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MOLDING MESSAGES

Analyzing the Reworking of “Sleeping Beauty”
in *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* and *Dollhouse*

Jeana Jorgensen and Brittany Warman

The story of “Sleeping Beauty” (ATU 410) is one of the most consistently captivating fairy tales. It tells of a cursed princess dreaming in a tower, waiting patiently for her prince to rescue her. Those who recreate the tale for contemporary audiences spin the story anew, reconstructing again and again what it means both to sleep and to awaken. This chapter analyzes two modern television versions of the tale, one for children and one for adults, comparing their incorporation of feminist messages and parallel ideas about shaping narratives and shaping lives. The children’s cartoon *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* (also called *Grimm Masterpiece Theatre*) and the adult program *Dollhouse* each remold the story to advance very specific rereadings of the tale.

Familiar all over the world, ATU 410 has become a Western cultural touchstone that is freely referenced by various media. Of several different versions, the best known have long been the French text by Charles Perrault and the German text by the Brothers Grimm. Disney drew on both for the beloved film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), further cementing them as the standard versions in Western imagination. Both *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* and *Dollhouse* use the Grimm version as the starting point for their “Briar Rose” episodes.

The Grimms’ first version of their folktale collection, *Children’s and Household Tales* (1812) incorporated “Little Briar Rose” (Grimm 1998). The

brothers debated including it, worrying that its antecedents, particularly Perrault's "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," were too well known for a collection that claimed to be purely German but ultimately decided to keep it due to its connections with the Germanic Norse story of Brynhild (Heiner 2010). Their title, however, seems to deliberately distance the tale from Perrault's by foregoing any mention of a "sleeping beauty." The Grimms continued to edit their version: the 1819 edition included some "modest stylistic changes" (Ashliman 2005), and by 1857 the story had been extensively expanded to contain more description and dialogue (Grimm 2001).

In the Grimms' story, a king and queen who have longed for years for a child are finally blessed with a daughter. They invite everyone to the palace for a feast in her honor and take special pains to invite the kingdom's wise women. However, because they only have twelve golden plates and there are thirteen wise women, they must exclude one. On the day of the feast, while the twelve invited wise women bless the child with magical gifts like beauty and virtue, the thirteenth suddenly enters the hall and curses the princess to die when she pricks her finger on a spindle in her fifteenth year. The twelfth wise woman, who had not yet given a magical gift to the child, could not undo the evil spell but she could change it: instead of dying with the prick of the spindle, she declares that the princess will sleep for one hundred years. Though the king orders all the spindles in the kingdom burned, the princess finds one on her fifteenth birthday and pricks her finger, which causes her to fall into a deep sleep along with all the rest of the people in the palace. An enormous briar hedge grows up around the structure and outsiders begin telling stories about the cursed princess inside. Many young men attempt to brave the briar hedge but all fail and die miserably. After one hundred years, the destined prince is allowed inside and awakens the sleeping princess with a kiss. The entire palace wakes up with her and she and the prince marry (Grimm 2001).

Reworkings of "Sleeping Beauty" have been quite abundant. Popular writers of the nineteenth century such as Christina Rossetti¹ and George MacDonald² were inspired by the tale. Numerous retellings in contemporary literature include Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* (1992), which places the story in the context of the Holocaust, and Anna Sheehan's *A Long, Long Sleep* (2011), a science fiction novel in which the world changes dramatically during the protagonist's century-long stasis. Disney's is only one of several film versions and the tale's popularity has also spread to television, as in the *Castle* episode, "Once Upon a Crime" (2012).

Many contemporary revisions of “Sleeping Beauty” as well as other fairy tales address feminist concerns. Feminism is no monolithic category. Nicole Kousaleos points out that commonalities across multiple feminisms include the notions “that gender is a fundamental organizing category of experience; sexual inequality is a cultural construct; and male perspectives have dominated fields of knowledge, shaping paradigms and methods” (1999, 19). However, the degrees to which gender identity, anatomical sex, sexuality, and the relationship of these categories to the body and mind are constructed as fixed versus fluid differ. Kousaleos broadly divides the schools of thought into equality feminism (assuming that men and women are basically the same) and difference feminism (assuming that men and women are fundamentally different; *ibid.*, 20–22). Elizabeth Grosz reads these relations in terms of the body; some feminist scholars view women’s bodies as the source of both their oppression and their unique embodied knowledge; others see the body as precultural and thus are more interested in social constructionism as the cause of women’s oppression; yet others take a stance on sexual difference or offer a more complex intertwining of body and mind, nature and nurture that foregrounds the lived body within a cultural context (1994, 15–19).

In feminist revisions as well as feminist scholarship on cultural texts, a distinction between political and theoretical feminisms is useful, though the two are rarely completely separate. Political feminist works attend to women’s issues on an activist or consciousness-raising level, while theoretical feminist studies critique misogyny and patriarchal systems beyond merely drawing attention to their existence (Jorgensen 2010, 54–60). Thus in our analysis, feminist messages within a text can be mainly political—on the level of the plot addressing inequalities between men and women and revising sexist story lines—or more theoretical—exploring interconnections between body, mind, and gender oppression in a complex fashion. We do not intend to create a hierarchical relationship between political and theoretical feminisms; instead we point out different levels of engagement with gender dynamics that occur in expressive culture.

