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Telling Old Tales Newly

Intertextuality in Young Adult Fiction for Girls

ELISABETH ROSE GRUNER

In one of the inaugural articles in feminist literary criticism, “Feminism and Fairy Tales,” Karen Rowe followed Simone de Beauvoir’s lead in claiming that fairy tales structure the consciousness of girls and women, and in a negative way. As Donald Haase has noted, “In Rowe’s view, the fairy tale—perhaps precisely because of its ‘awesome imaginative power’—had a role to play in cultivating equality among men and women, but it would have to be a rejuvenated fairy tale fully divested of its idealized romantic fantasies” (5). In the years since Rowe’s essay first appeared, however, it has been unclear whether the structuring power of the fairy tale could indeed be reworked for more egalitarian uses, or whether in fact the “replication of an old content and mode of representation [would only] result in the further replication of, for example, old masculinist and antifeminist metanarratives” (Stephens and McCallum 22). Whether they are empowering or disempowering, however, it is clear that fairy tales continue to provide structural and thematic elements for a wide variety of literature for children, especially for girls.

In this essay I examine three novels for young adults—Francesca Lia Block’s *Weetzie Bat*, Meg Cabot’s *The Princess Diaries*, and Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*—in order to consider the ways in

which fairy tales surprisingly provide both overt and, especially in the case of *Speak*, covert structures and themes of female empowerment. Refusing the nonplace and nontime of traditional fairy tales, each novel places its heroine in a recognizable landscape, gives her a voice (or at least a position as focalizer, as in *Weetzie Bat*), and refuses the calm certainty of “happily ever after” for a more vexed and less closed movement into the future.¹ (The fact that all three novels have sequels or continuations—though only in the case of *The Princess Diaries* do we have a traditional series—suggests a radical departure from the forced closure of the fairy tale.) Although none of these novels directly retells a single fairy tale, all are so deeply indebted to the genre as to constitute their own conversation with it. This conversation acknowledges both the power of fairy tales and their limits: both protagonist and reader may begin the tales invested in fairy-tale fantasies but are able to revise them significantly by the novels’ respective conclusions. All three heroines end their novels uncertain, unsettled, far from the “happily ever after” of fairy-tale romance; this very unsettlement, however, is the result of their refusal to be constrained by others’ stories, others’ narratives. “Happily ever after” turns out to be a dangerous fantasy; these three heroines reject it for the more realistic option of writing their own futures.

While there are many ways of discussing the ways fairy tales can shape narratives of identity development, this essay focuses on three interrelated elements—place, voice, and closure. I discuss in these novels what John Stephens and Robyn McCallum call “generic intertextuality”: rather than retellings or revisions of specific tales, what we find in these works are “no longer folktales but rather original creations which have a general intertextual relationship with folktale schemata, are not indebted to particular tales, and no longer pretend a direct connection with oral tradition” (220). Indeed, we may be seeing what Elizabeth Wanning Harries calls “transliteration”: “play[ing] [. . .] on our memory of salient images, often apparently peripheral details, transforming them into new centers of meaning” (135–36). Thus in *Weetzie Bat* we have the motif of the three wishes, familiar from “The Fisher-

man and His Wife” and many other tales, but without the didactic thrust of such tales; the wishes are fulfilled, but the story goes on. In *The Princess Diaries* (and its various sequels), we have the Cinderella-like transformation of ordinary girl into princess, but with an obsessive focus on the costs and the pain of that transformation. Finally, in *Speak*, we have a heroine who occasionally yearns for a fairy-tale life: “I used to pretend,” she tells us—or her journal—“I was a princess who had been adopted when my kingdom was overrun by bad guys. Any day my real parents, Mr. King and Mrs. Queen, would send the royal limo to pick me up” (147). But while most of the fairy-tale references in the novel are negative (the about-to-be-dissected frog, for example, waits “for a prince to come and princessify her with a smooch” [81]), Melinda appropriates one of the most negative ones (Snow White’s poisoned apple) with, ultimately, positive results. In all three novels, the “transliteration” of fairy-tale elements helps develop a new “center of meaning” in which passivity is not rewarded, sexuality does not masquerade as death, and the speaking subject can begin to articulate her desires rather than simply appearing as the object of another’s.

