

STARTING WITH *SNOW WHITE*: DISNEY'S FOLKLORIC
IMPACT AND THE TRANSFORMATION
OF THE AMERICAN
FAIRY TALE

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ABSTRACT

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, critical scholarship concerning the fairy tale genre has done much to address the social, historical, cultural, and national motivations behind transformations of the fairy tale from a European starting point. However, the fairy tale's development in the United States, including *both* its media-based adaptations and literary extensions, has been given limited attention. While the significance of Walt Disney's animated films to the American fairy tale tradition has been addressed (by literary and film scholars alike), an interdisciplinary study drawing together Disney's European and early twentieth century precursors (from literature, stage, and film); his own influential, modern debut; respondent literary and animated work of his immediate successors; and postmodern and twenty-first century adaptations has not been done. By examining the trajectory of a single tale, *Snow White* (or for Disney, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*), this dissertation aims to acknowledge the scholarly attention given to Disney's animated films, while further examining attributes which I suggest have enabled Disney to have a "folkloric impact" on the fairy tale genre in the United States. Disney's work stands upon the bedrock of not only European but American *Snow White* variations and makes these "new" through an innovative deployment and unification of word or language, sound, and image, unimagined prior to the debut of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). The effects of Disney's influence, as a master storyteller, on both the fairy tale genre and commercial market were so profound that this particular version of the tale refuses to be forgotten, its shadow haunting successors who aimed to counter or

redefine its understanding of fairy tale in light of shifting American values and culture. Therefore, even as the fairy tale is frequently understood to have moved beyond its folkloric “origins” (I use this term loosely, as the origins of fairy tale are surrounded by controversy), using the critical framework of folklorists Steven Swann Jones and Linda Dégh, as well as filmic folklorists, Sharon R. Sherman and Juwen Zhang, I explore how Disney’s patchwork of tradition, new technology, and media generated an easily recognizable and communicable tale, one that would be recalled, repeated, and reformed through adaptation by generations of audiences. These subsequent storytellers, in turn, extend American fairy tale tradition and lore still further.

For my boys, Joe, Drew, & Finn

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN AMERICAN *SNOW WHITE* TRADITION THROUGH HISTORY AND MEDIA

Recovering the History Behind America's "First" *Snow White*

Snow White, in its broader tradition, is frequently recalled with a handful of "classic" fairy tales, but with Walt Disney's production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), it was transformed into an American "classic." Was Disney's the first American *Snow White*? Some discourse spanning scholarly and public spheres would seem to suggest that yes, Disney's version was first, or the first that mattered anyway. One need look no further than a host of scholarly articles and texts—exploring American popular culture, film, literature, and folklore (amongst others)—to find Disney's *Snow White* foregrounded as a foundational "text" to either substantiate the critical claims that follow or serve as a point of critical departure. Similarly, the popular public imagination can scarcely recall *Snow White* without Disney's amiable band of seven dwarfs, each with his own individuated personality and name to match, as well as a cheerful "Heigh-ho!" guiding his step. I confess, this use of Disney's "classic" as a foundational text centrally informed this dissertation project, as well. However, instead of relying on Disney, my project began by questioning: how did Disney's *Snow White* gain its preeminent status and authority in the American fairy tale tradition? Was Disney's, in fact, the *first* American deployment of the *Snow White* tale?

I soon found that while Disney's was not *the* first *Snow White*, it was *a* first, in the

ways in which its pioneering technological innovation expanded its influence over audiences, making such an impression as to profoundly impact the folkloric transmission of the tale. It is for this reason, and not merely because it was Disney's first full-length animated feature, that *Snow White* was critical to the initiation of Disney's fairy tale legacy in the United States. By questioning the beginnings of this legacy via *Snow White* then, one also gains insight into this historical lineage of the American fairy tale tradition. If Disney had *not* created the first American version, how had earlier American precursors reconceived or adapted versions from their European precursors? Why were these initial versions so frequently overlooked in favor of Disney's? And, relatedly, what informs or contributes understandings of a "classic" version of a fairy tale? Is it purely innovation and timely modeling through adaptation?

Securing a Critical Space to Examine Disney's Folklore

In both the European and American traditions of the *Snow White* tale, I found that there exists a complex range of attributes that have informed scholarly and popular understandings of a *Snow White* "classic." I also found that these elements change over time, based on cultural evolution and possibilities for recreation through alternate forms of media—primarily literature and film. Because this history of transformation from the European into (and primarily emphasizing) an American *Snow White* tradition involved multiple strands of media at various points historically, my study, beginning with a base in folklore, subsequently called for an address of multiple disciplines—folklore, literature, theatre, film, and popular culture. While the overt purpose and guiding

questions for this dissertation remain genealogical, layered within is an analysis of discourse between multiple media concerning the *Snow White* tale, a conversation which I feel generates a productive blurring of disciplinary boundaries. Throughout, folkloric production is evaluated in its adaptive usages first across literature; then through stage, silent film, and animated film; and still later in television, cartoon, comics, and the graphic novel. Utilizing these various media representations, I have endeavored to generate a more balanced critical perspective which weighs the influence of Disney's "classic" in light of these *multiple* disciplines. It is this integration of (primarily) literature, stage, and film (including animation) which allows for my project's reinterpretation of Disney's storytelling prowess, positioning the animator's *Snow White* as a new kind of folkloric model in the United States.

This strategy of combining approaches, as opposed to emphasizing one discipline over another enables me to begin to close some of the historical gaps left open by discipline-specific analyses of *Snow White* in the United States. Where Jack Zipes recognized the earliest trends of the literary fairy tale in the United States as having mirrored the earlier European or British translations without alteration,¹ his work does not touch on the influence of the translational movement in the United States into those alternate contexts of stage and silent screen. Eric Smoodin's study of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (2012), while thorough in its filmic analysis of Disney's work, only minimally acknowledges the success of Marguerite Merington's stage version of *Snow White* (1910), performed by children through the Hebrew Educational Theater (19).

¹ See Zipes, *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*

Winthrop Ames' (1912) version is similarly glossed over, despite Smoodin's recognition of Ames as "one of the most important Broadway talents of the era" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 19). Where Smoodin spends a bit more time with the *Snow White* (silent) film, his account again centers primarily on reception (more broadly based, and regarding Disney's individual experience) and on the actress, Marguerite Clark (linking Ames' earlier play to the film) (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 21-22). While these details offer hints of a greater American lineage, Smoodin is more interested in briefly contextualizing the popularity of the *Snow White* tale and tradition prior to Disney, as his main subject is Disney's film itself. Karen Merritt's studies of the plays and film broadly inspect the American lineage they create, though the arguments she provides are in greater part geared toward defending Disney and his animative innovations than inspecting the plays and film to acknowledge their offerings to the American (and larger) *Snow White* tradition. Focused initially on the theatrical tradition and later, on the cinematic tradition (which she had earlier contested), Merritt misses some of the thematic influences which closer readings of the plays and silent film, "as texts" might offer.² This type of textual engagement not only generates an historical lineage, but also provides a clearer assessment of folkloric transmission and adaptive innovation. However, theatrical and film studies generally prioritize the work of the film, or in this case the animator, and literary studies miss the plays and film altogether. As a result,

² In "The Little Girl/Little Mother Transformation: The American Evolution of 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,'" Merritt argues, "It was not the 1916 film, however, that was the source for his ideas. [...] Disney made no direct use of the film when his SNOW WHITE was in production" (111). Yet, ten years later, when the film surfaced, she directed attention to this "acknowledged inspiration for [Disney's] first animated feature" ("Marguerite Clark" 5).

both have given only very limited attention to the early *American* folkloric steps generative of patterns, themes, and motifs, which blended into the more traditional European folklore leading toward Disney's adaptation.

Critical discourse inspecting fairy tale/folklore leaves a similar gap, where the American history of the *Snow White* tale is concerned. There are a few reasons for this. First, there are the literary/folkloric debates adamantly opposed to Disney's animation. In *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*, Zipes continues to argue, "Walt Disney sought to monopolize fairy-tale films so he would be recognized as a kind of master storyteller," and in so doing "has banalized the fairy tale with empty conventions" (12, 15).³ Connected closely with these disputes are those from librarians and educators. Immediately following Disney's production, in 1938 (librarian) Anne Carroll Moore "actively sought a correct version of the fairy tale for children" (by which she meant one reflecting the Grimms' tale), as book-based versions had seemingly become "Disney books" (Hoyle qtd. in *Sticks and Stones* 92). Nearly twenty years later, in "Walt Disney Accused" (1965), Frances Clarke Sayers similarly contested Disney's "[mis]treatment of folklore" (*The Horn Book Magazine*). Because of critics' disdain for Disney's adaptation based on his ill-use of folklore as well as their (frequent) veneration of the Grimms' collection, further exploration into an American *Snow White* tradition leading toward Disney's supposed misappropriation has either been countered or denied.

³ Zipes criticism bears a history of rejecting Disney's fairy tale films on these grounds. See an earlier version of this argument in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*.

Similarly, theories of folklore in their distinction of “oral” origins contest Disney’s usage of the form. For American folklorists, such as Alan Dundes, even the Grimms’ collections were inauthentic ““fakelore””⁴ (Stone 53). Dundes understood folklore as a form “passed on by means of person to person contact” and representing that “oral style” of transmission (58). Therefore, written or other forms, utilizing alternate modes of communication, sacrificed both the performance of the story, as well as the possibilities for varied performances, naturally providing opportunities for moments of improvisation or alteration (59). Although Mikel J. Koven speaks more specifically on filmic representations of folklore in “Folklore Studies and Popular Film and Television: A Necessary Critical Survey,” the underlying critique remains the same. Koven gestures toward the “perception” of many folklorists or advocates of folklore that “the movies [(Disney’s versions)] fix traditional narratives into single ‘definitive’ texts, which replace the more fluid oral variants” (177). Koven goes on to discuss the “devolutionary influence of the mass media,” in which Elizabeth Tucker also finds that ““mass-mediated versions of narratives [are viewed] as replacing the oral variants previously in circulation”” (177). Despite the survey’s suggestion that “fixed” filmic texts can be “varied via editing and/or subsequently altered and reproduced versions,” Koven ultimately finds that “folklore studies *is not* film studies, and while relevant for folklorists to discuss, [...] popular cinema remains tangential and adjunct to the main tenants of folkloristics” (185, 190). In other words, its departure from the “oral” form divides a film’s value (in some measure) from the field of folklore altogether. These literary and

⁴ Early American folklorist Richard M. Dorson used this term to describe “material falsely claiming origins in genuine folk tradition” (Stone 53).

folkloric discussions largely function to shut down the possibilities for understanding a preceding American folkloric *Snow White* tradition, particularly one of stage and screen.

However, Kay Stone, while beginning from these conservative understandings, provides an opening for the folkloric form's function within film. Stone begins with the premise that "The oral medium [...] provides a potentially direct bridge between tellers and listeners that encourages the ongoing re-creation of the story in an infinite variety of emergent texts, each with unique texture and content" (Stone 56). Where the medium of print narrows this "bridge," she suggests, Disney's animated film "isolates creators and receivers and offers them even less possibility of interaction since it furnishes sights, sounds, and motivations" thereby providing "the narrowest bridge of all" for interaction and audience response (Stone 58, 60). Nevertheless, Stone concludes that the filmic form does not preclude audience response and/or renewal (Stone 63). I not only agree with Stone but suggest in the chapters that follow that folkloric transmission of the *Snow White* tradition, and more particularly, the American *Snow White* tradition, pre-Disney, via Disney (and even beyond), seems to indicate a necessity to employ innovations in media or a range of multiple media in order to productively forward the tale and reinvigorate its progress over time.

Critical methodologies within the field of folklore have been reluctant to advance toward examinations of "filmic folklore" (discussed in Chapter 4). However, more recent discussions which reevaluate folklore within film, paired with the more traditional structural patterning of folklorists, such as Steven Swann Jones, provide clarity to my

positioning of Disney's film as a folkloric model and justify analyses of versions from his American folkloric precursors produced in alternate media contexts (the theater).

Contemporary literary/folkloric critical discussions have similarly come to acknowledge the value in cross-media representations of fairy tale/folklore, engendering new conversations concerning fairy tale adaptations. In *Fairy Tales Transformed?: Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder*, Cristina Bacchilega explores adaptations for young adults and adults from television, comics, visual art, drama, literature, and film, prioritizing the last two, finding these to be “the media platforms that have the broadest distribution and visibility within the fairy-tale web as well as the most power within the articulation of what the critical field of fairy-tale studies is and does” (16). Through explorations of these contemporary adaptations Bacchilega “aim[s] [...] to reflect on the linked and yet divergent social projects that fairy-tale adaptations imagine” (16). Maria Tatar similarly recognizes that “These days, fairy tales are passed on to us through what the media gurus call multiple ‘delivery systems’”—variants in literature, film, television, and enhanced through online participation (“Preface” xvi). Through these multiple means of engagement, earlier and contemporary fairy tale and folklore can be engaged and further transformed. While studies of this interplay between media seem to represent a more contemporary scholarly lens for the fairy tale, this dissertation, in its historical inspection of the same—throughout the twentieth century—contributes to these conversations. By generating a lineage of the American *Snow White* tradition which presents the dynamic movement between literary, staged, and filmic (silent and animated) arenas before moving back to

the literary and filmic spheres (where the trend continues on), I also explore this cross-media folkloric usage as a broader American trend.

Where I have endeavored to represent this phenomenon from a relatively neutral disciplinary stance (to enable a more balanced perspective), I have utilized a folkloric and literary base to trace lines of traditional and national influence and have layered on studies of theatre (from the turn of the century), film, and popular culture. Although film weighs heavily into this exploration, and Disney's film particularly, it would be inaccurate to position this historical narrative as framed specifically for film or Disney Studies. Similarly, despite my analyses of plays or films as "texts," it would be equally inaccurate to position the project as purely contributing to the literary and/or folkloric spheres. Both critical fields or lenses are too narrow to appropriately account for the innovations in media and technology also pertinent to the *Snow White* tale's success and forward movement in the United States. Because of the twists and turns this "classic" tale has taken on its journey through American culture—from stage to screen and back into literature, before returning to the screen, once more—one must carefully inspect the folkloric/fairy tale aspects of the story itself (as text) *and* address the alternate forms of media employed to further the American tradition of *Snow White*. Together, these interweaving parts generate an interesting narrative concerning the tale's American adaptations, linkages between owners, and understandings of how one movement of influence promotes the next.

To inspect the folkloric attributes of the *Snow White* tale and tradition, I utilize the episodic structure and patterning of Steven Swann Jones, delineated in *The New*

Comparative Method: Structural and Symbolic Analysis of the Allomotifs of “Snow White.” This has been recognized as the most comprehensive folkloric study of the tale, and although I note (in Chapter 2) that it has some limitations toward the effect of identifying the *Snow White* “classics,” I ultimately find that it provides a useful baseline. Essentially, this model offers a nine-point pattern which responds to the question: what should a *Snow White* variant look like? Jones also layers on a thematic analysis which proves productive for understanding those “classics” whose structure does not quite seem to fit.

Paired with this more formal means of analysis, I draw on Linda Dégh for her expertise and broadened view of folklore in mass media, as well as Sharon R. Sherman and Juwen Zhang, leading scholars addressing folklore in film. These additional critical perspectives further aid my examination of the folkloric inner workings of the tale, particularly in the context of filmic representation.

Moreover, I apply a range of perspectives on Disney’s work from film scholars, not only Eric Smoodin and Karen Merritt, but other frequently referenced studies from M. Thomas Inge and Terri Martin Wright. These not only offer insight into Disney’s progressive use of modern technology, but also signal those spaces not yet explored when combining disciplines (literary, theatrical, and filmic) to examine the films and earlier influential plays, as texts.

Coming from the discipline of English and Literature, I am able to examine and understand each representation of *Snow White* as a text or narrative, undergirded by a series of folkloric attributes, both of which have been continually transformed. It is this

understanding which produces the folkloric and cultural lineage which, in turn, speaks to a deeper knowledge of the American cultural formation of the tale and positionality of the creator. By negotiating this literary and folkloric form as it winds its way through a range of representations in media, this study presents a host of central moments in the American *Snow White* tradition that have been overlooked in favor of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

Disney's "Folkloric Impact"

Throughout the study that follows, a few terms which I have already introduced will become useful guideposts on the journey toward understanding Disney's profound influence on the *Snow White* tradition in the United States. First, in discussing the "folkloric impact" of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (an idea to which I will return), I found that I needed to qualify how/why American audiences (scholarly and popular) had begun to look toward Disney's version as a "classic," or "model," or "authentic" text. In other words, why is it that impressions of American audiences and their retellings tend to follow a similarly Disney-centered patterning of *Snow White*? A short summary of Disney's *Snow White* will bring clarity to the idea behind this "folkloric impact."

Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* initially offers up a young female heroine positioned as a kind of a Cinderella, dressed in rags, scrubbing the steps of her castle, humming to her animal friends. Opposite this innocent and hopeful young woman is a villainous stepmother, an evil queen solely concerned with her own appearance. As

she gazes into a mirror filled with fire, then smoke, then a mask-like face, she asks that fateful question, “Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?” She must be a witch to “summon” that face with its eerie voice, dooming Snow White with its declaration, “Famed is thy beauty, Majesty, but oh, a lovely maid I see. Rags cannot hide her gentle grace. Alas, she is more fair than thee. [...] Lips red as the rose, hair black as ebony, skin white as snow...” (Disney). With that acknowledgment of beauty, the innocent, singing Snow White (recently visited by her Prince, professing his love) is doomed.

On the Queen’s order, into the forest goes Snow White, happily, willingly, with the huntsman. Although he aims to murder her, finding that he cannot, the huntsman urges her to run into the forest, a place full of seemingly nightmarish horrors. There, trees and swampy bogs appear to reach out for the young heroine, and eyes all around are watching when she finally falls to the ground in tears. Those eyes, of course, belong to a host of cuddly animals (birds, bunnies, deer, and even a turtle) that will befriend Snow White, helpfully guiding her to the home of the seven dwarfs. These animal helpers will further assist her as she cleans up the messy space, cheerily singing “Whistle while you work,” and endeavoring to secure a haven for herself.

The dwarfs (and owners of that space) are next introduced in comedic fashion working the mines with their “Dig, dig, dig” song, which ends in that memorable “Heigh-ho, heigh-ho...” Their slap-stick routine continues as they discover Snow White sleeping in their home. She soon wakes to introduce herself and joins in the fun, identifying each according to a prominent characteristic or personality trait. The rhyming of most of their

names (Happy Sneezy, Dopey, Sleepy, Grumpy, Bashful, and Doc) adds to the fun. And still after it has been decided that Snow White will stay, the dwarfs' playful positioning continues. When the group must wash for dinner, another silly song ensues.

Only after considerable time spent with the dwarfs in sing-song fashion is the viewer returned to the castle, with the evil Queen's recognition that Snow White yet lives. She seemingly flies down to her dungeon and performs spells to transform her appearance and produce that lovely poisonous apple, cursed with the spell of the "Sleeping Death." Into the night the witch-like hag will go, cloaked in black with white hair, a horrific face, claw-like hands, and a red apple in her clutch. Through the woods she skulks toward the home of the dwarfs, where she will make her way in (once they leave in their morning routine).

Once inside, the Queen/witch/hag entreats Snow White to eat the apple, lest her "wish grow cold," and on that first bite, Snow White falls to the ground. The dwarfs will chase the evil Queen, now witch-like figure, to the top of cliff where she will, at her own misstep, fall to her death. A raining scene follows, mirroring the tears of the dwarfs and animals, before they place Snow White inside a glass coffin in the forest.

While she sleeps, the dwarfs and forest animals knowingly prepare Snow White with still more flowers just in time for her prince to arrive. With the charm of a kiss, he wakes his true love and carries her off into the sunset toward "happily ever after."

Now, one might contend that the details used to describe Disney's film above may have been more conveniently pared down to a series of bullet point moments that resonate.

- Snow White singing, scrubbing the steps in rags, meets her Prince
- Evil Queen's magic mirror reveals "fairest one of all"
- Snow White runs from huntsman into terrifying forest of haunts
- Snow White meets animal helpers
- Snow White cleans the dwarfs' home
- Snow White meets dwarfs
- Villainous Queen discovers that Snow White lives
- Queen transforms herself into a witch-like crone with poison apple
- Queen tempts and poisons Snow White
- Queen is chased by dwarfs and falls from a cliff at her own mishap
- Snow White is placed in a glass coffin
- Prince finds Snow White, surrounded by animals and dwarfs
- Prince kisses and wakes Snow White
- Happily ever after

Both the more detailed description and the bulleted list above, summarizing the narrative action of Disney's film are significant for the purposes of framing my study, though I will address them reverse order. A quick glance down the bulleted list provides the love triangle typical to the American tale, but more overtly displays the narrative action between the Queen and Snow White that forwards the traditional tale's movement and plot. Significantly, the dwarfs are ancillary, as are the animals. In fact, these simplified, bulleted terms almost exactly mirror the episodic structure that Steven Swann Jones uses to classify the *Snow White* tale (through which he emphasizes its fullest form in the Grimms' version). Therefore, one can detect the folkloric tradition of the tale in these bullets, but in its brevity, each disregards those attributes that made Disney's version so memorable.

By leaving out the color, the description of animation (as in the forest scene), and the songs, the essence of the Disney version is lost. The first summary of the tale is informed by the visual, animative (or cinematic), and musical enhancements that Disney had creatively inserted. Each action has been constructed so as to be memorably recalled.

Yet, as the bulleted list shows, the combination of European and American folkloric traditions (the story thread running through both) has also been maintained. Thus, the overarching structure, as well as the finer points are readily recalled for retelling because of the ways in which Disney unified: (a) the *Snow White* tradition (the tale as it had been told) with (b) his own creativity and technological innovation via the full-length, animated feature film.

When I am speaking of Disney's "folkloric impact" then, I am referring to both the story memory that has been generated from his exemplary film, as well as the ways in which that story memory becomes translated into successive versions of *Snow White*. The unification of tradition and technology propelled Disney's work forward as a "classic," and, this "classic" status propelled the subsequent "folkloric impact" of the animator. While marketing also ensured the further establishment of his tale, as well as its "folkloric impact" for successive generations, I argue that it was first and foremost Disney's mastery over the story and its tradition(s), which enabled this film's continued affirmation.

Teasing out this idea of "folkloric impact" is necessarily tied to the categorization of a "classic," or public and scholarly conceptions of a "classic" or "authentic" text. Because I am arguing that Disney's "classic" is one with "staying power," to be recalled and retold, revised, or adapted further, my study first requires a response to the question: what makes a "classic" *Snow White* version? Further, in historicizing the American *Snow White* tradition, I cannot ignore the precursory European tradition that has been deemed so influential to the (pre-Disney) succession of the *Snow White* tale. Therefore, Chapter

2, “*Snow White: The Origins of a ‘Classic’*” begins by offering a response to the question of how a “classic” is formed or constructed. Through a series of four measures: 1) a folkloric foundation, 2) the cultural consciousness of the creator, 3) a distinct formal style, and 4) adaptation, I analyze the three most frequently referenced early European versions of *Snow White*. These include: Giambattista Basile’s “La schiavottella” (“The Young Slave”) (1634-6), Johann Karl August Musäus’ “Richilda” (1782), and Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm’s “Sneewittchen” (“Little Snow White”) (1812-1815). The result of my critical evaluation whittles these three down to one, the single European “classic” that has proven most influential to the European tradition and successive studies of the *Snow White* tale, the Grimms’ “Sneewittchen.” Because this tale offers a foundation or benchmark, based upon the critical discourse surrounding the version as well as Jones’ prolific folkloric study, its formation and rise to prominence meaningfully segues into later understandings of Disney’s American *Snow White* “classic.”

Although the next anticipated critical leap is toward Disney’s “classic,” for the purposes of this study’s historicization of the *Snow White* tale and, more specifically, its American tradition, I needed to better understand what happened between the Grimms’ “Sneewittchen” (“Little Snow White”) (1812-1857) and Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Chapter 3: “Translating Content Across Contexts: Finding One’s Purchase on the American Fairy Tale Through *Snow White*” therefore recalls the transformations of the European *Snow White* tradition into an *American* context, the United States. Because literary translations did not show significant departures from the European tradition throughout the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century, I

instead turn toward the alternate contexts of stage and screen, wherein the tale had begun to evince *American* elements. In Marguerite Merington's *SNOWWHITE And the SEVEN DWARFS: Fairytale Play, with incidental Music, for Children: Founded on 'Schneewittchen' by Goerner, and the Fairy Tale Plays of the Brothers Grimm* (1910), Jessie Braham White's "*SNOW WHITE*": *A Fairy Tale Play From the Story of the Brothers Grimm* (1912) and *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS: A Fairy Tale Play Based on the Story of the Brothers Grimm*, with music by Edmond Rickett and numerous illustrations by Charles B. Falls (1913), and Winthrop Ames' *Snow White* (1916), one can begin to detect distinguishing American characteristics, many of which are thought of as Disney's cultural innovations—romance and humor, ideals of equity and democracy, gendered models, and consumeristic desire. Rather than looking toward Disney as the founder of the *Snow White* tradition in the United States, I guide a critical engagement with these earlier models which productively lent to a cultural transformation of the tale and its use leading toward Disney. In other words, I gesture toward the endeavors of these early American creators to generate a culturally conducive national model and subsequently lay claim to ownership over the tale, enabling their own rise toward success. The latter, as well, aligns these American precursors with Disney, displaying the significance of buying, selling, and stamping the fairy tale as one's own, an external condition of success, perpetuating the *Snow White* tradition in the United States. By investigating the successes and failings of Disney's American influences, I lay the groundwork for inspecting his melding of European and American folkloric traditions to produce an American "classic."

While Chapters 2 and 3 provide the historical groundwork (European and American) to explore aspects of the tale leading toward Disney's pre-eminent adaptation, they likewise encourage a reading of *Snow White*'s history which inspects the multiple layers of transformation across media (from literature to children's literature, to the American stage, and onto the silent screen) and types of audience engagement (children and/or a cross-population of children and adults). These contextual changes—at the levels of nation, media, and audience—represent the historical evolution of the *Snow White* tale in the United States, as well as the means for Disney's version to succeed.

Chapter 4, "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*: Disney's Resounding Influence on the American Fairy Tale" focuses primarily on Disney's "classic" and how it distinguished itself from its precursors, in other words, how it achieved this status as a foundational precedent for the *Snow White* tale in the United States *and* for adaptations that followed. To enter into this discussion and address the contested nature of Disney's animation in its ability to effectively represent *Snow White* from the stance of folklore or the literary fairy tale, I first critically evaluate what I term a "misrepresentation" of *Snow White*—the Fleischer Brother's animated short, "Betty Boop in Snow-White" (1933). Where this cartoon short shreds the tradition of the tale in favor of its series' title character, Disney's version of the tale, presented in the second portion of my analysis, actively engages with the preceding European and American folklore, in addition to productively layering these traditions with technological advances—combining word/language, image (animation and color), and sound—which further supported those folkloric episodes that already informed the tale's inherent structure. I use Jones' model

to frame this section and validate Disney's powerful engagement with folklore through this new media representation. While Jones' model provides a baseline for understanding Disney's folklore, in its emphasis on the oral/literary, it misses the context of film. For this reason, I draw in Linda Dégh, Sharon R. Sherman, and Juwen Zhang, for their theorizations of folklore in mass media or film. These forward-thinking perspectives usefully attune folklore to Disney's medium of transmission, enabling a critical revaluation of Disney's impact. Moreover, together these layers of analysis enable one to see Disney first and foremost for his ability to unify a range of elements through story. It is this which has given his film such force in the *Snow White* tradition, an effect which is proven out in my fifth and final chapter.

To open a discussion of Disney's immediate successors, presented in Chapter 5, "Following Disney: *Snow White* Successors Wanda Gág and Bob Clampett Employ a New Folkloric Model," I briefly examine the reception following Disney's film to offer something of the "sensation" created by *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 7). The larger portion of the chapter is then devoted to the adaptive responses of Gág and Clampett, demonstrating that Disney's impact was one that could not be refuted by either the sphere of literature or animation. Although Gág's German background and prior work translating the Grimms appeared to perfectly match the needs of children's publishing, which demanded an "authentic" version to counter Disney's film (and books published immediately thereafter), her illustrations, softened language, and romance drew this first American literary adaptation (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1938) nearer to Disney's version than the Grimms'. The Warner Bros., in

their animation, strove (in some sense) to follow closely on Disney's heels with *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* (1943)—markedly manipulating Disney's memorable images, scenes, and coloring, as well the unifying effect of song and story functioning together. However, for animating director, Bob Clampett, Disney's tale was utilized as an *animative* model *not* a *story* model. Thus, insofar as Disney can be seen through Clampett's animated scenes, this director's self-interest is prioritized, remaking *Snow White* to showcase African American music and entertainment. Although lively and jocular in its use of music, the short cartoon also features the racial prejudices and other American cultural politics of the WWII era. The core elements of the *Snow White* tale, therefore, have been displaced by attention directed toward culturally prominent entertainments and values. Where both versions (each with its own motives) aimed to revise or potentially replace Disney's influential filmic fairy tale, they instead did more to highlight and respond to that American *Snow White* "classic." Disney's "folkloric" footprint is stamped upon each, and together these literary and animated responses display the influence of his version, the new foundation for revisions and adaptations.

The Conclusion to this study, "Transforming Disney: Recuperative Power and Possibilities in Postmodern, Contemporary, and Future *Snow White* Adaptations," aims to provide an opening for further contemporary discourse concerning folkloric influence. Here, I offer a brief account of the most recent adaptations reflecting the continued American lineage of the *Snow White* tale. By marking a few further transformations, I suggest the potential for a new pattern of influence.

When initially discussing variants representative of the postmodern “unmakings” of Walt Disney’s “classic” and its conventions, I gesture toward the deconstructive endeavors of Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* (1965), Anne Sexton’s “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1971), Robert Coover’s “The Dead Queen,” (1973), and Michael Cohn’s film, *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* (1997). Specifically, I highlight their revisionary narrative construction, character development, sexuality, violence, consumerism, and/or female recuperation, which aim to potentially reform earlier conceptions of the *Snow White* tradition. As with Disney’s immediate successors, I do not mean to suggest that these versions were solely generated to respond to Walt Disney; however, they necessarily recall in a reader’s imagination the influential makings of that animated “classic.” That said, these more recent versions, in their progressive values and means for “contest[ing]” the conservative attributes of the traditional tale seem to serve another, more contemporary function, as well (Shippey 258-259).

In the remainder of my conclusion and examination of a range of twenty-first century *Snow White* adaptations, I suggest that by means of film, children’s and young adult/adult literature, television, and animated cartoon, innovative values presented through *Snow White*’s postmodern American inversions replay themselves with new and/or more focalized meaning and also speak more broadly to the changing dominant values of culture at large. Many of these new representations geared toward value re-setting frequently revise the characterization of the female heroine and/or villain, complicating her representation. However, others represent narrative breaks, in the now popular usage of the “fractured” fairy tale form. Yet still other twenty-first century

adaptations indicate future areas for contemporary revision, revaluing: treatments of disability, religion, or sexuality. Significantly, the current trend in which postmodern themes and issues appear to be redeployed through contemporary *Snow White* variants seems to indicate that almost any successor might help to remake the tradition, renovating the American pattern of influence. This does not negate Disney's influence (or that of the earlier Grimms'), but instead displays the incorporation and validation of various strands of influence.

In this American history of the *Snow White* tale, I have not addressed Disney's global folkloric impact or connected the Conclusion's suggested contemporary pattern of influence to recent *Snow White* versions emerging internationally. These larger conversations simply were not within the scope of this project. While there have been some film or fairy tale studies that have gestured toward Disney's globalizing impact, there is certainly room for more, especially given a continually changing landscape through which cultural transformation fuels folkloric/fairy tale adaptation. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, the story of America's *Snow White* tradition needed to be retold in such a way as to revalue Disney's folkloric impact. This could only be accomplished by acknowledging the various media influences, as well as the precursory and successive American versions validating that carefully crafted animated "classic," *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

CHAPTER 2

SNOW WHITE: THE ORIGINS OF A “CLASSIC”

While the focus of this study is the American fairy tale tradition and Disney’s impact on it, and the vehicle for the study is *Snow White*, one cannot construct a history and examine its effects without first recognizing the precursors upon which a younger cultural and literary tradition stands. This chapter, therefore, casts a backward glance on three particular versions of the *Snow White* tale crossing through the Italian and German traditions. I would be remiss if I did not recognize the proliferation of other *Snow White* variants that exist beyond the three that this chapter will investigate.⁵ However, given this study’s emphasis on the aspects of a tale that call it back into the minds and mouths of scholarly and popular audiences time and time again, I found it most useful to begin by focusing on those few tales which have been most frequently referenced in critical scholarship and through adaptations—those which have been elevated as “source texts” of a kind.

Insofar as my work examines the transformation of the fairy tale in the United States, it likewise explores the attributes of and conditions surrounding a particular tale and how these give one tale greater staying power over other variations. The latter proves significant in its identification of the criteria by which select texts or tales emerge from the rest in their preeminent standing as “classics,” “authentic” texts, or “originals,” in other words the versions that readers trust as representing the *Snow White* tale

⁵ See Jones, *The New Comparative Method: Structural and Symbolic Analysis of the Allomotifs of “Snow White”*

accurately.⁶ Whichever term one might use, the authoritative positioning of these versions is clear. These are the tales that one will consistently utilize for comparative framing and a determination of “what counts” as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, or *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Despite its earlier European precursors, prior to Disney, the Grimms’ *Snow White* held this status both in scholarly and popular contexts. It was viewed not as a *Snow White* version, but *the* “classic” *Snow White*. Unsurprisingly, it is also this particular tale which is recognized as Disney’s source text⁷ and (along with Disney’s version) is most frequently adapted into contemporary literature and media. It is for these reasons that I use this chapter to consider how the Grimms’ version attained this status and continued to maintain its resonant influence. Understanding this foundational European precursor’s influence is key to subsequent chapters’ examinations of Disney’s American *Snow White* “classic.”

While there exist a variety of folkloric and literary approaches which attempt to account for or provide clarity in the conversation of “what counts” as a qualified version of a fairy tale, for the purposes of opening this discussion, I draw together three of those who have critically engaged either the *Snow White* tale or heavily foregrounded the most

⁶ The idea of representing the *Snow White* tale “accurately” is a matter of readerly perception. I do not mean to suggest by the usage of this term, or the terms “classic,” “authentic” text, or “original” that there is one correct version. Instead, I gesture toward the significance of public perceptions that inform these qualitative assessments.

⁷ While the Grimms’ is highlighted as Disney’s source text, Disney may have been familiar with Basile’s or Musäus versions from his travels to Europe. M. Thomas Inge refers to a 1936 quote from Disney in which he indicated that he (Disney) “went to various book stores and purchased copies of this story [(*Snow White*)],” but as Inge further notes, “we do not know which translations or which editions of the Grimm Brothers” or, I would add, any other *Snow White* versions “he actually read” (135).

prominent authors of the same, the Grimms. Folklorist Steven Swann Jones study, *The New Comparative Method: Structural and Symbolic Analysis of the Allomotifs of "Snow White,"* in its methodology and breadth has come to be understood as foundational to critical scholarship concerning *Snow White*. Therein, Jones argues that it is a particular episodic structure⁸ in addition to a "thematic core"⁹ that justifies "what counts," though he focuses predominately on the former (*New Comparative* 38). This approach productively enables one to establish what might be thought of as a baseline for folkloric authenticity. However, I find that this stable or fixed framework (despite Jones' accommodations within) does not always unite scholars of varying disciplines (folklore, literature, media studies) or a diverse range of audiences (scholarly and popular) in their justifications for studying or recalling particular versions. To speak to these combined interests and audiences, I draw on the perspective of folklorist Linda Dégh. Dégh's work is marked by critical examinations of folklore across multiple media and playing toward multiple audiences, and her approach toward a model of "what counts" engages a more permissive fluidity. With respect to the fairy tale's most authentic form (attributed to the Grimms), she argues that "During the process of variation, a distinctive short narrative genre emerged which contained a characteristic episodic structure, style, and tone," thereby instantiating a "model" ("What did the Grimm" 69). While this understanding nods to the episodic structure, its primary emphasis is on the "process of variation," the

⁸ Here and throughout this and subsequent chapters, I use the term "episodic structure" to refer to Steven Swann Jones' "theoretical model of the folktale" (in this case, *Snow White*) wherein the tale is defined by a distinct "pattern of [nine] episodes" (*New Comparative* 26).

⁹ Jones argues that a specific tale's "structural and thematic core plays a vital role in maintaining the form and meaning of the tale as it passes from teller to teller and country to country" allowing the tale to "retain" a definitive shape and meaning." In other words, the episodes and themes together ensure that "the form and message of the tale" are "maintain[ed]" (*New Comparative* 81).

artistry, that ultimately produced this “model,” in addition to some of the formal elements defining its creation. In his work with children’s literature and understanding influence, David Blamires likewise recognizes the Grimms’ versions as “models,” surpassing others in the German tradition at the time in favor of the Grimms’ “scholarly approach and Wilhelm’s stylistic skill [which] managed to establish a norm of length, language and tone for printing traditional tales that has dominated the field ever since” (*Telling Tales* 51). In this layering of critical methodologies, I find that both the episodic or thematic framing of folklore, as well as formal “stylistic” adjustments have contributed to the continuity of the Grimms’ tales. However, I argue that each approach, while relevant, only operates on a single factor undergirding the formulation of a “classic” *Snow White* tale. Therefore, I suggest combining the two. Further, I point toward two additional attributes concerning the artistic production of the tale lend to its justification, as a classic—the cultural consciousness and adaptive ability of the creator. Thus, in this chapter, I contend that it is not one of these measures that justifies “what counts” in the minds of a wider audience, across geographical space and time, but four factors operating together:

- 1) a folkloric foundation,
- 2) the cultural consciousness of the creator,
- 3) a distinct formal style, and
- 4) adaptation.

To show the significance of what I term this multilayered approach, I will examine three literary adaptations of *Snow White* that have assumed almost canonical status in fairy tale scholarship: Giambattista Basile’s “La schiavottella” (“The Young Slave”) (1634-6), Johann Karl August Musäus’ “Richilda” (1782), and Wilhelm and Jacob

Grimm's "Sneewittchen" ("Little Snow White") (1812-1815). After providing a short critical rationale for the use of these three versions specifically, I will examine the workings of Jones' structural classification, featuring this folkloric approach to identification in and of its own right. While Jones' method alone does not justify a tale's persistence, it does offer a lens essential to understanding the evolution of the *Snow White* tales which this chapter inspects. Building history into this folkloric foundation, I draw in Christine Shojaei Kawan's "A Brief Literary History of *Snow White*," which finds fault with Jones' study and even the three traditionally conceptualized *Snow White* tales which I highlight here. Analyses of both serve to show how the folkloric method alone, or even in conjunction with an historical approach, only further prompts the question: what "counts" as an early literary version of the *Snow White* tale? As a result, one begins to see the pitfalls of relying purely on a folkloric analysis of episodic structure. However, by layering this approach with subsequent interrogations into cultural consciousness or sensitivity,¹⁰ formal style, and adaptation and progressing through the tale's traditionally referenced historical lineage (from the earliest version, Basile's, to the most recent historical precursor, that of the Grimms), I display how these attributes together have effectuated what is now most commonly thought of as the "classic" early version of the *Snow White* tale, that of the Brothers Grimm. Of the three, it was their "Sneewittchen" ("Little Snow White") that came to be understood as *the* version retold again and again, refusing to be forgotten.

¹⁰ I use "cultural consciousness" and "cultural sensitivity" interchangeably to refer to the author's awareness of and engagement with his cultural moment and of the (social, political, moral) conditions surrounding his artistic production.

A Starting Point for Discovering the Early *Snow White* “Classics”

I begin this journey into the *Snow White* tale by inspecting “Snow White” or “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” entries in fairy tale reference texts. Therein, I suggest that a pattern begins to emerge which informs one’s initial ideas regarding “classic” versions of this tale, or the more traditional lineage of the *Snow White* tale. For example, in the “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” entry in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (2000), the first few lines announce, “Early written versions appear in Giambattista Basile’s *Pentamerone* (*The Pentameron* 1634-6), J.K. Musäus’s *Volksmarchen der Deutschen* (1782), and Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm’s *Kinder- und Hausmarchen* (Children’s and Household Tales, 1812-1815)” (Goldberg 478).¹¹ While the tale is referenced to have “circulated widely in Africa, Asia Minor, Scandinavia, Ireland, Russia, Greece, Cerbo-Croatia, the Caribbean, and North, South, and Central America” only these *three* literary precursors are referenced in the entry, under a heading intuitively recalling Walt Disney’s “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937), a later adaptation recognized in critical and popular contexts (Goldberg 478). Although the entry begins from a more scholarly angle, gesturing toward a few earlier *Snow White* tales, when the entry’s title aligns these with a modern “classic” (Disney’s version), I find that it formatively aligns these three precursors with a broader audience’s idea of a “classic” version of the tale.

¹¹ The *Pentamerone* (1634-6), *Volksmarchen der Deutschen* (1782), and *Kinder- und Hausmarchen* (1812-1815) contain the *Snow White* versions of “La schiavottella” (“The Young Slave”), “Richilda,” and “Sneewittchen” (“Little Snow White”), respectively.

In a more recent encyclopedic collection, the second edition of *Folktales and Fairy Tales: Traditions and Texts from around the World* (2016), Vanessa Joosen's "Snow White" entry declares, "the best-known version of the German fairy tale 'Sneewittchen' or 'Snow White' was published in the 1857 edition of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinderund Hausmarchen (Children's and Household Tales)*" (944). Also recognized, is Disney's version: "the first fairy tale to be adapted to a full-length animated film [...] in 1937" (Joosen 944). While Jones' catalogue of "more than 400 variants of 'Snow White' from Europe, Asia Minor, Africa, and (to a lesser extent) the Americas" is accounted for, these versions remain ambiguous in this general reference and are only further distinguished by their "similarities to 'La schiavottella' ('The Young Slave') from Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti (The Tale of Tales, 1634-36)*,¹² as well as to 'Richilde'¹³ from Johann Karl August Musäus's *Volksmarchen der Deutschen (Folktales of the Germans, 1782-86)*" (Joosen 945). Other modern variants are acknowledged more specifically in the latter portion of the entry (successors of the Grimms and Disney); however, the only *early versions* of the tale cited are Basile's and Musäus'. If so many versions, variations, and adaptations of the tale and its motifs exist ("ways in which the protagonist is killed," for example), why are these two in particular (alongside a third, the Grimms' tale) so consistently recognized as *the precursors* (Joosen 945)? And, how does one begin to recognize a single resonant precursor? These

¹² *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1634-36) was the initial title under which the *Pentamerone* was subsequently published.

