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MASCULINITY AND COLD WAR FAIRY TALES:
EUDORA WELTY, VLADIMIR NABOKOV, DONALD BARTHELME, AND ROSS
MACDONALD

A Dissertation
Presented in partial fulfillments of requirements
For the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
In the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

SUSAN ELIZABETH WOOD

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the use of fairy-tale allusions to explore masculinity in four novels published during the Cold War period. This notable focus on men and masculinity held in common across these four novels from four different decades is interesting because it suggests that the shift in focus to women and feminist ideals in fairy-tale revisions of the 1970s and after is even more stark a shift than has yet been recognized by scholars. This dissertation finds that Eudora Welty's novella *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955), Donald Barthelme's novel *Snow White* (1967), and Ross Macdonald's novel *Sleeping Beauty* (1973) all subvert a reader's expectations of one or more character types drawn from traditional fairy tales, in some cases going so far as to invent an entirely new character type. These new and different character types each show the difficulty in performing Cold War gender norms, which aim to divide gender roles into the strict binaries of "hard" and "soft."

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation proposes that fairy tales play an important role within the works of four canonical American authors of the 20th century: Eudora Welty's novella *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), Vladimir Nabokov's controversial novel *Lolita* (1955), Donald Barthelme's experimental novel *Snow White* (1967), and Ross Macdonald's detective novel *Sleeping Beauty* (1973). I have chosen these works for three primary reasons: first, together they outline a time frame during the postwar and Cold War period (1940s-1970s) before the fairy tale genre was reclaimed by feminist authors who retold these classic tales from a woman's point of view; second, these novels have fairy-tale allusions (both explicit and implied) that are used to address anxieties around gender and sexuality, specifically postwar masculinity; and third, these four authors offer genre distinctions including the novella, the highbrow novel, postmodern tale, and detective fiction, thus showing that fairy-tale subtexts permeate different types of literature. Altogether, I hope to detail specifically how the fairy tale is used by these American writers during the Cold War to explore and critique the binary of masculine and feminine gender roles.

THE FAIRY TALE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

A revival of the fairy tale genre in American, Canadian, British, German, and Dutch literature began in the early 1970s during what Vanessa Joosen terms the "fairy-tale renaissance." She demarcates this "boom in the production of fairy-tale retellings and criticism" (4) against the time period immediately following World War II, when the fairy tale was

proclaimed “dead” (1) due to “an association with National Socialism” in Germany (4). The Nazi regime tried to align their political image with a longstanding tradition of the “*volk*,” the culture of the German peasant class (or “folk”); as Christa Kametsky puts it, “The Thousand-Year Reich of the future, as the new folklorists perceived it, had to be built on the stable foundations of customs and traditions still preserved in the modern peasant community” (“Folklore” 234). One particular way of achieving this juxtaposition was through the incorporation of fairy tales into their propaganda. They used the Grimm brothers’ scholarly and popular versions of German fairy tales to instruct the Nazi Youth (to be discussed in more depth in my chapter on *The Robber Bridegroom*). Propaganda Minister Goebbels “balked at the high price” the Walt Disney Company asked to screen *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in Germany; in retaliation, he publicly denigrated the works of Disney (Moritz 11). He also commissioned the live-action feature film *Schneeweisschen*, followed by several other fairy-tale re-visions by the same nature-documentarian director (12). Disney, in his turn, used fairy tales for the United States. While other filmmaking studios closed during the 1930s and 1940s due to the Great Depression and loss of overseas markets (Schickel 27), Disney stayed open due to a combination of selling stocks to the public and contracting with the U. S. government. Disney produced training videos for the troops and propaganda videos for audiences on the home front (Schickel 28). One such was “Der Fueherer’s Face” (1943), a cartoon in which Donald Duck has a nightmare of himself as a Nazi soldier (Brode 106). Disney used the Three Little Pigs and Pinocchio as characters in fundraising cartoons for war bonds for both Canada and the United States (*Walt Disney on the Front Lines*).¹ Disney helped form the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, a group which laid the groundwork for the Hollywood blacklist via the House Un-American Activities Committee (Wasko 18). These nations and the Disney company produced

¹ These and other short films from the era have been released in the DVD collection *Walt Disney on the Front Lines*.

high-profile films using fairy-tale allusions as integral cores of their appeal, and those fairy tales became inextricably bound with their producers. Ironically, this appropriation of the folkloric tradition “severed it from its genuine connection with the living folk tradition, thus stifling its growth and creative development” (Kamenetsky “Folktale” 178) until a flourishing traced to 1970.

Joosen surveys many changed cultural attitudes that led to the “fairy-tale renaissance” decades after the end of National Socialism in Germany, not least of which was the popularity of second-wave feminist theory (4). The second chapter of her *Cultural and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales* examines critical and creative texts published in the wake of Marcia K. Lieberman’s “Some Day My Prince Will Come” (1972), a touchstone essay responding to Alison Lurie’s “Fairy Tale Liberation” (1970). The dialogue established between the two essays is widely credited with kicking off a newfound focus upon the fairy tale form as inspiration for making old narratives new and in so doing critiquing old-fashioned ideals for women and girls. Whereas the earlier essay by Lurie advocates the use of fairy tales as good role models for girls, Lieberman’s response accuses Lurie of cherry-picking the best examples out of an overwhelmingly restrictive genre. “The classical fairy tales” convey messages with “male bias,” in the words of Donald Haase (23). Most fairy tales, Lieberman claims, “serve to acculturate women to traditional social roles” rather than women’s liberation (383). Creative writers in response to this critical conversation began to rewrite fairy tales wholesale according to what they thought would aid in women’s liberation. These retellings were aimed at audiences of both children and adults (Joosen 117). A well-known example of a second-wave feminist retelling is Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber.” Whereas in both the 1697 Charles Perrault version and the Grimm 1812 version the protagonist is saved from her murderous bridegroom by her

brothers, Carter's 1979 version emphasizes female agency. Carter's protagonist is saved by her mother. Carter's detailed style is different from the spare prose of a traditional fairy tale, and it is self-conscious of its literary predecessor: the mother comes to the rescue "as if she had been Medusa, the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs" (Carter 39). Although the re-vision matches in many ways the plot of the traditional variants, the experience of reading each story is very different. Depending on the edition, "The Bloody Chamber" is roughly 34 pages long, compared to roughly four pages for Perrault and three pages for Grimm (*Zipes Great*), and the increased length necessitates increased detail. Each new detail of Carter's feminist re-vision explores the interiority of the female protagonist. The tale type "Bluebeard" is ideal for illustrating women's liberation: the protagonist escapes from her serial murderer husband, free from the bonds (and threats) of marriage to the man Carter calls "[t]he puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last" (39).

There has been considerable scholarly attention to the re-invention and creative use of the fairy tale in feminist writing of the 1970s and after, but what was being written in the decades before? This dissertation argues that, before this "fairy-tale renaissance" of creative retellings and criticism, marked by writers who revise literature for explicitly feminist purposes, American literary authors used fairy-tale allusions during the Cold War to also explore gender norms, particularly masculinity as one half of a binary construction. R. W. Connell states that the concept of the "sex role" began only in the 1930s and was a commonplace by the 1950s. The concept is analogous to what we today might call gender roles: the concept of the "sex role" explains the cultural narrative that assumes that "being a man or a woman means enacting a *general* set of expectations which are attached to one's sex." Sex roles always come in twos,

internalized as masculinity and femininity (Connell 22). Masculinity,² as I use it here, is a set of narratives agreed upon by the American culture identifying specific features men should conform to in order to fit into society. I do not claim that the novels under consideration in this dissertation by Welty, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald do not engage with ideas of femininity. A binary exists with two integral halves. Indeed, the new character types created around the characters of Salome, Lolita, Hogo, and Lew Archer (respectively) only coalesce into types due to the characters' relationships with their female romantic interests. Feminine fairy-tale character types are also an important part of this dissertation. I suggest that any personal opinions about fascism or communism held by the authors of these novels are subsumed underneath the question of how gendered behavior – particularly romantic – could allow a person to break out of received narratives and live a “happily ever after” in a world seemingly full of global turmoil. Welty and Nabokov, in particular, are well known to have publicly disavowed political “crusading” in literature a stance that favors covert engagement with sociopolitical ideas in their works.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

This dissertation proposes that the authors included in this study use fairy-tale allusions to challenge dominant Cold War ideas of stable binaries including traditional gender roles. Haase argues that fairy-tale criticism beginning in the 1970s started the work of “demystifying the classical fairy tales as tools of socialization by exposing their male bias” (23). This dissertation suggests that this demystification was aided by the use of fairy-tale allusions in certain Cold War novels to interrogate narratives of masculinity. Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, Barthelme's *Snow White*, and Macdonald's *Sleeping Beauty* were all written in the postwar years, a time period characterized as the Cold War. Historians agree that no particular

² For more detail about masculinity within fairy tales specifically, see Jorgensen 338.

date marks the beginning of the Cold War between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Ambrose and Brinkley 52). Although the peak years of the conflict were between 1946-1964 (Nadel *Containment* 4), the interactions between the two countries culminating in the Cold War may be said to have already begun during World War II. Although Germany and the Soviet Union at first allied with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, the two countries disagreed over control of Poland. In July 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Great Britain had been at war with Germany since 1939; the United States joined the fight with a declaration of war on Japan on December 8, 1941 and against Germany on December 11. Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States joined together formally on January 1, 1942 in a “Strange Alliance” to defeat the fascist Nazi Germany. The colonial power, communist nation, and capitalist nation formed an uneasy alliance, none fully trusting the other, but they had to work together to defeat their common enemy (Ambrose and Brinkley 15). During World War II, Britain and the United States wanted the Soviet Union to advance across Eastern Europe to stop Germany’s invasion forces, but neither wanted the nation to dominate Eastern Europe itself. The Soviet Union, however, wanted to spread its ideology of communism to its neighbor states. Near the end of the war in 1945, USSR leader Joseph Stalin stated, “whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system” (30). During the war, the United States had to ignore the threat of spreading communism to focus on stopping the threat of growing fascism. But after Germany’s defeat, the spread of the Soviet Union’s preferred sociopolitical economic system into Eastern Europe led to the destruction of the Grand Alliance and the hostilities of the Cold War (53). The communist system of the Soviet bloc and the capitalist system of the United States and the political and ideological forces behind those

systems were diametrically opposed. This led to both sides trying to prevent the other system from infiltrating their own sphere of influence.

The Cold War is so called because the war never turned “hot,” though that did not mean that citizens were unaffected by the conflict. World War II was ended, in part, through the first military use of atomic bombs. The utter destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan by American military forces provided a strong threat and deterrent to any other challengers to American military might. Throughout the decades after those bombings, the threat of nuclear annihilation hung over international relations. The “cold war,” one of ideas and legal policies, could at any moment turn “hot,” with either nation sending their nuclear weapons to attack their enemy (Fink 132). And so, rather than engage directly and risk such huge losses, the Cold War became in part fought by proxy wars in other countries influenced by the United States or the Soviet Union. This is exemplified by the Bay of Pigs Invasion, leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1961, the United States attempted to invade Cuba covertly using CIA resources after the new Cuban President Fidel Castro formed ties with the Soviet Union. The plan, begun under President Eisenhower and defunded under President Kennedy, was a failure (137). In response, in 1962 the Soviet Union placed dozens of nuclear missile sites on the island to protect it against another attempted invasion (139). After a series of negotiations, the countries both reduced their nuclear arsenals – until other countries also developed nuclear technology (141). The meeting in Malta between George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1989, a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall, is a key date considered the end of the Cold War and a turn to de-escalation (258). The long-lasting conflict defined much of the twentieth century.

The conflict between East and West was more than a disagreement about the possession of resources or governmental jurisdiction over each other’s citizens. More than that, the conflict

was one of worldviews and metanarratives. These are the metanarratives seen in the fictional spaces of Welty, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald. With the threat of nuclear annihilation so pressing from the world without, the domestic space of the fairy tale lends room for processing the ways that individual lives (including ways of presenting masculinity) were changing. The Cold War binary of “Us vs. Them” touched every aspect of life: economic systems, social organization, religion, privileging the individual or the collective, governmental elections, and domestic life – as well as literature. Both sides wished to convert the other to their way of thinking, and increasingly sophisticated propaganda developed to further the cause. In part since the war was “cold,” fought with ideas rather than bullets, the United States invested in its local cultural resources to win the fight (White 2). While the FBI put American citizens on trial for communist sympathies, the CIA quietly funded artists in order to win the culture war. What could the Soviet Union produce to compare with a William Faulkner or an Ernest Hemingway? However, at the same time as the CIA was supporting the development of a cultured American elite, the broader culture at large came to devalue male intellectuals as “tedious egghead[s] alienated from the main currents of American life” (Cuordileone *Manhood* 200). The same type of man who thought and wrote and produced American culture was simultaneously seen as unmanly because of his “egghead” behavior and thus deserving of the suspicions of that era for which Joseph McCarthy is so well known. Therefore, the many tensions were not just between world systems but also within the United States itself as it sought to distance itself from anything representative of the USSR and communism. In the process of making itself a separate half of a binary system of polar opposites, the United States began to identify many American writers as spies and traitors, threats within linked to threats without.

FRAMEWORK: ALAN NADEL AND COLD WAR CONTAINMENT

Generally, I will use a framework supplemented by two works by Alan Nadel. I research the historical moment surrounding the publication of each novel to show how each work responds to concerns of its time. I will use the theory in Nadel's *Containment Culture* as both history and model argument for the way American literature responded to the new cultural and military threats from overseas with a heightened narrative of "true" American identity. I use Nadel's articulation of the allusion to show how bringing an older form like the fairy tale into literary novels allows the authors to contrast the real historical moment to an idealized, well-known tale with an established and assumed "happily ever after." This combination of European tale type with American settings and disrupted "happily ever after" plots creates a distinct epoch in American literature that explores the way that gender norms cannot be contained, just as a seemingly stable fairy tale changes when set in America.

Throughout this project I will use three concepts from narratology coined by Gérard Genette for clarity when discussing different variants of the fairy tales under discussion. For both creative writers and fairy tale critics, fairy tale retellings only exist as such because of an identifiable link between the original (hypotext) and updated (hypertext) variants. Genette defines the "intertextuality" between these texts, their relationship to each other, in relation to chronology. He calls the later text, "text B," the "hypertext," while the earlier text, "text A," he calls the hypotext (Genette 5). Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* is an example of a "hypertext," a story written in response to the "The Robber Bridegroom" "hypotext," the original being alluded to (5). In addition to these two linked terms, I will often refer to the interplay of hypotext and hypertext as "intertextuality." "Intertext" is a sort of catchall phrase to describe works in conversation with each other, whether they came first or second (1). This concept emphasizes the

indebtedness each new work of literature has to the preexisting canon of human creativity. Especially in a genre like the fairy tale, which is so omnipresent in culture and literature, readers may often unconsciously mesh all the different versions of a tale that they have heard into one, with no conscious thought for which is “original” and which is “rewriting” (both fraught terms, as the breakdown below of “traditional fairy tale” and “fairy-tale retelling” indicate). Literary authors such as Welty, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald can make use of this referential slipperiness, including changing the details of the hypotexts for particular effect within a huge range without fear that the reader will decide that the hypertext is too far estranged from the “original.”

Alan Nadel claims that allusion is a “covert form of literary criticism” (“Translating” 640). Nadel follows T. S. Eliot’s view that every new work of consequence changes the old canon (641). Nadel says that “the allusion not only refers the reader to a standard but forces him to interpret and redefine that standard.” Only this “reordering” gives us “potential for the new” (642). To make sense of allusions, we must establish the authorial intent with the “immediate text” aided with “the author’s other works” and the “generic conventions.” Then we may assume a probable reading (643). The fairy-tale allusions I highlight in these four novels encourage readers to “interpret and redefine that standard” presented by the literature in order to reflect on the utility of received narratives in the present day.

Allusions require more conscious attention and thus force “a normally subconscious activity toward consciousness” (Nadel “Translating” 648). Regarding the new work of creative literature, “[b]y virtue of its new context, by virtue of its being an allusion, it is both old and new. The presence of an allusion, therefore, forces us to ask how it is being changed” (648). Until the reader knows how the older work is being changed, they cannot understand the

hypertext (649). Nadel says, “Allusions, then, help us become aware of other problems in the text we deal with subconsciously” (649). This process of making meaning from something that could utterly fail to connect is how the allusion makes “subtle open-ended arguments.” Indeed, “allusions supply the focus without fully developing the argument” (650). This is how Welty can claim not to “crusade” politically while also incorporating thought-provoking allusions, or how Nabokov can be read on multiple levels, including not taking into account the fairy-tale intertext at all. I use this framing argument particularly for my Nabokov chapter, though it has relevance in every chapter.

Nadel’s *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* is a work of cultural studies focusing on the decades after World War II during the transitional period when the distinction between modernist and postmodernist literature becomes blurred. He sees in the “tropes” in contemporary literature a way for “a significant portion of the population to link its sense of self—the story of its life—to national history” (8). Specifically, the acknowledgement of the “artificiality” of the narratives of history, myth, and power that “had started to be manifest in a public discourse” show the incipient signs of postmodernism (3). This shift in both American culture and literature Nadel attributes to the breakdown of unsustainable binaries in grand narratives resulting from the fear of Soviet Communism spreading to America during the Cold War.

In *Containment Culture*, Nadel describes the contradictory cultural narratives of the Cold War as seen in literature. As the title suggests, he sees in literature of the time a reflection of the nation’s strategy to contain communism to the USSR. This strategy of containment was attempted and failed throughout the decades in part due to the internal inconsistencies of the narrative logic; the “gendered courtship narrative” ideally explains these narrative contradictions.

Nadel identifies clear and normative gender roles as a key part of the metaphorical language used to create a homogeneous America; this homogeneous nation was key to containing the threat of communism entering the country from outside. If “we” can be clearly and easily identified as distinct from “them,” then the threat can be easily dealt with politically. In both novels and films of the Cold War period, however, Nadel sees “a gendered courtship narrative that is constantly trying to make impossible distinctions between Other and Same, partner and rival, for the purpose of acquiring or excluding, proliferating or containing proliferation” (6). In brief, he argues that the American cultural narrative of the Cold War held that women were responsible for “domesticating” men, reintegrating soldiers back into peacetime on the home front through marriage. Women’s sexuality was predicated upon different behaviors before and after marriage. Nadel sees female sexuality as a “double”: “it had to be the thing that would gratify a normal male’s sexual desires for the rest of his life while not doing so during courtship; it had to signify abstinence and promise gratification; it had to indicate its presence through absence” (117). Cold War literature, containing within it knowledge of the strict binaries of male and female behavior in national discourse, breaks down such ways of navigating the world as we will see in the following chapters on Welty, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald. Through their use of fairy-tale allusions, each author plays with the boundaries of these gender roles, creating new character types or expanding old ones to the limits of their characterizations.

Though the binary systems may appear clear at first glance, these writers of the Cold War period complicate seemingly simple roles. In seven points, Nadel sketches out “gendered metaphors” which “[help] us recognize cold war discourse” and which “make legible the failure of containment”:

1. The atom, atomic power, rival nations, rival systems, the national body politic, the international body, the gendered body, the corporal body, the spiritual body are all made visible through a matrix of binary oppositions.
2. These binary oppositions are represented as contained by the object they define, naturally contained by that object.
3. This form of containment is called the object's dual nature.
4. Because of the dual nature, observation is often inadequate to definition.
5. The inadequacy of observation mandates heightened vigilance, greater surveillance, more universalized authority.
6. This authority must be external to the powers of scrutiny; in other words, it must be theological.
7. Internal security thus comes synonymous with external, universal scrutiny. (Nadel 34)

Nadel points out that metaphors in Cold War narratives both point to cultural and sexual containment and also “make legible the failure of containment” (34), simultaneously illustrating intention and lack of ability to follow through. Following Nadel's reading, in this dissertation I show that each novel under consideration tries to explore the anxieties surrounding gender, especially masculinity and heterosexuality, via the avenue of fantasy which the fairy tale genre can impose upon traditionally heterosexual normative plots. Through allusions to well-known plots, characters, and motifs from fairy tales, these works highlight the necessity of fantastic reasoning to follow the paradoxical system of containment. I work with Nadel's framework for reading literature through this lens of containment to novels by Welty, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald. These postwar works invoke the spectre of traditional femininity and masculinity through fairy-tale allusions, only to problematize the applicability of such traditional roles in

contemporary America. Traditional fairy tales are known for their, well, traditional values. Even more obviously didactic than most fairy tale authors, Charles Perrault's tales (1697) come with explicit morals at the end of each story. That is not the case in the fiction examined here. These authors use fairy tales to invoke seemingly simple categories of gender roles that would match Cold War binaries, only to muddle and problematize such binary conceptions of normative gendered behavior. If the rhetoric of containment finds the Cold War reflected in the hearth of the individual home, these fractured "fairy tales" suggest growing dissatisfaction with traditional gender roles. In this way, I extend Nadel's core ideas to new creative works. In each of my chapters, I illustrate ways in which the authors under consideration challenge these metaphorical understandings of society that are implicit in each novel. The authors' allusions to classical fairy tales help us see the ways in which strict binaries of gendered behavior cannot be contained even within literature that alludes strongly to fantasy. My chapters also focus upon moments of surveillance in which characters try to constrict the behavior of other characters yet find their powers inadequate. Each author uses fairy tales to break out of normative conventions: Welty's plantation mistress dominates her husband rather than remaining demure and content; Nabokov's adult immigrant molests his teenage stepdaughter rather than parenting her; Barthelme's seven half-brothers have sex with each other and the same woman within their commune rather than remaining monogamous and non-incestuous; Macdonald's aging hard-boiled detective quests to save a daughter figure rather than a femme fatale. No ending is uncomplicatedly happy.

FRAMEWORK: KEVIN PAUL SMITH AND FAIRY-TALE INTERTEXTS

In order to analyze the author's social criticism in each novel and how its affect is stylistically represented, I rely on the taxonomy of the fairy tale as defined in Kevin Paul Smith's *The Postmodern Fairy Tale: Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction* (2007). Based on

Linda Hutcheon's theories of postmodernism and Gerard Genette's theories of narrative, Smith studies the ways that contemporary American novels use references to fairy tales to "examin[e] the way in which formulaic stories hold a grip over the human imagination" and to "examine precisely why the fairytale has become so important" (Smith 1). Smith extends Genette's concept of intertextuality to create a framework for analyzing the different levels of explicit and implicit references to fairy tales found in a broad variety of novels.

Smith introduces a rubric of eight distinct types of references to fairy tales in the modern novel, terms that I use throughout this dissertation:

1. Authorised: Explicit reference to a fairytale in the title
2. Writerly: Implicit reference to a fairytale in title
3. Incorporation : Explicit reference to a fairytale within the text
4. Allusion: Implicit reference to a fairytale within the text
5. Re-vision: putting a new spin on an old tale
6. Fabulation: crafting an original fairytale
7. Metafictional: discussion of fairytales
8. Architextual/Chronotopic: 'Fairytale' setting/environment. (Smith 10)

While none of the writers examined here have an implicit writerly reference to a fairy tale in the title, several use implicit allusions in their novels. With this exception, all of Smith's eight designated references are used to some degree by the writers I examine; some are used more thoroughly than others. For instance, we may easily see that Welty, Barthelme, and Macdonald use an authorized reference. In this study, I will discuss how this title reference works and why it was deployed in this way.

Of authorized references, Smith says, “The use of a proper name of a fairytale in the title acts as an authorial sanction that the text is to be understood in its relevance to a prior, pre-existing fairytale” (12). This is true of three of my four novels: Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*, Barthelme’s *Snow White*, and Macdonald’s *Sleeping Beauty*. This means that it is no jump to read these novels in light of the expectations set by the earlier fairy tale. In the case of Welty’s novel, although her plot is displaced to a different space and time than the Grimm version, much of the plot remains recognizably consistent. In Barthelme’s and Macdonald’s novels, however, the characters, location, and plot are distanced enough from the original that the titular reference is much needed framing to understand something of the author’s intent for the story. Of course, Nabokov’s *Lolita* is not an authorized reference to any particular fairy tale. My argument for the inclusion of this novel in this study must come from references within the text rather than in its title. I will discuss *Lolita* as a fabulation below.

Smith identifies “incorporation” as the act of recounting the traditional fairy tale itself within the hypertext which refers to that earlier version. The novel in this dissertation which makes most use of this feature is Barthelme’s *Snow White*. Barthelme’s version of the story is set in a different time and society, and much of the plot is dissimilar. Still, the character Snow White is explicitly said to remember events which a reader will recognize as motifs from the plot of the traditional “Snow White.”

Smith breaks down the category of allusion into six types: quotation, character names and the proliferation of signifiers, character description, identification by pattern recognition or structure, identification by motifs, and the unconscious of the texts. Since allusion is “such a long-standing feature of literary criticism that it is very infrequently defined” (18-19), Smith describes allusion at length:

[...] an allusion is typically covert or indirect. Where the dictionary uses the terms ‘overt’ and ‘covert’, I substitute my preferred terms ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’. Clearly, the incorporation of a fairytale (element three) cannot be described as covert, implied, indirect, passing or incidental. This type of intertextuality is of the kind that is usually termed ‘intertextuality’ because of its obvious links with other texts, and it is for this reason that I term it ‘explicit’. Intertextuality that is closer towards the implicit end of the scale is considered allusion. Intertextuality that cannot be missed or ignored is more likely to be given its proper name.

(Smith 19)

The broad category of allusion is one that applies to every novel in this study. Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom* and Barthelme’s *Snow White* make use of quotations in reference to their respective original fairy tale. Barthelme’s *Snow White* is the only novel that uses the actual name of the protagonist as the name of the novel’s protagonist, whereas the other authors use names such as Laurel, Rosamond, and Lolita. Through additional descriptions and use of patterns and motifs falling under the next three sub-points of allusion, a reader may understand the connections between characters in hypotext and hypertext in Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*, Barthelme’s *Snow White*, and Macdonald’s *Sleeping Beauty*. Nabokov’s *Lolita* references motifs of multiple fairy tales, alluding to not just one but a broad corpus of the genre. The allusions in *Lolita*, then, build up to a fairy-tale “fabulation,” while the other three novels are fairy-tale “re-visions.”

Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*, Barthelme’s *Snow White*, and Macdonald’s *Sleeping Beauty* explicitly refer to fairy tales and view them through a different lens; this fits Smith’s fifth point of “re-vision.” “Re-vision” Smith describes as happening “where the hypertext [novelistic

revision] is mainly concerned with revising the hypotext [an original] with all that this implies in terms of structural similarities between the two tales” (34). The term “re-vision” is well known from Adrienne Rich’s use of the term in “When We Dead Awaken.” She defines the critical action as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (18). Smith does not mention Adrienne Rich’s 1972 article in his description of how the term “re-vision” is useful to the field of fairy-tale studies. However, he notes the importance of fairy-tale re-visions contemporaneous with second-wave feminism as integral to his study. Unlike Rich, he does not state that a feminist lens is necessary for fitting the criteria of a re-vision in this context. For Rich, re-vision is a crucial step for a woman to reassess received historical narratives: “it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (18). The re-vision is a crucial part of second-wave feminist literature, and it is no wonder that fairy tale allusions from the 1970s and after often take the form of re-visions. As I will show, re-vision of a slightly different quality was used before this “fairy-tale revolution” in order to explore gender and masculinity. Smith mentions Barthelme’s novel specifically as an example of this type of reference (34). Barthelme’s use of re-vision may not be for feminist purposes, but it is similarly disruptive.

Smith defines fabulation as a literary work that creates a “new” fairy tale using (or consciously avoiding) preestablished features of the fairy-tale genre (42). I argue that this feature applies best to Nabokov’s *Lolita* within this study. While *Lolita* “does not closely follow the plot of a previous fairytale” (Smith 42), and has no authorized reference, the novel makes use of a plethora of allusions to the genre and specific tales including “Little Red Riding Hood.” The use of two other strategies defined by Smith as metafictional and architextual/chronotopic are crucial for Nabokov’s creation of a fabulation. The last two types of reference are the two that Smith

uses most frequently in his study of texts from the 1970s and later. Metafictional intertextuality follows Genette's idea of the metatextual. Smith identifies this as what occurs "when a fairytale is commented upon, or when the fairytale is analysed in a critical way." The reference can be to either a specific fairy tale or to the genre more broadly (45). Smith's category of fabulation is by definition broad; he states that architextual or chronotopic references occur "when we recognise 'fairytale-like' qualities in a fiction, without knowing a *specific fairytale to which this text relates*" (48). In *Lolita*, the Enchanted Hunters scene, among others, creates this sense of fantastic unreality. Using these self-aware distortions of time and space in crucial moments of sexual import, such intertextuality "leads the reader to recall a genre, rather than specific examples of that genre." Smith identifies four well-known architextual features of the fairy tale: "the traditional opening, the indeterminate time and place of its setting, the dramatic personae and the presence of magical items or events" (48). Nabokov creates a new character type in *Lolita*: the nymphet. This new character type necessitates a new fairy-tale plot, one that is distinctly American and reflective of Cold War concerns about the need for women to properly domesticate their husbands.

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

Chapter One, "Eudora Welty, the Fascist Stepmother, and the Robbing Bridegroom," will focus on *The Robber Bridegroom*, which has received a considerable amount of attention as a fairy tale. Rosella Zorzi calls Welty's parody "a form that was much ahead of its time in 1942 and that can be seen as announcing the re-writing of traditional genres that took place in the 1960s and 1970s" (23). Few contemporary reviews of *The Robber Bridegroom* address the fact that the source material for the novella comes primarily from German fairy tales; it is a glaring omission not to note that a country at war with the United States was responsible for creating the

lore at the backbone of Welty's American story. Perhaps this is because of the limited but widespread perception of Welty as an author who wrote mostly regional stories.

My chapter on Welty builds on this insightful but still spare critical base. In this chapter, I argue that the character of Salome, the evil stepmother figure, plays the part of a fascist in her role as plantation mistress. This chapter contextualizes the implicitly political message regarding the war with Germany going on at the time of publication. Rather than being a demure plantation mistress such as the mother of Scarlett O'Hara in the wildly popular book (1936) and film (1939) *Gone With the Wind*, Welty writes Salome as unusually aggressive in her push to expand the borders of her plantation domain. In contrast to her increased aggression, the titular bridegroom's crime is less fatal than in the hypotextual fairy tale.

Each of my chapters extends Nadel's reading of Cold War literature as it pertains to gender. For example, in the Grimm tale by which Eudora Welty's *Robber Bridegroom* is inspired (Zipes *Great* 738-40), the villain is a murderous thief *and* bridegroom to the protagonist. Welty keeps this character and much of his characterization, but she makes him more sympathetic despite his villainous actions. Flipping the gender of the villain in her novella, Welty makes the primary antagonist the bride's plantation mistress stepmother. Nadel claims that "the responsibility for this containment in the postwar era fell on women" (117) through the "domestication" of their male romantic partners. Although Nadel did not write about Welty's novella, his framework for examining gender roles in literature is still helpful here. In Welty's novel, none of the characters are contained within their roles from the original "Robber Bridegroom," yet we still see the female characters attempting to contain their male romantic partners. While the villainous stepmother does domesticate her husband, she does so through complete control of the household, exceeding her feminine role. She takes on the worst traits of

masculinity in becoming a fascist villain. The eventual marriage of Rosamond and her robber bridegroom does not end with the “happily ever after” of his being domesticated, since his new career as a merchant just makes him into a different kind of robber; this calls into question the long-term potential of their happiness at the end of the story. Merely checking off “marriage” from the checklist of women’s ideal gender roles is not enough to produce a qualitatively happy household.

Unlike Welty, Nabokov creates a new fairy-tale fabulation in *Lolita*. In Chapter Two, “The Nymphet and the Charming Wolf: Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*,” I build upon critical commentary that refers to the novel’s use of fairy-tale allusions, and I read the novel as a fabulation specifically. The article I find most useful for exploring *Lolita*’s use of multiple allusions to the genre in order to build an entirely new fairy tale, written by fairy tale scholar Steven Swann Jones, is titled “The Enchanted Hunters: Nabokov’s Use of Folk Characterization in *Lolita*.” Jones’s reading showcases Nabokov’s subtle references to particular fairy tales as well as phrases indicative of the genre to show how these allusions are integral to the novel’s plot. Jones argues that Nabokov creates a fractured fairy tale within the novel, and in so doing “reveal[s] dialectically opposed ways of viewing the world as fantasy or fact” and that “through love” “we might transcend the initial perspectives of fantasy or fact and become enlightened” (283). Jones expands on Alfred Appel, Jr.’s catalogue of the fairy-tale themes in the novel, expanding it further to say that Nabokov took not only themes but fairy tale plots and characters “lock, stock, and barrel” (270). Jones’ thesis is that Nabokov uses the fairy tale intertext to “give his story some of the magical appeal of fairy tales,” to “expose the unrealistic way that fairy tales and their stock figures portray life and its actual participants,” and to “make a statement about the paradoxical relationship of art (mirage) and reality (fact)” (217). Overall, Jones sees in the

novel a suggestion that “man lives in two worlds... and that art—folk and literary—is a conscious exploitation of this situation,” suggesting that “human epistemology, philosophy, and morality must proceed from this paradoxical premise that the life we lead is part fantasy, part fact” (271).

Nabokov’s creation of a unique fabulation works to take the fairy tale into contemporary America. In this second chapter, I first present a reading of the novel as a re-vision of “Little Red Riding Hood” to illustrate the flaws in reading the novel merely as an updated warning tale. In the next section, I show how to read the fairy-tale allusions differently: to create a new fairy tale type centered around the character of the nymphet. Juxtaposed against this fantasy creature is a more familiar one: the Prince Charming. In attempting to persuade his readers that he fits into this character type, Humbert Humbert inadvertently reveals his true inept masculinity.

