, then one black eyebrow rose. 'Aren't you the gallant?'" (89). In taking her friend's place, Val proves her nature to the beast. He approves of her attitude and fairly accepts a month's servitude as a messenger instead of payment through torture. Ravus definitely has the potential to exact painful vengeance upon the human girls, but he is sophisticated enough to collect his damages in a fashion agreeable to a contemporary American system of justice.

However, other elements in Black's fairy world are not so just. Mabry, the lover of Ravus' best friend whom he accidentally killed in a duel, has framed the prevalent poisonings of exiled fairies on Ravus. The fairies who believe this lie wish to make Ravus pay for killing his fellow fairies. However, the human heroine has already identified with this kind fairy on a deep level. When one expatriate, Greyan, swings to attack Ravus, Val moves to defend her acquaintance on instinct and attacks Greyan with a pipe she had picked up. Her instinctive reaction is to interject herself into the disturbance in the supernatural world and through her human intervention restore balance. At this point in the story, this is not possible. Greyan "slam[s] the bronze blades into her leg," causing her to immediately pass out, but her distraction allows Ravus time to collect himself and save her (154-5). After this, Ravus teaches Val to use a sword in order to repay the debt of his life he owes her. His fairness and kindness—so different from the people she left behind—win conscious feelings of devotion from Val. After the partnered defense, human and fairy work together in something like a partnership for their mutual benefit.

C. Sympathy with Nature

Some aspects of modern fairy tales are unlike those told orally around the preindustrial campfire. After the Industrial Revolution, society's treatment of nature changed to confident domination. We are now more likely to feel sympathetic for the best interests of nature and its symbolic characters rather than believing those interests are in direct opposition to our own. In *Wicked Lovely* and in *Valiant*, the kindness of the male lead wins over the reader to care for the fairy's side, but their villains being supernatural does not rouse the call to care for all of nature as much as does Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. Contemporary viewing audiences are intended to identify with Belle's love for the Beast. Viewers of the Disney adaptation want Belle to love the supernatural creature rather than hunt him.

Disney plays on reader expectations for the genre in order to "tell" viewers to believe from the start that the Beast will be the hero. In the first song, "Belle," Belle sings to sheep about her "favorite part" of the book she is reading. The part is "where she meets Prince Charming, but she won't discover that it's him 'til chapter three" (*Beauty and the Beast*). Belle here takes the role of intended audience; though she has read this story before, her role is the same. Like the viewers of this movie, Belle knows the way this type of story tends to go. She can forecast the plot, and if the story conforms to readers' expectations of the genre, she will experience reader's satisfaction when her forecast comes to pass. As Belle knows to care about the hero of the story before its heroine does, we the intended audience know who the supernatural love interest of this story will be before the heroine does. We have known since the prologue that the Beast is actually a cursed human, but rather than because of this long-buried humanity, we care about the Beast's life because of his newfound emergence into humanity out of beasthood due to his love for Belle.

From the start the audience knows Belle and the villagers are at odds, and this knowledge is cemented when the villagers align with Belle's unwanted suitor Gaston to kill the Beast, a creature that in their last interaction allowed Belle to break their agreement and return to her sick father. The villagers embody what has been here shown to be prevalent old-fashioned fairy tale values. The villagers do not see anything of themselves in the fairy "Other" and only fear it. Gaston convinces them that the monster in the woods wants nothing more than to come into their village and "make off with your children! He'll come after them in the night!" (*Beauty and the Beast*). The mob's desire to destroy the Beast is more in line with older attitudes toward hunting the supernatural beasts of the woods than the contemporary sympathy for nature, as shown in Belle's love for the Beast. The lyrics to "The Mob Song" say exactly how the villagers feel about the situation:

In the mist, through the woods,
Through the darkness and the shadows
It's a nightmare but it's one exciting ride.
Say a prayer, then we're there,
At the drawbridge of a castle
And there's something truly terrible inside.
It's a beast, he's got fangs, razor sharp ones.
Massive paws, killer claws, for the feed.
Hear him roar, see him foam,
But we're not coming home 'til he's dead.
Good and dead!
Kill the Beast! (*Beauty and the Beast*)

Their fear of the beast echoes the something primal humans always looked to fairy tales to find. However, audiences of the Disney fairy tale now see this point of view as the "Other." Viewers identify with Belle, and the villagers definitively cut themselves off from her when, with a cry of "If you're not with us, you're against us!" they imprison her and her father in their own cellar.

