Preface

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PREFACE

At the center of a recent exhibition by French contemporary artist Jean-Michel Othoniel lies “My Bed” (2002-2003), a bed framed on the bottom by a mesh of aluminum circles of varying diameter which climb up one side to a wire canopy. Glass baubles of different sizes and colors are attached to this frame, glinting and reflecting shades of light in the room. Upon entering the exhibition hall, I was struck by how this ordinary bed had been propelled into the realm of the marvelous. Light filtered through the glass and a sense of suspension accentuate an empty mattress, fostering a sense of wonder and an almost magical luminosity which emphasizes the absence of a human figure. Othoniel’s mid-career retrospective, “My Way”, ran at the Centre Pompidou in Paris from 2 March-23 May 2011¹. Part of the exhibition was organized in the children’s hall around the theme of *Le réel merveilleux* (The Marvelous Real) and featured his “Le Petit Théâtre de Peau d’Ane” (2004) (The Little Theatre of Donkeyskin); tiny figurines inspired by Perrault’s tale, designed at an early age by French novelist Pierre Loti, are staged in settings of reflecting glass by Othoniel. The artist’s work with Murano glass explores the frontiers between the world of magical fantasy and reality. “My Bed” is enthralling in that its empty mattress tempts the reader to fill the space of the absent body. The fairy tale figure of Sleeping Beauty immediately comes to mind.

There are multiple variants of this tale, classified according to the Aarne-Thompson tale-types as category 410, but many readers are

1. Jean-Michel Othoniel’s retrospective is shown in Seoul until Nov. 27. before moving to Tokyo and New York. See Claudia Barbieri’s article in *The Global Edition of the New York Times*, October 14, 2011.

likely to refer back to *La Belle au bois dormant* by Charles Perrault or *Dornröschen* by the Grimm brothers to project upon Othoniel's space the figures of the story. Such projections are critically examined in this collection. Scholars from different academic realms and critical traditions have been brought together to re-investigate "Sleeping Beauty" as we know it, multiplying the lenses of investigation with the goal of defamiliarization. The interdisciplinarity privileged by Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère and Véronique Dasen has pushed the collection beyond the limits of folklore and literature, allowing the complex relationship between religious ritual, myth, and tale to govern the principles of the study. The nexus for reflection is the feminine figure, with a particular focus on the genealogy of the fairies of Beauty's christening, and the link to the concept of destiny and movement in and out of life and death. The feminine position is variously occupied throughout the volume by historical figures, mythical beings, divinities, fictional characters, fairies, and ordinary humans, allowing the sedimented culture around the tale gradually to come to light. Areas of research range from Mesopotamian figures related to birthing, Egyptian divinities, Greek Moirae, Roman Fates, the fairies of the more well-known work of Perrault and Grimm, to the disconcerting "Madam" figures in the brothels of Yasunari Kawabata's stories. The "Beauty" character is also revisited through the literature of the Middle Ages, Perrault, Grimm, to contemporary Disney representations, Angela Carter's postmodern *col-lage* figure of the Vampire/Sleeping Beauty, and Jane Yolen's self-conscious transmutations of "Briar Rose" into holocaust narrative. As one reads the collection, the changeable identities of female figures overlap, and even coalesce at moments, resulting in an uncanny effect of a kaleidoscopic palimpsest through which images and concepts emerge, converge, change shape and expand. We are invited to move in and out of the essays, navigating different traditions and times to piece together our own threads of investigation.

The project is ambitious in scope and content, and evidence of the rigor, time and energy devoted to the writing and editing process can be found in the quality of the articles. Researchers from numerous countries are represented, and international exchange is facilitated through the inclusion of articles in both English and French. Such international collaboration, in addition to the interdisciplinary nature of the collection, amplifies the reach of the research. Specialists can gain

access to other areas of expertise through the reading of individual articles. However, the full impact of this work of scholarship is ultimately achieved through the structure of the collection. It is through the juxtaposition and accumulation of information that the far-reaching potential of the volume becomes evident. Rather than repeating variations on the same theme, each article sets forth pieces of a multi-dimensional form. Recurrent elements undergo transmutations and echo each other in a scholarly and performative genealogy. The floating identity of the feminine figures underlying the tale are emphasized by numerous scholars in the collection, and this is mirrored in the intricate play with identity that develops among the articles. This is also true of the metafictional metaphor of the thread as related to speech, writing, destiny, through textual and oral filiation. There are indeed numerous conceptual strands that work through the collection, intertwining, often overlapping, and lending a sense of coherent questioning to the whole.