¹³ "Richilde," ending in -e (as opposed the -a ending I use) is often used in scholarship concerning Musäus' work. However, given that the primary text used for this chapter ends in -a, I have utilized this spelling in all cases, excepting those in citations from other texts or critics.

questions prove significant, as they not only came to inform how scholars and more popular audiences at last came to view the Grimms, as this chapter will show, but also how later audiences engaged Walt Disney's modernized *Snow White* version.

Steven Swann Jones' Folkloric Classification of *Snow White*

Folklore's methods are decidedly a part of the process for classifying what counts as a *Snow White* version or variation, and one can scarcely find a study of *Snow White* without mention of Steven Swann Jones' influential and wide-reaching analysis in *The New Comparative Method: Structural and Symbolic Analysis of the Allomotifs of "Snow White."* Here, Jones defines "the theoretical model of the folktale" as "its structurally identifiable, typologically distinct pattern of *episodes*" (*New Comparative* 26; emphasis added). He further argues that it is this model that enables one to understand "specific texts" in the "context of the entire tale type" (*New Comparative* 27).

In their earlier classification of the *Snow White* tale and its variants, folklorists Aarne and Thompson crafted a model of 5 *characteristics* distinguishing a *Snow White* version or variation:

- I. *Snow-White and her Stepmother*
- II. *Snow-White's Rescue*
- III. *The Poisoning*
- IV. *Help of the Dwarfs*
- V. *Her Revival* (*New Comparative* 21-22)

In his contradiction of this "flawed" framework and misidentification of pertinent motifs that may or may not be present ("red as blood/white as snow, the magic mirror, the compassionate executioner, the dwarfs, the poisoned lace, comb, and apple, the glass

coffin, and the red hot shoes”), Jones argues that there are “nine episodes (or action traits to use the historic-geographic terminology) that are consistently repeated, significant events in [the *Snow White*] tale” (*New Comparative* 21). These take place over the course of two parts.

Part I: Four episodes

1. Origin
2. Jealousy
3. Expulsion
4. Adoption

Part II: Five episodes

1. Renewed Jealousy (after news of survival)
2. Death
3. Exhibition
4. Resuscitation
5. Resolution (*New Comparative* 22-24)

Aarne and Thompson’s model, with its focus on a tale’s “characteristics” proved insufficient, according to Jones, to address all versions of the tale (*New Comparative* 21). Therefore, Jones’ model relies more heavily on “*episodes*” or “the essential dramatic events common to different versions of this narrative that are illustrated by various allomotifs”—“motifs that fulfill the same dramatic purpose in the same point in a narrative in different versions of that narrative” (*New Comparative* 21, 22). The latter (Jones’) structure seems more inclusive, allowing for the changeability of motifs that lead an audience through a certain narrative pattern of action. However, Jones broadens this understanding of “what counts” a bit too far in his continued theoretical framing, allowing that “Individual versions will sometimes skip one or another of the introductory episodes of each part” (*New Comparative* 24). This proves problematic not only for others employing his model, but further elicits a contradiction with his earlier premise

that each of the above episodes are “*essential* dramatic events” (*New Comparative* 21; emphasis added). If a variant permissibly misses episodes or “consistently repeated significant events,” how does one distinguish what counts as a *Snow White* variant? Does such flexibility ultimately broaden or prohibit classification?

For a response to this question, one need look no further than Kawan’s “A Brief Literary History of *Snow White*.” Here, Jones’ structural codification of *Snow White* is doubly challenged in a historical analysis embedded with the same. In line with Jones, Kawan appears to have treated a broader array of early precursors, only further delving into the literary schema to “outline the history of *Snow White* as a book tale and [...] relate the written sources to oral ones” (325). This relation of the literary to the oral, necessarily draws in the folkloric retelling which produced the literary form of the tale. However, as she moves from potential medieval oral variants involving “innocent persecuted heroines,” to an English tale upon which Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1608/09) might have been based, to Basile’s *La schiavottella* (“The Young Slave”) (about 1620-1630), Kawan employs Jones’ episodic structure to negate one potential variant after another (327). Each is cast aside for its failure to adhere to Jones’ model for classifying *Snow White* variants according to “dramatic action.” While Musäus’ *Richilde* is initially recognized as the “first full version,” this variant too is disputed based upon its form, “a novelette,” along with a minor divergence from the regular structural patterning (Kawan 331). At this point, Kawan’s criteria for securing an “early literary retelling” is troubled by the methodology of deconstructing as opposed to reconstructing a history of the oral and literary origins of *Snow White* (327). As much as this appears a shortcoming of the

study itself, it likewise reflects the insufficiency of Jones' structural method as a singular rubric for classification, even when placed in an historical framework. As a result, the question remains, what is required of a viable precursor, and what are effective means for the identification of one?

Jones' more flexible folkloric model, when followed strictly, does not enfold the breadth of tales it aims to (although he does not hesitate to include Basile's or Musäus' texts in his analysis). Kawan's historical study, in addition to poking holes in Jones method of classification,¹⁴ likewise displays how difficult it is to chart the progression of a tale which lies between variant folk retellings and their literary counterparts. If the methods driving these "broader" studies apparently negate two of the most significant precursors to the *Snow White* tradition, it suggests that additional measures for inspecting a tale's value are necessary.

In the following section, I will address Basile's, Musäus', and the Grimms' *Snow White* tales, each, in turn, in effort to advance an alternate approach employing additional measures that not only gesture toward the significance of Basile's and Musäus' versions, but further narrow toward the Grimms' "classic." While I do find that utilization of Jones' model provides a baseline for classification in its understanding of folklore, by indicating its methodological gaps, I open a discussion of how these additional attributes lead toward the identification of a *Snow White* "classic." These other attributes include: style, and cultural consciousness, and adaptive ability of the creator. I find that this

¹⁴ See Kawan, "A Brief Literary History of *Snow White*" for specific episodic discontinuities.

combination serves to unravel something of the mystery of those thought of as the most significant early versions of *Snow White*.

Alternatively Interpreting Three *Snow White* Precursors Using a Multi-Layered Approach

1. Giambattista Basile's "*La schiavottella*" ("*The Young Slave*")

A quick study of the formal episodic narrative patterning of Basile's version of the *Snow White* tale, "The Young Slave," displays the troubled structure that I find Jones endeavoring to sidestep. The story begins when Cilla, the central figure at the start, enters a contest amongst other maidens to jump over a rose. Instead of accepting her failure (as the others had), she quickly eats the leaf that fell to the ground. As fate would have it, she becomes pregnant. After hiding the pregnancy for as long as possible, she sends the "beauteous woman child," Lisa, to the fairies to raise her (Basile 206). While the **origin** of Lisa (or Snow White) is detailed in this opening, the most significant narrative element in the *Snow White* tale, **jealousy**, is absent. Instead, a scene of **expulsion** ensues. However, given the absence of jealousy, the tenor of this expulsion likewise changes. It is an action of compassion, to preserve the life of the child, not one of malice or intended destruction.

Nevertheless, with their **adoption** of Lisa, the fairies give way to the next episode. All of the fairies give "charms" with exception to the last, who, frustrated with her own misstep and twisted ankle, curses the child (Basile 207). As a result, upon the child's 7th year, while combing her hair (her mother) Cilla, would "forget the comb sticking in the hair on her head and this would cause her to die" (Basile 207). When the curse's

prophecy is executed, Cilla “order[s] seven crystal chests one within the other and [has] her child put within them, and then the chest was laid in a distant chamber in the palace” (Basile 207). Again, **renewed jealousy** is absent, displaced by a curse, resulting in the child’s accidental **death** and **exhibition**. Although the preface introduces and details a theme and central focus of jealousy in the narrative, for the first several episodes, this critical quality is altogether absent.

Only after Cilla’s death does this fundamental episodic action come into play. Finally, the narrative begins to align itself more closely with Jones’ episodic structure, with the jealousy of a cruel mother-figure, in this case, the baron's wife. In her husband’s absence (before which he “begg[ed] her not to open the forbidden chamber,” per Cilla’s request at the time of her death), the baron’s wife is induced by “suspicion,” which leads to “jealousy, [...] fired by curiosity” (Basile 207). Unable to help herself, she opens the door to find the child, “lying as it were in a deep sleep”; however, Lisa is no longer child-like. As she grew, the “chests lengthened with her” (Basile 208). Thus, when the jealous wife pulls her out by her hair, yanking also the comb, it is a *young woman* who “came again to life” (Basile 208). **Jealousy and resuscitation** mingle in this scene. Enraged at the sight of the beauty, the baron’s wife “at once cut off the damsel’s hair, and gave her a good drubbing, and arrayed her in rags. Every day she beat her on her head and gave her black eyes and scratched her face and made her mouth to bleed just as if she had eaten raw pigeons” (Basile 208). Here, at last, is the “persecuted heroine”¹⁵ that one expects to find all throughout the tale, struggling at the mercy of her jealous counterpart.

¹⁵ For more on the “persecuted heroine” cycle, see Jones, *The New Comparative Method: Structural and Symbolic Analysis of the Allomotifs of “Snow White.”*

Although the narrative action culminates in a **resolution** through which the jealous executer (the baron's wife) is punished, or returned to her family and deemed unfit, the scenes which precede this one feature a heroine who takes hold of her own fate. When the baron goes to a country fair and asks all in the household what they would like, Lisa's response of a few mundane items, as well as her warning that the baron will be incapable of returning lest he forget these items aligns her story and character with "Cinderella."¹⁶ With "action traits" or "dramatic events" that bespeak multiple tales, one might wonder what compartment of tales this one belongs in based on the use of Jones' model of classification.

From the first defect in the episodic structure, followed by the tale's disordered presentation of episodic actions, classification of Basile's version as a major *Snow White* precursor according to Jones' model is troubled. Although the folkloric model permits the missed episodic action, this alteration and others in the episodic structure of the tale produce shifts in the dramatic action, narrative, and meaning of the tale. As a result, the model no longer quite seems to fit, yet Basile's tale continues to be considered one of the primary *Snow White* precursors by Jones and others.

While I do not mean to suggest that the structure of "The Young Slave" runs entirely counter to Jones' nine-episode model (as a host of the episodes he gestures toward are present), I find that in this case, his structural model simply does not function according to its intended purpose. Because of the displaced episodes in Basile's tale, Jones' structure, as a tool of classification, does not resolve the issues that Aarne and

¹⁶ See Basile's "The Cat Cinderella" in Zipes, *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*.

Thompson's model produced. Moreover, it proves most problematic in its emphasis on jealousy. This central episodic action is *not* the key motivator of the "The Young Slave's" dramatic action *in the way that Jones has positioned it* (driving each of the two parts of his model). Jealousy, in Basile's tale, leads to neither expulsion nor death; therefore, subsequent episodes fall out of line or are eliminated altogether.

Although Basile's "The Young Slave" does not readily adhere to the episodic structure that Jones enumerates, this version of *Snow White* does speak to Jones' other precepts for the study of a tale. His understandings of folk or oral traditions reconstituting themselves in the literary realm and of folkloric retelling based on "thematic continuities" apply to both Basile's and Musäus' versions of *Snow White* (*New Comparative* 38). Herein, one might begin to find a folkloric basis for inspecting "what counts" as an extension of the tale and its tradition.

Where the episodic structure of Basile's tale moves counter to Jones' model, the thematic structure centers appropriately on the troubles that ensue when jealousy takes hold of an individual. The prologue's thematic focalization is produced by a litany of metaphors concerning the disgraceful effects of jealousy.

Jealousy is a fearful malady, and (sooth to say) 'tis a vertigo which turneth the brain, a fever burning in the veins, an accident, a sudden blow which parayseth the limbs, a dysentery which looseneth the body, a sickness which robbeth ye of sleep, embittereth all food, cloudeth all peace, shorteneth our days: 'tis a viper which biteth, a moth which gnaweth, gall which embittereth, snow which freezeth, a nail which boreth you, a separator of all love's enjoyments, a divider of matrimony, a dog causing disunion to all love's felicity: 'tis a continual torpedo in the sea of Venus' pleasures, which never doeth a right or good deed: as ye will all confess with your own tongues on hearing the story which follows. (Basile 205-206)

Based upon this opening, a reader or listener cannot help but search for jealousy's foul effects in the narrative that follows. They are frightening, but one nevertheless wants to read or hear more about them. The narrative keeps its promise. Whereas generally the narration moves steadily forward in this tale as a progressive sequence of actions, this is not the case when jealousy takes hold. The violence precipitated by Lisa's aunt's vices ("suspicion," "jealousy," and "curiosity"), as well as her hateful description of Lisa (the "slave") are so emphatically detailed that they slow the tempo of the plot's progression to accentuate the foul effects of these depravities, with "jealousy" at the forefront (Basile 207). This thematic focus, along with a host of common *Snow White* motifs—child originating from/associated with natural origins; death of the good mother; apparent death by a comb; glass caskets; jealousy of a surrogate mother; and a powerful, male savior—all re-center the tale as a *Snow White* precursor in folkloric terms.

Furthermore, Basile's version of the tale, as well as the larger framing narrative that the story is part of (*Il Pentamerone*) decidedly "[evoke] a strongly oral flavor, as if we were listening to its stories rather than reading them" (*Preserving* 28). In short, the narrative structure itself, focusing upon "fictive moments of tale-telling and positioning the reader as a (hypothetical) audience" engages even far removed readers as part of the storytelling audience and community of tellers within the tale ("Oral versus Literary" 534). In line with this framing, "The Young Slave" is subtitled or also recognized as the "Eighth Diversion of the Second Day." Because the chapter is termed a "Diversion," it invites the reader's participation in the activity or play that follows. Before the story begins, there is a dialogical exchange between other speakers in the room about the

significance of the story. Again, the reader is drawn into the conversation. As a result, once the story begins, the reader is as much a part of the room of listeners as each of the characters depicted within. Both the frame narrative and the dialogue between tellers create this performative, folkloric effect.

Also contributing to this readerly experience is the Neapolitan dialect that Basile used in writing the tales, giving them an essence of what Nicole Belmont would call “*oraliterature*, a written text that expresses a ‘nostalgic’ evocation of oral expression” (Jones and Schacker 114; *Preserving* 28). In other words, the voice is impressed within and expressed through the text via its recollection of the spoken word. This voicing lends to a formal style which mingles with folklore to engage the reader’s participation in the storytelling event and positions it more closely to the oral folklore from which it had sprung.

Jones speaks of these same connections when he more deeply engages the discussion of the transfiguration of the tales from the folk to literary spheres. Instead of dwelling on their folkloric status, Jones positions Basile’s and Musäus’ versions of the *Snow White* tale as “literary redactions of folk materials that found their way to these authors” (13). The literary and the folk are not one, but instead, the latter (an “earlier oral tradition”) gave way to the former, and as a result, “neither Basile nor Musäus can take credit for the creation, shape, or substance of the tale as it is usually told. The credit for that has always belonged to and continues to belong to oral tradition” (*New Comparative* 13). Insofar as ownership belongs to an “oral tradition” though, Jones also seems to argue that a tale’s transformation from oral to literary necessarily accounts for its malleability and altered construction.

Most likely we are dealing with a story that appears in many guises: purely oral versions; oral versions faithfully transcribed but inspired or influenced by literary versions or other collected and printed versions; oral versions that have been stylistically altered by editors or collectors; literary versions of oral versions; and finally literary treatments that use the oral tales as a springboard for new artistic work. (*New Comparative* 18-19)

Thus, from the folklorist's stance, a literary treatment is embedded with traditional oral elements *but* in its new (written) form may or may not have incurred significant modifications. Such modifications, however, do not alter its folkloric grounding. Here again, as with the methodology provided to classify a tale based on its episodic structure, Jones generates a broader understanding of folkloric inclusivity to allow for literary versions and variations. Once again though, this flexibility produces the counter-effect of providing an indistinct rubric for classification. For this reason, while acknowledging the groundwork that Jones' study provides, my approach draws in another layer of analysis.

It is not only the essence of folklore or stylistic elements of a folk or fairy tale that enable it to claim its space as a significant part of the tradition, authenticated as a "source" of sorts. The cultural positioning of a tale, in this case, as a part of an Italian literary legacy, is likewise significant. Basile's *Pentamerone* (1634-36) has been recognizably modeled after the *Decameron* of Giovanni Boccaccio, written in the fourteenth century. Basile's extension or elaboration of Boccaccio's work was in translating the oral tradition of the "folk" into print. Armando Maggi argues that "Basile is unquestionably the creator of a literary storytelling that strives to maintain an essentially oral appearance" (*Preserving* 29). He is not alone in positioning Basile as a "creator" or a "first."¹⁷ This positioning as both a founder of the literary fairy tale and

¹⁷ See Bettelheim's "Foreword" in Brackert and Sander, and Jones and Schacker.

cultural and literary successor following the Medieval tradition undergirds scholars' acknowledgement of his text as an early precursor for "classic" fairy tales, including *Snow White*. With Basile then, the spoken (folkloric) text gives way to the oft-conceived more credible *literary* form, granting the *Pentamerone*, and within it, "The Young Slave," a sense of worthiness as a "classic," essential to the fairy tale canon. Yet, these folkloric, stylistic, and cultural elements do not stand for or readily adapt to all publics and societies.

Although Basile's text resounds in a scholarly canon, it is more or less unknown popularly. While Jack Zipes gestures toward the reasons why Basile's tales may have reached this type of audience in his day—attending to issues concerning the "corruption in the courts" and vying for "the country folk [...] and their need and drive for change and the acquisition of better living conditions"—the "social and political problems depicted in their tales" lost their relevance for a modern audience (*Fairy Tales* 18, 27). In essence, the tales only remained truly alive for a wider audience, so long as they maintained cultural currency. Because the issues they present are largely demonstrative of the societal problems of Italy in Basile's day, these tales are marked by their time and not easily transposed into suitably modern issues. Another reason for this disconnect and fall from favor in a wider market is the manner in which the audience is addressed. As Marina Warner notes, of both the works of Basile and his earlier contemporary, Straparolla,

their adult material flows through baroque, sophisticated, yet demotic prose, packed with fanciful imagery and proverbial turns of phrase; mandarin ironies, high-flown emotions fuse with crude jokes and japes to create a hybrid text where

preposterous entertainment meets lacerating cynicism about humankind. (51)

Given these qualities, there is something for the modern academic audience as well as the wider public audience of Basile's day to appreciate. However, as the fairy tale tradition transformed into one which would be absorbed by not only a range of adults, but a cross-population of adult and child readership, these (graphic, bawdy, and sometimes lewd) tales, generated for a more sophisticated imagination, failed to prove adaptive. Where the folkloric, stylistic, literary, and cultural significance of Basile's "The Young Slave" give it credence as a significant precursor to the *Snow White* tradition, enabling one to see how and why it fits in this context, its inflexibility toward adaptation limits its modern-day reach. Thus, having investigated these multiple layers or attributes informing the tale, I argue that one can more readily position Basile's version in the *Snow White* tradition and see why it has not been recognized as *the* precursory or "classic" *Snow White*.

2. J.K. Musäus' "Richilda"¹⁸

Turning toward J.K. Musäus' "Richilda," one finds a stronger *Snow White* precursor, in part because of the way this version helps to position the most influential successor to the Italians, the Grimms.¹⁹ Because it contains most of the episodic actions that Jones views as contributing to a tale's folkloric credence within the *Snow White* tradition and is enveloped by those negative attributes of vanity and jealousy, this "tale"

¹⁸ In the following analysis of this primary text, "Richilda" is cited, rather than Musäus. Per David Blamire's *Telling Tales*, "Musäus made his entry into English anonymously. Neither his name nor that of the translator appears on the title page of *Popular Tales of the Germans* (London: John Murray, 1791)" (54). This same translated edition has been utilized for this project, as well.

¹⁹ If we were speaking of another tale, the next in this lineage would be Perrault. However, because Perrault did not pen a *Snow White* tale, the Grimms are recognized as the next (and indeed most) significant precursor. In *Preserving the Spell*, Armando Maggi recognizes this commonly referenced fairy tale lineage moving from Basile to Perrault to the Grimms.

matches up to the Grimms' version far more successfully than Basile's. However, guided by what I would call a faulty sense of folkloric positioning (wherein a successor's tale appears to influence its precursor), audiences might be inclined toward terming "Richilda" more "traditional" or "authentic" because it most closely represents what is thought to be a perfectly inclusive version of the tale, the Grimms'. In reality, Musäus' version, as an earlier *Snow White* precursor, likely informed the Grimms' work. However, Jones' model (a structure most effectively mapped onto the Grimms' tale), as well as the greater population's perception of "the classic" positions folkloric authority with the Grimms first. Therefore, one necessarily inspects this tale further in its connections to or departures from the Grimms' version.

Although "Richilda" offers the tale of that self-same, jealous Countess and begins with *her* origin, as opposed to that of the Snow White figure, Blanca, the story of Blanca's origin (birthed by a "good" mother, is also contained therein). When Blanca comes of age, the Countess becomes aware of the burgeoning beauty by way of her inquiries (concerning the fairest) directed toward a mirror which offers images in response. Immediately jealousy and hatred mingle, pushing Richilda toward three murderous attempts, assisted by the concoctions of Sambul, the Court Physician. Each time, these prove unsuccessful, though thinking her dead, Blanca's caretakers, the dwarves, place her inside a coffin with a "glass window in the top" (46). After the third instance, Blanca finally wakes to a young knight, Godfrey, who poses as a "Knight of the Tomb" and potential suitor in Richilda's court, to trick the vain Countess and seek vengeance (61). He is successful; by way of a story concerning the "murderous jealousy

of an unnatural mother,” he entreats Richilda to prescribe her own punishment, “to open the bridal dance [(at the marriage she mistakenly believes will be her own)] [...] in red hot iron shoes” (70). This punishment is executed at the wedding of the two young lovers, who at last “live as happy as Adam and Eve in paradise” (73). Despite the framing of the novelette, in its emphasis on the jealous Countess and the satiric tone throughout, a reader finds within nearly all of Jones’ episodes in their appropriate order (origin, jealousy, renewed jealousy, death, exhibition, resuscitation, and resolution). Only the third and fourth episodes, expulsion and adoption, occur out of their proper places.²⁰ That said, in the remainder of the tale’s structure, as well as its preoccupation with jealousy, one finds a version which fulfills many of the necessary folkloric requirements *and* very closely resembles the Grimms’.

Beyond the tale’s nearly seamless formal folkloric classification then, “Richilda” serves as proof, of a kind, to the Grimms’ assertions that “Snow White was one of the best-known folktales at their time” (Kawan 332). It was a tale that clearly belonged to an oral (as well as literary) tradition, per Kawan’s findings of emergent versions in primarily in Germany and Russia (341). While the locale of the tales (prominent in both Germany and Russia) might be viewed as problematic here, the similarities between “Richilda” and the Grimms’ “Sneewittchen” display the intents to salvage what was conceived to be a disappearing art form, and to create a collection of “traditional oral tales before they disappeared in the face of increasing literacy” (*Telling Tales* 147). Both of these authors

²⁰ Richilda has no need to rid herself of Blanca’s presence because she does not become aware of the beauty until later in life. While these episodes (expulsion and adoption) do exist, they are executed by Blanca’s father, who, choosing to marry Richilda, divorces Blanca’s “good mother” and puts both under the care of others.

do so, Musäus in his *Volksmärchen der Deutschen*, and the Grimms' in their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales). However, these versions assume vastly different forms, and, as a result, speak to different audiences. This, I argue, is part of the reason that both versions remain critically relevant *Snow White* precursors, yet it also eliminates "Richilda's" opportunity to be viewed as a "classic" in the way that the Grimms' version is understood.

Even though "Richilda" stands as representative of cultural character, its novelette form restricts its ability to be positioned a classic *Snow White* fairy tale variant in the way that the Grimms' "Sneewittchen" or even Basile's "The Young Slave" are considered to be. Blamires points to the "misleading" nature of the title of the larger work even [*Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (Folktales of the Germans)], "since what Musäus wrote were decidedly literary tales, more like short novels or romances in terms of length, rational and satirical in tone, minimizing or excising everything to do with magic or the supernatural" (*Telling Tales* 52). In sorting out this difference concerning literary form and of folk narrative versus fairy tale specifically, Andrew Teverson uses Steven Swann Jones' taxonomy of folk narratives, wherein "the fairy tale, like other folk narratives, employs 'ordinary protagonists to address issues of everyday life'" (Jones qtd. in Teverson 29). By this definition, Musäus has indeed still produced a folk narrative and fairy tale. However, in its "realistic setting" with its "specified time and place," Teverson's definitions position the tale closer to Blamires', where the narrative would be understood as a novelle or novelette (Teverson 28).

This literary distinction or division of “Richilda” from the fairy tale form extends still further, into the work’s failure to “*depict magical or marvellous events or phenomena as a valid part of human experience*” (Jones qtd. in Teverson 29). There is no miraculous conception by which the beautiful Blanca (Snow White) comes to be. Further, Richilda’s (the step-mother’s) mirror is a work of alchemy—part scientific and part religious—which will “represent every thing concerning which [she] enquire[s] in distinct speaking images” (“Richilda” 10). Despite the phrasing here, the images *alone* speak for themselves. In other words, the mirror does not respond through spoken language, but through silent images. Although images other than Richilda, herself, appear in the mirror, at times, the magical or marvelous quality of a mirror that responds verbally is absent. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, when the Countess intends to do away with Blanca, she does not employ witchcraft, but consults Sambul, the court physician to generate poisons for her. Ronald Murphy finds that through this exchange, of “turning [Blanca’s] apparent death into a medically induced sleep, Musäus makes the moment of crisis in the narrative fully responsive to reason and avoids any real need for supernatural agency to overcome death” (115). Here especially, it is not an insignificant component of the tale where the magic has been minimized. It is the crux of the tale. Logic and rationale displace the marvelous in each of these ways, thereby further distinguishing “Richilda” from the fairy tales of Basile and the Grimms. Where the magical or marvelous can be found in both Basile’s and the Grimms texts—in their miraculous births, growing caskets, talking dolls and mirrors, and witchcraft—Musäus narrative tones down or mutes these elements entirely.

Other portions of the tale are also rationalized, but with a more satirical slant. For example, there is an extended bit of narration about the fickleness of men's romantic passions, which are described as a medical affectation of royal inbreeding. Here, Musäus takes pains to describe a man's conscience "as delicate, sore, and ticklish, as the membrane called the *periosteum*, where the slightest scratch occasions violent pain and fever" ("Richilda" 34). The narrative then continues to describe how although most fail to recognize their true and "moral" passions which their "conscience" directs them toward, these can be awakened, as depicted through the Earl Gombald when he becomes aware of the Countess, Richilda's love for him ("Richilda" 35, 34). This medical rationale both provides and pokes fun at the reasons for which men of "high esteem" might seek divorces from their current spouses ("Richilda" 34).

Gendered relations are not the only subject of Musäus' satire, so too are appearances of religion unhinged. At the start of the narrative, the Count of Brabant is referenced as one of "exemplary piety," a "saint" even ("Richilda" 1). "The castle where he kept his court had every appearance of a monastery," and "The Count never missed mass" ("Richilda" 1, 2). The appearance of the Count's piety consumes almost the first two pages of the text, before it is markedly distinguished from his wife's vanity. The overblown description of visible displays constituting religious piety along with Musäus' lingering on the language of these appearances makes the notion of apparent religious fervor almost laughable.

A range of elements are impacted by these satirical moments in the tale, limiting its connections to the fairy tale form as well as its viability as a standing "classic"

precursor for broader consumption. The formal structure or length no longer bespeaks the compressed structure of a fairy tale, given these extended descriptions and detail. The characterization, as well, becomes more concrete, in opposition to the flat “one-dimensional” quality which fairy tale figures typically assume (Teverson 33). The elevated use of language, faux-medical diagnoses of supposed conditions, and ridicule of religion and piety indicate that this is not a tale for all audiences. Blamires likewise suggests that as an “allusive writer” Musäus’ full meaning might only be captured by intellectuals, the local color and flavor of his work missed or literally missing (due to translators’ choices when extracting material) (*Telling Tales* 54). In fact, as a tale that ironically situates gendered and social impulses, inasmuch as it punishes its central figure for her vice of vanity, it could be viewed as dangerous in its own latent moralizing. Because of its development and expansion concerning this host of themes, there is less of a lesson in civility and behavior and more to cause one to begin to question characters’ motivations, as well as the social institutions which informed them. While these stylistic elements of the narrative can be appreciated by scholarly and adult audiences, they have not contributed to the production of a tale that might be easily told and retold.

Still, what the tale does productively and innovatively offer to the tradition (in addition to structurally representing the folk version, per the Brothers Grimm) is an adaptation which focuses less on the persecuted heroine and more strongly on her opponent, the Countess. Aside from the brief mention of her birth, Blanca has no place in the narrative until more than half-way through. The emphasis instead, has been placed on the vanity and subsequent villainy of the Countess. Even as the narrative moves

forward, Blanca is no more than a chess piece, moved in and out of death, and finally into marriage. Richilda's thoughts, feelings, and emotional responses take center stage. In some ways, she is, at last, the fallen heroine of the narrative. It is this alternate perspective that gives still greater credence to considerations of Musäus text as essential to the *Snow White* tradition.

From the 1970s and onward, as greater numbers of fairy tale studies began to appear, many adaptations and variations of the "classics" were simultaneously being penned, revising the molds of early "classic" tales based on more contemporary ideas and values. This moment, in the late-twentieth century, likewise saw a rise in feminism and feminist activity. As a result, fairy tale adaptations endeavored to re-create or significantly revise negative images of female figures, or, at the very least rationalize their negative attributes through their revisionary work.²¹ With the production of such revisions [many of which took a longer (novelette-like) form], continuing to recognize and attend to a *Snow White* precursor that functioned in much the same way proves meaningful. It shows that modification is possible, even while maintaining a tie to the folk and fairy tale traditions. In other words, I find that Basile's and Musäus' tales help to remind readers that while connections to a folkloric past are pertinent, the fairy tale itself may assume (and *has*, in fact, assumed) a variety of shapes and contexts. Yet even as both create a platform for alternative adaptations, they nonetheless position the Grimms' tale as *the* "classic" version of *Snow White*.

²¹ In her "Snow White" preface in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, Maria Tatar recognizes also the influence of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's feminist critique of 'Snow White and Her Wicked Stepmother' in their "landmark" study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

3. *The Grimms' Renowned "Classic": "Sneewittchen" ("Little Snow White")*

In some sense, a new moment in folklore and fairy tale began with the collections of the Grimms. In "What did the Grimm Brothers Give to and Take from the Folk?", Linda Dégh describes the trajectory of the scholarly study of folklore, its starting point being with "materials edited and formulated in the service of nationalistic ambitions²² from both literary and oral sources" (66). This is precisely the type of folkloric project for which the Grimms employed their scholarly faculties, recognizing a need for this sort of collection, both as academics and national subjects. In *German Fairy Tales: Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm and Others*, Helmut Brackert describes the late eighteenth century as

a time when the German nation was divided into more than a hundred small and miniscule independent principalities (a Germany both politically and militarily powerless in the face of the growing threat of Napoleon's France), [and one in which] any such reminder of a common German heritage, of a nation and culture once united served to spur on the popular will to resist. (xvii-xviii)

This political climate not only urged the collection and development of the nation's folklore but made way for the Grimms' work to be recognized and appreciated.

Moreover, "the Romantic movement had stimulated an interest in the German past" (Bettelheim x). Thus, when the Grimms set about their task, they were readily assessing and speaking to their cultural moment in terms of the political dynamic *and* the scholarly milieu. In so doing, they created an initial standard for the study of folklore ("What did the Grimms" 68).

²² In "Three Transformations of Snow White," Kay Stone cites Alan Dundes' "Nationalistic Inferiority Complexes and the Fabrication of Fakelore"—where it is "suggest[ed] that countries with a weak sense of nationhood, like Germany in the early nineteenth century, sometimes produced a consciously composed literature deliberately passed on as genuine 'folklore'"—to show how the Grimms' impulses of "romantic nationalism" inspired their "unique genre" (57).

The introduction to their first volume, published in 1812, overtly displays their “respect for the German past” and their interest in preserving tales from a host of informants, “to try to retell these ancient tales the way they had been told and retold in the past” (Bettelheim *x*). Their endeavor was not that of earlier authors of the literary fairy tale who “changed [it] beyond recognition” or “trivialized and adapted [it] to what was the current style of polite literature” (Bettelheim *x*).²³ Instead, they were interested in using a literary means to reproduce an oral form.

Although the Grimms are often recognized first as scholars, experts devoted to the field of folkloric study, based on their detailed annotations which provide insights into their processes of collection,²⁴ we must also recognize their genuine cultural acuity. It is this attribute which combined with their intellect to inform their artistry. The Grimms’ scholarly folkloric and literary project was situated perfectly “within the nineteenth-century romantic milieu [where] a new ‘folk’ tone was attributed to the *Marchen*, [and] its rustic simplicity was highlighted and viewed as a survival of ancient poetry preserved by the lower classes” (“What did the Grimm” 68). By examining the Grimms’ initial collection, interpretation, and literary formulation of their *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* in light of this moment, one finds that they operated in a means true to the standards of a *kind of* folkloric study. At the time, “Scholarly recording of oral tales from the folk meant notation of a skeleton content of stories judged to be genuine” or more “plot

²³ For Bettelheim, Musäus too fell into this group, with his *Volksmarchen der Deutschen* (1782-87).

²⁴ In “A Workshop of Editorial Practice: The Grimms’ Kinder- und Hausmarchen,” David Blamires offers, “The notes they [(the Grimms’)] added to the printed texts from the first volume of the first edition onwards indicate their continuing concern to place what they collected from oral sources within as comprehensive a framework as possible” (74).

summaries” than “verbatim records of an orally performed tale” (“What did the Grimm” 70; “*Workshop*” 75). Blamires also equates the revisionary or editorial process of addressing “variant versions” with the scholarly treatment of Medieval texts, where “Scholars attempted to reconstruct the original form of a work on the basis of a comparison of extant versions varying in date, dialect, substance, vocabulary, [etc.] [...] [to create a] ‘critical text’” (“*Workshop*” 79). In writing a work primarily of scholarship, the Grimms’ process was systematic. The notes throughout their editions serve as a testament to this diligence. Yet, at the same time, they artfully crafted a “composite text,” utilizing the variant with the most “coherent plot structure” as a base and mapping on details from other variants, in addition to “proverbs, traditional verses and folk customs” (“*Workshop*” 79). Throughout this “editorial process,” as Blamires terms it, the most persistent “artistic form of the *Märchen*” was created, that “distinctive short narrative genre” with which readers are familiar with today (“*Workshop*” 82; “What did the Grimm” 69). Thus, in developing their nation’s folklore, the Grimms negotiated a careful balance between authentically re-presenting collected materials and deploying the nuance and artful acumen to re-imagine those tales in their truest and most impressionable form.

By way of the system of collecting and editing referenced above, one might imagine the Grimms to have utilized Musäus “Richilda” to serve as the structural core of “Sneewittchen” (“Little Snow White”). Given that the Grimms’ were likely familiar with Musäus work, I offer this as a plausible possibility, but not a certainty or matter of fact. That said, as mentioned previously in the discussion concerning Richilda’s folkloric

alliance, the narrative structure of this novelette closely aligns with the Grimms' tale. Further, it provided sufficient detail to either expand upon or transform, based on other variations. Because of its highly-developed narrative (not really a tale at all), it would have enabled the Grimms to compare its elements to other collected materials, selectively choosing which details and characters warranted greater significance, both for the veracity and further telling of the tale. In short, it would have provided the bases for the stylistic fashioning that the Grimms' proved themselves so highly capable of, an attribute which served to further benefit their tale's passing and final status as a "classic."

With their title alone, "Little Snow White," the Grimms embraced the larger *Snow White* tradition by returning the focus of the tale to Basile's persecuted heroine. The innocence of the young heroine is emphasized both through the use of color (white) and the diminutive adjective, "Little." It is that innocence which needed to be recalled and striven for, particularly as the tale would be directed toward an audience of child and adult readership (a point that I will later discuss in further detail). Where adult readers might empathize with the elder female character's indignation, as her beauty is surpassed, this quality of character is by no means the ideal that should be emphasized for young girls. Therefore, the focal point required a shift from that of Musäus' "Richilda."

As Snow White reclaimed center stage in the tale, the Grimms strove to make her memorable. The description of "a little girl who was white as snow, red as blood, and black as ebony," precedes a reader's or listener's introduction to Snow White (Grimm 249-250). However, this is not the first reference to her coloring. Her mother, wishes for "a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window

frame” where she sits, sewing (Grimm 249). And even before the wish, the color contrast is brought to the reader/listener’s attention, as the mother is imagined to be looking out “a window with an ebony frame” onto the winter scene, “when snowflakes the size of feathers were falling from the sky,” and “three drops of blood” from her freshly pricked finger “fell onto the snow” (Grimm 249). Thus, the Grimms set the stage for reminiscences of Snow White by drawing the young heroine’s appearance to the forefront, placing it in distinct colored terms, and repeating those terms again, and again, and again.

By the time the second female figure comes onto the scene, before any mention has been made of her desire to reign supreme in beauty, the beauty of the former has been established and the emphasis on this young beauty will not be forgotten as the narrative moves forward. Her coloring is later recalled in the composition of the poisoned apple “white with red cheeks,” and holding the promise of death or blackness. Still again, the colors are cackled “laughing[ly]” by the queen after Snow White’s fateful bite, “White as snow, red as blood, black as ebony!” (Grimm 258). The beauty of the coloring is ridiculed, brought low by the queen’s poisoned treat. Still, even in death, the young woman “looked just as if she were sleeping, for she was still white as snow, red as blood, and had hair black as ebony” (Grimm 260). Although she has so little voice in the tale, the *image* of “little snow white” is imagined and consistently recalled so as to ensure that her tale would be retold. Roger Sale argues that “The fears and wishes themselves are never extraordinary, but what animates a good tale and distinguishes it from other similar ones is a precision about them” (38). It is in this “precision”—distinguishing the

particular quality of this character's beauty through the repetition of adjectives, coloring her appearance—within which both the fears and wishes of the queen mingle. And it is this same precision which marks the attributes that audiences would continue to seek out in (Little) Snow White. As a result, it is this particular representation which would become the *Snow White* most persistently recollected in a reader's and future artist's imagination.

In contrast to the Grimm's emphatically defined beauty, figured in terms of sharp contrasts in color more clearly depicted for the imaginative eye, Basile's "Young Slave," Lisa, is imagined first as "a beauteous woman-child, her face like a moon in her fourteenth night," later a "charming creature," and finally "as beautiful as a goddess" (Basile 206, 208, 210). That Lisa is beautiful is clear, but what beautiful means or looks like, is left to the reader's imagination. While this might not appear problematic, the lack of specificity and consistency between descriptions of beauty makes the young beauty herself forgettable in a way that Grimms' details do not allow.

Similarly, in Musäus' "Richilda," vague descriptions of Blanca's appearance emphasize instead her angelic quality, finding her "beautiful as one of the Graces, full of softness and innocence, the most lovely of female angels" in the first description of her physical beauty (42). When further concrete physical characteristics are named, the young heroine is either dying or returning to life, again drawing her nearer to that angelic representation. After the first murderous attempt, "her rosy cheeks grew pale, every limb of her delicate frame quivered, [...] her fair eyes became dim ("Richilda" 46). After the third attempt, Blanca "closed her azure eyes," and later when her "prince" or knight

encountered her, “Godfrey was charmed at the sight of the beautiful alabaster statue through the glass window in the coffin” (“Richilda” 54, 61). Once she awakens, her “pale cheeks were tinged with a gentle red, the withered lips began to glow again” (“Richilda” 55). Although these scant descriptions of Blanca’s physical beauty leave ample room for the imagination, there are enough markers to hint at the coloring which the Grimms later embellish, beyond the “gentle red” of “rosy cheeks” and “alabaster” skin (“Richilda” 55, 46, 61). The angelic nature of this figure, as well, might have lent to the Grimms’ later moralizing depiction of the image of goodness or innocence set in opposition to evil or darkness. Through these details, one can detect the Grimms’ potential folkloric borrowing and refiguring of Musäus’ version (and potentially others) according to their own artistry. Still, as with Basile’s version, there are no resonant characteristics of Blanca’s beauty. She is angelic, but otherwise indistinct and unmemorable. The beauty of the Grimms’ young heroine, on the other hand is colored and shaped so as not to be forgotten.

Other formal elements of the Grimms’ tale similarly illustrate such creative, yet meaningful alterations, lending to ease of repetition. Hilda Ellis Davidson and Anna Chaudhri argue: “Rhythms and patterns are established, for example the use of the number three, the balance between the number of adversaries and helpers, the use of stock phrases and characters. These devices all ensure ease of transmission, whether in writing or by word of mouth” (2-3). Such patterning utilized in the Grimms’ “Sneewittchen” then is significant to the tale’s continuation. Therefore, along with the emphasis on color, the Grimms’ meaningfully employed the number three. Snow White

herself is manifested through three colors and by means of her mother's wish when she "pricked her finger with a needle" and "*Three* drops of blood fell onto the snow" (Grimm 249; emphasis added). The beauty of the colors together, represented first through the "blood," "snow," and "ebony frame" form the part natural, part man-made, pure and perfect beauty of Snow White (Grimm 249). The dark mother or "wicked stepmother" then tempts and apparently murders Snow White *three* times (Grimm 260). A strand of Christianity runs through the tale by means of this number and those tests of the pure, innocent beauty. The use of three, particularly in the case of the queen's villainy was emphasized in earlier versions, including "Richilda." However, its repeated usage throughout the Grimms' tale promotes retelling, as it embeds the detail into the listener's imagination. Tying this repetition to Christian themes also generates a relatable feature for a reader.²⁵ By framing the tale in structures that are easily recognizable and retold, the tale once again secures the means to extend its own longevity.

Importantly though, the tale's continuity is as much tied to the details that are present as those which are absent. The tales that the Grimms produced were timeless, literally holding themselves apart from any particular time. Rather than beginning with a set time frame or locale, they often began with mention of a season or the key (though nameless) figures of the tale, referenced only by occupation. The Grimms begin their

²⁵ Although I have emphasized the Christian symbolism of the number three, it is useful to recognize that this number held spiritual significance in ancient Babylon and Egypt, as well as Greek, Nordic, Roman, Celtic, Hindu, and even Islamic traditions. [See "Number symbolism" in *Britannica Academic* and "Interpretation of Numbers" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*.] Further, in German folklore, superstitions regarding protection centered around the number three (*Britannica Academic*). While the Grimms may or may not have devised Snow White's coloring with these protective aims in mind, the spiritual significance of the number three across cultures and traditions likely contributed to the tale's persistence in equal measure to its earlier mentioned usage as a property of storytelling.