Cold War norms may have demanded strict adherence to contradictory codes of conduct that were impossible to fully conform to, but that did not mean that their impossibility meant that deviation would go unpunished. Stemming from this cultural reality, Nadel also claims that “appearances were crucial [...] for the narrative that produced the cold war” (28). Regardless of a citizen’s actual behavior, one should at minimum *appear* to behave according to Cold War social and gendered norms. Ideas of containment, conformity, and surveillance are prominent in *Lolita*, as my chapter will illustrate. Nadel does not discuss *Lolita* in this book, but as I will show, the novel fits well within his theoretical framework. The protagonist of Vladimir Nabokov’s novel *Lolita* relies upon appearances to get what he wants from the girl. Nadel argues that Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Rear Window* (1954) is “not just about the powers of surveillance to contain gender roles [but] also about the inadequacy of observation to identify deviant behavior or distinguish it from normative” (28). Similarly, Nabokov’s *Lolita* is dependent upon the failure of community surveillance. From a family stumbling upon the aftermath of a roadside sexual act

to the teachers and classmates at Lolita's new school, the observers of Humbert Humbert's deviant behaviors continually fail to understand what they have seen. Instead, they seem to see only the character type that Humbert Humbert wishes for his readers to see: a Prince Charming type. The reader, given greater access to Humbert Humbert's foibles, is able to read against the unreliable narrator to understand that his brand of masculinity is a failure of type. As well, the role of the "nymphet" that Humbert Humbert tries to force Lolita into, a twisted form of Cold War woman, is a new character type existing only in a world of fantasy. Lolita is able to escape from Humbert Humbert during a lapse in his surveillance over her; Humbert Humbert's fictional memoir ends with him incarcerated for murdering the man who helped Lolita escape.

Moving on chronologically, my third chapter, "Poisoned, Hanged, or Vile: Masculinity in Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*," focuses on Donald Barthelme's 1967 experimental novel first published in *The New Yorker*. In this novel, the characters are self-aware about the story that has been foretold for them. They want to break free and tell a new story, but they find it impossible to write a new happy ending. The criticism for Donald Barthelme's *Snow White* is predominantly concerned with explaining his postmodern vision and less with interrogating the fairy-tale influence as such. Criticism on *Snow White* tends to fall into eight categories: biographical, structural, thematic, reception, as a work of postmodernism, plot and character development, analyzing the hypotexts and allusions, and even narrative form such as a line reading/stylistic focus.

Tracy Daugherty says that Barthelme tried the fairy tale structure because his "verbal collage" style by its nature depended on short length to not become merely formulaic (295); the character was already unrealistic and so he could build upon that with strange wordplay (296). Daugherty sees *Snow White* as compulsively acting out old myths though they will do no good

(293). Jerome Klinkowitz sees the novel primarily commenting upon a contemporary setting, which is “clearly the mid-1960s, with a counterculture divorced from its leadership but unable to create a new order on its own.” Americans do not respond to the princely language because that is not how they see themselves, he says (85-6). Lois Gordon argues *Snow White*’s only success is in her attempt to break out of her stereotypical role into which she has been born and create her own identity (62). The book is postmodern because it is full of people whose identities are the texts and myths they have absorbed (74). Richard Gilman says that the book has no development because there is so much disruption to the classic tale (30). He sees in the book the message that contemporary reality does not have the values to create these characters (unlike the possibilities of the mythical past), and so the story has no happily ever after, “no denouement except one that mocks the original’s, no satisfaction to be obtained” (31). Overall, critics agree that in *Snow White* Barthelme is using an old form to critique the ability of something so out-of-date to convey meaning in a new age. Unfortunately, there is disproportionately less criticism on this novel than on his other work (such as *The Dead Father*). I hope to show, however, that this is an important experiment in the postmodern fairy tale. Especially through his creation of the new “bad boy” character Hogo, Barthelme shows competing methods of enacting masculinity. Playing against the traditional fairy tale for farce, *Snow White* shows the bankruptcy of contemporary norms of masculinity and monogamy.

Nadel’s framework for surveillance helps illustrate a breakdown in the need for security when characters display some sexual behavior publicly while reserving other behaviors for solely within the domestic space. The binary of constructed gender norms becomes particularly problematic when it comes to same-sex sexual orientation. Following Eve Sedgwick’s metaphor of the closet, Nadel says that the closet, as “a vehicle of containment,” both “requires straight

narratives” and “also makes it impossible to keep the narratives straight” (34). This we may see in *Snow White*. Donald Barthelme’s re-vision of Snow White, imagined as an adult woman living with seven men (all of whom share one father), skirts along the edge of the closet. Outside of the home, the seven men make a show of ogling “girls” from their positions high above as window washers. They claim to be “very much tempted to shoot our arrows into them, those targets. You know what that means” (Barthelme 8). At home, the seven men and Snow White all have sexual intercourse at the same time, engaging in the deviant behaviors (from the perspective of Cold War ideals) of polyamorous, homosexual, and incestual intercourse. While Snow White distances herself from the men, waiting for her prince and a heterosexual marriage of “happily ever after,” the seven men try to contain the influence of the most deviant of the group, their leader Bill who refuses to lead, with an execution. Like Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert, the deviant character is put on trial and dies at the end of the novel. Both novels end without marriage or closure. Building the bones of the novel so thoroughly upon the romantic plot of a fairy tale raises the specter of the virginal Snow White (a child for much of the fairy tale); Barthelme then dashes the reader’s expectations with a character who wishes to gain notoriety in her neighborhood for her display of sexual desire and nonnormative romances. Against the Snow White who violates readers’ expectations, Barthelme crafts three male characters in particular who enact different constructions of masculinity: Paul, the Prince Charming figure; Bill, a dwarf figure; and Hogo, a “brute” with no precedent in the traditional tale. The deviance of the characters’ behavior in this novel are all the more striking not only because of their difference from Cold War gender norms but also because of the preexisting hypotext, the well-known fairy tale of the same name.

The last chapter, “Genre Mixing: The Combination of Fairy Tale and Detective Fiction by Ross Macdonald” addresses the use of fairy tales in detective fiction. While several scholars have commented upon Macdonald’s *Sleeping Beauty* (1973), by and large their commentary has been brief and dismissive. Bernard A. Schopen says, “As a detective novel, *Sleeping Beauty* is inept; because it is a detective novel, it cannot be successful as anything else” (127). If the interactions between the characters seem unbelievable, then I believe that that quality stems from the interaction of fairy tale and detective generic conventions. Both genres invoke certain scripts for their characters to follow, and these motifs do not always mesh easily. In these moments that violate the reader’s expectations of either genre we see Macdonald moving away from the hard-boiled into a more postmodern aesthetic.

Biographer Tom Nolan has written the most extended look into the fairy tale motifs in the novel, connecting motifs in Perrault’s version of the tale type, “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,” to echoes in Macdonald’s novel (329). Nolan picks out certain phrases in *Sleeping Beauty* that refer to the genre or particular tale: he notes that Laurel wants “to go to sleep and never wake up” and that Tom Russo “treats her as if she were a fairy princess” (Macdonald qtd. in Nolan 329). Nolan also situates the plot in terms of fairy tale motifs generally: he describes detective Archer as “a sort of surrogate prince,” and the oil leak as “spread[ing] ashore like an evil spell” (329). Although some scholars have noted Macdonald’s tendency toward incorporating elements of the fairy tale into his novels, no one has yet moved into a deeper analysis of how these intertexts challenge generic expectations in *Sleeping Beauty*. Since a reading of this novel becomes more interesting once the reader moves beyond merely pointing out instances of the “fairy-tale motif” (Nolan 331) and on into deeper analysis, I find compelling motivation for extending the reading of the novel through the lens of fairy tale as well as

detective convention. In the uneasy meshing of these two traditions we see Macdonald developing his hard-boiled detective into a postmodern commentary on the genre's expectations of masculinity.

Overall in this chapter, I will develop the argument that Macdonald's novel uses fairy-tale allusions to structure a novel in an innovative way, considering the genre expectations for both the detective novel and the fairy tale a reader brings to the reading experience. This novel also serves as an interesting transitional text. Like most detective novels of the "golden age" and "silver age," the detective presents as "hard-boiled" and hyper masculine. Like Barthelme, Macdonald uses his titular female character, the Sleeping Beauty, to subvert expectations about female sexuality, but more importantly, his protagonist's masculinity. Within detective fiction, the hard-boiled detective usually has a romantic interest. Nadel says that doubleness is key to a woman's performance of her role in the Cold War period: "Female sexuality [...] had to signify abstinence and promise gratification; it had to indicate its presence through absence" (117). Ross Macdonald's Sleeping Beauty figure, Laurel, exemplifies this "presence through absence." Lew Archer, the hard-boiled detective narrator in many of Macdonald's detective novels, spends almost the entire plot of *Sleeping Beauty* searching for the missing woman only to eventually find her calmly sleeping. The detective of this novel does not match the sexually aggressive masculine figure of the golden age of detective novels, but instead of a later stage in which the detective must show more emotion. Archer pursues not a femme fatale but a much younger married woman who is not his romantic interest, and by the end of the novel his kiss on her waking forehead is more paternal than princely. Macdonald takes care to develop Lew Archer beyond the misogynistic shallowness of other fictional detectives, thus reexamining masculinity at the same time that the 1970s fairy tale "renaissance" began to reconsider depictions of

femininity. This is not simply a result of Macdonald aging his hero: this shift in characterization of the hard-boiled detective does not appear in his next and final novel. In *The Blue Hammer* (1976), Archer engages in a sexual relationship with a woman so young he calls it “jumping the generation gap” (74). Only in this storyworld framed by a fairy-tale allusion can Archer’s role exceed the role allowed by the hard-boiled detective genre’s strict ideal of masculinity.

THE COLD WAR FAIRY TALE AND TRADITIONAL GENERIC MARKERS

All four authors chosen for this study “make legible the failure of containment” through the juxtaposition of ideal Cold War gender roles and deviant attempts at enacting them. All four authors reference the longstanding “flat” archetypal characters and simple plot constructions of the fairy tale to show the artificiality of idealized traditional gender roles. They challenge the ideas of traditional masculinity as something easy reducible to a “prince” role. The novels by Welty, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald critique a notion of universally applicable gender roles that generally applies to the classic fairy tale as well as Cold War cultural norms. These writers’ very complex characters, by contrast, act outside of expected social and sexual boundaries. From the time of the popular Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales, classic fairy tale characters such as Snow White do not engage in explicit sexual activity. But this does not mean that the fairy tale was always as child-friendly as a Disney version of any classic fairy tale today. For example, if one compares the Grimm Brothers’ 1812 version of “Rapunzel” with the 1857 revision, one sees a stark reduction of references to sexual behavior and a substitution of references to fairies with references to a Christian God. Whereas the 1812 Rapunzel reveals her pregnancy by naively wondering why her clothes no longer fit around her middle, the 1857 Rapunzel gives birth to children with no foreshadowing earlier in the narrative. In the Grimms’ 1857 version of “Little Snow White,” the girl is explicitly seven years old when the jealous

queen summons a huntsman to kill her; though she is a potential threat to the power of the queen, the girl is currently sexually immature. She is described vaguely through colors: “as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as ebony wood.” The first page of Barthelme’s *Snow White*, in contrast, focuses on the woman’s naked body: “She is a tall dark beauty containing a great many beauty spots: one above the breast, one above the belly, one above the knee, one above the ankle, one above the buttock, one on the back of the neck. [...] The hair is black as ebony, the skin white as snow” (9). In the gap of the text, the ellipsis, Barthelme illustrates those beauty spots with a series of dark black dots running down the page, using the white space of the page as illustration. The reader is invited to imagine Snow White’s body. Whereas the name of the character suggests snow-white skin, unblemished, Barthelme’s version of the character has “blemishes,” so-called beauty spots because they are erotic and attractive. While the fairy tale depicts Snow White as a housekeeper and nonsexual ward to the seven men, her role in Barthelme’s novel is as a housekeeper and sexual partner to all men in the household. Over the course of the novel, Barthelme’s postmodern Snow White has sexual intercourse with the seven men she lives with yet dreams of many other men, flat ideals of princes, in order to fulfill her preordained fairy-tale role. For the Snow White of the fairy tale the prince will come, but the Snow White of Barthelme’s novel will never successfully find a “happily ever after” with another character. Neither the seven men nor the prince she thinks herself destined to marry fill her with emotion; her desires are focused upon a wholly new character, the “vile” misogynist Hogo that Snow White will not allow herself to marry. The traditional narrative of heterosexual monogamy that Snow White is restricted to in the fairy tale is not fulfilled within Barthelme’s novel.

I will be using the composite definitions of Vanessa Joosen (following such scholars as Hans Robert Jauss, Max Lüthi, Maria Nikolajeva, and Jack Zipes) throughout this dissertation to identify different versions of the “same” story. Of the four authors in this dissertation, two in particular, Welty and Barthelme, most closely rely on the plot of the traditional tale to craft their own retellings. All authors, including Nabokov and Macdonald, rely upon the reader’s familiarity with the preexisting narrative structure as well as the plots of specific tales in order for the subversions of their novels to have full effect. According to Joosen, the “traditional fairy tale” and the “fairy-tale retelling” are set up against each other as sets of oppositions. The first must exist for the second to be written in response. First, the chronotope of the traditional fairy tale, she argues, is “beyond our reach” in an unknown time and place (Joosen 12) while it is often in some concrete setting in the retelling. Traditional fairy tales are set “once upon a time,” in some imagined past safely distanced from the present. Retellings, in contrast, more often set the story in a concrete moment in time. In the case of Welty’s *Robber Bridegroom*, the setting is 1798 in American South as opposed to the timeless setting of the fairy tale. This balance of bringing the setting physically closer in an American setting yet temporally still far away allows for some form of distancing of Welty’s sharp critique of fascism in America at the time when her novel was published in 1942. While Welty chooses a frontier setting to retell the story from her vantage point of the 1940s, Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Barthelme’s *Snow White*, and Macdonald’s *Sleeping Beauty* by contrast are all set in the contemporary moment. In all novels, Cold War concerns – from the threat of fascism to the act of postwar surveillance of deviant gendered and sexual behavior – are specifically pointed at their contemporary reading audiences.

Other elements of the genre of fairy tale are crucial to the efficacy of these novels’ allusions. While in retellings realistic alternatives are often given to explain seemingly magical

events, “[t]he supernatural is not felt to intrude in human life” in the traditional tale (Joosen 13). In Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert and Lolita pause on their road trip to spend the night in the Enchanted Hunters Hotel. The setting itself is nonspecific, evoking a tawdry recreation of a romantic retreat. Despite the reality of the situation, Humbert has grand imaginings of fantasy; he will be the Prince Charming to Lolita’s Sleeping Beauty. It is in this scene of fantastic romance, rather than in a more mundane motel, that Humbert Humbert first has sex with the girl. The dreamlike hotel allows Humbert to make the claim “it was she who seduced me,” making complete his goal of romance with the nymphet.

Another marker of the genre is the flat characterization of traditional characters of fairy tales (Joosen 13); in retellings, however, psychological development may even take precedence over descriptions of events that readers may be assumed to already know from older versions (14). For instance, in Macdonald’s *Sleeping Beauty*, Lew Archer transitions from hard-boiled detective to a newer, more sensitive form of detective. His masculinity evolves. Laurel, asleep, changes only insofar as the reader gains knowledge of her, not in that her psyche grows.

The traditional fairy tale ends optimistically (Joosen 13) while (at least in revisions for an adult audience) the retelling more commonly has a complicated or even unhappy ending (14). This is the case for each novel considered in this dissertation. While Welty’s novel ends with a marriage and happy characters, the reader is hard-pressed to give resounding approval to the marriage of the leader of a band of murderous robbers and the pregnant-by-rape daughter of a slave-owning planter. Nabokov’s *Lolita* dies in childbirth near the time that Humbert Humbert dies while awaiting execution as punishment for murder. The leader of Barthelme’s seven little men is tried and hanged by his brothers, immediately replaced, and possibly freed to wreak ghostly havoc upon the living. Macdonald’s detective novel ends with the detective finding the

girl alive and unharmed, but she will awaken to deal with the fallout from the murder and suicide committed by her immediate family.

Traditional tales are told by a third-person narrator, often “characterized by fixed formulas, repetitions, and symbolic numbers” (Joosen 13), but the retelling in the novels under consideration is frequently by a first-person narrator with a loss of the repetition; in this point, the two types of fairy tale are similar only in the retelling’s retention of “[f]ixed formulas and numeric symbolism” to serve as “markers of the inter-textual relationship with the pre-text” (15-16). Whereas Welty’s novella retains third-person narration, the novels of Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald all use first-person narration from the point of view of a male character within the story. Barthelme’s narrator, using “we” or “us” as often as “I,” cannot be clearly identified as any of the men in particular; the point of view shifts between characters with frequent section changes.

This dissertation will ultimately argue for a new categorization of fairy-tale retellings during the Cold War period. The works published in this time period both respond to developments of the field before and serve as jumping off points for the works written after during the “fairy-tale renaissance” of the 1970s. They are united by the quality of their use of fairy-tale allusions, using them to create subtle political commentary specific to America during the contemporary moment. These novels challenge the contemporary usefulness of traditional stories, most especially the received metanarratives which illustrate a happy ending found in heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman, each conforming to their assigned role in the Cold War binary of gender. Though the binary construction of gender means that I must discuss feminine character types in order to address masculine character types, I find the era

comparatively more creatively focused upon masculinity, particularly when compared to revisions of the “renaissance” movement beginning in the 1970s.

Overall, I depart from previous scholars of single author scholarship simply by taking a sustained focus on the fairy tale aspects in novels that few or no fairy tale scholars have written about. Although Welty, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Macdonald have received some criticism of the fairy tale elements within these novels, none has an established legacy among fairy tale scholars. I differ from other fairy tale scholars because the field does not tend to address either these authors or the time period in which they wrote. I hope to demarcate a time period of fairy tale creation and to encourage the field of fairy tale studies to explore more deeply a period in American literature that has been largely neglected in favor of the “renaissance” time period and “classical” time period. I also hope to broaden the scope of focus within the author scholarship of these chosen writers.

CHAPTER ONE

EUDORA WELTY, THE FASCIST STEPMOTHER, AND THE ROBBING BRIDEGROOM

A reader, picking up the hardcover first edition of Eudora Welty's 1942 novella *The Robber Bridegroom*, might expect a fantasy or children's book. The title is the same as that of a Brothers Grimm fairy tale. The cover art features an illustration from the story surrounding the informative words of the art. A reader of the hardcover first edition of *The Robber Bridegroom* sees the title in a gold box underneath Eudora Welty's name at the top of the cover. In the surrounding illustration, a woman in a white dress, long blonde hair billowing, moves along a dirt path toward a log cabin deep in the woods. The trees reach up past the title and beyond the author's name. The illustration would not be out of place in a children's book³. The back cover, however, places the novella firmly within the wartime tradition. The reader in 1942 would find on the back of the dust jacket a strong invocation to fight for freedom by buying war bonds. It says, "This book, like all books, is a symbol of the liberty and the freedom for which we fight. You, as a reader of books, can do your share in the desperate battle to protect those liberties—" and then in larger font beneath are the words "Buy War Bonds." Underneath that, within large parentheses comes the instruction "Bonds or stamps may be procured at most book stores, all banks, many other places of business. To buy them is to become a true soldier of Democracy." The front illustration contrasted with the seriousness of the war reference on the back cover

³ In contrast, the cover art for her first book-length publication, the short story collection *A Curtain of Green* published the year before, is a comparatively plain composition of the colors green and red backgrounding pale text.

might present something of a disconnect. But neither part of the dust jacket misleads the reader; that is just what Welty does in this novella. Welty takes the short story of a Grimm Brothers fairy tale and sets a newly-imagined version of that tale in the pioneer days of the American South. She revises the character types imported with the old story and invents new ones, splitting the sole villain into two, male and female. In so doing, Welty illustrates the dangers of foreign ideologies infiltrating the country.

The reader is primed to read the novella from this first impression of the appearance of its cover, and the title also instructs the reader in how to read. The reader knows to expect references to the fairy tale genre to be integral to the author's construction of and reader's understanding of the novella. The titular reference to the German fairy tale "The Robber Bridegroom" is an example of the strategy of intertextuality, one which Kevin Paul Smith calls an authorized reference. Of authorized references, Smith says, "The use of a proper name of a fairytale in the title acts as an authorial sanction that the text is to be understood in its relevance to a prior, pre-existing fairytale" (12). This is true of Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom*. In addition to the authorized reference, Welty uses the strategies of intertextuality identified by Smith as allusion and re-vision. Allusion refers implicitly, not explicitly, to a preexisting fairy tale. Re-visions put a "new spin" on a preexisting fairy tale; no matter how greatly changed the new story may be, its connection to the earlier fairy tale remains obvious to a reader familiar with its plot (Smith 10). In the case of Welty's novella, although her plot is displaced to a different space and time than the Grimm version, much of the plot remains recognizably consistent. The ways in which the plot deviates from that fairy-tale original reveal Welty's intentions for her version. This chapter focuses on actions by characters in the novella (Salome Musgrove and Jamie Lockhart) that variously reinforce and subvert gender norms, particularly

Cold War masculinity, to illustrate Welty's intentions in using the intertextual strategies of authorized reference, allusion, and re-vision.

Although the novella begins and ends in New Orleans, Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* is primarily set on and around a plantation adjoining the Mississippi River in 1798, when the land was still granted to inhabitants by the Spanish king. The cast of characters is large, including four primary characters. Clement Musgrove is the plantation owner father of Rosamond, the heroine at the heart of the novel. Her stepmother, Salome, engineers situations likely to kill Rosamond and remove her as a complication to Salome's domestic life. Jamie Lockhart is Rosamond's romantic interest—the robber bridegroom. Due to both Rosamond and Jamie wearing disguises, Jamie believes he is searching the woods for a robber to defend the honor of a plantation owner's ugly daughter, meanwhile romancing a beautiful woman he twice robbed from, while Rosamond believes she is avoiding the man her father has promised her to in marriage in favor of romancing the man who twice robbed her. While the two lovers – not four – stumble into learning who they are, they are threatened by a poor neighbor named Goat working for Salome as well as a bandit named Little Harp. A local tribe of Native Americans ultimately captures them, resulting in the separation of all the major characters. Despite many revelations and dangers, the couple are married, have twins, and own many riches. Seemingly the couple will live happily ever after, unlike the robber and bride in the earlier version of the tale by the Brothers Grimm.

While the fairy tale “The Robber Bridegroom” forms the backbone of the novella's plot, Welty draws on broader tropes from the fairy-tale genre to form several descriptions and characterizations. These allusions combine with and strengthen the broader act of re-vision. Her allusions are more implicit than explicit, performing Smith's function of allusion rather than the

separate function of incorporation (Smith 19). For example, Welty specifies that the protagonist Rosamond does not have pearls or snakes falling from her mouth; this is a strange state to clarify unless one assumes the reader has read Charles Perrault's "The Fairies," which Welty does not identify directly. With the entire plot of the novella, Welty "put[s] a new spin on an old tale" (Smith 10). Smith's function of re-vision takes fairy tales and views them through a different lens. Re-vision Smith describes as happening "where the hypertext [the newer work] is mainly concerned with revising the hypotext [the source text] with all that this implies in terms of structural similarities between the two tales" (34). It is in this last function, re-vision, that we find the most significant way in which Welty uses the fairy tale in *The Robber Bridegroom*. In "re-vising" the hypotext of the Brothers Grimm "The Robber Bridegroom," Welty makes several integral changes to the setting and characterization of the original, particularly relying upon the reader's understanding of traditional gender roles to round out the characters of Jamie and Salome from character type to unique character. Welty situates her story in the eighteenth-century American South. In so doing, Welty creates new antagonists for the fairy tale beyond the titular bridegroom, whose crimes are altered for this re-vision. Both in moving the setting from Germany to the United States and in creating a fascistic evil stepmother antagonist, *The Robber Bridegroom* suggests that the United States was not immune to the threat of fascism spreading across Europe from Germany.

Immediately following the close of World War II, Eudora Welty wrote one of her few public letters to the Jackson, Mississippi *Clarion Ledger*. In what would have been a letter to the editor, had the newspaper had such a section, Welty criticized the visit of the "fascistic Gerald L. K. Smith" to the city. As she later recounted in a letter to Robert Van Gelder, in response to her publication on December 20, 1945, Welty received an angry anonymous letter that alleged she

“was known as a dirty communist” (McHaney *Tyrannous Eye* 127). This exchange illustrates both Welty’s disapproval of fascistic leaders and the lack of easy demarcation between the conflicts of World War II and the Cold War. Although recent criticism acknowledges that Eudora Welty should not be read as simply a regionalist who writes about the interior lives of individual characters to the exclusion of wider-reaching sociopolitical issues, we have not fully dismissed this reductive categorization of the author held in consensus by earlier critics. In 1946 William Holder termed her a “distinguished regionalist” (qtd. in McHaney x); Jonathan Yardley in 1970 called Welty a “great regionalist,” but he dampened the positive qualifier by classifying a regionalist as someone “whose view does not extend beyond the first hill” (qtd. in McHaney 167). Diana Trilling calls Welty’s writing “at best, apolitical” (qtd. in Pollack and Marris 3), while Richard King claims that Welty’s writing is both “ahistorical and apolitical” (Pollack and Marris 4). Since many reviewers have not seen political implications in her work, she has had a reputation as being “indifferent to the larger social and political problems of [her] region,” according to Jan Nordby Gretlund (226). More recent criticism (since the 1990s, according to Harriet Pollack [2]) has seen Welty as a political writer, contending that her Southern setting does not prohibit her from addressing national or international issues. Ten essays in the 2001 collection edited by Pollack and Suzanne Marris, *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade?*, refine the view of Welty as consciously writing political themes despite her apparent disavowal of the practice in her 1978 essay “Must the Novelist Crusade?” More recently, Elizabeth Crews has argued that Welty’s children’s book *The Shoe Bird* (1964) uses the distance that anthropomorphic animal characters gives in order to subtly illustrate flaws in white supremacists and their sympathizers of the early 1960s American South. This chapter, in the vein

of such critical works as these, argues that Welty's early novella uses the distance allowed by the fairy-tale intertexts to provide "covert" political commentary, as in her later works.

Eudora Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942) tacitly responds to the growing threat of fascism, and this can be seen through the construction of the villainous evil stepmother Salome. My purpose here is to show one way in which Welty's novella is proof that, although the engagement with international events is not as explicit as in the bestselling war novels of the time, Welty deals with issues in her fiction that connect far beyond her region of Mississippi and the American South. Welty transcends regionalism through her allusions to several German fairy tales and major revision of the "The Robber Bridegroom" in particular. In this chapter, I will first explain the context during which *The Robber Bridegroom* was written and published, and then I will expand upon how the traditional robber bridegroom's role in the story was altered and the antagonism of the character Salome expanded in order to support my argument.

Few contemporary reviews of *The Robber Bridegroom* address the curious fact that the source material for the novella comes primarily from German folk tales; it is a glaring omission not to note that a country at war with the United States was responsible for creating the lore at the backbone of an American story. Reviewer Marianne Hauser (1942) holds the strange belief that *The Robber Bridegroom* "outdoes in its fantastic exuberance any of the fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm from the folklore of old Germany's elfin woods" precisely because it is "an American fairy tale." Hauser knows the plot elements are "transplanted" from Germany, but does not discuss the politics of such a revision (McHaney 22). Nash Burger (1943), oddly, seems unaware of any German connection to the novella; he states that Welty understands that "[t]he connection of the Southern Anglo-Saxon with his English forebears is universally understood," and that she writes "in the feeling and style of an Elizabethan or even Middle English folk tale"

(28). Burger says that the plot is insignificant (28), but the connections “close to the English ballad, close to the Middle English romance” and “matter-of-fact acceptance of the supernatural found in the Celtic tales,” create something “charming” (29). It seems incredible that this reviewer would so consciously exclude the Grimm connection—and I do believe it was conscious, since the fairy tale had been mentioned in American letters for years and the plot motifs are too easily apparent. The authorized reference to the fairy tale is Smith’s first element of intertextuality for a reason; the reader’s first introduction to the novella is an obvious “authorial sanction that the text is to be understood in its relevance to a prior, pre-existing fairytale” (Smith 12). Moreover, Burger was a childhood friend of Welty’s (Welty, *Writer’s* xix), and as such surely could have consulted with her about her source material. Burger’s wording seems like a conscious political choice, focusing on America’s cultural heritage with the British rather than anything touching on Germany.

Readers may not see the international interests in Welty’s fiction because of her artistic beliefs about what she called the political “crusader.” Statements by Welty and those who knew her indicate that she held strong political opinions. Again and again over the years, Eudora Welty has said that she felt that she has been political in her work, but she wants her “crusading” to be organic to the work and not an obvious act of propaganda. In “A Visit with Eudora Welty,” she is quoted as saying:

I don’t believe that a work of art in itself has any cause to be political unless it would have been otherwise. I think there are places for political outspokenness, but in my mind, it should be done editorially, and in essays and things that are exactly what they seem. But I think a work of art, a poem or a story, is properly something that reflects what life is exactly at that time. That is, to try to reveal

it.... I think a work of art must be moral. The artist must have a moral consciousness about his vision of life and what he tries to write. But to write propaganda I think is a weakening thing to art. (Ferris "A Visit" 165)

Welty had no qualms about voicing political opinions in her personal life—indeed, those in the Jackson, Mississippi, area who knew her readily classify her as a dedicated political liberal. However, she thought that such “preaching” (Ferris “A Visit” 166) belonged in a different sphere of her life than her constructed artistic works. Since politics concerns social and therefore moral issues, and since morality cannot be avoided if a writer wants to write a true picture of people, political implications are also unavoidable (Gretlund 226), and this Welty deals with in a non-straightforward style. In the interview with Gretlund, she said, “The real crusader doesn’t need to crusade; he writes about human beings in the sense Chekhov did. He tries to see a human being whole with all his wrong-headedness and all his right-headedness” (226). Through doubling, Welty starkly illustrates this “wrong-headedness” and “right-headedness” within a character. Welty’s political views are certainly present in her fiction, but they require a little thinking and digging to locate.

Letters written by Welty as well as opinions attributed to her by friends allow us to assume how Welty felt personally about World War II, which provides valuable context for arguing implied authorial intent. In Michael Kreyling’s publication of and commentary upon letters exchanged by Welty and her agent Diarmuid Russell, he says that “Welty’s brothers and several friends were drafted; their fates in Europe and the Pacific wore upon her concentration.... The spirit of the enterprise of popularizing violence seemed, at the outset of the war, false to her” (82). Welty had finished *The Robber Bridegroom* and sent it to Doubleday through Russell many months before the war began to truly weigh on her; however, even before America officially

entered into the conflict, she was preoccupied with the threat. “Writing this novella in 1940,” Welty’s authorized biographer and friend Suzanne Marrs asserts, “Eudora could not have known about the German death camps, but she would have known a good deal about Hitler’s systematic misuse of power to disenfranchise and discriminate against Jews” (*Eudora* 96). Marrs explains, “From the moment World War II began, Eudora Welty was overwhelmed by what was at stake and by an excruciating apprehension about the toll war would exact” (85). In 1980, Welty reflected, “everybody honestly believed we were trying to save the world from Nazism.... I couldn’t write about it, not at the time—it was too personal. I *could* write or translate things into domestic or other dimensions in my writing, with the same things in mind” (Pollack and Marrs 33). She felt strongly about the war, and her feelings are detectable in her writing. With her views regarding “crusading” in fiction, she did not overtly write a war novel with a story taking place in the European theater in order to work through her feelings about the same subject. She would come at the situation from a slant. Just as fairy tales are acknowledged as psychological consolation for difficult life events by scholars such as J. R. R. Tolkien and Bruno Bettelheim, so too does Welty’s revision of “The Robber Bridegroom” offer consolation for her contemporary audience, the removed setting allowing fears too close to reality to be dealt with at a more comfortable distance.

Much of the documentation we use to determine Welty’s perspective on the war in her own words occurs after the publication of *The Robber Bridegroom*. Welty had a summer internship at the *New York Times Book Review* in 1944; of this time, Pearl McHaney says, “While Welty was in New York in 1944, her two brothers and many close friends were in Europe fighting. Working at the *Times* kept her in close touch with the ‘real war’ as well as the growing literature about or from the war” (Welty *Writer’s* xix). Do we assume this immersion in

the *Times* created Welty's lifelong practice of reading the newspaper, repeatedly referenced throughout Welty criticism, or can we fairly assume she was just as invested in the headlines two and three years earlier? In a letter to the editor of the *Clarion Ledger* dated December 20, 1945, Welty condemned the two Jackson, Mississippi newspapers (the *Ledger* and *Daily News*) that reported without commentary on the visit to the state by pro-Nazi politician Gerald L. K. Smith. Welty states, "Nothing Gerald L. K. Smith could do is likely to be innocent, when he comes around poking his nose in" (Welty *Occasions* 223). Welty compares Smith to other politicians she disapproves of—elected officials Bilbo and Rankin—but says that "it's high time now to put the exodus on this public enemy we aren't even responsible for" (224). In this nonfiction piece published two years after *The Robber Bridegroom*, Welty is not shy about crusading against a man who aligned himself with the ideology of the Nazis. Can we assume that by 1942 Welty had already formed the political beliefs that she put down in writing so strongly here? The documentation is not chronological as I would like, but I believe that since Welty wrote *The Robber Bridegroom* after many years of Nazi influence in Germany and after some months of direct American involvement in the war, Welty's views would already be close to those we can intuit from writing a few years later.

Although not words from Welty specifically, there exists a large collection of opinions held across the country at this time. Field agents for the "World War II Rumor Project Collection, 1942-1943," held in the Library of Congress in the American Folklife Center, solicited spies to record overheard rumors and opinions on the war effort. By this point in the war, many people expressed fears that fascism was permeating the United States. In Warren, Ohio, on August 7, 1942, an anonymous source says, "The New Dealers are planning some form of Fascism, since the Government is creating such a large debt" (World E4225). A "[f]ormer

political office holder” in St. Paul says, “The Government is going to place greater restrictions on the people, but that won’t be until after the election” (World [32243]). A physician in Birmingham says that the President was planning to “become a dictator” (World [3222]). Variations of this sentiment occur throughout this collection, and like Welty’s perspective, it is unlikely that those fears were formed complete on the day they were spoken. Welty’s fairy tale novella was written to an audience fearing corruption and oppression from the highest levels of their government. They feared the European menace was encroaching on America.