Place

Most fairy tales begin “once upon a time,” and the effacement of both time and place is central to their perceived universality. Jack Zipes notes that “the timelessness of the tale and its lack of geographical specificity endow it with utopian connotations—‘utopia’ in its original meaning designated ‘no place,’ a place that no one had ever envisaged” (xiii). Young adult novels, on the other hand, seem to rely on an up-to-the-minute topicality that includes a fairly firm sense of place, and the three novels I discuss here are no exceptions. *Weetzie Bat* takes place in the Los Angeles of the 1980s, *Speak* in mid-’90s Syracuse, New York, and *The Princess Diaries* in turn-of-the millennium New York City (the movie’s transplantation to San Francisco notwithstanding). Jan Susina claims that “sense of self and sense of place are intimately connected in *Weetzie Bat*” (191); I’d go further, and suggest that this

connection is perhaps especially typical of young adulthood. Place can be central to an adolescent's sense of identity: we are who we are where we are.² For Weetzie Bat, Hollywood/Los Angeles teems with significance, and she is distressed at her peers' failure to note it: "They [kids in high school] didn't care that Marilyn's prints were practically in their backyard at Graumann's [. . .] that the waitresses wore skates at the Jetson-style Tiny Naylor's; that there was a fountain that turned tropical soda-pop colors, and a canyon where Jim Morrison and Houdini used to live" (1-2).

Weetzie's Los Angeles is a fairyland where wishes can come true; her novel is in part an account of her learning—perhaps, after all, like the fisherman's wife—what that means. That is, her coming of age involves not rejecting the fantasy world in which she lives but exploring it ever more deeply.

New York City often appears in contemporary film and television as something of a fantasy world as well, and *The Princess Diaries* series does little to dispel that impression. Although Mia may live in a quasi-realistic downtown loft, her grandmother's perpetual presence at the Plaza (until she decamps to the Ritz-Carlton—and then the Four Seasons—while her suite is converted into a condominium in book 8) has an air of unreality about it. (This may be particularly the case for little girls who have grown up reading *Eloise*.) The fact that the novels (there are now eight, plus three shorter episodes, published between 2000 and 2007) seem not to acknowledge the signal New York event of 2001—the World Trade Center attacks—increases this sense of unreality.³ But Mia does visit recognizable places and, especially in the earlier volumes, conveys a familiarity with her city that grounds the novels much as the Los Angeles setting grounds *Weetzie Bat*.

Speak's setting is the least fairy-tale-like of the three novels: Syracuse, New York, is hardly a fantasyland. Yet structuring the novel along the school year provides a fairy tale's rhythm to the piece while simultaneously blending with the standard story span of young adult fiction: it begins as the year is dying and ends with the rebirth of spring. One thinks of the movement from winter to spring in "Beauty and the Beast" or "Snow White."

It is the verisimilitude of the settings, rather than their potential connection to fantasy, however, that interests me most. In all three novels the heroines first assert their power, their autonomy, through their familiarity with and mastery of their locations. Weetzie's easy familiarity with Los Angeles marks her as superior to her high school classmates.⁴ Mia demonstrates a similar mastery of her environment: "I tried to show my dad how much better suited I am for life in Manhattan than in Genovia by ordering some really excellent food. I got us an insalata caprese, ravioli al funghetto, and a pizza margherita, all for under twenty bucks, but I swear, my dad wasn't a bit impressed!" (84).