Snow White tale, “Once upon a time in the middle of winter, when snowflakes the size of feathers were falling from the sky” (Grimm 249). Outside of the seasonal individuation, this tale could happen at almost any time, in almost any place. According to Donald Haase, another “absence” to consider is that “of an identifiable narrator” (“Response” 238). This, as well, presents the reader with a role in “the re-creative process,” wherein he/she is “made responsible for concretizing the characterizations, settings, motivations, and valuations that the text itself *has not* specified” (238; emphasis added). By using significant absences to enable the readerly re-creation of a tale, the Grimms composed an adapted tale (from oral and literary precursors) that was likewise readily adaptable for future generations and audiences.

One might contend that the Grimms’ placelessness is not unlike Basile’s “In days of yore and in times long gone before...” that begins “The Young Slave” (Basile 206). However, the difference lies in Basile’s positioning of these figures with individual names. Although these characters are by no means fully fleshed out, they are particularized to an extent. They are *not* anonymous and therefore not so easily adapted to a current reader. Further, the element of enslavement generates a link to a particular cultural moment(s). Modern society and culture could easily deem the narrative unacceptable or offensive on these grounds, finding the narrative core ill-fitting to the time.

While the same is not entirely true for “Richilda,” the novelette’s beginning, “During the time of the Crusades,” does establish a clear time, space, and context for the tale (“Richilda” 1). As such, there is not the sense that it could belong to anyone from

any time. Further, as previously noted, Blamires has argued that its particular reflection of German customs fails to be captured by *every* audience (*Telling Tales* 54). Thus, the tale's ready application for a far-removed reader or teller (by nation, culture, or generation) becomes limited. The work is set at a distance from his or her own life and cultural context and therefore cannot easily be repositioned or adapted to the needs of subsequent generations. In contrast, the Grimms' tale, with its broadened sense of setting, merely requires a similar framing of gendered relations and conceptions of life cycle.

Because the patriarchal model of gendered relations has continued to prove a dominant social construct in Western society, and the significant stages of growth within a woman's life (puberty, marriage, and childbirth) under this model are addressed and in some ways reconciled, the tale itself persists and remains ripe for retelling. Jones suggests,

Presumably the purpose of this patterning of the folktale [with 'three significant stages in the growth of the child into a woman'] is that it attempts to assist the heroine in her passage through these major life changes by providing her with psychological, sociological, and philosophical instruction along the way. By tracing and anticipating her journey, the folktale serves as a guide and model for the young woman. ("The Structure of 'Snow White'" 178)

Through its development of this theme, the tale is retold both as a means of encouraging and discouraging certain types of behavior or characteristics within a young woman.

Just as the details (alternately sharpened or intentionally vague) and themes prove significant to the retelling, so too does the length. In fact, this element might either contribute to or detract from the aforementioned means of ensuring a tale's continuation. The Grimms' "Sneewittchen," returns to the simpler, storytelling mode of Basile, but

tightens the narrative structure still further. As such, the significantly compressed plot of the fairy tale maintains an equitable balance of memorable details and gaps for improvisational performance (of the reader or teller). Through repetition and emphasis on a small number of key figures in the tale, easily distinguished through their flat characterization, the reader recalls each of the central folkloric actions of the Grimms' tale (per Jones' model). With the iteration and reiteration of "beautiful" coloring at the tale's start, a reader easily recalls the (good) mother's almost magical creation of the young heroine, Little Snow White. The bad mother is then introduced, and the magic mirror, which she repeatedly addresses, makes her vanity memorable. After the huntsman fools her, with the feigned murder of Snow White, the young girl escapes to the company of the dwarfs. Through consultations with her mirror, the bad mother re-enters in her persistent murderous attempts (three, to be exact), matching her folkloric precursors. Finally, Snow White appears dead, but is re-awakened under the care of a prince, only to be married to him and see her bad mother appropriately punished. The good mother, the huntsman, and the prince have relatively small roles at the start and close of the text (though they do, of course, influence episodic action). Outside of these, if the dwarfs are considered a group, one is looking toward three major figures—the good, the evil, and the helpers. Pared down still further, it is a tale which sets a model female figure against her anti-type. Thus, the limitation on length also significantly contributes to the tale's emphasis on particular characters, details, and themes, simplifying (in some respects), to ensure transmission.

“Richilda,” on the other hand, while drawing upon folklore, is more a novelette and less a tale. As such, its details and embellishments are significant. As earlier argued, its art springs forth from its bitingly ironic treatments of the false appearances of religious piety, love, and gendered failings. Without that artful elaboration, the narrative loses something, but *with them*, the performance of retelling, while remaining true to that particular version as it has been told, becomes complex. “Richilda” does not lend itself to improvisational variation, or the performative act of storytelling because it depicts its plot and characters in a particularly contrived construct, and the longer form allows for this.

Yet the Grimms’ success in their work was not singularly scholarly (based in the study of folklore), cultural, or artful in a formal or stylistic sense. Although the Grimms’ project began in the veins of scholarship and nationalism, their work and art transformed over time. They honed their craft, adapting to cultural changes and societal needs, the most pertinent being educative. While their initial impulse may have been to create a collection of “traditional tales before they disappeared in the face of increasing literacy,” the fact remains that six subsequent editions were produced with “stylistic and verbal changes,” Blamires argues, a move “calculated to appeal to a child readership” (*Telling Tales* 148; “A Workshop” 81).²⁶ Yet Blamires also suggests that this “editorial” process signals the Grimms’ commitment to scholarship, wherein they compared and combined multiple versions in attempt to “reconstruct the original form of a work” (“A Workshop” 79). While this may have been part of the reason for editorial changes to subsequent

²⁶ While editorial changes were made toward an educative purpose, the ordering of tales does not seem significant in contributing to such changes.

editions, one should also recognize Warner's point that "Wilhelm began altering other stories because they were off-colour by the standards of the day" (60). In other words, scholarly principle combined with and perhaps was even overrun by the adaptive necessity to editorialize. Only these types of revisions would allow the Grimms' stories to be heard based on the context of their changing society. Specific revisions to their tales highlight this new focus on child readers.

For example, one of the tale's central characters did not even exist in the Grimms' 1812 manuscript version. Blamires importantly notes, "Not until the 1819 edition do we get the figure of the wicked stepmother; up to that point it was Snow White's own mother who was her jealous persecutor" ("*A Workshop*" 78). This initial version, however, lacked moral definition; it presupposed that the offspring of both mother and anti-mother might evolve into the same female type. In this framework, the model and her antithesis do not act in opposition but are one and the same.

Another significant change from the manuscript to printed version involved how Snow White was discovered. Initially, "Snow White's own father [...] finds her supposed corpse in the glass coffin when he returns from abroad" ("*A Workshop*" 78). Subsequently, doctors bring her back to life, and she is "married to a handsome prince" ("*A Workshop*" 78). However, by the time the 1812 version was printed, Snow White is "given to a prince who has fallen in love with her beauty" ("*A Workshop*" 78). While the first version reads much more to the tune of folklore, with natural (non-magical or marvelous) intervention, but that of a doctor, in the latter version, Snow White's recovery depends upon her somewhat magical or entrancing quality of beauty. This quality finally

brings her into acquaintance with a prince and enables the scene where a servant stumbles, when carrying the coffin, serendipitously bringing her back to life. Warner argues that in the nineteenth century, with the rise of printing technology, “The fairy way of writing, packaged and pictured for younger readers, became a model of communicating moral values, political dreams, and even scientific knowledge,” and importantly, “Fairy tales settled into the canon of childhood education” (Warner 108). Specifically, as these intents related to the Grimms work, Maria Tatar contends, “[the Grimms] were part of a tendency that had become a trend by the early nineteenth century. [...] [Their tales] appeared in print just when folktales were moving out of barns and spinning rooms and into the nursery” (*Hard Facts* 21). And, “ever responsive to the values of their time and increasingly sensitive to pedagogical demands, [they] transformed adult folk materials into a hybrid form of folklore and literature for children” (*Hard Facts* xxii).²⁷ Significantly, the Grimms could not have generated such adaptations if not for their initial interest in capturing oral versions of a tale. It was this folkloric interest, paired with their own artistry, and keen awareness of the ways in which print culture was evolving that enabled them to adapt and speak to a dual audience—one vested in scholarship and a second, developing audience of child readership (which necessarily included the parents of those child readers).

Being attuned to new versions and translations of even their own tales, the Grimms in some respects editorialized to pander to this developing audience. Tatar

²⁷ In recognizing these trends and the Grimms’ interest in appealing to them, I do not mean to suggest that the Grimms were responsible for the shift into the nursery. Rather, they became engaged in the broader movement which imagined this collection for a new audience and purpose.

makes note of the Grimms' admission (in the preface to the second edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*) to compromising tales with deletions of "every phrase unsuitable for children" such that "their collection could serve as a 'manual of manners'" (*Hard Facts* 19). No longer intent on reproducing the purest version of a tale, the Grimms' subsequent editions were devised to meet the evolving needs and demands of new populations of literary stakeholders, parents and children. "Printing technology" propelled these groups, according to Warner, and they in turn propelled the industry, which "would soon make books with pictures one of the most exciting and successful ventures of the nineteenth century" (105). In fact, playing off of one of the most popular illustrated translations, Edgar Taylor's 1923 British translation of the Grimms, "Wilhelm Grimm put together fifty of the best known stories—more or less what became the classic canon of texts" into a "single, low-priced volume" (*Hard Facts* 19-20). I agree with Tatar that this does not necessarily indicate "that the Grimms were rank opportunists"; instead, it shows that they were dually academics and artists who used the full range of their assets to keep a pulse on their cultural moment, adapting their practice as the time called for them to (*Hard Facts* 21).

Conclusion

And so, unsurprisingly, the fact remains that even those critical studies which appear to offer a more detailed classification or broader scope of the *Snow White* tale's history resolve with a compulsory emphasis on the Grimms. If we return to Kawan's study of the interrelationships between *Snow White* variants, it becomes clear that insofar

as she demonstrates how oral culture may have influenced printed versions of the tale, through her emphasis on absences or gaps in these potential early variants, she also intentionally or unintentionally guides her audience toward the fullest, and most authentic representation of the tale—that of the Grimms. Although she recognizes “six widely independent versions (or eleven, if we count the Grimms’ variant material instead of their published tale[s]), [that] emerged in about half a century, from 1782 to 1833, in Germany and Russia,” this only further establishes the Grimms’ version(s) as foundational in that these comprised half, or nearly half, of those in circulation. Germany was the primary location of this tale, her study seems to say, and the Grimms were the “original” creators. Further, she goes on to laud their reputation for having crafted what has “now [been] firmly established as the quintessential version of *Snow White*, [...] the object of countless reinterpretations” (Kawan 341). Thus, rather than an inclusive history or acknowledgment of how the process of oral storytelling makes and remakes a particular tale, this study seems to narrow the lens of the literary fairy tale, in some ways devaluing the competing voices of which it had been composed.

Kawan is not the first to pay this sort of homage to the Grimms’ tale. Others have recognized the Grimms as having generated the “truest” version based on circulating oral narratives.²⁸ I highlight her study in particular because of its contemporaneity, demonstrating that this view of the Grimms’ prominence is still difficult to counter or revise. Moreover, I find it interesting that the study proposes a history of the *Snow White*

²⁸ See Bettelheim’s “Foreword” in Brackert and Sander; Dégh’s “What did the Grimm Brothers Give to and Take from the Folk?”; and Blamires, *Telling Tales: The Impact of Germany on English Children’s Books 1780-1918*

tale *and* at the same time seems oppositional to providing such a lineage. Because she disputes so many probable precursors in the name of a “correct” or “full” version (or, one might say, *the* “authentic” version), her literary history seems to venerate the Grimms’ version as foundational. Relatedly, this chapter has emphasized a similarly oppositional folkloric, historical, and literary lineage. This one allows for Basile’s and Musäus’ tales, but only to a point—a scholarly point, that is.

What gives Basile’s and Musäus’ tales power to survive alongside the Grimms’ is their folkloric positioning, formal stylistic elements, and cultural consciousness. However, the Grimms prevailed upon the work of their precursors by adapting folklore to print culture in a way that Basile, in his time, could not have, and Musäus did not endeavor to. It was not only the adaptation of the form, but the adaptation to engage the once upon a time told, now written, story in education and childhood entertainment.

In sum, the Grimms’ influence was contingent upon their evolving adaptation to a transforming society. Consider again the conditions under which these tales were produced. That which was understood to be “genuine” or “authentic” folklore, the Grimms gathered. That which Germanic culture had asked for, the Grimms produced. The Grimms were not married to their initial volume, but flexible enough to adapt to the tastes of print culture and assume a style that would match the needs of a larger, adult and child audience. The many revisions of their volumes, and of the *Snow White* tale specifically, are indicative of this quality. In essence, what their world asked of them, the Grimms readily gave.

The conditions under which Disney generated his first full-length feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, were not altogether different, as I will show in Chapter 4. As the Grimms had, Disney rose to meet the needs of his time with a unique representation of the fairy tale, one that had not forgotten its folkloric foundation, but transformed it with technology to reach the masses in a new way—both artistically and formally speaking. Further, he did so during a time when America was much in need of the rejuvenating power which fairy tale provides. Although others had paved the way for Disney’s transformation of the fairy tale in the United States, these American precursors similarly fall away, leaving Disney’s version in the limelight. One might, therefore, equate the dominance of his tale(s) to that of the Grimms’, favored above other German, Russian, or even Italian variants of the *Snow White* tale. Where the Grimms rose to an explicit cultural call, Disney generated a tale from this “classic” to speak to *his* culture purely of his own volition, based on what he had *seen* of the fairy tale’s magic. Nevertheless, the time was ripe for each in unique ways, and the ways in which each employed folklore, cultural awareness, formal techniques, and adaptive artistry made these representations of the *Snow White* tale (and others) timeless “classics.”

CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATING CONTENT ACROSS CONTEXTS: FINDING ONE'S PURCHASE ON THE AMERICAN FAIRY TALE THROUGH *SNOW WHITE*

Investigating the history of a uniquely American fairy tale tradition is tricky business. Does this mean first engaging America's folklore, in the ways that one might begin an historical study of the European fairy tale tradition? Does it mean looking toward the first printing of fairy tales in periodicals? Or, does it mean examining the point at which a distinction began to occur, once the "classic" European tales floated across the pond to the United States? For the purposes of this study, centered on *Snow White*, the third question proves most significant. If this were primarily a study of folklore, the first question would prove most significant. If I were advancing an argument concerning literature for children (frequently printed in periodicals) or examining the development of new national myths and tales, I would investigate the second. However, my purpose is to begin to unravel and see more clearly the folkloric, literary, staged, and cinematic threads that have been purposefully woven together, to form and inform the "classics" in an *American way*. Where the previous chapter casts a backward glance on the makings of *Snow White* as a European classic, this chapter identifies and investigates the precursors leading toward the *American* fairy tale classic, Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).

Because my project argues that Disney extended the folkloric origins of the tale in an American context, I must first lay the groundwork for his artistry by positioning those uniquely American stepping stones that enabled Disney's rise to recognition and

glorification as *the storyteller* in the United States. Disney's work did not emerge from a vacuum, nor did it flow directly from the European tradition upon which the Grimms placed their indelible imprint (even though some conferences with Disney, or critic's reflections on the same, might indicate otherwise).²⁹ While I would not argue that the Grimms' "classic" largely informed Disney's, the animator's *Snow White* is also marked by the folkloric footprints of two earlier American precursors who also stamped their names onto the tale, Marguerite Merington and Winthrop Ames. To ignore this part of the cultural progression means denying the early *American Snow White* tradition a space in this tale's historical trajectory, even when investigating the same in a national context. Further, one misses the insights which this earlier tradition offers into the adaptive formula for an America "classic."

I therefore suggest that a more apt beginning for interpreting the movement of *Snow White* in the United States is with the transition whereupon fairy tale translations from the European tradition began surfacing in this new culture and setting, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hoyle). Given that Disney did not produce his animated "classic," *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, until 1937, the point of inquiry becomes: what happened to *Snow White* between the time it came to the United States and the time (almost forty years later) when Disney placed his American stamp upon the tale. This history has not been discussed very much in a literary context, or in a way that bridges the influences of literature and media, reading the works of other media (stage productions and film) as folkloric models or texts mediating the process of folkloric

²⁹ See M. Thomas Inge's "Art, Adaptation, and Ideology," for a comparison in which Disney himself discussed alterations made from the Grimms' version to create his own.

production and reproduction. Film critics, Eric Smoodin and Karen Merritt have discussed the transformation of the fairy tale from printed word, to stage, to screen, but their interdisciplinary studies emphasize the latter forms of media,³⁰ and frequently work backward from Disney, per their field of primary engagement. As a result, they miss some of the cultural markings within the American lineage of the plays and film leading toward Disney. Reading both as cultural “texts” provides an alternate view.

In *Snow White*’s first marked appearances in the United States, artists were just learning how to culturally distinguish a tale to reach a new audience. Thus, the greatest emphasis was on cultural adaptation—the production of alterations in themes, tone, and character intended to reflect the new cultural milieu. However, there was another side to this story, as well. In the United States, where the rags-to-riches narrative, the rise of the self-made man, and the American dream³¹ all contributed to a cultural consciousness in which one individual strove to be recognized as *the* creator, *the* producer, *the* contributor to a tradition, later adaptations would endeavor to capitalize the opportunities which transforming the well-known *Snow White* tale held.

This self-promoting interest of the adaptor was compounded by the cultural evolution of various sites of media. Most importantly for this chapter, transformations

³⁰ In “The Little Girl/Little Mother Transformation: The American Evolution of ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,’ Merritt divides Disney’s version from its fairy tale origins, supplanting these with the “American theatrical tradition,” and primarily Winthrop Ames’ play (106). Then, ten years later, when Ames’ film surfaced, Merritt found the film and within it actress Marguerite Clark to have been Disney’s main sources of inspiration.

³¹ Tracey Mollet uses the “rags to riches story” and “American Dream” to discuss Disney’s transformation of the *Snow White* tale. In so doing, she argues that Disney’s version [...] brings new merits to the idea of the American Dream. Material wealth is no longer important for success in Disney’s tale; the emphasis is instead on inner values and manners and on collective action for the sake of a better world for all” (114, 123). This message, Mollet argues, “infuses hope and positivity into a society struggling with the Depression” (111). While this may be the case, I argue that Disney, as well as earlier American artists vie for their own individual interests in their production and re-production of *Snow White* (114, 123).

occurring within the theatrical and cinematic spheres resounded with the artists generating works to speak to those spaces. Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, and Art Simon link American cinematic developments, in particular, to

a series of developments in the economic, scientific, and artistic history of the nation: the tremendous growth of cities and the arrival of millions of immigrants between 1880 and 1920; the consolidation of business and manufacturing practices that maximized production and created a new means by which to advertise goods and services; the continuation, and in some cases culmination of experiments devoted to combining photography and motion, [...] and the emerging power of the United States and its place within the world economy. (3)

Many of these cultural enhancements paired with the rise of the city to profoundly impact and advance the competition of individual interests that initially drove *Snow White* transformations within the theatrical field of staged productions.

But to understand how *Snow White* was revised and adapted for the stage, one must also recognize changes occurring within the theatrical space itself in the United States, during the early twentieth century. Thomas H. Dickinson refers to these as having produced *The Insurgent Theatre*, wherein there was “an implied conviction on the part of the workers that the things of the old theatre must be destroyed and a new theatre be built up in its stead” (10). Dickinson further details this transformation: “When one speaks of the theatre he no longer refers only to play or actor or even production. The term now covers all the technical, professional, artistic and social connections of a great edifice of public amusement” (10). As a result of the theatre being understood as a much more complex system, individuals undertook to revise the theatre for various “purposes” (21). Dickinson offers a host of these:

To make money.
To serve society by giving good plays.

To serve society by giving plays cheaply.
To teach something.
To produce plays as artistically as possible.
Simply to do something in the theatre. (21)

The idea of a “children’s theatre” or, alternately, a space for the “use of the dramatic faculties in education”³² spoke to at least one, if not more than one of these (124).

Moreover, reflecting the second category particularly, the educational possibilities which the fairy tale had opened in Europe during the nineteenth century could here be extended, and so they were. Dickinson recalls that “In 1902 there was established by the educational Alliance of New York City a department of dramatic activity [...] The purposes of this work were the utilization of the dramatic faculties in the education of young people particularly of foreign races” (125). He then goes on to recognize how this work prompted “two movements in children’s dramatics” including “The Children’s Educational Theatre” and the “Educational Dramatic League” (Dickinson 125). Such venues provided an environment for the earliest American departures from the European *Snow White* tradition, and not merely because these versions initially spoke to child audiences, but more pointedly because they reflected the rise of various individual interests, as well as those of broader audiences.

Even as changes effected in the venue of production promoted the success of the tale in this space, so too did the tale itself. Eric Smoodin gestures toward the swift rise in popularity of *Snow White* from the start of the twentieth century and also to the “importance of the story to the lives of children,” when Marguerite Merington initially

³² Dickinson distinguishes between these two types of spaces. The “children’s theatre,” he asserts, “raises questions of entertainment and art and its values that are presumably absolute,” where the dramatic space for education “question[s] [...] mental development and its values are relative” (124).

brought the tale to them in 1910 (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 19). Merington herself testified to children's eagerness to engage with the tale. "The [Hebrew Educational] theatre was crowded every night," she notes, adding that children of the audience would interact with, "shriek," or shout to the actors at surprising or suspenseful moments of the staged action ("when the Queen tossed the poisoned apple to Snow-White," for instance) ("Should We Have Amusements" SM3). Winthrop Ames' revised staged production appeared two years later New York City, after which the staged production moved on to Boston in 1914, and ("either Ames' or Merington's or someone else's") appeared in Connecticut in 1915 (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 20). As "various theatrical and operatic versions of *Snow White* toured throughout the United States" the tale's impact resounded with multiple types of audiences and actors (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 20). "From amateurs to professionals, from Jews performing on Sundays to kids playing most of the prominent roles, from adult audiences to children, *Snow White*, in one version or another emerged as one of the period's perfect vehicles for all audiences and production circumstances" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 20). For Ames, even after the film's (Christmas-time) debut, the play continued to prove a successful winter holiday accompaniment for all, as the *Boston Daily Globe* pronounced on Dec. 22, 1925, "The charming fairy tale which has delighted the hearts of countless children was presented yesterday afternoon to an audience of fascinated youngsters and of grown-ups to whom the performance brought back happy memories of their own childhood" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 16). In short, *Snow White* in the

American theatre captured and held audiences of all kinds motivating an interest in the tale that in turn propelled its adaptors forward.

The American *Snow White* tradition had become a growing force in the United States and had asserted itself most prominently on the stage. Where print versions of the tale extended the scope of influence by familiarizing a wider audience with *Snow White*, a distinctly *American* voice was not yet found in this medium of transmission.³³ Rather, print versions of *Snow White* in the United States continued to reflect their British precursors because pirated translations were easily accessible.³⁴

English-language translations of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinderund Hausmarchen* abounded before the 1930s in both England and the United States. Translators and illustrators in England interpreted Grimm for English-reading audiences. American publishers then reprinted the same works for several decades. This procedure was cheaper than paying for a new American translator and illustrator. (Hoyle)

Again, while this means of transmitting the story did give a presence to the tale in the United States, it was not yet a notably American presence.

Conversely, the American stage (and later, screen) showcased a uniquely American development of elements—themes, tone, and character—while also recalling the earlier folk tradition from whence the tale had come. By analyzing Merington's and Ames' plays as texts and then critically examining the modifications of Ames' filmic

³³ However, Maria-Venetia Kyritsi's investigation of alternate motifs utilized in translation of the Grimms' shows that British versions had begun employing motifs that would become important for the American *Snow White* tradition, namely "the heart" of a young boar referenced in Margaret Hunt's (1884) translation, as the organ extracted and brought to the queen to serve as proof of Snow White's death.

³⁴ Karen Nelson Hoyle contextualizes form of transmission in terms of the International Copyright Agreement, which the United States did not commit to until 1891. In, *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*, Jack Zipes also finds that although "fairy tales had become very popular during the first three decades of the twentieth century in the United States, [...] With some rare exceptions, almost all the texts were pirated from British translations of the Grimms' tales" (83).

successor, I contend that one gains keener insight into the *Snow White* tale's forward movement from European traditions to its first "American" representations. Distinctly American qualities in the early plays and film have also been recognized, per the studies of film circles, though these most frequently identify their first usage in the Disney film. Drawing on some of these misconceptions, this chapter displays an earlier lineage of the American *Snow White* tradition featuring: romance and humor, evolving American ideals (concerning equity, democracy, and gender), and consumeristic desire, which pre-dated Disney's version.

At the same time, the chapter gestures toward the motivation for the appearance of such distinctly American versions of the *Snow White* tale. Once the fairy tale took hold in the United States, cultural adaptation proved less significant and individuation, laying claim to ownership of this obviously marketable commodity, was prioritized. Although Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix argue that "the movement of traditional fairy tales to cinematic form may have enabled their commodification in capitalist socioeconomic structures," and Tony Grajeda likewise contends that "*cinema* contributed to the larger development of commercialized mass culture," I would posit that the development of the early *Snow White* tradition in the United States displays this transition prior to cinematic deployments of the tale (Greenhill and Matrix 3; Grajeda 137; emphasis added). Where one might argue that the Grimms had earlier latched on to the trend of marketing *their* tales by means of adaptation to individuate their influence, I aim to suggest that *American* creators more actively strove to minimize a tale's "classic" attributes toward the ends of: first, generating a culturally conducive national form, and

later, claiming ownership, to enable their own rise toward success. While Walt Disney has been heavily criticized for his consumeristic desires, a study of the *Snow White* tale's earlier exchange of hands will show that he was not the first to reshape the tale in an *American way* or to engage in the business of buying, selling, and stamping the fairy tale as his own.

In the first section of this chapter, I gesture toward playwright, Marguerite Merington. Merington, while invested in defining her tale culturally, as American, was also the first to claim ownership of *SNOWWHITE And the SEVEN DWARFS* in the United States, in 1910.³⁵ Her adapted play for children recognizes its earlier precursor, Goerner, as well as the "Fairytale Plays of the Brothers Grimm," but foregrounds her claim to this American adaptation beyond those other voices. Where Merington, either intentionally or unintentionally³⁶ began to adapt the content³⁷ of *Snow White* to her surrounding American culture, her claim upon the tale was relatively short-lived based upon her limited status in the theatrical space, or her position within this new context.³⁸

Unable to move the American *Snow White* tradition forward, the tale was soon bought over by Winthrop Ames, whose influence I go on to discuss in the second section of this chapter. Ames published and produced two staged versions, "*SNOW WHITE*": *A Fairy Tale Play From the Story of the Brothers Grimm*, by Jessie Braham White (Ames'

³⁵ Although Merington's manuscript, available at the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, is marked, n.d., Eric Smoodin notes a copyright date of 1910.

³⁶ Because of her gender and minimal or covert attempts to counter culturally prescribed social values, little is known or written of Marguerite Merington and her contribution to fairy tale, even though she has been referred to as a prominent playwright (see Smoodin). Thus, her transformational intentions remain unclear.

³⁷ By *content* I mean, themes, motifs, and values embedded within or evinced through the text.

³⁸ Where *context* is concerned, I am referring to the sphere of activity which the stage or cinema present, as well as the alternate environment which American culture presents.

pseudonym) (1912) and *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS: A Fairy Tale Play Based on the Story of the Brothers Grimm*, by Jessie Braham White, with music by Edmond Rickett and numerous illustrations by Charles B. Falls (1913). This play was then adapted to a screenplay, *Snow White*, written by Ames and produced by the Famous Players Film Company (1916). In each of his versions, one can detect how Ames, embracing and embellishing Merington's American alterations (without attribution), went on to alter the fabric of the tale so significantly that while it more pointedly reflected *his* vision, it began to forget its folkloric origins. As such, despite Ames' stranglehold of ownership on *Snow White*, his version would not be repeatedly associated with that tale, but rather with fields of film and theatre. If Merington's challenge was with context, Ames' was with content, and the larger battle, which both lost, was one of rights to ownership, which would pass to Disney when the rights for the play were purchased in 1937.

Although each imbued the tale with American meaning, neither version of the tale had been imprinted on the American imagination in such a way that the mark of that particular teller (and once upon a time, owner) would remain. Nevertheless, I argue that an analysis of the culturally inspired content of both plays, in addition to the creative, self-promoting alterations of the latter (Ames' versions), will lay the foundation for an American folkloric tradition of the *Snow White* tale, leading toward Disney's pre-eminent adaptation.³⁹

³⁹ Because a script of Goerner's German version of the play is unavailable, I use attributes of the tale claimed to be "American" according to Disney's usage, and map these back onto Merington's and Ames' versions, as a means of displaying the national folkloric transmission that occurred prior to Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).

The Troubled Position of an Innovative, Female, Fairy Tale Playwright

Marguerite Merington is a little-known figure in the context of the American fairy tale tradition. Even in the context of her contributions to the staged *Snow White* tradition, she is attributed little more than a sentence or two in articles and chapters referencing her theatrical work. Although Karen Merritt builds her (1988) argument concerning Disney from a theatrical base, she references Merington only once, as having been “engaged [...] to adapt the play into English verse” by Herts Heniger (“The Little Girl/Little Mother” 107). Otherwise, in the few quoted citations from Merington’s work, Merritt identifies *Herts Heniger’s* (the director’s) intention and purpose.

Studies regarding female playwrights in modern American drama offer Merington little more. Although Yvonne Shafer describes a “rush toward playwriting by women [...] early in the [twentieth] century, when it became apparent that it was both acceptable and economically rewarding, in “‘The New Path’: Nineteenth-Century American Women Playwrights,” Doris Abramson recognizes that “few [of these plays] are available today. (They appear in collections or tattered copies of Samuel French or Walter Baker scripts found in auctions or flea markets)” and “those that are available, signal toward ‘female independence’” (Shafer 456, Abramson 47, 48). Merington is noted by name only in Abramson’s study, as one such forgotten playwright. Perhaps the cause for this oversight is critics’ understanding of her plays as “highly conventional” (Shafer 456). For the purposes of her text, *American Women Playwrights, 1900-1950*, Shafer addresses those who “made a particular contribution to the American theatre and [...] will be

remembered for at least one significant play which moved audiences, challenged conventional ideas, or broke new ground in the theatre” (Shafer 458). While one might argue that Merington’s work moved audiences, the play was mainly directed toward children, for educative purposes. Thus, the audiences that would be “moved” might not recognize Merington’s artistry as a playwright or storyteller.

Merington Situates *Snow White* in an American Context

Although *SNOWWHITE And the SEVEN DWARFS: Fairytale Play, with incidental Music, for Children: Founded on ‘Schneewittchen’ by Goerner, and the Fairy Tale Plays of the Brothers Grimm* is based on “a German play for children by a prolific writer of children’s comedies and fairy tale drama,” Merington productively adapts the former European tradition and folkloric base to speak to American culture (“The Little Girl/Little Mother” 106). Despite her address of the conventional, which is somewhat chastised in the aforementioned critical texts, it is likely that it was this very subject matter, in a tale like *Snow White* that made her highly relevant in her day. Lucia, et al., argue, “The melodrama, and more particularly the maternal melodrama, were staples of the era” (8). Specifically, a “variation of the maternal melodrama, in a more updated form, centers on an erotic triangle involving a mother, her love interest or second husband, and her late-teen/early twenties daughter” (Lucia, et al., 9). Even though the theme is recognized as a focal point of cinematic production here, one might argue that this, the central conflict of *Snow White*, is precisely what the American public was interested in seeing depicted, or re-framed, again and again.

In light of these cultural desires, Merington keenly begins the action of her version of *SNOWWHITE* with the Prince of Goldland and his infatuation with Snow White. In so doing, she not only draws the romance between the Prince and Princess to the forefront, but also enables an earlier display of the aforementioned love triangle that the American public expectantly awaited in entertainment.

PRINCE. But who is she, Otto, and who can she be?
OTTO. Prince, how should I know, and what matters it?
PRINCE. It matters this: - that she is loveliest
Of all the maids in all the world! The maid
I'll woo; and win; and wed! My bride!
(Merington 1.1, 1-2)

In this brief interlude, between the Prince and his tutor, the audience or reader might not initially capture the American transformation. Instead, this exchange seems to recall Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where another prince falls in love at first sight. This allusion is extended when the Prince here aims to win Snow White as "a pilgrim"/knight (Merington 1.1, 4). Neither is who he appears—Romeo masked and the Prince of Goldland cloaked. With this pairing of dramatic moments in mind, one can see Merington employing European models, even where she opens the fairy tale itself anew, with an *American romance*.

Snow White classically began with the origin of the extraordinary young beauty, not with a proclamation of love or even the introduction of romance. Terri Martin Wright claims that "*Disney's* implementation of love at first sight in the film was entirely American, replacing the medieval European idea of coupling strangers" (98; emphasis added). Later, with respect to the same early interlude between the Prince and Snow White, Wright asserts that

The Disney writers decided that their Snow White story would be ‘more romantic’ if the prince and princess met long before the final kiss” (qtd. Thomas in Wright 104). American audiences may not have accepted a marriage of two strangers that was completely devoid of romantic attachment. Because American society lacked a nobility, arranged marriages were never commonplace (104-105).

While I would agree with Wright’s assertions that this early meeting serves as an American innovation to the *Snow White* tale (in terms of its episodic structure) and that this new structure moves attention away from the forgone conclusion that *Princess* Snow White would find her *Prince*, maintaining a line of royalty, I question, based on the Shakespearean reference above whether “love at first sight” might be conceived of as singularly American. Further, while there is American precedent for the earlier, more romantic introduction of the Prince, it is not Disney’s, but Merington’s and later Ames’ versions of *Snow White* through which this alteration in episodic action is initially produced. Recognition of this lineage not only gives credit to the earlier author/playwright, but importantly displays an *American* folkloric patterning that undergirds Disney’s animated version.

The development and display of romantic love is, however, only one segment of Merington’s reconstitution of *Snow White*’s royal subjects, marking a division from this European structure of power. Where earlier fairy tales may have mocked a ruler with a political purpose, undercutting specific traits or characteristics of that individual,⁴⁰ the entirety of the court in Merington’s play is laughable. Perhaps most memorably, scenes which open with the Queen at court feature games of her making—“Beauty-Contest” or

⁴⁰ In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, Jack Zipes argues that the “ideological perspectives and narrative strategies” of early Italian and French writers of the fairy tale “varied in light of the social and political problems depicted in their tales” (27).

“Similes” for the Queen’s beauty—anything to drive the courtiers to compete in flattery of her highness (Merington 1.1, 11; 4.2, 2). While these moments align with the *Snow White* tale, emphasizing her vice of vanity, they also display the lack of effectual work (ruling or serving) that happens at court. A queen and her adviser or courtiers are no more than empty figureheads.

The ridicule of this baseless governing structure is furthered through the representation of a Chancellor who walks around with a “Court Manual,” a “red-bound Manual [in his] pocket,” available at all times to solve any problem (Merington 1.1, 8). Through this figure, the impression is further instilled that those at court are mindless, nothing without a set of written rules. The trouble is that such rules do not resolve every issue. Thus, when the Prince (disguised as Pilgrim/Knight) leaves a tablet which proclaims Snow White “the fairest of ladies” and “beauty’s very self” and the Queen subsequently calls, “High treason,” the Chancellor flounders, “Good gracious! There’s nought of this in the Court Manual!” (Merington 1.1, 12, 14). The tag before the Chancellor’s lines within Merington’s play is, appropriately, “CHANCE,” as his rulings and definitions of the law seem merely a matter of “chance,” available only if he has a book to guide him. In both cases, these powerful, royal roles are brought low by the humor with which Merington delivers them to her audience. American audiences are therefore able to laugh at royalty in favor of their own political structures of power.

The dwarfs are similarly transformed from the European model through the engagement of humor. While the quality of humor itself bespeaks American representation, their presentation is uniquely adapted to engage other American values, as

well. Even as American audiences laugh, then, they likewise develop an affinity with the little gentlemen.

From the moment the dwarfs are introduced, their dialogue has a sing-song rhyming quality. Not only does each dwarf rhyme within his own dialogue, but in conversation with one another, the rhyming continues. While this device may have been inserted to speak to the child audience, it also serves to make the group on the whole quite humorous. The same is true with the use of repetition in their grief, once they have lost Snow White. As each brother returns home early from work to guard the body of Snow White, Blick (their leader) questions, “Why so early back from work?” (Merington 4.1, 3). Each brother, in turn responds, “I have no heart to work.” (Merington 4.1, 3). There is gravity in their loss, but the repetition of exact dialogue provides some comic relief in this somber moment, as well. In much the same way, Disney would later engage the self-same silly seven dwarfs and animals of his version.

Yet an audience does not always laugh at, but at times laughs *with* the dwarfs, as the group indeed recognizes its shortcomings. In their imperfection, however, they align themselves quite nicely with Snow White. Their social status disappears in this affiliation, where dwarf and princess are brought to the same level. When they offer Snow White a home, Blick entreats the Princess to understand, “lest there be misconception; lest you fail to /notice—Our house—’t is not a palace! [...] And we, ourselves, you may have remarked, we are not giants” (Merington 2, 12-13). Pick (another dwarf) adds, “We are not even strikingly tall” (Merington 2, 13). As the dwarfs point out the obvious to Snow White, and clarify further and further, the comedy in the

scene rises. Although, ultimately when they announce themselves “Dwarfs!” and “hang their heads,” the viewer sees the self-consciousness of the dwarfs for what it is—the feeling of being somehow less than ideal (Merington 2, 13). In this they find some common ground with Snow White, the less-than-ideal princess/daughter of a vain queen. Here, we find another kind of American value emerging, the ideal of equity amongst *all* of a group’s members—not only amongst the men, but amongst men and women.

Again, when Snow White considers leaving the home of the dwarfs after thanking them for their hospitality, one finds this democratic value. Blick calls together the other dwarfs, whereupon they “(...gather in a group, confer briefly, nod emphatic YES)” before Blick asks, “In favor?” and the group replies, “Aye!” (Merington 2,10). Although Blick plays the role of a leader, and frequently speaks for the others, at this juncture it becomes clear that his voice is one in the name of all. Each dwarf has a vote and a voice to contribute, and each is heard before a decision is made. Their society is not based upon that of royal rule. Their governing principles are democratic, based on the equity of all.

Furthermore, once the decision regarding Snow White’s occupancy has been reached, Blick makes an offer to the young woman that further instantiates this ideal. “Abide with us forever! [...] We will work for you, protect you! We will be as so many *fathers* and *brothers* to you! And you shall be little *sister* and *housemother* to us all!” (Merington 2, 12; emphasis added). Although there is a bit of the veneration of the Princess at the start of this statement, that air quickly dissipates into language reflecting a more equitable distribution of roles—Snow White the “*sister*” to her “*brother*” dwarfs,

the “*housemother*” to her “*father*” dwarfs. Where Merritt finds Blick’s relational positioning of Snow White reflective of “both an adult and a child role” here, I would argue that the parallelism Merington creates displays the status of Blick/the dwarfs and Snow White as equitable partners (“The Little Girl/Little Mother” 108). She is, in essence, one of “the people,” little though they may be.

Where these additions of equity and democracy display another facet of American culture, a reader/viewer sees still more when the queen approaches Snow White as a peddler. Marking the transition into a culture of consumption, the significance of material possessions, as well as buying and selling are heightened. When the queen first approaches the dwarf’s house, her offerings are not the mere “Pretty wares” of the Grimms’ tale, “Staylaces in all kinds of colors,” or the single “poisoned comb” (Grimm 255, 256). Instead, the queen details each of her wares.

Here’s thimbles and thread and here’s needles and pins;
Here’s finest of flax for my lady who spins.
Here’s buckles and brooches and fanciful laces
And rainbow-like ribbons to set off sweet faces!

I’ve chains for your locket and charms for your pockets,
And dolls that can roll their eyes round in their sockets!

The foot of a rabbit; foot of a hare —
An excellent habit such baubles to wear,
To keep off rheumatics that come from damp attics
And cellars and dairies!

Here’s beads for your stringing and bells for your ringing,
And seed for canaries. It sets them a-singing!

Here’s lotions and potions and prettiful notions!
Here’s balm for complexions with book of directions!
Here’s knives for the husbands and scissors for wives,

And everything else for your natural lives! (Merington 3.1, 4-5)

In this version, when Snow White is not interested in the queen's wares, the queen is forced to make the sale enticing. Therefore, in each description she details the product's unique properties, or how it will prove useful. Ironically, while almost none of the products she names are natural, the queen as peddler purports that these are the material goods necessary "for your *natural* lives" (Merington 3.1, 5; emphasis added). In essence, it is *unnatural* to avoid or renounce participation in this culture of commodity, of buying and selling, and bettering one's life by means of material goods.

Thus, when the queen does enter, the discussion of the use value of goods is extended still further when the queen starts at Snow White's appearance. "Why, child, what hair! Unkempt, Disordered! Where's your comb?" (Merington 3.1, 6). Without the marketable goods in her possession, Snow White is shamed for her appearance.

Still Snow White refuses to buy in, for she is "penniless" and therefore has no purchasing power (Merington 3.1, 7). When the queen suggests "On credit, then!" her young patron still protests. Not until the young woman is given the right to the possession by her male counterparts does she concede. "The comb is yours—Aye, fairly come by! How? Your dwarfs! They crossed my palm with gold! 'T will suit her princess-comeliness, they said!" (Merington 3.1, 7). Once the sale is complete, Snow White "(delighted, takes comb from Queen) My dwarfs—I own it took my fancy from the first!" (Merington 3.1, 7). In this exchange, the process of "agree[ing] on a price" from the Grimms' version is greatly extended (256). In this prolonged version, Merington illustrates the possibilities for purchase (use of "credit"), the gendered

limitations on purchasing power, and the link between material desire and the gaze of a male counterpart or audience.