The European menace of the time, fascism, is a large and multi-faceted ideology, thus resisting easy definitions. A simple definition from *Benet’s Reader’s Encyclopedia* defines “fascism” as “a political system of the extreme right characterized by a dictatorial leadership, a one-party system, totalitarian control of economic and social activity, and exercise of absolute power by the government at the expense of individual liberty” (“Fascism” 341). Historian and political theorist Robert Griffin grounds the idea in time, defining it as “a revolutionary form of antiliberal nationalism that in its fanatical pursuit of national rebirth in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly in Germany, played a decisive role in causing the Spanish Civil War and World War II in Europe, and the resulting loss of many millions of military and civilian lives through war, persecution, forced labor, and genocide” (270). The word and the understanding of fascism has become in common usage less easily pinned down as time passes due to the way language changes over time and words with specific meanings sometime take on generic usage: “Fascist” is often used as a term of opprobrium for a person who seems to be against personal liberty or who wishes to use the power of government oppressively” (“Fascism” 341). This definition in particular resonates with the plantation mistress character of Salome in *The Robber Bridegroom*. Anne Goodwyn Jones in her article “Every Woman Loves a Fascist: Writing World War II on

the Southern Home Front,” emphasizes the fact that fascism often is highly misogynist in its worldview and implementation, and yet none of the attempts at definition in currency acknowledge the “flight from the feminine, manifesting itself in a pathological fear of being engulfed by anything associated with softness, with dissolution, or the uncontrollable” distinguishable in this movement (Griffin qtd. in Jones 114). “Softness” is associated with women in a binary system, the opposite of masculine “hardness,” a binary that only grows in significance as the 20th century continues into the Cold War. In particular, fascism encourages a “complete horror at the slightest suggestion of androgyny” (Payne qtd. in Jones 114). Many contemporary Southern writers considered the possibility that the culture of the South meant that “while not avowedly Fascist, the South nonetheless was potentially a seedbed of Fascist irrationalism” (Brinkmeyer 8). “[I]n the 1930s a number of commentators from both the North and the South began noting similarities between the political and social orders of the South and those of Fascist countries, particularly Nazi Germany” (Brinkmeyer 3), and this similarity between enemies did not easily fit into a more mainstream nationalistic narrative.

The Robber Bridegroom then is Welty’s way of dealing with the conflict. Suzanne Marrs believes that in 1940 Welty “had been able, through the metaphor of plot, to suggest the need for change both abroad and at home” (*Eudora* 96). Furthermore, Marrs states:

[I]n depicting the past, Welty created emblems of a contemporary international situation that for her resisted direct transformation into art. Indeed, in both *The Robber Bridegroom* and *The Wide Net*, violent acts of self-assertion, rejections of diversity, and quests to define the past authoritatively are embodied in plots that emerge from regional history, fairy tale, and autobiography, but that also

implicitly allow Welty to challenge, in what may or may not always have been a conscious fashion, the dogma that leaders like Hitler daily espoused. (*One* 45)

I agree with Marrs' claims that I find are evident in a close reading of *The Robber Bridegroom*.

The very structure of the novel indicates that *The Robber Bridegroom* is directly critiquing fascism by parodying a German classic Grimm Brothers' fairy tale. Much of my logic for this claim comes in my reading of Salome specifically, but first I will provide context for the primacy of the Grimms at the time.

The majority of Welty's fairy tale motifs in *The Robber Bridegroom* revise Grimm stories. Rosamond's explicit lack of pearls or snakes falling from her mouth, as in French author Charles Perrault's "The Fairy" is one exception, as is the Biblical figure of Salome. This focus upon the German tradition rather than French, English, Italian, or any other region rich in folklore indicates a pointed focus upon Germany, the most visible actor in World War II. The Brothers Grimm published the first *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812; the scholars revised seven editions during their lifetime. Their collection entered into a conversation widespread during the time of its first publication which intended to make known and perpetuate German heritage, particularly that of the folk. The brothers intended their collection to serve as a scholarly collection of rustic tales; however, they talked to few or no lower-class people as sources, gaining their materials instead from previously published sources or family friends' recollections of their servants' stories. Whatever their intent, the collection of fairy tales was received by contemporary reviewers as children's stories. The brothers caved to the popular pressure by respondents and edited sexual content from the tales, making the stories more appealing to children, although the violent content increased (*Zipes Brothers* 48). According to Jack Zipes, as early as "the 1870s the Grimms' tales were incorporated into the teaching

curriculum in Prussia and other German principalities, and some were also included in primers and anthologies for children throughout the western world” (15). The popular tales allowed for “an ‘Aryan’ approach during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, which allowed many German folklorists to interpret the tales along racist and elitist lines” (16).

A. S. Byatt, in the introduction to Maria Tatar’s *The Grimm Reader*, explains the role of Germanic folklore in asserting identity during times of war. At the time of first publication, the Grimms “saw themselves as asserting what was German against the French occupying forces of the Napoleonic Empire” (Byatt xv). The tales were sanitized during the Grimms’ editorial tenure, and were further sanitized during the spread of Victorian values and the propagandist needs of the Weimar Republic (*Zipes Brothers* 12). Richard M. Dorson says that “[u]nder the Nazis the originals of the tales with their bloodletting and violence were reintroduced” (qtd. in Tatar *Grimm* 284) implying that the child-appropriate sentimentality increasingly evident in the later Grimm editions of the tales was not as appropriate for the twentieth century audience as it had been for the nineteenth-century one. Randall Bytwerk in his online German Propaganda Archive gives an English translation of the education curriculum for the Hitler Youth, showing that the Grimms’ fairy tales were taught to girls in their first year (around age 10). Byatt notes as well that “the Allied occupying forces in Germany after the Second World War briefly tried to ban the Grimms because it was felt that their bloodthirstiness, gleeful violence, heartlessness, and brutality had helped to form the violent nature of the Third Reich” (xv), meaning that during the 1940s the Brothers Grimm tales were inextricably linked to ideas of German nationalism and Nazism. Boyd Schafer says that “the nationality of an author came to mean more than the content of his writing,” and school curricula reflected in course organization the trend to subsume importance of content under national identity (190-191). Grimm tales and other folklore

were inserted into the school curricula, with tales edited in order to appeal more to the mythology being created rather than their original content and context.

It is in this context that Eudora Welty wrote *The Robber Bridegroom*. She took a Grimm tale, “The Robber Bridegroom,” retained the title, and in the first line subverted the tale,⁴ the genre, the very logic behind any meaning in it. She placed “The Robber Bridegroom,” which was being lifted up as inherently German, into the American South, cementing the tale there with new characters from Mississippi legend. As Annette Trefzer writes about this move, “Welty’s turn to national culture rooted in regional mythology and history seeks to accomplish two goals: it engages a kind of patriotic nationalism that was fostered in part by the surveying and cataloging activities of the WPA, and it counters the threat of fascism abroad” (117). By bringing the tale into American territory, Welty both undermines the nationalistic tenor of the German source text and, like other writers at the time, illustrates a scenario in which the South is “potentially a seedbed of Fascist irrationalism” (Brinkmeyer 8). With this context established, I examine *The Robber Bridegroom*, specifically the character Salome, the plantation mistress.

The Robber Bridegroom is on its surface a simple story. It is modeled on the Grimms’ fairy tale “The Robber Bridegroom,” and brevity is one of the defining boundaries of the traditional form. In the 1857 version of the Grimm hypotext, a miller gives his daughter in marriage to the first man who seems rich and unobjectionable enough to take care of her. The bride-to-be goes to visit her bridegroom in his home in the woods, where she discovers he is the (implied) leader of a band of cannibals; this warning comes both from a bird and from an old woman enslaved by the men. The women escape, and she reveals the bridegroom’s crimes on the

⁴ That first line is: “It was the close of day when a boat touched Rodney’s Landing on the Mississippi River and Clement Musgrove, an innocent planter, with a bag of gold and many presents, disembarked” (Welty *Robber* 3).

wedding day, thus setting the stage for his and his band's punishment by execution (Tatar *Grimm* 129-133).

Welty's version, by contrast, includes references to other tales from within the German Grimm collection as well as Perrault's French tales and broadly American lore. In her comparatively lengthy fairy-tale re-vision, a rich planter from the American South (Clement) promises his daughter (Rosamond) in marriage to an infamous robber (Jamie Lockhart) whom he takes to be an upstanding man. Unknown to Clement, Rosamond has already developed an infatuation for Jamie Lockhart, a robber who as an unknown man with his face hidden behind berry juice has robbed her of her expensive clothing. Like Cinderella or Donkeyskin, Rosamond must perform dirty chores set by her malevolent stepmother (Salome). Rosamond in turn hides her true self with dirt when her father proposes the marriage to a cleaned-up Jamie, a gentleman. Still not knowing each other's true identities, Rosamond runs away to live with Jamie after he (disguised with berry juice) rapes her. In the hideout, Rosamond observes a bandit named Little Harp, a double of the bridegroom rather than Jamie himself, murder a Native American girl; the girl herself is also a double, mistaken to be the true bride of Jamie Lockhart. Rosamond sees Jamie without the juice, and in the style of Cupid and Psyche, she follows him when he flees. All the characters are brought together in the end of the tale by a vengeful group of Natchez Native Americans. Salome dies and Little Harp is killed; Jamie and Rosamond marry just before the birth of their twins. At a glance, it appears that the evil characters are punished while the virtuous are rewarded with a happily ever after; however, it does not take very much introspection to realize that the characters are much too complex in actions and personality for readers to accept such a simplistic conclusion. As cited above, Welty believed that the true crusader "tries to see a

human being whole with all his wrong-headedness and all his right-headedness,” and this is true of all characters, including Jamie and Salome.

In a combination of Welty’s moving the setting of the story to the American South to comment upon the fascistic potential within the South and the tendency of fairy tales to be removed in time for the function of emotional consolation, only one time and place is a proper setting for Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*: Mississippi prior to 1798 (according to “Fairy Tale of the Natchez Trace”), a time of westward expansion and slavery-enabled plantations. This setting and the psychologies found there necessitate a change in the villain of the tale.

Of primary concern here are the changes from the original fairy tale to the novella. Motifs or sets of actions from other recognizable fairy tales were added—“The Goose Girl,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “The Fisherman and His Wife” come to mind, and much has been made of the Mississippi legendary figure of Mike Fink and historic bandit Little Harp—but I am most interested in what was removed from the original story. The titular “robber bridegroom” is no longer the villain. True, Jamie Lockhart robbed the heroine of her clothing as well as “of that which he had left her the day before” (i.e., her virginity) (Welty *Robber* 33), but she still finds him desirable, and indeed seems to have a happy life ahead of her with him. Since Rosamond goes to Jamie in the woods, she may be seen as complicit in the sexual encounter that Welty carefully does not describe as “rape.” As Correna Merricks says in “‘What I Would Have Given Him He Liked Better to Steal’: Sexual Violence in Eudora Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*,” “The culture that teaches women to be submissive and men to be aggressive has yielded a rapist/victim relationship that . . . Rosamond sees as romantic” (7). We may understand this in comparison to another iconic story still seen as iconic of the Old South’s romance. Welty’s novella, published in 1942, comes just six years after the publication of the novel and three years

after the premiere of the film *Gone With the Wind*. In the wildly popular film and even more explicitly within the novel, Rhett Butler forces sex upon his unwilling wife Scarlett. The act is romanticized, triggering her to love and respect him more than she ever had before. Within the problematic social system of the American South, Jamie's villainy is redeemed. The character's status as a "good guy" is of course complicated, but he is not a figure of one-dimensional evil who must be removed from society as in the Grimm version. That distinction goes to Salome, of whom her husband says, "There was no longer anything but ambition left in her destroyed heart" (Welty *Robber* 13). Salome functions as an automaton devoid of human feeling, a perfect icon of a plantation mistress leaving Clement, appropriate to his name, a "soft" man innocent of the parental neglect of Rosamond. No mother figure appears at all in the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom." The bride does find an old woman in the cannibals' house, but although she helps the girl escape by drugging the robbers, she does not act in any way maternal to the bride. Salome seems to be imported from a tale like Snow White, lacking the plot motif of poison but retaining the stepmother's malice.

The changes and expansions from the original Grimm "Robber Bridegroom" story indicate Welty's intentions for her retelling. The greatest change from tale to novella comes in the treatment of the villain. In the Grimm story, the bridegroom is a cannibal. The man proposes himself as a suitor because he is looking for a young woman to kill and eat with his band of robbers. Much like Jamie, the robber bridegroom in the story knows how to get what he wants with his words. Although the bride-to-be in the story is wary of her fiancé, he pressures her to visit him at his home in the woods. She goes at his request. However, the bridegroom's plan is foiled. The bride arrives before him and, while hidden by an old woman, witnesses him and his "godless crew" dismember and eat "another maiden" (Zipes *Great* 739). The marriage was set up

by the robber solely to gain an unsuspecting meal. Since she unexpectedly became aware of his plot, she was able to walk home, tell her father, and give testimony before a crowd, ensuring the execution of the bridegroom and his band.

The bridegroom in Welty's novella, by contrast, is nowhere near as heinous. Welty's bridegroom robs Rosamond of her clothing before robbing her of her virginity, scenes not found in the source story, but he is absent when the robbers murder a young maiden. Jamie is not an innocent bridegroom, but his crimes are different. In accordance with Merricks's argument, Jamie's form of sexualized violence toward his future wife becomes an acceptable form of courtship. Though Welty writes the action of rape into the novel, she softens the impact of the act by how it is described. For several paragraphs, the prose in this section is descriptive and meditative, out of sync with much of what we see elsewhere in the novella. So much of the novella is full of dialogue and action, and here for a page and a half Rosamond wanders as though in a dream. She walks through a world "so early that the green was first there, then not there in the treetops." She hears hoof-beats, and then Jamie "reache[s] down his arms and lift[s] her up, pail of milk and all, into the saddle with scarcely a pause in his speed," as seamlessly as in a dream. While riding, Rosamond makes a picturesque scene: "On Rosamond's arm was the pail of milk, and yet so smoothly did they travel that not a single drop was spilled. Rosamond's cloak filled with wind, and then in the one still moment in the middle of a leap, it broke from her shoulder like a big bird, and dropped away below" (32). The meditative nature scene leads up to a romantic coupling underneath "the wild plum trees [...] like rolling smoke" (33).

Jamie follows the gender roles of aggressive male and passive female to their extreme logical conclusion: rape. The text puts it simply: "He stopped and laid her on the ground where, straight below, the river flowed as slow as sand, and robbed her of that which he had left her the

day before” (Welty *Robber* 33). After Jamie carries Rosamond away on his horse and takes from her a sexual encounter, she does not realize that going into the woods again was a mistake. Instead, after “Jamie had truly dishonored her,” she begins to feel “a great growing pity for him.” This motivates Rosamond to find his home and stay with him⁵ (38). Rosamond’s reactions overwrite the implicit abuse in their relationship’s beginning. This, as well as replacing him with his double Little Harp in order to remove him from the scene of murder, allows Jamie to be a sympathetic figure, a complicated but acceptable hero for the story’s heroine.

With the bridegroom redeemed, Welty must create a villain out of whole cloth in the character of Salome. In Jamie, as in most other characters in the novella, Welty makes the one-dimensional source character complex. She writes against stereotyping even the archetypal characters. This resonates with Welty’s perspective on judging the evil of others in the real world. Ronald Sharp, Welty’s co-editor between 1989 and 1991, calls the question of including Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Norton Book of Friendship* “the only time Eudora became angry with me.” He reports that she said, “I’m just appalled you’d even consider letting him into our wonderful book,” and Sharp believed that “Nietzsche’s appropriation by the Nazis was what made him so abhorrent to her.” He found her vehemence not to be a politeness condescending to his Jewish identity but rather a deep-set aversion to anyone touted by Nazi ideologues (44). This does not mean that Welty now or ever expressed prejudice against Germans in general; her 1945 review of *Apartment in Athens* by Glenway Wescott makes it apparent that she understands that an entire group of people are not all the same and that she does not agree with Wescott’s “thesis” “that all Germans are evil.” She points out that “The character of every German in the story

⁵ Here, too, Welty’s description of setting creates a fairy-tale sense of being out-of-time. One of the birds that Rosamond hears and sees on her journey through the woods is an ivory-billed woodpecker, now presumed extinct (Welty *Robber* 38). The last verified sightings of the bird came in 1944 Louisiana, after a failed National Audubon Society campaign to save it (Cornell). Welty’s casual inclusion of this rare bird further creates a sense of distance into the land of “once upon a time” far removed from 1942.

develops alike” implying that the portrait is stereotyping and not realistic (Welty *Writer’s* 62). As McHaney says in the introduction to *A Writer’s Eye*, typically in reviews in the 1940s Welty chose illustrative quotes from the books under review, and “[s]he let the books defend or condemn themselves” (xxiv). Welty may not explicitly say that this binary composition of character is unrealistic, but the judgment is clear in her tone. In her oft-cited essay “Must the Novelist Crusade?” Welty writes that, in contrast to arguments which “carry the menace of neatness into fiction,” what she calls “great fiction” instead “is very seldom neat, is given to sprawling and escaping from bounds, is capable of contradicting itself, and is not impervious to humor” (*Stories* 806). Welty’s wariness of typecasting is thus more apparent when she indulges in it when creating Salome.

In “Fairy Tale of the Natchez Trace,” Welty says that an inspiration for Salome was the Grimm tale “The Fisherman and His Wife” (*Eye of the Story* 304). In this tale, a fisherman catches and releases a fish that agrees to grant wishes in exchange. His wife makes him wish for grander and grander circumstances, raising herself as high as becoming the pope, until finally their fortune reverses and they both live in a pigsty as they did originally. Although this accounts for the character’s greed, this fairy tale couple is childless. The relationship between Salome and Rosamond comes from the origin tale of neither. It is instead reminiscent of the abusive relationships between many other fairy tale characters and their stepmothers (characters that in the Grimms’ first edition were biological mothers of the main characters). Cinderella, Rapunzel, and Hansel and Gretel are all popular Grimm characters who were tortured or sent to their death by their mother figures. More importantly, this maladaptive stepmother-child relationship would be familiar to a mainstream American audience at the time of the 1942 publication of *The Robber Bridegroom* thanks to the Disney Company’s 1937 release of its first full-length

animated feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. If any pair is iconic for a stepmother who has ill wishes for her stepdaughter, it is the Evil Queen and Snow White. This is the relationship Welty creates between Salome and Rosamond. Salome sends Rosamond to “the other side of the woods at the farthest edge of the indigo field” to gather herbs, hoping that “perhaps the Indians might kidnap the girl and adopt her into their tribe, and give her another name, or that a leopard might walk out between two trees and carry her off in his teeth before she could say a word” (Welty *Robber* 17). She hires Goat to follow Rosamond into the woods so that he can “finish her off” (23) much like Snow White and her huntsman. The given rationale for this is that Salome is ugly while Rosamond is beautiful (18), a reversal of the intensification of beauty in “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,” but an intertextual link all the same. Both Snow White and Rosamond are fairer than their stepmothers, and the stepmothers must compete with the younger women for all of the resources their respective patriarchs have to give.

The changes to Salome to create a villain say something about Welty’s overall goal with her novella, and I believe that this particular style of villain shows that Welty is responding to the global threat of the spread of fascism feared by the United States in the years leading up to the publication of the novella. In “Fairy Tale of the Natchez Trace,” Welty specifies that Jamie “leads a double life by hero’s necessity” (*Eye of the Story* 310). Intentionally, it is not Jamie who Rosamond sees killing the Indian maiden, but “his terrible, and real-life, counterpart, the Little Harp” (308). Welty says Jamie’s “renouncement” of his “double life” was also the “hero’s necessity.” “It is necessary,” she says, “that Jamie Lockhart kill his evil counterpart”—“and this is the only ending possible” (312). Welty focuses at length on the “duality” (310) of Jamie. Salome, by contrast, gets little attention in the talk. Welty quotes passages about Salome, relating them to the Grimm tale “The Fisherman and his Wife,” and continues to do so. Salome is not

two-sided like Jamie. She has no hero's journey; she is merely unpleasant and scheming. She is just a villain. Like the Fisherman's Wife, Salome will not be content until she can rule everything she can conceive of ruling.

Sally McMillan in her essay "Fairy Tales or Historical Records: Tales of the Natchez Trace in Eudora Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom*" focuses on Welty's use of doubling to mark her protagonists' increasing maturity. McMillan argues that Welty's "theme of life's complexity" (80), shown through this doubling, structures the changes her characters must make (or refuse to make) and lays visible for the reader a "commentary on life" that "leaves the reader better equipped for living" (94). She ties the psychological journeys made by Clement, Rosamond, and Jamie back to the idea that Welty is moving them from a state of wanting simplicity to a state of acknowledging the untenable nature of this desire. Particularly nuanced is McMillan's detailing of each character's journey: Clement "initially denies doubleness" (87), Rosamond "accepts duality only when it is pleasant," and Jamie "simplifies life by forcing it to fit into neat categories" (88).

It is then significant that in Welty's version her heroine chooses her bridegroom for herself. In the Grimm hypotext, the girl's only parent, her miller father, "wanted to be sure that she was provided for and that she married well once she was grown up," and so when "a suitor turned up who seemed to be rich," the miller "promised him his daughter." The miller dictated the course of his daughter's life "since the miller could find nothing wrong with [the bridegroom]" (Tatar *Grimm* 129).

Instead, in Welty's novella the fascist figure is Salome. In addition to her deplorable behavior toward Rosamond, locking her stepdaughter in her room as punishment for singing (Welty *Robber* 17), slandering her character to her father (18), and wishing dearly for her death,

Salome in her dominating behavior toward her husband and, indeed, her final insistence that she can control the sun (78) fits the connotation of “fascist” that had been used as a personal pejorative during the years prior to the time of Welty’s writing. As is excerpted below, Salome dictates to her husband how much land will be taken and cultivated. Salome is the traditional figure of the shrew who must be tamed in accordance with longstanding paternalistic tradition. In usurping the lead role given to men, Salome in the tradition of Grimm’s Fisherman’s Wife is the androgynous figure hated by fascism (Jones 114). Like the Fisherman’s Wife, her pride must be punished; unlike in the Grimm version, Salome must die. She has taken on more sins with her assuming the role of unloving stepmother; she must die dancing like Snow White’s stepmother, the heat of the sun replacing the fire heat of the red-hot iron shoes.

Salome’s death then seems to reinforce old ideas about “shrewish” women being punished for stepping out of line, while Jamie, exonerated in this revision as compared to the original, prospers. The best way to read this text as a condemnation of fascism rather than a text playing into its ideals is to see Salome as a creature of her time and place, the ideal time and place to convey Welty’s anti-fascist sentiment in the contemporary situation.

The rationale behind this situation comes from the necessity of the setting being what it is: the plantation-era South. During that time, the person who would have most to gain from expansion (or fascism) would be the mistress of the plantation. Her position is rooted in place. She has agency within the plantation system only in the domestic sphere. Salome is immobile, stuck in the home unlike her trading husband Clement. Therefore, the only way to increase her reach is to increase the land over which she is mistress. Salome is aided by the fact that Mississippi at the time of the novella was still frontier territory several years before statehood. Until the local Native American tribe appears to protest, Salome seems to be able to take all the

land and resources she wishes. There appears to be little society nearby for Salome to negotiate, even if she wanted to leave the plantation like her husband. In this societal power vacuum, Salome is able to take a firm hold over the family's domestic decisions. Of all the types of characters present in this setting, the married and settled frontier plantation mistress has the most to gain by establishing herself as the sole deciding voice over the plantation space. The villain has to be a woman character rather than the original's male bridegroom, and we see Salome step in to replace Jamie in this role. Much like her folkloric antecedents of evil stepmothers, Salome is a greedy figure competing with the daughter, the future. If it makes psychological sense for the fascist villain to be an ambitious mistress of a plantation, it makes structural sense for that woman to be an older woman, an evil queen of her realm, as a foil to a younger daughter. The larger politics of competition for influence and possessions is made interpersonal and more tightly tied into the plot of the original "Robber Bridegroom."

Salome has influence within the domestic sphere, and no further. To increase her reach, she must increase her plantation. In the following excerpt, Salome is shown exerting what influence she has in order to achieve more:

"Next year," said Salome, and she shaded her eagle eye with her eagle claw, and scanned the lands from east to west, "we must cut down more of the forest, and stretch away the fields until we grow twice as much of everything. Twice as much indigo, twice as much cotton, twice as much tobacco. For the land is there for the taking, and I say, if it can be taken, take it."

"To encompass so much as that is greedy," said Clement. "It would take too much of time and the heart's energy."

“All the same, you must add it on,” said Salome. “If we have this much, we can have more.” And she petted the little nut-shaped head of the peacock on her lap.

“Are you not satisfied already?” asked her husband.

“Satisfied!” cried Salome. “Never, until we have got rid of this house which is little better than a Kentuckian’s cabin, with its puncheon floor, and can live in a mansion at least five stories high, with an observatory of the river on top of that, with twenty-two Corinthian columns to hold up the roof.” (Welty RB 48-49)

This is the anachronistic “ruin of Windsor,” the remains of a plantation manor house which Welty describes in “Some Notes on River Country” with a similar focus on “twenty-two Corinthian columns in an empty oblong” as well as the added descriptor of its having “horses grazing like small fairy animals beside it” (762). This image of opulence more suitable for a more stable time period later in Mississippi’s history Welty includes as an indicator of Salome’s inability to be satisfied with even the incredible wealth the family already possesses. It is also one more way of moving the tale into an unstable chronology, a common tactic of fairy-tale revisions. Clement tries to convince Salome to be satisfied with the home and producing fields she already has, but she will not be satisfied until she has conquered every bit of territory bordering her own. Fascism is rooted in place, as is Salome’s dominion. As Rosella Mamoli Zorzi says, Welty’s prose continually “takes the reader back out of the fairy tale realm and into *place*” (25). During the time period in which the story takes place, prior to 1798, the United States (and individuals within it) were engaged in westward expansion to push forth its colonial reach, comparable to the way Germany was claiming territory in the contemporary moment.

Commenting upon the fascistic characters in America's history allows for a direct comparison and critique of contemporary fascism's potential threat to America. The Grimm fairy tale with its generic lack of specific setting is intentionally taken from the proud enemy nation's assumed setting and rewritten so that no setting but the American South can ever be presumed. The story fits its new, specific setting comfortably. The American South of 1942 may be removed in space from Germany and time from *The Robber Bridegroom*, but a careful reader can see that citizens at no distance should feel complacent, for a fascist threat can take root anywhere. One Salome and a few helpers like Goat may take advantage of a fertile situation anywhere and at any time.

Salome is the villain in this novel not only because she is cruel to Rosamond and attempts to command her husband and the sun. She is a villain because she wishes to expand her empire, in the same way the fascist Germany wished to expand its empire by taking over all surrounding countries. Salome and Rosamond are in competition with each other for resources, particularly the dress Clement brings home. In this excerpt, Salome competes with her stepdaughter:

“How much did you get for your tobacco, and where are the presents you were to bring?” she said next.

“Here are the moneybags, count it for yourself when the table is cleared,” said Clement, who would not cheat even a little midge of its pleasures. “And here is the packet of needles, the paper of pins, length of calico, pair of combs, orange, Madeira, and muscadine wine, the salt for the table, and all from the apothecary that he could provide.”

“And is the silk gown for me too?” Salome asked, paying no heed to the rest but holding up to herself a beautiful dress the green of the sugar cane, and looking like an old witch dressed up for a christening.

“No, that is not for you, but for Rosamond,” said Clement. “And so are the hairpins, and the petticoat stitched all around with golden thread, the like of which the young ladies are wearing in New Orleans.”

“As if she were not vain enough as it is!” cried Salome. “And now these fancy things will be putting thoughts into her head, you mark my words, and away she will run, off with some river rat, like Livvie Lane and her sister Lambie on the next plantation, there within a week of each other.” (Welty *Robber* 19)

In this way Salome steps into the classic role of conflict between mothers and daughters, exemplified by Snow White and the Evil Queen, by stepmothers and daughters through fairy and folk tales. When the characters are singly captured by the Native Americans, Salome hears them coming to kill Rosamond and, “jealous even of not being chosen the victim,” cries out, “What beautiful girl are you looking for? I am the most beautiful!” (76). The older, uglier woman is at great likelihood to lose out on resources since the husband prefers to gift them to the younger, more beautiful girl. The gifts meant for Salome are practical; “salt for the table” keeps Salome rooted in place on the plantation. Rosamond’s gift, by contrast, prepares her for life away from the plantation, allowing her to expand her reach as far as New Orleans. In this way Salome’s competition for resources with Rosamond serves a dual purpose, reflecting both the fairy tale tradition and the very real economic concerns playing out upon the plantation as well as the expansionist fascist state. Through the use of Grimm tales, Welty “suggests that the past must be constantly reexamined and reinterpreted in view of new situations and insights” in contrast to Adolf Hitler, who “believed that an authoritative and unchanging view of the past could and should be set forth” (Marrs, *One* 55). Salome’s “red-hot” dance to death (Welty RB 78) echoes the death dance in heated “red-hot iron shoes” given to the stepmother of Snow White (Tatar

178). Salome must die as an archetype of an evil stepmother, but because she is evil in a setting with more nuance than the hypotext short story, the circumstances of her death hold more meaning. For the first four chapters, the bulk of the book, Salome's expansionist desires seem unchecked by any other societal forces within the frontier space. Finally, however, in chapter five the Native Americans bring the white settlers into their camp for punishment. The original possessors of the land had never been as "greedy" with their resource usage as Salome had intended to be; for their good stewardship of the environment, the Native American group are sympathetic when they flip the power dynamic on the encroaching tyrant. The original inhabitants of the space are justified in their violent behavior because they allow the more sympathetic, if still flawed, characters to resume their lives with different personal and political dynamics.

With the introduction of Salome to the fairy tale that forms the backbone of this novella's plot, this combination of evil stepmother trope and shrew trope from "The Fisherman's Wife" shows an anxiety around women who exceed their traditional bounds in pursuit of masculine power. In trying to obviously control the people around her, Salome is not satisfied with her role in the domestic sphere. Salome adds to the wildness of the world around her rather than fitting into a preexisting order. The downfall of the fascist figure of Salome shows Welty's engagement with and desired outcome of the contemporary threat of fascism both abroad and at home. This text published during the early years of the war highlights the threat to America from European fascistic expansion. Because this engagement is not on the surface of the story, the context may be overlooked. However, a careful consideration shows that in this act of appropriating a German fairy tale and subverting the master narrative it represents, *The Robber Bridegroom* is a good example of Welty's engagement in areas exceeding the regionalism of a Mississippi writer.

Welty's re-vision of "The Robber Bridegroom" deals with impulses of domination. The novella uses fairy-tale allusions in order to link the American South's history of the plantation, slavery, and expansion into Native American spaces through Salome's expansionist desires to subjugate others. Using Nadel's term, this is a "covert" form of commentary ("Translating" 640). Published during the early years of World War II, this novella throws that past into sharp focus during this period of international fascism.

While Welty's novella responds to the fascistic threat during World War II using fairy tale allusions within a novel-scale re-vision, in the next decade Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) uses fairy tale allusions to create a new fairy-tale fabulation, and in so doing the novel explores the threat to American domestic life posed by un-American communist forces. Where Welty makes her fairy tale allusion obvious through an authorized allusion in the title, Nabokov's allusions are much more subtle though no less important. In scenes that highlight the deviance of the taboo sexual relationship between the two main characters, Nabokov includes references to specific fairy tales as well as to the genre itself. Building upon smaller moments like these, the novel as a whole creates a new type of fairy tale. In so doing, Nabokov becomes one of several Cold War authors who incorporate the fairy tale genre in order to interrogate appropriate gender roles.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NYMPHET AND THE CHARMING WOLF: VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S *LOLITA*

Over a decade after Eudora Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* was published, Vladimir Nabokov published *Lolita* in 1955. In the intervening time, the phrase "cold war"⁶ was first used by George Orwell to describe the "permanent state" of war that he predicted would develop between the world's superpowers (White 228). Tensions were high between the United States and USSR. The cultures of these countries shifted from "hot war" to "cold war," from the active conflict of World War II to an ongoing period of fear of active conflict. From the Hays Code restricting what was allowed on film to the Congressional House Un-American Activities Committee accusing U. S. citizens of communist activity, we see a movement in American culture toward containing controversial behavior definitively and legally. *Lolita*, with the sexual corruption of a minor central to its plot, was at first too controversial to be published in the United States. The manuscript was rejected by four American publishers, finally finding publication in Paris in September 1955. The French publisher, Olympia Press, was well-known for its salacious catalog; this created another barrier to publication Stateside (Appel, Jr. xxxiii). Only after publicity generated by debating reviewers in important outlets⁷ did *Lolita* secure American publication by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 1958 (xxxv). The lyrical yet taboo "Hurricane

⁶ In this and other quotations, I retain the original author's capitalization and spelling. In my own prose, I use American standards of spelling (e.g. "authorized" instead of "authorised") and capitalization (e.g. "Cold War.")

⁷ Such as the *Sunday Express*, *The Spectator*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Anchor Review*, *The New Republic*, *New York Times* (Appel, Jr. xxxiv-xxxv).

Lolita” (Nabokov’s words in lines 679-80 to the central poem of his 1962 *Pale Fire*) would take America by storm.

If in her novella Welty employs references to the fairy-tale form as strategies to subtly critique fascist tendencies in the United States, in *Lolita* Nabokov uses references to the fairy-tale form even more subtly to comment upon the Cold War culture of America during its height—specifically expectations for masculinity and gendered courtship. Both authors use the fairy tale politically. Welty uses allusions to several specifically German fairy tales in the setting of an antebellum American South to show the ease of transference of the titular tale’s fascistic implications to the United States. Nabokov’s allusions to German tales alongside Russian folklore, Biblical tales, and literary references create an entirely new form of a fairy tale set in America of the 1940s-1950s. In this novel, fairy-tale allusions are also integral to the meaning and the overall experience of reading the novel. Throughout *Lolita* Nabokov alludes implicitly as well as explicitly to various preexisting fairy tales, but unlike the other authors in this study, he does not “authorize” the novel by making such a connection explicit in the title. Whereas in the previous chapter I argued that Welty uses the fairy tale in her novella using four different intertextual strategies as laid out by Kevin Paul Smith, I here argue that with *Lolita* Nabokov authors a new fairy tale, which Smith describes as the strategy of fabulation. With old character types set against new, this fabulation explores how deviance thrives in Cold War America. It is through the use of the fairy tale, with all of its potential for the fantastic coexisting with the everyday, that *Lolita* reveals the Cold War containment narrative of idealized American masculinity to be only a cover for more realistic transgressive behavior.

