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“BECAUSE HE’S WORTH IT”: HEROIZATION OF THE MALE RESCUER IN RETELLINGS OF THE “SLEEPING BEAUTY” TALE TYPE

„Bo jest tego wart”: heroizacja męskiego wybawcy w renarracjach *Śpiącej królowny*

Słowa kluczowe: renarracja, baśń, romans rycerski, męski bohater baśni, dynamika postaci męskich i kobiecych w baśniach, heroizacja

Key words: retelling, fairy tale, chivalric romance, fairy-tale male hero, male-female dynamics in fairy tales, heroization

Streszczenie

W artykule omówiono wybrane renarracje *Śpiącej królowny* od XIV do XXI wieku: romans rycerski, baśnie literackie oraz filmy animowane i aktorskie. Analiza koncentruje się na przedstawieniach postaci wybawiciela płci męskiej. Jego heroizacja i idealizacja wydają się stosunkowo nowym dodatkiem do mitu śpiącej królowny i stanowią strategię, która pozwala złagodzić ambiwalentną naturę Księcia jako wybawcy-agresora oraz obecną implicytnie przemoc.

Abstract

The paper discusses some retellings of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type (ATU 410) ranging from the 14th to the 21st century: a chivalric romance, literary fairy tales, and films, both animated and live-action. The analysis focuses on portrayals of the male rescuer figure. His heroization and idealization seem to be a relatively new addition to the “Sleeping Beauty” myth, and constitute a strategy that allows the savior-aggressor ambivalence of the character and the violence implicit in the tale to be mitigated.

One of many difficulties related to the research of fairy tales is the sheer number of retellings, both written and oral, as well as audiovisual. While it is true that fairy tales have been reproduced through “communities and generations” “faithfully enough” to form relatively

stable discursive traditions, they have also evolved and mutated in order to remain relevant in a competition against other tales (Zipes 2006:5, 11–12). It is evident that individual retellings of a particular tale type (as defined by the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification) also compete against each other. Even though the basic structure – the “type” in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification – seems to change but a little, each retelling is effectively a rereading, expressing different ideas and activating different meanings, which result from the historic, ideological, and individual contexts of each work, as well as from the reaction to the hypotext(s). From among the countless retellings, only a few gain universal recognition and are thus elevated to the status of the “canonical” version. For the majority of fairy tale types, this distinction has been awarded to the Grimms’ texts and, even more so, to Disney films. Not surprisingly, it is these “canonical” versions that are usually referred to in critical and subversive interpretations and retellings, if only implicitly.

Such interpretations and retellings are particularly abundant in the case of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type (ATU 410: “The king’s daughter falls into a magic sleep. A prince breaks through the hedge surrounding the castle and disenchant the maiden”). Criticisms are frequently leveled at the allegedly sexist tale, presenting a passive female sleeper, a brave male savior, and a necrophiliac subtext (Barzilai 2014: 60–61). Although Bettelheim, who placed the tale in the context of sexual development, insisted on the fact that the male and female heroes “together symbolize the two ways in which one has to gain selfhood: through learning to understand and master the inner as well as the outer world” (Bettelheim 2010: “The Sleeping Beauty”, par. 5), and thus the tale’s consolatory message of “don’t worry and don’t try to hurry things” (Ibidem: par. 28) is relevant to readers of both genders, he himself closely associated the pricked finger with the first menstruation, and called the Sleeping Beauty the “incarnation of perfect femininity” (Ibidem: par. 38), awakened by sexual and maternal experiences.

Feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Madonna Kolbenschlag condemned the incapacitation of the woman presented in the tale, the repression of her sexuality, and her dependence on male figures. Modern popular and popularizing feminist interpretations of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale often reiterate these criticisms:

I believe that this fairy tale was and is interpreted not as the description of a woman’s inner journey from immaturity to maturity, but as the description of her position within the society and civilization. It imbues her soul with a poison-

ous message: until you meet a man who loves you, you are nobody (Suchowierska, Eichelberger 2012: 51, trans. author).

It is a paradox: a girl must be good, pretty, but at the same time not erotic, sexuality-free, innocence itself, the quintessential picture of a little sexless angel. And then suddenly, somehow, she must be ready both to have sex and to recognize the man who is right for her [...] (Miller, Cichocka 2009: 53–54, trans. author).