Because the audience identifies with the plight of the main character, and the main character has different values than the villagers, the villagers' beliefs must be in error. The supernatural character must be anything but this senseless, murderous enemy.

The villagers' fears are somewhat mocked in the lyrics "We don't like what we don't understand; in fact it scares us, and this monster is mysterious at least" (*Beauty and the Beast*). The villagers are drawn cloaked in the darkness of night and of their own ignorance; some bear evil grins of malice. They are not portrayed as humans with the justifiable motive of protecting their village from something supernatural with evil intent. We agree with the candelabra servant Lumiere; they are "invaders." We watch the mob march to a place "through a mist, through a wood, where within a haunted castle something's lurking that you don't see every day" and believe that the "something" is a friendly fantastic creature. The upbeat musical score directs us to feel joy when the enchanted houseware items defeat the human villagers. Gaston becomes the true beast as he looms over the Beast on the rooftop of his castle, surrounded by lurid green stormclouds pouring raindrops. When Belle comes upon the scene and calls "No!" she is worried for the Beast rather than her fellow human. Gaston's taunt, "Were you in love with her, Beast? Did you honestly think she'd want you when she had someone like me?" rebounds back on him. He is the one deluded; his personality prevents Belle from loving him while the Beast's looks cannot discourage her love. A turn has been taken; humans are the uncivilized monsters while the creature with fangs is the one "too kind and gentle to fight back" (*Beauty and the Beast*).

D. Ability and Necessity of Domestication

Because of the loyalties established early in each story, we believe that the actions of Belle, Aislinn, and Val will turn out for the best for both the main character and the fairy

character. Since the heroine is estranged from humanity at large and its less admirable views, and she is sympathetic to the plight of the supernatural character, the fairy “Other” is now much less an “Other” than the majority of human society. The fortunes of human and fairy are now connected to each other. Moreover, in modern fairy stories, we now believe we have the ability to domesticate, not simply the desperate desire to be able to domesticate. Reader expectations for a non-“Literary” fairy tale now all but demand a happy ending. This means that, though complications must arise due both to the requirements of any story and the historical requirements of the genre, domestication and alignment of human and supernatural interests must finally occur.

Since Disney’s Belle is truly the one in power, she can remake the Beast into the form that most pleases her. When Belle first comes to the enchanted castle, it seems that she, the human, is completely under the jurisdiction of the Beast. She is left in a prison cell in the tower guarded by a creature that looks less like a human and more like the grotesques and gargoyles decorating the castle inside and out. It at first appears that Belle is a damsel in distress, a maiden gone wandering in the woods caught in the lair of a beast. But though Belle at first believes this to be true, she is the one with the power in this tale. If she does not reciprocate the Beast’s affections by his twenty-first birthday, he, the castle, and all of its inhabitants will remain bewitched forever. Everyone has a vested interest in making Belle happy, and so Belle will get everything she wants, including the freedom to leave the castle and return home. The magical land does not exist because of Belle, but since she is its only hope of salvation, she becomes the center of that world.

After she decides to trust and care for him, the stage is set for Disney’s Belle to walk on and domesticate the Beast, and this she does. She shows him how to drink porridge from his

bowl rather than submerging his face like an animal; she guides him as he remembers the letters of the alphabet; she chastises him to control his temper and behave more kindly to those around him. In the final climax of the movie, her love causes him to fly up in the air in a shower of magic sparkles and emerge fully human, physically as well as emotionally. The magic leaves the castle in its former state of glory. Belle has put the supernatural world in line with human values.

Wicked Lovely's Aislinn is able to safeguard herself from the unruly supernatural world around her because of her inborn abilities. Thanks to the gift of her Sight, she is at an advantage by understanding the fairies' habits. Though she must pretend not to see their mischievous and dangerous actions, her Sight allows her to sidestep their influence when she may do so safely. She believes that "[f]or all their flaws, the fey seemed to be better behaved when they wore human faces," the glamours that allowed them to be visible to humans without the Sight; as a result, she could interact with Keenan in public with a moderate amount of calm. The mere fact that her knowledge allows her to pretend with some degree of confidence is all that matters to Aislinn, not the psychology behind the fairies' motivation; "Maybe it was fear of the steel bars in human jails," she thinks. "It didn't really matter why: what mattered was that it was a rule they seemed to follow." Therefore, when Keenan approaches her for the first time in a store glamoured as a human, she can believe he would not "hurt her, not here, not in public" (Marr 11). Though Aislinn fears the fairies, her knowledge allows her to spend her time in areas full of the iron that provides her protection from them. She will not be dominated by the threats of the supernatural because of her own human knowledge and ability to withstand iron.

