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Lili Sarnyai

**Figuring “Sleeping Beauty”: Metamorphosis of a Literary and Cultural Trope in  
European Fairy Tales and Medicine, c. 1350-1700**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



2016

Birkbeck, University of London

This is to certify that all the work presented in this thesis is my own.

## Abstract

This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to a recurrent cultural trope: the figure of the sleeping beauty. Sleeping beauties are young women—paradigms of femininity, paragons of virtue and physical perfection—who lose consciousness and become comatose and catatonic, for prolonged periods. In this unnatural state, these female bodies remain intact: materially incorrupt, aesthetically unblemished. Thus can the body of the sleeping beauty be defined as an enigma and a paradox: a nexus of competing and unanswered questions, uniquely worthy of investigation.

This thesis examines the metamorphoses of the figure of the sleeping beauty in literature and medicine between c.1350 and 1700 in order to interrogate the enduring aesthetic and epistemological fascination that she exercises in different contexts: her potency to entrance, her capacity to charm, in both literary and philosophical realms.

The widespread presence of the sleeping beauty in literature and art, as well as in the broader social sphere, over the centuries, indicates the figure's important and ongoing cultural role. Central to this role is the figure's dual nature and functionality. On the one hand, conceptualized as allegories, sleeping beauties act as receptacles for a complex matrix of patriarchal fears, desires and beliefs about the female body in general, and the virgin and maternal bodies in particular. On the other hand, understood as material or bodily entities, sleeping beauties make these same ideological questions incarnate.

Sleeping beauties are, therefore, *signs*, treated as *material bodies*, a tension which this thesis explores. As such, they are prime subjects for cross-disciplinary correlational study and historicist analysis: vehicles for comparison and dialogue between literature, medicine, and religion on the issues of power and passivity, sexuality and gender difference, mortality and beauty, nature and the unnatural or supernatural. Sleeping beauties negotiate the boundaries of human desire for, and capacity for belief in, miracles and wonders.

*Félinek, sok szeretettel*

Mortal

eternal in mortality, Rose,  
Names Dornröschen, Princess  
Of the Briar Rose [...]

You are the dreamer who dreams the world, and yet,  
Princess, the world dreams you. There is never  
A beginning. You create and are created,  
Legend forever [...]

Hajden Carruth, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1990)

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## Note on Texts and Conventions

All bibliographical citations are given in the footnotes, the exception being references to the texts that are the main subjects of each chapter; references to these are given in parentheses following the quotation in the main body of the thesis. Full details are given at the point of first citation. The epigraph and concluding quotation are from Hajden Carruth's novella-length poem, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1990). Translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own. I have quoted early modern and seventeenth-century literary and medical texts according to the spelling and punctuation of their original editions, without modernizing. Quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*, edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan ([1998] re-issued 2011).

By necessity, the summaries of the key primary texts, the three versions of the story of the "Sleeping Beauty," are redactions of the many variations, editions and translations available. Rather than being direct retellings of "L'histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine (Chapter I), "Sole, Luna e Talia" (Chapter II) and "La belle au bois dormant" (Chapter III), these summaries consolidate into compact and comprehensive wholes the stories that readers are most likely to think of when they think of the fairy tale in question.



## Introduction: Configuring Sleeping Beauty

### i. Seeking Sleeping Beauty: Project aims and scope

The aim of the project is to re-enflesh the body of the sleeping beauty through interdisciplinary research and critique. The focal point throughout is the female body, in its various incarnations: as literary metaphor, as aesthetic object, as cultural and material entity and, crucially, as medical and socio-historical subject. The female body is examined in the parallel contexts in which it appears: in literature—the fairy tales and romances of “The Sleeping Beauty”—and in medical history.<sup>1</sup>

Myriad versions of the story of “The Sleeping Beauty” exist, including works both canonical and non-canonical. Therefore, it is imperative, from the outset, to clarify the parameters of this tale type. Under the Aarne-Thompson-Uther system (formerly the Aarne-Thompson Folktale Types and Motif Index), “The Sleeping Beauty” is classed ATU type 410.<sup>2</sup> Narratives belonging to this category, including the three primary texts which this thesis discusses, contain certain identifying hallmarks:

A beautiful girl or young woman is the protagonist. A prophecy, a mention of her fate, or a warning about some future accident is given. This message is in some way fulfilled, and the heroine immediately and irreversibly loses consciousness, for reasons inexplicable within the realm of the story. Then ensues a period during which the heroine remains catatonic. In most instances this unnatural state is a manifestation of *apparent* lifelessness only. Nonetheless, sleeping beauty’s unconsciousness does, in some rare cases, signify the *actual* death of the maiden. Whether real or perceived, sleeping beauty’s lifelessness does not affect the materiality of her body or the perfection of her image; she remains asymptomatic, and her beauty, unblemished, throughout the time she sleeps—until one day, many years later, comes the awakening: the heroine’s revival and recovery. Other narrative elements present across

---

<sup>1</sup> I use “The Sleeping Beauty” and “Sleeping Beauty” tale/narrative/story interchangeably throughout this thesis to describe canonical texts classified as ATU type 410 (see below) and also to refer to non-canonical texts that could be listed in the same fairy-tale category. These (capitalized) terms should not be confused with my (lower-case) references to “sleeping beauty” or “sleeping beauties”. The latter two describe the titular heroines of the stories in question.

<sup>2</sup> “The Types of International Folktales,” in *The ATU Catalogue*. Edited by Hans-Jörg Uther. 2004. <https://jdcfairytale.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/atu.pdf>.

diverse variants of “The Sleeping Beauty” include magic and literal and/or implied enchantments; a father or father figure who, wishing to protect his lifeless daughter, hides and effectively imprisons her body inside a remote, hidden, and/or inaccessible room, tower or palace; the deliberate, decorative setting for and positioning of the body of the heroine: laid upon an ornate bed or couch, or seated upon a throne, in either case hidden from immediate view by a veil, canopy or curtain; the fortification of the sleeping beauty’s seclusion by means of physical obstacles around her room: a wall, moat, a forest; and lastly, the male rescuer: a knight, nobleman, prince or king destined to find, and determined to wake, the heroine.

Whilst the characteristics described above refer primarily to canonical variants of “Sleeping Beauty,” their presence both in non-canonical texts and in works of literature not recognised as belonging to the fairy- or folktale genre indicates the possibility of a broader definition for the tale type. The romance that is the subject of Chapter I, like the works of romantic drama mentioned in Chapter II, whilst not part of the fairy-tale canon, nonetheless bear all the recognisable signs, both structural and thematic, of the tale type in question.

Over and above the aforementioned characteristics, without one essential element “Sleeping Beauty” stories, both canonical and non-canonical, would lose their unique potency, their capacity,<sup>2</sup> to elicit wonder. Without narrative cultivation of iconodule belief, without, that is, textual evidence for the conviction that inanimate objects and inanimate human subjects (i.e. catatonic bodies, as in the bodies of the sleeping beauties) can come (back) to life, “Sleeping Beauty” stories would not be what they are. A belief in reanimation, in resurrection, runs through the texts with which this thesis is concerned, underscored at every turn by anxieties, questions and desires.



This thesis takes three significant versions of “The Sleeping Beauty” from the Western literary tradition as case studies through which the transformations of the figure of the sleeping beauty can be examined, and its changing depiction, role and literary/cultural significance analysed. Chapter I looks at the earliest identifiable “Sleeping Beauty narrative, “L’Histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” (“The story of Troylus and the beautiful Zellandine”), an episode found in the fourteenth-century prose romance *Le roman de Perceforest* (1330-1344). Chapter II considers “Sole, Luna e Talia” (“The Sun, Moon and Talia”), written by the Neapolitan courtier Giambattista Basile (1575-1623), and published posthumously in the story cycle

known as *Lo cunto de li cunti* (1634-36), or *Il Pentamerone*. Chapter III examines “La belle au bois dormant” (“The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood”) by Charles Perrault (1628-1703), which was first published in a literary magazine in Paris and later collected in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697).

Since the chapters follow a chronological order, they determine the project’s historical range: from the mid-fourteenth to the late-seventeenth century. Moreover, the language and country of origin of these three texts set the parameters for the project’s linguistic field and geographical range: medieval French, Italian (Neapolitan dialect), and modern French are the languages we deal with, alongside Latin (the language of much early medical and philosophical material) and English (i.e. translations), as we read from France, to Italy (the Kingdom of Naples) and back to France again.

Select non-canonical “Sleeping Beauty” texts are addressed briefly alongside these three core narratives listed. Most significant amongst these are Shakespeare’s late romances, particularly *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (written c. 1607-1608, published in quarto in 1609) and *The Winter’s Tale* (published in the First Folio, 1623) and, to a lesser extent, *Cymbeline* (written 1611, published in the First Folio, 1623). In all three we find the playwright putting the motif of the sleeping beauty to creative use, exploring the trope’s dramatic potency on a stage on which the body, the “corporeal fullness of presence,” as Michael Neill describes it, was emphasised.<sup>3</sup>

This project is unique both in terms of subject focus and methodology. Interweaving literary and socio-historical evidence, ‘Figuring “Sleeping Beauty”: Metamorphosis of a Literary and Cultural Trope in European Fairy Tales and Medicine, c. 1350-1700’ is a study which seeks to unravel and to en flesh the transformations of a specific trope. Sleeping beauties are young women who, through the force of fate or as the result of a curse, enchantment or accident, lose consciousness, and remain unconscious for an extended period of time. The nature and severity of their unconsciousness is not uniform, and varies from narrative to narrative. In some cases the unconscious state is coma, or deep sleep; in others it is understood as enchantment; in still others—a few, rare cases—the unconsciousness of the beautiful heroine is posited as her death.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Neill. *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics and Society in English Renaissance Drama*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. 181.



Sleeping beauties are complex, alluring and enigmatic: difficult to determine or define. The barrier to direct understanding is the female body itself. In the narratives which this thesis investigates, this body is subjected to injury, unconsciousness, paralysis and ravishment; worshipped and adored; impregnated; and ultimately, revived. The transformations of the figure of the sleeping beauty within each separate “Sleeping Beauty” story, as well as the figure’s metamorphoses across the centuries, inspire many questions: What is happening inside the unconscious bodies of these heroines as they lie sleeping or enchanted or dead on couches and beds, or sit upon lavish thrones? How is it that the passage of time leaves no mark upon these bodies? Why is it that even when the sleeping beauty is understood to be dead, there is no evidence whatsoever of bodily decay? And finally, how is it that from a lifeless or near-lifeless state, these unconscious beauties revive?

Sleeping beauties simultaneously invite and deflect the probing look, the inquisitive touch, the attempt to rationalise using epistemological reasoning. One way of getting closer, of probing deeper into the primary texts, is via close reading, a methodology I employ throughout to examine the selected stories both in the language in which they were written originally, and in English translations. But for a critical methodology aiming to open up the sleeping beauty, close reading alone is not sufficient. To really get under the skin of the sleeping beauty (so to speak), a broader and more complex critical approach is needed: a methodology that is cognisant of the material and cultural aspects and relevance of the texts in which sleeping beauty figures, and that recognises at the same time, above and beyond its literary symbolic significance, the material cultural significance of the body of the heroine.

For this female figure, which might otherwise seem nothing but an empty sign, a cipher, a symbol, is depicted and treated in every version of “The Sleeping Beauty” as a material form: a body made of flesh, a mortal entity. This materiality makes of the sleeping beauty an embodied medical subject: a body vulnerable to change, disease and pathology (to loss of consciousness, coma, catatonic states) yet nonetheless capable of healing (revival, awakening). This unmistakable corporeal presence of the female body in narratives of “The Sleeping Beauty” makes the omission of materiality in existent (literary) critical discourse on the subject all the more striking. Most scholars, discussing the portrayal and role of sleeping beauty figures in literary narrative, tend to narrow the mode and focus of enquiry to look mainly, indeed, sometimes, exclusively, at the text: at the words upon the page, and the metaphors and tropes contained therein. Such an approach is restrictive. It makes no allowance for the inherent complexity of the text as a written entity comprising both textual and extratextual elements.

Nor does it recognise the relationship between literary discourse and other, external forces and discourses shaping and colouring the narrative. As Mary Foskett underlines in *A Virgin Conceived*, the range of discourses and disciplines present in a text can be discovered only by adopting an interdisciplinary method of analysis.<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> Mary Foskett. *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002. 3.

## ii. Dissecting Sleeping Beauty: Analytical methodology

The present enquiry hinges on the twinned disciplines, or discourses, of literature and medicine. Within literature, my focus is on the figure of the sleeping beauty as it is depicted in the genre of fairy tale and romance. My interest in medicine is material historicist. In each chapter my focus is on a selection of time- and context-specific theories and practices pertaining to the female body: medieval medical theory and practice in Chapter I, early modern medicine in Chapter II, and late seventeenth-century medicine in Chapter III. Each medical grouping comprises ideas about anatomy and pathology and practices of disease prevention and cure: subjects essential to learning more about the unnatural state of the apparently lifeless heroine.

Integral to this medicalisation of the literary evidence is the introduction in the thesis of structuring and anchoring “nodal points” as unique cross disciplinary foci. These nodal points allow for clear, methodical research and analysis within an indisputably complex cross-disciplinary theoretical framework, and across a wide chronological and linguistic range. Within this framework it is possible to study and to question the material and mortal nature of the body of the sleeping beauty as it is evoked and contemplated in the selected works of literature on the one hand, and as it appears in the epistemological and material historicist context of the relevant (that is, contemporaneous) historical period. My correlative literary and medical investigation is enhanced throughout by looking further afield, to law, structural anthropology, psychology and psychoanalysis, feminism, and sexuality and gender studies.

The basis of my analytical method is structural.<sup>5</sup> The analytical method used is founded on a set of “nodal points,” a term that I developed to designate a specific set of structuring elements and moments present in *all* “Sleeping Beauty” narratives, i.e. present not only in the canonical fairy tale variants (Basile’s “Sole, Luna e Talia,” Perrault’s “La belle au bois dormant”), but also in non-canonical, neglected [unrecognized or hitherto unknown or undiscovered] variants (“L’Histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine”, Shakespeare’s late plays, known as his romances). The word “nodal” was chosen also because it captures and conveys both what I am trying to do, through interpretation, with each “Sleeping Beauty” narrative: get to the heart of the given “Sleeping Beauty” story, and figuratively delve into the

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<sup>5</sup> The influence of structuralism on my own methodology and theoretical framework will be discussed later in the Introduction.

sleeping beauty's body, too. "Nodal" furthermore conveys the nature of the elements and moments that I am studying in each version of the story. The "nodal points" identified are about, or have indirect or direct repercussions for, the body of the sleeping beauty.

Above all, nodes are relational. They are connecting strands, which designate and delineate the corporeal and medical focus of my study.<sup>6</sup> Nodal points provide the tools and the framework for accomplishing a revisionist reading. Below is an outline of the non-text-specific nodes commonly found across diverse "Sleeping Beauty" variants.<sup>7</sup>

### **General Nodal Points:**

1. *Prelude*. The heroine's fate is determined shortly after birth by a prophecy, curse or enchantment. At some indeterminate point in the future, something will happen that will endanger, suspend or shorten her (conscious) life.
2. *Disaster via puncture*. What was fated comes to pass. When her body is penetrated (and sometimes, a foreign object, usually a piece of flax, inserted) or pricked, the heroine loses consciousness suddenly, and collapses.
3. *Aftermath*. Immediate reactions to the heroine's sudden loss of consciousness and interpretation of the sudden collapse (as sleep or death). The consequent re-evaluation and redefinition of the female body. The handling and placement of the body of the unconscious heroine.
4. *Period of suspended animation*. The narrative continues as the beauty lies unconscious. The strange case of a girl who cannot be woken or revived becomes a legend: a story within a story.
5. *Rescue*. Arrival of male "rescuer". Veneration of the beautiful unconscious heroine, leading often to the viewer's drastic psychosomatic response, i.e. a response manifested in both physical and mental or cognitive symptoms.
6. *Penetration*. Violation of unresponsive female body; or, consensual intercourse.
7. *Female fecundity*. The heroine conceives and gives birth to a child/twins.
8. *Revival*. The heroine regains consciousness.
9. *Post-revival*. Once more fully conscious and now mature, the heroine leaves her father's domain with her "rescuer". Several obstacles and trials may need to be overcome. Marriage of the beauty and her "saviour".

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<sup>6</sup> See the Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of "nodal":  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/127562?redirectedFrom=nodal#eid>.

<sup>7</sup> Text-specific structural outlines of nodal points preface each of the three main chapters of this thesis. There, the nodes listed relate directly and particularly to the primary text in question, i.e. the version of "Sleeping Beauty" discussed in the chapter.

From the nodes listed above, the following moments, elements and instances all speak directly to the state of the body of the heroine: injury by a foreign body or object (the piece of flax), loss of consciousness, respiratory difficulties, unnatural sleep, coma, catatonic paralysis, penetration, consensual sexual intercourse or rape, pregnancy, birth, lactation, revival or awakening. These narrative nodes are the things that shape the figure of the sleeping beauty within the story, and determine its state and destiny. They reveal once again the centrality of the female body to the fairy-tale narrative. Corporeality is at the very core of these stories that seek to explain the constitutional material and mortal limitations of the body of the maiden, and to hypothesise about how, through miracle, through imagination, these limitations might be overcome.



### **iii. Reading Sleeping Beauty: Research approach and methodology**

Writing the thesis required that I employ systematic research methods. In addition to critical engagement via the close reading of primary texts in different languages (in addition to English: Latin, medieval and modern French, sixteenth-century Italian and its Neapolitan dialect), and translations of these texts, I carried out first-hand archival research, consulted subject-matter experts on topics related to my project and overall (interdisciplinary) field of enquiry, and conducted an extensive literature review for an overview of the current critical and theoretical landscape. The results of my close reading and critical analysis of the primary literature form the bulk of this thesis. These findings and the subsequent inferences and interpretations drawn made appear in the Critical Commentary section of each chapter.

The aim of archival research, which involved handling (and transcribing, translating) rare manuscripts and editions of primary works of literature, as well as handling material objects related to my subject, was to cultivate, on a haptic and visual basis, a more complex understanding of the relationship between text, material text and material/cultural history. This meant research trips to museums, archives and libraries in Florence and Paris, and archival research carried out in the Library of the Wellcome Collection in London, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, and Cambridge University Library's Rare Books and Manuscripts departments.

In order to expand my field of knowledge and at the same time develop a detailed understanding of relevant subject areas, I engaged in person with scholars working in areas as diverse as folk- and fairytale studies, comparative literary studies, philosophy and theory, medical history, and social and cultural history. This involved organizing face-to-face meetings, conducting research via email, and attending seminars, workshops and lectures. I am indebted to each and every one of these individuals, whose contributions are detailed in the Acknowledgements.

The interdisciplinary nature of this project necessitated a comparable, cross-disciplinary and multipronged critical approach. This meant developing a theoretical basis made up of an array of conceptual tools suitable for the purpose: to delve into, to open up, the complex subject of the body of the sleeping beauty. The ideas gleaned from this conceptual dissection, and conclusions drawn, are delineated over the course of the three main chapters, and summarised in the conclusion. Throughout I engage with diverse sources and discourses,

to nuance and to enhance my arguments. Most significant amongst these for critical study are the following: structuralist approaches to folk and fairy tales; the history and nature of the fairy-tale genre; body studies, or readings in corporeality; materiality, in the form of boundaries and bodies; and Freudian psychoanalysis (and psychoanalytic literary theory) and the notion of hysteria. Some of these I shall discuss at greater length in the chapters themselves, in relation to a specific version of “The Sleeping Beauty.” (There is, of course, a certain amount of overlap here, since the different “Sleeping Beauty” texts often demand the use of similar analytical tools and theoretical models, or the use of variations of the same tool or model employed elsewhere.)



*Strict analysis: Structuralist approaches to folk and fairy tales*

Structuralist approaches to the classification and interpretation of folk and fairy tales as propagated by the Aarne-Thompson system, and later revised under the Aarne-Thompson Uther system, provided a useful model for establishing a clear framework for my own research and for the analysis of my research findings: for interrogating the construction of the fairy tale narratives, the three primary literary texts, and for the consequent interpretation of the deconstructed structure. It was on this basis that I chose to divide each narrative into its structural elements—the “nodal points” described above. A structuralist critical approach enabled me in this way to identify more easily the similarities and differences between the texts, to pinpoint exactly the points at which the different tales correlate or diverge. This was essential to later hypothesizing the history of the transmission of the “Sleeping Beauty” narrative; focusing on which elements, which nodal points, remained, which were altered, which emphasised, and which omitted altogether made it easier to see the extent to which the basic story changed—over time, through revision, through translation.

I am thinking in particular about the original Aarne-Thompson classification systems.<sup>8</sup> These are two indexes used by folklorists to classify and analyse folk and fairy tales and as such, are essential tools. D. L. Ashliman states that "The Aarne–Thompson system catalogues

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<sup>8</sup> Antti Aarne. *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters: Helsinki, 1961.

some 2500 basic plots from which, for countless generations, European and Near Eastern storytellers have built their tales".<sup>9</sup> The indexes comprise the Aarne–Thompson Motif-Index (catalogued by alphabetical letters followed by numerals) and the Aarne–Thompson Tale Type Index (catalogued by AT or AaTh numbers).<sup>10</sup> The Aarne–Thompson Tale Type Index divides folk (and fairy) tales into sections, with an "AT" number accorded each entry; adding a letter to this number identifies subtypes within a tale type. The Aarne-Thompson Motif-Index is used to divide and organize hundreds if not thousands of motifs into a system similar to the one described above. Entries in the AT Motif-Index are organized by topic and placed under umbrella headings first, and then subdivided into smaller and more specific thematic categories.



*Finding fairy tales: Development and definition of a genre*

Structuralism was a useful model for developing a framework for my own clear, categorical narrative analysis of “The Sleeping Beauty,” a specific fairy tale (and, following the ATU index, tale type). In terms of accumulating the requisite knowledge and understanding of the literary fairy tale as a genre—about its development, scope and ever-changing, constantly-challenged definition—and about the place of “The Sleeping Beauty” within and in some cases, outside of, the canon, the work of both European and American scholars had a profound influence. The early works of the Swiss writer and critic Max Lüthi, specifically *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, 1976 and ten years later, in 1986, *The European Folktale: form and nature* (and to a lesser extent, the Austrian-born child

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<sup>9</sup> D.L. Ashliman. *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language: Based on the Aarne–Thompson Classification System*. New York, Greenwood Press: 1987. Hans-Jörg Uther webpage, “The Third Revision of the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index” (FFC 184) is also an invaluable resource: [http://www.folklorefellows.fi/?page\\_id=915](http://www.folklorefellows.fi/?page_id=915).

<sup>10</sup> See Hans-Jörg Uther. *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography. Based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. FF Communications no. 284–286. Three vols. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2004. The system was expanded in 2004 by Hans-Jörg Uther, becoming the Aarne–Thompson–Uther classification system (catalogued by ATU numbers). Stith Thompson, an American folklorist, translated Aarne's motif-based classification system in 1928 and enlarged its range. In 1961, Thompson produced a second revision to Aarne's original catalogue, this time initiating the AT-number system, sometimes referred to as AaTh system; this is the one most commonly used today, in its revised and updated ATU number form. Stith Thompson. *The Folktale*. [1928] Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.



psychologist and writer, Bruno Bettelheim, most markedly, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, (1976) informed my initial thinking about the genre. With regards to the relevance of these studies particularly to the subject of this project—the tale of “The Sleeping Beauty” and the body of its titular heroine—there are things to be taken from both, and in both, also, other ideas to be contested. Whilst I agree with Lüthi’s description of the tale in question as “more than an imaginatively stylized love story portraying the withdrawal of the girl and the breaking of the spell through the young lover,” I contest strongly, throughout this thesis, the definition he offers as an alternative: sleeping beauty as “an image for the human spirit,” and the story as portrayal of “the endowment, peril, paralysis, and redemption not of just one girl, but of all mankind.”<sup>11</sup>

The contributions of literary scholars engaging with fairy tales from socio-historicist and cultural materialist points of view enriched in many ways my basic understanding, and complicated my own approach to fairy tales in useful—indeed, essential—ways. Jack Zipes in *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, (1979) and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1985), and a few years later, Maria Tatar in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1987), were amongst the first to contextualise fairy tales historically. These early studies demonstrated that the fairy tale, in contrast to prevailing notions of its being a genre divorced from the everyday, from the trials and tribulations of life as experienced by writers and readers, was in fact inextricable from social reality and all that this reality entails.

Whilst Tatar’s specific and targeted study remains fundamental in complicating thinking about the literary contributions of the Grimm brothers, for my own work, focused as it is on the romantic (Italianate/Francophone) strain within the fairy tale tradition, Zipes’ broader studies proved of greater relevance. Marina Warner’s cultural histories of fairy tales, in particular *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994), and *Wonder Tales: Six French Stories of Enchantment* (2004), which she edited, further elucidated my understanding of the evolution of the literary fairy tale from oral sources, and alerted my attention at the same time to the survival of the oral within the written form. This coexistence of old and new, spoken and literary, was particularly evident in stories written by women

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<sup>11</sup> Max Lüthi. *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*. Transl. by Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald with additions by the author. With an introduction and reference notes by Francis Lee Utley. Bloomington, IN and London: Indiana University Press, 1976. Chapter 1, “Sleeping Beauty: The Meaning and Form of Fairy Tales,” 24.

writers in France in the late-seventeenth and very early eighteenth-century, an issue to be discussed at length in Chapter III, in relation to Parisian salon culture and the *contes* of Charles Perrault. In the milieu of the Parisians salons, it was imperative that the literary fairy tale prove acceptable (morally, stylistically) and appeal to those who frequented these cultured establishments. Moreover, if the *conte de fée* was to establish its claim as a new genre, a genre with unique valence and with the capacity to last over time and through changing tastes and fashions, it was essential that it appeal also to the French aristocracy and to the royals—that is, to courtly mores and manners. It was partly as a result of this need to fit in, to be accepted and acknowledged by those who mattered, by those who dictated the prevailing literary mode, that the fairy tale came to be “institutionalized” in fin-de-siècle France, quickly becoming part of the fabric of polite, cultured society.<sup>12</sup>

Zipes finds a reflection of this mannering and stylisation of the genre in the mannering and stylistic modulation of specific fairy tales, particularly in the stories’ depiction of women. Pointing to the *contes* of Perrault, Zipes identifies the writer’s universal “elevation” of the heroine, and argues that this is evidence for Perrault having a “distinctly limited view of women.”<sup>13</sup> But does the elevation and polishing of fairy tale princesses really indicate their limitation by the author? Does a presentation of “the composite female,” a young woman who is “beautiful, polite, graceful, industrious, properly groomed, and knows how to control herself at all times” (Zipes’ list of the principal attributes of Perrault’s “model female”) warrant an accusation of suppression of power and opportunity within the narrative? Certainly, Perrault’s princesses do possess these (largely aesthetic, culturally-conditioned) values; but this does not necessarily make them any weaker, nor does it imply a misogynistic authorial undertone.

Take “La belle au bois dormant,” Perrault’s version of “The Sleeping Beauty”. Perrault’s princess is no less active than the other two sleeping beauties considered in this thesis: the medieval maiden Zellandine, and Basile’s Talia. Indeed, in some ways the French dormant beauty could be said to be more active and have greater control: both self-control, and also control of the given situation. After all, of the three beauties she is the only one to regain consciousness prior to becoming more intimate with the prince; she alone is in a position, therefore, to give or to withhold her sexual consent. Perrault’s heroine may be “passive” but

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<sup>12</sup> Why the literary fairy tale evolved in France as opposed to elsewhere will be discussed at greater length in Chapter III. The culmination of the French institutionalization of the fairy tale was the publication in the eighteenth-century of Charles Mayer’s forty-one-volume *Le Cabinet des Fées* (1785-1789), in which the most important French fairy tales written during the past century were included.

<sup>13</sup> Zipes (1983), 24.

that is an effect of the hundred-year enchantment; in no other sense does she demonstrate “docility” or “self-abandonment”. If anything, she is a victim of circumstance—and this does not make her any less of a thinking, acting subject, but rather (if the tale is taken to reflect society in fin-de-siècle France) indicates Perrault’s awareness of the situation of women at the time: the gender-based limitations imposed upon them, and the ways in which they sought to overcome them.

Perrault’s heroine, like the other strangely-sleeping beauties who form the subject matter of this thesis, do not willingly or (being unconscious) wittingly, “show reserve and patience...until the right man comes along to recognize her virtues and marry her.” Nor do sleeping beauties live “only through the male and only for marriage,” as Zipes suggests. As the next three chapters will try to demonstrate, the narratives are far too complex to be reduced to the (misleading) summation of a hero who “acts” and a heroine who “waits,” patiently, allowed only to reveal the extent of her submission.<sup>14</sup> The supposed submission of sleeping beauties is surely something to be questioned; the apparent docility and patience of these figures are part and product of much larger and stronger forces than the power of a mere mortal male agent. Lest we forget: it was only after Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, working within a moral tradition “in keeping with the Protestant ethic and a patriarchal notion of sex roles,” decided to revise and elaborate their version of “The Sleeping Beauty”, that the heroine awoke with a kiss from the prince.<sup>15</sup>

Revision is the hallmark of the development of the fairy tale genre. Its history reaching back as far as the fifteenth century, with the transformation of the *Zaubermärchen*, the “magic” or “wonder” (oral) tale, into the literary fairy tale, the *conte de fée* or *Kunstmärchen* (“art tale”), is marked at every point by alteration and modification of existent narrative models.<sup>16</sup> The distinguishing feature of a wonder tale is the happy ending, the triumph over adversity and death, with its connotations of utopian belief—in short, “the sense of wonder,” which causes astonishment and makes space for (renewed) conviction in the power of the marvellous and the supernatural. The literary fairy tale, evolving as it did from the wonder tale as the latter was

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<sup>14</sup> Zipes (1983), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Zipes. *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 75.

<sup>16</sup> The German term is meant to evoke the “utopian impulse for a better future” that is at the heart of many of these oral stories, an impulse most often propagated by an artist or creative protagonist. See Zipes (1999), esp. 30-34.

beginning to be written down, maintains this sense of wonder. Indeed, it could be argued that the very definition of either type of story

depends on the manner in which a narrator/author arranges known functions of a tale aesthetically and ideologically to induce wonder and then transmits the tale as a whole according to customary usage of a society in a given historical period.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, as the tales were written down and transformed from oral to literary form, they cultivated a unique set of features: certain narrative conventions and constraints, motifs, characters, and plots that would come to identify the fairytale genre. For the most part these were taken from the oral wonder tales from which these new written stories had developed, except that often the material was revised and polished so as to suit the tastes of the new reading public, comprised of the educated middle class and the aristocracy.

With this institutionalization of the new literary form, one might expect its precursor, the oral tale, to disappear; yet this is not the case. Indeed, the oral tradition prevailed, with the stories that had been told and retold through many centuries continuing to exert some influence, as sources of inspiration for the writers engaged in the composition of the written *contes*. Indeed, it could be argued that the literary fairy tale in this way fed back into and re-invigorated the oral tradition by providing narrative material which then appeared in early chapbooks, the so-called *Bibliothèque Bleue*, peddled by itinerant colporteurs in villages all over France, which included many shortened or truncated versions of the literary stories.<sup>18</sup>

There were, however, important differences between the new, literary fairy tale and its oral predecessor, differences which meant that the former served to institute or in some cases reinforce existent social and class divisions. Amongst these, the most obvious difference is the mode of consumption: how the audience encountered a given narrative. Whilst oral tales had been recited, and could be heard therefore by anyone, regardless of age, gender, literary or socio-economic standing, the *contes* were in a sense less democratic. These stories were written down, written to be read, and read usually in private, thereby determining from the outset the composition of the audience. Most early consumers of literary fairy tales belonged to the educated, literate elite.<sup>19</sup> This is not to suggest that, appealing to an audience of higher social

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<sup>17</sup> Zipes (1999), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Zipes (1994), 12.

<sup>19</sup> Zipes (1994), 13.

standing, the literary fairy tale was immune from censorship, from policing by the governing authorities involved in the very same civilizing process from which the genre had developed.

Lewis Seifert's innovative contribution to fairy-tale studies has shown the important ways in which issues thus far neglected by critics, issues of (male) sexuality and gender, helped shape this civilizing process. In *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France* (2009), Seifert proposes a revisionist interpretation of patriarchy. In contrast to the stable image painted by traditional patriarchal ideologies and by studies of these ideologies, Seifert contends that sexuality—his specific interest within this area is masculinity—is “always potentially at risk of being destabilized precisely because it occupies the dominant position within the sex/gender system.”<sup>20</sup> Seifert's critical project goes beyond emphasizing the category of gender in the discourse of the civilizing process, striving to highlight the persistence of struggle and aggression within the discourse itself. “The discourse of civility,” he writes, “required aggression in the form of the oscillating tension between dominant and dominated positions....To aspire to the recognition accorded polite refinement is to overcome the risk of social debasement...”<sup>21</sup>

However, especially since it allowed for many new and diverse possibilities of social subversion through the medium of the written word, the (printed) fairy tale was viewed with great suspicion.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, given the propagation of elitism on the basis of narrative form, the fairy tale could still be described as akin to “socially symbolic acts and narrative strategies formed to take part in civilized discourses about morality and behaviour in particular societies and cultures.”<sup>23</sup> It is on this basis that Zipes describes the stories:

constantly rearranged and transformed to suit changes in tastes and values...they assume mythic proportions when they are frozen in an ideological constellation that makes it seem that there are universal absolutes that are divine and should not be changed.<sup>24</sup>

At this point a word about the extensive contributions of Jack Zipes to the field of fairytale and folktale studies would not go amiss. Spanning several decades, Zipes' work

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis C. Seifert. *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Seifert (2009), 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Zipes (1999), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Zipes (1994), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Zipes (1994), 19.

renders him what might be described as a touchstone for other scholars. This is despite—or perhaps, because of—the fact that he does not subscribe to any single methodology or any one theoretical approach. As a critic, Zipes has undergone almost as many evolutions during his career as the tales that form the core subject of his interpretations: materialist (or Marxist), cultural historian, psychoanalyst, and even, recently, evolutionary biologist.

In *Breaking the Magic Spell*, Zipes' earliest substantial work of socio-historical literary criticism on the subject of the fairy tale, he states his primary concern with “the reception and interpretation of the tales as part of our Western literary heritage.” He calls attention to the importance of folk and fairy tales as integral components in the shaping of social beliefs and attitudes.<sup>25</sup> Drawing deeply on his expertise in Germanic studies, Zipes argues for the necessity of dispelling “false notions” pertaining to the origins and the creation of the tales and for the importance, instead, of understanding what lies behind, or beneath, the tales' outer veneer and allure: the importance of understanding “the socio-psychological” dynamics. Only through such understanding is it possible to question and to show the dangers of what Zipes describes as “the instrumentalization of fantasy that threatens to void the liberating magic of all serious tales.” It goes without saying that there is magic inherent in the stories. What matters is what the reader does with this magic, a magic that is not “ethereal hocus pocus” but rather the real and liberating “symbolic potential” of folk and fairy tales to create better worlds, “utopias,” to use the phrase which Zipes borrows from Ernest Bloch, in the present.<sup>26</sup> Zipes maintains that the only way to do this is to cultivate a mode of criticism that is “more radical”. He goes on to explain that this means

breaking the spell of commodity production and conventional notions of literature so that we can discover our individual and communal potential for infusing our everyday reality with the utopias we glean from the tales.<sup>27</sup>

This notion of “everyday reality” is integral to Zipes' drive to situate folk and fairy tales within a socio-economic context, and through this contextualization to better understand the mediation that occurs between the author and his or her audience. This is important, for it is through this mediation that the images, forms and motifs of the stories can be standardized,

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<sup>25</sup> Jack Zipes. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. London: Heinemann, 1979. x.

<sup>26</sup> Zipes (1979), xi.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 8.

a standardization that is prerequisite to the tales' cultural appropriation. Once embedded in culture, part of the fabric of the collective imagination, folk and fairy tales, Zipes maintains, have the potential to question and to change the limitations imposed within a conservative society through "arbitrary socio-political repression". This is not to suggest that fairy tales, divorced from social reality and hardship, present unequivocally happy endings; instead, it is to recognise their power to express the urgent need for "greater justice and more rational alternatives."<sup>28</sup> It is in this sense that folk narratives and fairy tales, particularly those, including "The Sleeping Beauty," understood as 'classic or 'canonical,' can be seen as sources "for cultural and socio-historical information about cultural change and evolution."<sup>29</sup>

In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1983), a broad socio-literary history of fairy tales, Zipes traces the development of the genre from the oral to the written, and reiterates its culturally radical, "subversive" potential. In this later work, Zipes emphasises the importance of culture as a theme by having his title echo that of Norbert Elias, the German sociologist, whose *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* was first published in English in 1969 as *The Civilizing Process*, or *On the Process of Civilisation*. In this 1983 volume Zipes distinguishes between the earlier oral tales and their later literary versions on the basis of the narratives' appeal and audience. The former, he contends, both "portrayed children" and also "appealed to them as a possibly distinct audience."<sup>30</sup> Jacqueline Rose a year later identified a similar appeal in her thorough case-study of fantasy for young readers, *Peter Pan, The Case of Peter Pan; or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984). Rose cites fairy tales as one of "the supreme tools" through which the child can discover not only the world, but also its own self and mind, on the basis of the stories' "insistence of the concrete reality of what they describe."<sup>31</sup> More recently, and along the same lines as Rose, Maria Tatar argued that fairy tales facilitate reflection and psychic self-development, that they have a capacity to help "to construct our desires, cope with our anxieties, and understand how those desires and anxieties are profoundly enmeshed with each other." Unlike Rose, who reserves this function of the fairy tale for children, Tatar extends

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Lutz Röhrich. Introduction to *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*. Ed. by Ruth B. Bottigheimer. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Jack Zipes. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion. The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. New York: Routledge, 1983. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Jacqueline Rose. *The Case of Peter Pan; or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. London and Basingstoke, 1984. As the title suggests, Rose nonetheless concludes that it is categorically impossible to identify a unique genre of "children's fiction" because the narratives were written by adults who, to some degree tainted by experience, no longer possess a child's innocence, nor their view of the world.

it to include older and mature readers, so that her “us” describes both adults (who read the stories) and children (who have the stories read to them).<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, fairy tales affect most powerfully the imagination; but they also play a part in constructing consciousness. This was partly what Zipes was arguing in *Fairy Tales as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale* (1994), a work in which he considered how and why the genre came to be embedded so deeply within the collective consciousness of Western civilization. His argument hinges on the statement that “[T]he fairy tale is myth.” This is not to say that myth and fairy tale are synonymous as genres, but to argue instead that the so-called “classical fairy tale,” over the centuries, “has undergone a process of mythicization.” It is within this “mythic” framework that my study of “Sleeping Beauty” begins. What I mean by this is that not only has the tale itself assumed mythic proportions, evidenced through the centuries by its prevalence and its variability, its many versions (of which three are analysed in detail in this thesis), but also that its heroine, the sleeping beauty, has been transformed into something like a myth. She has become a mythic archetype, a symbol. What I wish to emphasise from the outset that this mythic outer layer is precisely what as critics and readers we must strip away, if we are to discover the material reality, the body of the tale and the body of the sleeping beauty. Yet equally, we must not ignore Zipes’ warning about the processes of mythicization prerequisite to any fairy tale becoming part of collective consciousness, becoming, “natural and eternal”.<sup>33</sup> As he writes:

the fairy tale as genre sets parameters for a discourse of the mores, values, gender, and power in the civilizing process...[and] the parameters and individual tales are frozen or become standardized, only to be subverted in a process of duplication and revision.<sup>34</sup>

The essence of Zipes’ thesis is that fairy tales were both integral to, and shaped by, the civilizing process. It is the particular role of “The Sleeping Beauty” in this civilizing process, and the ways in which this specific narrative was simultaneously contoured, that I investigate in this thesis, through studied attention to the body of the sleeping beauty: its familiar yet ever-changing depiction, implication and significance.

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Tatar. *Secrets beyond the Door: The Story of Bluebeard and his Wives*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Jack Zipes. *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale*. Louisville, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994. Introduction. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Zipes (1994), 8.





*Towards a definition of the body: Incarnations and corporeal variations*

Across areas as diverse as philosophy, sociology, cultural history, gender studies and literary criticism, “the body” has undergone countless theoretical incarnations, as Andrew Bennett points out about the inherent difficulties of undertaking “Body Studies”.<sup>35</sup> Susie Orbach argues the complexity of the body, an entity “made both in a literal physical sense and in a feeling sense.”<sup>36</sup> A contested site, the body is “notoriously difficult to theorize or pin down,” the editors of the new *Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature* remind us, because it is not a stable entity. The body is “mutable, in perceptual flux, different from day to day and resistant to conceptual definition.”<sup>37</sup>

There is also the complication of the extent to which our bodies belong to, or are natural to us, in relation to the extent to which they are shaped by and are therefore properties of, external forces. This is the issue with which Miri Rubin and Sarah Kay grapple with such eloquence in their introduction to *Framing Medieval Bodies* (1994), a key work in which the stated aim is both “to elucidate historically-specific conceptualisations of the body” and also, through reliance on a modern theoretical framework, “to develop in different ways an embodied understanding of subjects who receive through their bodies, and are accountable through their bodies.”<sup>38</sup> Kay and Rubin state that bodies are “native to us, and we innate to them;” yet this does not make the body more “natural,” by any means, for the body is always in some way “distanced... from ‘nature’ by a multiplicity of psychic, sexual, social and political codes.” This coding, a systematic process, means that bodies become both products and sites

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew Bennett, “Language and the Body” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*. Ed. by David Hillman and Ulrika Maude. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 73-86, 73. Bennett contrasts this critical focus on language and corporeality with another kind of “hard problem” that arises in philosophy: the question of consciousness, and how consciousness might be used to describe “the intractable difficulty involved in figuring out how sensory perception produces the experience or feeling – the ‘qualia’ – aroused by those sensations, how physical objects and processes lead to what appears to be the immaterial but undeniable phenomenon of consciousness.” NB: This volume of collected essays proved an invaluable resource, specifically Bill Burgwinkle’s chapter on “Medieval Somatics” (10-23) and David Hillman’s, “Staging Early Modern Embodiment” (41-57).

<sup>36</sup> Susie Orbach. *Bodies*. London: Profile Books, 2009. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Hillman and Maude, eds. (2015) Introduction, 1-9. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah and Miri Rubin, eds. *Framing Medieval Bodies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994. 7.

of experience.<sup>39</sup> Given this semiotic mutability of the body, the fact that the body can be conceptualised in such a plastic and malleable manner, it is imperative to theorize corporeality through not one, but many frames.

Whilst medical, religious, political and socio-economic authorities have for long tried to construct bodies in particular ways, according to their specific vested interests, literary texts have offered and continue to offer an alternative. During the 1970s, poststructuralists, headed by Michel Foucault, sought to posit the body at the centre of discussions of the creation and control of knowledge and desire and power. The poststructuralist body, thus discursively described and organized, itself became “a product of institutionalized knowledge and control.”<sup>40</sup> The post-Lacanian psychoanalytic feminism of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray refined Foucauldian notions of sexuality and focused rather on the question of gender, emphasizing in particular how gender could be produced through discourse, and the impact of this production upon conceptions of the body as a whole. Broadening the critical lens and taking a wider view, cultural materialists including Jean Baudrillard theorized the body as an entity constructed by and responsive to ever-changing cultural attitudes and norms. Phenomenological approaches, which developed out of the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1907-1961) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), refocused on the body as individual entity and in their work, “privileged first-person experience and foreground the body’s sensuous capacity.”<sup>41</sup>

In Part I of *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty conceptualises the body as “a mode of objective space,” which “inhabits space and time” (as opposed to being in space or time).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, for Merleau-Ponty, the body, by nature “implicit and vague,” is never what it seems but instead, “always something other than what it is”.<sup>43</sup> This bodily indeterminacy is a reflection, or translation, of “the ambiguity of being-in-the-world,” which in turn is understood through time. It is on this basis that a relationship between psyche and physiology, between the soul/spirit and the body understood as physical entity, might be

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<sup>39</sup> Kay and Rubin, eds. (1994), Introduction. 1-9, 1.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, (2015), Introduction, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Hillman and Maude, eds. (2015), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception* [Originally published in the French as *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 1945]. Transl. by Colin Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Part I: The Body. 161.

<sup>43</sup> Merleau-Ponty [1954], (2002), 230.

conceived.<sup>44</sup> Significant here is the notion that Cartesian dualism is no longer sufficient for describing the relationship between the body and the soul. Instead:

The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually exclusive external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence.<sup>45</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's work has influenced my thinking also in terms of its engagement with the question of perception. In Part II, "The World as Perceived," he distinguishes between sensory experience and "natural perception." The former is unstable and utterly "alien" to the latter, and achievable only "with our whole body all at once."<sup>46</sup> Thinking further about this sensuous, or sensory, capacity of the body (a corporeal entity), is integral to any consideration of the human body, given that the senses are, as Steven Connor reminds us, a form "mediation" between the inner life of the body and the outside world.<sup>47</sup> Sense studies are especially relevant to an investigation such as the one undertaken in this thesis, since its subject—the sleeping beauty—is remarkable precisely because her body does not appear to have this capacity. In other words, because what makes the sleeping beauty's body so remarkable has a lot to do with its state of unconsciousness, its lack of response, even, perhaps, its resistance, to external sensory stimulation (through aural and tactile means), it is essential to think about the senses and what it means for these senses to be incapacitated, or absent.

Besides the mortality and materiality of the bodies of the sleeping beauties, the ways in which they become immortal, or imply the capacity to transcend materiality, are also important. Given how the bodies of all sleeping beauties remain incorrupt even after (supposed) "death," and that the heroine of each and every version does in fact wake up, or revive, in the end (even those, like Basile's Talia, thought to have been dead), reading into the philosophical and religious ideas around miracles and wonders is important.

C.S. Lewis, in his 1947 study of miracles, argued that "[E]very event which might claim to be a miracle is, in the last resort, something presented to our senses, something seen,

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 262.

<sup>47</sup> "The senses are both a way of ordering the experience of the world, splitting it into visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile channels, and themselves subject to ordering." Steven Connor, "Literature, Technology and the Senses" in Hillman and Maude, eds. (2015). 177-196, 179-80.

heard, touched, smelled or tasted.”<sup>48</sup> Given Lewis’s conviction that our senses are infallible, he concluded that a miracle is not something which ruptures the natural order of things, or “suspend[s] the pattern to which events conform,” but is instead an event which is inserted into this existent pattern in a new and unexpected fashion. Indeed, Lewis goes on to claim that a need for logic and rationality and a belief in the consistence and systematic organization of reality, of the world around us, does not in itself preclude or exclude the possibility of miraculous occurrences. Miracles, he concludes must “interrupt the usual course of Nature,” but in so doing, if they are “real” miracles, they must at the same time reveal, or to use his term “assert,” the cohesion of the whole: “the unity and self-consistency of total reality”.<sup>49</sup> A distinction should be made here between miracles and apparitions. An apparition, distinct from an imaginary vision, was for many thinkers, including Thomas Aquinas, something readily apprehensible by and visible to the actual eye: perceptible by “the eyes of the flesh”.<sup>50</sup> But apparitions, like many religious, magical and supernatural occurrences depend to an extent on conviction and belief: on the credence of the seer. As such, they are “mechanisms by which imagined powers...can be introduced” into the natural world and order of things, and there “make their presence perceptible to the living.”<sup>51</sup>

Whilst the story of “The Sleeping Beauty” in its various forms belongs to the realm of fiction, the female figure it depicts not only stands for but in many ways also is, or can be interpreted as being influenced by and related to, the bodies of real women. The key to unlocking the secrets of this most enthralling and perplexing of bodies lies, it seems, somewhere in-between fact and fiction, historiography and romance, inside a matrix of disparate discourses: literary, medical, magical and religious. Intersecting these different voices and ideologies and systems of belief is a belief in the marvellous. Within the dominant Western European philosophical tradition, marvels and wonders have for many centuries been understood as phenomena without perceptible origin or cause.<sup>52</sup> Such a definition meant that often what was described as “marvellous” or “wondrous” was at the same time understood as being in some way preternatural, supernatural or occult; distinctions between these categories

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<sup>48</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles. A Preliminary Study*. London: Harper Collins, 1947. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis (1947), 61.

<sup>50</sup> Marina Warner. *Alone of all Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* [1976]. Republished, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 300.

<sup>51</sup> Robert A. Scott. *Miracle Cures. Saints, Pilgrimages, and the Healing Powers of Belief*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2010. 66.

<sup>52</sup> Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*. [1985] Transl. by Matthew Adamson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988. 5.

were fluid.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, marvels and wonders were analysed neither in empirical terms, nor within the purview of medical science, which, being built upon rational thought and evidence-based thinking, faltered when faced with something (like an insentient yet still living woman) seemingly outside of nature and beyond reason.

During the Middle Ages, miracles were often seen as facts, or events, as Benedicta Ward explains, noting how in the Bible, the ultimate literary source for miracles, the word used was *signa*, rather than *miracula*: not “wonder,” but “meaning”.<sup>54</sup> In a much more recent study, which he describes as “a non-causal account of miracles,” David Corner maintains that for something to be deemed a “miracle” it must have the capacity to evoke wonder, on the basis of the etymological origin of the term: “miracle,” from the Latin *miraculum*, derived from the verb *mirari*, “to wonder”.<sup>55</sup>

The story of “Sleeping Beauty,” the beautiful yet apparently lifeless female figure whose body is the subject of this thesis, has this in common with the life histories of saints: both are “open-ended” and resistant to “logically-fixed boundaries”. Sleeping beauty, like the saint, “inhabits” (indeed, is imprisoned by) her “mortality”—her mortal body—and at the same time “presses against its limits. In this way, in “Sleeping Beauty” narratives, we find “the transcendent rooted in the local”—or to put it another way, the miraculous (“the stuff of myth, fairy tale, archetype and symbol,” as the authors of the volume cited above describe it) anchored by, and thereby inextricably linked to, the rational, physical world.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, just as female hagiographies have been “imaginatively, creatively claimed over and over again” over the centuries, the narrative of “The Sleeping Beauty” has been appropriated, varied and transliterated in accordance with the literary and aesthetic intentions and aims, and the social and cultural dictates and requirements, of the given historical moments.<sup>57</sup> To make one final point of comparison between sleeping beauties and virgin saints: the former, mortal women with the capacity to evoke an immortal wonder; and

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<sup>53</sup> For instance, “occult” could mean “unknown causes of phenomena inexplicable in terms of Aristotelian physics, but recognized as natural and...regularly occurring,” or it could be used in reference to clearly “preternatural marvels.” 8.

<sup>54</sup> Benedicta Ward, “Miracles in the Middle Ages” in George P. Marsh. *Medieval and Modern Saints and Miracles*. New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1970. 149-165. 162.

<sup>55</sup> David Corner. *The Philosophy of Miracles*. London: Continuum, 2007. 78.

<sup>56</sup> Sara Maitland and Wendy Mulford. *Virtuous Magic. Women Saints and Their Meanings*. London: Mowbray, 1998. 366.

<sup>57</sup> Maitland and Mulford (1998) 366.

the latter, mortal women imbued with the kind of immortality which demonstrates the presence of “the miraculous within ordinary life.”<sup>58</sup>

Sanctity, or the potential for saintliness, is imbued within the female body. As Elizabeth Robertson notes, “the essential corporeality of women is the defining characteristic of her sanctity”.<sup>59</sup> To write about the female body without mentioning also the history of attitudes towards the female soul, or spirit, would be difficult; indeed, within the western philosophical tradition, based on classical thinking, such separation of the physical from the spiritual feminine entity would be impossible. Plato and Aristotle lay the foundations for thinking about women’s souls and bodies, and bodies within/without souls, and souls freed from or imprisoned by bodies, their writing setting the (mostly misogynistic) tone which was to dominate philosophical, medical, religious and legal discourse on the subject of gender and sexuality for many centuries.

This thesis begins with a literary and socio-historical discussion, in Chapter I, of a fourteenth-century “Sleeping Beauty” romance. At that time, in European thought, women’s spiritual nature was debated in opposing terms, with Platonic philosophy on the one side, up against Aristotelian philosophy on the other. According to Platonic thought, the soul, or spirit, was gender neutral; Aristotelian thinking, in contrast, held that there was a sharp distinction to be made between the souls of men and women, a distinction based purely on physiognomic difference. For Plato, there was no real difference between the souls of men and women. In fact, the two faced the same obstacle: that of the body, the prison of the spirit. The only means for the soul of an individual, male or female, to overcome this corporeal confinement was through virtue. Virtue was the pathway to and the vehicle for spiritual freedom. Aristotle, on the other hand, retained a closer and more direct focus on the body, and it was the anatomical differences between male and female, a distinction based on sex, which he extended to his understanding of the spirit as likewise gender-differentiated. For Aristotle, moreover, it was not only a question of difference, but one of power and weakness; women’s bodies, and by extension their souls, he viewed as much weaker than men’s, more susceptible to infirmity and disease, but also, interestingly, to sexual appetites.

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 369.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Robertson, “The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in The Life of Saint Margaret,” in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate, ed. *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991. 268-88. 269.

Women, then, were considered both in body and in soul to be more desirous. Although constitutionally weaker than men, the more powerful desire ascribed to women made them in a sense, paradoxically, also more dangerous.<sup>60</sup> The only (unsatisfactory) solution, as such, was for a woman to subdue completely or to transcend her innately sensual nature, by abstaining from all sexual activity and retaining her virginity.<sup>61</sup> Sexual desire, and specifically the sexual appetites of women, were paired in Catholic ideology with putrefaction: the decomposition of the human body after death. In other words, the corruption of mortal flesh was seen as no different from the corruption of the spirit. Giving in to concupiscence, to sexual desire, and indulging in the satisfaction of bodily pleasure, meant risking the purity and integrity of that same body. Mary Foskett has a useful summary of the close link between corporeality and virginity:

Because she is a sexually ripe but inexperienced female, her body is associated with varying degrees of health or sickness, increased sexual desire, emptiness and openness, holiness, monetary and reproductive worth, vulnerability, and weakness. Across a plurality of contexts, the virgin body remains a highly charged image. Yet ancient discourse also portrays the virgin as a subject, a person endowed with agency. As virginity signals sexual vulnerability, it also signals moral culpability. The virgin is as much an ethical, spiritual, and moral agent as she is a bodily presence.<sup>62</sup>

Absolute, or total, virginity was associated not with ordinary, flesh-and-blood women, but with women considered to be sacred. Absolute virginity was the sign of a deep and hidden power, embedded in the body of the virgin. The absolute virgin body is a sealed system, a preeminent example of corporeal continence, the material culmination of the refusal of flesh as well as spirit to be corrupted.

Within the Catholic host of saints, the sole female figure to transcend this bodily and spiritual corruption was the Virgin Mary, and it was virgin martyrs—young women untainted by sexual sin—who carried on her legacy. The virgin martyr remains “one of Christianity’s most important and enduring mythological types,” Marina Warner argues.<sup>63</sup> This symbolic durability is perhaps best understood in terms of death: the mode of death suffered by the

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<sup>60</sup> Robertson (1991), 269.

<sup>61</sup> Robertson (1991), 271.

<sup>62</sup> Foskett (2002), 58.

<sup>63</sup> Warner (1976), 69.

martyrs in question. Most of the virgin martyrs, later recognized and canonized as saints, died in defence of their virginity, often suffering excruciating deaths. As Charles Freeman explains in his study of holy relics in medieval Europe, “[T]he transformed nature of flesh, and hence saintliness, was shown by...its lack of corruption.”<sup>64</sup> This, then, is the basic argument behind the doctrine of the Assumption. It is my contention that it is to this doctrine that the central narrative motif of “Sleeping Beauty” tales—a mortal woman whose body remains incorrupt even after death, or deathlike sleep, and who revives or is awakened—is connected in intricate ways.



*Materiality: Bodies and boundaries*

Returning to thinking about how the skin, and thereby the body, of the sleeping beauty is penetrated in every version of the story, about the corporeal consequences of this dermatological disruption, this puncture—how the body becomes paralyzed, essentially, or what might be described as “walled in” within itself—and how the unconscious, punctured female body is, in most variants of “The Sleeping Beauty,” enclosed within the walls of a tower or a palace or a castle, the relevance of skin and sensory studies to the project become clear. Joe Moshenska’s recent *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) is a valuable contribution to “sense studies” and a fruitful point of departure for many of the lines of enquiry that shall be pursued throughout this thesis. Although limited in scope to England, Moshenska’s work is particularly relevant in the way it delineates the changing meaning and valence of touch during the early modern period. The sense of touch at the time

did assume a unique and distinctive prominence...because it attracted wildly contrasting interpretations and valuations....To debate the nature and value of touch was to engage with many of the most important and contested questions that arose in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Charles Freeman. *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011. 141.

<sup>65</sup> Joe Moshenska. *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Introduction, 3. This leads Moshenska to consider several key issues. He questions “the proper role for the body in worship,” asking whether there could be sensory or bodily access to God; whether the senses



We take away from Moshenska's study the importance of maintaining an intellectual ambivalence when thinking about the Renaissance.

If the English Renaissance was an age of touch, this was true only in the sense that the problems raised by touch epitomized the deepest and most productive ambivalences of the age. Ambivalence towards touch is itself not distinctive to the English Renaissance....There were long-standing anxieties in Christian thought surrounding the status of the kiss as a powerful but fraught form of pious touch.<sup>66</sup>

Claudia Benthien's extensive work on skin has shaped our understanding of this most sensitive—literally, and theoretically—surface. In *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* (2002), Benthien examines the relationship between self-consciousness, subjectivity, and skin in literature, art, and science from the eighteenth century to the present. She deals with skin as “the symbolic surface between the self and the world, a surface whose status has been undergoing a striking change over the last centuries.” The central thesis of the book is that “the integument of the body has become an increasingly rigid boundary in spite of the fact that medicine has penetrated the skin and exposed the interior of the body.”<sup>67</sup> Benthien's historicist materialist approach is particularly striking, and proves fruitful as a methodology, as it allows her to investigate her subject across a broad chronological spectrum.

Discussions of the skin as a boundary and of boundaries—bodily, material and symbolic—found more widely across “Sleeping Beauty” narratives can be enriched through engagement with social and cultural anthropological theory. The contributions of Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep and Mary Douglas threw new light on specific recurring tropes related to boundaries and boundary crossing, including issues of liminality, purity and pollution, and taboo. Douglas' work on liminality, dirt, menstrual blood and pollution (*Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*: 1966; *Implicit Meanings*:

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might offer direct or “reliable access” to the external, physical world—and, related to this, the question of the extent to which all sentient creatures functioned alike. 3-4.

<sup>66</sup> “The 1538 injunctions against improper worship were characterized by a profound indifference to...forms of ambiguity: all kissing was to be assimilated to servile licking, and thereby discredited....But [putting into effect this proscription] was incomplete and uneven. Pious touch proved hard to eliminate in practice, and touch assumed a lingering but ceaselessly contested importance.” Moshenska, (2014), 4.

<sup>67</sup> Claudia Benthien. *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World*. Transl. by Thomas Dunlap. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. 1.

*Essays in Anthropology*: 1975) specifically helped in shaping arguments about the handling and placement of the body of the Sleeping Beauty, particularly in the versions of the story where the heroine is believed to be dead; about the significance of walls and skin as barriers and the liminal spaces these barriers create; about the implications of touching, kissing and penetrating the unconscious female body; and about the narrative and symbolic significance of menstruation, pregnancy, and the associated bodily fluids: blood and breast-milk.

Focusing on the bodily effluvia of milk and blood brings the organic particularity of the female body into sharper focus. Not only are the discussions of corporeality undertaken in this thesis complicated by the complexity of the body defined in general, non-gendered terms, they are made even more intricate by the multiple specificity of the body of the sleeping beauty. What I mean by this is that this body is specific in terms of sex: a female body; but within this category, it is further particularised, and appears, across the various versions of “The Sleeping Beauty” in three different and yet related incarnations. The body of the sleeping beauty is, in turn, a virgin body: closed, pure and sexually unpenetrated; a maternal body, opened up through intercourse (defined, sometimes, as rape) and impregnated—made into a receptacle, a container, for another body, another being; and finally, an inanimate body, or a corpse.

Whilst the virgin, the mother and the lifeless (or seemingly lifeless) female figure have certain characteristics in common—each one is, after all, a version of the body of the sleeping beauty—they nonetheless differ in significant ways. To recognise these differences entails reading the various incarnations with attention to descriptive and symbolic nuance, through the critical and theoretical lens best-suited to the specific nature of the given body.