The character of the prince is discussed less often in these popular interpretations, and usually remains an accessory – a helper, to use Propp’s (2011: 75) terminology – whose usefulness degrades the female character by revealing her passivity and dependence. In some revisionist retellings, attention is drawn to his aggressive and possessive nature, “his pride and his desire to impose his will on the princess” (Fernandez Rodriguez 2002: 57). Indeed, the basic story seems to suggest inevitable violence and violation of the woman’s privacy, as evidenced by the phrase “breaks through the hedge” in the already quoted ATU summary. On the one hand, the man is the savior who liberates the woman from the imposed confinement, but on the other hand, he is the aggressor who invades the woman’s safe enclosure.

The aggression and the resulting ambivalence of the male character, nowadays mostly implicit, was fully explicit in the tale of Troylus and Zellandine in Book 3 of the 14th century chivalric romance *Perceforest*. While technically not a fairy tale, it is the oldest attested version of ATU 410, and is usually cited in discussions of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type (Bettelheim 2010: “The Sleeping Beauty”, note 4; Chardonnens 2011; Haase 2011; Barzilai 2014). In *Perceforest*, Troylus, a knight from Scotland, and Princess Zellandine have already met and fallen in love before Troylus learns that his beloved has fallen into a mysterious sleep from which she cannot be roused. Throughout the course of the story, both the reader and the characters gradually discover the sleep’s origin (the curse of an offended goddess), but even before the mystery is fully elucidated, Troylus breaks the enchantment, albeit indirectly. He has intercourse with the sleeping Zellandine, and it is the child born nine months later that sucks out a splinter stuck in her finger, thus waking her up.

The sexual act with an unconscious woman – a rape – is treated by the narrative with an uneasy ambivalence. Having woken up and learnt that she had had her maidenhood taken from her, Zellandine is “so alarmed that she could not speak” (McNeill Cox 1990: 135), and Troylus himself hesitates for a long time before intercourse. It is almost as if the narrator of *Perceforest* faced a dilemma: on the one

hand, the plot requires Zellandine to be raped if she is to wake up, but on the other hand, Troylus is supposed to be the perfect model of *amour courtois* – a valiant knight who is motivated to chivalrous deeds by the love and respect of his lady, and who “must be brave in his thoughts and timid in his actions” (Ibidem: 128). In other words, the hero of a *roman courtois* should channel his erotic desire into deeds of valor, and not satisfy it carnally – certainly not against the woman’s will. In order to ensure the required impregnation of Zellandine, Troylus has to act against that ideal. In the psychomachia over Zellandine’s bed, Love and Desire fight against Reason, Discretion, and Loyalty, who remind Troylus that he has already offended his beloved by so much as entering her chamber without her permission and knowledge. Finally, Venus herself intervenes by firing Troylus’s desire to the point where he can no longer control himself, so that he fathers the child who will break the enchantment. Thus, Troylus’s actions are “mitigate[d] and legitimate[d]” (Barzilai 2014: 63) both by their beneficial effect and by their supernatural cause. Venus’s coercion absolves Troylus of the responsibility for the rape, making him a tool in the hands of the goddess of love. When he leaves Zellandine after intercourse, he is again forced to do so because of the intervention of another god, Zephyr. In a sense, Troylus himself becomes a divine force; indeed, Zellandine’s father and aunt catch a glimpse of him as he rises from the princess’s bed, and think that their young kinswoman has had the honor of attracting the god Mars. This confusion transfers the entire episode beyond the boundaries of human morality. When Troylus and Zellandine meet again and tell their stories to each other, the rape is justified with necessity and so pardoned, albeit after a bout of tears from Zellandine, still ashamed about losing her virginity (McNeill Cox 1990: 138). Free of the responsibility for the unsavory act, Troylus can nevertheless claim the credit for disenchanting his beloved, and remain the perfect lover-knight.