With their very different perspectives on the frequently gendered meanings of enchanted sleep and rescue, the “Briar Rose” episodes of *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* and *Dollhouse* defamiliarize the tale, “thus opening up the possibility of a shift in perspective that encourages the audience to reflect anew on these stories that have ossified as part of the bedrock of cultural narratives” (Greenhill and Matrix 2010a, 12). These television renderings

question the stereotypical passive sleeping princess and assumptions about the allocation of gender and power within narrative. While both shows deal broadly with the problem of “the woman who withdraws from the social order” through sleep (Fay 2008, 273), their divergent resolutions offer new solutions for considering the broader ways in which both society and narrative mold acceptable identities for young people.

The “Briar Rose” Episode of *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics*

The English-language *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* was originally an animated Japanese series called *Gurimu meisaku gekijō* (Grimm Masterpiece Theater; 1987–1989). Developed and produced by Nippon Animation in the late 1980s (Clements and McCarthy 2006), the show proved quite popular in Japan (Ellis 2008a). European fairy tales’ influence on Japanese animation, called “anime,” is well documented,³ and several programs have drawn on the “Sleeping Beauty” story. Bill Ellis believes that *Gurimu meisaku gekijō*’s success in Japan sparked the real beginning of the numerous references to Western fairy tales in anime (2008b)⁴ and he writes extensively on ATU 410 connections in the very popular manga (comic) and later anime series *Cardcaptor Sakura* (Ellis 2008b). This series, by the collective of artists/authors known as CLAMP,⁵ features an episode in which the characters perform a “Sleeping Beauty” play. However, the tale can also offer a way of understanding the series as a whole. Ellis (2008a) also notes many references to “Sleeping Beauty” in the equally well-known series *Sailor Moon* and argues that the popularity of “Sleeping Beauty” allusions in particular may be because of the tale’s similarity to a particular Japanese folktale.⁶

In North America, *Gurimu meisaku gekijō* was broadcast by the children’s television station Nickelodeon as *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* from 1989 to 1995 (Haase 2008, 949). This show “introduced many viewers [in North America] to anime”—a very particular style—in much the same way that the original series “popularized” Western fairy tales with Japanese audiences (Ellis 2008b, 513). Donald Haase contends, “Western classics originally adapted for Japanese television audiences [were] transmitted back to Western audiences in a Japanese art form, through the lens of Japanese culture, and in a format adapted for television” (2008, 949). “Briar Rose” is a particularly potent example of the fascinating reshaping that resulted.⁷

While it is difficult to verify whether the creators had a particular intention, the “Briar Rose” episode of *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* seems to alter

the story specifically in order to advance a more feminist message (in the political sense, as discussed above). Fairy tales are frequently perceived as women's domain and "connected with women's issues" (Crowley and Pennington 2010, 298), and the popularity of contemporary feminist revisions is undeniable. Heroines who appear too passive in well-known versions, such as Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, are popular for feminist reimagining. Postmodern fairy-tale revisions frequently "expose . . . the fairy tale's complicity with 'exhausted' narrative and gender ideologies" (Bacchilega 1997, 24) and this often requires significant rewriting. This episode presents a different kind of story than those retellings, one that subtly advances particular contemporary ideas about women.

The feminist leanings of "Briar Rose" are presented early on with the appearance of the wise women, called "witch sisters," who are invited to the princess's feast. These women live all together in a castle. The entire kingdom fears their magical powers and ability to transform themselves into monsters, shown in the episode's early minutes. These self-sufficient, powerful characters are clearly visually coded as frightening witches—older women in black wearing items like capes and skull-shaped earrings. But, with the exception of the uninvited sister, they are also good-natured and kind women, eager to bless the princess. When the first comes forward to present her magical gift, she addresses it "to the princess [who] will someday rule this kingdom,"⁸ a loaded statement that seems to indicate that the wise women believe the princess does not need a male counterpart to rule with her. Furthermore, when the twelfth witch must counter the thirteenth's curse, her strong, clear voice remarks, "I will save the fair princess." The prince usually gets credit for saving the princess, not the twelfth wise woman, whose spell prevents the princess's death. This version gives appropriate credit by having the witch acknowledge her own role as the princess's true savior.

Later, when viewers are first introduced to Briar Rose (voiced by Rachel Lillis) as a teenager, she is shown to be lovely and accomplished but also sad and isolated. Her father has forbidden her from ever leaving the castle in order to keep her safe, and the princess dreams only of freedom. Musing to herself while walking through her rose garden, she remarks, "Beautiful rose, I have your name but not the freedom you have to grow up in open spaces." Also a dedicated musician, she uses her art as a distraction from the rest of her world. Despite the limitations on her freedom, Briar Rose is far more developed as a person than she is in older versions. She has hopes

and dreams, skills and interests, and ideas of her own about what her life should be like.⁹