Out of the eight strategies for the intertextual use of fairy tales in postmodern novels, the strategy Smith calls fabulation arguably maintains the most tenuous connection to earlier

examples of the genre. Fabulation relies upon a reader's recognition of generic markers broadly (such as formulaic beginnings and endings, an unspecified time and place, events recurring three times), not just character names (such as Cinderella) or motifs (such as a glass shoe or poisoned apple). This strategy Smith connects to Gerard Genette's "architextuality," which is "the relationship between the individual text and its genre" (42). This is how we understand a fairy tale to be such, even if it is postmodern rather than early modern. Smith identifies works as fabulations when the novels include "traditional and recognisable fairytale motifs, but they are brought together in a sequence that is a 'new' combination of the formula. That is, they do not replicate a pre-existing fairytale in its entirety, and therefore this can be seen as an example of fabulation" (45). Smith cites features such as the traditional "once upon a time" introduction, the nonspecific time and place of the setting, and the presence of magical items or events as key features of the fairy-tale genre that are likely to be incorporated into the creation of a fabulation (48). These elements of a fairy tale are present in *Lolita*.

Unlike the other three novels considered in this dissertation, *Lolita* does not have an explicit reference to a particular fairy tale in its title. The titular character of "Lolita," however, has become as recognizable today as a "Cinderella" type or a "Goldilocks" type. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists "Lolita" as an officially-recognized noun. The dictionary defines the term as one "used to designate people and situations resembling those in the novel *Lolita*, in which a precocious schoolgirl is seduced by a middle-aged man" ("Lolita, n."). Ellen Pifer says, "In the popular mind, the name Lolita has come to signify the cynical sophistication and sexual precocity, bordering on lewdness, of American—and Americanized—youth" (83). If *Lolita* has become its own tale type, passing into the common vernacular, then it is one which arises from a particularly American culture. Much as the Cold War film *Rebel Without a Cause* shows a

societal fear of what happens when youths rebel against the social order for no good reason, here *Lolita* may serve as a warning tale illustrating what may happen if the girls who will become women are unable or unwilling to perform the duties of domestication which society requires of them. As Graham Vickers puts it, “After her death, *Lolita* was to become the patron saint of fast little articles the world over, not because Nabokov’s mid-1950s novel depicted her as such but because, slowly and surely, the media, following Humbert’s unreliable lead, cast her in that role” (7). This character type is synonymous with the character type I will explore later: the nymphet. Steven Swann Jones argues that Nabokov uses “stock characters of the European fairy tale” (“Enchanted” 270) for three reasons: “first, just for magical appeal; second, to “expose the unrealistic way that fairy tales and their stock figures portray life”; and third, “to make a statement about the paradoxical relationship of art (mirage) and reality (fact)” (271). I agree with and extend this understanding of Nabokov’s motivations to apply to masculine gender roles.

Part of my argument for *Lolita* as a fairy-tale fabulation stems from the novel’s incorporation of fairy-tale allusions to tales such as “Beauty and the Beast” and “Bluebeard.”⁸ The strategy Smith identifies as allusion refers to “implicit reference[s] to a fairytale within the text” (10). These allusions to fairy tales are not spread evenly throughout the text. The allusions to different commonly known fairy tales appear, as I show below, at increased rate during scenes of heightened sexual import. These many references included at these points of the plot serve to highlight the perversity of the novel’s central romance. These allusions to well-known fantasies

⁸ At least two scholars establish the novel’s relationship to the fairy tale “The Sleeping Beauty.” Julian W. Connolly reads the Enchanted Hunters scene as a “corrupt” “Sleeping Beauty” (121). Susan Elizabeth Sweeney goes further, seeing “The Sleeping Beauty” motif throughout the novel. Sweeney notes important imagery held in common between Nabokov’s novel and the ballet, descriptions of Humbert Humbert as a “certain bewitched traveler” and as a “lone voyager” now “under a nymphet’s spell”; she compares these descriptors to “the prince in *The Sleeping Beauty*, spellbound by a vision of the sleeping princess, [who] embarks upon a voyage in order to obtain her for himself” (Sweeney 125).

of idealized romance serve to juxtapose the behavior of the narrator against Cold War ideals of masculinity that Humbert is failing to enact.

The deviant sexual behavior of Humbert Humbert threatens the most sacred space of the Cold War: the home of Lolita and her single mother, Charlotte Haze. *Lolita* was written during the years Alan Nadel identifies as “peak cold war America”: 1946-1964 (*Containment* 4). During this period in American history, importance was placed upon the domestic unit, the family space that Humbert Humbert infiltrates, as key to winning the Cold War. The narratives of containment, Nadel states, are “filled with repressed duality, [attempting] to reconcile the cult of domesticity with the demand for domestic security.” These narratives set up a “mythic nuclear family as the universal container of democratic values” (xi). Romantic relationships are central to these narratives. Containment culture “[lodges] the cold war in a gendered courtship narrative that is constantly trying to make impossible distinctions between Other and Same, partner and rival, for the purpose of acquiring or excluding, proliferating or containing proliferation” (6). During the 1950s, both men and women were expected to conform to traditional gender roles, and any deviancy was discouraged. *Lolita* clearly features deviant sexual behavior flourishing in a world that ineffectively discourages it. As Andrea Carosso notes, Nabokov is commonly read as an author who “deliberately elude[s] any reference to the political and social context” of Cold War America. I follow Carosso in her focus on “the way in which sexuality, a highly-charged domain in the early Cold War years, operates in the American novels as Nabokov’s distinct marker of his commitment to the politics of the Cold War” (43). By alluding to the world of the fairy tale, *Lolita* engages in “covert” explorations of sensitive narratives central to Cold War culture.

Two competing readings are central to this chapter's argument. First, I would like to examine *Lolita* in light of a preexisting fairy tale: "Little Red Riding Hood." Many elements of that tale type are recognizable in this story of an older man and his preteen object of desire. However, the novel is too complex for one to do it justice by reducing it to a "re-vision" of a fairy tale. In the second part of this chapter, therefore, I suggest that these generic components recognizable as "Little Red Riding Hood" work in concert with other elements of the fairy tale genre more generally, as well as the genres of folklore and romance. I suggest that *Lolita* is a fabulation, a new story scaffolded upon architextual features from the fairy tale, using much postmodern play to create the effect upon its reader. It is through the creation of this dreamlike fantasy world that the narrator's transgressive behavior is made to seem normal. Nabokov's juxtaposition of the fairy-tale-like romance of Humbert Humbert and Lolita with the mundane reality of the 1950s United States setting calls attention to the nonconformity and transgression of Humbert Humbert's masculinity against socially acceptable behavior.

The 1955 novel is narrated by a European transplant to America called Humbert Humbert, who is writing while incarcerated for murder. While the novel serves as an autobiography of his whole life, the events Humbert Humbert selects contextualize and aggrandize the narrator's love affair with the titular character, Lolita. This novel functions within the memoir and confessional genres. Although Humbert Humbert does admit to killing Clare Quilty, he feels no guilt for doing so. His confession is to a crime for which he has not been criminally charged: the rape of Lolita.

The novel begins with nine brief chapters summarizing Humbert Humbert's abbreviated life story before he meets Lolita. His childhood in the Hotel Mirana on the Riviera is glossed over until the age of thirteen, when he meets Annabel Leigh. She is "a lovely child a few months

[his] junior,” and the two fall “in love with each other” during her family’s beach vacation. Since Annabel dies four months later, they never have a chance to progress their relationship to a state of domesticity. Humbert Humbert fixates on her memory but says that he “[breaks] her spell by incarnating her in another” (Nabokov 15). This other is not his wife of four years, Valeria, or a series of youthful prostitutes, but a young girl in the United States when Humbert Humbert is 38 years old.

Dolores Haze (the girl’s real name, rather than the name of “Lolita” given her by Humbert Humbert) is 12 years old when he moves into her house as a lodger. Humbert Humbert feels contempt for her mother, middle-class widow Charlotte Haze, and yet he marries her “in order to have [his] way with her child (Lo, Lola, Lolita)” (Nabokov 70). Lolita is away at camp when Charlotte finds proof of Humbert Humbert’s attraction to her daughter and is killed by a moving vehicle while leaving their house. Humbert Humbert, finding himself the girl’s sole legal guardian, picks her up from camp and (before telling her that her mother has died) begins a sexual relationship with her at an inn called The Enchanted Hunters. The narrator frames their relationship as a love affair, but Part One of the novel ends with Lolita realizing that she has been “raped” (141). She must stay with Humbert Humbert because “she had absolutely nowhere else to go” (142).

Humbert Humbert and Lolita spend the year of August 1947 to August 1948 traveling across America in Part Two. Through a combination of new daily roadside amusements and consistent threats about what would happen to such a teenage “delinquent” (Nabokov 151) without him, Humbert Humbert keeps Lolita at his side away from anyone who knows them. They finally return east to settle in a new town, where at her private girls’ school Lolita makes friends and lives a more conventional life than she had in the prior year. More than that, she

meets Clare Quilty, an older playwright (of the play *The Enchanted Hunters*) in whom she sees an escape from Humbert Humbert. She suggests that Humbert Humbert take her on another road trip, but this time he becomes consumed with the idea of being followed. His suspicions are correct: when he has to leave Lolita in the hospital overnight, she checks out and leaves him with the help of Clare Quilty. Between the summers of 1950 and 1952, Humbert Humbert spends three years searching for Lolita. In 1952 Lolita reaches out: 17, married, pregnant, and desperate for money. With the name of her town and her husband (Richard F. Schiller), Humbert Humbert is able to locate her in the telephone book. Humbert Humbert gives her money, and she gives him the name of the man who took her away three years ago. When she will not agree to come away and live with him, Humbert Humbert finds Quilty and kills him.

Not unlike a fairy tale with a formulaic beginning and ending, Nabokov adds a second layer of distance to the novel in the form of a foreword by a fictional editor named John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. This introduction serves as legitimation for some of Humbert Humbert's claims, as well as information that Humbert Humbert himself could not have known. For example, Ray tells us that Humbert Humbert "died in legal captivity, of coronary thrombosis, on November 16, 1952" before his trial even started (Nabokov 3). Ray also tells us that a certain Mrs. Richard F. Schiller "died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl, on Christmas Day 1952" (4). This information means nothing to a first-time reader, but after learning the girl's married name toward the end of the novel, we understand that Lolita survived Humbert Humbert by hardly any time at all. This editorial framework serves to ground the otherwise unreliable and fantastic narrative of Humbert Humbert which is the bulk of the novel. Just as the Russian fairy tale "The Three Kingdoms" by Aleksandr Afanas'ev closes with an attestation that "I was at their wedding and drank beer" (53), the fictional Ray serves as attestation that the events of the novel are to some degree believable.

We might consider the plot of *Lolita* as told from the point of view of the wolf of “Little Red Riding Hood” rather than from that of a third person omniscient narrator focalized through the titular character. Both texts can be read as warning tales for young girls to be wary of wolf-like men following them in order to consume them.⁹ The consumption in both stories has sexual overtones. The OED lists as one definition of the word “wolf” “a sexually aggressive male; a would-be seducer.” Its examples of usage span from 1847 to 1978 (“wolf, n.”), during which time the novel was written. As common slang usage and the textual history of the tale show, understanding of the wolf as figurative predator was well established. It is worthwhile to explore these allusions in both the fairy tale versions and Nabokov’s novel.

Before I examine *Lolita* through the lens of the fairy tale, I will trace the motifs, themes, actions, intended audiences, political interpretations, and authorial motivations that different versions of the “Little Red Riding Hood” tale have accumulated over roughly three centuries. Like most fairy tales, the story classified within the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index as number 333 has been recorded in slightly different forms over time. When one refers to an “original” version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” one is making a slippery reference that, by itself, signifies

⁹ At least two other scholars read *Lolita* as a play on “Little Red Riding Hood.” John M. Ingham sees *Lolita* as a “parody” of the tale wherein the men involved play different roles simultaneously (35). Ingham agrees with other critics that Quilty is a “counterpart of the hunter” (36) but also “prey to Humbert” (37). Humbert Humbert as the wolf figure “would like to eat Lolita’s internal organs,” but he is also an “enchanted hunter” in contrast to the “unenchanting hunter” who is Lolita’s husband Richard Schiller (37). Extending the roles identified by others, Ingham notes that “[w]olves are also hunters,” and so in hunting Humbert Humbert and Lolita, Quilty becomes linked with the wolf role (37). This means that “[i]f Quilty/Humbert is a wolf, then Lolita represents Little Red Riding Hood. In fact, Annabel and Lolita are both associated with the color red” (38). Ingham explicitly builds his argument upon a reading of the novel by Jeffrey Berman.

Berman says that “in Nabokov’s fairy tale the roles of the huntsman and wolf are reversed.” Richard Schiller as huntsman “marries her, impregnates her, and fills her belly with the living thing that will eventually destroy her” rather than saving her life. Berman dubs this character “the unenchanted hunter,” and he calls Humbert Humbert “the poetical wolf” and “the good father.” Humbert Humbert’s final attempt to track down his Lolita, acquiring her address against Lolita’s obvious attempts to hide, Berman calls Humbert Humbert’s “attempt to rescue his beloved daughter from Quilty’s maltreatment and Schiller’s artificial insemination” (236).

nothing more than that the hypotext came before. No version in particular should be viewed as the definitive one¹⁰ unless otherwise specified.

Following Smith, we might read *Lolita* as a “re-vision” of “Little Red Riding Hood.” The link between earlier and later text can be explicit or implicit, Smith says. As long as there are “structural similarities between the two tales,” a reader may investigate the reasons the author might have had for including those intertextual references within their own work (Smith 34). I suggest that these structural similarities to the warning tale provide a base for subtle sociopolitical commentary upon the expectations of gender during the Cold War.

The fairy tale has never been either stable or politically neutral; this chapter’s argument that Nabokov uses fairy-tale allusions to build a cultural critique is in line with past use of the genre. The themes of sexuality, nationality, morality, and helping recur in this fairy tale’s many different versions. For this section, I rely on the definitive *Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (1983) by Jack Zipes. While other scholars have followed Zipes’ lead and chronicled the more recent adaptations of this tale type, there are few insights about the tale’s early history that Zipes did not first put forth.

The story of “Little Red Riding Hood” falls under the broad ATU heading of “Tales of Magic” (300-749) and its subheading of “Supernatural Adversaries” (300-399). The summary for this tale type is as follows:

A little girl, called ‘Red Riding Hood’ because of her red cap, is sent to her grandmother who lives in the forest and is warned not to leave the path [J21.5]. On the way she meets a wolf. The wolf learns where the girl is going,

¹⁰ As I have learned from teaching a fairy-tale unit to several sections’ worth of college freshmen over the years, if there is a Disney version of a tale, most people will default to that version as the “true” story. Unlike the three other fairy tale types focused on in this dissertation, “Little Red Riding Hood” does not have a feature-length Walt Disney animated movie retelling its story. Hopefully that means readers will more easily accept the many slight differences in this tale as equally valid motifs.

hurries on ahead, and devours the grandmother (puts her blood in a glass and her flesh in a pot). He puts on her clothes and lies down in her bed.

Red Riding Hood arrives at the grandmother's house. (She has to drink the blood, eat the flesh, and lie down in the bed.) Red Riding Hood doubts whether the wolf is her grandmother and asks him about his odd big ears [Z18.1], eyes, hands, and mouth. Finally the wolf eats Red Riding Hood [K2011].

A hunter kills the wolf and cuts open his belly. Red Riding Hood and the grandmother are rescued alive [F913]. They fill the wolf's belly with stones [Q426]; he is drowned or falls to his death. Cf. Types 123, 2028.

In some variants Red Riding Hood arrives at the grandmother's house before the wolf. The wolf climbs on the roof to wait until Red Riding Hood leaves. The Grandmother who had boiled sausages asks Red Riding Hood to fill the broth into a big trough in front of the house. Enticed by the smell, the wolf falls from the roof and is drowned in the trough. (Uther 224-5)

This summary serves to identify tales of a similar type, though it may leave out motifs used in few variants. One such iconic detail is the "What big eyes you have, Grandmother!" back-and-forth between Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf only hinted at in this abbreviated description. The above, though, is the core plot.

The first development of tales of the type that would become "Little Red Riding Hood," ATU 333, can be dated to the late Middle Ages. These "folk" tales existed primarily for an audience of rural children; the plots centering around vulnerable children under attack by wild animals, wild humans, or supernatural creatures had a straightforward social function: they showed children why not to talk to strangers or to allow strangers into their homes (Zipes

Trials 2). In the oral versions, the titular red hood motif that is today so integral to the story is missing. Appropriately, the tale was given the different title of “The Story of Grandmother” when collected in 1885 (5-6). In 1697 France, Charles Perrault published the first popular literary version of the tale type “Le Petit Chaperon Rouge.” While the folk tale spoke of real material concerns, the new literary tale dealt in thematics (*Zipes Trials* 9). Why did Perrault add a red hood to the integral characterization of the newly-titular protagonist? Since the color red was “generally associated at the time with sin, sensuality, and the devil,” as Zipes puts it, “Perrault obviously intended to warn little girls that this spoiled child could be ‘spoiled’ in another way by a wolf/man who sought to ravish her” (9). From this point on, the tale type became bound up with symbolic danger; the red cape and all it symbolizes is here to stay. In 1812 Germany, brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published their version of this tale, renamed “Rotkäppchen,” or “Little Red Cap.” The Grimms reintroduced a happy ending and a moral different from Perrault’s. This version is less cruel and sexual than Perrault’s, but their heroine is even more disobedient and helpless than her predecessor (15-6). Here, the wolf is part of a moral. By deviating from the path, the girl both disobeys and expresses her sexuality; for this she is punished. By the time she meets the second wolf (newly introduced in this version), the girl has learned to be “eminently rational” and repressive, and so she survives (16).

Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, most adaptations of tale type ATU 333 emphasized “virtue in danger” and a girl’s need for a male protector (*Zipes Trials* 20), blending together bits of both Perrault and Grimm rather than staying true to either tradition (24). The period immediately before the publication of *Lolita* saw, as with other literature of the time, great experimentation with the fairy-tale form. Although the Grimm version and Perrault version were both still (and remain) the most consistently recognizable, new variants emerged full of the

experimentation and subversion of the modernist expressionist and surrealist movements. Most literary authors during this period revised a Grimm/Perrault hybrid tale type with humor and irony, undermining cultural and literary conventions (*Zipes Trials* 32). Rather than overt politics, twentieth-century popular cartoons highlighted sex and danger in their versions of ATU 333. In the Walt Disney company's short Laugh-O-Gram using this tale in 1922, Little Red Riding Hood is treated as an adult damsel capable of romance, kissing a man who rescues her from the wolf (who here is an adult male human). The tale type was a favorite of cartoonist Tex Avery; several times in his career he retells the story in an ultra-contemporary setting. Whether the wolf, Little Red herself, or Little Red's grandmother is the sexual aggressor, all of the characters are portrayed as adults and aware of their sexually-charged behavior. Each of Avery's cartoons show that "Little Red Riding Hood" had come to be so well-known in American popular culture by the 1940s that the basic beats of the plot were able to be drastically changed, functioning easily as allusion. Arguably, its very familiarity allows for the preexisting morals associated with different versions of the tale to be subverted. If anything, the unthreatening associations of the fairy-tale genre allowed space in the public forum for American creators to playfully push against traditional values in a way that did not threaten a mass audience.

The shifting history of the fairy tale genre focused through "Little Red Riding Hood" shows that the tale functioned as a vehicle for a moral, but as the twentieth century wore on, increasingly artists used the fairy tale as a vehicle for parody. The status of Little Red Riding Hood as girl/woman and the status of the wolf as animal/man already coexisted. By the time Nabokov published his novel in 1955, an adult audience could be entertained by a "Little Red Riding Hood" retelling that held a multiplicity of registers and meanings. Although this chapter ultimately argues that Nabokov creates a fabulation reliant on multiple motifs in addition to

“Little Red Riding Hood,” this section’s reading of *Lolita* as a “re-vision” of only one tale type highlights the special interest in allusions to the fairy tale genre as part of a male-centered narrative before the 1970s fairy-tale renaissance with its focus on female-centered narratives.

Nabokov refers to many different fairy tales and folktales in *Lolita*. He references the name of Grimm directly, as well as several stories collected by the brothers. He refers to tales by Andersen and Perrault, as well as folklore derived from Goethe. There is also a clear allusion to “Little Red Riding Hood.” After leaving 17 year old Lolita but before killing Quilty, Humbert returns to the scene of the crime, Lolita’s old house in Ramsdale. Seeing that a new “nymphet” lives there, he approaches to “[say] something pleasant to her, meaning no harm, an old-world compliment, what nice eyes you have” (Nabokov 288). But, as in the outcome of the Grimm version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” this wolf’s second attempt is a failure. The girl flees without engaging in the tale type’s iconic back-and-forth with the wolf including the catchphrase “What big eyes you have!” The girl’s rejection of Humbert Humbert’s role as a charmer in dirty clothes makes him turn and leave.

We may see the connections to the fairy tale at the broadest level of the plot. Just as in “Little Red Riding Hood,” Lolita’s story begins with the girl at home with her mother. Her life changes when a new man enters her home as a boarder. The man, Humbert Humbert, sees and desires her, but she does not understand his designs on her. While Little Red leaves her mother to visit her grandmother, Lolita leaves home to go to summer camp. Instead of the wolf following the girl to grandmother’s house, Humbert Humbert stays behind and marries Lolita’s mother, thus gaining total access to Lolita’s home and to her. Although the wolf kills Little Red’s grandmother, Humbert Humbert does not directly kill his wife Charlotte; instead she runs into the road and is hit by a car after learning of her husband’s sexual desires for her daughter. In

some versions of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the story here ends quickly with the girl’s consumption and death. In *Lolita*, of course, this is just the beginning. Humbert Humbert takes Lolita away from her home and everyone she knows for a road trip across America. He consumes her life. He also consumes her body; as is typical of popular re-visions of “Little Red Riding Hood” in the early twentieth century, Lolita is an active participant in the pair’s sexual flirtation – at least at first. She quickly comes to regret her inability to escape Humbert Humbert and recover her normal life. The narrative then shifts once again to match up with the archetypal huntsman. In later versions of the fairy tale, the girl is saved by the timely entrance of a huntsman who cuts into the belly of the wolf and pulls the girl and her grandmother, still living, from its body. Lolita uses the character Quilty in a similar way to save her from Humbert Humbert.

Unfortunately, reading the novel as a simple re-vision leaves out much of the richness of the novel because it encourages a flattening of characters that are in fact complex and unique. Leland De la Durante argues that the “specific detail” of a motif or action, the specificity of a work, is what makes Nabokov’s work important (320). The fairy tale tends to have flat characterization; to use Vladimir Propp’s terms for dramatic personae, a character will be either a Helper, a Hero, or a Villain according to their function within the narrative’s overall plot (25). Reading the novel this way overemphasizes Humbert Humbert’s role as a wolf. It slots Quilty neatly into the role of huntsman. Such a strict division of character into type ignores the ways that the novel’s characterization blends types through doubling. Humbert Humbert is sympathetic despite his deplorable actions. Quilty commits awful actions despite his rescue of Lolita from Humbert Humbert. As well, Quilty is a double of Humbert Humbert, a foil whom Humbert Humbert despises and destroys. Such complexity, well established in criticism, is not

accounted for when one reads *Lolita* as a re-vision of “Little Red Riding Hood.” Lolita is an innocent and a flawed human girl, as Humbert Humbert himself complains in asides showing that his “nymphet” is really a bright and typical American preteen. Characters in *Lolita* are always double. Even Lolita’s precursor, Annabel Leigh, does not fit into this reading of the novel since there is only one little girl in “Little Red Riding Hood.” Nabokov purposefully creates characters who are both pursuer and pursued, culpable and vulnerable. Through the narratorial slipperiness of Humbert Humbert, a classic unreliable narrator, Nabokov introduces characters who point to a multiplicity of referents rather than pin down a sole fairy-tale archetype.

Reading *Lolita* as a revision of “Little Red Riding Hood” leaves much to be desired because the narrative surpasses “Little Red Riding Hood” in depth of characterization (as in Macdonald’s *Sleeping Beauty*) or extended episodes in the narrative (as in Barthelme’s *Snow White*) or combining the characters and plot events of different fairy tales (as in Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*). Therefore, I plan to show how *Lolita* builds upon fairy-tale generic markers to produce a unique fairy tale in a process that Smith calls “fabulation.” It is my contention that Nabokov uses fairy-tale allusions to create an ever-expanding text, frustrating any one interpretation with its surfeit of information. Through this Russian expatriate’s fictional creation of America, we may see expressed in the words and actions of his characters the nation’s contradictory and complementary views on sexuality, masculinity, and morality (among so many other aspects of contemporary society). Smith explains fabulation as a relationship that highlights the conventional elements expected of the fairy-tale genre. But, unlike in a re-vision, the fabulation does not replicate exactly the features or characters of any one fairy tale. It is in the recombination of elements that a fabulation is created.

Two crucial, recognizable elements of the fairy tale are a nonspecific time and a nonspecific location. *Lolita* is set in a specific time and place: the United States in the 1940s - 1950s. Yet Nabokov creates moments of nonspecific time and place within the narrative in order to create the feel of a fairy tale world. Some moments in the plot refer specifically to America at midcentury, and others, with the use of fantastic elements, create the illusion of timelessness, furthering the creation of a fabulation. In the collection of his lectures reconstructed by former students, Nabokov is reported to have said, “*Mansfield Park* is a fairy tale, but then all novels are, in a sense, fairy tales” (qtd. in Nabokov and Bowers 10). Scholars have long noted the recurring fairy-tale references within *Lolita* and concluded that they are significant. In his critical edition *The Annotated Lolita*, Alfred Appel, Jr. in his endnotes to the novel provides just over two pages cataloguing the fairy-tale references in the novel. The range covers eight references to elves, including the Erlkönig (elf king, derived from Goethe); seven references to general fairy-tale themes and motifs, including Quilty’s Grimm Road; the Enchanted Hunters hotel; six specific fairy tales, including Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid,” “Hansel and Gretel,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “The Sleeping Beauty,” “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” and “Bluebeard” (Nabokov 346-7). In addition to noting these allusions within *Lolita*, Appel contextualizes these references within the wider Nabokov oeuvre: across twelve novels and stories, Nabokov refers multiple times to the fairy tale in either noun or adjective form. Addressing *Lolita* specifically, Appel also cites (perhaps from his own student notes) Nabokov’s traditional beginning of each course at Cornell: “Great novels are above all great fairy tales [...] Literature does not tell the truth but makes it up” (Nabokov 347). Appel concludes, “The fairy-tale element has a significance far greater than its local importance to *Lolita*” (Nabokov 346). While Appel shows

that fairy-tale references are plentiful in Nabokov's work, he leaves to other works of criticism the question of *how* these fairy-tale allusions are important.

Nabokov is using the fairy tale to examine containment culture's sexual taboos, which flourish despite broad cultural censure. The epoch's concern with surveillance is twisted into a creepy voyeurism, and regulatory heterosexuality shifts into pedophilia. No one in the novel is able to prevent the relationship between Lolita and Humbert Humbert. Instead, Nabokov assigns sexual agency to a minor, Lolita, and creates a new character type, the nymphet. The nymphet is the site of the magical and the ordinary, the desired and the forbidden.

Nabokov's fabulation relies on the creation of new fairy-tale roles. To explore Humbert Humbert's deviant ways of enacting masculinity, Nabokov creates a new type of romantic character. This nymphet is submissive yet sexually insistent, womanlike yet a child. The nymphet is a parody of Cold War gender norms, and it exists as a foil to Humbert Humbert's farcical Prince Charming. Nabokov's coining of the term "nymphet" is so iconic that it has received an entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. While this word has a history prior to *Lolita*, the noun's second meaning of "a sexually attractive or sexually mature young girl" is attributed directly to *Lolita* ("nymphet, n. and adj."). The concept of the nymphet is central to Nabokov's act of fabulation. Humbert Humbert specifies that the "nymphet" must be between the ages of 9 and 14, appearing "to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they" (Nabokov 16). These girls who draw Humbert Humbert's attention are fantastic due to "their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac)." His definition of the "nymphet" includes the following words and phrases: "demon" "fantastic" "magic" "faunlet" "enchanted island of time" "fateful elf" (16-18). From the term's first use, Humbert Humbert thinks of the nymphet in magical or mythic terms. His definitions are not without failures in logic; his criteria

for judging nymphets are personal and not based upon a true system. By defining these girls into fantastic types through language, Humbert Humbert builds up a semi-logical framework for himself and any reader susceptible to his linguistic charms. Humbert Humbert then is not required to treat Lolita as he would a conventional young girl. For Humbert Humbert, the nymphet is more like a succubus, a pursuer. Nymphets exist as heterosexual enchanted hunters.

The definition of the nymphet also contains a mythical element of being out-of-time. The nymphet is by definition unable to be such to boys her own age; the nymphet quality appears only to an older man fascinated with the youth and budding womanhood of the younger girl. In chapter 5, Humbert describes the character type:

since the idea of time plays such a magic part in the matter, the student should not be surprised to learn that there must be a gap of several years, never less than ten I should say, generally thirty or forty, and as many as ninety in a few known cases, between maiden and man to enable the latter to come under a nymphet's spell.

(17)

Therefore, when he looks back to his own youth, Humbert Humbert says that “[w]hen I was a child and she was a child, my little Annabel was no nymphet to me; I was her equal, a faunlet in my own right, on that same enchanted island of time” (11). According to his own definition, a nymphet can only exist in relation to a man much older than herself. Rather than the nymphet's inherent demonic nature being an inherent trait, “nymphet” is a relational term. This changing status of the nymphet adds to the magical nature of the character type that Humbert Humbert perceives and Nabokov famously creates in his novel.

As Lolita grows up, Humbert Humbert grows disgusted with her maturing body. Her physical existence is the primary inhibition to his fantasy narrative. Later in the narrative he

moans that at age 14 “[h]er complexion was now that of any vulgar untidy highschool girl” (204). Though Humbert Humbert wishes to create static time through the construction of this narrative, Lolita is not timeless. His construction of a “nymphet” is stable and supernatural, but the real teenage Lolita, complete with acne, resists such containment. Humbert Humbert cannot fix her in her role of nymphet. He is no more able to do so than he was back in Europe when he became irritated with his first wife Valeria for showing irritation “quite out of keeping with the stock character she was supposed to impersonate” (27).

Working against Humbert Humbert’s intentions with the memoir, Nabokov emphasizes the ways in which Lolita is a real girl, resisting Humbert Humbert’s attempts to contain her. Most female fairy-tale characters remain one-dimensional. By contrast, Lolita is both pursuer and pursued at different points in the novel; she is a “damsel in distress,” a romantic partner, and a normal teenage girl who escapes using her wits. Her roles are multiple. When Humbert Humbert pursues her, Lolita is a prize at the end of his hero’s journey, like Elena the Fair in “Prince Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf” (Afanas’ev 624). Trapped with no foreseeable future other than that of a false bride to Humbert Humbert, Lolita is cast as a damsel in distress. She also throws fits, lies, and acts out against Humbert Humbert in ways that frustrate him, an antagonist to his attaining his prize. Lolita is not saved by a knight or woodsman. Although she tries to recruit a huntsman to rescue her from Humbert Humbert, Quilty ultimately kicks her out after she refuses to act in his pornographic film. Ultimately Lolita is entirely on her own.

Lolita is finally tamed and contained by becoming a true wife in marriage to Richard Schiller. However, this is not presented as a happy ending. When Humbert Humbert sees her in the domestic sphere, her existence is squalid and anything but a romantic ideal. Schiller is sexually virile: he has impregnated Lolita. He performs physical labor. According to what little

we see of him, Schiller seems to fulfill norms of Cold War masculinity. However, Nabokov's narrative undercuts those qualities, emphasizing that he is not quite a Prince Charming: he is hard of hearing due to a war wound, with dirty fingernails and blackheads on his nose. Humbert Humbert only finds Lolita because the little nuclear family was incapable of providing for itself financially, and she had to reach out to him after three years of hiding. Schiller seems perfectly content to build a home with Lolita, but he has not taken her away to the life of monarchical comfort enjoyed by so many fictional princesses. Even the standard traits of manliness, according to the narratives of containment, are not enough to attain the "happily ever after" of a fairy tale.

When Humbert Humbert meets with Lolita for the last time, he asks her to leave her husband and run away with him, urging her, "Come just as you are. And we shall live happily ever after" (Nabokov 278). This reference to the fairy-tale form highlights an important plot point in their story. This is Humbert Humbert's last chance to fix Lolita in a fantasy role, but they are not living in the same story. Lolita herself shoots down his suggestion: "You mean," she says, "that you will give us that money only if I go with you to a motel. Is *that* what you mean?" There was nothing enchanting about The Enchanted Hunters motel where Humbert Humbert drugged her and had sex with her for the first time, no prince and no magic. Nabokov ends this chapter with reference to a wildly different narrative trope. Humbert Humbert recalls, "Then I pulled out my automatic—I mean, this is the kind of fool thing a reader might suppose I did" (280). Though Humbert Humbert uses the weapon neither on himself nor Lolita, the genre shifts into the lurid confessional of a murderer when Humbert Humbert confronts Quilty and kills him.