However, Aislinn is forced to enter the world of the fairies by becoming a powerful one of them. Aislinn comes to accept her fate gradually, but in one scene in particular she and Keenan come to understand each other. She is attempting to work out a lifestyle that would

accommodate them both when their discussion is interrupted by the arrival of his sadistic mother, the Winter Queen. Aislinn proves that her growing powers of the summer can counteract the freeze of the queen. A mere touch to Keenan's frostbitten cheeks is enough to overcome the attack of a centuries-old fairy. Though the reader knows from extended conversations that Aislinn is destined to become the Summer Queen and have unusual power within their world, this is the first time that Aislinn truly realizes the power she is coming to wield. The finality overwhelms her (Marr 272-3).

Suddenly full of confidence that Aislinn will have to live with him rather than die, Keenan will not negotiate and even threatens her human boyfriend, Seth (Marr 274). However, he has not taken into account the fact that society has changed over the 900 years he has been searching for his mate. His advisors counsel him against threatening his future queen: "[I]f you force her or allow the [Summer Girls to use Seth, making Aislinn jealous], you will lose." Contemporary women are willful enough to fight back against an aggressive, unrequited suitor, supernatural or not. This fundamentally changes the dynamics of *Wicked Lovely* compared to the "Beauty and the Beast" tale type. "There was a time when that would not be seen as a violation," the advisor continues. "Today, it is." (280). The change in times galls Keenan. He is used to women who submit to his advances. In order to attain that which is in his best interests, the fairy king must submit to the wishes of the human heroine. Keenan also learns to control his temper. Though he expects his queen to want to be his lover, and he is hurt that she prefers "her mortal" to him, he realizes that he is no longer in control of courting. Humanity has become too powerful in the industrial age. Keenan must submit to Aislinn's desires that are not incompatible with his overall goal to get her to do what he wants. He is not domesticated by the end of the book, but Keenan begins to make an effort to see things from Aislinn's perspective and to try to make her

transition easy (282-8). A shift in their interactions has begun. This book feels unfinished, as it indeed is as part of a series. At the end of the book the audience feels that the pair will go on to grow a closer bond due to their shared destiny.

In *Valiant*, Ravus domesticates himself and makes a mutually beneficial relationship possible when he gives Val a sword made of iron “[c]rafted by human hands.” He tells her, “No faerie will ever be able to use it against you. Not even me.” (Black 311). Both human and fairy want to be together. “We both know that I am a monster,” Ravus says. “It demeans you to cover rotten meat with honey. I know what I am. What would you want with a monster?” Their union just as they are, according to traditional wisdom, makes no sense. Ravus understands the reasoning seen in older fairy tales, but Val acts from a contemporary viewpoint. “Everything,” Val replies solemnly. “I’m sorry I kissed you—it was selfish and it upset you—but you can’t ask me to pretend *I didn’t want to*” (232). Val’s desire to make the fairy a part of her life makes sense to the reader who feels that Ravus’ increasing fondness for her is apparent. The wilderness as portrayed by fairies still retains some of its dangerous potential, though we now believe it would never be used. Ravus’ most malevolent action toward Val, even when he knew her as nothing but a thief, was to too quickly believe she could never love a monster. He felt rejected too quickly, but he did not lash out unfairly at her. Indeed, the sympathy between human and fairy is what enables the domestication, not force. In discussing the elements of his magical potions, Ravus states, “a kiss is efficacious in transforming a beast” (157). That is exactly what Val has done, to the pleasure of them both.

Some readers may rely on their previously created schemas and assimilate any new examples about the environment into them. If in the world of story, our escape to a different perspective on real-life problems, the interests of both human and *super-natural* align, surely

they may do so in the real world as well. If in the world of story the *super-natural* creatures may be tamed to act in the best interests of humanity, of course natural creatures may be made to serve humans in the real world. If in the world of story the domestication of the *super-natural* brings those creatures as much peace and happiness as it brings to the human characters, it must mean that the history of natural domination since the Industrial Revolution has not been a misuse of humanity's power over the natural world. However, the literature shows that this perspective is not tenable; accommodation is required now, not assimilation. New schemas must be formed.