Reading the virgin body means tracing the often convoluted history of attitudes towards female sexuality in medicine, philosophy and religion, and recognizing the longstanding repression of female desire by the patriarchal structures. These are explored at length in Chapter I, in relation to the earliest version of “The Sleeping Beauty” identified, and the text’s medieval medico-religious context.

Reading the maternal body means recognising the paradoxical nature of the female body: simultaneously powerful as the site of generation, yet vulnerable for the very same reason. The maternal body poses a threat—to the outside world, and specifically, in terms of philosophical and theological belief—to the patriarchy, for it is unpredictable, leaky, and polluting. Conversely, it is also always a reminder of that holiest of mothers, the most sacred of all female forms: a reminder of the body of the Virgin Mary. This tension is explored throughout the chapters. Special attention is given in Chapter III, in relation to discussions of

the body of the old queen in Perrault's version of "The Sleeping Beauty", to the maternal body, and to the maternal imperative felt by women such as this queen, who find themselves unable and desperate to conceive.

Like the pregnant female body, and the maternal body shortly after birth, the female corpse is also dangerous. Artistic and literary representations of the dead body recognise the challenges this indeterminacy poses, and respond in one of two principal ways. Thus in literature (and often also in art), death takes one of two forms.<sup>68</sup> Following Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is treated as symbolic and allegorical and thereby effectively denied, the reality of mortality repressed; or it is deliberately de-aestheticized, according to the Hellenic mode of realistic representation.<sup>69</sup> The corpse, in particular the female corpse, will be discussed at greater length in relation to the supposed corpse of Talia, the heroine of Basile's version of "The Sleeping Beauty". Elisabeth Bronfen's pioneering contribution to the study of femininity and mortality, specifically to the idea of the dead female body, shaped the project from its outset. "Death and femininity," notes Bronfen, in *Over Her Dead Body. Death, femininity and the aesthetic* (1992), a book which deals with how death turns the woman into "an object of site" by transforming specific aspects of the female body, "are culturally positioned as the two central enigmas of western discourse. (...) These two values are condensed at the site of the feminine corpse..."<sup>70</sup>

Interrogating the significant issues underlying the literary representation of the sleeping beauty's corpse, or apparent corpse, and thinking about the questions raised by dead female bodies more generally outside of fairy tale, entails discussing death. Conceptually, death is not finite; as many critical studies have shown, such as the work of the philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), death is very much open to interpretation.<sup>71</sup> The pioneering work of Panos Bardis in the field of "thanatology" (*History of Thanatology: Philosophical, Religious, Psychological, and Sociological Ideas Concerning Death from Primitive Times to the Present*: 1981), and the contributions of Rodney Davis (influenced by Bardis) on the phenomenon of

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<sup>68</sup> See Michael Neill. *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997. See esp. p. 1-50 (Introduction), 51-101 (Ch. 1), 102-140 (Ch. 2) and 305-327 (Ch. 9).

<sup>69</sup> Sander L. Gilman, "Representing Dead and Dying Bodies" in Hillman and Maude, eds. (2015), 149-162, 150.

<sup>70</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen. *Over Her Dead Body. Death, femininity and the aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992. Bronfen's aim, first and foremost, is "to work out the hidden or ambivalent semantic encodings harboured by these images [of beautiful dead women]; the psychic material they serve to articulate and the rhetorical strategies by which they function." xiv.

<sup>71</sup> See Jean Baudrillard. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Transl. by Iain Hamilton Grant, with an Introduction by Mike Gane. London: Sage Publications, 1993. Originally published as *L'échange symbolique et la mort*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976.

“apparent death,” were influential in developing the framework for analysis of mortality and death throughout the thesis.<sup>72</sup> Chapter I offers the deepest critical and theoretical engagement with the question of mortality and with the ramifications of the dead (female) body, since it is there, in thinking about Talia, the only sleeping beauty believed for certain to be dead, i.e. the only heroine, out of the three discussed in this thesis, whose unconsciousness is not thought reversible, that death comes to a head.<sup>73</sup>

Humphreys and Kind proposed in 1980, on the basis of the work of Hertz, that death is not immediate, not a sudden and clean break or interruption, and as such is “not felt as an instantaneous destruction of individual’s life.” Instead, they posited an anthropological interpretation through which death becomes “a social event” and the start of a process whereby the dead person becomes, or is made into, “an ancestor,” which in turn reflects back on the semantics of death and renders it a form of initiation into “social after-life,” a kind of rebirth”.<sup>74</sup> This is significant, considering how the revivals and reawakenings of the three sleeping beauties to be discussed might be construed as forms of, or variations on, rebirth.



### *Sleeping Beauty on the couch: Hysteria and the foundations of psychoanalysis*

The Freudian model of psychoanalysis elucidated discussions of consciousness and unconsciousness and the psychosomatic relationship (mind/body relations), with specific reference to the vulnerability and susceptibility of the female patient/subject, manifested, in “Sleeping Beauty” narratives, in the unconsciousness of the heroines, and in the psychoanalytic case studies, in the symptomatology of the “hysteric” female patient.

Memories of the past and their relation to the present, the way in which memories can interrupt the present and disrupt the present self, even when they are *not* remembered, when they remain repressed, are the touchstones of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary criticism have had a profound impact on my critical approach, and on

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<sup>72</sup> Rodney Davies. *Buried Alive: Horrors of the Undead*. London: Robert Hale Ltd, 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Panos D. Bardis, *History of Thanatology: Philosophical, Religious, Psychological, and Sociological Ideas Concerning Death from Primitive Times to the Present*. Lanham, MD and London: University Press of America, Inc., 1981.

<sup>74</sup> Humphreys, S.C. and Helen Kind (eds.). *Mortality and Immortality: The Anthropology and Archaeology of Death*. Proceedings of a meeting of the Research Seminar in Archaeology and Related Subjects held at the Institute of Archaeology, London University, in June 1980. Academic Press, London, 1981.

the construction of the theoretical framework for the analysis of the “Sleeping Beauty” variants. Freud’s psychoanalysis offers a window both onto the human psyche, and onto how repression and dysfunction within the psyche, in human consciousness, can manifest themselves as psychosomatic symptoms: symptoms in and on the human body. Beyond complicating and enriching our understanding of narrative and of the possibilities inherent in narrative (literary) analysis, psychoanalytic theories have also influenced our sense of our subject: our sense of the sleeping beauty, of sleeping beauties, of what or who these problematically unconscious female figures are, and of how they might be described and interpreted. The description of hysteria posited by Freud and by Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria*, of this condition’s underlying aetiology, and of the so-called female “hysterical” patient, have been illuminating, particularly for developing a working definition of the sleeping beauty figure as a kind of proto-hysterical.<sup>75</sup> Freud’s studies of human sexuality and perversion have also proven fruitful paths for undertaking theoretical enquiry.<sup>76</sup>

The main theoretical position taken initially by both Freud and Breuer on the subject of hysteria was laid out in the ‘Primary Communication’. In this, the analysts differentiate between what happens during the normal course of events, and what happens when things go awry, or become pathological. Normally, each experience that a person undergoes is accompanied a significant amount of ‘affect’. This affect is then either ‘discharged’ through various conscious reflexes, or else is eroded gradually through association with other conscious mental material. In hysterical cases, on the other hand, these two things fail to occur, meaning that the affect is left in a ‘strangled’ state, with the memory of the experience to which that particular affect is attached being “cut off from consciousness.”<sup>77</sup> This memory, termed an ‘affective memory,’ is manifested in hysterical symptoms, which could be described as ‘mnemonic symbols’. These symptoms Freud and Breuer described as:

the effects and residues of excitations which have acted upon the nervous system as traumas...Now we are accustomed to find in hysteria that a considerable part of this ‘sum of excitation’ of the trauma is transformed into

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<sup>75</sup> Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud. *Studies on Hysteria* [*Studien über Hysterie*, 1895]. Transl. and ed. by James and Alix Strachey. [1955] London: Penguin Books, 1974.

<sup>76</sup> Freud. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [*Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 1905]. Transl. and ed. by James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1962.

<sup>77</sup> Freud and Breuer [1895] (1974), editor’s introduction, 37.

purely somatic symptoms. It is this characteristic of hysteria which has so long stood in the way of its being recognized as a psychical disorder.<sup>78</sup>

Freud and Breuer posit two main explanations for why this hysterical outcome might occur: either the person now deemed ‘hysterical,’ with affective memory, was in a ‘hypnoid’ or dissociated state of mind when they had the original experience; or the experience itself was in some way ‘incompatible’ with and therefore rejected by the subject’s ‘ego,’ in the interest of self-protection and psychic self-preservation.<sup>79</sup> This is as far as Freud and Breuer’s agreement went. Where they differed was on the question of the precise role of sexual frustration in the development of hysteria. Freud, for his part, believed fervently that hysteria had sexual origins in all cases; Breuer, in contrast, believed that sexuality was significant in causing not hysteria, but neuroses.

The female hysteric as defined by Freud and Breuer in these primary communications is significant for this thesis on two accounts: (i) terminology/pathological description, and (ii) pathological symptomology manifested in disrupted sleep patterns. In terms of terminology and pathology, it is worth remembering that long before Freud and Breuer were writing about “hysteria” as symptomatic of psychic malfunction, “hysteria”—*hysteria furens*, or *hysterica passio*, to be precise—were being used by physicians to describe a vast array of symptoms and diseases, affecting only women, and originating in the womb. The sleeping beauties discussed over the course of the next three chapters can each be seen as suffering from such a condition. It is for this reason that to describe these problematically sleeping or otherwise unconscious women as “hysterics” feels opportune, the word “hysteric” understood here both in its medieval/early modern medical sense, as well as its (proto-)psychoanalytic meaning.

Secondly, in relation to the ways in which psychopathology is manifested in hysterics as disrupted sleep, what is interesting is that the “hysterical” women Freud investigated and (supposedly) often cured, suffered from a variant of what Sleeping Beauties suffer from: not from paralytic coma, a sleep so deep it stops the body from moving, but instead from somnambulism: sleepwalking. The somnambulism of the hysteric and the coma of the sleeping

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<sup>78</sup> Discussion of “On the psychical mechanism of hysterical phenomena: preliminary communication” (1893) Breuer and Freud. 146. Contrast this with a later psychoanalytic feminist revision of the meaning of the term: hysterical symptoms understood as “metaphorically inscribed on the body...ephemeral and enigmatic. They constitute a language only by analogy.” Cixous and Clément (1986), 9.

<sup>79</sup> Freud and Breuer (1974), Editor’s introduction. 38. Catharsis can be understood on the same basic principle. “[I]f the original experience, along with its affect, can be brought into consciousness, the affect is by that very fact discharged or ‘abreacted,’ the force that has maintained the symptom ceases to operate, and the symptom itself disappears.” 37.

beauty are comparable in that both are manifestations of what can happen when sleep is pathological or unnatural, or induced by unnatural means. One means by which Freud induced sleepwalking in hysteric patients was through hypnosis—another means of manipulating consciousness. As his case notes state in one place, “[S]he was a hysteric and could be put into a state of somnambulism with the greatest ease.” Or consider another hysteric case:

She is an excellent subject for hypnotism. I had only to hold up a finger in front of her and order her to go to sleep, and she sank back with a dazed and confused look. I suggested that she should sleep well, that all her symptoms should get better, and so on. She heard all this with closed eyes but with unmistakably concentrated attention; and her features gradually relaxed and took on a peaceful appearance. After this first hypnotism she retained a dim memory of my words; but already at the second there was complete somnambulism (with amnesia).<sup>80</sup>



Theories of somatology and corporeality taken from diverse writers from across a wide historical range, who contributed to what might be broadly-defined as “body studies” informed my discussion, sustained throughout the thesis, of the meaning of the body of the sleeping beauty, and how this meaning changes as the body is made to undergo specific alterations, from a state of conscious virginity (the virgin body), through pregnancy and maternity (the maternal body), to a paralytic unconscious state resembling, or in one case synonymous with, death (the female corpse). Readings in the literature of miracles and wonders elucidated some of the ways in which the unconscious body of the sleeping beauty might be seen as achieving a kind of immortality through its state of total incorruption.

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<sup>80</sup> Freud in Freud and Breuer (1974), 106. Furthermore, Freud’s descriptions of “the pathological changes of consciousness” manifested by his hysteric patients provide a framework for thinking about what patient such as Sleeping Beauty might suffer from. Most important perhaps is the theory that these pathological changes are brought about by “conversion.” This is the term Freud uses to describe “the transformation of psychical excitation into chronic somatic symptoms;” the example he provides—the paralysis of a specific limb or indeed of the entire body, is particularly striking, considering the total paralysis of every sleeping beauty.

#### **iv. Beautiful paradoxes: Coda to the Introduction**

The present thesis presents a revised literary and cultural history of the figure of the sleeping beauty, formulated through sustained interdisciplinary analysis: a new story about the ever-changing meaning and significance of this enigmatic heroine, a story rooted in the female body. Sleeping beauties are unique in that they combine, and simultaneously incorporate, things that are more frequently diametrically opposed: life and death, youthful beauty and the horror of decay, desire and fear. Sleeping beauties are paradoxes. On the one hand, they are figures without finite form or meaning, amenable to redefinition through depiction and analysis. In this sense they function as ciphers, vehicles for the mediation of the cultural, sexual, and religious anxieties of any given (patriarchal) age. On the other hand, sleeping beauties are also and always embodied, mortal beings: real women made of flesh and blood. It is this strange and striking confluence of the symbolic and the real, the literary metaphorical and the medical/bodily, present in each and every version of “The Sleeping Beauty,” that this thesis seeks to unravel. As a nexus of competing meanings hinged on the dialectics of live and dead, conscious and unconscious, real and imagined/imaginary, sleeping beauties trouble the boundaries of belief and interpretation. By expanding the scope of interpretation and broadening the subject area, it is hoped that this thesis will begin to address these oppositions.



Chapter I:  
Medieval Sleeping Beauties: Wandering wombs and marvellous maidens in “L’histoire  
de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine”



Figure 1.1. Title page of Prologue. *Le première livre de roy de percheforest*. MS Français 345. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

### **i. Summary of “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zelandine”**

It is easy to speak of “The Sleeping Beauty” as if this story in its many variants were universally well-known. Nonetheless, for the purposes of accuracy and the benefit of the reader, we begin this venture into the thickets of enchanted text with an outline of the narrative trajectory and a summary of the constituent parts of “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zelandine”, the earliest version of the tale.<sup>81</sup>

Zelandine falls into a strange deep sleep, from which she cannot be woken. No one—not the king, the maiden’s father, nor the royal doctors, can understand her condition, or explain why or how Zelandine has become comatose—no one, that is, until a group of midwives enter the story and explain that the deep sleep was most likely caused by some vengeful goddess. The midwives are proved right, but the reader must wait for the narrative ratification; only later in the text are the circumstances of Zelandine’s accident recounted and revealed. It is explained that Themis, goddess of law and justice and fate, took offence at what she felt was a slight against her divine status, as well as a breach of common post-natal practice: unlike Venus (her sister-goddess but also her opposite), for whom food and drink were set out, according to custom, after the princess’ birth, for Themis there was nothing. The goddess therefore decreed that Zelandine should one day be injured by a small piece of flax, which would cause her to fall into a deep sleep. From the outset, the fate of the heroine is sealed; yet from the outset also it is guaranteed that the deep sleep shall not prove fatal or unending. Venus takes it upon herself to counterweigh the vengeful actions of her divine opposite, and ensure that under her watch, the princess shall be cured: Zelandine can and will be woken. The cure that Venus prescribes for Zelandine is in fact to be found inside the girl’s own body, as the deity tells Troylus when the lovesick knight, desperate to wake and thereby save his beloved, prostrates himself upon the sacred ground of the goddess’ temple. Zelandine’s body, Venus says, is not only the host of her illness but also and at the same time the source of its own healing.

The process of healing, however, turns out to be rather more complex than expected. For there to be a “cure,” external intervention is needed. Zelandine will regain consciousness only if and when the kernel for this cure, the kernel contained inside of her body, is activated

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<sup>81</sup> Each of the three main chapters of this thesis begins with a short summary of the “Sleeping Beauty” story relevant to that chapter. For further publication details of the various versions, see the Note on Texts and Conventions and Bibliography.

by an external agent, i.e. by means intervention from the outside. The type of intervention needed here is sexual, and penetrative; only through penetration can what Venus refers to as the “fruit” be “plucked” from the “cleft” of the maiden—and once the fruit has been plucked, the seed, as it were, reaped and harvested, can Zellandine be awoken.

The hero in question is Troylus, Zellandine’s beloved, a valiant knight who loves the princess and would go to any lengths to rescue her from her sad and unnatural state. Whilst it is never explained in the narrative how and when the lovers met, from Troylus’ reaction upon learning of the fate that has befallen Zellandine it is clear that the knight has already pledged his love and loyalty to the princess, and that correspondingly, he has her heart. It is also evident that their love has not been made public. Nor has this love been related to Zellandine’s father, the king, who intends to give his daughter in marriage to a different suitor altogether.

The episodes recount Troylus’ distress on account of his beloved; his search for and conquest of the palace in which she is kept by her father, walled up and hidden; his final triumphant entry into the tower room and his discovery of Zellandine, laid out behind a curtain, naked and asleep upon a bed. The narrative tells of the knight’s hesitation, the battle which he wages with himself, the struggle between love/desire and reason: Should he, can he, follow Venus’ bidding, and lie with the unconscious Zellandine? Would sex with his beloved in the state that she is in – paralytic, non-sentient, unresponsive and unaware of what is going on—would it amount to a breach of chivalric code? Even worse, might intercourse, in these circumstances be construed as rape, that act that is denounced most vehemently throughout the *Perceforest*, the act that is prohibited by the law of the land?

The story describes how Troylus at first tries to rouse Zellandine by other, less directly corporeal means: he calls to her, he touches her, he kisses her, waiting for some kind of response, but to no avail. With Zellandine still sleeping, and Venus urging him on, Troylus decides to continue and he undertakes the cure, and finally accomplishes the deed set out for him by Venus, the curative coital challenge through which he expects to be able to awake the maiden. In this, however, the knight is disappointed. Zellandine shows no sign whatsoever of being any closer to waking. She does not even stir. Even after sex, after the “fruit” has been “plucked” from the “cleft,” – the cure that Venus prescribed has been carried out –the sleeping beauty remains comatose. To ensure that Zellandine, once awake, will know that Troylus is the one who has entered her room and taken her virginity, the knight leaves a token; he places the ring that Zellandine had given him earlier upon the maiden’s finger.

Time passes. Zellandine's father and his father's sister, the maiden's aunt, visit the sleeping beauty daily, hoping to see some change in her condition. Whilst they can see no indication that the princess might be closer to waking, they do begin to notice something strange: that Zellandine's belly is slowly swelling. Sure enough, nine months later, the still unconscious Zellandine delivers a healthy son. The birth opens up her body, but still she stays asleep. It is only when her infant suckles on his mother's flax-penetrated finger, mistaking the injured digit for her nipple, and extracts the piece of flax that Zellandine at last wakes up. Her return to conscious waking life is a cause for great celebrations, and the king decides to host a tournament in which potential suitors compete to win her for their wife. Although Zellandine's father intends her to wed a knight by the name of Niven, the girl has her heart set on Troylus. The king arranges a great tournament, where potential suitors for his daughter's hand are set to joust. Troylus, in disguise, is victorious. Afterwards and in spite of having promised Zellandine to the winner, the king still insists that she marry Niven. Zellandine, her heart set on her saviour, secretly elopes with Troylus to Britain. There the young pair are married by Zellandine's uncle, and so their union is ratified, if not paternally, then at least recognised by an older male patriarch within the princess' immediate family.



## ii. Introduction, Methodology, Nodal Points

“L’Histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” (“The story of Troylus and the beautiful Zellandine,” a story comprised of several interrelated narrative episodes and found in the expansive fourteenth century French prose romance, *Perceforest* (*Le Roman de Perceforest*, or, *L’histoire du Roy Perceforest*), is the earliest distinct example within the Western canon of “Sleeping Beauty.”<sup>82</sup> The sleeping beauty in question is a princess, the beautiful Zellandine; Troylus, a valiant knight, is cast in the role of rescuer and lover. Structurally, “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” is episodic and non-sequential; the several sections which make up this story are scattered across five chapters of the complete *Perceforest* text. Nonetheless, when read together, the composite parts of “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” compose clearly a complete “Sleeping Beauty” narrative.

This is not to claim *Perceforest* as the single medieval source of “Sleeping Beauty,” elements of which appear in various other romances written around the same time. These include the anonymous *Amadas et Ydoine*, and Marie de France's Lai 'Eliduc' and [the] 'La Vie de St Jehan Paulus'.<sup>83</sup> In *Amadas et Ydoine*, when Ydoine is forced to marry someone other than her beloved, Amadas, she enlists the help of fairies to ensure that her husband is unable to consummate the marriage; she languishes in bed for some time, whilst Amadas, thinking that she is lost to him, goes mad. Eventually Ydoine rescues Amadas, but shortly thereafter a fairy-knight falls in love with her and in order to keep her for himself, makes her fall into a deep and deathlike sleep. Everyone assumes that Ydoine is dead, but Amadas, who sits vigil by her bed, fights with and defeats the fairy-knight when he comes to claim the girl. Amadas then wakes her up, and they are married.<sup>84</sup> The Lai 'Eliduc' tells the story of Eliduc, who is

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<sup>82</sup> First printed in Paris in 1528, as *La Tres Elegante Delicieux Melliflue et Tres Plaisante Hystoire du Tres Noble Roy Perceforest* in four volumes and printed in Italian soon after (1531). A Spanish translation is also known.

<sup>83</sup> Romaine Wolf-Bonvin. *Textus: De la Tradition Latine à L'esthétique du Roman Médiéval: le Bel inconnu, Amadas et Ydoine*. Paris: H. Champion, 1998. Arthur Ross, transl. *Amadas and Ydoine*. New York and London: Garland, 1993. See also John Revell Reinhard's *The Old French romance of Amadas et Ydoine: An Historical Study*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1927. *Lais Bretons, XIIe-XIIIe Siècles: Marie de France et ses Contemporains*. Édition bilingue, établie, traduite, présentée et annotée par Nathalie Koble et Mireille Séguy. Paris: H. Champion, 2011. Includes bibliographical references and index, with Old French and Modern French translation on facing pages. For translations, see Eugene Mason's *French Mediaeval Romances: From the Lays of Marie de France*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, [1911?] and *The Lais of Marie de France*. Marie de France. Transl. with an introduction by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby. London: Penguin, 1999 (2003 printing).

<sup>84</sup> See A. Le Roux de Lincy. *Le Livre des Légendes*. Paris, 1836. 257. For a critical discussion see Ariane de Félice de Neufville, “Formules, motifs et types de contes populaires dans le théâtre français du Moyen Age,” Actas do Congresso Internacional de Etnografia. Lisbonne, 1965. 44-45. *Amadas et Ydoine*. Ed. by J. Reinhard. Paris: Champion, [1926] 1974, vv. 2210-2228.

married, but after falling in love with a foreign princess, decides to elope with her. When the princess finds about Eliduc's first wife she appears to die, but her body does not decay nor her beauty diminish; so Eliduc constructs a shrine in which to keep her, in the forest. Eliduc's wife discovers her husband's bigamy, is able to revive the deathlike maiden, and in reparation for the hurt she has suffered, demands that Eliduc endow an abbey in her name, where she is to be abbess. Eliduc agrees, and is then free to marry the princess. They spend many happy years together, and eventually both the princess and Eliduc join the wife in the abbey.<sup>85</sup> In 'La Vie de St Jehan Paulus' the hermit St Jehan Paulus is tempted by the devil with a beautiful princess. Overcome with lust, the hermit rapes the princess and then, because he feels so guilty, kills her and throws the body down a deep well. Many years pass, during which time St Jehan does extreme penance; finally he confesses his deeds to the girl's father, and together they search for the body. When they find the princess in the well they discover that she is not dead, merely "asleep," watched over by angels; what's more, it is revealed that not only is she incorrupt (i.e. did not decay or was never killed) but she is also still a virgin (i.e. was not raped).<sup>86</sup>

Descriptive comparisons such as these demonstrate the prevalence in medieval romance of certain characteristic tropes and themes found commonly across "Sleeping Beauty" narratives. Nonetheless, "L'histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine" as found in *Perceforest* remains the single complete version, and it is this specific version, the subject of this first chapter, which, it can be postulated, was the literary template for later "Sleeping Beauty" variants. Looking at Giambattista Basile's sixteenth-century "Sole, Luna e Talia" later on, in Chapter II, the direct influence of this earliest medieval "Sleeping Beauty" tale in terms of style, theme and narrative trajectory, will become apparent. This genealogy can be projected forwards, into the late-seventeenth century, with "La belle au bois dormant," the fairy tale by Charles Perrault discussed in Chapter III, showing indications—less perceptible, but indisputable nonetheless—of indirect influence and borrowing. In fact, as references and brief comparative analyses throughout this thesis to the late romances of Shakespeare will suggest, echoes of "Sleeping Beauty" stories can be found also in *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles*, and

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<sup>85</sup> In *French mediaeval romances: from the Lays of Marie de France*. Transl. by Eugene Mason. London and New York: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.; E.P. Dutton & Co., [1911].

<sup>86</sup> In 'La Vie de St. Jehan Paulus', in *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, 18-19 (1935-36): 83-133. For an example of a narrative in which fairies feature in a more comic vein, see Adam de la Halle's *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*. Ed. by J. Dufournet, Gand, 1977, vv. 656-691, in which fairies grant (poisoned) gifts. I am grateful to Sylvia Huot for bringing these texts to my attention.

*Cymbeline*: an aspect of Shakespearean drama which has not, to date, received any close critical scrutiny.

This chapter begins with a contextual discussion, a few remarks about the text itself and its literary and historical context. This preliminary section touches on the status of the genre of chivalric romance, and position of women in medieval society and literature. A summary of the critical method follows, including an outline of the nodal points identified as specific to the text. This structural framework is the basis for the subsequent critical commentary and narrative analysis. The critical commentary focuses primarily on these nodes, which both identify, indeed certify, “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” as a “Sleeping Beauty” narrative, and at the same time mark out the unique distinguishing features of this specific version. Each nodal point selected encapsulates a moment or motif within the text when the issue of female corporeality, with particular relevance to the uncertainties surrounding the unconscious heroine’s body, is brought to the fore. A close reading of the text on the basis of these points leads to sustained critical interrogation of medieval attitudes towards the female body—the anxieties engendered in particular by this body’s unseen, unmapped interior—determined to a great extent by patriarchal ideologies. Further, it enables questions to be asked about the position of the catatonic body of the sleeping beauty within this discourse. What does this specific literary representation of the female figure in a state of coma, of a sleep so deep it seems like lifelessness, reveal about wider cultural attitudes? What might this earliest pathological heroine imply when it comes to thinking about the complex interplay between patriarchal expectations and beliefs about women, and women’s potential power, beauty and value?

The first subject of discussion is Zellandine: the medieval sleeping beauty herself, understood simultaneously as literary trope and also, crucially, as a corporeal entity. For the sleep of Zellandine, like the sleep of all the other sleeping beauties who come after, is no natural, temporary cessation of wakefulness. Her sleep is strange and deep and, on the surface, appears permanent. Moreover, given that the revelation of the actual cause of the heroine’s comatose condition is withheld for quite some time, until the reader is well into the intricacies and mysteries and adventures of the text, and taking into account the consequent atmosphere of epistemic uncertainty and disorientation which this postponement generates, it is imperative that a range of possible causes of the strange deep sleep be considered. Initially, in this analysis, this involves thinking in terms of contemporaneous, medieval medical theory—which, given

the tissue-thin line separating the medical and religious and magical spheres at the time, means also taking into account theological and spiritual and supernatural influences and explanations.

Zellandine's comatose body bears no visible signs of trauma. Nor does it present external symptoms of some lingering inner pathology. Other than the strange deep sleep, the paralysis, and the lack of receptivity to all external stimuli, the body looks healthy. That it is a still living body is never questioned (as it will be questioned in later versions of the narrative, as the next chapter shows). The gentle rise and fall of the chest and the rosy complexion are sufficient evidence to pre-empt any suggestion that the senselessness might be irreversible, that it might in fact spell death. So this is the medical and material paradox: a lifelike yet lifeless female body, a young woman asleep, but for what reason? Since the exterior of the body reveals nothing—it is a blank, in more ways than one, as will become apparent—the answer, must lie hidden someplace within. It is to this deeper place, inside the recesses of the female body that this chapter penetrates, dissecting body, text, language and context along the way.

The unseen breeds uncertainty, suspicion, and fear, for the hidden is potentially hideous. Fear of the unknown is one of the most potent forms of fear. This appears to be the case particularly when the source of the sense of something unseen, indeterminate and possibly malevolent is widely considered to be “other”. In the context of medieval medical and religious culture, the female body was “other”: a strange and different form, or thing, housing who knew what. It is on the basis of male fear of what might be within that so much misogynistic discourse and ideology has been rooted. Much of this discourse focussed on identifying and explaining women's supposed weaknesses in terms of anatomy: explaining bodily and spiritual, or moral, vulnerabilities, on the basis of the peculiarities of the female body. Hence the near-obsession, in the Middle Ages, with the womb, or uterus; indeed, “medieval women were often conceived of synechdocally in terms of the uterus.”<sup>87</sup> Consequently it is on this specific organ that a significant portion of the following discussion focusses. On the basis of the reproductive functions of women, it was widely held that most if not all forms of all female

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<sup>87</sup> Naoe Kukita Yoshikawa, ed. *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015. 18. The essays collected in this volume underline the importance of an interdisciplinary study. As Yoshikawa writes in the Introduction, the book:

probes the way the literature-medicine nexus operates within a culture deeply inflected by gender discourse, and medical discourse proves to be no exception. In exploring the gender-inflected nature of the medico-literary discourse and rhetoric, this volume seeks also to uncover the type of dialogues established—both positive and negative—between the medical, the religious and the gendered in the period under scrutiny. 6.



pathology and disorder originated in one way or another in the womb. The most common “disease” attributed to or thought to originate in the uterus was the “wandering womb,” and it is in terms of this strange phenomenon that Zellandine’s strange condition will be discussed here, since, as numerous medical tracts noted, prolonged loss of consciousness and a deathlike appearance—precisely what the catatonic body of the sleeping beauty manifests—were the most common symptoms.

This chapter offers a new lens through which the otherwise unexplained strange sleep of the heroine, depicted within a literary framework, might be better understood and situated within its proper socio-historical context. This revisionist reading is accomplished through sustained critical discussion of what happens in this earliest incarnation of “The Sleeping Beauty,” a discussion informed throughout by and delineated in relation to contemporaneous medical beliefs about the “wandering womb.” Besides the anatomical subject of the womb and related issues to do with female reproduction, and the secrets of the female body, interrogating several other topics is essential both to grasping the essence of the narrative of “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” and to understanding the social context in which it was composed and circulated. These include virginity and chastity; sexual intercourse—its supposed health benefits, alongside the spiritual and moral dangers; the related question of rape and the strong case in the narrative against it; and the maternal female body, leakier and therefore more dangerous than its virginal counterpart. On many of these issues there was, in the period, a degree of overlap between medicine and religion, a proximity that might well be explained in terms of contextual anxieties about mortal corporeality and materiality, or, to put it another way, about the corruptibility of the flesh, and the relationship between the (mortal) body and the (immortal) soul.

The inseparability of bodily and spiritual concerns was paramount, as displayed in the Church’s dominance over all issues concerning sickness, health, life, death and salvation of all individual souls. This inseparability is witnessed clearly in medical and devotional texts of all types and genres during the period: such texts interrelate thematically, entering into dialogue with one another by means of powerful metaphors linked to cultural and religious norms.<sup>88</sup>

The figure of the sleeping beauty is one of these “powerful metaphors,” but a metaphor rooted in corporeality. Zellandine, whilst indisputably an allegorical symbol, is also and at the

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<sup>88</sup> Yoshikawa, ed. (2015), 1-2.

same time a material entity. The materiality, that is to say, the physical constitution and presence of the body within the romance narrative, are the focus of that part of this discursive investigation which draws on medieval medical theory; the metaphorical aspects of the figure of the Sleeping Beauty are considered also, in terms of medieval spiritual belief, which at the time was undergoing a process of ideological revision. During the thirteenth century, theologians including Aquinas and Bonaventure began to challenge the concept of material continuity between the corpse, and the sacred, transformed flesh, as Caroline Walker Bynum relates in her study of religion in late medieval Europe.<sup>89</sup> In light of the Aristotelian concept of form, a modified version of post-mortem corporeality emerged: the body of every person came to be seen as the material manifestation of their singular and unique form. It was in this form, in this shape, that the body in the afterlife was thought to rise again, meaning that the resurrected body, whilst identical in appearance, might not be identical in terms of composition, of matter.

Yoshikawa points to the ways in which “medieval socio-religious culture offers an ideal site for an investigation into such a close cohabitation of religious and medical discourses.”<sup>90</sup> This statement is a useful point of departure, since it helps elucidate the “*mentalités*” that this close correlation, or interrelation, between medicine and religion, produced.

Medieval beliefs about the inextricability of the body from the soul will be investigated, and the consequences that this intertwining had on descriptions of and treatments for physical and spiritual disease alike, shall be discussed in this chapter in both ideological contexts: medical, and religious. Using this correlative method of cross-disciplinary research and reading, a new conceptual and figurative model of the Sleeping Beauty shall emerge, one in which the problematic body of the heroine is reconfigured in miraculous terms, as a “marvel,” a term, and a concept, based equally on medieval medical and religious beliefs about materiality, mortality, and the limits of nature.



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<sup>89</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum. *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. New York: Zone Books, 2011.

<sup>90</sup> Yoshikawa, ed. (2015), 2.

## Nodal Points specific to “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine”

The general nodal points outlined in the Introduction are readily identifiable in “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine”. These general points, however, are but the basis for a framework of nodal points specific to the text in question: for the close reading and analysis of this earliest version of the story of the “Sleeping Beauty”:<sup>91</sup>

- *Prelude*. The heroine’s fate is determined shortly after birth by Themis’ proclamation: Zellandine shall injure herself with flax, and fall into a deep sleep. This is countermanded by the intervention of another goddess, when Venus promises to keep the princess safe whilst she sleeps, and to ensure that, one day, she wakes.
- *Disaster via puncture*. The fated event comes to pass. Once the splinter of flax, a foreign object, enters her body, Zellandine collapses, comatose.
- *Aftermath*. The reactions of the king, the royal doctors, and the courtiers to Zellandine’s loss of consciousness: What do they make of it? How is her unnatural state interpreted? What is done to, or with, the insentient figure—where and how is it placed?
- *Period of suspended animation*. The narrative continues, and within it, stories about a strangely sleeping beautiful princess begin to circulate. Troylus hears of Zellandine’s condition and sets out to save his beloved.
- *Rescue*. After many misadventures, Troylus at last finds Zellandine, asleep and unresponsive.
- *Penetration*. At the insistence of Venus, he has sex with the unconscious girl in the expectation that this will lead to her “cure,” to her waking. But nothing happens. The maiden sleeps on.
- *Female fecundity*. Zellandine, still comatose, becomes pregnant and nine months later, delivers a son.
- *Revival*. Through (a form of) lactation, Zellandine’s infant son suckles her finger by mistake, and extracts the piece of flax. Immediately, Zellandine regains consciousness.
- *Post-revival*. Troylus and the now-conscious Zellandine are reunited, and, in defiance of her father, elope and are married.



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<sup>91</sup> Not every nodal point identified within the text is of equal significance. Those which help identify the narrative as a “Sleeping Beauty” text but do not relate directly to the body of the heroine – the object and the subject of this study – are identified in square brackets, [thus].



### iii. Peering into *Perceforest*

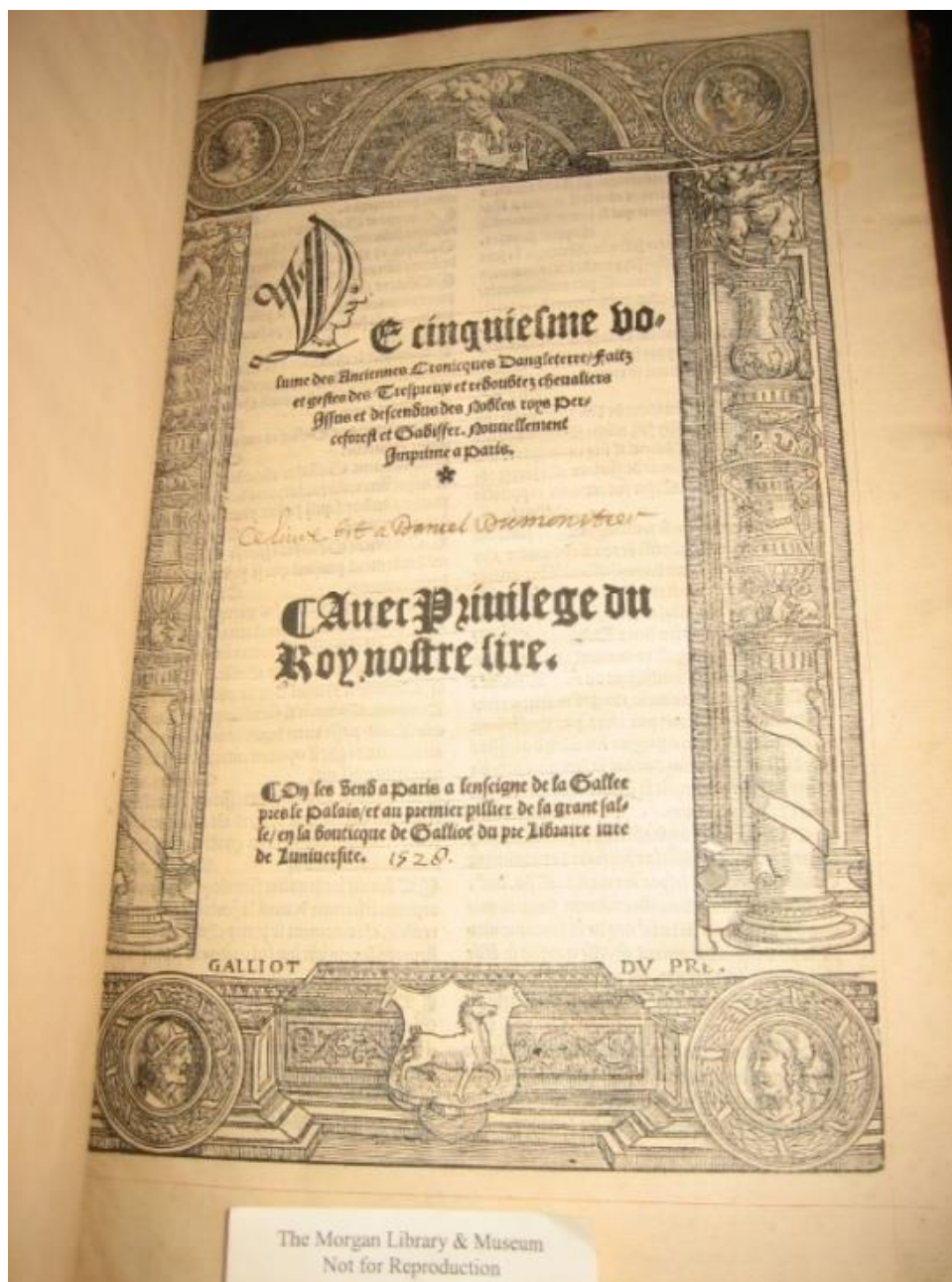


Figure 1.2. Title page of fifth volume (6 vols. in total). *Histoire du roy Perceforest*. Paris: Nicolas Couteau for Galliot du Pré, 1528. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library Dept. of Printed Books.

The anonymous author of *Perceforest* interweaves diverse tones and styles and mixes motifs gleaned from various traditions, including romance, myth, and legend, to create a rich and heterogeneous text. Such generic intermeshing makes for a narrative which it is difficult to define with any great precision, or to classify neatly according to existent literary taxonomies, as Nigel Bryant, the translator of a 2011 English edition, notes.<sup>92</sup> Consider, for instance, *Perceforest's* opening chapter: a close translation of the twelfth-century *Historia regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Whilst this would appear to situate the work in question firmly within the chronicle tradition, the reader need only read a few pages further to find this classification undercut and complicated. The author weaves an expansive work of fiction in which incidents and characters from a range of sources appear: from Alexander romances, such as Jacques de Longuyon's early fourteenth-century *Les Voeux de Paon* ("The Vows of the Peacock", 1312, written for Thibaut de Bar, bishop of Liège); from the Lancelot-Grail narrative; from the Prose Tristan; from the "travel writings" of Gerald of Wales; and from the Roman histories that would have been familiar to a medieval audience in the form of the thirteenth-century *Li Fet des Romains* (The Deeds of the Romans).<sup>93</sup> Yet this is not to imply that *Perceforest* is in any sense an uneven or haphazard text; the compiler achieves organic integrity by unifying the various generic and stylistic elements through a sustained undercurrent of chivalry and romance. Valiant knights on difficult quests doing heroic deeds to rescue and win the love of righteous maidens populate the text. Nowhere is this chivalric troping more apparent, this romantic underlay (or overlay) more acutely felt, than in the sections which together comprise "*L'histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine*" ("The story of Troylus and the beautiful Zellandine").<sup>94</sup>

Each of the four extant manuscripts of *Perceforest* date from the 1330s. Their survival demonstrates that the romance continued to be circulated and read down through the centuries, and serves as testament to the narrative's enduring popularity.<sup>95</sup> Or perhaps, their continued

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<sup>92</sup> Nigel Bryant. *A Perceforest Reader: Selected Episodes from Perceforest: The Prehistory of Arthur's Britain*. Boydell & Brewer: London, 2012. 2. Publ. online February 2013: <http://universitypublishingonline.org/boydell/chapter.jsf?bid=CBO9781846159350&cid=CBO9781846159350A01>. All subsequent (English) quotations from the text are taken from this translation, with page numbers in parentheses.

<sup>93</sup> Bryant suggests the *Perceforest* author "unite[s] the Alexander legend, very dear to the house of Hainault, with that of Arthur, the house of Plantagenet family legend – and that union was exactly matched and made flesh in the 1328 marriage of Edward and Philippa." In Bryant (2012), 1-2.

<sup>94</sup> "The Sleeping Beauty": a translation of Ch. III, Bk. Iii. In Bryant (2012), 76-83.

<sup>95</sup> The date of composition might be ascertained with some degree of certainty from a suggestion made early on in Book I: the work was begun under the patronage of William I, count of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland (1286-1337), whose daughter Philippa married Edward III of England. Bryant adds that "It was certainly written after

existence could be understood in terms of what might be described as the “cultural currency” of the work.<sup>96</sup> Either way, clearly there is something about the many scattered stories related in this expansive romantic narrative that captured the imagination of the original audience. Doubtless this had something to do with the language in which the romance was written. Written in Old French, *Perceforest* was more accessible to a wider range of readers than if it had been composed in the more scholastic and hence more exclusive Latin. Here the author is effectively democratising the literary text. Jean M. Dornbush contends that “one of the major purposes of the early Old French romancers was to make the literature tradition of antiquity available to their largely illiterate public through translations from Latin into the vernacular.”<sup>97</sup> It was part also of the literary project of the romancers to make their writing—that is, the writing of the period—more accessible and widely available. Moreover it is worth noting that the material existence of *Perceforest* manuscripts from the fourteenth-century indicates that it was one of the earliest narratives written to be read, since, as Howard Bloch explains, “manuscripts produced before the fourteenth century were, almost without exception, intended for oral presentation.”<sup>98</sup>

Though little is known about the translation and transmission history of the text, it does reveal something about *Perceforest*’s durability and transnational relevance: printed twice in French between the mid-fourteenth and late-sixteenth centuries, the tome was translated into Italian in 1558 and into Spanish in the 1570s. The appearance of the Italian translation at this point in time is of particular significance for thinking about the transmission in European literature of the “Sleeping Beauty” story. On the basis of the translation, there is certainly a case to be made for Giambattista Basile being familiar with, or at least knowing about, *Perceforest* and with its story of the sleeping Zellandine, which in turn would mean that it is highly likely that “*Sole, Luna e Talia*” (“The Sun, the Moon and Talia), Basile’s own “Sleeping Beauty” tale composed in the mid-sixteenth century, was modelled on the medieval French

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Jacques de Longuyon’s *Les Voeux du Paon* (c. 1312), from which the author borrows characters and incidents.” Bryant (2012). 24.

<sup>96</sup> Sylvia Huot. *Postcolonial Fictions in the Roman de Perceforest. Cultural Identities and Hybridities*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007. 6. Huot goes on to outline how *Perceforest* might be regarded as a transition text, one which spans both the medieval and the early modern worlds. Medieval romance and historiography, she suggests, were the “formative models” for what would in the Renaissance become a cultural and literary fascination with the foreign, the exotic, the other: in sum with the discovery and the conquest of the New World.

<sup>97</sup> Jean M. Dornbush. *Pygmalion’s Figure. Reading Old French Romance*. Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1990. 7.

<sup>98</sup> R. Howard Bloch. *Medieval French Literature and Law*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1977. 2.

romance.<sup>99</sup> Although it was and is a work of fiction and not an historical document based on facts, *Perceforest* did respond to and in certain ways anticipate some of the most urgent questions which Western European societies faced during the transitional period between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, nonetheless: questions pertaining to state and selfhood, nation, power, and conquest. Frequently, as in the narrative in question, these questions were mapped on to, and played out upon, the female body. The ideological and narrative manipulation of the female body—so different, so dangerous and at the same time, desirable—can reveal a good deal about anxieties relating to women, and to the question of femininity itself, underlying the dominant patriarchy.



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<sup>99</sup> In his editorial introduction, Roussineau has a concise comparative summary of “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” in relation to other medieval narratives featuring a “Sleeping Beauty” episode, Giambattista Basile’s “Sole, Luna e Talia,” and “La belle dame au bois dormant” by Charles Perrault. See Gilles Roussineau, ed. *Perceforest. Troisième partie*. Genève: Droz, 1988-1993. Chapters L, LI, LII, LIX, LX.



#### iv. Framing femininity in medieval society and romance

Conceptions of femininity in the Middle Ages were determined by ecclesiastical, feudal and familial authorities, as the late medieval historian Eileen Power discussed. In her view, the male members of the Church, the nobility, and the family, all considered women to be “ornamental assets”.<sup>100</sup> Such a view overlooks the fact that women, although accorded the role of beautiful and docile entities, nonetheless were crucial to the perpetuation of powers, dynastic as well as financial, with dowries, often huge in size and value, still obligatory amongst the elite. There is an argument to be made here for the liberated depiction of women in amatory fiction, in romance, which holds that it was in these (fictional) narratives that women were most often found breaking out of the patriarchal mould, overturning and transgressing the boundaries imposed by domestic, social and economic circumstance. The traditional view of chivalric literature, of romance, sees women accorded greater and more individuated presence, power and agency: in short, more control over their choices and destinies. The lady is the one who determines what happens to her, and what happens to the men around her, to the knight or knights vying for her attention, desperate to win her good favour and her heart.

Recent revisionist interpretations of the position of medieval women and of chivalric romance present a more complex picture, however. For one thing, the power dynamics between lady and knight, heroine and hero, which under the traditional view seem quite simple, are shown to be complicated and problematic, owing to the fact that the influence that the lady has over her knight is based largely if indeed not entirely on her beauty, purity and chastity. As critics such as Kathryn Gravdal argue, the supposed power and control accorded to women in medieval romance was in fact founded on, and made possible by, the very same feminine virtues through which women in medieval society were subordinated, the desired virtues to which women were expected to aspire, the virtues they should seek to embody and possess, according to the dictates of the dominant patriarchal ideology. Thus even romantic heroines can appear mere ciphers of and for male power and desire.

Gravdal further contends that one of the hallmarks of the period in terms of gender power structures was “the naturalization of the subordination of women,” locating this subordination within the feudal system: specifically, in the courts, and in the discourse of

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<sup>100</sup> Eileen Power. *Medieval Women*. Ed. by M. M. Postan. New York, USA and Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 1.

courtly love.<sup>101</sup> Whilst attentive to the inner states—to emotions and to feelings—courtly discourse was first and foremost a vehicle for the repression of women: “a locus in which the feminine figures as an empty sign that can be filled with the reflections of masculine hegemony on itself.” Partly this need to empty and then to fill the figure of “woman” with an image created by (and for) men came from an emergent asceticism grounded in an ideological subordination of women and a largely misogynist construction of the very notion of femininity.

Following these revisionist critiques of courtly romance and allowing that the heroines depicted in chivalric narrative are mere apparitions, or projections, of male desire and belief, the picture that emerges of the female body is not corporeal, but figurative. In other words, the bodies of the heroines of medieval romance will come to seem like ciphers, utterly devoid of materiality. And yet, in *Perceforest*, and in the episodes that constitute the narrative of Zellandine, the corporeal female body, the female body as biological entity, is precisely the text’s focal point. Indeed, there is an argument to be made for an overemphasis in the narrative on the materiality of the female body and for a consequent reactive repression of female sexuality, alongside which the idea of virginity is promulgated forcefully. Furthermore, if we take Gail Hawkes’ view, that the construction of ideas about sex—including, of course, ideas about virginity—about pleasure and desire, are always implicated in and part of the construction of ideas within “the broader process of social order,” there is an argument to be made for the socio-historical relevance of the issues depicted in the narrative; in other words, for seeing what happens to the body of Zellandine, the heroine, as a template for thinking about the wider implications in the medieval period of female corporeality.<sup>102</sup>

This is the key question to ask when considering how best to approach “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine.” It is worth reiterating here that this first “Sleeping Beauty” text in essence sets the framework for the narratives which follow in the same vein. It is a story that in its most elemental and fundamental form, revolves around the body of the heroine: a

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<sup>101</sup> Kathryn Gravdal. *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991. 12, 21-22.

<sup>102</sup> Gail Hawkes. *Sex and Pleasure in Western Culture*. Polity Press: Cambridge, 2004. 2. Gravdal notes:

The intertwining of sexual expression in the worldly institutions of religious faith, of marriage and of medical practice began to identify the importance of sexuality and its expression for secular order. Central to this understanding was a new division that fused sex, gender and sexuality – the binary model. In place of religious confessionals and public penance, new social rules detailed the proper use of the social body in an increasingly complex social structure. 105-106.

See also *Sexuality: A Reader*. Ed. by Feminist Review. London: Virago Press, 1987. See esp. Rosalind Coward, “Sexual violence and sexuality”, 307-325.

body punctured by flax, and later penetrated through intercourse; a body which undergoes several redefinitions, from virgin to mother, from conscious to unconscious, to finally resurrected.



**v. Call the doctor, call the midwife! A critical commentary on religion, medicine and romance in “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine”**

- *Prelude.* The heroine’s fate is determined shortly after birth by Themis’ proclamation: Zellandine shall injure herself with flax, and fall into a deep sleep. This is countermanded by the intervention of another goddess, when Venus promises to keep the princess safe whilst she sleeps, and to ensure that, one day, she wakes.

In Greek mythology, Themis is a goddess of fate, and presides over civic ideals of law and order and in her medieval incarnation in the romance of *Perceforest*, she acts as a fatal oracle, decreeing that ““from the first thread of linen that [Zellandine] spins, from her distaff a shard will pierce her finger and cast her into a sudden sleep, from which she’ll never wake till it’s sucked out!”” (“Une arreste au doy entelle maniere qu’elle s’endormira a coup et ne s’esveillera jusques atant qu’elle sera suchee hors.” (212/98-103).) This injunction, designed to arrest the development of the maiden, to interrupt and suspend her life, is repeated almost word for word in “The Sleeping Beauty” variant discussed in Chapter II. Similarly, in *Perceforest* an external agent, the goddess Themis, works through a natural object (the piece of flax) used for a domestic task (spinning, itself associated with the fates) to induce the heroine’s unconscious state; in Basile’s text, discussed in the next chapter, Fate works through flax to achieve the same end. Fortunately, in the French prose romance, Zellandine’s life is protected to some degree by Venus, Themis’s sister-goddess, and the presiding deity of love, desire and romance.<sup>103</sup> Although Venus cannot reverse completely the state and fate of Zellandine, she can and does take it upon herself to guarantee that the princess will awake again and that when she does, in the end, “all would be made well”. (79) However, before all can end well, Zellandine must succumb to the fate which Themis foretold.



- *Disaster via puncture.* The fated event comes to pass. Once the splinter of flax enters her body, Zellandine collapses and becomes comatose.

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<sup>103</sup> In Greek mythology, Themis embodied order and divine law. She was also the first goddess of prophecy, and, until she relinquished it to Apollo, responsible for the oracle at Delphi. Venus, in contrast, was a Roman goddess (in the later classical tradition in the West, she was simply referenced as a Greco-Roman deity) who embodied love, desire and sexuality. In this function she championed beauty, youth, sex, fertility and romance—all issues underlying the *Perceforest* narrative.

The narrative tells how, one day, Zellandine is suddenly “overcome by sleep” (elle s’endormy, [sic.]58) whilst spinning with “a distaff laden with flax” (67). Roussineau points out that the motif of someone (most often the heroine) pricking themselves with a magical object and falling into an enchanted sleep as a consequence is familiar from the oral tradition, and that this, which he terms “le thème de la piqûre magique,” is associated closely with the theme of awakening.<sup>104</sup> The sleeps seems impenetrable, the maiden’s catatonic state, irreversible. She cannot be woken.



- *Aftermath.* The reactions of the king, the royal doctors, and the courtiers to Zellandine’s loss of consciousness: What do they make of it? How is her unnatural state interpreted? What is done to, or with, the insentient figure—where and how is it placed?

Whilst it is evident that the sleep of Zellandine is not natural and that her state of paralytic coma is further from life than death, what is not clear is how she can appear so lifeless and yet still manifest certain indications of vitality. With her eyes closed and her limbs paralysed, she looks almost as though she were dead. Yet her “gentle breathing” and the freshness of her complexion indicate otherwise; these are signs which demonstrate conclusively the continuation of vitality, of life. The operation of her respiratory function proves the continued and unobstructed free flow so-called “vital virtue,” the most common term at the time for the life force. In medieval medical thinking, vital virtue was associated with “*spiritus*”.<sup>105</sup> In medieval and early modern culture, these “spirits,” or “subtle bodies” (*corpora subtilia*) were most often pictured as vapours of gaseous substances, and the two terms (vapours and spirits) were used interchangeably in medical and physiological language, as Christine Gottler explains in the preface to a study of “subtle bodies”.<sup>106</sup> These subtle bodies were defined

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<sup>104</sup> Roussineau, ed. (1988-1993), 3-4.

<sup>105</sup> See Nancy G. Siraisi. *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990. See esp. 106-108.

<sup>106</sup> *Spirits Unseen. The Representation of Subtle Bodies in Early Modern Culture.* Ed. by Christine Göttler and Wolfgang Neuber. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008. Preface, xx. To trace the continuing influence of these terms in medical and popular culture, see Cesare Ripa’s sixteenth-century reference book, the *Iconologia*, first published in Rome in 1593. This popular tome was later expanded and published in an augmented and illustrated edition, in 1603.

variously and often contradictorily as “medium, vehicle, instrument or engine of the soul and as ‘garment’ (*indentum*) of the soul.”<sup>107</sup>

Complicating matters further is the stability of the sleeping body: its strange, almost frozen permanence, a state of suspended animation indicating, perhaps, immunity against time and against the processes of nature. Even after the passage of many days, weeks and months, without food and water, the body of Zellandine looks “exactly the same,” just as if she had “fallen asleep that moment” (75). The general reaction to the phenomenon of the catatonic, unresponsive and yet still beautiful and breathing heroine is one of wonder and of puzzlement. In the absence of a perceptible cause and without a ready explanation for the princess’ condition, she is described simply as “une merveille,” (58) a “marvel” or “wonder.” Bearing in mind that this is fiction, such phenomena might pass without further comment or the need for explanation; yet the issues must be noted and addressed since, within the narrative itself, the desire, indeed the need, to understand in rational terms what befell the maiden, is pronounced. The meaning of the marvellous in this medieval context will be discussed later, in the conclusion to the chapter; first the implications that the presence of this ambiguous, enigmatic female figure has within the narrative framework must be considered. What reactions does the catatonic Zellandine elicit? What actions does an unconscious female figure motivate? What is done to, or with, the body?

Immediately apparent is the anxiety of the king’s royal physicians, learned men of medicine brought face-to-face with something for which they have no ready explanation. Their diagnostic uncertainty is evident in their seeking immediately to rationalise, to clarify the aetiology of the altered state which the catatonic body of the maiden manifests. To put it another way, the doctors seek to use logic and reason to displace and through displacement, comprehend, what appears marvellous, strange, and beyond the realm of comprehension: Zellandine’s sudden impenetrable slumber. Summoned by the king himself, and shouldering a grave responsibility, these learned men are clearly baffled by what they see, or rather, what they cannot see. They fail to find anything visibly pathological about the sleeping body: no wound, no laceration. Partly this may be due to the fear of the inside of the female body, of its hidden secrets, so that they focus solely on the outside. But since there is nothing abnormal on the surface, they are forced, after much deliberation about what might have caused the onset

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<sup>107</sup> Göttler and Neuber, eds. (2008). *ibid.* Xxiii. Subtle bodies were described also as a kind of “bond” (*vinculum*) that fastens together distant natures, and as “spiritus mundi,” the link between the celestial and corporeal body.”

of the coma, to admit defeat. The catatonic female body has defied their attempts at exegetic understanding. They are, they say, “powerless” to help.

With the doctors powerless to cure his daughter and rouse her from her sleep, the king is left hopeless, helpless. He does not, himself, understand her strange condition; this the reader knows, since the narrative leaves ambiguous and open to interpretation the issue of whether or not the monarch is privy to the prophecy that determined his daughter’s fate. Certainly, the king’s behaviour when the fated moment comes, and his reactions in the aftermath of the disaster, of his daughter falling into a sudden and impenetrable sleep, give no sense of his having any kind of understanding. Indeed, he is unsure even as to the duration and the gravity of the situation; there is the unspoken question: can she ever be woken? Still, the vital signs which Zellandine’s sleeping body shows—her breathing, her still-fresh complexion— provide the anxious royal father with some comfort, and the hope that, looking so much like she might revive at any moment, Zellandine will wake again. This in turn spurs the king’s determination to keep his daughter’s delicate body hidden. He has the unconscious Zellandine deposited in a palace on the outer edges of the kingdom, ordering her body to be placed in the highest room of the tallest tower, in a chamber to which only he and his sister have access, by means of an underground passage. Thus secreted away, Zellandine sleeps her unnatural, deep, fated slumber, upon “a gorgeous bed, worthy of a queen, its curtains and canopy whiter than snow.” (75). Zellandine is left, to all effects, immured, for the exits and entrances to her chamber have been blocked. Only a single, east-facing window remains unobstructed. The significance of this window and specifically the significance of the direction in which it faces might be understood in terms of celestial symbolic association with the sun, which rises in the east, and is thereby reborn each day.<sup>108</sup>

Immurement, or immuration, refers to the practice of walling up a living person and leaving them to suffer a slow and excruciating death brought on by starvation and dehydration. Since the earliest times immuration had been used as a form of lethal punishment and chosen by martyrs as a mode of self-sacrifice. It was used most often to punish women who had contravened their marriage vows, or broken doctrinal oaths of chastity and virginity. In the European folk literary tradition, immuration emerges as a theme in ballads and, to a lesser

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<sup>108</sup> Note also the east-facing tomb sculptures, p. 172. Looking ahead to Basile’s “Sole, Luna e Talia,” discussed in Chapter II, these associations are underlined with the names given to Talia’s children: Sun and Moon. Perrault’s decision to have the children of his sleeping beauty figure named “Aurore”, (“Dawn”) and “Jour” (“Day”) carries on the idea.

extent, in folk tales. In *The Walled-Up Wife*, a casebook that brings together traditional ballad variants on the same theme, Alan Dundes outlines the basic story of “The Ballad of the Walled-Up Wife”. The plot concerns the “the sacrifice of a female victim usually in connection with ensuring the construction of building, bridge or spring.”<sup>109</sup>

The basic structure of ballads in this group is as follows: a group of men want to build a new edifice, most often a castle, monastery or bridge. Owing to unexplained and supposedly supernatural events, whatever they build during the day somehow gets disassembled at night, leaving them back where they began. The men suspect a curse, or some kind of negative magic spell, to be responsible; they are proved right when it transpires that the only way to break the curse and to therefore complete the building is to sacrifice the very first woman to arrive at the building site on the following day. As it happens, the first woman on the scene at the specified time is none other than the chief architect’s young and innocent wife who, despite her pleading and protestation, is promptly immured. In some versions of the story, she begs the men to leave a small aperture in the stone wall, so that she can continue nursing her infant. In these variants, a spring of milk often marks the site of the event, and this site becomes a place of pilgrimage for infertile women and for mothers unable to produce sufficient milk with which to nourish their infants through lactation. These are women desperate for a “folk medical cure”.<sup>110</sup> In “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine,” as indeed in Basile’s later “Sleeping Beauty” version, echoes of this belief in the healing power of a mother’s milk remain, transformed into metaphor: the infant’s mistaken suckling of the comatose heroine/mother’s finger, and the mother’s consequent instant waking.