Between our unreliable narrator Humbert Humbert's presentation as a Prince Charming and the ways that Nabokov undercuts the narrator's narratives and desires, we may look for Nabokov's intentions for writing his novel as a confessional memoir: Nabokov explores the flaws in contemporary masculinity. Crucially, Humbert Humbert's Prince Charming is specifically American as Nabokov draws connections between his character and American celebrities. Humbert Humbert often highlights his good looks in terms of Hollywood actors and models. When Humbert Humbert is creating his visual self for the audience in a print medium lacking any other means of presenting an image, he uses that most American of industry standards to do it. In chapter 16, after masturbating against Lolita, Humbert Humbert enters her bedroom and spies a magazine advertisement on her wall. The ad features a "conquering hero" standing over a "thoroughly conquered lady" (Nabokov 69). The man appears as "a dark-haired young husband with a kind of drained look in his Irish eyes." Lolita had drawn on the ad, labeling the man "H. H." Humbert Humbert agrees that he does look like the model, though he refuses to admit to being as old as the model. Underneath is an ad for cigarettes featuring "[a] distinguished playwright" which we know to be Humbert Humbert's double Quilty. Humbert Humbert claims "[t]he resemblance was slight" (69).

These idealized comparisons to Hollywood models of masculinity are contrasted against a "gloomy" European physicality which we understand (by reading against the unreliable narrator) to be Humbert Humbert's true appearance. For example, long before Lolita's entrance into his life, Humbert Humbert decided to marry. Although he, in his own words, "might have easily found, among the many crazed beauties that lashed [his] grim rock, creatures far more fascinating than [his wife Valeria]," he did not choose any of those apparently better options (Nabokov 25). If he did indeed possess, as he says, "striking if somewhat brutal good looks" (24)

and his choice of partners, one wonders why he did not marry a more fascinating woman.

Humbert Humbert gives no reason beyond the non-answer of “a piteous compromise” (25). He is adamant that he is “an exceptionally handsome male; slow-moving, tall, with soft dark hair and a gloomy but all the more seductive cast of demeanor” and an “[e]xceptional virility” reflected in his features (25). This description comes from repetition; Humbert Humbert himself elaborates by saying, “Let me repeat with quiet force” (25). Humbert Humbert’s exercise of writerly force, controlling the narrative given to his “jurors,” is a clue that Nabokov satirizes this hero type which is “hard” and “virile” in a way that fits the Cold War ideal for masculinity. Nabokov uses the male Hollywood archetype in addition to the fairy-tale archetype to mask a social anxiety about the male self-image.

Humbert Humbert is indeed a detail-oriented writer, but stylistically this adjective-filled sentence is notable and suspicious in its effusion. In his first meeting with Lolita he calls himself “a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood” (39). Humbert Humbert casts himself an actor, a person known by roles he performs. Humbert’s relationships with women his own age do not flourish because of his own behavior. The mask of Prince Charming allows him to rewrite his own life story into something more charming and flattering. And more so, Humbert Humbert’s stated purpose for writing the novel is as a document for his own defense at his murder trial. The clearest reasons for Humbert to cast himself as Prince Charming come not from Humbert at all, but rather from the author who critiques archetypes and romantic master narratives at play in American culture of the mid-century.

Humbert Humbert acknowledges that his self-descriptions “made in the first person may sound ridiculous,” but he justifies this because he is crafting a role for himself. In his (very self-reflexive) explanation, his “gloomy good looks” are like an identifying feature given by a

novelist to a character, and he believes that his looks “should be kept in the mind’s eye if [his] story is to be properly understood” (Nabokov 104). But why should his good looks be prerequisite to understand this story or his actions? Because this is one way of signaling his type. He obviously is not charming; after he attains legal marriage to Valeria and Charlotte, he disregards their feelings. After he gains legal guardianship of Lolita, he is manipulative and gets what he wants by force. The handsome, charming prince will sweep a girl away to a much better life with him. Humbert did sweep Lolita away to a new life, but the facade of “happily ever after” absolutely cannot be maintained.

Though the plot of the novel builds up Humbert Humbert as an “enchanted hunter,” by the ending of the confessional, he admits his culpability for rape. The novel may not be a clear-cut re-vision of “Little Red Riding Hood,” but that does not mean that nothing of the “wolf” lingers around the character of Humbert Humbert. He is a predator as well as a suitor, and most of all a narrator indulging in self-delusion as well as confession.

The novel in its entirety revels in pleasure. Nabokov’s word choice and turns of phrase make even the confession of a murderer and rapist an experience of high literary expression. The novel revels in the titillation of describing sexual acts in unique and specific language. The reader can scarcely help but sympathize with Humbert Humbert’s high emotions, aided by frequent injunctions and pleas to the reader. Aware that the novel takes joy in depravity, early critics tried to censure the novel, but the story is all the more enjoyable for its violations of social and sexual taboo.¹¹ This is the power of Nabokov’s fabulation. The fabulation, according to Smith, includes “traditional and recognisable fairytale motifs, but they are brought together in a sequence that is a ‘new’ combination of the formula” (45). *Lolita* is a fairy tale for adults: there

¹¹ See Linda Kauffman (136).

is no happy ending but a journey tinged by fairy tale like magic that makes the story well worth telling.

To create the mood of the novel as a fairy tale fabulation, Nabokov uses a magically unmoored feeling of time. Smith identifies the chronotope as one of the methods of identifying the fairy tale. Following Tzvetan Todorov, Smith identifies the fairy-tale world as that of the “marvellous” (51). This setting explains how “seemingly fantastic events occur in realistic narratives” (53). The traditional fairy tale has no temporal referent; it is not set in any particular past or present. As we saw in Eudora Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom*, however, the literary fairy tale is often set in an identifiable time and place, even if it is not the contemporary moment. Nabokov works with magical timelessness and also many specific dates within the novel. For example, Humbert Humbert meets Lolita explicitly in 1947, when she is 12 years old. We know that they travel across America during the specific months of August 1947 to August 1948. Thus, the novel is set close in time to its date of publication, and so offers a relatively real-world setting. However, despite these examples of specific settings, the reader may experience a distortion of time due to the style of the novel. As Smith explains, quoting Mikhail Bakhtin, “[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible” when a creative work spends many words (or minutes of film, in the case of a film) dwelling upon a span of time that the characters of that creative work would experience as a much shorter length of time (qtd. in 49).

At the level of structure, the novel exists at several moments of time. The narrative itself stretches from Humbert Humbert’s birth, with a good amount of time spent “camping out” in his childhood, all the way to his 40s; there the memoir ends with Humbert Humbert writing from prison. Ostensibly, the narrator is writing as a way to explain himself to his courtroom jury as

well as for future mass-market publication (well after *Lolita* has died and so will be spared the pain of hearing about it), thus revealing an ambitious author. Before the reader reaches any of the primary narrative text, however, the reader is presented with a foreword by the fictional John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. which complicates the fiction. This paratextual framework distances the reader from the narrative, giving the death of its author as November 16, 1952. Therefore, Humbert Humbert's voice reaches us from beyond the grave. This framework recalls frame narratives such as *1001 Nights*. Just as the character Scheherazade simultaneously grounds her 1001 stories and makes the worlds of her tales seem more distant from the reader than she herself is, so too does the fictional critical apparatus of John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. work to recall the timelessness of a fairy tale set in the past while mimicking the format of a contemporary academic text.¹²

Experientially, Nabokov spends more time in certain scenes than others, capturing the reader within the enactment of events for such a long time that it can become uncomfortable. One example of this is the scene set within the Haze home, before *Lolita* goes off to camp and loses her mother, wherein Humbert Humbert finds sexual gratification against the body of the young girl. To get away with such a risky scene, Nabokov alludes to a stunning breadth of literature and culture, and he densely alludes to different commonly known fairy tales during this scene of heightened sexual import. The abounding references to fairy tales heighten the disjunction of a twelve-year-old girl and sexual relations with a middle-aged man. They indicate how removed from normal acceptable behavior Humbert Humbert's actions truly are. The actions in the scene are described in exquisite detail, expanding in a way to fill a large span of time. Humbert Humbert's sexual climax is described in still further length than the section I here read. This contrasts to the scene in the Enchanted Hunters inn much later in the novel wherein

¹² For another example of Nabokov experimenting with the form of academic criticism, see *Pale Fire* (1962).

the two have sex; that scene is abrupt and seems to take no time at all. That scene's compression highlights the expanded magical style of this scene.

The entire scene of Humbert Humbert's first sexual interaction with Lolita is united by the motif of the apple alluding to the Biblical Garden of Eden. The apple symbolizes the temptation of Eve into forbidden knowledge. The scene opens with Lolita sitting beside Humbert Humbert on the sofa with a "banal, Eden-red apple" while her mother has gone to church (Nabokov 58). Lolita merely eats the apple and, feeling tempted, Humbert Humbert flirts with her by taking her apple, initiating the one-sided sexual encounter. Nabokov alludes to "Snow White"—specifically, by using the word "snow" itself to refer to the apple's flesh being bitten into and consumed by Lolita just as his heart is consumed by her (58). Humbert Humbert holds her under a "spell" of distracting chatter while he rubs his erection against her body, much as Snow White is stilled by a poisoned apple. Before his climax, Humbert Humbert describes Lolita with the language of fairy-tale allusions. She is "apple-sweet" like Snow White. She is "losing her slipper" like Cinderella. The fairy-tale allusions become more obvious the closer Humbert Humbert comes to orgasm. Humbert Humbert tries to convince himself and the reader that Lolita knows nothing about the sexual encounter Humbert Humbert describes as "the secret system of tactile correspondence between beast and beauty" (59). After this collection of subtle allusions, Lolita tosses away the "abolished apple" core, and her wriggling in his lap pushes Humbert Humbert into a page and a half description of his climax (60). Now, at the height of the scene, the allusions to the genre that most readers first know as children's tales are obviously recognizable as such. The juxtaposition of fairy tales with the abhorrent act of sexual predation is stark. In order to groom Lolita into this position, he had to be able on some level to communicate with her. He had to be able to speak, as it were, the language of fairy tales. The allusions show

the way Humbert Humbert is framing himself for his memoir's own benefit. The accumulation of allusions to the genre could serve to make his actions appear more benign, a transference of positive associations from the tales to himself. His construction of self as Prince Charming, a role which exists only in connection with the fairy-tale princess, make his actions seem inevitable as part of his role. We are never allowed to forget for long that the memoir is written with an audience in mind as Humbert Humbert refers to "gentlemen of the jury" (Nabokov 61) and "my lawyer" (57). These references highlight the fact that this romantic encounter is taboo, even if it is not the primary reason that the character is incarcerated.

The framing references contrast sharply with the phrases invoking the imagery of popular fairy tales. Those utopian storyworlds are the proper province of children, not the aroused lap of a transient lodger. For Nabokov's purposes, this juxtaposition does not serve to transfer benign intent to Humbert. The language use highlights to the reader that *Lolita* does not belong in such a setting, that there is no way it could not be harmful to her, using Biblical imagery, knowledge gained and innocence lost. Humbert has spoiled the sanctity of the domestic sphere by muddling what should be stark roles. Instead of becoming settled into a husbandly role partnered with Charlotte Haze, he elevates Lolita into the role of sexual partner while simultaneously devaluing her as an other-than-human "nymphet."

Nabokov's explicit descriptions of sexuality breach not only the traditional style of the fairy tale, which after the Grimms made sexuality more and more implicit, but also typical codes of acceptability in the novel. Humbert decides Lolita is "apple-sweet"; he focuses on her slipper, lost like Cinderella's after a flirtation. He casts his own erection as a "gagged, bursting beast" touching "innocent" Lolita's "dimpled body" (Nabokov 59). This is the type of taboo-breaking prose which simultaneously made publishers reject the novel in America and made (as Appel Jr.

states happened to him) American soldiers looking for pornography reject the novel as “Litachure” (Appel xxxiv). As a beast Humbert Humbert simultaneously inhabits the roles of princely suitor and wolf; in “Little Red Riding Hood” the beast is a threat, while in “Beauty and the Beast” the beast is the bridegroom the bride must come to accept. In one more extension of his role of unreliable narrator, he legitimates his place with Lolita, not as an abuser but as a romantic partner. The quality implied by “partners” is, of course, undermined in this passage of sexual play even without taking the age difference into account. He is literally able to steal her apple, holding it away and taunting her in a display of his greater size, forcing her to beg him for what is already hers. He repeats this behavior again with her magazine (Nabokov 58). His taunting causes Lolita’s hair and arm to touch him, though the movement to come closer is all his doing (58). On the brink of climax, he thinks of himself as free and her as “the youngest and frailest of his slaves” (60). Lolita, his “slave,” must do whatever Humbert Humbert desires. This attitude sets the tone for their later years together. The power imbalance in the relationship cannot be ignored by the careful reader, even as Humbert Humbert couches his doings in the light most romantic and favorable to himself.

In Nabokov’s fabulated fairy tale, he expands and compresses time. Nabokov quickly handles the Enchanted Hunters section wherein Humbert Humbert and Lolita have sex for the first time. First, Humbert Humbert calls attention to the discrepancy between time of authorship and time of reading by addressing the “[f]rigid gentlewomen of the jury” (Nabokov 132). Humbert Humbert then matter-of-factly states that “by six she was wide awake, and by six fifteen we were technically lovers” when describing the act (132). In contrast to how much detail he gives when describing their early encounter on the sofa, here Humbert Humbert says, “I shall not bore my learned readers with a detailed account of Lolita’s presumption,” and he adds, “but

really these are irrelevant matters; I am not concerned with so-called ‘sex’ at all.” He is preoccupied with making himself appear as a Prince Charming, someone romantic and appropriate. Too much detail would ruin the overall narrative.

As seen above for the nymphet character type, Lolita is a girl out of time. She exists as a nymphet in relation to Humbert Humbert’s age. Humbert Humbert’s presentation of her as a nymphet who “seduce[s]” the older man creates an opening for commentary on contemporary social norms surrounding childhood sexuality. According to the current “customs,” 12-year-old girls should be virgins (Nabokov 124). Despite what “should” be the case, however, Lolita had gained sexual experience even before Humbert Humbert carried her away to the Enchanted Hunters motel. Nabokov writes:

I, Jean-Jacques Humbert, had taken for granted, when I first met her, that she was as unravished as the stereotypical notion of ‘normal child’ had been since the lamented end of the Ancient World B.C. and its fascinating practices. We are not surrounded in our enlightened era by little slave flowers that can be casually plucked between business and bath as they used to be in the days of the Romans; and we do not, as dignified Orientals did in still more luxurious times, use tiny entertainers fore and aft between the mutton and the rose sherbet. The whole point is that the old link between the adult world and the child world has been completely severed nowadays by new customs and new laws. (Nabokov 124)

In the mind of Humbert Humbert, the nymphet has a vexed relationship with time. Being between woman and child, she is expected to be contradictory things simultaneously. Like most girls should be, Humbert Humbert expects the nymphet to be sexually inexperienced and “soft.” However, as a nymphet, she should also enthusiastically desire sex. As Humbert Humbert learns,

it is because Lolita had been “ravished” at camp that she “saw the stark act merely as part of a youngster’s furtive world, unknown to adults.” Among Nabokov’s central concerns is the question of youth and old age. How can you freeze youth? How can you regain youth after aging? How can a wife be youthfully innocent yet mature enough to domesticate a husband? These questions are engaged yet never definitively settled. These character types incorporate and deviate from traditional gender norms in order to exaggerate the logic of those binaries of gender presentation taken to their furthest logical conclusion. In highlighting the childish qualities of the Cold War ideal femininity, Nabokov is able to explore the type of masculinity required to be the matching romantic partner.

The fairy tale is overwhelmingly a domestic genre, concerned with the relationships between characters who either currently live together (like Cinderella and her stepsisters) or will live together (like the bride-to-be and the robber bridegroom whose den of thieves she visits). Even nonhuman protagonists of the Grimms’ “The Mouse, the Bird, and the Sausage” set up housekeeping together. Containment culture of Nabokov’s time focuses on the home front as the core place from which to defend against a possibly communist incursion. According to Nadel, specifically, the nuclear family and its ability to raise the next generation must be kept in order in what he calls “the cult of domesticity” (122). It is specifically this home space that Humbert Humbert infiltrates. He takes Lolita away from the family home to a nomadic existence with no goal in sight other than the fantastic setting of the Enchanted Hunters inn.

Unlike the unspecified settings of the classic fairy tale, *Lolita* has several specific settings in time and place. When Humbert Humbert is a child, he lives on the French Riviera. He moves to America and makes his way to the (fictional) town of Ramsdale. He and Lolita visit several specific cities. Humbert Humbert tells us throughout the memoir that he is writing located in

prison. *Lolita* is a fabulation, however, in part because of the magical treatment of place in the novel. Humbert Humbert describes settings he and Lolita visit in such a way as to transcend the banality of a motel or private residence as the proper setting of a high drama. Some version of the word “magic” appears in the novel no fewer than 25 times. While these moments of magical places, thinking, and feeling are indicative of Humbert Humbert’s insane mental state, sites such as the “Enchanted Hunters” motel evoke the lurid world of sexual encounters generally, while Nabokov’s fairy-tale allusion to “Grimm Road” enhances the fantastic. Quilty, who is a double for Humbert Humbert, is killed “at his ancestral home, Grimm Road,” obviously a reference both to the dark deed to come and the well-known fairy-tale collectors. The house opens with a front door that “swung open as in a medieval fairy tale” (294). This scene referencing the fairy tale also plays with time. The moment of conflict is stretched out in the strange battle between Humbert Humbert and Quilty wherein they roll together and become one. When describing the fight, Humbert Humbert mixes pronouns: “I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us.” This chaotic moment feels extended rather than abrupt as Humbert Humbert acknowledges his intended audience: “elderly readers” in the “first years of 2000 A.D.” Humbert Humbert expects these readers to envision the fight with Quilty as an imitation of “the Westerns of their childhood,” a film genre popular in the 1950s. This genre is referenced in order to highlight the genre’s unreality; the fight with Quilty, by contrast, “lacked the ox-stunning fisticuffs, the flying furniture.” Both combatants pant “as the cowman and the sheepman never do after their battle” (299). Humbert Humbert accuses Quilty of “exaggerating the pain” after shooting him around eight times (303). There was a script Humbert Humbert had in mind, but the other man did not stick to it.

When Humbert Humbert takes Lolita to the Enchanted Hunters motel, this space feels magical, not tethered to reality. Against all odds, in this setting of enchantment everything seems to work out in Humbert Humbert's favor and the words of enchantment describe the scenes. The motel is first mentioned by Lolita's mother Charlotte as a "quaint" place to go on a fall vacation with her new husband. Humbert Humbert, not interested in his wife, ignores her suggestion and seems to forget about it. However, her notation that at the motel "nobody bothers anybody" seems to be the reason he does remember it. With Charlotte dead and Humbert Humbert the sole guardian of Lolita, he recalls "the seductive name of The Enchanted Hunters" as the ideal place to whisk the girl away to. Humbert Humbert, too nervous to speak coherently over the phone, calls himself "a comic, clumsy, wavering Prince Charming" when he must spend a lot of time deliberating how to word the telegram for booking a hotel room (Nabokov 109). Upon their arrival at the hotel, the universe seems to magically work out in his favor. He had ordered a room with two twin beds to avoid suspicion, but the hotel had given their reserved room to other customers. In this way, Humbert Humbert is able to agree to share a double bed with Lolita without looking suspicious. Within the room, things start to double and become strange. Nabokov writes, "There was a double bed, a mirror, a double bed in the mirror, a closet door with mirror, a bathroom door ditto, a blue-dark window, a reflected bed there, the same in the closet mirror, two chairs, a glass-topped table, two bed tables, a double bed: a big panel bed, to be exact, with a Tuscan rose chenille spread, and two frilled, pink-shaded night lamps, left and right" (Nabokov 119).

The scene references "Sleeping Beauty," with the spell conveyed through a modern narcotic rather than an enchanted spinning wheel spindle. With dessert, Humbert Humbert tricks Lolita into swallowing a sleeping pill. Nabokov writes, "As I look back at those seasick murals,

at that strange and monstrous moment, I can only explain my behavior then by the mechanism of that dream vacuum wherein revolves a deranged mind; but at the time, it all seemed quite simple and inevitable to me.” She does as he predicts: when he pretends to swallow what he calls “Beauty’s Sleep” and a “magic potion,” Lolita demands one of what he is having (Nabokov 122). He calls himself “a very Enchanted Hunter” using sleeping pills on Lolita, which he calls his hunter’s “boxful of magic ammunition” (109).

Humbert Humbert remembers approaching Lolita’s sleeping body: “I seemed to have shed my clothes and slipped into pajamas with the kind of fantastic instantaneousness which is implied when in a cinematographic scene the process of changing is cut” (128). When describing the state of half-awake, half-asleep desire for Lolita, he recalls, “A breeze from wonderland had begun to affect my thoughts, and now they seemed couched in italics, as if the surface reflecting them were wrinkled by the phantasm of that breeze. Time and again my consciousness folded the wrong way, [...] Now and then it seemed to me that the enchanted prey was about to meet halfway the enchanted hunter, that her haunch was working its way toward me under the soft sand of a remote and fabulous beach; and then her dimpled dimness would stir, and I would know she was farther away from me than ever” (131). Nabokov writes the scene from the point of the view of the sexual predator who tinges the scene with the enchantment.

The space itself is described as a magical wonderland. Before they “become lovers,” Humbert Humbert sees the dining room as “a spacious and pretentious place with maudlin murals depicting enchanted hunters in various postures and states of enchantment amid a medley of pallid animals, dryads and trees” (Nabokov 121), images typical of myth and legend, but not

inspired in the imagination.¹³ Afterward, Humbert Humbert sees it differently. He imagines repainting the mural himself:

There would have been a sultan, his face expressing great agony (belied, as it were, by his molding caress), helping a callypygean slave child to climb a column of onyx. There would have been those luminous globules of gonadal glow that travel up the opalescent sides of juke boxes. There would have been all kinds of camp activities on the part of the intermediate group, Canoeing, Coranting, Combing Curls in the lakeside sun. There would have been poplars, apples, a suburban Sunday. There would have been a fire opal dissolving within a ripple-ringed pool, a last throb, a last dab of color, stinging red, smearing pink, a sigh, a wincing child. (Nabokov 134-5)

Humbert Humbert's lurid imagination endows the scene of "enchanted hunters" and dryads with images implying the real world full of inequality: a sultan, a "slave child," "a wincing child" alternate with contemporary images of "juke boxes" and "camp activities." The fantasy world Humbert Humbert creates is a new fabulation. It departs from the older world of myths and fairy tales to create something new as it mixes Orientalist and mundane American images. This hybrid of the old with the contemporary is no fairy-tale utopia for the nymphet he has created. It is one of slavery and pain for the girl; she is no equal romantic protagonist. Humbert Humbert records this image in his confession in order to "sort out the portion of hell and the portion of heaven in that strange, awful, maddening world—nymphet love." Humbert Humbert describes the complexity of his relationship with Lolita: "The beastly and beautiful merged at one point, and it is that borderline I would like to fix, and I feel I fail to do so utterly. Why?" (135). Within this

¹³ Ellen Pifer notes the mythic associates of the "nymphet," "particularly the wood or water sprites of Greek mythology and religion," but also makes the scientific rather than mythological point that the quality of 'never growing up' is also indicative of the immature "nymph" growth stage of certain insects (9).

space, Humbert Humbert is aware of the porous borders of his own characterization. Here his doubleness becomes apparent. He is not merely enacting the role of protagonist / Prince Charming, but also the role of antagonist / beast. While Humbert Humbert wishes to live in a world of fantasy, for Nabokov, entering the world of the fairy tale allows him to illustrate the inherent failure of logic in the narratives of Cold War masculinity. While containment culture suggests that masculinity can and should be contained within tight roles, Nabokov illustrates that form of controlling masculinity taken to its furthest conclusion: a sultan and his slave child, the wolf / prince and the nymphet.

Using the old character type of the Prince Charming along with the new character type of the nymphet, engaging with literary expansions and contractions of time, and evoking magical spaces, Nabokov walks the balance of writing a new fairy-tale fabulation with the feeling of distance from reality of fairy tale has as a grounding concretely within the America of the late 1940s-early 1950s. In doing so, Nabokov explores the logic of containment culture. He does not fully refute its logic as nonsensical, but he does challenge the reductive conclusions evident within it.

Nabokov's engagement with Cold War masculinity highlights problems with the domestic front of containment culture even as it does not repudiate those values. Nabokov characterizes Humbert Humbert following certain Cold War models for masculinity in romantic relationships. He is "hard" and dominant, but also romantic and totally misguided. The taboo at the center of the narrative is that Lolita, as his legal stepdaughter, is fully dependent upon him and woefully inadequate as a Cold War romantic partner. As a child/woman she has no ability to escape or fight back, and she certainly cannot domesticate Humbert Humbert and bring him back into society. In creating the new character type of the nymphet, Nabokov creates a parody of the

Cold War gender norms for women against which to compare the parody of a Prince Charming which is Humbert Humbert. This is how we can read the novel as a fabulized fairy tale.

Nabokov's fabulation shows that Cold War ideals of proper gender and sexual dynamics are flawed. The novel does not fully dispute the logic of containment. It does push against it, showing that individuals living within its influence cannot but chafe against it because the possibility of containing sexual desire or deviance is itself a fantasy.

CHAPTER THREE:
POISONED, HANGED, OR VILE: MASCULINITY IN DONALD BARTHELME'S *SNOW
WHITE*

“Oh I wish there were some words in the world that were not the words I always hear!” These are the first words of dialogue the character Snow White speaks in Donald Barthelme’s first novel, *Snow White* (1967) (6). Linguistic novelty marks the style of the novel, which in content combines references to the fairy tale, politics, newspaper comics, and philosophy as well as 20th century marvels such as skyscrapers, airline travel, and mass production of food. The novel is dense and resists a straightforward reading, suggesting its intent via this accumulation of influences. One question that this novel asks is borne of the innovation of mental health care of the 20th century: What is “[t]he psychology of Snow White” (70)? The unidentified narrator of one section, presumably one of seven little men with whom Snow White lives, says that she lives her own being as incomplete, pending the arrival of one who will ‘complete’ her. That is, she lives her own being as ‘not-with’ (even though she is in some sense ‘with’ the seven men, Bill, Kevin, Clem, Hubert, Henry, Edward and Dan). But the ‘not-with’ is experienced as stronger, more real, at this particular instant in time, than the ‘being-with.’” (70)

Snow White, as understood by the narrator, experiences dissatisfaction with her surfeit of lovers and waits for something still greater, to the degree that her whole existence is one of discontent and yearning devoid of satisfaction. As in her desire for new words, Snow White

desires a new life different from the same old story already told for her. Although Snow White knows what she does not want, she is less clear about what she does want. Though Snow White is the titular character and the motivation for the characters around her, the male characters responding to Snow White are, for the purposes of this chapter, the site of Barthelme's most innovative use of the fairy tale. Three male characters in particular – Bill, Paul, and Hogo – all fumble toward a future that they are not sure they want, each tied to a greater or lesser degree to received narratives from the past. In showing the failure of the simple fairy tale form as a framework for a happy ending in the modern age, Barthelme's *Snow White* illustrates the difficulty of building a happy, meaningful life in a society where norms are quickly changing.

The 1960s in America were a decade of dizzying social change. The decade after *Lolita*'s publication saw the end of the height of the Cold War (Nadel *Containment* 4), though the end of the Cold War itself would not come until 1989. Citizens practiced atomic bomb drills, afraid that widespread nuclear annihilation could happen with little warning. Citizens, particularly college students, widely protested the Vietnam War during the later half of the decade.¹⁴ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended racial segregation of schools and public accommodations. The Stonewall riots in the summer of 1969 kickstarted the gay liberation movement. Over the course of the decade, the concerns of the feminist movement shifted into what we call today “second-wave feminism.” Across many different spheres of public life, Americans were dissatisfied with the status quo and voiced their desires for something better. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) claims that “[f]ulfillment as a woman had only one definition for American women after 1949—the housewife-mother” (44). The typical housewife of the 1950s described by Friedan resembles Barthelme's Snow White at the beginning of the novel: “It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth

¹⁴ Barthelme was drafted into the Korean War in 1953 (Daugherty 497).

century in the United States [...] she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?” (Friedan 15). Women across America began to question “the feminine mystique,” the same traditional ideal underpinning Cold War gender dynamics, presented as a new model, that “the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity [...] accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love” (43). Barthelme’s Snow White might have been drawn following this template. She lives with, cooks for, cleans for, and has sex with the seven little men. Though not a mother, she otherwise enacts the traditional model of femininity. She chafes against the role pre-written for her, but she does not know where to look for a different model to follow. As a result, even when Snow White tries to effect change in her life, her actions have a quality of passivity.

Rather than focusing on the psychology and actions of Snow White, this chapter focuses on the psychology and actions of three men who respond to Snow White’s vaguely-articulated romantic desires. I focus on the group of “dwarfs” or little men as a functional unit, and I analyze three individual characters in the novel: Bill, the normal type of man Snow White has been with; Hogo, the brutish man she desires but will not allow herself to be with; and Paul, the prince type she really wants—or wants herself to want. Hogo, a character type newly created by Barthelme, prominently displays the type of masculinity—“hard” and misogynist—that is arguably favored by Cold War gender norms. Roughly a decade after Vladimir Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert explored deviant desires for a prepubescent girl, Donald Barthelme used the basic framework of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” to explore several unconventional forms of romantic and sexual desire, including the polyamorous relationships between his characters of Snow White and the seven dwarfs. As in Welty’s *The Robber Bridegroom* and Nabokov’s *Lolita*, this novel

also shows the potential for subversions, adaptations, and revisions of classic fairy tales before the feminist fairy-tale renaissance of the 1970s (Joosen 4). This thoroughly experimental novel raises and explores the question of what roles men and women should play in contemporary romantic relationships, but refuses to model a new narrative that is capable of leading to a “happily ever after.” The novel is set during a moment of turmoil in the lives of Snow White and her companions: both she and one of the seven men she lives with are dissatisfied with their lives and want to break up the “family unit.” The characters wish for circumstances to change, but they seem too consumed with ennui to make life-changing decisions. Though the fairy tale is a form flexible enough to remain recognizable as authors across the centuries have responded to their unique moments in time by re-visioning the fairy tale, even when updated to the present moment the genre still carries with it the reminder of a preindustrial society. Barthelme ironically contrasts the fairy tale’s associations with a traditional past with the setting of an America undergoing massive social change; in doing so, he illustrates the difficulty of breaking out of prescribed Cold War gender norms for men and women. Barthelme recombines characters and functions, preserving enough elements of the previous versions of “Snow White” to remain intelligible and changing enough elements to create a unique “re-vision” of the story. Barthelme’s Snow White, seven dwarfs, her prince, and a newly-created male figure must try to write a new ending for the traditional story that they inhabit, though it is difficult to create something new with no model beyond what came before.

Donald Barthelme’s postmodern novel *Snow White* (1967) is a collage of pieces. It was first published in the February 18, 1967 issue of *The New Yorker* (Daugherty 283) then reprinted as a standalone novel by Atheneum the following month (294). This narrative “re-vision” of “Snow White” is intriguing both in its innovative tale and the method of telling. This chapter

focuses more on what Vladimir Propp calls the *fabula* (tale) than what he calls the *sujet* (telling). Here, I briefly discuss the way in which the story is told (the *sujet*) in order to later focus more fully on the tale. The novel, at 181 pages long in the Atheneum version, is not made up of chapters so much as of 107 miniature sections. Most sections are one or two pages long, five sections are three pages long, and one is four pages long. Thus, the narrative style is brief and fragmented. The scene that is arguably the climax of the book, the trial and execution of one of the seven dwarfs (or little men), is the longest at six pages long. While the novel progresses in chronological order, it might be difficult to tell that at first. Each section focalizes around a different character's viewpoint,¹⁵ but often words cannot be traced back to an origin in any particular character. Some sections consist only of headlines in all capital letters. One section is a questionnaire about the reader's enjoyment and understanding of the narrative, calling attention to the creative work's own artifice. The result is an accumulating impression of voices, memories, and desires that the reader needs to form into a narrative. It is a confusing narrative full of gaps that interrupt the narrative flow. It has been called "a collage of fragments" by Larry McCaffery (138) and "an assemblage of fragments" by Jerome Klinkowitz (39). McCaffery, Klinkowitz (7), and Tracy Daugherty (295) all refer to the text as a "collage." The novel rewards rereading for the very reasons that it may frustrate a first-time reader: every new interaction with the text reveals a new detail that was overlooked before. The novel is quintessential postmodern play.

This plot tension, irreverent humor, explicit sexuality, and language play garnered mixed reviews for the novel. The novel at first received generally positive reviews in venues such as *Newsweek*, *Life*, and *Time*; however, praise was not unanimous. Hundreds of subscribers to *The*

¹⁵ Three sections, most curiously, focalize through the President of the United States, who somehow is aware of the minute details of their lives (Barthelme 55, 81, 156).

New Yorker canceled their subscriptions in reaction to Barthelme's so-called "gibberish" (Daugherty 298-9). One subscriber to the *New Yorker* wrote:

[I]t seems to me a frightful waste that bilge of this sort be included in your magazine. I am an English major; my wife is an English major; my son is an English major and I like to think we have some fragmentary knowledge of the English language... to sponsor and nurture such pure drivel without any merit must eventually depreciate the value of your otherwise excellent magazine. (299)

In contrast to the scandal surrounding the taboo content of Nabokov's *Lolita*, both criticism and praise of *Snow White* focused primarily on style. A positive review by Webster Schott in *Life* says, "*Snow White* has everything, including William Burroughs cutups, words posing as paintings, ribald social commentary, crazy esthetic experiments, and comedy that smashes" (298). The novel uses several strategies to effect a feeling of disequilibrium similar to the characters' experience of life.

Arguably the most grounding feature of the novel comes from the title, what Kevin Paul Smith calls an "authorised" allusion to the fairy tale (12). The title "Snow White" hearkens back to the Brothers Grimm version of the fairy tale "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" or the comparatively more recent Walt Disney film by the same name.¹⁶ This title gives a reader a firm anchor in the world of the hypotext¹⁷ – an anchor often necessary in the hypertext, since many sections abound in characters' thoughts without clear referents and with pronouns without antecedents. Without the reader's foreknowledge of the plot of the traditional "Snow White" first popularized by the Grimms in 1812 and retold by the Walt Disney Company in their first feature-length animated film in 1937, this would be an even more difficult novel.