Much attention has also been paid to the temporal evolution of the fairy tale and its modes of filiation. *Des Fata aux fées: regards croisés de l'Antiquité à nos jours* emphasises the principle of exploring temporal boundaries and challenging fixed notions of a tale's identity. In *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, Donald Haase has called for scholars to take social and historical context into account when studying a version of a tale, and urges scholars towards more interdisciplinary approaches, "Because questions of gender in the fairy tale are also linked to the complex relation between the folktale and the literary fairy tale – between oral and print cultures – further cooperation among folklorists, anthropologists, and literary scholars is essential"². This collection responds to this call, setting forth research in a way that asks fairy tale scholars to practice historical vigilance and caution. The co-mingling of different disciplines and periods highlights the importance of context and historical relevance while also underlining a sense of continuity and repetition. The tension between these two effects remains unresolved, but productive; it heightens awareness of the tale's intricate development.

The importance of ambivalence and a movement away from binary concepts of good and evil associated with popular perceptions of fairy tales is also strikingly apparent throughout the volume. The "fairy" figures in their historical and cultural guises challenge such binaries,

2. D. Haase, "Feminist Fairy Tale Scholarship", p. 28.

and often wield complex forms of power through words and ritual that can determine life, death, or the destiny of various beings. Many contributors point to the ambivalence, and potential for opposition inherent to the tale. Images of rape, perversion, and violence are repeatedly associated with the “Beauty” figure – evidence of the many dark currents already wrapped through “Sleeping Beauty’s” composite existence. Recuperations of these currents are apparent in Sylvie Ravussin’s reading of Ana María Matute’s writing, in Elizabeth Wanning Harries’ emphasis on “Old Men and Comatose Virgins” and is particularly present in Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère and Géraldine Viret’s collaborative essay on Jane Yolen’s *Briar Rose*, where trauma studies meets fairy tale studies in an intriguing investigation of the tension between the urge to tell associated with the tale, and the problematic transmission of the “unspeakable” holocaust. Maria Tatar is mentioned in this article³ as underlining how fairy tales can capture the drama of historical events in a way that moves beyond the intellect. Kate Bernheimer also underlines the importance of *affect* in reference to Gilles Deleuze as being an essential element in the fairy-tale, that is a feeling or atmosphere proposed by the genre that can draw the reader in⁴. Angela Carter is well-known for harnessing the unsettling nature of this affect, as is evident in Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère’s article in this collection, and the volume as a whole suggests the multiple sites for such engagement in relation to the “Sleeping Beauty” tale. The marvelous often blends with socio-political issues in a way that yields complex, troubling results.

This brings me back to Othoniel’s work, also striking in its harnessing of the affect of the marvelous in the fairy tale. His work “Le Bateau de larmes” (The Boat of Tears) is composed of a small wooden boat adorned with strands of large, multi-colored glass beads, draped along the sides and arched above the boat. The boat was recovered from a beach in Miami, Florida, and had been abandoned by clandestine immigrants commonly known as “boat people”. The title, especially if one has knowledge of the boat’s origins, suggests a curious, disorienting tension with the marvelous, fairy-tale like atmosphere created by the ornamental, glinting glass. It is this type of ambivalence that is

3. M. Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, p. xxii.

4. K. Bernheimer, “Foreword”, p. 3.

underlined throughout this volume, attesting to the multi-faceted nature of “Sleeping Beauty’s” filiation and its many historical echoes. In an interview about his exhibition, Othoniel declares how “My Bed” is situated in the in-between space between the tomb and the bed, and invites the reader to penetrate the empty space, to jump in. Similarly, this volume moves beyond evidences to ask difficult questions, and like Othoniel’s bed, invites the reader in, to slowly re-work his/her own composite image of “Sleeping Beauty” and thus release the character from the sleep of historical fixity.

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