Rewriting the Fairytale: Princesses and Female Agency

Jennifer Orie

Dr. Lori Campbell

University of Pittsburgh

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Abstract

This research project, funded through the University of Pittsburgh’s Archival Scholars’ Research Award, traces how fairytales operate to define both the image and role of a princess. By creating a lens that views *The Selection* by Kiera Cass and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins as modern fairytale stories, this project aims to connect the traditional fairytales *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* to modern dystopian fantasy in order to return female agency and realize the function of a princess has shifted from objective passivity to active self-determination. Furthermore, in establishing an additional link to the *Wonder Woman* comic, the definition of the princess becomes one that embodies the classification of heroism. By working closely with the primary resources available in the Special Collections Department at Hillman Library, chiefly in the Elizabeth Nesbitt and Comic collections, this research will interweave genres in a way that recognizes the plotline of a fairytale story but modifies it in order to return autonomy to female characters and invites the opportunity for advancing the definition of female heroism.

Rewriting the Fairytale: Princesses and the Power of Body Politics

The fairytale is a story that is misunderstood. More specifically, the fairytale is a story that misunderstands the role of the female hero. In traditional stories like *Cinderella*, “beauty is by far the most common and revered attribute of the fairy tale female but the traits of patience and passivity are also highly regarded” (qtd. in Kuon and Weimar). Unfortunately, this stigma in fairytale narratives lingers and establishes a female trope that princesses cannot be both active and successful in stories. However, in connecting *Cinderella* to the modern dystopian fantasy novel *The Selection,* the “retelling” allows for the princess to retain her identity, liberating her from the intrinsic link between beauty and female heroism. Additionally, the comparison between *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins will further serve to revise the princess function through a reversal of stereotypically masculine and feminine attributes, and “in doing so, these texts explore the possibilities of living and being a body when appearance is not the only means of identifying a self, when self is not confined to a single, whole appearance” (Phillips 40). Finally, this reworked identity of the princess permits the female protagonist to establish herself as a heroine for our modern society when applying the fairytale genre to William Marston’s *Wonder Woman* comic and drawing connections between classical definitions of the hero. Through all of these works, clarity of the fairytale can begin to be achieved, and long-held notions of fairytale princesses can be revised.

Much of what we have come to understand about fairytales and feminism is that the two are in combative discord; according to critic Marcia Lieberman, “it is hard to see how children could be ‘prepared’ for women’s liberation by reading fairytales…they serve to acculturate women to traditional social roles” (383). As a result, women in traditional fairytales are presented as passive, objectified, and largely removed from a sense of agency. Although the

fairytale trope can be viewed in this light, not all fairytale stories reduce women in this fashion. Dystopian fantasy novels, such as *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and *The Selection* by Kiera Cass could be viewed as modernized fairytales that seek to remediate this long-held stereotype of passive princesses. Adopting this lens to study these works, one can begin to draw parallels between *The Selection* and *Cinderella*, as well as similarities between *The Hunger Games* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Though familiar patterns from the classic tales resurface, these patterns are altered to offer a new definition for princesses. Perhaps Collins and Cass consciously seek out these resemblances to establish a connection between past and present so that we may recognize that the stories haven’t fully changed overtime—only how we view the protagonist.