The elongation of this exchange is not unusual, given the alternate context of the play—the stage; however, Merington’s choice of developing this first scene while eliminating another of the scenes of temptation is intriguing. Merritt argues, “For the adapters, like their successors, the source fairy tale provides, even in the Grimm’s expansive later editions, no more than a brief, though event-filled narrative. Motivations, when they appear in the Grimms’ fairy tale, are simple and inadequate for the requirements of the stage” (“The Little Girl/Little Mother” 107). However, given these new “requirements,” it is interesting that where Merington chooses to prolong this scene of exchange, she *does not* include three scenes of temptation. Instead, she blends the Grimms’ first two scenes (with the staylaces and comb) into this single scene, to expand on the discussion of market or engagement with buying and selling goods. She could have easily developed the dialogue in both scenes with Snow White simply protesting or wavering in her decision to take one of the queen’s offerings. Instead of abiding by this more traditional fairy tale quality of repetition, Merington develops the language surrounding the exchange, which I argue gives greater credence to this facet of American society, positioning the tale as part of her culture.

Even as the details of this interaction serve to make the tale more engaging for an American audience, though, they likewise move the tale further from the European folklore from which it descended. Not only have the three temptations become two, but the development of a motif—the exchange—draws the reader/viewer’s attention away

from the jealousy which motivates each of these scenes. Moreover, one misses the repetition of “Pretty wares” from the exchange scenes of Grimms’ version, which so nicely aligns with the emphases on beauty and appearance that are persistent and central to the tale (255, 256). The maintenance of beauty is key to the tale. Therefore, a discussion of market which detracts from that motif as well as the jealousy tied to it places this version in jeopardy of being forgotten. This is the challenge of adapting a tale to a new culture and context. New elements, or the expansion of scenes or points of action might generate audience engagement, but if these are embedded in such a way that detracts from the central thematic significance of the tale, the new version of the tale, owing only to the culture of its time, loses its relevance for subsequent generations.

The same is true of the humorous reflection of royalty counterpointed by democratic impulses. While this political juxtaposition may have been important for an early American inversion of the tale (or fairy tale tradition which was attempting to distinguish itself from its European precursors), as the nation grew its own folklore, it would become less significant to display departures from British or European precursors. Furthermore, while these new qualities served the needs of the staged production and reflected American values and ideals, the number of departures from the (Grimms’) “classic” produced a tale less likely to be recalled with the same sort of authenticity. Similar to the novelette *Richilde*, one finds that the detail required to elucidate these new features is not so easily recalled and retold. Although where the novelette form was problematic for *Richilde*’s storytelling viability, the stage was not a problematic generic context. Instead, the decisions of where detail should be placed, and the fact that these

amplified areas did not always involve the central themes or productive storytelling redundancies of the earlier tale made them more difficult to persistently recall.

An additional setback for Merington was her audience. Merington's play was written for a child audience, promoted by the "Hebrew Educational Alliance." As such, nursery-rhyme-like songs that children would recognize were inserted. Where this works toward the goal of repetition in Merington's use of "The Song About Snow White," which recounts Snow White's origin at the start of the play and is recalled again later in the play, other songs do not so readily speak to the action of the play, but serve a moralizing purpose, such as "The Dwarfs Evening Hymn."

Father in Heaven, through the day,
O may Thy love enlighten me,
And when the sun goes down, I pray,
Let not the darkness frighten me.

When from the path I wandr far
Where shadows seem to swallow me,
May Thy protection, like a star,
Encompass, guide, and follow me.

Waking, sleeping
In Thy keeping
Hol[d] me fast, dear Lord, I pray. (Merington supplement, after 2, 17)

While such songs speak toward the goal of instilling religious value into a child viewer, other songs seem oddly placed, or inserted purely to amuse children and keep them engaged.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.
All good children go to Heaven!
Go to Heaven some fine day.
But a while on earth they play!

O - u - t spells OUT! (Merington 3.1, 11; 4.2, 14)

This song appears after the dwarfs and Snow White play (once they have rescued her from the poison comb) and again at the end of play. Both of these scenes—the first, an apparent death, and the second, marriage—might trouble a child audience or fail to have an impact upon that age group. However, the child-like rhyme (above) and playful moment between the dwarfs and Snow White serve to calm and restore the child-viewer. Similarly, at the play’s end, for those whom marriage might not yet be understood as a celebratory occasion, this play-song grants the child-viewer some sense of the joy, excitement, and happiness of that very adult moment.

Problematically though, in this engagement of a child viewer, the frame of Merington’s fairy tale is narrowed toward that audience and moved away from the cross-over (child-to-adult) possibilities that the genres of fairy tale and folklore had once held and could continue to hold. Thus, even though positioning *SNOWWHITE* in a new context—the American stage—allowed Merington to reach American children especially, per the intention of the work (“to elevate and educate a child audience”), this new stage also worked to her detriment, disabling her range of influence, in spite of her innovative content (“Marguerite Clark” 5). Further, although there was an insertion or embellishment of significant values and ideals which contributed to the play’s American quality and surrounding culture, these elements were not dwelt upon in a way that would facilitate storytelling or, more importantly, retelling. In addition, while some insertions resonated with Merington’s cultural moment, these were subject to losing their impact over time. And finally, select newly embedded characteristics, such as romance and

humor, fell away from her, instead understood as originating in Disney's American "classic." As ownership passed through her hands to those of Winthrop Ames, Merington's American extensions would either be revised or re-deployed, her name and authorship forgotten, left behind in favor of the *Snow White* tale's new owner and influence.

Snow White Changes Hands: The Merington/White/Ames Version⁴¹

Even though Merington's audience proved to be a sticking point for her continued success, her play's carefully woven tapestry of American cultural elements blended with those of the traditional fairy tale genre—a cast of non-specific characters and a near-"classic" episodic structure—proved to be the strengths of the work. However, the strengths of this nuanced version which extended the tale's folkloric footprint onto American soil were either overly embellished or negated altogether in light of White's/Ames' new vision of *Snow White*. While I see where Karen Merritt might argue that through these revisions to the play, Ames "rewrote it completely," for my part, I find a new—though not entirely different—extension of *Snow White* within White's/Ames' development of Merington's American attributes. I agree with Merritt's assertions that "Ames recreated the story by adding characters and incidents, by writing more natural, child-like sounding dialogue, and by sharpening the contrasts between comedy and

⁴¹ Given that Winthrop Ames wrote both the 1912 and 1913 versions of his play under the female pseudonym "Jessie Braham White," I cite the play under "White" and use White/Ames in the analysis that follows. (For all textual analysis, the 1913 print edition has been used.) In the analysis Famous Players film, with screenplay by Ames (immediately following), I then use "Ames." In maintaining, "Ames" name throughout the full scope of this analysis, I aim to overtly display the continuity of ownership (overwriting that of Merington).

suspense. Notably, he shaped distinctive personalities for the key characters” (“Marguerite Clark” 5). To these adjustments, however, I would further add that with this supplemented cast of characters, in which flat personae became individuated, new characters were venerated still further through significant roles. Nevertheless, when drawing Merington’s and White’s/Ames’ dramatic scripts into consideration together, one might easily have difficulty recalling, “Was it Merington’s or Ames’ which embellished this facet of the tale?” It is this very confusion which promotes the recognition of both plays’ contributions to an American storytelling tradition that evinces amplifications or variation, as opposed to one “completely” overwriting or “recreat[ing]” that which came before (“Marguerite Clark” 5).

Thus, where Merington’s dramatic version enhanced the Grimms’ European classic, I would argue that White’s/Ames’ revisions use Merington’s play as the folkloric bedrock to build or reframe the narrative to address a wider audience. Even as he produced *Snow White* initially for a children’s theatre, Ames reflected grander intentions: “You see, the parents have to bring the children, and if the parents aren’t pleased, why they won’t come. So we have to have a play with enough humor and other qualities in it which will appeal to grown-ups” (“Fairylend” X6). It is evident here that neither his imagined audience, nor his purpose was the same as Merington’s. “An aura of idealism pervaded Ames’ attitude toward the theatre [...] He idealistically believed that the objectives of the theatre were to instruct, inspire, and ennoble” (MacArthur 357). These aims might in part be geared toward a child audience, but, by and large, they extend a broader reach. “Ames’ attention was directed more to commercial success” (“The Little

Girl/Little Mother” 110). Therefore, each of the Americanized elements that I reference in Merington’s usage have been utilized and/or amplified in White’s/Ames’ script. When looking toward White’s/Ames’ version(s) of the play then, instead of inspecting the similarities, which effectively display an American tradition of folkloric passing on, it is more productive to examine those sites of difference to begin to understand how White’s/Ames’ version persisted in a way that Merington’s did not.

Ames Departs: Cue the Drama, Set the Stage

Winthrop Ames, whom I would term a kind of Disney before Disney, proved to be an architect of the story on stage. Although outside of circles of film and stage he is little thought of, Winthrop Ames was not far behind that fairy tale master, in terms of his artistry, innovation, and ownership, particularly when it came to staged productions. In his development of New York City’s key theatres—the Little Theatre and the New Theatre—he single-handedly manipulated a platform wherein the fairy tale, *Snow White*, might be employed to speak to and of his culture. In this forum, wherein Merington developed and reframed the classical European tradition of *Snow White*, Ames—self-invested—veered away from it. The tale was less significant for Ames, whose strongest interests were in the theatrical space and the opportunities it created to produce an effect upon its audience (MacArthur 352). David Edward MacArthur notes, “At the New Theatre, he would spend evenings moving about the theatre to get the effect of every detail from every angle and taking notes for possible improvements” (357). As an artist and a scholar, he rekindles affiliation with the Grimms, yet his innovation and

painstaking care to perfect his productions in the theatre bespoke the traditions of the American self-made man, deploying all of his knowledge and skill to rise to the top of his own field. Without the *folkloric* background of the brothers Grimm but with the *dramatic* background to bolster a new theatrical tradition, Ames produced and reproduced *Snow White* by emphasizing his own theatrical innovation.

In the opening of White's/Ames' *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS: A Fairy Tale Play Based on the Story of the Brothers Grimm*, a viewer/reader again finds an early introduction of the Prince and Snow White, setting the stage for the romance to come. In this version, the Prince falls in love with Snow White, misperceiving her status as she plays a Maid of Honor. Yet a stronger distinction occurs in the initial exchange between the two characters. As in Merington's play, this first interaction and flirtation rhymes. However, where the lines begin the same—"In the measure to ensue, / Lady, may I dance with you?"—Merington's version contains only a single reply from Snow White (Merington 1.1, 5). In contrast, White's/Ames' version extends the rhyming flirtation throughout their dance (White 41). M. Thomas Inge contends that the earlier introduction of the Prince (which he *does* attribute to Ames' film but *not* White's/Ames' play or Merington's) was *Disney's* way of heightening "dramatic engagement—that is creating more interest in the characters or plot through audience sympathy and involvement" (138). However, *White's/Ames'* play shows how an extended interlude between the two characters serves to amplify the romance in the scene, which is heightened still further through specific stage directions leading up to and throughout the dance. The viewer/reader sees the Prince's initial and growing intrigue, as well as Snow

White's responsiveness to his flattery. For the Prince, "[...*there is something about her that attracts the young PRINCE from the first; and as the dance [of the Maids of Honor, including Snow White] progresses he becomes so interested that he comes down from the throne to watch her more closely. As the first figure ends he is close beside her*" (White 40-41). Once the flirtation begins, stage directions show Snow White "[*Hesitating, and then*]..." conceding, executing lines "[*Playfully*]" and even "[*Embarrassed*]" at one point. Such responses elicit an air of sexual tension, which only draw the Prince (and audience) in further. This is no longer a mere child's play. White/Ames is aiming for a wider audience of consumption as the intensified drama serves to show, yet it is the use of Merington's episodic model that enables this more enticing exchange.

The ridicule of royalty, as well, is depicted more vividly in its representation for a reading/viewing audience (through stage directions) and through the perceptions of other characters, rather than simply through the actions of the play. First, in place of the Chancellor, one finds the Court Chamberlain, Sir Dandiprat Bombas. The stage directions depict this figure as "[...*a fat, puffy little man, with an enormous wig and a great sense of his own importance,*" and his name aligns him with the figure of a "dandy" or "man who gives exaggerated attention to personal appearance" (White 5; *Merriam-Webster*). This description alone, or his appearance onstage, would likely elicit a chuckle from the audience. When "Old Dandiprat" "*waddles in*" to give an "announcement" later, the audience eagerly awaits the foolishness to follow and Dandiprat does not disappoint (White 28). Although he is the speaker, Dandiprat has penned his own announcement (focused on the minute-by-minute events leading up to the arrival of the

Prince) on a parchment scroll, and proceeds to read this document word for word, including a self-important conclusion and closing, “By order of me, Sir Dandiprat Bombas, Court Chamberlain. ‘Signed, Yours very truly, ‘Sir Dandiprat Bombas’” (White 29). This repetition of his name calls further attention to his self-importance, of which no one is more aware than the good Chamberlain himself.

However, White’s/Ames’ mark is even more definitively stamped upon this scene. A new gossip exchange between the Maids of Honor at the start of the play reveals their lack of concern for “Old Dandiprat” (“He gives us our ‘instructions’ [...] “But we don’t mind *him*”), as well as their distaste for a jealous queen who mistreats their beloved Snow White (White 28,7). By drawing his viewer into the conversation, and providing the characters’ perceptions of others, Ames makes this aversion to the pompous, self-serving royals a sentiment which the audience shares. Importantly, the audience now might not merely laugh at but loath those within this court, alongside the Maids. This mode of audience identification with a subset of the players is gained not through the episodic actions of the play, but through specific stage directions and views expressed by supplementary characters. Importantly, the Maids of Honor were an White/Ames addition, facilitating this deeper level of audience engagement.

Audience identification was also further enhanced through a new presentation of the dwarfs in White’s/Ames’ version. Here, in contrast to Merington’s representation, the group functions to create within Snow White a model American female figure, subservient (on some level) to her male counterparts. Hardworking though they may be, the dwarfs are referenced as subhuman in their abilities to distinguish value, care for the

home and themselves, and communicate. They need Snow White to stay with them, to care for them, to mother them and show them the way. Where Merington's dwarfs wanted an equitable partner in Snow White, White's/Ames' dwarfs do not even know how to speak to her. Their leader, Blick, confesses, "We don't know how to talk to young people," nor do they know how to keep Snow White (White 115). When they offer her gifts to stay, she misinterprets these signs, wondering if it is Christmas or "somebody's birthday?" (White 117). In this exchange and others, Snow White and the dwarfs talk past one another. Her logic does not match theirs. Even when she suggests that in staying, "I could be so useful." Blick frets, "But our housekeeping..." (White 118). Blick lacks both the logic and language to ask for Snow White's support. Instead, she must offer and show him (and the others) the way, "That's just how I could be useful. I can cook and sew and sweep and brew and make beds, and—oh, lots of things" (White 118). The trouble continues when these dwarfs confer; they do not vote as in Merington's version, but attempt to make sense of her offer, "Did I hear right? Did she say she would *stay*?" (White 118). Unsurprisingly, given the disorder in their lives and daily tasks, there is no underlying governing structure or set of principles amongst the group. Snow White's function as a mother, a teacher, and a housekeeper is essential for this inferior lot. She must help them to make sense of their home and their world. Where Wright finds this a Disney innovation, reflective of the "popular heroines of the 1930s" and generated by a wave of feminist activity in the 1920s, in Ames' play one finds an earlier representation of the same, positioning Snow White as a "resourceful [individual] who not only survived but found a measure freedom and independence in spite of [her]"

second-class status in a patriarchal society” (104). With the importance of work highlighted through the dwarfs, White/Ames gave Snow White a functional role alongside them, situating her in a more predictable gendered position, as a commonplace American woman.

Although some of the exchanges with the dwarfs elicit a bit of humor, more of this quality comes through White’s/Ames’ most inventive insertion, Witch Hex. Through this character, White/Ames enables his audience to see one of the central figures of the play, Queen Brangomar, in a different light and offers a new device for the play’s development. Witch Hex is not only the supplier of magic, keeping Queen Brangomar youthful, but propels the play’s forward movement. She begins by giving the queen a magic mirror, warning her that it “Reflects you as you really are” and “If you ever break that Mirror you will become as ugly as you really are” (White 59). However, the warning is not pronounced with a grave tone, as which Hex concludes with “—and for life, too! None of my spells can beauty you again either” (White 59). Although a viewer/reader might not yet recognize the significance of Hex’s cautions or taunting remarks, it soon becomes evident that her words project the coming action within the play. For example, when she next refuses to “make any more bad spells” to resolve Queen Brangomar’s problem of Snow White, she also gives her the notion of sending Snow White off to boarding school (White 60). “You must contrive to have her lost on the *way* to boarding-school, and then just tell some tarradiddle to explain why she never comes back—and there you are! Everything permanently settled” (White 60). Importantly, Hex does not encourage the Queen to kill Snow White, but simply to do away with her. This, as well

as other actions and dialogue, demonstrate that though Witch Hex is not evil, the actions that she inspires are. While this still positions Queen Brangomar as villain, having inferred from the witch's prescription that she must kill Snow White, equal weight is given to this newly created co-conspirator who continues to motivate the play's episodic actions.

When Snow White has not been killed by the huntsman, Berthold, it is not the mirror who initially informs Queen Brangomar that the young beauty is still alive, but Witch Hex. Because she planned to use the heart of the young woman for a hair restoration spell, the pig's tails which sprout upon Witch Hex's head and her interpretation of this sign reveal the huntsman's deception. When the queen laughs, Witch Hex replies, "If the joke's on anybody, it's on *you*. Instead of a *human* heart, your precious huntsman has brought back the heart of a pig; and Miss Snow White is alive at this moment. Ha, ha, for *you*! Ask your Magic Mirror if Snow White's not alive" (White 141). Yet, at this point, the magic mirror is an ancillary device, merely goading the queen on. Witch Hex has, in fact, provided her all that she needs in terms of motivation for renewed jealousy, leading toward her murderous acts.

Hex also informs Brangomar who the dwarfs are and where they live, provides her with the poisonous devices, and the means to draw close to Snow White. At this moment in particular, Ames allows Hex to tell the audience what he has been doing all along with this character, "Dreary me! *Have I got to plan it all out for you again?* [...]
There's only one safe way... [...] First, I must transform you into a different looking person altogether [...] And then give you some means of disposing of Snow White that

the Dwarfs can't trace back to you. Fiddle, fetch me the deadly poison things" (White 143-4; emphasis added). As Hex plots out the next steps of the play's action, offering a couple of poison antidotes and disguises, the queen and her jealousy are brushed aside, peripheral, rather than the locus of the action they should be. It is Hex who manipulates the play's actions with Brangomar no more than a pawn in the game. Without Hex, the queen is an empty-headed jealous figure, stymied into inaction by her stupidity. The characters in the play rely on Hex⁴² just as the audience does. Subsequent actions of the play are only ascertained by following this central character—a now essential figure who had no place at all in the (Grimms') "classic" version of *Snow White*. Here, a reader/viewer looks toward White's/Ames' new character and key *Snow White* innovation, in the same way that he/she inspects the stage directions of the playwright. White/Ames calls readers/viewers to see the play through Hex's and his own eyes and figures her character and the text of the play in such a way as to give the audience little choice but to comply.

Owning *Snow White*

Although White/Ames contributes to the romance and humor that Merington's play showcases also inserting gendered representations in ways that were more keenly attuned to American culture and a wider American audience, in each of these elements, as

⁴² In the final scene, the Prince and Snow White do not come together until "The Witch" (since turned into a reputable character at court) gives her blessing, "You're just a dear sweet little girl, and that's good enough for any man, prince or pauper." After this she gestures for the Prince to offer Snow White a ring, "Put it on, Florimond. [...] Now, young man, lead her to the throne and crown her properly, and we'll all swear allegiance to our new little Queen" (230-231).

well as with the insertion of additional characters, White/Ames also provides a distinctive version of the *Snow White* tale which has not been told in the same way before or since, without reflecting on Ames as *the creator*. In “Winthrop Ames: The Gentleman as Producer-Director,” MacArthur provides a detailed study of Ames in these roles. He asserts that as a producer, Ames was a “genius” in the “imaginative execution and skillful direction [...] of his productions” (MacArthur 351). MacArthur likewise notes that “his [(Ames’)] strong personality completely dominated everything he accomplished in the theatre”; “The artistic details which other producers left to their staff had to be personally supervised by Ames or performed solely by him” (MacArthur 350). Having such a heavy hand in each of his productions (attending to “new lights and lighting effects”, set design and costumes, and examining the effects and details within a performance “from every angle” in the theatre itself), was the result of a college education at “Harvard, [where] he studied art, music, English literature, drama, and architecture” and developed a “scholarly” interest in theatre (350). Here, he gained the foundation for his domination of two of New York’s major theatres. All of this background is significant to Ames’ individuation of the *Snow White* tale because it demonstrates how and why making *his* mark was so significant.

Ames wanted his audience to see his plays, including *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS: A Fairy Tale Play Based on the Story of the Brothers Grimm*, in the way that *he* saw them. This particularity did not end with his work as a producer and director, it was evinced in the very scripts he produced. In my analysis above, I utilize White’s/Ames’ 1913 version of the play. I have used this version and *not* the earlier

(1912) version because the edition produced only one year later does not differ by and large from the language of the “Mother Script,” rather it has evolved only to create an even more distinct image in a reader’s mind, *Ames’* image. “For Children: New Books and Old Favorites in Holiday Guise,” published in the *New York Times*, December 21, 1913, features White’s/Ames’ 1913 publication as “Another large, handsome book, with delightful pictures, [...] a fairy tale play based on the story of the Brothers Grimm by Jessie Braham White,” with “full-page colored illustrations by Charles B. Falls and music by Edmond Rickett” (BR8). The songs of the play, as well as the colored pictures are touted throughout. This is an edition that was made to be sold, with an advertisement appearing just before the Christmas holiday. Furthermore, the writing within indicates White’s/Ames’ marketing of a particular version and vision. Where stage directions and descriptions of character actions are meant for the actors in the 1912 version, those more finely tuned, almost narrative descriptions of action in the 1913 script allow even a reader to view White’s/Ames’ play, in his/her mind’s eye.

Yet the 1912 “Mother Script,” marked “Never to leave the office: Winthrop Ames,” and the 1913⁴³ version, stamped throughout as “PROPERTY OF WINTHROP AMES,” offer still more from the storyteller. With stage directions, musical directions and timing, lighting specifications and cues, and detailed lists of “Properties,” either typed or handwritten into the copy, one is capable of seeing Ames’ vision of the play. However, it is also evident that the producer/director was acutely aware of the fairy tale

⁴³ While for the purposes of textual references, I have used an online version of the 1913 print edition, the 1913 version that I reference here is a notated version held by the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

(and his particular vision of that narrative) as a commodity, a marketable product. While the story with stage directions was shared, the nuance of Ames' theatrical vision of the play appears to have belonged to Ames and Ames alone.

There is little doubt of the significance of ownership for Ames, when the title page of the "Mother Script" is marked as the office property of Winthrop Ames, "by Jessie Braham White" (Ames' female pseudonym), with Copyright "by Winthrop Ames" (1912). While the "Fairy Tale Play" is referenced as having come "From the Story of the Brothers Grimm," *this artifact* is clearly *not* the Grimms', but Ames'. No mention is made of Goerner (from whom the original play came), or Merington (who adapted Goerner's play into English), as Ames had already bought the rights to the play. Although Merington had for a time pronounced a similar line of ownership, whereupon "acting and other rights" were under her control, the ownership over the play shifted hands within a couple of years and remained in Ames' hands until 1937.

That being the case, when Adolf Zukor's Famous Players Film Company released the six-reel American silent film, 'Snow White,' at Christmas⁴⁴ in 1916, it was Ames' adaptation for screen from his play *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* ("The Little Girl/Little Mother" 110). Where Ames had excelled in the theatre, "Zukor had pioneered the adaptation of full-length stageplays to the screen, touting the motto, "Famous Players in Famous Plays" ("Snow White (1916)"). Still, it was Ames who wrote the film version,

⁴⁴ Merritt notes how "The Famous Players Film Company had established a practice of recognizing Christmas through special releases," such as this version of *Snow White* ("Marguerite Clark" 9). She further highlights how "Disney began his own tradition of Christmas releases on December 21, 1937, [with this self-same tale,] the premiere of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*" ("Marguerite Clark" 9).

“true to its theatrical origins,” recalling even within the new form his own precursory version and control over the tale (“Snow White (1916)”).

Losing *Snow White*: The Adaptive Challenges of a New Platform

By means of ownership and control over the commodity, Ames’ vision persisted and was, in some ways, amplified by virtue of the new context of film and its medium of production, the cinematic screen. Although Merritt argues that through this adaptation, “the 1916 filmmakers completely transformed the Ames play,” she likewise points out how “‘magic’ transformations could be embellished” and images that could easily be described on stage, could instead be *shown* on screen (“Marguerite Clark” 11). Thus, the vision is not necessarily transformed, only the means to produce that defined vision. Using visual images, or what could be shown on screen, indeed had the propensity to make a lasting imprint. For example, Smoodin examines how “[this] film made a deep impression on Disney when he saw it at a special matinée showing for newsboys in Kansas City” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 21). Merritt, further examining this same production, likewise gestures toward the audience appeal. The Kansas City Convention Hall, where Disney viewed the film “seated 12,000. However, about 16,000 newsboys actually crowded into the hall, many sitting two to a seat. As J. Searle Dawley commented in his diary, this was the largest audience in history for a single film showing” (“Marguerite Clark” 17). It was later “estimated that altogether, 75,000 people saw *Snow White* screenings in the Convention Hall” (“Marguerite Clark” 17). Where Ames tale had lost its songs and many of its dances, it had gained wider audience engagement via the cinematic form (“Marguerite Clark 11).

This new technological mode of “storytelling” offered opportunities to confine the audience’s vision toward a singular view of the narrative’s presentation (scene by scene); however, there were also drawbacks to filmic representations in the early twentieth century, namely the lack of a human voice or spoken language. With only titles, projecting the most essential bits of narrative language to guide the viewer, the opportunity for a catch and release of the language, vision, and storytelling essence of a particular author are, in some sense, lost. Although Grajeda finds that orchestral music which served to supplement the scenes, images, and titles that appeared before a viewer’s eyes making the “silent cinema [...] anything but silent” the loss of spoken language and vocal inflection meant that Ames’ storytelling or writerly voice was also absent or only vaguely resonant (142). Losing not only songs and dances, but further, language itself, gestured toward Ames’ gradual loss of *Snow White*. This prominent theatrical director-producer could no longer own the audience’s vision of the production; technological advancement had obscured his role as well as the key innovations of his play.

As mentioned earlier, one of the elements that made White’s/Ames’ play, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, so uniquely *his* was the character of Witch Hex. Not only did she drive the plot’s central action, but she did so in a way that humorously undergirded the grim tale. Rather than focusing so intently on Queen Brangomar’s jealousy, a reader or viewer laughed at her majesty’s short-sightedness. This was made possible through the perspective of Witch Hex. In the film, however, the Witch, more symbolic in nature, plays an ancillary role—representative of evil and sharing its force with the queen.

Because the “Witch” acts as a symbol of evil or villainy and contrives with Brangomar (both in her initial rise to power and attempted elimination of Snow White) she is introduced sooner, before the romantic interlude between Snow White and the Prince even. Here, a viewer finds an alternate tale, wherein Brangomar was just “an evil lady of the court” (ironically, portrayed with a pointed hat, symbolic of witchery) when she initially “conspired with [the] Witch to surpass Snow White’s beauty” (Ames). While the Witch concedes to helping the lady, the very next image presented reflects the following (through titles): “In return, the Witch *demand*ed that, in the future, she would receive the heart of Snow White” (Ames; emphasis added). The language of “demand” intensifies this action and positions the Witch as complicit in the villainy, whereas in the play, when Brangomar begs the Witch, “Oh, make a spell and turn her ugly—as ugly as a toad!” the Witch replies, “Won’t! Refuse to make any more bad spells” (White 60). This is a very different scene. Here, Brangomar appears no more than a spoiled child from whom the Witch has withdrawn support. When, later in the play, the witch does take an interest in the heart of Snow White, she explicitly extricates herself from the murderous action the queen aims to undertake. With a hair restorer spell in mind, the Witch explains that the last ingredient she requires is “the heart of a nice young girl” (White 61). Lest she be understood as the villain, she adds, “Now I wouldn’t harm a nice young girl myself for anything; but if you’re determined to dispose of Snow White I’d be obliged for her heart” (White 61-62). *This Witch* has “*demand*ed” nothing, instead, she refers to the heart of Snow White as little more than an item on her grocery list. Because the audience does not find the same humor in exchanges with the Witch, the tone of the film

as well as the central dramatic action within are changed. It is not the figure of the Witch who nudges the action ahead with a smile and a wink to her audience; instead, it is the evil within Brangomar that motivates the film's central action. As a result, the tone is more serious and, one might argue, reflective of the *Snow White* tale's European folkloric past, where jealousy led the way, *not* Ames' Witch Hex. Moreover, this earlier scene between Brangomar and the evil witch draws to a viewer's mind an alternate tale of negotiation and commitment for later payment, that of *Rumpelstiltskin*, only it is the villain here who is bound by a verbal contract. Not only has Ames' vision been obscured by this alternate character presentation then, so too has the *Snow White* tale itself.

What Ames lost in the creative presentation of humor then, he attempted to recreate by heightening the romance of the film. Not only do the Prince and Snow White meet early in the film's action, but this relationship is cultivated in a more domestic space with the insertion of an additional scene involving the Prince (prior to their meeting at court). Where Merington's and Ames' plays draw Snow White's meeting with the Prince into the opening scene, the film finds Snow White's first encounter with her Prince in the woods, where she saves a bird from his bow. Although they briefly interact and return to Berthold's (the huntsman's) home with his children, the Prince is not aware of her identity during this interlude. He is equally unaware of her public standing when he visits the court and she appears with the rest of her Maids. Nevertheless, each of these interludes works to build the romance between the two and impacts the audience's eager anticipation of their next encounter. Further, when the queen decides that they should be parted for a year and a day, as in the play, this separation is even more distressing, given

that the audience has heretofore seen the romance building between the two. Where words cannot as be useful to Ames, per the rhyming interlude of the Prince and Snow White as they danced across his stage, the mounting dramatic action and romantic tension enables the viewer to become similarly engaged in the production.

Further, although it is not the same type of encounter and manipulation of dramatic action, there is also a domestic romance that is cultivated though the greater visibility and impact of Berthold's children. Again, a viewer cannot understand Berthold's fatherly compassion, as one had in the play, without the language of his verbal exchange with Queen Brangomar, when he intends to beg off from the task of killing Snow White.

THE QUEEN. Suppose I lock your six children in the great Grey Tower. Suppose I order that no one shall take them food or drink.

BERTHOLD. Oh, your Majesty, have mercy!

THE QUEEN. Think! Can you not hear their six small voices call to you from the dark. 'We are hungry, Papa,' they will cry; and they will beat on the door with their little hands.

BERTHOLD. [*Sinking to the ground.*] Spare me! Spare me!

THE QUEEN. At last they will be too weak to cry or beat. Then, when all has grown still within the Tower, I will say, 'Berthold, here is the key. Go and see how Queen Brangomar punishes disobedience.'

BERTHOLD. [*Rising with a cry.*] Oh, I will obey, your Majesty! Heaven forgive me, but I cannot let my children starve! (White 66-67)

This language in addition to the staged action of this scene, filled with sentiment, aims for a viewer's/reader's heart. An audience feels for Berthold based on his display of a parent's unconditional love for his children when their safety and well-being have been threatened. In short, White's/Ames' words and stage directions within the play make an audience feel *with* Berthold. However, in the film, most of the play's language is lost. This exchange, including Berthold's agreement, takes place over the course of a mere 25

seconds. Only two sentences appear on the screen. The first (from the Queen), “Berthold, go to the Forest, kill Snow White, and bring me her heart — or I will lock your children in the Grey Tower and starve them to death!” and 6 seconds later (Berthold’s reply), “Heaven forgive me! — I will obey” (Ames). Although during those 6 seconds of action, Berthold falls to his knees before the Queen, the audience might not necessarily feel for the giant of a man. Yet, with an earlier scene in the film’s action portraying Berthold alongside those children—when he came in from his work and they bounced beside him holding his hands, before he lifted one to his chest—the audience knows him to be a good and loving father.

This heartfelt domesticity is further evinced when Berthold is senselessly thrown into the “same dungeon where the Queen had imprisoned his children,” as a result of her mistrust (Ames). When Berthold realizes that his children are close, he is a man strong enough to bend the bars of his prison cell, inventively using a string (which a bird brings to his cell window) along with his boot to pull each of his children to safety. While this scene is entirely tangential to the episodic structure of *Snow White*, it does play on a viewer’s heartstrings. Although his words are silenced, one views a parent who, even when broken, would do anything for his children. An audience aches with him and for him and cannot stop watching the filmic action for a moment. The music amplifies the tension in this scene, and although a viewer knows that his heart is with his children, it remains uncertain whether he will be able to rescue them. When he does, and hangs the guard whose keys he steals, an audience rejoices in this resolution of good triumphing over evil, just as it will with the romantic ending of the play, when Snow White and the

Prince come together, and the Queen is punished by having to live with her “evil face” (Ames). Where the play did not require Berthold’s children to be readily visible, the film required their presence to position Berthold in this same romantic light, and also to reassert Ames’ *Snow White* vision where it had been lost with the character shift of Witch Hex.

Those characters and scenes which remain unchanged are equally important, in order for Ames’ *Snow White* vision to maintain credence across multiple media. The dwarfs particularly serve this function, and also work to lighten the dramatic action on screen. In the film, many of the dwarf’s lines or language used in interactions with Snow White are upheld, particularly those which position them as silly, foolish, or inferior. They are already inferior visually, little Santa Clause-like men hobbling around alongside a young (though taller) girl. However, they maintain their same linguistic misapprehension here, unable to speak on a level that corresponds with Snow White. When it is decided that she will stay, they ask, “Er – could you tell us what to say when you’re so glad that it almost bursts you?” As in the play, she offers them language, “Then we shout, ‘Hip-hip-hurrah!’” and in so doing guides them (Ames). An audience laughs at the dwarfs’ inability to find words to match their experience and understanding with Snow White’s logical thinking, just as it laughs at Snow White’s mimicry and leadership over their play. She not only offers them language but guides the simple group. In the presentation of a game, which appears play for her, the dwarfs actively follow her words and motions. As they do, the audience continues to laugh at these funny little men set alongside a beautiful human and princess. At the end of the film,

although Snow White refers to them as “brothers” who must stay with her forever, the audience visualizes them more as her pets, who amble up to position themselves alongside her throne (Ames). On the one hand, despite these scenes that create stability between the playwright’s and screenplay writer’s storytelling vision, I find Ames’ *Snow White* adaptation for film reductive, losing, with technology, more ground than it had gained in its theatrical or storybook forms.

However, one must recognize that for the purposes of “silent” film, a different story had to be told. In *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*, Jack Zipes argues that “The technologies determine the extent to which a filmmaker [or, in this case screenwriter] can elaborate and expand upon a particular fairy tale or fairy-tale motifs and themes” (9). In this new context, impeded by the loss of vocal sound, the witty language of Witch Hex no longer fit the bill. However, in his use of a singular, unchanging visual image, Ames found ways to amplify those “American” elements—the romance, the humor, the socially accepted gender constructions—in such a way that allowed him to speak to a movie-going audience, while still recalling elements of his own earlier version of the tale. As such, he had adapted his version of *Snow White* to speak to American culture in a new way. Even if he were not necessarily interested in making his work “American,” the changes that Ames initially employed and subsequently reshaped reflect an interest in generating a popular art form via the tale and utilizing a cultural connection to do so. This adaptation therefore demonstrates a consciousness of the changes in his surrounding culture, similar to that which informed the Grimms’ supplementary editions. Ames contextualized his work and vision for a new

setting and, potentially, a new type of audience, yet he did so to at the expense of the vision that he had once offered to theatrical viewers (the strength of his adaptation), as well as ties with the fairy tale's precursory traditions.

Conclusion: *Snow White* Moves on to the next American Owner

Neither Merington nor Ames had adapted the *Snow White* tale's content to its new staged (or cinematic) and American context in such a way that their versions could persist. While Merington's work comes closer to Disney in its newly American invocation of the "classic" tradition, her hold on *Snow White* was brief. Her child audience and limited control within the theatrical setting restricted her power of influence. Conversely, Ames' version took many liberties with the "classic" *Snow White*. He presented new characters who divested others of their roles and diluted the central motifs, theme, and episodic actions of the narrative. While these changes produced a unique voice, their lack of folkloric grounding and complex framing served well only for the play or film in its current form. Ultimately, these innovations were not sustainable in a world where new technology had taken hold, or for variant versions or adaptations that would obviously reflect the "classic" tradition of the *Snow White* tale.

In *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*, Jack Zipes argues that particular tales "stick" because of the "propensity within human beings to reproduce some basic narratives, as though there were a 'fairy-tale' gene within us that [he] [has] called a replicator, mental representation, or meme" (130). He further contends that these stories reflect "basic human drives and conflicts [...] [and] touch our instincts

so deeply that we have cultivated them and passed them on from generation to generation” (130). These “basic narratives” reflecting “basic human drives and conflicts,” are contingent upon the structure, characters, and themes which inform them. Therefore, if a writer navigates away from or eliminates some measure of these folkloric elements, in the way that Ames had, the “instinct[ual]” impact that Zipes gestures toward is lessened. To put it another way, if audiences seek and recall most persistently the “basic narratives” reflecting “basic human drives and conflicts,” then, by Zipes’ way of thinking, allowing that central classic framework, the basic idea and theme of the narrative to be displaced by other characters, themes, and actions is a formula for loss, rather than regeneration of a tale. Therefore, Ames power, most particularly evident in his staged production where he had owned the audience’s vision of the *Snow White* tale with the innovations he had employed, was also his downfall in the fairy tale sphere.

Where Ames had many Disney-like attributes to his work—using a pre-existing tradition (more Merington’s/Goerner’s, than the Grimms) as a platform for his own American vision and version; maintaining control over a production to create a singular, unified storytelling vision; owning the fairy tale and speaking to his market; and adapting to meet the needs of his surrounding culture—Walt Disney committed to the fairy tale *as well as* innovations in American technology in a way that Ames had not. Where Ames was more interested in generating and owning a superior vision of a work (primarily in the theatrical setting), Disney committed himself to the project of transforming the European and American versions of the *Snow White* tale into his new brand of animated lore with the use of new technology. Capable in his day of employing word, sound, and

image in tandem with his own singular vision, Walt Disney would come to monopolize the American fairy tale and far surpass the waning influence of Winthrop Ames. But that is the next chapter of the *Snow White* tale in the United States.

CHAPTER 4

SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS: DISNEY'S RESOUNDING INFLUENCE ON THE AMERICAN FAIRY TALE

It is somehow poetic that little more than a month after Winthrop Ames' death on November 3, 1937, Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* assumed the reigns of this American fairy tale, and soon, the American fairy tale tradition on the whole. Ames primary interests and investments in the theatre foreshadowed his exit from the fairy tale stage in the United States. Yet his transformations on stage and screen paved the way for a new innovator and adaptive life force to push the fairy tale in the United States to a new level. Walt Disney, recognized as "his own best story man" and one whose "acting and storytelling ability has often been chronicled"⁴⁵ paired this commitment to story with experimentation in filmic technological innovation and experience in commercialism to celebrate the folkloric tradition of the fairy tale in the United States in an entirely new way (Allan 84, 85).

The storytelling triumph of Walt Disney, however, has not always been viewed so positively. Rather, critical discourse concerning the fairy tale has frequently taken Disney to task for his purportedly insular vision of the fairy tale.⁴⁶ In "Walt Disney

⁴⁵ According to Robin Allan's "Still is the Story Told: Disney and Story," these remarks reflect impressions of Story Department artists Dick Huemer and Ben Sharpsteen, respectively. Further descriptions of Disney's storytelling presence indicate, "He had a terrific personality for telling stories in such a way that the animators and directors were thoroughly confident and believed in them. He could tell a story so that you could see it as it would appear on the screen. I cannot give the man too much credit" (Thomas and Johnston qtd in Allan 85).

⁴⁶ In "Analyzing the World According to Disney," Janet Wasko describes how "The Disneyfication of fairy tales [...] prompted harsh criticism from folklorists, children's literature experts, and educators, who argued that the changes tended to sanitize the original and deny the essence and motivation of the original tales. Furthermore, critics claimed that the narrative structure and balance in the Disney versions overemphasized some parts of a story or certain characters for entertainment purposes and thus distorted the original intent of the tales" (125).

Accused” (1965), librarian Frances Clarke Sayers produced one of the earliest lines of staunch criticism in opposition to Disney’s films. Sayers argues, “His treatment of folklore is without regard for its anthropological, spiritual, or psychological truths. Every story is sacrificed to the ‘gimmick’ [...] of animation” (*The Horn Book Magazine*). When interviewed, she further argued that “One of the great faults he has is to destroy the proportion in folk tales. Folklore is a universal form, a great symbolic literature which represents the folk. It is something that came from the masses, not something that is put over on the masses” (*The Horn Book Magazine*). Both of these sentiments contest the singularity of Disney’s vision, operating under the premise that his adaptation was markedly divided from *Snow White*’s folk tradition.

The shortsightedness of Disney’s adaptation is further detailed in Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. There, Bettelheim calls into question Disney’s “bowdlerization” of the tale, “which unfortunately emphasizes the dwarfs” (199). Added to faults gesturing toward the educational or psychological implications of Disney’s adaptation are those from the literary critics, also marking the destruction of the *Snow White* tale’s essential folk properties. Several times over Jack Zipes has attempted to disclaim the storytelling impact of Walt Disney’s fairy tale films in light of transgressions against the tale’s folkloric and literary past.⁴⁷ Briefly, for Zipes, Disney’s vision was disconnected from the tale’s German folklore (*Sticks and Stones* 84). In fact, Zipes argues that Disney had

⁴⁷ See Jack Zipes’ *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, “Breaking the Disney Spell,” *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter, The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*, to name a few (recognizing this condemning glare over time)

so altered the *Snow White* tale that he had generated a kind of “utopianism” which avoids the more complex conflict resolution in which the reader of the traditional tale is productively engaged (*Enchanted* 17). And, if seemingly mutilating the tale’s past were not enough, Zipes also contends that such changes were made purely to “suit [Disney’s] [own] tastes and beliefs,” to provide an overarching view which allowed him “to monopolize fairy-tale films so he would be recognized as a kind of master storyteller” (*Fairy Tales* 203; 14). Where this role of “master storyteller” bears a negative connotation in Zipes’ (and others) assertions, Disney’s animators viewed the same as a positive quality.