In the space created by fairy tales, authors and audiences may work out our uncertainties about real-world concerns. Here readers may placate themselves about concerns that human domination of nature is ruining the world for everyone involved. This use of fairy tales fits in with the definition of escapism as a mere “distraction” from the unpleasant qualities of life. However, some readers may consider use the “Beauty and the Beast” fairy tales to “escape” in the sense Tolkien espouses, that of “Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation” (67). Rather than accepting the previous shallow reading of these texts, these readers may believe that the treatment of nature by contemporary societies does not resemble the care Belle, Aislinn, and Val show for their supernatural counterparts. These readers would see the storybook relationships as a call to action, a call to cease feeling complacent in our societal treatment of nature and cease treating nature as the “Other.” As Wendell Berry says, “we can be true to nature only by being true to human nature—to our animal nature as well as to cultural patterns and restraints that keep us from acting like animals (15). When true sympathy between human and nature takes place, this tale type would have fulfilled its contemporary purpose, and communion with nature, rather than domination, may take place for the good of everything in the environment.

E. Ever After in the Woods

In older stories, the human characters almost invariably would wish to return to the safety of civilization. Little Red Riding Hood, for instance, would want to escape from the wolves in the woods and return to the safety of a village full of homes. Yeats' Thomas Connolly flees the supernatural banshee with such consuming fear that he does not even remember the trip home. By contrast, in modern fairy tales the heroine typically stays with the fairy "Other" to the gratification of audiences who have identified with her throughout many adventures. This choice may indicate a rejection of contemporary societal values to readers who believe that the alignment of human and fairy characters against the majority of the other human characters in the storyworld represents a call to reform prevailing American attitudes toward nature. It might be argued that these readers would approve of the rejection of older, complacent attitudes toward the domination of nature and see the loving union of human and fairy as a sign that human stewardship of the environment for the good of all is the viewpoint of the future.

After the climactic fight, Disney's Belle does not return to her village. Throughout the course of the movie, she has shown that she is enlightened compared to the 'normal' humans who view her as "strange, no question" (*Beauty and the Beast*). The villagers favor ignorant superstition over informed thought gained from reading like Belle or experimentation like Belle's father. Belle can go into the forest, the home of what we at first fear to be a danger to humans, and turn the magical "Other" into a thing that conforms to her idea of how the world should be. The village is a symbol of, if not evil, things that humans should not aspire to be. The castle in the woods is a symbol of all of personkind's dreams fulfilled. Any original fear of the woodland has proven to be false because the magical world of the forest is actually beautiful with humanity's best wishes at heart. Only in this once magical world can Belle and, through the

audience's identification with her, any American like her live out their days "happily ever after." Happiness for humanity is to be found in a world where nature and civilization are at peace with each other, not in a society that seeks the destruction of the "Other."

Just as Americans today wish to believe that our proven strategies of environmental domination are not harmful and that we have a choice in our destiny, so too does *Wicked Lovely*'s Aislinn want "[f]reedom. Not to even know faeries exist. To be mortal. But none of that is a choice" (Marr 284). She can either choose to join the fairy world or die like her mother rejecting it; we in the real world have to find a way to attain communion with the rest of the natural world or slowly poison our own species through our own actions. Aislinn does not realize immediately that she is becoming supernatural, but from the moment she can listen "to the soft whisper of paper falling... despite the impossibility of hearing such a soft sound," the audience knows that her fate is likely sealed (29). Without Keenan, Aislinn would "become a shade" (224). She will join the supernatural world and she will learn to live with it. But at the end of *Wicked Lovely*, the reader wants to believe that in the rest of the series Aislinn will grow to be fonder of the king and kingdom she was destined to join. This destiny, combined with the changes in perspective evidenced by Keenan's actions, foretells that Aislinn will be happier living as a powerful being within the fairy world she once dreaded more than any other force than she was as a human fearing the truths other people could not see. Union with the *supernatural* means that the preindustrial fears of nature may quiet.