After Briar Rose pricks her finger and she and the entire palace fall into their enchanted sleep, viewers see her would-be rescuers' actions. The pointed look at their failures is revealing. The village men attack the briar hedge with tools and fire but none can get through. Instead of dying as in the Grimm text, many are caught in the sleeping spell themselves. Angry, rough, powerful-looking men come as well, one stating, "The beautiful princess will be mine, all mine," but they too fail. The princess is not to be won and claimed: the person to break the spell must be her true partner, not her owner. He is revealed as an adventurous and brave but also kind prince who has dreamed of the castle all his life. He and Briar Rose are already deeply and meaningfully connected through their dreams of each other. The prince understands the princess in the way a true partner must; he is the one who is able to "hear [her] song." The castle gates open immediately for him and he finds Briar Rose asleep in her tower. He thinks that a kiss might awaken her, but the rose thorns surrounding her prick him before he can get close enough. Even though he is the right prince, this version does not allow the famous, nonconsensual kiss.¹⁰ He and Briar Rose only kiss at the very end of the episode, when she is awake and willing, a rewriting that emphasizes their status as partners and Briar Rose's autonomy.

Vanessa Joosen's work on fairy-tale criticism's influences on fairy-tale retellings applies to the shaping of the *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics'* "Briar Rose" episode. Bruno Bettelheim's popular *The Uses of Enchantment* "was without a doubt the most prominent psychoanalytic study of fairy tales in the 1970s" (2011, 123). The *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics'* creators may have known Bettelheim's primary thesis that "fairy tales have a therapeutic effect on children" and are therefore necessary to their development—"the fairy tale liberates the child's subconscious so that he or she can work through conflicts and experiences which would otherwise be repressed and perhaps cause psychological disturbances" (Zipes 2002a, 182). Despite his insistence that fairy tales must be presented in their "original forms, which Bettelheim usually equates with the Grimms' versions of 1857" (Joosen 2011, 125), and the fact that many fairy-tale scholars now discredit the majority of his findings,¹¹ his ideas had a lasting impact on retellings, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s.

Bettelheim (1976) understands "Sleeping Beauty" as a tale about the journey of growing up. Indeed, in the *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics* episode,

the young princess's maturation seems to dominate the narrative. Before her magical sleep, she acts not unlike a privileged Euro–North American teenager: she is listless, is bored with her life, and longs for freedom. She shows no interest in other people or even events like her birthday, and her father muses to the queen that it is “as though she were a stranger.” This “sleep” period in her life, Bettelheim argues, is both typical of adolescence and absolutely necessary for development.¹² He states that parents must accept these changes, despite their desire to keep their children young (1976, 230–23), which the queen specifically reminds the king in the episode. While Briar Rose experiences the enchanted sleep, her passive state actually begins long before in this nonmagical, “more realistic” (Joosen 2011, 158) narrative. Bettelheim also sees an inherent narcissism in the sleep of adolescence, a theme picked up in the television episode as well. Princess Briar Rose is initially quite self-centered—she is too caught up in her own tumultuous feelings, which causes her to experience “the isolation of narcissism” (Bettelheim 1976, 234).

The princess can only awaken and end this period of life when she is mature sexually and ready for the next phase. The fact that the rose thorns initially injure the prince rather than allow him to kiss the sleeping princess awake seems to directly undercut Bettelheim's insistence that the awakening is sexual in nature (Bettelheim 1976). But he believes that the princess awakens also to a union of “minds and souls” (*ibid.*, 232). The episode prioritizes this aspect of the awakening. This choice strengthens the retelling's feminist qualities; the connection between the prince and the princess is no longer purely sexual but cerebral as well, which Bettelheim saw as essential to all mature, and therefore good, fairy-tale unions.

Despite the positive steps “Briar Rose” takes toward presenting a feminist reimagining of “Sleeping Beauty,” it falls short, particularly with the characters of the evil thirteenth witch and Briar Rose's mother. The thirteenth witch is initially shown to be both powerful and confident in her abilities. She can make herself bigger than the entire castle, for example, and the twelfth witch even says that the thirteenth is stronger than she. Yet when the spell is broken and she has lost, the tale dispenses with her rather quickly, saying only that “the evil witch was sent away and was never heard from again.” This seems an inappropriate and dismissive ending for such a powerful woman; the Grimm version makes no mention at all about what happens to her.

The queen likewise seems to be denied her proper due throughout the episode. The narrator states at the very beginning that “there was once a

great king whose wish for a child was granted” and makes no mention whatsoever of the queen. Her role in the story is brief and she spends a great deal of it crying and lamenting her daughter’s fate. Even the princess’s personality has arguably less feminist aspects. Though she is independent minded, her thoughts return frequently to the idea that someone must rescue her. She never thinks of rescuing herself, only that someday someone else will give her the freedom she so craves. But her desire for rescue is necessary to the story because it means the princess thinks often of her prince. The teenagers thus establish their cerebral connection before they even meet—but the princess’s passivity in this area breaks with the overall messages of feminism that the episode presents.

The “Briar Rose” episode of *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* subtly remolds the Grimm narrative, offering a more contemporary and feminist depiction of and for young girls. While it qualifies more as a political feminist revision than a theoretical feminist deconstruction of the tale’s power dynamics, it largely advances less passive and male-dependent role models while still faithfully adapting a well-known and popular story.

