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PhD Student at McGill University Shooting Heroines: The Promise of Enchantment in Dina Goldstein's *Fallen Princesses*

In the spring of 2011, the Catherine Hardwicke *Red Riding Hood* movie made a hard play for the tweeniepopper Twilight demographic, even as *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, Peg

gy Orenstien's critical examination of preschool princess culture, climbed the New York Times bestseller list. From the pink tiaras and sparkly wands coveted four-year-olds, to the teen and tween fixation with sexy wolves and vampires, the motifs of enchantment dominate contemporary girlhood as strongly as they ever have. In his seminal work *The Uses of Enchantment*, psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim outlines the ways in which fairy tales provide children with a foundation for emotionally healthy adulthoods. The fantastic, magical struggles experienced by otherwise normal fairy tale characters, writes Bettelheim, prepare children to appropriately acknowledge and address the harrowing emotional ventures which accompany psychological maturation, while unfailingly happy endings teach children to trust in the possibility of successful futures (Bettelheim 1975).

What happens, we might ask, when real life happy endings fail to deliver the enchanted promises of fairytales? Photographer Dina Goldstein's *Fallen Princesses*, a series itself inspired by her three-year-old daughter's obsession with Disney princesses, uses the visual vocabulary of fairytales to emphasize decidedly mundane, un-magical realities faced by contemporary women. If, as Bettelheim argues, folkloric enchantment provides children effective tools for negotiating their futures, Goldstein's series suggests an enduring power that the promise of enchantment holds for adults, even (or especially) adults who suspect enchantment of falsity.

Enchantment Lost

The ten-photograph series uses a bright, painterly palate to depict grown women dressed as fairytale heroines in contemporary scenarios, juxtaposing enchanted beginnings with mundane realities. *Snowy*, the first image of the series, transforms a Disneyfied Snow White into an overburdened housewife. With black bobbed hair and dressed in the iconic gown of Disney's primordial princess, Goldstein's Snow White stares numbly into the camera, a baby in each arm, a toddler at her skirt, and a third child crawling in the

background. Prince Charming lounges in an armchair, stockinged feet up on an ottoman, watching TV and drinking beer. If the visual joke is easy, it is also provocative and dense.

Snow White can, and has, been subjected to a wide variety of readings. Bettelheim, for his part, sees the tale as an oedipal drama which pits mothers and daughter's against one another in competition for patriarchal love (Bettelheim 1975). Significantly to Goldstein's narrative, however, nearly every reading of the tale interprets Snow White as a conventional coming of age story. As such, the tale follows its titular hero's journey through adolescence; the bulk of the tale takes place in between the kingdoms of her childhood and adulthood. In the woods, a space suggestive of growth, she practices a preparatory domesticity for miniature men until she reaches a sort of stasis, which occurs when she ingests a maliciously enchanted apple brought to her by her competitive stepmother. Tellingly, the Grimm narrative ends not with Disney's kiss, but with the prince carrying a comatose Snow White into his kingdom; it is upon leaving the woods en route to a new space that she emerges as an adult capable of standing on her own two feet. Later, at her wedding to the prince, her stepmother is forced to wear hot-iron shoes, which literally cause the old queen to go up in smoke. Obsession with staying young, the story seems to say, results in fast burnout; better to grow old with Snow White's grace.

Snow White is thus a fitting introduction to *Fallen Princesses*, a series which addresses elements of aging in the context of fairytale enchantment. The complaint issued by Snowy, of overburdened mothers with disinterested husbands, interrogates the relevancy of an enchanted adolescence to a suburban, domestic adulthood. If the Grimm's tale condemns the Queen for her attempts at staying a youthful beauty, Snowy's dull reality renders the opportunity to be an old woman in killer red hot heels an appealing option.

Yet while *Fallen Princesses* addresses the role that enchantment plays (or ceases to play) as women grow older, its depictions of older women trying, like the wicked queen, to maintain their youthful image is literally not a pretty picture. In the photograph *Belle*, a woman with red lips and carefully sculpted eyebrows, dressed in the gold ball gown of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, undergoes grotesque plastic surgery. In *Beauty*, the Prince of *Sleeping Beauty* rests on a bed in a retirement home recreation room beside his still-youthful bride, young but comatose. If fairytales routinely address adolescent girlhood and early marriage, *Fallen Princesses* uses tales whose core themes include the enchanting, transformative power of beauty to emphasize the sometimes paradoxical construct that is growing old with grace.