The medium in which Disney worked left him little choice but to become a kind of “master storyteller,” guiding the vision of the production, and those under Disney looked toward him for this vision of story. Moreover, with respect to the tale itself, I would suggest that Disney had not closed interpretive gaps with this vision but opened them in new ways. Continued analysis of his *Snow White* vision professes to the multiple levels upon which one might understand and appreciate this adapted version of the traditional tale.

Based on the generative nature of this interpretive flexibility (within Disney’s version), I would have to agree with M. Thomas Inge that Disney’s film “does no violence to the traditional patterns of meaning of the original fairy tale but rather renews and affirms the relevance of the story for another century,” positioning Disney as a “conservator of Western culture and values for twentieth-century Americans” (142). Elements of Disney’s work then both serve to further conversations concerning the *Snow*

White tradition and display the evolution of an American cultural tradition embedded within the tale. Evidence of his national contribution is also apparent in Tracey Mollet's historicization of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which finds the film most responsive to its Depression era context (111). The film's contributions to the moment of its creation in this country, as well as the development of an American *Snow White* tradition in part serve to rationalize the tale's rise to prominence. Yet, I would like to suggest that Disney was not only speaking to his own (American) culture, but to the larger *Snow White* tale's more classically referenced European tradition. It was, in part, the combination of these influences that enabled him to successfully create a classic.

The folkloric footprint that the animator followed has proven essential to Disney's persistent influence. Not only was Disney professing to have adapted "The Grimms' [*Snow White* which] was clearly the best known prose version in 1930s America," but he was already building from a tale which had resounded in the United States across multiple media—literature, stage, and silent film (McGowan 71). Although he might only have referenced the literary version as a "source," in fact, he had this "classic" as well as the beginnings of a new American *Snow White* tradition to mold and reform, *and* both strains of influence had already captured the American imagination. Understanding the tale's prominence, and especially that of the "classic" Grimms' version, Disney, as a fellow storyteller, venerated that earlier "classic" in his retelling. In fact, "Before production began, Disney called his staff together for an after-hours meeting and acted out all the parts as he imagined them (*Encyclopedia of American Studies*). However, his vision widened beyond the Grimms' version. McGowan asserts that the "production

material highlights that the Disney team consulted a variety of other versions of the story, such as Joseph Jacobs' 'retelling' in the collection *Europa's Fairy Book* (McGowan 71). Further, the animator's work drew upon American versions (from stage and screen), and still other popularly recognized source material. Karen Merritt notes that "as the stenographic transcripts of the brainstorming sessions make clear, the Ames play [and within it, the Merington play] was just one of a shelf-ful of inspirational sources, including the Studio's own animated shorts, silent and sound films and film stars, radio and vaudeville performers, operettas, and even Shakespeare" ("Marguerite Clark" 17). This blending of source material for his *Snow White* version "echoes the Grimms' process of collecting and retelling folklore," shaping the many available versions of a tale according to their own artistry (McGowan 81). Thus, Disney's process both employs and looks beyond the tale's earlier tradition and methods, toward alternate types of source material, allowing the folklore he presented on screen to speak to a wider audience.

This expanded bedrock of research, as well as the particular attention paid to earlier American versions of the tale demonstrate Disney's recognition that he could not emulate the Grimms' tale in an American context. I would not argue with Zipes' contention then that Disney "cast a spell over this German tale and transformed it into something peculiarly American" (*Fairy Tales* 203). However, I would note that many of the changes upon which Zipes shed a spotlight—heightening the romance of the tale (from the start), presenting a "love triangle," of sorts; expanding the impact of animals "as protectors"; giving the dwarfs a more significant role; reducing the number of the Queen's visits; and awakening Snow White with a kiss—were first implemented by

Merington, Ames, or both (*Fairy Tales* 204). Thus, ascribing these changes specifically to Disney negates the American developments of the *Snow White* tale that preceded Disney and prioritizes this creator's work in the very way in which Zipes claims Disney himself to have done, in a mode of self-veneration (*Fairy Tales* 206). In other words, insofar as Disney's marketing may have promoted his own tale, so too do the critics and scholars who recognize *only* his version's alterations. By observing the larger American trajectory, one can see that Disney indeed made the tale "peculiarly American," acting in accordance with and expanding the folklore of his precursors (*Fairy Tales* 203).

In contrast to Zipes understanding of perpetuating authentic folkloric transmission, which emphasizes the "classics" of the past and remains critical of innovative methods of production, my understanding of Disney's use of folklore follows that of Linda Dégh. Dégh describes her "view of folklore as a process in time and space, in constant motion and change under the influence of an epochal transformation of western civilization" (*American Folklore* 3). On these grounds and by viewing the form as a dynamic process, I suggest that Disney's alterations provide evidence not indicative of inattentiveness to the tradition of the tale and the brothers Grimm, but instead displaying an evolving American model framed by the predominant precursor—the Grimms' *Snow White*. In Disney's version, many of the Grimms' *and* earlier American motifs, episodes, characters, and character relationships are employed and amplified using modern techniques in film and animation.

Based on this utilization of the precursory *Snow White* tradition and implementation of modernized technology, in this chapter, I argue that Disney's *Snow*

White and the Seven Dwarfs productively revives the history of the tale by seamlessly blending earlier versions with creative and timely enhancements which extend the tale's tradition still further. The range and process of Disney's work—attending to multiple sources, texts, and media enhancements—displays an interest not singularly in the gratification of his own pursuits, per Zipes, but in using all available sources and resources to generate a viable folkloric successor (*Fairy Tales* 206). Importantly though, this contention does not overwrite Disney's commercial usage of *Snow White*. The multiple product lines generated to reinforce his adaptation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* offer evidence of Disney's extension of the American tradition of fairy tale ownership (and later manipulation of the market) to propel his continued folkloric transmission of the tale. However, I find that Disney's primary contribution to *Snow White* (and the American fairy tale tradition) was in his storytelling force, made possible by his holistic treatment of the tale: piecing together the folkloric, European “classic” with the preceding staged and theatrical American traditions, then blending those words with technological advances in image (animation and color) and sound. Only by drawing together traditional models, cultural precursors, and technological innovations that spoke to his interests could Disney, as master storyteller, subsequently market this collage-like, fairy tale construct as a strategically re-formed, unified whole—*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

Although this chapter primarily emphasizes Disney's contribution to the *Snow White* tradition, I begin by contrasting his folkloric usage of animation with the exploitive Fleischer Brothers' short, “Betty Boop in Snow-White” (1933). In this lesser known, far

more distorted and self- or corporation-promoting version, I find a *Snow White* representing the ill-treatment of the fairy tale so often associated with Disney. As such, the backdrop or counterpoint it provides can change the way that one perceives Disney's storytelling ability, care in adaptation, and influence on the fairy tale tradition. To subsequently attend to his folkloric and artistic capabilities, I will employ Steven Swann Jones' model and episodic structure (which represents the Grimms' prior "classic"). This framework will ground my authentication of Disney's story [in accord with the folkloric model(s) of the past]. Within this frame, I will also layer analyses attending to those technological transformations—in animated action, color, and sound—which Disney productively utilized to implement his own kind of folkloric patterning. I find it impossible to separate these innovative developments from the Americanized episodic *Snow White* moments that are subsequently produced in the film. This makes Disney a transformer of folklore. However, only in contemporary studies have folklore, literature, and media or film come together. For this reason, I close with those more recent interpretations of Linda Dégh, Sharon R. Sherman, and Juwen Zhang. Where Dégh's work concerns folklore in various media, Sherman and Zhang's studies move more specifically into discussions of folklore in film. By drawing on this critical body of work, I position Disney's *film* in the realm of more contemporary understandings of *folklore* in the last section of this chapter. It is my aim to represent Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* not merely as a tale contributing to one field of discourse or another, but to demonstrate how, by merging those critical fields individually recognizing or condemning Disney's artistry, one can better understand his folkloric impact.

Misrepresenting *Snow White*

It is worth recognizing that Disney's was not the first animated production of *Snow White*. Although one might argue that the Fleischer Brothers' short, "Betty Boop in Snow-White," suffered from the same self-interest that Ames' productions had, in this case it was not an issue of self-interest and motivation, but company interest, motivation, and affiliation. In the Fleischer Brothers' attempt to latch onto the fairy tale's rise, the company's own self-interest in and blatant promotion of its already heralded characters, Betty Boop and Koko the Clown, won out over its commitment to the tale itself. David McGowan too finds the short troubled by the influence of corporate ownership. "While the surprising grotesqueness of the final image may seem somewhat worthy of the Brothers Grimm, despite being unique to this film, the majority of the cartoon presents variations of formulas associated with the *Betty Boop* series rather than the plot of *Snow White*" (McGowan 73). In this presentation of *Snow White*, animation clearly takes the lead, while the tradition of the tale and its lineage are mutilated in service of the modernist animated form projected. Although it offers some of the traditional *Snow White* motifs and episodic structure, the film lost sight of the tale's past. As a result, outside of film critics, the Fleischer Brothers' version, like those of Merington and Ames, falls into the shadows of an American historical trajectory of the tale, which namelessly proceeds to Disney for its firsts. Nevertheless, it is significant to recognize *this version* to counterbalance the aforementioned folkloric and literary critiques waged against Walt Disney. Lapses in the tale's folkloric past and a focus on innovations produced through animation at the time, made "Betty Boop in Snow-White" a *Fleischer Brothers'* classic as

well as a classic representative of modernist filmic technique, but in its deliberate inattentiveness to tradition, the tale produced in no way compares to Disney's *Snow White* "classic."

By taking a greater departure from the Grimms' version, expressing the contrasting blend of elements speaking to child *or* adult audiences, and presenting the jazz infused popular art of the time alongside the ancient mythos of an underworld, the characteristics of *Snow White* become lost in the variant forms, narratives, and transformations being displayed. While the primary focus on the central characters of the short alone proves problematic in terms of the tale's tradition, the seemingly disjointed elements (as opposed to the tale's more traditional motifs and episodic structure) position it as time-marked in terms of both content and use of technique.

Even though the tale/short might have functioned as a classic by means of its brevity alone, as McGowan puts it, "the lengthy comedic digressions within this already-economical structure indicates a conscious decision to privilege humour over faithfulness to the original text" (73). True enough, these comedic digressions operate counter to the purpose of the *Snow White* tale, added to which the visual presentation they create renders a self-promoting display of modernist technique. Herein, "filmic space—its ability to explore unseen dimensions, to play with forms," and to "transform reality itself" [is used] in order to make space visible and give it a voice" (qtd. Vidler in Telotte 135). In fact, as J.P. Telotte notes, the "transformation" of animated figures into other objects or things existed also throughout Disney's Mickey film, *Plane Crazy* (1929) (Telotte 136). Where this alignment in techniques of animation used by both the

Fleischers and Disney displays a comparable positioning of the two in terms of aesthetic value, the deliberate destruction of the “classic” *Snow White* tale in the name of this artful animation of the time sets the two apart.

As the tale/short is introduced and credits run along the screen, the listener/viewer is drawn in to a collision of musical elements. Initially, the background music represents a tradition of nursery rhymes with the “Humpty Dumpty” tune. Jazz music then breaks in, with the appearance of Cab Calloway’s name. Already, an odd blend exists, potentially appealing to audiences young and old, but in something of a disjointed fashion. While both tunes of nursery rhymes and jazz music will return throughout the course of the short, neither seems to correspond with the *Snow White* tale presented.

When the Fleischer’s Boop/Snow-White appears, she does not resolve any of these musical tensions but instead creates more of her own. The presentation of this character seems to not only clash with the fairy tale represented, but elements within the animation itself appear to operate in conflict with one another. In her sexy caricature, Boop/Snow-White is referenced as “cute” in the tune behind her, yet Boop’s nicely rounded, curvaceous form has clearly been generated to entice her viewer and is not “cute” by any means. This is not the naïve, barely developed Snow White heroine, entirely unaware of the beauty she has become; instead, Boop/Snow-White stimulates and entreats her audience’s engagement through the use of her body and the “cute” voice which accompanies it. Yet, when she enters the castle to tell the guards, “I wanna see my step mama...”, she does so to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” (Fleischer). This child-like tune clashes with the sexy, woman-like prowess of Boop, but offers something

of the child-like innocence of earlier versions of Snow White. However, this image too is quickly dashed when Boop/Snow-White encounters the queen, deliberately taunting her by inquiring about her “looking glass” (Fleischer). Again, to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” Boop/Snow White sings: “I heard about your looking glass, looking glass, looking glass; I heard about your looking glass...” batting her eyelashes all the while (Fleischer). Although the queen does not allow her to complete her rhyme and inquiry, the implication is that Boop/Snow-White is equally interested in the mirror’s evaluation of her beauty. It is no longer the queen alone who is vain, but the Boop/Snow-White imagined here is equally concerned with her appearance in comparison to others. This likewise complicates the simplistic educative order of good and evil within the tale, just as Boop’s appearance had. Is sexually enticing behavior or vanity “good”? Is ugliness “evil” (the cartoonish queen being slim and lanky, with bulbous features and a particularly large nose)? While the viewer attempts to unravel this complexity, another level of literary allusion appears. The “evil” queen orders “Off with her head!” following that fateful recognition that Boop/Snow-White is “fairest” (Fleischer). In this remark, *Alice in Wonderland’s* Queen of Hearts is recalled. Another leap into children’s literature has been made. In the first two minutes and seventeen seconds of the short then, one has been bombarded with an awkward collage of nursery rhymes, jazz music, and other literary allusions, as well as sexually-enticing animated characters, produced under the cover of “goodness.” Further, while there exist a handful of *Snow White* images, these are created with characters whose personalities produce conflicts with the thematic emphasis of the tale. Neither the sound, nor the images, nor even the two combined seem

to create a sensible or cohesive tale. That being said, part of the purpose within these earlier animated shorts was to play with form(s). In so doing, the natural order of the “real” and potentially even the “real” *Snow White*, in this instance, was subverted (Telotte 135).

Unsurprisingly then, this same sort of compromising endeavor is continued through the use of transformations. After being abandoned in the woods, Boop/Snow-White walks alone through the snow only to trip over a mound of snow, becoming something of a snowball herself. Soon after, she runs through a wooden frame, which transforms her snowball envelopment into a snow casket, solidified into ice when it topples into a body of water. After sliding through the home of the seven dwarfs in her iced casket, she is quickly transferred to the “Mystery Cave” (Fleischer). The glancing references to the episodic structure of *Snow White* here are subsumed by the humor of the animation produced via these comedic transformative moments. The Fleischer’s were not concerned with the lineage of the tale, but merely employed it as a popular vehicle for expression of “irony, the risqué, and one-off gags about physical transformations of the everyday world into surreal forms” (Aloff 242). While “amusing” and “charming” and given to a kind of modernist play, the cartoon emptied itself of *Snow White* even as it employed a handful of the tale’s recognizable episodes and motifs (Aloff 242).

By the time Boop/Snow-White enters the “Mystery Cave,” all connections to the folkloric past of the *Snow White* tale appear to be absent. Before this space becomes the focal point though, the audience’s gaze is directed toward the queen who slips down the grave marked by Boop’s garter. One finds no temptation though, for Boop has entrapped

herself in a death-like state. Thus, what follows is a chase-scene interrupted briefly by a clown, who subsequently morphs into a ghost-like long limbed figure. This figure, singing “St. James Infirmary Blues” shape-shifts occasionally according to the lyrics of his song (for example, mutating into a “watch-chain”) as he guides Boop’s encased corpse through this underworld-like scene (Fleischer). This performance presents itself as central to the short, and indeed, outside of Boop’s overall flapper-like appeal, it is this moment which situates the cartoon most significantly in its cultural moment whereupon jazz music takes the lead. However, its significance in terms of the *Snow White* tale is unclear. Equally unclear in its purpose is the Queen’s transformation into a dragon once Boop has been resuscitated by melting in the heat (presumably in the throes of hell). Before Boop, Koko (the clown), and a helper escape the dragon/Queen, this figure will be deboned and left to remain in the hell which her villainous behavior has warranted. Transfiguration through animation and song guide this scene. There is no *Snow White* motivation, only the preoccupation with the central characters of the series and their corporate-invested presentation through animation. As a result, there exists no story to be retold, only a muddled amalgamation of actions and effects produced through variant forms and transformative moments.

Although these defects limited the longevity of the Fleischer Brothers’ *Snow White*, the broad range of motifs and allusions displayed in some ways help to prepare a viewer for Disney. For as much as Disney speaks to his own American audience, so too does his adaptation harken back to its European precursors. This is, in fact, part of the folkloric magic of Disney; his work embodies that which came before, but it

accomplishes this feat cohesively, in a way that the Fleischer Brothers never intended to. Yes, they use the familiar *Alice in Wonderland* allusion, as well as familiar nursery rhyme tunes, aligning perhaps with the earlier American staged or cinematic productions of *Snow White* (which likewise encouraged their audiences to hum the familiar children's or Christmas melodies), but the subsequent clashes of mythos and jazz failed to contribute to and actually broke the narrative arc.

Furthermore, the features of this *Snow White* version bearing the strongest resonance are the individuated, company-owned characters—Betty Boop and Koko the Clown. The trouble of a single character or couple of characters being highlighted in the context of a fairy tale contributes to the structural trouble that I have gestured toward above—centering episodes on *characters* rather than actions leading toward significant episodic moments. However, this positioning also problematically detracts from the lasting significance of a tale. In its specific detailing of particular, recognizable characters, Boop and Koko here, the *types* of characters—the Snow White figure and the wicked stepmother/queen—produced by the fairy tale are displaced. The story no longer belongs to the type/types, to the “every man,” (woman and/or child) but to the individual, markedly identifiable character or couple of characters central to the animated sequence. As a result, the traditional motifs and themes are overshadowed making the adaptive innovation Boop's animation, not an artful endeavor which reconfigures *Snow White* in a memorably American way.

Where Disney similarly utilized modernist techniques in animation to produce some of his earliest Mickey shorts—featuring transformations in Mickey's character and

form, he was consistently looking forward (Telotte 136). Disney created “the first sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie* (1928),” followed shortly thereafter by “the first full-color cartoon (*Flowers and Trees*, 1932),” before “the first animated feature (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937)” (*The Oxford Companion to United States History*). Further, in between these technological advancements leading toward that first full-length feature fairy tale film, Disney shifted modes of aesthetic production. Telotte references Disney’s “step[s]” even with his Mickey cartoons of the 1930s into “a realist direction” and “to create characters and worlds that were indeed more aligned with the evolving potential of sound and with conventional film narrative” (139, 140). Both his technological “firsts,” as well as his advancements in adapting narrative enabled him to produce *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which cohesively embodied its more traditional past, while embracing the animative and aesthetic possibilities of his day. Time and technology were moving forward, and Disney utilized these cultural developments to their fullest, while remaining ever-cognizant of this tale’s persistence via the folkloric tradition and modeling of the Grimms.

Returning to Tradition: Authentic Folkloric Modeling from the Grimms to Disney

The start of Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* features a large storybook opening (a volume bound in white and gold) signaling his respect and esteem as a raconteur of a tale long told. Further, the opening of this book gestures toward a recognition of the tale’s literary past, placing him squarely “in the world of the Brothers Grimm and others who wrote versions of *Snow White* that preceded Disney’s film” (*Snow*

White and the Seven Dwarfs 41). In this initial animative move, Disney has not turned away from but toward his precursors. Not a word is spoken as the words from the page appear on the screen. The audience is meant to read them, either silently, or aloud for a child viewer. Disney acknowledges both the tradition of oral storytelling and the Grimms' literary transformation in this moment, but also adds an American twist with his use of color.

Capital letters at the beginnings of sentences and/or proper nouns appear in red, blue, or gold, set against the white or ivory background of the storybook page. There is a hint of the American nationalistic red, white, and blue coloring here, yet the gold sets off the scheme just enough to ensure that the Americanism of Disney's storybook is not overstated. In fact, one might even associate the gold with Merington's earlier version, where the Prince is entitled, "Prince of Goldland." One might conceive of "Goldland" in this context as America. Although this association might be a reach, it is not such a far-fetched conception for Disney to have inserted the color gold as a means for understanding his America (red, white, and blue), as a land of opportunity, where gold or the "rags to riches" rise which produces the same has been embedded into the national story.

This is not only America's fairy tale though, it is also Disney's. As a result, where no words are spoken during this storybook opening, instead, there is a musical accompaniment, one unique to the film. The music that surrounds this moment is none other than the chorus of "Someday My Prince Will Come," which Snow White will later sing to the dwarfs, in her hopeful bedtime story and song. This song represents the

Disney version of the tale, but, at the same time, carries with it the American tradition of the tale in which princess and prince meet and fall in love early, long for one another throughout, and reunite at the tale's end. This romance was not developed by but enhanced through Disney's representation. Through music, however, Disney reminds his viewer how *his story* develops and embeds this emotional connection throughout.

No "Origin" Here, Just "Jealousy"

Beyond the storybook framing of the narrative, Disney begins, perhaps contentiously,⁴⁸ with the site of jealousy as opposed to the Snow White origin frequently retold (featuring Snow White as initially imagined by and then born of the "good mother"). Where this opening proves problematic for some, I would refer to Steven Swann Jones' modeling and suggestion that "Individual versions will sometimes skip one or another of the introductory episodes of each part" (24). And, indeed, in the absence of this first action, episodes proceed through the intended folkloric progression of: Jealousy, Expulsion, Adoption, Renewed Jealousy, Death, Exhibition, Resuscitation, and Resolution (Jones 22-24). Therefore, I would argue that from a classically understood folkloric stance, this opening does not detract from the tale. Rather, I suggest that it productively contributes to the central conflict of the tale—the jealousy incited by a burgeoning beauty within one who has past her prime.

Disney focuses his audience's attention first and foremost on the intense jealousy of the queen. In a compelling scene where she consults her mirror, her utterance—"Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?"—and the mirror's subsequent

⁴⁸ See Bruno Bettelheim's "The Jealous Queen in 'Snow White' and the Myth of Oedipus," in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*.

replies— “Famed is thy beauty, Majesty, but oh, a lovely maid I see. Rags cannot hide her gentle grace. Alas, she is more fair than thee,” and then (upon further questioning), “Lips red as the rose, hair black as ebony, skin white as snow...”— recall the Grimms’ “Sneewittchen,” (“Little Snow White”). Although the mirror does not explicitly reveal that “Snow White is a thousand times more fair,” as in the Grimms’ version, this device provides enough information for the Queen’s own horrific discovery—“Snow White!” (Grimm 250; Disney). Further, by extending the dialogue between the two (queen and mirror), the tension based on this central conflict is heightened. Where in Merington’s and Ames’ versions, the Prince’s acknowledgment and pursuit of his beloved, Snow White, serves to mirror or reflect the truth of the “fairest” before a physical mirror can produce this information, Disney’s version prioritizes the voice of the “Magic mirror” once again (Merington 1.1.1; White 47, 49). However, he could not have rekindled this relationship so effectively if not for the developments in and enhancements produced through color and sound.

Although the words combined with the colorful image are powerful in and of their own right, this scene of influence and the effects produced through animation are compounded by the accompaniment of sound—the spoken language of the mirror. When the queen looks toward her magic mirror with its eerie smokiness, the mask-like visage that appears is tinged with a shade of green, the color itself foreshadowing the Queen’s jealousy. The image reflected is further affiliated with the queen, when its mask-like form suggests a seeming malformation of the queen’s own facial features. While the queen’s face is still smooth and pale, her hair does not flow free, as that of Snow White.

It is hidden beneath her royal gown and headdress. These details through which an affinity between the mirror and Queen are established speak to Disney's particularity, and the image itself draws the viewer in. Moreover, as Eric Smoodin notes, the color combination of the Queen, "Her lips [...] lushly red and her skin solid white, except for reddish cheeks [...] will be the visual links between the Queen and Snow White" (*Snow White* 69). She reflects the image of an earlier beauty but cannot compare to the youthful maiden. As a result of the effects produced by coloring within the mirror and the reflective image of the queen, color combines with animation to form an image of jealousy, frightening in its weight. If this is not enough, the ominous words of the mirror, through which the fairness of Snow White is detailed, deliver the condemning glare of the queen that the audience is prepared for. In a deep, haunting tone, the words describing the "fairest"—"Lips red as the rose; hair black as ebony, skin white as snow..."—horrify the queen (throwing her into a jealous rage) *and* the audience (in its fear for Snow White).

Beyond the jealousy ignited, the mirror's words also paint a picture of the Snow White that Disney intends for his viewer to see. While her coloring is the same as the Grimms', "a little girl who was white as snow, red as blood, and black as ebony," Disney's depicts the folkloric evolution of *Snow White* through his use of the simplicity of the (European) Grimms coloring, without particular characteristics applied; as well as (American) Marguerite Merington's, "Hair like this ebon frame, Cheeks red as blood on the white snow"; and Jessie Braham White's (or Winthrop Ames') "hair as black as ebony, skin as white as snow, and lips as red as blood" (Grimms 249; Merington "The

Song About Snowwhite”; White 16). The American construction of Snow White’s character, prior to Disney, calls for a more specific depiction of distinguishing features to match each of these colors. Using the European and American traditions then, Disney adjusts the story ever so slightly to prepare his viewer for the Snow White that he aims for him/her to recall. Thus, this scene recalls earlier imaginings of Snow White’s beauty even as it memorably narrates and imagines visually, through color and sound, the ugliness of the queen’s jealousy. These elements together produce a noteworthy strand of images and prepare an audience for the American version of *Snow White* that must be recalled and retold.

This new national model of the tale will continue to highlight precursory American versions, for the longevity of a folkloric past that Disney must go on to transform has already pressed beyond the Grimms, and their version alone cannot serve to represent his culture. Therefore, before he presents the scene of expulsion, Disney strategically inserts the romance generated through other earlier models. Although the earlier staged versions of *Snow White* began to hint at the American romance of the “rags to riches” narrative, by opening with Snow White’s origins and contextualizing her persona by way of a royal genealogy, the positioning of this type of figure in American cultural terms is compromised. American culture does not emphasize the Princess, and so, Merington and later Ames offer up a princess in the guise of Cinderella. In Merington, Snow White appears in “attire [that] is conspicuously simple” (Act I, Scene I, pp. 5). Later, when Ames describes Snow White’s appearance through the voice of a Maid of Honor, Rosalys, one finds a bereft child, who had all her “princessy clothes”

taken away and was “made [to] wear old, rag-baggety things” (White 17). To push the meager and lowly representation still further, Rosalys goes on to explain how the queen “made her sweep and dust the palace,” so that “now Snow White is really almost like a kitchen-maid, [who] sleeps in a little closet under the stairs where we keep the umbrellas and overshoes” (White 18). Where Merritt contends that Ames’ development of this Cinderella-like figure was a result of his “min[ing] other popular children’s tales [...] to amplify his adaptation,” I find that an inspection of the *Snow White* lineage from Merington through Disney enables one to see the amplification of an American cultural adaptation, one that spoke more definitively to and of its people (“Marguerite Clark” 7). From Merington’s commoner to this servant, not only in appearance but also in occupation, Disney projects a humble Snow White, entirely divorced from the sphere of royalty. Where his earlier American precursors poked fun at royalty, Disney ushered Snow White into a new era. Here, as Mollet states, she “gains the sympathy of the audience by being cast in the Cinderella mold of every American individual. Disney transformed her into the leading role in the rags to riches story of the American Dream” (114). Where in Mollet’s discussion, this transformation was made to meet the needs a post-Depression era, to forefront common experience or an everyman (via the dwarfs) I would argue that the thread of the American Dream figured through Snow White’s Cinderella-like appearance contributes to a longer-standing national impulse which would continue to make Snow White and her subsequently affiliated princesses relevant. One is no longer looking toward a princess, but a young woman in rags. Beginning from this meager, common status, she can only rise in the mode of the “rags to riches” ideal of

the American Dream. Where Merington's and Ames' humorous depictions of royalty set against the more ordinary and submissive figure of Snow White bespoke a demarcation between European and American understandings of idyllic femininity, Disney's later production no longer required him to battle for distinctions delineating *American* motifs or qualities of character in the fairy tale. Instead, his cultural moment called for an extension of the recognizably *American* qualities of the tale, which served to reflect a narrative depicting the *American* dream, the regeneration of *American* heroines and heroes inside of this frame, and a love that his society could rely on. Outside of the wealth that the transformation of the American Dream permitted, it also offered the opportunity to engage in an equally romantic fantasy where the status of royalty was attainable, and love could prove more powerful than social distinction.

Thus, a further instantiation of this romance is presented through Disney's introductions of Snow White and the Prince near the start of the film. Where earlier American precursors (Merington and Ames) similarly emphasized this early romantic introduction, using language or dramatic action to infuse this scene of love at first sight, Disney enhances the romance and impression for future storytelling through the use of song. The first song in the film, "I'm Wishing / One Song," depicts a hopeful and affectionate exchange between Snow White and her Prince (Disney). Snow White appears (Cinderella-like), scrubbing the steps outside the castle, dressed in rags. She is surrounded by doves, humming happily to herself, and soon begins her portion of the song while standing over the "wishing" well. While Snow White accepts her current status, working diligently as she is meant to, the song she first sings also productively

engages her American dream. Although it is a mere “wish,” the song produces the impression that within this “wish” is a conceivable possibility. The young beauty tells the doves (her audience surrounding the perimeter of the well) and the larger film’s audience that if a wish echoes in return, it will “soon come true” (Disney). The animation of Snow White’s character comes to almost a halt here, as the words and melody of her song take the lead.

Snow White: “I’m wishing
Echo: I’m wishing
Snow White: for the one I love, to find me
Echo: to find me
Snow White: today.
Echo: today.
Snow White: “I’m hoping
Echo: I’m hoping
Snow White: and I’m dreaming of, the nice things
Echo: the nice things
Snow White: he’ll say
Echo: he’ll say. (Disney)

Insofar as Snow White’s minimal movements (a slight tilt of the head to listen for her echo) contribute to the audience’s further engagement with the romantic ideology generated through the lyrics and melody, so too does the echo. Disney forces his viewer and listener to focus on each word or short phrase through the repetition that the echo creates. The repetition in turn solidifies the lyrical moment as a form of sonic memory or recall, such that one is more apt to pass on this particular version of *Snow White*, or, at the very least, a variation of *Snow White* which includes this Disney moment. As John Wills notes, “From the beginning, Walt realized the value of music as both a timing instrument and a storytelling device,” and these carefully contrived machinations gave his tale staying power (34). Where Disney did not *create* the initial romantic interlude

between Snow White and the Prince (as I have argued in Chapter 2), he did productively extend the American tradition of romance that had been implemented by Merington and Ames and enhanced this with his Snow White's American Dream. Through song, Disney intensifies this romantic moment and the American fantasy within it. If not for language and sound functioning together though, the heightened significance of this romantic interlude as well as the audience's recollection of the same would have been lost.

Similarly, when the Prince enters (immediately following Snow White's "I'm Wishing,") giving voice to his own part, entitled, "One Song," audience engagement in the narrative is fostered through song. With Snow White startled back into the castle, the Prince begins singing his ballad toward her widow. Again, the slowed tempo permitted the animation to move back and forth between the Prince (whom we initially see from the back) to Snow White, then back and forth between the two once more, before the camera pans to the jealous queen. After this, there is another brief image of the prince, followed by a brief image of Snow White, wherein she passes a kiss through a dove to the Prince. In this scene, less attention is intensely focused on one human figure and his/her individual bodily actions and reactions. Instead, by means of a continually shifting focal point, an audience is poised to engage with the interrelated character relationships and exchange of emotions that the romance of the song creates the space for.

Interestingly, the development of love through this exchange—the Prince's words and Snow White's responses (gazing, taking in the song)—is not dissimilar from the romance initially kindled between the Prince and Snow White in those earlier plays of Merington or Ames, or the subsequent silent film. What this song does, however, that the

others do not, is reinforce romance while *also* dwelling upon the central theme of jealousy.

Through the song an audience becomes aware of the impact of Snow White's beauty on the prince, and the resultant impact of the romantic relationship on the queen. Disney accomplishes this by positioning the initial lyrical phrases—

One song,
I have but one song
One song,
only for you.

One heart,
tenderly beating,
ever entreating,
constant and true. (Disney)

—as singular in their focus (on Snow White, of course). There is only “one” for the Prince, as evidenced through the repetition of this word (eight times) throughout the course of the song (Disney). This declaration serves to motivate the vile feelings which propel the Queen into action and move the tale forward, and as the Prince continues—“One love that has *possessed* me”—the audience's vision is shifted toward the Queen's condemning gaze (Disney, emphasis added). The word “possessed” combined with Disney's strategic repositioning of the audience's gaze prove significant insertions; not only is the Prince “possessed” in this moment by fond feelings, but, as Disney shows us, the Queen too is “influenced or controlled by” feelings of feminine inadequacy driven by the Prince's infatuation with a greater beauty (“Possessed”). With the Prince's statement and restatement of his “one love” (repeated three times), pronouncing itself as “true” (twice), and “only for you [(Snow White)]” (restated twice) comes the promise of and

from a handsome lover, a promise which the Queen will no longer have (Disney). Jealousy ignited, the camera's eye and lyrical focus then shift back to the Prince and Snow White to re-assert the Prince's "one love, only for you [(Snow White)]" (Disney). By using language that emphasizes the emotions and possibilities (or impossibilities) for each of the three characters within this love triangle, Disney re-centers the attention of his audience on the Queen's jealousy, the central trouble within the tale, while also emphasizing the romance of his earlier American precursors. Thus, as much as he continues in their folkloric stead, he revitalizes the same through a new mode of transmission. As the songs of the princess and prince, as well as images produced by the camera's eye memorably resound with an audience, so too does Disney's tale.

A Swift Scene of "Expulsion"

Once jealousy has been ignited, Snow White's expulsion is imminent. Yet Disney's scene is largely scaled down when compared to those of his American precursors, in which the huntsman takes a far grander role. By paring down scenes between the queen and huntsman and later the huntsman and Snow White, Disney's tale marks a return to the minimal character interaction of the Grimms' tale. Reverting to this "classic" scene of expulsion, however, does not detract from the tale or Disney's American representation; rather, it enables him to dwell further upon the central theme of the story—beauty set against ugliness and its resultant terrors—while amplifying the impact of his own animation. Berthold (the huntsman of earlier American versions) is not the character to be recalled in this tale. His story and family's story complicate the central plot by engaging an alternate, insignificant narrative for a viewer to recall. While

his character serves a function in the tale, it need not represent anything further. This is a good example which counters Zipes' claim that Disney delivers "mixed or multiple messages," (*Fairy Tales* 206). Where earlier versions had embellished some of the traditional *Snow White* characters, confusing the central idea of the tale, I find that this return to the simplification of the Grimms' tale displays an acute awareness of using and productively adapting what was significant from earlier traditions (both European and American) and eliminating that which was not.

Instead of placing any greater weight on the huntsman, Disney utilizes the moment of Snow White's condemnation and fall from favor as a result of her beauty to emphasize that selfsame quality. Beginning with the scene in which the huntsman leads Snow White into the forest, a newly adapted image of Snow White emerges, one that will imprint itself on the American imagination. Where the mirror's words began by defining Snow White's beauty in the terms of tale's past, Disney further particularizes this image with the Snow White viewers find in the forest. As the first to project a film in Technicolor, and recognized as a "pioneer" in its usage, Disney did not have to tell his audience of her coloring so frequently; instead, he could show his viewers (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 35). Although mention of her coloring is made or alluded to 6 times in the Grimms' short tale "Sneewittchen," Disney's viewers' eyes are trained to the sight of beauty through the constant projection of this character. From the forest scene onward, Snow White is displayed with a red bow, set against her black hair, with the fairest of white complexions. Dark eyes and red lips against this pallor again recall the coloring of Grimms' and American versions of Snow White. Her cape, when she flees

into the forest is likewise black and red, set against the white collar of her dress, once more offering up this fair trinity of color. Although the mirror pronounces the words to describe her beauty from the first, the animator's task is as much to tell through story as it is to show. Therefore, Disney displays through as many features as possible that this is indeed a later, far more specifically detailed version of the Grimms' young heroine who was "white as snow, red as blood, and black as ebony" (249).

Yet, Disney's *American* representation would not only be recalled alongside that "classic" Snow White heroine which the Grimms had generated; it would productively move this image forward by means of newly available technology. Dwelling on her coloring for just a moment more, a viewer might notice that it is not only the ebony, white, and red that define Disney's Snow White; there is, in fact, something more to her colorful characterization. The bodice of her dress is blue with red on the sleeves, set against the backdrop of red from the interior of her cape. The skirt of her dress (more frequently figured in subsequent representations as gold or yellow) initially appeared as an off white or creme color. Painting a hint of the nation's coloring onto this character, with blue, red, and a pale or near white color (if we look at the full image of this character) or a more exact red (lips, bow, sleeves of dress), white (dress collar), and blue (bodice) if we look at her from the waist up, Disney Americanizes the Grimms' character, while still thoughtfully figuring forth the earlier fairy tale representation. Recognizing that the persistence of story demanded recollection, Disney did not forget the memorable description of the Grimms but utilized this coloring as technology enabled now him to, such that he could reflect a newly American beauty.

It is this image of beauty which flees into a forest of grim, gruesome, and frightening images. Disney's animation of the woods—the monstrous trees, the grasping branches, appearing like hands, clawing; fierce faces; swamp creatures in full pursuit; and countless pairs of haunting eyes which surround Snow White—serves to usefully represent the Queen's villainy. Disney helps viewers to see through Snow White's eyes how a single fright, the huntsman's acknowledgment of the Queen's malicious purpose, can engulf the imagination, making one's surroundings equally beastly and terrifying. Every image which the forest projects seems to have the same deadly intentions as the Queen. Thus, the significant conflict between central characters is amplified by the animation and heightened still further with the tension which the orchestral music helps to build. Disney returned to the Grimms' representation of expulsion here and enhanced it, not in the way of his American precursors (by generating additional character interactions or developing a role and family for huntsman Berthold), but instead by productively contributing to the scene that was already present, with Snow White "running and rac[ing] over sharp stones and through thorn bushes," and bringing the combination of horrors, real and imagined, to life (Grimm 251).

The Dwarfs' "Adoption": A Grand Pause for the American Storytelling Tradition

While scenes of episodic action seem to proceed methodically up to Snow White's flight through the woods, when she comes to the home of the dwarfs, it is almost as though the action of the film stops, intent on dwelling in this space. Critics have

addressed this point from multiple angles. However, it is important to recognize that these disparate views are frequently based more in the scholarly inclination of the individual critic than in an objective evaluation of Disney's production and impact on the tale, through his utilization of the dwarfs.

Critical discourse concerning stage and screen indicates that Disney had little choice but to rely on the dwarfs as he did. Karen Merritt notes that "For the adapters, like their successors, the source fairy tale provides, even in the Grimms' expansive later editions, no more than a brief, though event-filled narrative. Motivations, when they appear in the Grimms' fairy tale, are simple and inadequate for the requirements of the stage," or screen, one might add ("The Little Girl/Little Mother" 107). A feature-length animated film necessarily needed to be transformed based upon its length, and Disney's additional attention devoted to the dwarfs enabled an elongation of the film's action, using a staple of the *Snow White* tale.

Other critical film reviews found "that the dwarfs were the best part of the film" (Frome 467). In "Analyzing the World According to Disney," Janet Wasko argued that "the film was entertaining, with emphasis on the dwarfs and their comic escapades" (131). However, Disney's dwarfs, ironically deficient when compared to the other humans of the tale, are also indicative of Disney's deficiency in animation. Even for the master animator himself, there were challenges that could not yet be overcome. Wasko goes on to state that amplification of the dwarfs and the success of this element of story had to do with the complications in animating human figures. Because of these "limitations in animation [...] The more cartoonish dwarfs [...] provided comic relief by

way of gags, mostly physical and slapstick, and thus actually dominated much of the film” (131). Frome’s critical survey similarly reflected that “the one criticism [...] included in the standard account of the film’s reception [was] that its human characters were poorly animated” (468). Based on these critical views and acknowledgments, it is evident that Disney resolved a technical complication by transforming the weakest point of his animation into (one of) the storytelling and transmission strength(s) of his American *Snow White*.

By drawing to the forefront his own animative incapacity, Disney also projected an image of the dwarfs’ space or the dwarfs themselves with enough American characterization to: 1) connect these fairy tale helpers both with their earlier American counterparts, and 2) allow for extended viability through critical discourse subsequently examining their representation. David Whitley argues that Disney (“in the early features,” including *Snow White*) takes up the question, ““What is the meaning of home?”” whereupon the home is often remade in the context of “a satisfying and interdependent relationship with nature” (8). This moment occurs once Snow White flees into the forest and subsequently to the cottage of the dwarfs. However, for Whitley, what is most significant in this elongated filmic moment is not the dwarfs at all, but the space that Snow White finds with them in the woods, as well as Snow White’s interactions with another of Disney’s animative attractions, “animal helper[s]” (8). Similarly to the dwarfs, these cute and cuddly forest creatures pull the viewer’s gaze from the human form and, from Whitley’s view, Americanize the *Snow White* representation. Alternately, Tracey Mollet suggests that Disney’s dwarfs, with their individuated personalities, made

them “relatable to the common American man,” and, more than this, “little heroes” for Snow White, driving the Queen to her death (118). Mollet connects Disney’s development of the dwarfs to the “new ‘common’ American man [created] through the shared experience of poverty and unemployment” during the Depression (118). Only by working together would all “bring about a new prosperity in America” (Mollet 118). Where Whitley’s argument emphasizes an American return to nature, or the natural world, present in *Snow White*, Mollet’s argument more pointedly addresses the historical moment of Disney’s production. Both emphasize the contribution of this pause in the dwarfs’ space to conceptions of American culture as they are produced through Disney’s *Snow White* tale.

Lest one understand Disney’s dwarfs as functioning singularly to an *American* purpose, however, Robert T. Sidwell connects Disney’s adaptation of his little men to the dwarfs of earlier myth and folklore. Arguing against Bruno Bettelheim’s contention in *The Uses of Enchantment* that “the Disney dwarfs were [...] prime examples of ‘ill-considered additions to fairy tales,” in “Naming Disney’s dwarfs,” Sidwell argues that “Disney was acting in tradition when he named the dwarfs [...] [giving] the dwarfs in his version of ‘Snow White’ [names that] are remarkably accurate in terms of the criteria of traditional dwarf-lore” (70, 71). More specifically, “In both myth and folklore, names tend less to be *proper* names (in the modern concept of a proper name) and more to be *descriptive* names or labels. In other words, mythic and folkloric proper names served not only to identify, but also to describe what the character in myth or folklore was portraying” (Sidwell 71). By using names associated with characteristics, and descriptive

of their function within the tale, Disney created dwarfs that have not lost their status and positioning as fairy tale types; instead these figures have been enhanced in their affiliation with their earlier dwarf counterparts while also remaining flat in terms of their fairy tale characterization. By aligning Disney's dwarfs with earlier myth and folklore, Sidwell counters the perception that Disney's work speaks purely to and of his animation, neglecting a keen attention to and awareness of the *Snow White* tale's past. Rather, one can see how Disney productively develops this past, as he moves the tale into its future with such memorably adapted animated features as the aptly named dwarfs.