The “Briar Rose” Episode of *Dollhouse*

The adult thriller series *Dollhouse*, while it contains fairy-tale elements, focuses on futuristic and technological themes (see also Tresca’s chapter). The show’s premise features brain technology that allows people referred to as “Dolls” or “Actives” to have their personalities wiped and replaced with those of others. These individuals are then rented out by the secretive corporation Rossum to, for instance, fulfill fantasies and solve crimes. The show’s creator, Joss Whedon, is known for his strong female characters (Snowden 2010), witty dialogue, and innovative approaches to themes such as the apocalypse (Vinci 2011), heroism, and morality. However, while audiences celebrate many of Whedon’s works, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly*, as containing feminist messages and compelling world building, *Dollhouse* inspired ambivalent and even negative responses. As Catherine Coker notes, “*Dollhouse* has become Joss Whedon’s most controversial work yet, with many fans, viewers, and critics troubled by the images and aspects of human trafficking and prostitution depicted on the show” (2010, 226). The show’s treatment of complex and disturbing ethical questions in a fairy-tale mode exemplifies how “sexual and moral ambiguity remains a standard feature of fairy tale films for adults” (Greenhill and Matrix 2010a, 9). Like

these films, *Dollhouse* works by foregrounding ambiguity, and yet its episodic structure, unique to TV, allows depth and complexity to be expanded upon and explored over time.

The show's reworking of ATU 410 in its "Briar Rose" episode (1, 11)¹³ contains a scene in which the main Doll character, Echo (Eliza Dushku), reads the fairy tale to a group of children in a foster care home. The tale particularly resonates for one girl with a history of abuse, since she blames herself, as she does the fairy tale's protagonist, for not escaping on her own. Simultaneously, the plot of "Sleeping Beauty" is mirrored in the episode's overall structure; FBI agent Paul Ballard (Tahmoh Penikett) searching for Echo (or rather, for her body's original identity, Caroline) is portrayed as a valiant prince overcoming the castle's defenses to rescue the princess. In this episode, and in *Dollhouse* overall, sleep is at once therapeutic and annihilating, inviting an analysis of the series' incorporation of "Sleeping Beauty" as a comment on how both people and fairy tales can be shaped and exploited in multiple ways. The three main intertextual uses of fairy tales we discuss include the episode's retelling of the text of a version of "Sleeping Beauty," the positioning of Ballard as a prince-rescuer to Caroline/Echo's innocent persecuted heroine (see Bacchilega 1993), and the very notion of fairy tales as therapeutic. This discussion focuses on the first season of *Dollhouse*, because it contains the "Briar Rose" episode and because its fairy-tale metaphors are more pronounced.¹⁴ The version of "Sleeping Beauty" that Echo, programmed to perform a charitable engagement that day, reads in the children's home is a pared-down picture-book version of the Grimms' tale. Echo has been sent specifically to help a girl named Susan (Hannah Leigh). Echo's personality imprint is an adult version of Susan, should she in growing up address her childhood sexual abuse in a healthy way. The episode shows Echo reading the end of "Sleeping Beauty" to the children, most of whom appear spellbound: "As soon as the prince kissed her, the spell was broken and Briar Rose opened her eyes. And as she looked at the face of the handsome young prince, the whole kingdom began to magically awaken all around them. The cooks in the kitchen and the boys in the yard, all rubbed their eyes and looked around them." Susan interrupts: "This is crap." In the ensuing discussion, she blames the tale's title character (and, it is implied, herself) for not having better common sense than to stay away from spindles, run away, or otherwise save herself from her fate.

Echo later talks privately to Susan about the fairy tale, suggesting that the child should not blame the protagonist for her fate. The conversation also includes references to the sexual abuse they both suffered while young

and the feelings of complicity with which they struggle. Echo says, “You couldn’t have gotten away. He was bigger, and stronger, and older. . . . It’s okay to get rescued by someone else if you’re young or small or you just can’t do it yourself.” Echo tells Susan to reread the story but think of herself as the prince, who “shows up at the last minute, takes all the credit. That means Briar Rose was trapped all that time, sleeping. And dreaming, of getting out. The prince was her dream. She made him. She made him fight to get her out.” This reimagining of female agency within the tale parallels the feminist search for coded women’s voices within traditional fairy tales (Rowe 1986).

“Sleeping Beauty” is also incorporated in the roles that main characters play, not just within “Briar Rose” but throughout the series. Thus “Briar Rose,” as the penultimate episode in season 1, inter-refers to other fairy tales and fairy-tale characters throughout the first season, in particular those of Echo and Ballard. Echo is positioned as an innocent persecuted heroine as early as the show’s first episode, “Ghost” (see Tresca’s chapter), in which Echo’s client watches her leave around five a.m. after a weekend of partying.

His friend asks,

“Dude, where’s your friend?”

“It’s time for her to go. Had to get to her carriage before it turned into a pumpkin.”

“What?”

“Stroke of midnight.”

“Midnight?”

“End of the ball.”

“Dude, it’s like . . . it’s like five.”

Cinderella is an obvious example of an innocent persecuted heroine, though the exchange here highlights the temporal nature of her enchantment.