Certain practitioners of folk medicine have an important part to play in “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine”. Although they never actually make an appearance and are only referred to in the text, midwives, and not doctors, are the ones who eventually identify what, or to be precise, who, might be behind the coma.<sup>111</sup> Midwives were above empirical

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<sup>109</sup> *The Walled-Up Wife: A Casebook*. Ed. by Allan Dundes. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. Preface, x.

<sup>110</sup> Parpulova-Gribble goes on to describe the similarities between stories of walled up women, and those of women locked in towers: “some songs present the creation of the world from the body of a woman, sometimes explicitly decoded as bridge, i.e. mediator. Others, connected with ideas about the world of the dead and about death, present the bridge as metaphor of the transition from the world of the living into the world of the dead; or, they present death as integration-immuration in the town...Still others, probably associated with initiation rites, present the passage from childhood to marriageable age as walling-up in a tower/town and release from it.” *ibid.*, 177.

<sup>111</sup> See Joseph Canning. *Ideas of Power in the Late Middle Ages, 1296-1417*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011. I think you need to find pp nos.



healers and unskilled herbalists, below university-educated doctors in the medical hierarchy of the Middle Ages. There is however evidence to suggest that ‘high’ medical theory and diagnostic practice was used also in ‘low’ circles, as Karine van ‘t Land explains:

Although the treatments of wise women and travelling healers may have been different to those of learned physicians and well-trained surgeons, their basic ideas about the body did not differ that much. The central concepts of medicine such as the humours, complexion and the continuity of the body proved to be pervasive.<sup>112</sup>

Nonetheless, where midwives were better-suited to the diagnosis and the treatment of women was when it came to uniquely female problems—a fact that will become important later on, in discussions of the possible uterine origins of Zelandine’s unnatural state of unconsciousness. It was thought that women were better-suited to dealing with reproductive and related “female” issues; moreover it was felt to be improper for a male physician to perform the kind of intimate physical examination that female complaints demand.<sup>113</sup> When it came to treating women, (female) midwives were supposedly more sympathetic, had a greater level of specialisation, enjoyed greater access to patients and better patient cooperation.

Besides midwives’ greater sympathy for and understanding of women’s bodies and diseases, their familiarity with folk belief and custom was of equal importance. Unlike many professional male doctors, working within the exclusive enclave of the university or the court, midwives lived and worked amongst the people. This meant that they were more likely to be conversant with the social customs and practices, especially those surrounding births. It is because of this greater familiarity with such customs that midwives, and not doctors, are the ones (so the narrator relates) to explain conclusively the circumstances precipitating Zelandine’s loss of consciousness and suggest that she might have offended one of several important goddesses:<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Karine van ‘t Land, “The Solution of Continuous Things: Wounds in Late Medieval Medicine and Surgery,” in *Wounds in the Middle Ages*. Ed. by Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. 89-108, 91.

<sup>113</sup> For an overview of this evidence, see Helen Rodnite Lemay’ chapter in *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honour of John H. Mundy*. Ed. by Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985. 317-336. See also Lucille B. Pinto, “The folk practice of gynecology and obstetrics in the Middle Ages,” in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 47. 1973.

<sup>114</sup> These three goddesses replace the fairies found in other works of medieval literature. This is in keeping with *Perceforest*’s pre-Christian setting in which ancient deities and a “Sovereign God” rule over mankind. See also *Huon de Bordeaux*. Ed. by P. Ruelle. Bruxelles, 1960; *Brun de la Montagne*. Ed. by d. P. Meer. Paris, 1875.

They have a custom in this land that, when a woman is a week from her confinement, she comes to the temple with a company of other women to make her devotions to the three goddesses who're worshipped here. Then on the day of the delivery they have one of their chambers splendidly prepared, and a table spread with all manner of food and drink, with three jugs of the finest spiced wine, three goblets and three knives. And when the pregnant woman has given birth to her child, the three attendant goddesses go and eat at the table in secret, invisible to all. Each goddess finds her plate laden with all kinds of delicacies, her jug full and her goblet and her knife laid ready. The goddess Lucina has pride of place since she has brought the creature into the world – dead or alive. Next to her sits the goddess Venus, who has her torch ready to fire the child, as soon as it's born, with that vital heat, filling each limb to the child's capacity – be it male or female – so that he or she can put it to good use at the due and appropriate age. And next to her sits Themis, goddess of destiny, who immediately determines the child's life and all that will befall it – bitter or sweet as the goddess chooses.

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The practice of setting out food and drink for goddesses and/or fairies to get help in return with domestic tasks or to attract their goodwill, was well-known in the Middle Ages (and was condemned by the leaders of the Church). In romance and *chanson*, it was a widespread theme. Not one of these comparisons with sleeping princesses in folk belief and narrative seems to enter the minds of the king's physicians as they stand baffled before the unresponsive body of his daughter. Nonetheless, this conjectured shortcoming is neither an excuse nor an explanation for the doctors' acute sense of diagnostic and therapeutic impuissance. Their declaration of being "powerless" to help the heroine must be considered from various angles, and the reasoning behind the declaration hypothesised on the basis of several possible factors.

Firstly, the doctor's limitations to explain, to help, to wake, might be related to the theories and practices to which these medieval men of medicine would have prescribed. The Hippocratic tradition, still dominant in the fourteenth century, placed great emphasis on externally visible symptoms as the primary means of diagnosing internal disease. This diagnostic model was based on Aristotelean physiognomic theory, which held that the human body's outward appearance was a mirroring of its inner workings. Faced with a pathological body such as Zellandine, a body that is asymptomatic (there are no wounds, lacerations, changes in colour, etc.), a Hippocratic diagnostic model is bound to fail. Zellandine's body is asymptomatic because from the outside, it appears complete, whole, not disrupted or

disordered in any shape or form. The significance of this becomes clear in relation to one of the central tenets of medieval medicine: the identification of bodily health and wellness with the continuity of the body. A lesion or a wound would indicate the disruption of this continuity, and indicate a pathological state.<sup>115</sup> Wounds, as Karine van 't Land explains, “were part of the concept of *solutio continuitatis*, or the dissolution of the continuity of the body”—defined not as isolated injuries, or breaches, but as breaches “of the whole”.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that although unseen, there is a kind of wound on Zellandine’s unresponsive body: the tiny penetration, the breach, made by the piece of flax as it entered her finger. But perhaps this is too minuscule for the doctors, trained to consider the body as an entire organism, to notice.

What other reason could there be? What other factor might bear closer examination? Here it is worth considering an explanation for the royal physicians’ bafflement rooted in a notion ingrained deep within the fourteenth-century medical (and religious) mind-set: the theory of sex and gender difference. Awareness of the disparities between the two sexes influenced theories of embodiment and medical concepts of the body and its diseases, and consequently dictated medical practice, including the diagnosis and treatment of disease. In other words, based on recognised anatomical differences between men and women, doctors handled the two types of bodies and their diseases and cures in different ways. What was applicable to one sex, to one body, was not applicable to the other. The major hurdle when it came to the female body was for doctors to overcome their fear of difference and attempt to explain their “physiological and psychological specificity”.<sup>117</sup> Specifically, it was in terms of the differences between the internal landscape of men’s and women’s bodies that the female body, and therefore female disorder and disease, were (mis)understood. The problem, perhaps, was that this “difference” was identified as and with the womb; women’s bodies and therefore their health were thought to be determined by their wombs, and by the related factors of their sexual and reproductive capacity and history. And since women were thought to be “notoriously duplicitous” during medical consultations about subjects related to their gynaecological health and sexual activity, and about any uterine symptoms they might be

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<sup>115</sup> Louise Elizabeth Wilson, “Miracle and Medicine: Conceptions of Medical Knowledge and Practice in Thirteenth-Century Miracle Accounts” in Kirkham and Warr, eds. (2014), 63-86. 73. See also Faith Wallis, “Medicine, Practical” and “Medicine Theoretical” in Thomas F. Glick, Steven J. Livesey and Faith Wallis, eds. *Medieval Science, Technology and Medicine*. London, 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Karine van 't Land, “The Solution of Continuous Things: Wounds in Late Medieval Medicine and Surgery,” in Kirkham and Warr, eds. (2014), 89-108. 103.

<sup>117</sup> Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 17.

experiencing, the task of the male physician—to diagnose and treat the woman for what would, most often, be a specifically “female” disorder—was made that much more challenging.<sup>118</sup>

The idea that the womb was responsible for everything to do with women’s health originated not in the Middle Ages, but much earlier: in the second millennium B.C., in the ancient Egyptian Ebers Papyrus, a medical treatise which makes reference to the womb in relation to female disease. More specifically, it describes the medical phenomenon of the “wandering womb” and uses this to explain all manner of female disease, thereby excluding the possibility of any other internal or external cause.<sup>119</sup> Medical terminology for the large cluster of symptoms believed to be associated with this female condition was wide-ranging, and developed down through the centuries. Other names for the wandering womb included uterine suffocation (*suffocatio uteri*), uterine strangulation (*uteri strangulate*), uterine fits (*furor uterinus*), hysterical passion (*passio hysterica*), green sickness (*chlorosis*), “the vapours” and, from the sixteenth century onwards, hysteria.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Lauren Kassel, “How to Read Simon Forman’s Casebooks: Medicine, Astrology, and Gender in Elizabethan London,” in *Social History of Medicine* Vol. 12 No. 1. Publ. by The Society for the Social History of Medicine, 1999. 3-18, 3. This notion of the womb as the main determinant of female health and the primary cause of female pathologies appears also in the medical iconography of the period. Often in “disease-woman” images, illustrations that showed the female body and its diseases, the emphasis was on the womb as the seat of all disease, with reference to the female body’s reproductive capacities and many possible gynecological malfunctions.

<sup>119</sup> For a translation of the Ebers Papyrus, see Bendix Ebbell. *The Papyrus Ebers, the Greatest Egyptian Medical Document*. Levin & Munksgaard, 1937.

<sup>120</sup> Derived from the Latin *hysterica* (“of the womb”), the term “hysteria” was used until the late eighteenth century, in medical writing, as a kind of umbrella term to cover the various symptoms associated with uterine disease.

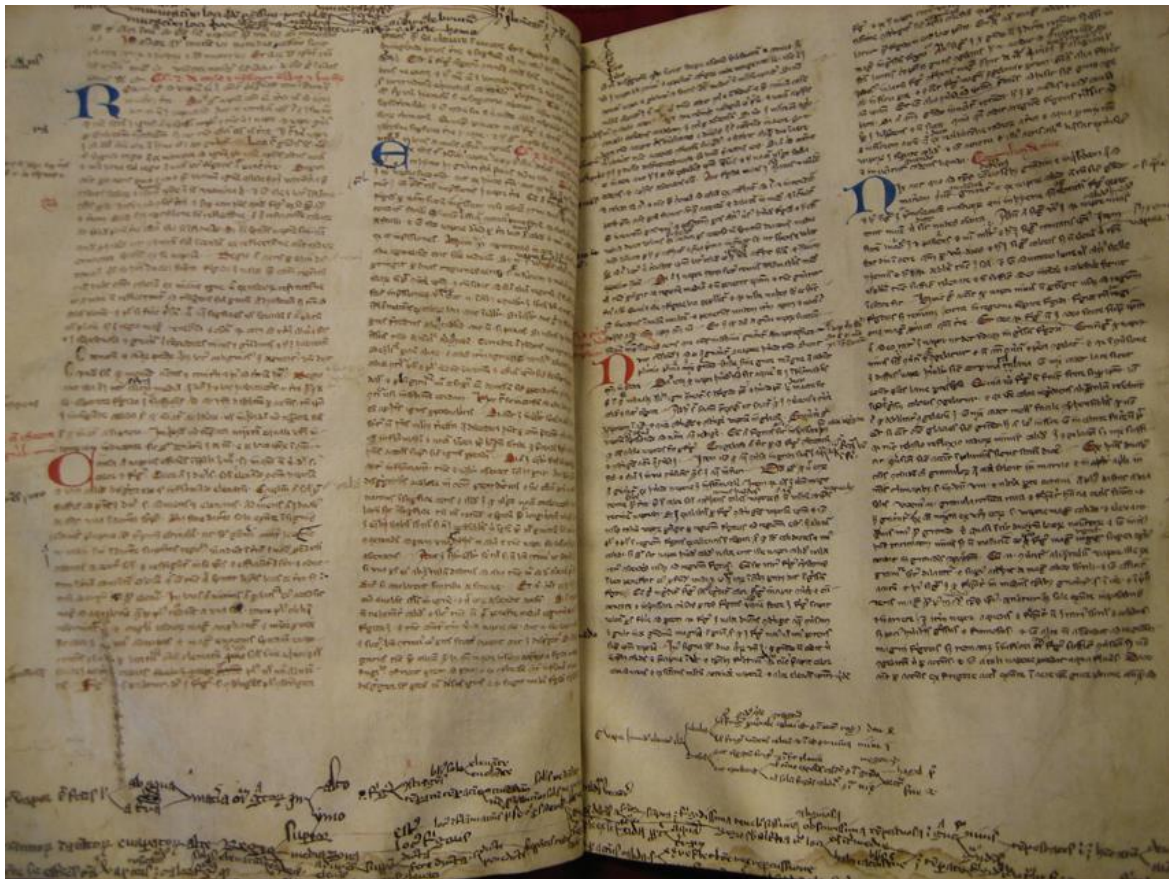


Figure 1.3. Double-page spread with marginalia and heavy annotations from the *Trotula: De passionibus mulierum*. MS Latin 1622. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

The wandering womb is discussed at length in the *Trotula* texts, a compendium of medical knowledge and belief on the subjects of women’s health and the female constitution (Figure 1.3). Written in Latin, three medical treatises make up the *Trotula: Trotula Major, Trotula Minor, De ornatu*. Written in Latin and translated into all the major European vernacular languages, the texts circulated widely between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Around the time when manuscript culture gave way to printed books, an anonymous compiler put the three texts together, added new material and retitled the composite work as the *Summa que dicitur “Trotula”* (*The Compendium which is called the Trotula*). Since the first and the third treatises, “On the Conditions of Women” and “On Women’s Cosmetics,” were both anonymous, the compiler based this title on the name of the author of the central text, “On

Treatments for Women”. It took Monica Green’s pioneering study to demonstrate the erroneous compilation of what emerges as three distinct treatises. Green showed that the treatises of which the Trotula was comprised were in fact most likely written by three separate male authors, each one with his own unique perspective on the subjects discussed: women’s cosmetics, women’s health, and the most common female disorders and diseases, together with a list of the most effective treatments.<sup>121</sup>

For a long time it was believed that “Trota,” an eleventh- or twelfth-century Salernian woman and female healer, was responsible for the composition of all three texts. The name “Trota” has connotations that go beyond the medical establishment. In the history of oral/folk culture these implications are significant in their application to old women. During the Middle Ages, the connotations of a “trot” were proverbial and suggestive. Beryl Rowland explains that a “trot” or “vieille” was an ugly old woman who “trotted for a living”. Deprived of physical attractions, the trot nonetheless possessed the (magical, medical) power and the knowledge of a sorceress. Less salubriously, a trot was associated with prostitution; “une femme de mauvaise vie,” she was an old woman who made her living as a procuress, and who in this role taught her young charges the tricks of the trade. Rowland refers to an old French proverb: “Besoing fait vieille trotter,” (“Need makes an old woman a bawd”) and explains how “Old Trot” or “Old Dame Trot” became a burlesque figure, “the stock joke of popular literature—the old woman who still wished to associate herself with sexual pleasures. To the medieval misogynist, she was the repulsive creature that the promiscuous, proud, and desirable young woman inevitably became.” Old Dame Trot, otherwise known as La Troitière, appears in all the major Western vernacular literature from Ovid’s Dipsas onwards and survives in English children’s nursery rhymes.

Beliefs about the wandering womb were passed down in medical treatises and developed over time. A striking example of the ongoing fascination with the wandering womb can be found in Ashmole 399, an English illustrated manuscript dating from the thirteenth century (Figure 1.4).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *The Trotula. An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*. Ed. by Monica H. Green. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. See *Medieval Woman’s Guide to Health: The First English Gynaecological Handbook*. Introduced and transl. by Beryl Rowland. London: Croom Helm, 1981. 4. Cf. Rowland’s article, “Exhuming Trotula, Sapiens Matrona of Salerno,” *Florilegium*, 1 (1979), 42-57; and Edward F. Tuttle, “The Trotula and Old Dame Trot: A Note on the Lady of Salerno,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 50 (1976), 61-72.

<sup>122</sup> For detailed studies of the manuscript, see Loren MacKinney. *Medical Illustrations in Medieval Manuscripts*. London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1965; L.C. MacKinney and H. Bober, “A Thirteenth Century





Figure 1.4. Attempts to revive swooning female patient.  
MS Ashmole 399, fol. 033r. 13th Century.  
Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Medical Case History in Miniatures,” in *Speculum*, 35, 1960, 251; Charles H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England*. London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967. 81-82.

Through a storyboard of delicately rendered, detailed illustrations, the manuscript narrates the case of a young female patient ostensibly suffering from a dislocated womb. The opening scene shows a woman much like our medieval sleeping beauty and symbolic hysteric, Zelandine. The Ashmole patient lies on the ground, her arms limp at her sides. She has fainted. This is significant because, as Laurinda Dixon points out, “[A]ccording to every medical authority,” fainting was believed to be one of the most common symptoms of the wandering womb. That the patient’s faint in the picture is an indication of her suffering from uterine suffocation or dislocation is suggested by the artistic rendering of bodily proportion: the woman’s head (the part of the body to which the womb was thought to “wander”) is shown as greatly enlarged.<sup>123</sup>

By the fourteenth century, one might expect there to have been some revision of the theory behind the wandering womb; however, a patriarchal medical establishment still entrenched in the strong conviction that (a) women were physically inferior; and that, (b) this comparative constitutional weakness was because of the womb, remains. The basis for the ingrained belief in women’s predisposition to “congenital weakness and ill health from the moment of birth” was the idea that the womb (depicted as a flask-like object with a long thin neck in Ancient Egypt and again by Hippocrates) was wild, “dangerously fickle” and unfixed, and therefore liable to migrate, to “wander” through the body, wreaking organic havoc.<sup>124</sup> The womb was likely to “wander” from its proper position when the female body, phlegmatic by nature, did not receive adequate fluid nourishment in the form of menses and “semen,” which it was believed widely women also had. This meant that virgins and widows – women of childbearing age who did not have their wombs “moistened” through sexual intercourse—were most susceptible to the wandering womb.

This [disease] happens to women because corrupt semen abounds in them excessively, and it is converted into a poisonous nature. This happens to women who do not use men. . . . It regularly comes upon virgins, too, when they reach the age of marriage and are not able to use men and when the semen abounds in them a lot, which Nature wishes to draw out by means of the male.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Laurinda S. Dixon. *Perilous Chastity: Women and Illness in Pre-Enlightenment Art and Medicine*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995. 26.

<sup>124</sup> Dixon (1995), 25. Hippocrates considered the womb to be like an inverted jar, an animate container which could attract liquids into itself, rather like the vessels used for the medical practice of cupping. In this way the womb would gather blood from other parts of the body and use it to produce menses and, during intercourse, the so-called “female seed”.

<sup>125</sup> From “The Conditions of Women” in *The Trotula. An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*. Ed. by Monica H. Green. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. 21.



With the womb dried out, the female body was believed to enter into an unnatural and pathological state. Disease pathology in medieval medicine was understood in terms of humoral imbalance, or *dyskrasia*, the main constituent in the development of *nosos*, or disease.<sup>126</sup> In other words, disease was defined as the manifest disorder in the liquid parts of the human body.<sup>127</sup> It is worth pointing out, however, that humoral balance was understood not as a spontaneous or isolated event, but as something related closely to the environment. External factors, it was believed, had some part in the onset and aetiology of disease, since the interaction between the surface of the body and outside factors such as air, wind and sunlight, were through likely to affect the body's unseen inside, its organic internal makeup.<sup>128</sup> Besides humoral imbalance and external environmental factors, medieval medicine held that astrological movements, in particular the misalignment of celestial bodies, could also cause the onset of disease.<sup>129</sup>

Whilst the environment and stars were significant, in relation to the wandering womb the dominant model for thinking about this specific disease was humoral. In a female body that was unmoistened and too dry, the imbalanced humours would obstruct the free flow of air through the body's "channels" and as a consequence place undue pressure on the inner organs, in particular on the lungs. Extreme pressure then accumulated throughout the body and pushed the womb from its natural location. Once released, the dried-out womb would migrate "lightly and unimpeded," in a search of moisture and nourishment, until it reached another inner cavity, frequently in the head. Theoretically, this migration was possible because of the (mistaken) Hippocratic belief in a direct channel connecting the head to the womb. From there, the dislocated womb could cause a whole array of symptoms: dizziness, lethargy, an irregular or

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<sup>126</sup> Mirko D. Grmek. "The Concept of Disease," in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*. Ed. by Mirko Grmek. Transl. by Antony Shugar. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1998. 241-258, 247.

<sup>127</sup> Also significant was the belief, held by Classical Greek physicians, that disease had what might be described as "a temporal dimension." Understood in these terms, disease appeared as a process and a progression, "punctuated by crises that manifested themselves, at regular intervals, either by the evacuation or the deposit of the perturbed humors." See *Sources for the History of Medicine in Late Medieval England*. Transl. by Carole Rawcliffe. Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 1995.1.

<sup>128</sup> Rawcliffe (1995), 250.

<sup>129</sup> Although most people accepted that disease was caused by humoral imbalance, there is evidence to suggest that many retained a parallel belief in the spiritual basis of illness: that bodily disorder was, ultimately, punishment from God for mortal moral sins, a form of retribution and, at the same time, of purification. Rawcliffe (1995), 3. For an excellent summary of the general medical landscape of medieval Europe, see Katharine Park, "Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe, 500-1500," in *Medicine in Society*. Ed. by Andrew Wear. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cited by Monica Green in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate/Variorum, 2000.

weak pulse, syncope, disturbed sleep patterns, and extended periods of loss of consciousness. To quote from the *Trotula*:

Sometimes the womb is suffocated...[young women] suffer syncope, and the pulse vanishes so that from the same cause it is barely perceptible...Galen tells of a certain woman who suffered thus and lost her pulse and her voice and she was as if she had expired, because no exterior sign of life was apparent, though around her heart Nature still retained a little bit of heat. Whence certain people judged her to be dead. But Galen put some well-carded wool to her nose and mouth, and by its motion he knew that she was still alive.<sup>130</sup>

Some of these symptoms—indeed, the most important and characteristic indications of a body suffering from a dislocated womb—are present in the story. Zellandine is in a state of syncope; her sleep is more than disturbed—it is impenetrable, a kind of coma; and her period of unconsciousness is unnaturally long.

Within this humoral framework, the medieval doctor's principal treatment objective was to restore a state of balance by manipulating the four principal elements of which the human body was believed to be comprised. This was achieved (or more often than not, attempted) in one of several ways: either through healing by “opposites,” a method whereby substances with opposing properties were used; using substances with opposing qualities); using evacuations, which meant removing through bloodletting, sweating or purging the humour deemed to be present in excess; or by consulting the heavens and trying to attract more constitutionally favourable astrological influences and star alignments. The use of these treatments was not mutually exclusive. Indeed, there is evidence that often physicians combined elements from each of these “regimens of cure” in their treatment plans.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, the medieval doctor might also transgress traditional disciplinary boundaries in developing a course of treatment; that is, they might and amalgamate accepted medical knowledge and practise with “exempla” inherited from a long tradition, as well as with beliefs

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<sup>130</sup> *Trotula*. Transl. and ed. by Monica Green. *The Conditions of Women*. 71.

<sup>131</sup> Alongside these professional and learned modes of treatment, which medical textbooks termed “regimens of cure,” there were also “regimens of preservation” where the objective was not so much to heal but to maintain health and hygiene in order to prevent the onset of disease and to sustain the highest possible level of wellbeing. See Michael R. Solomon, “Non-natural love: Coitus, desire and hygiene in Medieval and Early Modern Spain,” in *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700*. Ed. by Elena Carrera. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013.147-158, 149. The popular health guides of the period, *regimina sanitatis*, discussed the proper maintenance of hygiene at length.

and cures collated from diverse sources and ideologies: with folk customs, astronomy, astrology, alchemy, to name but a few.<sup>132</sup>

The variety of treatments prescribed for the wandering womb, which was thought curable except in the most exceptional and severe cases (when the womb lodged in the head for a period longer than six months and lead to death) reflect this kaleidoscopic approach. One popular treatment was odiferous therapy, based on the common practice of fumigation and premised on the belief that the womb was particularly sensitive to smells. The “best” or at least the most popular remedies included applying fetid odours to the nostrils in order to repel the womb from the higher location to which it had strayed, applying fragrant substances to the genitalia in order to coax the uterus back down to its proper position, and (less invasively) rubbing the hands and feet of the affected woman with laurel oil. For optimal health benefits, the most comprehensive regimen of cure involved anointing the woman “inside and out with oils and ointments of good smell”.<sup>133</sup>

Still, since the medieval doctor believed and worked on the basis of the idea, inherited from Hippocratic and Galenic medicine that “the suffocation of the womb was without any doubt a problem caused by excessive chastity,” by far the best and most lasting cure put forward in the medical (and religious) literature of the time, was marriage. Marriage brought with it a guarantee: the certainty that the womb would receive adequate moisture through regular sex.<sup>134</sup> This is not to say that the health benefits of copulation were exclusive to the female body. For men, the supposed benefits of sufficient and regular copulation included the rebalancing of extreme emotions, elevation of depressed spirits, sharpening of eyesight, and relieving the symptoms of kidney disease. Too little sex, and men were liable to suffer from headaches, melancholia, madness, and blindness; too much, and fatigue, amnesia, and general loss of sensation could be expected.<sup>135</sup>

It is in terms of the belief in the necessity of sex for the female body to be adequately “moistened” that “The Sleeping Beauty” should be read; it is of the utmost significance in “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine”. Considering more closely at the “cure” that Venus prescribes, and describes to Troylus, Zellandine’s lover (and also, simultaneously, her physician) is therefore important.

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<sup>132</sup> Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 6.

<sup>133</sup> From “The Conditions of Women,” in Green, ed. (2002), 72.

<sup>134</sup> Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 174.

<sup>135</sup> Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 76-78.



- *Period of suspended animation.* The narrative continues, and within it, stories about a strangely sleeping beautiful princess begin to circulate. Troylus hears of Zellandine's condition and sets out to save his beloved.

Troylus visits the temple of Venus to ask for help.<sup>136</sup> The goddess of love instructs the knight to make his way to the distant and impenetrable castle where Zellandine is hidden, and up to the tower room. Once inside, “qu'eslissiez par la raierre/Le fruit ou gist la medicine,/Garye seroit la meschine.” (Troisième partie, LII, 80)) Troylus must “pluck from the cleft/ The fruit that holds the cure” and the unfortunate woman will be healed (72).<sup>137</sup> Zellandine's own body holds the antidote for her affliction. But in order for this antidote to work, for the remedy to effect the girl's revival, her awakening, it has first to be extracted; and for this extraction to take place, the body of the heroine must initially be penetrated. When Troylus betrays his anxieties—has he understood her words correctly? Will he be capable of acting on them when the moment comes?—Venus reassures him. Whatever happens, she will keep the promise that she made, to ensure the girl's revival; therefore Troylus need not worry: “Amour trouvera la raierre/Et Venus, qui scet la maniere/Du fruit trouver, le queillera/ Nature le composera.” (“Love will find the cleft/ And Venus, who knows how to find the fruit [so well], / Will pluck it and Nature will compose it.” (73)). Troylus sets off and after some time reaches the castle where Zellandine lies sleeping. The fallen angel Zephyr, sometimes described as a “Puck-like trickster” comes to the hero's aid here in the form of a magical bird, and carries him up on his great wings to the window of the highest tower, the window that looks onto the sleeping beauty's room. Clearly, there are many echoes here of the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche, first described by Apuleius, and popular across Western Europe during the fourteenth-century, when *Perceforest* was most likely composed.

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<sup>136</sup> There are echoes of this temple scene in Shakespeare's late romance, *The Winter's Tale* (III.i) a play in which Hermione's statue is in many ways a sleeping beauty figure.

<sup>137</sup> “Cleft” is my translation of “la raierre”; Bryant's translation has the more vulgar “slit” instead. This reference can be situated within the iconographic tradition of the female body, and the pregnant womb in particular, depicted as containers for fruit. See Jacques Gélis. *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe*. Transl. by Rosemary Morris. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. 79. [First published as *L'arbre et le fruit*. Paris: Fayard, 1984.]

Moreover, the magical bird as helper is a motif familiar from myths and fairy tales, including in comparable “Sleeping Beauty” narratives, or stories comprising elements of this tale type.<sup>138</sup> In the *Nibelungen*, for instance, in the story of Brunhild and Siegfried, a magical bird transports the hero safely across the enchanted circle of fire that surrounds the castle of the sleeping heroine.) In *Blandin de Cournailles*, an anonymous Catalan poem composed from the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century, a magical white bird is the only one directly able to wake Brianda, the sleeping beauty, but the bird itself must first be freed from the tower in which it is imprisoned, guarded by a dragon, a serpent and a fierce Saracen. Blandin, the valiant young hero of the poem, frees the bird, and together they go in search of Brianda. They soon find her, and the maiden wakes just as predicted, the moment when the white bird alights upon her hand.<sup>139</sup> Magical birds likewise helping the hero appear in *Frère-de-Joie et Soeur-de-Plaisir*, a Catalan narrative composed anonymously in the fourteenth-century, to which “The story of Troilus and the beautiful Zellandine” otherwise bears a striking resemblance. In both, the sleeping heroine is taken to an inaccessible tower, where only her parents can visit. In both there is an exchange of rings between the hero and the heroine. In both, the hero has sex with the unconscious maiden, who gives birth nine months later and, when she wakes and realizes what has happened, weeps bitterly for her virginity. There is, however, one significant difference, as Roussineau explains. Whereas in *Perceforest* it is clearly stated that Themis is the cause of Zellandine’s sudden and impenetrable sleep, the goddess working her powers through the physical medium of the piece of flax, there is no reason given in *Frère-de-Joie et Soeur-de-Plaisir*. Roussineau emphasises: “aucune explication...pour la soudaine catalepsie de la jeune fille...[elle] somber subitement dans un profond sommeil sans raison apparente et sans qu’il y ait eu de malédiction.”<sup>140</sup>




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<sup>138</sup> For a useful introduction to comparable tales, and references for further reading on the subject, see Chapter I of Heidi Anne Heiner’s *Sleeping Beauties: Sleeping Beauty and Snow White Tales from around the World*. Surlalune Fairytale series. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010.

<sup>139</sup> See also E. Zago, “Some Medieval Versions of Sleeping Beauty: Variations on a Theme,” in *Studi Francesi*, t. 69, 1979, 422-424; P. Meyer, “*Le roman de Blandin de Cournailles et de Guillot Ardit*,” *Romania*, t. II, 1873, 170-202.

<sup>140</sup> Gilles Roussineau, “Tradition Littéraire et Culture Populaire dans L’histoire de Troilus et de Zellandine (“*Perceforest*”, Troisième partie), Version Ancienne du Conte de la belle au Bois Dormant. *Arthuriana*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1994) Scriptorium Press. pp. 30-45. 39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869044>. Accessed: 03/05/2014: “no explanation whatsoever...for the sudden collapse of the young girl...[she] fell suddenly into a deep sleep without any apparent cause and without having been cursed.” My translation.

- *Rescue.* After many misadventures, Troylus at last finds Zellandine, asleep and unresponsive.

When Zephyr deposits him outside the sleeping beauty's window, Troylus climbs inside. At this point he feels ready to do as the goddess Venus bid, and pluck the curative fruit from the cleft of the unconscious body Zellandine. But before he can reap the harvest, so to speak, the knight must first overcome a few last hurdles. The first of these is a material obstacle that Troylus sees straight away when he casts an eye around the room: "il voit a l'un des lez de la chamber a l'aournement d'un lit moult riche et noble, comme se ce fust pour une royne, car le ciel et les courdines estoient plus blanches que nege." (Troisième partie, Lii. 86.) Zellandine's bed, magnificent enough to be "worthy of a queen," is covered by a curtain. This curtain keeps her body hidden, despite the physical proximity, at a certain scopic distance—a theme of concealment that recurs in both of the other two primary "Sleeping Beauty" variants to be discussed Chapters II and III. The curtain here is like a veil: a material that covers and at the same time tantalises with the promise of postponed exposure. The veil-like curtain is in this sense part of the symbolic apparatus of revelation (159).<sup>141</sup> The curtain surrounding Zellandine's bed emphasises, moreover, the value of what is hidden. To curtain something (or someone) is to call attention to the value of what cannot be seen, of what is protected and concealed behind, beneath the curtain: like the Paduan Madonna, a late medieval devotional image where the curtain affixed to the canvas covers and protects the painting and at the same time makes its (symbolic) value manifest through the denial of immediate and easy visual access.<sup>142</sup>

In a chapter on the subject of swooning and fainting in medieval literature and medicine, Judith Weiss points out that during the period, indeed from the twelfth century onwards, "there appears to be a rise in approved emotional behaviour, in both secular and

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<sup>141</sup> Barbara Baert, transl. by Kathryn Rudin. Introduction to a section on "Veiling," in *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*. Ed. by Rudy and Baert. Turnhout: Brepolis, 2007. 158-160.

<sup>142</sup> This is discussed by Victor M. Schmidt in "Curtains, revelation, and pictorial reality in late medieval and Renaissance Italy" in Baert and Rudin, eds. (2007), 191-213. Schmidt remarks: "The sanctity and power of cult images was best guaranteed by keeping them out of sight," 200. In the same edited same volume, see also Christine Sciacca's analysis of curtains attached to manuscript pages, i.e. the adhesion of textile coverings to icons of the Virgin, in "Raising the curtain on the use of textiles" 161-190.

religious contexts.”<sup>143</sup> It is in this context of a greater emotionality, or greater tolerance for emotional display, that Troylus’ psychosomatic response to the sight of Zellandine, “whom he loved more dearly than himself” (67) might be read—a response which proves to be another obstacle which the knight must overcome in order to accomplish the remedial penetration of the passive sleeping maiden there before him.

Medieval medicine recognised the effect of emotions on the body: how emotional upheaval could manifest in organic change. Emotions were understood not as abstract concepts, related somehow to the Platonic definition of the “soul” as an “immaterial immortal entity,” but rather as semi-corporeal things, “movements of the embodied soul”.<sup>144</sup> It was believed that the environment had a lot to do with the nature of human emotion; the perception of “good or evil,” or positive or negative stimuli, determined the response. The emotions, sometimes referred to as the “accidents of the soul,” were related closely to some of the most fundamental tenets of medieval medicine, categorised under the umbrella term, “the six non-naturals”. The six non-naturals comprised (1) ambient air, or air and breathing, (2) food and drink, (3) exercise and rest, (4) sleep and wakefulness, (5) retention and evacuation, or emptiness and repletion, and lastly, (6) perturbations of the mind and emotions, otherwise referred to as “affects of the mind”. These non-natural factors, extrinsic to the body, were placed in relation to the “naturals” i.e. what the body was thought to be made of naturally and what it required in order to maintain a state of health. The seven “things natural” were: elements, complexions, humours, members, powers, operations, spirits.<sup>145</sup> Popular health guides from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, like Arnold von Bamber’s *Regimen Sanitatis*, describe the effects of the emotions on the health and the internal balance of the body. Heightened emotions in particular were believed to be capable of producing a catalogue of violent somatic response. Emotions controlled the amount of nourishment available to the various organs and limbs of the body by altering the amount of “spirit” that the body produced;

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<sup>143</sup> Judith Weiss, “Modern and Medieval Views on Swooning: the Literary and Medical Contexts of Fainting in Romance,” in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*. Ed. by Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011. 121-134. 123.

<sup>144</sup> Elena Carrera, “Anger and the Mind-Body Connection in Medieval and Early Modern Medicine,” *ibid.* 95-146, 116-117.

<sup>145</sup> See Carrera, *ibid.* 95. This Aristotelian explanation was prevalent and widely influential in the fields of medicine and medical philosophy until the beginning of the eighteenth century. This understanding of the emotions as being located simultaneously in the mind and the body (“psycho-somatic entities or events,” as I put it, or as Carrera terms them, “cognitive-physiological events”) was widely promulgated, and can be found in a variety of learned texts, including the writings of Thomas Aquinas, Arnold of Villanove and Bernard Montana de Montserrat.

as a result, it could be said that emotions controlled indirectly alterations in the affected body parts.<sup>146</sup>

Troylus's emotions get in the way of his performance, of his actions. Even before the knight lays eyes on Zellandine the anticipation of the impending visual and physical encounter with his beloved increases his emotional turmoil so much so that he feels "le corps a eschauffer" ("his body burning/aflame").<sup>147</sup> No mere metaphor, this burning is manifested in the form of physical symptoms; the narrator describes the hero's flushed cheeks, his stagger back. The psychosomatic response is even more drastic when Troylus draws back the curtain and looks finally upon the image, in the flesh, "toute nue" ("completely nude"), the image which for so long has occupied, indeed has obsessed, his imagination. He sees, finally, "la pucelle, qui sy doucement dormoit qu'il sembloit qu'elle fust tout droit endormie, tant estoit coulouree, blanche et tendre. (Troisième partie, LII. 87.)"<sup>148</sup> Such discovery (or invention) of images, it could be argued, is a hallmark of the genre of the Old French romance. This is what Dornbush contends when he describes these revelations as "fundamental" to the narratives in which they happen, designed to "bring together the experience of narrator hero, and reader." The purpose of these scenes, the critic further contends, "is to examine the relationship between rhetorical and amatory arts, as these are governed by the imagination and enacted through the narrator/hero/clerk/knight configuration."<sup>149</sup> To this can be added that a further purpose of these scenes, or at least another function of the scene in the narrative in question, is to examine the relationship between the body and the spirit, or the body and the mind—that is, the imaginative faculties. When Troylus discovers the sleeping Zellandine, when he is confronted in the flesh with what for so long has been but an image, a memory, the psychosomatic response is the noticeable one; the knight felt his legs "give way" and his heart (the principal

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<sup>146</sup> Günter Kallinich and Karin Figala. *Das "Regimen sanitatis" des Arnold von Bamberg*. *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 56 (1972) 44-60. Until the sixteenth century the *Liber pantegni*, a medieval medical text compiled by Constantinus Africanus sometime before 1086, included one of the most influential discussions of the accidents of the soul. See *Constantine the African and Ali ibn al-Abbas al-Mağusi: The Pantegni and Related Texts*. Ed. by Charles Burnett and Danielle Jacquart in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Studies in Ancient Medicine, vol. 10. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994. The idea of there being bodily ramifications to emotional distress goes back a long way in history. The Ancient Egyptians, for instance, believed that the soul, which usually remained hidden, sometimes flew from the body and left it in a state of trance. See Ewa Kuryluk. *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a "True" Image*. Cambridge, MA and London: Basil Blackwell, 1991. See esp. 212-214.

<sup>147</sup> Troisième partie, LII. 86-87.

<sup>148</sup> "the maiden, sleeping so soundly that it seemed like she would sleep forever, her complexion rosy, her skin white and soft."

<sup>149</sup> Dornbush (1990), 27.



organ, the source of heat and therefore of life) begin to fail.<sup>150</sup> The spectacular sight of the sleeping Zelandine, of “the one he loved most in all the world,” (la personne du monde qu’il amoit le mieulx.” (Troisième partie. LII. 87) literally stops his breath.

Arguably, the principal reason for Troylus manifesting so strong and immediate a psychosomatic response to the beautiful vision in the flesh is that Zelandine really is, in the flesh: “toute nue” (LII. 87) (“stark naked,” 75).<sup>151</sup> Nakedness renders the sleeping heroine a still more complex symbol; through her nakedness Zelandine becomes metaphorically more multivalent. Her naked body, besides its material presence, is also and at the same time a symbol with myriad and unfixed meanings. It has been argued that in medieval and early modern history, “virtually nothing is known of the meaning of skin, both in the everyday and in medical or religious discourse,” nor of the “identity concepts” to which the significations of the skin might point to or pertain.<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, it is possible to conjecture about the meaning of Zelandine’s naked skin in the context of the text. On the one hand, the naked body of the sleeping heroine invites advance. Divested of the protective materiality that clothing would provide, it looks like the naked body of the heroine could be more easily appropriated, opened, penetrated. There is now nothing obstructing the unmediated look, nothing stopping the probing touch or a more invasive physical advance. In *The Book of Skin*, Steven Connor describes medieval medical conceptions of the skin, or rather the multiple skins, in and of the human body. In *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages*, Marie-Christine Pouchelle describes the body as “a series of nested or concentric enclosures, each bounded by its own membrane or tunic.”<sup>153</sup> Bound in an outer layer of skin (the epidermis), the body’s inner-organs were likewise membrane-bounded: the belly, enclosed in several layers; the lungs and the heart likewise. Citing Pouchelle, Connor writes how such “nesting involution,” in essence “replicates

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<sup>150</sup> Galen later denied the Aristotelian model and suggested instead three principal members (the heart, the brain and the liver) each governing a separate group of organs and functions. Avicenna complicated the matter further when he combined the two previous dominant theories to devise an account in which the heart was given the dominant position in a system that comprised several other principle members. See Nancy Siraisi. *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990. 105-107.

<sup>151</sup> Zelandine’s nakedness is reinforced verbatim later on, with the repetition of “toute nue” (LII. 90.)

<sup>152</sup> Daniela Bohde, “Skin and the Search for the Interior: The Representation of Flaying in the Art and Anatomy of the Cinquecento”, in *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture*. Ed. by Florike Egmond and Robert Zwijnenberg. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. 10-47. 45.

<sup>153</sup> Marie-Christine Pouchelle. *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages*. Transl. by Rosemary Morris. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

the relation of the body as microcosm to the macrocosm of the world” since the cosmos is also an endless concentric collection of bodies and membranes, of bodies in membranes.<sup>154</sup>

In its unblemished perfection Zellandine’s naked body invites comparison with the Virgin, whose body of “spotless white stuff” is a paradigm for purity and bodily as well as spiritual perfection.<sup>155</sup> Lily-white, soft and perfect, (*tendre et vermeille comme une rose et de chair blanche comme la fleur de lys* (LII. 87-88), Zellandine’s naked body is the incarnation of her spotless, perfect self, of a body—and therefore a moral integrity—as yet unblemished by the touch of man. Both the ideal of virginity and virginity’s attendant moral value, chastity, belonged in this period (as during earlier centuries) to a patristic mindset defined by “ecclesiastical preoccupations with sexual purity for women, the virginal conditioning of women in religion, and the often necessary prerequisite of virginity for sanctification.”<sup>156</sup> All of these were rooted in early monastic tradition and teaching, promulgated first in learned tracts and later, in popular texts. For much of the Middle Ages, the desired, ideal female state, was one of total virginity. Hence the many virgin martyrs, the women who sacrificed their lives in order to keep their bodies unblemished. Countless (male-authored) tracts describe the supreme importance of cultivating and defending this state of *integritas*, amongst them, the writings of Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose and Tertullian. Jerome, for instance, in his “Letter to Eustochium,” admonishes women to guard their virginity with jealousy, and outlines the benefits of so doing. Only by remaining *integritas*, pure in both body and in spirit, could a woman hope to unite, after death, with the Son of God, as a bride of Christ.

Such integral symbolic purity defines the body of the sleeping beauty. Like the immaculate body of the Virgin, the naked female body is a blank: a *tabula rasa*, something that can be marked and, through marking, (re)defined. Zellandine in her nakedness is described as malleable, “soft,” (“*tendre*” (LII. 87)) and pliant, like unformed clay or melted wax. This sense of the body’s material softness evokes the well-established scriptural and philosophical tradition in which notions of materiality and malleability come together to inform concepts of a weaker “female” entity. In Genesis 1:2, the “female” (understood cosmologically, rather than just as body or as concept) is that which is without form and void. Similarly, in traditional Jewish and Greek belief, what is formless is considered female, and what is female, defined as

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<sup>154</sup> Steven Connor. *The Book of Skin*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2004. 18.

<sup>155</sup> Kuryluk (1991), 4.

<sup>156</sup> Jane Tobbetts Schulenburg, “The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation,” in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*. Ed. with an Introduction by Mary Beth Rose. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986. 29-72.

formless. In the classical philosophical tradition, both Plato and Aristotle promulgated this view. Plato, in *Timaeus*, describes the universal substance, the stuff that bears the imprint of all things, as the “Mother” (or the Recepta. The distinguishing feature of this semantically female-gendered universal stuff is its shapelessness: it is “void of all forms” and like clay or wax, ready to “receive... the copies of all things intelligible and eternal.”<sup>157</sup> For his part, Aristotle focuses on the provision of substance and the agency required to shape it. The “female,” according to the Aristotelean concept, “provides the material,” whilst the male provides the tools for and wields the shaping power.<sup>158</sup> Added to this were the Hippocratic views on the female body as an organic unit that was by its very nature watery and “phlegmatic”. Women’s bodies were understood as leaky, with easily permeable surfaces, particularly during menstruation and after birth.<sup>159</sup> This supposed leakiness lay behind the ancient male fear, still very much prevalent in the Middle Ages, of women’s bodily fluids. It was widely held that emanations such as menstrual blood and breast milk were polluting. In sum, the “phlegmatic” nature of the female made the body’s surface porous. How such a permeable body might seem dangerous, on the basis of the fluids that it is liable to leak, has been discussed; it is worth pointing out also that a permeable body has a certain surface vulnerability. Whilst some things leak out, other things are forced in.<sup>160</sup>

With this belief in the organic vulnerability of women in mind, it is time to return to Troylus, who stands enraptured, gazing upon his beloved. Before initiating physical contact, the knight first tests whether his voice might not be enough to wake Zellandine, since she looks to be sleeping so naturally: “il ne sembloit point qu’elle eust empeschement que, s’il l’eust appellee, qu’elle ne se fust esveille.” “Wake, my love, and speak to me!” he whispers—and waits, with bated breath. And waits some more. But nothing happens. “La pucelle, qui ne se

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<sup>157</sup> Kuryluk (1991), 15.

<sup>158</sup> Kuryluk notes how in the Byzantine period, encaustic icons – images pressed into wax – had the power to make observers weep. This suggests that Plato’s invocation of the wax analogy in relation to the materiality and function of the feminine could be interpreted in a more positive light—positive, because suggesting a latent iconic potential, or power. *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>159</sup> The prevailing view of the body in general in the fourteenth-century (and indeed well into the eighteenth century) was the cosmological view, inherited from the Classical Greek tradition. According to cosmological theory, celestial and human bodies were organically related. Both groups of bodies were comprised of four elements and defined by the characteristics associated with each: earth (cold and dry), air (warm and wet), water (cold and wet), and fire (hot and dry). Related to these four elements were the four bodily humours, which in turn determined the four dominant physical and psychological characteristics. Earth was associated with black bile and melancholia, air with blood and a sanguine temper, water with phlegm and the phlegmatic persona, and fire with yellow bile and choleric persons.

<sup>160</sup> It was believed that through menstruation women could inflict harm on men and would pollute anyone, male or female, coming into contact with the menstruating body. There was moreover a belief that held that after death the female body became a “repository of poison.” Rawcliffe (1995), 11.

pouoit esveiller ne parler, ne respondy point a son propos ne semblant n'en fist". She does not wake, or stir, or give any indication whatsoever of the voice of her rescuer having penetrated the deep slumber that has her body and her consciousness in its steely grip. Zellandine is closed off entirely to external stimuli; she lies there in a state of complete and total senselessness, of numbness, with her faculties anaesthetised and her motor functions incapacitated.

The lack of response does not deter Troylus. The knight moves on from this unsuccessful vocal reveille to an attempt at reviving the sleeping beauty through sensory stimulation. He "nudged [Zellandine] with his finger several times," hoping, perhaps, that a more tactile form of therapy, comparable to the popular method of "stroking," might prove more effective.<sup>161</sup> But if touching is meant to ease out, magnetically, the "evil" humours accumulated in the disordered body, through the skin, the limbs and the extremities, in this instance it fails: "la pucelle ne se remeut en riens" ("she didn't stir at all"). The inefficacy of such tactile therapeutics proves again the strangeness of Zellandine's condition, and again shows how this body, how this sleep, is something beyond the powers of medicine. Troylus has confidence in his own abilities nonetheless ("I know a good deal about medicine thanks to my father – he was one of the finest doctors in the world," he claims, 67) and, given the proven inefficacy of tactile and vocal therapy, instead turns to a universal cure.

The cure in question is the kiss, a gesture in which holistics and erotics are combined. In medical term, kissing has many uses: "baiser porte medicine en pluseurs manieres" (80). What's more, it is thought "especially good at reviving from a swoon." (76) "il resuscite les personnes tressaillies et sy appaise les troublez." (Troisième partie. LII. 88), and might therefore be the solution to Zellandine's state of unresponsive syncope. In this belief in the medicinal potency of the kiss there are echoes of the Christian and Neo-Platonic tradition of metempsychosis, or soul migration, through the mouth: the notion that in a kiss the soul could transfer between bodies, or that two souls could, through kissing, be combined.<sup>162</sup> Martin von Kemp's late-seventeenth-century tome, *Opus polyhistoricum...de osculis*. (Frankfurt, 1680) is the longest single work on the kiss: an encyclopaedic volume which collates extracts from classical, biblical, theological, medical and legal sources concerned with the various aspects

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<sup>161</sup>“Stroking was not necessarily a ‘superstitious’ form of cure. It could be rationalized to fit Galenic medical theory according to which the excess humours needed to be evacuated in order to restore the body to equilibrium....stroking could be represented as a magnetic means of easing the evil humours down through the limbs and out through the extremities.” *ibid.*, 201.

<sup>162</sup> Nicolas James Perella. *The Kiss, Sacred and Profane: An Interpretative History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969. 7.

of kissing. Earlier narratives in which pneumatisation via the kiss is significant include the myths of Cupid and Psyche and Pyramus and Thisbe; Perceval; and Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. In many Christian texts this intermingling is imagined as a form of "impregnation," where the moment when the lips meet in the kiss the moment of conception.<sup>163</sup> Here, the kiss became "the mutual exchange of soul through breath," the very "vessel of spirit" through which the source of life, of vitality, was relocated to the mouth.<sup>164</sup> Troylus kissing the unconscious Zellandine might therefore be interpreted as the knight's attempt to infuse into her his own soul, with his fully conscious, vital spirit.

Troylus kisses the sleeping beauty not once but, in his unchecked ardour, "more than twenty times," only to be confronted by the same disheartening result; "tout en restant figée dans son immobilité," (88/360) Zellandine gives no sign of reawakening.<sup>165</sup> Inflamed with desire after so many kisses, Troylus at this point feels himself ready to do as Venus bid, to "pluck the fruit" through the more intimate penetration of the maiden, a penetration meant to bring about a cure—and yet, something makes him hesitate. His body seems willing, but what about his mind, his sense of judgement and reason? And is his will his own? In both the medical and the spiritual literature of the time, the "will" was as an integral part of individual interiority. It was thought to be fixed on the one hand to the fluctuations of the "spirit," a term with psychosomatic connotations, and to the "rational appetites" of the "intellective soul," (a term almost synonymous with "the mind").<sup>166</sup> This made the matter of self-control, of marshalling or resisting the body's appetites, more complicated: self-control was redescribed as a psychosomatic effort. Moreover, it imbued self-control with a moral element and thereby put greater emphasis on this capacity.

The capacity for regulating the will, for self-restraint, was of particular importance for the group of citizens to which Troylus belongs. Under the chivalric code a knight must at all times be in control, which is to say, the master of his will, able to adhere to chivalric good

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<sup>163</sup> One example is the bride in the *Song of Songs*, who at the beginning of the poem makes the bold request, "let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." See Perella, ed. (1996), 54.

<sup>164</sup> Luke Davidson, "The kiss of life in the 18th C: the fate of an ambiguous kiss" in Perella, ed. (1996), 98-119. 108. These beliefs later influenced ideas about the spirit (also called the "soul"), and in particular the notion that the soul of the dying could be held via the final kiss.

<sup>165</sup> There is plenty of humour in *Perceforest*, in the wordplay and also in the commentary of the narrator, who suggests, for instance, that although she appears to be asleep as Troylus tries to awaken her kisses, Zellandine might not be completely senseless "Tout en restant figée dans son immobilité, elle deviant 'plus vermeille' (88/360), "elle reschauffee de couleur" (89/363). Introduction, xxvii.

<sup>166</sup> Angus Gowland, "Medicine, Psychology, and the melancholic subject in the Renaissance" in *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700*. Ed. by Elena Carrera. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013.186-219. 207.

conduct. It is to this duty to self-regulate that the voice of Reason appeals, warning Troylus to rethink what, impelled by desire, he is about to do: “Sire chevalier, il n’affiert a home d’entrer en lieu ou pucelle soit en son secret, se par avant il n’en a eu congé, et ne la doit atouchier tant qu’elle dorme.” (Troisième partie, LII. 88) (“Sir knight, no man should breach a girl’s privacy without her leave, and he certainly shouldn’t touch her while she sleeps!” 75-6.) Reason’s appeal points to the rules governing social interaction between the sexes, and in particular to regulations pertaining to physical contact between a man and an unmarried woman. Inextricable from this is the question of consent: whether or not the female subject in question invites or allows (or tolerates) the touch, the physical approach. In cases where contact between the sexes is uninvited or repudiated but nonetheless forced through, it should be redescribed in terms of an act of aggression: a “breach,” a breaking through, the parameters of interpersonal space, through bodily boundaries, and a break up or dismantling of proper conduct and decorum.

By no means is Troylus singular in finding himself in such a situation; other knights in *Perceforest* are forced to contend with similar trials, to confront the limits of their capacity to listen to Reason and to practise self-control against urgent physical desire, to try to silence the body’s urgent call for gratification. Most notable is the case of Gallafur, a knight who appears in the so-called “episode of the Red Sword.” This section of the narrative relates the misadventures of Utan, Nero and Gadiforus, three knights who give in to temptation, ignore the voice of Reason, and fail to exercise proper self-control, when confronted by the alluring sisters, Corsora, Canones, Carhaus. No sooner do they indulge their bodily desires than the Red Sword which they hold turns to black in their hands. They fail the test of chivalric self-decorum. Gallafur very nearly suffers the same fate. He is lured by the charms of the fourth sister, Capraise, whom he believes to be Venus herself: the goddess of love, an immortal, and therefore one whose wishes on the subject of erotic longing must be obeyed. In a scene that mirrors closely the bedroom scene in “The Story of Troylus and the beautiful Zellandine,” Gallafur is put to the test. He is within touching distance of a beautiful woman, asleep on a bed before him. Feeling his desire rise, he takes off his armour and undresses quickly. He climbs into bed, where he feels “the body of a girl, young, tender, and fit” beside him. His body was “afire,” the narrator relates:

and Nature supplied him with the weapon he needed to conquer the castle. Venus came to the bed, swiftly and unseen, and did all in her power to spur them both with amorous desires.<sup>167</sup>

It is evident that the temptation to give into desire is great; yet Gallafur resists, feeling that it would be both “shameful” and “treacherous” to take advantage of an unconscious woman, to “assail her as she slept.” In this instance, however, such anxiety is unfounded, for the heroine positions herself in a way that indicates her willingness quite clearly: “the lady of the castle was inviting attack, spreading her arms wide to the knight while feigning deepest sleep.” With nothing else to stop him, Gallafur is just about to launch the said attack, when, at the very last moment, Love (in a more rational guise, not in the form of the goddess Venus) steps in and confronts him with what he is about to do (betray another maiden, to whom he is betrothed), and with “the disastrous consequences of going through” with it. Taking advantage of a (supposedly) sleeping woman, proving false to one’s true beloved: “this wasn’t the action of a loyal knight.” (596).



- *Penetration.* At the insistence of Venus, he has sex with the unconscious girl in the expectation that this will lead to her “cure,” to her waking. But nothing happens. The maiden sleeps on.

Does Troylus still deserve the title of “loyal knight”? Perhaps it is because Zellandine *is* his own beloved, because to lie with her would not constitute the betrayal of another woman that Troylus, unlike Gallafur, does not act with self-restraint. Whereas Gallafur draws back and leaves the “sleeping” girl untouched, Troylus goes through with the sexual act, and sleeps with the still-sleeping Zellandine; or as the text simply puts it, the knight takes from the girl “the name of maiden”. This “breach” might be overlooked and excused on the grounds that behind Troylus’ actions is the desire to cure and thereby to awaken the sleeping maiden. There is also the role of Venus to consider: the goddess was the one who tasked the knight with “plucking”

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<sup>167</sup> *Perceforest*. Bk. 5, Ch. XV-XVIII, 595-596.

the “fruit” from the body of Zellandine, after all.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the goddess does all she can to heighten the knight’s physical excitation, using her “torch” to set him “afire” with a passion that cannot be ignored, a passion that he feels course throughout his entire body, a passion which at the same time acts on his mind and clouds his reason, his judgement, his sense, a passion he feels beginning to drive him mad. By calling into question his manhood and his bravery, the goddess weakens his resistance further still: ““Tu es bien lache, chevalier, veu que tu es seul au plus pres d’une tant belle pucelle que tu aimes sus toutes autres, quant tu ne couches avecqu elle!”” (Troisième partie. LII, 89).<sup>169</sup>

Finally, and to pre-empt any objection that Troylus might have to bedding Zellandine, on the grounds that, being asleep, the maiden would be unable to give her consent, Venus whispers that sometimes consent is irrelevant, that women are capricious when it comes to questions of their bodily wants and needs, and that, in any case, “Whatever she might pretend, the girl wouldn’t mind what he did.” (76). The words of the goddess strike a note of discord, particularly in relation to one of the founding principles of the entire *Perceforest* narrative, and call into question exactly to define what Troylus does. The goddess’ urgings to the knight to overlook the question of consent render his act an act of rape. Indeed, this is explicitly acknowledged later in the narrative, because when Perceforest becomes the king of Britain, one of his first acts as sovereign is to introduce a piece of legislation protecting women from (domestic) sexual violence and exploitation. The new law outlaws rape:

que s’il est home gentil ou villain, noble ou non noble, de quelq’etat qu’il soit, que s’il fait force a femme de quelque condition qu’elle soit, c’est assavoir qu’il ait charnelle compaignie a elle oultre son gré et sa volenté, il a mort desservie telle que d’estre detrait a quatre chevaulx tant que ceulx qui tiennent justice dessoubs nous ou pour nous...qu’il face justice telle que dessus est dicte.

I.ii, ch. 108, fol. 97r, 73

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<sup>168</sup> See Gravdal (1991), 69 :

One significant example of romance transformations in the thirteenth century offers a great deal of material for further thought. Guillaume de Lorris begins an allegorical dream vision of the ‘art of love’ in his *Romance of the Rose*. As if to aestheticize completely the sexual drives at the heart of the romance narrative, Guillaume transforms the courtly lady into a flower: the lover’s quest becomes the plucking of the bud...Jean de Meun’s celebrated continuation of Guillaume de Lorris’ romance...[in it] continues the rose quest, stripping it of aestheticization and revealing it to be wholly carnal. The ‘seduction’ of Rose, the courtly lady, is depicted blatantly as the rape of a virgin.

<sup>169</sup> “You, knight, must be a coward not to take advantage of the situation! You are so close to and all alone with a beautiful maiden, the girl whom you love above all others, and yet you do not lie with her!” My translation/transliteration.



if any gentleman or peasant, noble or non-noble, of any social station, forces a woman of no matter what social condition, that is, if he has carnal knowledge of her against her will, he should be put to death by being drawn between four horses until his body is dismembered, and we command all those who administer justice below us or on our behalf...that they mete out justice as aforesaid.<sup>170</sup>

Two considerations motivate this prohibition, both of them related to control; one is military and political, and the other, largely related to social stability. In the first place, Perceforest's injunction against rape is designed to limit the powers of the ruling tribe, the much-feared *lignaise Darnant*, who control much of the land in Britain. The unsavoury characteristic of the clan is their ubiquitous and merciless mistreatment of women. The *lignaise Darnant* use rape as a means of maintaining power and control.<sup>171</sup> By making rape a capital offence Perceforest denies the clan their chief weapon of aggression, limiting their powers. Secondly, the prohibition against rape is interlinked with the king's desire to establish a stable, feudal society, a society in which the relationship between lord and subjects finds its counterpart in the conduct of heterosexual relations. The prohibition of rape creates a knighthood, as well as what Huot describes as "a ladyhood".<sup>172</sup> Its legislation effectively recasts the social mould and creates a society based on "courtly models of masculinity and femininity," where abiding by chivalric codes is paramount. Furthermore, the law rebalances the power relations between men and women, so that, "the honour and empowerment of men and that of women, rather than being mutually exclusive, are mutually defining". This in turn makes it possible to have erotic relationships based on mutual desire and respect, leading to

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<sup>170</sup> My translation. Belinant sums up the basis for the prohibition:

All male animals and birds treat their females with respect – they don't force their lustful wills upon them! But we who are supposed to be blessed with reason...have behaved more basely than the lowest things that copulate on Earth!...The god of Nature established this most noble condition: that the female should have the rule of her own body and the male should not use force against her will. And to ensure the female's freedom, the god of Nature instituted a safeguard known as consent. 80.