Kiera Cass quickly establishes her link between protagonist America Singer and Cinderella when America receives a letter in the post inviting her to become part of “The Selection,” a female competition designed to help future king, Prince Maxon, find a wife in a series of broadcasted proprieties at the castle. Essentially, this selection is a massive beauty pageant in order to win the prince’s hand in marriage. Coinciding with Lieberman’s theory, “the beauty-contest is a constant and primary device in many of the stories…and the focus [is] on beauty as a girl’s most valuable asset, perhaps her only valuable asset” (385). In both the original Cinderella tales and *The Selection*, each protagonist attends a ball despite coming from low socioeconomic statuses. As Cinderella derived her name from sitting among the cinders and ashes after doing her work (“Cinderilla” 7), America Singer’s name also matches her class and profession, as she is a Five, the caste associated with musicians and artists. Interestingly though, the tales slightly deviate when, regardless of class status, all eligible girls are sent letters in *The Selection*. However, Cinderella is not initially included, for only “all nobility were invited to the great ball given at the court by the King’s son” (“Cinderella, or, The Little Glass Slipper”). As a result, she bursts into tears, and “it is only the sound of her weeping that arouses her fairy godmother…[u]ltimately, her loneliness and her suffering are sentimentalized and become an integral part of her glamor” (Lieberman 390). Cinderella is absolutely devastated that she is unable to go to the ball and passively weeps. On the other hand, America is repulsed by the letter and does not wish to have any involvement with The Selection. To America, “the idea of being entered into a contest for the whole country to watch as this stuck-up little wimp picked the most gorgeous and shallow one of the bunch to be the silent pretty face…was enough to make [her] scream” (Cass 8). Already we can see where the fairytale trop begins to diverge in a manner that retains female agency. America desires to be more than a trophy wife, whereas no dialogue exists to give Cinderella a voice in the traditional telling. For America, life is more than being swept off her feet and living “happily ever after.” She does eventually want to marry, but it will be a man of her own choosing, and she first wants to seek out independence defining herself as a singer before a wife. It is only for the wellbeing of her family that she decides to apply for The Selection, since anyone who is chosen will have amenities sent to her immediate family members for the duration of her stay in the castle.

Once America is chosen as a finalist to enter Illea’s castle, beauty and image become central to her success. Upon arrival, she is immediately told, “You are now considered property of Illea. You must take care of your body from here on out” (Cass 59). Completely objectified as “property,” America recognizes “the limitations that are imposed by sex upon a person’s chances of success in various endeavors” (Lieberman 384). In other words, for America to continue to be able to move onward in the competition and provide enough food for her family, she must accept the societal expectation of female beauty and cater to this patriarchal hegemony. Unfortunately, beauty and females become intrinsically linked, and the “beautiful woman as autonomous subject hardly exists; she exists only as beautiful object of the male gaze of desire” (Worley 371). Once again, the female passivity and objectification that dominates original fairytale stories poses a threat into the more modern fantasy world of Illea. In the face of these societal pressures, however, America does not fully cave into passivity, as indicated by her decisions to override the suggestions of her maids who become her “fairy godmothers.”

In an 1820 edition of the Cinderella story, Cinderella’s fairy godmother casts a spell so that her “rags turned to cloth of gold and silver, bedecked with jewels and silver, [with] the prettiest glass slippers in the world” (“Cinderilla 15). At the ball itself, everyone was speechless at the “singular beauty of this unknown new comer” (16-17). However, though America undergoes a similar transformation scene, she is not as willingly receptive to her maids. In fact, after reluctantly agreeing to wear a luxurious outfit picked out for her to make her first impression at the castle, America is granted permission to choose her shoes, and she picks “worn-out red flats” (Cass 71). Far from glass slipper material, America admits, “I figured I should make it clear from the start that I wasn’t princess material” (71). Because America so ardently rejects this notion of docility, the tight knot between princesses and beauty pageants becomes loosened, giving way to a less rigid structure of the fairy tale narrative. Moreover, America’s worst fear is to “become something unrecognizable—covered in layers of makeup and hung down with jewelry [so that she’d] have to dig out of it for weeks to find [her]self again” (174-175). Whereas Cinderella does not appear to mind that she is unrecognizable to anyone, including herself, America does not want to lose her identity. Acceptance by others based on beauty is too trivial for America, and she does not want to participate in a spectacle where she is judged solely by her looks. This strong sense of self overrides “the almost stifling intensity with which the [fairy]tale concentrates on the conflict in the mirror between….self and self…in which the King *is* present…His, surely, is the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgment” (Gilbert and Gubar 202). As America looks in her own mirror, she realizes the image looking back at her is not one that is dictated by society or Prince Maxon; rather, she admits, “I still looked like me. It was the prettiest version of myself I’d seen so far, but I knew that face” (Cass 174). Despite being told she was “property of Illea” earlier, America preserves ownership over her image and is the agent over her own body.