At the end of *Valiant*, Val plans to remain a part of Ravus' life. She is planning to attend college at NYU in New York to be near her fairy lover and away from her mother, whom she no longer trusts. She even wishes to join the school's fencing team in order to maintain some of the fighting skills Ravus taught her during her time in his world (Black 311). Ravus also has no

intention of rejoining his home Court even though the revelations at the end of the novel show him innocent of the crimes that prompted his exile. “There is nothing for me there,” Ravus says. Though he, the natural and *super-natural*, will remain on this earth far longer than the human he loves, he wishes to “remain nearer [Val] for what time there is” (313). The domesticated figure wishes for the unity with humanity the human character intends to create.

Valiant, in particular, illustrates the state of disequilibrium in contemporary American views of the environment’s relationship with civilization. The city, traditionally a bastion of safety, is here called Ironside, noted only for being saturated with the poison of fairies. As in *Wicked Lovely*, the same city that stifles fairy growth also creates a failure to thrive in humans. According to Wendell Berry, “if we cannot preserve our cities, we cannot preserve the wilderness (11). The city is full of poison, and yet it cannot even keep out the dangerous fairies. As wild coyotes venture into the densely inhabited spaces of New York City, so too do supernatural beasts like Ravus find a way to exist. Human habitations have encroached upon the lands of nature, and so its wildlife must in response live where they can: the same spaces humans live. Civilization is no longer separate from wilderness; the agenda of domination of all of nature, followed to its extreme logical conclusion, means that all spaces will eventually be Ironside. Unfortunately, as shown in these fairy tales, the same world that sickens fairies also sickens humans. If we destroy our world through the destruction of nature, the human race may very well die out. Nature, however, will survive. The supernatural symbol for nature shows us exactly how: fairies have immensely long lives. While humans are “[g]one in one faerie sigh” (Black 159), creatures like Ravus may produce a protective Never potion and sustain them for the long term. This is the understanding the green movement or ecocritical perspective is trying to make understood by a majority of Americans. If these new facts are properly accommodated

into our understanding of the world, people may, as the fairy tale characters do, attempt to enact a position of good stewardship of nature in the real world.

The endings of these modern American fairy tales are not clear-cut metaphors, but they do all signal a shift toward communion with nature. Though Val goes from the suburbs to New York, she is still leaving behind the mundane world of civilization and entering into the wilderness in the supernatural pockets of the urban jungle. Though Aislinn desires to maintain relations with her boyfriend and grandmother in the “real world” (Marr 4), she increasingly draws happiness from her destiny as queen of the fairy court. Though the previously enchanted castle of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* is no longer supernatural, Belle still stays in the Secondary World when she leaves her hometown behind forever. All of the heroines of these tales start out afraid of the fairy “Other” but eventually come to a place of understanding. The stewardship inherent in the heroines’ remaining in nature symbolizes a move toward equilibrium. Only the accommodation of old fears with new understanding may lead to a person who can “learn to love a beast.”

Conclusion

Texts, particularly those classified as genre fiction, reflect and work through the cultural fears and values that resonate with a given people at the time of their popularity. Readers consume that in which they see their beliefs and interests reflected. Since “a text is not only the product of a pre-existing combinational system (constituted by all that is literature *in posse*); it is also a transformation of that system” (*Fantastic 7*), understanding of all of that preexisting system and the cultural effects that formed it is essential if a scholar is to say what fairy tales represent about their reflected cultures. As Marianne Moore says, “we do not admire what we cannot understand” (41), and by using the metaphors of fairy tale as an aid to accommodate the conventional views of the world and modern perceptions about nature, we may achieve cultural equilibrium.

Current American fairy tales, taken together, present a record of our varying views toward nature. They reflect the preindustrial roots of our fairy stories as well as an increasing perspective unique to an industrial society. When dominance meant our protection, storyworld fairies could be good or evil (like the life-giving or life-taking forest), but human characters were always wary of their unpredictable nature. These tales presented the message that fairies are wild things with the capacity for violence, and a human should always be on guard. Now trends in the genre have slightly shifted to reflect trends in the real world. There are certain scenarios repeated throughout modern fairy tales. Authors do not tend to forget that fairies originated as mischievous other beings, and so there are some fairies in each story with the power or desire to harm humans. However, despite their supernatural abilities, magical beings as a whole are no