<sup>171</sup> Huot (2007), explains:

Property rights and sexual norms alike are central to the larger process of establishing cultural hegemony. Matters once considered private are redefined as public and therefore subject to strict regulation. 73.

<sup>172</sup> This knighthood is "bound to the king in part through his power to approve marriages, and eager to win their brides by performing valiant deeds in battle or, failing that, in the court festivities." *ibid.* 74.

more honourable conduct between men and women, and therefore to greater cultural refinement.<sup>173</sup>

In their introduction to *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, the editors Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose argue that in its very extremity, “rape makes manifest the specifics of a given culture’s understanding of the female subject in society.”<sup>174</sup> Rape in Western culture for Robertson and Rose is significantly bound up with social and epistemological structures, as well as with questions of decorum and aesthetics. Rape makes the reader question what violence against women might be for; what kind of knowledge do the perpetrators hope to gain, what forms of power do they hope to establish? “If male contact and exploration results in knowledge,” the authors ask, if rape facilitates a physical and ideological ‘mapping’ of women’s bodies, then “what knowledge is procured for women in such transactions?”<sup>175</sup>

In *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, Kathryn Gravdal examines representations of rape in the different discursive genres of literature and law in order to study what she terms “the naturalization of the subordination of women in medieval French culture”.<sup>176</sup> On the basis of the observation that in Old French, there is no corresponding word for “viol,” the modern French term for “rape,” Gravdal goes on to suggest that the very notion of forced coitus in medieval culture was ambiguous, and the act itself, discussed but rarely. In language, “slippery lexematic exchange,” metaphor and periphrastic expressions such as *fame esforcer* (to force a woman), *faire sa volonté* (to do as one wants), *faire son plaisir* (to take one’s pleasure), or *faire son buen* (to do as one sees fit/ good?) replace clarity of expression and obfuscate, deliberately, perhaps, the violent meaning.<sup>177</sup> It is important to consider such linguistic indeterminacies within their historical context; in this case this means remembering that Old French inherited “*rapere*,” a term with multiple meanings—to carry off or seize; to snatch, pluck, or drag off; to hurry, impel, hasten; to rob, plunder; to abduct (a virgin)—from classical Latin.

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<sup>173</sup> Huot (2007), 78.

<sup>174</sup> *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*. Ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 2.

<sup>175</sup> Robertson and Rose, eds. (2001), 3.

<sup>176</sup> Gravdal (1991), 65. See also Annette Kolodny: “The power relations inscribed in the form of conventions within our literary inheritance...reify the encodings of those same power relations in the culture at large.” “Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism,” in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon, 1985. 147.

<sup>177</sup> Gravdal (1991), 2.

From this list of some of the possible meanings of *rapere*, the recurrent theme of unlawful capture is worth noting. This relates to the fact that in Roman law, for something to be defined and consequently prosecuted as rape, there had to be an element or suggestion of abduction, which during the middle ages was not difficult since women and young girls were abducted frequently; it was a widespread practice across Europe. In short, *raptus* refers to noncontractual marriage by abduction and/or forced coitus (modern rape). Although the word was used in different ways at different times it usually meant marriage by abduction in medieval law.<sup>178</sup> In canon and ecclesiastical legal theory, *raptus* was legislated mostly on the basis of what was already at the time an old cultural debate about the two possible models of marriage: on the one hand, marriage negotiated legally between the fiancé and the father of the bride, and on the other, marriage by abduction without the knowledge or the permission of the bride's father or her family. It was this second definition which was legislated under canon law as *raptus*.<sup>179</sup> In hagiography, however, rape looms large as a vile work of the devil. Virgin martyrs resist sexual attack, to the death.

In Church law, whilst forced coitus may have been a crime, it was not a sin. To force a woman to have sex therefore would not in any way impinge upon the moral standing of a man, nor upon the state of his spirit in the eyes of God. In medieval secular law, although *raptus* was considered a serious crime, it was not a public crime; instead, it was legislated more like a form of personal injury, specifically as theft: the theft of a woman from the man under whose authority and guardianship she happened to be living (father, husband). From our perspective looking back today, the absence of selfhood accorded to the woman is quite striking. There is no acknowledgement of the abducted woman being an individual in her own right, nor any mention of the woman as a victim. She is but an item of property, a possession, belonging to one or another man.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Constantine (311-77) made *raptus* a public crime and instituted the death penalty. A woman found to be complicit in the abduction was also subject to the death penalty. Then in the sixth century, Justinian rewrote previous law on *raptus*, described it as a sexual crime against unmarried women, widows or nuns. "This was significant since at least temporarily it was not only a crime against property but against an individual woman." Quoting James Brundage, "Rape and Seduction in the Medieval Canon Law," in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*. Ed. by Vern Bullough and James Brundage. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982, 146. See also Bullough. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, esp. 47-48, 209-10, 249-50.

<sup>179</sup> See also Georges Duby. *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*. Transl. Barbara Bray. New York: Pantheon, 1983, 40-43.

<sup>180</sup> Gravdal (1991), 8. "The early medieval laws on *raptus*...share one overriding concern: that of maintaining peace among men."

As the legal definition of what constituted rape changed, the requirement that there be some kind of abduction involved disappeared. This left terms such as “*ravir*” and “*ravissant*,” used to describe the (sexual) violence enacted against women, as purely figurative terms. They went from meaning to carry away by force, to meaning being carried away by desire or emotion. This semantic development led to the revision of the system of gender coding, as Gravdal explains:

when *ravir* was literal, it was the male who ravished the female. When the term soars off into the realm of the figurative, it is the female who is ravishing, who causes the male to be ‘carried away’ and is responsible for any ensuing sexual acts. The moving force behind rape becomes the beautiful woman.<sup>181</sup>

With the conflation of ravishment and rape in the French language from the thirteenth century onwards, the reality and the literal meaning of sexual violence was erased, or to put it in more nuanced terms, was veiled behind the romantic notion of ravishment. Romance and ravishment go hand-in hand. Often a rape scene forms one of the constituent episodic building blocks which make up a medieval (Arthurian) romance.

Whether Troylus’ “breach” of the sleeping Zelandine constitutes rape or something less dishonourable is not clear. What is clear, however, is that the sexual infringement does not have the desired effect. Plucking the “fruit” from the body of the dormant maiden does not result in her waking, as Venus had predicted that it would. Zelandine emits a “deep” post coital sigh, (“elle jecta ung grief souspir” (Troisième partie. LII. 90) but goes on sleeping, from the outside looking “exactly as before”.<sup>182</sup> Although why the “cure” has no immediate effect is not clear, it does point towards the belief, prevalent in medical thinking at the time, that women were not “needed” for the sexual act, that their “seed” was not required. The female seed, in short, was disparaged; it was thought to have no part—not even a passive part—in inducing form through conception. Therefore it was not considered as a prerequisite for conception to take place.<sup>183</sup> This relates also to the notion, propagated first and most forcefully by Averroes, that a woman could become pregnant even if coitus was only partial or incomplete. Women, Averroes believed, could become pregnant through coitus interruptus,

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<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>182</sup> However, when her father looks more closely he notices a minor alteration in her colouring: she appears less flushed, not quite so feverish. From this he infers that recovery has finally begun.

<sup>183</sup> Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 66.

too. As he explained, “the woman’s pleasure [in sex] is in no way required since the vulva possesses the specific property of attracting the sperm even without the sexual act being performed.”<sup>184</sup>



- *Female fecundity.* Zellandine, still comatose, becomes pregnant and nine months later, delivers a son.

In the narrative, the sexual penetration of the sleeping female form does not result in that body’s being opened and through this opening, being cured. Not that Troylus lay with Zellandine for nothing; indeed, nine months later and still asleep, the heroine gives birth to Benuic, a beautiful son destined for great things. Yet the birth, like the sex, does nothing towards mitigating or reversing her insentience: “[elle] dormoit comme devant” (Troisième partie, LIX. 210)–“[she] slept on as before”.



- *Revival.* Through (a form of) lactation, Zellandine’s infant son suckles her finger by mistake, and extracts the piece of flax. Immediately, Zellandine regains consciousness.

Ultimately, in the tale of Zellandine, the cure is not found in sex or conception or pregnancy or birth, but in, or rather through, an adulterated form of lactation. (The significance of lactation and the relation between breast and menstrual milk will be discussed at greater length in Chapter II.) This can be taken to suggest that a precondition for Zellandine’s recovery and revival is the maturation of her body from a virginal entity into a functional maternal form. It is when Benuic suckles on Zellandine’s finger, taking it for her nipple, that the tiny piece of flax is finally dislodged, and the sleeping beauty awakened. Although the narrator offers no great detail in his rendering of this nursing scene, nor makes any explicit mention of maternal milk, it is nonetheless significant that Zellandine’s revival is accomplished through her sometimes permeable body, via (symbolic) bodily emanations.<sup>185</sup> If the initial loss of

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<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>185</sup> Kuryluk (1991), 200.

consciousness was caused by a puncture to the skin, a puncture which (we can justifiably hypothesise) released at least a little blood, then it is fitting that the return to consciousness should happen as a partial consequence of another kind of bleeding. This is owing to the fact that in the medical literature of the Middle Ages there was still a strong belief in there being a close affinity, a direct material interrelation, between menstrual blood and breast milk, an idea asserted first by Hippocrates and then repeated and expanded later in the work of Galen.

According to Galen, the menstrual stream as evacuated every month by means of the vessels that lead to the womb, and these same veins serve the purpose of bringing nourishment to the foetus during pregnancy. When the child has been born, all the menstrual blood, by a modification in the circulatory system that intrigued medieval authors, flew back to the breasts.<sup>186</sup>

The same theory was reiterated by Isidore of Seville in the *Etymologiae*, an etymological encyclopaedia compiled in the middle of the seventh century A.D. and the most popular and widely used textbook throughout the medieval period. In *de medicina*, Book IV of the *Etymologiae*, Isidore claimed that, “the blood used for the nourishment of the uterus goes to the breasts and takes on the quality of milk”.<sup>187</sup> Menstrual blood, as Jacques Gélis explains in simple terms, was diverted to the breasts, and turned white.<sup>188</sup> Here it is worth noting that this theory, concerning the modification of the circulation of the blood and the transformation of menstrual blood into milk for the suckling infant, constitutes the only significant discussion of the breasts in medieval gynaecology, as though the breast, like the reproductive organs, were seen somehow as too shameful or too hideous or too unknowable to warrant mention. Perhaps this is owing to the close sympathy that existed in the thinking of the time between the breasts and the womb—the latter, both revered and feared, as the most powerful and at the same time the least accessible part of the (sexual, pathological) female anatomy.



- *Post-revival*. Troylus and the now-conscious Zellandine are reunited, and, in defiance of her father, elope and are married.

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<sup>186</sup> Jacquart and Thomasset (1988), 83.

<sup>187</sup> Cited in Jacquart and Thomasset (1988).

<sup>188</sup> The supposed relatedness of these two bodily fluids was based on the supposed relatedness of the womb and the breasts. Jacques Gélis. *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe*. Transl. by Rosemary Morris. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. First published as *L'arbre et le fruit*. Paris: Fayard, 1984. 11.

In the moment of awakening Zellandine feels frightened and disorientated: “la demoiselle s’esveilla et se print a tordre ses bras comme celle qui ne sçavoit qui lui estit advenu.” (Troisième partie. LIX. 210). She is bewildered: ““Ma chiere tante, je me couchay hier en bon point et maintenant he me retreuve malade. Je ne sça don’t ce me peut venir.”” (210). She asks “What on earth has happened?” as she struggles to understand why she feels so “sick, now, when she felt fine when she went to sleep—“yesterday.” Zellandine’s conviction of having slept but a single night belies a curious narrative and thematic strain present also in many later sleeping beauty tales. It is through unnatural (cursed, enchanted, poisoned, death-like) sleep that time and consciousness are frozen, and organic (bodily) change suspended. The beauties who lie sleeping in these narratives sleep in pockets of created time. There is a strange relativity between time, unnatural or induced sleep, and the sleeper’s sense of the passage of time. This perceived sense of chronological disjuncture is not confined to the sleeping heroines’ experience. Troylus, we learn, earlier suffered a similar perceptual shift when his senses, dulled to the point of amnesia and idiocy by means of a magical herb, were suddenly restored. Although at this point he has been in the kingdom of Zelland for over a week, to him his sojourn seems no longer than “a single night” (70).

Zellandine’s confusion when she wakes quickly turns into panic, and panic into tearful shame, when she learns she was impregnated during her sleep: “elle commença a plourer comme celle quy ne sçavoit que home eust eu affaire a son corps.” (210, Troisième partie. LIX. 210.) (“She began to weep when she realised that a man must have had dealings with her body.” Clearly, a man must have taken her virginity without her consent, without so much as her conscious knowledge.<sup>189</sup> This discovery is so shameful and painful because of the high value placed on maidenhood; at the time, virginity was considered the *sine qua non* of respectable femininity. It was imperative for women to remain virgins until marriage. Thus Zellandine’s acute distress is emotionally as well as practically motivated. She laments losing her virginity, and feels it as a personal deprivation. At the same time and on a more practical note, she is anxious about what her besmirched status now will mean for her relationship with Troylus. She fears that “his favour would be lost” and that “he would be sure to shun her” (80). Her only comfort is that from the outside, she still looks the same. It is impossible to tell that she

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<sup>189</sup> It is worth noting that the majority of textbooks for midwives and obstetricians emphasised a pregnant woman’s need for sleep. Gélis explains how sleep was considered prudent and necessary for a healthy and successful pregnancy, and cites: “A pregnant woman must ‘seek repose and take it when necessary.’” *ibid.*, 80.

is no longer a virgin, or that she has carried and delivered a son. From the outside, she appears as unblemished as the day she fell asleep: “il ne sambloit point qu’elle eut eu enfant. Attant jennesse avec santé...” (Troisième partie. LIX 213) (“no one would have guessed she’d borne a child. Youth and health were stirring her...”, 80). Most important are her youthful, healthy looks: she still has the appearance of an untouched maiden. Briefly Zellandine considers turning this to her advantage, and keeping everything a secret, especially from Troylus. However, when she sees the ring that Troylus placed upon her finger before he left, a ring that she had given him, she knows she has no cause for worry. It was her beloved Troylus who took her maidenhood, Troylus who is the father of her son, from whom “would come the glory of Britain.” (83)





## vi. Conclusion: Mortal marvels

The narrative description of the comatose Zellandine as a “marvel” belies an underlying conviction during the medieval period in the existence of phenomena outside of what can be considered rational, natural or real: a belief in wonders, miracles, and the supernatural. Definitions of what constituted the marvellous and the miraculous were modified over the course of the twelfth century, and the definition of “nature” was also restricted to the observable course of events. Departing from Augustinian theology, miracles came to be seen as “genuine contravention[s] of natural processes”.<sup>190</sup> In the story, the “natural process” that is contravened through omission, subverted by its very absence, is the process of material decay. The organic matter which makes up the body of the sleeping heroine does not change. The body does not diminish in shape or size or beauty. Here, in “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine,” this permanence, although described in terms of marvel, might perhaps be understood more logically—for Zellandine is not dead. Coma does not preclude the continuation of vitality. However, as the next chapter will demonstrate, such logic and reason fail completely when applied to our second sleeping beauty. The same “accident” that befalls Zellandine happens to this maiden: her finger is pierced by a small piece of flax. The outcome, however, is different. Zellandine sleeps; this other beauty dies. It is in considering the corporeal permanence and the eventual revival of this other dead heroine that a (Catholic) ideology rooted in the marvellous, in miracles and wonders, especially those relating to female virgin saints, will be explored further.



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<sup>190</sup> Louise Elizabeth Wilson, “Miracle and Medicine: Conceptions of Medical Knowledge and Practice in Thirteenth-Century Miracle Accounts” in Kirkham and Warr, eds. (2014), 63-86. 72. See also see Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead and other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds*. Abingdon, 2005, esp. 8-11.



Chapter II:  
Early Modern Sleeping Beauties: Giambattista Basile's  
"Sole, Luna e Talia" and the incorruption of the flesh

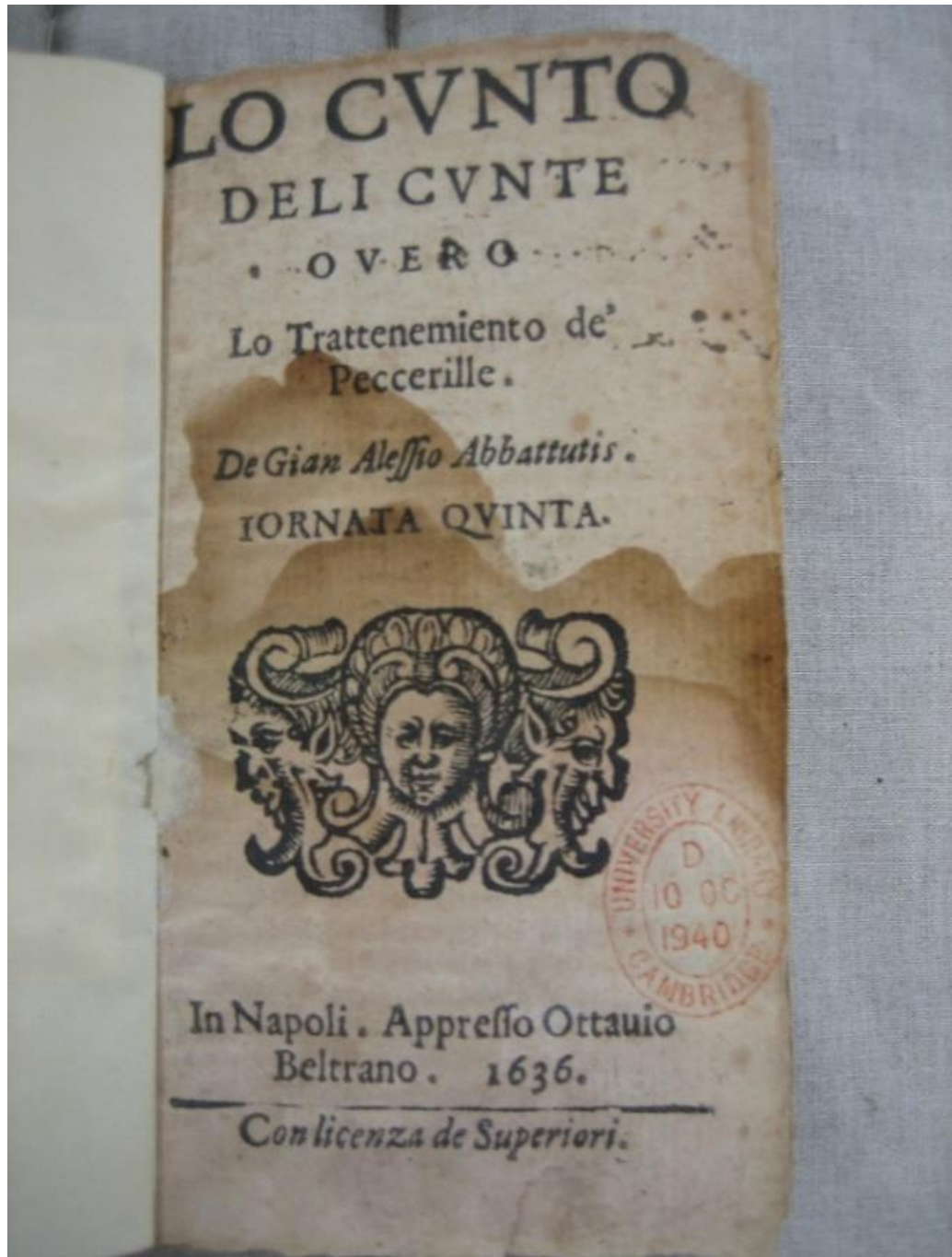


Figure 2.1. Frontispece from Giambattista Basile. *Lo cunto deli cunte, overo, Lo trattenemiento de' peccerille*. Iornata primma. Napoli : G.A. Abbattutis, 1636.

### **i. Summary of “Sole, Luna e Talia”**

In Giambattista Basile, “Sole, Luna e Talia,” (“The Sun, Moon and Talia”) in *Lo cunto de li cunti overo lo trattenemiento de le peccerille* (*The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*), published posthumously in two volumes between 1634-1636, it is foretold that the heroine, Talia, will have her life endangered by a tiny piece of flax. In spite of all the precautions of her father, the king, Talia cannot escape her fate. Some years later, a small piece of flax gets stuck underneath her fingernail and “At that same moment she fell to the ground dead” (“stesso istante cadde a terra morta”). Her father does not bury her, but instead places his daughter’s body in a palace in the woods, and then leaves the place forever. Many years later, a young king who loses his way whilst out hunting happens upon the sleeping maiden, and tries to wake her. His attempts are fruitless. She doesn’t stir; she doesn’t respond. But she is so beautiful, and the king is so overcome by desire, that he can’t stop himself, and rapes her in her deathlike sleep (or sleeplike death). And then he leaves.

Nine months later, Talia (who is still unconscious) gives birth to two beautiful children: a son, and a daughter. A host of fairies attend to the babies whilst their mother lies senseless in a state of suspended animation. Then one day, one of the infants, hungry to be fed, mistakes Talia’s finger for her nipple, and sucks so hard that the piece of flax which caused her to lose consciousness and collapse all those years ago, becomes dislodged. The very instant that the flax comes out from underneath her fingernail, Talia wakes up. As might be expected, Basile’s heroine is more than a little confused when she sees the children, *her* children, but her disorientation is soon replaced by joy. She embraces her babies, her “two precious jewels,” her “gems,” and gives them the names of “Sun” and “Moon”.

Meanwhile, the young king who discovered Talia was back at his own court—where he already had a wife—with no recollection of what had happened in the woods; conveniently he had forgotten all about his escapade. However one day, he suddenly remembers, and sets out to find the sleeping beauty once again. Upon entering the forest palace the young king is delighted to discover that Talia is now awake. The unexpected sight of his two beautiful children only increases his happiness. He and Talia get along wonderfully, and after this he visits her often.

The only problem is, when he is back at home, at court, in-between trysts, he is simply unable to stop himself from thinking about Talia and about his children, to the extent that he

calls out their names in his sleep. His lawful wife, the queen, is (quite understandably) suspicious. She orders the king's secretary to disclose the details of his master's liaison, and then, by means of a letter forged in the king's name, requests that Talia send her two children to the court. Talia is only too happy to oblige: anything for her beloved, anything for the king. The vindictive queen then orders the cook to kill and cook little Sun and little Moon, and to serve them up in a tasty dish to the king. The cook, however, takes pity on the infants and hides them, and unbeknownst to the queen, dishes up two lambs instead. But the queen wants more. She then summons Talia herself to the court (again, in the name of the king), and after accusing the young woman of making her husband lose his mind, she orders that a great fire be lit in the courtyard, and that Talia be cast into the flames. Talia pleads with the queen to be allowed to first remove her rich and ornate garments. The queen agrees, and Talia proceeds to strip off one item at a time. As she divests each piece of clothing, she utters a great cry of woe, in the hope that the king (who is away at war) might somehow hear her, and come to her aid.

Luckily, Talia's cries reach the ears of the king, and he arrives back at court just in time to save her. In terms of punishment, the king commands his wife, his unfaithful secretary, and the cook to be thrown into the fire, which the queen had intended for Talia. The cook protests his innocence, and reveals that the two children, whom he saved, are safe and sound. The king and Talia are overjoyed, and reward the cook with the title of royal chamberlain. The king marries Talia, and they live happily ever after.



## ii. Introduction, Methodology, Nodal Points

This chapter examines the figure of the sleeping beauty and the complexities that this female body presents and symbolically represents in “Sole, Luna e Talia,” a tale written by the Neapolitan courtier and Renaissance man of letters, Giambattista Basile. The tale was published in 1636 in the collection entitled *Lo cunto de li cunti; overo lo trattenemiento de peccerille* (*The Tale of Tales; or Entertainment for the Little Ones*), more often referred to as *Il Pentamerone*.<sup>191</sup> The first part of this chapter provides the biographical and historical background and socio-historical context to *Lo cunto de li cunti*. It discusses the structure, content and publication history of the collection, and describes Basile’s style and original use of language, in order to better situate *Lo cunto* within, and suggest its influence upon, the European literary canon. A review of contemporaneous theories and practices relating to the female body in early modern medicine, in particular to this body in its unnatural or pathological state, forms the second part of the chapter. The aim here is to explore the medical context on which the critical examination of the female figure in Basile’s story will be based: to sketch out and to explain the beliefs most pertinent to understanding the physiological fate of the heroine as it is narrated.

Thus the third and most substantial section of the chapter turns to the tale itself, to the narrative, and through exegetic close reading examines Basile’s text. The basis for this critical interrogation and for the commentary into which this examination then develops are the tale’s constituent nodal points: fate determined and then fulfilled via puncture (first penetration); the reaction to and interpretation of the unconscious heroine; the handling and placement of her unresponsive body, in particular the laconic, blank[eting] manner in which this body is described; the treatment of this unconscious, unresponsive body (veneration, opening of her body via violation of rape as the second penetration); the revival; and finally, the post- revival period. A brief summary of the findings concludes the chapter. To give a sense of where and how the selected nodal points fit into Basile’s narrative and of why they are important in

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<sup>191</sup> *Cunto de li cunto overo Lo trattenemiento de peccerille*. 5 vols. Naples: Ottavio Beltrano, 1634-1636. The edition that I have found most useful is a dual-language, Neapolitan/Italian edition: *Il cunto de li cunti di Giambattista Basile*. Nella riscrittura di Roberto de Simone. Note de Candida De Iudicibus. Illustrazioni di Gennaro Vallifuoco. Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2002. All non-English quotations are from this edition unless indicated otherwise, and cited parenthetically in the body of the text, thus (page number of Neapolitan text/page number of Italian text).

formulating a clearer and closer understanding of the figure of the heroine—of Talia’s body as a body enflashed, and also as a structure with symbolic valence—these are explained below in greater detail.

### **Nodal points specific to Basile’s text:**

*Prelude.* After much deliberation, the group of wise men, summoned by the King, Talia’s father, determine that it is his daughter’s fate to have her life endangered by a small piece of flax. The king reacts to the ominous prophecy by issuing an injunction across the land forbidding both the use and the possession of flax and of any and all related material. His objective is to prevent the fate prophesied for his only daughter from ever happening.

*Disaster via puncture.* A small splinter of flax gets under Talia’s nail and into her finger. Immediately she loses consciousness and (according to the narrator) falls down dead. All of the king’s disaster preparations are shown to have been in vain: what must come, will come.

*Aftermath: Reaction and interpretation.* It is reported to the king that Talia has collapsed and fallen down dead; the monarch does not question the message’s veracity. He asks for no further affirmation, nor asks to examine the body in order to have visual confirmation, that the collapse indeed constituted death. At this point the possibility that there might be another conclusion to be drawn from Talia’s sudden and dramatic loss of consciousness, one less finite than death, is not mentioned or entertained.

*Aftermath: Handling and placement of unresponsive body.* Talia’s unresponsive body is treated and prepared according to funerary custom; curiously, however, it is left unburied. The king instead has the body of his daughter beautifully clothed, embellished and decorated and seated on a throne beneath an ornate canopy, rather like an effigy or an “incorruptible” virgin saint, in a palace in the middle of the woods. Mourning his great loss, the king locks the door to the palace and determines never to visit the remains of his daughter again, in order to wipe from his mind the painful memory.

*Period of suspended animation, rescue, penetration.* Many years go by. One day, much later, another (young) king out hunting in the woods comes across the palace, and discovers the unresponsive and unconscious Talia seated on her canopied throne. Her body is still lifelike: beautiful, intact, without any visible signs indicating the onset of post-mortem decay. On this basis the king acts as though he thought she were alive—alive, and merely sleeping. He tries to wake her, first through voice, then through

touch, but to no avail. He is unable to elicit a response from the seated figure. Nonetheless he is overcome by Talia's still-resplendent beauty, and overwhelmed by desire coupled with frustration at having failed to wake the maiden, he lifts Talia's body onto a bed and "gathers the fruits of love"—or in other words, rapes her. Afterwards he leaves the palace in the woods and returns to his own kingdom, and his wife. In the meantime, Talia, still unconscious, becomes pregnant, and nine months later gives birth to twins: a boy (Sole) and a girl (Luna). But still she does not wake.

*Revival.* One of the infants, hungry for mother's milk, tries to suckle on Talia's finger, thinking it her nipple. In so doing the baby extracts the small piece of flax that caused the Sleeping Beauty all those years ago to lose consciousness and collapse and fall down (as though) dead. Talia wakes the moment that the flax is removed from her finger. She wakes confused, but also delighted to find her two beautiful children by her side.

*Post-revival.* The "rescuing" king returns. He is overjoyed to discover Talia finally awake and alive, and to see their beautiful children. Although he must return again to his current wife, he visits Talia and their children often. His wife grows suspicious, and so when the king is called away to war, she asks first for the two children to be brought to court; her intention is to have them killed and cooked. She then summons Talia to court; she wants to eradicate her young and beautiful rival, to punish Talia with death for turning her husband's head. Fortunately the king returns just in time to save Talia. It is revealed that the twins, who were hidden, are alive and well; they are reunited with Talia and the King. After having his current wife and unscrupulous secretary, who helped the queen in her plans, punished, the king marries Talia.

From these expanded points, four key strands emerge. These are the most ambiguous and problematic aspects of the narrative, and consequently those most in need of closer critical scrutiny. The four key strands to be considered in this chapter are:

- *An ambiguous prophecy; the danger of a piece of flax; the King's edict*
- *The fulfilment of the prophecy; loss of consciousness; Talia's deathlike sleep, or lifelike death;*
- *Responses to the "dead" sleeping beauty; an elaborate non-burial: the body's positioning and display;*
- *The discovery of the "body" years later, and the reactions of the rescuing king; the impenetrability of Talia's body, her unresponsive, unconscious state; violation of the heroine, perpetuated by frustration incited by the failure to elicit a response*



Why specifically these four strands? It is evident that over the course of the narrative, several things happen to, are done to, Talia's body. It is subjected to a series of penetrations and positionings, which have far-reaching material and symbolic consequences. By working through these four strands it is possible to better understand a narrative comprised primarily of bodily or body-related moments. In sum: a small piece of flax gets lodged underneath her fingernail; this leads to her sudden collapse and apparent death, and to the consequent redefinition of her body as a corpse. This post mortem redefinition gets complicated when her "dead" body does not decay. The incorrupt body is handled accordingly, left unburied, in a manner reminiscent of the practices associated with "incorrupt" Catholic saints and tomb effigies: one historical, and one sculptural, instance of a comparable kind of problematic once-living femininity.<sup>192</sup>

Of greatest importance is the fate of the body from the prediction of its first puncture by a piece of flax, to its ultimate and most violent penetration in the final rape. It is between these two points that Talia becomes the enigmatic "sleeping beauty," neither whose "sleep" nor whose "beauty" is quite what it seems. It is in the interim period between the initial, fate-determined moment of puncture and the later desire-driven penetration that the narrative presentation of Talia—unmoving, unconscious and lacking in sentience—is most problematic—and therefore, most fascinating. Thus the analysis in this chapter is limited specifically to the first two thirds of Basile's narrative, wherein the main subject of study—Talia's body, and the responses and reactions that this figure elicits in its various forms and states, from the moment of loss of consciousness up to the point of revival—is depicted.

Talia's body is, in essence, the focal point of the narrative: the figurative node around which the story revolves and on the basis of which it evolves, through which the plot develops. Alongside this narrative function, the Sleeping Beauty's body can be understood also as a symbol and a symbolic slate, on which and through which sixteenth-century anxieties and beliefs about the female body, and about the relationship between body and consciousness, *soma* and *psyche*, could be sketched out: an instance of cross-disciplinary dialogue between literature, medicine and theology, of the intertwining of different voices and ideologies in contemporaneous debate. Talia's figure cannot be read only literarily or only literally; it is best approached by means of a critical method based on interdisciplinary symbiosis conscious always of both written text and socio-historical context.

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<sup>192</sup> On the iconography of tombs in the early modern period, see Michael Neill (1997), e.g. 38-42.

Both religion and medicine were dominant forces at the time that Basile was writing, shaping culture, learned discussion, and popular belief. Religion and medicine have a common and ongoing fascination, a fascination born of fear, with the bodies of women; these are evident also in the artworks of the period. In medical history the fear-driven fascination with female bodies is most evident in anatomical literature and illustration, in the practice of dissection, and in the modeling of wax anatomies. In religion (that is, in the Catholic strand of Christianity under discussion here), theologians' fears focused on women's sexuality and their reproductive capacity, leading to the widespread and paradoxical suppression and simultaneous sanctification and veneration of the material female form. This critical discussion therefore goes beyond the text to incorporate fragments from material history: whole and partial female bodies from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries figure in illustration, in wax, dissected, left "incorrupt," and cast in stone.



### iii. Back to Basile: The ribald *cunti* of a Baroque stylist

Giambattista Basile was born in the village of Posillipo, just outside Naples, around 1575, into a respectable, if not very wealthy, family. Most of his professional life he spent serving in courts in Italy and abroad as a learned *cortigiano* or “court intellectual”. Basile’s position at the court of the Venetian nobleman Andrea Cornaro, in Candia, set the groundwork for the writer’s later debut into literary society. It was in Andrea Cornaro’s service that Basile was invited to become a member of the Accademia degli Stravaganti (The Academy of the Eccentrics). This was an important stepping-stone to his later foundation of, and leading involvement in, the Accademia degli Oziosi (The Academy of the Idlers) (1610) at the court of Vincenzo Gonzaga, duke of Mantua.<sup>193</sup> Basile’s itinerant movements between the courts of Europe influenced his literary outlook and output considerably, exposed him to a variety of languages and dialects, to the best and the worst of “high” society, and to a range of places and persons. Nonetheless, it could be argued that Basile’s migrations were not wholly positive in their effects; that, seen in a negative light, the courter’s itinerant existence left him disenchanted and wishing for greater social and working stability.

Basile’s earliest known works are a series of letters dating from 1604 and written in the Neapolitan dialect. He achieved a certain degree of literary recognition mainly through works composed in Neapolitan (as opposed to being written in the more courtly Italian tongue). After Basile died, in 1623, his works were published posthumously, with his sister playing a vital role in their publication. Of the texts in circulation following the author’s death, *Lo cunto de li cunti; overo lo trattenemiento de peccerille* was of the greatest significance. It has been argued that this subtitle, which gives a foretaste of the tone of the collection as whole, is playful, willfully misleading—or, as the scholar Nancy Canepa describes it, “blatantly tongue-in-cheek”. Despite the collection’s claim to having been written for children, Canepa argues, it is evident that the *cunti* were in fact intended for adult consumption.<sup>194</sup> Their audience and

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<sup>193</sup> Basile returned to Naples in 1608. It has been conjectured that he was accepted into court society at the behest of his sister, Andrea, who as an acclaimed singer and something of a celebrity, had considerable social influence, helped by the fact that both she and her husband, Muzio Barone, were members of the court of Luigi Carafa, Prince of Stigliano. See Canepa (1999), esp. 41-44.

<sup>194</sup> Nancy Canepa. *From Court to Forest: Giambattista Basile’s Lo cunto de li cunti and the Birth of the Literary Fairy Tale*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999. 11. The recreational value of the collections rests in the *cunti* as sources of polite amusement. A recent radio interview with Canepa on the subject of this translation is well worth listening: “Fairy Tales Before Disney And Grimm: Giambattista Basile,

readership comprised members of the provincial courts around Naples, where Basile served. Naples as the geographical context is significant, for several reasons. At the time, the kingdom of Naples was a peculiar combination of power and poverty, intellectual and cultural dynamism and a pull back into the past.

Maria Conforti defines the peculiarities of this urban centre, noting the paradox of “a large, overcrowded, poor, economically dependent” city being “interwoven with [Naples’] position as the political and intellectual centre of the Kingdom.”<sup>195</sup> Moreover, Naples was a city infused with a thirst for new and exciting discoveries in the sciences, and a tendency to translate these discoveries into new philosophies, where “information about new scientific developments was as strong as the tendency to transform them into theories—and into philosophical and historical debate.”<sup>196</sup> Basile’s residence in and around Naples was significant also for the (posthumous) production and publication of his collected tales, since Naples was, during the period, “one of the premier “Italian centres for clandestine printing and the exchange of books.”<sup>197</sup> Whilst never banned or censored, Basile’s tales did contain certain ribald elements, which some may have construed as causing offence. Publishing the *Pentamerone* in a place where the printing of questionable material was commonplace circumvented any such potential complications.

The sheer entertainment value of the *cunti* cannot be disputed. Although not designed for entertaining “the little ones,” as the subtitle misleadingly suggests, the tales did unquestionably serve the function of “after-dinner fun and games,” for the aristocracy and nobility. This deliberate deception of the reader on the author’s part—Basile having a little game of his own with the subtitle—points to what Jacqueline Rose identified, in her study of J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, as the “impossibility” of children’s fiction: the fact that because of the chasm, the gap, between the psychological worlds of the adult and the child, because of the “impossible relation” between them, an adult writer cannot hope to compose things which are both so innocent and so complex as to meet the criteria of true writing for children.<sup>198</sup>

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Newly Translated,” an interview with Nancy Canepa. February 15, 2016. WBUR Radio Boston: <http://radioboston.wbur.org/2016/02/15/giambattista-basile-translated>.

<sup>195</sup> Maria Conforti, “Medicine, History and Religion in Naples in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in Peter Ole Grell and Andrew Cunningham, eds. *Medicine and Religion in Enlightenment Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 63-78, 63.

<sup>196</sup> Maria Conforti (2007), 54.

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, on book trade and censorship in Naples, see P. Lopez, *Inquisizione, stampa e censura nel Regno di Napoli tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, Naples, 1972.

<sup>198</sup> Jacqueline Rose. *The Case of Peter Pan; or, The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*. London and Basingstoke, 1984. 1-2.

*Lo cunto* comprises forty-nine tales in total, or fifty if one counts the frame-narrative. This frame-tale, which recounts the story of Zoza and the prince, provides structure and narrative context to the several dozen tales which it contains. The tales in the collection are divided into five *giornate* (days); it is from this term that the collection's alternative (sub)title derives: *Il Pentamerone*.<sup>199</sup> On each day except for on the very last, ten tales are told. On the final day, nine tales are recited, and in addition the conclusion to the frame-story is told: a structure reminiscent, in literary form, of the recitation of a rosary—or in the case of Basile's often raucous tales, a kind of profane rosary.

Basile consolidates a narrative tradition, inherited from Apuleius and Boccaccio (1313–1375), of female storytelling. As in Apuleius' episodic novel, the *Metamorphoses* (or to give the work the title by which St. Augustine referred to it, *The Golden Ass*, and in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio's collection of novellas, the tales contained within Basile's *Il Pentamerone* are told by women: ten grotesque old hags, summoned to the court by the prince. The women take turns so that each day each woman tells a single story. It would be wrong, however, to think of these storytellers as serving no purpose other than as vehicles of recitation. The ten narrators are also characters with active roles to play, their contribution vital to the dynamics and the shaping of the whole. The same goes for their auditors, the prince and his wife, who beside listening to the women's stories partake in them and in the frame-narrative through their reaction and response, these being recorded (to the previous day's narratives) at the start of each new day. At the end of each day's recitation, the prince and his wife and all ten of the old women collectively take on the role of auditor and audience, listening to a final, daily eclogue.

That the frame-narrative does more than structure the collection is evident. Instead, the framing narrative is built around and in a way even built into the tales which it appears from the outside to contain. It may be more accurate, then, to think of this complex textual architecture, this structure, not in terms of a single frame-tale—of one large frame—but rather to view the whole as a structure in which multiple narrative frames are nestled. In terms of the architectonics of text, *Lo cunto* can thereby be conceptualized as a collection built on different

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<sup>199</sup> The term "*Pentamerone*" appears for the first time in the first volume of the princeps, but not in the title; it is found in a letter from the editor (Salvatore Scarano) to the duke of Acerenza, Galeazzo Pinello (Basile's last patron), to whom the volume is dedicated. See Anna L. Moro. *Aspects of Old Neapolitan: The Language of Basile's Lo cunto de li cunti*. LINCOS Studies in Romance Linguistics. Muenchen: LINCOS GmbH EUROPA, 2003. Moro, f.n. 31, 12: The term was first included on the title page of the 1674 edition, edited by Pompeo Sarnelli.

layers, or, to put it another way, built as a series of interlocking and at the same time self-distinct frames. The frame-narrative stands as the outer structure, the main frame, encompassing everything within; inside this outer frame are imbricated forty-nine smaller frames containing the forty-nine *cunti*. Interpreting the structure of Basile's collection in this way, on the basis of the concept of the *mise-en-abime*, helps differentiate between the separate stories, since it demonstrates that each and every story has its own designated outer frame: an identifying border in which it is contained.<sup>200</sup> At the same time, recognising that Basile's collection is built on imbrication points to the cohesion of the whole.

Within the text itself, on the level of words, of language, there are smaller, structuring elements which provide a kind of intra-narrative cohesion. Recurring turns of phrase, repeated symbols, and regular proverbial insertions give the text a certain kind of unity, a uniformity of constructed meaning. Proverbs in particular are interesting, serving as they appear to do as tonal markers: expressions through which the sounds and the rhythms of oral culture, the language of "the folk," can enter into the work of literature. As Anna L. Moro explains in her study of Basile's language, it is through proverbs that, "Basile presents a catalogue of popular culture and tradition: games, dances, songs, popular maxims, proverbs, customs, references to local events and individuals."<sup>201</sup> Clearly, *Lo cunto* marks the culmination of Basile's cultural project, an undertaking which saw the courtier and man of letters "gathering in a systematic way the primary materials of Neapolitan tradition and tracing the outlines of an alternative literary and ethical framework worthy of containing these materials." It could be argued that in so doing, Basile "marginalize[d] himself threefold" from the orthodox literary (Italian) establishment by transposing a noncanonical genre from the spoken into the literary realm, and then writing stories, under the purview of this nascent genre, using a nonstandard dialect language (Neapolitan), in a "low," or comic tone.<sup>202</sup> By no means was Basile the only writer to engage in such stylistic jocularity. Indeed, given its persistence one century later in the fairy tales of Charles Perrault, this lightness of language could be said to be a hallmark of the early literary fairy tale.

In *Lo cunto* Basile is balancing two often disparate influences and aims: on the one hand, fantasy and entertainment; and on the other, a reflection of reality, of the socio-historical

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<sup>200</sup> The term was first applied to art and literary criticism by André Gide, in 1893. For challenges to Gide's use of the term, see Lucien Dällenbach. *Le récit spéculaire. Essai sur la mise en abyme*. Paris : Seuil, 1977.

<sup>201</sup> Moro (2003), 45.

<sup>202</sup> Canepa (1999), 13.

situation. Basile's *cunti* feature magic, miracles, happy endings, metamorphoses, chronological impossibilities and astonishing feats in abundance—in other words, features indicating that the stories are situated firmly in the fairy tale realm, a realm of fantasy, where the primary function of this fantasy is to entertain through cultured *divertissements*; yet at the same time, underlying and often overriding this fantasy is a firm basis in reality: in the actual and the factual elements of which daily life is constructed. The *cunti* are delightful, shocking, fantastical, raucous, comic, and they *do* entertain; nonetheless, they are permeated by the author's concern to maintain a sense of the social realities of the age in which he was writing. As much a part of the texture of Basile's text as the lighter, literary elements, these social realities shaped the tales in the collection by conditioning the context in which they were written, received and circulated.<sup>203</sup> To take a geo-political example, consider the Kingdom of Naples. At the time when Basile was writing, with a population of over 200,000, Naples was one of the largest and most vibrant European cities, with a flourishing artistic and literary culture. At the same time, the city and the neighbouring regions were in a state of political and financial crisis, as a result of which society was undergoing what could be described as a period of "refeudalization". This meant that class divisions were becoming sharper, with the rich becoming even richer and more powerful, and the poor becoming poorer. This growing inequality led to civilian unrest, culminating in the popular uprising known as the "Revolt of Masaniello" (1646-47). Such social turbulence had wider cultural repercussions, with its ripple effects felt even in the courts. Court society, and the function of court intellectuals and academicians, like Basile, were redefined radically.

Originally, *Lo cunto* was published in five separate volumes, one *giornata* at a time: Days 1 and 2 in 1634 (Naples: Ottavio Beltrano), Day 3 in 1634 (Naples: Lazzaro Scorriglio), Day 4 in 1635 (Scorriglio) and Day 5 in 1636 (Beltrano). Although there is no surviving manuscript and the textual history of *Lo cunto* is in print only, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the collection was read throughout the seventeenth century, the 1645 and 1654 editions confirming the demand both in Naples and beyond, including in France.<sup>204</sup> In her 1986

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<sup>203</sup> "[T]here are three principal ways that Basile dialogues with reality through his text...many *cunti* lend themselves to being read as allegorical elaborations on the sociohistorical reality of Basile's time...Basile engages with various literary and cultural traditions: the oral tradition in which folktales originate, the Neapolitan popular tradition, the elite Italian literary tradition, and the anti-classicists or carnivalesque tradition of the Renaissance...*Lo cunto* can be read as a laboratory of rhetorical and thematic experimentation in which Basile offers his own unique interpretation of the Baroque 'poetics of the marvelous'." *ibid.*, 29.

<sup>204</sup> On the basis that the general public had at least a passing familiarity with the Neapolitan dialect, gleaned most from the theater and the commedia dell'arte, Canepa argues that Basile's collection would have had a wider readership across the Italian states. See Canepa (1999), 45-6.

edition, Michèle Rak suggests that the readership of *Lo cunto* grew significantly after the uprisings of 1647-1648, since an interest in dialectic literature and popular traditions was a formidable component of the anti-Spanish and anti-baronial feelings which had played a large part in igniting and fanning the flames of the unrest.<sup>205</sup> Considering the tales' popularity, there was remarkably little critical appraisal of Basile's writing. Vittorio Imbriani's *Il gran Basile: Studio biografico e bibliografico*, the first significant Italian study of the man and his work, dates from as late as 1875. After suffering this period of critical neglect, Basile was "rediscovered" in the early twentieth century by Benedetto Croce, whose evaluation of *Lo cunto*'s aesthetics, his definition of the language of the tales as being "heavily Baroque", had considerable influence on subsequent readings and valuations of the texts.<sup>206</sup> Croce recognises that a pronounced emphasis on stylized expression is integral to Basile's compositional method. Basile is most interested, Croce implies, in elements of language with the capacity to convey nuances of tone and complexities of meaning, layers of inference and emotion.<sup>207</sup>

Semantic vibrancy, a kind of linguistic effervescence, animates the tales written by Basile: a palpable delight in words, in the sounds of words, and in the images that these create. In his 1974 essay, "*La mappa delle metafore*," the Italian writer and critic Italo Calvino considers Basile's stylistics and the ramifications of his innovations.<sup>208</sup> Metaphor, ribald humour, flashes of quick wit, and displays of verbal dexterity pattern Basile's prose, animating what Anna Moro calls its "*instancibile movimento*".<sup>209</sup> Basile's language twists and turns, ripples and folds. In Basile's dynamic prose, the creative potential of language fully realized. Language in the tales *makes* and *moves*, it *generates*. In the fairytale world of the *cunti*, words have the capacity to alter, to transform ideas, events, even the bodies and objects depicted.

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<sup>205</sup> Michele Rak, ed. *Lo Cunto de li Cunti*. Milan: Garzanti, 1986, 1042.

<sup>206</sup> Benedetto Croce, "The Fantastic Accomplishment of Giambattista Basile and His Tale of Tales", in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm*, ed. Jack Zipes. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 879, 880-81. The term "Baroque" came to literary criticism from the discipline of the history of art. It is therefore worth exercising caution when using the concept to interpret or explain a narrative, since between texts and images there are crucial differences which the critic must recognise as a prerequisite. Cf. Heinrich Wölfflin. *Principles of Art History. The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art.*, transl. by M. D. Hottinger. New York: Dover Publications, 1932. See also Wölfflin, *Classic Art. An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance*. Trans. by Peter and Linda Murray from the 8th German Edition. Basle: Benno Schwabe & Co, 1948 and London: Phaidon Press, 1952, 2nd ed. 1953.

<sup>207</sup> Croce in Zipes, ed. (2000), 880.

<sup>208</sup> Italo Calvino. "La mappa delle metafore" in *Sulla fiaba*. A cura di Mario Lavagetto. Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1988 129-146.

<sup>209</sup> Moro (2003), 8.



Croce's study had a profound impact on later Basile scholarship, with many critics reading *Lo cunto* largely within a Baroque frame.<sup>210</sup> Canepa, for instance, contends that *Lo cunto* was at the time of its publication "the most significant Italian example" of the "Baroque technique" of conflating traditions, of interweaving "elite" and "low" linguistic styles and forms. This conflation, part, perhaps, of the Baroque transformation and transmutation of form and matter, enabled Basile to subvert ironically, literary and ideological expectations.<sup>211</sup> By undercutting audience expectation and by fulfilling the "Baroque craving" for novelty, marvel and surprise, Basile the "Baroque fabulist" (Croce) brings into question the larger issue of genre. The question again arises: What is a fairy tale? What shapes does it take: what form, what style? "Style" understood as concept and category complicates the discussion. Never stable, "style" is redefined continually over time; it is determined by both historical moment and by cultural specificity. This means that the nomenclature and the makeup of style – the meaning, composite parts, and identifying characteristics – transform and develop. A lexicon of style appropriate to critical estimations of the concept in works of literature and art today may not be applicable easily to artistic and literary works of the past. Every historical period, in other words, has its own definition of what style is, a definition which recognises its own ephemerality: the fact that the meaning of and criteria for "style" are in constant flux. Style informs, indeed in many cases, *forms*, or dictates, narrative representation; it influences the degree of narrative visibility. Style can therefore be said to be connected closely to issues such as the question of gender: questions where what is hidden (by/in the text) is at least as important as that which is revealed.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, definitions and discussions of style were determined by and centred on questions of social hierarchy and of genre. Genre and social rank could be expressed by varying levels of (elaboration in) diction, and by playing with the degree of stylization in the language used. Hierarchy and genre thereby revealed certain distinguishing particulars (in a text, in a work of art), which made them the primary determinants of "style".

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<sup>210</sup> Indeed, Italo Calvino argues that it is impossible to separate Croce from Basile, or Basile from Croce; neither can be mentioned without the other. "*E impossibile fare un qualsiasi discorso su questo libro senza partire da Benedetto Croce, senza incrociare le orme dei suoi passi che l'hanno esplorato in tutte le direzioni, e non solo lungo le vie dove egli voleva guidare il lettore, ma anche in quelle da cui voleva farlo girare al largo. Del resto e d'un libro di Basile-Croce che sto parlando, perche non conosco il primo autore se non attraverso il secondo.*" Calvino (1974/1988), 129.

<sup>211</sup> Canepa (1999), 11-12, 23. It would appear that Basile positioned his tales within the contemporary Renaissance debate about the purpose of literature. With regards to the Italian novella tradition, at the end of which *Lo cunto* appeared, this debate sought to mediate between the opposing poles of whether literature should be useful, or whether it was enough for it to provide pleasure: that is to say, the debate between *docere* and *delectare*.

During the cultural period in question, “style” denoted most often “levels of discourse correlative with speaker, audience, subject matter and the characters and actions represented”<sup>212</sup> Style was, essentially, an aesthetic index of expectations of, and variations on, accepted modes of expression (self/social expression and artistic expression both included), a catalogue of possibilities available within the culture and the canon. In literature, as in art, questions of style are acute, for it is in these texts and objects that style and aesthetics combine.

Basile did more than simply borrow from Boccaccio or Straparola a template for the fairy tale; stylistically, the Neapolitan revised and embellished the fairy tale and in so doing, accomplished significant steps in literary innovation.<sup>213</sup> Basile expanded the very notion of the fairy tale and in so doing expanded also the notion of narrative. This concept of expanding something is significant also to the critical perspective, as Canepa’s definition of *Lo cunto* as an “open text” makes clear.<sup>214</sup> It is useful to consider the “openness” of the collection on this level because doing so focuses attention on the “peripheral” linguistic elements: the verbal diversions, elisions, the linguistic playfulness discussed. Nonetheless there is another way in which Basile’s fairy-tale collection is “open,” openness in this sense being an indicator of a productive lack of fixity. The collection is “open” also on the level of what Gérard Genette described as the “paratext”. “Paratextual” elements are embedded in the collection’s structure, part of the texture of the work. So-called “paratextual elements” can serve a variety of functions. These elements can be used to “communicate a piece of sheer information,” “make known an intention, or an interpretation,” “convey a genuine decision,” or “involve a commitment”; some paratextual elements can even “perform what they describe.”<sup>215</sup> Examples of paratextual elements include the frontispiece, the author’s name, the title, the preface, the chapter and tale headings. One of the most interesting paratextual elements of *Lo cunto* is the

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<sup>212</sup> John M. Steadman. *Redefining a Period Style: “Renaissance, “Mannerist” and “Baroque” in Literature*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1990. 3.

<sup>213</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio. *Decamerone: Principe Galeotto*. Mid-fourteenth century. See Giovanni Boccaccio. *The Decameron*. Transl. with an Introduction by Wayne A. Rebhorn. New York: W. W. Norton, Co., 2013; Giovanni Francesco Straparola. *Le piacevoli notti* (1550-1555). See *The Nights of Straparola*. Transl. by W. G. Waters, illustrated by E. R. Hughes. London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1894.

<sup>214</sup> Canepa takes her interpretation of what an “open” text might be from the Italian semiotician, writer and literary critic, Umberto Eco. See Eco’s *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984. (I.e. Canepa’s suggestion does not derive from Roland Barthes’ 1967 essay, “The Death of the Author [“La mort de l’auteur”] See Roland Barthes. *Image-Music-Text*. Transl. by Stephen Heath. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: London, 1978.) Although Canepa identifies “peripheral” material in Basile’s collection, she does not go on to consider *Lo cunto* in terms of Genette’s theory of the “paratext”.

<sup>215</sup> Gérard Genette. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Transl. by Jane E. Lewin, foreword by Richard Macksey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Originally published in French as *Seuils*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987. 1-2.

authorial attribution. Basile wrote both of his Neapolitan works under the anagrammatic pseudonym, Gian Alessio Abbattis. Following a suggestion made initially by Chlowdowski (1985: 194-95) Moro conjectures that this dual identity of “Basile-Abbatutis” reflects Basile’s desire to keep separate the two distinct spheres of his professional life: on the one hand, “respected court poet and writer in Tuscan of some renown,” and on the other, “friend of Giulio Cesare Cortese and [a] writer interested in the language and culture of Naples”.<sup>216</sup>



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<sup>216</sup> Moro (2003), 7. This may be correct. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that *Lo cunto* was published posthumously, through the efforts of Basile’s sister; the recycling of the pseudonym reveals in this sense as much about her desires and decisions as it does about Basile’s own.

#### **iv. Some things better left unseen: The secrets of the female body in early modern medicine**

Italy in the early modern period was a centre of pioneering medical enquiry and experimentation. At the universities of Bologna and Padua in particular, the pursuit of scientific knowledge and discovery was undertaken across the various disciplines, and on different subjects. Chief amongst the subjects coming into consideration was the human body: its external shape in terms of anatomical construct, and also its internal landscape: those unseen yet no less vital parts which together make up the animate human being. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, one of the main objectives of medical writers was to understand the “secrets of women,” Katharine Park points out; in other words, to uncover the secrets of the female body. The reasons behind this desire to come to know what might be termed “the corporeal feminine,” were multiple and complex. They can, however, be divided into two main categories of epistemological motivation. Firstly, the study of female anatomy was so integral to medicine because of the fear of women’s bodies so entrenched in patriarchal society, beginning in the classical period. This fear was fostered by ancient natural philosophy, by Aristotle’s teachings and by theories influenced by his teachings, including those promulgated in the notorious treatise, long attributed to Albertus Magnus. (c.1200-1280), a German Catholic bishop and Saint, *De secretis mulierum*, which, gained great prestige.<sup>217</sup> Popular throughout the late Middle Ages and modern times, *The Secrets of Women* dealt ostensibly with human reproduction and was written to teach celibate clergy about the facts of life and natural phenomena; the underlying message, however, was about the essential evil and dangerous nature of women.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> See Helen Rodnite Lemay. *Women's Secrets. A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's De secretis mulierum with Commentaries*. Albany, N.Y : State University of New York Press, c1992.

<sup>218</sup> Aristotle. *Physics*. Transl. by Robert Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 32. Consider the influence of Aristotelianism on the sixteenth-century writer Giordano Bruno (1548-1600). In his famous 1584 dialogue, *De la causa, principio ed uno* (1584), Bruno has Poliinio (an Aristotelian and a pedant) describing how the essential problem with women is their materiality: the body, described here as “matter”. A woman, Poliinio says, “is but matter. If you do not know what a woman is because you do not know what matter is, study the Peripatetics a little; they will teach you what a woman is by teaching you about matter.” In Giordano Bruno. *Cause, Principle and Unity: Essays on Magic*. Transl. by Robert de Lucca. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 74. [Giordano Bruno. *De la causa, principio ed uno*. 1584; facs. ed., Florence: Olschki, 1999. 95-96: “La donna non è altro che una materia; se non sapete che cosa è materia, studiate alquanto gli Peripatetici che con insegnarvi che cosa è materia, te insegneranno che cosa è donna.”]

Understanding the anatomical “secrets” of women was the first step towards being able to control them. In contrast to the neatly-bounded physical male form, female bodies seemed all too volatile and permeable, liable to “leak, drip, squirt, expand, contract, crave, divide, sag, dilate, and expel.”<sup>219</sup> There was something dangerous, something wild, about these bodies, something unfixed, an apparent absence of bodily boundaries suggesting, perhaps, the absence of a bounded, well-formed self. Rebecca Kukla adds to this discussion of the female body as a “troubling counterpoint to the mythical well-bounded, fully unified, seamless masculine body” by explaining that maternity, “the capacity of the maternal body to nurture, via the womb and its breasts” meant an additional layer, another type, of lack of fixity. The maternal body, Kukla explains, was considered to be “unfixed”; it was also an incorporated entity, an “organic unity” with the ability in pregnancy and after “to bridge the gap between two bodies, becoming both one and two at once through the gifts of gestation and milk” (Figure 2.2).<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Rebecca Kukla. *Mass Hysteria. Medicine, Culture, and Mothers' Bodies*. New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005. 2-3.

<sup>220</sup> Kukla (2005), 3. Later in her Introduction, Kukla elaborates the prevalent “concerns with the permeability of the maternal body and with its appetites and cravings,” which historically have been “partnered with concerns about the potential for corruption of the pure space of the womb through ingestion and permeation across the boundaries of this body.”<sup>6</sup> This “pure space” was problematic. In terms of the female body’s interior organic landscape (its organscape), it was to the womb, or uterus, that a special, symbolic status was accorded. As the organ and the space where both life and knowledge originated, the uterus was simultaneously revered and feared. See Lori Schroeder’s discussion of the “riddling uterus” in “Monstrous Issues: The Uterus as Riddle in Early Modern Medical Texts” in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*. Ed. by Julia L. Hairston and Walter Stephens. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 34-50, 41.

While in the medieval period descriptions of the imagined human uterus and of actual dissections of female pigs’ uteruses drew attention to the ‘tunic’ or ‘chemise’ of the womb that can be drawn (almost like a curtain) to reveal the chambers of cells within, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries actual female uteruses were publicly revealed in the popular ‘anatomy theatres’. Accordingly, the gynecological texts of this period often present the female reproductive body as a mystery that is finally to be understood, unveiled. Both the written texts and the illustrations often liken the anatomizing of reproductive organs to the casting off of one or several coats or veils before the viewer’s gaze. 41.

See also Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*. Transl. by Matthew Adamson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. See esp. 26-27.



S.iiiij.

Figure 2.2. Illustration of a pregnant woman showing the foetus.  
 From *De dissectione partium corporis humani libri tres...* by Charles Estienne. Paris: S. Colinaeus, 1545.  
 L0047391, Wellcome Library, London.