America’s first ball further indicates her resistance to losing her identity and subjecting herself to a stereotypical beauty contest. In an 1814 edition of Cinderella, all of the ladies at the ball want to model their headdress patterns to match Cinderella’s after witnessing the attention she receives from the prince (“The Interesting Story of Cinderella”). In a similar fashion, after hearing in the *Illea Capital Report* that America was a favorite of Maxon’s, “everyone requested a blue dress…all the maids think it’s because [she] wears that color almost daily, and the others are trying to copy” (Cass 236). Unfortunately, most of the girls in *The Selection* remain shallowly developed as characters and support Lieberman’s theory that “marriage is the fulcrum and major event of nearly every fairy tale; it is the reward for girls” (386). As in the Cinderella fairytale, none of the female characters are interested in establishing their own identities; instead, they want to take on whichever image will best suit the prince’s fancy. However, America’s own identity is her most important part of her life, and she tries to encourage the women around her to unsubscribe to the superficiality associated with beauty expectations. She even advises one of the girls: “Next time you pick out your clothes, maybe you should try being yourself instead of me” (Cass 239). Alas, the sense of competition only sharpens with America’s success, which leaves everyone staring at her bitterly with each Illea report. Suddenly, America realizes, “They didn’t know I didn’t want this. In their eyes, I was a threat. And I could see they wanted me gone” (102). Despite America’s attempt at friendships, “Fairy stories relate the tensions between competitors for a young man’s allegiance; they reflect the difficulty of women making common cause” (Warner 226). The acidic nature of The Selection seems to derive from the desperation that women in America’s society face as vulnerable objects. For many, marriage to the prince would provide financial stability and better opportunities; therefore, they readily sell themselves as a commodity if it means advancement in the competition. This act is too horrendous for America to imagine. Though she dislikes the gossip that surrounds her and is scorned by “evil stepsisters,” she still treats them with the dignity and respect they deserve as humans. Just as Cinderella continues to advise her stepsisters in their preparations for the ball (“Cinderella, or, The Little Glass Slipper”), so too does America selflessly continue to guide her competitors. She recognizes their individuality and helps them exude the best aspects of their personalities not only for Prince Maxon, but also for themselves.

America’s own identity is something she simply will not compromise at any rate. In classical fairytale stories, “good-temper and meekness are so regularly associated with beauty…the beautiful single daughter is nearly always noted for her docility, gentleness, and good temper” (Lieberman 385). Adhering to this rule, Cinderella is “universally beloved and respected for her sweet temper and charming disposition” (“The History of Cinderella”), and she has an “unparalleled goodness” (“Cinderilla” 6). Once again, it becomes apparent that passivity results in being “chosen.” As a result, the girls in The Selection fear they will say something that would be unpleasing to Maxon and cause dismissal. Yet, America rewrites this scripted princess behavior as early as her very first encounter with the prince. In preparation to meet him, a male designer consults her about her image and offers several different angles that she could potentially pull off. However, America vehemently responds, “I’m not changing everything about me cater to some guy I don’t even know” (Cass 90). America makes it clear that she will not conform to male desires and expectations of women. And when she actually meets Maxon, she erupts into anger and screams at him, “I am no more dear to you than the thirty-four other strangers you have here in your cage…Are you really so shallow?” (114). This blatant distaste for her circumstances makes it quite evident that America does not plan on holding her temper; she will not be groomed and viewed as if she were a caged animal. This imagery of a cage evokes the symbolic oppression that these girls must submit to under the patriarchal operations of her society. Intriguingly, contrary to everybody’s beliefs, Maxon admits on television, “I plan on keeping her here for a while” (181). Rather than reject the inkling of female progressivism, Maxon opens up the opportunity for princesses to be nontraditional and create their own personalities.