Melinda, on the other hand, although she notes her environment, rarely seems to master it. It does move her on occasion to something like poetry, however: "The cement-slab sky hangs inches above our heads. Which direction is east? It has been so long since I've seen the sun, I can't remember. Turtlenecks creep out of bottom drawers. Turtle faces pull back into winter clothes. We won't see some kids until spring" (91). Rather than mastering the Syracuse winter, Melinda takes control of a small "room of her own": the janitor's closet, which becomes her refuge when school becomes unbearable. Furnished with a poster of Maya Angelou (an early hint that Melinda's unspoken problem is, like Angelou's, a rape) and some books from home, the closet is Melinda's domain until the end of the novel.⁵

While fairy-tale heroines are often at the mercy of their environment—Snow White exiled in the forest, Cinderella in the kitchen, Rapunzel imprisoned in the tower—each of these heroines has a place she controls, a place she knows, a place she can be herself. The first indication that these characters will take charge of themselves, then, may be their ability to take charge of their surroundings. And the fully realized details of their surroundings provide another early indication that the novels will reject or at least revise the fantasy of their fairy-tale predecessors; in the intersection of such particularity with the generic constraints of the fairy tale, indeed, we may begin to find an opening for feminist possibility.

Voice

The voice of the fairy tale is detached and dispassionate, an objective narrator who tells what happened but rarely why.⁶ There is no interiority in fairy tales, no psychological development of character, rarely even a narrating “I.” Young adult novels, by contrast, frequently rely on what is most often called first-person narration and interior monologue: they create the illusion of a speaking subject by representing that subject to us in an unmediated way, with direct address or the illusion of “eavesdropping” on the private diary of the writer.⁷

Of the three novels I discuss, *Weetzie Bat* employs a narrative voice most similar to the fairy-tale narrator.⁸ My students frequently complain about the novel’s lack of interiority, for example, without (at first) connecting this to the same tendency in the fairy tales they love. *Weetzie* herself, however, is the most frequent focalizer of the novel—that is, it is most often her perspective that controls our perceptions.⁹ That is, although the narrator may seem external and objective, the novel most frequently directs our perceptions through *Weetzie*’s own. As I’ve already noted, however, this is not the “once upon a time” narrative of most familiar fairy tales. Rather, the similarity to fairy tales is most striking in the narrator’s calm acceptance of the fantastic; in much the tone of Perrault’s narrator announcing the arrival of the fairy godmother, for example, Block’s narrator seems unfazed by the presence of the genie: “Yes, it was more and more solid. *Weetzie* could see him—it was a man, a little man in a turban, with a jewel in his nose, harem pants, and curly-toed slippers” (26). *Weetzie* herself expresses astonishment at the sight—“‘Lanky lizards!’ *Weetzie* exclaimed”—thus providing the reader with confirmation that, yes, this is like a fairy tale, that is, potentially not real. The ironic (or call it postmodern) play with form continues when *Weetzie* wishes for world peace.

“I’m sorry,” the genie said. “I can’t grant that wish. It’s out of my league. Besides, one of your world leaders would screw it up immediately.”

“Okay,” Weetzie said. “Then I wish for an infinite number of wishes!” As a kid she had vowed to wish for wishes if she ever encountered a genie or a fairy or one of those things. Those people in fairy tales never thought of that.

“People in fairy tales wish for that all the time,” the genie said. “They aren’t stupid. It just isn’t in the records because I can’t grant that type of wish.” (27)

The genie’s matter-of-fact explanation of “the record” simultaneously both increases and decreases the fairy-tale quality of the episode. By suggesting that there is a “record” that does not completely conform to some set of external facts, the genie’s words may suggest that other fairy tales are also “true,” if limited. More to my point here, however, Weetzie’s skepticism suggests that she will not allow a fairy-tale sense of the world to govern her own life. The questioning voice of the adolescent revises the fairy tale in even more striking ways in the two “first-person” narratives under consideration.