Secondly, and related to this first category of fear-driven pursuit of anatomical knowledge about the female body, was pursuit of knowledge based on conceptions of innate difference between women and men, between the female and the male anatomy. It was believed that whoever could “probe into the complicated and mysterious workings” of the female body (in particular, into the mysteries of gynaecology), would find it easy to understand the rest of the “comparatively simple human frame”.<sup>221</sup> By “the human frame” Park means men as well as women, with the more complex female body as the template for general anatomy.<sup>222</sup> Some of the male anxiety around internally volatile and effusive female bodies relates to the difference between the unseen unknown and the visible familiar. The bodily interior had long been thought to reveal something essential, both about that specific body and more generally, too, about human corporeality, some hidden “truth”.<sup>223</sup> The interior of the female body was imagined as a fluid space in which the organs moved around, seemingly at will, and where bodily fluids, including milk and blood as well as bile and pus, were often changed into each another. Moreover it was believed that these transubstantiated liquids could leak out of any bodily orifice.<sup>224</sup> Since breast-milk and menstrual blood comprised the only outward signs of the material unfixity of female anatomy, the rest of it—the other reasons for, the organs behind, the female body’s leakiness and its maternal capacity—were left to be imagined. Aristotle, for instance, in his *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle puts forward the argument that bodily fluids—milk, blood and sperm—are all residues of the digestion and transformation of food inside the

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<sup>221</sup> Katharine Park. *Secrets of Women. Gender, Generation and the Origins of Human Dissection*. New York: Zone Books, 2006. 26.

<sup>222</sup> Often the only difference between male and female figures in early anatomical illustration was that the former were depicted in terms of exteriors and surfaces, whilst the latter were imagined with volatile inner bodyscapes. Classical art, in contrast to anatomical illustration, sought to gain aesthetic control over women’s bodies. In stark contrast to the medical(ised) female body, leaky and threatening, the female nude embodies an exercise in containment. As Lynda Nead explains in *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 1992:

If the female body is defined as lacking containment and issuing filth and pollution from its faltering outlines and broken surface, then the classical forms of art [as the female nude] perform a kind of magical regulation of the female body, containing it and momentarily repairing the orifices and tears.

17-18.

See also *Fasciculus medicine*, (translated into Italian in 1494, as *Fasciculo de medicina*) or *Medical Compilation*, published in Venice in 1491, attributed to Johannes de Ketham, an influential group of anonymous texts circulated in manuscript form. Male figures were depicted in terms of surfaces and exteriors, to illustrate general topics in physiology. There is just one female figure, a drawing entitled “On Woman,” which in contrast to the male images has an inward cast, i.e. focuses on the body’s insides, and shows the pregnant womb.

<sup>223</sup> It is for this reason, Elizabeth Stephen argues, that such a “high evidentiary value” has been attributed to anatomical images. “In seeing the interior of the body,” she writes, “we see its truth.” Elizabeth Stephen. *Anatomy as Spectacle: Public Exhibitions of the Body from 1700 to the Present*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011. 3.

<sup>224</sup> See Barbara Duden. *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor’s Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.



body. Francoise Héritier-Auge (1989, 162) outlines how this applies to women's bodies, in particular to their bodily "heat"—which, thinking in terms of Talia's cold, "dead" body, bears some consideration:

Essentially cold by nature, women never manage to make semen, the only bodily fluid with fecund power. Out of their substance, they obtain a less perfect product, but one that nevertheless taxes all of their capacity for heat. This explains the disappearance of the menses, at least during the first months of nursing. All of the heat of the substance available goes into milk-making. And though they continue to produce enough blood to cover their own needs, women have none to spare.<sup>225</sup>

Effectively this meant that women pursuing or indulging in their supposed natural "coldness," might transform their "heat" into passion, or lust, instead of into milk.

Opening up the female body through dissection was a way of controlling its dangerousness, of making it more familiar and therefore, less threatening. To be able to visualize the female body's inner workings meant having some degree of knowledge of what had been an object of such ambiguity, fear and fascination. This need to have revealed, to *see* the hidden operations of the female anatomy, is evident in many early modern medical texts and illustrations, which "work to create the sense that one can suddenly 'see' (or at least can conceptualize seeing) what one could not 'see' before and may not or should not be able to see first-hand."

The artist Leonardo da Vinci (1459-1519) described, visually, the "divine" machinery (da Vinci's term) of both the exterior and interior of the human body. In so doing da Vinci found that there was an aesthetic as well as functional need to present fully, which is to say, in three dimensions, the structure of the body.<sup>226</sup> Da Vinci, like other students of the human body at this time, conceptualised the structure and the workings of the human body in microcosmic terms. Da Vinci called the interior of the body 'a lesser world' in which the properties and

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<sup>225</sup> Cited by Kate Flint in her essay, "Blood and milk: painting and the state in late nineteenth-century Italy" in *The Body Images: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance*. Ed. by Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 109-123. 121. These theories were later disputed in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth century, with the discovery that the epigastric vessels leading to the breast did not originate from the uterine vessels, which in turn meant that there could be no logical argument for blood originating in the womb.

<sup>226</sup> Leonardo da Vinci. *The Da Vinci Notebooks*. Ed. with an Introduction by Emma Dickens. London: Profile, 2005.



shapes and forms of the greater universe, of the macrocosm, were reflected.<sup>227</sup> Later, anatomical texts based on actual dissections by Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) make this pull between the urge to see and the desire not to see especially prominent (Figure 2.3).<sup>228</sup>

Beyond medicine, anatomical study (of male as well as female bodies) has had much wider cultural and aesthetic repercussions, particularly in art.



Figure 2.3. Title and frontispiece from Frederick Ruysch. *Opera omnia anatomico-medico*. Amsterdam: Janson Waesberg, 1737. L0021443. Wellcome Library, London.

The broader implications of understanding and visualizing anatomies have been recognised since the seventeenth century at least, when anatomical artists such as Spigelius depicted

<sup>227</sup> It has been argued that the “early modern body” came into being, came into its own, through painting, sculpture and anatomical dissection, and that “the care of the body finds explicit justification elsewhere than in its role as vehicle for an immortal soul under constant scrutiny.” Due to a revival of Neo-Platonic thought and the burgeoning of physiognomic science, this early modern body was understood not in terms of the Cartesian division between soul and body, spirit and matter, but instead as the incorporation of the two, “neither strictly body nor purely soul.” Blood-borne ‘spirits,’ the ‘astral’ body and the imagination were each defined as “immediate components of the total person”. See Hairston & Stephens, eds. (2010), Introduction.

<sup>228</sup> Schroeder (2010), 41. See also Jonathan Sawday. *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. London: Routledge, 1995. See esp. 183-229 for illustrations.

dissected bodies as part of natural and architectural landscapes.<sup>229</sup> As will become apparent in the critical discussion of the placement and positioning and decoration of Talia's body, Basile seems to be alluding deliberately, in "Sole, Luna e Talia" at least, to these morbid displays, in a spirit of writerly levity. His parodic, often inflated tone undermines the otherwise sacred solemnity of such tableaux, and makes the reader question the human foible of obsessing over an inevitable mortality. Of still greater relevance to this enquiry are the emotive and coloured wax anatomies which develop out of the earlier seventeenth-century examples discussed above. Most significant amongst these were those produced by the Sicilian wax artist Gaetano Giulio Zumbo's (1656-1701), often in collaboration with the French surgeon, Guillaume Desnoues (c. 1650-c.1735); they include the "Anatomical Head," housed still at Florence's La Specola, and other figures with a "distinctly melancholy air" or depicted "wide-eyed and stunned by the fact of their dissection."<sup>230</sup> More than mere "exercises in sensationalism," Zumbo's waxes convey the familiar seventeenth-century message, *Memento mori*, which in later waxes, including the so-called "Anatomical Venuses," would be transliterated and transformed in the name of medical investigation and discovery.<sup>231</sup> Basile is not interested in such discovery, nor in investigation, yet he is able to convey, nonetheless, a sense of what a posed (female) figure might suggest to the viewer, to the reader, through his literary depiction of Talia, whom he invests with a certain majesty, beauty, and complexity, as will become apparent.



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<sup>229</sup> See also "De foetu formatu," Adriaan van de Spiegel (Spigelius), *In Opera quae extant Omnia* (1645). Wellcome Library. [image]; "Skeletons and Parts of the Human Body arranged on a Plinth," Frederik Ruysch. In *Thesaurus Anatomicus* (1703). Wellcome Library.

<sup>230</sup> Zumbo's was the first anatomical wax to be made by an anatomist, rather than an artist; previously all waxes of the body had been made for the purpose of teaching art, in art schools, rather than anatomy as part of a medical education. See R. Ballestriero, (2010). Anatomical models and wax Venuses: art masterpieces or scientific craft works? *Journal of Anatomy*, 216 (2), 223-234 DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-7580.2009.01169.x.

<sup>231</sup> R. W. Lightbown, "Gaetano Giulio Zumbo – I: The Florentine Period," in *The Burlington Magazine*, November 1964, Vol. CVI No. 740, 493.

**v. Between enchantment and death:  
A critical commentary on “Sole, Luna e Talia”**

i. *An ambiguous prophecy; the danger of a piece of flax; the King’s edict*

Narrative prolepsis is a powerful force. Therefore it is unsurprising that prophecies are such prominent features of fairy tales, where their function is to unfold and to reveal certain aspects of an otherwise opaque, unknowable, and consequently frightening, future.<sup>232</sup> Usually it is through magical or supernatural means, or by consulting “wise men” skilled in reading the signs in the skies and the stars and in nature, that characters in fairy tales come to know (some part of) the things to come. In several of the tales in the *Pentamerone*, prophecy functions as a proleptic narrative device, though it is worth noting that, as Andrew Cunningham explains, at the time, learned men of medicine, history and religion tended to focus on what was known and seen, and rejected “wholly...the idea that they could be accounted for by the intervention of god or gods...and so they excluded, or reduced to a minimum, [the inferred significance] of single supernatural events.”<sup>233</sup> And yet prophecies can be seen scattered throughout narratives of magic and imagination. One notable example with many parallels with “Sole, Luna e Talia” is “Face” (Third Entertainment of the Third Day), another AT 410 (“The Sleeping Beauty”) tale, which tells the story of the unhappy and ill-fated Renza.<sup>234</sup>

There once was a king, the king of Narrow Ditch, who had a beautiful daughter. Since he wanted to know what sort of destiny was written for her in the book of the stars, he summoned all the necromancers, astrologers, and gypsies of the land. They came to the royal court, and when some had / examined the lines of her hand, others the signs on her face, and others the birthmarks on Renza’s body, for this was her name, each of them spoke their opinion; and the majority of them concluded that she was in danger of tapping *the sewer main of her life*

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<sup>232</sup> See Michael Wood. *The Road to Delphi: The Life and Afterlife of Oracles*. London and New York: Picador, 2004.

<sup>233</sup> Peter Ole Grell and Andrew Cunningham, eds. *Medicine and Religion in Enlightenment Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 77. Moreover, sixteenth-century physicians were expected to prognosticate more than treat. See The Casebooks Project: A digital edition of Simon Forman’s & Richard Napier’s medical records 1596–1634. <http://www.magicandmedicine.hps.cam.ac.uk/>.

<sup>234</sup> *Giambattista Basile’s The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*. Transl. by Nancy Canepa; foreword by Jack Zipes. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007. p. 233-240. This tale is classified also as AT 313: “The Girl as Helper in the Hero’s Flight”. Canepa comments on how “Face” “stands out for its unhappy ending (one of the only ones in *The Tale of Tales*) and its theme of irrevocable fate.” Note the (sometimes uncomfortably) jocular tone of the translation, e.g. “he decided to duck so that he wouldn’t get hit”.

because of a big bone [*uosso maestro*: (Neap.) ‘The femur of animals’ (Croce 265)]. When the King heard this he decided to duck so that he wouldn’t get hit, and he had a lovely tower built where he enclosed his daughter together with twelve ladies-in-waiting and a governess to serve her, and gave the order that, under penalty of death, they were always to bring her meat without bones so as to bypass that unlucky planet.

233-234

One day, a Corsican hound somehow slips inside the tower room, with a big bone. To Renza, “all this seemed to have been sent by fortune for her very needs”. She throws the dog out and takes the bone. Then she feigns a headache and orders her ladies-in-waiting to leave and let her rest, barricades the door from the inside, and with the bone in hand, she “put in a day’s work.” (235) She chips away at a stone in the wall until she can pry it away and make a hole large enough to allow her to climb out. Unfortunately, what seemed to her like a blessing turns out to have been a curse, for although she does manage to escape, she has escaped in vain. The prince with whom she is in love and for whom she has fled is untrue; she discovers him kissing another woman: his bride, no less. Renza dies of a broken heart, and the prince, on learning of her death, kills himself.

With regards to the historical context, too, consulting astrologers, soothsayers and others learned in the various arts of foretelling the future was common practice, particularly at times when “belief in immortality began to waver” and “fatalism got the upper hand,” as Jacob Burckhardt explains, leading to an opening in popular credence. This gap was filled by ancient astrology, and by magic. “From the relation of the planets amongst themselves and to the signs of the zodiac, future events and the course of whole lives were inferred, and the weightiest decisions were taken in consequence.” Burckhardt claims that Italians were particularly susceptible to popular superstitions based on “premonitions and inferences drawn from ominous occurrences.”<sup>235</sup> This argument, whilst correct in its basic premise, is far too narrow. Popular superstitions unquestionably were rife elsewhere, outside of Italy.

Shakespeare’s plays provide ample evidence that superstitions existed not just on the Continent but also in England. That these beliefs were widespread is not surprising, given the hardships of everyday existence at the time. It is within this particular historical framework, a framework in which prophetic consultations were quite common, that the decision taken by

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<sup>235</sup> Jacob Burckhardt. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy. An Essay*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1981 [1945]. 314-320.

Talia's father (the "king" or "great lord" as his title is variously translated) should be considered: the decision to summon soothsayers and wise men and order them to look into and decipher his newborn daughter's future, "fece venire i sapienti e gl'indovini del suo regno a predirle la sorte" 873. After several consultations, "dopo svariati consulti" (873), the learned men of the court report back to their lord, having reached the regrettable conclusion that, "la bambina correva un ferle pericolo a causa di una lisca di lino" (873). Variations between English translations of the prophecy are revealing. In his 1893 translation of Basile's text, [Sir] Richard Burton writes that Talia would "incur great danger from a chip of flax."<sup>236</sup> Norman M. Penzer's English translation, based on Croce's 1925 Italian edition, heightens the sense of impending crisis and doom carried by the prophetic words: Talia, Penzer writes, would one day be "exposed to great danger from a small splinter of flax".<sup>237</sup> In comparison to Burton's casual "incur," suggesting something like a chance encounter with the fated danger ("incur," meaning "to run into" or "to meet with"), Penzer's more deliberate "exposed" makes the danger feel acute, inevitable and immediate, human helplessness laid bare by the semantic force of the word "exposed".<sup>238</sup>)

It is worth probing the symbolic connotations of flax, beyond its domestic implications about spinning and weaving and "women's work," beyond the relationship between spinning cloth and spinning stories, to the effects which this plant-fibre has on Talia, on her consciousness via its effects on her body. The term "flax" derives from the old English *flaex* and the German *flachs*, but it is the Latin name for this medicinal plant which conveys its multivalent properties: *Linum usitissimum*, or "the most useful". In Byzantine *materia medica*, linseed (lintseed, or flax seed), the dried ripe seed of the flax plant, is listed as a remedy with particular potency for women, which is to say that it was thought particularly effective in treating female diseases and conditions. Linseed contains mucilage, as well as an oil which can be obtained by expressing the seed. Since Ancient times, in general practice (treating the diseases of both sexes), extract of linseed was used as an emollient and demulcent, and

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<sup>236</sup> Giambattista Basile. *The Pentamerone*. Transl. by Sir Richard Burton, with an Introduction by E. R. Vincent, drawings by Michael Ayton. London: W Kimber, 1952. 373. All further references to this translation will be made parenthetically in the text by page number and, where appropriate or needed, translator.

<sup>237</sup> *The Pentamerone of Giambattista Basile*, translated from tuhe Italian of Benedetto Croce, ed. with a preface, notes and appendixes by Norman M. Penzer. London: J. Lane, the Bodley Head, 1932, vol. ii, 129-133, 129. Emphasis added.

<sup>238</sup> P.L. Travers repeats Penzer's rendition of Basile's text verbatim in her translation of the tale: "Sole, Luna, e Talia" ("Sun, Moon, and Talia") in *About the Sleeping Beauty*. Illustrated by Charles Keeping. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975, pp. 85-97. 85.

employed frequently to treat both superficial and deep inflammation, to relieve pain, and to promote healing. Dioscorides, the ancient Greek authority on materia medica, thought that linseed was aphrodisiac, and also suggested it as an enema. During the Middle Ages, flax seed was prescribed for the type of excessive and painful menstruation caused by uterine inflammation.<sup>239</sup> In Eucharius Rösslin's 1513 *Der Schwangern Frauen und Hebammen Rosengarten* (*The Garden of Roses for Pregnant Women and Midwives*, later known by its shortened title, the *Rosengarten*), a compilation of medical material relating to plant and herbal remedies gathered from a variety of ancient sources, there is a description of the obstetric and gynecological uses of flax.<sup>240</sup> Thomas Reynolds translated Rösslin's work into English, and published the *Rosengarten* in 1545, under the title of *The Byrth of Mankynde* (also known as *The Woman's Booke*).

In "Sole, Luna e Talia" the wise men can offer the king only an inconclusive conclusion, despite holding several lengthy consultations. The image of the future that they reveal lacks clarity and detail, leaving Talia's fate largely ambiguous. They are able to give the anxious royal father only an impression of what the future holds, the mere sense what is to come. Hence their prophecy does little to mitigate worry or inspire confidence—and, as will become clear later on in this analysis, this is why the king overcompensates through overprotection, instigating edicts meant to prevent any and all accidents. It remains unclear, for instance, when Talia is due to meet the mentioned "danger". And other questions remain: How will she be exposed to the flax? What will happen to her? Will this predicted fate be her end, her death, or just an interruption in or diversion of her young life in the form of a temporary and illness or transitory abeyance of consciousness/conscious functioning? The king does not press the wise men any further, and these, along with many other questions go unasked. It is

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<sup>239</sup> When exposed to oxygen, linseed oil formed a hard transparent varnish and was used in fine arts and for its properties as a drying oil. Flax was used for cord and sail cloth and a finer version became known as linen, the cloth from which Biblical garments were fashioned. Until cotton came into ready supply in the eighteenth century, flax and hemp were the most important vegetable fibers. In the *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia* (1991) the actions of Linum or flax seed are recorded as "anodyne, demulcent, and emollient." In *Herbal medicine past and present*, ed. by John K. Crellin and Jane Philpott. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990. 104. See also *Critical Approaches to the History of Western Herbal Medicine: From Classical Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*. Ed. by Susan Francia and Anne Stobart. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

<sup>240</sup> Rösslin was the Stadtartz, or city physician, of Worms. He was granted the copyright for the book on 24 September 1513. In reference to the title, Ingerslev of Copenhagen wrote in his 1909 treatise on the work in question that textbooks with exotic titles on the subjects of botany, medicine and pharmacology were common in Germany at the time, so the title was designed to appeal to a wide, i.e. popular audience. At least three editions of the *Rosengarten* were published in 1513, each one with illustrations. The front page of one of the 1513 shows an illustration of two women in Old German dress with a child in swaddling clothes. One of the women, possibly a midwife, is depicted with a rose held in her right hand, suggesting perhaps some influence on the Grimm's narrative, "Dornöschen" or "Briar Rose".

enough (indeed, it is too much) for Talia's father to know that there is peril in store for his daughter, peril that will come in the form of a piece of flax. He does not—he cannot—acknowledge the fact that knowing what the future holds still does not enable him to influence the events to come. And so, upon learning of the prophecy the king wastes no time and immediately initiates disaster preparation, starting by issuing a prohibition meant to cover all eventualities: (cosa fece na proibizione, che dintro la casa soia non ce trasesse ní lino ní canapa no outra cosa simele pe' sfoire sto male scuntro." 872); "cosa il Re proibì severamente che nel suo palazzao entrasse mai lino o canapa o altro vegetae del genere, per sfuggire alla malaugurata congiunture."873).

Even subtle distinctions in translation clearly make a difference to semantic meaning. Travers writes of the king's desire "to prevent any unfortunate accident". To emphasise the accidental in what is fated is to give the sense of happenstance, and to relocate responsibility for what is to happen to the individual from the abstract. An "unfortunate accident" sounds like something firmly within the mortal realm: an everyday mishap, perhaps, a chance occurrence caused by human imperfection (haste, curiosity, inexperience). An "unfortunate accident" is not, or does not sound like, something with much larger, something with cosmic overtones: inescapable, calamity written in the stars. Yet Travers retains the sense of the severity and breadth of the ban, the sense of over-preparation inherent in proclaiming that "no flax or hemp or any other similar material should ever come into his house." (85)



ii. *The fulfilment of the prophecy; loss of consciousness; Talia's deathlike sleep, or lifelike death*

Try as he might, the old king cannot prevent his daughter's fate being fulfilled, the fate outlined in the initial prophecy. Talia meets with the predicted "danger" through the insertion into her finger (under her nail, to be precise) of a piece of flax. One day, as she stands looking out the window, Talia catches sight of an old woman—representing Fate, perhaps—, with a spindle and a thread. Never before having seen either thing, she wants to look at them more closely, and try her own hand at what the woman is doing. She calls the old woman up to her chamber. No sooner does she take the spindle and thread in hand, then she meets with what, in the text, is described as an "accident": "ma, pe' disgrazia trasutole ne scarda de lino dintro l'ogna, cadette

morta ‘n terra.” (874) / “ma per fatalita, le penetro una lisca di lino sotto l'unghia, e li per li cadde morta a terra.” (875). The mention of the girl’s curiosity implicates her, renders her at least partly culpable in her own demise. And it is Talia’s demise, her death, which the narrative describes: so *this* was the danger, this the fate, this the calamity predicted: “dead on the ground,” is unambiguous in its meaning. The finitude of these words forecloses the possibility of a less drastic interpretation of this “accident,” even if the meaning and significance of the concept of death itself has evolved since this early modern period, as Peter Koudanaris suggests.<sup>241</sup>

Variations in translation at this most pivotal point in the text, whilst ever so subtle, are striking nonetheless. “Unfortunately, one of the chips of flax entered her nail, and Talia fell dead upon the ground.” This is Burton’s translation. (373) Penzer’s is almost identical but the specifics of penetration are altered. Where Burton writes of a “chip” of flax going into the fingernail of Basile’s ill-fated princess, Penzer has “a splinter in the hemp” going “under” the nail (129). Though small, this difference is not insignificant; the reason attention is drawn to it here, is to highlight the verbal differentiation apparent in these two English translations between the degrees and modes of penetration. Burton’s translation of Basile’s original mentions insertion; Penzer’s, embedding. Insertion into is invasive and direct, in contrast to embedding under; the latter feels less acute, less dangerous: a more passive and less permanent penetrative action. (Getting something stuck underneath one’s fingernail, or in one’s finger, is painful; often the pain seems disproportionate to the size and the gravity of the puncture, of the “injury”. It is curious, therefore, that neither in Basile’s tale nor in any of the English translations is there mention of pain or discomfort.) Insertion carries with it a sense of permanence, of chronic and irreversible injury: the suggestion that once inserted into the hard substance of Talia’s fingernail, the flax can never again be removed. If, on the other hand, the flax is merely embedded, lodged beneath the surface of the nail, there is perhaps more hope for, a chance for, extraction and consequent cure. In other words, it seems easier, potentially, to remove something embedded in the soft tissue underneath the fingernail, than to remove something stuck in the hard substance of the nail proper. There is another difference worth

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<sup>241</sup> Peter Koudanaris. *The Empire of Death. A Cultural History of Ossuaries and Charnel Houses*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2011. 21. Koudanaris suggests in his study of charnel houses and ossuaries that the most marked change has been in the cultural visibility of death, with death becoming most visible during the later years of the Renaissance and into the Enlightenment. Whilst during the Middle Ages, in Western Christian Europe, death was seen as a kind of sleep, with the deceased awaiting final judgement, this perception evolved, with time.



noting between these two English translations, which alters the sense of immediacy and thereby tinctures the reader's impression of the event. By adding the word "immediately" (Penzer, 130; Travers, 85-6), Penzer and Travers emphasise the mortal potency of the flax: Talia in their translation dies at once.



iii. *Responses to the "dead" sleeping beauty; an elaborate non-burial: the body's positioning and display*

Responses to Talia's collapse reveal the collective conviction that it was fatal: "La quale cosa visto la vecchia ancora zompa pe' le scale a bascio; e lo nigro patre dopo avere pagato co varrile de lagreme sto cato d'aspirinio" (874) / "La vecchia, terrorizzata da quella sciagura, se la squagliò che ancora fugge giù per le scale; e il desolato padre, dopo avere pagato con un barile di lacrime questo sechio di asprinio" (875). The old woman inadvertently supplied the maiden with the fateful flax runs from the palace, panic-stricken; the king is so distraught that he does not even pause to consult his wise men and his soothsayers about what happened, whether this was indeed what they meant when they predicted years ago that Talia would one day have her life endangered. Nor does the "wretched" king (Burton, 373), the "stricken father" (Penzer, 139; Travers, 130) summon the court physicians to examine his daughter's body and to confirm her death. What use are experts, the narrative seems to ask, in the event of a disaster such as this? Perhaps this reaction is understandable, given the circumstances and the acute shock of loss. Yet what remains baffling is that for the king, it suffices to *hear* about his daughter's death: remember, the King is not himself present at the fateful moment, and there is no indication in the text that he rushes to the room in the immediate aftermath. There is no need to probe further into details, into circumstances; no desire to prove or disprove the certainty of what is reported as Talia's death. What seems stranger still is that in the immediate aftermath of the heroine's collapse, the narrative reveals nothing about the status of her body: nothing about its appearance, nothing about its external symptoms and signs, nothing which would validate the universal, unquestioning acceptance that the sudden collapse means death/of the diagnosis of death. Here, there is no sense in which her "death" is recognised in any special way, no sense of her death, taken for what it is—the young girl's final mortal end—being made more "familiar," as Michel de Montaigne, writing around the same time, would have it. For Montaigne, the only response to death, and the only way to think about it for those

still living, is to “frequent” it, get used to it, in an attempt to “deprive death of its strangeness”.<sup>242</sup>

With the ready acceptance of Talia’s death, Basile eradicates scepticism from his tale, as he does also the desire for more proximate and accurate knowledge of the suddenly unconscious body.<sup>243</sup> Although extreme in emotion, the king’s reaction to his daughter’s supposed death is otherwise inadequate as a response. This inadequacy can be located in an omission, in what the king does not do, the action or actions he chooses not to take, when and immediately after he hears the report of Talia’s collapse. Limited, perhaps, by the conditions of the story, by the constraints of the world depicted in the narrative and by the structure of the narrative itself, the loving father does not demand to see the body. Nor does he order his court physicians to perform a (post-mortem) examination. There is no trace in the king’s inaction of a desire to know more accurately the circumstances of his daughter’s death, or to consider more closely Talia’s supposedly dead body.

Through this narrative omission Basile constructs a block, an obstacle for the reader who would seek to look more closely, to question, to investigate the apparent death and perhaps to disavow it. Paternal and narrative certainty foreclose the possibility of an alternative interpretation, making another reading of the “dead” Talia impossible—or at least, impossible at this juncture. For appearances can be misleading. Nowhere does this hold more true than in the enchanted, topsy-turvy world of fairy tale, a world wherein disguise and transformation are widespread. Add to this the fallibility of human perception, and the potential for misinterpretation, for misreading (in this case, of a body in/and a text) becomes clear. Rodney Davies defines “apparent death” as the “intermediate state...between life and death...when many of the so-called signs of death are evident.”<sup>244</sup> Across early modern narratives, from genres ranging from romance to ribald tales to comedies and dramas, there is instead a widespread fascination with apparent death. It is almost as if the folk material on which Basile is drawing in his tale recognizes this fascination, and recognizes also the limits of existent medical knowledge on the topic. Davies describes how even bodies which display the physical symptoms associated most commonly with the approach and onset of certain death – paralysis, a lack of breath, the unnatural pallor of the skin – may in fact still cling to life and can, in

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<sup>242</sup> Michel de Montaigne. *The Complete Essays*. [Essais], 1580. 103.

<sup>243</sup> For one of the most influential discussions of skepticism in relation to morality, tragedy and the early modern worldview, see Stanley Cavell. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>244</sup> Rodney Davies, *Buried Alive: Horrors of the Undead*. London: Robert Hale Ltd, 2001. 20.

some cases, be revived from their apparent mortal end. Davies underlines the importance of inspecting the body closely even when death appears to be unmistakable and manifest. Visual and tangible examination are imperative for more proximate knowledge and for a more precise diagnosis or conclusion.

Davies is drawing here on the ideas of Panos Bardis, whose 1981 study ushered in the academic discipline of “thanatology”. Bardis emphasized the importance of gathering evidence-based knowledge of the body presumed dead. He advances the argument for close inspection of the supposed corpse by pointing out the ambiguity of death. The extant clinical definitions of death are complex and, at best, contentious. Death has been and continues to be understood in various ways, according to a multitude of diagnostic and aesthetic criteria. Bardis explains that the traditional criteria for death fall into two main categories: three primary considerations (respiration, cardiac pulse, and blood pressure), and one secondary (body temperature). “Traditionally,” Bardis writes, “death has been regarded as the absence of the following: a heartbeat (therefore, lack of a peripheral pulse), breathing (thus, presence of bluing of the lips, mouth, and limbs), and certain eye reflexes.” To this catalogue Bardis later adds *algor mortis*, defined as “the chill of death”; *rigor mortis*, which is the rigidity of skeletal muscles; and *livor mortis*, referring to the purplish spots that sometimes appear on parts of the corpse’s skin due to the settling of the blood.<sup>245</sup>

Yet even these traditional and basic definitions leaves a wide margin for diagnostic error. The line between life and death is arbitrary, never self-evident or clear-cut. Furthermore, Bardis identifies that the changes to the body that suggest the onset of what is understood usually as the state of “death” need not be general, or generalized. Generalized death, the death of the body as a whole, of the entire organism, is defined as “clinical death”, but clinical death is by no means the only form of organic mortality. Death might be present only local, in a distinct part of the body: this is the “biological” form of death, with reference to the body’s specific organs. Then, to complicate this post-mortem physiognomic picture further, there are varying degrees of what Bardis terms “biological disintegration”. These are the marginal, or liminal, states between life and death, and include “artificial survival, coma vigil (delirious

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<sup>245</sup> Panos D. Bardis, *History of Thanatology: Philosophical, Religious, Psychological, and Sociological Ideas Concerning Death from Primitive Times to the Present*. Lanham, MD and London: University Press of America, Inc., 1981. 8-10.

lethargy with open eyes and partial consciousness), coma dépassé, persistent vegetative state, and irreversible coma.”<sup>246</sup>

But if the notion of “apparent death” does not enter into the tale in question, if the general consensus is that Talia is dead, why is her body not disposed of properly: why is it not buried? What is meant by Talia’s body being denied a proper burial is that this supposed (royal) “corpse” is not treated according to what Park identifies as those “specifically Italian funerary practices and attitudes” which in Italy, when the cult of so-called “new saints” (contemporary holy men and women and martyrs) was at its highest, and papal funerals were at their most ostentatious, in the period from the second half of the thirteenth until well into the fifteenth century, dictated that the bodies of members of the nobility and those bodies considered to be sacred after death, be eviscerated.<sup>247</sup> Evisceration would have been necessary for what the king does with the body, given the link between evisceration and preservation through embalming; although Talia’s body is not embalmed, the way her body is handled does convey a sense of the king’s desire to keep it preserved whole, and to place it on display.<sup>248</sup> Otherwise, disregarding the prevalence of evisceration and embalming practice in Italy at the time, the question of why Talia’s body is not interred—a question to which we will return shortly—for the time being, remains.

Conceptualizing burial as a process rather than as an event, however, reveals another possible explanation. In “A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death” the anthropologist Robert Hertz argues that burial is more accurately conceptualised as not as a single and time-specific act but instead as gradual process. Influenced by the work of Victor Turner and Arnold Van Gennep, Hertz advances a model of “double” burial rites. Burial, according to Hertz, consists invariably of two steps, or stages: a primary “wet” stage,

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<sup>246</sup> Bardis (1981), 10.

<sup>247</sup> Park (2006), 20.

<sup>248</sup> Embalming was the earliest of dissectory practices performed routinely outside the medical arena. From the thirteenth century, dissection emerged from cultural and social practices: funerary ritual, Christian relic cults, autopsies performed under the purview of public health and criminal jurisprudence, and finally, from the practice which would come to be known as a Caesarian section but which at the time was known as “*sectio in mortua*”: cutting open a woman who had died in childbirth to extract the still-living foetus, so that it might be baptized. Nonetheless, there were “strong continuities” between the medical/educational sphere and the “worlds of childbirth, murder trials, chronic illness, state funerals, and Christian cult,” Park notes, pointing to specific words. “Latin writers tended to use nontechnical words – *incidere* (“cut”), *aperire* (“open”), and even *exenterare* or *eviscerare* (“eviscerate”)” to describe dissections, autopsies, embalming and the opening of women who had died in childbirth. Park (2006), 16-17.

and a secondary “dry” stage.<sup>249</sup> With this in mind, it could be argued that the king’s handling of his daughter’s body corresponds to the primary preparatory stage in the burial process. It is not that Talia is not buried, but rather, that the burial of the princess in Basile’s tale is accomplished only in part. The second stage of burial which would need to be performed in order bring the process to completion is omitted, or perhaps, postponed.

Still, the reaction of Talia’s father to the reported death of his only daughter is one with which must be recognised for what it is: an inconsistency in narrative. What the king does in lieu of arranging for his daughter to be buried speaks volumes about his own interpretation of events:

la pose dentro a lo medesimo palazzo che steva ‘n campagna, seduta a na seggia de velluto, sotto a no bardacchino de broccato; e, chiuso le porte, abbandonaie pe’ sempre chillo palazzo, causa de tanto danno suio, pe’ scordarse ‘n tutto la memoria de sta disgrazia.

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collocò la fanciulla senza vita in quello stesso palazzo, che era in campagna, adagiandola seduta su un trono de velluto, sotto un baldacchino di broccato; poi, sprangate le porte, abbandonò per sempre quell’ edificio, dimora di tanta sua sofferenza, per cancellare completamente dalla memoria il ricordo di quest disgrazia.

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Here is how Burton translates the episode, in its entirety:

[The King] bade them...lay her out in the palace (it was one of his country mansions), and put her seated on a velvet throne under a dais of brocade; closing the doors, being desirous to forget all and to drive from his memory his great misfortune, he abandoned for ever the house wherein he had suffered so great a loss.

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Penzer’s and Travers’s translations are identical and both diverge at several crucial points from Burton’s. In the two more recent English versions, it is “the dead Talia” who is seated on “a

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<sup>249</sup> Robert Hertz, in Rodney Needham and Claudia Needham, eds. *Death and the Right Hand*. New York: Free Press, 1960. 34. [Published originally as «*Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort* » [1907], and later translated as ‘A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death’].

velvet chair” (rather less splendid than Burton’s “velvet throne”). The position of the body is crucial, for it suggests the king’s desire to evoke a sense of its worth. It was with this same aim in mind –to remind those still living of his status and wealth—that Vincenzo Gonzaga I (1562-1612), the fourth duke of Mantua, dictating in his last will that when he died, his body be buried “not as is the custom lying down, but sitting up with his sword placed at his side on a marble chair prepared for this purpose; that it should in no way (“nullo modo”) be put in a wooden coffin, but...be placed in the little room”.<sup>250</sup> The “dais of brocade” from Burton becomes, in Travers and Penzer, “an embroidered canopy”; and the palace, which in the earlier translation Burton describes parenthetically as one of the king’s several “country mansions” is relocated, to “the middle of a wood” (Penzer, 130; Travers, 86). This distancing and displacement, this almost apologetic seclusion of the body, jars against what has been described as the contemporaneous “mania” for making visible the dead: a mania for bones and relics and shrines as vehicles for remembering and even communicating with the dead. Indeed, the kingdom of Naples itself at the time has been described as “the true centre for the popular veneration of human remains in all of Europe,” a place where relics and bones and shrines were made readily visible, placed and erected in central locations where there was no risk of them being missed or overlooked, where they remained as not only visible but tangible presences within the mortal material world.<sup>251</sup>

Perhaps, then, the actions of Talia’s father can be seen to betray a deep desire to keep the loss of his daughter, his only, precious daughter, private. Perhaps in placing her in the palace in the middle of the woods upon a throne, he is in essence constructing for his daughter a *memento mori* in the hopeful guise of a *tableau vivant*. Or perhaps his decoration of his daughter’s body and its careful, artistic display suggest a desire to fashion for Talia a new identity, a post-mortem self, proper to her station. Even after death, or perhaps, *especially* after death, clothes maketh the woman. Dress, in death as in life, was, as Ulinka Rublack has written eloquently, “experienced in dialogue with the body”.<sup>252</sup> The king’s decorative display of Talia show him participating in what Rublack describes as a Renaissance vogue for self-fashioning through dress and accessories, with material accoutrements constituting “a sense of the body,”

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<sup>250</sup> Valeria Finucci. *The Prince’s Body. Vincenzo Gonzaga and Renaissance Medicine*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2015. Whether or not the duke’s wishes were executed is not known; neither is there any agreement about where exactly he was buried.

<sup>251</sup> Koudounaris (2011), 53.

<sup>252</sup> Ulinka Rublack. *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 31.

and reflecting this body's way of life: its rank, its wealth, its habits.<sup>253</sup> Clothing at the time was essential to the construction of selfhood, "crucial for *an experience of the self in itself*."<sup>254</sup> Detail and decoration in the form of fine clothing, an ornate canopy and a velvet throne are what make Talia what she is after her (supposed) death. They determine the effect that she has on observers within the narrative, and also the reader's experience of her.

With this elaborate display of Talia's body accomplished, the king quits the palace forever. Burton describes him "closing" the doors to the palace, the palace that is now and forever will be (the father thinks) Talia's mausoleum. The king wants nothing more than to wipe the slate of memory clean, "to forget all" and in particular to forget his "great misfortune", his "great...loss" (373). Travers in her translation alters the description of the king's actions ever so slightly to nuance the intensity of paternal grief. Here, the king "locked" the door to the palace (as though to close it merely would be insufficient as a defense) to form a barrier between the living and the dead, between grief and the cause and site of his "evil fortune". The sense of the king's desire to forget reaches a critical level in Travers' translation, where desire is transmuted into desperation. It is a desperate mind that wants to "entirely obliterate" all remembrance, to whitewash (or black out) too painful memories.

Another possible reading of the placement of the unconscious female body in a room inside a palace in the woods—the placement of the body behind successive walls—points towards the importance in the story of boundary metaphors. The exterior walls of the palace in the woods, the walls of the room within, indeed the forest itself with walls and walls of trees: each one of these is a boundary which serves to distance, progressively, Talia's corpse from the world of the living. But thinking about boundaries and walls, bodies and houses, raises another important point: the analogy, found across the Western Christian and philosophical tradition in writing and in iconography, between the female body and the house. Houses, like women's bodies, are described as having walls—and much more besides. According to this Christian conception of the body-as-house, the corporeal entity possesses passageways, sensory doors and windows, through which sensations and perceptions can move from the outside world to the mortal, flesh-bound world within (the body).<sup>255</sup> It was in doctrinal

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<sup>253</sup> Ulinka Rublack and Maria Hayward, eds. *The First Book of Fashion: The Book of Clothes of Matthäus & Veit Konrad Schwarz of Augsburg*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015. 2-3.

<sup>254</sup> *ibid.* 19.

<sup>255</sup> In fact the picture is somewhat more complex, as Claudia Benthien explains. The passageways might be better understood as presenting "a metaphorical field with two levels: on one level, the windows of the body are understood to be exclusively the insular sensory organs concentrated on the skin (mouth, eyes, nose, ears). In this case, the opening is a selective membrane with respect to the specific sensory perception. On the second

discussions of the body of Mary, mother of Christ, that this analogy reached its full elaboration. The house, with its hollow spaces, came to be seen as a metaphor for that body in which the hollow space of the womb is of the utmost importance: an analogy for the female body, which “can be penetrated and envelops the growing embryo,” the body with the capacity to ‘house’ the developing infant.<sup>256</sup>



- iv. *The discovery of the “body” years later, and the reactions of the rescuing king; the impenetrability of Talia’s body, her unresponsive, unconscious state; frustration-fueled violation of the heroine*

Time passes, and many years later a king, who has lost his way whilst out hunting in the woods, stumbles upon the hidden palace. Inside the palace he finds Talia—in the exact same pose (seated beneath a canopy) in which her father placed her lifeless body and, stranger still, in the same exact material state (incorrupt in body, still lifelike and beautiful). In its suspended state, somewhere between life and death, bodily vitality and its cessation, Talia is a figure self-enclosed, as though fortified by apparent death against further penetration. A heavy stillness hangs about, and a dreadful silence—a silence so terrifying it leaves Talia’s rescuer stunned, convinced that he must be the sole surviving living being. The rescuing king, “restaie na mummia non trovanonoce perzona vivente” (874) / “resto stupito di non trovarvi anima viva” (875). This fear is the first stage of what might be construed as paranoia, a schizoid state which in this case suggests to the sufferer (the rescuer, in this case) that there is a way to bring the “dead” to life. The young king’s attempt to wake Talia is, therefore, in some ways like the enactment of a wish-fulfilment fantasy:

all'ultemo arivaie a la cammara dove stava Talia comme 'ncantata. Allora, credennose che dormesse, isso la chiammaie; ma non revenenno pe' quanto facesse e gridasse, e pigliato de cauro da chelle bellezze, portatola de pesole a no lietto, ne couze li frutte dammore...

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level, the circulatory exchange, with its acts of incorporation and excretion, is understood as entrance and exit movements in and out of the body-house, and the body orifices connected with this exchange are conceptualized as doors or gateways.” In Claudia Benthien. *Skin. On the Cultural Border between Self and the World*. Transl. by Thomas Dunlap. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. 27.

<sup>256</sup> Benthien (2002), 26.



fino a che giunse nella camera dov'era seduta Talia, immobile sul trono come incantata. allora egli, credendo che dormisse, la chiamo; ma non risucendo a svegliarla, quantunque la scuotesse e levasse la voce, e, nel contempo, avvapato tutto di desiderio per quelle bellezze, la sollevo tra le braccia, e, portatala di peso su un letto, ne colse i frutti d'amore...

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Finally he arrived at a room where Talia sat, as if enchanted, and when he saw her he thought she was asleep. He called to her, but no matter what he did and how loud he yelled she did not wake up, and since her beauty had enflamed him, he carried her in his arms to a bed and picked the fruits of love.<sup>257</sup>

In contrast to Talia's father, who believed readily in his daughter's mortal demise, it does not so much as cross the mind of this other king that Talia might be dead, and that the beautiful, bejeweled body he sees seated there before him is [but a] corpse. This certainty in the discovered figure being that of a still-living woman is conveyed first in the narrative description of Talia's body, and re-emphasized in the subsequent actions of the king.

Even if the reader accepts that Talia's life ended the very moment that her body was penetrated by the piece of flax, an acceptance that would be based on the (in)action of the king, her father, a specific and rather thorny question remains: the question of the material resilience of the supposed "dead" female body, or, to phrase it more simply: why does the "dead" Talia, i.e. her corpse, not decay? One explanation might be found in the theology and theological literature surrounding the Catholic cult of "incorrupt" saints: might Talia be construed as a symbolic incarnation of one of these incorruptibles? Consider, for instance, the doctrine of the Resurrection of the body, as described here in the 1611 King James Version of the New Testament: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:52, Cambridge "Authorized" Edition). Similarly the prophet Peter reminds the faithful that reserved for them in heaven is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 1:4).<sup>258</sup> As Park describes in her fascinating history of human dissection in late medieval and Renaissance Italy, the bodies of so-called "holy women" manifested sanctity in corporeal terms, in and through the products of their bodies. Incorruption as concept filtered

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<sup>257</sup> Canepa, transl. (2007), 414.

<sup>258</sup> See <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1-Corinthians-15-52/>.

down to popular belief: the idea that holy bodies, bodies sanctified in some way, is in fact “an instinctive folk belief,” discussed at length in *Mysteries of the Church. Miracles of holy mysticism from incorruptible corpses to stigmata*.<sup>259</sup> Writing in the late nineteenth-century, one of the first modern historians of the subject, Father Herbert Thurston S.J. (1856-1939), described the six phenomena most commonly associated with these “incorrupt” bodies, listing: a persistent perfume emanating from the corpse; the absence of rigor mortis; a lack of decay; bleeding after death; bodily heat; and (rarely) ritualized movement of the arms and legs.<sup>260</sup>



Figure 2.4. Mummified figure of Caterina de' Vigri (St. Catherine of Bologna) (1413-1463) seated in her shrine in the church of Corpus Domini, Bologna.

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<sup>259</sup> Peter Brookesmith. *Mysteries of the Church. Miracles of holy mysticism from incorruptible corpses to stigmata*. London: Orbis Publishing, 1984. 31.

<sup>260</sup> Cited by Brookesmith (1984), *ibid.*, 31. Other examples include St Teresa of Avila, St Catherine of Genoa and Zofia Bosniakova, a Hungarian countess (d. 1644).

Santa Caterina of Bologna (Fig. 2.4) is one such “incorrupt” saint, who lived and died during the early modern period on which this chapter focuses. Born in 1413, as Caterina de’ Vigri, she was the daughter of a diplomatic agent of the Marquis of Ferrara. At the age of fourteen she made the decision to leave the court, and become a Franciscan Tertiary; this community later became part of the Poor Clares. Having determined to live a life of chastity and perfection, Caterina was admired for her holiness and devotion. Soon she started having visions of Christ and Satan, which she recorded in a diary. Her commitment to the holy life led to her being appointed Superioress of the Poor Clares and, later, of another convent in Bologna. In the spring of 1463, she fell suddenly and gravely ill, and died a few days later, on March 9<sup>th</sup>. Her body, to which miraculous cures were attributed, was buried without a coffin. There were reports of a sweet smell coming from her grave. When, eighteen days later, her body was exhumed, it was found to be incorrupt. Myth has it that a few years after her death, Santa Caterina appeared to one of the nuns and asked that her body be placed in an upright, seated posture; thus she remains to this day, mummified and incorrupt, installed in her shrine in the church of Corpus Domini in Bologna.<sup>261</sup> Both idol and effigy, her incorrupt body is a kind of “active image,” a material and visual entity in which the idea of what Marina Warner has described as “image flesh,” is made incarnate. There is, in other words, an indexical relationship between real flesh and iconic flesh: a dynamic relationship which makes potent the body that remains.<sup>262</sup>

The female body clearly was a source of great iconic power when this body was believed to be in some form or another, holy—a designation based most often on the woman’s absolute chastity, a purity of body and so, of spirit. Besides fleshly incorruption, the bodies of supposed “holy” women might give other indications of their sanctity and special status. Amongst these signs, the most common was the continuation, after death, of the production of bodily effusions: namely, the continued production (or leaking) of milk and blood, manifested by the dead female body’s lactation and bleeding. Elena Duglioli, a woman from a wealthy family who died in Bologna in September 1520, presents an historical case in point. Elena had been renowned locally for her gifts of prophetic vision, as well as for her chaste existence. (It

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<sup>261</sup> “Incorrupt Bodies of the Holy Saints”. Catholic Apologetics. <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/library/gallery/incorrupt/incorrupt.htm>. See also Marina Warner. *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the Twenty-first Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 pp. xxx, 1-2, 3, 5-6, 26, 50.

<sup>262</sup> Marina Warner, “Idols, Icons and Effigies,” a lecture at “Being Human,” Kings College London Festival of the Humanities. 14 October, 2013.

was revealed after her death that for many years, she had had no conjugal relations with her husband.) In 1507 Elena told her confessor that her heart had been removed by Christ; a few years later, when she was in her thirties, she began to menstruate and lactate, and Jesus said to her that “the milk in her virginal breasts would last until the end of the world.”<sup>263</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that when she died, post-mortem examinations, carried out on her body laid out in the church of San Giovanni in Monte, focused primarily on the area of her chest and breasts. Eager to prove the holiness of her body, Elena’s confessor pressed down on her chest; a spring of milk was produced, from which some of her most devout supporters suckled. Her corpse was then eviscerated and embalmed. It was not until two days later that her organs were inspected.<sup>264</sup> It was then that it was discovered that the heart was missing; where her heart should have been, they found a greyish, liver-like mass of tissue. She was then buried. However, her body, the locus of such miracles, was not allowed to rest in peace. Elena was exhumed twice over the next three months in order to convince sceptics that her breast milk was still flowing, and to examine the corpse for signs of corruption. On neither occasion were the experts—a group of medical and holy men (one of the first instances of doctors’ involvement)—able to reach a satisfactory consensus, and it was not until 1828 that Elena was finally beatified.<sup>265</sup> Although Elena is an especially vivid example, such wonderful and wondrous bodies were fairly widespread, and actively sought out by believers.; in this sense they were connected to the cult of relics, as in the case of the very august Doctor of the Church, St Teresa of Avila.<sup>266</sup>

Elena’s case raises larger, complex issues: questions about the material substance of the (holy) female body, about its vulnerability or resistance to putrefaction, and about the relationship between this process of decay and concoction, through which breast milk was believed to be produced, following on Aristotle’s description of the process in *Meteorology* (4.1.379a3-b10.) The basic supposition was that human breast milk was composed of menstrual blood purified and concocted, through natural body heat, in the breasts. Given the absence of heat in Elena’s dead body, the doctors conjectured that what looked like milk had

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<sup>263</sup> Cited by Park in her chapter on “Holy Autopsies: Sainly Bodies and Medical Expertise, 1300-1600” in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*. Ed. by Julia L. Hairston and Walter Stephens. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 61-73, 72.

<sup>264</sup> The same procedure was applied to the bodies of Chiara of Montefalco and Margherita of Citta di Castello in the Middle Ages, i.e. the corpses of the women were eviscerated and embalmed and only then were the remains inspected.

<sup>265</sup> Park describes how “both promoters and opponents of holy women increasingly invoked the opinions of learned men, especially those of physicians and surgeons.” In Park (2006), 165.

<sup>266</sup> I am grateful to Marina Warner for bringing this reference to my attention.

to be something different, and was most likely flesh. The interaction between concoction and putrefaction was complex and unpredictable, even though both processes were believed to happen through natural body heat: “putrefaction involved an initial increase in heat, which might allow lactation to continue naturally after death, assuming that the requisite raw material, menstrual blood, was present.”<sup>267</sup> This is the magical side of virgin bodies; or, to put it another way, the miraculous material qualities attributed to the bodies of female virgins. Although virginity had been of the utmost importance throughout history as a concept, it was not until the early modern period that it was imbued in Western thought with an additional material significance: re-described as a something visible, a concrete seal.<sup>268</sup> The redefinition of virginity from concept to thing was not immediate, and for some time the hymen, the concrete seal, was spoken of only in vague terms.

Michele Savonarola (1385-1468), professor of medicine at Padua and Ferrara in the fifteenth-century, was the first to mention the hymen directly, and it was not until the mid-1500s, when public anatomy demonstrations became popular theatrical events, that this part of the female body became part of common lexis. For a woman to be considered of worth, and therefore worthy of marriage, “ocular proof” of material virginity was necessary since in Western culture, the marriageable woman “was required to have a legible body: impenetrable before the marriage and penetrable at leisure after,” Valeria Finucci notes. This need for material evidence of being corporeally, sexually intact and unblemished necessitated virginity “checks,” carried out by doctors, midwives, and also by the families of would-be suitors. One of the most popular ways of checking was by examining the nipple, which was believed to change colour after sex. It was possible to give the illusion of a virgin body, in essence to construct a new virgin body, through a variety of medical and para-medical cures; there were plenty of doctors, midwives, female healers, *materculae*, herbalists, and charlatans ready to offer hymenoplasty procedures.”<sup>269</sup>

Thinking about virginity and about the magical or miraculous properties attributed to these bodies is useful to the cultural historian trying to situate, and understand, some of the beliefs held by religious cults devoted to the Virgin Mary; specifically, the devotion was to the body of the Madonna—the body understood as simultaneously material/mortal and

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<sup>267</sup> Park (2010), 175.

<sup>268</sup> Previous to this, the hymen had been of importance only to the Arab physicians in the classical period. Whilst Albertus Magnus does mention a membrane at the mouth of the womb that is destroyed during the sexual act, not much is made of it. See Park, (2010), 34-35.

<sup>269</sup> Finucci (2015), 33-34.

sanctified/immortal entity. These cults flourished in Catholic countries across Europe, many in Italy. It is in Italy in particular that the enduring and magical appeal of the virginal body of the mother of Christ becomes apparent.

The profusion of “miraculous” images and statues of the Madonna, composed and sculpted over the past six centuries, are testament to this appeal.<sup>270</sup> Miraculous images of the Virgin attracted the viewer’s gaze by means of some external sign. Amongst the signs most commonly reported were Madonnas shedding tears; suddenly becoming animated and moving like a living being; changing colour; being illuminated by a mysterious light; and exuding sweat or blood from one of several body parts or orifices.<sup>271</sup> There are echoes of this historical belief in the ability of sanctified female bodies to go on producing milk even after death in “Sole, Luna e Talia,” even though in the tale, breast milk is not mentioned directly. It is through a misdirected kind of lactation that Talia is eventually (accidentally) reawakened, brought back to life when one of her newborns mistakes the mother’s finger for the nipple, and sucks so hard on the unyielding digit that the lodged piece of flax is expelled, and Talia, revived. Or perhaps the state of incorruption indicated that, symbolically at least, Talia’s body is imbued with an “angelic” or “subtle” materiality. In her article, “Holy Autopsies: Sainly Bodies and Medical Expertise, 1300-1600,” Katharine Park cites Gareth Roberts’s observation that in the early modern period there was an idea prevalent amongst theologians, received from the writings of early Christian theologians like Eusebius, Irenaeus and Tertullian, that angels’ bodies were uniquely constituted, made of an insubstantial-substantiality. This was “appropriate to their

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<sup>270</sup> The majority of these images depict the Madonna delle Grazie. Moreover in Italy, unlike in the rest of Catholic Europe as a whole where three-dimensional images were most common, sacred images enshrined in sanctuaries tended to be either frescoes or paintings. For further discussion of these images, their power, and the anxieties of the Church authorities, see Michael P. Carroll. *Veiled Threats. The Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy*, esp. 15-25. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Although the Council of Trent opened in December 1545, images and image cults were not considered until its twenty-fifth, and last, session, which began in December 1563....Trent’s position on image cults appears in a decree entitled On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images....The tridentine decree starts by firmly and unambiguously endorsing the practice of placing images in churches...goes on to give two basic arguments that legitimate image cults. First. Images are venerated not because some special virtue resides in them but because the veneration offered to an image is really being offered to the prototype the image represents....Second, the decree notes that the stories depicted in paintings can be a method by which ‘the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith’...The tridentine decree goes on to recognize that abuses have sometimes arisen in connection with image cults and calls for these abuses to be eliminated....The first abuse consists of attempts to make images that portray ‘false doctrines’....The second abuse consists of images that are ‘painted and adorned with a seductive charm’....Completely missing from the tridentine decree is any suggestion that there is anything inappropriate about the behaviours that ordinary Catholics in Italy (and elsewhere) displayed in connection with image cults.

<sup>271</sup> Carroll (1996), 37.

spiritual substances (*corpora subtilia*)” since angels were believed to be neither fully mortal nor completely ethereal entities.<sup>272</sup>

Female bodies, bodies imbued with sanctity, with a privileged and more potent status, or as is the case in Basile’s text, with “enchantment” or some other differentiated or elevated state of consciousness and sentience, fascinate the eye, and ask the viewer to stretch the mind and expand the scope of belief.<sup>273</sup> This is true even when the body is a figure of art or artifice: an effigy, made of stone, or, more popular during the early modern period in Italy, an *ex voto* effigy, sculpted beautifully from that most pliable material, wax, such as the wax effigy in the Basilica di San Lorenzo, in Florence, showing a Talia-esque, peaceful “sleeping beauty” (Figure 2.5).

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<sup>272</sup> Gareth Roberts, “The Bodies of Demons,” in *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*, ed. by Darryll Grantley and Nina Taunton. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. 131-141; Katharine Park, “Holy Autopsies: Sainly Bodies and Medical Expertise, 1300-1600” in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*. Ed. by Julia L. Hairston and Walter Stephens. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 61-73, 77.

<sup>273</sup> In another tale in the *Pentamerone*, “The Crow” (Ninth Entertainment of the Fourth Day) Basile describes a male body that takes on a stone-like quality,--though becoming a statue there signifies guilt, rather than the materialization of sanctity. To please Milluccio, the king of Shady Thicket, his brother Iennariello takes a long journey, and when he brings his brother back what he had desired and frees him from death, he is condemned to death himself. But in order to prove his innocence, he becomes a marble statue [“he turned completely to stone and remained standing there in the middle of the hall like a statue”, 368], and then due to a strange incident he returns to his former state and lives happily.”

In Canepa, transl. (2007), 361-370. 368.



Figure 2.5. Reclining “sleeping beauty” wax effigy encased in glass coffin.  
Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence. Photograph by Lili Sarnyai.

Relics—bits and pieces of holy bodies—often elicited impassioned emotional responses in devout believers. The way that the rescuing king reacts to the “dead” and yet still incorrupt and beautiful, enthroned Talia, has a tinge of this kind of devotion, which can be situated in the context of the cult of holy images and relics. In sixteenth century the “fanatical devotion to relics” and fashion for pilgrimage, which had started centuries before, was still widespread.<sup>274</sup> One contemporary account comes from the prolific French writer and diarist,

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<sup>274</sup> Burckhardt (1981), 298. E.g. Michele Savonarola writing about 15th C Padua tells of how the nails and hair of a holy nun in Santa Chiara kept growing after death, and how her corpse would lift up her arms and make a noise when the city was in danger.

Moreover, a dynamic relationship existed in Renaissance Europe between image cults and relic cults, particularly in Italy and other Northern countries. Image cults were “among the most vital and dynamic sites of cultural activity in Renaissance Italy, involving widespread social participation,” especially when it came to the veneration of the holy image of the Virgin Mary. See Megan Holmes. *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013, esp. 33-35.



Michel de Montaigne, who after suffering from kidney stones made a pilgrimage through Italy between 1580 and 1581. Montaigne records his travels and what he saw at the various sites of pilgrimage, including the surfeit of votive offerings.<sup>275</sup>

Votive, or “ex-voto” offerings were objects left by pilgrims at holy sites, as gifts and/or as evidence of a saint’s intercession. Votive gifts fall into two main categories: those proffered “*per Grazia ricevuta*,” and those performed or given “*pro remedio animae*”. In the first group, a votive bestowed “*per Grazia ricevuta*,” was “something testamentary... a material object or an act of veneration...that is given or performed after a miracle or intercession has occurred.” A votive *pro remedio animae*, on the other hand, was “given or performed with the objective of securing future salvation for the donor’s soul or that of a relative or friend.” In terms of the relationship of the giver to the object, to the votive gift, the distinction between votives was one of obligation versus hope: something given *per Grazia ricevuta* made “the requisite fulfilment of a promise,” concrete, in contrast to something *pro remedio animae*, which was a means of accumulating spiritual credit.<sup>276</sup> Votive offerings, both those given *per Grazia ricevuta* and those *pro remedio animae*, took many different forms. Ex-votos came in an array of shapes and sizes and materials, with a corresponding array of (monetary and sacred) value.<sup>277</sup> Wax was one of the most popular materials, both because of its tractability and its

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<sup>275</sup> On the way, he visited the ancient sites in Rome and, during Holy Week, followed the pilgrim’s path which connects the seven great basilica of the capital city. On his return to France he went through Viterbo, where he stopped to visit the miraculous church of Madonna della Quercia, and through to Recanati and Loreto where he paid his respects at the church of the Madonna of Loreto. See *Montaigne’s Travel Journal*. Transl. with an Introduction by Donald M. Frame, with a foreword by Guy Davenport. San Francisco, 1983.