worse than the human characters presented in the story. In fact, often the fairies that the main character and audience most identify with are kinder than the other humans introduced in the text. Further, the fairies that the human character chooses to interact with the most grow in emotional and social depth due to interaction with the human. Because the main fairy characters tend to be better than the main character's former society, the main human character often chooses to live with the fairies at the end of the story. Not every fairy story contains all of these elements, but these plot functions together comprise the bulk of the current state of fairy tales. Modern fairy tales, unlike older ones, show no ambivalence over our ability to dominate the *super-natural*. The fairies are not in control; humans are. Humans do not run back to the safety behind city walls after escaping with their lives; to the contrary, the modern heroine joins the fairy world where she has always belonged. Because in these fictions humans hold all the power, we can be benevolent toward nature and domesticate it for the good of both parties. The human and fairy characters' lives are in balance, and all is happily ever after.

Given what we have seen when comparing modern fairy tales to older ones, two trends emerge. First, a privileging of the natural world over civilization parallels the privileging of supernatural characters to human characters. This is done, for example, through Val's mother seducing her boyfriend, while Ravus would never lie to Val or treat her unfairly. Likewise, when Belle is set apart from her fellow villagers due to her love of reading, the human world is criticized. When we feel sympathy for Ravus' betrayal by his former friend or the Beast's wounds from the pack of wolves, we prefer the fairy world. When the human Gaston attacks both Belle and the Beast when they want nothing to do with his life or when the fairy carrying the Queen's chill saves Aislinn from a gang of human teenage boys, we prefer the supernatural. Time and again, through the ways the authors coax audiences to identify with the main character

through popular ideology, to feel sympathy for the supernatural creatures, and to understand the fairies to be as multifaceted in personality as a human, audiences come to understand that the poisonous iron world of the city pales to the attractions of the green world of nature.

The second trend, that of domestication of the monster, can barely be untangled from the love of nature. The trends shown together in popular American books, compared to trends in earlier examples of the genre, show that Americans feel the desire to domesticate the “Other,” nature, which is no longer seen as a threat. This desire to dominate seems like an ability well within our grasp. Because we feel affection for the helpless nature that cannot defend itself from our ways, we feel the need to protect it from us. When Keenan desperately needs Aislinn’s help to overrule his mother after 900 years of trying fruitlessly, we easily accept that he could do nothing without the strength of mankind at his side. We feel that Beauty teaching the Beast to eat with fine china and read the books she loves so much is only the good and proper thing to do. Bringing the monster into human society, though on the one hand we condemn society, is seen as right. The Beauty character has learned that appearances may be deceptive in the Beast character; she now realizes that the “something there that wasn’t there before” may actually have been there all along (*Beauty and the Beast*).

The two trends are distinctly different yet impossible to separate. It seems ludicrous to accept that, on the one hand, human society has overstepped its bounds and needs to return to a simpler time when the kind, gentle nature reigned supreme, while on the other hand we accept that nature is unrefined and quite likely still a threat and therefore must be domesticated in order to be brought into alignment with the human society that, on the first hand, is not so wonderful at all. The ideas are noticeably in disequilibrium, yet somehow they do coexist within fairy stories again and again. Because fairy tales are a genre particularly responsive to the whims of their

storytellers, fairy tales are especially likely to present a confusing narrative when taken as a whole. After all, humans are skilled in accepting cognitive dissonance until such a time as they can achieve equilibrium. In stories attempting to accommodate ancient primal fear and modern cataclysmic guilt, it is no wonder that counterintuitive logic finds a stronghold while we are in this process of accommodation.

The trends in fairy tales reflect America's evolving perceptions of the self and the wider world across centuries. We know from our entire history on this earth that humans have the ability to dominate nature. There is evidence that humanity has always altered its environment drastically, from hunting and gathering animals and plants into extinction to domesticating animals and crops into forms much unlike their uninfluenced states. We feel in our basest impulses that use of this power as a species is in our best interest as individuals. If we subdue the wild forces in the woods, they cannot attack any part of our kingdom, much less our fortified castles of civilization. Our culture is built upon centuries of this perspective reinforced by action, taken in large degree during the Industrial Revolution. Our inherited fairy tales show this worldview. But this outlook no longer looks viable. In the late 20th century, a way of thinking popularly called "the green movement" found purchase in the American mental landscape; this movement supports becoming better stewards of nature than we have been to date. People began to understand the major changes done to the world beginning with the peak of human activity in the Industrial Revolution. Machine after machine, convenience after convenience, the natural resources available for human use began to be depleted. In the spaces cleared of trees and minerals for fuel production, people built new homes and shops, which in turn used up more resources. The prospect of Ironside overtaking all of what was once the domain of nature became distressingly likely.