This same type of affiliation with the "classic," as well as subsequent American *Snow White* versions is evident if one looks toward the earlier tales' use of these characters. In the Grimms' former usage of these fairy tale helpers there is a similar pause within the cottage of the dwarfs, which turns over approximately four-fifths (80%) of the tale to their intermittent interventions. Their adoption, protection, and preservation of the young beauty are central to the tale. Moving onward, through Disney's earlier American precursors, one finds that the dwarfs positioned themselves in three out of four acts in Merington's play (75%) and three out of seven acts in Ames' (42%). Given this earlier tradition of attention to the dwarfs, the 45.87 minutes out of the total 88-minute run time (or 52%) allotted to these helpers seems to provide a more moderate emphasis on these figures and their space in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.⁴⁹ Further, it productively shows Disney's utilization of a pre-existing folkloric attribute to the tale, not merely a baseless embellishment geared toward the comedic gag.

⁴⁹ I begin these calculations with the appearance of the dwarfs' cottage, serving to represent these figures and their space.

It was not the time that Disney attributed to these figures that marked a departure from tradition; rather, it was the animator's attention to the details of the space surrounding these figures, as well as their presence as individuated characters. Through animation, personality, and song, these fairy tale helpers may have indeed gained a significance in Disney's tale which rivaled that of Snow White herself. However, I would argue that these qualities through which Disney meaningfully revised the dwarfs both functioned to ensure affiliation with the previous *Snow White* tradition *and* gave audiences yet another tool by which they could recall and retell his *Snow White* tale.

To begin, the animation of Disney's dwarfs immediately engages a viewer's attention and follows from the humorous depiction of their earlier American counterparts. Because Snow White has already discovered their beds with individualized names—Doc, Happy, Sneezy, Dopey, Grumpy, Bashful, and Sleepy—an audience attempts at once to participate in the same game or challenge that Snow White gives herself when she first encounters the “little men” (Disney). “Now don't tell me who you are; let me guess” (Disney). Disney has provided enough information through their appearances and animated characteristics that one can identify each before Snow White does the work for larger audience. When she plays the game to confirm the predictions of the audience, Disney's animation enables Snow White (and his viewer) to immediately recognize Doc in glasses; Bashful fidgeting with his beard, his full face and neck turning red; Sleepy with a big stretch and yawn; Sneezy with a red nose, about to burst with a sneeze; the

giggly and jolly Happy; and Grumpy with his arms crossed and a pronounced scowl.⁵⁰

By slowing the pace of the film to take the time to engage in this play, Disney makes *his dwarfs* memorable for his audience. One can see each again and again in his/her mind's eye, making the character association based upon those individualized characteristics.

Scenes engaging the dwarfs in action or animated movement then only serve to further imprint these characters on a viewer's memory. Their slapstick-like comedy routines, an extension of the burlesque tradition, spoke to the culture of their time, mirroring those popular comedies of "The Three Stooges." ("The Three Stooges"). However, by attending to the qualities of character that fit their names in many of the dwarfs' actions or animated moments, Disney emphasized not only the humor of the dwarfs, but their fit within *his Snow White*. For example, Grumpy cannot emerge from this characteristic name and trait even at the prospect of Snow White's offering of a warm meal. Instead of embracing Snow White, his grumpiness is further pronounced through his mistrust of women and disdain for his counterparts in their submission to Snow White's commands. This characteristic quality then further snowballs as a result of his disgruntled actions and reactions, leading him toward comedic actions of tripping into walls or being overtaken and scrubbed down by the other dwarfs before supper. Therefore, even as a viewer or audience member is entertained by the dwarfs, he/she is groomed to engage with each of the dwarfs as he is represented by Disney. In this way, the dwarfs facilitate Disney's folkloric dissemination of a tale that could not be

⁵⁰ While Dopey's appearance fits his name, as well, with large ears set against otherwise immature features (beardless with wide, child-like eyes; a smaller overall physical form than the rest), he is the only dwarf that is introduced to Snow White because of his inability to speak for himself and confirm his identity.

recognized as merely *Snow White*. Rather, one recalls *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, ironically a title that preceded Disney, in its usage within American staged productions.

As I have argued in Chapter 2, the dwarfs were indeed a significant part of the American *Snow White* tradition before Disney. The humor reflected through them gave them credence as American figures, but also enabled a viewer to more clearly understand the relationship between these fairy tale helpers and Snow White. Disney amplifies this distinction between the intellect and guiding influence of Snow White set against the dwarfs who struggle to interpret and make themselves intelligible to her. When she first meets the dwarfs, Snow White asks, “How do you do?” (Disney). Upon receiving no response, she repeats her question. Frustrated, Grumpy replies, “How do you do *what?*” (Disney). Snow White’s meaning and inclination are mannerly and conversational, where Grumpy’s comprehension of meaning cannot extend beyond the literal. His baffled and silent counterparts indicate that Snow White’s logic is equally incomprehensible to the rest of the dwarfs. Doc has a further trouble with his language, exhibited through a form of “paraphasia”⁵¹ (Biran and Steiner 363). He first inquires of Snow White, “What are you and who are you doing?” (Disney). Once again, later in their conversation, when Snow White offers to cook (in addition to a host of other household chores), Doc similarly struggles to use language effectively and make himself understood, “Can you make dapple muffins, muffle dapplins...” (Disney). Although Doc recognizes that his words are not what he means for them to be, he cannot correct the

⁵¹ “Paraphasia” is defined as a “partial aphasia” (or inability “to communicate verbally”) and is characterized by “us[ing] wrong words, or us[ing] words in wrong and senseless combinations” (“Paraphasia”).

problem. The other dwarfs must act as interpreters, making his language accessible to Snow White; “Apple dumplings” they offer in unison (Disney). Again, the dwarfs can understand one another but cannot make meaning beyond themselves.

Critical discourse in the field of disability studies or even medicine have remarked on a couple of the dwarfs’ individual challenges with language or intellect. In “The speech disorder of Doc in Walt Disney’s ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,’” medical practitioners Iftan Biran and Israel Steiner gesture toward Doc’s trouble referenced above, diagnosing the character with a stutter, “spontaneous paraphasias” and “grammatic errors” (363). They further speculate that the representation (with no link to the tale of the Grimms’ or Disney’s family history), merely displays the “Comic personification of a stuttering leader”⁵² (Biran and Steiner 363). While this accounts for the challenge of one of the dwarfs, the study fails to account for those of the others in the group, aside from remarking offhandedly that they have “personality disorders” (Biran and Steiner 363). Michelle Resene similarly comments on “Disney’s history of disability representation” and its “problematic imagery and stereotypical representation” gesturing toward Dopey (another of Disney’s dwarfs). Resene interprets Dopey as “intellectually disabled” and uses an earlier study of the same character by Schwartz, Lutfiyya, and Hansen to show how this character was “Othered” by his “‘dog[-like] mannerisms” and intellectual deficiency (Resene). However, none of these studies take the full group of the seven dwarfs into account, examine the earlier lineage to their American

⁵² Biran and Steiner similarly gesture toward the “verbal communication problem[s]” of Moses [...], the Roman emperor Claudius, the French King Luis XIII, and King George VI,” in addition to more broadly referencing “stuttering leaders or lawyers [...] in the arts” (363).

representation, or set the full group against Snow White, the flawless female character functioning as an intellectual and behavioral guide. From this angle, the representation of the dwarfs enables Snow White's seemingly feminist rise in position (albeit within the domestic sphere).⁵³ However, these critical analyses, in their emphasis on Disney's individual stereotypical representations, miss the folkloric lineage leading toward the animator's projected vision as well as the relational positioning to the central character. Both gesture toward Disney's evolution of story and still more to the function of the heroine in this American tale.

As a result, the characteristic moment of "adoption" becomes more clearly double-sided in the work Walt Disney. Although true to the folkloric model, the young heroine is ushered into the home by the universal agreement of the dwarfs—"Hooray, she stays!"—she has, in some sense, already devised this as her space and positioned the dwarfs as her adoptive children. This is clear from the moment she encounters their cottage, whereupon Snow White decides, "I like it here" (before the owners of the home have even arrived) (Disney). Snow White need not be called into action or negotiation by her diminutive helpers, as in the Grimms—"If you will keep house for us, cook, make the beds, wash, sew, knit, and keep everything neat and tidy, then you can stay with us, and we'll give you everything you need" (254)—nor does she await their vote, as in Merington's version. Instead, she pushes forward even more than Ames' Snow White, who laughingly recognizes the dwarfs' deficiency and creates a solution by putting into words her use value, when they are unable to rationalize the same. Even that version of

⁵³ This was a prominent depiction of heroines at the time (1930s). See earlier discussion and Wright reference in Chapter 2 (page 97).

Snow White asks, “Oh, will you *let* me? Please let me live with you!” (White 118).

Disney’s Snow White, on the other hand, pronounces shame at the messiness of those “seven untidy little children” before she even encounters them (Disney). Predicting their “orphan[ed]” status, she creates a space and occupation for herself—“we’ll [Snow White and her animal friends] clean the house and surprise them. Then maybe they’ll let me stay” (Disney). When the dwarfs later appear before her, she seems to make the decision for them, declaring, “[the Queen will] never find me here, and if you let me stay, I’ll keep house for you. I’ll wash, sew, sweep, cook...” (Disney). As in Ames version, Snow White gives the dwarfs the idea of how she can be useful in their home; however, Disney propels his heroine forward with an alternate industriousness. A spirit of self-motivation and self-interest, defines this character through her confident will to act, as well as her further diminution of the dwarfs who surround her. Insofar as she finds herself in need of a new home, these seven “little men” likewise need to be adopted (Disney).

While animation and alignment with earlier American versions of the dwarfs alone might serve to enhance Disney’s continued folkloric transmission of *his Snow White*, music and song, both leading toward Snow White’s first encounter with the dwarfs and beyond this meeting, undergird an audience’s recollection of Disney’s tale while also substantiating earlier patterns of folkloric narrative action. A re-examination of the aforementioned double-sided adoptive phase enables a viewer to see Snow White practicing her skills in mothering or teaching before the dwarfs even enter. Once she has decided that she is in the home of those “seven untidy little children,” and suspects that “Maybe they have no mother,” she utilizes song to instruct the forest animals (who

accompany her to the dwarfs' cottage) as to inappropriate behaviors or cleaning practices, singing, "Whistle While You Work," to speed the job along (Disney). When she catches the deer licking dishes clean, she starts, "Oh! No, no, no, no. Put them in the tub," and once this issue is rectified, she corrects the squirrels, sweeping dirt and dust under the rug with their tails. "Ah, ah, ah, ah. Not under the rug" (Disney). While Snow White's qualities of character develop (per the fairy tale's representation of the female life cycle), Disney keeps his viewer entertained and engaged through Snow White's motherly "tut-tutting" in song, as she teaches the little animals and woodland creatures how to clean and keep house and practices the functional role of mothering, also developing into the gendered prototype that American culture warrants.

In the same way that an audience follows Snow White's narrative development and function through song, the dwarfs too, memorably appear first accompanied by song. Immediately following the "Whistle While You Work" song and scene, a viewer encounters the dwarfs in the mine, with the song, "Heigh Ho." This tune begins with the lyric "We dig, dig, dig, dig, dig, dig, dig in our mine the whole day through; To dig, dig, dig, dig, dig, dig, dig is what we really like to do" (Disney). The dwarfs are pictured here in the mine, happily gathering and sorting jewels of various sorts. Perhaps the more clearly recognizable, titular "Heigh-ho, Heigh-ho, It's home from work we go [Whistle]" ends the tune, carrying the dwarfs through their forest walk home toward their cottage (Disney). Both Snow White's "Whistle While You Work" and the dwarfs' "Heigh-ho" clearly correspond with Disney's characters' animated actions, and, even more

significantly, their functions within the tale. Thus, the audience gains a greater understanding of these characters through the songs they perform.

Furthermore, the simplicity, repetition of, and connections between the songs themselves ensures this tale's memorable quality and also displays an affinity with the Grimms' devices for continued transmission of the *Snow White* tale. The first two verses of "Whistle While You Work," for example, are comprised of a simple melody which spans only five notes (Disney). Not only does the same melody repeat itself in the second verse, but Snow White's *whistle* or *hum*, which almost mirrors the melody of the musical phrase immediately preceding, encourages an audience to listen, learn, and whistle or hum along. One might tie the effect of the whistled or hummed phrase in this song to the earlier echo in "I'm Wishing/One Love" (Disney). Or, one might more closely coordinate the whistling of this tune with the whistling of "Heigh-Ho" (Disney). Although the latter tune is slightly more complicated, an audience need only remember two words (for the bulk of the tune)—"Heigh-Ho"—and once again, a whistled melody will follow. The whistling especially, serves to connect these two songs, just as their simplicity and repetition align them with others presented earlier in the film. These attributes together then produce songs that support a memory and recollection of Disney's unique version.

Even though the earlier plays had featured simple songs, these did not necessarily support memory through their fusion with the tale's episodic actions or characters' functions. However, in Disney's film, the "narrative is inseparable from the songs" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 50). Smoodin argues that "This dependence on songs

to tell the story [...] makes the film an ‘integrated musical’. Prior to the late 1920s, this form was virtually unknown in American popular culture” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 51). While this does not necessarily depict Disney as an innovator in terms of the art form manipulated, it does, once again serve to display how Disney latched onto the cultural forms of his moment, applying these timely ideas concerning music and narrative to a traditional form, marked by innovative folkloric transmission and transformation. Again, Disney’s genius was not always in creating, but in recognizing the significance of and combining previous art forms with technological innovations and interests evinced through a particular American cultural moment to memorably convey the *Snow White* of old, anew.

Yet, even easily recalled and repeated songs do not necessarily ensure a perfect recounting of the film’s narrative action. In my earlier recollections of Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (despite having seen the film several times), I tended to associate “Whistle While You Work” with the dwarfs, perhaps because they are frequently pictured whistling as they journey to and from work. In my re-framing of the story for retelling then, this song belonged to the dwarfs. My own memory-based recollection of the animated film-story signals a couple of important points: 1) the songs had made the dwarfs (for my recall) as much a center of Disney’s *Snow White* as the *Snow White* character herself, and 2) even a tale that has taken on a distinct shape per an animator or film-maker’s vision is subject to an audience-member’s re-telling, which may or may not represent the exact image that had appeared on screen. The second is perhaps the more interesting point in terms of the potential for an animated film to contribute to a

folkloric tradition. This formula for extending the tale's storytelling tradition combats arguments, such as that of Jack Zipes, suggesting that "audiences can no longer envision a fairy tale, for themselves," given that "the pictures deprive the audience [...] of visualizing their own characters, roles, and desires" and gestures toward new possibilities for the tale to be recalled and reimagined (*Fairy Tales* 199-200).

Kay Stone similarly argues that the Disney films yet provide gaps for re-authoring or retooling the tale in retellings. While she begins from the premise that "The Disney film [(*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*)] isolates creators and receivers and offers them [...] less possibility of interaction since it furnishes sights, sounds, and motivations," after seeing her son create "his own multitextual and multitextural tale by experiencing it through a variety of contexts [(film, print, and oral)]," she resolved, "neither the medium nor the content can fully define the message of Snow White for any active receiver. Each new context simply adds another text for consideration" (Stone 60, 61, 63). Thus, even "the most closed text and context," (Disney's animated film) allows for an "active receiver[']s" manipulation of a tale in his/her retelling. One could further argue, based on my aforementioned story-memory experience, that even without the layering of contexts (print and oral versions) external to the Disney film, the multiple internal contexts (animation, song, and story—literary and oral) might be enough alone to engage an "active receiver" and produce an improvised retelling (Stone 63). For where song and image *assist* memory and the extension of Disney's fairy tale version and narrative action, such attributes cannot ensure that the audience member or subsequent teller of the tale will perform the tale in its exactitude. That said, the combination of Disney's words,

color-filled animation, and sounds, as well as his significant pause with this episodic action all guide a viewer toward an emphasis on the dwarfs as central to the tale, promoting ruminations on these adopters, or perhaps, adopted. Future audiences cannot but recall *Disney's* seven dwarfs in some respect; his story will not allow it.

"Renewed Jealousy"

Nevertheless, once jealousy is renewed, the viewer's focus snaps back to the central theme of the tale. These little men, while significant, are not powerful enough to detract from the central theme of jealousy within Disney's tale. In this episode, the audience sees again, quite vividly, the queen's horror and when she becomes aware that her fair rival still lives. Her face is transformed by fury before she casts a single spell with her dark magic. As she circles the downward spiral of steps and her cape swirls behind her, there is the illusion of the Queen's flying down the winding staircase, witch-like. Her venomous rage climbs as she draws together spells for disguises and the "Sleeping death," before transfiguring herself into the shape of a hag, cloaked in black with white hair, green eyes, facial features aged and marred with a large wart on her nose, a single tooth, and a scratchy, throaty voice. Her coloring of black and white, set against the red of the apple, recalls again the Grimms' trio of colors, those which the queen aims to undo. The witch-like presence of the queen merges Ames' American Queen and Witch Hex. The evil capabilities of the latter merge with the jealous rage of the former, generating an image of the Queen as evil temptress that one recalls from the Grimms' tale, and restoring to her the magic of transformation that needs no witch at all. In this

way, Disney again draws together European and American traditions, while amplifying their impact through the cackling, frightful animated image that is presented.

A Significant, Insignificant “Death”

Also foregrounding the theme of jealousy, Snow White’s death is unseen. The audience sees the temptation of the queen, the transfer of the apple to Snow White’s hand, and even the bite of the apple. By means of this sequence, and as a result of the unseen Snow White, the emphasis of the scene is placed on the Queen/hag. She relishes every moment of the life slipping away from the young beauty and rehearses the language of the spell as she watches its magic work: “Breath grow still. Blood congeal...” before releasing a huge cackling laugh and proclaiming in a throaty voice, “Now I’ll be fairest in the land!” as the apple is seen falling from Snow White’s lifeless hand (Disney). As much as the tale is Snow White’s, its central emphasis is on her stepmother’s jealousy and inability to accept her own depleting beauty. In this moment, Disney shows his viewer and allows him/her to hear through the Queen’s own voice how her humanity has been poisoned by her ill-feeling. A viewer is prevented from focusing on the object of her jealousy and instead is forced to focus his/her attention on the central conflict of jealousy itself, which leads to the Queen’s undoing. Disney’s thematic focalization through this animated depiction not only served to propel the subsequent narrative action, but further cemented the insidious Queen’s representation in the mind of the viewer, ensuring perpetuation of this particular adaptation.

Disney's Pre- "Resolution"

Before the brief exhibition, resuscitation, and resolution, Disney provides a hint of pre-resolution. When the dwarfs return, they avenge Snow White's death, chasing the Queen through the forest, and up to a steep mountain cliff where, in attempting to do away the dwarfs, she herself falls. However, here too, Disney takes occasion to remind his view of the central theme of the tale. Uncontrollable jealousy led to the Queen's fall, literally and figuratively, jealousy painted in the colors of white, red, and black, the very same as those of the vultures that fly down to devour the tale's villain. Snow White's beauty consumed the Queen, and through the coloring of the vultures, Disney provides a visual representation of this. Although this scene does not offer the traditional folkloric resolution with the Queen being punished prior to the traditionally final resolution of marriage, this modified structure permits Disney to focus on the conventionally romanticized American conclusion to Snow White's story.

An "Exhibition" Featuring Earlier Lore

Following the moment of Snow White's death, Disney circles his viewer back to the start, with the language of the tale appearing on screen. Importantly however, while the presentation of words across the screen invokes the folkloric and literary past, Disney extracts these from the storybook, for these titles do not represent the words of the Grimms. First, one finds, "so beautiful, even in death, that the dwarfs could not find it in their hearts to bury her..." (Disney). Instead of "she still looked like a living person with beautiful red cheeks," Disney more broadly references her beauty, emphasizing the catalyst of her doomed state (Grimm 258). The next screen states, "...they fashioned a

coffin of glass and gold, and kept eternal vigil at her side...”, followed by “...the Prince, who had searched far and wide, heard of the maiden who slept in the glass coffin” (Disney). Here too, Disney reignites the romance highlighted at the start of the tale, also a feature of the American versions. Yet the appearance of words paired with the adapted language features Disney paying homage to the *Snow White* tradition by merging European and American influences. These words are meant to be read *by* and not *to* an audience by means of animation. This was a marked choice by the animator, who could have easily utilized the newfound tool of synchronized sound to tell the tale, even as titles appeared. However, by slowing the pacing of the conclusion, setting each of the titles on the screen for ten seconds or more (increasing slightly with each slide), Disney forces the viewer to read (silently, or aloud to a child viewer) and in so doing to reconnect with what was once spoken and later a tale penned to a page. Where Disney’s animation, color, and sound heighten some aspects of the tale by playing a more pronounced role, he drew the weight and emphasis of these elements back in others, forcing the viewer to reconnect with the words, representing the earlier literary and folkloric tradition of the tale.

A Romantically American “Resuscitation” and “Resolution”

In episodic moments of resuscitation and resolution, Disney’s animation prepares Snow White as bride. All of the animals and dwarfs pay homage to the apparent corpse of the young maiden, laying their offerings of flowers beside her glass coffin. However, this process moves one step further when the glass is removed to place a bouquet of flowers in the hands of Snow White. Her head, as well, appears encircled by white

flowers. Although asleep, she has been prepared for her bridal kiss, and, indeed, the kiss from her Prince, her true love, will awaken her. This type of awakening transforms the magic of the tale—with a bit of poisoned apple more traditionally falling from Snow White's lips. Further, it generates an adapted narrative moment in which the passion of a Prince cleanses away any remnants of jealousy. And finally, the kiss offers a further installation of the American romance which Marguerite Merington had previously implemented.

Contrary to critical discourse surrounding Disney's work,⁵⁴ the first instance of a kiss awakening⁵⁵ Snow White did not belong to Disney; it did, however, appear in another American variation. In Merington's version, it is the Prince who returns Snow White to life, as well, through the prelude to his "bridal kiss" (4.1.9). In Merington's scene, just before the Prince leaves to redress the Queen's actions and avenge the death of Snow White, he demands "first—my bridal kiss!" after which he "(...raises SNOW's head, [and] the morsel of apple falls from between her lips)" (4.1.9-10). Here, the kiss or near kiss awakened the princess. Where one might argue that the morsel still falls from Snow White's lips here, heightening the romanticism but still pertinently referencing the earlier European version, I would argue that Disney's adaptation required him to recall past versions even while turning the wheel of American evolution one notch further. Referencing Merington's version is important then, in that it helps one to recognize that

⁵⁴ See Jack Zipes' *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* and David McGowan's "'And They Lived Happily Ever After???: Adaptations of Literature in the Animated Feature Films—*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Gulliver's Travels*'"

⁵⁵ Although the kiss as a means of "awakening" might be viewed as a common folkloric trope, preceding American cultural usage, its evolution toward Disney's idea of "love's first kiss" can be seen through Merington's *Snow White*.

Disney's transformation was not unfounded or too far out of reach. It was simply a matter of pressing the romanticism a bit further than earlier American inversions had, adapting Merington's "bridal kiss" into "love's first kiss" (Disney). And, because of the transfer of rights from Merington to Ames to Disney, it is likely that he would have been aware of this scene to make his fairy tale coupling and "happily ever after" still more significant.

A New Era for *Snow White*: Advancing Filmic Perspectives on Folkloric Transmission

Because the majority of critical perspectives ground an understanding of *Snow White*'s folkloric authenticity initially with the Grimms', the "fullest" version, per Jones' model, I have framed the greater part of this chapter under that selfsame episodic structure. In so doing, I argue that Disney's tale maintains credibility with Jones' method of "typology," or "naming and classifying" of the folktale (blending the historic-geographic and structural methods) (20). As a result, one can detect the resonant impact of the Grimms' European model, as well as subsequent contributions to it, depicting pieces of *Snow White*'s treatment in American culture, as well as technologically innovative elements via image and sound that contributed to Disney's retelling and particular storytelling force. While I find that this evidence could sufficiently establish Disney's folkloric impact, additional, more contemporary interpretations and theories concerning folklore and film also lend themselves toward this re-positioning of Disney's work in folkloric terms. Yet initially, this too was contentious ground.

Even as prominent American folklorist “Stith Thompson⁵⁶ recognized cinema as both a marvelous channel of tale dissemination and a kind of storytelling event,” one that would “encourage viewers to rediscover these tales,” other theorists “saw the cinema, especially the Disney texts, as an attempt to become definitive, thereby solidifying a single variant” (Koven 177). To mediate between these competing views, I find that value can be found by inspecting the intersections of folklore and mass media, per the scholarship of Linda Dégh, and, more specifically, studies in folklore and film executed initially by Sharon R. Sherman and expanded through the work of Juwen Zhang.

Grounding her understandings of folklore in the “modern age” with Rudolf Schenda, Dégh contends that “Folklore [...] is the product of an ongoing historical process that consolidates the interaction of literary and oral, professional and nonprofessional, formal and informal, constructed and improvised creativity” (*American Folklore* 1). Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in its unique collage-like structure, mapping the lore that came before over an animated screen that would further illuminate the wealth of traditions (both European and American) that fed into it speaks directly to this type of folklore—generated for all, and informed by Disney as artist. When Dégh goes on to reference Schenda’s supposition with respect to mass media that ““folklore reproduced and placed in new contexts produces new folklore genres,”” I see this as precisely what is made available through Disney’s work, a new folkloric genre, where animated action, color, and sound unite to re-envision *Snow White*, enabling Disney’s mastery over the story and subsequent impact of the tale (Schenda qtd. in

⁵⁶ Stith Thompson “is notable for his classification of folk literature, particularly his massive *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955)” (Buxton, et al.).

American Folklore 1). True, this variation stands outside “of the normal context of traditional spinning rooms, firesides, and wayside inns,” yet, as Dégh argues, “electronically reproduced folklore [...] retains all the criteria by which we judge what is folklore and what is not: it is socially relevant, based on tradition and applied to current needs” (*American Folklore* 1). In his production of *Snow White*, Disney had modified folkloric production not in disservice to his precursors but utilizing all that had come before along with his talents as storyteller and artist to speak to his audience using a new technological form. The result was an ever-resounding impact on the *Snow White* tale. However, theories of folklore frequently refused to appreciate this aspect of his work, added to which, the greater critical acclaim for his genius in animation and commercialism meant that his impact on *Snow White*’s storytelling tradition was, in some ways, overlooked, misinterpreted, or discredited.

Because studies of folklore, film, and literature have not always spoken to one another, their divided interests have failed to lend themselves to an understanding of Disney’s tale as one which offers something to each sphere. More contemporary studies have reevaluated the intersections of film and folklore and, as a result, have brought to light the beneficial influence of the former on the propagation of story which the latter bespeaks.

In *Documenting Ourselves: Film, Video, and Culture*, Sherman discusses folkloric film mainly as an extension of documentary film or ethnography. Still, I find that a couple of her initial premises could be applied to Disney’s work, as well. Sherman argues that “Most initial folklore films reflect a preoccupation with texts to which visuals

have been added” (63). While it is no secret that Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* drew much of its influence from the Grimms’ “Sneewittchen,” the animated film also drew from the film script (1916) and earlier play (1912) of Ames. These textual representations centrally informed the visuals presented in Disney’s film, but the tradition of folklore—primarily shifting through literary, staged, and screened forms⁵⁷—also prompted Disney to pay homage to these texts and this language, by means of creating his own storybook within his film. With the innovation of synchronized sound, titles were no longer necessary, yet Disney *chose* to implement these and to place them poignantly upon the pages of large volume, a story book. The visual presentation of language geared toward retelling which had been associated with the earlier lore was pertinent for Disney and his tale’s continued influence.

Sherman also argues that “What is required for a successful folkloric film is not the mere visual recording of the context, but a more encompassing endeavor that provides a glimpse into the processes of traditional human behavior” (68). This prerequisite seems to correspond directly with Zipes’ idea of a “meme” as central to the continued transmission of specific narrative or tale. While Zipes’ work already enables one to think of *Snow White* in the context of this type of formative narrative that cannot be forgotten and continues to be retold, Disney’s use and transformation of motifs or themes of beauty and jealousy impacting female development depict those “processes of traditional human behavior” that Sherman references (68). Indeed, its impact resounds through multiple scenes within the tale (from the opening, through the woods, to the home of the dwarfs,

⁵⁷ In this lineage, I move forward from the “folklore” of the Brothers Grimm.

and even beyond the death of Snow White). This repetition of and emphasis upon a central theme reflecting humanity enables Disney's story to be relevant and retold and connects it to the type of folkloric film that Sherman describes.

Even as these aspects relate to Disney's film and help one to piece together the film's connection with folklore, the bulk of Sherman's theory, because of its (nonfictional) subject matter, departs from the animator's work. To fill this gap in theorizing on folkloric film, Juwen Zhang's term of "filmic folklore" becomes useful. For Zhang,

Filmic folklore, by definition, is an imagined folklore that exists only in films, and is a folklore or folklore-like performance that is represented, created, or hybridized in fictional film. Taken out of the original (social, historic, geographic, and cultural) contexts, it functions in similar ways to that of folkloristic films. Filmic folklore imposes or reinforces certain stereotypes (ideologies), and signifies certain meanings identified and consumed (as 'the truth') by a certain group of people. The folklore in filmic folklore may appear as a scene, an action, an event, or a storyline (plot), and in verbal or non-verbal form" (267).

Zhang concludes, "Overall, it is a historical artifact (the film itself); a describable and transmittable entity; (through the medium of film technology); a cultural product; and a behavior (in filmic patterns)" (267). The fictional context initially described in Zhang's definition as well as the understanding of this type of film as a storyline enables one to conceive of Disney's animation in these folkloric terms. Where the imposition of meaning is concerned, Zhang later goes on to add that "Films with filmic folklore do not have the purpose of documenting folklore, but rather deconstructing and reconstructing folklore through the medium of film, thus creating a time out of time" (268). Not only does this rekindle imaginings of the "Once upon a time" placelessness that helped to

make the Grimms' [and Disney's] tale so successful, but it also offers a space for renewal of a tale based on cultural meaning. This work of "deconstructing and reconstructing" must necessarily take place in a new national setting to embody more recent and culturally relevant precursory versions, values, and ideals. Disney accomplishes this work successfully in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, but is, more often than not, chastised for it.⁵⁸ However, if we turn our attention toward this new idea of filmic folklore, I would argue that it gives weight to Disney's representation of the tale and its tradition as a new folkloric model which also extends that which had come before.

It is insufficient to think of Disney's work as singularly representing the original, but Zhang does not ask a viewer to. Instead, there is value for a transmittable tale which has been adapted both by means of "genetic transfer (the aim to communicate the essence, if not the actual text of the original to the adaptation)" and, perhaps even more importantly, "de(re)composing (which incorporates various cultural narratives, not only the original literary form)" (Hasan-Rokem 489). Disney initially drew upon the text of the Grimms, but this was not the culmination of his project. Rather his adaptive formula involved remaking the Grimms' *Snow White* to embody American traditions and versions of the tale, as well. Using the core of the Grimms' version then, he re-wove the threads of the tale across European and American traditions, emphasizing the values of the latter to produce a nationally informed product using a process not dissimilar from the Grimms. Here, I recall David Blamire's assertion that the Grimms would "construct composite texts" not only based on a tale with the most "coherent plot structure" as well as other

⁵⁸ See Jack Zipes' *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*

variants, but with their own “stylistic improvements” (79, 81). As I have shown in the first part of this chapter, this is precisely the way in which Disney utilized the fabric of the Grimms’ structure to recraft his own American yarn by means of animation. Not only do folklore and literature together reflect these assertions, so too do folklore and film theory. However, the critical fields of discourse must combine, as the layers of my analysis (carefully regarding folklore, literature, and film) have attempted to, in order to offer Disney’s work the credibility it deserves as an authentic model of American folkloric transmission.

Owning *Snow White*: Only Part of Disney’s Story

There is a significant caveat to the argument I pose in this chapter, concerning Disney’s positioning as a kind of filmic folklorist. Importantly, this assertion does not detach Disney from his work as a commercial artist, self-promoter, and expert marketer. It cannot be denied that Disney proved himself an astute force in the commercial market, starting with *Snow White*. When his *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* premiered, on December 21, 1937, “A couple of blocks from the theater, a movie-themed diorama called Dwarfland, complete with diamond mine and working water wheel, entertained crowds” (Wills 1). This was but one way in which the marketing of the film engaged what John Wills refers to as “Disney Culture.” Wills argues that Disney Culture “includes all Disney products, corporate and work practices, education, slogans, media, and advertising” (4). Through these means “facilitated by media, technology, [...] and mass consumption” it “promotes a distinctive way of viewing the world” (4). One can

see evidence of this cultural trend already making its mark not only through “Dwarfland, but also through the “veritable merchandise bonanza” which had been ““Coupled with the cinematic release” of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Wills 9). Wills notes, “The company granted 147 movie-tie-in licenses; 2,183 novelty items saturated the market; 16.5 million ‘Snow White’ drinking glasses and 20 million books were sold” (9).

Berkowitz similarly gestures toward “*Snow White* inspired dolls, dresses, umbrellas, children’s jewelry, socks, puzzles, pencils, cut-out books, and coloring books” (136). In essence, through the market, Walt Disney’s *Snow White* found a space in American homes, if not in its full fairy tale form, certainly through the merchandise which rekindled imaginings of this specific tale. These material products generated in support of the tale drew a new kind of public engagement with this individual tale, coercing retellings of its particular version.

Disney’s adaptation and influence were not only reinforced through accompanying product lines. Mindy Aloff notes that “Prior to home-media technology [...] the studio was quite careful to time the theatrical re-releases of *Snow White* in order to tap into new generations of young filmgoers” (239). Now, well beyond public dependency on theater for popular viewing, the Disney corporation periodically re-releases its “classics,” such as *Snow White*, in the latest available means for viewing. “In late 1994, *Snow White* was finally released on VHS home video (and laser disc) and sold 10 million copies in its first week of sale. [...] It eventually sold 50 million copies worldwide, the bestselling cassette of all time” (“*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*”). Six years following this astounding success, “*Snow White* was [...] released for the first

time on DVD, in late 2001” (“Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”). Later, there appeared a “Platinum Edition,” “Diamond Edition,” and most recently, in 2016, “The Signature Walt Disney Collection.” The gaps in production and later re-releases of these items in newer and more advanced formats (“Digital HD,” for instance) further drive the market toward this film and version.

If these promotional devices were not enough, Disney’s preparation of the market and public relations immediately following his premier served to venerate his storytelling voice still further. In “*Snow White: Critics and Criteria for the Animated Feature Film*,” Jonathan Frome notes how

The impact of Disney publicity on research about the film’s reception is particularly problematic regarding statements that are primarily evaluative rather than informational. [...] By distributing press releases that make aesthetic evaluations of the film, with [...] relatively sophisticated prose, the Disney studio’s publicity department has increased the difficulty of accurately gauging the film’s initial critical reception. (464).

Frome goes on to cite how many critical reviews used the Disney company’s self-same, promotionally generated language in descriptions which seemed to offer critical evaluative insight. In other words, the Disney company’s self-promotion was, even at this early moment, savvy enough to manipulate the public so as to tell its story.

While I have only cast a brief glance on Disney’s marketing impact on the commercial industry, I feel it is sufficient to provide a sense of the animator’s other area of mastery, an area which I do not intend to disclaim. However, I do find it problematic to view Disney as one *or* the other—*either* storyteller *or* marketing expert. In other words, claiming that Disney failed the *Snow White* tale or precursory folkloric tradition on the basis of his success as an owner of the tale is problematic. If we look toward those

earlier American owners, Merington and Ames, their limitations—in audience, narrative scope, and rekindling of past versions in forming the new—prevented their success in creating a *Snow White* tale to be passed on. Disney not only rectified these failings but prioritized the “classic” of the Grimms (and therein the tradition of the folkloric tale) in addition to its previous American variations when generating this new form. Only after the story was produced did the commercial marketing of the tale commence. Thus, the marketing of Disney’s particular version lends to his folkloric transmission—recalling in the purchaser’s imagination the very image of that cartoonish Snow White, the villainous queen, and the loveable dwarfs—but it does not surpass the folkloric impact that the animated film itself has had based on Disney’s careful framing of a tale which combines word, image (animation and color), and sound for audiences to latch onto and share.

Conclusion

Notably, if one were to adjust, even slightly, any one of these areas (folkloric and literary patterning, technology in animation, use of color, or synchronized sound) which Disney had enhanced with a style of balanced sophistication, the adaptation would likely not have persisted. In Merington’s and still more so in Ames’ versions, one finds the troubling of the tale due to additional episodes, characters, or development of scenes which departed from the standard folkloric episodic model. Color, which may have existed on-stage was emptied from the version produced in a filmic setting. American elements needed to be present without overemphasis. Sound, language, and lyric enabling songs which bespoke character development and narrative action equipped

audiences with the means to carry on Disney's tale, recalling and recounting it for others. Thus, again I would say, even with those elements animated more heavily (dwarfs and animals) in place of those which were imperfect (the central characters—Snow White, the Prince, and the Queen), the entertainment value would have likely been overwritten in another decade if *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* had been produced as a “silent” animated film (with only orchestral accompaniment). Where one might contend that some key sections of the film—Snow White fleeing through the woods, for instance—would not have changed in the slightest, most episodic moments of the film are reinforced through vocalized language or song (by which I mean lyric and melody or accompaniment, not merely the latter). Without language, without songs that at once reinvent *and* productively reinvigorate the tale, the animation suffers and the story becomes less memorable. Thus, as much as Disney's work of art demanded recollections of folklore through language and songs tied to episodic action, so too did an American *Snow White* model. However, to say that only the elements of sound and language enabled the film to succeed and persist would be as much of a misstatement as the mistaken supposition that it is only Disney's marketing that enables the tale to persist. It was the unity and balance of these elements (word, image, and sound) that enabled Disney's prioritization of story, making his version a “classic” and later propelling him to further capitalize on the fairy tale. Disney was both a master storyteller and an astute force in the market, but his American folkloric impact on the *Snow White* tale depended predominantly on the former.

CHAPTER 5

FOLLOWING DISNEY: *SNOW WHITE* SUCCESSORS WANDA GÁG AND BOB CLAMPETT EMPLOY A NEW FOLKLORIC MODEL

With the creation of Disney's animated feature film, *Snow White* became farther removed from the theatrical stage, but clearly took its place at center stage in American culture and art worlds both inside and outside the film industry. Despite having been recognized during its high-cost production (\$1,400,000 over a three-year period) as "Disney's folly," the animated film immediately proved a renowned success (Wills 1). Where "Few believed that a cartoon based on a children's story, [...] would appeal to a general film audience," Disney, having used his own *Silly Symphonies* as a precursor, engaged audiences by artfully marrying song and narrative, through developments in "personality animation" (as in the seven dwarfs) and "innovative technologies [...]" [which] led the film to be 'widely embraced for its realistic effects'" (Stone 26; McGowan 74-75; Frome 462). Further, although as a fairy tale it was "initially presumed to be primarily for children. Upon its release, [...] this presumption rapidly disappeared," ensuring still grander success (Frome 465). Along with its broad-ranging appeal, Jonathan Frome finds that "*Snow White* was immediately considered to be a landmark film [...]" [based on] the agreement that it broke new ground aesthetically. As an animated film *Snow White* was sometimes discussed not as a variant of the live-action feature but as 'an entirely new medium of expression'" (466). Mindy Aloff similarly notes that at the time of *Snow White*'s premiere, Disney "was considered to be turning out, by way of cartoons, some of the most avant-garde art in America" (239). Audiences were not

merely drawn in by the familiarity of the *Snow White* tale, already popular in the United States, they were entranced and astounded by the artistic work itself. In a 1938 review, Frank Nugent found, “‘Snow White’ is as significant cinematically as ‘The Birth of a Nation’” (157). Both Yale and Harvard stood in agreement, recognizing Disney’s artistry through the film with “the honor of [a] Master of Arts” and “In 1939, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City displayed original watercolor artwork from *Snow White*” (Wills 32). A curator from the same, Harry B. Wehle, esteemed Disney as “a great historical figure in the development of American art” (“Disney Joins” 17). As worlds of art, education, and film joined in their praise of Walt Disney’s *Snow White*, the last presenting Disney with “a special Academy Award in 1939,” so too did popular interest evince the film’s success (Wasko 14). Janet Wasko measures the film an “immediate hit, setting attendance records around the USA, with box office grosses of \$8.5 million within its first three months of release” (14). In short, the film’s impact quickly stretched across the United States and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, by way of Disney, cemented itself as an American fairy tale icon.

I have begun with this short account of the reception of Disney’s *Snow White*, representative of a variety of fields and industries (not only film), to show the resounding impact of this single version of *Snow White*. Disney grabbed the attention of those: invested in the fairy tale tradition (translators, authors, illustrators, scholars, folklorists, librarians, and early childhood educators), motivated to advance film and animation, interested in the artwork presented via the animation medium, and fascinated purely by the entertainment which the film provided. Disney brought his *Snow White* to center

stage in American culture, and, while I am not as concerned with the broader range of critical reception attesting to the artistic and cultural success that followed Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, I am interested in what these critical reviews suggest—a version of *Snow White* that would not only be retold but manipulated and/or adapted anew.

The overwhelming response to Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* made the version a part of American culture that could not be ignored *and*, at the same time, opened the *Snow White* tale to successors in new, yet fundamentally responsive ways. In this chapter, I examine the immediate successors to Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in the United States from two industries—literature and animation—to provide some insight into their engagement in the dance which the fairy tale would continue to do between literature and other media. The impressions which Disney's *Snow White* left on a wide range of critical audiences, were, in fact, so profound that they propelled immediate, yet divergent adaptive responses reflecting self- and industry-based or corporate-interest. Although the tale had never lost its credence across multiple media, an effect which Disney used to his advantage (producing books that mirrored *his Snow White* version), there had not necessarily been an *American* literary version to distinguish itself from its European precursors (pirated British translations) nor had there been a conversation between American fairy tale representations. However, Disney's version prompted both discussions to ensue, with an American literary response *and* a filmic or animated response which closely followed.