In “The Target” (1, 2) the man who rents Echo for an engagement turns out to be a psychopath who enjoys killing women for sport (see Tresca’s chapter). After he creates a scenario in which Echo becomes his prey, he refers to himself as the “big bad wolf.” Further, in the eighth episode, Ballard dreams he is kissing Echo, but she goes still and dead. Her pale, waxy skin contrasts against the bright red of her lipstick and her dark hair, visually suggesting a Snow White or Sleeping Beauty in reverse, as though Ballard’s kiss has killed rather than revived her. Even though Echo is established as

a strong character in her other interactions during the show, through these intertextual references she is shown to be in need of rescue.

Leading up to the events in “Briar Rose” when Ballard finally manages to storm the impenetrable castle of the Dollhouse, he, too, is framed with fairy-tale references. In “The Target,” some of Ballard’s colleagues mock him by saying, “A couple kids found a house in the woods all made of candy and gingerbread. We thought that might be up your alley.” When in “Man on the Street” (1, 6), Ballard finally manages to locate and interrogate a Dollhouse client (a task that takes him many episodes, as the organization has enough high-ranking allies to help it cover its trail), the client rhetorically turns the tables on Ballard. The client redirects the conversation to Ballard’s fantasy about rescuing Caroline (the real name of Echo’s Doll body), saying, “But then the brave little FBI agent whisked her away from the cash-wielding losers and restored her true identity—and she fell in love with him.” These references to “Hansel and Gretel” (ATU 327A) and “The Brave Little Tailor” (ATU 1640) from the Grimms’ collection establish Ballard as a hero and rescuer.

In “Briar Rose,” at the end of the scene in which Echo reads the fairy tale to Susan, viewers are shown the prince’s illustration in the fairy-tale book; immediately, the camera cuts to Ballard, strengthening the implication that he is the prince figure. However, as the events in “Briar Rose” reveal, Ballard misjudges the situation: Caroline/Echo is not in need of rescue in the sense that Ballard thought, nor is he the hero he imagined himself to be. His helper in breaking into the Dollhouse is Alpha (Alan Tudyk), one of the show’s villains, and Dollhouse security apprehends Ballard while Alpha steals away Echo. Ballard’s embodiment of the rescuer role turns out to be misguided and misdirected. Part of the problem is that he is locked in his internal fantasy, his facile interpretation of the scenario that positioned him as the prince: “He could not understand that the Sleeping Beauty was awake and thinking, feeling pain and solving problems, because he was so sure of her being asleep” (Deritter 2010, 196). Indeed, after Alpha kidnaps Echo in “Briar Rose,” she rescues herself in the following episode, demonstrating that both the characterizations of Echo as helpless heroine and Ballard as prince–rescuer are stereotypes that were meant to be broken.

The first season’s main antagonist, Alpha (a Doll whose imprinted personalities have all merged with his original serial killer personality, thus making him extremely unstable and dangerous), also fits within a fairy-tale role in “Briar Rose.” The only references to him prior to that episode were verbal,

not visual, and they obviously position him as villain. In “Briar Rose,” once he apprehends Echo and imprints her with a personality that recognizes and adores him, they kiss and he tells her, “I told you I’d come rescue you.” She responds, “My prince.” This positioning maintains Echo as the heroine in need of rescue, while viewers see that in Alpha’s twisted fantasy, he is the hero rather than (as in reality) a killer who enjoys cutting up women. By setting up and then destroying fairy-tale expectations about the *Dollhouse* characters, the show uses fairy-tale intertexts in a more complicated fashion than simple retellings.

The other significant fairy-tale intertext in *Dollhouse* does not involve a specific tale but rather discourse about fairy tales in general. “Briar Rose” (and indeed, much of the scholarship on it) takes for granted the Bettelheim notion that fairy tales can and should be used therapeutically. As folklore scholars know, fairy tales are not universal or timeless; instead, their meanings and uses are socially determined. Jack Zipes writes, “The fairy tales we have come to revere as classical are not ageless, universal, and beautiful in and of themselves, and they are not the best therapy in the world for children” (2006a, 11). Indeed, fairy tales serve many functions, including the indoctrination of children with appropriate values coated in a film of appealing magic. For example, starting with the French court in the 1690s, “fairy tales were cultivated to ensure that young people would be properly groomed for their social functions” (ibid., 30).

There is nothing inherently therapeutic about fairy tales, but due to the popularity of Bettelheim’s ideas, as discussed above, many North Americans uncritically believe that one of these stories’ main purposes is to aid children in processing their issues. Bettelheim proclaims, “While it entertains the child, the fairy tale enlightens him about himself, and fosters his personality development. It offers meaning on so many different levels, and enriches the child’s existence in so many ways, that no book can do justice to the multitude of contributions such tales make to the child’s life” (1976, 12). This idea has been absorbed into the premise of “Briar Rose” that Echo’s reading the tale to Susan will prompt the girl to evaluate and resolve her problems. Part of the evidence for this connection is that it is unclear whether Echo has been programmed to read “Sleeping Beauty” to Susan and the other children or makes that choice herself.¹⁵ Either way, the naturalness of reading fairy tales to troubled children goes unquestioned.

