Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS   College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

2007

A Wave of the Magic Wand: Fairy Godmothers in Contemporary American Media

Jeana Jorgensen
Butler University, jsjorgen@butler.edu

A Wave of the Magic Wand: Fairy Godmothers in Contemporary American Media

Jeana Jorgensen

JEANA JORGENSEN

A Wave of the Magic Wand: Fairy Godmothers in Contemporary American Media

With just a wave of my magic wand
Your troubles will soon be gone
With a flick of the wrist and just a flash
You'll land a prince with a ton of cash

—Fairy Godmother, *Shrek 2*

In her book *American Folklore and the Mass Media,* Linda Dégh discusses the magical worldview prevalent in the United States, illustrated by commercials that utilize both emergent and traditional folklore forms.[1] In Dégh's examples, magic helpers appear in TV commercials "to spell out the magic truth about what is good and what is useful, and to educate ignorant consumers with their incantations" (40). The magical worldview Dégh describes in advertising exists on a broader continuum in modern American media today, expanding to encompass reality TV shows and other attention grabbers that promise a quick magical fix or solution, whether it be for one's physical flaws or one's house. Magical helpers persist in genres that draw upon fairy tales, such as fantasy novels and films, and the contemporary American affinity toward supernatural improvements illuminates some of the changes made to folktale helpers in new media.

Donors and helpers traditionally appear in fairy tales to aid the hero and the heroine at various points in the plot. Vladimir Propp, in his *Morphology of the Folktale,* assigns donors and helpers separate spheres of action, but also acknowledges that is it possible that "One character is involved in several spheres of action" (80). A good example of one character taking on more than one sphere of action is the helpful animal; according to Propp, they "begin as donors (begging for help or mercy), then they place themselves at the disposal of the hero and become his helpers" (80–81). In many fairy tales, especially the

more literary tales of Charles Perrault and other French writers of his period, a common donor and helper is the fairy godmother. As Jane Yolen notes in "America's Cinderella," the innovation of the "Perrault godmother" became "incorporated in later versions" of the tale, notably those that have become very popular in North American rewrites of "Cinderella" (298). Yolen discusses the many changes made in mass-market children's versions of "Cinderella," changes that often deprive the heroine of agency and displace it, rather, onto helper figures like the fairy godmother and the mice in the Disney version of the tale.

However, a pathetic, whimpering heroine rescued by an all-powerful fairy godmother is a radical departure from Propp's formulation of the helper as an expression of the hero's strength and ability in folktales (*Istoricheskie korni volshebnoi skazki,* 139). As Yolen points out, most folktale versions of "Cinderella" portray a heroine with a "birthright of shrewdness, inventiveness, and grace under pressure" (298). Later literary incarnations of fairy tales often feature fairy godmothers whose appearances erase Cinderella's initial efficacy. The classic fairy tales and their derivatives—mass media and popular narratives—redirect power roles to serve the hegemonic culture industry, as Jack Zipes has argued in "The Instrumentalization of Fantasy." As a reaction to canonical fairy godmothers, fairy godmothers appearing in recent pastiche texts continue to provide aid to (and sometimes challenge) the protagonists, but they also take on new roles in new narratives. This article shall examine the figure of the fairy godmother in two contemporary American fantastic works based on fairy tales: one film and one novel. Each of these works differs from traditional folktales and fairy tales in fascinating ways and corresponds to trends found in current American mass media. Finally, this article will examine how these reworked fairy godmothers indicate patterns in the American worldview and provide an interesting parallel to the work of folklorists in affirming tradition.