We may not in the new schema give nature a higher priority than humanity, but we must at least take care not to stamp it wholly into dust. A king who does not protect his people, even from himself, soon will have no one to lord over. Anecdotal and scientific evidence about such things as global climate change and increasing species extinction increasingly suggest that humans' self-centered "dominion over...all the earth" as encouraged in the Bible may lead to our species' own downfall if it is not checked by sympathy for the needs of the wider natural world. Those who "diminish nature...ultimately... diminish or destroy themselves" (Berry 7). Many Americans are now aware of this impending dark future, and our interests recorded in our popular and literary works have changed to reflect the times. As shown through the escape to metaphorical reality in fairy tales, only communion achieved through love points the way to mutual benefit.

To be sure, not every American believes in global climate change and/or humanity's negative role in the phenomenon. Some people believe that the earth is in a natural state of flux and that to alter our own productivity would be impractical for our long-term interests. It would be as false to claim that every mind in a society at any time in history held the same outlook as it would be to claim that all fairies in every story at a particular epoch were entirely good or evil. Few people are this single-minded; fewer societies lack this nuance. However, general trends may be identified in a particular culture at a point in time. Though current human thought is molded by our history of dominance of nature, it is starting to include a sense of our own culpability in the destruction of nature. This sense of guilt leads to a sense of reverence for nature. The untamed world (what is left of it, or imagined to exist) is seen as innocent now, a weaker thing in need of protection from our uglier selves. Our "ecological self" now identifies with a wider portion of nature (Naess 83). The city is the symbol for all of man's destructive

potential. Domination is no longer equated with our own protection; it is equated with our destruction.

The way these contemporary recurring motifs differ from values reflected in earlier tales reflects a shift in cultural thinking regarding civilization, nature, and their proper interaction. The older influence is still felt in malevolent fairies and domestication. It should be; there are still dangerous wolves in the real world woods, and those still deserve our fear. But there is a shift in degree of confidence that we can domesticate. The emerging adaptive schema that our stewardship is for nature's own good as well as our own hopefully indicates that good stewardship, not dominion, is the meme of the future. The stories are beginning to reflect an eco-conscious movement making uneasy headway into a largely resistant preexisting cultural guiding principle. As Joseph Campbell puts it, humans must begin to "think of ourselves as coming out of the earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, [and in doing so] see that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth" (40). The biggest change in modern stories compared to older ones—the heroine staying in nature rather than retreating to the artificial city—suggests the eco-conscious movement will become prominent.

Much work has been done showing how fairy tales present views of masculinity, femininity, Freudian dreams, and other fears about things relating to human interaction. While all of these themes are to be found in abundance, especially in fairy tales that have no definite setting whatsoever and deal only with characters' mental interactions, perspectives relevant to the ecocritical movement may also be found in fairy tales. Some fairy tales cannot be studied through an ecocritical lens because they simply lack environmental descriptors, but many fairy tales do take place in some sort of setting. It may be simply "in the woods" or a place described in minute detail, but these settings allow a scholar to find in the stories a culture's views of

nature. The tale type of “Beauty and the Beast” is particularly appropriate for this examination of the tendency of people to explore real world problems through the escape into fantasy. In stories with relevant intertextual links back to this type, the main character is made the “Other,” though he is in most variants as human as the Beauty, just as humans are as much a part of nature as any wild beast in the forest. The understood metaphorical separation and amplification of difference is the perfect framing for the ecological uncertainty of our age.

People are beginning to adopt a mode of thinking that should have been obvious long before now: treat nature with deeper consideration when taking from it necessities and pleasures. Our world needs “both coyotes and sheep,” both civilized humans and wild nature (Berry 10). As Joseph Campbell says, “We have today to learn to get back into accord with the wisdom of nature and realize again our brotherhood with the animals and with the water and the sea” (40). Through fairy tales, beast tales, and national rhetoric, we have to acknowledge “one of the primal ‘desires’ that lie near the heart of Faërie,” what Tolkien calls “the desire of men to hold communion with other living things” (43). We must be kind to the garden that has sustained us throughout so many long snows. Before plucking a rose, we must be sure it will not be missed.

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