The definition of the princess further becomes renovated in the comparisons drawn between *The Hunger Games* and *Beauty and the Beast*, where traditional male and female roles begin to become blurred by a reversal in stereotypical functions. Whereas *The Selection* seeks to insert agency into original *Cinderella* stories, *The Hunger Games* further develops the agency already evident in *Beauty and the Beast*. In both stories, adversity falls upon the female protagonists’ families, causing them to sink into poverty. In an 1856 edition of the fairytale, “by a series of accidents, the merchant suddenly lost his whole fortune” (McLoughlin). In *The Hunger Games*, the accident manifests itself as a coalmine explosion that leaves Katniss fatherless. In despair, the surrounding female characters in each story threaten to regress women back into a passive state; Katniss’s mother submerges into a major depressive episode that renders her indifferent and negligent to her children’s needs, and Beauty’s older sisters refuse to go to work to support the family. As a result, Katniss and Beauty are forced to take on premature roles as caretakers. Beauty rises at four in the morning everyday to clean the house and make breakfast for everyone (“Beauty and the Beast: A Tale”), and Katniss rises early to hunt in the hours of dawn when only the coal miners working a morning shift are awake (Collins 4). Although Katniss’s hunting is more hegemonically masculine than Beauty’s cooking, each girl is “transforming herself from a dependent into a provider” (Henthorne 44), enabling both to be seen as active “breadwinners” or having characteristically male roles. Rather than submit under the tragic undertow of their circumstances, Katniss and Beauty exhibit strength and willpower to live, traits that detract from the classic “damsel in distress” narrative of typical princess stories.

If conditions aren’t already dire enough, Beauty and Katniss stumble upon even more misfortune. Beauty’s world becomes much graver when her father returns from a trading journey and admits that he must return to his ultimate doom after stealing a rose for Beauty from a strange beast’s property. In a similar vein, at the annual reaping ceremony for the “Hunger Games,” a gladiatorial-like competition where kids are coerced to kill each other as the “Capitol’s way of reminding [them] how totally [they] are at their mercy” (Collins 18), it is revealed that Primrose, Katniss’s younger sister, will be the female representative from District Twelve to compete in the Games. Roses, traditional female symbols associated with beauty, as contained in Prim’s own name, also become associated with foreboding death at the hands of powerful male figures. As Beauty’s father says, “Take these, Beauty; but little do you think what they cost your unhappy father” (McLoughlin), the rose, which was the Beast’s most prized possession in his carefully tended garden, is transformed to a masculine symbol. Likewise, President Snow, the head of Katniss’s nation Panem responsible for the Games, consistently wears roses on his suits and grows the flowers in the Capitol, transposing gendered icons even further. This reversal in masculine and feminine identifiers is completed by the responses observed in both Beauty and Katniss. Katniss volunteers to replace Prim and as she assumes her place on stage, she says to herself, “I don’t want to cry. When they televise the replay of the reapings tonight, everyone will make note of my tears, and I’ll be marked as an easy target. A weakling. I will give no one that satisfaction” (Collins 23). In an almost identical situation, Beauty volunteers to take her father’s place and return to the Beast’s home, and she is the only one who does not cry at her departure “so she would not increase their uneasiness” (“Beauty and the Beast: A Tale” 24). Meanwhile, Beauty’s father cries when he has to leave Beauty behind, and Peeta Mellark, the male District Twelve tribute, “has obviously been crying and interestingly enough does not seem to be trying to cover it up” (Collins 40). Emotions tend to be expressed more by women than men, and they are more inclined to experience intense joy and sadness (Brebner 387), yet in both scenarios, the males express more emotions. Expressing emotions is often stereotypically linked to powerlessness, a last resort when rational thought and reason cannot provide alternative solutions. Understanding this connotation, Beauty and Katniss intentionally withhold their tears, symbols of weakness and femininity. As a result in these shifts of symbols classified as “male” or “female” in association, we begin to see how princesses become less feminized and remain more in control over their image.