From Postmodern Fairy Tales to Fairy-Tale Pastiche

Both fairy-tale-inspired works I shall be discussing were produced in 2004, and I would classify both works as postmodern. Here it is helpful to distinguish between *postmodernity* and *postmodernism* as John Dorst does: postmodernity is "the social and historical circumstances of advanced consumer capitalism" (218), while postmodernism is a "self-identified cultural movement" (217). One useful guide to postmodern ideas is Cristina Bacchilega's *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies.* Noting that conflicting versions of postmodernism can be self-defeating, if not hostile, Bacchilega lists some of the redeeming qualities of postmodern studies, which have "played with multiplicity and performance in narrative, and struggled with the sexual and gender ramifications of problematizing identities and differences" (19). Bacchilega makes an excellent case for taking a postmodern approach to what she calls postmodern fairy tales, or new readings of fairy tales, including "literary texts, cartoons, movies, musicals, [and] soap operas," that exhibit ideo-

logically charged self-reflexivity and disseminate parodic and performative multiple versions (22–23). The notion of postmodern fairy tales is useful; however, the texts I am dealing with here cannot be reduced to individual traditional fairy-tale plots.

Another feature of postmodernism, the pastiche, becomes essential in defining these new texts. Pastiche imitates in the absence of normativity, unlike parody, the sole function of which is to mock an established form (Workman 7). This is a relevant concept for studying popular revisions of fairy tales that contain more than a single fairy-tale plot, or no traditional plot at all, in addition to countless references to fairy-tale motifs. In "Disrupting the Boundaries of Genre and Gender: Postmodernism and the Fairy Tale," Cathy Lynn Preston claims: "In postmodernity the 'stuff' of fairy tales exists as fragments (princess, frog, slipper, commodity relations in a marriage market) in the nebulous realm that we might most simply identify as cultural knowledge" (210). These fragments, whether fairy-tale motifs, characters, or plots, are the building blocks of new media texts, inspired by fairy tales but not quite fairy tales themselves. I have taken to calling these new texts "fairy-tale pastiches," which is not to deny that they can also have parodic functions, but rather to privilege their schizophrenic instrumentalization of fairy-tale matter.[2]

The first fairy-tale pastiche I shall discuss is the film *Shrek 2,* released by DreamWorks in 2004 following the success of its prequel, *Shrek,* in 2001. In the first film, based on a children's book by William Steig, the title character, an ogre named Shrek, falls in love with a cursed princess named Fiona through a series of antics and adventures that draw on myriad fairy-tale tropes. The second film continues with the two of them happily married, and Fiona's curse lifted by "true love's first kiss" such that she no longer alternates between human and ogre forms by day and night, but rather is perpetually an ogre, and is happy that way. The plot of *Shrek 2* begins when Fiona is summoned home to the kingdom of Far Far Away to obtain her royal parents' blessing on her new marriage. There, Fiona, Shrek, and their sidekick, Donkey, meet with a meddling fairy godmother, who intended her son, Prince Charming, to rescue and wed Fiona. Fairy Godmother is not merely self-interested, but also manipulative, determined to use her considerable magical powers to her own advantage despite the injurious consequences of her actions.

The fairy godmother in the second fairy-tale pastiche I shall discuss is a diametrically opposite character. This novel, by best-selling fantasy author Mercedes Lackey, is titled *The Fairy Godmother,* set in a fantastic realm known as the Five Hundred Kingdoms. The way magic works in this milieu is through a force called The Tradition, which intangibly propels people's lives down established fairy-tale paths. For instance, the main character of the novel, Elena, lives with her wicked stepmother and stepsisters, hence she is a perfect candidate to become a Cinderella. The problem is that there is no suitable prince for her to marry, so instead her fairy godmother appears and offers her the chance to become her apprentice.[3] Elena accepts, and begins to learn how to be a fairy

godmother, which involves maintaining a balance between using The Tradition's magic to guide people's lives down the proper fairy-tale channel and ensuring that those people live happily ever after. For there are also dark magicians in this world, and they too can harness The Tradition and use its magic to work evil. As Bella, Elena's fairy godmother, explains The Tradition's ambivalence: "The Tradition doesn't *care,* you see, whether the outcome of a story is a joy or a tragedy; if the circumstances are there, it just makes things follow down set paths. And since we can't fix them directly, we have to help the heroes who can" (Lackey 59). The plot of this novel revolves around Elena's initiation as a fairy godmother and her attempts to battle evil while reconciling her personal desires with the lack of a Traditional path that allows fairy godmothers to fall in love.