However, just as the character roles trouble normative fairy-tale images, so too does the therapeutic reading of a fairy tale in the episode deepen the ways

in which such narratives are made meaningful. Unlike the *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics* episode's reaffirmation of Bettelheim's equation of sleep with steady maturation, the *Dollhouse* episode questions whether sleep provides a direct therapeutic parallel. Here, we disagree with Valerie Estelle Frankel's Bettelheim-inflected interpretation of Briar Rose's enchanted sleep: "When she has finished developing, the thorns part, the princess wakes, the prince is waiting" (2010, 69). Frankel writes, further, that if "little Susan is another Sleeping Beauty, trapped in the horrors of her abuse and unable to escape, Echo is her reflected self. . . . As they read the fairytale together, Echo is rousing from her enchanted sleep and gaining self-awareness, but she is still as exploited as her young charge" (ibid., 68). Associating development into maturity with the situations that trap Echo and Susan—slumbering until they are rescued—is ignorant at best and condoning abuse at worst. A Bettelheim-inspired interpretation of the tale (sleep as innocent growth) is manifestly incompatible with a reading of abused (and enslaved, in Echo's case) characters as sleeping (sleep as processing the horrors of childhood sexuality, so far from innocence). This comparison is especially fraught since the characters experience molestation at night,¹⁶ leaving them most vulnerable during sleep, a time that (according to Bettelheim) protects the girls as they evolve into their mature selves.

Instead, we argue that *Dollhouse* uses the generally accepted idea that fairy tales can be therapeutic but does so critically. The fairy tale only "works" for Susan when she revises it so that she can emotionally relate to it as an active rather than passive character.¹⁷ She says (viewers cannot see the book's text, so we do not know if she is reading or making up her own version), "The prince said, 'I will not let this stop me. I'm as strong as any spell. I'm as strong as any thorns. I won't let anything stop me from reaching her and saving her. I will go and rescue the Sleeping Beauty.'" Though Susan never appears again, she sounds convinced; it appears that she will be capable of working through her childhood abuse by revising the fairy tale. Simply expecting fairy tales to guide children through difficult times, then, is portrayed as unrealistic and overly simplistic. In fact, when Echo first reads the tale to the children, Susan's initial retort of "This is crap" becomes a full-fledged tantrum in which she screams and tears pages from the book. In contrast, Ballard's naïve acceptance of (and desire for) his fairy-tale role as rescuer is subverted by the episode's plot. He ends up being used by Alpha, not even able to rescue himself. Being mature enough to know when to accept and when to revise fairy tales is, thus, one of the show's more sophisticated points about the uses of enchantment.

The show's feminist content is, like its use of fairy tales, complicated and at times ambiguous. Certain patterns of sexist and misogynist behavior are explicitly critiqued within the show, thus placing it within a political feminist framework. Ballard is "revealed to be living out a homogenised heroic narrative that can be traced back to a patriarchal fairy tale" (Vinci 2011, 240). His narrow interpretation of events not only fails him but also shows how he is entrenched within the same destructive ideologies as those he fights and those he seeks to rescue. "Whedon's own radical feminist credo [posits]: it is the Man within society who programs women, and by doing so, sets them up to succeed or fail" (Coker 2010, 236). Similarly, in some fairy tales, only those heroines who follow their social programming to be dutiful and self-negating get ahead (Stone 1985). And, "The feminist ethos of *Dollhouse* is a thorough explication of what makes society an enemy of women, and how women can fight society and hopefully make it better. . . . Whedon has made it clear that he believes women's rights are an ongoing issue" (Coker 2010, 237).

However, foregrounding women's rights by depicting their objectification and violence against them in order to critique these processes is a slippery slope. Teresa de Lauretis's phrase "story demands sadism" (qtd. in Bacchilega 1993, 4) is certainly apt here. All the Dolls, and especially Echo, undergo constant physical and emotional violence: "Sometimes she's just generally beaten up, but a surprising number of the episodes involve her getting directly punched, in the face, by a man . . . it indicates a generally pervasive, less spoken male fantasy—the desire to perform harm, with one's own two hands, on a woman who is stronger" (Simons 2011, n.p.). This pattern certainly fits within the degradation that innocent persecuted heroines must face: "Undergoing humiliation therefore becomes the common experience for fairy tale princesses . . . fairy tale heroines are expected to accept willingly, or even be grateful for, these degradations" (Lin 2010, 85).

Although one could view Echo's subjugation as appropriate based on the evidence that she fulfills the innocent persecuted heroine role, it is still disturbing to see how "Echo is the ultimate male fantasy—she is a woman that literally anything can be done to for the right amount of money, with those actions then simply erased afterward" (Simons 2011, n.p.).¹⁸ While *Dollhouse* presents and critiques misogyny, fulfilling the political feminist directive, the show also questions the inevitability of gendered power dynamics in a subtle and at times ambiguous way, engaging with theoretical feminism but perhaps not explicitly enough condemning sexism. Thus, from a

feminist perspective, *Dollhouse*'s engagement with women's issues remains problematic.