¹⁶ The abbreviated name of "Snow White" could also recall another Grimm fairy tale, "Snow White and Rose Red," but allusions to that tale type in Barthelme's novel are minor (Barthelme 70).

¹⁷ The hypotext is an earlier work; the hypertext is a later work in some way responding to the former.

Barthelme's version of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" is not set in some unspecified setting long ago and far away. These characters live together in a contemporary American city; the problems of the characters of this novel are grounded firmly in the 1960s counterculture and, as I argue, a Cold War sense of a "crisis of masculinity." As in the traditional fairy tale, here, too, Snow White lives with seven little men. While Snow White stays home and does some cleaning, for most of the novel she seems listlessly consumed with ennui or attempting to write "a dirty great poem" (4). However, while in older versions there is no question that the girl has a purely platonic relationship with her housemates, in this version of the tale Snow White has simultaneous sexual relationships with all seven men. Barthelme changes Snow White's role from a platonic roommate performing domestic chores to earn her keep in the Grimm and Disney versions, to the center of a sexually active commune with competing desires and rivalries (though she still cleans the home). He has created a kind of counterculture to monogamous heterosexuality. Snow White, as Lois Gordon explains, has to contend with society's ideas of femininity (62) that shape what she expects out of the world (63). Gordon says, "Her only success—if one can call it that—is her attempt to break out of the unfortunate role into which she has been born and to create her own identity" (62). In the sections focalized through Snow White, we see that she has grown bored of this arrangement. She yearns for a prince to whisk her away from her life. But much of her thoughts remain hidden because, though she is at the center of the story, more sections present the thoughts of the seven men as they try to understand what Snow White is feeling. We understand her character filtered through them as they try to woo her affections back to them. Long before the novel is over, however, Snow White becomes a background concern to the group. With their domestic dynamic threatened and shifting due to her changed emotions and desire for a prince, the men direct their attention to

blaming their leader for his lack of ardor and his failure to lead. After this leader, Bill, is executed, the Evil Queen figure kills the Prince Charming character, and a “bad guy” figure newly fashioned by Barthelme (Hogo) becomes the newest seventh man in their group. The lives of all of the characters seem different and upended, but functionally nothing has changed in their household. Snow White has no prince for whom to leave the household of seven men, one member of which now is not a dwarf. Her countercultural sexual commune remains a site of traditional domestic drudgery. This “re-vision” of the traditional fairy tale suggests that the unorthodox new roles filled by the fairy-tale characters can only slightly disrupt the social status quo. Snow White and her men may engage in nonnormative sexual behaviors, they may yearn for a new story, but they are in no way able to change the social pressures or myths about women’s and men’s roles. In fact, they conform to the old ways and roles—including female desire for a princely man and male performance anxiety—despite the setting of America in the 1960s. This chapter contends that, from the novel’s title to its plot structure to the names of its characters, Barthelme creates and then subverts the expectations of his readers with his use of fairy-tale allusions. Using the reader’s expectations based on a traditional fairy tale, Barthelme deviates from the expected plots and roles for the characters to explore new ways of living, particularly ways which deviate from traditional American ideals of masculinity.

As with every chapter in this dissertation, I look to Kevin Paul Smith’s *The Postmodern Fairytale* for a lens through which to read this book. In this case, Smith actually refers to Barthelme’s version of *Snow White* as an “authorised” fairy tale, meaning that by the title alone we know Barthelme is making a fairy-tale allusion (12). More than that, Smith calls Barthelme’s book a “re-vision,” a “‘new’ version of a fairytale” (34). Smith says that *why* is the central question we must ask of these references (36). Why does Barthelme employ them? Smith does

not answer this question; however, I propose that it is Barthelme's exploration of changing and unstable gender norms that get focalized through the fairy-tale genre. I argue that Barthelme uses this genre because of its associations with traditional gender norms so widespread in pop culture, including Disney's 1937 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* movie. Those go-to paradigms of romantic norms juxtapose with the ennui and confusion surrounding gendered behavior in Barthelme's novel to show the difficulties of building an adult life in America in the 1960s, a culture undergoing extensive social change.

Before I argue in this chapter that Donald Barthelme's *Snow White* (1967) uses characters metafictionally aware of their own status as characters with archetypal lives predetermined for them in order to reflect a similar postmodern ennui in his contemporary American society, I will provide a brief textual history of the fairy tale "Snow White." Most of my information for this section comes from Christine Shojaei Kawan's "A Brief Literary History of *Snow White*." I particularly focus on the masculine characteristics of the little men, comparing the earlier versions to Barthelme's literary version.

The "Snow White" tale type presents somewhat differently in every variant. This should be unsurprising for a tale found in varying cultures across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Tatar *Classic* 74). Notable versions are the Basile version of 1634, the Brothers Grimm version of 1812, Pushkin's 1833 version, Walt Disney's 1937 film. The Aarne-Thompson index of folktales identifies five "major characteristics" of the tale: 1) a magic mirror tells the stepmother-queen that Snow White is more beautiful than she; 2) the stepmother-queen sends Snow White away, wrongly expecting her to be killed by either a huntsman or dwarfs; 3) the stepmother-queen finds Snow White living with the dwarfs and tries to kill her; 4) the dwarfs fail to resuscitate Snow White and lay her body in a glass coffin; 5) a prince sees and resuscitates

Snow White, and the queen must dance to death at their wedding (Jones 58). In this older telling, the Queen's motivation is said to be jealousy over her young ward's beauty.

"Snow White" (ATU 709) falls under the large ATU heading of "Tales of Magic" (300-749), its subheading of "Other Tales of the Supernatural" (700-749). The summary for this tale type is:

Snow White has a skin white as snow and lips red as blood [Z65.1]. A magic mirror tells her stepmother that Snow White is more beautiful than she [D1323.1, D1311.2, L55, M312.4]. The jealous stepmother orders a hunter to kill Snow White [S322.2], but he substitutes an animal's heart and saves her [K512.2].

Snow White goes to a house of dwarfs (robbers) [N831.1] who adopt Snow White as their sister [F451.5.1.2]. The stepmother now attempts to kill her by means of poisoned lace [D1364.16, S111.2], a poisoned comb [D1364.9, S111.3] and a poisoned apple [D1364.4.1, S111.4]. The dwarfs succeed in reviving the maiden from the first two poisonings but fail with the third. They lay her in a glass coffin [F852.1].

A prince resuscitates her and marries her [E21.1, E21.3]. The stepmother is made to dance herself to death in red hot shoes [Q414.4]. (Uther 383)

Steven Swann Jones, writing in 1990 before Uther published his expansion of the Aarne-Thompson index in 2004, uses the AT index in order to clarify the core structure of the tale. In the third chapter, Jones divides the essential "Snow White" tale into nine episodes: origin, jealousy, expulsion, adoption, renewed jealousy, death, exhibition, resuscitation, and resolution (Jones *New*). Barthelme's version of "Snow White" changes the way that these core motifs

appear, eliding some and attaching others to different characters than in the original. In so doing, Barthelme's novel illustrates a unique "re-vision" that relocates the central conflict between the male characters rather than between the female characters.

Certain elements are common to both the Grimms' and Disney's plots (the best-known versions of the tale type): an evil queen wishes to be the most beautiful, and when she is told that her stepdaughter is more beautiful, she sends a huntsman to kill the girl. Snow White runs into the forest, where seven dwarves take her into their home. The queen tries to kill her at least one more time, is foiled, and Snow White ends up with a prince, happily ever after. The two earlier versions have depictions of masculinity more similar to each other than to Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*.

In the 1857 Grimm version, when Snow White wanders into an abandoned house in the woods, she tries out each bed until she falls asleep in the seventh and last. Any possible implication of sexuality is not addressed. The dwarves recognize her as a child and care for her. Though their job, mining in the mountains, is physical, their masculinity is never a concern of the story. The role of husband is filled by a prince who wanders by one day and simply wants to possess the beautiful girl in the glass coffin, rather than by any of the men who had lived with her for years by that time. The little men function as a unit, with not an individual among them (unlike in Barthelme's novel). No one of them could ever be considered a potential romantic partner, unique or masculine in any way.

The meeting between Snow White and the little men goes similarly in the 1937 Disney version. Here too, Snow White sleeps in the strange house in the woods, but the Disney animation takes care to avoid any suggestive visuals. Snow White is so much larger than the seven men that she has to sleep across three beds pushed together. The men are terrified of the

large unknown being in their beds. Upon waking, she says that she had assumed she was sleeping in the beds of children. The seven men cover below the edge of the bed until she extends them polite courtesies as “little men” rather than as children. Disney’s animated film introduces the prince figure much earlier than the Grimm version. Snow White already has a romantic interest before she is driven away from her castle home into the house in the woods.

Barthelme’s Snow White is not said to climb into the men’s beds. Instead, in the second section (a mere two pages into the narrative), we are given the first hint of what we through the course of the novel come to realize is a habit in the household: communal showers. Snow White and the seven men share sexual intimacy in “the shower room” (4). Care was taken in the earlier versions of the tale type to de-sexualize the men with whom Snow White lives by making them dwarfs, a disability traditionally mocked as objects of cruel humor. In the Disney version, the men are drawn as old with bald heads and long white beards. Simultaneously, their behavior and their height, contrasting with Snow White, makes them seem childlike. Disney’s dwarfs have nicknames that refer to personality traits easy to animate into physical comedy rather than proper names.¹⁸ The Grimm dwarfs have no names at all. In contrast, Barthelme gives his characters common names¹⁹ and makes the men sexually virile; the narrator also mentions them looking at “girls” around town (8, 15, 154), a shocking deviation from their platonic characterizations in the well-known versions of the fairy tale.

What is Cold War masculinity? To a large extent, it is defined through what it is not. Historian Kyle A. Cuordileone reads contemporary documents, particularly political and not literary, to determine how the culture at large used language to describe ideas about masculinity. According to Cuordileone, Cold War gender norms distilled into the descriptive binaries of

¹⁸ Bashful, Doc, Dopey, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, and Sneezy

¹⁹ Bill, Clem, Dan, Edward, Henry, Hubert, and Kevin

“hard” and “soft” (*Manhood* viii). If being a woman means being “passive, maternal, and emotional” (119), then a man must be the opposite. This fear of “the feminization of American society” Cuordileone sees stemming from late 19th century changes in society (x), especially changes in the workplace from rural labor to passive office worker (120). If on one side we have “emasculat[i]on,” on the other we have a “virile” and “hard-hitting” man (17). Literature professor Alan Nadel defines the “gendered courtship narrative in America after World War II” in the following way as

a sexual narrative of courtship and rivalry: the Other and the Same, the virile and the impotent, the satisfied and the frustrated. The unspoken source of potency in this narrative, I argue, is atomic power, which is also the source of its incoherence, an incoherence closeted by containment in the same way that sexual and political roles were. In attempts to keep the narrative straight, containment equated containment of communism with containment of atomic secrets, of sexual license, of gender roles, of nuclear energy, and of artistic expression. (5)

Gender roles are defined in opposition to each other in a binary that is only able to exist in theory, not application. The ideal masculinity, built up over decades before Barthelme wrote *Snow White*, was hard, strong, unemotional, and sexually masterful. Deviating from that strict gender role was tantamount to defying the nation of the United States during the Cold War.

What precisely does the character Snow White understand as ideal masculinity? She muses: “*real men*, as we know them from the films and from our childhood, when there were giants on the earth. It is possible of course that there are no more *real men* here, on his ball of half-truths, the earth” (42). Snow White yearns for a nostalgic past that never existed. Her desire is for a simulacrum: men in old films of her childhood, characters that influenced her childish

brain's understanding of gender. As the author makes clear, masculinity is perpetuated by popular culture such as films rather than something inherent in any of the men. Snow White's thoughts are not deep or revealing, merely discontent. This realization that she does not know if such "real" men exist seems to set the stage for her later baiting behavior: hanging her hair out the window, like Rapunzel advertising for a prince to come to her. Klinkowitz states that Barthelme describes Snow White hanging her hair out of the window in the language of a Vietnam-era military offensive: "Snow White's hair initiative." No one responds to Snow White's hair advertisement because, he claims, "in this novel's view, Americans do not see themselves as princely" (85). The novel, in other words, specifically addresses an American situation.

Barthelme connects these seven male characters to the seven dwarves of the earlier fairy tale versions in a scene wherein Snow White realizes that her counterculture lifestyle is not shocking to the community around her. In this two-page section, the 26th section of the book, Snow White and an unspecified number of her paramours go to the movies. When Hubert puts his hand "in Snow White's lap," she becomes "agitated," asking (in reported speech, coming from the narrator rather than Snow White herself), why the men have "allowed her to become a public scandal" by being seen in public together "*en famille*" (41). When they reply that no one in their neighborhood has noticed or cares, Snow White becomes "bitterly disappointed" (41). This scene suggests that Snow White has engaged in polyamorous sexual relationships with the seven men in order to gain attention, even notoriety. She seeks information on her status as an object of gossip by pretending to take care for her reputation in a more conservative manner. Although behaving according to more liberal sexual mores (of free love), she pretends to a more traditional respectability of non-sexuality. Her disappointment reveals

that her protestations of respectability are mere pretense. As this scene shifts to Snow White's reported thoughts, it suggests that Snow White's behavior is tied up with her views on contemporary masculinity. She says, "My suffering is authentic enough but it has a kind of low-grade concrete-block quality. The seven of them only add up to the equivalent of about two *real men* [...]" (Barthelme 41-2). Snow White's judgment is mean-spirited and dismissive, reducing the men to their bodies rather than individual selves and raising the question of what a "real man" is. Their physical bodies, to be sure, contribute to their masculinity.

The seven men are barely characterized as individuals: Bill is the leader, age 28 (Barthelme 160). He appears to have anxiety, though he "does not believe in" the condition (4). Clem behaves violently toward "normal" couples (66-7). Kevin is "easily discouraged" (6). These unique traits are so bland as to be useless in telling the men's characters apart. They function more as a unit. Even their brotherhood, a way of making them individuals with unique relations to each other, reinforces their sameness. Cuordileone says that one worry about Cold War masculinity is that men, losing their individuality to the collective, become more susceptible to authoritarian leaders (97-9):

Whether it is the 'organization man' engulfed by the committee and its 'groupist' ethos; the Communist who relinquishes self to the party and its all-consuming collectivist ideology; the juvenile delinquent all too eager to surrender self to the 'pack'; or the army-reject whose self has been so weakened by a smothering mother that he is left unfit for military service—the lone, pliable self stands in opposition to some seductive, overwhelming force that squashes individual will and autonomy. (98)

This specifically links to fascism according to Erich Fromm; Cuordileone paraphrases Fromm as arguing that “human beings tend to fear freedom and welcome the order and certainty that authoritarianism offers” (99). The seven little men when considered as a group embody the worst of masculinity according to the Cold War ideal. The men don’t perform labor as traditionally manly as digging in mines. No, they cook baby food and clean the vats that make the baby food; they also wash buildings. Although real and necessary jobs, these technologically advanced jobs are unusual choices in literature, and they increase the feeling of absurdity of the characters. As well, the traditional, non-industrial counterparts of cooking, cleaning, and child tending fit into “the feminine mystique.” In the binary of “soft,” matching feminine qualities, and “hard,” matching masculine qualities, men working together “succumbed to the ‘softminded’ ethos of ‘togetherness’” (Cuordileone 523). These fairy-tale men are a Cold War nightmare. By taking on tasks that society at large sees as feminine, the men undermine their own masculinity.

Cuordileone explains how at the root of the “crisis of masculinity” is the “anxiety about ‘whether they can fill the masculine role at all,’ or whether, being thus more feminine, feeling ‘the male’s crippling fear that he *might* be homosexual” (15). None of the men acknowledge explicitly in the narrative that their sexual experiences in the shower occur between men – indeed, between brothers. For all that the men have sex with Snow White in the shower room, it is not an unambiguously heterosexual experience. Nadel addresses the interaction between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the defining of ideal Cold War masculinity. He says, “If the closet is a vehicle of containment, the policy of containment requires straight narratives [...] the closet also makes it impossible to keep the narratives straight” (34). The shower room in Barthelme’s narrative is such a closet space. Despite their homosocial and homosexual activities, the men talk about sex and girls, not feelings. The narrator of the novel focuses on Snow White’s

desires and, as the second page of the book begins, the problem of Bill. Snow White's narrative in this book, her heterosexual desire for a prince, is a shield for the men's story, framed though the book is from its titular allusion (Smith's "authorised" retelling). The group, already failing to perform normative heterosexuality, turn on the one member who stands out as becoming more "soft" than the rest.

Cuordileone says that one worry about Cold War masculinity is that men, losing their individuality to the collective, become more susceptible to authoritarian leaders (98-9). The men in the novel seem to validate such a fear. At the beginning of the novel, the seven men behave similarly: sharing Snow White's affections and home, sharing a job, even sharing a father. Bill is the "leader" of the men. Now, however, he no longer wants to lead. He stops engaging in sexual intercourse, loses his virility, and falls prey to anxiety. Nobody knows quite what to do with him. When Bill declines to lead, the others put him on trial in the longest section of the book. Found "guilty of vatricide and failure," Bill is hanged until dead by the other men (Barthelme 180). This trial highlights American democratic principles as opposed to monarchical systems (as exemplified by the prince Paul) or fascistic Nazi sympathies (as exemplified by the "vile" Hogo). With him gone, the remaining six men appoint Dan their new leader and fill Bill's place with another male character, Hogo de Bergerac. In the novel, only Hogo comes close to meeting the ideal Cold War masculinity, but he is deemed "vile" by others. If anything, his influence over the other men illustrates the likelihood of the group dynamic to fall under the spell of a charismatic authoritarian.

In the three following sections, I analyze three main male characters to argue that they illustrate Barthelme's engagement with Cold War masculinity: Paul, a bad representative of Prince Charming; Bill, a failed model of male leadership; and Hogo, a new brutish American

character type who has no antecedent in the fairy tale. These three main characters illustrate three competing methods of masculinity. Barthelme exaggerates their flaws and thoroughly mocks their attempts at fulfilling normative heterosexual gender roles. Though their actions exceed those of their precedents in the “Snow White” tale type, none finds a “happily ever after.”

Paul is the Prince Charming of Barthelme’s *Snow White*. Barthelme interrogates the place that a character trope like Prince Charming could even serve in the United States in the 20th century. Paul is neither modern nor traditional, neither regal nor everyman: he is not written to fairy tale type. Even a name like Paul, so very short and ordinary, is the opposite of what a reader might expect of a Prince Charming. Snow White, when daydreaming and waiting for her prince, names several more likely names: Philip, the name used in Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* (1959); Albert, the name of Queen Victoria of England’s consort; Fortinbras, the Norwegian prince from Hamlet; humorously, Prince Valiant, the name of the hero of the eponymous newspaper cartoon first published in 1937. Snow White muses upon several names from different regions (Igor, Alphonso, Siegfried, Myshkin, Pericles, Florizel, Matchabelli) and other commonplace English contenders of Paul (George, John, Charlie) (Barthelme 132). Their names may vary greatly, suggesting a wide variety of princely types, but they are depthless besides their unique names. Paul is the lucky man chosen out of all these names, but there is nothing unique about him until after Snow White has chosen him and he chooses to become her voyeur. Snow White, hanging her hair out of the window and waiting for her prince to come, looks for Paul. However, he is unreal to her. He is just an idea of “a Paul.” Seeming to recall him specifically, she says, “Of course there is a Paul! That Paul who was a friend of the family, who had, at that point, not yet assumed the glistening mantle of princeliness. There is a Paul somewhere, but not here. Not under my window. Not yet” (102). Snow White, talking with Hogo, reiterates that she “must

hold [herself] in reserve for a prince or prince-figure, someone like Paul.” Though she “despise[s] him utterly,” he “has the blood of kings and queens and cardinals in his veins” (170) – and that is Paul’s most appealing quality.

As a prince, Paul’s identity has nothing to do with actions and everything to do with an unearned identity received at birth. The same thing Snow White values in him Paul most values in himself. Paul says, “I AM princely” (27) and that thinking of his “blue” “blood” makes him feel better when he is “down” (27). Despite this, Paul is dissatisfied with his role in life. Paul is endlessly narcissistic and entitled. He remains stuck in an immature narrative unlike traditional fairy-tale princes who ascend to kingship explicitly within the narrative before they achieve their “happily ever after.” Paul compares himself to his father and finds himself “more experimental” and “more withdrawn.” As members of a monarchical dynasty, a prince’s legitimacy stems from his father’s status. However, his father’s greatest ambition was “to tumble the odd chambermaid now and then.” The king’s “sole accomplishment during his long lack of reign was the deification of his own person.” Paul claims to have “loftier ambitions, only [he doesn’t] know what they are, exactly” (27). The old narrative is unsatisfying. Paul wants to do nothing in particular; he only desires to surpass his father. Unfortunately, Paul can only conceive of himself enacting the old narratives. Even though he speaks derisively of “tumb[ing] the odd chambermaid,” his intentions for Snow White are not so very different. The only ambition Paul can intuit falls in line with his identity as a prince: “Probably I should go out and effect a liaison with some beauty who needs me, and save her, and ride away with her flung over the pommel of my palfrey, I believe I have that right” (27). Paul does not understand his own desires, only acts according to prescribed roles. In doing so, he does not understand the situation and danger he is in. He underestimates both Snow White and Jane, and he dies for doing so. In his “soft”

masculinity focused around observation rather than action, he remains away from Snow White as opposed to allowing her to assimilate him into a monogamous domesticity.

Paul tries to find a job outside of his princely identity. Paul writes palinodes (13-14), paints (48-49), joins a monastery (167-8), and wishes to be discovered for television (78-79). He succeeds in none of these deviations from his traditional role. Twice Paul must visit the Unemployment Office (13, 94). As Jerome Klinkowitz notes, Barthelme's "postmodernization of the classic fairy tale / movie consisted of rechoreographing the action into abruptly anachronistic poses" (7). The prince does not fit into this world. When writing his palinode, Paul says, "I would wish to retract everything, if I could, so that the whole written world would be..." He trails off then resumes: "I would especially retract that long black hair hanging from that window, that I saw today on my way here, from the Unemployment Office" (13). Here Paul wishes to reject the hair, its seductive call and all duty. Perhaps that is why he wishes to do away with the written word: it is in the tales that his traditional, princely role is laid out, waiting for him to step into it. Barthelme, however, uses these details to satirize the prince character and the Prince Charming type. It's not just that Paul is inept at becoming a prince; the very idea of a prince is a farce within *Snow White*.

However, despite the incongruity of this role, Paul cannot resist the hair just like he cannot fully resist the appeal of the old tale though he knows it does not suit him. He admires the hair. He calls it "beautiful" though it "has made [him] terribly nervous." He worries, "Why some innocent person might come along, and see it, and conceive it his duty to climb up, and discern the reason it is being hung out of that window. There is probably some girl attached to it, at the top, and with her responsibilities of various sorts... teeth... piano lessons..." (13-14) [sic]. Paul is made nervous by his "duty." A monogamous relationship with Snow White would imply

financial responsibilities, children, the domesticity of extracurricular activities. She and he both would be fulfilling Cold War gender norms. He does recognize that it is his duty, yet he is afraid of climbing the hair, metaphorically, and finding at the top a romantic relationship with ties binding him to family duty.

With no other job to save him from his princely role, Paul's method of coping with his fear to indulge in his desire for Snow White involves surveillance. Not satisfied with seeing her hair in passing and yet unwilling to interact with her, Paul digs an intricate pit outside of her home to watch her. The knowledge Paul gains while waiting and watching her home prompts him to finally enact his princely role; his action results in his death. Following the traditional "Snow White" tale type plot progression, Jane (the Evil Queen figure) tries to poison Snow White—in Barthelme's modern "re-vision," with a cocktail. Paul is able to see this because he has been spying on Snow White. His spot of surveillance is close enough to allow him to take her poisoned drink, saving her, but his heroism is inadvertent. He is being misogynistic, justifying his action by saying, "It is a good thing I have taken [this drink] away from you, Snow White. It is too exciting for you." This action reinforces Cold War standards of male/female romantic relationships. Paul is being assertive and treating Snow White as a weaker individual. He paternalistically acknowledges that if Snow White had drunk it, "something bad would probably have happened to [her] stomach. But because [he is] a man, and because men have strong stomachs for the business of life, and the pleasure of life too, nothing will happen to [him]." Paul saves the day just in the nick of time, we learn, through a humorously extended commentary on the drink: "Lucky that I sensed you about to drink it, and sensed that it was too exciting for you, on my sensing machine in my underground installation, and was able to arrive in time to wrest it from your grasp, just as it was about to touch your lips" (175). Then he dies

horribly, with “convulsions” and a “green foam coming out of his face” (175). During his funeral, Fred says that Paul would require “a lot of ginger” to “have dug that great hole, outside the house, and to have put all those wires in it, and connected all those dogs to the wires, and all that. That took a lot of mechanical ingenuity” and “technical knowledge” (176). Paul’s act of surveillance might have brought him nonnormative sexual pleasure, but it did not allow him to enact a new version of the princely role. Snow White “cast[s] chrysanthemums on Paul’s grave, although there is nothing in it for her, that grave.” Snow White reacts to Paul as a figure rather than an individual she loved. Barthelme writes, “She was fond not of him but of the abstract notion that, to her, meant ‘him’” (180). Snow White loved an idea of chivalrous masculinity, not this specific prince. None of Paul’s perverse surveillance aided him in becoming emotionally closer to Snow White and forming a mutually beneficial romantic relationship.

The novel criticizes women’s ideas of a “perfect prince” as well as the paternalism of men like Paul. The deeper exploration of the masculinity of the prince type in this variant of *Snow White* explains why Kevin Paul Smith called this novel a “re-vision” of the fairy tale (34). The prince is almost an afterthought in the Grimm version of the tale. The Disney version intentionally introduced the prince earlier, so that the romantic union at the end of the movie would be fulfilling, emphasizing the “happily ever after.” However, the prince’s interiority is not considered in any traditional version of the story. Here, Barthelme’s prince character explores the difficulty of reconciling contemporary masculine pressures and pursuits with older ideal models of masculinity. Though Snow White’s received narrative mandates that she live “happily ever after” with a prince, the prince figure does not fit within an American setting. Paul must visit the unemployment office – America is a democracy with no work for royalty. Barthelme casts the prince figure as functionally useless: Paul enjoys watching Snow White from his

underground bunker more than he enjoys interacting with her. The synecdoche of her hair hanging from the window is more appealing than the real woman. Despite his pretensions to royalty due to his “blue blood,” Paul lacks foresight and is ineffectual. Paul represents a “soft” masculinity; there was never any indication that he had the potential for the “hard” masculinity of a womanizing king like his father. The age of Prince Charming is past, if ever it had a place in America.

Like Paul, Bill is uncertain about what he wants. Unlike Paul, Bill, as a dwarf, has little in the way of an established character type. Traditionally, he is a dwarf and no more. Bruno Bettelheim says of the dwarf in European folklore, particularly those in “Snow White”: “dwarfs are eminently male, but males who are stunted in their development. These ‘little men’ with their stunted bodies and their mining occupation—they skillfully penetrate into dark holes—all suggest phallic connotations. They are certainly not men in any sexual sense” (210). From the start of the novel, Barthelme has already drawn a figure exceeding his traditional character type. To show that non-conforming behavior must be contained and punished (even though said punishment results in absurd complications), Barthelme uses the character of Bill in his novel. Barthelme critiques Cold War masculinity through Bill’s violations of those ideals of ruthless individuality and sexual “hardness.” Unlike the desexed characters in the Disney and Grimm versions, Bill has an active sexuality away from which to develop.

Instead of what Bill wishes to be or is expected to be by others, his role in the novel is one of resistance. Bill alone among the seven men has a unique role to play. Bill resists male leadership and domesticity. He is introduced on the second page of the novel—the first character after Snow White herself. The first line of this section reads, “Bill is tired of Snow White now” (4). This establishes the setting *in medias res*. Unlike in the version of the story by Walt Disney

or the Brothers Grimm, in Barthelme's version, we may expect that Bill and Snow White's personalities are probably in conflict. The speaker continues: "he cannot tell her. No, that would not be the way. Bill can't bear to be touched. That is new too" (4). They speculate that Bill's telling her "that he is tired of her" (4) would be "cruel words" and he "has not had the heart" (4-5) to do so. Barthelme's language implies that Bill's feelings for her and his not wanting to be touched are separate issues (5). Snow White enjoys her shower, where she and the seven men are intimate, but she asks, "But what of Bill? Why is it that Bill, the leader, has not tapped at my shower-stall door, in recent weeks? Probably because of his new reluctance to be touched. That must be it" (34). She then continues and worries no more. Unlike a traditional one-dimensional fairy-tale character, this character is rounded, is changing. Bill's boredom with Snow White and his physical withdrawal from everyone indicates his alienation. Bill's aversion to touch extends beyond Snow White to the other men (4). The narrator (a plural "we") who seems to be one of the six other men "speculate[s]" that his new behavior is caused by anxiety because the "withdrawal" behavior they observe in Bill "is one of the four modes of dealing with anxiety" (4). Dan, individually, "speculates" that it is "a physical manifestation of a metaphysical condition that is not anxiety" (4).

All of the men in Snow White's household acknowledge Bill as their leader even after one day he refuses to lead. This failure to enact his acknowledged role leads to the fundamental breakdown in the order of the group, resulting in his execution. Early in the novel, we see Bill acting as a leader despite his distaste for the role. During their first interaction, when Snow White is tired of hearing the same words, Bill supplies "Injunctions!" and the others "were glad he was still our leader" (6). The others follow his lead by proposing novel words for Snow White (6). The men's frustration seems to stem from this: Bill has potential but does not use it. Snow

White responds positively to his word “injunctions,” while the words the others supply do not arouse her equally. The others do not have as much potential as Bill does. The situation “is vexing” Henry and makes him “want to go out and hurl boxes in the river” “and rage against fate, that one so obviously chosen to be the darling of the life-principle should be so indolent, impious and wrong” (20). All the men share Snow White’s sexual encounters in the shower room, but here Bill intrigues her mind in a way that the others cannot. Being chosen by Snow White and this nebulous “life-principle” is not enough for Bill, however. Like Snow White herself, Bill wants more, and he has changed in ways that make him least likely of all in the group to conform to Cold War ideals of masculinity. Bill has become “soft.”

We know for sure that Bill rejects his role in his domestic life because he no longer wants to be touched. We do not know for sure what he does want, but we have a clue. In a short section, Bill monologues, “I wanted to be great, once. But the moon for that was not in my sky, then” (51). During the longest section in the book, Bill’s trial, the interrogator wishes Bill to answer questions about “how you first conceived and then supported this chimera, the illusion of your potential greatness.” This is what got him the leadership despite “total incompetence” (159). Bill does not know how he got the idea, but he “sustained” it by “tell[ing] myself things” like “Bill you are the greatest. Bill you did that nicely. Bill there is something about you. Bill you have style. Bill you are macho” (159). These benign self-esteem boosters, showing Bill as a struggling individual, also betray his discomfort with masculinity and feeling “soft” emotion. As with the Prince Charming character, whatever “greatness” meant to Bill, he was faced with a disjunction between his reality and his wishes.

We see Bill throughout the novel working through the continued influence of traditional ideas of sexual exclusivity even while living in this sexual commune. Despite his desire to

withdraw from the group, he is still emotionally invested in Snow White. In the 55th section, a monologue by Bill, he first poses questions that seem uncertain about what the hanging hair is, but he then states that “I am only pretending to ask myself this question” (92). He moves from rhetorical questioning to repudiation of Snow White to theological philosophizing to a fundamental lack of certainty about how to act. After his acknowledgment of the rhetorical question, Bill identifies “the distasteful answer” that the black hair coming from their house belongs to Snow White. He knows “the significance of this act, this hanging, as well as the sexual meaning of hair itself” (92). Bill is aware that Snow White is advertising herself for a Prince Charming; the act of hanging her hair out of the window allows her to be active in her desire for a new romantic partner while simultaneously remaining passive. (The Grimms’ variant of Snow White, after all, waited passively for her prince in a coffin, not acting in any way to attract him.) Bill believes that all the dwarfs are “clear” on the hanging hair’s meaning. He exclaims, “It means that she is nothing else but a god-damn degenerate!” But in the same thought he backtracks. He says that is but “one way of looking at it” and calls it a “complex and difficult question” (92) after at first responding so emotionally. Despite the unconventional relationship of seven brothers living with and sleeping with one woman, his first reaction is to call her “a god-damn degenerate” when Snow White advertises for a new romantic partner. Bill backtracks, does not wish to enact mastery over Snow White, allows himself to consider her interiority. Barthelme illustrates that the social norms of the Cold War influence Bill’s thought processes, even though Bill himself is being used to challenge the efficacy of those norms.

Much like Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert, here Bill is put on trial. During the era of the House Un-American Activities Committee, trials were frequently front-page news. Bill, in his failure to enact Cold War norms of masculinity, is scapegoated by his fellows as a response to

the group's fall from Snow White's favor. Bill's trial reveals the type of Cold War man Bill should be. When the fellow men decide to bring Bill to "trial," all their frustrations come out (129). Dan complains about Bill. He says that he is tired of a "cow-hearted leader whose leadership buttons have fallen off" and who does not work hard while Dan does (138). The implication is that work makes a man important, and without work, Bill is not important (much like Paul and his inability to earn a living). Really, Dan is blaming Bill for Snow White's indifference: Dan says that "[t]rue leadership would make her love us fiercely and excitingly, as in the old days" (137). This desire for the "happily ever after" is not realistic and Dan blames the wrong person. Dan wants to "vote" to replace Bill (138). Henry says, "Bill must be brought to justice for his bungling" (156). Henry sees "the trial as a kind of analysis really, more a therapeutic than a judicial procedure" (156). On the last page of this section, the anonymous interrogator asks, "is it true that you allowed the fires under the vats to go out, on the night of January sixteenth, while pursuing this private vendetta?" "It is true," Bill says. The interrogator replies, "Vatricide. That crime of crimes. Well it doesn't look good for you, Bill. It doesn't look at all good for you" (164). The trial is a farce condemning Bill to death for the destruction of baby food. Barthelme's word creation "vatricide" alludes to the term fratricide. Though the interrogator invokes spoiling baby food as the reason for Bill's punishment, in actuality the group of men kill their brother.