Shrek 2 and *The Fairy Godmother* are notable fairy-tale pastiches that engage not only with oral folktale and classical fairy-tale materials but also with commodification and consumerism. These texts respond to the classic literary and animated texts with both faithful reproductions and humorous revisions. Lackey's descriptions of fairy godmothers in powdered wigs and gossamer gowns attending a princess's christening celebration correspond to imagery from Perrault and Disney. Even Lackey's updated fairy godmothers must cater to the expectations of those they serve. In essence, the fairy godmothers are selling themselves as "authentic" magic users in order to gain the support of the more traditionally minded monarchs. *Shrek 2* and its predecessor each parody the classic fairy tales and the culture industry in various ways. In "The Radical Morality of Rats, Fairies, Wizards, and Ogres," Jack Zipes discusses the morally significant issues present in *Shrek*: "The artificial Disney world of Duloc versus the natural beauty of the swamp, conformists versus outsiders, conventionality versus unconventionality, the tyranny of symmetry and homogenization versus the freedom of unsymmetry and heterogeneity—these are some of the conflicts in the film that represent a real struggle within the film industry of cultural production" (229). *Shrek 2* grapples with similar dichotomies in a biting and funny manner that is nonetheless designed—like *The Fairy Godmother*—to make money on fairy tales while critiquing them.

Traditional Helpers and Their Pastiche Counterparts

Moving from context to content, both of these fairy godmothers embody traits rarely seen in folktale and fairy-tale helpers. This observation is compounded by the fact that fairy godmothers are relatively rare in oral folktales. Even in "Cinderella," "There are few fairy godmothers, as help usually comes from animals, supernatural beings, or inanimate objects" (Schaefer 140). Although Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 510A, Cinderella, is normally associated with fairy godmothers due to the classical tales and the Disney film, there are actually very few fairy godmothers in the oral folktales. One major discrepancy between helpers in the folktale and fairy godmothers in the fairy-tale pastiche

is that the folktale helpers are often abstract and poorly described—both in the material and in the scholarship. Hilda Ellis Davidson, in her essay on helpers and adversaries, makes a few generalizations that are pertinent to the discussion of fairy godmothers: "Human helpers are often left unspecified beyond such descriptions as an old woman, an old man with a white beard, a grey man, or a druid in the Irish tales." In addition, helpers are "usually elderly rather than young," and it "is often not clear whether such helpers are supernatural beings" (104). Max Lüthi believes all folktale characters to be similarly depthless, and he comments on the helper's lack of personal background: "Otherworld helpers are not the domestic companions or fellow-workers of ordinary people, but rather they flash from the void whenever the plot requires them. Each new situation generally calls forth a new helper, but even if the same otherworld beings appear more than once, they disappear from sight in the meantime—not to any particular place, or into an abyss existing behind things, but rather just by not being mentioned any more" (17). In contrast, donor figures in classical fairy tales and in pastiches are individuals. The main difference is that the pastiche fairy godmothers are far more fleshed out than their canonical counterparts. For instance, the fairies in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* each had distinct traits, expressions, and appearances—but only to a degree, as their outfits were color-coded in the same genre of clothing. Yet their motivations remained shallow (i.e., to help good triumph over evil), as is the case with folktale helpers. In contrast, the fairy godmothers in *Shrek 2* and *The Fairy Godmother* are concrete characters with dynamic personalities. They are portrayed respectively as a burlesque or a more sympathetic version of the classical godmother. In *Shrek 2* the character's name is actually Fairy Godmother, yet this does not detract from her individuality. She wears her glittery gray hair in a sculpted style, and she has retro half-moon glasses, manicured nails, and a form-fitting dress that accentuates her curves. She markets herself and her magic in the land of Far Far Away by turning herself into a media figure, appearing on billboards and at social functions like the ball to commemorate Shrek and Fiona's marriage.[4] Moreover, Fairy Godmother is a devoted mother, who does not hesitate to manipulate events and people to ensure that her son, Charming, marries into royalty. Some of her idiosyncratic characteristics include motherly overprotectiveness (styling her son's hair before the ball because he's "hopeless") and a proclivity for unhealthy foods ("somebody bring me something deep-fried and smothered in chocolate!").