Fallen Princesses at times plays on specific objects of enchantment as a means of emphasizing the lack of fantastic fortune in its subjects' lives. Goldstein's photograph *The*

Princess and the Pea addresses poverty by placing the folkloric princess with the fantastic ability to sense a single pea beneath twenty mattresses atop twenty mattresses in an urban junkyard, foregrounding a bulldozer. What role might sensitivity play in economic depression? Similarly, invokes Rapunzel's themes of entrapment and isolation to address illness. In perhaps the most darkly compelling image of the series, the heroine with the impossibly long hair is transformed into a chemo-patient. Her gaze downcast, she sits on a hospital bed attached to an IV, a long braid in her hands. Both photos cleverly take fantastic images of folkloric enchantment – twenty mattresses stacked one on top of another, synthetic hair – and place them in plausible situations. The magnitude of the subjects' misfortune is fantastic, but the technologies of their hardships are far from enchanted.

Enchantresses and Culpability

Perhaps no image of *Fallen Princesses* achieves the complexity of *Not-So-Little Red Riding Hood*, a reimagination which stuffs Little Red Riding Hood's iconic basket full of burgers and fries. Red Riding Hood herself is shown as a plump young woman, strolling alone through a sunny forest while slurping a soft drink. When Goldstein posted selections of *Fallen Princesses* on the photography site *JPG Mag* in the spring of 2009, the photo drew commenter ire for reading as an easy fat joke, and continued to provoke fiery discussion on feminist blogs. *Women's Glib* criticized it as containing, "two glaringly problematic stereotypes...that fat people eat indiscriminately and 'unhealthily'; and that being fat is the ultimate downfall" (*Women's Glib* 2009). Meanwhile, *The Sister Project* countered that the photo takes aim at, "the flawed society that we currently live in, where mainstream diets are made to poison consumers" (*The Sister Project* 2009). Is *Red Riding Hood* a culprit, deserving of blame and derision? ("Ha! She's fat!") Or is she a victim, in need of rescue and empathy? ("Fast Food is killing us!") I argue that by inviting those two oppositional – and dangerously reductive – readings, *Not So Little Red Riding Hood* moves beyond them. By deploying twin impulses to shame women or pity them, might the photograph actually reveal its subject's latent agency?

To understand how well equipped *Red Riding Hood* is in articulating such a conflict, we need only look to the history of the tale. Feminist anthropologist Yvonne Verdier documented how *Red Riding Hood*'s shift from oral tale to literary text (and, consequently, its transition from female to male authorship) was accompanied by the infantilization of its protagonist (Douglas 1995). Through fieldwork in rural France, Verdier uncovered a variation of the familiar tale that predates its seventeenth century sanitization by Charles Perrault. In the bawdy Verdier variation, the wolf eats the grandmother – and so does *Red Riding Hood*, albeit unwittingly. She performs a striptease for the wolf at his behest and then climbs into bed with him, where (yes) she can't stop remarking on how big he is.

Sexual double entendre, however, is far from the most striking difference between this early iteration of the tale and its subsequent literary adaptations. This version of the tale, which Verdier describes as belonging to a tradition of female storytellers, does not end in the protagonist's death (as in Perrault's text) nor with her rescue by a kindly woodcutter (as in the Brothers' Grimm). Instead, Red Riding Hood escapes through her own wiles. She tricks the wolf by asking him to tie a leash around her while she relieves herself outside, but instead ties her end of the leash to a tree, and escapes.

In contrast, the textual variations by Perrault and the Grimms drain the tale of its bawdy playfulness and feminist resourcefulness alike. As the anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, they suggest a much younger protagonist (Douglas 1995), and, according to folklorist Jack Zipes, they force her to bare responsibility for the wolf's assault. Significantly, in Zipes' examination of the illustrations that accompany the story's printed tradition, he places special emphasis on Red Riding Hood's woody encounter with the wolf. His exhaustive study reveals the scene's depiction in nearly every illustrated version of the tale ever printed (Zipes 1987). Beginning with Gustave Doré's 1862 illustration, originally designed for Perrault's fairytale collection and reprinted in multiple anthologies thereafter, these depictions mark the woods as a space where society's rules are broken and a young girl can do the forbidden. Significantly, in the woods, she does not merely talk to the wolf, she nearly touches him. The little girl's proximity to the wolf in the Doré illustration makes their encounter look something like a dance. Writes Zipes of the illustration:

Little Red Riding Hood appears to invite the wolf's gaze/desire and therefore incriminates herself in his act. Implicit in her gaze is that she may be leading him on – to granny's house, to a bed, to be dominated. (Zipes 1987, 243)

The wolf may be big and bad, but this illustration sets Little Red Riding Hood up: the ensuing tale will be about her punishment. But what is her crime? She talks to the wolf, yes, but does doing so make her stupid or sultry?