In concordance with this unraveling of the passive princess archetype, a good temper is no longer linked solely to female characters. The Beast, frighteningly large and overwhelming taken at face value, is actually a gentle creature. He gives Beauty sole command of his estate, and the two enjoy walking through the beautiful gardens he cares after. Beauty even admits that he was, “neither a witty nor a fine person, but [had] virtue, sweetness of temper, and complaisance” (“Beauty and the Beast: A Tale” 24). All of these characteristics are quite unexpected to observe in an apparently hideous monster seeking to destroy those who trespass on his property, especially given that this beast is a male that possesses very feminine qualities. Moreover, Peeta also holds very nontraditional talents. Because of his family background in a bakery, his best survival skill is attributed to his cake-decorating proficiency. “All those hours decorating cakes paid off” (Collins 291), and he can successfully camouflage himself in a shallow pond until Katniss is able to rescue him. Frosting cakes and hiding, atypical male traits, highlight the blurring of gender lines and open up a space for women and men to explore other ways to define themselves. Peeta, just like the Beast, is also very gentle in nature, and “his kindness, sensitivity, and willingness to work in teams also defy masculine stereotypes, as does his general lack of aggression” (Henthorne 58). Peeta only demonstrates aggression as an act of defense or when trying to protect Katniss, and he never kills a tribute during the entirety of the competition; on the other hand, Katniss takes a total of three lives both directly and indirectly. This mixing of male and female characteristics could be seen as a distinct break free from long-held casts that have restricted the roles characters can hold in stories.

Although this blending takes place, one could make the counterargument that women’s passivity is still present in both tales. For instance, it’s later revealed to Beauty by a fairy that a “beautiful virgin” had to consent to marriage in order to break the Beast’s spell (“Beauty and the Beast: A Tale”). Reading with this lens, “her beauty is seen as the family’s sole asset, and she is sold, like a commodity, to the [beast]” (Lieberman 387). Additionally, Katniss “quickly learns that performing traditional forms of femininity is essential to her survival” (Henthorne 53). In other words, for Katniss to be successful in the Hunger Games and earn necessary sponsorship from Capitol viewers, she must adhere to the Capitol’s expectations of female beauty, as well as play into a “love story” act with Peeta. As a result, “the beautiful girl does not have to *do* anything to merit being chosen; she does not have to show pluck, resourcefulness, or wit; she is chosen because she is beautiful” (Lieberman 386). Once again, marriage leaks into the plots as the ultimate climax for a woman’s narrative, and it appears that Lieberman’s argument holds true for these more liberal tales. However, though both stories do eventually end in matrimony, each protagonist does not center her plans on marrying her male counterpart, neutralizing Lieberman’s view that princesses “seem to exist passively until they are seen by the hero” (Lieberman 386). On several occasions, the Beast asks for Beauty’s hand in marriage; however, she refuses him each time, asserting that she instead feels, “sincerest friendship, esteem, and gratitude” (McLoughlin). Furthermore, though Katniss must adhere to traditional beauty expectations, she wields her image at her own discretion to manipulate the emotions of viewers. She decides when to withhold her emotions, like during Thresh’s death (Collins 308), as well as when to allow herself to feign vulnerability and openly profess her love for Peeta to obtain food (302). For both women, friendship is more important than marriage; Katniss even admits, “I did what it took to stay alive, to keep us both alive in the arena…I’m never going to get married anyway” (373). Being a princess, and being a woman, is much more than marriage. Female characters ought not be defined solely by their associations to male characters; instead, we should view them as individuals with respect for whatever qualities they wish to ascribe to themselves.