I’ve argued elsewhere that highlighting the figure of the storyteller can be a significant way of revising the Cinderella story, and this is true for other fairy tales as well.¹⁰ Mia’s control of her narrative, then, is essential to our reading of it. Though we could see Grandmère as the storyteller—after all, she is the one who breaks the news to Mia and makes her aware of her own history—in fact it is Mia who tells her own story, authoring the tale of her transformation in diaries that also incorporate fragments of her nonprincess life throughout. Math notes, take-out menus, grocery lists, princess homework, and the like are scattered throughout the diary much as we might expect them to be in the diary of a relatively disorganized and busy teenager. The greatest accomplishment of the diaries is not, however, her startling achievement in math (raising an F to a D), but her control of the narrative itself. Although the surface story of Mia Thermopolis is of someone whose life has gone out of control—she can’t choose her own clothes, take the subway to school, or even go on a date without media coverage—by writing the diary she has

the ultimate shaping control of the storyteller. While Grandmère is remaking Mia, for example, Mia is making us see Grandmère. Mia, in fact, *makes* Grandmère for us. What Mia gives us in Grandmère is not the frightening figure of the evil stepmother or the benevolent fairy godmother (although, in this revision of “Cinderella,” she also stands somehow for both) but rather a somewhat ridiculous old woman with tattooed eyeliner, a drinking problem, and a pathetic, rather than frightening, attachment to dictatorial authority. Most tellingly, Grandmère cannot control Mia. She may dress and remake her superficially, and Mia may let us know how distasteful she finds the process, but in the end Mia wins—in the sense that she has laid bare the process that Grandmère would rather conceal. Grandmère’s power, like the power of all monarchies, indeed, like the power of gender itself, rests on its appearing natural, foreordained, given. Mia shows it to be arbitrary, unearned, and petty.

In the sequels to *The Princess Diaries*, Cabot becomes even more playful with the narrative technique of the diary, bringing its composition out into the open of the story. In volume 4 (*Princess in Waiting*), for example, Mia’s friends frequently comment on her journaling:

“Do you mean to say you’ve been in here [the Moscovitzes’ bathroom] for the past half hour *writing in your journal?*” Which I’ll admit is a little weird, but I couldn’t help it. I was so happy, I HAD to write it down, so I would never forget how it felt. (222)

This moment is closely followed by Mia’s realization that her “secret talent” (an issue throughout the novel) is writing. Writing then becomes central to the next several volumes, as Mia rewrites scenes from her life in the style of romantic novels, tries to model her own love life on what she finds in the books that she and (especially) Tina Hakim-Baba are reading, does poorly in English (her teacher doesn’t appreciate her heavily cliché-ridden style), and, finally, makes friends with another writer.¹¹ It is this writer,

J.P. (formerly known as the Guy Who Hates It When They Put Corn in the Chili), not Mia, who best articulates the importance of writing, the lesson Mia has implicitly learned as early as volume 1: “I’d rather be a writer than an actor. Because actors, when you think about it, their job is just to interpret stuff somebody else has written. They have no POWER. The real power’s in the words they’re saying, which someone else has written. That’s what I’m interested in. Being the power *behind* the Julia Robertses and Jude Laws of the world” (168).

Melinda, of *Speak*, has no such revelation about her writing—she is characterized far more by her investment in visual rather than verbal arts. And unlike *The Princess Diaries*, *Speak* includes no explanation of exactly what we are reading or why Melinda is writing it. We do learn, early on, that the English teacher (whom Melinda dubs “Hairwoman”) “wants [her students] to write in [their] class journals every day, but promises not to read them”—but it is not clear that this is, in fact, the journal we are reading (6). Nonetheless, the journal format—incorporating, as does Mia’s, nonjournal materials, including the occasional list, screenplay-style dialogue, and report cards—gives us the illusion of direct access to the teenaged protagonist’s thoughts and feelings. In a novel dominated by Melinda’s silence, the journal makes sure that “her voice is never internally stilled, even when externally lost” (O’Quinn 55).¹²

The fairy-tale connections to *Speak* are, as I noted at the outset, the least clear of the three novels I’m discussing. But Melinda’s voice gives us several clues. In biology class the sight of the frog ready for dissection elicits a memory of “The Frog-King,” while her difficult relationship with her parents sparks a recollection of earlier orphan fantasies. One encounter with her rapist in a parking lot becomes a scene out of “Little Red Riding Hood”: “He turns his head and sees me. And wolf smiles, showing oh granny what big teeth you have” (97). That is, unlike in the first two novels I’ve discussed, which have clear references to fairy-tale motifs embedded in their plotlines, *Speak*’s references are

more oblique and rest entirely on Melinda's language rather than structural elements in the narratives.