The literary version was prompted by the rise of children's literature and book publishing in the United States. Where educative principles for these young minds were at stake, librarians especially found that a qualified or "correct" American translation of the Grimms' earlier tale was necessary. In their responses to Disney's film version, these custodians of book publishing asserted that its treatment of the tale and subsequent book-based renditions which followed in suit were insufficient in their representations or altered details. Therefore, the need to generate a proper version of the *Snow White* tale in the United States warranted the beginning of this cross-media conversation.

Where animation and Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* had missed the true mark of the fairy tale, a literary representation was needed to "talk back," to right its wrong. Wanda Gág was the author and illustrator selected for the task. Although, given that she had begun the work of producing translated volumes of the Grimms' tales in 1936, one might say that Gág had self-selected into this role. Gág's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, published in 1938, just one year after Disney's debut, was intended to return the tale to a more "authentic" past, maintaining an essential alignment with tradition in a way that Disney's version arguably had not. In sum, Gág's task was to re-awaken the Grimms' folklore, and through this return to its past restore the tale's inherent values.

In contrast, other animators appeared not to differentiate their work from but instead respond to the film in kind—jumping on the successful Disney bandwagon that the full-length animated feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, had created. One might find that this was precisely what the Warner Bros. and, more specifically, director

Bob Clampett aimed to do through his animated version *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*, produced in 1943. However, this assessment would be short-sighted, for even as the short employed Disney's version and strategies within animation to springboard its own success, this variation was more acutely invested in manipulating the *Snow White* tale as a means of unabashedly representing the director himself and his surrounding American culture.

While it is true that Disney too had been leaning more heavily toward realism in his animation of the late-1930s (mirroring trends in American culture), he still prioritized the story that *Snow White* aimed to tell in a way that lowlighted those American cultural and realistic attributes inserted into the film. As a result, Disney's tale more effectively serves as a continuation of the past (European and American) *Snow White* traditions. Yes, he moves the tale forward in many ways, but not so far as to lose the progressive history of the tale. Again, Disney's artistry was creative, but at the same time methodical and inclusive of precursory versions and trends. It is for this reason that Disney's film often came to stand in for the Grimms' as foundational or a baseline for judging or understanding those *Snow White* tales which would follow.

It is against Disney's benchmark then that one gazes upon *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*, seeking out that earlier animator's memorable images which shaped the story. While these are evident, American social and cultural politics clearly take the lead, exploding the *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* that viewers expect to see. In fact, the WWII era sentiments, including racial and ethnic prejudices, are some of what critics find most valuable in this later animated version. *Snow White* as a fairy tale frame becomes

almost inessential. Instead, the self-interest of the corporation or individual animator takes the lead, looking not toward past versions in his/her reinterpretation, but only toward the backdrop of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Because Disney's tale had rapidly become the animator's model and soon would become the American cultural model, *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* had to utilize it to forward an alternative animator's vision.

Whether inadvertently or unabashedly, both of these—literary and animated versions—use Disney as the foundation for their divergent conversations. As much as Gág's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is intended to recoil from the animator's American innovations to return to the tale's past, as an artist (or illustrator, in this case), first and foremost, Gág cannot seem to turn entirely from Disney's animative influence. In the first part of this chapter then, after briefly discussing Gág's and/or the publishing industry's intents based upon her background, I go on to analyze Gág's drawings, accompanying her version of the *Snow White* tale, to show how Disney's images underlie several of these. While I find that her illustrations represent the strongest tie to the Disney version, I also explore how Gág deliberately softens the tale for younger readers or listeners and highlights romance that was not present in the Grimms' version. These attributes, as well, align her version with Disney's and the oft-criticized softened or sweetened version that he created. Furthermore, critics most frequently recognize Gág's contribution to the tale by using Disney as a point-of-reference, central to the composition of her *Snow White*. Thus, even the version which aims to re-authenticate the

Grimms' earlier version, mistakenly highlights Disney's work only further grounding the American *Snow White* tradition.

With respect to the latter, Clampett's *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*, Disney's film in some respects forced the hand of animator. As a full-length animated feature Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* not only showcased the power of fairy tale reproduction or adaptation but also signaled the importance of developing animation, not precisely as he had, but in a similar, if not tangential vein. There was money to be gained in doing so, and the development of a new, more cohesive animated form in its technicolor production could signal back to Disney and push the work of the industry and competing corporations forward. Bob Clampett and his *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* took advantage of the Disney version in just this way. Although it was the animator, first and foremost, who was influenced by the Disney version and approach, this individual (Clampett, in this case) worked under the purview of a studio. Therefore, in the second part of this chapter, I first gesture toward the Disney influence on the Warner Bros. studio, following which I engage the idea that the animator, Clampett, functioned similarly to Disney, as conductor of the vision produced through animation. By means of the company's interest and self-interest of Clampett, however, I view the latter as more keenly aligning himself with earlier American owners of the *Snow White* tale. This self-interest again reveals itself in the actual production of the short, which at the same time returns a viewer to a handful of poignant Disney images, scenes, and embellishments via color, as well as the unified whole engendered through the marriage of music and story. The latter was a significant marker of Disney's fairy tale versions,

for, as I have earlier argued, music and narrative functioning together facilitated a tale's reproducibility. In this successive *Snow White* version though, rhyming and music, while facilitating the production of story and unifying the tale, operate in greater part as supporting devices to entertain as opposed to aid in storytelling, offering some further knowledge of those characters, relationships, or episodes presented throughout.

Although Clampett's version lacks this plot advancement through music as well as Disney's resounding impact of effected by recurring segments of lyrics or melodies, which served to reinforce impressions and story moments, his *Coal Black* nevertheless recalls the Disney version by drawing the tale together within a musical framework. As a result, insofar as one sees Clampett engaging with animation toward a new purpose, one cannot forget the underlying influence of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

By inspecting these two primary works—Gág's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938) and Clampett's *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* (1943)—through the lens of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, I show how this newly emergent foundational bedrock for the fairy tale centrally informs its immediate successors, whether or not their self- or corporate- interests aimed to engage the same. Because of the storytelling impression created through Disney's version, Gág's and Clampett's subsequent versions necessarily respond and call readers and viewers to look for Disney's influential markers within. Disney's work was so profound that immediate successors, in the literary and animated realms needed to respond, whether or not it was their intention or desire to do so.

Wanda Gág's Story and Industry-Based Positioning

Wanda Gág was born in 1893 in the small town of New Ulm, Minnesota “settled by families from Germany and Bohemia” (Ray). German was spoken in her home, and influences of “Old World customs” and a folkloric past permeated her household, not only in the form of story but in artistic representation and engagement with music, as well (Winnan 2; Peschel). With a father whose vocation was art—“decorating houses and churches to support his large family” and painting in his free time—and a mother who “told Märchen at bedtime,” Gág found comfort and pleasure through her engagement with these traditions (Ray). When she was fifteen and her father passed away, leaving her to care for and support a near-destitute family of seven children, she would use art and story to do so, selling her works to magazines. Commitment to this vocational pathway eventually led her to art school on scholarship and later, to “study at the famous Art Students League in New York City” (Ray). While it was her artwork that she was primarily motivated toward, a “‘Notebook of Ideas’ for possible children’s books inspired by the old fairy tales she loved as a child” indicated a strong interest in and tie to that folklore of her early childhood, as well.

A similar divide between devotions to art and story is evident in her legacy. Where she was successful in and known for her artwork in her time, she became a renowned author of children’s books, particularly noted for having “pioneered the format of composing each opening of the book (two facing pages) as one unique design, integrating the illustrations and the text” (Winnan 37). Notably, Gág’s “critical reputation” rests namely on her work “as one of the first and foremost illustrators of

American picture books, with *Millions of Cats* (1929), *The ABC Bunny* (1934), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938) and *Nothing at All* (1942) having received special acclaim (Crawford 62; Ray). Deborah Ray notes how critics of her time thought of Gág herself as representative of a “‘fairy-tale’ story,” and perhaps that too was part of her allure for publishers aiming to reclaim *Snow White* from Disney.

Although the start of Wanda Gág’s project of translating the Grimms’ tales preceded Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the *Snow White* tale is her only standalone translation of the Grimms’ work complemented by her own illustrations. With its publication in 1938, just a year after Disney’s premiere, one might readily assume that her version, while deeply invested in returning the tale to its German roots, had emerged just in time to profit from Disney’s rapid success with the fairy tale. While Gág’s self-interest may have informed part of the stakes in her pursuit (as I will later discuss), industry-interest was the other motivator, in this case the book publishing industry and its executors or critical informants, librarians and educators.

In *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children’s Literature in America*, Beverly Lyon Clark speaks to the influence which librarians (and particularly one librarian) exerted over the publication of children’s books.

Librarians have provided a haven for children’s literature and have also played a vital role in shaping it. In the 1920s through the 1950s, a single librarian, the Superintendent of Work with the Children for the New York Public Library, exerted considerable influence on the development of children’s literature. Thanks to her position in the New York Public Library (1906-41), her leadership in the ALA [...], her annual lists of recommended books (1918-41), and her columns in the *Bookman* and then in the *New York Herald Tribune* Sunday supplement, Anne Carroll Moore assumed a position that has been called ‘olympian’ and ‘magisterial.’ ‘Hers was the authoritative voice in the world of

children's books.' (70)

While Clark recognizes that "Moore was not the sole mover in shaping children's literature at this time" and that "Other librarians were active as well, in interaction with publishers, booksellers, and educators," as something of an arbiter of children's literature, Moore became a significant figure in the *Snow White* tale's progression, as well (73). "In 1938, [because she had been] dismayed by the liberties that the books based on the Disney film had taken with the Grimms' 'Snow White,' Moore pressured Coward-McCann to get the award winning Wanda Gág to translate and illustrate the tale" (Clark 71). Given that the aforementioned books were "Disney books," produced by or in conjunction with the production of the film, they represented the Disney version, and *not* the Grimms' (Hoyle qtd. in Zipes 92). Thus, a literary response from an "authentic" representative was immediately necessary to restore the tale to its more traditionally penned, European past.

Wanda Gág's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was meant to serve as the proper, or as Gág referenced in light of her other translations, "preserved" version of one of the Grimms' tales. When Moore "actively sought a correct version of the fairy tale for children [...] Wanda Gág was the logical choice" for this literary revision, or adaptation of both the Grimms' and Disney's work (Hoyle qtd. in *Sticks and Stones* 92). With the recent publication of *Tales from Grimm* (1936), Gág translated under the premise that "The tales, coming as they do from many sources, and being composed by such widely different people as peasants and scholars are written in a great variety of styles and tempos, which I have tried to preserve in every case" ("Introduction" x). This act of

attempting to “preserve” what was once deemed authentic⁵⁹ and using “free translation” only where it absolutely needed to be employed to “convey the true flavor of the originals,” gave librarians or educators (such as Moore) the confidence that Gág was, in fact, presenting the real or “correct” version of the Grimms’ tales (“Introduction” viii; *Sticks and Stones* 92). In sum, it positioned her perfectly to respond to and rectify the errant version of Disney.

In “Wanda Gág’s Americanization of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales,” however, Jack Zipes offers a different perspective, countering Gág’s positioning and claim of preservation, as well as the supposition creating a “*correct* version” is possible, given that “nobody knows what a genuine, authentic, or correct fairy tale is” (*Sticks and Stones* 92). Although he notes that Gág “rarely changed the plots in a radical fashion,” supporting the authenticity of her translations geared toward preserving the German past, Zipes still contends that “she was not preserving anything. On the contrary, she was creating something new, and this was her imagined conception of what it might be like to be German or European and how American children should receive something European. Her act of preservation was a reconception of what genuine European tales are supposed to be” (88). According to Zipes then, Gág was not only unsuccessful in her purpose driving the translations, but in fact “Americanized the Grimms’ tale and exploited the figure of Snow White for personal and professional purposes” in precisely the way that Disney had.

⁵⁹ See Jack Zipes’, “The Contamination of the Fairy Tale” and David Blamires’ “A *Workshop of Editorial Practice*” for arguments recognizing the Grimms’ artistry in their composition of Kinder- und Hausmarchen, as opposed to what were once thought to be exact or authentic recordings of the tales therein.

To this assessment, I would add that her Americanization of the tale, conjoining European and American influences, represented a new version grounded in Disney, not only by means of approach, marking Gág's self-interest (per Zipes), but also pointedly revising Disney's images and romance, and softening the text in her own way. This use of Disney reflects Gág's artistic method, as well. Audur Winnan notes, "She did not imitate what she saw, but translated it in her own language, symbols, and values" (42). To this Jodi Duckett adds, her illustrations spoke to "her classic folk-art style, characterized by heavy outlines and decorative patterns" (F01). In other words, she used Disney's version in much the same way she had used the Grimms', to suit the needs of *her* version and artistry. Following the advice of her father (also an artist) that she "Always look at the world in [her] own way," Gág appropriated the works of her two most significant precursors to re-view their tale, as her own (Ray). The result of this combination of influences is recognized as the first American literary version of *Snow White*.

Therefore, while Gág's version of *Snow White* might have been intended to counter Disney's Americanized version of the tale, her transmission of an "authentic" tradition had its limitations, even if readers are engaged to believe otherwise. Despite biographical and even autobiographical information which consistently connects Gág's German Grimm translations with her childhood and upbringing,⁶⁰ those German traditions which informed her past were born and bred in an American space. This duality

⁶⁰ See Julie L'Enfant's *The Gág Family: German Bohemian Artists in America*, Audur H. Winnan's *Wanda Gág: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Prints*, Deborah Kogan Ray's *Wanda Gág: The Girl Who Lived to Draw*, and Jack Zipes' *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*

invariably shaped the works Gág produced. Thus, even as reviewers, such as Carl Zigrosser, purport that “Wanda Gág was particularly qualified to translate and illustrate Grimms’ tales” having been “born in Minnesota of pioneer Bohemian stock, and [grown] up in the German-speaking community of New Ulm” where “She was nourished on the old-world tales of Grimm, Bechstein, and Andersen,” this evaluation must be tempered by the recognition that this German upbringing was not inclusive of the full scope of her cultural experience (vii).

While it was beneficial for Gág, as well as her work in translating the Grimms to be understood in this way, as a “qualified” representative, this positioning failed to offer a grander portrait of her story and those that she produced. Significantly, Gág began to take up a heavier involvement with children’s books, as well as her project with the Grimms’ fairy tales during the Depression. Although Winnan notes that “the drawing mood eluded [Gág] and she felt an uneasiness about her work,” following her 1933 publication of the *ABC Bunny* book, Winnan also importantly recognizes that “By 1931 the Depression had caught up with the art market. Sales at the gallery had slowed to a trickle. The children’s books, however, continued to earn royalties for Gág, and throughout the thirties the literary expression was dominant” (50). In other words, insofar as her artistry “eluded” her, so too was her writing of children’s literature and endeavor to re-focus her sights on the Grimms’ tales a necessity of the times.

The literary market and a custodian of children’s literature called on her, and it was not only profitable, but easier to translate the words of her childhood onto the page. Further, it satisfied her compulsion to generate meaningful art, even at a time when it was

difficult to do so. In 1928, Gág was first asked about writing a children's book based on her artwork, and she made it her "aim" in crafting works for children "to make the book as much a work of art as any picture she would send to an exhibition" (Ray). Although she may have been committed to storytelling (which her studies of the same and rigor in producing translations show) and also to "fairy tales, which [she believed] derive from ancient religion and mythology and spring from deep roots in the human psyche," her statement concerning the children's books she crafted appears to indicate a greater devotion to art, positioning the image above the word (L'Enfant 155). Bearing this system of value in mind also gestures toward the significance of her illustrations which complemented the version of *Snow White* that she produced. In those especially, one can see Disney's images, as well.

Gág's Return to the Grimms' Tradition, or the Disney Version?

When looking toward Gág's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, one finds something less than a distinct return to the Grimms' "Sneewittchen" ("Little Snow White"). While pictured within is a decidedly "little" girl, likely one who is approximately "the age of seven," per the Grimms' tale, Gág's other illustrations recall not the Grimms' tale, but Disney's version instead (Tatar 250). When the image of the Queen gazing into the mirror is presented and considered alongside Disney's queen, there are key resemblances.

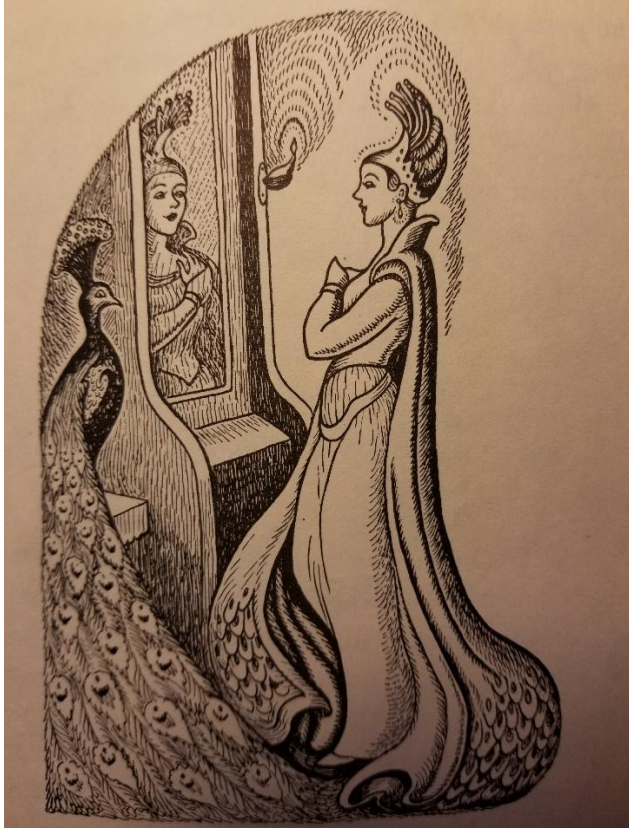


Fig. 1: Gág's Queen



Fig. 2: "Snow White, the Queen and the Magic Mirror 1"

In Gág's drawing (left), the headdress and crown which surround the queen's hair almost obscure it from view, similarly to the way in which the hair of Disney's queen (right) is concealed (Gág 11; "Snow White, the Queen and the Magic Mirror 1"). The gowns of both have a similar waistline and the collar of their cloaks rises high at the neck. While the resemblance here might be viewed minimal, the same is not true of the image of Snow White fleeing into the woods.



Fig. 3: “She Ran All Day Through Woods and Woods”

In Gág’s image (Fig. 3, above) with the caption, “SHE RAN ALL DAY THROUGH WOODS AND WOODS,” one finds a Snow White surrounded by cute and cuddly forest creatures, many of which are presented in twos or families of a sort (Gág 13). Karen Merritt argues that “Disney’s special touch was to show the animals as often as possible in family groups,” and, as shown above, Gág readily employs a similar figuration in her tale (19). Up in the tree’s boughs, near the top of the drawing there are two doves in flight, and two squirrels on a branch. An owl gazes over the full scene.

Two birds fly alongside Snow White, and two others rest on or within a stump at the front of the scene. A deer gazes after her, as do three small bunnies. These are not by any means the “Wild beasts” of the Grimms’ tale that one imagines “hovered around her at times” or in even the “wild animals” that Gág’s version tells us “[Snow White] passed” (Tatar 251; Gág 14). Rather, they are entirely emblematic of Disney’s image (below),



Fig. 4: “Snow White Runs Through the Woods (Disney)”

marked also by deer, bunnies, squirrels, and birds amongst a host of other cuddly looking creatures.

Because Gág offers her reader this image, one reflecting a scene and creatures so frequently referenced as belonging to Disney’s precursory animated feature, readers are apt to recall the animator’s influence and Disney’s story even while reading Gág’s translation of the Grimms’ version. Despite Gág’s intent to return to the Grimms’ tales and language in such a way as to avoid “too much bowdlerizing,” maintaining “A certain amount of ‘goriness,’” so as not to “depriv[e] [tales] of their salt and vigor,” her image

paired with the softened language of “wild animals” (in contrast to the “wild beasts” which other Tatar references) provides for a version softened even more than that of Disney (“Introduction x; Gág 14; Tatar 251). In the film, a viewer fears the wooded scene, as does Snow White; in this story, Gág’s image tells her reader not to fear. Here, all animals have been immediately portrayed as cuddly creatures, the same in fact with which a viewer had become familiar through Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, presented just a year earlier.

For more drawings reflecting Disney’s *Snow White*, one need look no further than the title page of Gág’s tale (Gutenberg, left; Coward-McCann, Inc, right).

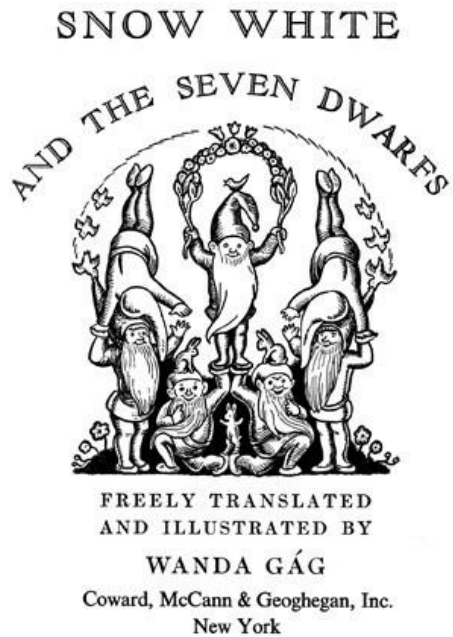


Fig. 5: Gág, Gutenberg, Title page



Fig. 6: Gág, Coward-McCann, Title page

Here, a host of pleasant birds and bunnies, encircle a playful, smiling, childlike bunch of seven dwarfs with beards. While one might argue that through this representation Gág generates an imagined return to the earlier American precursory play of Marguerite

Merington, where child actors played the roles of the dwarfs, this explanation seems counter to her purpose—to either maintain “literal translations” or produce “a free translation” to “convey the true flavor of the originals” when the verbatim translation “came out thin, lifeless and clunky” (“Introduction” vii, viii). With these as her self-professed aims, Philip Charles Crawford’s assertion that “Gág’s charming pictures conceal the wit and violence that permeate the story” creates a similar contradiction (65). If anything, Gág’s intention was to restore the “wit and violence” (in careful measure) that the Grimms’ had earlier employed. In her attempt toward restoring the Grimms’ *Snow White* as well as her intended goals for the text, however, her artwork appears decidedly mismatched.

To demonstrate this disconnect, in the following I analyze two moments from the text representing the dwarfs’ responses or actions, utilizing an alternate translator’s annotated version of the Grimms to represent a baseline from which to judge Gág’s linguistic deviation. I then set these against her seemingly mismatched artistic figuration of the dwarfs.

In the Grimms’ “Sneewittchen,” per the translation of Maria Tatar, one finds a set of dwarfs who stand as leaders in both negotiations over their space and Snow White’s activities within that space. These dwarfs do not allow Snow White to ask to stay; they “told her: ‘If you will keep house for us, cook, make the beds, wash, sew, knit, and keep everything neat and tidy, then you can stay with us, and we’ll give you everything you need’” (Tatar 254). Then later, when leaving the home, “the good dwarfs gave [Snow White] a stern warning: ‘Beware of your stepmother. She’ll know soon enough that

you're here. Don't let anyone in the house'" (Tatar 254). The dwarfs begin with and continue to issue orders. So long as Snow White is within their home, she is meant to abide by their social contract and regulations. They do not ask but *tell* Snow White what she is meant to do.

Gág's language in the same scene of arrival largely mirrors that of Tatar, with a few narrative embellishments. Even though Gág's narrative language allows that Snow White awakens and soon recognizes the dwarfs as "friendly little folk," the image Gág paints of them (through her use of language) while Snow White relays her story is a bit different (Gág 20).

All seven stood around and listened, nodding their heads and stroking their long beards, and then they said, 'Do you think you could be our little housekeeper—cook and knit and sew for us, make up our beds and wash our little clothes? If you will keep everything tidy and home-like, you can stay with us, and you shall want for nothing in the world.' (Gág 21)

Despite the softening of the text through narrative detail, the description of the dwarfs pondering what to do next gives the impression of a group of elders, somberly listening, while also casting judgment and coming to a decision. This representation of the dwarfs follows in close keeping with Tatar's scene of negotiation. Yet the band of dwarfs that enters to find Snow White asleep in Gág's tale, appears a happy-go-lucky bunch, inquisitive certainly, but not serious. In short, they do not appear a troop of leaders in negotiations, even with respect to their own home. Indeed, they appear much more the "little children" that Disney's Snow White had expected to find (Disney; Gág 18, Fig. 7, below).



Fig. 7: Dwarfs' Discovery of Snow White, Gág

Again, in their day-to-day routines, Tatar's version simply states, "In the morning, they would go up to the mountains in search of minerals and gold. In the evening they would return" (Tatar 254). Gág's narrative elaborations move a bit further in the way of description, depicting dwarfs who are particularly industrious; their routine is one of work.



Fig. 8: Dwarfs' Mining



Fig. 9: Dwarfs' Mining Again

These “seven little dwarfs [...] dug all day and hacked away at the hills, in search of gems and gold,” and every evening, “[they] came trudging home from work” (Gág 17-18; 26, 30, 36). This phrase, as well as the dwarfs hard-working nature, is emphasized through repetition following each instance of the Queen’s murderous intent. Although the dwarfs’ compulsions toward work and industriousness are represented in Gág’s drawings (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9), these appear to be pleasant undertakings (Gág 24, 34). In Gág’s representation (pictured in the two illustrations above), the dwarfs do not appear to be beaten down by their work, as the terms “hack[ing]” and “trudging” suggest; instead, they seem contented by their daily task and routine. This is precisely how Disney imagined the group through animation—driven to work, yes, but also enjoying the constancy of the routine per both their song, “Heigh-ho” and images from the mines.



Fig. 10: “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) – Heigh Ho”



Fig. 11: “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) – Heigh Ho” (Mines)

Moreover, out of thirty-five pages with illustrations, twenty picture the dwarfs or the home of the dwarfs, and twelve of these twenty feature the happy bunch of “little dwarfs” (Gág 38). As in the Disney version, there is a preoccupation with these cute or funny little men, but Gág’s supposed intention was to ““preserve in every case”” the Grimms’ tales (x). Counter to this purpose, her artwork conflicts with the textual

representation of her tale. Zipes similarly contends that rather than “add[ing] depth to the texts [...] [Gág’s illustrations] take away from her translations and even contradict them” (91). Although where Zipes finds Gág’s “self-projections” stamped upon her artwork, I would argue that Disney’s influence, whether intended or unintended, wormed its way in to her illustrative responses. As a result, what one finds is not a clean or clear-cut version which follows the original as closely as possible. Instead, what appears in this first referenced *American* literary version is the clash between representing the older foundational or “authentic” model, the Grimms’, and the new, Disney’s. As much as she endeavored to, based on her upbringing, education, and commitment to storytelling, Gág was seemingly compelled to follow the Disney version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

At this juncture, however, Gág’s conflicting representations will seem to have formed an easy divide, where: images are on par with the Disney version, and the text, primarily, appears to read as the Grimms’ *Snow White*. Yet the split is not nearly so simple. Where Zipes found that “[Gág] added little to our understanding of the Grimms’ tales, nor did she daringly revise or challenge some of their messages and themes,” he does reference a “style” wherein “Her sentences tend to be colloquial, paratactical, and melodic, and she strives for the personal tone of a storyteller sitting across from a child” (90). I would like to suggest that it is this style and “personal tone,” geared toward storytelling for a younger audience, that softens the language of the tale, in a way not dissimilar from Disney.

A strong critique of Disney's version of the *Snow White* has been his "bowdlerization"⁶¹ of the tale, softening the story in such a way that the narrative itself has been damaged. Although Gág's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* recognizes this fault to some degree (noting how "too much bowdlerizing creates a spineless quality which is not characteristic of these tales"), she does not appear to see that her method of "free translation" or "simplification" for younger readers, might engender this same effect (x, ix). When Gág details her method of approach in this type of translation, she states, "By simplification I mean:

- (a) freeing hybrid stories of confusing passages
- (b) using repetition for clarity where a mature style does not include it
- (c) employing actual dialogue to sustain or revive interest in places where the narrative is too condensed for children. ("Introduction" ix-x).

These adjustments to language or style can, in fact, alter the narrative in much the same way that Disney's stylistic choices had.

Moreover, Gág's adjustments do not stop there; to those listed above, I would add that additional, explanatory adjectives or phrases are often inserted for clarification, or to draw in or limit a young reader's perspective, as deemed appropriate. For example, after Snow White's mother has passed and her father (the King) marries once more, Gág finds that the new Queen "was very beautiful but *haughty and proud and vain*" (10, emphasis added). The Queen's beauty is less significant than the three negative adjectives that further describe her character. The repetition of the conjunction "and" likewise accentuates the negative qualities, which the child reader or listener must not miss.

⁶¹ See Bruno Bettelheim's oft-referenced argument in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* for more.

Where this explanatory phrasing hones the child's interpretation of the tale, other additional phrasing is merely intended to entice a reader or listener, or to pique his or her interest. A bit further into Gág's tale, one finds that "She [the Queen] had a mirror, *a magic one*" (Gág 10, emphasis added). While the line could have just as easily read, "She owned a magic mirror," as in Tatar's translation, Gág wanted to draw in her young reader, to give him or her a sense of awe, to keep the child engaged (250). In contrast, when the royal huntsman was meant to "do away with [Snow White]" and "'bring [the Queen] a token,'" Gág deliberately divides her child reader or listener from the brutal reality of the Queen's bidding (Gág 12). To "kill" Snow White and "Bring [the Queen] her lungs and her liver as proof," provide quite a different message than the vague language of "do away with" and "token" referenced above (Tatar 251; Gág 12). Neither is the murderous intent or finality of death present, nor is the Queen responsible for the "token" which is brought to her. She has not asked for any organ of Snow White's, but a "'token,' [...] 'so that I may be sure you've obeyed me'" (Gág 12). As a result, the language of Gág's Queen seems to indicate that she less concerned with Snow White's annihilation and more focused upon the actions of the huntsman. It is the compliance of her servant that she seems to desire, not to be entirely rid of Snow White (at least in this passage). Not only does this adjusted use of language in translation soften the exchange then, it also divides the child from the destructive impact of jealousy on the Queen. As a result, the message which the tale sends is less overtly stated.

Slightly further into the tale, however, Gág does attempt to rekindle some of the Grimms' violence when the huntsman returns with "the heart of a wild boar" (Gág 14).

As with Tatar's Queen who "consumed" the organ which she supposed had belonged to Snow White (Tatar 251), so too did Gág's Queen who, "had it cooked and ate it" (Gág 14). However, Gág adds the following to the Queen's foul action: "I am sorry to say, with salt and great relish" (Gág 14). For Maria-Venetia Kyritsi,

her [Gág's] rendition is quite free and with the addition of 'I am sorry to say' she makes her apologies to the child readers for presenting a violent element in her story. She also adds the phrase 'with great relish,' which makes her sentence an even more jocular one that would appeal more to children reading and—even more—listening to the story. With Gág's addition, one can practically hear the Queen making slurping noises as she is eating (34).

As Kyritsi suggests, Gág is playing to her audience. However, in so doing, Gág diminishes the violence of both the murder which has purportedly taken place *and* the "cannibalistic" act of consumption. Tatar notes that "Like the witches and ogres of folklore, the queen [...] [is] hoping that by incorporating her stepdaughter, she will also acquire her beauty" (251 n8). This significant action then should not be taken lightly, as it returns a reader or listener to the central trouble of the tale—the deterioration of beauty with age, and subsequent jealousy and desire to acquire once more (by whatever means necessary) that which was lost. Yet the grave tone of this moment is destroyed by the amusing portrayal of cannibalism; therein the bowdlerization of Gág's style becomes more apparent. Despite her best intentions, Gág softened the tale's meaningfully sharp edges to produce a suitable literary version for young readers, one in which the narrative voice would speak to the culture of her time. That culture, of course, had been gazing upon Disney's version, which frequently led with humor to alleviate some of the tale's tensions. We find a piece of that humor, here, as well.

Disney's influence wove its way into Gág's version even beyond the level of the images presented, seeping into the Americanized style she employed. Because Gág was aiming for a child audience, just as her precursor had been interested in reaching a wider (child and adult) audience, her "simplifications" often equated to what was conceived of as Disney's "bowdlerizing" effect ("Introduction" ix, x). Gág's style promoted these changes, just as it permitted romance, a distinctly American quality, to creep in. Here, a reader finds Gág's more overt transformation of the Grimms' tale, also a touchstone of Disney's version.

Although Gág does not introduce the Prince at the start of her *Snow White* tale, affiliating her version with the Grimms', she does make the heart and romance important. This can initially be seen in the huntsman's choice of the "heart of a wild boar" as "token" of his observance of the Queen's wishes (Gág 14). The Queen does not request a heart, and different countries and cultures have been known to insert alternate tokens (Tatar 247). However, Gág selects the heart as the token to be utilized here, just as Disney had, and Ames before him.⁶² Kyritsi argues that "eating someone's heart holds more emotional connotations," and while emotion and romance were both significant in Disney's and earlier American versions of the tale, they were not nearly as important to the Grimms' *Snow White*. Nevertheless, they become important for Gág.

⁶² I do not mean to suggest that the use of the heart is an American innovation, as Margaret Hunt's 1884, English translation likewise made this substitution, despite "her aim [...] to translate the Grimms' original as 'faithfully' as possible" (Kyritsi 34, 33).

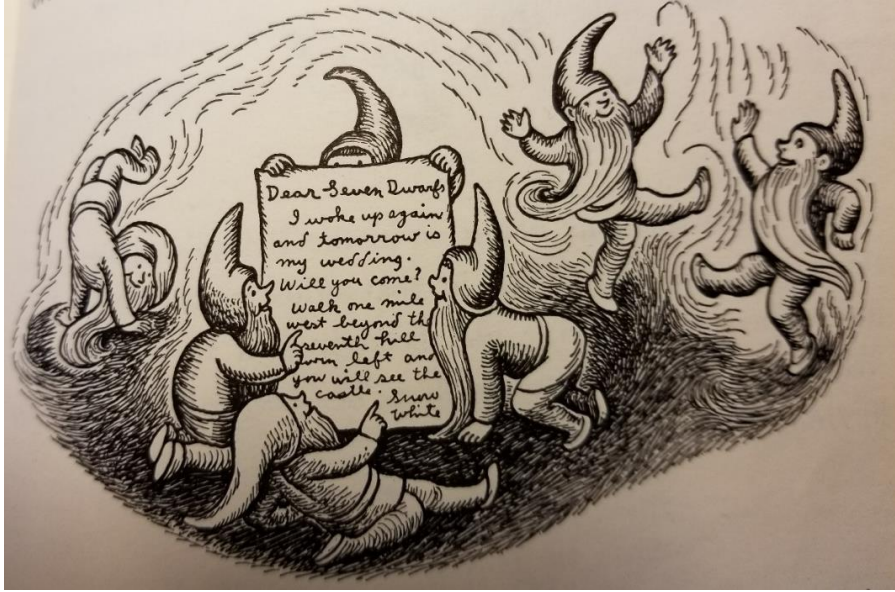


Fig. 12: Dwarfs' Wedding Invitation, Gág

In her illustration accompanying the text where Snow White “woke up” (see above), the dwarfs dance and play around an invitation from the princess to her wedding (Gág 41). In this invitation is Snow White’s eagerness to be wed. While the invitation itself is demonstrative of the prince and princess’s “prepar[ation] for a gay and gala” wedding, in line with other translations, there is an added emotional emphasis in the presentation of this image that is not displayed in the Tatar translation, where “the marriage was celebrated with great splendor” (Gág 42, Tatar 260). As indicated by the detached tone of the language in Tatar’s translation, the marriage is merely the next course of events and part of the resolution to the tale. Furthermore, the tale does not end with the marriage, but the consequences or punishment of the Queen’s actions. In Gág’s version, however, the closure of the tale belongs to Snow White— “But as to all the rest—the Prince and his Princess Snow White, and the seven little dwarfs—they all lived happily ever after” (43). This ending is reminiscent of Winthrop Ames’ (Jessie Braham

White's) earlier American version, wherein Snow White asks that the dwarfs remain at court and prince and princess "*did* live happily ever after," as well as the Disney storybook's ending announcing "...and they lived happily ever after" (White 236; Disney). By concluding similarly to these American versions, Gág leaves her reader with the language and romance that have already become familiar to her surrounding culture. Further, the final signal to the "seven little dwarfs" reminds her reader how important these adorable fairy tale helpers are to her text, just as they were to Disney's. Significantly, this romanticized vision was decidedly not within the scope of the earlier Grimms' version.

Thus, Gág's adaptation in its images, stylistic additions, and romantic emphasis might be viewed as bearing greater similarity to than difference from the Disney version. Where Wilhelm Grimm's "alterations [...] were concerned with the inner consistency and the logical coherence of the tales," subsequent translations, such as Gág's, "attempt[ed] to shield their readers from what they saw as unacceptable elements in the original" (Kyritsi 37). The resultant impact was that "Faithfulness to the German texts—which dealt with sensitive issues such as religious superstition, violence, terror and intense human feelings—and especially to their narrative logic, was frequently sacrificed for considerations of morality and for the reading public's taste and expectations" (Kyritsi 37). Where Kyritsi makes this assessment regarding primarily nineteenth-century tales, the trend, as examined here, continued into the twentieth century as the tales shifted across cultures and media. Gág had a new national model and set of interests centrally informing her *Snow White* tale, and while Disney was careful not to

break the earlier traditional narrative logic and cohesion, Gág's style, audience (child readers), and textual positioning (as a successive American representation) necessarily transformed the tale.

Even as her German upbringing coaxed a return to the Grimms', Gág could not stray from a host of Disney markers present in the images, softened text, or romance of her tale. And, even if one's inclination is not to see Disney but the Grimms' in Gág's tale, critics force the association. Because of this complicated response to Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, at once intent on turning away from the animator's impact and gesturing to an earlier precursor (the Grimms'), this version needs Disney's *Snow White*. Yet, as I have shown above, Disney proves more than Gág's "calling card," of sorts. His version, with its poignant images, broader reach of audience, and romance, proved influential for Gág as both artist and translator. In short, even though both the publication industry and critical reviews aimed to showcase Gág's as "the original, un-Disneyed version" of *Snow White*, her artistry could not follow Disney's successively, without employing Disney's American influence (Crosbie 18).

Deliberately Following Disney: Securing Success in Animation

Disney's influence on animation through the fairy tale film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* struck a chord that other Hollywood studios and corporations similarly could not ignore. At the same time, they were not all too eager to jump on the Disney bandwagon, even though the production of *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*—a short, produced just six years following the renowned Disney version—might well lend to

another impression. Geoff Pevere states that “Sixty years ago, Warner Bros. reluctantly entered the animation age, and only because the seemingly out-of-nowhere success of the Disney operation—where [Cartoon Director Chuck] Jones had once worked, miserably—made it impossible for competing studios not to make cartoons” (Pevere C3). Despite this disinclination toward animation, under a “subcontracted” “independent company run by Leon Schlesinger,” a host of animators and the Warner Bros. company together “evolved [their] own style” (Pevere C3). What they termed their own style, however, was not so far removed from that of the master animator, Walt Disney himself.

Walt Disney was referenced as a conductor, of sorts; all artful activity in the studio fell under his purview and discretion. The Warner Bros. animators, while fully recognizing the distinction of Disney’s work, which “possessed a different, seemingly higher quality than their own” likewise strove to represent their own imagined desires and styles on screen (Arnold 96). Leon Schlesinger, pinpointed the divergence in the two studios animated films, saying, “‘We’re businessmen. Walt Disney’s an artist’” (Arnold 96). Jones’ remarks mirrored the same, though with a slightly more defeatist tone, understanding, “No matter what we do, Disney is going to be ahead of us,” and later “recall[ing], ‘We never thought of ourselves as artists. We never used the term’” (Pevere C3). Ironically, calling out the distinction between their work and Disney’s enabled the animators to thrive as owners over their own cartoons and cartoon style, just as Disney had with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (and later fairy tale films). Only the Warner Bros. “cartoon style” was more boastful in its “belief that cartoon character was an ideal screen for the projection of the animator’s personality. The stronger that personality, the

bolder the cartoons it produced” (Pevere C3). Although Disney’s work is often disparaged on the grounds of his self-interest, the Warner Bros. openly committed to this model, and this is the style presented through director, Bob Clampett’s *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*.

This overbearing weight of Clampett’s self-interest may have, in part, clouded his perspective as to what he actually had produced in *Coal Black*. Instead of the voraciously researched and cohesively unified blend of previous *Snow White* traditions, adapted by Disney, Clampett’s version callously throws away the tradition of the tale, in favor of his own “fascination with black entertainment” (Lehman 77). It was understood that “Clampett appreciated African American music and frequently used it in films” (Lehman 77). Therefore, Clampett, and even critical perspectives of his work, such as that of Jaime Weinman, view the film as “Clampett’s tribute to music and culture that he loved,” where “voices [were] done by African-American actors” and “jazz musicians [were] brought in to augment composer Carl Stallings orchestra” (57). Another, similarly minded critic, Michael Barrier, argues, “The characters are black because the idea for [Clampett’s] cartoon was born when Clampett saw the Duke Ellington revue *Jump for Joy* in 1941” (Barrier qtd. in Beck 103). Norman M. Klein also argues that “[Clampett’s] primary source for *Coal Black* was *Harlem as Seen by Hirschfeld* (1941), a book of caricatures [...] [one that] specialized in theater entertainment imagery” (192). These perspectives, complimentary in the first and nonchalantly disputing any ill treatment through caricature in the following two, gaze upon *Coal Black* through the director’s eyes, per the Warner Bros. cartoonists’ self-conceived mission and vision. However,

there is quite a bit more to this *Snow White* inversion than representations of jazz and entertainment. For one, *Snow White*, the tale itself, is entirely absent from these assessments, and in their praise for the director's vision, they avoid the troubling racially infused perspective that has been produced.