<sup>276</sup> Fredrika H. Jacobs. *Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. “Strictly speaking, only a votive donated *per Grazia ricevuta* can be called an ex-voto.” 7. Implications of mode:

Consider mixed-media votive effigies or *boti*, and counterweights or counterlengths, or *massae cera* (also referred to as contrepoids). Both *boti* and *massae cera* asserted resemblance between the material object and its donor or the individual on whose behalf it was given...in most instances, with the same principal material: wax. Boti were mixed-media constructions, yet the all-important heads of these effigies were portraits fashioned by skilled *ceraiuolo* (image makers who work in wax). Having modeled a physiognomic likeness of wax, the *ceraiuolo* painted it with a mixture of egg tempera and oil, a technique known as wet-on-wet... facilitated the subtle blending of colors that transformed the portrayal into a vivid, veristic portrait. In early modern texts they are described as naturalistic and lifelike (*immagini al natural*, *similitudini*, and *somiglianze*) or referred to as portraits from life (*ritratti dal vivo*). Like *boti*, *massae cera* also were formed of wax. Unlike effigies...the wax was not subjected to the studied modeling of a *ceraiuolo*. Resemblance was instead conveyed through measurable equivalences.<sup>27</sup>

See also Roberta Panzanelli, ed. *The Colors of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute, 2008, cat. No. 1, 100-1. Life-size effigies were on occasion dressed in real clothes that had been dipped into wax.

<sup>277</sup> “Beginning in the sixteenth century, pilgrims were offered another way to recall their journey, one that was especially personal (and transportable). Memory was no longer dependent upon a tangible memento, nor was it restricted to an unseen image – the *figura* – impressed on the soul of the pious visitor. A devotee’s body could

affordability, particularly across Italy. For instance, Marta Poggessi describes how in many Florentine churches until the 1600s you could expect to find wax ex-votos, with the greatest concentration in Orsanmichele and Santissima Annunziata, where there were limbs, organs, portraits and full statues cast in wax, which after strong protests against them were removed in the 1630s.<sup>278</sup>

An imagined description of the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Loreto in the early sixteenth century gives a sense of the atmosphere evoked by these votive offerings:

Visitors looked upon an assortment of anatomical casts made of wax and metal (*immagini*) hanging from rafters and suspended from tie beams spanning chapels. They surveyed small gold and silver portrait plaques (*tavole*) lining pilasters and columns, took note of discarded crutches and bits of clothing littering the floor, and gazed upon gem-encrusted diadems and bracelets resting on statue pedestals....a veritable testamentary collage of disasters avoided through the receipt of intercessory grace.<sup>279</sup>

The figure of Talia seated and enthroned beneath the canopy, is in many ways like the “living statue” of the sleeping fairy in “The Myrtle” (Second Entertainment of the First Day).<sup>280</sup> And looking beyond the narrative frame of the *Pentamerone*, Talia’s still body is as lifelike and as statuesque as what is taken almost without question to be the “statue” of Hermione, in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* (1623). In his preface to an edited collection of essay selections focusing on aspects of *The Winter’s Tale*, Roy Battenhouse places great emphasis upon what he terms “the marvellous” in this, Shakespeare’s last romance; in *The Winter’s Tale*, as indeed in the romances of *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, it is the force of the “miraculous” which brings about a neat dramatic finitude.<sup>281</sup> A sense of marvel and a belief in the power of the unexplained divine are the driving forces shaping the resolution, the play’s resurrective conclusion. Battenhouse contends that this inherent sense of wonder, of miracle, situates *The*

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take the place of wax or metal as a surface on which to imprint a mnemonic image. More than sixty patterns carved of boxwood used to stencil tattoos on the arms of the faithful can still be found at the Sanctuary of Loreto.” Jacobs (2013), 28.

<sup>278</sup> Marta Poggessi, “The anatomical wax collection,” in *Il Museo di Storia Naturale dell’ Università degli Studi di Firenze Vol. I Le Collezioni della Specola: zoologia e cere anatomiche*. Ed. by Giulio Barsanti, Guido Chelazzi. Firenze University Press, 2009. 81-105.

<sup>279</sup> Jacobs (2013), 66-67.

<sup>280</sup> In Canepa, (2007), 53.

<sup>281</sup> Roy Battenhouse, editorial comments on *The Winter’s Tale*. In *Shakespeare’s Christian Dimensions: An Anthology of Commentary*, ed. Roy Battenhouse. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. 232.

*Winter's Tale* firmly within a Christian paradigm. The credibility and power of the final “apocalypse of resurrections of the presumed dead” depend upon being understood within this framework, Battenhouse suggests, and “The network of marvels,” Battenhouse suggests, “rests as a whole on biblical paradigm,” but – and this is a significant qualification – with influences from other sources, in particular, “an assimilation of motifs from classical myth and Greek romance.”<sup>282</sup>

In *The History of the Tryall of Chevalry*, a play printed in 1605, there is another explicit example of the staging of the resurrection of an “effigy”.<sup>283</sup> The plot of *The History of the Tryall of Chevalry* revolves around a complicated love triangle. Both Prince Ferdinand and his good friend the Earl of Pembroke are in love with Princess Katharine. Ferdinand is the lady’s suitor, but Katharine has shown him no encouragement; in fact, she has been cruel and aloof in her behaviour towards him. Ferdinand and Pembroke argue over the rights to attempt to woo and wed the Princess. Their dispute devolves into a duel, during the course of which they are both to all appearances mortally wounded: they “fall down dead”. But these are only apparent deaths. Both noblemen recover without the other’s knowledge. Furthermore, both are tortured by remorse at the knowledge of what they think they have done to the other. Pembroke, to show his regret and to memorialize his friend for all eternity, constructs a tomb for Ferdinand. The supposedly dead Ferdinand appears at the tomb, and the scene is set for recognition and joyful reunion, but not before Katharine is made to regret her former conduct through an elaborate performance, a trompe l’oeil staged by Pembroke. Ferdinand is to impersonate his own effigy. This will in turn elicit the heartfelt sorrow of the Princess, who will come to see the error of her ways, and, faced with the monumental reminder of the loss of her suitor, with the monument to Ferdinand, she will reconsider. This is how Pembroke explains the whole to his friend:

I told her and no more truth I told  
A cunning carver had cut out thy shape  
And whole proportion in white alabaster,  
Which I intended here should be set up.  
She earnestly entreated she might have  
A sight of it, and daily be permitted

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<sup>282</sup> Battenhouse, ed. (1994), 233.

<sup>283</sup> *The history of the tryall of cheualry, with the life and death of Caualliero Dicke Bowyer*. London: Printed by Simon Stafford for Nathaniel Butter, 1605. Reproduced in facsimilie, 1912. Archive.org. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924013325422>.

To deck thy tomb and statue with sweet flowers.<sup>284</sup>

Pembroke's plan revolves around questions of spectacle and (mis)belief: on staging, perception, and misperception. The plan is a success. Upon interpreting the finite meaning of what she thinks is the effigy of her affianced, understanding what she believes to be an irrecoverable loss, Katharine sinks down weeping and prepares to join Ferdinand by taking her own life. At this moment the effigy begins to speak – the trick is revealed and the lovers united.

Reading *The History* leads Catherine Belsey to suggest that the “statue” of Hermione is in fact her “effigy”. To support her hypothesis, Belsey marshals the argument put forward in an article written by Bruce R. Smith, where Smith discusses sculpture in early modern England. He points to the relative scarcity of classical statues, and identifies funerary sculpture as an alternative referent. “Most of the statues that Shakespeare’s audiences had actually seen,” Smith contends, “were tomb sculptures.” Yet this interpretation is not without its difficulties. The main obstacle in reading Hermione’s stilled figure as an effigy lies in the position of the body: posture and stance pose complications. Unlike the majority of early modern tomb sculptures, or effigies, which are depicted recumbent in horizontal positions, the figure of Hermione, the “statue” which figure Belsey tries to see as an “effigy”, remains resolutely upright. Hermione is not depicted lying down; instead, she “stands”. Such complications do not deter another critic of Shakespeare’s romance from re-appraising the figure of Hermione. Roy Battenhouse shares with Belsey a sense of critical frustration; for both, it seems somehow inadequate to have to understand the figure of Hermione within the paradigmatic confines that a sculptural interpretation would suggest. To speak of Hermione’s “statue” is to miss the point: this definition is inaccurate, and insufficiently complex. What the ontologically ambiguous figure of Leontes’ queen demands instead, what the more-than-statue of Hermione asks for from its viewers, is a more complex form of critical analysis and interpretation. Unlike Belsey, whose vision of Hermione as an “effigy” situates the figure of the queen past hope, past help, amongst the dead, the viewpoint advanced by Battenhouse retains a sense of the regenerative. For Battenhouse, Hermione’s figure is best understood as an “icon”, as “a monumental figure, a statue”, the definition that came into use in English at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>285</sup> During the final redemptive scene, the play presents what Michael Neill describes as the

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<sup>284</sup> *The history of the tryall of cheualry* (1605)/1912. Facsimile page no. 123.

<sup>285</sup> Battenhouse, ed (1993), 234.

“restoration of Hermione”.<sup>286</sup> Or, still thinking within the Christian paradigm of re-enfleshing and revival, Leontes’s queen “comes alive as a body of flesh restored,” as Battenhouse puts it, in the chapel scene.<sup>287</sup>

In contrast, in “Sole, Luna e Talia” the suggestion is that the heroine has no need of restoration, of resurrection. The canopy above this seated figure both protects the supposed corpse and aestheticizes, makes an object d’art of, the still-perfect body. The symbolic value of the body is in this way covered, framed and emphasised; the Renaissance tendency to privilege the symbolic within the mortal is here literalized. Increasingly, the living human form came to be seen as a figure and a potent symbol worth producing for posterity in the form of a lifelike (though idealized) replica.<sup>288</sup> The canopy is “hors-d’oeuvre” to use Derrida’s concept of a decorative border or frame which functions to compress the image or the object it surrounds.

Moreover, the canopy under which Talia is seated completes the figurative transformation of her body into stone, into something like, or reminiscent of, at least, a tomb sculpture.<sup>289</sup> In his panoramic study of funerary sculpture, Panofsky makes the point that in this figurative form of art, an enduring paradox of human nature is made manifest. This is the paradox between a human desire for peace after death, and the human fear of a peace so total, a tranquillity so deep, that all sense of self is lost, vanishes: “[W]e desire repose after death yet balk at the idea of a repose so complete that it amounts to an extinction of consciousness and thereby to a loss of identity.” The desire, then, is “to be dead enough to have peace and quiet (*securitas, tranquillitas*) but alive enough to enjoy them.”<sup>290</sup> It is this paradox which, like the bodies of sculptured effigies, Talia’s corpse-like body expresses in solid and material form. *Securitas* and *tranquillitas*, alongside vitality: this is impossible to achieve for the human body, the living body of blood and flesh – but it might just be possible for a stone-based body, or a body made to seem, symbolically, stony.

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<sup>286</sup> Neill (2000), 114.

<sup>287</sup> Battenhouse, ed. (1993), 233.

<sup>288</sup> Catherine Belsey. *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*. London: Macmillan, 1999. 91, 97.

<sup>289</sup> In his discussion of free-standing funereal monuments with canopies, James Curl identifies Italy as the place of origin for sculptures in this style. It was in Italy that, in the period in question, canopied sculptures to the dead were most widespread. In *Death and Architecture: An Introduction to Funerary and Commemorative Buildings in the Western European Tradition, with Some Consideration of Their Settings*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2002. 109, 118.

<sup>290</sup> Panofsky (1964), 27.

Belsey's description of tomb sculpture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries adds to Panofsky's argument and also makes the link to thinking about Talia in these aesthetic terms more clear. In tomb sculptures of the period Belsey identifies a depictive pattern: human figures in arrested states of movement, still(ed) yet with an undercurrent of anticipated (re)animation. In these details, the unconscious body of Basile's princess post-collapse can be recognised: Talia's body on display, frozen yet lifelike, and positioned in a posture suggestive, indeed hopeful, of the continuation of motility and conscious life.

These figures, usually open-eyed, horizontal, and facing east, appeared, writes Belsey, "in confident expectation of their ultimate resurrection, apparently ignorant of the death which occasioned their representation." Talia's upright posture and apparent material vitality suggest a comparable confidence in resurrection—or at least, they are enough to instil this confidence in the one who finds her. To the rescuing king, this "statue" looks lifelike—indeed, it looks alive, or like it could be brought back to life quite easily. The reaction of the king is precisely that of one swayed too much by sculpture, an effect that the nineteenth century art historian Henry Weekes discussed. Coloured statues were what had Weekes so worried, the kind of statuesque verisimilitude that the Ancient Greeks strove for in their figural sculpture was dangerous.<sup>291</sup> Such verisimilitude in inanimate form was dangerous, Weekes maintained, because by giving "the impression of reality," an inanimate object was also "deceiving the senses". Causing "feeling[s] of a sensuous kind" (particularly in "vulgarly constituted" minds) meant risking all sorts of unwanted eroticized reactions—such as the libido-driven response in Basile's story, to be discussed.

In Basile's narrative it is stated explicitly that the rescuing king believes Talia to be "enchanted" ("comme 'ncantata"/ "comme incantata"). Enchantment indicates another state of being, a suspended state somewhere between life and sleep and death. The enchanted state leaves open the promise of a return to life; it does not foreclose the promise of a reawakening. It is this promise, this possibility, which the king pursues. He sets out to break the spell, to unbind the body and the mind of the woman from under the spell he assumes must hold her in its thrall. His endeavour might be compared to the efforts of a true magician-healer, who in

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<sup>291</sup> Henry Weekes. *Lectures on Art*. London, 1880. Lecture VII, "Colour in Sculpture," 155-178. In these statues ivory was used for flesh tones, gold and embellishments for decoration, and bright colours for the figures' clothing: everything "boldly, fearlessly portrayed". So nearly did these artists wish to give a sense of "Nature" that they used glass and jewels to represent the eyes. The ideal statue is uncoloured, for it is only then that the object achieves its aesthetic purpose: to train the eye of the beholder "to look upon it, not as a real existence, but as a sort of visible representation of some admirable concentrated essence that excites our admiration, or calls forth imitation". 158.

another one of Shakespeare's late romances brings an "entranced" woman back to life. *Pericles* is a case in point. In this play, of particular interest is Cerimon's revival of the queen Thaisa, whose body he discovers perfumed and incorrupt inside a casket which had been cast onto the sea (a motif that comes up in another of Basile's tales):<sup>292</sup>

This queen will live: nature awakes; a warmth  
Breathes out of her: she hath not been entranced  
Above five hours: see how she gins to blow  
Into life's flower again!

(*Pericles*, III.ii.1392-1395)

In contrast to Cerimon, or Paulina, *this* magician-doctor, Basile's (questionable) hero, is only mortal and must resort to mortal means. He "called to her, but she remained insensible" (in Burton's translation), her lack of sentience like an impenetrable wall. He touches her, to rouse her, to "bring her back to her senses" (in Penzer's translation), but to no avail. "No matter

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<sup>292</sup> "Penta with the Chopped-Off Hands" (Second Entertainment of the Third Day) in Canepa, transl. (2007), 223-232.

The tale might be summarized as follows:

Penta disdains marriage with her brother, and she cuts off her hands and sends them to him as a present. He has her thrown to sea in a chest, and when she ends up on a beach a sailor brings her to his home, where his jealous wife throws her back into the sea in the same chest. She is found by a king and marries him, but because of the trickery of that same wicked woman she is driven out of the kingdom. After undergoing many hardships she is found by her husband and her brother, and they all end up happy and satisfied.

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The relevant sections of the story are included here:

When the king saw how he had been betrayed, he was so infuriated that he flew into a frenzy and immediately had a tarred chest made into which he stuffed his sister and had her thrown to sea. Carried forth by the waves, the chest ended up on a beach, where it was pulled in by some sailors who were casting their nets, and when they opened it they found Penta, much more beautiful than the moon when it looks like it's spent Lent in Taranto [fn 14: i.e. like the full moon] And so Masiello, who was the one in charge and the ringleader of the men, took her home with him, telling his wife Nuccia to treat her kindly. But no sooner had her husband gone out than Nuccia, who was the mother of suspicion and jealousy, put Penta back in the chest and threw her out to sea again. ...Tossed by the waves, the chest drifted here and there for so long that it finally crossed the path of a vessel in which the king of Green Earth was / traveling. When he saw this thing floating amid the waves, he had the sails lowered and a dinghy thrown into the sea. His men retrieved the chest and opened it, and upon discovering the wretched girl the king, who saw a living beauty inside a coffin, believed he had found a great treasure. ...And he took Penta to his kingdom and gave her to the queen as a lady-in-waiting, and she did every imaginable job with her feet, even sewing, threading a needle, starching collars, and combing the queen's hair, and for this she was held as dear as a daughter.

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how much he touched her, the beautiful maiden remained immobile and closed.” (Burton, 685).<sup>293</sup>

Corporeal impenetrability, immobility and a lack of sentience: three symptoms which, when co-presenting, would appear to indicate quite clearly that the heroine is dead. And yet Talia’s admirer ignores these signs and carries on, irrespective of—indeed, precisely because of—the “enchanted” figure’s lack of response. What seems like an insurmountable obstacle (Talia’s rigid body, lifeless to all appearances save for a still-resplendent, intact external beauty) to the hero is no deterrent, as he feels desire rising, and “his blood course hotly through his veins in contemplation of so many charms” (Burton, 685). In Penzer’s more figurative rendering of the same moment, the king is set “on fire” (130), overcome by what at the time might have been described in medical circles as a kind of erotic madness.<sup>294</sup> The resistance of the supposedly enchanted female body only heightens the male desire to possess, and to open up, the object of his gaze. In the figure of the sleeping beauty, perfect passivity and strict resistance, sexual invitation and chaste self-closure, are combined. It is this combination which so maddens the king and which increases his desire in inverse proportion to the success he has in trying to elicit some kind of response, in trying to awaken or to disenchant the maiden.



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<sup>293</sup> The lack of movement takes in another implication if Talia’s paralysis is considered in relation to decorum. As Sharon Fermor explains:

Since Antiquity, it has been accepted that physical movement revealed the inner self. In medical and physiological writings from Aristotle onwards, movement is seen as an index of the motions; it is also perceived as a guide to an individual’s character and moral or ethical state, since these are defined in part in terms of control over the irrational passions...in the sixteenth century, for both courtiers and members of the socially aspiring bourgeoisie, physical movement became a continuous index of the social and ethical self, and subject to intense scrutiny.

“Movement and gender in sixteenth-century Italian painting,” in Adler and Pointon, eds. (1993), 129-145.131.

<sup>294</sup> Robert Burton discussed erotic madness in *Anatomy of Melancholy* 1621. Cf. Jacques Ferrand. *De la maladie d’amour* early 17th C.



## vi. Conclusion: The rape of Talia?

The period of hesitation described in “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” when reason and desire wage a bitter struggle in the hero’s mind and body are absent from Basile’s tale. The king who finds Talia is ruled only by his passion(s), his conduct motivated and directed by bodily tempers. It is for this reason that he turns so quickly and without further thought to bodily violence, to the most invasive form of violation: rape. Although Basile’s tale differs from the *Perceforest* text in the immediacy with which the rape is perpetrated, the act’s description is identical: in both texts, cloaked in metaphor. Like Troylus, the knight we might conjecture was his literary precursor, the young king in “Sole, Luna e Talia” “gathered the fruits of love” (“couze li frutte dammore” (874)/ “colse i frutti d'amore” (875). It is difficult to read the king’s symbolic harvesting of Talia’s “fruits” as anything other than rape; for Talia at this point is still unconscious, and therefore unable either to give or to withhold consent; in *Perceforest*, one century earlier, the author was fully aware of his guilt.

By no means is rape easy to define. Cultural and social norms, contexts, values and expectations coalesce to complicate the meaning of the word, and the significance of the act. Rape, Sylvana Tomaselli argues, can be presented and understood in any number of different ways and forms. It might in some cases be considered a “crime, vice, sin, ritual, physical violence, perversion or just another word for sex.” Moreover, the scope of rape is fluid, and depends very much on individual, social and cultural perspectives. For some, rape is “a particular act, a single instance, an individual’s breach of law, of morality and/or decency, devoid of any wider signification than the consequences it has for the victim.” But for others for whom such an individualized interpretation seems inadequate, rape is something much greater, and with greater consequences: “sociological, economic, cultural or even cosmic...”<sup>295</sup> What is done to Talia in Basile’s tale, and allowed to pass without so much as a narrative pause for comment or critique, certainly supports this contention.

Peggy Reeves-Sanday argues that rape is “an expression of a social ideology of male dominance.”<sup>296</sup> It is worth bearing these words in mind when considering another notion: that, as Edward Shorter suggests, the “physical subordination” of women was pervasive in the

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<sup>295</sup> Sylvana Tomaselli, Introduction to *Rape: An Historical and Social Enquiry*, ed. Tomaselli and Roy Porter. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 10.

<sup>296</sup> Peggy Reeves Sanday, “Rape and the Silencing of the Feminine,” in *Rape: An Historical and Social Enquiry*. Ed. by Tomaselli and Roy Porter. Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 84-101, 85.

sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries.<sup>297</sup> The king who finds Talia uses rape as a means to vent sexual and epistemological frustration. Talia's unresponsive body leaves his passions unabated, whilst the closure of her body denies him access to its secrets. Rape, in other words, is a means of abreacting desires. Abreaction, a concept introduced by Freud in 1893 (influenced significantly by his work with Breuer), denotes the expulsion of pent-up feelings and thoughts and sensations, in the psychoanalytic situation, through talk, but in the sexual confrontation described in Basile's tale, through corporeal violation, through the forced opening up of Talia's body.<sup>298</sup>

What does this forced opening of the female figure reveal? What is the outcome? In the same way that Zellandine, discussed in Chapter I, merely sighs and fails to wake after Troylus has his way with her unconscious body, Talia's rape does not have the desired reviving effect. Talia remains unresponsive, dead to all appearances. Neither her "rescuer" nor the reader is any closer to penetrating the wall of immobility, to revealing any of her corporeal, subcutaneous secrets. Like her medieval forebear, whose own body holds the cure to her somatic pathology, the means to reversing the princess's strange sleep, the early modern sleeping beauty of Basile's tale remains impenetrable, unknowable, until the moment comes that her infant—issue, product of her fecund body—should remove the piece of flax. Certainly, in "Sole, Luna e Talia," as in "L'histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine," the male agent plays a part, as does fate (in the guise of female divinities, as prophecy); but it is the imbued power and potentiality of the female body which are revealed as being of the greatest import.

And yet, as Chapter III will show, the question of agent and agency in relation to the fate of the body of the sleeping beauty is not fixed, or predetermined. It remains open to narrative revision, and cultural, historical re-interpretation.



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<sup>297</sup> Edward Shorter. *A History of Women's Bodies*. London: Allen Lane, 1982. Introduction, xii.

<sup>298</sup> See Vol. III *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications (1893-1899)* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey, Alan Tyson, and Angela Richards. 24 volumes, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-1974.



**Chapter III:**  
**French Sleeping Beauties: Cosmetics, hygiene and *les maladies des femmes* in Charles Perrault's "La belle au bois dormant"**



Figure 3.1. The enchanted sleep. Image taken from a nineteenth-century illustrated French edition of Perrault's fairy tale. Epinal: Paris, 1890. Waddleton.d.4.120. Cambridge University Library. Photograph taken courtesy of the Syndicate of Cambridge University Library (Rare Books).

### **i. Summary of “La belle au bois dormant”**

Charles Perrault’s story begins with a king and queen who for a long time have remained childless. The queen tries all kinds of remedies and cures, goes on pilgrimages, but to no avail. Until, finally, she is able to conceive and soon gives birth to a beautiful baby girl. According to the custom of the land, the king and queen invite all the fairies in the kingdom to attend the christening of their long-wished-for daughter; the invited fairies number seven in total. At the christening feast the fairies are seated and before each one is laid a golden casket in which they find golden utensils set with jewels. Shortly after, and entirely unexpectedly, an eighth fairy enters. Since this fairy had not left her tower for the past fifty years, everyone has assumed that she has died, or been enchanted—which explains why she had been left off the guest list. The youngest of the fairies, sensing potential danger:

went and hid behind a tapestry on the wall as soon as the meal was finished, in order to speak last of all, and prevent if possible any harm that the old fairy might do.<sup>299</sup>

Six of the seven fairies who were invited give the princess gifts intended to increase her virtues and perfections: beauty, wit, grace, dance, song, and musicality. Offended at having been overlooked, the eighth fairy, curses her instead. She declares that the princess will prick her hand with a spindle and die. Although the young fairy does not possess sufficient magic power to reverse the old fairy’s curse, she is able through enchantment to mitigate its malignant force and reduce its the fatal impact; instead of dying, the princess, will fall simply into a deep sleep, lasting one hundred years, and at the end of the century she will awake.

The king, desperate to preempt the onset of the enchantment, prohibits all spinning and all spinning instruments throughout the kingdom. His disaster preparations, however, are proven useless. Fifteen or sixteen years later, when the king and queen are away from the

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<sup>299</sup> “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,” in Charles Perrault. *The Complete Fairy Tales*. Transl. with an Introduction and Notes by Christopher Betts. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 83-98. 84.

palace, the princess, impelled by curiosity, wanders around the palace. She comes upon an old woman, spinning with a spindle. Never having seen anyone spinning before, curious about this novel pastime, and eager to try her own hand at it, the princess asks if she too can try. The moment that she touches the spindle, the princess pricks her finger and falls down in a swoon. The enchantment has been fulfilled. The old woman calls for help and from all corners of the palace people rush to try and revive the girl; but their efforts are all fruitless. The king then has the unconscious princess placed upon a splendid, canopied bed of gold and silver embroidered fabric, in one of the finest rooms of the palace. He orders that she be left undisturbed, so that she might sleep peacefully until the time should come for her waking. Then the king and queen kiss their dear daughter one last time, and leave. The good fairy, when she hears about the princess falling asleep, extends the enchantment to encompass the rest of the palace: everyone and everything is to sleep for one hundred years, so that the princess might not find herself alone and distressed upon waking. Furthermore the fairy conjures a great forest of trees and thorny brambles to grow around the palace, to shield it and the princess from the eyes of the world, and to make it difficult if not, indeed, impossible, to gain access.

One hundred years pass, and a prince from a different royal family passes by the palace on one of his hunting excursions. He learns the story about the mysterious and beautiful princess who is asleep inside, and determines to rescue her. The trees and brambles part to let him through (an evident Freudian sexual metaphor), and he enters the palace, only to find everyone asleep. Finally he finds the princess' chamber. Overcome by her beauty, he sinks down on his knees; at that very moment the one hundred years end, and the princess opens her eyes. She is delighted to see the prince, and they spend many pleasant hours conversing. The prince then leaves, for he must return to his own kingdom, but he visits the princess often. Time passes, and she bears him two children, named L'Aurore (Dawn) and Le Jour (Day). They are secretly married.

When the prince's father, the old king, dies, the prince ascends to the throne. At this point he returns to bring the princess and their two children back to his own kingdom. The trouble is that the prince – lately become the king – has a mother, and “although he loved her, he was afraid of her, because she came from a family of ogres,” and his late father the King had married her purely “because of her great wealth.”<sup>300</sup> (This ogress queen shares a bloodthirsty appetite with, and has a violent streak much like, the ogres in Perrault's “Hop o’

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<sup>300</sup> Perrault, transl. Betts (2009), 93. “de race ogresse” in the French, “of the ogre race”

my Thumb”.<sup>301</sup> The difference is in the specificity of her desire to destroy completely her son’s new and unwelcome bride, and that beautiful young rival’s offspring.) So when the young king leaves for war she has the young Queen and her children placed in a secluded house deep inside the forest. She then orders the cook to prepare the little boy for dinner, cooked with sauce Robert.<sup>302</sup> “Je le veux’, dit la reine (et elle le dit d’un ton d’ogresse qui a envie de manger de la chair fraîche), ‘et je veux la manger à la sauce-robert.’”<sup>303</sup>

The cook, however, takes pity on the child and substitutes a lamb. The Queen mother eats the meal, and, thinking she has devoured the child, is satisfied. Then she demands that the girl be cooked next; this time the cook substitutes a kid; this, too, satisfies the cannibalistic Queen Mother. When she asks for the young Queen also to be served (cooked in a sauce Robert), the cook gives her a hind, which the older woman eats with relish. Meanwhile the young queen and her children are reunited, and rejoice. Their joy is short-lived, for the Queen Mother overhears them and discovers the subterfuge. She has a great tub prepared in the courtyard, filled with vipers and toads and other poisonous creatures; this she intends for the young Queen and her offspring.

But the young King returns just in time to save his wife and children from his mother’s evil plan. The Old Queen hurls herself into the tub, and is promptly devoured. The young king and queen and their two children live on, happily. “But he was a bit sad, she was his mother, after all.”<sup>304</sup>



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<sup>301</sup> “Hop o’ My Thumb,” in Perrault, transl. Betts (2009), 151-166.

<sup>302</sup> Sauce Robert is a mustard-based variation of the classic French Espagnole sauce made from chopped onions cooked in butter, a reduction of white wine, pepper, with a demi-glace. One of the so-called mother sauces of French cuisine, Sauce Robert is used most often on cooked meats, particularly pork and beef.

<sup>303</sup> [http://www.alyon.org/litterature/livres/XVIII/esprit\\_salon/perrault/la\\_belle\\_au\\_bois\\_dormant.html](http://www.alyon.org/litterature/livres/XVIII/esprit_salon/perrault/la_belle_au_bois_dormant.html)

<sup>304</sup> Perrault, transl. Betts (2009), 98.

## ii. Introduction, Methodology, Nodal Points

In this third and final chapter, the focus moves from Italy to France, from the Renaissance period into the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The subject is “La belle au bois dormant,” or “The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods” (often shortened in translation to “[The] Sleeping Beauty”), written by Charles Perrault (1628-1703). This one of the better-known versions of “Sleeping Beauty,” one distinguished also by being amongst the earliest of the *contes de feés littéraires*, or literary fairy tales, to be published in France in the twilight years of the seventeenth century. Perrault’s fairy tale will be discussed and analysed in detail. First, however, the key moments and elements which characterize the text as belonging to the “Sleeping Beauty” genealogy are listed, and from these, the nodal points of particular relevance to the narrative in question are identified. It is on the basis of these nodes that the subsequent textual and contextual investigations are developed, from which the position of Perrault’s fairy tale in relation to the other versions of “Sleeping Beauty” considered in this thesis is considered, and the implications of the similarities and differences between the three variants—“L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine,” “Sole, Luna e Talia,” and “La belle au bois dormant”—are discussed.

Following on from the structural identification of the most significant nodal points in Perrault’s text, the chapter continues with a sketch of the literary and socio-historical background in which “La belle au bois dormant” was written, meaning, essentially, an outline of fin de siècle cosmopolitan France—cosmopolitan, because throughout, the focus remains on Paris. A literary and cultural epicentre, the capital was where the nascent genre of the fairy tale developed. Given that women—specifically, a group of proto-feminist, aristocratic ladies—were hugely influential in the genre’s development and popularization, both as writers and also as hostesses of the famed literary salons, a significant portion of the historical and contextual discussion in this chapter is devoted to the subject of gender roles, rules and stereotypes under Louis XIV. With what social, sexual and economic constraints did women at the time have to contend? What were the limitations imposed upon them? Crucially, in what ways did they seek to demonstrate their discontent with the system, and to circumvent, refute and break free from these restrictions? Certainly, writing fairy tales was one form of self-expression and resistance, but many of the women showed their dissatisfaction through their unorthodox conduct, and, in the eyes of the patriarchal establishment, shocking moral codes.



Conduct and morality and the ways in which these became overriding issues during the period in question are considered here in relation to marriage, or, more specifically, and as was often the case, forced marriage.

The second section of the chapter looks from socio-cultural and literary issues to the medical context. Here the aim is to consider a selection of ideas prevalent in the medical and pseudo-medical/cosmetic writings of the period, at the end of the late-seventeenth century: beliefs and theories pertaining to the female body in its various states and stages (of consciousness and health, and of sexual maturity, and materiality)—and to hypothesise the possible influence of these ideas on Perrault's writing, with specific reference to the writer's depiction of the young body of the sleeping beauty, and also, of the older female body of her mother, the queen. This socio-medical investigation establishes a conceptual framework in which close textual analysis and critical commentary are undertaken in the third and final section of the chapter, before the conclusion.

#### **Nodal points specific to Perrault's text:**

*Prelude.* The heroine's fate is determined. The princess will prick her finger whilst spinning and die, says the old fairy, who was forgotten and not invited to the christening. This curse/evil gift is the fairy's revenge. The youngest fairy uses her gift to mitigate the curse and turn fated death into fated sleep. The princess will prick her finger, but rather than causing her death, the prick will cause a one-hundred year sleep.

*Disaster.* The heroine's fate is fulfilled. The princess finds an old woman spinning; this is something completely novel to her, and she wants to try it for herself. She pricks her finger and loses consciousness in a faint/swoon. Perrault makes the heroine partially responsible: she was young, curious and hasty with the spindle, he writes, before mentioning, almost as an afterthought, the fated 100-year sleep.

*Aftermath.* All kinds of attempts are made to revive the heroine, since the sudden loss of consciousness is taken at first to be a swoon. When nothing works the, King concedes/realizes that the swoon is actually sleep and it is what the fairies said would happen. The sleeping princess is placed on a bed, not to be disturbed for one hundred years. [nb: *Treatment of unresponsive body of unconscious heroine:* Nothing happens to the sleeping maiden. The body is left untouched and undisturbed.] The good fairy puts the rest of the castle to sleep, except for the King and Queen, who then kiss their daughter goodbye and leave.

*Period of suspended animation.* Great, thorny rose bushes grow around all the castle whilst its inhabitants sleep an enchanted century. A story about a beautiful enchanted

sleeping princess circulates. Many young men try to rescue her but they all fail. One prince hears the story and sets off to rescue the princess.

*Rescue.* The prince is able to make his way through the roses. He enters the castle, and arrives by the side of the princess just as the one hundred years end. Her beauty overwhelms him.

*Revival:* The princess wakes spontaneously, when one hundred years elapse. The male “rescuer,” the prince, plays no part; he is a bystander.

[Disjointed narrative structure]<sup>305</sup>

*Post-revival, female fecundity.* The princess and the prince converse happily. Conversation is the metaphor for consensual intercourse; eventually, the heroine becomes pregnant, and nine months later gives birth to twins. They return to the prince’s home. His father dies, and he becomes King. He marries the heroine, making her the new queen. His mother, the old queen, who is an ogress, is envious. Whilst he is away at war, she sets out to have the babies killed and then eat them. The King returns just in time to save the children and his wife.

Despite the fact that Perrault’s version of “Sleeping Beauty” is well-known, the significance of the issue of female fertility in the story has been overlooked. Across the fairy-tale genre, fertility is, of course a common theme. Think back to Basile’s collection: In the *Pentamerone*, “Peruonto” (Third Entertainment of the First Day), “The Myrtle” (Second Entertainment of the First Day) and “Petrosinella” (First Entertainment of the Second Day) revolve around anxieties associated with fertility, infertility and over-fertility. In “The Myrtle,” a peasant woman from Miano is desperate for a child and after many prayers finally gives birth—but not to a human child:

the wife especially, was always saying, ‘Oh, God, if only I could bring something into this world, I wouldn’t care if it were a branch of myrtle!’

And she repeated this song so often and bothered the heavens so much with these words that her belly became big and her womb round, and at the end of nine months, instead of delivering into the midwife’s arms a little doll of a baby

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<sup>305</sup> What I mean by a “disjointed narrative structure” is that Perrault’s fairy tale essentially falls into two parts: the first part relates events up to the sleeping beauty’s revival; the second part tells of what comes after, i.e. her relationship with the prince, and her persecution by the jealous ogress mother. The two parts could, in effect, be separated. Indeed, this was what the Brothers Grimm did when they took the first part of Perrault’s story as a template for “Dornröschen” (Little Briar Rose), their 1812 versions of the story of “Sleeping Beauty,” and the second part as the basis for their story of “Snow White,” “Schneewittchen,” also published in 1812.

boy or a little fart of a baby girl, she cast out of the Elysian Fields of her womb a lovely branch of myrtle.<sup>306</sup>

In “Peruonto,” the “the tried and true wretch” anti-hero of the tale takes revenge on a king’s daughter who laughed at him by putting a curse on her through which she becomes pregnant by him; this leads to many trials and complications both for Peruonto and for the maiden.<sup>307</sup>

When Peruonto raised his head and saw that he was being made fun of, he said, ‘Go on, then, Vastolla; may you become pregnant by this fellow!’ ...But after Vastolla stopped getting her period and started feeling certain cravings and palpitations of the heart, she realized that she had swallowed the dough. She hid her pregnancy for as long as she could, but when her belly, which had swollen up like a little keg, could no longer be hidden, the king realized what was going on.

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In “Petrosinella,” the theme of an unwanted or dangerous pregnancy, or rather the dangerous appetites and rash promises that pregnancy can inspire, is continued:

There once was a pregnant woman named Pascadozia who, while sitting at a window that overlooked an ogress’s garden, noticed a lovely bed of parsley, for which she got such a craving that she felt she would faint. And so, not being able to resist, she kept close watch until the ogress went out, and then she picked a handful of it...<sup>308</sup>

Perrault complicates the questions of conception and fertility in “La belle au bois dormant” by looking at them through a bifocal lens. The writer considers the difficulty of conceiving (infertility) whilst glancing also to what happens when conception is all too easily achieved, when a surfeit of fertility leads to unwanted or accidental pregnancy.

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<sup>306</sup> *Giambattista Basile’s The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*. Transl. by Nancy Canepa; foreword by Jack Zipes. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007. 52-62. 53. Citing De Simon, Canepa explains the origins and the beliefs attached to myrtle, in the Mediterranean world, an ornamental plant, and also a symbol of love and amatory poetry, sacred to the goddess Venus. Believed to have the ability to wither and be reborn, myrtle was used in decorative hedges in cemeteries.

<sup>307</sup> In Basile, transl. Canepa (2007), 61-69. “The king finds out that Peruonto is the father of the baby, puts him in a barrel with his wife and children, and throws it out to sea. But by virtue of the enchantment Peruonto frees himself from the dangerous situation and, after he turns into a handsome young man, becomes king.” 61.

<sup>308</sup> The trouble is that Pascadozia is caught in the act, and promises the ogress her child “Petrosinella” (First Entertainment of the Second Day), in Basile, transl. Canepa (2007), 147-151. The ogress takes the baby girl and locks her in a tower. Years later, a prince steals her away and with the help of three acorns they flee from the ogress. Petrosinella is brought to her lover’s house she becomes a princess. Note the similarities in plot and theme between this Neapolitan tale, and the much better-known “Rapunzel”.

Without question, Perrault's fairy tale is an identifiable "Sleeping Beauty" story, given that on the whole, the French narrative correlates closely to the earlier Sleeping Beauty tales discussed in Chapters I and II. Yet there are also some significant differences: certain nodal points on which and at which "La belle au bois dormant" diverges from the pattern established on the basis of the completed studies of "L'Histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine" and "Sole, Luna e Talia". This means that the list of nodal points above needs to be revised, limited to be more specific to the happenings and the themes present in Perrault's version.

- The birth of the heroine and the determination of her fate: the role of the fairies, the one-hundred-year enchantment.
- Fate fulfilled: the spindle prick which causes the heroine to lose consciousness; the loss of consciousness interpreted as a swoon.
- Reactions to the sudden collapse: attempted revivals, medical and medico-cosmetic "cures," with a focus on William Harvey's theories about circulation, and supposedly all-purpose aqueous remedies such as Queen of Hungary's water.
- The body of the heroine: unresponsive, yet still lifelike. This younger female body is discussed in terms of contemporaneous medical beliefs about the virgin body and fears surrounding the premature sexualization of girls.
- The placement of the body: on a splendid bed, in an embellished room. In contrast to the previous two versions, in which the unconscious body is disturbed and violated, here the heroine is left to rest in peace until the one hundred years elapse.
- Beyond the body: the legend of a "sleeping beauty," the many failed rescues, and the final arrival of the "rescuing" prince.
- Revival: the spontaneous revival of Perrault's sleeping beauty, without the need for external intervention.
- Post-revival: consensual intercourse, pregnancy, birth of twins, ogress mother plot, eventual marriage.

It is not known whether Perrault ever read *Perceforest*, nor can his degree of familiarity with medieval literature be established. With no firm basis in historical fact and in the absence of documentary evidence in the form of written sources, one can but conjecture that it is likely that Perrault would have heard of the fourteenth-century romance, and therefore knew of the kernels of the "Sleeping Beauty" story that it contained. This hypothetical likelihood is based in part on the irrefutable fact that the French medieval literary tradition did have a profound influence on late-seventeenth century writers, Perrault amongst them, involved in the creation, shaping and codification of the fairy-tale genre, with Alice C. Montoya estimating in *Medievalist Enlightenment from Charles Perrault to Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (2013) that as

many as half of all the fairy tales published in France during the 1690s incorporated or at least invoked “authentic medieval material”. In fact, “fairy tales from the beginning drew on medieval chivalric fiction, and on the narrative characters and situations typical of it”.<sup>309</sup> Some writers, including Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier (who may have been Perrault’s niece), readily acknowledged their position in this genealogy of influence, and the debt they owed their literary predecessors. Both in her own fairy-tale compositions and in the tales written by many of her contemporaries, L’Héritier identified traces of the medieval troubadour tradition. Montoya bases her explanation of the prevalence of medieval material in seventeenth-century works of fiction on printing practice: between 1690 and 1700, numerous authentic medieval texts were republished in France. This is not to suggest a universal fashion for medieval ideas and writings at the time. Indeed, in the late-seventeenth century, the medieval was largely excluded from the official discourse of self-styled literary “Moderns”—in brief, it had “no place”. In fact, Perrault himself “described the Middle Ages using the same topoi of darkness and decline as had been used by his humanist predecessors,” Montoya explains:

the most important term he used describe this epoch was ‘barbarism’ (*barbarie*)....The medieval was implicitly defined by its very lack of linguistic or literary refinement, bringing questions of language and literature to the fore.<sup>310</sup>

This supposed lack of refinement was considered the consequence of political disorder and civil and social unrest which made for a context not at all conducive to the pursuit of literature.

Having hypothesised the ramifications of Perrault’s possible knowledge of *Perceforest* and other medieval texts, what if the opposite was true? Supposing that Perrault did not have access to medieval material and had no first-hand knowledge of the story of the strangely sleeping Zelandine, there remains the possibility that the writer learned of the narrative in question through an intermediary source: Basile’s “Sole, Luna e Talia.” Perrault never proclaimed Basile’s writing as a direct source, influence or inspiration—nor, for that matter, did any of the other French fairy tale writers acknowledge any debt. Nonetheless, strong case can be made for Perrault having come into contact with the Neapolitan collection of tales, as

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<sup>309</sup>Alicia C. Montoya. *Medievalist Enlightenment from Charles Perrault to Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013. 4-5. Later, Montoya notes: “In the earliest references to the genre, which are to be found in Madame de Sevigne’s letters, allusion was most often made to a paradigmatic scene in which fairies bestow a set of gifts upon a new-born princess, a theme that went back to the fourteenth-century chivalric romance *Perceforest* and would recur, among others, in Perrault’s ‘Sleeping Beauty.’” 116.

<sup>310</sup> *ibid.*, 39.

Suzanne Magnanini has shown, pointing to the publication and wide circulation in Paris by the 1680s of French editions of *Il Pentamerone*.<sup>311</sup>

Yet Perrault's version of "The Sleeping Beauty" bears a marked difference from the story's two earlier variants. Unique to the French fairy tale is its modification of agency. Agency is the force, or power, that determines the direction in which the plot develops, and determines in particular what happens to, or what is done to, the body of the heroine. Whereas both "L'histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine" and "Sole, Luna e Talia" feature a "hero," a male agent, who interrupts the sleeping beauty's peaceful sleep through sexual intervention, in "La belle au bois dormant" the prince's entrance onto the narrative scene and the subsequent development of the relationship between the prince and the heroine are postponed. In Perrault's fairytale, the male agent finds the Sleeping Beauty the very moment that her enchanted sleep concludes; he is in no way responsible for her waking. And it is not until after the heroine is fully conscious (and therefore capable of giving or withholding her consent) that a sexual relationship develops—an illicit liaison glossed over in Perrault's texts: veiled beneath polite metaphor and references to a good deal of "conversation," in the interest of stylistic decorum and moral finesse.

In sum, Perrault's heroine is left untouched. In contrast, the bodies of the sleeping beauties configured in Basile's tale and in the medieval narrative are disturbed, and, if this disturbance is understood as rape, then the unconscious bodies can be considered also to have been polluted and corrupted. It is worth noting, too, that the sexual encounters described in the two earlier "Sleeping Beauty" versions result in pregnancies and births that can be described only as unnatural, and strange. Neither Zellandine nor Talia seem affected by the processes happening to their bodies and inside them. Unconscious and unresponsive during sex, conception and birth, neither heroine wakes until after the piece of flax directly responsible for their catatonic states has been extracted, removed not by the hero, but by their hungry infants. In this sense, although the maternal body is forced to host, to house, the cause of its comatose pathology (the piece of flax), it is nonetheless, and rather wonderfully, also the source of its own cure. In producing the child who then suckles out the flax, the maternal body of these two

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<sup>311</sup>Suzanne Magnanini. "Postulated Routes from Naples to Paris: The Printer Antonio Bulifon and Giambattista Basile's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France" in *Marvels and Tales*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Fairy Tales, Printed Texts, and Oral Tellings (2007), 78-92. Published by: Wayne State University Press: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41388816>.

earlier Sleeping Beauties can be described as generating their own revivals. So Talia and Zellandine wake when the flax is removed.

But in “La belle au bois dormant” there is no flax to injure the heroine; nor is there a vengeful goddess, as there is in the earliest “Sleeping Beauty” narrative, or, as in the early modern version of the story, a prophesied fate. There is, however, an evil fairy, a good fairy—intermediary agents—and the medium of time. In Perrault’s story, it is time—not fate, not divine intervention—which in the end determines what happens to the maiden, and for how long. Yet this is no ordinary kind of temporality, but enchanted time: temporality modulated by and mediated through the magic of the fairies. Another way to think about the enchanted time-scape of Perrault’s fairy tale is as a kind of magic chronotope: an enchanted version of the concept which, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin defines as “time space”. Bakhtin explains that the term “chronotope” refers to “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” expressed artistically in works of literature: intrinsic, because for Bakhtin space and time are inseparable; indeed, time is defined as the fourth dimension of space:

Spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time...thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.<sup>312</sup>

This fusion of space and time, the idea that time is not an abstract and invisible entity but rather something readily visible, with a mass and a body, is a useful metaphor for thinking about the strange temporality found in Perrault’s fairy tale, and for defining its function and form. For in the story, time is suspended, stretched out in such a way as to become “artistically visible,” as Bakhtin puts it; thereby it assumes a greater role. Enchanted temporality displaces, or squeezes out, other elements and aspects vying for the position of narrative determinant. Stretched out, with its own weight and shape and spatial dimension, enchanted time in the story has the power to exert influence over other bodies, spaces and presences within the text. In this sense, Perrault’s narrative accomplishes something comparable to what the hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur: that from traces of the past, the past might be reconstituted within the finite framework of the present. For Ricoeur, memory was the medium through which this

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<sup>312</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. “Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Transl. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 84–258.

temporal reconstruction, this project of reconstitution, might take place—memory presented as narrative, memory captured by the act of writing and the consequent act of reading what was written.<sup>313</sup> Ricoeur believed, then, that the narrative mode, the mode of storytelling, was the only one through which the past could be brought to life. But is this reconstituted, remembered past real? Is it accurate? For narratives are not unambiguous, as the literary critic Frank Kermode pointed out. A narrative for Kermode is a complex form, always with a certain “measure of opacity.”<sup>314</sup>

Something similar to Ricoeur’s belief in the narrative mode functioning as a potential avenue to the past is at work in Perrault’s magic-infused, temporally affected narrative. Implicit in the structure and content of “La belle au bois dormant” is a sense of the story—and, perhaps, all stories, all fairy tales—having the capacity to contain time, to possess it and to repossess, or recapture it, from the past. It is just such a temporal trick that is accomplished in the tale by means of the one-hundred year enchantment: a predetermined period of sleep wrought upon the Sleeping Beauty, the palace, and all the inhabitants. The moment that the century is up, the temporal force is broken, and the enchantment lifted. Everything reverts exactly to how it was before, one hundred years ago; there is not a single sign of the passage of time. The past presents itself inside the present. A narrative of the past is contained within the narrative of the present, with both locked inside the fairy-tale framework. The fairy tale, made “present” and active through each retelling, revitalised through the collaboration which Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) described as the essential interconnectivity between narrative, writer/narrator, narrative, and reader, is unique in having the capacity to contain such temporal overlay.<sup>315</sup>

The temporal dimension is a constant presence throughout Perrault’s fairy tale, with references to time and timing, to the chronological quantification and control of lives, of fates,

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<sup>313</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Praise of Theory*. Transl. by Chris Dawson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*, 1927]. Transl. by Joan Stambaugh, revised by Dennis J. Schmidt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010. See also Robin Le Poidevin and Murray MacBeath, *The Philosophy of Time*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>314</sup> Frank Kermode. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979. 25. Kermode underlines also the capacity for “darkness” inherent in all narratives, writing that “the oracular is always there or thereabouts, accessible if only by a sensory failure.” 14.

<sup>315</sup> Wayne Booth. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 1960 [1960]. Second ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983. For Booth, a narrative was a form of created communication, not an isolated entity; there would always be a sender, a message and a receiver at the other end, or on the other side.



of wills and bodies, scattered everywhere.<sup>316</sup> Time gives shape and form to the narrative and in so doing structures the framework both for what is possible within the confines of the tale and for what remains beyond the limits of possibility. This shaping and structuring, this potentiating and delimiting, extends beyond the form of the text to the form of the figures described therein. Time determines and defines the female bodies presented in Perrault's fairy story: not only the youthful, virgin body of the sleeping beauty, but also the older, more mature body of her mother, the queen. Whilst in Chapter I the symbolic and narrative ramifications of the virgin body were explored in detail, in this third chapter, the meaning of the maternal body, "troubling and disruptive" in its potential for generation, will be discussed.<sup>317</sup> Whilst these two bodies are in many ways opposites—young and old, virgin and mother—they incorporate, symbolically, similar and in some cases identical questions: questions about the limitations of the female body, about female sexuality, and about the promise and the menace of a body with the capacity for gestation, for reproduction.



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<sup>316</sup> Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère. "'But marriage itself is no party': Angela Carter's Translation of Charles Perrault's 'La belle au bois dormant'; or, Pitting the Politics of Experience against the Sleeping Beauty Myth," *Marvels & Tales* 24.1 (2010). <<http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/marvels/vol24/iss1/8>>.

<sup>317</sup> Clare Hanson, "The Maternal Body" in Hillman and Maude (2015), 87-100, 94.

### iii. Fashioning fairy tales: The Parisian historical and literary context

Charles Perrault was born into a bourgeois family, with connections in law and finance. After obtaining a degree in law, he worked for some time as a governmental administrator. This career path, that of an elevated bureaucrat working closely with Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's Superintendent of Finance and later, Superintendent General of Buildings, influenced how his intellectual contemporaries viewed him. Throughout, "Perrault championed the cause of *contes de fées* against the scorn of his confrères in the Academy, as Marina Warner explains in her introduction to *Wonder Tales*, a collection of new translations of both well-known and less familiar French fairy stories.<sup>318</sup> That Perrault's career trajectory had an impact on how his contemporaries responded to his writing is clear from their preconceptions, which manifested themselves in "more than the usual degree of resentment," to quote Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi, translator and editor of Perrault's memoirs<sup>319</sup> Working alongside Colbert, Perrault's governmental duties included founding and working in the "Little Academy" (founded in 1663), an organisation whose principal objective was to devise the mottoes that were to be inscribed upon the countless new and newly-rebuilt and refurbished public buildings, palaces and monuments, which Louis XIV, in a drive for self-memorialisation and self-aggrandisement, had ordered.<sup>320</sup>

Perrault continued writing right through the period of his professional involvement with higher-level royal administration; in no way did official duty hinder creative capacity or output. Indeed, the opposite might be stated: that such close involvement with the court enabled Perrault to cultivate a literary style unique to him, a style characterised by elevated and refined rhetoric and a mannered mode of description, but at the same time with an underlying delight in the narrative possibilities of the ludic: a sense of playfulness, jocularly, and wit, reminiscent of the many "divertissements," or entertainments, which Louis XIV had devised for his own

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<sup>318</sup> *Wonder Tales. Six French Stories of Enchantment*. Ed. with an Introduction by Marina Warner, with translations by Gilbert Adair, John Ashbery, Ranjit Bolt, A.S. Byatt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 3. Warner notes: "The writers collected in *Wonder Tales* were anthologised in *Le Cabinet des Fees*, first published in three volumes in Amsterdam in 1731, then rearranged and increased to forty-one volumes and appearing from 1785 in Paris and Amsterdam and then in Geneva, after the Revolution interrupted their appearance. The attributions were muddled..." Warner, ed. (2004), 16.

<sup>319</sup> Charles Perrault. *Memoirs of My Life*. Ed. and transl. by Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989. 11

<sup>320</sup> The project was a failure. Only a year after the king's death in 1716, the institution was renamed "Inscriptions and Belles Lettres" and the production of medals cancelled.

royal amusement, to while away the long days and hours at Versailles. Characteristic also of Perrault's style are "les bienséances," linguistic and thematic indications of the writer's cultivation of the concept of decorum, a founding principle of classical literature and theory, related to the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of a style to a subject. More generally, "decorum" described the prescribed limits of appropriate behaviour and self-conduct within a given social situation. Either way, whether in writing or in everyday interaction, to follow decorum was to abide by aesthetic and moral codes designed to uphold respectability and good taste: hallmarks of the cultured, moneyed elite.<sup>321</sup>

Perrault's fairy tale was first published in the *Mercure Galant*, a popular Parisian literary journal, in February of 1696.<sup>322</sup> It was reproduced in the same year in the Dutchman Adrian Moëtjens' *Recueil de pièces curieuses et nouvelles, tant en prose qu'en vers*. In early 1697, a slightly modified version of the story appeared alongside seven other tales in what was to become Perrault's celebrated anthology of fairy tales, *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé, avec des moralités*, published in Paris by Claude Barbin.<sup>323</sup> Most scholars agree that the story published by Barbin, rather than the one published by Moëtjens, is the definitive version; in terms of content, tone and language it is closest to Perrault's 1695 manuscript.<sup>324</sup> This first collection, it is worth noting, did not bear Perrault's name; instead, the author chose to have the work ascribed to "Pierre Perrault Darmancour," the name of his son.<sup>325</sup>

Perrault was not the first French writer to compose a narrative that could be termed a literary "fairy tale". His work in this genre owed a great deal to the group of writers who preceded him: to be precise, to two waves of proto-feminist women writers whose social and literary activities in Paris during the ancient regime under Louis XIV led to the establishment and development of the fairy tale genre. Through recitation, composition and publication of stories these women invented, essentially, the modern fairy tale, the literary form for which Perrault would become best-known. The development of the *conte de fées* began with the younger generation of women working under the influence of Mlle de Scudery and other

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<sup>321</sup> For an analysis of what a "précieux" style of prose entails in terms of vocabulary, tone and language, see M. J. O'Regan. "Charles Perrault and "Précieux" Prose," *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 58, No. 3 (July, 1963), 343-349. Published by: Modern Humanities Research Association. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3721425>

<sup>322</sup> Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. London: The Softback Preview, 1984. 402.

<sup>323</sup> The first English translation, by Robert Samber, was published in 1729.

<sup>324</sup> Gérard Gélinas. *Enquête sur les contes de Perrault*. Paris: Imago, 2004. 178.

<sup>325</sup> ("Armancour" being the name of a property he bought for him) See Nadine Jasmin (2002). *Naissance du conte féminin, Mots et merveilles, Les contes de fées de Madame d'Aulnoy, 1690-1698*. Paris: Champion.

“*précieuses*” writers. This second generation included Marie-Catherine D’Aulnoy (1650-1705) and Catherine Bernard (1662-1712). These women had concrete goals and aspirations for which they fought in and through fiction: French proto-feminists, “profoundly subversive, anomalous women within the social order of the ancient regime” using the fantastical stories today called “fairy tales” to express their grievances, advance their philosophical arguments and positions, and offer alternative worlds to the male-dominated one in which they were living.<sup>326</sup> The essence of these female writers’ narratives is “fiery protest...against the serfdom of dynastic matrimony and mental inanition”.<sup>327</sup>

Above all the *précieuses* were seeking a way out of, or if not actively seeking, then *writing* their way out of, the social institution of arranged marriage. The social practice of forced and arranged marriages was still widespread across Europe at the time, and France was no exception. By delimiting a woman’s choice, prohibiting her from expressing and pursuing her own desires, arranged marriage ensured that domestic male authority (first the father’s, then the husband’s) was upheld. The *précieuses* demanded that they be given the choice to decide if and when and whom to marry; the right not be forced into a matrimonial arrangement counter to their will; on the basis of their ideals of friendship and civility, the right not to marry; and an equal right with men to take a lover. In short, in their fairy stories and often also in the biographical stories of their lives, these women pursued a (romantic) path of their own making.<sup>328</sup>

Always a contentious issue, in the seventeenth century the social institution of marriage came under even closer scrutiny and featured often as a subject of heated debate, as its founding principles and constituent elements (monogamy, mutuality and the limits of responsibility) emerged were questioned. Nowhere was this interrogation of marriage more evident than in the more subversive forms of *fin de siècle* literature: in the *contes*, and in fantastical novels such as Mme de La Fayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves*, which Nicholas Hammond describes as “a work widely considered to have changed the landscape of prose fiction,” marking, as it did, “the moment that gossip becomes literature and literature becomes

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<sup>326</sup> Marina Warner. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1994. 169. There are close connections between the earlier generation, the *précieuses*, and the female writers who came later; for instance, Mlle L’Heritier was Mlle de Scudery’s friend and protégée. See Joan DeJean. *Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*. Chicago, Ill. and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997; Joan DeJean and Nancy K. Miller, eds. *Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literatures in French*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

<sup>327</sup> Warner (1994), 169.

<sup>328</sup> Warner, ed. (2004). 7.

gossip.”<sup>329</sup> Published anonymously in 1678, *La Princesse de Clèves* presents a narrative in which marriage is redefined as less of an unequal partnership and more of a union based on mutual trust and shared responsibility, equally binding on both sides; women and men are given the same freedoms, but also the same limitations. Both sexes are held equally responsible for their actions. This is by no means a utopian vision of matrimony. Indeed, marriage in La Fayette’s novel emerges as something still very much problematic. Although the Princess is already married, she falls in love with the Duc de Nemours. Her husband, however, does nothing directly to prevent her from pursuing the affair; instead, he shows that he trusts her by giving her the choice of what she wants to do—a choice which gives the princess a certain freedom but at the same time burdens her with the full weight of individual moral responsibility. In this way it is almost guaranteed that she will come to the “right” decision and choose not to stray from her matrimonial bonds. “I shall trust only in you” her husband says; “it is the path my heart counsels me to take, and also my reason. With a temperament like yours, by leaving you your liberty I set you narrower limits than I could enforce.”<sup>330</sup>

In their literary challenges to authority and present practice, the *précieuses* were not explicit. Instead, they buried their discontent with the existing patriarchal system in overwrought language, language made almost artificial by means of a surfeit of symbols, metaphors, and elaborate allegory. Moreover, the *précieuses* infused their writing with magic, enchantment and metamorphosis, to stand for the desires and demands that were otherwise communicated in their stories through words often of an ironic, hyperbolic and satiric tone. Such redescription was not purely a matter of stylistics; it was a necessary and practical step that had to be taken, given the stringent censorship and the atmosphere of religious revivalism prevalent in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century France. Louis XIV’s court at Versailles kept both the salons and the doyennes who ran them, the *salonnières*, under close surveillance—and for good reason.

Salon culture unquestionably was integral to the emergence and subsequent rapid popularisation of the nascent fairy-tale genre. Looking back today, it is difficult to recover the atmosphere of the salons, given the scarcity of primary documentary evidence. Most of what

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<sup>329</sup> Nicholas Hammond. *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal in France, 1610-1715*. Oxford, Berlin and New York: Peter Lang, 2011.3. Hammond goes on to discuss how “gossip in seventeenth-century France seems permeated with a peculiar intensity....this intensity is derived from its relationship to and, more importantly, its difference from the role played by Conversation in the period.” 17-18.