There is more than one fairy godmother character in the novel *The Fairy Godmother,* each watching over a series of kingdoms, and each is usually represented as having unique traits. The main character's mentor, Bella, is portrayed as eccentric; the first time she meets Elena, she is described as "a little old lady" wearing an outfit that was "bright enough to be gypsy clothing" (Lackey 46). Elena is a fully dynamic character with both external and internal motivations—for instance, the passion for right that motivates a fairy godmother to do her work, coexisting with the desire for her own happy ending. Moreover,

because of her upbringing as a downtrodden "Ella Cinders," Elena cannot tolerate injustice. This leads to one of the novel's key developments, when Elena transforms a rude prince into a donkey, saying: "You are as ill-mannered, as stubborn, and as stupid as an ass! So BE one!" (192). It is entirely consistent with Elena's character when she then brings the ass home with her in order to supervise his rehabilitation into a decent human being.

Another divergence from folktale helpers is that pastiche fairy godmothers are far from neutral or disinterested. Lüthi does not even acknowledge the possibility that helpers might have ulterior motives when he claims that "The folktale isolates people, objects, and episodes" (43) and that the "donor himself is for the most part someone unknown" (60). Other scholars have challenged the notion that the donor's identity is irrelevant to the rest of the tale, such as Francisco Vaz da Silva's perception of "the merging of godmother and stepmother statuses," which "calls attention to the fact that both women are called on to replace a dead mother" (96). These complex symbolic links are all supported by ethnographic evidence from communities around Western Europe. Marina Warner also examines the vested interests of godmother figures when she analyzes their origins in kinship affiliations (98). In the fairytale pastiche, fairy godmothers are the opposite of isolated helper figures; their interests and desires dictate how they use their magical powers to help or harm other characters.

The fairy godmother in *Shrek 2,* it turns out, has been scheming to have her son, Charming, wed Princess Fiona for years. When the curse on Fiona is revealed at her birth, her parents seek the aid of Fairy Godmother, who instructs them to lock Fiona in a tower, there to await the kiss of Prince Charming to remove the curse. Even earlier, Fairy Godmother struck a deal with Fiona's father, King Harold, who had originally been a frog prince. When the king does not wish to administer a love potion to make Fiona fall in love with Charming, Fairy Godmother threatens the king thus: "I helped you with your happily ever after, and I can take it away just as easily!" Fairy Godmother not only manipulates Far Far Away's royal family, but she also runs a potion factory wherein she exploits her labor force. It is tempting to speculate that Fairy Godmother was the original cause of the curse on Fiona, since it was in her interest to arrange a marriage between Charming and a princess too helpless and cursed to object.

Elena's actions in *The Fairy Godmother* are also motivated by her own interests, which are generally altruistic. Once she becomes a fairy godmother, she works very hard to preserve peace in the kingdoms she oversees. Her tasks usually involve using magic inventively; one example is altering the fate of a baby girl destined to become a Rapunzel (in that world called "Ladderlocks," which would cause numerous deaths as princes died trying to rescue her from the tower). Instead, Elena guides the girl's destiny to that of the Princess on the Pea (or "the Tender Princess"), ensuring that the girl will grow up and marry royalty without suffering captivity. Elena's creative use of magic is inspired by her

compassion for everyone in her world. Moreover, she discovers new ways of using magic that expand the number of options available to her, which, though it takes more effort on her part, is beneficial because "The more paths The Tradition had to choose from, the easier it would be to keep it to one she and other good magicians preferred" (Lackey 209). Despite finding her work fulfilling, Elena also wishes for her own happy ending, to have her own true love. Her dilemma is that The Tradition lacks "any reference to a Godmother with a lover" (369).