Giambattista Basile had no qualms about the character’s morality when he wrote *Sole, Luna e Talia*¹, one of the fifty fairy tales in his *Pentamerone* (1634). Similarly to Troylus, the King in this tale does not immediately rouse Talia from the enchanted sleep; instead, the splinter is sucked from her finger by the children born from the King’s

¹ The exact genetic link between *Perceforest* and *Sole, Luna e Talia* is not fully determined. For the purposes of this article, it is of little importance whether Basile knew *Perceforest* or whether he was inspired by an independent, possibly oral, tale. It is probable, but not certain, that Basile’s tale reflects an older, more archaic tradition (Soriano 1968:125–129; Gheeraert 2005: 47).

intercourse with the sleeping woman – Sole and Luna. This time, however, the King is not justified by former acquaintance with Talia or by a divine intervention. Basile’s tales, although clothed in ornate baroque style, are more direct when it comes to motivations of characters. The King simply chances upon Talia’s castle during a hunt and, his desire kindled by her beauty, he “gathers the fruit of love” (“*colse i frutti d’amore*”, Basile 2017: 414). He then returns home, forgetting about the sleeping beauty. When he comes back after nine months in order to repeat the adventure, he is charmed by the awakened princess and their children, and so he brings them closer to his castle, disregarding the suspicions of his wife. The jealous Queen has the cook prepare Sole and Luna for her husband’s dinner; if it were not for the ruse of a merciful cook who replaces the children with goat kids, the King would have merrily devoured his own offspring. At the end of the story, when the Queen wants to burn Talia at the stake, the King burns his wife instead and marries his lover, which illustrates the explicit moral concluding the tale: the one who has good luck (“*fortuna*”) will be rewarded even while asleep (Basile 2017: 417).

The lack of concern for moral implications and psychological probability in Basile’s tale can be striking to a modern reader, who may see the King as a rapist willing to revisit his victim after nine months of oblivion, an almost-cannibal, and a cruel tyrant who inflicts death penalties without a second thought. The narrative neither condemns nor praises him directly; he is not immoral, but amoral. His every step is accepted as-is, not because of his gender or his political power in the story universe, but because he is firmly placed on the side of “good” within the tale’s structure. To quote Propp’s terminology, he belongs to the sphere of action of the helper: he provides *fortuna* to Talia by repairing the misdeed done to her (the sleeping curse) and protecting her from the villain (his wife, who is compared to Medea and Nero). Thus, his actions need no further justification.

However, they must have seemed unpalatable to Charles Perrault when he wrote *La Belle au bois dormant*, his first prose fairy tale, published in 1696 and republished with some changes in *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* in 1697. Possibly inspired by Basile’s *Sole, Luna e Talia* (Soriano 1968: 129), Perrault transformed the character of the male savior in accordance with the courtly conception of *fin’amor*, spiced with the 17-century French esthetics of *galanterie* (Sellier 2003:83). Motivated by “love and glory” (“*poussé par l’amour et la gloire*”, Perrault 2005: 191), the Prince is valiant like all young princes in love (“*un prince jeune et amoureux est toujours vaillant*”, Ibidem).

Nevertheless, it is not glory or valor that allow him to save the Princess. The thorn hedge parts to let him pass not because of his merit, but because of the destiny fixed by the good fairy who has chosen him to serve as a reward for the Princess after the long sleep.

He does not rape the Sleeping Beauty nor even kiss her; shivering in adoration, he kneels down by her bed, and she wakes up simply because the hundred years of enchantment have ended. Stuttering in confusion and embarrassment, he resembles the lovesick princes from Perrault's *Griselidis* and *Peau d'Âne*, disarmed by their awe for the beautiful heroine. He is even more compliant to the model of *amour courtois* than Troylus, as his love never oversteps the limits of decency. "Rich, handsome, gallant, and tender (*"Riche, bien fait, galant et doux"*, Ibidem: 197), he is designed to please women, who were an important part of the fairy-tale readership in 17th century France: as stated by Pospiszyl (1986: 66), for a woman, a man's lack of self-confidence, shyness, and humility guarantees his gentleness and tenderness, and thus her greatest satisfaction. The Prince's status as the Princess's helper and reward is made even clearer in the more verbose 1696 version of the fairy tale, where he is amazed by the fact that he was born only to serve her (*"les destins favorables m'ont fait naître pour vous servir"*, Perrault 2005: 328). This is his sole "glory", which can only be achieved through love (*"tous les rois de la terre, avec toute leur puissance, n'auraient pu faire ce que j'ai fait avec mon amour"*, Ibidem). The Princess accepts his worship with joy because she immediately recognizes him from the pleasant dreams she was sent by the fairy. The latter has thus taken over the role of Venus from *Perceforest*, and it is thanks to her manipulations that love at first glance is possible for the young couple. In the fairy tale's structure, she is the superior helper, who uses the Prince to safeguard the happy ending (Robert 1981:39).