<sup>330</sup> Madame de Lafayette. *La princesse de Clèves, avec une notice sur le roman avant la Princesse de Clèves, une biographie de l'auteur, une étude générale de son oeuvre, une analyse méthodique des textes choisis, des jugements et des sujets de travaux*. [1678]. Ed. by Bernard Roussel. Paris: Bordas, 1968. My translation.

is known derives from a small number of epistolary and literary sources. These include Jean Regnault de Segrais' *Les nouvelles françaises ou les divertissements de la princesse Aurélie* (1656), about the group around the Grande Madame during her exile at Saint-Fargeau.<sup>331</sup> Another account that survives is *Jeux d'esprit* (1701) by Charlotte-Rose de La Force, another writer of fairy tales, in which she details the “*divertissements*” that the Princesse de Conti devised during her period of exile, which lasted until she was welcomed back to court in 1657. (Having refused many proposals from eligible European royals, she scandalised the court of France when she asked the permission of Louis XIV to marry the courtier, Antoine Nompar de Caumont. The reason for the scandal was that such a proposed union, one between unequals, would have been seen as a great social and proprietary “*mésalliance*”.<sup>332</sup>)

Parisian salons, in other words, served a purpose much greater than their name might suggest. A more accurate and apt description for the salons might be forums for discussion, or venues for creativity, chiefly of the literary kind, all conducted through, or under the guise of, civilising and socialising play. Literary scholars of the period agree, for the most part, that fairy tales developed directly out of the conversational contests, or “*bagatelles*,” played in the salons. Indeed, one critic goes so far as to describe the resultant stories as the products of collaboration and “*competitive emulation*” in which “*the process of composition was valued as much as the story itself.*”<sup>333</sup> Marina Warner emphasises the importance of such word games both as “*pastimes*” and as indications of the gradual development of “*the art of conversation*” as an “*ideal*” of salon society. It was “*required*” of guests at the salon soirées to be able to tell stories with elegance, wit, and aptitude.<sup>334</sup> The question of whether or not those involved in salon culture were aware of what they were doing, of the influence their activities were having on the development of literature, is open to debate, although there are some critics, such as Elizabeth Wanning Harries, who claim that the women were in fact fully conscious of their central role in “*the creation a new genre.*”<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Jean Regnault de Segrais. *Les Nouvelles françaises, ou les Divertissemens de la princesse Aurélie* (2 volumes, 1656-57). Réédition: Société des textes français modernes, Paris, 1990. Anne Marie Louise d'Orléans, Duchess of Montpensier, (27 May 1627 – 5 April 1693) known as La Grande Mademoiselle, was the eldest daughter of Gaston d'Orléans, and his first wife Marie de Bourbon.

<sup>332</sup> Charlotte Rose de Caumont de la Force. *Les Jeux D'Esprit, Ou, La Promenade de La Princesse de Conti Eu*. Paris: Nabu Press, 2011. See also Molière's satires: in *Les Precieuses* the playwright ridicules and in *Les Femmes savants* gives an exaggerated but nevertheless revealing picture of the realities of salon culture.

<sup>333</sup> John Laurence Carr. *Life in France under Louis XIV*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1966. 102.

<sup>334</sup> Warner, ed. (2004), 3-4.

<sup>335</sup> Elizabeth Wanning Harries. *Twice Upon a Time. Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. See esp. 17-22. Harries argues that tales written by French women fell into

The salons provided the backdrop to a women-led process of socialisation and cultural production during the French Enlightenment, an era described by one historian for this very reason as “the century of women”.<sup>336</sup> The women who hosted the salons and took part in the literary activities central to salon culture were like “civilizers,” regulators of social discourse, taste and style and therefore integral to the “realization of society and civilization” in France.<sup>337</sup> In this sense they were part of what Norbert Elias famously described in his seminal sociological study as the “civilizing process”.<sup>338</sup> Yet the salons were also potential hotbeds of anti-establishment feeling and revolt. What went on at these venues could propagate discontent and even spark protest, the emergent social ideals of “*préciosité*” emerging as a form of polite revolt against the dominant culture.<sup>339</sup> The social ideals of the uprising of the French nobility known as the Fronde, for instance, which marred the early years of Louis XIV’s reign, was planned and organised in the salon of the great *précieuse*, the Marquise de Rambouillet.<sup>340</sup>

The feminist fairy tale writers who succeeded the *précieuses* continued to question prevailing attitudes, social practices and institutions which emphasised inequalities between the sexes and reinforced women’s widespread subjugation; often the focus of these challenges was matrimony. The fairy tales of Marie-Catherine D’Aulnoy feature some of the bleakest depictions of marriage from this period<sup>341</sup> In D’Aulnoy’s stories, marriage is an economic transaction first and foremost, in which the woman always loses: she “loses” not only the financial value that her dowry represents, but worse, she loses her freedom. D’Aulnoy shows that for women, to be married is to be bound. Marriage in her tales means financial, physical and emotional dependence. Besides challenging social practices and institutions, these early feminist fairy tales challenged stylistically (patriarchal) literary tradition. Indisputably these stories were “modern” in the sense that they went against the conventions of classicism, openly mocking the hallmarks of the tradition, such as inflated rhetoric, overwrought allegories, and moralising fables.

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critical disrepute; they were “systematically denigrated and, by the nineteenth century, deliberately forgotten.” 21.

<sup>336</sup> Geoffrey Atkinson and Abraham C. Keller. *Prelude to the Enlightenment. French Literature, 1690-1740*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971. 7.

<sup>337</sup> Wanning Harries (2001), 6.

<sup>338</sup> Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process. The History of Manners*. Transl. by Edmund Jephcott. New York: Urzen Books, 1978.

<sup>339</sup> Warner (1994), 168.

<sup>340</sup> Warner (1994), 8.

<sup>341</sup> See Jack Zipes. *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale*. Louisville, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994, esp. 25-27. See also Jack Zipes. *When Dreams Came True. Classical Fairy Tales and their Tradition*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.

The *précieuses* and the *conteuses* who came after were “modern” also in their flouting of literary inheritance. They claimed the popular tradition as the source and origin of their compositions. The *conte*, transmitted orally, was a genre through which the male-dominated tradition of classicism and inflated rhetoric could be challenged, questioned and mocked. It was also a genre that was more open and more democratic, since its essential ingredients—proverbs, old wives’ tales, fables, bits and pieces of anonymous culture handed down, in speech, through the generations—did not make having an education prerequisite to the composition of the stories; nor did it demand an aristocratic audience.<sup>342</sup> Nonetheless, this “popular” folk provenance was almost always fictive. The reasoning behind emphasising this (artificial) oral genealogy was, on the one hand, to give the women writers a sense of solidarity, through stylistic self-identification, with the “vulgar” people, against establishment figures such as Boileau and other members of the *Académie française* who looked down on fairy tales and anything to do with the ‘people’ “folk”; on the other hand, by aligning their literary compositions with a native tradition, the *conteuses* could break out of and away from the limitations imposed by classicism; in their fairy tales they could ignore completely the rules of seamliness, or “*bienséance*” and indulge in a particular kind of stylistic intricacy.

Long, intricate and fantastical plots, flights of fancy, magic, artifice, and metamorphosis characterised the style of the contes written by both the first- and the second-wave of French female fairy tale writers. Of these stylistic attributes, the most significant perhaps is metamorphosis. It was in writing about shapeshifting and about the potentiality and the power inherent in assuming a new body, a different guise, that the *conteuses* were able most explicitly to explore questions of agency and escape from societal or domestic entrapment. A “defining dynamic” of fairy tales, wonder tales and myths, metamorphosis promises a way out, or a way through, the oppressive ideologies and often suffocating expectations of the real—though it is worth pointing out that this transfiguring, transformative promise is not always fulfilled, or when fulfilled, is often not without its own set of complications.

Perrault undertook a similar project of pretence when in the wake of the success of the fairy tales written by women he came to publish his own stories. He crafted his narratives carefully so as to make them appear as amalgamations of folk and literary motifs, “cleverly

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<sup>342</sup> Warner, ed. (2004), 12-13. It is worth noting, however, that many of the *conteuses* belonged to the upper echelons of French society. Consequently they enjoyed certain privileges—literacy, greater financial security, ample leisure time—which enabled them to pursue writing careers.



pieced together from a variety of models and given elements of humour and language alluding to seventeenth-century bourgeois and court society.<sup>343</sup> On the surface, then, Perrault's tales seem to derive directly from a lower, oral culture: a piece of subtle stylistic subterfuge sometimes derided, and sometimes highly praised by his contemporaries.<sup>344</sup> There were those who found in Perrault's style a sign of skill and an indication of the writer's learning. To be able to write *as though* one were uneducated was something to be praised, whilst writing without being educated, in a simple fashion, was something to be derided and looked down upon. The Abbé de Villiers, for instance, in *Entretiens sur les contes des fées et sur quelques autres ouvrages du temps, pour servir comme préservatif contre le mauvais goût* (*Dialogues on fairy tales and some other works of our time, to act as an antidote against bad taste*), featured a discussion between a 'Provincial' and a 'Parisian' on the subject of the vogue for fairy tales. In this dialogue Perrault is praised for possessing the learning that makes it possible for him as a writer to imitate the "ignorant" style of the storyteller in his literary tales.

To summarise this short historical and contextual introduction: the literary fairy tale was developed and then quickly "institutionalised" in France between 1697 and 1789. During this period there was an explosion of interest in and veritable vogue for fairy tales in France. This is not to suggest that fairy tales became the only or indeed the primary staple of the French literary diet. Other forms of writing continued to be read, including romantic novels of adventure, witty poems, and shorter tales and plays on a range of topics ranging from the rational to the fantastical, religious and sentimental.<sup>345</sup> From France, the fairy tale spread quickly across Western Europe. The rapid expansion of the genre was helped by technological innovation—advances in printing that meant volumes could be produced and circulated more quickly—and also by the appearance of translations into German, Italian and English within relatively short time-frames. Here it is worth pausing to question why it was in France, specifically, that the fairy tale first flourished. As demonstrated, the literary efforts and achievements of the *précieuses*, *salonnières* and *conteuses* were indisputable shaping forces in the creation and popularisation of the genre; Paris, as cultural and metropolitan centre, was

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<sup>343</sup> Zarucchi, ed. (1989), 19.

<sup>344</sup> See also Raymonde Robert. *Le conte de fées littéraire en France de la fin du XVII à la fin du XVIII siècle*. Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1982, p. 87. "Tous les folkloristes sont unanimes à reconnaître que ce conte est probablement d'origine non populaire mais lettre, qu'aucun conte n'en a été recense, dans tout le monde occidental, aussi bien qu'en Orient." The supposed folkloric origins of Perrault's tales was particularly problematic, by association with Basile and Straparola. This was because Straparola's collection, *Le piacevoli notti* ("Facetious Nights") based on Basile's *Pentamerone*, in 1605 was banned in France under the country's obscenity laws.

<sup>345</sup> Atkinson and Keller (1971), 19.

also important in the genre's development. Yet these factors alone cannot give the full and complex picture.

The development of the fairy tale into a recognised literary genre was helped also by the elevated status and excellent reputation of the French language at the end of the seventeenth century, and a French culture and a government receptive to and supportive of the Arts. At the time that Perrault was writing, French was held in high regard across most of Western Europe. Codified and refined by rhetoricians and grammarians during the course of the seventeenth century, modelled on *bon usage* at the Bourbon court and in the salons of Paris and enhanced stylistically and syntactically by prominent playwrights, philosophers and poets, French rose to prominence and became the preferred literary language. In this way, gradually, and alongside the emergence of a culture and a language based on *politesse*, French came to replace Latin in the modern *respublica litterarum*, the Republic of Letters, which, like the modern political state, developed “out of the religious wars of the sixteenth century, out of the articulation of public and private spheres, citizen and state, agent and critic.” Rather than “impose itself upon other European nations,” French instead remained a “*lingua franca*”.<sup>346</sup> Yet it was still adopted abroad outside of the literary realm, as the official language of princely courts, of politics, of diplomacy, and of socialising amongst the upper classes.

Fortunately, France was also unique amongst European nations in having a culture open to artistic innovation, where, with royal patronage, learned societies fostered and rewarded excellence in the Arts.<sup>347</sup> The men elected to such exclusive, members-only institutions were well-educated intellectuals who found in their own culture the epitome of polite society: “la bonne compagnie,” the “highest point...yet attained” in civilisation.<sup>348</sup> In 1671, at the instigation of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Perrault was presented for membership at one of the most prestigious of these societies, the Académie Française. He was not elected until his third attempt, in 1671.<sup>349</sup> The official charge of the Academy was to produce a dictionary of the French language; this shows a move towards a codification of language and of thought, as well as structuring, a regulation, of creative expression. More generally, the Academy's aim was to

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<sup>346</sup> Dena Goodman. *The Republic of Letters. A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994. 2.

<sup>347</sup> Atkinson and Keller (1971), 9.

<sup>348</sup> Goodman (1994), 3.

<sup>349</sup> “Once admitted, Perrault became one of the Academy's most assiduous members, attending virtually every session for over thirty years.” See Zarucchi, ed. (1989), 11.

foster the pursuit of the arts through the provision of a platform for their discussion and critique.

Literary merit was one significant issue debated at the Academy: the question of the value of the literature of the present time, which is to say, literary writings of the late-seventeenth century, versus the value of literary works from the classical period. Known as the “Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,” or the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, and originating three centuries earlier, during the Italian Renaissance, in 1687 this particular debate reached a new apex, an ideological turning point. The spark for this was Perrault’s public reading of a polemical poem he had written in celebration of the age of Louis XIV, entitled *Le siècle de Louis le Grand*, a poem with aesthetic and political implications.<sup>350</sup> In a way, Perrault’s participation in the Quarrel was the “final stage” in the writer’s “struggle for legitimacy,” as the editor and translator of his memoirs notes:

If he was to earn or retrieve the respect of his colleagues, Perrault would have to persuade them that his views were neither the result of thoughtlessness and ignorance, nor an expression of resentment on the part of an inferior author towards the heroic model of antiquity.

He set out to accomplish this by producing the first volume, in October 1688, of the *Parallel of the Ancients and Moderns*, a series of dialogues in which an imaginary “Président” (judge or councilman), an “Abbé” (abbot or priest with no ecclesiastical duty), and a “Chevalier” (titled gentleman) discuss the relative accomplishments of ancient times and seventeenth-century France. The “Président” generally upholds the Ancients with vehemently narrow-minded arguments, which the “Abbé” counters in a more moderate tone, and with carefully reasoned examples supporting Perrault’s own views; the “Chevalier,” meanwhile, is a passive, presumably objective observer who never fails to agree in the end with the “Abbé”.

In subsequent volumes of the *Parallel*, published in 1690, 1692, and 1697, Perrault reinforced his position by broadening his comparisons to include such fields as geography, astronomy, navigation, and medicine, in which the superiority of the Moderns was difficult to contest. By representing the arts as merely one aspect of a general cultural advancement, and by offering the debate in the entertaining format of dialogue, Perrault succeeded in creating a persuasive manifesto of the modernist view.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> The British Museum recently staged an exhibition featuring many artefacts of interest and relevance: Triumph and Disaster, Medals of the Sun King, British Museum. 4 June - 15 November, 2015. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/exhibitions/triumph\\_and\\_disaster.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/triumph_and_disaster.aspx).

<sup>351</sup> Zarucchi, ed. (1989), 14-15.

Perrault was firmly on the side of the “Moderns.” In his own work, he maintained a demonstrably “modern” tone and style, and was “modern,” or “of the moment” also in terms of his writings’ narrative content. Moreover, he championed other writers active at the time, arguing that they were superior to ancient (classical) writers because the French authors were fortunate enough to be living and working at an ideal artistic moment: under the enlightened governance of the Bourbon king, whose support for the Arts (and indeed, for the Sciences), through royal patronage, meant that literary innovation flourished.<sup>352</sup> At the time, royal patronage meant receiving the king’s financial and social support, and also, having his stamp of approval, which besides anything else meant a great deal in terms of prestige. For Perrault in particular, in his dual role, as “administrator of the King’s buildings charged with promoting the physical manifestation of the monarch’s glory, and as an artist in his own right,” the significance of garnering and keeping official royal support cannot be overstated.<sup>353</sup> That royal patronage was particularly important for Perrault when it came to assuming the role of writer working in a still-nascent genre—the genre of the literary fairy tale—is clear from the first edition of the *contes*: to ‘Mademoiselle’, referring to Élisabeth Charlotte d’Orléans—the niece of Louis XIV.<sup>354</sup>



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<sup>352</sup> Jack Zipes. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion. The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. New York: Routledge, 1983. 15.

<sup>353</sup> Zarucchi, ed. (1989), 10.

<sup>354</sup> Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984. 129.

#### iv. The (in)fertile female body in late-seventeenth century medicine

The concern with female fertility and infertility found in many of the French and Italian fairy tales written and published during the late-seventeenth century can be taken as literary evidence for an ongoing anxiety around female sexuality and power, an inheritance from the early modern period. As Ulinka Rublack explains in *The Astronomer and the Witch*, her recent study of the witchcraft trial mounted against the mother of the astronomer, Joannes Kepler, sixteenth-century iconography was replete with sensationalist images of the frightening figure of “the demonic witch as an old, envious hag with her broomstick, keen to attack fertility”.<sup>355</sup> Images of women past mid-life were exaggerated to frighten and to fascinate, to convey the relationship between a fascination with nature and naturalism and beauty, and the “ageing maternal body.”<sup>356</sup> These images and the fear they inspired remain within the cultural consciousness and literary imagination, as their appearance in fairy tales attests, as we shall see in the case of the mother of Perrault’s sleeping beauty.

The fairy tale genre’s concern with female infertility in the seventeenth century reveals moreover something about the state of medical knowledge at the time: about contemporaneous theories and (mis)understandings of reproduction, in general, and the role of the female body in the generative process, in particular. The dominant theory of animal and human reproduction, which held sway throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century, was “preformationism,” the notion that organisms developed out of pre-existent, miniature forms. Alongside and against preformationism was the reproductive theory of epigenesis, which described embryonic development in terms of a progressive process originating in undifferentiated egg cells. Spontaneous generation, the theory that living creatures could come into being of their own accord, without the need for parent-like pre-existent organisms, was another popular mode of understanding reproduction at the time.<sup>357</sup> Of course, advances in the

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<sup>355</sup> Ulinka Rublack. *The Astronomer and the Witch: Johannes Kepler’s Fight for His Mother*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 3.

<sup>356</sup> *ibid.* See Rublack’s example: a carved pear-wood statue of a pensive old woman with loose, veined skin and sagging breasts, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum. 6.

<sup>357</sup> Pythagoras was one of the first to write about the origin of form in the context of reproduction. He is credited with developing the theory of “spermism,” the idea that the essence of offspring come from the male, with only the material coming from the female. Pythagoras’ ideas were accepted and developed by Aristotle, through whose writings they were transmitted to later generations of physicians, amongst them Galen, Girolamo Fabrici and Realdo Colombo. In 1651 William Harvey published *Exercitationes de Generatione Animalium (On the*

science of optics and consequent technological innovations, including the development of the microscope, meant that spontaneous generation, epigenesis and preformationism, along with other less mainstream medical ideas, were gradually revised, as scientists and physicians were, for the first time, able to see and to study at first-hand the minutiae of the world and of the human body. Yet these advances did not preclude many scientists continuing to ascribe to long-held belief, with Nicolaas Hartsoeker's 1694 *Essai de Dioptrique*, an example of a preformationist stance based on microscopic observation, being a case in point. In his essay, Hartsoeker includes the image of a minute human form curled inside the sperm; this form he termed "petit l'enfant" or "petit animal." In later medical writings, this form would be given the moniker of "homunculus."<sup>358</sup>

Clearly, in spite of optical and technological advances, the physiology of human reproduction was still little understood, with the female body in particular suffering from medical misinterpretations based on lack of direct knowledge. For a long time it was believed, for instance, that women, as well as men, had testicles, and thereby the biological capacity to produce sperm (See Figs. 3.2, 3.3).

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*Generation of Animals*) in which he rejected many of Aristotle's ideas concerning matter and outlined a largely mechanistic epigenetic model of generation. For a useful summary of the various theories and how these were later developed, see Lois Magnier. *A History of the Life Sciences*. New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc, 2002.

<sup>358</sup> See Clara Pinto Correia. *The Ovary of Eve: Egg and Sperm Preformation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, esp. Introduction. See also Elizabeth B. Gasking. *Investigations into Generation, 1651-1828*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1967.



Figure 3.2. François Mauriceau. Image and facing explanatory notes: 'l'origine & la distribution des vaisseaux spermatiques,' in *Traité des maladies des femmes grosses...* Quatrième ed. Paris, Laurent D'Houry. M.DC.XCIV. Western MS 2091. Wellcome Collection. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.



Consider this excerpt from a late-seventeenth-century treatise written by the French anatomist and physician, François Mauriceau first published in Paris in 1670. In Chapter II, aptly titled “Des Testicules,” Mauriceau writes :

Toutes les femmes ont aussi-bien que les hommes deux testicules, qui ont pareillement le mesme usage, qui est de convertir en semence le sang qui leur est apporté par les vaisseaux [...] mais ils diffèrent de ceux des hommes, en situation, en figure, en grosseur, en substance, en température, & en composition. Les testicules des femmes sont situez au-dedans du ventre, vers chaque costé [sic.] de la Matrice...<sup>359</sup>

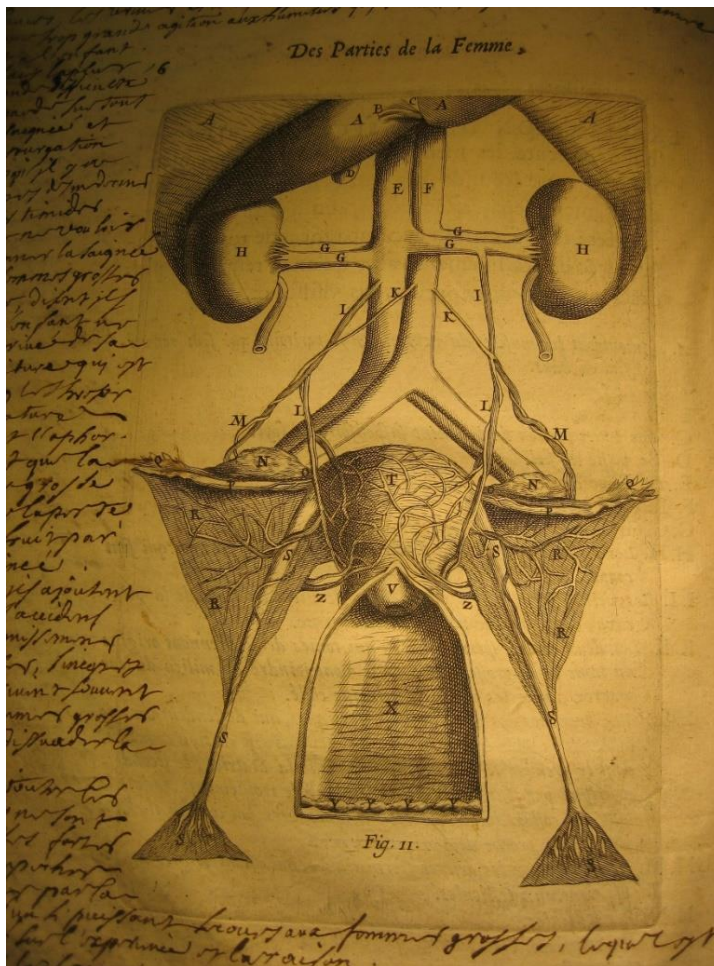


Figure 3.3. François Mauriceau. ‘Les vaisseaux spermatiques, la Matrice, etc.’, *Traité des maladies des femmes grosses...* Quatrième ed. Paris, Laurent D’Houry. M.DC.XCIV. Western MS 2091. Wellcome Collection. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>359</sup> “All women also have two testicules. These serve more or less the same function [as they do in men], which is to convert the blood that is carried to them by the vessels into seed [...] but the testicules of women differ from those of men in terms of location, in shape, in size, in material/substance, in temperature, and in composition. Women’s testicules are situated within the abdomen, on either side of the womb...” My translation. Wellcome Western MS 2091 : François Mauriceau. *Traité des maladies des femmes grosses et de celles qui sont accouchées*. Quatrième ed. Paris, chez Laurent D’Houry. M.DC.XCIV.



Medical texts of the seventeenth century propagated widespread theoretical and visual misconceptions pertaining to the female body, as the images presented in this chapter reveal. Exacerbating this lack of physiognomic and specifically, reproductive understanding, was the tendency of the male medical establishment to conceptualize the female body on the basis of its significant difference from the male organism, which in essence meant describing female bodies, and by extension, women, as weaker and more vulnerable. This notion of the relative weakness and vulnerability ascribed to the female sex based largely on women's primary role as child-bearers. Pregnancy and childbirth at the time still posed many potential dangers to the mother's health, and in many cases, her life. Without accurate medical understanding and in the absence of the medications and tools available today, the pregnant female body, the female body giving birth, and the post-natal maternal body were particularly susceptible to complications. Indeed, the myriad obstetrical manuals published during the period contain detailed inventories of the innumerable things that could potentially go wrong, and not without good reason. Statistics from the period show that an estimated one in ten women died in labour or from post-natal problems under the Ancien Regime.<sup>360</sup>

Consequently, theories of generation, of reproduction, struggled to respond. The most striking example is the iconographic cross-gendering of the female with the male, a picture which reveals an underlying conceptual cross-gendering. In countless medical sketches and images from the period (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3), the male reproductive organs are superimposed onto the female ones. The text from which these images are taken appeared at a time when the "one-sex" model of the human body was still dominant, although it was beginning to be redefined. The anatomical inaccuracies demonstrated by these images, suggesting that the pictures were not created from direct objective observance, are evidence of a wider epistemological fear: a fear of the "secrets" of the "vulgar" female body such as in the author's almost apologetic warning added to a label of the vagina, or "la partie honteuse":

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<sup>360</sup> <http://blog.catherinedelors.com/a-guest-post-by-holly-tucker-childbirth-in-the-17th-and-18th-centuries/>. See also Dobie and Wilmott's *An Attempt to Estimate the True Rate of Maternal Mortality, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*. *Medical History* 26.1 (1982): 79-90. For a detailed study of the issue, see Holly Tucker's *Pregnant Fictions: Childbirth and the Fairy Tale in Early Modern France*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003.

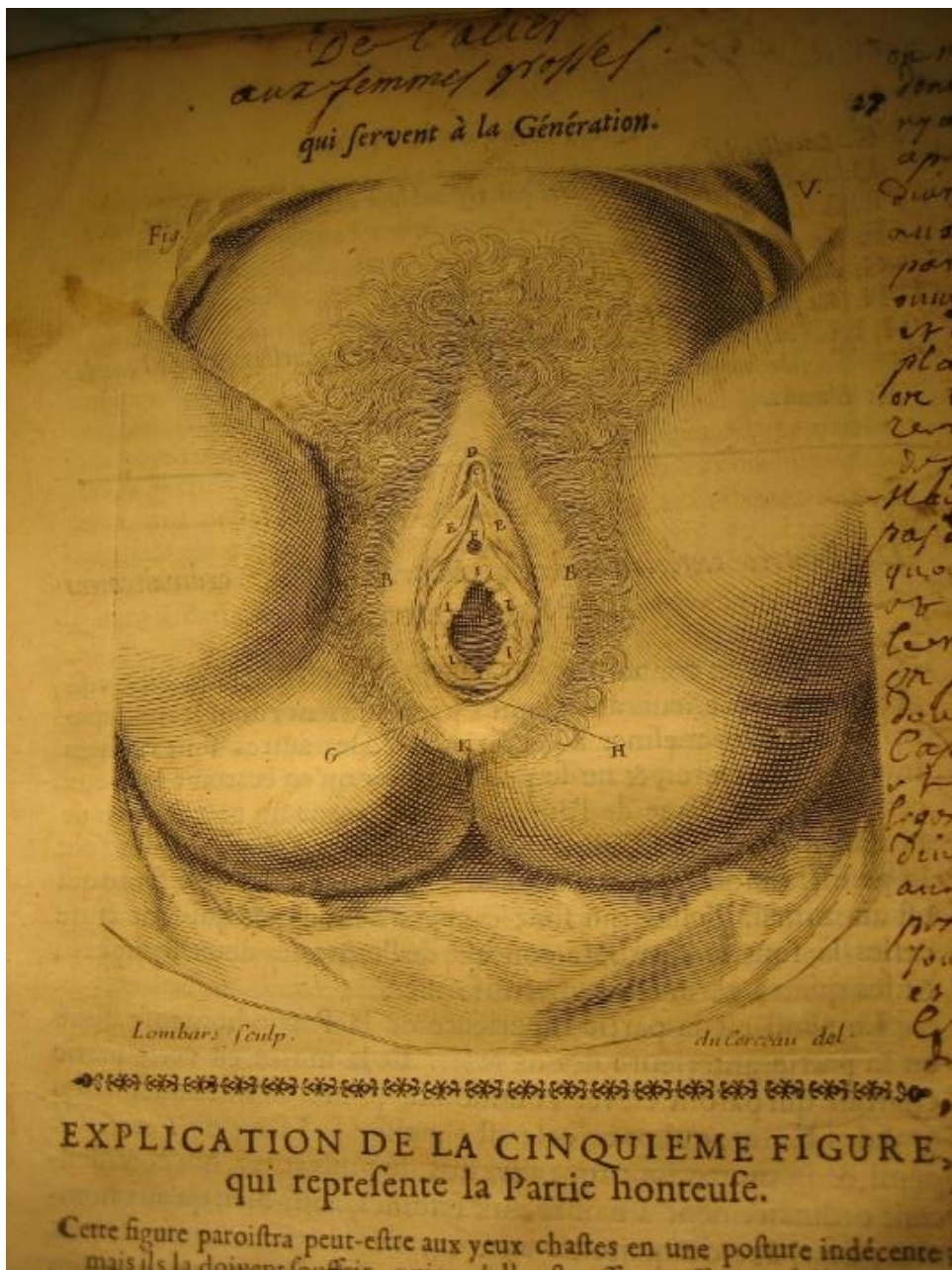


Figure 3.4. François Mauriceau. [Fig. V] ‘La partie honteuse,’ *Traité des maladies des femmes grosses et de celles qui sont accouchées*. . . . Quatrième ed. Paris, chez Laurent D’Houry. M.DC.XCIV. Western MS 2091. Wellcome Collection.  
 Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

About this most “shameful” part of female anatomy, Mauriceau writes:

Cette figure parastra, peut-être aux yeux chastes, en une posture indécente ;  
 mais ils doivent souffrir, puis qu’elle est aussi nécessaire qu’elle est commode,

pour faire voir plusieurs particules qui sont cachées sous celle Partie honteuse...<sup>361</sup>

Taking into account beliefs such as these alongside the lack of precise anatomical knowledge, specifically with reference to the female organs of generation, it is unsurprising that the biological and environmental conditions necessary for reproduction should be so little understood. Misconceptions about female fertility and sterility, alongside those relating to bodily and external factors influencing both, were common across medical and popular belief. In Chapter I of *Traité des maladies des femmes grosses et de celles qui sont accouchées* (*Treatise on the diseases of pregnant women and those who have [recently] given birth*), Mauriceau outlines the signs and symptoms of fertility and sterility in women. Sterility, or infertility, is identified as a particular and widespread problem. “[i]l s’en rencontre beaucoup qui sont stériles.” Most important is the womb, or uterus: “La Matrice est absolument nécessaire pour la fécondité,” he writes, before counselling closer examination: “qu’elle est la principale partie qu’on doit examiner pour en bien juger ... ”.<sup>362</sup>

Figure 3.5, shown below, is an illustration from Mauriceau’s account, which depicts the womb as it was believed to appear in its “natural” state and situation.

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<sup>361</sup> “To chaste eyes, this figure will perhaps appear indecent, but this visual suffering must be tolerated, since it is necessary that the figure is practical and handy [as a visual aid] so that it reveals the many [anatomical] details/particulars hidden underneath this shameful part.” My translation. Mauriceau. *Traité des maladies*....Wellcome Collection.

<sup>362</sup> “Many women are infertile; “The womb is absolutely necessary for fertility...”; “[the womb] is the main part [of the female body] that must be examined in order to determine fertility.” My translations.

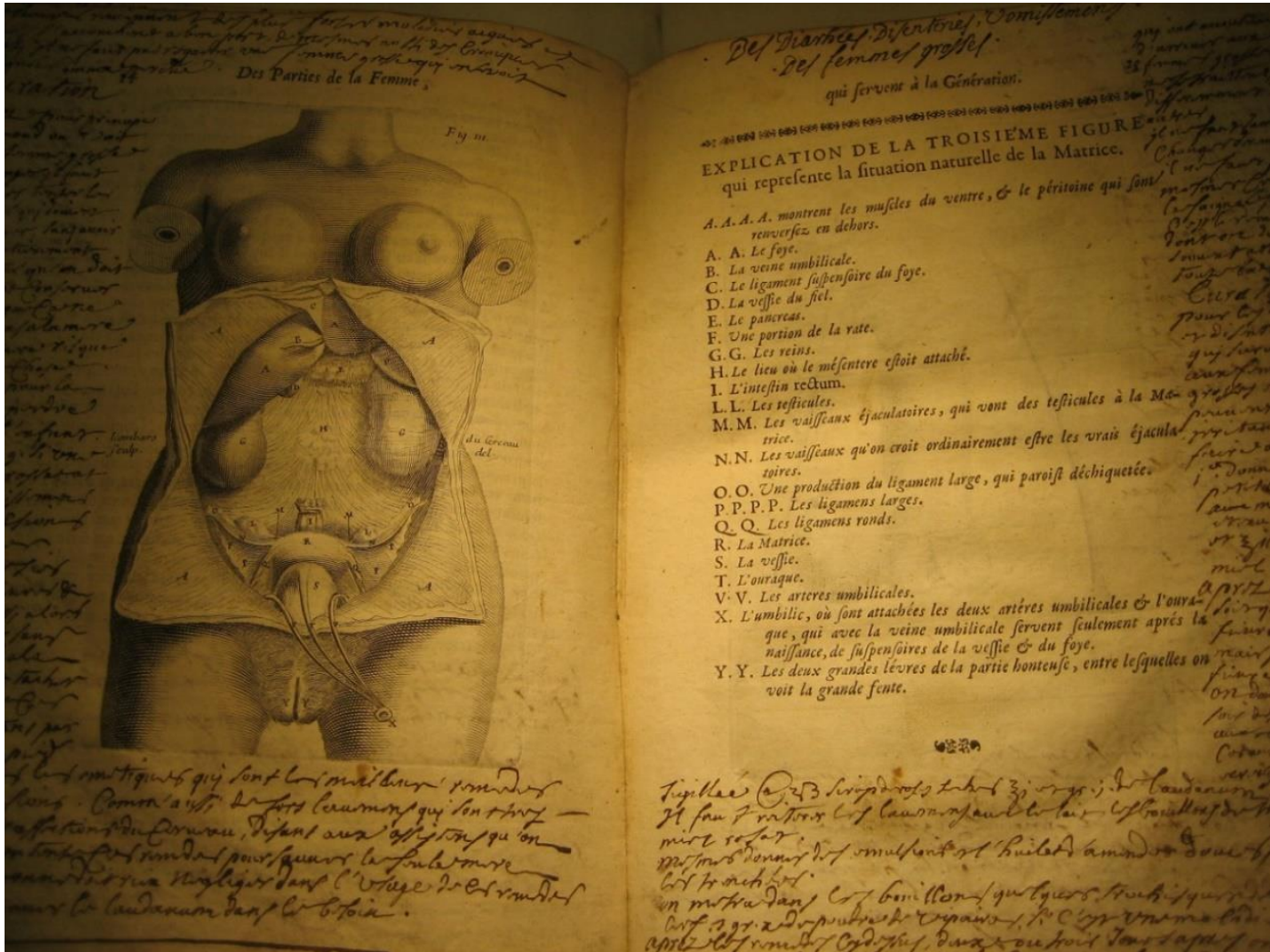


Figure 3.5. François Mauriceau. Explanation of the figure of the womb, 'la matrice,' *Traité des maladies des femmes grosses...* Quatrième ed. Paris, Laurent D'Houry. M.DC.XCIV. Western MS 2091. Wellcome Collection. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

Mauriceau goes on to describe the biological signs that a woman is fertile, that is, ready and able to conceive:

les signes de la fécondité de la femme sont, qu'elle ait sa matrice bien disposée ; & qu'elle soit d'âge au moins de treize à quatorze ans, & au plus de quarante-cinq à cinquante pour l'ordinaire...qu'elle soit de bon tempérament, & médiocrement sanguine ; qu'elle ait pendant ce temps ses purgations d'un sang bon & louable en couleur.



The signs of fertility in a woman are that she has a healthy [well-disposed, functional] womb; is at least of the age of thirteen or fourteen years and in most cases no older than forty-five to fifty...that she is of sound constitution and [in terms of humours] only mildly sanguine; that during this time [i.e. the period of fertility] her menstrual blood is of a good and vibrant colour.<sup>363</sup>

In the following chapter he explains the conditions necessary for conception: “La conception n’est autre qu’une action propre & particulière de la Matrice...par laquelle les semences prolifiques de l’homme et de la femme y sont reçues & retenues, afin que l’enfant en soit engendré & formé.”<sup>364</sup>

This discussion of the conceptual misconceptions prevalent in seventeenth-century medical literature about the design and the function of the reproductive female body, a female body reconfigured as “maternal” by means of its involvement in generation, is the factual framework in which the body of the old queen, the mother of Perrault’s heroine, shall be discussed. It is with a consideration of this mature body that this chapter’s critical commentary begins, before moving on to a longer and more detailed discussion of the body of the sleeping beauty as it is configured in “La belle au bois dormant.”

In terms of contextual medical belief relating to the female body, most significant for thinking about the youthful, virgin figure of the heroine, and about the possible alternative explanations for its sudden “swoon” and loss of consciousness, is the acute anxiety, during the early Enlightenment, over the premature sexualisation of girls. These fears linked disturbances suffered by girls as they became young women—that is, during the period of sexual development—with the onset of “hysterical” symptoms. These were all symptoms of conditions in some way related to the womb—reminiscent of those described in Chapter I, with regards to the medieval medical establishment’s uterine obsession. Clearly, not much changed over the course of several centuries; the most common symptoms of hysteria described in seventeenth-century writings were swoons, fainting fits and convulsions. The critical term here is the swoon, or faint, for it is this precise word that is used by Perrault’s narrator to define what happens to the princess, referring to “son évanouissement.”

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<sup>363</sup> My translation.

<sup>364</sup> “Conception is but the proper and particular function of the womb; the womb receives and retains large amounts of male and female seed, so that the child might be engendered and formed.” My translation. Mauriceau. *Traité des maladies*.... Wellcome Collection.

Femmes et leurs maladies	
potion pour femme en travail de enfant	233
potion pour la conception dans une femme	268
perte de sang par le bal avec femme saignée	212
distillat pour perte de sang avec femme	212
pourquoi le mois aux femmes	449
perte de sang avec femme	411
saignement du pied pour perte de sang	424

Figure 3.6. Jean Medard Le Gay. Table of contents showing 'Femmes et leurs maladies,' *La Fleur des Receptes Medicinales* [1674]. Paris. Wellcome Collection. Western MS 3228. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

Swooning, like fainting, was one of the many “maladies des femmes” (“women’s diseases”), an umbrella term used at the time to describe myriad minor ailments, as well as other more serious medical conditions, believed to be specific to the female sex. These “maladies” could take many forms (Figure 3.6), resulting in a concomitantly broad and varied symptom spectrum. In general, symptoms most commonly associated with these female “diseases” were those thought to originate or in or relate to the womb. (Again, echoes of medical theories prevalent already in the fourteenth-century...). Unbalanced sexuality was believed to be the significant factor in the development of these female diseases; imbalances in sexual desire and sexual activity (too much or too little of either) and the womb would suffer. Therefore, on the basis of age and marital status and consequent supposed degrees of sexual frustration, those believed to have been most likely to develop these conditions included young girls not yet sexually active, widows, and spinsters.<sup>365</sup> Such warnings against unbalanced female sexual desire echo earlier dogmatic moral and medical tracts in which women were presented as possessing immodest desires, and as being “lewd,” rather than chaste, with the power to seduce men and thereby wreak social disorder through sexual transgression.<sup>366</sup>

<sup>365</sup> Lindsay Wilson. *Women and Medicine in the French Enlightenment. The Debate over Maladies des Femmes*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. 127.

<sup>366</sup> Ulinka Rublack. *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 158.

Perrault's unconscious virgin princess is the opposite of lewd. She seduces her rescuer in her sleep, almost in spite of herself; her chaste beauty is sufficiently potent to bring the prince trembling to his knees. Indeed, it could be argued that the maiden's imbued purity is in part the cause of her unnatural state: in other words, her insentient state might have hysterical basis. Although "overt expressions of emotion, an awareness that it was proper and even necessary to react strongly, and indeed a certain pride in being emotionally stirred" were prevalent themes in the literature of the period, found in both medical and imaginative writings, young girls and women of an aristocratic origin were nonetheless considered the most constitutionally delicate, and therefore the most likely to develop such "hysterical" diseases.<sup>367</sup> These are the girls and women le Gay refers to when he writes about "les femmes qui sont sujettes à de fréquentes passions hystériques..."<sup>368</sup>

This medical background is significant, for if the sleeping beauty's "swoon" as it is described in Perrault's version of the story is taken to have an hysterical (medical) rather than a magical origin, then the basis for narrative analysis shifts, and the entire understanding changes. Instead of a fairy tale about the power of enchantment, about the force of fairy magic and enchanted time on mortal lives, "La belle au bois dormant" becomes a tale about the latent sexuality of the heroine: a story of sexual awakening, a narrative that might well be interpreted according to the framework first defined by Bruno Bettelheim. In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bettelheim developed what could be described as a psychosexual critique of Perrault's story in which the focus is on the burgeoning sexuality of the central female figure, a sexual maturation deferred for a period of one hundred years by the spindle prick. Bettelheim suggests in his analysis that the enchanted sleep of the heroine is in fact a metaphor for the process of self-discovery, of physiological and emotional maturation, that the adolescent girl goes through. During this developmental process, "long, quiet concentration on oneself" is needed. The lengthy sleep wrought upon the beauty is what makes such long and quiet concentration possible. What "in outer appearance" looks like "passivity (or sleeping one's life away)" is in fact a portrait of a (female) subject self-engaged with "internal mental processes of such importance" that "no energy for outwardly directed action" remains. Another way to put this would be to say that in this tale, and perhaps more generally across all sleeping beauty stories,

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<sup>367</sup> Writing in 1676, the Rev. Father Bernard Lamy described the "passions" as the "essence of the soul's action". In Atkinson and Keller (1971), 26.

<sup>368</sup>"Women subject to frequent hysterical spells." My translation. Medard le Gay. *La Fleur des Recèptes Médicinales*, 1674 [?]. Western MS 3228.

sleep is prerequisite to obtaining and a vehicle for achieving the self-knowledge needed for full sexual maturity.<sup>369</sup>

The theme of the dangers and the discontents of female (psycho)sexual development is not unique to sleeping beauty narratives, nor to Perrault's stories. Catherine Bernard, who was writing around the same time, explored the issue in "Prince Rosebush". In this fairy tale the spindle prick familiar to us from "La belle au bois dormant" appears in a slightly different form. Bernard's heroine, the beautiful Florinde, suffers the prick of a rose thorn:

she saw a rosebush that was more verdant and had more flowers than the others; it bent its little branches as she approached, and in its own way seemed to give her its approval...She tried to pick a rose that was ruby red and pricked her finger badly. The painful prick did not let her sleep that night.<sup>370</sup>

Even in this short passage, the situational similarities to Perrault's tale are striking. Also apparent: one significant contrast. Whilst the spindle prick in the former induces sleep, in the latter the prick of the thorn of the rose causes sleeplessness instead. Florinde's insomnia is rooted in the pain of the puncture wound. The pain does not dissipate; the after-effects of the injury are felt into and throughout the following day, with Florinde sensing an alteration in her degree of consciousness. She feels as though she were living in a daydream. In this state she wanders around the garden, her mind clouded and detached, until she comes close to the rose bush where she met with the small accident the day before. Because of her condition she has little control over her motor functions. Her spatial awareness is still skewed, and her perception of distance, altered. When she strays just that little bit too near the bush, she finds herself caught on its spiky thorns, "unable to free herself." When she tries desperately to pull away, she senses "an extraordinary resistance". It takes several attempts until she is able finally to extricate herself, to free her body from the thorny rose bush. As she peels herself away, she thinks she hears a sound, rather like a human sigh, issuing from somewhere deep amongst the verdant leaves.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Bruno Bettelheim. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

<sup>370</sup> Catherine Bernard, "Prince Rosebush," in *Enchanted Eloquence: Fairy Tales by Seventeenth-Century French Women Writers*. Ed. and transl. by Lewis C. Seifert and Donna C. Stanton. Toronto, Ontario: Iter/The Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010. 51-60.

<sup>371</sup> Looking forward, this moment can be compared to the unlucky princes caught upon the wall of thorns in "Dörnroschen" ("Briar Rose"), the "Sleeping Beauty" story written by the Grimms: "from time to time, several kings' sons came, and tried to break through the thicket into the palace. This, however, none of them could ever do; for the thorns and bushes laid hold of them, as it were with hands; and there they stuck fast, and died



What does Bernard's narrative teach, or caution, about female sexual development? Thinking back to Perrault's tale and to the century of sleep, the sense that this process of maturation takes time—a very long time indeed—is present. But in Bernard's story the time required for development is drastically reduced, cut down to a single night. The day after her first painful encounter with the rose bush Florinde appears sexually aware and mature. Her capacity for desire and her ability to pursue it through to sexual enactment is revealed when, her "ambivalent resistance" broken down, she opens up to the "rose bush," actually a transfigured prince, and in so doing frees him from the enchantment.



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wretchedly." <http://www.authorama.com/grimms-fairy-tales-7.html>. See also "Briar Rose" in *The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. Transl. by Mrs. Edgar Lucas. Illustrated by Arthur Rackham. London: The Folio Society, 1996. 31-35: "[f]rom time to time Princes came and tried to force a way through the hedge into the castle. They found it impossible, / for the thorns held them fast in their prickly grasp, and the Princes were caught up in them and were unable to free themselves, so they died a miserable death." 33-34.

**v. Pricking Sleeping Beauty:  
A Critical Commentary on “La belle au bois dormant”**

“La belle au bois dormant” opens with a lack, an absence, and the long drawn-out period of expectant waiting consequent upon this absence. What comes before the first identified narrative “nodal point” establishes the thematic framework of the tale, and focuses the reader’s attention upon its most important trope: the female body. The first body presented and encountered by the reader in Perrault’s tale is the body of the queen (soon to be the mother of the sleeping beauty). The queen’s body is a body with potential, an incorporation of futurity: a would-be maternal body, valued according to the fecundity it promises. The feminist critic Elisabeth Bronfen describes the maternal body as a symbol for all that is dangerous and forbidden: a vessel in which untold horrors and destabilising forces dwell.<sup>372</sup> The potentially maternal body poses no less of a threat; indeed, if anything, its liminal status imbues it with an even greater degree of alterity. Whereas the maternal body is a known or knowable danger, the not-yet-maternal body is an unknown and, until pregnant, an unknowable entity.

Given that Perrault’s narrative, like many fairy tales, is anchored in “a teleology of royal succession, investment and consolidation,” there are certain expectations of the queen, and of her body in particular: to be fertile, to become pregnant, and to give birth to a healthy child—preferably, considering the laws of primogeniture still in place in many European nations, a son and heir. The queen, in other words, is defined by and valued on the basis of her bodily physiognomic, reproductive capacities. It is her duty to give birth to the future king (or, in the absence of a son, the future queen). Yet the unfortunate queen in the fairy tale seems incapable of becoming pregnant. This is a problem not only because it threatens to break the royal line of succession, but also, in terms of narrative development, it prevents the story of “The Sleeping Beauty” from beginning. The infertile body of the old queen, in other words, presents a potential causal crisis.<sup>373</sup> (Sleeping beauty has to be born in order to be christened, gifted, cursed, and put to sleep.)

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<sup>372</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen. *Over Her Dead Body. Death, femininity and the aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992. 35.

<sup>373</sup> This barren queen has a kind of doppelgänger, or double, in the tale: the mother-in-law whose rapacious and unnatural appetites lead her to (want to) desire another mother’s offspring, to ingest the products of another maternal body.

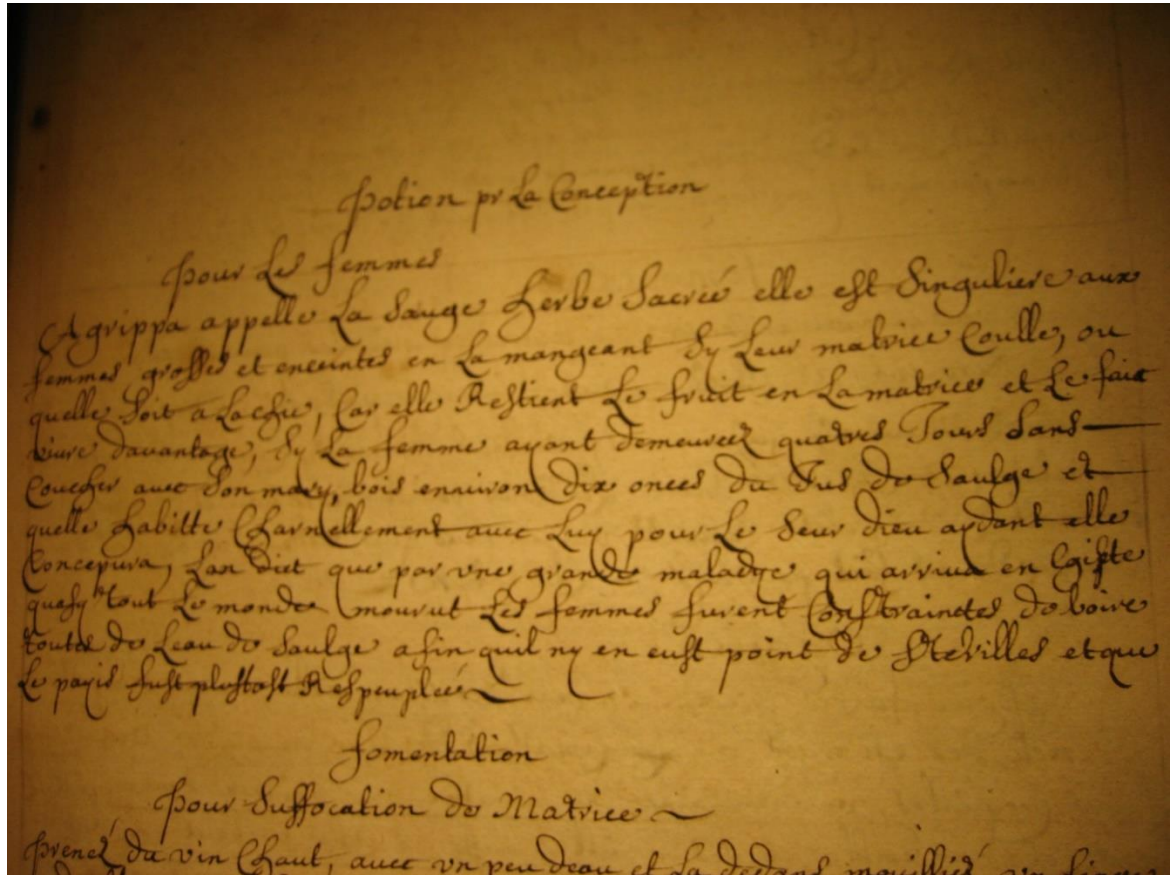


Figure 3.7. Jean Medard Le Gay. 'Potion pour la conception,' *La Fleur des Receptes Medicinales* [1674]. Paris. Western MS 3228. Wellcome Collection. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

The absent child is the lack, and its wished-for fulfilment the chief concern, bordering on obsession, of both the king and queen. Perrault's narrator describes the worry, anxiety, and annoyance of the sovereigns, outlining how all these feelings increase past the point of surfeit, of saturation, to leave the older couple "si fashés qu'on ne sçauroit dire" (99) ("so vexed that it is impossible to describe"). With no real knowledge of the conditions necessary for conception to occur, or of the factors that might be preventing it from taking place, the queen, accompanied by her husband, pursues a regime of therapeutic bathing: "Ils allèrent à toutes les eaux du monde" (99) (They visited all the baths in the world...).<sup>374</sup> "Taking the waters," as

<sup>374</sup> Louis XIV had lavish bathing rooms installed in the palace at Versailles, complete with an octagonal bathtub. On the advice of his doctors, however, the King mostly abstained from bathing, believing it to be dangerous. At the time, baths were still seen as potential breeding grounds for disease, with water believed to carry the disease

this popular form of self-cure was known, was widespread practice amongst women of all social classes. In a footnote to their commentary on another French fairy tale, Seifert and Stanton note that this form of hydrotherapy was thought particularly beneficial for women struggling to conceive.<sup>375</sup> To what extent was this treatment really effective in “curing” infertility, or for otherwise influencing a woman’s reproductive capacity? In another fairy tale, “The Doe in the Woods,” by D’Aulnoy, where the queen’s problem is not infertility as such, but rather that she has been unable so far to produce a male heir (she is “convinced that the king would love her even more if she gave him a son.”), medicinal bathing produces the desired result and the queen gives birth to a healthy boy. (151) The queen in “La belle au bois dormant,” on the other hand, is not so lucky. She remains childless.

Historically speaking, childlessness was one of the greatest concerns for royal women. Childlessness marred the early years of Anne of Austria (1601-1666), queen consort of Navarre and France. She tried every known therapy and cure, including visiting healing bathing places and making pilgrimages to the churches and shrines of saints and leaving dedications and offerings, but to no avail. It was not until 1638 and Queen Anne was in her late thirties that she was able finally, after several stillbirths and nearly twenty-two years of marriage, to produce an heir. The birth of her son, the future Louis XIV, heralded by the *Gazette de France* as “a marvel when it was least expected,” secured the Bourbon line.<sup>376</sup> Like Anne of Austria, the fictional queen in Perrault’s tale appeals to the heavens when natural remedies fail in the hope that ardent displays of piety and devotion might prove more effective than hygienic interventions. “Voeux, pèlerinages, menües devotions, tout fut mis en oeuvre...”, 99).<sup>377</sup> Still, “rien n’y faisoit” (99). But then, just when it seems that there is nothing that the queen can do to influence the fecundity of her body, to invigorate her body’s child-bearing functions, the

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into the body through the skin. See the website of the Musee Historique Environnement Urbain: <http://www.mheu.org/en/bathing/bathtub-louis-xiv.htm>.

<sup>375</sup> Seifert and Stanton, eds. (2010), 151-188.

<sup>376</sup> Antonia Fraser. *Love and Louis XIV: The Women in the Life of the Sun King*. London: Anchor, 2007. See esp. Madame de Motteville’s declaration: “They saw in the arms of this princess whom they had watched suffer great persecutions with so much staunchness, their child-King, like a gift given by Heaven in answer to their prayers. See also Walker Freer. *The Married Life of Anne of Austria: Queen of France, Mother of Louis XIV*. London: E. Nash, 1912. Oliver Mallick. “Clients and Friends: The Ladies-in-waiting at the Court of Anne of Austria (1615-1666),” in *The Politics of Female Households. Ladies-in-Waiting across Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Nadine N. Akkerman, Birgit Houben, Leiden: Brill, 2013. 231–264.

<sup>377</sup> “They visited all the baths in the world. Vows, pilgrimages, everything was tried...” 688.

wished-for unexpected happens: “Enfin pourtant la Reine devint grosse, et accoucha d’une fille.” (99) (“At length, the queen became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter.” (688).<sup>378</sup>

In Marie-Catherine D’Aulnoy’s “The Great Green Worm,” (“Le Serpentin Vert”) the narrator makes the observation that in most cases, “the power of the fairies set to rights almost everything that nature had spoiled; although sometimes, it must be admitted, this power also spoiled what nature had made perfectly well.”<sup>379</sup> To compensate for the deficiencies of nature means to act in order to counteract, to mitigate or improve, what in its original form is imperfect. The fairies in D’Aulnoy’s tale serve perhaps a function similar to that of the divine; like gods and goddesses, the fairies possess supra-natural agency, power which they can wield to help mere mortals in their times of greatest need. It could be argued, consequently, that belief in fairies came to replace belief in the divine, in a single god, though as Keith Thomas points out, even by the Elizabethan age, “fairy lore was primarily a store of mythology rather than a corpus of living beliefs”.<sup>380</sup> In *The Secret Commonwealth & A Short Treatise of Charms and Spells*, the late-seventeenth-century Scottish minister Robert Kirk argued that the existence of fairy spirits was proof of spiritual orders encountered more often in Christian theology. As Marina Warner explains in her introductory essay to Kirk’s text:

*The Secret Commonwealth* itself has no precursors; as an account of the fairies and their powers, it is uniquely rich and rare. This ‘ Essay off the Nature and actions of the Subterranean (and for the most part) Invisible people, heretofore going under the names of Elves, Faunes, and Fairies, or the life, ... as they are described by those who have the Second Sight... ’ is a unique, ethnographical anthology, whose peculiar interest has sharpened with distance, as the hold of the uncanny has grown, as inquiry into consciousness and altered states has intensified, and as the idiosyncratic mix of memoir, meditation, and dreamwork

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<sup>378</sup> This compression, which is also an elision of the female body, can be contrasted with the description of impregnation in another fairy tale. In Giovan Francesco Straparola’s “Biancabella and the Snake,” one of the tales in *Le piacevoli notti* (155-1555), there is the same motif of the childless woman. There, it is a marquise rather than a queen, who lies asleep, unsuspecting, beneath a tree in her garden, when this happens:

a little grass snake crawled to her side and slipped in beneath her clothes without her ever feeling a thing.

Then it entered her vagina and carefully made its way into her womb, where it rested quietly. Shortly thereafter, the marquis’s wife became pregnant, to the great delight and pleasure of everyone in the city.

See “Biancabella and the Snake” in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm*. Ed. and transl. by Jack Zipes. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001. 406-415, 406.

<sup>379</sup> Marie-Catherine D’Aulnoy, “The Great Green Worm,” transl. by A.S. Byatt, in Warner, ed. (2004), 189-230, 189.

<sup>380</sup> Keith Thomas. *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971. 608. Nonetheless, Thomas goes on to point out that belief in fairies was nonetheless “sometimes still accepted literally at a popular level.” 608.

begins to take its place, alongside fiction, as a significant genre in the literature of the imagination.<sup>381</sup>

Kirk was eager to communicate the idea that the borders between fairy belief and certain other contexts of folk belief were often ill-defined, particularly when it came to “matters as spells and enchantment, divination and prophecy, and the inimical powers of witches, ghosts and other supernatural creatures...”<sup>382</sup> Indeed, the minister believed that belief in fairies was in no way incompatible or inconsistent with Christian belief in the orders of the spiritual world of Christianity as these are defined and described in the theological commentaries of the Middle Ages and in the literature based on these writings.<sup>383</sup> A certain degree of critical caution, of incredulity, is needed, however, when reading Kirk’s decidedly unique tract, as Marina Warner warns, describing how the text, “phrase after phrase...hangs between metaphor and reality with irresolvable and often sinister ambiguity.”<sup>384</sup> Moreover, the fairy cosmology that Kirk describes is tinged with mystical Neo-Platonic beliefs, garnered from the philosophies of the Cambridge Platonists such as Henry More, a staunch defender of “a transcendental vision of a higher, spiritual universe”.<sup>385</sup>

The question of superstitions, of belief in fairies, in sorcery and the like, runs through as an undercurrent to Perrault’s tales, and indeed can be found also in his other writings. As Gélinas explains: “Le merveilleux féérique aurait ainsi servi de succédané au merveilleux antique, puisque le merveilleux chrétien ne pouvait pas bien remplir cette fonction.” Gélinas suggests that Perrault was less modern than some of his contemporaries when it came to the question of sorcery. Pointing to Perrault’s *Pensées chrétiennes*, the critic writes: “Il y a beaucoup de choses très variées dont on doute souvent, parce que les faits qu’on rapporte les

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<sup>381</sup> Marina Warner, ed. Introduction to Robert Kirk. *The Secret Commonwealth: Of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies*. New York: Penguin/Random House, 2006. 6.

<sup>382</sup> Robert Kirk. *The Secret Common-Wealth & A Short Treatise of Charms and Spells*. Ed. with and Introduction by Stewart Sanderson. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976. 32-33. “Kirk seems inclined towards the belief that fairies are ‘of a middle nature betwixt man and Angel’ and are, as other folklore sources suggest, the angels cast out of heaven at the fall.” 37

<sup>383</sup> “Kirk argued that belief in fairies was not inconsistent with Christian belief, for it accorded with belief in the orders of the spiritual world of Christianity as they are described in medieval theological commentaries and their descendants....The main suggestions put forward to account for belief in fairies may be placed in two categories: first, those that seek a natural explanation for the activities of the fairies, and secondly, those that accept the irrational and supernatural basis of fairy belief and seek to explain it in these terms. In the former category are the theories: 1) that the fairies were a folk-memory of a race of short-statured people lurking in underground dwellings; 2) that the fairies were human beings playing their role in the surviving rituals of pre-Christian religion. The second category accounts for the fairies as: 1) the discarded gods and heroes of pagan religions; 2) nature spirits; 3) the dead.” Warner, ed. (2006), 39-41

<sup>384</sup> Warner, ed. (2006), 8.