Sexuality is the final topic that distinguishes fairy-tale pastiche fairy godmothers from folktale helpers. According to Lüthi: "The folktale knows of engagement and marriage but not erotic sensations" (16), a statement one would expect to extend to the helpers in folktales in addition to the protagonists. Except in the cases where folktale helpers are dead parents, the helpers do not seem to have sexual interests, past or present. The character of Fairy Godmother in *Shrek 2* must have been sexually active at some point in order to have a son. Additionally, she promotes a sexualized image of herself in public. When Shrek and Fiona first enter the kingdom of Far Far Away, they see a billboard with an image of Fairy Godmother on it, lying seductively on her left side clad in a silky gown edged in fur with matching slippers, wearing elbow-length gloves and a smoldering expression on her face. At the marriage celebration ball, Fairy Godmother sings a cover of "Holding out for a Hero" while wearing a slinky red gown with a slit up one side and matching red heels. The manner in which Fairy Godmother represents herself—as sexually desirable—is also the mode she encourages for her clients to attain their own happily ever afters. When Fairy Godmother first encounters the married ogre Fiona, she animates Fiona's furniture and sings a Disney-parodying song with words such as "vanish your blemishes, tooth decay / cellulite thighs will fade away" and "nip and tuck, here and there / to land that prince with a perfect hair / lipstick, liner, shadows, blush / to get that prince with a sexy tush." Fiona rejects Fairy Godmother's brand of superficial sexuality while embracing attraction based on inner beauty, which formed the premise of the first movie, when she and Shrek fell in love.

In *The Fairy Godmother* Elena is also given sexual qualities. She is described as good-looking and interested in finding love; however, she refrains from sexual contact until the point in the novel when she does find love. Before Elena manages to reform the prince she has turned into a donkey, he attempts (in human form) to seduce her as a way of breaking her spell over him. This gambit almost succeeds, as Elena, a former Cinderella, is Traditionally obligated to feel attraction to any nearby prince. After she repels his advances, she realizes that he had tried to overpower her as though "she was some idiot milkmaid in a bawdy song" (Lackey 260). Wryly, Elena notes: "Evidently, bawdy songs created as many paths as the Traditional tales did. She would have to remember that from now on" (260). This sort of metacommentary is particular to the fairy-tale pastiche genre. Eventually, the prince, Alexander, does reform suffi-

ciently that he and Elena are able to fall in love as equals. Apparently it is not uncommon for fairy godmothers to take lovers, and Alexander can remain in Elena's life by taking on the Traditional role of champion.

Fairy Godmothers, Social Power, and Cultural Roles

As mentioned above, Dégh shows how magic helpers appear in TV commercials "to spell out the magic truth about what is good and what is useful, and to educate ignorant consumers with their incantations" (40). Fairy Godmother in *Shrek 2* is precisely this type of figure, who sells happy endings to her clients. Her business card even says, "Happiness is just a tear drop away," illustrating the structural lack (a lack of happiness, hence a state of crying) that motivates the helper's intervention. Dégh illuminates the underlying meaning of such potent magical help with her observation that "the most traditional and persistent of Märchen attributes is its remarkable surface flexibility, which facilitates its transmission and at the same time protects the immutability of its essence: the peculiar magic worldview" (35). This magic worldview, or the idea that magical (or at least extraordinary) solutions exist, permeates the American media. Priscilla Denby's article "Folklore in the Mass Media," which also focused on American media, explicates this connection by calling folklore "a psychological magic wand" that, regardless of its users' intentions, is generally perceived as a trustworthy guide (121).