However, it would not be correct to treat the Prince as an idealized lover. Not only is his embarrassment in front of the Princess presented with Perrault's characteristic light-hearted mockery (Sellier 2003: 83), but he is also not completely free from ambivalent traits. In the second part of the tale, he brings his wife to his castle, disregarding the fact that his mother is a descendant of child-eating ogres; what is more, he leaves his wife and their two children alone at the mercy of the old Queen, who immediately orders the entire family to be served for dinner with Sauce Robert. Cheated out of her cannibalistic feast, she plans to throw the Princess and her children into a vat full of snakes. In the end, she is forced to jump in the vat herself when her son arrives unexpectedly, asking in surprise (*"tout étonné"*, Perrault 2005: 197) what is going

on. The narrator notes quite phlegmatically – or ironically – that the Prince was rather upset with the death of his mother, but he quickly found consolation with his beautiful wife and children.

Perrault’s Prince does not have the predatory nature of Basile’s King, as all of the more carnivorous aspects of the character have been transferred to the ogress Queen. However, the more affable Prince is not idealized. He may well love his family, but he is oblivious, careless, and absent, both in body and in mind. While within the fairy tale’s basic structure he remains the Princess’s helper and is thus just as firmly placed on the side of “good” as Basile’s King, his characterization has ironic overtones, even more visible in the social and cultural context of Perrault’s work. It is useful to cite Heidmann’s interpretation (2011), according to whom *La Belle au bois dormant* was a direct warning to the then twenty-year-old niece of Louis XIV, Élisabeth-Charlotte d’Orléans, soon to be married and transferred to a new, strange, and possibly hostile environment. The lonely Princess would then be left to her own resources and find only illusory support in the spouse chosen by her family. Analogously, the Prince appointed by the fairy would not have saved the heroine from the enchantment if it were not for destiny, and he would not have saved her from the evil Queen if it were not for sheer coincidence.

Regardless of whether we accept Heidmann’s theory as true, it is in itself an example of the modern tendency in feminism-inspired scholarship and literature to empower the female characters and devalue the male ones. As demonstrated by Fernandez Rodriguez (2002), the focus on the woman’s experience and self-reliance in modern feminist revisions of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type leads to the demythologization of the male rescuer, or even his complete substitution by a female figure. Such retellings stress the male character’s vices such as arrogance and possessiveness or his ineptness: he is “bereft of his heroic condition, unable to be an authentic rescuer” (Fernandez Rodriguez 2002: 57).

The “heroic condition” of the male savior bears closer scrutiny, as the term “hero” itself evokes two different meanings. On the one hand, it denotes a structural role in the story and is used broadly to mean the main character of a work. In Propp’s terminology (2011: 49), the hero is the character on whom the narrative is focused, who is either directly touched by misfortune or lack (a victimized hero), or decides to repair somebody else’s misfortune or lack (a seeker hero). On the other hand, a hero is also a person celebrated for certain qualities deemed as heroic: magnanimity, courage, strength (both of body and of charac-

ter), determination, and valor. For the sake of clarity, the terms “structural hero” and “moral hero” will be used to refer to these two meanings of the word.

These two meanings are often conflated in popular discourse about fairy tales – erroneously so, since few fairy-tale structural heroes exhibit morally heroic qualities, as noted by Tatar (1987: 85–86). It should also be mentioned that there are certain characteristics which, while not heroic in the traditional sense, serve to idealize male saviors in the popular discourse on fairy tales. This is illustrated by such phrases as “Prince Charming”, “a knight in shining armor”, or (in Polish) “a prince on a white horse”, used to denote the perfect man dreamt of by women, capable of faithful love, utmost devotion, and undying protectiveness. Such an idealized figure is referred to in Heather Dale’s 2008 song *Fairytale*, where heroism is directly associated with a man’s attitude towards women: “It’s supposed to be important / That you come and set me free / You’re supposed to be a *hero* / Not out with easier girls than me” (emphasis mine). The disappointment with reality relegates “Prince Charming” to the fairy-tale realm, referred to in the song’s title, although the idealized portrayal of the male hero devoted to a loved one seems to grow out of the tradition of chivalric romances rather than fairy tales.