As Zipes demonstrates, Victorian illustrators damn her as both: they make her coy. An 1870 illustration by Walter Crane shows a Little Red Riding Hood cocking her hip while hearing out the Wolf, one foot placed forward so that the front of her cloak falls open, revealing her teenage body underneath. An 1880 illustration from Father Tuck's Fairy Tale series makes Little Red Riding Hood younger, but no less coquettish. (Zipes 1987). In the Father Tuck illustration, the little girl is drawn face forward, equal in size to a dapper wolf adorned with a monocle and top hat, like a predatory Mr. Peanut. For her part, Little Red Riding lolls wide eyes in the wolf's direction, one finger placed suggestively in her mouth.

At this point, it should come as no surprise that Little Red Riding Hood is often discussed by folklorists as a prototypical rape fantasy. Diane Herman (Herman 1979), Susan Brownmiller (Brownmiller 1975) and others have identified rape culture as stemming from a dangerous understanding of heterosexual sex wherein women passively await male acts of sexual aggression. These Victorian Red Riding Hood illustrations suggest how deeply rooted such cultural assumptions may be. The seductive innocence with which these protagonists are drawn, however, bears little resemblance to the craftiness of their feminist forbearer in the Verdiere version. They suggest the subversion of feminine ingenuity with a darker matrix of enchantment: the intersection of male predatory instincts and female collusion. Through her encounter with the wolf, Red Riding Hood transforms from a naughty child to a wanton young woman; the wolf from untouchable forest animal to knowable predator. The process of enchantment in the fairy tale is activated not merely by the wolf's anthropomorphism, but by its collusion with budding (and punishable) feminine sexuality.

Interestingly, by the mid-twentieth century, illustrators neutered the sex appeal of both the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood alike. A 1968 illustration reminiscent of the Father Tuck's (Zipes 1987) keeps the wolf in a top hat, but transforms it from a marker of society to a shiny, curling cartoon that seems to mock its wearer. The upright wolf's bare chest, meanwhile, is covered in a cloak of his own. At a great distance from the wolf walks Little Red Riding Hood, diminutive as a pixie. Her head is big; her body small. She looks like a kewpie doll.

During the same time period, images of adult Little Red Riding Hoods turned explicitly sexual. In the 1950's, Max Factor's "Riding Hood Red" lipstick bore the slogan "to bring the wolves out." A 1953 ad for the lipstick in the magazine *Vogue* featured a sexy, red cloaked woman and the copy, "turn the most innocent look into a tantalizing invitation." (Zipes 1987). If the Victorian era saw both women and girls as coquettish innocents wanting male domination, these illustrations indicate a twentieth century rift: girlish pixies grow into femme fatales, who knowingly wield their sexuality to seduce otherwise powerful men. Here, the positive connotations of folkloric enchantment see a dark flip side in the role of the female enchantress, a seductress who compels powerless men to pursue her.

Bearing in mind last spring's two fairytale-focused hits – Orenstein's book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* and Catherine Hardwicke's movie *Red Riding Hood* – we can see Red Riding Hood's virgin/whore duality playing out in the present day, in the pastel princess attire peddled at preschoolers and in the proverbial vampires and big bad wolves framed for teenagers as model lovers. What happens when contemporary grown women overcome the seductive, punishing promise of bad boy beasts? What happens after *Twilight*?

Body Politics

It would be easy to argue that, as the industrial commodification of fairy tales replaces the complex technologies of enchantment with superficial, mass produced magic wands and other princess gear, tales themselves will lose the enchanting power which Bettelheim finds so essential to social education. However, the publisher-selected illustrations of Red Riding Hood which Zipes critiques are as much a tool of industry as contemporary Disney princess gear, and the very proliferation of fairytale iconography suggests that the lessons of enchantment are perhaps shifting, rather than vanishing altogether. With *Fallen Princesses*, Goldstein participates the shift not merely by quoting the precedents of enchantment, but by literally altering the landscapes of the tales.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Goldstein's *Fallen Princesses* is what the series lacks. Though the series depicts a host of serious issues faced by women today, including illness (Rapunzel), poverty (The Princess and the Pea), war (Jasmine), and isolation (Pocahontas), sexual violence is inconspicuously absent. Further, where men are included in the series, they are explicitly marked by passivity. Cinder puts Cinderella alone at a dive bar, in a ball gown, an up-do, and long white gloves among men in denim and boots. Although the bar is filled exclusively by men, they slouch in their seats beside their drinks and she appears wholly unthreatened by their presence. No cues are given to their danger, or even their sex appeal. Likewise, the elderly dejection of Beauty's would-be suitor renders him passive, even with a passed out woman by his side. Similarly Snowy, the only series to feature a younger and potentially virile young man, takes care to mark his passivity in the face of his wife's industriousness. Although I am not suggesting that sexual assault is not a serious contemporary issue, to what extent might *Fallen Princesses* suggest that, three centuries after Perrault published *Tales of Mother Goose* and three decades after Brownmiller published *Against Our Will*, fear of violent aggression need not make a top ten list of Western women's concerns? At the very least, it doesn't make Goldstein's.