In defying archaic tropes and muddling male and female scripts, the princess emerges with much more flexibility and opportunity to define herself. With transference from inactiveness to agency, the princess could be viewed as a heroine in her own right. In order to fully appreciate how a princess operates under the definition of heroism, we must further observe how she has been modernized. To do this, we can view a modern superhero with princess origins to revisit the fairytale and trace how it has been rewritten to reflect how princesses are important heroes to our community. No longer is the princess’s role one that is composed for her by society; rather, she composes herself and society assembles behind the heroic ideals she exudes.

This “Wonder Woman” is a creation by psychologist William Moulton Marston in 1942, when protagonist Diana Prince became the first female superhero to have her own comic book (Lepore 219). Descending from a long line of Amazonian women, Princess Diana lives in a community of all females on Paradise Island. However, instead of being a community of women competing against each other in matrimony, there “is no want, no illness, no hatreds, no wars” (*Wonder Woman*, issue 196). No longer does a woman’s sole purpose have to be finding a man to marry, as fairytales so often provided “conditions [which] set women against women…rivalry for the prince’s love” (Warner 238). Instead, they can focus on their own self-improvement and advancement as a collaborative community, and “that is why Amazons have been able to far surpass the inventions of the so-called man-made civilization” (*Wonder Woman,* issue 196). Even when one woman is able to defeat another, the defeat becomes a source of motivation rather than an extinguishment of potentiality. For instance, Queen Hippolyta, Diana’s mother, holds a race on Paradise Island, which Diana easily wins. Rather than bask in her own victory, however, the princess walks up to a disappointed opponent and states, “It’s you they should be cheering, Althea…you came close to beating me!” (*Wonder Woman*, issue 301). Her mother continues this encouragement by saying, “What is most important is that each of us strives to better herself—to become the best that she can be!” (*Wonder Woman*, issue 301). If unrestricted by the hostility of a competitive environment, women become liberated to explore the full extent of their potential. Marston wanted to create Wonder Woman to “set up a standard among children and young people of strong, free, courageous womanhood; and to combat the idea that women are inferior to men” (Lepore 220). With these principles in mind, Marston wanted to remove the stigma associated with princesses and open an avenue for women to realize they possess the same capacity for heroism as their male counterparts.

According to Joseph Campbell’s definition of heroism, “the ultimate act of the hero is self-sacrifice” (Indick 56). Wonder Woman embodies this characteristic from the very beginning of her journey in the comic world. A World War II intelligence officer washes to shore on Paradise Island after his plane crashes, and the spirits of Athena and Aphrodite appear in Hippolyta’s court to inform her, “American liberty and freedom must be preserved! You must send with him your strongest and wisest Amazon—the finest of your Wonder Women!—For America, the last citadel of democracy, and of equal rights for women, needs your help!” (*Wonder Woman,* issue 196). In her care for Steve Trevor, whom she can carry “as if he were a child” due to her Amazonian strength that is “stronger than Hercules” (*Wonder Woman,* issue 196), Diana falls in love with Trevor and his principles about fighting the crime and evil of the Nazi forces. Feeling this mission beckoning her, identified as the “Call to Adventure” within the Departure phase of Campbell’s Hero (Indick 46), Diana requests to be the Amazon who returns to America with Trevor. However, Queen Hippolyta, believing in an equitable system among women rather than playing favors, opens the opportunity to any capable woman who can complete her tasks of speed, strength, and agility. Diana’s superior skills serve as her “Supernatural Aid,” stage three of Campbell’s Departure sequence, and she is able to successfully “Cross the First Threshold,” otherwise known as stage four, where she emerges as the winner after three rounds of intense competitions (Indick 46). In order to transition to the Initiation and Return sequences of Campbell’s archetype, where Wonder Woman will continue to serve justice in both “Man’s World” and her own, Diana “giv[es] up her heritage, and her right to eternal life” (*Wonder Woman,* issue 196). As a result, Diana is no longer indestructible; she becomes more vulnerable and more human in order to protect the man she loves and uphold the virtues of freedom and self-actualization that she ardently supports. Just as Katniss volunteers for Prim and Beauty takes the place of her father, Princess Diana also places her own life in danger to protect those she loves. Although Diana has many abilities that make her superhuman, such as being, “swifter than Mercury and wise as Athena” (*Wonder Woman*, issue 301), it is her act of self-sacrifice that makes her heroic. In Marston’s eyes, “she wasn’t meant to be a superwoman; she was meant to be an everywoman” (Lepore 220).