Indeed, Troylus is a chivalric romance character, a lover-knight, and he is both a structural and moral hero, even though he must be robbed of his agency and justified with convoluted plot twists in order to maintain the latter status. On the other hand, the structural (victimized) hero of Basile’s *Sole, Luna e Talia* and Perrault’s *La Belle au bois dormant* is the sleeping Princess (which is also reflected in the two fairy tales’ titles). It could be argued that Perrault’s Prince is temporarily granted the status of the structural seeker hero when he decides to investigate the mysterious overgrown castle, but his main sphere of action is that of a helper. While he is much more courteous than Basile’s King, and thus approaches the ideal of the perfect lover, the lack of knightly qualities prevents him from being the Princess’s efficient protector. Basile’s King, on the other hand, does have such heroic qualities as strength and determination, but he lacks tenderness and moral compass. Neither of these characters is awarded the moral (or even structural) “heroic condition” which they could be robbed of, and which could be transferred to female saviors in feminist retellings. Nevertheless, such retellings often address the fairy tale’s contemporary myth rather than particular texts. For example, as has been demonstrated by Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (2010), Angela

Carter’s translation of Perrault’s tales is critical not of the particular text by the 17th-century author, but of the 20th-century perception of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale type.

The myth of the heroic Prince who rescues the Sleeping Beauty seems to stem in a large part from the Disney movie *The Sleeping Beauty* directed by Clyde Geronimi (1959) and, to some extent, the Grimms’ *Dörnroschen* (final version in 1857). In the Grimms’ version, it is still the Prince’s timely arrival that seems to guarantee his success rather than his worthy deeds, just as in Perrault’s tale. However, it should be noted that the Grimms’ Prince has not been explicitly chosen by a fairy or other “*destins favorables*” to become the Princess’s husband. He acts autonomously and affirms his fearlessness as soon as he hears about the enchanted Princess (“*ich fürchte mich nicht, ich will hinaus und das schöne Dornröschen sehen*”, Grimm 1857: 253). The thorn hedge before him turns into flowers, admitting his exceptional status, and even though the one hundred years of the enchantment are about to end, Briar Rose does not wake up until the Prince’s active intervention: the kiss which has since become iconic (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère 2010: 131) as a tender sublimation of sexual intercourse and restoration of breath and voice (Haase 2011: 288–289). Thus, the Grimms’ Prince is the direct savior of the Sleeping Beauty, an adventurous visitor from the outside world who wakes the Princess from the sleep that has already become legendary. In doing so, he concludes his own quest for love. What is more, since the fairy tale ends with marriage, the narrative never refocuses on the female character, and the Prince remains the center of attention; it is his wedding with Briar Rose that is celebrated, not the other way round: “*Hochzeit des Königssohns mit dem Dornröschen*” (Grimm 1857: 254). As the perspective shifts permanently to him, he is less of a helper and reward for the Princess, and more of a structural seeker hero, as well as a moral hero who exhibits such qualities as courage (see above) and sensitivity to beauty (“*Da lag es und war so schön, daß er die Augen nicht abwenden konnte*”, Ibidem). Due to the fact that there is no second act to the Grimms’ tale and the aggression of the female villain is cut, he has no opportunity to fail as a protective husband, or do anything else than bring salvation to Briar Rose.

The film retellings discussed hereafter differ from the literary texts above in that they point explicitly to their hypotexts and overtly present themselves as adaptations. This is all the more understandable in view of the development of the notion of authorship and author’s rights since the 19th century, as well as the relative fossilization of the

fairy-tale canon (Hafstein 2014). As mentioned above, this canon was subsequently transformed by the adaptations produced by the Walt Disney Company. Despite presenting themselves as adaptations, which could suggest a subservient status, they have effectively replaced the originals in the global collective imagination.