Like Mia, Melinda takes control of her story—in small things, like her refusal to name Andy until she is ready, and in larger, like controlling the entire narrative, including withholding the information about the rape until she has the tools to deal with it.¹³ Her most emancipatory acts are acts of writing: first, she writes Andy's name on a bathroom wall under the subject heading "Guys to Stay Away From," and soon thereafter she writes the story of the party in her notebook, in a series of notes passed with Rachel/Rachelle (175, 182–83). Only after writing can Melinda speak, as she does when Andy tries to assault her again in "her" closet. By telling her own story—insisting on her right to her own voice—the fairy-tale heroine becomes an agent rather than a victim.¹⁴

An Aside

Although this discussion is not, strictly speaking, related to the previous discussion of voice, it's worth developing further the ways in which *Speak* transliterates the fairy tale. Anderson threads throughout the novel two images from "Snow White"—the mirror and the apple—in her subtle revision of that most relevant of tales. While Bacchilega makes the mirror central to her reading of postmodern fairy tales, it seems marginal—almost literally—in *Speak*. In a telling subversion or reinstatement of the mirror's revelatory qualities, Melinda covers the mirror in "her" closet with a poster of Maya Angelou. While she refuses the mirror's image of herself, then, she replaces that image with a potentially emancipatory one of another rape victim silenced by her abuse and then empowered, through writing, to speak. The "magic mirror" reveals, as mirrors always do, an image of herself, though not one she can recognize at first.

It is the apple, however, that most interests me in *Speak*. In "Snow White" the apple is poisonous. A possible echo of the fruit in the Garden of Eden, it simultaneously marks the eater as sexual and punishes her for that sexuality: the stepmother prepares it to tempt the now-beautiful Snow White and to kill her for that

beauty. It casts Snow White into a deathlike sleep, but the apple that Melinda eats seems to have quite the opposite effect. It begins as a biology project: each student receives an apple to dissect.

Applesmell soaks the air. One time when I was little, my parents took me to an orchard. Daddy set me high in an apple tree. It was like falling up into a storybook, yummy and red and leaf and the branch not shaking a bit. Bees bumbled through the air, so stuffed with apple they couldn't be bothered to sting me. The sun warmed my hair, and a wind pushed my mother into my father's arms, and all the apple-picking parents and children smiled for a long, long minute.

That's how biology class smells.

I bite my apple. White teeth red apple hard juice deep bite.
David [her lab partner] sputters.

David: "You're not supposed to do that! She'll kill you! You're supposed to cut it! Didn't you even listen? You'll lose points!"
(66)

Not only does the biology teacher not "kill" Melinda (as Snow White's apple doesn't really kill her), but she awards her extra credit for discovering the small new growth inside the apple. This apple, then, awakens Melinda—the strong sense-memory that it elicits, the sensual description of the bite ("white teeth red apple hard juice deep bite"), and the growing plant seed all suggest growth, awakening, life, not the death we have learned (somewhat perversely, really) to associate with Snow White's poisoned fruit. Unlike the child Snow White, Melinda is sexually aware, in ways she had no desire to be; the apple reminds her, and us, that she can have other desires, other feelings, and it helps her begin her long process of recovery. Reworking the fairy-tale motifs in this way thus reaffirms Melinda's agency as opposed to Snow White's passivity throughout the traditional tale.