<sup>385</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

prouver sont faux, et cela est injuste. Cela se voit particulièrement sur le fait des sorciers, des apparitions, des miracles et des possédés.”<sup>386</sup>

Fairy magic is mostly beneficial and benevolent; usually a fairy’s goodwill increases or improves mortal virtues, riches, blessings and aesthetics. For instance, in “The Fairies,” another tale written by Perrault, fairy magic brings great riches to the kindhearted youngest daughter when the selfless maiden takes pity on “poor woman” (the fairy in disguise) and gives her a drink. The result is contained in the fairy’s promise to the girl: “at every word you speak, from your mouth a flower will come, or else a precious stone.”<sup>387</sup> The gifts, the “perfections” bestowed upon the infant princess in “La belle au bois dormant,” might be considered compensatory tokens; in combination these gifts ensure that the heroine has all that she might ever need in order to grow up to be a paragon of beauty, in order to become the true embodiment of the female virtues most highly prized, most dearly valued, at the time.<sup>388</sup>

Yet fairies are not always and universally benevolent. Like goddesses (thinking back to Themis and her role in “L’histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine), when they feel they have been slighted, dishonoured or mistreated, fairies too can take offence, and react accordingly, effecting dark and wicked aims. “La belle au bois dormant” memorably features one of these more malevolent fairy types. She is the eighth fairy, the oldest in the kingdom, so old in fact and so rarely seen (the last sighting being half a century ago) that she had been presumed dead or perhaps, under a spell, enchanted. Having taken umbrage at the king forgetting to invite her this evil fairy does what she can to “spoil what nature had done its best to make perfect.”<sup>389</sup> Her “gift” to the princess is “terrible”— a curse, rather than a gift: the curse of a sudden and no doubt early death. After all but one of the good fairies have given their gifts, the old fairy stands up and to the horror of all those gathered at the feast, proclaims: “la Princesse se perceroit la main d’un suseau, et qu’elle en mourroit.” (101) (that “the princess shall pierce her hand with a spindle and die of the wound.” (689)

Luckily, the youngest of the good fairies, suspecting the evil that her elder had in mind, had taken care to hide behind a canopy, and thereby to postpone her turn. So it is that after the wicked fairy announces the mortal fate that awaits the princess, this youngest one emerges,

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<sup>386</sup> Gérard Gélinas. *Enquête sur les contes de Perrault*. Paris: Imago, 2004. 66.

<sup>387</sup> “The Fairies,” in Perrault, transl. by Betts (2009), 127-129. 127.

<sup>388</sup> The exact gifts vary between the story’s different versions, suggesting that the precise nature of the “perfections” is less important than what they present: an impression of the given culture’s aesthetic and moral expectations of women. In Perrault’s story the fairy gifts include grace, beauty, a sweet singing-voice, and a musical inclination.

<sup>389</sup> D’Aulnoy, transl. by Byatt, in Warner, ed. (2004). 189.

and using what power she has, she mitigates the fatal impact. She does not have enough magic to render the curse obsolete, but she is able to alleviate its effects.<sup>390</sup>

La princesse se percera la main d'un suseau; mais au lieu d'en mourir,  
elle tombera seulement dans un profond sommeil qui durera cent ans,  
au bout desquels le fils d'un Roi viendra la réveiller.

102

The princess will pierce her hand with a spindle. But instead of dying,  
she'll only fall into a deep slumber that will last one hundred years. At  
the end of that time, a king's son will come to wake her.

689

Within the broader ideological context this deep sleep might otherwise be understood in relation to the distinction in many seventeenth and eighteenth century French (and other European) medical treatises, between “natural” sleep and “sleep contrary to nature”. One good example is Gilles de La Tourette’s *Hygiène moderne* (1787).<sup>391</sup> An image of the relevant chapter from this treatise is shown below, alongside two subsequent images detailing “natural” and “unnatural” sleep.

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<sup>390</sup> Bettelheim points out that whilst good fairies’ gifts are different in every version of the tale, the evil fairy’s curse remains the same. See Bettelheim (1976).

<sup>391</sup> Gilles de la Tourette. *Hygiène moderne*. 1787. MS 8571. Wellcome Collection.



Chapitre VI<sup>e</sup> Sommeil  
<sup>car on</sup> observe ~~que~~ que leurs nerfs sont  
 ceux des adultes; et cette grosseur  
 et de leur mollesse, leurs fibres étant <sup>comme nous le</sup>  
~~les~~ <sup>les</sup> autres. Et voilà aussi la rai- <sup>dirons dans l'un</sup>  
<sup>on</sup> permette aux enfans un plus <sup>des N<sup>os</sup> Suivants.</sup>  
 qu'aux autres ages <sup>comme nous</sup>  
~~de de la durée du Sommeil.~~  
~~car les causes du Sommeil na-~~  
~~nt de décrire ses effets propres.~~  
~~us à réparer le délabrement des for-~~  
~~mes de notre Corps et de notre~~  
~~procure bien d'autres avantages.~~  
~~et abondante transpiration de~~

A  
 Le Sommeil  
 naturel

Figure 3.8. Gilles de la Tourette. Marginal note about 'Le sommeil naturel,' *Hygiène Moderne*. 1787. Paris. MS 8571. Wellcome Collection. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

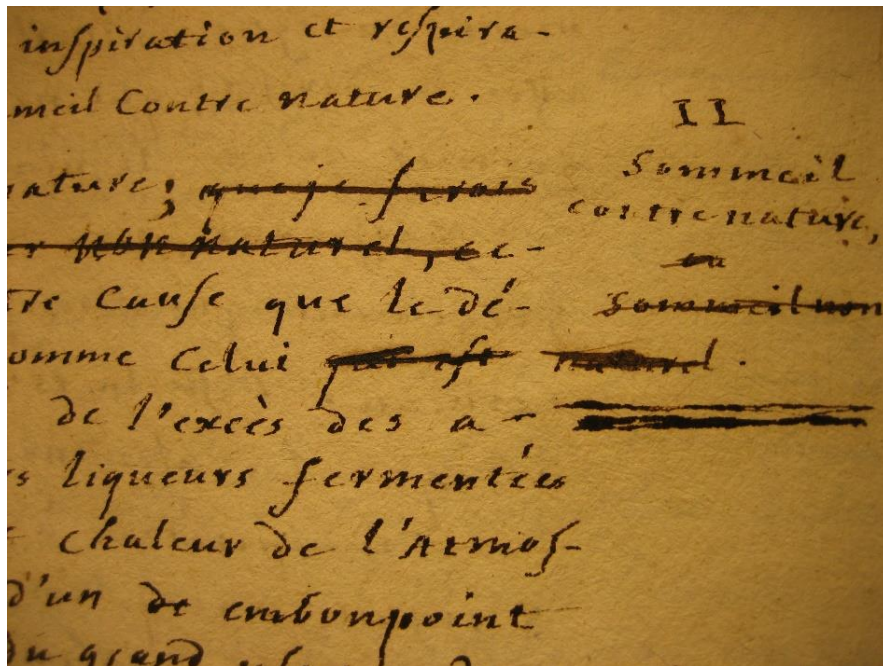


Figure 3.9. Gilles de la Tourette. Marginal note about ‘Sommeil contre nature,’ *Hygiène Moderne*. 1787. Paris. 75. MS 8571.

Wellcome Collection.

Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

Magic and enchantment are behind the unnaturally deep sleep of Perrault’s princess. In reality, however, where there are no fairies, other explanations are needed to account for sleep that runs counter to the normative pattern. On the subject of “sommeil contre nature” de La Tourette writes of “celui qui est produit par toute autre cause que de fléaux de fluide nerveux,” (that which is produced by a different cause altogether than the flow of nervous fluid) and lists several possible contributing factors. These include the excessive consumption of food or drink; very hot temperatures; very cold temperatures; the use of narcotic drugs; and “des grandes passions,” or excessive emotional excitation.<sup>392</sup>

In the mistaken and too-hopeful belief that he might in some way prevent the fated “misfortune” from occurring, the king, the sleeping beauty’s father, leaps into action. To keep his daughter safe from harm the monarch bans the use of spindles and all like instruments, and

<sup>392</sup> La Tourette. *Hygiène Moderne*. 76.

decrees that anyone in his kingdom found in possession of such an object should be put to death. These efforts to prevent disaster and avert a daughter's fate, although well-meaning, cannot undo what the fairies willed; against enchantment, against fairy magic (fairy "gifts") man is powerless. In Perrault's tale this moral limitation becomes clear at the second narrative nodal point: when what was fated comes to be fulfilled.

One day, after "Fifteen or sixteen years went by," the now-adolescent princess comes upon a small attic room somewhere deep inside the palace.<sup>393</sup> In the room she finds an old woman engaged in what to her seems to her a novel task; the girl has never before seen anything quite like it, and she is overcome with curiosity. Those familiar with Perrault's "Bluebeard" will know that female curiosity rarely, if ever, bodes well; giving into it tends to bring with it rather nasty consequences. The curiosity of the unfortunate wife of the bloodthirsty lord "avec le barbe bleu," the curiosity which impels her to "leave her guests" and go "down by a little secret staircase at the back...in such a hurry that two or three times she nearly broke her neck," is what leads her to the fateful discovery of the chamber of horrors and consequently, to very nearly becoming her husband's next victim.<sup>394</sup>

Whilst the young princess' curiosity does not lead to such almost-bloody-consequences, it does have instant and dramatic results. The girl asks the old woman—perhaps the wicked, slighted fairy in disguise?—if she might try her hand at using the spindle and distaff.<sup>395</sup> The old woman agrees. "Elle n'eut pas plutot pris le suseau, que comme elle estoit fort vive, un peu estourdie, & que d'ailleurs l'Arrest des Fées l'ordonnoit ainsi, elle s'en perça la main, & tomba évanouie." (103). ("No sooner had she grasped the spindle than she pricked her hand with the point and fainted for she had been hasty, a little thoughtless, and moreover, the sentence of the fairies had ordained it to be that way." 690). Note how Perrault's linguistic style, his ironic, gently mocking tone, renders the princess partially culpable in her own undoing, in bringing about her own near-demise. Her near-demise is presented as the direct consequence of her being "fort vive, un peu estourdie" (very lively, a little careless). The fact that the fairies had anything to do with what happens is deferred until the final clause, added

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<sup>393</sup> "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" 83-98. 84. Charles Perrault. *The Complete Fairy Tales*. Transl. with an Introduction and Notes by Christopher Betts. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>394</sup> "Bluebeard" 104-114. 107-108. In Charles Perrault. *The Complete Fairy Tales*. Transl. with an Introduction and Notes by Christopher Betts. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>395</sup> The old woman in Perrault's story, like the one in Basile's earlier variant, might also be interpreted as representing Fate.

to the sentence almost as a kind of afterthought: “& que d’ailleurs l’Arrest des Fées l’ordonnoit ainsi” (and in any case, the fairies had ordained it).

The gendered implications of the spindle are clear, as are its symbolic phallic associations. When utilised for spinning, as it invariably is, this instrument signifies the domestic domain with specific reference to women’s work, to female productivity and production. Yet the spindle might be seen to have a different symbolic valence, too. In the particular narrative context of Perrault’s text the spindle, usually a domestic tool, is re-envisioned as a kind of medical instrument; it is like a needle, the function of which is to puncture and to penetrate the skin, the epidermis, and thereby, through a prick, to create an aperture: an entry-way and an exit-wound into and out of the body. Often there is blood when the skin is pricked; the puncture to the outer layer of the body makes its inner vital fluid leak. Blood from a small wound or prick leaks *out*, but it also carries things *in*. In this capacity blood functions as a fluid transport system, a vehicle through which elements external to the body can be infused in. The significance to the story of the “Sleeping Beauty” of this concept, of haematological transmission inwards, becomes apparent if we think in terms of seventeenth-century disease theory, and of iatrochemical explanations of pathogenesis (the development of a disease or morbid condition; the chain of events leading to the onset). Iatrochemists explained illness as the consequence of chemical disturbance and imbalance in the organism, precipitated by certain chemical changes in the bloodstream.

According to iatrochemical interpretation, disease was a poison, a “malignant serum” carried into the body through the blood: an apt image for thinking about what happens to the princess’s body in the tale from the moment that she pricks her finger.<sup>396</sup> Whilst it is not stated explicitly by Perrault’s narrator that the spindle prick drew blood, on the basis of the likely outcome of a surface puncture to the skin, it could in fact be conjectured that it did. That the finger of the princess in “La belle au bois dormant” is almost certain to have bled at least a little from the “accident” which marked the onset of her century-long unconsciousness is a hypothesis supported also by what happens when another beautiful young girl comparable to Perrault’s heroine pricks her finger. In “La bonne Femme” (“The Good Woman”), a tale written by Charlotte-Rose Caumont de La Force, the beautiful Lirette is the one who suffers the consequences of a too-tactile curiosity. It is because of the girl’s “desire to open a bud and

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<sup>396</sup> L.W.B. Brockliss, “The medico-religious universe of an early eighteenth-century Parisian doctor: the case of Philippe Hecquet” in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Ed. by Roger French and Andrew Wear. 191-221, 197.

find [the] heart” of the rose bush she admires and waters each day that she pricks her finger on one of the thorns, and bleeds. In this text it is clear that the girl does bleed, even though the injury to her finger is minor. It is clear in the aftermath of the accident, with the narrator describing how Lirette’s brother, Finfin, tries to stem the flow and heal the wound, by squeezing the blood out of her finger, squeezing juice from a rose leaf onto the wound, and wrapping the punctured digit in the same leaf, on the basis that “the remedy may be found in the same thing that has caused the evil.” (105).

The similarity between the two narrative situations must be emphasised: the comparison between what happens in “The Good Woman” when the heroine pricks her finger, with what happens when the beauty in Perrault’s story does the same; there is a sense in which one story functions as a kind of template or a blueprint for the other. At the same time it is important not to overlook this significant difference: Lirette in “The Good Woman” does not lose consciousness when she pricks her finger; instead, she remains fully sentient, alive and well. In contrast, there is Perrault’s princess, whose consciousness is revoked and her life temporarily suspended in enchanted sleep, for an extended but finite period of time, on the back of the single spindle prick. This second and more dramatic outcome realises what one critic describes as a potentiality: “the magical possibility of suspended time.” To this can be added that what Perrault’s heroine’s loss of consciousness realises also and at the same time is the possibility of *suspended life*: in other words, the possibility that by being suspended, magically, through enchantment, a life might be saved and a future preserved.<sup>397</sup>

When the heroine collapses, people from every corner of the palace rush to her side. The collective actions of these first responders demonstrate a blind belief in the power of human knowledge, specifically in the power of popular medicine, to cure and to revive. On the basis that cold and wet might shock her back to life, they throw water on the princess’ face; to remove any material stricture which might incapacitate respiration they unlace her stays and thereby facilitate her breathing; to activate the pulse, that telling sign of vital functions, they slap her wrists; and finally, they rub her temples with Queen of Hungary’s water, a remedy used widely at the time to which were attributed diverse properties.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> “The magical power of the fairies, in particular, lies in their ability to master time.” Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (2010), 137.

<sup>398</sup> One method that is not mentioned in the narrative description of the attempted revival of the unconscious princess is cure by aromatic herbal unguents; given its success rate in another fairy tale, it might have helped in Perrault’s. In D’Aulnoy’s “The Bee and the Orange” the resourceful Princess Aimée, who “always carried certain herbs with her” with “an odour...so powerful that they could revive anyone from the longest fainting fit” revives a man who washes up on the seashore “without any signs of life” by pressing the sweet-smelling herbs between

Two modes of resuscitation from those listed will be examined and discussed, in greater detail, in the context of culturally prevalent medical theories—which in turn might help explain their use in Perrault’s narrative. The first revitalising therapy to contextualise and discuss in more detail is slapping the wrists. It has been mentioned in passing that the pulse was considered to be a sure sign of life, of the body’s vital functioning. It was something that could be felt and measured. Most often the wrist was the site of this tactile quantification. It could be argued that slapping the wrists with the intention of achieving bodily rejuvenation was developed on the basis of William Harvey’s findings, which, having been published in Latin, were well-known in French academic and professional circles. The pioneering studies of this seventeenth-century English physician, studies on the animal and the human heart, led him to describe the circulation of the blood in *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus* (*An Anatomical Exercise on the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Living Beings*).

Harvey concluded that:

the blood passes through the lungs and heart by the force of the ventricles, and is driven thence and sent forth to all parts of the body. . . . It is therefore necessary to conclude that the blood in the animals is impelled in a circle, and is in a state of ceaseless movement; that this is the act or function of the heart, which it performs by means of its pulse; and that it is the sole and only end of the movement and pulse of the heart.<sup>399</sup>

In Harvey’s sketch of the pulmonary system, the heart is the pump and the pulse the main indicator of the heart’s activity: the sign that the heart is indeed working. The presence of a pulse means that the heart is pumping; each pump of blood from this vital organ results in a pulse. The absence of a pulse is an indication that the heart has ceased to function. A weak pulse indicates a weak heart, which in turn suggests some degree of pathology, some weakening, within the system. A weak pulse is amongst the most common symptoms listed for a swoon.<sup>400</sup> On the basis of this interrelation it is not illogical to think that if one is not working

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her hands and rubbing them on the drowned man’s lips and temples. See Marie-Catherine D’Aulnoy, “The Bee and the Orange Tree,” in Zipes, transl. (1989) 417-437. For a short and useful overview of aromatics, see Dan Mackenzie. *Aromatics and the soul; a study of smells*. London, W. Heinemann, 1923, esp. Chapter V, “Smell in folk-lore religion and history,” 66-78. See also James Sturzaker. *Aromatics in Ritual and Therapeutics*. London: Metatron Publications, 1979.

<sup>399</sup> Cited by Charles Joseph Singer in *A Short History of Anatomy from the Greeks to Harvey*. New York: Dover Publications, 1957. 182.

<sup>400</sup> It is worth noting, too, Harvey’s observations on the ability of the heart to recover from fatigue, which he recorded in relation to watching the heart of a dead pigeon give a few transitory but irrefutable and perceptible pulses.

(if there is no heartbeat, or if there is no pulse), then the (over)activation of the other might effectively reverse this inaction, this lack, and restore the dynamic balance of vital functions. The hope on which this treatment method in the tale is based is that the tactile activation of/on one important body part, on the wrists, will lead to the reactivation and ultimate revival of the whole organism, the entire body.

Turning to the other method: rubbing the temples of the unconscious princess with “l’eau de la reine de Hongrie,” or “Queen of Hungary’s water”. This is one of the many fashionable allusions scattered throughout Perrault’s tales; others include the luxury status-symbol mirrors in “Bluebeard”, “so tall that you could see yourself from head to foot, some with frames of glass, some of silver, and some of silver-gilt, which were the most beautiful and splendid they had ever seen”; and again in “Cinderella, “looking-glasses in which [the sisters] could see themselves from head to foot” and also in that tale, “parquet flooring, beds of the most fashionable design,” a red velvet dress, English lace, a diamond hairpin, beauty spots (small patches of black taffeta, placed on the face to enhance the complexion), and an in-demand hairdresser who meets the sisters’ demands for the most current hairstyle: “double rows of curls”.<sup>401</sup> Queen of Hungary water (or “eau de cologne” as some translators choose to over-simplify the term), was a popular concoction in the period, believed to have both curative and cosmetic benefits. French recipe books from the period are full of instructions for making myriad water- and alcohol-based concoctions. To cite just one example: Cholier’s *Secrets de Médecine et de Beauté* (1660) (Figure 3.10).<sup>402</sup> This weighty tome contains myriad recipes written in many different hands, indicating that the collection most likely was circulated amongst physicians, each of whom would add something of their own to the existent text.

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<sup>401</sup> See Perrault, transl. by Betts (2009): “Bluebeard” 104-114, 106; “Cinderella” 130-141, 130-131.

<sup>402</sup> Cholier. *Cosmetic and medical receipts in French. 1624. Western MS 1624. Wellcome Collection.*



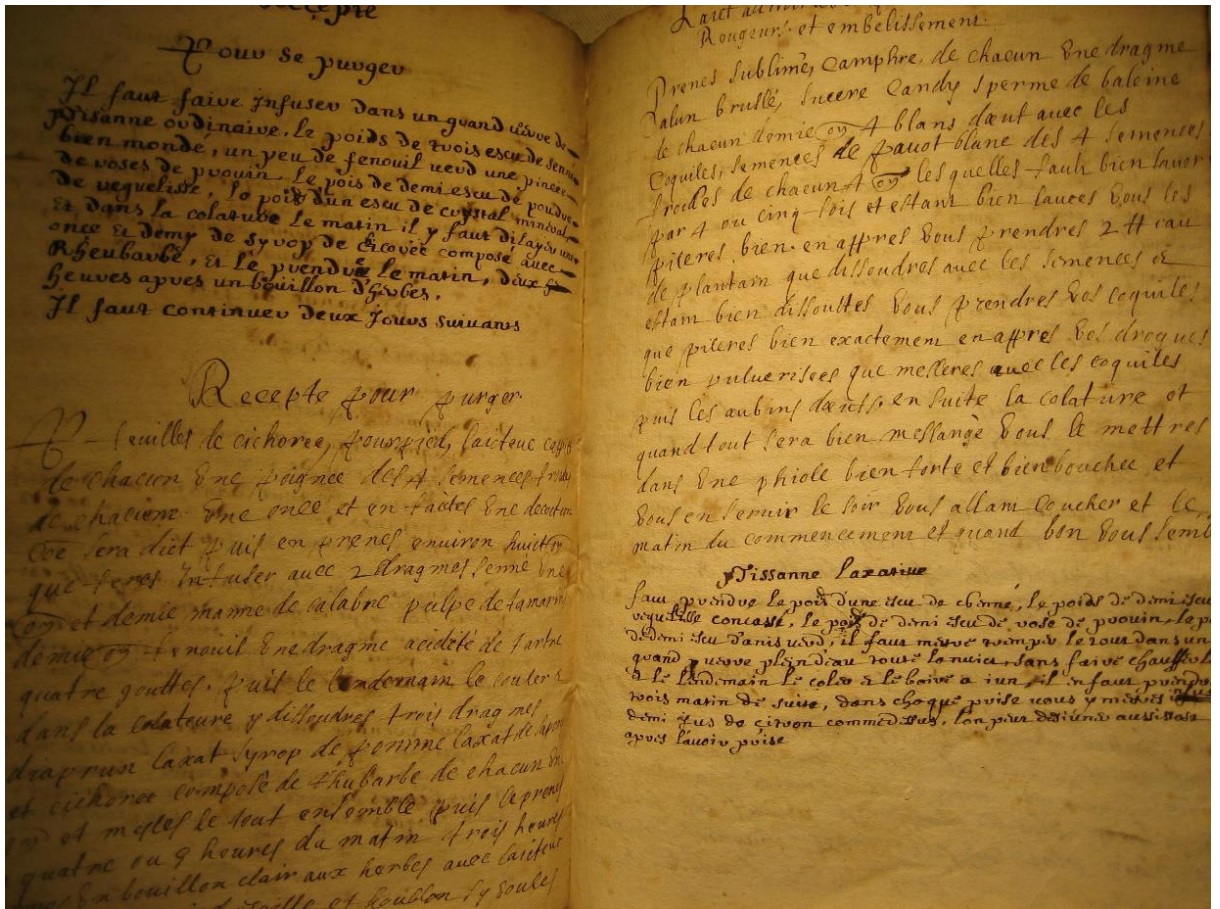


Figure 3.10. Cholier. Pages from *Secrèts de Médecine et de Beauté*. 1660. Western MS 1624. Wellcome Collection. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.



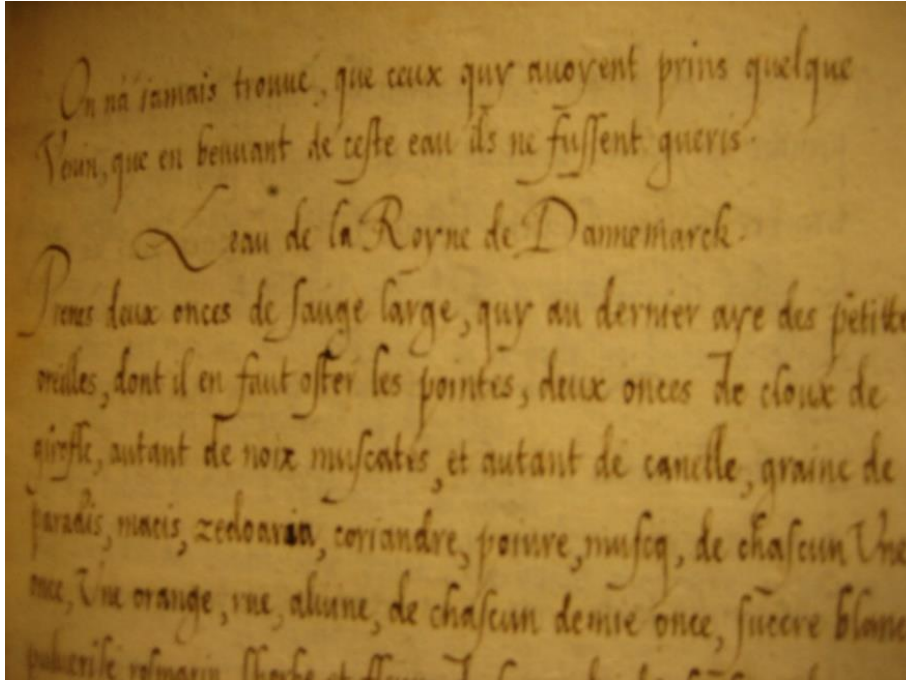


Figure 3.11. ‘L'eau de la Royne de Danemarck,’ *Receipt pour divers maladies*. 109. mid-17th C. Western MS 672. Wellcome Collection. Photograph taken courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

Queen of Hungary’s water, which dates from the fourteenth century, was one of several “waters” boasting royal endorsement; others included ‘L’eau de la Royne de Danemarck’ (Figure 3.11) and “L’eau de la Royne de Romains”.<sup>403</sup>

Thinking back to pneumatology and to the equal weighting given to beauty and breath, to cosmetic and physiological symptoms, it seems only logical to apply this sweet-scented panacea to the temples of the unconscious princess. By introducing such a specific remedy, it

<sup>403</sup> Szabó István. “Apro cikkek” in *Napkelet* (September, 1924). Budapest: Tud. Társ. Sajtóvállalata: [http://epa.oszk.hu/02000/02076/00206/pdf/EPA02076\\_napkelet\\_1924\\_09\\_383-384.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/02000/02076/00206/pdf/EPA02076_napkelet_1924_09_383-384.pdf). Queen of Hungary’s water was the first alcohol-based perfume produced in Europe. Its exact makeup is not known; later recipes call for a mixture of lavender, sage, mint, marjoram, lemon and orange blossom, whilst earlier ones are simpler, mentioning only strong brandy mixed with freshly distilled herbs, usually thyme or rosemary. Early recipes convey a sense of the perfume’s many uses. A multi-purpose remedy, Queen of Hungary Water was sometimes drunk, sometimes applied liberally to the face and skin, and sometimes used in greater quantities to bathe in. It was believed that this fragranced *panacea* was beneficial in the treatment of a broad spectrum of diseases and conditions, including gout and also, more relevant to the discussion of the princess’s condition in Perrault’s tale, a female disease spectrum of nervous disorders, lethargy and fainting.

The perfume most likely got its name from Queen Elisabeth, the fourth wife of King Charles I of Hungary (m. 1320). In the nineteenth-century Hungarian *Polgári Lexikon* (Popular Lexicon, Lexicon of the People) there is an entry citing Queen Elisabeth’s own account of her experience using the remedial perfume at the age of seventy-two to treat her painful gout. She writes of her conviction that had she not tried the water, she would have continued to suffer from “the wretched gout” (“a kínos köszvénybenn fetrengenék”) without a doubt. She describes how quickly she felt the remedy taking effect (“tsakhamar jobbulásomat érzettem”) in all her limbs (“minden tetemeimben”), and of the additional benefit of the water, its beautifying effect: “és mindenek előtt oly szépnék tetszettem, hogy engem a Lengyel Király feleségül kért magának” (and above all else, I looked so beautiful that the King of Poland himself asked for my hand in marriage.”).

could be argued that Perrault is interested in cultivating a reality effect. But in the story, the perfume has no effect; none of the other methods of revival produces any change; and so the girl remains asleep. And yet, in contrast to what happens in Basile's tale in which Talia post-puncture is described as "dead", it is clear in "La belle au bois dormant," that the unnatural state of insentience into which the beauty slips is no more than temporary. This certainty in the French tale is based on what is externally visible and observed:

[S]on évanouissement n'avoit pas osté les couleurs vives de son teint: ses joües estoient incarnates, & ses lèvres comme du corail: elle avoit seulement les yeux fermez, mais on l'entendoit respirer / doucement, ce qui faisoit voire qu'elle n'estoit pas morte.

103-104

The "swoon" that the princess suffers as a consequence of the spindle prick does not rob her of vitality. Swooning does not deprive her of her "rich complexion," of "crimson" cheeks and lips "like coral". And although her eyes might now be closed there is no question that one day they will open; her "gentle breathing" indicates clearly that she is *not* dead.<sup>404</sup> Aesthetic and pneumatological signs, signs of still-vibrant, healthy beauty and of unaffected breath, coalesce in this moment of crisis as evidence to support the hope that the condition into which the princess falls can be reversed. Whilst cosmetic beauty and respiration might seem to us, thinking about things from a modern medical perspective, like factors entirely unrelated to each other, in early Enlightenment thinking the two were linked under the university discipline of "pneumatology". The core concept in pneumatology was that when it came to determining the body's state of health, beauty and breath were of equal importance, both taken as definitive outward signs of inner processes.<sup>405</sup>

On the basis of the belief that this pneumatological interpretation offers, the response of those around the princess to her loss of consciousness might be better understood. (It does not, however, resolve the question of why, in Perrault's story, the princess' condition is not interpreted as the enchanted sleep that it clearly is: why it is handled as a "swoon" instead.)

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<sup>404</sup> Laurence Brockliss, "The Literary Image of the Medecins du Roi in the Literature of the Grande Siècle" in *Medicine at the Courts of Europe, 1500-1837*. Ed. by Vivian Nutton. London: Routledge, 1990. 197.

<sup>405</sup> For example, Christopher Wirsung's *General Practise of Physicke* (1654) included medico-cosmetic "remedies" for eradicating freckles and spots, and for beautifying chapped hands. See Sally Pointer's historical overview in *The Artifice of Beauty: A History and Practical Guide to Perfumes and Cosmetics*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2005.

The princess' sleep seems impenetrable, beyond the reach of remedies based in medicine. It could be argued that these suggested shortcomings of medical knowledge and therapeutic practice reveal the limitations of science and human endeavour relative to the power of a force as strong as fairy magic. On the basis of this inference, there is nothing to be done about the princess's sleep since it was manufactured and ordained beyond the mortal realm, by the fairies. On the other hand, the fact that the revival methods mentioned in Perrault's narrative are all proven ineffective might instead be pointing to an historical fact: that at the time, the medical "profession" was widely held in disrepute, particularly in courtly circles. Throughout the seventeenth century the courts of Europe teemed with "visiting quacks," with charlatans and pretenders who would come from all over, "making wild claims for their cures and often being allowed to try their luck."<sup>406</sup>

Although "La belle au bois dormant" makes no mention of such quasi-medics directly, there is plenty of evidence elsewhere, in other fairy tales contemporaneous with Perrault's, that these soothsayers and faith-healers and medical magicians were part of the fabric of the literary imagination—an indication of their presence also in popular culture and belief. Often in these stories the charlatans appear as objects of sharp ridicule, targets of ill-disguised critique, their narrative presence indicating, perhaps, that the non-specialist patients and patrons whom they tried to sway and trick with their inflated claims of expertise, with stories of the cures they had performed and with their unsubstantiated claims to fame, are well aware of the gap between their words and promises and of what in reality they could medically achieve. In L'Héritier's "The Discreet Princess, or The Adventures of Finette," the narrator mocks these charlatans, "without jobs or talent," pretending to be "endowed by heaven to cure all sorts of maladies" but with knowledge only of the fine art of "bold deceit," by having the heroine adopt the guise of one, and present herself to cure the long-suffering king in the false persona of "Cavalier Sanatio," a physician from a distant land, in possession of "marvellous secrets that cured all sorts of wounds, no matter how dangerous and infected."<sup>407</sup>

In the same story, the ever-resourceful Finessa cross-dresses as a male physician to gain access to the court of Prince Belavoir. In so doing, and particularly in proclaiming her supposed healing talents, Finessa mocks "all the charlatans and mountebanks of Europe".

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<sup>406</sup> Brockliss (1990). Brockliss describes a state of "open competition" where both qualified and entirely untrained "physicians" had access to royal patients. For a useful summary of the royal medical retinue, in the same volume see also Colin Jones, "The Médecins du Roi at the End of the Ancient Regime and in the French Revolution," 209-261.

<sup>407</sup> In Zipes, ed. and transl. (1989), 77-92, 88.

For, at that time...there were in our continent a great many adventurers without portfolio, so to speak, without any precise business or talent, who would announce to any prepared to listen that they had received from heaven the gift of curing every imaginable type of illness and injury. These individuals, whose only diploma was in quackery, always found themselves willing subjects among the ordinary folk....Our ingenious princess, who knew all about such men and their swindles, took for herself a name that nobody in the kingdom had ever heard before, Sanatio. Then she let it be known about town that the Chevalier Sanatio was ready to share all his occult secrets, all his alchemy, with the townsfolk, ready to cure every species of wound, even the most chronic and dangerous.<sup>408</sup>

Unlike Cerimon, the magician-healer who through some kind of learned magic revives the “dead” queen Thaisa in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, those who respond and try to revive Perrault’s princess are ultimately unsuccessful in their attempts. Finally her father, the king, acknowledges the facts before him and realizes the truth of the matter at hand: what looked like and was assumed to be a swoon—a temporary and reversible condition experienced commonly by young ladies—was actually the beginning of the century of enchanted sleep “gifted” to the princess at her christening. On the basis of this (belated) realisation, the king orders that the princess be left to sleep in peace, “until the hour arrived for her waking” (690).<sup>409</sup> To ensure that she sleeps undisturbed and in the luxurious and beautiful surroundings to which she was accustomed in her waking life, he has the princess placed upon a bed of gold and silver in one of the most ornate chambers in the palace.

Having placed their dormant daughter upon the splendid bed in the richly decorated room, what the king and queen do next seems puzzling: “Alors le Roi & la Reine après avoir baisé leur chère enfant sans qu’elle s’éveillast sortirent du Château,” (105) (“the king and queen kissed their dear daughter without waking her and left the castle”, 690). They decide not to stay to watch and wait, choose not to keep a wake by the sleeping beauty’s bed. They have no way of knowing that the same fairy, who reduced the death sentence which the wicked fairy placed upon the princess at the christening feast to a hundred years’ enchanted sleep, will return and extend the enchantment over the palace and all its inhabitants so that the heroine should not find herself alone upon awakening.

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<sup>408</sup> ‘The Subtle Princess’, trans Gilbert Adair, Warner, ed. (2004), 65-98.

<sup>409</sup> Moreover, “There is reason to believe...that the good fairy had procured her the pleasure of very agreeable dreams during her long slumber.” 693.

Whilst the basis of their decision to leave the palace for good at this point might be explained in terms of a joint foreknowledge of the future—their awareness that they will not live for one hundred years more and so, even if they were to stay, they would not be alive to be there when the enchantment ended and the princess woke—it could equally be interpreted in other ways. That the king and queen choose not to stay might be interpreted as a form of child abandonment, a theme commonly found in many fairy tales; or perhaps this departure could be understood to signal the royals' abdication and consequent recognition of the princess' right to succeed them, inherit, and ascend to the throne.

It is during the narrative interim of enchanted time that the changes that Perrault made to the “Sleeping Beauty” story can be seen: in the period precipitated by the sleeping beauty's sudden loss of consciousness, and concluded one hundred years later with her spontaneous revival. Reading Perrault and thinking back to what happens or does not happen to and through the senseless female figure in “L'Histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine” and “Sole, Luna e Talia,” the sleeping beauty narratives discussed in Chapters I and II, the degree to which the unconscious body of the girl in question (be she Perrault's unnamed princess, Basile's Talia, or the beautiful Zellandine) is violated, is striking. This is a question of the degree of corporeal interference and of what interfering with an unresponsive female body might achieve; it is also a question of the amount of individual agency accorded to each heroine by the narrator and by the author of the story in which she appears.

In terms of the body and the body's materiality, that of the French princess seems permeable, stronger, and more robust. This solidity is in contrast to Talia's and to Zellandine's leakiness, a permeability evidenced by their bodies being subjected to not one but to two penetrations, first from the flax, then during rape, in contrast to the single spindle prick that Perrault's beauty suffers. This reticence to exploit the permeability of the female body suggests a desire on the writer's part to keep the figure of his heroine aesthetically perfected: solid and self-contained, not liable to leak or bleed or otherwise transgress its corporeal limitations.<sup>410</sup>

Another significant difference between Perrault's *conte* and the two earlier versions of “The Sleeping Beauty” can be found in the details surrounding the birth of the heroine's children: in the delivery's timing, its details, and its implications. The girl in Perrault's story

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<sup>410</sup> See Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Emile Durkheim. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, esp. concept of “sacred contagion,” the belief that spiritual properties within an object, place, or person may be passed to another object, place, or person, usually by direct contact or physical proximity.

becomes pregnant and gives birth only after she is awake; the two earlier beauties are still unconscious when their bellies swell, and when their children are delivered. In fact, Zellandine and Talia revive only after their infants extract the flax that caused them to lose consciousness; this suckling of the baby on the mother's finger spells the final opening up of these more penetrable female forms. In effect this means that both in "L'histoire de Troylus et de la belle Zellandine" and in Basile's story, rape is prerequisite to recovery: before revival, there must first be a violation. Contrast this with Perrault's version, where the decision to give herself, to open up her body to and for a man, is given to the heroine in "La belle au bois dormant" the princess is fully conscious—that is, in full possession of both her mind and body—when she first "meets" the prince, meaning that she is aware of what she is doing when she agrees to see him again (and again). By having the revival of the heroine precede her more intimate involvement with the hero Perrault effectively splits the narrative in two: part I, the unconscious girl; part II: the romance between the now-conscious princess and the prince. In the extended/added post-revival section, issues of female rivalry, of jealousy, of matrimony and inheritance, come to the fore.<sup>411</sup>

It has been argued that this, the "second half" of "La belle au bois dormant," is essential in setting the overall tone and establishing the context of the collection of fairy tales in which it appeared. Post-revival the "drama of royal succession" is shifted to a new setting, to another court, where the princess is threatened not by a malevolent fairy but by an ogress: the mother of her handsome husband.<sup>412</sup> This is not to suggest that what happens in the temporal gap of one hundred years between the two halves of the story is not important. Perrault's narrative of what goes on beyond the enchanted palace walls as the princess sleeps, and his description of her "rescue," contain many moments of significance worth discussing, by way of conclusion to this chapter.



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<sup>411</sup> It is worth pointing out that in most "modern" tellings of Perrault's version of the tale, the post-revival section is omitted: The princess wakes when the prince arrives, and they live happily ever after.

<sup>412</sup> Philip Lewis. *Seeing through the Mother Goose Tales. Visual Turns in the Writings of Charles Perrault*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996. 28.

## vi. Conclusion: From waiting to waking

A great thorny wall of roses grows around the palace in which the sleeping beauty lies. Soon the palace is barely visible, hidden behind the briars and the trees. A story about a beautiful enchanted sleeping princess in a castle in the woods begins to circulate. An old man, who first heard the legend from his father more than fifty years ago, narrates : “qu’il y avoit dans ce Château une Princesse, la plus belle du monde; qu’elle y devoit dormir cent ans, & qu’elle seroit réveillée par le fils d’un Roy à qui elle estoit réservée.” (107).<sup>413</sup> Countless young nobles and knights who hear about the sleeping beauty determine to be the ones to rescue and to wake her, but those who set out before the expiration of one-hundred year enchantment fail, inevitably, although they all share the belief that the one successful prince has: that they are the ones “destined to accomplish this wonderful adventure.” (691).

Although the prince in question is “destined” to achieve his desired end and save the sleeping maiden because he arrives just as the one-hundred year enchantment ends, the narrative sustains the possibility of his failure. This sense of difficulty and impending potential disaster is conveyed in the tale through the description of the many obstacles that the prince is given to contend with. First, there is the wall of thorns. The prince hesitates, uncertain about how he could possibly go on, but as if by magic the thorny rose bushes disentangle themselves and a clear path to the palace opens up. Next, the atmosphere inside the palace is a test of the prince’s bravery and strength of mind. To this onlooker the sleeping palace bears the stamp of death, as though the prince were the only one, the only thing, still living. A cold terror, a fear sufficient to “freeze his blood” (691) grips him: “tout ce qu’il vit d’abord estoit capable de le glacer de criante.” (108). With this second challenge overcome, the prince faces one final test, this one designed to try his emotional resilience and libidinal control by placing him in close physical and visual proximity to the beautiful sleeping maiden, a sight so splendid that it has the capacity to produce in the viewer what Max Lüthi has described as “*Schönheitsschock*,” translated as “the shock effect of beauty.”<sup>414</sup> “The fairytale describes not beauty but its effect, and in accord with its characteristic inclination to the extreme, represents this effect as a sort

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<sup>413</sup> “that in this castle there was a princess, the most beautiful princess in the world; that she had to sleep there for one hundred years; and that she would be awoken by the son of a king for whom she had been destined.”

<sup>414</sup> Often “it is the picture of a beautiful maiden who is unknown and far away which produces the shock effect. It can also be a statue or a dream vision. The painting or drawing occurs most frequently, however; it best corresponds to the stylistic demands of the European fairytale.” Lüthi (1984), 9.

of magic,” Lüthi writes, before stating clearly that “*Schönheitsschock* is characteristic of the fairytale.”<sup>415</sup> What characterises beauty in the fairy tale is that as a quality, although it might include elements of terror and danger, beauty on the whole remains something altogether “positive”; indeed, it is nothing less than “visible perfection”.<sup>416</sup> In terms of what beauty in the fairy tale is for, in terms of its functionality, the critic is insistent that besides its aesthetic shaping force beauty also acts as a moving force, an “instigator of action”.<sup>417</sup> Key to understanding the effects of the beautiful sleeping maiden in Perrault’s fairy tales is Lüthi’s further contention, that:

The effect of the beautiful is expressed most sharply where it produces a shock, where it strikes the onlooker dumb or paralyzes him, where it knocks him unconscious or even brings him near death’s door.<sup>418</sup>

The prince in Perrault’s tale is not paralysed, but the bodily effects of what he sees before him are obvious as he stands beside the sleeping beauty’s bed, “en tremblant” (109), or “trembling”.<sup>419</sup>

il vit sur un lit, don’t les rideaux estoient ouverts de tous côtez, le plus beau spectacle qu’il eust jamais eu: Une princesse qui paroissoit avoir quinze ou seize ans, & don’t l’eclat resplendissant avoit quelque chose de lumineux & de divin.

108-109

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<sup>415</sup> Max Lüthi. *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*. Translated by Jon Erickson. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984. 3, 7.

<sup>416</sup> Lüthi (1984), 13.

<sup>417</sup> “The beauty of the fairytale is a perfect one, one conceived to be perfect and thus one that is absolute...It is absolute in two senses: of highest validity, highest value, an extreme, a superlative, and to his degree incomparable, independent—but independent also in the sense of being set apart, of absolutum. Even though the beautiful, like almost every other important element in the fairytale, is also a plot factor, a carrier of function, it still shines forth out of the whole...”In *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>418</sup> Lüthi (1984), 23.

<sup>419</sup> The supposed shock of the beautiful (of the feminine beautiful) in Perrault’s narrative is more like a pleasant enthrallment, relative to the acute shock which some other fairy tales recount. In Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, comtesse de Murat’s “Little Eel,” the Prince of the Peaceful Island is struck by the beauty of the princess Hebe with such force that it leaves him “stunned”. In Seifert and Stanton, eds. (2010), 236-269, 243-44. In D’Aulnoy’s “The Island of Happiness,” when Prince Adolph (hidden underneath a magical cloak of invisibility) beholds the radiant Princess Felicity in all her glittering beauty is rooted to the spot, “like a man entranced. He could hardly stand the princess’s explosive beauty”. In Zipes, transl. (1989), 299-308. “She sat on a throne made of a single carbuncle more radiant than the sun, but the eyes of Princess Felicity far outshone the carbuncle. Her beauty was so perfect that she seemed a daughter of the heavens....She was dressed more in a gallant than a magnificent fashion: her blond hair was decorated / with flowers and a scarf, and her robe was made of gauze mixed with gold.” 304-5.



Upon a bed, around which the curtains were drawn open on every side, he saw the most beautiful sight that he had ever seen: a princess who appeared to be fifteen or sixteen years old, from whom a radiant luminescence shone.

The girl he sees is like a precious jewel, asleep on a canopied bed in the centre of an ornamented room. The curtains on the bed are drawn open, so that its beautiful occupant, a girl “who seemed to be about fifteen or sixteen,” might easily be seen.(691) The prince gazes with longing at this “luminous” almost “supernatural” creature and as he gazes he kneels down, to get a closer look. There is no kiss; the kiss back to life is a later addition, introduced by the Brothers Grimm in their version of the story, “Dornröschen” (“Briar Rose”) (1812) and later filtered into the popular imagination through Disney’s cinematic musical version, released in 1959.<sup>420</sup> Instead, in Perrault’s tale, the one-hundred year enchantment ends at this very moment, and the princess awakes. Looking lovingly at the handsome young man before her, she asks, “‘Is it you, my prince?’” she asks. “‘You have been long awaited.’” (691).<sup>421</sup>



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<sup>420</sup> “At last he reached the tower and opened the door into the little room where Briar Rose was asleep. There she lay, looking so beautiful that he could not take his eyes off her. He bent down and gave her a kiss, and as he touched her, Briar Rose opened her eyes and looked lovingly at him.” In Lucas, transl. (1996). “Briar Rose,” 31-35, 35.

<sup>421</sup> Perrault’s version of the sleeping beauty story in particular “stresses the importance of the princess’ waiting” and casts this waiting within a moral frame. See Sunje Redies, “Return with New Complexities: Robert Coover’s ‘Briar Rose’” in *Marvels & Tales*, Volume 18, Number 1 (2004) 9-27, 12. Published by Wayne State University Press.



**Conclusion:**  
**Sleeping Beauty, an enigma re-enfleshed**

This project set out to re-tell an old story, the story of the “Sleeping Beauty,” by means of a critical methodology with the capacity to question and enrich existent scholarly as well as popular assumptions about the meaning of the story, and the meaning of its focal heroine. Through a unique interweaving of literary representation and medical epistemology, I delved into the past, into literary and cultural, ideological history, with an outlook that might be likened to Angela Carter’s for whom the past was, in part, “a vast repository of outmoded lies,” where one could “check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which new lies have been based.”<sup>422</sup> Carter rummaged around in the “official” past—a past, a history by default defined and written by men, by those in positions of power and authority—with a view to revising this past through her explosive writing in what Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère describes as the author’s “laboratory of creation,” in which “the combination of elements, types, and genres” is always and deliberately “fluid, unstable, and explosive.”<sup>423</sup> The term “explosive” can here be taken as a reference to Carter’s own oft-quoted statement about her creative ethos and practice: her fondness for “putting new wine in old bottles especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the bottles explode.”<sup>424</sup>

For my part, I looked back across several centuries in order to question and revise received accounts of the “Sleeping Beauty” story and of sleeping beauties themselves: to explode, to open up the topos and to show the importance of distinguishing between the cultural myth, and the textual and socio-historical reality. My focus was on revising and complicating prevailing notions of sleeping beauties by means of interdisciplinary research and comparative analysis: drawing attention to the problematic nature of the unconscious bodies of these female figures, hypothesising as to the possible reasons underlying their strangely-altered, ambiguous

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<sup>422</sup> Angela Carter. “Notes from the Front Line,” in *Shaking a Leg. Journalism and Writings*. With an Introduction by Joan Smith. Ed. by Jenny Uglow. London: Chatto & Windus, 1997. 36-43, 41.

<sup>423</sup> Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère. Chapter 5. “Revamping Sleeping Beauty: From “La belle au bois dormant” to “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” and “The Lady of the House of Love.” *Reading, Translating, Rewriting. Angela Carter’s Translational Poetics*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013. 189-225, 192.

<sup>424</sup> Carter, ed. Uglow (1997), 37.

states, and interrogating both the limitations of and conversely, the (literary, iconographical, ideological, narrative) possibilities of the female body.

From the outset, the primacy of the material female body to the history of the figure of the sleeping beauty, and by extension to the history of stories about sleeping beauties, was clear. I sensed an acute and urgent need to refocus the debate, in response to critical views propagating a limited and limiting assessment of the Sleeping Beauty as a “docile” figure who does nothing except “lie in a comatose state until a prince rescues her” (Zipes), or, from a slightly different angle but with the same overall message, Sleeping Beauty as a heroine who is “simply rescued from her catatonic condition by a prince who is attracted by her beauty or reports of her beauty” (Swann-Jones).<sup>425</sup> Consequently, my own research approach was to re-examine the well-known beautiful sleeping heroine not as a passive body, not as a symbol or a cipher, but instead as a distinctly corporeal subject. Reading across diverse “Sleeping Beauty” variants, several key strands, or focus areas, emerged: the “secrets” of female anatomical structure, particularly in relation to the womb, that hidden and unpredictable receptacle of female reproductive capability; the consequent epistemological, diagnostic and therapeutic challenges that the pathological, or unnatural, female body posed for the male-dominated medical profession, and also the doctrinal difficulties it precipitated for patriarchal religious authorities; the materiality of the (im)mortal virgin body: its potential resilience against corruption in every form (sexual, post-mortem); and the sexual desirability, and sustained potency, of the catatonic body.

Having identified these thematic lines of enquiry, the next question was: what do they reveal? What might thinking about the female body *as a body* in the stories about sleeping beauties suggest about prevailing attitudes and expectations, both literary and socio-cultural, through the centuries? How might stripping away the outer layer of ideology, of fantasy, aid the reader or the critic in getting underneath the skin (so to speak) of the sleeping beauty myth? Does this movement inwards help re-enflesh the figure of the heroine? And finally, does dissecting the story and the body of the sleeping beauty get us any closer to an answer to one of the questions with which this thesis began: the question of why the sleeping beauty figure was and is still so prevalent?

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<sup>425</sup> Jack Zipes. Introduction to Angela Carter. *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*. [1977]. London and New York: Penguin, 2008. vii-xxviii, xvii; Steven Swann-Jones. *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of the Imagination*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002. 72.

Conclusions are by nature meant to offer something like a final and definitive solution or answer to a problem or a question: to summarise one's findings, and then leave the reader with a final statement: clear, concise and neat...

As the ellipses indicate, with this conclusion that is not the case. For what I found, after interrogating sleeping beauties and sleeping bodies and the socio-historical circumstances in which these figures and these narratives were envisioned and created, read, and circulated, before being translated and revised by consequent generations, was an overriding sense of their impenetrability. Their opacity is precisely what made and makes sleeping beauties so unique: their resistance to epistemological enquiry and finite interpretation. There can be no single definition; nor would a simple answer suffice. My research has revealed that sleeping beauties retain their ambiguity; indeed, it is what makes these female figures what they are: enigmatic, enthralling and complex.

Conceptualising complexity of this nature requires a different model of critique: an alternative mode of viewing and reading. Prerequisite to a reconsideration of these female figures is the cultivation of a different kind of critical approach, one that is suitably open-ended, attentive to nuance, to a sense of the indeterminate and in-between, and to the perhaps: that is, the presence of what could be, what may be. A useful model for how best to approach the sleeping beauty can be found by looking back several decades, to 1995, when London's Serpentine Gallery staged a live art installation entitled *The Maybe*. This installation featured acclaimed actress Tilda Swinton as a live and real sleeping beauty figure. For eight hours a day, over seven days, Swinton performed in what was described as:

an enigmatic and evocative work exploring a series of unanswerable questions from within the confines of a glass case....Glass display cases around the gallery contained objects relating to the passing of time – relics of famous fascination, traces of lives lived, objects of historical resonance and of prurient curiosity. Swinton, enclosed in her own glass cabinet – a living, breathing, silent being – invited questions of mortality and of time.<sup>426</sup>

Viewers were captivated by the sense of something bubbling just below the surface, just behind the glass—close, and yet, beyond reach, beyond understanding.

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<sup>426</sup> Cornelia Parker, "The Maybe," Serpentine Gallery, London. 4-10 September, 1995. <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/maybe>.

Readers of “Sleeping Beauty” are similarly captivated by the figure of this unconscious conscious heroine, and the anxieties and desires and tensions that she embodies. Sleeping beauty’s principal source of attraction is not her otherworldly beauty, however striking and enchanting this might be, but her beauty coupled with and complicated by the material and symbolic ambiguity of her strangely catatonic body. Somewhere between eidolon and material, sculpted idol is the figure of the sleeping beauty: an “insubstantial image,” a phantom (the definition of “eidolon”) in the sense of being indeterminate, yet conversely, and at the same time, a material entity, a solid body frozen in place and time. The image of the sleeping beauty is disruptive insofar as it makes the viewer hesitate on the brink, in the transitional space between what the viewer knows and what they can only dream. This notion of the threshold, of liminal subjectivity, is key, since it is embodied by each and every one of the female bodies which this project examined, it is there in the figure of the comatose Zellandine, in the lifeless lifelike Talia, and in the enchanted dormant heroine of Perrault’s story, as it is also in Shakespeare’s sleeping beauty-like queens—Thaisa and Hermione—and in terms of material history and culture, in the incorrupt virgin saints, the anatomical waxes, and other objects designed and crafted to project a true and lifelike verisimilitude.<sup>427</sup>

If the principle of animation is that the difference between life and death is the active presence of something—call it energy, consciousness, spirit, animus/anima—within the embodied subject, then the absence of this animation, the absence of a kind of consciousness, gives rise to uncertainty and unease. Descartes held that in principle, the ego could not withdraw from consciousness, nor the cogito cease from thinking. Only the human soul or mind possessed consciousness; everything else in Nature obeyed the laws of material entities, or “extension”.<sup>428</sup> Following the implication of this Cartesian model of the cogito, the self emerges as an entity that is unified and whole only when fully conscious and awake. Consequently, it could be argued that sleeping beauties are always at least notionally, or symbolically, incomplete: divested both of cognitive and corporeal unity by the very thing that makes them so interesting, so frustrating, so fascinating: by their sleep, or other form of loss

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<sup>427</sup> “The anthropological idea of the limen was reconfigured by French theorists, as for example in Julia Kristeva’s formulation of points of entry or insertion – an interface between concept and experience. In Derrida’s work, the idea of the threshold structures the ethics of interpersonal relations, the interface between the self and the other. . . . Sign-making is seen in Derrida’s work as a threshold activity, facing in both directions, *a double sens*. The imagination itself often figures as a threshold where a rite of passage occurs between sense and sensibility.” Mukherji, ed. (2011), introduction, xix.

<sup>428</sup> See Roy Porter’s explanation of the Cartesian model. *Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine*. Ed. by Roy Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.93-94.

of consciousness. Sleeping beauties, thus interpreted, embody the compelling notion of unconscious consciousness.

“Passivity,” another term for “unconscious consciousness,” is an important concept, for it is in terms of the supposedly passive, or supine nature of her body that sleeping beauty has often been interpreted. Partly in response to Simone de Beauvoir’s critique of fairy-tale heroines in (*The Second Sex*), many consequent feminist readings and re-tellings of “The Sleeping Beauty” focused on the idea of a woman on display: a helpless, beautiful, visually and physically available female subject.<sup>429</sup> The displayed female body became the basis for polemical critiques aiming to expose patriarchal paradigms and ideologies, with the aim of demonstrating gender inequality, particularly in terms of the suppression of female sexuality and subsequent repression of women. Certainly, first-wave feminists especially were “eager to challenge, contest, and displace the cultural authority of the powerful social fictions propounded by the fairy tale of “The Sleeping Beauty.”<sup>430</sup> At the same time, many were eager to displace and contest the fictions embodied by the central figure of the story, since, as Rosemary Betterton argues in her Introduction to *Looking On. Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, there is much at stake: perceptions and representations of the female figure are inextricable from the issue of “the feminine,” and the images created in and perpetuated by literature, art and media have the power to “produce and define the feminine in specific ways.”<sup>431</sup> This is an understanding of the feminine, and by extension, the female body, as a tabula rasa, or a screen: something blank, onto which society can project ideas and ideals about what it is and what it means to be a woman.

Related to this concept of sleeping beauty as a blank, or a cipher, is an idea of the figure as a paradigm: a model for or of something. It is in this guise that she appears in the dialogues between the French feminist writers, philosophers and literary critics Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, in *The Newly Born Woman*: sleeping beauty as a model for better understanding what it means to be a woman within patriarchal society.<sup>432</sup> Such dialogues are valuable up to a certain point; they demonstrate the myriad ways in which the very concept of the sleeping beauty can be appropriated for various, often contradictory purposes, at different

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<sup>429</sup> Originally published as *Le deuxième sexe* (1949).

<sup>430</sup> Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (2013), 20.

<sup>431</sup> *Looking On. Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*. Ed. with an Introduction by Rosemary Betterton. London and New York: Pandora [1978], 1987. 4-7.

<sup>432</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*. Transl. by Betsy Wing. Minneapolis, I: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. See esp. the Introduction.

times, and according to different ideologies. Nonetheless, to model sleeping beauty *as* a model, to think of the figure as a paradigm, is to run the risk of blurring an essential distinction: the difference between the cultural sleeping beauty myth, and sleeping beauty as she appears, time and again, in narrative.

It is this distinction to which Angela Carter, a self-proclaimed feminist (“I regard myself as a feminist writer, because I’m a feminist in everything else”) was attentive when she came to translate the fairy tales of Charles Perrault, amongst them, “La belle au bois dormant”.<sup>433</sup> Commissioned by Victor Gollancz, Carter “deliberately modernized their language and message” in *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977), her English translation for children, before going on to rewrite the tales, this time for adults, in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979): a movement from translation to re-creation indicative of Carter’s discovery that Perrault’s “deceptively simple tales” had in fact a definite “historical thickness, textual density, and dual mode of address,” i.e. children and adult readers.<sup>434</sup> In his introduction to the 2008 edition of Carter’s translation of Perrault, Jack Zipes captures something of the essence of Carter’s subversive method when he describes the stories being turned “inside out in defiant and definitive ways” by the feminist writer and translator.<sup>435</sup> Carter’s creative and critical feminism, and conversely, her feminist creations and critiques, are the most pertinent to this project; they open up the narratives in dynamic ways.

The figure of the sleeping beauty emerges from this project, reinterpreted through sustained interdisciplinary enquiry, as a literary and cultural nexus, and also as a matrix for the exploration of some of the beliefs and prejudices underlying both historical and current Western attitudes towards the female body. My analyses of texts and contexts has shown how sleeping beauties were shaped by, and at the same time part of the shaping process, the ideological framework of each given era. Conceptualised as symbolic and material indices, sleeping beauties were the products and producers of a complex of tensions—fears, anxieties and desires—relating to the female body, and channelled through diverse but often overlapping discourses: in literary, medical and religious writing.

In approaching the figure of the sleeping beauty cross-disciplinarily, by looking at unconscious woman simultaneously as concepts and as concrete entities, this project has helped elucidate the tensions and ambivalences inherent in the complex of discourses—

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<sup>433</sup> Carter, “Notes from the Front Line,” in Uglow, ed. (1997), 36-43, 37.

<sup>434</sup> Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (2013), 2-3.

<sup>435</sup> Zipes Introduction to Carter (2008), vii-xxviii, vii.



literary, medical, and religious—focussed on issues relating to the definition and valuation of the female body, femininity, and female sexuality, from the mid-fourteenth through the late-seventeenth century. Tracing the presence of sleeping beauties across such a broad chronological range has revealed the extent to which this particular and uniquely problematic female figure was, and indeed still is, a point of cultural fixation. To recognise the prevalence and value of the sleeping beauty image is to participate in the universal unfolding of a narrative concerning the lure of the female body, the power inherent in supposed passivity, the significance of spiritual and iconodule belief, and the cultural material complexities underlying literary and aesthetic images.



Naked, spelled, fixed in the storm and flood  
Of civilization, the bound  
Of thorny fire, the wall of the bloom of blood.  
You are known and you are never found.

Hajden Carruth, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1990)

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