Even though Disney's *The Sleeping Beauty* cites *La Belle au bois dormant* by Charles Perrault as its source text, it appears to be highly syncretic. The Princess's name – Aurora – may have originated with the 1890 ballet *Spyashchaya krasavitsa* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, which also provided inspiration for the film score, while Aurora's adopted name – Briar Rose, as well as the life-restoring kiss and the story's conclusion with marriage, resemble the Grimms' retelling. Systematic struggle between good and evil fairies throughout the entire story brings *The Sleeping Beauty* closer to other French fairy tales written by Perrault's contemporaries, for example Murat's *Le Parfait Amour* (good fairy Favorable, evil fairy Danamo), or Aulnoy's *La Biche au bois* (good fairy Tulipe, evil fairy Écrevisse; the resemblance is all the more striking since this fairy tale opens with a gift-giving scene, similarly to many "Sleeping Beauty" tales). Moreover, Aulnoy's *L'Oranger et l'Abeille*, *La Princesse Carpillon*, and *Le Pigeon et la Colombe* present a Prince who falls in love with a girl without knowing about her royal status; similarly, Phillip falls in love with Aurora when she lives in hiding in a peasant cottage.

Phillip and Aurora's amplified relationship becomes the main axis for the entire story universe, which also resembles the French fairy tales written by Perrault's contemporaries – as noted by Robert (1981: 47), their narrative is predominantly organized around the two lovers who are to be united in the story's denouement, despite the efforts of aggressors, and whose marriage sanctions the final restoration of order. The only one of the four tales discussed above that fits this structure to some extent is Basile's *Sole, Luna e Talia*. Even in the Grimms' *Dörnroschen*, while the final wedding does restore the fairy-tale order and ensures eternal happiness to all characters, the story as a whole is not focused on the relationship of the couple, and the Prince is not actively hindered by the antagonist. It is Disney's adaptation which brings "Sleeping Beauty" in line with the usual pattern of 17th-century French literary fairy tales.

The relationship between Phillip and Aurora is given much more attention than in its hypotexts. First of all, it is socially sanctioned within the story universe, as the two characters are engaged to each other in their childhood. There is a hint of rebellion against this dy-

nastic arrangement when Phillip meets Aurora in peasant disguise and decides to marry her against his father’s will. However, the established order is never in any danger, because the girl Phillip wants to marry out of love is really the Princess he has to marry out of social obligation. Their marriage is the fulfillment of their fathers’ wish to unite their kingdoms. By contrast, in the literary texts discussed above, the Prince’s bond with the Princess is largely of a private and emotional nature, and in the retellings by Basile and Perrault, it is even disapproved of by people close to him.

While in *La Belle au bois dormant* and *Dörnroschen* the Prince’s fascination with the Sleeping Beauty is sparked by a tale told by an old peasant, and in *Sole, Luna e Talia* it is Talia’s inanimate body that arouses the King’s desire, Phillip and Aurora meet and fall in love before she falls asleep, similar to Troylus and Zellandine. What is more, their love is given a foundation in the form of dreams they had of each other before first meeting as adults. This element is most probably inspired by the dreams that the good fairy in Perrault’s retelling provided to the Princess in order to comfort her in her long sleep and give her an advantage over the astounded Prince. Here, both characters are on an equal footing when it comes to the prescience of their lover. As paradoxical as it may sound, the dreams, whose origin is never clarified, serve to rationalize the plot, explaining and legitimating the abrupt affection between Aurora and Phillip. They suggest a mystical connection between them apart from the social and political one. The characters are destined to love each other, but their destiny is not closely manipulated by a supernatural protector such as Venus or a good fairy, although it is a good fairy’s words which reinforce Phillip’s mystical connection to Aurora. Indeed, the curse in Disney’s film has no fixed term, and the sole requirement for its breaking is stated explicitly by Fairy Merryweather in the prophecy: “from this slumber you shall wake when true love’s kiss the spell shall break”. While love – carnal or spiritual – is always associated with the Princess’s awakening in the four literary retellings discussed above, the Prince’s role is never prophesied so clearly at the beginning of the tale as in Disney’s *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Phillip’s function is not limited to that of the Princess’s helper, either. He is undoubtedly as much of a structural hero as Aurora, to the point where he also falls victim to the aggression of the evil fairy Maleficent. The harm she inflicts is symmetrical: a long sleep for the Princess, and a long imprisonment for the Prince. According to her, he is to wake Aurora after one hundred years. The visual representation