The magic worldview is evident when Preston, in her essay on postmodernism and the fairy tale, discusses the TV show *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* This show is a contemporary literalization of the Cinderella marriage, and as in other reality TV shows currently airing in America, ordinary people are given the chance to ascend to extraordinary levels of wealth, beauty, and power. Though there are no fairy godmothers explicitly named in this TV show, the producers of this show and others fulfill the same functional slots. Interestingly, the fairy godmother as donor/helper appears in contemporary contexts other than the rewritten fairy tale or fairy-tale pastiche, consistent with her origins. The fairy godmother most likely became a motifemic filler of the donor/helper slot precisely because of her gift-giving capabilities: "At the time when Perrault was writing, the Christian godmother bore some likeness to earlier supernatural guardians, since she was a donor of gifts, benefactor of the family and associated with the Otherworld" (Davidson 107). Warner also points out the supernatural aspects of fairy godmothers, as fairies were closely aligned with concepts of fate and destiny (14–16).

Fairy godmothers, perhaps more than other donor/helper figures that can be assigned other functional roles, are associated with benevolent aid. One advertising campaign captures this connotation of the fairy godmother thus: "MasterCard will launch the first national promotion behind its offline debit card in May with a sweepstakes that offers a grand prize of $10,000 and a fairy godmother (aka personal shopper, or trip planner) to help spend the cash"

(Lefton 5). Here, the fairy godmother functions not precisely as the donor, but rather as an adviser, in all probability accessing the implication that the fairy godmother is wise.

The implied age and judgment of fairy godmothers, more than other donors/helpers, positions them to impart traditional wisdom, and to instill not just heroes and heroines but also tale audiences with aspects of worldview. As Stephen Benson notes, fairy tales are often treated "as a form which embodies and prescribes a particular set of culturally dominant ideologies centered on the codes and paradigms of patriarchy. They are read as suggesting and symbolically rewarding gendered patterns of behavior particularly pertinent for young readers, depicting as they often do the transition from adolescence to maturity" (168). It is not just the tales themselves that symbolically reward gendered patterns of behavior, but, more literally, the donors and helpers in the tales. Fairy Godmother in *Shrek 2* advocates traditionally proper behavior, not simply along gender lines (for example, when she tries to push Fiona into more feminine behavior, such as using makeup), but also along narrative lines. When Shrek goes to ask Fairy Godmother about what he can do to ensure that Fiona is happy in their marriage, Fairy Godmother responds by pulling books of fairy tales from her library and reading the title of each one—"Cinderella," "Snow White," "Sleeping Beauty," and so on. Fairy Godmother points out that there are no ogres in any of the happy endings and triumphantly concludes: "[Y]ou see, ogres don't live happily ever after!" Fortunately, Shrek and Fiona are able to overthrow Fairy Godmother's hegemony on happy endings. Similarly, in *The Fairy Godmother* Elena must negotiate her own happy ending with the expected Traditional outcome. With her magical powers, Elena rewards and punishes the behavior of others, and thus she is also instrumental in defining happy endings, though, luckily for those under her care, she is not so elitist about what acceptably constitutes a happy ending.[5]

This preoccupation with traditionality illuminates a parallel between the work of fairy godmothers and the work of folklorists. Regina Bendix states in her book *In Search of Authenticity* that students and scholars of folklore are "authenticators of cultural production," meaning they are able to determine what is authentic and what is not (9). Authenticity and tradition both connote value; in the tale narrative, traditional behavior warrants a reward, and in the realm of folkloristics, traditional behavior secures the influential label of authenticity. Yet as *Shrek 2* and *The Fairy Godmother* exemplify, traditions can be limiting. The characters in both works—mainly Shrek and Fiona in the former, Elena and other godmothers in the latter—struggle to expand the possibilities available to them, rather than adhering to strictly defined lifestyle options. Just as donors and helpers in narratives can decide to distribute value in the form of magical gifts, folklorists can decide to assign prestige in the form of collections and studies of traditional items. Folklore-inspired texts and folkloristic texts have both shown that it is possible to create less restrictive possibilities. In *The Fairy Godmother* Elena's pursuit of romantic and sexual fulfillment that does