Overall, the use of fairy tales in *Dollhouse* as text (with the reading of "Briar Rose" aloud), context (the framing of the Dollhouse itself as an enchanted castle full of sleepers), and subtext (the incorporation of the idea of fairy tales as therapeutic) is perfectly appropriate. "The Dollhouse can . . . be viewed as a microcosm for society itself. As children, we are programmed with gender expectations, sexual mores, and the thousands of other bits of cultural coding that we take for granted every day" (Coker 2010, 228). Fairy tales are undoubtedly part of this process, and thus with its many intertextual references, *Dollhouse* both implicitly and explicitly acknowledges the role of fairy tales among other expressive forms as an aspect of our cultural programming.

Dreaming Gender

Both the children's anime *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics* and the adult program *Dollhouse* address the impact of social messages on and for the characters therein and thereby, implicitly, also the audiences. While gender roles and sexuality are major and obvious themes, the overall role of identity—whose identity and how it is shaped—is also implicated. The fairy-tale tropes that both shows integrate and alter in subtle but significant ways demonstrate that identity is a contested and constructed process, constrained and compelled by multiple forces. The notion of an internal, essential self (which may resist, fall victim to, or be created through the execution of social messages) is explored in both shows, as seen in the treatment of classic ATU 410 motifs such as the curse and the rescue as well as more general notions of power and control.

In both programs, the curse highlights how little control individuals have over the shaping of their identities. In *Dollhouse*, all the Dolls are "sleeping" in some sense of the word.¹⁹ What precipitates the long sleep in both fairy-tale intertext and TV show is a curse. "No one 'volunteers' for the Dollhouse without having experienced some sort of 'curse,' usually trauma" (Palma 2012, 91). Echo's trauma results from her boyfriend's death and evading Rossum's corporate forces; other Dolls struggle with posttraumatic stress disorder and grief. The choice to "sleep" away trauma or grief is never free or unconstrained, for the Dollhouse's head, Adelle DeWitt (Olivia Williams), dangles bait "in front of desperate people she saw as perfect fits for the Dollhouse" (Anderson 2010, 163).²⁰

In *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics*, by contrast, the unavoidable curse is merely that of growing up, something everyone must experience (a fact that makes it no less unpleasant) in their journey toward becoming themselves. Though Briar Rose has no control over her fate in experiencing the curse, the twelfth witch's action ensures that the sleeping spell is not the end of life but rather a pause before awakening to new life. Even though Briar Rose, like all teenagers, must still remain "cursed," the twelfth witch plays a role of unexpected power, enforcing the idea that destinies can be changed.

Additionally, both shows deal with notions of rescuing or saving. While in *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics*, the dream connection of the prince and princess highlights their ideal partnership, *Dollhouse's* multiple, often failed, rescue attempts reveal that "the only person who can really save Briar Rose is herself" (Palma 2012, 90). Thus, "rescue is a gift one can only give to one's self" (Ellis 2011, 48). Both Echo and her original personality, Caroline, experience a strong need to save people, up to and including saving the world.²¹ One reason Echo must save or rescue herself is that she is multiple selves; one of the show's plot arcs concerns her relation to the core self or soul of sleeping Caroline's body. Even when she experiences a composite event like Alpha's, she does not go insane. Instead, Echo's ability to integrate myriad identities is a literalization of her saving herself. Thus, any external attempt to save her (like Ballard's or Alpha's) will fail. Approaching rescue from a different angle, the *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics* episode emphasizes that only the prince can rescue Briar Rose because theirs is a union of equals: a partnership, not a property exchange. Other men who try to rescue Briar Rose fail utterly because their attempts reflect their desire to possess the princess.

Both shows also emphasize the power of women in the rescue scenario. While the twelfth witch in *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics* boldly proclaims, "I will save the fair princess," Susan in the *Dollhouse* episode imagines herself as the prince: "I'm as strong as any spell. I'm as strong as any thorns. I won't let anything stop me from reaching her and saving her. I will go and rescue the Sleeping Beauty." These congruent statements of agency, as performative acts, narratively demonstrate that women can take control of their situations and help other women—and sometimes also themselves.

Another intriguing overlap between the two ATU 410 television texts also concerns rescue. After the disastrous (but perhaps not surprising) attempt to read the fairy tale aloud, Echo tells Susan, "Briar Rose was trapped all that time, sleeping. And dreaming, of getting out. The prince was her

dream. She made him. She made him fight to get her out.” She could have been describing the *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* version of “Briar Rose” in which the heroine really *does* dream the prince and lead him to her. The latter rendition makes explicit what must be verbally unpacked in *Dollhouse*: the princess of ATU 410, for all her apparent passivity, manages to actively shape her life even under the curse’s duress.

This chapter is less concerned with investigating these revisions’ success than interpreting their meanings. With Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix, “Our question is not how successfully a film translates the tale into a new medium, but, instead, what new and old meanings and uses the filmed version brings to audiences and sociocultural contexts” (2010a, 3). A superficial glance at the ATU 410 retelling in the *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics* series might lead to dismissing it as an overly sentimental and even antifeminist version that does not significantly rewrite the Grimms’ tale. Similarly, a first look at the relationship between ATU 410 and *Dollhouse* might make it appear too fragmented and dark to fully access the fairy tale’s meaning. We contend, instead, that both adaptations offer highly effective uses of “Sleeping Beauty” that foreground messages about gender, identity, and society in artistic and unexpected ways.