of the decrepit Prince stumbling to the rescue is accompanied by Maleficent's mocking commentary (Haase 2011: 292–293): “Off he rides on his noble steed, a valiant figure, straight and tall, to wake his love with love's first kiss, and prove that true love conquers all.” This twisted plan underscores the dual strength – that of the body and of character – required of a moral hero. Even after one hundred years, Phillip will remain faithful and loving, but his heroic status will be perverted by bodily weakness, changing the ideal into a parody.

Thanks to the help of good fairies, Phillip is saved as a moral hero and is able to rescue Aurora while still “a valiant figure, straight and tall”. His bodily strength and military valor prove invaluable when he forces his way through the thorn hedge and fights the witch-turned-dragon. Holding a sword in his hand, motivated by the love of his lady, and proving his merit in armed combat, he resembles epical dragon-slayers and knights from chivalric romances. He combines heroic valor and tender eroticism, both of which are necessary to rouse the Princess from the enchanted sleep, with only limited interference from supernatural helpers.

Before turning to the third retelling belonging to the tradition of the heroic Prince, it is worthwhile to briefly mention the 2014 Disney movie *Maleficent* (directed by Robert Stromberg), conceived as a direct polemic with the 1959 film in the vein of feminist revisions mentioned above, demythologizing the male savior and substituting it with a female one. The character of the Prince is introduced in *Maleficent* for the sole purpose of deconstructing and criticizing the trope of love at first sight, contrasted with the notion of “true love”. In the retellings discussed above, intercourse, a kiss, or (in Perrault's case) a delighted gaze, is always an inevitable consequence of love and desire, an expression inseparable from the feelings that engendered it; in *Maleficent*, by contrast, a kiss without the “true love” qualifier is an insignificant gesture. That is why the 2014 Phillip cannot disenchant Aurora, as he has only seen her once and does not know her at all, as he himself bashfully explains. When finally forced by the bumbling fairies to kiss the Princess, he fails to break the curse, confirming the inevitable shallowness of his feelings for Aurora, no longer strengthened by a mystical dream connection. His recent attraction to her is contrasted with the long-term mother-daughter relationship – the real “true love” – between the Princess and Maleficent. No longer a hero in the structural nor moral sense, the Prince exists only to criticize the idea of destined love and the idealization of the male savior developed in the 1959 film. Thus, Disney polemicizes with Disney, denouncing the ideas that the

studio itself has propagated. What is more, in an ironic turn of events, the polemic which addresses a single hypotext in such a specific way confirms and consolidates the canonic nature of Disney’s 1959 film, pushing other “Sleeping Beauty” retellings into ever deeper shadow.

Retellings, however, abound, shaped and reshaped for ethical, esthetic, and ideological reasons. One of them is the 2009 German TV film *Dornröschen* (directed by Oliver Dieckmann), which continues the tradition of the heroic Prince. It could even be said that the heroization and idealization of the male savior reach their peak here. Roughly half of the one-hour film focuses on a stable-boy named Fynn, which effectively makes him a structural hero of the story. Despite his humble condition, Fynn dreams of becoming a knight so that he can save the enchanted Princess whom he has seen in a portrait and who – according to the story – can only be rescued by a pure-hearted Prince. Through his tenaciousness and fidelity, Fynn fulfills the first prerequisite, if not the second one, and he is contrasted with the cruel and arrogant Prince Erik who dies in the thorn hedge. By following the teachings of his mentor uncle, Fynn achieves the status of the moral hero who never attacks from behind, helps his adversaries, conquers his own fear, and – most importantly – “knows to wait for the right moment in a fight”. This vague phrase is recalled in a voice-over as Fynn confronts the thorn hedge and, with a determined face, slashes at the brambles, which part before him immediately. After waking the Princess with the obligatory kiss, Fynn reaches the end of his quest, not only for love, but also for his identity: he learns that he comes from a royal family, and both his father and grandfather died trying to break the enchantment. It is an interesting reversal of the situation in Disney’s *The Sleeping Beauty*, where it was the Princess who was raised as a peasant for her safety. However, Fynn regaining his royal status is not simply a happy turn of events which gives him an equal social standing to his beloved, thus averting the threat of misalliance; it is first and foremost a reward, as nobility of blood serves to confirm and acknowledge his nobility of heart. In this respect, Fynn is doubly a moral hero: on the one hand, the destined savior, prophesied decades earlier, and on the other hand, a self-made man who had to earn his final reward. Familiar with the hardships of the commoners, he proves his merit once more as he supports the Princess in her desire to help the subjects impoverished after her father banned spinning wheels in order to protect her. Thanks to his heroic courage and chivalry, but also kindness and social sensitivity, Fynn fully deserves his princely title, the Princess’s love, and her hand.