While Clampett may not have seen race as he had produced it in *Coal Black*, one cannot help but see how he attempted to claim ownership anew over the popular animated fairy tale by taking a measure of control over the race caricatured within. There was a need for animation or film to respond to Disney's wildly successful *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Yet the response also needed to depict a distinct departure from the same. What better way to differentiate this new *Snow White* than to caricature the tale's fair heroine as a black figure? Clampett's response may well have been based upon the jazz culture that he found himself entranced by, but it was equally oppositional to Disney's fairy tale form. Where Disney's version directed its story to all Americans, displaying its national influence in relatively broad strokes, Clampett's version more specifically detailed particular facets of American culture by means of racial parody and played to the purchasing classes or "dominant culture" of Americans (Gabbidon 699). Shaun Gabbidon finds,

The humor of the film drew from existing exaggerated perceptions of African Americans by the dominant culture. The film was thought innocuous when released to the general public. However, at the time of its release, the general movie audience was predominately Caucasian due the social segregation of the 1896 Plessy decision. Blacks were not permitted to attend theaters operated and attended by Whites. (699)

Similarly, Robert L. Tefertillar notes, "There was no public outcry when they [(cartoons using ethnic or racial stereotypes)] came out, [...] since certain ethnic stereotypes were a

part of everyday American life. They were prevalent on the radio, in newspaper cartoons, and in advertising, especially during the war years of the 1940s” (182). Thus, as much as a host of viewers were/are not seeing past Clampett’s perspective in this film, so too were/are these individuals failing to see past a dominant American cultural perspective. In fact, this directorial-, corporate-, and critically-informed gaze is so pronounced that the fairy tale and the remarkable cohesion of its storytelling tradition produced by Disney suffers.

Stripping Away Tradition, Adapting Disney for the Animator’s Sake

So White, the central character of Clampett’s *Coal Black* is not naive, unaware of her own beauty; instead, she is highly sexualized (even more than the earlier Fleischer Brothers’ Betty Boop), and her body is readily exploited throughout the film. There is no deeper interrogation into the jealousy which a burgeoning beauty produces, why or how this comes to be, only a series of Snow White episodes drenched in jazz music, dance, and “one racist stereotype after another” (Breux 175). The music and racism function together, as Breux notes, “Animated shorts like these sought to reinforce or add weight to the racist claim that African Americans are inherently good dancers and singers with inborn rhythm. The film also presents African Americans as hypersexual, lacking self-control, and incapable of being responsible adults” (Breux 176). This depiction of the African American race, presented through a singular perspective and vision yet still representative of U.S. culture at large, becomes, in greater part, the value of the film. What the film sacrifices is engagement with the *Snow White* tale, but Clampett’s impulse

was to dissociate himself from the artistry and storytelling power that defined Walt Disney as animator and represent himself and his personal interests more keenly.

Nevertheless, if one thinks of this fairy tale as disregarding its *Snow White* past, it paid its thoughtful respects (whether intended or unintended) to the Disney version. This is evident from the start of the production, referencing not the literary, but the earlier oral or storytelling tradition with a child rocking upon a Mammy's lap. Although Disney had opened a book, the effect is similar, linking the new fairy tale with others that have been retold. In *Coal Black*, as well, one does not learn the story of So White's origin; instead we begin with the "mean old queen" who soon gazes into her mirror (Clampett).

Disney's structure is again mirrored here, yet with none of the significance of the tale.

Instead of expressing concern over her beauty, asking, "'Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?'" this queen demands (to a rhythmic beat), "'Magic Mirror on the wall, send me a Prince about six feet tall'" (Disney, Clampett). The first part of the phrase is identical to Disney's (and, of course, resounds with the *Snow White* tradition), yet beauty is far less significant in Clampett's version, downplayed by sexual need or desire. This desire is thwarted only moments later in the short when the Queen gazes out of her window to declare, "The gal and de prince, what a sickenin' sight" (Clampett).

Once again, we are reminded of Disney's triangulation of three of the tale's central players. However, when Disney's Queen looks down on the couple (singing, in his version and dancing, in Clampett's), her facial expressions as she dashes the curtains closed tell her viewer all. First, her hard gaze reads anger and contempt, but this is followed very briefly by a visage marked by shock, hurt, and disappointment. Here, an

audience *sees* jealousy ignited, but there is so much more. In these three significant seconds of animation exist the queen's painful recognition that she has been surpassed in beauty. Age has stolen her fresh and blossoming appearance and with it the opportunity for the "one love" of which the Prince sings (to Snow White) (Disney). This is the real story of *Snow White*, that which propels the plot further, but Clampett has missed it, only conveying some measure of the queen's anger at her spoiled opportunity with the Prince. While this creates something of a scene of jealousy, the depth of the episodic action is reduced by its failure to capture the effects of the feminine life cycle and fading beauty's impact on the same. Further, because this is the central theme of the tale, these initially reductive scenes both parodically break Disney's version and the broader tradition of the tale.

Where Disney paid homage to the tale's tradition and themes, Clampett cast both aside and with them Disney's cohesive form. Clampett was not so concerned with displaying his adaptive influence on *the Snow White tale* as he was representing his adaptation of *popular animation*. Where Klein argues that Clampett's version "was intended as a declaration of personal independence" in which "Black music was literally presented to as an antidote to Disney sentimentality," I would press this assertion a bit further to suggest that Clampett's *Coal Black* was not only operating as a revision to "Disney sentimentality" but to Disney's very role as conductor of animation. Clampett's means for assuming this position could not be through story, as this did not represent his interests, but through representations of musical entertainment he could counter the

former, displaying instead his own unique animative force and ideologies by manipulating Disney's memorable filmic moments.

In Clampett's version, one views a *Snow White* with a deliberate slant toward the Disney version. Yet, one might just as easily argue that although Disney's version is much referenced, its and with it the *Snow White* tale's substance is lost in lieu of Clampett's view of American culture, and more predominately, African Americans and their culture from a white gaze (outside looking in). Here, the Queen is not transformed by jealousy; rather, she is "mean" to begin with, and wealth and villainy are bonded together, as "she was just as rich as she was mean" (Clampett). The wealth here is significant because it allows Clampett to display what wealth allowed Americans of that time. Following this statement, the camera pans across a series of images, from treasures and jewels, to tires, sugar, and coffee—commonplace items rationed or restricted during the time of WWII. The queen's gluttonous behavior is then imaged as she gulps down "Chattanooga Chew-Chews" (Clampett). While wealth and gluttony are unimportant to the *Snow White* tale, they are important for Clampett toward a different effect. These, paired with the Queen's desire, evident in her request of the mirror (to "send me a Prince about six feet tall"), display the bodily (physical and sexual) appetites stereotypically understood of African Americans, from the opposing racial viewpoint (Clampett). This sexual or sexually frustrated theme appears once again when the Queen angrily appears at her window, eyes wide and glaring, teeth clenched, her gaze fixed on So White and the Prince dancing, upper bodies pressed close together. The dance itself, while fast-paced, elicits a kind of sexual advance. Once more, in Clampett's version of the Queen's

response, but even more in the exhibition of dance (between the Prince and So White), only a single-sided perception of African American desire is conveyed. While this heightened sexuality displaces both the innocent romance of the Disney version and, more importantly, the recognition of beauty lost, Christopher P. Lehman argues that “The unprecedented amount of African American sexual imagery in the film was another of Clampett’s methods for visually interpreting swing. The romantic leading characters, So White and Prince Chawmin were animation’s first heterosexual African American couple to demonstrate sexual chemistry” (77). Although sexual chemistry is not as significant to the *Snow White* tale, it is significant for Clampett, for it offers him another means to present his interpretation of African American entertainment. Clampett’s intent was not to attend to the veracity of the *Snow White* tradition but to his own vision portrayed through animation. However, even as this perception primarily exemplified his own self-interest and that of the dominant American culture, it was likewise inextricably tied to Disney’s exemplary animated feature film.

As an audience is introduced to So White (Snow White), again one views an adaptation of Disney’s version of the character. Although white, black, and red are evident in her appearance, even more so are the nation’s red, white, and blue. In *Coal Black*, Clampett morphed Disney’s image of Snow White, generating a character opposite. Her skin is not white, but black, and her attire is comprised of a white, short-sleeved top, and a *short* skirt of blue with a red patch on the back. Where Disney’s Snow White is conservatively dressed, in a long skirt with a bodice and top of capped sleeves,

So White is dressed provocatively, deliberately meant to entice an audience. Her skirt is very short; her blouse, also with capped sleeves, is cut with a deliberately deep V.



Fig. 13 So White, Clampett

So White's shoes are also red high heels, where Disney's Snow White's are a more conservative style in muted beige. Gone is the black cape with the white collar which reminds a viewer of the Grimms' earlier version of Snow White. White, red, and black are deliberately less significant than the American red, white, and blue that So White's appearance screams. Where Disney inserted hints of this, it remained hidden under the cover of or within the white, red, and black of the Grimms' and earlier American versions. In *Coal Black*, Disney's earlier character image had not been replaced, but reformed by Clampett, embellished on account of the American culture and animator's vision it bespoke. The resultant image of So White attributes an American precedence to the tale, and while it discards any link to the tale's past, it significantly recalls the Disney version.

Beyond the visual appearance of this character, one again recalls Disney's initial scene engaging Snow White in a position of servitude, scrubbing the steps, only here So White is doing laundry. This scene becomes all the more reminiscent when the parodic So White gazes into the water of her washtub, just as Disney's Snow White had once gazed into a wishing well. Both scenes offer the American enhancement of the tale which anticipates the romance to come, only, Disney's Snow White, aligned with character representation of earlier tales can only imagine what it *might* be to fall in love. She is yet innocent, and the verbs she utilizes in song mark this quality. Snow White is "wishing," "hoping," and "dreaming" for her love to discover her (Disney). In contrast, So White, recognizing the prowess of her sexuality, is confident—"Some folks think I's kinda dumb, but I know someday my prince will come" (Clampett). Contrary to those other "folks" opinions, So White knows that she is not "kinda dumb" when it comes to finding a suitor. She "*know[s]* [her] prince will come," having a greater awareness of her sexual body (Clampett, emphasis added). Again, So White is reductively sexualized.

This figuration persists throughout the course of *Coal Black*. As such, loose and flippant expressions of So White's sexuality are not only confused with the romance of this initial scene, but later with the more traditionally referenced compassion of the huntsman. In this version of *Snow White*, there is no huntsman at all; instead, there is a gang or mob-like entity, comprised of four men under orders to murder So White. The group is aptly referred to as, "Murder, Inc." and had been hired by the Queen "BLACKOUT SO WHITE" (Clampett). While they do serve the function of delivering her into the woods, and she appears to be unconscious (her body horizontal and

unmoving) when she is removed from the car, So White quickly regains herself. As she waves the four off, her other hand set upon her hip and her body bouncing to the beat, So White sing-songs, “Well thanks for de booty ride, you’re So White’s squeeze” (Clampett). Clearly, almost none of the shock, fear, and horror of preceding Snow White figures into this experience. While there is a scream of shock heard as she is taken from her dance with the prince, an audience soon finds that she has quickly recovered herself. So White does not wax sentimental as have earlier Snow Whites, plying the huntsman with her innocence and engaging his compassion through kindness (the obverse of the queen’s jealous rage). Instead, she utilizes the singular quality by which she has been most readily defined by Clampett thus far, her sexual body and sole means for male engagement. Although a viewer does not see the exchange which precipitates her freedom, the evidence of red kisses covering the faces of all four of the hired men, as well as So White’s language indicate not only how So White came to be free and yet alive, but also her own gratification in the presumably multiple sexual encounters that occurred within the car.

This sexually charged So White continues to exert her provocative influence when she meets de Sebben Dwarfs in the wood, kissing each in the line-up squarely on the mouth. As they fall back, she poses dramatically with her high-heeled bare leg extended, breasts thrust out, and hand across her forehead. The image calls the dwarfs to take her, as she is there for the taking. Her body is her means of negotiation, the commodity she is ever-willing to exchange. This is not the motherly figure Disney has presented, nor the female caretaker of the home that the Grimms’ dwarfs negotiate the

presence of, but neither of these figurations jive with the representation that Clampett has heretofore generated. His earlier exploitation of the African American female body, necessitates a continual adherence to that form of caricature and again offers something of the “mystique of the black entertainer” that so entranced Clampett⁶³ (Klein 192). At once Clampett tells us that this is *not* Disney’s Snow White, *and* she is an American figure defined by his own gaze.

Even though So White is figured as a sexually charged being, loose with her body and easily taking on additional men for her pleasure, one, a dwarf, does wake her and rises above the rest of her potential male suitors, seemingly in line with the more traditional *Snow White* tale. Yet, in this too, Clampett appears to poke fun at the idea of Disney’s “true love,” for the dwarf that wakes So White is strongly reminiscent of Dopey—bald-headed, a single tooth in front, sleeves hanging down over his arms, and smaller than the rest. The idea of So White waking to this “Dopey-like” figure deliberately mocks Disney’s “true love,” or the romance which traditionally resolves an American *Snow White* tale. There is no indication that the two will live happily ever after or even marry; he was merely the right kiss for the moment, a theme with the each of the men that So White encounters throughout the short. In every scene in which So White appears, she becomes more and more sexually charged in opposition to the virginal innocence of the traditionally referenced burgeoning beauty. Not only does Clampett’s adaptation dramatically oppose Disney’s heroine in this way, but he further undoes her

⁶³ It is this character, “‘So White,’ a spunky little pinup designed by Clampett and Rod Scribner,” that Klein notes was a “particular favorite of Clampett himself, who used to keep a drawing of her, winking back like a teenage Betty Grable, in his office forty years later” (193).

connection to the *Snow White* tale by representing her in this light. One cannot hear the echoes of the earlier fairy tale in Clampett's tale, one can only see a handful of Disney images, distorted by the distinctly American animated version that was produced.

Indeed, Clampett's vision throughout the short appears more intent upon commenting on American culture, as seen through his gaze, via animation. How better to do so than through an adaptation of the pre-eminent model of animation at the time, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*? In this response, Clampett made *his* animative voice the focus of a wider audience, where the artistry of Disney in that industry had already overshadowed so many others.

When images such as Disney's witch-like Queen re-enter then—pictured with a huge, red nose with a wart, wearing a black hooded robe, as well as red and white striped tights—despite the classically referenced coloring, one recognizes by this point that such connections with Disney's animation and the preceding *Snow White* tradition are empty. As with each of the earlier usages of Disney's version, Clampett only fosters affiliation with the earlier animator's work toward the purpose of forwarding his own animation. The same is true in Clampett's alignment with Disney's filmic model which unified song and story.

Although much has been made of Clampett's affinity for African American music, which quite literally underscored the narrative of his version, one cannot help but note that Disney too had a strong soundtrack supporting his narrative plotline and character development in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Unsurprisingly, Clampett similarly focused on music as the glue to hold his narrative together. In fact, music and

performance were so significant to the production that “Clampett took his animators out to Hollywood’s black nightclubs for inspiration and performers loaned their voices and authenticated the work” (Beck 103). Clampett did not have Disney’s storytelling craft to productively shape his animation or that of the other animators working alongside him, but he could provide guidance by exposing them to environments and scenes filled with the African American music and dance of his own musing and influence. These alternative sites of inspiration, however, led Clampett to produce a *Snow White* driven not by story, undergirded by song, but driven by song and more moderately reflecting the story.

Nevertheless, one effect produced by music and story functioning together is the similar creation of a unified whole. In *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* then, “jazz, and boogie woogie music” paired with “African American swing” hold the cartoon together, as “characters rhyme and scat their lines to the background beats” (Breux 176; Lehman 77; Breux 176). Jazz and/or swing music, if only in the background, runs through almost the entirety of the short. And it is not only the rhythmic or lyrical language of the characters that further melds narrative and song within the animation, but the movements of characters likewise seem attuned to an inner beat. The image of the Mammy figure who first appears, prepared to tell the child upon her lap the story of So White, is rocking in a chair. This sets a rhythmic tone, which is amplified by louder, more vibrant jazz music that strikes up in the background as she begins her tale. When an audience sees the queen, described by the narrating Mammy, this figure, also embodying the music, is pictured lounging on her throne, rhythmically gulping down “Chattanooga Chew-Chews”

(Clampett). The dialogue of the characters, moving forward, while not always set to lyrical rhymes, still engages the beat, as do their bodies, bobbing, tapping, or dancing to the beat. In fact, not only the Mammy and Queen, but every character introduced thereafter steps onto the scene and into center stage by means of dance, or with some other bodily movement speaking to the pulsing beat. Prince Chawmin's toes are tapping as he sidles up out of his car, swinging his hips before speaking. After he announces his interest in So White, an audience is visually introduced to this central character, first by means of her outwardly thrust bottom, bopping up and down to the beat as she washes clothes in a tub. The seven dwarfs, army soldiers, likewise introduce their role by half-marching through a song and dance number. As the narrative continues, so too does the rhythm wound into the movements of each character's body. So important are music and rhythm to the short that the story, the tale itself, takes a back seat to the performance viewed. However, perhaps this was Clampett's intent, as it only further emphasizes a new effect produced by privileging that music and song reverberating throughout *his* animation.

Animating American History

To understand how the *Snow White* tale has been interpreted in light of or unmade by the vision of Bob Clampett in his *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*, one need only look toward the reception and critical discourse concerning the same. While the animated short is rarely discussed, likely based on its representations of race, those that do enter the conversation gesture to its significance: (a) as a projection of the Warner

Bros. company and/or director's influence, and/or (b) as an historically American cultural representation of its time. More often than not, these two aspects merge together. In *Animation and the American Imagination*, Gordon B. Arnold gestures toward both, first noting, "Warner Bros. animation directors mocked many types of people and situations. However, the cartoons they made told stories with a brashness that sometimes veered into dubious territory" (117). Like other critics, Arnold finds it significant to draw the company's/ animator's style and artistic inclination into discussion of the film. Even though the animators from the Warner Bros. studio attempted disassociate themselves from categorization as artists, Arnold's comment shows the types of stylistic leanings or tendencies that drove constructions of character and ideologies presented within animated shorts such as *Coal Black*. As Arnold continues, one finds the other significant analytical perspective, that even though "At times, some films repeated egregious racist stereotypes [...] racist attitudes remained commonplace in American films generally, which continued to be made in studios dominated by white men and for U.S. audiences that were often not very diverse" (117). Therefore, although the representations of race are deeply problematic in the film, they importantly offer something of the individual (studio/animator's) and popular interests and views of the time. In a more general assessment of animation in the United States, Arnold asserts that such productions "often mirrored the attitudes, prejudices, and inclinations of the culture at large," enabling them to be viewed as "historical artifacts, [...] provid[ing] valuable insights into specific eras" (238). In other words, while recognizing the problematic nature of racial representations,

Arnold rationalizes the cartoon's continued critical significance and historical relevance based on these representations.

Other works, such as Christopher P. Lehman's *The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954*, focus more keenly on Clampett's artistic interpretation of African Americans. "*Coal Black an de Sebben Dwarfs* reflects the director's fascination with black entertainment. Clampett appreciated African American music and frequently used it in his films" (Lehman 77). However, Lehman does not use this explanation to excuse the problematic racial representations that have been put forward, noting that "For all his unique ethnic imagery, Clampett could not divorce his attempt to illustrate African American swing from the stereotypes that shaped his business," and further, "His love of black music did not prevent him from drawing characters who sport the usual exaggerated eyes and lips" (77). The problem of race here becomes the director's, not necessarily one that was illustrative of a larger cultural perception.

From an opposing perspective, critics, such as Michael Barrier, defend these representations, asserting that *Coal Black*'s characters are "no more grotesque than, say, the middle-aged white men Clampett lampooned in cartoons like *Draftee Daffy* and *The Wise Quacking Duck*. The characters are black because the idea for his cartoon was born when Clampett saw the Duke Ellington revue *Jump for Joy* in 1941" (Barrier qtd. In Beck 103). While this comment gestures toward a potential motive for the cartoon's content, it ignores obvious stereotypical racial perceptions of the animator, which not only

represented his individual taste but also spoke to and even shaped broader pre-conceptions of American culture, so easily represented through animation.

Examining this larger context of animation in its cultural usage of racism thus becomes significant. In this broader frame, Lehman argues, “animation relies on caricature,” and in a “medium [which] had its origins as an act in vaudeville shows, [...] audiences came to expect cartoons to be funny” (3). The result of this usage of humor, Lehman finds, was often “ridicule” (3). As described here, the bent of animation toward racially infused humor was almost natural, in order to speak to the tastes of predominately white audiences. Similarly, when speaking on the usage of race in animation, Nicholas Sammond contends that “the demise of minstrelsy on the stage coincided with a period of far more intense racist caricature in American animation” (30). Although Lehman is speaking on what the “medium” or form itself permitted, and Sammond is speaking to the lineage of racial (mis)representation that the animated form produced, both depict the ways in which “commercial animation actively participated in (rather than simply reflected) racial formations of the day through its circulation of fantastic embodiments of dominant notions about the relationship between blackness and whiteness in the United States” generating “visual correlates [...] literizing and animating long-standing stereotypes” (Sammond 30). More than serving as an extension of directorial influence then or even an American artifact representing racial views of a particular historical moment, *Coal Black* serves to represent both of these *in addition to* gesturing toward the prolongation of a tradition and transformation of racial

disparagement in the United States effected through animation and its precursory entertainments.

Significantly, nowhere in these critical perspectives was it even remotely significant that the *Snow White* tale should have been selected for further adaptation. Where the *tale*'s prominence led earlier American artists to seek ownership and control over its usage, Clampett, knowing that he could not own the tale, simply used it as a device to further his own animation and interests. Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was not *a* foundational model, but *the* foundation for an American animator to showcase his talents and views, per the Warner Bros. style.

Conclusion

It cannot be denied that both Gág's and Clampett's versions proved critical developments in the American *Snow White* tradition, the first pulling the tale back into the literary sphere and the second reactively breaking the American conventions and sentimental fantasy of Disney's version. Wanda Gág translated and illustrated what is understood as the first American literary or book-based version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, reflecting the Grimms' tradition, but also her own surrounding culture. Bob Clampett's parody, *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*, tossed the tradition of the tale aside, but produced an animated short which represented WWII era American culture, values, and ideologies, as well as his own. Although censored,⁶⁴ it continues to be

⁶⁴ *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* became part of the "Censored Eleven" in the 1960s, "an unofficial blacklist of offensive cartoons that broadcasters wouldn't show on TV" (Weinman 57). Jaime Weinman further notes that unlike other Warner Brother cartoons released via VHS or DVD, *Coal Black* never appeared in either of these forms.

examined, analyzed, and further critiqued for these attributes. These two sides of the *Snow White* story, produced very shortly after the Disney version, display the push-pull effect between multiple media that Disney's landmark film produced. Could the publishing industry return the tale to its more traditional literary and folkloric past? Could animation and/or other media move the tale forward still further in its particularly American representation? And how could or would representations of *Snow White* generated through multiple forms of media continue to correspond with one another, extending the American fairy tale conversation still further? These works represent the very beginnings of critical responses to Disney that would continue to emerge and gain prominence in the postmodern era.

Markedly, both adaptations were successful in some measure; however, the Disney film in its profound influence and reminiscences rekindled through artwork, language, scenes, and even music, was at least partially responsible for the successes of each. Where the earlier American *Snow White* tradition (pre-Disney) was marked by ownership, Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* produced a fundamental shift in revisions or adaptations of successors. Despite self- or industry-/corporate-interests attempting to reclaim, retaliate against, or manipulate this foundational American *Snow White* version, these successors would not be able to avoid responding to the American *Snow White* tradition, or its guardian of the tale, Walt Disney. Whether willingly or unwillingly, in their responses, Gág and Clampett began a new American tradition of folkloric patterning for the *Snow White* tale, one that may or may not heed the Grimms' precursory work, but was inextricably tied to the Disney version.

CONCLUSION:

TRANSFORMING DISNEY: RECUPERATIVE POWER AND POSSIBILITIES IN
POSTMODERN, CONTEMPORARY, AND FUTURE
SNOW WHITE ADAPTATIONS

Snow White, or in an American context, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* has proven itself a timeless tale, but only a couple of creators have adapted it in such a way as to transform it into a “classic.” In this dissertation, I have endeavored to signal toward the ways in which powerful, folkloric aspects, or properties of the story generated to perpetuate its retelling, gave the *Snow White* versions of the Brothers Grimm and Walt Disney prominent positions in the European and, later, American traditions of the fairy tale. Moreover, in the American tradition, I gesture toward the folklore present within Disney’s version to make a case as to how and why his *Snow White* tale has proven foundational to the nation’s continuation of the fairy tale. In American versions following Disney, successors necessarily began to generate adaptations responding to this master storyteller and animator’s “classic,” either affirming or rejecting its model. However, more recent adaptations have displayed further departures from the Disney version, potentially signaling a new or revised pattern of influence.

In some ways, Disney could be said to have usurped America’s vision of the *Snow White* tale, first, by means of his (Walt Disney’s), and eventually, its (the Disney Corporation’s) influence. Further, Disney’s more recent self-reflexive responses to its own “classic” might be thought to signal the company’s continued, irrefutable stronghold on the tale and its American tradition. However, in the ways that some of these new

adaptations play into contemporary uses of the tale, one might alternately find that an insular, “classic” version of the *Snow White* tale is simply not enough to engage contemporary audiences. A brief examination of postmodern and contemporary successors that have employed or broken from Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) might therefore display possibilities for transformation both within and outside of the Disney sphere.

Postmodern adaptations of the *Snow White* tale in literature and film appear to have utilized Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and made their mark upon the tale by unmaking the “classic’s” conventions. Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* (1965), Anne Sexton’s “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1971), Robert Coover’s “The Dead Queen,” (1973), and Michael Cohn’s film, *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* (1997) represent this pattern, employing various strategies to do so. Barthelme voids the tale’s narrative and characters of meaning, such that the metafictional strategies or “self-reflexivity” of the unreliable narrator that Jaroslav Kusnir gestures toward only further confuse plot, its progression, and the tale’s overall purpose (36, 39). For Coover, the expected narrative structure has likewise been broken and remade to give voice to a highly-emotive Prince, now positioned as narrator. As in Barthelme’s version, Snow White is sexualized, and the dwarfs, although appearing comic at times, are also understood to have sexually exploited the young Snow White. Sexton’s “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” withdraws from Disney’s sentimentality and romance entirely to insert images of brutality, violence, gore, and sexuality in their place, all in the language of consumer-driven material culture. Cohn’s version too opposes that of Disney in its

depiction of the tale in darker and more horrific terms. Yet, Andrea Wright argues that Cohn also advances a new representation of the female villain, positioned in “a scenario whereby [her] life crumbles because she *cannot* fulfill society’s expectations, not because she *wants* to reject them” (238). Each of these variations, in its own way—by means of narrative construction, alternative character development, sexuality, violence, consumerism, and/or female recuperation—strives to unmake the powerful influence of Disney. The cohesion, unity, and what Zipes refers to as “conservatism” (“stressing the morals and values of the Protestant ethic as well as sentimental love”) of the Disney version all have been broken (“Americanization” 99). While this may not be the sole purpose or intent of each textual re-presentation of *Snow White*, the response to or rejection of Disney’s “utopian” formulation is clear (*Fairy Tales* 193).

Filmic adaptations in the twenty-first century similarly counter Disney’s system of values, primarily in their treatment of female characters. Tom Shippey positions the contemporary fairy tale as a “contested site” wherein “The most straightforward way of engaging the contest was to write new stories which would provide girl-children with more active and more positive role models than [...] Disney’s domesticated Cinderella,” or, one might add, *Snow White* (259). This same application is evident in *Snow White and Huntsman* (2012) which features revisions of the central female characters projected for an alternate (young adult/adult) audience, displaying its responsiveness to this most heavily contested attribute of the fairy tale.

Interestingly, twenty-first century literary and television adaptations under the Disney imprint similarly configure the *Snow White* heroine or villain from an angle

which further attests to her strengths, multiple dimensions of character, and gendered positioning in society. Serena Valentino's *Fairest of All: A Tale of the Wicked Queen* (2009), R.C. Lewis' *Stitching Snow* (2014), and the ABC series, *Once Upon a Time* all feature alternative representations of *Snow White*'s female figures. Furthermore, the latter example (from television) goes on to break the conventional framing of the *Snow White* tale, wherein this narrative is only a piece of a more complex fantastic and, in some ways, realistic structure. This additional break from the "classic" also represents an earlier *Snow White* revision.

Serena Valentino's *Fairest of All: A Tale of the Wicked Queen* (2009) provides precisely the alternate perspective that its title alludes to—"A Tale of the Wicked Queen." For the first half of the novel, however, this presumed villain is not "wicked" at all. Rather, she functions as a mother/protector to Snow White, sheltering the young girl even from the brash reactions of her father when he returns from war. Where Disney's earlier "classic" presented the simpler and more traditional modeling of "good" (Snow White) versus "evil" (Queen/Stepmother) through its characterization and plotline, Valentino's adaptation (still under the Disney publication label) presents an interrogation into the "wicked" queen's psychological undoing. Although the cover is shadowed by the glaring face of Disney's animated stepmother/queen, this only serves to further complicate the *Snow White* tale presented within for its readers, particularly in the adaptation's final suggestion that the Queen, standing before a cliff, chooses to punish herself. Had she recognized the err of her ways? The same question resounds when her image returns to Snow White through the very mirror that precipitated her downfall. The reader might

now wonder, “Has the cycle begun anew?” Or, has the elder, more experienced stepmother returned to meaningfully guide the younger female figure toward a new path or ideal? The gendered ideologies that Disney once aimed to project through the simplistic, “classic” framing have been muddled through the questions elicited by this ending and the dimensions of the queen which the novel on the whole provides.

R.C. Lewis’ *Stitching Snow* (2014), also under the Disney imprint, provides young adult readers with a further adapted vision of the *Snow White* tale. Here, however, is a deeper interrogation into the character of the heroine, a fierce young woman renowned in her sphere not so much for her beauty as for her physical strength and intellect. The use of an otherworldly, sci-fi setting and language draws the realm of Essie (Princess Snow) closer to the fantastic in a sense, yet in its positioning of this central figure, the tale departs from the conventional naiveté traditionally associated with the *Snow White* heroine of the “classic” tales. In this revised portrayal—imagining *Snow White* as a disguised (and very successful) cage fighter, still witty and intelligent enough to “stitch” code into computers, shuttles, or mining drones—the novel’s characterization of Essie (Princess Snow) subverts readers’ expectations right from the start. This young woman is not pressed into and out of roles; instead, she creates them for herself. While one might find something akin to Disney’s seven dwarfs, or in this case, individually named and characterized mining drones, these companions of Essie’s run according to her programming; they cannot function without her care. Moreover, although a prince of sorts emerges early in the narrative, guiding one to recall the traditional American romance, Essie (Princess Snow), a self-sufficient Princess, decides when and how this

romance will progress. From the start when Dane's ship crashes and *he* is in need of rescuing, Essie is positioned as both the heroine of her *Snow White*, as well as the white knight or savior. The romance as well as the tale are hers first and foremost. Even where hints of the Disney version bleed through then, the stronger emphasis in the adaptation of this young adult novel is on recuperating and empowering the heroine.

Each of these representations re-activate the characterization of the two central female roles in the *Snow White* tale. While both admittedly recall Disney's imprint on the tale on some level, the revisionary work of each, in its gendered staging, depicts a cultural necessity to engage some of those self-same ideologies or formulas for creating a contested space that had been utilized in postmodern adaptations. Ironically then, those same strategies that had been employed to unmake the Disney form would be redeployed, in more contemporary versions under the Disney label, when the traditional depiction no longer matched the needs or values of the surrounding culture.

Beyond the contemporary usage of postmodern representations, this pattern of infusion has continued, wherein still more recent experiments with the *Snow White* tale have been re-invoked in subsequent inversions, displacing the "classics" still further. In 2002, Bill Willingham created a fairy tale comic series, entitled *Fables*, about a host of fairy tale characters that have been pushed from their "Homelands" to New York City, where they form a community called "Fabletown."⁶⁵ In its utilization not only of the *Snow White* tale, but a host of fairy tale motifs, heroes, heroines, and villains, a kind of

⁶⁵ Jack Zipes has earlier gestured toward a line of influence between the series, which ran from 2002-2015, and *Once Upon a Time* ("Americanization").

“fractured fairy tale” was formed.⁶⁶ Nearly ten years later, in 2011, as Willingham’s series continued on,⁶⁷ a similar “fractured fairy tale” television series, ABC’s (or Disney’s) *Once Upon a Time* merged realism with fantasy.

Once Upon a Time re-presents various tales, familiar fairy tale figures, and motifs. Where these characters and their adapted fairy tale histories (or former tales) are revealed through individual episodes, a stable narrative thread for the series exists in the American reality which the characters have been displaced into. In a town called “Storybrooke,” (not unlike Willingham’s “Fabletown”) these characters or fairy-tale types are presented as “real” individuals. In its blend of realism and fantasy, viewers are further engaged in what Claudia Schwabe refers to as a “third reality,” where “contemporary fairy-tale reinventions synthesize quotidian reality with supernatural/magical reality, forming a new reality with magical influences” (295). The realism presented within, as well as the more complex characterization of figures such as Snow White or the “wicked” Queen (another light nod to the feminist recuperation of the tale) promotes a new level of audience participation. Moreover, insofar as viewers gaze upon and enter into this “new” magical reality, they might also find themselves negotiating the “tension between the Disney canon and the show’s innovative retellings” (Hay and Baxter 319). However, as much as one might argue that Disney’s “classic” *Snow White* maintains a presence in a viewer’s experience of this adaptation, so too might more recent narrative departures or realistic presentations of consumer culture and

⁶⁶ I use the term “fractured fairy tale” not to indicate a simple parodic use of a tale, but instead to represent the breaking of multiple tales and redeployment and/or combination of the characters and motifs within to create a new adaptation which unifies these disparate fairy tale figures and elements.

⁶⁷ Willingham’s series published its last issue in 2015.

desire figure in—not only Willingham’s, but potentially Coover’s or Barthelme’s, as well. In this way, the redeployment of a successful “fracturing” of the tale creates the space for multiple *Snow White* tales to emerge, reawakening what Bacchilega refers to as a “fairy tale web” of magic⁶⁸.

In highlighting this new form of *Snow White* patterning, however, I do not mean to suggest that all of Disney’s and/or other contemporary versions function in this way. Several young adult novels produced in recent years are baseless, taking *Snow White* or *Fairest* only in name to coerce a market readily consuming fairy tales. From an alternate angle, animation and marketing geared toward Disney’s younger audiences continues to groom new child-audiences with the “classic” Disney structures and figureheads.

Although the animated cartoon series *Sofia the First* (2012) might be understood to have progressively employed the “fractured fairy tale” form, as well, its manipulation of this contemporary tool soon becomes evident as characters from Disney’s own “classic” library frequently come into play. Briefly, *Sofia the First* centers on a series of adventures undertaken by the titular character. However, when Sofia (the young princess from humble origins) encounters challenges that are insurmountable, the magical amulet that she wears around her neck enables an earlier Disney princess to appear, offering advice and counseling the younger princess into action. The (elder) Disney Princess (whether *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, or another), now positioned as something between a

⁶⁸ Cristina Bacchilega contends that “it may be helpful to think of the fairy tale genre today as a web whose hypertextual links do not refer back to one authority or central tradition. This early-twenty-first century ‘fairy tale web’ has woven into it—inside and outside of the academy—multiple, competing historical traditions and performances of the genre as well as varied contemporary revisions in multiple media” (Bacchilega and Rieder 25).

mother figure or fairy tale helper, instructs Sofia, gently guiding her into the mold of the princess that she “should” become. In this way, Disney’s traditional “civilizing process” and “classic” version are once again activated under the pretense of contemporary modeling for young girls (*Fairy Tales*).

Similarly, the company’s revisionary marketing has in recent years been deployed to redefine and speak to its present-day princesses. A “Dream Big Princess” campaign was launched in 2016 (supposedly) to promote alternate pathways for young girls. A few of the young girls presented within these commercials are featured swimming, dancing, or doing gymnastics, not unconventional activities for young girls, nor are they difficult to match a Disney “classic” princess image or scene to. These scenes are, of course, interspersed with a young girl as scientist, another reading, a few practicing social activism, another graduating, a leader/speaker, and an astronaut. The latter are apparently the images meant to reshape young female impressions of what is possible. However, the tagline at the commercial’s end seems to offer a different message. “For every girl who dreams big, there’s a Princess to show her it’s possible” (Disney). But what have the princesses poised in their various scenes shown? Several of them are dancing (often with male counterparts), singing, or twirling. There is nothing ground-breaking conveyed through these actions. While on the surface, these productions *seem* to support young women pursuing alternate paths and roles, the company’s own “classic” princesses, as well as the tagline at the close remind viewers what the more conventional Disney Princess should be. Once again, one needs only to look toward Disney’s “classics” to secure an appropriate model. In this way, Disney continues to groom audiences, if not

familiar, to become familiar with its traditional tales and princesses, including Snow White, in the name of contemporary values.

Although these examples of projections geared toward children might be understood as Disney maintaining continued control over the *Snow White* tale and its American representations, the earlier mentioned postmodern and contemporary versions combined with the reappearance of their central concerns or troubling of the “classic” *Snow White* tradition seem to signal a new cycle of influence even in children’s literature. Chris Colfer’s recent “multimillion-selling series” of children’s books exemplifies the same (Kit).

Colfer’s *The Land of Stories* series (first published in 2012, with the most recent and final book produced in 2017) is one of the latest popular representations of the “fractured fairy tale,” weaving magic into the reality portrayed within. Despite the number of fairy tale characters and versions of their stories presented or alluded to, the first book, *The Wishing Spell*, centers around the trouble of Snow White’s stepmother, the “Evil Queen.” Before the story proper even begins, there appears a “Prologue” entitled “The Queen’s Visit,” wherein Snow White meets with and interrogates her stepmother in the cell where she suffers for her crimes. As with earlier postmodern and contemporary renditions of the tale, a reader is primed to reconsider the “Evil Queen’s” position, pre-*Snow White* narrative, and motives complicating this generally typified, one-note character. The difference between this version and those earlier adaptations recasting the Queen’s disturbing representation of femininity is, at least in part, audience. Where postmodern literary unmakings of the *Snow White* tale which strove to reinterpret and/or

justify the actions of the villain typically spoke to adult (or potentially young adult) audiences, here, *child* readers are engaged in the process of recuperating or productively reconstructing the restrictive gendered views imparted by the fairy tale. As a result, new systems of value and ideologies are being produced and conveyed to a wider audience, gradually reshaping American understandings of *Snow White*.

American literary representations for young adult and/or adult audiences in the twenty-first century continue to push the *Snow White* tale still further, subverting the folkloric tradition or modeling of the tale to inspect additional themes including: disability, history, religion, sexuality, or the use of artwork in story. Although Gregory Maguire's *Mirror, Mirror* (2003) draws together a familiar assemblage of dwarfs, in this adaptation they are marked by disability-infused characteristics and names (enhancing the display of the inferiority of individual dwarfs)—Blind eye, Lane/Gimpy, Tasteless, No Nose, Deaf to the World, Heartless, and Mute. This emphasis, as well as Maguire's investment in developing a fictional account blended with historical elements changes readers' impressions of the tale either subtly or more overtly. By imagining a *Snow White* set in Renaissance Italy, Maguire provides a fictional representation of the decline of the prominent Borgia family, also reckoning with the power and corruption which religious hierarchical orders might produce. Where historical re-imagining might not seem so revolutionary in terms of what a fairy tale might represent, the other comments of the text concerning disability and religion certainly stretch and re-form the tale. K.S. Trenten's *Fairest* (2016) presses the boundaries of the "classic" *Snow White* still further, exploring the heroine's sexual development from an alternate, lesbian angle, queering the

tale. This novel defies all readerly expectations but utilizes the fairy tale to productively examine the commonly understood theme of female development, from a new stance. In still another new inversion, Matt Phelan's *Snow White: A Graphic Novel* (2016) offers a host of familiar motifs aligning a reader's imagination with the *Snow White* tradition, all the while utilizing artwork in place of language to produce an alternate type of story or projection of folklore. Here, a reader is forced to make interpretations based upon the bridge which art/image creates, as opposed to that of language. The retelling itself is also new, gazing at *Snow White* through the lens of its Depression-era Manhattan setting. While this might draw a linkage to the cultural and historical moment of Disney's production, the realism of the narrative and the artwork itself have been prioritized. Each of these versions provides a creative revision of the *Snow White* tale which might turn the American evolution of the same just one notch further in its revaluation of the characters, context, underlying theme, or mode of interpretation. In so doing, it might subsequently enable the tale to represent a shift in cultural values.

Throughout this dissertation, and most particularly in Chapters 2 and 4, I have suggested a host of means by which the "classics" were formed, and in turn informed popular and scholarly understandings of *Snow White*. For the Grimms, in addition to a folkloric foundation, the cultural consciousness of the creator, and a distinct formal style, the key was adaptation, or more specifically, adapting to cultural changes, new audiences, and rising literary production. For Disney to remodel the "classic" in American culture, these same attributes were key, as was his use of innovative technology. Significantly through, it was not only his use of film or animation (which could by his time usefully

employ color and sound) but Disney's *combination* of artful animation, new technology, and story which together substantiated his view of and continued folkloric impact on the *Snow White* tale. Each "classic" resounded in the history of the *Snow White* tradition and served to critically influence subsequent cultural or generational adaptations. Yet my study also shows how the tale's tradition transformed over time, to either meet new cultural or contextual needs. While my brief glance toward more recent versions and trends representing the American *Snow White* tradition indeed displays further transformation, I would also like to suggest that the recurrence of postmodern and contemporary themes and values presented therein might be signaling a new turn in the use-value and revisionary possibilities of these post-Disney *Snow White* tales.

More recent, twenty-first century *Snow White* transformations are not so frequently guided or even gauged by either the Grimms' or Disney's "classic" folkloric modeling, but instead embody and transform these traditions based upon a new cultural trend, system of values, or creative impulse. By productively highlighting alternative attributes of the tale, these adaptations embody subsequent (contemporary) cultural trends and values in addition exhibiting motifs from the "classics." These re-formations of *Snow White* are thus giving way to an alternatively understood lineage within the tale, which traces many variations of *Snow White*, but prioritizes none. Rather, it serves to emphasize its own value, be it the treatment of gender, "fractured fairy tale form," disability, history, religion, sexuality, or some other internal or external element. In so doing, this adapted representation inserts itself into the tale's conversation, becoming a

contender for subsequent adaptation and re-presentation (as shown through the feminizing swing of the *Snow White* tale).

What becomes clear in these contemporary adaptations and in the American tradition of the *Snow White* tale on the whole is the continual interdependent influence of multiple forms of media. While in some respects, Disney's folkloric impact amplified the effects of film's influence on literature and literature's influence on film and other media, this dynamic movement between various types of representation actually resonated in and with American culture (albeit in a more limited way) prior to Disney's classic—through the theatrical play (as performance), play (as text), and silent film, presented with titles. It is this movement between forms which has regenerated and continues to regenerate the folkloric tradition of the *Snow White* tale in the United States, gradually employing progressive experimentation to reaffirm or reconfigure cultural values to address societal needs.

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