not compromise her career goals could be read as a feminist exploration of a role—the impersonal donor/helper—that traditionally does not allow for individual realization. Similarly, folklore scholarship, such as Cristina Bacchilega's "peopling" of postmodern fairy tales, can expose ideologically charged assumptions about traditional roles, gender and otherwise.

Conclusions

With a wave of the magic wand, fairy godmothers in fairy-tale pastiche texts can enforce tradition or challenge it; with the careful application of scholarly tools, folklorists can authorize the authenticity of texts or deconstruct the ideologies of both text and authenticity. Postmodern scholarship and postmodern texts are both key to the project of revealing power structures and multivocality in the tales we tell, in addition to the tales we tell about those tales. If sexy, empowered female figures were not common in folklore or popular media until recently, one reason could be related to the women's liberation movement, in that feminine sexuality is no longer as demonized as it once was. Similarly, the expansion of tale roles that former donor figures can now occupy in popular narratives can be attributed in part to how genre changes lead to differing expectations about characters, such that a reader would not expect to encounter a flat, folktale-style character in a fantasy novel. The donor/helper function can be assimilated to the protagonist or villain function as well, leading to hybrid characters that may have been symbolically hinted at in traditional folk narratives but are only becoming prevalent in modern media.

If, as Lee Haring points out, "Stratified societies favor frame-stories" (229), then *Shrek 2, The Fairy Godmother,* and other pastiche works are worth examining for how their use of framing devices overlaps with their social milieu. *Shrek 2* employs a frame in its opening, depicting in storybook illustrations how Fairy Godmother locks a cursed Princess Fiona in a tower, there to await the kiss of Prince Charming. Thus, from the very beginning of this narrative, the frame establishes some characters as being more empowered and having more agency than others. In *The Fairy Godmother,* on the other hand, there is no explicit frame, but Elena's story functions as a frame for all of the other stories occurring in the Five Hundred Kingdoms. Elena facilitates the happy endings of numerous other characters, again linking fairies with destiny. These two framing strategies, one overt and one subtle, are related directly to the levels of egalitarianism and free will in the fantasy worlds they describe.

The fairy godmothers in *Shrek 2* and *The Fairy Godmother,* though they differ in disposition, both contest conventions about folktale helpers and embody aspects of the American worldview, such as the prevalence of consumerism and the desire for extraordinary (magical) success. A belief in supernatural help, or the potential for any kind of improvement, could be crucial to worldviews such as the American dream. As Elena says in *The Fairy Godmother,* "[A] country whose people ceased to believe in magic soon lost much of their ability to imag-

ine and dream, and before long, they ceased to believe—or hope—for anything" (Lackey 318). The figure of the fairy godmother inspires hope for a better future, and progressive as well as contesting reinterpretations can also inspire hope for newer paths to take us there.[6]