Closure

After “once upon a time,” “happily ever after” is probably the most characteristic phrase of the fairy tale. Zipes suggests that the two are necessarily linked, and further that they do not imply closure: “The tale begins with ‘Once upon a time’ or ‘Once there was’ and never really ends when it ends. The ending is actually the beginning” (xiii).¹⁵ But fairy tales seem more linear: a problem is introduced “once upon a time,” and upon its resolution, the tale is over, with the protagonist(s) living (usually) “happily ever after,” a closure that belies the possibility that the problem initiating the narrative may—indeed, no doubt will—arise again. The obvious unreality of such a closure has not escaped notice, of course; feminist critics, for example, frequently call into question the “happiness” of the marriage ending.¹⁶ All three of the novels I discuss interrogate the “happiness” of the fairy-tale ending, as well as resisting traditional narrative closure in more subtle ways.

Weetzie Bat takes up the “happily-ever-after” trope the most overtly: after her three wishes are fulfilled, the last one by her encounter with My Secret Agent Lover Man, “Weetzie and My Secret Agent Lover Man and Dirk and Duck and Slinkster Dog and Fifi’s canaries lived happily ever after in their silly-sand-topped house in the land of skating hamburgers and flying toupees and Jah-Love blonde Indians” (45). The novel, however, is not even half over at this point, and on the next page (after a chapter break), Weetzie asks Dirk, “What does ‘happily ever after’ mean anyway . . . ?” (46).¹⁷ The question generates a brief meditation on change, specifically on the changing Los Angeles landscape: the loss of certain beloved landmarks and their replacement by strip malls and vacant lots. The meaning is clear: as Weetzie’s fairy-tale landscape is changing, so too is her fairy-tale romance. For starters (like so many fairy-tale mothers), Weetzie wants a baby, one of the most compelling change-agents in human experience. And since her lover doesn’t, she turns to others.¹⁸ The traditional fairy-tale closure implicitly recognizes the heroine’s sexual matu-

rity as she marries her prince but draws a discreet veil over what, exactly, that might mean.¹⁹ *Weetzie Bat* makes it clear: sexuality brings its own set of experiences, happy and unhappy, and narrative closure is a fiction. By the end of the novel, a chastened Weetzie reflects, "I don't know about happily ever after . . . but I do know about happily" (109). Happiness requires force of will, though, not a magic wand or a genie: My Secret Agent Lover Man's willingness to parent a child he didn't father, Weetzie Bat's similar generosity to his child, Dirk and Duck's reunion after an AIDS-related parting. And indeed "ever after" eventually turns out to encompass four more novels as well, though Weetzie is no longer the protagonist.²⁰

The Princess Diaries series similarly refuses closure, though perhaps less self-consciously than *Weetzie Bat*. Although the first novel ends with the acknowledgment that maybe Michael Moscovitz does "like" Mia—and her own acknowledgment that he, not Josh Richter, is indeed the "prince" of her dreams—they are not yet happily-ever-after, nor do they appear to be by the end of volume 8 (as of this writing, the most recent episode). Indeed, Mia has a different boyfriend by the end of volume 2 and spends most of volume 3 trying to break up with him and re-interest Michael. It is clear throughout that Michael is her "prince," for example, when his compliment makes her feel "just like Cinderella all of a sudden" (*Take Two* 211), or when, at the end of volume 3, he finally does kiss her and she writes, "I'm living happily ever after" (*Third Time Lucky* 213). Yet over the next five volumes "happily-ever-after" turns out to include missed communication, anxiety, the potential pressures of sex, and a seeming breakup when Michael goes off to Japan and Mia goes to see *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway with J.P. Although Mia as a character remains fully invested in romantic closure, the novels' persistent refusal to provide it may (though to a lesser extent than *Weetzie Bat*) undercut her impulse to fairy-tale closure.