In light of her relatability, Wonder Woman also functions as a hero under Lord Raglan’s definition, which states that the function of the hero is “to bring the community together, to bind them as one, to provide a common identification figure, thereby forging a communal identity” (Indick 41). During the 1970’s and 1980’s, the second major wave of feminism “advocated women’s full and equal participation in politics, work, and the arts, on the grounds that women were in every way equal to men” (Lepore 19). Also during this time, Wonder Woman’s image was strategically placed on the 1972 first regular issue of *Ms.* and the 1982 cover of *Spare Rib*, two feminist magazines that sought to end female stereotypes and push for reproductive rights, equal payrolls, and the removal of double standards. Because Wonder Woman “has force bound by love and, with her strength, represents what every woman should be and really is” (Edgar 52), she is a Raglan heroine that “forges a communal identity” of equality. Thus, similar to how Katniss’s image as the Mockingjay becomes a spark for the revolution within her dystopian world, Wonder Woman’s image is one that can be channeled to promote positive change within our own society. Furthermore, with Dorothy Woolfolk serving as the first female editor for DC Comics in 1973 (Edgar 55), the comic’s storylines began to reflect the ideas of the time. Wonder Woman makes it clear that she is an independent and fully competent woman, saying, “I don’t actually *need* to be protected by a big, strong, colonel!” (*Wonder Woman*, issue 306), and she does not tolerate sexualizing a woman’s body, indicated when she protests to her boss, “I won’t judge a contest treating women as if they were hens in a barnyard…When men realize there’s more to a woman than just her looks—just as there’s more to a book than its cover—then you’ll realize what you’re missing” (*Wonder Woman,* issue 205). However, although Wonder Woman allies herself on the side of justice and “captured the Amazonian spirit of strength and self-sufficiency,” she “usually saved her worst enemies and reformed their character” (Edgar 52). To Wonder Woman, heroism was not comprised of brute force that continued to alienate others from society, as women have so typically been deemed “other.” Rather, “evil destroys itself, unless Wonder Woman can bind it for constructive use” (Edgar52). Defeating enemies became teachable moments for Diana; she used each encounter with “evil, intolerance, destruction, injustice, suffering, and even sorrow, on behalf of democracy, freedom, justice, and equal rights for women” (Lepore 211). In “bringing the community together” as Indick’s definition requires, whether they be enemies, victims, or citizens, Wonder Woman’s immense love for others and devotion to justice render her a common identification figure and heroic princess for our modern society.

In all these versions of the “fairytale,” we can begin to observe how the disconnect between princesses, female agency, and heroism finally become addressed. In the comparison between *Cinderella* and *The Selection*, the princess witnesses a shift from objectivity to sovereignty over her own body and individuality. Through the parallels between *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Hunger Games*, constructs between masculinity and femininity become redressed to remove labels associated with the princess characterization. And finally, viewing princesses through *Wonder Woman* reveals that princesses are heroic in their own right, and, “it is precisely the fact that the heroines are not constrained by the culturally determined boundaries set for beauty—for women—that allows them the social and symbolic freedom to develop as individuals” (Worley 377). By revisiting the fairytale, princesses can live “happily ever after” in the way they wish to achieve that ending.

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