Notes

1. See Rossetti’s poem “The Prince’s Progress” (2001).
2. MacDonald’s story “The Light Princess” is, in many ways, a parody of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale (1999).
3. See, for example, Ellis (2008a, 2008b), Cavallaro (2010, 2011), and Lezubski’s chapter on *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.
4. For example, the *Dragon Ball* series led to the creation of the film *Dragon Ball: Sleeping Beauty in the Magic Castle* in 1987 (Clements and McCarthy 2006, 161). Additionally, Kihachiro Kawamoto Film Works in 1990 produced an entire “Sleeping Beauty” film that Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy describe as “a sinister retelling of the fairy tale that highlights its Freudian subtexts” (*ibid.*, 335).
5. The connected series *Tsubasa: RESERVOIR CHRONICLE* (2005), also by CLAMP, features the Sakura character and uses “Sleeping Beauty,” albeit differently.
6. Ellis outlines similarities between “Sleeping Beauty” and a version of ATU 185, “Stories about Forecasting Fortune,” and notes that no true Japanese version of ATU 410 has been found (2008b, 253).
7. Due to limitations with the Japanese language, we examine only the English-language translation. We recognize recent fairy-tale scholarship focusing on issues of native and outsider values (Kuwada 2009) and on a text’s reception and positioning based on how its paratextual and contextual cues are mediated in translation (Bianchi and Nannoni 2011).

8. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this section are from “Briar Rose,” episode 18 of *Grimm’s Fairy Tale Classics*.
9. Joosen offers a discussion of the ways contemporary fairy-tale retellings frequently add character depth (2011, 14).
10. It was not until the Grimms’ version that the famous kiss to awaken Sleeping Beauty was added (Rodriguez 2002, 52). Many older versions, particularly Perrault’s “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” and Giambattista Basile’s “Sun, Moon, and Talia,” have the prince doing far more than stealing a kiss. Though rape of the sleeping girl is a prominent feature it does not awaken the princess (Basile 2001; Perrault 2001b).
11. See, for example, Zipes (2002a, 179–205) and Joosen (2011, 184–212).
12. This ethnocentric and classist characterization of adolescence fails to recognize how youth and maturity are coded differently across cultures. Zipes notes that Bettelheim’s “book is largely male-oriented and fails to make careful distinctions between the sexes, ages, ethnicity, and class backgrounds of children” (2002a, 189). Alan Dundes discusses how Bettelheim plagiarized portions of his book and possibly even abused some of his young wards (1991). The discerning reader regards Bettelheim’s writings and representations skeptically.
13. (Series, episode).
14. However, a notable fairy-tale intertext appears in the second season, when the phrases “I’m your white knight” and “I’m your beautiful damsel” are the call-and-response dynamic of other characters.
15. This is also a more general problem with Dolls, as Echo is not the only one to creatively interpret her programming on a given assignment.
16. Her handler molests/rapes Doll Sierra (Dichen Lachman) within the Dollhouse at night.
17. This is, of course, precisely the opposite of Bettelheim’s method of reading fairy tales, as he was obsessed with the “original version” (usually a Grimms’ variant) and his interpretations relied on the exact phrasing of the translation he used. As Dundes observes, “Bettelheim’s lack of familiarity with conventional folkloristics leads him to make a number of erroneous statements” (1991, 76), among which we would include the mistaken (from a folklorist’s perspective) fidelity to a single version.
18. Simons continues: “The show perpetrates the worst kinds of violence on its female characters. Over the course of the two seasons on-air, Echo is repeatedly used for intercourse and made to pretend she enjoys it, one woman is removed from Doll status because of a physical deformity, another female is steadily and terrifyingly raped by her male handler—and even the term ‘handler’ suggests a male role intended to actively control” (2011, n.p.).
19. Throughout the show, the Dolls are programmed to wake up after an engagement and say, “Have I been asleep?” Further, when Alpha during “Briar Rose” adjusts the chemicals in the air being piped into the Dolls’ sleeping pods he mutters to himself, “Stay asleep.” During “Haunted” (1, 10), Topher (Fran Kranz) programs the Doll Sierra to embody his best buddy (someone who loves computer games, potato chips, and laser tag) to keep him company on what would be an otherwise solitary birthday, and she asks him why they can’t play with “the sleepies.”
20. Anderson comments, “These were people who were tired of telling their own stories, who couldn’t handle living with situations brought about by or despite their choices, and chose instead to put themselves into the story of Sleeping Beauty. But here the

princess deliberately pricked her finger, because life in the castle was just too much” (2010, 163). This interpretation suggests Echo as a telling counterpart to the princess in *Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics* who certainly appeared unhappy with her situation, but not to the point of muting her pain by choosing the sleeping death.

21. Caroline, before her capture by Rossum and coercion into signing away her body, was trying to uncover and expose unethical animal testing in Rossum's labs. Whatever residue remained of Caroline's personality influenced Echo to also become a savior figure, constantly trying to rescue her friends when they were in trouble (see Espenson 2010).