Speak begins with the aftermath of a rape, and tells its story both backward and forward, revealing the full extent of the encounter only three-quarters of the way through the novel. If

we didn't already know that this was the event she had been trying to repress for over a hundred pages, we might mistake the episode for the love-at-first-sight moment from a fairy tale:

A step behind me. A senior. And then he was talking to me, flirting with me. This gorgeous cover-model guy. His hair was way better than mine, his every inch a tanned muscle, and he had straight white teeth. Flirting with me! Where was Rachel—she had to see this!

Greek God: "Where did you come from? You're too beautiful to hide in the dark. Come dance with me." (134)

But the fairy-tale moment quickly turns ugly and violent. Melinda is not Cinderella, not Snow White: the kiss—and then the rape—does not awaken but deadens her, silencing her before she even enters the arena of young adulthood. Reawakened by her apple, her journal, and her art, Melinda is able to confront her attacker when he threatens her toward the end of the novel and finally responds to her art teacher Mr. Freeman's efforts to help her as well. The novel ends not with her final encounter with Andy: "I said no" (195)—but with her response to Mr. Freeman: "Let me tell you about it" (196).²¹

On occasion I've had students dissatisfied with the ending of *Speak*, which fails to develop the nascent relationship between Melinda and David Petrakis, her lab partner and friend, or to indicate what happens to Andy after the encounter in the closet. Anderson resolutely refuses the potential satisfaction of either the romantic or the judicial closures, ending instead with the invitatory opening line with Mr. Freeman. But in *Catalyst*, Anderson's 2002 novel, Melinda resurfaces. No longer the protagonist, Melinda is a minor character in *Catalyst*'s story of Kate Malone, a senior at Merryweather High who knows Melinda as "Melinda Something." "She's half-famous around here," Kate narrates. "A senior tried to rape her in a janitor's closet last year. She fought him off and pressed charges, which was cool. It made the papers when he was found guilty. He didn't go to jail, of course. White,

upper-middle-class criminals go to the state college, not the state penitentiary. Then they join fraternities” (76). Kate’s casual cynicism about Andy again reminds us that Melinda is not living in a fairy tale (nor, for that matter, is Kate, a motherless senior whose ambition to attend MIT drives her story). By shifting Melinda from protagonist to minor character in this second novel, Anderson reworks “happily-ever-after” as successfully and as critically as both Block and Cabot.

Fairy tales may indeed still structure our imaginations, especially if we are girls and women.²² The traces that fairy tales leave in these three novels for young adults, however, indicate that they can be revised, revisited, “transliterated” in unexpected ways. As critics since Bettelheim and historians since Darnton have told us, fairy tales are not all sweetness and light. “Transliterating” them into the sometimes gritty world of young adult fiction restores their more troubling aspects. Like their forebears, Weetzie, Mia, and Melinda face disappointment, danger, threats, and failures—without, however, the consolations of magically derived happy endings. At the same time, the potentially emancipatory plotlines of the novels suggest that despite the power narrative has to shape imagination—perhaps even development—such power is far from determinative. Mia, Weetzie, and Melinda rewrite the tales they seem to be inhabiting, resisting their utopian placement, their silencing, their romantic closures. In so doing they point the way for others to do the same.

Notes

1. Although none of these novels is, strictly speaking, a *Bildungsroman*, all are clearly novels of becoming, as Bakhtin would have it, and these qualities—especially of time and space—are characteristic of such novels (on *Bildungsromane*, *Entwicklungsromane*, and young adult literature, see also Trites 16–19).

2. It would be interesting to explore further in this regard the metaphor of “alienation” with regard to selfhood, a fundamentally spatial metaphor.

3. Although it might seem plausible that the books are simply set prior

to the attacks, it's clear by volume 6 that characters have seen the Disney movie adaptation of the first book (released in August 2001).

4. Patricia J. Campbell writes, "I know of no other writer who has written so accurately about the reality of life in Los Angeles" (57).