The trial ends with Bill's death and the belief that "Bill will become doubtless one of those skyheroes" (179). The men who shared a home, job, father, and Snow White have turned on their former leader. The narrator continues, "Bill will become doubtless one of those sub-deities who govern the calm passage of cemeteries through the sky. If the graves fall open in mid-passage and swathed forms fall out, it will be his fault, probably" (179). This view of the

afterlife is uniquely absurd. Bill is physically ascending, to become tasked with managing tangible coffins rising through the sky to heaven; tangible corpses Bill will allow to fall back to earth. This image shows a literal failure of containment. Even in death, Bill's negligence and passivity can affect them below on earth. Bill, dead, can cause the chaos of corpses raining from the sky. Even the normal containment of the dead within graves will be changed, so disruptive was Bill. Bill is a dwarf who yearns for a heroic story, who exceeds his type. For this, he is punished, but the effects of his life live on.

Barthelme shows that the social order has not changed with the execution of Bill. The section after the trial begins, "Bill has been hanged. We regret that. He is the first of us ever to be hanged. We regret it. But that was the verdict" (Barthelme 180). The narrator speaks as though they had no free will. However, in executing one of the seven men, the characters have taken bold steps in changing their stories; the only execution in the traditional fairy tale, of course, is that of the evil stepmother. Like so many other attempts to write new endings for themselves, this deviation from the plot does little to break from tradition. After the execution, Bill is replaced as leader by Dan; Hogo moves into the house of the man he helped execute (180). The men rewrite the story with a new leader and a new seventh man. Things change, but barely. Different people move into the same roles, and the roles continue. The functions the characters perform, which Propp's *The Morphology of the Folktale* identifies as the key to classifying tale types, remain the same despite the change in *dramatis personae*. Snow White remains unfulfilled and continues to dream of a prince. The plot ends with stasis. Gender roles continue, sexual desire remains unfulfilled, the individual is sacrificed to the will of the group. The men's trial eradicates the threat of non-conformity Bill presented by his avoidance of his role as leader. Their enforcement of the social order keeps all roles intact.

Contrasting with both Paul, the prince, and Bill, the leader of the little men, is Hogo de Bergerac, a character who matches no character in the traditional “Snow White” tales. He is no huntsman, no king. He is described instead as an American “brute” (180), a “rebel without a cause” unsuitable for Snow White’s affections because he is not a prince. Yet it is precisely his “bad boy” deviancy that interests her. Beyond Snow White’s existential ennui, beyond her boredom with traditional types of men and narratives of a life well led, Hogo is a new type of American man for Snow White to choose and change her story. Though Snow White ultimately rebuffs him, Hogo introduces a modernized masculinity, one that takes its cues from misogyny and authoritarianism. Overall, Hogo is “vile” (63). The character is repeatedly called “loathsome” (8, 32, 33) by the other men. Even his own mother no longer loves him (33). Hogo is a caricature of Cold War hardcore masculinity.

Barthelme characterizes Hogo as a misogynist. He ogles women and also harasses them. In his first appearance, the narrator thinks that it might be good for Hogo if he were to work with the brothers at washing windows, but that he would more likely be irritating and throw beer cans from the top of the building for “girls” to step on (8-9). At the start of the story, their collective opinion on gender roles seems to be distanced from Hogo’s. They are aware that his harassment of women is different from their own behavior and they show no inclination to imitate him. That inclination shifts after they interact further with Hogo.

Hogo uses vile and degrading language about women, suggesting that no happy marital domesticity would ever be possible. Referring to Snow White, he says, “this cunt you’ve got here, although I’ve never seen her with my own eyes, is probably not worth worrying about” (73). He then extrapolates out to women generally, objectifying them as “a female gesture.”

Picturing women “in their bikini” or in their homes “in her absolute underwear,” he implies that women enjoy being observed in a state of undress (73). Like Paul, Hogo is into voyeurism. Through these characters, Barthelme expresses his concern with surveillance culture of the Cold War, which includes ogling women.

Also, Hogo thinks of women as disposable objects. Hogo advises the seven men that the loss of any particular woman is not to be taken seriously (74) and that they should reduce Snow White conceptually to no more than her body. She is interchangeable with any other woman, worthless as an individual. So far as he is concerned the role of any person in a relationship is purely transactional. He advocates not simply changing partners when boredom sets in, but also trading up for younger women: “new classes of girls mature, and you can always get a new one, if you are willing to overlook certain weaknesses in the departments of thought and feeling” (75). In contrast to Hogo, the seven men, up to this point, have cared about Snow White as an individual. When she expresses dissatisfaction with all of the words she has heard, they are eager to impress her with new words. They care about her thoughts and feelings. Hogo degrades the men’s “soft” feelings, encouraging them to harden their love for Snow White: “perhaps you do care about [all this Blague]” (75). “Blague” is French for lies, and what Hogo calls out are the lies of romance and sweet talk. Hogo frames their concern for women as a weakness of masculinity. Hogo says, “But my main point is that you should bear in mind multiplicity, and forget about uniqueness” (75). This sums up his blunt relationship philosophy, which we see enacted when Hogo attempts to exchange Jane for Snow White. The inclination to subsume individuals into character types is not unlike how Snow White mentally rifles through the names of every prince she has ever heard when she wishes to marry a prince, any prince. The quality of Hogo’s reduction, however, contains disdain.

Although “hard” masculinity is preferred to “soft” masculinity by the narrative of Cold War containment, it was already a nostalgic preference during the height of the Cold War. Such aggressive masculine presentation was already often seen as “outdated” and not ideal in the home (Cuordileone 141). Hogo shows the worst of this “vile” aggressive masculinity. At age 35 (Barthelme 57) Hogo “wears an Iron Cross t-shirt,” a German Teutonic reference and symbol of rebellion (32). Does this indicate that Hogo has the wrong politics or merely the fashion sense of a rebellious teenager? Hogo, the narrator tells us, reads a book of “atrocities stories” and is upset about Germany in a monologue that is nearly Shakespearean in its syntax and outrage. As the omniscient narrator reports, he thinks that “we” were “filthy beasts” back then (64). He thinks, “What a thing it must have been to be a Hun! [...] And then to turn around and be a Nazi!” (64). Then his oratory becomes sweeping:

Filthy deutschmarks! That so eclipse the very mark and bosom of a man, that
vileness herself is vilely o’erthrown. That so enfold . . . That so enscrap. . .
Bloody deutschmarks! that so enwrap the very warp and texture of a man, that
what we cherished in him, vileness, is . . . Dies, his ginger o’erthrown. Bald pelf!
(64)

The apparent typos in Hogo’s monologue are Barthelme’s word creations lending puns and punch to Hogo’s rant. With no transition, the section shifts to Henry, frustrating a clearer reading of Hogo’s politics (64). Whether Hogo is a Nazi sympathizer or believes them to be “filthy beasts,” at the very least Barthelme juxtaposes this “vile” character with the idea of Nazism. This characterization makes clear why the seven men begin to follow a man they at first profess to despise. As Cuordileone argues, Cold War masculinity feared that a man who gave himself over to the collective, as all brothers do in their sexual commune, is at increased risk of falling victim

to an authoritarian figure. Hogo's masculinity does impress the men, and they do begin to follow him.

As Bill's desire to lead declines, he invites Hogo to speak to the group of men, advising them about how to reinvigorate their dying love life with Snow White. Bill says that he "knows the deaths of the heart, Hogo does. And he knows the terror of aloneness, and the rot of propinquity, and the absence of grace" (62-3). To Bill, Hogo is an expert in managing the worst that relationships have to give at the end. Bill tells the others that they will know Hogo, who they apparently know only by reputation at this point, because "[h]e will be wearing blueberry flan on his buttonhole." Hogo also possesses the "vileness" that Bill claims too as a clear marker of who he is (63).

Despite the fact that Hogo has no clear antecedent in previous fairy tales, he professes to also behave as though his life is pre-written for him. Hogo is a misogynist who traps and abuses women. Jane (the Evil Queen figure) had once tried to secure Hogo within a relationship, marking him with blueberry flan. But Hogo, tired of Jane, glued her to a chair and trapped her in his house for several days at least. She implies but does not directly ask for him to let her go. She is a damsel pretending not to be in distress because pretending to comply with the situation is the only way to survive captivity (127). He responds that he has her trapped "because I want you near me Jane for some strange reason I don't even understand myself." Alluding to Freud, he says that he has trapped her for "some dark reason of the blood which the conscious mind does not understand." He says that that is the truth, though "God's Body but I wish it were not" (127). If we take Hogo at his word, he has kidnapped Jane because it is the sort of action someone of his character type should take. He speaks as though he is a "pre-written" villain, but of course he does not come from the fairy tale "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Still apparently glued to

the seat, Jane asks, “What is to become of us, Hogo” [sic]. He replies, “Our becoming is done [...] Now it is just a question of rocking along with things as they are until we are dead” (128). Switching from the fairy tale mode to realism, Barthelme offers a very bleak outlook on the “happily ever after.” They have united and from now on will be trapped in a static marriage. Jane herself calls it not “a very bright picture.” Hogo protests that he “didn’t think up this picture that we are confronted with. The original brushwork was not mine” (128). He does not disagree with Jane, but affirms that he must follow the narrative script. They seemingly live together for years until Hogo decides to “trade up” for Snow White.

When Hogo professes his love to Snow White, she retorts that she knows, since he has told her “a thousand times” (170). She “must admit” that his “Prussian presence” and outfit impress her (170). However, she says, “You don’t have the blood for this ‘love,’ Hogo. Your blood is not fine enough. Oh, I know that in this democratic era questions of blood are a little *de trop*, a little frowned-upon” (170). Barthelme mocks Snow White’s concern with ancestry and “blue blood,” and he acknowledges that the narrative of a Prince Charming is not American in origin. Yet, he points out the persistence of this myth and women’s search for a prince. Snow White explains, “I must hold myself in reserve for a prince or prince-figure, someone like Paul” (170). Hogo protests that his blood is hot with “fever” and “love” (171). He implies that he is indeed vile but still has high aspirations in desiring her. He wants to be her “consort,” but Snow White rejects him and his “cunningly-wrought dark appeal” (171).

This, then, is the new type of American “Prince Charming.” His blood is hot, but it is not blue. He is a misogynist who has no sense of chivalry or, indeed, charm. His love is transactional and uncommitted. Though the male characters initially disapprove of Hogo, by the end they approve of him enough to absorb him and his beliefs into their home. Though rejected by Snow

White, Hogo does not leave the tale. Hogo replaces Bill after his execution, not as leader (which goes to “Bill’s friend Dan”), but as a member of the household. Hogo is, the speaker says, “a brute perhaps but an efficient brute” who is “good at tending the vats” (180). His words and perspective have infiltrated the male community. The accepted narrative among all of the men seems to be one of increased misogyny, reducing Snow White to her role as beautiful woman/body moreso even than she had been at the start of the novel – and the first page of the novel visually depicts the moles on her body with typographical marks.

In Barthelme’s re-vision of the hypotext of “Snow White,” Hogo is figuratively a new type of American prince. His blood is hot but not “fine enough” for a princess; he certainly is no Prince Charming as we used to know it. Surrounded by references to fast cars and motorcycles, Hogo is drawn as a figure of virility. That this “hard” man – a misogynist and authoritarian – is the desired ideal of Snow White shows how very changed American Cold War society and gender norms have become compared with earlier variants responding to the norms of the nineteenth century or even pre-war twentieth century. Richard Gilman writes that there is “no happy ending to this *Snow White*, no denouement except one that mocks the original’s, no satisfaction to be obtained from a clear, completed arc of fictional experience” (31).

Contemporary American reality does not have the values of the fairy tale, so the novel provides no happily ever after (30).

The last line of Barthelme’s *Snow White* sums up the tone of the whole novel: “I am not sure that that is the best idea” (180). Here, the narrator reflects on our last image of Snow White, mourning her dead prince figure as she “cast[s] chrysanthemums on Paul’s grave, although there is nothing in it for her, that grave.” Snow White, as she has done throughout the novel, decides how to act not based on her own feelings and desires, but rather on the role preordained for her

by society. She never explicitly calls herself a princess out of a fairy tale, but we the reader know how her tale is supposed to go. We know, having heard “Snow White” many times, that the princess should marry her prince and live happily ever after. That is decidedly not the case in this postmodern novel. Here, after trying to shirk his perceived responsibilities, Paul has finally behaved according to his mode of gallantry which here presents as overbearing control. He takes from her and drinks a cocktail meant for Snow White, not knowing that it was poisoned by Jane, scorned by Hogo. The novel’s final image is of the tension between old, received narratives about gender and masculinity, about chivalry and misogyny, and the necessity of moving toward a new way of life. Inventing a new story when one has not been pre-written to follow is difficult. There is a general sense that longing for the myths of the past is not “the best idea,” but ultimately, the narrator is “not sure.”

With this chapter, I have shown the way that Barthelme re-visions “Snow White” in a way that explores constricting gender norms. Paul, Bill, and Hogo show three different ways of exploring contemporary masculinity, ultimately illustrating that the old narratives surrounding masculinity cannot survive in the contemporary American moment. Paul dies, Bill dies, and the other men are swayed by Hogo’s misogynistic approach to relationships. Barthelme uses humor and absurdism to show the bankruptcy of traditional narratives of masculinity from fairy tales as well as contemporary injunctions of Cold War narratives of containment.

CHAPTER FOUR
GENRE MIXING: THE COMBINATION OF FAIRY TALE AND DETECTIVE
FICTION BY ROSS MACDONALD

Roughly a decade after Donald Barthelme published *Snow White*, Ross Macdonald²⁰ published *Sleeping Beauty* (1973), the penultimate of eighteen murder mystery novels following the cases of private detective Lew Archer. While *Snow White* serves as a prime example of high postmodernist play with style, the narrative style of *Sleeping Beauty* is straightforward and terse by comparison, conforming to a reader's expectations for the genre. As with the rest of the Archer series, this novel is grounded in the contemporary reality of airplanes, cars, and offshore oil rigs, not a fantastic world of malevolent fairies. Unlike *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty* does not wholesale situate the same characters from the preexisting fairy tale into a modern American city. Yet Macdonald's style is not lacking in the literary. Alongside the gritty reality of a plot moved forward by malevolent actions committed by regular people, *Sleeping Beauty* meditates on dreams and escapes from that reality. From the reference to the fairy tale in the title to Archer's awakening kiss which closes the novel, fairy-tale allusions are one important tool Macdonald uses to transcend normal expectations for the detective genre. Much as "Sleeping Beauty"'s prince appears when the story turns around from waiting to fulfillment, Archer's detective serves an important role in the correction of a society cursed by evil deeds. *Sleeping*

²⁰ Ross Macdonald is the pen name of the author Kenneth Millar. For clarity's sake this essay uses the name Macdonald exclusively.

Beauty pushes the boundaries of the genre as illustrated through such earlier touchstone texts as Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) and Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939); Macdonald may be part of the "second generation" of hard-boiled detective authors, but his writing is not a "deplorable [falling]-off from" writers like Hammett and Chandler (Priestman 2). Through the combination of detective genre conventions and fairy tale allusions, *Sleeping Beauty* illustrates changing standards of masculinity in the hard-boiled detective of the second generation, and an ultimately unrealistic and unsatisfactory climax illustrating the impermanence of wish fulfillment for author, narrator, and reader. The *Sleeping Beauty* character is a blank slate allowing aging detective Lew Archer to enact fantasies of masculinity, and as a result of this complicated characterization his protagonist must grapple with changing generic and personal ideals of masculinity.

The first Archer novel was published just five years after Raymond Chandler wrote "The Simple Art of Murder" (1944), an essay in which he famously attacks the stale formulaic nature of Golden Age detective novels. The Golden Age, following Howard Haycraft's timeline, lasted from the end of World War I until 1930. Much more preferable, to Chandler, were the more recent works featuring a "hard-boiled" detective. This type of character and the type of plot in which he worked Chandler saw as more realistic, more middle-class, more American. This detective speaks not with the clever, genteel turns of phrase of an English drawing-room, but rather with a terseness that goes straight to the point. Lew Archer is this hard-boiled detective type. Christopher Breu describes the hard-boiled detective as a loner "characterized by a tough, shell-like exterior, a prophylactic toughness that [is] organized around the rigorous suppression of affect and [is] mirrored by his detached, laconic utterances and his instrumentalized, seemingly amoral actions" (1). However, Peter Messent disputes the amorality of the detective

character. This style of detective novel, Messent argues, identifies a world “where criminality is no longer exceptional” (37), and in this type of world, “where danger and physical violence are constant threats, it is the single honest and heroic man who is portrayed as the possible savior of an entire society” (38). Archer’s sense of the right course of action determines his actions, and those actions define him as the heroic hard-boiled detective. Narrowly viewed, Archer’s goal in *Sleeping Beauty* is to find out what happened to a disturbed young woman who stole a bottle of sleeping pills from him before walking out of his apartment and disappearing into the night. Although the novel never loses sight of Archer’s core drive, the prior misdeeds of every character Archer interviews in pursuit of that young woman intrude and distract from Archer’s straightforward pursuit of his goal. Quite incidentally, Archer uncovers the secrets of both the woman and most members of her family, going so far as to solve an unresolved murder case from 1944. Archer, through his dogged and honest pursuit of the young woman, sets several extended families on the road to healing. Archer might not be the “savior of an entire society” by the end of the novel, but the implications of his involvement in that family are far-reaching.

The plot of *Sleeping Beauty* is that of a search for a missing person, along the way revealing the inner workings of a dysfunctional wealthy family. Returning home to Los Angeles from Mexico, Lew Archer sees from his airplane window a vast oil spill growing across the ocean. Drawn to the Pacific Point beach to see the devastation for himself, Archer meets a young woman who is abnormally upset about a bird covered in the oil. Still upset after the bird dies, the woman asks Archer to drive her away from the beach. Expressing guilt over her family’s oil rig as well as suicidal intent, Laurel Russo disappears from Archer’s apartment with a bottle of his sleeping pills. Archer then sets out on a quest to find the young woman. Archer finds Laurel’s husband, Tom Russo, and convinces him to engage the private detective’s services. With this

legitimacy, he seeks out information from Laurel's parents, aunt and uncle, and grandparents. When her parents, Jack and Marian Lennox, receive a ransom demand for Laurel, Archer must investigate a man who had helped Laurel fake a previous kidnapping. They reveal that as a teenager Laurel faked her own kidnapping for ransom money; this causes uncertainty when her parents, Jack and Marian Lennox, receive a ransom demand for Laurel. Her aunt, Elizabeth Somerville, unearths family secrets with her story of a fire onboard the ship Jack Lennox and her husband Ben Somerville were stationed on; the accident caused Captain Somerville to end his military career and transfer into the Lennox family oil business presided over by family patriarch William Lennox. Elizabeth also tells Archer that her husband had kept a mistress, after which revelation Elizabeth and Archer suddenly have sex. Archer learns of three deaths: a sailor onboard Captain Somerville's ship (Nelson Bagley), Tom Russo's mother Alison when he was a child, and the secretary of Laurel's grandmother Sylvia Lennox. Tom's father tells Archer that his deceased wife Alison had had sex with Bagley, who they suspected of her murder. Archer, with Elizabeth, learns that Alison had been Ben's mistress as well as Jack's. All men become suspects for her murder as well as the other murders, but the murderer is at the last revealed to be the jealous and vindictive Marian. Laurel's mother at first blames her daughter for pushing Bagley to his death, but upon Archer's questioning, she admits all and jumps off her home's cliff face to her death. Though only two nights pass, the plot takes several unexpected turns, the mystery only resolving in the last few pages. Finally, in a direct reference to the titular fairy tale, Archer finds Laurel at home in bed asleep; after he chastely kisses her forehead she begins to stir with life. Although the plot itself does not retell or revise the story of "Sleeping Beauty," the fairy-tale allusion is central to the novel's understanding.

Established literary author Eudora Welty²¹ reviewed Macdonald's 1971 novel *The Underground Man* for the *New York Times Book Review*. Her review focuses around "the medieval tale of romance and the fairy," reading plot elements through this lens (Welty 252). Indicating the tightly related weaving of genre convention to his subject matter, she says, "The fairy-tale motif is brilliantly used and brilliantly appropriate. [...] The problem [of society] is that of unreality, but the problem itself is real" (Welty *Eye of the Story* 256). If we follow Welty's focus, we find further justification for considering *Sleeping Beauty* on its fairy tale merits, regardless of how it fits into the detective novel genre. Of the criticism written on *Sleeping Beauty*, biographer Tom Nolan has written the most extended look into the fairy-tale motifs in the novel, connecting motifs in Perrault's version of the tale type, "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," to echoes in Macdonald's novel (329). Nolan picks out certain phrases in *Sleeping Beauty* that refer to the genre or particular tale: he notes that Laurel wants "to go to sleep and never wake up" and that Tom Russo "treats her as if she were a fairy princess" (Macdonald qtd. in Nolan 329). Nolan also situates the plot in terms of fairy tale motifs generally: Nolan describes Archer as "a sort of surrogate prince," and the oil leak as "spread[ing] ashore like an evil spell" (Nolan 329). Overall, these highlights of the "fairy-tale motif" (Nolan 331) provide compelling motivation for reading the novel through the lens of fairy tale as well as detective convention. While the bulk of the plot of the book hits typical beats of detective fiction, the story is bookended by interactions between the protagonist and the character whose disappearance kickstarted the action. Their interactions can be read through the fairy tale lens

²¹ Before writing the review, Eudora Welty had said in a *New York Times* interview that she liked Macdonald's work, and in response he wrote her a letter. After Welty's review, the two became friends. He dedicated *Sleeping Beauty* to her (Nolan 333). Reynolds Price, a friend of both authors, came to believe that "they were in love with one another" (qtd. in Nolan 340). Although this sentiment could be seen to affect Welty's critical opinion, chronologically the personal connection came after her review of *The Underground Man* had been published, and so should not be seen as biasing her significant review. The correspondence between the two has been published in a joint project by their biographers (*Meanwhile*).

through which the reader is primed to read thanks to the title's allusion. This juxtaposition of generic expectations pushes the boundaries of both genres, creating a story unique to what is typical of either genre. Since a reading of this novel becomes more interesting once the reader moves beyond merely pointing out instances of the "fairy-tale motif" (Nolan 331) and on into deeper analysis, I find compelling motivation for extending the reading of the novel through the lens of fairy tale as well as detective conventions. In the uneasy meshing of these two traditions we see Macdonald developing his hard-boiled detective into a postmodern commentary on the genre's expectations of masculinity.

The novel uses two of Kevin Paul Smith's functions of fairy-tale references: authorized and incorporated references. The title of the novel gives the reader a clue as to how to read from the very start. As with Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* and Barthelme's *Snow White*, Macdonald's *Sleeping Beauty* uses what Kevin Paul Smith calls an "authorized" reference to a preexisting fairy tale. As Smith says, "The use of the fairytale title as the title of the novel, allows the reader to generate a reading of the text that appears uncontentious and even common sense" (13). The novel uses "incorporation" when discussing how Tom treats Laurel as "a fairy princess." Smith says, "Other uses of incorporating a fairytale, or a story, into a novel is to give an insight into the narrator's psychological state and the stories that influenced their expectations" (18). When Tom marries Laurel expecting to treat her like a princess, that suggests that he is attempting to use their relationship as a romantic escape from real life. As Connie says of Laurel's grandfather, Laurel is a "dream" in Tom's imagination. The kiss ending the novel is also an example of "incorporation." Smith says that incorporation "cannot be described as covert, implied, indirect, passing or incidental" (19). No modern reader would think of the "Sleeping Beauty" tale without thinking of the life-giving kiss illustrated so dramatically in Walt

Disney's 1959 animated version (which is also present in the Grimm version, but not present in the versions by Basile and Perrault). Generally, a reader expects a plot that in some way features a woman waiting for a prince to save her from a curse caused by nothing she herself has done, but because of the actions of her family. In this too, Macdonald's incorporation of the fairy tale is not "incidental."

The actions of Laurel's family lead to destruction both within and without the family unit. As Archer sees on the first page of the novel, an oil well drilled by the Lennox family company off of the shores of the California beachfront catastrophically breaks, spilling oil into the ocean. The creep of the oil from the site of the leak onto the shoreline marks the progression of the time in the novel, deepening the ominous feel of unease at Laurel's uncertain location. Laurel's escape from both Archer and her family is a reaction to her witnessing her mother murder a man a short while before meeting Archer. This murder stems, in a circuitous way, from an affair Laurel's father had with the mother of Laurel's now-husband Tom. Laurel's mother kills three people to keep secret the fact that she murdered the other woman over twenty years before. In addition to these large actions of environmental and interpersonal violence, the members of the family treat each other to smaller incidents of verbal violence or disdain instead of kindness. Laurel, sensitive and less aggressive than the rest, has a history of avoiding the stresses of her family life with sleeping pills. She expresses a desire to escape through eternal sleep. Though the novel ends before Laurel awakens, one might assume that Archer's reveal of so many family secrets will upend the existing dysfunctional family dynamics.

Rather than a century's surfeit of sleep, the curse of the Lennox family seems to be the exact opposite: a lack of sleep. To escape from reality into the world of dreams, it seems like all of Laurel's family uses sleep aids. Explicitly, Sylvia Lennox, William Lennox, Marian Lennox,

Ben Somerville, and Laurel Russo are given pills to help them sleep. Sylvia explains that her old age causes her to need the pills, even though she hated drugs in her younger years. Laurel, by contrast, needs them to deal with the mental distress of so many things going wrong in her life. While Laurel's absence from much of the plot might make it feel like she has been under a sleeping spell for several days, that is not actually the case. Laurel has been wandering around, not finding rest. Only after Archer has been searching for two full days does Laurel return to her parents' home where Archer finds her. Archer might stay awake too long, but that is due to his determination to find Laurel rather than an inability to fall sleep. When Archer first finds his sleeping pills missing, he says that they come from a time in which he "had forgotten how to sleep, and then had learned again" (14). He no longer uses Nembutal. By 5 pm of the first full day of the investigation, Archer is so tired that he nods off sitting up in a chair at the hospital, waiting for Jack's guard to return. That night he falls asleep in his own bed even when he tries to stay awake to puzzle through the mystery. Archer's tiredness might become increasingly emphasized as the investigation goes on, but he does not by habit sleep either too much or too little.

Archer is fundamentally a hard-boiled detective, not a prince. But functionally, that is the role that Archer performs in this novel. His quest for truth in pursuit of Laurel frees her from the curse that is her family's web of secrets. At the end of the novel, Archer is the one to kiss her forehead and awaken her. In the various earlier versions of "Sleeping Beauty," the prince is much less active. In Basile's 1634 version, the princess is awakened by a king who happens to find her abandoned palace while he is hunting. In the Grimm 1857 version, the princess awakens after a timeline of 100 years and the prince merely appears at the time through luck. Archer, like Disney's prince, intends to rescue the damsel in distress.

Peter Messent identifies specific traits of the hard-boiled detective which are at odds with a broader Cold War conception of masculinity. The detective, of course, is known for tough physicality, “wisecracks,” and “solv[ing] crime and [putting] the world back to order in its wake.” In addition, the hard-boiled detective, to Messent, has no close interpersonal connections, “his solitary nature and often spartan existence a sign of his difference from the surrounding world, of his ability to remain untainted by it” (38). In effect, he cannot be a prince who marries a princess and settles down “happily ever after.” This tension between momentary success and ultimate success leads to what Messent calls “a peculiarly schizophrenic fictional world in which constant action and the desire for social improvement goes hand in glove – though in varying ratios – with passivity and powerlessness and the knowledge of a deep-lying social disease for which no foreseeable remedy is possible” (39). While the detective and the novel itself pursue completion, a sense of finality, it is of course impossible. “Happily ever after” is only a narrative flourish found in the fairy tale. *Sleeping Beauty* ends with the formulaic kiss and waking drawn from the earlier fairy tales, but given this specific plot, no marriage is forthcoming, and no immediate happiness can be expected for Laurel.

Laurel is the Sleeping Beauty, the nexus of all action in the novel even though she performs only a minuscule amount of the action. The best explanation of Laurel’s role in the novel comes through the critical lens of Slavoj Žižek’s breakdown of the “McGuffin,” an idea which itself stems from Jacques Lacan’s *objet petit a*. Žižek explains that “the McGuffin itself, ‘nothing at all’, an empty place, a pure pretext whose sole role is to set the story in motion [...] is a pure semblance: in itself it is totally indifferent and, by structural necessity, absent; its signification is purely auto-reflexive, it consists in the fact that it has some signification for others, for the principal characters of the story, that it is of vital importance for them” (Žižek 6).

The *objet petit a*, the McGuffin, exists only as a mirror upon which others may see reflected what they want to see. Laurel is the McGuffin in this story; Archer and every other character may say they are very concerned about her, and she may be the motivating factor for all of the plot's action, but she herself is not important. She functions as a placeholder, a thing existing only to give the action a catalyst. Her importance to the other characters, Archer in particular, tells us what we need to know about this titular character. Laurel's missing status is not unique in Macdonald's oeuvre; Bruccoli notes that most of his novels "[have] a missing child as the triggering event" (17). Peter Wolfe says that this "structural innovation" of "off-center focus" in which the novels' "chief movers rarely appear" allows for innovative character development. In contrast to older mystery novels, which begin with a murder, the missing person creates an extra element of mystery because of his or her ambiguous existence. Because of this, "he can be both found and returned to the family. He touches our hearts and creates suspense in ways no corpse can" (Wolfe 39).

Laurel is the "sleeping beauty" of the title, but her central role in the novel is misleading. Laurel appears on merely eleven out of 269 pages. She is present for nine pages at the beginning of the book, and for her last, two-page appearance, she is asleep. Laurel as an actor is not important to the plot. Her past actions are necessary to the progress of the plot, since only by piecing together an understanding of her can Archer determine whether she took his sleeping pills, is extorting money from her family, or is doing something else. But Laurel, for the purposes of the plot at the moment of rising action, need only have existed in the past and have a potential future. She may take a break, be asleep, and the plot will go on without her. Indeed, if any evidence of her activity should have appeared in the plot, even "offscreen," her continued state of existence would be apparent to Archer and everyone else, and the primary mystery

would largely be solved and the story thus be over. Indeed, for this plot to continue, Laurel must be the focus of the detective's attention and she must not be present. She must sleep through all.

A first-time reader of this novel experiences what the characters feel: a lack of certainty. Until nearly the last page, both Archer and the reader do not know for sure that Laurel is alive. Nearly the entire experience of the novel is one of ongoing catastrophe. Every character lives with the experience of the world around them as dark and secretive, no happy ending assured. Archer's every question yields him information which only opens new avenues to new questions. At one point, Archer is sure that Laurel has died. Everything that he has discovered is dark and depressing: multiple dead bodies, kidnapping and ransom, familial discord, infidelity, violent double-cross, possible necrophilia. Every new lead in this detective story leads to another dark secret. And against each depressing reveal is literal darkness of the oil spilling into the ocean, marking the setting of many scenes of the novel. The title, the frame of the fairy tale, is one of very few things providing light in this novel. With the title comes hope that, even if the heroine should lie as if bed for a century, when the time is right she will once again live. The subplot of environmental devastation is never resolved, just as the family dynamics are never satisfactorily solved. But because of the fairy-tale framing, the reader has some faith that some goodness could come, even though it is hard to imagine at the moment.

This sense of uncertainty extends to Archer's status as a hard-boiled detective. His masculinity is undergoing a change. At their first meeting, Archer's relationship to Laurel at first falls into the stereotypical role of potential suitor. Laurel accuses Archer of wanting to have sex with her in exchange for giving her a place to sleep for the night. She states that she will not be "an easy mark" and drops his raincoat from her shoulders, "an act of rejection," but in so doing "she was inadvertently showing [Archer] her body" (13). Macdonald here provides an

opportunity for an extended reflection on Laurel's attractive appearance. He goes into detail, calling her body "deep in the breast, where the bird had left its dark stains on her shirt; narrow in the waist, deep in the hips, full-thighed. There was sand on the rug from her dirty elegant feet (13). However, after looking at her, Archer's vision turns inward. Laurel provides an opportunity for Archer to see himself, but not as the ideal he wishes to be. He [catches] an oblique glimpse of [himself] as a middle-aged man on the make" (13-14). He realizes that it is because of her "dark unchanging beauty" that he brought her home, saying, "It was true that if she had been old or ugly I wouldn't have brought her home with me." Archer tells her that he wants nothing from her, he only wants to help, but he asks himself if that is true (14). Reflected in Laurel is his behavior to her, and it is not chivalric. Archer emphasizes her beauty, but she is not sexualized in quite the same way the hard-boiled detectives Spade and Marlowe do to their disrespected women. With the inclusion of other details, such as the oil stain left by the grebe and sand on her feet, Macdonald creates a woman to whom things have happened. She may now be present in Archer's apartment because he was drawn to an attractive woman, and the character's entire purpose may be to serve as a mirror to Archer, but there is a slight nod in the direction of Laurel being a developed character.

The hard-boiled detective is known for his masculinity. He is physically aggressive, seeking out information and not succumbing to villains who punch or shoot at him; his weakness is often a female romantic interest. However, the heyday of this figure came before World War II, and Macdonald is writing this character in 1973, long after the "Golden Age" of the detective novel. World War II "[made] the taboo acceptable" and worked to "enhance our sense of the evil people do," which as with all types of novels "turned the detective novel" "more toward personality than plot" (Winks 8). Thus the later evolution of the genre, which Macdonald

followed, became something different than that which we commonly associate with the hard-boiled detective. Archer, an unusually aging detective, does not match reader expectations and suffers for it. Macdonald's best novels were written towards the end of his career, chronologically closer to this change in literary preferences, which could be why critics have harshly said he does not suit generic conventions.