The Grimms' *Dornröschen*, Disney's *The Sleeping Beauty*, and Dieckmann's *Dornröschen* are three retellings of the "Sleeping Beauty" tale that contribute to the myth of the idealized and heroic princely savior – a myth that seems relatively recent, as it is absent from older texts, although it borrows many elements from chivalric romances. However, it is worth noting that although Troylus – the only real romance Prince among those analyzed – is described as a valiant knight, he does not rescue Zellandine with his military prowess, but by succumbing to carnal desire. By contrast, Disney's Phillip and Dieckmann's Fynn do rely on their knightly skills to reach the Princess. This may be explained by the film-makers wish to include action sequences, but it may also reflect the modern meritocratic worldview of "no pain, no gain", requiring the structural hero to also be a moral hero.

Before reaching a conclusion, it is useful to return to the claim made at the beginning of this article: the "Sleeping Beauty" tale type implies the inevitable violation of the woman's privacy, which makes the man both a savior and an aggressor, an ambivalence that is played on in some feminist revisions (Fernandez Rodriguez 2002: 53). Despite the feminist critique, the tale seems to have succeeded in remaining relevant and attractive to contemporary readers and viewers, including female ones. Barzilai (2014: 66) proposes three possible reasons for the particular appeal of the "Sleeping Beauty" tale for girls and women: first, the long and undisturbed rest and freedom from all responsibility; second, the possibility to "sleep through" the difficult experiences of sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and childbirth; third, the fulfillment of the desire to be the object of the Other's desire. Furthermore, according to Bettelheim (2010: "The Sleeping Beauty", par. 28), the story can comfort hesitant young people, assuring them that at the right time, they will achieve (sexual or psychological) satisfaction. Both the escapist gratification that can be derived from the tale by the audience members who identify with the Princess, and the joy of conquest possibly experienced by those who identify with the Prince are guilty pleasures which, even in the wish-fulfillment realm of fairy tales, have to conform to some degree to contemporary moral norms and social conventions². This is especially true in view of the fairy tales' 18th and 19th century migration to literature for children, and the associated belief that they should propagate sound moral principles and provide good role models (although the tendency to justify the

² This claim may need to be nuanced in the case of the retellings that exist solely and overtly for the purpose of fulfilling basic desires, e.g. pornographic works.

aggression implicit in the “Sleeping Beauty” tale existed before that, as demonstrated by *Perceforest* and *La Belle au bois dormant*).

Making the Prince a hero, both in the structural and moral sense, seems to be one of the strategies to mitigate and legitimate this implicit violence. As the narrative focuses on him more, he is given agency and earns his final reward with limited or no help from outside. In the Grimms’ fairy tale, Disney’s animation, and Dieckmann’s TV film, the Prince is a virtuous and fearless rescuer motivated by noble and respectful love, the expression of which has been sublimated into a tender kiss. His righteous personality ennobles all of his actions, and his valorous efforts justify the glory he finally achieves. He has the right to kiss the Princess because he deserves her. Conversely, the Princess can sleep peacefully with a clear conscience, knowing that the Prince who wakes her – the Other who makes her the object of his desire – is virtuous, noble, socially acceptable, and thus worthy of her love. Thus, the heroization of the Prince not only excuses his invasion of the Sleeping Beauty’s castle, but also our culture’s undying fascination with this tale.

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