5. Elaine J. O'Quinn notes, with reference to the closet, that "a strategic retreat is not a surrender" (56).

6. Harries's analysis of early literary fairy tales suggests that this quality may be related to the "folk orality" invented by Perrault and imitated by the Grimms. The "longer, more complex, and more self-referential model" of tale, most often written by women, may not conform to this narrative style (16; see also 22–23 and 72 for further development of the contrast). See also Bacchilega's comment on the "very simple but powerful narrative strategy that stands as one of the narrative rules for fairy-tale production: an external or impersonal narrator whose straightforward statements carry no explicit mark of human perspective" (34).

7. Mieke Bal, following Gérard Genette, notes that all narrators are grammatically "first person" and develops a layered schema of narrator, focalizer, actor, and character. I use the more familiar "first-person," then, to refer to a situation in which all four elements coincide (also called, by Bal, a "character-bound narrator" [*Narratology* 122; see also *On Story-Telling* 79]). Fairy tales, by contrast, most often employ an external narrator who is neither actor nor character and a shifting focalization.

8. Campbell writes, "The tone is pure fairy-tale" (n.p.).

9. See Bal, *On Story-Telling*, chap. 4, for a more nuanced discussion of focalization. Regarding perspective, we also have occasional access to Dirk—it is, for example, presumably his judgment that terms Weetzie "almost beautiful" early in the novel (2). My Secret Agent Lover Man and Duck are, in this novel at least, more opaque to the reader. Mike Cadden claims that "the voice of the slim novel is singular and irrefutable within the confines of the text" (153).

10. "Cinderella, Marie Antoinette, and Sara" 171. See also Warner.

11. Among the novels that Mia and Tine read, *Jane Eyre* and the fictitious (no) sex-guide for girls, *Your Precious Gift*, feature especially prominently.

12. Cadden's cautions regarding the ethics of adult authors "provid[ing] the young adult reader with an unassailable, seductive, and singular voice in order to sound like that younger readership" are instructive here (153). I would argue, however, that by engaging in dialogue with their fairy-tale predecessors, all three novels may indeed provide the alternative viewpoints Cadden calls for.

13. As Bacchilega notes, "Snow White rarely has a voice of her own" (35).

14. O'Quinn makes a similar argument using different terms.

15. His claim is specifically about the ways in which fairy tales both begin and end in a "utopia," a no-place; thus when the tale is over, it replaces us where another tale can begin.

16. Haase's introduction to *Fairy Tales and Feminism* offers a useful review of some of these arguments, as does Cathy Lynn Preston's essay "Postmodernism and the Fairy Tale," in the same volume.

17. Mike Cadden observes that the popular direct-to-video Disney sequels *Cinderella II* and *Cinderella III* raise similar questions; *Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas* sidesteps the problem by creating an episode that takes place within the narrative time frame of the original movie (personal correspondence).

18. Does this episode reflect the odd birth stories of such fairy-tale heroines as Snow White and Rapunzel?

19. This is, of course, not the case in many of the less-well-known versions of heroine tales like "Sleeping Beauty" (who, in the Italian version, bears twins in her sleep) or "Rapunzel," who similarly bears a son and a daughter to her night-visiting prince. The "happily-ever-after" formulation in our most familiar tales, however, usually occurs just at the point of marriage.

20. The Weetzie Bat books, eventually published together as *Dangerous Angels* in 1998, include *Witch Baby* (1991), *Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys* (1992), *Missing Angel Juan* (1993), and *Baby Be-Bop* (1995). Weetzie appears in most of these, but they are not "her" stories.

21. This ending feels as well like a veiled reference to the opening of that most famous of young adult novels, Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*: "If you really want to hear about it [. . .]" By the end of Melinda's story, we know why we—or anyone else—would want to hear it.

22. As Marina Warner says, "Boys might surrender to the pleasures fairy tales offered before they were taught otherwise, but they soon sternly put them away, like skipping and doll's houses, and would scoff from their superior world of electric trains and airforce yarns" (xvii–xviii). Kay Stone similarly notes that fewer male students seemed to remember fairy tales in later life than females do (398).

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