One event illustrates Archer's approach to physical violence. In chapter 19, Archer stops by the harbor on his way to Seahorse Lane and Sylvia. Twice in ten minutes he defuses the tension caused by protestors, mostly the middle-aged with a few long-haired youths. He stops the driver of a delivery van from hurting the protestors blocking his path with a tire iron. He stops the mob from descending on Captain Somerville when he arrives. Archer self-reflects that twice the air felt like danger, and as he drives away he notes the sweat of his reaction to that danger. This self-reflection, brief as it is, highlights his version of Cold War masculinity. He deescalates violence. He does not rely on his fists or gun to stop violence. He uses his words. Archer makes the driver with the tire iron realize that he is the one who is being a threat. He provides Somerville with a different plan, that of leaving the area entirely and literally following Archer away from the field of battle. He does not engage the mob but rather argues with two individuals using words. One man, Somerville, is the vice president of an influential company, while the other man is in control of a motor vehicle with the power to inflict damage. Archer uses his outsider status to talk down two men who are currently occupying a greater position of power than he does. The masculinity Macdonald constructs for Archer is not a failing to match the hard-boiled type but rather a stylistic choice illustrating a different, more intellectual type.

As the detective novel genre is aging and changing, so too does Macdonald's protagonist Lew Archer age. Brucoli says that "most fictional private eyes ignore the calendar," but Archer

is approximately 35 in *Moving Target*, and therefore would be 56 in *Underground Man* (the book published immediately before *Sleeping Beauty*), becoming “older and tired” as he ages with his creator (101). The words “old man” are used often to refer to the older generation, mostly William Lennox, Ben Somerville, and also Tom Russo’s father (Macdonald 129, 134, 203, 220). By contrast with youth Archer describes himself as someone “middle-aging” or older (113). Early in the novel, Archer has a daydreaming “fantasy” of being “young,” “clever,” “unencumbered,” and “mobile” (84). These elements make the ideal hard-boiled detective. Here we see the use of the fairy tale, not as wish fulfillment, but Tolkien’s “Consolation.” Fantasy author and scholar J. R. R. Tolkien says that what he calls “fairy stories” function as a specific form of escapism for readers. Rather than a facile entertainment, this complex idea is catalogued by four distinct elements: “Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation” (Tolkien 67). When reading fantastic stories that are different from but still echo difficult real life problems, readers go through these four stages to adjust their psyches to deal with the comparable real situation. Archer’s fantasy allows him a respite from aging out of a world he knows.

Here, Archer’s expression of masculinity is changing. He is growing away from the hard-boiled ideal, and thus his masculinity is under threat. He wants to have sex with Laurel, but he is too old to appeal to a woman that young anymore. His spontaneous sleepover with Laurel’s aunt shows his attempt to cast onto her his desires for the young woman. After having sex with Elizabeth Somerville, “Archer experiences semi-incestuous shame” and “[i]n an instant he moves from sex to guilt to death: there’s an oil-soaked corpse floating in the sea outside--a grotesque double to the oil-damaged bird Laurel had held when Lew met her” (Nolan 331). Before the reader understands that the pair have had sex, Archer begins the chapter dreaming of “sleeping with Laurel,” waking up “in her bed” (Macdonald 79). Having sex with the married

woman is itself inappropriate, though not exactly out of character for a hard-boiled detective, full of masculine appeal. It is the fact that he uses Elizabeth as an age appropriate, physically present double for her niece that makes this scene “semi-incestuous” and unappealing. This scene, compounded by the characters’ subsequent awkwardness and formality with each other, highlights the inappropriateness of Archer’s desires. Elizabeth is fully present and active; she will not allow herself to be Archer’s *petit objet a*. Generic conventions almost mandate a love interest appear somewhere in the plot, but, as Brucoli points out, most detectives do not have to concern themselves with a broad spectrum of women’s ages. The aging detective’s new demographic of romantic partners makes the entire relationship, with its innumerable doubling, “semi-incestuous” and awkward.

Archer’s capabilities are questionable; it is odd that Archer, a detective who has for years at this point in the series investigated murders and strange occurrences, does not recognize that Laurel is acting oddly in her first appearance. Her apparent reaction over a dead bird, tears and peevishness, is completely out of proportion. Archer should realize that something is afoot, but he does not seem aware that there is a darker reason for Laurel’s tears than one dead bird. As he admits, he takes her home because she is young and attractive, not because he senses a mystery needing to be solved. Perhaps he is distracted by her beauty and assumes that overemotional women are normal, a critical flaw in his logical reasoning put there by misogynist cultural norms. Part of the problem with understanding Archer’s mental state at the time is the narrator’s lack of interior monologue. Much of this scene is dialogue between the two, and that dialogue is natural and therefore brief, rapid exchanges. The most insight we get is the brief reflection regarding Laurel’s quick “decision” to reveal her home address as near Archer’s; he “didn’t quite believe in the coincidence,” but he “was willing to go along with it and see where it led”

(Macdonald 10). This could mean that Archer senses a mystery afoot, but it could just as easily mean he was wondering if she was angling to go home with him and sleep with him. As well, later, Archer as narrator says, “Something about the situation made me hold back the fact that I was a private detective” (10). It is hard to say, but in this scene, thanks in large part to detective fiction convention, it feels like the audience is in on the secret that Laurel is in trouble while Archer has no inkling. This should not happen if Archer is an ideal detective at the height of his abilities. Laurel highlights the problems for a hard-boiled detective who allows gentler emotions to influence his deductive abilities. If the new generation of hard-boiled detectives are becoming less hard-boiled, exchanging “prophylactic toughness” and “suppression of affect” for non-cynical sentiment, then how can either the individual detective or the genre be as effective as they had been in the past?

Archer is constructed as a competent detective because he can make people talk to him; he is old and knows his craft. This improbable tendency is only necessary because the absent Laurel cannot speak for herself. Her identity becomes communal property. Her presence is unnecessary because others can best use her if she is not there to contradict their pronouncements. Only in this way may Macdonald muse on broken family relationships. This extended monologuing divulging personal information that Archer manages to prompt from all other characters may be seen as a flaw of the book.

This almost unbelievable ability of Archer to get the information he wants is the element in this remixed fairy tale that comes closest to the fantastic. Bernard A. Schopen says that this novel is “an implausible fiction, a detective novel so poorly crafted that it renders some of the accompanying thematic discourse cumbersome, obvious, and--because it is unattached to any represented action--pretentious” (127). As well, Schopen says, “As a detective novel, *Sleeping*

Beauty is inept; because it is a detective novel, it cannot be successful as anything else” (127). This is an exceptionally limiting view of generic convention, not allowing for any evolution of the genre. *Sleeping Beauty* may not represent the hard-boiled detective of the genre’s golden years, but it remains a detective novel. The idea that the detective novel blends well with the fantastic is not a unique idea. Genre theorist Tzvetan Todorov compares the detective novel to the fantastic. I here provide an extended quotation for Todorov himself to explain the similarities in the two genres:

[In t]he murder mystery [...] on the one hand there are several easy solutions, initially tempting but turning out, one after another, to be false; on the other, there is an entirely improbable solution disclosed only at the end and turning out to be the only right one. Here we see what brings the detective story close to the fantastic tale [... W]e note that the fantastic narrative, too, involves two solutions, one probable and supernatural, the other improbable and rational. It suffices, therefore, that in the detective story this second solution be so inaccessible as to ‘defy reason’ for us to accept the existence of the supernatural rather than to rest with the absence of any explanation at all. (Todorov 49)

I am not suggesting that Macdonald introduces the possibility of the supernatural into his text, but the problem of plausibility is definitely a sticky one in this novel. If the interactions between Archer and Laurel or Archer and the characters he interrogates seem unbelievable, then I believe that that quality stems from the interaction of fairy tale and detective generic conventions. Both genres invoke certain scripts for their characters to follow, and these motifs do not always mesh easily. It is in these moments that violate the reader’s expectations of either genre that we see

Macdonald moving away from the hard-boiled into a more postmodern aesthetic. Lew Archer in *Sleeping Beauty* is one data point illustrating a moment of transition in the larger trend of distancing of the hard-boiled detective figure from the callous protagonists of the Golden Age.

While Archer is concerned with directness, the partner of Laurel's grandfather focuses on the dreams of other men of the family. With Laurel's physical absence from the bulk of the book, the idea of Laurel exists as a mirror for the other characters. In trying to learn more about Laurel to figure out where she might have gone, Archer receives from the other characters sketches of Laurel refracted through the lens of how they view her influences on their lives. When Archer says that Connie Hapgood (not-quite-fiancé of William Lennox) was too emphatic in her cynical description of Laurel to her loving grandfather, Connie says, "I have to, or he'll go on dreaming about her. Men are so unrealistic where women are concerned" (130). It has already been apparent in the novel that Lennox loves his granddaughter Laurel so much that she can do no wrong even when he is aware of her misdeeds. Through the dream, Lennox creates for himself the version of Laurel he wishes to be the only version of her. In his exposition of the McGuffin in reference to Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, Žižek says, "The *objet a* is precisely that surplus, that elusive make-believe [...] In 'reality,' it is nothing at all, just an empty surface [...] but because of it the break is nonetheless well worth the trouble" (Žižek *Awry* 8). As Lennox creates Laurel, so too through the creative impulse of writing, Macdonald creates for himself a renewed version of his daughter, this one not yet dead, able to be saved. Ironically, Connie stops Lennox's dreaming by putting him to sleep with tranquilizers. She seems to believe that if she is the one to suggest sleep and induce it, her negative views of Laurel will be conveyed to the sleeper. Though we never see the character again, it is likely that the dreamer's dreams will instead serve to reinforce his desired image of his granddaughter. As well, earlier in the novel,

Archer awakens Tom from a dream of his mother's death. Tom, still in the grips of the dream, conflates that with his missing wife and believes that Laurel has died. Archer takes advantage of that dreamlike state, questioning him while he is emotionally defenseless.

Archer too uses Laurel as a mirror for seeing himself. With her as a blank canvas upon which to write whatever he wishes, she becomes his *objet a*. Archer is active in seeking out the job from Laurel's husband Tom. Archer is interested in the case and pursues an appointment onto the mystery even when everyone else seems unconcerned with Laurel's disappearance. Archer needs this hero's quest to unite with the young woman. To Archer, at least, she seems like a lost soul whom he can save. In saving this "princess," Archer becomes a white knight, a virile young prince, a strong, hard-boiled detective.

In the climactic final scene, Archer ignores all of the situation's real concerns—the murderer in the room with him, alerting the authorities—to reenact the fairy tale scene: "Laurel lay asleep on the bed, a pillow under her dark head and an afghan over her. [...] I bent over Laurel and touched her warm forehead with my mouth. I could hardly believe that she was alive. [...] She stirred and half awakened, as if my concern for her had reached down palpably into her sleeping mind. She was alive" (Macdonald 270-271). The repetition of "she was alive" betrays the deep emotion Archer feels at this scene. A woman he has only spent a few hours with, but has thought about incessantly for days, has not committed suicide or been murdered by any of her unsavory family and friends; this fills Archer with so much relief that he impulsively kisses her sleeping body even though she showed no affection for him during their previous meeting. Archer's kiss may not have been on her lips, but the action itself shows an inordinate amount of intimacy. Archer looks like an old man preying on a vulnerable young woman. However, when we view Archer as a stand-in for an author who knows how it feels suddenly to lose from his life

a vibrant young woman, Archer's action makes more sense as the author function. This obvious trope of ending with a kiss and awakening is less supernatural connection between their two souls and more writer as god. In this revision of real-life events, Macdonald's desire controls his daughter's life. The fiction has been created as a stay against death. Laurel is death; Archer erases that death with a kiss.

From our first vision of Laurel, death or its nearness is emphasized: the omnipresent oil in the ocean smells like death. Archer muses, "The wind had changed, and I began to smell the floating oil. It smelled like something that had died but would never go away" (Macdonald 5). This detail almost supports Michael Kreyling's claim that "[t]he 'sleeping beauty' of the novel is the layered geological and mythical California: Santa Barbara shares the same initials, S. B." (146). However, I think this connection is of secondary importance compared to, as Kreyling puts it, "the human sleeping beauty of the novel" (147).

The specific association of Laurel with death echoes the Sleeping Beauty character; the folkloric mainstay exists in a state of seeming death but is really sleeping for a century. Though not truly living, her body is incorruptible, refusing to decay and fall apart from its original form. The first time we see Laurel she is holding a grebe, which dies. She is sitting where "a scattering of boulders lay at the foot of the cliff" (Macdonald 9), the same cliff from which she had just watched her mother push Nelson Bagley to his death. Archer, not knowing this motivation for her tears, reflects, "The cliff and the boulders at its base looked in the fading light like something seen for the last time" (9). We do not yet know the reason for Archer's premonition, and the foreshadowing that is later obvious is here misdirected into foreshadowing onto Laurel, who in the next chapter steals Archer's bottle of sleeping pills with the implied intention to kill herself. But the line has another level of deadly significance when one considers the fairy tale title's

allusion. The cliff here is comparable to the sleeping beauty's placement in the top tower of the castle in the Grimm version and the castle with no door and a high window in Calvino's version (to be discussed below). The boulders at the bottom, which crushed Bagley's body, are comparable to the briars surrounding the castle which killed several kings' sons in the Grimm version. (No physical obstruction is written in Calvino's version, but an impenetrable wood is present in Perrault's version.) The cliff-briars also have significance at the end of the story when Laurel's cruel mother jumps out of the window above the cliff face and commits suicide onto those same boulders. At the beginning of this scene of suicide, Macdonald writes, "A dead grebe covered with oil lay on the patio" (265), mirroring back to the scene of Laurel's introduction.

Laurel, associated with death generally, is also specifically associated with death. Even when Laurel is with Archer, he reports that "she seemed a long way off, at a telescopic distance from me." She reaches out to take his hand, and "[h]er hand was cold" (Macdonald 11), figured cold as a corpse. Her hold on his hand is then called "tight and spasmodic, like a frightened child's" (11). Laurel, described in this way, is Archer's daughter, doomed to die and, as he imagines it, frightened at the brink of the great beyond. Oddly, Archer can "smell her fear" (11), hinting at a magical link with this young woman--a supernatural connection that parents sometimes claim to have with their children when they are in danger. Archer tries to maintain the distance between himself and Laurel; in the next chapter, he watches and leaves her alone after her emotional phone call. He knows that she is "full of trouble," but despite this she fits into his life, "looked quite natural in my room" (13).

Archer's not complete dissociation from Macdonald makes the relationship between Archer and Laurel uneasy, a strange mix of sexual attraction and paternal feeling. Nolan notes that "[l]ike a father, Lew feels responsible for Laurel" (330); however, "he worries that his

paternal motives are impure” (331). The father-figure Archer must feel compelled to save the daughter-figure Laurel with no time spared in the narrative for them to realistically become friendly. Sexual attraction is the fastest way to make this happen believably. From the time of her disappearance with his bottle of sleeping pills, Laurel, the Sleeping Beauty, seems doomed to death, or at least a half-death of comatose sleep; Macdonald through Archer has the ability to save her life with a fairytale kiss. However, this simple, fantastic story is complicated by the fact of who Lew Archer is. Like his creator, Archer is getting to be an old man, and the femmes fatales his genre requires him to consort with are changing too.

The aging protagonist calls attention to the fact that he and Laurel are of different generations. In the original fairy tale, childlessness gave way to an effusion of children. Referring to any “original” fairy tale as source material for *Sleeping Beauty* is misleadingly simple. As a fairy tale, the source of Macdonald’s title comes not from one particular country or author, but rather from dissemination across centuries and the ocean between America and the multiple European countries with variants of this tale type. There are three published literary variants from well-known compilers that Macdonald may have been familiar with: versions from the Brothers Grimm, from Germany (1812); Charles Perrault (1697), from France; and Italo Calvino, from Italy (1956). In all three of these versions, the tale begins with the problem of childlessness. A king and queen cannot conceive, no matter what they do. The titular Sleeping Beauty is of course the fruit of their eventual success. In the Calvino and Perrault versions, the story continues past the point when the prince awakens and marries the sleeping princess and on into a second vignette. In these two versions, the married couple produce children. These two versions drive home the generative focus of the story. First, there is the problem of creating new generations. Then the tale type is filled with older generations harming younger, be it

intentionally or cruelly intentional. In the two variants with Sleeping Beauty's children, in both her mother-in-law sends a servant to collect her grandchildren and cook them as a meal. In both versions, the husband comes into the kitchen as his mother is about to kill Sleeping Beauty, and she herself is killed instead. In Grimm and Perrault, the royal couple offend a fairy with a lack of hospitality, and rather than punishing them, the fairy curses their newborn daughter. The fairy curses their family line, the next generation. Sins of the father are visited upon the child, which is a theme of Macdonald's. In all three versions, Sleeping Beauty is able to prick her finger on a spindle because of an old woman still possessing the prohibited marker of times now past. This marker of an earlier time unintentionally (and yet fated due to the curse) again harms a member of the generation too young to know what the old device does. The Sleeping Beauty story is a story of generations.

Just as in the fairy tale, here old generations hurt the young. When Archer sees Laurel's family generally coming apart, he wishes to intervene and save her from their evildoing. Laurel's mother Marian, a "cruel parent" of archetypal proportions, uses her daughter as a blank slate in an attempt to save her own life. Marian tells her husband and Archer that Laurel was the one to murder Bagley, not her. Marian gives Laurel "some sleeping pills, and she [goes] to sleep" (Macdonald 267). Marian here becomes not only the royal parent who caused a spell to be put on her daughter, but also the evil fairy who casts the curse. Marian ensures Laurel's mental absence from the story, and in that absence, Marian may use her however she wishes. She tells Archer that Laurel decided not to commit suicide using his sleeping pills, which "was a brave decision" since, as Marian tells it, "[s]he has so much to face up to" (267). Laurel as a passive sleeper allows others to weave their own versions of events. Marian knows death repays death, and is envisioning her own criminal punishment and suicide when she says that Laurel is the one who

“ran at him and pushed him with all her force. He went flying over the wall” (267). But more importantly, this explains why Laurel’s mother was willing to sedate her daughter to save herself. Marian’s intention before her suicide is unclear. Could she get Laurel to take the blame? Could she sedate her long enough to send her to an asylum, to shut her up? Even kill her as well? Logically, since she had not been given a lethal dose, Laurel must wake up and tell her own story. Even if it took a hundred years, Laurel becoming an active agent would destroy her mother’s attempt at self-preservation. Marian confirms this by committing suicide as soon as Laurel begins to awaken. As soon as the illusion of her absence dissipates, the unpleasant reality becomes too much to bear.

Here as throughout the book, Archer steps into the role of savior. Given what we learn from Laurel’s mother in the next to last page of the book, Laurel has watched her mother murder someone earlier that day; Archer is correct when he surmises “that she had been badly hurt already, perhaps damaged like the grebe beyond hope of recovery” (Macdonald 14). When he tries to reassure her that he does not want sex or anything else from her in exchange for his help, Laurel does not believe that nobody will “hurt her,” as Archer phrases it (14). She knows that even the people she should be able to trust the most, her mother and now her husband, do awful things and leave her to deal with the aftermath. Though this development happens throughout the book, with relatively little actually given in her active appearance, Laurel is given character development. Though Archer tries to keep his distance, he cares much more emotionally for Laurel than Spade and Marlowe do for their female matches, even in *The Maltese Falcon* wherein Sam Spade falls in love with the femme fatale.

Archer, in a complicated way, feels paternal toward Laurel. Here we see how hard-boiled detectives are more recognizable in their generic role as single young men, virile and sexual.

With William Lennox's death and the concurrent downward slide of the family's station, we can see a lack of virility in the family line as a whole. Laurel's father says that he cannot take care of Laurel himself; instead, Jack cedes authority over Laurel's affairs to the detective, saying, "Will you take over from Marian for me?" (264). Archer is explicitly made a surrogate parent to Laurel. This is made awkward since Archer has well established his sexual attraction to her.

Archer's attraction to Laurel and paternal feelings toward her show a middle-aged man caught in between stages in sociobiological development. "The absent child" in many of Macdonald's works "[embodies] his parents' thwarted hopes and stake in posterity, [and] he would not strengthen the plot by appearing in it" (Wolfe 39). If Laurel were a minor child, her relationship to Archer would be simpler. As an adult who could be a child of Archer's, she raises the idea of generation both with herself as symbol of the next generation and herself as woman who could produce a new generation. Laurel, however, doesn't want to give birth to her own children. Instead of having sex with her, Archer has sex with another childless woman, Elizabeth. Laurel's aunt functions as her double, a way for Archer to work through the impulses of his id that he tries to not acknowledge and thus keep below conscious thought. With Elizabeth, he performs the act that could lead to child production, filling the void left by her husband who has left her emotionally and biologically unfulfilled. Nolan says that in this novel "the same signs that signal something ending could also cue renewal" (331). Laurel's seeming death is instead the coma of a sleeping beauty. She remains full of potential to be reawakened. As Nolan so optimistically puts it, Macdonald "did the impossible [...] This time the story came out right: the princess is found, the pills thrown away, the victim rescued, the wicked punished, the scapegoat set free. The hero succeeds. The spell is broken. The daughter lives" (332). Archer's

impulses toward proving his virile masculinity show impulses toward creating the next generation. Only in the survival of children may humans attain immortality.

Ultimately, the blatant unreality of the novel's ending drives home the fact that this happy ending is that of a fairy tale. Michael Kreyling has criticized this scene, saying, "The disjunction of the ending, retrieving the conclusion of a different kind of case for a new kind of crime, makes *Sleeping Beauty* less successful than *The Underground Man* at reforging the linkage of conventional novel and detective novel" (*Novels* 148-149). This "disjunction" of the ending comes from its quick conclusion, unrealistic behavior from Marian, and, most significantly, Laurel's awakening from the slight pressure of Archer's lips. This fantasy ending cannot be constructed with believable behavior, but for the novel's story to have any Consolation for its reader and creator, this ending must occur. Kreyling implies that the ending makes the novel as a whole unsuccessful, but I believe that this odd ending self-consciously points to the fictional quality of its own existence.

The Consolation of a fairy tale ultimately ends. This is true of all the fictions we tell ourselves for comfort and respite from our daily lives. The story ends and reality returns, since unreality was satisfying but never convincing. Raymond Chandler "calls the detective novel a tragedy with a happy ending." In *Sleeping Beauty*, the tying up of loose ends at the end "gives no catharsis" (Wolfe 13). Even though our Sleeping Beauty is awakened and the villain is punished, the self-conscious fictionality of it all leaves us knowing that the fairy tale was just that. This is a novel produced by a desolate creator, desiring consolation but unable at the last to create it compellingly. Jerry Speir says that "*Sleeping Beauty* is a powerful book" in part because "the novel also succeeds in portraying the ambiguity of hope" (104).

While most readers think of the fairy tale genre as defined by the “happily ever after” ending, this contrasts with what Matthew J. Bruccoli says is core to the genre “loosely categorized as the American hard-boiled detective novel”: “no restoration of an Edenic state” (xix). With the fairy tale and the detective novel having mutually exclusive generic conventions, it is no wonder that this novel which is a fusion of both has a complicated ending. Readers wish for the happy ending but ultimately are left feeling that such a thing is impossible in the real world outside of fiction.

Critics of the American detective genre group together with genre giants Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett as, to use critic Michael Kreyling’s words, a “trinity” of “three founding fathers of” the American detective figure (3). In a genre identified by certain rigid, repetitive plot and character motifs, Macdonald “tried for art” (Bruccoli xx). Through the combination of detective generic conventions with fairy-tale allusions, *Sleeping Beauty* illustrates changing standards of masculinity in the hard-boiled detective and an ultimately realistic and unsatisfactory climax illustrating the impermanence of wish fulfillment for author, narrator, and reader. Macdonald’s contributions to the hard-boiled detective novel, a uniquely American genre, are significant. Matthew J. Bruccoli says that this style “was developed by many writers using the American language and the American experience in ways that fused in the late twenties and seems to provide a voice for the bitter thirties” (Bruccoli 19). Macdonald, whose first detective novel was published in 1944, shows the continuation of this genre which did not burn brightly and die young. *Sleeping Beauty* deserves attention for the postmodern way the novel blends despair and hope, reality and unreality, detective fiction and fairy tale. *Sleeping Beauty*’s fairy-tale intertexts show Macdonald’s investigation of masculinity and virility, dreams and reality.

CODA

Through the ways in which these authors use fairy-tale allusions to explore Cold War gender roles, we may see the underlying quality of postmodernity. Linda Hutcheon argues that “the postmodern is, if it is anything, a problematizing force in our culture today: it raises questions about (or renders problematic) the common-sensical and the ‘natural’” (xi). When Welty takes from the Robber Bridegroom his act of murder yet leaves him a robber in the extractive economy of the antebellum South, she uses the freedom granted by the remove from the “real” time and space of America in 1942 into the world of the fairy tale in order to critique that his “stealing” of love remains an acceptable trait for a male romantic hero. By crafting a troubled middle-aged man who sees himself as a Prince Charming type in the model of a Hollywood actor playing opposite a romantic lead who is a nonhuman child of a nymphet, Nabokov problematizes the Cold War ideal of commanding masculinity. Cold War cultural narratives mandate that societal norms, including gender norms, become internalized; the self (rather than or in addition to the state) polices the self and others (Nadel *Containment* 3). These “metanarratives” (4) are challenged by the sense of unreality imported through allusions to fairy tales.

Since these “metanarratives” become “what Barthes (1973) has called the ‘given’ or ‘what goes without saying’ in our culture” (Hutcheon xiii), these gaps in language become sites of literary play. Hutcheon says, “Willfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can

do is question from within” (xiii). Following this understanding, Barthelme writes characters who are self-aware of their status as characters who must act out lives pre-written for them; though Prince Charming tries to work different jobs, he cannot escape enacting his given role (albeit in a perverted form). Framing his detective story with an allusion to “Sleeping Beauty,” Macdonald makes use of the combined genre expectations to shift the characterization of his established hard-boiled detective from romantic hero to paternal protector. These authors understand the expectations that come along with their literary projects, and they use allusions to the fairy tale form as a way to push the boundaries of “question[ing] from within.”

Though I consider these works as products of their time, the conception of masculinity they are working with is but a snapshot from an ongoing evolution in thought about gender. We may see another straightforward snapshot of gender roles from the genre of fairy tales much earlier: in the eight-tale Charles Perrault collection of 1697, which is notable among traditional tales for having explicit, didactic morals. For Perrault, the moral of the story was not incidental enough to be left implicit within the story; he felt the need to make his message absolutely clear to the reader. “The Blue Beard” (in the same tale type family as “The Robber Bridegroom”) for example, has two different morals. The first says:

Curiosity, in spite of its mirth,
Often costs more than it’s worth.
Everywhere and always examples abound.
No offense to the ladies, it’s an illusory crutch.
As soon as you seize it, it is nowhere to be found
And it always costs too much. (Jones *Mother Goose* 126)

The next, titled in translation “Another Moral,” reads:

Even a wit of the dimmest cast,
Who is not so very worldly,
Will discover anon that this story
Is a tale of times long past.
No more the horrible husband of old
Whose demands were impossibly bold.
Though now he be discontent and domineering
Still with his wife he's endearing.
The color of his beard no longer stands
To show among them who wears the pants. (126)

As long ago as the seventeenth century we can see that fairy tales were seen as traditional, even old-fashioned stories. Even then, they functioned out-of-time to comment on the present day. The second moral argues that, while men "of old" were brutish, men today are "endearing" with their wives, no matter how "discontent" they feel. Husbands of 1697 do not "wear the pants" in the family. The first moral addresses "ladies" specifically. Women, not men, are vulnerable to curiosity even though it "always costs too much." Something within the "Bluebeard" tale type was timeless enough for Perrault to find it appealing in his day.

In "The Blue Beard" we see the importance of gender in the world of fairy tales. These didactic morals make clear that normative heterosexuality in the world of the home must be maintained. Whatever abuses women of 1697 endured from their husbands, at least their husbands were not so "impossibly bold" as to murder them and store their bodies in a locked room, as Bluebeard did to his successive wives. The tale's moral indeed shows a fear of a loss of masculinity. Christine A. Jones says that the original French of the eighth line of the second

moral has connotations of feminized submission. The expression, *filer doux*, comes from the feminine task of spinning yarn. The men of Perrault's day, then, are more like the crone whose spinning unintentionally put Sleeping Beauty into her long slumber than they are like the prince who awakened her.

In midcentury America, literary authors addressed similar concerns about masculinity. They did not, however, express their sentiments about the way that society should behave as explicitly as Perrault did in his didactic morals following each fairy tale in his collection. In her first novella, Eudora Welty relied heavily on the plot of the original "Robber Bridegroom" fairy tale. In his novel, Vladimir Nabokov used several notable features of the fairy tale genre, rather than an individual tale type. In his first novel, Donald Barthelme relied upon one single fairy tale but in content and style diverted enormously from the original. In his penultimate novel, Ross Macdonald relied upon allusions to one fairy tale though not its plot structure. All authors relied heavily upon character types. All of their characters try to enact or push back against roles that do not suit them. The authors create new character types or adjust preexisting ones, manipulating the hypotexts to create something new that relates specifically to the present.

In particular, these authors use the fairy-tale allusions to examine gender roles. Welty creates a female villain who takes on stereotypically male traits. Nabokov creates a female character type, the nymphet, to highlight the male character's inability to be a prince charming. Barthelme creates Hogo, a rebellious, misogynistic romantic hero. Macdonald refines the hard-boiled detective character type to be more emotional. As with "The Blue Beard" above, all of these character types exist in relation to a romantic partner. Without that connection, their characterizations would not exist.

When gender is political, all of these characterizations become political by default. By not including a didactic message, the authors save themselves from being harshly critiqued, especially during the Cold War era of punishments for social deviancy. Using allusions to a child's genre is a good way to divert suspicion – or highlight the perversity of the changes to the genre. Such “covert” messaging shifted during the 1970s. In 1978, after the publication of the novels under consideration in this dissertation, Mary Daly began *Gyn/Ecology* by saying “The child who is fed tales such as *Snow White* is not told that the tale itself is a poisonous apple, and the Wicked Queen (her mother/teacher), having herself been drugged by the same deadly diet throughout her lifetime (death/time) is unaware of her venomous part in the patriarchal plot” (44). Such bold statements as this characterize the movement to recover fairy tales for feminist aims during the “fairy-tale renaissance.” Anthologies exploring strong female characters were published, including *Womenfolk and Fairy Tales* (1975), *Tatterhood and Other Tales* (1978), *Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folktales* (1980), and *The Maid of the North: Feminist Folk Tales from around the World* (1981) (Haase 21). Yet there is still room for more critical literature (and indeed, creative literature) addressing masculinity within literary texts that employ allusions to the fairy tale.

Although short essays of criticism exist, there is still work to be done to address masculinity and fairy tales. Robert Bly recognized a need for male tales alongside tales for women and girls. In *Iron John: A Book About Men* (1990), he writes, “We are living at an important and fruitful moment now, for it is clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them [...] Such a man is open to new visions of what a man is or could be” (xiii). The editor of the 2007 anthology *Brothers and Beasts* (which explores the social significance of the fairy-tale form to boys and

men), Kate Bernheimer, as well as two prolific scholars in the field, Maria Tatar and Jack Zipes, all agree that the default association for many people is that fairy tales are for women or girls. Bernheimer says that writing a book about men's relationship to fairy tales aroused negative reactions in many; she had a difficult time soliciting personal essays from men fearful that an association with fairy tales would cause readers to turn away. She states, "There was an implied disdain for boys drawn to stories of wonder [...] It is as if men are not allowed to have an emotional or artistic relationship to fairy tales" (5). In her introduction to the collection, Tatar says, "Girls may be allowed to indulge their desires to read about multi-towered castles surrounded by rose hedges and about princesses who dance nightly in enchanted realms, but boys are far less likely to remain absorbed into adolescence by stories framed in our culture as satisfying feminine desires" (*Brothers and Beasts* xvii).

A trifold division of character types designed by Brian Attebery seems like a good place to begin with future criticism in this field of study. In particular, it would be interesting to apply this method to works of literature like *Lolita* which are fabulations or otherwise not "re-visions" closely aligned with their source fairy tales; this is a gap Attebery leaves open. Attebery in 2018 described a method for "reinventing masculinity in fairy tales." He, like Bernheimer in 2007 and Kay F. Stone in 1985, has found through informal discussion with those around him that fairy tales have become marked "as a particularly feminine form" which most men feel they should not be reading (Attebery 314). Attebery identifies three types of man in the traditional fairy tales which can be used as models of masculinity in future fairy-tale re-visions: the Little Man, the Monster Bridegroom, and the Erotic Swan (316). Attebery identifies Barthelme's *Snow White* as one inappropriate for his study of masculinity because the retention of the female protagonist means that male characters are not centered. As my chapter above demonstrates, I do not fully

agree that the novel's focus on Snow White overshadows the male characters. Though I do not believe that the "Monster Bridegroom" or "Erotic Swan" character types have analogues in Barthelme's novel, I do believe that Bill can be read as the "Little Man." Attebery defines the character type as one in which the male character is little "in physical stature, as compared with other males in the stories, and in status, as working-class males interacting with their superiors." Bill, a dwarf, is short in stature, but he does not report to a direct superior. In Bill's refusal to continue leading the other six men, however, there is room for an interesting reading of his execution by the brothers he formerly led. Also interesting is that Bill's ending, an unhappy one, does not match what Attebery sees as the "lesson" of the Little Man. The lesson, Attebery says, is that "one can fail to measure up, literally and figuratively, and still find a way toward a satisfying male identity and a fulfilled life" (324). In Barthelme's 1967 novel, all of the male characters try and fail to achieve this goal. Is this failure to attain a happy ending a feature of the midcentury literary novel that uses fairy-tale allusions, in contrast to 21st century novels, yet to be written, which will follow these models of masculinity to a happy conclusion? I forecast that there is some likelihood that this will be so. If I were to continue this project, this is one of many paths of related research that I would explore.

Though my aim in this dissertation has been to fill in a gap in criticism, to explore four decades of time before an established era of literary creation, I know there is still more work to be done. Four single texts cannot stand for an era. However, the work in this dissertation stands as an early contribution to more work that can, and should, be done to understand the use of the fairy tale during the Cold War and its ability to explore norms of masculinity.

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