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 14th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research in Tartu, Estonia, in July 2005. I received helpful comments, both at the congress and outside its bounds, from Ben Aldred, Cristina Bacchilega, Shuli Barzilai, Sandra Dolby, Lee Haring, and Linda Lee.
2. I have my colleague Ben Aldred to thank for a discussion that led to the term "fairy-tale pastiche."
3. Part of Elena's apprenticeship to the elder fairy godmother, Bella, involves learning her way around The Tradition so that she knows the parameters within which she must work. To this end, Elena studies the Traditional tales that have come before her as a component of her education. An example of the Traditions that the elder fairy godmother influenced can be seen in the following excerpt describing Bella's home: "Shelves lined the walls, floor to ceiling, and there were objects carefully arranged on them. But what *odd* objects! A cap made of woven rushes. A fur slipper, but quite the smallest that Elena had seen, clearly made for an adult woman, but the size of one meant for a child. A knitted tunic that was made of some coarse, dark plant fiber. A golden ball. A white feather. There were hundreds of these odd objects" (Lackey 67).
4. While she appears publicly as a benevolent figure, in keeping with folktale tradition Fairy Godmother acts much like a mafia boss (a godfather?) for the following reasons: she has an ethnically homogeneous labor force, she has muscled henchmen, she wants to keep power in the family, and her magical power allows her to overthrow legitimate authority figures such as the king of Far Far Away. Indiana University law student Michael LoPrete pointed this correspondence out to me.
5. The ability to determine a happy ending—for oneself and for others—in the fairy-tale pastiche relies on agency derived from reflexivity. Because both Fairy Godmother and Elena are familiar with the structures and motifs of fairy tales, they are able to manipulate these elements using the same magical principles that rule their worlds. The implication is that knowledge is power.
6. Another way to end this article would be: And they all lived happily till the end of their days.

Works Cited

Bacchilega, Cristina. *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997.

Bendix, Regina. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies.* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1997.

Benson, Stephen. *Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale, Theory.* Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003.

Davidson, Hilda Ellis. "Helpers and Adversaries in Fairy Tales." Davidson and Chaudhri 99–122.

Davidson, Hilda Ellis, and Anna Chaudhri, eds. *A Companion to the Fairy Tale.* Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003.

Dégh, Linda. *American Folklore and the Mass Media.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Denby, Priscilla. "Folklore in the Mass Media." *Folklore Forum* 4.5 (1971): 113–25.

Dorst, John. "Postmodernism vs. Postmodernity." *Folklore Forum* 21.2 (1988): 216–20.

Haring, Lee. "Framing in Oral Narrative." *Marvels & Tales* 18 (2004): 229–45.

Lackey, Mercedes. *The Fairy Godmother*. New York: Luna, 2004.

Lefton, Terry. "Mastercard Spins Fairy Godmother Fantasy." *Brandweek* March 20, 2000: 5.

Lüthi, Max. *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. Trans. John D. Niles. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.

Preston, Cathy Lynn. "Disrupting the Boundaries of Genre and Gender: Postmodernism and the Fairy Tale." *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches.* Ed. Donald Haase. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2004. 197–212.

Propp, Vladimir. *Istoricheskie korni volshebnoi skazki.* 1946. Moskva: Labirint, 2002.

——. *Morphology of the Folktale.* Trans. Laurence Scott. Rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner. 2nd ed. 1968. Austin: U of Texas P, 1996.

Schaefer, Pat. "Unknown Cinderella: The Contribution of Marian Roalfe Cox to the Study of Fairy Tale." Davidson and Chaudhri 137–47.

Shrek 2. Dir. Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury, Conrad Vernon. Film. DreamWorks Pictures, 2004.

Steig, William. *Shrek!* New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990.

Vaz da Silva, Francisco. *Metamorphosis: The Dynamics of Symbolism in European Fairy Tales.* New York: Lang, 2002.

Warner, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers.* New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994.

Workman, Mark E. "Folklore in the Wilderness: Folklore and Postmodernism." *Midwestern Folklore* 15 (1989): 5–14.

Yolen, Jane. "America's Cinderella." *Cinderella: A Casebook.* Ed. Alan Dundes. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1982. 194–306.

Zipes, Jack. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales.* Rev. and expanded ed. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2002.

——. "The Instrumentalization of Fantasy: Fairy Tales, the Culture Industry, and the Mass Media." Zipes 104–45.

——. "The Radical Morality of Rats, Fairies, Wizards, and Ogres: Taking Children's Literature Seriously." Zipes 206–31.