Although I would like to argue that the controversial photograph *Not-So-Little Red Riding Hood* marks a departure from the illustration's genesis in female sinfulness, I can't do that without deploying the underlying assumption that this story is a little girl's. In reality, it ceased to be a girl's story as soon as the versions by Perrault and the Grimm's began circulating. As Zipes argues of the Victorian illustrations of Red Riding Hood's initial encounter with the wolf, she isn't a little girl so much as she is a fantasy of femininity, one used as a justification for its subordination. Tellingly, Zipes wrote in 1986:

Ultimately, the male phantasies of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm can be traced to their socially induced desire and need for control – control of women, control of their own sexual libido, control of their fear of women and loss of virility. That their controlling interests are

still reinforced and influential through variant texts and illustrations of Little Red Riding Hood in society today is an indication that we are still witnessing an antagonistic struggle of the sexes in all forms of socialization, in which men are still trying to dominate women.

[Zipes 1986, 257]

A quarter century later, are men still engaged in the fraught struggle for domination that Zipes describes? *Fallen Princesses* answers that question with a quiet, “who cares?” In the storied scene of Little Red Riding Hood in the woods, Goldstein craftily erases the male presence entirely, and instead shifts the story’s burden of control to its female protagonist.

Disordered eating, as Gillian Brown has argued, is fundamentally tied to humanist notions of bodily control (Brown 1991); by stuffing Red Riding Hood’s basket with sodas and fries, Goldstein harnesses the aggressive struggle for control that forms the basis of the story. And in a subtle, brilliant twist, that struggle is not about men attempting to master their baser urges while also mastering the so-called fairer sex, but about a woman’s struggle to gain control over her own body. This Red Riding Hood is the body in question, and her body is meant to attract our attention, much as Victorian illustrators meant her body to attract the attention of the wolf. As in all internal struggles for a Foucaultian semblance of control, Red Riding Hood is both disciplinarian and disciplined, subject and object both.

Just a Little Bit Naughty

Shortly before Goldstein began developing *Fallen Princesses*, an advertising team in Australia began looking for a new way to market low fat flavored milk. The ensuing fairytale-themed ad campaign bears the slogan, “just a little naughty.” Each print ad features the same model, dressed in fairytale attire against a white background. As Rapunzel, she demonstrates her naughtiness by cutting off her long braid. As Cinderella, she wears a patent leather boot in place of a glass slipper. There is no real narrative intervention, however, for the ad’s take on Red Riding Hood, so solidified is Red Riding Hood’s cultural her role as femme fatale. The wolf tattoo which the ad places on her exposed forearm is actually in keeping with traditional depictions of this prototypical misbehaving girl.

With Little Red Riding Hood already a signifier of naughtiness, to what new low can *Fallen Princesses* sink her? Snow White, in place of a royal kingdom, gets an unhappily suburban ever after. Cinderella, in place of a royal kingdom, gets a skeevey dive bar. The heroine of *The Princess and the Pea*, in place of a royal kingdom, gets a pile of junkyard mattresses. And Red Riding Hood, in place of digestion by a wolf, gets to eat hamburgers and fries.

In her own critique of Little Red Riding Hood, Mary Douglas suggests an anthropological approach to folklore would do well to examine not how humorous a story is, which Douglas sees as a subjective assessment, but how light the tale is meant to be. This photograph – from its to its punning title to the fact that its protagonist’s clogs look a little like crocks – indicates a lightness of spirit, a winking whimsy. Further, it is literally a light photograph. The studio lighting sets Red Riding aglow, making her pop against the woody background. Does that lightness poke fun at its protagonist’s fat body (a potentially mean spirited gesture, to be sure) or does it make a pointed comment about the surreptitiously sinister realities of fast food? Goldstein marks the photograph as light, while viewer perspective interpolates Red Riding Hood as an object of either scorn or of pity.

Significantly, scorn and pity are, historically, attitudes with which society has addressed the proverbial fallen women from whom Goldstein takes her title. Goldstein not only simultaneously solicits both scorn and pity from her audience, she does so by erasing the threatening male presence from the much-depicted scene. In doing so, she places the story’s emphasis back on Little Red Riding Hood. Not-So-Little Red Riding Hood thus works to undo the titular heroine’s objectification, by making it Little Red Riding Hood who struggles with control, and by positioning control as hers for the taking. Goldstein’s series promises a look at fallen heroines; Not-So-Little Red Riding Hood suggests a potential for the fallen to rise again.

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